

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

What made Adi Shankara, who restored the pristine purity and grandeur of Vedic thought and awakened the quiescent intellect of millions, one of the greatest philosophers of the modern era? How did Gandhi acquire such steely and sacred character so as to be honoured with the sobriquet ‘Father of the Nation’ of a land, which has existed since times immemorial? Born of uneducated farmers, if Lincoln became one of the greatest Presidents of America and was hailed as ‘the saviour’, what was it that propelled him to such noble heights? How did Shivaji, the great Maratha emperor, become a *chatrapati* (‘formidable protector’) who liberated thousands from vindictive rulers? What was it that drove all these men with humble beginnings to achieve Herculean heights of human excellence? Was it their impeccable virtues and indomitable determination? Yes, certainly, but that is only half the story. Just as a fully blossomed flower would not have been a thing of beauty but for the relentless support and sustenance from its roots, these individuals became legends because they had the strength and shield of a superior being - Their Mothers.

“It is because of the noble feelings of the mothers that children become virtuous, intelligent, attain exalted positions and earn name and fame,” Bhagavan Baba has said, and added, “Gracious souls like Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Paramahansa could attain exalted positions in their lives only due to the sacred feelings of their mothers.”

In fact, no person is ever self-made. We are the gift of our mothers. Why only we, even when God decides to walk on earth donning a human frame, it is always through a mother. And so it was that Mother Kausalya had the blessed opportunity to rear Lord Rama for the sake of humanity eons ago. In the Dwapara age, Mother Devaki delivered the enchanting Krishna for the emancipation of the world. As eras rolled by, Mother Dughdova was the instrument for the incarnation of Zarathustra. Again, it was the pious Mother Mary who was chosen by the Almighty when He descended as Jesus Christ. Allah gifted Prophet Mohammad to the world through the pure soul, Mother Amina. When the Supreme One took birth as Buddha, Mother Maya was the divine conduit, and it was to the holy Mother Trishala that Mahavira was born. And thus continues the saga of the Infinite Divine manifesting as a finite form by choosing one immaculate soul..

In the most recent times, when the Lord decided to adorn the human cloak again, now three times in quick succession, it was Mother Devagiramma who was bestowed first with the blessing of bearing the body of Shirdi Sai Baba. And next, was the glorious good fortune of Mother Easwaramma. Bhagavan Baba emphatically declared in a divine discourse on May 6, 2001, “There may be many noble mothers in this world, but Easwaramma is the Chosen One. I chose her to be My Mother. This is the intimate relationship between Easwaramma and Myself.” Just like the Lord, the Divine Mother too was childlike and simplicity personified. Nothing mattered to her more than alleviating the suffering of the poor villagers of Puttaparthi and ensuring the comfort of the hundreds of devotees who thronged to her Son’s presence.

Even though she was unlettered, simple and unassuming, the Mother was deeply concerned about the health and education of the innocent village folks.

It was she who asked Bhagavan to start a small hospital in Prasanthi Nilayam to look after the medical needs of the poor village residents and devotees, especially women and children. Acceding to her wish, when in 1954, Swami laid the foundation stone of a twelve-bed Hospital on the hill to the south of the Mandir, her joy knew no bounds.

So ecstatic was she that she joined the women devotees hauling sand, stone, bricks, and cement from the road up to the construction site, and lifted bricks herself, brushing aside protests from the other women. When the wards were ready, she sought out women patients, brought them to the doctor, pleaded that they be admitted, and looked after them until they could move about and take their normal share in the work at home and in the fields. Dr. Jayalakshmi, who served for many years in this Hospital, recollected that Easwamma was a pioneer in serving pregnant women and babies. Though very religious, she advised against superstitious rites that the villagers used to resort to drive diseases away. She sat with the patients while they were questioned, waited for the diagnosis, and held them firm as the dreaded needle was administered. When ladies were admitted as patients, she climbed the hill to the Hospital to make sure they know there was a Mother interested in their recovery.

Today, if the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam, is the lifeline of thousands of deprived patients from all over India and even abroad; performs over 2500 deliveries annually and is equipped with a most modern neo-natal ICU; saves over 500 lives a year from vicious snake-bites; assuages daily the dental pain of many, young and old; operates full-time operation theatres to clear ENT ailments and do general surgery; has scores of doctors and hundreds of qualified nurses who willingly work overtime to ensure each of the 1,50,000 patients who walk into this home of healing every year returns with a smile – it is because of the pure and absolutely selfless yearning of Mother Eswamma. To know how this once-upon-a-time twelve-bed hospital has grown into a sophisticated primary and secondary healthcare centre with 100 beds, a plethora of departments, and most importantly, a large but cohesive family of medical professionals and support staff with many talents but only one goal – to serve the Swami present in every patient, read our cover story “When Love Greets You and Grace Cures...”. Based on your overwhelming response to its first installment, this is the sequel to the earlier H2H cover story on this marvelous institution. Yet, we have barely scratched the surface as there is still much about this mansion of love that remains largely undiscovered.

While this Hospital was the immediate response of Bhagavan to the pure wish of Mother Easwamma, way back in the fifties, it was only a precursor to the unfolding of a golden chapter in His grand healthcare mission. In 1990, when Bhagavan announced the setting up of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences in Puttaparthi, to provide state-of-the-art tertiary care to the poorest of the poor, again absolutely free of charge, it was an awe-inspiring

eye-opener not only for the worldwide medical profession but also for the entire humanity. Even today, ill-informed individuals, especially in the West, refuse to believe such an institution exists, while Bhagavan has gone ahead and set up another sister institution in Whitefield, Bangalore! When you read the story of Sunil Verma in the Healing Touch section, you will know why, patients who arrive at this hospital devastated and desolate, leave it feeling contented and peaceful saying, “This is a Temple of Healing...Sai Baba works through everyone here; each one is a living embodiment of His love.”

The Hospital was actually one of the three wishes of the Divine Mother; the second one being the construction of a school for the little ones of the village. Again, Bhagavan immediately started the Easwamma High School, but later unfurled an entire system of elementary, secondary and university education. The alumni of the majestic Sri Sathya Sai University are internationally sought by employers looking for highest caliber professionals. Every year hundreds graduate from the portals of this ‘Temple of Learning’ equipped with not only secular knowledge but also sound wisdom. To get a glimpse of the products of this University, please read the article “How I Made My Decision-Making Easy” in the features section.

There are more stories from the alumni of this University in the Swami and Me section. When you read Dr. Ravi Kumar’s account “Mother Supreme – Mother So Sweet, So Dear”, you will get a peep into what makes every student of this Institute so special. Bhagavan says, “Mother’s love is the greatest; it is imbued with immense power.” Now imagine, if we have a thousand mothers’ love! What a colossus of confidence and care will we be blessed with! In fact, we may not realise it, but even now we indeed have this amazing good fortune. As Dr. Ravi Kumar in his article says, ‘They say “the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world”, but now “the Hand that rules the world, rocks our cradle!”’ How fortunate are we! And how grateful we should be, if not for anything else, just to be alive, at this point in time in history and be contemporaries of the Avatar.

Before concluding His Divine Discourse on May 6, 1993, Swami said, “This is what I expect you to learn today. On the occasion of Easwamma Day, I exhort all of you to practice these three principles of service, experiencing bliss and sharing it with all.” In H2H, it has been our constant endeavour to share the bliss of Sai Love to the utmost extent possible. If this journal is alive and running, it is purely His visible and invisible Grace. And in this month of May, as an expression of our sincere gratitude to our Dear Lord Sai and to the Divine Mother Easwamma, we offer a new website www.h2hsai.org. This will be a dynamic portal, completely dedicated to H2H, which will strive to connect all our ‘little loves’ to that ‘One Love’, so that we can experience the Bliss of Sai, increasingly and uninterruptedly. Do let us know what you feel about this new effort and we will do our best to serve you better.

Let love surround us, subsume us and reverberate in every cell of our being.

Loving Regards,
Heart2Heart Team

Please write to us at h2h@radiosai.org

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Noble Mothers – Key to Great Nation

Ideal Mothers

It was because Aryamba was a devoted and pious woman, and observed sacred practices that the great world-teacher, Adi Shankaracharya was born to her. For Vivekananda to achieve worldwide renown, his mother's sacred life was responsible. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was able to preach the sacred doctrine of love to the world and achieve greatness because of his mother's good qualities.

Gandhi earned the appellation of "Mahatma" (great soul) because of the sacred "*Kokila Vratha*" observed by his mother. Gandhi's mother used to observe everyday a vow ritual known as "*Kokila Vratha*". As soon as she completed the ritual, she would wait for the call of *the Kokila* (the Indian cuckoo) to have her breakfast. However, on one day, she waited for a long time, without taking food, for the call of the cuckoo. Noticing this, the young Gandhi went out of the house, imitated the cooing of the cuckoo, and then told his mother, "Now, that the cuckoo has made its call, please, mother, take your food." Unable to contain her grief, the mother slapped on the cheeks of Gandhi and wailed: "What sin have I committed that such a liar should be born to me! What a great sinner am I to have begotten such a wicked liar as son, Oh Lord!" She shed tears as she spoke. Deeply moved by his mother's words, Gandhi made a promise to her: "In my life, henceforth, I will not utter falsehood."

In those days, the mothers used to watch the behaviour of their children and strove to keep them on the right path. Gandhi became a 'Mahatma' because of the severe punishment meted out to him by his mother.

As Is the Seed, So Is the Plant

Mothers of those days led a pure and pious life, cherishing sacred thoughts, fostering virtues and setting an example to the world. If the mothers are good, there will be no room for bad behaviour by the children. Although parents may appear innocuous like fig fruits, they are responsible for the misbehaviour of their children, like worms inside the fruits.

There have been many mothers in the world who have sought, by their strenuous endeavours, noble thoughts and sacred practices, to bring up their children in the path of righteousness. In the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata), there lived a mother and his son. For the education of the son, the mother made many a sacrifice. She, however, impressed on the son one lesson: "Dear son, do not be concerned about worldly education. One should study that which frees him from death. Only spiritual knowledge can lead to

immortality. It is enduring. Worldly knowledge is temporary. For earning one's livelihood, worldly education is necessary. But this education should be acquired only to lead an independent life, with limited desires. Therefore, dear son, while pursuing studies, embark also on the spiritual quest."

Human Life Should Be Used For Service

In this manner, the mother taught her son the true aim of education. The boy completed his education and took up a small job. One day, in that village, there was a folk festival. The womenfolk of the village donned their best clothes, and jewellery to attend the festival. The mother also went, but with tattered clothes. The son could not bear to see that sight. He said: "Mother, you have no good clothes or jewellery. I am distressed to see you like this. Please let me know what ornaments you wish to have, mother!" She replied: "This is not the right time. I shall let you know at the proper time."

The Three Ornaments Sought By the Mother

Thanks to the good behaviour and diligence of the lad, he rose to higher positions in service. Once again, he returned to his mother and asked what ornament she desired. "I shall get them as fast as I can," he said. The mother told him that she wished, three ornaments, but she would disclose what they were later on. The son, in the course of years, reached a very high position. Once again he entreated: "Mother, I now have some money. Please let me know what jewels you would like. I shall get them for you." The mother said, "Dear son! I am now not in a state when I can wear jewels. However, there are some ornaments in which I am interested, and I shall tell you what they are. Drawing the son nearer to her, she said, 'In our small village, I am grieved to find that the children have to go to distant places for education. The first ornament I desire is that you should set up a primary school in the village. Secondly, our people have no facilities for medical relief even for small ailments. I spend sleepless nights thinking about their plight. When you set up a small hospital for the village folks, it will be your second ornament for me. The third ornament is something, which you have to do by yourself. In the days to come, your reputation may grow. If anybody asks, "Who is your mother?" you may mention my name. Your conduct must be such that you will uphold your mother's name. You must share with others the benefits of the education you have received. Do not go after wealth. The worshipper of mammon will not yearn for God. The seeker of God will not seek wealth. Observance of this is the third ornament I desire from you."

The young man who heard these words from his mother, and later became famous and earned the people's esteem was none other than Eshwar Chandra Vidhyasagar. He earned a great name in the city of Calcutta.

Eeshvar Chandra's mother shed tears of joy when she realised the great fame her son had achieved. "Having begotten such a son, my life has been redeemed. It does not matter what happens to me hereafter," she said to herself.

The Moving Tale of a Mother and Her Son

In this manner, from ancient times the relations between mother and children have been hallowed as a result of the purity, virtue and integrity of the children. The relationship was full of love, mutual esteem, intense devotion and nectarine sweetness. The children had deep love for the mother. It is because of the pampering of the children in all sorts of ways by the mothers that the children tend to go astray.

After the Burma war (in 1940s), a mother and her son came to Madras as refugees. This son used to go out begging for food, and bring home whatever he could for both of them to eat. Seeing the pathetic condition of the young one, the mother said that from the next day she herself would go out for getting food, leaving the boy in the shed. Moreover, no mother would like to see her son going out as a beggar. So, she decided to go out herself. For some days, she did this, but could manage to get only a small amount of food. She gave the food to the child and starved herself, but told him that she had already eaten. After some time, the woman was too weak to go out for begging. The son started again and kept feeding his mother. Her condition deteriorated every passing day; she could not bear the pangs of hunger. The son went out and begged for food at an officer's residence. The gentleman, who was glancing through the day's newspaper, heard the boy's cry for food. He brought some food and gave it to the boy and asked him to eat it in his presence. The boy said he would not eat there, but take the food home. The officer questioned him why he would do that when he was so hungry. "You are not really hungry. You are lying," shouted the officer. The boy was too weak to stand and dropped down at the feet of the officer with the food in his hands. The gentleman noticed that the boy was muttering some words to himself. He went close to the boy's mouth and heard him say: "First for mother, first for mother." Saying those words, the boy passed away.

Mothers are Living Gods

The nation needs noble mothers who lead an exemplary life. They should manifest in their life the great culture of Bharath. Then, that culture will be transmitted to their progeny. These days, fathers, instead of chastising children who take to wrong ways, pamper and encourage them. Children who misbehave should be severely dealt with. Youth today are forgetting God, revelling in sensual pleasures and ruining their lives. They have no reverence for the mother or the Motherland. After the war in Lanka, when Rama was entreated by Vibhishana and others to crown Himself as the ruler of Lanka, Rama told them that 'Mother and the Motherland are greater than Heaven itself' and nothing on earth would tempt him to give up his love for Ayodhya. How many today are observing the great teachings of Rama regarding love of the Motherland? Once Rama told Sita, while they were staying on the Chitrakoota mountain, that as a few could comprehend the subtle principle of Divinity, people should adore their parents as the visible embodiments of God.

Only when there are good mothers and good sons, will the nation be free from troubles. Otherwise, the nation will break into pieces. This is the lesson of the

Mahabharatha where the wicked Kauravas brought ruin upon their entire clan by their evil ways. What the nation needs today is not material prosperity or high education. It needs men and women of character. People should develop faith in God, have concern for the good name of society, cherish fear of sin and dedicate themselves to Godly activities. Then, the nation will enjoy peace and security. Every mother should be regarded as an embodiment of the divine. Then, every son will enjoy peace and prosperity.

- Divine Discourse on Easwaramma Day, May 6, 1993.

CONVERSATIONS WITH Sai

Satyopanishad - Part 15: 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' following Dr. John Hislop's series 'Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba' that ended 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 among people 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 begin the fifth chapter, Concepts.

Chapter 5: Concepts

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We hear about *pancha koshas*, the five sheaths, the *pancha pranas*, the five vital airs, and *panchendriyas*, the five organs. Do they cover our spirit, *atma*? Are they obstacles to *atmic* bliss? What exactly is their position and role in our body?

Bhagavan: The whole world is made of five elements: Earth, fire, water, air and space. Man is the product of these five elements, besides his temperament. *Raga* or attachment, *dvesa* or hatred, and *bhaya* or fear, originate in *akasa*, space. Our breathing process, movements like walking or other body movements are due to *vayu*, wind. Hunger, thirst and sleep are the effects of *agni*, fire. Phlegm, blood, bile, urine, etc., are the outcome of *jala*, water. Skin, muscles, bones, nails, hairs, nerves are of *prthvi*, matter. Therefore, all the five elements are equally distributed in everyone. No one can truly be considered superior to any other.

The human body has five sheaths, the *Pancha koshas*. The first one is *annamaya kosha*, the sheath of food, the second is *pranamaya kosha*, the sheath of life, and the third is *manomaya kosha*, the sheath of mind. The fourth is *vigyanamaya kosha*, the sheath of knowledge and finally *anandamaya kosha*, the sheath of bliss. One sheath encloses the other. You know rice grains are enclosed within husks. Therefore, a rice grain is within the sheath of husk. For the tamarind seed, tamarind pulp is the sheath. An embryo is within the sheath of its mother's womb. *Annamaya kosha* is a sheath which covers *pranamaya kosha*. This encloses *manomaya kosha*, the

sheath of the mind. This covers *vigyanamaya kosa*, sheath of wisdom, which finally encloses *anandamaya kosa*, the sheath of bliss.

Annamaya kosha is the product of food. The body is *annamaya kosha*. You have all the behavioural tendencies that result from the food you eat. Then, you have *pranamaya kosha* composed of the five organs of action (the *karmendriyas*), and five life breaths, *pancha pranas* (*prana, apana, vyana, udana, samana*).

Then comes *manomaya kosha*, the mental sheath consisting of five organs of perception (*jnanendriyas*), and the mind, which is full of thoughts and counter-thoughts. The fourth is *vigyanamaya kosha*, the sheath of knowledge, of sound, touch, form, taste and smell, which constitutes the *buddhi*, intellect.

The innermost sheath is *anandamaya kosa* (sheath of bliss). In order to enable yourself to experience this state of bliss, you will have to practice all that you theoretically know and do what you are supposed to. Likewise, you should understand the principle of *samatva*, equality, and *ekatva*, unity, and experience *daivatva*, divinity. This leads you to a state when you will not hate anyone.

Everyone has an equal right to know and experience the *atma*, self. To attain such an awareness, self-enquiry is very necessary. However, an intense and deep desire is essential to know and experience *atma*. Just like a seed within a fruit, as a copper wire within a plastic covering, butter in milk, sugar in the sugarcane, oil within sesame seeds and fire in wood, *atma* is encased within *pancakosas*, *pancendriyas* and *pancapranas* (five life sheaths, five sense organs and five life principles).

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We come across words like *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *citta* (consciousness), and *ahamkara* (egoism). How are we to understand and correlate them? How do they differ from one another? It is our good fortune that Swami explains in simple ways, terms ever so complex.

Bhagavan: Here is an illustration. Consider a Brahmin. When he conducts ceremonies like weddings, you call him *purohit*, priest; when he reads out from the almanac at your home the *tithi*, lunar phase, the *varam* day of the week, *naksatra*, star, etc. you call him the *pancanga Brahmin*; when he prepares food in your home, you call him the brahmin cook.

Another illustration. Your wife addresses you in Telugu as *e mandhi*, (Oh, you! Please, Sir!) because addressing the husband by name is not considered proper. Your child calls you 'Father' and your student addresses you as 'Sir'. But, you are, after all, only one individual, aren't you! One and the same faculty has different names: *manas* or mind when engaged in thinking; *chitta* or awareness in a state of equanimity devoid of plans or decisions; *buddhi* or intellect while exercising discrimination; and *ahamkara* or egoism when introducing oneself or referring to oneself as 'I'. All these are one, but named differently according to their function.

What is to be controlled is the mind. When you have that *nigraham* (control), you obtain God's *anugraham*, grace. Once you consider something as evil, do not allow it to enter the mind. The behaviour of trees and animals is regulated by *prakrti*, Nature. Only man is disobeying the commands of God and has become depraved. There is only one solution.

Another little illustration. Tie up *kamadhenu*, the wish fulfilling cow, of your body with the *pasha*, rope, of *prema*, love, to the post called *nama*, chanting the Name of the Lord. That is enough. You gain control over the mind. Then, on the *chitta*, awareness, devoid of the turmoil of thoughts, is imprinted the form of God. *Buddhi* undertakes fundamental discrimination; the 'I' which has been egoistic cognises its own true nature as *atma* and realises the innermost Self in all beings. This is *adhyatmika*, spirituality.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! You stress *chittasuddhi*, purification of our heart, but how is one to accomplish it?

Bhagavan: You are mistaken here. *Chitta*, heart is always pure. So, where is the need for its *suddhi*, purification? You only pollute it.

Take for example, this kerchief. This is white in colour. It becomes dirty as I use it. I give it to a washerman to wash and return it. When he brings it, it looks white and bright as before. It was so before and it is so after a wash, but it was dirty in between due to use. The washerman did not paint the kerchief white. He only removed the dirt. So too, like a kerchief, your mind is also pure which becomes impure due to your desires and thoughts. Once you remove the impurities from the mind, it will become pure. So *chittasuddhi* means 'exercising control over desires'.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Now it is clear that *chittasuddhi* is lacking in us due to our bad thoughts and bad deeds. We have certain weaknesses, lapses, bad qualities and thoughts. As you have said unless we get over them, *chittasuddhi* cannot be attained. The mind gets polluted very often. How is one to control bad qualities?

Bhagavan: It all depends upon your determination and your understanding of the intensity and the gravity of the problem. It needs an honest and sincere attempt on your part.

A small example. You are moving freely without any hesitation and fear in this room. There lies a rope in one corner. But, if you come to know that it is not a rope as you have been thinking it to be, but a snake, would you move freely in that room any longer? You know that it is dangerous to be anywhere near a poisonous snake. You know that you will die if that snake bites you, and so you keep off from that place. Similarly, when you are aware of the danger or harm you will be put to, you will definitely stop your misdeeds.

You keep on holding the rope till you know that it is just a rope. But once you realise that it is a snake, you drop it down immediately, because of the fear of death. So long as you think that these bad thoughts and evil deeds make you

happy, you continue to be in the same frame of mind. But, when you know that they are dangerous, you will not hanker after them. Therefore, first of all, you must identify your own bad qualities and then give them up gradually, one after another, until you are perfect.

It is also strange to notice that some seekers undergo rigorous discipline for a set period of time during which they lead a perfect life without any trace of a bad quality. But after that avowed period of discipline they resume their previous bad habits with redoubled vigour. This is a big mistake. That which holds you for some time is artificial. Here, withdrawal from bad habits, is not due to the realisation of the evil effects.

Here is an example. You see the ceiling fan rotating there. Now, if you switch it off, it will not stop rotating immediately. The three blades stop moving slowly. Therefore, in full knowledge of the possible harm and the evil effects, you should give up your bad habits slowly.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! *Pranayama* (breath control), some say, is important on the spiritual path. Would you please tell us about it?

Bhagavan: *Pranayama*, breath control, has to be undertaken in an exact and perfect way under the care and guidance of a Guru. It leads to danger if it is done imperfectly and irregularly.

There are chiefly three steps in *pranayama* or breathing exercise. The first one is *purakam*, inhalation. The second is holding the breath or the air breathed in; this is called *kumbhakam*, retention. The third stage is exhalation or *rechakam*. The important point here is that, the time taken during all these three stages must be equal. It means that the time taken for *purakam* must be the same as for *kumbhakam*. Similarly, the duration for *kumbhakam* must be the equal to the time taken for *rechakam*.

In the human body there are *shadchakras*, six life sustaining points on the vertebral column. The lowest is called *muladhara chakra*, fundamental, primordial life sustaining point at the bottom. In *pranayama*, during the second step, *kumbhakam*, (that is, holding the breath), *kundalini* starts moving upward being restless due to the lack of supply of air across the *sadchakras*. On the top lies *sahasrara chakra* (region of the head). There exists a *jyoti*, divine light, surrounded by *dalas*, petals. The *sahasrara chakra* is like a thousand petalled lotus flower. If one has *daivi sampatti*, divine qualities, the *jyoti* starts touching the petals. Thus, *kundalini* affects the human body during this course of *sadhana*. A living being taking too many breaths per day is short lived. A dog takes many breaths; so, its life span is short. Snakes and mongooses take a few breaths per day; they live long. The breathing exercise has an influence on the life span.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! It is said that we carry with us certain traits, *vasanas* of the past life. Is that true and how does it happen?

Bhagavan: Certainly so! Just as in accounts the balance is brought forward from the previous page to the next page, the traits of the previous life are brought forward to the present.

When you light an incense stick or an *agarbatti* or camphor, don't you get the fragrance all over this room? When you have a fragrant flower, does it not spread its fragrance? Similarly, bad odour or foul smell also spreads. So also, the characteristics of the past lives are brought forward to subsequent lives.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Bhagavan! How is it that we have *vasanas*, traits of the past life? We are born, we grow and die. The body is bound to weaken, wither, die and decay. How then are our features brought forward to the next life?

Bhagavan: It is certain that the features of the past life are carried to the next life. You can call them *vasanas* or *samskaras* or the qualities of the past life. People with good *samskaras* will spend their time in a sacred way by participating in *satsang*, good company, *bhajan*, singing His glory, entertaining good thoughts, good deeds, and good discussion. On the other hand, people with bad *samskaras* make their lifetime unholy by indulging in misdeeds, entertaining bad thoughts and speaking falsehood. As you have said, it is true that the body weakens, withers, dies and decays, but the *samskaras* don't die. They follow you to the next life.

A simple illustration will make this subject clearer to you. Suppose your hand was injured. You got it treated, and for some time had also put a bandage over the injured part. The hand was healed completely after some time. But in that part of your hand where the injury took place, a scar or a mark is left, and it remains till now as well. Similarly, the body may die. But the *vasanas* remain as a spot in the next life.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Three *gunas* or attributes such as *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva* (passion and activeness; dullness and inertia, and purity and goodness) are said to bind man. Does a *sattvika* quality also bind man? Is that also a bondage?

Bhagavan: These three attributes only bind man. Your life is conditioned by them. All your deeds and expressions are governed by them. They monitor your conduct and behaviour. Even *sattvika* qualities also chain you.

For example, you are confined with an iron chain. Is that not bondage? You may be confined with a silver chain. It is also bondage. It may be now a gold chain. Is it still not bondage? After all, the three chains differ only in the composition of the metal. Each is, ultimately, a chain and nothing more, though its value may differ from that of the other. Thus, the attributes bind or limit you. Here the iron chain is compared to that of '*tamas*', dullness or inertia. The silver chain is like the '*rajasika*' quality, active, energetic, passionate; and the gold chain is like the '*sattvika*' nature, pure, steady and good. But divinity is beyond these three '*gunas*'. It is, in fact, attributeless.

CHINNA KATHA

Ideal and Incessant Service

A few days after Lord Rama's coronation, Sita and the three brothers of Rama met and planned to exclude Hanuman from the seva of Rama. They wanted to divide the responsibility of rendering the various services to Rama only among themselves. The reason? They all felt that Hanuman had had enough chances serving their sweet Lord already. And so, they drew up a list, as exhaustive as they could make it, of the many services from dawn till dusk, down to the smallest detail and assigned each item to one among themselves. They presented the list of items and assignees to the Lord, when 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. Not believing what he had just heard, Hanuman prayed to Rama that the list be read once before him. And after it was, Hanuman noticed that the task of 'snapping fingers when one yawns' had been left unassigned. He said that since Rama was an emperor, he should not be allowed to do it himself, as it had to be done only by a servant. Saying so, he pleaded to the Lord to grant him the opportunity to be that servant and Rama agreed.

It came to be the greatest piece of fortune for Hanuman, as the task entailed Hanuman's constant attendance on his Master. After all, how could anyone predict when the yawn would come? And since he had to be ready with a snap, as soon as the yawn was on, it meant that Hanuman could not be away even for a minute nor could he relax for a moment. His love and sincerity to be of service to his Lord Rama had gotten him the best out of an otherwise disappointing announcement.

True indeed it is that when we have sincere love for God, everything else falls automatically into place.

- Baba

COVER STORY

WHERE LOVE GREETES YOU AND GRACE CURES...

The Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam

Vol-II - Part 1

The healthcare scenario in the world today, on one hand, is really heartening. Thanks to the superlative advancements in technology and medical research, diseases, which meant death a few decades ago, are today just another ailment. Surgeries inside the human body are being performed without even touching the patient, let alone using a knife, and at times, by a surgeon who is actually sitting thousands of miles away! While this is simply magnificent and mind-boggling, on the other hand, the majority of society has practically no access to this sophisticated care.

Like the proverbial 'water, water everywhere, not a drop to drink', there is amazing expertise, plethora of medicines and plenty of money, but acceptable treatment for multitudes in many countries is still a dream. In fact, many modern thinkers opine it is practically impossible. But that is probably because they are unaware or disbelieve the existence of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, in Prasanthi Nilayam and Whitefield (Bangalore). The miracle that is happening in these institutions is out of the world, but it had its genesis in a much smaller healthcare unit, inaugurated just six years after the independence of India. And that is the story of the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital.

In the October 2008 issue, we offered the first cover story on this General Hospital, in which we presented a glimpse of some of its primary departments. However, there is so much more to share, and the present story is an attempt to place before you a few more beautiful aspects of this mansion of love, which many refer to as 'God's Hospital'. We hope it soothes your soul, and fills your heart with peace and joy. Happy reading!

Every moment of the past two days that we have spent at the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam, has been a revelation. "How little we knew about this magnificent and munificent mansion of divine healing!" we think to ourselves, as we slowly climb the gentle slope behind the Subramaniam Temple to step into its sacred precincts one more time. We cannot but think of Ram Naresh Vishwa Karma, the utterly helpless patient from Jabalpur, who could neither talk, nor walk, sleep, or eat! Within two days of treatment at the Hospital, he regained his smile and avouched with

emotion, “I do not know what cured me, nor am I interested...All I know is this doctor’s love; his love alone has given a new life to me.” His face flashes in our minds as we ascend along the winding concrete pathway. More scenes flood our mind. The moving tears of Mrs. Kumari, who was recovering from a terrible snake-bite, and had said, “But for ‘Sairam’ I would not exist. This is God’s Hospital and all the people working here are God’s people...Who else will care so much for unfortunate people like us?” Then, of course, there was Sheikh Jainabi, the Muslim lady, who with folded hands had expressed, “These doctors teach us to love God and have faith.... The kind of love and concern these doctors shower on us, we may not be able to give to our own children...” More faces fill our thoughts; of Mrs. Lakshamma who had emphatically said, “I will never go anywhere else; these doctors are like mothers”; Mr. Kadirappa who had literally touched the feet of Dr. Patel in gratitude; Mrs. Kalavathi, with her cute baby, whom she wanted to name ‘Sai Ganesh’...plenty of touching stories, each one more stirring than the other. “How much this Hospital has meant to the rural folk around!” we ponder, as we pass through the western silver gate of the Hospital.

On the left, under the trees, we see a wan looking, deeply wrinkled, fully tanned and almost bald middle-aged man with torn clothes, sitting on the concrete hedge beside the tar road; a few metres away is a petite lady with a baby on her arms and a puny toddler, who is continually imploring her to buy him something at the nearby kiosk; a little further away is a bespectacled old man. On his nose rests a pair of thick and broken-but-mended-with-a-tape glasses; he wears a soiled shirt, badly crumpled and a *dhoti* that comes up to the knee. As he ambles slowly towards the main door of the Hospital with the help of a stick, we remind ourselves, “Each one is a Mrs. Kumari, a Kadirappa or a Kalavathi...”

Shirdi Sai Exudes a Comforting Calm to Premises

We are choked with compassion at the sight of these destitute people. But when, for a moment, we turn our attention to the right, we are immediately snapped out of our emotional reverie. The benevolent figure of Shirdi Sai Baba soothes our minds and fills us with a great sense of calmness. Here is the guarding and guiding deity of this Hospital, we say to ourselves, and at this point are reminded of what Dr. Vasundhara had said about this serene statue which we had missed recording in our previous day’s diary.

We had asked, “Doctor, how did such a beautiful garden take shape here?”

“Oh, it is a long story,” she had said, and continued, “It all began in 1994. There was a tiny garden then, and Dr. Kamala used to look after it. One day, I asked her if we can clean up the rest of the area. She looked at me quizzically and asked, ‘Is that possible?’ I said, ‘We can do it’. I had no idea how I was going to do it, but the urge in me was very strong. I felt a voice within me telling me forcefully to go ahead, and so, like a person possessed, I sought support from people who could help in this task. Thanks to Sai volunteers from Kerala, the entire patch was cleared in a few weeks. Then, we wanted to install a statue here and requested Mr. Shilpi Subramaniam, the gifted

architect who has designed many parts of our Prasanthi Mandir, to sculpt an image of Shirdi Sai Baba.

Miracles Abound at Every Turn and Corner

“And at this point, Bhagavan blessed the project by giving His consent through Dr. Bhagavat, the then Superintendent of the Hospital, to go ahead with the construction of the idol. Just as the figure was being completed, we had this idea of creating a pond below, which would reflect Baba’s blissful form. And quite amazingly, exactly at that time, a lady who is an expert in building ponds, came to us and offered to execute the whole plan. She stayed in Puttaparthi and oversaw the entire project till it was completed. She left immediately after that, and I have never seen her ever since. After this, we waited for Swami to come and unveil this statue, and that took three prayerful years. But we waited patiently all the while.

“Actually, an interesting incident happened before this. A few weeks before the inauguration, we uncovered the statue because Swami was enquiring about this, and we wanted to keep it ready for Him. And on the day we were doing this, an old man came and stood on a rock, and was watching us at work quite benignly. We even told the person to go for *darshan* as it was already time, but he smiled and asked, ‘Will they allow me to sit there?’ ‘They will surely find a place for elders like you’ we said. So the man started walking back slowly. Meanwhile, Mr. Emilinathan, a staunch worshipper of Shirdi Sai Baba, was coming that way, and this old man patted him heartily and then continued to walk down the slope. The next moment, we couldn’t see him! I still remember the twinkle on the old man’s face; it was as if we were opening it for him! A month or two, after this incident, on March 2, 1998, Swami Himself came, now in the form we are familiar with, and cut the ribbon. It was a day of great fulfillment for me.”

Work Till Your Last Breath: Baba

A thrilling experience, but we were not done. “Doctor, we heard you have been working here for 25 years. And now, you are past your retirement age, still you work so hard. What propels you come to this Hospital every morning?” We had asked her this, deeply impressed with her tenacity to stretch herself thin working for the Hospital.

“It is Swami!” she had said without batting an eyelid. “When Swami came here in 2000, He said, ‘I am blessing you all - Work till your last breath.’ And that is what I want to do. I remember, on an earlier occasion, when one of the nurses asked Swami on how to deal with patients who have complicated cases, or complex attitudes, Swami said, ‘They are your relations. They are coming to your home. Treat them accordingly.’ Therefore, to me, coming to the Hospital everyday, is like coming to my home; there is nothing like office hours... We are a beautiful family here, even though, of late, we have become quite big.”

“How wonderfully all the doctors in this Hospital echo this same feeling!” We reflect on this thought again as we recollect Dr. Vasundhara’s story. We now

walk into the western entrance of the Hospital and take the flight of steps to go to the first floor. We are now quite familiar with the location of many departments of this Hospital, especially the office of the Medical Superintendent, Dr. Verma. We started our Hospital odyssey with him, and we now want to take further guidance from him, before talking to the other doctors and staff.

We make a beeline to his room. The lilting breeze wafts the curtain aside for a second, and we see that, fortunately, he is alone. We part the pink screen a little, and softly say, "Sairam Sir." He immediately looks up, gives us a broad smile and says, "Sairam! Oh, you boys from Radio Sai! Please come inside."

After we take our seats, he warmly asks, "So, how is it going? This is your third day here, right?"

"Yes, we have now collected plenty of touching stories. Actually the story of every patient is moving and each doctor's tale is truly inspiring... We have briefly covered General Medicine, General Surgery, and yes, the huge Mother and Child section covering Pediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynecology."

"That's nice." Dr. Verma gently smiles, and continues, "This Hospital has many other departments. They may not be as large as these, but they are as lively and life-giving. For example, there are about a thousand patients every month who throng to the Dental outpatient department. Similarly, there is ENT, Ophthalmology, Physiotherapy and Gastroenterology. But I suggest that before you visit these departments, you should speak to Sister Ganga, who is the Nursing Superintendent of this Hospital. She was a Colonel in the armed forces, and took voluntary retirement to join us here a year ago. She is very committed and will give you the full picture of how the nursing faculty functions here. Without the dedicated service of these sisters, this Hospital would be like a body without blood."

"Sure, thank you for this suggestion. Actually, we would love to do this because till now we have spoken to doctors, patients and a few sevadals, but not even one sister. This will make the story more wholesome," we respond happily.

"You are welcome. Let me see if she is in her room." The next moment, Dr. Verma picks up the phone and dials a number. He waits for half a minute and when there is no response, he smiles again, and then says, "She must have gone for her ward rounds. Maybe, you can walk up to her room, which too is on this corridor. It is next to the neonatal ICU as you walk on the right. She should be back anytime."

"Ok, sure, no problem. Thank you Sir, and Sairam."

The unassuming head of the Hospital lovingly reciprocates our final greetings, and we leave his room quite happy, as we now have a definite plan for the day. As we pass through the passageway adjacent to the neo-natal ICU, memories of Bhagyamma and her rescued baby, fill our minds. Soon we are

in front of a curtained door. We say ‘Sairam’ and in a few seconds, a lady parts the curtain with a big smile, and says, “Oh, you are here again, please come in.”

We now recollect seeing her earlier. Yes, it was when we met Dr. Verma for the first time; she was in that room discussing a few matters with him when we had stepped in.

“Nursing is Service With a Smile” – Sister Ganga

“Madam, we had seen you earlier, but we didn’t know you are the Nursing Superintendent,” we say with a smile to trigger the conversation.

Pat comes the response. “Actually, you are right! I am not the Nursing Superintendent as far as I am concerned; I am only a chosen instrument in His hands. In fact, it was not my desire to come here as the Head of Nursing; I am basically a theatre nurse, and have worked in the armed forces for 30 years as a fully commissioned officer. When I was chosen to work in this Hospital, I was told to serve as the Nursing Superintendent as per Bhagavan’s blessings. I accepted whatever was given as His gift. Actually, for the last 18 years, I have spent 40-45 days of my annual two-month vacation in Puttaparthi only, just to have the opportunity of seeing Him and being here. Just like all devotees, I used to stay in the shed, get up early in the morning, stand in queue for my meals and spend the rest of my day waiting for His *darshan*. But now, as a staff member, I have a place to sit in the Mandir for *darshan*; still many a times, I just sit behind as I do not want to forget my past.”

“It is this merited past, which has gifted you the ‘present’,” we add, quite pleased with our pun. She smiles too. Then, curious to know more about the uniqueness of the nursing care in this Hospital, we ask, “So, how different is it working here than in the command Hospitals?”

Sai Nursing - Driven by Spirituality

“Oh, there is a world of difference!” she replies, and then adds, “See, in the army we are bound by rules and regulations, but here the driving force is spirituality. There, your ego is constantly being boosted through ranks, positions, etc., but this place makes you egoless. There, I used to think that ‘I am a Colonel’, ‘I am an officer’, and so on, but here, everyday, I endeavour to forget the ‘I’. That is the profound change that I have seen in myself.

“And then talking of the nursing care – elsewhere nurses work with an eye on the watch; nobody wants to work beyond the scheduled time. But here, their attitude is totally different; they (the nurses) feel ‘Swami is watching me. If I neglect the patient, it is like neglecting Swami’. And it is for this reason that they address every patient as ‘Sairam’ if they do not know their name. It is never ‘that abdomen-pain patient’, or ‘fever-patient’, but ‘this Sairam’ or ‘this *Amma*’ here. The beautiful part of this Hospital is that even those nurses who

have not been earlier exposed to Bhagavan adapt to this environment pretty soon and quite impressively.

“Can you share with us one example?” We interrupt her narration, eager to listen to an inspiring story.

“Oh yes. Ms. Kairunisa Begum, who joined us two weeks ago, comes to my mind. She knew nothing about this Hospital, or Baba, till she applied here. But now, when I see her at work I wonder ‘Is it Kairunisa working or Sai serving through her?’ In fact, she might be around here. I just saw her in the ground floor...Would you like to speak to her directly?”

“Yes, of course. That will be great.”

Sister Ganga picks up the phone and has a quick word with someone. We overhear her request, “Can you send her for just five minutes?” She keeps the receiver down and says, “Yes, she is coming,” and then continues, “You know, this lady loves the patients just like her own relatives. That is what impresses me the most. Besides, I have seen her often overshooting the time; she is never bothered about her lunch break or evening closure time.” Sister Ganga now pauses for a while, as if to consider an important thought that has just occurred in her mind, and then says, “You see, observing such an attitude in devotee-volunteers is understandable. But to see this in paid staff, who were non-devotees when they joined, is something very special.”

Just then a lady enters.

“Yes, come Kairunisa”. Sister Ganga welcomes her with a big smile, but the young lady is perturbed. The video and still cameras in our hands disturb her. But then Sister Ganga comforts her immediately, “There is nothing to worry; they are from Radio Sai. They have come to know more about the Hospital.”

Kairunisa relaxes a bit although her bewilderment has not left her completely. Sister Ganga now asks her to sit next to her, and then explains, “They want to know about how you joined this Hospital and how you feel working here.” The camera-shy Kairunisa is still very hesitant. So we let her be for sometime, and continue to talk with Sister Ganga.

“When Kairunisa came she was completely unaware of Swami,” Sister Ganga explains and then looking at her, asks, “Isn’t it so?”

“Yes,” now Kairunisa replies, and then slowly adds, “Actually, I didn’t know anything about Swami. A friend of mine had applied to this Hospital, so I too filled up the form and had it sent. After attending the interview here, I wasn’t sure if I would be selected. **I had many reservations in my mind since I am a Muslim. So I was very happy when I was selected. Later, I learnt that selection was done purely on merit. And now, as every day goes by, I like this experience more and more.**”

“What impresses you the most?” We ask her.

Positive Work Environment and Loving Team Spirit Draws Staff

“The work environment here is really good. The doctors and other seniors treat you so well; they never harshly reprimand you for mistakes, and teach you very patiently. Nobody orders anyone here, only explains. I like this very much. Earlier, I worked for a year in a hospital in Hyderabad (India); that too was some kind of a charitable institution. But the spontaneous urge to serve that is present in everyone in this Hospital is something very unique. Unlike in other Hospitals, here, nobody looks at the patient as a ‘disease’, but as a human being. That is why, there is so much empathy and everyone goes all out to help the patient...It is 15 days since I have joined here, and not even for a moment have I felt out of place here. The moment I step in, I forget the time, my house, and everything else. I love being here and serving the patients.”

“This is wonderful. Thank you very much Kairunisa.”

The young lady then seeks the permission of Sister Ganga and leaves the room. We now return to Sister Ganga.

“The Hospital is blessed to have such dedicated and pure souls,” we say, extremely delighted and impressed after speaking to Kairunisa.

Each Instrument of Sai Personally Chiseled by Him

“Actually, you know what?” Sister Ganga now excitedly explains, “In the early years of the Hospital, all the people working here were virtually hand-picked by Bhagavan. Even now, even though formal job interviews are held for a few vacant positions, ultimately the list is approved by Bhagavan. On one odd occasion, however, we hired a nurse on our own, because of an urgent need. But then we found that, even though she was very qualified on paper, she did not fit into our system at all. We had no option but to terminate her employment. Therefore, Swami is the only Doer here; He selects, shapes and runs the Hospital. He makes every heart blossom. **Nursing is ‘service with a smile’ and it is Swami who adds the special fragrance of spirituality into this, which spreads all over.**”

“That’s a beautiful way to describe this noble profession.” We like her poetic way of describing this age-old and important vocation.

Injecting Hope and Love to Patients

“Actually, in our Hospital, we have a few devotee-nurses from other countries too,” Sister Ganga adds and goes on to say, “We have Maria from Holland, Evelyne from Switzerland, and yes, and Gloria from Jamaica/US. The first two will be very busy, but Gloria might be available in the Injection Room if you want to speak to her.”

“OK...yes, we would to speak to whosoever is available.”

“The Injection Room is right at the entrance of the Male Outpatient Department,” Sister Ganga gives us further clues.

“Sure, we will go there right now. Dr. Verma had asked us to also visit the Dental Department. Perhaps, we will go there after speaking to Sister Gloria.”

“Yes, you should do that. The Dental Department is doing yeoman service to the poor villagers of this area. It is only a few steps away from the Injection Room.”

“Sure. Thank you very much for your time, Madam. Now, we better move on.”

“No problem. It was a pleasure,” Sister Ganga says with a radiant smile as we bid her a final ‘Sairam’.

We now come down the stairs and as we walk towards the male OPD entrance, Dr. Hema spots us and lovingly asks, ‘So, how is your work going on?’ We had interacted with her on our first day in the Hospital. “Great, we are now going to speak to Sister Gloria.”

“Oh! That’s nice. You know, when Swami came here in 2004, she was among the ones whom He spoke to and even blessed her with a nice gift.”

“That’s wonderful. Then I am sure Sister Gloria will have something interesting to say.” We are brightened by the prospects.

“Yes, you won’t be disappointed. Go ahead.” Dr. Hema, as always, gives us a big smile and dashes off into a ward.

Soon we reach the room of Sister Gloria. She spots us immediately at the door, smiles and says, ‘Sairam’.

“Sairam Madam, we are from Radio Sai, could we speak to you for a few minutes?”

“About what?” she asks inquisitively.

“About Swami, your experience in this Hospital, your feelings working here...”

“Oh, sure. No problem. But let me finish medicating this patient.”

She is done in five minutes, and then, we enter her small room filled with tiny injection bottles, syringes and so on. After we position our cameras, we ask, “Madam, how long have you been working here?”

“It has been nearly a decade now. I came here first in 1993, and again in 1995, 1996 and 1997, and during every visit I served in medical camps. And then, in 1998, I approached Dr. Bhagvat, the then Medical Superintendent of this Hospital, seeking to join the staff here. He asked me to write a letter to

Swami, which I did. And Baba not only sent an emphatic ‘yes’ as the reply, but also three packets of *Vibhuti*. I was overjoyed!”

“That’s too good. So how has the experience been since then?”

“Excellent, I have no words to describe. I feel Swami is always with me here. For me, this is heaven. My only regret is that Swami did not call me to Him sooner. But, by the way, about five years ago, He Himself said to me in Sai Kulwant Hall, **‘I am the One who brought you here. I am responsible for you. So, it’s your duty to tell Me if anything is wrong.’**”

“Wow! That’s a great blessing. He is your Mother!”

Maternal Resemblance Hard to Miss

“In fact, He really is!” Sister Gloria now excitedly shares, “Actually, when I saw Him for the first time, I said to myself, **‘Oh God! He looks just like my mother.’ If my mother were alive, you could put both of them just side by side; they resemble each other so much. The only difference would be probably the lips!**”

“Fantastic. Now tell us about your work here. You must have served in many other hospitals before. Do you find anything different here?”

TLC Sets Apart Sai Healthcare from Western Systems

“Well, professionally speaking, it is much more satisfying working here than in America where I was being paid. Here, the issue is not about money; it is about love. The way the patients are taken care of with TLC (Tender Loving Care), is something I haven’t seen in USA, Canada or in Africa. For some reason, love just pours out here. And the beautiful thing about this is, even though you love the patients a lot, you never get attached. This is something absolutely unique. I had never before experienced such intense love with detachment; it is more of Divine Love. That is why this is the best part of my life. I always feel as if I am in heaven.”

“Madam, talking to you has been truly a heavenly experience for us too. This Hospital is truly incredible. Each one here is a pillar of inspiration.”

“Well, it is His Hospital, it has to be out of the ordinary,” she says with a smile.

“Right, absolutely. Ok, thank you. We now have to move to the Dental Department.”

“Sure, just take a few steps on the right and you are there. And do not miss speaking to Dr. Mahalakshmi there. She is the young, committed and permanent dentist of this Hospital. But, wait a minute. It is already twelve (noon) now. Maybe you should come at 2 p.m., after your lunch. She will surely be there then.”

Jolted back to real time, we pack our cameras and quickly walk out of the room. In fact, until Sister Gloria uttered 'lunch' we had no clue that it was more than two hours since we had stepped into this holy abode of healing. Even now, we are actually not hungry. There is so much to assimilate from what we have seen and heard since morning. This Hospital not only heals your body and mind, but also fills your soul.

WHERE LOVE GREETES YOU AND GRACE CURES...

The Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam

Vol-II - Part-2

Divine Dentistry Delivers World Class Care to Rural Population

It is 2.15 in the afternoon. Armed with our cameras, we are in front of a room on the door of which is marked in bold “Dentistry”. Soon, the door opens and we see a patient come out, probably after his treatment. An elderly, bespectacled lady comes out then, clad in white, and requests another patient sitting right next to the door on the black chair to move into the room. We try to grab the attention of this petite, senior lady and say, “Sairam, we are from Radio Sai. Is it possible for us to speak to Dr. Mahalakshmi?”

“OK, please wait. Dr. Mahalakshmi is at work. I will find out and let you know.”

She goes inside and within ten seconds returns, and opens the door wide open for us. We are ushered inside the dental examination room, where we see at least three doctors completely occupied with their patients on the dental chairs.

“In that corner is Dr. Mahalakshmi,” the elderly lady guides us, and immediately we see the doctor stop her machine, lower her face guard, and then flash a welcome smile.

“Please come,” she says, and continues, “I was expecting you; Dr. Verma had informed me. If you do not mind, can I complete the procedure on this patient? After this, we can talk.”

“Oh, sure. No problem. We will be glad to stand and watch you work.”

This is a good opportunity to take a few snaps, we say to ourselves. So, in the few minutes we are clicking away from various angles. We even ask her if we could the window to avoid the backlight, which she kindly obliges. We do a lot of video taping as well. Five minutes go by, and then, the doctor says, “Yes, I am through. Tell me, how can I help you?”

Disadvantaged Villagers from Far Off Areas Avail of Free Dental Care

“Well, there is so much going on here, so silently. Can you please tell us about this patient on whom you were working just now? What is the treatment being given?”

“Well, he is Naresh. He has just completed his XII grade. He comes from a village called Chandrayanupalli. He came a few months ago, for the first time, with complaints of severe pain. There was a serious infection and one of his teeth was damaged. We did root canal correction for him a few weeks ago,

and today we are filling it with silver. This is a permanent treatment. He should be fine now.”

“Why did he come all the way to this Hospital? Aren’t there government hospitals nearby his village?”

“Right. Why don’t you ask Naresh himself?” the doctor suggests.

“I can say emphatically that these doctors alone live up to the nobility of this holy profession” – Naresh, a young patient

So we ask the same question to Naresh who is now sitting on the dental chair. The spirited youngster, in his deep blue and red stripes shirt, bursts out spontaneously, “Everyone from my village travels 18 kilometres to come to only this Hospital now. Yes, there are public hospitals, but most often there is no doctor there. You find only a medical assistant who is very incompetent. Besides, they are free only on paper. Nobody treats you unless you pay handsomely. And corporate hospitals are worse; they fleece you.

“I know because I have been to Bangalore too, and worked there part time in an AIG (an American company) call centre. Actually, it was then that I developed this terrible ache in my tooth. It was absolutely unbearable. I would suffer night and day in solitude. There was no one who could help. To add to my misery, my brother at that time, suffered an accident. He is a taxi driver. So, all my hard earned savings of Rs. 25,000 were utilized for his treatment. In fact, we had to borrow an equal amount for his surgery. My father is very old now. He used to grow a few crops a couple of years ago. But today, I cannot expect any support from him.

“Therefore, I lived with my tooth pain for as long as I could. But when every moment became a nightmare, I went to a hospital in Bangalore. They asked me Rs. 5000 only for consultation. I was shocked, devastated. I somehow borrowed the amount and got myself checked. There was no way I could afford their treatment. It was then that my brother suggested that I do not waste any more time and come to Puttaparthi.”

“So, how was the treatment here? What did the doctor say?”

“Actually, within a few minutes of taking the first tablet prescribed here, I was so much relieved of that excruciating pain. The doctors here told me that I have to undergo root canal treatment after which everything will be fine. But in the corporate hospital in Bangalore, they told me that I have a severe bone infection, which I now know is not true. The doctors here have assured me that I have no such problem... Everywhere else, people are driven by money, nothing else. But here, I find love. The doctors treat you as a fellow human being. With no hesitation, I can say again and again that these doctors alone live up to the nobility of this holy profession.”

The narration flows without a pause. We are able to feel the voice of the heart, of emotions and gratitude, as Naresh goes on,

Free and Loving Treatment, the Ultimate Refuge of Poor Patients

“I am aware that more than Rs. 70,000 has been spent on me in this Hospital...this is the only place for desperate people like us. But treating free is not the main issue, what touches me most is the concern these doctors have for you. Nowhere else will you find such genuine care and love.”

The boy is now almost in tears. We immediately break the conversation with “Naresh, would you mind if we take a snap of yours?” He agrees and quickly swaps his tears for smiles. We are happy. Well, it helps us too. Even for us, it was a fight against overwhelming emotion.

“Almost everyday we see cases like this,” Dr. Mahalakshmi now remarks. “It is impossible for such people to get treated elsewhere. Take the case of Pulaiya”. The doctor now turns to her right, and on that dental chair we see another youngster, probably the same age as Naresh.

“I know it is because of devotion to Baba that these doctors treat us with so much concern and love” – Pulaiya, a restaurant worker

“He works in a restaurant in Puttaparthi,” she explains, and continues, “When he came here a few weeks ago, he had a huge cyst extending from the base of his gums to the eye ball. We initially tried oral medication, but it didn’t help. Then we put him on IV fluid and the swelling subsided. After that, we extracted his damaged tooth. Today, he has come for a check up. There is no pain now. He should be fine in future too.”

We now turn our camera to Pulaiya and ask, “How was your condition before you came here?”

“Oh, the pain was intense. It was piercingly agonizing if any hot or cold beverage entered my mouth. Two days ago, my tooth was removed, and now I feel so relieved. I actually hail from Rudravaram, a small village near Nandyala (about 300 kms from Puttaparthi). Because of lack of employment there, I came here. I have no education, or money, or any family support. My parents are too poor to take care of me. Besides, I have five siblings. When my toothache became severe, I first went to a public hospital in Nandyala. The doctors there advised that I should get all my teeth removed, and wear a complete set of artificial teeth. And to get that procedure done, the staff there demanded a bribe of Rs. 15,000! Obviously, I could not afford such a huge amount and I let my problem be.

“When the problem became acute after coming to Puttaparthi, I came to this Hospital. Now, I am so happy. Without spending a rupee, I am treated completely and my teeth are safe too. I know it is because of devotion to Baba that these doctors treat us with so much concern and love. That is why, in spite of the hectic work schedule in my restaurant, I make sure that I have Baba’s *darshan* every other day. I cannot imagine my condition without Him and this loving Hospital.”

Dr. Mahalakshmi next shows us another extremely poor patient, again a youngster, who has come all the way from the state of Orissa. And this young man, the doctor tells us, has been bleeding from his mouth for years. Apart from the complexity of the case, communicating with him is a major issue because he knows no other language than a local dialect of Oriya, the language of Orissa. "But we will somehow fix him," Dr. Mahalakshmi says, patting her patient lovingly. We are moved by the passion of this emphatic doctor to go to any length to help all these forlorn patients.

"For me, to serve here is really a dream come true. I cannot ask for anything better." – Dr. Mahalakshmi, Dentist

We are now tempted to ask Dr. Mahalakshmi a question about herself. "Is this what you wanted to do when you were studying dentistry? Did you never think of working in a corporate set up?"

"No," replies the doctor instantly. "I always wanted to work in a rural set up because these poor folk need it more than the people in the cities who can afford the big hospitals. There is nobody to treat or educate these illiterate and simple masses. It is for this reason that immediately after my medical degree in 2000, I joined the Swami Vivekananda Movement which works for the upliftment of tribals. But on a casual visit to Puttaparthi in 2004, when I heard about a vacancy in this Hospital, I jumped at the idea and applied. But Dr. Alreja, the Medical Superintendent then, did not give me much hope. 'Swami would prefer senior people here,' he said, but I requested him to present my case to Bhagavan. And to his surprise, Swami told him to take me in! For me, it is really a dream come true. I cannot ask for anything better. It is a very rare opportunity Bhagavan has given me!"

"But don't you think you are missing out on your career having opted to work here at the prime of your youth?"

Superior Gratification and Learning Make Serving Sai More Attractive

"Not at all!" she replies emphatically. "The kind of exposure I get here is something I had never imagined. All round the year there are senior doctors from all over the world who come for short periods according to a roster set up by the Hospital administration. And the years of experience that some of them have is equal to my age! I learn a lot from them. Even now, there is a visiting doctor from UK, Dr. Digish Patel."

"Oh, is it?" we exclaim excitedly.

"Yes, he is busy on that last chair."

"Great, can we speak to him?"

"Of course!"

We move our equipment to the other corner of the room where Dr. Digish is at work. He notices us, our cameras, and then smiles. "We just need two minutes," we submit politely.

The doctor halts his work, and his hands still holding the tweezers, he says, "Ok, what would you like to know?"

We quickly ask, "Can you please tell us what motivates you to come all the way from UK to work voluntarily in this Hospital?"

UK Doctor Serves Sai Hospital Every Year

"Oh, I have been doing this for years now. Under Bhagavan's direction, I served nine months in a year in His General Hospital in Whitefield, Bangalore, for seven years. And now, I come to this Hospital. I just love being here. The recovery rate is much higher here. A procedure like wisdom tooth extraction heals much faster here, in spite of poverty and malnutrition! But the big difference is that here everything is done out of love. There are no estimate forms given to the patients, so there is no chance of disagreement between doctor and patient, which happens quite often in UK. All the patients have a lot of faith, which helps immensely."

"How do you compare this Hospital with the ones back home in terms of infrastructure and facilities?"

"Oh, the professional standards are the same. We have here all the equipment and sterilizations, as we do in the UK. Actually, here it is even better! And the kind of cases my Indian colleagues treat here, are most infrequent back in the UK; I take years to see such cases there."

"Ok, so what do you take back from this place every time you come?"

"Even though everyday I see double the number of patients that I would in the UK, I go back truly enriched" – Dr. Digish Patel

"Well, for me, it is a holiday! Yes, it is a very pleasant experience. I go back recharged! Even though everyday I see double the number of patients that I would in the UK, I go back truly enriched. Actually, I get more from the patients here than I can ever give them!"

Even though we would want to speak to him more, we decide not to disturb him any longer. We thank him profusely, and he returns this with a big smile and 'Sairam'.

We are indeed glad that we were lucky to find him this afternoon. It has been nearly an hour in the Dental Department, and we now want to move on. We convey our gratitude again to Dr. Mahalakshmi. "You are welcome anytime, no problem," she says politely.

As we walk out of the Dental department, we ask the friendly elderly lady, “Can you please tell us where the ENT section is located?”

“It is just a few steps away on the right, after the tiny staircase. You will find Dr. Sunil there,” she guides us very kindly.

SaiENT Service Geared to Rural Conditions and Challenges

We follow her directions and it is easy to watch Dr. Sunil at work, as this room has no curtains. As soon as he sees us, he welcomes us very cordially. We then explain our objective and say, “Dr. Verma told us this morning that we should not miss this department.”

“Ok, he called and informed me too. That’s good. So, what would you like to know?”

“Could you please tell us about the work that happens here? We heard many new developments have taken place here recently.”

“Well, the outpatient department of ENT has been running for the past 15 years, thanks to Dr. Devi Pavan. I joined only about six months ago. We have now started surgeries, so we have an operation theatre that is busy all round the year. We have opened an endoscopy department upstairs which...”

At this point, we notice a middle-aged lady standing at the door, her left hand clutching her left ear, and her face contracting in pain. Dr. Sunil calls her in immediately. We suspend the conversation and make space for the lady. In the local dialect of Telugu, she seems to say that something has entered her ear. Dr. Sunil first comforts her with love, and then examines her ear carefully for a few seconds with the light of the torch that is fixed on his clinical head band.

Next, he picks up a long metallic forceps-like instrument, inserts it into her ear, and effortlessly pulls out a thick ball of cotton. The lady is instantly relieved, and overjoyed. She does not know how to thank the doctor. The next second she bends down completely to touch the feet of the doctor! Dr. Sunil instantly holds back her arms, reassures the lady lovingly and invites her to come anytime she has a problem again. The lady now leaves the room with her hands folded conveying gratitude to the doctor, and also to the photo of Swami above his table.

It was very simple procedure and there was nothing spectacular about it. Still, we are touched watching the poor lady, first in pain, and later her relief and expressions of gratitude. We ask Dr. Sunil, “Is this typical of the cases you generally see?”

“Yes,” he replies and goes on to explain. **“Most of the villagers here sleep on the floor in the night, because of which they are always vulnerable to danger of insects and other foreign bodies entering into their ears and noses. Many times, I have come in the night to the Hospital to help**

remove a live insect from someone’s ear. When something alive is inside your ear, you know, it can be hell.”

“Of course!”

“And then there are these uncared for small children who accidentally insert sand, pulses, vegetable matter, and the like into their noses and ears. In fact, within a span of one week after I joined the Hospital in April this year, I had three children who had swallowed coins. They all had repeated episodes of vomiting. At that time, with Swami’s prompting, I used a particular procedure using a foley’s catheter and easily managed to remove all of them. So, these cases are common. Their treatment may not be complicated, but the relief that it gives to the patients is immense.”

“Exactly, and that is what is ultimately important. Earlier, you were talking of the new initiatives like endoscopy...”

Sophisticated Endoscopy Aids ENT Efforts

“Yes, since the last seven months, we have started ear operations and micro-ear surgeries. We are also doing endoscope nasal diagnostics and surgeries. In simple terms, we insert a sophisticated and rigid instrument 8 centimetres long and 4 millimetres in diameter inside the nasal cavity to see and correct anatomical abnormalities within the nose. This equipment has an embedded camera, so everything can be viewed directly on the monitor.”

“Ok, that’s encouraging. Now, how do you rate patient recovery in this Hospital?”

“Well, that reminds me of one boy I operated upon a few weeks ago. He had chronic obstruction in his nose, and his nasal bone was severely deviated. Actually he is a local youngster, maybe you can speak to him directly sometime. In any case, after the correction, within two days, I saw him actively going about doing his duties in the *ashram*. This was quite unlike what I had seen in 13 years of my experience in Delhi; anywhere else the patient should have rested for a week.”

“That’s interesting. Doctor, can you please tell us how you happened to join the Hospital here, leaving your job in Delhi?”

Birthday Gift from God: Appointment as ENT Specialist at His Hospital

“Well, it is Swami’s will! After my MBBS and MS in Delhi, I served for nine years as a specialist with the Government of Delhi. I was an active sevadal and was also the convenor of the Sai Centre of my area. I always longed to serve in this Hospital. And in the last five years, I came for two weeks every year, to offer my services in the Cardiac Screening Block of the Super Specialty Hospital. In December 2007, one of the doctors here suggested that I could serve in this Hospital as an ENT specialist. So, I requested for this chance, and in January 2008 I was called by the Hospital for an interview.

After that many things fell in place quite mysteriously, and to my delight, I received the appointment letter to join this Hospital on March 31, which is my birthday!”

“Amazing. So, what inspires you every morning to come to this Hospital?”

Most Potent Medication – Capsule of Love: Dr. Sunil

“The one and only motivation for me is to share Swami’s love with the patients and my colleagues in every way. The most important thing that is to be given to the patient is the capsule of love. If you hold the patient’s hand and with love say ‘It is all fine, no worries’ half of their ailment is gone. When you smile and the patient responds similarly, the treatment has already begun. This dissemination of love is what inspires me everyday.”

“What you mentioned is really profound, and that is what Swami has been saying for decades now,” we say to him, and then ask a final question.

“Doctor, how has working here helped you as a person?”

“Oh, it has served me tremendously. It has helped me to grow spiritually. I constantly check myself if I am living up to the principle of love. Whenever there is even a trace of anger or irritation, I ensure that love takes over in that situation. Well, that is my ultimate aim – to just pour out love in all actions, and everyday here is a step forward towards that sublime goal.”

“Doctor, speaking to you has really been an enlightening experience. Thank you very much for your time.” We now look at our watches. As we pack our cameras, we ask, “Doctor, it is already past 4 o’clock now; isn’t time for you to go for *darshan*?”

“Yes, I am going now. What about you boys?” He asks us as he stands up to get ready to close his room.

“Well, we would want to, but our work is not done yet. We still have to meet a few more people. By the way, can you please tell us who looks after the maintenance of all this new equipment of this Hospital? It just occurs to us that there should be many working behind the scenes to make this beautiful institution run so smoothly.”

Man Behind the Machines – Hospital Maintenance Expert

“You are absolutely right,” Dr. Sunil says, as he locks his room. He now starts to walk along the corridor and adds, “You know what? You should speak to Mr. Sharma. He is the one-man army who looks after the entire maintenance of this Hospital. Elsewhere, you will find big departments set up especially for this purpose, but here with the help of a few assistants, Mr. Sharma is doing a fantastic job.”

“Oh, we have never heard about him; he must be a silent worker. Can we talk to him now?”

“Actually, it is very difficult to find him in one place, as he is always on the move. But he has a make-shift room in the middle of the other staircase where he keeps his files. If you’re lucky, you will find him there.”

“Oh, thank you very much for this information. We will somehow locate him. He is as important to our story as the doctors and patients.”

“All the best then, Sairam”.

Dr. Sunil leaves the Hospital, and from the entrance we now walk into the Hospital again in search of Mr. Sharma. We find a person in khaki dress in the corridor. Maybe he is the Hospital watchman, we surmise, and ask him for the exact location of Mr. Sharma’s table. Soon, we are in the middle of a staircase where there is a little corner as the steps turn 360 degrees, and we find a tiny enclosure with a gate created in this small area. It is absolutely spartan; there is an aluminum rack and a table, that’s it. But we do not see Mr. Sharma. The person in khaki says that he has not left the Hospital yet, so we decide to wait. Luckily for us, he appears in about ten minutes and is pleasantly surprised to see us with cameras et al.

“What do you want to do? Why are the cameras here?” He asks inquisitively. We then explain him patiently the objective behind our story, and he readily agrees to share his thoughts.

“You are now taking care of the maintenance of this entire Hospital. Did you have any earlier experience in doing this kind of a job? How do you manage this?” We want to know more about him first and then his work.

Pouring a Lifetime of Learning into the Temple of Healing

“Well, I worked for 35 years in the HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited) division in Orissa where I mainly had administrative responsibilities. For seven years, I was in the Production Control Department, and I had a keen eye on every kind of activity in the shop floor. I was checking different parts of big aircraft engines, so it was a job to be done very carefully. I always had many mechanical and technical ideas to improve processes. However, in HAL my role was more on the administrative side, but here I am able to implement new concepts. I learn everyday, and it has been a very fulfilling experience.”

“How many hours do you work here everyday?”

Hospital Handyman its Unsung Hero

“Well, I have no idea. Most often a phone call from the Hospital is my alarm clock! There is always someone or the other trying to reach me, either to fix a leaking tap, to rectify an oxygen cylinder, to repair a broken chair, or replace a tubelight, or organize plumbers to construct something, and so on. Yes,

sometimes I do struggle, but I enjoy it. I feel very satisfied that I am able to contribute constructively to this Hospital.”

“It may also happen that you might have to miss *darshan* on some days because of the workload. Does it bother you?” We ask again.

“Never,” he says without a second thought. “In fact, I feel guilty sitting for *darshan* if there is work pending here. I can never be at peace seeing Him in Mandir if I am needed in the Hospital. I have come here voluntarily to do His work, and I feel sincerity is very vital in Swami’s institution. I have to live up to the opportunity that I am blessed with. If not me, somebody else will get this chance. I know it is a rare opportunity, therefore, I put my heart and soul into it.”

“You are in charge of maintenance of this Hospital, but don’t even have a decent room; only this make-shift corner is your place of work. Does it frustrate you sometimes?”

“Oh, I never think about it at all,” Mr. Sharma smiles. “Actually I never asked even for this STD facility in my phone too. This area in the Hospital is being used for more important things. I completely understand. My motto is only to serve, and to do this, the first thing I need to do is to curb my ego. So, I never think of myself. For me, my work is my worship. And this is what I would like to do as long as there is energy in this body.”

Sai University Alumnus behind Major Modernisation

Undoubtedly, we are impressed with the dedication of this man who is almost 65 years now, but works as if he were 40. “What are the recent major developments in the Hospital?” we venture to ask again.

“Well, in the last 20 months, thanks to a former student of Swami’s University, the Hospital has seen many new changes. From cubicles in the Out Patient department to bio-medical equipments in the Operation theatres, to the new neo-natal ICU, to the creation of new wards, to the installation of ENT endoscopy, the Hospital has moved to a new level of patient care and administration. The laboratory too is well-equipped now.”

“All this means more work for you!” we joke.

“I enjoy it, I am here for that!”

“You are incredible.” We admire Mr. Sharma and then say, “Yes, this morning Dr. Verma mentioned to us about the laboratory, and even told us to speak to Dr. Uma and Mrs. Sadhya there.”

“Yes, they are the key persons there,” Mr. Sharma agrees, and then says, “You must go there quickly. It is already 5 p.m.”

“Right, we will rush there. Thank you very much.”

Laboratory of Love and Life

We lift our bags and in the next moment are in front of the laboratory. We find Dr. Uma there, and she needs no introduction. We had interacted with her a lot on our first day. She welcomes us and goes to explain, “About ten years ago, we used to do only basic investigations like hemoglobin count, ESI, and the like here, and depend on the Super Specialty Hospital for other tests. But now, we have acquired so many new instruments. Presently we do bio-chemistry, renal function tests, all blood sugars, etc.” Dr. Uma now points a machine on her right and says, “We have this new machine which is a fully automated haematology analyser, because of which we are able to do extensive blood investigations.” Then, she moves forward and shows us another small machine. “This is the electro light analyzer.” Next, she points to another equipment and says, “This one is the ABG (Arterial Blood Gases) machine. Now, we also have the apparatus to test for HIV, HBSAG and HCV, and we do them routinely for expectant mothers as these infections can be transferred to the foetus.”

We figure out that the lady standing beside Dr. Uma is Mrs. Sandhya, and we now ask her, “Madam, can you please tell us how it feels working here?”

We notice that she is very camera-shy and reticent. But we persist and she says, “The satisfaction that I derive here is something that cannot be explained. I am just happy working for Swami.”

“Now, the workload must have increased with new equipments and more tests,” we comment.

“Yes, but that makes me happier. We are doing more work to help the patients and be of use to Swami.”

We now move on to another lady technician, and ask her to share her feelings about working in the Hospital. She responds enthusiastically, saying, “I am Sai Leela. Thirty years ago, Swami had promised my father that He would give a job to one of His children. My father asked Swami to bless my brother with that opportunity, but He gifted that to me. I am very happy working here.”

At this point, a young lady working on a microscope turns, and we see that she is eager to share her thoughts. We lend the microphone to her, and she says, “I am Gauri. Before coming here I had worked for a year and a half in a hospital in Tirupathi. But I am extremely glad to be here because there is so much cooperation from everyone around; it is like a family. Everybody is so devoted and there are no differences. I really like it here.”

Similarly, one more lady now joins in and says, “My father first came here in 1975. He currently works in the Gokulam....”

Happy to hear all of them, we finally thank them all and say, “It is wonderful how Swami has chosen and brought all of us together.” They all agree and

smile. We now quietly walk out of the laboratory after a taking a few pictures of the equipment there.

SSSGH – Healing with God's Love

It is already past 5 p.m. now. As we walk along the corridor to reach the door, our eyes fall on the Out Patient department cubicles. The scene there is now an anti-thesis of what we had seen in the morning; it's deserted. But the activity inside is the same, and there are nurses coming in and out of the wards. We see them go about their work in such a focused manner. Yet, whenever they confront a patient, they flash a smile. We cannot but recollect the words of Sister Ganga – 'Nursing is service with a smile'. And stepping into this Hospital, we say to ourselves, is like stepping into a mansion of love. And it is no wonder because the Force behind the Hospital is, verily, the Source of all Love in this Universe.

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 25

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. This is the 25th article in this series and all I can say is WOW! I am astonished that not only have I been able to come this far, but also retain so many of you dear readers! So let me start with a big thank you to all of you loyal readers out there.

When we were together last, I was trying to tell you something about the complexity of the philosophy behind Quantum Mechanics [QM]. As a tool box, QM has become so common that students everywhere now routinely use it for solving all kinds of problems in widely different areas, ranging all the way from astro-physics to chemistry and bio-molecules. However, when it comes to what the maths *means*, it still is a mystery, a mystery that has bugged even the pundits, then and also now it seems.

The Magical Cat who is both Alive and Dead

Just to highlight this last point, let me start off this instalment with a brief reference to what is sometimes called Schroedinger’s cat paradox. The paradox, invented by Schroedinger himself, is a macabre *gedanken* [thought] experiment. To perform the experiment, one first gets hold of a box. Into this is fitted a deadly contraption consisting of a bottle of hydrogen cyanide and a hammer held by a clip. The figure below gives you some idea of what I am talking about. The clip is connected to a device that can detect radioactive emissions. In front of the detector is placed a radioactive source. The idea is that when the detector registers a particle emitted by the source, the clip holding the hammer is released. The hammer than falls on the bottle, breaks it, filling the chamber with cyanide vapour.

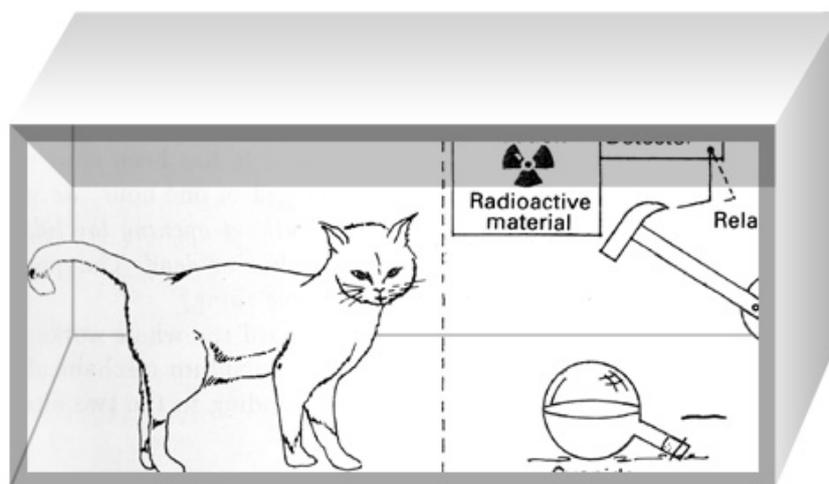


Figure 1: *Given here is a schematic of the gedanken experiment devised by Schroedinger to highlight the difficulties of interpreting QM. In this experiment, there is a lethal gadget that consists of, to start with, a weak radioactive source, that emits on the average, roughly one particle per hour. The emitted particle is detected by a particle detector [in those days, the most commonly used detector was the famous Geiger-Mueller counter]. Whenever a particle emitted by the source enters the GM counter, it gives out an electrical pulse, which can be made use of in many ways, depending upon the preference of the experimenter. In this case, the electrical pulse is supposed to release a clip holding a hammer. If the clip gets released, the hammer falls on a glass bottle, and breaks it, spilling its content. And what is in the bottle? Deadly hydro-cyanic acid! Why - all this is explained in the text!*

Now why all this deadly plotting? Ah, that is where the poor cat comes into the picture. When everything is almost set up, a cat is put into the box, the release clip put in place, and the lid of the box is quickly closed. By the way, the box is made of steel and so one cannot see inside.

OK, we have set up the gadget which clearly has some evil intention behind it, and in this environment, we have placed a poor cat! But what has all this got to do with QM? That is what Schroedinger explained. He said [in effect]: "Let us suppose the radioactive source is quite weak which means it would emit a particle only once in a while; say that on the average there is only a 50 % chance of a particle being emitted during one hour – one can have sources that are as weak as that, in fact even much weaker. Anyway, let us assume that is how weak our source is. We place the cat in the box immediately a particle has been emitted [taking care of course that the hammer is not allowed to be released at that time!]. We then quickly make the release clip on the hammer operational, **close the lid and wait for one hour**. Remember that during this period, there is a fifty percent chance for a radioactive particle to be emitted, and thus a fifty percent chance for the cyanide bottle to broken and the cat to die. However, we do not know that for sure; we just have a probability.

"Question: Without opening the box, what can we say about the fate of the cat" An average person would possible say, "Well, there is a 50 % chance the cat is alive." Suppose you insist, "Give me a definite answer," the person would respond, "That I cannot do."

What about QM? It says, "The cat is in a state where it is both alive and dead." To us that might seem absurd, but the strange thing about QM is that when no observation is made, it can talk only of potentialities. From the quantum mechanical point of view, the cat has the potentiality to be alive and also the potentiality to be dead. Hence, QM's answer is that the state of the cat is **one where it is alive as well as dead**.

To us of course, this answer would be pure nonsense; either the cat is alive or it is dead. Thus, after a while during which all this big debate was gong on about the meaning of QM, some people said, "It seems from Schroedinger's cat paradox that the way people are interpreting QM is wacky!"

An Unclear Picture

To be factually correct, this is not the way Schrodinger described it. His version of the description of the experiment is given in BOX 1. And about the meaning of QM he said that the physical interpretation of reality given by QM is actually a “blurred model” of reality. In other words, Schrodinger was cautious and essentially said, “The maths is OK, but trying to interpret it the way it is being done now is not acceptable to me! We really cannot squeeze these equations to construct an intellectually acceptable picture of reality, at least not as things stand at present. ” That is the essence of what he said then, way back in the early thirties.

I hope I have not lost you! Basically what I have been trying to tell you is that while people quickly became skilled in using QM as a superb tool-box, very few understood what QM really implied, especially in terms of physical reality. And as the years went by, some of these issues became murkier and murkier, that is to all but a select few. One reason for this apparent clouding of the issues was the enormous progress made in the physics of elementary particles. Basically, as one tried to study matter on a smaller and smaller scale, it also meant study of phenomena on a smaller and smaller time scale. What made this combination of small length and time scales particularly interesting and exciting is that these are precisely the sort of conditions encountered in the Baby Universe, that is to say when the “age” of the Universe [age being reckoned of course from the “instant” of the so-called Big Bang] was about 10^{-30} seconds or even less! It emerged that on such small time scales [the length scales too were incredibly small], both Space and Time were quite possibly grainy! What kind of Physics Laws hold sway under such mysterious circumstances? To this day, no one knows for sure!

So you see, while the “technology” of QM has become very sophisticated, our understanding of its basics has also become more and more difficult. Nevertheless, it has become clear to the physics community as a whole, that there is a lot more than to QM than just the rule book and the tool box it provides. Why do I say that? For the following reason, and to explain it all, I must go back to about 1931 or so.

The first round of the great Einstein-Bohr debate, which took place largely during various conferences held in Europe, ended with Bohr being declared the “winner”. Einstein admitted he was not quite successful in rebutting QM, but continued to believe that all was not OK with QM, and that one day, QM would be replaced by some other new “super theory” where there would be no room for fuzzy interpretations and where Causality would once again reign supreme.

Meanwhile, Hitler had come to power in Germany and started his witch-hunting of Jews. It was time to worry about personal safety more than about what QM did or did not imply, and most Jews in Europe, particularly those in Germany did all they could to escape to safe havens. Einstein too joined in the exodus and having sold off his house in Berlin, left for America for good. Having achieved world-wide fame already, it was no problem for Einstein to

find a position, and soon he settled down in the small town of Princeton in the state of New Jersey, as a Professor in the *Institute for Advanced Study*, a position he held till his death in 1955.

Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen Enter the QM Debate

The issue of personal safety having been successfully solved, Einstein began to concentrate again on the one issue that was bothering him, namely, what did QM really mean? Working with two collaborators name Podolsky and Rosen, Einstein published in 1936, in the prestigious American journal the *Physical Review*, a paper entitled: *Can Quantum Mechanical Description of Physical Reality be Considered Complete?* By the way, this paper soon became famous and is generally referred to in the trade as the EPR (Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen) paper.

EPR began with the remark that for a theory of physics to be considered successful, it must be subjected to two tests: **1) Is the theory correct? 2) Is the description given by the theory complete?** As far as the first question is concerned, EPR donot doubt the [mathematical] correctness of QM; in fact, Einstein had conceded this point as far back as 1930. The point at issue now was: “Could QM claim to be a complete theory?” This raises the question: “How to judge whether a theory is complete or not?” EPR themselves gave the answer. They said:

*If without disturbing a system, we can predict with certainty [i.e., with probability equal to unity] the value of a physical quantity, **there exists an element of physical reality corresponding to this physical quantity.***

I should point out at this juncture, that basically EPR wanted to show that they do not quite subscribe to the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle [which I have already discussed earlier]. If you recall, the crux of the principle is that if you want to know something about a system, you have to make an observation on the system; and when you do that, you are likely to disturb the system; the net result is that the value you measure for a property right now might not be quite be the same as the value that existed **before** the observation was made! In other words, **the very act of observation and measurement disturbs the system**, which immediately raises all kinds of questions about physical reality. By the way, in Classical Physics, the assumption is always made that ideally, it **IS** possible to make measurements of the property of a system **without** disturbing it in the least. What EPR were now essentially saying was:

We would now describe a gedanken experiment where we make an observation and yet can make an exact determination of certain quantities; according to conventional wisdom this should not be possible, since the system would have been disturbed. Our analysis shows that conventional wisdom is in error; in turn this means, according to us, the notion that QM is a complete theory is wrong!

Let us briefly examine how EPR went about trying to knock out Bohr! Before I begin, I must caution you that the narrative that follows is very descriptive and

qualitative and also full of hand-waving! But, as you would appreciate, that is inevitable at the level of presentation we are trying to maintain. I assure you, however, that despite these limitations, truth is **not** being sacrificed! With that caveat, let me proceed. Here is an extremely [over-simplified] account of the EPR *gedanken* experiment, the essential elements of which are sketched in Figure 2.

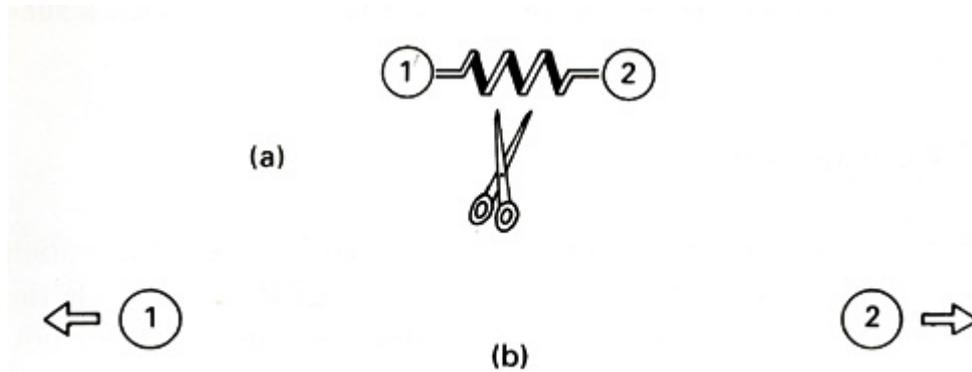


Figure 2: This figure presents a schematic of the *gedanken* experiment invented by EPR to question the picture of reality that QM gives. (a) shows two particles held together by a spring in compression. When the spring is cut, the two particles would fly off in opposite directions as in (b). EPR argue how, by making observations on particle 1 alone, they can determine with infinite accuracy the position AND the momentum of particle 2. This of course would violate the rules of QM. But EPR say: “We don’t care! Here is an experiment where your rules don’t work! What do you have to say about it?” That was the bombshell delivered from across the Atlantic that Bohr had to deal with. How he did that and what happened later is all described in the main text.

There are two particles held in tension by a spring. The spring is cut, whereupon, the two particles fly away from each other in opposite directions, of course. Say the particles are 100 km apart; it does not really matter how far apart they are. EPR say:

Listen. According to QM, there are six quantities associated with these two particles. They are as follows:

p_1 and q_1 , which denote respectively the momentum and position of particle 1.

p_2 and q_2 , which denote respectively the momentum and position of particle 2.

P which is the total momentum of the two-particle system, i.e., $P = p_1 + p_2$.

Q which is the separation between the two particles, namely, $Q = q_1 - q_2$.

We also keep in mind the following facts:

p_1 and q_1 cannot be simultaneously measured with infinite accuracy; that is what the Uncertainty Principle says, and we accept that.

p_2 and q_2 cannot be measured simultaneously measured with infinite accuracy for the same reason.

However, P and Q can be; QM allows that, thank God!

Let us now go to work.

EPR then go through careful arguments which are a bit too detailed for us and so I shall skip them. But one important aspect of their analysis is easy to understand; they simply avoid making any measurements on particle 2; all their observations are confined to a) particle 1 alone **and** the TOTAL properties of the system as enshrined in P and Q. From these observations, they then calculate the values of p_2 and q_2 . They then say [effectively]:

At the end of it all, we have been able to determine accurately BOTH the position AS WELL AS the momentum of particle 2. Your way of describing QM says that is not possible. However, by using exactly the rules that YOU have laid down, we have been able to describe a situation where we can in fact beat the system and achieve what you claim is impossible! So, there you are!! Your QM does not appear to be a complete system.

I know I am taking many liberties in telling the story, but in essence that roughly was the argument made by EPR. Just to add a touch of contact with history, I would like to quote here the closing statement of EPR. They said:

The [Schroedinger] wave function does not provide a complete description of the physical reality, and we have left open the question of whether or not such a description exists.

The EPR paper was submitted to the **Physical Review** on 25th March 1936, and was published a few months later. As soon as it appeared in print, The **New York Times** carried a story under the heading: **Einstein Attacks Quantum Theory**. Einstein strongly condemned the article saying that it did not properly reflect his views. Be that as it may, Einstein **had** challenged QM, and back in Europe, Niels Bohr took due notice of it. Rosenfeld a close associate of Bohr later recalled:

This onslaught came as a bolt from the blue....A new worry could not have come at a less propitious time. Yet, as soon as Bohr heard my report of Einstein's arguments, everything else was abandoned!

Bohr Rebutts EPR

Bohr did not take the challenge to QM lying down. He replied with a paper of his own, in the **Physical Review**. Bohr's arguments were long, complicated, and as always quite difficult to follow. He made two substantive points: 1) The

first was technical and refuted the idea that when measurements are made of p_1 and q_1 , they do not affect the value of P . Bohr said that is incorrect, and that is one weakness in the EPR argument. 2) Bohr’s second point was that EPR were quite ambiguous about what exactly they meant when they used the word “reality”.

So what did Einstein think of this rebuttal and what about the general public, meaning the physics community in this case? Einstein took one look at Bohr’s arguments and said, “Look suppose the two particles are say, a trillion miles apart. How then would particle 2 know anything about measurements made on particle 1, until information of some kind travels from particle 1 to particle 2? That would take a huge amount of time since light travels at finite speed. The way Bohr is talking, it is as if information can travel from particle 1 to particle 2 with infinite speed; but that is against Relativity! So, I simply do not buy Bohr’s argument!”

And so the difference remained, with each claiming flaws in the argument presented by the other. The question thus became: “OK, all this is fine; these two giants have very differing views but what does Nature say?” That question was answered only after both Bohr and Einstein were gone, and the answer came from some very clever experiments performed in Europe during the seventies, using laser beams. The whole thing is quite complicated, and I am not too sure if I would be able to explain it in simple terms. But the essence of those experiments can certainly be stated in a simple manner.

The Web of Universal Relationship

The experiments showed that when particle 1 is observed, particle 2 does get disturbed and there is no question of calculating its properties the way EPR tried to. The question immediately arises: “But how on earth would that be possible? For particle 2 to know that a measurement has been made on particle 1, some signal/message has to come from that particle, and if the two particles are a trillion miles apart, it would be a long, long, time, before particle 2 even comes to know that its erstwhile partner has been disturbed. And, according to relativity, information cannot travel faster than light; so, something is surely wrong somewhere.” But then, Nature is full of surprises, and this was one time when it pulled off a huge one. **Nature said, “Listen folks, you people are talking as if the two particles are separate. There is no two but only one!”**

Now that sounds like a Swami Discourse, does it not? Indeed, and with good reason, which is that in the physical world too, there is actually only one entity! You don’t have to take my word for it and just hear what two experts say. First, we hear from Gary Zukov, who in his famous book ***Dancing Wu Li Masters*** says:

The philosophical implication of quantum mechanics is that all things in our Universe [including us] that appear to exist independently are actually parts of one all-encompassing organic pattern and that no parts of that pattern are ever really separate from it, or from each other

In short, the physical world, according to quantum mechanics is not a structure built out of independently existing unanalysable [indivisible] entities, but rather a web of relationships as a whole.

If you think that is weird, listen now to what Professor Geoffrey Chew of Berkeley says:

Your electrons and mine are only approximately distinguishable. In denying objective reality [that Einstein vehemently stood by], quantum mechanics denies absolute status to your individuality. The only individual is the entire Universe.

I hope you are able to appreciate what I am driving at; you had better, because the point is not only a subtle one but quite profound, at least in my opinion. And, as I shall point out [hopefully in the next instalment], this point of view is in fact shared by many leading physicists. Let me stop beating about the bush and come to the point itself.

It is that at its subtlest level, Modern Physics is in fact corroborating the Vedantic truth that underlying the seen and experienced world, there exists a mysterious substratum. Of course, Modern Physics does not talk about the Soul, good and evil, etc. But to say that the reality behind what is perceived as many is actually ONE, makes Physics appear just one step away from Vedanta. Where does that leave the scientists, a good number of whom are trying to debunk God?

Those are the interesting topics we shall begin to explore when we slowly make the transition from the Physical Universe and the realm of Modern Physics to the bridge of Meta Physics, before crossing over to the Infinite realm of *Vedanta*!

I shall stop right here, because that journey would require you to make a lot of preparations; and you have exactly one month to get ready!

BOX1: Given below is how Schroedinger himself described his *gedanken* experiment relating to the cat, now famous as the Cat paradox.

A cat is penned up in a steel chamber with the following diabolical device [which must be secured against direct interference by the cat]: In a Geiger counter there is a tiny bit of radioactive substance, so small, that perhaps in the course of one hour one atom decays, but also with equal probability, perhaps none; if it happens, the counter discharges and through a relay releases a hammer which shatters a small flask of hydrocyanic acid. If one has left this entire system for an hour, one would say that the cat lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed. The first atomic decay would have poisoned it.

The above is the actual description of the cat experiment by Schroedinger himself. His discussion of the experiment is too technical to be included here!

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 17

Living Up to the Challenge of Conscience in Daily Life

Dear Readers, 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 around the globe. These included the experiences of 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, Mr. P. S. Kannan, Mr. Sai Mudigonda, an anonymous charity board member (Part 15) and Mr. Vivekananda Sahoo.

Imagine being handed over keys to a successful life at a young age; hands-on knowledge that would enable us to overcome every obstacle, meet every challenge and create a lasting impression of good character wherever we went. This tapping of all the good that lies within each of us, happens when we put into practice the five D's: Discipline, Discrimination, Dedication, Determination and Devotion. This month's contributor reveals how by making these powerful human qualities shine in her life and living by their guidance in every action and decision, she was able to create a successful career and demonstrate to her colleagues at work how human values can win even in the toughest of situations, where opinions vary sharply.

HOW I MADE MY DECISION-MAKING EASY

By maximizing the power of the five D's

By Mrs. Annapurna Shankar

An alumna of the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Mrs. Annapurna Shankar completed her Bachelors in Arts (Philosophy) in 1993. Subsequently, she acquired additional certifications from leading professional institutions. She started her career as a Technical Writer before moving into the area of HR, specializing in recruitments. Initially, she served as a Senior Consultant in a recruitment firm, and later went on to manage and lead the recruitment function of various services as well as product-based multinational IT companies. After about 10 years of corporate experience, she joined her husband to set up a consulting firm, an IT solution provider for Capital markets. She oversees its HR solutions. She also runs a home based business specializing in traditional and ethnic women's wear.

Each one of us has something special in our lives which we cherish. It could be a relationship, a beautiful slice of our life, a piece of timely advice, a facet of our personality, or even a value that is close to our heart. For me, the most indelible and treasured experience has been my three years of stay in the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University; and for definitely good reasons. In fact, it was in those years that I learnt the true *ABCD* of my life – **Always Be Careful of the Ds** – Discipline, Discrimination, Dedication, Determination and Devotion. What I appreciated and absorbed intellectually then, I have now practiced, over the 12 years of my corporate life. And today, I feel so empowered and fulfilled, materially, emotionally as well as spiritually. How did this actually happen and why do I feel so good? Here are a few glimpses.

The Dialect of Disciplined Discrimination

This happened more than a decade ago. It was during my days with the first organisation where I began my recruitment career. Fortunately for me, I had a great boss who appreciated human values a lot, and also positively encouraged me to hone my talents and fine-tune my personality. As I disciplined myself more, I could increasingly rely on my inner voice to make the right decisions.

For instance, one day, we got a mandate to hire a senior candidate for an executive position for a key client organisation. Our approach was to meet each applicant in person before going ahead with the further processing of their application, as we felt, that was the best way to evaluate a candidate completely, including their emotional quotient and general demeanour. As we got on with this assignment, I met quite a few senior candidates and there were some who were unwilling to drop into our office for a preliminary discussion. One such case was of a very senior person who was highly qualified, had rich experience working for reputed companies, and had recently returned from the USA.

He was looking for a break in India and was open to this opportunity. I had a first round telephonic discussion with him to check if he fits the bill, and also explained how a face to face meeting would add to the comfort levels of both of us. Although his profile could have easily been the best pick for any client, as I conversed with him, I strongly felt there was something missing in him; my heart was actually not too convinced about his candidature. And to add to this, it was a real challenge to convince him for an in-person meeting. Finally, he did agree, and I suggested to my boss that it would be better if she too was present with me for this meeting.

On the appointed day, the prospective candidate did drop in, but with a big “attitude”; that a person of his caliber and profile be asked to meet a consultant was very disconcerting for him. My boss and I had a marathon three hour session with him, during which time we found that his body language and behavioral patterns were not in line with what his profile in the resume claimed to be, and eventually our in-depth interview brought the cat out of the bag.

*"Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters
cannot be trusted with important matters."*

Albert Einstein

Towards the fag end of our conversation, we shared with him how there was so much disharmony between what he said and what his body language communicated. He was quite taken aback and realizing his mistake, said, "I have met many people in my corporate career, but not consultants like you who could penetrate this deep into a person, and not only make him understand what was going wrong but also help him come out with the Truth". Saying this, he thanked us generously and parted ways.

This episode was a clear affirmation for me to follow my inner voice steadfastly. I was very keen about the value system of the person more than his impressive resume, and what helped me to judge him rightly was my own disciplined set of values (like adherence to truth and transparency in my dealings) which had endowed me with a powerful inner sense of discrimination.

*"Always tell the truth, that way you don't have to
remember what you said."*

Mark Twain

The Triumph of Dedication and Determination

I moved on, with time, to head the recruitment function of an IT product firm in Bangalore. My job was to build an effective team of recruiters, mentor them, strategize, build vendor relationship, hire senior candidates, and manage the delivery as well. I gave my 100 % to this job, and soon my efforts yielded great results: my organisation grew from 80 to 200 plus within a short span of 8 months, that too with very stringent evaluation criteria (natural for product development businesses).

However, what was shocking and definitely demoralizing was the complete apathy of my boss. Despite being appreciated by my colleagues and overseas managers, my boss trivialized my achievements during my performance appraisal largely due to internal politics; he pretended being blind to all the obvious evidences and performance records. I did try to explain my position once, but that meeting, to put it mildly, was unpleasant.

I was terribly despondent, still had not decided to put in my resignation; I wrote to my boss a detailed mail humbly sighting my contribution to the organisation in various spheres, and hoped he would change his mind. But what happened was exactly the opposite. In fact, he added insult to the injury by stating that whatever I had written was false.

I was devastated and shared my sorry story with my husband who was in an equally respectable position with another IT Company. He advised me: "For all your sincere efforts and commitment, you have received only brickbats, and not even a passing compliment. This kind of behavior by your boss is most undignified, and bordering on wickedness. Now, don't try to prove, justify

or explain anything - your performance is already there for them to see. There is no need for you to self-introspect; be confident. Their attitude, sooner or later, will lead them to their ruin.”

There was already a strong prompting within me to part ways with this company, and the supportive thoughts of my husband only reaffirmed this. So, I lost no time and put in my papers, even though I was advised by many, colleagues and others, to take the matter higher up to the authorities in the US. I decided against this as it could lead to unnecessary pain in the lives of many employees.

The decision to quit was not an easy one though, because but for the boss, everything else – position, remuneration, organisation's standing, etc. – in that job was extremely satisfactory. Before I left, I sent a gratitude mail to the boss thanking him for all the support he had extended to me until then, and also wished him and the organisation the best in the future.

Now, my heart was light; I had no regrets about my decision, even though it was a big loss materially, as I was very sure that I did not want to be part of an organisation that did not respect human values.

I later learnt that after three months of my resignation, that organisation fell apart as the core team disintegrated and distanced from the company. Soon, the boss too was shown the door by the parent US company.

This only vindicated my belief that if we always discriminate well, and respect the voice of righteousness, that same righteousness will, in turn, protect us. In fact, it will not only safeguard us but also ensure our sustained welfare, as I saw it in my life. Leaving that company actually turned out to be a blessing in disguise for me, because that gave me a golden opportunity to explore entrepreneurial ventures, and today I am a successful and satisfied self-employed executive.

*“Endurance is one of the most difficult disciplines,
but it is to the one who endures that the final
victory comes.”*

- The Buddha

The Transient Delays on the Determined Path of Truth

While, in this situation I was able to take a stand and live by it; adhering to truthful principles in life has not always been so easy or difficult (depending on how we look at it). I remember, in one of my previous employments in an IT product development organisation, when I was just two months old in the system, I was given the mandate to build a team of recruiters.

As I was going about this assignment diligently, identifying the right talents needed for the job, my boss, the Managing Director of the Company, wanted me to hire a particular individual. And this person, I learnt later, was actually referred by the Sales Director, who was in the good books of my boss. I was

open to the idea so far it met the requirements and so, interviewed this person. To my dismay, in spite of all the years of experience he had, at least on paper, and the recommendations that he came with, I did not find him having the required skill-set for an experienced recruiter; he did not seem to be a fit into the team.

I frankly shared these observations with my boss, but he just could not take it positively, as he had interviewed him even before hiring me and had decided to recruit him. Generally, we have three levels of interviews, and the other people who interviewed this person after me, also did not share great feedback about him.

Nevertheless, my boss directed me to hire him and I had no choice. But the most unfortunate thing was my boss misread that I felt insecure because of this person's selection. In fact, he told me plainly that this recruiter would not be a threat to my position. Actually, I had never felt insecure, and my only dominating intention was to ensure that we hire a person who fits into the organisation culturally and also possesses the right set of expertise and knowledge.

However, there was little I could do in this circumstance, despite clearly being aware that the candidate lacked the required skill-set. Reluctantly, I processed his application and gave him the offer.

And what happened next was revealing. Within 20 days of his appointment, negative feedbacks about his lack of performance, uncouth interactions with internal customers, laid back attitude, etc. started pouring in from many departments. Besides, he was irregular to the office citing personal reasons which were unconvincing.

I had to bring this to my boss' notice, and also apprised him how our work was being adversely affected by the newcomer's irresponsibility. It was then that my boss realised the gravity of the problem and acknowledged the correctness of my original judgement. Eventually, this person himself could not cope with the pressures and expectations of his role, and resigned from the job.

It is many such instances that has instilled in me, again and again, the courage to follow my conscience, or inner voice (whatever one may call it) with dedication and determination to whatever extent I can. I know for sure that ultimately it is truth alone that triumphs.

Living the Ultimate D - Devotion

Moreover, I have seen umpteen occasions in my life where I have come out of pretty tight or tricky problems, only by sincere dedication. In fact, events unfold quite magically when we are determined to follow the right path.

During my tenure as the Recruitment Manager with an IT MNC in Bangalore, I was asked by a client company, to hire a team of professionals with a stringent combination of technical skills. It was virtually an impossible task as

that was a niche area and to find people who would accept an offer in a week's time was really a pipedream. But it happened! We rolled out 10 offers in 7 days, and in fact, were awarded the 'Best Recruiter Team' for this pilot project.

"Struggle ends where commitment begins."

We were so determined and dedicated in this project, that we actually became deeply devoted to our work; as a team, there was absolute harmony in our thought, word and deed. As a result, it was no more work, it had transformed into worship. And that is why, I feel, the seemingly impossible became possible.

"Dedication is not what others expect of you, it is what you can give to others."

Unknown

The Five Ds - The Force of My Life

These five Ds, starting with discipline and culminating with devotion, and going through the process with discrimination, dedication and determination, have become the unsurpassable support system of my life. And in fact, this is what I always share with all, especially young professionals. I observe that today's youngsters come with exaggerated expectations of salary, growth and responsibilities even at the very beginning of their careers. This attitude in them eventually gives rise to unrealistic ambitions, and is often the cause of an early disenchantment with the job leading to frequent job moves.

Therefore, I take it up as my challenge to make these excited young aspirants understand the long term benefits of working initially with certain organisations, even if they are not the best pay masters. I explain to them the advantages of exposure, and the learning curve they could gain by exercising more discipline in their desires.

"Talent without discipline is like an octopus on roller skates. There's plenty of movement, but you never know if it's going to be forward, backwards, or sideways"

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Citing my own example, I emphatically orient them towards these crucial five Ds and also impress upon them that along with knowledge and experience, what we need to combine is faith in ourselves, which in effect, is faith in God; because only when the journey from discipline reaches the stage of devotion, that huge resources of the universe get unlocked for us. And to this day, I am in touch with many of these youngsters, who are now heading organisations, but are grateful to me for that timely guidance.

As far as I am concerned, I accept their kind words but pass it on mentally to my Divine Master, Bhagavan Baba, the revered Chancellor of my alma mater,

Sri Sathya Sai University. I am indeed eternally beholden to Baba, who instilled in me these precious values through His overpowering message and magnetic personality. Whatever I am today, it is because I am an alumna of this hallowed University.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PART 6 (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 bearing the same name.

Loving Sai Ram, and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. Welcome once more to our Radio study circle in which I answer your questions. Today I have at least three questions before me and with luck I might be handling a few more; let us see how it goes. Meanwhile, I do hope you are benefiting from this special program from us.

Today’s bag brings us three questions and they are as follows:

QUESTION 1: How can we build up a good character?

QUESTION 2: Which is better, doing spiritual practices or doing one’s duty?

QUESTION 3: What is the main purpose of life?

How can we build up a good character?

Unlike in earlier programs, this time the questions are not quite linked, at least, that is what I think. That, however, does **not** mean they are unimportant! Indeed, the first question is very vital in today’s situation, and so, let me turn to it first.

What is character? Surely, this word ‘character’ can be described in many ways, but I shall do so by describing what one would normally expect from a

person of good character. First and foremost, we would expect such a person to be honest and truthful, always be true to the given word, never indulge in deceitful practices, etc. In general, we all have an intuitive understanding of what a person of good character is supposed to be like – no problem there. And by the way, whatever it be, good character means good character and nothing else, and its description should thus hold across the board for people of all faiths, and indeed, also for atheists.

In the first question, the questioner wants to know how to build up a good character. This implicitly means that character is built upon something, a foundation; clearly, that foundation must be strong and not weak, for otherwise, under difficult and testing circumstances, the so-called good character might abandon the person. Indeed, steadfastness and uncompromising adherence to basic principles is one of the hallmarks of a person of good character.

The question now shifts to the foundation; how to build the foundation? It may surprise you to know that we really do not have to lay any foundation because it is already there! How can that be? How could that have come into existence without any effort? No house gets a foundation just like that; somebody has to lay the foundation. Very true; in this case, it is the Good Lord, who has already done that for us, laying the foundation I mean! I am sure you are feeling dazed, and so, let me explain what exactly I mean.

Let me put it this way. We all have heard Swami telling us repeatedly that we are the Embodiments of the Divine. **Swami has also told us that *Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema* and *Ahimsa* are the fundamental and eternal values in-built into each and every one of us, even as we are sent forth into this world to start our journey through life.** These fundamental values encoded into us are, in fact, the Seal of the Divinity latent within us.

So my first point is: We do not have to bother about building a foundation; it is already there, and believe it or not, God Himself has laid the foundation. And let me remind you once more, that the foundation consists of the five basic human values that I listed out a short while ago. Good Character is the name given to the superstructure of behaviour that is built on these values.

The question now becomes: **“If we already have a foundation given to us in fact by God Himself, why then does building up a good character seem so difficult?”** Now that is an interesting question and needs some discussion.

Let us say you have bought a plot that earlier belonged to someone else, and that the previous owner had already laid the foundation for a house he wanted to build. However, he could not, for various reasons, build the house and sold the plot to you with merely the foundation. You are now the owner, and looking at the foundation, you say to yourself, “Hey, I like this layout, and maybe I shall build on it the house of my dreams.” That is fine. You have a plot and also a good foundation but what happens if the fellow who builds your house uses substandard methods and gives you a house that has

defects all over the place? You, of course, get into all sorts of troubles. There is heavy seepage through the walls when it rains, the roof leaks, the wiring is faulty, the toilets do not work, etc.

What this tells us is that if we want a good house, then we must not only have a good foundation but also make sure that the superstructure that is built is of good quality and is robust. In turn, this means that one must use the right building materials, follow the right building procedures, and take all the necessary precautions while constructing the house.

Let us take over the lessons from this illustration to the discussion about character development. Many people – this includes both parents as well as some teachers – think that good character can be instilled simply by **drilling** and saying, “Hey kids, you must always speak the truth, you must never cheat,” and so on. Yes, drill is an essential part of the overall training and cannot be dispensed with. However, mere drilling alone is **NOT** enough. So, in that case, what more is needed? Children must be slowly but surely exposed to the fact that the foundations for good character are already latent in them, having been put there most thoughtfully by God well in advance. **Elders could possibly say, “Dear children, do you know God sent you to live on earth with a box full of precious jewels and ornaments? They are called Sathya, Dharma, etc. God would be very pleased if you wear them. Make sure you keep these gifts of God in good condition. They must be kept polished and their shine and lustre must dazzle,”** and so on.

I am not making this up. Many years ago, I met a devotee from Brazil who was closely connected with education there. He told me of an interesting incident in a school, which had adopted the EHV (Education in Human Values) approach to education. Apparently, in one class, there was a boy who was a sort of terror; smart kid, but very unruly and always creating trouble. The teacher tried her best but the boy was just too difficult to handle. One day, just before the silent sitting class, the teacher called the boy near her and whispered something into his ear. That day, the boy sat silently and did not make even the slightest noise. Not merely that; from that day, the attitude of the boy changed completely, and soon he became not only an ideal boy in his school, but a national icon! Imagine that!

When I heard this, I was filled with curiosity, and was dying to know what magic mantra did the teacher whisper into the ear of that boy? I asked my Brazilian guest and with a smile he replied, “The Teacher said softly to the boy, ‘Boy, everyone thinks you are bad kid; I know that is absolutely wrong. Just show them what a fine and wonderful boy you are and shame them!’” That worked! Now how was this rowdy kid suddenly able to become so disciplined? Because unknown to him, he silently drew upon the huge reserve of goodness latent within. In short, he brought what was already inside – **that is really what character development boils down to; bringing out outside and making patent what is already latent within, what has been already put there by God Himself as His loving gift to us.** Let me add emphatically that God does not send out a single human being into this world without this

treasure. It is a different matter if people remain ignorant about it, or are indifferent to it, even when they know they have this wonderful treasure.

So, the point really is that the first step in character development is for each and everyone of us to realise that WE ARE IN FACT INTRINSICALLY DIVINE, even though our externals might not suggest that. However, with some vigorous “scrubbing and polishing”, many a “bad” person has completely turned around, which is why they sometimes say that yesterday’s sinner is today’s saint, and today’s sinner is tomorrow’s saint. This “scrubbing” as I called it, is what *Sadhana* is all about.

Please understand that what I have just pointed out is something non-trivial. In the context of today’s situation, where the jails in most countries are overflowing and huge sums are spent by the state in building new prisons and in maintaining the prisoners at taxpayers’ expense, few realise how thousands of prisoners can be easily rehabilitated back into Society, if only we spent time in caring for them, showing them love and compassion, and dealing with them humanely instead of treating them as beasts. If we take the Divine Spark in each and everyone seriously, then the world would be a better place.

By the way, I am not talking through my hat. No less a person than Kiran Bedi, India’s top female cop as newspapers often describe her [now retired, and winner of the Magsaysay Award], was once put in charge of the Tihar Jail, India’s most famous jail if I may say so, located in the capital city, Delhi. Built to hold 4000 prisoners, it held 14,000 when Kiran Bedi took charge, and it included terrorists, convicted murderers, and all sorts of tough guys. It was a horrible job, but during her term, Kiran Bedi managed by introducing a spiritual atmosphere that included *bhajans* and all that. Now, how come all these hardened prisoners responded well? Because there was goodness latent in them. Till Bedi arrived, no one had ever dreamt that beneath all that external toughness there might be goodness latent within. Kiran Bedi showed that this latent goodness **could** be tapped and some peace brought to an otherwise difficult environment.

Winding up my answer to the question I started with, let me now make it concrete by restating it as a step-by-step procedure as follows.

Step 1: Reconnect with God within; remember Swami is within you and with you always, not as a policeman keeping an eye on you, but as your friend, ever ready to help you. So keep that hotline always open.

Step 2: That hotline would be in perfect working condition and ever available, if you keep chanting His Name. Chanting the Name is like ringing up God on the hotline and saying, “Sai Ram God, I am just testing. Are You hearing me?” And He would respond, “Loud and clear!”

Step 3: Make sure that whatever you do would please Him.

How to ensure that? Swami Himself has given the recipe; He says:

WATCH your **W**ords
WATCH your **A**ctions
WATCH your **T**houghts
WATCH your **C**haracter
WATCH your **H**eart

I am sure that would do it. Finally, let me remind you of an old saying according to which, character is what you do when no one is looking! Well, no human might be looking and there might not be a surveillance camera either; but someone is always looking and that someone is God. How come God is everywhere and is able to look at all the people all the time? Very simple – God installs Himself in everyone, which makes it every easy for Him to know what we are doing. Thus, if we **really** love God and **really** understand that He is watching us every single second, we would begin to resonate with Him so much, that good character would come to us most naturally! So you see, it is not all that difficult, provided we make an earnest try. By the way, if you are a teacher or a parent or both, make sure those under your care get a good grounding in loving God, for if they do, they would automatically abhor doing anything that would displease God. And when you put them on that track, character emerges automatically.

I now turn to the second question, which is:

Which is better, doing spiritual practices or doing one’s duty?

I find this question a bit puzzling because the term Spiritual practices is not defined. Anyway, interpreting that word as people normally do, I shall proceed to answer this question. First and foremost, let me emphatically state that doing one’s duty in the proper manner and in the correct spirit is, in fact, the foremost amongst so-called Spiritual practices. In this context, I recall a stirring Discourse that Swami gave in March 1999, when He was making a brief visit to Delhi after about eighteen years. Speaking to a large crowd in front of the Sri Sathya Sai International Centre that had just been blessed by Him – and the crowd included not only luminaries like the then Prime Minister but also hundreds of Government servants, **Swami said [in effect]: “People think that one must do Seva in order to redeem oneself. Yes, Seva is indeed a very good Spiritual *Sadhana* because it cleanses you. However, do not imagine that you have to pick up a broom and sweep a village street in order to do Seva. If, on the other hand, you conscientiously do the work you have been appointed and paid to do, that itself would be a great Seva.”**

I was present when Swami spoke those words, and it had an electrifying effect on me. Do you know why? Because, for decades, I had seen how thousands of public servants regard it as a matter of right just to waste their time and do their work most causally or not do it at all. Back in the fifties when values were still held to be important in every household, people worked hard, be it in the schools or in the hospitals or office or whatever. Subsequently, however, massive degeneration occurred in public life [thanks to many factors, both global and local], work culture deteriorated rapidly, and people

began to forget that there were obligations and duties that one **had** to perform. By the way, in earlier times, duty was held to be prime, not only in India where it was enshrined as *Karma Yoga*, but also in the West. In fact, in London there is a statue of Lord Nelson who was famous among other things for his statement: "England expects every man to do his duty." And let us not forget that the *Gita* is all about duty.

All this might still not leave our questioner satisfied. So, let me add some footnotes. Duty is a word that is sometimes interpreted in a narrow sense; so let me use instead the word **responsibility**, which subsumes the word duty. Seen in this sense, we have many responsibilities, and doing the work assigned to us by our employer [which is how the word duty is sometimes interpreted] becomes just a small part of one's overall responsibilities. The ancients of India stipulated many such responsibilities that included one's obligations to one's ancestors, one's parents, to society, to Nature and so on. And there were rituals associated with all these; so, in the olden days [when life was very different], performing duty meant also performing all the stipulated and prescribed rituals.

Times have changed and we have to adapt, but only after keeping the basic principle intact. Thus, when one has, say a sick parent, and one is torn between attending to the parent and performing on time the daily *puja* or ritualistic worship at the family altar, God's choice is clear: He would say [as He did via the famous story of Pundalika], **serve your parent thinking that your parent is Me; that is better than worshipping an idol thinking it is Me.** This is where making a right choice, exercise of proper discrimination or use of *buddhi* as Swami would put it, come in.

In short, if by Spiritual practices one means ritualistic worship, I would say follow Swami who advises us to elevate work itself into worship; that, incidentally, is also the essence of *Karma Yoga*, one of the cornerstones of the *Gita*. I hope I have managed to convey the point.

This brings me to the last question slated for today, which is:

What is the main purpose of life?

Actually, I have already raised this question myself in the earlier broadcasts, even though the question itself had not been posed. And having raised the question earlier, I have also answered it. I shall therefore not go over all that once more. However, since the question has been formally asked, I am obligated to give some response, which I shall now proceed to, but briefly.

Basically, God gives life in human form so that we use life to go back to God. As Swami has told us, from God we come and to God we must return. It is somewhat like the water cycle. As we all know, on account of the heat radiated by the Sun, water in the ocean evaporates and first goes up as water vapour. In the upper atmosphere, the vapour turns into clouds, which are then carried inland by wind. When the clouds encounter tall mountains, they come down as rain, and the water then starts flowing down slopes to lower regions.

While some of the water directly flows into rivers, and thereafter, reaches the ocean, thus completing the cycle. The rest of the water gets trapped in lakes and so forth, or just seeps into the ground where it often accumulates in aquifers. The water, thus trapped, is of course very useful to us, and in course of time this once trapped or locked up water slowly finds some route or the other back to the sea, thus completing the cycle but in a delayed fashion.

It is the same with humans; they are born, they die when they live out their lives, are born again, die again and so on it goes. This cycle slowly converges only when humans make the effort to enhance their spiritual purity; **it is only when humans become pure that they can merge back with God and thus escape the recurring cycle of birth and death.** Hence, if one wants to get back to God quickly – and that is what all must aim at – then life must be spent largely in removing the spiritual contamination acquired in all the previous births.

In short, the purpose of life is to do all we can to live in such a manner as to put an end to the recurring cycle of birth and death and merge once and forever with God. As Swami says, humans are born so that they may not be born again, and when they die it must be the very last time they do so. By the way, animals cannot achieve this [except perhaps in exceptional cases]; humans alone can because they have been given the capacity to cognise God and to yearn for Him.

I think I have said enough and also given you enough to think about! So, maybe I shall end here, with the hope that you liked what you heard and would join me again next week at the same time to continue further with questions and answers. Till then, all the best. Jai Sai Ram.

THE DRAMAS OF LIFE DIVINE – PART 4

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 for it. In fact, now that the script is available, this television serial has been re-enacted as a play in many Sai centres.

Encouraged with this, we decided to continue this section and offer something in a similar format. And now, after the Divine Life story of Bhagavan Baba, it is the innumerable dramas presented in the Divine Presence by the students of Bhagavan’s Schools and University, as well as by the Bal Vikas students and Sai devotees from all corners of the world. We hope the current 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. So, enjoy these divine dramas where the Divine was a keen spectator and the hidden director!

This is part two of ‘Krishna - The Peace Ambassador’. The first part related how the battle lines had been drawn between the Kauravas, who had chosen Krishna’s army, and the Pandavas who preferred Lord Krishna Himself. It ended with the enchanting scene of Lord Krishna bringing bliss to His devotee Vidura by visiting his humble home. We rejoin the play when Dhritrashtra, the old and blind Kaurava King, seems bent on ignoring Krishna’s mission of peace, despite counsel from Bheeshma and Vidura to avoid a war.

Full Cast

- 1) Lord Krishna;
- 2) Arjuna, the master archer among the Pandava brothers;
- 3) Suyodhana, the eldest of the Kaurava brothers;
- 4) King Virata, the king in whose court the Pandavas spent last year of their exile in concealment;
- 5) King Drupada, the king of Panchal and the father of Draupadi who was married to the Pandavas;
- 6) Nakula and Sahadeva, the 4th and 5th Pandava brothers;
- 7) Bheema, the great uncle of both Pandavas and Kauravas who was one of the greatest warriors;
- 8) Dharmaja, also called as Yudhisthira, the eldest of the Pandavas;

- 9) Dhritarashtra, the father of the Kauravas and the blind king of Hastinapura;
- 10) Shakuni, the brother of Gandhari, the mother of the Kauravas;
- 11) Karna, a great archer and a friend of Suyodhana, who was actually the sixth brother of the Pandavas;
- 12) Dushasana, the younger brother of Suyodhana;
- 13) Vidura, the pious minister of King Dhritarashtra;
- 14) Drona, the teacher of Pandavas and the Kauravas;
- 15) Three characters representing the mind;
- 16) Three characters symbolizing the Conscience;
- 17) Kripa, the court priest of Hastinapura;
- 18) Vyasa, the author of the epic Mahabharata.

KRISHNA - THE PEACE AMBASSADOR

Part Two

Sports Meet Drama, 2007

Scene 6

Driving Sense into Dhritarashtra

Shakuni: Enough is enough. I have decided to retire and return to my kingdom. My presence here serves no purpose.

Suyodhana: *Mamashree* (uncle), what has happened, who has dared to insult you?

Shakuni: Who else but you Suryodhana! I had forewarned you about this Krishna. When you had a lion to choose, you chose a flock of sheep!

Suyodhana: Krishna. .. Ha Ha ha What does that cowherd know about warfare *mamashree*, and an unarmed Krishna is no match to His peerless army.

Shakuni: Fool, that is what you think. What is a bale of cotton when compared to a lighted wick? Even unarmed, this *mayavi* (one with many tricks) Krishna is skillful enough to wreck havoc amongst His enemies. Subdue this cowherd and then it is child’s play to slay the herd of Pandavas that flock about Him.

Announcement: Emperor Dritarastra accompanied by Gangaputra Bheesma, Acharya Drona and Mahatma Vidura have just arrived.

(All rise as the three come in and all of them take their seats)

Bheeshma: O King, Vasudeva has finally arrived in an attempt to avert the war. Listen to His voice in solemnity and reverence, and pay heed to His advice. He epitomizes the eternal truth, and so it is no ordinary event that He has Himself come. Weigh His proposal upon the scales of wisdom and find their worth therein.

Vidura: Maharaj, Krishna’s visit is not a mere attempt to earn peace. Beyond the compassion of His looks, and the sweetness of His smile, there is a righteous anger that is waiting to be unleashed. O King, save Hastinapur from the wrath of the Pandavas led by Krishna.

Suyodhana: Do not squeal such meek words, O minister! The rage of *Pitamaha*, the skill of *Acharya*, the bow of Karna and Suyodhana’s mace shall embarrass the Pandavas into mortified muteness...and *Mamashree*’s brilliance ha ha ha.... shall put to shame Krishna’s acumen.

Dronacharya: My son, war is not a game of dice. Your words are but hollow echoes and shameful shadows of a loathsome pride. Let not your greed dig countless graves; let not wild ambition ascend to the throne that rightfully belongs to wisdom.

Dushasana: *Acharya* ...Attempt not to beckon slavery from our fierce hearts. War is the only solution for a Kshatriya.

Bheeshma: Children, your hearts are goblets of gold, but alas you have chosen to savor the wine of greed and toss the goblet by. Maharaj, Pay heed to my words and give away Indraprastha to the Pandavas.

Dhritharastra: But... Indraprastha is under Duryodhana’s control. I have no say in this matter.

Bheeshma: Your power was a free flying bird but you chose to lock it in a cage and give the silver key to your son. Fie upon his ambitious greed and pride. But it is not too late, stretch and seek Krishna’s offer my son.

Dhritharastra: My ears were longing to sip that word ‘son’ from your lips father.

Bheeshma: *Maharaj*, we are deliberating on an entirely different issue right now.

Dhritharastra: But father, I have done all that I could to please Krishna. I have arranged the best of palaces for His stay, assigned a thousand servants to attend His every need, ordained eighteen golden chariots at His disposal...

Vidura: Oh King! Krishna cannot be bought by material wealth. Seek not to bribe Him.

Shakuni: Ha Alas...I have not seen in the clan of Kuru servants reprimanding their masters....ministers admonishing their kings.

Vidura: O King of Gandhar! It is the duty of the minister to speak the truth. The day he justifies the follies of his master be assured that the kingdom is doomed. *Maharaj*, you may not listen to me but I am bound to you and I will speak only the truth, however harsh it may seem to your ears.

Dhritharastra: What is all this argument for? Why do you all blame Suyodhana for his greed? It was the Pandavas who lost the kingdom in the game of dice.

Bheeshma: *Maharaj*, let not the attachment for your son overpower your responsibilities. Take pity on the fate of Hastinapur. For a moment, be a king, my Lord; be a King, and not a father.

Dronacharya: *Maharaj*, with Krishna on their side, the Pandavas shall march to victory as the Lords of the world.

Dhritharastra: You are right *Acharya*. Let us not incense Krishna by giving scope to insult. Say how shall we welcome Him into the royal court? Will He be given a seat next to me or can we seat Him next to Gangaputra Bheeshma.

Vidura: The seating arrangement is not a solution to the war *Maharaj*. Krishna is beyond honor or insult. He stands for *Dharma* and *Dharma* is on Pandavas' side. It is their immaculate character that binds Him to them.

Shakuni: Does that mean that Suyodhana is of despicable character, and so he is not fit to reign as the emperor of Hastinapur!

Suyodhana: I have had enough of this nonsense as they have bound Krishna with their so-called love; I too shall bind him with my power. Huh! I shall have Him arrested.

Bheeshma: Bridle your tongue to the channel of your hateful throat you foolish brat! Think not of such mean things lest ruin shall seize thee. Then neither Bheeshma nor Drona nor even Brahma can save your soul from Krishna's ire. Your father then will not have a droplet of tear to wet your ghastly corpse.

Scene 7 The Eternal Battle Within

Manas (mind): O the icons of justice, all my life I have learnt from you to be impartial and just to my subjects. So, it would be unfair to be deaf to their arguments. (*Sits on throne with 'good' and 'bad' on either side*)

Bad1: Oh Manas! In this freedom that we offer, higher and higher shall rise your fame and even the thunders will echo your name. Untold wealth will adorn your court, and powers that beckon the lord of death himself, will serve your throne. Men will kiss the dust of your feet and gods in

awe will bow to thee. Embrace the freedom we offer and you shall change the destiny of the world.

Good2: It is bondage and not freedom that they speak of. Power and wealth are a mantle of dust which will mercilessly be dissolved in the flow of time. Their friendship is treason; their pleasures are mere decorations on pain. Their delights are snares and their comforting wisdom is the darkest ignorance.

Bad2: Advisors do not dictate, they *advise*.

Good2: Our words are bound with truth and fie on that advisor who cloaks his words with falsehood.

Bad3: Oh! Viveka - the great intellect! Let me tell you, Manas is not your puppet. *Manas* is a master, isn't he?

Good3: *Manas*, let me warn you. You shall cease to be a master the moment you sell your soul to this *ahankar* (*ego*). You will no longer be the mastermind but a mad, wandering beast.

Bad1: Ah! What a treachery? He calls you a beast and paints our friendship with treason! Instead, seek my hand and be our master. Countless riches, matchless glory, splendid mansions and dazzling delights I shall confer to thee. We shall make thou the Greatest.

Good3: Greatness! What use of the greatness that cannot fight the darker realms of your heart? What use of the greatness that cannot give you peace of mind, cannot make you good? O *Manas*! Weigh not our words but heed not to their words too. Seek ... Seek thy conscience.

Bad2: Conscience! A hurdle to all your joys! An illusory binding on your freedom! Isn't it then mere foolishness to seek the refuge of the conscience?

Good1: Conscience! A pathway to eternal joy; an indefinable reality amidst the shadows of unreality. Seek conscience, O *Manas*! Because conscience is always right.

Bad1: And *manas* is always wrong?

Good1: We did not say that.

Bad2: Thou art a heap of falsehood. Thou hath spoken in unspoken terms, "Conscience is always right. Conscience will rule forever! And *Manas* will be condemned to a life of insignificance and eternal slavery."

Good2: There is no greater glory than abiding by the dictates of the conscience.

Bad3: Go...Sell thy soul to that glory that barter your honour to slavery. Let

the blaze of that ruthless conscience immolate your success and burn away your dreams. Be led by that voice – a mirage of everlasting joy, which binds you in eternal bondage.

Good3: The voice of the conscience is the unsullied truth. Truth is the source from which emerges existence and time. It embodies eternity and the rest is but a manifestation in the relentless flow of change. Thus, Truth alone is the ultimate. Conscience, that reflects this truth, is the supreme master.

Bad3: Beyond the pleasing reflections of the pond lies the murky slush. O *Manas!* Delve into the depths of their words and then you shall realise that the unsullied truth is a conspiracy of conscience woven to consume your freedom. Subdue them all and raise your regal mansion upon their ruins.

Manas: I see it all now. I am the master. My reason shall decide what truth and untruth are, and not the whims of the conscience. Guide me, ye men to freedom.

Good1: Oh *manas!* Not only have you been blinded but also defeated. Very soon you will be stuck dumb. A time will come when...

Good2: Your conduct is a mere mockery of our presence. You will...

Manas: Why do I feel my determination shivering like a withered leaf in the autumn wind? Why does my heart thump so hard and fast? A blanket of fear seems to envelop me and ... and... everything is dark. And so confused...

Krishna: (*chants sloka*) –
Dhyayato Vishayaan Pamsaha Sangasteshupajayate
Sangaat Sanjaayate Kaamaha Kaamat Krodhobhijaayate
Krodhaatbhavati sammohaha Sammohat Smrutivibhramaha
Smrutibhramshahaat Buddhinaasho Buddhinaashaat Pranashyati

O you fool! Hankering for sense objects and worldly glory has clouded you with attachment and led you to frustration. You are sinking deeper into this mire of delusion and have abandoned your closest allies – *viveka* and *buddhi*. Everything looks bleak as you are riding on this royal road of wretched ruin.

Manas: Your words are like sharp arrows, pricking and piercing me.

Krishna: They are missiles of truth which will shatter your false armour of ego, attachment and delusion.

Manas: Who are you?

Krishna: *Naaham Pashu, naaham manushya, Aham Sathya bhodakaha.* [I am

neither man nor animal, I am the Teacher of Truth]

(removes blindfold)

Manas: Who art Thou, the deluge of light? You blind my vision and scorch my soul. Ah! This is not joy, but suffering in guise. Comfort my eyes and help this hapless one.

Krishna: *(Sarcastic laughter)* This is the fate of man today.

Scene 8 **The Peace Messenger's Message**

The moment has arrived... the moment of truth. What the blind king and the wayward son decide today is going to decide the future. Peace is inevitable. But will it arrive to the joyful welcome of all, or will it crawl over the dead bodies, into the empty homes as a numbing silence? Will the pull of mamakara (attachment) be stronger than the voice of wisdom? In a few moments from now, Krishna is going to arrive at the royal court of Hastinapur to make His final bid for peace. Let us go and seat ourselves in the front rows, to listen to what is going to happen.

Announcement: Dwarakadeesha, Yadukulabusha, Madhusudhana, the messenger of peace, Vasudeva Sri Krishna has just arrived.

Vidura: Please do come in Krishna.

Krishna: O Great King of Hastinapura, accept the salutations of this emissary of Peace.

Dhritarastra: O Madhusudan! Please honour me and glorify this assembly by accepting a seat.

Krishna: Pranam Pitamaha.

Dhritarastra: O Messenger of Peace, Sri Krishna, what proposal have my beloved Pandavas sent forth.

Krishna: O Great Monarch of Bharat and the great men assembled here! I have come here on My own accord as a messenger of peace and a guardian of *Dharma* and I assure you that which is acceptable to Me will be agreeable to the Pandavas as well. Peace O *Maharaj* is not a debatable issue. Just the assurance of a victory in case of war should not blind us to the miseries and tears that are an inevitable part of it. The talons of death and destruction shall shred both the sides. With this broader perspective, comes a responsibility of righteousness, justice and peace to this illustrious assembly.

O great King! You belong to the lineage of truth and tradition. Time beckons you now to take a decision. Lead the Kuru race embark upon the path of peace, for therein alone is the good of this great land. History will not hold the cunning Shakuni responsible for the game of dice, nor will it debate upon the despicable act of Suyodhana insulting Draupadi for they happened in *your* court. Now, again it is your call O King! Make no mistake this time.

Bheeshma: But Vasudeva! Perhaps no one desires a war.

Krishna: If no one desires a war, respected grandsire, then why words like “perhaps”. Words like ‘perhaps’ are too feeble to voice for *Shanti* (peace). O Maharaj! If the Kauravas and Pandavas come together under one banner, there will be limitless glory and man will never know where paradise ends and earth begins. You will be the noblest of monarchs whose magnificence will be sung in the aeons to come. But heavens forbid, if you choose war, who knows upon how many corpses over you will have to weep. Make peace O great King, by returning Indraprastha to the Pandavas.

Shakuni: Why alone Indraprastha, let the Pandavas take away even Hastinapura! Long have they roamed the forests...we'll press their tired feet. O Suyodhana, abdicate your throne. Go...kneel in their presence, kiss the hem of their robes and let history term you as the one of unparalleled magnanimity.

Suyodhana: Stop it...this peace proposal is not acceptable to me.

Bheeshma: My son! Bathe not your thinking with fleeting emotions. Abhor greed and leave your petty pride. Before you dispose this proposal as an unworthy end, weigh it in terms of greater good.

Dronacharya: Beware of the righteous indignation of Dharmaja, the fearsome rage of Bheema and the unparalleled skill of Arjuna. Meeting them in war is utterly foolish.

Kripacharya: Let not the clamour of your conscience go unheard. O son! Let not death and desolation rein your clan. Let your people wield ploughs and not swords. Let the sun smile on the green fields and the kingdom rise prosperous in wealth and peaceful in rule.

Vidura: Sip these words of wisdom, Suyodhana and be at peace.

Suyodhana: Is this my kingdom and my own royal hall? All around I see my own men conspiring against me.

Dhritarastra: Speak not of such words my son! They are your elders and well wishers.

Suyodhana: Ah! My heart swells with pride for I have so many well wishers...Well wishers who adore my enemies.

Shakuni: O wise men. Let me say it loud and clear, none of us are unjust and wrong. Dharmaja participated in the game of dice on his own volition. As per the will of destiny he lost the game and went for exile. Had we lost the game, we too would have vanished into the depths of anonymity.

Krishna: Were there any chances of you losing the game? Everyone seated here knows how fair and right the game was.

Suyodhana: Krishna, what madness is it to break the kingdom into pieces so as to honour foolish rights? Not alone the five Pandavas; the hundred of us, Bheeshma, Vidura and Vyasa too have rights over the kingdom. Would it then be advisable to divide the kingdom into individual rightful shares, ignoring the interests of my subjects? Their well-being is my utmost concern.

Krishna: Rare are the kings like you Suyodhana whose ears are deaf to the voice of their conscience but open to the woes of their subjects. Anyway, if you cannot give back the Pandavas their kingdom, then at least part with 5 villages, Avisthal, Varkasthal, Makandi, Varnavrata and any other village of your choice.

Suyodhana: Haah!... Krishna, You are asking me to give those villages, which I have gifted, to my relatives and friends. Is it possible? Is this the way you make a proposal? And now you will taint me as an emperor who could not part with even five villages. Five villages! Tell them even a speck of land needed to place the tip of a needle will not be granted to them.

Krishna: Mistake not their silence for submission and their humility for meekness. The wise seldom speak but when they speak, time itself would stop to hear their words. The powerful are always humble but once they are enraged, the heavens themselves would shudder.

Karna: Krishna! Have you come on a peace mission or are you trying to terrorize us. The Pandavas will be scattered like a herd of frightened deer when I romp like a bloodthirsty tiger amongst them.

Krishna: Boast not of your valour, O Karna. The world has not yet forgotten how you fell into unconsciousness in the face of Arjuna's arrows in the war against Virata.

Tell your dear friend that gruesome would be the sight to watch poor Dushasana's blood dripping from Panchali's tresses. What a pity it would be to see the emperor Suyodhana moaning helplessly on the battlefield with his thighs shattered by Bheema's mace.

Hear O *Ahamkari* (egoistic) Suyodhan! If you pursue this path of greed, even Gandhari will have no tears to wet your corpse.

Suyodhana: Ah...You speak of my mother's tears! You cowherd, you are a messenger of peace...otherwise...

Krishna: Otherwise? What would you do?

Suyodhana: I would rip your tongue and bind you for life in the dungeons.

(All react)

Krishna: Can You? Realize that you are nothing but a mass of ignorance garbed in greed and misguided by revenge. Your valour, wealth and strength are but plumes of smoke that even a single breath can blow away into nothingness. Try to bind me if you can.

Suyodhana: Guards, arrest Him...

After Vishwaroopa Darshan

Krishna: O ye men! Know that you can capture Me only through love, for I am not the body. I am the one residing in every atom of this universe. Every atom embodies me. Seeing me everywhere, at all times is the true Vishwaroopa Darshan.

Vyasa: To be touched and yet not be moved, to be moved and yet not understand, to understand yet not experience, to experience yet not transform. There cannot be a greater folly. The blind king committed this folly too. Standing face to face with his own self, he wasn't able to see, understand, experience and transform.

Bheeshma: 7000 years have passed and we find ourselves in a similar position, we stand face to face with our Cosmic Reality.

Vidura: We have a choice, whether to continue to be blind, or to open our inner eyes and behold the cosmic reality that manifests itself in every form. Let not this opportunity go waste.

Krishna: O Lord! O Vasudeva! O Sai deva! We are ready. Please open our eyes so that we can see, experience and transform ourselves into thee.

Final Song

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

HOW A 'HELL OF PAIN' BECAME A 'HEAVEN OF LOVE'

...By the sheer power of selfless love

If life is lost in dreaming, and being is lost in becoming, then creation is an eternal saga of searching for joy that is fulfilling. From wealth to power and positions, from fame to relationships, human beings wonder all over, seeking that elusive and gratifying joy that may lend a sense of completion and meaning to their lives.

In February 2009, we, the Heart2Heart team, witnessed and recorded this pursuit of happiness in an unusual setting - an unattended and isolated ward of a premier hospital in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of the East Indian state of Orissa. What we saw simply left us spellbound. What was once a 'god-forsaken' corner has today transformed into a laboratory of pure love, where miracles happen almost on a daily basis. How did this happen? Who did it? And, finally, who is the happiest?

Read this real life story and your perspective of life may not be the same again.

Imagine you are visiting a sick friend in the hospital. He however has recovered well and that makes you feel happy. You, finally, leave him in good spirits. But as you make your way through the maze of corridors of that huge hospital, accidentally you find yourself at the doors of a murky room. You are not sure in which corner of the building you are in, but what you see in front is just shocking. The unbearable stench coming from that room hits you like an avalanche; you can barely breathe. The supine people lying on rickety beds look as if they have been given up for dead – they are downcast to the hilt; practically lifeless. You wonder what on earth is going on in that room? It destabilizes you completely. In the next instant, you make enquiries and learn that it is actually a 'ward' – a so-called ward, where people are not treated to restore their health, but literally left to die. "How can this happen?", "Why should it be so?"... Your heart aches and revolts...and then someone says, "Because these people have no one who cares the least about them; they have no homes, no money and are stricken with dreadful diseases."

You stare at those unfortunate ones in utter disbelief for a few seconds, but can stay there no longer. You leave that place, but only physically. The pitiable scene of that ward refuses to move from your memory; it pulls and tears at your understanding of how life should be. The wide gulf that you see between your life and theirs plunges you into self-introspection. A few hours pass and the restlessness ends. You are now a different person – you have decided to act, and not just react! You are determined to change that part of the world.

Purest Motives Emerge from the Pits of Misery

But does it sound too good to be true? A nice and inspiring story, but just about that, as isn't there suffering all around us? But what if we tell you that this is a true to life account? This is, in principle, how a tremendous service initiative started, six years ago, at the Capital Hospital, in India's eastern state of Orissa. That single gut-wrenching encounter in the ward of 'unknown patients' by a Sai Youth, has started a holistic healthcare movement which has today a contingent of thirty young highly motivated people who have dedicated their lives to lighten the burden of these poor souls. Every morning there are at least six volunteers who spend a minimum of three hours caring and curing these ailing individuals. And like every Sai revolution, this project too is silent, but very potent, and remains untainted by any desire for recognition, reward or publicity.

Higher Purpose, Inner Strength Needed to Pursue Pitiable Cause

Surely, this task is not an easy one. It is also not for the faint at heart. When H2H Team visited this site of service in February 2009, a Sai Youth, Ms. Sanghmitra Nayak, sharing her initial days in the hospital, said,

“At first, the environment in this ward clearly put me off. I had to struggle with the odour of the patients, and the hospital in general; there were terribly depressing sights everywhere. But since I was convinced Baba is pleased more with service than doing *bhajans*, I held on, and gradually overcame my initial hesitation. Slowly, I joined the others in taking care of the old and the horribly sick. On special days, we bring sweets and other gifts for them and these patients get so delighted. I began cherishing their joy. I thought to myself, ‘I have a home, relatives, and family...but what do they have?’”

Sanghmitra was now is in tears...but soon she composed herself and continued,

“One lady had maggots in her wound. We cleaned her abrasions, dressed it daily, and took good care of her. When she was finally cured and ready to leave, she could no longer withhold her emotions; she hugged us and wept...it was as if she was leaving her parents' home! We were so overwhelmed to experience such sweetness, and we know, all this comes from our sweet Lord.

“So many such touching tales of deep love have bound me to this hospital. And so, every morning I am waiting to be here, and often I am the first to arrive. I feel deprived of something too precious if, for some reason, I am unable to make it any day. That is why, **even when I am unwell, I don't miss this. Actually, even today I am not feeling all too well, but how can you resist the happiness of bringing joy to another person?** I tell all the women members in our Sai Bhajan Centre to come just once and see the patients. Even a few loving words, makes these poor ones too glad. Once you taste that happiness, you will never want to lose it. I constantly pray to Swami to bless me with such opportunities of service till the last moment of my life.”

The Genesis of this Glorious Adventure

This is the heartfelt account of just one of the many, for whom this project is their life's primary passion. Mr. Rajani, a senior Sai youth, is the one, who along with a few others, started this project in 2002, and since then has dedicated himself to this completely. Recounting how this initiative actually began, he said,

“Well, one day we were in this hospital looking for a destitute person. We could not find him in the regular ward. So, we enquired and searched, and finally found ourselves in this most pitiable and absolutely neglected corner of this hospital. Nobody here was ready even to touch these patients; let alone helping them. I do not know if even the proverbial ‘hell’ would be so bad...it was absolutely distressing. That was it, we decided that we would come here everyday, and transform the place, bit by bit, into earth, if not heaven.

“The first day however was very challenging. The foul odour coming from the bodies of these patients was practically intolerable; it was nauseating, and at times, would lead us to vomit. There were only two of us that day. But with His grace, our number grew, and now we are a group of 30 strong volunteers. Apart from serving in this ward, we are also always available to the hospital to help in any emergency or accident case.

“And whenever we decide to take up a big assignment in this ward like cleaning the entire surroundings, or the walls, etc. many other volunteers too joined in. Besides, we also do our regular, once a year, service duty in Prasanthi Nilayam.”

Patients Stand Testimony to the Far-reaching Impact of Love

Listening to the heart-felt narratives from these inspired youth is simply an eye opener. One wonders how they manage to spare so much time and energy for a cause such as this. But more than anything else, what is it that motivates them to be engaged in such a voluntary service on a continuous basis, day after day, and that too for years together?! There surely is a joy that they experience here which perhaps is far greater than anything else that the world outside can offer.

Having found the elixir of true happiness, it wasn't surprising to find that every Sai youth's reflection was elevating. But the heartfelt expressions of gratitude of the patients in the ward was even more overwhelming. We met an old man in the ward who was recovering from multiple illnesses and started a conversation.

H2H – Uncle, tell us something about yourself?

Elderly Patient – Son, what can I tell you about myself? I used to drink a lot and roam about on the streets.

H2H – You don't have anyone to look after you?

Elderly Patient – They were all there, but no one is with me now.

H2H – How long have you been like this?

Elderly Patient – I left home when I was 17 or 18. Since then, I have been a daily wage earner. I worked and lived on whatever I earned. I started when my daily wage was six *annas* (about 37 paise, 100 paise make 1 rupee). I never had a roof over my head. I stayed in a monastery for 2 years, and again I left.

H2H – But why were you moving from one place to another?

Elderly Patient – What else could I do? I had no place to stay. Wherever I found work, I went there, toiled and fed myself. I have done all kinds of work, from being a labourer in construction sites to cleaning trucks to serving in hotels. I am illiterate. Whatever I earned, I spent in eating and drinking. That is my life.

H2H – What is your age now?

Elderly Patient – Must be over eighty.

H2H - Why and when did you come here?

Elderly Patient – I was lying by the roadside. My legs could not support me. I requested some people to leave me in a hospital. Someone brought me in a bus, and left me here about 2-3 months ago. Since then I am here.

H2H - How are you now? How is your leg?

Elderly Patient – They are giving me medicines. Yesterday a lot of water came out of my leg.

H2H – Are these white clad people (the Sevadals) looking after you?

Elderly Patient, nodding in the affirmative – Everyday I pray to the Lord to do good to all of them. My *koti namaskar* (million salutations) at their feet!

H2H – What are they doing?

Elderly Patient – O my god! What are they not doing! They are cleaning our stool, our vomit, our clothes and our stinking bodies. They are feeding us. They are so young; still they love us so much. May the Lord bless them, look after them and their families always!

H2H – Have you received such care from any one else?

Elderly Patient – No, my son, never. I am going to die soon, I will not tell a lie. Even one’s own father and mother may not do the kind of service these angels are doing. I do *koti namaskar* (million salutations) at the dust of their feet. May God give them peace and happiness all their lives.

Well, that was just an extract from the many such encounters we had with the patients. Words and expressions were many, but the feeling was one, that of, touching gratitude. The destitutes no longer felt ‘god-forsaken’, with the Sai selfless workers with them, they were now ‘god-chosen’.

When Safe Under Sai Surveillance, What’s a Memory Loss

“Over the years, scores of such patients, who were labeled as ‘hopeless’ have returned hale, hearty and healthy,” said Mr. Rajani, and cited one such instance.

“There was a former lecturer, a 70 year old bachelor from Puri, who had come to Bhubaneshwar to collect his pension. Accidentally, he fell down on the road and suffered severe head injuries. In the process, he lost his memory completely. Finally, he ended up in this ward, and we resolved to do whatever we could to restore his faculties.

“The doctors suggested various tests, but, with faith in Sai, we persisted with our simple remedies of sincere prayer, *vibhuti*, and a liquid medicine prescribed by the physicians. After one and half months of sustained care, to our delight, he not only recovered, but also regained his memory. He was able to tell us his address and the details of his family. We then took him to his village, which was about 150 kilometres from here. His brother was ecstatic to see him; they had been searching for him for the last two months!

“One of the villagers came up to us and asked if we were ‘Sai Baba’ people. He then revealed ‘I had been praying to Sai Baba for the past two months for this man’s safety, and He has now answered my prayers through you!’ We were speechless; yet again, it was proved to us, that **wherever we go, Sai is always there before us.**”

Sai Volunteers Cure Burns Victim with Help of Ayurvedic Treatment

Mr. Rajani narrated another case concerning a patient with 50 per cent burns. She had been receiving treatment in another hospital where the doctors had given up on her, for they believed she had no real chance of survival. But the Sai youth never lost hope.

“When we came to know of her condition,” Rajani narrated, “we literally carried her from that hospital to this ward, and started to nurse her back to life. We took her to an Ayurvedic doctor within this hospital who was confident of not only saving her life but also ameliorating her condition. He told us to soak Neem and Betel leaves in a pot of water and clean her burn-injuries

everyday using that medicated water. Later, he gave us a bottle of oil to apply, which he had personally prepared. **We carried out this treatment plan for three months, and the lady recovered completely. And now she is able to even walk!**

In fact, the Chief of Surgery of this hospital was so surprised and impressed with this recovery that now he himself advises patients with burns to try this therapy.”

Though the hospital fraternity is now very appreciative of the work done by Sai Youth, it was not so originally. “Initially the hospital staff and administration were very uncooperative due to government bureaucracy,” Mr. Rajani shared. “They never admitted they cannot treat these patients, but at the same time said they are too hard pressed for time. For us, however, this was a great opportunity.” he added.

Positive Transformation in the Lives of Young Volunteers

Inquisitive to know what impact this ceaseless service has had in his own life, we asked Rajani, “How has this helped you as a person?”

“Oh...I have benefited tremendously; it has transformed my life. I used to be very crooked, but now I am a different person. Like me, there are many Sai youth, whose lives have changed beyond recognition. One of them used to be a heavy drinker. But after participating in this service, he felt strong enough to keep away from his bad habits and eventually joined the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization. There are at least four youngsters in our group of 30, who were initially drawn to serve in this ward, and only later, came to know of Swami and became His devotees. They are all new individuals now!”

Mr. Manoranjan Muduli, a young man in his twenties, who had been serving for the past 3 months, took up this thread of personal transformation, and said:

“I came here once only to observe, but I felt very uneasy seeing what the Sai youth were doing - it was all strange to me. They were cleaning the wounds of patients, giving them baths, feeding them...doing every other thing for them! For a few days in the beginning, I could not get over my revulsion, though it changed once I started to love the patients. Initially I used to wear hand gloves, but gradually I did not even feel the need to use them. However, we do use gloves mainly for the safety of the patients, so as to not transfer any infection from one to the other. And now, I am so attached to this work that if I don't come to the hospital for a day or two, I feel guilty!

“Earlier, I wasn't so much concerned about the suffering of other people. Even if I saw someone in pain, I just said, 'It is not my business'. But that has changed now; the desire to better the lives of people around us is growing in me everyday. I only pray to Baba to ensure that I am engaged in such activities till there is breath in my body.”

Sai Discipline Wins Hospital's Confidence

The dedication of this group of 'messengers of love and healing' was indeed stirring. They start their day's work by chanting "Om karam" and surrender their actions and results to Swami. When cleaning wounds, they apply *vibhuti* and also partake the same reverentially. They know no fear of infections because their faith in Sai is steadfast and they rely on Him and only Him entirely. Even while treating cases like Tetanus, when normally no one is allowed anywhere near an infected individual as the disease is extremely contagious, the Sai Youth enter the ward, treat and dress the wounds, and deliver all round care as usual! And the impact their work has had on the staff of the hospital is marvelous. A chief nurse of the hospital, said,

"The entire look of this ward has changed as a result of the efforts of Sai Youth. Earlier, no one would even want to enter this side of the hospital, but now look how spic and span this is! These volunteers are incredible. Their dedication is exemplary. We find here patients with maggots in their wounds, but these young girls don't even wince while cleaning them. What our own nurses and sweepers cannot do, they do it willingly. That is the greatest thing, and we are so very grateful to them.

"Because of their care and loving service, patients, who normally take a month to be cured, are being discharged in a week's time. They not only clean the patients and the ward, but also treat the patients as if they were family. This has a great impact on the patients' sense of well being."

Her words of praise however do not end with that. She goes on to stress how the dedicated and undaunted service by the Sai youth may well take the government hospital to a new pedestal.

"Not only this, they respond to our call at any time of the day or night. Besides, they pick up patients from the roadside, many on the brink of death, and bring them here. Those who had been left to die get a new lease of life in their hands, and return healed. This is absolutely great work. May the good Lord, Sai Bhagavan, bless them. If they continue doing this work, I have no doubt, one day this hospital will stand as a model for others."

Bridging the Gaps in Public and Private Health Care

The Sai Youth, however, are not content serving only inside this hospital. Their objective is to impart a holistic and complete patient recovery, and they are ready to do whatever it takes to achieve that. Mr. Sushant Kumar Sahoo, another committed Sai Youth, recalled the story of an injured young man and said,

"We came to know of a young man who had a broken thigh bone. When the cast on his leg was cut open, it was found that one leg was shorter than the other by two-thirds of an inch! It meant he would have to limp all his life, and he was only 21!

“The doctor at the government hospital expressed his inability to help, so we approached a specialist in a private hospital, who agreed to operate on him. That gave us some hope. So, we took him there and throughout the period of his recuperation in the hospital, 4 or 5 of us attended on him round the clock taking turns. He had no friends or relatives. So, we did everything - brought him food, cleaned his bedpan, changed his clothes, and stayed with him at night. This service continued not for a week or two, but for 5 months and 13 days.”

“On another occasion, a patient came to a private hospital in a very serious condition. He had been in coma for the past 10 days, and his condition was so bad that ants had started eating away at him! The hospital was not prepared to admit him, but one of the medical staff, Dr. K.P. Tripathy, took responsibility and accepted him as a challenge. This patient too did not have any relatives to look after him. So, the hospital authorities, therefore, requested us to take care of him. He remained in a coma for another 5 days. Finally, when he opened his eyes, he asked for food. His speech was still incoherent, but the doctor assured us that he would be all right.

“Since it was a private hospital, the medical costs were sky-high. But our brother Rajani told us not to worry about money. One good thing, however, in this hospital is that when they know the Sathya Sai Youth are involved in a case, they don’t mind treating on credit. Actually, we knew nothing about this person, and in a few days the unpaid medical bill rose to Rs. 40,000. The chemist hesitated to give us any more medicines, but we persuaded him to continue, and assured him we would pay every rupee we owed him.

“We took the person to a barber in a van and cut his hair, got him clean shaven and ensured he looked presentable. But his speech was still unintelligible. We had no clue where he came from. After this, he was subjected to many other tests, and found to have a plethora of complaints affecting his kidney, heart and other organs!

“Twenty six days of continuous caring left us really tired. I needed to write an exam and had to cover many kilometers on a bicycle every morning to attend on the patient. Additionally, I conducted tuition for a few youngsters to manage my own expenses. I found it extremely difficult to meet all the demands on my time, patience and resources. The other boys working with me were also exhausted.

“One day I decided I would have a chat with the doctor and discontinue my service. When I arrived at the hospital that day, I found another patient being admitted, and this new person immediately recognised our patient, as they belonged to the same village. We easily collected his address and went to inform the family about his condition. They were so full of gratitude for all the care we have taken, and without losing a moment, came to the hospital to take charge of their relative. In a few days, he was recovered well and was discharged. Personally, I feel, it is the hand of Lord Sai which was taking care of that person and doing the right thing at the right time; not only that, it is the same Hand which is looking after me as well.”

Serving Others is Serving One’s Self

Sushant then went on to narrate how Swami has been always with Him as he immersed himself in His work. He said,

“Initially, when I began by cleaning the patients’ wounds and their clothes, I felt like vomiting. I could not eat anything for two days. Then, I stopped going to the hospital. But...I could not help myself from returning .

“Now I have undergone a big change in personality. I have become more open to others’ suffering. I do not feel any revulsion from the horrible smell some patients emit as I can work with any patient without any reservation. **I have also been blessed with a very practical benefit. Previously, I used to sit in the library the whole day and study for my exams. Now, I get much less time to study. Nevertheless, my level of success is nearly four times than before! Isn’t this purely the blessing of Bhagavan?”**

Ms. Sanghmitra Nayak had a similar story. Jubilantly, she said,

“Initially, I was working in a small company. But suddenly, I had a windfall gain – I was asked by a big company to join them at a much higher salary. **This is purely Bhagavan’s grace. He has given me more money to use for the needy.** My only regret is, as I am a girl, my movements are restricted. If I had been a boy, I would have done even more. Once I met a gentleman on the road. He greeted me and said, ‘Sister, do you recognize me? You looked after my wife at the hospital. She is quite alright now.’ I was so moved. So beautifully, we can share God’s love with each other. I passionately feel that of all service projects, seva to the distressed in the hospitals is the best. There is nothing like this!”

Truly, there is nothing comparable to genuine selfless service, because it has the power to bestow on us that perennial joy which is actually the eternal quest of every being on this planet. When love is shared or accepted in its most undiluted form, the bliss that it can confer is unbounded. And this small but strong Sai group of angels in Orissa has tasted this spring of eternal joy! They have demonstrated to the world what Pure Love in the guise of compassion can do to society, as well as to each one of us. It is only up to us to open our hearts and relish this innate yet glorious miracle of our lives.

Dear reader, many of the associated pictures of this story are too gruesome to share, for they might turn many a stomach! Therefore, we have used only a select few, and we hope this amply conveys the message that the most abject and pitiable scenes that surround us can elicit the most beautiful response from our hearts in the form of compassion. Let us keep the flame of love glowing in our hearts.

PRASHANTI DIARY

March 7, 8, 15, 16 and 21, 2009 - Gratitude Programmes by the Students of His University

The onset of summer at Puttaparthi is very special for the students of Swami's schools and colleges. The "ides of March" was the term that Shakespeare used to describe this onset. Though that term brings to mind the assassination of Julius Caesar, it originally referred to the day of the full moon, the 15th of March, and the Romans considered this an auspicious day in their calendar. Swami's students too agree whole-heartedly with the Romans as they readied themselves to present their gratitude programmes. The "gratitude programme", a term that attempts to describe the indescribable, occupied a major portion of the many presentations made before Swami in the month of March. Year after year, the Sri Sathya Sai University sends a fresh batch of students into the society, moulded by the Divine Chancellor. Being present in Prashanti Nilayam, when it is 'march'ing time for many a young cadet of this divine brigade, gives one an idea of how much goodness is being slowly injected into our world. For the cadet, it is a time of mixed emotions. There is joy at the opportunity to offer gratitude to the Divine Master and Parent, but, deep down, there is sorrow at the thought of leaving Him; physically only, of course! And so, there were five occasions when everyone seated in Sai Kulwant Hall was blessed to witness samples of this divine love between Him and His students.

March 7 saw the outgoing batch of undergraduate students of the Prashanti Nilayam campus gather in the hall to offer their gratitude to Swami. They were seated in the marble blocks and Swami arrived at 5:30 p.m. for His *darshan* rounds. Completing it, He went into the interview room. It was 6 p.m. when He arrived onstage and permitted the programme to commence. When it comes to writing about the programme, it is either very easy to describe or incredibly hard even to try to think about writing! The whole programme could be summarized easily by the sentence, "it was a presentation of songs and short heart-felt speeches in many languages." But if one attempted to write about the flow of feelings, then no amount of description would do justice. As each of the songs was sung, a couple of students came up to Swami with a rose and a card which had the lyrics of the song handwritten. Students also went to Swami with trays of chocolates, vibhuti and pens! Every item became a vehicle to get closer to the Lord.

There was a short Veena recital where one of the students offered the song "Bho Shambho" at His lotus feet. So beautiful and correct was his rendition that some mistook him to be a student of the music college! As he completed the piece, Swami called him and creating a beautiful gold chain put it around his neck. There was a short piece played by the members of the brass band on the band instruments. As each student got up and spoke, there was deep nostalgia that filled their voices. As the 'programme' neared the conclusion, Swami called the students up onto the stage in small groups of 5-6. They were all thrilled at this gesture from Swami that made the day truly memorable

for them. However, the surprise that Swami planted was still not over! He next called for the teachers too to come up by His side. Almost all the teachers and staff of the University were blessed with *padanamaskar* and a picture with Swami. They were pleasantly shocked but soon overcame it and converted surprise into super joy! Blessing everyone and leaving all in a mood of sublime happiness, Swami retired at 7:10 p.m. after *aarathi*.

On March 8, the students of the Anantapur campus arrived to seek an opportunity to present their gratitude programme. *Bhajans* had begun and they had still not received the chance to pray on the physical plane to Swami. But does Swami need that plane for communication? As the *bhajans* concluded, He moved in the car towards them. The girls were actually leaving the next morning, and so, Swami told them to sing then and there! As they sang, Swami had a look at all their offerings which they made through the open window of the car. The saying, "When the Lord closes the door, He opens the windows", came to one's mind as Swami blessed the outgoing batch of girls from the Anantapur campus.

March 15 was the turn of the outgoing undergraduate students from the Brindavan campus of the University to express their feelings for Swami. The Lord came for evening *darshan* in the chair, and after His *darshan* round, came to the Bhajan Hall where some of the students were in costumes, awaiting His arrival. The batch from Brindavan had been named as "Vainateya" (another name of Garuda, the eagle vehicle of Lord Vishnu) by Swami, and surely enough, Swami found a student-eagle in the Bhajan Hall! He seemed to study the marvellous and painstakingly made make up. As "Lord Vishnu" stood up to his magnificent height, Swami seemed to admire the costume for long. He also seemed intrigued at "Vainateya" who spoke to Him through his 'beak' which was another classic example of wonderful costume design. They prayed to Him to come to Brindavan and Swami seemed to nod. After having one final look at the fine and detailed make up, Swami moved out to the stage.

As Swami came on the stage, there was a surprise(d) visitor for Him. A pigeon, that had come on stage for taking a few sips of water from the pots placed there, seemed to escort Swami to His place in the middle! The programme began with the celestial sage Narada, Lord Vishnu and the eagle Garuda starting a discussion. All the students chipped in with their expressions of gratitude. The languages were different and the styles of expression varied, but the message was the same – "We love you, Swami". A few students chose to express themselves through poems. As the boys sang the songs, the whole roof of the Sai Kulwant Hall virtually seemed to blow away with their amplitude and energy. Swami sat, reading through the words of each song, and tapping His hand in rhythm to the ongoing number. There was also a lively dance sequence in which the dancers seemed to be flowing in a river of energy. A couple of songs had been composed and tweaked specially for the occasion. A kind of division of labour was seen as the singers, dancers and speakers did what they did best. Gratitude programmes give scope for singers to speak out and speakers to join and sing, for it is a heart to heart conversation between man and God. But when a person

expressed his gratitude via a skill/talent that God has blessed him with, even onlookers are swept away in the wave of love and emotion. At the end of the programme, Swami agreed to gift them with the opportunity of group photos with Him.

As the different students moved on to the stage Swami blessed them with group photographs and when the only refrain from them was that He should visit Brindavan, He seemed to acquiesce. They sang a couple of *bhajans* which were again pleading to the Lord to visit Brindavan. At 6:30 p.m., after receiving *aarthi* and blessing all with *prasadam*, Swami moved to the car. There, the students from the final year Post Graduate class, requested Him for an opportunity to express their gratitude. Swami agreed and retired.

As Swami had agreed to the previous day, the graduating batch of post-graduate students from the Prasanthi Nilayam campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University presented their gratitude programme on the evening of March 16. Swami came for *darshan* in His chair and after a round of the hall and a brief visit to the Bhajan Hall, came onstage to begin the programme just after 5.30 p.m. Being the senior most students of the University, they spoke to Him as they would to their best friend - straight from the heart and without any flowery words. In addition to a musical tribute and short speeches in various languages, the boys innovated with a dumb charade of events in Swami's life. Just like Swami used to engage the students with a game of passing the parcel at picnics, the students engaged Him with their game of passing the parcel. There were various extempore performances in the game. One was mimicry; another was a question as to what was the song Swami had composed for the advertisement of a medicine in His childhood. The boy was not sure of the lyrics. When offered a helpline, he wanted help from his 'best friend' - Swami! Swami obliged by calling him and telling him the words of the song on the 'wonder medicine'- Balabhaskara, which he then sang out! There was an applause of joy, and Swami too seemed to enjoy that a lot.

As the programme went on, Swami went into the interview room after about 45 minutes. The programme, which was paused, resumed as soon as He returned a few minutes later. There was a band performance on the famous *bhajan*, "Manasa Bhajore Guru Charanam." There was also a dance for a song that Swami had composed in the early days. As stated by the compere at the beginning, the students offered all their talents to Him as a token of their gratitude. At the end, Swami asked for *bhajans*. A few boys moved up the stage and asked Swami for group pictures. It was late but Swami agreed for a quick round of photos as the *bhajans* went on, after which He retired for the day, receiving *aarthi*.

The music wing of Swami's educational institutions, the graduating students from the Music College, put their gratitude programme on March 21. One hardly needs to state that songs of the Hindustani and Carnatic classical variety formed the bread and butter of the programme. Swami arrived at about 5:10 p.m. for the *darshan* rounds and moving to the stage, asked for the programme to begin. It began with the rendering of a prayer to Lord Ganesha in Raag Hamsadhvani, with two singers singing in the Carnatic style while

two others did the Hindustani rendering. That was followed by a Veena recital and a Tabla duet which was highly appreciated by all the listeners. Swami was absorbed in the programme and the *Ganapriya* (Lover of Music) that He is, His hands moved constantly in rhythm of the song. There were a few speeches in different tongues but the speaking was minimal. Some who got up to speak, ended up singing, for that was the best medium to express their feelings for Him. As the songs concluded, Swami blessed all the students and accepted roses from many of them. He blessed the chocolate trays and *prasadam* to be distributed among them.

March 14, 2009: 'Educare' Drama by Sai Youth from Bihar and Jharkand

"God's delays are not His denials", is a popular saying and many are familiar with this phrase. But only a few have experiences that match the richness of this saying. The devotees from Bihar and Jharkhand were blessed indeed to receive this fulfilling experience. After presenting their holy Holi programme on March 11, they awaited the Lord's green signal to stage another programme. When the permission did not seem to come by, with heavy hearts they packed their bags. It was then that they heard the joyful news that Swami had consented to have their drama on the evening of March 14! Many of the participants were actually in the train, moving away from Puttaparthi, though their hearts were always here. They all literally 'stopped in their tracks' and returned in all enthusiasm. And thus it was that their stay at Prashanthi Nilayam was extended by another day.

After arriving for *darshan* that day, Swami briefly paused at the centre of Sai Kulwant Hall to observe the large backdrop on 'Educare' that had been erected. He also interacted with a few children, and then completed the rounds on the gents' side before arriving on stage. Ministers from the state of Tamil Nadu had come to have His *darshan*. Swami blessed them as He moved from the stage towards the interview room. For Mr. Stalin, the Mayor of Chennai city, Swami materialized a gold chain and gifted it in his hands. Also, seated on the stage were the medical students of Dr. H. S. Bhat, considered as the father of urology in India, who had all come to Prashanthi Nilayam to pay homage to their guru and of course the Sadguru, the Sai Avatar! In the morning and afternoon, they had honoured the humble and genius octogenarian, and in the evening, they sought blessings of Swami. The Lord blessed them all and accepted their letters. All had beaming smiles plastered on their faces and some of them offered a rose to Swami. A few others also had the good fortune of exchanging a few words with Him.

Swami then arrived on the stage and asked for the programme to begin. The State President of Bihar and Jharkand and the youth leader showed Swami the photos and the card. Swami seemed to study them quite intently and then blessed them. Next, two boys came up on the stage and after making offerings to Swami, returned to get the drama started.

The presentation traced the roots of Educare from the gurukulam days where the Guru personally taught everything for life to the disciples. Then, it depicted

the current scenario where the vices take hold of the children in their early years and remain as their deceptive companions throughout their lives. Man has reached such a stage where he is better off dead than alive! In sharp contrast, was presented the Sri Sathya Sai System of Educare where character is given top priority. Bringing out the colours of loyalty and patriotism, the drama depicted the story of an individual who spurns rich offers to go abroad in order to serve his motherland. On this note, there was a "tricolor dance" which concluded with an impressive formation. Swami seemed very happy and immediately went down the stage amidst the children. As He moved through the lines, He asked each and every boy his name! Thus, there was a roll call of the divine kind, and smiles blossomed everywhere. He then posed for the group pictures. And after this, asked for safari cloth pieces to be brought.

Swami presented the first cloth piece to the youth leader, who also happened to be a participant in the drama. Then, calling the other participants, Swami began to gift each one lovingly. Not one was missed and all crowded around Swami as they received the gift of Love. Swami then returned to the stage where He blessed *prasadam* to be distributed. After this, *aarthi* was waved and as Swami moved towards the car, the medical students again sought His blessings and Swami sweetly obliged. Blessing the Tamil Nadu ministers once more, Swami retired for the day.

March 27, 2009 – Ugadi Celebrations in Prasanthi

Another eventful year was to meet fruition, in order to welcome the arrival of *Virodhi*, the New Year in the 60-year cycle followed in India, especially in South India. It was time to bid the year *Sarvadhari* goodbye after thanking it for all the wonderful boons and blessings conferred. Ugadi or Yugadi means 'the beginning of a new era'. It is that time of the year when people eagerly and anxiously consult astrologers and fortune tellers as to what the year holds for them according to the *Panchanga* (a manuscript). But as Swami says, the fears and joys are unfounded. When the Divine *Anugraha* (Grace) has been showered on anyone, the *Navagraha* (nine planets) can do no harm! *Virodhi* means 'opposition'. But again, it's after all a name. The attitudes and mindsets of people are what matter really. People think that the nature of people and circumstances depend on the times they are living in. "These are bad times", they say and thus bad seems to happen to them. It is the character of man and his attitudes that determine the goodness or badness of the times as Swami puts it in His Dharma Vahini,

"The Yugas change only with the change in Dharma, not with the mere passage of time. The wicked Hiranyakasipu and the pure-hearted Prahlada, both lived in the selfsame chronological Yuga; the same era saw Dharmaja, the personification of Righteousness, and Santhi (peace), as well as the arch-cheat, Duryodhana. So, Dharma is what makes the Yuga for each; one can always be in the Kritha Yuga, if only one has all the four qualities of Dharma. It is the conduct of man that makes or mars history and changes the Golden Age to the Iron Age."

On March 27, at about 9:25 am, as the *bhajans* were on, Swami arrived for the Ugadi morning *darshan*. Sai Kulwant Hall was like the bride awaiting her groom! Decorated in flowing blues and yellows, the hall looked like a picture out of a fairytale! The traditional holy items from coconut trees and mango leaves were placed at various places, and the steps leading to the stage were filled with a myriad range of colourful items. The atmosphere was festive and cheerful. The hall was filled with thousands of people, all desirous of beginning the New Year with His *darshan*.

Swami went around for a complete round as the *bhajans* were on. He sat in the centre stage and enquired from the students as to whether they were well prepared for a music programme in the evening. One of the members of the bhajan group went up to Swami and told Him about all the songs that had been prepared. Swami directed that they should sing a lot of *swaras* (the notes of music) in the songs. After a few *bhajans*, Swami called a senior member of the faculty of Sri Sathya Sai University and gave instructions about an announcement to be made. Accordingly, it was announced that in the evening, after 4:00 p.m., there would be a music programme by the students of the University and the College of Music. Swami seemed pleased even as the announcement was made. A few boys moved to the stage and showed Swami the cards they had made for Ugadi. The *Ugadi Pachchadi*, which is a mixture of all the six tastes and is partaken as symbolic of accepting everything that comes as the Lord's *prasadam*, was also blessed by Swami. He soon received *aarthi* and left.

In the evening, a huge mat had been spread and the students who were to sing, were seated by 3:30 p.m. The array of instruments presented a wonderful sight. At about a few minutes before 5 p.m., Swami arrived. He came on the special raised golden throne. The hall was truly packed now and Swami gently made His way through the surging crowds of devotees. Completing a round of the hall, He moved through the veranda and then arrived onstage. As soon as He saw the students, He asked for them to begin the programme. The lead singers moved on to the stage and offered flowers to Him. The introduction was beautiful. It stated that the New Year was one in which we have to be *Virodhi* (opposed) to the six *Virodhi* (enemies) within. The first song was the Yugadi song in Telugu which was so poignantly rendered.

The second song was a Thyagaraja *kirtan* that extolled the might of Lord Rama. The pair that sang the song excelled in the rendering of the *swaras* in the beginning, and as they performed, scaled new heights in the pitch and undulated their voice rapidly with great ease. The crowd could not help but burst into an appreciative applause. From the wonder of technique, the duo shifted to the beauty of feelings as everyone soaked in the Love of Rama. Swami seemed very happy and even proud at their rendering. The third song was "Maula Maula" which had been suitably altered and modified to fit the theme. Again, another pair reveled in high scales as they melodiously pleaded to their Lord. Then, there was a Hindustani classic that brought out the richness of feelings and of the sonority that the voices of the boys exhibited. Another song in Telugu thrilled at the prospects of being in the divine

presence. The next song was, "Gopi Gopala Bala" and it described the divine sport of Krishna with the gopikas. It also projected the masterful control and the expertise of the singers. Finally, there was a Namavali song on Lord Hari which was sung by a trio of singers.

Though only seven songs were sung, the programme lasted a full 75 minutes! Time passed quickly as it does when one is lost in something. In between Swami went to the interview room for a short while but He sat through for almost the entire programme. It was a beautiful and musical way to begin the New Year. More than anything else, Swami seemed very happy with the programme. He blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all and then received *aarthi*. Two students moved up to Him and thanked Him for the wonderful opportunity, and also prayed to Him to forgive any mistakes that might have crept in. Swami blessed them and then moving to the car, retired for the day.

April 2, 2009 – Programme by Orissa Devotees

Every summer, Swami does something different and special, as if He is blessing the efforts of the people who tide over the harsh summer conditions. This year, Swami has moved the venue of the *bhajans* from the Bhajan Hall, outside to the Sai Kulwant Hall. So, both in the mornings and evenings, the devotees have the joy of seeing Swami as the *bhajans* go on. On the morning of April 2, after the *bhajans*, Swami told the Kerala State President, Prof. Mukundan, to make an announcement that there would be a cultural programme that evening.

In the afternoon, devotees from Orissa presented their programme on the eve of the festival of Rama Navami. For those unaware, during Dasara celebrations in September 2008, Swami had announced that He would construct permanent houses for those affected by the devastating flood in Orissa. The first batch of those houses - about 200 of them - were ready within four months of construction. Swami had agreed to present the keys to all the poor beneficiaries who had come in batches.

That evening, Swami arrived a few minutes before 5 p.m. He took a complete round of the hall and arrived on stage via the veranda. He had arranged for clothes to be distributed to the poor folk of Orissa. It was very evident that it was the first thing on Swami's mind as that was what He wanted to be done as soon as He arrived. The clothes were neatly packaged in a bag and the distribution began in the divine presence. The overwhelming gratitude of the people was evident as they prostrated on the floor in front of Him on receiving the clothes. The men received first, followed by the women. Many of them broke down and tears flowed freely from their eyes, down their cheeks. Some of the women just refused to rise after falling prostrate on the ground. Like a tumbler that falls flat on the floor and empties all the water within, these recipients rose leaving the portico wet with their tears. They literally had nothing else to offer and it was for the first time in their lives that someone had valued their tears so much! Swami sat calm amidst this storm of swelling emotions, blessing everyone. The volunteers ensured a smooth distribution.

If one eats sweets always, over time their tongue gets insensitive to sweetness. Sometimes a similar condition befalls those who always stay in Prasanthi Nilayam, witnessing His ever-flowing love in action. It can get numbing at times, for it is a daily sight! But on this day even such benumbed hearts melted as the grateful recipients broke down in joy! Like rivers emptying themselves into an ocean, these innocent villagers poured their devotion to Swami, and He in turn replenished the very same rivers with 'showers' of Grace! The whole sight was humbling and beautiful. Swami conducted the whole event so silently and smoothly. He promised that He would gift them with the keys to their homes the next day on Sri Rama Navami.

As the distribution came to a close, Swami went briefly into the interview room and after He returned, asked for the cultural programme to begin; it was about to become six o'clock. They began their programme by welcoming Swami by blowing the conch. Three small children blew two conches each for about three minutes as Swami watched them. Next, was a "Pala" performance. Consisting of 8-9 members, it was a performance in rustic style, narrated in Hindi and Oriya, where there is a single lead singer and the others are accompanists. It was a moving performance as they recounted their travails when the devastating floods hit their homes in July and August of 2008. Then, with great joy, the raconteur related how the Hands of God came to their rescue. Towards the end of the performance, the lead singer became very emotional as he prayed for Swami's divine redeeming feet to touchdown upon the soil of Orissa. As he broke down, Swami called Him up to the stage and spontaneously materialized a gold chain for him. As Swami put the chain around his neck he continued to pray for Swami's visit to Orissa and the crowd burst into rapturous applause. A 20-minute Hindi drama on Sabari's story was the next presentation.

The depiction showed the early life of Sabari. The scene opens with tribals breaking into dance and music on the eve of Sabari's wedding ceremony. Having been exposed to the sacred vibrations of the *Mantras* chanted in the *Ashram* of Sage Matanga, she leads a Satwic life with vegetarian habits. Naturally, she disapproves of the inhuman and barbaric custom of an innocent creature's sacrifice before the deity of the tribe as part of the marriage ritual. She runs away from home into the forest away from her marriage. Being a girl, she is forbidden to enter an ashram, but after hiding behind, listening to discourses and performance of spiritual practices, she is blessed by Sage Matanga to stay in his ashram. The sage reveals to her that one day she would be blessed with Sri Rama's *darshan*. The drama culminated with Saabari being blessed with the divine *darshan*, *sparshan* and *sambhashan* of the Lord. She feeds Him with berries apparently 'desecrated' by her tasting it to verify whether they were sweet enough for the Lord. But the Lord is lost in tasting the sweetness of her devotion and grants her liberation. The short skit was very well performed and the voices used were very unique and distinct. The Hindi playlet ended and the members assembled in front of Swami. Swami moved down amidst them and posed with a lovely smile as the photographers captured the moment. He spoke to a few of them, asking them

their names. Returning to the stage, Swami received *aarathi* and returned to His residence at 6:45 p.m.

April 3, 2009 – Ram Navami in the Divine Presence

Food, clothing and shelter are the three basic necessities of life. Anyone who doesn't have comfortable access to these three is considered poor by the society! April 3 was to be an 'enriching' day in ways more than one, and it would be an enjoyable experience to go through the day in the order of events as they unfolded. The trainloads of people, rendered hapless and homeless by the fury of the floods in Orissa, were dressed majestically in their *sarees* and *dhotis* that Swami had gifted them the previous day. It was a very special day for them, a turning point in all their lives, as many of them seemed to admit. They were to receive the key to their new home- homes that had been built by Swami for them - in the Divine Presence. They unanimously felt and experienced that this was not a mere key to their homes but the key to solve their miseries and problems, and more importantly, the key to their undying happiness.

They were seated as families, two or three members together, in the marbled blocks of Sai Kulwant Hall. A carpeted path ran through the blocks of people. Banners heralding the function were displayed at vantage points in the Hall. "Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust. Orissa Flood Rehabilitation Housing Project - Allotment of Houses to Beneficiaries by the Divine Hands" was the message in the banners. Maps containing the regions where the houses are built were placed in important locations in the Hall. Swami arrived, so grand and beautiful, on the golden throne chair. He was dressed in the golden *pitambara* (yellow cloth) robe. A mere sight of Him advancing thus towards the hall in the afternoon sunlight filled everyone with anticipative excitement. The minute Swami reached the centre of the hall, He cut and moved towards the stage. He was very eager to have the distribution started. Nearing the stage, He sat in the chair, in front of all the people assembled in the marbled blocks. The keys to the homes had been neatly arranged in trays in the front. Swami blessed the keys and asked the All India President and other elders to begin the distribution immediately.

And so, the much-awaited moment for the 200 families arrived. It was with tears of gratitude and joy that they received the key to not just their homes but to their redemption too! They were also given a hamper that contained mats, vessels, plates, tumblers and ladles - items that are vital for them and yet are conspicuous by their absence in their lives! These people are among the poorest of the poor and they had lost whatever precious little they had had to the floods. The joy radiating on their faces and joyful tears welling up in their eyes made one wonder whether the ravaging floods were really a curse upon them? It had brought them to the feet of the Lord and made them the beneficiaries of His immense Grace and bounty. On Sri Rama Navami, everyone present in Sai Kulwant Hall saw this beautiful facet of service to mankind in Swami's Rama *Rajyam* (the Rule of Sai Rama)!

Swami sat, very silent, witnessing the entire distribution in progress. He personally checked whether every person seated there received the gifts of grace. The State President of Orissa Sai Organisation expressed his deepest gratitude on behalf of the state to Swami and requested Him to speak to all. Swami told him that He would speak in the evening. As the distribution was nearing its close, Swami started to move down the lines of recipients. He moved through the centre of the blocks of seated people and all of them bowed to Him. A lucky few, evading the ever-growing security cordon, managed to touch His feet. Swami was all smiles and even seemed to tell the security people to be lenient! He moved behind all the way to the main gate and then traced His path back to the stage. He seemed so happy and satisfied. He is most happy when everyone around is happy!

All the while, the Veda chanting maintained a holy and vibrant background for the proceedings. Swami blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all. Then, knowing the inner cravings of all the hearts, Swami asked for photos to be distributed to all the beneficiaries. As they say, coincidences are miracles where God remains anonymous. The photos distributed to them were of Swami in a yellow robe granting the *abhayahastha*, a perfect souvenir to remember this beautiful moment with Swami. It was 10:20 a.m., when Swami received *aarthi* and retired for the morning.

Swami arrived for *darshan* in the evening and took a complete round. The student numbers had dwindled and so had the devotees. As Swami passed through the students' block, many of them offered letters to Him. Swami, pointing to His heart, said, "Keep them in the heart. That's enough!" Arriving on the stage, Swami blessed the All India President of Sai Organisation to address the gathering. Referring to a line in a *bhajan*, "*Prem Ki Behati Dhara ...*" (flow of stream of love), the learned speaker said that the beneficiaries were experiencing Bhagavan's love and compassion in abundant measure. He then introduced the two speakers for the day.

Dr. Ramesh Chandra Panda, senior IAS officer from the Tamil Nadu cadre, began his speech by offering his obeisance at the Lotus Feet of his Guru of gurus. The erudite speaker said at the outset that he is a humble instrument to transmit Bhagavan's message to the beneficiaries, and so would speak in Oriya, the language of the people of Orissa. Speaking of the various humanitarian projects of Swami, the speaker said that students in His educational institutions practice Bhagavan's precept, *Education is not for a mere living, but for leading a good life*. Expressing the myriad feelings of everyone about the housing rehabilitation project in Orissa he concluded his speech with the *shloka*, *Twameva Mathacha Pitha Twameva* that states that the Lord is our everything.

The next speaker, Mr. R. Kondal Rao, formerly chief engineer in the Panchayat Department of Andhra Pradesh, and also associated with many of the major service projects of Bhagavan, began his speech expressing his gratitude to Swami on being given the opportunity to speak on the holy occasion of Sri Rama Navami. He started with giving the reasons for the floods. About 15 lakh cusecs flowed from the river Mahanadi due to the

torrential rains whereas its capacity was only 10 lakh cusecs. As a result, the river breached its barriers and entered human habitations. The floods washed more than 50,000 houses away! Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Orissa, quickly swung into action by providing cooked food and medical relief to affected people. They had to travel even in boats to inaccessible places. When Bhagawan saw the photographs of large-scale destruction of houses, He immediately wanted concrete houses to be constructed for the victims. A team comprising Mr. V. Srinivasan, Mr. A. Ramakrishna and Mr. R. Kondal Rao was sent by Bhagawan to assess the damage on October 19, 2008. It has been a long and eventful journey since then. You can read this fascinating and overwhelming account in the cover story of the March 2009 issue of H2H.

Mr. Kondal Rao concluded his speech by saying that it was only Bhagawan's grace, which had helped them to do this work. After his speech, Bhagawan gave His Discourse to the huge gathering of devotees. The excerpts of which are as follows:

Sweeter than sugar, tastier than curd, sweeter indeed than honey is the Name of Rama. Constant repetition of this sweet Name gives one the taste of divine nectar itself. Therefore, one should contemplate on the Name of Rama incessantly. (Telugu Poem)

Bharat is the motherland of many noble souls who earned great name and fame in all the continents of the world. This is the land of valorous people who vanquished foreign rulers and attained independence. This is the land, which excelled in music, literature and other fine arts. Having been born in this great land of Bharat, oh boys and girls, it is your sacred duty to protect its rich cultural heritage. (Telugu Poem)

From the very birth, there are no children in this land of Bharat who do not chant God's name. Children are given names of God so that parents get an opportunity to remember the name of God. In this land of Bharat, there is no village without a temple. From times immemorial, this land has given importance to spirituality. If Bharatiyas are happy and leading a secure life, it is due to their spiritual way of life. Every Bharatiya has self-confidence. They may be poor, but youngsters in this land have come up in their life by studying even under streetlights. Whether the adversities come in the form of explosion of bombs or floods, Bharatiyas depend on God. If you depend on God, you will not face difficulties. Miseries and difficulties are like passing clouds, they come and go.

Dasaratha had three wives – Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. A daughter was born to Kausalya, but a daughter cannot be crowned as heir to the throne. Dasaratha and Kausalya gave away the daughter to Sage Rishyasringa. He taught her all kinds of education. As there was no male child in the family who could ascend the throne, Sumanthara and other ministers asked Dasaratha to perform Putra Kamesti Yaga. They thought only Rishyasringa was competent to perform the Yaga. During the performance of Yaga, a divine being emerged from the sacrificial fire and handed over a vessel containing Payasam

(pudding). This was to be equally distributed between his three wives. They were supposed to partake of the pudding after having a bath. As Sumitra was drying her hair in the terrace, she kept the pudding in the parapet wall. Suddenly an eagle swooped down and carried the pudding in its claws. Sumitra was fear-stricken since she was afraid of facing Dasaratha. When she related this incident to Kausalya, she readily agreed to share half of her bowl of pudding. Kaikeyi too did the same. Kausalya gave birth to Rama and Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata, but Sumitra gave birth to twins – Lakshmana and Satrughna. Sumitra faced a predicament; Lakshmana and Satrughna were always crying. She could not find out the reason for this. In spite of resorting to many incantations and Mantras, they never stopped crying. When Vasishtha, the family priest, was asked the reason, he told her to place Lakshmana by the side of Rama and Satrughna by the side of Bharata. When this was done, both Lakshmana and Satrughna slept peacefully. The reason was Lakshmana was born after partaking of half of the pudding given by Kausalya and Satrughna was born after partaking half of the pudding of Kaikeyi.

In the Ramayana, we do not find Sumitra and Lakshmana's consort Urmila being given prominence. When Lakshmana came to take leave of Urmila, she told him that he should never think of her in the forest. He should serve Rama always. Even a thought of her should not interrupt his service to Rama. Such was the nobility of Urmila.

The demon king Ravana abducted Sita. In the battle, Lakshmana fell unconscious. It is then that Rama declared, "I can even live without Sita, but not without Lakshmana." One of the demons advised that Lakshmana could be saved by rubbing the Sanjivini (a medicine that had a divine cure) on his body. Hanuman was sent to bring the Sanjivini. As Hanuman could not locate the Sanjivini, he uprooted the whole mountain and brought it to Rama. When the Sanjivini was applied on Lakshmana, he regained consciousness.

Rama was ever blissful. The name of Rama which is sweeter than sugar, tastier than curd and honey should be chanted always.

The five human values, namely, Sathya, Dharma, Santhi, Prema and Ahimsa are very important. One who cultivates these five human values is a true human being. Even if one of them is missing, he / she cannot be called a true human.

When we have love in our heart, nobody will hate us. Therefore, develop love and live like brothers and sisters. This is the essence of Ramayana. What Swami has done in Orissa is to demonstrate this truth, the propagation of love. All of us should be united.

Let us all move together,

let us all grow together,

Let us all stay united and grow in intelligence together,

Let us live together with friendship and harmony. (Telugu Poem)

Whether you are in Ashram or anywhere else, do not have a sense of hatred. It is love, which unites everyone. Swami concluded His Discourse with the Bhajan, “*Prema Mudita Manase Kaho Rama Rama Ram ...*”

After the *bhajans*, Swami blessed everyone assembled. He asked the students as to who were all leaving for their homes. Many of them raised hands and Swami then received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

April 4, 2009 – Burra Katha by Sai Students

The Burra Katha is a traditional narrative form in Andhra Pradesh, popular in the villages on festivals and other occasions. The troupe consists of one main performer and two co-performers. *Burra* is referred to ‘Tambura’, a musical instrument with a hollow shell and attached strings. ‘Katha’ means story. The main storyteller (called as *Kathakudu*) narrates the story. He plays Tambura and dances to music. He also wears a metal ring called as *andelu* on his right thumb, holds another ring in his other hand, and adds more music by colliding them frequently. The co-performers play *gummeta* (also called as *dakki* or *budike*), earthen drums with two heads. All three or only *kathakadu* wears the anklets (also called as *gejjelu*), which add even more music when they dance. The performer on the right side is the *hasyaka* (means joker) and cracks satires and jokes. The left side performer (called as the *rajakiya*, means politician) acts as a person who knows worldly ways and talks about politics and social issues. The main performer and co-performers constantly address each other. This art form was instrumental in arousing nationalist feelings during the Indian independence movement and is a very effective communication tool. However, it was a dying art form as patronage was in acute scarcity in this technological era. That was when Swami stepped in and resurrected it!

Today, it flourishes in Prasanthi Nilayam with at least annual or bi annual performances in front of an international audience who enjoy it along with Swami. And the day after Rama Navami happened to become another day in which Swami decided to permit the students from the University to stage a Burrakatha programme. It was shortly after 5:00 p.m. as the *bhajans* began and Swami arrived for *darshan*. He moved into the interview room and on His way out, went into the Bhajan Hall. The three participants for the Burrakatha were seated and Swami spoke to them, checking their costumes too in the process. He blessed them and moved out on to the stage. Halting the ongoing *bhajans*, he called the trio to start their performance. The Burrakatha had been entitled, "Yugavatara".

As soon as the “Ganesha Vandana” was done, in traditional style, three students came and garlanded the performers. Then, the narrative started with the Lord's promise to incarnate whenever the situation on earth deteriorates. The theme was based on the massive and magnificent service projects that Swami had executed so selflessly and efficiently. So naturally, it derived its

inspiration from the three boons of mother Eshwarammma. As the dialogues and songs went on, orchestrated and sequenced beautifully, Swami seemed so moved. Lost in the nostalgia of the memories of *Grihamammayi* (mother of the body), Swami almost had tears welling in His eyes! Just listening to His glories and stories was an inspiring experience. The *hasyaka* performed his role beautifully, eliciting peals of laughter from both, the audience and Swami, with his clever and apparently innocent queries about the modern times. The finale was a *bhajan* that Swami had asked for an encore when it had originally been sung by the students' teacher in his Burrakatha, in front of Swami years ago! Everyone joined in the singing and clapping that the *bhajan* elicited. The whole performance lasted about 50 minutes and it concluded with thunderous appreciative applause from the audience.

Swami called the three students onstage and blessed them with *padanamaskar*. He also blessed their teacher. Group pictures were taken after which Swami received *aarathi*.

April 5, 2009 – Performance by Ms. Dana Gillespie

If April 4 was an opportunity for the students of Sai University to present a local flavour through the Burrakatha, the next day Swami had blessed the famous blues singer, Dana Gillespie to sing in concert. This popular artist of international fame expressed that being able to sing for Swami was, for her, a wonderful blessing. She also said that she has been blessed on numerous occasions before by Swami, and that she was grateful for just another such memorable occasion where her prayers to sing her heart out to Him had been granted.

The stage had been set and everyone waited in readiness for Swami to arrive. Swami completed the *darshan* round and came on stage. He asked for the performers to move on to the stage. Ms. Dana Gillespie was being accompanied on the tabla, sitar, guitar, congo drums and the keyboards by students from the University. She moved to Swami and in a beautiful manner dropped rose petals onto His lotus feet! Swami blessed her to begin and she did so. In her inimitable style, she sang songs like, "One", "Love is Love" and so on. Her lyrics have been influenced by Sufi mysticism and so her songs were a blend of the Sanathana Dharma, Islam and Christianity. They were all filled with the power and beauty of Love. Swami heard about six songs that she rendered beautifully. The lyrics were very meaningful and full of profundity.

The forty-minute programme of fusion music concluded and Swami blessed the singer. Then, He called one of the students from the *bhajan* group and asked, "How was the programme?" "Very nice Swami", was the reply. "Is it? Then, tell me, what did she sing?" Swami asked with a smile. The boy replied, "Swami, that there is love in the birds and bees, in the oceans and seas...." Swami lovingly smiled at him and told him to go and sing some English songs. And so, the whole *bhajan* group began to sing popular English songs like, "I keep feeling your Love in me " and "Why fear when I am here." Swami then

asked the students to sing a Telugu song and they came up with "Madhura Mohana". As that song concluded, Swami asked for *aarthi*. Meanwhile, the students who had accompanied the artists asked Swami for *padanamaskar*. Swami agreed and all of them came forward, one by one, and utilised fully the golden opportunity. Swami then retired for the day.

April 9, 2009 – A Dance Programme by the Students

The academic year of the Sri Sathya Sai University and Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School ended on March 31. Many boys left for their homes to spend time with their parents, but a substantial number stayed back as Bhagavan was still in Prasanthi Nilayam. They did not want to lose any opportunity of being with Him, and to make best use of their time the boys started preparing programmes to present before their beloved Lord.

On April 8, Swami had seen the members of the dance group, dressed up and ready to perform. However, Bhagavan told them to perform on the next day, as it was a Thursday. And on April 9, when Swami emerged from His residence at 4.10 p.m., He appeared eager to watch His children's performance. Swami moved slowly and gently through the entire hall and after completing the *darshan* rounds, He moved towards the interview room. But when He saw the colourfully-attired students in the Bhajan Hall, He went near them. All the dancers thronged around Him and many had letters with them. Swami began to collect their letters and spoke to a few of them. He asked them as to what the evening's performance was all about. Seeing the uniformity of their dresses, Swami even enquired as to how they managed to get so many symmetrical dresses. He had with Him a *vibhuti* packet, which He gave to the lead dancer who had trained all the boys and asked him, "How many days did you need?" Three days, was the answer. Swami seemed happy and He promised them that He would definitely see their dance, and then moved on the stage via the veranda.

The Veda chanting was on and Swami sat on stage listening to it. After a while, Swami moved to the interview room. On His way, He told the dancers in the Bhajan Hall to move out, take their positions and be ready. The marble block was now cleared for the dancers. Soon, Swami arrived and asked for the programme to begin. There were two compeers, one speaking in Telugu and the other in English. As the one in English was speaking, "...thank you for this opportunity Swami...", Swami asked, "What did you say?" The boy repeated it, and both, him and Swami, exchanged meaningful smiles.

The first piece was of Swami chanting the poem, *Khanda Khandantara*, to which the boys moved and depicted gracefully. The poem was repeated twice and Swami seemed to ask as to why it was being repeated. The boys continued, and Swami also began to lip sing the words of the poem when it was on for the second time. "Well dear Swami, that is the reason why it is being repeated," would definitely have been the reply in every dancer's mind for it was so beautiful to see Swami chant a few lines to which they were dancing. The poem ends with Swami addressing all the devotees reminding

them of their duty. As that part came, Swami pointed towards all the devotees who had gathered.

That was followed by five more pieces. Most of them were on Lord Rama and were composed and sung by the students themselves. There was a good variety and mix in the type of songs chosen and Swami was clearly happy. The themes of the songs were also so beautiful and different that everyone in the hall enjoyed the performance. As it concluded, all the dancers moved up to Swami. He called the lead dancer and asked him whether they had eaten anything before coming. He replied in an affirmative, and Swami smiled saying, "It would have all got digested by now." He seemed impressed by the fact that they had all prepared it in just three days. He also had a few comments on the wide and flowing *dhotis* of one of the dancers, and the boys assured that it would be rectified the next time. It is so wonderful to see Swami's attention to detail and His overflowing love for the children, and so it is little surprise that many of them decide to spend their vacation in His physical Presence.

The lead dancer asked Swami for a group photo. Swami replied, "All are the same old dancers. Why photo again?" He had nothing to reply and just returned to his place. Then Swami smiled and said, "Make a parting and sit as two groups. I will come in the centre." Wow! How beautiful was that! Swami slowly moved down and posed for photos with his dear children. Then, as the *bhajans* began, Swami moved into the interview room. After a while, He came out again and sat listening to the singing. Three more *bhajans* later, He received *arthi* and left.

April 12 and 13, 2009 – Tamil New Year and Vishu Celebrations

Devotees from Tamil Nadu and Kerala arrived at Prasanthi Nilayam for celebrating the Tamil New Year and Vishu respectively on the second week of April, and on the evening of April 12 they had received permission for their first programme. Bhagavan came for *darshan* at 5.30 p.m. Taking a complete round of the packed hall, Swami came onto the stage and asked for the programme to begin. It was about 5.45 p.m.

It was a musical presentation where two members of the Kerala Sai Youth, trained in Carnatic music, performed. Swami sat listening to their songs as they sang popular devotionals like *Bho Shambho*. They sang a couple of Malayalam songs too, and after about five songs, Swami asked them whether they had completed their planned quota. When they replied in the affirmative, Swami asked the students to sing *bhajans*. During this period, Swami went into the interview room and returned with clothes, which He wanted to give to the artists. He called all the five members of the troupe onstage during the *arthi* and distributed His gifts to them. They all sought *padanamaskar* which He gladly allowed them to do. After the *arthi*, as Swami moved towards the car, He called a student and asked if the "Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavanthu" prayer had been chanted. The boy replied in affirmative. Swami then moved along and also blessed the Governor of Rajasthan, Mr. S. K.

Singh and former Election Commissioner of India Mr. T. N. Seshan, both of whom were also at Prasanthi Nilayam over the weekend.

On the next day, that is, April 13, the children from the Kollam district (Quilon) of Kerala had been permitted to put up a drama entitled, "Madhuram Gayati" in the divine presence. The backdrop and sets were in place and the children were decked and ready. The costumes and makeup were as realistic as it can get. In fact, so natural was the dressing and finish that one forgot if there was any make up at all! The characters looked as if they had been picked from the bygone Dwapara Yuga and brought into the Sai Yuga, right into the Sai Kulwant Hall. As they say, a more overwhelming response than a thunderous ovation is a pin drop silence. The fact that no one even noticed to say, "Good costumes and makeup" in itself was a compliment!

It was at about 5:30 p.m. that Swami arrived for *darshan*. Swami took a complete round looking at the sets as He passed by them. Reaching the stage, Swami asked for the children to begin. Two little Radha-Krishna couples moved to Swami and made offerings to Him. He asked them, ever so sweetly, as to what their names were. All the four girls answered. They also gave Him a long peacock feather, which Swami accepted with a slightly amused look. The drama then began as the children returned to backstage.

The drama depicted the pure Love that the *gopikas*, Radha in particular, had for Lord Krishna. It opened with the childhood pranks of the charming little angel of Brindavan, wherein He steals butter from houses. The *gopikas* complain to Yashoda about Krishna, but when she takes the stick to punish Him, they all plead on His behalf, telling her not to beat Him. They are all lost in the beauty and divinity of His pranks. Krishna grows up, and so does the love between Him and the *gopikas*. Radha is possessive of Him, and though she loves Him with all her heart, Krishna seems to ignore her. Torn with sorrow, Radha undergoes a deep soul searching when she realises that there exists only Radha and Krishna in the whole Universe. Everyone and everything other than Krishna is the embodiment of Radha, she realises. Then, she appreciates the expansiveness of Krishna's love. The Truth of her discovery is verified when Krishna comes to her and tells her that in all times to come, Radha and Krishna will be inseparable. When Akrura, much to the pain and sorrow of the *gopikas*, arrives and takes away Krishna and Balarama to Mathura, it is Radha who assuages the grief of all the other *gopikas*. She cheers them saying that Krishna could never leave them, and then all of them perform the Rasa dance again with the Krishna of their hearts.

Swami was very happy with the play. Love is something that always turns on the Lord, for there is no difference between the Lord and Love. He smiled so radiantly when the scene of the *gopikas* and Krishna playfully bantering was depicted. He was also absorbed in the scene when Radha expresses her anguish to her dear friend. When the children came forward at the end of the drama with lighted lamps, it presented a beautiful sight. Swami told that the lighted lamps be placed behind, away from everyone so that they cause no accidents. Then He called the children to come forward. Moving down the stage, Swami sweetly posed for group pictures with them. He asked many of

them their names and patted them appreciatively on their cheeks. Then, He slowly made His way to the stage and asked for *aarathi*. During the *aarathi*, He asked for sarees to be brought and distributed it to the children. The children were delighted and Swami kept watching them joyfully. It was tough to make out whether it was Swami who was smiling as He saw the children, or was it the other way round! Blessing everyone, Swami retired to His residence at 7 p.m.

April 14, 2009 – Tamil New Year and Vishu Celebrations cont.

The traditional people of Kerala celebrate Vishu with a lot of joy. And Prasanthi Nilayam is a place where every occasion becomes a reason to celebrate for one is in the presence of the Lord. One very interesting custom of Vishu is *Vishukani* or *Kani Kanal* (first sight). Under this tradition, there is a prescribed list of items that people see first thing on a Vishu morning. Thus, the *Vishukani* has over the years become a ritual arrangement of auspicious articles like raw rice, fresh linen, golden cucumber, betel leaves, arecanut, metal mirror, the yellow flowers 'konna' (cassia fistula), and a holy text and coins, in a bell metal vessel called 'uruli'. A lighted bell metal lamp called *nilavilakku* is also placed alongside. And this was precisely the arrangement that greeted one and all as it adorned the centre of the Sai Kulwant Hall. It also happened to be the day of the Tamil New Year.

The actual *Kani Kanal* or first auspicious sight occurred in the evening at 5:15 p.m., as the lovely Lord arrived gently from the Yajur Mandir. Swami took a complete round of the hall and thousands slaked the thirst of their eyes as they seemed to drink in His beautiful form. The ritual arrangement of the articles had now been shifted onto the stage. Swami arrived on stage and looked admiringly at the wonderful arrangement of the various items for quite some time. Then, He sat listening to the Veda chanting for a few minutes, after which He moved into the interview room. Ten minutes later, Swami was out again, and this time He asked for the programme to begin as soon as He reached the centrestage. On this day, He was indeed seated at the centre of the stage unlike many other occasions when He is towards a side. The drama was entitled, "Sai Yuva Shakthi" and it began at about 5:30 p.m. A few characters of the drama moved onto the stage and made offerings to Swami. The Lord seemed to be fascinated by one "stick" of flowers which He kept in His hands throughout the next 45 minutes or so!

The drama was quite 'radical' in terms of the way the theme was depicted. The protagonist, Bharat, realizes that he needs power and influence to change the way things are going on in his region. So, he decides to participate in the forthcoming elections and hopes to win. Backed by his nobility and the people who have benefited from his service activities, he indeed wins the elections. Then, comes the acid test, when as an MLA he has to keep up his promises. Bharat spares no efforts and dives headlong into serving his people. First, he introduces the Sathya Sai Educare concept in all the corporation schools. When we see such things in dramas, we think that it's nice to fantasize or imagine these dramatically positive changes. But the

fact is that Sathya Sai Educare has indeed been introduced in Chennai Corporation schools today, and it was announced by the Mayor of Chennai with gratitude. That audio clip was played in Sai Kulwant Hall for all to hear.

Back to the drama, Bharat calls the medical fraternity and inspires them with the example of the Sathya Sai Super Speciality Hospitals. When everyone sighs that those things are possible only for Swami, he comes up with an innovative idea. He requests every hospital to allot just one free bed for a deserving poor patient, and ensure that patient too receives the same quality of treatment. That seems like a practical solution and when all hospitals incorporate that concept, there is a virtual mini free hospital! Again, this has already been incorporated in Chennai city, Prof. Rangabhashyam, Prof. Sunder and Prof. E. Prabhu, the three giants in the medical fraternity, being responsible for it. Very intelligently directed, the drama had these doctors themselves as a part of the drama and they acted out their real life roles on stage too!

[The Indian Association of Surgical Gastroenterology awarded the 'Living Legend' award to Prof N. Rangabashyam for setting up the Department of Surgical Gastroenterology at Chennai Government General Hospital in 1973. He was instrumental in bringing the surgical gastroenterology super specialty course into India in 1985 and for training surgeons in advanced surgery like liver resection, pancreatic surgery, colo-rectal surgery and transplant. Prof. Sunder specializes in heart transplants and is working at the Apollo hospitals. Prof. E. Prabhu specializes in Nuclear medicine. In fact, H2H had a cover story on this Virtual Hospital Project called the Sri Sathya Sai Healthcare Project in January 2009]

The drama surged ahead to show how a glorious society gets built with just one strong-willed and good-character person being in a position of power. It concluded with Bharat being honoured and heard by all in the Parliament, the seat of power in India. Traditionally, Swami has repeatedly exhorted everyone to keep away from politics. Seeing the drama, it seemed that everything has its exceptions. More than anything else, what is most important for the Lord is the motive behind the action rather than the action itself. There are reasons which we may not be able to fully understand and appreciate as to why Swami discourages entry into politics. At the same time, we may not equally understand why Swami inspired this group of youngsters to put up such a drama. But we can definitely appreciate their motives and Swami's will, for nothing can ever happen unless He wills! As the drama concluded with a final song, Swami smiled in joy and said that He would move down for a group picture. And what a huge group it was! It spanned the entire breadth of the marble block and was a wonderful sight. Swami told the photographers to take one half of the group each from either sides. That being done, Swami said that He was very happy and slowly moved back to the stage. Swami, for a few moments, was all alone on the stage and it was such a beautiful sight - Swami, in front of the beautiful decorations! A true *Vishukani* indeed! Next, *Prasadam* distribution ensued as the students sang *bhajans*. Ten minutes later, Swami received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

SWAMI AND ME

DECADES OF LOVE WITH THE DIVINE MASTER

By Mr. Birendranath Bardoloi

Mr. Birendranath Bardoloi hails from the East Indian state of Assam, and has had the good fortune of serving as a faculty member in the Department of English, Sri Sathya Sai University (Prasanthi Nilayam campus) for over two decades. Presently retired, he spends his time between Prasanthi Nilayam and his other home, Sri Sathya Sai Sishu Sadan, an orphanage he founded many years ago, in Assam.

The Lord Beckoned...

I first read about Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in an issue of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, which appeared some time in the mid '60s. In one of the pages, Mr. S. B. Chavan, a political figure of the country at the time, was seen worshipping Bhagavan Baba in his altar that was filled with Bhagavan's pictures. I felt deeply touched by the form in these photographs.

Later, I read a discourse of Bhagavan Baba on the subject matter of human mind, or rather on its non-existence. This article appeared along with an image of Swami on the opening page of the magazine *Bhavan's Journal*. In more ways than one, the discourse had a direct appeal to my heart. It was not a philosophical treatise meant for a school of pedants, it had no jargon or a logician's jugglery; it was simple and appealing. It was an intimate rendering of one heart to another, such as between father and son, as it were.

As for Bhagavan's photograph printed in the magazine, the fairly large and circular tuft of hair on His head looked like an aura, filled with radiance. His head and His glowing face appeared to be a picture extraordinaire. "Here is a form unlike all other images of highly evolved souls I have seen before." - this was my instant response to the discourse and the photograph of Bhagavan Baba.

Not many days after this great experience, my brother-in-law brought me a chunk of *Vibhuti* (sacred ash), and a soiled copy of Professor Kasturi's *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram, Part I* (the biography of Bhagavan Baba). The book must have acted as a messenger of God passing on from hand to another, across many towns and villages.

At the time of his giving me these two priceless gifts, my brother-in-law put two straight questions to me: 1) Do you believe in God? 2) If so, do you believe in His descent on earth in human form? My answers to both these questions were an emphatic "yes".

And when I look back at my life now, I realize that I have come a long way. Life as it meant to me then, has metamorphosed into a complete different experience with Swami taking the centre stage. Many reassurances given over the years, with one miracle followed by another, has left me confident that I have found my Master. He chose me as one of His humble servants. He found an excuse for me to serve Him in His University in the department of English. He blessed me with a beautiful family of four lovely girls who have flown their nests now. He continues to live in my heart and work through me.

“In your childhood, you used to make shiva *lingams*” - Baba

Even for those, who have been fortunate enough to obtain a glimpse of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba by staying near Him physically for a certain length of time, it is a well-nigh impossibility, an unattainable El Dorado, to dwell and understand, and then share about His glory and mystery. However, I shall share an instance or two to the best of my limited knowledge.

My late mother would often tell us about her years as a girl. Climbing trees, going to school, knitting, and praying were her favourite pastimes. One of her creations was a tiny lump of clay that she called her *Shiva lingam*. She would spend hours on end having animated conversations with this source of joy, the *Shiva lingam*. Krishna was another attraction, our family deity. My mother, in all her naïveté, talked to Krishna lovingly calling him “Gopal”. She would complain about her children, cry to Him, ask for His guidance, beg for reassurances, etc. Did our omnipresent Lord note all of this, more than ninety years ago?

In 1976, Bhagavan Baba gave my late mother a *lingam*, an *atma lingam*, as He had called it, in the interview room. Baba said that the emergence of that *lingam* had taken place on the Maha Shivarathri day in 1974. Swami had waited for two long years, as He alone can time events to perfection. He further explained that he had kept it especially for her, saying **“*Tumhara bhakti bada hai, isliye tumko yeh bada lingam deta hoon.*”** (Your devotion is big, so I give you this large *lingam*.) He continued, **“In your childhood, you used to make *Shiva lingams* out of the clay taken from a termite hill, although your family God was Gopal.”** Overwhelmed with the joy of receiving the *lingam* and bewildered at the revelation by Baba, she could only manage a nod.

The *lingam* was the size of a swan-egg, only heavier than it; greenish-blue in colour. Wherever she went, she carried it for its daily worship and *abhisheka*. If you rotate it, you can see a number of impressions, such as *Bala Gopala* (Child Krishna) with a *laddoo* (round sweetmeat) in His right hand, *Muralidhara* (Lord Krishna) playing upon His divine flute, *Rama-Lakshmana-Sita-Hunaman* and *Lord Shiva as Kailashpathi* (Lord of Mount Kailash).

Bhagavan Baba was then, as much with my mother here inside the interview room in Prasanthi Nilayam, as He had been with her at North Guwahati, Assam, when as a child she would blissfully worship her clay *Shiva lingam*! He was that very *atma lingam*, the all-pervasive God.

Bhagavan would address my mother as ‘Ma’ (mother). Such was His love for her! He always had some gift or the other for her, and once blessed her with an emerald-studded gold ring and a *Spatika Japmala*. On another occasion, He gave her a large-sized round silver pendant of 1-1/2 inch diameters. On one side of it was the image of *Ashta bhuja* (eight armed) *Durga*, and on the other the letter, *Aum*. **While giving it to her, He told her that although divinity has many forms, “Guru (Preceptor) is one” – “Guru Ek Hai.”**

In one of the interviews with Swami in 1985, in course of the conversation with us, looking at my mother lovingly, Bhagavan asked about her well being. My brother told Swami that he wasn’t really able to take care of her as he lived far away in Assam. Bhagavan assured him that He would take care of her all the time and created a *Lingam*. It was a *Netralingam* (eye). One can see a very charming eye with a beautiful eyebrow over it. Baba said it would constantly look after our mother and that she would never be alone.

The Lord’s Unsurpassable Mercy

Ten years before this, I was witness to an extraordinary incident. Kiran Konwar, a devotee from the same town, came to my house with a request to hold *bhajans* at her residence. Her father, a retired draftsman of the Geological Survey of India, was on his deathbed. She hoped that Bhagavan’s Grace through *bhajans* might restore her father’s health.

At 10:15 a.m. on the following day, I went to Kiran’s house accompanied by my nephews, Rupak and Hirok, both still in school at the time. I saw the body of a man laid down on a wooden plank in the entrance room, ready to be taken for the final rites. Alas! Kiran’s father had already left the planet. I was late! The draftsman’s relatives had already gathered there, having arrived from nearby villages. His wife was sobbing inconsolably, and so were Kiran and the other relatives.

Undaunted by the fact that we were late, I decided to start the *bhajan* session. We began at 10:30 a.m. and sang with a burning ardour amidst the poignant scene. Our hearts turned heavy with devotion as we reminded ourselves of the glory and grace of our Lord. It seemed as if we were floating on the wings of a timeless time.

I opened my eyes for a moment. Did I notice a very feeble movement of the fingertips of the “dead” man’s left hand, lying on a plank, lifeless all this while? Was it my imagination? Evidently it was not, for, slowly but steadily, the movement turned into a rhythmic drumming, keeping in tempo with the *talas* (the beats on the tabla and tambourine) of the *bhajans*. Exultant and ecstatic, we continued singing with renewed enthusiasm, realising that Bhagavan had taken over. The word ‘enthusiasm’, by the way, has its origin in Greek ‘*entheos*’ – ‘having a God within’. ‘Enthusiasm’, therefore, is a state of one’s being in God.

At the end of the *aarti* at 2:00 p.m., I saw a large chunk of *Vibhuti* sticking to the back of Rupak’s old green woollen coat. There were also sprinklings of

Vibhuti all over the place and over the resurrected old man as well. The grateful man happily ate the *Vibhuti* and folded his hands in front of Bhagavan’s photograph. Kiran wept like a child, her heart filled with gratitude. It is another story that Rupak later studied at Bhagavan’s college in Brindavan and also had the great fortune to serve Swami closely for many years.

Healed By His Himalayan Love

In 1974, I attended the conference of the All India Sri Sathya Seva Organisation in Rajamundry (East Godavari district). I was on crutches as I had fractured my ankle two months prior to that. One day, I was returning to my camp from the morning session of the conference when Swami’s car passed me. In the vehicle, with Swami were Dr. Vinayak Krishna Gokak, the first Vice Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Prasanthi Nilayam, and Professor N. Kasturi. Swami looked at me and waved. Later, Dr. Gokak told me that Swami had asked Professor Kasturi what had happened to me and why I was limping.

The conference got over and I was on my way back home. At the Rangia railway station in Assam, as I was getting off the train onto the platform, there appeared a shabbily dressed man. He looked at me and said, “*Tumhara paon mei dukh hai, nahin?*” (“You have pain in your foot, haven’t you?”) He then very gently touched my affected leg. I felt embarrassed, and telling him to ignore my pain, I hobbled off to my wife and others as fast as I could.

When I got home and started walking from the gate to the verandah of the house, I found that the pain in my ankle had almost vanished! Well, who could have been the shabbily-dressed man but for the Omnipotent One?

A few days later, I was in my office (serving as the then Principal of the Rangia College), when a tall person wearing a *dhoti*, *kurta*, and a headgear, approached me, standing outside my window, with a cotton bag hanging from one of his shoulders.

This person had not been seen by any of the staff anywhere in the neighbourhood before. He took out a bottle of oil from his bag, asking me to extend the palm of my right hand. I obliged rather hesitantly. He poured a little into my palm, and asked me to rub it on my forehead and head, and then said, that would heal my leg completely. I said, “But I have pain in my leg, not on my head or forehead.” “It doesn’t matter” was all he said. I offered him some money, but he did not want to accept. I persisted; finally he took it saying, “Okay, I will spend it on Bhagavan’s work.” Now, I had my doubts. Who was he? How did he know of my pain? I couldn’t help asking him his name and where he came from. He continued: “I have no name, not even a specific home or village or town to live in. I appear wherever I’m needed.” As soon as the *fakir* disappeared, so did the pain from my leg. I did away with the crutches once and for all. Needless to say, I was humbled beyond words.

The Magnanimous Eternal Provider

After finding God in the form of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba and experiencing His abounding love, the zeal to sanctify my life by worshipping Him, through service to society, became more intense. And as a result, in the early 1970s, a few of us started an orphanage for 20 boys on the bank of a river in Rangia, Assam. The orphanage was named Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Sishu Seva Sadan, for which we decided we would not raise funds. The boys were to be given living accommodation, food, and clothing, as well as proper education. We kept a few cows in the orphanage so that the children could have milk everyday. This ‘ambitious’ venture obviously strained our limited source of income. But we had immense faith in Bhagavan. There would be *Aumkaram* (chanting of *Aum*) and *Suprabhatam* (ritualistic prayer to wake the Lord) in the mornings and *bhajans* in the evenings at the Sadan. On Thursdays and Sundays, there would be *nagar sankeertan* (*bhajans* sung by a group of people while walking past every lane in the neighbourhood). Soon enough, so suffused was this place with divine vibrations that it came to be called an ‘*ashram*’.

One evening, I was sitting on the verandah of my house, a little dismayed, asking Swami if it was a wise decision to have taken the responsibility of 20 boys’ lives, as I saw resources dwindling.

Bhagavan’s response was perfectly timed, as is always. My telephone rang. From Guwahati, a Sai devotee, Wing Commander T.C. Punetha’s voice greeted me: “Jai Sai Ram. I’m Punetha speaking, we are visiting tomorrow morning with some clothes, blankets, and food for your boys.” An SOS message was hardly just sent! Our dear Swami always responds to a prayer, albeit in His own way.

On my leaving Rangia for Prasanthi Nilayam to join as faculty in 1979-80, the Lord Swami sent His emissary Col. Sukhvinder Singh of Patiala to take care of the boys. Each child, in course of time, excelled not only in school, but also in other activities like sports, painting, and poetry writing. One boy was even selected for the prestigious National Cadet Corps Parade in New Delhi on Republic Day. Two of them won prizes in All India Sports competitions, while another went on to be the first graduate of the village and also received the first prize for the best motivator for ‘Village Development Work’ in the country in October 2000. As for the small *Gokulam*, the cowshed of the *Ashram*, the first few cows had female calves as family. It is amazing how Bhagavan takes care of us constantly.

The *Ashram* would celebrate festivals like Guru Poornima, Lakshmi Poornima, Vijaya Dasami, Saraswati Puja, Diwali and, of course, Maha Shivarathri. On these occasions, the Rangia *Bhajan Mandali* (small Sai centre) alongwith the boys and workers of the *Ashram* would sing *Akhanda Bhajans* (non-stop *bhajans* for long hours). The calves were named Poornima, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Shyama, Sankari, all after the deities worshipped in these festivals. I was blessed to be present at the naming ceremonies of each of them who reminded me of the fortunate cows of Lord Krishna’s *Gokulam* at Brindavan, thousands of years ago. The same kind Lord has bestowed prosperity on this

humble establishment too, probably pleased with the willing and pure hearts who were serving there only for the joy of it.

The place has today grown into an institution, which takes care of 2,000 needy families, besides providing employment to 300 men and women. The able secretary guiding the orphanage is a humble instrument of the Lord for whom Swami’s words are His life-breadth. Bhagavan Baba, indubitably, is our only real Provider. And how many times have I experienced this in my life!

A Little Girl’s Surprise Gift

In one of our visits to Prasanthi Nilayam, my eldest daughter, Manisha, a teenager at the time, looked sullen one morning after *darshan*. Swami had blessed devotees with *sarees* and shirts that day. Manisha was not one of them for obvious reasons; she was too little to be draped in a *saree*, but she didn’t think so. She walked off the *darshan* ground feeling a bit unloved. She went home that day and sat in front of the altar next to my mother complaining that Swami ignored her altogether. My wise mother had words of consolation for her. “Swami responds to a heart that asks with faith. Ask Him for anything with all the faith in your heart.” Manisha hardly closed her eyes and prayed when she heard a knock on the door. Mr. Kutumba Rao, the in-charge of the *ashram* at the time, was at the entrance with a *saree* in hand. “Swami has sent this *saree* for Bardoloi’s daughter.” Manisha ran back to my mother, elated and shocked at the same time.

Why Fear When He is There, Everywhere

Often we do not realize that each of us is special to Bhagavan. Each prayer is heard and answered. He just times it to suit the need of the hour. He says, “Why fear when I am here?” ‘Fear’ means fear of anything, imaginary or real, danger, disaster, or death. “When” means “anytime, or all the time.” “I am here” means “I am everywhere, I AM IN YOU and not outside you, not separate from you, whether I am at Prashanthi Nilayam or at Brindavan or anywhere else.”

Swami spoke to my family and me one day in the winter of 1984. During the interview, Bhagavan noticed that my wife showed signs of anxiety of a mother like most mothers do. Swami placed the palms of His hands on her head and mine, and reassured us, “**Why fear when I am here? These four girls are my girls, not yours. I shall take care of them. Do not worry.**” My wife knew those words were meant for her. Our all-knowing Lord knows every passing thought of ours.

All of us have no reason to fear. For, we have the Lord in our midst. We have Him placed in our hearts. All we need to do is Love Him dearly. After all, we all belong to Him and are equally special in His eyes. And living this realization makes the whole world one big, sweet and loving family.

MOTHER SUPREME... MOTHER SO SWEET, SO DEAR

By Dr T. Ravi Kumar

Dr. T. Ravi Kumar joined the erstwhile Sri Sathya Sai College at Brindavan (Bangalore) as a student for his intermediate course in the year 1974. He continued this with his Bachelors in Science in the same college. After he completed his Masters in Science (Chemistry), he joined the Sri Sathya Sai College as a faculty member in 1981. Later, he was awarded Doctor of Philosophy in Chemistry from the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1990. Currently, he is a Reader in the Department of Chemistry in the Brindavan campus of the same university. Additionally, he is a talented speaker and a keen student of Sri Sathya Sai literature.

The saddest day and the happiest day in my life fell on the same day - September 15, 1963. I was only 4 ½ years old then, and my mother had passed away that day. In the evening, as her body was being taken away for cremation, my cousin, who was slightly older than me, whispered into my ears that my mother would be taken in a procession. That somehow made me a lot happier as I imagined that it would be like the temple procession. Every image that my little mind could evoke of that religious parade was one of joy and gaiety. But when my cousin said that "... she will not return" I was plunged in grief. All attempts to soothe me failed, and so I was taken across the street to my aunt's house to keep me distracted. This aunt of mine was a devotee of Swami, and so there was a nice photo of Baba in the front room of the house. Looking at it, I asked her who He was. And she told me: "This is God. Pray to Swami and He will protect you". Little did I realize then that the Divine mother's compassionate eyes had fallen on me, at a time when my physical mother's eyes had closed. And from that instant, I can say, my life has never been the same again.

It was in the year 1968 that my father was cured of cancer by Swami by just uttering "**Your cancer is cancelled**". Father lived for 38 years after that, and died of old age a couple of years ago! He was active till his last breath. My family and I had always thought that it was only in 1968, after this miraculous curing of my father's cancer, that we had the good fortune of being drawn to the lotus feet of Bhagavan Baba. But the sweet Lord was soon to remove our misconception! One day, when I had the blessing of speaking in His Presence, I mentioned about how my family and I had come under Swami's fold. But the all-knowing Lord corrected me by saying, "**Not 1968 - 1963**". Swami went on to mention "**Do you remember the day your mother died? Did you not ask your aunt, seeing My photo 'who is this, aunty?' From that day onwards, I have been looking after you**". And what an exciting journey it has been with Sai Maa to guide me! Swami has been a mother, nay much more than a mother to me!

Teenage Adventures

At the time it was made known that my father was suffering from cancer, our lives went through quite a few twists and turns. Since he was not expected to survive the cancer ailment, on returning to office after his trip to Puttaparthi, he found many of his colleagues, who were quite junior to him, had been promoted. This meant my father had to work extra hard to make up for lost time and opportunity.

At that time, I was studying in high school and fell into bad company. The school I studied in had the distinction of having three cinema theatres in front of it, and we – my friends and I - used to spend our afternoons in the cinema theatre watching movies and whiling away time. In fact, we would see as many movies as there were days in a week - we would even go for a morning show to make up for not seeing one on Sundays, which was a school holiday!

From ‘Good Boy’ to God’s Boy

One Sunday, my family and I went to Brindavan (Baba’s *ashram* in Bangalore) for Swami’s *darshan*, and Baba picked us for an interview. Now, normally everyone looks forward for this blessing. You only need to see the joy on the faces of the devotees thus selected to understand what it means to them.

However, as we went to the interview room, I was filled with mixed feelings. There was a slight panic somewhere within my heart along with the joy that we had secured the coveted interview. As Swami returned from the *darshan*, He passed us and patting me on my cheeks, said “**Good boy**”. Now, anyone who gets this remark, even once in his life, would feel that the purpose of life has been achieved, and would be excited and thrilled. But, believe me, it was nothing compared to the bliss I felt. The reason for this was two fold: on the one hand, Swami had ‘certified’ that I was a good boy and I could wear this on my sleeve. But more importantly, on the other hand, it was also a feeling of tremendous relief as it confirmed that even Swami was not aware of what I was up to!

However, the very moment this thought passed me, Swami looked at my father and enquired about the other friends who had accompanied him. On being told that they were on the grounds outside, Swami sent him to fetch them. He then turned towards me and with a sweet smile, again said, “**Good boy**”. I felt a glow within for a millisecond maybe, till this assertion became a question. “**Good boy?**” I tried to look as innocent as good boys do, but the questions followed: “**Where were you yesterday at 2.30 in the afternoon?**” Trying to look as pan-faced as I could, I answered confidently, “Swami, yesterday was Saturday. I must have been in the classroom...” Swami quipped back saying, “**That’s right, you should have been.... But where were you?**” (I realized that the questions were becoming tougher and decided to remain silent). Swami continued, “**Shall I tell you? You were sitting in the third row from the last in Ajanta theatre with your friends G and P on**

either side of you watching the film *Katti patang*” (a Hindi movie; the title means “a runaway kite”).

That was a precise description of my life till then! Swami’s voice trailed off, when from the corner of my eye I noticed that my father was coming with his friends. I shuddered realizing that it would be a red letter day in more than one way. Swami might choose to expose me within a second’s time and my father would punish me... my father strongly believed in the theory ‘do not spare the rod and spoil the child’. But what followed next, transformed me inside out! Instead of revealing it all to my father, Sai Maa, with the most loving smile, said, **“He is a good boy. I was advising him to keep good company”**.

I was moved beyond words can express. I asked myself, “Is there anyone in this world who can be and is so kind, in spite of knowing everything about you? Who could have loved me and helped as much, despite my many shortcomings?” I reasoned that Swami could have used this incident to demonstrate to my father and the others His omniscience, but chose to save me instead. From that moment, I decided to love this Mother with all my heart and serve Her lotus feet all my life!

This incident, truly, marked a new beginning in my life; I turned a new leaf. But what made it even better was when, after my schooling, Swami gave me the priceless privilege of being selected for the Sri Sathya Sai College for my intermediate class (XI and XII grade). This meant that I could enjoy Swami’s proximity, and could grow up in the Divine Presence. That was in the year 1974. But now, when I look back at the tapestry of my life, I can see how Swami has so intricately and lovingly woven it with threads of gold.

Growing Up, Literally, with the Lord

Being in the junior most class, and that too the shortest, did not do much to boost my self-confidence. I secretly yearned to add a couple of inches to my height. One morning, in my first year, standing in front of the porch in Brindavan, Swami said, “All short boys come to the front”. I was surprised to see that there were about 8 of us! Swami called the warden and instructed him to give us all a ‘medicine’ for growing tall! He handed over a box and instructed that it be given to us with hot milk in the morning everyday. The warden marched us to his office, and as an additional precaution noted down our heights. The next morning, when we were given the ‘medicine’ we were delighted to find that it was very tasty and sweet. How many times have we heard of a ‘sweet medicine’? But when the dispenser is the Divine Mother, how else would it be?

After fifteen days the ‘medicine’ was fully consumed. The warden went to Swami for the next ‘dose’. Swami just said, “There is no need. Measure their heights and see for yourself”. And of course all of us had grown taller. The evasive couple of inches had been added! Realization dawned on me that there was nothing too small to escape Swami’s attention, and nothing too big that He could not bless us with.

The Overpowering Sai Shakthi

It was a few days after the 70th birthday celebrations in the year 1995. I was sitting in the first line in the Bhajan Hall. Swami had called a group of devotees and was inside the interview room. I was reading an English translation of the Tamil classic *Periya Puranam* which my sister had presented to me a few days ago. It was the life story of Thirugnana Sambandar - a child devotee of Lord Shiva. In that particular story, one day, when the father wants to go to the temple tank for a bath and swim, the child, who was barely aged a couple of years, insists on accompanying him. A tantrum follows and the father is forced to take the child to the temple tank. The father goes for his bath, leaving the child on the tank bund. After sometime, the child starts crying.....

At this moment, Swami came out of the interview room and putting away the book I was reading, I looked at Him. Swami came into the Bhajan Hall, went along the aisle, and talked to a devotee at the end of the hall. When He returned, He looked into my eyes and asked, **“Tell me how many litres of milk do you need?”** The first thought that came into my mind was that Swami had warned me to reduce my weight six months before, and in fact, had even listed the items to be avoided! Had I failed in the attempt to diet? Swami repeated the same question thrice, and being unable to understand the purport of the question I remained silent. For sometime after Swami returned to the interview room, His question kept bothering me... ‘Why did He ask me this question?’, I pondered. When, even after intense effort, I could not understand what the question meant, I decided to shelve it for the present, consoling myself that Swami would reveal the true meaning at the appropriate time, and returned to reading the book from where I had left off:

‘..... the child starts crying. It was hungry. Seeing its plight, Shiva and Shakthi appear before the child and **the Divine Mother gives the child a golden bowl of milk.** When the father returned from the swim, seeing the drops of milk on the child's face, he questioned the child. The small child, who till then was barely lisping, sings out a poem describing the Divine couple.’

You can imagine my state. I put the book down, as tears of joy filled up my eyes. I was exhilarated when I realized that the very same Shiva and Shakthi had asked me the same question just a few moments ago! I also realized that it was at the same spot (in the Bhajan Hall), that in 1963, on the Guru Poonima Day, Swami had declared that His was the incarnation of both Shiva and Shakthi, and cured Himself of the paralytic stroke.

To be a child and to enjoy the loving care of the Divine Mother is the greatest of experiences. Once in Trayee Brindavan, Swami was consoling a new student who had just joined that day, and was crying due to home sickness. He said, **“I shall take very good care of you like your own mother... ask Ravi here, he knows”**. There is a famous quote which says, ‘the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world’ illustrating the supremacy of the mother's role in shaping the citizens of tomorrow. How lucky all of us are, as the ‘Hand that rules the world, rocks our cradle!’

H2H SPECIAL

ENTHRALLING REMINISCENCES OF THE DAYS OF YORE *From the mental diary of Mrs. Karunamba Ramamurthy - Part 4*

Extremely fortunate to come to His lotus feet when she was just a tiny girl in the 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". This is the second part of her wonderful reminiscences.

He Hears All Our Pleas

During the days of the Old Mandir, we were often blessed with the opportunity to offer *Pada Pooja* (worship the feet) to Swami. During one such occasion, Baba sang a song that went as “*Kamalamba! Please remove my mental worries!*” It happened that there was a devotee present there by name Kamalamba who, needless to say, was surprised to hear Swami singing the song that she used to sing many years before. She asked Him, “What is this, Swami? I was singing this song long back! How is it that you are singing it now?”

Swami replied, “You would sing this in your kitchen after cooking, when you felt tired and weary. Of course you only praised Me with this song, and now I am singing it for you to remember. How many years have passed by since those days?”

The lady narrated that she was married at the tender age of 11 years (child marriage) to her husband who was a tempestuous and angry man. They did not get on and he never helped her in her household chores. When he would leave the house, she would console herself through by worshipping the Mother Goddess. It was then that she used to sing this song - “Kamalamba, shower your Grace!” **When she calculated the time period, we were startled – this had occurred before the birth of Swami’s body!**

The Account of Earning *Punya*

On another occasion, two disciples of Swami Shivananda of Rishikesh, called Sadananda and Chidananda, came for Swami’s *darshan*. They would neither eat in the canteen nor anywhere outside. So, Swami called my mother and said, “You have to cook and serve them from tomorrow.”

There were no electric lights in the Old Mandir, we used only oil lamps. When they were about to take meals at night, they themselves used to light the lamps, and after partaking food, they would throw out the leaves and clean the floor neatly. My mother was perplexed at their behaviour, and said that she would like to do all this for them. However, the monks told her something

quite interesting: “If a daily labourer, who earns a hundred rupees a day, has his wages cut by five rupees, he feels very sorry. Whatever time he serves us in a day, we have to compensate him an equal amount of ‘punya’ (the fruits of virtue) from our earnings.”

“We try to earn 100% of our share of goodness out of our penance. If others serve us we will lose something. Even if we don’t give anything to them, it automatically accrues in their account. That’s why we will not allow anyone to serve us. This treasure, the fruit of penance, is very subtle and we don’t want to lose any by taking others’ services.”

In those days, when we were a handful, Baba used to tell us to carry out all kinds of service activities, even though some of us protested. There were many buildings coming up, and this involved the shifting of stones and sand, and the carrying of baskets of construction materials. Swami never said ‘no’ to anyone who wished to participate and told us that “Any type of service performed near Me will yield great *punya*. You don’t know how much virtuous effect or *punya* you have acquired - but I know. So, do as much as you can and ignore the small physical discomforts involved.”

Singing *Bhajans* – a Potent *Sadhana*

Once the Swamis, Sadananda and Chidananda, asked my mother how was it that there was such a relaxed atmosphere in the *ashram*? People wear good clothes, move about and talk freely; it appears that no one is performing any *sadhana* (spiritual practice). They were perplexed as they were used to practicing severe austerities in simple hermitages.

My mother answered them by saying that Swami taught His *ashramites* to perform *bhajans* every dawn and dusk daily by His side. Then, the monks went and asked Swami, “Why is it that You have not taught any *sadhana* and penance?”

Swami replied, “My devotees earned holy power in their past lives. When I incarnated due to their prayers, they reached Me and are staying here. For you, there is a lot of *sadhana* yet to be done. So, you carry on and do it.”

They were very happy and understood how *bhajan* singing is a way to reach God. Swami never told them to leave the path of their own *sadhana*.

He Bears the Brunt of Our Suffering

Swami had one day invited my daughter-in-law to come to Puttaparthi with her children. However, just before leaving for Puttaparthi, a dog bit my second son. His leg became infected and he was in great pain. Though he was under doctor’s treatment and was administered injections regularly, we all went to Puttaparthi. Swami was very happy at our arrival and welcomed us joyfully.

It was a very hot summer and I was worried where the children would play. My fears were confirmed when my grandson, Neelu, had his foot run over by

a lorry. His foot was severely injured, and one toe was separated from the others; it was bleeding profusely.

In those days (1950s), in Puttaparthi, there was a very small dispensary room with limited medicines. My elder son went and reported to Swami of this tragic incident. Swami immediately pulled back His sleeve to reveal His hand, and there he could see the impression of a lorry tyre! Not only that, there was profuse blood flowing from it!

We laid down our grandson in the veranda of Prof. Kasturi's house. Swami used to come and visit him every day and would ask Prof. Kasturi too about him. It took one month for the wound to heal completely, but even after that he was not able to walk without a limp. We were quite concerned about his condition, and our minds were full of questions. During one of His visits, Swami came, sat on the veranda and talked to our family. He said, "Do you all know why I have called you here? If this accident had happened at your place, what would you have done? The boy might have died there. I averted a worse situation. Who would have looked after you there?"

Then my elder son told Swami that even though we might be away, Swami could still look after us there. Swami replied, "It is not like that. Let all difficulties be experienced here in My presence. That is why I called you all here. Do you understand? If it happens in My presence, the impact will be less." We were overcome with His grace and marveled at His loving care for us.

Astounding Grace and Healing

At one period, smallpox struck all the three of my sons; boils sprouted all over their bodies, they vomited and the whole night was spent crying without sleep. I wrote a letter to my mother who was at Puttaparthi, to return home to help us in this hour of distress. She took the letter to Swami and said, "Swami, I will go to Bangalore. My daughter is unable to look after the children with this ailment. I will help them a little, by at least cooking for them." Swami asked my mother, what else would she do? She replied, "I'll pray to You, Swami."

"Why can't you pray here, instead of traveling so far? If you stay here I will look after them. Write My instructions to your daughter but don't go there." Then my mother posted the letter to me.

Amazingly, all the boils on their body suddenly subsided and vanished. Their eyes also were cleared. Their fevers abated and they began to regain their former health. Right from the time of Swami's instruction to my mother at Puttaparthi, my children in Bangalore were relieved of suffering. How powerful are Swami's command and word!

The Wonder of Sai *Prasadam*

My son, Sathish, had an injury on his leg and subsequently, a lump had developed. As I had said earlier, Swami had granted him rebirth when a lorry

had run over his foot. After this lump showed up, he started talking strangely and used to bite his teeth frequently. However, Swami avoided any question I put to Him about my son. Days passed, and suddenly the boy’s leg swelled up. I asked Swami what should be done. He said, “None of you should stay here in Puttaparthi; leave before evening.”

I silently acquiesced to Swami’s wish. A devotee called Ravindra from Kobugu in Mysore state offered to help us, saying “I have brought my car here. I can take your son and drop him at Chimpangi railway station where I have some other urgent work. From there all of you can go by train.”

We accepted his kind offer and reached Bangalore where we admitted him in a hospital. The leg was swollen like an elephant’s, and the doctors thought his illness was untreatable; they did not take as good care of him as they should have done, and believed that amputation was the only option.

At this time Baba visited Bangalore, and was staying at the residence of Mr. Shetty, an ardent devotee. When I heard this news, I went to Swami and told Him that the doctors had decided to amputate my child’s leg, and asked for His consent stating that otherwise he might turn mad or may even die. I told Him that I was being forced to take this decision.

Swami then said, “Some doctors behave very strangely; they make amputations too readily. Do not allow them to do this. I will give you *vibhuti* right now. Take this home and put in his mouth. That’s all - he will be cured.”

I gratefully accepted the *vibhuti* and did as He said. The very next day, all the fluid from his leg drained out, and he became normal. The doctors were shocked; they wondered how the legs suddenly looked healthy without even an operation! I told them how Swami’s *prasadam* had done the magic.

“Be like a child and Swami will look after you” - Baba

We went to Swami again and reported the improvement. He compassionately told us, “Do you know why I drove you out from Puttaparthi. If you had stayed there, one of you would definitely have died; it was bound to happen. Hoping that you would go home I ordered you to leave. Everything will be fine in future. All of you come to Puttaparthi for Dasara Celebrations.”

Truly speaking, my son would have possibly died, or become insane. Even after his recovery, the doctors advised us not to send him to school, as due to his mental impairment, the teachers may mistreat him, and that could make his condition worse.

When I came to Puttaparthi next time, I reported the doctors’ advice to Swami. And Baba told me not to worry. He asked me not to send him to school but let him live in Puttaparthi, and that He would look after him. From then onwards, he stayed at Puttaparthi for a long time. He had medical problems affecting his head and legs, and also suffered mental illness. The doctors would continue to drain pus from his body. One day, Swami wanted to see this

specimen. And after the Lord Swami saw it, he was completely alright - fully cured!

Is this not a wonder? Who else can do this? This is possible only for God. We have overcome many hurdles like this, with His grace alone. He guides us in the present and will always do so in the future. But, our mind should always be stable and steadily fixed on Him alone.

Always exhorting us not to worry, on one occasion, Swami said,

“I will remove all your problems. I have come down to earth only for this purpose. But if you are having more bad *karma*, I will leave some part of it for you, which will present some difficulties. Don't blame Me for that trouble. If you can cross over that *karma* peacefully, you will receive My full grace.

“How does a little child ask if he needs something? He cries and the mother looks after him. Be like a small and innocent kid and Swami will at once take care of you. You need not do any great deeds. Simply chanting God's name is the best *sadhana* for you.”

(To be continued)

THE INSCRUTABLE WILL OF THE COSMIC BEING – Part 1

A conversation with Mr. V. Srinivasan

Mr. V. Srinivasan is an electrical engineer and an eminent industrialist. He is a former National President of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and also a Senior Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (USA). Currently, he is the All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, as well as a Member of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust and Sri Sathya Sai Medical Trust.

The following is an excerpt of a conversation between Mr. V. Srinivasan and Prof. G. Venkataraman, former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University, held in the Radio Sai studio in 2002.

G. Venkataraman (GV): Sairam and thank you so much for sparing some of your valuable time. I know you are really very busy. But, you have so much to share with all of us, the very large number of Radio Sai listeners. One of the things that devotees usually like to hear is how did different people come to Swami. And in your case you have been with Swami for nearly four decades, am I right?

V. Srinivasan (VS): That is true.

GV: So, how did you come to Swami? Can you share with us the experience?

VS: I am a firm believer in the principle of cosmic timing. I believe that each one of us has a preordained moment for coming to Bhagavan, a moment willed and stipulated in the Divine Timetable, unknown to ourselves. In my case, the ‘moment’ came three decades ago, when a family member persuaded me to come and meet Bhagavan. And I was fortunate to see Swami in Madras (now Chennai) when He came there in 1970.

The First Enigmatic Encounter

I met Swami at the house of the late Mr. Tarapore, a great devotee of Bhagavan. I was audacious enough to ask Swami a few pointed questions, but Swami patiently replied to all my queries. And that, somehow, struck a chord in my heart, and marked the beginning of my journey to Him. In fact, within the next month, I came to Puttaparthi and there has been no turning back ever since.

The initial years with Swami were more of a ‘growing up’ experience. As happens with most of us, I came to Swami with a lot of ‘baggage’ - preconceived notions on what He is, what we are and how we should behave. But, over the years, under Swami’s merciful care and nurturing, I learnt that there was more to life than what was obvious. Slowly and steadily, the magnificence of Bhagavan’s mission began to unfold before my eyes.

Baba Enlightens about the Soul of the Business

GV: Would you say that being with Swami also affected your work style?

VS: Definitely. To start with, Swami's teachings had a tremendous impact on my work style. I had been in business for quite some time, and as you know, business is a domain where functioning with a scrupulous sense of values is not regarded as good business sense. However, at no point of time did Bhagavan ask me to give up my business. Instead, He always said, "Work is Worship. Duty is God." Gradually, I have stepped back as Bhagavan made it possible for me to do so. Being with Bhagavan, I gained a sense of values. I felt that I was not a part of the 'rat race'. I learnt, to some extent, the virtue of contentment. I realised that whatever happens is for the good.

Corporate governance invalidates today the long-prevailing conception, or rather misconception, that values and successful business do not go together. But the fact is Bhagavan gave 'horse sense' to the current codes of business well before they became accepted theories of conduct in business schools. Way back in the 1980's itself, Bhagavan gave a talk to leading industrialists in Chennai, on how businessmen should conduct themselves and the perils of business without ethics. It was one of those invaluable lessons on management. Bhagavan stressed, as He does even today, the importance of a good leader, as the core principle of management. Bhagavan further defined a good leader as one who 'leads by example' rather than giving long talks or trying to make others do what he wants.

All this gave me a firm belief that whatever Bhagavan has been enunciating was so relevant to every aspect of life as it exists in the world today, and as it will exist in the future. I realized that Bhagavan's teachings were optimal solutions for the conduct of government and the interpersonal relationship between individuals and races, and applied all the way from a single individual to the whole of humanity.

The Ecstasy of Lodging with the Lord in Kodai Kanal

GV: Now, slightly changing the subject. You have been with Swami to Kodai Kanal many times over the years. Can you share with us some wonderful glimpses for the benefit of people who have never been to Kodai Kanal but have heard a lot about it?

VS: Yes; if Bhagavan is a preceptor and a visionary, He is a wonderful companion as well. We had some unforgettable moments with this endearing aspect of Bhagavan whenever we were privileged to spend time with Him at Kodai Kanal.

The first trip with Swami to Kodai Kanal happened in 1981. And if there was something which one could be certain about Bhagavan, it was His unpredictability.

That year, Swami was in Ootacamund (Ooty) and I had gone with Him. My family, meanwhile, had gone to our little house in Kodai Kanal, a house which was about 100 years old, not very ornate, and with limited accommodation. So I called up my family in Kodai Kanal, telling them, “Look, Swami is in Ooty and I don’t think that He will come to Kodai Kanal. It is better that you wind up and come over here to Ooty.” Heeding my words, my family members set off from Kodai Kanal.

Suddenly, that evening, Bhagavan said, “We will go tomorrow to Kodai Kanal.”

You can well imagine my plight. In those days, one didn’t have all these kind of elaborate STD (phones), leave alone mobiles. We had to go through the old fashioned ‘trunk’ system and book a call. It was quite an exercise to get through on the telephone. But I finally managed to call my wife to tell her, “Swami is coming tomorrow”. She was incredulous. But that was Swami, springing surprises when one least expects them.

The next day, we started off. It took about 8 hours to travel from Ootacamund to Kodai Kanal – driving down to Coimbatore, getting across the plains and the steep climb to the Palani Hills. We were a small group of people – Dr. Bhagavantam, Col. Joga Rao, C. Srinivas, and one other person, with Bhagavan. I must emphasize that the house was really an antediluvian specimen with old bedrooms and bathrooms. But Swami spent ten days with us there with us, just like a family member! In the entire duration of His stay, a tiny gathering of barely 50 people would assemble for *bhajans* in the evening, which used to take place on the lawn outside. There was no bhajan hall or anything like that. But it was wonderful because Swami’s chair was placed against the Sun and during dusk it was a great sight. When the Sun, which was fiery red, was setting, it used to form an orb around Bhagavan’s hair such that it seemed the beautiful glow radiated actually from His hair. Those *darshans* of Bhagavan have remained etched in my memory.

Bhagavan would remark in those days, that a time would arrive when we will recognize Him from afar by His robe and His hair. And, verily, we can see that happening before us already.

Some of my cherished memories of the early Kodai trips were the bhajans we used to have by the fireplace.

GV: (chuckles)...You had a fireplace?

VS: Yes, we had a fireplace because it was an old house, so we had a wood log fire. Swami used to love to sit near this and at that time, the bhajan singers were just the family members, and we were not all that good. And the doors in the house would also squeak at that time. In fact, Swami would mischievously remark, “Not only the people, or the family of Srinivasan sing, even the doors here sing!” That was Swami’s sense of humour.

Kodai Kanal today is a mini-Prashanthi Nilayam visited by unceasing throngs of devotees whenever Swami comes to reside at Sai Shruthi. It is indeed difficult to imagine now the sort of priceless, intimate moments we had with the Avatar, moré three decades ago.

Bhagavan Commands...And the Lamé Walk!

GV: Now, talking of experiences you must share with us one or two more from your life.

VS: It was His supreme Love that drew us to Him, just as it attracts millions of people even today, like a Cosmic Magnet. One such glimpse of the Divine Love, I witnessed with my own eyes.

This happened in Prashanti Nilayam many years ago, in the ‘arch’ days (before the construction of the Sai Kulwant Hall). Bhagavan was walking amongst the people He has chosen for interview, and He came across a lady who was sitting with a fairly grown up child, about 10 years of age. This lady was sobbing inconsolably, for it turned out that the child was not able to walk.

I was standing a little distance away from Bhagavan. And He selected this lady to proceed for interview. But the lady just couldn’t get up along with her child, who did seem quite well-built.

As the lady struggled to get up, I thought I would rush forward to help; I was then very new into the Sai fold and was unaware of Swami’s ways. Even as I moved towards her, Swami firmly asked me to “get back!” Shocked, I moved away. Swami then turned to this child and said, “Walk!” Lo and behold! The child ‘walked’, commanded by the Lord, to the interview room. God alone knows, after how many years! The whole gathering burst into a loud applause, even as tears came from my eyes.

This is an experience which stands vividly even today in front of my eyes, an experience that I always value.

This incident also revealed to me that Bhagavan can do anything, at any point of time, simply by His *Sankalpa* (Will). It is just that sometimes, He chooses not to do it instantly because He knows that the ‘right’ time or the appropriate time, is yet to arrive. In this instance, Bhagavan did not wait for the regular interview. He did not even wait to materialize vibhuti, which He often does, to cure maladies on several occasions. He simply commanded the child, who implicitly obeyed!

It was indeed a very moving experience that taught me that Bhagavan chooses His own timetable, and everything is contained in the *Divya Sankalpa* (Divine Will), the Sai *Sankalpa*.

(To be continued)

SAI WORLD NEWS

NEW ZEALAND STEPS FORWARD AS NEW SAILAND

H2H's Kiwi team shares the story of New Zealand's first ever Walk for Values held in Auckland, on March 21, 2009

"Do not walk in front of Me, I may not follow you. Do not walk behind Me, I may not lead you. Walk beside Me and be My friend." - Sathya Sai Baba

This is exactly how all the people who took part in the New Zealand Sathya Sai Service Organisation's inaugural Walk for Values felt, as over 700 walked up Queen Street in Auckland, the largest city of New Zealand, on the morning of Saturday, March 21. All felt that Sai was there with them, and walking beside them, as they moved up the main street behind a rolling closure of three police motorcycles and one police car, with other policemen on points duty holding traffic back on side streets. According to a teacher from the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, "The presence of Sai was very evident on the Walk. He shone through the eyes of the preschool children and of all the participants, and when you had a doubt about something, or needed to know something, the answer was there in an instant. Only the Master Writer could script such a wonderful day".

Finally, the 18 months of planning and preparation had come to fruition, and to have so many participate in the very first Walk for Values was a wonderful show of support for the organisers, the walk itself and its aims.

Planning, Praying, and Preparation Comes to Fruition

Planning had begun back in August 2007 when the Central Council gave its approval for the Walk to happen. A team was assembled under the guidance of Mr. Selven Naidu, a member of the Central Council and tasks allocated. Contact was made with the Sai Organisation of Australia who had held their first Walk for Values in March 2007, based on the guidance the Aussies had received from the Sathya Sai School of Canada, where the idea had originated. Information was exchanged, and advice was given along with the required material to ensure that the basic theme was kept the same – a perfect example of just how the Sai devotees from around the world can come together with love and unity when there is a need.

Bro. Selven said, *"Walk for Values is simply another way of reaching out to the community in an effort to raise the level of awareness of who and what we really are. The walk is not just a human values campaign but most of all an invitation to one and all to commit to pledge to make a difference in society. This can be achieved by practicing at least one or more of the values of Love, Truth, Peace, Non-violence and Right Conduct. By this walk, we endeavour to*

create a greater awareness of human values and its need to be practiced in these current times”.

Our Team Leader even flew to Brisbane, Australia, in March 2008 to take part in the Australian Sai Organisation’s Walk for Values and to talk with their organizers, and learn from them what they did to overcome any obstacles, if any had occurred, and to pick up sample brochures and any other information that would help with our planned walk. From this visit came our own input into the Walk for Values logo, which had a distinct New Zealand flavour.

City Officials Impressed with Sai Organisation’s High Ideals

Much effort into the planning and preparation started with visits to the Auckland City Council offices, Auckland Police, different media outlets and the like. When working with local body representatives, things can move at a fairly slow pace and it wasn’t until late in the planning stages that the final walking route was agreed upon and permission by the Council given. This was understandable as there are many activities happening in the city in any given weekend, and the Council officers have to ensure that all aspects of any planned event are looked at thoroughly before granting permission.

But once they had met our team of dedicated Sai members who made the presentation, and heard and realised what our organisation stood for, all opposition fell away and permission was given to have the walk up the main thoroughfare of Auckland city – Queen Street. Once again the hidden hand of Sai was there. This route was accepted happily as it gave the walk maximum coverage on a Saturday morning when many citizens would be in the vicinity.

Over the months until the actual day of the walk, many other tasks had to be planned and completed. Health and Safety issues had to be addressed, banners designed and made, special caps and T-shirts priced and ordered, and the necessary equipment arranged for the venue at Myers Park where the walk ended. Our Sai youth were involved in this as well as the elders, and all worked together, harmoniously, to ensure that there were no hiccups on the day.

Sai Students Lead New Sailand’s Walk for Values

On the day itself, people began to gather at the start at 8 a.m. We had arranged a large bus to pick up the children, parents and teachers of our Sathya Sai Pre-school Rongomai, in South Auckland, who had agreed to lead the walk from the front. This was a wonderful gesture of support for the event, as none of the children or parents from our Sathya Sai Pre-school are Sai devotees, but the parents can see the benefits the teaching of the five human values in our school curriculum makes to their children by the way they behave at school and at home.

Swami has said: *“About Me, there is no need to speak; spread the message of the five values.”*

Some people had not registered before the day, so a stand had been set up for this to be done and also caps and T shirts were given out to those who had not ordered them earlier. On the Friday night at Sai House, a group of our teen youth had spent time blowing up the hundreds of balloons that had been printed with the five values on them and which were given out along the route during the walk.

At 10.15 a.m., a powerful and profound Maori prayer set the tone for the experience that was to follow. The Maori prayer translated into the following reflection:

"Thank You Swami for giving us
Your Love in our hearts,
Your peace in our souls.
and Your joy in our lives".

Once Sai guidance and blessing had been evoked, the ribbon was cut and New Sailand made history with its own Walk for Values led by the Pre-school children, parents and teachers.

"This walk will promote and celebrate the five human values which are inherent in all New Zealanders. It is in this spirit of celebration that we will draw attention to the values, towards all that is tolerant, caring and peaceful in society without seeking to promote any individual religion or philosophy. These are times of challenge for all New Zealanders. Economic changes and the increase in violent crime are confronting all of us. Now is the appropriate time for Kiwis to hear the message about the five human values and begin to understand the goodness they reveal, and this walk is an avenue for us to take His teachings to the community," opined Mr. Doug Saunders – Chairman, Central Council of Sai Organisation, NZ

Law and Love Lead the Walk for Values

The small contingent of police led the way with motorcycle outriders and one police car at the head. There was a buzz of excitement as the lead groups turned into Queen Street to head up to Myers Park, some 50 minutes walk away. Led by our fun ‘animals’ (Sai youth wing) handing out Values stickers and balloons to the crowds, there was an atmosphere of love and unity, and it was definitely a family affair as many of the walkers were accompanied by their young and not-so-young children.

"I am so glad we participated in this walk. The feeling of unity and togetherness that began to build before the day has burst out like a flower in the rays of the Sun as we came together at the beginning and welcomed some who joined us from the public at the side of the road. Even they could feel the warmth and joyfulness of the occasion and wanted to be a part of this, no matter who the organisers were". This is what David and Mary Wilson, two of the ‘Walk’ marshals on the day, have to share.

Many of public, who were viewing the walk from the footpaths, were taking photos and videos and were asking questions of our walkers about the purpose of the walk, who had organised it, and so on. Once they had been given the answers they congratulated our people, and some even joined the walk as they wholeheartedly agreed with the five human values we were promoting, and felt that this was an excellent values platform.

“My wife, my young son and I were at the Saturday morning markets early on the morning of the walk and noticed these people gathering with banners and balloons, and all in a very happy mood. I asked one of them what was happening and he told me about the Walk for Values, what the values were and why they felt the need to do the walk. I was impressed and asked if I and my family could join. We were welcomed with open arms and someone gave my young son a couple of balloons which made him extremely happy. We walked the whole distance and enjoyed the feeling of unity and love immensely, and I promised myself I would make a wholehearted effort to put into practice the value of Peace”.

- Young Kiwi who spontaneously joined the walk with his family.

Participants Enjoy Concluding Celebration

After approximately 50 minutes, the lead group led the rest off Queen Street into Myers Park, a lovely quiet oasis of grass and trees in the midst of high rise apartment blocks and offices. There, the children had a field day as there was a child’s play area with the latest climbing equipment for them to crawl all over.

The Sai youth team had already been up here early in the morning prior to the walk setting up the small stage, sound system and stands for handing out fruit and water to all.

The crowd spread out and sat down on the grass and under trees, as by now the Sun was out and the day was beginning to warm up. Bottles of water and fruit were given out as the ‘Sai-entertainment’ began with our Sai youth band singing a few beautiful songs about values and catching everybody’s attention.

Then, the MC introduced the first of the speakers, a young SSSE child who spoke beautifully about the values, and why we all should be following them. There were five young speakers from within our SSSE classes and all of them impressed with their confidence and clarity.

The next speaker was Ms. Ecie Hursthouse, the CEO of Amitabha Hospice, which does wonderful work within the community for terminally ill patients; spending time with them, talking to them, helping them with any problems and generally giving out a lot of love and compassion to those unfortunate people. The Sai Organisation in the Auckland area has a number of devotees involved in this programme, and it is a beautiful, caring and sharing activity which humbles those who are involved. Ecie spoke passionately about the need for all to abide by the five human values. She said:

“Walk for values was a wonderful celebration of what makes all people happy, the values that give all our lives meaning, success and joy. It was so well organised with such a broad collection of people: children, teens, university students, parents, singles and grandparents of all colours and faiths. Everyone was with big smiles while they walked together, then they clapped together to the live band music, and finally listened together to the excellent talks by the five children. I feel so privileged to be part of this wonderful event, and I hope I can come to many more in the future.”

Auckland Police Acknowledge the Worth of Walk for Values

Next to speak was Senior Police Sergeant, Rod Salt, the Auckland City Community Services Manager. Rod said, among other things, that he was pleased to see the similarities between the values promoted by the walk and the values upheld by the New Zealand Police. He also suggested that we, in the Sai Organisation, can work closely with the Police in some areas, and would like to be involved in the next Walk for Values if we hold one.

Richard Wallis, the Director of the ISSE of New Zealand, was the last speaker and spoke passionately and eloquently about need for all of us to incorporate the five human values into our everyday lives. He also mentioned how touched he was to see the large group of Sathya Sai Pre-school children, parents and teachers present, and how he could see that all of them enjoyed the day. As he finished his talk, the horn on the bus sounded and the 75 pre-school children, parents and teachers walked up the hill to board their vehicle.

Doug Saunders, the chairman of the Sathya Sai Organisation, proffered the vote of thanks to wind up what had been agreed by all, a wonderful day of sharing, caring, uniting and happiness, and this was finished off with a Maori prayer of thanks to our Dearest Lord, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Walk for Values Concludes with the Gift of Life for 300 patients

But, for the Sai Organisation, the day was not over yet! As a group of youth and elders got busy cleaning up the place, over 100 devotees headed off to the New Zealand Blood Bank to donate blood, and to the amazement of the blood bank, 100 units of blood was collected – enough to save the lives of 300 people!

Come One, Come All: Walk Promotes Unity in Diversity

The walk included Sai devotees from Auckland, Hamilton, and a few from Wellington, members of the Art of Living group, and members of the public. Other non Sai groups have now shown interest in joining the walk next year, and already approaches have been made to these groups and meetings arranged. Also, after looking at the reports and pictures, and the walk for values website of New Zealand, the Sai Youth of UK have made enquiries and shown keen interest to take this wave of Walk for Values to their country.

For us, the Sai devotees in New Zealand, it is really heartening to have over 700 people participate in the first Walk for Values in New Zealand, and we are waiting for the day when this island, literally and really, transforms into the New ‘Sailand’.

- H2H Kiwi Team

GET INSPIRED

ANASTASIAS – THE AWESOME TEACHER

Anastasias was Abbot (superior monk) of a Christian monastery in Egypt, way back in the 8th century. He was a man of prayer who was renowned for his spiritual guidance in his time; in fact, so good were his virtues that he is remembered even to the present day. The monastery prospered under him as a religious centre of learning, and it contained a large collection of books, one among them being a rare volume, worth a great deal of money.

One day, a visiting monk happened to visit this library and chanced upon this precious book. He was a holy man, more in dress rather than in action, and despite his vow of poverty succumbed to the temptation of riches and walked away quietly from the monastery with that valuable work. The theft was discovered the same day, and it was not hard to guess who the culprit might be, as no one else had visited or left that day. But the old and wise Anastasias refused to send anyone after the monk, even though his disciples were ready to go out in hot pursuit. Instead, he explained to them the following,

“You see my dears, if we make bold to catch up with him and gently persuade him to admit to his crime, he may begin weaving all sorts of lies. Then, where will he be? – in a worse state of sin than before! Let’s leave this incident to God’s Will – I am sure that His angels will guide the poor monk to come back to his senses and keep this book safe from harm.”

Of course, the sagacious Anastasias was right, but how this happened is really interesting.

The monk, meanwhile, was trying to sell the book in a nearby bustling town, and eventually found a buyer, a rich merchant, who asked him to leave the book with him for a day so that he could get it evaluated.

When the monk had gone, the man hastened to the monastery and showed the book to Anastasias, who neither withheld his kind advice to any one, nor countenanced any subject outside his purview. The Abbot recognized the book instantly, but was calm; he did not utter a word.

“A monk wants to sell it to me,” said the trader. “He’s asking for a gold sovereign. You are knowledgeable about books. Is this book worth that much?”

“It’s worth much, much more than a sovereign,” said the Abbot. “It’s a valuable book.” And he let the merchant go a happier man.

The man went back to his town, relishing that the book would soon be his and no one less that Abbot Anastasias had recommended it. The next day, when the monk returned, he informed him that he would like to buy the book and

was prepared to pay the asked price. He added that he had appraised the value of the book.

The monk was overjoyed. “Whom did you show it to?” he asked.

“Anastasias, the Abbot.”

The customer now turned pale. “And what did he say?”

“He said the book was worth a sovereign.”

“And what else?”

“Nothing.”

The monk was shocked; he felt giddy. He looked around to check if this was a trap and if he was about to be seized. But it was the same sleepy room in this trader’s house. He realized that the Abbot had refused to reclaim his lost treasure so that he, the thief, would not get into trouble. He was stunned...nobody had ever shown him such love...nobody had ever behaved so nobly towards him.

“I’ve ch-ch-changed my mind, I d-d-don’t want to sell it,” he stuttered, and took the precious book from the perplexed merchant. “I’ll give you two sovereigns... well, three then,” the bewildered merchant persisted.

But the monk’s senses had become dumb; the inner turmoil was too loud for him to hear any noise outside. He just walked away. He felt God Himself had weaved this incident to teach him a big lesson. He realized that Anastasias was God’s instrument, and now he had to meet him and ask for his compassionate forgiveness - even if it meant being punished or thrown out of the order. But somehow, he doubted if the holy Abbot would do such a thing to him.

He went directly to the monastery and handed the book to the Abbot, his eyes brimming with tears.

“Keep it,” said Anastasias. “When I learnt you had borrowed it, I decided to give it to you.”

“Please take it back,” stammered and pleaded the monk, “but let me stay here and learn God’s wisdom from you.”

Anastasias granted him his wish. The transformed monk spent the rest of his years in the monastery, modeling his life after that of the saintly Anastasias. And Anastasias – he wasn’t too bothered about that book, or any other books for that matter. His wealth lay in the souls under his care. He specially valued the soul of that transformed prodigal son, who returned to God’s ways so sincerely, and who had consecrated his life anew to holiness. And he decided to leave the costly book in a pride of place in the library...just in case.

LOVING OUR 'LIVING GODS'

The air conditioning in the flight was a little too strong for Surya's comfort. But, it was just a matter of a couple of hours before he would reach his hometown. He couldn't wait to meet his friends after so many years. He had already arranged for a small party later that night. His secretary had called the best hotel in town, fabulous food was ordered and the tables were to be adorned with choicest flowers. After all, Surya had never settled for anything mediocre in his life. He was a successful investment banker working in one of the country's leading banks. He drew a salary that would exceed the sum of all his friends' earnings. In short, he was proud of his perfect enviable life.

Gowri could not contain her happiness. Her son was returning after three long years. She had spent sleepless nights after he called to tell her about his trip home. She had prepared his favourite food. Everything was planned to suit his taste. The house was cleaned, the garden was manicured and even the dogs were given a wash. She had so much to tell him. After her husband passed away, she had been left alone. But now, her son was coming to be with her. He had promised to stay for a week. She was so excited!

The doorbell was music to her ears. She ran to the door and there he was standing tall with his face shining against the twilight. "Hello mother! How are you?" said Surya smiling at her.

Over the course of the conversation, however, Gowri's heart sank. "I knew you would be upset, mother! That's why I didn't tell you before. I have to leave in two days. Anyway, I will probably try to make another trip in six months. I will still be calling you once a week, mother," said Surya trying hard to sound reassuring. But Gowri could not hide her tears. "You've come all this way just to see your friends. And you're leaving me just as alone as ever," she cried as she ran upstairs to shut herself away in her room. But Surya was unmoved and cold hearted. He was in a hurry. It was getting late for his dinner meeting with his buddies. He quickly collected his things, took a shower and left with his friends.

Loneliness wasn't new to Gowri. But, today she was heartbroken too. She gave away all the dinner she had painstakingly prepared for her beloved son. She was not hungry anymore. Even her dogs, Ramu and Moti were surprisingly quiet today. "Maybe, they understand me better than my own son!" she murmured and switched off the lights for the day.

On his way to the hotel, Surya wondered why his mother had to blow this whole thing out of proportion. He was tired from the long journey and had not seen his friends in years. After all, didn't he deserve the long awaited break from work? Anyway, he would try to talk to her tomorrow morning, he thought. He was trying to have a great time with his friends. But, felt disconnected. "Maybe I was a little tough on her" he said to himself.

He decided to send a flower basket to his mother to pacify her, and in return, feel less guilty. On seeing a florist, he asked for a bouquet to be sent to his mother. Just as the florist was about to start packing his flowers, a young man rushed to him and said, "If you don't mind, can I get my bouquet done before you? I am in a great hurry! The flowers are for my mother and she is waiting for me." While the florist was packing the man's flowers, Surya was curious and asked him, "Sorry, but I couldn't resist. What's the occasion? Is it your mom's birthday today?"

"No brother, today is the day she made a permanent place for herself in our hearts. Today is her death anniversary!" he answered unwaveringly. Surya was left speechless. Here was a man rushing flowers to his dead mother, and here was he who had left his loving mother alone. The simple and heartfelt love for his mother was conspicuous by its absence in his life. Surya was about to leave for his home when he heard the man's fading voice, "Thanks a lot brother! I am very grateful to you! Sairam!"

The bystander's unflinching love for his mother had touched a cord in Surya's heart. He had, in an instant, realized how some unforeseen divine power may have been at play here, for how else could he explain the co-incidence of him meeting someone like that in today's age! Without wasting any further time, he took the bouquet and went straight to see his mother. The mother, whose love had been his bastion during his struggling days; the mother who had borne the brunt of his swelling ego and confidence, and countered it with more love for him; the mother, who had waited all these years, for her son to come back home. And what a homecoming it was.

Time and again, Bhagavan Baba has impressed upon all of us the importance of loving and respecting one's mother. The mother, who gives us life and selflessly takes care of our every need as a child, has to be worshipped as nothing less than a Living God. It, truly, is in loving that we receive, as there is no other way to express gratitude to our mothers for their unbridled, fathomless love for us, than by loving them back in return.

“AMMA”

- A Musical Dance Drama

“Mother and Motherland are greater than the highest heavens,” said Lord Rama in the Treta Yuga, and now, the same Sai Rama reiterates this by saying “The Mother is your living God... Try to win the wealth of your mother’s grace, only then your life will be sanctified.” In this month of May, when we celebrate the memory of the Mother of the Avatar of this age, Mother Eswaramma, here is the script of a beautiful play “Amma” enacted in front of Bhagavan Baba by the Bal Vikas children of Medak District, Andhra Pradesh on July 11, 2007.

It begins with a touching scene where a poor devotee of Lord Venkateshwara, Venkanna, is searching for medical help for his mother, the play then centers on Ram, a busy modern youth who has no time for his devoted Mother Parvatamma. The characters depict the two contrasting outlooks of the youngsters, which is a reflection of our modern society, and concludes with a eulogy of Motherly love.

Characters:

Hospital boy

Tirupati Venkanna - Illiterate but devoted son

Tirupati Gangamma - Venkanna’s mother

Ram - busy modern youth

Ram’s mother

Srinivas - Ram’s boss

Scene 1

Hospital boy (HB): Oh! Disgusting! What are you murmuring? This is a hospital! Keep quiet!

Venkanna (Ven): What! Is it unpleasant to utter God’s Name? My mother Tirupati Gangamma asked me to repeat the name of God always. He will protect us from all difficulties.

HB: What is your name?

Ven: Triupati Venkanna.

HB: I am not asking the name of the Lord of Seven Hills! Tell me your name.

Ven: That is a long story.

HB: What? A long story for your short name?

Ven: Yes! My mother is a great devotee of Balaji. Every year she used to go on pilgrimage to the Lord of Seven Hills. She was trekking the whole distance barefoot to have a darshan of the Lord. However one year, she came to the holy shrine but not on foot.

HB: Why?

Ven: She was very upset with the Lord. She prayed: "Oh Lord! You are on top of the hill enjoying the daily processions and celebrations. You don't care for me. If you are really God, please bless me with a child." As a protest, that particular year she did not take the trekking route. You see, the Lord is so compassionate. With His blessings, I was born. I was lovingly named as Tirupathi Vankanna. That is the story behind my baptism.

HB: OK. Go and wait inside, the eye doctor will come to check your eyes.

Ven: No, it is not for me but for my mother. She has cataractS.

HB: Is it so? Then deposit 10,000 Rupees at the counter and bring the receipt. She will be operated upon today itself.

Ven: What! Ten thousand rupees!

HB: Yes! An operation is not a joke. We use German equipment and medicines imported from Japan. The operation will be done in an air conditioned Operation Theater.

Ven: Sir, I am a poor man and cannot pay ten thousand rupees. Please request the doctor to be considerate to us and reduce the fees.

HB: Don't teach us compassion and generosity. At best we can reduce by a thousand rupees.

Ven: Sir, sir, please be kind to us. My mother is my god. If she cannot regain sight, what is the use of my existence? I can pay a thousand rupees. Please get her operated. I will be indebted to you.

HB: What! One thousand rupees! You see, you will not be allowed even to step into the operation theatre for that amount. Get out. How dare you come to beg for an operation?

Ven: Oh! Mother why of all the world you chose to become *my* mother - who is incapable of providing even essential health care to you. Oh Lord of Lords, Venkanna! Please help my mother get back her sight.

A voice from behind-

Brother! Don't worry. The Lord will surely listen to your prayer. Your mother will surely get back her sight.

Ven: How! I don’t have ten thousand rupees.

Stranger: Don’t worry. Even without a single penny, your mother can get operated. Can the Lord be a mute witness to the pangs of His ardent devotee like you?

Ven: Brother! What am I hearing? A free operation! Can I believe what you are saying?

Stranger: Yes! It is true.

Ven: Brother, who are you? Are you an angel?

Stranger: The all-merciful Lord Venkanna has come down to earth. In place of conch, lotus, mace and discus - He now carries *Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi* and *Prema* - Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love. The crown of Lord Venkanna is replaced by a crown of dark hair. In place of gold ornaments the present form is wearing the ochre robe. He adorns an indelible smile. We are the angels of that Lord in human form.

Ven: Is it so? Has the Lord incarnated in human form? Where is He Sir?

Stranger: He is Sathya Sai Baba. His abode is in Puttaparthi. He runs Super Specialty Hospitals in Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh and in Bangalore in the State of Karnataka. He is Compassion Incarnate and the patients are treated there without any fees. Even diet is provided to the patients without any charge. In fact there is no bill counter in the Hospital. Get your mother treated there by specialist doctors. She will definitely regain her sight.

Scene 2

Ram: Mummy, Mummy!

Mother: When did you come Ram?

Ram: Ten minutes back. First I went home to see you. You were not there. What are you doing here Mummy?

Mother: Ram why don’t you call me mother? What is this mummy? It reminds me of the Egyptian mummies.

Ram: If you cannot understand modern life, what can I do. But why are you here?

Mother: You see those lovely children playing there. I was engrossed in watching them. Let us go home.

Ram: Be quick. I have no time. I have so many urgent engagements.

Mother: Dear, don't you usually stay for at least four days at home?

Ram: Oh no! I have no time even to stay for 4 minutes. Back in Hyderabad I earn 4 lakh rupees in 4 minutes.

Mother: Don't you feel the mother's longing to be with her son for a couple of days?

Ram: Oh mummy! You have seen me here for 25 years. Why this attachment?

Mother: If you cannot stay for 4 minutes even, why at all you have come here?

Ram: It is to repay your debt.

Mother: What debt?

Ram: That you incurred on my upbringing. I calculated to the last pie. It has come to 3,30,000 rupees. Here is this cheque.

Mother: So nice. When did you start computing parental love in terms of money? Have you worked it all out meticulously without any omissions?

Ram: I haven't left out anything.

Mother: Don't think otherwise. What is the rent you worked out for your cozy stay for nine months in the mother's womb and for the breast-feeding for the initial 3 years? As a mother, I attended your every single need. What is the fee for that? While you were sick, I spent anxious and sleepless nights praying for your speedy recovery. Can you calculate this in monetary terms? As a mother, I showered my love and affection on you. Have you included them in your payments?

Ram: Sorry mummy, these aspects were not included. Ok! Let me add a lump sum of 3 more lakh rupees for all these. Have another cheque. Are you happy now?

Mother: Dear! With this money, you believe you have cleared your indebtedness to your parents?

Ram: Yes, totally and completely.

Mother: You are right. You don't have any value for the living; why should I have any value for these lifeless papers.

Ram: Mummy, mummy don't tear them! These are cheques worth more than 6 lakhs! Oh! Why did you tear them?

Mother: I am not educated like you. How can I understand the value of these papers? But I can see that lifeless paper is worth more to you than human feelings.

Ram: It seems with age you have become senile.

Mother: Yes, dear. The moment you worked out the love and affection of your parents in terms of money, I lost my balance of mind. Now you can go happily... Oh, Lord Ram, kindness incarnate; pardon my son for his intemperate behavior and for the disrespect shown to his mother. Please make him realize the sacredness of mother's love.

Scene 3

Venkanna enters: Mother!

Mother: Who is there? Oh Venkanna! I thought it was my son Ram calling me.

Ven: I too am your son. Why not? I love you dearly.

Mother: I wish. But how can you be my son without being born to me.

Ven: Why? Though not by birth, but by my love and affection towards you I can be your son.

Mother: Venkanna you are right. With your selfless love and affection truly you are more than my son.

Ven: Please come to our house. I will take care of you.

Mother: Venkanna! How did this thought of caring for me come to your mind?

Ven: My mother used to narrate the epics Ramayana and Bhagawata, in my childhood. She used to tell the stories of Shravan Kumar and Pundarika and their devotion to their parents. She always impressed upon me to take care of the elderly and treat them as your own parents.

Mother: I now realize that if I would have narrated such stories to my son Ram in his childhood, he too would have imbibed such noble qualities like you.

Ven: Don't be disheartened. Pray to Bhagavan Sathya Sai Baba. Your son will surely return to you with love.

Mother: Have you seen Baba?

Ven: Yes! Not only did I have His Darshan, I could also listen to His nectarine discourses.

Mother: What did Baba say?

Ven: Swami tells, “Mother is the first God. He showers the love of thousand mothers on His devotees.”

Mother: Venkanna, you are a true devotee of Baba. How may educated youth have such a kind heart like you?

Ven: Mother, let us go home.

Scene 4

Office scene

Ram: Good morning Sir.

Officer: Good morning, please be seated.

Ram: Sir, there is no time to sit. This contract is worth lakhs of Rupees. I have prepared all papers and rates have been quoted considering all aspects. Please sign it.

Officer: Ok! Keep the file.

Ram: Sir, it is very urgent. This is to be posted with in an hour.

Officer: What do you mean? Am I not to go through the documents before signing? I will thoroughly study the pros and cons of the deal before signing. You can go.

Ram: I am working here for 2 years. Never did you doubt my ability. It seems you are suspecting me.

Officer: Yes.

Ram: Do you doubt my integrity?

Officer: Why not? You are not truth personified!

Ram: Oh God! All these years of dedicated service of mine has gone to waste.

Officer: You have been paid for that.

Ram: Please sir, don’t insult me that way.

Officer: Are you hurt?

Ram: Yes, I am really hurt. I served the company with such dedication as I serve my mother.

Officer: Is it so? One who cannot love his mother, how can he love his company?

Ram: Sir, what are you referring to?

Officer: Don't you know that I am always concerned about the welfare of my employees and their families?

Ram: I am sorry sir.

Officer: Ram! When you were toiling day and night in the office for the betterment of the company, I was proud that I got a manager with integrity and sincerity. But I was disappointed to hear that you do not consider the mother's affection as something sacred but stooped to the level of returning your mother's love in the form of money. Ram! You were upset by my just saying that you got paid for your work. Then can you realize the agony of your mother when you tried to return her love and affection in the form of money?

Ram: This thought never occurred to me sir.

Officer: Now ponder over this: You are born in a land that gave the world the sacred Vedas which declare mother as God (*matru devo bhava*). You are brought up in a land which was ruled by compassionate and virtuous Lord Rama, you studied in a land that give birth to Mahatma Gandhi, you are living in the times when the Lord himself has incarnated as Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Still if you cannot love your mother, what is the use of such a life?

Ram: Sorry sir, I committed an unpardonable sin.

Officer: Ram! It is not your fault. It is the fault of the system, which fails to grasp the importance of education for higher goals. We consider education merely as a means of earning our livelihood. Frankly, I am blessed to be a student of the educational institutes run by Sathya Sai Baba, which produce good citizens. Baba says that God resides in every home in the form of our mother. I take care of my mother as an eyelid protects the eye.

Ram: Now, I am able to understand the value of the mother.

Officer: To respect your mother means to live in accordance with her wishes. Bhagavan Baba showed it by example. When Mother Easwaramma asked Bhagavan for a school in Puttaparthi, He set up a University. When she requested for a well to provide water for the villagers, He undertook several projects to provide water to thousands of villagers including the inhabitants of the metropolitan city of Chennai. When His mother requested for a dispensary, Swami set up Super Specialty Hospitals of international repute, one at Puttaparthi and the other at Bangalore. See how much of importance

was given to the wishes of Mother Easwamma! We have to learn how to respect the mother from Bhagavan’s life.

Ram: Sir, I committed a sin by neglecting and insulting my mother. I will immediately go to my mother and beg her pardon.

Officer: Ram! I know you are honest and truthful. I remember my mother saying, “I don’t mind if you don’t possess cars and mansions, money and authority, but I will be hurt if there is dearth of love and affection in you. Now onwards develop love and respect for others.

Ram: Sir, you have opened my eyes.

Officer: Loads of money cannot give your mother the joy and happiness she otherwise derives from your love and affection. Let me show it to you.

Scene 5

Ram’s residence

Officer: Is this Parvatamma’s residence?

Parvatamma: Yes, I am Parvatamma.

Officer: Are you Ram’s mother?

Parvatamma: Yes. Who are you Sir? Is there any problem with Ram?

Officer: Nothing happened to him. He is perfectly alright. I am the chief of the company where your son Ram works.

Parvatamma: Please be seated Sir.

Officer: No, I have not come for sitting. I am very much pained to say that the integrity of your son is in doubt and as such I have decided to dismiss him from service.

Parvatamma: How dare you say so Sir? He is as pure as a crystal. His integrity is beyond doubt. I am his mother. I know him better than anyone else.

Officer: All mothers say the same thing about their children.

Parvatamma: Integrity and honesty is in our blood.

Officer: If he is so good how can he insult his mother?

Parvatamma: It might have happened on the spur of the moment. Out of childish pranks, the child may punch his mother but that doesn’t mean that he

dislikes the mother. Please don’t doubt his honesty and sincerity. He served your company with total dedication. I have full faith in my son. He will surely realize his mistake and return to me. But, these are family matters. I don’t understand why you are poking your nose into the affairs between a mother and her child. If you remove him from your company, I bet he will surely get a better job.

Officer: I salute you for the motherly love towards your prodigal son.

Ram Enters

Ram: Mother! Mother! Please forgive me!

Officer: Ram! Have you understood the mother’s love for her son?

Ram: Mother, he is our company manager Srinivas. He made me realize my mistake.

Officer: Madam! Pardon me for speaking harshly with you. I wanted to bring home to Ram what a mother’s love is.

Parvatamma: I am glad, you brought my son back home. I can never forget your help.

Venkanna: Mother you see your deep prayer to Lord Sai has brought back your son. Our Lord is so compassionate. He made His devotee an instrument to make a disobedient son realize the significance of motherly love.

Parvatamma: Ram, though Venkanna is not my son by birth, he took care of me as his own mother and helped in forgetting the pangs of your separation. I am indebted to him.

Officer: Ram learn from Venkanna’s example. Let your love flow in all directions. Be devoted to your mother and propagate motherly love. That is the real service you can render to the society.

Ram: I shall surely follow your advice. Mother! Come with me.

Mother: Let us first go to Prashanthi Nilayam to seek the blessings of our benevolent Lord Sri Sathya Sai Baba who was instrumental in dispelling the dark clouds from our lives. Let us prostrate before the Lord and take a vow to spread the light of love to every home.

- From the original Telugu script by Mr. M. S. Prakash Rao

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI FAITH QUIZ ON SACRED MOTHERS AND MOTHERHOOD

On many occasions, Bhagavan Baba has begun His divine Discourse with this sweet poem (in Telugu):

*More fragrant than the sweet-smelling flowers
Like the Jasmine and the Champak,
Softer than the cheese and the butter,
More beautiful than eye of the peacock,
More pleasant than the moonlight,
Is the love of the mother!*

The Mother, Baba says, is every individual’s Living God. In this month of May, when we reverentially remember Eswaramma, the Divine Mother of Bhagavan Baba, let us turn a few pages of history, through this quiz, and relish the greatness of Divine Mothers and their exemplary Motherhood.

1. During a Divine Discourse in 1994, Bhagavan Baba shared with us the impact that Mother Mary’s teaching had on her divine Son Jesus: “Jesus exemplified the spirit of social service. The inspiration for this came from his Mother Mary. From his childhood, Mary taught him such good qualities as truth, kindness, compassion and justice.

In his twelfth year, Jesus and his parents went to Jerusalem for a festival. In the crowds, the parents lost trace of Jesus and searched for him everywhere. Not finding him anywhere, Mary sat under a tree and prayed to God to come to her help.”

Much to her relief, when Mother Mary found Jesus, what teaching of hers had saved Jesus?

- A. Prayers are our only resort
- B. God is everything
- C. Being courageous will always keep us safe
- D. There is a lot of power in a Mother’s Love

2. In the ancient Indian epic, Mahabharatha, this is what Bhishma says on motherhood: “The mother is the panacea for all kinds of calamities. The existence of the mother invests one with protection; the reverse deprives one of all protection. The man who, though divested of prosperity enters his

house, uttering the words, ‘O mother!’ has not to indulge in grief. Nor will decrepitude ever assail him. A person whose mother exists, even if he happens to be one who possesses sons and grandsons, and is probably hundred years old, in the eyes of his mother he looks like a child of two years of age.”

According to Bhishma in Mahabharata, what assurance does the offspring have from having a mother?

- A. Constant guidance
- B. Will always be protected
- C. Will never be sorrowful
- D. Will never make mistakes

3. Mata Tripta, is the mother of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak. Of the many prophets who have walked the earth, many of their mothers were unable to celebrate in the joy of rearing such wondrous offspring. In contrast to all of these examples, Mata Tripta was happy and peaceful throughout her pregnancy, meditating constantly on God's name. On giving birth to Guru Nanak Dev Ji, she was blessed with all the joys of motherhood as she raised him and cherished him.

What was Mata Tripta’s reaction when, instead of using the money for family, her son Guru Nanak Dev Ji used the money his father gave to buy food for the starving monks he met on the way?

- A. She was furious!
- B. She was sorrow filled for months!
- C. She realized the greatness of her son’s action
- D. She gave up her worldly life thereafter

4. According to Jainism, a man can attain Godhood by his own superb spiritual efforts. This fact also applies for Mahavir. He was born at the home of King Siddharth. His mother’s name was Trishala.

When Queen Trishala was expecting the baby, she had several sequential dreams of a white elephant, a white bull, a lion, the goddess Sri, a garland, the Moon, the Sun, a large flag, a vase, a lake, the milk ocean, a celestial abode, a heap of jewels, and a fire.

After sharing these auspicious dreams with her husband, what was the interpretation given by the scholars of Queen Trishala’s dreams?

- A. He will be full of virtues
- B. He will be a powerful preacher
- C. He will never abandon his mother
- D. He will become a monk.

5. Queen Maya and King Suddhodhana did not have children for twenty years into their marriage. One day however, Queen Maya has a dream, in which she sees a magnificent white elephant, which, by striking her right side with its trunk, is able to enter her womb, and she became pregnant. According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha-to-be was residing as a Bodhisattva in the Tusita heaven, and decided to take the shape of a white elephant to be reborn, for the last time, on Earth.

How long did Queen Maya live to be fortunate enough to see the world renowned Buddha's greatness?

- A. Until Buddha got married.
- B. She died at the age of 74 years.
- C. She passed away seven days after his birth.
- D. Until He left the palace in search of Nirvana.

6. Legend has it that before the birth of Zarathustra, the magicians and wicked people knew that a person, who would teach the people the true worship of Ahura Mazda, was to be born to Dughdova. They wanted to kill her so that the people would not turn to Zarathustra for help from their wickedness, but she was saved from them.

In similarity to Bhagavan Baba's Divine Mother Easwaramma, what Divine intervention played the role in the life of mother Dughdova before she conceived Zoroaster?

- A. Many strange sounds were heard one night
- B. Dughdova's husband had the same dream for seven nights
- C. Some angels left a note by Dughdova's bedside
- D. Dughdova was visited by a shaft of light

7. "There is one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet," is one of the five pillars of Islam, the cornerstones of the faith. Islam accepts the existence of numerous prophets throughout history, but Mohammed is accepted as both the greatest of the prophets and the last.

Prophet Muhammad's mother's name was Amina. She was good, pretty and pure, and Allah, the one god, had chosen her to be Muhammad's mother. The happy news was proclaimed far and wide, in the heavens and on Earth.

When an angel came in Amina's dream, and told her she will give birth to a divine soul, and she should place him under Allah's protection, what else did the angel ask her to do?

- A. “You must call him Muhammad”
- B. “You must give him up for adoption”
- C. “You must give a lot of charity to earn Allah’s Grace”
- D. “You should accompany him on all of Allah’s missions for him”

8. In a Divine Discourse in 2000, extolling the impact of a noble mother’s thoughts on children, Bhagavan Baba narrated Gandhiji’s story: “Putlibai, the mother of Mahatma Gandhi, spent her life in the contemplation of God. She used to observe a vow wherein she would not partake of food unless she heard the singing of cuckoo. One day it so happened that the song of cuckoo was not heard. Gandhi, who was a small boy then, could not bear to see his mother fasting for a long time. He went behind the house and mimicked the singing of cuckoo.”

What did Putlibai do when she found out that her son had made the sound of the cuckoo?

- A. She laughed at his prank.
- B. She gave up the habit of waiting for the cuckoo’s call.
- C. She felt very sad that her son was uttering a lie.
- D. She complimented him on his cleverness.

9. The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and embody the core of his teaching. The values they express are as true today as they have ever been. Mother Teresa offers perhaps the best living example of the way in which the Beatitudes can be lived. She followed the ideals of Jesus: Blessed are those who are merciful; Blessed are those who are pure in spirit; Blessed are those who are pure in heart; Blessed are those who make peace; Blessed are those who mourn.

Mother Teresa, being endowed with the spirit of God and attitude of prayer, was spiritually driven by the beatitudes. And only a person whose life is deeply rooted in God and His teachings can lead a life of Beatitudes. To lead a life of the Beatitudes, Mother Teresa consecrated her life to God and humanity embracing three religious vows – Chastity, Poverty and

-
- A. Sacrifice
 - B. Obedience
 - C. Humility
 - D. Gratitude

10. From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’í’s have learnt a lot on motherhood: “Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort

in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart...” [page 124-125]

According to Abdu’l-Bahá, what are mothers also considered as?

- A. The Guiding Posts in life
- B. The First Educators
- C. Pillars of Strength
- D. Beacons of Light

ANSWERS:

1B. God is everything.

Swami continued: “At that moment, a thought flashed in her mind that Jesus was perhaps in a nearby temple. And Jesus was there sitting in a corner of the temple and listening to the words of the priest. Mary affectionately rushed towards him and embraced him. ‘Child, what agony I went through on your account,’ she said.

Jesus told her: ‘Mother! Why should you have any fear? Those who believe in the world will have fears. But why should anyone believing in God fear at all? I am in the company of my Father. Why do you fear? **You taught me that God is everything for us.** How, then, can you worry like this?’

Jesus had learnt his lessons from his mother and developed his spiritual faith.”

2B. Will always be protected.

Bhishma continues: **“Whether the mother is able or disabled, lean or robust, the son is always protected by the mother.** None else, according to the ordinance, is the son’s protector. Then does the son become old, then does he become stricken with grief, then does the world look empty in his eyes, when he becomes deprived of his mother. There is no shelter like the mother. There is no refuge like the mother. There is no defense like the mother. There is no one so dear as the mother. For having borne him in her womb the mother is the son’s *dhatri* (earth). For having been the chief cause of his birth, she is his *janani* (universal mother). For having nursed his young

limbs, she is called *amva* (*Amma*). For nursing and looking after the son, she is called *sura* (God). The mother is one's own body. There is no mode of life that is superior to serving one's mother."

[*Mahabharatha: Section CCLXVI*]

3C. She realized the greatness of her son's action.

Watching her son grow, Mata Tripta Ji increasingly realized how unlike other children he was. She was fascinated seeing the different facets of his personality develop; when he laughed and played, like other children, she was full of joy; however, when he became quiet and contemplative, she felt anxious; when he left his meals unfinished to go and listen to the sermons of the '*sadhus*', she would be the one to bring him back home; when he fell into deep, meditative sleep, she would be the one who would worry.

On the occasion that Guru Nanak Dev Ji did the "*Sacha Sauda*" (i.e. the incident when his father gave him money to buy some bargains from the nearest town, but Nanak used that money instead to buy food for some starving '*sadhus*' he met on the way), **his father was furious, but Mata Tripta Ji's heart melted as she realized the greatness of her son's action**, and, taking Nanak into her embrace, she hugged him gently and chided "my darling son, try not to go wandering off."

Mata Tripta Ji had always been of a very high spiritual level, and thus the great honour of being the mother of the great saviour Guru Nanak Dev Ji was bestowed upon her.

4A. He will be full of virtues.

After having these dreams she woke her husband King Siddharth and told him about the dreams. The next day Siddharth summoned the scholars of the court and asked them to explain the meaning of the dreams. **According to the scholars, these dreams meant that the child would be born very strong, courageous, and full of virtue.**

While still in his mother's womb it is believed that Mahavir brought wealth and prosperity to the entire kingdom, which is why he was also known as Vardhaman. An increase of all good things, like the abundant bloom of beautiful flowers, was noticed in the kingdom after his conception.

Queen Trishala's auspicious dreams before giving birth to Vardhaman were signs of foretelling the advent of an extraordinary child, one who will show the path of true happiness to humanity.

Many members of the Jain religion celebrate the event of the Dreams. This event is called *Swapna Darshan* [Dream Vision]

5C. She passed away seven days after his birth.

According to the sages, the dream was understood to be a prediction of the birth of a son who will be a world ruler either through kingship or renunciation.

The pregnancy lasted ten lunar months. Following the custom, the Queen returned to her own home for the birth. On the way, she stepped down from her palanquin to have a walk in the beautiful flower garden of Lumbini Park. She was delighted by the park and reaching for a branch to take a rest, the Prince emerged from her right side and was born.

The child was named Sidhartha, meaning, "Every wish fulfilled". **Queen Maya passed away seven days after the birth of the Buddha-to-be, and went to the Tusita Heaven.** Her sister Prajapati became the child's foster mother.

6D. She was visited by a shaft of light.

Zoroaster was born into the Spitama family. **Zoroaster's mother Dughdova, whose name means 'milkmaid', was said to be a virgin since she conceived after she had been visited by a shaft of light.**

Before Zarathustra was born, a very bright light shone all around the house. His birth was a very special event. It is believed that at the time of his birth, instead of crying like a newborn usually does, Zoroaster laughed loudly. This was an indication of the birth of a divine person.

An amusing fact associated with the birth of Zoroaster was that Ahura Mazda descended from heaven and entered the house of the would-be mother of the prophet. Angels also came in the house and worshipped and praised the unborn child.

7A. "You must call him Muhammad."

A few days before the Prophet's birth, an angel appeared from the sky and visited Amina in her dreams. "I bring you good news," the angel said. "Oh mother of the Blessed last Prophet, your Son will be the Lord of all worlds, the best of men. He will save the world. **When He is born, you must say these words, 'I place him under Allah's protection, safe from wickedness and envy.' And you must call him Muhammad, the praised one.**"

8A. She felt very sad that her son was uttering a lie.

Swami continued: **“Putlibai felt very sad as she knew that her son was uttering a lie. She cried, “O God! What sin have I committed that I gave birth to a son who speaks untruth?”** Realizing that he had caused immense grief to his mother by uttering a lie, Gandhi took a vow that he would never indulge in falsehood thenceforth.

So, it is imperative that the mother gives training in moral values to her children right from their childhood. She should not overlook the mistakes of her children. She should punish her children whenever they stray away from the right path and reward them for their good deeds. It is because of the feelings of the mother that the children become good or bad. Gandhi's mother was a strict disciplinarian and pure-hearted.”

9B. Obedience.

To lead a life of the Beatitudes, Mother Teresa consecrated her life to God and humanity embracing three religious vows: Consecrated Chastity (remaining a virgin for one's whole life), Poverty, and Obedience (completely open and disposed for God and His service).

Moved by compassionate love Mother Teresa began her works of mercy and charity among the poor, the afflicted, orphans, the dying, the unloved, the illegitimate. She wanted the people she cared for, to experience the tenderness of God's love. Her affectionate hand, her wide open arms, her luminous smile, her welcoming gestures, all carried the message: "You are loved, you are accepted, there is someone to take care of you". The persuasive power of Mother Teresa's love could win hearts.

"I am only a poor woman who prays. In praying, the Lord has filled my heart with love, and so I have been able to love the poor with God's love". (Mother Teresa.)

10B. The First Educators

Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: “For mothers are the first educators, the first mentors; and truly it is the mothers who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgment, the understanding and the faith of their little ones.”

QUIZ BASED ON DIVINE DISCOURSES ON DIVINE MOTHERS

In a beautiful discourse where Bhagavan Baba talked about Motherhood, He said, "There is an adage: There's no love like a mother's love. At its finest, the love a mother possesses for her child embodies all the beautiful virtues that we, as human beings, hold sacred - patience, kindness, forgiveness, compassion. And perhaps the greatest one of all, sacrifice. This aspect of a mother's love, the willingness to surrender her time, her dreams, her life for the sake of her children, is what makes her love so phenomenal."

So many such precious gems have been gifted by Bhagavan Baba through His innumerable discourses over the past few decades. Let us revisit some of those precious messages, through this quiz, in this month of May when we offer our loving salutations to Mother Eswaramma, the Divine Mother of the Avatar of the age.

1. After making His Beloved Mother Easwaramma happy by fulfilling her three wishes of providing education, healthcare and safe water to the poor villagers, on the Easwaramma Day of 1998, extolling His Mother, Swami said: "Noble mothers give birth to noble sons. Mothers should also feel lucky to have noble sons. Kondama Raju used to tell his daughter-in-law, 'Easwaramma, you have no idea of your great good fortune. You are not an ordinary woman. The Lord Himself is with you. What a lucky woman you are!'

Easwaramma was the daughter-in-law of Kondama Raju. Has there been any instance of a father-in-law adoring his daughter-in-law? He used to say, 'Easwaramma, your name has been vindicated. Easwara's Mother is Easwaramma.' Kondama Raju was one of those rare persons who could perceive the Truth. Those who cannot recognize the Truth will never be able to understand it. They are like a blind man who cannot see the Sun even during the day."

According to Swami, what was the most remarkable quality about His Beloved Mother Easwaramma?

- A. She was always conscientious.
- B. Everybody respected her a lot.
- C. She wanted everyone to be happy.
- D. She always looked after Swami's comforts.

2. During a Divine Discourse in 1997, while preaching on the potency of a Mother's Love, Swami gave an example of Mother Sita's unparalleled love for her sons Lava and Kusha: "Every person, man or woman, should respect the parents, install the Divine in the heart and pray to God constantly. It is everyone's duty to bring a good name to one's parents. When the children are good, they bring a good name to the parents. It was because of the noble behaviour of Lava and Kusha that their mother, Sita, became renowned.

When Lava and Kusha were engaged in a battle with Rama, Lava aimed an arrow at Rama with the prayer that if his Mother Janaki was a *Sadhvi* (a supremely noble woman) the arrow should render Rama unconscious.”

What happened when Lava aimed the arrow at His Divine Father, Lord Rama?

- A. Sita intervened and saved both Lava and Lord Rama.
- B. Rama became unconscious.
- C. Lava begged forgiveness from his Mother even to think of such an act.
- D. In order to make Lava happy, Rama feigned unconsciousness.

3. Swami often remarks: “When Divinity dons the garb of a human body, people are thickly blanketed by illusion. They become blind to the Divinity of God. Illusion covers the eyes of men like a thick curtain and prevents them from seeing the Reality. However, Yashoda was the mother, and even if Krishna was *Paramatma*, the mother’s affection still showed up.”

During the 1996 Summer Showers, Swami pointed out how *maya* (illusion) can affect even the Mothers of Avatars! “Once Balarama complained to mother Yashoda that his brother Krishna was eating mud. Challenged by Yashoda to tell the truth, little Krishna made a startling statement, ‘Oh Mother Dear! Am I an infant, or a foolish one, or a mad one, to eat mud?’ These very words speak eloquently about the Divinity of Krishna, but poor Yashoda failed to fathom the depth of the revelation contained in Krishna’s words. On the other hand, she demanded that Krishna should open His mouth, so that she could check for herself whether Krishna had eaten mud. Little Krishna opened His mouth wide.”

At that point mother Yashoda saw the Universe in His mouth and realized that Krishna was verily God Himself. How did she react after this momentous event?

- A. She ran to all the neighboring houses proclaiming His Divinity.
- B. She fainted for a few days.
- C. She never reprimanded Him after that.
- D. She hugged Him and treated Him as an ordinary child.

4. During the 1993 Summer Showers, Swami reminds us of yet another great, Divine Mother – Mother Devaki; the real Mother of Lord Krishna, who for saving humanity from her evil brother, had to give Him up as soon as He was born: “Though Devaki was the Mother who nurtured Krishna in her womb, it was Yashoda who enjoyed the pleasure of Krishna’s company as a foster mother. Sitting under a tree Devaki lamented her misfortune thus:

*It was not for me to see the wondrous deed of your sucking away the life of
Putana while she suckled you;
It was not for me to kiss your wondrous belly, which ropes failed to bind;
It was given to me to suffer the labour pains to deliver you to the world;
It was given to Yashoda to fondle you in fond joy.
Though fertile, I became a barren woman.
Without begetting a son, Yashoda became the mother of a Great Son.*

While explaining the inner significance of all the characters in the Divine play during the Krishna Avataar, according to Swami, while Mathura represented the navel, Gokulam represented the mouth and Mother Yashoda represented the tongue, what did Mother Devaki represent?

- A. Divine *Shakthi*
- B. Divine Sound
- C. Divine Heart
- D. Divine Intellect

5. During the Summer Showers Discourses of 1995, Swami talked about young Dhruva’s Divine Mother, Suniti, who exemplified sacrifice by having immense faith in God. She let go of her distraught five year old son to teach him to seek only Him to achieve the fulfillment of his desires: “Suniti said, ‘Son! No one can really help another. It is God alone who is the sole refuge of everyone. He alone can fulfill all your wishes. Go to the forest and seek Lord Narayana to achieve your desires.’

Are there such mothers today, who send their five-year-old sons to the forest for penance? She placed her hand on Dhruva’s head as blessing and said, ‘Whether you are in the forest, city, village, mountains, or sea, God is the only refuge of the forlorn. Instead of suffering in the palace, it is much better to delight in thoughts of God in the forest. Wherever you may be, I am not in a position to help you. God will take care of you. Don’t think of the forest as a forest but as God’s abode. Go and seek Him, my son.’”

According to Swami, besides a mother’s blessings, what is that other factor that helps us to attain the Lord or any goal in life?

- A. Determination
- B. Sacrifice
- C. Forbearance
- D. A Guru’s guidance

6. During a Divine Discourse delivered in 1988, Swami used the example of the Pandava brother’s Divine Mother Kunti to teach us how fortune can be sought with the support of a mother’s love: “If the Pandavas were able to become so dear to Krishna and make their lives worthy by serving Him, it was

not on account of their own merit or austerities. It was mother Kunti Devi's love for them that brought to them such a great fortune. Even when they had to live in a forest or in the House of Wax, she always stayed with them and prayed for their welfare. The Pandavas also reciprocated her love, and that accounts for their final victory.”

What did Mother Kunti request her sons to do when they informed her (from outside her house) that they had brought her a valuable fruit?

- A. She asked them to bring it to her.
- B. She asked them to share the fruit equally between themselves.
- C. She told them to offer to Lord Krishna first.
- D. She requested them to give it way to a hungry beggar.

7. During a Divine Discourse from 1988, Swami teaches us as to what can happen when the mother does not bestow the power of her blessings and maternal love on her children - no matter how old they are: “All our epics and sacred books emphasize the power of the mother's love, her blessings and grace. Consider the story of Gandhari and her sons - the Kauravas. When Krishna visited Gandhari to console her after the Kurukshetra war, she accused him of partiality towards the Pandavas. ‘Though You are God, how could You be so partial? Why did You support the Pandavas in full measure, and allow the destruction of all my sons?’ she asked Him.”

What reason did Lord Krishna give to the blindfolded Gandhari for her sons losing the battle of Kurukshetra?

- A. She was always mentally engrossed in her own material pursuits.
- B. She wasn’t their true mother after all.
- C. She didn’t cast a loving glance on them at any time.
- D. She was more focused on them earning name and fame.

8. During a Divine Discourse from 1997, Swami shared the very powerful story of how by the blessings of his Divine Mother Aaryaamba, the very famous saint, Aadi Shankara won Divine Grace. “Here is another illustration from the life of Aadi Shankara. He was born in Kaaladi in Kerala. When he was a six-year old boy, his mother, Aaryaambha, told him ‘Son, your father was a very pious person and. He used to worship God according to the prescribed rituals. You must follow his example. You are very lucky. I am always devoted to God. Having taken birth as my son, you should conduct yourself in such a way that you achieve great name and fame and bring a good name to me. Act according to your father's example. It is the mother who makes the son noble and great. It is a noble son who brings glory to the mother. Hence, remembering this, act according to your father's injunctions.’”

What was result of the power of mother Aaryaaamba’s blessings when a Goddess appeared in front of Aadi Shankara after being touched by his perseverance and devotion?

- A. He attained powers of being able to heal people by mere touch.
- B. He became a great King and ruled vast kingdoms.
- C. He mastered all the Vedas effortlessly.
- D. He attained a boon and lived on for a hundred years.

9. During a Divine Discourse from 1999, Swami taught us what happens when we don’t heed a Mother’s advice: “When Abhimanyu was in the womb of his mother Subhadra, his father Arjuna used to tell her many stories. One day, Arjuna was explaining to her the intricacies and nuances involved in entering *Padmavyuha* (a military formation in the shape of a lotus). Before he could explain to her how to come out of the *Padmavyuha*, Lord Krishna, the supreme director of the cosmic drama, entered the scene. God comes whenever the need arises and plays His role appropriately.

Krishna asked Arjuna, ‘What a mistake you are committing! It is not Subhadra, but it is the child in her womb who has been listening to you all the while. Where is the necessity for you to teach the child about *Padmavyuha*?’ He took Arjuna away with him.”

What happened to Abhimanyu when he didn’t pay heed to his mother’s advice of not entering the *padmavyuha* since he only knew how to get into it and not how to come out of it?

- A. He nearly died fighting a fierce battle.
- B. He lost his life in it.
- C. He called on Lord Krishna who came and saved him from sure death.
- D. His father Arjuna had to go in to save him.

10. During a Divine Discourse from 1968, Swami enlightens us with the knowledge that there are five different kinds of Divine Mothers: “The mother is the first of the five *Maathas* (Mothers) that the Indian child encounters: *Dheha-maatha* (the mother that gave birth to this body); *Go-maatha* (the cow that gives sustaining milk); *Bhoo-maatha* (the land that grows the crops which feed the body); *Dhesa-maatha* (the Native country that gives protection, care, love, rights and chances to serve and elevate oneself to one’s full height), and *Vedha-maatha* (the heritage of spiritual treasure that reveals the aim and purpose of human life and takes one step by step, towards the Goal of Self-realization).”

According to Swami, in the spiritual path, while Truth represents the father, who represents our Mother in the spiritual family?

- A. Devotion
- B. Love
- C. Wisdom
- D. Peace

ANSWERS:

1C. She wanted everyone to be happy.

During a Divine Discourse in 2001, Swami elaborated on her Divine nature thus: “She had a broad mind. Today, we see only narrow-mindedness everywhere. **People desire that only their family and children should be happy. But Easwamma was not like that. She wanted everyone to be happy.** Even though she was not educated she taught such noble qualities to everyone.

Everyone aspires for a peaceful death. People who have evil feeling will not die such a death. Easwamma did not have even a trace of evil feeling in her. That is why she was always joyful. **She always aspired to see others happy.** Because of such mothers there was great progress and prosperity in society.”

2B. Rama became unconscious.

Reiterating the message of the power of a Mother’s blessings, Swami shared: **“Rama became unconscious when the arrow hit Him. See what happened. The mere thought of his mother lent so much power to his arrow!**

This shows that when you cherish the mother and seek God's Grace, the blessings of the Mother become more powerful.”

3D. She hugged Him and treated Him as an ordinary child.

Swami continued: “To her utter shock and amazement, Yashoda saw heavenly spheres rolling in the mouth of Krishna. She exclaimed:

*Is this a dream or magic spell cast by a magician?
Is all this true or false?
Am I awake?
Am I Yashoda?*

At that instant, she realized that Krishna was verily God Himself. However, this realization did not last long. **As soon as Krishna closed His mouth and stood in front of her with an innocent look, she hugged Him to herself, and treated Him as an ordinary child.**”

4A. Divine *Shakthi*.

During a 1992 Discourse, Swami revealed: “Yashoda did not know where Balarama and Krishna were born. She brought them up as her own children. They were born in Mathura, but grew up in Gokulam. They grew in the womb of Devaki (the wife of Vasudeva). But they lived and played in Yashoda’s house. When we try to explore the inner meaning of these events, we realize the Divine story unfolded by them.

Balarama and Krishna were both in Mathura. Mathura signifies the navel. **Devaki represents the Divine *Shakthi*.** The *Naadam* (Divine sound) represented by the names Balarama and Krishna emerging from the womb of the Divine *Shakthi*, proceeding to Gokulam, represented by the mouth, was playing on the tongue, represented by Yashoda.”

5A. Determination.

Swami narrates further: “Dhruva accepted his mother’s words as command, prostrated at her feet and left immediately. By the power of Suniti’s blessing, the Divine sage Narada met Dhruva midway. Narada divined Dhruva’s intentions. He asked the lad, ‘Where are you going, young Dhruva? Are you going to play?’ Dhruva said, ‘Yes, O Divine Sage, I am going to play with God.’ Narada asked, ‘Where is God?’ Dhruva answered, ‘My mother told me to go to the forest and seek Him.’

‘You are a child. You have no worldly experience. You don’t know about God. How can an innocent, ignorant child like you achieve God? It is impossible!’ Dhruva replied, ‘Narada, age is not important to the Lord. **My mother’s blessing and my determination will take me to the goal.**’ Dhruva did not give heed to Narada’s words. He said, ‘It is my mother’s command. I should follow it even at the cost of my life and prove the value of a mother’s word. I must, and will, succeed.’

After deep penance in the forest, finally, the Lord appeared and guided him: ‘Till now, you followed your mother’s command. Now, I am your Father, Mother and everything.’”

6B. She asked them to share the fruit equally between themselves.

During a Divine Discourse in 2006, extolling the dutiful behaviour of the noble sons of the noble Mother Kunti, Swami shared further: "At that time, the Pandavas were staying in the house of a potter. When they went back to that house along with their new bride Draupadi, their mother Kunti was inside. Even before entering their house, they announced to their mother that they had received a very valuable fruit. **Their mother replied from inside the house that they should share the fruit equally between themselves.**

The Pandavas always obeyed the command of their mother and honoured every word that she uttered. They went inside and offered their salutations to their mother and vowed to follow her command religiously. **In this way, Droupadi became the wife of all the five Pandavas. The Pandavas dutifully accepted the command of their mother.**

But, how could the world accept this? It is the duty of the children to obey the command of their parents, irrespective of the fact whether the world accepts it or not."

7C. She didn't cast a loving glance on them at any time.

Swami narrates the profound incident further: "Krishna replied to her that she herself was to blame for the death of her children. He reminded her that though she gave birth to a hundred sons, **she didn't cast her loving glance on even one of them at any time.**

As she chose to remain blindfolded, she never looked at any of her sons with great care, attention and affection. 'How could such sinners who couldn't even enjoy their own mother's loving glance thrive and flourish?' He asked her."

8C. He mastered all the Vedas effortlessly.

Swami narrates the incident: "One day, when Shankara was barely four years old, the father had to leave his home to visit a neighbouring village. Every day after finishing his *puja* and offering milk to the goddess, he used to distribute the remaining milk to his wife, son and others as *prasadam*. He told the boy: 'Son, your mother cannot perform the worship which I do. You better do the worship today.'

After the father left, the boy followed the father's instructions. He filled a tumbler with milk, placed it before the image of the goddess Raaja-Raajeshvari...when he found that the milk remained untouched, he was in great anguish. He cried: 'Oh Mother! What crime have I committed? When my father offered the milk you used to take it. Why are you not taking it when I am offering it?' He was in deep distress. He declared in agony: 'Mother! If you

don't take the milk I shall end my life. I would have dishonoured my father. I would also be guilty of failing to fulfill my mother's command. If I cannot please my parents, what use is there in my living?'

Moved by the naive entreaties of the boy, Raaja-Raajeshvari appeared before him. She told him, 'Child! Be happy. I am immensely pleased with your devotion. I shall drink the milk.' So saying, she drank all the milk offered in the tumbler. The boy was aghast to see that the whole tumbler was empty. 'Oh mother!' he cried. 'If you drink all the milk, what is left for distributing as *prasadam*? My mother will think I have drunk all the milk. I have to *give prasadam* to her. My father used to give some milk as *prasadam* to others also. Therefore please restore some of the milk in the tumbler.'

He thought within himself: 'I will get a bad name from my mother.' He prayed: 'Mother! Please give at least a little quantity of milk.' Responding to the prayers of the young boy the goddess drew milk from her breast and gave it to the boy. It was the sacred power of the milk which enabled Shankara in later years to master all the scriptures and earn lasting fame as a great spiritual teacher, revered by all. **Knowledge of all the Vedas came to him effortlessly: It was due to the grace of the Divine Mother and the love and blessings of his own mother.** When one is blessed with *Prema and Anugraha* (love and grace) he is transformed from the human to the Divine."

9B. He lost his life in it.

Swami continued with his narration: "**Later on, in the Kurukshetra war, Abhimanyu lost his life in *Padmavyuha*, since he did not know how to come out of it.** Why did Krishna do this? It is because Abhimanyu had to attain *Veera Swarga* (heaven of the heroes). In fact, when the Kauravas challenged Abhimanyu to enter *Padmavyuha*, he came to his mother Subhadra and sought her permission and blessings. Subhadra tried her best to dissuade him from going to the battlefield. She said, 'My dear son, it is not an ordinary task to enter *Padmavyuha* and come out of it. Moreover, your wife is in the family way, and your uncle Krishna and father Arjuna are not here. So, give up the idea of going to the battlefield.'

But Abhimanyu did not pay heed to her advice. He said 'Mother, I am a *kshatriya* (warrior) by birth. There is no greater insult for a *kshatriya* than to shy away from the challenge posed by the enemies. In fact, you should encourage me and enthuse me to fight and annihilate the enemies. It is not proper on your part to discourage me from going to the war.'"

Abhimanyu knew what he was doing was correct, but he did not understand his mother's love. He lost his life because he went to the battlefield against the wishes of his mother.

10B. Love.

During a Divine Discourse from 1985, Swami explains: "There are no permanent mothers in the world; the only permanent Mother is the Divine Mother. **Swami often reminds you of your spiritual family where Truth is your father, Love is your mother, Wisdom is your son, Peace is your daughter, Devotion is your brother, and Yogis are your friends.**

In the spiritual path these are your true relatives who will always accompany you. When you have this kind of relationship, when you treasure this kind of friendship, you will be able to break the bonds of the world and become free."

H2H QUIZ ON DIVINE MOTHER EASWARAMMA

Only one soul in every era is blessed with this awesome blessing of being the Mother of the Avatar. In the present age, it is Mother Easwaramma. It is on the 6th of this month, more than 35 years ago, that she installed herself permanently in the heart of everyone who loved her. Let’s recapitulate sweet instances from her pious life, through this quiz based on our May 2006 Cover Story “Easwaramma – The Crown of Motherhood.” and sanctify our lives.

1. While sharing one of the many mystical and profound experiences that bedazzled Easwaramma, Swami shares a story of an extraordinary incident that took place: “One day, somebody invited Me to their house for food. Actually their intention was to poison Me. They were feeling jealous of My growing popularity and prosperity. In those days I used to relish *vadas* made of Alasanda grains. Hence, they mixed poison in the *vadas* and offered them to Me. Before going there, I had told Easwaramma and Subbamma not to be afraid if any untoward incident was to happen. When I returned from there, My entire body turned blue and My mouth started frothing. I told Easwaramma to wave her hand in a circle.”

What happened next?

- A. She refused to do so.
- B. She did and vibhuti appeared in her hand.
- C. Easwaramma rushed Swami to the Hospital.
- D. Easwaramma waved her hand and two bottles of curative tablets appeared!

2. Comparing Mother Easwaramma to the other Divine Mothers who were chosen to play the role of Mother to the Avatars, we shared: Mother Easwaramma, truly, was a divine effulgence, who graced mother Earth with a sacred mission and purpose by the inscrutable Will of the Divine just like Kaushalya, (Mother of Sri Rama), Devaki (Mother of Sri Krishna) or Mary (Christ’s Mother). She underwent similar agonies and ecstasies, fears and dilemmas, trials and triumphs, and ultimately bliss and beatitude that the Divine Mothers of yore passed through.

What was that common prayer that Lord Krishna’s Mother Yashoda and Bhagavan Baba’s Mother Easwaramma shared?

- A. Both prayed for their son to have a normal childhood.
- B. Both prayed earnestly to be born as the Mother in each birth thereafter.
- C. Both wished that they would come back as Fathers.
- D. Neither one of them wished for their son to be married.

3. While sharing an incident of how distressful it was for Easwamma as she watched her beloved son Sathya become Sai Baba, we mentioned: There were many occasions when she vacillated between being a mother and devotee. The transition from doting mother to adoring devotee was a long and tortuous path as her Son was revealed as the Source of divine light shining His benediction on humanity.

Just picture this scene as the anxious parents had rushed to Uravakonda to visit Swami, who was then still a mere lad. They were confronted with a large crowd of devotees who cheered them as, “*Matha Pitha ki jai*,” (Victory to the Parents!) close on the heels of each full-throated “*Sai Baba ki jai*” (Victory to Sai!). Sathya was seated on a chair with flower garlands piling up on his right as he accepted each one that was offered and added it to the mound. But when pressed to identify his parents, Sathya said: _____

How did Sathya identify His parents on that eventful day that changed Easwamma’s life completely?

- A. “They are Divinity personified!”
- B. “They are actually My grand-parents!”
- C. “In reality, I was adopted by them!”
- D. “They are simply an illusion!”

4. As the destiny of Prashanti Nilayam was unfolding, we shared Easwamma's aggravation: As the years went by Easwamma had to adjust to many other changes that followed the ever-growing glory of her Son. She strained to retain whatever contact she could as Swami’s time became taken up by the needs of the devotees.

In fact, she was the one most aggrieved at what she considered Swami’s determination to keep Puttaparthi at arm’s length. The existing Mandir was already at the fringe of the village and the new site was a half-kilometer further away. Gathering all the arguments she could drum up against the project, Easwamma went rushing into the hall where Baba sat among a group of devotees...

Who did Easwamma recommend for Swami to consult before moving anywhere?

- A. Swami’s Father
- B. Their Family Guru
- C. Astrologers
- D. Her Father-in-law

5. In fond remembrance of our Beloved Easwamma, May 6th is also celebrated as Children’s Day in all Sai Organizations throughout the

country. In our article, we presented the reason: Truly, the whole life of Easwaramma is a shining example and ideal for Sai devotees to emulate. “Amazing love for Swami and constantly seeking happiness and welfare of others” – this is the summary of her life. She had a special love for children because in every child she saw Sathya hiding, inviting her to seek and succeed. Naturally, they cuddled in flocks around her. They watched with delight the twinkle in her eyes and the wrinkles on her cheeks and chin as she joked and laughed. They were amused and their attention was aroused when her gold and glass bangles jingled as she gesticulated, while stressing a point or underlining a caution. When she found a child chubby, she squeezed and pulled its cheeks to see the patch of pink, the thrill the impact lent to the angel face.

What was Easwaramma favourite past time with kids?

- A. Narrating tales of Shirdi Baba and Swami.
- B. Playing snakes and ladders.
- C. Singing lullabies.
- D. She was an expert at playing the flute.

ANSWERS:

1B. She did and vibhuti appeared in her hand.

Swami continued: “**She did accordingly, and to her utter amazement there appeared vibhuti in her hand.** She mixed it in water and gave it to Me. Instantly, I became normal. She wondered, ‘Swami can create vibhuti with a wave of His hand. But how is it that vibhuti appeared in My hand?’ In fact, I had given her that power for that moment.”

2A. Both prayed for their son to have a normal childhood.

Like Yashoda, Sri Krishna’s foster Mother, Easwaramma would often pray for Divine intervention for Sathya to turn into a normal Puttaparthi boy. Still, Easwaramma could see in Him the potentials of a poet, a singer, a dancer, a playwright and a director and she hoped he would blossom in these fields. In fact, such were Sathya’s theatrical skills and such was Easwaramma’s simplicity that whenever she saw Him being “tortured” in a drama he acted in, she wept aloud and even tried to protect her Sathya!

And again like Mother Yashoda, who was troubled and torn by instances of demons vying for the life of her sweet darling child, Mother Easwaramma too faced agonizing and abnormal experiences.

3D. “They are simply an illusion!”

When pressed to identify his parents, Sathya said concisely, “They are *Maya!*” [illusion]. “*Maya!*” exclaimed Easwaramma, and fell in a faint. When she came back to her senses she sat by Sathya’s side, tears coursing down her face, for her son was but a shadow of His former self though only three months had elapsed since she last saw Him. “Sathya, speak to Your mother!” she begged. A few minutes of silence ensued.

Then, “Who belongs to whom?” asked Sathya, remote and cold. It was not a question but a pronouncement. Baba continued with her lesson. “It is all Maya, it is all Maya.” Her only consolation was when Sathya agreed to eat some lunch. She finished serving and nervously signaled that her offerings be accepted. With a swift movement Sathya swept all the food into one mass and rolled it into three balls. “Maya! Maya!” He kept repeating.

Someone told the stupefied mother that Sathya was bidding her come near and she moved a few feet forward. He put one of the balls of food in her right palm and kept His palm before her to receive it. As she gave it back, Sathya ate, whispering, “Maya is gone, Maya has left.”

This scene is unique in the annals of human experience, for who can fathom what Easwaramma must have felt in her heart – nothing could have prepared her for the jolt as her little Sathya became Sai Baba, Guru to the whole world. She alone bore the brunt of this metamorphosis of her dearest Sathya to a discreet and distant Sai Baba.

4C. Astrologers.

"Swami, what is this I hear? They say You are going to build a new Mandir on that hill. How can You go to a spot that is so far from the village, a place that is surrounded by jungle and filled with snakes and scorpions? How will people who are old and sick and mothers with tiny children get to You? Aren't You going to bother hereafter with their troubles? Are You going to deny them Your Darshan? What of the fate of those who come to You in the future? You have the mark of the wheel [the chakra] under Your foot and You will never stay in one place!" she went on agitatedly, "You must always be climbing a hill or crossing a river to find a place to sit singing bhajans. Which godforsaken place have You found now? **Don't You know that You must consult astrologers before You think of moving anywhere?** And, listen to me," she warned, "This Mandir is enough for You. It is better to have a small place that is filled with people than a huge building half empty!"

There was no interruption to this torrent of protest. Swami sat in patient silence letting her have her say and merely smiled at the end of it all. "Speak to me! Tell me something in reply!" she exclaimed at last in vexation.

Swami softened. "Why do you bother with people's talk?" He gently asked and assured her, "There will be no jungle and no snakes when I go there. There will be hundreds of pilgrims pouring in every day – and that place will become a Shirdi, a Tirupathi, and a Kasi."

5A. Narrating tales of Shirdi Baba and Swami.

She could be easily inveigled into the narration of hair-raising or heart-warming tales in order to keep the children wrapped in excitement. Her pleasing pliant voice reproduced the screams of the kidnapped heroine, the wail of the wounded demon, the plaint of the frightened son, the roar of the victorious warrior, and the crooning of the child cast on the jungle track. In fact **she was quick in adding to her repertory stories about Sai Baba of Shirdi and Swami.**

The children watched the pictures she so realistically designed and described – the white umbrella with tassels of gold held over a pair of sandals, the emergence of the lion-faced God from the marble pillar of the royal audience hall, the dance of the child on the hood of an angry serpent. Easwamma forgot her physical ailments, the deeper deprivations, and the assaults on her inner peace when engaged in storytelling. Invariably she rounded up the tales with emphatic words on humility and honesty, love and loyalty. These lessons were lapped up by the children for they were soaked in the syrup of her affection.

THE HEALING TOUCH

TOWERING SUNIL WALKS AGAIN...OVERPOWERED BY LOVE

The story of how the terrible trauma of Sunil Verma, who met with a near fatal accident, was transformed into a triumph of Love...

Delirious and at Death's Door

With high fever, Sunil Verma lay almost delirious as the doctors struggled to bring down his temperature. They needed to clean the wound on his leg three times a day. Despite administering high potency antibiotics, his fever and infection refused to subside.

"We had done all that we could. When I walked out of the operation theatre, I saw Sunil's parents in tears. A patient in his condition is facing a risk to his life. **Though it was late evening, I told them to rush to Prashanti Nilayam and post a letter to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba narrating their son's condition,**" said Dr. Kailash Rao, the Head of Orthopaedics, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram.

Taking the doctor's advice, the parents rushed to the *ashram*. Sunil's parents had not slept a wink for four days, and his mother, Eshwari's eyes drooped on their own accord as she took an auto rickshaw along with her husband, Mr. M.P. Raju for the 5 kilometre ride to Prashanti Nilayam. In a daze, she beheld the quickly changing scenes of the harrowing ordeal of the days gone by.

How on that fateful day her son had just returned from college and his friends visited him...They took him for a joy ride on a motorbike... She had been preparing snacks for him but he said he will have something outside...He had been away for a long time... She had waited... He did not return... Then somebody, must have been a passer by, dropped in and told her that her son had met with an accident!

The memory of that terrible moment shook her out of her painful reverie...as she looked outside, she realised they had reached Prasanthi Nilayam. She walked straight to a courier agency, and the way she and her husband went about writing a long note, the receptionist there knew it was a 'SOS' call to Bhagavan. They poured their heart out to Bhagavan...they were going through the worst nightmare of their lives. How terrible the twist of fate had been for them in the last few weeks.

A Joyride Too Far

In fact, on March 31, 2007 Sunil was his jubilant self. He had returned home after the end of the first theory examination, very satisfied and happy. Of course, there were more exams to follow, but on that day it was time to enjoy.

It was almost dusk when two of his friends had picked him up from his home for a joy ride. Negotiating the dirt tracks of their village of Kottapeta (near Rajahmundry, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh) had always filled them with a sense of excitement and achievement. Tall and lanky, with a thick plastic-frame spectacles, Sunil always stood out among his friends, precisely for his figure more than anything else, as he was noticeably mild-mannered and unassuming.

Recalling the moment that turned his life upside down in a split second, Sunil said: "As we sped along, there was a tractor wagon lumbering ahead. It was a narrow path and foolishly, we tried to squeeze the bike through and overtake the tractor. As the bike cut across the track in a hurry and tried to manoeuvre through the illusive few inches of space, I brought my leg close to the bike's frame. I tried my best to prevent a collision, but in vain. My left leg struck the back of the wagon, and it was a high speed accident... I just flew off the bike and landed in the dirt. My other two friends too were thrown off the bike."

As he lay on the dirt track bleeding profusely from the left leg, Sunil saw a few pieces of what looked like bone strewn on the track. Loose dust on the ground had turned into dark red mud after blood from his body had seeped into it. Sunil felt no pain. So, he got up on his feet momentarily, thinking he would just walk away, but collapsed. He could not get up again...

Sunil's knee and femur had pulverised at the impact with the tractor wagon; tiny pieces of his bone lay sprayed on that village track.

His parents rushed him to the nearest hospital, but it being Saturday evening, only emergency services were available.

Frantic Attempts to Save His Ebbing Life

Extensive loss of blood made Sunil's blood pressure plummet, and he then fainted – imagine the parents' desperate condition. Frantic phone calls to relatives and friends brought them three units of blood. Then they called up their neighbour, who was a volunteer of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation. With his help another donor was arranged, who donated a unit.

Sunil's situation stabilised to some extent, but any hope of saving his leg began to fade. When the hospital finally opened on Monday morning, 36 hours after the incident, infection had already set in. The doctors grimly told Sunil's family that an operation would cost around Rs. 2 lakh (US \$ 4000) and they would have to spend another Rs. 1 lakh (US \$ 2000) on medicines.

Sunil's father, Mr. M.P. Raju, was a teacher in a local school and earned Rs. 4,000 a month. The only other source of family income was their land of two-acres. Income from this piece of land went towards Sunil's and his elder brother's education.

Relatives of the family came forward with whatever they could organise. Eventually, Rs. 1.5 lakh was raised so that the surgery could begin. But

shockingly, the doctors refused even to touch Sunil, unless the whole Rs. 3 lakh were arranged.

It was undoubtedly the lowest point of their lives. "We lost all hope. We could do nothing. We did not know what was to become of him," Sunil's mother Eashwari said, her face harried as she remembered this traumatic period.

Divine Help - Out of the Blue

Suddenly and out of the blue, a sympathetic doctor from the same hospital told them about the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram, where the surgery and treatment were given totally free of cost. The doctor also told them that nothing would be charged from them, even for the hospital stay or food. Unable to believe that such a place could really exist in a society dominated by monetary values, Sunil's family initially had their doubts. But then that was the only hope they had.

Four full days after the accident, with hope diminishing like a twilight sunset, the family engaged an ambulance from Rajamundry to Puttaparthi paying Rs. 14,000, and finally reached SSSIHMS, Prasanthigram, on April 3, 2007.

On entering its premises, they somehow felt reassured. The sight of the huge embracing arms of the massive building ignited in them a little confidence...were their renewed hopes going to be dashed as they entered inside, or was everything they had heard about this unique hospital really true?

As they were ushered in they noticed the peaceful atmosphere and spotless environment. The concerned doctor on night duty was aghast looking at Sunil's wound. Blood had seeped through the dressing and it had started emitting a foul smell. Sunil was immediately admitted, investigated and emergency debridement (surgical removal of foreign matter and dead tissue from a wound) was performed. The doctors feared that with the wound getting infected, any delay in treatment would necessitate amputation of the limb.

An X-ray of the leg confirmed that several pieces of bone were missing from his left leg, and the knee was shattered. Sunil had actually suffered from an open fracture of the lower end of the femur on the left leg. The doctors fixed his leg with an external fixator (a device consisting of multiple pins and external rings or bars which hold a fractured bone in place).

According to Dr. Rao, the first six-hour period following such an injury is called the golden period. If the patient comes to an orthopaedician within this time, then the success rate is almost 100 per cent. But beyond 6 hours, there are high chances of infection setting in. And Sunil had come to SSSIHMS, Prasanthigram after four days...

"Sunil had developed a high fever due to infection. The microbiology department report said that the bacteria were resistant to common antibiotics. Finally, a high potency dose of antibiotics was given to Sunil. But the fever continued," the surgeon explained, and also added that Sunil's condition was,

indeed, dangerous. His bone was badly broken and blood vessels had been torn off. The worst part was he had delayed coming to the hospital by more than four days. **"Patients in such cases do not always recover", the surgeons opined.**

"With the infection refusing to subside, we thought it would be impossible to save Sunil's leg. There was also a threat to his life. The only refuge we had was Sai Baba. We surrendered completely to Him," the surgeons humbly submitted.

Then at the Very Lowest Point...

And that's why they asked Eshwari and Raju to pray hard and also write a letter to Baba. And after they had handed over their envelope to the courier agency, they hurriedly returned to the Hospital. Immediately they sought out the surgeons, and surprisingly, they were greeted by twinkling smiles.

"The fever has started reducing on its own," the doctors jubilantly told them.

For the first time, in the last many weeks, Eshwari and Raju's hearts lit up. "That news was a relief, such a big relief," she said later. "I just slumped into a chair and shed tears of joy. We had emptied our heart entirely in that letter and prayed for His mercy, and it just worked!"

And then, followed a dramatic reduction in Sunil's infection. The doctors now administered oral antibiotics for 10 days and Sunil was put on an external fixator. Later, a bone graft was done followed by illizaro fixation. And finally, Sunil was given a brace and a walking shoe-raise.

"I never believed I will walk again..." - Sunil

The stunned doctors who treated Sunil, till this day, feel his case was nothing short of a miracle: "We did all that we could. **We gave him the most potent antibiotics and cleaned the wound three times a day, but finally when we could do nothing more, we just surrendered to Bhagavan. From that moment, Sunil's situation just began improving on its own.** It felt like a gentle reminder by Bhagavan, that it was He who cures, not us. Sunil was able to have food after several days. He then recovered remarkably."

The surgeons now say Sunil will be able to walk again, but for sometime, he will not be able to bend his left knee. "We can do a joint replacement later, which will help Sunil lead a perfectly normal life," Dr. Rao added.

Sunil currently walks with a crutch but in time he will give this up. He says that after the harrowing experience of being refused treatment in Rajamundry, the care extended by the doctors of SSSIHMS just feels like a dream. "All I can say is I never believed that I will be able to walk on my two legs again. But here I am on my two legs!" Joy was dancing on his face as he happily looked down at his feet.

“Sai Baba works through the doctors here...” – Eshwari, Sunil’s mother

Sunil’s mother, Eshwari, chokes with feeling, when she speaks about how her son has received a new life. **“I never expected my son will be back on his feet. We did not have to spend a single paisa on his treatment in this Hospital. We had completely given up hope. But Sai Baba works through the doctors here, who are living embodiments of His love. My son has got a new life,” she added,** her face wet with emotion.

The Bible says that the Lord made the blind see and lame walk, and there are a few such instances in that Holy Scripture. But today, this is happening right in front of our eyes every single day, and the Lord is doing this, not only directly, but also through ordinary people like us. Bhagavan Baba is demonstrating to us what we can really do if we surrender to Him and believe in the power of Pure Love. Miracles manifest every moment in our lives if we surrender to Him sincerely and make Love the only inspiration and destination of our lives. And as a testimony to this, stands gloriously the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences.

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the March 2009 issue

Feedback on the cover story: *Abodes of Happiness... The Abounding Grace of Sai to Orissa*

Every month, I eagerly await the new edition of Heart to Heart, because I get deeply touched and moved to tears on reading about various service projects, as well as the experiences of various devotees and students.

This month's article on the wonderful rehabilitation project for the flood-affected areas in Orissa was an eye-opener for me. To read about the manner in which the entire project has been conducted just moved me to tears. Knowing about how much suffering those villagers had to go through made me realize that I should learn to count my blessings.

Swami is as tender as a rose. He gets moved by any suffering that His children undergo. Wherever His children are, His hand reaches out to them. I had tears in my eyes reading the entire story- how these people suffered and how much faith they now have in Swami, about how they now want to build a temple for Swami and how Swami was overwhelmed on hearing about the villagers!. I can go on citing so many instances that moved me. A truly inspiring story! Thank you so very much for bringing out such lovely articles. I feel Swami speaks to me directly through all these articles.

Thank you once again! Jai Sairam!

Aarthi, Chennai, India.

Thank you for publishing the Orissa project story. I was amazed by the work done. At the end of the story, I just started applauding spontaneously. Till now, I had thought that during calamities people only talk of doing many things. But our Sai has always done more than expectations. My words can never be equal the magnitude of Sai's grace in this world.

Thank you for your online magazine. Sitting away from India, Heart2Heart is a very big way of being closer to Sai.

Kavita

My heart is overwhelmed. As I read, watched, and listened to Lord Sai's love translated into action, I prayed that my heart also would overflow with this love, and that I, too, would translate it into acts of service towards all. This article has indeed been instructive and challenging to me.

Jai Sai Ram!

Wilbert M. Stephenson, Brooklyn, New York, USA

I felt moved by such a very beautiful and moving story about the Orissa programme. It was very well written and documented. Many of the details concerning how much Sai has done for this project are unknown throughout the world. Can the story be sent to various news agencies throughout the world?

Well done yet again,

Doug Saunders, New Zealand

I was deeply moved by the Grace and Compassion of Lord Sai and could not stop crying at His Mercy. There is none other than Lord Sai concerned about the welfare of Mankind.

Rama Rao

Your article about Orissa was very touching. It is wonderful how Swami's love and grace touches people all over the world and makes His presence felt. Keep sending such stories please.

Sai Ram,

Asha

Feedback on: *He Lived His Message... And Shared His Love*

I was also one of the very fortunate students who were moulded by Prof. Habbu and I am very happy to convey that his inspiration influenced me a lot in my career. Though it is about 25 years ago that I was a student of the school, some of his favourite inspiring statements like "Not high ...but a low ambition is a crime!" still reverberate in my mind when I think of him. He truly had "hands in the society and head in the forest". Years later also, he fondly remembered every aspect of my student days and lovingly invited me every time I had come to Puttaparthi, for a tea in his house. I fondly recollect the long discussions we had about education, science and spirituality. I thus had the good fortune to be rekindled by his motivating spirit. Bhagavan, thanks for

placing me under his care as a higher secondary student between 1984 and 1986.

M. Krishnamurthy

Congratulations for bringing out one of the finest article ever read in Heart to Heart magazine. It is said "It's is not so important what people talk about you when you were alive, but what is more important is how people remember you when you are no longer available to them." The best ever literary tribute a person can get, an article in H2H did just that. Great!

One aspect that might have been over looked was that Habbu Sir was a literary person and he always used to encourage boys to write articles. Due credit should go to him for starting "the school magazine" way back in 1980. Mr. V.K. Gokak, the first Vice-Chancellor of SSSU, in his book "The Man and The Avatar" thanks Mr. Habbu for his invaluable help and inputs.

The Sun makes no distinction in giving out its light and warmth to all. So too Sri Habbu lived his life giving out his light (wisdom, knowledge) and warmth (understanding) to all those who crossed his path.

God is known for showering gifts on mankind and we are indeed grateful to Him. Sri Habbu is indeed one of the rare gifts.

Love and regards,

B. Vinay

I was very glad to read the article on the life of Prof. Habbu. There are so many such effective instruments of Bhagawan who have played such an important role in His mission but are relatively unknown to the outside world. Such articles will help spread the fragrance of their silent sacrifice all over. Keep up the good work...

Best Regards,

Shashank Shah, Sri Sathya Sai University, Prashanti Nilayam

I was a student of Professor. I finished my schooling and went on to complete my MBA. After leaving, I visited him often and also was a part of the seva program that he set up in the year 2002 and 2003. He was a very noble person and was dedicated to Bhagavan's principles and teachings.

We used to observe him on the veranda chanting 'Om Namah Shivaya' when Swami would go for interviews. I picked up this habit from Professor and to this day I chant the Gayathri Manthra when I am walking or have spare time. This is the strong influence that he had on me. We, his direct students are living testimonies of the ideals that Habbu sir lived for. Please convey my regards to the team that provided the wonderful memories. Thanks once again.

Regards,

Bharadwaj Vvan

Feedback on: *Quest for Infinity*

I love the series - my humble pranams to Prof. Venkataraman - if only I can personally thank him for making this colossal and mind boggling subject so readable and understandable.

Maybe this series can be brought out in a book form. I am pretty sure it will be a best seller or in a documentary format for television - it can reach many people. This series puts Vedanta on a pedestal in that Science is now uttering its truths! We are truly on the threshold of a Brave New Sai World!

Great job and the effort that goes behind it must be truly tremendous.

Jai Sai Ram,

Tony Bong, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Feedback on: *Spiritual Questions and Answers - Part 5*

This series is superb. It answers many questions and thoughts I have had. In fact all the articles on H2H have been thought provoking and inspiring, not to mention educational. I am personally indebted to you for all the knowledge you have imparted to me via the website and for that I express my heartfelt gratitude.

Jai Sai Ram,

Kaventha Bridgmohan, South Africa

Feedback on: *My Sai - The Soul of My Life*

I just now read an article about Ms. S. Lakshmi and her experience of Baba's love. I could not contain my feelings. I would love to be one of His devotees. Only His grace can make it happen. I thank you all from the bottom of my

heart to keep us all connected and will look forward to receiving your journal
now onwards.

Love and regards,

Savjeet Kaur, Canada

Thank you very much for publishing this beautiful and inspiring article. I am deeply inspired by the love and devotion of this Sai sister. She is truly exemplary in her attitude and faith and was so generous to share her incredible experiences with all of us. Very touching, thank you.

Best regards,

Ellesha Wanigasekera, Toronto, Canada

Feedback on: *How Swami Turned my Life 180 Degrees*

The article touched my heart. A very true to life experience, narrated so frankly which gave the reader an insight into how life throws challenges to us - but if God's grace is showered how things can change! The author was very honest in presenting the facts for the benefit of our inspiration. I thank him for sharing his divine experiences and Heart to Heart team for bringing out such a moving article.

Regards,

Girija BV

Yes, this true depiction of another of Swami's miracles was indeed inspiring. The writer has been very open in explaining all that he has experienced.

Thanks to Swami,

Ganesh

This article was absolutely heart-warming and inspiring and I definitely enjoyed it. I especially loved the poem at the end of the article. Thank you for sharing such people's experiences with us.

Mohini B. Rupani, Kobe, Japan

I have just finished reading this inspirational story that moved me to tears. I now understand that Swami is indeed a most benevolent God who resides in all His children regardless whether they believe in Him or not. Thank you for your efforts in sharing such inspirational stories.

With lots of love,

Julia Aich, Dubbo, Australia

Feedback on: *The Unknown Hero*

Sai Ram,

Thanks for the wonderful account of the astonishing "unknown Hero" and for recognising his services of 22 years of toil. Let's hope people start to appreciate and emulate such noble qualities. Thanks to Swami for making us share the glory of unknown hero.

Sai Ram,

Bhagirathi Radhakrishnan

The story of the unknown hero, Dasarath Manji is very inspiring. I enjoyed it thoroughly and shared it with my family. Thank you for publishing such articles which are real eye openers. Keep up the good work.

Vidya Alekal

It was just great. I realised my actual status, how small I am and how great Sri Dasarath is.

Thanks and Sai Ram,

Harendra Singh, USA

Feedback on: *The Ramayana Quiz*

Sai Ram,

I just attempted the Ramayana Quiz. I found it very interesting and a very nice way of teaching moral values to the children. I hope we will be able to see many more of such quizzes online.

Thank you,

Jayanthi Sridhar, Bangalore

Feedback on: *Sai Inspires, the inspirational daily e-mail service*

Dear Heart2Heart team,

I wish to thank you a million times from the bottom of my heart for your prompt emails. I eagerly look forward to Sai Inspires and all the wonderful *leelas* of Swami, depicted with photos and enriching reading material. Each of these inspirational quotes seems to answer a query of my heart.

With loving regards and Sai Ram,

Geetha S

Om Sai Ram,

I daily download and enjoy Sai Inspires and also take down notes of some of them for my further reading. It is a beautiful service for the benefit of the mankind as a whole. Please keep it going. I feel blessed.

Om Sudrania

General Feedback

I love reading all the stories you provide on this journal. It helps me through everyday situations and it literally lights up my day. It brings me closer to Prashanti Nilayam and to physical nearness to Baba. Although He is always with us, we all cherish the moments we can spend near His physical self.

Thank you so much for the love and the effort you put in the stories, reports and pictures - it helps us overseas devotees yearn just a little bit less for the next time Baba calls us to His Ashram. May Baba bless you and keep up the great work that makes me happy every day.

Sai Ram,

Helena Emling, Croatia

Thank you very much for the journal which I am very happy to read. I like each and every section very much and I hope you will continue this great seva. The journal makes me feel that I'm a little bit closer to Prashanti Nilayam and it helps me to get wiser and to remember and live the teachings of our beloved Swami. I only hope that the journal will always be available. I like it as it is at present.

Sai Ram and all the best,

Mogens, Abildgaard, Denmark

