

HEART 2 HEART

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Between You and Us

This is the best of times, undoubtedly, many would concur. It is absolutely baffling and fascinating when we see all that we are surrounded with today. Everything that was considered unthinkable, found only in sci-fi stories, is real in this millennium. To think of it, it is amazing how television, which was a wonder fifty years ago, has today become as common an accessory as a table in every home - be it a flat in a metro, the shanty in a city slum, or a hut in a village. Today the mobile phone, which has totally changed the communication landscape of this century, is as ubiquitous as people. In fact, the number of mobile phone subscriptions in Europe is more than the continent's population. Imagine a tiny shop selling a dozen utilities in an obscure corner in Africa, and then visualize a huge shopping mall selling everything from 'pin to plane' with branches in every city and town on the planet, and at the same time expanding exponentially every day. See the huge difference in possibilities? That is how much our lives have changed since the Internet has invaded our lives. The whole world is virtually inside our home, and amusingly, for the modern day kids, 'Google is God' as it has answers for almost everything. We are in a state of constant awe, thanks to the intellectual exploits of modern man. Surely, what has been achieved in the last few decades in every discipline, especially in our understanding of Nature and harnessing of science, is something that could not be accomplished in so many previous centuries of human civilization.

Kudos to modern man's ingenuity and intelligence; none of this would have been possible without the systematic acquisition of knowledge and their application. But at the same time, we are deeply disturbed and shocked, almost on a daily basis, with events that unfold in our neighbourhood and what the media delivers to us. If one day it is about an IT professional who did not think twice before trading off confidential data of his company's clients to a third party for making a quick buck; the second day it is about a smart banking executive, with access to sensitive information of the bank's customers, who siphoned off funds from many accounts surreptitiously. The next day you hear the devastating news of a distinguished doctorate, who drives his SUV loaded with explosives into an airport terminal. The fourth day's story is that of a school kid who takes his father's firearm and shoots his classmates dead, over frivolous classroom fights. Pick any day's newspaper and it can easily depress you.

What a paradox! We have advanced so much, yet, at times, it seems all our achievements are pointless. Today we have more knowledge, but little wisdom; great discoveries, but no discrimination; more medicines, but less well-being; an increasing number of experts, but earth-shattering problems. We have great connectivity, but little time; fancier houses, but broken homes. We have diverse food, but less nutrition; an increasing number of hospitals, but new and sinister diseases. We buy more, but enjoy less. We have multiplied our possessions, but lost our peace. We have added years to our lives, but not life to our years. To sum up, we have learnt how to make a living, but not a life. Can a person be called educated just because he/she has degrees and qualifications against their name?

For most parents, education is only about ensuring their children get good grades and secure highly-paid jobs - nothing else. For many youngsters, being educated means acquiring a few technical skills and collecting degrees to build an impressive resume. Ask any professional how much of what he learnt in his college he actually uses in his work, and the answer will be precious little in most cases. What the students carry with them when they leave an educational institution is not the subjects, but the system and its ambience. For the other category of youth, who do not work so hard for a cushy job, education means 'freedom' - a license to indulge in whatever their instincts and company dictate. And it is for this reason that behind all the perverse activities and immoral acts in our society today, we find, not ignorant people or school-drop outs, but highly educated minds. One shudders to think what the world would be if all the so called intellectuals that our education system creates cannot distinguish between virtues and vices, confidence and arrogance, doing things right and doing the right things.

It is for this reason that Bhagavan Baba says, "Only if education is blended with culture, will it shine forth as true education. And what is culture? It is the cultivation of discrimination between good and evil, sin and merit, and truth and untruth that we experience in our daily life. Education must remove evil thoughts, feelings and qualities; cultivate the good, and make one broad-minded. True and eternal education never changes when the heart is filled with compassion; it becomes sacred and aspires for the welfare of one and all." To instill in young minds such a higher and sublime quality of learning, Bhagavan Baba started the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1981, though He opened the first college in Anantapur for women way back in 1968. On the inauguration day of the University, Swami said, "The students are the roots. The tree will grow with branches on all sides, countless flowers will bloom; it will provide and promote, peace and security, to the world." True to His Word, today, beautiful blossoms have bloomed, and through the fragrance of their selfless service and ideal lives, they have become harbingers of a future that is filled with hope, harmony and goodness.

In the cover story of this issue, we have the inspiring story of such 'fragrant flowers' of Sai's Education Mission who have not only shone beautifully basking in the Sunlight of their Divine Chancellor, but also have given themselves away completely in sharing the fragrance of their noble education to the distraught, poor and misguided. When Ms. S. V. Radha and Ms. S. V. Mala, former women students of Baba's University, decided to set up a Sai School in a rural area called Otteri, in the outskirts of Chennai, more than two decades ago, all they could see in that village were dilapidated huts and muddy roads. At the same time, that area was a hot-spot for communal violence and a breeding ground for criminals where unemployed and uncared-for youth were brainwashed into becoming anti-social elements.

Today, thanks to the Sri Vishwa Vidyalyaya Matriculation Higher Secondary School (SVVMHSS) run by these Sai University alumnae, where the Sai Model of Holistic Education is put into practice in letter and spirit, the rural children have become national icons and the pride of Chennai city. What is

most heartening is that apart from them becoming ideal citizens, they have also become models of inspiration for their families, and agents of change in their society; they have transformed the character of their locality from God-forsaken to one that is reverberating with God's Name. How did it happen? "It is all because of what Swami taught us in His University, and purely due to His Grace and Concern," says Ms. S. V. Mala, the Principal of SVVMHSS. But what is the complete tale of this social miracle? Read our cover story "The Divine Oyster in Otteri" to find out.

Bhagavan Baba often says, "Education can yield peace and prosperity only when, along with technical skills and objective information, students are equipped with moral ideals, righteous living and spiritual insight." The products of Sai's University and Schools are such individuals for whom sound discrimination and good character are central to life, rather than amassing wealth and indulging in self-aggrandisement. And you have seen several examples of such inspired individuals in our 'Harnessing the Heart' section. In this issue, we have yet another thrilling account of a former student who is a practicing lawyer. When you read his story of how he could stick to his principles and come out triumphant in the murky world of law where he had to deal with criminals and corrupt officials, you will know what Swami means when He says, "Take care of your character and you will need no other wealth or power."

Truly, character is the previous gift of true education. But what is the truest manifestation of an educated person? It is pure love, Swami says. If we have a heart filled with compassion, a head that bows down in humility and a hand that is eager to serve selflessly, then we become true human beings, nay Divine Beings. When we have more such Divine Beings on this planet than the so called human beings, the much awaited new age of peace and harmony, brotherhood and love would have arrived. Dear reader, let us try to become such Divine Beings, now!

Let's envelope ourselves with good and noble thoughts every moment.

Loving Regards
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Why Did The Divine Descend as Rama

On April 14, 2008 falls the holy festival of Rama Navami, the day celebrating the Advent of Lord Rama. Bhagavan Baba has often elaborated on the Sacred Life of Lord Rama, and exhorted one and all to emulate the ideals set by the Lord during that Incarnation. Here is an extract from one such discourse delivered by Bhagavan on March 24, 1991.

All objects in the world are liable to change. All living beings must pass some day. But ideals and sacred objectives established in human hearts shine forever. If one has to live up to an ideal, he/she must be prepared to face many ordeals, difficulties, calumnies, trials and tribulations. These ideals have continued up to the present day to glow in the hearts of the people, because they have been upheld in spite of vicissitudes and ordeals. Aeons may come and go, continents may appear and disappear, people may pass away, but ideals and values remain a perennial source of inspiration to the world....

Common people can derive no benefit if the Formless Absolute remains in Kailasa or Vaikunta. It is not possible to worship the Formless Absolute. Hence, the *Rama-Avatar* appeared in human form to enable humanity to experience the Formless in a form which is accessible and helpful to them...

Unfortunately, even when the Formless Absolute assumes a form, there are persons, who impelled by their own attitudes, attribute their own human foibles to the *Avatar*. "When He has the same Form as ours, the same physical features, and eats, talks and moves about like any of us, what is the difference between the *Avatar* and ourselves?" they ask. Because of this narrow-minded approach, these persons distance themselves from the Divine. An effort must be made to understand the nature of Divinity. "*Daivam maanusharoopena* (God in Human Form)," declares the scripture. ...

Why and How Avatars Work

The descent of the *Avatar* means the Divine coming down to the level of the human. No blemish attaches to the Divine as a result of this descent. There is no diminution in His puissance. Here is the example of a child playing on the ground. If the mother feels it is beneath her dignity to bend, and calls upon the child to leap into her arms, the child cannot do so. But out of her love for the child, the mother herself stoops and picks up the baby. By bending down to take the child, does the mother bow to the child? Likewise, the *Avatar* descends to the level of the human to bless and rescue those who cannot rise to the level of the Divine. The ignorant assumes that because the Divine has descended with a human form, God has lowered Himself to the human level. This is a case of bending and not kneeling down. It is an act of benediction and not of submission...

Similarly, the *Avatar* does not forgo any of His supreme powers merely because He lives and moves among human beings as a man. Narrow-minded persons view these things differently.

This phenomenon could be noticed in several instances in the case of the *Rama-Avatar*. In the Ramayana, Rama is depicted as one who, like other ordinary human beings, experienced the pangs of separation from Sita. Why did Rama exhibit such feelings? It is to serve as an example to the common people how individuals should behave in similar circumstances. The Ramayana is a work which holds out ideals for every home and every family. What should be the relations between a father and a son, how should a husband and wife conduct themselves, how should brothers behave towards each other, what should be the relations between the rulers and the citizens, how should sisters-in-law conduct themselves - all these are exemplified in the story of the *Rama-Avatar*.

Sri Rama – An Ideal for Every Man

Rama was prepared to honour a boon given by His father to His step-mother in fulfillment of an old promise. He renounced the throne at the moment of coronation and elected to go to the forest as an exile. Eminently qualified as He was to become the ruler, nevertheless He chose to go to the forest to honour His father's plighted word. This is a glorious example of an ideal life. Today people would set at nought promises given by the father and place their self-interest in the forefront...

Rama was prepared to face any ordeals and troubles in upholding this sacred principle. Rama was ever active in fulfilling the wishes and responding to the opinions of the people. Highly sensitive even to the remarks of a petty washerman, Rama sent away Sita to the forest out of a feeling that the washer-man's comment might be an indication of the unspoken feelings of many others among his subjects. Rama stands out as an ideal ruler intensely responsive to the wishes of the people...Rama demonstrated the ideal relations that should exist between the ruler and the ruled.

Lakshmana's Unflinching Devotion

Turning to the harmonious relations that existed between the brothers', complying with his stepmother's words, Rama might don the bark of trees, wear the mantle of an ascetic and leave for the forest, there was no such obligation on Lakshmana's part. But as a younger brother, he felt that it was not proper for him to stay and enjoy life in Ayodhya, when his brother was leaving for the forest. He was ready to renounce his mother and wife and accompany Rama, whom he considered as his life-breath...

The behaviour of brothers today in similar situations would be entirely different. They are likely to indulge in litigation over the sharing of property, and lose them all in carrying the dispute up to the Supreme Court...To such brothers, Rama should serve as an example...

The Lesson from Ramayana

The foremost lesson to be learnt from the Rama-story is how to foster unity and harmony in a family...The reign of Rama was marked by concern for justice and morality. Today the people are bedeviled by distrust and suspicion at every step. "Why should God do this?" Such questions are asked out of narrow-minded doubts. There will be no room for such doubts if the Infinite Nature of the Divine is properly understood. The petty-minded folk who cannot grasp the Omni-competence of the Divine raise such questions. Their entire life is wasted in this manner. Hence, people should get rid of such pettiness...

Strengthen Your Faith to Acquire Bliss

If the Name of the Lord is not recited in the proper spirit, of what use is all spiritual practice? Faith is the primary requisite. Chanting the Name endlessly, without faith, is utterly useless. Where there is faith, there is Love. Where there is Love, there is Peace. Where there is Peace, there is Truth. Where there is Truth, there is Bliss. Where there is Bliss, there is God. If faith is lacking how can Bliss be experienced? Therefore, strengthen your faith... Develop faith in the ideals of Rama. Rama does not mean the son of Dasharatha. The *Atma* (Self) is Rama, and hence Rama is referred to as *Atma-Rama*... Everyone must aim at becoming an ideal person... Ideals, not ostentation, should be the watchword. Develop faith in the Self, and lead a Godly life.

- *Divine Discourse, Rama Navami Day, 1991.*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - Part 3: Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear reader, responding to positive responses from many readers to this section in H2H where we have a dialogue with the Divine, after we completed serializing Dr. John Hislop's "Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba" in January 2008, we started Prof. Anil Kumar's "Satyopanishad" from the next month.

This too is in the "question-answer" format that many devotees prefer, and has answers from Bhagavan on topics as wide-ranging as the origin of evil, the goals of human life, aspects of God – embodied and formless, to price hikes, women's liberation, vegetarianism and the generation gap of the present times.

Published in two parts by the author, these volumes have 270 questions in all, which are neatly grouped under separate chapters. In this issue, we continue with the first chapter called "The India Eternal" from where we stopped in the March issue.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! Right now, we are in Kodai Kanal. Tamilnadu is known for its renowned devotees. We often hear about Manikya Vachakar and Tiruvalluvar. We want to hear from You about these two illustrious sons of Tamilnadu.

Bhagavan: Manikya Vachakar is the personification of forbearance, forgiveness, patience, and devotion. One day, the son of a very rich man came to him. You know, Manikya Vachakar was selling saris and maintaining his family. This boy, who came to him, was a pampered and spoilt child. Picking up a sari there, the boy asked, "What is the price of this sari?" Manikya Vachakar said, "Twenty rupees, Sir". The boy tore the sari into two halves and said, "What is the price of this half sari?" The sari seller said, "Rupees ten, Sir". The boy tore it further into two halves and asked, "Now, what is the price of this quarter sari?" The former patiently replied, "Rupees five, Sir". The mischievous boy was very much taken aback by Manikya Vachakar's patience. He then asked, "How is it that you are so patient in spite of my mischief?" Manikya Vachakar smiled and said, "I am a devotee of God and I have full faith in Him. He is responsible for my peace and calmness."

In Tamilnadu, there was one devotee by name Tiruvalluvar. He was highly reputed and is known even today for his devotional composition, Tirukkural. In those days, the Pandya king had youngsters serving him as ministers. Tiruvalluvar was one of them. The Pandya king had a great liking for horses. He liked to have a number of horses of different breeds from all parts of the

country. He called Tiruvalluvar, gave him some money, and sent him to get new breeds of horses from all places. The latter agreed and proceeded.

On his way, Tiruvalluvar found a temple in a dilapidated condition. He decided to renovate it, and in doing so, he spent all the money he had with him. Having come to know of what he had done, the King became furious. He kept Tiruvalluvar behind bars as a punishment. There, in the prison, Tiruvalluvar composed his famous Tirukkural. The King repented later for his hasty and wrong decision. He requested Tiruvalluvar to return and resume his duties as a minister. However, Tiruvalluvar politely refused to take up any responsibilities in the kingdom. He spent the remaining part of his life wholly in spiritual pursuits.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! God is attributeless. He is above the three qualities - *sattvika*, *rajasika*, and *tamasika*. But, we are bound by these three attributes. Then, how can we realise God?

Bhagavan: The Divine has two aspects - He can be experienced as the one with attributes, and also as beyond them. You should know one thing chiefly - God is in the attributes. But, the attributes are not in Him. Attributes or traits cannot function and operate without Divinity in them. Gold is in the jewellery; but, jewels are not in gold. Pots are made of clay, but not vice versa. Silverware, like a glass or a plate, is made of silver. But, the glass and plate are not in silver.

Another example: You know, an electric bulb illumines, and a fan revolves. Radios, TVs, etc. are electrical gadgets, which need electricity for their functioning. But, none of these gadgets are there in electricity. Likewise, God is present in the attributes. They are not present in God. So, in a way, we can say that He has attributes, and at the same time, He is attributeless – that is, *saguna* and *nirguna*.

Every man has three qualities - *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. But, the one that dominates the other two decides his/her thinking, feeling and action. But, unless we transcend these three qualities, we cannot experience Divinity in the true sense. Here is an example: If you want to see your own chest, what should you do? First, remove your coat, then your shirt, and finally even your undershirt, isn't it? So also, to see the chest of Divinity, you should first remove the coat of *tamasika* quality, the shirt of *rajasika* quality and the undershirt of *sattvika* quality.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! We pray to you to tell us about the two aspects of God, with form and without it?

Bhagavan: It is here that many are confused. Without a form, from where do you get the formless? How is it possible for you to visualise the Formless? Since you have a form, you can only think of God with a form. For example, if a fish is to think of God, it can visualise God only in the form of a bigger fish. So also, if at all a buffalo thinks of God, it can think of God only as a bigger

buffalo. In the same way, man can think of God only as existing in human form, the form of an ideal man.

Even the formless aspect of God can be meditated upon basing on the aspect of God with form. You cannot derive the formless without a form. Here is a small example. You are all seated in this hall, in front of Swami today, in Kodai Kanal, and listening to Swami's words. This is an experience with a form. Later, you go home, and after a few days, you begin to reflect on what had happened here. You recall the entire scenario. In fact, has Swami come to your place physically? Would you find this room at your place? Have all of you gone there? No. But this direct experience is pictured mentally, which gives you the indirect experience of being here. What you see here is the *sakara* (with form), and what you experience there is the *nirakara* (formless). So, the formless is based on the aspect with form. One cannot exist without the other.

Another example. Here is milk. You want to drink it. How do you drink? Don't you need a cup or a glass? Similarly, to worship God (milk) you need a form (cup).

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami, of these two ways of worship, the aspect with form, and the other, the formless, which is greater?

Bhagavan: In my opinion, both are equal. One is not in any way greater than the other. Now you are in Coimbatore. Here the land is plain, without any ups and downs. The level of the land is the same throughout; nobody leveled it. Nobody prepared the ground to be like this. It is basically the design of Coimbatore. But Kodai Kanal is located on the hills. Nobody assembled hills there. It is made that way. Coimbatore and Kodaikanal are different from one other. Each one is full, but in its own way.

So also, the two methods of worship, one with form and the other formless, are equally beneficial to the seekers of truth and aspirants of spiritual enlightenment.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! Scriptures declare that God is omnipresent; God is everywhere. Kindly explain this aspect of Divinity? How are we to understand this?

Bhagavan: The Bhagavad Gita says, *bijam mam sarva bhutanam*, which means 'God is the seed of this entire Creation, of all beings'. For example, you see here a mango seed. You sow it in the ground. The seed, as days pass, germinates. In the process, the seed produces a root, then a stem, a leaf, branches, and flowers gradually. The seed is latent in every part of the plant, as all parts directly or indirectly emerge from it. Finally, in the hard seed of the fruit, also the initial or the original seed is present. So, God is present in the entire Universe. The whole world is a tree, God is the seed, and fruits are the beings or creatures born of the tree of the world.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! When the same Divinity is present in everyone, why should differences exist? Divinity being the same, why are we so different from each other?

Bhagavan: *Ekam eva Advitiam Brahma:* 'God is one without a second', says the scripture. Then, how do we account for the variety, diversity, differences, and so on? A small example to understand this. Power supply being the same, don't you find the difference in the voltage of the bulbs that illumine? A bulb with a low voltage gives you light of low intensity, and a bulb with a high voltage illumines more brightly. Don't they? But, at the same time, electricity is one and the same. Bulbs are different in their voltage, and this determines the intensity of light. Similarly, our bodies are like those bulbs with the inner current of the same Divinity.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! You said that Divinity is in everyone. Then, before we were born where had it been? Does Divinity exist even after our death?

Bhagavan: The Divine exists. Divinity is imperishable, pure and unsullied. It has neither birth nor death. It is eternal and stable. It is beyond time and space. Divinity transcends all physical laws.

Now, your question is: where did Divinity exist prior to your birth, and where will it be after your death, while it is in you during this lifetime? You see, there is an electrical wire on the wall, and also holders here and there to which bulbs are fixed. You get light only if a bulb is fixed to a holder and not otherwise. Why? The current passes through the wire that enters the bulb fixed to the holder. If you hold the bulb in your hand, it does not illumine, as there is no power supply. What you have to understand is this. The current has not been newly produced to get into the bulb. It was already there in the wire. If you remove the bulb, what will happen to the current? It will be there in the wire only. The only difference is that you will not experience its presence as illumination. Similarly, the bulb is the body, the current of Divinity flows into it as the illumination of life. When this bulb of the body is removed, even then, the current of Divinity persists hidden or latent, so much so that Divinity has all along been there before you were born, during your lifetime, and will even be there after your death like the current of electricity.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! It is said that God is *hrudayavasi*, dweller in our heart. Is it the same heart, which is on the left side on our chest?

Bhagavan: No, no. That is the physical heart. But the seat of God is the spiritual heart, which is also called *hrudaya*. It means *hr + daya = hrudaya* which means, the one filled with compassion. Today compassion is a matter of fashion. People put on *kasayavastra* (ochre robes), but they have *kasayihridaya* (hearts of butchery).

The physical heart is on the left side, while the spiritual heart is on the right side. The spiritual heart is the temple of God. In the Gita, Lord Krishna says, *isvarah hrudese arjuna tisthati* which means 'God resides in the altar of your heart'. Knowledge, be it physical, secular, scientific or technological, relates to

the head and not to the heart. But love, compassion, truth, sacrifice and forbearance concern the heart.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! Can Divinity be probed into? Is it possible to know it by reasoning?

Bhagavan: All worldly experiences are bound by time and space. Your senses help you to experience all that is in the outer world. Science and Technology investigate the five elements, make certain combinations and permutations, and provide certain additional conveniences and comforts for mankind to lead a better life. These include electronic gadgets, computers, and so on. A scientist conducts an experiment, but a spiritual aspirant's experiences of Divinity cannot be conducted in a laboratory. How do you expect to convey anything about Divinity, which is beyond expression? How do you imagine Divinity, which is beyond comprehension? How do you investigate and experiment upon Divinity which transcends all your reasoning and senses? Science is based on experiments, and religion on experience. In science, you analyse; but in religion, you realise.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! What should we do to receive God's Grace?

Bhagavan: There is no way other than devotion. Your wealth, scholarship, authority and physical personality cannot please God. It is only your devotion that He looks into.

Don't you know Guha in the Ramayana? What scholarship had he to please Rama? Nothing. He was not even educated. You also must have heard of Sabari, an ardent devotee of Lord Rama. How rich was she to be close to Rama? Nothing. She was in rags at that time, the poorest of the poor. What made the bird, Jatayu, receive the special blessings of Rama so as to deserve performance of the last rites at the Divine Hands of Rama? Even Rama's father, Dasaratha, was not as fortunate as this bird Jatayu, because he died when Rama was in the forest, far away from Ayodhya. How about Hanuman, a monkey? By implicit faith in and total surrender to Rama he could be successful not only in the task assigned to him, but also came to be worshipped by the devotees of the Lord, and his worship has been continuing since the days of the Ramavatara.

The Mahabharata clearly portrays Draupadi, the queen of the Pandavas, as Lord Krishna's devotee of the highest order, always, in times of success or failure, pleasure or pain, calm or turmoil, anywhere, either on the throne in Hastinapura, or in the forest. The Pandavas are known for their deep devotion and abounding love for Krishna. They are the best examples of equanimity and total surrender to God such that Krishna identified Himself completely with them by saying that Dharmaja (Yudhisthira) was His head, Arjuna His heart, Bhima His shoulders, and the two youngest brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, equal to His two feet. This is true devotion. This is the ideal stature of a devotee.

In the Bhagavata, you come across the Gopis (the cowherd girls who were rustic, innocent, and unlettered) whose *madhura bhakti*, total attachment to God, was backed by unconditional love and surrender. Their devotion was noble, pure, nectarine, and exemplary. They saw Krishna in bushes, thorns, leaves, branches, and flowers. Is theirs not *tadatmyabhava*, total identification? Isn't theirs the *advaitabhava*, non-dualistic state? They could not bear the pangs of separation from Krishna, even for a split second. This is the level of their devotion.

Have you not heard about Tyagaraja, the South Indian saint-singer and composer, who had put the question: *nidhi cala sukhama? ramuni sannidhi seva sukhama?* Is it wealth that gives you happiness or proximity to God? Ramadas, Surdas, Kabir, Tulasidas, Jayadev, Tukaram, Mira, and others were the very personifications of devotion. They are remembered to this day. By reading about them, you will not only be the recipient of God's Grace, but even have a claim on God's Grace. You know, the moment you marry, your wife will have a claim on your property. This is due to the *mangala sutra*, the sacred knot tied at the time of the wedding. Similarly, devotion is *bhakti sutra*, the knot of devotion, which empowers the devotee to claim from God His Grace. Therefore, for everything, devotion is most important. For most people, it is the proper and noble approach to Divinity.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! Why are we not the recipients of Divine Grace?

Bhagavan: It is not proper to feel so. You are wrong if you think so. God's Grace is equally available to all of you. He makes no distinctions of caste, creed, sex, nationality, and so on. You should know that the defect is in you. You have to cleanse the tumbler of your heart. For example, it is raining heavily now. If you want to collect water in a vessel, what you do is to keep it straight. However, if you turn it downwards or put it upside down, is it possible to collect water? The downpour of rain will be of no help at all. Therefore, we have to keep our hearts always pure and ready to receive the rain of Grace. We have to turn it towards the rain of God's Love in order to collect it. Is it not so?

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! Our fortune is immeasurable, how many people get this opportunity! This is all Your Grace. But, how are we to preserve this?

Bhagavan: Look! Out of the millions of devotees how many are able to be here? Is this proximity possible for everyone? Merit from several past lives had made you fortunate enough to be here. Out of a few thousand in our institutions, how many students are lucky enough to be here? Only a few of you could follow Me to this place, Kodai Kanal. This you will have to preserve and sustain carefully.

A small example. Here is a roll of thread, which is the product of much rotating and winding. A time consuming job, really! If they take up this process in haste, and drop it in the middle out of neglect or carelessness, all the thread will lie scattered on the ground. Similarly, your fortune is like this roll of thread, carefully and laboriously wound, like the merit of the good deeds you had

done in your past lives. If you neglect this fortune and lose it by any mischance, you can't get it back. All the effort you have put in will go waste. The thick pad at the centre of this roll is like your faith round which your meritorious deeds are wound. So, never neglect this good luck, nor take it for granted, nor view it as simple and ordinary. Negligence and carelessness are harmful to spiritual aspirants.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! How does your Grace affect our destiny and our *prarabdha*, past karma?

Bhagavan: God's Grace and God's Will can change anything. God is Love. His Infinite Compassion makes Him change your *prarabdha karma* or the karmic effects of your past lives. A devotee can arrest God in the jail of his heart. In this world, there is nothing that you can't achieve with devotion. God's Grace can cancel all your karmic effects or the evil effects of your past life. Nothing untoward can happen to you.

A small example. You see many medicines kept for sale in a medical shop. On each of the medicines you find the date of manufacture and of expiry. The medicine will not act with efficiency beyond the date of expiry. It becomes just useless. What God does is exactly the same thing. He simply stamps on the medicine bottle the date of expiry canceling your *prarabdha karma*, the suffering you are going through in this life. Right then, your suffering ends. This is how Swami, out of His sheer Grace and Compassion, gives you relief.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! Can we be sure of God's Grace if we do *sadhana* regularly?

Bhagavan: Certainly! As sure as anything! Why do you doubt? For example, you have a pet dog. You feed it every day, and you will notice that it will get habituated to come to you exactly at the same time every day to be fed. Is this not true? When regularity makes a dog respond, why not God? You will definitely receive His Grace.

Anil Kumar (AK): Swami! We are here in Your presence because of Your Infinite Grace and Mercy. Your Blessings have brought us all here. We bask in the sunshine of bliss bestowed on us by Your Divine *darshan*, *sparshan* and *sambhashan*. Do we still need merit from past lives and the *samskaras*?

Bhagavan: The present state of bliss and the merit from past lives are both essential and they should go together. They are closely interrelated. Take this example. Here the soil is sandy. When there are heavy rains, water sinks into the soil or gets absorbed in the soil. The same is the situation with you at present. Therefore, devotion doesn't remain steady. But, suppose there is a flow of river water, what happens when it rains? Water will flow with greater vigour than before. Similarly, your present blessed opportunity of being with Me is like rainwater. If you have good *samskaras* from your past life like the water flow of a river, the blissful state you are experiencing now will continue with more vigour.

God's Grace is like a shower of rain. Your merit from the past will enable you to contain it. So, I tell you often to retain the good luck, the opportunity, and the privilege given to you. You draw water out of the well in a bucket. But you have to pick up the bucket full of water yourself. On the other hand, if you drop it in the middle, what happens? You can't collect water, can you? However, there is one important thing. If you love God intensely, you can achieve anything. As human effort increases, God's Grace also lends strength and intensity to the effort, which ultimately leads man to success.

CHINNA KATHA

Compassion Is a Sign of the Great

Once when Samartha Ramadas (a great saint from Maharashtra who was the preceptor of King Sivaji) was moving about the countryside with his disciples, those behind him seeing a fine field of juicy sugar cane, entered it and started pulling out the cane, crunching it with great relish.

The owner of the field, naturally enraged at their behaviour and at the loss to which they were subjecting him, fell upon them with a stout cane. The Master was sorry that his disciples had broken discipline so objectionably, drawn by the desire of the tongue for the sweet juice.

Next day they reached Emperor Sivaji's place, where a great welcome awaited the Guru and his followers. Sivaji offered to attend personally to the Guru during his ceremonial bath.

When Ramadas undressed, Sivaji was shocked to find broad red marks, indicating that he had been beaten! Such was the sensitive sympathy of the great saint that he received on his back the blows meant for his pupils.

Sivaji sent for the owner of the field of cane. When he stood shivering in fear before the Emperor and his Guru, Ramadas was requested by Sivaji to inflict on him any punishment he liked.

But Ramadas accepted the fact that wrong was committed by his disciples and blessed the farmer, granting him a boon that his lands would be tax free forever.

- Baba

COVER STORY

THE DIVINE OYSTER IN OTTERI

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has revealed to modern humanity a whole new dimension of holistic learning by raising the status of education to a pursuit that can liberate us and confer ultimate happiness, than securing only a decent standard of living. He has practically demonstrated this unique model of learning to the world through the deemed Sri Sathya Sai University and more than a hundred Sai schools that have sprouted in India and all over the globe.

To the students of His University, Bhagavan Baba is far more than a mere Chancellor. He is not only the architect of their destinies and their supreme benefactor, but also the most loving parent, wisest teacher, truest friend, and the ultimate role model that ever can be, for He is perfection personified.

He inspires them to pursue the highest goals in life, just like Him, and serve everyone unconditionally. He redefines the very purpose of their existence as a quest for virtues and divine ideals. Love acquires a whole new meaning as selfless service to fellow beings, and righteousness becomes a solemn commitment to live an upright life.

As His parting advice to a batch of graduating students in 1986, when Bhagavan Baba stressed the need to serve in villages, a student vowed to make that counsel her life's mission.

Inspired by the spirit of sacrifice demonstrated by her parents and the cooperation of her sisters, a former student of the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University is making history everyday by bringing the Divine Love and Light of Bhagavan Baba's philosophy of Educare to a neglected, forgotten and actually dangerous village in rural Tamil Nadu.

Spearheading a revolution in values education in a community that, till not too long ago, had the dubious distinction of churning out more goons and criminals per household than the national average, a dedicated team of alumnae of Bhagavan's University pay their dues to their sacred Alma Mater by running a very special school, and in doing so, they replicate the values education they have received at the Feet of the Supreme Teacher, their mentor, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

The Sri Vishwa Vidyalaya Matriculation Higher Secondary School, in a village near Chennai, India has lovingly embraced the embattled and downtrodden children, recreating them as models for humanity. Today, a small but driven group of Sai women students are leading the way in spiritual activism, reviving timeless values in a community that world had turned its back upon. The story of the sacrificing Sai University alumnae working in Otteri who have converted, so to say, a bed of pathetic pebbles into a perennial Oyster brimming with pearls, is most sanctifying and uplifting.

This account once again highlights the power of pure intent and the transformation at source, never by force, that the vast but absolutely silent love revolution generated by the Sathya Sai Incarnation is bearing upon the neediest of the world's forgotten children.

The atmosphere was electric. The occasion - grand, and the milieu – the best indoor stadium in New Delhi, the capital of India. While the rest of the city was slowly slipping into slumber after the day's toil, the Talkatora Stadium was ecstatically abuzz with frenzied activity. A great spectacle was about to unfold. It was past nine on that momentous night of February 11, 2006, and the over four hundred thousand music lovers filled every inch of space; the cool air was laden with a sense of exhilaration and excitement, and at the same time, eager expectation. The grand finale of the National Talent Hunt for young vocalists, organized by the internationally renowned Sangam Kala Group was striding along, and the audience's anticipation had indeed hit a high note. They reveled and rejoiced, screamed and shouted, as the stadium reverberated with the scintillating songs of the budding artists. Suddenly, the assembly fell silent. In fact, silence gripped the whole ambience; but for one melodious voice.

A frail and simple-looking girl had begun her devotional rendering *Dayaku Premaku Roopu Dalchina Daivama, Sai Daivama* in Telugu. The experience was out of the ordinary. Mesmerised by the melody, and overwhelmed with the soulful emotion that exuded from the little performer, the spectators became still and speechless. For the next ten minutes, an unusual serenity seemed to envelope their being. It touched the inner core of every heart, including the highly accomplished judges from tinsel town. When the results were announced, little Jayalakshmi, became a national star. She stood second in that prestigious competition and instantly the spotlight was turned on a little girl with a mighty talent, who suddenly transformed into the cynosure of everyone's eyes, especially the professionals from the music industry.

Ten-year old from Rural Tamil Nadu takes Delhi's Music Mandarins by Storm

Sounds like a headline from a tabloid, or a fictitious fairy tale, isn't it? But it is as real as the story that went into making of a national star out of a poor village girl.

Remarkably, just a year earlier, little Jayalakshmi did not even know that she had it in her to sing! Her electrifying performance at the Talkatora Stadium in the nation's capital was the very first time in her young life that Jaya had sung a solo in front of such a large gathering. Her earlier experience had been limited to singing as part of a group.

If the ignorance of her latent talent is surprising, her home situation is simply shocking, yet it is typical of millions of disadvantaged children in developing countries.

Two hours prior to leaving her home on the journey to New Delhi and stardom, little Jaya did not even have a decent pair of slippers or a presentable dress to wear, for such luxuries were unthinkable for her illiterate father, who earlier drove a truck and now, as a result of a serious injury, drives an auto-rickshaw, and struggles every single day to provide two square meals to his three daughters. The family's home is a tiny hut in the poverty ridden Manivakkam village, in the outskirts of the city of Chennai (formerly known as Madras) in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu!

Heartwarming Spirit of Camaraderie

Upon hearing the news of Jaya's imminent departure to Delhi, to participate in the talent hunt, her classmates spontaneously and immediately offered her their best dresses, slippers and other accessories for use. Her school Principal procured her travel tickets and made all other arrangements, while the Vice Principal, Ms. Vasumathi, personally accompanied her to New Delhi, given that Jaya's parents had neither any clue about their child's talent, nor the enormous significance of the competition, and certainly no resources or inclination to send her so far.

A Lotus Blooms in the Murky Waters

When Jaya returned triumphant, the children made huge banners to welcome her, while all her teachers voluntarily contributed to present her with a gold ring. The parents of Jaya, in awe and wonder at the sudden turn of events, had no words to say, except to express their gratitude. "Whatever good has happened in our life, it is because of the School! Two of my daughters are able to study there, because the School has arranged for scholarships. My daughter has won many prizes, but I have no clue. It is all due to the loving teachers of the School."

Today, Jayalaxmi is a rising star, an idol for her friends, pride of her parents, and more importantly, an ideal for society. In spite of their poverty, she exudes a remarkable sense of personal dignity and self-confidence, rather refreshing for her age, as she asserts, "I will never sing cheap songs for money; I will sing only those which extol the Lord. I am what I am because of my school and my dear teachers. I will walk on the path they have shown me."

Rural Uplift through Spiritual Activism

Jaya is just one of the many dust-to-diamond dramas that unfold almost routinely within the sacred precincts of Sri Vishwa Vidyalaya Matriculation Higher Secondary School (SVVMHS), located in a [formerly] notorious pocket, on the outskirts of Chennai where it is emerging as a lighthouse of values-based learning. An example of social uplift through education, and inspired solely by the spiritual activism exemplified by Bhagavan Baba, the school has its genesis in His message of personal salvation through selfless service to those in need.

From Poverty to Prosperity and an Integrated Personality

Krishna Chaitanya, who joined the school in Kindergarten, belongs to a nomadic tribe community. His father, a farmer from the state of Maharashtra admitted his son to SVVMHS after coming to know about the school from a friend. Today Krishna is pursuing Chartered Accountancy, the elitist degree in the field of commerce in India. As if his professional success is not enough, as a student, Krishna consistently won the first prize in the Gita Recital competition organized by the Chinmaya Mission of Chennai throughout, from his VI to XII grade. To maintain this victory, he competed against at least one hundred thousand student contestants in this competition every year.

Keeping up with the inspiration behind the Sathya Sai Education model, Krishna excelled not only in his mental and spiritual development, but also in physical accomplishments. He has a Black Belt in Karate, which he learnt at the school too. Today, he says, "As tiny tots we used to memorise Baba's sayings blindly. But now, when I am caught up in trying situations, I remember these words of assurance, and I realize I have greater mental equipoise than any of my class mates. I can never forget one fact - the world is a reflection, reaction and resound of our own selves. This has brought me to where I am despite my background."

The finished product, where personality is character and character is personality, this is integral education. – Baba

Oasis in Otteri – A Miracle of Divine Motivation

Transforming the lives of the little hearts, hardened by circumstances, social neglect and abject poverty in the rural areas, by instilling in them courage and confidence first, and then, imparting a value-oriented education, is the mission of the Sri Vishwa Vidyalaya Matriculation Higher Secondary School, run by none other than former girl students of the Sri Sathya Sai University.

This school, located 35 kms south of Chennai, in Otteri (a small village near Vandalur) has today become a beacon of hope and happiness for the beleaguered villagers, and at the same time, an ideal and a challenge for the schools in the city of Chennai. The journey this far has been no walk in the park, rather, it has been literally a walk on sharp rocks, big boulders and terrible terrain.

A Family's Crusade to Serve their Mentor

When the school was started in 1986 by Mr. S. V. Rajagopalan, an ardent devotee of Sai who gave up his job at an international bank to serve in a rural area, the village had no roads, only a muddy footpath. The village folk had little or no food, the very concept of cleanliness was alien to them, violence was rampant, and education, for them, was anathema, meant only for the affluent. Nothing however deterred Mr. Rajagopalan, because apart from the

support of his wife and four devoted daughters, he had one another asset in abundance – His Grace. In fact, it was Swami Himself who had inspired and initiated the whole endeavour.

Parting Divine Words Define Life's Mission

When his third daughter, Ms. S. V. Mala completed her education at the Anantapur Campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, in 1986, Swami blessed the outgoing students with an interview, and said, **“Go and serve in the villages.”** Taking the Divine Chancellor's parting words straight to heart, the family made it their life's personal mission to live it out in thought, word and deed. The dedicated sisters, along with their father, chose Otteri as their spot of loving service, as three years earlier, Swami had personally visited the adjoining Mannivakkam village. The family realized that through this project, the population of that blessed village could benefit immensely.

Where There Is a Will, There Is a Divine Way

For starters, the family had neither any resources nor available space. But their determination to defy all odds and achieve their dream of expressing their gratitude to their life's inspiration, their Divine Master, Bhagavan Baba, was unmistakable. The bleak prospects did not deter them.

Taking their first step, all they could see around the village was dilapidated huts of various sizes. The family's journey of a thousand mile began with the proverbial first step when they realised that they needed to pray – a lot. And right from the start, they found the Divine making insurmountable obstacles insignificant.

Was it a Coincidence? No, it's a Saincidence!

Within a few days they met a gentleman, Mr. Sripathi Rao, who too, incidentally, had resolved to work in that village and even had a house – the only semi-concrete house in the whole area. “The main idea of owning that house in the village was to serve the villages,” recalls Mr. Sripathi Rao. “When I first came in 1980, there was no electricity, transport or roads to this area, let alone proper schools. Later, a few schools did start in the vicinity, but they were all commercial in their approach. Therefore, when I met the dedicated family of the late Mr. S. V. Rajagopalan and heard about their noble plans of a service-oriented school, I intuitively knew it was God's Will at work. And so, I instantly offered my house to start the school.”

That is how SVVMHSS began with five grades, four classrooms and 54 students in the first year.

Unstinted Perseverance and Unconditional Love – the Success Mantras

Armed with a prayer on their lips and their Divine Lord's counsel to serve in the villages, the late Mr. S.V. Rajagopalan's two daughters, Ms. S. V. Radha and Ms. S. V. Mala, traveled 10 kilometers, out of which 2 kilometers was an arduous trek through muddy roads, everyday to open the school at 8 am in the morning.

During the rainy season, these two kilometers would be a frightening ordeal with, at times, knee deep water infested with snakes and insects to navigate through. Add to this the zero inclination of the villagers to send their children to school, as it meant fewer hands to work at home or in the fields. Even if they came, the children's health conditions, hygiene and overall cleanliness were appalling.

The teachers spent most of their energy in health education and creating an environment that made the school enticing enough for the children to return the next day. The challenge for the teachers was to first get the children involved in activities that they enjoyed the most like playing games, gardening, making garlands, etc. More importantly, the teachers gave the students what they lacked the most in their homes – a sense of being wanted, a feeling of recognition and importance – unconditional love and acceptance, as they had experienced from their Divine Chancellor and Lord, Bhagavan Baba.

Slowly, but surely, the children began to realize that their teachers genuinely loved and cared for them. That is how the school took shape in the initial years, and a bond began to develop between the students and the teachers, which later enveloped everybody – parents, supporters, community leaders – into its ambit.

The Divine Endorses the School as His

Meanwhile, by now, one of late Mr. Rajagopalan's daughters, Ms. S. V. Vijayalakshmi, had joined the Sai School in Ooty. When Swami visited this hill station to give joy to the little children in 1987, she showed Swami a card seeking blessings for their family's school in Otteri. "When I held the card," Ms. S. V. Vijayalakshmi, narrates, "Swami asked, 'What is this?' I said, 'Swami, father has started a school and we need Your Blessings because it is in a village.' Swami took the card immediately from me, looked at it and said, 'Why school? It has already become an Anantapur College!' Then I said, 'Swami, with Your Blessings, it can become like Anantapur College.' The next day, Swami called all the teachers of the Ooty School and suddenly started asking me about the school. 'How many classes are there?' I said, 'Swami, 7 classes' (by then two more classes had been added). 'No, not Ooty, I am asking about Otteri,' He said. I submitted again, "Yes Swami, 7 classes in Otteri'. Then He asked about the strength of the school. I replied, 'About 260, Swami'. Again, He said, 'Not Ooty, Otteri'. So, this went on and in the end, He said, 'Oh, this school and that school are one and the same' referring to the school in Otteri and the Sai School in Ooty."

Surmounting Obstacles through Surrender

It was this sweet love and concern of Bhagavan that helped the nascent project overcome all the major challenges in the initial years. Ms. S. V. Mala, the Principal, recalls, "We did not have any resources in the beginning, and financial crunch was a perennial problem. But then, we just relied on Him completely. Whenever we needed even a small sum of Rs.1000 to be made available the next day, we just prayed and tried our best. And almost always, at the nick of time, we found the money, help and support. We never stopped any of our planned activities. Swami has always been with us."

With this confidence in the Divine Will that was directing their pure intentions, the family continued their saga of selfless service. However, working in a rural area known for communal violence and other anti-social activities was not easy. Moreover, there were many governmental regulations to be complied with, which the school found very difficult, given its meager resources.

"I will take care of the school" – Baba

Since its inception, the school had grown every year by adding one extra grade. But in 1987, in face of some seemingly Herculean challenges, the family started doubting its ability to continue the project. It was in this year that Swami lovingly granted them an interview. As soon they went in, the first remark He made was this: "I know how much sacrifice your whole family is doing for the school". And then referring to the father, He said, "I know, though he appears as if he is not bothered, day in and day out he is thinking about the school, its growth and maintenance. He wants to do more for the welfare of the villagers." And then suddenly and solemnly, Swami said, "Why fear when I am here". Not only that He raised His Hand in blessing and reassured them again saying, "I will take care of the school, do not worry. One flower cannot make a garland, nor can one tree make a forest; I will send the people, I will do everything."

Divine Assurance Dispels Doubts, Emboldens Devotion

It is such potent Divine Assurance that propelled the school to greater heights every year. Tragedy however struck the family in June 1996, when the father Mr. S. V. Rajagopalan, the fulcrum of the devoted and spirited unit, suddenly fell ill, and passed away shortly thereafter. The daughters were devastated. They did not want to live in Chennai anymore. Moreover, getting the governmental recognition to start the 10th grade seemed next to impossible because of the bureaucratic red tape involved.

In a subsequent interview with Swami the following year, they prayed, "Swami, if You bless us, we will offer the school to somebody else, and serve You here in Puttaparthi permanently." But Swami said, "No, no! That is also My School. Take care of the school on My behalf. I will take care of everything."

From that day, the sisters have not looked back and continue to uphold the legacy of their late father. They have toiled hard and given their all to the school.

The school has never had any clerical staff. The Principal opens the school every morning, looks after administration, appoints teachers, collects fees, maintains records, as well as teaches the children.

Similarly, the Vice Principal has taught everything from commerce and social science to music, acrobatics, gardening, painting and chanting of *shlokas* (hymns). There were nine dedicated teachers in the initial years, out of whom three were former Sai students (including the Principal and the Vice Principal), and another two were ardent Sai devotees. The love they showered on the children was what laid the solid foundation of the school.

The Power of Love Lifts Students, Families and Community

When the mother of Srutishree, a ten year old student, wanted to discontinue her from SVVMHS to get her admitted in a posh city school which boasted of big playgrounds and spacious classrooms, her little one cried. When her mother forced her to write the entrance exam for the other school, she submitted an empty answer sheet and returned home. Today Sruthi is in grade VIII and is the pride of not only SVVMHS, but also of her parents, as she shines in everything she does, be it playing the keyboard, public speaking, dancing, and reciting spiritual verses to academics.

“We do not want the children to be only academically oriented,” says Ms. S. V. Vasumathi, the Vice Principal. “We want them to have an integrated personality, and this can happen when we expose them to various other activities. It is then that their hidden beauty blossoms and their personal growth becomes complete. This is what I personally learnt from the five years that I spent in Swami’s University.”

A school should not be considered just a common place arrangement designed for teaching and learning. It is the place where the consciousness is aroused and illumined, purified and strengthened, the place where the seeds of discipline, duty and devotion are planted and fostered into fruition.

Replicating their Chancellor’s Model of Integral Education

Ms. Vasumathi graduated from Bhagavan’s University after completing her Masters in Philosophy in 1994, and immediately joined the family’s school to help her elder sisters. Right from the start, it has been the sisters’ endeavour to make their school a replica of Swami’s school in Puttaparthi, however small in scale it may be. Therefore, the emphasis on extra-curricular and spiritual education is as strong as it is on secular subjects.

“Based on Bhagavan Baba’s advice that the End of Education is Character, the aim of our school is values-oriented. But this is not what many think and

other schools profess to offer. Our emphasis is on practice, which needs courage,” says the Principal. “Drawing such inner conviction from students has to be based on a spiritual approach. Again we do not here refer to meditation and such other spiritual practices. Spirituality, for us means instilling complete faith in God. From such unshakable faith arises self-confidence. We begin the whole process with small steps like devotional singing, verses from the Gita, Quran and other holy scriptures. Essentially, we tune their mind to God, and after that He takes over.”

Alumni’s Greatest Take Away – Priceless Life Lessons

It is for this reason that prayer and singing are an integral part of the school. Sharath, who is currently pursuing his MBA at Hyderabad, after completing his XII grade in SVVMHS, says, “The concept of praying to God before partaking food was something that struck me when I was a student of SVV. I realized how we tend to take certain basic things so lightly. Now this practice has become an inseparable aspect of my life and I owe it all to SVV.”

Kumaran was studying in the fourth grade when he was taught the *Mrityunjaya Mantram* (a powerful verse to ward off dangers) in the school. As a matter of habit, whenever he traveled, he first chanted the *mantra*, and then got onto the vehicle, be it a bus or train or whatever. One day he had to go to a nearby town, Tambaram, and en route, his bus met with an accident. Everyone was injured except Kumaran; he was extremely grateful for the habit that saved him from serious injury. The next day, with excitement and joy, he narrated the whole episode in the school assembly.

In fact, the School begins and ends with prayer. The 20 minute assembly session in the morning has chanting from sacred texts, followed by news, quizzes and thought for the day. And if it is any student’s Birthday, the entire gathering sings and wishes “Happy Birthday”, while a few come on the stage and enumerate that student’s good qualities.

After every class, the children chant the sacred hymn “Loka Samastha Sukhino Bavantu” which means, “Let all beings everywhere be happy.”

SVV Students – Agents of a Silent Revolution

The school is located in an infamous area that had acquired quite a reputation for breeding criminals. It is in those by-lanes that unemployed and uncared-for young adults were enticed and trained in the use of weapons. Since the school started, the violence graph in the community has fallen drastically. Run solely by women staff, till date, the school does not have a watchman. It doesn’t need one!

The students of the school have become its ambassadors of peace, goodwill and communal harmony. Twenty five percent of them are from a minority community, and whenever communal tension rose, it is these young leaders from the school who diffused the situation by appealing to their parents’ good sense, thereby calming the passions on both sides. Many have dissuaded

their families from consuming non-vegetarian food and making poor and unhealthy lifestyle choices.

Mr. Sitaram Yadav, a building contractor, and the father of Vipin and Harsha who joined SVV in 2001, says, "We were in the habit of eating non-vegetarian food. But once my children were exposed to the value education imparted at the School, they decided to give up eating anything that is non-vegetarian. Seeing their steadfastness, I too resolved to become a vegetarian."

There is a community, belonging to a particular caste in that region, who are used to taking alcohol. The parents of these families even encourage their young children to drink along with them everyday. Noticing the deteriorating effect this deadly habit was having on the physical and mental faculties of these children, the teachers of the School made many visits to the homes of these families and convinced the elders to give up this unhealthy habit. Today, this community had completely given up drinking liquor. Similarly, when Mr. Arumugam and Mr. Palani, who are illiterate and belong to the scheduled caste community, heard their children, Vanitha and Nithyakalyani, speak English with confidence, they were thrilled. The proud fathers decided to accede to their daughters' requests and gave up consuming alcohol and gambling.

"In a society which is writ with crime, the students of SVV are like shining stars," says Mr. M. Loganathan, the President of Mannivakkam Panchayat, the local Government. "The personal care and concern shown on every student is the hallmark of SVV," he adds, and says emphatically, "These students are truly the hope for a better future."

While bringing about all these amazing transformations of heart among family members and others in the society, the students are also unlocking their own hidden talents in the process.

A decade ago, Mohan Krishna was a carefree child who whiled away his time playing village games and doing silly things. Today, he is a graduate and also a certified Radio Artist at the All India Radio. In fact, he was awarded the "Best Percussion Player in Chennai City" in 2003. Going down memory lane, he nostalgically says, "I cannot forget the school life at SVV and my dear teachers. They took care of me so lovingly, spotted my talent and shaped my skills. Throughout my education at the school they arranged for scholarships, and I am proud to say that I am still continuing my education in another college because of this scholarship. Imagine that! I scored 98% in main subjects in my XII grade! It was because of the loving care of the Principal and the Vice-Principal. It gives me so much satisfaction to visit the school even now, and offer my services in whatever capacity. I have coached another student - Himamahesh, who is currently in the school, on a percussion instrument called *Dholki*, and I am so grateful for the opportunity."

"Our students are our strength," says Ms. S. V. Vasumathi, the Vice Principal. "They are willing to take up any activity of the school. We are extremely

satisfied that we were able to instill in them the power of positive thinking and the confidence to contribute to the welfare of others.”

Ms. K. P. Ashitha, another alumna of the school, who is currently working in the Electricity Board of the Government of Tamil Nadu, says, “The activity I enjoyed the most while in the school was Narayana Seva, wherein every Thursday, each class collected whatever they could, be it rice, vegetables or whatever, and then we packed them neatly and distributed to the poor in the evening. This left a deep impression on me, and now apart from visiting the school to coach the children on *shlokas*, which I am good at, I also take time out and serve the handicapped in my vicinity. This gives me immense satisfaction.”

Swami says, a person without compassion ceases to be a human being, and in SVV today this salient virtue, inherent in every human heart is gently prodded forth in the students at a tender age. A classic example is the story of Kripa and Parveen.

Pure Love Overcomes Prejudice

While Kripa was from a relatively affluent family, Parveen’s parents found it difficult to pay the very nominal fees that SVV charges. The situation compelled them to withdraw her from SVV and admit her in the government school, which was free, but the quality of education there was very poor. Both the girls were good in academics, and when Kripa heard of Parveen’s plight, she persuaded her parents to sponsor her classmate. The parents were touched by the loving sentiment of their child. She was more open-minded than them. Being an orthodox Brahmin family, it took the parents a while to shed their prejudices and offer their hand in help to a Muslim girl. More than what it has done to the students, the transformation of the parents is more precious, feel the school teachers.

From the most impressionable years, the children should be taught to cultivate love for all. Love leads to unity. Unity promotes purity. Purity leads to Divinity.

Now, Kripa’s parents are staunch supporters of the school. Her father, Mr. Ramesh, says, “What attracts me about this school is the selfless dedication of the teachers and their commitment to develop the child in all spheres. The students are given a free hand, and I like the way they are brought up with more devotion in their hearts, especially in these times when mental peace is not available anywhere, but within you. These little children are blessed to realize this very early in their life. This purity and sanctity in their thought process comes because of devotion.

“I first became aware of this school when I had gone to watch a Bhagavad Gita chanting competition held by Chinmaya Mission four years ago. There I saw tiny tots of 3rd and 4th grade chanting the *shlokas* so beautifully. I knew it

was no mean achievement to train the playful minds of kids to that level of perfection. Moreover, the discipline and mannerism of these children was exemplary. They listened to their teachers with reverence. I wanted to know more about these children and the people behind their fantastic achievement. Once I discovered SVV, I immediately transferred my daughter to this school. She is in Xth grade now and will write the Board Exams, but I am not even a least bit concerned, given the matchless dedication of the teachers of the School. My daughter has won a lot of awards and cups too in vocal music, dance, *bhajans*, *shloka* recitation, etc. for herself and the school. In fact, it has almost become a practice for the students of this school to win prizes whenever they participate in the city.”

Awards and Accolades Galore

One can realise this by stepping into the guest room of the school which overflows with awards and shields. Since the inception of the competitions, the school has been winning first prize in the devotional songs competition organised by Ramana Kendra and Amrutha Vidyalaya. In fact, the students were given a free trip to Tiruvannamalai, Tiruchuzi and Rajapalayam for their outstanding achievements. Continuously, they have won winners and runners in Patriotic song competitions organized by Bharath Vikas Parishad, Crescent School, Celebrate India and various other organizations. Whenever any competition was announced by Sri Suprabhatha Sabha, TTD, Bhakthaswaraa Bhajan Mandali, Dutta Peetham, etc. the school returned with laurels. The prizes included for events like painting, religious and general quiz competition, dance, oratory, charades, *rangoli* to yoga and karate. In fact, the students have been invited to perform and give concerts at reputed assemblies like TTD, Ram Samaj, Thiruvannamalai and so on. And the School's Band has been invited by other organizations to play on important occasions presided by the President of India and Chief Ministers.

“The fame of SVV has spread far and wide and is much talked about in Chennai city. I am proud that the academic standards and facilities offered here are on par or even better than the city schools. This School is, in fact, a boon to the society,” says Mr. Aramudhan, the President of the Vandular Panchayat, which is local government body in Vandalur, the area in which the School is located.

Values without Borders

Despite the disadvantages of challenging home environments, low or no literacy of many parents and the multi-faith student body, the teachers strive to draw out from within their pupils the universal values common to all races, religions and civilized societies. The universality of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's teaching comes through loud and clear in the whole-hearted participation by its entire student body in various forums where they shine with the added luster of the human values that form the core of their education program. An interesting fact about the laurels of this school's students is that many times the prizes in Gita chanting and *shloka* recitation competitions have been won by Muslim boys and girls studying in the school.

“SVV is not a School, but a Temple” – Mr. C. E. Parmeshwaran

Mr. C. E. Parameshwaran, a senior member of the Chinmaya Mission, says, “Whenever the students of SVV enter a competition, they set high standards, and it becomes mandatory for the other top city schools to cope up and raise themselves to that level. SVV is, truly, not a school but a temple. Every year I bring new set of members to this School to conduct the competition, so that they too get the opportunity to experience the joy of listening to the Divine Gita chanting done by these village children.”

If this is what attracted the attention of a spiritual organisation to the School, for the staff of Accenture, a global software and management consulting company, it was just the ambience. “The calm atmosphere and good vibrations here is so relaxing. It relieves you from your tensions and worries,” they said. When they watched the tremendous confidence of the children to stage a small cultural programme in very short notice, and heard them speak immaculate English, they were in for a surprise.

All the extra curricular activities of the School from *shloka* recitation to carnatic music, classical dance to learning karate, painting to playing musical instruments, and so on, are usually reserved for the last session of the day. Many children willingly stay back after school hours to practice their fine art, as in their homes they neither the facilities nor the space or ambience to nurture their talents. The teachers keep the School open till 8 or 9 pm almost every day to assist and encourage their spirited wards.

Excellent Academic Record

None of this has been achieved at the cost of academics. Kripa’s father says, “It may be easy for schools in the urban areas to achieve hundred percent results where generally the knowledge level of both the parents and the students are supposed to be higher. In spite of being in a rural area, SVV has been able to produce consistent results. In the recently held XII grade exams conducted by the Board, they attained 100% pass rate.” In fact, in the last six years, no student has failed to clear the X and XII grade tests. In 2006, one third of the students secured 85% and nearly all students of XII secured 1st class (above 60%). For the past five years, the School has been awarded a certificate of recognition from the Government for achieving cent percent result in Higher Secondary Board Examination.

The School’s Formidable Feature - Discipline

“You don’t find this type of a school anywhere in the city,” says Mr. Jayakumar, the parent of Divya, who is now in IX grade. “Most city schools are not able to compete with this school....Though it mainly caters to the lower middle class and the bottom most strata of society, its students invariably win prizes in every inter-school competition. This has actually caused a stir in many. But what has impressed me the greatest about this school is the discipline. And also, the noble objective of serving rural masses, inspired by Sathya Sai Baba. There is never an element of profit, it is selfless

service done with love. And I think it is this unstinted dedication of the Principal and the teachers that has made all the difference.”

Satisfaction of Selfless Service - The Key Driver

In SVV, you see indefatigable commitment in every staff member right from the highest to the lowest. Mr. Sripathi Rao, who initially offered his land to start the school, later applied for early retirement from the Postal Department in 1998, and since then has been serving in the school looking after the finances and other administrative work. “I find hundred percent satisfaction here. We always talk only about Swami or the School,” he says brimming with happiness and contentment. Even the elderly lady who has been the school’s sweeper since its inception, says, “Both of my sons have studied here. As long as I am alive, I will serve only in this school.”

The sincerity of the teaching staff is unparalleled. The engagement ceremony of Ms. Malathi, who teaches Grade XII chemistry, happened to fall on the same day her students had practical exams conducted by the Board. Without a second thought, she accompanied her pupils to their examination location. She says, “When I am sincere, I get a lot of satisfaction. To take up one thing at a time and do it perfectly is what I have learnt in this school.” Another teacher, Mrs. Rukmini, who has worked in some of the leading schools in Chennai City, says, “My career as a teacher, began only here and will find its culmination too here. I am aware of the big difference we bring out in the lives of these poor children who have nothing to inspire or enthuse them in their homes. This job has given me tremendous sense of fulfillment.”

Teaching is the noblest of professions; it is also the holiest sadhana (path) for self-realisation. For, it involves the cultivation of selfless love and the showering and sharing of that love. The teacher moulds the rising generation into self-confident, self-reliant, god-conscious persons.

Similarly, Mrs. Vijayalakshmi, who has served the school for nearly 10 years now, says, “The sisterly feeling among the staff members and the innocent love of the village children is no match for the salary other institutions offer.”

If the school today has 950 students, 25 rooms, three floors of four separate concrete blocks, one each for Kindergarten, Primary, High School and Higher Secondary students, a full fledged computer lab, a big playground, two buses, two vans, or is able to conduct ‘smart classes’ with the aid of videos, animations and captivating graphics by empowering teachers with technology inside the classrooms, it is because of this single virtue of dedication and faith in the Almighty.

The students too know that it is the Blessings of the Bhagavan Baba alone which has made their school so unique and exquisite compared to other schools. This is the reason why every year they celebrate November 23, the Birthday of Bhagavan Baba, as Children’s Day with great fervour and joy.

They decorate their classrooms, present music and dance, and organize fun games, while the teachers gift each one with presents. The Divine is celebrated all throughout the year, be it Dasara and Krishna Janmastami or Christmas and Ramzan.

Divine Grace Soothes Growing Pains

In 1996, when the construction of a new building became unavoidable, the school did not mind taking loans from well-wishers and friends to go ahead with their plans. Three years later, in 1999, the Principal and the Vice-Principal decided to upgrade their school to Higher Secondary Level by starting the XI grade. Despite their best efforts they were unable to get permission from the relevant government authority. Finally, they prayed to Swami and sought an appointment with a close aide of the then Education Minister. Recalling that day, Ms. S. V. Vasumathi, narrates, "We were highly tensed as we entered his chamber, as it was our last hope, and the academic year was drawing to a close. But we were in for a pleasant surprise! We saw a picture of Swami on his desk. That gave us confidence to speak out and explain our predicament. The official was very eager to see to it that the formalities were completed as soon as possible as it was 'Swami's School'. And we did not have to pay any amount to anybody. We knew Swami was at work."

Study to be Steady, says Sai

At no point in time did the Lord take His Loving Gaze off from the school. In 2004, Swami blessed the participant-teachers of an EHV training programme organized in Anantapur, with an interview in Puttaparthi. Ms. S. V. Vasumathi, who was part of the group who attended the course, took the opportunity to present her problem to Swami. She said, "Swami, the students are still not up to the mark academically." Then, Swami asked, "Why should one study?" Vasumathi was silent. The Lord continued, "One should study to be steady. They are all good children. Do not worry. They will do well in academics too." Ever since the day of the Divine Pronouncement, the school has been scoring hundred percent results continuously.

The actual syllabus is not as important as the creation of an atmosphere where noble habits and ideals can grow and fructify.

National Award for Tireless Selfless Service

One of the most prestigious recognitions came to the school in 2003 when it was conferred with the national Manava Seva Samvardhini Award instituted for enterprising women from all over India. The Vice Principal of the school received this award from the Governors of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra at a grand function organized in the Shanmukhananda Hall, Mumbai. The citation said:

“Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani is pleased to present Sadguru Gnanananda award 2003 to Ms. S. V. Radha, Ms. S. V. Mala and Ms. S.V. Vasumathi in deep appreciation of their outstanding effort as co-founders of the SVVMHS in a hamlet of Otteri extension on the outskirts of Chennai.

This award is a token of the grateful appreciation of the entire society for their meritorious work and tireless initiative in working towards the betterment of the lives of the rural people.”

This, surely, was an amazing recognition of their untiring selfless service. But, for the teachers of the School, a smile or a word from their Beloved Swami is all that matters.

The Lord’s Sweet Concern

In fact, as recent as January 2007, when the school teachers offered a card to Swami praying for His Blessings during His visit to Chennai, Swami looked at them and quipped, “Manivakkam School? Should I come there right now?” That is how much the Lord loves the School and its dedicated teachers, proving that He never forgets anybody, especially if one has dedicated one’s life completely for His Work. More recently, He gave them yet another reassurance of His love for their efforts to live life in the light of His Message and Example.

“You do My work, I will take care of yours” – Baba

Out of the many plays submitted by the various Sai centres and groups across the state of Tamil Nadu, the drama proposed by this School, has been selected for staging in the Divine Presence of Bhagavan Baba on Tamil New Year Day, 2008. The students are no doubt ecstatic and the teachers see it as another sign of His Amazing Grace upon His School! Adding to their joy of being chosen amidst such stiff competition, the Lord ensured that the school received the necessary support just in time to cover the expenses for the sets, costumes and other preparations necessary for the drama, leaving their cup of joy overflowing!

The budding and blossoming of the School is a story akin to the growth and prosperity of Puttaparthi itself. Both started in rural areas and have made huge differences in the lives of the village folk, while drawing the attention of the international community. The process has been gradual and steady – at God’s pace.

SVVMHS – A Grand Mission in Making

The mystery of the Divine Master-plan is hard to comprehend. Who knows, just as Swami had mentioned in their first interaction, the Sri Vishwa Vidyalaya Matriculation Higher Secondary School may one day grow into the Sri Vishwa Vidyalaya College, and maybe even graduate into a University. Incidentally, the literal translation of the Sanskrit words ‘Vishwa Vidyalaya’, is University. It will be a University where devotion and love will be the

underlying principle behind every activity and endeavor, just like the Sri Sathya Sai University. With the products of the Divine University as the chosen instruments of change, even the sky is not the limit!

Dear reader, the life and teachings of Jesus were expounded only by His four disciples, Mark, Mathew, Luke and John. Today, millions find their lives' purpose in the light of Biblical virtues and guidance, thousands of years after the cruxifixion of Christ. Uniquely, humanity today is at the dawn of a new age of blessings. During the physical Presence of the Greatest Master of all times, Sri Sathya Sai on earth, His students like the Anantapur alumnae in Otteri, are spreading the same values and message by living it themselves. This powerful moral impulse emanating from Bhagavan Baba's Divine personality is bearing a profound impact at a global level, transforming those who practice, spread and benefit from His Life, Teachings and Example.

Bhagavan Baba urges us to sanctify our lives by practising unconditional love by serving our fellow beings without judgment, reservation or expectation of any recognition, just like Him. He explains, "The dull and the inert will hesitate to work for fear of exhaustion, failure or loss. The emotional and the passionate individuals will plunge headlong into work and crave for quick results and will be disappointed if they do not come in. The balanced persons will do all work dispassionately deeming it to be their duty; they will not be agitated by anything, failure or success. The godly will take up activity as a means of worshipping God and they leave the results to Him. They know that they are but instruments in the hands of God."

With thousands of students from His schools and colleges striving to become His worthy instruments, the time to connect the dots and build a critical mass to deluge our planet with heightened awareness about the oneness of all live forms, the interconnectivity behind all diversity and the singularity of the energy that binds us all cannot be too far.

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 15

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. Our quest for Infinity is taking us on a long journey, is it not? Well, after all it is Infinity we are after, and we should not be surprised if the quest is long! However, as long as the quest itself is exciting, I guess there is not need to feel either tired or bored. With that preamble, let me pick up the threads from where I left off last time.

If you recall, I had, after recalling first the ancient versions of the so-called Cyclic Model of the Universe [which I did in QFI – 13], moved on to a brief narration of how the Cyclic Model came to be revived in the 20th Century, and how it came to be abandoned after four fatal blows were delivered to it, almost till very recently. And yet, in a sort of never-say-die spirit, the Cyclic Model is refusing to give up, incarnating in a new “Avatar”, taking the help of modern String Theory. I briefly hinted about this development in some of my earlier presentations but this time, I shall go into it in as much detail as we can in these pages. So on now finally to the “New Improved Version of the Cyclic Model, with a Magic Additive called String Theory!” – may be I could try to sell it that way, just like TV ads try to sell soap and toothpaste!

Before I proceed any further, let me assure that I am **not** about to present a soap opera; on the other hand, this is serious cosmology. Let us go back a bit and start with a sketch that summarises the essence of what people believed in, after the original Inflation Model of the Universe received general acceptance. This schematic may be seen below; along with this schematic, I also offer another that captures similarly the essence of the original Cyclic Model [pre Tolman, that is – see QFI – 14].

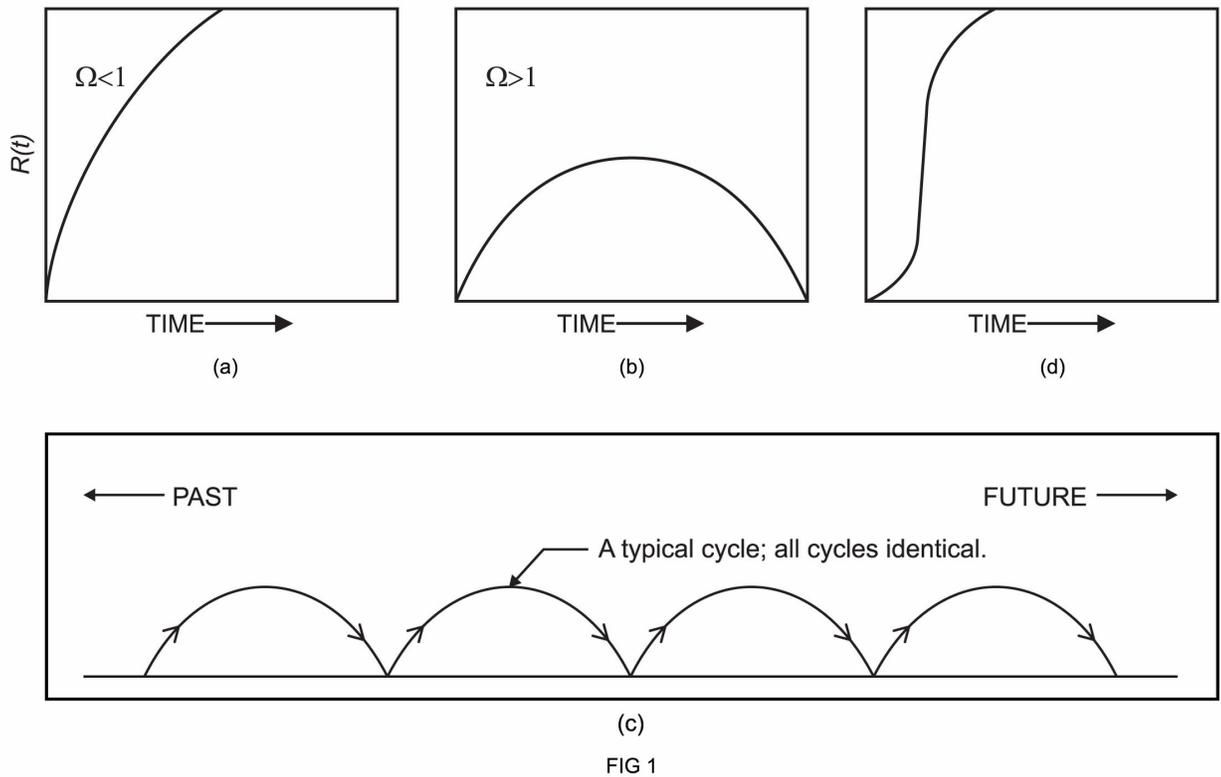


FIGURE 1. The sketch in (a) shows one of the three possibilities for the evolution of the Universe, originally considered by Freidmann. In this, the Universe is born, expands, then contracts, and ends up in a point, even as it started its existence as a single point. The curve in (b) shows the scenario as it later became when it was realised that Universe is not closing, on account of dark matter. It is a further study of this curve that led to the Inflation Model; the curve corresponding to this is shown in (c). The curve (d) shows the closed loop being repeated endlessly, and that is the essence of the original Cyclic Model. All this is essentially a recap of what has been said before.

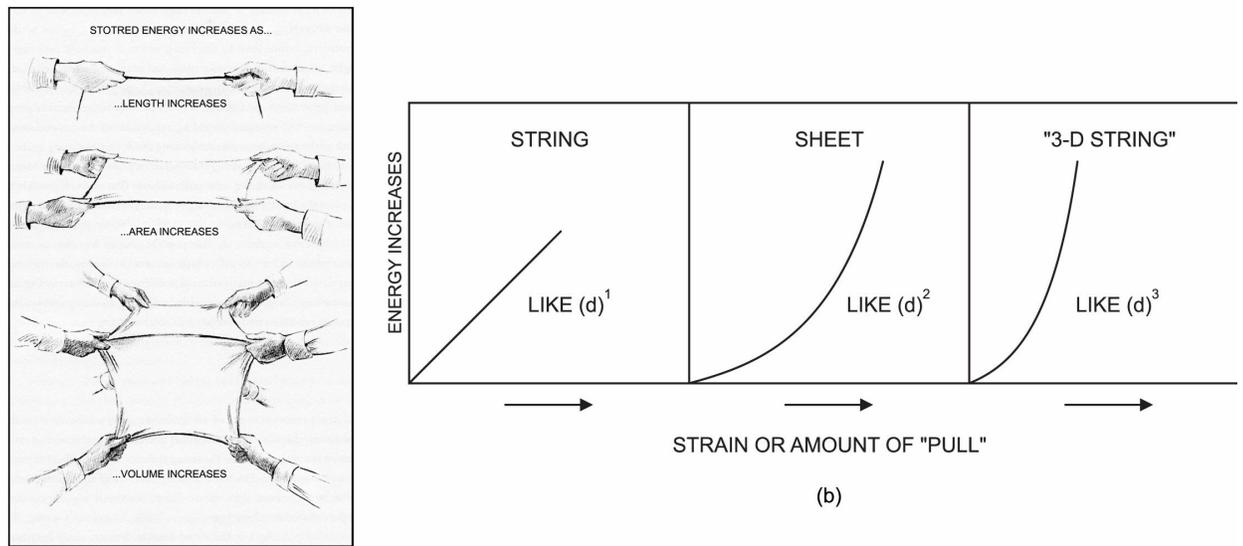
The Cyclic Model of the Universe - With Strings Attached

I also told you in detail last time how, starting with Richard Tolman, four blows were struck on the Cyclic Model. That being the case, one would have thought that the Inflationary Model would now be proclaimed the victor and rule the scene. However, thanks to Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok, the Cyclic Model is trying to stage a comeback [in a “new and improved form” of course], and the rest of this episode would be mostly about this revival story.

As I have mentioned several times [though only briefly and somewhat casually up to this point], the version of the Cyclic Model that Paul and Neil offer is based on String Theory; and they are venturing to do this because in their view, the Inflationary Model [Figure 1 a] is not all that faultless. So,

before I start describing what exactly Paul and Neil are trying to do, let me remind you of a few elementary facts concerning strings and String Theory. The first thing is that string can acquire tension and store this tension energy. If, for example, you consider a small piece of string that is open and loose, then it would have no tension. However, when pulled, it would develop tension; moreover, the tension grows linearly, that is to say, if the length is doubled, the energy also is doubled. If the length increases three-fold, then correspondingly the energy of tension also is trebled, and so on. [See Figure 2].

Suppose we have, instead of a piece of string, a rubber sheet or membrane; in this case also the energy due to pulling or applying a tension or strain energy as it is sometimes called, would increase. By how much? Well, there is where the thing becomes interesting. If say the sheet is in the form of a square and as a result of the pull, all sides double in length. The strain energy would then not just double but increase four times. It turns out that if we move over from simple strings to two and higher dimensional membranes, the energy increase is proportional to $(d)^n$, meaning the n th power of the dimension of the [generalised] string. Thus, in the case of the ordinary string, the energy increases simply in proportion to (d) ; in the case of the two-dimensional string or sheet, it increases as $(d)^2$. In the case of the three-dimensional string, the energy increase follows the rule $(d)^3$, and so on; hope that is clear.



(a)

FIG 2

Figure 2. The sketches here show tension being applied to strings of dimension 1, 2 and 3 respectively. In every case, tension produces strain, and this results in energy being stored in the string. The sketches in (a) illustrate the application of tension and the size enhancement that results. [These sketches are based on what Paul and Neil provide in their book.] Naturally, as

the strain increases, so does the energy stored. The interesting point is that the increase in energy is proportional to the n th power of the dimension of the string, i.e., the increase goes as $(d)^n$ where n is the string dimensionality. This is depicted in (b).

Now why am I telling you all this? Just to convey two important facts: The first is that if we want an efficient energy reservoir, then we should consider strings of higher dimensions or branes. The second and the related fact is that developments in String Theory do offer scope for considering branes, rather than just simple strings themselves.

Initially, hardly anyone even thought of connecting String Theory with Cosmology; there were problems in the theory itself, which, let us remember, was still in a rudimentary stage. One problem was that there seemed to be so many versions; the question was: "Which one of these was to be taken seriously?" Then came Witten, who, waving a magic wand as it were, assured the community that though there appeared to be diversity, there was really a basic underlying unity – I described this in QFI – 10. [Reminds us of Swami's saying: "Jewels are many but gold is one", does it not?]

Soon after the Witten magic, many thought, "May be, we can use the M theory and explain inflation. If we do that, then inflationary cosmology would have a foundation in fundamental physics." There was great excitement in the air, even as many worked hard to get there first. But then came the bad news and the crash – the M theory, if invoked to explain inflation, did predict inflation but **the inflation happened too fast**. By this I mean the universe after inflation had too many wrinkles and it was not smooth by any means, which went against experiment. In Physics, experiment always has the final say; if its vote is negative [meaning the experiment comes up with a result that does **not** agree with theory], then out goes the theory, no matter how distinguished and famous the author is! Well, that is exactly what happened in this case, though there were no star competitors.

Physics and Cosmology Attempt to Agree

That was one down for M theory, no entry into cosmology, at least right then. We move on now to the late 1990's when a scientific meeting was arranged at the Newton Institute in Cambridge, [recall QFI – 12 where I discuss the birth of this Institute]. The main aim of this particular meeting was to bring leading string theorists and cosmologists together to the same venue, hoping that proximity and stimulating talks would induce the two communities to break new ground by coming up with innovative ideas. That indeed happened.

It all started with a talk by Burt Ovrut, a highly respected string theorist and a colleague of Paul Steinhardt during the latter's stay at the University of Pennsylvania. Ovrut who was not only a good physicist but also blessed with artistic talent, made his talk come alive with evocative drawings and sketches, even as he explained complex ideas. Ovrut started by reminding the audience that space in string theory is multi-dimensional [see QFI – vv]. He then drew on the board, two close sheets that were close and parallel. Although the

sheets shown in the sketch were two-dimensional, Ovrut asked the audience to imagine that these two-dimensional sheets really represented nine-dimensional space. [By the way, in Physics and cosmology too, we must consider not only space but also time, which, by the way, has the status of a dimension, though of a different type. Here, for simplicity, we keep the time aspect out.]

Are we not missing something here? Is not the Witten theory supposed to have ten space dimensions rather than nine? Sure there are ten space dimensions in all and we are **not** forgetting the tenth dimension. Ovrut said that the gap between the sheets lies along the tenth dimension. In other words, the gap represents the tenth dimension of sheet 1, and it also represents the tenth dimension of sheet 2. Ovrut added something more. He said that the sheets [which, remember are really branes], are not ordinary ones. Branes normally have space on both sides [this sentence may sound confusing; if it does, think of it this way: branes are like “carriers” for space dimensions]. But Ovrut’s branes were special; they represented the boundaries of the tenth dimension. Put this way, space [taking all dimensions into consideration] exists only on one side of the two branes and between the two branes; the side of the brane that is chosen, faces the gap. I am aware that all this is a bit difficult to grasp [and also maybe to swallow!].

To repeat,

1. There are two branes facing each other and close to each other.
2. Each brane is a carrier for space.
3. Each brane has nine plus one space dimensions.
4. The tenth dimension lies between the sheets, while the remaining nine are confined to one side of the sheet only.
5. Further, and this is a point I did not mention earlier in order not to confuse you too much, six of the nine are really extra dimensions; they curl up or are compactified [see QFI – 10].
6. The branes are something like stages for universes to reside.
7. On one brane resides our Universe. About the other, we do not know; nor are we bothered.
8. We are stuck like flies on flypaper, that is to say, we are confined to our Universe which is attached to one of the two branes forming a pair in a strange cosmic pair!

This is the starting picture of Ovrut. Why does Ovrut want this other parallel brane? What purpose does it serve? Why is he not satisfied with just one brane? According to Ovrut, the proximity of two such brane worlds could lead to spring-like forces between the two branes, and as a result, the branes could move back and forth. Could they collide? Maybe! Could the collision produce a Big Bang? Perhaps!

So you get the idea, don’t you? Bringing in branes and all that, even opens up the possibility of explaining why the Big Bang occurred! Wow!! However, things are often not that simple in Physics; it is one thing to get a bright idea but quite another to work out the details mathematically. And physicists are

pretty hard-nosed people who don't accept mere handwaving! If you have an idea, you must first spell out all the details mathematically and give a framework that enables people to do their own calculations and make predictions. After that, one waits for experiments; and that is when the jury is out. After that the final outcome; do the experiments agree with experiments or not? If they do not, then out goes the theory, no matter how beautiful and elegant it is mathematically and how famous its author! In this case, the mathematics of the colliding branes, at least the first cut, proved too tough. And that is how the curtain came down on scene 1.

Great Minds Struggling with Gigantic Theories

The curtain rises again, this time on scene 2, which begins in a train going to London from Cambridge. Time: The evening of the day when Ovrut gave his talk. Three people are riding the train, all going to London for the same purpose, to attend a play there, which was supposed to be a part of the cultural program associated with the heavy scientific discussions – major conferences and seminars always throw in some event meant to promote relaxation; often it is a party [and I guess you understand what that means!] but in this case, Cambridge being a high-brow place, the organisers just gave the participants tickets to a high class play then running in London.

Huddled in the train speeding to London were Paul, Neil and Ovrut. They were lost in discussion, hardly aware of the landscape speeding by. They realised that brane collisions were unavoidable in M theory. Next, a brane collision would in no ways be unique; if there was a collision, then there must have been others before, and that concept had of course, huge implications; it meant – back to the Cyclic Model! What?! How could that be? That model had been killed four times and buried four fathoms deep! However, it seemed that in the M theory, the Cyclic Model could not be dismissed all that easily!

Meanwhile, the train pulled into London, and the brain-storming session had to stop. However, the seeds of a new idea had been sown, at least in the minds of Paul and Neil, and that is how scene 3 begins!

Scene 3: Paul and Neil decide to work and do so intensely to see if they could pull something out of all this. Sure it was not easy, but then, exciting problems seldom are. However, history has shown many a time that if one is steadfast, never loses hope and persists in nibbling away at the difficulties the model posed, then one day, one might even hit the jackpot. It was that hope that kept the two going.

Paul roped in an associate, Justin Khoury, and the two worked closely, holding daily meetings to discuss progress. Paul and Ovrut also met once a week, though one was in Princeton and the other in Pennsylvania – that was the kind of magnetic pull that the new idea provided. What about Neil? Well, he was on the other side of the Atlantic, sometimes in Cambridge where he had settled, and sometimes in his native South Africa, where he was trying to set up the new African Institute for Mathematical Sciences. Between Neil and the trio in America, there were countless phone calls, e-mails, and faxes, so

that everyone was in touch with everyone else all the time. Digressing for a moment, these days, we take all such conveniences for granted; thus, we scarcely appreciate how different it was say in 1900 or, for that matter, even in 1950. We must keep that in mind, when we reflect on the way science developed back then.

Scene 4: Something emerges after all this furious tossing of ideas and scribbling hundreds of equations on pieces of paper all the time. The four mentioned above have a model, a model based on M theory, a model that addressed the question of the birth and the evolution of the Universe, our Universe of course. What was the big deal about this new idea, apart from the fact that it relied on M theory to kick off the birth of the Universe? The big deal [schematically illustrated in Figure 3] is that it tries to explain why our Universe is presently the way it is, WITHOUT bringing in inflation.

Remember what I said about inflation when I introduced it to you to in QFI – 08? Alan Guth invented the idea of inflation in order to explain why the Universe is pretty smooth and rather flat today, which it would not have been if we had only regular and steady growth/expansion from the moment of the Big Bang.

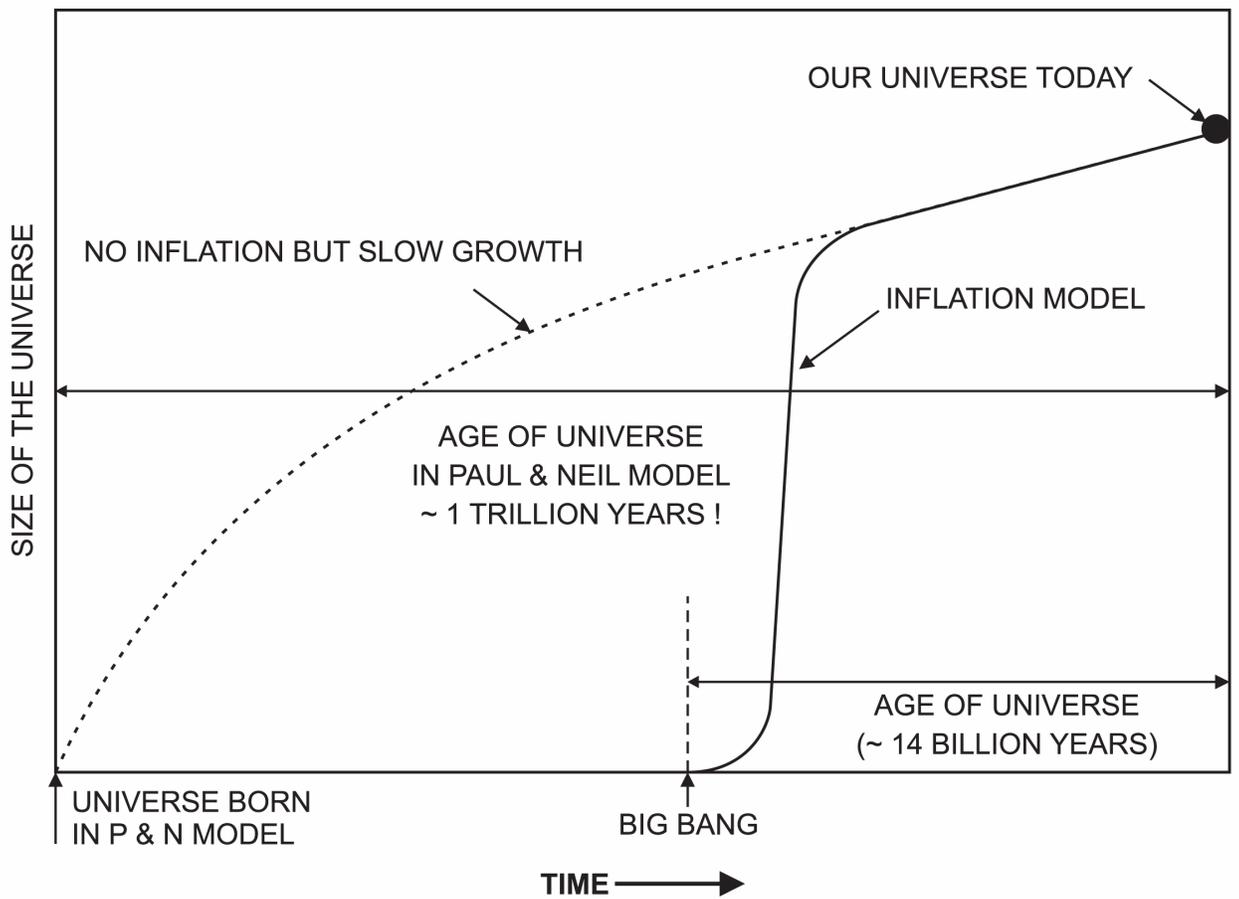


FIG 3

Figure 3. This figure compares the history of growth of the Universe in the Inflation Model and in the Paul-Neil Cyclic Universe Model. In other words we see here a comparison of how the size of the Universe is supposed to increase without and with Inflation. Initially, when ideas were still rudimentary, no one bothered about the early history of the Universe. But there came a time when one did have to give detailed consideration to what could have happened in the Baby Universe. That was when Alan Guth took a bold step and said: "Let us start with the way the Universe is today, smooth, wrinkle free and isotropic, and along with it also the current observed rate of expansion of the Universe. In addition, let us accept that the Universe was born in a Big Bang around 14 billion years ago, as most people believe. If we combine all this, then an inflation or a dramatic increase in size, an increase of the type impossible to imagine, is unavoidable; and that staggering increase is Inflation!"

That picture slowly got accepted over the years. And now, Paul and Neil are saying something radically different. In proposing their version of the Cyclic Model based on M theory, they say, "The Big Bang did not occur 14 billion years ago but about a TRILLION or so years ago; and that Bang was due to brane collision. Over the birth, the Universe evolved slowly, to reach the state

it now is in; and in this way, the Universe escaped Inflation!" [How nice it would be if we could escape financial inflation in some such manner!] The picture above captures the spirit of the above two points of view.

Now you might wonder: In one of the earlier issues, I told you that recent high precision satellite experiments had suggested that the Inflation Model was right; and now I am telling you that maybe inflation did not occur at all! So what's going on? Are the physicists spending huge amounts of public money and using it for engaging in a huge con game? Not really.

You see, when the satellites obtained some data and the authors of the experiment wanted to know what that data was telling us, they did the obvious and the most reasonable thing. Now typically, when there are new experimental findings, the researchers usually say: "Let us see who has said what about such matters prior to our experiments." They then study carefully all the earlier predictions made by model builders or "forecasters" if I might call them that, and then say, "Well, it looks like our data are consistent with the predictions made by so and so; however, there are some differences," and so on. That is the way opinions are generally expressed and conclusions drawn. If there is only one candidate theory available, then that alone is considered while examining the data. That DOES NOT mean that another theory later could not explain all these facts in an entirely different way. Such things do often happen and I shall tell you more about such matters later, when we consider fundamentals of physics needed to consider matter, space and time in their entirety.

What I am driving at is that when the satellite results became available, the only model generally accepted was the Inflationary Universe Model; and that was the model the results were compared with, as was to be expected of course. While the satellite experiments certainly were in agreement with many aspects of the Inflationary Model [in so far as they relate to the Universe as it existed after radiation started dominating – see Fig 06 in QFI –09], the satellite data could be equally in agreement with an alternate model [such as we are discussing now] where after about say anywhere between 100,000 to 300,000 years after the Universe was born [an event we describe via the word Big Bang], the Universe had the same appearance as it had in the Inflationary Model. As Figure 3 above shows, in one case, this state when the radiation era begins is attained, in the Inflation Model by one burst of super rapid expansion. In the Brane Collision Model now under discussion, this same state is reached via a slower growth stretched over a longer period. The end result [i.e., the state of affairs when the radiation era begins] is the same; what differs is the **way the Universe evolves to this era**. Is there any way of picking between these two alternatives? There sure is but that would come later.

Let me continue with what I was telling you earlier. While discussing what I called "Scene 4", I told you Paul and Neil, along with two others, came up with a model for the Big Bang and the subsequent evolution of our Universe, that sought to avoid inflation, and yet be able to describe the Universe the way it is

found to be by recently launched satellite experiments. The model was far from perfect but seemed very promising.

A Universe of Fire

At this point, there arose an interesting issue: what name to give the “new baby”? All kinds of suggestions were made from Big Splat to Brane Smash. However, Paul Steinhardt, who felt that this was too important a matter to be dismissed with some humorous and funny title, sought the help of Greek scholars; as a result, the name ***Ekpyrotic Model*** was given to this new idea in which our Universe is born out of brane collision. The Greek work *ekpyrosis* means that the Universes was born out of fire. And this name Ekpyrotic Model has since stuck.

Scene 5: August 2001. There is a meeting in Rovaniemi, Finland, a small town right near the Arctic Circle. The meeting called COSMOS – 01, brought together cosmologists and particle physicists, and it was at that meeting, that Paul and Neil presented their [draft] paper on the Ekpyrotic Model. The presentation started a heated argument involving, as Paul and Neil recall, “a raucous back-and-forth with a few enthusiasts of the inflationary picture, a snowstorm of silly barbs and minor quibbles. In the end, most of the audience probably left with the impression that the ekpyrotic picture was too exotic and confusing to be considered a serious contender. As the two of us left the auditorium, we were so frustrated by the lost opportunity that we agreed not to exchange a word about what had happened until breakfast the next morning.”

Scene 6: Paul and Neil get up next morning, after a sleepless night, in a rather grumpy mood one might add, and mechanically go through the breakfast routine. They then go for a long walk alongside a river in the bright Arctic sunlight. A serious conversation begins. Questions are fired back and forth and the discussion goes like: “No that cannot be right!” “But look at it this way!” “Maybe we could fix that problem doing this!” “You know what? That’s a great idea. You know why? Because we now could do this....” And so on. It is difficult to describe the mood that grips a lively scientific dialogue when very creative ideas get tossed around, but this much I can say with mild experiences of such brainstorming. Suddenly, the cloud lifts and where there was darkness, there is new hope, a feeling of light-at-the-end-the tunnel, and a desire to roll up the sleeves and get back to work. That’s what happened after the long walk in the Arctic Circle.

Paul and Neil began to understand why their paper on the Ekpyrotic Model got a reception, that was as cold as the Arctic winter! There were all kinds of conceptual defects, all of which needed a fix. The problem was to find that fix, and it was when they went about that task that the “new improved version” of the Ekpyrotic Model was born! And it is that version 2.0 [which, took shape even as America was shaken by the so-called 9/11 attack] that I shall now describe in outline, of course glossing over as usual, the knotty and complex details.

The key idea is that the two branes that face each other [with the tenth dimension tucked in between] are held together by some kind of a spring-like force. Now elementary physics tells us that if two objects are coupled by a spring, they could move back and forth relative to each other in a periodic way. The way this is taught to physics students is by drawing a picture of the force or tension that exists between the two entities connected by the spring. While force is what matters for motion, in physics we start with something more fundamental, which is energy [the “mother” of the force]. For the usual spring problem, the potential energy associated with tension varies with separation as sketched below.

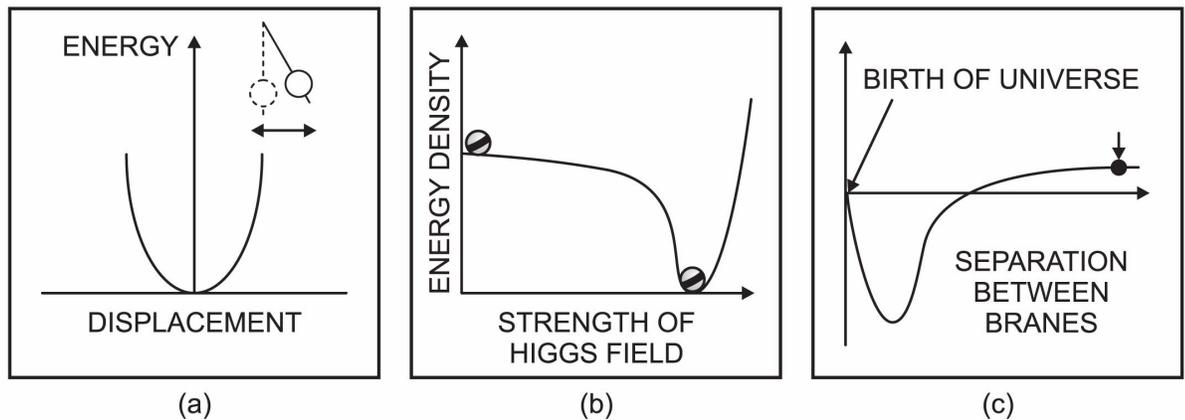


FIG 4

Figure 4. Shown here are three figures. The first (a) concerns the basics of simple harmonic motion, a good example of which is the simple pendulum. Here, the energy varies as the square of the displacement of the pendulum from its equilibrium position. In (b) we have a recap of the energy density curve that was used to explain Inflation. Note, here we do not talk of any displacement. What is of interest is the energy state of the Universe. Initially, the energy density is high; from that state, the Universe “rolls over” to the valley, which is the lowest energy state possible. Inflation, as explained earlier [see QFI 09] is all due to this roll over. In (c) Paul and Neil present an energy curve that combines features of both (a) and (b); this gives the curve in (c). Once again, the focus shifts to displacement, and we see in (c) a synthesis of the features of both (a) and (b). How the features actually control and regulate brane collisions we shall examine in a later issue.

In the case of the brane collision, the potential energy curve invoked by Paul and his associates was a bit more complex as we see in Figure 4. If we compare this curve with the usual curve used for the spring problem, there is a substantial difference; this difference has been built in deliberately to take care of many of the subtle nuances of the Cyclic Model [based on brane collision]. However, there is one aspect of this overall curve, that bears resemblance to the usual harmonic oscillator curve; and that part of the curve

is crucial for producing a “cosmic dance” of the branes, that leads to the repeated “birth and death” of the Universe. That in brief was how the Cyclic Model was sought to be revived, using branes now [with all their extra dimensions] rather than with just three space dimensions, as the earlier version [see QFI –14] tried.

The stage is now set to have a brief glimpse of the ekpyrotic model as proposed by Paul, Neil and others, based on repeated collisions of two branes, locked in an intricate “cosmic dance” as it were. However, that would have to wait till the next issue! Meanwhile, let me say a word two to those who might wonder what has all this really got to with Infinity, if by Infinity we mean God. At the moment, it might seem that the connection if any is rather tenuous. However, when we are finished, you would be surprised how subtly Infinity leaves its fingerprint in the most unlikely places, including in things infinitesimal! All that comes much later. In the meantime, I do hope you are enjoying this quest, even though you might not exactly be able to follow some of the things I am trying to explain.

Thank you for your patience and being with me for, let me see, more than one year now? That sure is most encouraging to me! See you again next month. Jai Sai Ram.

LIFE IS A GAME – PLAY IT!

Imagine you are watching a cricket match and at a crucial moment, your favorite player who had been playing superbly was caught out! You might have been disappointed, but did you ever expect the chairman of the cricket board to come down and declare your favorite batsman to be not out since he was playing so well? Or, for that matter, ever expect the umpire to change the rule of the cricket game temporarily so that he would not be out?

No, because we understand that there is no fun in the game without rules. And changing or transgressing the rules in the middle of the game, spoils the spirit of the game.

The same human mind which not only appreciates, but also expects the sports and games to be exciting, with unexpected twists and turns, questions God when it comes to the game of life.

In an interview given to the Blitz Magazine in September 1976, the interviewer asked Bhagavan Baba, “Why does God not help people in distress by bringing rains in times of drought or creating food where there is famine by means of His Divine Power? Cannot an Avatar help humanity to prevent calamities like earthquakes, floods, droughts, famine and epidemics?”

Baba answered: “Any such instant solution would go against the fundamental quality of Nature itself, as well against the karmic law of cause and effect. Suffering and misery are the inescapable acts of the Cosmic Drama. God does not decree these calamities, but man invites them by way of retribution for his own evil deeds. This is the corrective punishment which induces mankind to give up the wrong path. I work through them, rouse the in-dwelling God in them, and evolve them to a higher reality in order to enable them to master the natural law and forces, and avert the calamities themselves.”

So, we have certain rules in this game of life to abide by; rules by which the nature runs. We have our duty towards Mother Nature, and we should do our best towards preserving the environment in its best shape, while seeking God’s Grace and help for the same.

On the contrary, if we act in a way such that the balance of nature is disturbed, chaos is bound to arise. The same nature, which provides man the resources for his sustenance, can turn hazardous. In terms of the cricket analogy, the same ball, which when timed properly could have fetched the batsman a six runs, would also get him out, if played carelessly.

The Challenge in the Game Today

Pollution and environmental problems are increasingly seen as the biggest threat the world faces today. And it was the Industrial Revolution which marked a major turning point in human social history that also gave rise to modern environmental pollution as it is generally understood today. The emergence of great factories, consumption of immense quantities of coal and

other fossil fuels, emission of dangerous chemicals as waste gave rise to unprecedented pollution of water, air and soil.

The automobiles and electricity came up, the comforts increased; and along with them the harm to nature. The fossil fuels, used by them, generate green house gases, which in turn increase the average temperature on earth. This phenomenon termed as global warming, (which by now everybody has heard about, whether he/she understands the phenomena and its implications or not) is expected to be the cause for various other environmental havocs.

Even ancient and common human activities like agriculture and livestock farming, which are supposed to be more nature-friendly than others, are today posing great threats to the environment. Inefficient irrigation, which wastes water, and massive deforestation are outcomes of today's agricultural practices.

Trees play a vital role in helping mankind receive oxygen from the atmosphere while they absorb the carbon dioxide exhaled by human beings. Hence, the ancients favoured the growing of trees to control atmospheric pollution. But nowadays trees are cut down indiscriminately and pollution is on the increase.... The primary task is to purify the environment which is affected by pollution of air, water and food. All the five elements are affected by pollution. People should, therefore, try to reduce the use of automobiles and control the emission of harmful industrial effluents.

- Divine Discourse 6 February 1993

Agriculture uses more than 50 percent of habitable area of the planet, including land not suitable for it. Overgrazing by cattle is leading to soil erosion and desertification.

Peter Raven, former President of AAAS (the American Association for the Advancement of Science) says, "During a remarkably short period of time, we have lost a quarter of the world's topsoil, and a fifth of its agricultural land, altered the composition of the atmosphere profoundly, and destroyed a major proportion of our forests and other natural habitats without replacing them". The root cause, according to him, is the collective impact of human numbers, consumption per individual, and our choices of technology exploiting world's resources at an unsustainable rate.

Impending energy crisis is also another major threat we face today. However, it must be agreed that the use of natural resources is an essential condition for human existence. But the problem arises when exploitation happens in an uncontrolled and non-sustainable manner. As a solution to energy crisis, all the nations today are seeking to turn to renewable sources of energy, and technologists are busy devising energy-efficient machines. This will, no doubt,

be of great help, but it should be said that with growing population and increasing standards of living, the demand for energy would be on the rise. Therefore, unless mankind commits to save energy and reduce pollution by limiting his demands for luxury, the development of renewable sources and energy-efficient machines will still prove a chase of a receding target.

We are prone to take the creation for granted, thinking that it is but insentient Nature, thereby ignoring the Sentient Principle that regulates nature and imparts a proper balance among its various constituents. Scientists and technologists, in pursuit of selfish interests as well as of name and fame, utterly disregard the security and welfare of the society and the nation, by upsetting the balance in Nature, which results in various accidents, calamities, losses and misery to the public at large...The rapid and excessive proliferation of industries, factories, automobiles, etc., with the attendant pollution of the atmosphere is responsible for the increasing incidence of diseases like eosinophilia, asthma, deafness, pneumonia and typhoid, etc. However, science per se is not bad; what is necessary is for man to put it to proper and judicious use.

- Divine Discourse 26 May 1992

Some suggest a radical political change and modification of the governing laws, to be the most efficient solution for the world's environmental crisis. Others say better designs and new technologies would solve the problems. And there is a minority who advise that reformation should come in every individual's attitude. Whether one is a politician or a technologist, he/she is first an individual, and only when each person commits to preserve nature, can anything substantial be achieved in nature care.

The key solution, therefore, is the change in the attitude of man, which makes him feel as the pinnacle of creation with the right to make the most of the environment, often recklessly, to meet his ends. Even if all the governmental policies are strong and efficient technologies are around, if man does not have a ceiling on his desires, can we ever avoid getting into such problems?

A surprising fact which demonstrates the importance of ceiling on desires is that worldwide, the number of people who are overweight has surpassed the numbers who are malnourished! In a 2006 news story, MSNBC reported, "There are an estimated 800 million undernourished people, and more than a billion considered overweight world over". So, unless man has control over his mind, and the will to remain within limits, he can spoil the quality of his life even when surrounded with abundance of all resources!

Modernity is Limitation

Prof. Anil Kumar: "Swami, if we don't make use of all these modern amenities, can I call myself a modern man? I think I am modern, or ultramodern, by

making use of all these natural resources. If I don't tap these natural resources, how can I be modern?"

Bhagavan: "No, no! Modernity is not exploitation. Modernity is limitation. Modernity is making use of natural resources in a limited way, without disfiguring them or without killing them altogether. That's what modernity is."

Prof. Anil Kumar: "Swami, all right. Somehow in this modern age, naturally the standard of living will certainly increase. Yes, in earlier times we did not make use of toothpaste and a toothbrush. However, modern man uses toothpaste and a toothbrush. Gas stoves and such things like heaters weren't available in earlier times. Today, people are making use of all these gadgets. So, naturally the standard of living goes up with modernity, without any special effort."

Bhagavan: "Modern life, or what you call 'modernity', is not the latest style of living. Modernity lies in putting a ceiling on our desires. Control of one's own desires is modernity, not leading a life of limitless desires."

- From a Talk of Prof. Anil Kumar on January 12, 2003

Now, where does this will to control one's desires come from? From a materialistic point of view, it might be hard to find a reason strong enough to sacrifice some of our comforts, which we can happily afford, for the welfare of our fellowmen and future denizens of earth, whom we would never even see. Only the outlook of '**Vasudhaika Kutumbakam**' (the world is One Family) can inspire fully one to care for tomorrow's generations.

It is this attitude that is constantly emphasized by Bhagavan Baba and exemplified in His continuous acts of service to humanity. The prayer He teaches us is '**Loka samastha sukhino bhavanthu**' ('Everyone should be happy'). And this change in attitude needs to come in each and every individual. Baba clearly says that without individual reformation, the reformation of society is impossible. We all, therefore, have our part to contribute. Which ocean was ever formed without those drops of water?

The entire atmosphere is surcharged with electro-magnetic waves. Because of the pollution of these waves, the hearts of human beings also get polluted. To purify this atmosphere, you have to chant the Lord's name and sanctify the radio waves. There is pollution in the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we consume. Our entire life has been polluted. All this has to be purified by suffusing the atmosphere with the Divine name. Chant the name with joy in your hearts.

- Divine Discourse, 14-1-1995.

The Source Cares for the Resources

Each and every one among us can work towards a better earth in our own little ways, and it is not surprising to see that the solutions of these problems are all found in the ways of life which Bhagavan prescribes and urges us to follow, not only in His Discourses, but also by the example of His very own Life!

If we care to share, we would not mind using public or shared transport whenever possible, instead of using our private vehicle every time, and thus we would have reduced the automobile-generated pollution and consumption of fuel. And as in every other aspect, Bhagavan drives lessons to us by His own style of living. His Car is always filled with people whenever He travels long distances.

Once in Bangalore, Swami called Prof. Anil Kumar and cautioned him of an un-attended tap that was running in the college, not only demonstrating His Omnipresence, but also teaching a valuable lesson to save water! And people in close proximity have always seen Bhagavan using the back-sides of the envelopes to write small notes. In fact, if one sees the manuscripts of *Prema Vahini*, *Dharma Vahini* and other articles that He used to write for 'Sanathana Sarathi' in the earlier years, one will be amazed to see how Swami used every inch of the page. He never wastes paper. And anybody who has gone for an interview knows how Swami Himself switches the fan off before coming out of the room.

When the Source of all resources Himself is using the resources optimally, aren't there lessons for us in it? He could just have created an inexhaustible supply for us, if that is the complete solution for our plight today, but He Himself is respecting the limitations of the resources! This is how He keeps the rules of the game He has designed.

The Sure Solution

There are various other ways in which we can care for our environment. By reducing the use of plastic; say, by carrying water with us when we go out, so that we need not buy packaged water, or by using equipment with "energy star" standards etc. which can help contribute towards making a better earth. But, the spirit in which we implement these, and thereby the joy we derive from that extra effort and sacrifice, is as important as the number of ways in which we care. In fact, the care for the environment would come naturally to anyone who is committed to the principle of love and devotion to God, who manifests in every single inch of the Universe; for, a mistreatment of nature amounts to disrespecting the Omnipresent Divinity itself.

We know instances of Bhagavan visiting a place where a particular construction activity is on, and immediately finding a misplaced nail or wire that could have hurt someone! It shows how spontaneous His care and concern is to prevent the problems of others! And how tenderly He handles everything! And speaks with what a mellow!

This pure love is what when translated into action becomes Dharma. And Dharma, or right action, is what protects the world. It is love that automatically turns every single action of ours into a beneficial and auspicious act to the world. Instead of strengthening the core value of love, if we just look at environmental care as one more bullet in our to-do list, it might appear like a sacrifice of one's pleasures. The question "Why should I not spend it, when I can afford it?" might arise in the mind. We may succeed in one aspect but fail in the other.

For example, we may have saved fuel because we enjoy cycling, but might not have fared too well in saving electricity if we are a little too lazy to keep turning off the switches promptly when not being used! These differences in our implementation arise when corrective action is applied not at the core of our values.

When the air we breathe is itself polluted, how are we to lead a pollution-free life? The environment and the elements should be pure to ensure purity of heart. The cause of this pollution lies nowhere else except in our own actions. Whatever words we utter, they spread to the entire atmosphere. We can purify the atmosphere of the world by chanting the sacred hymns and singing the glory of God.

- *Divine Discourse 18 October 1993*

Instead, when love is the base, the right attitude and right action automatically result, so effortlessly, just as sugar whose basic property is sweetness, adds sweetness to everything it is put into. Without love, the rules of control and care appear as hurdles to pleasure. With love, they are the ones which keep the fun on.

Life is a game, take it cool. Play it!

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 5

...LIVING UP TO THE CHALLENGE OF CONSCIENCE IN DAILY LIFE

Dear Reader, in this series, we offer you real life stories from contemporary heroes who have demonstrated the courage to follow their conscience when confronted with difficult dilemmas or challenging circumstances in their daily lives. This segment is an ode to the strength of the brave-hearts who chose to listen to the voice of their conscience, thereby abiding to the values of Right Conduct, Truth, Love, Peace and Non-violence, even if the choice appeared the tougher one to follow.

In our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories of Mrs. Priya Davis, and of Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani and Mr. Karthik Ramesh.

In this issue, we carry the thrilling account of Mr. Amar Vivek, a former student of Sri Sathya Sai University, who narrates how he could remain steadfast in his principles and come out triumphant without compromising his values in the complicated world of law and dealing with criminals and corrupt officials, by his sheer faith in the power of Truth and Righteousness.

The Love of Pure Law vs. the Law of Pure Love

By Mr. Amar Vivek

Mr. Amar Vivek joined the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1986 for his Masters in Business Administration. Earlier, he had completed his LLB in Punjab University, Chandigarh. He is currently a lawyer in the High Court of Punjab and Haryana, and also a founder member of Sri Sathya Sai Gramin Jagriti Sewa Sadan, a non-profit organisation committed to rural empowerment and education.

August 16, 1988. I can never forget this day in my life. It was the saddest, and at the same time, the happiest day of my life. I had to leave the physical Presence of Bhagavan that day after having completed my post graduation. But Bhagavan made that day etched in gold forever in my heart, as He called me inside the interview room as part of the group of boys leaving that day. Inside the interview room, He spoke to me very lovingly, and then holding my hand, He asked, "What will you give Me in return for your education at Swami's University?"

I was stunned; obviously not prepared for such a straight question. But I did manage to find my voice and blurted out, "Whatever You say, Bhagavan." He then looked piercingly into my eyes, overwhelming my whole inner being. And then, the Divine conversation continued. "Do you promise you will give Me whatever I ask?" I firmly replied, "Yes, Bhagavan."

Then, issued from the Divine lips a commandment: "Do not bring a bad name to Sai - that is all I want from you. I do not want someone to tell Me that My ex-student is not living up to My Teachings and Example."

You can imagine what effect these parting words from Bhagavan had on me – and it continues to influence me till this day. Many are the times when His exhortation comes to my mind, and prompts me to listen to the voice of my conscience. It propels me to try for the highest standards of ethical behaviour. And just the feeling that He knows my every breath, word and action fills me energy and inspiration. What better encouragement does a man need on entering the complex and sometimes traumatic world of law, where you have to deal with criminals and a multitude of cases of human tragedy? There have been many instances which strenuously have tested my mettle, and I passed through them only by listening to my inner golden voice.

The Bright Light of Truth

While practicing as a lawyer in the High Court of Punjab and Haryana at Chandigarh, I handled an extremely tough case in 1999. A corrupt policeman had illegally obtained the house of a poor school teacher. Without relying on The Divine, I could not have been able to withstand the tough fight I had to endure, as the police officer was bent upon harming me and even my family. The former lawyer of my client had advised him to make false claims; but, keeping Swami's words in mind, I told him that he must not lie in the court, and furthermore, we would win our case based on truth, and not on exaggeration and falsehood.

The case took a long time and a large number of witnesses had to be examined. Finally, after many years, the arguments were concluded, and the Ld. Judge was to pronounce his judgment. I was quite nervous over the impending decision of the case, as it had been rather emotionally draining.

While I was at home, looking at the picture of Bhagavan in my room, I could feel His reassuring Presence around me. I started to remember the moments when it seemed that the Lord was, in fact, looking after me, as we continued to stick to truth and righteousness.

I had handled the case selflessly and fearlessly, relying only on my inner strength and conviction. I had an intuitive feeling that surely, we would be successful in this case as we never deviated from righteousness.

As I ruminated over the events that had unfolded in the previous few days, I recalled how at a critical juncture during the case, a crucial document came to my office from nowhere. A gentleman, whom I did not know, had walked in and handed it to me. His name, he said, was 'Rishi' (meaning 'sage') and I felt it was surely The Divine at work.

Again, I recollected how when I had cross-examined the police officer, surprisingly, he answered one question after another against himself! I had surely prayed to Bhagavan before commencing, and had never expected

such a dramatic turn of events, because the officer, otherwise, was a strong willed man.

And then, I was also buoyed up by the name of the Ld. Judge, who was to deliver the judgment. He was Sri Sant Prakash (which meant 'light of the saint'). I felt I didn't have to worry as *Light is bound to flow out of a Saint!* And finally, it was on a day, none other than Thursday, May 17, 2001, that the verdict of this much awaited case, came in our favour! We were ecstatic, as all the long years of patient adherence to values had finally triumphed over falsehood, forgery and manipulation.

Willing Help

On another occasion, an elderly lady had asked for my help. Let us call her Savitha (for reasons of privacy), who had lost her husband and a grown up son, in a tragic road accident. She had then become entangled in a property dispute with her sister-in-law, who was claiming the rights to the house where Savitha lived. Utterly desperate in her pitiable situation, she showed me a few blank signed papers from her husband and mother-in-law, and asked if I could use them for making a will, which would testify that she had succeeded to the properties left by her husband.

At that point I was shaken. Should I help her by creating forged documents, or should I stick to the righteous path? It was truly a dilemma, as I could, at a stroke, save her from an unjust situation, but it also meant taking recourse to falsehood.

I asked her to wait for a while, and I went inside my office to be myself for a few minutes. I prayed intensely to Bhagavan, and searched in my inner being for the right path. My emotions were influencing me to help her out at all costs, as she was a defenseless victim. After a short while, the voice of my conscience spoke aloud. The path I had to take was clear.

I went to my client and told her I could not use those papers for scribing a document such as a will, but I could certainly produce those papers before the court, so as to convince the Judges her bonafide as a truthful lady, provided she does not misuse them under any circumstances. I also told her that by sticking to Truth, it may so happen that she might not win the property dispute, but she would be a winner in her own eyes, and that God will surely take care of her.

She readily agreed to my suggestion, and the courage and conviction we derived from this small episode gave us the confidence to adopt only honest means. Then matters took a curious turn, when Savitha's sister-in-law, produced a purported will on behalf of the late mother-in-law, bequeathing all the properties to her daughter and the sister-in-law! We were taken aback when we saw the very same scheme played out in front of us that we had rejected as unethical and against our principles.

The will had allegedly been executed only a few days before the lady's death, and during those days she was fighting a battle against cancer. To reach the truth of what had happened, and to establish our suspicions was an arduous and difficult task.

It so happened that a gentleman named Mr. Janardhan (name changed), a practicing advocate, had appeared as a witness in the case. He was alleged to have drafted the said will. In his testimony before the court, he clearly recorded that he had no information that the will was authored by the old mother-in-law of Mrs. Savitha. He said that he had been called to their house by the sister-in-law of Savitha, and upon reaching there he found the old lady lying on the bed.

It was the sister-in-law who then forwarded him the papers – purported to be the will of her mother. He simply signed it without knowing its contents or without checking if it was executed by her or not. The case is still on in the court and the verdict after Mr. Janardhan's testimony is awaited in the coming months, but intuitively I know, truth alone will triumph. In fact, this belief itself is a victory for me and my client.

A Just Witness

I also recollect how merely by undertaking a journey by train to Puttaparthi, I was rescued from a dire situation when someone laid false charges against me. I had conducted a case against a lawyer, who had molested a lady editor of a newspaper. Fired by a sense of indignation, I fought the case relentlessly against the lawyer, and as a result, his anticipatory bail application was dismissed. This greatly antagonized the lawyer and he drew up a clever plan to ruin me.

He filed a false complaint against me in Saharanpur, UP, alleging serious and demeaning charges pertaining to my character and conduct. The incident cooked up by him, referred to June 14, and the clever strategy about this date was that in the month of June, the High Court remained closed due to summer vacations. Thus, I could not have proved in my defense that on the date of incident, I was present in the court, arguing some case or the other.

However, on June 13, that year, I had boarded the Karnataka Express from New Delhi to Dharmavaram en route to Puttaparthi. And just think of it, the passenger next to me in the train that day was none other than the then Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court, Chandigarh who was also traveling to Puttaparthi!

After returning to Chandigarh, I was served with the nasty court summons of the complaint against me, and rather shocked, I fervently prayed to Bhagavan. Through His inspiration, I straightaway rushed to the chambers of the Hon'ble Chief Justice, and explained everything to him. He immediately rang up his counterpart in the UP High Court and offered to stand as a personal witness in my favour, as he was present with me in train from June

13 to 15. The Chief Justice of UP High Court, made sure that the false case against me stood closed, and thus I was left totally unscathed, with His Grace.

The journey to Sai, is no doubt sure to lead one to the assured destination of Sai Himself. But that train journey to Puttaparthi was a special one, as it proved to make me safe beyond any harm! It was a Masterly planned reservation, to rescue a humble worker who tried to follow the path of Truth to the best of his ability.

Settling in Good Time

I recently conducted a few cases for a personality from the movie world. Her opposite party was a “high socialite” in Chandigarh. With prayers to Bhagavan, I was able to bring the gentleman to the negotiating table, and both parties mutually worked out a settlement. The outstanding twenty cases, which were being bitterly fought over, were closed in a few days.

The lady client was very satisfied with this outcome, and after a few days, the person from the opposite party too came to my house and thanked me for bringing to an end the bitter litigation. He placed a sum of Rs. 75,000/- on my table and left.

My conscience immediately began to rankle. I thought I should return the money to the person without more ado. But then, a higher impulse gripped me. I thought why not pass this money onto my client, who had suffered huge losses to her assets during the case. I immediately called her in Mumbai, and after I explained to her everything, she gladly accepted the amount. I also asked her to send an acknowledgment receipt of this amount to the opposite party. Later, she called me to say that until then she had never believed that a lawyer would ever pass on money in such a situation.

It was only because of my behavioral value systems, and the confidence to listen to my conscience, that I have gained from the noble training given at the Sri Sathya Sai University that I was able to act in such a manner. “Honesty in personal and professional life is the first policy”, was an important lesson that we were taught at our cherished Alma Mater, and over the years it has become a deep rooted conviction in my soul. We only need to have the courage and conviction to practice it in real life.

Bhagavan, in His abundant Grace, gives us many moments when we need to be attuned to Him in those tricky situations of morally grey areas. It is very easy to fall into the traps laid by other people’s minds - and our own! But His Love always binds us as long as we follow His Words, to the last letter. A few days before I passed out of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Swami revealed the true meaning of my degrees – LLB and MBA. He said it referred to ‘Live and Love Baba’ and ‘Mind on Baba Always’. Now I know what it really means. When we really live by His ideals, we have truly loved Him. Moreover, His Loving Gaze is always fixed, continuously on us, wherever we are, and whatever we are doing. It only requires a little effort on our part to look inside us, and see the Lord looking at us! His Glance never fails us.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part - 40

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT XIV - SCENE 1

Kondama's House

KONDAMA RAJU: The words of Venkava Dhoota have proved to be absolutely true! Venkama, ours is the Ratnakara lineage, and we do not know black magic, related rituals, and the like. Other than pure devotion to God, charity and compassion to others, and a spiritual outlook, we are ignorant of strange practices.

VENKAMA RAJU: That may be so father, but people are making all sorts of comments about our Sathyam. I am unable to decide whether He has Divine Power in Him or devilish power. I have therefore sent for Narasimhachari, an expert on magical chants. He should be able to diagnose the problem correctly.

NARASIMHA: Venkama Raju,..... Venkama Raju!

VENKAMA RAJU: You have come at the right moment. Please step inside; come.

NARASIMHA: Salutations to you Kondama Raju sir!.....[chants] Please get water in this vessel.

VENKAMA RAJU: Easwari!

EASWARAMMA: Yes?

VENKAMA RAJU: Take this and get some fresh water.

NARASIMHA: Mother, also put a couple of basil leaves in the water. And, apply turmeric as well as kumkum to the vessel on the outside.

EASWARAMMA: I shall do so.

NARASIMHA: Call the boy, and let me see what the problem is.

VENKAMA RAJU: Sathyam,Sathyam.Sit here boy.

NARASIMHA: Your name?

SATHYA: Sathyam.

NARASIMHA: Your place?

SATHYA: The whole Universe!

NARASIMHA: Your age?

SATHYA: I am Eternal!

NARASIMHA: Where do You live?

SATHYA: Everywhere!

NARASIMHA: What is this strange behaviour?

SATHYA: It is just Divine Love.

NARASIMHA: Are You a devil or a ghost?

SATHYA: I am the Embodiment of Love!

NARASIMHA: You are talking too much philosophy! Is it due to the poison of the scorpion?

SATHYA: The Blue-throated One held back the poison in His throat. If digested, it becomes ambrosia. It is the same with Vedantic Philosophy. If it is understood, it will reveal Divinity.

NARASIMHA: Venkama Raju, the influence of the devil seems to be greater in this boy than the effect of poison.

SATHYA: Do you know what your lineage is?

NARASIMHA: What! You have now begun to ask me questions in return! It surely means that the devil is in You.

SATHYA: If I am an evil spirit, then you are a deadlier one.

NARASIMHA: Oh I see, You want to talk back, is it? Now look straight into my eyes and tell me what you see.

SATHYA: Basil leaf.

NARASIMHA: No, not that. Now tell me what You see.

SATHYA: I see the bow of Siva, the Pushpaka Chariot, and Anjaneya flying in the sky with the Sanjivi Mountain.

NARASIMHA: Where are they? I cannot see them.Did you hear? He is speaking meaningless words.The Bow of Siva, the aerial chariot!

SATHYA: They are not visible to you because you are a phoney. I know exactly what your strength is. You, who do Puja to My Divine Form daily, can you not recognise Me? Look at Me!

NARASIMHA: Venkama Raju, your son has lost all His mental balance. He has been seized by some evil spirits. Take Him immediately to the witch doctor in Kadiri-Brahmanapalli. I'll go back now. Kondama Raju and Mother Easwaramma, the boy is in the grip of evil spirits.

EASWARAMMA: What is he saying about devils and evil spirits? What has happened to our Sathyam?

VENKAMA RAJU: Easwari, don't get agitated. So far, we have tried the doctors of Anantapur and Dharmavaram. Narasimhachari also has examined Sathyam. We will now see if the native doctor in Kadiri Brhamanapalli at least can cure Him. We will know for sure whether it is the devil or Divinity.

I feel very scared. I will accompany Sathyam on the visit to this doctor.

KONDAMA RAJU: Why you, my dear? Tomorrow, Seshama and Suseela will be here. They can go. Well, Sathyam,will You go?

SATHYA: If you wish, grandpa. As far as I am concerned, nothing has happened to Me. The doctor can do nothing to Me.

VENKAMMA [sister]: I too shall go, as company for our brother.

KONDAMA: Alright my dear, you too may accompany.

SCENE 2

At the witch doctor's place. Black magic chants

WITCH DOCTOR: Glory to Maha Kaali, Malayala Bhagavathi. Salutations to You Mother! Speak Mother, speak. Speak! Tell me, are you a ghost, devil, imp, or goblin? Why did you seize Him? Where did you catch Him? Tell me, who are you? Tell me!

SATHYA: I am Satyanarayana Raju.

WD: I know that; I did not ask for the name of the body, but of you the ghost, devil, or goblin, or whatever, within. Tell me: What are you? Speak out!

SATHYAM: I am Sathyam, the whole Truth.

WD: No, you are an evil spirit. Tell me, where did you come from? The north, south, east or west? Answer. Answer!

SATHYA: You are the evil spirit! With the Five Elements as the witnesses, I declare that I am I!

WD: Are You refuting Mother's words to me, who has the five elements in his hand? Mother is demanding!

SATHYA: Mother will not do anything to Me!

WD: You are a devil who will not respond to mere words. I know how to drag you out! I shall drag you out! Sound the drums!

VENKAMMA [sister]: Please don't hit my brother! Don't hit Him! Don't hit my Sathya!

SESHAMA RAJU: Don't be scared Venkamma. He is not hitting your brother, but the evil spirit that has seized your brother. The spirit will flee and nothing will happen to your brother.

VENKAMMA: Don't hit my brother!

WD: Did you walk under a tamarind tree? Speak out!

SATHYA: Yes, I did.

WD: It caught you there, it seized you there!

SESHAMA RAJU: Which evil spirit has entered Sathya?

WD: The evil power resident in the tamarind tree. It is no ordinary power. If you do not drive it away, this child will not be yours. Glory to Kaali,..... glory to Maha Kaali, Come out, come out, come out.

SUSEELA: Sir, I pray to you; please chant incantations or do some magic and drive away the spirit, but for heaven's sake, don't beat the child. [to husband] Please tell him not to rain blows.

SESHAMA RAJU: Don't feel scared; there is nothing to be alarmed about. Nothing will happen to Sathya. These blows will drive away the evil spirit. Don't be scared.

WD: This devil will not leave with mere chants or magic. It is the Tintirini Devil. Come out, come out, I say!

SISTER: Don't hit my brother!

WD: Child, I am not hitting your brother, but the devil that has entered into Him.Yes, Mother. What's that Mother? Is that so Mother? It shall be so, Mother.

SESHAMA RAJU: Whom are you talking to?

WD: To Malayala Bhagavathi. She says that the help of the nine planets must be sought, and employing the nine-fold strategy, this Tintirini devil must be driven away.

SESHAMA RAJU: What must be done for that? What's that? Why have you taken out chains?

WD: Jai Malayala Bhagavathi!

SESHAMA RAJU: Hey, what's it that you are doing?

WD: With this chain, I am tying up the spirit.

SESHAMA RAJU: No, no! Don't bind my brother!

WD: Stop! If you want your child back, there must be violence. This is no ordinary devil, but a very proud one. It has entered the head, and I shall bring it down by tying it.

SESHAMA: Don't tie my brother with chains! Don't hurt Him!

SUSEELA: Don't tie that poor little child! Release Him, I beseech you. Let Him go.

WD: Out, out, come out.....

SUSEELA: Release Him!

SESHAMA RAJU: No, no! Don't hit Him; don't torture Him!

WD: Come out!.... Come out!

SATHYA: Only if it has gone in, can it come out!

WD: What! You are talking back to Mother?...[chants] What's that Mother? Is that so Mother? Alright Mother! You want the head shaved? Will be done Mother. ...[To assistant] Bikshalu! Hand me that knife!

BIK: Here it is, Master.

SESHAMA RAJU: I appeal to you, please let my brother go!

WD: Stop!One step more, and you will vomit blood, your intestines will get hopelessly knotted, and you will writhe with pain on the ground.Drums!

Drums. Knife sharpened.

SESHAMARAJU: No, please no! Don't shave my brother's head. Tell me what you want, and I shall give it to you – any amount of money..... No, please no! I pray to you – let my brother go!

WD: Run away! Run away! I am now shaving your head. Devil Tintirini, I have shaved your head and chased you away; I have shaved your head and chased you away. I have snapped your grip!

SUSEELA: No!No!

SISTER/SHESAMA: No!

WD: You are laughing in spite of lashes, and bleeding. You must be a greater evil force than Devil Tintirini!

SESHAMA RAJU: No! Stop! We cannot stand this torture! We want to take our brother home.

WD: Stop! One step forward, you will vomit blood, your guts will twist and you will die! The evil spirit will enter you! Jai Maha Kaali!!....Drums!

SESHAMA RAJU: No, no! Don't torture my brother! ...No! Don't torture Him please!

WD: This punishment is not enough because this is a cruel and stubborn female devil. I shall deal appropriately with its eyes, and drown the devil in the waters of the nether world!

Throws acid in the eyes, pours water, drums

SESHAMA RAJU: Stop, please stop! Don't destroy Him totally! What you have already done is enough!

More water poured over Sathya's head

SESHAMA: No, no! Stop the torture.Don't do anything to Him!

SISTER: No!....Brother! Brother!

Explosion. WD and assistant collapse

SESHAMA RAJU: Come on, this is the opportunity to release Sathyam and make a quick getaway! Brother, come! Come!

END OF SCENE 2

MUSINGS ON AVATARS – Part 2

Dear Readers, for 40 previous issues – from October 2004 to February 2008 - we brought you a spiritual feast in the form of the "Gita for Children" in a serialized form. Prior to that, we had started our first series entitled "Shirdi Sai – Parthi Sai" which is continuing till date. The "Gita for Children" series was taken from the book "Krishna - Arjuna Dialogue" authored by Prof. Venkataraman. As we concluded the final segment of this book in February 2008 issue, from March 2008, we started a new series on "Avatars" or Divine Incarnations. The articles in this series are actually adaptations of talks delivered recently on Radio Sai by Prof. G. Venkataraman, and are based on the book "Message of the Lord" authored by him a few years earlier. We hope H2H readers will relish the spiritual insights this series offers.

The Story of Rama

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prasanthi Nilayam. In the last article, I gave you an overview of the ten Avatars of Vishnu and also narrated how Jayan and Vijayan, the two doorkeepers of the Lord's Abode in heaven, chose the option of three births as villains rather than ten births as virtuous men. I explained that Jayan and Vijayan felt that this way, they would return faster to the Lord. By virtue of the option they chose, in the *Sathya Yuga* they took birth as the two demons Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashyapu, and how they were duly annihilated by the Lord, incarnating respectively as Varaha Avatar and the Narasimha Avatar.

The *Treta Yuga* had set in, and it was time for Jayan and Vijayan to be born again, which they did as the demonic brothers Ravana and Kumbhakarna, belonging to the clan of the *Rakshasas* (demons). Propitiating Brahma with intense penance or *Tapas*, Ravana gained the boon of freedom from death by *Devas*, *Asuras*, *Rakshasas* (angels, demons, etc.). Curiously he omitted humans from his list of exemptions, feeling perhaps that humans were too weak to represent any danger - it was, of course, the Lord's play in leaving a loophole for Himself!

Being evil by nature, Ravana was in no mood to use the various powers gained by penance for doing good; instead, he went on an attacking spree and soon became a much-feared ruler. Unable to bear the harassment he inflicted on the three worlds, the *Devas* or the demi-gods approached Lord Narayana for protection. Yielding to their pleas, Narayana decided to stir out again from His abode, Vaikuntam. Unlike earlier when His incarnations were brief and highly goal-oriented, this time His visit to earth would be more leisurely. He would descend in human form, indeed as the perfect man; and His agenda would be larger than merely getting rid off Jayan and Vijayan, now born as demons.

The Divinely Auspicious Birth

When incarnating, the Lord always chooses the time and place to suit His purpose. This time He chose to be born as the son of Emperor Dasaratha of Ayodhya. Dasaratha belonged to the Ikshvaku clan, descended directly from the Sun. A good monarch loved by all, Dasaratha had everything a king could possibly desire, except progeny. On the advice of his preceptor, Sage Vasishtha, Dasaratha decided to perform a special ceremonial sacrifice or *Yajna* that would confer progeny. As the religious rites wound to a climax, there emerged from the sacred fire to which oblations were being offered, a form carrying a golden vessel. Addressing Dasaratha, the form said, "Sire, I bring from Brahma His blessings to you and offer the sacred *Payasam* (sweet pudding) in this vessel as *Prasadam*. Kindly distribute this to your wives; they will soon present you with sons". Dasaratha did as instructed, and in due course, four sons were born to his three wives, Rama to the eldest wife Kausalya, Lakshmana and Shatrugna to the second wife Sumitra, and Bharatha to the third wife Kaikeyi.

Following the happy event, everyone was deliriously happy, from the Emperor down to the common people. The Princes were most charming and loved by all, Rama, the eldest especially. Among the brothers, Lakshmana formed a special bond to Rama, and likewise Bharatha and Shatrugna had special attachment for each other. However, it was not as if there were two groups; they all loved each other immensely, and the younger ones without exception were devoted to Rama beyond words.

A Sagacious Request

One day when the Princes were in their teens, Sage Viswamitra, famed for his rigorous penances, arrived at the court of Dasaratha and was received with all due honours and courtesy. After the initial welcome and greetings were over, Dasaratha respectfully inquired how he could be of service to the venerable sage; Viswamitra had only to command and Dasaratha would immediately obey and execute the order. Pleased with the offer, Viswamitra said, "O King, I am in the midst of performing some important *Yajnas* (austerities) in my hermitage, Siddhashram. Unfortunately, I am being severely obstructed by several demons, Subahu and Maricha, in particular. I believe they can be held at bay by your sons, Rama and Lakshmana. Please send them with me and help me to complete the rituals."

Dasaratha was stunned and his head reeled. Barely finding his voice, he replied, "O venerable Sage, it is only appropriate that you seek protection for your *Yajna*. I offer you my entire army for the purpose. Indeed, I shall personally come and supervise the protection. What can two young lads do compared to an army? I beg of you to spare them". Viswamitra shook his head and said, "Dasaratha, neither you nor your army would be necessary; Rama and Lakshmana alone are sufficient". Hesitantly, Dasaratha again ventured, "But O Sage, the Princes are mere teenagers! Please allow me to substitute for them." Viswamitra replied, "I appreciate your anxiety, but have no fear, for Rama is none other than the Lord Himself and Lakshmana is

Adishesha personified (Adishesha is the thousand-headed serpent on which Narayana rests while in His heavenly abode *Vaikuntam*). But Dasaratha would not listen and again offered arguments to claim that Rama and Lakshmana were inadequate for the task ahead.

Viswamitra now became angry and raising his voice said, "Dasaratha, I thought you were a man of honour who never went back on his word. You promised to do whatever I wanted, but when I actually asked, you are beginning to retract. You are a disgrace to the illustrious Ikshvaku clan". Seeing that matters were getting a bit out of hand, Sage Vasishta intervened and persuaded Dasaratha to stand by his word. Eventually, Viswamitra departed, with the two young Princes in tow.

Rama's Role Defending the Righteous

Viswamitra had accumulated so much power through his penance (*Tapas*), that he could well have reduced to ashes the demons who were bothering him; but he chose not to. Instead, conscious of the Lord's game plan he was content to play a secondary role. The Lord had descended to destroy Ravana and there was an elaborate preamble to that which could not be short-circuited.

Although Viswamitra knew fully well who Rama really was, Rama kept up the pretence of being an ordinary Prince and plied the sage with various questions while they were making the journey to the Sage's hermitage. The sage smiled and said to himself: "Here is the Lord who knows everything and yet asks me questions as though He knows nothing. Well, I suppose I must keep up the charade." Thinking thus, Viswamitra narrated many a tale including one about how he himself was transformed from a king to a sage. (In passing it may be mentioned that Swami has remarked: Man knows nothing and yet acts as though he knows everything, whereas God knows everything but pretends He knows nothing!)

By the time the party reached Siddhashrama, it became dark and the demons in the neighbourhood came out for their prowls making hideous noises. Viswamitra suddenly became worried. "My God!" he said to himself, "Here are the demons out to do no good and I have these two tender young Princes with me. What if evil befalls them?" Thinking thus, he taught Rama and Lakshmana some special *Mantras* which would serve as protection. Swami says that Viswamitra was a Wise One (*Jnani*) which was why he was able to see the Lord in Rama when he first saw Him in Dasaratha's court. And yet his Knowledge (*Jnana*) was apparently somewhat clouded because he now thought of Rama as a mere Prince who needed protection! If a supremely wise sage like Viswamitra himself was subject to *Ajnana* (ignorance), then what to speak of lesser mortals!

Soon after their arrival at the hermitage, Viswamitra commenced his sacrifice or *Yajna*. As it approached a climax, the demons came in waves to disturb the proceedings, but Rama and Lakshmana made short work of them. In the end, came Subahu and Maricha; while Subahu was killed, Maricha escaped

wounded, which, of course, was a part of the Divine plan as Maricha was to play an important role later.

The *Yajna* successfully concluded; a highly pleased Viswamitra then conducted the Princes to the city of Mithila, the capital of the kingdom of Emperor Janaka. En route, the Sage again narrated many a tale, especially about Rama's ancestors. He also took care to make Rama step on a particular boulder on the way. Once the stone came into contact with Rama's Lotus Feet, it immediately transformed into a lovely woman who introduced herself as Ahalya, the wife of Sage Gautama, cursed to be turned into a stone for unchaste behaviour earlier.

Viswamitra then explained to the Princes why they were headed towards Mithila. Janaka, he said, was a Raja-Rishi, meaning that while Janaka functioned as a king, he ruled with complete detachment, and in that respect, therefore, he was like a *Rishi* or sage (which, incidentally, is also the reason why Krishna praised Janaka). The Emperor had a foster daughter named Sita (also called Janaki and Mythili). Sita was found as a baby girl in a field by Janaka, and she was really a child of Mother Earth.

Rama Wins the Hand of Sita

Stored in the palace of Janaka was a mighty bow that once belonged to Siva. No one could lift the bow, and yet one day, when she was a young girl, Sita quite effortlessly lifted the box containing the bow, in order to pick up a marble which while playing had rolled under the box. King Janaka was astounded and resolved that when Sita came of age, he would get her married only to a person who could lift the bow of Siva and string it. A contest had now been arranged to select the right person from among the prospective suitors, which was why the Sage was taking the Princes to Mithila.

Arriving at the court, the party found that the contest was on. One after another the suitors tried to lift the bow, but all of them failed miserably. On a nod from Viswamitra, Rama approached the box, lifted the bow with absolute ease and with equal nonchalance strung it. A delighted Sita garlanded Rama signalling her willingness to wed Him. Janaka was overjoyed, but Rama made it clear that He would not marry without parental consent. Riders were therefore sent post-haste to Ayodhya to give Dasaratha the happy news and to invite him to the wedding.

Dasaratha was overcome with joy. When the young Princes left for the forest, he was consumed with anxiety, but now all that had ended well, there was not a happier person on earth. Promptly, he left for Ayodhya with his three queens and entourage, accompanied by a sizable section of the city's population as well. (At times, Swami sings a lilting song describing this scene.) At Mithila, not only was Rama married to Sita, but the other brothers also were suitably paired off to the daughters of Janaka as well as his brother.

The wedding celebrations over, Dasaratha's party returned to Ayodhya with four new brides as additional members. Shortly after this, Dasaratha, in

consultation with preceptor Vasishtha and other elders, decided to step down from the throne, and hand over the task of reigning to Rama. Everyone rejoiced but the joy was short lived. Dasaratha's third wife, Kaikeyi, was one of those who at first felt happy but soon her thoughts were poisoned by Manthara, a hunchbacked servant of queen Kaikeyi.

Rama Is Sent Into Exile

The hunchback reminded her mistress that years earlier the Emperor had granted two boons to Kaikeyi, but the latter had never cashed them; now was the time to do so. She should ask that firstly, her son Bharatha be crowned King instead of Rama; and secondly, Rama must go to the forest for fourteen years; Kaikeyi succumbed to the foul advice. Meanwhile, Dasaratha arrived in Kaikeyi's private chamber to convey personally to her the tidings about the impending coronation of Rama. To his amazement, he found his lovely queen in a dishevelled state of dress and in an angry mood. Full of concern, he wanted to know what he could do to please her and make her happy. Seizing the opportunity, Kaikeyi promptly demanded that the Emperor grant her the two boons promised earlier, and went on to state her demands exactly as coached by Manthara.

Dasaratha felt as if he was struck by a thunderbolt. At first, he could not believe his ears and then he reeled under the impact of what he had heard. He pleaded and begged with Kaikeyi to withdraw her unreasonable demands, but the lady would not budge; instead she taunted the King for trying to go back on his words. At this stage, Dasaratha fainted. Meanwhile Kaikeyi sent for Rama, and when He arrived, told Him about the boons granted to her - Bharatha was to be crowned and Rama was to go the forest for fourteen years. Rama, who just then was getting ready for the coronation, agreed without a second thought to go to the forest exactly as He had been commanded.

News about the exile of Rama spread like wild fire. There was no dearth of people who advised Him against it, starting with Dasaratha and Kausalya. This scene in Ramayana (as the story of Rama is called) is a poignant and also an illuminating one, showing as it does the vast difference between human thinking and the viewpoint of Divinity. The various arguments offered to dissuade Rama from going to the forest appear very convincing (to us), but Rama skilfully overrules them. To use Swami's language, whereas all others applied individual discrimination in arriving at their respective arguments, Rama employed fundamental discrimination i.e., that based on the Knowledge of the *Atma*. He firmly declared that the King had given his word that Bharatha would be crowned and that Rama would go to the forest. It was the duty of all subjects to uphold the decision of the King. If the King's command were to be flouted by his own son, how then could one expect the citizens at large to obey the King? Doing one's duty was what *Dharma* was all about.

Barely a few hours earlier, He was preparing for the coronation; now without a second thought, He was leaving for the forest in a hermit's dress (precisely as

Kaikeyi wanted). Although only Rama was banished, Lakshmana and Sita followed Him out of their devotion.

What about Bharatha, the surprise beneficiary? At the time all this drama was taking place, he, along with Shatrughna, was away in his grandfather's place, blissfully unaware of the scheming of his mother and the injustice done to Rama. Meanwhile, following the departure of Rama to the forest, Dasaratha died of a broken heart. Messengers were, therefore, rushed to fetch Bharatha, without unduly scaring him by giving him the bad news.

Bharatha Refuses to Rule

When Bharatha returned to Ayodhya, he received a tremendous shock. Rama had been banished and his father had died, all because of his scheming mother. Furious, he raved and ranted against her, while she feebly tried to tell him that it was all done because of her love for Bharatha. Meanwhile Vasishta advised Bharatha that he must perform the rites for the departed soul, which the latter tearfully did. But, when on completion of the obsequies ceremonies, Vasishta asked Bharatha to be crowned, he flatly refused. Instead, accompanied by Ministers of the realm and a good proportion of the citizens of Ayodhya, he left for the forest to search for Rama and persuade Him to return.

Meanwhile, Rama had established a temporary residence in the forest, and one day shortly after that, they all heard a great commotion in the distance. Climbing up a tree, Lakshmana saw Bharatha approaching with a big army behind. Hastening down he conveyed the news to Rama and then proceeded to roundly condemn Bharatha not only for being so mean as to seize the crown, but now following Rama into the forest so as to attack and kill Him. Rama, who knew Bharatha better, cut Lakshmana short and said that Bharatha was actually coming for persuading Rama to return! And so, indeed, it was.

Eyes flowing with tears, Bharatha summoned every argument he could to plead with Rama to return, but the latter was firm in His determination to adhere to *Dharma*. Ultimately, Bharatha had to bow to Rama's decision to remain in exile, but at the same time, he stubbornly refused to be crowned King in Rama's place. Bharatha told Rama, "Please give me Your *Padukas* (sandals), and I shall crown them in Your place (*Paduka Pattabhishekam*). I shall stay in the village of Nandigram on the outskirts of Ayodhya and live as a hermit even as You are doing. Drawing authority from Your *Padukas*, I shall rule the kingdom on Your behalf during Your absence; exactly fourteen years, and not a day more. I shall be keenly awaiting Your return. If You fail to return after the stipulated period, I shall end my life" - that was the great Bharatha; a mighty empire was offered to him on a platter, but he refused to accept it.

Following the departure of Bharatha, Rama and party penetrated deep into the forest, visiting many hermitages on the way and calling on many sages. Eventually they arrived on the banks of the sacred River Godavari, built themselves a small hut and began to live in it. One day, there came near their

abode, a grotesque female named Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana. Captivated by Rama's beauty, she approached Him and asked that He take her as His wife! Being in a playful mood, Rama teased her by saying, "I am so sorry I cannot oblige you. I am already married you see, and in fact, the lady over there is My wife. Why don't you approach My brother Lakshmana? He is younger than Me, and what is more important, he is all alone, unlike Me. He would be your ideal match!" Believing what Rama said, Surpanakha approached Lakshmana and proposed to him. Sensing Rama's game, Lakshmana decided to join the fun. "Madam," he said, "I am but a slave to my Brother. Do you want to be the wife of the Master or the slave? Just consider." Taking Lakshmana seriously, Surpanakha went back to Rama and renewed her proposal of marriage, in the process making some denigrating remarks against Sita. Rama now became angry, and deciding that the teasing was enough, ordered Lakshmana to cut off the nose and ears of Surpanakha as a punishment for her effrontery.

Ravana Hatches His Wicked Plot

Disfigured, bleeding and screaming, Surpanakha ran to her brothers Karan and Dushan pleading that they avenge her mutilation. The brothers then went with a large army to attack Rama, but in no time at all, He annihilated the entire pack single-handed. Thwarted thus in her quest for revenge, Surpanakha then rushed to Lanka where her oldest brother Ravana was the monarch. Flinging herself at her brother's feet, she narrated her tale of woe and pleaded with Ravana to teach the Princes of Ayodhya a fitting lesson. And, as a bait, she included a captivating description of Sita's exquisite beauty.

The seeds of lust having been sown, Ravana now decided he must have Sita. To evolve a plan for achieving that, he flew to meet Maricha, his uncle. Having been chastened by his earlier encounter with Rama, Maricha was now leading a pious life, and therefore, strongly advised Ravana against any such misdeed. But drunk as he was with lustful desire, Ravana was in no mood to receive advice; becoming angry, he threatened to kill Maricha if no help was forthcoming. Preferring to die at the hands of Rama, rather than the evil Ravana, Maricha yielded.

A plan was thus hatched for the abduction of Sita. According to it, Maricha would assume the form of a golden deer, and play in the neighbourhood of Sita's abode in such a manner as to attract her attention. Wanting the deer as a pet, she would then appeal to Rama to capture it. That was when Maricha would skilfully draw Rama far away and deep into the forest. Exploiting Rama's absence, Ravana would go to the hut, grab Sita and fly away.

The plan was duly set into motion, and sure enough, Sita fell for the ploy, pleading with Rama to capture for her the golden deer. Rama cautioned that there was something weird and unnatural about the deer because there was no such thing as a golden deer in God's creation. But since Sita was adamant, Rama yielded to her wishes and went after the golden deer. However, before leaving on the chase, He took the precaution of placing Lakshmana on guard,

emphatically ordering him not to leave Sita alone under any circumstances. Following the deer, Rama penetrated deep into the forest. He knew it was really Maricha in disguise, and so in order to kill him, shot an arrow. As the arrow pierced his body, Maricha fell down and imitating the voice of Rama cried, "O Sita, O Lakshmana, I am dying".

Both Sita and Lakshmana heard the cry; while Sita was fooled, Lakshmana was not. He knew that no one could kill Rama, but Sita did not have that confidence. Greatly agitated, she asked Lakshmana to go immediately and investigate. Lakshmana assured Sita that no harm could ever come to Rama, but Sita would not be convinced. Finding that Lakshmana would not budge an inch, she now became angry and accused Lakshmana of wanting Rama to die so that he could have Sita! For poor Lakshmana, these words were like daggers of fire. Unable to stand the taunts and unjust accusations, he finally went into the forest leaving Sita all alone.

Seizing the opportunity, Ravana, who was disguised as a *Sannyasi* or a renunciate, approached Sita as if begging for food, grabbed her, put her in his flying chariot, and flew away. Realising finally the trick that had been played on her, Sita wailed and pleaded with Ravana to let her go free; and when he refused to comply, she screamed for help. Swami says that the inner significance of the abduction of Sita is the following: Sita represents *Jiva* or the embodied soul. Sita was well protected as long as her attention was focused on Rama (who stands for the *Atma*), but when it strayed to the golden deer (illusory worldly attraction), she got into trouble. In the same way, the *Jiva* will face no problems as long as it remains attached to the *Atma*, but if it gets tempted by the transient pleasures of the external world, then pain is inescapable.

Getting back to the story, Sita's cries for help were heard by Jatayu, the king of eagles, and an old friend of Dasaratha as well. Rushing to the rescue, Jatayu attacked Ravana fiercely, but Ravana got the upper hand and succeeded in inflicting fatal injuries on the bird. Leaving a dying Jatayu, he then, resumed his flight to Lanka. Meanwhile, tearing off a piece of her sari, Sita wrapped into it some of her jewels and threw the bundle down in the belief that Rama and Lakshmana would spot it when they went around searching for her; hopefully, the bundle would give them some clue as to the direction in which she was taken.

Back in the forest, Lakshmana caught up with Rama and discovered, as he had suspected all along, that the death cry heard earlier was a cruel fake. Surprised to see Lakshmana, Rama sternly asked him why he had left Sita alone and unprotected. Trembling with remorse, Lakshmana feebly tried to explain the extraordinary circumstances that compelled him to disobey Rama's orders. It was now patently clear that the entire episode, starting with the mysterious appearance of the strange deer, was all part of a sinister master plan. Fearing for the safety of Sita, the brothers rushed to the hut, only to find it empty.

Rama's Quest to Rescue Sita

Rama now became crestfallen and inconsolably sad. (It was all play acting no doubt, but the remarkable thing is that the Lord went through every bit of it, even though He was alone in the forest with only His aide Adishesha by His side!). Lamenting the loss of Sita, the brothers then went in search of her and in the process met the dying Jatayu, who, they learnt, was a great friend of their father. Though in a feeble condition, Jatayu gave a graphic account of his attempt to rescue Sita, and then breathed his last. Rama and Lakshmana bade the bird a tearful farewell, Rama performing all the due last rites just as Jatayu's own son would have.

The brothers then moved in the general direction pointed out by Jatayu as having been taken by Ravana, and after crossing several streams, rivers, hills and dales came one day to an *Ashram* or hermitage once occupied by Sage Matanga. The sage was no more, but residing still in the Ashram was an old servant of his, a tribal woman named Sabari. Just before leaving for his eternal abode, Matanga told Sabari, "Wait here. One day the Lord will come and give you Darshan. After that you will be liberated." Sabari waited patiently for that day, always keeping the pathways clean and free from thorns for she knew not when the Lord would come; and she also maintained a stock of fresh fruits and berries for entertaining the Lord when He came. Sabari had not the faintest idea of what or how the Lord would look like, and yet when Rama entered the *Ashram*, she immediately knew it was Him! Overjoyed she welcomed the Lord and lovingly offered the fruits she had gathered.

Sabari's devotion is an everlasting example of pure devotion of which Krishna speaks so fondly in the *Gita*. A simple tribal woman and totally unlettered, she knew nothing whatsoever of wisdom, meditation, and the rest of all that high-flown stuff. But, she had great love for the Lord, unselfish love, and in the end that is all that matters!

Hanuman Pledges Eternal Devotion to Lord Rama

Continuing their journey south, for that was the direction taken by Ravana, Rama and Lakshmana entered Kishkinda, the territory of the Vanaras (monkeys). Here they encountered Sugriva and Hanuman (also known as Maruti and Anjaneya). Sugriva, they learnt, was in exile having been driven out by his elder and more powerful brother Vali as the result of a misunderstanding. Vali was currently the ruler of Kishkinda but, on account of a curse, he could not enter the premises where Sugriva was hiding. In fact, as the distressed Princes were approaching, Sugriva, suspicious whether they were the agents of Vali in disguise, sent Hanuman, his loyal minister, to investigate; and that was how Hanuman first met Rama.

Hanuman's entry into the story of Rama is a bit late, but he makes up by playing a stirring and unforgettable role in the later parts. More important, he would for ever be remembered as the supreme example of a *Rama Bhakta* or a devotee of Rama and an ideal servant of the Lord. Of the relationship between a master and a servant, Swami says that there are three types. The

first understands precisely all that his master wants, and a mere nod is enough; no need for elaborate instructions, constant supervision, reminders, etc. The second type is a calculative one and does just what he is told; no sense of anticipation and not an iota more of service than what has been ordered. The third kind is demonic and, thinking he understands his master, does just the opposite of what he is supposed to do. Hanuman, adds Swami, belonged to the first category.

After ascertaining who they were, Hanuman conducted the Princes to Sugriva. To the latter, they explained that they were in search of Sita who had been abducted by Ravana. Listening to the sad story, Sugriva said, "O Rama, one day we saw a demon flying above in a chariot with an abducted woman. She was wailing all the time and while the chariot was flying over us, she dropped a bundle containing jewels." Sugriva then fetched the bundle and showed the jewels. Recognising them as belonging to Sita, Rama's anguish increased, whereupon Sugriva promised all help in locating Sita and in rescuing her. Rama, in turn, promised to eliminate Vali and a friendship was sworn between the two, with fire as the witness.

Shortly thereafter, Rama killed Vali and Sugriva was installed the chief of Kishkinda. Meanwhile the rainy season intervened, and the search for Sita had to be put off till the monsoon withdrew. That happened four months later and Rama became impatient to get on with the search. However, Sugriva, who had earlier assured help, now became immersed in kingly pleasures and forgot his earlier promise. A stern reminder from Lakshmana, and Sugriva promptly became alive to his responsibilities. Four search parties of Vanaras were then organised with instructions to proceed, north, south, east and west, in search of Sita; Hanuman was in the group headed south. Eventually, Hanuman's party reached the sea coast and no sight of Sita yet. There they ran into Sampati, the brother of Jatayu, who with his distant vision told the searchers that Sita was in the far-away island of Lanka. A hundred *Yojanas* (one estimate is that a *Yojana* is about ten kilometres) separated Lanka and Bharath and the question was how to go to Lanka and continue the search.

At this stage, an elderly bear in the party named Jambavan reminded Hanuman of his extraordinary abilities, and asked him to leap over the ocean to search for Sita. Accepting the responsibility, Hanuman meditated for a minute, assumed a giant form and leapt across, constantly chanting the name of Rama. En route, he ran into various obstacles, but they all vanished like the mist before the rising sun - a reminder to us that obstacles can occur even in Lord's work, but they can invariably be overcome by relying entirely on Him.

That's all for now and more next time. Meanwhile, I do hope you enjoyed the story. With the prayer that God bless us all, I sign off. Jai Sai Ram.

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

TINY TREASURES OF LOVE

Tender Care for Young Burns Victims in New Zealand

In July 2003, a devotee was in the office of his printing company in a suburb of South Auckland, New Zealand, and happened to notice a small column in one of the local newspapers. It said that the burns unit of the children's wing at a public hospital was struggling to find funds to purchase specialist therapeutic toys that the staff could use to help in the rehabilitation of children who had been admitted with serious burns.

The specialist wing, called 'Kidz First Hospital', is part of the Middlemore Public General Hospital that serves a large community in the South Auckland region and comes under the control of the South Auckland Health Foundation. The hospital, as are all public hospitals in New Zealand, is Government funded and is free to all New Zealand citizens, but still has to rely on the generosity of the local community when a special need arises.

Answering a Special Need

The devotee immediately saw that here was a real need and a great opportunity for the Sai devotees in the Auckland area to help. Without hesitating, he telephoned the Hospital and spoke to the Public Relations Officer offering support and suggesting that a meeting could be arranged. At first, it seemed as if the plan to help would be rejected due to uncertainty on behalf of the Hospital public relations staff; they were unsure whether the offer was genuine or not. Quite a few times in the past, different organisations had offered help, but with certain strings attached such as advertising the event, or something similar.

But, as usual, the devotees saw His Hand working, when after a few weeks, one of the hospital doctors, who happened to be a Sai devotee, was talking to one from the public relations team and was asked if he had heard of the Sathya Sai Organisation. Over a cup of coffee, he explained the philosophy of the Sai Organisation and reassured them that selfless service was the only motivation of Sai Organisation, and that Sathya Sai Baba Himself is continually reminding millions of devotees throughout the world of those precious words, 'Love All, Serve All'.

The next day, the devotee who had made the original contact, received a telephone call in his office, and was asked if he could meet with the Public Relations Officer, Claire Del, and the head nurse of the burns unit, Robyn Maria at the Hospital. That is how the Lord ensured that the noble intention of the devotees find its fruition.

The meeting was held the next day, and after introductions, informal and friendly discussions went on for some time on how the Sai Organisation could help and in what capacity. It was clear that the need was for the supply of

new, specialty water toys that could be used in the saline baths that seriously burned young children were placed in to aid the changing of their dressings. Instead of the suffering small patients concentrating on the terrible pain they experience, these specialist toys placed in the bath with the child would help in taking their minds away from the pain, and give them brief respite, as they reached out to touch and hold the toys. New toys, not used toys were requested, for obvious reasons, as most on the list could only be purchased from one or two specialist suppliers, and also because of health requirements.

Relief of the Kid's Pain

The Hospital anxiously produced a list, and it was suggested to the Sai Organisation representative that maybe they may find it easier to donate money and the hospital staff could do the purchasing. But after reassuring Ms. Robyn Maria that the purchase list was not a problem, the Sai devotee then explained that this project would be very suitable for each of the ten Sai centres and groups in the larger Auckland area to be involved in, and that it would involve family groups going out, sourcing and purchasing each of the items on the list. This would ensure that these devotees would feel part and parcel of a new service project, and also help in drawing them together as a unit.

Altogether, the list totaled over 60 specialist toys with the majority of them to be used in the baths. A date was agreed upon for the first delivery, after which deliveries would be every 4 months for a total of 3 times per year. Thanks to the devotees' enthusiasm, this service is still carrying on to this day as originally initiated. And Ms. Robyn Maria, head nurse of the children's burns unit, had these moving sentiments to share in November 2007.

'God answered my prayers' - the Children's Hospital Head Nurse

"Kidz First is a dedicated hospital for pediatrics, built with mainly donations from the people in Auckland. There are 80 beds divided into three units: the medical unit, the surgical care unit and the emergency unit.

"One of the most exciting things I have come across is suddenly when you least expect it, someone will say that 'I know where I can help you' or 'I know where we can get that special item that you need'. If someone sees a need that we may have in this Hospital, then I am very happy to work with that person to provide that for the children in this Hospital.

"The first delivery that the Sai Organisation made, a few years back, caused me to burst into tears when they arrived with the delivery. I had been worrying about where to get the finances from to purchase the toys that we needed here, and it was obviously God that answered my prayers.

"We now have an excellent working relationship with the Sai Organisation here in Auckland, and I have been to six centres over the past couple of years, and talked to the members about just how wonderful their donations and collections are to us.

Ongoing Service

“One of the concerns we have with the children who have serious burns is infection. Often they will have to have a bath which is a painful procedure, and it is also quite traumatic for the child. The bath involves a nurse, a parent and quite often a play specialist.

“I think one of the most exciting things I see is how children actually manage to endure a dressing change, and something as simple as blowing bubbles with one of these bubble toys for us is really important, as it gives the children something to concentrate on apart from doing their dressing change. It’s something that is really gentle, and when you ask the children to take a deep breath and blow the bubbles out, you are getting them to relax the muscles in their body. And it is one of the most calming things for them to do at that time. It is something that the child finds really gentle and peaceful in the middle of something that is painful and stressful, we call that a ‘coping strategy’.

“One of the things that the Sathya Sai Organisation has done for us is that they have worked very hard in finding and purchasing the most wonderful, soft, and gentle specialist bath toys. The child can reach out and grab them, and it distracts the children from their pain and stress. The whole range of toys that are supplied to us is incredible as there is such a variety, and a big range of toys which really gives the children such a big choice. And what is sweet is that tucked up in the toys that the Sai Organisation donates us are little treasures that can be used in many different ways. Treasures that soothe, treasures that engage, treasures that stimulate, and treasures the children just have great fun with.”

Dear reader, this service initiative maybe tiny, but the impact it has in the Hospital, and the relief it has brought to the troubled little ones can never be overstated – it has to be seen to be really felt. Unfortunately, for reasons of privacy, we cannot have pictures of their special smiles. Bhagavan Baba says, “Joy lies in giving, not in receiving. The bliss that you derive from service is something that cannot be experienced from any other activity. The thrill that a kind word, a small gift, a good gesture, a sign of sympathy or compassion can bring to the distressed, is something that is beyond words to describe...God will not ask when or where you did service, but with what motive you did it, and what was the intention that prompted you. You may weigh the service and boast of its quantity, but God seeks quality - the quality of the heart, the purity of the mind, the holiness of the motive.”

So wherever we are placed, if we only look around, there are a million ways we can reach out to our brethren. And no activity is small. Mother Teresa said, “Without that single drop, the ocean would be less”. Let us keep our hearts filled with compassion and fill our lives with real joy.

PRASHANTI DIARY

February 26, 2008 – Programme by Ooty Devotees

There was a small sea of turbans in Sai Kulwant Hall as devotees from the Nilgiris and Ooty had been given permission by Swami to put up a programme on the evening of February 26. A huge backdrop with the Sai Mandir in Ooty painted on it had been raised. The participants of the programme were all members of the Badaga tribe living in the Nilgiris. When Swami came out for Darshan and went through the Kulwant Hall, His eyes seemed glued to the "visitors" from the Blue Mountains.

After the Darshan round, He alighted from the car and came straight to the stage and asked for the programme to begin. There was eager anticipation in His face. The elders from Ooty came and offered roses and other items for His blessings. He blessed them all and then the programme began. It was the drama "Markandeya" in traditional tribal art form. There was a narrative in the beginning that explained the whole drama in detail. Then the drama began with a dancing Lord Ganesha. It was like a complete dance drama and it consisted of only a few very simple steps. Swami seemed to watch the drama in all attention. The narrative was in the form of a song sung loudly in Tamil accompanied by basic beats on a percussion instrument. The manner in which Markandeya's parents long for a son was depicted very elaborately, and for almost 20 minutes after the drama started, Markandeya had not made his appearance. Swami was explaining the scenes to the boys seated next to Him. Truly, Swami is the greatest patron of folk arts and rural talents. For a sophisticated mind, the depictions may not have seemed "up to the mark", but they communicated the eternal values, and these folk arts are, in fact, strong binding forces in the communities and the villages. This unity is what Swami always emphasizes and likes to see in any presentation.

Swami was very moved when Lord Shiva appeared from the Linga to annihilate death itself, and save his devotee Markandeya. As the drama concluded, and the actors bowed to Swami, He called the actor who played the role of Markandeya, and created a 108 beads *japamala* (rosary) for him. After that, the floodgates opened. Swami said He would go down from the stage and interact with the devotees. Next He got up from the chair and walked down. He blessed all the actors and told them to cluster around Him so that all would fit in the frame for the group picture. Everyone was so simple minded that they did not seem to understand what to do; they were just overwhelmed by His Presence. Everyone was looking at His Face and prostrating at His Feet. Swami, then, asked for sarees to be brought. He went to the ladies side and distributed them to all the Ooty devotees. There was a huge onrush to receive the Divine Gifts. Almost everyone received *paada namaskar*. He then gifted all the gents with *dhotis* and sat watching as the distribution went on. He spoke leisurely with many of the devotees and also said that He would visit them all soon. Conferring joy on all, Swami received Aarthi and left.

March 1, 2008 – Gratitude Programme by Final Year PG Students

When the first day of the new month dawned on March 1, there was a huge gathering of devotees from Hyderabad who had come with the single pointed motive of inviting Swami to their city. Swami came out at 3:15 pm and seeing all the Hyderabad devotees, asked them to sit in front on the raised marble enclosure where the Institute professors and teachers usually sit. He then turned and drove out. He returned in a very short while and then went for the Darshan rounds. After completing it, He alighted in the portico and then went into the interview room. He took many senior members of the "visiting Hyderabad Team", if we may call it so, for an interview.

As the interview proceeded, word arrived that Swami had permitted the II PG students, the outgoing batch from the Prasanthi Nilayam Campus to put up their "Gratitude" programme. All the students began to take their positions and waited eagerly for Swami to arrive. Swami completed the interviews and came out at about 5:15 pm. In spite of the long session inside, Swami looked so fresh and cheery. As soon as He sat on the stage, He asked where "Krishna" was. A boy who was donning Krishna's role as part of the program, came walking out majestically from behind. Swami asked him to be seated in front of the marble block. Then He asked for Sudama (Krishna's friend). Sudama came forward and Swami blessed him by touching him on the head, and then asked for the programme to begin.

The programme began with a visitor in heaven being introduced to the three major departments - the 'Prayer and Petition Receiving Department', the 'Blessing Packaging and Processing Department' and the 'Gratitude Receiving Department'. For a change, the third department is most busy! And that is because gratitude has been pouring forth in plenty from the students of Swami! At this point, students carrying pictures of each boy with Swami on decorated hearts, came to Swami and the Lord lovingly blessed them all, holding and viewing a few of them. The children then began to attempt to express the rich myriad feelings and emotions that were coursing through them. Many students spoke their heart out. Orators, poets and singers seemed to emerge by the minute as each student used different methods and means to express the same sentiments of Love.

The first song was a beautiful melody in Telugu which stated that the Love received from Swami during their stay was more than enough for births together, and there remained no other desire in the boys' hearts. They offered gratitude to Swami for having guided them to take their first few steps in Life. Comparing Swami to the Gardener who has nourished them in His Nursery, they prayed that they spread the fragrance of His Love to all who come in touch with them. The songs were soulful and one could see tears streaming down many a face as they realized the apparently bitter truth of physical separation from someone who has been a Mother, Father, Teacher and Friend, all rolled into one. For Swami's students, instead of the mother, father and Guru being God, God becomes the Father, Mother and Guru.

There was a small dance sequence for a song composed by Swami Himself. The gist of the song was that irrespective of what you do, whether you wear ochre robes, smear the holy ash, turn rosary beads or even visit Puttaparthi, the only way to get sanctified is by imbibing Love and compassion for all. The students recollected memories of how some boys had not eaten for two days as Swami was not speaking with them. Swami, then, told the teachers that they must be fed, and then it came to be known that even Swami had not eaten for the past two days! There was not a single dry eye in the gathering. If we just sit back and think of how Swami has beautifully moulded our lives, nay has become our very lives itself, there will not be a single moment when our eyes will remain dry. Life without God is full of tears. Life with God is also full of them - only that, this time, they are tears of Love and Gratitude. Why is it that these tears flow down when we are with Swami? When there is someone so beautiful in our eyes, where is the place for the tears to remain!

A student then narrated how he, a bordering failure in academics, was resurrected by Swami. When his parents had asked Swami in an interview, "Swami, will this boy ever change?" Swami had emphatically replied, "When Valmiki himself transformed, will this boy not change? Tell him that Swami has called him with Love, He will come to me!" As he narrated this, the boy broke down, and Swami too appeared quite emotional as he blessed the boy. To highlight the experience of friendship with Swami, the Krishna-Sudama episode was enacted. Swami seemed to become nostalgic as the play was enacted and was touched.

As emphasised before, the Gratitude Programmes are events that can never be adequately captured in words. The beautiful and emotion filled evening concluded with an energy-filled song addressing Swami as the heartbeat of each and every child. There was Love, Grace and magic in the sweet evening air as the fragrance of gratitude wafted, scenting everything in its wake. As the programme concluded, Swami came walking down the stage to pose for pictures with His Dear Children. What ensued next was a loving exchange of words and feelings. After spending time with them, Swami blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all. He, then, retired to Yajur Mandir.

March 2, 2008 – Songs by Hyderabad Youth

On the evening of March 2nd, the youth, who had arrived from Hyderabad with the intention of inviting Swami to their wonderful and bubbling city, had been permitted to put up a programme in front of Swami. Swami came for Darshan at about 5:05 pm and He alighted near the interview room after completing Darshan rounds. He immediately came out and took a small round on the stage granting beautiful Darshan to all who had gathered. Then He went into the interview room for about 10 minutes and sent word for the programme to be started. The youth began their presentation with Omkar.

First, was a welcome song on how fortunate they were to be able to offer their salutations in His Divine Presence. The song had a slow waltzing melody in the beginning and then it picked up momentum and speed as they called out

to Swami as their Father. It turned out to be a real welcome song, for, as they completed singing it, Swami came out of the interview room onto the stage. There were commentary pieces in between, explaining the gist of the songs. There was a song on how sweet and beautiful is Swami's Name, Form and everything associated with Him. As Swami sat, swaying gently to the tunes, it was really a sight for the Gods to behold, and everybody present there felt supremely blessed with the opportunity to be there. On one occasion, speaking to a person, who was a chain smoker, Swami had said, "If you do not give up this bad habit, I will not think of you and I will ensure that you too do not think of Me!" Even the fact that we are able to think of Swami is His Grace and Blessings that we ought to be grateful for.

The songs continued. The commentator said, "Swami, if we look at You, it is enough, we'll forget the world." Swami nodded and seemed to say, "Oh yes! Why not?" Everyone smiled and the songs continued. There were songs dripping with gratitude for His Compassion and Love. "The eyes never tire seeing you and get addicted to your Graceful Form; the ears ache to hear Your Sweet Voice; the temple of our minds is complete only due to Your Form being installed." There was another song that described the glories of the Ten Avatars that Lord Vishnu assumed to protect the world. The songs began to gather momentum, and the enthusiasm remained on the high that it always was.

Swami kept responding and emoting to the noble feelings and thoughts being expressed in the songs. As a fast paced song on the ideal way for the individual to conduct himself concluded, Swami called the violinist and materialized a gold chain for him. He was, naturally, overwhelmed as he delicately touched His Feet, and accepted the gift of grace. The songs continued. Requesting the Lord never to forget them, the devotees sang out a composition by Swami Himself unto Him. From Him, for Him unto Him! There was a very innovative composition that incorporated popular bhajans, "Govind Krishna Jai", "Prema Muditha" and "Shivaya Parameshwaraya". It was a devotional outpouring where the devotees said that their only refuge was His Feet. All those seated in the Hall were washed pure and joyous by this spontaneous flow of devotional songs, and the silent shower of Love seen from the twinkle in Sai's Eyes. The last song was a patriotic one with a marching beat.

As they concluded, Swami called the harmonium player cum singer, who had performed exceedingly well. He had a slight difficulty standing due to a hunched back. Swami showered all Love on him, and materializing a gold chain for him, put it around His neck and granted *paada namaskar*. After that, Swami stood up and walked down to the group that had clustered by now. He spoke to them and almost satiated everyone's pangs to have a few precious words of *Sambhaashan* (conversation) with Him. He posed for group photos, and after that, went into the interview room. He returned with white cloth pieces and personally handed them over to each and every participant. As the Aarthi went on, Swami granted the Abhayastham with both His Hands raised. The devotees shouted *Jaijais* at the end of the Aarthi. Leaving

everyone in this blissful frame of mind Swami retired to Yajur Mandir after blessing the *prasadam* to be distributed.

March 5, 2008 – “Churning of the Ocean” Dance by the University Students

A dance ballet had been planned by the students of the University for the Shivarathri celebrations which was the next day. Swami planted a pleasant surprise for all when after completing His Darshan rounds, He sent instructions that the ballet be performed that evening itself! All the bhajan singers were seated, not in the bhajan hall but in the marble block of the Sai Kulwant Hall. The bhajans began and Swami came outside and sat on the stage, much to the thrill of all the devotees assembled. But as Swami sat for the bhajans, all the while He was enquiring whether the dancers were ready. Since the dance involved elaborate make up and costumes, it took a while for the students to get ready.

In the meanwhile, as the Bhajans continued in the Sai Kulwant Hall, Swami visited the Bhajan Hall twice and interacted with the performers who were getting ready there. He asked about the various roles in the dance and blessed all of them to perform the dance. With blessings abounding on them and smiles adorning their faces, the dancers made their way to the Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami too arrived on the stage. The marble block was cleared of student occupation. As Swami watched on, a huge 25 x 12 feet backdrop was brought in. It was a very innovative and creative painting of Lord Shiva consuming the deadly Haalahala poison to save the world from total destruction.

The half-hour dance programme in Telugu depicted the Puranic episode of the churning of the Ocean, with Lord Shiva consuming the poison to save the world. The ocean is churned with the devas (angels) on one side, and the *asuras* (demons) on the other. The serpent king, Vasuki is the rope. When the mountain is sinking into the ocean, Lord Vishnu assumes the form of a huge tortoise and holds up the mountain. This is the famous Kurma Avatar. This was so gracefully and beautifully depicted. The celestial sage Narada was the narrator for the entire episode, and that role was played by the lead dancer. As the dance progresses, various things emanate from the ocean. They are evenly distributed among the Devas and the Asuras. Lord Vishnu takes the form of Mohini to ensure that the immoral demons do not become immortal by drinking the nectar that comes forth as the final item from the churning. The whole dance was wonderfully choreographed and the thrill of the entire Puranic story was experienced by everyone in the audience. Swami too seemed so happy at the effort. He was engrossed watching the dance all the while.

At the end of the programme, Swami came down from the stage to grant group photographs. He interacted with the students. All the students literally mobbed Him and there was joy all around. Swami said that He was extremely happy with the dance and also told all the dancers to come up with more such creative dances. The dancers submitted that everything was because of His

Grace alone. Swami posed for group photos and collected letters from the dancers. The entire troupe got the chance to do *paadanamaskar*. After blessing the prasadam to be distributed and receiving Aarthi, Swami left for His residence at around 6.40 pm.

March 6, 2008 – Shivarathri Celebrations

The whole of Prasanthi Nilayam seemed to have a very serene yet powerful aura about it on March 6, the holy Shivarathri Day. A kind of austere aura enveloped the atmosphere and there were mystical and powerful vibrations in the air. Everyone seemed to be charged with some mysterious energy, and there was bubbling enthusiasm everywhere. Very early, in the morning itself, even the birds and bees seemed to prepare for the Holy Night. The fragrance of incense pervaded the air, and all the temples within the Nilayam were the loci of intense devotion. People began to file into the Sai Kulwant Hall with the great desire of having a glimpse of their Sai Shiva on this very special day. A novel and huge LED screen had been erected near the Ganesh temple so that the Darshan-hungry devotees, not able to find room in the Hall, could be satiated. It measured 14 ft by 30 ft and was perfectly visible even in the brightest daylight!

In the morning, everyone waited for the Lord to arrive, but for reasons best known to Him, Swami did not come out. From 10:45 am itself, devotees began to queue up for the afternoon and evening session. The emptiness from not having Swami's Darshan in the morning had intensified everyone's desire and longing to see Him. At about 4:30 pm, a wave of applause burst forth and seemed to travel through the length and breadth of the Nilayam. Swami had not only come, He had arrived on a special high chair, which had been specially designed, so that all could see Him even from a distance. Like every Shivarathri, Bhagavan exuded a halo of sheer Power and Grace, as He moved gently through the surging and revitalized assemblage. The energy and joy that He radiated sent people into raptures. There were people wherever the eye could see. The balconies and lanes outside the Hall, and every inch of space in the Hall, had been taken up. Swami did not collect any letter, but a gentle smile danced on His Lips, and He conferred benign blessings of bounty and beauty to all as He passed by. He reached the stage and took up His place behind the discourse table. He beckoned the *Vedam* to stop after a while, and then the All India President, Sri. V. Srinivasan addressed the august gathering. Explaining the significance of Shivarathri, he reminded everyone of the great good fortune to be in Swami's Presence on the day, when all the sages and saints are in intense penance.

After this, Swami rose to speak. And a mere sight of that was enough to raise goose bumps on everyone assembled. Swami rose, unmindful of any suffering or pain, and as He began with the nectarine poem, it was an experience to be felt and cherished. Given below is a summary of Swami's Discourse:

Today, right from the morning till night, people always run behind money. Money seems to be everything in the world today, and everyone is asking for

money. Is there anyone who asks for God with the same fervent intensity? It is only God who can give peace and happiness. That is why it is stressed that one must engage in bhajans and singing God's Glories always.

Love is one, and though it is one, it is expressed in many ways between mother and son, husband and wife and between friends. Take for instance, the demise of Mr. Shourie. Many came to see him. There were policemen too standing as guards there. But what happened there was that fire merged into fire, water back with water, and air back with air. All the elements returned to their original state. Nothing but ash is left there. Everything returned to nothingness; gone back to the Source. That is the Truth that all must realise.

There was a certain Yogi who had learnt various forms of knowledge - the Vedas, the Shastras, the Upanishads, the Puranas and Itihasas. He heard the sound of the cosmic damaruka (the drum that Shiva holds). There is great power in the beat of the damaruka. It is the one that destroys and burns. There is only one Truth. Brahma Satya, Jagan Mitya. The world is all illusory.

Today as I look around, I see only two forms. Those are the forms of Eashwamma and Pedda Venkamma Raju, the parents of this Body. Even as I came out for Darshan, they were there dressed in yellow. Yellow is a very auspicious colour; it represents Vaikuntam. They were telling Me that they were waiting for me to return to them. Swami sees yellow everywhere. All of you are in yellow now. Carry this yellowness with you always. Bhagavan wanted to also bring forth the lingam which is golden yellow in colour. But as I came out, all the children and the devotees, were praying, "Swami, do not do so. We cannot bear to see you in pain." They want Me to be with them in a very relaxed and tension free manner.

The nature of Bhagavan is mysterious and un-understandable. Once He has decided, His sankalpa will happen. Why should the Truth remain shadowed? It is the nature of the human mind to keep changing and not Sai's nature. (At this point Swami sang the Telugu song "Tandava Keli Salpeni.." . He explained that it was only Shiva who had the beat, "Dhimiki Dhimiki" and none else.)

Whenever we have difficulties, we cry out to God. Once Shiva and Parvati were passing over a hill when they saw a man on a tree about to fall. Shiva told Parvati to save him while she said that Shiva should save him. They agreed that if he calls out, "Appa"(Father) then Shiva would go to his aid, and if he called "Amma"(Mother), then Parvati would rush to rescue him. As he fell, the man screamed, "Ayyo" (meaning "woe upon me")! That is the fate of man today. When you are in trouble, you must always remember Amma or Appa; your parents are your Gods. The mother bore you for 9 months and father took all the trouble to bring you up. Worship your parents as God - remember that for this world, Mother is Parvati and father is Parameshwara. The amma (mother) of Eashwara (God) is Eashwamma.

The Avatar came as a trinity. The first was Shirdi Sai, the second is Parthi Sai, and the third will be Prema Sai. The complete unity among all will be achieved

when Prema Sai comes. Today there is absolutely no Unity. There are only differences and fragmentation. When Prema comes, there will be Unity. The Caste, Culture and Country should all be one. When I had visited East Africa, the prime minister there, Idi Amin asked me, "Where do you come from?" I did not say Andhra Pradesh. I said India. There should be no such division based on states. Today Andhra will be broken for Telangana; tomorrow there will be a demand and break up for Rayalseema too. These things should not happen. Similarly Uttara Kannada and Dakshina Kannada - such divisions are bad. There is only one country - India.

(Swami narrated about the Unity that existed between the 3 wives of King Dasharatha - Kousalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra, and the unity between Rama and his brothers as an example.)

All the disunity is due to selfishness. A fish is better than selfish. Be and remain united always. Bharathi means 'Bha' – 'God' and 'Rathi' – 'intense love for'. He is a true person of Bharat who has intense Love for God. The only way to attain joy and peace in this world is by singing bhajans. Never give up that.

Bhajan Bina Sukh Shanti Nahi....

With that bhajan, Swami kindled the night-long vigil of bhajan singing. He sat for the first bhajan. It was not a surprise as it turned out to be, "Dhimita Dhimita Dhim". After that, Swami returned slowly to Yajur Mandir. It was about 7:30 pm by the time Swami retired.

The next morning, it was about 7:10 am, when along with the rising Sun, the light and apple of every eye, arrived into the Sai Kulwant Hall. Again, Swami chose to come on the chair. He gently coursed through the ladies side. As He came to the marble block, a plea was made to Him to bless the *prasadam* to be distributed in the morning. Swami went to the main gate where the idols of Lord Rama, Lakshmana and Mother Seeta are, and blessed all the huge vessels holding the *prasadam*. He, then, returned and moved through the gents side granting Darshan. He sat on the stage listening to bhajans being sung. Needless to say, His Presence brought a boost to the tempo and rhythm of the bhajans. Swami sat for more than half an hour and that seemed to be the most fruitful portion of the holy songs being sung. After that, Swami asked for the Aarthi to be taken. He Himself lit the Aarthi which is a rarity in the present days. After the Aarthi, the *prasadam* distribution began.

Swami sat silently watching the distribution. His Eyes traveled almost over every soul sitting in the Hall. Meanwhile, outside, the devotees were having a joyful time watching Swami on the giant screen. A lady even exclaimed, "I got the first line to see Swami in front of the screen!" Swami continued to sit and just kept seeing all around the Hall. *Prasadam* distribution of *laddoos* and *pulihora* (gram flour sweet balls and tamarind rice) - went on smoothly and quickly. "Brahmaarpanam" was chanted, not once but twice, as the tiny tots from Primary School outdid their senior brothers from the Institute. All the senses were in a state of bliss. As the *prasadam* was a delight to the tongues, the ears heard the devotional strains, eyes beheld the beautiful Form of

Swami, there was a divine aroma in the air, and the feeling on the whole was so charging. After a while, Swami slowly went back to Yajur Mandir.

In the evening, Swami came out at about 5:00 pm. The Hall was still jam packed. Swami's Darshan is something that you can never have too much of. Each time you see Him, you feel like seeing Him more and more. And today, it seemed that Swami too had decided that His Devotees can never have enough of His Darshan. He completed His Darshan rounds, and then came out again on the chair. He slowly moved through the gents side, and from there to the ladies side. Every face had a joyous look and every palm folded in deepest reverence as Swami went about blessing everyone. Thrilling all the hearts with the beauty, auspiciousness and Grace of His Darshan, Swami returned to the stage. The bhajans for the evening were on in full flow. Swami had decided to make the evening into another very special one. He called out to Mr. Ajit Popat and asked him to speak. He spoke in his well known enthusiastic way and elaborated on how all of us should always be happy. He also mentioned on the importance of keeping good health. And as he concluded, Swami filled everyone's cup of joy to the brim as He said that He would speak. Sitting in the chair, Swami began His Divine Discourse. Here is the summary:

Birth, bondage and liberation; everything is a result of action. All must attempt to recognize the actions done from dawn to dusk. As is the action, so is the result. Good actions give good intellect. Actions prompted by bad thoughts give bad results. You must have seen bats. They keep flying in the air like all other birds. They also rest on trees. But their posture is upside down. Did anyone tie it that way? No. But its karma is like that. Similarly when man does bad deeds and has bad thoughts, he reaps bad consequences.

We just cannot escape the reactions of our actions. Just like a correct answer in the examination yields good marks, and a wrong answer yields no marks, the way of life is also such. It is the foremost responsibility of man to do good deeds. Whenever any action is done, think, "I am Man". Question whether what you are about to do is human or bestial. Otherwise, why God, people themselves will question, criticize and punish you. There is no need to go to God, the actions themselves will confer the consequences.

Again, among the different birds, when some of them call out, people throw stones at them. But the cuckoo and the nightingale are welcomed. Our speech too determines the reactions we receive. Help ever, hurt never. Many times, we knowingly hurt people. To do it knowingly is the worst of sins. Man has a mind. It can be set on the right path or the wrong path. "Mana Eve Manushyanaam Kaaranam Bandha Mokshayoho". Accusing others, blindly following people and hurting - these are not the qualities that are natural to man. Man should be free of these and help his fellowmen. When animals themselves help men, there is nothing great about you helping your fellowmen. Do human actions based on human values.

Follow God's command. Not any external God. Follow the God within. "Daivam Maanusha Roopena" - God is in Human Form. Just obey His

command. You may have intimate friends. But do not follow them. Follow only God's command. Do not hurt anyone in thought, word or deed. Irrespective of caste, community or culture, be a good human being. If this humaneness is forgotten, all spiritual penance is useless. Do acts to please God. That is the fulfillment of human life. "Jantunaam Nara Janma Durlabham.." that is, "Among all the creatures, human life is the most fortunate one". So do not waste this life by speaking untruth, doing injustice and having bad feelings.

It is important to be good, do good and see good. Today you smile at others having bad looks and vision. That is not proper. There must be harmony of thoughts, words and deeds. If there is no unity in the first place, there can be no purity. If anyone criticizes, think that it is for your good only. Everything is for the good. Be smiling always. That does not mean that you laugh unnecessarily. Have good thoughts. Let any property be lost - but not humanness. True good health means developing good thoughts.

Do not eat everything that you come across. Whatever you eat, offer it unto God, and only then eat. Have pure saatwik food. Remember, whatever you offer, will come back to you. You cannot get good from wrong activities. Good food alone will give good health, and then alone will good thoughts arise.

Once a beggar went to a house and the lady there told him, "Have a bath and come. I will serve you food." He replied, "Govindeti sadaa snaanam" (Govinda's name is the holy bath). She then said, "Then Govinda's name itself will be good food for you. Have it!" If bath is Govinda, then food is also Govinda. Do not have double standards. Sometimes, we have very bad thoughts. The remedy for that is good company.

*Satsangatve Nissangatvam
Nissangatve Nirmohatvam
Nirmohatve Nischalatatvam
Nischalatatve Jeevan Mukti.*

You cannot call yourself good if you have habits like drinking, smoking or eating non-vegetarian food. They should be totally absent. Human life is very sacred. It is a gift of past merit. Though you will get company in liquor houses and bars, you will never get good thoughts there. Give up jealousy, anger and ego. Have gratitude to those who have done even the most miniscule help to you. Then you will be successful. We get so much help and betray even those who help us. Have gratitude even for the simplest help you receive; else, all is vain. Treat even enemies with Love and respect. Then the reaction, reflection and resound will be good. You need not worship God. Your goodness will support you. You are the witness for the mind, foolishness is the witness for a fool. Follow the right path according to your heart. Self -satisfaction is very important. That will prepare you for Self-sacrifice.

Dear students, develop good thoughts. There is no use of reading big books. People think that you are reading the Mahabharata, while on the sly you are reading all nasty things. You are Vidyarthi (student). Seek the knowledge of

the Self. Do everything for Atma Trupti or Self-satisfaction. First and foremost, develop tolerance and give up anger. At this age, you have sacred hearts. It is not needed that you please the world. It is enough that you please God. If you want happiness, the only way is to sing God's Glory. (Bhajan Bina Sukh Shanti Nahi...)

It was Guru Nanak who emphasised the importance of bhajans. When we sing together, at least one heart will go to God, and that is enough. God will be ecstatic when you sing His praises. Everyday there are nights, but the night you think of God is Shivarathri. Do bhajans now.

As Swami commanded, the bhajans began. Though it was quite late in the evening, everyone was so happy at this unexpected bounty. Swami then received Aarthi and retired.

March 14, 2008 – Gratitude Programme by Final Year Undergraduate Boys

All the students from the III year undergraduate class, along with the batch from the Mirpuri College of Music, who were passing out of the University, had assembled in the marble block, ready with their gratitude programme on the evening of March 14, 2008. At 5:00pm, like every other day, the bhajans began. For the last few days, the students had been praying for the opportunity to present their programme before Swami. Very often, we think that noble indeed are those who offer their gratitude to the Lord. Little do we realize that it is also a blessing from God, that we feel gratitude welling in our beings and also get the chance to express it to Him. To have gratitude is really a great boon from the Lord, and gratitude speaks in a language that only the heart wholly comprehends. As Cicero put it, "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others." And that is because Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough and more. It turns denial into acceptance, and chaos into a beautiful harmony.

As the bhajans continued, Swami came out at about 5:10 pm. He gave Darshan on the chair, but cut through into the Bhajan Hall after completing the ladies side. After a while, the message was that bhajans would stop, and that Swami was coming out to see the gratitude programme. Everyone was happy - the students because the opportunity for which they had been pining for had materialized, and the devotees because this meant Swami's Darshan for an hour atleast! The students began with Aumkaaram and a prayer to Lord Ganesha. After that, it was a sheer flow of the heart. In various languages, the boys expressed the inexpressible experiences with their dear Lord. As the different songs were sung, boys came forward with roses and a sheet containing the lyrics of the song being sung. A very famous story by Swami where a person tries to paint the whole world green because his guru had instructed him to see only green was enacted. The Guru then advises him thus, "Oh fool! Instead of wasting so much money, if you had brought yourself a pair of green glasses, the problem would be solved. Change your vision and everything will be fine."

There was also a dance. One boy said, "Swami, whatever I know of dancing is only because of you. Today, when I am able to teach some Bal Vikas students to dance in Your Presence, I feel fulfilled." After they danced for the popular devotional song, "Dandaalayya", Swami called the dancers and spoke to them. Towards the end, one of the students was blessed with a chain from Swami. After the final song, Swami said that He would grant group pictures to all the students. The students grabbed at the privileged opportunity, and as they went on to the stage in small groups, Swami thrilled all their hearts with smiles and Grace filled interactions. After all the groups were completed, one of the students asked Swami whether teachers too could have a group picture, and Swami readily agreed. It was a wonderful sight to see the Guru with all the teachers, and He also seemed immensely happy to be amidst them He granted *paadanamaskar* to all of them and spoke to them too. He also called and spoke to the students who were in colourful costumes. Swami blessed prasadam to be distributed to all. Then, receiving Aarthi and raising His Hands in benediction, Swami retired for the day.

March 15, 2008 – Swami Blesses GATE Rankers of the University

As the bhajans began at 5:00 pm on the evening of March 15, 2008, Swami came out for Darshan on the chair. He slowly moved from the ladies on to the gents' side. He collected letters and then went into the interview room. Very shortly, however, the bhajans were halted. Students from the University had written the national GATE (Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering) examination for the various Sciences. The results were out and the students had performed exceedingly well. The nationwide second rank in Physics and various other ranks had been secured by the students of Swami's university. Swami decided to bless these students specially.

There is a very important difference between the ways humans judge something and the way God does the same. People judge others from the results they produce. Whether it's in music or business, arts or sciences, the person is judged purely on the basis of the results he/she obtains. But with God, it's so different. God is interested only in the efforts that have been put in to achieve the results. If the efforts put in are 100 percent and in full sincerity, He is happy, irrespective of the result. And that is why it is said that all are equal for God. We may all be different in terms of our talents and skills, and thus vary in the results we produce. But we are equal in the fact that we all can put in our 100 percent. And that is all that God is concerned about. Has this person put in the effort? The result comes nowhere in the picture for God. Only the humans judge by result.

Swami came on stage and a podium was set up for the Vice Chancellor to announce the results. As the VC went about the announcement, there was a loud and cheerful applause for all the candidates. The boy, who had secured the top rank, was presented before Him. Swami created a chain for him and put it around his neck. He then posed with him for a photograph. After that, Swami called all the students who had cleared the exam to come on stage. Swami was so happy, and like a proud mother began speaking to all the students. There was no distinction for Him based on the ranks. He was just so

happy with everyone. He asked for watches to be brought from inside. He personally began to hand over watches to each and every student who had made Him so happy and proud. It was such a beautiful scene. Swami was blessing and praising the students telling them that they were wonderful. The students were bowing to Him and saying that it had nothing to do with their intelligence, and that it was sheer Grace that they had done so well. As Swami completed the distribution of watches, one of the students expressed his desire to speak on the occasion. Swami agreed and the student was oozing with gratitude for Swami. He stated emphatically that it was completely Swami's Grace that they had achieved good results. After his speech, all the students gathered around Swami, and the Divine Master then asked many of them about their future plans.

Very soon Prof. Anil Kumar was called and Swami made him speak. He spoke very highly of the students narrating the multi faceted activities that they carry out. After that, he began mentioning each student by his name, and also mentioned about the various other activities that each student did in the Hostel and the Institute. Swami was many times moved into almost tears. It is such a beautiful feeling to be owned by the Lord. Even the tiniest joy that we are able to give Him comes back to us manifold. Please God and the world is pleased, they say. That statement found fulfillment that day. Make Swami your whole world and you become the whole world for Swami. After blessing all the students, Swami called for all the teachers. He posed for a huge group photo with all the teachers, and blessed all of them too. He, then, slowly made His way towards the interview room. Bhajans and *Aarathi* followed, after which Swami retired for the day.

March 22, 2008 – Holi Celebrations

In the afternoon of March 22, the stage had been set for a song and dance program by the devotees of Bihar and Jharkhand. On both, the gents and ladies side, there were groups of singers with various accompaniments ready to sing on the grandeur and colour of Holi. It will not be out of place to add a small note on Holi here. The festival of colours, as it is popularly known, is celebrated with great vigour and merriment in India, especially in the northern states. Holi takes place over two days in the later part of February or March.

On the first day bonfires are lit at night to signify burning the demoness Holika, the sister of demon Hiranyakashipu, who tried very hard in vain to kill his God loving son Prahalada. His sister had the boon that fires would not be able to touch her. But when she sat in a pyre with Prahalada on her lap, he emerged unscathed while she was reduced to ashes. On the second day, known as *Dhulhendi*, people spend the day throwing colored powder and water at each other. The spring season, during which the weather changes, is believed to cause viral fever and cold. Thus, the playful throwing of the colored powders has a medicinal significance: the colors are traditionally made of Neem, Kumkum, Haldi, Bilva and other medicinal herbs prescribed by Ayurvedic doctors. Basically, it is the celebration of the victory of Love for God over all the elements and forces in the Universe.

Swami arrived at Sai Kulwant Hall at 4.45 pm, welcomed by small children bearing lamps on either side of the path in the ladies side. The whole hall had been transformed into a palette of multiple of colours. Balloons of various hues and colours had been innovatively used to lend a rich splash and dash of colours in the Hall. Swami completed a full Darshan round and reached the stage. He, then, came out to the stage and there was a cheer. The programme commenced with a dance by children, while a song on Gayatri was being sung. The Gayatri was sung very soulfully and powerfully in the king of ragas - Darbari. Then were songs for the occasion of "Pavitra Holi" as they termed it. This was the general trend of the programme. The songs continued on the beauty and joy that the festive Holi brings, and very aptly, the children danced in rhythm to the songs. Each song had a short note of introduction in English. They also requested Swami to visit Bihar and Jharkhand.

The songs were unique in the sense that the counter notes were sung very wonderfully along with the main tunes, the way it is done in western classical music. There was a song on the impact of Swami's education system, and especially the Sri Sathya Sai Village Integration Programme. The glory of Grama Seva was extolled beautifully in this song. The Shivaashtakam was also sang and it charged the entire atmosphere with a feeling of wonder and awe at the magnificence and sheer power of the Lord Shiva. The musical offerings continued for the next 45 minutes. At the end, Bhagavan blessed the performers with group photographs, and as a bonus for them, asked them to sing bhajans. They responded very joyously to Swami's command. Fifteen minutes of their Bhajans followed, till Swami accepted Arati and returned to His Residence.

March 23, 2008 – “Shabari” Drama by Bal Vikas Children from Bihar

The small drizzle in the previous day came as a respite to the thousands of devotees from the states of Bihar and Jharkand who had flocked to Prasanthi Nilayam to celebrate Holi in the Divine Presence of their Lord. After a wonderful dance-music extravaganza on March 22, on the evening of March 23 was a drama presentation by the Bal Vikas children of these states. The chief protagonist of the drama was the great devotee, Shabari. The early life of Shabari is not well known and this was brought out beautifully by the children. Bhagavan arrived into Sai Kulwant Hall at 5:40 pm and immediately took His place at the dais. Just before the programme commenced, He called a few primary school children and gave away goodies placed in lovely decorated baskets. What really caught attention was the number of baskets; there were easily about 15 baskets and really huge ones too.

The drama began with the little known story of Shabari's early life, when as a child, on the occasion of her marriage, a poor little lamb is being sacrificed for her well being. Being born in a tribal community, that was the usual custom. Shabari questions her father about the virtue of such an act but is shunned. Unable to reconcile herself to be a part of such a meaningless ritual, she silently runs away from home to the ashram of the great sage Matanga. Through her sheer dedication and selfless service, she pleases her guru who

grants the boon of having the Darshan of the Lord when He would come as Rama. From then on the saga of devotion of that woman is truly heart rending. Every day, she sweeps the paths, cleans every stone and collects fresh fruits for her Lord. She does so uninterrupted for many long years until one day when her Lord arrives. There was one particular song which brought out the following meaning: "The mental agony of separation from You Lord is much more painful than the physical pain that the body undergoes; when will You come Lord?" Finally, the day arrives when the Lord is to come, and almost intuitively Mother Shabari knows that would be the day she would behold His Form. She sings, "How is it that all the birds are chirping away so gleefully, how is it that every flower is beaming with some extra hue and colour? Is it that today the Lord is going to come?..." And even as she is singing, Lord Rama with his brother Lakshmana, arrive there to redeem the great devotion of this pious devotee. The whole drama was staged wonderfully and everyone was deeply touched.

Swami immediately called Shabari and blessed her with a gold chain. It was very interesting to see Swami holding the chain in His Hands, stretched out to put it around even as 'Shabari' was adjusting her wig, unsuccessfully. In a way, it summed up man's situation today. God is waiting to give, but we are too busy adjusting the appendages that we have so willfully put on ourselves. This was the second 'Shabari' getting a physical shower of love, as on December 23, 2007 the students of Swami had also put up a drama on the similar theme. Swami went on to bless the children with photographs. They were visibly ecstatic and overwhelmed. Swami retired for the day at 6:50 pm after receiving Mangala Arathi.

March 24, 2008 – Sri Sri Ravishankar's Visit and Holi celebrations

His Holiness, Sri Sri Ravishankar had expressed a desire to meet Swami on March 24, 2008. Swami had permitted him to come in the morning at around 10:00 am. The perfect host that He is, Swami was out at 9:45 am and the bhajans were on in the morning. Swami sat for the bhajans and the singing went on. At about 10:10 am, Swami looked outside. All the devotees were singing with the joy of His Presence amidst them. And next, He called for the car. As He was sitting in the car, Sri Ravishankar arrived. Swami went in the car and slowly made rounds amidst the devotees who had been sitting and singing bhajans for so long. There was a loud applause as Swami moved among the devotees. As Shirdi Baba, Swami had said, "*Shraddha* (faith) and *Saburi* (perseverance) are the two qualities most endearing to the Lord." And today, Swami went around proving that those two qualities are still held very dear by the Lord. He completed the round and came back to the portico when Sri Ravishankar rose from his chair to prostrate to Swami. Swami stopped him and told him to go into the interview room. The interview lasted for about 45 minutes, after which Sri Sri Ravishankar left. Swami went into the Bhajan Hall, and after the bhajan asked for Aarthi. He sat for the complete Aarthi and retired for the morning at about 11:05 am.

In the evening, there was the concluding programme by the states of Bihar and Jharkhand for the festive Holi festival. The central marble block had been

kept empty, and it was flanked on both sides by singers ready to express their love and devotion to Swami. Children waited behind the backdrop of the Sri Sathya Sai Village Integrated Programme or the SSSVIP as it is popularly called. Swami came for Darshan at about 5:20 pm. He took a detour after the ladies side, and came straight on the stage. As He sat, He seemed to signal to the Vedam group to stop, but as the tempo and pitch was dying, He looked and told them to continue! Then, He decided to come down and move around in the chair. He went towards the Primary School children, and the amplitude of the Veda chants went up immediately by several decibels! Swami seemed to enjoy that. After all "Veda Poshana" (Sustenance of the Vedas) is one of the primary goals of the Avatar. It is but natural that the Vedic chants receive a boost when the Avatar comes near! From the Primary School side, Swami moved towards the ladies, who were seated in the front. He spoke to a few of them inquiring into the details of the programme that they were about to stage. Then Swami went through the students on the gents side. He blessed all the boys sitting with trays and collected letters. He completed a round around the students and moved back on to the stage.

He, then, asked for the programme to begin. The first part was a garland of songs in Hindi. The five songs sung were all preceded by a short commentary in English on the meaning and significance of the song. Swami sat tapping His Right Hand to the rhythm of the songs. After the songs, two children came in front and offered roses to Swami. The next programme was a short Hindi drama on the SSSVIP. It was the story of the transformation of a child who aims to become a big shot in life - a VIP. He thinks only of himself. He is not selfish, but he feels that a single person cannot do much to transform the world. Persuaded by a friend of his, when he goes for the Grama Seva, he is very touched at the scenes he witnesses. A true incident where a whole village gets burnt down due to an unexpected fire was depicted. The Sai Youth then help rebuild the village in every way - physically, morally and spiritually. That village, presently, stands out as an ideal for all villages. The protagonist of the story decides that only that life is worth living which is spent in service to others, not because it redeems the world, but because it redeems and gives ultimate joy to the server! He is an example of the members of the youth brigade being touched and transformed by Swami's Love and Message. The drama concluded with a song of gratitude to Swami expressing the beauty of the bond that exists between Swami and every devotee.

Swami blessed all the participants and had *prasadam* distributed. It was 7:10 pm by the time Swami received Aarti and retired to Yajur Mandir.

SWAMI AND ME

COMING HOME

By late Mrs. Peggy Mason

Mrs. Peggy Mason and her husband, Ron Laing were assigned the task of founding the Sathya Sai Organisation in the UK by Bhagavan Baba in 1980. Peggy was an excellent writer and an editor of a monthly spiritual magazine called "The Two Worlds" for many years. Later she was the editor of Sathya Sai Newsletter of UK till she breathed her last in the mid-nineties. Along with her husband, she co-authored the internationally well known book "Embodiment of Love" on Bhagavan Baba in 1982. The famous book "Sai Humour" was also compiled by her.

In this article, taken from the compilation volume, "Golden Age" published in 1980, Peggy describes her spiritual odyssey spanning seventy years to Bhagavan's Lotus Feet.

I came into this life (into which it seems that I have packed about five lives) knowing the existence of other dimensions, and feeling a stranger on an alien planet, constantly astonished at what my elders considered to be quite normal — such things as killing each other on a grand scale by the millions (my childhood was during the First World War), and eating up our friends - the animals, and the extraordinary concept that life would almost certainly end with the demise of the physical body.

In the family and social background into which I was born, assuredly for good reasons, I was therefore called "the peculiar one" by my parents, whom I rarely saw, as the children were relegated to nannies. What can one think of a child of seven, who weeps at the sight of trees being cut down because God is being hurt? I felt that God must be in the tiniest flower, the smallest insect, in the stones under one's feet, as well as in the vastness of the starry heavens. I was a natural pantheist, though I did not know the word at the time. And like all children who have felt crushed or unloved, I grew up with an inbuilt sense of inadequacy, afraid to be truly myself, in case I should alienate those I loved or whose love I craved. It was like a bird beating against the cage. I felt I would never be able to mix with 'grown-ups' on an equal footing, and though I entered fully into life and all its activities, I never really felt part of it, but rather the observer, except when I was excelling at some purely physical pursuit. I could talk to animals, or to my special trees, with my arms around them when I was lonely, but not to people.

Many Years of Searching

When I was very young, I found a friend in the Beloved Jesus. He was very close to me, very Real. I adored His Message of Universal Love, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, which He came to demonstrate and suffer for, by the total crossing out of the 'I', the complete surrender of the lower nature, to merge with the Will of the Father.

Through the years of a very active and varied life, I studied a range of metaphysical subjects. I started with Philosophy, and later delved deep into Theosophy, Yoga, both the phenomena and higher teachings of Spiritualism, and comparative Religions — and I came to love Lord Krishna through the Bhagavad Gita. Because I had lived so much of my life in close proximity to animals, I espoused the cause of animal welfare, to lessen the intolerable abuse of our younger brethren for which mankind is incurring heavy Karma. The 'answer' was always the same — and what I already knew it had to be: "There is only one religion, the Religion of Love; One God who is Omniscient, Omnipresent. One Life, of which all and everything is a part, like drops in the Universal Ocean." And this, I endeavoured to inculcate in all my writing.

Yearning for Eternity

My soul yearned to identify with that Ocean, to become immersed in It, even if it took aeons for this little stream, of which I was a part, to trickle along its stony course to reach It. I yearned for the whole suffering, groaning, wayward world of Humanity to be embraced in that Ocean, and the burden of this yearning, and compassion for the hideous consequences of sheer ignorance often became unbearable, and in anguish, I would weep for the world. How long, O Lord, how long...?

But the Ocean was aware of the cry of the little stream which had just managed to negotiate an emotional boulder which seemed very formidable. The little miracles, the seeming 'coincidences' started to happen, as they do when the Voiceless Voice of the Ocean calls. To recover from the bruises, I visited Australia as a Guest of Honour at a national Spiritualist Conference, and to give a few talks. An Australian friend lent me a magazine from New Zealand called 'Heralds of the New Age', and from it I learned, for the first time, of the existence in the world of a Being called Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It was like being impregnated by an electric shock. I immediately subscribed to this magazine and lent it to other friends when I returned to England, for it always contained references to this Beloved Being. I had to find out more.

Photographic Shock

Then I came across a smiling photograph in a newspaper in which there was a review of Dr. Samuel Sandweiss's book "Sai Baba - the Holy Man and the Psychiatrist". I was impelled to cut out this photo, which I stuck on a card, and put on a piece of furniture opposite my bed. The Eyes looked straight at me. As I was contemplating this newspaper photo whilst in bed one night, an extraordinary thing happened which made my heart thump with the sudden shock. The photo definitely jumped to one side and back, while the whole area lit up in shimmering, iridescent light! I was stupefied, because I am not normally clairvoyant, and as I looked round at the other furniture in the room, it was obvious that this phenomenon was only centered on the photo. "Oh Baba!" I think I said, and while I recovered from the shock, the light gradually faded.

Now, at this time, early in 1978, I had become progressively crippled by increasing pain in the calf of the left leg, to such an extent that I could not walk more than twenty yards without stopping, to give time for the acute pain to subside enough to walk another twenty yards, and the foot was always white. My doctor sent me to a specialist who diagnosed a blocked main artery between knee and thigh. He told me it would get progressively worse, and was keen for me to agree to an operation through the abdomen to the spine. But he warned me that it was a very tricky operation, with only a fifty-fifty chance of success, and if it did not prove successful, the artery would be so impaired that the leg would eventually have to be amputated. He asked me to think about it, and let him know what I decided at a further appointment. (As I hobbled out of his consulting room, I had already decided to keep my leg as long as possible)

That night, after some prayer and meditation, I spoke to my Friend, the Photo. I simply said, "Oh Baba, I wish You could do something about my leg!" and went to sleep. About two days later, a stranger telephoned me. "You won't know who I am," he said, "but I'm a friend of an Indian lady called Swami Ganesha Ananda. This was the name given to her by her teacher, Sivananda, many years ago. She is impressed by your writings and very much wants to meet you. I could bring her over as she only lives fifteen miles away." I was prompted to agree, for I had the strangest feeling that this was connected in some way with Baba. I made an appointment for later the same week.

In the meantime, Dr. Sandweiss's book had arrived, and was on my table when this lady was brought to my home, though I had not had time to start reading it. As she entered the room, she glanced at the picture on the cover, and smiled. "Do you know Sai Baba?" I asked, knowing fully well the answer. "Oh yes!" she said. "Have you been to see Him, in India?" "Oh yes!" she said again, smiling. It transpired that her family had been ardent devotees of Shirdi Sai Baba, and that she too, being elderly, could recount many miraculous things that occurred when she was young and used to call on the Shirdi Body.

I never mentioned my leg, but at the end of a delightful afternoon, she suddenly said, "I have a pain in my left leg. Is it yours?" I said that indeed it was. "May I give it healing?" she asked. She knelt down and laid her hands on it for less than two minutes. "You won't get any more pain," she said. And from that moment I never have! The blood flowed normally to the foot and has continued to do so. I cancelled the appointment with the astonished surgeon. This was one demonstration of the thousand ways in which the Divine works, the thousand methods which are utilised. My simple plea was answered in this way. It seemed unbelievable.

The Lord Is Here!

With what avidity I started to read the book! After only the first ten pages, I was in a ferment of excitement. How many times, weeping for the world, I had cried out 'How long, O Lord, how long...?' Now hope, certainty, burgeoned forth within me. The Lord was here! This had to be the World Teacher, the Avatar for the New Age for Whom the world was waiting! This was no wishful

thinking, no clutching at straws, or gurus, or false or suspect prophets. This was Truth — Sathya! I have never met Sam Sandweiss, but I would like him to know that his book is pure magic for the Western seeker. Baba's Love, and Majesty, His Power and Gentleness, His Divinity and His adorable Humanity shine from its pages and bring tears to the eyes however many times it is read.

I found an address of a Sai Centre in England, so I wrote to this Centre in Wellingborough, asking for further books and information. A correspondence resulted which was full of love from the Secretary, Pravin Patel, and then one day a big envelope arrived, filled with a fragrance which was not of this world. This loving devotee had sent me a plastic bag containing a large amount of Divine Vibhuti!

The Overwhelming Love of Sai

The effect of receiving this was instantaneous. Something in me broke, and I wept and wept for half an hour. It was as if the dam gates had been lifted, and the trickling stream was suddenly swept along in full flood. And with it came a sense of release from years and years of trying to 'keep my end up' through thick and thin.

There seemed no need any more. I saw myself as I really was. I accepted myself, made peace with myself; became myself. Strangely, too, my sense of inadequacy dissolved in the acceptance of my littleness and limitations. In spite of all the years of turbulent events and experiences in my life, I realised that in my heart I was essentially that little girl of seven who cried because God was being hurt. And what was wrong with that, if that was what I was? All pretence vanished. Baba says: "To get at the core of God at His greatest, one must first get into the core of himself at his least, for no one can know God who has not known himself." The humble worm has its vital part to play in aerating the soil of the field for the growing crop, and God is also in the worm.

During this time, for reasons which are irrelevant here, my husband was elsewhere. When we were together again I pestered him unmercifully to read the Sandweiss book, and his reaction was the same as mine. We made our first journey to the Wellingborough Sai Centre and were overwhelmed by the love and hospitality they showered on us, and by the fervour of their bhajan singing. We were shown films of Swami, and I could not take my eyes off this unique, graceful, fluid Form. A large group of devotees, including many children, were off to India in a week's time. Their excitement was intense. I had now written an article about Sathya Sai Baba and the healing of my leg, just in time for them to take the magazine with them to India. Furthermore, they took our breath away by saying they would take a letter from each of us, and give them, with the article, into Swami's Hands. How does one start a letter to God? But then God is one's dearest Friend! So I wrote "Beloved Baba..." When it was time to leave the devotees, after I had gone up to the Shrine Room to kneel before the life-size picture of Swami, the tears started to run down my face and I felt a fool. "Is it because you would like to come to India with us?" they asked. "No," was all I could say. "It's just Baba..."

His Personal Advice

With what excitement, we awaited their return from India! Swami had sent a little message: "Tell Peggy to write Sathya Sai Baba in future, not just Sai Baba..." He had been so kind, so loving — and the message meant that I could write many more articles! In the following months, too, it meant that the hundreds of enquiries from readers became thousands. Yet we had never met Swami! Rumours that He might pay a visit to England did not materialise. Time passes quickly, and I was now seventy. There was only one thing to do — to go to India. I confess that to both of us, India seemed a very long way away the morning we got up in the dark of a cold winter's morning to travel to London Airport! But we knew that even if it was the last journey we ever made in this life, we had to go...

'His Essence, His Gifts, His Mystery'

How can anyone describe what it is like to meet Divinity Incarnate in the perfect-Human, perfect-Divine Embodiment of Love which is Sathya Sai? In His Boundless Compassion, He took us in for interview after interview, filled our cup to overflowing, and then poured out more, and more, until we felt saturated with His Love, His Essence, His Gifts, His Mystery, Himself. Of that first meeting, it is difficult to speak. There are sacred moments in life which cannot be put into words. Every human being longs, some acutely, some less so, to find that Sublime Love which can only be found in a Being who is aware of one's innermost self, all of it; who knows one's frailties, successes, failures, aspirations and yearnings: who knows one's long past, one's present, even one's future; a Being from whom no secrets are hid. A Being who said: "Bring me the depths of your mind, no matter how grotesque, how cruelly ravaged by doubts or disappointments. I know how to treat them. I will not reject you. I am your Mother..."

At long last, being in the Presence of such a stupendous, Divine Love is overwhelming in its impact. What one had dreamt, or imagined in advance, is as nothing compared to the Reality, just as no photograph can give even an inkling of the thousand facets, the thousand expressions, the movements, or the amazing Aura of this Avatar of all Avatars. The expression of tenderness, compassion, and understanding in that unique, so lovable Face, and in the dark, luminous Eyes which see into one's soul — and into which one can gaze without the slightest trace of self-consciousness but in utter trust — enveloped us in an ocean of Love, as He looked down so tenderly at our tearful faces, saying gently, softly, "I know...I know..." before raising us up with His Hands. How well I understood, in that moment, what Dr. Sandweiss meant when he wrote: "What was communicated in that brief moment? The world!"

I felt I wanted everything to stop for a space so that I could properly take into myself the implications and consequences of this Divine experience, and this Divine blessing which transported me above the world into the Cosmos which is also Himself. It seemed that I needed eternity fully to realise that this little 'I', which at the same time is the immortal *Atma*, is truly a particle of Him, and will eventually merge with the Whole; and in the meantime, while dualism

inevitably exists at my level of consciousness, He is in every beat of my heart. The child of seven longed to clasp that adorable Form in her arms and bury her head in the Mother of all Mothers. But of course that could not be. I must have appeared very dumb!

He Knows

Yet Swami knows so well how to lift one up, and at the same time 'bring one down to Earth'. And He also has an enchanting way of letting you know He knows, sometimes by a simple action with no words spoken. Let me give a small example. The night before the first interview, I had prayed that He would touch the chain and pendant I wore round my neck, in order to consecrate it. It was only a cheap locket bought from a stall and sent to me by an Australian friend who had visited Baba a year previously, but I treasured it because it bore Swami's coloured head, and I never took it off. And, indeed, during the first interview, Swami did bless the locket, unasked, and smilingly examined it for a long time. I was determined not to let the thought escape me that He might replace it! I had not come to India to get objects from Him, but to lay my love at His Lotus Feet. And He did exactly what I had prayed He would do!

The next day, however, I felt I was dreaming when I found myself sitting right beside Swami's chair at a group interview. It wasn't long before He turned to me and said, "Wouldn't you like a real locket? What you have now is imitation." Whereupon He circled His Hand in the air and produced a charming locket for me. Of course He knew I secretly longed for this, but would not ask! Later, at the same interview, I was doubly blessed. "Do you do *sadhana* (spiritual practices)?" He suddenly asked me. "Yes, Swami." Again He circled His Hand, and down fell a long *japamala* (rosary) like a cascade of crystal light. Spreading it out with His Hands, He threw it lightly over my head on to my shoulders. What can one say except "Oh Baba!" My husband was also blessed with a beautiful ring.

The Cosmic Christ

Baba can be so full of humour, so Divinely childlike, making us all laugh by remarks about my "mad monkey mind, sometimes all confusion"— when I have six things to do at once, and all of them equally urgent! Yet in private interview, sitting close, His wonderful Eyes looking deep into yours, and with that soft, gentle voice so full of tender concern, He answered many questions of a serious nature about my first Friend, the beloved Jesus, whom He sent into Incarnation. And when my husband asked for confirmation of the Truth: "Are You what Western Christians call the Cosmic Christ" (and what Theosophists call the Logos), He nodded His head and replied with ineffable simplicity: "Yes."

How many Christians are aware that the Second Coming for which they are yearning, is here? That the triple-incarnation of the 'Kalki Avatar on the White Horse', when He comes for the third time as Prema Sai, will possibly span a total of two hundred and seventy years reaching into the twenty-second Century? The Light will spread ever brighter, and more quickly. In the words

of The Great Invocation, it will "restore the Plan on Earth, and seal the door where evil dwells." How privileged we are to be living at this time!

Our only desire is to serve that Light which is Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai for the rest of our days; to play our small part in spreading knowledge of that Light; to try to live as He wishes us to live; to love Him in all people, in all the kingdoms of nature, in all manifested creation. Inadequate as we are, He will always help us, if our hearts are sufficiently pure for Him to reside in, and our love but the palest reflection of His own. More and more, after leaving the physical Presence, He fills and pervades one's whole being, waking and sleeping, irrespective of the 'distance'. How can I attempt to describe how I see Him? He is the Mother in the safety of whose loving arms one longs to hide. He is the All-Powerful Father one implicitly trusts and obeys. He is the closest Friend to Whom one can open the deepest secrets of one's heart. He is the Child, away from 'Home' one longs to gather up in compassion at the isolation of His Mission (though He is ever filled with Bliss). He is the God at Whose Feet one falls, and to Whose Will one longs to surrender the last breath of the restricting mortal body, to come nearer to Him in the freedom of death.

So after seventy years I came Home – and He was waiting for me with outstretched Hands.

How small it is, the pale brown Hand
That holds the World.
How gentle is the Mighty Strength
That lifts Humanity from self-destruction!
Through future aeons of Time
When my struggling soul
Climbs slowly SAI wards,
Imbedded in my consciousness,
To spur me on, will be the knowledge
That I looked into the Face, the Eyes of Love,
That once — nay twice — I held and kissed
The small brown Hand of God.

WHEN GOD BECOMES YOUR GUARDIAN...

By Mrs. Bharathi Harihar

An alumna of the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University from 1992-1995, Bharathi Harihar (nee Shanmuga Sundaram) received her graduation degree and Gold Medal for B. Sc. (Hons.) Botany from Bhagavan's Divine Hands in 1995. She hails from a family which came to Bhagavan in the late 1980's. After her Post Graduation and marriage in Bangalore, she taught Biology and Chemistry at high school. She moved to the USA in 2002 and currently resides in Phoenix - Arizona. She is actively involved in the activities of the Sai Centre and is the SSE coordinator at the Scottsdale Sai Center. She also enjoys teaching preschool and kindergarten children.

*What thanks can we render Sai?
For the gifts Thou hast showered on us,
Everyday we blossom in Thy Love and Light.
What thanks can we render Sai?*

This was the refrain of the song that went over and over in my mind on May 31, 2004, the weekend known in USA, as Memorial Day weekend. To explain this, I need to go back a little. On July 4, 2003, the SSE (Sathya Sai Education) children and teachers were granted Divine permission to perform in the Divine Presence during the next Guru Poonima celebrations. By September, children were auditioned for the play based on American heroes. The title of the play was "Bloom Where You Are Planted."

As a mother of a four-year-old, it was my intense desire that Sai Prashanth should be a participant in it. So, our little son auditioned and did well. But since my husband's project extension hadn't come through, all we wanted was a minor role.

By November, my husband's extension came through, and the play practice too began in full swing. After the voice recording and the music was incorporated, a CD was given to all parents. Though just four, he learnt entire dialogues from Abraham Lincoln. But at the practice sessions, he cried a lot and made me very anxious. For four weeks, I tried all that I could to make him understand the enormous significance of just standing in front of Swami. But he refused to be a part of the play, unless I was with him during practice sessions.

Winsome Love and Warm Grace

Saddened by this, I prayed to Swami to guide us. That was the night of February 22, 2004. I talked to Swami saying that if He wished little Sai to be in the play, He should show us a sign. As I was closing the *pooja* room door, I realized it was very cold. Even though I know that Swami is God, I just blurted out, "Just in case, dear God, You feel very cold, You can come and stand (Oh

God! What did I say?) under the heater here. Goodnight Swami. Please take care.”

Early next morning around 5am, I experienced someone scratching my hand, and I got up with a start, thinking a burglar had entered our bedroom. Immediately, I tried awakening my husband saying someone is in the room. Since I didn't wear my spectacles, it took two seconds to adjust to the darkness. And who did I see? It was my dear Bhagavan, in His beautiful orange Robe, standing under that very heater, and blessing Sai Prashanth and us as well! I shook my husband saying, “Please get up, look, Swami has come.” By the time he woke up with a start, Bhagavan's form dematerialized, and Shirdi Baba, very tall in His white *kafni* (robe) appeared and blessed us. Then He kept His hand on His forehead as though some big tragedy is going to befall on us. Within seconds His form too dematerialized. I asked my husband if he saw Swami, he said, “No!” and went back to sleep.

I was shaken to say the least. I have read about Bhagavan appearing to people - but to me? It was unnerving, and then my monkey mind started asking questions. Did I really see Bhagavan? Was it a figment of my imagination? That night again, my silent conversation with our Lord began. “Oh Lord! You promised in our final year interview that, though we may get married into families that do not accept Sai as God, a day will come when we would come to Puttaparthi with our *Bhartha* (husband), and the entire family. Did I really see You? If I did, then please let my husband also experience the bliss of seeing You.” I wished Bhagavan goodnight and closed the *pooja* room door.

Early morning, the following day, I saw Shirdi Baba under the same heater, and He was blessing us. I folded my palms in *namaskar* and awoke my husband who also saw Baba (which he mentioned after three months), and immediately after that Shirdi Baba dematerialized!

The combined play practice then began at ASU's (Arizona State University) Gammage Auditorium's green room. Here our son Sai settled down a little, and after driving him to SSE class, my husband and I would take more children to South Phoenix at ASU for the play practice. I would pray during every drive, “Swami, this is for you, please take care. Though You may not need it, we want to do it for You. Please be with us.”

My husband, not much of a talker, but a doer, would drive in Phoenix's 120°F (around 48°C), without grumbling, because this play meant so much to me. By then, I too began actively to help out as an SSE teacher's assistant. Then came Easwaramma Day, the last day of play practice, following which everyone was to assemble by June 18, 2004 in Puttaparthi. As I was talking to the SSE children, I narrated the beautiful experiences of Bhagavan coming to the Vidyagiri Stadium to watch us practicing for Sports Meet. One child asked, “Will Swami come to watch us too?” I looked at a photograph of Bhagavan and said, “Yes! If our focus is just Swami, then He will surely come.” In my heart I sincerely prayed for these children, who would be visiting India and Puttaparthi for the first time, to be blessed similarly.

I was to enroll Sai Prashanth in a kindergarten school in India, as my husband planned to return to India after the completion his project in USA, and join us in India in December 2004. By May 10, 2004, my husband said, "It looks like my project would be extended, so are you willing to come back to U.S.?" I agreed, but would I get return tickets with just twenty days left to travel? Well, if Bhagavan wished, it would happen. By May 12, the booking agent said we would get good deals only from May 31. By May 25, all aspects of the journey were confirmed.

The Eternal as 'Ed' - Roadside Rescue

On May 31, 2004, at 3.45am, we started our drive to Phoenix International Airport. As we were about ten miles to the airport, I smelt gasoline, and within a minute we entered a four lane freeway tunnel. Suddenly we heard a loud bang, and our car swerved out of control; it went spinning. Later, we understood it was a tire blowout. A huge container truck, which was following us, narrowly missed hitting us, and we spun from the right most lane to the left most, and turned 360* and back into the right lane. In that instant, knowing that it was impending death, I kept chanting "Sairam, Sairam!" and closed my eyes. The car came to a screeching halt, and when I opened my eyes, I saw we were now facing the oncoming traffic, and waiting for a mid-sized van to run into us. "Sairam! There comes Lord Yama (God of death)!" I thought. Amazingly, the van came to a halt just centimeters from our car, and the van driver got down and enquired as to what happened.

Soon a police car arrived, and I was sitting behind the wheel, while my husband and the van driver, Ed, pushed the car towards the shoulder of the freeway (a narrow strip of paved road to help drivers to safely park their cars during emergencies). The police officer started asking me questions, thinking I was the driver of the car. By then I had tears in my eyes. Swallowing my tears, I told him that in an hour I was heading to Los Angeles, and from there proceeding to India. He said," No problem, Madam, I can drive you and your child to the airport."

My husband came forward and explained the situation, wherein the police officer gave a tip to park the car on the shoulder, and that the car should be parked along the flow of traffic. That way it would not be towed, and we could avoid an unnecessary expenditure of about \$200. They looked at the car tire, and shook their heads in disbelief that we survived without even a scratch on our bodies on such a high speed tire blowout!

The van driver, Ed, (he was about Bhagavan's height) said, he was an airport employee and would be happy to give us a ride to the airport. Luckily, he had a car-seat for my son, and we transferred the luggage and proceeded to the airport. We had just fifteen minutes to check in, and thanked Ed for his kindness. He just nodded and drove away as the sun was just rising over the horizon. In that hurry, we didn't have the presence of mind to ask him for his address. In my heart, I had a strong feeling that he was Bhagavan Himself as Ed. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask him to reveal Himself. Then again, I felt it was just His Grace that we were all alive.

Until that moment, my husband would use the term 'Baba' to refer to Bhagavan. But on that day, as we checked in, he said, "This trip is a pilgrimage for you. Don't worry, Swami will take care of you." We boarded the airplane with Bhagavan's name on our lips.

My husband then called a friend, who rode him back to the freeway tunnel and helped him change the tyre. After this was done, when he started the car, the song "Sab kaa Malik Sai Bhagawan" (Sai is the Master of Everyone) began to play from the CD a Sai sister had given us a few days ago. We reached India safely, and everyone was amazed when they heard about the incident, and how the Divine Hand protected us.

We stepped in Prasanthi Nilayam on the afternoon of June 17, 2004. My mother-in-law and father-in-law had traveled for the first time to Puttaparthi to watch their grandson perform. We went to the assigned room to unpack and went for Darshan. We heard the bhajans and then the arathi, and waited with bated breath to see our dear Lord. Bhagavan was sitting in the golf-cart, and I felt He was looking at me, and heard Him asking, "So when are you leaving?" I could not make up my mind whether He was referring to my leaving Puttaparthi or returning to the US; so I just kept staring at Him and His golf-cart proceeded.

The practice session for the play began on the afternoon of June 20, and again Sai Prashanth started crying, and wouldn't let me go for Darshan. By then, I too had tears. I was having Bhagavan's Darshan after three years, and the inner conversation with Bhagavan began, "Bhagavan, I have come from so far just to have Your Darshan. Why is it that I can't even see You?" Five minutes later, as the children were practicing in front of North 5, one sevadal ran to us saying Bhagavan's golf-cart was coming to that part of the ashram. Sure enough, we all had a beautiful Darshan! And after the practice, the children ran up to me and said, "Aunty, it just happened as you told us. Bhagavan did come to watch us as we were practicing." I had until then, a lingering doubt as to how, if ever, Bhagavan would come, because the previous year Bhagavan had undergone a hip surgery. Once again, I knew and was convinced that Bhagavan is a silent listener to all our conversations.

The Much Awaited Moment Arrives

The play was scheduled for the afternoon of July 5, three days after Guru Poonima, in the Sai Kulwant Hall. The day dawned bright and beautiful, and the children awaited their beautiful moments with the Lord.

Bhagavan arrived at 2.45 p.m. (it was earlier than usual) and asked for the play to commence. He asked the child who carried a bouquet, "Who is Sojourner Truth? Who is Abraham Lincoln?" The little girl answered well and Bhagavan turned to everyone sitting around Him saying that even small children knew the play well.

When the play started, a short circuit occurred exactly at that scene, where the play was stopped twenty days ago during practice session, when Bhagavan suddenly had arrived in front of North Block. The serial lights above

Bhagavan started bursting like tiny fire-crackers, but Bhagavan sat blissfully, totally unaffected. Then He looked up for a second and it stopped. However, Bhagavan's swivel chair was moved to the left, near to the men's side of the portico. Bhagavan asked the narrator to continue, and one year's practice surely served its purpose. Very confidently, the children began from where they stopped. Soon the recording resumed, and the play continued with a final scene with all the children singing a bhajan. After the play, a senior SSE student requested Bhagavan for a group photograph, and Bhagavan in His Infinite Compassion, blessed the teachers and assistants too with a photograph. So we too could treasure and cherish that precious moment forever.

A Child's Wish Fulfilled

Immediately after this, Bhagavan sent word for something, and big bowls of apples were brought by the students. Bhagavan personally gave the apples to the Bal Vikas boys. Now, my Sai Prashanth, who was acting as a slave, posed for the photograph, and was completely oblivious to the fact that Bhagavan was distributing apples right behind him. He happily sat removing the stitches from his patchwork. Frantically I began praying to Bhagavan to bless little Sai too with the *prasad*. Suddenly, Sai got up and Bhagavan called him "little boy" and blessed him with an apple. It was then that I recalled a casual conversation with little Sai in Phoenix, when he was just learning the alphabets. I was explaining to him that Bhagavan can give him anything good he wants, provided, he stays in the play practice without crying, and then I had asked what he would like from Bhagavan. In his own sweet way, he had replied, "Umm, I think I will ask for an apple!" Thus, even the wish of a small child was granted.

Drenched in His Love, I called Phoenix and narrated everything to my husband. At the end of our conversation, he said, "Guess what? I went for *seva* yesterday." It was the first time he had the intrinsic desire to go to the welfare center in our one and a half year's stay in Phoenix, though he would, without protesting take me for most of the Sai center activities, and here Bhagavan was blessing our son with His love!

Infinite Grace of the Indweller

With beautiful memories of our trip, we all returned to our native States to visit grandparents and in-laws. I, then, started my return trip with my little son. International travel is not my forte, but Bhagavan gives strength always. This time the flight departure from Chennai (Madras) was delayed by two hours, and so when I reached Singapore, I had just fifteen minutes to change terminals. A kind hearted Singaporean at the help desk, rushed Sai Prashanth and me through the sky train and into the next terminal, and we boarded the plane with just a minute to spare. We returned safely to Phoenix.

Our dear Lord, who promised that He would be with us, was and is always watching over us and guiding us!

What thanks can I render Sai?

For the gifts Thou hast showered on us.
Everyday we will blossom in Thy Love and Light,
What thanks can I render Sai?

For Thy mercy and Thy Love,
How can we repay Thee,
We will offer Thee ourselves,
For we belong to Thee,
Yes, we belong to Thee!

'HUNGARY' FOR HIS LOVE

The experience of being in Prasanthi from four humble and devoted Hungarians

In December 2007, about hundred and eighty eager and devoted Hungarians made their pilgrimage to Prasanthi Nilayam. For many, it was their first visit. Some had come after Swami made His Presence felt to them in His own mysterious ways, others had heard wonderful stories of His Love from their family and friends, and for a few of them it was their second or third visit, who had come to relive the bliss of being in His Physical Presence. The group had also lovingly prepared a wonderful collection of songs to present to their Lord, and their choir practice sessions in Prasanthi united them all in His Love. In the January 2008 issue, we offered you the inspiring story of their group leader, Mrs. Szilvia Szaraz, and now we have more stirring experiences from four other members of that group.

We start with the story of Mr. Laszlo Daloki, aged 46. Here is the miracle of Divine Love that he experienced in his own words:

Behind Every Cloud There is a Silver Lining...

I was the only child with no siblings. But, at the same time, I was also an unwanted child. Right from the beginning I was the cause of much conflict at home. No day passed without some haggling between me and my parents. I used to run away from home trying to find space to hide. My father was an aggressive person and would not mind even hurting me physically. As a youngster, I had feelings for God, but never understood why my parents were not interested in Him; it was difficult for me to reconcile these mental conflicts. However, my mother did love me very much, and always tried to protect me. [In fact, she is now here in Prasanthi Nilayam (December 2007) and we both would really like to live here permanently!]

When I was 30 years old, I had a serious accident. I had lived my life like most anywhere do – following my desires and looking for happiness outside. But later, I fell sick with a strange kind of illness and I realised that my hearing was deteriorating every passing day. I underwent many surgeries. During one of the operations, the doctor made a mistake, and cut the nerves to both the hearing organs. I became completely deaf. This was in 1991. I was so depressed and mad with myself that I wanted to commit suicide. I lost all my friends. Nothing interested me in life, and I felt I was useless. I became very aggressive and disrupted whatever little harmony prevailed at home.

I later married and we adopted an eight year old boy. I did my small job, but always kept away from people; I never sought anyone's help. It was my wife and son who always stood by my side. Three years ago (2004), I was in a big financial crisis with many debts to pay; I almost lost the apartment I owned with my mother. I had no friends whom I could go to for help. It was a moment of great trial and frustration, and I thought there has to be some meaning to

what I was going through. I wanted to know why my destiny was so cruel, and started to question everything about my life.

I went to a counsellor who said that it is important for me to identify the root of the problem, and also suggested I go to a Sathya Sai Baba centre. After visiting the Sai Centre, I took a basic course in Human Values, as well as a Self-Awareness course. I learnt a lot about Sai Baba and His Teachings. I also heard that a group from Hungary had gone on pilgrimage to see Sai Baba, and that their lives improved considerably after receiving His Blessings.

There was another group that was preparing to go to Prasanthi on January 3, 2006. Somehow, I managed to find a job which gave me enough money to pay for the ticket, and so I joined that group. This was how I came to see Baba for the first time. When I alighted from the plane in Bangalore, I felt it was a special place, and when I stepped inside Puttaparthi, I was in a joyful, dreamlike state.

I phoned my family in Hungary to share my happiness, but they didn't seem to understand why just being in Prasanthi Nilayam filled me with so much joy. I read a book called 'Unity is Divinity' and understood who God is. I knew it was possible for me to feel His Presence.

Ah! His Magical Gift!

During that trip, the Hungarian group of 168 people had an interview with Swami in the Bhajan Hall, and I had the blessed chance to sit in the front row, almost beside Him. Swami asked me my name and I told Him; then He held my hand and created Vibhuti. After pouring the sacred creation into my hand, he communicated to me that I should put the Vibhuti in each of my ears for a few days, and that everything would be alright. He was speaking with me through a translator (who spoke loudly). I could not hear Sai Baba's voice due to my deafness, but as the translation went on, I could feel what Swami was saying.

And after that night, something incredible happened. The next morning, I woke up and cleaned out the Vibhuti in my ears to put in the hearing aids, which I used to wear even though they did not help me much, except making few noises audible. I turned them on and placed them in my ears, and then immediately I had to take them off! The sounds were too loud! I then turned down the volume, but later I took them out, and to my amazement I could hear everything clearly! I ran to call my mother, and told her I could hear. I could talk with her and hear everything clearly. I was ecstatic. After so many years, I could hear my mother's voice. It was like I received a new life. From then on, I realised that I had to change my life completely. I had to improve my relationships with people. I wanted to understand Sai Baba's Teachings more and understand the true meaning of life.

After that blessed interview, I was sitting in the Mandir, and I suddenly found beautiful thoughts filling my mind in the form of a poem. I did not know where those words were coming from, but I was so thrilled; I ran out and grabbed a

pen and paper to write them down. Later, the Sai Organisation of Hungary published them in their official magazine.

The Inevitable Transformation

After I returned home that year, my life took a U-turn. Everything around me became better, be it my family life, relationships with people or my financial position. My whole experience of my life was enhanced.

The doctors, who performed the failed operation, had told me I could not possibly hear again, as the damage was too much to repair. I had gone to a university hospital for a second opinion, and they too had said: "Only the good Lord can give you back your hearing."

When people asked me how I got my hearing back, I tell them God gave it back, and narrate my experience with Sai Baba. My first doctor believes me, but as a professor of medicine, he is unable to understand or explain the incident. Some doctors have even questioned about the Vibhuti - they wanted to examine and investigate if it was a new medicinal cure!

"Wherever you are, you are Mine..." – Baba

That year, after I returned from Sai Baba, a second miracle happened. One day, my neighbour was very drunk and attacked me with a big crowbar. Before the iron bar hit me, the man suddenly fell down – he could not hit me for some strange reason. I believe it was because of the positive energy around me. At that moment, in spite of what he was doing, I only had love for him in my heart and I showed it to him spontaneously. I think this is what changed the situation and saved me.

Later, we had a tragedy in our family. I was driving to see my parents, and suddenly I saw a coffin, which caught my attention. When I arrived, I saw my father lying on the bed; he said he was sick maybe because of what he had eaten a few hours ago, and that he would be fine soon. But I felt his condition was more serious than that. I wanted to help him stand up, but he kept falling onto the bed. I realised the situation was critical and called for an ambulance. As we were driving to the hospital, the medics kept checking his parameters, and they found that there was something wrong happening in his brain, and soon one half of his body was paralyzed. After a few hours, my father passed away in the hospital, I learnt later that it was more because of an overdose of drugs than anything else. But I consoled myself as I know my father would never have wanted to live in that debilitating condition. I did not harbour any hatred or anger toward the doctors as I realised they were simply instruments of God, just as the doctor who made the mistake with my ears, without which I would have never come to Swami and seen so many beautiful changes in my life.

I pray to Swami every day and always express my gratitude to Him for what He has done for me.

If that was the life-altering experience of Mr. Laszlo Daloki, here is another revealing account from a senior lady, Clara, who had come to see Swami for the first time in December 2007. Though the journey and stay were not easy for her, given her advanced age, Clara narrates how the trip left her stronger than ever – physically and spiritually.

The Might of the Spirit

This is my first time here, and it has been hard due to my age, but at the same time, I am very happy to be here. My experience did not start here, in Prasanthi Nilayam, but in my heart, in my home town in Hungary. I had been preparing for a month for this trip, and when I arrived, I felt I had come home. I have known about Swami for some years now, and decided that finally it was time for me to come here. I know the body lasts only for a short period, but the soul is eternal.

There have been some hardships here such as sitting for long periods, twisting my ankle, etc., but it also enabled me to let go of my resistance to ask for help. I knew it was only my ego being proud; this is one of things I had to overcome. When I sat quietly before Darshan, thought of Swami and visualised Him, my spirits rose beyond the physical inconvenience.

I became part of the choir to be close to Him. During the practice sessions, I was thinking of Swami so much that my whole attitude changed and my spirits lifted. Being in the group, brought me closer to Him. I had many feelings of devotion for Swami before I came here, but when I saw Him for the first time, this feeling of love for Him became more elevated and stronger than ever.

If I could express how much Swami means to me, I would answer with a song which means “Deep within my heart and soul, I find the Being without form” - which is a description of Swami. I feel this so deeply that I cannot express it in words. There is a happy end to this story. I was walking to my room feeling the pain in my ankle, accompanying another lady who had poor eye sight. As we helped each other along, we were talking about Swami, and suddenly the pain disappeared.

The third Hungarian we spoke too, was a young man, Imre, who also saw Swami for the first time in December 2007. What impact did Swami’s Darshan have on him? Imre narrates:

I came to know of Swami three years ago, and later heard of this group pilgrimage to Prasanthi. Luckily, there was a place for me to travel and the journey to Puttaparthi was quite beautiful.

My first days here were tough as I was quite sick. I also found my back aching sitting in the Darshan Hall for long hours. But when I first saw Swami and experienced His Endless Love, I knew my decision to visit Prasanthi was right. During our second Darshan, Swami took all our letters, and I was crying like a baby for 15-20 minutes. I could feel His Unceasing Love and Grace for me.

His Mesmerizing Presence

Often, during Darshan, I could smell this beautiful fragrance which I cannot describe. I felt as though someone was embracing me. I felt as if I was being purified.

In the beginning, I did everything by myself and did not want to be a part of the group. I am a self-made man; I have always done things the way I wanted to do, I have earned enough and have been quite successful. But during the practice sessions of group songs, I realised I should be part of the group, and felt the power of the unity of the group. Though I normally do things my way, here, in the group I felt the call of service.

I love Baba. And when I see the eyes of many people here, I see the reflection of His Endless Love; my objective is to keep this feeling alive in myself. If I had the opportunity, I would have stayed longer here, nevertheless, I return happier, rich with all these beautiful experiences I have had here. I am also regretful as I have to leave.

And here is another moving personal experience from Cecilia, a young lady, who too had come to see Bhagavan for the first time in 2007. But Cecilia had seen Swami and experienced His Presence even before physically seeing Him. So, how did she feel when she saw Swami in Prasanthi? Here is her account:

“Yes! I am home, I am here!” – Cecilia

This is my first visit here (December 2007), but when I was planning to come here I felt I was coming home. When I got here I said to myself, “Yes! I am home, I am here!” In my heart, in my life and in my soul I feel this wonderful feeling. I first heard about Swami ten years ago. At that time, I felt I was not ready and did not take any further interest in Him.

Since I was a little girl, I have had Jesus Christ in my heart, but a few years ago I went to an esoteric school and started to know more about Sai Baba and His Teachings.

About one year ago, a big group returned from Prasanthi Nilayam. They were blessed with an interview and they shared beautiful experiences they had with Swami. After I heard their sacred stories, I realised that I too need to come closer to Swami.

Not long after this, I was on my balcony, and felt Swami appeared to me and entered my heart. I saw Swami’s Form clearly and He looked deep into my eyes. I even felt His Hair as if He was really there - it was such a real experience.

When I had my first Darshan, I saw Swami from a distance and was a little disappointed as I could not feel that strong Presence I had felt in my vision and experience on my balcony. The next day, however, I went inside the Bhajan Hall, and while waiting for Swami before the bhajans started, I felt His strong Presence even before Swami arrived; it is a feeling I cannot explain.

“For me, Swami is God – no question about it!” - Cecilia

I have no conflict at all being a follower of Jesus and coming to see Sai Baba. I feel, in my heart, it is all One - only God exists.

Swami has helped to end my six years of unemployment, and now I work in a pharmacy where I also speak about Swami to anyone who is interested. Also, I wanted to have a husband, and after getting to know about Swami, reading His discourses and thinking about Him, I met my partner; I am very happy.

Since I have become more aware of Swami and His Teachings, I have started to have more self-esteem; I am more sure about myself, and I am able to stand up for myself and my beliefs, and also for others who need help. For me, Swami is God – no question about it!

Dear reader, what we have offered you in this small compilation is only a glimpse of how the Lord is changing lives of millions in His own myriad ways. Out of the about 180 Hungarians who were in Prasanthi, we have here the stories of only four, whom we spoke to randomly. In the inner recesses of every devotee, there is a tale that can touch the lives of a thousand others, for; such is the inscrutable Glory of Sai!

SAI WORLD NEWS

EXPERIENCING SAI BLISS IN BARODA

The Story of Prema Jyothi Exhibition at Baroda, Gujarat

Dear reader, in the September 2007 issue of H2H, we took you through a journey with Sai of the grand Prema Jyothi Exhibition that was held in the Poorna Chandra Auditorium during Guru Purnima Celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam. And one of every three who visited the Exhibition at that time expressed the view that this breathtaking Exhibition on the Life and Mission of Bhagavan must travel to every part of India and the world. We too wished it would happen but had no clue then of what was going to come. After a month or two, devotees from Chennai wanted to organize this Exhibition in their city and they did it excellently for ten days from September 22 to October 2, 2007 wherein more than 22,500 people visited. But what was more heartwarming were the amazing transformations it brought in the hearts and minds of Chennai citizens, many of whom had no clue of the Glory and the Grandeur of His Life and Mission. If you remember, we did a cover story on this in the November 2007 issue of H2H.

But the story of Prema Jyothi did not stop there, even though, for various reasons, we could not have another story on this fabulous presentation. From Chennai, Prema Jyothi traveled to Indore, the commercial capital of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. It was staged there after just two weeks of its curtains down in Chennai, and was inaugurated by the Governor of Madhya Pradesh, Hon. Dr. Balram Jakhar. Apart from thousands of people and school children from in and around Indore, it was also visited by the Education Minister of Indore, Mr. Lakshman Singh Gaud, and the Mayor of Indore, Mrs. Uma Shashi Sharma. After Indore, the next stop was the Capital of India, New Delhi where it was held from Dec 15 to 25, 2007. From there, it traveled to the commercial capital of India, Mumbai. And in this city, which is the most populous city in India with 13 million people, it was held in two locations. First, in Borivali from January 24 to 30, 2008, and then in King's Circle for another week, that is, from February 4 till 10. We will bring you a detailed story on what impact the Exhibition had on the citizens and elites of Delhi in the coming issue.

Now, we have the story of Prema Jyothi in Baroda, the stop after New Delhi. Baroda is one of the most important cities in the state of Gujarat in Western India, which is home to 1.6 million people. And the response Prema Jyothi received here was tremendous. Here is the story in brief.

Inauguration of the Exhibition

The Exhibition was inaugurated by Mrs. Jayaben Thakkar, Honourable Member of Parliament, from Baroda on the morning of January 3, 2008 at 9.30 am. Mr. Manohar Trikannad, State President, Gujarat and Mr. Kanubhai K Patel, State Trust Convenor, welcomed the dignitaries and the Chief Guest. The inauguration ceremony commenced with Mrs. Thakkar cutting the ribbon

to enter the Exhibition area. The Balvikas children of Baroda and the Sai Youth recited the Vedas and accompanied the Chief Guest inside the shrine area of the Exhibition. Thereafter, the auspicious lamp was lit by her and other dignitaries signifying the opening of the Exhibition.

Mrs. Thakkar spent two full hours going round the entire Exhibition which was housed under a massive marquee, covering an area of 13,000 sq. ft. She was very impressed and palpably moved to learn so many details of Bhagavan's Life, Message, and humanitarian projects. This is what she had to say:

"Everyone is in search of Love and Peace. This can be found only through Selfless Love. Bhagavan Baba has not only provided the path for Selfless Love, but has also actually walked this Path and shown everyone how it can be done. When we integrate all our efforts of body, mind and money in these acts of Selfless Seva and Love, all our impurities disappear. Bhagavan Baba has explained what is each human being's *Swadharma* i.e. one's own righteous path by teaching and practicing the same in his own way. Bhagavan has taught us the language of Love, and if one carries out social work and welfare with this Love, this society, country and the world will be immensely benefited. Baba has done this by not just preaching, but also by including all His devotees in these great projects where people's basic needs of education, drinking water and healthcare are taken care of. What Bhagavan has done cannot be done by any Government or Institution."

One of the other distinguished guests, His Holiness Goswami Shri Vagishkumar Shri, Kankroli (Baroda), of the Vaishnav sect, from the Bethak Mandir, Baroda was equally impressed by the Exhibition. After going round the entire Exhibition, he said:

"I have experienced both the key elements i.e. the 'Prema' and the 'Jyothi' at the Exhibition. I am very much amazed at the various incidents in Bhagavan's Life and am very much convinced that Sri Sathya Sai Baba is truly an Avatar as proclaimed by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. This is not just an Exhibition for one's eyes to see, but it is the opening of one's consciousness to the spiritual world. 'Love' is the only solution to today's problems. The incidents of Lingodhbhavam and other miracles only show that He is God."

Similar sentiments experienced by thousands of other men and women were apparent to the Seva dals who were stationed all over the marquee to inform and guide visitors who poured into the Exhibition over the next eleven days. With Bhagavan's Grace, an average of over 3,000 people came per day, bringing the grand total to an amazing 33,873!

Everyone was greatly inspired and touched viewing the panels depicting Bhagavan at myriad Darshan locations, along with His spellbinding social welfare projects. Several visitors yearned for more information such as: whether Bhagavan will come to Baroda? How to travel to Puttaparthi? How to find treatment at the Super Specialty Hospitals? How to participate in Sai activities? And so on.

Feedback counters were placed at the end of the Exhibition for all visitors to record their views, some of which we carry in this article. There was also a bookstall providing Sai literature at the exit point of the Exhibition, where they were also presented with Prasadam.

Shri Vora, the Deputy Municipal Commissioner of Baroda City, who had limited time and had planned for only 10 minutes to view the Exhibition, finally spent close to an hour going through all the panels. Additionally, he promised all possible assistance from the local authorities for all future projects to be carried out by the Sai Organization in Baroda. Before he left, he said:

"I have known about Sathya Sai Baba for many years and I wish to have His Darshan. I am delighted to see this Exhibition, specially the healthcare projects, water projects and Grama Seva. Grama Seva is Prabhu Seva (service to villagers is service to God)."

Another dignitary, the well known spiritual guru of Baroda, Sri Pinakin Gurujii, spent nearly two hours and then said:

"The Exhibition is a small sample of the Lord's Creation. The Creator is interested in maintaining His Creation, and how this is being done has been expressed in these panels. The Exhibition is the reflection of the great work done by God Himself."

Dr. R.P Patel, an ardent and senior devotee of Bhagavan Baba, reminisced about those wonderful olden days of the sixties when the crowds were less and devotees were witness to many wonderful Manifestations of His Power and Glory. He was very impressed by the Exhibition.

Sathya Sai School Children visit the Exhibition

The school children of the Shri Sathya Sai Vidya Niketan, Navsari and the Shri Sathya Sai Vidya Mandir, Ahmedabad came to Baroda on the third day of the Exhibition. The children were enthusiastic and eager to know about Bhagavan and His Work. They formed small groups and went through the entire presentation in a disciplined manner, asking questions to the Seva dals about Swami and His Mission.

The many elderly visitors were able to enjoy Prema Jyothi to the fullest extent as wheelchairs had been arranged with Sevalal escorts to explain the panels.

Dignitaries Bedazzled by His Love

The fourth day of the Exhibition was a Sunday, and several dignitaries visited the Exhibition. This included politicians, eminent doctors and government officers. Amongst these was Shri Shabdasharan Brahmbatt, ex-mayor, Baroda. He remarked: "It is an unbelievable experience! The work done by the Organization led by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, is possible only by the Divine Grace and Strength. This work is indeed worth emulating. This is the need for the society today and these modern times. Baba's work, fully

integrated, with spirituality, is indeed worth studying and adopting the same everywhere else."

Shri Ramesh C. Prajapati, an eminent engineer, past Lions District Governor and local politician said, "It is amazing! Only God can think of such beautiful Seva."

Shri Nilesh Bhavsar, member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, was eloquent about how Bhagavan Baba will bring India back as the future spiritual Guru of the World. He said:

"Our country is the Guru of the entire world. If we see today's politics, we would have several worries about the future of the country. However, after having the Darshan of Baba and an Exhibition of His works, I am convinced that it is only because of these Divine and Holy people that our country will again rise to the position of the Spiritual Guru for the entire world."

Shri V.S. Dole, DGM, Union Bank of India, Baroda said, "It was an excellent experience. It touched the heart and is a good lesson to everyone. There cannot be an Exhibition better than this for informing all about the activities of Baba."

There were many school children who were fortunate to come in buses from long distances, such as from Anand Balwadi School, Gotri. The students were totally engrossed in the Exhibition. They listened to every word spoken and explained by the Sevadals, as they took down copious notes.

Mr. Jalendu Dave, an eminent personality in the field of music and art in Gujarat, could not control his emotions after seeing the exhibition and said:

"This Exhibition conveys the message of Sathyam, Shivam and Sundaram. It also conveys the message that one must speak less, do more, love others, adhere to Righteousness and speak the Truth."

Nandaben Joshi, Corporator, Municipal Corporation, Baroda was equally impressed with the Exhibition. She said, "The Exhibition of Sri Sathya Sai Baba really touched the heart. I have decided to go to Puttaparthi. I feel that I have already got His Darshan here itself."

The flow of visitors continued throughout during all days of the Exhibition. On the eighth day, among the guests was Mr. Upendrasingh Gohil, the local Member of Legislative Assembly, Baroda, who said:

"This is a manifestation of Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram. I pray to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba to protect all religions. The Exhibition has shown that it is only Truth that gives the power to serve the masses."

In a city like Baroda where on any occasion, not more than a few thousand people gather for any Sai function, to see more than 23,000 visitors by the end of the eighth day itself was a miracle. The sevadals had only one prayer

on their lips: "Swami, let more and more people come and benefit from this golden opportunity and experience Divine Bliss.'

Spreading the Good Word

One vital aspect of the preparations was to let the general public know about Prema Jyothi in as many ways as possible. Twenty large hoardings were displayed at main cross roads of Baroda city, with details about the venue, dates and timings.

A Press Conference was organized on 1st January 2008 afternoon, informing the media about the Exhibition. Forty journalists and TV channel representatives attended and were also able to see a 10 minutes slide show on the various panels on display. The local TV channels of the city carried a live interview on Prema Jyothi.

To ensure sustained media coverage during the Exhibition, a team of dedicated Seva dals prepared press notes every alternate day for the editors of the local dailies, and almost all newspapers carried news items during that period.

In addition, as an innovative idea, 12 cycle rickshaws were hired to inform the public and they covered 12 different areas of the city throughout the day, over a 10 day period. Over and above, more than 2000 colour posters were printed containing the Exhibition details. These were pasted in all Sai vehicles / Sevalal cars, temples, public places, school notice boards etc. Cardboard posters were also printed and displayed at all major temples of the city and nearby villages. In addition, 25,000 pamphlets containing details about the Exhibition with the Prema Jyothi logo, Sarva Dharma and Values symbol of the Organization were printed and distributed in the city.

A Blood Donation Camp was also organized on one day, from 4.00 pm to 8.00 pm which attracted an overwhelming response - soon there were more donors than could be accommodated. 110 blood bags were collected at the camp from the general public.

Arrangements for Special Visitors from the Villages

Visitors also came to the Exhibition from the nearby villages where Sai activities take place. As reported earlier, an awareness programme of the Exhibition was carried out a week before in all the villages so that they do not miss out this opportunity to see their Sai's Glory. They were asked to let the organizers know when they could come to the Exhibition in groups. If possible, the Organization also arranged for vehicles to go to the villages and bring them to the spot of the Exhibition. Since travel time for the villagers would be approximately 2-3 hours to and fro and a further 2 hours to see the Exhibition, arrangements were made to serve lunch for them as well.

An eminent guest, Dr. Niruben H. Patel (Deputy Mayor of Baroda) told the organizers, "I am very happy to see this Exhibition. This really is a great

opportunity for the people of Baroda city. I am very pleased to see through the photographs, the work Baba has done for poor people. The main inspiration of this Exhibition that one should draw is Bhagavan's message of Love all, Serve All."

Radio Sai Captures Visitors Attention

In particular, several visitors, especially young people, took keen interest in "Radio Sai" and "Heart 2 Heart" e-journal displays. Many of them left their email address, so that they could also be included in the free subscription service of the "Sai Inspires" daily emails. Shri N. R. Parikh, an advisor to the local Sai Trust, was so overwhelmed that he said it was impossible to describe his impression in words.

More Fascinating Feedback

On the ninth day, several distinguished guests visited the Exhibition. This included Mr. Ashok M. Patel who said, "The exhibition provided us an insight into the remarkable and significant services of Baba towards humanity. We realize through the pictures and His message that love is a cure for all problems. Baba's inclination towards educating the youth of our country to empower India with love will enable them to become better human beings."

Shri Raj Panchal, a Journalist from the Loksatta newspaper, expressed his views as follows: "Splendid experience which cannot be expressed in words".

Shri Nandkishore Shah, an eminent advocate, said, "Watching the Exhibition was the happiest experience and gave me splendid joy, something that has never come to me before."

Shri Hemant B. Brahmhatt, eminent Chartered Accountant, penned his views as follows: "Very systematically organized orientation and exposition to the Life, the Works and Message of Baba. This is a live Manifestation of His Grace."

Sincere and Silent Sai Workers

A dedicated Sevadal team from Baroda worked tirelessly at the Exhibition Centre to assist in the food preparation and distribution. This Sevadal team rendered yeoman service serving behind the scene. Most of them gave their full time across the 11 days for this purpose.

There was also a big group who explained the panels with unparalleled dedication for all the days giving quality time and taking leave from their offices for such a long duration. Many said that they experienced Swami's Presence and that is what propelled them to serve with additional vigour everyday.

Youth Seva Dal from the Sai villages of Oslam, Rayan Talavadi, Amlipura, Rajupura and Shuklipura too contributed in a major way taking up specific

responsibilities for (a) food collection and distribution (b) providing night security teams (c) carrying outdoor jobs (d) carrying out heavy duty physical work such as unloading of all the panels when the same came from Delhi and thereafter helping in the dismantling of the Exhibition and loading the same for sending the same to Mumbai, the next city where Prema Jyothi was staged.

The End of the Exhibition - Maha Arathi

As the end of the Exhibition approached, preparations were made for the Maha Arathi to be performed to conclude the 11 day function. Key members from the Organizing Committee and the State Office Bearers performed the main Aarathi. Alongside them, 108 Sevadal, who had participated in the Exhibition for 11 days, performed Aarathi with small lamps. Thus, a Maha Aarathi was performed, with more than 125 members participating in the same, which was truly a grand sight. The Aarathi was sung by all in one voice, and when it ended with *Om Shanthi* being repeated three times, one could distinctly feel the Divine Presence.

Overwhelming Gratitude and Earnest Prayer

Thus, the curtains came down on yet another saga of Prema Jyothi. **In all, 4,088 visitors saw the Exhibition on the last day, taking the total of visitors to 33,873 for the total Exhibition.** For most of the devotees, it was a monumental event. For many, it was like the precursor to many larger events to come to Baroda, and one could only marvel at the Divine Will in all of these events. Baroda devotees and the Sai Active workers paid their humble respects to Bhagavan for giving them this wonderful opportunity in participating in His Mission in Baroda and giving them the courage and the strength to conduct the Exhibition. The Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization, Gujarat and the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi, Baroda expressed their deep sense of gratitude to the Lord for granting the permission to conduct the Exhibition at Baroda, as for most devotees, visitors and Sevadal who worked for the Exhibition, it was as if they were having Bhagavan's inner Darshan and experiencing His Presence in every panel! For many visitors, the first question when they came to the Exhibition was if Bhagavan had come to Baroda!

Bhagavan says He is not different from His Form and Name. Where His Form is, He is; and where His Glory is sung with sincerity, He installs Himself there. This is the reason why wherever Prema Jyothi traveled, it was as if the Embodiment of *Prema*, the Divine Lord, was really there! Transformations of hearts and transmutations of mind followed automatically. There are a lot more thrilling accounts of this Exhibition from other major cities coming in as Prema Jyothi travels to the holy city of Puri in the state of Orissa on April 18 where it will go on for ten days, and from there to the southern most state of India, Kerala on May 8. So, watch this space for more such "Love and Light" stories in the next issue. Till then, Sairam!

We are extremely grateful to Mr. Hariharan, an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, for painstakingly documenting the Exhibition through audio, video as well as detailed reports.

H2H SPECIAL

MESMERIZING MOMENTS WITH THE DIVINE MASTER

Interview with Mrs. Rani Narayana - Part 1

A devout and dedicated devotee for nearly sixty years, Mrs. Rani Narayana, who originally hails from Tamil Nadu, came to Bhagavan Baba as early as 1950. Eighty five years old now and fondly called 'Rani Maa' by Bhagavan, her life is a treasure-chest of scintillating experiences from yester years. A sincere spiritual seeker, she currently resides in Puttaparthi and shares her elevating memories to eager devotees with deep conviction, insight and faith.

The Initial Calling...

I got my first Divine call in 1950. I was then in Nagpur (in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Central India), not in the South, so I had no opportunity to hear about Swami. It was Ms. Kamala Sarathi, a devoted lady who is like a sister to me, who first told me about Swami. When she was in Delhi, she heard about Swami through a person who was teaching her music. This person was a classical singer who used to sing in Prasanthi, and he told Ms. Kamala that she must go and see Baba.

So, that is how Mrs. Kamala Sarathi came to Swami first, and she returned very impressed with His Presence. Everything about Puttaparthi touched her very much and she wrote to me saying, "The next time I go, you must come because you are really missing something! He is a very great Soul! He is supposed to be Bhagavan." At that time we did not have the conviction that He was God.

Oh! The Unforgettable Odyssey

Though I told her I would accompany her on her second visit, I could not do so because of domestic compulsions. I finally went with her on her third visit in 1950. On this trip, I had brought along my two kids, a son and a daughter. The train stopped at the small Penukonda station for hardly two minutes. I had to literally throw my luggage quickly from the train. And then we found a horse-cart – not a bullock-cart – to go to the bus-stop. And on that day, there was a bus break-down - the bus which was to leave for Bukkapatanam (nearest village to Puttaparthi those days), was under repair. The bus driver said: "Amma, we are trying to repair it; and until it is repaired we can't move, so we don't know what time we can leave."

So we waited for hours and finally, got into the bus. There were about 10-12 of us, as apart from Mrs. Kamala Sarathi and her two music masters, my sister's children were there too. When we landed in Bukkapatanam, it was almost 11 in the night. Then, from there we had to take a bullock-cart to come to Puttaparthi, as in those days, that was the only transport available. But actually we had to walk, because the bullock-carts mainly carried luggage and

very small children. They said: "As far as possible, all the adults may please walk, and we will take the children, because they can't walk for two hours!" There were no other bullock-carts there either, because it was too late in the night! So, by the time we reached Puttapparathi, it was at 1 o'clock in the night!

The Light That Leads Everyone Incessantly

It was pitch dark! There was no road; like a forest there were just cart-tracks, wide enough for a cart to go, bouncing up and down on the stones! It was quite an experience for me as I had never been to a place like that before! It was so dark that we couldn't even see. Then, the music master Mr. Chidambarair (he used to play the violin for Swami's bhajans) said: "Don't worry! Swami is with us." And suddenly we saw a ball of light in the sky! It was like the moon, but very big! He said: "That's Baba! He is serving the world. He is with us!" We didn't know! We thought there was a forest fire that was coming as a ball or something like that as we had no previous experience of such miracles. He said: "That is Baba's Light; He travels in the night to see how the *prapancha* (world) is." In any case, we were fine and we reached at 1 in the night! Frankly, Swami's Abode was very unimpressive. There were no properly built walls or gates or any proper structure! There was no proper garden either, only thorns and ant-hills everywhere.

After we got down, I asked, "Where do we sleep?" Somebody said, "You have to sleep here, under the sky!" I thought someone would take us inside and give us a place. But they said, "No, you just have to sleep here."

There was a big shed there, meant only for devotees. And at the end of the shed was Swami's shrine. It was His altar, where His chair was kept. There was no separate room for Swami. They used to put a curtain in the middle, like a partition, and the same place would also serve as Swami's altar. That's where He would come and sit for bhajans.

At the end of the bhajan, they would pull the curtain, and we are all there in the same shed. And Swami's real room, a tiny enclosure, was in the courtyard, where there was a well.

Welcomed by the Lord

So, that night, in that darkness, suddenly we saw somebody; it was Baba! How did He know we had arrived? He came from that shed, with a big, long torch! And He flashed it on us. There was a big grill-door, not a wooden door, which He opened and then flashed the light to see who had come. Next, He came near my elder sister, Kamala Sarathi, and asked her: "Have you had something to eat? I can get you something, but it will just be some flattened rice and *channa* (chick peas); I can't give you more than that. If you would like some water, I can give you some. What do you want?"

My sister said, "Swami, you don't worry, we have got everything; we are alright." He said, "If you are fine, then you sleep now, and I will see you in the morning." And He left. In the morning, we went in and settled down. Then,

Swami came to where we were. In those days, Swami would be in and out of that shed any number of times. He would come at anytime – 9, 10, 12, 2, or any other time – and go around talking very informally to everyone constantly. There was no discipline required. You could ask Him any question at any time you wanted. He was always available!

So, He came in the morning at 8 or 8:30, and said, “You are all well-settled.” He also said there was a waiting room and we could put our bed and trunks in a small area there. There were hardly 20-30 devotees there, so it was actually no crowd at all.

The Inscrutable Indweller

Swami came in the morning, and spoke to both my sisters. Then He looked at me, turned around and left without asking me anything. On the next day, He came and did the same thing – He talked to them, looked at me but no word to me. Then, I think, it was on the third day that my elder sister was feeling sorry for me, and told me: “We feel, He has been talking to both of us, but He is not talking to you; we are feeling sad about it. Today I am going to ask Swami why He is doing this!”

So, when Swami came, she asked, “Swami, why are You ignoring my other sister? You haven’t even asked who she is! Why are You doing this?” He said, “I have a reason. I know her feelings and thoughts. She is not comfortable here, in this atmosphere, or with My Form. She thinks ‘His Hair, His Robe! I have not seen anybody like this!’ She is feeling a little strange. So, I am giving her time. I am not ignoring her, but giving her time to settle with her own self, and to be at home. Everything is so strange to her; she can’t understand and is very confused. So, at this stage, I cannot tell her anything.”

I felt He was giving me His *kripa* (Grace); His aura to help me settle! Because He can give you those good vibrations, to settle our minds, as He is everywhere; inside and outside, it is only Him! So, Swami went back, and a few days after that He told me to come for an interview. He called me alone and took me to another room. During those days, there was no interview room; but next to this room, there was another room, which was also like a shrine.

When it would rain, the water would get into the shed! There was no window, but through a gap, the water would get in and all our things would get wet. Then, we would have to shift! And where could we now go and sit? There was another hall – not very big – where all the devotees would crowd and sit, because there was no place to lie down! That was also like a shrine – they had put some grass for Swami and some other material. But Swami would not sit there for bhajans, He would sit in the shed only! So, sometimes, He would take people there for a private interview.

“Once you come to a Guru, you can’t do what you like!”- Rani Maa

Then, He enquired with me where I was from and other details, and finally asked, “What is your program?” I said, “Swami, I have permission to stay here for only 10 days. My in-laws have given me permission for only so many days. I have to get back after 10 days as they don’t know anything about where I am going or who I am meeting! They will be very concerned about me, so I cannot extend my stay.”

Then He said, “No! You can’t go. After 10 days, I won’t let you go!” I was a bit troubled. I said, “Swami, they will be very upset with me for disobeying them, and it will be a hard task for me to tackle this situation.” He said, “I don’t care. But I will not let you go! You have to stay here for at least a month or more! I will tell you when to go.” I said, “But Swami, I will have to inform them. I don’t know anything! How will I inform them?” He said, “I will arrange to send a telegram; you give Me the address and don’t worry about anything. I will send it for you.” Then I said, “Alright, Swami.”

What I am trying to convey here is that, at that time I didn’t understand all this because I was not open to a spiritual life! Spiritual life is different from our worldly life. Similarly, spiritual behaviour too is poles apart from worldly behaviour. Once you come to a Guru, you can’t do what you like! That is what Swami was trying to tell us through this incident. He was preparing us to that state of acceptance. We got the message straight away – “If you want to follow Me, you have to follow the way I want you to follow Me. You can’t say ‘Swami, I will stay for 10 days only!’ You can not take decisions!” He made it very clear. And now, I have got several experiences, and I am convinced that once I start following Him, it is going to be an arduous path, because there will be opposition. But if you want Him, you have to be prepared for all that!

People may make all sorts of remarks, but if you love Swami, you must bow your head and be prepared. It came to us that He is not an easy Guru to follow; but if you want Him, you have to adopt this path; He is not going to make any compromises for us. He will tell us exactly what He wants. Whether we obey, or disobey, is up to us and we will reap the consequences accordingly – blessings for obedience, and no blessings if we disobey. So, I accepted that, and after that, He started talking to me and everything was alright.

No Progress Without Pain

In those days, we had to go to the hills for morning ablutions. There were no bathrooms. So it was a very difficult time and Baba made us taste all that to test our devotion to this path! If you are devoted, you can bear hardships and any inconveniences without grumbling! The mosquitoes were biting; there were no fans; and all sorts of things could happen, for example, the rain could get all your things wet, but you have to be calm. But if you are complaining, there is no merit; only de-merit. Acceptance is merit! That came to us very clearly.

Also we realised that He was a difficult Master, but a very Great Master – meant for a very few people who are willing to face whatever He says! And He said we should not try to understand Him. I find in my own case, that understanding comes when you are humble. Our intellect is of no use; it's foolish! How can we understand Bhagavan? To understand Divinity, that Grace has to come from Him! And that Grace comes when we do perform, that is, lead our lives according to His Guidance. If you follow whatever He says, Swami says, you don't have to read a book. In Prasanthi Nilayam, He once came to our room. Those days He used to come in and out of our rooms, and sit, eat and play with us; it was a very close relationship.

“Spirituality is an inward journey” - Baba

So, one day He said, “You are reading so many books!” We asked, “Then Swami, what should we read? We also want to educate ourselves, as we don't know much about spiritual life.” We thought all this reading would help. Then He said, “Read the lives of the saints, you will get the message. All this is of no use! It will just give you a heavy head. You will know all intellectual stuff – full of *Advaita* (non-dualistic) knowledge. There is no need for all that! Just read the life of the saints. They have reaped it; they have gone on the spiritual track, and they have realized it. The whole pilgrimage is inside, you can't seek for it outside; it is not available outside at all; forget it! It's an inward journey.”

And giving us more clues, He said, “When you get doubts, sit quietly and pray to Swami: ‘Swami, I don't understand, please reveal the meaning, and tell me what I have to do now.’ Ask Me for help, but sit down and contact Me through prayer.” He has told me, “Rani Maa, if you ever have any problem, you must pray, but pray sincerely; pray ardently and not superficially. Sit calm, go deep within yourself and pray. I will show you My Omnipresence.”

Once, He came into our room in Prashanti Nilayam – in those days, He used to come and give us talks in our own room! We didn't have to go into any interview room. And we were allowed to go to His room too, anytime we wanted. He had given permission to certain devotees to go upstairs to His room, and we were among them. Even though I had this privilege, I didn't want to take undue advantage of this precious opportunity, and run up to His room every time I had a doubt, because He would come to our rooms too, and then we could ask Him.

I have another sister who is a *Bramhacharini*, who didn't marry because she was seeking God; she was our fourth sister. She and I were in the room, and Swami came into the room. He looked at us and said, “You are not convinced yet that I am God, right? You have got doubts about My Divinity, is it not?” He asked us a straight-forward question.

Prashanti Nilayam was not yet built then. We kept quiet and just looked at Him, which meant ‘Yes!’ We couldn't tell Him directly; He knows everything, why should we? Then He said, “It is but natural! It's nothing unnatural. How

can you believe if somebody just comes and tells you 'I am God!?' There's nothing wrong; it is very natural!"

"You must test My omnipresence!" – Baba

We thought He may not like it, but He said it was very natural! So we were happy with ourselves that we had been, in a way, forgiven for our doubts. Then He said, "But there's one thing you must do to remove your doubts. You can't always live with doubt, so try it! If I am God, I must show Omnipresence; nobody else can be Omnipresent – only God can do that!"

Ordinary Gurus can't guide us, the way Baba is doing for us. He said, "You must test My Omnipresence!" And He insisted: "You have to do it! There is no other way! Only then will your doubts go." How could we test His Omnipresence in Puttaparthi? He is already there! He said, "When you go back to your respective places, test Me whether I am available as Omnipresence! You have to do it for your own sake!"

That in itself proves what a great Guru He is! He didn't say, "I told you I am God; why should you have doubts? Why can't you believe?" Instead, He said, "It is natural! Everybody has doubts; but doubts can be removed by your own efforts in your own life."

(To be continued...)

GET INSPIRED

A BASKET OF BURDENS

Some years ago, a group of conventioners gathered at a ski resort to conduct their annual meeting. Hundreds of conventioners came from every part of the country - young and old, rich and poor, and in all shapes and sizes. They shared common interests, though their backgrounds and careers were quite varied.

Twenty of the conventioners were put up at a large hotel near the outskirts of town. After a few days, the guests became better acquainted, friendships developed, and a camaraderie was felt within the group. But one night, the stories around the fireplace took a different twist. The conversation turned serious when Mike, a young man in his 20's, confessed that he had just been diagnosed with cancer. While it was treatable and he stood an excellent chance of being cured, he was nonetheless distraught. A middle aged couple, Tom and Cheryl, offered their support and understanding. They had just been informed that their child needed a kidney transplant. The news had been emotionally devastating to the family. A woman tearfully explained how she had recently lost her husband to a car accident. Another person told he had just lost his job and was at his wit's end. The evening turned gut-wrenching as others began to describe horrible aspects of their "normal" lives, or lives of their loved ones. From depression and drug addiction, to eating disorders and relationship problems — no one seemed immune from some sort of hardship.

Finally, an elderly gentleman — a man who was at the convention by himself, and only known to the group as Mr. Hayes, interjected himself into the conversation. Mr. Hayes had a distinguished look about him, and while no one knew exactly where he came from, he spoke with a gentle voice that engendered confidence and assuredness. During the past days, he had smiled and laughed, evidently enjoying the company, but he had not said much. People just looked at him and thought he was a "nice old man." After listening to everyone's concerns and problems, Mr. Hayes looked over at the hostess and asked her if she could get a paper and pen for everyone in the room. She returned in a minute, complying with the unusual request. "Do me a favor," Mr. Hayes asked. "We're going to try something and I need your cooperation. On the small piece of paper please write down the 3 biggest problems or burdens you are facing in your personal life right now. Don't sign your name. We'll keep it confidential."

When everyone was done writing down their problems, Mr. Hayes asked everyone to fold their paper and place it in a small basket that was placed in front of the fireplace. There were curious looks throughout the room, but again, everyone cooperated, wondering what would happen next. Mr. Hayes shook the basket and held it above everyone's head as he walked around the room and asked each person to pick a paper from the basket. After he was done, he sat back down and looked around the room. "Friends, open the paper and just read to yourself the problems that you chose," Mr. Hayes

explained. "And please, be as honest as you can." Then, Mr. Hayes glanced at the woman sitting on his left and asked, "Lisa, would you like to trade your burdens that you wrote down with those that you chose from the basket?" Lisa quickly replied, "No!"

Next, Mr. Hayes asked the man sitting next to Lisa the same question. "Would you like to trade the problems you wrote down for those that you chose from the basket?" Again the reply was "No." Mr. Hayes went around the entire room. Everyone had a chance to respond. Remarkably, the answers were all the same — no, no, no, no, no... Comments ranged from "I can deal with my own problems, but I can't deal with what I chose out of the basket," to "Wow — these make my problems look like nothing. Forget this."

Mr. Hayes settled back in his cushioned rocking chair and asked, "Do your problems seem so difficult now when you see what others must endure? Most of you wish you were in someone else's shoes, and yet, when you get a chance to trade your problems for theirs, none of you are willing. Don't you see? Tonight you've learned, by your own admissions, that despite the hardships you face, and despite the worries that grind away at you and cause you to lose sleep at night — despite all that — you've come to appreciate and understand the simple fact that the problems you face are nothing compared to what others must deal with. In light of everyone else's problems, your own problems seem manageable. If nothing else, that's something to be grateful for. Sure, we like to complain. It's our nature and it's also therapeutic to express ourselves and get our frustrations off our chests. There is nothing wrong with that, and in fact, it can be a healthy thing to do. It helps us sort things out. And heaven knows, we can always find something to complain about."

The group found themselves mesmerized with Mr. Hayes' comments, with several people shaking their heads in agreement, as if something amazing had just dawned on them. "But friends," he said, "the burdens that have been placed upon us are there for a reason. Because without our problems, we would not search for answers. And if we led our lives without searching for answers, we would never become better, or stronger, or more understanding. Sometimes it takes a serious problem to wake us up to what's really important in life. As an example, you'll find that many of the answers you're looking for can be found by helping others facing similar problems, and that act of service is what's really important. You see, the key to your enrichment, to your happiness and peace, is to take the problems you have and look at them as a chance to find an answer. Learn your lessons well, and then to take those lessons and answers, and use them to become a better person — for yourself and for others. I'm not saying you have to like the challenges you face. No one does. But you can look at those challenges as an opportunity to do some good.

"Now with that in mind, remember this... Some people let the world and the problems they face dictate what they think and how they live their lives. And yes, some people just love to wallow in misery. But if the truth be known, it should and can be the opposite. You have the power within you to change

your world and put your problems behind you as you move forward. Ironically, the power to do comes from the very things you see as problems and setbacks. That's what most people don't understand. For every setback you experience, there is an equal or greater blessing that accompanies it. You may not realize this, but your struggles are allowing you to become a better person each and every day. You just have to open your eyes and see it. The blessings that come from your struggles are sometimes hidden, and many times you have to look long and hard. But by finding them in due course, and by counting those blessings, you will discover a secret of the ages, an undeniable truth, which seems to have escaped most of humanity. That secret is very simple: The more you count your blessings, the more blessings are bestowed upon you. If you don't believe me, just try it and see what happens."

The group was spellbound, just staring at Mr. Hayes, reflecting upon his words, his sincerity and conviction. His comforting knowledge seemed to vanquish the stresses and worries which had infected the earlier conversation. Mr. Hayes took his last sip of hot chocolate and excused himself to retire to his room. Those present continued to discuss what they had learned, and by the end of the evening, all had concurred Mr. Hayes had hit on something. Each person was able to discuss a problem they had which could be turned into a blessing.

The young man who was diagnosed with cancer was determined to use his experience to educate others on the importance of early detection. The couple with a son who needed a kidney transplant dedicated themselves to join the campaign to encourage others to sign donor cards. The woman who had lost her husband decided to carry on his memory by volunteering to pick up where her husband had left off in his community work. The man who had lost his job, told himself that he would use this opportunity to do what he had always wanted to do — write a book that he had been thinking about for years. Rather than dwelling on their problems, everyone had learned to use their problems as a stepping stone towards bettering themselves and helping others. Rather than getting wrapped up in self-pity, the experience of confronting their problems and seeking answers proved to be a valuable lesson indeed. Someone commented, "Now I finally realize what looking at the glass as 'half-full' means."

The next morning at breakfast, the hostess reported to the group that Mr. Hayes' room was empty and that he must have left very early. During subsequent conventions though, the friends often reminisced about their gathering at the secluded mountain resort and of their fond memories of the fireplace conversations and the time their problems ended up in a basket. Bhagavan Baba says, "Pleasure is an interval between two pains.... You may have immense knowledge, wealth and valour, but you are bound to suffer if you become a slave to anger, desire and greed. Do not take pride in your wealth, physical strength and education. Develop the strength of love. Love can transform even a foe to a friend. Only through love can your life be redeemed."

DIAMONDS IN THE BACKYARD

Though only a boy of 12, Silas Harper exhibited all the characteristics that ingratiated his elders. It was hard not to like the kid — cheerful, enthusiastic, diligent, helpful — your typical boy scout type.

His family eked out a meager existence on a less than desirable piece of property on the outskirts of town. The rocky outcrops on the small Arkansas farm did not bode well for wheat or corn, so the Harpers did what they could with some livestock and doing odd jobs for the other families in town. Silas, as always, did more than his share to help with the chores.

As he grew into adulthood, his ambitions and charm grew too. Some thought he would become a banker or lawyer. But Silas had bigger dreams than that. "My dad's farm is a nice place, but what would I do with that property?" he asked friends. He didn't get any arguments. The farm was hardly workable and for all intents and purposes was good for nothing.

By the time he was 19, Silas had saved enough money to board the train and head west to seek his fame and fortune. He set up an import business in San Francisco, and was not only well received by the business community there, but also achieved success in a relatively short time.

Colleagues liked and trusted him. It seemed that luck was on his side, until several years later when he stood on the street and cried while he watched a fire destroy his business. Everything he had worked for had gone up in smoke.

The Worst Day of My Life

But nothing and no one would ever stand in his way. "I must say that I thought that was the worst day of my life," Silas later recalled, "but that wasn't the only setback I experienced as destiny handed me my fate." Indeed, Silas spent the next forty years spanning the globe, living in exotic places, and putting deals together. However, he was overtaken with illness, dishonest business partners, and other misfortunes.

He sought peace and contentment by eventually finding his way back home. The old homestead had been boarded up for many years, and the farmhouse was in desperate need of repair. But Silas enjoyed the company of his old friends, and he invested what he had to fix the place up.

One spring day, Silas was relaxing in his rocking chair on the back porch of the old farmhouse. It was a nice day. But something was about to happen that would make it very special.

A glint of sunlight had caught his eye. It caused him to look up and search the rocky field. Silas caught the spot in the field where the ray of light had come from. He got up, walked over to the spot, knelt down, and saw something.

"At that point," he said, "I tried to look more closely. My eyesight hadn't been the best, so I got my spectacles out. I can't say I know one rock from another, but I've been around enough to think I knew what I was looking at."

Within a week, geologists from a state university had confirmed his find. Silas was looking at a diamond. But that's not all. They had surveyed his property and discovered the place was littered with diamonds — so many in fact, that Silas was now sitting on the largest diamond field in North America.

That worthless piece of rock infested earth — the same one that Silas had forsaken decades before for opportunity in distant lands — turned out to be one of the most valuable pieces of real estate anywhere. If Silas was bitter before, he could only kick himself now. "If I had only known," he told friends, "that my riches were not only right in front of me, but given to me early, I would have lived my life very differently."

You Already Have the Key

As a wealthy celebrity, Silas spent the remaining years of his life going to schools and telling students the lessons he learned. They listened intently.

"Don't think for a minute that what you are looking for is down that track, or over the next hill. Don't be fooled into thinking that someone else has what you want. Yes, strive for what you seek. Work hard and honestly for what you want. But don't blind yourself to what you can find in front of you right now! You already have the key to unlock the treasures.

"It took me a lifetime to discover the secret I am telling you now. Please don't misunderstand. I'm not telling you to go to the trouble of running outside with a shovel. No, it's much easier than that. You don't even have to get your hands dirty!

"The trick to finding your treasure involves opening your eyes, and opening your heart. Look in front of you, and within you. Some of you are afraid to look because you have grown comfortable struggling with troubles you've come to expect.

"Believe me when I tell you that you have been given everything you need. You already own the gifts you seek. Don't spend your lifetime seeking your happiness, when in reality, you already have the means to it.

"Everyone is good at something, and you'll come to find out that the more you share your treasures, the shinier they get, and the more valuable they become. We can become rich beyond imagination when we discover that we are all sparkling jewels."

By Lee Simonson Publisher, Heartwarmers.com

HAVE A BLESSED DAY

A blind boy sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which said: "I am blind, please help." There were only a few coins in the hat.

A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around, and wrote some words. He put the sign back so that everyone who walked by would see the new words.

Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy. That afternoon the man who had changed the sign came to see how things were. The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?"

The man said, "I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way."

What he had written was: "Today is a beautiful day and I cannot see it."

Do you think the first sign and the second sign were saying the same thing?

Of course both signs told people the boy was blind. But the first sign simply said the boy was blind. The second sign told people they were so lucky that they were not blind. Should we be surprised that the second sign was more effective?

Moral of the Story: Be thankful for what you have. Be creative. Be innovative. Think differently and positively.

Invite others towards good with wisdom. Live life with no excuse and love with no regrets. When life gives you a 100 reasons to cry, show life that you have 1000 reasons to smile. Face your past without regret. Handle your present with confidence. Prepare for the future without fear. Keep the faith and drop the fear. Don't believe your doubts and doubt your beliefs. Life is a mystery to solve, not a problem to resolve. Life is wonderful if you know how to live.

Bhagavan Baba says, "Life has to be an incessant process of repair and reconstruction, of discarding evil and developing goodness....In the journey of life, if you want to travel without fear, you must have the ticket of a good conscience."

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

This quiz concerns festivals celebrated by people of different faiths all around the world in the month of April. It shows how for generations man has exalted God and His Presence on earth in this blessed month in so many beautiful ways and found light, peace, bliss.

1. The Thai New Year, called 'Songkran' is celebrated every year from 15 April to 17 April. Of all the feasts and festivals in Thailand, which are many, Songkran Festival is the most striking, for it is widely observed not only in this country but also in Burma, Cambodia and the Lao State. Thais wish 'Sawatdee pi Mai' or Happy New Year to every one.

How do they most widely express their ritual on this day?

- A. By burning firecrackers on the streets.
- B. By cleansing images of the Buddha.
- C. By reading from the scriptures with the monks.
- D. By ringing huge gongs in the monasteries.

2. Celebrated on April 14th, Tamil New year day is a holy day for the Hindu Tamils of Tamil Nadu in South India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and of other parts of the world. Tamilians exchange greetings of "Puthandu Vazhukal", meaning Happy New Year on the auspicious occasion of Tamil New Year.

The highlight of the festival is the 'Maanga Pachadi' (a dish made of raw mangoes, jaggery and neem flowers), which is at the same time sweet, sour and bitter. According to Swami, what is the significance of this special dish?

- A. It brings in Prosperity.
- B. It is Lord Krishna's favourite food.
- C. It indicates that joy and sorrow have to be treated with equanimity.
- D. It creates harmony and peace in family relationships

3. Every year on April 13, the Sikh community celebrates 'Vaisakhi', also known as 'Baisakhi'. People of North India, particularly in the Punjab, thank God for a good harvest. It is thus a festival of joy and happiness and the beginning of the Sikh New Year. Baisakhi is of major importance for the people following the Sikh faith, as it celebrates the founding of the Khalsa order of Sikhs by Guru Gobind Singh, when he baptized 5 disciples, later known as the "Panj Piaare" or Five Beloved Ones. By doing so, he eliminated the differences of high and low and established that all human beings were equal.

The festival is marked with 'nagar kirtan' processions through the streets, nagar means "town", which form an important part of Sikh culture and religious celebrations and Kirtan is a term meaning the singing of hymns from the Guru Grath Sahib, the Sikh holy book.

While singing the hymns, what do Sikhs do at these processions?

- A. Carry their Holy Book into the Gurdwara.
- B. Distribute food packets to the homeless.
- C. Distribute donations given by their community.
- D. Distribute copies of their Holy Book to passers-by.

4. On April 14, devotees all over the world will be celebrating Ramanavami. Rama is one of the ten Avatars of Lord Vishnu, and one of the two most popular, along with Krishna. He was the first of the four sons of King Dasharatha of Ayodhya.

Swami tells us: "Ramayana is the history of Rama. It is HIS-story. The Ramayana has been described as the story of Rama, the ideal man. In fact every human, in a way, is Rama Himself, when he embodies the ideals of Rama. The Ramayana has been divided into two parts: Purva Ramayana and Uttara Ramayana. Purva Ramayana (the earlier part) deals with the prowess of Rama as a Dheera (hero) who destroyed Vali, Ravana and others...." What does the Uttara Ramayana reveal?

- A. The Compassion of Rama.
- B. The Love for His Brothers.
- C. His Sacred Dharmic Rule in His Kingdom.
- D. Rama's Role of an Honourable Son.

5. On April 18, Jains will be celebrating a very important event called 'Mahavira Jayanti' - a celebration of the birth of the great Jain teacher, Mahavira when accounts of his life are read aloud and his image is anointed with scented water. Mahavira lived a life of absolute Truthfulness, a life of perfect honesty and a life of absolute chastity. He lived without possessing any property at all. He preached his message of Peace for thirty years after the attainment of Omniscience. Many kings became his disciples.

'Maha' means great; what does 'Vira' mean?

- A. Sage
- B. Poet
- C. Honest Being
- D. Hero

6. Of all the Jewish holidays, 'Pesach' is the one most commonly observed as it celebrates the birth of the Jewish nation. It is the first of the three major festivals with both historical and agricultural significance (the other two are Shavu'ot and Sukkot). The name "Pesach" means to pass through, to pass over, to exempt or to spare. In English, the holiday is known as the Passover. It is an eight day observance.

How do Jews start this ritual?

- A. With a festive meal.
- B. With the decoration of homes with special flowers.
- C. With singing at dawn.
- D. With giving charity to the homeless.

7. 'Ridvan' is a twelve-day festival in the Bahá'í Faith, [April 21 to May 2] commemorating the days of Bahau'llah in the Garden of Ridvan where He proclaimed His Mission as God's Messenger after his exile from Baghdad. It is the most holy Bahá'í festival, and is also referred to as the "Most Great Festival". The First day of Ridvan is not only the "King of Festivals" as referred by the Bahai's, it could also be said to have marked the beginning of the Bahai Faith.

What does Ridvan stand for?

- A. Holiness
- B. Peace
- C. Paradise
- D. Solemnity

8. On April 20, 2008 falls a sacred day when Shri Hanuman is worshipped all over India - either alone or together with Lord Rama. Every temple of Sri Rama has the *murti* or idol of Sri Hanuman. Hanuman, it is believed, is the Avatara of Lord Shiva. A few among his other names are Pavanasuta, Bajrangabali and Mahavira.

After which God is his name 'Pavanasuta' dedicated to?

- A. The Sun God
- B. The Wind God
- C. The Fire God
- D. The Goddess Earth

9. Islam, in Arabic, means "submission," that is, submission to the Will of God. It also means "peace," specifically, the peace one finds through submission to God's Will.

Muslims pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and evening - facing toward the Ka'bah, the House of God, in the Great Mosque at Mecca. They may pray wherever they are when prayer-time arrives, in any clean place, preferably in the company of other Muslims.

While giving a Divine Discourse in 1983, Swami compared the significance of the Muslim ritual of praying 5 times to the Hindu culture for the arousal of *Aathmic* Consciousness and promoting the manifestation of *Aathmic* Illumination.

Until when should a Muslim pray 5 times a day?

- A. For a month.
- B. Until one achieves Self-Realization.
- C. Only during holy days.
- D. Up to the moment of death.

10. 'Kwanzaa' is a week-long holiday honoring and encouraging strength in African-American families and communities. The name Kwanzaa comes from the East African language of Swahili. It means first fruits of the harvest. On this day, candles are lit to reinforce Principles and Values.

What does this celebration promote?

- A. Love
- B. Sacrifice
- C. Sharing and Giving
- D. Longevity

ANSWERS

1B. By cleansing images of the Buddha.
Songkran was traditionally a time to visit and pay respects to elders, including family members, friends and neighbors. People celebrating Songkran also go to a Wat (Buddhist monastery) to pray and give food to monks. They also cleanse Buddha images from household shrines as well as Buddha images at monasteries by gently pouring water mixed with a Thai fragrance over them.

The Buddha images from all of the city's important monasteries are paraded through the streets so that people can toss water at them, ritually 'bathing' the images, as they pass by on ornately decorated floats. It is believed that doing this will bring good luck and prosperity for the New Year.

In many cities, the family is dressed in traditional Thai costume and wearing leis of jasmine flower buds. The water is scented with the petals of this flower. In addition to the cleansing of the Buddha images, a traditional Songkran involves the sprinkling of water by younger people on the older people as a tribute of respect and for blessings as well as on each other.

2C. It indicates that joy and sorrow have to be treated with equanimity. Tamilians believe that it was on the Tamil New Year's Day that Lord Brahma began the Creation of the World. Tamilians begin their New Year's Day by rising early and viewing the auspicious light called "*Kanni*" at dawn. Like others, Tamilians too, believe that by engaging in auspicious activities on the occasion of Tamil New Year's Day will bring in prosperity and a good life in the coming year. The auspicious objects include gold and silver jewellery, betel leaves, nuts, fruits and vegetables, flowers, raw rice and coconuts. Kanni is followed by a ritual bath when all the Tamilians then gather around the household altar to hold a special religious ceremony.

The afternoon is spent by paying a visit to the temple for prayers to ensure good luck and prosperity in the coming year. Tamil New Year is also the occasion when the ladies adorn the entrances of their houses with 'Kolam' (design made with rice flour) and deck the doorway with mango leaves.

In His 1999, Tamil New Year Discourse, Swami tells us about the significance of the Special Food on the Tamil New Year. "On New Year day, it is a practice to mix sweet, sour and bitter things and eat them. It is to indicate that joy and sorrow have to be treated with equanimity. It is the tongue that tastes the delicacy and it is the heart that tastes love. The taste of love is peerless. It is sweeter than even nectar. Love alone can match love. God is love; love is God; live in love."

3A. Carry the Holy Book into the Gurdwara

Around the world at Baisakhi time, Sikhs and Punjabis reflect on the values taught to them by their Gurus and celebrate the birth of the Khalsa. To mark the celebrations, devotees throng at gurdwaras - the Sikh place of worship. The celebrations start early as the worshippers, with flowers and offerings in their hands, proceed towards the gurdwaras and temples before dawn. Celebrations always include music, singing and chanting scriptures and hymns. The Guru Granth Sahib is carried reverentially into the gurdwara and then carried in the procession in a place of honour.

4A. The Compassion of Rama.

Swami explains: "The Uttara Ramayana reveals the compassion of Rama. (It is filled with Karuna Rasa). Valmiki has compared the sweetness of the Ramayana to the sweetness of the sugarcane juice. The sugarcane has a hard rind and is full of knots. Nevertheless the juice from it is sweet. Likewise despite the many evil characters in the story and the sad episodes in it, the epic maintains its sweetness. The appeal of the Ramayana is inexhaustible. It is believed that listening to the story of Rama cleanses the soul. Meditating on the noble Rama and chanting His name is believed to ease the pains of life and lead one to moksha, or liberation."

5D. Hero.

'Maha' means great and 'Vira' means a hero. Even as a boy, Mahavira came to be associated with many episodes of absolute fearlessness which earned him the name 'Mahavira'. At the age of eight he observed the twelve vows of Ahimsa, etc. He was obedient to his parents and served them with great faith and devotion. He grew up as a prince, excelling in physical prowess as well as intellectual acumen. However, he renounced the pleasures and luxuries of the palace, as also the power and prestige of kingship, and undertook a life of intense penance for more than twelve years. He calmly bore not only the rigors of nature but the torments from the ignorant and mischievous among his own countrymen also. He finally became self-illuminated. But not content with his own personal salvation, he chose to become a great human redeemer.

Mahavira was always immersed in Self-contemplation. He knew that the pleasures of this world were transitory and that they strengthened the letters of Karma. He knew that renunciation would lead to the attainment of eternal bliss.

Mahavira initiated a simple five-fold path for the householders: Ahimsa (Non-injury - physical or mental - to others), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (chastity) and Aparigraha (non-acquisition of property).

6A. With a festive meal.

It is traditional for a Jewish family to gather on the first night and open the Passover with a festive meal, the Seder, each part of which symbolizes the events of the time. The story of Passover is retold through the reading of the *Haggadah* meaning "telling," which contains the order of prayers, rituals, readings and songs for the Pesach Seder.

With its special foods, songs, and customs, the Seder is the focal point of the Passover celebration. As the Jewish day begins at sundown the night before, for the year 2008, the first night of Passover will be April 19th.

7C. Paradise.

Bahauallah left his house and moved to the Garden of Ridvan after he was exiled from Baghdad to Istanbul. On the afternoon on which he entered the Garden he declared the Festival of Ridvan, which continued for 12 days including the days of his arrival (the first day), the arrival of his family (the ninth day) and his departure (the twelfth day).

It was during his stay in the Garden of Ridvan he declared his mission to humanity and that he is the Promised one. Nearly 10 years later, Ridvan was declared as one of the "Most Great Festivals". Since then this festival is celebrated every year by all the followers of Bahai Faith all around the World and the three holy days are marked by communal prayers and celebrations, and are days on which no work is done.

8B. The Wind God.

Shri Hanuman was born of the Wind God and Anjani Devi. He is the living Embodiment of Rama-Naam. He was a great devotee and served Sri Rama with pure love and devotion, without expecting any fruit in return. He lived to serve Sri Rama. He was humble, brave and wise. He possessed all the Divine virtues. He did what others could not do: crossing the ocean simply by uttering Raam-Naam; burning the city of Lanka; and bringing the sanjeevini herb and restoring Lakshmana to life again.

Lord Rama Himself said to Sri Hanuman, "I am greatly indebted to you, O mighty hero! You did marvelous, superhuman deeds. You do not want anything in return. Sugriva has his kingdom restored to him. Angada has been made the crown prince. Vibhishana has become king of Lanka. But you have not asked for anything at any time. You threw away the precious garland of pearls given to you by Sita. How can I repay My debt of gratitude to you? I will always remain deeply indebted to you. I give you the boon of everlasting life. All will honour and worship you like Myself. Your murti will be placed at the door of My temple and you will be worshipped and honoured first. Whenever My stories are recited or glories sung, your glory will be sung before Mine."

Thus did Lord Rama praise Hanuman when the latter returned to Him after finding Sita in Lanka. Hanuman was not a bit elated. He fell in prostration at the Holy Feet of Lord Rama. Lord Rama asked him, "O mighty hero, how did you cross the ocean?" Hanuman humbly replied, "By the power and glory of Thy Name, my Lord." Again the Lord asked, "How did you burn Lanka? How did you save yourself?" And Hanuman replied, "By Thy Grace, my Lord." Such was the humility Sri Hanuman embodied!

9D. Up to the moment of death.

Swami says: "The Quran lays down that all men should cultivate the sense of unity, of interdependence, of selfless love and of the immanence of Divinity. Generally, all men take food of some kind or other for the body five times a

day: an early cup of coffee in bed, breakfast two hours later, a heavy lunch at noon, tea at four and a fat dinner at nine. Islam prescribes food for the spiritual nature of man and directs that it be taken five times a day, as prayer.

For the arousal of the *Aathmic* consciousness, for earning spiritual joy and for promoting the manifestation of *Aathmic* illumination, prayer is prescribed as many as five times a day, from the dawn of discretion up to the moment of death.”

10C. Sharing and Giving.

Kwanzaa is a day for sharing and giving. Candles are lit to reinforce *Nguzo Saba* (the Seven Principles.) These seven community African values are: *Umoja* (Unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), *Nia* (Purpose), *Kuumba* (Creativity), and *Imani* (Faith).

Kwanzaa has seven letters and seven candles. There are three green candles, one black candle, and three red candles. The black candle is lit first. The black candle means *Umoja*. The red candle means *Kujichaguli*. The green candle means *Ujima*.

H2H QUIZ ON RAMANAVAMI

This quiz tests your recall powers from reading Heart2Heart and all the questions are related to Lord Rama.

1. Students often say that Prashanti Nilayam is Swami's office, Brindavan is His home, and Kodaikanal (Kodai) is His playground. In our article *Kodai: The Lord's Mountain Top* from the Nov 1st 2003 issue, we shared that Rama Navami is the festival that marks the Advent of the Lord as Rama. Many years, the festival occurs when Swami is in Kodai Kanal. On such occasions, the festival becomes a truly memorable day for the boys. On one such Rama Navami day, Swami materialized the pearl necklace that Mother Sita gifted to Hanuman at the time of Rama's Coronation.

What was very unique about that pearl necklace?

- A. The pearls had Rama's image on it.
- B. The pearls were translucent.
- C. None of the students could touch the pearls – they were too cold!
- D. Many pearls had teeth marks.

2. In our cover story *Sai Rama* from the March 15 2004 issue, we presented a few incidents from Swami's past that revealed His Advent as Sai Rama. One such incident was:

'Long back, about 65 years ago, in a remote and tiny hamlet, there was a group of boys of ages 5 to 11 going along the streets. Among them was a boy named Sathya (Baba's boyhood name). He was their Guru, their leader. They came to a Hanuman temple and all of them decided to take a *pradakshina*, or a circumambulation of the deity. So off they went to offer their obeisance's to Hanuman. Except little Sathya. But how could the group be without their leader? So they dragged him too...in spite of His protestations.'

What happened next?

- A. A huge monkey appeared.
- B. Sathya fainted.
- C. Torrential rains prevented them from moving further.
- D. The boys feet became stuck to the ground.

3. In the article *A Householder's Life - The Vedic Way* from the July 2006 issue, Prof. Venkataraman in his sixth talk in the Veda Walkthrough series mentions that: 'Swami has, in some of His Discourses, especially a memorable one given during the Summer Course of 1996, described the marriage of Rama and Sita. He said on that occasion, that this was no ordinary marriage...Enlightening us about the difference in the modern marriages and the pious, sacred marriage of Rama and Sita, He said:

'There was the holy and sacred fire and *Mantras* were being chanted both by Janaka, the father of the bride, and Rama, as appropriate, guided of course by celebrated *Rishis* like Viswamitra and Vasishta. At one point, Janaka says, here is my daughter Sita. Rama was expected to turn towards her and take a look at her. He did not. Emperor Janaka repeated the statement again; once more, Rama did not turn to look in the direction of Sita.'

When Janaka repeated that statement for the third time, why didn't Rama still look at Sita?

- A. He was too exhausted from the ceremonies.
- B. He said: "An unmarried man must not look at other women."
- C. His brother Lakshmana was waiting for his bride's arrival too.
- D. His parents forbade Him.

4. In our H2H Special article, *Unforgettable Moments with Sai*, from the June 2006 issue, we presented Mr. Chidambaram Krishnan's nostalgic memories of the past when not many believed in Bhagavan's Avatarhood. He shares: "The proceedings started with Brahmam reading out some passages from the Ramayana. He then started explaining what he had read out. After that, Brahmam asked us who were gathered there, whether we had any doubts. None of us understood what he had said in the first place; where then was the question of asking doubts! At this point, Swami intervened and said, 'You will not understand what this man is saying. I shall explain it all.' So saying, Swami started giving a Discourse. During His Discourse, Swami narrated many incidents that are not recorded in the published versions of the Ramayana. Brahmam therefore asked, 'But Swami, one does not find these incidents reported in the Ramayana.'

What did Swami retort to that?

- A. "I wrote the Ramayana!"
- B. "These incidents are not reported in the modern Ramayana!"
- C. "Valmiki made some mistakes!"
- D. "I am Rama, I was there and I know what exactly happened!"

5. In our cover story *Sai Rama* from the March 15 2004 issue, Prof Venkataraman emphasizes: 'Swami is not merely Rama come again. He was Rama before the Rama Avatar. He was Rama during the Rama Avatar and He is Rama forever! That is because Rama is not the name of an ancient Prince of Ayodhya, blue in complexion and with a bow in his hand. Rama is something more....in fact something absolutely fundamental.'

Which quality of Rama resembles Swami the most?

- A. His Disciplined way of living.
- B. His very Generous Nature.
- C. His Blissful Nature.
- D. His Dharmic oriented teachings.

ANSWERS:

1D Many pearls had teeth marks.

Swami then told the boys: "While receiving the necklace, Hanuman gave it a suspicious look. He then placed the necklace near one of his ears as if to check whether the individual pearls were emitting some sound. He appeared to examine every pearl in the necklace, and once in a while, he would bite a pearl."

After narrating the story and materializing the necklace, Swami passed it around and asked the boys to carefully examine it. Sure enough many pearls had teeth marks! After everyone present there had had a look, Swami made the necklace disappear!

2A A huge monkey appeared.

The story continues:

'He had barely put a few steps around the temple when, from somewhere, a huge monkey appeared on the scene, obstructing his way. All efforts to shoo it away were in vain. The circumambulation project had to be shelved. And the monkey too mysteriously disappeared as if the purpose of its appearance was accomplished. It was only later that Sathya revealed that what appeared as a monkey was really Hanuman imploring Sathya not to go around him. Rama was not to go around Hanuman. It was He, Hanuman, that had to go around Rama!'

3B He said: "An unmarried man must not look at other women."

Rama said to Janaka, "I am not yet formally married, and an unmarried man must not look at other women". One might say that this was the limit, but that was how seriously the observance of code of conduct was taken in those days.

4D "I am Rama, I was there and I know what exactly happened!"

Mr. Krishnan continues: “Swami simply said in reply, ‘I am Rama, I was there and I know what exactly happened!’ Mr. Brahmam was stunned and feebly asked, ‘Are You really Rama?’ Swami coolly replied, ‘Yes, I am indeed Rama.’

In the evening, there was one more session that started off with Mr. Brahmam reading out some passages from the Mahabharata and trying to explain the meaning. Swami intervened like on the previous day, and said many things not found in the usual texts. Once again Brahmam said, ‘Swami, these things are not found in the books. They are completely new.’ **Swami brushed aside the objections with the comment, ‘I am Krishna and I know it all.’** Brahmam was floored and muttered, ‘Swami, yesterday You said You were Rama and today You are saying You are Krishna!’

To that, **Swami simply said, “I am everything!”**

5C His Blissful Nature.

Prof Venkataraman continues: “The word Rama is explained in Sanskrit as “*Ramayatheethi Ramaha*”, meaning: one who gives happiness. Now, at a gross level, if we see our Swami, there is no other person in this world who inspires such genuine happiness in millions of people just by His Darshan. One should only see the faces of the devotees when they see Swami....Absolute, out of the world joy! Therefore, Swami qualifies to be called Rama.

Swami has any number of times made known to us His reality as nothing but this principle of bliss. He often says: I AM I. It is for this reason that Swami is qualified to be called Rama. That is the real meaning of Sai Rama.”

In Swami’s own words: ‘So, Rama is in all beings as the very core of their existence, without Rama there can be no Rama or joy, happiness or well-being. Because Rama is within you, you rejoice, you are pleased, you are happy, you feel blissful. Rama is Prema, Love. So, see the Rama in all and love them and serve them.’

QUIZ ON SWAMI'S DIVINE RAMANVAMI DISCOURSES

Swami says: "The Ramayana is a guide book, a sacred text, an inspiring scripture, for every man, in all lands, at all times, whatever his creed or condition might be. For, it imparts poise, balance, equanimity, inner strength and peace. The Ramayana holds up the ideals to be pursued by the father, the son, the mother, the brother, the friend, the servant, the master, the teacher, the pupil, etc. Duty is God - that is the lesson the Ramayana teaches."

1. True devotion and surrender lies in understanding the inner significance of the *Ramayana*. Swami has always taught us: "Make your *Hridaya* (spiritual heart) an Ayodhya by means of *Raamanaama*; Ayodhya is an impregnable place where enemies cannot enter. Forget this and you are lost. Install Rama in your heart and then no outer force can harm you."

In His Divine, 2000 Ramanavami Discourse, Swami teaches us more: "Ayodhya" means "invincible". Its ruler was Dasharatha. Dasharatha means one who has made his ten *indriyas* (sense organs) - the five organs of action and the five organs of perception - his chariot. Allegorically, this means that Dasharatha represents the body, with its ten organs. These sense organs are related to the three *gunas* (qualities) *Satwa*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*."

Who represented these three *gunas* in Dasharatha?

- A. His Desires.
- B. His Sons.
- C. His Wives.
- D. His Servants.

2. Swami says: "The Beauty of Rama was the Beauty of Inner Peace, the Splendour that fills one when he is conscious of living in *Dharma* (righteousness). Everyone should recognize the sweetness, the sacredness and the Divinity enshrined in the name 'Rama'. It was for this reason that Thyagaraja sang: *Oh mind! Contemplate on the name of Rama with full awareness of its power*. It is good to utter the name Rama with full understanding of all that it signifies. But even without that understanding, the chanting of the name has the power to destroy all sins."

According to Swami, what is the true meaning of the word 'Rama'?

- A. He who Forgives.
- B. He who Pleases.
- C. He who is a Winner.
- D. He who is Truthful.

3. In His Divine 1998 Ramanavami Discourse, Swami revealed some divine facets on Lakshmana:

“When Rama started out into exile in the forest wearing garments of bark, Lakshmana, too, did the same. For fourteen years he watched over his brother and his wife, guarding them day and night without any regard for his own comfort or even for sleep or food. Lakshmana laid down his life for the purpose of realizing the Mission of the *Avatar* (divine incarnation). When Rama ordered him to raise a fire into which Seeta was advised to step as part of the fire-ordeal to prove her chastity to the world, Lakshmana obeyed with a bleeding heart. When Rama ordered him to take Seeta out into the forest and leave her alone and unguarded there, Lakshmana obeyed, though his heart was wrung with pain.

Lakshmana is a superb example of the attitude of surrender. When Rama, Seeta, and Lakshmana went to the forest and reached Chitrakoot, Rama told Lakshmana, ‘I am feeling tired and Seeta is also tired. It is better we stay here for some time. So, I would like you to put up a cottage in which we can stay for a longer duration, if necessary for the whole period of 10 years. You can put up the cottage in any place of your choice.’

Hearing these words, Lakshmana felt hurt and bent down his head with grief. Noting this, Seeta asked Lakshmana, ‘Why are you perturbed, Lakshmana? Your brother did not speak anything harsh. Why do you feel so?’

What was Lakshmana’s reply?

- A. “I can’t find materials for building a cottage in a forest!”
- B. “I don’t know how to make a cottage!”
- C. “I need my brother’s help!”
- D. “Have I ever had any choice of my own?”

4. In several of His Discourses, Swami instills some deep thoughts in us when talking about Seeta: “Seeta was no ordinary woman. She was the embodiment of *Maha Maya* (supreme divine illusion). Rama acquired *Maha Maya* as his mate. Seeta, for her part, sought oneness with the *Atma* principle represented by Rama. The marriage of Rama and Seeta represents the association of the *Atma* and the *Maya*. It is in this combined form of *Atma* and *Maya* that Rama entered Ayodhya.”

But what did Rama have to do to win Seeta’s hand in marriage?

- A. Move a mountain.
- B. Fight a battle.
- C. Lift a bow.
- D. Meditate and carry out austerities.

5. When Bharatha was asked to rule the kingdom in Rama's absence, Bharatha was dumbfounded! "Rama! Rama! Rama! I am not competent to rule over Ayodhya. To reign over the kingdom, You alone are worthy as the eldest son of Dasharatha. You alone are fit to rule over the kingdom properly and establish *Rama Raajya*. Please return to Ayodhya." Thus pleaded Bharatha.

In His Divine, 1977 Summer Showers Discourse, Swami presented some deep unheard of insights into the character of Bharatha and said: "Bharatha was not in a position to overrule Rama's orders. Bharatha did not like to become the king and rule the kingdom. In this conflict, Rama tried to console Bharatha. Vasishtha then gave a small advice which would give satisfaction to Bharatha. Vasishtha said, "You can take the sandals of Rama, and regarding those sandals as symbolic of Rama, perform the coronation for the sandals and carry on the rule of Ayodhya."

What did Bharatha do after he performed the coronation for the sandals?

- A. He began to live a life of austerity.
- B. He walked bare-feet until his brothers came back.
- C. He vowed to keep silent for 14 years.
- D. He slept by the throne everyday.

6. Glorifying Hanuman's character, Swami tells us: "Hanuman is the brightest example of a realized soul. He had mastered the *Vedas*. His speech was saturated with the humility and dedication and his thoughts, words and deeds were always offered to God. When these three are in perfect harmony, the person wins the Grace of God, as Hanuman succeeded in securing.

When Seeta and Rama returned to Ayodhya, people's joy knew no bounds. At the time of his coronation, Rama distributed gifts to all those who had helped him in the war, except to Hanuman. On being questioned by Seeta, Rama said that Hanuman did not care for any gift and that he had no worthy gift to be given to Hanuman. Then Seeta took out her pearl necklace and presented it to Hanuman."

What did Hanuman do with it?

- A. He cried and fell at Her Feet.
- B. He plucked each pearl and threw them away.
- C. He wore it day and night.
- D. He refused to accept any gifts from anyone.

7. Valmiki, after completing the composing of the *Ramayana*, summoned the sages in his ashram and asked them who was capable of propagating the immortal and sacred epic to every nook and corner of the world. The sages were nonplused. They declared, "*Guruji*, we are old men. We are at the end of our span of life. We are incapable of conveying the *Ramayana* to the length and breadth of the world." Valmiki was downcast. At that stage, the twins Lava and Kusha arrived on the scene.

What did they tell Guru Valmiki?

- A. "Can you please teach us the *shlokas*?"
- B. "Will you accompany us in the singing too?"
- C. "We are prepared to convey the *Ramayana* to every place."
- D. "We first need to meet all the characters of the *Ramayana*."

8. In His Divine, 2000 Ramanavami Discourse, Swami asks us: "What is the reason for the intimate relationship that existed between Rama and Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughana? Here you have to take into consideration an incident that happened prior to their birth. When the sweet pudding emerged from the sacrificial fire of *Putrakameshti Yajna* (*Yajna* for begetting children) performed by Dasharatha, sage Vasishtha told him to distribute the same to his three wives.

Dasharatha treated all his wives alike; he had no partiality towards any of them. He divided the pudding into three equal parts and distributed to each of them. He told them to have a ceremonial bath before partaking of the pudding. Kausalya and Kaikeyi were overjoyed. They kept their share of pudding at a safe place and went inside to have a ceremonial bath. But Sumitra was not all that happy. She felt 'Since Kausalya is the first wife of Dasharatha, the son born to her has every chance of becoming the crown prince. Even Kaikeyi's son may occupy the throne as Dasharatha had given word to her father. But the son born to me stands no chance of becoming the crown prince.'

Thinking thus, she completed her bath. As there were no fans or hair dryers in those days, she went to the terrace, kept the cup containing the pudding by her side and started drying her hair in the sun. Suddenly from somewhere an eagle swooped down and took away the cup containing the pudding. Sumitra was taken aback. She was not really sad for losing the pudding, but was afraid that her husband Dasharatha might reprimand her for her carelessness. She approached Kausalya and Kaikeyi and explained to them her plight."

What did the two wives do?

- A. They took pity on her and gave a part of their share to her.
- B. They called the maid to get another one from the king.
- C. They both gave away their puddings totally to her.
- D. They threw their puddings away in despair!

9. In His Divine 1992 Ramanavami Discourse, Swami simplifies our spiritual journey by conveying this powerful message: "Who was Ravana? Ravana is described as a demon with ten heads. These ten heads are the six vices, namely desire, anger, greed, infatuation, pride and jealousy and *Manas* (mind), *Buddhi* (intellect), *Chitta* (will) and *Ahamkaara* (Ego). Since these ten are present in every human being, all men are Ravana indeed! Whoever beholds all these ten heads in fact becomes a Rama. It is God alone who can behead ten heads!"

According to Bhagavan, what is the fastest approach to annihilating the 'Ravana' in us and bringing out the 'Rama' in us?

- A. Constant Remembrance of the Lord's Name.
- B. Surrender to God.
- C. Service to mankind.
- D. Follow the Principles laid down in the scriptures.

10. In His Divine 1990 Discourse, Swami said: "Many people complain that their troubles have not ended and God has shown no compassion towards them. They would do well to learn a lesson from an episode in the Ramayana. After Vibhishana had become friendly with Hanuman, he once asked the latter, 'Hanuman! Although you are a monkey, you have been the recipient of the Lord's Grace. Although I have been ceaselessly engaged in the contemplation of Rama, how is it I have not secured His Grace?'

What was Hanuman's reply?

- A. "You are not pondering on the Name!"
- B. "You are more focused on the Image!"
- C. "You must do Narayana Seva!"
- D. "To what extent are you engaged in the service of Rama?"

ANSWERS:

1C His Wives.

Swami explains: "Dasharatha had three wives, namely: Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra who represent *sathwic*, *rajasic* and *thamasic* qualities, respectively. These three wives had four children, namely: Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Shatrughana who represented the *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharvana Veda* respectively. True devotion and surrender lies in understanding the inner significance of the *Ramayana*.

Kausalya was highly virtuous and even minded. Likewise, Sumitra too was pure hearted, and as her name indicates she was a good friend of everybody (Sumitra). Her ideals were unparalleled...What was Sumitra's advice to her son Lakshmana when he came to seek her blessings before going to the forest? She told him, "My son! Do not be under the impression that you are going to the forest. Ayodhya is wherever Rama is - without Sita and Rama, this Ayodhya is but a forest. Sita is your Mother, Rama is your Father. Serve them with love. That is your primary duty." She advised her second son Shatrughana to serve Bharata."

2B He who Pleases.

In His Divine, 1989 Ramanavami Discourse, Swami tells us: "Rama means He who pleases. Nothing pleases man more than his *Aatma*, which is an eternal unending source of joy. Be pleasant to every one; let every one be pleased with you. Do not hurt or harm, by thought, word and deed.

What are the inner meanings of the name 'Rama'? The three syllables 'R', 'A' and 'Ma' indicate the three causes for human birth, namely *Papamu* (the sins one has committed), *Thapamu* (the troubles one experiences) and *Ajnanamu* (one's ignorance). The letter 'R' has the power to destroy all the sins committed by man. The letter 'Aa' (symbolizing the moon) has the powers of cooling the fevers man suffers from and conferring peace on him. 'Ma' represents the sun that dispels the darkness of ignorance and confers illumination of wisdom. Hence, the word 'Rama' has the right triple power of destroying sins, conferring peace and dispelling ignorance.

When you utter the word 'Rama', you first open the mouth with the sound 'Ra'. All your sins go out when your mouth is open. When you utter 'M' by closing the mouth, the entry is barred against the sins that have gone out."

3D "Have I ever had any choice of my own?"

Swami tells us: "Lakshmana said, 'Have I ever had any choice of my own? I left my mother; wife, and all comforts of life and accompanied you both to serve. I have surrendered myself to Rama. Where is the question of my choice? The command of Rama is what I want to carry out. While so, how can I withstand the impact of Rama asking me to put up the cottage at a place of my choice?' Rama realized the sacred feelings of Lakshmana and the true attitude of his surrender and pointed out the site himself.

Surrender involves three entities: one is the person who surrenders the other the one to whom he surrenders, and the third is the act of surrender. If we analyze carefully in the spiritual sense, you have a person, mirror, and reflection. When you remove the mirror, the reflection is automatically gone.

So, you find three minus one becomes one only. It is the person only that remains.

4C Lift a Bow.

In His Divine, 1987 Ramanavami Discourse, Swami reveals: "Rarely in the world do we see married couples who are identical - man and wife - in their physical features, their qualities, behaviour, thoughts and capacities. But in the case of Rama and Seeta, the similarity was complete in every respect. There were no differences in features, qualities or other aspects. The truth of this is evident from what Hanuman experienced. Once Hanuman happened to look at Seeta when she was alone. He got a doubt whether Rama himself had assumed a feminine form. Looking at Seeta, he thought it was Rama himself. Hence Rama and Seeta should be regarded as one identical entity and not as separate beings.

Emperor Janaka was a *Brahmajnani* (one who possesses knowledge of identity of individual self with the cosmic being) who had renounced everything. Like water on a lotus leaf, he was completely detached, with no concern for worldly things. Having no children of his own, he brought up with great love a foundling (Seeta).

There were two powerful entities in his kingdom; Shiva's bow and Seeta. Once, while engaging in play, Seeta lifted the giant bow of Shiva with astonishing ease. Struck by this feat, Janaka decided that Seeta should be given in marriage only to one who could handle Shiva's bow and be worthy of Seeta's hand. With this resolve, he invited princes for Seeta's *svayamvara* (self selection of a husband by the bride herself).

Rama arrived and lifted Shiva's bow as lightly as Seeta had done. Janaka realized that Rama and Seeta were well matched in every respects-beauty, character and strength."

5A He began to live a life of austerity.

Swami tells us further: "Bharatha could not throw away the orders and suggestions given by the *Guru*. He could not also contradict the orders of Rama. So, with a very heavy heart, he agreed to receive the sandals.

He took Rama's sandals, put them on the throne, and with a heavy heart, went to the village Nandigram. In that village, he announced that he would stay without food and without rest till Rama returns to Ayodhya. He decided and began to live a life of austerity in the village Nandigram in the same manner in which Rama was living in the forest. In this context, the *rishis* and elders have been telling us that the attributes and aspects of Rama and Bharatha became one and the same. This exemplary conduct of Bharatha, by which he had accepted fully the orders of his brother, and was carrying on the

rule of the country, demonstrates his greatness. His brother Shatrughana also followed him everywhere with love.”

6B He plucked each pearl and threw them away.

In His Divine 2000 Ramanavami Discourse, Swami tells us further about his unmatched, unsurpassed devotion:

“He plucked each pearl, put it between his teeth, placed it near his ear and with a face indicating disappointment threw it way in disgust. Surprised at this behaviour of Hanuman, Seeta said, ‘Hanuman, this is a precious pearl necklace given to me by my father, but you are throwing away the pearls without realizing their value.’...Then Hanuman replied, “O Mother, I examined each pearl in order to see whether it had the sacred name of Rama in it. I could not find it in any pearl. Without the name of Rama, they are but stones and pebbles. So, I cast them on the ground. Even the hair of mine is filled with the Name of Rama.” Saying so, he plucked out a hair from his hand and put it near Seeta’s ear. She could hear Rama’s Name emanating from it.”

7C “We are prepared to convey the Ramayana to every place.”

In His Divine 1998 Ramanavami Discourse, Swami tells us: “They told Valmiki, ‘*Guruji*, we have been listening to what all has been spoken here. We are prepared to convey the *Ramayana* to every place.’ The sage was immensely happy. The two children were like twin birds. They were extraordinary children. They were utterly fearless. They would not shrink from anyone out of fear. On the contrary, Lava and Kusha forgot all bodily considerations and sang from their hearts the glory of Rama. They thus taught what is relevant to youths today - the path to a God-oriented life.

Lava and Kusha were princes of royal blood. They carried in their hands tambourines. They set out on the great task of propagating the *Ramayana*, chanting the *shlokas* (verses) all the way. Are there any today who will undertake such a task? Many will fear being mocked by the public. Even persons who may wish to do *bhajans* in public are afraid of being jeered at.

Devotees should be able to transcend such considerations. Why should anyone who is doing something holy be afraid of public ridicule? People should be prepared for any sacrifice for the sake of the Divine. The joy to be derived from chanting the Lord's name is ineffable. Without the constant remembrance of God, there can be no experience of the Divine. Whatever the name that may be chanted, when it is done wholeheartedly the fruits of it will be certain. Everything should be done with a pure heart.”

8A They took pity on Sumitra and gave a part of their share to her.

On extolling the three queen's characters, Swami said: "They loved Sumitra as Sumitra loved them. So, they took pity on Sumitra and gave a part of their share to her. Out of the part of pudding given by Kausalya, Lakshmana was born to Sumitra, whereas Shatrughna was born out of the share of the pudding given by Kaikeyi. Hence, Lakshmana, born of Kausalya's share was deeply attached to Rama and Shatrughna, born out of the share of Kaikeyi, was deeply attached to Bharata. Sumitra's two children, Lakshmana and Shatrughna, started crying as soon as they were born while Rama, the son of Kausalya, and Bharata, the son of Kaikeyi, had blissful smiles on their faces in their cradles. The children of Sumitra puzzled everybody by their incessant crying. Sumitra tried various means to make them stop crying but it was of no avail.

Emperor Dasharatha consulted several physicians to cure the strange malady of Sumitra's children, but nothing worked. Mother Sumitra then called sage Vasishtha as a last resort to solve her problem. The eminent sage meditated for some time and said: "Oh mother, you need not administer any medicine to alleviate your children's suffering. All you have to do is to keep Lakshmana by the side of Rama, and Shatrughna in the cradle of Bharata." Sumitra did accordingly and found that Lakshmana and Shatrughna stopped crying immediately. The two children who had refused to drink milk till then started taking food and playing in the cradle. Surprised at this sudden change of their behaviour, Sumitra prayed to the sage to explain the cause of this behaviour. Then Vasishtha explained to her, "O mother, Lakshmana and Shatrughna are the *amsas* (parts) of Rama and Bharata, respectively. So, when they were united, they became blissful."

9B Surrender to God.

Swami helps us realize that: "When a man surrenders himself to God, all these ten heads will go and he will merge in Rama." What is the root cause of Ravana's ruin? Unable to conquer his desires, unwilling to get rid of his impulses, he ruined his entire clan. His sons were killed. His brother and other kinsmen were killed and ultimately his country itself was reduced to ashes. Raavana confessed: "In the end I ruined myself." This was the message Raavana gave to his countrymen in his last moments. Only by suppressing desires does a man manifest his humanness. A man, who is unable to put an end to his desires, puts an end to himself. A good man by his good conduct achieves greatness. Raavana sought to achieve greatness but did not strive to lead a good life. Rama's career is different. He aspired only to be a good man and did not seek greatness.

10D "To what extent are you engaged in the service of Rama?"

Swami tells us: "Hanuman replied: 'Vibhishana! It is true that you are ceaselessly chanting the name of Rama. But to what extent are you engaged in the service of Rama? By merely contemplating on the name of Rama you cannot get Rama's grace. When your brother Ravana brought away Sitadevi, what is the help you rendered to her? Did you do anything to relieve even partially Rama's distress?'

"Devotees should realize that by merely uttering "Rama! Rama!" you cannot ensure the Lord's Grace. To what extent are you carrying out the injunctions of Rama, Krishna or Baba? How far are you practicing the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*? Without practicing the precepts, no amount of repetition of the name of the Lord is of any use. It is merely like playing a gramophone record. The Lord's Name must get implanted in your heart.

Today, on account of the special prerogative of the *Kali* Age, people think that it is enough to recite the Lord's name alone for achieving the goal of life. But this is mistake. Can you have the current merely by having the negative wire? Only when the negative and positive lines are combined will the current flow. Devotion must find expression in dedicated service to the Lord."

HEALING TOUCH

SEVEN TENSE HOURS... AND THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE

By Mr. Y. Arvind

It was 6.00 am in the morning when the vehicle drove up to the emergency department of SSSIHMS, Whitefield. The patient was smoothly transferred onto a stretcher, brought in, laid on the bed and connected to medical support systems. One look told the clinicians that he was all but gone; all vital signs were at their lowest ebb and there was no response to stimulus. The doctor picked up the patient response sheet, and began writing down the observations. The final score for this patient suffering from a neuro condition was an abysmal '3/15'. In clinical terms, he was at the threshold of the Grim Reaper's call.

Turning to the young wife, who had just finished the formalities of admission, the doctor said, "We have to perform surgery today."

The eyes widened.

"This is a high risk condition; we will need your consent to go ahead with the surgery."

"Consent?"

"Permission. We need to have your permission to do the operation", explained the doctor, simplifying.

The eyes vacillated. "Will he...survive?" she asked hesitantly.

"We cannot guarantee you that. The chances of survival for any patient in such a condition are less than 2%. If we operate he 'may' survive, if we don't we will definitely lose him."

Consent to Life

The words were delivered with practiced efficiency, equivocal and final. There was no choice; the slimmest chance of life against the certainty of death. She looked at the inert form of her husband who meant everything to her, up at the blinking screens that told her nothing, into the eyes of the doctor and the nurses surrounding them, and then again at her husband. Less than fifteen minutes ago her husband had been admitted and now ... she had to decide. The life or death of her husband lay in her choice... her consent.

Sensing her confusion, one of the sisters quickly read out the consent form translating it into Tamil, the language of the couple. The face of the young woman blanched, but she understood that there was, in reality, no choice. Death was certain, but the chance of life remained.

Uma, the young wife of Dorai, picked up the pen that lay on the table and initialed the high risk consent form.

The clinical staff got into action, and for an hour he received their attention. Intravenous drips were attached, syringe pumps sent calculated doses of inotropes (drugs to support a failing heart) into his blood stream, and the

monitors blinked and beeped telling the professionals what they needed to know. In an hour's time, surprisingly, his score dramatically improved to 7/15.

"We can move him now!" said the doctor.

Seven Hours to Save a Man

He was taken for a CT scan, and then moved to the Operation Theater. She could only walk silently, her tears coursing down ebony cheeks, as her husband was efficiently hooked up to mobile life support systems, and wheeled out into the vast corridors. The lift doors opened and they crowded in around the wheeled bed. The hum of the machinery did nothing, but strike at her already taut nerves. The doors opened onto the second floor into a long corridor, lit at intervals. The shadows waxed and waned as her husband moved under them, inert and silent. They came to a pair of double doors.

"Wait here", said the staff nurse.

Uma watched him disappear behind glass doors. After all the bustle of admission, evaluation, diagnosis and discussion, the silence fell again as a heavy cloak over all of them. There was nothing to do, but wait.

Seven interminable hours later when Uma had all, but shed her last tear, the doctor emerged from the theater complex. The anxiety was writ large on the faces of those accompanying Uma.

"He has survived the surgery. He is now in the intensive care unit under observation. You can see him in the evening during visiting hours."

The tired smile on the face of the doctor was worth all the wealth in the world to the young wife and the mother of two.

New Neuro Paths

One week later Dr. Ravi Dadlani, walked into the neurosurgery ward and approached the bed of a 30 year old male patient who was looking out of the window in a reverie, having survived Glioblastoma Multiforme (GBM) – an aggressive form of brain tumour. Seeing the doctor he quickly came to attention and sat up on the bed.

"How are you feeling?" The staff nurse translated. "Much better, thank you," replied the patient. "Are you able to eat well? Can you move your arms and legs?" "I am able to walk, doctor." "Show me."

The patient swung his legs off the bed, laid them firmly on the smooth polished brown granite floor of the ward, and raised himself from the bed, the orderly moved forward, but the man motioned him away. Holding himself erect, he walked to the end of the cubicle, and returned to his bed. The doctor finished making his notes and smiled the terse smile behind which doctors

train themselves to hide their satisfaction. “Good, keep up the exercise and medicines, things will improve.”

The doctor moved away from the bed and told the staff nurse, “That’s what I would call a medical miracle. Within six minutes of being extubated (out of the life support systems) in the ICU, he started speaking! He was fully coherent and was even able to recognize his surroundings. I can tell you it is not normal, its is phenomenal.”

The wide eyes of the girl told him that she was new. “He had a score of ‘3’ when we admitted him and was almost gone - dead! But now, he is back to ‘15’.”

The eyes of the nurse flew to the patient as the import of the words sank in. She dropped her eyes to the file, to the label that identified the patient. “Indeed”, she thought, “He has really returned from the gates of death.”

The same afternoon, the couple was seated in conversation with the Physiotherapist Mr. Naveen and Mr. Y Arvind, Sr. Mgr. Public Relations, SSSIHMS, Whitefield. Mr. Naveen acted as the interpreter translating Tamil to English, and vice versa. Uma took on the role of the narrator, and Dorai supplemented with details, which was remarkable for a man who was in the throes of death less than six days ago.

An Urgent Need Delayed

They hailed from a village near Salem, a city in the north central part of Tamil Nadu, the southern state of India. Dorai was the youngest in his generation having three older brothers, and four older sisters. He was a native of Salem, and worked as a laborer in a power-loom shop. His wife, Uma has two siblings, one older and another younger sister. Her father had come to Bangalore city 35 years ago, and was a handloom craftsman. They lived in a small rented house near Wilson Garden. Having three daughters, he was unable to save up to build a house of his own.

All his problems started with headaches that progressively became more serious. They approached a Government hospital that performed a perfunctory scan for Rs.500, and dismissed the head ache as non-neurological in origin. They also suggested an EEG scan, and ‘ruled out’ the possibilities of any problems. The opinion of the doctors was that the headache was ophthalmic in origin. It is common knowledge that the first symptom of eye related problems is headache. This was about two years ago.

In the middle of January 2007, his condition worsened and he was admitted in Salem since he had vomiting, and was symptomatic. After he was stabilized, they approached an ophthalmologist. It was he who diagnosed the problem, as seated in the brain and advised them to approach a specialist.

A specialist meant more money, so they began saving up anticipating the bills. But the progress of the disease did not stop. After Deepavali, the festival

of lights that comes in the month of October, he started to have problems with the right eye. For a power-loom worker, identifying shades among colors, the thickness of the yarn, the waft and warp, are doors to imagination, but the eyes are the keys to these doors. Once his vision blurred, he could not function optimally. Apparently, he earned Rs.100 per sari. A sari on an average took 4 hours; so in effect, his monthly income was Rs. 4000.

They approached Saravana Hospital, Ponnampete, Salem town, where Dr. Thiruvachelluvar examined Mr. Dorai. He confirmed the final diagnosis as an advanced disease of the brain, and suggested that he be operated upon as soon as possible. Now, Dorai had a sister, whom he had earlier brought to SSSIHMS, Whitefield. He suggested the name, and the doctor immediately assented. Apparently Dorai was not aware of his ailment when he had brought his sister to SSSIHMS. They had no second thoughts after the doctor himself directed them to SSSIHMS, Whitefield.

They came 10 days after Deepavali in October 2007 for the first time, and received an appointment for February 4, 2008. This told Dorai and Uma that there were many more who were also suffering from the same problem and in worse conditions than theirs. They could only wait till their turn came. On February 4, they returned to SSSIHMS and the preliminaries of X-ray and blood tests were done. Dorai was told to come and collect the date of surgery after two days. The couple returned and he collapsed. The nightmare had begun.

He started vomiting, and was restless and inert alternately. The agitated relatives, Uma included, took him to St. Philomenas, the nearest hospital, at 3.00 a.m. By then he had stopped responding to all forms of stimulus, even deep pain. The diagnosis on arrival there was that he had gone into a coma, and the situation was very serious. To add insult to injury, they were also informed that it would cost Rs. 10,000 per day. They bit the bullet, and immediately brought him to the emergency ward of SSSIHMS in an ambulance at 6.00 a.m.

The rest was there for all to see. Dorai has recovered more than 90% of his faculties, and will have to undergo chemotherapy for six months, after which he will be regularly visiting the Hospital for check-ups. One near miss of the Scythe of the Grim Reaper is more than sufficient for one to view life through different colors. They had spent Rs.30,000 before coming to SSSIHMS, a very large sum in any sense. And the contrast of having the best possible facilities beyond what they had seen earlier brought to them a greater sense of gratitude.

“I am happy for the gift of my life” – Mr. Dorai

But Dorai did have a few words to say.

“I could have never been able to afford such an expensive surgery. I still have to undergo further treatment, and Baba’s Hospital has sponsored this 45-days extensive chemotherapy sessions in Manipal Hospital.

“I only have one request to make, there are many more like me. If the Hospital can attend to their problems immediately, it will be able to save much more lives. I understand that when free medical care is given, there will be many who will want it, the Hospital has its own constraints, but it is only a suggestion from a simple man...I feel so happy for the gift of my life.”

The Hospital, practically, cannot solve all the Neuro problems of the world, but surely, does show the way as to how it can be done. And just like the proverbial starfish thrown into the sea by a concerned onlooker, which made a difference to that particular little fish, the Hospital finds fulfillment in bringing hope and happiness in the lives of at least a few suffering souls.

“What will you do, now that you have been given a new lease of life?” asked Mr. Naveen, the physiotherapist.

“I am waiting for my vision to clear. The doctors tell me it will take a while. Once I get my vision back, I will return to my home town. I want to get back to work as soon as possible...Because of my illness and the resultant pathetic financial situation, the education of my two little ones – aged 5 and 6 – had to be discontinued. I want to put them back in school and start building my life again. I am so grateful.”

Life has many lessons to teach, but we must train our minds to willingly receive. Therein lay the wisdom of ancients. It was not said in vain, “history repeats itself because man does not learn from it”. More often than not, we are in situations that do not endear themselves to us. We have a choice to make, to like what we do or do what we like. When destiny presents an opportunity to make a difference, to improve the lives of others, to put a smile on a careworn face, let us grab it with both hands. Life is worth living if it gives meaning to others lives.

YOUR SAY

Feedback from our readers on the March issue

Feedback on the Cover Story: *The Enigma of Islam, Enlightened by Sai*

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the H2H Team:

Sai Ram!

Baba knows that even prior to the 9/11 Terrorist Attack I had a "real problem" with Islam. I adamantly refused to accept that Islam was a religion acceptable to God. After "9/11", my "problem" grew exponentially. I never trusted any Muslim, and I took a combative stance against the religion of Islam. This article has dramatically changed my perspective. Baba knew I needed this strong medicine, and He has administered it to me - generously. Thank you, Baba.

Now I must begin the challenging work of loving my Muslim Brothers and Sisters, and recognizing that religions are merely vehicles used by the Divine to awaken us to our own divinity.

Wilbert M. Stephenson
Brooklyn, New York
U.S.A.

Sai Ram everyone!

I just finished reading a part of the article on Islam in Heart to Heart and I absolutely loved it. Thank you for sharing so many teachings of Swami and the many experiences that devotees have had by His Grace.

Please give more information on the various aspects of Islam in future issues of the journal. Thank you so much for your hard work and sincere efforts in conveying Swami's teachings to millions of His devotees all over the world. May Bhagavan shower His blessings on all of you!

Sai Ram!

With regards and best wishes,
Jaidev.

Sairam,

Excellent coverage, kudos to the H2H team. Islam - the word itself signifies peace. A lot of misconceptions exist in the world today because of a lack of understanding and it was but essential that the Sai family worldwide gets the right perspective of Islam and who better to explain it than The One who gave the Holy Quran to the world - our beloved Lord Sai.

In our own little way - living in the Middle East amongst faithful practitioners of the most nascent faith - we have been inculcating Swami's teachings in all the activities that we do involving the local population - be it "Spreading the light through human values"; service activities - blood donation, platelet aphaeresis, grama seva, celebrating Eid / observing Ramadan with our Omani and other Muslim brethren.

In the service of Sai,

Dr. Narayan Ramachandran

Sai Ram,

I just want to say that I love this month's cover story on Islam and would love to see more articles on it whenever possible. Obviously, Baba wants us to love and respect all the faiths of the world and I think this article does a great job in helping that cause.

Sai Ram,

Krishan Jeyarajasingham

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

I really enjoyed your cover story on "The Enigma of Islam...Enlightened by Sai". I would love to read more details on all the Five Pillars of Islam and other concepts like "Jihad", etc. I have learned so much from this segment on Islam and really enjoyed the sound clips that accompanied this article. I would love to know more about this beautiful state of mind, Islam.

It is because of this longing that I was doubly delighted to read your cover story on Islam. I have always felt it was a peaceful religion and have always wanted to know the truth about it.

Thank you for all your precious offerings. I always look forward to it. And yes, I would love to know about all the other religions too. Have cover stories on all of them, enlightened by Sai.

Much love to you,

Piyali, USA

Hello,

I was reading the "Enigma of Islam" and it gave me a perspective I wasn't completely aware of. I am intrigued by the other pillars and topics like "jihad". Could you please do a cover story on it as well?

Thanks,
Srini

Many, many thanks for the stupendous Cover Story on Islam. I was blown away by it! Please could you continue the story and cover the important Five Pillars of Islam, and also Jihad. Thank you for putting this article together and we look forward to the rest of it.

Best regards and Sai Ram

Jean Dixon, Johannesburg, South Africa

[Sairam, we are working on a second cover story on Islam which we will have after a couple of months – H2H Team]

Dear Sai Brothers,

Many thanks for this beautifully inspiring cover story! I would have never thought that I would one day feel so close to and happily inspired by Islam. You should in any case go forward with such articles unifying history, theology, pictures, sound, and direct witnessing of Sai's incredible plays and work. Father Charles is undoubtedly extremely talented and inspired for such work.

Sai Ram

S. Jungk

Om Sai Ram, Dear H2H,

The article *Enigma of Islam* by Father Ogada is sublime. In this era of global religious conflict, the article should be a "must read" by everyone around the world. Please have more articles by Father Ogada in coming issues.

Sai Ram

Sheila Cheliah, Perth, Australia

Dear H2H,

The article on Islam was marvelous and self respectable. It shows how we can glorify the praise of a God without having boundaries on race or religion. It has given me a different perspective and insight of Allah which is very different from the opinion I had on Allah and Islam before attributing to the fact of terrorism and involvement of Islam.

Hope to learn more on Islam and hope Radio Sai will continue this Article on other religions, like Christianity and Buddhism as well.

Good luck.

Sumathi, Malaysia

Om Sairam!

Salutations at the Lotus Feet!

I had some glimpses of the article on Islam & Allah the Great!

The problem is we desire the easy way of attaining big things in life not realizing that we need to totally surrender to the Lord to reach that the Supreme state! That is where probably the Sadhana & the control on Self comes into picture.

Probably it is human nature that we do not attach much significance to many of the incidents unless we have a real life experience ourselves. The feeling in each one of us is : 'How I wish Baba materializes something for me!'

The true meaning of God or the Supreme Being and the meaning of the term 'Muslim' was very well explained which was not known to me. Such articles really help to understand the inner meaning/essence of each religion. A non- believer also starts looking from a different perspective.

Keep up the good work. Om Sairam!

Sridhar Subramanian, Mumbai.

Feedback on: *Prison Break!*

Sairam,

The article "Prison Break" was superb. It emphasised the Omnipresence of Bhagavan Baba and it shows that true devotion always wins His Grace. Please thank Mr. Peter Phipps, Bill and Arthur for sharing this story with us. I have read it several times, and shared the "Noodle Miracle" with my family.

Dear Sir,

The article on New Zealand prison inmates was excellent one. Thank you and please keep up the good work.

Yours in Sai Service,

Vijay

Feedback on: *Sai - The Ceo Of My Life*

The article "SAI - The CEO of My life" by Mr. N. T. Arun Kumar, was a feast. I felt every experience narrated by Mr. Arun Kumar. It was a beautiful article on Swami's Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence. My heart is filled with divine bliss while reading and after reading this article. Somehow, Swami's literature is the best of all. Thank you Heart 2 Heart and thanks to Mr. Arun Kumar for bringing out such a beautiful article.

Sairam,
Girija B.V.

Sai Ram,

A beautiful article indeed, flowing direct from the heart. No wonder that it has such a divinely meaningful effect on people like me. Such articles are a must to read periodically to help a person like me to tread on the right path. My most sincere thanks to the H2H Team. Sai Ram and warmest regards.

Premchander S. Raj, Warwick. NY., USA

Sai Ram,

Reading this story about Arun and the rest of the students made me cry in my heart. I know Swami is always with His devotees. You have to believe in Him, love Him always and give all your love 100 percent to Him...that is the only way to God.

Sai Ram.

Tara Krishna

Om Sai Ram,

I am so grateful to the team at Heart2Heart for sending Sai messages every morning. That email is usually the first one that I wish to read. And each time I realise how foolish some of us mortals are, can not understand the basics which Bhagavan explains so clearly and dearly.

This particular story has definitely inspired me. I have actually felt the Divine Power with me so many times in my career moves in the last many years, especially since 2006. I could really relate to Mr. Arun Kumar's story, though he is much more blessed by Baba, having experienced Him so closely.

God permitting, I too would like to come under His fold, when and whichever way He wishes.

Regards,

Nidhi

Feedback on: *Musings On Avatars*

Respected Sir, Sai Ram,

Your article is really interesting. Rolling on my PC while I go ahead of the lines below I surprisingly saw "to be continued." I completed the entire article in one breathless spell. While going through, I recall the days when Rama Katha Rasa Vahini was coming as a serial in Sanathana Sarathi through the pen of our All Merciful Lord. In addition to this, *The Enigma of Islam* is also a beautiful article which clears many doubts and part 2, 3, and 4 are yet to come!

Sai Ram,

Mr. R. R. Sar, District President,

Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization, Angul District, Orissa.

Sairam,

The 'Musings on Avatars' is fantastic. Already I'm eagerly waiting for the next chapter. I think we Indian's will also learn a great deal that we are ignorant about right now.

The quiz on Shivaraathri too was very interesting and informative; I enjoyed it a lot. Thank you for all the effort you have taken.

Thank you and loving Sairam

Saraswathy from Chennai

This topic is excellent. We have heard many times about the stories of Bhagavatam, but with Bhagawan's comments on each of the Avatars, this Bhagavatam has become a class apart.

Thanks for starting this serial.

Meera Bhatia

Feedback on: *All Encompassing Grace*

Sairam to all,

Excellent and lovely experience from Mrs. Kavita. While reading this article my eyes were wet with emotion - what an experience. She is lucky.

Sairam,

Vasantha

Feedback on: *Dynamic Youth Conference In Luton, Uk*

Sai Ram,

My name is Devesh Maharaj and I am attached to the Sai Centre of Port of Sapin Trinidad and Tobago. I have read the above article and have found it extremely interesting especially since we live in a multicultural and multi-ethnic society.

Mr. Devesh Maharaj

Feedback on: *Prashanti Diary*

Dear Sir,

Congratulations on producing this excellent newsletter. At least now I know exactly what events and functions are being held in the Ashram, a place I am constantly thinking about. I often wonder what Baba is doing and at least now, we know so much that it feels that we are part of all of these celebrations. Please pass my appreciation on to everyone who assists in putting this together. We wish you continued success.

Best regards,

Rani Chetty

Feedback on: *Signals Of Grace*

Dear H2H,

A small thought provoking story. Very crisp, but it conveyed a great truth - calamities can also become blessings in disguise. Such stories really give solace to the wounded hearts.

S. Jayaraman & Vathsala Jayaraman.

Sairam.

I am a regular browser of the Radio Sai website and I feel like writing to the team. In fact this is giving me a real comfort and solace for being away from Swami. Today's article of 'Signals of Grace' is well written and a factual truth reflecting a similar writing in our ancient epic of Srimathandra Bhagavatam namely Gajendra Moksham.

May many more roll out of your pen in the future.

With love,

Sreenivas.

Feedback on: *the Quiz on Swami's Divine Shivarathri Discourses*

Sai Ram,

It is like gold, the more we read and practice the quizzes, we will become closer to Swami. Swami made you guys to post this quiz for us to practice and learn more. Thank you Swami.

With Love,

Vasanthi Vijayakumar

Sai Ram,

The Shivaraathri quiz is an excellent, innovative and interactive design.

Thanks,

N. Balasubramanian

Feedback on: *Law Of The Garbage Truck*

Sairam,

Thanks for sharing such an inspiring article. We keep dumping our garbage quite often on others and get garbage dumped also on us. As beautifully explained by the taxi driver, the moment we realise that it is the other person's anger and suppressed frustrations that has become garbage ready to spill on you; not to take it personally, just keep smiling - we are helping him unload a bit of his load and by making him feel lighter. Inspiring thought - worth sharing with all who carry garbage loads.

Sairam,

Giridhar, Kingdom of Bahrain.

Sairam Dear Friends,

I loved the simple pictures on 'The Law of the Garbage Truck!' I still have to learn this lesson.. Sometimes I feel the steam of too much irritation or other dirt and get infiltrated with it...These are nice words to keep in mind and prevent any annoyance when the garbage passes by.

Thanks.

Rita from Amsterdam.

General Feedback

Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,

I am an American devotee (in the state of Massachusetts in the U.S.), and I have just recently subscribed to the daily word from Beloved Swami which you so thoughtfully have created. It has been a thrill for me to be able to connect with Baba through the Internet more frequently, even though I still am not able to log on every day. The daily thoughts are so inspiring, so timely, and so beautifully done.

I also very much appreciate the monthly newsletters and the way the daily message highlights specific articles with a link to the newsletter. This format really brings certain things to my attention, and I use the individual links to find what I want. I want to let you know that of the stories I have read in recent months, the ones I have most enjoyed have been the long articles on Sri Kasturi, Father Ogada, the whole December issue with the focus on Jesus and Christianity, and the most recent amazing article on Islam by Fr. Ogada. You asked if we would be interested in learning more about Islam, such as the 5 Pillars and the idea of jihad; Yes! I would also like to read about other faiths, including Judaism.

Although I have read and studied more than, perhaps, many Americans, dear Fr. Ogada illuminated some fascinating points in his usual eloquent way. Plus, the stories of the 3 Muslim devotees were particularly awe-inspiring. I never tire of hearing or reading about individual experiences of Sai.

Thank you again for the loving service you offer to those of us who are far away. Being part of this global community is, to me, the great gift of this modern technology I have been too slow to embrace!

Sai Ram,

Cara Gallucci

Sai Ram,

My humblest thanks for a wonderful magazine. I wait with great anticipation for the monthly magazine and when I do receive it, I read every single article and it brings me a lot of comfort and inspiration. And I know without the Grace of our Beloved Lord, this would not be possible. My heartfelt thanks goes out to the dedicated team that put together this beautiful magazine, well done and may Swami's Blessings be with you all always.

Jai Sai Ram from a servant of Sai.

Cookie Naidoo, South Africa