

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

A job well begun, they say, is half done. How about a beginning in the physical presence of the Divine Himself! Can it get any better? No wonder, come every New Year and Prasanthi Nilayam is transformed into a bustling beehive, with excited 'bees' from all around the globe eager to drink in the nectar of His bliss, His Presence and His Love. For the thousands who make it to this divine hamlet, it is undoubtedly an unmatched blessing. But in the year 2007, this fortune was available for millions. Bhagavan, the "Queen Bee", Himself 'flew' to one of the largest metropolitan cities of India, Chennai, and granted this ambrosial experience to a massive multitude. In fact, what happened in that capital city of the state of Tamil Nadu, the land of temples, can only be described as 'unprecedented and unimaginable.'

When Bhagavan landed on this historic land on January 19, 2007, it was as if Chennai was swept by a tsunami of Love. From every nook and corner of this 8-million strong metropolis, masses converged in 'Sundaram', His Divine abode, and in Thiruvannamalai, the site of the grand Athi Rudra Maha Yagna, which was being conducted, as Bhagavan explained, for the welfare of entire humanity. The historic city was beholden to Baba, and there were too many reasons for this.

While the devotees were ecstatic to have their beloved Lord amidst them after a long gap of ten years, the entire populace of Chennai proffered their heartfelt gratitude to Bhagavan for putting an end to their century long distress of dismal and inadequate drinking water. In the grand function that was organised in the Nehru Stadium by The Chennai Citizens Conclave on January 21, Mr. Karunanidhi, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, said, "Earlier, the people of Chennai had 'kaneer' (tears), but now they were blessed with 'taneer' (water)." Actually, now there were both; but the former was out of overwhelming love and gratitude to Sai. Every single evening of the 13 days that Bhagavan stayed in that tech-city was taken up by a particular section of society such as lawyers, educationists, policemen and so on, who gathered in large numbers to express their heartfelt feelings to Bhagavan personally.

When it was the opportunity of the doctors on January 28, the city's competent medical fraternity came up with a simple yet powerful idea to offer their homage at His lotus feet. It was the birth of Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project. Their goal was to deliver the best tertiary care possible to the economically worst section of the population, constantly and completely free of charge. So, what did they do? Did they start to build a Super Specialty Hospital like in Puttaparthi and Whitefield? Well, they did not exactly do that, but achieved what these 'Temples of Healing' accomplish and possibly more.

Till date, nearly 500 indigent patients have found inspiration and hope, to live and rebuild their lives, thanks to this novel medical initiative. This project has hundreds of supporters, but no employees; dozens of surgeries are being done, week after week, but it has no building or infrastructure; name any specialty of medicine, and it always has the best expertise available; its human resource is enormous and enthusiastic; it neither has a permanent

director, nor regular technical officers or paramedics, nor even a steady stream of revenue, but nothing hinders its aim of incessant alleviation of the suffering of the poor. And the difference it has made in the lives of not only the patients, but also in thousands of others, who are directly or remotely associated in this sacred endeavour, is simply stupendous. That is the beauty of Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project. Now, the moot question is – how does it function? What is the great idea? We will leave that for you to explore in our cover story, which is in two parts.

But what we *can* share with you now is the fundamental basis on which this fantastic medical innovation operates, and also why we chose this as the theme of our cover story this New Year.

During this same January 2007 visit, speaking to the people of Chennai on one occasion, Swami said, “This human life has been gifted to support one another. When the mother is strong, she should take care of the child; similarly, once the son has come of age, he should ensure the welfare of his mother. Why do we have these relationships? It is only to share the property of love, not to distribute wealth! The expansion of love is the principle of relationships. People may live under the same roof, but without love, it is useless. The stronger ones should support the weak. We should shed tears when we see the poor, suffering and needy. Compassion should flow spontaneously from our hearts. That is the noblest *dharma* (virtue). That is love, divine Love.”

This is precisely what the Divine in human form has demonstrated in His life right from the days when He was little ‘Sathya’. When a beggar called out for alms at the door, Sathya ran and gleefully offered his share of food without a second thought. When his earthly father brought clothes for all in the family, He waited for all to pick their choices and gladly accepted the one rejected by all. When His sister-in-law asked Him to deliver two pitchers full of water everyday from a well located miles away from their home, Sathya did it with a smile. It is the same joy with which Bhagavan opened the first Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital in Prasanthi Nilayam in 1954. And since then, it has only been one steady but determined step after another, decade after decade, in His absolutely unique mission of holistic healthcare. While the second Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, now in Whitefield, came into being in 1970s, the next decade saw a completely modern and expanded General Hospital at Puttaparthi. This was followed, in early 1990s, by the unfurling of the world’s first state-of-the-art and totally free Super Specialty Hospital in Puttaparthi – a ‘miracle of love’ which many even now, especially in the West, refuse to believe is true and possible. And then, with the coming of the new millennium, arrived the majestic Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences at Whitefield, Bangalore.

Incidentally, this edifice was inaugurated in this month of January, eight years ago. Being a young and vibrant home of healing, the strides this institution has made in various spheres of its operation, in these few years, is truly commendable. Starting from maintaining a robust Healthcare Information Management System, to offering services to patients located in remote areas

through telemedicine, to the setting up of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Allied Health Sciences for providing free paramedical training courses, to creating a Learning Management System for all its employees, to adding a hostel for patients' relatives, an indoor sports complex for the employees' children...the list goes on. Read our article about this marvel of healing on the move, in the Healing Touch section.

The only common thread that runs through all these magnificent institutions of Bhagavan Baba is the feeling of Pure Love, expressed as selfless service. This is exactly the principle on which the relatively recent Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project in Tamil Nadu runs too. Not only in Tamil Nadu, there is no place in the world where this formula demonstrated by the Divine has not worked. This New Year issue has a touching illustration of this in the Sai Seva section. It is the moving story of how the islanders in New Zealand welcomed Bhutanese refugees, who had lived in temporary shelters (at times nine people inside one hut) in north-east Nepal for 17 long years. The Asian refugees, now completely at home in New Zealand, say, "This is not New Zealand, this is 'New Silent Land'; everybody here is so loving and cooperative." Tell this to the Kiwi Sai devotees and they say, "Our goal is to transform New Zealand into a 'New Sailand', just how Bhagavan had referred to it on one occasion."

Well, this is what everyone should aspire to do wherever they are – create a kingdom of Sai, of Love, however tiny it may be, through selfless service. In the New Year message in 1997, Bhagavan said, "From today try to cleanse the heart of whatever impurities there may be in it. How is this to be done? One is by meditating on God; and secondly, by rendering service to society. Only through these two can one achieve purity of the heart. If you secure the love of God, you can secure anything. There is love in you. Use it to win the love of God." And we know the best way to do this is to see 'Sai' in all, and serve them with all our heart, all our mind, and all our soul.

Let's start this New Year with a new zeal to be pure and to subsume ourselves in the service of the poor.

Loving Regards,
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The Mighty Spiritual Activity – Service

Where and when does 'service' in our lives start? And how can it be a true spiritual activity? Is it more, or less important, than meditation or chanting His name? Swami beautifully explains all these and more in a discourse delivered to the delegates of a Sevadal Conference on November 19, 1981. Here are excerpts from that profound message:

Society is the coming together of people. Cooperation among people in a society, motivated by spontaneity and pure intentions, is the hall-mark of seva (service). Seva can be identified by two basic characteristics - compassion and willingness to sacrifice.

History tells us that in all countries and in every age, man is a social being. Man is born in society; he grows in and through society, and his life ends too in society. His songs and speech, duties and diversions, are all determined by society. Society for man is like water for fish: if society rejects or neglects him, he cannot survive. What a single individual cannot accomplish, a well-knit group or society can achieve.

A man walking alone may feel tired and miserable at the end of five miles; but, walking with ten others as a group he would find the five miles a jaunt; he will arrive refreshed and strong. Social living contributes increased happiness and efficiency in efforts among birds and beasts. When they act as a group they are able to defend themselves from enemies, secure food and shelter, travel great distances and migrate to far away locations.

The Liberating Chain of Service

The first lesson in service has to be learnt in the family circle itself. Father, mother, brothers, and sisters - in this limited group which is well-knit, one must engage in loving service and prepare for the wider service that awaits outside the home. The character of each individual member determines the peace and prosperity of the family; the character of each family is the basic factor that decides the happiness and joy of the village or the community. And, the nation's progress is based on the strength and happiness of the communities which are its components. So, for the welfare of the country and of the entire world, the spirit of service, vital enthusiasm, constructive imagination, pure motivation, and unselfish alertness are all needed urgently.

Take Hanuman as your example in service. He served Rama, the Prince of Righteousness, regardless of obstacles of all types. Though he was strong, learned and virtuous, he had no trace of pride. When asked who he was by the demons in Lanka into which he had entered so daringly, he described himself, in all humility, as the 'servant of Rama.' That is a fine example of uprooting of the ego which service must bring about in us. No one can serve

another while his ego is rampant. The attitudes of mutual help and selfless service develop the 'humanness' of man and help the blossoming of the divinity latent in him.

Krishna was known to all as almighty, all-knowing, all-encompassing and all-fulfilling. Yet, the enthusiasm to do service prompted Him to approach Dharmaraja, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, on the eve of the magnificent *Raajsooya Yaaga* he had planned to celebrate, and offered to take up *seva* of any kind. He suggested that he might be given the task of cleaning the dining hall after the guests have partaken of the feast! Krishna insisted on outer cleanliness and inner cleansing. Clean clothes and clean minds are the ideal combination.

The Lord Sets the Example...

The Lord sets the example for the devotees to follow. He teaches that service done to any living being is offered to Him alone and is accepted by Him most joyfully. Service rendered to cattle, beasts, and to men is laudable spiritual practice. Keeping the environment of our residences clean, providing help to those who live around the place, going to hospitals and serving the patients who are in the wards – it is such acts of service one must take active part in. Many undertake such activities now as 'social service,' not as a spiritual practice in a full-hearted manner.

Through the spiritual practice of service, Hanuman attained identity with Rama, as the river attains identity with the sea. Arjuna too considered every act as a spiritual act to attain the grace of Krishna, for Krishna directed him to fight on, ever keeping Him in memory - "*Maamanusmara Yuddhyacha*." You too should keep God ever in your mind as the pace-setter, whether you are serving patients in the hospitals or cleaning a drain in the bazaar. That is the *thapas* (penance) – the highest form of spiritual practice. More than listening to a hundred lectures or delivering them to others, offering one act of genuine service attracts the Grace of God.

The body has to be utilized for service to others. Activity is its main purpose. Lord Krishna says, "I have no need to be engaged in work, but I do work in order to activate the world." More bliss can be gained won by serving others than what can be got by merely serving oneself.

Offer service to someone in need, with a full heart and experience the bliss that results. It need not be something big; it can be a small act, unnoticed by others. But it has to be done to please the God within you and the other person.

Eliminate the Ego

We need today those who take delight in selfless service, but such men are rarely seen. You, who belong to the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, every one of you, must become a *sevak* (volunteer), eager to help those who need it. When the *sevak* becomes the *nayak* (leader), the world will prosper. Only a

kinkara (servant) can grow into a *Shankara* (Master). Of course, one has to eliminate the ego totally; even a trace of it will bring disaster. However long you may do meditation, or how constant maybe your *japa* (chanting His name), a little ego will render them barren of results. *Bhajans* done with egoistic pride will be as harsh as the crow's caw. So, try to avoid the ego marring your spiritual efforts, even to a small extent.

What God Will Ask You

The Sathya Sai Seva Organisation has laid down service as spiritual activity, in order to uproot from your mind this evil trait; service helps you to remove the ego. So, do not pay heed to what others might say when you engage in service activities. When you are doing good acts, why hesitate, feel ashamed, or fear? Let Compassion and Sacrifice be your two eyes; let Egolessness be your breath and Love be your tongue. Let Peace reverberate in your ears. These are the five vital elements you have to live upon. God will not ask you, when and where did you do service? He will ask, "With what motive did you do it? What was the intention that prompted you?" You may weigh the service and boast of its quantity; but, God seeks quality, the quality of the heart, the purity of the mind, the holiness of the motive.

- *Divine Discourse during Sevadal Conference, 19-11-1981.*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - Part 12: Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear Reader,

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

This series is also 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, and 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 fourth chapter: The Outer Door.

Chapter 4 - The Outer Door

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We are engrossed in worldly problems and responsibilities. We get deeply involved in self-centred activities. Yet, we pray to God. In a sense, our minds are fully occupied with mundane thoughts. What is to be done?

Bhagavan: The Mahabharata explains this aspect clearly. The righteous Pandavas, the five brothers who spent their time in exile, never lost their devotion. Everything in life depends on priorities. They kept God first, others next, and considered themselves the last. Therefore, they were successful, and are remembered till this day. On the contrary, for the Kauravas (their cousins), the priorities were different; they kept their comfort and selfish interests in the first place, others next, and God last. What happened? They lost the battle and received a bad name. Since they placed God last in their priorities, they lost the battle. If you have God with you, you don't need to worry. You will be successful in all fields. After all, in this world nothing is permanent; all are passing clouds. Not even one is permanent. Know that whatever happens in life, it is for your own good.

A human being walks on his two legs. So he is erect, unlike the four legged animals: After marriage, man loses some of his freedom with increasing responsibility, and becomes "four legged" and his walking pace slows down.

With a child born to him he has "six legs" like those of a scorpion, and with another child he turns eight legged like a cockroach, and his movement further slows down. All this bondage and attachment is of your own making; no one made it for you.

In spite of all your riches and positions, remember that true happiness lies in the company of and nearness to God. You may keep a fish in a gem studded golden vessel; it will never feel comfortable there. It freely swims only in water. Bliss lies in your true self. The rest, however valuable it is, leads only to unhappiness.

A simple example for you: Here is a glass of water, with sugar at the bottom. If you taste the water on the top, it is tasteless; and it is the same with the water in the middle of the glass too. But, get a spoon and stir the water in the bottom well until the sugar gets totally dissolved in the water. Now you taste it, either at the top or in the middle of the glass, the water is sweet. So also in your life, 'the glass' is your 'body', 'water' is your life', the 'spoon' is your 'intellect' and 'sugar' is 'divinity'. If you exercise your intellect in the right direction, you will experience the sweetness of divinity everywhere. What you need are peace and happiness. You should pray to God for these two essentials. You worship Him and serve Him; you aspire to be happy and peaceful, no doubt. But, your prayers to God are for worldly possessions. So, aspirations and prayers are at variance with each other. This is your weakness.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Today, Sai glory brought almost everybody from all parts of the world to Your feet. People from many countries, whose names we had never heard before, are coming to You. People of almost all linguistic groups of the world are here. We have representation from all walks of life. It is unfortunate that we, who have been here with You, find ourselves less devoted to You than Your overseas devotees. We see them practice Your teachings with much more sincerity of heart than us! Why is this happening?

Bhagavan: The experiences of the devotees depend on their sincerity, steadfastness, devotion and faith. Nearness, in one way, is responsible for not realising the actual value of Divinity. Don't you find a shadow under a lamp? Similar is the case here. As the light of the Avatar spreads everywhere, there is shadow underneath the light. You also know that honeybees come from a distance to suck the honey out of the lotus flower, while frogs, snails and fishes so near the lotus flower do not know the taste of honey. The same thing happens when God incarnates in human form. People who are very near Him will not be able to realise His divine splendour.

When you hear of a mango fruit, you feel like eating it. But when you go to a market and see fruits there, you take a fruit close to your nose and start smelling it. Why? You doubt if it is a ripe fruit or not. The very mention of the name of the fruit made you long for it. But when you near it, you doubt. Isn't it so? Why go for such a farfetched simile? Well, you speak ecstatically to everyone saying that Baba appeared in your dreams and that you experienced His presence at your place. But, when you are in the immediate presence of Baba, you are not even thrilled and excited. You, people who are

so near me, don't know the tremendous and magnificent experiences of devotees all over the world and their magnitude. A frog in a well cannot know the outer world, you see!

It is not the length of time or the number of years you are with Swami that matters! Bus drivers come here and go from here daily. What experience do they have? You may keep an iron ball in a water tank for any length of time. What happens? It undergoes absolutely no change in any way! Just as darkness is dispelled by a flash of light, the darkness of ignorance should be dispelled by the light of wisdom.

If you have full faith and love for Swami, you will follow His teachings. You find a spectacular transformation in the life of umpteen numbers of people everywhere. Why? It is because of their implicit faith in the teachings of Swami. I don't send invitations to anybody to come over here. There are no welcome boards nor do I say goodbye to anyone. But people come in large numbers everyday. Why? This is the love of Divinity that attracts and draws people to this Prasanthi Nilayam.

It is only God whom you respect, love and worship. You respect your boss, administrators, elders, etc; you love your parents, family, and friends; all the same, you don't worship your officers, or the members of your family. Isn't it so? But you respect, love and worship only God.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami, devotees come from far off places like Argentina, Philippines, Guatemala, Russia and many other countries from all over the world. They return from here with heavy hearts, not able to leave You. How should they take it and what exactly do You want them to do in such circumstances?

Bhagavan: You should experience the omniscience of God. God is always with you, around you, below you, above you and in you. In fact, you are God. Devotees come to Swami to charge their batteries. Always remember this: 'Near' is not important to Swami, 'dear' is important. The flame burns brilliantly when the breeze blows. Two wooden pieces are close to each other; this is 'nearness'. As you light and burn them, you also fan them, so that the flame rises upwards. This fanning is 'dearness'. Mere nearness is not enough.

Suppose there is a lotus flower in a lake. There are a number of fishes and frogs in the same lake that do not know the value of the flower. But honeybees come from long distances and suck nectar from the flower. Bees represent dearness, while frogs and fishes stand for nearness.

Similarly, you know the lighthouse from which light spreads all around guiding the ship's voyage. But, under the lighthouse, it is dark because of the shadow. So, light around is dearness, while the shadow underneath is nearness. So, devotees, who go from here, should understand this. They should strive to be dear to Swami and not merely near to Him.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! It is our common experience that some of us are quite good for sometime - devoted, disciplined and dutiful, especially when we are here in Your proximity. Then, why do we change when we are somewhere else? What happens to all that we learn here? Why do we lose sacred qualities like sincerity, devotion and steadfastness when we are away? Kindly pardon our mistakes and let us know the causes of our downfall?

Bhagavan: This is a wrong statement. Sincerity, devotion, discipline, steadfastness and all the noble qualities that you claim to have possessed while you are here are not true and natural; they are artificial. They are like plastic flowers that are not fragrant, and cannot attract bees. It is all your show or trick. God is never carried away by these artificial, temporary, and external features. God looks into your heart and internal nature.

You say that circumstances change you. If noble qualities were really present in you, you wouldn't change due to the change of circumstances. No change in the environment will ever affect you. Truly, the mistake lies in you alone; you don't have strong faith and conviction. In fact, the seeds are there lying underground and are waiting to sprout at an appropriate time. Environment has no legs, hands and life to move about like you!

You are now here in Kodai Kanal. You are fully clothed, with sweaters and shawls, rugs and blankets and all the woollen stuff to keep you warm in this cold place. If you don't have warm clothes, whose fault is it? Whom would you blame then? Similarly, you know how challenging and testing life is in the world today. It is your own responsibility to carry with you the blanket of duty, the rug of devotion and wear the sweater of discipline whenever you are exposed to the severe cold winds of neglect of duty, disobedience of God's commands, and vagaries of ego and disbelief. If you wear this warm woollen clothing, you will not be affected by the cold climate. You have to protect yourself, and blaming the environment is of no use. If good thoughts and good behaviour are in you, you will remain unaffected, whatever be your surroundings.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami, we are here by Your sheer grace and mercy. You say that You spend three-fourths of Your time on Your boys. What do You want us to do?

Bhagavan: There is nothing you can do for Me. I don't need anything from you. I only give and never receive. I do not accept or receive anything from anyone. I never stretch My hand before anybody in order to receive something. I have never asked anybody for anything till now. In fact, all things happen according to the will of Swami. But, I ask you to give Me only one thing, and that is enough. What is it? It is your love. Your parents sometimes stay away from you. But I am always with you, in you, below you, above you and around you. I am indeed yourself. If you remember this always, that is enough. *[To the students]* You follow Swami, and you will shine like a precious gem in the future. You will be highly respected and will get a good name in society. Whatever you have learnt here in the hostel and the college,

and on top of all this, the love of Swami you have received, should never be forgotten. Get for yourselves a good name. Follow Swami's teachings.

Once King Janaka put a question in the open court, "Is there anyone who can teach me *Brahmajnana*, knowledge of the ultimate reality, within the time it takes to place my foot in the stirrup and ride on the back of my horse?" His preceptor, Yajnavalkya said, "Oh King! I shall teach you. Follow me". King Janaka accordingly got up from the throne and started following him. After walking some distance, Yajnavalkya asked the King to stop and sit on the ground in the middle of the royal highway. Janaka obeyed and sat down accordingly.

Everyone was taken aback on seeing the King sitting on the ground. They prayed to him to go back to the palace, but in vain; he would not respond to any of his citizens. The army chief and the ministers heard the news; they rushed to the spot and pleaded with the King to let them know what had happened. Janaka did not open his mouth. The Queen came out of the royal palace, sat in front of him, cried and begged him to let her know what had happened. The King did not speak to her too. Soon everyone came to know that Sage Yajnavalkya was responsible for the present plight of the King. They went out in search of him, and finally got him. They questioned him as to what he had done to the King that made him sit on the ground in the highway. Yajnavalkya replied that he did not do anything to the King, and never asked him to keep silent.

Followed by all of them, Yajnavalkya came to the King and asked him why he was remaining silent without replying to any of the queries made by those visiting him. Janaka said, "Swami! You asked me to follow you. I did so. You made me sit on the ground in the highway. I obeyed you. But you never asked me to reply or talk to anyone. I needed your permission to do anything other than what you had told me to do. The moment you wanted me to follow you, I was no longer my own. I had to wait for your instructions, isn't that right, Sir?" This kind of strict obedience to his Guru made Janaka a *Rajarshi*, a saint among kings. What is expected from all of you is following the teachings of Swami.

The Pandavas were acclaimed as the noblest of kings since they followed Lord Krishna unquestioningly. You follow Swami's command; that is enough. Since Hanuman followed the command of his chief Sugriva, he could come so close to Rama and do the duty assigned to him successfully. This is why he is remembered today as a great devotee of Rama.

There is nothing that you can't achieve if you follow Swami's teachings. There was a Muslim devotee by name Mansoor. He always used to repeat 'anahak', which means 'I am God'. Hearing this, the King of the place was very furious and forbade him to repeat these words. But still Mansoor did not stop saying 'anahak'. The king became so very angry with him this time that he got Mansoor's hands and legs chopped off. Yet, Mansoor didn't stop repeating 'anahak'. The blood that was oozing out of the wounds started saying 'anahak'. Finally, the King got Mansoor burnt alive. Then the ashes from the

burnt body started rising, echoing 'analhak'. This is an eloquent example of a devotee's staunch and unflinching faith in God. He may choose to die, but he would not under any circumstances lose his faith in God.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! How can we develop confidence in ourselves?

Bhagavan: By discrimination if you eliminate all doubts and confusions, you can develop confidence in yourselves. Today no one is exercising this faculty of discrimination, a gift from God. You have *buddhi*, the intellect, which discriminates. Since you don't discriminate, you are full of confusion and doubts. Hence, modern youth are not able to accomplish anything worthwhile. For any human attempt, confidence is absolutely necessary.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! I am interested in philosophy. Do you advise me to study philosophy?

Bhagavan: Many read books on philosophy. What is the use? Their reading of philosophy brings them down to "full loss". It should be the other way round. Philosophy should "fill-loss" in our life; only then is its study useful. Go through the book of your heart. It is not enough if you merely repeat mantras. You will never be able to experience their efficacy by doing so. You have to know what you are repeating. In other words, you need to have practical knowledge.

Take for example, the Bhagavad Gita, where in the first verse, *dharmaksetre kuruksetre...*; the king wanted to know from Sanjaya what was happening there in the battlefield. Does it not look silly and meaningless? In a battlefield what else can one expect other than fights and killing. Did King Dhritarashtra expect a dinner or a football match in the battlefield? Then, why did he put that question to Sanjaya at all? Well, it is not as simple as it sounds. Dhritarashtra wanted to know from Sanjaya if his sons, the Kauravas, had undergone any transformation in the last minute before the war started, which possibly could lead to a compromise between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. So, mere reading is not enough. One must know the inner significance and subtle meanings of the text for a clear understanding. This is "Fill-loss", which is true philosophy.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! How are we to believe that all this is happening everyday in Kodai Kanal? Can we estimate our good luck that is responsible for the golden opportunity of sitting at Your lotus Feet and listening to five discourses a day? How are we to retain this privilege?

Bhagavan: As you rightly deserve, you get this opportunity. But you need to note one important point. The Bhagavad Gita says, *ksinepunye martyalokam vis'anti*, which means that the merit accrued is exhausted with the passage of time. You will have to return to the earth, even from the highest of heavens.

One example: you know that some of your representatives are elected as legislators and some as members of the parliament. How long does their term last? Only five years. Does it not? Their term is for five years after which they have to go back to their constituencies. But as legislators, parliamentarians

and people's representatives, if they frequently visit their constituencies, meet the electorate and render service to the voters who elected them to those positions, they can contest elections again and return to the assembly or parliament as the case may be for another term. Similarly, while enjoying the present golden opportunity you can still work for its continuity by *satkarma*, doing good deeds, *sadalocana*, entertaining good thoughts, and *satsang*, joining good company.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

Becoming God, Not Dog

Once, a dog came to Lord Rama bleeding from blows. Lakshmana (Rama's brother) was sent to enquire why it had to receive such blows. The dog said: "I was beaten by a Brahmin (the priestly class in a Hindu society) with a stick."

The Brahmin was questioned. He said that the dog was always annoying him by coming across his path. Rama asked the dog: "Well, how do you want to punish the Brahmin?"

The dog said: "Make him a manager of a temple."

Rama replied with wonder: "That would be a reward, not a punishment."

The dog said: "No, I was a manager of a temple in my previous birth. It was impossible not to mishandle or misuse or misappropriate some fraction of God's money. When he is that manager, he too will get, like me, this canine birth and perhaps get beaten too in his subsequent birth."

In fact, not only the dog or the Brahmin, but every one of us are lining off the property of God, for does not all this belong to Him? What do we do in return for all benefits we derive from the property of the Lord? We should not simply eat and sit quiet. We have to render service to the poor and the helpless in a manner suitable to us.

- Baba

COVER STORY

A MEDICAL INNOVATION WITH A MARVELLOUS MISSION

- The Sri Sathya Sai healthcare Project, Tamil Nadu

Part 1

On November 22, 1990, when, out of the blue, Bhagavan Baba announced to the world that a Super Specialty Hospital offering sophisticated treatment completely free of charge to all, would be inaugurated the next year, in the very hamlet of Puttaparthi, there were as many sceptics as believers. "What does Sai Baba know about running a tertiary hospital, and that too offering it free?" is what some of the healthcare professionals in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, are reported to have said. They had no clue of the power of Pure Love. Many years have rolled by since then, and today another similar medical marvel stands majestically in the city of Bangalore, India. In fact, Jan 19 of this month celebrates this holy edifice's 8th anniversary. Now, when Swami visited Chennai in January 2007, somebody said, "Why not a Super Specialty Hospital in this city too?" And yes, Chennai did receive this gift of Love from the Divine, but in a manner that was extraordinary and exciting! How did this happen? Read this riveting story.

Filling Light and Delight into the Destitute

For Govindan, a 70 year old rag picker, life was not easy, understandably. From dawn till dusk he struggled to eke out a living by scavenging trash cans and refuse heaps, and collecting loads of waste paper which he sold for a measly sum of money; just five or ten rupees, for all the hard and dirty work throughout the day. It was a terrible life, and it probably could not have gotten any worse for anybody. But, sadly, it did, for this unfortunate septuagenarian. One morning, Govindan discovered that, for some mysterious reason, he was gradually losing his vision day by day. Life had in no time become unbearable, for there was no one whom he could call his own in this world; society barely acknowledged his existence. Earning enough to keep his flesh and bone together now became an impossible task. There were days when he would just lay down on the street, hungry and weak. Often, his temperature would run high; it was almost as if his body had given up, but his soul was still clinging on. Hardly anybody knew about him; and even if a few had seen him occasionally, they couldn't care less.

But one day, Mr. Ramamurthy, a member of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Korukupet Centre, Chennai, spotted him on the street, helpless and terribly sick. Deeply concerned, he went near him and lovingly enquired about his condition. It was only then that he realised Govindan was almost on

the verge of complete blindness; in fact, his failing eyesight was one of the principal reasons for his empty stomach, and the consequent pitiable illness. "Once he developed cataract in both his eyes, he could no longer work; he resorted to begging, and that was distressing for him, physically and emotionally," explains Mr. Ramamurthy, and continues, "I could not bear to see his plight, I immediately brought Govindan under the auspices of the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project." And now, Govindan feels young in spirit again; he has not only regained every bit of his vision, but has also found a large and caring family! Every day there is one Sai brother who takes of his personal needs. Ask Govindan, how does he feel now, and all he says, with moist eyes and a choked voice, is "Baba...Baba...Baba!"

That is what the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project has done, not just to one, but to a hundred such Govindans. Mr. Patchai Pillai, a 65-year old watchman, leading a hand to mouth existence, found the light diminishing from his life when one day he was unable to see even the time on his watch. Desperate to find a means of livelihood, he had actually migrated two years ago, along with his wife, from Tiruvannamalai (in the state of Kerala) to the city of Chennai. With great difficulty, he had found a job, but now he was desolate; there was no way he could continue to be a watchman without being able to see!

And just like it happened with Govindan, thanks to the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project, his life too has turned a full three-sixty-degrees. "I can see so clearly now...Baba has granted me a new lease of life!" Patchai is ecstatic and overwhelmed with emotion. "I do not know how to express my gratitude to Swami and to so many loving devotees...the only way I can show my gratitude is by sharing this most beautiful episode of my life with as many people as possible, and help those who are in similar need and are not aware of this amazing healthcare service."

SSSHCP - The Novel Healthcare Innovation

Now, what is this 'amazing healthcare service', the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project? Is it a Sai Super Specialty Hospital in Chennai like the ones in Puttaparthi and Whitefield? Well, the answer is both a yes and no. 'Yes' because Govindan and Pillai were, in fact, gifted with new lives in Baba's Super Specialty Hospital in Chennai. And 'no' because this Hospital is not like the huge mansions of healing that stand majestically in Puttaparthi and Whitefield. Confused? Well, here is what happened.

Both these patients were treated in a virtual multi-specialty Sai Hospital that functions in Chennai itself. So, are you wondering what this new concept is? And why is it virtual? This is where the story actually gets more interesting, as this novel concept is as simple in its idea, as it is effective in its implementation and powerful in alleviating the suffering of the poor and miserable.

The project has been made possible by the willing offers of scores of sophisticated hospitals of the city of Chennai to offer one bed completely free in their institution all round the year, for that desperate populace of this city

who neither has the means, nor the knowledge to seek cures for their chronic maladies in premier hospitals.

The Divine Breathed a Word and the SSSHCP was Born...

Let's get to the genesis of this innovative and unique initiative. The seed was indeed sown by Bhagavan Baba Himself almost 13 years ago. The occasion was the International Conference on Cardio-Vascular Diseases held in the auditorium of the Sri Sathya Sai University. It was the winter of 1995. Eminent medical practitioners from India and abroad had gathered in Prasanthi Nilayam for this two-day event. It was December 18, the Valedictory session, and Bhagavan had graciously consented to deliver the final message. And on that important occasion, Bhagavan beautifully enunciated the nuances of true holistic care. Addressing the august assembly of physicians, He said,

"Make love the capsule you offer to your patients. When a weak patient comes to you, do not be content with offering him glucose or some other medicine. Give him the injection of love; that will give him instant strength. Speak to him with love, offer medicines with love, and keep him in good humour. That is the way to make him happy. Happiness is union with God. Anything you do with love will be rewarding..."

After this compelling doctrine on love, Baba went on to give practical suggestions, and even went to the extent of appealing to the audience to rethink the true goal of their profession. And then, in a moving gesture, He gently stretched His hand and said,

"You are all estimable persons; broad-minded, gentle and kind hearted. You may receive fees from the rich patients, but treat the poor free. **Dedicate at least one day in a week to render free medical service to people**, irrespective of creed or nationality. Such service will give you spontaneous joy and enable you to experience the Divine."

"It was such a touching moment for me," says Mr. Ramani, the current State President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Tamil Nadu, who was then the State Coordinator, and was present on that occasion. "Swami always gives and gives, but here He was asking for something with an open palm! Though not a doctor, I had decided instantly that we should do something about this at the earliest. There was no way I could rest unless we had taken some step in this direction; it lingered in my mind constantly."

On the same wavelength of Mr. Ramani, was Dr. M. S. Sundararajan, a plastic surgeon from Chennai. "I was so blessed to be part of that Conference," he shares. "Even though I am not a cardiac surgeon, I had received an invitation probably because a few months ago I had started to offer my volunteer services at Swami's General Hospital in Whitefield. We were literally Swami's guests during that occasion. We were not allowed to even lift our suitcases as soon as we landed in Puttaparthi. Swami took care of us so well and showered so much love...and then, on the final day when

He made this touching appeal, my heart transformed into cotton. I knew I had to act immediately.”

As soon as Dr. Sundararajan was back in Chennai, he went to Mr. Ramani with his new idea. The plan was to organise a few free beds in a tertiary hospital in Chennai on a continuous basis. Mr. Ramani welcomed the idea wholeheartedly. For him, it was as if Swami was speaking through this Sai doctor. Soon, they got in touch with Dr. K. Senthilnathan, the Head of Sri Devi Hospital, a pioneering Multi-Speciality Hospital, and the kind medical chief agreed straight away.

“Prasanthi Ward’ – The Pilot SSSHCP

And thus, within a matter a few weeks, the ‘Prasanthi Ward’ came into being with four beds in Sri Devi Hospital in early 1996. The desperate and down-trodden patients identified by the Sai doctors during village medical camps as well as in ‘Sai Krupa’, the permanent free medical consultation programme in ‘Sundaram’ (Baba’s abode in Chennai), were referred to this special ward. Recalling those days, Dr. K. Senthilnathan, says,

“Even though, I did not know much about Sathya Sai Baba then, I just liked the idea of offering free service. Therefore, I immediately extended all support. Given that my hospital is located in Annanagar, one of the plush areas of Chennai city, I never got the opportunity to see the poor, but this was a beautiful opportunity. All my doctors too welcomed this wholeheartedly.”

So, while Sri Devi Hospital offered these beds free of charge, the Sai doctors as well as doctors from Sri Devi Hospitals performed these surgeries as a labour of love, and the Sai volunteers ensured that every other support needed for the success of this endeavour including looking after the travel, expenses, food and other personal needs of the patients were taken care of.

This was, in fact, the miniature virtual Sai Hospital with just four beds and a handful of doctors involved; that is, until Bhagavan made His landmark visit to Chennai, after ten long years, in January 2007. And then, the whole dynamics of this health initiative metamorphosed overnight; it assumed a gigantic proportion. And here is how that happened.

The Divine Descends on Chennai and the City is Overcome with Gratitude

Swami set His holy foot in Chennai on January 19 and two days later, The Chennai Citizens Conclave organised a grand event in the Nehru Indoor Stadium to offer their gratitude to Bhagavan for rescuing them from their century old woe of inadequate and unsafe drinking water. Bhagavan had gifted to them the Sri Sathya Sai Free Drinking Water Project to ensure that no one ever went thirsty again in this bustling city of 8 million – the fourth largest metropolis of India.

[To read more about this, please go to our previous cover story "The Chennai Citizens Conclave – H2H March 2007.]

The grateful populace was at a loss to convey their gratitude to Bhagavan. Each day of His 12-day stay was taken up by a particular section of society like lawyers, policemen, educationists, etc. coming to offer their collective homage at His lotus Feet. And on January 28, it was the chance of the doctors. 400 eminent physicians from the city of Chennai had gathered on this 'Doctors Day', many of whom were actually seeing Bhagavan for the first time.

January 28, 2007 – "Doctors Day" in the Divine Presence

Representing the medical fraternity on that Sunday was Dr. (Prof.) Rangabhashyam. A Former Head of the Department of Surgical Gastroenterology and Clinical Professor of Surgery in the Madras Medical College and Government General Hospital, Prof. Rangabhashyam was elected as the President of the Association of Surgeons of India in 1987. He was appointed as the Honorary Surgeon to the President of India, by former President of India, Mr. R. Venkataraman, and is a Consultant Surgeon to India's Armed Forces Medical College. In recognition of his yeoman contribution to the country, the Government of India decorated him with the premier civilian award Padma Bhushan in 2002. The Professor has also been awarded the Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians, UK.

Bhagavan was all smiles when the eminent physician bent down and offered a rose. He accepted it lovingly, exchanged a few words caringly, and then asked him to take the dais. It was then that the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project, in the huge magnitude that we see today, was unveiled to the world.

SSSHCP Receives Sai Permission and Benediction

In fact, on that afternoon, as soon as Bhagavan alighted from His car, Dr. Ram Manohar Rao, who is now the chief coordinator of this programme, offered to Bhagavan the project proposal, and Swami happily accepted the document, placed His hand on the folder and said, *Chaala Shantosham* (very happy); His blessings were obvious and copious.

In his spirited speech, Prof. Rangabhashyam submitted to Bhagavan the collective prayer of the physicians of Chennai. He said,

"Swami, although it is late, we would like to be a part of Your grand healthcare mission, the torchbearers of which are the magnificent Super Specialty Hospitals in Puttaparthi and Whitefield. Presently, sixty three medical institutions, which comprises hospitals and imaging and diagnostic centres, have come forward to treat and conduct investigations totally free of cost. All these hospitals have offered to provide one bed completely free in the areas of their specialty, be it cardiology, neurology, nephrology, ENT, ophthalmology or any other discipline. The diagnostic services too like MRI, CT, angiogram, blood tests including blood transfusion, etc. will be done at no cost to the patient.

“Swami, we would not request you to build another Super Speciality Hospital in Chennai. On the other hand, we will multiply the number of hospitals involved in this noble endeavour to 200 in a short span of time. Starting with Chennai, we will slowly embrace the entire state of Tamil Nadu, and later, even India, and offer thousands of poor patients much-needed medical attention free of charge, with love.

“As a past president of the Associations of Surgeons of India and the Head of the Committee on Gastroenterology in the Medical Council of India, I assure you that I will make this project a success, by Your grace. Swami, we have no doubts about how this project will be implemented. The Sai youth of Tamil Nadu, who have been conducting medical camps in the rural areas, will identify the hapless patients needing further treatment. These selected poor folk will then be routed to the hospitals enrolled in the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project through the medical wing of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation of Tamil Nadu.

“Swami, we, the doctors and the public of Chennai, are truly fortunate and blessed by Your presence. Our motto is to love our patients, and love till it hurts, till nothing else exists.”

After this magnificent declaration by Prof. Rangabhashyam, Swami Himself symbolically unfurled this virtual hospital programme, christened as the “Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project (SSSHCP)”, by gifting a medical kit, first to this distinguished doctor, and then to the representatives of all the medical institutions who had volunteered to be a part of this holy medical adventure. Now, how did these 63 institutions get involved in a matter of 3-4 days? Did it involve a lot of talking and persuasion?

The Team Manifests to Realise this Dream

“Well, we approached doctors, who owned hospitals or diagnostic centres, and, you will not believe, every single doctor we went to, immediately agreed to be a part of this divine project. In fact, Dr. Subramaniam of V. S. Hospital came forward to offer 4 such beds! It was as though they were all waiting to be approached,” confides Dr. E. Prabhu, a committee member of the SSSHCP.

Dr. Ram Manohar Rao adds, “I must confess, initially I was unsure how many medical institutions would extend their support for this project - but we were pleasantly surprised. Many wished to join us such as Dr. Emmanuel, the Director of Bharat Scans, a Christian institution, who personally approached us.”

“And thanks to Swami, we now have a Super Specialty Hospital in Chennai, just like in Puttaparthi or Whitefield, but with no expenditures for maintenance, investment, manpower or infrastructure.” Dr. Prabhu signs off with a broad smile.

This January, it is two years, since this magnified version of the tiny "Prasanthi Ward" launched on its mission of suffering-alleviation. Till date, it has transformed the lives of nearly 500 poor patients directly, while the indirect beneficiaries have been thousands. Be it the doctors who have operated upon these patients, or the family members of the ailing ones, or even the Sevalal volunteers who have cared for these unfortunate ones during the dreary days of their convalescence – every one has a story to tell, of hope, of love, of joy and smiles. Ashwin's story is one such.

When Prayers Are Answered – Ashwin Finally Wins!

"I had perennially suffered from acute ear infection," shares the fifteen year old, Ashwin Prabhu. "The unbearable pain had made my life miserable. With great difficulty I went through my daily life, be it sleeping, eating, playing, listening or any activity for that matter. But what hurt me the most was that it became virtually impossible for me to be able to concentrate on my studies, be it in the classroom or at home. The lingering pain sapped all my energy and enthusiasm."

Given that he was in the IXth class, when every student in India has a difficult examination at the end of the year, his trauma was heart rending. But what was sadder was the ordeal that his parents were going through. "My husband works as a contract worker (porter)," says Ashwin's mother. "His earnings are meagre. We could not bear to see our dear one, our only child, writhe in pain, but what could we do? Leave alone getting the operation done, we were struggling even to pay for his medicines. We could only pray, day and night, for a miracle to materialise." One could not miss the tremble in her voice, as she re-lived those dreadful days. Unable to endure their son's suffering, the couple finally decided to borrow money. With huge difficulty they gathered a sum of Rs. 30,000 (USD 625 approx.), but even that was not enough.

That was when Ashwin's father requested his employer for monetary assistance. It was at this time that destiny, finally, started to smile at them. His employer happened to be a Sai devotee, who knew about SSSHCP. And so, soon, the cyst was removed from Ashwin's ear. "I am a Bal Vikas student, but until this happened I never realised the magnitude of God's omniscience," says Ashwin who too prayed to God desperately to come to his rescue.

His mother is now eternally grateful to Swami. "All I wish for my son is He should stay in His umbrella of grace forever. The entire operation was done free of cost! How can I ever thank Him?"

"But for Swami, I would have been an orphan" - Johnson

Another teenager, twenty-two year old Johnson too had a similar pathetic malady – constant ear pain since 2003. "Every doctor I visited gave me a different opinion about the cause of the pain. Some gave me medicines too. But, each time the pain would come back with greater vigor and intensity," he says recollecting his dreadful days. He too finally found support, solace and cure in SSSHCP, but how that happened is interesting.

When Johnson had almost given up hope, the person who introduced him to the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation was actually the pastor of a church. But once this happened, the Sai doctors took over. After conducting a series of examinations and consultations, Johnson was finally operated for a mastoid bone infection completely freely by Dr. Mohan Kameswaran at the Madras ENT Research Foundation.

"I am now free of the pain that had haunted me for years." An emotional Johnson continues, "My father left us when I was very young. My mother too followed him after a few years. But for Bhagavan's love, I would have been an orphan. I can only thank Swami for choosing me. I will never forget till my last breath what Baba has done for me."

Scalable Multi-specialty Service Activity - SSSHCP's Strength

Healing hearts and rebuilding lives is what the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project has accomplished since Swami's visit to Chennai in Jan 2007. This virtual hospital is virtual only in the sense that it does not have a separate concrete edifice, otherwise it is a life-creating and life-sustaining holy enterprise. What is also significant is that being a virtual hospital, it has the advantage of being a comprehensively diversified multi-specialty project. While Govindan and Pillai needed ophthalmic surgeries, Ashwin and Johnson had ENT operations done. Now, here is the story of Reji, who needed an abdominal surgery.

Touched By the Divine Wand

Hailing from a small town called Neyveli in Tamil Nadu, Reji could not stop her tears as she recalled how her prolonged abdominal illness was finally alleviated. "Even after taking medication for three months, there was no relief to my abdominal pain. Being a housewife, it was extremely difficult for me to take care of my family and do the daily chores. The local doctor I visited first told me that my intestines were intertwined and blistered. He gave me a few medicines, but said that this could not be treated by just pills. That is when I realised it was something more serious."

"All I wish to do is pass on the love I have received" - Reji

Reji's problem was Rectal Prolapse, wherein the walls of the rectum rupture and cause severe discomfort. Belonging to a lower middle-class family, the tension in their home had assumed mammoth proportion. Just when her husband was trying desperately to gather the requisite sum, her uncle, who is a Sai devotee, asked her to see Dr. Prabhu. Soon, many things fell in place, and in early 2008, Reji was operated upon by Dr. Chandra Mohan at Royapettah General Hospital.

Recalling this final and happy chapter of her illness, Reji says, "Everything happened like a dream. I did not spend a single paisa. Bhagavan knew I could not have afforded it all by myself." Was she nervous when she was wheeled

into the theatre? "I remember praying the day before my operation. I asked Bhagavan to never leave my side. And as always, He kept His promise. I have no words to express what I feel now. All I wish to do is pass on the love I have received, to everyone, in whatever way I can."

SSSHCP - A Powerful Healthcare Model of Innovation, Suffering-alleviation and Transformation

More than the mitigation of physical suffering, what is more touching is the broadening of peoples' hearts and expansion of their souls. And this is the case not with the patients alone, but with everyone who has been closely involved in this spiritual social service, be it the doctors and surgeons, the hospital staff and paramedics, or the sevadals and devotees of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Tamil Nadu. You will find plenty of their heartfelt feelings in the second part of this cover story.

Meanwhile, as the juggernaut of the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project rolls on, more hospitals have entered its sacred orbit. The latest count is 90 which includes 10 hospitals outside the city of Chennai, five each being from Erode and Coimbatore. "Soon, this project is going to snowball greatly across the state of Tamil Nadu," says Dr. Ram Manohar Rao, the Chief Medical Coordinator of this programme. "We are waiting for the Sri Sathya Sai Village Integration Programme to gain momentum. Once that happens, we will expand our network of doctors and hospitals, and more importantly, offer this service to the neediest, especially to those who are below the poverty line and worse. And I know this will happen, because it is not we who are doing this; it is He, every bit of it!" Well, with such an egoless attitude, any altitude is no altitude, because the power behind is mightier than the mountains ahead!

A MEDICAL INNOVATION WITH A MARVELLOUS MISSION

- The Sri Sathya Sai healthcare Project, Tamil Nadu

Part-2

"Our motto is to love our patients, and love till it hurts, till nothing else exists." This is what Dr. Rangabhashyam, the distinguished doctor from Chennai, declared while offering the proposal of the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project to Bhagavan Baba, in the presence of 400 medical practitioners, in this month of January, two years ago. And that is exactly what this novel medical initiative has done, if the stories of the beneficiaries as well as participants of this project are anything to go by. Though it is a 'virtual hospital' with no concrete structure of its own, every institution and doctor, paramedic and Sai volunteer associated with this endeavour are bound by a stronger bond – that of love and passion to serve the poor. It is this sacred adhesive that first connects the hapless have-nots to the modern and sophisticated health services otherwise enjoyed by only the well-heeled, and then leads everyone to God. This noble ideal started on January 28, 2007, when 63 hospitals in Chennai offered to allot one bed free all round the year for a poor patient, and this inspired network of professionals and Sai workers have till now ameliorated the agony of nearly 500 families. And each one's tale is more heart-rending than the other. Take the case of Lalitha, for instance.

Termination of Cyst and the Transformation of Heart

"I had been living with a cancerous cyst in my intestine for two years, but it seemed as if I had been sick forever; the pain was so severe and the discomfort so irritating," says the forty-eight year old housewife, Mrs. Lalitha. Life, for her, had become a burden. "There was no way I could carry on my life without getting the operation done," she recalls. Therefore, the family started to pool their meager savings. Her husband, who was an accountant-clerk earning just enough to maintain their family, hardly had any savings worth the mention. That is the reason why the Rs. 100,000 needed for the operation felt like a huge boulder sitting on their hearts. It was now a 'do or die' situation for the family, and so, they somehow borrowed the money and prepared themselves for the surgery. Everything now seemed to be moving in the right direction, but just then, tragedy struck.

Like a terrible bolt from the blue, Lalitha's husband met with an accident, and seriously injured his leg. "We were distraught. In order to salvage my husband's health, we had to spend all the money we had borrowed on his treatment as he needed it more than me." Now, all doors seemed shut for Lalitha, except one – prayer. And that worked! Lalitha's husband poured his heart's anguish to his employer, who was a Sai devotee. In no time, they were part of the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project, and on February 5, 2008, her cyst was successfully removed in Srinivasa Priya Hospital, in Perumbur, Chennai.

“I want to only share the Love I have been blessed with” – Mrs. Lalitha

“The doctors took great care of us. We did not even feel that we were being treated free; there was no discrimination whatsoever. In fact, Sai volunteers visited us many times in the hospital and were always there whenever we needed any help,” shares Lalitha, delighted to recall those moments. That event had a deep impact on her character and personality, as she says, “I never even imagined all this can happen to me! I am a much better and very different person now. Bhagavan has filled my life with His love.”

Lalitha's is a story of a dual surgery. While the doctors weeded out her intestinal malady, Someone else had performed on her a heart operation of a different kind! “My faith in the Divine now is absolute. From now on, as much as possible, I only want to serve and spread His love. I want everyone to experience the immense joy that I have been blessed with.” This is the new Lalitha that the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project has gifted to the world.

And this transformation happens, not only in the patients who are treated in this virtual hospital, but every person who is associated with this project, directly or indirectly.

The Healers Receive the Healing Touch

For Dr. M. A. Kabir, National Director of Hypertension Society of India, who renders his voluntary service to this project, the experience has been one of “professional satisfaction and personal transformation”. When asked about the days of his initial involvement, without batting an eyelid, he says, “When I was approached with the idea of setting up this virtual hospital, I immediately consented to being a part of this noble cause. And so would any service-minded doctor.”

As a physician, Dr. Kabir treats and heals people. But as an individual, he, in turn, receives the healing touch that only selfless acts of Love can confer. As he confides, “I am a happier man now. The amount of mental satisfaction that I derive by doing ‘my little bit’ in this gigantic project is enormous.”

“This has brought a sea change in my life's perspective” – Dr. Senthilnathan

Dr. Senthilnathan, the creator and chairperson of Sri Devi Hospital, where the ‘Prasanthi Ward’ was first set up which eventually metamorphosed into the massive Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project as we see it today, says, “After being associated with this programme, my perspective on life has undergone a sea change. Healing the patient, whatever be his condition socially or economically, has now taken precedence over mere money-making. Swami says at least 10% of our income should be allocated for the poor, and this is so important. Else, where can the impoverished go? Actually, it is my experience that if we take care of others, God takes care of us. Twelve years ago, when we started ‘Prasanthi Ward’, I had only one hospital, but now by His grace, I have two, and both are doing extremely well. In fact, I started the

second hospital in Koyembedu, which is located on the Chennai-Bangalore highway, to principally help trauma and accident patients... And all the doctors and paramedical staff of my hospital are always available for any Sai medical camp. More than any recognition, the inner satisfaction that I derive on being engaged in these purely service projects is very fulfilling.”

Indeed, the joy of serving selflessly and receiving, in turn, the beaming love and smiles from the patients, wields a soothing influence on all who come under its spell. Dr. Manimekalai, a Director of the city's Kumaran Hospital agrees. “I am very happy to be a part of this project. Looking at the grateful faces of the patients, who could not have otherwise afforded all the medical facilities extended to them, gives me a great sense of job satisfaction. The whole experience has brought about a lot of positive changes in my character. When you serve the poor, you become rich!”

Harassed by Hernia, But Healed with Love

Another such ‘rich’ story is the tale of Dinakaran. The 67-year old unskilled worker, living with his wife in Ashok Nagar, Chennai, Dinakaran suffered from an agonising hernia for many years. “Initially, I took homeopathic treatment, but then, the pain never ceased; it was persistent. The doctor then told me that an operation was the only way to end my suffering. I worked part-time as a salesman in an electrical shop. I have no children and no savings; we just had a hand to mouth existence. The cost of the surgery, therefore, was absolutely beyond my reach. It was at this time, when I was feeling completely hopeless and clueless, that one of my relatives asked me to visit Dr. Prabhu. And then, life took a beautiful turn. Dr. Prabhu examined me and then called up Subiksha Nursing Home in Perambur. Within a week's time, my operation was scheduled.”

“Before the surgery, I was asked to get a few scans done. Even these were done in Precision Diagnostic Centre for free. On September 16, 2007 I was operated upon and discharged within three days...how can I tell you how I feel now? It is all Swami's grace. We never imagined we could get this operation done so quickly, and that too, at completely no cost.”

Dinakar's wife adds, “Initially I was worried because he was being operated for free; I was not sure if we will be taken care of properly. But I soon realised how wrong I was! The doctors checked on my husband, once every hour. Actually, they treated me too so respectfully; I was overwhelmed. It was truly beyond our imagination. Sometimes, even when you pay for your medical treatment, you do not get a genial response from the hospital staff, but in our case, not only was my husband operated upon for no charge, we were also showered with lots of love and respect.”

“Now, my faith in God is more than ever” – Mrs. Dinakaran

Dinakaran now takes over. “One of the greatest lessons that I have learnt from this whole experience is nothing happens without His Will. Actually, we had tried to get the operation done quite a few times, but we were always

short of the required money. For me, every one of the doctors and nurses who were there around me in that hospital were Swami." His wife again eagerly joins in, and states, "Now, I have more faith in God. Earlier I used to be always worried about our many difficulties in life, but not any more; now I know He is there to take care of us."

The Cosmic Calculus

This confidence in the Supreme Self is probably the highest gift that the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project has given to its beneficiaries and participants. Because once one learns to rely on the Divine, miracles are not uncommon. Sharing his personal experience, Dr. K. T. Sundaram, an eminent cardiologist serving in Subiksha Nursing Home, says, "I have personally observed that in almost all operations, in spite of planning well in advance and executing it meticulously, more often than not, we experience some hitches. But amazingly, as far as the SSSHCP is concerned, we have not had even minor obstacles. Leave alone delays, we never had even a single case of post-operative infection! How does one explain this scientifically or mathematically?"

The Divine Bastion of Support

God stands like a citadel by the side of those who are steadfast in their faith and dedicated in His service. When one engages in good work, He takes over the responsibility to assist and aid, guard and guide, and verily, protect and provide at every step. And this has been experience of many who have been involved in the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project. Actually, there are instances when they have keenly felt His watchful presence, not just in the operation theatre or at the consultation table, but, in fact, even in the mundane promptings of mere thoughts, that remotely pertain to the healthcare project.

The story of Ligi Bose, who works at Mohan's Diabetic Centre, Chennai, is a classic example. As the personal secretary to Dr. V. Mohan, who is actively involved in SSSHCP, she often had to keep track of the medical camps organised by the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Tamil Nadu. She recounts, "One morning, I was working at my desk, which is right under a ceiling fan. After turning on the fan, I sat on my chair, mentally going through the day's pending work. Suddenly, I remembered that the free medicines we were to send to the medical camp had not been dispatched."

"Sai has saved my life, I have no words to thank Him" – Mrs. Ligi Bose

Ligi got up from her desk to pack the medicines. No sooner had she left her seat, she heard a loud thud. Aghast, she turned back, only to find that the ceiling fan had fallen on her chair and had broken to pieces! "Had I not left the room to do His work, I would not be alive to tell everyone about this! I realised that Swami in His infinite grace had reminded me about the medicine and saved my life. I have no words to thank Him."

She continues, "I was born and brought up as a staunch catholic. I did not believe in Sri Sathya Sai Baba. But slowly, after getting involved in the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project, I have started attending *bhajans* and other Sai activities."

Why the SSSHCP is so full of Health, Hope and Happiness

For the Lord, sincere service is what matters, not creed, colour or faith. And this is exactly what has made the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project, a heartening success. If it enters its third year this January with more vigour than ever before, it is because of its inspired and completely committed doctors and other volunteers. Dr. Ram Manohar Rao, the Chief Medical Coordinator of this programme, who liaisons with the doctors and hospitals on one hand, and the Sai Centres and patients on the other, says, "I am a fortunate man. It moves me when I see the gratitude and love that the patients shower. I am just an instrument, who transmits Bhagavan's love to the neediest of His children."

Dr. Manimekalai, who actually had already been rendering free medical service to the economically challenged in the villages in the outskirts of Chennai for twenty years, says, "Though I was already doing similar service, working for the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project is very special. This initiative is set on a completely different scale of dedication, enormity, reach and commitment. Now that I am a part of this project, I can confidently say I am fully committed to Bhagavan's service."

Sai Sevadals - the Steady and Supporting Pillars of SSSHCP

The other group of people, apart from doctors and paramedics, who are actually the backbone of this noble endeavour are the completely dedicated Sai sevadals. Cloaked in the familiar blue and yellow scarves, they are present wherever there is a gap in this sacred exercise of bringing the best treatment to the economically worst section of the society. Commending their commitment, Dr. M.A. Kabir from Zohra Madani Nursing Home, says, "We can rest assured that every patient who is referred to us through the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project is going to be 100% benefited. A team of doctors and Sai workers from the Sai Organisation verify the history of the patients before bringing them to us. It saves us a lot of time and effort."

Yes, it saves a lot of time and money for the patients too, who would otherwise have to make incessant rounds to the hospitals for registration, diagnosis and analysis. And what can only be termed as the Sai-way of serving the needy, the Sathya Sai Organisation does not stop just at routing the patients to the right hospitals. It takes responsibility for the speedy recovery of the patients by rendering emotional, physical and moral assistance to the patients and their families. And this is something which is so vital for the patients' early recovery.

“Liquid Love” – Another Pure Expression of Selfless Service

Actually, apart from being there beside the patient physically, another remarkable service that the Sevadals have been engaged in for more than a decade now, which helps these poor patients greatly, is a program called “Liquid Love”. This is a 24/7 voluntary service catering to the blood transfusion requirements of the entire city of Chennai. Equipped with a computerised database of interested blood donors and their essential contact information, this non-stop service has saved innumerable lives since its inception in December 1998. For instance, in the initial year itself, at 2 a.m. one night, this cell received a call from St. Isabels Hospital in Mylapore asking for blood urgently for a young man with a ruptured spleen. Five donors located in Mylapore were immediately alerted and the requisite blood was made available at the hospital within 45 minutes, which was the time stipulated by the hospital.

“The blood offered by Sai devotees is always good and timely. And more importantly, they offer it with so much love and devotion as if they were doing it for their own family or friends,” says Mrs. Jyostna, the Public Relations Officer of Vijaya Hospital Blood Bank. It is the same experience with other Blood Banks and hospitals in Chennai. Mr. Raj Kumar of The Madras Voluntary Blood Bank, says, “The prompt service offered by the ‘Liquid Love’ cell based in ‘Sundaram’ must be commended. Moreover, the meticulous and committed manner in which the sevadals conduct Blood Donation Camps is exemplary. Apart from planning it well in advance and doing plenty of preparatory publicity systematically, on the day of the event they receive the donors with a lot of respect and affection. No wonder, every one of their camps is a resounding success. If only every blood donation drive in this country was organised this way, then we would be having ten times more than the number of people donating presently.”

Dr. Selvraj of the Government General Hospital, which always has a great need for emergency blood donation, says, “The annual all-day blood donation camp conducted by the Sai Organisation on Global Blood Donation Day is something remarkable. Nearly 7-8 camps are conducted simultaneously on that day collecting over 500 pints of blood. The attitude and the spirit of selflessness which with the Sai volunteers perform this sacred service, is what should be really appreciated. It is a yeoman service to humanity.”

The ever-ready-on-call ‘Liquid Love’ cell, with a database of over 5000 records, is manned 24 hours of the day by a band of dedicated volunteers, each of whom offer at least 4 hours of their time every single day. And this is an initiative which is now complimenting the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project in its own unique way. Therefore, without the sincere love and selfless time and energy of the Sai sevadals, the SSSHCP is unthinkable.

SSSHCP – A Healthcare Model and a Marvel of the Twenty-first Century

In His Valedictory discourse during the International Cardiac Conference in 1995, Swami's principal message to the medical fraternity was only this –

"Make love the capsule that you offer to your patients...anything you do with love will be rewarding." This is the Divine direction for medicare of the 21st century and Bhagavan has amply demonstrated to the world, through practical examples, what should be done and how it can be achieved. At the crux of the issue is not availability of financial resources, as many would imagine. All it needs is a will and passion to reach out to the poor. Imagine how stupendous a service it would be if such virtual hospitals were up and running in a mammoth scale in every corner of India, and in every country? And this is possible. Because as they say, where there is a will, there is a way; but where there is a pure will, which is divinely inspired, there are innumerable ways. And the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project is just one among them – a simple but superb one at that.

Since the 1950s when Bhagavan Baba set up the first Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital in Puttaparthi, every successive decade has seen a determined leap of Bhagavan in extending this Sai system of holistic healthcare, where the poor are offered the best care possible, with love. In the seventies, the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital in Whitefield came into being, and in 1984, Swami inaugurated the new and modern General Hospital in Puttaparthi. The nineties dawned and the Prime Minister of India opened the first completely free Super Specialty Hospital in Puttaparthi, a decade later Bhagavan set up another such marvel of healing, now in the metropolitan of Bangalore. And with the coming of twenty first century, we now see an impressive Super Specialty Hospital in Chennai, without an edifice but as efficient and equipped, and delivering the same quality of service as the 'Temples of Healing' in Puttaparthi and Whitefield. What a glorious simulation of Sai Medicare Vision! For the medical administrators and professionals of the world, there are plenty of lessons, if only they open their eyes, and more importantly, their hearts...to Love.

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 22

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. Last time, I made an attempt to introduce you to the world of Quantum Mechanics [QM] which, many feel, is the most important scientific development of the twentieth century. That is because QM compelled us to change entirely our approach to the world of the small. And such a change in thinking was absolutely essential to explore issues connected with the mysteries of the Universe, especially how the Universe itself came into being.

Now there are two basic aspects to Quantum Mechanics. One is the “Tool Box” aspect and the other is the Philosophical Aspect. As far the former is concerned, this dual aspect of QM is best exemplified by a remark due to a distinguished Physicist [I believe it was David Mermin] who told his students, “Shut up and calculate!” What he is supposed to have meant is: “Students, the philosophical implications of QM are extremely subtle and we are not sure even after seventy years what exactly to make of it. If you enter that realm, you would simply get lost. However, at the working level, QM gives a good set of working rules like grandma's medicines. Just use those rules, crank the wheel and do calculations to get practical answers to practical questions. That can help a lot. Leave all the worrying about the philosophical underpinnings to egg-heads who do not have to worry about getting research contracts, promotions etc! If you want to survive, just shut up and calculate!”

We do not know if the Prof actually said that to his students, but that remark attributed to him does indicate the complexities underlying QM. That there were such complexities became evident even in the early days, and in this issue, I shall offer you some glimpses of that, as also where the enquiry of those days led subsequently; all that makes a very fascinating story!

Quantum Discoveries

Now where exactly do I begin? Maybe I should start by recalling the sequence leading to the birth of QM. I narrated that story last time, but just to get going with this issue, let me do a bit of recall. Essentially four things happened, almost in an unconnected manner, but having deep connections nevertheless.

- To start with, Louis de Broglie in France categorically stated that likeligh^t, matter too had a dual nature, that is to say, a particle and a wave-like aspect.
- Then came Erwin Schroedinger, who wrote down an equation, now famous as the Schroedinger equation. Once this equation is formulated for a given system, all one has to do [easily said!] was to solve for the wave function Ψ . This Ψ was a complex quantity, called the wave function, and characterises the state of the system. The various allowed states of the system come out as various possibilities for the

wave function Ψ . In a manner of speaking, Schrodinger took hold of the wave aspect of matter and explored it.

- Meanwhile, quite independently, Werner Heisenberg, then barely twenty two years of age, made an epoch-making discovery. Focussing entirely on what he called physically observable quantities, Heisenberg found, among other things, that there are pairs of physically measurable quantities, like position and the momentum of a particle for example, that cannot, even conceptually, be **simultaneously** be measured with **infinite** precision. In fact, said Heisenberg, the product of the errors in their measurement is dictated by a relation which is now the quantification of what is called the **Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle**.
- Loosely speaking, one might say that de Broglie, Schrodinger and Heisenberg were like three "blind men" feeling an elephant called QM. The man who showed that these three forerunners were all dealing with the same "beast" was Dirac. In fact, Dirac tied all the different pieces of work and concepts neatly into a "Tool Box" that was very comfortable to work with, because it was rather like the good old Tool Box of Classical Mechanics, with of course many significant differences. By the way, Dirac's Tool Box is useful even today, provided we are in the non-relativistic domain.

Getting back to the early days, by around 1930 or so, one had a formal scheme called QM, using which, one could, in principle, start calculating many things, like the energy levels of the hydrogen atom, for example. Earlier, one had to do this using Bohr's rather artificial model [see QFI – 20, 21]. Thanks to Dirac, one had a much better way of doing that calculation and getting much better results too. Of course, all this was at the non-relativistic level, but for the moment let us set that complication aside. At any rate, for the sake of record I might state that Dirac in fact wrote the relativistic equation for the electron, which proved to be another important break-through; but then, I am drifting away from what I want to say presently.

Returning to our main theme, people now began to say: "Well, this QM certainly works. True, in many cases the mathematical problems to be solved are horrendous, but then, we faced that problem in classical mechanics too. One thing must be said, however; in classical mechanics, we understood what was going on, and there were no mysterious entities, like the Uncertainty Principle and the wave function."

The wave function Ψ introduced by Schrodinger did seem like a big puzzle. What exactly did it mean? This Ψ was supposed to be a complex quantity. But in Physics, we do not have any complex quantities, only real numbers. How then did this Ψ sneak in? It seemed so essential and yet its role was so elusive. Did it have any physical meaning at all, and could it in fact have any? Such were the questions troubling many. The smarter ones focussed on publishing papers, ignored such issues and improved their rating with a string of papers and discoveries. As someone said, those were times when second-rate men could do first-rate work! But there were others who **did** worry about

the philosophical implications of this new mechanics called QM. One of them was Max Born, whom we met briefly earlier.

Born's Search for the Real

Born thought and thought about Ψ . He said, "Listen, we simply cannot have a complex quantity having a physical meaning. But one thing we do know from mathematics. If we take a complex quantity and multiply it by its complex conjugate, we get a real quantity. Should I be looking for something like that here, before searching for meaning?"

I should perhaps add a few words of explanation that would make clear the lines along which Born was trying to go. Consider a complex number like say, $2 + i3$, where, if you recall from my earlier explanations, i is the square root of -1 , and is an imaginary number. The number $(2 + i3)$ is called a complex number having both a real as well as an imaginary part. The real part is 2, while the imaginary part is 3. The complex conjugate of this complex number, denoted as $(2 + i3)^*$ has the value $(2 - i3)$. Thus, the product $(2 + i3) \times (2 + i3)^* = (2 + i3) \times (2 - i3) = 2^2 + 3^2 = 13$; and 13 is a real number. I hope that is clear. What I am driving at is that while Ψ introduced by Schroedinger might be a complex quantity, the product $\Psi\Psi^*$ is a real quantity and could therefore perhaps be assigned a meaning. Thus Born said to himself, "I shall not try to find a meaning for Ψ but for $\Psi\Psi^*$."

After exploring for a while, Born did succeed in finding the meaning of $\Psi\Psi^*$, and that sure was a major breakthrough in the conceptual understanding of QM. Let me now try to explain what physical interpretation Born gave to $\Psi\Psi^*$. By the way, the contribution of Born, monumental though it was, remained ignored for a long time, and was rewarded with the Nobel Prize only much later – thank God his contribution was finally acknowledged!

Understanding the contribution of Max Born is crucial and so let us spend some time over it. Basically, what Born said [after much reflection of course] was the following:

- I shall start with the wave function Ψ introduced by Schroedinger. This I shall call the *wave amplitude*.
- Now, Ψ is a complex quantity; therefore it cannot by itself have a physical meaning.
- However, we all know that while Ψ is complex, $\Psi\Psi^*$ must be real.
- The question now becomes: "If Ψ is the wave amplitude, what meaning could we possibly give to $\Psi\Psi^*$?"
- I say that $\Psi\Psi^*$ is the *probability amplitude*!

That is what Born said, and I realise that terse statement would not make much sense to you. So, let us go over all that a bit more slowly. First of all, when we talk of a wave amplitude, we must specify the point at which we are considering the amplitude. The meaning of this observation would become clear from a reference to Figure 1.

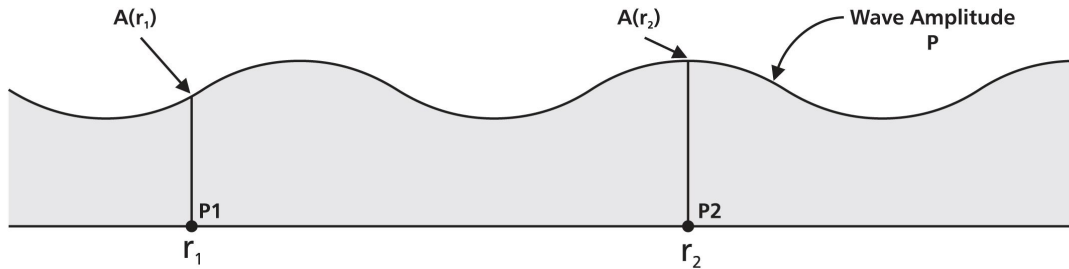


Fig 1

Figure 1: This figure shows a wave. Clearly, the wave has a physical extension. Marked in the figure are a few space points, P_1 , P_2 , etc. From the figure it is evident that the amplitude at these points are different. Thus, when one talks of a wave amplitude, one must also specify the space point one is considering. That is, if A is the symbol representing the amplitude of the wave, we should really talk in terms of $A(r)$, where r denotes the space point under consideration. By the way, presently we are considering a static wave, that is a wave that does not change with time. In general, waves could change with time, like a wave on the surface of the sea for example. Such waves are called time-dependent waves and in such cases when one speaks of the amplitude, one should quantify it as $A(r, t)$, where t denotes the time at which we are considering the wave amplitude at the point r .

From the figure above, it should be clear that when Born interprets $\Psi\Psi^*$ in terms of probability amplitudes, he should really be talking of $\Psi\Psi^*(r)$. By the way, we are considering what are called *stationary quantum states*, that is, states that do **not** change with time. That means we do not have to deal with $\Psi(r, t)$ but only with $\Psi(r)$; I hope that is clear.

Quantum Orbits

OK, now how do we take all this further? This is best done by going back to the Bohr atom model. You would recall [see QFI – 20] that Bohr visualised the atom to be something like a mini-solar system, with the electron going round in various orbits around the nucleus, which played a role similar to our Sun, as the main centre of attraction. In the case of the hydrogen atom [which, remember is the simplest atom in Creation], there is only one electron revolving round the nucleus, and this electron has many orbits to choose from. Of course, each orbit has its own energy, and by choosing different orbits, the electron can occupy different energy states – all this we have been through before.

Let us stay with this simple model and consider one particular instant of time. It is like taking a photograph of the hydrogen atom with such a short exposure that during the exposure, the electron has hardly moved; we would then see the electron as if it were frozen at one spot in the orbit it is moving along. Suppose we take many such photos and superpose all of them; we would then get a picture something like in Fig. 2

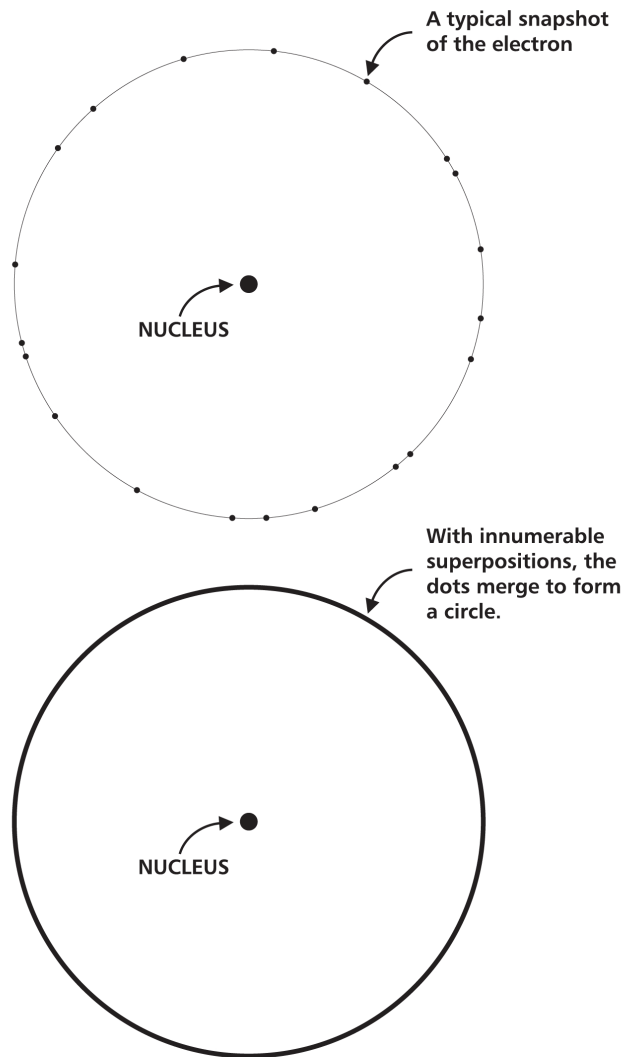


Fig 2

Figure 2: *This is a schematic of what we would see if an electron obeying the Bohr model were to be photographed repeatedly and all those photos were superimposed. All we would see would be a series of dots, as in (a), each dot representing the position where the electron was, when the snap was taken. If the electron were to be photographed say millions and millions of times and all these photos are once again superimposed, then in this case, we would see more or less a closed orbit as in (b). I guess you can understand why.*

Let us now carry over this idea to the Schrodinger equation and all that. Here is what we do. First, we start with the Schrodinger equation for the hydrogen atom; next it is solved. When this is done, one ends up with any number of solutions. These are then indexed. [I believe the big man himself did all this]. Now how do we label these different solutions that turn up? That is simple because Schrodinger himself has told us how to. Remember what Bohr did? He labelled his solutions with integers, 1, 2, 3, etc. So his index was n , where

n could take on all integer values, 1, 2, 3,etc. The orbits corresponding to these different values for n were what Bohr called the stationary states of the hydrogen atom. Schrodinger found that the solutions for $\Psi(r)$ the wave-function of the hydrogen atom did require an index n [like Bohr had]; but there was also a need for another index, which was denoted by l . Thus, in the Schrodinger picture we had $\Psi_{n,l}(r)$, characterising the stationary states of the hydrogen atom. Before we proceed further, we need to know what this new index l is and what values it can take. First, the allowed values for l ; suppose the index n has the value 3 say. In this particular case, l can take the values 0, 1, and 2. If similarly n were equal to 5, then l would take on the values 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, and so on. In general, l could take on the values 0, 1, 2, up to $(n-1)$. Hope that is clear.

And so we now have two indices characterising the stationary states of the hydrogen atom in the Schrodinger scheme, which means we have to deal with $\Psi(r)$ for the (n,l) combinations: (1, 0); (2, 0) and (2,1); (3, 0), (3, 1) and (3, 2); (4, 0), (4, 1), (4, 2) and (4, 3) etc. Clear? Hope so! There is one more complication, but that we shall come to that later.

Let us now ask a simple question. "Bohr had a solar-system model. Suppose we had a 2 D hydrogen atom in the Schrodinger picture. What would $\Psi\Psi^*(r)$ look like for $n=1$? Remember, in this case, the only allowed value of l is 0. So when we talk of $n = 1$, we are really dealing with the case $(n, l) = (1, 0)$. The question we are asking is, to use the language earlier used: "Suppose we take repeated snap shots of the electron in the state $\Psi_{1,0}(r)$, superpose it and all that. What would we get? That picture is shown in Fig. 3.

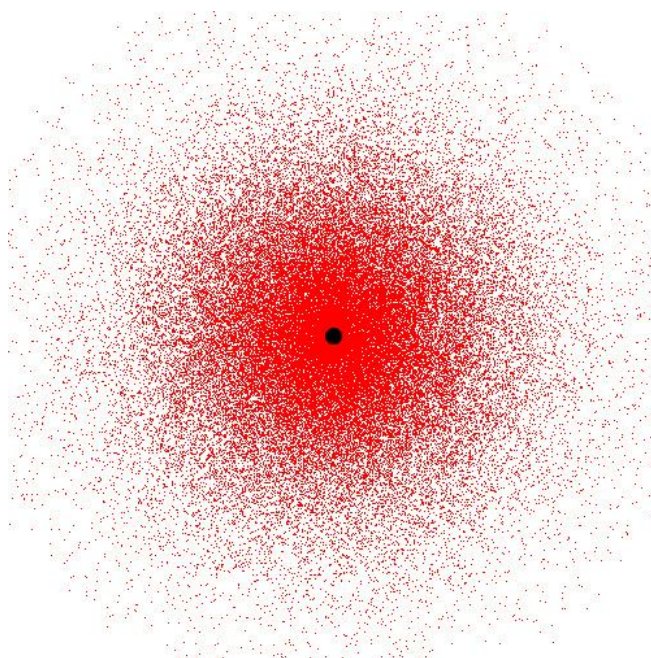


Figure 3: This figure is a “superposition of snapshots” when the [2 D] hydrogen atom is in the state $\Psi_{1,0}(r)$. The nucleus is in the centre and is shown as a much bigger dot than it really ought to be; this is done for the sake of clarity of seeing. We observe, as we saw earlier, a collection of dots, a cluster really as opposed to one that roughly defines an orbit. In other words, QM demolishes the notion of orbits! Instead, the electron in a particular state is spread out into a fuzzy cloud.

I hope you have digested the main message of Fig. 3. In case you feel a bit confused, imagine a fellow shooting bullets at a target, as in rifle practice. The man is aiming at the bull's eye, but does not always hit it. However, he hits close, but occasionally misses the target by a wide margin. If the target is taken out after a time and examined, you might see something like in Fig. 4.

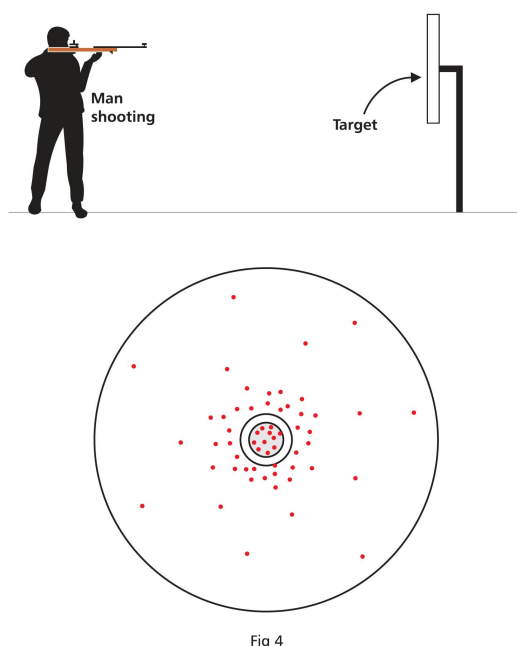


Fig 4

Figure 4: This is a schematic of a target shot at during rifle or pistol practice. The shooter always aims at the Bull's Eye, but misses it most of the time. The pattern of misses is what we see here. If the shooter is a good one, most of the bullets would cluster near the centre, whereas if he is a poor shooter, most of the bullets would miss by a wide margin. On the whole, this gives some idea of the probability that the shooter would hit the Bulls Eye.

OK, what Fig. 4 is supposed to do is to tell us that the schematic in Fig. 3 is a **probability** pattern of where we might find the electron around the nucleus, when it is in the $\Psi_{1,0}(r)$ state. Hope you are able to follow that. Notice that the stationary states of the atom do **NOT** correspond to the electron moving in well-defined orbits; rather, the electron is “spread into a kind of cloud”. Remember, this “cloud” picture comes from first solving for the wave function

$\Psi(r)$, then calculating $\Psi\Psi^*(r)$ for various values of r , and then plotting a dot for each value of r with a number corresponding to the value of $\Psi\Psi^*(r)$.

In the schematic figure shown in Fig 3, the values for $\Psi\Psi^*(r)$ are not shown. *Instead, what is shown is a scatter of points that is representative of these numerical values. That is to say, if the probability is high, we have a high packing, while if the probability is small, we have a low packing of points.* In the figure, we see that the cluster of points is congested for small values of r . That means that the probability for the electron to be near the nucleus is greater than when it is far. That is how one must read this figure. In short, it is best to imagine the electron cloud to be something like a cotton-candy puff, of varying density! I hope you have noticed that I have stopped referring to the electron moving in an orbit and instead am talking about the probability of finding the electron at different points. This is a major paradigm shift, brought about by QM.

Quantum Density Distribution

So now the question becomes: "What kind of cotton-candy puffs would represent the stationary states of the hydrogen atom?" Well, a whole library of pictures have been produced corresponding to these various stationary states, by patient calculations of course. However, before I present them to you, there is one more detail, an important one, that I must mention.

Remember I said that two indices, n and l are needed for indexing the stationary states of the hydrogen atom in Schrodinger's picture? It turns out that we actually need one more called m [sometimes labelled l_m]. By the way, n and l are not just called indices but **quantum numbers**. Thus n is called the **principal quantum number** while l is called the orbital quantum number. In the same way, m is called the **magnetic quantum number**. What about the restrictions on m ? Just as for a given n , l was restricted to the set $0, 1, 2, \dots, (n-1)$, for a given l , the quantum number is restricted to the set $l, (l-1), \dots, 0, -1, -2, \dots, -(l-1), -l$. Thus, if $l = 3$ say, then m would take the values $3, 2, 1, 0, -1, -2$, and -3 . Given below is a sample table that shows the manner in which the various quantum numbers form a hierarchy.

TABLE: This table shows the relationship between the Principal Quantum Number n and the Orbital Quantum Number ℓ . For a given value of n , ℓ can take only certain values. Similarly Number m can take only certain values. All that is explain below.

PERMITTED RANGE FOR ℓ

	ALLOWED VALUES FOR ℓ
$n=1$	0
$n=2$	0, 1
$n=3$	0, 1, 2
$n=4$	0, 1, 2, 3
\vdots	\vdots
\blacktriangledown	\blacktriangledown

PERMITTED RANGE FOR m

	ALLOWED VALUES FOR m
$\ell=0$	0
$\ell=1$	1, 0, -1
$\ell=2$	2, 1, 0, -1, -2,
$\ell=3$	3, 2, 1, 0, -1, -2, -3,
$\ell=4$	4, 3, 2, 1, 0, -1, -2, -3, -4
\vdots	\vdots
\blacktriangledown	\blacktriangledown

Very nice pictures have been made using software to illustrate the electron distribution associated with the various possible states indicated in the above table, but before I discuss that, there is one more point I must bring to your notice so that you are able to appreciate the pictures that I shall soon present.

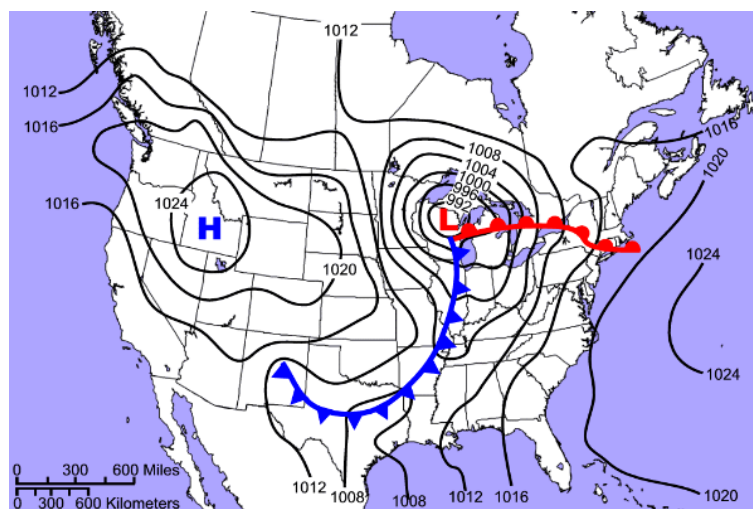


Figure 5: Shown here is an example of a weather map. What I would like you to note are the lines drawn across the map. These lines connect points that correspond to places having the same atmospheric pressure. In the map above, we have many lines, each marked with a number. Follow the line with the number 1008. You would see it forms a loop. All the towns, villages and cities lying on this particular curve have the same pressure, measured as 1008 in some units. A line connecting points having the same pressure is called an isobar. Thus the map above is an isobaric map. Such maps are very useful for the weather man. For example, in the map above, one can see loops within loops, the smallest one carrying the number 992. This shows that there is a Low-pressure trough. And that sure means bad weather is coming to that region! What have weather maps to do with electron clouds? For that, return to the main text!

The main reason why I digressed into weather maps is draw your attention to the concept of connecting points having the same property with a continuous line. An isobar is one such line; it connects points on a weather map that have the same atmospheric pressure. Similarly, let me consider maps showing $\{\Psi_n, \Psi_m(r)\Psi_n^*, \Psi_m(r)\}$. I am sure you understand what the quantity within the brackets $\{ \}$ means. It means the probability of finding the electron at the space point r , when the electron is in the state labelled by the triad of quantum numbers n , l , and m .

Suppose I now join all points that have the same value for $\Psi\Psi^*$. Note the points are different; however, the quantum numbers remain the same [since we are talking of a particular electron state] and the numerical value of $\Psi\Psi^*$ also would be the same. So what do we expect at the end of it all? We expect to see a surface such that all points on the surface correspond to the same numerical value for $\Psi\Psi^*$, for, of course, the state defined by particular values for $\{n, l, m\}$. This surface would be like the isobar I introduced to you earlier; so maybe you would now understand the significance of the digression into weather maps.

OK, with all that preamble and preparation, I guess I can now unleash some nice pictures!

















	$s\ (l=0)$	$p\ (l=1)$	$d\ (l=2)$	$f\ (l=3)$
$n=1$	 $m=0$			
$n=2$	 $m=0$	 $m=-1\ m=0\ m=1$		
$n=3$	 $m=0$	 $m=-1\ m=0\ m=1$	 $m=-2\ m=-1\ m=0\ m=1\ m=2$	
$n=4$	 $m=0$	 $m=-1\ m=0\ m=1$	 $m=-2\ m=-1\ m=0\ m=1\ m=2$	 $m=-3\ m=-2\ m=-1\ m=0\ m=1\ m=2\ m=3$
$n=5$	 $m=0$	 $m=-1\ m=0\ m=1$	 $m=-2\ m=-1\ m=0\ m=1\ m=2$...
$n=6$	 $m=0$	 $m=-1\ m=0\ m=1$
$n=7$	 $m=0$

Figure 6: Shown here are what are called atomic orbitals, corresponding to the various quantum states that the hydrogen atom can be in. The concept of atomic orbitals is explained further in a BOX that comes at the end. Don't miss that!

There are a few important things I must draw attention to here. The first relates to the “cotton candy” aspect of the electron density distribution. What these pictures show is the expected [probability] density of electrons in the neighbourhood of the nucleus. Thus, the electron is more likely to be found in certain places than elsewhere. I hope you are able to follow that.

Electrons Have No Trajectories

Next comes the whole issue of electron trajectory. In classical mechanics, trajectories play an important role. When a bullet is fired, for example, it follows a particular trajectory. A lot of problems that students have to solve deal with such classical trajectories. In QM, the idea of trajectory disappears! This was in a vague way realised at the time the Bohr model appeared. Bohr no doubt started with the idea that the electron perhaps moved in circular orbits, but nowhere in his calculations do the actual trajectories appear. Sure there are states labelled by the quantum number n , and sure, one talks of the radii of the various orbits, but no mention of **actual** trajectories and electrons **actually** going round and round in such orbits. There was no need to; Bohr just wanted to know the energies of the levels, and the energy differences for that gave him an idea of the hydrogen atom spectrum, which after all was his goal [see QFI – 20]. And he got what he wanted without discussing actual trajectories.

The work of Schrodinger and the subsequent interpretation of Max Born showed that orbits really had no place in QM. I mean, go back to Fig. 3 which shows a lot of dots. Let us say that the electron was found at a spot corresponding to one of these dots at a particular instant. Can anyone say where the electron would go to in the next instant, from that starting spot? No one can! In fact, a little closer examination shows that the idea of trajectories has no meaning at all in QM! And do you know why? It is all because of ***Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle*** [see QFI – 21]!

To define [an ideal] trajectory, one must know precisely where the electron was from one instant to the next. In classical mechanics, if one knows where the electron was at time t_1 say, and also knew precisely the momentum of the electron at time t_1 , then one could, using the equations of classical mechanics, calculate precisely where the electron would be at some other later time t_2 . In QM, on the other hand, if at time t_1 we know precisely where the electron was, then we do **NOT** know precisely what the momentum was at that same instant – that is the ***Uncertainty Principle*** for you! In short, the whole concept of a definite trajectory is lost. The “cotton candy” aspect introduces a fuzziness! All that is due to the probabilistic nature inherent in quantum mechanics; and thanks to that probabilistic nature, first called attention to by Max Born while figuring what Schrodinger's Ψ meant, erupted a famous controversy or debate I should perhaps say.

This, by the way, was no ordinary debate, but one between two great giants – Einstein on one side and Bohr on the other. The debate was long and protracted, and ran over many years. But out of that came many ideas and many issues, some of which still remain, making QM one of the strangest aspects of Nature.

Squeezing the Space within Iron

Just to give you an idea of how strange things can be, let me draw your attention to the following strange fact. Suppose you consider iron. The iron atom has 26 electrons around its nucleus. The size of the nucleus would be roughly 10^{-11} cm, quite small. If we think in terms of the Bohr picture, we would have a solar system with many orbits, each containing some electrons; in all, there would be 26 electrons of course, as shown schematically in the figure below. The largest orbit would have a size of about a few times 10^{-8} cm.

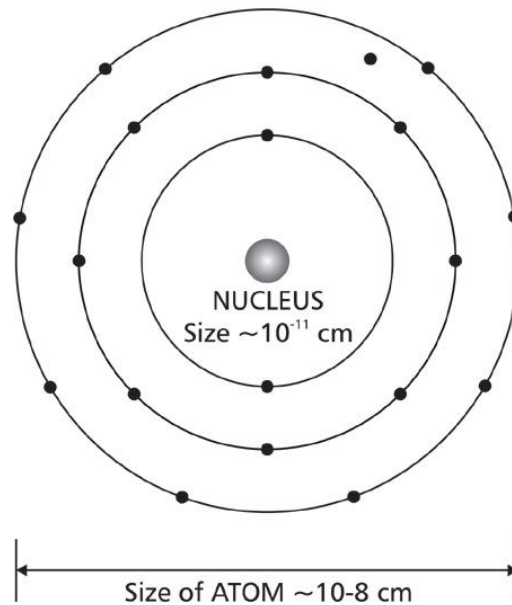


Fig 7

Figure 7: This figure is a schematic of the iron atom, as one would visualise it in the Bohr model. The basic idea of this figure is to convey that at the centre is a tiny, tiny atomic nucleus with a diameter around 10^{-11} cm, while around this miniscule nucleus are circulating 26 electrons that are even tinier [each electron may be around 10^{-16} cm!]. What it all means is that the atom is mostly empty space. But the miracle is that when we put a lot of such “empty spaces” together to form a piece of iron and try to squeeze it, we find it hard! Strange is it not? Well that is all due to the mysteries of QM. Thanks God for that, for it were not for that, we all would have fallen through the earth long ago!

What the above figure shows is that by and large the iron atom is empty, rather like our solar system. But hold on for a minute. Suppose we pack a lot of iron atoms together, we would get a piece of iron, may be as big as a nail [it would have to be a large number of atoms, something like 10^{22} !]. So we have this piece of iron which we find to be very solid, though every atom is supposed to be practically empty. Strange, is it not? But wait! Try holding the iron piece and squeezing it. You just would not be able to; this we know from experience. But why is not the iron squeezing? After all, every atom is almost empty; and when we squeeze, all we are trying to do is to move the atoms close to each other; with so much empty space available, it should be very to easy to squeeze the iron piece, since every atom should be able to literally move through other atoms. Yet, squeezing iron is so tough! Odd, is it sit not? Well, that is where QM pulls its magic. You may not believe it, but it is the “cotton candy” nature of the electrons as opposed to the orbit picture that I tried to sell above, that makes atoms so hard to press against each other. Remember way back I told you about stars called White Dwarfs and Neutron Stars? Their exotic properties all have to do with the strange way electrons behave, thanks to QM.

In short, it all goes right down to the probabilistic nature of QM. Einstein was shocked by the probabilistic message QM was trying to give. Suddenly, determinism was out of Physics, and it seemed as if God was playing dice! How on earth could God do that? No wonder the poor Prof. lost sleep! All that story in the next issue!! Till then, all the best.

P.S. Please do not miss the box which supplements the above with some interesting information about electrons in atoms.

BOX:

When one studies carefully the “cotton-candy” patterns that the electron in the hydrogen atom could adopt in the various allowed quantum states, one is filled with wonder. I mean all this serves a great purpose, that God obviously knew in advance, which is why, I think, He endowed the simple hydrogen atom with such richness, via QM that is. What exactly do I mean? To understand, please study carefully what follows.

Let us start with a hypothetical one-dimensional atom with a nucleus and one electron. In this case, one of the many possibilities for the electron to position itself with respect to the nucleus is shown in Fig (a) below.

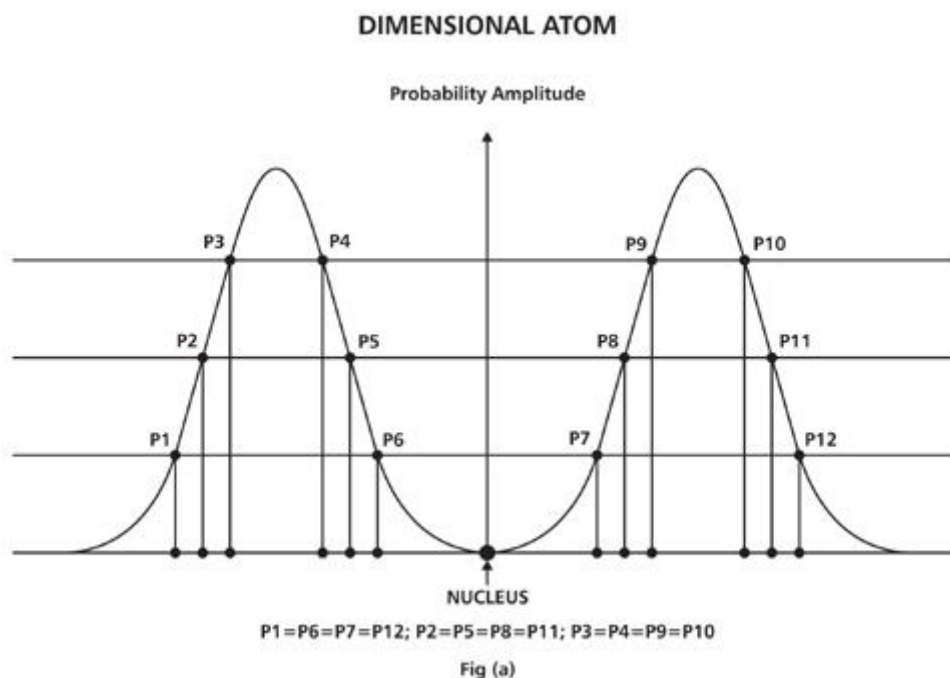


Figure (a)

In this figure, we have a double-bell shaped probability distribution curve, centred around $x=0$ where the nucleus is supposed to be. On the x -axis are marked points 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ...etc. The probability of finding the electron at these points is given by the values P_1, P_2, P_3 , etc., that can be read off the

electron density distribution curve. I hope this is clear. If we try to make a “map” of points with same values, we would get a plot as in Fig. (b).

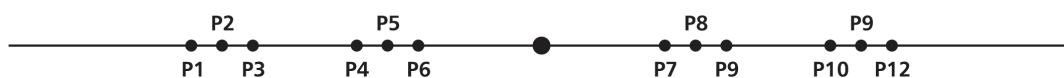


Fig (b)

Figure (b)

Let us now consider a two-dimensional atom. There is a nucleus and one electron, that can move in 2 D. In this case, the Electron Density Probability Distribution curve becomes a surface with two sheets as shown in Fig. (c). Basically, this shape is obtained by rotating each of the two independent curves of Fig. (a); I am sure you can easily follow that.

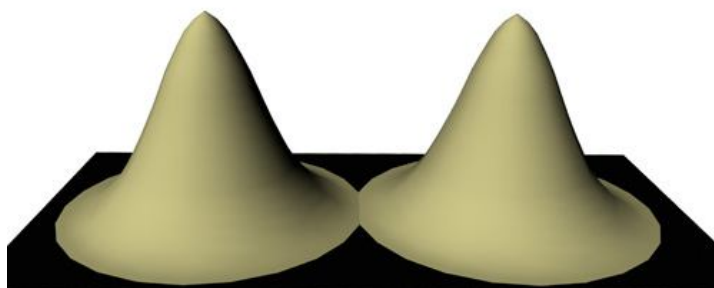


Figure (c)

Next, let us try to locate points on the plane where the electron distribution would have equal values; this would be like drawing isobars on the weather map. To do this, we first slice the two mountains with horizontal planes as shown in Fig. (d).

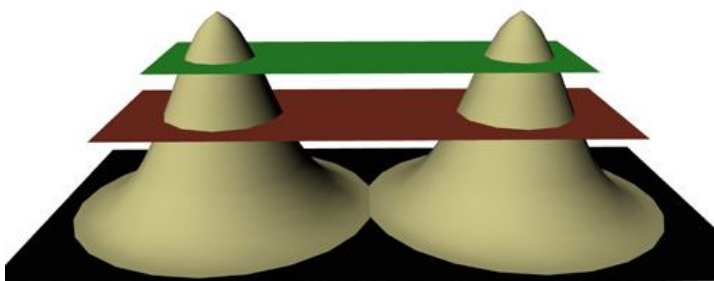
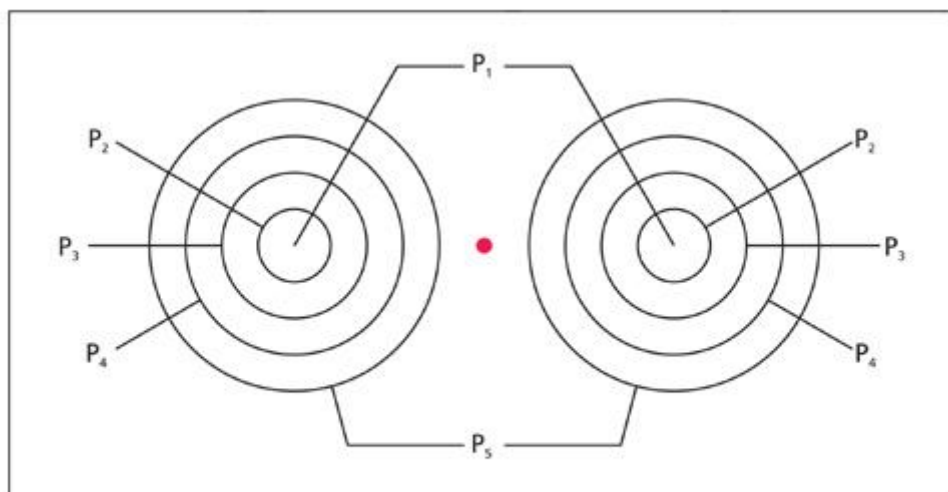


Figure (d)

I am sure you can see that each such plane would cut the “mountain” along a circle. If all these circles are plotted together, we would get what is shown in Fig. (e). We have a set of concentric circles, each corresponding to one particular value for the electron density – just like in the isobar map.



P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 represent probability densities; compare with previous figure.

Fig (e)

Let us now move to 3 D, which is the realistic case. In this case, if we tried to depict a “mountain plot” we would need four dimensions! I am sure you can follow that – for a 1 D atom we needed two dimensions to show the mountain plot. For a 2 D atom our mountain required three dimensions for portrayal. In the same manner, for a 3 D atom would have a four dimensional mountain. Living as we do in 3 D, we cannot depict such a mountain- sorry about that! However, we can certainly do something that is the equivalent of drawing circles as in Fig. (e). And that something is shown in Fig. (f).

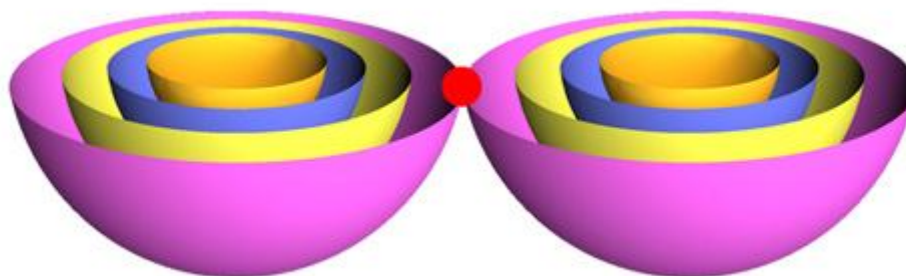


Figure (f)

We have here instead of nested circles as in Fig. (e), a set of nested spheres. For convenience of visualisation, these spheres have been cut across, so that

you can see the different spheres, one within the other, just as we had one circle within another in the previous figure.

OK, all this is fine but what is big deal about God being clever? That is what I am coming to. You see, if you consider the immense richness in the “cotton candy” patterns that even the simple hydrogen pattern provides, then you sure must wonder: “Why all this?” Well, God did it all with a grand purpose! And you know what that purpose is?

Just look at the molecules in Nature; there are millions and millions of them, starting with the simple molecules like the hydrogen molecule itself (H_2), the water (H_2O), on to an amazing number of organic molecules that include kerosene, petrol, and so on – just millions of them. And when we enter the biological world, there are millions more, all amazing molecules, from the zillions of proteins to the DNA itself. Each of these has the hydrogen atom.

How on earth is the hydrogen atom able to find a place for itself almost everywhere? That is all due to the diverse “cotton-candy” patterns that the hydrogen atom can choose from. It is to make room for such diversity that God apparently, and with much forethought, made the atom into a quantum entity, thus granting the potentiality of incredible diversity! By the way, these cotton-candy patterns as I call them have a scientific name; they are called *atomic orbitals*, a name very familiar to chemists. It is thanks to the richness of the atomic orbitals, that Nature is able to accommodate so many diverse and wonderful molecules. In turn, these molecules provide such richness and diversity to both the inanimate and the animate worlds.

And by the way, the “cotton candy” also prevents us from falling through the surface of the earth on which all of us walk!

God sure is amazing, is He not? Next time you have Swami's Darshan, try to see the enormous Glory of the Divine behind His Beautiful and Enchanting smile. He might pretend not to know many things, including your name, but don't get fooled by all that! Take care!

THE EXPANSION OF SAI LOVE

...in the United States and in our unique personalities

Mr. Robert A. Bozzani

One among the few devotees from the western hemisphere who came to recognise Baba's divinity way back in the early seventies, Mr. Bozzani was a forty-five year old flourishing businessman from the USA when he came to Baba for the first time. For more than thirty five years since then, he has visited Puttaparthi at least once every year and has been a hand-picked instrument of Bhagavan in His Divine Mission. Currently, he is a Trustee of the Sathya Sai Book Center of America, California, USA.

One of the more beautiful aspects of my relationship with Swami is the complete care He took to ensure that I received not just His teachings, but also the ambience to practice the same. What I refer to here is the blossoming of the Sai Movement that America was witnessing just about that time, when I came to see Him first in the early 1970s. [Read "How Swami U-turned My life from the December 2008 issue]. And I can only thank Swami not just for initiating me into the Sai-ward path, but also for fostering my spiritual growth in the company of like-minded spiritual aspirants such as Dr. John Hislop, Charles Penn and a few others - all of whom were early comers to Sathya Sai Baba from the West. It felt like we were all classmates in the 'Divine School', and to me, that was a great relationship. Not just that, each one of them, in their own way, was a sterling example of the goodness and godliness that Baba taught, and that provided me with the necessary motivation and impetus to trudge on my newly chosen path.

Dr. John Hislop – The Pioneer of the American Sai Organisation

America saw its first Sathya Sai Organisation centre under Dr. John "Jack" Hislop. He was a staunch devotee of Baba, and played a premier role in the expansion of Sathya Sai Organisation in the USA. Dr. Hislop embodied Swami's teachings to the fullest, as I saw it. It was he who inculcated a strong sense of discipline amongst us as a very necessary step for the organisation to get started and running. Indeed, Swami knew whom He was appointing for the task! For, the Sai Organisation rests on the bastion of a spiritually synchronised code of conduct, and we, in America, owe that to Dr. Hislop.

In 1975, there were only about three to four Sai centers. I was, supposedly, one of the region coordinators along with two others. The main Sai center was in Mrs. Elsie Cowan's house in Tustin, California.

There was one centre in Sandweiss' house. So, those were the two important ones. Apart from these, San Francisco and New York had one Sai center each. It was at these Sai centers that I got to know more people.

The Penns – The “Love” Messengers

Charles and Faith Penn were among the most wonderful people I met. I got to know them because they would come to the Sai get-togethers when we would have retreats and conferences. And all they would talk about was Love. They would have a meditation, and then they would get up and talk about the Love of Sathya Sai Baba and the poor.

I still remember distinctly, that first time at the retreat; I was very disturbed. I said, “What is this talk about love? Let's get to work and make the changes necessary!” I really laugh at myself when I think of it now, because I've understood over the years that it was the Penns' message which was the most important of all! And understanding that message of Love was crucial to the perception and implementation of Baba's teachings. In fact, Charles Penn was really the first in the United States to introduce Sathya Sai Baba to the United States, because he had come to Swami as early as 1969.

The Movement Gains Momentum...

Talking of the seventies, word was spreading progressively of the 'holy' man and teacher in distant India. And there were a host of others apart from Dr. Hislop and the Penns, who pitched in their bit to spread that word. People like Walter and Elsie Cowan, Indra Devi, and Mrs. Raja Gopala in Ojai did a lot for His mission.

Then, there was another lady, Hilder Charlton in New York. She served as a catalyst to the Sai Movement in New York. Once a week, she would organise a *bhajan*-cum-speech session wherein she would talk about Sathya Sai Baba, His life and teachings. And these sessions would attract a lot of young people who were seeking meaning in their lives. Many of those early youth hitch-hiked to see Swami in the early 70s and He let them live in His ashram. So, she too played a crucial role to introduce Swami to United States.

The Cowans – The Chosen Instruments

The Cowans were yet another important link in the network of Sai devotees in the America of the 70s. They were important to me, personally, because, when I returned to America from my first visit to Puttaparthi, I just felt that I had to go to a Sai center. And so, I drove a long way to Tustin at Elsie's house, just to enjoy *bhajans* for an hour or so; this gave me enough 'charge' to 'return' to the world for another week. Elsie was always so loving and sweet to everybody; but at the same time, she was very dynamic when it came to her devotion to Swami. A lot of people would come to them; in fact, more so, when they heard the story of Walter Cowan's resurrection by Swami.

Walter Cowan had been declared clinically 'dead' by the doctors in Madras (now Chennai). But Swami brought him back to life, saying that he still had a role to play in His mission; that's when the Cowans started the Sai Book Center in Tustin. They sought permission to reprint the first “Sathya Sai Speaks” because back then, in America, it was difficult to get them. And so,

they reprinted these books and set up a process to distribute them in the United States - all in the backyard of their house and in their garage. And, when Walter passed away, Elsie built the book center.

Even today, the book center runs on a purely honorary basis, with no salaries. We do our best to sell the books on Swami at the lowest price possible, on a "No profit, No loss" basis. And that is a very important thing for the people too, to realise that around Sai activities there is no money collected, and that the Sathya Sai Organisation works purely out of love and service, never for any monetary gains.

Thus, the Cowans too, through their book center, played a decisive role in disseminating Swami's message and glory. It is also interesting to note how a lot of people got to know Swami through Indra Devi and Hata Yoga coevally.

Sai Movement in the USA on a Strong Footing in the 80s

Gradually, the Sathya Sai Organisation began to take deep roots in America, thanks to all the travelling that Charles Penn and Dr. Hislop did, to spread His word. And Swami was ensuring all the time that He prepared more and more 'instruments' for the American chapter of His Mission. Next into the picture, came Dr. Michael Goldstein and Dr. Samuel Sandweiss. In fact, Sandweiss probably has the oldest center running in United States at the same place.

I was quite fortunate to interact with all these stalwarts. For, they were Swami's instruments to begin to let people know that He was here, in the United States.

Over the years, more Sai centers sprang up. And then, later on in the 80s, when brothers and sisters from India, who were in the United States, started coming to the Sai centers, these centers blossomed really faster.

The Sathya Sai Organisation grew in its reach and magnitude, and transformed the lives of the people it touched. Not just that, it also engineered the spiritual progress of the individuals who were already part and parcel of its fabric. I, as a person, felt its deep and abiding influence in my life too. It not only gave me the ambience to practice Swami's teachings, but also helped me to understand and unravel Swami's message better, especially Swami's message of Love.

Making 'Love' Work

The greatest problem of humanity today is poverty of love. And I've always felt that a lot of unhappiness and agitation we find in the world today has to do with just that – want of love.

So, I feel very fortunate when I know that Swami has been grasping my heart and opening it more and more – to encompass all that I can see and feel. And love is not limited to our family or workplace. It is not enough if we merely kindle the 'feeling' of love. For instance, when we tell ourselves – "we are

going to love our family", or that, "when I am working in Sai organisation, I should practice love there" That is not right. Wherever we are, every single moment, we must be 'love in action'. Love is best expressed when put in action. And it is just that. The best way to do it over and over again is watch how we act; there is no other way.

When we are faced with, what we think is a hostile person/situation, we tend to go with it, and attack. But what we all need to learn is to go the other way around, through the path of love, instead of finding fault with the 'other' and taking an offensive stance. That's because, ultimately, everybody is looking for Love; that 'lovelessness' is the real problem.

I have had moments when I have experienced the extra-ordinary power of Love even in the most mundane of things. For instance, when I go out to do an errand on certain mornings and I find a clerk who is simply unhappy, I do my best to smile and send love by how I act, rather than complain about things. And that action of love generates an aquifer of energy that keeps me going cheerful and buoyant the whole day.

I sometimes think how wonderful it would be if we all had the ability to address the other person as "My dear embodiment of love..." instead of "Mr. So-and-So". Just the way Swami does! The mere act of addressing someone with love, generates so much of happiness and good-will that there can be no trace or scope for ill feelings. And that is exactly what Swami wants us to do – to give Love.

There are times when we just can't do that. But it is at such times, if we really open our hearts, we can feel Swami at that moment! Even if we can't 'feel' the love, we can, at least 'think' it, saying mentally to the other person, "Although you upset me, personally, I love you." And when we do that, we feel His presence! Even if we get angry, Swami is there; He is a good witness.

The incident of Phyllis Crystal and the hijacker is a perfect example of the sort of magical effect that Love can have. A long-standing devotee of Sathya Sai Baba, Phyllis Crystal shares the message of love with youngsters and adults alike, even today, in her talks. She tells people – "If you can't love, ask God to help you." For that is what she did once, when hijacked on a plane. Threatened at gunpoint, and probably counting what were the last moments of her life, Phyllis Crystal mentally prayed to Sathya Sai Baba for succour. In that moment of intense prayer, she felt Swami telling her to 'Love those people'! But the hijackers were people who were mean, angry and upset. Distressed and angry herself, Phyllis realised she just couldn't do that. Being honest to herself, she started praying to Swami again, "Swami, 'I' can't send them (the hijackers) love, these people are cruel... but Swami, please send 'Your' love through me to them." And she prayed that way, over and over again. When she did that, peace came to the aeroplane, and they weren't harmed!

[Read this entire episode in the November 2008 cover story]

It does not end there. Later on, Phyllis Crystal verified that incident with Swami in her next trip to Puttaparthi. And Bhagavan confirmed that when she had prayed for His love and opened her heart, it was that Love which had changed the hijackers' hearts and transformed the whole situation.

Living a Life of Love...

We need to feel and express Love; a love that stems not merely from the lips, but from our hearts, a love that is felt from the depths of our beings rather than recited in a humdrum fashion. For instance, we chant the Universal Prayer of Peace – 'Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavanu' (May all the worlds be happy), thrice, at the end of *bhajan* sessions. We do it pretty routinely like a tape recorder. If, for a moment, we did it with an intense feeling, and with the thought – "Swami, the world is in deep trouble due to absence of Love. Please, may this prayer of mine move You, and quell, to some extent, the agitation in the minds of the people, so that there is greater love" – it would naturally have a greater and long-lasting effect. For Love and beauty lie in the eyes of the beholder, not in the beheld; in the *Drishti* (Vision), not in the *Srushti* (Creation).

When we see something that we don't like or relish, the fault lies in our outlook. And we must rise above that. This is what Swami means when He talks of 'Reflection, Reaction and Resound', and the need to put our perspective in place. There is no right or wrong. Everything is God.

I have asked Swami, for years, to make me rise above my judgmental point of view, which we all, as humans, are prone to take. And I can, with all my heart, say that, fortunately, I am getting there, even if I am not there. I can truthfully say that when I am not comfortable with a particular situation or somebody, I can, in my heart, send them Love, Swami's Love, which is God's Love. I can do that, and I can pray for them hoping that all is well with them; that they finally will get the message, whatever be the outcome, as long as I am Loving rather than Complaining about their actions. Because when we complain about something, that something is within us. That has been my experience, and to me, it's gotten right – 'What I See is what I Am'.

What is more, I have never felt better or younger in all of this life as I feel now. And I can only express my gratitude to Swami for His beautiful message of Love, and the opportunity to share my experiences with that message of love. Not only because I am the one who is most benefited in recounting my stories and experiences, but also because, when we share our experiences with each other, we are transported to an ineffable state of Love, Happiness and Bliss, that is verily, the nature of God.

HARNESSING THE HEART - Part 14

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, Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi, A courageous woman executive (Part 11), Mr. Shalabh Mittal and Mr. P. S. Kannan.

A powerful global corporate manager, Mr. Sai Mudigonda raked in huge dividends for his company, as he aggressively amassed more-than-expected business profits and made a name for himself as a successful executive. But soon the chickens came home to roost in the form of - to put it simply - unhappy people. Now, how did this unfold? And what pertinent lessons did this roller-coaster journey in the corporate highway teach him? Mr. Sai Mudigonda shares his valuable story.

VALUE SOURCING - NOT JUST OUTSOURCING

By Mr. Sai Mudigonda

A management and actuarial consultant, Mr. Sai Mudigonda has lived and worked in as many as nine different countries in Europe, Asia and North America. He has held various senior management positions in leading global corporations. Currently, he works for Accenture, a global consulting firm as a Specialist.

He feels fortunate to be born in a family who were already in the divine fold to experience Bhagavan Baba's omnipresence and blessings. By His grace, he has been able to re-enforce Human Values at critical junctures of his life. As part of his Individual Social Responsibility, Sai is currently engaged with a charitable organisation involved in promoting 'Values in Action' (which is, in fact, his passion) in individuals, schools and corporates.

Encounter with Values Value Sourcing Not Just Out Sourcing

Even though I was brought up in a devote family and Values have been driven into me right from the childhood, the wisdom related to the practical application came much later with experience. And now, the significance of Values is even more reinforced in me.

The 'Aggressive' Global Manager

Five years ago, when I was with a global company, I was managing a large multi-million dollar assignment covering multiple countries including India and the USA. I managed a team of around 250 employees at my base location in USA, where I was stationed for the assignment. We promoted the offshore/onshore Operating Model, highlighting the economies of scale and utilising the resource skills and expertise from various parts of the world. In this business model, a good amount of work was to move from USA to India – it was a simple cost saving model, since qualified labour was available in India at a significantly cheaper cost.

Initially I worked as a Senior Financial Consultant and Business Manager for 2 years. Later I was promoted as Business Development & Relationship Manager. My performance was to be measured based on revenue growth, profitability, client relationship management and employee care. But the highest focus primarily was on revenue growth.

Reaping a Bonanza

To accomplish my objectives, I started with a strategic business planning exercise and created an aggressive business plan. This strategy demanded some change in the work style and adjustment from my peers too. Later, I realised that they perceived it as threat since they were non-collaborative. In the first year, our performance was better than planned. We did 5 times the original target of 2 Million USD and ended up with a 10 Million USD for year 1. I was instantly recognised within the company. Motivated by my success, in the 2nd year I pursued a similar aggressive business plan. We forcefully upped the target to 2.5 times of the 10 million achieved. We managed to achieve a growth that was twice the previous years and I was duly recognised with certification and awards for the effort.

**'The mind of a superior man is
conversant with righteousness. The
mind of the mean man is conversant with
gain.'**
Confucius

Unanswered Questions for the Conscience

While this was going on there were many things which were actually falling apart.

Situation 1:

Moving work to India at this rate impacted the jobs in my client company in the USA. The local employees who lost their jobs became restless and started their agitation through media against their management as well as my company. One such employee who lost the job had to sell his house for lack of income and ended up in a divorce as a consequence of this.

In one of the 'Soup Kitchen' service activity (*Narayana Seva*), this employee was part of the homeless guests. He recognised me and asked, "Do you allow a foreigner to take your job in your own country?" He was very polite, and asked this without any aggression. I was stunned and surprised at his question. I had justified this on business terms, but deep inside my heart, I was not satisfied with this rationalisation. I could not answer him.

Situation 2:

Due to the perceived job insecurity, the client company's managers and other employees made daily operations difficult. In spite of various trust building exercises we failed to build a cohesive and motivated environment. In that chaotic situation, some of the client managers and employees started a pre-emptive exercise of building strong non-job related relationships with my next level staff to safeguard their jobs.

In one of my client relationship building exercises, a senior manager asked me a question: "Friend, I am not sure if I am going to be around in my job to maintain a business relationship with you or with your company. My question to you is: Can you offer me a job in your team if my company gives me a pink slip tomorrow? Your answer would help me to decide my next course of action". Again, I had a business justification, but something in me was not happy.

'Social equity can't be left to market forces.'

*- Prof Kenneth Keniston, Director,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
(MIT).*

Situation 3:

My peers, for their own good reasons, did not pursue aggressive revenue growth plans in their assignments. Excessive revenue growth generated in my assignment caused imbalance in their teams and their career aspirations. I caused this indirectly by stretching the boundaries beyond normal growth levels. Though some of them made their best effort to compete fervently, we could not create a healthy competition amongst us and thus failed to create a collaborative environment. This also created opportunity for competitor companies to gain a share from our business.

Situation 4:

All this was leading to an unhealthy work environment. I sensed the low morale in our teams. Most of the key performers started opting out of the assignment or the company itself; some joined our competition. There was a 'work to rule' attitude and people were complaining about other peers or their managers. This led into productivity and quality related challenges for the client. Employee commitment levels went down and most employees ensured that their fellow employees did not get any positive recognition.

One of the employees asked me a question: "What do you mean by joy at work? Can you please help me to experience how can I be happy in our current situation?" I could not answer him.

An Appointment with the Inner Self

I did the best I could to fulfill my professional obligations. In fact, I surpassed expectations! I did work hard and for long durations to do what I understood and believed were my professional objectives. In spite of big gains and unexpected growth, things were not going right and were falling apart subtly and internally, though everything appeared commercially successful. I knew I had to undergo some self-introspection to find the reason.

For the most part of my initial years, I was in pursuit of revenue growth, but the above developments showed that there was something basically missing. This led me into an introspective mode. I could see the implications of these actions by the end of the second phase. Initially I was under the impression that the business of my company was to enable our client to increase the overall operational capacity to execute major projects. Initially, I believed strongly in this concept as it seemed to lead to a win-win situation of creating employment in both the companies and in both the countries.

**"If money is your hope for independence
you will never have it. The only real
security that a man will have in this world
is a reserve of knowledge, experience, and
ability."**

- Henry Ford

However, there was more to it than the above. The process would have started with that intention but it got buried under the greed to grow exponentially. At that point, though the external world perceived me as a successful manager in business terms, various unanswered questions raised in different situations made me realise the thorny issues which have accompanied this 'success'.

More Intriguing Questions!

The self-enquiry resulted in me asking certain questions, which, I wish I had asked at the beginning.

- What is the main intention and objective of this business model?
- What kind of work is moved offshore and why?
- Is this business model leading to an unstable job environment in the host country?
- Is the host country adopting this model for lack of expertise or knowledge? Or is it just driven by 'higher cost' factor at their end?
- What is the mutual learning and knowledge sharing benefits to both the businesses and the countries?
- What are the possibilities of training the existing resources to handle more work in a better manner?
- Is this business model creating an economic imbalance in the host country?
- Does the business in question violate any of the values above?

Taking Control and Finding True Success

I could see that many of these questions in my mind were coming too late. These were mostly beyond my control, but I could have acted on some of them at the right time. I had to do something to check the situation. The only way I could think was to evaluate everything from the Human Values perspective.

Without impacting the basic process and the business structure I wanted to work on my team, as that was something I was primarily responsible for and over which I also had control.

My primary focus started with improving team morale and curbing the attrition. I arranged meetings with each of the key team members and identified their career and personal aspirations. I made sincere and concerted efforts to address their individual needs in a more involved manner. Things surprisingly started looking up. Within the first 6 months, I could enable 90% of my team to get back to working in a committed manner.

I had to re-evaluate my business plan to find a solution to the client employees losing their jobs. I identified areas of work which did not impact their employment and aimed to move only those activities to India, even though I lost some business to competitors in the process. I communicated this revised plan to the client management team. It was a surprise to them. They also agreed and supported it, as they were facing internal hostility due to the poor work situation.

While this was going on, our fluctuating client relationship started getting some positive attention. I proposed a Shared Managerial Responsibility Model wherein both client managers and my managers collaborate, and execute their given assignments as paired teams. This helped client managers feel

more stable and involved in their jobs without feeling insecure. This built mutual trust and brought stability to the business relationship.

The lack of collaboration amongst peers was a tough one to address. It took almost 9 months of compromising, sacrificing a part of my success and working together as a team to build the mutual trust. Initially I started sharing my success with them and created opportunities for some of my disgruntled peers to grow along with me. Also, I initiated a few team activities for fun and also got ourselves involved in some community service activities. At the end of 9 months, I got 75% my peers collaborating with me. The results were very satisfying.

However, after 6 months, the management of the client company in the USA changed. They cancelled assignments half way through. Their decision was aimed to help keep their local employment intact without losing jobs to foreign countries for the sake of low cost. More than 50% of the business was lost in a year's time. Many moved out of the company to pursue a specialist type of work where they started deriving more joy at work.

The Learning Curve

To summarise all that I learnt from the above painful experience: If core Human Values are ignored in business, there is a huge hazard of overall disharmony, which would be veiled by the illusion of the short term commercial benefits.

**“If you think of vision and mission as an
organization's head and heart, the values it
holds are its soul.” - Buzotta**

Such situations will eventually trigger a natural corrective process. But predicting the time frame for such corrective action may not be possible. It could be a few months or some times a life time. In my case it took 3 to 5 years to acknowledge that change.

At the same time, managers must recognize the critical requirement of proactively building in the 'Human Values' approach into any strategic plan. Or else, some of the repercussions of ignoring these values are too painful and also too difficult and time consuming to correct. These also have huge costs, including social, which might have global implications, if the company is structured that way.

It is certain that Core Values bounce to correct any such situation, independent of our involvement. By being part of that bouncing process, there is a tremendous amount of valuable life time learning for the individual. It is a privilege and good fortune to experience human Values becoming victorious over unethical business practices. Core Human Values are the reflection of the innate nature of human beings. They are installed in human beings by none other than God. They are bound to be victorious in the end.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - Part 3 (Continued from the previous issue)

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Since Heart2Heart started in 2003, readers have very often written to us seeking answers to many spiritual questions. We have answered them at times through appropriate articles in H2H. However, there are still many that have to be explained carefully and in detail. And in the recent past, a lot more queries have arrived on varied topics concerning spirituality and personal growth.

We have now meticulously compiled and categorised these questions, and Prof. G. Venkataraman has offered to answer all these queries in a structured and systematic way as a series on Radio Sai as well as in H2H. In this way, these answers now remain always on our website as a ready reckoner on spiritual doubts.

This is a suitably adapted transcript of our radio series of the same name. To listen or download the talk from our website, please visit www.radiosai.org/qa

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. Welcome once more to this Q & A series, which, I hope, is of use to you. In this issue, I would like to deal with three or four questions, all connected with what might be called the true purpose of life and what humans must do to realise it. If you recall, this was the theme I started with, and there are still many questions in this topic before I can move on to some other topic.

Let me first list the questions I wish to consider this time. They are as follows:

QUESTION 1: How can man have flaws, when he is the Spark of the Divine?

The other questions are as follows:

QUESTION 2: Why does man forget God? How does man deceive himself?

QUESTION 3: Why is the Cosmic aspect of man important?

QUESTION 4: How can man enter the Cosmic route, which would lead him to God?

So these are the four questions I will deal with today, and let me see how far I am successful! By the way, I do hope you are able to see some kind of a connection between the four questions above.

Let me start with the first question, which is:

How can man have flaws, when he is a Spark of the Divine?

I am sure all of us know that humans have faults, in fact plenty of them, but not many might be aware that we are Sparks of the Divine. So maybe, I should start with a brief remark on that latter point. If we look around, one thing we cannot escape seeing is bewildering diversity. No matter to which religious faith one belongs or even if one does not believe in a God Supreme, one thing that no one can deny is the incredible diversity with which the entire Universe is packed. We have every thing from rocks to gigantic mountains, from little streams to big rivers to vast oceans, living creatures from the invisible bacteria and the tiny ant to huge elephants and so on.

For centuries, man has always wanted to know the source of all this diversity. Today, science has a pretty good reply, at least in part. It says, [and some of this story can be found in our H2H series entitled ***IN QUEST FOR INFINITY***] that all the diversity in Creation came from one primordial event called the Big Bang, that occurred about 13.8 billion years ago and which signalled the birth of our Universe.

At the instant of the Big Bang, there was just one something, call it the Cosmic Soup if you will. Physicists would say that this Cosmic Soup was governed by a single Unified Field Theory and all that. However, within one second, yes, just one small second, this grand Unified Force field split into four distinct ones, that have ruled the Universe ever since. Playing out in different ways, these forces led step by step to the formation of electrons, protons, neutrons, etc., which, later, coming together in many different ways formed atoms from which came molecules, and so on.

Thereafter, it was a story of aggregation in many different ways, leading to everything from galaxies and stars to ants and monkeys. Thus, we can truly say, that even science accepts that from One came Many. Of course, the debate is all about what exactly that entity I call One is. Meanwhile, there is one critical fact I should mention here, and maybe, also stress. All our bodies are made up of atoms, and these atoms have a lineage going back almost to the beginning of our Universe.

Further, locked up in the recesses of the atom are all the four fundamental forces that have been ruling the Universe almost since its birth. These four forces are: the gravitational force, the strong force that holds protons and neutron together in atomic nuclei, the so-called weak force that governs radio activity, and finally the electromagnetic force that binds atoms and molecules, and is very much a part of the macro world. By the way, without radioactivity, we cannot have many forms of cancer therapy, the gamma camera that helps to diagnose many diseases, industrial radiography and so on.

I hope I have said enough to convince you that though we might not be conscious of it, the forces of Nature are in fact ***mirrored within us***, indeed in every single atom of our body. In that sense, all of us are truly cosmic

creatures. This is very interesting and flattering no doubt, but you will agree that we are, at least while alive, something more than a bunch of atoms or even complex molecules. We have something more, something we all know exists, but not easily described, and that is the mysterious entity called life.

Everyone accepts that life exists, including atheists, but few have been able to define it satisfactorily, in scientific terms that is. When it comes to issues related to life, consciousness and such other matters, one finds three kinds of scientists. One type says, "I do know what consciousness is, but scientifically, I am not concerned with it; I personally believe this topic falls outside the realm of science, and therefore I prefer not to comment on it." This is the so-called uncommitted neutral group, if I may call it that.

Then there are others who say, "Life is something that transcends space and time, and science, as we know it, relates to matters that are bounded by space and time. Therefore, I believe science can never answer questions relating to life and consciousness. Perhaps only religion and spirituality can; maybe life is a gift of God." The third group is very allergic to God and vehemently declares [and its cries have become shriller lately], "There is no God. God is just a concept invented by humans who are weaklings and want a crutch to hold on to. Just hang on for a while, and science would have all the answers to the mysteries of life and consciousness, **without** invoking any God." This is the atheist lobby speaking.

I am mentioning all this to stress, that when one declares that humans are a Spark of the Divine, it automatically assumes (a) that God exists, (b) humans came from God, that is to say God created humans [though maybe in an elaborate and evolutionary sort of way such as how Darwin outlined], and (c) the power of God resides in humans.

The statement that humans are a Spark of the Divine, is meant to stress that not only have humans been created by God but also that in His infinite mercy, God has packed humans with all kinds of capabilities, each of which is a reflection of the Divine, in a way more than atoms and molecules alone are – by the way, they too are packed with the power of the Divine in their own way. To cut a long story short, in the celebrated *Gita*, Krishna gives a brief glimpse of the different ways in which God's power functions within humans. Comments related to this are spread all over, but in the Tenth Chapter called the *Vibhuti Yoga*, there is an impressive collection. It is to stress that humans have been cast in the image of God [something which the Bible too records] that Swami almost invariably begins His Discourses with the words, *Premaswaroopalara* meaning 'Embodiments of Divine Love'. In earlier times, it used to be *Diyatmaswaroopalara*, which meant 'Embodiments of the Divine *Atma*'. Either way, there is a reminder that we all are nothing but Sparks of the Divine.

Sorry about that long introduction, but it was needed to set the stage to answer the main part of the first question which I shall rephrase as follows:

If man is indeed a Spark of the Divine, why then does he not behave like God? Why does he, as he often seems to these days, behave more like the devil? How come such a thing happens?

This is the essence of the first question. It is a very important question that we would be dealing with in great detail as we go along but the short answer to this question is as follows, and it all revolves around action.

The Universe is full of action, and every entity acts, and by every entity, I mean inanimate entities like stars and planets, animate entities all the way from plants to ants through elephants, and finally human beings. Is there any difference in the way these different entities act? Sure there is. Inanimate entities act according to set rules and these are the rules that we refer to as Laws of Nature. Science is all about discovering the Laws of Nature and explaining them if one can. Many such laws have been discovered and a good many have also been explained. When it comes to living beings except humans, they too have certain rules that they obey; they do so by what we call instinct, and so we say, instinct built-in by Nature governs the actions of animate beings, except humans of course. To put it differently, actions in the case of animals are hard-wired. No one teaches them how to; they know what to do and how to do because they have been programmed so to say; perhaps, the programs are encoded in the genes itself.

Let me now move on to man. To some extent, he too is programmed and hard-wired; this is inevitable since humans have evolved from lower animal species. But in one very important respect, humans are very lucky in that God has blessed them with very superior and remarkable powers. The most important power is resident in what we call the Mind. Thus, if man exhibits flaws, sometimes very serious ones, in spite of being a Spark of the Divine, it is entirely because the Mind tricks him into actions that constitute a blot on the innate Divinity of humans. In fact, that is the central problem today, and I guess we would be dealing with it quite extensively later on. For the moment, the simple answer to the question I am dealing with is that man has been given a Mind that gives him a freedom of choice. Thus, though he knows what he should do and must do, he may decide not to do what is best for him and Society, and thus stands in denial of the Divinity latent in him. In short, Mind is the culprit!

This leads me on to the next question which is:

Why does man forget God? How does man deceive himself?

The short answer to both questions is MIND! Man forgets God on account of the mind. As someone said, the mind has infinite capacity to trick itself. In other words, man deceives himself through his mind! It is no surprise then that the issue of the mind, what it is, and how to deal with it the right way, assumes great importance in *Vedanta*. I cannot deal with all that right now, but for the moment, maybe I could say the following:

If you recall, in my last instalment I mentioned that a human being is a composite of three entities namely, first the *Atma* which is fundamental and forms the core of the human personality, then a subtle mind which is supposed to play a role subordinate to the *Atma*, and finally the gross body. By the way, when I say the mind should be subordinate to the *atma*, it means that the mind must take instructions and guidance from the *atma*. Having received this guidance, the mind is then supposed to direct the senses and the body on how they should act in this external world under various circumstances.

In this scenario, the *atma* is in the driving seat; and if this hierarchy, namely *atma* first, mind next, and body last, is maintained and always observed, then there are no problems whatsoever, spiritually that is. However, things do not always occur according to the script. Often, the mind is easily misled by the senses, which drag humans into actions that seemingly lead to pleasure and happiness, but end up plunging the person into trouble and misery. Although this happens again and again, and has in fact happened millions of times in history, most humans want to discover disaster all by themselves! And so, misled by the senses, and misguided by the deluded mind, they ignore the Voice of Conscience, or the Voice of God speaking from within. And that is how they court disaster; and when they find out about it, it is often quite late, rather like the man who constantly defies warnings, smokes heavily and finally ends up with lung cancer, from which he has no escape!

I now move on to the third question in the present series which is:

Why is the Cosmic aspect of man important?

This is an important question and requires a long and elaborate answer; obviously, I cannot do that now but the issue would surely come up again, at which point I shall deal with it in greater detail. Basically, it all boils down to almost the very first thing Lord Krishna told Arjuna, when he suddenly announced that he, namely Arjuna, was quitting and dropping out from the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, just as it was about to begin.

Krishna then told Arjuna, "Arjuna, you are not the body but the eternal *Atma*. Let your *atmic* nature guide your actions rather than mere worldly considerations." Swami reminds us of the same thing by telling us, "You are not man but God."

However, what happens almost always is that misguided by the senses, the mind falls for the false attractions of the world. It forgets to take orders from the *atma* and help man to lead his life in the proper way; in short, man forgets his priorities. In particular, he easily becomes very selfish. On the other hand, in the *Gita*, Krishna very clearly reminds man, "You have a Cosmic connection with every entity in Creation. Behind this connection, there is an underlying balance. If you forget this connection, you would engage in actions that upset the delicate balance I have ordained; result? You would be in deep trouble." If you want one example that illustrates this point powerfully, it is climate change.

Driven by extreme self-interest and the desire to consume more and more, man has become addicted to fossil fuels, that is, oil and coal. In some way or the other, our major sources of energy today are fossil fuels. The more we burn them, the more we pollute the atmosphere with greenhouse gases. But who cares? Hardly a few; most say, "I live in **Now**; who cares what happens tomorrow? That is none of my concern!" And why have we landed in such a dangerous situation? Because we have stopped to think and be in harmony with the Cosmos.

It is this indifference that is leading to the destruction of forests, the extermination of species one by one, disturbance to biodiversity and bio-equilibrium, and so on. Ultimately, it is all because we are forgetting that it is the *atma* within us that is supreme and not the body or the senses which are quite transient. True, the body and the senses do form a part of us; but to which do we give the importance, to the Master or the servant? When the obvious does not meet the eye and priorities are brushed aside, there can be problems for sure. If we do not want problems, then we **cannot** and **must** not ignore the Cosmic aspect. Once again, this is bound to come up later and I guess, slowly the bits and pieces would start adding up to make better sense.

This brings me to the last of the four questions I intend to discuss today, which is:

How can man enter the Cosmic route, which would lead him to God?

I would put it this way. When we are born, God does put us on the Cosmic route and in fact gives each one of us a compass called Conscience. All we have to do is keep consulting that compass and following it; if we do that, we are well on the road to God.

OK, all that is fine; man has now lost his way, and so what should he do? That really is the essence of the present question, and it is a fair one I must say. Let me go back to the compass business. Let us say, man has the compass but the glass is very dirty; as a result, he cannot see clearly which way the needle inside is pointing. So, if he wants to use the Compass, what should he do? Obviously, he should clean the glass. In the same way, our Moral Compass within is not lost or misplaced; just that it is covered with a lot of muck. So, the first order of business is to remove the accumulated dirt. In spirituality, it is the mind that accumulates dirt and it is the mind that must be cleaned up. In practical terms, one has to go through a drill of mind and sense control, even as one has to go through all kinds of exercise and diet control if one wants to bring down obesity. I shall not go into all that now, especially as it might frighten many of you! But I shall offer a simple recipe.

It is not original really, and Baba gave it to us a long time ago. It simply calls for us to keep chanting the Name of the Lord as often as we can, even as we are doing work that does not call for heavy concentration. What name to choose? A *bhajan* that we often sing gives the answer; it says, "Chant that name that appeals to you, but when you chant, do so with Love and deep feeling." Remember that? So you see, chanting the Name is not as tough as it

might sound. Often when our boys travel together in a bus, they spend time singing *bhajans*. In Prashanti, when Sevadals move objects in tractors and trucks, they do so singing. You can sing as you vacuum the house, and so on; there is no limit to what one can do and it is so easy too!

Oh yes, there are other things also that one must do, but first, let us get started, and then we shall talk about steps 2, 3, 4, etc!

Well, that's all for now, and I hope you were able to understand what I have tried to convey. All the best, and God bless. Jai Sai Ram.

THE DRAMAS OF LIFE DIVINE

Dear readers, till the December 2008 issue, in this section we serialized for you "Shirdi Sai Parthi Sai", the glorious saga of Shirdi Sai and the divine life of Sathya Sai till His early childhood. This series continued for 48 episodes, and we received very positive responses to this serial. In fact, now that the script was available, this television serial was re-enacted as a play in many Sai centres. Encouraged with this, we have decided to continue this section and henceforth offer something in the similar format. Now, it is not the Divine Life Story of Bhagavan Baba, but the innumerable dramas presented in His Divine Presence by the students of His Schools and University, as well as by Bal Vikas students and Sai devotees from all corners of the world. We are sure this new series, which is accompanied with lots of pictures and video stills/clips, will not only make an enriching and edifying reading experience, but also will help devotees everywhere to redo these inspiring plays in their own settings with little effort.

We start this New Year, with a drama presented by the students of Sri Sathya Sai University on the Convocation Day, November 22, 2008. It was entitled "Divya Premaashrayam".

This is presented in two parts. In the next month, along with the second part, we will also offer you a pdf download of the entire script. So, enjoy these divine dramas where the Divine was a keen spectator and the hidden director!

"DIVYA PREMAASHRAYAM"

Convocation Drama, November 22, 2008

This drama depicted the subtle difference between 'good work' and 'God's work', and enunciated the golden formula that transforms 'good work' into 'God's work' through the life of Anand Vardhan, an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, and a young idealist.

After completing his MBA from the Sri Sathya Sai University, Anand Vardhan has returns home and is about to embark on a career that can fulfil his dreams.

Lights on

Scene 1 – His vision

(Bhajan is going on, father is reading a book and Abhay comes. The door bell rings)

Abhay: Arre Kaka...(Oh Uncle!)

Uncle: Jeete Raho ...(my blessings...)

Father: Arey, Rajesh... Anand.

Uncle: Anand! Congratulations for the gold medal! So Anand! How is Swami?

Anand: Oh, Swami is as blissful as He always is.

Uncle: Hmmm... now you are an M. B. A! You have made us all proud, Anand; so, what are your plans? Which Multi National Company do you intend joining?

Father: For joining he must apply, isn't it? So far, two-three top companies have called him, but he has turned down their offers. He says, he's waiting for the 'perfect offer'. Of course, let him choose...

Abhay: *Kaka*, maybe, he wants to start his own company? Someone like my brother could make a fortune company. Am I right, Anand?

Anand: You know, one of my fondest memories is of the occasion when Swami called us, all the MBA boys for an interview. During that interaction, Swami painted for us His picture of a glorious Bharath (India) - A Bharath, where every individual lives on the ideals of Brotherhood of Man and Fatherhood of God, a Bharath where every village is an epitome of spiritual prosperity and every town engaged in righteous nation-building activity. He went on to say, 'I am depending on you students, for a great transformation, a silent revolution. Do not be under the impression that you and I have come together only now; our bond is age old! You have come to Me for the sake of far higher triumphs, not just for studies.'

Uncle: Profound indeed, Anand! And we are sure you will live upto Swami's ideals. And ...

Father: Wait Rajesh, Anand... I feel, there is something you want to tell us. (*questioning*)

Anand: Yes father, and forgive me for confining it in my heart all this while. I intend to contribute my mite in rejuvenating our country. I have decided to work in a village and create an ideal model

Uncle: That's great, we expected this from you... So, you are going to spend your weekends in the village? We too will join you.

Anand: Not weekends Kaka, everyday... That will be my job, my profession, my life!

Abhay: Wait a minute! You are going to work full time in a village!? And do what?

Anand: Help them find a life for themselves - a life where economic prosperity will fuse with social and spiritual harmony.

Father: And your livelihood?... I mean income and...

Anand: You mean food and home?... I'll stay with them and live among them.

Uncle: Anand *beta* (Son)... have you thought this out seriously? Is this not youthful immaturity? You are young, smart, and virtuous. This is the time for you to focus on your career.

Anand: That is why I am doing this *Kaka*. If not now, then when? This is the time!

Abhay: This is foolish, Anand! Father just give him some time and he'll come out of it.

Anand: Father, Abhay, *Kaka*... Swami is there. It is His vision and it cannot fail. And you all want to see me happy, right? (*everybody reluctantly nods*) This is what is going to make me happy and Swami proud.

Lights Off

After Scene 1 - Narration

Anand's decision to serve in the villages has left his family perplexed though his father has half-willingly given his blessing to his venture. Is it an act of youthful immaturity or a divinely inspired adventure?

(two seconds gap)

Ramnathpuram is a poor village located on the banks of a river. The mostly illiterate villagers too have been praying for someone to come and redeem them from their hard life of deprivation. Will their Grama Devata, Shri Ramachandra respond to their prayer?

Lights On

Scene 2 – Dance

Lights off

It looks as though their Grama Devata has answered their prayers; Anand has chosen Ramanathapuram as his centre of activity. His objective is to achieve Swami's vision of a model village where prosperity and nobility complement each other. Is it going to be a smooth ride for him or a roller-coaster ride?

Lights On

Scene 2a – His Entry

[Chowdary, the village headman, Anthony and Ibrahim are talking to each other, Krishna enters]

Chowdary: Come Krishna come, yesterday one Anand had visited our Ramnathpuram. He has some plans, it seems, for the community. We couldn't

understand much of what he was talking. I told him that you would take him around and show him whatever he wants to see, today.

Krishna: How many such people have come and gone, *Kaka*? A hundred promises but zero deliveries. Why do you entertain such people? [*Anand enters*]

Anand: *Namaste Chowdary Kaka. [All get up and welcome him]*

Chowdary: *Namaste, Anand Babu, please come, [They usher him into his seat]*

Anand Babu, this is Krishna, a young, dynamic, educated boy of our community.

Ibrahim: We are all illiterate, but he can understand whatever you say. He'll take you around. Ok, Krishna?

[Ramaiah and Lakshmaiah murmuring come there... quarrelling]

Lakshmaiah: Chowdary garu, you have to settle this issue today. I don't care for his problems which are always there; I want my share.

Chowdary: Look, this is your personal issue. Why don't you resolve it yourselves? Look, Anand Babu, this is our problem. You were saying so many nice things yesterday, but we have a myriad variety of problems in the village.

Ramaiah: Who is this young man? And why are you publicising our problem to some stranger, eh?

Krishna: You fellows have gone about scandalising each other around the whole village; everyone knows about it! Anand Babu, these two are brothers. This Ramaiah had borrowed 20,000 rupees from Lakshmaiah, a few years ago. Some unavoidable circumstances prevented him from repaying the sum till today.

Anthony: Their father passed away a month back and now when it has boiled down to division of property, Lakshmaiah is demanding his amount from his share of the property. The point is that Ramaiah needs the amount for a bore-well.

Lakshmaiah: What bore-well? All white lies... not a drop is going to surface from that ground. Aye, Ramaiah, I am warning you; either you give me back my money or you know what I am capable of!

Anand: Ramaiah *garu*, are you sure that the bore-well will yield water?

Ramiah: Absolutely. The experts have surveyed the land and they expect a good yield of water. The problem is about procuring a loan!

Lakshmaiah: Who'll give him a loan? Who will guarantee for him?

Chowdary: You, Lakshmaiah, who else?

Lakshmaiah: After all that he has done to me, you expect me to stand guarantee?

Anand: If you don't mind, I can arrange that. I'll stand as a personal guarantor for him. We will work with Ramaiah to see that he gets a good crop and pays back the money. *[Pause]* Is that ok?

Krishna: You, Anand Babu!

Anand: This is no time for hesitation, Krishna. If one part of the body suffers, the rest of body rushes to it help. He is one among us in the body of the community; he needs help.

Krishna: If Anand Babu is ready to stand as guarantor, I think we have finally found a solution.

[Everybody else acknowledges the same]

Anand: Lakshmaiah, you are brothers. This relation was designed in heaven. And now for a paltry sum, you are ready to sever that sacred bond.

Krishna: Anand babu is absolutely right. *(Looking at Lakshmaiah)* Settle your differences; it will help both of you!

Lakshmaiah: Don't blame me; He is the one, who raked up the issue and precipitated it!

Anand: As I came here, I noticed that you have a beautiful Rama temple adorning your village; which means this is Ayodhya. My Swami, Satya Sai Baba says, 'A temple is not merely a place where you pour out your anguish and beg for your desires; it is a silent but powerful reminder of the ideals that we have to practise in our daily lives. You both are fighting for a small sum of money; there where two brothers who fought for a kingdom... but it was totally a different kind of fight!

Lights Off

The divinely potent story of Shri Ramachandra has been echoing in the heart of mankind for aeons. The epic is, was and will continue to be contemporary in its message for it contains eternal truths of life and living. There is something for everyone in it. One such episode is that of Bharata meeting Ramachandra on the Chitrakoota mountain. He has brought along with him the entire Ayodhya with only one objective in mind – to take Rama back and crown him on the throne.

Lights On

Scene 2b – Bharata & Rama

(Rama and Bharata along with Vasishta and Janaka are seated. Lakshmana and Shatrughna are also present standing along with two soldiers)

Vasishta: Dear Ramachandra, Bharata, today as we assemble here, your glorious ancestors are watching proudly over you. What Bharata has done today is unmatched in the history of emperors. I stand overwhelmed by what has transpired between the two of you, Bharata, pour out your heart to your brother without any hesitation.

Bharata: Brother! Ever since you left Ayodhya, the place has verily become a graveyard, where one hears only cries of lamentation. For the sake of the people of Ayodhya, please accept the crown and return to the city. [*Padyam*]

Rama: Brother, I too experience the pain of parting with Ayodhya, but My swerving from obedience to father's command will bring ignominy to the entire clan of Raghu's. Is that what you want, Bharata? Tell me.

Bharata: But Ramachandra, Gurudeva is witness to the fact that Mother Kaikeyi has withdrawn her demands that she made on father and even publicly apologised for her folly.

Rama: Bharata, our mother might have withdrawn her demands; but, it is to father's command that we all are bound. One son must be in the forest and the other should rule over the kingdom.

Bharata: If that is the case, I shall spend the fourteen years in exile. You return to Ayodhya, and bring joy to the people.

Rama: Bharata, *dharma* is not something that can be tampered with by barter. I have to practice my Dharma and you, yours at any cost! (*A telugu Poem*)

Bharata (*in desperation*): Lakshmana, you understand my predicament! At least Rama may pay heed to your words. Please intercede on my behalf.

Lakshmana: Brother, you know Rama much better than I do. He will not swerve from the path of *dharma*. His duty is to follow *dharma*, and my duty is to follow him.

(Rama looks at Lakshmana and nods in approval)

Bharata: [*Looking at Rama*] Alright brother, you fulfil your *dharma*, and I shall fulfil mine. (*A telugu Poem*) Unless you accept the kingdom and come to Ayodhya, I will forsake food and water, and give up this worthless life.

Rama: *[He gets up]* Bharata, do not push me into a dilemma by such drastic step. Gurudeva, I plead with you... kindly tell us what we should do?

Vasishta: Rama, Bharata's devotion has the power to submerge the three worlds. The love of Bharata has created ripples of emotion in my otherwise composed mind. *(Looks at Janaka.)* The only person who can resolve this *dharma sankata* is Rajarishi Janaka. Maharaj, you are the epitome of equanimity and wisdom. Please enlighten us.

Janaka: Brahmarishi Vashishta has put me in an unenviable position by asking me to resolve this intricate situation where the irresistible waves of love confront the immovable bedrock of *dharma*. But perhaps, it is the Lord's wish that He gives His judgement through me. Rama! Bharata! *Dharma Moolam Idam Jagat*. The power of *Dharma* is what sustains the universe. But *Prema* is higher than *Dharma*. When *Prema* as devotion, reaches its zenith, God himself breaks the laws of creation. This is not a conflict between brothers, but a confrontation between God and His Devotee. And God has to bow to the will of devotee.

(Shouts of Sri Janaka Maharaj ki jail!)

Janaka: But Bharata, *Prema* has its own *dharma*. Selfless love asks for nothing, it gives away everything. Love is Sacrifice, Bharata, Love is Sacrifice. Ask your brother, what he wants. In his happiness lies yours. **(A telugu Poem)**

Bharata: Maharaj, I express my deep sense of gratitude to you for lifting the veil of selfishness that blinded my eyes. Forgive me Ramachandra, never once did I ask you what you wanted. Your wish is my command. Please bless me with your guidance and grace.

Rama: Rama surrenders to your devotion. None can match the depth and intensity of your love. Rama promises that He will rule over the kingdom. But, in His physical absence, Bharata will be the guardian of the empire.

(Rama loosens his sandals and gives to Bharata which he reverentially accepts and places on his head. "Bantoo rithi...." in the background)

Lights Off

The sublime and touching story of the two divine brothers opens a new chapter in the lives of the two rustic brothers – Ramaiah and Lakshmaiah (Two seconds gap)

This and similar such insights bring Anand close to the people of Ramanathapuram. Anand has found a place in the hearts of the residents. He now has a task to rebuild and rejuvenate the poor village. He has to bring them out of their inertia and make them participate in a village-building activity. This will not only require a Herculean effort but also bountiful grace of the Lord.

(Pyar Hun Main video begins...the video shows how the villagers worked together with great joy and enthusiasm under the leadership of Anand and transformed its landscape from brown to lush green in a few days. But more importantly, the unity among them is heartening)

Lights remain off

Anand's effort has paid off. Within a few years, Ramanathapuram has turned into a model village. The village has a school, primary healthcare facility, and all the basic material requirements for every resident. Everybody is involved in productive activity. Anand has done it! Accolades and praise are showered on Anand. But the real test of gold comes when it is put in fire. (2 seconds gap)

A sudden quirk of fate has brought complete misery to the people of Ramnathpuram and the villages around.

(Flicker Lights in spurts) (Video Begins)

A cloudburst has resulted in ceaseless rain over seven continuous days. The consequent fury of floods in the river has completely devastated the agricultural fields, has washed away the cattle and destroyed the houses. Even as people struggle to find a morsel of food, epidemics are on the rage. (Video Ends)

For Anand, it is a test of faith. He has put every penny of his into salvaging the people from starvation and death, and in the process, has become a pauper. But, how long can he sustain his beloved villagers, and more importantly himself in his struggle?

Lights on (dim)

Scene 4 - Crisis Begins

Anand: There you are, Ibrahim kaka! Please go along with Chowdary garu; Srirampur has received some food supplies and we must rush there to bring something here.

Ibrahim: I cannot, Anand. I need to take care of whatever is left.

Anand: Where are your sons, Ismail and Anwar? Can't they do it?

Ibrahim: Parents are a big burden to carry around, Anand babu. They have left. I hope, they have a better life in a better place!

Anand: You mean to say they deserted you!?

Ibrahim: In the face of crisis, you are on your own, son; all values become insignificant.

[Thunder... and Flicker] Chowdary and Ibrahim proceed; some gunny bags are being taken under the watchful eyes of Anthony to his house and Anand notices it]

[Joseph comes to Anthony who lives across the street]

Joseph: Anthony brother! I am in dire need. Could you spare some of the food you have?

Anthony: I have very little for myself. I am sorry.

Joseph: Even a morsel will do.

Anthony: I have nothing, ask someone else Joseph. I am not the only person in the village.

[Anand is watching all this]

Anand: Uncle, did you say you have nothing? I noticed sacks carried into your house. I reckon that is enough for you and your family for at least a month. His condition is desperate.

Anthony: Look here Mr. Anand, that rice belongs to me. Who are you to interfere in our affairs? What do you know? I have lived in this village much before you came. You are a novice and you talk about values. If you want, you can help him.

(Thunder and Flicker)

Anand: Krishna, Where were you? The village needs us.

Krishna: Srinath is missing. Anand, I don't know where to find him.

Anand: What!

Krishna: Somebody told me that they saw him last about twelve hours back near the temple. We have searched every inch of the surroundings but he ...

Anand: Don't worry Krishna, Swami is there. Nothing will happen to him. We'll complete the work here and then I'll join you in searching for your...

Krishna: Anand, my brother is more important to me right now. My parents had left him in my custody. Nothing else matters. I gave my life for this village and what did I get in return. I am sorry I won't be able to support you any more. You are on your own, Anand.

Anand: Krishna! Krishna!

(Thunder and Flicker)

Lights off

The tempest has devastated the village but that is only half the problem. The old instincts have come back to haunt the people of Ramanathapuram. Anand is crestfallen with the sudden disappearance of values. His close compatriot has left him high and dry. All his efforts in the village have come to a nought, and now, he stands at crossroads. Will he be able to survive this crisis?

Lights on (dim)

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

A DREAMY NEW BEGINNING IN NEW ZEALAND

...the love of Sai comes to the refuge of the Bhutanese refugees

No one wanted them, neither the country of their origin nor the land to which they had given their sweat and blood for years. More than a lakh of such Bhutanese refugees have lived a miserable existence in the north-east of Nepal for nearly two decades now. But now, when there was an opportunity to end this desperate situation of at least a few of them, the Sai devotees in New Zealand grabbed this opportunity and opened their hearts out to embrace them in the love of Sai. This is one heart warming account which demonstrates how through little acts of kindness and genuine love we can make a profound and powerful impact in the lives of our brethren, no matter who they are or where they come from.

It is a country which is often referred to as one which is "scarcely touched by the modern age." Progress, in this nation, is not measured by Gross National Product, but by Gross National Happiness. The people of this land take great measures to preserve their old culture, rich traditions, and more importantly, their literally 'top of the world' natural environment. Yes, this tiny landlocked nation is perched right on the roof of the world. Nestled in the eastern Himalayas, Bhutan is one of those rare countries of this world where people live in great harmony with nature and where the environment is still pristine even today. In fact, the country has been identified as one of the 10 bio-diversity hot-spots in this world. But what is more interesting is the fact that it was rated as the happiest country in Asia by *Business Week* in 2006.

Yes, the majority of Bhutanese are pleased and proud of their country, and the way their land is governed, even though only in the previous year, in 2008, this nation moved from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. But, at the same time, this is not the story of every Bhutanese. At least one-sixth of the population of this mountainous nation lead a precarious existence in refugee camps, all from the ethnic Nepalese group.

A large number of them are actually descendants of Nepali settlers (Nepal is a neighbouring country) who came to work in the southern valleys of Bhutan in the late 19th and early 20th century. They are referred to as *Lhotshampas* (literally translated as "people from the south"), and in many ways are different from the indigenous population. They speak Nepali, while Dzongkha is the country's national language; most Nepalese are Hindus, while Buddhism is the state religion, which is followed by two-thirds of its population. But at the same time, they constitute almost 35% of the population of Bhutan and for generations had a 'perfect life' in this peaceful kingdom working as farmers. In fact, the government encouraged the integration of this significant group into mainstream Bhutanese society in many ways, from teaching in Nepali in the schools of the southern Bhutan, to inter-ethnic group marriages. But after 1980, the attitude of the Bhutan rulers changed for various reasons and the

government started a series of “ethno-nationalist” policies in the 1990s. Since then hundreds of thousands of Nepalese-Bhutanese have become stateless and have been living in seven refugee camps in South-eastern Nepal.

The United Nations Commission for Refugees stepped in to help these homeless people and began discussions with the Bhutanese and Nepalese governments to provide the exiled people a home in either country, but met with little success. However, in 2006, the US government generously offered to resettle more than 60,000 of these refugees over the next five years. Many other countries too joined in this noble endeavour, one of them being the island country of New Zealand. And so, in March 2008, 17 families, after 17 years of miserable existence in refugee camps, moved to the USA and New Zealand. And that is where our story proper begins...

Project SAIRAM Launched

The Sai devotees in New Zealand saw this as a great opportunity to reach out and share their love with these new comers to their land. Therefore, when the first group arrived in March 2008 from Nepal, they immediately called a meeting of all the forty refugees and launched a programme they called SAIRAM (Service Action Initiatives for Refugees, Asylum-seekers & Migrants). What started as an enthusiastic initiative of two Sai devotees has today snowballed into an elaborate project involving all the Sai centres in the Auckland region of New Zealand.

“We have had 129 Bhutanese comprising of 26 families and spread over four groups arrive since this that first meeting in March 2008. The sheer love and joy that has resulted in this new relationship is undoubtedly the Divine Grace of Bhagavan Baba,” says Mr. Ravi Rudra, one of the main coordinators of this initiative. He adds, “None of our planning, vision, or organisation can explain the wonderful manner in which this programme has unfolded. Actually, we did not have any great strategies, except a preparedness to respond to an opportunity and follow our hearts.”

The Sai devotees truly followed their hearts to the full. They maintained close communication with the Immigration Officials at the Refugee Hostel, and within 48 hours (to allow time for recovery from jet lag and formal interviews by local authorities) they met all the new arrivals, and assured them that the Sai Family will be their family, and the Sai devotees are their brothers and sisters who are available to assist them in any way during their stay at the Hostel.

Most of the Bhutanese, after landing in a completely foreign land, were not only terribly homesick, and but also had come ill-prepared for the colder weather of New Zealand, especially during the winter months. What was more difficult to literally digest for them was the alien food offered at the Refugee Hostel. In fact, many did not eat the food served even on their flight to New Zealand; it was so different from what they had been eating for decades. All these elements of culture shock contributed to their initial feeling of awkwardness and unhappiness.

The Sai devotees were determined to make them feel good, and so, arranged for them a variety of programmes. They started with distributing warm clothing and offering them Indian and Nepali cuisine and went on to conduct long weekend sessions which consisted of devotional singing, Nepali dancing, temple visits, fun games and sports, music and inspiring movie shows, to get-togethers on the beach.

"I can never forget the picnic we had on the sands with a group of 40 or so," says Mr. Mike Naiker of Auckland. "One older lady of 65 years saw the ocean for the first time in her life; the youth who were crossing the bridge found it such a novel experience that they were spellbound. There are many things that we take for granted here in New Zealand, but seeing through their eyes we realised how such tiny acts of kindness made a remarkable difference in their attitude. Their outlook of life, in spite of their problems, was a great lesson to the rest of us who are leading a reasonably comfortable life."

Eager to make these much-suffering families feel at home in the new land, some Sai families opened their homes wholeheartedly to entertain the Bhutanese, not just for individual families but for the entire group. Narrating this joyful experience, one family in Auckland says,

Seva, Learning In Itself

"We believe that Swami had given us this opportunity to be part of this wonderful sharing experience; it is such an enriching and uplifting feeling. In spite of formidable life challenges, both in Nepal and Bhutan, and all their suffering, they do not bear any grudges or feel sorry for themselves. Instead, their faces glowed with happiness for not what they had lost or left behind, but what they have gained. Their family spirit is strong and each one is totally supportive of each other. This was wonderful to observe, and for all of us, it was a learning experience of love and compassion."

The open-arms welcome of Sai devotees not only gave the refugees the much needed emotional and physical support, but also instilled in them courage and self-confidence. What also helped this process was the fact that many of the Sai centre group members were themselves migrants to New Zealand. When they shared their own stories and offered practical suggestions, the 'New' New Zealanders seemed convinced and secure.

Krishna Samy, a Sai devotee involved in this project, says, "To me, it was an eye-opener to know how hard the lives of these Bhutanese had been as refugees, not for a few days or months, but for years together."

Life, for these Bhutanese, truly had been a struggle for at least 17 years. For instance, when a family of nine was asked how many rooms they had in their hut back in Nepal, they replied with a smile, "Only one! We just have make-shift partitions - curtains suspended with string for living and domestic areas."

Another 22 year old teenager said that she went to university only to sit in the exams as she had to work to pay for her studies. She prepared for her exams

by borrowing the notes of her friends. The families received only a small allowance of food on a weekly basis with a ration of one litre of kerosene a month, which they used only to provide light for studies.

"Given what they have undergone for so many years, they valued every aspect of any help we offered them and they accepted it with sincere gratitude," continues Krishna Samy. "Swami always asks us to 'understand and adjust', and that is what we did. For me, personally, whatever time I have spent with them in different groups has given me joy and self-satisfaction as I realised just how many needs these people have!"

One of the refugees, Tara Ghimirey, overwhelmed with the love showered on her, says, "People here are so polite, generous, helpful, cooperative and patient...there is no discrimination of any kind, be it colour, culture, religion, etc."

Music and Sai: That's the Bond They Share

While the refugees were moved by the love of the Sai New Zealanders, the devotees too were fascinated by their new companions' multi-faceted abilities and talents. Mr. David Wilson, a Sai devotee from Auckland who participated in this programme, says,

"What impressed me the most was their faith and trust in us which was very strong. Besides, the young men had beautiful voices, and some could play the guitar very well. I loved mingling with them and felt so much harmony singing songs and *bhajans* together with them.

"In fact, I had a spare guitar and was happy to give it to the young Bhutanese brothers so that they have an instrument to keep them singing once they are resettled in proper homes further down the country.

"The other day, I remember, a new group of Bhutanese arrived. I had actually not met any of them, but one evening I was walking my dog near the top of Mt. Eden - a well known Auckland city landmark and tourist site - when I noticed a group of people who looked very different culturally.

"One of the gentlemen from that group asked me a question about our local trees; he seemed educated, and I guessed he must have been a teacher. After listening to him and observing his features, I was convinced he was a Bhutanese. I asked him if he was from Bhutan and he was extremely surprised that I had guessed his country. Then, I folded my palms and said "Sai Ram", and a big smile came over his face. Soon, we were talking like friends. I welcomed them to our country and some of them even gave me a hug as if I was their brother. They were so happy to have been recognized so quickly by a complete stranger in a new and foreign land. The name 'Sai Ram' united us. We are just one big family."

It is with this feeling of oneness that the Sai Volunteers went ahead to make the lives of their new brothers and sisters as comfortable as possible. As

starters, they provided every family a “Starter Pack”, based on each family's specific needs (depending on the age, gender and size of each family member). These suitcases contained:

- Toiletries (tooth brushes, tooth paste, soap, shampoo & shaving set)
- New towels (bath & hand)
- Laundry items (washing powder, laundry soap, pegs)
- Bed sheets and pillow cases (single & double)
- Disposable nappies (for babies)
- New clothes, socks & stockings

In addition to these packs, there were other gifts like school bags, shoes, saris, and guitars too. All these were packed neatly by the Sai devotees and offered to them lovingly. Recalling that experience, Ms. Yogi Moodley, says, “The feeling of love, warmth and fellowship amongst our ladies group when we were packing the starter packs, sorting through the clothes or helping to serve them meals is something I will cherish forever. I feel so privileged to have participated in this wonderful service initiative.”

Thanks to the love of the devotees and their survival skills coupled with family values, within a few days the Bhutanese earned the affection of not only the Refugee Hostel Staff, but also of other fellow refugees belonging to other ethnicities. Together they sang and danced; a beautiful feeling of unity pervaded the Hostel.

Now, this was true not only of the Bhutanese, but also of members of the Sai Centres. This service activity provided a beautiful reason to bring so many devotees together continuously, who would otherwise meet only once in a while. Even smaller Centres and Sai groups in Auckland, Palmerston North and Christchurch, rose to the occasion and took a far greater and active role so that entire Sai families could be involved in this project. The sheer happiness and flow of love was simply touching.

After the initial six weeks in the Refugee Hostel in Auckland, the Bhutanese were scheduled to be taken to Christchurch and Palmerston North by the New Zealand government. Therefore, the devotees organized a farewell function on the last Sunday of their stay in Auckland, and that occasion was an emotional one for everyone who was present. Tears began to flow from the eyes of the newcomers – they had to say goodbye twice in just a few weeks, first in Nepal and now in Auckland. At the same time, they were happy too, for they had now found a country which loves them and which they can call now as their own. In fact, there was one young woman, who was very upset when she initially arrived in New Zealand. She had expected to see her eldest sister along with her children, whom she had cared for a lot in Nepal. She imagined them to be in New Zealand, but they had actually migrated to the USA. This was the cause for her deep sorrow for many days, but she too soon came out of it. During the last few days in Auckland, when everyone saw her smiling and carrying around small children of other ethnicities in the Refugee Hostel, they could not contain their joy. Their stay in Auckland had truly converted the Bhutanese refugees into new and happy New Zealanders.

Resettlement in Their New Homes

The second and final stage in the resettlement of the Bhutanese refugees, after the initial orientation stay in the Refugee Hostel in Auckland, was moving to their new homes.

The New Zealand government greatly assisted these families by providing them residences in Christchurch, in South Island, and Palmerston North, a smaller town in the North Island. The government made available these houses despite the scarcity of accommodation in the housing market, and having to cater to large family numbers, as much as 9 in some cases. The Sai devotees stepped in again to help. This time, many kind New Zealanders from the community too came forward to serve as volunteers and take care of every need of the new citizens. The devotees and volunteers quickly furnished their new homes with beds, sofas, dining table and chairs, curtains, pillows, TV, DVD, kitchen utensils, and so on. The churches too provided assistance in many ways.

Actually, after the Bhutanese arrived in these towns, the volunteers picked them up from the airports and drove them straight to their fully furnished houses. The Bhutanese were now completely overwhelmed! Having undergone decades of ostracism from society, they had never expected so much love in their wildest of dreams. They could not believe that they were amidst such comforts, when just six weeks ago they were living in penury and sleeping in temporary huts in Nepal.

But the devotees did not stop with this. They continued to assist them by taking them to the shopping markets, hosting them in their homes for meals, showing them the bus routes, and so on. In all these activities, Sai volunteers were also helped by the Bhutanese people who had settled down earlier and were now guiding the new comers with great enthusiasm.

"Till now we have assisted with the resettlement of 33 Bhutanese refugees from 8 families in Christchurch," says Mr. Micheal Spurr, the Chairman of the Christchurch Sai Centre. "We have distributed clothes and many household necessities through the official channels (Refugee Services) as well as personally. In fact, seven families have been regularly picked up by Christchurch Sai devotees for *Bhajans* on Thursdays, and about eight families of devotees (maybe 20 or 30 people) from the Christchurch centre have been involved in helping in one way or other. Four individual members of the Christchurch Sai Youth group have interestingly signed up as official volunteers with Refugee Services, and are busy regularly helping the refugee families. For me, this small service project has been an extremely rewarding experience and I have thoroughly enjoyed being able to assist them in whatever way possible."

One of the Bhutanese-turned-New Zealander, Mr. Padam Lal Bastola, from Palmerston North says, "This country, New Zealand, is such a good place to be. I find the people here always very helpful and courageous. They love to extend their hand and help others in every situation."

Educated, Employed and Empowered

Happy to be in New Zealand, the Bhutanese are now building their lives. The majority of the adults now attend English and Computer Skills, while the children attend good schools.

Kriti Das, one of the New Zealand Sai Youth, who has been helping these kids, says, "I have been part of the tutoring classes for the Bhutanese children this year and I have really enjoyed my time. These children are beautiful and smart. They are great with English and other subjects at school considering that it is their second or sometimes third language. I have benefited by talking to them and learning about their culture, background, challenges and values. Another beautiful gain for the children as well as for us, the helpers, is the gift of friendship. I would love to be part of this service project as long as I can".

While the children get special coaching, many families have been given computers and internet connection for a year by a special government grant to help them learn new skills faster. For many young women, nursing is the chosen area of profession and they have begun to take the relevant courses. For New Zealand, this is a great plus as the country needs to fill a lot of vacancies in their healthcare system at the earliest. These maybe the general professions taken up by the new citizens, but they are also a few others who plan to study accountancy, aviation and similar other professional courses. Undoubtedly, a new and bright chapter of their lives has just begun.

A very happy Ms. Anu Koirala from Palmerston North, says, "I have been in New Zealand for six months and have found it peaceful; the people here are so friendly. I only expect that the future of all refugees is same as all of us here."

Recently the Bhutanese community took part in community events and celebrated many festivals like Dassara and Deepavali along with others. Their talent for singing and dancing is something which is looked forward to by everyone around; they spread joy very easily. And they are always grateful to the members of the Sai family. Karna Bahadur, from Palmerston North, says, "They call this country New Zealand, but I call it 'New Silent' as it so peaceful. We have progressed a lot by walking in the direction shown by the Sai Family".

Tell this to any Sai volunteer, and he or she will say, "This is not only 'New Silent' but also New 'Sailand'." In fact, that is how Bhagavan Baba referred to this country on one occasion. And as years roll by we see the love of Sai manifesting in so many silent but eloquent ways. The Bhutanese story is only one instance, and an example enough to show the depth of Sai love that is embedded in the hearts of the devotees of this land located miles away from Prashanthi Nilayam and the way it expresses itself in manifold ways in the manner advocated by Bhagavan Baba.

We are grateful to Mr. Ravi Rudra for sharing with us this story and the visuals.

PRASHANTI DIARY

December 17, 2008 – Swami's Visit to the Tennis Courts and Programme by Chattisgarh and MP Sai Youth

Swami has always stressed on the need to combine the power of the youth with the wisdom and experience of the elders. His idea is the harmonious mingling of the two to usher in the "Golden Age" of dynamism and values. He has constantly wanted the young staff and the elders in the Ashram to work more cohesively for the benefit of all the devotees. To seek more guidance from Him, all the former students of His University, who are currently working in His Trust in Prashanti Nilayam, had assembled in the Bhajan Hall by 3.30 p.m. In the meanwhile, the youth from Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh too were ready with a music-cum-drama-cum-dance programme to be presented before Swami. The stage and backdrops were set.

While this was the scene in Sai Kulwant Hall, there was another group of youth – the current students of His University - waiting for Him in the Indoor stadium, ready to receive Him in their sports gear. Swami had promised to visit the stadium that evening to watch their matches conducted as part of the annual Sports and Cultural Meet.

Thus, any person with the knowledge of these likely events would have wondered how Swami was going to be present for all the three. But, actually, there was hardly anybody who was aware of this entire multifarious scenario. And how the Lord satisfied everyone that day is really beautiful. This is how that evening unfolded:

It was about 4:10 p.m. as Swami arrived for *darshan*. He came in the car and immediately took the "right" turn after the Yajur Mandir clearly showing indications that He was visiting someplace outside the ashram premises. As the devotees swarmed out of the Sai Kulwant Hall to catch one glimpse of Him, all the students seemed focussed in heading towards the indoor stadium. And this swift movement was not missed by the devotees; soon enough there was a huge gathering at the gates of the indoor stadium. Swami moved to the Vidyagiri Stadium via the General hospital and the Primary school premises. Seeing a solitary squad of marching students at the stadium, Swami arrived at the entrance of the Indoor Stadium. He moved straight to the brand new tennis courts which would be blessed with their inauguration very soon, in just a few minutes!

Using the lift, Swami moved up to the upper galleries and then the players took their positions. As soon as Swami came to the balcony, everyone cheered and Swami raised both His hands and looked as if He was blushing at the rapturous welcome! And then the game began. As always, Swami was watching intensely as the Sun shone brightly above Him. Soon a huge multi-coloured umbrella was placed and seeing the boy holding it, Swami smiled. The game was slow and, at times, amateurish and soon Swami commented, "They should not hit the ball straight; they should hit it cross and out of reach."

The physical trainer wanted to explain; he said, "Swami, they are not yet used to the new court. They will soon improve." Swami immediately said, "See, the game of tennis has nothing to do with old courts and new courts. They have to learn to play better." Everyone around laughed and Swami too joined in the laughter. Sitting there, Swami's eyes also fell upon some buildings at the distance and He asked, "Whose are those structures?" No one knew exactly and the question just passed. After about 5-7 minutes of watching the game, Swami decided to leave. Trays of chocolates were brought up to Him and He threw them to the eager beavers waiting down! Once that was done, Swami moved back to the lift and descended.

He then vended His way to the courts inside the Indoor Stadium where the basketball and volleyball teams had gathered. Alighting from the car, Swami sat amidst a joyous sea of students and told the players to begin their game. A thunderous chanting of the Sai Gayathri began and the entire stadium joined in, and what a feeling it was! The divine wafting feeling was overpowering. Swami seemed thrilled, and so too was everyone in the stadium. Those chants have that power and austerity which make them apt for any occasion, for which occasion is not enhanced by the thrill of the heart? So, after the prayer, the game began. The 5-6 minutes that Swami witnessed saw an intense battle between the two sides. Seven baskets were scored in all - 4/3 being the score. While watching, Swami said, "When they play, all should not keep running from this side to that. They should spread out and pass." The students made frequent changes in the team composition so that every player gets a few minutes of play in the Divine presence. That play drove home a very important lesson. None of the boys were focussed on the actual game; everyone was trying to ensure that everyone else gets a chance to play in His presence. When the focus is on ensuring that all are happy - *Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavanthu* - the "game" automatically gets exciting and fantastic. Seven baskets in 5 minutes was really something wonderful and that also included two 3 pointers!

Now His attention turned to the volleyball court. It was getting a bit late considering the fact that two more programmes awaited Him in Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami spent a little time and saw a few serves and volleys, and then blessing the boys, started moving towards the Mandir. It is a fascinating scene to see the devotees throng around His car. If the Sai Kulwant Hall is packed with devotees waiting for Him, how is it that there are so many on the road too? Well, wherever the Lord is, there devotees have to be!

Swami reached the Sai Kulwant Hall and drove straight towards the main portico. Alighting from the car, He entered the Bhajan Hall and keenly looked at every single ex-student. And then He accepted the letter that was offered to Him and saw through it keenly for a minute. After this, He looked at one of them and said, "Actually, I did not plan to come..." But seeing all of his young staff seated there, the kind Lord had condescended to come and spend a few minutes. Swami, then, spent another five minutes talking about the games He had just witnessed in the Indoor Stadium, and then moved towards the centre stage of the Sai Kulwant Hall. Once there, He asked the Veda chanting to a stop and asked for the programme to begin.

The first fifteen minutes was the traditional Karma dance from the state of Chhattisgarh. The youth made the displays with cymbals, small sticks and long sticks with attached wooden cymbals. After its conclusion, began a Hindi adaptation of a play Swami had composed as a "child"- 'Cheppinattu Chestara' (Do you do as you say?). It is a delight to read this simple story.

The scene opens, revealing a lady reading out the Bhagavatha (an epic that narrates the story of Lord Vishnu and His devotees) to a number of other women, and explaining the meaning of the slokas (hymns). She says that it is the duty of the housewife to give charity to the deserving, the unfortunate ones who cannot earn by the sweat of their brow, and not to pretenders who lead idle, parasitic lives. The women disperse sometime later, and the lady is left alone with her little son, who has all along been an interested listener.

Presently, a blind beggar comes and makes much fuss to attract attention but he is rebuked and sent away. Then, there comes along a hefty mendicant with a pompous paunch and a polished copper vessel filled with grain and a richly caparisoned Tambura (a stringed musical instrument), and the mother respectfully welcomes him and offers him rice and coins, and falls at his feet asking for his blessings. The son is nonplussed; he asks the mother why she had not followed what she had herself preached a few minutes ago, and he is dismissed with the curt answer, "Cheppinattu Chesthara? Can we act as we say?" The mother is irritated by the impertinence of the son who dared question the behaviour of grown-ups. She drags the boy to the office room where the father, an Upper Division Clerk in some Office, is busy with the files.

He gives the son a long lecture on the value of education and how people should study and get educated whatever may be the difficulties. Suddenly, a schoolboy pops in and asks for some money to pay his fees, for otherwise his name will be struck off the rolls. The father says that he has no money with him and shows the boy his empty wallet as proof. A few minutes later, a batch of young men, all clerks belonging to his office, thrust themselves in and hold out a subscription appeal calling for contributions for a 'Welcome Dinner' in honour of an officer, taking charge of their office in a few days! The father is very jubilant at the idea, says that it must be done very grandly so that the new man may be pleased and also offers to make a speech. He then pulls out the drawer of the table and gives them a substantial amount.

The child looks aghast at this behaviour and asks the father why he went against his own words; why did he utter a lie to the schoolboy? The father turns angrily at the child and asks, "Cheppinattu Chesthara? Need deeds follow words?" He roars at the child and commands him to go to school immediately.

The scene then shifts to the school. Sathya, that is to say 'Krishna' of the drama, enters the school. The teacher is in a storm of excitement because the Inspector of Schools is to visit the school the next day. He coaches the children intensively for the occasion. He tells them that the Inspector may ask, "How many lessons have been completed?" And they were all to say, not "23"

the actual number, but, "32". He says that he will do, when Inspector comes, lesson number 33, on "Harishchandra," the legendary king who sacrifices everything to uphold truth. So, he teaches them that lesson so that the answers may come quick and fast the next day; he threatens them with severe punishment if anyone so much as whispers that lesson number 33 was already done in class. "It must all appear as if I am doing it for the first time tomorrow," he says, and continues with the teaching of King Harishchandra's sacrifices for the sake of remaining true to his word that he had given to Sage Viswamitra. When the class is over, all other boys move out, but Krishna alone remains behind; he asks the teacher the question he has already asked twice that day; "Why do you not follow the advice you give?" and he gets the same rebuff, "Cheppinattu Chesthara? Do you mean to say that the adviser should follow the advice?" Hypocrisy, and hypocrisy, everywhere!

The scene now shifts to Krishna's home. Next day at school-time, the boy refuses to go. He throws away his books saying that going to school is a waste of time. The distracted parents send for the teacher, who comes rushing in. Then, Krishna says, "If all that you teach, as mother, father and Guru is only to be spoken and written, if all that is learnt is to be discarded when it comes to action, I do not understand why I should learn anything at all." This opens the eyes of all three and they praise the boy as their "Guru," and decide thereafter to speak the Truth and live by the Truth.

Swami was very involved in the drama. Though the sets and backgrounds were simple and neat, the play was presented very powerfully. It concluded with a very soulful song which had, as a part of it, the Telugu portion of the famous song, "Humko Tumse Pyaar Kitna". A few eyes moistened at the emotion, and Swami seemed so very pleased. As the final formation came into position, the next programme began.

There were three songs sung by Mr. Abhas Joshi, a former Bal Vikas student and a top three finalist of a singing competition on national television. The songs were presented wonderfully. The first one was, "Baba, Main Aayaa Dwaar Tumhaare". It was a lovely melody coupled with sheer power of his voice. The second song was a poetry stating, "After seeing the joy of chanting His name with Love in *Fakiri*, I see no joy in riches!" The third song was the popular, "Satyam Shivam Sundaram". As He completed, Swami blessed *prasadam* to be distributed. He was all smiles as He raised both His hands in joyous benediction, and then promised, "I will give you photos tomorrow!" Bestowing another final blessing as He went into the car, Swami retired for the day.

December 18, 2008 – Special Blessings to MP and Chattishgarh Sai Youth

As Swami moved towards Yajur Mandir on the evening of December 17, 2008, He said, not once but almost 5 times, to the Sai Youth of MP and Chattisgarh, "I will give photos tomorrow." It is said that every word the Lord

speaks itself is Truth. In the evening of December 18, at about 5 p.m., Swami came out in the chair.

As He moved through the ladies side, and then through the students, He seemed so full of love and energy. The Lord is pure reaction, reflection and resound. If the devotee exhibits great excitement and anticipation to meet Him, He too mirrors those feelings. There was a huge block of blue-scarved Sai Youth from MP and Chhattisgarh waiting in great eagerness as that was their last *darshan* as a group. Swami halted in front of them and spoke to their group leader, and then, all of a sudden, made a decision. He decided to move through the youth and bless them.

The young adults' joy knew no bounds as they tried in haste to make a clear path for Swami to move through. They were seated so tightly and their longing to touch Him was so intense that Swami resembled a little saffron boat on a rough blue sea! Swami moved through them very lovingly and everyone eagerly fell at His lotus feet for their life-time opportunity. Swami had only smiles and His hands went up often in blessings. Swami, very often has said, "This body is not mine; it is yours. It has come for you and will work for you. It is up to you to take care of it." Therefore, no matter what happens to His body, the beautiful smile ever dances on His effulgent face. His life is the gift for entire mankind, and His body is there to only give us joy and allow us to love Him in a manner that is easily understandable for us. But at the same time, it is our duty to take care of it too.

Wading through them, Swami went about collecting letters and speaking to a few, here and there. At one point, He waved His hand and materialised Vibhuti. He then distributed that to at least 10 youth. There was little space to move, but Swami surely wanted to take that path through the eager Sai youth. And thus, it was such a marvelous sight of the Lord and His young devotees relishing His love and benediction. Every face was beaming with the joy of seeing Him and touching Him, and at the same time of being seen and 'touched' by Him. Having completed that, when all assumed that Swami would proceed to complete the regular *darshan* round, Swami called the head of the Youth and told him to gather all the participants of the previous evening's drama. He said He would give them the promised group photos! There was a surge of thrill that swept through all the blue scarves.

In the meanwhile, Swami interacted with the previous day's singer - Abhas. He spoke to him and his brother, and then materialised Vibhuti for them. He also applied Vibhuti to the singer's throat and there were smiles everywhere. It is no surprise that Swami seems to have a special corner in His heart for the singers. If they have pure feelings, they sprout Love for God in many hearts. There have been a few instances where Swami has materialised honey and used it as an ink to write on people's tongues. Those people fill devotion in millions of hearts even today with their honeyed voices. Being blessed with the "honeying" touch, Abhas seemed to be in "ninth heaven"!

Once the participants had been separated, they moved to another secluded area in the centre of the Sai Kulwant Hall, and there began their unforgettable

photo session with Swami. The Lord sat sweetly amidst the participants and told all of them to look towards the camera. After the men, Swami called Abhas and gifted him with a personal picture. Then Swami told the photographer there that if the gents moved, the ladies too could sit arrayed around Him in the same place. According to that wish, soon in the same place were the ladies. They were obviously overjoyed. Swami then moved through the students into the interview room.

He came out soon with clothes for the two protagonists of the drama. Gifting them the clothes, He added to their joy by giving them prints of the photos taken minutes before! With the Lord, when it rains, it showers! Moving to the Bhajan Hall where the *bhajans* were going on, Swami went down the aisle in His chair and gave sarees to a lady and to three of the *bhajan* singers to give them as gifts of Love to their mothers. After *bhajans*, He received *aarathi* at 6 p.m.

December 21, 2008 – “Sai Jyothi” Drama by Srikakulam Bal Vikas Children

The winter arrived in Puttaparthi in December and though it seemed hidden in the afternoon Sun, it spread its tentacles through the night, lasting well into the middle of the day. And even in this winter, devotees thronged to the serene abode of peace to receive His warmth! The devotees from the north eastern corner of Andhra Pradesh, Srikakulam, filled Prashanti Nilayam seeking His Love and Grace on December 20-21. Swami had graciously permitted them to put up a programme in His divine presence on the 21st and they were well prepared and waiting for Him by 3:30 p.m.

It was almost 5:40 p.m. when Swami arrived for *darshan*. Since a programme had been scheduled, no *bhajans* had begun, and Swami was welcomed with the traditional Veda chanting. As He neared the centre area, He was engrossed looking at the backdrop and the children holding flags and banners. After moving across the centre of the Hall, Swami took a detour along the lines of the devotees from Srikakulam and moved towards the stage. He arrived on the dais and surprised everyone by taking a round of the veranda before arriving again on the stage. This time, He asked for the chanting to cease and the programme to begin immediately.

It began with the district president's address. He profusely thanked Swami for all the love, guidance and grace, and detailed the various activities that had been carried out with His grace. Swami seemed touched, and that showed in the way He blessed the speaker at the end of his talk. Then, a row of devotees approached Bhagavan, and each of them offered a rose and sought His blessings. Swami patiently and lovingly blessed all of them. They also brought a huge wooden model of a Mandir which Swami blessed. After this, Swami lit the lamp to mark the beginning of their programme.

A little girl now went up to Swami and in her hands was a bowl of holy grains. Swami smiled and showered that holy rice on her. Soon, a few children in

costumes also moved up to Him and after their offerings, the programme began.

It was entitled, "Sai Jyoti" and sought to highlight the way in which the "light of Love" of Swami was spreading in all the villages through the "progress of the children", that is what literally and truly is "Bal Vikas". The drama began with the celestial sage Narada requesting Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati, considered as the parents of the world, to descend to the earth to save mankind. Shiva then tells him not to worry as children on earth are already working towards the redemption of mankind by the virtue of values and valuing all virtues! The scene then shifts to the earth.

The father of the protagonist is falsely accused of being a cheat by the village landlord. The son stands by his father steadfastly and exhibits exemplary devotion towards him. He has a huge influence among the other children of the village as he always guides and advises them whenever there is a need. Quoting the inspiring example of Alluri Sitaramamraju for self-confidence and that of Lord Sri Rama for universal love, the young boy brings about a transformation in the hearts of all the elders as to how one must lead one's life. Few instances from Swami's childhood are also brought alive, especially the one in which Lord Hanuman, in the form of a huge monkey, comes to Puttaparthi and prevents little Sathya from circumambulating the Hanuman temple. The drama is interspersed with colourful dances, and a simple devotional song marks the crescendo.

As the performance neared its end, all the children came together for the final formation, and Swami was all smiles. He had sarees distributed for the girls and white safari cloth pieces to the boys. Once that was done, He blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all. Adding to their joy, Swami finally said that He would be coming down! All the children clustered around Him and a wonderful moment was captured for all of them to admire and relish. Swami blessed them again after the group photo session and then returned to the stage. As He sat there, He raised both His hands in loving benediction. Soon the camphor was waved and Swami retired for the day.

December 24, 2008 – Christmas Eve at Prasanthi Nilayam

Christmas or Yuletide or Noel or Christ's Mass brings to mind images of snow and snowmen, candles and candies, Santa Claus and his sprinting reindeer, Christ and the Holy Cross. The night before, celebrated as Christmas Eve, is that holy night when Jesus, the son of God, was supposed to have taken birth. And in Prashanti Nilayam, it is the holy night which is blessed by the Father of Christ!

At about 4:15 p.m., Swami arrived into the "decked with holly" Sai Kulwant Hall. A mention must be made about the elaborate decorations. Sai Kulwant Hall didn't seem as a place in South India. Huge clothspreads with Virgin Mary and her babe boy hung from different parts of the hall. Beautiful paintings adorned the Mandir premises and there were lovely blue lights draping the pillars along with decorative cloths. Tiny bells, ornamental trinkets and other

Xmas decorations made the whole atmosphere festive and holy. How the entire decorations came about is a lovely story in itself which we plan to carry soon as a separate story.

That evening the large number of participants for the choir sat neatly arranged in rows in their respective places. This choir too has a wonderful story of its own and you can find that at: http://sssbpt.org/Pages/Prasanthi_Nilayam/SingingforSai.html

Swami observed the beautifully decorated Christmas tree as soon as He came out. Moving through the hundreds of Christian and Jewish ladies who had assembled for the occasion Swami blessed them all. A huge area in the centre of the Sai Kulwant Hall had been occupied by the members of the choir. They bowed down to Swami and were flashing smiles of glee and joy. Passing through them, Swami blessed all of them. He took a complete darshan round and blessed the boys holding trays as He neared them. He then accepted two letters and a card from the students, and those happened to be the only offerings received by Him that day during darshan rounds.

Swami then moved on to the stage and lit the three huge candles that had been specially placed there. That was followed by a round of applause, and then Swami asked for the choir to begin. Christmas Eve in Prasanthi Nilayam is distinctive over the years with a unique choir comprising representation from many countries singing His glory together in His immediate Divine Presence. The overseas choir has been a part of the Christmas celebrations for over a decade now. This unique choir for this year had over 400 voices singing a spirited collection of songs which were based on different cultures from around the world.

Swami gave His blessings and the graceful conductor waved her finger-baton in the air, giving the clue to over 400 vocal cords to start the performance. The result was three resounding Omkars and another wonderful Christmas Eve in the immediate Divine Presence had begun! All men and women, clad in white, symbolising purity, sang their hearts out in devotional ecstasy.

Some of the numbers for the evening included 'Christmas Is The Holy Time To Celebrate The Birth', 'Almighty God...Make Me Aware' and 'This is Christmas in Prashanti'. At His Divine command, they continued...as sonorous notes from an array of musical instruments rendered the air, hundreds of them sang in chorus, the Sun in the western horizon slowly started giving way to a beautiful twilight, and they continued to sing...'My soul', 'My saviour God to Thee'...'How great Thou Art, How great Thou Art...It was a befitting evening paying homage to the Master of masters while remembering His chosen Son, anticipating yet another Divine Advent - the glorious Christmas! It was such a wonderful feeling listening to the overseas devotees and seeing Swami. All sang in unison, united in their Love for Him. The joy and power of Unity which Swami always stresses on could literally be felt, especially with the carols, since these songs are chord based and all the counter strains add up to a great symphonic effect. Separately sung they

seem disconnected but when combined, they make an everlasting impression - just what Unity does to diverse components - bringing amazing synergy.

There was something very subtle but interesting that happened as the choir was in progress. After about half an hour of singing, Swami seemed a bit unhappy that no truly Christian carols were being sung; most of them were carols composed on Swami. Swami always advises all to follow their chosen pathways steadfastly. When it is a Buddhist festival, He ensures that bhajans on Bhagavan Buddha are sung and the same is the case on Islamic festivals where the glories of Allah and The Prophet are sung. Therefore, Swami repeatedly called the conductor of the orchestra and told her to sing "Jesus" carols. All of them who witnessed this were in smiles as Swami seemed like a child insisting on the traditional Christmas carols being sung. In such a sweet manner Swami was conveying a profound message. There is no single pathway to the Lord and Swami stands for all. Moreover when there is a gathering of various faiths, we must ensure that our singing reflects the same.

Taken aback at this sudden request from Swami, the conductor began to guide the choir through the carols and songs that they had not actually practised! O Holy Night the stars are brightly shining and some of the more traditional carols were then sung. As this was on, Swami blessed prasadam to be distributed to all. People joyfully sang sweet songs as they received "sweet" gifts of the Lord. Towards the end, when the choir told Swami that they were done, Swami seemed to ask, "One more please?" They were simply overjoyed and burst out singing one more which concluded with thunderous claps and a sweet smile from Swami. The Lord then looked towards the students and asked them to sing. It is so beautiful to see how Swami involves the students in any celebration that happens in His presence. It is a great fortune indeed to be His students. And as they began singing bhajans with Aalap, Swami sat enjoying it. After 3-4 bhajans, aarthi was taken and Swami retired granting Abhayahastha to all assembled.

December 25, 2008 – Christmas in the Divine Presence

Christmas morning is something very special in terms of the schedule in Puttaparthi. Till a few years back, the Lord clad in pure and pristine white would grant *darshan* to all the eagerly awaiting devotees from the shiny silver door leading to the balcony in the Mandir premises. It's been a few years since those days, but the lovely taste and feelings of those beautiful mornings linger in the hearts of the thronging thousands as they encircle the hallowed Mandir premises singing carols. The way the Christmas processions have progressed with each passing year has been symbolic of a spiritual revolution that is encompassing the world over with His presence. Those were the days when Swami would physically come up in the balcony to bless the devotees. The devotees would carry candles and sing hymns glorifying the Father and His blessed Son Jesus. Today, the candles are absent and carols are no longer restricted to "Christian" themes as they embrace all, being sung in the glory of the single God. The whole experience represents a movement from the religious to the spiritual.

More joy awaits the watching ones...this is the way to express the beautiful morning of 25th December. True to the feeling entailed in the expression, the Christmas morning indeed was brought forward from the previous evening wherein the spirit of the festivity was very much ringing in....and the beautiful morning had men and women clad in white singing His glory in the waking hours rounding the *ashram*, and at the culmination they sang Christmas Carols for the Lord in the Mandir. Two screens that had been put up in the Mandir played clips of the times when Swami would bless the thousands with candles and people rejoiced in that memory and the joy of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God.

The celebrations in the Divine Presence got underway at 8:30 a.m. with Swami's arrival from Yajur Mandir. There was a procession by the members of the Nativity scene as Swami watched on. A few tiny tots moved up to Swami offering Him flowers and Love. Swami smiled and blessed them. Swami was in shiny white and the moment the hem of His robe was visible to the vast gathering, a rapturous applause of glee moved through the entire Sai Kulwant Hall. The Heavenly Father that He is, He was seated on a lovely golden throne and He entered the hall as the heart of the procession. Soon the procession moved on and Swami gracefully granted *darshan* to the joyous devotees. The Veda chanting was on and it was such a harmonious commingling of the instrumental carols on the PA system and the Veda chanting by the students. One can say with surety that such a Christmas will never be witnessed anywhere else in the world.

Swami completed the *darshan* rounds and then arrived in the portico. Several cakes and their makers awaited the Lord's attention. Swami smilingly moved from one cake to another, lighting the candles on them and gracing them with a gentle cut of the knives. Blessing all the cakes thus, Swami arrived on the dais. The whole hall was so beautifully decorated and lit up. Swami blessed the programme to begin. The University brass band was the first to perform. It turned out to be a scintillating band display by the University boys. Some of the popular Christmas numbers namely, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, *Noel*, etc. were rendered to perfection by the well trained students. Swami kept tapping His hands in rhythm to the playing band. The audience too clapped in unison to some of the lively numbers. After about 5 pieces, Swami said that it was time now for the Primary school violins to take over.

The kids rose and with wonderful co-ordination and harmony played a few carols and *bhajans* on the violin. Towards the end, they played the famous "Jingle Bells" piece and with that popped up half a dozen Santas! They moved to the stage where Swami took chocolates from their bags and threw them to the students nearby. Then He bid them to go around spraying their chocolates on all. All the devotees leapt and rushed for the chocolates, for they had been blessed by Swami, and just receiving one made them feel that they had a part of Him with them! Swami watched these scenes from the stage and soon two "snow machines" installed on the roof of the hall began to emit snow flakes adding to the Christmas atmosphere. As the violins completed their performance, Swami blessed the University students to begin their carol programme. Swami looked so beautiful - the embodiment of purity in the

silken white robe! A mere sight of Him was enough to send thrills of joy through ones being. People drank in thirstily at His form and the eyes feasted on a magnificent supper!

The students beginning with the *Aumkara*, presented a most joyful gift of Christmas Carols tied together by a thoughtful and informative voice-over narrative depicting the entire course of the story of His Divine Advent - the Christmas Story, to all assemblage consisting of a sizeable number of western devotees. Starting with "Light one thousand candles", they sang a variety of carols covering all the significant aspects of Christmas. As the programme went on, Swami sifted through the various letters that He had collected during the rounds. The programme climaxed with the song, "Come everyone to Santa Claus's Party". It was at this time that the "senior" Santas came onstage. Swami blessed them and their bagful of chocolates too. Then they hopped and skipped around throwing chocolates to all the devotees and students. The programme continued after that with a few more songs. Swami then blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed to all. The Christmas day also happens to be the Students' Hostel Anniversary. So, a few students moved to Swami to show the pictures of the decorated hostel. They also showed Him pictures of His visits to the Hostel with the aim of (as they put it), "making Him nostalgic and inducing another Hostel visit!" Swami smiled (for no motive is secret from Him!) and blessed the students. A few more Christmas cards were blessed before Swami received *arthi*.

The afternoon session began at about 4:40 p.m. with Swami's arrival. Swami moved to the stage and blessed the proceedings to begin. Mr. John Behner sought His blessings and began his introductory talk.

Thanking Bhagavan profusely for the wonderful opportunity and blessing bestowed upon everyone, he divulged into varied details of the back stage operations that made the celebration a grand success. Making a special mention of the wonderful array of decorations made all over the Sai Kulwant Hall and Yajur Mandiram, he said, the preparations for the same started six months before Christmas with a dedicated team from the US taking the lead. Various wings of the ashram, the special group of ladies and gents from Indonesia who cooked food for the entire group, the Californian group of devotees behind decoration, the *sevada's* - all came in mention for their dedicated and loving service rendered during the run up to the festivity. Talking about the children choir and drama presentation to be followed the next day, Mr. Behner narrated the story of young Sathya Sai, as has been the practice during the rehearsal sessions every day to pep little hearts and minds, for the benefit of children, compensating for the miss out on the previous day owing to the tight schedule.

The first speaker for the afternoon was Ms. Gisela Sebastian, a long time devotee from Munich, Germany, a wonderful singer, and member of the choir group. She talked about the love of Bhagavan, the beauty of Christmas in Prasanthi and the greater significance of being in Prasanthi in the Divine Presence to celebrate in Christmas spirit. She went on to narrate her wonderful tale of her introduction into Sai fraternity. She said that she was

directed to go to Sai Baba by her doctor at a time when she was in a critical condition. Not knowing anything about Sai Baba, she was reluctant at first but subsequently she met with a terrible car accident and lost her vision. Her passionate plea, prayer to this unknown God was heard and she had a dream...and got a promise...an answer to her prayer...! It was an amazing story of total surrender! She concluded with a mellifluous rendering of prayer to Bhagavan...at *Thy Lotus Feet...I hold on to Thy Feet...Om Bhagawan...Om SaiRam...*

The last speaker for the session was Mr. Ted Henry, a veteran TV journalist and a news reporter of fame from Cleveland, Ohio, who runs a spiritual oriented programme on Television in the United States. Having traveled all over the world, Mr. Ted Henry was instrumental in interviewing many a devotee and these interviews were published in various Sai Media, including Heart2Heart e-journal and Radio Sai Global Harmony.

"We are among the luckiest people on the face of the earth on this Christmas Day...We get to be on Christmas Day, with Jesus Himself," said Ted Henry commencing his rhetoric excellence. Narrating the incident when he sought Divine permission to take Bhagavan's name to the United States of America, to contribute his might as a journalist to the Sai Cause, Bhagavan gave him a firm 'no' as an answer, further advising him to take His Love instead. Henry said he understood the underlying message in it, that first he should be submerged in His love before taking His name across the world. Talking about his own boomerang story wherein through hundreds of interviews, seeing the love of devotees for Bhagavan and their tears of joy, he said the journalist in him has had a transformation and that was the wonder of Bhagavan. Traversing through the Divine Wonder and His life in true journalistic perception, Ted spoke about His all encompassing love, barring boundaries, bringing in transformation of heart. He prayed to Bhagavan to get all hearts deeper and deeper into the majesty of His Divine Awareness!

And then came the moment all had waited for with bated breath. Mr. Behner requested Swami to deliver His divine discourse. With a sweet smile, Swami nodded and asked for the microphones to be brought. There was a loud round of applause. And this is what Bhagavan said, to put it as a summary.

Starting His discourse hailing Bharat for her glory and her spiritual leaning in all matters, Swami exhorted that all the seen in this world is momentary and subject to change. The only one that lasts without any change is the principle of Atma, the principle of Love. With Love one can conquer the whole of the world. And God, being the witness, does not give you good or bad. Everything is man's own making. With reference to the recent terror attacks, Bhagavan said that world was finding restlessness with wicked things happening everywhere. The best solution to counter this would be to develop self-confidence and pray to God. With Self-confidence in place one could achieve anything. Once we develop self-confidence and lead a life of love, nothing would ever happen to us. "God is in you, with you, above you, around you, below you". God is only ONE though He is called by different names and is

seen as different forms. God is the only hero and once we rest our faith in Him, no bomb or any other artillery could disturb humanity.

God is the most powerful hydrogen bomb within, Swami said and asked, "Then why are you afraid of small tiny little bombs?" Swami exhorted the assembly to develop self confidence. "In respect of God do not entertain any doubts; one doubt leads to another, and that multiplies and spoils man. If you want to lead a perfect and ideal life of a human being, dispel all doubts." All of you have come from distant lands with full of devotion and steadfastness for God. Hold on with that conviction and love. Develop the deep conviction that "I am God", Swami directed.

As is the case always, Swami's discourse had a message for each and every soul seated in the hall. It was 90 minutes of sheer profundity as words flowed in an endless stream from the Divine lips. The climax was two *bhajans* that Swami sang instead of His usual one *bhajan*. Swami sang both, "Prema Mudhita" and "Hari *Bhajan* Bina". After that, as *prasadam* was distributed, Swami asked the students to sing *bhajans*. Another small episode occurred while the *bhajans* went on. The wooden cover of one of the speakers kept in front of Swami fell off, slipping down the steps. A student went up and put it back in place as Swami watched. However, the problem was the satin cloth that was making the cover slip away. So, a few minutes later, the cover fell again and Swami looked at the student with a smile as if to say, "Nay...not a properly done job." The student went back and set it right, rectifying the problem. That was a job well done! Three *bhajans* later, Swami asked for *aarthi* and then retired to Yajur Mandir.

SWAMI AND ME

“WHAT THANKS CAN I RENDER SAI?”

By Mrs. S. V. Radha

Hailing from a family which has been devotees of Bhagavan Baba for the last four and half decades, Mrs. S. V. Radha joined the Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur Campus for her Bachelors in Education in 1990. Prior to this she completed her Bachelors in Chemistry in Chennai. Currently, she serves in Sri Vishwa Vidyalaya Matriculation High School, an institution which founded along with her sister to help the poor and downtrodden in the city of Chennai.

I had bought a potted flowering sapling which I had placed, under the Sun strategically, just a few metres away from the window of my bedroom. Everyday, gladly I watered it, and watched it grow. This was one of my joyful rituals every morning, month after month, until the festive season of this October (2008). Being the wife of a globe-trotting executive, daughter-in-law of old in-laws, and mother of a little one had taken its toll; somehow the plant slipped out of my busy mind completely.

But one morning, I woke up with a start, as if startled by a bad dream, and rushed to the garden. I suddenly remembered my dear 'little green friend'.

And what did I see? A sprightly and healthy young one with 1, 2, 3, 4....10...no, 20 leaves and three beautiful red flowers! And around it were lush green grass adorned with shining dew drops! I just stood there transfixed with delight. It may not mean much to anybody else, but to me they were among the most beautiful seconds of my life. But soon, another thought seized me as completely as the previous moments of joy. "How did it grow so well and so beautifully? I had actually completely forgotten about it! I haven't even watered it for days together!" As I pondered over these reflections, I carefully picked one beautiful bloom and started walking towards our *pooja* room. I had realised the secret behind the plant's budding beauty, and now wanted to offer the first blossom to the One who actually made all this happen.

As I knelt down in front of the shrine of my Loving Lord, I stared at His beatific image speechlessly, and the next moment, my head touched the ground in complete submission at His Lotus Feet. My mind had now transformed into a sea of thoughts...I could not but draw a parallel to the events of my life to that of my 'green companion' which was no more 'little'. I too had grown because He, silently, took care of me when my world came crashing down and there was no one to hold on to.

So many scenes of my life just filled my mind's screen. I went back to 1963.

When TB turned out To Be a 'T'rue 'B'lessing...

I remembered how that fateful year our entire family was struck by a massive jolt - my father was diagnosed with advanced stage of tuberculosis; the doctors actually gave up all hope. I was only a 6-month old baby then and my older sister was a little one of two years. It was at this time that my uncle, who was a believer in Baba, took my father to Prasanthi Nilayam for the first time. While my father was away, the predicament of my mother at home suddenly became pathetic; both, I and my sister, fell seriously ill. There was no one to help my innocent and unlettered mom. Those were days when there were only a handful of telephones, only with the rich and powerful, in the whole city of Madras (now Chennai).

My father and uncle, who were in Puttaparthi, obviously, had no clue of my mother's tribulations. But soon they came to know of it, and guess from whom? Swami Himself! The loving Lord had actually called them for an interview! As soon as they entered the room, Swami first materialised a big lump of Vibhuti and instructed my father to swallow the whole quantity then and there. Next, He blessed him profusely, and then persuaded him strongly not to worry about the doctor's verdict. He went on to assure him of a long and extended life, and said, "What can even the best doctors do? I am there...I will take care." And finally, as they were about to leave the room, Swami once again called my father and materialised Vibhuti. While giving it this time, he said, "Your daughters are very sick. What can the doctors do? As soon as you go home, apply this Vibhuti on their foreheads, and also mix a portion of it with water and let them drink this; all will be well."

When my father heard this, he was completely perplexed. When he had left for Puttaparthi, we were all hale and hearty. Now, what had suddenly going wrong with his little angels in a few days? He didn't know whether to be sad or happy as he accepted Swami's gift of Vibhuti. With trepidations in his heart, he began his return journey. The moment he reached home he realised the gravity of the sorrowful condition and also how Swami had mentally prepared him to bear it all with fortitude. Not only that, Swami had also given the treatment for their maladies. In fact, within hours of taking the Vibhuti, our mysterious fever vanished without a trace. And most importantly, we had with us our father - healthy, happy and contented – for another 23 years!

That was how He loved and rescued us, and also how we fell in love with Him. Since then there has been no looking back. Very soon we joined the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation and we, little girls, enrolled ourselves as Bal Vikas students. Years passed and when I was a Pre-Sevadal student, my sister had actually grown to be the District Bal Vikas Convener. There was not a single day when our house was not busy with some Sai activity or the other, be it a *bhajan* session, a study circle meeting or preparing for a seva activity.

The Penance and the Divine Prize

During those days, Swami used to visit Madras frequently and would joyfully give a lot of His time to the Bal Vikas children. The top rankers of the annual

Bal Vikas examinations received their prizes surely from the Divine hands. Knowing this, I longed to be blessed with such an opportunity and prepared very hard for these tests.

The year was 1983; it was the month of January, and Swami was already in Chennai. We were busy decorating the Sai Leela Kalyana Mandapam as Swami was likely to arrive there the next day. Suddenly, at four o' clock that evening, I was informed that I had indeed secured first in the All India Bal Vikas examinations! And what is more, my sister was the top ranker at the state level! And then the best part - Swami was Himself going to bless us with the prizes the next day! Our joy knew no bounds. When the much-awaited and fervently-prayed-for event arrived the next day, Swami lovingly smiled at me, put His hand on my head and blessed me gently as He filled my hand with the reward. I was simply ecstatic; what a wonderful dream had come true! How I relish the thrill of that moment even now!

In this manner, months turned into years and how Sai-suffused I was! The next big milestone in my life came when Swami blessed Mannivakkam, the first adopted village of the Tamil Nadu Sai Organisation, with His own visit. My sister and I were deeply moved seeing the Lord of the Universe traverse on foot in this rustic and backward village, blessing the village folk, consoling the sick and enthusing the youth to be united and dedicate their lives to make others' lives better.

The seed of selfless service that was sown in our hearts right from the time we joined Bal Vikas now wanted to sprout, without any further delay.

Sri Vishwa Vidyalaya – Serving Him Through His Children

We were absolutely sure about the direction and purpose of our lives, and thus, was born Sri Vishwa Vidyalaya Matriculation High School, in Otteri extension, just adjacent to Mannivakkam. In over two decades, from 1986 till now, how magnificently this "oasis of learning" has transformed an area which was known for breeding criminals into one from where exemplary and much-envied boys and girls step out every year to the wide world with self-confidence and faith in their moral fibre! Clearly, He has worked through us every step of the way. And that is how daunting challenges have disappeared just at the nick of time any number of times.

In fact, in 1996, Swami confirmed this when He blessed us all as a family with an interview. How He showered a lot of blessings on us, and then reassured us saying, "Why fear when I am here? I will take care of the school. A single flower cannot make a garland, I will send the flowers." And indeed, He has been doing that in so many beautiful ways...

While I was happily busy working for His school, there was one unfulfilled desire lurking in my heart - I wanted to somehow become a student in Swami's own University. And therefore, once the school started and stabilised to a great degree, I applied for the Bachelors of Education course in Sri Sathya Sai University in 1990. By His grace, I was selected, and luckily for

me, exactly in that year, Swami resumed the Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality (which is generally held before the start of the academic year) for the students.

The Scintillating Summer of '90

For me, every minute as a student of this great University was most valuable. I knew the B. Ed. Programme was going to be only for a year and I wanted to make the most of my stay at His lotus feet. I took keen interest in the Summer Course, and was really overjoyed when I secured 100 marks in the Summer Course examination which was conducted on the last day of the course.

And from then on, the next 12 months in Swami's University was the most memorable period of my life. It was not only filled with rich experiences but also equipped me with a lot of inner strength and vigour. The most coveted moment of my life came when I received the gold medal in B. Ed from the hands of the Divine Chancellor, my dear Lord. I felt as if there is nothing more to achieve for me in this life. Thanks to my long years of prayers and hard work, all my dreams, I felt, had found fulfillment.

And today, when I look at the school, which is truly His school, I do not know how to express my gratitude to Him. What began with a modest strength of 54 students is now bustling with over a 1000 students. It is like an oasis in a desert, a beautiful testimony of His love, a touching story of what can materialize out of us if we offer ourselves to Him and He takes over....

"Amaaaa...." Hmm...my reverie was broken! That was the cry of Varsha...how I had got lost in the lanes and bylanes (or rather 'Sailanes') of my unforgettable past...Varsha, yes, is my daughter, another miracle in my life; she was gifted to me by Bhagavan, when I am 45 years old.

Once again my eyes stared at the flower I just offered at His serene Lotus feet and then at His most lovable form....

*What thanks can I render Sai
For the gifts Thou hast showered on us?
Everyday we will blossom in Your Love and Light
What thanks can I render Sai?"*

THE MIRACLE OF A LIFE TIME

By Mr. Vijay Sohni

A spirited Sai Youth from Indore, Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Vijay Sohni serves as Assistant Commercial Tax Officer in the Government of Madhya Pradesh. He is also the Convenor of the Indore Sai Samithi and the Madhya Pradesh State Coordinator of Prashanthi Service.

Miracles fascinate all of us. When Bhagavan Baba creates lockets, chains, rings, etc. it baffles us, but Swami says these are not *chamatkars* (miracles) done to earn *namaskars* (respect and adulation); these are not *pradarshans* (exhibitions of power), but *nidarshans* (evidences of My divinity). These materializations, therefore, are only gifts of His love, a means to another fantastic end, which is the transformation of hearts – the real and lasting miracle. And the story of my life is one such fascinating miracle.

Living a Wayward Life

From my very childhood the members of my family worshipped Shirdi Sai Baba as God, but we did not have faith in Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Actually, on the contrary, I used derogatory language when referring to Sai Baba; I had no love or respect for Him. This was partly because there was no place for spirituality in my life then; mine was completely materialistic. Though I belonged to a Brahmin family (the priestly class of Hindus), I often went against the traditional norms, and indulged in non-vegetarian food, and occasionally, even shared alcoholic drinks with friends.

It was during this period, 1985-86, that I appeared for the State Civil Services Examination. And in this, I indicated my first preference for the Sales Tax Department (now called Commercial Tax), for the sole reason that it was a 'lucrative' department for 'extra income'. I was duly selected for the post of Sales Tax Inspector and was posted in Indore (the commercial capital of the state of Madhya Pradesh, India) in 1987. In no time, I was attracted towards the evils of the department, and eventually I got involved in it quite deeply. I was tutored by my seniors about the ways of making 'quick money'. I returned home everyday with 'extra cash' in my pockets; I did not mind spreading wrong information or even giving veiled threats to businessmen. From 10 in the morning till 9 in the night, I was in the market, moving from one business enterprise to another; I was annoyed if any of the shop owners did not do my bidding. "Nobody dare hurt me" was what I conveyed verbally and otherwise; my ego was obvious and demanded compliance from everyone on my own terms.

During this time I visited an astrologer who, on reading my horoscope, prophesied that a change for the better will come in my life in 1994-95. My immediate thought was that I could be posted in a flying squad (which conducts surprise raids on suspected offenders) and my 'extra income' would jump enormously. In 1992, our family was blessed with the birth of my

daughter, and four years later, I admitted her in Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar, purely because it was a school of repute in my city, Indore.

At the time of her admission, a close friend of mine talked highly about Bhagavan Baba to me. He had just returned from Puttaparthi and said, "Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is not only Shirdi Sai Baba Himself, but also the reincarnation of Lord Krishna, Rama and Jesus Christ too!" I dismissed this idea entirely initially, but later I thought to myself, "Whoever this person may be, I should at least familiarise myself about Him as my daughter is studying in a school which bears His name". And so, I started going for Sai *bhajans* to the house of my friend. Casually, I started attending the programmes of the Sai Centre too. After a while, I do not know how and why, I developed this desire to visit Puttaparthi at least once.

Coming Closer to God

In October 1995, I traveled to Puttaparthi alone. The ashram was abuzz with Dasara celebrations then. Even during this time, I had no special respect for Bhagavan Baba, but maybe I was more open. I sat for *darshan* everyday, and for three days Swami did look at me. However, on the fourth day, the day I was scheduled to return, Swami came and stood right in front of me. I do not know what happened to me then; I suddenly burst into tears like a child. My hands automatically folded in obeisance to Him; the next instant I bent down completely and touched His lotus Feet. It was such an elevating experience; He made me feel so light. I cannot really describe that experience in words.

After this first rendezvous with the Revered One, I was definitely a much different person. Once I returned to Indore, I started participating in the activities of the Sai Samithi with great enthusiasm. I also decided that I would join the Sai Organisation formally as a Sevadal volunteer and serve at Puttaparthi whenever there was an opportunity. And this chance materialised for me in September 1996.

This second journey to Puttaparthi in 1996 was truly the turning point of my life. In fact, Swami was giving me indications of things to come much before I reached Puttaparthi on that visit. At about 5 o'clock, while I was still in the train, Baba appeared in my dream and asked, "What do you want?" I was startled. I just said, "I only crave for Your love and blessing." Then He smiled, and again said, "This you have anyway, ask for something else." I had no other reply; I made the same request again. After this, Swami disappeared and I woke up with a start.

It was the first time I saw Swami in my dream. I wasn't sure how to understand this; I conjectured that I dreamt about Him probably because I had been thinking about Him. After reaching Puttaparthi, I immediately went for *darshan*. And while waiting for Swami, I saw a person next to me reading a Sai book (those days books were allowed during *darshan* time). I was inquisitive and asked him if I could see through the book for a few seconds. He obliged and when I opened the book I became still. The bold inscription on the page I opened was an excerpt from Swami's discourse which said, "I

appear in dreams at My will. If you think that I appear because of your thinking, you are mistaken.” Instantly, all doubts about His mysterious appearance vanished! This was just the beginning.

On the morning of September 26, 1996, I waited in line for His *darshan*, and was lucky to get the front row. When Swami arrived, He came very near me, and accepted a letter from a devotee sitting on my right. I too tried to present my letter, but He showed both His hands, which were full with letters, and gestured as if to say, “See, I have no room for your letter”. So, I withdrew my hand. But in the next second, to my surprise, I saw Him collecting a letter from another devotee sitting on my left! This was depressing; when I came out of *darshan*, I had a bee in my bonnet. I went into a self-introspection mode.

On the Path of Self Introspection

The voice of my conscience was now speaking louder than ever; my evil habit of taking bribes bothered me terribly. I resolved then and there that I will not accept anything unofficial in future, and mentally, I made this solemn and solid commitment to Swami. The next day, I was fortunate again to find myself in the first line. This time too, Swami came straight to me, but now, He lovingly accepted my letter without a word. Not only this, He granted me the chance to touch His Feet too. I came out of *darshan* as if I was in seventeenth heaven. Joyously I shared my happiness with a senior member of our Sai Samithi, who was also present there, and he explained to me that by not accepting my letter on the first day Swami clearly conveyed that He is not interested in a corrupt devotee. I had learnt a vital lesson of my life, but the Lord did not rest at this.

Now, before I started for Puttaparthi on that occasion, I was to do a market survey which could have easily yielded me over a lakh of rupees in unaccounted income. After I returned from Swami, my clerk informed me, with a heavy heart, that my area of operation has been changed, and the present one would fetch me much less income. In other words, my ‘extra cash’ had shrunk a great deal. If I was my former self, I would have got wild with my officer. Certainly I would have picked up a quarrel with him, and harbored jealousy against the inspector who had snatched my money-spinning assignment. But now, it did not bother me.

Putting Everything in His Hands

When I set out to the market for my new assignment, shopkeepers, like always, came forward offering me bribes, lest I might write adversely about them in my report. But when I refused, they were obviously surprised, and happy too. In my hearts of hearts, I was so glad and thanked Swami profusely for cleaning my life up so amazingly. I gave up drinking and non-vegetarian food too. My colleagues and officers could not believe the transformation they saw in me. Many thought this would not last and tried to lure me back to my old ways. “How are you going to maintain your family with your limited salary?”, “You have a daughter, remember that! You are going to need plenty of funds for her one day...”, “Have you gone nuts?” and so on. They tried to

influence me through many clever arguments and strategies. But my only answer was, "All this does not bother me; everything is Swami's problem."

All said and done, it was not easy. Once I stopped taking bribes, my revenue stream shrunk. To manage the household expenses with my inadequate income, we cut down our desires. Earlier, I changed my dress twice a day, but now I am happy with a change once in two days. We decided to restrict the size of our family and reduced all avoidable expenditure. For three full years, it was a financial tight-rope walk. But I was determined to follow this new path; it had given me so much peace. I was sure Swami would help us and He did. Eventually, my wife was appointed as a teacher in Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar with a decent salary. This solved all our problems. But how this happened is also interesting.

Dispelling All Doubts

Even though I became convinced about Swami's divinity in 1996, my wife was not. In June 1999, for the first time I came to Puttaparthi along with my wife and little daughter. For my wife, Lord Shiva was God, none else. And that very night in Puttaparthi, Swami appeared in her dream, and she saw that there was a snake wreathed round His neck, just like it is with Lord Shiva. This aroused her faith in Baba; still, she was not completely doubtless.

On the second day of our stay in Puttaparthi, I joined the *darshan* lines at 4 a.m., and when I left the room, I told my wife to follow a little later, carrying along Maitreyee, our tiny daughter. But given her shaky faith in Baba, she did not take this seriously, and slept through the morning *darshan*. When my 7-year old Maitreyee woke up at 7 a.m., she cried incessantly for missing *darshan*; she loved Swami dearly. Therefore, the next day, she was up at 4 a.m. and tagged along with me to see Swami. She was a small girl, so I could have her with me on the gents' side. Before Swami arrived that day, she confided with me that Baba had appeared in her dream the previous night and promised her that He would grant her *padnamaskar* at 7 the next morning. And so, she sat with eagerness and expectation. I told her Swami always keeps His word. And that's exactly how it unfolded. At 7 a.m sharp Swami was right in front of us, and even though she was sitting in the third row, she just walked up to Swami fearlessly and the Lord too blessed her profusely as she touched His Feet.

Now, this was a moment of revelation more for my wife than anybody else. This sealed her faith in Bhagavan. Soon, my mother too became a sincere devotee, and Sai became the sole inspiration and personal God of our entire family.

Work Becomes Sadhana

Meanwhile, my office environment saw a lot of changes; every activity was now being computerized. This alteration brought Mr. Hari Ranjan Rao as the Additional Commissioner to my department. He was a staunch Sai devotee right from his childhood and was happy to entrust me with many important

responsibilities. In fact, one of the projects was inaugurated by the then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh in 2003. And on that occasion, I was awarded a certificate of appreciation along with five other top officers. I know certainly that all this has been purely because of His grace. Even today I continue to work in the computer section, and recently have been given a promotion too!

What is more heartening, though, is that my transformation has inspired many other officers to rethink about their wrong ways. Today almost everybody in the office greets me with 'Sai Ram'! Bhagavan Baba has transformed my life, in and out. When I recollect the prophecy of the astrologer now, I understand the true import of his words. Yes, my life has undergone a great metamorphosis. And I do not know how to thank Swami for the amazing miracle that He has performed on me!

H2H SPECIAL

ENTRALLING REMINISCENCES OF THE DAYS OF YORE

From the mental diary of Mrs. Karunamba Ramamurthy - Part 1

Extremely fortunate to come to His lotus feet when she was just a tiny girl in 1940s, Mrs. Karunamba Ramamurthy, lovingly addressed as Kannamma, has a priceless treasure trove of incredible memories of the yester years. She is also the author of the famous book "Sri Sathya Sai Anandadayi - Journey with Sai".

The Avatar's Attraction

This happened in the mid-forties. Once a lady, a friend of mine, from Bangalore wrote a letter to us stating that Bhagavan had come to their house, and asked me to come over for His *darshan*. In that letter she said, "We have read about Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and felt very sorry about our misfortune of not having had his *darshan* as he had already entered *Samadhi* years ago. However, the same person has reincarnated as Sri Sathya Sai Baba, hence, please come!"

After receipt of that letter we proceeded from Mysore to Bangalore. We had His *darshan* in a devotee's house. Incidentally, the day happened to be Bhagavan's birthday. After the function, Bhagavan told everyone present to partake *prasadam*. "I will then answer your questions," He said. The owner of the house instructed us, "Whomsoever Swami calls, should go to the corner room and ask their doubts and desires. Swami will give instructions and clear any doubts you may have."

It was our good fortune that Swami called us first. My mother instructed me that as we had already received one *Mantra Upadesha* (divine injunction to chant a particular name) from a guru we should only ask for the grace of the Lord. Swami, being omniscient, showed that He knew about this and told us, "You already do *japam* (*chanting*) and other spiritual activities; hence don't worry, I will look after you."

The Divine Invitation

Following Bhagavan's *darshan* at the friend's house, my mother had His *darshan* in two other occasions at the residences of other devotees. It was during one of those *darshans* that Swami told her "come to Puttaparthi." You can imagine that by this time we were rather enamoured by our sweet interactions with the Lord, and it took only those words for my family to resolve to make the arduous journey to His abode.

Soon, my father and his sister visited Puttaparthi for the first time, in 1946, when Swami was barely 20 years old! In those days, only the old Mandir existed; even today it stands close to the Sri Venugopala Swami temple in the Puttaparthi village. At that time, it had just been constructed. My family stayed

in an open space beside this old Mandir. As *Brahmins* (belonging to the priestly class), we cooked our own food, which was done in the open. During her visit my mother respectfully asked Bhagavan, "Swami, will You accept the food that we cook and bring for You?" And to her abounding joy, Swami said, "Yes"! Since then, due to His grace, she was able to cook and serve Him food on many occasions.

"Will you accept *mantra upadesham* from Me?"

Once when my mother was serving Him food, He lovingly asked her, "You have already been given *mantra upadesham*, however, shall I initiate you again? If you are particular to receive it through Me, just add *Sai* before the mantra, that's all!" My mother had only been initiated (given *mantra upadesham*) a year before she had her first *darshan* of Bhagavan. However, she was very devoted to Bhagavan and asked Him for anything and everything.

In those days there were not more than 35 devotees; in fact, that was a big figure then! A respectable lady, Mrs. Sakkamma, well-known as a coffee-estate owner in those days, used to come often from Bangalore (Kodugu District) and stay for about three to four days. She was the one who used to take upon herself the task of arranging everything for Bhagavan, be it His bath, water, food, or anything else.

The Magnificent Jyothi *Darshan*

One day, Swami blessed all of us in Puttaparthi by partaking meals in our house. Sakkamma, who was present then, asked Swami if she could return to Bangalore. Swami, however, did not grant her permission. But Sakkamma insisted that she had to leave. My mother also tried to dissuade her. Finally, Sakkamma boldly said, "If Swami shows His *darshan* in a miraculous way, only then will I stay back."

For those who are not aware, Bhagavan has stated that the first period of His divine life was characterized by *leelas* – the sports of the Lord. It was because this aspect was prominent then, and also because Sakamma adored and related to Swami as a young boy that she could at times take the liberty to make such demands. And Swami too was very ready to grant Sakamma's prayer in a spectacular way on that occasion.

The next evening He took all of us along with Him to the Chitravathi River, which was a copious flow during those days. At about 6.30 p.m., Swami suddenly told us all to follow Him, and He walked up a hillock and stood there. He showed His empty hands and then asked us if we were all ready to see what followed. We waited with bated breath to see what would unfold... There, suddenly appeared a brilliant light, and in the middle of that sublime brilliance stood Swami!

All of us assembled there, at the foot of the hillock, saw this Divine spectacle and were dumbfounded in awe. A Divine aura had completely surrounded

Swami as He stood there on the hillside. The light was a pulsating brightness, so dazzling that it was overwhelming. But at the same time, the luster was so soft and gentle, because of which we could withstand the purity of its luminescence.

And then, Swami slowly came down a few yards, but the effulgence continued to surround Him. When He further descended, the aura was still there around Him, undiminished. We were stunned and speechless. How can one describe that unprecedented event? We were just shocked with delight and overjoyed at the divine gift bestowed on us.

After this historic event, we all returned to the old Mandir and sang *bhajans*. At the end of this session, we offered Him *arathi*. Swami then told us the significance of the *darshan* He had bestowed on us just then. He explained that there are many types of devotees and everyone worships God in the form they like the most; the choice is totally up to them. Each one will become aware of the brilliance of the Divine in the form they worship and that is dear to them.

It is interesting to know that this very same miracle occurred when Jesus walked the earth as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There, he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the Sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Just then, there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

(Gospel of Matthew, chapter 17, v1-8)

Worshipping the Lord's Lotus Feet

The old Mandir was built in the year 1945. During this period, the unique opportunities devotees had for divine conversation with Bhagavan were absolutely amazing; no one has enjoyed such opportunities later. Swami used to come and just sit with us and talk. There was not even a time limit then!

The old Mandir was only a small shed, and needless to say there wasn't ample space there. It was built by a devotee, Mr. Devaraj. The hall was shared by all, ladies on one side and men on the other. In fact, Bhagavan Himself used to sleep in the hall on the floor; there wasn't even a cot!

We were very fortunate to perform *Pada Puja* (Worship of the Feet) to Swami in the old Mandir; it was performed with devotional songs. During the *puja*, we were allowed to sing any song we liked. "*Pesara Pappu Kosamu Poena....* (I went to bring Moong Dal...)" is one of the songs we used to sing. Swami used to like Moong dal cooked and served in the meals those days. Mrs. Sundaramma, a devotee from Karnataka, used to sing that song beautifully.

During the *puja*, we used to spread a white cloth on the ground. Over that we placed castor oil and *haldi* (turmeric) powder. These two were then mixed and the paste applied to the soles of Swami's Feet. After gently pouring scented water (*panneer*) over His feet, we offered our salutations and touched His feet in reverence. Swami would leave the *puja* only after we all had taken *padanamaskar*. Of course, when He walked over the white cloth, His feet made impressions (*Pada mudralu*) on the cloth, and these became prized objects of devotion.

Sometimes, we used to place a pad on the floor. When Swami stood over this, we poured scented water and washed His feet, and then, wiped them with a towel. After this, we applied turmeric powder and vermillion on His lotus feet. Finally, we placed a flower garland around His neck and sang *bhajans*. This is how we performed *Pada Puja* in those bygone years.

Dassara with the Divine

People of great social stature such as the Maharaja of Mysore and Basavaraj Urs used to visit Swami frequently those days. All these important people used to sit around Swami, who was just a young boy.

During Dassara and other such festivities, all of us got together, with great love and devotion, arrayed Swami in fine garments. We used to assemble elaborate carriages for Him such as the Swan *Vahana* (vehicle in the form of a swan) and Nandi *Vahana* (carrier in the shape of the sacred bull, Nandi). Flower decorators from Bangalore often brought varieties of blossoms that were placed on these *Vahanas* (vehicles), which were used as palanquin for Swami. During Dassara, Swami used to visit the village in a different *Vahana* each day. The decoration for Swami was based on the *Dasavatharam* (ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu). Swami's *Vahana* was followed by a band and a Shehnai (an Indian musical instrument) party. And behind this was the concourse of devotees. *Arathi* was offered to Swami once the procession returned. Then, coconuts too would be broken and we all offered salutations. The programme would conclude by 9.00 p.m. Again, by 2.00 a.m. we would gather around the Mandir. Residents from the hamlet used to attend all these festivities regularly without fail.

Interview Room on the Sands

Swami used to take us all to the Chitravati River every afternoon. We used to return to the old Mandir only by about 6.00 p.m. As the old Mandir did not have extra space, the bank of Chitravathi was the interview room. Swami used to answer all our questions on the sands. Those who had unfulfilled desires in their lives, such as not being able to have children or those who were troubled with material constraints, prayed to Bhagavan to bless them. He often materialised many idols of deities. He also used to create fruits and flowers, which He distributed to everyone around.

When the Lord Wills Abundance

On one occasion, He created an apple which He cut into small pieces and passed around to all of us. The wonder was that every devotee got a fair share of the same small apple! His will produced surplus *Akshayam* (unlimited quantity) so that all could partake of the divine *prasadam*. Another feature of the apple was the blemishless texture of its skin; it was absolutely smooth and shiny. When we asked Bhagavan about the wonderful quality of the apple skin, He replied that blemishes represented strife in life, which resulted in rebirth. To drive this lesson home, He had created such perfect apples.

One day, due to some reason, the fire in the kitchen was not lit. Swami, then, went inside this room, and taking a cloth, wiped all the cooking vessels thoroughly clean. He then placed lids on all of them and left the scene. At about noon, Swami told us to open the lids of the vessels. When we did that we were shocked to find a variety of cooked delicacies! We served this delicious food to all the devotees present, which was no small number. But the vessels never became empty! He had willed all the containers to remain full till all ate to their heart's content!

In those days there was never enough rice or paddy stock in the kitchen. However, none remained hungry; there was food for all and in abundance! It was a simple *leela* for Bhagavan to ensure this.

This Leela from Bhagavan, which by the way He repeated many times to assuage the needs of His devotees, can also be seen mirrored in the divine life of Lord Jesus during the feeding of the five thousand, as we can read from the Bible:

...the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

"Bring them here to me," he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

(Gospel of Matthew, chapter 14, v13-21)

"Sing *Bhajans* wholeheartedly, that is enough"

In those days, my mother used to stay in the kitchen of the old Mandir to cook for Swami; that was a tiny room. Devotees used to come from all over the country at all hours of the day to see Bhagavan. Once a group of devotees of the popular Tamil saint, Sri Ramana Maharishi, came to see Bhagavan. They had arrived at dusk, when the village was enveloped with darkness. Navigating down the road was a problem, and to compound the issue, they did not understand the local language, Telugu. However, one villager thought of my mother and directed the visitors to her as she knew Tamil.

They informed my mother that they had come all the way from Thiruvannamalai hearing that God had incarnated here. They had come to have His *darshan*, offer their prayers and perform *puja* to Him. And then, they questioned her on the modalities of performing such a *puja*. She replied that there was no such worship necessary, and that devoted *bhajans* alone were enough.

When this group saw Bhagavan, He was very happy. Swami told them to stay with their guru (Sri Ramana Maharishi) and to sing *bhajans* with devotion and dedication. That alone is enough to earn merit, He conveyed to them. Hearing this, my mother was ecstatic as Bhagavan had given the same *upadesam* (advice) to my father too.

Diesel Generator Runs on Water!

During those days, there were no street lights. The roads were dark and uninviting in the evenings. A couple of bulbs glowed powered by a diesel generator for which devotees procured the fuel.

One evening, during a celebration, when the procession was about to start, the bulbs failed to light up! At that time Swami was sitting in an old room at the rear of the old Mandir. Devotees started complaining that there was no light. Hearing this, Swami asked for water in a bucket from the nearby well. He then directed them to pour the water into the generator tank. Wonder of wonders! The bulbs lit up and burned beautifully throwing bright light all around!

This amazed everybody, but maybe there were still a few Doubting Thomas's. Swami again asked the devotees to fetch another bucketful of water and directed that it be poured into the generator – the bulbs continued to burn beautifully. Nobody had any doubts about His divinity that evening!

Bhagavan is *Sakthi Swaroopini*

Swami used to sit along with devotees and discuss various topics with them. Many came to Him for advice, which He offered with the greatest of concern. The number of devotees in the Mandir in those days often did not cross single digits; even ten people on normal days were a big number.

Everyday, turmeric powder and vermilion was placed on the deities who adorned the altar. Incense sticks and lamps were also lit, and all these duties were done in turns by the ladies staying in the Mandir.

One day, it was my mother's chance to decorate the idols and light the lamps. While she was busy doing this, Bhagavan was actually standing right behind her. Swami made a few remarks expressing His apparent displeasure in the way the idols were being adorned. When my mother heard this, she immediately turned around and what did she see? In stead of Swami, it was the Divine Mother! The form of *Sakthi Swaroopini*! She was decked in a red silk saree; Her face was shining with turmeric powder and vermilion; beautiful gold jewelry adorned Her neck. What a divine blessing Swami has conferred on her! It was just heavenly. She often recounted this glorious *darshan* with great fervour.

In those cherished days, I was awed by the glory of Swami. We have not seen Lord Rama or Lord Krishna, but the present Avatar is living with us, amidst us! What a great opportunity!

GET INSPIRED

BUILDING NEW BRIDGES...

As we welcome another New Year, here is a short allegorical story which has the power to brighten not just this day, but all the moments to come to create for us a great year ahead.

Once upon a time, two brothers, Mart and Pete, who lived on adjoining farms fell out with each other. In all the years of trust and understanding before the rift, they shared each other's burdens, sought advice from one another, and lived in harmony and peace. It was the first serious rift in 20 years of farming as neighbours and good friends. They used to share machinery, trading labour and goods as needed without any hesitation.

It began with a small misunderstanding which grew into an enmity, and finally, exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of uncomfortable silence. There were now seemingly unbreakable barriers between the two brothers. 20 years is a long time to cement any relationship and yet there seemed to be a reason for differences of opinion so much so that it resulted in a severance of ties. Days turned into months, and it was never the same again. Mutual anger and mistrust were thick in the air, and no effort was made by either of them to make amends.

One morning there was a knock on Mart's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days' work," he said, "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs I could help with? Could I help you?"

"Yes," said the older brother, who felt he could use this man to get back at his brother without too much trouble to himself. "Sweet revenge" is what he mumbled to himself.

"I do have a job for you. Do you see the creek at that farm? That belongs to my neighbour, who is my brother Pete. Last week there was a meadow between us. He took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll do him one better. Do you see that pile of lumber by the barn? I want you to build me a fence, an 8-foot fence, so I won't need to see his place or his face anymore."

The bitterness was quite plain in his voice, but the carpenter simply smiled and calmly said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post-hole digger, and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you."

Mart had to go to town, so, he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and was off for the day. The skilful woodsman worked hard all day long - measuring, sawing and nailing. It was sunset when Mart returned, and saw that the job had been completed.

Mart's eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. It was a bridge. A bridge that stretched from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of work, handrails and all! And the neighbour, his younger brother Pete, was coming towards him across the bridge, his hand outstretched.

"You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've said and done," Pete said warmly to his brother. The two brothers met in the middle of the bridge, with tears in their eyes, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox onto his shoulder. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said Mart.

"I'd love to stay on," the warm hearted carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build...."

Bhagavan Baba often tells us:

"When you are confronted with problems and difficulties you should not get upset, and become victims of depression which is a sign of weakness. In such a situation, you should bring tolerance and an attitude of forgiveness into play and should not get agitated giving rise to anger, hatred and revengeful attitude. You are embodiments of strength and not weakness. Therefore, in times of despair, fill yourself with the feeling of forbearance and be ready to forgive and forget. This quality of Kshama (forgiveness) is the greatest power of a human being."

Bhagavan wants us to lead a life of peace, forgiving those who have hurt us, and in turn, not hurting others. It is the Lord who is ever waiting to play the role of the 'carpenter' in our lives, building bridges where there was and is mistrust and anger. This new year let us allow ourselves to feel the joy of forgiveness, and share it with others too. Just like our ever compassionate Lord who forgives us for our failings, whether we realise it or not, let us not dwell on events that pull us down. Let us trust the Divine Carpenter, and eventually become a skilful Divine Workman ourselves!

THE INVISIBLE LINK OF LIFE

There once lived a carefree mouse on a farm. She enjoyed her humble life searching for scraps of food and looking after her little home, a tiny hole in the storeroom of a farm house. She was on good terms with all the other animals on the farm, and even had no fear of the farm cat, which was too well fed to bother her!

One day the mouse happened to look through a crack in the farm house wall when she saw the farmer and his wife open a package. "What food might this contain?" she wondered. She was devastated by what she saw. It was a mousetrap!

Retreating to the farmyard where all the other animals resided, the mouse sent out the warning in a shrill cry: "There is a mousetrap in the house! There is a mousetrap in the house!" Strangely there was only silence in return; it did not seem to perturb any of the animals. She was hoping to rouse the others to help her out of this dire situation, but everyone went about their business in cold nonchalance.

After a few seconds of quietness, the rooster clucked, came over, and rather proudly said, "Mrs. Mouse, I can tell this is of grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me. Besides, I have my work to do." He, casually and callously, went back to scrapping in the dirt for bugs and making his cries every other minute. A noisy bird indeed!

The mouse now turned to the pig and pleadingly repeated, "There is a mousetrap in the house! Can you help me, please?" The pig sympathised, like most of us do, but said, "I am so very sorry, Mrs. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it. Anyway, I am never invited into the house." As if nothing had happened, the pig happily returned to the mud and began to roll away gleefully.

The mouse next turned to the horse and politely said, "There is a mousetrap in the house! You are such a powerful animal. Please do something about it." The horse felt flattered. "Yes, Mrs. Mouse, I am the Master's blue-eyed boy! But, you know I'm so sorry for you; I do not know what I can do for you. You are in my prayers though."

Three continuous rejections dejected the mouse terribly. She looked at all the other animals and everyone seemed already ready with some excuse or the other. So, the sad mouse returned to the house, completely crestfallen. With no options left, she prepared herself for the worst. She decided to face the farmer's mousetrap – alone!

That very night a thumping sound was heard throughout the house - the sound of a mousetrap snapping shut on its prey. The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. Since it was pitch dark, she could barely see anything at all. Expecting a mouse to have got caught in the trap, she got to the spot. And before she knew what was waiting for her, suddenly something bit her.

She let out a loud cry. It was a snake that had bitten her! The snake simply retaliated because actually it was its tail which was caught in the mouse trap and the reptile was just as terrified as the farmer's wife.

The farmer rushed his dear wife to the hospital. She returned home alive, but she was severely sick with fever, terrible headache and body spasms. She became sensitive to sound; every little noise would irritate her to no end. A slight noise increased the pain in her head exponentially. Now, it was the rooster who was at the root of all her problems. By force of habit, it crowed ceaselessly, a million times everyday. The farmer immediately sold the bird away at the market.

The farmer's wife condition still was pathetic. She kept shivering day and night; slowly her situation became very grave. A doctor in the valley had quite a reputation as a healer using expensive herbal remedies. Determined to save his wife, come what may, the desperate farmer approached this doctor for help. He didn't have the money, so, he gave his pig to a friend in exchange for much needed cash to pay for the healer's fees and medicines. Unfortunately, this too did not help. His wife's condition was only getting worse.

The poor farmer was now rushing to the other doctors from the nearby city. Everyday he travelled on his horse to get these experienced physicians. The poor horse had to make many rushed trips everyday for his tensed master. In the process, not only was the farmer tired but his horse too was totally worn out. Not used to tedious labour, one fine day, it turned lame and finally collapsed. He now only stayed in the stable. The farmer was obviously miffed whenever he would see the horse, idle in his corner. The horse was extremely miserable when the mouse called to offer her sympathies to him.

The tiny mouse watched all these events and felt sad. She only wished that her old friends had been more caring and considerate about her situation. She knew it was a way of life giving them a taste of their own medicine.

Bhagavan Baba tells us that we are all part of society; in fact, every individual is a limb of the society, and society is the limb of God. Therefore, whether we realise it or not, we are inextricably connected in so many ways; we cannot be insensitive to another's joys or sorrows. We can be happy only if we care for others as much as we are concerned about ourselves. And in essence, it is the message conveyed in every religion and every festival. Bhagavan once beautifully said,

“Man should strive to use every talent and skill given to him not only for his own benefit but also for the good of the world. Man owes everything to society for all that he has received from it.”

THE TWO WOLVES WITHIN

A young lad, Robby, felt injustice was meted out to him by a person he thought was his friend. Visibly livid, he narrated the day's incident to his grandfather, Bob. Just like most grandpas in this world, Bob was a well of wisdom. He let his grandson vent his anger till such time Robby had nothing else to say.

The old man then placed his hand on Robby's shoulder and began: "Let me tell you a story. I have to admit that I have felt hate in my time for those inconsiderate people who never seem to have remorse or repentance for what they do," continued the wise grandfather. "As time passed by, I realised that the hate and anger I carried in my heart actually wore me down. It had little effect on people who evoked these emotions. I began to see that I was giving myself ales of poison with the hope that the other person should die. It hasn't been easy at all, boy.

I introspected further to understand where these negative feelings stemmed from. I knew I was a good man, but why was I carrying hate and anger in me? Well, I called it the case of having two wolves inside of me!" Robby listened with rapt attention as Bob went on with his rather interesting story.

The first wolf is absolutely harmless, and what's even better is that it seeks peace and harmony around it. It sees only the good in people, never the bad. It doesn't take offense even if someone is nasty to it. Instead, it has a good word for anyone and everyone who crosses his path.

But this is the bit you need to know now."

"Go on, Grandpa," begged Robby.

Grandpa continued, "This other wolf is a monster. It is under the dangerous delusion that it is the only perfect thing on the planet and constantly finds fault with everything and everyone around it. It has a shallow ego and gets piqued easily. This wolf is always filled with anger and hate. It doesn't realise that hate and anger get it nowhere.

When you hear me talk of the second wolf, don't you think it is utterly foolish? Don't you approve of the first wolf and wish the second one never existed? Do you want to know more?"

Rob replied immediately, "Oh, yes, Grandpa, please tell me more."

"These two wolves inside me scream for attention. Each one struggles to push the other to take centre stage. When wolf #1 is the winner for the day, everyone loves me and thinks I'm an angel! But hell breaks loose when wolf #2 decides to be the bully. Wolf #1 is pushed away and all that the world sees of me is a cruel, angry, unreasonable, difficult person to deal with.

There is a constant tug of war over my spirit, and sometimes it leaves me rather tired and hopeless!"

The boy looked intently into his grandfather's eyes and asked, "Which one wins, Grandpa?" The grandfather smiled and quietly said, "The one I feed."

Robby was speechless. He learnt so much that day. He thanked his friend in his heart for being the reason for this lesson that he would keep for life.

Have anger and hatred done any good to us ever? History is full of lessons for us. The world today has enough proof as well. Let us be intelligent, and become less judgmental. Let us urge the goodness in us to manifest. For, that's who we are - Good.

In a beautiful discourse in the Summer of 1972, Swami said,

"Anger, pride, and other passions reduce man to the level of a lunatic and sometimes degrade him to the level of an animal. One's anger is one's greatest enemy and one's calmness is one's protection. One's joy is one's heaven and one's sorrow is one's hell. He who is possessed by anger will be hated by people. Anger leads to many great sins. It is caused by weakness, not of the body but of the mind. To give strength to our mind and remove the weakness from our mind, it is necessary to fill it with good thoughts, good feelings and good ideas."

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ ON SERVICE

If there is one message that rings out loud and clear in every sacred scripture of this world - be it the Bhagavad Gita, the Bible, the Quran, the Guru Granth Sahib, the Avesta or any other holy book – it is 'serve all men as your own'. And it is this same message that Bhagavan Baba exhorts us to follow when He says, "Love all, Serve all; Help ever, Hurt never."

This month's multi-faith quiz takes you through different faiths of the world, and demonstrates how this simple yet profound message is conveyed in so many beautiful and varied ways through various Divine Masters, age after age.

1. In a "Chinna Katha", a small story during His Divine Discourse, Bhagavan Baba narrates this anecdote from the epic Ramayana.

Lord Rama has vanquished Ravana, rescued Sita and has been coronated Emperor of Ayodhya. Swami continues...

"After the coronation, one day, Sita and the three brothers of Rama met and planned to exclude Hanuman from the seva of Rama and wanted that all the various services for Rama should be divided only among themselves.

They felt that Hanuman had enough chances already. So, they drew up a list, as exhaustive as they could remember, of the services from dawn till dusk, down to the smallest minutiae and assigned each item to one among themselves.

They presented the list of items and assignees to the Lord, while Hanuman was present. Rama heard about the new procedure, read the list and gave His approval, with a smile.

He told Hanuman that all the tasks had been assigned to others and that he could now take rest."

What happened next?

- A. Hanuman said that he would take up 'yawning service' for Lord Rama.
- B. Hanuman left for his brother's kingdom in a huff.
- C. Hanuman shrunk himself to the size of a bee and settled on Lord Rama's crown.
- D. Lord Rama asked Hanuman to build a bridge up to heaven to keep him occupied.

2. What act of service did Lord Jesus offer to his disciple Peter, who then refused to accept it from him?

- A. Lord Jesus offered to give him his shoes.
- B. Lord Jesus wished to bless him with the Holy Spirit.
- C. Lord Jesus offered to wash his feet.
- D. Lord Jesus wished to heal him of a skin disease.

3. Eknath was a great saint of India. Once he made a sacred pilgrimage to the Kashi Viswanath temple at Varanasi, and while there, collected water from the Ganges, intending to perform the ritual of Consecration (*abhishek*) at the Rameshwaram shrine, thousands of miles away. He set off with the water which he placed in pitchers hanging from a bamboo pole held across His shoulders.

What happened along the way which meant he could not carry out this wish?

- A. He was dying of thirst and so drank the water himself.
- B. A holy monk asked for the water for blessing a nearby King's new baby.
- C. An eagle swooped from the sky and carried off the pitchers.
- D. He saw a donkey dying of thirst and gave him the water to save its life.

4. Prophet Mohammed had to contend with the open hostility of the Quraish tribe, who dominated the city of Mecca and who attempted to destroy him and his followers over a twenty year period. Finally the Prophet was able to capture Mecca without any opposition. What did he do to the vanquished Quraish?

- A. The Prophet ordered the Quraish to be exiled.
- B. The Prophet gave clemency to the Quraish.
- C. The Prophet had all the Quraish executed.
- D. The Prophet made the Quraish slaves of the Muslims.

5. When a young man of only 18, Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was sent out by his father with a companion with some money to buy merchandise to make a little profit. What did Guru Nanak do when on the way he came across some holy men, wearing only loin cloths.

- A. He gave them all his money.
- B. He preached to them the value of seeing God in all things.
- C. He became their disciples.
- D. He asked them to give him a *mantra* in return for the money.

6. In Judaism, the practice of *tzedakah*, is the act of charitable giving that is laid down in Jewish law. Every traditional Jewish home has a *pushke*, a box for collecting coins for the poor, and according to Jewish beliefs, the spiritual benefit of giving to the poor is so great that a beggar actually does the giver a favor by giving a person the opportunity to perform *tzedakah*.

According to Jewish law what is the minimum percentage that of income that should be given?

- A. 10%
- B. 5%
- C. 15%
- D. 3%

7. Lord Buddha encouraged His (lay) followers to practice charity and service to all beings saying: "If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of selfishness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift."

Lord Buddha also taught his followers to develop the inner quality of loving kindness to all beings. What is the name of the well-known prayer that the Buddha dictated to cultivate love for all beings?

- A. *Sabbâsava sutta*
- B. *Mahâ-sudassana sutta*
- C. *Metta sutta*
- D. *Ketokhila sutta*

8. Bhagavan Baba tells us a fascinating story from the life of Lord Krishna:

"Krishna was known to all as almighty, all-knowing, all-encompassing and all-fulfilling. Yet, the enthusiasm to do service prompted Him to approach Dharmaraja, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, on the eve of the magnificent *Raajsooya Yaaga* he had planned to celebrate, and offered to take up *seva* of any kind."

What was the *seva* that Lord Krishna suggested He might take up concerning the feast to be held?

- A. Serving the guests their food.
- B. Cleaning the hall after the feast had ended.
- C. Announcing the honoured and distinguished chief guests to the assembly.
- D. Playing on His flute to entertain the guests.

9. Jains serve the world by their strict adherence to *ahimsa*, or non-violence. In which unique way from the following selections do Jain monks and nuns practice ahimsa in their daily life?

- A. By sweeping away insects lest they tread on them.
- B. By never speaking lest they might swallow insects.
- C. By never eating fruit lest they kill small creatures inside.
- D. By never using paper lest trees are chopped down.

10. Lord Jesus taught that service to others is a prime requisite for spiritual maturity. What was the name of the parable by which He expounded on this topic?

- A. 'The two sons'
- B. 'The Laborers in the Vineyard'
- C. 'The Sower'
- D. 'The Good Samaritan'

ANSWERS:

1A.

Swami tells us about Hanuman's ingenious response:

"Hanuman prayed that the list might be read and when it was done, he noticed a task of 'snapping fingers when one yawns'. Of course, being an emperor, Rama should not be allowed to do it himself. It has to be done by a servant, he pleaded. Rama agreed to allot that task to Hanuman.

It was a great piece of good luck for Hanuman, for it entailed Hanuman's constant attendance on his Master, for how could anyone predict when the yawn would come? And, he had to be ready with a snap, as soon as the yawn was on! He could not be away for a minute nor could he relax for a moment."

2C.

Lord Jesus offered to wash his feet. The Gospel of John records this event as follows:

'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came forth from God, and was going to God, arose from supper, and laid aside his outer garments. He took a towel, and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. Then he came to Simon Peter. He said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus

answered him, "You don't know what I am doing now, but you will understand later."

Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me."

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "Someone who has bathed only needs to have his feet washed, then he is completely clean... So when he had washed their feet, put his outer garment back on, and sat down again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me, 'Teacher' and 'Lord.' You say so correctly, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Most certainly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his lord, neither one who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.'

(Gospel of John, chapter 13 v3-17)

3D.

Swami tells us that:

"Adore the God that is resident in all beings, motivating them and prompting their every activity. Eknath, the Maharashtra saint, had that vision. He was going on pilgrimage to Raameshwaram, in the extreme south of India, from Varanasi, in the North, carrying the sacred Ganga in a pot, to be poured ceremonially on the Ramalingeshwara idol at that place. His disciples were with him. On the way, he saw a donkey dying of thirst, in great agony. Ekanatha felt that the Raamalingeshwara in the donkey was calling out for the holy Ganga that he was carrying on his shoulder; in spite of the protests of his followers, he poured the precious Ganga down the throat of the dying animal and saved it. His joy knew no bounds."

4B.

The people of Mecca expected general slaughter in view of their persecution of Muslims for the past twenty years. While standing by the Ka'bah, the Prophet promised clemency for them, stating: "O Quraish, what do you think that I am about to do with you?" They replied, "Good. You are a noble brother, son of a noble brother." **The Prophet forgave them** all saying:

"I will treat you as Prophet Yousuf (Joseph) treated his brothers. There is no reproach against you. Go to your homes, and you are all free."

The Prophet also declared:

"Allah made Mecca holy the day He created heavens and earth, and it is the holy of holies until the Resurrection Day. It is not lawful for anyone who

believes in Allah and the last day to shed blood therein, nor to cut down trees therein. It was not lawful to anyone before me and it will not be lawful to anyone after me.”

5A.

Guru Nanak said to his companion, “Father has asked us to carry out some profitable transaction. No bargain can be more profitable than to feed and clothe these naked and hungry hermits. I cannot pass this true bargain by. One will rarely get an opportunity to carry out such a profitable transaction.” So saying he took all the money and placed it before the leader of the hermits and said, “I offer this in your service.”

The leader of the hermits said, “Son, we are *Nirbaanis*, we have foresworn wearing clothes, this money is of no use to us. We do not go to villages or towns. We stay in the jungle. But, if you get us a meal with this money we will accept it.” Hearing this Guru Nanak went to the village nearby. They had meals prepared with the money and brought them to the hermits. Having fed the holy men they headed home empty handed.

Guru Nanak understood that by serving the saintly people he had indeed made a profit from the currency of good deeds, good thoughts and righteous actions.

6A.

The obligation to perform *tzedakah* can be fulfilled by giving money to the poor, to health care institutions, to synagogues or to educational institutions. It can also be fulfilled by supporting one's children beyond the age when legally required to, or supporting one's parents in their old age. The obligation includes giving to both Jews and non-Jews.

Certain kinds of *tzedakah* are considered more meritorious than others, ranging from the least favourable which is ‘giving begrudgingly’ to the most desired that is ‘enabling the recipient to become self-reliant.’

7C.

The Metta Sutta has become a meditation that is used by countless Buddhists to develop loving kindness for all beings:

“Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born,
May all beings be happy!
Let none deceive another,

Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings:
Radiating kindness over the entire world
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths."

8B.

Swami goes on to state that Lord Krishna:

"...suggested that he might be given the task of cleaning the dining hall after the guests have partaken of the feast! Krishna insisted on outer cleanliness and inner cleansing. Clean clothes and clean minds are the ideal combination.

During the battle of Kurukshetra, which climaxed the Mahabharatha story, Krishna served as the 'driver' of the chariot of Arjuna throughout the day on the field and when dusk caused the adjournment of the fight, he led the horses to the river, gave them a refreshing bath and applied healing balms to the wounds suffered by them during the fierce fray. He mended the reins and the harness and rendered the chariot battle worthy for another day."

9A

Jain monks and nuns endeavour to practice stringently the following precepts of *ahimsa*:

Mentally not to injure oneself;

Mentally not to be injured by others;

Mentally not to approve injury done by others;

Orally not to injure oneself;

Orally not to be injured by others;

Orally not to approve injury done by others;

Physically not to injure oneself;

Physically not to be injured by others, and

Physically not to approve injury done by others.

10D.

The parable of the Good Samaritan exemplifies Jesus' teachings to love and serve all, irrespective of their community or colour:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" asked Jesus. The man answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said:

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead with no clothes. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

(Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, v25-37)

QUIZ ON DIVINE DISCOURSES ON SERVICE

"Convince yourselves that life cannot continue long without others serving you and you serving others. Only those who have humility to regard themselves as "servants of servants" can become true servants of God. You must render service out of spontaneous urge from within, with a heart filled with love..."

When you grasp the significance of the word, Service, you will find that it is not so much the service of others, but, service for yourself! Once you feel the distinction that the other person is foreign, then, service becomes patronage; it loses its savour and fosters the evil of egoism. Such service is quite against the spiritual practice called Seva. Serve man, until you see God in all men; then, what you do will be elevated as Worship."

This is what Bhagavan Baba said in a beautiful discourse while delineating the value and virtue of service. In innumerable discourses like this, Bhagavan has elucidated on this supreme human value of service. The present quiz is designed to help you recapitulate these precious tenets from the Divine Master.

1. In a Divine Discourse delivered in November 1988, Swami reminds us: "It is the sense of dualism - of "mine" and "thine"- which accounts for all the joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes experienced by man. This dualism is rooted in selfishness, which makes one think that as long as he is all right, it does not matter what happens to the world. Such a self-centered person, who regards his body, his wealth and his family as all that matter to him, looks upon truth as untruth and the false as true. To get rid of this deep-seated malaise, men have to engage themselves in service. They have to realise that the body has been given not to serve one's own interests but to serve others. Service should proceed from an awareness of what one owes to society."

According to Swami, with what spirit should one serve society?

- A. Subservience
- B. Gratitude
- C. Material fulfillment
- D. Mutual exchange of help.

2. In a Divine Discourse delivered in November 1987, Swami guides us as to which category of people we should focus on to serve the most: "One should be prepared to serve others than choose to be served by them. There are three levels of people in the world. At the highest level are those who may be placed in the category of *Lakshmi-Narayana*. Those who are in the same stage as ourselves are in the category of *Aswatha-Narayana*. Those who are poorer than ourselves may be described as *Daridra-Narayana*."

According to Swami, then on which section of people should our efforts be directed to?

- A. Lakshmi-Narayana
- B. Aswatha-Narayana
- C. Daridra-Narayana
- D. Whichever one comes first

3. During the 1973 Summer Shower discourses, Swami corrected us: "You should be prepared to do selfless service. You should never think of being served by others. You have the strength of the body, mind and spirit at this age and therefore you should do service to others right now. You should serve old, hungry and weak people. Such service should be regarded by you as service to God. On the other hand, if you are anticipating that someone will serve you, your life will be going along a dark path."

So according to Swami, what will be the end result of getting accustomed to only being served by others?

- A. We will never progress spiritually.
- B. We will become old sooner.
- C. We will become egotistical.
- D. We will have to repay the debt of service to others.

4. In a Divine Discourse given in November 1987, Swami reminds us that: "We must consider that we have taken birth only to render service to society as a sacred duty. Whatever small service we may do, if we do it in the right spirit, serving with no thought of self, we shall be doing something commendable and worthwhile. An act of service by itself may be a small thing. But it must be done wholeheartedly. Just as a cow transforms whatever it may consume into sweet, wholesome milk, any kind of service rendered with a pure heart will result in great good. You should not have any returns in view in rendering service. "This is my duty. I am born to serve" - it is with such an attitude that you should take up service."

According to Swami, what should be taken into consideration when allotting service?

- A. It should be according to one's capacity.
- B. One should obey one's superiors.
- C. Take up anything that comes one's way.
- D. Always wait politely to be asked first.

5. In a Divine Discourse given in May 1984, Swami describes how true seva should be done: "How is service done presently? Doubtlessly, there are

persons who undertake service with love. But for whose sake are they doing it? It is for their own sake, not for others. It may not be done to achieve name or to gain something. It is done for the pleasure derived from it. To engage in service activities with pleasure and to regard a day devoted to service as a good holiday is not enough."

So according to Swami, when can service considered as true service?

- A. When you earn people's respect.
- B. When the nation progresses.
- C. When it is regarded as an offering to the Divine.
- D. When Swami comes in our dream and acknowledges it.

6. In His Divine series "Vidya Vahini", Swami shares His Wisdom: "The parrot talk, "Service to Man is Service to God" (*Manava seva is Madhava seva*) does not extend to all men. Those who reel off this axiom do not inquire who are the men to be served. They are eager only to fill their own stomachs; for this purpose they restrict their mental horizons to the uplift of their own people. Thus, they lay waste the valuable education they have received."

According to Swami, besides serving not only those who help us, who else should educated persons serve?

- A. Those who don't ask for anything.
- B. Those who harm us.
- C. The pious and the holy.
- D. The uneducated and lowly.

7. In a Divine Discourse delivered in December 1967, Swami propounds on how each one can share their talents and skills within their own society in the form of service: "The doctors among you can serve the poor by treating them without insisting on payment; give the poor all the attention and care that you lavish on the rich, paying patients. Do it for the sake of God; feel that it is the *Puja* you are offering Him. The lawyers among you can help those, who for want of a skilled advocate, have to go undefended or have to suffer at the hands of unscrupulous men."

According to Swami, how can the sevadal empower destitute ladies?

- A. By teaching them about the advent of Sathya Sai.
- B. By letting them know someone cares.
- C. By inculcating in them the awareness of their own divinity.
- D. By teaching them to be assertive.

8. In a Divine Discourse delivered in November 2000, Swami expounds more on the Divine act of service: "The hands do the work, the tongue performs the task of talking and the head enquires. All these limbs of the body may be different from each other but the divine power that exists in them is one and the same. Likewise, the same divinity exists in all beings. Once you understand this truth, the service you render will become divine. One should not become egoistic thinking that one is doing great service. Actually, service is meant to _____."

- A. Pass the time usefully.
- B. Kill the ego.
- C. Build friendships.
- D. Keep the idle mind busy.

9. In a Divine Discourse given in November 1987, Swami guides us: "A peaceful mind is the abode of love. Love is inherent in man, but like a seed that has to be nourished by manure and water, love in man has to be fostered by *sraddha* and *prema* (dedicated service and love). Love is a sacred quality. It is like nectar. A man who has tasted the immortal sweetness of Divine love will not desire anything else in the world. Life must become a constant manifestation of love. Today love is manifested in a constricted, selfish manner. It needs to be expressed in service to society. It has to be offered to others and shared with them. Thereby love becomes a reciprocal, ever widening experience."

According to Swami, how does the sacred act of service change our lives?

- A. It sanctifies our lives.
- B. It attracts others towards us.
- C. It makes purposeful projects get done faster.
- D. It ensures liberation.

10. During the 1979 Summer discourses, Swami expounded on the ultimate of all seva. "We should undertake today what is known as *nishkama karma*, or action performed without any desire for the fruit thereof. Service of the downtrodden, the disabled and the diseased also constitutes an obligation in one's daily life and cannot be described as being *nishkama karma*, or motiveless work. This is because man's love for the universe is not without selfishness. If man loves any object, he does so for his own sake and pleasure. Similarly, if a man conceals an object in a secure place, it is not on account of his love for the object, but because of his love for himself. Thus, in the world, all kinds of love are born of love for oneself and not out of love for others."

According to Swami, how should one regard the opportunity of doing selfless-service?

- A. Fear of sin and love for God.
- B. The need of society.
- C. The true bank for prosperity.
- D. The purpose for which we are given life.

ANSWERS:

1B. Gratitude

Swami reiterates: "One's name and fame, all the comforts one enjoys, are derived from society. One finds fulfillment in society. That being the case, if one does not serve society, whom else can he serve? Sheer gratitude demands that one should serve society which is the source of all benefits enjoyed by man. Men without gratitude are worse than wild animals. What are required for service are not money and materials.

2C. Daridra-Narayana.

Swami guides us further: "There is nothing meritorious in serving those who are high above us. For one thing, they can command the services of attendants. Rendering service to those who are in the same position as ourselves is not also commendable. Service should be rendered to those who are worse off than ourselves and who are neglected by the world.

There is no need to render service to one who is *Lakshmi-Narayana*, as there will be servants to take care of him. *Aswatha-Narayana* is the type of person who is filled with endless desires and is never contented, whatever his accomplishments or earnings. Service to such a person is unnecessary. **It is the weak, the destitute and the helpless who need to be served.** Even in rendering service to such persons, there should be no feeling that we are serving 'others'. We should feel that we are serving the Lord Narayana who dwells in them. When service is rendered in a total spirit of dedication, with concentration of thought, word and deed, the heart gets sanctified. Without purity of the heart there can be no spiritual progress."

3D. We will have to repay the debt of service to others.

Swami teaches us: "Many of us in affluence are accustomed to getting work done by servants. We feel the position of authority and think that we are entitled to service, but **this is going to result in a situation wherein you have to repay the debt of service back to others.** What you see, what you do and what you say, will always come back to you as resound and reflection.

We must train ourselves in such a way that we can do our own work and after that we must be ready to serve our parents. We should then plunge into the society and be prepared to serve the society. This service must come from within you in a free and voluntary manner. We should not prepare ourselves to do work for the sake of showing it to others. It is for the sake of *prema* and

love that we should do work. We should be prepared to do work as a consequence of our realising the oneness of all mankind. If there is an individual who is suffering in a hospital without anyone to look after him and is without any friends, if any of you go to the hospital in those circumstances and talk to him sweetly, you will establish a close bond of affection between you both. This will make you a closer friend of his than even his own relatives."

4A. It should be according to one's capacity.

Swami says: "All beings in creation are living by rendering mutual service and no one can be considered superior to another. **Every person should render service according to his capacity and the sphere of his activities.** There are various limbs in the human body. But the hands cannot do what the legs are capable of, nor can the eyes perform the duties of the ears. What the ears can enjoy, the eyes cannot. Likewise, among human beings there are differences. Their capacities and aptitudes may vary. But each should take part in service activity according to his ability, equipment and field of work. Any individual may offer worship and engage in spiritual activities according to his preferences. But, in my view, the merit to be gained through service is greater than what can be got through these religious observances."

5C. When it is regarded as an offering to the Divine.

Swami elaborates further: "**To utilise one's wealth, one's talents and resources for the service of the people and help to all living things must be regarded as an offering to, and a form of worship of the Divine. Only then can Seva (selfless service) become true service.**"

Sadhana (spiritual effort) does not mean performing *japa* in a lonely place. There is no greater *sadhana* than service to one's fellowmen done in an unselfish spirit. Ignoring the sufferings of others, if you occupy yourself in meditation or other devotional activity, it has no spiritual value at all. It is only one form of selfishness."

6B. Those who harm us.

Swami reprimands educated people: "Man forgets the fact that God is in perceptible form in all beings. Service rendered to any being is service offered to God. This has to be the chief goal of the educated. Nara is Narayana. Man is God. Every single act of Man has to be elevated as an act of service to God. But students today do not know what exactly is Narayana and what exactly is Nara. How can a person claim to be educated when he cannot identify the Nara-Narayana Principle? They are the entities denoted by the Upanishads as '*Thwam*' and '*Thath*,' "you" and "That." He who has not become aware of these two cannot claim to have known himself.

The education that does not reveal oneself to one, of what use can it be to reveal anything else? But to our misfortune, the educated who are the educators, are engaged not in promoting our best interests and serving us, but in doing great disservice as much as they need. It is highly strange. For, **the educated persons must not only serve those who help them, but also those who harm them. This attitude makes the service doubly holy. Serving those who do service to us is but a natural reaction. Serving those who harm us is the greater virtue.** For this latter course of action involves deeper understanding of one's best interest and an alert sense of time, place and circumstance. Education must confer and cultivate these qualities."

7C. By inculcating in them the awareness of their own divinity.

Swami expands further: "Service done in homes for the disabled, the defectives, the feeble minded, the delinquents, the orphans, the refugees - is indeed very beneficial and a good *Sadhana*. So too, in jails and hospitals. Visit these places often, give solace and strength; light the lamp of devotion in the inmates. Do *Bhajan*; help them to write to their homes, give them books for reading or read books for them, be the kith and kin of those who have none whom they can call their own. Your smile will be a lighted candle in their darkness.

Women devotees, if they have the enthusiasm and support, can start *Mahila Sathsangs*, not only for *Bhajans* and study of sacred texts and books, but for service of women. Go among the poor in the slums and spread light and joy therein. Gather the helpless girls and try to provide them with some means of honourable livelihood. Sweeten their lives with *bhajan* and the *Sadhana* of *japa* and *dhyaana*. **Women too have a right to know that they are the *Aatma*, encased in human form, and they too can tap the strength, the joy and the peace that the *Aatma* holds.** Inculcate in them the prayer habit; that will cleanse the mind of all impurities, and make God shine in His full splendour."

8B. Kill the ego.

Swami elaborates more on this: "**Actually, service is meant to kill the ego.** You cannot call it service if it is rendered with ego. First of all, ego has to be subdued. Body attachment is the root cause of ego. Ego will vanish once the body attachment is given up. The spirit of oneness will develop once the ego is annihilated.

Never think that society cannot progress if you do not render service. Society does not depend on you. If not you, someone else will do the needful.

When you serve others, your power will also increase. The power of attraction is present in everybody. The purer you become, the greater will be your power of attraction and so, you will absorb more power."

9A. It sanctifies our lives.

Swami tells us clearly how to sanctify our life: "Every Sai *sadhak* and *sevak* has to make the *Atma* the basis of all activity. He should regard himself as the embodiment of the Divine and realise that the *Atma* is present in everyone. One should have the feeling that whatever joy or sorrow others experience is equally his. Only then can one render service, conferring joy on others.

You should realize that there is no greater and more sacred path to the Divine than service. It is a golden opportunity for you in this birth. Here is the means to sanctify your life by service in the Sai Organisation.

There is no use in sitting alone in meditation with closed eyes, or in going on pilgrimages. You must realize the Omnipresent Divine through service."

10D. The purpose for which we are given life.

Swami reveals more: "*Nishkama karma* uproots the bestiality in man and confers divinity on him. Selfless service is a more exalted means of spiritual progress than such other ways as meditation, *bhajan* and *yoga*. This is so because when we undertake meditation, *japa*, or *yoga*, we do so for our own benefit and not for the good of others. These are aimed at subjugating one's individual desires and securing happiness for oneself. What we should aspire for is the attainment of the good of others without any desire for personal gain.

Nishkama karma, or selfless service, is the fragrant flower of altruistic love. It is not to be performed for the satisfaction of the person rendering the service or the person at whose bidding it is done. Man should regard *nishkama karma* as the purpose for which he is given life. This feeling should flow through his very nerves and bloodstream and permeate every cell of his body. Whatever be the work we do, we should do it as an offering to God and for His pleasure.

HEART2HEART QUIZ

ON SERVICE

Love – this has been Bhagavan Baba's message incessantly decade after decade. And the highest expression of this Love is selfless service.

The mission of Heart2Heart too is to share this Love, month after month, so that everyone can relish this Love, and then grow in this Love. Here is a quiz to jog your memory about the various facets of this supreme love, with manifests as selfless service in practical life. These questions are culled from the many previous issues of H2H.

1. In 'All Encompassing Grace' from the March 2008 issue, Mrs. Kavita Sriram shared her experience of Swami's Omnipresence: "Swami's 77th birthday was fast approaching when I had humbly proposed to the members of our Sai Center in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, that we take up a special service project such as the sewing or knitting of baby blankets, to live His message that the 'Hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray.' Despite the lack of talent, the task was completed well ahead of time and our parcel of love was shipped to Puttaparthi.

Ever since then, during Swami's birthday every year, it has become a tradition for us to undertake a special service activity to express our love by reaching out to Him among the needy, as He so lovingly always reminds us that 'Service to God is service to man'."

To whom did Swami instruct that the first package be given to?

- A. Kavita's first child.
- B. The first child born on November 23 in His Hospital.
- C. One of the orphanage kids in the first row at Darshan.
- D. One blind child sitting near Swami.

2. In 'Creating A Land of Love ...' from the November 2007 issue, we presented the moving story of service done for a group of people who were named 'Narayanas' by the Sevalal, but who are more normally called 'lepers' by society. After carrying out this service as an offering to Bhagavan for years, one volunteer...

"who was cleaning the wounds of the Narayanas in dedicated and heartfelt service, after some time, started to feel the sensation in his right hand was slowly decreasing and becoming numb - an early sign of leprosy!"

What did he do next?

- A. He prayed to Bhagavan and his symptoms vanished.

- B. He collapsed in a faint, but was revived by vibhuti.
- C. He became a member of the 'narayana' community.
- D. He went to a Delhi hospital to receive treatment and was cured.

3. In 'The Divine Alchemy' from the November 2007 issue, Mr. Jeremy Hoffer shares a very inspiring story of the beautiful effects that service with love can bring to others, while he took part on a group service project: "Very often, the poor and homeless are treated badly, even by people offering them services. We all agreed that we would work differently. We reminded ourselves that God is the indweller of every living being, and therefore, we would treat every single person as if he were Swami Himself, and give only love towards one and all.

"As the long line of people began filing into the downtown church where we were giving away the boots, the poor and homeless were at first very restless and aggressive with each other and with us. But our group continued to treat them all in a loving manner. Very quickly, the atmosphere began to change. Soon, everyone became peaceful, orderly and happy. Each person was invited to sit down in a chair and be served food and drink while they waited their turn to find a pair of boots. When their turn came, our workers peeled off the old shoes and socks from their worn and tired feet, and carefully fit them with a new pair of socks and boots, and sent them on their way happy and recharged."

What happened when one of the homeless men saw that one of the others could not find a pair that fit him?

- A. He taunted the group for their disorganisation.
- B. He made them promise to bring a right pair for him the next day.
- C. The other man walked off bare foot.
- D. He donated his own boots to the other man.

4. In "Hands That Serve Are Holier than Lips That Pray" from the October 2006 edition, we presented an enlightening panel discussion with distinguished members of the Sri Sathya Sai University.

Sri Sanjay Sahani, the Principal of Brindavan campus of the Institute, related a question posed to Bhagavan from Dr. Fanibunda, a dentist from Bombay and ardent devotee, who asked:

"Swami, what is the role of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation in Your mission?"

What was Swami's reply?

- A. To spread the glorious name of Sai.

- B. To bring good people into My mission.
- C. Nothing.
- D. So I can measure a person's progress on the path.

5. In 'Serve Man Until You See God in All Men' from the December 2007 issue, Mr. Bjørn Ribers from Denmark shared how blissful he felt when she put Swami's teachings to practice: "I volunteered to become a visiting friend at the nearest old people's home. Several days a week I would go and spend time with the elders, talk to them, listen to their life stories and learn about the difficulties they are grappling with in the last days of their lives.

It was on one such day, when I was on my way to visit an elderly man at the old people's home that I was longing for India and Swami. When I entered the room where the old man lived, I saw him lying on his bed. And as I went near and we started speaking, my thoughts went back to India and for a few seconds I didn't focus on the person in front of me, whom I had promised to serve."

What did Mr. Ribers see after he looked up at the old man again?

- A. He saw Baba in His physical form.
- B. An angel.
- C. He turned into a young man suddenly.
- D. There was an orange halo all around him.

ANSWERS:

1B. The first child born on November 23 in His Hospital.

Kavita continued: **"The following year too, He graciously accepted the sample package and instructed that the first piece be given to the first child born on November 23 in His Hospital in Puttaparthi.**

Swami inspires us in many ways and instantly acknowledges every single sincere gesture of ours, however small and insignificant it may seem. We think, in our small human minds, that we are doing something for society, but He does not need our help. It is a chance given to us to improve ourselves."

2A. He prayed to Bhagavan and his symptoms vanished.

The story continues:

"Incredibly, a calm resignation took him over, as he felt this happened while serving those so much in need. He simply prayed to Bhagavan to give him enough strength to carry on serving. Miraculously all the symptoms vanished! It is now ten years since this happened and he is still serving the Narayanas with tremendous zeal and love! The way the Lord takes care of His workers is unimaginable."

3D. He donated his own boots to the other man.

Mr. Hoffer continued: "At the end of the day, after almost all of the boots were gone, there was one man who had received his pair of boots and was about to leave, when he noticed another man who could not find a pair of boots to fit him. The man without boots was very discouraged as his shoes were in very bad condition and not fit to last through the tough winter months. **Observing this, the first man with boots in hand went over to this man and gave him his boots and said, 'Here, it looks like you need these boots more than me. My shoes are in better condition than yours, so please take my new boots.'** With this, the man walked away smiling.

We need not wait for hurricanes to befall us for opportunities to serve. In fact any act of love directed to relieve the suffering of another person is worthy service. In this work love is the essential ingredient. Service is nothing more than love in action. It has the power not only to uplift the downtrodden, but also to transform us into more selfless loving human beings."

4C. Nothing.

Sri Sanjay Sahani goes on to say:

To his utter amazement, Bhagavan said, "Nothing."

It was so startling!

Dr. Fanibunda continued, "Swami...nothing?"

Swami confirmed, "Yes...nothing."

Dr Fanibunda couldn't help but ask this question: "Swami, then why is there such a huge organization setup?"

Swami explained, "It is only for your *chitta shuddhi* – purifying your heart."

If we keep this in mind, we will never lose our moorings when we take up service activities, we will always remain on track on reaching the goal. This is the important and distinguishing feature.

5A. He saw Baba in His physical form.

Mr. Ribers continued: "When I looked up again it was no longer the old **man lying on the bed. It was Sri Sathya Sai Baba, in His orange robe, with a crown of black hair! Not like a vision or a dream, but in His physical form. I was so awestruck that I almost fell on my knees. But the moment I moved, the scene changed. Again it was the old man lying in front of me.**

'Serve man until you see God in all men,' Baba tells us. I spent the rest of the day with my friend, reflecting upon Baba's words. As humble as I would be towards Swami, I should be to this man. As respectful as I would be to Swami, I should be towards this man. All the love I would have for Swami, I should have for this man. **'In the years to come, you will see Me in My different manifestations of My form.'** Baba had indeed kept His promise. For five years I served several different people at the old people's home and I spent almost every evening there. I didn't see Swami in His familiar divine form again, but I learned to see and experience His omnipresence and His Love in His multiplicity of forms."

THE HEALING TOUCH

EIGHT YEARS OF ELEVATING AND HOLISTIC HEALTHCARE

By Mr. Y Arvind

On January 19, 2009, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, celebrates its 8th anniversary; another fulfilling year in the calendar of the Sai Health Care Mission. Times change, people alter, but the will of God remains eternal. Many are called but few are chosen, is an oft repeated aphorism. When opportunity meets energy, the result is a revolution. Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has set in motion a revolution founded on the most fundamental need of every being – Love. Swami's Hospitals are the physical representation of "Love in Action". No wonder they are referred to as 'Temples of Healing'.

With its four specialties of Cardiology, Cardiothoracic surgery, Neurology and Neuro surgery, the SSSIHMS, Whitefield, has steadily been healing hearts and minds - physically, emotionally and spiritually - and returning them to society as productive men and women. The guidelines that Swami has given form the bastions that hold up this edifice of healing:

- Medical care should be made available to all patients free of charge.
- Medical care should be administered with love and care.
- Every patient should be given the best available treatment.
- The patient, and not merely the disease, should be treated.

With time, the SSSIHMS, Whitefield, has evolved to meet demands from various fronts: Clinical, Academic and Technological. In addition to this, fresh initiatives have also been taken to provide more amenities at the staff residential campus.

I. The Clinical Dimension -

Exploring New Frontiers of Cardiac Sciences and Setting Challenging Targets in Neuro Sciences

On the clinical front, a special mention must be made of the Department of Cardiology which has surpassed itself in performing a variety of cases and has added to its repertoire the cutting edge procedure of Device Closure. This is a new technique where holes in the heart are closed using artificial devices in the Catheterisation Lab, instead of doing an open heart surgery.

A little explanation will make this clearer. The heart has four chambers, two atria on top and two ventricles at the bottom. The right side of the heart pumps impure blood to the lungs, which return pure blood to the left side of the heart, which in turn pumps the pure blood to the rest of the body. There

are four valves that control the unidirectional flow of the blood; from the left – the mitral, the aortic, the pulmonary and the tricuspid. Anything out of the ordinary with the walls between the chambers or these valves, leads to a cardiac problem. “A hole in the heart” causes pure and impure blood to mix leading to various other complications. Earlier, these holes could be closed only through open heart surgery, where the sternum (breast bone) was cut in half, the chest opened up and the surgery done on Cardiopulmonary bypass using a heart lung machine. This, of course, meant that the patient was scarred for life and post operative complications always hung like the sword of Damocles. Young women and girls in their teens were the worst affected since the scar on their body was always a cause of concern for them.

In Device Closure technique, a small collapsed synthetic wire-meshed device is threaded onto a catheter and through standard catheterisation procedure is manoeuvred into the hole and released. The device pops open and expands into a disc that effectively blocks the opening, and restores normal blood flow. It has the same result as a full fledged operation, but without the pain, scarring or intensive care unit observation – all this at the same price. The benefit is enormous, particularly because the patient can return to normal life and activity within two days of the procedure with no after effects.

The workshop on Device Closure conducted by SSSIHMS, Whitefield on November 13, 2008 had Dr. Hieu from Vietnam National Heart Center demonstrating the procedure. Dr. Dash, Head of the Department, Cardiology, SSSIHMS, Whitefield was guided by Dr. Hieu, and together over 8 cases were addressed in one day.

Other participants from SSSIHMS, Whitefield included Dr. Barooah, Dr. Amit Garg and DNB (Diploma of National Board) residents. Dr. Ravi Narayan from Manipal Heart Institute, Dr. Deepak from Vydehi Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Center, and Dr. Keshav Murthy from BGS Apollo also participated in this workshop.

The Department of Neurosciences, not to be out done, has performed more than 49 aneurysm clippings (surgical procedure to treat a balloon-like bulge or weakening of an artery wall) in the brain along with a host of other surgeries including spinal surgery and brain tumour excision. This department has upped its ante of increasing the number of surgeries, and as a unit, has achieved the set targets. There are new frontiers now being envisaged.

II. The Academic Dimension

The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Allied Health Sciences, Aids Scores of Students

With the inauguration of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Allied Health Sciences, the SSSIHMS added another feather to its cap. Already recognised by the , the Hospital has a full fledged DNB program in Cardiology, CTVS, Neurosurgery, Anaesthesia and Radiology. Now, the Hospital has further increased its academic ambit by offering undergraduate paramedical training

programmes. The SSSIAHS offers seven courses – B. Sc. (nursing), BSc. (Radiology), BSc.(Anaesthesia Technology), B. Sc. (Cardiac Care Technology), B. Sc. (Imaging Technology), B. Sc. (Medical Lab Technology), B. Sc. (Perfusion Technology). **All the courses are offered totally free of charge.** The students are provided accommodation on campus and are selected through an entrance examination. The program is affiliated with the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences.

The first batch has 57 students with a compulsory science background hailing from various parts of the country. They are taught the Sai system of education and educate, and are made aware of the value of the opportunity provided to them. **For instance, an undergraduate nursing training programme in a commercial institution costs Rs. 4,00,000 (US \$ 8300). The students of SSSIAHS get it absolutely at no cost to them.**

The academic curriculum is designed to give the students the best of both worlds, and there is no paring of resources when it comes to delivering quality education. A fully equipped library, laboratory facilities, computer lab, and avenues for various extra-curricular activities provide the students all they need to mould themselves into fully productive members of society. Their classrooms are equipped with technological aids including LCD projectors, networked computers, and the new kid on the block – Moodle (more about it later). In SSSIAHS, it is called LMS (Learning Management System).

III. The Technological Dimension

eHis and Telemedicine – Demonstrating the Direction to the Future

On the Technological front, the institute conducts academic research focusing on preventive healthcare, low-cost substitutes for medical implants, and clinical markers for early disease detection to name a few. Inspired by the noble mission of the Hospital, many professionals of eminence from various domains and geographical locations visit the institute and contribute their expertise.

The Hospital has moved over to a superior electronic database management system called the eHIS, short for, Enterprise Hospital Information System, set up by IBA Health, a leading provider of medical software solutions. The DMS (database management system) is a multidimensional tool that is being customised to suit the needs of the Hospital with able support from the managers of the Hospital's Information System department working in tandem with the representatives of IBA Health. Efforts are now on to have a complete software solution including the Human Resource Management, Asset Management as well as Payroll modules.

The Department of Telemedicine that started just 18 months ago has already helped over a thousand patients, both cardiac and neurological at the Barrackpore nodal center in West Bengal. Tele-consultation for cardiac sciences started less than four months ago, and over 90 patients have

benefited from this new service. Efforts are now underway to open a second nodal point in Orissa that has the second largest concentration of patients visiting the Hospital.

IV. The Academics-cum-Technology Dimension

“eGuru” Takes off to Train the Eager and Inspired

Technology offers tremendous opportunities to impart interactive, enriching and collaborative learning experience for the students, and a Learning Management System (LMS) is the best tool to harness its potential. The institute deployed an LMS in October 2008 using the popular open source Moodles under the banner "eGuru" to impart, administer and manage the various academic programmes and courses it offers. eGURU offers self-paced, interactive and object-oriented training to its students. The trainers of education are very adaptive to such technologies and advancements which give LMS an edge in acceptance and usage. The institute plans to extend the scope of LMS to enhance staff skills, job-oriented training, and shape it into a knowledge portal.

One can use the LMS to: access course materials (such as lecture slides and assignment sheets), view announcements (that will be posted throughout the semester and will contain important information about the subject, such as reminders about an upcoming assignment due date) and perform online tasks (such as submitting an assignment). The course outline, lecture notes, assignments, and other learning resources will all be made available through the LMS. In addition, one will also have access to online tools such as feedback quizzes, interactive courseware, and audio recordings of lectures.

The advantages of e-learning are many, such as: Flexibility – anytime and anywhere; Self-paced – students can learn at their own pace; Knowledge Management and Electronic Performance Support; increasing the self-responsibility of the students; and so on.

V. The Spiritual Dimension

Direct Guidance from the Divine - Swami's Visit to the Hospital

While all these developments have been taking shape in the Hospital in recent months, the One who actually shaped and gifted this marvel of healing to this world, and continues to inspire the employees in so many different ways, **Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, blessed the Hospital again with His personal visit on June 7, 2008. On this occasion, He inaugurated the “Sai Veda Venkatarama Health and Fitness Center” in the residential campus of the SSSIHMS.**

The fitness centre was the concretization of the words spoken by Swami on His visit to the Hospital on January 26, 2002.

On that day Swami had blessed the staff of the Hospital with His divine message in which He said, "In due course, this Hospital will have a General Hospital, and a school for children. In the evenings, the tired teachers and doctors will have a play ground to relax and play tennis. I will arrange for all these amenities."

The SSSIHMS Whitefield now has the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Whitefield associated with it, the Health and Fitness centre has a tennis court, a basket ball court, an indoor shuttle court, a fully loaded gymnasium and an indoor games area; a crèche for the children of the staff is also part of the fitness centre complex.

After inaugurating the campus, Swami blessed the Hospital and surprised all the staff with His munificence by dining with them in the huge atrium of the main building. He then blessed all those present with His Divine message in which He highlighted man's weakness for wealth and the loss of health in pursuit of the same. Here is an extract of that timeless discourse:

"The world today...is dependent on money. Whichever party or department you may see... it is all money, money, and money... For the sake of money, everything else is discarded. One destroys ones health for money.

Health is very important. It is the greatest wealth. With good health one can achieve many things. Therefore, Hospitals are very much necessary to be healthy. Amongst you, some consider themselves doctors and others as students. No! In my opinion, all are students. Even doctors, need to study, learn and know many new things. So, they too have to study throughout their lives. Doctors and everyone else too...should learn new techniques...And find treatment for new diseases. Giving medicine alone is not enough. More investigation has to be done to ascertain if the dosage is sufficient and know more about the nature of the disease. The personality of the patient as well as the cause of the malady has to be thoroughly understood; at times, the diseases are genetic, at other times, from friends and associations, or through unforeseen circumstances.

Diseases come and go...The cure is not as important as preventing the infection. This is very important in youth. All powers are imbued in youth energy. God, the almighty, the All-knowing One, is in man. And in man, there are thoughts, mind, intellect, awareness...and ego. Diseases arise because of all these. Even the food we eat... gives rise to many diseases. Therefore, investigate the food you eat... is it *Satwic*, *Rajasic* or *Tamasic*? First and foremost, examine the food. *Satwic* (sublime) thoughts arise from *Satwic* food, and *Satwic* actions arise from *Satwic* thoughts.

So, based on food... diseases progress. First, partake *Satwic* food. Alcohol and non-vegetarian diets bring with them many

diseases. There is no medicine for these diseases. If we eat proper *Satwic* food...good health is assured. So, eat *Satwic* food... but in moderation. Excess eating leads to indigestion. Just because it is tasty, do not overeat.

But children today do not think on these lines. They consume immediately whatever is offered. One has to investigate to know if the food is *Satwic*, *Rajasic* or *Tamasic*. Therefore, the mind is the cause for bondage or liberation. In fact, it is the cause of everything. Mind is the primary source of both health and happiness. If the mind is steady... one has good thoughts. Good thoughts lead to good action. And good action in turn gives rise to happiness and health. So, we have to be careful of what we eat. Without health, the body is of no use. It cannot do any work. So take care of your health.

For children too, in whatever they may learn and play, everything should be in moderation (*mitamu*) and *hitamu*, that is, for goodness and good will. The world needs both of these.

Today in politics, there is no moderation. We find excesses in all forms. More importantly, there is no goodness or good will. With moderation and goodwill, one earns respect from society. To provide strength and support, and reform society... we must enter society, and give them appropriate advice. Not mere advice, but demonstrate to them through our actions. When we do so, society will reform. Therefore, if society has to improve, it is possible only through our efforts. If society and country have to progress, first you should evolve. When you transform for the better...you can then help society. Understand this concept.

You consider the body very important... not the body, the sheaths covering the body are important. Mind, intellect, awareness and ego... are the four coats covering the body. First and foremost, the coat of *buddhi* (intellect) must be removed from the *Atma*. Why do you wear a coat? It is to protect from external environment. First, remove the coat of *Tamas* (dullness and inactivity). Abandon the vest of *Rajas* (unwarranted aggression and passion) and discard the shirt of ego. What remains is the body. This mind, intellect and awareness are meant to facilitate the function of the body. Without these, the body is an empty balloon. Once the body is empty, neither sin nor merit will touch it. Neither praise nor blame; or rewards nor ignominy will have any effect on it. The body is then liberated.

Therefore, eat in moderation. Do not eat in excess and make your stomach look like a "question mark". When you feed the feed the patients in the Hospital, speak to them peacefully. Have a cheerful "smiling face". When we explain to them calmly, they will develop good feelings and follow the right path. Therefore, students too should be careful. In particular, if students are well, the Hospital will be fine. They must follow doctor's advice, respect their words and learn from them."

After this, Swami blessed the staff with group photographs and then left for Brindavan. The very next day He returned to Prasanthi Nilayam.

VI. The Inspiring Dimension

The Beacon of Blissful Healthcare for the Twenty-first Century and Beyond

"Hi Arvind, this is Lakshmikanth from Stockholm, remember me?" When one receives a call that begins like this at 10.30 in the night, it is a natural reaction to say 'wrong number', but when the caller has used your name you begin to think twice. Well, in this case, it turned out to be genuine. The call was from the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden. Some of the alumni of the Sri Sathya Sai University are doing their academic research there, and Lakshmikanth was one of them. He and his co-researcher, Mr. Pettr Brodin, M.D., an immunologist, were working together on the same project and had been to Australia to attend a conference. They had to stop over in India, and when one is touched by God, one cannot but run to him at the first chance. Therefore both of them visited Prasanthi Nilayam and had Swami's *darshan*. And after this, Bangalore being just a three hour drive away, they decided to see His Hospital.

Apparently, life is indeed a series of appointments. It is a matter of semantics whether we call these moments appointments or circumstances or coincidences or miracles. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, one can live life only in two ways, as though nothing is a miracle, or everything is a miracle. I must confess, I don't believe in coincidences. As Swami says, everything happens for a reason.

Pettr and Kanth, as they wanted themselves to be called, drove in from Prasanthi Nilayam in the afternoon just in time for lunch. Over lunch we swapped tales of our experiences working in Hospitals and I was surprised to find Pettr, a European, relishing proper Indian fare, down to eating without a spoon and fork. I asked him about this, and he grinned and gave a distinctive answer "Looks like the amino acids on my finger tips are adding a new taste to my lunch". One can't argue with such an answer. Anyway, after their lunch we set out on a tour of the Hospital.

He Came, He Saw and Was Conquered

We started with the main atrium that soared up 488 feet with its massive six layered crystal chandelier, surrounded by . Though Pettr kept a straight face, one could see he was impressed. We went over to the wards, and Pettr whispered in the deafening silence of the preoperative cardiac ward, "Is this a ward?" It was enough to tell me that he was moved. Being a doctor, he had seen many hospitals. But he later confessed, "This is different. I've never been to a place like this before." Then, with the permission of the Chairman of the Cardiac Sciences, the three of us entered the cardiac theatres. Again Pettr's silence told me much more than words can assay. Not many can put into words their feelings when they see Operation Theatres, and Cath-labs

half the size of shuttle courts, wards the length of football fields, with roofs soaring up to 25 feet, balconies larger than an average sized parking lot, and an atrium that fills them with awe and reverence.

It was when I took him over to the patient counselling area that his façade melted a bit. The patient counselling department at SSSIHMS was the brainchild of Mr. and Mrs. Umesh Rao, who are long time followers of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. In their recent visit overseas, they had been to Karolinska University, and had presented the concept of emotional counselling with the onus on psychosomatic relationship to some of the senior staff over there. Their response had been overwhelmingly in favour of the idea, and they agreed that what they were just beginning to accept with scientific validation was already being practiced at the SSSIHMS for the past 8 years, and the underlying concept had been expounded by Bhagawan Baba decades ago, "Treat the disease and not merely the patient".

Pettr was from the same Institution and was in the audience when the couple had made their presentation. He saw what was propounded in reality – if seeing is believing, he saw and believed.

There are many more like Pettr who come with questions and return with none of them unanswered. For actions speak louder than words. Ask and you shall be given, knock and the door shall be opened is what the Bible says. We are taught again and yet again that we have to take the first step. But we rarely heed the words. Probably that was the reason for the great artist Michelangelo painting the magnificent fresco of God reaching down from the heaven every sinew of his arm stretched fingers pointed...reaching out to man...but man lies on the earth, his arm raised in limp response, his fingers lifeless and without spirit. God does not have to descend on earth to prove He exists. He exists in the good man who helps his fellowman. But when God does descend on earth and sets an example, He lights up fiery beacons that do not hide their glow, but speak through silent action, putting smiles on the faces of those stricken by sorrow and defeated by life. It is time to do what we have to do. The words of Robert Frost should always reverberate in our minds...

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep.

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the December 2008 issue

Feedback on the cover story: *The 'Be-Attitudes' of Jesus*

I have just finished reading the Be-Attitudes series. It was wonderfully done, profound and simple. I forwarded it on to a few others. As a Christian minister (and devotee of Swami) I commend the writer for great insight into Jesus' teachings and the use of illustrations. Thank you so much and Sai Ram!

Don Sandin

Thanks for enlightening us with *The 'Be-attitudes' of Jesus*, the examples added so much to the words, spoken so long ago! Yes, please tell us stories of saints again and again - love it!

Sai Ram

Mina Menon

I was born in former Yugoslavia, and after the beginning of the civil war in my country, I left Croatia and became a refugee in Serbia, where I still live. Reading this article, I was reminded of great lessons taught by Swami.

He guided me always to research the depths of my being, trying to fulfil each or any of God's 10 Commandments (I was born as an Orthodox Christian, but lived as an atheist.)

As you wrote in the cover story I realised that I must never judge anyone, just because, no one can do anything, if it wasn't called. I can hear my inner voice say "Only true forgiveness is true understanding".

Love and blessings from the depths of my heart!

Branka Babic

I came to know about the story of Father Kolbe by reading Heart2Heart. All the publications are extremely helpful and a constant reminder to practice at least one value from Swami's teachings at all times and at all places.

Thanks very much,
Nirupa Thayalkhandan, Boston, U.S.A

The impact of *The 'Be-Attitudes' of Jesus* goes beyond comprehension. Thanks a lot for spreading this great message of Love around the world, with all the best blessings of Baba.

Aum Sai Ram,

Jaap van Setten, The Netherlands

The story of Jesus was very informative and I would like to have such stories of all other Divine Incarnations. These are very useful to improve our knowledge and for our Unity of Faith Programs.

Thank you for all the hard work.

Ranjani

Feedback on *Spiritual Questions and Answers - Part 2*

Thank you for this wonderful service. I find it most interesting and useful, particularly the illustrations to go with the explanations.

Daya Ram, Fiji Islands

Feedback on *Colossal Tragedy and the Current of Spontaneous Love*

Your article was truly inspiring to me to learn more on seva that we all must do wherever and whenever possible. Bhagawan Baba's message of "Love all and serve all" is definitely put into practise by the selfless and dedicated Sai-volunteers in Bihar.

When no one else comes to help, Sri Sathya Sai Baba is always there to help the unfortunate ones. Bhagawan acts on what He preaches. We all should learn the lesson from Him to share what we have with those who do not have. Thank you for giving such inspiring articles and faith-enriching news in H2H of Radio Sai.

Gopal Mehta, Toronto, Canada

May Sai always bestow Divine energy upon all the Sai Volunteers, who have carried out selfless work in such difficult circumstances in Bihar.

Vikram

Feedback on *Harnessing The Heart - Part 13*

As usual, an excellent value based experience. This is another lesson Swami has given me today as I am going to retire in 2 months time.

With lots of love Sai Ram,

Ms.M. Vasantha Lakshmi, Asst Manager, Sales

Feedback on *Illuminating Lessons at His Lotus Feet - Part 2*

I needed this article. I am in a situation where I have to decide to continue working as a chaplain in a veteran's hospital or go back to being a Pastor in a church. I pray that Swami will make his will known to me. I am very troubled over having to make this decision. Thank you for bringing me a return to the mother's feet.

Wayne, USA

Feedback on *How Swami U-Turned My Life*

This article definitely inspired me. It is so beautiful how Robert has narrated his experience. I have taken a very tiny step towards Swami. I am hoping that I will definitely get closer to Swami sooner than later. I have been asked to help at Bal Vikas and I am surrendering to Swami to guide me and be with me to do the duty that he is assigning to me with Love and Devotion.

Koti Pranams at His Lotus Feet,

Viji, Toronto, Canada.

Yes, definitely, the article has not only inspired me, but also showed the true meaning of LOVE in every aspect of life.

Thanks and Regards

S. Ravikumar

Actually I have not gone through the entire article but I could not resist myself from writing a few words about this wonderful effort. May the Lord of the Universe always shower His blessings on articles like this to spread His message wide across the globe in the most vibrant manner!

Sai Ram,

Sathya

Feedback on the Quizzes

The quiz is very well organised and indeed very interactive. It helps us to stay in tune on our spiritual journey. Keep up the great work. I am really enjoying the website.

Mooroogessa Arnachellum.

The quiz was amazing and would like to receive more of such quizzes in future.

Thanks & Regards,

V Balasubramanian, Hyderabad, India

The quizzes are excellent to learn and understand various aspects of all religions. I like to see them more often. It is an excellent work that you all are turning out.

Ganesh Krishnan, Phoenix, AZ, USA

I did like the quiz on 'Unity in Diversity' very much and the questions are excellent. It is very interactive and informative too. I liked the small stories, incidences and quotes cited in each question and enjoyed reading every bit of it. Please do continue to post such wonderful and interactive quizzes in H2H.

Thanks and Sairam again.

Sai Lakshmi Swaminathan, Chicago, USA

Feedback on *Mesmerizing Moments with the Divine Master*

All the 9 parts of the experiences of Rani Maa were of particular interest to me. I felt Rani Maa was answering personally many of my questions. Thanks for the series and I wish that you continue with your invaluable service for long time to come.

Sai Ram!

P.Vijayaraghavan, Chennai

Feedback on the Get Inspired Stories

I am Indra, a school teacher in the Fiji islands and currently working for the curriculum development unit in Fiji. I am working with a team on a project called citizenship education. We are responsible for writing support materials for the project and while going through the **Get Inspired Archives** I became really enthusiastic to share these inspiring stories with all the teachers and students of the primary schools in Fiji through this project.

The team I am working with are already impressed with the stories and we would like to include them as a component of our language programme in the form of story cards. We are definitely going to acknowledge your immense and soul searching contribution. It just has the power to lift anyone's spirits. May Bhagavan Baba continuously guide your team to continue to do this wonderful work of love for humanity.

Indrawati, Fiji Islands

What a beautiful inspiring article 'The First Temple' was! Caring for each other is the cure the world needs.

Sanjeev Menon,

This story on 'The First temple' is again a wonderful act of love. Thank you so much. It is so beautifully explained that when we pour love, God will live within us and also in our surroundings. When we have unconditional love for people and sacrifice, we receive God's grace with so much ease. My heartfelt thanks and best wishes for your service.

Ms. M. Vasantha Lakshmi

General Feedback

The October issue of the H2H was amazing, fantastic, but this one of November is simply the best ever! Congratulations and thank you very much for this monthly Divine Gift! May Swami keep on blessing you all forever and ever!

With Love, in the Light of the Self,

Samuel

I want to thank you again for your wonderful and inspiring stories on 'Love all, serve all'. This is just what I needed at this time of great tragedy in Mumbai. I will pick myself up and carry on with Baba's Love surrounding this beautiful world. Thank you.

Joan Casper, Grass Valley, California, United States of America.

Feedback on *Sai Inspires*, the inspirational daily e-mail service

I want to congratulate the whole team of Heart2Heart for their meticulous efforts. Checking this mail everyday has become the most important chore of my life.

Rishu Sharma

I have recently subscribed to your website and I am feeling highly benefited by the daily messages and the other contents. Please accept my appreciation and thanks for the service being rendered by you. I am 69 years old and am only repenting why I did not join the Sai Satsang earlier. Anyway, nothing is too late if Bhagavan Sai's Grace is there with me.

Thanks once again,

JPLN Sastry, California, USA

Om Sai Ram,

I daily download and enjoy the Sai Inspires and also take down notes of some of them for my further readings. It is a beautiful service for the benefit of the mankind as a whole. Please keep it going. I feel blessed.

Om Sudrania