

HEART 2 HEART

VOL 6 ISSUE 10, OCTOBER 2008

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Every day India is making news internationally. No more a sleeping giant, the 'big elephant' is said to have stirred and is now moving at a pace that is shaking international commerce and trade, demography and technology, and now there is no stopping it. The USA calls India a strategic partner and recently went out of the way to lift a three-decade long nuclear trade isolation with her. This month, India's 'Chandrayan' is likely to soar into the skies for her first unmanned moon mission costing \$3.8 billion. Today, nearly a 100 of the Fortune 500 companies have their operations and offices in India, and every now and then one reads about an Indian multinational company gobbling up a foreign corporate giant

And why are everybody's eyes on India? It is the world's largest democracy; its GDP is likely to touch 1 \$ trillion by 2011; it will over take China with the highest working population in the world (700 million) in another 30 years; the high intelligence quotient of its people, (4 out of every 10 scientists in NASA, and 38% of doctors in the USA are of Indian origin); it's diverse and all-inclusive culture; its English-speaking youth; and so on. Much of the recent media hype about India's so-called progress indicates that India and Indians are shining. Correct? True! There are four Indians in the Forbes 10 super-rich and India has 53 billionaires – the highest in Asia.

But what is also true is that 35 out of every 100 citizens in India earn Rs. 10 (less than one-fourth of a dollar) a day! And almost 77% of Indians earn just about half a dollar a day. Similarly, 4 out of every 10 people in India do not know how to read or write. The scene is especially pathetic when we look at the health scenario. Even as multi-specialty hospitals are mushrooming in metros and upcoming big cities, and medical tourism (with a promise of 50-100 billion rupees of additional revenue) is increasingly been seen as the way to go by the Government. What is often conveniently and callously overlooked in the process is how can more than 70% of India which does not earn even Rs. 20 a day afford to consult a doctor, let alone undergo any procedure/operation, when the fees for one visit might equal a person's entire month's salary.

A news report in The Guardian on September 29, 2008 says that a new four-in-one drug which could halve deaths from heart attacks and strokes, could not go into clinical trails until now, though it was ready 6-8 years ago. The startling reason behind it is that the drugs it contains are very cheap! It could be marketed for as little as \$1 month, and therefore, no pharmaceutical company was interested. No corporate body spared a thought on the immense benefits it could do for the poor in the under-developed and developing countries. Read our feature "The Pull of Mammon Vs. the Power of Morality" and you will get an inkling of what goes on inside the corporate corridors of pharmaceutical companies and where lies the remedy.

In India, even now 70 of every 1000 children born in the rural areas do not live to see a single day. And 30 per cent of all infants weigh less than 2.5 kilograms, which is the World Health Organization's cut-off level to determine

low birth weight with a lower chance of survival. In the state of Andhra Pradesh today, there are only 13 doctors and 9 beds for every 1,00,000 villagers. A farmer has to travel a minimum of 10 kilometres to spot a government hospital. There are Primary Health Centers (PHCs) at more accessible distances, but the less said about them, the better. The doctors’ visit to these clinics are as unpredictable as rains in the summer, and even when they come, there are either no medicines or no supporting infrastructure.

To further compound this problem, is the poor level of health awareness among the villagers, thanks to years of harmful superstitious beliefs and practices. If this is the situation in rural Andhra Pradesh even now, after 60 years of India’s self-governance, imagine the situation 50 years ago in Puttaparthi, then an obscure hamlet in one of the most arid and dreary districts of this State. No wonder providing proper healthcare to the poorest of the poor was Bhagavan Baba’s very first welfare project.

As early as in November 1954, Swami laid the foundation stone for the first free Hospital – the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital in Puttaparthi. On that occasion He said, “Be it rich or poor, educated or illiterate, pious or immoral, all are subject to disease, and therefore, everyone should be treated with love and affection. And to set an example *Madhava* (God) Himself does *manava-seva* (service to fellowmen), so that man too can do likewise and thereby earn the Grace of God.” “Service” and “Grace” – these two words actually sum up the story of this unique General Hospital, as you will realise when you read our cover story **“Where Love Greets You and Grace Cures...”**

If love can heal and grace can cure, then why go to the hospitals? This is exactly how people questioned even then, and Swami answered this in a beautiful discourse on the fourth Annual Day of this Hospital, saying, “Some of you ask why should there be a hospital at all, here! Why should Baba not cure diseases by His Will? Well, for one thing, this Hospital is not My only hospital... In fact, all hospitals everywhere are Mine...all who call out for succor, in whatever language or clime, from hospitals or homes, are Mine...Do not confine Me to these few acres around Prasanthi Nilayam....You should remember another aspect. The hospital serves to increase faith, to demonstrate Divinity and to remove doubt....Besides, there are many who are hungry for medical treatment and they are satisfied only if drugs are given and injections administered. Their faith in Grace is not yet strong. So, a hospital is required...”

Therefore, the mission of the Hospital is myriad and profound. Yes, treating the poor patients of their maladies is one of the main goals of the Hospital, but not the primary objective. It is true that currently more than 1,50,000 patients walk into the Out Patient departments of this Hospital every year and out of this about 60% are women; similarly, nearly 2500 babies are delivered annually, which averages out to 6 to 7 births per day; but more than healing their ailments and ensuring their good physical health, what the Hospital has done to the emotional and spiritual make-up of their beings is what is more significant.

Read the story of Shiekh Jainabi, a poor Muslim lady, who has been coming to this Hospital for decades for ailments, big and small, for her own and her entire family. She says, “What draws us here is the concern and care shown by these doctors...they not only treat us...they also teach us to love God and have faith; for me, there is no difference between Sai and Allah...I cannot do a thing without uttering His name.” Or, the tale of another very poor elderly lady Lakshmi, a widow deserted by her children, who breaks down when asked about her feelings about the Hospital and says, “But for this Hospital, I would have died 30 years ago...as long as this Hospital is there, I am not concerned about my health...I pray to Swami, I have faith, I live because of the energy He gives me...”

Or, the story of **Vishnu Sharma**, another unfortunate one, who came to the Hospital from the state of Madhya Pradesh with borrowed money and said to the doctor, “Sir, I want to die....I cannot eat, speak, walk, work...” and after two days was smiling with joy and saying, “I do not know what the doctor has done...all I know is that this doctor has given me Love which nobody elsewhere has given me even when I went broke paying the hospital bills...Now, I have faith in God, in Baba.” The cover story of this issue, which is in two parts, contains many such touching stories and every account invariably ends with ‘faith’ and ‘love’.

In fact, in this issue, we have a bumper of such stories as the Healing Touch section too has two accounts, instead of the usual one, of patients whose lives have been transformed after stepping into the portals of the Super Specialty Hospitals in Puttaparthi and Whitefield, Bangalore. While Bhagavan Baba is not only the sole inspiration, but also in the truest sense, the Sole Doer of these Medical Marvels of Healing, what is fascinating and really intriguing is the way this happens.

Ask any doctor in the General Hospital, “How does it feel working here?” And he or she will say, “It is very fulfilling working here...we are a big family...it feels like a home, we have all come here for loving service and we know we are only instruments, Swami is the real Doctor.” Imagine, if every doctor and nurse, volunteer and helper feels this way and offers his/her service? That is the reason why everyone feels that the General Hospital is not a Hospital, but a ‘House of God’. It is this very special ambience which makes this Hospital so special, not only the fact that it is serving thousands of patients everyday absolutely free of charge.

Now, can we have more such Hospitals which India needs so desperately? Is the model replicable? Well, Swami has said it is. Since He is not limited to the five feet four inches physical frame that we behold and enjoy, but is all-pervasive, it is definitely possible. But what is needed is faith in God and the passion to serve. Clearly, it is not a utopian idea. Twenty years ago, one would have said that running a completely free Super Specialty Hospital was an impossible idea. So, we have to begin by believing in ourselves and trusting God, and then take our first step. We need to think less about ourselves than think less of ourselves. We need to ensure that we become a

conduit through which His energy and His love flows; nothing then is impossible.

Let us pledge to touch others' lives as much as He has touched our lives!

Loving Regards
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The True Spirit of Dasara

The celebration of Dasara in the Divine Presence of Bhagavan Baba every year is unique as it is accompanied by a week-long sacred yagna (sacrifice). Even more significant is the fact Bhagavan often speaks on many occasions during this celebration revealing many salient spiritual truths. One such discourse was delivered on October 6, 1992, on the last day of the celebration, called Vijaya Dasami Day. Here is an extract from that profound message. Let us recapitulate these words of Bhagavan as we rejoice in the Dasara celebrations of this year which starts from the 3rd of this month.

All things in the cosmos are limbs of the body of Vishnu (God). Hence, no one should have any aversion to anything in the universe. You should not hate anyone, because the same Divine is present in you and in everything in the universe.

The cosmos has three forms: the gross, the subtle and the causal. The physical universe represents the gross form. The subtle form is the mind, and subtler than the mind is the *Atma*.

The Five Kosas or Inner Coverings of Man

A human being has five sheaths. These five sheaths have been grouped into three. The gross sheath is the *Annamaya Kosa* (the food sheath). The three *Kosas*, *Praanamaya* (vital breath), *Manomaya* (the mental sheath) and the *Vijnanamaya* (the intellectual sheath) together constitute the subtle sheath. The causal sheath is the *Anandamaya Kosa* (the Bliss sheath). Even the last sheath does not represent total bliss, because there is a higher entity above the *Anandamaya Kosa*. This is known as *Mahakaarana* or supracausal entity. This is the *atmic* principle.

Every human being has these *Tripuras* (three cities). The three *puras* (cities) are the body, the mind and the heart. Because every individual has these three, he/she is called *Tripurasundari* (endowed with the beauty of the three worlds). Since the *Prakruthi* (Nature) element, which is feminine in nature, is present in greater measure in the body, it is termed as *Sundari* (a beautiful lady).

The Spiritual Truth of Dasara Festival

During the Navarathri (also called as Dasara) festival, Tripurasundari (Goddess) is worshipped. Unfortunately, from ancient times people have been observing only the external forms of worship without understanding the inner significance of these festivals. The entire cosmos is a temple; the Lord pervades the cosmos.

Prakruthi (Nature) teaches the spiritual truth about Navarathri. The Lord has to be realised through *sadhana* (spiritual practice). *Sadhana* does not mean adoring God in a particular place or form. It means thinking of God in all that you do wherever you may be. One may ask if this is possible. And the answer is that it is possible by dedicating every action to God.

During the Navarathri festival, there is a form of worship called *Angaarpana Puja*. In this form of worship, all the limbs of the body are offered to the Divine in a spirit of surrender (*Sharanaagathi*). Surrender means offering everything to the Divine and giving up the idea of separation between oneself and the Divine. There can be no true surrender if there is a sense of separation. There must be the conviction that it is the same Divine who dwells in all beings - *Eko Vasee Sarvabhutha-antharaathma*.

The True Meaning of *Angaarpana Puja*

In the performance of *Angaarpana Puja*, there is a form of self-deception. When a devotee says, "*Nethram Samarpayaaami*" (I offer my eyes to the Lord) and offers only a flower to the Lord, he is indulging in a kind of deception. The proper way would be to say that he is offering a flower.

Actually, *manthras* (verses) like "*Nethram Samarpayaaami*" are intended to indicate that one is using his eyes only to see God. The real significance of the *Manthra* is that you think of the divine in whatever you see or do. Therefore, the true meaning of the *Angaarpana Puja* is to declare that you offer all your limbs in the service of the Lord. This means that whatever work you do should be done as an offering to God. Nowadays, selfishness is rampant among devotees and they love God not for God's sake, but only to get their selfish desires fulfilled. As long as selfishness prevails, the Divine cannot be understood.

The Navarathri festival should be used as an occasion to examine one's own nature, whether it is human, animal or demonic, and strive to transform the animal nature to the human, and divinize the human nature. Wisdom cannot be acquired from outside. It has to be won through inward *Sadhana*.

- *Divine Discourse on Vijaya Dasami day, October 6, 1992*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - Part 9: Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear reader, in response to positive feedback to this section where we have a dialogue with the Divine, we continue with Prof. Anil Kumar's "Satyopanishad" after completing the serial Dr. John Hislop's "Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba" in January 2008.

This also 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 the third chapter: Youth.

Chapter 3 - Youth

(Continued from the previous issue)

Anil Kumar: Swami! Everywhere we hear people speaking of 'brain drain'. Statistics indicate that every year the number of educated people going abroad is increasing. Is this good?

Bhagawan: This is not good. It is not proper on the part of the young people to leave this country and settle in foreign countries. Here, in Bharat (India), according to tradition, you have five mothers almost equally venerable. These five are the most revered and ranked along with one's own mother. Who are those five mothers? The first and foremost, of course; is the *dehamata*, the physical mother. It is this mother who has given you birth, struggled hard serving you and sacrificed everything for your comfort and upbringing. So, she has to be revered. The second is *gomata*, the cow. It is the cow that gives you milk and helps to nurture and strengthen your body. You have to be grateful to the cow. The third is *bhumata*, Mother Earth. It is on the earth that we live. We cultivate the land and grow grains. All the metal ores we extract and use are treasured in the Earth. The fourth is *Vedamata*, Mother Scripture. It is the Vedas that teach you the aim and the goal of life while showing you the spiritual path as well. We should be grateful to Mother Scripture, as we should be to our mothers. The fifth is *desamata*, Motherland. Your culture, tradition, and rich heritage are all embodied in this land where you are born. You have to treat your *desa*, country, as your mother. So it is called *desamata*, Motherland.

For the simple reason that a woman you meet happens to be more beautiful than your mother, you will not call her 'amma', mother. This message is conveyed in the Ramayana. At the end of the war, after Ravana had died,

Lakshmana said to Rama: "O Brother! This Lanka is prosperous and exceedingly beautiful. Our enemies have all died, and we have every right to rule this land. O Lord! Why don't you become its king? Bharata has been already been there for fourteen years as the king of Ayodhya. We can as well ask him to continue his reign there, and we stay here and rule this kingdom." Then Rama replied, "O Lakshmana! Your motherland is greater than heaven itself. Your mother may be ugly and another woman you have seen may be beautiful. Yet, you don't address the beautiful woman as 'amma'."

Whatever may be the country you belong to, it is your Motherland. Everyone must be patriotic. Everyone must love his or her own country. You should serve your country.

Anil Kumar: Swami! What are your comments on brain drain? Many highly educated professionals like engineers, doctors, computer experts plan to go abroad and settle there for better and higher prospects of income and placement in life. This is the cause for worry in many circles, both government and private. What do you feel about this?

Bhagawan: It is most unfortunate that this trend is on the rise. This is not good at any point of time anywhere in the world. You are born in this society. So you grow up, educate yourself, make money, name and fame in this society. Only through this society can you get your clothing, food and shelter: Have you come up on your own without the society you live in? Could you make a career for yourself without its support? Should you not express your sense of gratitude to it for all it has done for you?

Man should never be an ungrateful creature. The best way to be grateful is to serve. You know, our people put in greater effort, and work more sincerely abroad. While they are here, they don't show the same spirit and zeal in their work. They are not as sincere and industrious here as they are in foreign countries. In fact, the emoluments they get here by doing their best will be the same as they get abroad, a fact they fail to realise. To some extent, parents also are responsible for this problem of brain drain. They don't properly inculcate in children the values of work, patriotism, sacrifice, love and gratitude.

So, it is your fundamental duty to serve the society in which you are born and brought up. You see many a foreigner coming here. They learn lots of things from this sacred land of your birth, whereas our people forget what they know. Some of our people are even inferior to locals and natives of foreign countries in respect of observing traditions. What for is our education? Is it for the decline of human values? *Janani janmabhumi s'ca svargadapi gariyasi*. Rama observed 'Mother and motherland are greater than Heaven.'

Anil Kumar: Swami! Modern youth, in the name of the generation gap, are not prepared to pay heed to their elders. Advise and give us Your message.

Bhagawan: This is meaningless. What are the changes you notice in the name of the generation gap? The sun rises only in the east and never in the

west. There is no change in the laws of nature. Don't you feed the same stomach every day? Don't you wash the same face every day? Don't you clean the same utensils every day? Don't you wear the same clothes? So, all important things need to be done time and again. In the name of the generation gap you should not neglect doing things that need to be repeated.

You shouldn't turn a deaf ear to the advice of your elders branding them as senile, old hags. No. They are persons with rich experience. They are your well wishers. You must listen to them, obey and follow their instructions. The modern generation is not prepared to listen to the elders. It is foolishness and utter ignorance to brush aside all that the elders say. It amounts to pride and egotism. You will ultimately ruin yourself if you don't follow the valuable advice of elders.

Anil Kumar: Swami! We have on one side our parents pulling us towards the world and on the other, the divine teachings we have been fortunate enough to receive from You. We wonder which of the two will dominate and influence us?

Bhagawan: If the ideas of your parents are against God, you should choose God and definitely not your parents. You must clearly explain and appeal to them, and then convince them of the value and importance of the spiritual path. Among the Bal Vikas children, there are a large number who have brought about a change in their parents. There are many who have been influenced and transformed by the children of the Sri Sathya Sai Primary School, Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School and the students of the Sri Sathya Sai University. There should be a change in the family of the children first, then in the society.

In fact, you are not from your parents, but you are through your parents. Truly, you are from God. If you are convinced of this, your words and actions would be godly. Take a simple example. You fill a container with sweet milk pudding, *payasam*. If the container has holes, you will expect the same sweet pudding to come out of these holes. Will you not? Similarly, when you know that you are from God, your words, thoughts and actions will be divine.

Anil Kumar: Swami! We are progressing in Science and Technology. At the same time, our modern youth are not able to face life's problems courageously. They are depressed by the slightest problem. They are not able to bear any suffering with patience, and easily take to drink and drugs. What is Swami's message to our youth?

Bhagawan: Today, many young men and women go to Colleges and Universities for studies. There are many specialisations in every branch of knowledge. This is, on the whole, good. But the pity of it is that we find innate, vital human qualities deteriorating fast and disappearing altogether.

Education is not for living, but it is for life.

Education is not for transmitting information, but it is for transformation.

Education is for elevating the human personality to the mansion of God.

***Education should not be instrumental in earning annas, money
but in earning gunas, values.***

Education is not for jitam, salary, but it is for jivitam, life.

Without values even if one is highly educated, what is the use? Is there progress without values? Will Science and Technology help you, if you have no values? It is for this reason, that is, the absence of values, that modern youth take to drugs and alcohol.

The youth are not *vira*, courageous, but *bhira*, timid. They should be masters, instead they are slaves. They should know "Life is a challenge. Meet it". They have to encounter and overcome all the problems and difficulties in life rather than choose to run away from them and feel frustrated. Since life is a challenge, you should meet it. Life is full of keen competition in all fields - scientific, technological, physical, ethical, political and spiritual. They should fully equip themselves with the right weapons and be ever ready to face the challenges of life.

A similar thing happened during the Mahabharata war. Arjuna wanted to run away from the battlefield being totally disheartened like a coward. At that time, Lord Krishna instilled in him the needed courage and morale by teaching him the Bhagavad Gita, the Song Celestial. This acted like calcium and glucose injections that gave strength of mind and body to Arjuna.

Life is a sports ground, life is a game, play it. You have to play with sportsmanship and accept victory or defeat, gain or loss, with equanimity. In this world, people may not have everything they want, but there is none without love. So, life is love, share it. God is love, love is God; hence, live in love. Your heart is full of love, but with how many are you sharing this precious gift? Question yourself. Love begets love.

Today this is not happening. This is the main reason for all conflicts, misunderstandings, and differences. Do your duty with all your skill and to the best of your ability. Don't be lazy, building castles in the air. You work such that your dreams come true, "Life is a dream. Realise it!" Nowadays, you plan in a funny way, so very far from reality. Is it life? No.

Yogah karmasu kausalam - 'Do your duty sincerely praying to God'. Then, your work will be transformed into worship. Your *karma*, action, will turn into *yoga*, spiritual communion. Then, duty and work will become a spiritual discipline on the path of *karma yoga*. Don't merely dream; don't spend time in meaningless fancies. Know that life is duty.

Anil Kumar: Swami! You seem to be very much upset and annoyed when anything goes wrong in respect of discipline, educational standards and personality development in general. Swami! You come down heavily upon students when you see their slackness in coming up to Your expectations and

openly reprimand the guilty in public. It is terrifying to be a witness to this sort of a thing. I get fear stricken when I think of You, Swami, in that mood. How are we to reconcile ourselves to such a situation and take it positively?

Bhagawan: First of all, you should know that Swami is completely selfless. You should also note very clearly that Swami is never angry with anyone: "God is Love, Love is God". I pretend to be angry and unhappy with you only to correct you. Even that apparent anger vanishes very soon like a shower of hail. You cannot call anyone a guru if he accepts and endorses all that you do and say. He is a guru in the true sense of the term if he corrects you and turns you in the right direction as your well wisher.

Suppose this is a workshop. All damaged and spoiled vehicles come here for repair. I must, if I am a mechanic, tighten bolts, nuts, screws, etc. Similarly, I should correct your mistakes, make you free from your faults, see that you are rid of your weaknesses and defects, and finally mould you into ideal citizens of this country. Your mistake must be corrected immediately then and there itself, as and when it is committed. I should be harsh enough to correct you. You bend iron when it is hot, don't you? But, when it is not hot, no man with all the strength of his muscles will be able to bend it. So, you should be corrected and admonished when you go wrong immediately. If your mistakes are pointed out in public, you don't repeat them.

Take a small example here. Suppose, wearing a *lungi* (a South Indian informal dress, a long robe wrapped round the waist, down to the feet), you are sweeping your room with a broom. Suddenly your friend comes to see you. What do you do? You will put the broom aside, change your dress and make yourself presentable to your friend. Why do you do that? After all; you are cleaning your room. Nothing wrong about it! You don't want to be seen in your informal dress. You want to be dressed neatly before you meet him. You care for him. Don't you? So also here, when I point out your mistakes in public, you will be able to correct them forthwith and you will also be careful enough in future not to repeat such mistakes, won't you?

In fact, I don't lose anything if you are spoiled. I don't gain anything if you are good. I don't expect anything from you. I want you to be good and get a good name to your parents, your institution, and your country. This is not for Me, but for your ultimate good.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

Righteousness Rules

Prahlada was not only a devotee of Lord Narayana but also a very righteous king. He was also the most bountiful of kings. He would never say 'no' to anyone who approached him for a favour, gift or help.

Once Lord Indra intended to test Prahlada and so came to him in the guise of a Brahmin. Prahlada offered his respects to him and asked, "What do you seek of me? How can I make you happy? The Brahmin replied, "Oh king! I want you to gift me your *sheela* (character).

Prahlada said, "So be it. Your wish is fulfilled. I am gifting away my *sheela* to you." The Brahmin left the court. No sooner did the Brahmin leave, than a charming young man was seen walking away from the royal court.

Prahlada questioned him: "Sir! Who are you?" The young man replied, "I am fame. I cannot stay with you any longer since character has left you." Prahlada permitted him to leave.

A few seconds later, yet another handsome person was seen walking away from the court. Prahlada asked, "May I know who you are?" He replied, "I am valor. How can I be with you without character and fame? Therefore, I am leaving." Prahlada permitted him to leave.

Soon, a charming lady was leaving the court in hurried steps. Prahlada asked her: "Mother, may I know who you are?" "I am Rajalakshmi, the presiding deity of this kingdom." She replied and added, "I can't live here without character, fame and valor."

Next another lady was seen moving away with tears in her eyes. Prahlada ran towards her and asked, "Mother, who are you?" She said, "Son! I am *Dharma Devatha* (righteousness). I don't have a place where there is no character, fame and valor. Even Rajalakshmi has left you."

Prahlada fell at her feet and said, "Mother, I can live without character, fame, valor and Rajyalakshmi, but I cannot live without you. How can I send you anywhere? It is the duty of the king to protect righteousness; that alone is the basis of the entire world. Please stay with me. Do not forsake me!"

The *Dharma Devatha* agreed to stay. And when this happened, all the others too returned to the court and said, "We cannot exist without *Dharma Devatha*. Let us please be with you."

Lord Indra tested Prahlada only to illustrate to the world the greatness of Prahlada, who practiced the principles of righteousness steadfastly.

- Baba

COVER STORY:

WHERE LOVE GREETES YOU AND GRACE CURES...

The Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam

Part-1

It is a Monday morning in the month of September 2008. And we are in front of this stately edifice which is as elegant as it is sublime; the alternating hues of light pink, sky-blue and mellow yellow that adorn its façade, attract us. The straight two-storied structure stretches to about 400 feet, and all along the front is a tiny garden culminating with an exquisite open enclosure on the left, which houses beautiful statues – the most impressive one is of Shirdi Sai Baba, but not in the often-seen sitting posture, with one leg crossed over the other; here Baba is standing benignly on a high rock. This freezes our eyes for a few minutes with its beauty and serenity.... We turn to our left and the big white letters on the deep blue board read “Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam.” We are happy. This is where we wanted to be. This was our mission for the day. This is the historic institution about which we had heard much, but now we were going to experience it for ourselves.

Patients are Needy but their Hearts are Full of Faith

We look around and see people of all kinds – an old man with thick glasses, walking, holding on to his tottering stick; a young lady in *burkha*, with a puny baby sleeping in her arms; a middle-aged man with a towel on his shoulder, ambling slowly, his face wrinkled and body tanned resembling the bark of a teakwood tree; a young boy, skinny but with a twinkle in his eye holding on to his father’s arm...there is a sense of eager expectation in each one of them; they all need help. If there is anything common to all of them, it is their poverty, which is obvious in their attire and etiquette. We see each of them walk towards one of the main doors of the Hospital; as they near the entrance, their vigour only increases. They are needy, sure, but there is now a sense of concealed happiness too, as they reach the glass door.

Two men in whites with blue scarves on (the sevadals) greet each one of them untiringly and with love, saying “Sai Ram” with both their hands folded. Each one shows his or her registration papers and the volunteers direct them to the right department. As this motley crowd enters one by one, we too join the queue. We do not have any papers, but in our hands are a digital still camera, a video camera and notebooks. “We are from Radio Sai...” we explain. A bright smile lights up their faces and they exuberantly say, “Oh, Sairam! Please go.”

Thousands Come Everyday Beseeking for Help

“So far, so good,” we say to ourselves, and walk in. What we see next is a busy scene. The whole area is divided into cubicles and every doctor is

engrossed with their patient. "Tell me, from when have you been suffering from this...", "Do not worry, take these medicines, and do not be sad; pray to God, He will help,", "You must eat well...do you take milk?... take these tablets and come again after a week...here, keep this Vibhuti too...have faith in God, all will be fine.." Every doctor is so busy and so focused with their patients that we do not feel it right to disturb any of them.

We spot a nurse passing by. "Is it this busy everyday?" we ask. "Yes, this is the Outpatient Department. We have more than a thousand patients everyday, but Monday is the busiest..." We then introduce ourselves to win her confidence and time, so as to get a few more of our questions answered. But just then, she is called away... we quickly ask, "Where can we see the Medical Superintendent?" "Go upstairs..." she points to the staircase as she dashes off.

Bhagavan's Energy is a Palpable Presence, says Dr. Verma, Medical Superintendent

We see the steps right in front of our eyes, and the next moment we are in the chamber of ex-Air Vice Marshal Dr. Verma. We are completely at ease with the inviting smiles and gentle demeanour of the chief of the Hospital. "We want to do a story on the Hospital for "Heart2Heart", Radio Sai's e-journal..." we explain, we explain, and request him to spare five minutes for us.

"Sure, no problem. Ask what you want," he says, with a smile.

"Sir, you have served many years in the defense forces. How does it feel working here, in this Hospital?"

"Oh, serving in the Army and Air Force was an interesting experience...I retired as the Principal Medical Officer of the largest command of the Air Force, but...that was a different experience. Working here is unique, incomparable. I was blessed with the privilege to offer my services here only a couple of months ago, but I was pining for it the last four years...I must tell you, there is no institution I have seen where such colossal and extensive care is offered with such love and affection, with absolutely no cost to the patient...When I was working outside, we used to have many cases of snakebite, but in this Hospital more than 500 cases of snakebite are treated every year, and quite amazingly every patient is cured...we have never lost a patient...there is a subtle healing force that pervades this entire ambience. It is Bhagavan's energy that is infused in all of us here...we can feel it, but cannot see it...I can feel it, cannot express it... When you go round the Hospital, you will see it for yourself..."

We ask a few more questions before we take leave, but this last comment reverberates in our minds. As we walk out of his room pondering over his statement, we smile, and we see our smiles reciprocated, quite unexpectedly. Two old men, attired in Hospital costume, walking out of the male ward, seem so happy. We are naturally curious. "May we know what gives you so much happiness?... Where do you come from?... When did you come here?"

'I have always returned healthy from this place' – Mr. Sigijarla Narayanappa, a patient

"My name is Sigijarla Narayanappa," says one of them eagerly. He must have been through at least sixty summers we decide, looking at his worn-down and tanned, but still active physical frame. "I come from Vengalamma Cheruvu," he continues, which is a village about 10 kms from Puttaparthi. "I am a daily wage worker earning Rs. 100 (just about US \$ 2) a day, but for the last four months I have not been able to work. I have this huge bulge on my back...I do not know how it happened. Maybe when I was carrying a load of sticks a few days ago on my head, one of them caused a wound. I came here couple of days ago and the doctors checked me thoroughly and told me to come again for an operation. And now I am admitted for the surgery...I never go to any other hospital whatever be the problem... A year ago a bullock cart ran into me, and before that I had an accident with an auto rickshaw...every time I came here..."

"I am so happy to be here, in spite of my problems, because this is Swami's Hospital and the doctors and sisters take care of me so well. Moreover, I do not have to spend any money...I find it difficult to maintain my family with my meager earnings, fortunately my son is supporting me now, but even if I had money, I would not go anywhere. Why should I? People from everywhere come here. Here they treat me so well, I have always returned healthy from this place. This is Swami's Hospital..."

'Sairam is our God' - Mr. Narasimha, a patient

Even before Narayanappa finishes, the other old man spontaneously starts, eager to share his story of joy. "I am Narasimha. I am from the village Talarla. It is 20 kms from here. About a month ago, I had a scorpion bite and the pain was unbearable. But the doctors and nurses here took good care of me with injections and tablets and I was alright in no time. Now, I have body pain and my wife has chest pain...but we are not worried because we know the doctors here will take good care of us." He pauses and then says forcefully, "No government has done what this Hospital has done for us. Everywhere else, they first ask for money, and even after we spare our precious savings, they do not treat us with kindness...we are poor farmers...only 'Sairam' is our God." Narasimha's palms are now folded prayerfully and his head is bent in reverence. We battle with our eyes to stop them getting moist and walk out of the ward thanking both the seniors profusely.

Every Day is a Challenge... and a Joy

Just then we meet a young doctor, Dr. Uma. We later learnt that she is a former student of the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, who has been serving in the Hospital right after her graduation in medicine in 2000.

We share with Dr. Uma our experience of the day and she says, “Cases like these are plenty. Every other day we deal with poor villagers who work in fields and gardens and are bitten by snakes. Now, with our experience, we can guess the type of snake from the symptoms of the patient. Do you want to speak to such a patient?”

“Yes, sure...by all means.”

“Ok, there is one lady in the ward who recovered dramatically from a life-threatening condition. I am going there to see her. You can come with me.”

As we enter the ward, we see a fragile, petite and evidently underprivileged woman being helped by a nurse to be seated on the bed and have her food. We decide to wait. In the meanwhile, Dr. Uma picks up the lady’s health papers and narrates, “Her name is Narayanamma. She came here on September 4 at 9 a.m. Her condition was pathetic, to say the least. She was bitten by a snake at 4.30 a.m. and when she came she had ptosis, which is drooping of both the eye-lids. From the symptoms, we guessed that the snake must have been a crate. This particular snake causes neuro-toxicity, in other words poisoning of the nerves. Therefore, she was unable to walk, or see, or speak, or swallow - so eating was out of question. Worse, she was having great difficulty in breathing.

“We immediately administered anti-venom drugs, and watched her vitals. But unfortunately, her condition was only progressively deteriorating. She was heading towards a complete neurological paralysis; her muscles in the chest were getting weaker, and her respiration could stop anytime! The oxygen saturation for a normal human being is 96%, but for her it had dropped to 30%! She was clearly in danger, so we intubated her, meaning we inserted a tube into her trachea and breathed for her. After a while, her oxygen levels were restored and then we sent her to the Super Specialty Hospital, so that she could be put on a ventilator (artificial respiratory system). She stayed there for four days and now she is fine.”

‘Sairam Hospital’ has saved me, this is God’s place’ – Mrs. Narayanamma, patient

We now turn to Narayanamma. “How do you feel now?” we ask. “Swami saved me; otherwise I would have been dead. These doctors took such good care of me. I do not remember much of what happened that fateful morning...our house is nearly 40 kms from here. I come from a village which is seven kms from Chinna Kothapalli. We live in a hut...Even though there are other local hospitals, all my family members brought me straight here because everyone said we will be looked after well here. And really, the doctors and sisters have taken care of me with so much love. Anywhere else, they would charge Rs. 200 to administer an injection, here we did not spend even a single rupee...and they talk to us so nicely. If this Hospital was not there, where would I have gone? We have no money to pay for huge medical bills...I would not have been alive today. ‘Sairam Hospital’ has saved me, this is God’s place...”

‘Without Swami, we would not be living in this world’ - Mrs. Kumari, a patient

At this moment, another lady, on the bed next to Narayanamma’s, bursts out, “Without ‘Sairam’, we would not exist. Even I was bitten by a snake... I am Kumari and I come from a nearby village, Muddigabba. I could not see the snake; I was filled with terrible pain. After we came here, the sisters and doctors here have taken so much care...for me, Swami is God and all these people are God’s people...in this Hospital, nobody ever talks about money, everyone is only concerned about health and recovery; they provided everything I needed from medicines to food. And now, they are willing to leave me at my home too. Without Swami, we would not be living in this world...He alone has saved me.” The devotion and reverence for Bhagavan on her face is heart-rending.

It was a touching experience. We slowly walk out of the ward and Dr. Uma rushes off downstairs to attend to somebody else. And as we slowly amble along the pinkish corridor, we ponder, “How vital is this Hospital for all these villagers around – from near and far...How much it has helped these unfortunate ones!...” Our legs have become heavy; our minds want to go deep...reflect...so we sit down on the black chairs placed outside the ward and look at blank space.

And suddenly... we see a familiar face – the father of a Sai youth who used to help us in the Radio Sai studio a year or two ago. We exchange smiles. We have met him before...and fortunately for us, we now learn that he has been helping the Hospital by serving as an interpreter to many doctors who are not fully conversant in the local language, Telugu. He is surprised to see us there. We tell him the whole story till then. “What this Hospital has done to the rural folks around is immeasurable...” we remark and then he cuts in. “It is not precious only to the villagers around – that was more than a decade ago,” he clarifies and continues, “Now, there are patients coming from all over India. And at any point of time, you will find more patients from that state of India which is undertaking sevadal duty in the Prasanthi Nilayam ashram at that time. These poor and illiterate patients need escorts, and the devotees who come as sevadals help them get here. Why don’t you speak to Dr. Patel? He interacts with many patients everyday in the Mens’ Out Patient Department. He has come here after working for many years in the UK; he will have loads of stories for you.”

“Oh, this is a good clue. We will do that right now. Will he be there now? It is 1 p.m.”

“Hmm...it is lunch time. Why don’t you come at 2 p.m. He will surely be there at that time. By the way, what about your lunch?” he asks.

“Oh yes...we almost forgot about it...these moving tales transported us to another world...”

“And you have not even seen the tip of the iceberg,” he chuckles. “Anyway, see you later. Meet Dr. Patel after an hour, and yes, do not forget to meet Dr. Kamala too. She will have plenty to tell you from the womens’ Outpatient Department, and you will have no trouble locating her; she is the tallest figure around here.” he again flashes a smile.

We smile back with “OK...thanks.”

“I had this deep desire to serve the poorest of the poor” – Dr. Patel

Sharp at 2 p.m., we are in front of Dr. Patel’s room. The soft-spoken doctor is busy with a patient. We peep inside for a second, and once his eye meets ours, we say ‘Sairam’. He smiles and says, “Let me finish seeing this patient.” After 5 minutes, we are with him and after explaining the reason of our visit. We ask, “Doctor, how did you happen to join here? You were in UK, right?”

“Oh...that is a long story,” he smiles. “Yes, I served in the National Health Service, UK for 20 years. But after having known Swami and listening to His discourses, I longed to return to India, my motherland, and serve the poorest of the poor. I had this deep desire in me to serve the underprivileged, and I thought Swami’s Hospital is the best opportunity; because here one can serve the downtrodden without any constraints and reservations whatsoever, financial or otherwise. When I see a patient, I do not look at him or her as a patient; for me, he is an individual just like anyone from my immediate family. I look at the person as a whole, and not the disease alone, because a person’s ailment, many a times, is connected with many social, emotional and other factors. And I do not restrict myself to allopathy; I try other complementary therapies too. One of them is tachyon therapy wherein we try to harness cosmic energy with the help of special metals to heal the patient. And this treatment has sometimes done wonders. In fact, I was just speaking to one such patient now. He actually hails from Jabalpur, from the state of Madhya Pradesh...”

“Is he still there? Can we speak to him?” we ask eagerly.

When the Helpless Have Nowhere to Turn...

“Yes...he should be around.” Dr. Patel goes out of his room and returns with a middle-aged man who has a white band tied from his forehead to behind the neck. He is still weak, but can walk. His speech is unclear but understandable. “He is 45 years old,” Dr. Patel says looking at us. “When he came to my room a few days ago, he said, ‘Doctor, I want to die...I cannot suffer anymore.’ His condition was most pathetic. He was suffering from a condition called Bulbar Palsy. Simply put, it is a kind of paralysis of the food pipe (esophagus) because of the impairment of function of the lower cranial nerves. Therefore, he could not eat anything. Anything he put in his mouth, either came out, or got stuck inside. This was due to damage in one part of his brain. There is actually no remedy for this in allopathy. So, I tried Tachyon therapy, and amazingly, on the second day itself he showed improvement! Now, he comes to me everyday.”

We are tempted to talk to the patient now. "How are you now?" we ask him. With enthusiasm and joy, he shares, "Now, I can talk and eat! I do not know what Dr. Patel has done...nor am I interested. For me, what has cured me is his love. I have visited any number of Hospitals before coming here. Everywhere, nobody wants to see you unless you have money, but here the doctors treat you with so much concern. I am so touched by his warmth...nowhere else I have seen doctors so pleasant... By Baba's grace, I am cured." He pauses and wipes his overflowing eyes, and continues, "I have a small job in a non-government organisation and I had to take a loan of Rs. 12,000 to reach Puttaparthi, but now I can earn and repay the loan. I want to serve in this Hospital as everyone here works with so much dedication; there is no discrimination, and each one is so selfless and caring..." he goes on and on.

We are touched, to say the least. "His condition is no more regressing and with God's grace, he might recover completely," Dr. Patel adds.

Meeting a Grateful Patient. Mr. Kadirappa

Just then another person enters the chamber. "He is Kadirappa, you can speak to him too; he has been coming for 10 years," Dr. Patel says pointing to the new patient. "Kadirappa, how are you? Why are you in the Hospital today?" we ask.

"I come to the Hospital every 3-4 days to collect medicine; I have chest pain. But even if I have medicine, I come many times just to see Dr. Patel...he has been taking care of me for four years now. When I suffered from a massive heart attack recently, Dr. Patel immediately sent me to Super Specialty Hospital and I was saved. I never go elsewhere for any ailment. (Pointing to Dr. Patel) He is like God to me, he is always so loving...when he goes to London for two months in the summer, I miss him."

It is one emotional scene after another. "It is no more a mere patient-doctor relationship in this Hospital, it almost like a family," we say to ourselves. No wonder the number of outpatients has only increased year after year. "Does it not bother you when you have to see hundreds of patients everyday? Does it not at times irritate you? You are past 65 now", we ask Dr. Patel.

"No, this is my joy. Yes, sometimes there is physical tiredness, but it does not affect me much, because I enjoy doing this. This is a God-given opportunity...why should I get upset if I have to see a few more patients? In fact, I would like to carry on till my last breath. This is my prayer. I know Swami will be happy with this." There is nothing more we want to ask Dr. Patel. The love of the patients and commitment of the doctors has made us speechless. Now, we only wish to remain silent, ruminating and learning. We take leave of Dr. Patel, humbly.

'Our work truly is our worship' – Dr. Kamala

As we come out of his room, we take a look at the wall clock. It is 3 p.m. “Do not forget Dr. Kamala...” the Sai student’s words ring in our ears. We head straight to the female OPD. As soon as we see Dr. Kamala, even before we can speak anything, she says, “Yes, I know...the Medical Superintendent told me about you all. So, how can I help you?”

“In so many ways,” we respond instantly, our faces beaming. “First tell us your story and then about some of your patients.”

Dr. Kamala smiles. “My story with Swami goes back nearly four decades...I was originally working in Sri Lanka. To put it in brief, I first came to Swami when my brother-in-law became sick; I initially came to ‘check out’ this place but later fell in love with this divine hamlet. Later, my son joined Swami’s college in 1977 and in those days, we used to have lovely interactions with Bhagavan. Swami first asked me to work in the General Hospital at Whitefield, Bangalore, but after 1984, I started working in this Hospital under His instructions.”

“What has been your guiding principle when you treat patients here?”

“I firmly believe that Swami has brought all of us here for our spiritual growth, not only to do service. The feeling of ‘I did it’ comes very easily to us, but with time we realise that we are but instruments in His hand. In the early days of the Hospital, there were no extensive lab facilities and the number of qualified personnel was low, but we never had any deaths. When tiny children are down with vomiting and diarrhea, the situation can get precarious. There were no pediatricians then, still there was no untoward incident. I know, it was all His doing...so, all we have to do is perform everything as an offering to Him and see God in every patient... It is so beautiful here because we do not want name, fame or money. We just want to do His work and our work truly is our worship.”

Here is an enlightened doctor, we say to ourselves, and now ask something more down-to-earth. “What has this Hospital meant to the local population of Puttaparthi?”

“It is just fantastic, you know,” she replies excitedly. “I really do not know how they would have survived without this Hospital! I can not imagine them traveling all the way to Anantapur or Bangalore for their ailments. Even simple conditions like asthma can become very serious. For example, take the case of M. Lakshmi... Actually she is here now; she comes to see me very often...Do you want to speak to her?”

“Sure, we are indeed happy she is here today.”

We request Lakshmi to come with us to another room so that we do not disturb Dr. Kamala any further. Then, we ask her about her condition, background, family situation and so on. “I have been coming to the Hospital for the past 30 years. Whenever I come, even if it is midnight, they treat me well,” says the old, tired and meek Lakshmi. One look at her and you know

she has gone through some of most difficult struggles in life. “When the doctors here diagnosed me with asthma a few years ago, both my sons deserted me... My husband was a drunkard and he is no more... I have nobody and nowhere to go... But for this Hospital, I would have died 30 years ago. I am not supposed to work in the fields, but I cannot help it; they give me Rs. 20-30 (50-60 cents) a day... whenever I have a problem, these doctors look after me very kindly and give me Vibhuti, medicines and injections. I recover fast... as long as this Hospital is there, I am not concerned about my health, and I pray to Swami everyday to give me the strength to ensure that I have enough food and clothes. In fact, I am 58 years now, and if I am still alive, it is because of the affection of these people and the energy given by Swami. I strongly feel Swami is telling all these doctors and others to take care of me... without Swami, who is there for people like us?” Lakshmi breaks down at this point...

There is silence in the room. There is nothing more need be said or asked. ‘One heart-rending account from a patient is enough to know what this Hospital means to the local population here’, we think to ourselves. At this point, another old lady, bespectacled and supported on a walking stick, walks into the room. “Sairam sirs, Dr. Kamala asked me to come to this room...” she submits slowly and humbly.

‘What draws us is the care shown by these doctors’ – Mrs. Sheikh Jainabi, a patient

“Yes, please sit here.” We place a chair for her and then ask, “What is your name? Why are you here? Please tell us about yourself.”

“I am Sheikh Jainabi...” but we notice that she has no *burkha* on her. Maybe it is because she is old, or maybe she cannot afford one. “I have been coming to this Hospital since the days of the old Hospital...” We make a note of this and decide to ask Dr. Kamala about the ‘old Hospital’. “We do not visit any other Hospital, even if it is a small ailment,” she continues and says, “Today I have come to see my grandson, Afzal, who is in the ward. Though my son does a small job in Bangalore, he comes here whenever there is any health problem in his family. In fact, all my daughters had their deliveries in this Hospital... elsewhere, one has to spend thousands for the birth of a child. Here the treatment is free, but what draws us here is the concern and care shown by these doctors... They not only treat us, but also advise us on healthy eating and living habits. They teach us to love God and have faith...truly, even to our own children we may not be able to show this much concern...they hold our hand and guide us...” We stop Jainabi. We do not want to see her get tearful too...we change the topic and ask, “Being a Muslim, do you experience any problems visiting this Hospital from your family or others?”

“Being Muslims makes no difference to us,” she continues. “We pray to Allah, we know there is no difference between Swami and Allah. For us, Swami is Allah; everyone in my family believes in this. But for Him, we would have been

dead long ago...I do not even board a bus without uttering His name...I always feel joyous to come to this Hospital.”

We thank both the elderly ladies and tell them “We are going to tell your stories to the rest of the world, to share with others the work being done in Swami’s Hospital. Are you ok with this?”

“Sure...we are alive because of Swami,” they reply with reverence.

We are touched once again. We come out of the room to meet Dr. Kamala. “So, how was it?” she asks. “It was stirring, to say the least,” we say and then ask, “What is the ‘Old Hospital’? Jainabi referred to it...”

“Oh! Yes, this new building for the Hospital was inaugurated by Swami in 1984. Before that there was a tiny structure in the area where the Sai Srinivas guest house currently stands,” Dr. Kamala explains and adds, “If you want to know more about that, you must speak to Ms. Nagamani. She is the granddaughter of the first doctor of this Hospital, Dr. Seetaramaiah, and has been working here since 1965...she joined the Hospital as a young girl...”

“Where can we find her?”

“Look in the pharmacy. Go to the left.”

We immediately move in that direction and locating the board “Pharmacy,” peep inside and ask, “Can we meet Ms. Nagamani?”

Sharing Forty-Four Years of Service

“Yes.” A lady turns up and with a gentle smile on her lips, asks, “What do you want? I am Nagamani.”

“Madam, we would like to speak to you if you have a few minutes,” and then we introduce ourselves. She is very kind and says, “So, you want to know about the old days?”

“Yes!”

“There are so many stories...” she starts, as she settles down comfortably in her chair. “Those days, the Hospital had a total of five rooms, that’s it. There was a central, bigger room flanked on each side by two smaller rooms... Swami laid the foundation stone for this humble building way back on November 23, 1954, His 29th Birthday. And it was inaugurated on October 4, 1956 by the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Gopala Reddy.

My grandfather had just come to the Sai fold, and had retired three years ago from public service; he was a civil surgeon. Swami appointed him as the first doctor of this new Hospital, but initially he demurred saying that he would like to spend the rest of his retired life only in spiritual pursuits. Swami, then, told him: ‘I will work through you, you just be an instrument.’ And true to Swami’s

words, my grandfather had innumerable experiences where he saw the Divine Doctor in action.”

“Do you remember any instances narrated by him?”

‘Swami Himself would see the patients!’ – Ms. Nagamani

“Yes...those days, my grandfather used to report to Swami every little thing about the Hospital. He used to have at least three audiences with Swami every day, and would take His direct instructions for the treatment of every patient who had a difficult problem. The Hospital then had very basic equipments, rudimentary facilities and a few medicines. But all the patients were cured because, actually, He took care of every patient. Swami would, at times, come and sit outside the labour room (there was no operation theatre then) while my grandfather was busy inside. At other times, he would ask him to rest and Himself would see the patients! I remember one amazing instance. Once a young girl was admitted with high fever, and it did not come down in spite of his best efforts. So he reported to Swami, and the only answer he got was ‘Wait, wait...’ The situation in the Hospital was pretty tense. And then, in the early morning, the next day, this girl called out, ‘Grandma, Swami has come!’ Everyone thought it was hallucination. But on her forehead was a mark of Vibhuti, and the next moment she was completely alright.

Swami’s Grace Cured Their Ailments, says Ms. Nagamani

“Even in those days, people used to come from long distances because of the faith they had in this Hospital. Once, there was an elderly lady from Nellore who was suffering from extreme pain in the neck, back and the chest. She was bed-ridden and her blood pressure was high. When my grandfather reported to Swami about her, He said, ‘She has no disease, only the shower of grace.’ This was the beginning of the end of her troubles... I can go on and on...Patients get cured here more because of His Grace than the medicines administered or surgeries performed. In fact, Swami even said in those days, “Give only half the dose required, My grace will do the magic.”

“That’s amazing...So, for how long did your grandfather serve in this Hospital?”

“He was the head of the Hospital till Swami’s 50th birthday and even after that he served for another ten years, but from December 1, 1975 Swami appointed Dr. Alreja as the Medical Superintendent. Dr. Alreja too is a treasure-house of Hospital stories. You should speak to him too, but he may not be in the Hospital now... Try to see him in the morning tomorrow... but presently you can speak to Dr. Hema. She has been serving for 10 years now and regularly sees His grace work in different ways. Swami might not be physically interacting much these days, but His presence is very much there...that is how this Hospital runs and has grown from an 8-bed Hospital to a 100-bed Medicare facility today, with an impressive record of patient treatment and recovery.”

“Yes, we will do that,” we respond. “Actually we would love to speak to you more, but maybe we will come another day. We will see if we can speak to Dr. Hema now before it gets too late in the day.”

“Yes...carry on. You might just be lucky. You will find her in room no. 24. She often works late...I am always available any day.”

We pack our cameras with a quick parting “Sairam” to Ms. Nagamani. She responds with a big smile.

“We are a family...I learn a lot from the patients’ - Dr. Hema

“Sairam Dr. Hema...” We are in front of room no. 24. “Ms. Nagamani directed us to see you. Do you have a few minutes...?”

“Are you from Radio Sai?”

“Yes...I heard about you boys from other doctors. Ok...tell me, what do you want?”

“Can we ask you a few questions?”

“Sure...go ahead.”

“When did you join this Hospital? And where did you work before?”

“I and my husband, Dr. Gopinath, joined this Hospital on September 1, 1998. Before that, we worked for almost 25 years in Canada. Actually, Swami gave us our first interview in 1984 and told us to return to India in five years. So in 1989, we closed our practice there, packed up everything and came to Puttaparthi. But somehow we could not receive any instructions from Swami then. During this time, the Divine Life Society approached us, and since we always had this desire to work for the poor in rural areas, we accepted their offer and went to Swami Sivananda ashram in Pattamadai, a rural town in South India, to join their fledging hospital. We actually set up the hospital there and worked for nine full years. There, along with a lot of satisfaction, we gained tremendous experience too. And then, in 1998, my mother passed away and we came to Puttaparthi to inform Swami.

“On that occasion, Swami said, ‘Your mother is with you.’ I was so happy to be back in Puttaparthi after a long time and wished if we could continue to stay with Swami. When Dr. Alreja went with our applications, Swami said, ‘Oh, they are long time devotees! Take them.’ So, that is how we became a part of this Hospital.”

“Wonderful! Is it a different experience working here than in Canada or even in Pattamadai?”

“Absolutely. Swami is the core of the Hospital here. And everybody is so focused, so, we have greater cohesion. Here, we are just a family...a big

family. And more than that, it has been a great learning and humbling experience for me because people come here with so much faith. There was one lady with an advanced stage of cancer, but she would not agree for operation because many years ago Swami had told her, 'No operation'. Her condition was getting bad to worse; there was puss oozing out. We used to only clean her wounds and she would return happily. She used to only take Vibhuti and say 'I have no pain'. Every time I saw her I was in awe at her faith. Later she even suffered a hip fracture. She endured this along with her cancer, but never wanted an operation. Like this, she lived for many years. I cannot imagine a patient with her condition surviving for so many years, that too, with a smile on her face! I feel we are here only to learn from such people!

"Even now, there is an elderly gentleman in the male ward. His name is Mr. Divya Poorna Chandra. For more than a year, he had been suffering with a foot problem because of diabetes. And then, in this July, he went into sepsis, meaning, his kidney, liver and heart failed. There was no way to save him than to amputate his leg, but Swami instructed that his leg should not be cut, and now look at him! Suddenly all the drugs have started working...he has started walking now! So, these instances happen everyday. Sometimes, it might be direct instruction, at other times, it is a strong intuition, a right suggestion at the nick of time, or just a prayer answered...And what works in this Hospital, apart from faith in Swami, is the absolute dedication of people working here. Whether one is paid or is working voluntarily, he or she is working here only for Swami and nothing else. If there is work, you will not find a nurse say, 'Madam! It's time, I have to go.'"

'This Hospital is your home' - Baba

"That's remarkable. Ok, Doctor, what is your best memory of working in this Hospital?"

"Well, Swami's visits are undoubtedly the most memorable. I remember, on one occasion He said, 'This Hospital is your home.' And for me, there is nothing more personal than working here. This is my first husband and first home; I spend three-fourths of my day here. This is very special to me."

"Madam! It is so refreshing speaking to you....Swami always puts the right person at the right place at the right time. It is so amazing...thank you very much, we should not take more of your time...but do you think we can speak to Dr. Gopinath, your husband too?"

"Yes, why not? Go upstairs, he might be there."

'No human being can do what Swami has done for the poor' - Dr. Gopinath

We climb the steps with our hearts and minds still dazed pondering about the commitment of these Sai doctors.

“Sir, we are from Radio Sai, we just now spoke to Dr. Hema...can you too spare a few minutes for us?”

“Yes, come in...what are your questions?”

“Sir, can you please share about the growth of your department since you joined here?”

“Well...actually, the surgical department started right from the very early days of the Hospital. Earlier, it was only deliveries and minor procedures, but now we do major surgeries. The most common abdominal operations done here relate to hernia and appendix. In 1998, I was the only person in this department of General Surgery, but now the Hospital has grown.”

“What fascinates you the most about this Hospital?”

“It’s spiritual atmosphere, unquestionably. This is a spiritual Hospital, and not a commercial, or even a religious Hospital. I enjoy it so much here because not a penny is charged. Even in the Swami Sivananda Hospital where I worked, there was a charge, though it was much less than private hospitals. Personally, for me it is very difficult to mix money with medicine. And it is for this reason that I never had a private practice ever in my life. For more than half a century thousands have been treated here free of charge, it is a magnificent achievement even if Swami were a human being...but He is Divine; no human being can do what He has done for the poor. It is just too beautiful. Now, others should get inspired and build more such Hospitals. There is no dearth of rich people in this country. Swami says, ‘when one undertakes to do noble work, money will automatically come.’...Swami has shown it to us...He is demonstrating everyday the power of sharing, the power of Love!”

It is almost five in the afternoon, and we do not wish to hold the senior doctor for long. We thank him profusely and walk down the corridor. This stretch of the Hospital is now familiar; the room of the Medical Superintendent is just a few steps away. “Why not update the Chief with the plethora of our interviews and experiences?” one of us voices. “Good idea...let’s drop in and see if he is there.” We all agree.

“Sir, do you have a minute?”

“Oh...you have all come!...come in. So how was the experience? I did alert and inform many doctors about your project.”

“Yes, many seemed to know about it. We did not have to explain ourselves much. Thank you for your help.”

“So what did you gather?” Dr. Verma asks.

“We spoke to Dr. Patel, Dr. Kamala, Dr. Hema, Dr. Gopinath and...yes Ms. Nagamani and many others too. We covered a lot of the Hospital...it has been a very busy day.”

“That’s nice...but you know what you have seen is just about maybe 20% of the Hospital...you have seen only a little of General Medicine and General Surgery. That’s it. One of the main areas for which you have to spend an entire day, or maybe many days, is the Mother and Child section of this Hospital. The Gynecology and Obstetrics Department is as old as the Hospital. And that is the area where maximum benefit has been done to the rural population around.”

“Ok...Yes... That will be our agenda tomorrow.”

“Good...but before you visit the Maternity section, you might want to see the Pediatric Out Patient Department and Ward. Start by enjoying the sweet and innocent smiles of the kids. We have created a nice playpen for them recently; it will make you smile too and ensure your day is bright!”

“Sure...that’s what we will do. Thank you Sir.”

Sevadals Who Just Can’t Stop Serving!

We climb down the staircase reminiscing all the beautiful moments of the day - some touching, some revealing and a few heart-rending. As we near the door, we are again greeted with a warm smile and loving ‘Sairam’ with folded palms of a sevadal volunteer. Now, we are tempted to talk to this Sai worker.

“Can we ask you a few questions?... Where do you come from?”

“I am Rajesh Kumar Jain and I come from a town called Ganj Vasudha from the state of Madhya Pradesh.” His broad smile still lingers.

“How do you like serving here?”

“Oh, I love it very much. In fact, I feel bad when I have to return home after the mandated 15 days of service, that is why, I often extend my service. If Swami permits, I would like to serve here permanently.”

“What is it here that interests you the most?”

“Everything! I like the doctors, the poor villagers, the loving atmosphere...I like to serve the patients, feed them, bring medicines for them, carry their x-ray films...really, as long as I am alive, I will come to serve in this Hospital.”

We spot another sevadal, a middle-aged lady, guiding the patients at the gate with so much love. We go to her, fold our hands and say ‘Sairam’.

“We are from Radio Sai...would you like tell us how do you feel working here?”

“Sure...I am Preeti Khobra; I absolutely love being here. The doctors here see the patients with so much patience. Every time I come, I learn so much from this place...it is so beautiful serving here...for me, believe me, it is like serving in front of Swami....I work 12 hours from 7 a.m. till 7 p.m, but I am never tired...I want to come here every year and hope I have that good fortune.”

These are just two volunteers who have served here for maybe just 10 days and how heart-touching are their feelings! We wonder what is in store for us the next day. Whatever it is, we are sure, at the end of the day we will return recharged and enriched. For, this is not a Hospital, but a 'House of God'... where doctors, nurses and others happen to be there and healing just happens. In fact, the patient is the deity of this house, and the rest are all loving devotees...

(END OF PART 1. PART 2 FOLLOWS BELOW)

WHERE LOVE GREETES YOU AND GRACE CURES...

The Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam

Part-2

It is our second day in this Sai-suffused abode of healing, the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam. Touching moments from the previous day are still playing, again and again, in our minds as we are about to step into this sacred premises. The sevadal volunteer at the gate, with the distinctive blue scarf on his shoulder, just like yesterday, greets us with a big smile, and his palms-together. The ‘Sairam’ today is even more enthusiastic, now that we are no more newcomers. We bend our heads gently and reciprocate his greeting gracefully.

As we go in, our eyes meet another sevadal, the one we interviewed yesterday, and he again flashes his now-familiar broad smile and eagerly moves towards us. “Is all this going to come on Radio Sai?” he asks, pointing to the digital still and video cameras in our hands.

“Yes, surely... that is our aim. We want to share with everyone the stirring story of Swami’s Hospital. We will first do a story in “Heart2Heart”, Radio Sai’s e-journal, and then an audio documentary for Radio Sai, and later probably a video documentary.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful. Yes, we must tell everybody about this beautiful Hospital. I just love being here...When I am here, I am the happiest.”

“It is obvious; he does not have to say it...” we think as we look at each other. Whenever we saw him yesterday – in the morning, afternoon or in the evening the smile was ever intact on his face.

The Little Ones Capture Hearts

“Ok...Do you know where the pediatric department is?” we ask him, not to lose more time. The children’s section is first on our agenda for the day. We have not forgotten the last words of the Medical Superintendent before we left the Hospital yesterday – ‘Start your day tomorrow with the smiles of the sweet and innocent kids... it will make your day bright’.

“O yes, just go on the right. Walk a few steps and then look in the left, you can not miss it!” The sevadal now rushes off to attend to his many duties.

We follow his instructions, and yes, what a lovely sight we see! It is like a lively and colorful little garden inside the Hospital itself. We see a toddler galloping on his stationary horse; another one in a red t-shirt is sliding down a tiny climbing frame with big smiles across his chubby face; a third, maybe a year or two old, is swinging merrily on a rocking chair while her *burkha*-clad mother gently holds her arm; a fourth, with a brown shirt on, is holding onto

the huge ears of his red and yellow tiny elephant and riding on it joyfully, his eyes wide-open with excitement; and there is a fifth, who, looking at our cameras, flashes an impish smile... his mother laughs heartily at her boy’s prank; and the sixth is....well, each kid is so sweet...we stand here for a while enjoying this beautiful scene and taking as many snaps as we can. Whenever a tiny one reciprocates our smile, we are thrilled too.

‘The only prominent feeling prevalent here is service’ - Dr. Mohanta

“Sairam...next patient.” we hear a voice from inside. There are three cubicles attached to this playpen. ‘At least, if we can speak to one doctor, it will be great,’ we say to ourselves. We decide to go in and try our luck.

“Sairam, Sir?...” We part the curtain a little and ask. “We are from Radio Sai... can you spare five minutes for us?”

“Oh ok...” says the elderly bespectacled and busy gentleman. “Let me finish seeing this patient.”

After a few minutes, we are in the tiny chamber of this pediatrician.

“We are working on a story on this Hospital... can you please tell us about your experience working here?... When did you join here?”

“I am Dr. Mohanta. I joined here in 1996. Earlier, I was a professor in Cuttack Medical College, in the state of Orissa... I have known Swami since the early eighties and I used to come to Puttaparthi regularly on festival occasions to serve in medical camps. But after my retirement, I did not want to go anywhere else for I derive so much joy working here!”

“What do you feel is so special about this Hospital?”

“Everything is different! To me, actually, this feels like a home; it is a big sweet home because here we have no distinctions whatsoever – there is nobody senior or junior; no one is worried about position, power, money, etc. The only prominent feeling prevalent here is service; each one of us here is focused only on moving closer to God through loving service and we are all aware that we are just instruments in His hand, therefore, everyone is at the same level...we only want to serve.”

‘Seeing patients is *darshan* for me’ - Dr. Jorge Luis Berra

At this point, another doctor, a Caucasian gentleman looks in. He sits opposite Dr. Mohanta and chips in with “Here, patient is at the top!...the rest are all at the bottom.”

We find his remark interesting and want to learn more about him.

“Doctor, from which country do you come from?”

“I come from Argentina. I have been working as a visiting doctor in this Hospital since 2005. Since then, I have been coming here twice a year for two weeks each. What I love the most here is the atmosphere, it is so full of love and every treatment is offered completely free. Many parents come with their malnourished children to this Hospital, and we are able to give them proper advice with minimal investigations - unlike in western countries where everyone goes through a battery of tests which may not always be necessary.”

We want to know more about him. So, we ask again, “What motivates you to come here, every year?”

“Ah, my heart is surrendered to Swami. I want to be a little drop in His vast ocean of selfless service. It does not matter if I miss *darshan* working here - seeing patients is *darshan* for me. I hope and pray I can come here every year because this is the most important part of my life.”

We are amazed at the level of commitment and sense of devotion of this visiting doctor from across the world. We later learn that he is Dr. Jorge Luis Berra and he is a member of the International Medical committee of the Sai Organisation. We look at a photo of Swami on the doctors’ table and wonder at His mysterious designs.

Now, we want to know more about the maladies and the treatment offered in this vibrant department. “What are conditions that you often see among these rural children?” We ask Dr. Mohanta.

“Diarrhea, vomiting, respiratory infections, anemia, worm infections... most of these diseases have poverty and malnutrition as their basic cause. We have patients coming even from Bangladesh, a neighbouring country, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh (far off states in India). We see an average of 200 children a day, 95% of them are from poor families. By Swami’s grace, we have all the facilities and equipment needed like X-ray, ultrasound, comprehensive blood investigations, all available drugs to manage a wide spectrum of diseases, photo therapy, new-born resuscitation facilities for infants, etc.”

At this instant, a young lady doctor comes in to discuss about a patient with Dr. Mohanta. “She is Dr. Saritha. You must speak to her...” Dr. Mohanta alerts us. “She has left her job in the UK to join us here. She manages the newly opened neo-natal ICU.”

The Intensive SAI Care Unit

We greet Dr. Saritha with a hearty ‘Sairam’ and request her to give us a few minutes. She readily agrees.

We move over to the next room and ask her to share her story.

“I hail from Kerala, a southern state of India,” Dr. Saritha starts. “After my MBBS, MD and Diploma in Child Health in India, on the advice of my

professor, I went to the UK. I worked there for three years, and then, one day, I read the advertisement for the post of a pediatrician in ‘Sanathana Sarathi’, the ashram’s monthly magazine. I applied and got the job! I immediately resigned and came here.”

“You had no second thoughts? You were getting set for a good career in the UK, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I worked in a reputed hospital there and if I would have continued, maybe in 3-4 years I would have become a consultant and brought home a big salary. But I came here only for Swami and my spiritual development. For me, to be chosen by Bhagavan to work as a pediatrician in His Hospital is a big honour, nothing else compares to this!”

Again and again, we are humbled by the dedication of these doctors. We ask her again, “How does it feel working here, professionally?”

“The pediatric department in this Hospital is still growing. A few months ago, Swami gifted us with a neo-natal ICU. Now, we can attend to any complication of a new born baby. Do you want to see this facility?”

“Sure...if that is possible.”

“Yes, let’s go.”

We walk upstairs along with Dr. Saritha and first enter a ward.

‘This is our Swami’s Hospital’ - Mrs. Bhagyamma, a patient

On the second bed, as we enter, is a lady with a precious new-born on her lap. “You can speak to her, she is Bhagyamma,” Dr. Saritha guides us and adds, “Her baby came out of the ICU a few days ago.”

“Is it a boy or a girl?” we ask Bhagyamma, smiling.

“A girl...she is my second daughter. The first one, Vennela, too was born in this Hospital.”

“What was the problem with this child?”

“My baby was born 13 days ago, but she was underweight. She weighed only 1.75 kilograms (normal is 3 kilograms) and developed serious complications. The doctors, therefore, put her in the ICU. In no time, she put on weight and is now pink and healthy.” Bhagyamma tells us smiling.

“Her baby was not only underweight, but also had low blood pressure on the second day. So we gave her glucose and other fluids with the help of the modern equipment here. That is how she recovered,” Dr. Saritha explains.

“What do you do for a living?” We are keen to know more about Bhagyamma’s background.

“My husband runs a hair saloon in our village which is 10 kilometres from Puttaparthi. He earns Rs. 100 (about US \$ 2) a day and we are unable to meet our daily expenses. We cannot afford treatment anywhere else so for the last 23 years, we have not gone to any other Hospital. It is not just the free treatment, the doctors and sisters here take care of us so well - it is our Swami’s Hospital. We are alive and still living because of this Hospital.” Bhagyamma now puts her head down and fixes her eyes on her baby to hide her emotions. Looking at this moving scene of mother and child, we ponder how like a mother, Bhagavan has taken care of so many poor and deprived ones.

“Inside is the ICU,” Dr. Saritha now turns our attention to her right. “Now, we have four beds, which are sufficient for the present, as out of more than 2,500 deliveries that happen every year in this Hospital, only 5% of the babies may develop extra complications at birth. Do you want to film the inside of the ICU?”

“Yes, if that is possible.”

“One of you can put on a gown and come inside.”

We take a poignant picture of a baby hooked onto a respiratory support system inside the ICU...our heart goes out to him. We move around and take a few other general shots. “We have facilities to monitor the functions of all the vital organs of the body as prematurely born babies need a lot of care. By Swami’s grace, we are doing very well in this department.” Dr. Saritha smiles, and then says, “Ok...now, I need to go, there must be many children waiting downstairs.”

“Sure, madam. Thank you very much for your time.”

We too walk down the stairs, but rather slowly, ruminating on all events since we stepped into the Hospital this morning... the doctors’ dedication, and the love and gratitude of the patients for this Hospital and Swami, fill our minds. As we reach the bottom of the staircase, the tall figure of Dr. Kamala greets us warmly. Yesterday she had spent quite a few minutes with us narrating the story of her life. Now, smilingly, she asks, “How is it going?”

“Very fine, madam...we just now saw the neo-natal ICU and spoke to Dr. Saritha, it was very inspiring... we would like to know more about the maternity section now.”

“In that case, you should speak to Dr. Chaya and Dr. Prabha; the latter has been here since 1979. They have contributed immensely to the Gynecology and Obstetrics department. Besides, their own stories of how they came to Swami are wonderful too. But it is only 10 a.m. now and they will be very busy in the outpatient department. You should go to them after 11 a.m. After that, maybe you can speak to Dr. Ghooi. She is the one who helps childless

couples become parents and she will have many interesting stories to share. Her room is just a few steps ahead, next to Pharmacy.”

“Sure, we will do that, thank you very much.”

We walk as per Dr. Kamala's directions and soon pass by the Pharmacy. The next room has curtains on and we ask a sevadal standing outside, “Is it Dr. Ghooi's room?”

‘I have never experienced such love before’ – Dr. Ghooi

“Yes,” she says. We begin to explain “We need to speak to her, we are from...” Just then a patient comes out and we spot Dr. Ghooi. We grab the opportunity, “Sairam madam, we are from Radio Sai, we would like to talk to you...”

“Oh, sure...come in.”

We enter inside with our camera bags and occupy the empty chairs beside her. Then, we ask, “Madam, can you share your experience in this Hospital? Where were you working before? Is working here in anyway different from your work experience elsewhere?”

“You see, I am a gynecologist and I had set up my own Hospital in Bhopal. But I locked it up and came here in 1999 on His instructions. Though I am an allopathic doctor, I treat patients with many alternative therapies too. Before starting to work here, I asked Swami, ‘Can I start integrated medicine?’ He said, ‘Yes’. So, I treat infertility with ayurveda, homoepathy, yoga, etc. besides allopathy. And by Swami's grace, so many have been blessed with babies. Just now, I was seeing a couple who originally hail from Rajasthan, but the husband has now opened a shop in Puttaparthi. Maybe they are still here...let me see.”

Dr. Ghooi now rises from her chair and as he walks out, she says, “It will be nice if you can get their story directly from them.”

“Certainly, we would love that,” we respond. And in a few seconds she returns with the couple. “You can speak to them...” she directs us.

“Is it ok if we have your experience in this Hospital on the camera? We are doing a story...” we explain our objective in detail.

“Sure...we have no problem. This Hospital has benefited us immensely,” says the husband sincerely.

“When and why did you come here?” We ask our first question.

“Well, we had no children for two years after our marriage. Later, she conceived, but it was a miscarriage in the third month. Then, we approached Dr. Ghooi and her treatment worked so well. We had a son who is three years

old now! We came to her again, a few months ago, for our second child, and now, my wife is pregnant. In fact, my aunt too was blessed with a daughter with the help of Dr. Ghooi’s treatment.”

Now, the wife joins in spontaneously. “For any ailment, we come only to this Hospital; there are two important attractions here. First is the love of the doctors - they talk to us so nicely and always give the right advice. Doctors in other Hospitals, many a times, mislead patients... I have seen that in our family. A few years ago, when my father had a urinary problem, the doctors in a hospital in Bangalore suggested an operation. But the doctors in Swami’s Hospital here, prescribed medicines for one year and he is fine now. I have seen many cases like this. The second most unique thing about this Hospital is Swami’s Grace. No doubt, the entire treatment is free, but it is His healing grace that pervades here which draws us to this Hospital.”

Dr. Ghooi now adds, “Truly, there is something about this Hospital which is beyond comprehension. The success rate I gave to an international conference about my treatment to infertile couples from my practice in the other hospital was 22%. But here, it is amazingly high – it is 50-60%! So I know it is Baba who is giving them babies.

“A few years ago, the children of a doctor working here came from America seeking treatment. So I took down their complete problem, wrote my treatment and asked the doctor to give this letter to Swami. That day, in the evening, when he gave the letter, Swami asked in Hindi, “*Baccha kaun dhetha* (Who gives babies)?” The doctor, for a moment, was taken aback, and then he replied, “You Swami!” Bhagavan then said, “*Haan! Mein dhetaa* (Yes, I give).” After that He took his letter. They were blessed with a baby girl in the US...”

“There are so many stories like this. I am very happy here, because my patients are happy. They love me and I love them. I never experienced such love in my private practice; love here is a truly spiritual experience. There is so much energy in this love and that is how miracles happen!”

Just then, another doctor comes in. “She is Dr. Leela, a gynecologist. She too can share with you plenty of such stories...” Dr. Ghooi suggests to us.

‘It is God alone who is doing everything’ – Dr. Leela

“Every doctor here is a goldmine,” we say to ourselves and shifting the angle of our camera, ask Dr. Leela, “Madam, would you like to share with us one or two of your incredible experiences in this Hospital?”

Dr. Leela obliges, and says, “There are many...ok... I will narrate one for you now. This incident happened three years ago. There was a lady admitted for her first childbirth, and she had high blood pressure. In fact, she was on two drugs and we were monitoring her closely for 15-20 days, but her blood pressure would not come down! We were really worried about her impending delivery. And then, suddenly, much before the due date, she went into labour!

We were giving medicines to reduce her blood pressure even at this hour! That whole day I was in the Hospital...I had gone briefly to have my dinner and then I get a phone call from a sister, ‘She is in labour! Suddenly her blood pressure has dropped! It is too low; it is below what our instrument can record! The pulse is feeble...please come immediately!’ I rushed there, terribly tensed. There could be serious complications if delivery happens during low blood pressure; some patients don’t survive elsewhere. I asked the sister to call the anesthesiologist, because they can be of great help in such situations too. He came and we gave drugs to raise the blood pressure, and the situation did improve. The baby was delivered within an hour... But after that problems multiplied!”

“She started bleeding...she bled like a tap! We did everything that could be done, but nothing worked! We thought she was going into DIC, a condition where blood stops coagulating in the body. Three years ago, we did not have some of the modern facilities that we have now. We had to get blood from the Super Specialty Hospital, and the only option we had now to save her life was hysterectomy (removal of the uterus). But even that was a risk because of her low blood pressure; she could die on the operation table. Now, we called another senior doctor, and then started praying to Swami fervently – ‘Swami! We have done everything we can, please come and save this patient! We cannot see this patient die in front of us...please...’ And then, you won’t believe, after 10-15 minutes, she stopped bleeding and the blood pressure too came up!”

Dr. Leela’s eyes are now suddenly overflowing... “Can you put off the camera please?” We immediately hit the ‘pause’ button. The memories of the trauma and the final deliverance on that fateful day is too overwhelming for her. After a while, she continues, “You see...I have come to the conclusion that what we do is nothing; we think we are doing everything, but actually, through us, it is God alone who is doing everything. In any case, that night we transfused 3 to 4 bottles of blood into her. Usually, after such an amount of blood loss, the kidneys shut down. But quite miraculously, she was hale and hearty, and her baby was healthy too. Therefore, God works in wondrous ways. Swami need not physically come and administer *vibhuti*; a sincere prayer reaches Him... and we have seen so many cases like this.”

Dr. Ghooi now takes over. “I can tell you many such stories and some of the patients are our own staff working inside the ashram and in the Hospitals. But I think you should also speak to Dr. Chaya. Everyday she attends to many patients in the Out Patient Department and also performs operations.”

“Oh yes, she is next on our list, and the time is just perfect. It is past 11 a.m. now; hopefully she will be able to spare sometime for us...Thank you so much, madam, it was absolutely enlightening talking to you both.” We fold our palms to convey our gratitude.

“It is all His doing...you are always welcome.” Both of them echo the same feeling.

We pack our cameras and move out. We stop a sister passing by and ask, “Where can we find Dr. Chaya?”

“Just go straight. Her room is beside the big altar.”

We take a few steps walking along the sparkling corridor, responding to the ‘Sairams’ of sevadals serving in front of every room. And soon, we come to a large area, a portion of which is occupied with rows of black chairs. We turn right and yes, there is the altar – in fact, a very beautiful altar. There is a huge picture of Swami at the centre, smiling beatifically and blessing; it is so inviting; to the left of this is a bewitching statue of Lord Krishna... our hands automatically go to the cameras. We adjust the lens and take a steady snap...just then an elderly lady comes from behind and says, “Do you know whose Krishna is this?”

“No madam, please tell us.”

Krishna – Not Just a Statue

“This is the statue that Mother Eswaramma (Baba’s mother) used to worship! After she passed away, it used to be in the Mandir many years. Later, Dr. Jayalakshmi, one of the earliest doctors of this Hospital, requested Swami for this idol and He kindly agreed. This has been here for decades now and there are amazing miracles related to this statue too.”

“Oh, can you narrate just one?”

She continues, “One night when I was on duty, it was raining heavily and the weather was chilly. Somehow, I felt very sorry for this Krishna. So, I went to Him and said, ‘Poor Krishna! You must be feeling very cold!’ and covered the idol with a shawl. The next morning, during *darshan*, Swami came near me and said, ‘Oh...it is so cold!’ At that instant, I did not understand what Swami was referring to. Only later, when realization dawned, I was just stupefied.”

We listen to this soft spoken senior lady, dressed completely in white, with awe. “Every object in this Hospital too seems to be so special...so alive!” we think to ourselves. Meanwhile, that kind lady is walking away...and we find another lady with a white apron on her saree and stethoscope on her shoulder coming our way. We smile, and quickly ask her, “Doctor, can you please identify that elder lady for us?”

“Oh, she is Dr. Wamsa, an ophthalmologist; she has been serving here for nearly three decades now.”

“Ok... that’s interesting, thank you. We are from Radio Sai. We would love to speak to her sometime; but now, we want to talk to Dr. Chaya. Her room is supposed to around here.”

The Mothers are All Safely Guarded in His Hands – The Doctors from the Gyne Unit Speak of Bhagavan’s Care

She smiles and says, “Yes, I am Dr. Chaya. Dr. Kamala told me about you all, and that is the reason why I came towards you when I saw you here. I have quickly written a note on the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department here... see if it helps you.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful! So thoughtful of you, but we would love to speak to you too. Do you have a few minutes? Also, Dr. Kamala mentioned to us about Dr. Prabha. Can she also join us? It would be great.”

“Ok, sure. Let me see if I can locate Dr. Prabha quickly.” And then, pointing to a room, she says, “Meanwhile, make yourselves comfortable there.”

We move into that room, and in less than a minute, not two, but three doctors come in. “This is Dr. Prabha, and she is Dr. Kameshwari,” Dr. Chaya introduces them, and adds, “Both are veterans.”

We fold our hands respectfully and say ‘Sairam’ to both of them as they occupy seats in front of us.

“Ok... so, what do you want from us?” Dr. Chaya asks.

“Please tell us when did you join here? And how was this Hospital then, especially your department?”

“I joined here eight years ago,” Dr. Chaya begins. “Earlier, I had worked in a couple of government and other Hospitals in India, and also nine years in the UK. I always longed to come here, and now I feel so blessed. The situation then and now is vastly different. In those days, the patients were so innocent, illiterate and reserved that they wouldn’t know their age; they won’t say their name, and often they wouldn’t disclose if that was their first, or second or third pregnancy... many times we would discover this information much later. And the number of emergency cases was numerous because they would come here only if the mid-wife or the grandmother was unsuccessful in performing the delivery. So, it would be cases of obstructed labour, impending rupture of the uterus, severe infections, and so on... It was really challenging with limited facilities available at that time.”

“So, how did you manage?” we ask inquisitively.

“Well, to tell you the truth, it is Swami’s Grace which helped us to treat those unfortunate ones. They were all very poor and illiterate villagers; where could they go? For them, a bus fare of Rs. 50 to come to the Hospital was itself a difficult proposition. So, we used to take His name and do our best, and the patients used to recover.”

Dr. Prabha now chips in. “You know, many years ago, a lady came in during labour, with many complications. Our Hospital was not equipped enough to

treat her case. We thought it would be best for her to go to Anantapur or Bangalore. So, we went to the Bus stand hunting for a suitable conveyance for her. But nothing was available, not even a taxi. Crestfallen, we returned to the Hospital. The patient was also unwilling to go; she said she would die here than go elsewhere. We were helpless. We prayed to Swami and then took her in. To our amazement, her conditions changed! She delivered normally. The next day, in an interview, Swami told us, ‘Why did you get upset and go roaming to the bus stand? Just do what you can and I will look after the rest.’ So, that is our Swami, and that is how this Hospital functions. He runs it and we are only His instruments. In fact, He drew all of us here.”

Brought by a Miracle in Nigeria, Dr. Prabha

“Madam, please let us your story? How did you happen to come here?”

“Oh, that is a fascinating tale... I came to Him actually through a patient. More than 32 years ago, I was working in Nigeria as a consultant. There were a group of people there who would gather every Thursday and do *bhajans*. My mother would go to these meetings; I was least interested; still at times I used to accompany my mother. For me, the main attraction was not the *bhajans*, but what happened at the end of it. Generally it would be a crowd of about 15 families, and each family would bring one dish to be served to all after the *bhajans*. So, that way, I had the opportunity to taste 15 dishes! That was enough motivation for me.” Dr. Prabha smiles childishly, and continues,

“One particular Thursday, they said, ‘One of our brothers has just returned from Swami and he has brought *Vibhuti* packets, each of us can take one.’ So I picked up one, and while driving back home I thought, ‘Maybe this *Vibhuti* might help my emergency patient?’ and forgot about it. I had a really critical case in the Hospital. There was a lady who had come with a completely ruptured uterus, and her blood pressure was very low. The baby, unable to come out, had died in the womb. It was a very sad condition and I had immediately operated on her at 11 a.m. that morning; still, her blood pressure never rose beyond 90/60 (the normal reading is 120/80).”

“I had tried everything...and the worst part was that she had not come out of anesthesia even at 12 in the night. I was absolutely clueless and petrified. If a patient does not reverse 4 hours after anesthesia, it is a major danger sign, and in her case, 13 hours had gone by! So, you can imagine my plight...all her vital parameters were falling...I was unable to sleep that night. At midnight, suddenly I got this thought: ‘People say this Baba is God...why not try this *Vibhuti*?’ So, I jumped out of my bed and drove immediately to the Hospital. I went straight to the patient, sent the nurse away on some errand, and then, opened the *Vibhuti* packet and put it in her mouth. I applied a little on her forehead and hair too, and then returned quite relaxed to my car. While driving back, I kept saying to Baba, ‘This patient could have died before she came to the Hospital, but it didn’t happen...why should she die after I have operated on her? You better save this patient!’ I kept saying this to Him again and again, and after I had poured my heart out to Him completely, I slept peacefully.

The first thing I did the next morning was to call the hospital. And the nurse said, ‘The patient is alright.’ I was vexed. ‘Say *she is still alive*; what do you mean by *alright*?’ I kept the receiver down. And the next moment, I was rushing to the hospital. And when I entered her ward, I saw her sitting up and smiling broadly! I was dumbstruck...her blood pressure was perfect at 120/80! This blew me over... I had not done anything special last night except give her *Vibhuti*! I immediately booked my tickets to Bangalore via Beirut and Bombay; I wanted to find out what this ‘Baba’ is all about andhere I am.”

“She smiles and then continues, “I joined this Hospital in 1979; initially I worked for three years in His General Hospital in Whitefield, Bangalore. But as Dr. Chaya was telling you, the situation now has changed drastically since those days.”

“Exactly,” says Dr. Kameshwari, and goes on to explain. “Thanks to the Sri Sathya Sai Mobile Hospital, the Eswaramma Mother and Child Welfare programme, and also a few initiatives taken by the government, there is more health awareness among the rural folk these days. Now, they come to us with fewer complications and well before time. Slowly, they are coming out of years of superstitious and harmful health practices.”

“At the same time, by His grace, the Hospital is much better equipped now. We now have a comprehensive laboratory where some of the tests that we do routinely, may not even be done in teaching Hospitals.”

“Besides, one other great comfort factor here is the availability of blood,” Dr. Chaya comments, and she amplifies this saying, “Apart from stored bottles, fresh blood is just a phone call away; the students, staff and hundreds of devotees are always ready. And this has saved many lives. For instance, a few years ago, one morning, a Muslim mother walked in desperately seeking help; in her arms was her young girl, lying almost lifeless. We checked her daughter immediately – she had no blood pressure or pulse! When we examined her we discovered that hers was a case of ruptured ectopic pregnancy, a condition where the foetus is fertilized in the tube and not in the main uterus. As a result of which the tube bursts and the patient collapses. This was her sorry state. We instantly arranged for blood, opened up her abdomen and did the necessary surgery. She made very good recovery. The mother was very grateful to all of us, and especially, Swami. Five times a day she would spread her mat in the ward and say her namaz facing Swami’s picture. It was a touching sight!”

The Mobile Hospital and Eswaramma Mother and Child Welfare Programmes Do a World of Good

Dr. Prabha now chips in again to elaborate further. “At the root of all their problems is poverty and ignorance. Their daily meal is just rice and a pickle; they have no intake of iron, calcium or other essential vitamins. But the good side of this story is that over the years they have developed a lot of faith in this Hospital. Now, expectant mothers from local areas come here periodically

for ante-natal checkups and take proper health supplements. And this effort is supplemented by the Mobile Hospital and the Eswamma Mother and Child Care Programme where volunteers go from door to door and supply the essential iron, calcium, folic acid and multi-vitamin tablets.”

“The Mobile Hospital programme has not only significantly improved the health of expectant mothers in the rural areas, it has also unearthed many chronic gynecological cases,” Dr. Chaya adds, and elaborating further she says, “Presently, every week we have at least 2 operations of tumours or fibroids in the uterus. And most of these patients, until our doctors diagnosed them, were unaware that they were suffering actually from a serious ailment! And it is not just their ‘bad blood’ leaving the body as some local grandmothers put it to them... often we have to keep these patients in the Hospital for a week or more before the operation date to improve their vital parameters. In fact, I cannot forget this lady from Kadiri (100 kilometres from Puttaparthi) who walked into the Hospital looking absolutely weak, completely pale and anemic. When we checked her condition, she had a tumour in the uterus, but the most shocking fact was that she had only 1 gram of hemoglobin in her blood! The normal count is 12 grams. That she was still alive and walking was itself a miracle! We immediately admitted her, infused blood, pumped in other essential vitamins and minerals, and after 8-10 days operated on her. She left the Hospital virtually with a new lease of life. It was His Grace that everything we did was successful without any complications.”

We listen to all these stories and facts with wide eyes... Now, we want to ask them something more personal.

‘It is not me anymore, it is Swami’ – Dr. Chaya

“Madam, the number of surgeries, in both obstetrics and gynecology, has increased over the years, and you attend to the Out Patient Department too which averages 150 patients every day. But, you are now in the evening of your life...How are you able to handle this load? Does it not tire you? Do you really get frustrated at times?” We ask Dr. Chaya.

“You see, it is very different working here and elsewhere... Frankly, here my energy levels are far superior than what it was when I was working in government hospitals. Here I do not have any tension; I am calm and composed...the moment I go into the theatre, it is as if I am taken over by another force. It is not me anymore, it is Swami...I know it, it is my experience. And this is precisely why even the difficult operations that we encounter here pass as smoothly as peeling an orange. Even in cases where the baby is stuck and the mother has severe infections, there is no stormy post-operative recovery. The mother recuperates quickly and impressively. What truly keeps me going is the happiness of these poor patients; once they get well, the smile on their faces is enough inspiration and the biggest energy-booster. And some of them visit the Hospital frequently only to see us...they are like our family. Actually, even now there might be a few sitting outside; I can look there if you are interested.”

“Sure...we would love to talk to them... there is nothing like listening to the patients directly!”

‘Everyone speaks to you with so much love’ – Mrs. Lakshmi Narasimha, a patient

Dr. Chaya now walks out of the room, and in a few seconds, she is back with two middle-aged ladies. Introducing one, she says, “She is Lakshmi Narasimha, and comes from Yenumunapalli, about 3 Kilometres from our Hospital. You can speak to her.”

“Sairam... can you please tell us what brought you to the Hospital and what did the doctors do for you for here?”

“I was suffering with severe bleeding for more than a year. When I came in this condition last year, the doctors examined me and suggested that I undergo an operation. Because it was this Hospital, I immediately agreed.”

“She had a mass in her uterus, which we call, a fibroid; she is past 45 years now and was suffering very much. We, therefore, performed a hysterectomy (removal of uterus),” Dr. Chaya explains. Now, the lady wants to say more; we see her eager eyes, so, we ask her to go on.

“These doctors looked after me so well. I have full faith in what these doctors do here as this is Swami’s Hospital; everyone speaks to you with so much love. I will never go to any other Hospital. We work in the fields and have a few cows; we make our living selling milk to the local population. We have no savings, but even if I had money, I would not go anywhere else. I have full faith in Swami and I love this Hospital; I love everything here...” She goes on enthusiastically...

We thank her and now turn our attention to the other lady. “Please tell us, what has been your experience in this Hospital?”

‘I was very sad when they discharged me’ – Mrs. Narayanamma, a patient

“My name is Narayanamma. What can I say? I do not know how to express my joy...the way the doctors here have taken care of me is more than what even my parents would do... Really, nobody outside will take care of us like this...” She is almost crying now.

We pause, and then to divert her mind, ask, “Ok...where are your children?”

“My children are not with me now; they have all gone to the cities. They offered to take me to Bangalore when my bleeding became severe, but I never agreed; why should I? Who will see you with so much care and concern? You will have to spend money elsewhere. Here, there is no money charged and they serve you with so much love. Frankly, to tell you, I was very sad when they discharged me; it felt as if I was going from my mother’s home

to my in-laws house... these doctors are like mothers to me... this Hospital feels like a home...I will never go anywhere else...”

‘What motivates me is the dedication of the senior doctors’ - Dr. Chandrika

It is another emotional outpour... our hearts are full. “How ignorant we are about this magnificent house of healing” we think to ourselves. We decide to pack our cameras, and just then, a young doctor walks in. “This is Dr. Chandrika... she has joined just two years ago. You can get her perspective too, if you like...” Dr. Chaya tells us.

“Yes, sure...” We are actually glad for the opportunity to speak to one of the dynamic young doctors of the Hospital.

“Is this your first Hospital job after your studies and training?”

“No...I worked in two other hospitals for a couple of years,” she says.

“Ok...so, what has your experience been like here?” we throw in a general question.

“First of all, what gives me immense satisfaction is that here the treatment is completely free. Even in a government hospital, where I worked, only the doctors’ services are free, the poor patient actually has to run around for everything from medicines and sutures to collecting blood. It is so fulfilling working here because I do not have to think twice before using an additional swab of cotton because it is not going to add to the patient’s burden. Everything here is abundant, and everybody does his or her part only for Swami. So there is great cohesion, the Hospital atmosphere is like a home and I enjoy working here so much.”

“Do the type of cases and work load bother you?”

“Not at all, actually, this is a great place to improve one’s skills. Every day I learn so much...Yes, it does tire you sometimes, but what motivates me is the dedication of the senior doctors here who have been serving for 30-40 years! They are a great source of inspiration, and of course, there is Swami...who is the soul of this Hospital.”

We thank Dr. Chadrika heartily and sneak a quick look at our watch. It’s past 1 p.m.

“Madams, we have taken so much for your time... sorry for the delay.” We submit humbly.

“Oh, do not worry. We enjoyed it too... it is after all His work and His Glory.”

“Absolutely...thank you very much...the only thing we could not do this morning is visit the wards.” We mention rather casually as we pack our camera bags and leave the room along with Dr. Chaya.

“Hmm...you can do that in the afternoon. I will be there upstairs at 2 p.m. Just drop in, no problem.” Dr. Chaya leaves us with a warm smile.

Moving to the Heart of the Hospital - The Maternity Ward

Sharp at 2 p.m. we are above the Gynecology and Obstetrics OPD, where the Maternity ward is located. We look for Dr. Chaya, and after a while spot her coming out of the area marked “Sterile Zone”. She is now attired completely in green, in a surgeon’s dress.

“I am just coming out of the operation theatre....a patient is now being wheeled into the ward. You can come with me now to see the ward.”

“Yes, thank you...” We follow the doctor and enter a spacious, air-conditioned and bright room with in-patient beds placed in neat rows. Soon, a patient is brought into the ward and the sisters help to place the patient from the wheeled stretcher to one bed in a corner. “Here, we have one nurse for every three patients,” Dr. Chaya informs us and adds, “This is a post-operative ward. We have two such wards, three labour rooms, one in-labour waiting ward, another for high risk pregnancies, and also an isolation ward and a special room for any contingencies. In a month, we have upwards of 200 deliveries.”

“That makes it at least 6 cases a day.” We make a quick calculation.

“Right...that’s the average. But you know, on some days it can be even 8 or 9.”

“Amazing...” We want to ask her more about childbirths, but we spot a lady sitting with her sweet baby on her lap near the other door of the room.

“Can we speak to that mother?” We ask Dr. Chaya.

“I want to name my child ‘Sai Ganesh’” - Mrs. Kalavathi, a patient

“Oh... she is Kalavathi, with her second baby, a boy this time too yes, you can ask her what you like”

“Sairam...where do you come from?” We ask the simple and humble Kalavathi.

“I come from Kadiri.”

“It is 100 kilometres from Puttaparthi,” Dr. Chaya adds, looking at us.

“Ok...your baby is so beautiful...can we take a picture?”

Kalavathi smiles, holds her baby closer to her and raises his tiny head a little, very gently. The camera flash goes... and then, we ask, “Why didn’t you go to any government hospital in Kadiri?”

She replies softly, “There is a heaven and hell difference between here and other hospitals. We get such good treatment here....” We prod her to speak more by asking a few more questions, and then, the reticent mother says, “Apart from very good care, here everything is free. My husband is an auto-rickshaw driver, earning Rs. 60 (US \$ 1.5) a day. We do not have enough money for a comfortable life let alone for medical care. This is Swami’s Hospital; for us, Swami is God, we have faith in Him, so we came here.”

“Ok...what will you name your child?” we ask.

“Sai Ganesh” comes the spontaneous reply, and she adds, “I want ‘Sai’ in the name, it gives me a lot of satisfaction.”

“Every patient here has a moving story.” Dr. Chaya remarks, and asks, “Do you want to speak to more mothers?”

“No...it’s fine...” We decide not to disturb the mothers and babies in the Maternity ward for long, and also not take more of Dr. Chaya’s time.

“Ok, I need to go now,” Dr. Chaya now says, and then adds, “But, if you like, you can speak to our anesthetist, Dr. Hemadri. I have informed him about your project. Just walk into that enclosure and turn left.”

‘This Hospital will grow to something even more fantastic’ - Dr. Hemadri

“Sure, madam. We will do that.” As she leaves, we follow her directions and reach a room with the sign “Doctors Change Room” at the top. We push the door a little and say, ‘Sairam...’

Immediately, the door is opened for us and we are greeted with the big smile of Dr. Hemadri. There is no need for us to introduce ourselves as he seems to know all about our endeavour. “Dr. Chaya told me you might be coming. She is my wife.”

“Oh...that’s wonderful. She has helped us greatly today and it is so nice to know that both of you have dedicated your lives to this Hospital.”

“Well, it is all His Grace. He brought us here.”

“Right, so probably you too were in the UK for 9 years.”

“Yes.’

“So, tell us, how different does it feel working here?”

“You see, there we did our work as a job, but here we do it for Swami - so the approach and motivation is completely different. And actually, He alone is the doer. There are any number of instances where we have taken up very serious cases because we cannot refuse a poor patient, and they have recovered remarkably...we just leave it to Swami. He himself has said, ‘Do whatever you can; leave the rest to Me.’ So that is what we do...often there are difficult cases mainly because of the poor health of the mothers. For example, a baby after delivery does not cry, we do everything we can and finally say ‘Sairam’, and the next moment we hear the thrilling sound of the infant.

“Ok, so most of your patients are to-be-mothers...”

“Yes, 85% of my time is spent in the maternity ward. This hospital has a strong focus on mother and child care right from its inception, though we have several other departments too.”

“Yes, we had a glimpse of the work being done in the Gynecology and Obstetrics Department today, it is absolutely marvelous.”

“Yes, but there are miles still to go. And by His Grace, I know this Hospital will grow to something even more fantastic. After all, it is His Hospital.”

“Yes, of course...” It is past 4 p.m. now, and we see the doctor looking at the table clock for a split second...we decide to wind up the session.

“You must be getting ready for going to *darshan* now.”

“Yes, but before that I need to do a few things here.” he says with a smile.

“Ok...we should not take more of your time...thank you very much.”

“You’re welcome... you can drop in on any other day too if you have more questions.” Dr. Hemadri now shakes our hands and very satisfied we leave his room.

We now slowly walk down the stairs, trying to re-live all the memorable moments of the day... we switch on our digital camera, and browse through all the precious snaps of the doctors, patients, sisters, mothers, babies....there is so much happening here, and the world has no clue...we wonder, how can we ever convey all these heartfelt experiences in an article...will we be able to do full justice to this ‘Sacred Home of Healing’?

The Multi-faced Marvel of Healing

We are at the bottom of the stairs now, and as we proceed towards the exit gate, Dr. Uma spots us, and with a big smile asks, “So, how is it going?” She had helped us a lot yesterday, so, first we thank her for that, and then say, “Yesterday you told us about so many patients, but not a single word about yourself.”

Her smile immediately shrinks...she dismisses the idea completely, and says “Patients are important, not me...,” and then to change topic, she immediately asks, “So which department did you cover today?”

“We did a lot in the Gynecology and Obstetric Department...that is the heart of the Hospital, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but there are so many other departments too. There is a vibrant Dental Department; the ENT section now does not only general surgeries but also microscopic surgeries and ENT endoscopies; on the 1st floor there is a full-fledged physiotherapy section; the Orthopedic Department in the OPD screens patients who need more attention and sends them to the Super Specialty Hospital; and then there is Ophthalmology, Dermatology...”

“Wow! This is not a General Hospital, but a Grand Hospital...It is going to take us many days just to get a glimpse of what goes on in every corner of the Hospital...It is absolutely overwhelming and enriching that Swami has allowed us to do this work... thank you very much for this information.”

We fold our hands in gratitude, and Dr. Uma responds with “You are always welcome...this is Swami’s Hospital, always open to all.”

A patient now approaches Dr. Uma with a slip of paper and she takes her along with her and disappears into one of the rooms.

“I return recharged to do more for the poor, every year” – Ms. Pillay, a sevadal

“We need to plan our next few days properly so that we do not miss anything,” we say to each other, and approach the exit door. But there is a sudden activity there...3-4 sevadals help to lower a stretcher from an ambulance and carry the patient in a rush. “Maybe an emergency...” we think. Looking at the sevadals, we are reminded of our interviews with two sevadals yesterday. “Why not speak to one today too?” It is a good idea, we all agree. We go near the middle-aged lady standing near the entrance, first introduce ourselves and then request her to spare a few minutes for us.

She agrees. We are glad. We now go to a small room so that we can talk peacefully.

“Where do you come from? And what is it like serving in this Hospital?”

“I am Ms. D. K. Pillay and I come from Chattisgarh (a state in eastern India),” she says, and continues, “I come here every year, because I learn a lot from this place. I am actually a Principal in a Tribal School and I do a lot of social service there. I teach the poor kids the basics of health and hygiene, and human values, apart from regular subjects. I try to do whatever I can with the resources I have. Every time I come here, I return recharged to do more for the poor. Swami is doing so much here and is teaching us through so many

ways. It does not matter if I do not have His *darshan* while I am here...He is always in my heart...and He is very close to me...I know it.”

The Hospital is He!

This is another revelation. Again, an eye-opener. The way this edifice of service reaches out to thousands every day through so many mysterious ways is really mind-boggling. Just like Swami, every project of His too has a million facets which are seen, and another one billion that remain unseen. As we step out of the gates of this holy abode, we turn once more, bend our heads, fold our hands and salute reverentially. For, we have now realized that the Hospital is truly He!

- Heart2Heart Team

Dear readers, Swami's General Hospital has numerous divine facets, all of which we know are of great interest to you. We have only briefly covered one half of the Hospital's departments and are aware that you, dear reader, must be yearning to learn more about this unique medical facility, that has been quietly serving humanity for over 50 years. We intend to offer you further articles on the other fascinating specializations in the Hospital, the doctors working there and the patients whose lives are transformed, at various times in the future and hope you will look forward to reading them, as much as we do in presenting them to you!

FEATURE ARTICLES

BEYOND WESTERN PSYCHIATRY....THE BLISS OF ‘SAI’CHIATRY

A personal and illuminating conversation with Dr. Samuel Sandweiss - Part I

Dr. Samuel Sandweiss, an eminent Psychiatrist from California, USA, is one of the early devotees from America, who visited Bhagavan Baba in early seventies and recognised His divinity. Thereafter, He penned the famous book “Sai Baba: The Holy Man and Psychiatrist” which has been an instrument to draw many devotees, especially from the West, to the Divine. His recent book “With Love Man is God” too is an enlightening volume and is widely read.

Dr. Sandweiss has visited the Radio Sai studio on many occasions. Below are extracts of a conversation that Prof. G. Venkataraman, the former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University, had with him in June 2002.

Prof. G. Venkataraman (GV): Sairam and welcome Dr. Sandweiss to the studio of Radio Sai. Well, I must ask you how does it feel to be in our studio? Did you ever dream you would be in such a studio at any time?

Dr Samuel Sandweiss (SS): You know it is remarkable coming to see Swami and experiencing His greatness, and to see this studio blossom is extraordinary. It is wonderful to see modern equipment being devoted to such a holy task.

GV: You are a product of the West and an academic. You practice medicine, psychiatry, and also are associated with a much respected University. So, the question that most people would like to ask is: how did you come to Swami?

SS: Just a quick side note. I wouldn’t consider myself an academic; I am not an intellectual in that sense, nor do I spend much time teaching. I am inquisitive and thoughtful. I thought a lot about Swami, His relationship to western behavioral sciences and psychiatry. But, I wouldn’t consider myself an academic. How did I come to Swami? Probably it’s hard for me to understand from this life. So, one must posit that there would have been other lifetimes that prepared me because here I am, though apparently stuck in a western culture.

GV: You know you are the first person I have heard say that (*chuckles*).

SS: Well, it is probably because I cannot understand why I would have the good fortune; especially because I am coming from the west where this kind of thinking is not well recognised. In western psychiatry, it is quite unusual to think this way, to ponder about *vedantic* thoughts. But from very early on, I was interested in enquiry such as ‘Why am I alive? Why this world? And why

am I in such an extraordinary game?' It just did not seem as if it were a natural thing. I was amazed at it all the time.

GV: At what period of your life was that?

SS: I think very early. I could remember walking down the street at about 11 or 12 years old thinking about these questions.

GV: Oh! As early as that, that's very unusual.

SS: Well, I don't know. Children are very innocent and pure, maybe at an early age they (children) do have thoughts like this and then they are educated out of them (laughs).

GV: (laughs)...That's a good one!

SS: So, this idea of what is the purpose of life naturally led me to read spiritual books. I was very interested in saints and sages, and the level of knowledge that they had, which was beyond general worldly knowledge. Since I was born into a medical family and it was our tradition to go into medicine, I found an area that was closest and that would allow me to think about spiritual matters, and that was psychiatry.

After 9 years in the practice of psychiatry, I could see that the question I was asking was not answered in any field of psychiatry. So, I began to ask a question to people: "Have you ever seen a miracle?" I had heard enough theory and ideas, and I just wondered "Is there anybody who knows anything at a higher level and can show it by some kind of manifestation of something?" So, that is how I was thinking.

GV: You mean, you thought miracles might be possible. You just didn't take it for granted that miracles are impossible as most university-educated people do?

SS: Well, throughout my education I had been reading these books on Jewish mysticism, Zen, Buddhism, and feeling that those high souls had one foot in this life, and another in another dimension; they had vast wisdom with which they could see and experience. It thrilled me that there was this level of understanding that transcended time, was infinite, and also brought us into a very high elevated state. They had discovered that we were godly in some way. So I was always searching. But once, during my residency in psychiatry, I told my professors at the medical school that I was wondering about these ideas, and they looked at me very seriously and ...I thought they were going to send me down for a check up (laughs).

So I stopped asking those questions, but once I got out of residency, I did experiment and wonder about a spiritual based therapy, and also about the other therapies besides the classical ones. I finally began to ask this simple question "Have you ever seen a miracle?" - Something beyond what we

understand as reality. Within 2 or 3 weeks, I heard about Sai Baba and in about 2 months I was in India. That’s how quick it happened!

GV: It happened very fast!

SS: Yes...

GV: And which year was that?

SS: That was May of 1972. It was difficult for a young western psychiatrist, as I had heard from devotees that it was not me going to see Sai Baba, rather He was bringing me to Him.

GV: Did you believe it?

SS: Of course not! At that time I thought it was psychotic thinking. The only place I heard that kind of thinking was by paranoid people who thought there were other dimensions of unreality. But, I was coming into a strange country and I had done some traveling, so it was exciting too. But it was also a bit of a shock.

GV: And when you saw Swami, did you see your much-sought-for miracle?

SS: Well, I came to Bombay (now Mumbai) and Swami was about to give *darshan* at a large stadium in the city. A devotee invited me to the outskirts of town where I could have a little tea and rest before I took a taxi to the function area. After I had rested, I got up to go and as I left this little apartment, Swami passed me and went inside another apartment, without a look at me!

GV: Oh! In the same building?

SS: Swami had come to that building which was way on the outskirts of Bombay. You know I was skeptical and I was not a devotee, and I was a very inquisitive western psychiatrist. So, I am leaving this little building, way in the suburbs and Bombay is a very large place; so, to pass Swami that way, in such a timely way, shook me and I turned and ran after Him like I was a crazy man, and I was not even a devotee! But it shocked my belief system so much; I thought “My god! Was He bringing me to Him?” How could such a chance occurrence happen like this? That was the only time that something like this ever happened in my life in that manner.

GV: By the way, do you know what Swami says about coincidence? He says coincidence is a miracle where I hide Myself (*laughter*). Okay, carry on.

SS: Well, this was a coincidence in which He didn’t hide Himself! He was right there and I was very much taken with it! I saw Him for the first time and I was not impressed. He seemed like a man relatively small in stature, and everybody was very respectful and reverential to Him. And, that was my first contact. He left the building and I went to the stadium. I came late, and so I was outside the stadium which was packed, and Swami was way in the

middle. Then He just slowly walked in my direction and walked all the way till about 15-20 feet from me, and then just stood in this kind of blissful state, and I thought ‘My goodness! That was an unusual occurrence too’. So, He was warming me up!

I had come during the time of Swami’s first summer school (Summer Course on Indian Culture and Spirituality). I think the first teaching Swami gave me was during the course of this summer school. I was sitting watching the proceedings with a person who had been there for about 8 years, and was telling me some of the things that were happening. It was hot and he put his legs up on the chair in front of him and just rested back. And, all of a sudden he felt somebody’s feet on his chair, and I could see his chair rocking back and forth. We turned around and it was Swami sitting in the chair behind showing him how it felt to the person in front of him!

GV: (laughs)

SS: That was the first lesson I had from Swami. It was really quite warming that He was teaching us ‘do unto others as you would like them to do unto you’. And, I was immensely attracted to Him. We had lunch with Swami and He served everybody, and He served us without any pretence. Swami was immediate, was alive, was truly humble and like a servant. And I couldn’t get over that! - How He fed everybody.

One day, I started listening to what He had to say. This, truly, is at the core of what He taught me, and what I am applying in my practice. Swami was talking to His college students about the importance of values, and being simple, kind and humble. “Be humble, harmless, upright, forbearing, have no pretence and be free from the bondage of desire”. You know that was really the core of what He was teaching these young students.

GV: It touched you?

SS: It did not touch me at that time. In fact, it was upsetting to me. Here I was a young psychiatrist thinking that the way to live is fully to experience all of your drives, interests and desires, and to have them all fulfilled and gratified. So hearing somebody talk like this made me feel like it was back to the 17th century Europe, which was very restrictive and constrictive.

GV: It sounded like a kind of unnatural self-denial?

SS: Yes, I came all the way and I hear somebody saying ‘Just be good, try to be good. Don’t give in to fads and don’t let your hair grow long with big beards and tight pants. Just be a good human being - simple and humble.’ So, I thought, what kind of simplistic ideas are these? I thought I would like to hear something very complicated and sophisticated. I was very upset and was thinking of leaving; so I was at some distance from Swami. There were many walls separating us in that house, and Swami was surrounded by people who obviously loved what He was saying and wanted to be really close to Him. I was thinking that I would have to leave, and before I knew what was

happening, He was in front of me with these sparkling eyes and this smile that I had never seen. It just captivated me, just made me loose my self in it. You can’t describe it; because you are absorbed all of a sudden – He is so full of Love!

He gave me two pieces of candy and said, “Sweets, eat!” And I felt all of my troubles just melt away like that. I could then understand there’s a level of spirituality that dominates all of our ‘feelings system’. All our emotions of sadness and pains, upset-ness and frustrations can all be washed away - just because of Swami’s smile!

I said to myself, “What happened to those feelings that I almost took pride in? I felt life was so terrible”. But within that second it was completely gone and I had a childish giggle.

GV: (*laughs*) Now, let me come to you as a professional. Only a very few people like you are available who know what the western concept of mind is, and at the same time, have also been exposed to Swami’s teachings about the human mind. Please tell us whether western philosophy has any special role for the mind opposed to what eastern philosophy states. You know, in eastern philosophy, they say, the mind is an instrument given to you by God; do you have that kind of an approach in western philosophy?

SS: Well, you see the difference is that in the west we are considered to be the mind and the body. The idea that you are not the mind or the body is like an unusual, almost psychotic idea. But in the east, they believe that you are not the mind and the body.

Eastern philosophy teaches that when the conscience is highly defined and purified, it is capable of visualizing the light form of the *atma*. Well, we don’t know anything in the west about what *atma* is; or that we are actually divine and that there are higher aspects of the mind. One of the most important concepts in the east is that the mind can be a stumbling block on the way to realizing your true reality. Well, all this is completely absent in western philosophy.

GV: But let me ask you a couple of questions in this context. For example, western people know the word ‘conscience’. I mean, people say ‘I follow my conscience’. And then people talk about the human spirit, especially in relation to adventure and achieving the impossible. So, maybe *buddhi* and *atma* are known to the west, but in different terms. Maybe in not such greater depth, and after all, you remember Shakespeare says, ‘Above all to thine ownself be true’. So he implicitly, unknowingly perhaps, recognized that there is a Self. Won’t you agree?

SS: Well, yes! And mystics and artists intuitively grasped that. But the cold and hard science of psychiatry doesn’t actually define that. And they don’t define the idea of spirit too - that there is a spirit inside you. I have never seen any definition for that.

GV: Yes, I remember, I think it was Watson (a scientist and co-discoverer of DNA) who said that, mind is a meat machine! (*chuckles*) That is probably a pretty brisk way of putting it.

SS: Probably in the west the mind is very much associated with the body. So, the body and mind are considered interwoven. But the idea that our true identity is a divine identity is not present. Of course, when my first contact with Swami became very clear, I realised He at least had a way beyond what we understood by western definitions of mind.

GV: So, can I put it like this: the hard-core scientists and intellectuals in the west do not go beyond the brain. The mystics understand the mind, and that it is something which has got divine overtones. And that Swami identifies the mind as the derivative of this *atma*, which is also the universal spirit. So, He amplifies this and takes it to the Ultimate. Is that the way you want to put it?

SS: Yes! And there are many psychologists and psychiatrists who are interested in trying to make this integration between spirituality and psychiatry. Many people are thinking this way.

GV: When you say they want to integrate spirituality and psychiatry, how do they define spirituality?

SS: Well, these progressive psychiatrists say there are some things beyond the mind as we understand it, and that there is a higher level of being, a higher intuitiveness and even divinity within man. Some of them believe that the knowledge from great teachers like Buddha and Jesus should be integrated into general psychiatry.

When I went through psychiatry, I would ask people, “Why don’t we try and understand the relationship between the teachings of the great saints and the science of psychiatry?” But they are just not that interested for some reason. But now there are people in many fields and in different facets of psychiatry and psychology who are interested; they are trying to bring about some integration.

GV: Is it just academic interest, or is it an interest directed towards developing new methods of treating mental illness?

SS: People who are looking at *yoga*, *hatha yoga*, Patanjali’s eight steps of *Raja Yoga* and such are exploring what influence these have on mental diseases. How can engaging in service activities affect mental health? They are trying to integrate eastern spirituality with western techniques, to achieve higher levels of consciousness and to help people with mental anguish.

GV: This brings me to a direct question. Do you use any of Swami’s teachings in treating your patients? And if so, how?

SS: This is a wonderful question. Because once we meet Swami, we enter into this deep enquiry, “what is this relationship of my life and how am I

expressing it?” Because you can’t just forget it, once you experience Swami. Of course, I have done a lot of thinking about how this is integrated.

I would start with something that seems so simple but is obviously vastly important. And that is, respecting the other person. For me, that is the spiritual technique of seeing Swami in the other, and respecting Swami in the other, actually listening to them. To look at how that person is living his or her life? Are they practicing good values, and doing their duty? Just taking a look at the basics, and from there we can go to the many different levels of Swami’s teaching.

GV: Absolutely!

SS: It is very complicated and esoteric, but Swami is, over and over again, for years, repeating His teachings of ‘*Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema, Ahimsa*’ (Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Non-violence) and making us ask, are we just basically good people?

GV: That’s right.

SS: Swami amplifies it and never gets tired of telling us; and we listen and go out and do the opposite the next minute! So when are we going to listen and learn?

You know, for instance, I had a patient come in who was speaking primitive swear words. Her movements were very agitated and she lived a very disorganized life.

GV: Was she an educated lady?

SS: She was fairly educated. She was a nurse but had just dropped down to the level of a demon almost. She had a lot of psychological and physical problems, and just seemed to lose all faith and hope. She was just cussing like a sailor, just terrible. The first thing I said was, “Look, you can’t talk like that here. You have to talk respectfully”. And she said, “Doc, you are a psychiatrist, you are not my father!” So I said, “Father, mother or whatever, it’s not good for you. It’s not good to speak in that way. It’s actually a very bad thing for you. Good speech is extremely important; it controls the mind, and relates ourselves to higher conscience. To have deep respect for life, you have to speak nicely in here. You know, you don’t have to be here, but if you are going to be here then you have to talk nicely.”

So we just had that one agreement “you have to talk nice” and so she would come in and she would talk in a better way. And if she would swear, then I would not accept it. A simple thing like that is profound.

We are thinking of all kinds of higher meditative techniques. But Swami once said, “Somebody came up to me after 50 years of meditation and said that they have not felt anything different. What a waste that is for that person! First

of all you can’t just go up to be a high meditator; you first have to know how to have good values, sense control, sit quietly and watch your breath.”

GV: The very essence of Patanjali’s teachings.

SS: Yes, you just don’t go to the 8th step of meditation immediately.

GV: Now coming back to this lady whom you tried to get to talk to you nicely. Did she improve afterwards?

SS: It is still early. The improvement was that she is not talking like that (like before). She knows that when she comes into the office, the ambience has a certain level of respect.

Another instance is of a lady who was working as a nurse and had a traumatic event. She developed all kinds of aches and pains, felt very sad, and that her life was useless from then on. And all she would do was come in and complain and complain.

And then after some time, she saw that I was not going to fight with her. We needed a little time just to show that I respect and liked her, which was very important. This is Swami’s teaching about being respectful and listening to someone.

Then, because she had tried so many other techniques and was filled with so much medicine, I just said “Have you ever had religious and spiritual feelings in your life? Do you have an altar in your home?” Just to give a little awareness with a simple thing like that, because this world is filled with darkness. So she said, “I don’t have an altar, do you have one at your house?”

That was the first time she talked to me and asked me a question, because she was just complaining and self-absorbed. I said, “Yes! I even have an altar in here! You see this statue here - this represents the God whose name is Vishnu, or the Protector. When I look at that, I think of God’s protective powers and am asking Him to protect and just keep us safe.” That was the first time she would allow me to say something sweet to her. And then, she started asking me how should she make the altar and where should it go. This was a very sick lady, but this is how spirituality is, and it is amazing how it can attract people.

I once read a psychologist who said that people who are in pain have spiritual experiences. And the strange thing is that many deeply neurotic people and persons who are troubled from disturbed relationships that keep haunting them, have spiritual experiences that are authentic. They have many genuine experiences, even though psychiatrists would be apt to think they are having them because they are downtrodden and hurting. The love of God is so sweet and so vast that He does come to people.

GV: When you spoke to her kindly, did that touch her?

SS: Well, I could feel for the first time the 'love experience' that was generated through talking about Vishnu, and you could feel she was receiving it. Sometimes people don't tell you.

GV: That is the basics of Swami's teachings: Love all, serve all.

SS: Love all and serve them. And it can come in the most subtle way.

(To be continued)

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 11

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 by the values of Right Conduct, Truth, Love, Peace and Non-violence, even though the choice had appeared tough.

In our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories from Mrs. Priya K-Alldis, Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani, Mr. Karthik Ramesh, Mr. Amar Vivek, Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam, Mr. Hiten Morarji, Mr. N. Prabhakar, Mr. Sathya Jambunathan and Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi.

We now bring you a high-octane moral dilemma from an author who has been working in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries for over 25 years. She has held senior management positions with leading pharmaceutical biotechnology companies in North America heading regulatory affairs, clinical affairs and quality compliance departments. In addition, she established and co-owned a pharmaceutical scientific laboratory which later became one of the leading scientific laboratories in North America. Currently she is responsible for the Clinical Compliance activities of one of world's leading multinational pharmaceutical companies in the world. Outside of her professional and family time, she dedicates her energy and resources to Sathya Sai educational and other community service activities. The author endeavours to practice human values in every aspect of her professional and personal life.

THE PULL OF MAMMON Vs THE POWER OF MORALITY

...A powerful story of a lady who had the tenacity to tread the path of Truth

Through her excellent interpersonal skills and scientific expertise, the author was recognised for outstanding contribution in the pharmaceutical sector. She earned herself a reputation for the highest ethical and professional standards. That was until she faced a moral quagmire when she took up a lucrative position with a new company, only to find that the venture was tuned exclusively towards quick profit making, by compromising quality and regulatory standards.

By falsifying scientific data the company hoped to fast track the approval for marketing a new drug product. At stake were millions of dollars worth of research funding, millions more from its likely sale, the life-threatening risks to millions of innocent lives that would be exposed to the medication, and most importantly, the violation of her conscience, that revolted against a corporate

agenda focused on instant profits, regardless of the safety of the drugs being marketed.

According to an estimate, in 2007 alone, the top 5 pharmaceutical companies made a profit of about \$600 billion. Each year, thousands of drugs are presented to the United States Food and Drug Administration or the USFDA for approval by pharmaceutical research companies. Once approved, the products hit the marketing channels, reaping in the profits. Driven by market forces and stiff competition, the race to the finishing line could potentially be influenced by greed at all costs, including moral and human. An industry veteran shares her story.

The Standards of Success

“In the year 2006, I accepted the position as the Head of Regulatory and Clinical Affairs of a pharmaceutical company in a large metro in North America. It was a relatively small firm, but I felt confident that I could make a huge and positive difference in the organisation based on my previous achievements. Main reason for accepting the position was the close proximity of the company to my home and to my children’s school. The company’s President knew my reputation as a successful employee at my previous job. He was keen to have me on board as part of the core executive team to build the company. I was enthusiastic to apply my skill-set and experience for the success of the company. It seemed like a win-win situation.

Entering a Moral Quagmire

Being a disciplined worker, I applied myself whole-heartedly to my work from day one. Within the first month of my employment, I began to sense some disconcerting trends at my workplace. There seemed to be some problems and discrepancies with the authenticity of scientific documents for a new drug that was being developed to seek market authorisation in North America and Europe. Being responsible for the regulatory compliance of the organisation, I checked all the documents prepared by the Research and Development, and Quality Assurance departments, as a part of the review process for the regulatory submission. It didn’t take me long to find irregularities in the scientific documentation. The information presented in the documentation for regulatory submission was not consistent with the actual raw data generated during the quality control testing. There was clear evidence of falsification of records by responsible scientific personnel.

The thought of exposing thousands of patients to a drug that is not safe and effective was unnerving and totally against my ethical beliefs. Naturally, my alarm bells went off and I felt it was my duty to take the issue to the top management.

Mismanagement from the Top

I brought the matter to the attention of the company’s president, expressing my grave concern citing specific examples of the counterfeit scientific data. I

urged him against submitting the questionable information to the regulators. I recommended that we reformulate and make new batches of drug product with acceptable quality standards for use in the clinical trial. 'Let us discard the previous batch and start the scientific data collection from a clean slate', I advised.

He pretended to be listening to my concerns but, continued with his meetings with the key personnel from Research and Development and Quality Assurance Departments without my presence. Subsequent to his meetings, he informed me that there was really nothing wrong with the scientific data, and insisted that it was acceptable for regulatory submission. Using clever logic and smart talk, he tried to assuage my concerns and brush off any suggestions of irregularities. My idea of going back to start over was not welcome for obvious reasons that it will delay the marketing approval, and in turn, cause a loss of millions of dollars of revenue for the company.

During the subsequent weeks, additional paperwork was being forwarded to the regulatory affairs department and I assigned the responsibilities of compiling and reviewing of the documents to my staff. Independent of my view, one of the regulatory specialists in my department noticed conflicting scientific information provided by Research and Development department for the regulatory submission, and she immediately brought her concerns to my attention. There were multiple discrepancies indicating questionable scientific data throughout the documentation provided for regulatory submission.

When the regulatory specialist questioned the person in-charge of R&D about the errors in the documents, he immediately attempted to alter the records in the presence of the regulatory specialist. She was in deep shock to see the fraudulent actions by a responsible individual and alerted me immediately showing the altered documents. I immediately met with the head of R&D and confronted him with the evidence of fraudulent incidents. I explained to him about the negative impact of his actions including regulatory actions, health and safety of consumers and the reputation of the organisation. He did not appear to be much worried about the ethics and consumer impact of his fraudulent actions, since he had the support of other key personnel in the organisation.

During my routine meetings with the president of the company, I brought forward all of the concerns relating to the falsification of documents again and again. He continued to pretend as if he was concerned, but nothing was being done to correct or improve the situation. These unethical and immoral actions started to affect my morale, personality and health.

In the meantime, the company was also working on getting market authorisation in Europe for a few other new drug products formulated for treating other illnesses. Due to questionable track records, regulatory affairs personnel scrutinized every document received from the R&D and Quality Assurance departments. Regulatory staff noted several other questionable entries in various documents clearly indicating that the problem was rampant.

As calmly as I possibly could, once again, I met the president and pointed to him that obvious mistakes had been made and I was personally prepared to help the company succeed by going back to the drawing board and starting all over again. I had enough experience in the area and was confident that the company could successfully get the product approved for marketing by diligently following due procedures. I had done so throughout my career and it was possible to achieve the same here as well. The product was sound and was sure to be approved and capable of bringing us profits by following an ethical route. It was clear from his gesture that the president was not thrilled about going back to the drawing board to rescue the product since it would translate in a delay in product approval, and thus, loss of income to the company and the share holders.

A Troubled Conscience Leads to Misery

The unsettling situation at work was wreaking havoc on my health – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. I felt an inner violation by being a part of the set-up where my concerns for following the right path to business success were being totally ignored. Being a calm and patient person by nature, it was becoming obvious to me, and those close to me noticed that I was becoming more restless, irritable and impatient in my behaviour. I found myself acting and reacting out of character. I was reflecting the disturbances of my work environment. I was at a cross-road in my life where everything seemed to be clashing. My personal and ethical values were at war with my work environment.

I often stopped and thought about what had been happening using my discrimination. I acted according to my conscience by revealing untruthful and deceitful actions. In an effort to steer the company in the right direction, I provided options and advice to conduct business in an ethical manner. I clearly communicated the consequences of committing of fraud. My conscience was surely in sync with my rooted values, even though the work environment was out of line with my ethical values.

Obviously, I spent considerable time praying to Bhagavan Baba for guidance, courage, and a sense of direction on how to handle my situation. An inner debate was raging all the time and my restlessness was hard to ignore. Soul searching, sleeplessness, self-doubt and inner conflict continued to plague me. Everyday, I came home feeling very stressed and could barely focus on my family. My blood pressure shot up and I found it hard to force myself to go to work and turn a blind eye to the fraud going on right under my nose. I kept questioning myself as to how Swami would expect me to handle the situation. Soon I realised that I had tried every possible means to correct the unethical activities going on and had done everything in my power to influence a positive change in the situation. I had sought meetings with all the key players in the company to express my serious concern and to warn them of the possible consequences to the organisation if they continued with their deceptive activities and sham practices.

The Moment of Truth Dawns

After having satisfied my inner self that I had left no stone unturned to rectify the situation and steer the company on the right path, I realised it was time for me to face my moment of truth. When I arrived home, I sat in front of Baba's altar and fully surrendered to Him for His guidance on my next action. As I meditated I felt very strong and positive about the actions that I took during the past several months based on my strong ethical principles. I felt that the only choice for me was to leave the company immediately. So I decided to meet with my family to discuss my decision. I was worried about the reaction from my family members about losing a six figure salary that all had been enjoying!

I told my family what I was going through and reminded them that I was bringing home an attractive income, but felt it was coming from an unethical source and I couldn't live with that. There were no ethics at work and human lives were at risk due to the company's malpractices. I explained to them the company's rush to get the product on the market and the compromises that were being made along the way with dangerous implications for the health of sick people. My family was completely empathetic to my predicament and fully supported my decision. Moreover, they had witnessed first-hand the effect of the stress on my health and personality.

A Dharmic Decision

Having my family's backing and the satisfaction that I had tried my best to help the company correct its moral course, I tendered in my resignation and walked out from the job. What a relief it was! I felt a liberating sense of well-being the moment I cut myself clean from the situation. I was absolutely sure that I had done the right thing and Bhagavan had guided me through the entire experience. Nothing felt better than my decision to adhere to righteousness or *dharma*.

As if to reward me for sticking to my conscience in the right path without being affected by the environment, with Bhagavan's grace, I was offered a position as the Director of Clinical Compliance with one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, within three months of resigning from my previous job. The new organisation highly values ethics and is recognized worldwide for its humanitarian assistance. The company values are in line with human values and the employees are encouraged to practice a chosen value for each month. In fact, there are routine presentations by the president of the new company about the values in work place. The company even won an award for contributing the largest amount of donations to under privileged countries in 2007.

Today, Bhagavan has finally found me the perfect career match, where I am in harmony with the ideals of the company. My sense of principles is in sync with the corporate vision of my current employer. The work environment is conducive to my personal practice of values, with no room for moral compromises. It is an ideal ground for integrating spirituality within my

professional life. There is no conflict between the two. My work feels like my worship. Every moment feels sacred. Could I have asked for a better opportunity for spiritual growth?

Meanwhile, at the previous company, the unethical activities continued but the bad *karma* has caught up. The president has been removed and the company is now on the verge of bankruptcy. In no way do I feel vindicated at their sorry state. Indeed, many lives have been adversely affected by the lack of moral compass of the few top people. When the leaders fail, the entire organisation suffers.

My experience is a testament for the outcome of following the *dharmic* path in my professional and personal life. Many of us go through similar challenges at our work environment where money is given priority over truth or right conduct these days. When we truly follow and practice human values and listen to our conscience, we are guided to ultimate victory by our beloved Bhagavan.

As Swami indicated in this extract from a Divine discourse delivered during the Convocation ceremony in 1996, whose words are a constant reminder that I follow *dharma* whatever situation I am in. "In whatever situation you may be placed in your official careers, never give way to untruth. You must uphold *dharma*, which means acting according to your conscience. This is the meaning of the *Upanishadic* dictum *Sathyam Vadha, Dharma Chara*; (Speak truth, follow righteousness). This was the advise given by sages to their disciples when they completed their studies."

(Due to the sensitivity of the content, the identity of the author has been withheld. Apart from pursuing her career in the pharmaceutical giant, she continues to serve the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation in her city with devotion and gratitude.

In fact, she says, "While I was using my computer for typing this experience, all of a sudden Bhagavan's picture with His saying 'Why Fear When I Am Here' appeared on my computer screen. For me, it was a marvellous flash of Divine affirmation not only of my experience but also of my decision to share it with my sisters and brothers who are aspiring to tread the path of righteousness."

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part – 46

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT XX - SCENE 1

A hut is built on the land gifted by Subbamma, and that now becomes the residence of Young Swami. While many adore and worship Baba, some are jealous and have evil intentions towards Him.

A MAN: It seems that Karnam Subbamma gave a piece of her land to Young [Bala] Swami.

SECOND PERSON: Subbamma has tremendous devotion for Bala Swami.

THIRD PERSON: Apart from devotion, Subbamma is also a very generous lady. That is why she so readily offered help.

YET ANOTHER MAN: It is Easwamma's blessing to have given birth to Bala Swami, while it is our good fortune and blessing to be able to listen to His Divine Discourses.

FIRST PERSON: Swami taking birth in this village of Puttaparthi is the result of the good merit earned by its inhabitants in previous births.

SCENE 2

A plot is hatched to set fire to the hut of Baba.

RAMA: Hey, come on!.... Come quick!

RAJA: Look out and see if someone is coming.

RAMA: Sit down.....sit down.....

GANGA: They call Him God, God. They hire bullock carts and come here...Deluded, they have become mad.....How can man be God? What is all this illusion and miracles!.....

RAJA: Even if He is not God but has some power, let Him show it now!Is it miracle or magic, is He real or fraud?.....We will soon know!

RAMA: Stop talking Go and get the torches first; we will then light the torches and set fire to the hut.

The hut is torched, and is rapidly getting burnt. People see this and are shocked.

A MAN: Look! Bala Swami's hut is burning..... And Swami is inside!!

ANOTHER MAN: Hey! Get up!! Bala Swami's hut is burning!.....Fire....Fire!.....

A THIRD PERSON: Come on!The hut is burning!Bring some water!...

FOURTH PERSON: Hey, all of you come! Bala Swami's hut is on fire!.....Come! Someone has set fire to it.....

Meanwhile, it mysteriously starts raining. But wonder of wonders, the rain is pouring down only over the burning hut and nowhere else! People are astonished.

A MAN: Look! It is raining right over there! Rain is pouring down on the burning hut!!.....

ANOTHER MAN: Indeed!..... Really, it is raining!.....

THIRD PERSON: But it is not raining over us! Not even a drop on us!....How amazing!

FOURTH PERSON: This is most astonishing! Rainwater is not falling on us but coming down only on the burning hut!!.....How strange!.....

YET ANOTHER PERSON: There is nothing strange about it.....Bala Swami is inside.....And Swami is no ordinary person.

A LADY: Swami is God!

ANOTHER SPECTATOR: That is why it is not a mere hut but a Divine Abode.

Meanwhile, the plotters are aghast; evidently, their plans have totally misfired. Slowly, the truth dawns on them.

GANGA: All along we mistakenly believed that everything was an illusion and a fraud.....But now, we know the truth....

RAJA: The rain is coming down only on the burning hut!.....How strange!!.....

A MAN IN THE CROWD: Bala Swami is no ordinary person. He is God!....He is a God with extra-ordinary powers....Otherwise, how can it rain just on the burning hut and not on us?.....Astounding!.....

SECOND PERSON: Look! The burning hut is now back to normal!

THIRD PERSON: That is not a hut but a temple. That is why such a miracle has happened!.....

FOURTH PERSON: That makes sense. After seeing this miracle, can anyone doubt the Divinity of Bala Swami?.....There! Looks like Bala Swami is coming!...

A LADY: It is all a *Leela*, a sport of God! Bala Swami is coming!

Swami appears on the scene and He is duly hailed. A cheer-leader shouts, “Bala Swami Ki” and the crowd responds by shouting “Jai” which means victory. The gang that set fire to the hut realise who Swami is, feel remorse, and decide to seek Swami’s pardon.

RAMANA: Bala Swami is truly God!.....

RAMA: Let us go at once to Bala Swami, fall at His Feet, and beg for His forgiveness....

THE EVIL GANG: [chorus] Swami, please forgive us!

BABA: What for?

GANGA: Mistaking You to be a fraud and a magician, we set fire to Your abode...

RAJA: We wanted to test Your powers. Swami! Please forgive us!

BABA: You did not do any wrong. It was your ignorance that made you act the way you did..... Ignorance is like darkness.... In the matchstick that you used, there is fire as well as light. The same match can be used to light either a fire or a lamp. With the fire you can reduce a hut to ashes whereas with the lamp you can dispel darkness. ...Use first your intellect to remove your ignorance... Stop testing. The fault is not yours but that of your ignorance... You may go now...

THIEVES: Swami! You are truly God! You are truly God!

SCENE 3

Easwamma is deeply upset by the incident of arson. She is very much worried about the safety of her dear Sathyam. The boy refuses to listen to her; she has no recourse but to pray to her favourite God, Lord Sathyanarayana, who gave her the boy as His gift.

EASWARAMMA: O Lord! You are constantly testing young Sathyam who is totally innocent about the ways of the world.....How long am I to bear all this? ...Oh God! How long have I to suffer this anguish?Treating Sathyam to be Your very Gift, we have named Him after You!...

Sobs.

EASWARAMMA: When people worshipped Him as Bala Swami, I saw You in Him..... But.....But...This jealousy and hatred have exceeded all limits! ...Lord! Why are You subjecting Sathyam to all these difficult tests?...No!....No!...No more such tests!..... Please don’t agitate this mother’s heart....Don’t disturb it please! ...I can’t bear it....I just can’t bear it!

Swami enters Easwaramma’s house at this juncture and calls out to her.

BABA: Lady of the house.....lady of the house....

EASWARAMMA: My boy.....my dear Sathyam.....my child!...

BABA: Is it not true that when a net is thrown into a pond, only fish will be caught and not water? In the same way, acts performed out of ignorance will not harm those who enjoy God’s Grace. Lady, don’t worry!..

EASWARAMMA: My child,my Sathyam!

SCENE 4

The hut being set on fire and its miraculous survival now becomes the talk of the village.

A LADY: Sister, did you see that extra-ordinary happening? There was no rain anywhere in the village but it just poured over the hut of Bala Swami!

ANOTHER LADY: Yes, the rain came down only on the burning hut!

THIRD LADY: The rains came to put out the fire because Sathyam is God!

FOURTH LADY: How remarkable! In this *Kali* Age, God is living right here in this very village of ours and right before our eyes!

THE FIRST LADY: Venkama’s son Raju is no ordinary person! He is a Great One with extra-ordinary powers. Otherwise, how can it rain non-stop just over the burning hut and nowhere else?

SECOND LADY: It seemed as if the Rain God had come down to have the *Darshan* of Bala Swami!

A LADY IN THE GROUP: We should all be proud that such a Noble Soul is residing in our village. Not everyone can have this Divine Spark; it is the cumulative merit of earlier births.....This miracle is like what Lord Krishna performed earlier in the *Dwapara* Age.

FIRST LADY: Fortunate indeed are we to be able to witness and be thrilled by the *Leelas* of Swami!

SCENE 5

The scene is Venkama Raju's house. The subject of discussion is the recent hut-burning incident.

KONDAMA RAJU: Such stories are known from the days of the *Mahabharatha*. Did not the evil Kauravas try to burn the noble Pandavas, when the latter were occupying the palace built of lacquer? What happened then?God's power prevailed, and evil power took flight!.... A similar thing has happened in this *Kali Age* also. Once more, and in the very same manner, God's might has triumphed over evil forces. No evil power can ever touch our dear Sathyam, anywhere and at any time.....Please believe me. Don't worry!

VENKAMA RAJU: Father, how can you say that?! What if something terrible were to happen?.....

KONDAMA RAJU: Venkama, you have not understood Sathyam. That is why you are having such doubts.

VENKAMA RAJU: We have to punish those wicked people.....We have to make sure that such things do not happen again. ..

BABA: I have not incarnated in order to punish the wicked but to remove the evil in them, and to show them the sacred path. Even Dharmaraja, who never wavered from *Dharma*, had enemies. He was named Ajata Shatru [one who has no enemies] but all the Kauravas were his enemies!In this *Kali Age*, evil overshadows good..... Devotion to God alone can invoke the Supreme Power that annihilates evil forces..... Constantly remembering God, promotes devotion.

SCENE 6

MAN: Seshama Raju, Seshama Raju! It seems some evil people set fire to Bala Swami's abode in Puttaparthi!

SESHAMA RAJU: Is that so?

MAN: But don't worry. Swami is safe. Thanks to the Divine Power in Him, He did not face any danger. I will take your leave now.

(To be continued)

MUSINGS ON AVATARS - PART 8

*By Prof. G. Venkataraman
(Continued from the previous issue)*

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 "The 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 last episode described the opening scene of the great Kurukshetra War, and also how Karna, at the very last minute, learnt that he was really the elder brother of the Pandavas. It was painful for him to have to fight against his very own brothers, but that was the choice he made. This month we begin with a few remarks on Karna and then lead to the war itself and what followed.

Loving Sai Ram and greeting from Prashanti Nilayam. If you recall, in the last issue, I ended with a reference to a conversation between Kunti and her eldest son Karna, and the very different ways in which Karna and Kunti looked at life and death.

The Tragic Hero Karna

Karna is perhaps the most tragic of all the characters that appear in the Mahabharata. On occasions, Swami has praised Karna but has also pointed out that for all his noble qualities, Karna committed one fatal blunder. He surrendered himself totally to Duryodhana because he felt that Duryodhana saved his honour in an hour of crisis. It was this loyalty that compelled Karna to refuse even his mother's request to desist from fighting. Swami says that total surrender must only be to God and not to man, whoever that may be; ***any pledge given to another human must be restricted and conditional when the issue of God becoming a priority arises.***

Sanjaya is Blessed to 'See' the Battle from Afar

With war about to break out, Dhritarashtra began to panic, for he knew well what the outcome would be. He cursed his sons for not being reasonable, and he cursed himself too for not exercising parental authority with sufficient

force. At that juncture, Sage Vyasa came to Dhritarashtra and consoled him by saying, "The past is past and there is no use in crying over spilt milk. Prepare yourself to accept the outcome bravely, whatever it may be. If you wish, I can bless you with a vision so that you can see what is going on in the battlefield." Dhritarashtra declined the offer but still wanted some means of obtaining news from the battlefield. Vyasa then blessed Dhritarashtra's companion, Sanjaya, with the capacity to see the happenings on the battlefield and offer reports to his king. Thus, it was that Sanjaya became not only the world's first war correspondent but TV commentator as well!

The *Bhagavad Gita*, which we all think of as the lessons taught by the Lord to Arjuna and humanity as well, actually begins and ends as a conversation between Dhritarashtra and Sanjaya, with the dialogue on the battlefield between Krishna and Arjuna tucked in between. Sanjaya is not only blessed with remote vision but remote hearing as well; and when Krishna reveals to Arjuna His Cosmic Form, Sanjaya is able to see that too.

The conversation between the blind king and his constant companion begins with Dhritarashtra asking Sanjaya to describe the scene at the battlefield just before the fighting was due to commence. And that is when Sanjaya describes Arjuna asking Krishna to drive the chariot to a central location between the two armies when, seeing the line up of revered elders on the other side, Arjuna's heart sinks yielding to doubt and misery. Krishna waits patiently for the disturbed Arjuna to pour out his heart, and then instructs him in Divine Knowledge. This clears the cobwebs in Arjuna's mind and gone is the confusion. He gets up as instructed and fights with vigour, dedicating his actions to Krishna and seeking no reward. Swami adds:

“Krishna's exposition benefited Arjuna, Sanjaya, Vyasa [who wrote the Mahabharata] and Hanuman [who as the symbol in the flag of Arjuna's chariot, also heard it]. The same Gita fell on the deaf ears of Dhritarashtra too.”

This last remark is most significant. These days, there are many who make it a point to read all the seven hundred verses of the Gita every day. Some even take the trouble of memorising all the verses. All this is fine and desirable no doubt, but only up to a point. As Swami has often remarked, what is the use of all this memorising, if one does not put into practice the teachings of even one verse, or at least half a verse? If one merely chants but does not follow the teachings in real life, then one is no better than a tape recorder! That's the warning from Swami and I suggest that we should periodically remind ourselves of that warning when we try to cleanse ourselves merely by routine reading or chanting.

Moving on, Swami has also made a few other remarkable revelations concerning the Kurukshetra War. First is the fact that the war was fought in 3141 BC, when Krishna was 86 years old (Krishna, Swami says, was born on July 20, 3227 BC). The war started on a Full Moon day (*Amavasya*) but Sanjaya started his narration ten days later. He adds: "Some consider this day as the '*Gitajayanti*' or the day on which Krishna vouchsafed the

message of the *Gita* to Arjuna. But, this was the day on which Sanjaya narrated the story of the battle to Dhritarashtra. The *Gita* was actually given by Krishna to Arjuna on the '*Karthika Bahula Amavasya*' day."

By the way, some of you might recall that not only has Radio Sai broadcast the entire text of the *Gita* in Sanskrit with concurrent translation in English, but has also brought out the essence in the form of a simple dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. In addition, I have sometime ago broadcast an extended series of talks on the essence of the *Gita* as highlighted by Swami. In view of all this, I shall not, on this present occasion, spend any more time on the *Gita*.

The Kurukshetra War lasted eighteen days in which initially, fortune seemed to favour the Kauravas, causing much despondency in the Pandava camp. But eventually the tide turned and the Pandavas won, the last act in the Great War being a keenly fought one-to-one mace combat between Bhima and Duryodhana. Bhima finally killed Duryodhana, and it was all over.

Were Lord Krishna's Actions Fair?

Krishna's role in the war has been the subject of much comment, the feeling in some quarters being that though Krishna did not wield any weapon, He, using questionable tactics, skilfully manipulated many a situation so as to give the Pandavas a tactical advantage.

(In the Rama Avatar, too, scholars have debated endlessly on the correctness of Rama slaying Vali from behind; however, Swami has put to rest all such controversies by giving a deep insight into the Divine purpose and intentions). In fact, in his dying moments, Duryodhana himself levelled such charges of foul play and severely castigated Krishna. Balarama too was chagrined by Krishna's role in the final destruction of Duryodhana. And so the question has often been raised whether some of Krishna's actions were above board or fair? This is an important point and merits some attention.

There are basically two ways of looking at Krishna's so-called "questionable" tactics. The first is by regarding Krishna as a mere human and the second is by taking into account the fact that Krishna was an Avatar (Divine Incarnation), a *Poorna* Avatar at that. If Krishna was a mere mortal, then the charges levelled against Him might perhaps have a basis, but if we remember that He was, in fact, God incarnate, then His actions fall totally outside the purview of limited human analysis.

Man is bound by space and time and views things, people and events circumscribed by this limitation, whereas the Blessed Lord is **completely beyond the finite boundaries that apply to us ordinary mortals**. Thus, His actions can be understood only by Him and not by us, and we simply have no business whatsoever, judging Him by our yardsticks; it is totally meaningless and absolutely stupid.

Indeed this is always the mistake one makes with Avatars. Did not Shirdi Sai frequently baffle his contemporaries as does our own beloved Swami? As the late Mr. Kasturi once remarked, not only every discourse, but even a "casual" remark or for that matter, even a "mere" gesture of Swami has unfathomable meaning. It is pointless either to try and analyse, interpret or understand the actions of the Avatar. Humble and meek acceptance, as Gandhi recommends, is the only way open to us. In this context, it is sobering to remember that even Balarama, an aspect of Narayana, could not understand Krishna's earthly actions.

Post War Carnage

Returning to the story of the war, the casualties were truly staggering. All the Kauravas were killed; and so also all the leading lights on the Kaurava side, including Karna, Drona, etc. Bhishma was felled but he held on to his life as he had been blessed with the boon to shed his mortal coil at a time of his choice. Bhishma lay on a bed of arrows arranged by Arjuna, and waited for the Sun to come from the southern to the northern sky, as that was a more auspicious time to give up the body.

On the Pandava side too the toll was heavy. Though the Pandavas themselves escaped death, all their offspring were totally annihilated, and the slender hope of the continuance of their lineage rested entirely on the boy growing in the womb of Uttara, the wife of Abhimanyu, who was the son of Arjuna. Later, this boy became King Parikshit, and, facing a death sentence due to a curse, he spent the last seven days listening to a narration of *Srimad Bhagavatham* which describes the glory, and the incarnations of Narayana (up to that time of course), and the lessons taught by Him on various occasions.

Back to the main story; seeing the carnage Yudhishtira was completely shaken. The despondency that overtook Arjuna at start, now made Yudhishtira its target, and overcome with grief, he refused to pick up the reins of kingship that was now his. Sense had to be knocked into his head, just as was required in the case of Arjuna earlier! This time, Krishna gave the job to Bhishma who, for a number of reasons, was reluctant, not the least of which was the fact that there was Krishna right there, who was certainly more qualified than anyone else to advise him. But Krishna insisted and Bhishma yielded.

Bhishma Gives His Profound Teachings

Thus came into existence the *Santi Parva*, the body of knowledge communicated to Yudhishtira by the venerable Bhishma on diverse matters, both secular and spiritual. It is an unparalleled manual of practical wisdom, especially for those involved with governance. In the course of the dialogue, Yudhishtira asks, "Which is the best *dharma* of all?" To which Bhishma replies that the best one is the ceaseless contemplation and worship of Lord Narayana. Having said this, Bhishma composed on the spot a flowery hymn in praise of Narayana, containing over a thousand different descriptions of

the Lord - this is the famous *Vishnu Sahasranamam* (which Shirdi Baba asked many to recite daily). The incredible aspect of it is that the first time it was recited was in the physical presence of Narayana Himself!

The Joy of Being the Lord’s Instrument

In passing I might throw in a nice little story concerning our beloved Swami. This happened many years ago in Trayee Birndavan, and I was a witness to it. It was evening, and the post Bhajan period when boys gather around Swami’s *jhoola* (swing) inside Trayee, waiting for yet another of those memorable sessions to start. As usual, after Swami entered and was seated, there was small talk for sometime, after which Swami said, “Narasimhan, say something to the boys.” The remark was addressed to late Mr. V. K. Narasimhan, a distinguished journalist and for long the editor of Sanathana Sarathi, after Kasturi could no longer handle that job. Narasimhan, who was widely read and could speak on practically anything, replied, “Swami, when You are there, what business do I have to speak? It is You who know everything and it is You who should speak. In any case, the boys are waiting for You to speak, not me!” Swami smiled and said, “No Narasimhan, you go ahead and speak.” When Narasimhan persisted with his prayer adding that it is God who should speak to man and give advice, not man to man, Swami said, “Narsimhan, you know, sometimes man listens better to man than to God!” Narasimhan was shocked and said, “Swami, how can that ever be?”

Swami then said, “Narasimhan, don’t you remember? When Bhishma told Krishna that He should advise Yudhishtira, Krishna insisted that it was Bhishma who should speak and not He! And it worked, did it not?” Narasimhan smiled and accepted that he had been vanquished in argument and went on to give yet another scintillating talk! Unfortunately, I don’t remember a word of it, though I remember every word that preceded that talk! In any case, that incident is what is important to Sai Bhagavatham! Sometimes, God uses man as His instrument, even though He could do it all Himself!

Getting back to the bits and pieces of the remaining part of the story, accepting Bhishma’s advice, Yudhishtira assumed the rulership of Hastinapura and ruled for many years as a wise king who never deviated from the path of *Dharma*. Mindful of his responsibilities, he gave shelter to Dhritarashtra and Gandhari though this was not quite liked by some of his younger brothers. And in due course, the Pandavas one by one shed their mortal coils, their mission on earth having been completed.

The story of the Pandavas is an inspiring saga of courage and determination. It also illustrates that having the Lord on one’s side does not automatically provide exemption from troubles or difficulties. However, the Lord does help in bearing the difficulties with courage and fortitude.

And finally, referring to the allegorical significance of the great epic, the Mahabharatha, Swami says:

“The Mahabharatha is basically the story of the five Vital Airs (the Pancha Praanas) overcoming a hundred obstacles in the path of progress.”

Sai, the World's Third Poorna Avatar

When God descends on earth, He comes as an incarnation or an Avatar. Thus far in human history, He has come only three times in human form with His full compliment of Divine Powers i.e., as a Poorna Avatar. The Rama and the Krishna Avatars were Poorna Avatars. The current Sai Avatar is also a Poorna Avatar. Blessed are we therefore to be born and living at the same time as the Avatar, and even more blessed are we to have His Darshan as also to experience directly His limitless Divine Love.

Rama bore arms and physically destroyed enemies. Krishna too used destructive force when needed, but quite sparingly. The current Avatar, however, has come without any weapons whatsoever. Why? Has not Krishna declared that the wicked would be destroyed when the Avatar descends?

In Rama's time, the enemy, i.e., Ravana, was outside. In Krishna's time, the forces of evil and good were to be found within the same family. But in the present day world, the forces of evil and good are both within the same person. No longer are there pure "good guys" and patently "bad guys". Thus it is that our Lord Sai has chosen to use Love or *Prema* as His "weapon". This weapon destroys the wickedness in man, transforms him and raises him to the level of Divinity. As Swami Himself has declared:

“In this Kali Age, the wicked have to be reformed and reconstructed through Love and compassion. That is why the Avatar has come unarmed. It has come with the Message of Love.”

In one of His Divine Discourses, Swami declared in ringing tones that His mission was unique in that He was involved in making each and every person realise that he or she is God.

Times change, habits change, fashions change but one thing remains constant and that is “God is Love and Love is God”. In addition, man too is God; which means, he too must breathe Love and not hate. This is our Dear Lord Sai's constant reminder.

I would like to add one point about the Krishna Avatar. Krishna is worshipped as (a form of) God which is correct, but in the process one tends to lose sight of the human that He was. The Discourses given by Bhagavan Baba during the summer of 1976 (*Summer Roses On The Blue Mountain, 1976*) are worth reading in this context, for Swami then repeatedly emphasised the human aspect of Krishna. Those discourses are most illuminating to read for they open our eyes to the human aspect of both Shirdi Sai and the current Sai Avatar as well.

Well, this brings to an end my original project to tell you something about the Rama and the Krishna Avatars. As I mentioned right in the beginning, my aim was not to present a scholarly discourse but to make you get acquainted with the essential aspects of these two Avatars, hoping that this would stimulate a deeper study of the earlier Avatars on your part. Having come this far, I perhaps ought to include a few more talks dealing with the current Sri Sathya Sai Avatar. Unfortunately, right now, I have too many deadlines to meet; so I shall reserve for later, the pleasant task of speaking about the incarnation of our own Beloved Swami!

Meanwhile, thanks for being with me during the present series, and I do hope it was of some use to you. As for me, it certainly uplifted me a lot in countless ways.

God be with you all. Hopefully, I shall be back soon, with narrations about the wonderful Sri Sathya Sai Avatar, who is here not only to save humanity but also to fill us with Bliss in so many different ways!

Samasthaa Loka Sukhino Bhavantu. Jai Sai Ram.

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

'ARE YOU A DOCTOR?'

Dear reader, in this 'Window to Sai Seva' section, in every issue we bring you inspiring stories of service done by seva teams from all over India and the world. However, in this issue, we have something different. It is not so much on service but on an instrument of Swami who has been selflessly offering his time and energy for the poor and needy. What drives an eye surgeon from the USA to travel thousands of miles every year to spend three weeks serving in Swami's Super Specialty Hospital in Puttaparthi? How different is the experience? Here is a personal account from a person to whom hundreds owe their eyesight.

In 2001, during one of his visits to Prasanthi Nilayam, Dr. Sanjeev Dewan, an eye surgeon based in Canton, Ohio, USA, was sitting on the veranda in front the Bhajan Hall, eagerly waiting for Swami's *darshan*. "Baba walked into the veranda and as He passed, **He glanced at me and said, 'Are you a doctor? You are a patient'**", Dr. Dewan said. "I knew the significance of Swami's words. I nodded and said, 'Yes, Swami, I am the patient and you are fixing my illness.'"

Dr. Dewan, a 40-year-old visiting eye surgeon at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS), Prashantigram, feels that since he came to Swami's fold, the transformation that Swami had desired has been taking place in countless ways. Every year, Dr. Dewan takes a break from his busy practice back in the U.S. and heads to SSSIHMS for three weeks, where he treats the patients - and himself gets 'cured'.

The Qualifications of a True Doctor

"I am not a complete doctor. A doctor has to be wholly desireless, selfless and compassionate. The transformation is taking place in many ways," he smiles. A disarming smile, which has the warmth to put even the most edgy among the patients, at ease. Apart from his smile, what patients notice as soon as they enter his room at the Hospital is a cheerful man in a lilac blue apron, with Ohio Eye Alliance embroidered on the left side. Dr. Dewan's parents had migrated from Pakistan to India during the partition. The family later got settled in the U.S. in 1956.

It is a delightful story how Swami brought Dr. Dewan into His fold. As he tries to remember his first encounter with Bhagavan, one can see his sharp brown eyes getting wistful as he searches his memory. His head falls back and he looks remotely at the white wall facing him in his room.

"I am not all that good with the details", he says breaking the silence. He, however, remembers the picture of a 'man' his wife had placed at the location of their marriage ceremony, which took place in Buffalo, New York in 1992. "During our wedding, Seema had kept the photograph of Sai Baba at the

place where the wedding ceremony was to take place," he says. "'Who is this man?' I had asked. 'My Guru,' was her answer."

Mrs. Dewan has been an ardent follower of Baba since she was seven years old. She has visited Puttaparthi on several occasions and also authored several books on Swami, the first one being, "Sai Darshan".

"I did not have any reservations about having the photograph of Sai Baba at my wedding, but somehow was not impressed with the 'man'" says Dr. Dewan and continues, "It was several years after our marriage that one day my wife said, 'let us go to India and visit Puttaparthi'. I somehow felt like accompanying her. But I told her, 'we will stay only for a day at the ashram as we have other engagements'."

It was in 1995 that Dr. Dewan visited Prasanthi Nilayam for the first time. "We got down at the Puttaparthi airport, after taking a connecting flight from Bangalore. It was as if some invisible hand was taking care of all our concerns. As soon as we descended from the aircraft, a person volunteered to guide us to the ashram. We hesitated, but he took us along and made adequate arrangements for our stay. Only after we felt comfortable inside the ashram, he left," Dr. Dewan recollects. He told us that he worked with the Indian Airlines. That was all we could gather about him, Dr. Dewan adds.

The Numinous Attraction of Divine Love

When it was Bhagavan's *darshan* time, the family quickly reached the hall. "I sat far away from Swami, somewhere in the multitude of devotees. As I saw Swami walking among the devotees, I felt drawn to Him. Something overcame me. I wanted to be close to Him. 'Why cannot I be close to him?', 'Why this distance?', I kept asking myself. That night I was almost in tears," Dr. Dewan confesses. "Then I told my Seema, 'all right, we will stay for two days more!'" Now, Dr. Dewan chuckles.

The next day Dr. Dewan visited Bhagavan's birthplace, where now stands a Shiva Temple and lies at one end of bustling Puttaparthi town. "During our visit Mr. Bhatt was the temple priest. He took us with him to his home and started narrating stories of Baba, I could not be satiated. Acknowledging my interest, Mr. Bhatt went from one story to another. Yet I wanted to hear more." Soon Dr. Dewan was visiting Prasanthi Nilayam along with his family of five every year.

The Gift of True Vision

In innumerable ways, Bhagavan helped the Dewan family in their difficult times. One of the doctor's three sons, 12-year-old Karan, was suffering from isotropia in one eye, which is an in-turning of the eye which makes a person cross-eyed. Due to his condition, Karan used to wear glasses.

Dr. Dewan says that during an interview granted to his family in the year 2000, Swami looked at his 12-year-old bespectacled son and told him: "**Boy's**

eyes are weak", He then paused and added, "Glasses will go". It is sometimes difficult to understand what Bhagavan means. But soon enough, Dr. Dewan was to witness the manifestation of Swami's infinite grace.

"We went back to the U.S. and one day Karan came to me and said, 'Dad, I see everything blurred when I wear glasses, but when I don't, everything looks perfectly clear'. **I thought he was joking. I specialise in paediatric ophthalmology, so I took Karan to my clinic and tested his eyes. His eyes were perfect. They had healed!"** Dr. Dewan says, his eyes aglow with happiness reminiscing this amazing miracle. **"As Swami said, the glasses went,"** he adds, jubilantly.

Working in the Temple of Healing

"I always feel that we are just instruments in His hands. I have experienced so many wonderful things here. The first time I came to the Hospital I was awestruck, as it looked more like a temple than a Hospital", he says.

On his first visit, a large number of people with specific eye disorders, whose treatment was Dr. Dewan's expertise, suddenly arrived at the Hospital. "This is Swami's grace. And this happens on every occasion any visiting physician arrives at the Hospital. People may think it might be because the message spreads through word of mouth. But on many occasions the visiting physician might be visiting the Hospital for the first time. This has happened too many times for it to be just a coincidence."

"Also when I come here, my efficiency suddenly increases. I am able to treat more people here than what I do back home in the U.S.. When I return my efficiency drops," Dr. Dewan chuckles. "I believe it is Baba's grace!"

He adds that on several occasions he had come across cases which he had never seen during his practice in the U.S. "Working here also helps me to gain new insights into several rare cases. I take back the experience with me to America", he adds.

According to Dr. Dewan, in India he finds more cases of nerve palsy than back in the U.S.. He explains that there are three nerves which control the movement of the eye, and nerve palsy leads to abnormal movement of eyes. "Many cases coming to the Hospital are of such kind," he explains.

Dr. Dewan had also yearned to teach, which he is able to do now during his present visit to the SSSIHMS. "I wanted to teach and now Swami has fulfilled my desire", he says with a smile. "Teaching helps a doctor to remain abreast with the latest developments in the field of medicine. I have to answer questions, which are put to me by the resident doctors, so I have to strive harder to learn and then teach the same. This process helps me to be a better physician myself."

An Aspiration for Peace

Speaking about the transformation which has come about in him, Dr. Dewan says that his experiences with Bhagavan have helped him to re-align the goal of his life. **The goal has now changed to peace and unity. "I have a yearning to speak less and accept more - and to serve without desire."**

"It is difficult to explain to my colleagues where I go off to every year for three weeks. They think I am taking off to some beach," he chuckles. "They find it hard to imagine that I am taking off to volunteer in a Hospital, which lies in a remote corner of India and treats patients free of cost," he adds.

Dr. Dewan says he tries to explain to his colleagues that it is not a holiday but an experience that takes a person to a different level. He tells them that when he started visiting the Hospital he realised how much people appreciated the work that he was doing. "The fact that I was able to serve was itself highly rewarding," he adds.

During an interview granted to Dr. Dewan and his wife, Seema, by Bhagavan, Dr. Dewan had asked Swami, "Why this separation between You and me, Lord?" **"No separation, no separation." Bhagavan had affirmed.**

"Before I came to Bhagavan, I used to ask 'God, where are you?' I don't ask that question anymore", Dr. Dewan ends the conversation with a satisfied smile, to continue doing what he loves the most – serve patients in Swami's Hospital.

PRASHANTI DIARY

July 31, 2008 – Central Trust Anniversary Celebrations

July 31 was a special day for all the students working at the various institutions that Swami has personally set up in Puttaparthi and Bangalore. September 2 is the anniversary of the formation of the Central Trust and it happened to be a Tuesday. So, to enable all the students, even the ones from Bangalore, to assemble in His divine presence, the celebrations were advanced to the August 31, a Sunday. And it turned out to be very apt, for, indeed it was an 'August' gathering!

In the morning, all the students who are now staff, 165 in all, gathered in the Bhajan Hall. The ages ranged from the early twenties to the late fifties! It was indeed a wonderful brotherhood that had united under the fatherhood of Sai! Swami too seemed to be very eager to make the occasion very special. He arrived at 9:10 a.m. and then sat in the Bhajan Hall listening to the singing till 10:00 a.m.! Before leaving, He promised that He would speak to everyone in the evening.

In the meanwhile, the Lord, divine Mother that He is, had arranged a sumptuous feast for all the children who had so lovingly and sincerely gathered at His feet. All of them were escorted to the South Indian Canteen premises where a meal of more than 18 items had been spread over regal plates royally for the 165 gathered!

It was around this time that all the chief priests of the Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanams arrived at Swami's residence, Yajur Mandir. Very graciously, Swami permitted them to enter and chant mantras in His presence. The new Chairman of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) Mr. Adi Kesavalu Naidu, had also come along with his wife to offer his obeisance and great sense of gratitude to the Lord. Swami blessed them and said, "The opportunity to serve the Lord is something that people do not get even after intense prayers. You have got it so easily even without asking for it! Indeed, it is a great blessing conferred on all of you." Everyone fell in full prostration at the feet of their living Lord and left after Swami blessed them smilingly and graciously.

As He had promised, Swami enquired at about 3:30 p.m. if all the students had gathered in the Bhajan Hall. He wanted to make sure no one would miss the bounty that He was about to confer. At exactly 4:00 p.m., Swami and His dear children were all inside. Swami took a round and enquired sweetly from everyone as to whether they were all happy with the food! When everyone responded with joy, Swami was very touched and happy. Moving to the front, Swami lit the candle and cut a specially made cake. Then, Swami settled comfortably facing all the students.

"What do you want me to speak about?... Ask your doubts."

A research scholar from the University put forth his sincere shortcoming. "Swami, how do we control the mind?" he asked. Swami then began His illuminating discourse:

Mind has no death and none can control it; it is forever. Without that consciousness, man cannot live. Mind should be there; it is the nature of man. When you are a man, mind too exists. When you become one with God alone, mind goes and all become One. Only in the *Advaitic* state, mind vanishes. As long as 'I' and 'We' and 'Mine' and 'Ours' exist, mind will exist. "This is mine", "that is mine" - such thoughts lead to the persistence of the mind. This is all *dvaita* or dualism. Mind will be fickle as long as duality exists. *Advaita* is "I am I". If you think you are the other, the materials, etc., mind continues. If you say, "This is mine", you are different from the material. The physical world removes spirituality. Reduce your desires gradually - less luggage, more comfort.

Many people take to meditation. What is it? It means the halting of the mind. Ask for anything, but be detached. Thoughts and desires do come. As long as ocean is there, waves are natural. You cannot get rid of waves. When waves merge in the ocean, they disappear. When you achieve oneness with God, waves reduce. Till then, desires keep attacking. Physically, mentally and materially, thoughts arise. The thoughts are the saplings. Courage is necessary. Seeds of Love and rain of devotion mixed with feelings, lead to good crops. If worldly thoughts arise, they keep growing. You talk about meditation, but no one does it. One just sits but does not focus the mind even for a moment. When you say to yourself that, "I and God are one" with full faith, the thoughts will cease. "God is not separate from me. I am not separate from God." Have firm faith. There is no place without God. Everything happens from thoughts. People say they saw things in meditation. That is only imagination due to the thoughts. There should not be any thoughts. Even if you think God has come and stood, that's also imagination. It is an aberration of the mind. There is only one - no other! Have no feeling of 'I' or separation. As far as possible, crush the feeling of 'I'. As long as 'I' exists, 'you' also will exist.

The mind, brain, *buddhi*, *chitta* - everything will go. Only the *atma* remains. To think that you will achieve all this through meditation is a mistake. Indrajit was Ravana's son. He had conquered the senses. But he too died when Rama came. Vibhishana's son was also there. If he is won over, victory was assured. He came to fight.

Formerly, Hanuman had gone around all the streets of Lanka. He got himself caught by Indrajit only to see and study the place. After that was served, Indrajit got killed. Vibhishana's son, Buddhijit, was very fearsome. If he is gone, Lanka too shall be gone. None knew where his life principle was. Vibheeshana told Rama to shoot his right shoulder. Then he died. Then the father began to cry and Rama came to know the Truth. Lanka will be gone. The war was as good as over.

The father gave up the life of his own son. Even among demons, there are such people. He was a man without the feeling of 'mine' and 'I'. Only when he gave up these, victory was achieved. Vibhishana was coronated. All were happy including his wife, Sarma, and children, Shakini and Dakini. They had protected and enthused Sita by constantly telling her, "Do not worry, Rama

will surely come. He will kill Ravana and remove all of his ten heads." Sita then became courageous. Lanka was full of demons but Rama made even that place peaceful. The reason for all demons getting killed was that they all had the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. If Vibhishana had the feeling of 'I' and 'mine', then Lanka would not have got redeemed. Even demons helped God.

In the world, Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa will come only if you tell, "I am man and not an animal". Animal thoughts must go. Human qualities and human values must arise. From Truth, comes Peace. From these emerges Love. When Love is there, you hate none and all are equal. This Love has to be developed. It is there in everything. You see ants moving in a single line, talking to each other, kissing and then moving ahead. Ants have love. When a calf is born, the mother may go to forest to graze, but she is always thinking of the child. The calf too keeps saying "Amma, amma" till she comes. Even animals have Love. This love is same in all. So, you cannot give up one another. Therefore develop human values.

The first is Truth. It is everything and everywhere. There is only one Truth; not two. From that arises, Dharma. And then comes, Shanti. Then everything is so serene! Love emerges then. When peace comes, you have feeling of Oneness. In ancient times, people meditated even in forests with vicious animals. All animals would come and sit with them. Why? Because of pure feelings and absence of ill-will. *Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavati* - if you harm none, none will harm you. Only when you try to harm, problems arise. There is a dog sleeping when you pass by, but it will just remain in its place. Only when you bend to pick a stone, it will get up. When you take care of thoughts, nothing can happen. Do not harm others even in thoughts. Never pain or hurt others in thoughts too. When you trouble others through your thoughts, it is a way of cheating yourself. Everything, the whole world is in us. Good and bad reside in us. When bad thoughts arise, bad actions follow. The connection between thoughts and actions is like the switching of a light bulb. The action definitely follows your thoughts. If you think of all as brothers, all will be that way for you. But if you develop hatred and anger, they too will develop thoughts of hurting you. Do not have bad feelings on others, for it is what you are feeling towards yourself. You are responsible for all that happens to you. The thoughts and feelings do not affect others, they affect only you. Be thought-less, then you are pure. Lest, the thoughts come back and trouble you!

Here is a small story. A dog went into a house of mirrors. It saw many dogs coming towards it. It got fearful. So it attacked one dog. The mirror collapsed and broke. Now, thousands of dogs began to attack it! The dog resigned and left. As many pieces you break, that many dogs appear. But if a human enters such a house, he will know, "I am only getting reflected everywhere." So, if he sees any fault, he sets himself right. For everything is but a reflection. *Ishwara sarva bhootanam* - God is not separate from us. He is within us. We must have that feeling. Help ever hurt never. If you hurt anyone, it'll come back to you. Same with rendering help, it will return to you. That is the secret of God's creation. In God's creation, there is God alone. Truth, God and Consciousness are all one. Everything else is due to change. What is

consciousness? That is Myself. That is self realisation - to recognise oneself. That animal is me. That dog or that lion - all are me. The dog barks at elephant not knowing that both are the same. If you look within, dog and elephant are same. Names and forms are many but the consciousness within is the same; it is changeless. There is only one Sun in the sky. It is the same that is seen in Russia or USA or Italy. But it is day here and night in USA. It does not mean that the Sun is not there! It is only due to the changes in the Earth's rotation. There is only one Sun. S-u-n not S-o-n! (all laugh) The countries are different but feelings are same. Put in efforts to realize the unity. Work for Oneness.

Don't meditate to see God. You are God. Why do you struggle to see Him? *Daivam Manusha Roopena* - When the artist draws, naturally he draws a human form, be it Rama or Krishna. This is because God takes human form; He has human qualities. And these human qualities act as a screen on His divinity; that is *maya*. As long as the screen exists, one is deluded. The dog is confused as long as the mirrors are there. Once the mirrors are removed, all problems cease! We are only increasing our attachments and not destroying them. *Mukkalu (divide) cheesthe Kukkalu vosthayi (dogs will come)!* There is only one God, not many, but reflections are seen in all. No need to fear that there are so many dogs. Do not feel that we are facing so many sorrows and obstacles? The trouble is actually you. You alone are responsible for them. We develop and keep only the photographs of the feelings. Remove all the images and keep the negatives, which is the basis. If you keep printing photos, they will one day be not there. But keep the negatives, and you can get any number of images printed.

How does God look? Peacock feather implies Krishna and trident is for Shiva. None have seen Him. This is all imagination. You say, "Swami, we saw Krishna". You are Krishna. Why efforts to see yourself. It is only when you forget your nature, you desire thus. So do not forget yourself. God does not have many forms. They are all like the pictures of Ravi Verma (an artist)! It's not that God came in that form. It is the imagination of the painters. People without wisdom alone stick to forms. All these forms are for your satisfaction alone.

But when you think you are God, you must have God's qualities. But if you consider yourself anything lower, lower thoughts arise. Everything arises, lives and merges back into pure Truth. Your Self is the Truth; everything else is a copy. There is only one original. All creation is basically copies. Everything is born from love, depends on Love for sustenance and merges into love again. Your reflection is seen on the water bubble. But the bubble bursts in moments. You are eternal! All reflections will die down one day.

When Sita was taken to Lanka, she always kept chanting "Rama", "Rama". If you want to see Rama, keep His form in mind and His name on the lips. Same is the case with Krishna. The name and form are one and the same. If you see the form, Name comes, and if you chant the Name, form comes. So, whatever bad feeling comes, it is because of you. You cannot say that it came from this or that person. All are born out of you. Bad thoughts arise in this

age. Where did it come from? Suppose you saw a woman. But if she comes in your thoughts, did she enter you? No. It is because you think of her that her form came in your mind. Both good and bad arise out of us. The belch depends on what you eat. If you eat mango, you will not get the belch of cucumber. Only whatever you think of, comes in your dreams. You may think I did not think of it before sleeping. You must have thought of it sometime before then! Nothing can come from outside and get into you. Is it easy for a lady to come and get into us? Because of your feelings the form arose in the mind. Feeling has no form and she too is formless. So formless always remains formless. Everything comes from within you. You are the cause for everything. All the good and the bad are in you!

Think of bad thoughts, and you receive bad. Similarly, good gives good. So, understand that everything comes from thoughts. So always think that, "I am the *Atma*." What is the form of *Atma*? It is Purity. It is true consciousness. Develop the purity first. Unity arises out of purity. From there comes divinity. Therefore, get purity and you can reach God. So, when you want to see oneness, move from multiplicity to unity. When you see Swami, you think only of Him, and then only He will come. Some think, Swami is not speaking with me. Not only to you, Swami is not speaking with anyone. Now, I am speaking. Tell me with whom I am speaking? To all, isn't it? I always speak to all. Never think that Swami is not speaking to me alone. Or, Swami is close to him and far from me, etc. Swami never goes far nor goes near to anyone. Swami will never give up anyone. The fault lies in our feelings. So, set right the feelings. That is meditation. Get the feeling of oneness. As is the feeling, so is the happening. Nothing comes from outside. It is all from within. Even the child is born from within. It does not enter the womb from outside. Only physically differences exist. Truth is one but described in many ways. Do not go by the descriptions. Did you all understand?

From this moment realise 'I' and God are only one, not two. It's not the bodies merging, but in the 'I' that Swami exists. Even Jesus declares, "There is only 'I'". Cut the 'I' of the ego and only 'I' remains. Even the Muslims say, (here Swami said "Alla-o-Akbar" and told the meaning of Akbar also) "Allaha". Aa - means 'I' and La means 'not this'. It too says to remove the 'I'. There is only that sound of *Akaara*. Joining different consonants, many sounds are created.....What is the time now? 5:00 p.m.!

After the *bhajans*, you sing, *Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu*. It means let everything in this world be happy. Don't say that. Say, "**Samastha Lokaha sukhino bhavanthu**". It means let every being in all the worlds be happy. It is very broad based and expansive. Let all the worlds be happy. Start it from now or from Thursday.

What else? Remember that God's work is real work. Swami's *darshan* is true *Aanandam*. Swami's words are your meditation and joy. Body is for work and mind is for contemplation. If these two are there, all merge into one. Contemplate on any name. Gods are not separate; all are one and they differ only in pictures. In Uttar Pradesh, peacock feathers are easily available and so all children put it on their head. That does not make all of them Krishnas!

Peacock feather alone won't make you a Krishna. Think of the beauty of God. Everything is God. So also, all work you do, it is God's work. Do not think I am working in hospital, college, hostel or Central Trust. Everything is God work, but you make it bad work by thinking of differences. In book stall you say "this is Rajan's work". That is neither Rajan nor Central Trust work. It is all Sai work. Be united in every small thing too. Then you will get true meditation. But you close eyes and search for mosquitoes biting you! All work done by this body is God's work. Then you do not need to do any *tapas* or penance. Many are doing *japam* and instead of forgetting the world, they forget the rosary! Whatever you think in the heart, will happen. That is everything. Any more doubts?

How to be spiritual following the Gruhastha Dharma?

That is also divine! Think that is divine work Do not separate things as worldly or spiritual. Everything is God, in and around God!

Is it not being boastful saying "I am God, I am God"?

No. That is the correct fact - Satyam. If you think you are God and do mad things, then its wrong. When you think you are God, work like God. When you do something, think "Will God do like this?" Search yourself. That is true. Whatever work you do - home work, office work - do not separate them. You are important. Nothing else exists and you are there everywhere. Keep the 'I'. Forget the differences of work of all sorts. That is Oneness! So in everything, get rid of 'I' and 'mine'. If these two are gone, all is achieved.

This is my towel. If I give it to you, how will it be mine? There is nothing called mine. Have no sense of difference.

Swami we are all very grateful to you!

Then You should not tell that! Treasure and keep it! Its all God's Grace. Grace alone gives you gratefulness. Without Grace, everything is grass! You cannot divide and chop Grace. You can cut grass, but not Grace.

All are happy?

Yes Swami!

We all look forward to such sessions with you!

Very happy. I'll give one more opportunity. (claps)

Swami then permitted a senior brother to speak a few words. He beautifully recounted experiences with Swami that had touched him. Listening to him, everyone gathered at His feet were moved very deeply too! After that, Swami asked all the students to sing songs. One Telugu song narrating the unique love between the Lord and His devotee, and another Hindi song expressing the great joy at being in His presence praying that such things happen over

and over again were sung. Swami then looked at the clock and said, "Even *bhajans* time is over!" Receiving *aarthi* and blessing the *prasadam* to be distributed to all, Swami retired for the day.

September 5, 2008 – Ganesha Idols Immersion Ceremony

Teachers' day was welcomed by most of the residents of the Sri Sathya Sai Institutions like one would do for the New Year's Day - by keeping awake throughout the night! Swami had notified everyone that Ganesha Idols immersion - an event of great significance in the Indian annual calendar would take place on September 5th afternoon. The act of taking the clay idol of Lord Ganesha to the nearby water body and immersing Him in it has a great spiritual meaning. The clay idol is symbolic of the human body composed of the five elements. It should spend time on the earth in a manner that it is worshipped! After its adorable stay on the earth, it finally merges back with the elements. Though the idol is gone, Ganesha lives forever! And that story is the same for the true being, the soul, too. It is in this spirit and fervour that the immersion is celebrated all over India, more so in Puttaparthi. And everyone is fully immersed in making either chariots or palanquins for carrying the sweet elephant Lord Ganesha!

At about 3:00 p.m., all the chariots from the school, Institute and the various institutions were all lined up along the main road at Puttaparthi and what an impressive sight it was! The procession began with the singing of *bhajans*, enthusiastic rhythms of the chants and the musical beats of the drums. The beeline towards the Mandir was ready and it began. As the chariots entered the Mandir, they were led to the bays that had been earmarked for them to park. Soon the entire array was ready and it was truly a glorious scene! The Mandir resembled a cosmic battlefield where the Lord pervaded all the chariots! To add to this was a contingent of little Ganeshas from primary school waiting in front of Swami's residence along with the *nadaswaram* and the Veda chanting contingents. There was a peacock chariot and another one that had the Golden eagle. A palanquin and a chariot had been inspired by *Adi Sesha*, the serpent which forms the bed for Lord Vishnu, and they were designed like that of the divine serpent. There was a "Harry Potter" cup inside which Ganesha stood as the prize; a huge Hibiscus flower had Ganesha as its centre; there were more - a castle, a mountain, and many more designs. An elephant with Ganesha seated atop in the howdah also paraded in the procession. A "navaratna ring" chariot too was present and there were chariots from the indoor stadium and from the Sri Sathya Sai Airport too.

It was about 4:00 p.m. when Swami came out for the *darshan* rounds. A little "Ganesha" immediately moved forward to his "father" and offered a rose and that instantly brought a sweet smile on Swami's face. He asked for the procession to begin as He sat watching it from the front of Yajur Mandir. Representative members of each group that had gathered there went forward to Swami and offered flowers before embarking and joining the procession. The procession entered the Sai Kulwant Hall and so did Swami moving slowly behind the procession. He went past each and every chariot, and as He went by, there were people holding out fruits and various articles of worship. Very

patiently, Swami blessed each of them and looked at the chariots. He went for a full round looking at and appreciating the creativity and devotion embodied in the vehicles for Lord Ganesha. He then came and sat on the stage. As part of the programme, a dance on the glories of Ganesha had been organised. The children from the school did a wonderful job and there was a loud round of applause for all of them. As they concluded, Swami called the warden and blessed everyone to go around for the *pradakshina*.

There is a very famous story of how Ganesha went around Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati and claimed that He had circumambulated the entire universe. When questioned, He simply replied that his parents were the Universe for Him. In that similar manner, all the students and staff went around Swami and the Mandir. After that, each chariot was brought in front of Swami as the announcers introduced them and explained the significance of the different vehicles. Many boys tried to come in front to get Swami bless their trays of fruits, flowers, cards, small Ganesha idols, etc. But Swami told all of them to stay back. As there were more than 150 people with various objects to be blessed by Swami, if Swami personally was to bless every little thing, it would have simply taken too much time and effort. Apart from the schedule going haywire, it would also have caused lot of physical strain to Swami.

Sometimes, people in such situations wonder "what wrong did we do that Swami kept us physically away". Here, a small thought will help. A few years ago, after Swami came out of the operations, He said, "This body is for all of you only! Treat it as you want, I am not in the least attached to it." And now the body that Swami was referring to will soon complete 83 years. Since then, like a candle that burns itself down to spread light and warmth, Swami has been just going on and on. We devotees are many times very unfair towards Him! We want Him to feel our joys and pains, but do not spend time to think about His! We brush it away saying, "Oh, No problem! He is the Lord!" If we truly feel and believe that, then it is only appropriate that we accept everything He does. But on the other hand, we want Him to keep smiling always and keep reassuring us like an ordinary human does. So, when it comes to Him thinking and feeling for us, we think in a human fashion, and want Him to respond in a human manner, but when it comes to us thinking and feeling for Him, we shrug away all responsibilities and say "He is Divine". The programmes that are staged in His presence are increasing exponentially and Swami sits through all of them. Everyday in Puttaparthi has become a festival! And all this does put a lot of strain on His physical body. But because He is constantly thinking of the joy and happiness of everyone all the time, He never for a moment spares time or cares for His own body. But it is our responsibility to at least think of His comfort when He thinks, says and does everything for us. And maybe we can start doing that for Him by not rushing and falling over Him. And maybe by ensuring that when we put up programmes for Him, we keep it short and sweet, and maintain discipline at the end of the performance when He showers all His Love and Grace on the participants.

Returning to the Ganesha Immersion ceremony, the chariots slowly made their way to their final destination as Swami very lovingly blessed each and every chariot with *Abhayahastha*. Strains of "Jai Bolo Sai Baba Ki" and "Jai

Bolo Ganesh Maharaj Ki" filled the air. The whole atmosphere was one of enthusiasm and energy. Swami sat viewing till the entire procession moved past Him. As it left the Mandir, Swami went into the Bhajan Hall. There, He interacted very lovingly with one of the students for quite some time and materialized a gold chain for him. Spending time speaking to him, Swami then asked for *bhajans* to begin. *Bhajans* went on for about 40 minutes after which Swami received *aarthi* and left to Yajur Mandir. Again, there too were students who offered roses of gratitude to Him. Swami accepted all of them and blessed the students before retiring for the day.

September 6, 2008 – Programme by Devotees from Kadapa District

Puttaparthi has become one of the most fulfilling pilgrimage centres on the face of earth. And this is purely because of the living presence of the Lord. If we just examine the history of the world briefly, we will notice that men of God came quite often to the earth. They have a huge devoted following today but few had the good fortune of recognizing their greatness and spiritual splendour when they lived in flesh and bones. Swami is special in that sense as so many have been privileged to know His divinity and have been blessed to see Him, speak to Him and work for Him. Today, as a part of their spiritual *sadhana*, all the Sai centres undertake an annual pilgrimage to Puttaparthi to recharge their spiritual batteries. So, the devotees from Kadapa district of Andhra had arrived in thousands for Swami and they had been permitted to put up their programme on September 6, 2008.

Wet grinders, sewing machines and iron boxes had been placed for distribution to the poor from Kadapa. It is a very special chance for these people who have to think twice even before getting into a bus to check if they have the necessary fare required for even an inter-village journey. The members of the Sai Samithis identify such poor and as a token of Swami's Love gift them with articles to carry out their livelihood. And when Swami graciously agrees to Himself gift away the articles, those people are brought to Puttaparthi so that they are blessed with also the wonderful gift of Grace-Darshan.

When Swami arrived inside Sai Kulwant Hall, it was completely filled. He moved through the ladies side blessing the girls from the primary school. Then at the center of the hall, He looked keenly at all the items placed. Moving to the gents' side, He received the adoration and devotion that was laden in the air as the devotees' rose to different heights to see Him and then stood even 'higher' with the sheer joy of just seeing Him. Swami completed the rounds on the gents' side, and then moved through the students and finally went into the interview room. After a while, He came and sat outside listening to the Vedic chants. He called the district president of Kadapa and enquired into the programme scheduled. He also called Prof. Anil Kumar and gave him a few instructions. Then as the chanting ceased, the district president spoke for a few minutes outlining all the activities being undertaken at Kadapa. After him, Prof. Anil Kumar spoke on why Kadapa was so special to Swami; it had played an important part of His "education" and hence has got embedded in all the *leelas* and *mahimas* the little Sathya performed there,

years ago. The famous fair and Pushpagiri that Swami attended too are in Kadapa. After a beautiful 25 minutes when Swami seemed to become very nostalgic about what was being spoken, Prof. Anil Kumar concluded his talk.

Then the names of the recipients of the articles of Love were read out and they reverentially came forward to receive the tokens of Love. There were volunteers to help move the heavy gifts! The distribution went along very quickly and without much fanfare - the way it always is when it comes to Swami. The Lord, all His life has been giving and giving. Never once has He stretched out His hand to ask. And people who have seen and experienced Him even once are in love with Him forever. In a world where publicity, pomp and show rule with all regality, they have no place for a foothold even in the thoughts of the people at His lotus feet. And that is what makes Swami so divine - not only because of what He is but what people are when they are touched by Him just once!

As the distribution concluded, the next programme, a dance ballet entitled "Annamaya" began. It consisted of the compositions of the saint Annamacharya and dances tuned to their rhythms. The children participating in this programme had been drawn from the poorest strata of society. Some of them were also children of people who had taken to begging as a means of living! But on the stage, they were such wonderful performers that they won everyone's hearts. They were all extremely rich in their love for God and simple in their faith in Him. Swami sat watching the dance providing the rhythm through the beat of His hands. There were about 5 dances in all performed by different sets of children. The most prominent among the songs was "Adigo Allidigo Sri Harivasamu" for which every member in the audience also began to clap rhythmically. Every dance was received by rounds of hearty applause. As the final dance concluded, all the children came forward and in a very disciplined manner stood in lines. Swami was very happy. He had sarees and white cloth pieces distributed to the girls and boys respectively.

As the distribution concluded, He said that He would move down to bless them all with group photos. He slowly moved down and smilingly sat amidst the children. As the photos were taken, Swami told the photographers to move to the right and then to the left so that none of the children get left out! That was a very sweet gesture from Swami. He asked the names of a couple of kids and blessed them. Moving back to the stage, Swami asked the devotees to sing a few songs. They were ecstatic! It was already late and they never expected that chance. But with Swami, it is joy always! He always wants everyone happy and will always go out of His way to ensure this. And so, the group songs began. Though it was already dark, Swami sweetly sat tapping His hands rhythmically for two songs that followed, one each by the gents and the ladies. After that, He received *aarthi* and left.

September 9, 2008 – Commencement of Rudram Teaching in Mandir

Life with the Lord is always full of novelty and a new freshness. No moment is the same. And the fact that the ever-steady Lord is also the ever new Lord

each day is indeed a great mystery. When Swami came out for the *darshan* rounds at 4:40 p.m. on September 9, very few even dreamt of the wonderful gift that Swami had planned for one and all. As far as Swami was concerned, He came out in His usual sweet smiling self. Moving down the slope on the ladies side, He collected letters. One letter seemed to engross Him a lot and He began reading it then and there. By the time He completed reading it, He was already on the marble block in the centre.

Passing by the students, He collected more letters and moved onto the gents' side. Finally, finishing the complete round, Swami went into the interview room. Within a few minutes, He came out and was seated in the centre stage. There was a gleam in His eyes and everyone seemed to understand that something special was brewing! He called boys who led the Veda chanting in the Mandir everyday and also asked for the podium and mike to be brought forward. Next, He gave them a few instructions and soon the special news was conveyed to one and all over the public address system.

Swami desired that all the students learn to memory the chanting and meaning of the first part of the Vedic hymn Sri Rudra Prasnah, or the Namakam, as it is popularly called. There is a significant point to note here. The Vedas are believed to be birthless and the term originates from the word "vid" meaning knowledge. Initially, the Vedas were not written down and the composers were actually seers, that is to say, the chants were revealed as intuitive flashes to all of them. And as Swami says, people falsely mistake that it pertains to Hinduism. It belongs to the Sanathana Dharma (the eternal way of life). For ages, these chants, which are basically very powerful and positive vibrations, were simply taught to the disciples along with the pronunciation only orally.

Sri Rudra Prasnah is a very spiritual and wholesome prayer to Rudra, another name of Lord Shiva.

The famous Indian novelist R. K. Narayan wrote a humorous story about the efforts of a tiger to become spiritual, by seeking enlightenment from a Guru. One day, the Guru asks the tiger to describe God, and the tiger replies:

God must be an enormous tiger, spanning the earth and sky, with a tail capable of encircling the globe, claws that could hook the clouds, and teeth that could grind mountains, and possessing of course, immeasurable strength to match.

And so, it is sheer imagination and visualization that gives a form to the Lord with various attributes. As Swami always says, "You are all God as much as I am God! Realize that!" Therefore, while the name Siva and the specific form attributed to Him are useful in their own way, we must really look beyond the form to the formless aspect of God to reach the ultimate realization.

First, one of the students thanked Swami for presenting everyone with this great opportunity to learn in His divine presence. Following that, everyone chanted the *Gananaam twa* mantra. And then the training began. Swami's

desire was that all learn it before His birthday. He also promised in a very inviting manner, "Those who learn very well, I will call personally and reward all the efforts." So, in His presence, the class began. Each line of the first paragraph was chanted and everyone followed twice. Swami sat with a scrutinizing eye looking at every student and checking how well he/she was picking up! This was Vedic teaching in its past pristine glory, in the "Guru-Shishya parampara" as its known. The special difference here was that the Lord sat in the Guru's position! As 25 minutes of 'coaching' elapsed, Swami turned and said, "That is enough for today." And that too was so sweet about Him. He knows how much syllabus covered can be grasped!

Swami had said on 31st August, "When I speak, it is with everyone, not to a particular individual." Everyone knows that though Krishna taught the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna, but it was meant for all of humanity for all times to come. And so, though Swami said that He wanted His students to learn this, it is up to us whether we want to be His students or not. As Swami Himself put it some years ago to all the boys, "You are all University students, but I want you to be Sai students." Only a few get the privileged chance to be the students of the University, but Sai studentship is open for all who desire and strive.

Swami blessed the 'coaches' with *padanamaskar* and once again said that those who pick up the best would be amply rewarded! It was also conveyed that from the next day onwards, there would be regular half an hour classes in the Mandir! Also, to aid this great chance, the Sri Sathya Sai Book Trust would present every student with a copy of the Namakam with translation. Swami moved into the Bhajan Hall after this and then *bhajans* began. Swami moved to Yajur Mandir at about 6:20 p.m.

September 10, 2008 – Onam Celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam

September 10 marked the beginning of the three day festival of Onam. Onam is the biggest festival in the Indian state of Kerala and it falls during the Malayali month of Chingam (Aug - Sep) marking the homecoming of the legendary King Mahabali. The spiritual carnival of Onam lasts for ten days and brings out the best in Kerala culture and tradition. Intricately decorated *Pookalam* (design with flowers), ambrosial *Onasadya* (the traditional feast), breathtaking *Chundanvellams* (Snake Boats) racing through placid waters and the exotic *Kaikottikali* dance are some of the most remarkable features of Onam - the harvest festival in Kerala. Most importantly, wherever the Malayali people are located, they return home for the festival. And it is this homecoming that sees thousands of devotees from Kerala flock the abode of highest peace at Puttaparthi.

A central stage had been set up in the marble block in which the acting area had been demarcated with flowers. The sets were in place and wonderfully costumed children sat awaiting the Lord's arrival. The staging area however had been filled with students. Swami came out for *darshan* at around 4:35 p.m. He was all smiles and so were the devotees. To see Swami is really a very special feeling. But that feeling seems to get enhanced especially when

you see Him on a day that you consider as very special. And so, while the people in Kerala waited in eager anticipation for their king Mahabali, the Kerala devotees in Puttapparthi were welcoming the Lord Vamana Himself!

Swami moved through the ladies side and coming to the centre saw the elaborate stage that had been set up. Seeing the tiny tots seated in regal costumes, the smile on His face widened. He asked them, "Are you doing drama?" All He got for a reply was hesitant and cute nods from a few kids and absolutely blank looks from the others! Smiling to Himself, Swami moved on. As He moved through the gents' side, the devotees rose to various heights to catch a glimpse of Him. On His part Swami blessed all of them and His hands kept moving up and down, reassuring and calming them. Moving through the students' area, Swami finally came onto the stage. He asked all the students to clear the performance area so that the drama could immediately begin. He called the State President of Kerala Sai Organisation and asked him to introduce the program.

"The Balvikas students from Kerala would be performing the dance-drama called 'Dashavataaram'." As that announcement was made, very tiny children came forward with flowers to present to Swami! The Lord also seemed to be amazed at how little the children were. Full marks to the children for the exemplary discipline they exhibited and that discipline seemed to invite Swami to interact more with them. Swami blessed them and then told them to return to their place which they did in the most reverential manner. Then the programme began. It turned out to be more of dance and less of drama - a wonderful proposition when it comes to the children from Kerala who seemed to have learnt dance even before they were born!

The programme traced all the 10 avatars of Mahavishnu. Each avatar was introduced by the dance and then the incarnation made its brief appearance. The Avatar was then celebrated with another dance. The dances were such a pleasing sight and musically so rich and resonant. The choreography was perfect and it was incredible to think that children so small were capable of feats so big! The Matsya (fish), Kurma (tortoise) and Varaha (boar) Avatars were well depicted with 'manimals' shall we say! That is, people in disguise as a fish, tortoise and boar were seen on the backstage. The story of the Narasimha Avatar (half man- half lion) was briefly depicted and the actor donning the role of Hiranyakashyapu performed superlatively.

The significance of Onam and some of the festivities were beautifully depicted as the Vamana Avatar came onstage. The Prashurama and Rama Avatar arrived together and the greatest devotee Hanuman too got his share of the 'limelight'. The tiny toddling Krishna won everyone's heart with his sheer presence on the scene! He looked so sweet and cute. The famous episode of Krishna enriching Sudama's life in every way was depicted. Then going through the Buddha Avatar, the programme finally turned to Swami.

Swami went briefly to the interview room and returned having arranged for sarees which He wanted to gift the children with. On His way back, He stopped for a minute at the Bhajan Hall. Representatives of the students

working in Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust were seated there. Swami, in all Love, had granted everyone bonuses and hikes in salaries, and they expressed gratitude to Him. Swami was moved reading their letter and then blessed them. He also told them, "Continue whatever you are doing in the same way. That's enough for me!"

He arrived at the stage and asked for the children to arrange themselves in a compact manner so that He could pose for group photos with them. As the boys and girls seated themselves separately, Swami moved down from the stage and posed for photographs with the children. He then asked for sarees to be brought. He personally gave all the girls sarees and along with each saree came a free smile too! The same procedure followed with the boys too, only that they were given white cloth pieces. After blessing them thus, Swami moved back to the stage and asked for *bhajans* to begin. During the *bhajans*, He blessed *prasadam* to be distributed. Later, receiving *aarthi* and blessing everyone with beautiful smiles, Swami returned to Yajur Mandir.

September 11, 2008 – The Second Day of Onam Celebrations

It was 3:45 p.m. when Swami came out for *darshan* on September 11, 2008. Many were taken by the pleasant surprise, for, in the past few days, Swami usually came out only after 4:00 p.m. Bhagavan completed the rounds quickly and then moved on stage. He asked for the Veda chanting classes to begin. He said that come rain or shine, the classes must proceed and all must make efforts to learn the vedic hymn "Namakam". And so, the class began and as it went on, Swami went into the interview room.

Soon He came out, and once the lessons for the day had been completed, He asked all the students seated in front to move out to clear the area for a drama, that was scheduled, to begin. This was a fantastic scene. Usually, there is very little space even to walk as all the students sit huddled and close, with the desire of maximum divine proximity. But at the same time, when Swami tells His students to get up and clear the area, everyone does it with the greatest enthusiasm, for is that too not a chance to directly follow His command? However, as these two feelings combine, the apparent confusion it creates is hilarious at times! And Swami sits enjoying every bit of it. As the students cleared the area, Swami once again went into the interview room. He asked for the programme to begin. On His return, after a few minutes, He sat watching the proceedings.

The drama that was being performed was derived from the immortal epic, Ramayana. Its focus seemed to be on three characters whose lives were intertwined since birth - Rama, Lakshmana and Hanuman. While Lakshmana was born of Kausalya's portion of the potion given to Sumitra, Hanuman too was born of the same potion which an eagle carried away and dropped in his mother's hands. The drama opened with the incident where Rama is so happy that Lakshmana won the game, but Lakshmana is crying because Rama had lost the game purposely in his favour. Rama is the apple of the eye of every queen. Seeing this scene, the Lord's eyes brimmed with tears. Seeing Swami at such times is such a revealing experience. Nobility has the power to arouse

the pure heart very easily. And so, irrespective of the background score or the level of acting, the episodes from Ramayana seem to arouse in Swami such powerful feelings and emotions. And when we sit seeing the drama in a distant fashion, it inspires us to aspire for that purity that sweet Swami embodies. But whatever be the purity levels, seeing Swami at such times makes everyone also feel for the drama being presented (and maybe that's why the Lord who is called *Sthitaprajna* - the ever steady- does His human role of emoting!)

Then, there is fast forward of Ramayana and the trio of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are seen in the forest. Rama tells Lakshmana to set up a hut in the place of his choice. This brings Lakshmana into tears! He asks, "Oh brother! What do you mean by the place which I like? My likes are exactly whatever You like. Don't you know that?" That sort of brotherly Love existed between them.

Once again the story moves forward and now is the episode where the search for Mother Sita is on. Lord Rama places all his faith in Hanuman. This so beautifully showed that the amount of faith the Lord has in His devotee is the reflection of the faith that the devotee has in the Lord! Hanuman completes the mission successfully by meeting Mother Sita, conveying her Lord's message to her, and then strikes terror into the hearts of the demons. Vibhishana comes over and surrenders to Lord Rama. And Rama accepts him wholeheartedly saying that He will give refuge to anyone who asks for it irrespective of any distinctions. This part reminded everyone so much of our dear Swami who says, "If you need me, you deserve me!"

The drama concluded with the famous pearl necklace incident where Hanuman breaks Mother Sita's gift to him saying that it is worthless as none of the pearls chanted Rama's name! When the courtiers think that it is the monkey in him manifesting, he plucks out a hair from his body and the resonant name of Rama is heard. The drama's closure took place in a grand palace. As all the participants gathered in a formation, Swami sat watching them and smiling. He told the two 'Ramas' and two 'Sitas' to come in the front separately. Then, He moved down and stood amidst them posing for group photos. He patted many a child and said, "Very nice drama, very nice drama." Then, He had sarees and white pant-shirt pieces distributed to all the participants. *Prasadam* also followed very soon. As all this was going on, singers from Kerala began *bhajans*. They were sung in a different style such that they had portions which only the lead singer would sing, which demonstrated his hold over the ragas, and there were also portions which gave a chance for all the following devotees to sing out and vent their devotion and Love! After two *bhajans*, Swami received *aarthi*. He sat through the entire *aarthi* on the stage itself.

Swami was so happy with the drama that He called the State President of the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation of Kerala and using him as a translator for Malayalam said, "I am very happy with this drama. This drama gets first prize. The dialogues, script, acting, role selection and dresses were all very good. The people who have trained the children have also done a fantastic job.

When I come to Kerala, I will surely stay in your school. And when I come I will come walking! Sita especially did very wonderfully. She performed with a lot of feelings." At this time, very understandably, the girl who had donned Sita's role broke down and let a free flow of tears. That started tears from almost all the other actors' eyes too. Swami immediately said, "One should not cry! Swami is overwhelmed with joy and so all of you should also smile and not cry!"

Leaving all in a state of great satisfaction and happiness, Swami retired for the day.

September 12, 2008 – The Day of Onam in the Divine Presence

The Kerala festival of Onam dawned in Puttaparthi with a lot of expectations from the devotees on the morning of September 12, 2008. Swami had been showering so much love on these devotees in the past two days that everyone expected a grand closing ceremony for the festival celebrations! A procession had been arranged from the Yajur Mandir. Traditional posts in black wood for holding lamps had been erected at various places inside the ashram, and one decorated even the main stage. The mainstage lions had been housed in bamboo, and floral decorations covered the roof and floor of the Mandir. The Pookalam, the traditional flower decoration, adorned the marble floor in the centre. As Swami came out, the procession began. A band and the Vedic contingent led Swami into the Sai Kulwant Hall where small girls with lamps in the hand flanked both sides of the royal path through which the Lord was being welcomed.

Swami was not collecting letters but was all the while raising His hands in benediction to the thousands who had thronged the ashram to be with Him for the most important festival of their year. He completed the *darshan* rounds, and then moved on to the stage. There He lit the lamp to mark the formal beginning of the celebrations for the day. As the Veda chanting subsided, Swami blessed three gifted singers, Sri Kavalam Sreekumar, Sri Yogesh Sharma and Sri Sankaran Namboothiri to sing on the occasion.

The first among them has been a regular singer during Onam at Puttaparthi and he seemed to mesmerise the music lovers with his honeyed voice and near perfect rendition of Carnatic songs in the praise of Lord Vishnu. Sri Sankaran Namboothiri, a child prodigy, was all fervour and grace as he seemed to almost dance to the tunes of his notes! And Sri Yogesh Sharma, specialising in Kannada songs, thrilled the audience with songs of a fast rhythm and power. Swami also pointed out to the people by his side that the songs were in Kannada. He seemed to pay attention to every word being sung and as He swayed His hands in that divine manner, and it seemed as if He was drinking deep into the meaning of the songs. As the songs concluded and *aarthi* was sung, Swami threw in His surprise gift for Onam! He had it announced that in the afternoon He would be addressing everyone in the Sai Kulwant Hall. As the whole hall burst into applause, Swami asked the students to sing two *bhajans*.

The now famous and popular numbers, "Sri Raghunandana" and "Ram Hare Hare Ram Bolol" were then sung to the energetic clapping and singing of all the devotees gathered. Swami then returned to Yajur Mandir.

In the afternoon, as per His instructions, the Veda class began at 4:00 p.m. In ten minutes, Swami made His appearance. It need hardly be said that the chanting levels went up at least two notches when the Lord marked His presence! Perfection is what comes in the presence of Perfection Personified. After the day's "vedic tuition", the sole speaker for the day before Swami was introduced. He was a student from the Sri Sathya Sai Vidyapeeth, Sri Sailam and spoke confidently about his great fortune of being in a Sai School for about five minutes. And then, to the greatest joy of everyone, Swami rose to deliver His divine discourse. He said:

Khanda Khandantara khyati narjinchina mahaneeyulanu kannu mathru bhoomi,

(India is a land which gave birth to many noble souls, who were renowned in all the continents)

Paschathya veerula para drolinchiyu, swatantramunu kannu samara bhoomi

(Driving away the foreign invaders from their land, this land has gained independence)

Sangeetha Sahithya sastreeya vidyalandu, dheer shakthi choopina punya bhoomi

(This land has shown scholarly excellence in the field of music and literature)

Itti Bharata bhoomi yandu janana mudi

(Being born in such a holy land...)

Bharata mata dharma bhagyambu kapada bhadya tantayuu meede bala balika lara

(To protect the spiritual riches of this holy India, it is the responsibility of you Boys and girls)

India is not an ordinary country. Bha-Rathi means 'one who has love for God'. In spite of this, India is facing lot of difficulties. Don't be afraid of any problems. One should have self-confidence and immense faith in God. Time waste is life waste. Don't crave for worldly education. Advances in science will not help you know God. Science may fetch you some money, but will not lead you to God. Under the name of science, we learn delusion and impermanence. You may have faith in science. It will help you get wealth but not value! You may come across big names and terms in science. But that does not help even to control ones body! Why learn science that makes you insane? Use all your learning for the welfare of the community. Strive for the Truth. Spirituality is the path you should adhere to. So students, develop self-confidence; control your senses and keep the mind in check.

Develop intellect, have pure mind and serve your mother land. All your education should help the society. Only then your education will have any value. Develop morality. Struggle hard to know the truth. Who is your true mother? Dharma is your mother, Sathya is your father. When you have both you will have the child Shanthi. Shanthi will give love and where there is Love,

there is no scope for hatred (non-violence). Love is God, live in love. But humans have zero love today. Today there is no love among siblings. Love is not to be seen any where. All the love has been routed towards power and money. Even in a tiny ant there is love. When ants go in a row, when they meet another ant they share love. Even insects have love. It is very sad that human beings don't have love. Love for individual is useless. Have love for the society.

Bali is a person of great sacrifice. But Bali doesn't just mean mere sacrifice. He has sacrificed everything. It is the good fortune of Keralaites that they have an emperor like Bali. Bali was conducting a huge Yagna. Vamana, the dwarf comes to the yagna. He was only 3 feet tall. Everyone wondered, "How can such a small child come for this big sacrifice?" Bali went to him and asked, "O sire! What is the purpose of your visit?" Vamana replied, "Emperor Bali, I don't want any money, I just want only 3 foot steps of land." Emperor Bali was surprised. Even a dead body needs at least 6 feet of land. So he wanted Vamana to ask for more. But the Lord did not relent, and so, emperor Bali agreed to his request.

The first step of Vamana covered the whole earth, and the second step covered the whole sky and there was no place for the third foot. Vamana asked the emperor, "Where is the place for the third foot?" Emperor Bali removed his crown and asked Vamana to put His foot on his head. If you see it spiritually, the emperor gave up his huge ego. All the people who came for the Yagna were crying. They couldn't believe that their emperor was no more. They prayed to Vamana, "Swami can't we have our Emperor back", to which Vamana replied that Bali would come to Kerala once a year and it is this day when Vamana comes to Kerala that is celebrated as Onam. Vamana came to confer liberation to Emperor Bali. Vamana was the first avatar that was fully human. It is Bali's merit to get that chance.

This is a very holy festival in Kerala. The people of Kerala take a bath and prepare good food consisting of 10 items on this day! There is payasam and banana dishes along with lamps and poojas. All join in the prayers and the feeling is that emperor Bali is with them. They wait for long for this day. "Yatha Raja, tatha praja" - as is the king, so are the subjects. Bali is an example of complete surrender and sacrifice. "Na Karmana Na Prajaya Dhanena Tyagenaike Amrutatvamanashuhu". Bali did not go back on the given word. He gave himself up. The three steps are those that are physical, moral and spiritual. Whether the Lord puts the hand or leg on the head, it means the same - that He confers blessings.

In Kerala, there is no shortage of anything. The monsoons begin in Kerala. It is a land of merit, righteousness and sacrifice. Charity and dharma exist to this day in Kerala. Prayers begin there and the land is filled with scholars. Keralites celebrate this festival with utmost devotion. They don't even celebrate their own birthdays like this festival. Keralites ask swami to come there. I will come.. I never say I wont come to any one.. I will certainly come. Whomsoever invites Swami, Swami will accept. It is a state of scholarly excellence. It is a state of God. There is sincerity and devotion dancing in the

hearts in Kerala. Kerala is a place named after God. There is no one who does not sing the glory of God in Kerala, but they do not publicize it. It is not a Communist state. Communist means "Come you next"!

When any child of any drama comes to Swami, He/she is full of smiles and love. Today we have the drama Savitri. Savitri is the wife of Sathyavantha. She stands for truth. She could bring back her dead husband to life. She followed Yama where ever He went. After 6 days of severe fight, she could revive her dead husband to life. Only in India such a thing can happen. Savitri was a role model for womanhood.

The women are very powerful. Their power will work to any extent. And it is only in Bharat that such things happen. Chandramati put out a forest fire and Sita went through a fire! And so if anyone asks you where you are from, do not reply with "Bangalore", "Bombay" or "Delhi". Say that you are from India. Anantapur, Puttaparthi etc. are all in Bharat.

The prosperity of Bharat is seen fully in Kerala. The past two days, dramas have been very good. Yesterday, Sita and Rama excelled in their roles. And before that, Krishna and Sudama did very well. (This was a very touching thing. Two days before, when the drama was on, Swami went into the interview room at exactly this scene. The Krishna and Sudama in the scene were visibly disappointed! But Swami never misses a thing! The Lord proved it yet again!) Kerala always maintains high standards in their plays. The dialogue delivery, music, action and even the dress are very nice. Keep up the high standards for years to come. The ladies from Kerala stand for heights of devotion. Because of the support from the ladies, the presentations were very good. Now get ready for Savitri...

As Swami completed the discourse, all the students cleared the performing area for the drama. The performance began and moved along the lines of the story that Swami had already narrated. It had an impressive opening dance sequence with Shiva and Parvati. Then the story began. Savitri chooses Satyavan as her husband knowing fully well that he has only a year of life on earth left. She performs penance and when the fateful moment comes, she bravely follows Yama, the Lord of death, almost till His abode. She selflessly asks for boons to benefit everyone and finally when Yama wants her to leave, He asks her to ask one last wish. She, very intelligently, prays, "Lord, may I be blessed with righteous children." Yama gets outwitted as He grants that boon for the childless Savitri could not bear children without Satyavan coming alive! The whole drama was well interspersed with beautiful and graceful dances.

Everyone in the hall celebrated the joy of Savitri and Swami blessed all the children who participated in the drama with clothes. As *bhajans* went on, *prasadam* was distributed, and finally, Swami received *aarthi* and retired.

September 18, 2008 – Drama by UP and Uttaranchal Youth

Another beautiful Thursday dawned in the international hamlet, Puttaparthi on September 18, 2008. Thousands had arrived from the Northern states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. It has now become a kind of timetable schedule, with devotees from the different places arriving in a manner that the pilgrimage dates do not clash, and thus, all are assured of the precious proximity of Bhagavan. Swami had agreed for a programme by the youth from these states and a huge backdrop of the Ganges bathing ghat stood in the centre of the hall. As per the regular schedule, the Veda chanting class for Rudram began at 4:00 p.m. and was on when Swami arrived at about 4:20 p.m.

Moving in the chair through the ladies side, Swami reached the centre. He seemed to be intrigued by the back drop that had been erected. He studied it as He passed by. The previous day, Swami had not moved through the gents' side. And so, as He entered that side of the hall, all of them were happy and excited. Like bees getting attracted to the rose, they seemed to be buzzing all around the orange robe. Swami bestowed *abhayahasta* and seemed to be making a sort of futile attempt to calm the devotees! Moving through the students, Swami collected letters and blessed the boys holding trays. As soon as He moved to the stage, Swami said that the coaching was enough for the day. The teaching students took *padanamaskar* and returned to their places, and then Swami sat in the silence that prevailed.

It is amazing how His mere presence has such a soothing and calming effect on everyone present. The 10,000 strong crowd sat in a serene silence, and all the 20,000 eyes were riveted on Swami. It was after a few moments of blissful silence Swami went into the interview room. As soon as He returned, He indicated for the programme to begin. The performance area was immediately cleared. The actors moved up front and opened a huge scroll which Swami read with a smile for about a minute or so. Then receiving His blessings and *padanamaskar*, the youth returned to start the drama.

The drama was based on the secret behind the Sai Avatars. It was entitled "Sai Avatara Rahasya". It showed a modern youth very disturbed, coming up to his saintly uncle with doubts. The uncle offers him sage counsel along the lines of the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba. Very intrigued and interested in knowing more about Swami, the young boy asks his uncle about the same. Narrating the story of how Swami suffered a paralytic attack and cured it during the Guru Purnima of 1963, the uncle narrates the story of how Swami as Lord Shiva promised sage Bharadwaja of three advents into his clan. When the sage visits Kailash to request an audience with the Lord, he sees Shiva and Parvati engaged in the cosmic dance. Mother Parvati smiles at him and he mistakes it as a mockery. As he begins to leave, he suffers a paralytic stroke on the left half of his body. Lord Shiva then revives him after 7 days and tells him that his suffering of the stroke was a blessing in disguise. He confers the boon of being born in his lineage, not once but thrice. In the second advent as Sathya Sai, the left side of His body signifying the Shakti or Parvati aspect would suffer a stroke for exactly the same time as sage

Bharadwaja i.e. 7 days suffered. The drama then concludes with all the children coming in the front and forming the Sarva Dharma symbol that Swami has gifted the world with.

After this, Swami very sweetly asked, "Drama over?" He makes such a perfect audience. Always asks, "Is it over already?" as He is so engrossed. Many times, we humans do not enjoy things because we have expectations and keep judging the performance. As Mother Teresa beautifully put it, "If you judge, you just do not have time to Love." We can safely add the corollary that when you Love, there is not a moment free where you can judge. And Swami is always so engrossed for He sees only the sincerity and effort. And so, whether it's a fantastic performance or an average one, they are the same for Him as long as the efforts have been put in. It is not so for humans. We judge everything by results forgetting the fact that many things that we ourselves have learnt in our lives is because of the encouragement and support that our efforts (and not our results) have received!

Swami called the actor "Bharadwaja" to come up to Him. He materialised a gold chain and gave it to him. His hair and beard were so copious that Swami could not put the chain around his neck! Swami then asked what "Parvati's" name was! He said that the drama was fully based on Parvati! Calling 'her' Swami created another beautiful gold chain with a pendant for the boy who had donned that role! Swami then wanted Shiva, Parvati and sage Bharadwaja to pose for photos with Him. The co-ordinator for the state was kneeling beside Swami. Swami told him that he would come in the frame and so he must sit down! Then the pictures were taken! The three were overjoyed and after that, Shiva fell at Swami's feet. It was such a poignant and beautiful sight! Swami then called the videographer and told him, "I will come down and pose for photos." Swami then moved down the stage and with a beatific smile posed with the performers. As it always happens, after the session, all of them took the opportunity to fall at His feet and speak a few words with Him. After that, Swami moved up the stage and blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all. He also asked them to sing *bhajans* which they did. After two *bhajans*, Swami received *aarthi* and left.

September 21, 2008 – Programme by Devotees from Medak District

Props had risen up in the marble blocks of the Sai Kulwant Hall. Little boys holding flags stood in front of them to welcome Swami. That is almost a penance these children do. Every time when there is a programme by the children from a district in Andhra Pradesh, the basic stage framework is almost the same and it inevitably has children holding banners and flags, standing and waiting for the Lord's arrival. At 4:00 p.m., the regular daily Vedam classes began. It was around 4:25 p.m. when Swami came out for the *darshan* rounds. Swami came in in His natural sweet and graceful manner. As He passed by the props, He seemed to carefully study every bit of it.

September 21, 2008 also happened to be the concluding day of the Cardiac Midterm – CT CME Conference being held in the Super Specialty Hospital. This conference, held in collaboration with the Indian Association of Cardio-

Thoracic Surgeons had some of the best surgeons in India and abroad giving live demonstrations to post graduate medical students. Notable among them was Dr. Valluvan Jeevanandam. A few words about him need to be mentioned. Dr. Jeevanandam has a special interest in treating patients traditionally considered inoperable. He has repaired damaged hearts in several patients awaiting transplant, enabling those patients to forgo transplantation. He also has successfully performed transplants involving patients who do not fit the standard criteria for transplant.

Dr. Jeevanandam is a pioneer in the field of mechanical circulatory assist devices. In October 2000, he was the first surgeon in the world to successfully implant the CardioVad, a revolutionary, permanent circulatory assist device that boosts heart function in patients with severe heart failure who are not candidates for transplant. And most importantly he feels that the future of health care is in the way Swami's Hospitals function. In his own words,

"After being given the privilege and honor of working at the SSSIHMS many times, my answer to all questions is unequivocal - not only is patient care absolutely superb, but this institution is unmatched by any other in the world. If my experiences are any indication, SSSIHMS is truly a Temple of Healing. Not only is there treatment for the patient, but there is also the 'Presence' of the Caregiver as well. Everyday now, I spiritually give Him my patients and He takes care of them - I am an extension of His Hands and just do the duty that Swami has put me on this earth for."

All the participants were seated in front and Swami blessed them by accepting letters and speaking a few words. One could see that those few precious words really meant the world to the recipients. It was a wonderful sight. Great surgeons and 'aspiring-to-be-great-surgeons' taking the blessings of Dhanvantari (God of Medicine) Himself! Swami moved on to the stage where the other surgeons too sought and received His blessings. Swami then sat on the stage and presided over the classes. After the completion, Swami asked for the drama to be staged. The coordinators came up to Swami and offered flowers and the details of the programme. Swami blessed the district president with a gold chain. It all happened so simply that the president was just dumbstruck. With a sweet smile, Swami put the chain to his neck and blessed him by placing His hand over his head. Then Andhra Pradesh's Industries Minister Mrs. Gita Reddy along with another lady moved to the stage and offered the program at His lotus feet. Swami also accepted groundnuts that they offered and sweetly popped one into His mouth too. That act was followed by a gentle smile which was actually a reflection of all the smiles that beamed at His act. Swami blessed a marble Shivalingam and silver *padukas* that were brought for His blessings. All the office bearers made most of the opportunity as they fell at His feet joyfully. Then after a brief introduction, the programme began.

The drama, based on real life incidents, centred on a young man, Bheeshma, who has been inspired by Swami's Love and teachings. He acts as the center of serenity, peace and harmony in his village. Being young in age, he still displays admirable maturity and conscientious thinking. He inspires the

children of the village to go Godward. He wins the respect of the elders and inspires them to work together and build a much needed bridge without any external help. When some of the foreign-resident members of the village arrive there with ideas of constructing factories to exploit the natural resources, he transforms them to construct a school and hospital instead. Having done all this, he says that he has to move on and share the wonderful Love he has received from Swami with people in all other villages too.

The drama had its share of dances. Little boys and girls performed with sweet synchronization and devoted dexterity to highlight the salient points the 'hero' of the drama was making. The grand finale song was the theme song and its first line was "Sai Rama Nauka". The dance featured a boat being rowed by the hero and the lilting melody was one that would transport the listeners to a traditional and serene village; the tune was so relaxing and refreshing.

The drama concluded and all the participants came forward into the final formation. Swami called out for a little boy and patting him asked, "What's your name?" He replied, "Aravind." Swami smiled and blessing him, told him to return to his place in the formation. Swami then moved down and sat amidst all the children. He told them to come close and cluster. When that was done, a beautiful group picture was the result. As Swami moved up the stage, He granted permission for a music programme too. It was already 6:05 p.m. and it was indeed an act of Grace that Swami decided to shower love on the singers. Since it was a programme that Swami scheduled on the spot, the singers and artistes had a difficult time trying to move ahead and tune their instruments. Then, Swami so understandingly went into the interview room for 5 minutes! That gave them sufficient time to arrange everything and get ready. Immediately, Swami came out with a smile dancing on His beautiful lips.

The performers, ladies and gents, consisting of a vocalist, violinist, keyboard player, a percussionist and chorus singers comprised the team. After they sang two songs, Swami blessed them and promised another opportunity the next day. It had already got quite late and Swami received *aarthis* after blessing the prasadam to be distributed to one and all. There was a plethora of *aarthis* performed that day and that was also a wonderful sight. Camphor and the holy fire were being waved from all sides. The fact here is that anything done in the Lord's presence becomes so wonderful because He is the source of all that wonder and grandeur! Swami asked them, one by one, to place the *aarthis* plates down and then retired to Yajur mandir.

September 22, 2008 – Distribution to the Needy by Devotees from Medak District

The devotees from the Medak district on September 22, 2008 had planned a distribution of livelihood items to the poor and needy of their district. And Swami, being one who always encourages service, had graciously permitted the distribution to happen in His divine presence. And thus, it was that the materials for distribution like sewing machines, sprayers, bicycles, carpentry kits and so on were arrayed in Sai Kulwant Hall in the evening. The Vedam

tutorial that began at 4:00 p.m. was on when Swami arrived. He took a detour straight to the stage before moving on to the stage, where He blessed the completion of the Vedic chants. Swami then asked Prof. Anil Kumar to make the introductory remarks and also read out the names of the recipients of the distribution materials.

In his inimitable style, the professor spoke about the wonderful service activities that had been taken up in the district with Love and reverence for the Swami in all. During the course of his speech, he mentioned about a young bread-winner who had a second lease of life thanks to the Super Speciality Hospital here. He needed more than Rs. 80,000 for his operation and was at his wits end as to what had to be done. And Swami's hospital at Puttaparthi ensured a wonderful happy ending to what could have been another tragic story of dwindling health due to lack of finances. It is said that familiarity breeds neglect, if not contempt. The way the hospitals run by Swami have completed more than 30,000 operations completely free of cost is a wonder that makes us drop our jaws and gape in awe. It's not about the quantity but the quality of the treatment and the way it has transformed the lives of these people that is truly so divine and magnificent. (In Heart2Heart, every month we bring one such story in the Healing Touch section. In fact, in this issue, there are two. These are just tiny drops of His divine compassion.)

The narrative was very touching and as it was completed, Swami asked, "Where is he now?" And so, on the PA system the announcement was made, "Mr.Sathyanarayan, please come to the stage!" And there, embedded in the crowd, a solitary figure rose and stood in a sort of confused manner till the security personnel escorted him to the stage. He stood near Swami barely able to speak, and as his blank face showed, he was barely able to even think! Swami waved His hand creating a beautiful gold chain and put it around Sathyanarayan's neck. The overwhelmed devotee bowed down to His feet and Swami lovingly raised him and patted his cheeks. There was a thunderous applause. The magic of Love is such that it thrills everyone - the Giver, the receiver and the audience alike. The grateful and dazed patient slowly made his way back to his place. Midway, he was intercepted and the devotees gave him a place right in the front to sit! It's always true that once you win the Love of the Lord, the whole world will seem to give preferential treatment to you! The speech went on for a few more minutes where the speaker described the spiritual *sadhana* taken up by the devotees before this pilgrimage and about the water project that Swami had set up at Medak. After that, he began to read out the names of the worthy recipients.

As the names were read out, the devotees came forward and accepted the gift after reverentially offering a rose to Swami. And thus, cycles, grinders, sewing machines, iron boxes, carpentry kits were distributed. It is heartening to note that all the recipients had also received training for some weeks prior to their trip, and thus, were skilled at using the equipment being given to them. One of them wanted to desperately touch Swami's feet. He made a plea, and then went to Swami and had his heart's desire fulfilled. After the distribution, Swami permitted a musical programme - the same group that had performed the previous day. In that way, Swami kept His promise. They sang popular

Telugu songs which everyone enjoyed. There were two main singers among the gents and two among the ladies. The programme went on for about 35 minutes and after that, Swami gifted them with sarees and Safari pieces. Then, receiving *aarathi*, Swami retired for the day.

September 25, 2008 – Visit of University Grants Commission

The Sri Sathya Sai University, on September 25 had important guests visiting. The Vice Chairman of the University Grants Commission, Mr. Mool Chand Sharma and his team of academics had arrived. In the afternoon, they were seated on chairs and they too joined the devotees in the wait for the Lord to arrive. It was about 4:40 p.m. when Swami arrived for *darshan* as the Veda chanting classes were on. And since even the children from the Primary school had arrived, the hall was not only full but was also complete! It being a Thursday - the holy day decided by Sai - also added to the wholesomeness of the occasion.

Swami came down the gentle slope through the ladies side and was welcomed by smiles and salutations. Letters exchanged hands and blessings were blown in all directions by the gentle breeze that had stirred up seemingly to rejoice His arrival! The Lord's entry into the lives of His devotees takes place in such diverse ways, but for the common factor that they have all been 'touched' by Him! He means so much for the world and means the world for so many! And that's precisely why, come winter or spring, the hall is always packed with people eager to just catch even a glimpse of His crown of hair, in the minimum.

Swami moved from the ladies' side to the gents' side through the central students' block. An aura of tranquility seemed to spread among those devotees seated in the front lines seeing His lovely features from close quarters. And for those who were sitting a bit far physically, a wave of excitement seemed to surge through them as they strained to see Him. It's so fantastic that the same Swami generates so much tranquility and excitement simultaneously! The narrow path between the Sai Kulwant Hall and East Prashanti too was filled with people as eyes filled up every gap between the railings, eager to glimpse Him. Sometimes people wait for more than 3 hours just to see Him. Thoughts like, "Oh God! Is it worth so much wait?" may arise in the minds of devotee newcomers and some impatient devotees too. But a mere sight of Him and everyone knows that every moment of their wait is worth its 'weight' in gold!

Swami blessed all the boys holding trays and then passing through the Veda chanting group, He moved towards the stage. He materialised Vibhuti for a devotee and then came near the Vice chairman of UGC. He rose from his chair and fell in prostrations to Swami. The loving lord patted and blessed him. After a heartfelt exchange of words, Swami came to the stage. All the other members of the UGC team too sought His blessings. After granting them *padanamaskars*, Swami sat on the stage listening to the Veda tutorials that were on. As that concluded, Swami asked for all the students to chant all that they had learnt in the past few days. And so the Rudram began in all

fervour and enthusiasm. Everyone were at the top of their spirits and the top of their throats too as they strained to impress Swami with their "vedic knowledge"! Swami too, on His part, kept a vigil and was liberal with appreciative looks to all those who had picked up well! He called many students and accepted letters from them. He called all the birthday boys and blessed them too by sprinkling the holy Akshatha grains.

Then came what could be termed as some very special moments of the evening. Swami began spotting those students who were chanting very sincerely, beckoned them and accepted their letters. There were quite some rice grains that had collected on His lap as He had blessed the birthday boys. Swami picked them up and began sprinkling on all the boys He was calling! They were all so happy and thrilled at this act of special Grace. The rest of the 30-40 minutes, Swami sat with a smile, His hands swaying to some celestial rhythm! Blessed indeed was the day as everyone had the golden opportunity for an hour long *darshan*. A day like this is indeed a bounty out of His Love and
Compassion.

Swami then moved towards the behind door of the Bhajan Hall. On the way, He received many letters and a privileged few had the opportunity to kiss His feet. Bhajans began soon after and aarthi was taken at 6:00 p.m.

SWAMI AND ME

THE LOVE OF MY LIFE

By Ms. Malini Gadepally

Ms. Malini Gadepally was born in Kolkata, India, and raised in Los Angeles, California in the United States of America. She joined Swami's school in Prasanthi Nilayam in 9th grade, and went on to get a Bachelor's degree in English literature from the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, graduating in 1991. After marriage, Malini went on to get another degree in Liberal studies and a teaching credential. She currently works as a Grade 3 teacher in the California Public School system.

She is an active member of the Sri Sathya Sai Center of Central San Jose, California, and has taught SSE for 15 years now. She is also an inspiring speaker, and has spoken in Sai meetings in different parts of the US, Canada, Europe and India.

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is the Love, Guiding Light and Inspiration of my life. He has been the greatest influence on my family and myself, and has shown His incredible love in ways too numerous to even describe. This article is a humble attempt to portray small examples of Swami's Divine love and His ever inspiring omnipresence in my life.

The privilege of being His student was bestowed upon me in 1984 when I joined the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam. Until then, I had been a Bal Vikas student in Los Angeles, California where I grew up. Having known Swami as a child, I was very excited to be in such close proximity to the Lord Himself. The experiences of Swami's visits and interactions are undoubtedly the highlights of my seven year stay in Swami's school and college, and are indelible in my memory.

No Detail Too Small for Divine Attention

While I was studying in His Higher Secondary School, Swami walked into our classroom one day and pointing to a stack of books on the bench asked one of my classmates, "Are all these textbooks!" She said, "No Swami, textbooks and notebooks." Then Swami shook His head and replied, "Too many books, too many thoughts." We were very happy because we had 10 subjects to study, and thought that the Divine words would somehow prompt our teachers to decrease our academic load – Wishful thinking of course on the part of young teenagers! Instead, a few weeks later, brand new desks were delivered so that we would have a place to store all our books! The Lord showed His thoughtfulness and compassion in even such mundane details.

Life Lesson in Every Act of Lord Sai

Another time, Swami came to visit our school soon after breakfast, and when we were all assembled in the foyer, He asked Kitchen Aunty to show Him

what we had eaten for breakfast. She brought a plate with all the varieties: *idlis*, *sambar*, porridge, sprouted gram, and *chutney*. Swami pointed to the sprouted gram and asked her, “What is that?” She replied, “Swami, it is sprouted gram”. He then took a few and put it into His mouth and made a face while chewing it! We were so happy to see that Swami Himself had taken a dislike to it because none of us really relished the gram. He, then, turned to Kitchen Aunty and asked her, “How much of this do you give them?” She said, “One teaspoon, Swami.” Swami then replied, “From now on, give them two teaspoons full!” He then smiled at all of us very sweetly! From that we learnt that even if things seem unpalatable, we have to take things with a smile because in the long run, they are going to be good for us. Life’s blessings don’t necessarily have to be sugar coated for easy swallowing. Sometimes they may taste bitter and unappetizing, yet they are good for our spiritual health.

Sai - The Caring Parent

During my 10th grade, there was a chicken pox epidemic in our school. While sneaking a peek at my brother who had it, I contracted the disease a few weeks before the 10th grade Board Exams. The discomfort and pain from having the pox all over the body (including inside the throat), was mitigated by all the remedies that Swami Himself gave for us. He asked the teachers to make pills out of *neem* leaves, told them to use *sambrani* or a special type of incense to purify the air, asked them to feed us soft foods and curd rice so that our throats would not ache so much, and would enquire daily about the welfare of the 100 of us who had got it at the time! When mumps broke out soon after, He even arranged for rooms in Prasanthi Nilayam, a short distance away from the school premises, so that the disease wouldn’t spread like the chicken pox had.

Loving His Uncertainty

Our class was preparing for the 10th Board exams, and we had been praying to Swami to bless us before this momentous event. He told us that His blessings were always with us, but didn’t give us *padanamaskar* (take His blessings by touching His feet). Disappointed but happy that He had acknowledged us in *darshan*; we walked back to school after *bhajans*. The next day, when only the teachers had gone for *darshan*, someone came and told us that Swami was calling us! We ran like the wind, and gasping from sheer excitement, sat in rows for the Lord to come. He came smiling with something in His hand. He looked at us and said, “Take two pens to the exam hall in case ink runs out in one of them.” Our ever compassionate Divine Mother had called us to give us pen sets! He blessed each and every one of us, as well as our hall tickets.

Dream Infuses Self-Confidence

The 10th Board Exams were a nightmare as far as I was concerned. Having been brought up in the United States where there are no exams in the lower classes, the whole concept of finals was new to me. I especially dreaded

Sanskrit, since the script itself was so strange, and memorisation was not a natural talent that I possessed. Swami is so aware of our innermost thoughts and feelings. He knew how much I feared the Sanskrit exam. The night before the exam, He came in my dream and showed me the whole question paper! Needless to say, my understanding of the language was so minimal, that seeing the paper didn’t help me in the exam. Nevertheless, it boosted my self-confidence that somehow I would pass. I convinced myself that if the Lord Himself took the trouble to allay my fears, then I should be courageous regardless of my personal inability. With His grace, I did clear the paper.

Sai Blessings Follow His Students Everywhere

My class was the last batch to graduate from the Primary School after 10th. After we left, the 11th and 12th grades were established in Puttaparthi for girls as well. The sorrow of leaving Swami’s immediate physical presence to go to Anantapur was lessened when He gave us *padnamaskar* before the academic year started, and said, “My blessings are always with you, no matter where you go.”

The Boon of Womanhood

The five years in Anantapur were challenging and yet exhilarating. Swami came 2-3 times a year to the hostel and it was literally heaven to eat with Him, perform for Him, and hear His Divine Discourses tailored just for women, and to behold His Divine form. He told us how to sweep our rooms (including the corners), to fold our clothes neatly, and that we should study well. He said women had the greatest blessing to become mothers, and that in fact, was the primary and potent purpose of our birth as women! To me, it was such a powerful statement.

He Sees the Past, Present and the Future

His words take on a whole new dimension when we graduate and go out into the world. After my convocation was over in November of 1991, and my mother and I were leaving Puttaparthi to return home, I sat in the lines with everyone else who was leaving that day. When Swami came out, I muttered, “Swami, *Amma* (mother) and I are going.” Swami looked at me and sweetly replied, “Go and come back.” Then, after walking a few steps, He turned around and looking deeply into my eyes, said “Canada?” I numbly nodded, thinking to myself that I had never gone to Canada, but lived in the US and so it was the same North American continent. He kept looking deeply into my eyes and waving His hand, produced *vibhuthi*. He poured the ash into my hand and then sprayed the remaining bit with His fingers onto my face. Utterly amazed but happy to have received such grace, I did not think about the import of His words.

Two and a half years later, I accompanied my husband on a business trip and we drove to Canada. At the end of the day, we were tired and hungry, and were heading back to the hotel. My husband was driving and he suddenly realised that the exit was to the left. As he quickly changed lanes, we were

struck very hard by a vehicle behind us. I started shouting "Sai Ram, Sai Ram". Our car started to tilt, and we were about to go over the railing. The driver of the car who had hit us saw what was happening, and actually hit us again to stop us from going over. We did not realise at the time that there was a river on the other side. Both vehicles came to a screeching halt.

Amazingly, no one was injured. As we were talking and exchanging information, a very well dressed watchman came up to us. He wore a suit, a cap and there was a watch hanging out from his pocket. He asked us if we were okay. We said that we were all fine and continued checking the vehicles which were badly damaged. When we looked for the watchman again, he had disappeared. In fact, there were no cars around and it was dark with no traffic passing by at all. It was only later that I realised that the watchman was none other than Swami Himself, and that the vibhuthi He had sprayed on me two years ago had saved not only me, but also my husband and the driver of the van behind us!

Every Set-Back Insulated with Sai Protection

As I look back upon a multitude of life experiences from losing two of my closest loved ones, to having burglars rob my home and taking all my jewelry, to running from a raging fire while carrying my then very young son and daughter, as well as a variety of physical, mental and emotional challenges, I know that Swami has always been taking care. He has protected, strengthened and guided me. It is in times of despair and in my darkest moments that He makes His presence felt. His words of wisdom while I was studying in Puttaparthi and Anantapur, the experiences we had as students, and the countless times His presence is felt in my everyday life, only reiterate that our beloved Bhagavan is always there. The wonderful fact is that He is there for each and every one of us regardless of our backgrounds. His love for us is the same.

In the Sky and on Earth, the Sai Message is: "Love All, Serve All"

Recently, as I was driving home from work, I was missing Swami's physical form. As I looked up at the clouds in the sky, I imagined them to be His hair and smiled thinking that He is looking down on Earth at all His children. Then, I prayed to Swami with tears in my eyes and asked Him what He wanted me, His child, to do now, at this stage in my life. I am a mother, a school teacher, and a Bal Vikas teacher, and I wanted His reassurance that I was doing what He wanted. During this internal dialogue with Him, I had to stop at a Stop sign before making a left turn, when I suddenly noticed that the car in front of me had a huge sticker of Swami on the back window! I had never seen something like that before! Under His smiling picture with His Hand raised in blessing, it said "Love All, Serve All". With tears pouring down my face, my heart overflowing with gratitude, I thanked the Lord once again for His timely guidance. His Love is limitless. Without Him, life is meaningless. With Him anything is possible.

WHEN STAUNCH CATHOLICS MET SATHYA SAI...

An interview with Dr. Christian Moevs, Part-1

*By Mrs. Varsha Jonnalagadda
Beaumont, Texas*

Dr. Christian Moevs teaches Italian Literature at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, USA. He obtained an undergraduate degree in Philosophy from Harvard and a Ph. D in Italian Literature from Columbia University. At 49, he is a devout Roman Catholic and an ardent devotee of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Swami). When we met him in 1999, he not only read and served at Mass on Sunday but also taught the young adult Bal Vikas class in Granger, Indiana. This seeming contradiction of faith has been the subject of curiosity for both the Catholics and Hindus known to him. Dr. Christian had such a profound influence on our children that I interviewed him to learn more about his experience with his religious beliefs in general, and Swami, in particular. Little did I realise that this journalism assignment that I had to complete for a college course would change the course of my husband’s life and mine – forever. I also learnt later that this was Swami’s way of executing His will.

With His strong emphasis (among other things) on both the universality of all religions and Educare through Human Values (EHV) teachings, Swami is considered the most fascinating and enigmatic spiritual teacher of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Christian is a soft spoken, unassuming and friendly person and has been recently recognised for his exemplary contribution to Italian literature. His book titled “The Metaphysics of Dante’s Comedy” (Oxford, 2005) was awarded the 2006 Best Book Prize from the American Association for Italian Studies and the Marraro Prize from the Modern Language Association.

Here are some excerpts from my interview with Dr. Christian.

Question: Can you tell me a little about your family background?

Answer: I was born in Boston and grew up there till I was five years old. Then I spent a year in Italy and returned to the US. I grew up in a farmhouse near Princeton, New Jersey. I went to College at Harvard and majored in Philosophy. After graduation I lived in New York for quite a few years. I parked cars, and then worked for a music management company. I went to Italy for two years, and wrote poetry. Then I returned to the US with intentions to pursue Graduate studies in Philosophy or English literature. Somebody suggested Italian literature and that seemed to be obviously right. So I did a Ph. D in Italian literature at Columbia. Soon, I was hired by the University of Notre Dame.

Question: How did a Catholic Professor of Italian literature start teaching Hindu classes!

Answer: I was a Catholic and Christian in my upbringing. I am Catholic in my own tradition and was rather intensely involved with that when I was younger - but more as a kind of cultural or aesthetic attraction because I never really believed in Christ as God. I realise now that I didn't believe in miracles. I thought that all that was emblematic and not real. I did not have any real relationship with anything one could call 'God'. But I had a very intense attraction to beauty and would cry a lot at the experience of anything beautiful. I didn't realise at that time that 'God is Beauty'. Even as a child I had these strange fits. I remember one time when my sister plucked a flower and the tragedy of the suffering of this flower made me cry for three hours!

Question: Isn't that rather unusual?

Answer: (*laughs*) Yes, it was unusual. But things like that would happen a lot. I was going between desire, frustration and rebellion on the one hand, and the compassion and love I would experience every once in a while, on the other. Living in New York, I was looking for bliss everywhere in all the wrong places. That was essential at the time: to lead a wild secular life in order to see what that is, and what that does not bring. In the middle of all this, it was around 1985 that my sister invited me to dinner. She has always led an intensely spiritual life. At her house there was a picture of Sathya Sai Baba about whom I had never heard before and knew nothing. I asked my sister about Him and she told me that He is someone who has infinite power over the sky and the earth - someone who can create anything out of thin air. And I thought "Yeah, right". I certainly did not believe it.

But I was curious, so my sister gave me a book about Baba to read. As I reached the third page of the book, I started crying because I realised that this was real. There was a kind of ineffable beauty, truth and sweetness in this book, which is a mark of the Divine. Right at that moment, I was hooked forever to the Divine. But it was a very long process to change my life.

Question: How did your life change?

Answer: My own way of life was against everything that Baba teaches (*laughs*). I was breaking every one of Baba's rules. But that is how Baba works! It's not so much from trying to suppress and change the 'bad' in you, it's more falling so deeply in love with the 'good' that eventually the 'bad' disappears. And that is what the transformation is - the 'good', the 'right' takes over more and more of your life. Till all of a sudden you realise that 'darkness' has no more power on you. So it was a gradual process. At the beginning, all I did was read about Baba and His talks, and this intense joy and peace would come over me - that became the anchor of my life. Then, very gradually, I began to meditate a little bit looking at a picture of Baba.

The changes began to happen really only in 1987. I was starting Columbia (for Ph. D) the same year, and at that time a friend and I tracked down a Baba Centre in New York, and we went to a meeting at this Centre. My friend was not turned on by it. I felt something there and started visiting there twice a

week for doing *bhajans* (devotional singing). And that is what really transformed my life. I did not realise it at that time.

I was totally frazzled in all sorts of worldly concerns. I would go to *bhajans* and it would completely transform me. I would come out in a state of bliss. There was this place, in particular - it was an apartment on W.83rd Street and Broadway in New York. As you walked in, by the time you got to the second floor, you could feel the divinity and the sacredness of this place. The lady, who lived there, had made Baba the centre of her life some years ago when her life had gone through a huge tragedy. She lived, breathed and thought Baba. There were pictures of Baba everywhere in her apartment. All the pictures in the house were covered with 'Vibuthi' (Sacred Ash). You cannot go into an environment like that once a week for five years and be the same human being afterwards.

Question: Did you ever meet Baba?

Answer: I had no intentions and no desire to go to India and meet Baba. Everyone would talk about going to 'retreats', I did not feel 'called' to do that. But I guess it was 1990 when I was sent to Italy on a fellowship and I lived in Rome. I got deeply involved in the Sai Baba Centre in Rome. It was a different cultural take on Baba. The intensity and purity of their devotion, the power of their *bhajans*, and the seriousness and sacredness of how they focused on Baba was a giant inspiration. They were organising a trip to go meet Baba and I realised that I would be going. It was not a decision. I simply realised that I would be going. It all unfolded in a very magical way.

In January 1991, two groups - one big and one small – left to Puttaparthi. Everybody wanted to go in the big group because the lady, who was leading the group, had had 50 or 60 interviews with Baba. I was in the small group. I was pulled out of the big group by the travel agent and put into the small group led by a wonderful lady who later became my spiritual godmother. That is how Baba works. Everyone in that group was picked by Baba to teach spiritual lessons to everybody else in the group.

At Puttaparthi, I was in a room with four other young men. One of them had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. There was another young man named Gianpaolo who was exactly my age and who never spoke. He had been to visit Baba three or four times earlier. He had this intense purity and stillness. I just followed him and did everything that he did; I was his shadow. Getting up at 3:00 a.m. for meditation, going to sit on the verandah where Baba walks - anything he did, I followed.

What happened during the course of this trip was the turning point of my life. On January 16, Baba called us for an interview - our group, not the big group (*laughs*). Baba called us right over the heads of the big group who were seated in the front because they were to leave before we were. There was never really any harmony in that group, and there again, are all these lessons. Baba always uses us that way. Baba just focused some intense energy on me and... [*overcome by emotion*] changed my life forever. It is amazing that in the

space of 10 minutes on January 16 at 7:12 in the morning I came out a different human being. There is no explanation except for the overwhelming power of the transcendent, of divine love. Every single person in that group was permanently changed to an extraordinary degree.

Carmelo, who had just found out that his wife was dying of cancer, did not really 'believe' in Baba. The interview changed his life. Baba turned to him, did not ask him anything and with great gentleness told him: "No, no operation - she is in My hands". Carmelo started crying. Then Baba turned to the boy with multiple sclerosis. There was a doctor in our group who was dressed like everyone else. Baba asked the doctor, "What is wrong with the boy?" It was His way of letting the doctor know that He knew him. The doctor said, "He has multiple sclerosis, Baba". "Yes, yes. He hasn't walked in seven years," Baba said. The boy had indeed suffered that condition for seven years. Baba then asked the boy to stand up, and He massaged his side and led him out of the room. The boy just walked out of the room! We all realised that the physical healing was an emblem of 'inner healing'. Baba is the doctor and He works on our insides. The doctor became a very changed person when I met him the next year. He looked radiant and told me the secret: "Everyday do one thing only for Baba". The doctor would go to the mountains once every day and give free medical aid to the poor.

Question: All these people you are talking about are not Hindus...?

Answer: Yes, they were all Italians. All of them were Catholics. There was not one Hindu in that whole group.

Question: What was the driving force for these people? Rome is considered the centre for Catholicism. Then, how did these people...?

Answer: Well, Italy has a very strong spiritual tradition, and so it has a kind of 'openness' to spirituality. Baba is very well known in Italy. Often in Puttaparthi one may find the second largest group of devotees after Indians to be the Italians.

Question: Did you find any opposition from the Catholics in Italy?

Answer: Absolutely not.

Question: Were/Are they confused by your actions?

Answer: People who do not understand and who have not 'grown' in their own spiritual tradition will sometimes think that there is a tension or opposition between the two traditions. But that is just being young in your spiritual growth or 'adolescence'. But as you 'grow' you begin to see things much more deeply. In so far as people in the Catholic Church are concerned, they might say that we have only one way to God and everyone else goes to hell - well, that is not actually Catholic at all. But it is the way things are sometimes interpreted. For, anyone who has had the direct experience of God, one who has tasted the 'sugar', he/she has no interest in what form it comes.

Question: Does Baba ask you about your own religious beliefs?

Answer: Oh, but there is only one religion - the religion of love. Baba teaches that everyone must follow their own religious path. They all lead to the same place. But do it with absolute intensity and follow it all the way. They will all merge in the same place. Baba says, “Let all the religions flourish as long as they do not extinguish the flame of unity.” Baba also gave a profound message on another occasion. He said, “It is an excellent thing to be born into a religion, but not so good to die in one”.

If you think you are dying a Jew or dying a Hindu and not dying in God, it means you have not reached the goal towards which all religions are leading. All those Italians going to Baba - almost all of them - went to Church too. And I did the same.

At Notre Dame, I am a Eucharistic minister, an acolyte, and a lector at the Basilica. And it is very powerful for me, now that I have some sense of devotion and the reality of Christ that I never had before. I can honestly say that I am a Christian because of Baba. I now believe everything the New Testament says about Christ, and I have seen with my own eyes Baba heal people. Baba teaches us to have a sense of reverence for every spiritual tradition.

After I came back from that visit I began telling everyone about Baba. I had never experienced such happiness. One of Baba’s teachings is that one of the direct paths to God is to “serve God” in others, that means service to humanity. In Rome, Baba’s devotees were going to Mother Teresa’s Sisters of Charity shelter near the Vatican. I did the same. The experience was so sublime. They would serve on white floors, white tables, white linen, shining crystal, silverware - everything polished by hand and set down perfectly as if Christ was coming to eat. That is how they served every single person who came to them. Everything was served with discipline, joy and silence - just as they do near Baba. This was a huge turning point in my attitude towards Catholicism. I had to go all the way to India to get slapped personally in the face by Baba in order to come back and do what my fellow Catholics had been doing for years! It was such a turnaround! I felt a deep sense of gratitude and devotion to the Church.

Question: To a person not familiar with Sai Baba, how would you introduce or explain Baba?

Answer: Sai Baba is a mirror. He reflects us to ourselves. A thief will see a thief. A spiritual aspirant will see a holy teacher and a saint will see God. To most people, Rama is just another King; to those who can see what Rama is - Rama is the *avatar*. To know Christ is to completely sacrifice and surrender yourself to the Divine. Understanding comes when you shut your mouth and start serving, begin loving and growing in self-sacrifice. Mother Teresa is an example.

Question: Do you need to keep in touch with Baba?

Answer: Initially yes, but not anymore. When I began to really go inside myself, I realised what Baba said - that He is with me all the time.

Question: What was the reaction of your family?

Answer: My sister has had a very intense spiritual experience of Baba. At one time when she was anorexic and suicidal, she read a book about Baba. She began to have dreams about being at the ashram where Baba lives and being held and healed by Him. She realised the dreams were set in the ashram, when after being healed this way, she visited the ashram. She recognised the various rooms, including the interview room, because she had already 'been' there. It was a bit of a trauma for my mother who said "what is all this; I will never set foot in that country". She is a strict Catholic and believes in ritual, but she had not had direct experience of the divine. But my parents were full of wisdom and love, so their resistance did not last very long.

Through my transformation they began to understand what Baba was. I was in New York, and one day I stood in front of Baba's picture and said, "Baba please give my mother some taste of who you are". Two weeks later, when I visited my parents, my mother told this story. She had been going through a mental trauma and could not sleep. While pacing around the house she reached my room and saw Baba's picture. She stood in front of it and said, "Baba, if You are who You are, You must help me". And at that instant something happened. All her worries dissolved and she felt great peace. The next day, her problem was resolved, through an inexplicable miracle, with touches no ordinary being could have thought of. My mother said that only the Divine could have done that. She later visited Puttaparthi to "thank Baba".

(To be continued)

H2H SPECIAL

MESMERIZING MOMENTS WITH THE DIVINE MASTER

Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 7

A devout and dedicated devotee for nearly sixty years, Mrs. Rani Subramanian, who originally hails from Tamil Nadu, came to Bhagavan Baba as early as 1950. Now eighty five years old 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 with eager devotees with deep conviction, insight and faith. This is the seventh part of her wonderful reminiscences, continued from the previous issue.

One day, years ago, Swami distributed *amrita* (nectar) to all of us. I don't recall if He said anything specific about the significance of *Amrita*. He just said we were all very fortunate to receive it. Looking back, what I have understood now is this: We always operate from the level of body consciousness - "I think", "I do", "I listen" and so on. What is He trying to do? Remove the body consciousness from our minds and reveal to us, our *atma swarupa* (our true form, which is of the Self). *Amrita* has a very significant message. An often repeated prayer goes *Mrityorma Amritangamaya* (Take me from death to immortality). Death is limited to the body; there is no death for the soul. Swami has come to dispel our body consciousness and reveal our *atma swarupa* to us. What is *atma*? It has no *roopa* (form), but it is immanent in the body as infinite power. So, He says, "You have all the power in you, you're immortal! Then, where is the room for fear or anxiety?"

All of us, sisters, (Rani Maa and her sisters) are indeed blessed! We did not come to Swami to ask for help with material issues such as health or wealth. We took to the path for spiritual help alone and came to Swami only with that purpose. He would Himself enquire if we had any physical problems concerning our health many times. But we never initiated such conversations.

Transforming Ignorance to Bliss!

When we visited Kodai Kanal in accordance with His direction, Saroja, a friend of ours, stayed with us. She would return every day from Swami's *darshan* and cry inconsolably. We asked her why. She said, "Swami has been ignoring me, He never looks at me nor talks to me". This went on for a few days and she confided the cause of her anguish to several of us. We tried to provide many possible explanations to her that Swami was doing this for her own good, and that she must learn to accept it. But she was unconvinced and felt there must be a meaningful explanation behind Swami's behaviour.

Since we ran out of options, we prayed fervently to Swami to grant the right explanation to Saroja. Following the prayers, I had a dream, in which Swami said, "Pass on this message to Saroja: I know she is crying and this will console her. When the master of the house invites guests, will He attend to His family members or will He attend to the guests? Those who are close to

Me, who are family members, should not think I am ignoring them! You are like *gopis*, you live for My sake; always thinking about what you should do to please Swami. You are family!” When I woke up in the morning, I related this to Saroja and she was overjoyed.

In a recent discourse, He said old devotees must not expect anything and make place for newcomers gladly. The fresh ones should get an opportunity to be educated and guided by Swami. He told me personally as well: “Rani Maa, you have received so much! What more do you want? Make place for newcomers! Be contented and happy. Do not envy others. They need My guidance. You have already received it. Now, you must live it!” The last interview I received was in 1984!

More Self-Cultivation, More Grace

It is pertinent here to also mention something else that Swami has said. “If you haven’t practiced what I told you the first time, I will ignore you”. This is much like going to school when we have not done our homework! Supposing He says, “Love all serve all”, and if we go back, get angry at home picking up quarrels with everyone, not helping others when the opportunities arise, and so on; what is the use of going back to Swami for more *upadesha* (advice)? He will not talk to us again until we have practiced what we have received.

Atma (Self) gives us the power of wisdom and strength. In every family, we may love some members more because they are kind, while we may love others less, because they may be callous. But we cannot do that! Swami says divine love is unconditional, human love is conditional. “Why are you bothered about how others are? Be concerned with how you are! If you want My grace you must cultivate unconditional love! Love everyone equally and unconditionally”. Our being good will help us grow spiritually and not help others a great deal. If we do well in class, it will not help someone else to do well. They must make an attempt on their own; if they wish to do well, they have to practice.

Practicing True Wisdom

In a letter, Swami talks about “Communion with Bhagavan”. He says, “You must keep talking to Me always”. Since you are practicing and experiencing His presence as pure consciousness in you all the time by talking to Him, this becomes meditation! What is pure consciousness? It is the knowledge that body has no great importance but is an encasement of *atma* - the pure consciousness.

Once He told old devotees who would clamor for His *padanamaskar* (to touch His feet) and run after Him constantly: “Why do you run after My physical body for *paadanamaskar*? You can always visualize Me in your heart, and do any number of *namaskaars* (prostrations). That yields much better results because you are doing it in your spiritual consciousness rather than the physical consciousness”.

Why do we run after Swami’s physical form? By doing this, we not only limit ourselves to the body, but limit Swami to His body! This is no *jnana* (wisdom)! This is ignorance. This is why Swami says *bhakti* (devotion) must progress hand in hand with *jnana* (wisdom). *Dhyana* (meditation) must follow *Jnana* and *bhakti*. What is *dhyana* or meditation? It is not being seated in a posture. Until you go deep within and be completely in tune with yourself, it cannot be *dhyana*. It can at best be contemplation; not meditation. *Dhyana* comes after years of *sadhana* or spiritual practices. Swami says, “First practice being in My presence”. If you are constantly talking to Swami in your heart, where is the need for you to go to Puttaparthi and get an interview to talk to Swami? He is your *maata*, *pita*, *bandhu*, *sakha* (mother, father, companion, friend) - your everything. So, open your heart to Him and share everything. You must develop the conviction that He is in you.

I get so many experiences despite not going for *darshan* for days. I probably go two to three times in a month now. I do not talk to Swami physically, or give Him any letters. When you get *jnana*, He helps in you in many wonderful and special ways, and makes you feel joyful. In my sisters and my case, He has taught us in stages. When we started, we would offer flowers, camphor and other paraphernalia. Even at that time, He told us to read a minimal number of books. He would say, “Books that carry Guru’s *upadesha* (advise) and Swami’s books will help you”. He has His own ways of giving you messages at the right time – He will give you messages through books.

I don’t buy any books these days. There are a few published recently, that are very informative - “Sai Darshan”, “Saicology”, “Sai Sandesh” to name a few. Sai Sandesh is very helpful in understanding the set up here. The author explains why the set up in the Prasanthi Nilayam ashram is the way it is. We get disturbed if a particular individual or an important person, at times, is given preference in the ashram.

What happens in Prasanthi Nilayam is not our concern. We must leave it all to Swami. He says, “Do your best and I will do the rest!” He expects a very good performance from us. He says, “You must do three-fourth of self-analysis and one-fourth should be *sadhana* (*spiritual practice*)”. *Sadhana* can be *japa*, *dhyana*, *bhajan*, reading and self-introspection – how did I behave today? Did I help or turn away anyone who came to my door seeking help? Was I kind to everyone? We must wipe out differences in our perception. *Advaitam* (Non-duality) is nothing but unity. Pray for even the terrorists! This is more in tune with spiritual understanding. Swami says: “You are all playing a role on the stage of the world. When you are acting, do you concentrate on how the other person is performing? You must focus on how you must act out your role successfully! You’re on the stage only for a short while. You have to perform every role well. But, if you identify yourself with any of the roles, you will be disappointed. Stay focused on what is happening on the inside. Don’t worry about the events on the outside.”

Have Faith in Sai’s Compassion

Let me narrate an incident that vividly demonstrates Swami’s omnipresence. My son was about 8-9 years old then. We used to live in Nagpur. My son had the habit of riding adult-sized bicycles; although he had one that was much smaller in size, he didn’t like it. One day, he had gone to play with his friends riding a big cycle and carrying a football in his hand. After they were done, he was on his way back home. He wasn’t even tall enough to sit on the vehicle properly and reach the pedal. So, he was standing on the bicycle and pedaling while balancing the football in one hand. And then, he lost control of the bicycle near a big culvert. The football fell from his hand and got in front of the bicycle which came crashing down on him. He was bruised all over and covered in mud. Fortunately, all his bones were intact. He came home pushing the bicycle, a short distance from his friend’s house where he had been playing. Upon seeing him, I was shocked and upset. I called a doctor immediately who arrived after a couple of hours to examine him. By this time, my son had developed a fever. The doctor said this may be septicemia, which could be fatal if not treated soon. He advised that the medicine needs to be administered without further delay.

Unfortunately my husband was away at the time. The doctor said he could not get the medicine as there was a strike in the city, and there was no stock of this drug in his hospital either. He said that I would have to procure it as quickly as possible somehow! My immediate thought was, ‘How can I leave my child alone and go?’ I prayed to Swami for help. Soon after, Madhavi, a friend of mine, who was at the nursing college, came home on some work. I entrusted the child to her care, thanked her profusely, took a peon of our house in our car and drove to the chemist. The shop was closed, and the chemist was not around. I went to his house and found that he wasn’t there either.

Swami always tests how persistent you are! His help always comes at the last minute, after you have tried your best! I met the chemist’s wife, Mrs. Bannerjee, at his house and asked her about his husband’s return. She said he had gone to supervise some work at the hotel that they ran, on the top of the same building where their shop was located, and that he should be back by about 8 p.m. I sat there praying to Swami. Just before 9 p.m., a gentleman came and said to Mr. Bannerji’s wife, that her husband needed the keys to the shop. Someone else needed a medicine urgently. Mrs. Bannerjee gave the key to the gentleman who had arrived on a bicycle. I told him that I would follow him in my car to the shop. And so, I met Mr. Bannerjee, who gave me the medicine, and then, I rushed home and administered it to my son. He regained his health after a few days without any complications.

A couple of months after this incident, my sister, Prathima, who lived in Delhi was on her way to Puttaparthi for Swami’s *darshan*. Before proceeding to Puttaparthi, she stopped for a few days to stay with us at Nagpur. Only later I came to know what transpired with her in Puttaparthi. Upon her arrival in Prasanthi Nilayam, Swami called her upstairs, and asked, “How is Jawahar (my son)? Is he alright?” She was surprised by the question. She asked, “Why

do you ask Swami? He is alright”. He said, “Don’t you know? He met with a serious accident recently. Rani Ma didn’t tell you?”

She said, “No, Swami! Please tell me what happened?” Then, Swami narrated the entire incident to her in this manner: “He was riding a bicycle and fell down. He would have sustained a head injury which would have been very serious. But, since Rani Ma is constantly praying to Me to protect her children, it is my duty to do so. I instantly knew that he was involved in this accident, I went, took him in my arms and saved him from the mishap.”

Conversing with God is Meditation

This proves Swami’s omnipresence. All I was doing was talking to him all the time and praying to Him, to protect my children. This is what Swami means when he says, “Talking to Swami is meditation!” Contacting Him as *antaryaami* (our indweller), and constantly praying to Him for guidance and support is meditation. What is meditation? Having God’s presence in our hearts and forgetting the world! It is asking for guidance in every act we need to perform all day. It is to keep appealing to Him, and seek His guidance. As you develop spiritually, your own inner voice will guide you on what to do.

I no longer perform worship with lamps, camphor and other paraphernalia. He will guide you. Swami helps you and sends you messages through a song, a book, or someone. All the three books that I mentioned earlier, “Sai Sandesh”, “Sai Darshan” and “Saicology”, came to me at home. I did not go and purchase them. These have been of great help to me spiritually.

When you are constantly saying, “Swami, help me grow spiritually, let me please You in everything that I do”, He helps you spiritually. This song below was taught to me by my granddaughter who studied in Swami’s school. “*Duniyaa ne chadaaye phool tujhe, khud ko chadaane ayi hu*” (The world has offered you flowers, but I have come to offer myself). Each stanza in this devotional song is pure *advaita* (non-dualism). I feel uplifted when I sing this.

An elderly person told me that her whole body aches in pain. She said her painkiller is to talk about God. When she does that she does not feel any pain! So, she constantly wishes to talk about God. This shows she has evolved to that stage and is sincere. Swami says, “Be simple, sincere and make your best possible effort - and watch how I will take you up!”

‘I cannot let them down!’ - Baba

My daughter and I were keen that my grandchildren study at Baba’s school. I was keener than anyone else in my family. However, my son-in-law didn’t like the idea of sending them to Puttaparthi. He felt that they will be misfits in the real world if they got educated at Puttaparthi, and that their approach and understanding of life would become very different. So, he did not want to send them to Swami’s school. Although they are my grandchildren, I could not force them to take a decision against his will. So, I decided to pray to Swami. I went to Puttaparthi alone, took up a room and prayed for 40 days for Him to grant

the opportunity to my grandchildren to study near Him. After this, I asked my daughter to talk to her husband again. When she did, he said, “Perhaps this is good, let us try it”. His opinion had changed!

My daughter proceeded to apply for admission. Dhruv, my grandson, was in his 8th class, and my two grand daughters were in the 6th and the 7th class, studying in Valley School at Bangalore. My daughter was informed that she would receive a card for Dhruv to take a test/interview. One month before the date of admission to the school, my daughter said, “*Amma* (mother), take Dhruva to Puttaparthi and coach him in English, general knowledge and other subjects, since I have to stay at Bangalore”. So, my grandson and I arrived at Puttaparthi, a month before the admission date. Swami gave me a room in the south block; it was a nice room, and was very close to the Mandir. So, we settled down. A few days before the day of admission, at about 9 p.m., when we were about to go to bed, someone knocked. When I opened the door, he said, “Please send your grandson with me immediately. Mr. Kutumba Rao wishes to speak with him”. I wondered why Kutumba Rao (the secretary of the ashram at that time) wanted to talk to my grandson and offered to accompany him. But he insisted that Mr. Kutumba Rao wanted only Dhruv to go. So, I sent him with the gentleman. Upon his return, I asked him what the conversation with Kutumba Rao was all about? Dhruv said he was asked all kinds of questions.

On the eve of the test day, we had still not received the card! Anxiously, I checked with my daughter, and she said she had not received it either. On that day, I sat in the front line. So, when Swami approached, I asked him: “Swami, you gave us permission to admit Dhruv, but we have not received a card. How can he take the test?” Swami said, “No card? Don’t worry about the card! Send him to the test without the card”. I persisted, “Swami, but he will be in trouble! Without a card, they will throw him out”. Swami said, “Did I not tell you? I will take care of it; let him go and attend the test”.

Next morning, I sent him without the card for admission. Nobody stopped him and the moment they heard his name, they let him through. Finally, he went to Mr. Habbu, the principal. He invited him in. He wrote the test and was admitted to the school!

It was only later that I came to know what had transpired. Mrs. Habbu was a good friend of my daughter’s mother-in-law, who had been living at Puttaparthi for a long time. When Mrs. Habbu visited her, she mentioned to her how lucky our family was! And then here is what had happened: Swami personally went to the school in His car and told Mr. Habbu, “Tomorrow, a boy named Dhruv Subbayya will arrive for admission without a card. Admit him. Whether he passes or fails in the test, you must admit him! Do you know why? Because that family is very close to Me and I have to do this for them. I cannot let them down!”

See how important talking to Bhagavan constantly is! I didn’t go back just because I didn’t get the card – see what faith can do? Look at His compassion! He personally went to the school for this one student! He lays

down His conditions for receiving His compassion in the book, "Sai Darshan", written by Mrs. Seema Diwan. It is an enlightening and inspiring book. It explains what we must do to receive maximum grace from Him, and be a good devotee. It is very difficult to meet the conditions He has laid down. But if you meet those conditions, He promises that He will constantly take care of you! You will have 24x7 service from Swami! This is a promise directly and authentically from Swami Himself! Reading the book is not enough. Putting it into practice and living by those conditions is what gets us His grace.

(To be continued...)

GET INSPIRED

"BEFORE THEY CALL, I WILL ANSWER"

This story was written by a doctor who worked in South Africa:

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died leaving us with a tiny premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive, as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator). We also had no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts.

One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby could be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (rubber perishes easily in tropical climates). "And it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed. As in the West, it was no good crying over spilt milk, in Central Africa, you can say, it was no good crying over burst water bottles. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways.

"All right," I said, "put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm." The following noon, as I did most days, I went for prayers with the orphanage children who used to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions on things to pray for and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them to look after the baby's two-year-old sister, who was crying because she no more had her mother.

During prayer, one ten-year old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. "Please, God," she prayed, "Send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon." While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added, "And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?"

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen"? I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything, the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty-two pound parcel. I felt tears covering my eyes. I could not

open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. At least thirty or forty eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled.

As I gave them out then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then, came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas - that would make a batch of buns for the weekend. Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the... Could it really be? I grasped it and pulled it out - yes, a brand-new, rubber hot water bottle! I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly too!" Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted!

Looking up at me, she asked: "Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so she will know that Jesus really loves her?" That parcel had been on the way for five whole months. Packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child, five months before in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it "that afternoon"!

God's ways are mysterious but more importantly, what prayer can do is unimaginable. Therefore, it is said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Let us pray as if everything depended on God, but work as if everything depended on us. For, with prayer in our hearts, we are the richest and most blessed.

- Adapted from SSS Bal Vikas, April 2008

THE CARROT

One of the most excellent stories told at the Chicago Parliament of Religions was given by a Russian representative.

A woman, who was a thief, a cheat, and of generally evil repute, was lying on her death bed, and was now frightened at the prospect of what awaited her after death.

Though she had had, during a long life of evil doing, no thought of religion or of God, yet now she began to cry loudly and more vociferously to God to have mercy on her. So much did she cry that at last she attracted the attention of the angel Gabriel, who came to see what the matter might be.

"Oh Sir," said the woman, "what am I to do?"

"What is the matter?" asked the angel.

"Sir, all my life I have done not one good thing, and now, I am about to die. What will become of me?"

"Is there not one good act of which you can remember? Think," replied the angel.

After much thought the woman remembered that when she was a young woman one day she was almost starving, and then she found a carrot, which was the only food she had had for two days. As she was about to eat it, another woman, as badly off as herself, came to her, begging.

Though it was contrary to her usual nature, the carrot was divided between them. This incident the dying woman apologetically related to the angel, who replied: "Hold on to that carrot and it will save you."

The woman held on to the carrot when she died. And as she was being drawn up to heaven by the carrot, many others, who had died after leading a life as evil as her own began to cling to her, in the hope of sharing her escape.

At that, she got jealous and cried out: "Get off; the carrot is mine." No sooner after she had said this the carrot broke, and she fell back into the place of torment.

One small deed of unselfishness had been sufficient to outweigh her bad *Karma*, but her selfishness had undone, in a moment, the previous good.

Bhagavan Baba says, "The worst disease to which one is subject to is selfishness. Only when one has been able to rid oneself of selfishness will one be able to understand the true meaning of life and experience true happiness... Only when one becomes animated by the spirit of sacrifice will one become sublime."

Adapted from Nava Sarathi, October 2007

TAKE THE KINDNESS CHALLENGE ...

The big snow storm that hit the East Coast of the United States a few years ago prompted countless "random acts of kindness." Have you ever been the recipient of a random act of kindness? Or better still have you ever given one?

Generosity warms the spirit. The act of giving, no matter how small, opens our hearts and spreads joy to the giver of the gift as well as the recipient. Random Acts of Kindness are the perfect springboard to leap into generosity. But what exactly are Random Acts of Kindness? Simply put, they are good deeds done for strangers who could use a little blessing.

Agreed we all have stress in our lives. We all have good days and the not-so good days...but there's nothing like a Random Act of Kindness to pull any person out of a lousy mood.

In our long ago Chicago days, my wife and I used to make sure we had extra change with us when we traveled the tollway system. We would pull up to the booth and give the attendant our toll, plus pay the toll for the car behind us. And the reactions that we got for this were priceless. While some people sped away, unable to understand they had been the recipients of a Random Act of Kindness, most were appreciative. Some even made the effort to catch up to us and thank us.

Another target for Random Acts of Kindness is the drive-thru window. If you go through a fast food joint for breakfast and have an extra four dollars, pay for the meal of the person behind you. Imagine their surprise and delight when they pull up to the window to pay for their food, only to be told, "The guy in front of you already paid for it."

Random Acts of Kindness can be big or small. If you would rather be more generous than a sandwich or toll booth change, perhaps you can buy groceries for a needy family. If you can, put the groceries on their front porch without them knowing go for it. What's the worst thing that could happen?

If you are unable to buy them food or are uncomfortable doing it get them a gift card from the local supermarket. Find somebody who knows the family in need (maybe their pastor, or a neighbour) and ask them to give them the card, but not to tell them the gift is from you. Random Acts of Kindness are best served anonymously...

Be creative with your Random Acts of Kindness. Have fun with them. Make them a family project. If you think you get a charge from it, wait until you see how the kids get into it.

The possibilities are endless, as are the opportunities. We just have to train ourselves to be watchful for the chance to share God's blessings.

It can be as simple as a greeting card slipped onto a stranger's car windshield that says, "You are loved". You could even send flowers to a hospital patient you've never met.

Opportunities to share love surround us every day. It's up to each of us to grab hold of those opportunities and turn them into Random Acts of Kindness.

- By Chris Courtney, Heartwarmers.com

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ ON PLACES AND PRACTICES OF WORSHIP

We often cherish the time when we offer worship to God. As a result, our temples and churches have become ornately and beautifully decorated, varying according to geography, culture and history. The different ways of worship that we use to propitiate and approach God are also replete with exquisitely crafted items of worship, rich imagery and involve elaborate devotional forms, embodying thousands of years of tradition.

In one of His Divine Discourses, Swami explained the great value of worshipping God thus:

“There is only one God and He is Omnipresent. True, but to concentrate on the Omnipresent, some fixed point or preliminary form is needed. And to conceive of the Divine as present everywhere at all times, the mind of man is to be clarified and purified by means of certain psychological processes called sadhanas (spiritual efforts). This is the reason why not only among the followers of Hinduism but also among Christians and Buddhists, regular rituals are prescribed for the worship of idols of God. Cynics question the validity of this type of adoration and say that will only confirm faith in a superstition. ‘Can God be a stone or a piece of paper?’ they ask. This attitude is not correct. By adhering to the traditionally laid down ritual worship, many aspirants have attained the vision of the Omnipresent and stayed in that Incommunicable Bliss.”

In the present multi-quiz we hope to not only instil in you the significance of these rituals but also kindle a little awareness of the ‘unity in diversity’ that can be seen all over the world, as we lift our spirits up to the unseen Omnipresent God, or visualise Him in one of His myriad Divine Forms.

1. Swami says: “The entire English literature is made up of permutations and combinations of the 26 letters of the alphabet. *Puja* (ritual worship), *japa* (recitation of holy Names), *archana* (offering of flowers with God’s Names) and *aaradhana* (Divine service) are the letters of the spiritual alphabet. The collection of the various items necessary for worship (lamps, camphor, flowers, plates, cups, a bell and the book) needs hours-long concentration on the Divine. The *puja* itself may take another hour or two of concentrated and purificatory attention, and the performer rises up after the recitation and meditation, a stronger and steadier pilgrim on the path.”

According to Swami, what is the very first step in the spiritual pilgrimage?

- A. Ritual Worship.
- B. Recitation of Holy Names.

- C. Reading of the scriptures.
- D. Divine service.

2. Inside a **Jain temple**, worship is called a *puja*, which is done with eight-fold offerings of water, sandal wood, flower, incense, candle, rice, sweet and fruit. Each offering has a specific significance. By doing this puja, Jains strive to follow five great Vows: Non-violence, Truthfulness, Non-stealing, Chastity, and Non- possession. Ultimately following these vows, coupled with right faith and knowledge leads to liberation.

According to Jains, what do these 8 offerings help us to destroy?

- A. Our Desires.
- B. Our Karmas.
- C. Our Anger.
- D. Our Geed.

3. For many Christians, worship is at the heart of their relationship with God, both as individuals and a community. In worship, Christians focus on God by hearing a message based on the Bible, or through prayer, and the Sacraments.

Services often begin with a combination of prayer, responsive readings and music which simply celebrate being in God's presence. The sermon is preached to help people understand God's Word and to follow it in their daily lives.

What is the platform from where the preaching is done called?

- A. The Pulpit.
- B. The Stage.
- C. The Gallery.
- D. The Place on High.

4. All **Buddhist temples** contain an image or a statue of Buddha. Worshippers sit on the floor barefoot facing an image of Buddha and chant. They listen to monks chanting from religious texts, perhaps accompanied by instruments, and take part in prayers.

It's common to use prayer beads to mark the number of repetitions of a mantra. Mantras may also be displayed on a prayer wheel and repeated by spinning the wheel.

What does the Prayer Wheel also represent?

- A. Predetermined Destiny.

- B. Buddha’s Will.
- C. A testing of the will power.
- D. The Wheel of the Law.

5. A **Hindu temple** can be a separate structure or a part of a building. A feature of most temples is the presence of *murthis* (statues) of the Hindu deity to whom the temple is dedicated. They are usually dedicated to one primary deity, called the presiding deity, and other subordinate deities associated with the main deity. The '*murthi*' is typically placed on a '*mandap*' or pedestal, surrounded by beautiful offerings such as colorful cloths, flowers, incense sticks and instruments such as a conch or large bells.

How does a Hindu generally begin the individual worship?

- A. By acknowledging the priest.
- B. By chanting a particular manthra.
- C. With meditation.
- D. By ringing a bell.

6. A **mosque** is a place of worship for the followers of Islam. Muslims often refer to the Mosque by its Arabic name, *masjid*, meaning 'place of prostration'.

The primary purpose of the mosque is to serve as a place where Muslims can come together for prayer and some other activities of their life (i.e, a centre for information, education, and dispute settlement). The Imam leads the prayer.

For a Muslim, which day is considered more important than others for offering prayers?

- A. Thursday
- B. Friday
- C. Saturday
- D. Sunday

7. A **Bahá'í House of Worship**, is the designation of a place of worship, or temple, of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í faith has no clergy or sacraments, and virtually no rituals and the temple is exclusively reserved for worship. Sermons are prohibited and only scriptural readings may be read along with interpretations of them and prayers. Bahá'ís are encouraged to come together in communal worship, but there are no congregational prayers. One person recites prayers on behalf of everyone present.

All Houses of Worship are open to people of every religion. Each temple has its own distinctive design, and yet conforms to a set of architectural requirements that give a unifying theme. All Bahá'í Houses of Worship must have _____ sides and a central dome.

- A. Five sides.
- B. Seven sides.
- C. Nine sides.
- D. Eleven sides.

8. A **Zoroastrian Fire Temple** is a place of worship for Zoroastrians. Zarathushtra preferred fire instead of idols as a symbol of divinity, and thus made fire the symbol of his religion - a symbol of sublimity, grandeur and purity. In Zoroastrianism what does the symbol of fire represent?

- A. Fear of God.
- B. Submission to God.
- C. Energy of the Creator.
- D. Nature of man.

9. A **Gurudwara** meaning "the doorway to the Guru", is the Sikh place of worship and is sometimes popularly referred to as a "Sikh temple". People of all religious backgrounds, or of no religious faith, are welcomed into a Sikh Gurudwara.

All those who enter the hall must remove their shoes and cover their heads before entering. On entering the hall, devotees walk slowly and respectfully to the main throne on which the Guru Granth Sahib rests. Devotees then stand before the Holy Scriptures, often say a silent prayer, offer a donation (if they can), and then bow humbly.

According to the Sikh belief, what Grace can one achieve by bowing down to the Guru?

- A. The activation of destiny.
- B. The achieving of material prosperity.
- C. Good health.
- D. Overcomng of the senses.

10. A **Synagogue**, is a Jewish house of prayer. Synagogues usually have a large hall for prayer (the main sanctuary), smaller rooms for study and sometimes a social hall and offices. Some have a separate room for Torah study, called the *Beit midrash* — "House of Study".

Every synagogue contains an Ark, which is a cupboard. The Ark is named after the wooden chest which held the stone tablets of the Covenant that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. An Eternal Light (called *Ner Tamid*) hangs above the Ark. This light is always burning, as a symbol of God's presence.

What is kept in this Ark?

- A. The Torah Scrolls
- B. Sacred Water
- C. Sacred Bell
- D. Special Rosary Beads

ANSWERS:

1A. Ritual Worship.

In His Divine 1979 Discourse, Swami said: “***Puja* (formal worship, at regular hours, with the recitation of hymns and songs) is the very first step in the spiritual pilgrimage.** Many seekers have undoubtedly achieved an awareness of God by years of asceticism among jungle caves. But, starting early with *puja* and continuing with scrupulous care, the rites of *archana*, *bhajana* and *aaradhana* (offering of flowers with repetition of God's Name, singing His glory and adoring Him as a living presence) are more fruitful and satisfying.

Puja or *archana* offered without a purified heart is sheer waste of time. But even a short sincere session of *puja* spent in Divine Awareness yields much fruit. The material and the Form are inseparable, but the seeker must dwell on the Form which he desires to be manifested in all Its Glory, rather than on the material. He must dwell long and deep over the thought that God is found through every particle in the universe, free from any limitations of space and time.

The Omnipresent is not absent in the icon or the picture. We do not reduce God and shut Him up in a stone image; we affirm and realize that He is in the icon also. We raise the image to the dimensions of the absolute; we expand the picture far beyond its frame and through the processes of *saadhana* we become aware that the picture too, can be made a tool for the mind to escape from its limitations.”

2B. Our Karmas.

Jains believe that these eight-fold offerings represent the eight karmas that man needs to destroy to attain liberation.

Jala (Water) Puja: Water symbolizes the ocean. This puja reminds that one should live the life with honesty, truthfulness, love and compassion towards all living beings. This way one will be able to cross the Ocean of Life and attain *Moksha* or liberation.

Chandan (Sandal wood) Puja: *Chandan* symbolizes Knowledge (*Jnana*). Right knowledge means proper understanding of reality which includes the Soul, Karma, and their relationship.

Pushpa (Flower) Puja: Flower symbolizes conduct. Our conduct should be like a flower, which provides fragrance and beauty to all living beings without discrimination.

Dhoop (Incense) Puja: *Dhoop* symbolizes ascetic life. While burning itself, *Dhoop* provides fragrance to others. This puja reminds one to strive for an ascetic life, selflessly for the benefit of all living beings.

Deepak (Candle) Puja: The flame of *Deepak* represents a Pure Consciousness, or a Liberated Soul. The ultimate goal of every living being is to become liberated from *karma*.

Akshat (Rice) Puja: Symbolically, rice stands for the last birth. By doing this puja, one should strive in life in such a way that it becomes one's last life.

Naivedya (Sweet) Puja: *Naivedya* symbolizes tasty food. By doing this puja, one should strive to reduce or eliminate the attachment to tasty food.

Phala (Fruit) Puja: Fruit symbolizes *Moksha* or Liberation. If we live our lives without any attachments to worldly affairs, continue to perform our duty without any expectation and reward, be a witness to all the incidents surrounding and within us, truly follow an ascetic life, and have love and compassion to all living beings, we will attain the fruit of *Moksha* or liberation.

3A. The Pulpit.

A Pulpit is a small elevated platform where a member of the clergy stands in order to read the Gospel lesson and deliver a sermon. The Pulpit is usually made of wood or stone, with steps. It is raised up so that the speaker can be seen and heard.

In many Christian churches, there are two speakers who stand at the front of the church. Typically, the one on the left (as viewed by the congregation) stands at the Pulpit. Since the Gospel lesson is often read from the pulpit, the pulpit side of the church is also sometimes called the *gospel side*.

The other speaker's stand, usually on the right (as viewed by the congregation), is known as the lectern. The word *lectern* comes from the Latin word meaning "to read", because the lectern primarily functions as a reading stand. It is typically used by lay people to read the scripture lessons (except

for the Gospel lesson), to lead the congregation in prayer, and to make announcements.

4D. The Wheel of the Law.

A Prayer Wheel is a hollow metal cylinder, often beautifully embossed, mounted on a rod handle and containing a tightly wound scroll printed with a mantra. According to Tibetan Buddhist belief, spinning a prayer wheel is just as effective as reciting the sacred texts aloud. This belief derives from the Buddhist belief in the power of sound and the formulas to which deities are subject. **For many Buddhists, the prayer wheel also represents the Wheel of the Law (or Dharma) set in motion by the Buddha.**

The prayer wheel is also useful for illiterate members of the lay Buddhist community, since they can "read" the prayers by turning the wheel.

Prayer wheels come in many **sizes**: they can be tiny things that a Buddhist carries with them attached to a stick, and spun around by hand; medium-sized and set up at monasteries or temples; or very large enormous objects up to nine feet high found in monasteries continuously spun by a water mill. Prayer wheels at monasteries and temples are also often located at the gates of the property, and devotees spin the wheels before passing through the gates.

5D. Ringing a bell.

Hindu worship is primarily an individual act rather than a communal one, as it involves making personal offerings to the deity.

Shoes must be removed before entering to keep it clean and pay respects. **When praying or worshipping a God, the bell is rung to announce to the God and the surrounding people that someone is worshipping a God.** When inside the temple, it is typical to keep both hands folded together as a sign of respect. The worshipers approach the inner sanctum, recite sacred Sanskrit verses called '*mantras*', follow the instructions of the priest called the '*pujari*', meditate and pray called '*puja*', and, present the offerings to the feet of the God-form 'the *murthi*,' symbolising total submission and immersion into the All Loving Being.

Upon the conclusion of the prayer, devotees get down on their knees and bow before the symbol of the All Loving Being and mentally state whatever is felt in their hearts. If a priest or '*pujari*' is present, he is likely to provide sacred symbolically-blessed food called '*prasad*' to the devotee. He may also apply a holy red mark to the forehead of the devotee symbolising blessings. Visitors to temples often feel inner joy, harmony and peace at this point.

6B. Friday

In addition to holding the daily prayers, mosques hold weekly jumuah sabbath services, which replace the midday prayer on Fridays. While daily prayers can

be performed anywhere, it is required to attend Friday prayers at the mosque.

Outside every mosque, or just inside the entrance, is a place where worshippers can remove and leave their shoes. There is also a place where they can carry out the ritual washing required before prayer.

The main hall of a mosque is a bare room largely devoid of furniture. There are no pictures or statues. Muslims believe there can be no image of Allah, who is wholly spirit.

Everyone sits on the floor and everywhere in the mosque is equal in status. A niche in one of the walls, called a *mihrab*, shows the direction that the worshippers should face in order to face Mecca.

7C. Nine.

Bahá'í literature describes that a House of Worship should be built in each city and town, and emphasizes that its doors be open to all regardless of religion, or any other distinction. The Bahá'í laws emphasize that the spirit of the House of Worship be that it is a gathering place where people of all religions may worship God without denominational restrictions.

All Bahá'í temples share certain architectural elements, some of which are specified by Bahá'í scripture. `Abdu'l-Bahá stipulated that **an essential architectural character of a House of Worship be that it requires having a nine-sided circular shape.** While all current Bahá'í Houses of Worship have a dome, they are not regarded as an essential part of their architecture. Bahá'í scripture also states that no pictures, statues or images be displayed within the House of Worship and no pulpits or altars be incorporated as an architectural feature (readers may stand behind simple portable lecture stands).

8C. Energy of the Creator.

The symbol of fire; the energy of the creator is represented in Zoroastrianism by fire and the Sun, both of which are enduring, radiant, pure and life sustaining. Zoroastrians usually pray in front of some form of fire (or any source of light). Fire is considered to be an agent of purity and as a symbol of righteousness and truth, because fire burns ever upwards and can't be polluted.

When Zoroastrians stand in devotion before a sacred fire, they believe that they are standing in the presence of the radiating power of Ahura Mazda. In its simplest form, fire is that which burns and gives out light. Fire can consume all organic matter and is able to transform most inorganic matter. The burning may be likened to that which destroys evil by consuming or changing. The light may be seen as that which makes life possible by providing heat and energy that permeates all of Ahura Mazda's creations.

9A. The activation of destiny.

For Sikhs, one's first act in Gurdwara is to bow to the Guru by bringing the forehead to the ground at the Feet of the Guru. It is not enough to touch the turban, or the nose – the meridian at the third eye must touch the ground. Sikhs believe that the blessing of being able to bow to the Guru, the Word of God, is something which comes only by blessed destiny. **They believe that when they touch their forehead to the ground at the Feet of the Guru, their destiny can be activated.**

Once Guru Gobind Singh was asked by a Sikh how it was that He could change a person's destiny, if it had been pre-ordained by God from the very beginning of time. The Guru showed him a ring, which had a design imprinted upon it. It was used to seal certain documents. He showed the Sikh that the ring had the design backwards, so that when it was pressed onto the hot wax, the design was set correctly. The Guru explained that one's destiny is written upon one's forehead, but it is latent, waiting to be activated; this is what occurs when one bows and touches one's forehead at Guru's Feet.

10A. The Torah Scrolls.

The Ark is a cupboard where the Torah Scrolls, which contain the text of the Hebrew Bible, are kept, and a desk from which to read the Torah. The Hebrew words of the Ten Commandments are usually written somewhere above the Ark.

The platform and the desk for Torah readings are called the Bimah. At the proper moment in the service, the Ark is ceremonially opened, and the Torah scroll is carried in procession to the reading desk, unrolled to the reading chosen for the day and laid on the reading desk. It is normal for everyone to stand whenever the doors of the Ark are open.

QUIZ ON DIVINE DISCOURSES ON TRUE MEDICAL CARE

The first Hospital that Swami built was in Puttaparthi and opened in 1956. Till now, it has served millions of people (please see our current cover story “Where Love Greeted You and Grace Cures...”). Since then Swami has established many medical institutions, including two Super Specialty Hospitals, which have given completely free treatment to all patients, including expensive surgeries, without any discrimination whatsoever.

In one significant divine discourse, Swami exhorted:

“Some of you may ask why there should be a Hospital at all here! Why should not Baba cure diseases by an exercise of His Will? That is the question. Well, for one thing, this Hospital is not My only Hospital. In fact, **all Hospitals everywhere are Mine**. I visit them all. Why, all those who call out from their hearts for succour, in whatever language, from whatever clime, whether from Hospitals or homes, are Mine.

Doctors are embodiments of the Divine. As such, it is their duty to see that people do not shed tears of grief. They may doubt how far this is possible. Do as much as lies within your power. What happens thereafter need not bother you. Treat ‘Duty as God’ and ‘Work as Worship’. If you carry on your work in this spirit, the world will be a happier place for all.

Our Hospital stands for unity in diversity. It does not crave for money, name and fame. In olden days, education, health care, food and water were provided free of cost. I have determined to provide them all free.”

Over the years on many occasions Swami has given deep insights on true healthcare through His mission and message. The purpose of this quiz is to share with you these precious doses of medicare from the Divine Doctor.

1. At an International gathering of Cardiac specialists present at a symposium held in the Auditorium of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Prashanthi Nilayam, on February 6, 1993 Swami declared: “This Hospital is not Swami’s. It belongs to all of you. This Hospital was established with the noble aim of serving suffering humanity. Besides excellent equipment of the highest quality, we have here the most modern facilities for medical and surgical treatment and, above all, a team of dedicated doctors and other staff who render selfless service with a smile. The construction of the Hospital was completed in an incredibly short period of _____ months.”

- A. Five months
- B. Seven months
- C. Nine months
- D. Eleven months

2. On Hospital Day, October 5, 1967, Swami clarified:

“Do not be under the impression that we have this Hospital because I need the help of these doctors and these drugs to cure those who come to Me. There are some who desire treatment by the doctors, in a Hospital; that is the means by which they feel they can be cured. Some are anxious that the doctor must give them an injection; if he doesn't, they feel they are neglected. So, I ask the doctor to give them one, or even a series! There are many who have no faith in anything except tablets and the needle. They come to the Hospital and while there, they listen to the silence of the Prashanthi Nilayam, and feel the bliss that is redolent in the atmosphere. They respond to the *bhajans* (congregational singing of devotional songs) and see how people who partake in it are happy: when they are in that *Aarogya nilaya* (House of Health, the Hospital), they are drawn to *this Aanandha nilaya* (Home of Bliss, the Prayer Hall), and gradually, they equip themselves with the armour of _____ which guards them against any illness.”

- A. Devotion
- B. Faith
- C. Discipline
- D. Divine Energy

3. At the inaugural session of the Second International Symposium on Cardiovascular Diseases held in the Sathya Sai Institute Auditorium on January 21, 1994, Swami clarified:

“Some doctors wonder how we are able to give free treatment, free operations and free meals to our patients. To be frank, there should not be any room for wonder in this regard. You can work wonders with purity of heart. Any work which is started with purity of heart is bound to succeed. Money flows if your work is suffused with love and sacrifice. People will provide munificent funds to support any noble endeavour. The land of Bhaarath has been a *Punya Bhuumi* (Land of sanctity), *Thyaaga Bhuumi* (Land of Sacrifice), *Yoga Bhuumi* (Land of spiritual austerities), and *Karma Bhuumi* (Land of righteous action). In fact, there is no dearth of money in India.”

According to Swami, what is the first step that a doctor can take to transform humanity with their expertise?

- A. Read Swami’s books.
- B. Have faith in spirituality.
- C. Start with giving free treatments to poor.
- D. Take training from other Doctors.

4. In an address to the Valedictory session of the Cardiac Specialty Symposium on February 7, 1993, Swami said:

“There are in the world today highly intelligent and experienced doctors of great renown. They are, however, concerned only with the cure of diseases and not the redemption of the patient. It is more important to cure the mental condition of the patient than to relieve his physical illness. Doctors treat the disease and not the patient. During the past two days, the doctors have been discussing how to cure diseases. They have presented statistics as to the number of cases handled, the number of cures effected and the incidence of mortality. The doctors have had some doubts about how all diseases are cured in our Sathya Sai Hospital. How does this happen? There is a good answer for this doubt.”

What was the answer that Swami gave?

- A. The state-of-the-art equipment.
- B. The renowned Doctors.
- C. The constant prayers said by relatives.
- D. The sacrificial approach.

5. In an inaugural session of the Second International Symposium on Cardiovascular Diseases held in the Sathya Sai Institute Auditorium on January 21, 1994, Swami reiterated:

“You have high degrees such as MD, FRCS, MRCP, etc., as a result of your sincere striving. But it is a mistake to think that these degrees are yours. In fact these degrees have been conferred on you for your study, skill, memory power and knowledge. These degrees will truly belong to you on the day you apply this knowledge in practice. Unfortunately, in this modern age all activities and professions are tainted by a commercial outlook and greed for earning money. Even the sacred profession of a doctor has degenerated into a business. A doctor should reflect the triple qualities of sacrifice, love and _____ in treating his patients.”

- A. Willingness
- B. Compassion
- C. Expertise
- D. Experience

6. In His Divine Discourse at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield on June 3, 1995, Swami said: “Elsewhere Hospitals have become big business. In fact, in every sphere commercialization is rampant. Education is a business. Music is a business. Health is a business. The whole world has become a market place.

“Welfare services should be free for all. There are numerous people who cannot afford the costs of medical treatment. Doctors should render free service to such persons. My words should not be misunderstood. Even in the earning of incomes there should be a limit. Many doctors lack determination.

They join a hospital on a good salary. But after a month or so, when another hospital offers a higher salary they go over to the new hospital. How long are you likely to stay in the other hospital? When you go like this, you forfeit the confidence of hospital managements. Even workers behave in this way. They shift from place to place. Doctors are obsessed with salaries. They should be more concerned about patients. When they concentrate on their patients, they will develop into excellent doctors.”

What tip does Swami then give to become a good doctor?

- A. Inspire confidence in patients.
- B. Work longer hours.
- C. Provide free transportation to patients.
- D. Offer free visits to their homes.

7. In an Inaugural session of the Second International Symposium on Cardiovascular Diseases held in the Sathya Sai Institute Auditorium on January, 1994, Swami reveals:

“The essential mark of a hospital is its cleanliness. Clean toilets are an index of the cleanliness of a hospital. Our Hospital is as clean as a mirror; as it is always kept clean by the team of dedicated *seva dal* volunteers who relentlessly work hard with a spirit of service and sacrifice. It is not the service of one, but the service of many, which has contributed to the rapid development of our Hospital! A single flower cannot make a garland. All the people - the patients, doctors, workers - work in a spirit of harmony and unity. It is this sense of unity which contributes to purity and this purity of heart secures _____”

- A. Respect
- B. Self-worth
- C. Grace
- D. Divinity

8. During the Inauguration of SSSIHMS, Whitefield, Bangalore, on January 19, 2001, Swami implored:

“Of what use is medical science if it does not bestow health and happiness on the poor and needy? Today the educated do not care to spare a thought for the poor and forlorn. This Hospital is dedicated for the welfare of the poor. I am happy only when the poor are served. I have dedicated My entire life for the uplift of the poor and downtrodden. Doctors! Fill your hearts with compassion and serve the poor and needy. Don’t be stonehearted and money-minded. When the hour of reckoning comes, will you be able to carry with you the wealth you have amassed? No. Serve the poor with love. That alone can redeem you. Service to the poor is _____”

- A. A good use of time.
- B. Better than serving the rich.
- C. Service to God.
- D. A good way of making money.

9. At the Valedictory function of the Second International Symposium on Cardiovascular diseases on January 23, 1994, Swami reminded the audience:

“It is the duty of the doctors to use their knowledge in the service of mankind. Acquisition of skill and perfection in one's work delights one's self. Education gains significance only when it is rested on the touch-stone of practice. One must continuously work. It is activity that confers authority. A doctor gains happiness in proportion to the work he puts in. The genuine doctor is one who _____ in work.”

- A. Collects awards
- B. Delights
- C. Gets promotions
- D. Gets publicity

10. During the Inauguration of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, in Bangalore, on January 19, 2001, Swami enlightened us by stating:

“Divine Grace is essential for cure. Medicines on their own cannot cure diseases; it is Divine grace that cures. Without God’s grace, even the pulse cannot beat. You are under the mistaken notion that mere medicines can cure the diseases. If that were the case, what happened to all those kings and rich men who had access to best medical facilities? So, along with medicines, one should have Divine grace too. Medicine and Divine grace are like _____ respectively’

- A. Earth and Sky
- B. Faith and Devotion
- C. Atom and Energy
- D. Negative and Positive

ANSWERS:

1A. Five months.

Swami elaborated: **“The construction of the Hospital was completed in an incredibly short period of five months.** The construction of a Hospital of

this magnitude might have taken even ten years if the Government had taken up the work. When I announced on 23rd November 1990, that this Hospital will function from 22nd November 1991, many eyebrows were raised, doubting the possibility of the date being kept up. But it became an accomplished fact as willed by Swami.”

2B. Faith.

Swami continued: “They equip themselves with the armour of faith which guards them against any illness. There is another reason; many patients with illnesses of an advanced nature are brought here; they cannot be accommodated with others, in the sheds or rooms; they require close attention and loving care, special diet and facilities, which only a Hospital can provide. So they could be admitted into the Hospital awaiting My darshan and My ministrations. They can be looked after better there, than in the midst of the vast gathering of devotees.”

3B. Have faith in spirituality.

Instilling noble thoughts, Swami encourages: “**Doctors should first and foremost have faith in spirituality.** Faith in spirituality alone can bring about transformation of humanity. Spirituality is not the celebration of festivals, not even the performance of rituals. True spirituality calls for earnest endeavour to eradicate all animal qualities. Today humanity has descended to such a degrading level that men see evil in good, without trying to see good in evil.

Doctors who are eminent experts in their fields have come to participate in the symposium here. Sincere efforts should be made to put your great talents and skill to good use. The climes and countries from which you have come may be different. But all of you have one thing in common - noble feelings. These noble feelings are God's gift to man and come by Divine grace. Treat the patients as your own kith and kin. The help which you extend in good faith to your patients will be rewarded in course of time.”

4D. The sacrificial approach.

Swami enlightened the doctors with: “In regard to any action, if it is done with a pure heart and good intentions, it is bound to be successful. Man today regards self-interest as a way of life. This has become the philosophy of the modern world. But, we should consider *thyaaga* (sacrifice) alone as the true philosophy for the world. **When you approach the patient in a spirit of sacrifice, the patient's feelings get purified.**”

5B. Compassion.

Swami advises: “**A doctor should reflect the triple qualities of sacrifice, love and compassion in treating his patients.** But some doctors do not have these virtues at all! They misuse their divine and sacred knowledge for the sake of money. Money is important, but we must exercise discretion in this regard. You can charge the correct fees from the wealthy, but be kind and

considerate while dealing with the poor. Try to give free treatment to the poor. You should not treat a millionaire and a pauper alike!

It is said, "*Vaidhyo Naarayano Harihi*" (The doctor is equal to God). As the Lord has love and compassion, doctors too should have these divine virtues of the Lord. A doctor devoid of these virtues is not a doctor at all! Doctors should win the hearts of the patients by talking to them with compassion and concern. Diseases are half cured when the doctors talk to the patients with love and consideration. The sick and the diseased respond favourably to your treatment once you start talking to them with love and with a smiling face. But, if you wear a grim expression, the patient loses heart. Doctors should administer the injection of courage and encouragement as calcium administered to the weak. It is essential that doctors should have the sterling virtues of love and compassion. **Compassion is more important than money.**"

6A. Inspire confidence in patients.

Swami further continues: "Inspire confidence in the patients. Then any medicine you give will work wonders. The patients will hail such a doctor as a "good doctor." A "good doctor" in due course becomes a "God doctor." "*Vaidhyo Naaraayano harih,*" it is said. The doctor is Divinity itself. Doctors should render service in this spirit. Service is God. The same *Aathma* is present in everyone. Doctors should look after the patients with the same care they would show to their kith and kin. Then all would experience equal happiness."

7D. Divinity.

Swami reinforces: "**It is this sense of unity which contributes to purity and this purity of heart secures divinity.** This Hospital is a direct proof of the presence of purity, unity and divinity. It is our fond hope that such purity, unity and divinity should prevail in other Hospitals as well! Unity is most essential in all fields of activity - moral, scientific and spiritual. Purity vanishes in the absence of unity. Divinity will be absent when there is no purity and unity. Humanity will be healthier if doctors resolve to offer two days of free treatment every week."

8C. Service to God.

Swami emphasized: "**Service to the poor is service to God.** Sacrifice your life for the cause of the poor. Service to the poor is My only motto; I have no other desires. I am prepared to sacrifice even My life to serve the poor. Do at least one-thousandth part of what Swami is doing. Of what use is human life if it is not spent in the service of the poor? Neither by penance nor by pilgrimage nor by study of scriptures nor by *japa* can one cross the ocean of life. One can achieve it only by serving the poor. (Sanskrit Verse) It is your good fortune that you have become doctors. Sacrifice is the hallmark of a true doctor. So, doctors should have the spirit of sacrifice. They should be compassionate and

considerate towards the poor. There are many poor people who are losing their lives as they cannot afford costly treatment. Your love alone can sustain such lives. The more you develop the spirit of sacrifice in you, the greater will be the world's progress. Hospitals are meant to serve the poor and not to earn money. What is the point in earning crores of rupees when one has to ultimately leave the world empty handed? So, **spend all your earnings for the welfare of the poor. Dedicate your lives to the service of your fellowmen.**”

All of you, particularly doctors, should learn this lesson. Eschew greed for money; develop love and spirit of sacrifice. Then money will come to you automatically. You can experience bliss only when you give happiness to the poor. The poor are suffering because they cannot afford to buy medicines. We will give all the required medicines free. Make every effort to give happiness to all.”

9B. Delights.

Swami continues: **“The genuine doctor is one who delights in work.** Our Hospital is an infant of two years. Within a short span of time it has become one of the best Hospitals. It owes its magnificent success to the coordinated efforts of doctors, nurses, technicians and volunteers. Unity is strength. The doctors in our Hospital perform their work with all love and sincerity. They work without any publicity.

One single flower cannot make a garland. Many flowers are needed to make a garland. It requires a thread also. All these doctors are like the fragrant flowers and Bhagavan is the invisible thread which binds them together into a beautiful garland. Since all the doctors and staff work together, this Hospital has earned great name and fame. The love of doctors and love of Swami have contributed to its tremendous success.

10D. Negative and Positive

Swami continued: **“Medicine and Divine grace are like negative and positive, respectively.** Diseases can be cured only when both these come together. So, along with taking medicines, one should also pray for Divine grace. Without Divine grace, the human body cannot be sustained. The human body is most wonderful and mysterious. Who is responsible for the pulse beat? Who is making the heart pump blood? All this happens because of Divine Will. Divine power is responsible for the growth of the body. There is no point in merely feeding the body and sustaining it unless it is used to serve the poor. **This Hospital will surely attain an exalted position. You may not understand it now, but you will realize it in future. People belonging to different parts of the world will come here for treatment (*loud applause*). This Hospital has such Divine potentiality in it.**”

H2H QUIZ ON CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Under the “Spiritual Blossoms” section, in every issue of Heart2Heart, we have the feature “Conversations with Sai”. These are question and answer sessions that fortunate devotees like Dr. John Hislop and Prof. Anil Kumar have had with Bhagavan on various occasions. Now, here is a quiz based on this Heart2Heart serial article.

1. What was Swami’s reply when Dr. Hislop asked Him about the most subtle point of His teachings?

- A. Truth
- B. Right Action
- C. Peace
- D. Love

2. October 15, 1918 is Bhagavan Baba’s previous Incarnation, Shirdi Sai’s *Mahasamadhi* [death anniversary] day. In the October 2006 issue, we had what Swami revealed about Shirdi Sai during one conversation. Bhagavan Said:

“During the lifetime of Shirdi Baba not much attention was paid to Him. Recognition of Him as an Avathar, and interest in His life developed only after His 'death'. Thus, various incidents are recalled from memory now by devotees and written down in books... A lady made a plate of sweets for Shirdi Baba, and a dog ate them. The lady drove the dog away with blows. She then carried another platter of sweets to Shirdi Baba, who refused them.”

What did Shirdi Baba cite as His reason for refusing the sweets?

- A. We must not offer sweets to God.
- B. He was fasting.
- C. He had already eaten her sweets.
- D. He told her to offer the sweets to a hungry dog.

3. In our October 2007 issue, Hislop expressed his confusion: “In His Discourses, Swami says that God should be recognized as the Doer of all actions and that we should not take it upon ourselves to be the doer. How can we do that?”

Swami guided him thus: “Take the viewpoint that _____.”

- A. “God is working through you.”
- B. “I should be fearless of the consequences of my actions”
- C. “I must have equanimity in all my actions”
- D. “I should become action-less.”

4. In the June 2005 issue, Hislop tells us that once Bhagavan was at Dharmakshetra, His ashram in Bombay. Swami had just selected 96 saris for distribution out of 100 saris offered to Him and the 4 rejected ones had been placed in a box. Hislop, who was with Swami, immediately noticed that water had collected around the box with the rejected saris.

Where had the water come from?

- A. The saris had already been wet on delivery.
- B. The saris had ‘wept’ because Swami had rejected them.
- C. Hislop had inadvertently knocked over Swami’s water tumbler.
- D. Swami had caused the 4 saris to get wet as there were only 96 ladies waiting to receive saris.

5. In the January 2006 issue, a visitor asks Swami, a simple yet important question: ‘How can I recognize a right thought?’ What was Swami’s reply?

- A. Make enquiry from Swami’s books.
- B. Ask a trusted friend.
- C. There are no right thoughts.
- D. Pray to Swami and make inquiry.

ANSWERS:

1D. Love.

Swami emphasized: “The most subtle aspect of Swami's teaching is love. The circle around that subtle point, in order to realize it, are the spiritual practices **such as meditation, repetition of the Name of the Lord, talking with good people, directing the mind away from harmful thoughts and so on. In themselves these spiritual practices are of no value. The only thing of real value is love itself.**

In dealing with people, Swami looks to the good and ignores the bad so as to intensify the good. Swami's teaching is, in a way, just as when you go to buy sugar in a shop, you do not bother about all the other details of the shop; the history and character of the shopkeeper, his personal relationship with other people, his personal looks, whether he is tall or short, old or young, and so on.

The central part of Swami's teaching in regard to living in the world is to see in other people that essential quality which is God and to love that quality and not to be bothered by all the actions, qualities, misbehaviour, and characteristics of the person. And the love of God in the person with whom one is dealing is spiritual love and not physical love.”

2C. He had already eaten her sweets.

Swami continued by saying the Shirdi Baba went on to tell the lady:

“He had eaten the sweets she previously provided and His hunger was satisfied. The lady objected that this was the first time the sweets had been offered, so how could Baba say to the contrary? Baba said, 'No', that she had offered them before and had also beaten Him. In this way, He gave a lesson that that He was Omnipresent and that there was only one life.”

3A. “God is working through you.”

Swami guided Hislop: “Take the viewpoint that God is working through you. **You think you are engaging in the action, but it is your body doing so, or your mind, or your intelligence. But God is working through them. It is only the *Atma* in you which is the source of action. The *Atma* is God.** God is using your intelligence, mind, and body as His instruments for doing that particular work. You write with a pen, or cut paper with scissors - but it is not those instruments that are doing the work, it is you who are using the instruments for the purpose of doing the work. Likewise, the instruments you call "yourself" - intelligence, mind, and body - are used by God for His purpose.”

4B. The saris had ‘wept’ because Swami had rejected them.

Hislop records this amazing event as follows;

H: Swami, something has happened here, water is around this box. These saris will get wet.

(Swami removed the cover of the box and those of us who were standing there could see that the edges of the saris were wet. The cardboard box with four saris in it was lying on a table at Dharmakshetra in Bombay. Swami had selected 96 saris for distribution to some lady volunteers, and of the 100 brought for His inspection; four were replaced in the box to be returned later to the merchant. The table was not close to any source of water, and Hislop, several other men, and Swami had been standing there from the time the saris were examined one by one, by Swami.)

SAI: The saris are weeping because Swami has rejected them. Now, I will take them.

H: Swami! How could that be? Does Swami say that inanimate objects have injured feelings and can weep?

SAI: Inanimate objects are also capable of feeling joy and grief...

H: ...Swami! The saris came and could not be used. They wept tears of anguish; and in His compassion Swami relented, and the rejected saris will be used, although not for the original purpose of making gifts to the volunteers. *(Mrs. Hislop and three other ladies were given the rejected saris).*

5D. Pray to Swami and make inquiry.

Hislop records the illuminating dialogue as follows:

A Visitor: How can I tell what is right thought?

SAI: Here, in the Ashram, you can ask Swami. In America, **pray for the answer, then make inquiry in an impersonal way, and in half an hour you will have the answer.**

If you know what is right, don't ask. Do it. That is confidence, God power. Put aside all relationships. Is the work right, regardless of who is involved?

H: Swami says to keep a distance from the mind. What does that mean?

SAI: **That means do not be led by the mind.**

H: What are the acceptable mental functions?

SAI: First, find out what is right and what is wrong. If right, do that which satisfies you. If unsure, do nothing until you are sure.

HEALING TOUCH

FROM DISASTER TO DIVINE DELIVERANCE

The Stirring Story of Senthil

More than four decades ago, in a landmark discourse on March 3, 1965, Bhagavan had said, "Many hesitate to believe that things will improve, that life for all will be happy and full of joy, that the Golden Age will ever recur. Let me assure you that this *Dharmaswaruupa* (Righteousness personified) has not come in vain. It will succeed in averting the crisis that has come upon Humanity."

This was undoubtedly a powerful declaration then, and we have now seen such a day in reality; we had a 'preview' of what the 'Golden age' would be like when we met with Mr. Senthil Kumar, in the remote village of Sulur, near the city of Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, India. For, in that small one-bedroom house of Mr. Senthil Kumar, we experienced the love and warmth that was nothing short of Divine. We were treated as angels who had been sent by Bhagavan Baba Himself, for that was how much indebted Senthil felt to Baba.

But behind the now happy faces in that house, was a life that was once riddled with poverty, challenges and sickness. A life that in spite of its many downturns and struggles, is a living testimony to the far reaching impact of Bhagavan Baba's expansive and selfless love.

The Sorry Plight of Senthil

Over 15 years ago, when Senthil was happily marrying the girl he had decided to have as his soul mate, little could he have imagined of the crisis that would befall him soon. Though he had been aware of a mild heart condition that his wife-to-be was suffering from, he was certainly not prepared for what fate had in store for him. Their first son, Bala Prakash (now aged 11) was born with a deformity in the bones of his left forearm (which are called the radius and the ulna). Due to his condition, the boy could not move his left wrist. For a family that eked out an existence on daily wages, this came as rude shock. 'How would Bala Prakash earn his living?' was the constant concern that clouded this young father's heart. "Disability is a curse, but it becomes worse when you are poor", confessed Senthil. A few years later, even after the couple was blessed with another son, a healthy baby this time around, the worry about their elder son's physical condition never seemed to abate. Was there anything at all that could be done to help Bala Prakash?

Senthil soon started making regular rounds of the general hospital in the city of Coimbatore, only to be told each time that they could not help his son. Ironically, the ones that could, which were the plush private hospitals that were mushrooming in almost every street of the city, demanded a whopping Rs. 4-6 lakh (about 9,000-13,000 USD) for performing the wrist surgery. For a daily wage worker, who earned just about Rs. 150 a day (less than 4 USD) this was by all means beyond reach. "I felt helpless. I just could not see my

son suffer, but then the money required was so high; there was nothing that I could do." But problems gripped him further when his wife's heart condition became grave and doctors in the general hospital insisted on an operation. All of a sudden, Senthil's well-knit life was tumbling in front of his eyes, and all he could do was be a mute spectator. He was living the worst nightmare of a father and a husband.

Senthil's narration of the course of events, interspersed with gasps, watery eyes and deep silences, was so heartfelt and touching, that we could not help from reliving those miserable moments with him ourselves. Some people go through so many struggles in life, while others have it easy. Why? Was it God's will that Senthil and his family suffer like that?

Ray of Hope

More often than not, we fail to see God's presence in our lives, while we are suffering, but after the turbulent times pass, the footprints of God are found everywhere. By now, Senthil had started giving us smiles; his beaming face now assured us that he had found God's footprints even in those dark days of his life.

So, at the time when Senthil had almost given up, hope came to him in the form of some comforting words from a fellow villager. That kind-hearted person, who knew of Bhagavan's Hospitals, asked Senthil to try his luck at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Puttaparthi, which treated all its patients for free. Without a second thought, Senthil rushed to Puttaparthi along with his wife.

But what he told us next was something we were not prepared for. The doctors in the Sri Sathya Sai Super Speciality Hospital, after examining his wife, assured him that she would be alright if she regularly took the medicines they would prescribe! Period... no operation... Seeing our bewildered expressions, Senthil confessed, "I was also surprised. I had been mentally preparing myself for getting my wife operated, and in an instant, these doctors had made my life simpler!" The smile on his face had by now become a fixture; it refused to leave. He further added, "While that ended my immediate worry, I was still concerned about my son, Bala Prakash."

In God's corridor, no prayer goes unanswered. And so, when Senthil was walking out of the Hospital, his eyes caught a board, which read 'Orthopaedics'. He immediately decided to get Bala Prakash to the Hospital. "There was something about the Hospital and its people; the whole aura about the place was so captivating, that I knew my son would be alright if I took him there", shared Senthil. The diligent father that he was, without even taking a day's break, took Bala Prakash to Puttaparthi. After an initial examination, Bala Prakash's operation was fixed for the next day. "Initially I was worried. But somewhere deep inside my heart I knew my son was in safe hands", expressed Senthil. Needless to say, the operation was a success and restored the young boy's wrist movement.

By now, Senthil's smiles had metamorphosed into tears; tears which were not that of misery but of the immense joy that comes only when you are overwhelmed by a higher force. We knew Senthil had been 'touched', but so were we by his simplicity and innocence. "I had always believed in God, but that was a God whom I had never seen. But after this incident, I now believe in a God whom I have not only seen but also experienced," said the happy father. In a simple sentence, he had struck the right notes that perhaps would sum up even our love for God.

"I want to be a teacher"- Bala Prakash

We wanted to know what Bala Prakash felt about this whole experience. All this while, throughout Senthil's narration of his life's roller coaster ride, two pairs of keen eyes, that of Bala Prakash and his younger brother, held on to every word and reaction of ours. And so, when we asked him about how he felt about his now restored wrist action, all he had to say was, "I am very happy". But something made him volunteer more information than that. He followed it with, "I love to play cricket". Now, cricket was something he could not have played before, but after the operation, it was obvious he was enjoying playing his favourite sport. But when we asked him if he wanted to become a cricketer, pat came the reply, "I want to be a teacher". When we asked him why, all he did was gift us another one of his mystical smiles.

Life Finds a New Meaning

We now turned our attention back to the father. When we quizzed him on what this entire experience had taught him, Senthil replied, with a voice full of conviction: "Giving life to people is true service. After having experienced this gift of life, I have come to realise that all are our brothers and sisters. We should always see good, do good and be good." We were stunned at his reply, for is that not what Bhagavan Baba has been reiterating for decades now! He said, "If I have 2 Rs. in hand and meet a beggar on the way, I give that to him and walk back instead of taking the bus home".

Now, it was difficult for us to contain our tears. Imagine a daily wage labourer with a wife and two young children saying this! But what came next stunned us further. "I have a white pant and shirt ready with me. Whenever you call me for any service activity, I will come there immediately," added Senthil jubilantly. Indeed, the Golden Age is not far off.

*- Heart2Heart Team
and TN Sai Organisation*

HIGHWAY TO HOPE

By Mr. Y. Arvind

A faulty heart valve debilitated a young trucker’s life, affecting his ability to provide for his young family. When the simple act of breathing became a laborious chore, poor and uneducated Easwaran found himself tossed from pillar to post, trying to find a cure for a disease whose treatment is beyond the reach of a vast majority of India’s one billion population. That is, till he found himself at the ‘temple of healing’ that offers free treatment of the highest international standards to anyone who seeks it. The story of Easwaran from rural Tamil Nadu is a tiny leaf from the book of Sai’s overwhelming and inexhaustible love for suffering humanity.

A doctor was speaking to a patient. With the rigor born out of habit, the doctor was repeating in fluent Tamil, a South Indian language.

“You are being discharged today. You will receive your discharge summary in which all the instructions that you have to follow are mentioned. Follow them rigorously. Your heart valve has been replaced. It is a metal valve and has to be maintained. We are giving you a medicine, Warfarin.”

The forehead of the patient puckered in confusion. The doctor picked up the discharge summary and showed him the name of the medicine printed in bold.

Clarity of Communication Defines Doctor-Patient Relations

“I don’t know English sir!” said the patient in Tamil. “I only know how to sign my name.” A common answer from many of the patients who come to the doors of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield; most of them are illiterate even in their mother tongue. But, of late, things seem to be looking up. The value of education seems to have been recognised, for though the parents are not so fortunate, they endeavour to provide their children with at least a basic education.

In this case however, English was definitely not the medium of communication, and the doctor was following the best practice; explaining to the patient in a language that he understood and was conversant with, the meaning and import of everything that was said. In fact, it is mandated that nothing be done without the consent of the patient in writing. Before any procedure that the patient will have to undergo, it is explained fully in their native tongue. Returning to the context...

“Go to your local chemist and tell him that you have had an Aortic valve replacement surgery done,” said the doctor. “Also show him the note that I gave you this morning (prescription). It contains all the medicines that you have to take regularly. He will know what to give you. Otherwise, the sister here will help you, write down the names in Tamil and memorise them.”

The patient’s face brightened. Now that was something he could do. After all, most of what we learnt in our formative years was through memorisation. The doctor continued.

Treating Patients with Plenty of Patience

“I am mentioning this again and again. Of all the medicines you must take, this medicine Warfarin is the most important. This is a blood thinner. Your valve will work as long as you take this medicine. It must be taken every day at 5.00 p.m. without fail. You cannot miss even one day. You can skip eating your meal but you cannot miss out on this medicine. Do you understand?”

The patient nodded but from the expression on his face it was obvious he was still unclear. The doctor explained for the third time and concluded saying, “If you miss even one dose, the blood will clot and the valve will close permanently. If the valve closes, your heart will stop and you know what happens when your heart stops. There will not be enough time to get you to a hospital.”

The doctor paused and repeated slowly with emphasis.

“Prevention is the only solution. You must take this medicine life long. The other tests that you need to get done periodically, have already been explained to you, correct?” his eyes looking at both the men standing at the desk.

“Yes sir,” replied the thin and spry young man accompanying the patient. “Take care, if you take the medicine regularly, stop smoking and eating non-vegetarian food, the valve will serve you well. If you don’t follow the instructions perfectly... all the effort spent will be a waste. Do you understand? Your wife and children will suffer the consequences of your action. Okay?” said the doctor.

The patient nodded once again. His attendant piped up. “I will make sure of everything sir. We live together. I will take care.”

“Good!” the doctor turned and caught sight of me at the end of the desk.

“AVR?” I asked in English.

“Discharge today. You know the drill!” replied the doctor in English, his fingers mimicking the opening and closing of a heart valve.

“I only hope he takes it regularly.” I was referring to Warfarin.

“He will if he understands that his life depends on that little white tablet. Got to go now, have to scrub up.”

I nodded understanding his hurry. The Operation theatres begin at around 8 in the morning and go on till late evening, sometimes even into the night. It was close to 9 a.m. and there was definitely a patient waiting on the table...

Faulty Valves Damages Hearts, Shortens Life Spans

AVR is short for Aortic Valve Replacement. Easwaran was suffering from aortic valve damage, a consequence of rheumatic fever. The heart is the pump of the human vascular system with the Aortic valve being the outflow regulator for pure blood to all parts of the body. Due to various reasons, rheumatic fever being primary, the valve slowly undergoes degeneration. Calcium deposits form on the valve preventing its function. Consequently the heart muscle weakens and if left untreated will hasten the inevitable.

I was intrigued by the last words of the doctor ‘He will, if he understands that his life depends on that little white tablet’. What did this new life mean to the recipient? Did he really know the value of what he had been gifted with? A valve surgery in any commercial hospital costs not less than Rs.1,00,000/- (approximately US \$2500.00). One is advised not to look at a gift horse in the mouth, but equally true is the corollary that when things are given free, one does not realise the value. I wanted to know more of this man from the land of Avvaiyyar and the holy Tiruppavai (the state of Tamil Nadu in South India).

Sai Sevalal Volunteers – An Army of the Virtuous

Understanding that the patient spoke no language other than Tamil, I required the help of the Tamil speaking sevalal volunteers to buttress my meagre repertoire. The old gentleman who seemed to have weathered more than fifty summers readily agreed to be my interpreter and we went to the cubicle where the patient was seated on his bed.

To the uninitiated, sevalals are unique to the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation where men and women from all walks of life, from academicians and businessmen, to students and housewives come and perform service activities allotted to them in the true spirit of giving. They can be identified by the blue and white scarves for the men and the orange and yellow scarves for the women. They are the silent and unsung heroes who work incessantly to resonate Bhagavan Baba’s call that service to man is service to God.

The sevalal and I stood at the foot of the bed together.

“There are many people in this world who are not as fortunate as you, and there are others who are willing to help people like you...” I began. The sevalal translated eloquently. “Would you like to be of service to others who have similar problems?” The patient nodded and vehemently replied in the affirmative.

“I would like to put your experience in this Hospital in words and share it with the world. Do you have any objection to that?”

“Absolutely no problem sir, it would be a great service if more people got to know of this Hospital and the good work it does.”

“Please tell me your story,” I said, uncapping the pen.

Tale of a Humble Truck Driver

“My name is Easwaran, I come from the township of Namakkal in Tamil Nadu. My heart problem was first diagnosed in 2003. Then the problem became serious in 2006. When I was first faced with the symptoms in 2003 I approached a local doctor, Dr. Vishnu Ram in our town. He had done his medical education abroad and had returned to practice in India. He did all the required tests and told us to come here, to this Hospital (Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences). He has his own hospital cum nursing home in our town. We saw the photo of Swami in his hospital. He is a follower of Swami.”

The direct and uncomplicated narration of the man with the scar was typical of one speaking of facts oft repeated, but now in a different context. He paused to catch his breath, and his attendant who introduced himself as Manoharan took up the thread.

“My sister’s daughter worked in Puttaparthi Hospital for five years.”

I realised he was speaking of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences at Prasanthigram, in Puttaparthi. Manoharan continued.

“Since I had the contact in Puttaparthi, we first went there. Once there, we were told that a Hospital has been started at Whitefield and were directed here. We, at least, wanted to have Swami’s darshan. But that was also not feasible. We were worried about his condition and we came over here immediately. We came in 2003, all the required tests were done and we were given a number and told to come in 2004.

“We received the call letter in 2004; it came to our home address. We immediately came over and he was checked up. We were told that the disease was still medically manageable and were told to come in 2007.”

Missed Appointment Causes Delay in Treatment

They could not come in 2007 for various reasons one of which being that Easwaran was a heavy motor vehicle driver. For more than a decade, his call of duty took him across the country, even to the northern states. They missed their appointment and had to get back in line. The load of driving heavy lorries and trucks over long distances in high strung situations, took its toll, and one day in Nasik, in the western state of Maharashtra, Easwaran collapsed. He had severe pain in his chest and was immediately admitted in the local hospital; the expenses were borne by the transport company. After a week’s hospitalisation, he was pronounced fit to travel and he returned to his home town. His family and friends suggested that he go to Coimbatore (second

largest city in Tamil Nadu) for a more comprehensive check up. The entire trip cost him Rs. 6,000/- and as usual the doctors had their words of advice.

Expensive Surgery Beyond a Truck Driver’s Means

Easwaran spoke, his voice cracked and hoarse, sometimes fading away as his breath gave out. “The doctors said the condition was very serious and I must undergo surgery immediately. They gave us a figure of Rs. 2,00,000 (approximately US \$5000) and told us that this included, the angiogram and other preoperative tests, the surgery cost and post-operative stay in the hospital. That amount was way beyond us. We just collected the reports from them, put our faith in God and came to our Hospital here.” He reached for a glass of water that stood ready on the bedside cabinet.

I could not help smiling hearing the word “our”. Apparently the temple of healing means different things to different people.

Health Restored, Easwaran Looks Forward to Reunion with Family

Manoharan took over. “We came and had a full check up done. We went back to Namakkal for the dental check up and other formalities because it was difficult to find accommodation here. He was admitted as an inpatient after we came back with the reports. The operation was done on August 19, 2008, and today, one week later, he is being discharged to return home.”

“How do you feel now?” I asked Easwaran.

“We have no complaints; very satisfied sir,” replied Manoharan; Easwaran nodded his assent. A father with two sons, Iraivan in the fourth standard, Jagadeesan still a toddler, Easwaran had a lot to look forward to. His wife Amu along with his sons awaited his arrival back home.

Sai, the God of Many Names

As a parting shot, I asked, “When did you get to know of Swami?” and gestured reverentially towards a photograph of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba on the wall of the cubicle.

“We got to know Swami only through the doctor in our town. He has a huge photograph of Swami in his hospital. We pray to all gods, Maariamamma, Angala Parameswari...we believe in all gods, sir,” came the rapid fire reply from Manoharan. He continued without a pause pointing in the direction of the central dome. “Every morning after my ablutions I chant the various names of God. And, I feel very happy and satisfied.”

Purity of Premises Unites Families

The Suprabhatam (invocation to awakening the divine within) and ashtothram (the 108 names of God) in praise of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba are chanted every day at daybreak in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher

Medical Sciences. Many patients and their attendants join in offering their gratitude to God; whatever they deem Him to be. Manoharan joined in this everyday of his stay in the Hospital. I flicked through the file and found he was the brother-in-law of Easwaran. It was interesting to see the extremes of filial bonding; newspaper headlines of brother suing brother at one end of the spectrum and in-laws so close at the other in Sai’s hospital.

I capped my pen and smiled at the duo.

“Give them my gratitude uncle, and ask them if they are certain they want to share their experiences.” I said to the kindly sevadal volunteer who had patiently played the role of impromptu interpreter.

“We want more people helped like us, sir,” said Manoharan. “This Hospital is really heaven but how many can come here?” he left the question hanging.

I understood the unsaid words. There are many who cannot travel the distance to the Hospital for various reasons: financial constraints, family problems, critical stages of their disease... Manoharan was sending a message to the more fortunate among us. It does not suffice to just direct people to the SSSIHMS, it would be of greater use were we to be able to help them in their home towns. I began to see a new meaning in Bhagawan Baba’s words.

“I have not come to start a new religion. I only want a Hindu to be a better Hindu, a Muslim to be a better Muslim, a Christian to be a better Christian... There is only one religion, the religion of Love.”

Altruism - A Reflection of the Soul’s Evolution

There are among us those that earn ten times a month what others earn in a year. Yet we think a million times before we extend a helping hand. And there are among us those that don’t think twice about going out of the way to help another in need. To do what is possible within one’s means to make the world a better place for one’s fellowman... is a reflection of one’s evolution. These thoughts flashed across my mind as I looked into the honest sparkling eyes of Manoharan. Easwaran’s eyes however looked tired, but a new life was spread out before him. He was happy and that was evident in the smile that played on his lips.

I was exiting the cubicle when Manoharan hesitantly asked, “Sir, when would be the best time to have Swami’s darshan?”

The innocence of the question evoked a smile. I replied with what has worked for a million others.

“Sincere prayers are always answered.”

I knew my words had hit home when I saw the blooming faces of the brothers in arms.

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the September 2008 issue

Feedback on the Cover Story: *The Enigma of Islam Part 2*

Sairam,

I just wanted to let you know that I really enjoyed reading the cover story. I always wondered about the inner significance of the rituals of Islam and this article clarified everything. Moreover, it was amazing how the article showed unity amongst religions. The story about Sai-naz was very touching and inspiring. The article was also very helpful in terms of implementing Swami's teachings.

Thank you for publishing the article!

Sairam,

Shveta

Sai Ram,

This great article has opened my Roman Catholic eyes a little about Islam. I needed it as an ignorant Dutch inhabitant with a lot of Muslims in our country.

Thank you so much!!

Yours,

Machteld G Hanekroot, Holland

Sai Ram,

This article is so good, as it inspires us always to remember God's name. We need more articles like this on different religions.

Jai Sai Ram,

Santhosh Patil

I feel engulfed with the love of Swami after reading "This Life Is For Him" and "The Engima of Islam" on this holy day. These articles definitely make me feel His presence. I express my heartfelt thanks to H2H for bringing such soul

stirring issues about our beloved Swami. May Swami continue to inspire H2H with many more such issues.

Thanks and Regards

Balaji, Zürich, Switzerland

Feedback on: *This Life Is For Him*

I am a school teacher and was seeking a lot of answers about my career, personal life and other matters. I just cannot believe it as this interview session was like Swami talking to me in every word and every issue discussed. I am feeling so much at peace at the moment. All the other articles too are just wonderful - truly heart to heart – and I just feel like sharing them with so many people. Thank you for the wonderful service once more.

Indra Wati

Dear brothers at H2H,

Our gratitude for bringing out such a beautiful interview of Sri Siva Ramakrishnaiah. Please continue to publish interviews like this from devotees of long standing so that we can at least see and learn from their devotion and experiences. May Swami bless you all and please continue the good work.

In Loving Sai Ram,

Jayaraman, Toronto, Canada

Feedback on: *Mesmerizing Moments with the Divine Master, Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian*

Dear H2H,

I was born in Dublin, Ireland but I am writing to you from New York as I care for an elderly man in terminal illness. It is 03.40 hrs and I have spent the past couple of hours enjoying the content of your wonderful site. I have signed up for Inspirational e-mails but particularly want to thank you for printing the exquisite teachings of Swami to Rani Maa, as communicated to her and shared with us in the articles entitled "Mesmerising Moments with the Divine Master".

I have read all the backdated copies and taken copious notes and would love Rani Maa to hear how her diary can touch the souls of strangers who long for the wisdom it contains. It is the clarity when faced with day to day struggles which can help us stay true to our inner self and the simplicity of Swami's

instructions to her and through her to us all, which are so powerful. I believe there are many like me, who long for clarity so that we might follow the path to God.

I have experienced many of the issues and come to some of the solutions through searching my soul and it is so wonderful to hear Swami say the words to Rani Maa, which I sometimes found in listening to the God within me. Now I want to practice more and more silence and mastery of thought, word and deed and feel I have clear instructions for the way forward from Swami Himself.

Swami has been with me without my realising it! You are doing such important work, Thank you for being the inspiration! Thank you to everyone involved for serving Swami and me!

With Love and gratitude,

Odette, New York, USA

Feedback on: *Swami – My Mother Unparalleled*

Sairam,

It was really touching to read about Mrs. Sangeeta Bhadriraju's beautiful experiences. Swami is indeed a loving and living divine mother. Though Swami has never spoken to me or granted interviews etc, He has always been showering our family with His divine grace. I could relate easily to Swami as our Divine mother, since I also do not have my physical mother; Swami has always been more than compensating me with that love in so many ways.

Regards

Nandini Ramesh, Singapore

Feedback on: *Get Inspired Stories*

Sairam Dear Brothers & Sisters,

Many thanks for your wonderful service through H2H. I love all the sections of the journal. Particularly, my favourite section is "Get Inspired". Conveying the message through beautiful stories and cute pictures is really a pleasant, wonderful and effective way to reach people.

Sometimes I post these beautiful stories in a mailing list, giving a link to H2H journal. Once again many thanks for the wonderful gift.

Sai love,

Subrahmanyam, India.

Om Sai Ram,

It is indeed amazing how God sends messages. Probably for the first time, I was in tears when my parents left for their residence today morning. I do not know why, but I was very emotional. I could not even hug my mother because I would have cried out loudly.

And then, I chanced upon this article of *Picture In A Wallet*, below which was the message from Baba.

Try to reduce your attachment to the world to the minimum extent possible. Be happy and make others happy. Do not hurt anybody. Consider difficulties as passing clouds. You have developed family relationships and there are bound to be some worries. But do not be perturbed by them. When you look at the vast sky, you find many clouds. Likewise, in the sky of your heart there are clouds of attachment. They just come and go. Do not worry about them... Develop equanimity and strive to attain Divinity.

Krishna, God, is the only constant companion.

Regards, Nidhi

Feedback on *Bhajan Tutor*

Just a quick note to say that you all are doing a brilliant job at Heart to Heart. You must have heard it many times already from many people, but I would just like to add another vote of thanks. Every month I look forward with great anticipation to the new release from Ravi K. and S Prashanth, who are both simply out-of-this-world singers. Their bhajan singing really invokes devotion and we are eternally grateful.

Thanks and regards,

Sreejit

General Feedback

Sai Ram,

How to give thanks to Radio Sai? I am a youth leader from the local Samithi, and I was able to find so much information about my beloved Sai and amazing photos of Him only through this media. So thank you very much and keep it up!

Jai Sai Ram,

Manas, Orissa

Sairam,

I have been reading all the articles of Heart2Heart the last few months. Having read this month's articles, I just could not stop and my heart craved for more and more of Swami's stories. So, I started going through all the previous issues and trying to exhaust the whole site.

Today I read the entire series, *Unforgettable Moments with Sai: The Recollections of Mr. Chidambaram Krishnan*, the H2H Special published in 2006, which were marvellous.

I can feel real happiness reading Swami's Mission, stories and miracles. All these are benefiting me a lot and I know it is all His grace. I want to thank you for this site which is helping me a lot in my long spiritual journey.

Sai Ram,

Sreelakshmi

Sai Ram!

I am an alumna of the Sri Sathya Sai College for Women, Bhopal. My father is a regular listener of Radio Sai and it is through him that I came to know about Heart2Heart.

I had lost touch with the Sai family for almost 4 years and now I'm finding H2H a very effective medium to communicate with them all.

I have seen the best of management institutes including IIMA in India, but the people force that Baba is creating is unquestionably the best-Best among human beings! You just have to follow the instructions of Swami, that's all!

Best regards

Dr. Mamta Yerra

