

HEART 2 HEART

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Section</u>
03	BETWEEN YOU AND US
	SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS
06	SATHYA SAI SPEAKS – Love is the Key
08	CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI BABA - Part 31
14	CHINNA KATHA – The Winning Smile
	COVER STORY
16	RESURRECTION AND REINCARNATION, BORN NOT TO BE BORN AGAIN
	FEATURE ARTICLES
35	IN QUEST OF INFINITY - Part 4: The Birth and Death Of Stars Continue
49	DHARMA – THE DIVINE CYCLE
54	SAI MOVES LATIN AMERICA
66	GUIDE TO A HAPPY LIFE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN – THE CHINESE WAY
	SERIAL ARTICLES
75	THE DIVINE STORY OF SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI - Part 28
81	GITA FOR CHILDREN - Part 29
	WINDOW TO SAI SEVA
84	MOVING MEDICAL CAMPS IN RUSSIA
89	PRASHANTI DIARY
	SWAMI AND ME
113	LOVE MY UNCERTAINTY
117	EXPERIENCING THE ETERNAL
120	ALL THAT REMAINS IS MY SAI – AHAM BRAHMASMI
	H2H SPECIAL
127	MADRAS MEMORIES

137 HOW I BECAME FASCINATED WITH SAI – PART 2

GET INSPIRED

144 LEARNING LESSONS FROM LINCOLN

146 BAND OF GOLD

147 LIKE FATHER LIKE SUN

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

150 MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

155 QUIZ ON HEART2HEART

THE HEALING TOUCH

158 FROM LIFELESS EXISTENCE TO A LIVING
INSPIRATION....THE RIVETING STORY OF GEORGE
MELKAY

165 YOUR SAY

BETWEEN YOU AND US

How is it that Mozart, at the age of four, learnt to play clavier, violin, and organ like a virtuoso and by five, was ready with his first composition? Or, Pablo Picasso able to paint his first masterpiece *Le Picador* at age eight? Or, for that matter, Balamurali Ambati graduate from New York University at age 13 and become the world's youngest doctor at age 17! On a different note, why is it that one is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, while the other struggles for existence right from day one on earth? Similarly, why does anyone have to be born blind, deaf or dumb? Or, be suddenly afflicted with a disease with no apparent reason? Why it is that one person is always lucky, while another, in spite of right and best efforts, is always at the wrong end? Call it "Law of Nature", "Mystery of Creation", "Cosmic Principles", or whatever, the Law of Karma – rule of cause and effect, action and reaction - is an indissoluble part of man's life and destiny, whether one acknowledges it or not.

"*Karmane bandhini Manushya Loke*", Swami has mentioned this any number of times in His divine discourses, which means, "Mankind is bound by *Karma* (or activity)." In fact, this is what defines man – his present, past and future. "When you are born, you are not born with garlands and necklaces. You have no pearls or diamonds... But around your neck hangs the garland of your past *Karma* (actions) and acquired *samskaras* (subtle impressions). When you die you do not take anything with you except the consequences of your good and evil actions. You are always decked with the invisible garland of your inexorable Karma, which pursues and burdens you," Bhagavan said during a summer course discourse in 1979.

In fact, this law is one of the principal tenets of all *dharmic* religions. "Men have, O young man, deeds as their very own, they are inheritors of deeds, deeds are their matrix, deeds are their kith and kin, and deeds are their support. It is deeds that classify men into high or low status," the Buddha had declared and emphasized that that the body is an 'old deed' and to suffer, means, to 'lie on the bed one has made'. The ancient sages of India in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* have revealed: "According to his deeds, the embodied self assumes successively various forms in various conditions". Similarly, Jainism concurs that a person's physical and mental make-up and fortune in life can be traced back to the effects of his or her previous actions, in this, or an earlier life. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna explains: 'Just as the body casts off worn out clothes and puts on new ones, so the infinite, immortal self casts off worn out bodies and enters into new ones'. And this is not restricted to the faiths in the Indian Subcontinent or Asia alone, if we carefully investigate even in Christianity, there is an implicit acceptance of this seemingly inexorable rule. The classic example from the Bible being the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (*Galatians* 6,7). There are many more such like the Apostle's question in John 9.2: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"; or Jesus' reproach to Peter: "All who draw the sword will die by the sword" after he cut off the ear of the high priest's servant in his attempt to prevent Jesus' arrest. Though disputed by many Christians and others in the West, this eternal principle is illustrated through

unmistakable evidence in the story and words of Jesus. How? Our cover story will clearly explain how the drama of the life of Jesus is, in fact, so completely intertwined with this inevitable law of cause and effect.

Those who say reincarnation is incompatible with Christianity because it undermines and compromises God's sovereignty over creation, transforming him into a helpless spectator of the human tragedy, fail to see that this concept actually emboldens man, gives him hope and empowers him to attract the grace of the divine. The supremacy and ultimate nature of God's power is, in fact, enhanced. Again, there are others who state that 'belief in reincarnation' takes away morality and motivation for moral living, as a convict can adopt a detached stand to crime and theft considering them to be 'normal debts to be paid', but in reality, if we examine the practice of law of karma, we visibly see that it reinforces right conduct and moral living like no other, because a person knows that he can never escape the damaging consequences of his actions, unless, of course, he takes corrective actions, which we will come to shortly. There are still a third group of anti-reincarnationists who pronounce that it represents a threat to the very essence of Christianity, which is, 'the need for Christ's redemptive sacrifice for our sins.' It is here that perhaps the highest sacrifice of Jesus is understood only superficially. It is pertinent to recognize that Avatars and divine incarnations descend to demonstrate a divine life and be a model for man. Jesus' crucifixion is the pinnacle of service, surrender and forbearance meant to inspire the whole of mankind to emulate.

In fact, beloved Swami gave an altogether new dimension to this episode during His Christmas Discourse in 1976 when He said, "People talk of the sacrifice of Christ...but, he was surrounded and bound...and nailed to the cross...he was not a free man. Let us pay attention to the sacrifice that Jesus made while free, out of his own volition. He sacrificed his happiness, prosperity, comfort, safety and position; he braved the enmity of the powerful. He refused to yield to compromise. He renounced the 'ego', which is the toughest thing to get rid of. Honour Him for these... this is the sacrifice greater than the sacrifice of the body under duress...Crucify your ego and be free." Here lies, perhaps, the whole essence of crucifixion and resurrection. This also convincingly answers those who subvert the law of karma saying, "If we have to face the consequences of all our actions, what is the necessity of the divine?"

Swami says, "If we can root out the entrenched tendencies that cling to our heart, we are free to perform any action without concern for the results. From that point on we will not be bound by any *Karma*." This simply means that if we can subdue our "I – the attachment and 'mineness'", and perform every act as a dedication, a worship, to the divine, then no action or its consequence can ever touch us. 'Mountains of sin can be then washed away,' Swami says, through the grace of the All-merciful One. In fact, this 'cutting of the ego' is the symbolic meaning that the 'cross' so evidently expounds. And this is precisely the message every devotee of the Lord should ponder over and live out as they celebrate 'Easter'. How exactly to go about practicing

this? Is there a systematic approach to achieve this glorious goal? When you read our cover story, you will be enlightened on all these specific aspects.

Jesus said 'unless you die, you will not live (John 19.3). And what has to 'die' is in essence, the source of all our egos, the mind. Recently, on Ugadi, the Telugu New Years day, Swami said, "This year, (named) Sarvajit, is very significant to realize divinity latent in a human being...A truthful desire will always find fulfillment." So, dear readers, let us take this unique opportunity to loose ourselves in the thought of the divine, in His work and His mission this sacred year. Let God-consciousness pervade our every act. Let us become Him, just like Jesus.

Loving Regards,
H2H Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Love Is The Key

Man is so designed that he can derive *anandha* (bliss) and maintain it only through association with his kind. To divest oneself of all contacts with others, and tread a lonely path is a sign of weakness, of fear, not of courage. Lively association alone produces morality, justice, compassion, sympathy, love, tolerance, equanimity and many other qualities that toughen and train character, and mould the personality of man. Culture is the consequence of the co-mingling of hearts and heads. A group of individuals, who are charged with hatred or contempt of each other, cannot produce any beneficial effect on any of its components; a common outlook, or rather, a common inlook, is the essential factor, *Sama-chintha* - the sameness of beliefs, opinions and attitudes - is the prime factor. This *Sama-chintha* must result in a flood of *anandha* (divine bliss) that envelops and enthuses the entire group. If the individual knows he is Divine and that all else are equally so, that consciousness is the best bond for Society, that *anandha* is the best atmosphere to sustain the Society - how can a person who knows that all are Divine keep away from the God He recognises? "I am he, he is I, both I and He are kith and kin in Him." This awareness is so thrilling, so satisfying, so uplifting, that such Society is the noblest *Sathsang* (holy company) man can ever come into.

This Universe Is Enveloped In God

Shutting yourself in a room and offering incense and flowers to a picture or image of God, singing or reciting His glory are very poor substitutes for the discipline that will liberate you from ignorance. All beings are images of God; all men are His pictures; then, why shut yourselves in? All creation is marching on a pilgrimage to Him; why then behave as if you are trekking it alone? You believe that the time spent in church or temple or the domestic shrine in adoration and in ritual worship is devoted to God and the rest is spent for other purposes. But, you cannot demarcate and delimit the realms of God and man like that. God is ever with you everywhere. *Vasudhevassarvamidham* – "All this is God." Society is the school where this lesson is taught to those who earnestly seek.

The sages of this land (ancient India) resorted to the hermitages in the forests, and mixed with the steadfast seekers there in scholastic discussion and disciplinary practices. They drew inspiration and instruction from each other, and learnt the Truth, *Ishaavaasyam idham jagath* - "This Universe is enveloped in God" - that God is the string on which the worlds are strung. When man gives up his conceit and becomes nature's pupil, rather than its tyrannical master, he can hear her voice advising, admonishing, and illuminating.

Man has all the resources he needs in himself. He can tap them by identifying them and manifesting them, and by sharing them with others. He is *Sath*, *Chith* and *Aanandha* (Being, Awareness, Bliss Absolute); He is *Shiva-Shakthi Swaruupa* (Form of divine-energy). When man extols himself, he is extolling God. Do not cultivate the conviction that you are mere men; be assured that you are destined for Divinity. When Divinity takes on the human form as described in the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, and the Bhagavatha (Indian epics), one has to interpret the actions as providing examples and lessons, and not as human stories enacted for entertainment...

The Pristine Prayer

A heart saturated with love of God can never entertain thoughts of violence. It is sheer hypocrisy, to kneel before God and, then, force men to kneel before you. God is love, God is peace, God is strength. How can a person be in contact with God, and yet, be proud and acrimonious? Agitated and angry? Weak and vacillating? His claim to be in contact with God is only a laughable foible; it cannot be true. A tree is judged by its fruit. Leaders of people have to develop this universal feeling of love, not limited to political boundaries which change from decade to decade, or religious labels which are affixed and erased to suit temporary needs. The prayer that rose from millions in this country (India) from all its temples, holy seafronts, shrines and altars for centuries, has been *Sarve janaah sukhino bhavanthu* – ‘Let all the people of the world be happy and prosperous’, *samastha lokaah sukhino bhavanthu* – ‘May all the worlds have peace and prosperity.’ So, pray for all humanity, for the welfare and happiness, the peace and progress of all countries of the world, and all beings everywhere.

- *Divine Discourse in Hyderabad, April 1973*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI
PART 31
(continued from the previous issue)

The Uniqueness of Human Birth

H (Hislop): May I ask a spiritual question?

SAI: Go ahead.

H: Is there something that is unique about having a physical body?

SAI: **The human form is unique in that the divine force is as much as 80 per cent present. In the animal only about 15 per cent.** Man can raise himself to union with God, whereas the animal can never be free of its natural state. For example, a cat can be fed some nice things, but if it sees a mouse, even while eating the food, it leaves the food and goes for the mouse. A tiger can be trained, but food made from grains does not satisfy it. The tiger's impulse to kill and eat remains.

H: But Swami, what is so unusual about it? Why should anyone wish to have a physical body?

SAI: Hislop is in Mexico or America or Puttaparthi. Without a body how would he know where he was? A stone falls. The force of gravity is unseen but is revealed by the falling stone. The body of man is necessary because it is able to reveal the unseen God. The sun, moon and stars are in space, and they move and revolve according to order and discipline. If that discipline wavered for a moment all would collapse. What maintains that discipline? It is the unseen divine force.

H: What is unique and special about having a human body?

SAI: Swami already explained that the body serves to reveal the indwelling divinity.

H: Yes, Swamiji. But I mean from the standpoint of the individuals what is the value to the individual of having a body? He lives and dies, why should he care? Science says there are many planets where there will be much the same life.

SAI: In all the universe there is no other planet that has human life, or a similar life-form.

H: In that case, Swami, there has to be something very special and unique about life in a physical body?

SAI: There is life throughout the universe. To God, the universe is one. Rebirth can never be in other regions of the universe. Always the rebirth is on Earth.

H: Swami, what does that mean to the individual?

SAI: **The expression of life on Earth is upward through the human to the Divine. By virtue of human birth, the next step is the full realization of the Divine. Human life is sacred and must be appreciated as having the highest value.**

H: Considering the individual, Swamiji, can it be that Swami is saying that human birth is some sort of a special opportunity to get free from birth and death?

SAI: Quite right. That is the case.

H: Swamiji! Then, that is it? That is the secret! That is unique feature of being born into a body!

SAI: Yes, that is the unique feature.

H: Swami, are there other regions throughout the universe where there may also be an escape from birth and death.

SAI: **Only on Earth may this take place. In no other planet or region throughout the indescribable vastness of the universe does this opportunity exist. It is unique and is limited to this earth.**

H: Swami! Wonderful! Wonderful! How sacred is this Earth! How infinitely precious is human birth!

SAI: That is so. But people have no appreciation or understanding of it. They do not know.

H: Swami, may this great life-secret be told to the devotees? At Sathya Sai Baba centres, they should know that even five minutes time wasted is a tragic loss in the face of the magnificence of this human opportunity.

SAI: Yes, you may tell. The question that you have raised is of the greatest importance, and the answer may be told.

H: Swami, the answer is divine! It is so wonderful that adequate appreciation cannot be put into words. Swamiji said that there was no rebirth from Earth to other regions of the universe. How about the reverse? Can there be a movement from the regions or universe to Earth?

SAI: **All life may aspire to human birth. But only through the human birth may God be realized. To waste time is the greatest folly. Now and here is the individual. Now and here is the opportunity to realize the absolute goal of life. Who can be sure of the conditions and status of his next birth? Not even one moment of this life should be wasted.**

The Sadhana of Adjusting to Life

A Visitor: Swami, I have a question. What is the best sadhana for a young person with business, family attachments and bondage. *(After Swami had jokingly referred to the visitor's 8 month-old daughter as attachment bondage - Samsara)?*

SAI: It is not correct to look at these things as bondage or attachment. They must be seen as "adjustment sadhana." To keep your life balanced and to give direction they are good things. The changes you must make in your life, your daily routine – these adjustments are sadhana, not bondage.

The purpose of all sadhana is to see the good, the Divine in everything and to be able to overlook the bad, the evil. From the viewpoint of Divinity, there is no good or bad - all is Divine. But the mind sees this as good and that as bad, this

as right and that as wrong. It is the mind that must be trained to see the Divine in everyone and in each difficulty.

A small example: A dead dog is on the road, crows are pecking at it. People walk by and say, "Oh, what a terrible sight and horrible smell !" But Jesus was walking by and He said, "What beautiful teeth the dog has, so white and shiny. Nobody was brushing or taking care, but still the dog kept such beautiful teeth." **Jesus was showing that one can see the best qualities in even the worst situations. People who are saintly look always to the good and do not become entangled in the bad.**

Another example: A knife is used by a surgeon and a knife is also used by a villain. The surgeon's cutting of a person is for his good, but the villain uses the knife for an evil purpose. A butcher may use knife to cut meat and a lady may use a knife to cut fruit for a salad. If all the knives are put in a circle with a magnet at the centre, all the knives will be equally attracted by the magnet. The good or bad is not in the knives. God is the magnet and all men are attracted to God. Good and bad are not in a human being, but in the way the mind is used.

Do not fill the mind with thoughts of the evil actions that may be perceived in the world. **The purpose of all types of sadhana is to train the mind to see the Divine in everything- that is true adjustment sadhana.** This you can carry this out in everything you do.

Guidance for Young People

H: Devotees in New York would like to have a guideline for personal life, similar to the administrative Guidelines for Centers.

SAI: The principal thing is that the life and the work should be dedicated to God.

H: Swami, they would like a series of do's and don'ts to guide them through the day.

SAI: There are so many different vocations and professions that each has its appropriate code of behaviour. One vital principle for everyone is to do no harm to others. We should do everything in our power to help others.

H: A big problem that faces these young people is that of drugs. It is the general belief that marijuana is not harmful.

SAI: At first, a drug may make the person feel strong and confident. But all drugs are unnatural in their effect on the mind, and they do positive harm to the brain and to the spiritual capacity. The spiritual aspirant, the devotee of God should not use of drugs.

H: Most young people, not only in New York, have the desire to, or feel pressure to engage in intensive social life. What is the correct attitude for Sai devotees?

SAI: Social Service, yes. Idle social life is not good.

H: Swami, the devotee arises in the morning, and then what for the day?

SAI: The awakening each morning should be a new birth. After awakening, be quiet for a few minutes. Pray to God for strength to live the day in dedication to

Him, and for the strength to help others. At night time, there is a new death. Recollect the day - but not in detail, and offer it to the Almighty. In the morning, the day was dedicated to God. At night, the day's work and its fruit is laid as an offering at His Lotus Feet.

No Publicity for Sai Centres

H: Swami, new Centers, with maybe only three people, want to have some other people come to their meetings, but months pass and nobody comes. Could they do something like posting a notice of their meeting at places like health food stores?

SAI: No. Swami prefers that additional people come only through observing the virtuous lives of the Center members, and by word of mouth. Notices and such might start small, but in time they will get out-of-hand. Even such small things as notices will be taken as an advertising of Swami. Other Swamis have to advertise and even provide transport, but Sai does no advertising, yet thousands come. Sai even tells the people here to go home, but they stay. There is this difference.

H: Then the small Centers will need to just patiently wait for membership increases?

SAI: Yes.

The Jewish Faith and The Sarva Dharma Symbol

H: Swami, some questions arise in the American Centers for which I do not have an answer. Many people of Jewish faith do not understand why the symbol of the Jewish faith is not included in the Sai symbol of all religions, since the Jewish people exceed in numbers some of the religions represented in the Sai symbol.

SAI: It is not through any intention that the Jewish symbol is excluded. In India, there is not a general awareness that the Jewish symbol is substantially different. Does the Cross fail to symbolize the Jewish faith to a substantial degree?

H: Yes, Swami. There is a substantial difference.

SAI: Then let the Jewish people make a proposal to us and we will give consideration to it.

H: Swami says that there is the duty of self-preservation. People wonder how far this goes. To save one's own life, should one kill the person who is attacking?

SAI: To preserve one's body is an important duty. One may take whatever means are necessary for self-preservation. About the other part of your question: to kill the person attacking - the answer is "yes," if that is the only way to preserve one's own life. But keep in mind that many alternate actions might be taken to avoid being killed. Only if every possibility is exhausted may one take the extreme measure of killing the attacker.

The Lokas of the Sun and Moon

H: Swami's discourse about people going to the Moon *Loka* (world of moon) and the Sun *Loka* (world of sun) created much confusion.

SAI: Sai has explained it before, and perhaps the people asking the question did not read. People may think there is a journey over a distance to the realm of Indra, the Moon, and the Sun. **All such changes are within the person. If a person develops his life so that he has great physical force and strength, he is said to have centered his life in the Indra Loka. If he has developed his mind to such an extent that it is beyond the comprehension of an ordinary person, his life is said to be in the Moon Loka. And, if a man had developed intelligence to a maximum extent, his life is said to be in the Sun Loka.**

Attaining Human Birth

H: Another question that arises has to do with Swami's statement that, by virtuous actions in the past, a human birth is gained. In this context there must have been virtuous animal actions, but how can this be when the animal acts by instinct?

SAI: **A good action is good whether accomplished by instinct or reason. Is not the shelter provided by a tree good for both animal and man? When a cow denies milk to its calf because the milk is taken by the herdsman, the result is beneficial for the human persons who drink the milk, and the benefit enjoyed is no less because the cow did not think, but is only being itself. And the dog in the house, does he not guard and care for the master, and love him too?** A human guard must be paid, but the dog gives love and loyalty without concept of payment. There are endless examples throughout nature of good and virtuous action being fully effective, even though, by instinct, the animal or plant is only being true to its own nature.

Human life is not being depleted even though millions die and, in addition, there is a constant transition from humanity to the Divine. Instead of depletion, the human population is growing, and this new supply comes from the rock, the insect, the animal. Even science testifies that the rock decomposes and becomes the tree; the vegetation is eaten and becomes the animal; and the animal in its various aspects is consumed and becomes the human. **It is a constant process of passing from one grade to another. The human birth is the final birth and, dependent on the virtue of the life, it ends in the Divine, or is reborn again.**

H: Is degrading possible? Is there a rebirth back to the animal?

SAI: The possibility is not denied, but it is only rarely that such a thing happens. The degrading of human life due to lack of virtue will normally result in rebirth as a lower grade human. The total process is always present. Table and wood are equally present. If attention is given to wood, table is not seen. If attention is given to table, wood is not seen. This cushion is not without thread, nor is the thread without cotton. How it is viewed is a matter of emphasis. Here I am now drawing three circles, the smaller within the larger. This middle one represents the Jiva (the individual "soul"); the smaller circle, the body; and the largest, the Atma (the ultimate Self).

The smaller circle is what you think you are, the next one what others think you are, and the third is what you really are: the Atma. The smaller circle may expand and expand until it merges with the larger, the Atma.

H: Swamiji, that is the present list of questions that have come up for which I did not have the answers.

SAI: It is good. It is important that the questions be asked. They are the questions that are presented to the many gurus, but Sai can give the correct answers.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

The Winning Smile

Once it happened that Krishna, Balarama and Satyaki who were quite little boys at that time, scarce four or five years old, strayed into a thick jungle, all alone. Darkness fell, and there was no way of reaching Gokulam! Of course, as you must have guessed already, it was a stratagem of Krishna. Even at that age, he would do nothing without a deep purpose behind it and the purpose would invariably be teaching someone some good lesson. They decided to spend the night, just where they were. Krishna put fright into them with his descriptions of ghosts, ghouls, and demons roaming in search of human prey. He proposed that two of them sleep for three hours at a stretch while the other one keeps watch.

It was Krishna's duty to keep awake and be on the lookout from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. Satyaki was to be vigilant from 10:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. Balarama was to start his part of the duty at 1:00 a.m. and keep on till 4:00 a.m. Satyaki sat up at ten and Balarama and Krishna laid themselves on beds of dried leaves and slept soundly. Meanwhile a demon did actually present himself before the little Satyaki. He fell upon the boy, who resisted heroically, dealing and receiving hammer strokes with fists with a good deal of clawing and biting in between. The demon had to retreat at last, leaving Satyaki badly mauled, but happy.

The two brothers were sound asleep. They had not been disturbed in the least by noise of the encounter. Satyaki had met blow with blow, and dealt injury for injury. At 1:00, he awakened Balarama and stretched his body on the heap of leaves, as if nothing had happened. The demon invited Balarama, too, for combat and had to retreat humiliated, because Balarama too was as fierce as he, and his blows were even more terrible than Satyaki's. Balarama too curled himself into the bed at 4:00 a.m. after awakening Krishna who was to keep watch in *Brahmamuhurta*, the auspicious hour when Gods are to be propitiated, that is, until dawn.

The demon came roaring like a wounded tiger, and advanced furiously at the little Divine Boy. Krishna turned his sweet charming face at him, and rewarded him with a lovely smile. That smile disarmed the demon. The longer he came under its influence, the weaker became his vengeance and venom. At last, the demon became as docile as a lamb. When the other two awoke, they were surprised at the victory that Krishna had won by the weapon of Love.

You cannot destroy anger by anger, cruelty by cruelty, hatred by hatred. Anger can be subdued only by forbearance. Cruelty can be overcome only by non-violence. Hatred yields only to charity and compassion.

- BABA

COVER STORY

RESURRECTION AND REINCARNATION: BORN, NOT TO BE BORN AGAIN

One day Jesus took his close disciples, Peter, James and John up on a high mountain. There Jesus revealed to these disciples a glimpse of His Divine effulgence. As the men watched Jesus was transfigured. His appearance changed so that His face shone like the brilliance of a million suns, and His clothing became dazzling white. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. Peter blurted out, "Lord, this is wonderful! If you want me to, I'll make three shrines, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." This Divine experience was too much for Peter and he wanted it to be permanent. But even as he said it, they were taken up in a cloud of bliss. In this Super-conscious state they heard the Primordial Sound of Silence saying: "This is My beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with Him. Listen to Him." This heightened experience gave the disciples a spiritual shock. They fell face down on the ground. Jesus, the all compassionate Mother came and resuscitated them. "Get up," He said, "don't be afraid." With His gentle touch, the disciples came back to normal consciousness and when they looked they saw only Jesus with them. (Matthew 17:1-9)

Jesus instructed the disciples not to tell anyone about their experience until He has been raised from the dead. That is until He has shown the world that He has power to lay down His body and to take it up again. (John 10:18)

This Divine experience instilled in the hearts of the disciples the truth of the Divinity of their Master. "Yes, He is the promised Messiah, the One who is to come". However, one more doubt lingered in their minds. The prophets of yore had given unmistakable signs that will herald the coming of the Anointed One. One of these is that the great Prophet Elijah who lived 850 years before Christ will come again to prepare the way for the Messiah. "Behold I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great day of the Lord". (Malachi 4:5) "Since this prophecy has not been fulfilled", the disciples wondered in their minds, "why does Jesus claim to be the Promised Messiah?" And as they descended the mountain, they mustered the courage to ask Him: "Why do the teachers of religious law insist that Elijah must return before the Messiah comes?"

Jesus, the master of time, told them that Elijah had already come in the person of John the Baptist but people had not recognized him and he was being badly treated. (Matthew 17:12; and 11:14)

In the drama of John the Baptist - the reincarnation of Elijah - and Jesus the resurrection of the Christ, we see the twin play of reincarnation and resurrection. ***Resurrection is the realization of who we are. Since our essence, our true Self is the very essence of all things, created and uncreated, resurrection is the knowledge and totality of all things. Reincarnation is the ignorance of who we are. It is the delusion that***

identifies the unbounded Immortal Spirit with the limitations of the body-mind complex. Resurrection therefore, is the consummation of reincarnation. The very purpose of birth is to overcome the cycle of rebirth. We are born to learn how not to be born again. Our Beloved Swami once said in one of His discourses in Brindavan that the greatest gift one can give to a Mother is not to be born again in the womb of a mother. Within this process of emancipation we are faced with the intricacies of fate and freewill, the play of karma and grace and the enigmas of suffering and death. How can we overcome death? When Jesus says "Unless you die, you will not live"(John 19 :3), what exactly did He mean? What is death? What is it that must die? What is it that reincarnates? What is it that resurrects? What is it that is not born and does not die?

Through history Humanity has battled with these mysteries from age to age. However hard one may try to grapple with these questions, the final elixir lies on that resurrection day: that early morning Sun-day, when the Effulgent Sun of the Atma rises from within our hearts. Then all doubts will dissolve as the mist disappears with the dawn of the morning sun. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed.(Luke 12:2) This presentation is not aimed to give a blueprint answer to the above questions, but to dare you to dive into that depth of your being wherein there lie no secrets.

The Story of John the Baptist who was Elijah

The conception and birth of John the Baptist was a Divine Miracle. It all began with a Jewish priest, Zechariah, who lived when Herod was king of Judea. (37 – 4 BC) Zechariah was a member of the priestly order of Abijah. His wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

One day while Zachariah was engaged in his priestly duties in the temple, he had an unusual experience. An angel of the Lord appeared to him with this message: "Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:5 -13)

Zachariah doubted the message of the angel Gabriel because he could not understand how his wife who has passed the age of childbearing could give birth to a son. Because of this unbelief, Zachariah was struck dumb by the angel and was not to speak again until the Holy child John was born. It was on the eighth day during the naming ceremony that Zachariah spoke again to the delight of all to disclose the name which the Angel had given to the child:

“He is to be called John”. We were told that the child John grew up in the Spirit and Power of God and stayed alone in the wilderness living a very austere and simple life. Jesus said that John neither ate nor drank anything. (Matthew 11:18)

Jesus in the Womb of Mary visits John in the Womb of Elizabeth

After six months of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was again sent by God to a virgin named Mary to announce to her the good news that she was to be the chosen Mother of God - she was to bear the Divine Child, Jesus. After this message, the Angel told Mary that her relative (cousin or aunt) Elizabeth who was said to be barren was going to have a child in her old age and is now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God! Mary who was then pregnant with the Divine Child Jesus hurried into the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, we were told that the child in her womb leapt for joy. Even as a fetus in the womb of his mother, John recognized the presence of Jesus in the womb of Mary. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. In other words, Mary must have stayed to help Elizabeth until John was delivered. (Luke 1:56)

John was the One Who Announced the Divinity of Jesus

Before Jesus began His public ministry in Israel around the age of 29, people thronged to John in the wilderness where he was preaching and baptizing by the River Jordan. The people were curious to know the identity of John. They were wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ, the Promised Messiah. John flatly denied it. “I am not the Messiah,” he said. “I baptize you with water but there is someone among you who is more powerful than I, One whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” They then asked John whether he was Elijah or one of the prophets. John said, “No, I am not”. (John 1:21) It is interesting to notice that John did not know that he was Elijah. But Jesus who has merged with the principle of time knew who he was. John’s state is the common experience of many who have not reached the super conscious state of being where one is able to see all things - past, present and future.

When finally Jesus appeared on the scene, it was John the Baptist who announced His Identity to the world: “Behold! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘Soon a man is coming who is far greater than I am’. From now onwards, He must increase and I must decrease”. (cf John 1:29 ff)

Jesus was Baptized by John

Jesus went to John to be baptized. Baptism is a Jewish/Christian religious ritual symbolizing the new birth in the Spirit. It is an outward sign which initiates the spiritual aspirant on the inward path that leads to the resurrection of the Eternal Immortal Spirit. Jesus once said, “The truth is, no one can enter

the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit.”(John 3:5) The water used in the ritual of baptism represents the cleansing process that leads to the inner purification of the heart. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. John baptized with water. But Jesus baptized with fire and the Holy Spirit. Water can cleanse only the outside. That is why the baptism of John is regarded as incomplete. But the spiritual agents of fire and the Holy Spirit that represent Christ’s baptism purify from within and without and makes the inside one with the outside. This is initiation into the highest state.

John was surprised that Jesus was coming to him for baptism. He knew Jesus was clean both inside and out. He protested saying, “I am the one who needs to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. In this way we could say that John the Baptist was the Guru of Jesus who initiated Him on the path of the Spirit; just as Lord Rama was initiated by Sage Vashishta and Lord Krishna by Sage Sandeepani. They took upon themselves a Guru, not because they needed one, but because they want to teach humanity the necessity of spiritual initiation on the path of liberation.

After His baptism, as Jesus came out of the water, the heavens were opened and John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on Him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with Him.” (Matthew 3:17)

John Imprisoned by King Herod

Herod Antipas (born 20 BC) ruled over Galilee and Perea where Jesus and John the Baptist concentrated their ministries. King Herod had violated the Old Testament Jewish law that forbade the marriage of a man to his brother’s wife. (Leviticus 18:16) Herod had snatched away Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip while Philip was still alive. John the Baptist openly denounced this marriage saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” As a result, Herodias nursed a very grievous grudge against John and wanted to kill him by all means. Herod feared John because all the people believed John was a prophet. As a compromise to his wife, he had John put in prison around AD 30 or 31.

John Doubts the Divinity of Jesus

While John was in prison, naturally he would have prayed to Jesus to free him from the shackles of those who wanted to kill him. John knew very well that Jesus had the Power to free him. But Jesus was totally silent about John’s predicament. Only one who has been behind bars would understand the agony of John the Baptist, whose life was hanging by a thread. What didn’t John do for Jesus? He has been righteous from the womb. Jesus said John was the consummation of all the prophets put together. John had sacrificed

every drop of blood and sweat for the mission of Jesus. For the sake of Jesus he spent all his life in the austerity and the dangers of the wilderness neither eating nor drinking. The very reason of his birth was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. This mission he carried out with his entire Soul and Heart and Strength. On the physical plane, John was a blood relation of Jesus. What other conditions could a devotee fulfill to draw the compassion of the Lord?

The big Atmic question is "Why didn't Jesus do anything to help John?" Sometimes devotees cry to the Lord in the anguish of their suffering but all that they experience is an impenetrable Silence. Can the One who made the ears not hear? Can the One whose very essence is pure Love be indifferent to the anguish of suffering?

This condition raised a number of doubts in the mind of John. He has already heard the mighty works that Jesus was doing. So he sent his disciples who came to visit him in prison back to Jesus to ask Him: "Are you really the Messiah we've been waiting for, or should we keep looking for someone else?" Jesus told them, "Go back to John and tell him about what you have heard and seen—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor. And tell him: 'Blessed is he who does not lose faith in the Son of man.'" (Matthew 11:6) The test of true faith is that unconditional and unwavering devotion to the Lord in the midst of the contradictions of reason. Indeed it is impossible to please God without faith. (Hebrews 11: 6)

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Herodias's hatred for John the Baptist was unquenchable. She could not settle for just his imprisonment. Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. Herodias had planned to have her daughter, Salome, dance before Herod and his guests. Salome's dancing pleased Herod and his dinner guests and in an impulsive passion, Herod promised her under oath that he would give her anything she asked for, up to even half his kingdom. The little girl went to her mother and said, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." Immediately Herod regretted his rash promise, but because of his oath and because he didn't want to back down in front of his guests, he issued the necessary orders. So John was beheaded in the prison, and his head was brought on a tray and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. John's disciples came for his body and buried it. Then they told Jesus what had happened.

So ends the story of John the Baptist as far as the Human mind can perceive it. It is a very sad story from the limited human perspective that sees only a part of the whole. The story of John the Baptist as it stands now leaves a lot of questions unanswered. It creates a lot of contradictions about God as we are

taught to see Him - All Loving, All Knowing, All Powerful, All Just and Omnipresent. It evokes a feeling of angst, disgust, and revenge towards life and towards being. Why did Jesus tell us, "Love your enemies?" Can this Love truly be genuine when we find ourselves in the practical situation of John the Baptist? Why did Jesus tell us, "Do not judge"? In the existential situation of John the Baptist, how is it possible not to pass judgment on Herod and Herodias?

So far we have looked at the story from the perspective of John the Baptist, which is also our own perspective, the human point of view. The human mind can only see fractions because its very nature is fragmentation. The Spirit sees all things because its essence is Totality. Let us now see the story not from the human fragmented **points-of-view**, but from the Divine Holistic **view-point** where all points, past, present and future converge.

The Big Atmic Question: "Why Is God Silent?"

The present Life is a short interlude in the vast infinite span of Life.

Although John the Baptist was totally ignorant of his past, Jesus knew him even before he was born. The Lord said to the Jewish Prophet Jeremiah, "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the world." (Jeremiah 1:5). Lord Krishna said to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita "You and I have gone through many births. I know each one of them but you are ignorant of them". How is it that Jesus and Krishna knew and can see former births but we can't even remember exactly the details of what happened in our lives ten years ago, nay, we can't even recall everything that took place just a day before? When such is the case with the happenings of a single day what shall be said of the events of past lives?

We find ourselves in this situation because we are operating on a level of consciousness which has a very small memory capacity. This is the waking state consciousness, commonly described as the **conscious state**. Everyone has three other levels of consciousness which remain untapped by most people. These three include the sub-conscious state, the unconscious state and the super – conscious state (Turiya).

Beloved Swami has offered many simple explanations to these levels of consciousness in His Divine discourses. The first level of consciousness, described as the **conscious state** relates to the waking state. During this state we see the sun that illumines various objects and the moon that plays a similar role at night. Hence we conclude that the sun and the moon are responsible for the things we see during the day. But when we are dreaming, we also see many things. However, the sun and the moon seen during the waking state are not there during the dream state nor is any other type of light. Yet in the dream state, we can see an entire world, namely the dream world. What is it that illumines that world? This dream state has been described as the **sub-conscious state**. In the subconscious is stored all the information of our past lives to the last minute detail.

In the deep-sleep dreamless state, there is absolute darkness. There is neither knowledge nor wisdom in that state. But a further inquiry will lead us to the question of how we know that it is dark? What is the light of awareness that enables us to see and know this darkness? The deep sleep state has been referred to as the **Unconscious state**. The unconscious state is beyond the mind. It is the undisturbed stillness of bliss and is associated with the causal body that veils the Supreme Self. It is the total absorption in pure bliss without an object. In dreamless sleep we are able to contact this level of consciousness which gives utmost rest and freshness to the body-mind complex. When we wake up from deep sleep we feel quite refreshed and energized. To become conscious of the unconscious state (**Consciousness of Unconsciousness**) is to attain that undisturbed stillness of silence behind the multiplicity of sound.

There is a fourth state which transcends all these other states. This may be described as the **Super-conscious state** or **Turiya**. In this state of awareness, you are able to see everything, everywhere and enjoy bliss supreme. Those who have realized this state of consciousness are the masters of time and space. They are everywhere, they know everything and they can do anything.

These four levels of consciousness are in everyone just as butter is in every drop of milk. The fact that one has not realized the butter in the milk does not mean that it is not there. In the same way, the fact that one cannot see one's past lives does not mean that one is only appearing for the first time in this terrestrial universe.

When we see only one life time out of millions of other life times how can we give correct judgment? This is the limitation imposed by the mind. Only those who have merged with the principle of Divinity can give correct judgment. Since Jesus has said that John the Baptist was Elijah in his former life (850 years back) let us now dig into the sands of history to discover the hidden fossils that will unravel the mysteries of God's Silence and explain some of the mysteries of reincarnation.

The Untold Story of Elijah

Elijah lived and prophesied around 850 BC during the reign of King Ahab. He was one of the greatest prophets Israel ever had. Many great miraculous signs and wonders were attributed to him including raising the dead to life. At the end of his life, Elijah's body did not go through the natural process of death and decay. Instead his body was dematerialized into pure energy in what the bible refers to as a chariot of fire. (2 King 2:11) Such was the greatness of the prophet Elijah the Tishbite.

One of the greatest confrontations that Elijah faced during his ministry as a prophet was the battle for the religious freedom of Israel. Israel as a nation worshiped Yahweh the God of their ancestors. They entered into an agreement (covenant) as a people with Yahweh who delivered them from

slavery in Egypt. Yahweh was to be the personal God (Guru) of the people of Israel on one hand and on the other, Israel was to obey the laws of Yahweh which include the Ten Commandments and a more extensive list of laws that were written down in the "Book of the Covenant" (Exodus 21 :1-23).

King Ahab went and married a foreigner, Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal the King of Sidon. When Jezebel moved to Israel she brought Baal, the God of her people which she worshipped. As time went on she forced her husband to make Baal the state religion. Pretty soon, almost all of Israel was worshipping Baal and this violated the covenant Israel had made with Yahweh.

Although God is One and can be worshipped and appropriated in different forms, God wants us to stick to One Form and One Name. Without singleness of mind and that unshakable faith in the chosen Guru, it is impossible to control the wayward and wavering nature of the mind. To penetrate that level of consciousness where we are one with God we must stick to the chosen Guru.

Real idolatry lies in the wayward nature of the mind to jump from one Guru to another at the least dissatisfaction of one's expectations on the Guru. Devotees nowadays find faults with their Gurus and hop from one Guru to another. The fault is not with the Guru. The problem is with the mind of man. True Masters will never yield to the vicissitudes of the mind of the devotee. Masters are one. Follow one Master. Their task is also one, namely to destroy the expectations of the disciples. Devotees run to a Guru with a heap of desires. But the Guru's one desire is to make the disciple desireless. When the devotee cannot surrender to this action of the Guru, how can the goal of life be reached? The result is a trail of Gurus and before long the devotee will start boasting on how many gurus he has come across!

It is true that treasures are hidden in the womb of mother earth. But when you do not drill at one point, how can you hope to reach the depths of the treasure? One-pointedness of mind, heart and strength is the greatest commandment imposed on the people of Israel so as to reach that promised land of supreme peace, bliss and beatitude. "Listen O Israel, Yahweh is One. And you shall Love the Lord your God (Yahweh Adonai) with all your Mind and with all your heart and with all your strength". (Deuteronomy 6:4)

This was the mission of Elijah: to turn the hearts and minds of the people of Israel to their Guru, Yahweh and to follow his teachings. It was a battle which he fought with religious zeal.

The Great Confrontation on Mount Carmel

The religious cult of Baal was flourishing in Israel because it had enjoyed the support of the state. The prophets of Baal grew by leaps until there were 450 of them. Elijah was the only prophet of Yahweh that was left. Finally Elijah was able to convince the King to hold a religious contest between the prophets of Baal and himself which was to take place on Mount Carmel. King Ahab gathered all the people and the prophets of Baal together on this

Mountain. The agreement was set by Elijah. He said to them “You call on the name of your Baal and I will call on the Name of Yahweh; and the one who answers by fire, let Him be God over the people of Israel. And all the people answered, it is well spoken.” (1 Kings 18:24)

The prophets of Baal made everything ready and prepared their sacrifice to Baal. Then they started praying and calling on Baal to come and consume the offering with fire from above. They prayed from morning until noon dancing round the altar they had made until they were exhausted. Then Elijah mocked them saying: shout louder! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or he is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or he is asleep and needs to be wakened!” So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords so as to appease Baal to answer their prayers. They raved all afternoon until evening, but still there was no reply, no voice, no answer.

Then it was the turn of Elijah. Elijah built his altar according to the tradition of Jewish religion. He led his sacrifice on the altar he had made and told the people to dig a trench round the altar. After they had done this, Elijah commanded the people to pour gallons of water on the sacrifice until the altar ran through with water and overflowed the trench.

Then Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, “Oh Adonai, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am Your servant. Prove that I have done all this at Your command.” Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the dust and licked up all the water in the ditch! When the people saw it, they fell on their faces and cried out, “Yahweh is God! Yahweh is God!” (1 Kings 18:38)

Elijah Beheaded the 450 prophets of Baal

When this happened, Elijah commanded the people “Seize all the prophets of Baal. Don’t let a single one escape!” So the people seized them all, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and had them killed there (1 King 18:40). This act was a breach of the agreement that Elijah made with the people and the prophets of Baal. This was also not the will of Yahweh. Elijah succumbed to the temptations of religious fanaticism.

When Peter, one of the closest disciples of Jesus drew his sword to fight the Roman soldiers who came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to him: “Peter, put away your sword, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.” (Matthew 26:52). This is the immutable law of Karma. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). There are certain seeds that take time to reap their fruits. It is not at the time you sow the corn seed that you reap its harvest. Some seeds produce their harvest annually. Others are biannual and yet others take a much longer period to bear fruit. It is foolish to think that one’s thoughts, words and deeds have no consequences because one does not experience their effects immediately or in one’s present life. The effects of

certain actions may take many lifetimes to manifest. This was the case with Elijah who was born John the Baptist as we will find out.

The Path of Elijah's Soul - Life to Life

When Queen Jezebel heard what the Prophet Elijah had done to her prophets she vowed to put an end to the life of Elijah. Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying: "So let the gods do to me and more so, if I make not your life as one of them (the prophets of Baal) by this time tomorrow" (1 Kings 19:2). Jezebel had this desire ingrained in her mind. She pursued Elijah to take away his life and Elijah fled for dear life.

But this desire was not fulfilled in that present lifetime. Beloved Swami has said that there are three reasons for a man to be born again. One is the sin, the second is an unfulfilled desire or some experience and the third is lack of knowledge or ignorance. It can also be a combination of the three. The residue of lifetimes of desires, activities and experiences which have been thrust back into forgetfulness (that is into the sub-conscious mind) by subsequent events makes an impact on character and personality. One's actions, habits, talents, relationships and dispositions date back to previous births. **Herodias' hatred for John the Baptist sprang from her desire to kill Elijah in her past life as Jezebel.**

Elijah prayed to God as he ran away from the hands of Jezebel. He fled for forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God and there he had an experience of God's presence. He was not to die in the hands of Queen Jezebel in that lifetime.

However, the consequences of one's actions are inescapable. They can be postponed but the soul must pass through its purifying tunnel to learn the lessons of self evolution. In extreme situations, God descends in human form to cancel the effect of these sins by taking them upon Himself. This happens only when there is total surrender on the part of the devotee or when Mother Earth groans in the burden of man's collective sin. The prophet Isaiah wrote about Jesus thus: "He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; by His wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53, who lived around 700 BC). There are so many instances where Beloved Swami has taken upon His Body the sufferings of His devotees.

Today also, when Mother Earth is at the verge of total destruction due to the weight of the age of wickedness (the Kali Yuga) the Sai Avatar has promised that no major destruction will occur. Today we experience the joy of Mother Earth as the Sai Avatar walks bare footed on its bosom. Every day we watch Mother Sai take upon His Body the negative energies of our collective consciousness. Some weak minded people say: "Why can't Swami heal Himself. He healed others but He cannot heal himself". These are the same minds who said to Jesus, "Come down from the cross. You claim to be God but you cannot come down from the cross". (Matthew 27:40 – 41)

But think of it! The Avatar knows that one of the major reasons for His incarnation is to heal the wounds of our transgressions by taking them upon Himself. How foolish it is for us to challenge the Avatar to heal Himself! If He Heals Himself then we are dead. Ramana Mahrishi, the sage of Arunachala was dying of cancer. One of His devotees prayed to Him in many tears: "Oh Ramana, I cannot bear this suffering of yours. Please give them to me. Let me bear them on my own body". Sweet Ramana looked at her with such tenderness and said: "Who gave it to me in the first place?" Yes! The Avatar is our reflection! His Sufferings are our sufferings. Whatever He does or undergoes is for the good of man. The grace of God neutralizes the effects of our Karma.

The Play of Karma: What Goes Round Comes Round!

Jesus, the master of time, told us that John the Baptist was Elijah. The word of the master is absolute truth. We do not need to inquire further on that. However, from good inference, we can see the same environment of Elijah's time reenacting itself in the whole drama of John the Baptist. King Ahab was reborn as King Herod. Queen Jezebel came back as Queen Herodias. In the past Ahab went against the law of the Israelites to marry a foreigner, Jezebel, who brought so much trouble to Israel by imposing a foreign religion on them. In Jesus' time, Herod, who had been King Ahab, also went against the law to marry the wife of his brother Philip. Before then, Elijah had condemned with venom the action of Jezebel which finally led to the great confrontation on Mount Carmel. Later, John the Baptist spoke vehemently against the marriage of Herod to Herodias because it was unlawful in the sight of God. Previously, Jezebel had nursed a deep revenge to take away the life of Elijah because he had killed her prophets. As time went on, Herodias found an opportune moment to realize her dream which she had nursed 850 years back.

Why did God remain silent? Because without resolving our karma we can not be set free. For everyone must give account of every single word uttered (Matthew 12:36). God remains the Silent Witness in this drama. Jesus knew that if He freed John the Baptist from prison with His Divine Powers, He would not be doing any good to the spiritual emancipation of John the Baptist. Jesus also knew very well that if he had freed John, it would have only been a temporary terrestrial freedom and that John would have to come back again to clear the consequences of his actions. And this Divine opportunity might take another 850 years to come by!

Now we understand why Jesus told us to love our enemies! Now we have a glimpse as to why Jesus told us never to pass judgment. How can I love my "enemy" when I do not know that my "enemy" is my greatest friend in every sense because he helps me to clear my debts? Without this "enemy" I cannot be free! Or how can I judge another when I know that in judging another I condemn myself? Whatever happens to me, I have attracted to myself and that which I attract to myself works for the emancipation of the Self from the tangles of the non Self. Everything that happens to the Self is a gift from the Self to the Self for the highest good of the Self, which is Self liberation.

It now makes sense why Jesus the all knowing master said: "If anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other as well and if anyone asks for your tunic, give him your cloak as well. (Luke 6:29) When we react to actions we repeat the chain of action since action and reaction are equal and opposite. If I slap you and you slapped back and I retaliate and you revenge and I hurt you and you hit me back; we shall never escape the wheel of birth and death. The stings of death and birth are destroyed through non – reaction. We must act but we must never react.

Just do it!
With no compulsion to do it
And with no repulsion not to do it
Just do it!

It is called action in inaction
With no eye on the fruit thereof
With no sense of I and mine
Just do it!

... For the sake of IT

Man is born in Karma. Man dies in Karma. Man also works his way to God through Karma.

What is it that is born? - Body
What is it that dies? - Body
What is it that is reborn? - Mind
What is it that must die to end rebirth? - Mind
And what is it that is never born, and that never dies? - Atma

When Jesus said - unless a person dies, he will not live! - He was referring not to the physical death of the body but to the dissolution of the mind in the Oversoul. Physical death involves the disintegration of the five elements that compose the physical body. First, when the mind becomes united with the subtle body, we say the person has lost consciousness. He does not hear; you call his name, he does not respond. Ether (Sound) the first element has merged back to ether.

Next, the person stops breathing. That is when the doctors declare him dead. But this was not the time he died. It was only the moment that the second element, air relating to the sense of touch, had merged back to the universal breath. After this, the third element fire disintegrates. The body grows cold starting from the feet. Fire relating to the sense of sight has gone back to Fire. When this happens, the fourth element, water, which relates to the sense of taste, begins to drip from every pore and hole. That is why the doctors put the body in a cold chamber. Finally, earth which pertains to the sense of smell merges back to earth, dust unto dust. The body is either buried or cremated.

When the physical body which is made up of the five elements which in turn relates to the five senses, the five sense organs and the five organs of action, thus disintegrates, the vital force is withdrawn to the subtle body which is composed of the mind. In fact the process is the other way round. When the vital force is withdrawn to the subtle body - the mind, the physical body disintegrates. The mind does not die with the death of the body. Because the mind is the treasure house that stores one's memories, experiences, habits, desires, expectations etc, and this information is not wiped out with the death of the physical body. It remains in the memory chip of the sub-conscious mind and are transmitted from birth to birth. Those who are able to tap into the roots of the sub-conscious mind know the truth of their former lives. When the mind, lower and higher, is freed of this pile of information, there is no birth and there is no death. This is why the Christian mystics have referred to this path of mental transcendence as the "cloud of unknowing" and the Eastern mystics have also described it as the "negative path: not this, not that."

Swami has given a very beautiful analogy. Here we have a seed of rice with its husk. If we plant the rice with its husk it will germinate and give rise to many grains of seed. If we plant the rice without its husk, it will never germinate again. The husk is the mind. The rice is the body. As long as the mind persists, rebirth is inescapable. Immediately the husk of the mind is removed, the body has no power of rebirth. When this happens the Atma resurrects in its true formless state. This is the spiritual equation: Man minus Mind equals God. God plus Mind equals Man. The ability to "*diemind*" that is, this dissolution of the ego - which is the root of all mental activities - is the alchemy that transmutes man to his Divine state. This is the meaning of the resurrection. It is also the meaning of the Cross: the cutting of the "I" right across. Without the Cross, the death of the ego-consciousness, there is no resurrection. Herein lies the very essence of Christianity and indeed of all religions.

The Best, Easiest, Surest, Fastest Safest And Most Enjoyable Way To 'Die-Mind'

Many spiritual masters have said that it is with the mind that you can conquer the mind. And this is true. But nay, it is very difficult. Why? Naturally the mind does not want to die. How then can you trick it into destroying itself! How difficult it is for the thief to catch itself. Sage Ramana Maharshi told the story of the thief which is the mind who donned the cloths of a constable in search of itself, the thief. Nay, all the actions one performs are done through the mind. All words uttered must pass through the gates of the "I" consciousness. All rituals, japas, tapas, and spiritual exercises are done through the *instrumentality* of the mind. How then can one destroy the mind through these means, since one requires the mind to do them? The truth is that these spiritual exercises can only purify the mind. They can only make the mind very sharp to penetrate inner subtleties but they can never succeed in eliminating the mind. We need the grace of God to end the mind. Even when one has succeeded through rigorous spiritual exercises in emptying the mind of all thoughts and desires, yet that tiny root-seed-impulse, the seat of ego-

consciousness, the sense of I-ness from which all thoughts germinate, will still persist.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was troubled by this problem. How can the mind know God? One day he was having a walk along the shores of the ocean lost in silent contemplation. As he walked, he met a little boy who had made a very small hole beside the sands of the shore and was transferring the waters of the ocean into the little hole. Augustine was puzzled when he saw this child. He stopped and asked the little child what he wanted to do. The boy told him that he wanted to transfer the ocean into the hole he has made. The saint was amused by the child's audacity. He told the child that it is a mere waste of time. First the hole is not big enough to contain the waters of the ocean and secondly, even if it were as big, it will take the child uncountable lifetimes to transfer the waters with the little cup in his hand. The child then raised his head and said to the saint: "So also it is for the mind to understand God!" Immediately the child disappeared and Augustine realized it was Jesus who had come as a little child to teach him this lesson.

*How can you understand That
which has no stand?!*
*How can you comprehend That
Which has no end!?*

*That which has no bottom
How can you fathom IT?
And That which has no dimensions
How can you measure IT*

*Who can gauge the depths of the Heart
Or with the categories of the mind
Tell That which words
Cannot define?*

*Who can confine the infinite Spirit
Or with the limits of Time
Specify That
Which is beyond sound!?*

*Deep is calling on deep
In the depths of the depthless.
Oh how can the Soul tell It
The untold Truth
That It can only reach You
Only through You!?*

Dare to Let God do it

There is a simple way out. And because this way is very simple, it is very easy since it allows you be at ease and at peace throughout the process. Allow

God to kill the mind. Don't try to kill the mind. You might not succeed over a trillion million life times. Instead, allow God to do it. In the first place only God can do it because only He has the Power of mental dissolution. God is the Master mind. Only the master can set the slave free. Secondly it takes Him no time. Swami has said that He can give Self liberation in a twinkle of an eye. Dare to let God do it! This means that you have to give your mind to God. When God Himself fights the war then not only will you be sure of victory, but you will also enjoy the war. The war will be fun. This is because you will be unaffected by whatever happens since the Lord is your shield. You will remain calm and equal minded in cold and heat, day and night, sorrow and joy, loss and profit because you know you are in that Divine zone where you are totally screened from by the dualities of the mind. This is also the message of the Bhagavad Gita.

King Janaka Gave His Mind to Sage Astavakra

Beloved Swami tells a beautiful story to illustrate this path. Once upon a time, King Janaka sent round a message inviting scholars and Pundits, sages and saints and yogis and Mahatmas to teach him the knowledge of *Atma*. ***The king was looking for the best, easiest, surest, fastest and most enjoyable way to die – mind.*** He announced: "In the time it takes me to climb on to my horse, one should be able to give me full knowledge of the Absolute."

The Sages and Scholars were worried, as they felt "This is going to be a severe test for our scholarship and learning." No one dared come and offer to satisfy the King's demand.

Meanwhile, a very young sage by name Astavakra entered the kingdom. While he was nearing the capital he saw the scholars and *rishis* assembled there. They were looking worried and despondent. He asked them, "What is the cause of all your worries?" They explained their situation and he said, "Why should you be scared about such a small thing? I can solve this problem." So saying, he entered the court of King Janaka. He said to the King, "King, I am ready to teach you the knowledge of *Atma*, but it cannot be taught in this palace which is full of *rajas* and *thamas*. First I must take you to a *Sathwa* (Serene) area."

They took a few horses and soldiers and left the palace. On reaching a lonely spot, Astavakra told the king, "I am now going to teach you the knowledge of *Atma*. I am the preceptor and you are the disciple. Are you ready to accept this relationship? If you agree to this, then you have to make the offering the disciple has to give to the *Guru* (preceptor). Only after you have made your offering will I start my teaching." King Janaka told Astavakra, "The attainment of God is the most important thing to me. So I am ready to give you absolutely anything you want." Then the *Guru* told the King: "I don't want anything except your mind." King Janaka answered: "I offer it to you; up to now I thought this was my mind but from now on, it is yours." Then the *Guru* brought

a horse, made it stand, and asked the King to sit down on the ground in the middle of the road of his kingdom. He left the king there and retired into the forest to sit quietly under a tree.

Janaka Achieves Self-Realization

The soldiers waited for a long time for the return of the king but neither the king nor Astavakra came. They wanted to know what had happened to them, and one by one, they went to find out. They found their king sitting in the middle of the road with a horse standing nearby. The king had closed his eyes and was absolutely still. Astavakra was nowhere to be found. They were rather afraid that Astavakra had cast some magic spell over the king, making him lose his consciousness. They went to the prime minister and brought him to the king.

The prime minister called the king, "Oh King! Oh King! Oh King!" but the king did not open his eyes or respond in any way. The prime minister and all other courtiers were alarmed as they could not rouse the king or give him any food or drink. They were wondering what to do. Left with no alternative, the prime minister sent the chariot to bring the queen, thinking that if she called the king, he would respond to her entreaties. The queen came and pleaded. But the king remained unmoved.

Meanwhile, the soldiers went in search of Astavakra in the forest. They found him sitting under a tree in total peace. They took hold of him and brought him to the place where the king was sitting. Astavakra said, "The king is safe, he is all right. You may see for yourself." The ministers, the queen and others told Astavakra: "He has not opened his mouth or eyes." Astavakra went close to the king and spoke to the King." Immediately the king opened his eyes and replied, "Master."

Astavakra questioned the king, "The ministers and the queen have come; the soldiers and many others have come and all have tried to talk to you; why did you not answer them?" The king replied, "Thoughts, words and deeds are associated with the mind. As I have offered my mind entirely to you, first I need your permission before uttering a word. What authority do I have to speak to anyone or use this mind in any way? I have offered it to you; it is yours. I won't do anything without your permission and command." Then Astavakra said to him, "You have attained the state of God – Realization."

There and then Astavakra asked him to place his foot upon the stirrup to mount the horse. By the time he had climbed the horse and placed his other leg over the horseback, he received the experience of the Bliss of Divine self.

As was the case with Astavakra and Janaka so also with Krishna and Arjuna. Some spiritual seekers will surely raise the question: how do I give my mind to God? Does it mean I should cease all thinking processes or sit like King Janaka in total stillness all day long? Let us look at it from another view point.

When you Remove the Thread, the Cloth Cannot Persist!

What is it that makes an action good or bad? In other words, what is it that makes an action binding? When we inquire into the matter we discover that it is not the action in itself that makes it good or bad but the circumstances surrounding the action. These circumstances are seven: **who, whom, why, when, where, what, and how**. These circumstances are the attributes of the mind or fruits of action and they alone make an action good or bad. For example, the act of urination is neither good nor bad in itself. But when one urinates inside the church or the mandir everyone will cry sacrilege! Here it is not the action of urination that is the problem but "**where**" it was done. If it were a one month old baby that has performed the same action, people will not frown at it because the "**who**" has changed.

The secret of selfless action (egoless action) is to surrender the seven circumstances of action to God. When we give these mental categories, the six Ws and the single H to God we discover that we have given the entire mind to God.

The first is the "**Who**". You must feel that God is the doer of the action. Since God is carrying you and your burden (and the ONLY burden is the mental burden) isn't it foolish to still laden your heart with the load? Sage Ramana put it so beautifully: what will happen, will happen no matter how you make it not to happen. And what will not happen, will not happen no matter how you try to make it happen. Knowing this we must allow that which is meant to happen to happen and that which is not meant to happen not to happen. By trying to make that which is not meant to happen to happen and that which is meant to happen not to happen we simply get entangled in the endless wheel of karma. This is the ignorance that binds man from birth to birth: to think that you are the one that makes things happen. God is the doer but pretends not to be doing anything. Man does nothing but pretends to be doing everything. This mentality has to be given up. Allow Being, just by being! Be a channel of that which must happen. Do not worry about that which is not meant to happen. Therein lies the bliss of Happiness, the union of the soul. Let go of life's worries and enjoy the thrill of riding in the wings of total surrender to the Lord. God is doing all these! You are not different from that God. Relax! That is when things truly happen!

The second is the "**Whom**". You must feel that God is the recipient of every action. Jesus said, "Whatever you do to any of these little ones, you do it to Me!" And since you and God are One and the same it follows that whatsoever you do to anyone, you do it unto yourself. Hence the golden rule: "Do to others what you would want done unto to you". To realize that there is indeed no other is to attain that mental transcendence where there is no longer any difference between the "**who**" and the "**whom**".

The third is the "**How**". We must feel that God is the means of every action. God is the great Provider! God is also the providence. In His treasury, nothing is lacking. When we give God the "How" of every action, our lives become a stream of Divine miracles and surprises! "With God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26)

The fourth is the “**Why**”. We must feel that God is the reason for every action and His reason is that Love that is beyond reason and knows no season. We must accept everything that happens to us as a Divine precious gift of Pure Love meant for our highest good. In this way our lives become a divine song of praise and thanksgiving. The scriptures say: “Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”. (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

The fifth is the “**When**”. We must feel that God’s time is the best for every action and God’s time is the Now. To give God the “When” of our lives is to live in that stillness of the Present where we experience the Power of God’s Presence which is Omnipresent. “Be Still and Know that I AM” (Psalm 46:10)

The sixth is the “**Where**”. We must feel that God is the background Presence of every action. Everywhere is in God! In Him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

The seventh is the “**What**”. We must feel that God is not only the efficient cause of every action but also the material cause of action. God is not only the Goldsmith, God is also the Gold.

As long as we dictate to God the “**who**”, “**whom**”, “**how**”, “**why**”, “**when**”, “**where**”, and “**what**” of our lives, birth and rebirth is inevitable because the thread will always be woven into a new cloth

Elijah failed to see God (**whom**) in the 450 prophets of Baal. He failed to realize that God is the recipient of every action. That was why he slaughtered them. Hence he had to be reborn to learn the soul-lesson that whatever you do to others, you do it to yourself because there is no other. When we surrender the mind to God by surrendering these mental categories, we have indeed destroyed the very seed of sin and death. When we remove the thread with which the cloth is woven, the cloth also disappears.

In the same way, when we surrender the operations of the mind:

This imperative to understand;
This will to will,
This urge to do,
This repulsion not to do,
And this impulse to force things,
How can the mind endure?

The good news of the seven circumstances of action is that we don’t need to surrender all of them at the same time. Once one of the circumstances is given up, the rest will naturally fall apart. When we surrender the “who” for example, the “what”, “whom” etc, will naturally give way. When we give up the sense of doership - “It is no longer I who lives but Christ living in me” as St Paul would put it, then the rest of the mental categories will disappear. If God

is the doer (the Who), then He will also be the provider (the How) and He will determine the “when” the “where” the “whom” and the “why”.

Again if we choose to give up the “when” and live in that stillness of Silence where we experience the essence of God’s Presence we discover that the mind will automatically evaporate. The mind cannot persist in the Silence of the Now! The same applies to the rest of the mental categories. Because they are intrinsically connected, once one is destroyed, the rest loose their power to bind.

At this holy season of Easter when we celebrate the resurrection of life immortal, we pray for the grace to give our minds to God:

At this holy season of Easter when we celebrate the resurrection of life immortal, we pray for the grace to give our minds to God:

O Lord,
I offer you the totality of today.
I offer to you the **Ws** of every action
and also the **How** of the **Ws**.

Amen.

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY - Part 4

THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF STARS CONTINUES....

By Prof G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings. I hope you are ready to resume our journey from where we left off last time. On that occasion, I told you about how [some] stars finally end their life as a White Dwarf, and how young Chandrasekhar made an astounding discovery about the White Dwarf. To recall briefly, Chandra not only confirmed that quantum mechanics creates an outward pressure [called degeneracy pressure of the electrons] that prevents the stellar corpse from being relentlessly crushed by gravity [as Fowler of Cambridge had already pointed out] but added a new twist. According to Chandra, when the mass of the dead star equals 1.44 times the mass of our Sun, then even the degeneracy pressure due to electrons fails to prevent gravity from asserting itself. Thus, in Chandra's analysis, a stellar corpse of mass 1.44 times the solar mass would be crushed to a point. That of course is ruled out by physics and so young Chandra merely ended by wondering what new physics would intervene to take over and prevent this undesirable collapse. It is here that Chandra's discovery was stunning. As passing years have revealed, there is in fact wonderful physics that became revealed over the decades, and it is that story we shall be concerned with presently.

A New Discovery: The Neutron

The first step in going beyond Chandra was taken by Landau, a brilliant Russian physicist, who in 1932 argued that electron degeneracy pressure would not and cannot work beyond a point, and the reason for that was relativity. Remember I told you that where Chandra went beyond Cambridge Don Fowler was in adding relativity to quantum mechanics, and that was what changed the whole story. What Landau was now saying was,

“Hey, hold on a minute. True, relativity is a must and sure it modifies the repulsive pressure the electrons generate, opposing gravitational collapse of the White Dwarf. But you know what? As the mass of the star increases, there are more and more electrons and in this situation of much higher electron density, you find that the electrons have to move really very fast, faster than light in fact. But Prof. Einstein would not allow that, which means that something else must happen, not discussed hitherto.”

Landau argued that maybe some other particle of Nature, not known till then, might step in. Boy, was that a great guess! Almost close on the heels of Landau, a man named Chadwick in Cambridge [a student of Rutherford, the Titan of nuclear physics in England] discovered a new particle named the *neutron*. The neutron was more or less of the same mass as the proton [an important component of the atomic nucleus] but slightly heavier. What was

more important was that the neutron was electrically neutral, quite unlike the electron which carried a negative charge and the proton which carried a positive charge.

Baade and Zwicky: From Supernovas to Neutron Stars

So how could the neutron make any difference? That was pointed out by Fritz Zwicky. Zwicky was born in Bulgaria in 1898 but went to live with his grandparents in Switzerland at the age of six. In 1916, he enrolled in the University and earned a degree in theoretical physics. During this period, Zwicky met Einstein, Pauli and interestingly enough also Lenin [the Father of the Russian Revolution of 1918]. After getting his Ph.D, Zwicky moved to America and ended up in California where he teamed up with Walter Baade who had migrated from Germany. Both were at the Mount Wilson Observatory, and after studying bright novae inside galaxies made a remarkable observation. They wrote:

We advance the view that a super-nova represents the transition of an ordinary star into a neutron star, consisting mainly of neutrons. Such a star may possess a very small radius and an extremely high density. As neutrons can be packed much more closely than ordinary nuclei and electrons, the 'gravitational packing' energy in a cold neutron star may become very large A neutron star would therefore represent the most stable configuration of matter as such.

What Baade and Zwicky were doing is start where Chandra left off, and pick up where Landau gave a new opening. And by doing this, they “invented” the neutron star! Of course, all this was done with words, meaning that it was more of an idea than a proper theory. The proper theory came a few years later in 1939, almost on the eve of the World War, when Robert Oppenheimer [later to head the atom bomb project] and George Volkoff, who worked out in detail the physics of stellar collapse and thus gave a formal theory for the formation of a neutron star.

Now you may say: “Wait a minute. Baade and Zwicky were studying novae or cosmic gas clouds and in that process came up with the idea of a neutron star. What precisely is the connection between the two that is, between a nova and a neutron star?” Good question and that is what we shall now consider. What I am going to describe is the picture that has emerged over decades, and an amazing picture it truly is! Let us consider a “dead” star, that is, a star that has ceased thermo-nuclear burn and is now collapsing due to the overwhelming force of gravity. This “corpse” has a mass say 1.44 times the mass of the Sun. Remember this is the Chandrasekhar Limit, when physics of those times threw in the towel. Here is a blow by blow account of what happens at that limit, in the light of present knowledge.

- To start with, the stellar remains start collapsing, thanks to gravitational crush.
- The inward crush is resisted by the electron degeneracy pressure, which acts towards the outside.

- However, because the mass is 1.44 times the solar mass, electron degeneracy pressure is not able to stop the ruthless force of gravity. Why? Because to really stand up to gravity, the electrons have to move faster than light, which of course Prof Einstein will not permit. So gravity wins and electrons quit!
- The gravitational squeeze now becomes maddeningly fast and believe it or not in about a second or so, the gas cloud shrinks from a size of, I don't know, several hundreds of thousands of km to just about 10 km! Mind you, all this in the twinkling of an eye! This is what happens in the core.
- As a result of this amazingly rapid squeeze, the shrunk core overshoots, going beyond what it shoots. It then sort of recoils outwards [this is like an overswing followed by a reverse rebound], and this recoil collides with the matter that is continuing to [slowly] fall from the outer layers earlier left behind in the fast crush.
- That collision [between the rebounding matter from the highly compressed core and inward falling matter] then generates a shock wave, which swiftly travels outward, meeting the outer layers of the collapsing cloud. You have to remember that during the gravitational crunch, the speed with which different layers move inwards depends on the gravitational force that acts on the layer concerned. The force is more for inner layers, which is why they move much, much faster than the outer layers. It is the vast difference in the layer speeds, that creates the scenario described above.
- Let us for a moment go back to the crushed "core" and examine its nature.
- This core contains neutrons. Where did these neutrons come from? Recall we started with a gas cloud containing nuclei of all sorts including that of iron and of course lots of electrons. All these get crushed, and due to that crush, the nuclei get stripped into protons and neutrons [of which all nuclei are made]. Further, the electrons which cannot exist as electrons [because if they do they have to move faster than light, which of course is banned] combine with protons to become neutrons. Thus it is that the core is essentially made up of neutrons. We now return to the shock wave travelling outwards and away from the core.
- On the periphery of the collapsing cloud, a different scenario is being enacted. The shock wave has arrived there and crushing the layers there.
- The crush due to the shock generates heating. Remember these outer layers contain nuclei. Heat generated by the shock now triggers thermonuclear reactions in the nuclei [lighter than iron of course], and in the process, many neutrons are produced.
- These neutrons get absorbed in the nuclei present in the outer layers. In a fraction of a second, these nuclei absorb many, many neutrons and transform to elements much heavier than iron, elements like mercury, silver, gold, uranium and so on. You know something? All the gold and uranium on our earth is the remnant of some ancient stellar explosion! So, our earth can, in a manner of speaking, trace its ancestry to a star that lived long ago!

- To complete the story, when the shock wave triggers thermo-nuclear reactions in the outer periphery, there is an explosion and a bright flash, which is what we normally call a super-nova explosion. This explosion is very bright, incredibly bright in fact, and soon I shall tell you how bright. In short, while a neutron core is being formed, the shock wave generated by it creates a super powerful thermo-nuclear bomb in the periphery! Who says natural phenomena are dull!?
- One or two more facts to wrap it all up. Going back to the formation of a neutron core due to massive compression in an incredibly short time, you might ask: “But surely this would generate a lot of energy! How does that energy get released? Is it as heat or light?” And the answer is neither. The enormous energy gets released with the liberation of an incredible number of very tiny electrically neutral particles called *neutrinos*. By the way, the name neutrino was first used by the famous Italian Physicist Enrico Fermi; in Italian the suffix ‘no’ is often used to indicate something small, like bambino for a baby. Fermi was trying to convey that the neutrino was like the neutron but small.

To repeat all that in different words, in short this is what happens:

1. First there is a gravitational collapse, with all layers in the collapsing gas cloud moving inwards. The inner layers move fast while outer layers move slow.
2. The inner layers soon start moving with incredible speed, crushing the interior into a dense core, which is made up of neutrons.
3. The core is formed at such a terrific speed, its surface rebounds, meeting the matter from outer layers slowly falling inwards.
4. This generates a shock wave that travels fast outwards.
5. The outward travelling shock then meets the layers of nuclei in the outer regions and compresses that those layers.
6. This generates extreme heat, triggering thermo-nuclear reactions.
7. An explosion then results and there is a bright flash, the **supernova flash**.
8. The two events, the formation of the neutron core and the simultaneous release of an intense neutrino burst, followed by the supernova explosion in the “outer” region are connected, being two aspects of one story; the formation of the neutron core is the ‘first’ chapter so to speak while the supernova explosion is the ‘second’ chapter. Very little time elapses between the two, though they are distinct aspects.

I am sure all this would make your head dizzy, and so to help you, we have series of sketches that illustrate the process described here in words. Please take a good look at the text and the accompanying sketches.

Hearing the Bell Toll for a Dead Star

You may now say: “Nice story, but how do we know it is all true?” Fair enough, and that is where human curiosity and ingenuity show up brilliantly. The “story” I have just told has been put together from various events that

happened in history, and may be I should start in 1967 with a young lady named Jocelyn Bell, a student of astronomer Anthony Hewish of Cambridge, who was scanning the sky with a radio telescope looking for turbulence in stellar plasmas far, far away. On November 28, Bell recorded a strange radio signal; it was amazingly periodic, with a period of about 1.3 seconds. She just could not make any head or tail of this incredible signal, because till then, there was no reason to expect a radio signal from outer space with such extra-ordinary regularity. Could it be that these were signals from some intelligent beings out there? No one knew, and these signals were simply dubbed LGM standing for "little green men"! Bell and her supervisor were not serious that these signals actually came from little green men, but a name had to be given, and this seemed a nice and intriguing one to give!

This is what Jocelyn Bell said later:

As the chart flowed under the pen [Hewish and Bell used a pen recorder like they use in ECG machines] I could see that the signal was a series of pulses, and my suspicion that they were equally spaced was confirmed as soon as I got the chart off the recorder. They were 1.33 seconds apart. I contacted Tony Hewish who was teaching an undergraduate lab in Cambridge and his first reaction was that they must be man-made. This was very sensible response to the circumstances, but due to a remarkable depth of ignorance. I did not see why they could not be from a star.

And indeed, from a [dead] star they were! Anyway, later Hewish shared the Nobel Prize for his discovery!!

Intensive investigations followed and soon it was discovered that these signals actually came not from intelligent beings but from an astral object the like of which had never been detected before. This pulsating radio source of natural origin was named a *pulsar*. Since then, hundreds of pulsars have been detected in all parts of the sky.

The question now became: "What are these pulsars?" From the short pulse duration and the rapid rate, it became evident that pulsars must be exceedingly small objects. The fact that pulsars were radiating radio signals meant that there must be moving charges in them. [According to the laws of physics, if there is electromagnetic radiation, then that means there must be moving charges.] And the fact the radio signals were coming in the form of short pulses meant that pulsars must be rotating fast, acting like lighthouses and emitting radio waves instead of light.

The Pulsar - A Signal of Nebulous Origins

All this is fine but why pulsars and how did they form? The clue to that came when a pulsar was discovered right in the middle of the famous Crab Nebula. This pulsar was pulsating at 30 times a second. I must here digress and narrate briefly the history of the Crab Nebula. This was discovered in 1731 by the British astronomer John Bevis. Charles Messier independently found it in 1758 when he was looking for the famous Halley's comet; in fact, Messier first mistook this nebula to be a comet but later corrected himself. This gaseous object or nebula was christened the "Crab Nebula" on the basis of a drawing made by Lord Rosse around 1844, and since then the name has stayed. In 1921, J.C. Duncan of Mt. Wilson Observatory in California discovered by comparing two pictures of the Crab Nebula taken about 11.5 years apart that the nebula was in fact expanding. From the expansion rate, Duncan deduces that the nebula was probably born about 900 years earlier in some cosmic event. This backtracking 900 years is significant because it took one to around the year 1054 A.D. That story soon but first I must tell you that Knut Lundmark of Sweden also noted in 1921 that the Crab went back about 900 years and in fact its location was very close to where a spectacular astronomical event had been seen in 1054. This brings us to the story of 1054, which is remarkable tale in itself.

On 4th July that year [4th of July by the way, happens to be America's Independence day! Was this God's gift to America several hundred years before it was born?!] Chinese astronomers noted a "guest star" in constellation Taurus. At least four Chinese astronomers left records and one Japanese observer too has noted this sudden appearance of a "star" on that day in the sky. One astronomer, Yang Wei-te presented this report to the Emperor of China on August 27th:

Prostrating before Your Majesty, I hereby report that a guest star has appeared; above the star in question there is a faint glow, yellow in colour. If one carefully examines the prognostications concerning the Emperor, the interpretations is as follows: The fact that the guest star does not trespass against Pi the Lunar mansion in the Taurus and its brightness is full means that there is a person of great wisdom and virtue in the country. I beg this to be handed over to the Bureau of Historiography.

According to the Chinese records, when it first appeared, the "guest star" was so bright it **could be seen during daytime**. When it was one week old, the remnant cloud was as big as the solar system and as bright as the Sun! For twenty three days, the luminous cloud could be seen during day time. After four weeks, the cloud was visible only during night. It kept getting fainter and fainter, and after 653 days, was no longer visible to the naked eye. It was that very same cloud that was later picked up by European astronomers viewing through the telescope, and subsequently named the Crab Nebula.

By the way, intensely bright though it was, the supernova explosion of 1054 A.D was not seen by Indian astronomers but then that is understandable because July is the peak of the South West Monsoon in India, when the sky is covered with clouds practically all the time. Interestingly, Arabian astronomers and observers in Europe also missed but not so the Indian tribes in Arizona.

Carvings in caves discovered in the mid-fifties suggest that they too saw the event. This is based on the fact that in the carving, the crescent moon is very close to the star, which was the case for observers viewing from North America. Putting all this together, Baade and Zwicky in fact argued that **there must be a neutron star in the Crab Nebula**. But at that time, no one knew and no one could assert either.

The discovery of the pulsar changed all that. People said, "Let us say that the Crab is a supernova remnant and that the bang occurred in 1054. If so, a neutron star must have been born then. May be the neutron star also acted like a pulsar. Let us look at the centre of the Crab to see if there is a pulsar there." Many astronomers did, and lo and behold, there was a pulsar there!

The Aurora Borealis of the Universe

You might still shake your head say, "Wait a minute. I agree that the birth of a neutron star is signalled by a huge SN explosion that might sometimes even be seen by the naked eye [by the way, after 1054, there have been other sightings but more about that a bit later]. But how come the neutron star behaves like a pulsar?" Valid question and there have been detailed theoretical studies on that. There are the following considerations that form a part of the argument.

- To start with, though electrically neutral, each neutron acts like a tiny magnet. Since there are trillions and trillions of neutrons in a neutron star [its density is amazingly high], the neutron star as a whole behaves like an **extremely powerful magnet**. Thus, the neutron star would have a magnetic north pole and a magnetic south pole, even as our Earth does. But unlike the Earth, the magnet that the neutron star represents would be unimaginably powerful.
- Next, when free, a neutron can disintegrate due to radioactive forces into a proton and electron, both of which, please note, carry electrical charge.
- This disintegration cannot happen in the interior of the neutron star where the density is too high, but in the outermost region, this is certainly possible.
- Thus, like an onion skin, the neutron star could have charged particles in its outer layer.
- Some of these particles could escape from the surface but they cannot quite get away. Dragged by the magnetic field, they would spiral into the polar regions.
- Am I making all this up? By no means. All this is not only mandated by the laws of physics but in fact, even on earth, charged particles in the upper atmosphere do spiral into the geomagnetic north and south poles. And when they do, they give rise to the phenomenon of Aurora Borealis and Aurora Australis.
- OK, like on earth, when charged particles on the surface of the neutron star fall into the magnetic poles of the neutron star, they emit electromagnetic radiation. This radiation could be in the form of radio signals, of light, and even x-rays.

All this is fine. How come the signals are emitted as pulses? Does that mean that particles fall into the poles, take rest, resume their falling and so on? Not at all! You see, due to angular momentum effects, the neutron star is spinning all the time like our Earth does, and our Sun does too. If you take that into account, you end up with a celestial lighthouse! Ever seen a lighthouse? It is always emitting light but since it is rotating, the light is always directed in one direction [two if you want to be technically fussy!]. Thus, an observer on earth would receive electromagnetic signals from a neutron star/pulsar only when the radiation beam sweeps the antenna; very similar to a sailor seeing the lighthouse only when the light beam sweeps across him.

I think we should pause and let all this sink slowly!

1. We started with a stellar corpse with a mass say more than 1.44 solar mass.
2. We then said that such a mass cannot become a White Dwarf; Chandra would not allow that.
3. But Baade and Zwicky, backed by Oppenheimer and Volkoff, say no problem. This object would become a neutron star.
4. However, the transformation of the gaseous remnant into a neutron star would do two things. First, it would release an INCREDIBLE amount of energy, about which I have not said anything so far but would shortly.
5. The formation of the neutron star is accompanied by the generation of a powerful shock wave that, travelling outwards, compresses and heats those outer layers.
6. The atomic nuclei in those layers then undergo thermo-nuclear reactions, during which process there is copious neutron production.
7. Most of these neutrons get capture in those layers, generating new elements far heavier than iron.
8. At this stage, there are two entities, a neutron core that is very small and dense and a gaseous outer layer, the remnant of shock heating, thermo-nuclear transformation and all that. That layer is gaseous in nature and contains heavy elements, not a part of the original stellar corpse that had only elements up to iron.
9. The neutron star [it is not really a star in the usual sense we use the word!] now spins and continues its existence while the outer gas cloud slowly expands [this is what is happening in the Crab, for example].
10. And thanks to the electrons and protons in the outer layer of the neutron star, the neutron star tells everyone about its presence by acting as a celestial lighthouse!

Wow, what a story! At this point, I must add some important additional facts.

Super Facts about Supernovas

First about supernova sightings. I told you that the Chinese observed a great event in 1054 A.D. Any other such sightings? Yes, there have been many, and two significant and reliable ones are 1) by Tycho Brahe in 1572, and 2)

Kepler in 1604. Both these are universally accepted. A third important one is that which occurred in 1987, concerning which I give some interesting facts separately.

These days, astronomers regularly track and study SN explosions and using fancy telescope a large number have been detected. In fact, the study of SN is an active subject in itself that has led to many wonderful insights into the nature of our amazing Universe.

Next, the amount of energy released in the SN explosion. Careful studies made on the recent SN 1987 A event give a good idea. In this, the sudden formation of the neutron core released an energy equivalent to that which would be generated if 1/10 th of the mass of our Sun were to be converted all into energy, and this happened almost instantly. For your reference, the mass of our Sun is about 2×10^{30} kg; one tenth of that would mean 2×10^{29} kg or 2×10^{32} grams. Imagine that! Hiroshima was devastated when a mere 5 grams of matter was converted into energy. And now, we are talking of one tenth the mass of the Sun all being converted into energy in a fraction of a second! Mind boggling, is it not?!

Now how is this energy released? Whereas our Sun releases energy in the form of electromagnetic radiation mainly, when a neutron star is formed, energy is released in the form of neutrinos. These neutrinos, as I told you earlier, are extremely tiny. They are as tiny as the electron but with much less mass; they therefore travel almost at the speed of light. You know how many neutrinos were released in the SN 1987 A formation/explosion? A cool 10^{58} neutrinos! That number, by the way, means 1 followed by 58 zeros! We can't even imagine such a number, can we?! That is Nature, all sorts of amazing things happen there.

Detecting Neutrinos Is No Small Matter

You may ask, "How do we know that neutrinos are actually emitted?" We know because scientists have actually detected the neutrinos emitted by SN 1987 A! That is a fabulous story and I must give you the highlights of that. It all starts with a group of Japanese scientists who in collaboration with some scientists from America were involved in a difficult experiment to check if the proton would ever decay by itself due to radioactivity. From the point of basic Physics, this was a crucial experiment and many years and many millions of dollars were spent in setting this experiment underground in a place in Japan. The scientists waited and waited – the proton decay experiment is a very difficult one but the result was expected of vital importance to Physics, which is why so much effort went into designing that experiment. Of course, data collection was all automatic, done in computers, 24/7.

One day during this long, long wait, the scientists heard that astronomers had detected a SN explosion on 23rd February. These scientists then said, "Hey, our detector can detect neutrinos. If neutrinos had been emitted, then some of them would reach the earth. Of those reaching the earth, some would hit our detector. And since our detector can detect neutrinos, some of those hitting

our detector would actually have left their signatures behind. So why not we look for those tell-tale signatures?” That precisely is what they did. It was truly a needle-in-a-haystack kind of detection, but the effort seemed worth it.

I said earlier that about 10^{58} neutrinos were emitted in the SN event. Of these only about 10^{16} or ten-thousand trillion neutrinos hit the detector in Japan. And do you know how many of these 10^{16} were actually detected? Just twelve, yes only 12, but the scientists were damn sure of every neutrino they had caught. Believe me, it is not easy to get the world to accept this kind of data, but the entire scientific world not only accepted all this but also applauded, including by awarding Masatoshi Koshihara the leader of the Japanese team with the Nobel Prize.

Incidentally, I urge you to take a look at Boxes 1 and 2, where some info about neutron stars etc is assembled.

God Allows Us to See His Cosmic Form

You know, when I think about it all, I am simply wonder struck. On one side of it is God who has created the Universe in which all these wonderful things happen. On the other side, there He is in human form in Parthi, going about as if He is not aware of any of the mysteries in the Universe He has created. But do not be fooled by that great put on. Five thousand years ago, Arjuna was fooled in precisely this manner, with the Lord taking Arjuna for a ride for about seventy and odd years. But then, on the battlefield in Kurukshetra, Krishna said, “Arjuna, do not be fooled, and take a look at My Cosmic Form!” Swami blessed Arjuna and gave him special powers to behold the Cosmic Form – the famous *Viswaroopa!*

Many a time, I have seen boys in the old days praying to Swami, “Swami, please show us the Cosmic Form!” And the Lord would smile and reply, “What is there for Me to show specially? It is there all round you. See it and feel amazed; Everything you see around you is an aspect of My Cosmic Form. Understand that!”

What I am trying to say is that when we see Swami during Darshan, we must not only rejoice in that beautiful form of matchless beauty, but also take a minute off to appreciate that hidden in this form is the **enormous** Cosmic Power that animates the Universe.

Let us also take a minute off to realise how much man has unravelled of the mysteries of God’s Creation. All that I told you about the White Dwarf, neutron stars, pulsars, SN explosions etc., have been discovered by man simply by sheer brain power combined with ingenious experiments and amazing instruments, including those sent into space. Newton once said that the thumb alone is enough to prove that God exists. I would say that man’s achievements alone are enough to prove that God exists. It is the power of God packed into the human frame that enables man to do the many things he is so very proud of. Man is constantly proud of his achievements but as Swami told Arjuna, man is able to do all this [and much more] because God

has blessed him with all that incredible capacity and capability. Alas, man does not remember that! That is man's great foolishness and tragedy.

Yes dear reader, the road to Infinity that we are trekking along is filled with amazing scenes; but do not be surprised if the road eventually ends within us! But that comes later!! Meanwhile, thanks for your company and all the best till we meet again.

Jai Sai Ram.

BOX 1

In this box, we assemble some facts relating to neutron stars and their properties. The final fate of stellar corpses is now considered in three categories, according to the mass of the star, after thermo-nuclear burning has finally ceased. For each category, there is a particular end point, the three end points being: 1) White Dwarf, 2) Neutron star and 3) the Black Hole. White Dwarfs we considered last time and this time we are focussing on neutron stars. In the next instalment the focus would shift to Black Holes. In every case, during the formation of the end-product, some excess mass is blown away, and what remains is the "core"; this ought to be kept in mind. With this, please first see the following table:

REMNANT	PROGENITOR MASS	REMNANT MASS	SIZE	DENSITY	HELD BY	EXTERNAL FORM
White dwarf	Less than 8 SM	Less than 1.44 SM	Radius about 10,000 km	1 ton/cc	Electron degeneracy pressure	Gas cloud/nebula
Neutron star	Bet 8 and 20 SM	About 3 SM	Radius about 10 km	200 million tons/cc	Neutron degeneracy pressure	SN cloud
Black Hole	More than 20 SM	More than 3 SM	Who knows?!	Infinity?	None!	???!

What this table shows is how stars that have ceased thermo-nuclear burning finally end up; this end state is of three types: White Dwarf, neutron star and Black Hole [to be discussed next time]. The exact end state attained depends on the mass of the burnt out star, referred to as Progenitor Mass above. Please note that not all the mass of the progenitor ends up in final state and forms a part of the "remnant mass". Some of it gets blown away, and only the rest forms a part of the White Dwarf or the neutron star as the case may be.

Turning next to the progenitor, figure below gives a rough schematic of a star of about 20 times the solar mass, before it is ready to settle down into a final state.

Turning now to some interesting numbers about neutron stars, don't imagine that just because the neutron stars are small, they are insignificant! Their

enormous density gives them enormous power! Know about escape velocity, the velocity with which an object must move to escape the gravity of the celestial object on which it is located? I am sure you are aware that the escape velocity on earth is about 11.2 km/sec that is to say, if we want to launch an object into space from the surface of the earth, we must make it move upwards with this velocity. This is a big number and it is for generating this velocity that the space people employ huge rockets. Turning to the neutron star, do you know what the escape velocity there is? Any idea? It is a whopping 0.5 c or about half the speed of light! That is to say, it is around 150,000 km/sec! Small the neutron star may be, but what a mighty punch it carries!

Another impressive number. Suppose you drop a 1 kg object from a height of 1 metre. It would of course fall towards the earth and hit it with a thud; we all know that. If you did that on a neutron star, do you know how powerful that thud would be? It would have the energy of two thousand hydrogen bombs! I am mentioning all these numbers for several reasons.

- Firstly, we must realise there are amazing forces at work out there in space.
- Secondly, when we see Swami or think of Him, let us also remember that it is He who is orchestrating all these incredible forces.
- Thirdly, the neutron star is too tiny to be seen with any telescope that man can ever build. Yet, he has devised clever methods and reasoning to infer their presence, and also designed remarkable instruments to detect them through the radiations they emit as pulsars etc.

God is infinitely powerful but God has also packed samples of that infinite power into man. That is why the *Upanishads* declare, "*Poornam adam, Poornam idam, ...*" etc., meaning roughly: "This and that are the same; one is the Macrocosm while the other is the microcosm."

Spend a minute to appreciate how much man has learnt about the physical aspect of the Cosmos just by gazing at the sky, wondering what's up there, and devising clever and ingenious means of finding out what's going on out there! You will then appreciate how much power God has given man to satisfy his curiosity.

Yes, stunning aspects of Infinity are already manifest in the Physical Universe but then that ought not to be surprising because, as Krishna explains, the Universe is the manifest aspect of His Divinity. God has given man the capacity to cognise also the Un-manifest Divinity, but alas, that is what man consistently misses, not because God has not equipped to cognise this Universally-present subtle aspect of Divinity but because he is too drunk with his "achievements". That is a different story, that we shall discuss later in our quest.

BOX 2

Concerning The Supernova 1987A

We reproduce below extracts from an article on SN 1987A by Richard McCray. This would offer some further insight into the SN phenomenon.

On the evening of February 23, 1987, a young Canadian astronomer named Ian Shelton took a photo of a nearby galaxy, the Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC) with his Nikon Camera. Shelton developed the photo and immediately noticed a bright star where none had been seen before. He told his colleagues, and within hours the word had sped around the world, by phone, e-mail and fax. This was a nearby supernova -- the brightest one to be seen since 1604 AD, when Johannes Kepler observed a supernova in our own galaxy.

Before it blew up, it was already a fairly luminous (about 10^5 times the Sun) blue star; but after the explosion it suddenly became 1000 times brighter (about 10^8 times the Sun).

From its location in the LMC, the light from SN1987A must travel for about 160,000 years before it reaches the Earth. So, when Ian Shelton first saw the supernova explode in 1987, he saw an event that had actually occurred in about 158,013 BC (1987 - 160,000 years). Today, when we look at the event with a telescope, we are seeing a delayed-action re-run of the actual event. [The temperature associated with the neutron core formation is about 40 billion degrees, and the event happens in about 10 seconds!]

The light from SN1987A faded at almost exactly the same rate observed in laboratories for the decay of the radioactive nucleus Cobalt-56 into the stable nucleus Iron-56 (the half-life of Cobalt-56 is 77 days). This was not a great surprise, because astronomers had long suspected that supernova explosions were responsible for the formation of the heavy elements in the universe. Theoretical calculations of the formation of heavy nuclei at billions of degrees (the temperature expected during the explosion) indicated that about this much Cobalt-56 would be formed. But the fact that the supernova light decayed just as expected was the strongest confirmation to date of the idea that supernova explosions really did make the heavy elements -- and, for the first time, we could measure exactly how much Cobalt-56 was made (0.07 Solar masses).

After 500 days the visible light faded even faster than the Cobalt-56 decay rate. That happened because after that time dust particles began to form in the supernova debris. The grains absorbed part of the optical radiation and converted it into infrared radiation. Moreover, the supernova debris had thinned out enough so that the gamma rays could escape directly without first becoming converted to optical light. In fact, gamma ray telescopes in space could observe these gamma ray photons, and they saw that the gamma ray photons had exactly the same energy as those produced by Cobalt-56 in laboratories on Earth. That clinched the idea that the supernova explosion made Cobalt-56. Think about it: the iron that makes your blood red was once radioactive Cobalt-56. It was produced in a supernova explosion several billions of years ago. The observations of gamma rays from SN1987A leave

little doubt about that. The same with the oxygen you breathe, the calcium in your bones, and the earth you stand on. We are, literally, stardust. In fact, we might consider ourselves the consciences of supernovae: the creatures supernovae have created to worry about the consequences of their unruly outbursts.

Even though the supernova became as luminous as a billion Suns, the total energy of the light that it produced was a tiny fraction -- only 10^{-4} -- of the energy released as neutrinos during the first few seconds after the collapse.

In 15 years, we have seen the debris of SN1987A cool from one of the hottest places in the universe ($T > 10^{10}$ K) to one of the cooler places ($T < 100$ K).

DHARMA – THE DIVINE CYCLE

By Prof. A Anantharaman

Prof Anantharaman has worked as Managing Director of several multinational companies in Africa, Asia, Europe, USA and also as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of a Transnational Business conglomerate based in Switzerland. He has served as an adjunct professor in several business schools including the Harvard Business School and is currently an honorary faculty member in the School of Business Management at Puttaparthi.

“I alone know the agony of teaching you each step of the dance,” said Swami once. What a confession by the Dance Master of the Universe! And how amazingly appropriate! He has to maintain balance and order in the Cosmos when the “gravitational pull of a single electron randomly shifting position can affect even the outcome of a billiard game on earth!”

Dharma – Duty with Reasoning

Action is at the very heart of the Universe. The Universe itself came into existence because of action and it cannot be sustained without this action chain. But what is Right Action? There is no word that can convey the depth, amplitude and vibrancy contained in the word ‘*Dharma*’. Swami explains the concept of Right Action from the root words of *Dharma* “*dharini and dhru*”- as the vesture that binds the whole world. He explains the concept of Dharma, shorn of all that is esoteric and erudite, through a simple fable.

When Dasaratha was running after Rama’s chariot, which bore him to the forest, he was crying out in anguish - “Stop, Stop! I command you to stop.” The charioteer Sumantra did not know what to do. Rama told him: “Don’t stop. If Dasaratha chides you later, tell him that you did not hear.” Sumantra was in a fix. How could he tell a lie? Rama explained to him: “The order to stop the chariot came from Dasaratha, the grief-stricken father. The order to take me to the forest had come from Dasaratha, the king. You have no Dharma to listen to the ravings of a man grieving for his son. But you have an absolute obligation to listen to the command of your king.”

Sumantra therefore had an obligation to use reason in determining his *Paradharm*a. Swami explains: **“The word Dharma does not even mean duty. In duty there is no freedom. In reason there is freedom. Dharma is an obligation that imposes both duty and reason.”**

For Swami, Dharma is not mere adherence to rules, but an extension of his oft-repeated concept of unity of thought, word and deed – *Trikarana suddhi*.

He says, “It is good to be born in a church, but it is not good to die in it. Grow and rescue yourself from limits and regulations, the doctrines that prevent your freedom of thought, the ceremonial rules that restrict. **Reach the stage where churches do not matter, where all roads end, from where all roads begin.**”

The Bhagavad Gita is a gospel whose message is timeless. In words that belong to Eternity, Incarnate God speaks to man; His friend. In *Gita Vahini*, the Eternal Charioteer speaks again on Dharma. Sai Himself interprets in Kaliyuga, what He uttered in Dwaparayuga. For has Swami Himself not declared, "*I am Vasudeva!*"

Swami makes two profound modifications to generally accepted interpretations of Gita. Firstly, He says that when Krishna was speaking about *Swadharma* (*individual duty*), He was basically referring to *Atmadharma* (*duty of the self*).

"Again looking at your own duty as well (Swadharma), you should not waver; for there is nothing more welcome to a *Kshatriya* (member of a warrior clan) than a righteous war." (Gita 2.31)

Right Action and Right Conduct in Individual Dharma

Every creature is bound by its own respective individual Dharma. And **what is right action for one may not be right action for another**. The story of King Sibi brings out this point dramatically:

A pigeon chased by an eagle seeks refuge with King Sibi, an ancestor of Rama. When warned not to harm the pigeon, the eagle says, "The pigeon is my prey. To hunt and kill it is my Dharma. It may be your Dharma to protect those who seek refuge in you. But in that process why are you interfering with my Dharma?"

And the story goes that Sibi offered an equivalent weight of the flesh of his own body to adjudicate the matter.

Bhagavan's Prescription for Moral Dilemmas

Swami points out that while following *Paradharm*, one should not violate *Atmadharma*, nor do anything which is against the nature of Atma. And He gives simple prescriptions for the daily conduct of Dharma.

"What is Dharma? Let me summarize it. First, treat your parents with love, reverence and fortitude. Second, act as you speak, speak as you feel and do not play false to your conscience. Third, be calm and levelheaded and maintain equipoise. And finally listen to the voice within!"

In another significant departure, Swami refutes the point that working for reward is immoral. But Swami offers an improved recipe:

"Perform action as an offering to God without hankering for reward and without any sense of individual doership."

This was another reaffirmation of Krishna, who said, "Therefore surrendering action to Me, thy thoughts concentrated on Me, the Absolute and the Self of all, freed from selfishness and without anticipation of any reward, with your mind in a perfectly calm mood, begin thou to fight." (Gita 3.30)

And how far is this Yoga of action practicable? And what happens when there is a moral dilemma. Sai Krishna provides the answer:

“Fix your mind on Me. Be devoted to Me. Sacrifice to Me. Prostrate before Me. So shall you come to Me. This is My pledge to you, for you are dear to Me.” (Gita 18.65)

Transform Work into Worship

When we see Divinity installed everywhere, as the indweller in every being, *Karmayoga* becomes *Bhaktiyoga*, work becomes worship. Swami says that the emphasis of such an offering should be Love.

As the Sufi poet Khalil Gibran said: “Work is Love made visible. And if you cannot work with Love, but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple, and take alms from those who work with joy. For if you bake bread with indifference, you make bitter bread that feeds but half man’s hunger. And if you grudge the crushing of grapes, your grudge distills a poison in the wine. And if you sing though as angels and love not your singing, you muffle man’s ears to the voice of the day and the voices of the night.”

As part of this *pavithrakarma*, Swami brings in the concept of Service. “**Hands that help are holier than lips that pray.**” In fact, He echoes the words of the bard of Shanti Niketan (Sri Rabindranath Tagore), who wrote over six decades ago, in language of unsurpassed beauty:

“Leave this chanting, singing and rolling of beads,
Whom dost thou worship in the lonely dark corner of the temple with its doors
all shut,
Come out of thy meditation and leave aside the flowers and incense,
Your God is out there in the tattered clothes of he,
Who toils by the sweat of his brow.” (Tagore)

As an international corporate citizen, I have worked in several continents with varying culture and environment. Several times I have experienced moral dilemmas. But whenever doubts assailed me and anguish stole a march, whenever I had conflict on what should be the right action, I always recollected the story of Dasaratha and found immediate clarity.

Several times I have also experienced moral dilemmas. But whenever I surrendered to Swami, all action and the fruits thereof; confusion, doubt and dismay vanished like the mist before the morning sun.

Turning Action into Sacrifice, Surrender and Love

Let me recount just one incident. This happened six years ago. As a group Chief Executive, I headed a cluster of operations in the United States belonging to our parent company, a Swiss conglomerate. One of these companies was

going through extremely trying times. There was an economic recession. We sorely needed an infusion of capital, which was hard to come by. The company's bankers were themselves in the middle of a restructuring process and had indicated that they would not extend the loan when it came for renewal in September that year.

During a board meeting in August, the directors took stock of the situation. While appreciating all action taken by the company, they saw no other option except to suspend the operations. I asked for time, a four week period, in which to try out some alternative plans. I was concerned at the loss of employment and livelihood for the staff and workmen of the company, most of whom had put in long years of service and knew no other trade. There were several employees, each with his entire family working for the company - these would be devastated. The Board agreed to my request and decreed that if no acceptable alternative plans were found, the operations should be closed down on a Friday; four weeks hence.

It was the longest four-week period of my life. I began each day with an intense prayer to Swami. I felt that it was my Dharma to ensure that I take any and all actions that would prevent a closure and loss of jobs. I met with several bankers and financiers to whom I made presentations about the Company's financing needs. I approached competitors interested in consolidation and possible acquisition of our Company. It was work round the clock. I tried, as Tennyson said: "To lose myself in action lest I wither in despair". Nothing seemed to succeed. There seemed to be no other option except to let the employees go.

All too soon the penultimate Thursday, the day before the expiry of the time limit given by the board was on me. As a last resort, I decided to meet a competitor to try and work out a possible sale of the company. As the long day wore on, it seemed clear that even that would not work. The buyer would not agree to a vital condition that I insisted - not to shift the operations and jeopardize employment.

As I drove back home totally dejected, I recollected the words of Shelley, "I was in the shadows of a starless night in which I moved alone And pale anguish kept a heavy gate."

En-route I passed my workplace. I cast a long lingering look behind. It had started raining; and in the dim haze, I fancied that I saw the several families that would be jobless by the next day. As I retired that night I wondered what next after Result-less Action. And whatever happened to Krishna's pledge in chapter 18 "*pratijane priyoasi mey*" (This is my pledge to you for you are dear to Me).

With great effort I betook myself to work next morning to do the inevitable. As I reached the outskirts of the plant, I found the traffic blocked and a large group of people assembled. All around, as far as eyes could see, there was a sheet of water. Our factory was situated in a low-lying area. Due to the heavy rain the previous night, the river nearby had risen and inundated the area. There was four feet of water in and around our premises. The newspapers next day

reported that this was a rare occurrence; the last reported flood in the area had occurred 80 years earlier and since then the river embankment had been strengthened. The actuarial calculations of the insurance companies had rated the probability of the region getting flooded as one in a million! The city and county geological officials were completely baffled!

It was another two days before water receded and we could get into the premises. We waddled in ankle deep water. When I entered my office, the photograph of Swami, which adorned my desk, stood calm and serene amidst the ravages of the deluge. It almost seemed to mock at me and repeat the words in chapter 18: *“For those who prostrate before Me, solemn is My promise.”*

To cut a long story short, we did not have to suspend the operations the next day. The federal government declared the area a disaster area and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management) poured in funds for rehabilitation. We also benefited from a substantial insurance claim - for some strange illogical reason, which I still cannot fathom, I had earlier overruled my controller and instructed him to take a flood coverage, an unusual practice at that time and in that area. Further, we did not have to repay the term loan to our bank that September; as part of a public relations gesture the bank forgave the loan! Suddenly, we had the needed capital for implementing our plans. The livelihood of the families of the employees, my sole concern in the whole effort, was protected.

Action, Sacrifice, Surrender and Love - How well this cycle works!

Announcing His Divinity, Swami wrote to His brother in May 1947:

“No one can comprehend My glory, wherever he is and whatever his method of enquiry and however long his attempt!” Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a one as this, in flesh and blood, ever walked on this earth. And it is indeed our privilege that we are contemporaries of this Avatar. The only tribute we can offer is to lay down our lives as flowers at His Lotus Feet!

Jai Sai Ram!

SAI MOVES LATIN AMERICA

Dear Reader, for the last one year, in every issue we have been bringing you the story of the Sai Movement in one Latin American country. Till now we have covered 11 nations and there are still stories to be told of Peru, Chile, Ecuador and many Caribbean island-nations, which we will be narrating in the coming issues. As a breather, this time we have the transcript of a conversation aired on Radio Sai in January 2003 between Prof. G Venkataraman and Sri Leonardo Gutter, one of the founding and first Coordinating Committee members of the Sai Organisation in Argentina, and currently a member of the Prasanthi Council, the body which oversees the activities of Sai Organisation worldwide.

Venkatraman: Sai Ram and welcome to our studios, Brother Gutter. Am I pronouncing your name correctly?

Gutter: Yes, you are pronouncing it perfectly. Sai Ram.

Venkatraman: I have seen you here all the time, every time there is a festival, but many of our listeners may not have seen you, especially since you come from a far-off continent, Latin America, based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Would you mind telling us exactly when you came to Swami and how you came to Swami, because different people are pulled by Him in different ways? So, how did He pull you?

Hearing the Name of the Lord

Gutter: It is a very interesting story. It was about twenty-two years ago. At that time I was already on a spiritual path in a Raja Yoga Organization, and I heard about Swami, I don't know how, but I heard about His Name.

Venkatraman: Was it like Hislop and many others? They heard it from Indra Devi.

Gutter: No, no, not like that. I personally do not know from where I heard His name. I was on the spiritual path; I heard it in Argentina. What happened then was that I became very interested. Soon a member of the organization, where I was, came to India. She had an interview with Swami and when she came back something happened. On her way to India, she stopped in the UK and she went to the library and there a book fell on her head; it was a book on Swami.

Venkatraman: A book fell on her head? Direct transmission of the knowledge.

Dream Darshan

Gutter: Exactly. She decided to come here. She came here and got an interview with Swami. She came back and she told us about Swami. At that

time, as I told you, I was in another organization. Then, one night I had a dream with Swami. My first dream.

Venkatraman: You saw Swami in the dream?

Gutter: Yes, I saw him in the dream.

Venkatraman: Complete form, robe, physical form, everything?

Gutter: Yes.

Venkatraman: It is amazing how many people had this kind of experience.

Gutter: It was very special for me. I was in a room, there were seven or eight people in a room, and Swami came in and I thought (this happened in the dream), *Well, now I will know if you are an Avatar. If you are an Avatar and when you come close to me, by where I am standing, I will have to feel something.* So then, He started to approach me and suddenly I found myself doing namaskar. And I thought, *What I am doing? I am not a Sai devotee.* So, I myself found it strange that I was doing that.

Venkatraman: You have heard about Him by that time. Had you seen His picture?

Gutter: I just heard His name and then I had this dream. I had not seen His picture. What happened was that when He came by my side, suddenly I started to feel waves of energy, one after another.

Venkatraman: Very interesting, exactly the same thing was said by Mr. Jum Sai a few days ago.

Gutter: **One wave of the energy after another. It was like all the cells of my body were bubbling with energy. Each cell was exploding and giving me Ananda, a state of bliss. It was so intense, one after another. One moment I lost my equilibrium and fell to the floor. I couldn't move, I was completely without any strength in my limbs. It was in my dream, I was quite conscious, and I was smiling from ear to ear. And He was just going to leave the room and I looked at Him and thought, *You are God, You Are God, You Are God.* He looked at me and He came back where I was lying on the floor and hugged me and gave me a few kisses on my head and I woke up.** That was so strong that I decided to come here to India. In January 1982, I found myself in the ashram. If you would like, I can share my first experience with him.

Venkatraman: Definitely.

"I will never disappoint My devotees." - Baba

Gutter: What happened was that I came here with the first organized group of Argentinians. Thirty to forty days went by and we didn't have a single

interview. One night I was alone in my room and I felt so strongly His divinity and I wrote in a paper that I was resigning from the other spiritual organization where I was participating, because I found the Avatar and I want to surrender completely to Him to serve Him in whatever way I could. Then I went to sleep. Next morning I went for darshan and Swami came straight to me. Instead of doing His normal darshan, He came from the mandir, directly to where I was seated. He came directly to me and looked directly at me and said, "Yes, this afternoon I will see you."

I was so happy when the darshan was over, I decided to go directly to the interview room and wait there for the afternoon. The seva dal stopped me and told me that it was not like that. "He has to call you again in the afternoon," he said. And I thought that the seva dal did not like my face. I thought he was spoiling my opportunity. I really thought that Swami will not find me or He will forget about that and I was really very sad. Well, afternoon came, darshan again, I got third line. I was simply dejected. Swami came out from His room and looked at me from the veranda, He looked *at* me, He didn't start to look for me, He just looked straight at me and from the veranda He shouted, "You!" I was so happy. I jumped up and ran to him. He said, "Go." He called me for an interview. I asked if other Argentineans can come. He said, "Yes."

The interview started and He gave Darshan. Suddenly, in the middle of the interview, He looked at me and told me what happened since the morning, all my thoughts, my doubts. He came close to me and said in my ears wonderful words. I will always remember these words: "**I will never disappoint My devotees.**" I will always remember those words that proved to be true for the past twenty-two years.

Venkatraman: That is a wonderful story, typical of the way Swami draws people. I will use the opportunity to share something very interesting I heard just a few days ago. This is from a lady, a Muslim lady, she hails from Bangladesh and she has come here for the first time. She knew nothing about Swami. Absolutely nothing. She is a fashion designer; she has an outfit in Dhaka where she employs 350 destitute women. She is giving those jobs and they are a mixed lot, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. Her products have been displayed in many exhibitions. They were bought by Queen Elizabeth, Princess Diana, and so forth. And she went to Singapore for a fashion shown to display her products. She didn't know a thing about Swami and had never seen His photograph.

There she had a dream. Swami came walking downstairs and said to her, "Don't worry; I will take care of your problems. If someone tries to do anything, that person will get an electric shock." She woke up and said it's a strange dream and forgot about it. Two days later, she went to meet her agent, a Chinese girl in Singapore and when she entered her house she stood frozen, because she saw a photo of Swami. She said, "Who is that?" The Chinese agent said, "He is Sai Baba." She kept on looking at the photo. The Chinese girl asked, "Why are you looking like that?" And then this lady told the story. "Where is this Sai Baba? I want to see him." And so she found out and she came here.

She told me a lot about her life and family and herself, how her husband has now retired from the railways, how they always lived a very dharmic and principled life and her husband was totally against corruption. She said, "You know our country is number one in corruption ratings, but we were very principled." I told her because you follow dharma and you are giving sustenance to 350 people, Swami has picked you from apparently from nowhere. This sort of thing seems to happen all the time and I am very interested to know that you had this more than twenty years ago.

Gutter: Latin America and my country are so far from India and our culture is so different yet Swami is known. I had the good fortune of traveling to almost all the countries in Latin America. In all the twenty-three countries there is a Sai Organization; so many people have had direct experiences. Everywhere in Latin America, there is a Sai Organization. He appears there in different ways in different places in the interior of Argentina. So the way people know about Him is through many situations. His physical form materialized in those countries.

Venkatraman: This is unbelievable.

Gutter: I think that having a Sai Organization everywhere, with our culture so different, is great. Because in our culture we don't believe in an Avatar and the concept is completely alien to us. In spite of that, people receive it well and are so open to it.

Venkatraman: Incidentally, talking of this manifestation in different places, I remember an incident that took place in Brindavan, many years ago. Swami was with students and someone from Europe was describing how Swami had manifested in Croatia and was doing service there. And at the end of it all, when that person sat down, one devotee said, "Swami, this is astounding." Swami's reply was, "**For you, it is astounding. For Me, it is normal.**"

Gutter: Very nice.

Venkatraman: I won't forget it. The exact words of Swami were, "Nee ku chaala aascharyam, naa ku chala saham" ("For you it is astounding, for me it is common"). You have told us of Swami's manifestation and his wide acceptance all over Latin America. Incidentally, I am reminded of what Hislop told me in the early 1990s. He had come to Bangalore for a summer course. It so happened I was sitting with him while the proceedings were going on in the College Auditorium. He said, "You know, the Sai movement is spreading like wildfire in Latin America." I asked, "What is the reason for this?" He said, "Most of Latin America is Catholic and the Catholics have no difficulty in accepting mystical experiences and saints. It is the Protestants who have a problem. It is very easy for the Catholics to accept somebody like Sai Baba." That is exactly what he told me.

Skeptic Transformed

Gutter: I just remembered a nice story. When the Sai Organization started to appear in Brazil, there was another spiritual movement called “Spiritism,” which is very important there. It is second to the Catholic Church. When the Sai organization started to grow, the movement became a little worried and concerned. So they decided to send here to India the number two person of their movement. His name is Prof. Rivaldo to check if Sai Baba was true or not. He came here with a goal to prove that Swami was a fraud. That was the aim of his trip. And he is very respected; he says he seems to have 12 siddhis or powers and they believed that he is going to be able to see and know. He is so popular there, whenever he gives a lecture, like 5000 people attend.

When the Professor came back from India from the ashram and went to Brazil he said that he came here and he saw the ashram surrounded by angels. He also said, “Whenever Sai Baba comes out, spiritual light flows from the sky for all people.” He could see all that when Swami approaches a person, the aura of Swami that is completely pink absorbs all the negativity of the people. He spoke so well about Swami, himself being the person who was supposed to be speaking bad about him. So that is how he got transformed. And in another situation when the first Sai Center was opened in Costa Rica, the day it opened there was an article in the press, sent from a correspondent in Prashanti Nilayam. Can you imagine that? A newspaper from Costa Rica carrying an article from Prashanti Nilayam?

Venkatraman: Most of us don’t even know where Costa Rica is.

Gutter: Thus we have very nice experiences.

Venkatraman: Talking of angels, I am reminded of another incident narrated by Hislop. Many years ago, Swami went to Madras and took Hislop with him. He just drove to one house at about two o’ clock in the afternoon. He knocked on the door. The lady opened, and said, “Swami, You are here”? Swami: “Yes, I am here. Aren’t you going to welcome me inside?” So she goes inside, she doesn’t know how to receive Swami. Normally, you have all sorts of things, fruits, flowers, etc. She said, “Swami, why didn’t you tell me? I have nothing.” He says, “Don’t worry,” and He looks at the car and signals. And Hislop says, “Angels came from that car bringing silver trays they deposited and went back to the car and disappeared.” He has written this – you have to believe Hislop – but the story doesn’t end here. Next time a year later when Swami came to Madras, He brought students with Him. He took them to that house and then He told the lady, “Show these boys those silver plates the angels brought.”

Gutter: Fantastic. That is very great.

Venkatraman: We don’t understand what sorts of things go on. When you talked about aura, I was reminded about what Frank Baronowski saw. He also

saw a tremendous aura. Now, tell me something about the activities that go on in Argentina and Latin America.

Seva Activities in South America

Gutter: We have plenty of activities. One feature that is very important is that the Sai center in our country became like the community center. It is open every day of the week. In Argentina we have almost 100 centers, between Sathya Sai Groups all over the country, from the North to the South. In Latin America, we have over 300 Centers. Only in Argentina, where we have most centers, there are almost 80 or 90 centers in total. Those centers are open every day of the week, so devotees can go any time. Mostly they are open from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. everyday and weekend they are open all day. They have several activities every day – service activities, study circles, twice a week bhajans. Then we have service activities three or four times a week. People do Narayan seva, for example, in Buenos Aires. About 11,000 to 15,000 plates are put out by one center every month and food served for poor people just in one center every month. We have plenty of service activities in each center.

Venkatraman: Apart from distribution of food, do you run medical camps?

Gutter: We do medical camps, we have slums areas adopted, we have visit to the leper's house, visit to the children's hospital. The important thing is that this is done in a weekly basis, it is not something done once a month; every week these activities are done.

Venkatraman: How do people, the general public like it? Do they know about the Sai Organization?

Gutter: They like it very much. They know and they acknowledge. For example just now there was a flood in one area of greater Buenos Aires and this organization was the first to help. We made a medical camp, we give them an integral service.

Bal Vikas and EHV

Venkatraman: What about things like Bal Vikas or EHV or things like that?

Gutter: We have in Latin America now 13 Sathya Sai Schools: five in Argentina, four in Brazil, one more coming in January or March in Brazil [which year was the interview?] we have two in Ecuador, one in Venezuela, and we have one in Mexico. 159 adopted public schools by Sai Organization, just in Mexico with 15,000 public school students going through the EHV Program

Venkatraman: Tell us something about what the EHV program really does and what it means for the benefit of our listeners.

House of Gold

Gutter: I can tell you a story that is very nice. But before that, let me give you some updates. A month ago, the Minister of Education from Argentina met with the Director of Sathya Sai Institute of Argentina. She approved the Sathya Sai EHV Program and requested the Director of Institute to adopt as many schools as possible and our limit are our own people resources. Now, I want to tell you the effect of EHV It is a wonderful story. For example one of the service activities we have is that we care for children who do not have houses. We have children who do not have houses, children who live on the streets, in Buenos Aires.

What happened was that we were working with those children, bringing them twice a week to the Sai center, and there we let them take a shower, and we give them food and we helped them by teaching; especially we gave EHV classes to them. At the beginning they came back to the center. But then we felt that the problem was that they were going back to the streets and they live in an environment where they have to survive there. We were trying to fill a bucket full of holes. It was a very difficult task. We decided to rent a house, so we are really bringing them out of the streets; But as you know, Latin America is not rich like Europe or United States. So with the funds we have, we were able to rent a dilapidated house, but we decided to work there to make it nice enough to receive the children.

So, one day, three of those children went to the house to help to repair the house; there was a Sai devotee and this lady asked them to go to the front of house to move some earth to put some plants to make it a little nicer. Moments later, they came back inside with a bag that they found, a bag inside one of the pits. **What happened was that inside the bag there was thirteen kilograms of pure gold. When they found the gold the first thing they thought was to run away. But then they said they remembered what they were taught in the EHV classes. And they felt that they had to bring back the gold to us. With that gold – the judge declared that it belongs to us – with that gold, we bought two houses for the homeless children. One of the three children had a missing leg.**

Venkatraman: Are people digging more in Argentina?

Gutter: That child to whom we bought the leg, he told that he really wanted to meet Swami; He wanted to come here; we agreed to buy him a ticket with that gold we received. He came here. Swami granted him an interview and Swami told him that He had put the gold there. In one of the houses we have, we have a home for nine or ten abandoned girls. The judges sent them to us. Lots of services like this are known in other countries in Latin America. There are water projects in El Salvador. Latin America is a country where service activities and EHV activities are flourishing.

Venkatraman: We hear a lot about the economic problems of Latin America. Argentina was very much in the news sometime ago and I even received letters from your colleagues there. The question is, do you feel that Swami's message has a solution for the problems of Latin America, and if so, are

people ready to listen to it? Not just the Sai Members, the community at large?

Gutter: I feel that Swami's message is the solution for worldwide problems.

Venkatraman: I agree with you; I wanted you to say it.

Gutter: I feel that people are receiving it very well. Just to give you a couple of examples, the President of El Salvador is a Sai devotee; he came here a long time ago. The Vice President of the Central Council of Brazil is a Sai devotee. They have elections in Brazil and a new President was elected. He offered this lady a position in the Government; she refused. Thinking she wanted a better one, they offered a new one, she refused. The third time they offered her an important position in the government; I don't know if she has accepted; she didn't want to accept in one or two years as she is very committed to the Sai work.

In spite of the crisis in Argentina, we just had Swami's birthday celebrations in Argentina in a very important theater in downtown attended by 1200 people. People from all levels of society are receiving Swami's messages very well as it touches their hearts.

Venkatraman: Now the important point here is Swami's emphasis on morality; it has become out of fashion in America and Europe perhaps. Are people in Argentina realizing that morality is the only solution?

Gutter: I think so because what we realize at this moment is that the problems we are facing now are due to corruption. Argentina is a very rich country and we have everything there. To be in the present economic crisis is just because of corruption. I know that everybody is realizing that. We feel that Swami's message is very much needed there and is well received. This is what we infer when people come to centers and we have public meetings. When invited to a program with magazine or newspaper, they keep asking us about Swami and His message.

Venkatraman: From the point of view of culture and religion, both are very different there as compared to here in India. Do the people have difficulty in accepting Swami?

Gutter: My experience is that people do not have difficulty, from twenty-one years ago, after my first trip when I came back from India with my heart filled with love for Swami.

Venkatraman: But then, you know, you were already in Rajayoga.

Spreading the Glory of the Lord

Gutter: At that time, I felt the urge to share what I have found with everybody and I started to go around to different places wherever I was invited and I started to travel all around Argentina and the neighboring countries to speak

about Swami. What I found was that everybody was eager to listen. What I found was that since then I am traveling all over Latin America and participated in many meetings.

Venkatraman: What is the profile of the devotees? Are they middle class? Are they lower class? Are they from industry? Professionals? Academicians?

Gutter: We have devotees from all the classes, from industry, academicians, and professionals and intellectuals.

Venkatraman: And they are ready to accept Swami?

Gutter: Yes.

Venkatraman: What about politicians?

Gutter: Many politicians are Sai devotees.

Venkatraman: I suppose they are not corrupt.

Gutter: No, They are not.

Venkatraman: So, what you need to do is get more Sai devotees and then corruption will be wiped out. Tell me something about Sai movement in other countries, like Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Guatemala. We see those people here occasionally. I like the Columbia scarf, it is very imaginative, and Guatemala. Why don't you tell us something more about those countries also?

Gutter: You don't see many people here because of the economic situation in our countries. We just had a meeting with five zonal chairmen; we have many centers here everywhere in all countries. We have many centers in Latin America, including Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Haiti, now there is a devotee carrying books in French from here to Haiti and including Cuba.

The Cuban Story

Venkatraman: Cuba? That is very interesting.

Gutter: Once I had the opportunity to speak before Swami and with His blessing, I mentioned the experience in Cuba. In Cuba, once some years ago a stewardess asked me to give her a picture of Swami to carry to a Hatha Yoga Professor, an instructor, in Cuba. So I sent the photo there. From that photo started to appear vibhuti in Cuba. And this Professor, Hatha Yoga Teacher gave a little vibhuti to a teenager who was going to a heart operation the next day. The next day when they took him to the surgery room, they found that the problem in the heart had disappeared. There was no operation. From that day onwards; the Sai devotees started appearing from nowhere. No one Cuban came to India; there it is forbidden to meet in groups. But in a

short time there were 108 groups appeared all over Cuba. Even the members of the secret police who were sent to the meetings became Sai devotees. One of Fidel Castro's sons became a Sai devotee; they reached a point where the Government became a little worried. They closed the Sai organization.

Venkatraman: That will be a temporary closure.

Gutter: I am sure. What I heard is that they are still having meetings anyway. What I heard that is in three years there were 30,000 Sai followers in Cuba. If they let them continue, everyone will become a Sai devotee.

Venkatraman: It is amazing; it is almost like what is happening in Russia.

Gutter: The reason that there was a drop "Glasshouse" (Is the word correct?", as we say in Latin America was that one day they had Swami's birthday in Cuba. They had almost twelve to fourteen hours celebration, there were hundreds of people going to the center to participate in the celebration; that was it for the Government.

Venkatraman: That was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Gutter: Imagine in a country in Cuba where no one has come here, yet there are so many Sai devotees. All of Latin America is filled with Swami's love.

Venkatraman: This is a little extraordinary; nobody has come from there and all you did was you sent a photo to the Hatha Yogi Professor. This is just remarkable, absolutely mind-boggling. It was really nice talking to you and you told us many things that we didn't know. It just shows that there are dimensions to Swami which we are hardly aware of when He comes in the morning and evening for darshan. We just see someone coming and someone going. This shows how limited our vision is.

Nothing is Impossible with Sai

Gutter: First of all I want to appreciate the opportunity to share our experiences with all the people that are listening to us. Thank you. I want to say that Swami is doing everything. When I came back from my first trip to India, it was March 1982; I was traveling for three months. I was in the ashram for forty-five days. The day I was returning to Argentina, I felt in my heart such a pain that I am leaving the abode of God. So I said within myself, *Swami, I want to come back in September*. But at that time it was economically impossible to come back in September. I was just starting my new business, and my partner was going to kill me if I tell him I will go back to India in September, after being three months out. But within my heart I asked him.

So in the ashram, I told my ashram friends, "Don't miss me. I will be back in September." So I went back to Argentina. In the middle of June or July, I received a proposal to do a theater play in Ecuador; I was representing a film company at that time. The company came to get the rights to do a theater play in Ecuador. Part of the deal was I had to go with them for one month to

check what they were doing and to collect the royalties due. So, I went to Ecuador. When the month was over and finished, I had to come back to Argentina. Suddenly, I felt that I had to speak about Swami in Ecuador because no one knew about Him. I went to the airline office and the company. As part of the deal, had given me a thirty days valid ticket. I went to the airlines office and I tried to extend my ticket for one week to be able to speak about Swami.

I didn't know how and where. I went to the airlines office and I said, "Please, let me go back on the next flight from Ecuador to Argentina." There were two flights that fly from Ecuador to Argentina in a week. And the lady there said, "No, no way, your ticket is expiring tomorrow. You have to go on that flight." Each time she said, "No," I was more determined to stay. After forty minutes of discussion, she said, "If you want you can keep your ticket open for one year, and you stay how long you like." I asked her, "How much is it?" She said, "With one hundred dollars you can stay as long as you like." So I told her, "Why didn't you start with this?" I paid one hundred dollars, I had my ticket open. I left the airlines office and say what am I going to do now? I cannot go to a park and speak about Swami, they will think I am crazy. I called one friend who stayed in the capital of Ecuador, and he said, "Come here." He arranged for me to go to a meeting at a hatha yoga group, presided over by a Catholic priest.

Venkatraman: A Catholic Priest accepted hatha yoga?

Gutter: Yes. The Catholic Priest was running this organization. I told him that I wanted to speak about Swami, He said, "Please, next Friday we have a meeting, you can talk about Swami." I went there and the hall was crowded with people. I started to speak about Swami; I spoke about one hour about him. When I finished, the Catholic Priest came to me and said, "Listen we have a magazine that we publish and distribute all over the Ecuador. If you write an article, I will publish it in the magazine and if you have a photograph, I will put it on the cover of the magazine." You can imagine how happy I was.

Next day, Saturday, I was invited by this friend to a concert. When I left the concert, he met with a person with whom he was preparing to work. They went to the exit of the theater. It was cold. When they realized I was feeling cold, this industrialist told my friend, "Listen, your friend is suffering. Why don't you come to have lunch in our house tomorrow and we will discuss over business there." And he invited me to come over there too. When he left, I said I will not go to a business meeting. My friend said, "If you don't come, I will feel bad. The custom here is you have to be polite." So I went. Can you imagine what my talk was during lunch? I started to speak about Swami.

This industrialist was a very important man in Ecuador. He was a former ambassador to Israel. He had a very important industry too. He was very attached to all the pleasures of the life. He was really not in the spiritual path at all. After ten minutes of listening to me, he said, "Excuse me, Sir, do you have a mind to go to India with me?" I heard him and said, "Of course not." "OK," he said, "I will meet you in this place, next Monday; here is a travel

agency, and I will buy two tickets and go to India.” I said, “OK.” I thought it was a joke. I told myself, today is Sunday, I have my ticket to return to Argentina to go on Tuesday. Monday I was supposed to meet him and I said, “Let me go and see. This may not be a joke.” So I went. This person came, he bought two tickets. On September 2, I was in the Ashram, Ecuador-Buenos Aires completely paid; Ecuador-India completely paid. And I was surprised.

On the way to India, he explained why he bought the ticket. He had a cancer in his palate, he was not in the spiritual path at all. He had a few months to live. He went to the United States, had surgery in Houston and they couldn't cure him. When he heard me speaking about Swami, he said, “I have the money and I have nothing to lose.” He came to India with me. The first day we were in darshan in Whitefield. When Swami came to the door, I felt the voice within my head saying, “You want to be here in September, well, here you are.”

That man was very fat. He could not comfortably sit on the floor and he was complaining all the time. So one day, I don't remember, I think it was Thursday, we had bhajans and he remained seated all day. I was surprised; because after ten minutes, he would complain as he couldn't sit. In the afternoon, before Swami came, he looked at me and his eyes were completely wet, and he told me Swami had just been here. He put his hand in my mouth, took out something and told me, “You are cured.” I didn't see Swami, but he had this experience. Couple of days later, we went back to Ecuador and he was completely cured. He went to the hospital in Europe, the clinic in United States, and they told him, “No more cancer.” Now it is almost twenty years since then, he is alive, completely cured and very happy. When he went back to Ecuador, this person was so grateful to Swami, he published his experience in a magazine and he distributed 10,000 copies free all over Ecuador. This is how Swami makes himself known.

Venkatraman: Swami often says, “Things are going to happen far sooner than you imagine;” Now I can believe all of it. If these things are happening, what is there to stop Him? But He always says for everything there must be a time and place and a circumstance. He writes the timetable, He writes the schedule, and all we need to do is to watch very carefully. I am very hopeful, after all that you have said, that Argentina is really going to pull itself out of the current economic, ethical, and moral crisis. And I do hope that rebirth will show a new light to the whole world. Thank you and Sai Ram. We hope we will see you here again in our studios. Sai Ram.

Gutter: Sai Ram and thank you.

GUIDE TO A HAPPY LIFE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN – THE CHINESE WAY

During the recent Chinese New Year's Day [CNYD] celebration at Prasanthi Nilayam on February 24, 2007, a devotee gave us a book entitled **Di Zi Gui - Guide to a Happy Life**, published by **Pure Land Books** in Australia. This book is all about various aspects of Chinese culture [including respect for elders and filial piety, a theme that was much stressed during the celebrations]; H2H found the book very informative as well as educative. Since the publishers have generously welcomed wide dissemination of the contents of this book, we are taking the liberty of presenting the gist of this wonderful book to our audience. Explaining the motivation for publishing the book, the Publishers say:

Chinese culture is heavily influenced by Confucius, the great Chinese scholar. Confucius believed that moral principles, virtues and discipline should be the very first lessons taught to a child, and that children need to practice them daily. It was most important to the ancient Chinese parents that their children learned moral principles and virtues first, before any other subjects, because without these as foundation, the learning of all other subjects would be futile. In ancient China, the purpose of going to school and studying was to prepare for becoming sages and saints, not to pave the way for fame or making a profit.

All this is amazingly similar to the values considered vital by Vedic society in ancient India; yet, the similarity is not surprising since people worldwide in those days uniformly set a higher store to values than to profit. Ancient Chinese felt that without strict discipline and moral principles, a child would amount to nothing.

Not knowing what it means to be dutiful to parents and respectful to teachers, a child would grow up not listening to or respecting anyone. Ironically today, many parents listen to the child instead of the other way around. Additionally, teachers are afraid to teach and discipline children because they are fearful of violating the children's legal rights and being sued by the parents.

Currently, we live in a tumultuous world where the relationships among people, between people and their environment, parents and children, husbands and wives, and employers and employees are disintegrating. Parents do not act like parents. Children do not act like children. Our minds are polluted and our family system is disintegrating, as evidenced by an ever-increasing divorce rate. Soon, the planet Earth will no longer be fit for us to live on. We are fearful of our future and of the future of our children.

The book is based on the teachings of Confucius, and have been taught for ages, as the core of Chinese culture. The stress is on affection between generations so that grandparents, parents, children etc., are tied by bonds of love, so that there is no gap, mentally and culturally. Later, when Buddhism was adopted in China, the concept of love and affection was further extended. Outside the family, the child was expected to treat every male and female of the parents' generation as if they were the child's own father or mother.

Considerable stress was laid on following the teachings of the ancient sages and saints and offering respect to them. All individuals were expected to love all, and cultivate love and compassion. This, the ancients of China firmly believed, was the way to improve the quality of their cultural and spiritual life.

We now consider the contents of the various Chapters. Chapter 1 deals with how the child ought to be dutiful to its parents.

When my parents call me, I will answer them right away. When they ask me to do something, I will listen respectfully. When my parents reproach me, I will obey and accept their scolding. I will try to hard to change and improve myself, to start anew.

In the winter, I will keep my parents warm; in the summer, I will keep my parents cool. I will always greet my parents in the morning to show them I care. At night I will make sure my parents rest well. Before going out, I must tell my parents where I am going, for parents are always concerned about their children. After returning home, I must go and see my parents to let them know I am back, so they do not worry about me. I will maintain a permanent place to stay and lead a routine life. I will persist in whatever I do and will not change my aspirations at will.

A matter might be trivial but if it is wrong to do it or unfair to another person, I must not do it imagining it will bear little or no consequence. If I do, I am not being a good child because my parents would not want to see me doing things that are irrational or illegal. Even though an object might be small, I will not keep it a secret from my parents. If I do, I will hurt my parents' feelings.

COMMENT: In the Chinese tradition, it was the duty of a child, if necessary, to advice their parents from doing wrong. Sometimes, parents are misguided while children are far more honest; in all such cases, it was considered essential for the child to guide the parents than the other way around!

When my body is hurt, my parents would be worried. If my virtues are compromised, my parents would feel ashamed. When I have loving parents, it is not difficult to be dutiful to them. But if I can be dutiful to parents who hate me, only then would I meet the standard of saints and sages for being a dutiful child.

COMMENT: In China, a person's conduct is governed by five important moral principles [*Wu Chang*] and eight virtues [*Ba De*]. The five moral principles are: kind-heartedness, duties and obligations, proper etiquette, wisdom, trustworthiness. The eight mandatory virtues are: duty to parents, respect for elders, loyalty, credibility, proper etiquette, duties and obligations, a sense of honour, and a sense of shame. Not surprisingly, there is some overlap between the two sets of codes of conduct.

When my parents do wrong, I will urge them to change. I will do it with a kind facial expression and a warm and gentle voice. If they do not accept my advice, I will wait until they are in a happier mood before I attempt to dissuade

them again, followed by crying if necessary, to make them understand. If they end up whipping me, I will not hold a grudge against them.

COMMENT: This may come as a bit of a surprise, in ancient China, they were so fussy about obedience that when a child did not obey the parents, the parents were not only allowed to discipline the child but even allowed to ask the authorities to have the child executed! By the way, in ancient China, etiquette was laid down by the emperor. Obviously all this is going too far by today's standards, but what we must understand is the passionate belief the Chinese had in discipline.

When my parents are ill, I will taste the medicine first before giving it to them. I will take care of them night and day and stay by their bedside. During the first three years of mourning after my parents have passed away, I will remember them with gratitude and feel sad often for not being able to repay them for their kindness in raising me. During this period, I will arrange my home to reflect my grief and sorrow. I will also avoid festivities and indulgence in food and alcoholic drinks. I will observe proper etiquette in arranging my parents' funerals. I will hold the memorial ceremony and commemorate my parents' anniversaries with utmost sincerity. I will serve my departed parents as if they were still alive.

COMMENT: It is hardly necessary to point out how much importance Swami gives to revering one's parents both when they are alive and when they are no more. Talking about the death anniversaries of departed parents, Swami told His students, "Think of all the sacrifices they have made and shed a tear or two. After that feed the poor, seeing your parents in their forms." We now consider the duty the child has to siblings.

If I am the older sibling, I will befriend the younger ones. If I am the younger sibling, I will respect and love the older ones. Only when I can maintain harmonious relationships with my siblings am I being dutiful to my parents. When I value my family ties more important than property and belongings, no resentment will come between me and my siblings. When I am careful with words and hold back comments that would hurt, my anger would automatically subside.

When I am drinking, eating, walking or sitting, I will let the elders go first; the younger ones should follow. When an elder is asking for someone, I will get that person right away. If I cannot find that person, I will immediately report back, and put myself at the elder's service instead.

When I address an elder, I should not call him by his given name. This is in accord with ancient Chinese etiquette. In front of an elder, I will never show off. If I meet an elder I know on the street, I will promptly clasp my hands and greet him with a bow. If he does not speak to me, I will step back and respectfully stand aside. Should I be riding a horse and spot an elder I know who is walking, I will dismount and pay respect to the elder. If I am riding a carriage, I will stop, get out of the carriage, and ask if I can give the elder a

ride. If I meet an elder passing by, I will stand aside and wait respectfully. I will not leave till the elder disappears from my sight.

COMMENTS: It is necessary to pause and make several comments at this stage. Firstly, about the naming system in China. In the Chinese tradition, a male had at least two names. The first of these was the 'given name', the name given by the parents at birth. A second name was given to the male by his friends when he reached the age of twenty, at a ceremony called the Ceremony of the Hat, that was held to announce his coming of age. After that, only his parents could call him by his given name; all the rest, including the emperor had to address him only by his second name. The only exception was if the person committed a crime. In that case, at the time of sentencing, he would be called by his given name.

Notice how detailed the instructions are. Such detailing is needed so that the term 'rightful conduct' becomes a detailed practical manual, easy to absorb and follow. Otherwise, each person would adopt his or her own version of rightful conduct and that could cause all kinds of problems. In this context, it is pertinent to mention that in ancient India, Emperor Manu laid down similar rules and they are collectively referred to as Manu Dharma.

The rules comment on what a young person should do if that person is riding a horse and crosses an elder who is walking down the road from the other side. It is interesting that even today, in Prasanthi Nilayam when an old student or a villager is riding a bicycle crosses a teacher or a senior and respected elder, that person would alight from the cycle and mount it again only after the elder has crossed! Shows how similar the customs are in distant lands and how they have survived in some measure to this day!

When an elder is standing, I will not sit. After an elder sits down, I will sit only when I am told to do so. Before an elder, I will speak softly. But if my voice is too low and hard to hear, such soft speaking is not appropriate. When meeting an elder, I will walk briskly towards him; when leaving, I will not exit in haste. When answering a question, I will look at the person asking the question.

I will serve my uncles as I am serving my parents. I will treat my cousins as if they were my own siblings.

COMMENTS: The advice about looking in the eye is an interesting one. Sometime ago, in Holland there was a lot of debate about Muslim immigrants, especially women, not looking the person they are speaking to in the eye. The Dutch said, "In this country, we always look into the eye of the person we are speaking to; doing so is a sign of being honest and straight-forward." In the Islamic tradition, however, the customs are different, and the issue was: Should the host country be tolerant to the culture of the immigrants or demand total conformity, in the name of all sorts of dubious arguments. It is important to understand, tolerate and be as accommodative as possible, especially when the customs are based on respect and humility. This also applies to calling the other person by name. In India, one did not until recently refer to an

elder by name; but now, thanks to imported traditions, it is not uncommon to see youngsters refer to elders not only by name but even without the respect prefix of mister, etc.

Let us continue and see what more advice ancient Chinese had for their children.

I will get up each morning before my parents; at night, I will go to bed only after my parents have gone to sleep. When I realise that time is passing by me and cannot be turned back, and that I am getting older and older year by year, I will especially treasure the present moment.

COMMENTS: Ancient Chinese valued time very much. They had a proverb which said, "A unit of time is as precious as a unit of gold but you cannot buy back one unit of time with one unit of gold!"

When I get up in the morning, I will wash my face and brush my teeth. After using the toilet, I will always wash my hands. I must wear my hat straight, and make sure the hooks of my clothes are tied. My socks and shoes should also be worn neatly and correctly. I will always place my clothes and hat away in their proper places. I will not carelessly throw my clothes around, for that will get them dirty. It is more important that my clothes are clean, rather than how extravagant they are. I will wear only what is suitable for my station. At home I will wear clothes according to my family traditions and customs. When it comes to eating and drinking, I will not pick and choose my food. I will eat only the right amount. I will not over-eat. I am still young, I must not drink alcohol. When I am drunk, my behaviour would be ugly.

COMMENTS: The dress that ancient Chinese wore had hooks; there were no buttons then.

I will always walk composed, with light and even steps. I will always stand up straight and tall. My bows will always be deep, with hands held in front and arms rounded. I will always pay my respect with reverence. I will not step on doorsill or stand leaning on one leg. I will not sit my with my legs apart or sprawled out. I will not rock the lower part of my body while standing or sitting down.

COMMENTS: In ancient China, people paid their respects to other by bowing, holding one hand over the other which is closed, or by prostrating themselves on the ground.

I will always lift the curtain slowly and quietly. I must leave myself ample space when I turn so I will not bump into a corner. I will hold empty containers carefully as if they were full. I will enter empty rooms as if they were occupied. I will avoid ding things in a hurry, as doing things in haste will lead to mistakes. I should not be afraid of difficult tasks, and I will not become careless when a job is too easy. I will keep away from rowdy places. I will not ask about things that abnormal or unusual.

COMMENTS: In ancient China, curtains were made of bamboo strips woven together.

When I am about to enter a main entrance, I must first ask if someone is inside. Before entering a room, I must first make myself heard, so that those inside know someone is approaching. If someone asks who I am, I must give my name. To answer 'it is me' or 'Me' is not sufficient. Before borrowing things from others, I must ask for permission. If I do not ask, it is stealing. When borrowing things from others, I will return properly. Later, if I have an urgent need, I will not have a problem borrowing from them again.

When I speak, honesty is important. Deceitful words and lies must never be spoken. Rather than talking too much, it is better to speak less. I will speak only the truth. I will not twist the fact. Cunning words, foul language, and philistine habits must be avoided at all costs.

What I have not seen with my own eyes, I will not readily tell to others. What I do not know for sure, I will not easily pass on to others. If I am asked to do something that is inappropriate or bad, I must not agree to do it. If I do, I will probably be wrong. I must speak clearly and to the point. I must not talk too fast or mumble. Some like to talk about the good point of others, while some like to talk about the faults of others. If it is none of my business, I will not get involved.

When I see others do good deeds, I must think about following their example. Even though my own achievements are still far behind those of others, I must aim at getting closer. When I see others do wrong, I must immediately reflect upon myself. If I have made the same mistake, I will correct it. If not, I will take extra care to make the same mistake.

When my morals, conduct, knowledge, and skills seem not as good as those of others, I will encourage myself to be better. If the clothes I wear, and the food I eat and drink are not as good as that of others, I should not be concerned.

If criticism makes me angry and compliments make me happy, bad company will come my way and good friends will shy away. If I am uneasy about compliments and appreciative of criticism, then sincere, understanding, and virtuous people will gradually come close to me.

If any mistake I make is inadvertent, it is merely a mistake. If it is done on purpose, however, it is an evil act. If I correct my mistake and do not repeat it, I no longer own the mistake. If I try to cover it up, I will be doubly wrong.

Human beings, regardless of nationality, race, or religion – everyone – should be loved equally. We are all sheltered by the same sky and we all live on the same planet Earth.

A person of high ideals and morals is highly respected. What people value is not based on outside appearance. A person's outstanding abilities will

naturally endow him with a good reputation. Admiration from others does not come from boasting or praising oneself.

If I am a very capable person, I should use my capabilities for the benefit of others. Other people's competence should never be slandered. I will not flatter the rich or despise the poor. I will not ignore old friends, only delight in taking new ones. When a person is busy, I will not bother him with matters. When a person's mind is not at ease, I will not bother him with words.

If a person has a shortcoming, I will not expose it. If a person has a secret, I will not tell others. When people are being praised and approved of, they will be encouraged to try even harder. Spreading rumours about the wrongdoings of others is wrongdoing in itself. When the harm done has reached the extreme, misfortunes will follow. When I encourage another to do good, both our virtues are built up. If I do not tell another man of his fault, we are both wrong.

Whether I take or give, I need to know the difference between the two. It is better to give more and take less. What I ask others to do, I must first ask myself if I would be willing to do. If it is not something I would be willing to do, I will not ask others to do it. I must repay the kindness of others and let go my resentments. I will spend less time holding grudges and more time paying back the kindness of others.

When I am directing maids and servants, I will act honourably and properly. I will also treat them kindly and generously. If I use my influence to make them submissive, their hearts will not be with me. If I can convince them with sound reasoning, they will have nothing to object to.

We are all human, but we are not the same. Most of us are ordinary; only a few have great virtues and high moral principles. A truly virtuous person is greatly respected by others. He will not be afraid to speak the truth and he will not fawn on others. If I can be close to and learn from people of great virtue and compassion, I will benefit immensely. My virtues will grow daily and my wrongdoings will lessen day by day. If I choose not to be close to and learn from people of great value, I will suffer a great loss. People without virtue will get close to me and nothing I attempt will succeed.

If I do not actively practice what I have learned, but continue to study on the surface, even though my knowledge is increasing, it is only superficial. What kind of person will I be? If I do not apply my knowledge diligently, but stop studying, I will only do things based on my own opinion, thinking it is correct. In fact, what I know is not the truth.

There are methods to study correctly. They involve concentration in three areas: my mind, my eyes, and my mouth. To believe in what I read is equally important. When I begin to read a book, I will not think about another. If I have not completed the book, I will not start another. I will give myself lots of time to study, and I will study hard. If I devote enough time and effort, I will thoroughly

understand. If I have a question, I will make a note of it. I will ask the person who has the knowledge for the right answer.

COMMENTS: Students were expected to read a book again and again till they have understood it in full.

I will keep my room neat, my walls uncluttered and clean, my desk tidy and my brush and inkstone properly placed. If my ink block is ground unevenly, it shows I have a poor state of mind. When words are written carelessly, showing no respect, this shows my state of mind has not been well. My books should be classified, placed on the bookshelves, and in their proper places. After I finish reading a book, I will put it back where it belongs. Even if I am in a hurry, I still must neatly roll up and bind the open bamboo scroll I have been reading. All missing or damaged pages ought to be immediately repaired. If it is not a book on the teachings of the saints and sages, it should be discarded and not even looked at. Such books can block my intelligence and wisdom, and direction. Neither be harsh on myself nor give up on myself. To be a person of high ideals, moral standards and virtues are qualities we can all attain in time.

COMMENTS: In ancient China, a brush was used for [calligraphic] writing. The ink was prepared by grinding an “ink block” against the inkstone, using water for dilution. “Scroll” or “*juan*” means a bamboo scroll. It is an ancient book, in the form of a scroll made of bamboo slips with knife-carved or painted Chinese characters. Such books were used before paper was invented.

Our purpose in presenting the above is not only to draw attention to the fact that values formed the backbone of all ancient societies but also to stress that the ancients everywhere recognised that the inculcation of values must start at a young age. This, of course, is something that Swami has been always stressing, which is why for decades the Sai Organisation has been running programs like Bal Vikas, EHV, etc.

We do hope that parents, teachers and Gurus involved in developing values in children would read what we have offered here. And having done so, would some of them at least, please write how Swami has been teaching these very same lessons [and many more] over the years? We particularly welcome Bal Vikas Gurus the world over to contribute articles that would take this theme further.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The book ***Guide to a Happy Life*** from which we have presented several extracts, is published by **Pure Land Books**, 57 West Street, Toowoomba, Queensland 4350, Australia, and was kindly made available to us by Brother Wee Lin of Singapore, to whom H2H expresses many grateful thanks. We mention once again that we have taken the liberty of quoting extensively from this beautiful book because the Publishers, in keeping with ancient tradition, have generously welcomed reproduction and distribution, provided it is done free.

POST SCRIPT: After we prepared this article, we received from Bro. Billy Fong of Malaysia, a mail attached to which was a long text. That attachment not only contained the text we have reproduced, but also carried comments on how these teachings were imparted to children in Malaysia as a part of their educare/EHV programs. A book entitled ***The Traditional Chinese Di Zi Gui, and its Relevance to the Sathya Sai Educare Programme*** was also placed at the Lotus Feet during the Chinese New Year Day Celebrations.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part - 28

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT VI - SCENE 5

Sathya comes home, thorns all over His dress and on His head too. His sisters and mother are shocked.

PARVATHAMMA: What's this Sathya! I see so many thorns in Your head! Did You fall on a thorny bush?

VENKAMMA: O my God! So many thorns, so many of them!Mother see!

EASWARAMMA: What my dear?

VENKAMMA: Look how many thorny nuts are stuck in Sathya's hair. Mother, see!

EASWARAMMA: Oh! So many thorns! Sathyam what happened? O my dear child, how did it happen?

SATHYA: Mother, why are you so agitated? Good and bad, friendship and hatred, pleasure and pain, are all near each other! I replied very well to the Master's questions and he liked My answers. The other boys could not answer properly, and became angry with Me. To give vent to their anger, they pelted thorny nuts at Me.

PARVATHAMMA: They hit you?! I'll ask father to break their bones!

VENKAMMA: If we tell grandfather, he'll take care of all of them!

SATHYA: Why are you upset so much about such a small thing? The feeling of anger and revenge are like fire. The fire blazes for a while but dies down eventually. These boys have again become My friends, have they not? They even asked for forgiveness. Therefore, we should not think of doing harm to them.

EASWARAMMA: My! What kind of friends! Do friends pelt thorny nuts? If tomorrow something more serious happens.....

SATHYA: Mother, nothing serious will happen! Why are you unnecessarily worried?

ACT VII - SCENE 1

Puttaparthi village scene. Cloth merchant Gurunatham brings his products on a cycle and parks himself under a shady tree. From there, he calls out to the village folk, particularly the women. He knows practically everyone by name.

VENDOR: Clothes! Clothes! Gurunatham brings you all new clothes! Come quick, come one, come all! Ladies come! Venkatalakshmi, Ramalakshmi, Subbalakshmi, Veeralakshmi – all of you come! Hurry and don't delay; if you do, the clothes will all be gone! And I won't come again for another month! Madame Subbalakshmi, please come. *[To a lady]* You there, what are you staring at?

Hearing the cry of the salesman, many, especially ladies, leave their house to go and see what is being offered for sale.

LADY 1: Sister-in-law, cloth merchant Gurunatham has come. Let's go and see what he has to offer.

LADY 2: Yes, coming.

VENDOR: Mothers, come quick, and remember, my next visit will be a long time after.

LADY 3: Gurunatham, any new designs?

VENDOR: Want to see? I have shirts and trousers for ladies and sarees and blouses for men! Would you like to see?

LADY: Aren't you getting your words mixed up?!

VENDOR: Oh, did I? Look, I have sarees from Barampuram, Vatlamudi, Gadwal, Dharmavaram and Ambajipeta *[these are names of places famous for the production of good sarees]*.

LADY: Ambajipeta? That place is famous for bitter medicines, is it not?

VENDOR: Sometimes, business is also like a bitter medicine! *[to a lady customer who is inspecting]* You there, careful! You will dirty the clothes. For men, I have shirt pieces, lungis, and some under garment cloth.

MAN: What sort of cloth is that? I had a banian stitched with that cloth and I felt as though I was wearing thorns! It was that rough.

VENDOR: Where did you get the idea that under garment cloth would be soft?! Try this one this time. Shall I give you two yards of this? Here, take this.

WIFE OF THE MAN: That's enough! He hardly gets out of the house; may be once a year! Cheap cloth will do for him! Now, have you got any sarees?

VENDOR: Try this cloth. Make a dress out of it and lie down on a thorny bush if you will. Yet, you will feel as if you are sleeping on a rubber mattress. Lady, take a look at this Mangalagiri saree. Wear it, put a red vermilion mark on your face, and you will look just like Goddess Lakshmi! This one is from Dharmavaram. The design is absolutely new and it is double colour – dark green and pale red; both colours can be seen. And when you wear it, others will not be able to decide what the colour of the saree is.

LADY: What, are you saying that the saree will appear not to have any colour?

VENDOR: Why are you trying to buy a saree, without first deciding upon the colour?

Meanwhile, in Sathya's house, the girls hear the sales commotion come out to see what is going on. They are excited to discover that clothes are being offered for sale.

PARVATHAMMA: Mother! Cloth vendor Gurunatham has come!

KONDAMA.RAJU: [calls out] Gurunatham!

VENDOR: Sir!

KONDAMA.RAJU: Come here.

VENDOR: [to the people gathered under the tree] Ladies, I have to go to Kondama Raju's house. Please pay up fast.

LADY: Here's the cash.

GIRL: Don't forget to bring a silk dress for me next time.

VENDOR: You start saving money for the dress, and I will surely come at the time of the Dussera festival.

LADY: Here's the money I owe you.

KONDAMA.RAJU: Gurunatham!

VENDOR: Coming sir! Oh, I forgot this sheet; someone might whisk it away!

Cloth vendor comes to the house of Kondama Raju. Kondama asks the girls to come out. Sathya also joins.

KONDAMA.RAJU: Venkamma, Parvathi, come.

VENDOR: Salutations sir, and salutations mother!

KONDAMA.RAJU: Girls, pick what you want. [to vendor] What types do you have?

VENDOR: All types sir! [to Sathya] Boy, how are You?

KONDAMA.RAJU: You are coming after a long time.

VENDOR: Yes sir. I came for Dussera but could not come for Deepavali because of the pregnancy of my wife.

KONDAMA.RAJU: Is that so?

PARVATHAMMA: [pointing to a dress] How much does this cost?

VENDOR: Eight annas [in those days, the rupee was divided into sixteen annas].

SATHYA: In Reddy's house it was six annas and here in Raju's house it is eight annas, is it?

VENDOR: What Reddy are you talking about? I did not go to any Reddy's house.

SATHYA: Did you not sell a blue saree in Harishchandra Reddy's house? I know everything!

VENDOR: Boy! If you expose me like this, what will happen to my prestige? Will I tell a lie in Raju's house? That blue saree was Salem silk. That material shrinks, and the saree will reduce to the size of a handkerchief! I sell such second-rate stuff to those who haggle and bargain. But here, I bring only good stuff! By the way, staying here, how do you know what happened there?

SATHYA: That's something you will not understand!

VENDOR: Come on, take what you want, take it!

KONDAMA.RAJU: Gurunatham!

PARVATHAMMA: Mother, I'd like to have that purple-colour saree.

EASWARAMMA: Take what you like, my dear!

KONDAMA.RAJU: That colour is a good choice, young one!

VENKAMMA: I want this red-coloured upper cloth.

EASWARAMMA: You already have a red piece; take one with yellow colour.

VENKAMMA: As you say mother.

VENDOR: Anything else you want? I have a good selection.

SATHYA: Be careful about the measurement!

VENDOR: Yes, boy.

SATHYA: When you were selling under the tree, you said two yards but measured out only one!

VENDOR: Come on! Don't reveal all my secrets! It will ruin my prestige!!

K.RAJU: Look Gurunatham. A mistake can be corrected but cheating cannot be rectified! Measure carefully!!

VENDOR: Yes sir! [*shocked by Sathya's exposures*] Oh my dear!

PARVATHAMMA: Mother, why don't you pick a saree for yourself?

EASWARAMMA: Not now; later perhaps.

VENDOR: Mother buys for herself only at the time of the Sankaranthi and Deepavali festivals.

Venkama Raju walks in at this juncture. Seshama Raju follows a little later.

VENKAMA RAJU: Hello Gurunatham, have you brought anything for me?

VENDOR: Clothes for you and mother are being specially woven now, and I will bring them at the time of Sankaranthi.

SESHAMA RAJU: Gurunatham, did you bring the Rangoon silk I had asked for?

VENDOR: Would I not?! Here, just for you, a piece six yards long. It is so fine and silky that you can wrap it up and hide it in the palm of your hand!

SATHYA: All lies! This is not Rangoon silk but Dharmavaram silk!

VENDOR: [*squirming*] Not quite my dear boy. Dharmavaram material gets shipped to Rangoon, and we get it from Rangoon. So it is Rangoon material, is it not?

SESHAMA RAJU: Okay, okay. Now how much does it cost?

SATHYA: Twelve annas.

VENDOR: Correctly said my boy! You have upheld my dignity.

SATHYA: Twelve annas is your price but the real cost of that material is only eight annas!

VENDOR: No, no! It is twelve annas!

SATHYA: Open and see and you will find eight annas printed on the cloth!

SESHAMA RAJU: [to vendor] Hey you! Why did you say twelve annas, when it says eight annas here?

VENDOR: [to Sathya] I don't understand how You can see what is written in the cloth?!

SATHYA: That's the way it is. I can see what others cannot. Just because we don't bargain in the Raju household, you should not ask for any price you like! Don't cheat!!

VENDOR: No boy, it's not cheating

SATHYA: I know the difference between Truth and lies. Don't tell lies again!

K.RAJU: [to vendor] Your name may be Gurunatham [*meaning literally, Master of Gurus*] but my grandson is the *Guru* of the whole world! Be careful, no one can cheat Sathyam!

VENDOR: Forgive me sir, I made a mistake. In business, one tends to exaggerate. Please don't hold it against me. I'll give you the best of clothes for bargain prices!...[to Sathya] How about this one for you son? It'll look nice on You.

K.RAJU: Yes Sathyam, You also take what you want.

SATHYA: Grandfather, I don't need any clothes. These merely cover the body. What one needs is the dress of Wisdom, for it is Wisdom alone that can sweep away the dirt in the mind.

SESHAMA RAJU: Stop that silly talk and take this one. You will look nice in that dress.

SATHYA: No brother, I have no desire for clothes.

EASWARAMMA: That's all right son. Just take it; it will look nice on you.

SATHYA: Mother, no! I have already said it – I just don't want, that's all.

KONDAMA.RAJU: Sathyam's word is like the arrow of Lord Rama; it does not return!

GITA FOR CHILDREN
- Part 29
(Continued from the previous issue)

Chapter 13

78. Arjuna now asks, 'Krishna, You are saying that everything is God and that there is nothing other than You. Yet, a short while ago, You were talking of *Kshetra* and *Kshetrajna* as if they were two distinct entities. Now which of this is true?'

79. Krishna says, 'You have raised an important point and that gives Me an opportunity to mention something that I have not till now. You see Arjuna, there are two ways of looking at this world. One is through the Looking Glass of Oneness and the other is through the Looking Glass of Diversity. One who uses the former will see Unity in diversity, while the one who uses the latter will see Diversity in Unity, that is all. Of course, viewing through the Looking Glass of Oneness is preferable.'

80. 'Let Me illustrate with a simple example. Say you have a narrow beam of white light. Allow this beam to strike a prism at a suitable angle. Passing through the prism, the beam gets split into the seven rainbow colours. A person who is seeing the beam before it has entered the prism would say it is white while a person who sees the emergent beam would say it has rainbow colours.'

81. 'Now what has all this got to do with the *Kshetra* and *Kshetrajana* business? Simply this. An evolved being is like the person who does not see diverse rainbow colours but just a white beam. For him, the *Kshetra* and the *Kshetrajana* are one. Incidentally, such a person does not see the world merely with his physical eye. Rather, he uses Inner Vision; that is how he is able to see Unity in Diversity.'

82. 'In the example that I just gave, the prism is *Maya* or delusion. If the prism is removed, there is no beam splitting and no rainbow colours. In the same way, if a person gets rid of *Maya*, he would see only Unity and not Diversity.'

83. 'Let Me now go a bit deeper into this business of Diversity in Unity and Unity in Diversity. I am the sole Creator and all-in-all, but with respect to the Universe, I perform three distinct functions. I first function as the Creator, bringing the Universe into existence. I then wear a different hat and act as the Sustainer. And when the time comes I change My role once more, this time to function as the Dissolver of the Universe.'

84. 'People worship these three aspects of Mine individually as Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Sustainer and Protector; and Siva, the Dissolver. These three Gods are referred to as the Cosmic Trinity. In reality, all this is just a convenient way of describing My three different functions and aspects.'

85. 'Let Me now move on to the emergence of diversity from the Primordial Cosmic Oneness. Basically, this diversity comes about on account of the *Gun*as. For now that much is enough; more about *Gun*as later. With respect to the diversity present in Creation, you can treat the *Gun*as as playing a role similar to the prism.'

86. 'One who is below the *Gun*as would be bound by them and always experience diversity. In particular, he would see God as different from himself. This is what philosophers refer to as duality. By contrast, one who is above the *Gun*as, or *Gun*atheetha as he is called, will perceive only Unity, though his eyes may show him diversity.'

87. 'OK, the big question now is: "How does a person immersed in this world of diversity rise above it?" This is a very practical question, because 99.999% of the people are immersed in duality and swamped by diversity. They insist on seeing God as quite different from themselves. How to get out of this rut?'

88. 'One starts with simple steps. One first firmly resolves, "I shall never hurt any being whatsoever." People hunt and kill animals for sheer pleasure. This is very bad. Are there no better ways of enjoying oneself? Don't the animals experience pain while being killed? Must one kill another living being for entertainment?'

89. Arjuna asks, 'OK, but what about slaughtering animals for food? Man has to live, must he not?'

90. Krishna replies, 'Yes, man has to live and to eat. But who said that you have to kill animals, birds and fishes in order to eat? Why on earth do you think I created crops, vegetables, and fruits? Are there not people who are vegetarians? Are they not keeping themselves alive and healthy? The food argument does not wash!'

91. 'From the principle of hurting never, you must move on to being kind to all beings.'

92. Arjuna interrupts and asks, 'Just a minute. How do you expect me to be kind to a tiger?'

93. Krishna replies, 'I knew you would come up something like that. Listen when I say be kind, I don't expect you to go the tiger, pat it on its back, scratch it, fondle it and do things that you would do to a cat. All I am saying is that you must realise that God is present in the tiger also, and at least prevent it from becoming extinct.'

94. 'You know Arjuna, animals are not what you think them to be. They too respond to love and kindness. You must be aware that *Rishis* live in forests full of wild animals, snakes and what not. But they never come to any harm. Why? Because they always radiate love. And when wild beasts pass that way, this Love envelops them and they become peaceful.'

95. 'People have little idea of the Power of Pure Love. If you are able to access this Divine Power, there is no limit to what you can do. So the drill is straightforward. You start by not hurting anyone. Next you start to love. In due course, you will move away from diversity and begin to experience a Cosmic Oneness.'

96. 'The scriptures say that God has a thousand eyes, thousands of feet and so on. People do not pause to think what precisely this means. Instead, they immediately start imagining a form with a thousand eyes, a thousand feet and so on. If anybody had such physiological features, that person would look like a monster! God is not a monster.'

97. 'No, God does not sport a monster-like appearance! What the scriptures mean is that the totality of humanity is God. Society is God. Incidentally, this implies that if you serve Society, you are in fact serving God!'

98. 'The question arises: If Society is God, then how is man related to God? Simple! Man is just a limb of God - that is all. The day man feels that way, his ego would disappear.'

99. 'To wrap it all up, the body and the Mind are very sacred, and together ought to be regarded as constituting the Temple of God. Nothing must be thought, said or done as to pollute this Temple built by God Himself for Himself.'

100. 'Those who understand clearly that the body and Mind are vehicles for journeying towards Me, are very dear to Me. And as they come towards Me, I shall be waiting for them with open arms! What more can one ask for?'

END OF CHAPTER 13

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

MOVING MEDICAL CAMPS IN RUSSIA

Till now, we have had in H2H inspiring stories of Sai Seva from Australia and Fiji to UAE and Kuwait to Argentina and the US. But this is the first time we bring you a story from the Federation of Russia. Unknown to the world, there has been a lot happening for almost a decade, albeit silently, in this huge country that stretches over a vast expanse of Asia and Europe. In fact, during the Shivarathri celebrations this year (2007), Sai Kulwant Hall saw a multitude of devotees from this nation which has the world's eighth-largest population. **Not only that, Swami even extolled their devotion and sense of dedication during his Benedictory Shivarathri discourse and said, "You are no longer Russians. You are all mine. I love you all."** The Lord surely knows from which direction pure love is flowing. It is, therefore, no wonder, that there is so much Sai-love suffused selfless service going on in this federal republic which is an energy superpower and largest country of the world.

For the current story, we will restrict ourselves to two important medical camps, both of which had an indelible impact on the needy and caught the attention of the government and the media.

The August 2006 Medical Camp – Serving Sai Love

Nyazepetrovsk is a city in Western Russia, located on the Western slope of Ural Mountains – the mountain range that runs through north and south of Western Russia and is sometimes considered as the natural boundary between Europe and Asia. It is in this city, known for machine-building and metal-working, that the 2006 International Medical camp was conducted. It would be interesting to note that such is the importance of machine-works here that the city itself is named after a metal merchant, Peter Osokin, and the River Nyazyza on which the first iron-producing plant was established. Many industries means many rich people but at the same time a large number of people who are quite poor too. It is to address the needs of this underprivileged class in the city, as well as the deprived who lived in the villages in the periphery of the city, that the Sai Medical Camp was organized.

From 5th to 12th of August 2006, a medical team comprising of 96 people which included 34 doctors landed in this city. In addition there were 200 volunteers who came from Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, UK and USA. Dr. Surendra Kumar Upadhya from UK, who led the whole operation, had brought a team of sixteen doctors and three medical assistants from London. Other members of the team included twelve medical assistants, twenty translators and fifteen people who worked at the registration department.

During the eight days of the Medical Camp, which was carried out in close cooperation with the regional administration and the hospital

management, the doctors attended to a staggering total of over seven thousand patients. They also distributed bountiful supplies of free medicines and over a thousand pairs of spectacles to the local people. 7,500 disposable syringes were also handed over to the regional hospital for their use.

Inspired by Bhagavan's message to reach out and find those in desperate need of help, many doctors made day trips to twelve nearby villages, a lifting crane factory, an orphanage and a primary school.

Provision of True Holistic Care

The service was not restricted to consultation and treatment alone, it was interlaced with other service activities focusing on health and hygiene and preventive healthcare too. **For example, there were three barbers in the team who were serving along with the medical team. During the eight day medical camp they cut the hair of 430 people, absolutely free of charge. Also, to promote health awareness, dermatologists, endocrinologists, cardiologists and dentists conducted educational lectures which were translated for the local community.** Moreover, a conference was held with the local doctors on the conclusion of the camp where the visiting doctors discussed and deliberated with their local counterparts on the impact and results of the camp, demonstrating the symbiotic relationship that so easily fell in place between the hosts and the visitors within those few days.

The medical camp's outreach did not stop at curative and preventive health care alone. **Motivated by Bhagavan's love to give all-round comprehensive care, they went a step further and also had a Damage Control Team, consisting of twenty members, which focused on repairing rooms, a corridor and a kitchen at the surgical department of the local hospital.** This went on in parallel as the doctors treated the poor patients. This team also carried out an inspection of the whole plumbing system of the hospital and carried out extensive repairs.

Like the Damage Control Team, the team also had many other Teams like the Transport Team who drove nineteen vehicles from various regions of Russia; and the Kitchen Team who looked after the food requirements of all the volunteers, doctors, paramedics and other participants of the camp with tasty and nourishing vegetarian food three times a day. In addition, there were eight people who maintained the cleanliness of the school and hospital premises all throughout the operation. Mention must also be made of another special group who sang and danced Russian folk tunes and kept the patients occupied while they waited for their turn for consultation.

It was, in fact, a medical *tour de force* in that region of the world. Naturally, the local population was stunned by the love and dedication of the doctors and other team members. The *Panorama* of Nyazepetrovsk was moved to report this on the whole effort:

The very first necessity of every human being is to safeguard his or her own life and health. The absence of any kind of disease whether physical or psychological is an indispensable prerequisite for our happiness and holistic personal development. Good health allows us to work, study, do sports and enjoy the fullness of life. It is for their good health that the residents of Nyazepetrovsk attended the free medical camp these last ten days, organized by a joint team of doctors from Russia and the UK (most of whom were of Indian origin).

The Medical Camp in 2003 – Memorable For All

While this is what happened about a year ago, it is not an isolated outpouring of medical care. In fact, a similar, but grander camp, was held soemtime ago too. We could not carry the story in H2H then, but in the spirit of 'better later than never', here is the wonderful story of the 2003 Russian Sai Medical Camp, again guided by Dr. Upadhya of UK and conducted at that time in south-western Russia, near Stavropol city. Stavropol, by the way, means "The City of the Cross" owing to a huge cross made out of stone found by the soldiers who were building the fortress in the future site of the city.

In June 2002, one of the most devastating natural disasters swept this region of Southern Russia. Torrential rains caused the worst flooding and landslides in ten years leaving 93 people dead and 87,000 homeless. Human suffering was extreme. Infrastructures such as roads, railways and gas pipelines sustained major damage amounting to more than \$385 million. Electricity was cut off in more than a hundred villages. The Russian government responded swiftly providing aid to the distressed.

However, by the next year, there were still many areas without essential amenities. Some houses were still unfit for living and it was a sight of suffering all around. Determined to do something for these victims, over 200 Sai volunteers from both Russia and other countries came together in 2003 to share Swami's love and to serve those who still needed great help.

Dr. Surendra Upadhya, Ophthalmologist and UK Sai Service Co-ordinator, who led the entire operation said this after landing in Russia:

"We feel that we come from such a long distances like London or America - it takes us minimum two days or one and half days. But some other people who have come from Siberia in Russia have travelled six long days to reach here. It is wonderful how 180 people have traveled so far in order to interact with Sai devotees from other parts of Russia and the world. This place has become a 'mini Prasanthi' and they have come with great zeal to offer their services to the poor and the needy."

Looking on-site at the damage done by the flood and elaborating on his plans for the Camp, Dr. Upadhya said, "This area was affected only a little while ago with a flood. And the floods were almost three feet high. **So our group is now divided into two; one will offer medical service and the other brigade will do the service of repair and paint all these broken buildings.** So this is the

beauty of the Sai Consciousness that brings people from all walks of life in order to render the service to the poor and the needy” Dr. Upadhyaya signs off with a bright smile on his ever-ebullient face.

Over the period of nine days, the camp doctors provided medical treatment to about 9,000 people in six different locations. The poor patients were extremely grateful for the opportunity to see a doctor and feel Swami’s love.

And this feeling of gratitude was expressed not only by the patients, but even by the volunteers who served the patients too;

“I’m so fortunate because this is the sixth time I have been able to accompany Dr. Upadhyaya to Russia with this great medical team,” says Margaret, a devotee from London. “All the people in this team have all sorts of qualifications and specialties. And it’s amazing how we all respond to Swami. He sends us out to help our fellowmen. He tells us to go out to the villages and help the poor, serve the needy and treat them as an extension of ourselves, and to love all and serve all. **Once we begin to do this we feel the resurgence of love in ourselves, and in fact, we get far more from it than people receive from us. It’s an overwhelming experience. When I first came to Russia in 1998 I had described it as having a little pilot light simmering away inside and in the end of the week it was ranging full blast. It is the most amazing experience and I’m truly grateful to Swami for giving me this opportunity to come out and be an instrument of His.**”

One of the principal camp areas was a local school and many people turned up to assist the doctors in any way they could. With doctors of varied specialties in the group, all kinds of medical conditions were attended to and offered necessary treatment. Sharing his personal experience on the second day of the camp, Dr. Vishva, a General Practitioner from London, said:

“We started work yesterday and it was interesting that the elderly people who were present in the clinic seemed to be going through a grieving process. They came to me and said that all their physical symptoms were made much worse after the flood which they had last year. When I enquired as to why this was, they mentioned that one had lost his son, another had lost his wife and the third had lost her husband, son and all her belongings. And this is the first opportunity where they had where people were empathizing with them and listening to their problems. They were just letting their feelings come out. So I just sat there holding their hand, allowing them the chance to speak and all the healing that took place would have been done by Swami”.

Rita, a nurse from the town of Voronezh, who worked with the doctors said, “I feel the treatment which is given here is not only for the body but also for the soul. There is so much love and happiness for all. We are grateful to those who come for treatment.”

Well, this was the spirit with which the doctors and other volunteers offered service. They, in fact, they only offered love and allowed Swami to work

through them. "Swami is always here, we feel it every time, every minute, every second," said Olga from Russia, a volunteer who was serving as an interpreter. No wonder, the entire exercise was most successful. While continuous Medical Seva went on with doctors and others, the other team was busy repairing, cleaning and painting a local orphanage, a hospital and many houses. In addition, food, clothing and other basic necessities were also distributed alongside. The elderly of the village were moved with the selfless service of the Sai volunteers.

The Volunteers also devised innovative methods of seva through song and dance to help many who were undergoing severe physical and emotional turmoil in the wake of the disaster. As traditional Russian folk songs and dances filled the air, smiles bloomed on their faces and they forgot their pain. They danced together with joy singing His glory. Sai's love had penetrated every soul and conferred on them happiness and comfort.

A Moving Message from a Young Devotee

But the most moving scene of the whole operation was eight-year old Vladimir who proved that one is never too young to spread Swami's message. Adept in English, he assisted the doctors and enthused everyone with his infectious devotion for Swami. **When asked what he would wish to communicate to Swami, the 'wise head on young shoulders' said, "We (Russian Sai devotees) work here for You. We want people here to know all good things. We want to help other people who don't know about You, who don't know God. We want all people to have good manners, be kind and humble. Also, we want them to be very glad that they know You. Help us to do this work. We are very glad to work here, we are glad to know You".**

This message of Vladimir, perhaps, encapsulates the spirit in which the entire team of doctors and volunteers worked incessantly traveling long distances and undergoing many hardships to bring smiles on the faces of the distressed and the distraught. It is amazing how Sai motivates, unifies, guides and finally confers His all-comforting love on so many all over the world, so mysteriously and through so many instruments.

PRASHANTI DIARY

I. Programme by Sri Sathya Sai Deena Janodharana Pathakams, Andhra Pradesh: March 3, 2007

“Go to the help of the poor and the forlorn. Real service is seeing the almighty in the poor and the destitute,” Swami says. True to this dictum Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba started the Deenajanodharana Pathakam in Puttaparthi in the year 2000. Under this scheme Swami has provided free shelter, food, education and medical care for the unfortunate children who lost their parents when they were little ones. They are now being groomed into ideal human beings.

With the inspiration given by Swami and taking it as Swami’s divine command the Sri Sathya Sai Deena Janodharana Pathakam was started in the Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh with merely seven children. Gradually the scheme spread to nine districts of Andhra Pradesh; viz. Arasavalli in Srikakulam district, Lakshmipuram in Vizianagaram district, Tanuku in West Godavari district, Khammam and Kothagudam in Khammam district, Vangal in Medak district, Kalvakunti and Vanaparathi in Mahaboobnagar district, Sarornagar in Hyderabad district and Vijayawada in Krishna district. In all, 100 children benefit from this scheme.

This project is executed in a planned way beginning with the selection of the students right up to their employment. The children are selected on the following basis:

1. The child does not have parents, or, if the mother is unemployed and does not have enough financial resources to support themselves.
2. The child should be between the age group of six to thirteen years.
3. The child should have interest in studies.
4. The child should be in sound health.

They are brought to the Sai centres where an examination is conducted to discern how good the child is in studies. Based on the result the child is put in the English medium school.

Once the student joins the Deenajanodharana Pathakam, he becomes a member of this Sai family. He now has to follow the rules and the daily routine set for every student. The daily routine caters to the student’s all-round development and personality development.

The daily routine:

5:30 am - 6:00 am	Omkar, Suprabhatam and Nagarsankeertan
6:00 am – 6:15 am	Physical exercise
6:15 am – 7:45 am	Breakfast
8:00 am – 1:40 pm	School
1:45 pm – 2:15 pm	Lunch
2:15 pm – 3:30 pm	Rest
3:30 pm – 4:00 pm	Milk and Snacks
4:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Outdoor Games
5:15 pm – 5:45 pm	Bhajans and Bal Vikas

6:00 pm – 7:30 pm	Study hours
7:45 pm – 8:15 pm	Dinner
8:20 pm – 8:30 pm	Prayer and Milk
8:30 pm – 5:00 am	Bedtime

One of the teachers of the Deenajanodharana Pathakam remarks, “This daily routine has helped the students imbibe strict discipline and punctuality in their lives. All efforts are made to ensure to provide good physical and mental health to these students.”

It is not only the physical and mental health that is addressed but the emotional well-being is also taken care of since most of the students are orphans. Therefore, during festivals like Sankranti, Diwali and others, these children are invited to the houses of Sai devotees to participate in the celebrations along with the children in the family. This makes them realize that they have kith and kin who love them and care for them.

In addition to achieving excellence in education, the teachers take upon themselves the responsibility to inculcate human values of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa in the students. This is done by telling them stories that reflect Indian culture and spirituality. The students here participate in service activities, learn fine arts like music, painting and dance, chant Vedic hymns, thus shaping themselves into ideal citizens of India. In the words of a teacher, “They are groomed to become ideal citizens by doing selfless service so that they can become ideal instruments and worthy citizens of India.”

On March 3, 2007, these children presented a “Pushpanjali” – a bouquet of programmes in the Divine presence which included a band performance, Veda chanting, traditional Pandhari bhajans, a speech about their experience in the Deenajanodharana Pathakam and a musical dance drama entitled “Jagruti”, meaning “Awakening”.

Sai Mani, a little one from Hyderabad gave a moving speech in the divine presence. He spoke about the divine love that all the boys at Deenajanodharana Pathakam enjoyed under the divine umbrella. Pouring his heart out, he said, “When God Himself is our mother and father we need not worry about our future. We pledge that we would carry the message of love that Baba preaches and thus become His worthy instruments.”

Then came the Vedam chanting. Dressed in Angavastram and dhoti (traditional dress worn by Veda pandits), students from the Deenajanodharana Pathakam of Vishakhapatnam chanted the Narayana Suktham in the immediate presence of the Vedapurusha Himself. Bhagavan listened intently to the boys’ chanting.

This was followed by the boys from Srikakulam district presenting a colourful Pandhari bhajan. Boys dressed in traditional attire danced to the beat in perfect coordination.

Now came the highlight of the evening's proceedings – a musical dance drama entitled “Jagruti.” The drama depicted how an orphan by the name Sathyam, groomed in the Sri Sathya Sai Deenajanodharana Pathakam transforms a wealthy person, Mr. Jagannadhan, whose sole aim in life is to amass money and enjoy princely comfort, into one promised to carry out service to humanity under the divine guidance of Baba. The story goes thus:

Jagannadhan's son Srichakri is a dancer of great repute. He encourages his son to stage a dance performance in America so that he can earn more money. Naresh, a friend of Srichakri also plans to settle in America. He too supports Jagannadhan's view of going to America. Srichakri starts day-dreaming about the luxurious life of America. Just then, Sathyam, a close friend of Srichakri enters. Sathyam advises Srichakri that the purpose of education is to develop good character, devotion and discipline, not earning money. Sathyam then goes on to narrate stories of the great saint poet, Pothana who resented kingly honor and dedicated his immortal composition 'Bhagavatha' to Lord Rama Himself.

Next, he reminds Srichakri about the glorious story of the great devotee Meera. She gave up all the princely comforts of the palace and spent her entire life totally immersed in Krishna. So deep-rooted was her devotion that when poison was given to her it turned into nectar.

Next Sathyam tells Srichakri of the inspiring story of Dokka Seethamma and her husband who jumped at every opportunity to serve the hungry. Once when the river was in flood and many people lay stranded without food and shelter, they went to serve the flood victims least bothered that they would lose their lives.

After hearing these exhilarating and exciting stories of sacrifice, service and devotion, Srichakri gets convinced that he too should walk the path of selfless service and devotion to God. But Jagannadhan seems to oppose Sathyam's views. He only desires that Srichakri should earn lots of money and have a comfortable life full of modern amenities. He doesn't want Sathyam to give “wrong advice” to Srichakri.

At this juncture, the drama takes an interesting turn in the form of Jagannadhan's old parents entering the stage. It is Sathyam who brings them from a destitute home where Jagannadhan had put them in his greed for money. Jagannadhan is put to shame when Sathyam challenges him as to what he would do if Srichakri renders the same treatment to him. Jagannadhan bows and begs his pardon. Then Sathyam advises them to follow the path of love and devotion preached by Bhagavan, which they willingly agree to do.

When asked how he got such noble thoughts, Sathyam tells them his story. He recalls the days when he was an orphan and had no one to support him, when an angel came to him in the form of the Deenajanodharana Pathakam. They treated him with complete love and care. “That day”, Sathyam says, “Baba became my mother and father.” That day onwards Sathyam realized that friendship means sharing love and not merely enjoying entertainment.

The drama was full of powerful dialogues, melodious songs and beautiful dances. Moved by the performance, Bhagavan Baba called the playwright Mr. M.S. Prakasa Rao and blessed him with a shining emerald ring. He also gave Rs. 10000/- to get a printed version of the drama and instructed that the drama be staged in every town and every village of Andhra Pradesh to inculcate human values. Then He called each participant and gave them the chance to touch His feet and pose for a photo along with Him. Bhagavan lovingly also gifted clothes to all the 150 students personally. For all the hitherto orphans who have now become proud children of their divine mother, it was a 'triple blessing'. It was the moment of their life. So overcome with joy and gratitude they were that most of them were literally crying as they basked in His love. Sri Vivek, one of the students, was taken by surprise when Swami materialized a silver Ganesha idol and gifted it to him saying, "Do vibhuti abhisheka to the idol and eat the vibhuti everyday and your concentration will improve." Only later Vivek revealed that he was having trouble concentrating on his studies. Truly, the students were extremely to be in the presence of their Mother who knew their problems even without their expressing it and blessed them profusely with remedies and reassurances.

Later, speaking to the office bearers of the organization, Bhagavan expressed that such Sri Sathya Sai Deenajanodharana Pathakams be established in all the districts in Andhra Pradesh.

The scintillating and brilliant performance came to an end when Arathi was offered to Bhagavan. It was past 6 in the evening.

II. Celebration of Holi in Prasanthi Nilayam: March 4, 2007

The Morning Programme

Colours! Colours of life, of joy, of happiness, sometimes of pain and disappointment. Life is a celebration - a celebration of these colours. In India, the festival of Holi, symbolizes this celebration. There are so many fascinating and interesting legends and stories associated with this festival. Holi gets us close to the glorious ancient past.

The colourful festival of Holi is celebrated under different names in this vast and culturally diverse country. The traditions followed for the festival varies somewhat from one state to another as one studies the various facets of the festival and understands the different cultural contexts. One region where it is celebrated with utmost gaiety and enthusiasm are in the places of Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana and Nandgaon - which are all associated with the birth and childhood of Lord Krishna. At Barsana, Holi assumes the name of Lathmaar Holi.

In Haryana, it is called Dulandi Holi, people of Maharashtra name it Rangapanchami, as Basant Utsav and Dol Purnima are the names in West Bengal. The fun-filled and enthusiastic people of Goa know Holi by the name of Shimgo in their local dialect Konkani, while the people of Tamil Nadu know

Holi by three different names Kaman Pandigai, Kamavilas and Kama-Dahanam. Actually, the legend of Holi which is extremely popular in Southern India is that of Lord Shiva and Kaamadeva. According to the legend, people in the south celebrate the sacrifice of the Lord of Passion, Kaamadeva who risked his life to invoke Lord Shiva from meditation and save the world.

In Bihar, this festival of colors is known as Phagwa as it is celebrated in the later part of the month of Phalgun and the early part of Chaitra as per the Hindu calendar. This corresponds to the English months of March-April.

The celebration of Holi in Prasanthi Nilayam has gained momentum ever since the devotees from Bihar and Jharkhand thronged to Prasanthi Nilayam with their colourful and profound programmes three years ago. This year too, they brought along an enthralling cultural feast.

Bhagavan arrived at the aesthetically decorated Sai Kulwant Hall just before 9:00 a.m. Thousands of devoted souls joined the hundreds from the states of Bihar and Jharkand greeting Bhagavan on this holy 'Holi' day...Colourful balloons and hoardings with His Divine Messages were welcoming Bhagavan, metaphorically signifying the colourful nature of the festivity coupled with spiritual significance.

As part of the morning function they presented a bouquet of songs – “Nrithya Sangeet”.

The first song, dedicated to Lord Ganesha, the remover of all obstacles, echoed that He is the embodiment of all auspiciousness. The devotees went on to sing that no worship can succeed unless the heart is pure and the senses are mastered. At this point, it is maybe worthwhile narrating how the legend of Holi actually began. It is a story which demonstrates the Lord's loving protection and care to a pure heart. Holi dates back to the time of the great little devotee and his Lord - Prahalada and Hiranyakshyapu. Hiranyakshyapu, the demon king (representative of the modern misguided scientific mind) considered himself a God and wanted everybody to worship him. To his great ire, his own son, Prahalada began to worship, Lord Vishnu. To get rid of his son, Hiranyakshyapu asked his sister, Holika to enter a blazing fire with Prahalada in her lap, as she had a boon to enter fire unscathed. Prahalada's great devotion saved him while the fire consumed Holika – she had paid a price for her sinister desire. The tradition of burning Holika or the 'Holika dahan' comes mainly from this legend. Coming back to 2007, and Parthi, the entire song, depicted through a dance was a treat for the ears as well as the eyes.

Soon afterwards little dancers came singing, “Mother, you are the most beautiful! One may go to a hundred places in the world, but there is no one parallel to the mother and Her magnanimous heart.” Unity in Diversity was demonstrated imaginatively by the seven colours of rainbow, which merge to form one white colour.

After this song entitled “Vande Mataram”, the singers enchanted the audience with another song “Bal Leela” on the childhood pranks of Bhagavan. And then came a vibrant Qawali. Dressed in traditional attire, the Bal Vikas children danced to the beat as the Qawali singers pored their heart.

‘O Lord Sai! Your doorstep is Kashi and Kaba.
Whoever develops kinship with You, receives everything.
May jealousy, greed and ego never crop up in our minds.
May we always drink the nectar by repeating the name of Sai.
May our devotion never diminish.’

These beautiful sentiments filled the air to the delight of the devotees.

It is a belief that Biraj or Brindavan, the land of Lord Krishna, is also the land that witnessed the first celebration of Holi. The singer captured this mood of Holi in Biraj where the gopis and gopikas played Holi with their beloved Krishna and then compared it with the Holi celebrations in Parthi. They sang, “There is rejoicing in Baba’s courtyard on this Holi day. Sai is the Lord of the universe and His courtyard is the place of liberation.”

The mood of Holi in Parthi was aptly reflected when they sang, “Parthi is drenched in Holi colors. This is a sacred festival in the month of Phalgun. Every year the devotees come here to play Holi and redeem their live by Sai’s darshan.”

Continuing on the same theme, the next song, “Krishna, Krishna, kahe ujadi meri neend”, meaning, “O Krishna, why did you disturb our sleep?” portrayed the sweet relationship between the Gopikas and Lord Krishna. The Gopikas represent the Jivatma (the individual soul) while Krishna symbolizes Paramatma (the cosmic self). The Paramatma awakens the Jivatma from its deep slumber of ignorance. When awakened, the Jivatma searches frantically for its master. It is only when the Paramatma reveals Himself, that the individual soul finds fulfillment and attains bliss. The singers sang this Divine Love that characterized the relationship between Gopikas and Krishna. In the song, the Gopikas ask Krishna, “Why have you disturbed our sleep?” But mischievous young Krishna plays His pranks with the Gopikas. He runs away and the Gopikas search for him everywhere. But to their utter dismay all their search is in vain. All of a sudden Krishna appears before them and makes them blissful.

The song was no doubt melodious, but beauty was added to it by the young dancers attired as Gopikas and Krishna. Their expressive faces and elegant movements made the whole scene come alive so enchantingly. One could not help but imagine the glorious days of Brindavan.

This was followed by a Bhangra - “Antar mein hain Antaryami”. The devotees of Bihar and Jharkhand made a commendable effort in depicting the most popular folk dance of Punjab – the Bhangra which is an integral part of the Punjabi culture. The dancers garbed in colorful customary dresses danced in full enthusiasm while the singers sang the Punjabi song reminding one and all

that the All-knowing One, who is inside you is none other than the one sitting right in front of you, Bhagavan Baba. “Why do you wander from door to door when all the four dhams (spiritual destinations) are right here? Sai is Rama, Krishna, Jesus and Nanak.”

The concluding Holi dance “Sang sang mil ke gao” meaning, “Let’s all sing together” was an extremely colorful dance performance and a grand finale as the dancers threw gulal – red powder in the air while they danced and sang:

“O Kanhaiya let us hear the sweet music of Your flute.
The colorful Holi has come to the sacred land of Parthi.
Play Holi with us.
Eshwaramma’s beloved son has created a stir in the whole universe.
The nectar of love is flowing all through...
Everyone should engage themselves in Seva and rejoice at the Lotus Feet”.

Colorful, glorious and memorable – that’s what the Holi morning was.

Holi Evening Programme

The evening programme displayed another colour, quite a contrast to the morning. If the morning programme enthused colour and gaiety, the evening programme was deep with profound meaning. The afternoon programme, a play titled ‘Man Darpan’ was a portrayal of this turbulent mind and its great vistas.

‘Manava Manushyaanaam Kaaranam Bandha Mokshayoho’ is the saying from the Vedic scriptures. This means that mind alone is the cause for either bondage or liberation. Bhagavan often refers to this in his divine discourses. The mind alone has the power to make or break a person.

The drama, put up by the youth members of the SSSO, Bihar and Jharkhand conveyed this message very powerfully. The drama began with five friends who assemble to celebrate Holi and exchange notes, boasting their professional achievements. A common friend, Veda, misses the celebration with them. The next day all the six of them meet at Veda’s residence. Veda narrates how he celebrated Holi at an Old Age Home and the satisfaction he derived out of the same. The other five friends consider it bizarre and express their surprise and dissatisfaction. Veda then says that true happiness can be found only within and will not be available outside. And to experience the same, one has to have control over the mind, which comes only from the control of the senses.

As Veda begins to explain the intricacies, the drama moves into an ancient setting with the character of Kal Charka (time) coming on to the stage. He sights examples from the various periods or yugas when great kings, and even seers and sages too fell in the same trap - the trap of the mind.

“In the Sathya yuga”, Kal Chakra says, “Great yogis used to undergo great tapas in order to control the sense and hence the mind. But the wavering mind would jump from one thought to another and make man dance to its tune. The yogis, through arduous penance would command the mind to be calm. The restless mind would retaliate trying to divert it from tapas. But the

yogis who exercised total sense control eventually won this tumultuous battle between mind and man. Once their mind was calm, everlasting inner peace would manifest itself within them.”

Kal Chakra goes on to narrate the Rama story from the Tretha Yuga, “Ravana a slave of lust and greed, abducts mother Sita and finally ruins not only his life but is responsible for the annihilation of his entire clan. Ravana, was no doubt a great tapasvi (man of severe penance), but a slave to his senses. He had no control on his mind. It was his uncontrolled mind that ruined him completely.”

He then tells the story of King Parikshit who lived in the Dwapara yuga. Parikshit was the grandson of the illustrious Pandavas. His father was Abhimanyu, Arjun's son. A great and righteous king, Parikshit looked after his subjects well. He was considered to be the personification of goodness and nobody could match him in valour.

On one occasion when King Parikshit had gone on hunting, he went deep into the forest and became lost. As he was wandering in the woods alone looking for food he came across a sage (Sage Shameeka) in deep meditation. Parikshit, overcome by his intense hunger and fatigue, asked for some food and shelter. The sage, too lost in deep contemplation, did not answer and this made the great king livid and insulted. To avenge the ‘insult’ he picked up a dead snake and laid it on the shoulders of the sage. The sage had a son named Shringi. Upon hearing that the King had insulted his father while he was under a vow of silence, the enraged son cursed the King with death within seven days. Sage Shameek, his father, was not pleased to hear what his son had done, for he knew the reason behind the king’s action. He sent his most intelligent pupil, Gaurmukh to Parikshit to warn him of the impending danger and to protect himself in any way that he can. King Parikshit listened and accepted his fate without argument.

Parikshit, in his utter dismay questions his mind, “O Mind, why did you not stop me from putting a dead snake around the sage’s shoulders and neck? It is your entire fault because of which I have to suffer.”

The mind then reminds Parikshit that he was not the one to be blamed but the onus lay with himself. Mind goes on to explain, “Overcome by fatigue and anger, you lost your power of discrimination and committed a heinous sin. Instead, had you any control on me and compassion in your heart, you wouldn’t have insulted the sage.”

The Mind is confused due to the reflection of both - virtues and vices. While virtues of love, compassion and benevolence pull the mind to walk the path of goodness, the vices in the form of lust, greed and jealousy drag the mind into the bottomless pit of evil. This turmoil of the mind forces it to seek the guidance of Wisdom. Wisdom advises the mind, “O Mind, Control the senses. Vices pulls the mind towards the other extreme...Selfless Service suffused with Unconditional Love is the only remedy to control the senses.”

The scene moves forward in time where Veda narrates these episodes to his five friends. Witnessing these scenes brings the essential transformation in them. Veda, the wise friend, declares that Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba as the best example of the spirit of selfless service in His message to mankind -

“Only unconditional Love for God will purify the mind and Love is the ultimate solution for all the problems of the World.”

The Lord, pleased with their presentation came down from the dais to bless the participants with a group photograph. While He did so, Bhagavan also lovingly interacted with a few participants.

Indeed, a marvelous Holi Day with a ‘Holier’ message—the message of Unconditional Love. The Sai mission marches forward with His Message of Selfless Service and Unconditional Love.

III. ‘Gratitude Programme’ by II PG Students: March 17, 2007

February and March are months when students put up ‘Gratitude Programmes’ in the divine presence. As the name suggests, the theme of the programmes are to convey their heartfelt gratefulness to Swami for all that He has given them in their stay over the years at His lotus Feet. There are students who have been recipients of Swami’s education right from the class one upto their double post-graduation – nineteen years in the direct divine presence; while there are others with the privilege of being a ‘Sai Student’ for two, three, five, seven or more years. Now as they move out into the wide world to pursue their professional careers, this truly is a touching moment for most boys. They pour out their feelings to Swami recollecting all those blissful moments with the Lord which made all the difference to their lives.

This year too, the 2nd year post graduate students put up a colourful programme in front of Swami. Here is the report from one of the students who has completed nineteen years in Swami’s institution.

“Bhagawan says, ‘Love my uncertainty.’ This aspect of Bhagavan was made very evident as the senior boys tried in many ways to get approval to put up a program in the mandir, to express their gratitude to Bhagawan for His love. Group songs in different languages were learnt, some took to preparing a dance, a few of them prepared relay speeches to be delivered between the songs, the artistic among them took to make exquisite cards for Bhagawan requesting permission to put up the program, while some others went on to prepare skits.

But Bhagavan had different plans. He avoided all our approaches. The students persisted with different cards of invitation. Maybe, the right time hadn’t come. Our prayers were becoming stronger. That is what He wanted, perhaps. A week later Bhagavan asked for the program to be put for Ugadi (New Year). This was not what we had expected and we were thrilled. However, Ugadi too was not to be the day. We were beginning to get a little disheartened, but were sure that Swami would listen to our prayers. Just when we had reached the moment of despair, Bhagavan sent a message asking specifically for the program to be staged the following day.

On the evening of 17th March the program was held in the divine presence. The premeditated delay had only intensified the feelings of gratitude and love for Bhagavan. Prior to the program Bhagavan came to the Bhajan hall, where the students were getting ready with their makeup and costumes for the

dances and skits. He interacted with the actors and dancers and displayed His eagerness to see the show.

The gratitude programs are structured in such a manner that every student gets an opportunity to be close to Bhagavan with either a card, a rose, a candle, a tray of chocolates or some artwork. Bhagavan too lovingly blesses them by allowing them touch His Feet, speaking to them, and by accepting their offering of love. So, during the program all the students had the unique opportunity of going to Bhagavan. Some of them had the songs written down beautifully in the form of a card, a few others took trays of chocolates and pens to be blessed. There were others who took their paintings and sketches to get them blessed. One of the cards was in the shape of a heart with another heart within it, linked by a chain. Bhagavan asked what it was for and the student went on to explain that 'The big heart' signified Bhagavan and 'the smaller one' signified the students. The students are always in Bhagavan's heart and they are linked by the bond of love. Bhagavan was very much moved. He accepted the card very lovingly and kept it with Him for the entire program.

During the program, we sang many songs learnt specially for the occasion. Before every song a few students would get up, take the mikes and express their gratitude to Bhagavan, in their mother tongues, for all His love and grace. It was a heartfelt outpouring of love between a mother and her children. The students from the band group too put up a special performance.

Adding drama to the whole episode, was a pot breaking ceremony enacted wherein little Krishna with the assistance of Gopalas gets down a pot of butter. This event was to signify how Sai Krishna has gathered His own Gopalas around Him to share His love amongst them. Then there was the dance program put up by amateur dancers from among the students. Bhagavan seemed to enjoy every moment of the dance as He watched the dancers intently.

In the last lap of the programme, there were two skits staged by the students. The first was on an incident from the life of Adi Sankara. It was a skit in Hindi depicting the incident of the great saint meeting the Chandala (low caste). The Chandala imparts wisdom to the learned saint teaching him that the indweller in all beings is one and the same. The second skit was a one-act comedy in Telugu. The story went like this: There has been theft in the heavens above. Lord Brahma has lost his lotus and the mountain Meru. The moon has been stolen away from the skies. The lord of fire, Agni, is missing. The Dunnapota (buffalo) of Lord Yama is missing. The clouds of Lord Indra are missing. Finally Lord Shiva and Mother Parvathi are missing. The gods are agitated and pray to Lord Vishnu for help. He appears before them and becalms them. He explains to them that Lord Shiva and Mother Parvathi have taken birth as the Shiva Shakthi Swaroopa, the avathar of the Kali age, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. His eyes are like Brahma's lotus, Mt Meru is the mole on his cheek, His countenance is the moon, the curly locks upon His head are the clouds of Lord Indra and His apparel is fire.

There was thunderous applause for the entire program. Bhagavan was too touched by the effect that the drama created. Every student had His personal moment with God. As if this were not enough, Bhagavan called for group photographs with different groups and made one student even announce the name of the group as each group came forward and took a photograph with Him. There was only joy and love all around and the feeling of separation melted away. Bhagavan made the day for the students and filled them with confidence and courage to face the world for which He had prepared them for.”

IV. Burra Katha Presentation by Institute Students: March 18, 2007

March 18th presented to the students of the Sri Sathya Sai University a unique chance to perform a Burrakatha in the presence of their Lord. Many might not know that Burrakatha is actually one of the prominent folk art forms and probably the most popular form of narrative entertainment in Andhra Pradesh. One can say that it is the Telugu art of story telling. In this theatrical form, a storyteller accompanied by his partner gives recitals for two or three days. He sings, dances and recites a story before the village folk under the patronage of a village elder.

The term 'burra' refers to 'tambura', a stringed instrument worn across the right shoulder of the performer. 'Katha' means a story. Thus 'this story-telling accompanied with classical instruments' requires lot of oratory as well as musical expertise. The main performer (kathakudu) plays the tambura as he dances rhythmically wearing andelu (anklets) on the stage while reciting a story. He also wears over his right thumb, a hollow ring in the palm of his hand. With the rings, he beats the basic tempo of the songs.

At regular intervals during the narration, he responds to his co-performers, two drummers who play two-headed earthen drums (dakki) which are regarded as an indispensable ingredient of Burrakatha performances because of the distinctly metallic sound they produce. The drummer to the right of the performer is known as the 'rajkiya'. He usually comments on contemporary political and social issues even if the story concerns historical or mythological events. The drummer on his left, the 'hasyam', cracks jokes and provides comic relief.

Bhagavan who persistently encourages the youth to always remember the rich culture and tradition of this ancient India was pleased to witness the students present this folk art. It gave Him immense joy when He saw three students of the Sri Sathya Sai University donned up in the traditional attire of Kathkudu, Rajakiya and Hasyam and get on stage to present a burrakatha entitled “Devudamma Easwaramma”, that is, “Easwaramma – The Mother of God.”

The students began the performance with devotional songs in praise of Lord Ganesha and other celestial beings. Then, the kathakudu introduced the main story to the audience. He extolled Mother Easwaramma and narrated the story of the birth of this great soul who is today fondly remembered as “The

Mother of God.”

As the main story began, all three performers took an active role assuming various characters in the incidents, as well as providing narrative bridges between incidents. They introduced various characters like Karnam Subamma (Bhagavan’s foster mother) and Pedda Venkappa Raju (Bhagavan’s father) amongst others.

The Rajakiya made one and all travel as if in a time machine to the olden days; the days when one had to travel miles and miles in search of drinking water, the days when Puttaparthi fell short of providing adequate medical facilities. Those were the days when little children had to traverse long distances to attend school. He then reminded that it was mother Easwamma who lifted up the ‘standard of living’ of the inhabitants of this tiny hamlet by virtue of the three boons she asked from Swami.

The excellent narrator compared each of the boons to Saraswati, Lakshmi and Ganga. He said, “Bramha, the creator has Mother Saraswati as His constant companion. She is the repository of all knowledge. That is the reason Mother Easwamma asked Swami to build a school. Secondly, Mother Lakshmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu, not only gifts man with the wealth of the world but also heals him of all his afflictions and diseases. It for this reason that Mother Easwamma asked Swami to construct a hospital for the people of Puttaparthi. Finally, she beckons Swami to bless the land of Parthi with ‘Sai Ganga’ in the form of pure drinking water because it is Mother Ganga who resides in the matted hair of Lord Shiva and blesses mankind with her nectarous flow.”

Listening to this beautiful narration extolling Easwamma, the embodiment of motherhood, Bhagavan was moved. He was so involved in the katha that one could feel as if She was right there standing beside Him. It was as if the tape was ‘rewinded’ and ‘played’ all over again much to the delight of the Lord Himself. The Kathkudu went on narrating the story in many scintillating Telugu songs. One of them was –

“Enta goppa enthi vamma sadhivo Easwamma
Evuru saateleru neeku jagatilo devudamma

Adigatey ambarani dinchada mungita nee sutudu
Adagakani echhuvadu asalaina devudu
Ambaram naaku oddu sambaram naaku oddu
Urivarikosamey ashta aishwarya”

which means...

“O mother Easwamma, on this Earth you are the greatest amongst women.

O mother of God, on the Earth none equal you.

Had you asked your son, He would have brought the sky to your doorstep.

The true God is the one who grants without our asking.

But Easwamma says, ‘Neither do I desire for the sky nor for any happiness

and joy.

This Ashta aishwarya (in the form of schools, institutes, hospitals and water supply projects)

Is not for me, but for the sake of all the residents of Puttaparthi.”

While the kathakudu, an excellent singer, takes the audience through the events by the medium of songs and the Rajakiya narrates significant events, the Hasyam through his wit and humor brings smiles on all faces and enlivens the atmosphere. It was the time when the Rajakiya was narrating about Bhagavan being born in the month of Kartika (November - December) on a Monday, the Hasyam very innocently questions him, “On which day were you born?” The Rajakiya replies, “Well, it was a Sunday.”

A very astonished Hasyam refuses to accept the answer, but the Rajakiya keeps insisting, “No. No. It is the truth. I was born on a Sunday.” Finally, much to the amusement of the audience, the Hasyam goes on to say, “How can you be born on a Sunday when all the schools, colleges, banks, shops and even hospitals are closed. It is a public Holiday, isn't it?” The assembled devotees burst into laughter.

The story moved on listing significant events in the life of Mother Easwaramma. They cited instances of how anxious she became when Swami traveled to different places away from Puttaparthi.

The burrakatha came to an end in the form of a prayer to the Mother herself to come amidst us once again to witness the metamorphosis that Puttaparthi has undergone.

The Kathakudu sang (in Telugu):

“Okka saari marala nuvvu puttavamma Easwaramma
Nuvvu kalaluganna parthi entha maaripoyindo choodavamma

Apudepudo Swami neeku maatichchenu gurthunda
Puttaparthi maro Thirupathi avuthundani kada
Ghana parapathi perigenu mari Thirupathi kannu
Varanasini minchenu Shirdini maripinchenu.”

which means...

“O Mother Easwaramma, take birth once again,
See the magnificent transformation Puttaparthi has undergone.
Do you recall the promise that Swami gave you long ago;
Wasn't it that Puttaparthi will become one more Tirupathi?
But today Puttaparthi has risen far beyond Tirupathi.
O mother! It has surpassed Varanasi and makes us forget Shirdi.”

The story of Rama would not have been possible without the presence of mother Kausalya. The glorious leelas of Gokul have become immortal because of the childlike pranks that Krishna played with mother Yashoda. In

the ranks of such immensely fortunate women stands 'Easwaramma – The Chosen One'. Fortunate was humanity to have a woman of this caliber born on Earth and more fortunate were the students who were blessed with this unique opportunity to sing her glory in the presence of her darling son.

Bhagavan blessed the boys with Padanamskar and fondly interacted with them after their performance. Later bhajans started and Bhagavan continued to sit in the Sai Kulwant hall itself instead of going to the bhajan hall, as is the usual practice. Indeed, it was a blessing for all devotees for they could sing His glory and simultaneously see His sweet form. Bhagavan then received arathi and proceeded for Yajur Mandiram leaving very sweet memories in the hearts of every student and devotee present.

V. Ugadi Celebration in the Divine Presence: March 20, 2007

The Morning Programme

Bharat, is a land of varied cultures, languages, traditions and customs, and even varied new year celebrations. Blending this diversity into a quintessential oneness with the magical formula of Love bestows upon Prasanthi Nilayam the exalted status of being the epicenter of world spirituality. The miniscule amount of the world's population that throng to this privileged township share their cultural heritage and ignore any differences, turning the ashram into a home of harmony. This unique feature makes all the festivals shine with a unique glory in Prasanthi Nilayam. And within this spirit of unity and inclusivity come the different New Year's celebrations that Bhagavan graciously permits to be held ... differently styled and tailored to diverse mythical concepts and beliefs.

March 20, 2007 marked the 'coming' of the New Year based on the southern Indian lunar calendar for three Indian states. It is Ugadi, the Telugu and Kannada New Year for Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka respectively. And in Maharashtra, it is celebrated as Gudipadava. Ugadi, an ancient festival that reveals, in essence, by purifying the heart is a periodical reminder to man to revert to the age old godly path with righteous living. Bhagavan says: "The true celebration of Ugadi lies in giving up evil qualities and purifying one's heart. The human heart in its pristine state is highly sacred and human birth is difficult to attain. External cleanliness, an observance that man does as a part of this festivity by getting up early in the morning, having a sacred bath, donning new clothes, etc. does indeed signify in essence the much needed inner purification that man should aim to achieve."

Ugadi...the New Year of remarkable metaphorical significance, heralding auspiciousness and prosperity was celebrated with gaiety, piety and religious fervor in Prasanthi Nilayam in the Divine Presence of Bhagavan on March 20, 2007. A tastefully decorated Sai Kulwant Hall, bedecked with a blend of multi-hued flowers and festoons bore testimony to the grandeur of the occasion and the arrival of a much promising New Year. And it was that promising feature of this New Year, christened Sarvajith that caught the limelight on this most auspicious morning.

This Ugadi was extra special as Bhagvan had a twinkle in His eye as He came out for Darshan at about 8:40 am. The divine discourse that followed soon after His arrival made us realize the reason for that twinkle. Dwelling upon in detail on this 'impending' New Year, Sarvajith by name, Bhagavan, much to the delight of the thousands gathered in Prasanthi Nilayam declared the conferred boon, that the New Year would be a promising one that could fulfill all of humanity's ambitions and aspirations. He further added that one should develop right thoughts and with good thoughts one is bound to be successful. Ugadi has always been special for all Sai devotees as Swami has very often made declarations about the coming year. (more of this later!)

Bhagavan's discourse was preceded by Prof. Anil Kumar. Ordained by Bhagavan to share his thoughts on the festive occasion, Prof Anil Kumar was at his poetic best recapitulating the immortal lines coined by Mahakavi Devulapalli Krishasasthri Garu. Recalling those immortal poems on the Love between God and a devotee, Prof. Anil Kumar emphasized, "Bhagavan is the Magnet...If there is any magnet that attracts devotees from all over the world, it is Bhagavan..." Every incident he shared was received with rapturous applause by the concourse of devotees assembled.

Speaking on the greater significance of the festivity, he recounted a memorable Ugadi morning in Brindavan in the year 1989, when the then President of India, Shankar Dayal Sharma was commanded by Bhagavan to address the gathering of devotees. He begged Bhagavan with utmost simplicity and sincerity, "I have not come to give a speech, rather I am here to listen to Bhagavan, and have His Divine Darshan with the belief that all auspicious things on that doubly auspicious Ugadi day would repeat manifold throughout the year." The president who was requested to sit on a chair chose to sit at His Lotus Feet and even refused to accept a garland that was offered to him. Instead, he went on plucking petals from the flowers in the garland and offered them at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet. Prof. Anil Kumar concluded his rhetoric excellence expressing gratitude on a personal note, narrating how Bhagavan's Love and Grace has conferred his aged mother a peaceful end, remembering the Beloved One in her last moments and ultimately reaching the Divine Lotus Feet.

Prof. G. Venkataraman, who spoke next, said, "Among the various regionally celebrated New Years of Indian tradition, Ugadi is different as is evident from the very name itself." Talking on the Mobile Dispensary that is completing a year of yeomen service, Prof. Venkataram was lavish at praising the entire team of doctors and paramedics who have been actively engaged in rendering medical service to the poor village folk in selected areas of Anantapur District.

Switching over to the Drinking Water Project for East and West Godavari, Prof. Venkataram, who had been there personally to study the project activities, narrated the thrilling experiences and encounters he had during his visit. Referring to an incident wherein a tribal lady had donated an acre of land for the water project, and another incident where village women expressed

their contentment and gratitude to Bhagavan for the boon of elixir divine, he said, he was astonished to find such fine qualities in ordinary village folks, that is surprisingly and unfortunately missing in the educated urban class.

Talking about the role of youth in carrying Bhagavan's Mission, he added, "The soul of India finds expression through the youth. Victory is here; Krishna is here and we are all Arjunas...by obeying His Divine Command the whole world can become a better one..."

During the Ugadi celebrations in the year 1985, Prof. Kasturi in his short speech in the Divine Presence significantly had mentioned that the New Year day was an occasion for devotees to draw up a balance sheet of their record during the past year and submit it to the Lord. "All of us", he said, "are pilgrims to His Lotus Feet." Man should cease to be blind any more and look up to the bestower with gratitude and in essence he should come to term with the reality that he is being constantly guided and guarded by the Supreme Selfless One. "You cannot indulge in sinful deeds and hope to realise the fruits of meritorious actions. Hence embark on good deeds and sanctify your life. Do not get needlessly agitated over the name of the year. Shed all fear and, placing your faith in God, transform even a dreadful year into a divine one". Bhagavan had urged the gathering in the 1985 Ugadi message in Prasanthi Nilayam.

Now coming to the main part of the 2007 Ugadi celebration. Bhagavan rose for the discourse holding on to the brass handle in front of Him and refused to use the customary table. It was evident that Swami had something urgent to tell and did not even wait for the microphone. The discourse began with reeling out the names of coming years. Prof. Anil Kumar (the translator) was just not able to keep pace with Swami. Then Swami declared, "Divinity is always born in the Akshaya (name of the year) year. This body too was born in the Akshaya year. This body has seen two Akshaya years."

Swami went on to tell the special significance of this year named 'Sarvajit'. He declared that this would be one of victories. "Any endeavour taken up this year whole heartedly will result in its successful fruition. Therefore, in this year, Sarvajit, strive to realise the divinity latent in humanity. The year Sarvajit fulfils such desires which are truthful. The year will see significant progress being made in the moral, physical, righteous, spiritual and scientific fields. A truthful desire will always result in fulfillment. One has, however, to hold on to the Truth with steadfast faith. Sarvajit year will bring victory in all possible ways. It is the most important year in all these sixty years. 'Jit' signifies victory. Sarvajit means victory in all fields of human endeavour. If one were to progress in life, one has to cultivate truthful desires in this Sarvajit year. I have not seen a single person who cultivated such truthful desires and failed in his life. Hence, I exhort you all to cultivate truthful desires and aspirations and lead a life full of happiness and bliss in this Sarvajit year."

Bhagavan, then, went on to chart out the mission for this year. "On this holy occasion of Ugadi, we are launching a new scheme for rural development, under the name, "Village Works". It is necessary that every house in every

village shall be kept clean. The houses are to be kept neat and clean both inside and outside. The children in these homes are also to be groomed into clean and healthy children. We propose to cover every village under this scheme. Of course, the project involves huge expenditure. But, we don't hesitate to incur the necessary expenditure. Money comes and goes. But, the help and good work we render remain. Hence, we must undertake this rural development project immediately. We are launching this scheme from today itself on the holy occasion of Ugadi. Every village must become a model and self-sufficient one. Only when the villages prosper, will the country prosper."

He exhorted the youth to take up this 'Village Works' across the state and country. "Whatever you need, ask Me; I will provide. I am the ocean. Like the rivers that flow merge into the sea ultimately, whatever Seva you do to anyone, reaches Me only. Hence, don't fear for anything. Why fear, when I am here? Do not hesitate to ask Me for whatever you may need. Surely, I will provide everything to you. Hence, make yourself ready to participate in this service, both men and women."

At this point, Prof. Anil Kumar translated a sentence like 'every village must become like a town', to which Swami immediately retorted saying, "Not towns! Towns are dirty. From today onwards, you must all embark on a mission to bring about a transformation in the villages. It does not mean that the villages are to be transformed into towns and cities. In fact, I don't like such transformation. First and foremost, the villages are to be kept clean. Already, the towns and cities are stinking with filth. The people living there wear a neat pant, shirt and a neck-tie. But, their inner feelings are all bad. You must cultivate good thoughts and feelings, in keeping with the neat dress you wear. First of all, you try to bring about a transformation in your own self and then work for a change in the outside world."

Swami, then, said, "Loka samastha sukhino bhavantu (meaning, 'Let all the beings in everywhere be happy') must be the mantra that you must keep chanting." Later, He went on to narrate experiences from his childhood to the delight of everyone. And while doing this, even sang songs which He had composed in His childhood. He also spoke of the sweet relation between Him and Karnam Subbamma, His foster Mother, and how Subbamma often compared their relationship with Mother Yashoda and Krishna. He went on to narrate the events relating to the last days of Smt. Subbamma. He said, "I will always keep my promise. Subbamma wanted me to be by her side and pour water into her mouth during her last moments. She had already passed away a day before I arrived. When I arrived, went to her home and called out to her, she opened her eyes and saw Swami. Swami poured some water into her mouth, she drank and then she passed away. Swami will always keep His word."

Bhagavan also spoke of the Chennai water supply project and the Godavari water supply project. As you have read earlier in this page, the previous day, three boys from the Institute had rendered a beautiful 'Burrakatha' programme, the theme of which was the life-story of Mother Easwaramma. Swami had been touched by the rendition and during His discourse

mentioned about the same. He hailed the performance and beckoned the boys to come forward and receive prasadam from His own hands. The composer of the burra katha, Mr Krishna Bhaskar was also felicitated.

The discourse went on for nearly an hour and half. The morning programme ended at about 11:15 am with Mangala Aarthi. The Ugadi morning was truly a grand beginning for the coming year.

VI. Ugadi Evening Programme

As you have just now seen, in the Ugadi morning, Swami declared the necessity of starting village works and uplifting the rural poor, the evening of Ugadi saw the beginning of Swami's declaration in action. Nearly 8000 devotees from the Anantpur District had assembled to kick start the village activity.

Swami always urges all to find a permanent and lasting solution to the villager's agonies and not a temporary solution. Keeping this guidance in view, the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Anantapur made a commendable effort in this direction.

The Anantapur Samithi had visited villages in the interiors of Anantapur district with the intention to identify poor people who were unemployed and did not have any means to support themselves and their families. Having identified them, the Samithi then went on to study in what way they could help which could have a sustainable impact on their lives. This process of 'identification of beneficiaries' was done in an extremely transparent selection process, the modus operandi being something like this:

A village consists of people of different communities, religions and so on. The Sai volunteers got all of them together to identify the poor, unemployed and underprivileged people there. This had a dual benefit. Firstly, it helped the volunteers identify the genuine populace who needed help, and secondly that it created a medium for all the villagers to come together for a common cause and thus this entire exercise enhanced a feeling of unity amongst the villagers. The volunteers, thus, made a thorough study and consultation before identifying the beneficiaries.

Sewing machines, grinders, carts, bicycles, iron boxes and pesticide spraying pumps were given to 131 beneficiaries. 75 sewing machines were handed over to those unemployed villagers who underwent training in sewing, and could today, by Bhagavan's blessing in the form of a sewing machine could stitch clothes to earn a livelihood. 8 bicycles were gifted to those hardworking students who had to travel long distances on foot to attend school. Apart from this, 21 grinders, 16 carts, 8 iron boxes, 8 pesticide sprayers and 2 handlooms were gifted to the beneficiaries so as to facilitate their livelihood. All this was done in the immediate presence of Bhagavan.

What followed next was a beautiful garland of songs sung by the Balvikas students of Anantapur. The simple and melodious rendering by more than 150 students in perfect synchronization was the befitting gift offered to the lord on the day of the New Year.

An impromptu Divine Discourse then followed. It was the second discourse of the day! Bhagavan showered praises on the noble work undertaken by the Anantapur Sai Samithi and said, "My heart is full of bliss (Ananda). I will visit Anantapur soon. Continue to do the good work. Spread the message in every house, keep it clean and pure and Swami will definitely come."

The H2H team met a few of the participants of the evening's proceedings. They were overcome by the love that Bhagavan showered on them. In the words of one of the volunteers from Anantapur, "The Sarvajith Ugadi has opened a new chapter in the history of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Anantapur." Another volunteer said, "Swami has said that He will visit Anantapur so as to encourage the volunteers to conduct more service activities in villages. We pray to Swami that we should please Him by our good character which again, comes through His blessings only."

Thus, the grand Ugadi celebration concluded with many blessings and clear directions from Bhagavan as to where the energies of the Sai organization and Sai Youth should be directed in the New Year. It really filled every one present with renewed enthusiasm to plunge into the Sai mission with wholehearted dedication and redeem their lives.

VII. 'Gratitude Programme' by Music College Students: March 22, 2007

God is often addressed as Ganalola Priya, the 'Lover of Music'. Swami, our dear Lord and Master, founded the Mirpuri College for Music in Puttaparthi in the year 2001. Today that bud has flowered into a beautiful flower filling the air with the fragrance of music.

The students of this wonderful institution offered a musical treat to Bhagavan on March 22, 2007. Their long wait was over when at 5:00 pm Bhagavan came to the stage.

Bhagavan first spoke to a few students who presented a card to Him. Later, after receiving the indication to start the program from Him, the anchor of the program began with a beautiful verse (in Hindi - the national language India) that gave words to their feelings:

Na yahaan roop na shrungar amar rehta hain
Na dhani, na dhan ka bhandar amar rehta hain
Jo aaya hain vah jaayega ek din, lekin
Swami ke saath Swami ka pyaar amar rehta hain

In this world neither beauty nor pageantry is everlasting
In this world neither the riches nor the rich remain immortal
The one who has come has to certainly die, but

Only Swami's love remains permanent

The rendering of the songs began with a composition of the great Saint Surdas. The songs had informative preludes on the composer of the song and the style of singing. Soordas, born in 1478 A.D., was blind from birth. His eyes could not see the world but enjoyed a constant vision of the divine. This blind poet of Braj is credited with a composition of 25 great works of devotional poetry which includes nearly 100,000 poems on his favorite lord Sri Krishna. Nobody has expressed the Bal Leelas (childhood sport) of Lord Krishna and the affection of mother Yashoda and the Gopis better than Bhakta Soordas. The music college students sang a Soordas composition entitled 'Jaagiye Brajaraj kunwar' in Raga Bhatiyaar.

Jaagiye Brajaraja kunwar
Kamala kusuma phule
Kusuma vrunda sakuchita bhaye
Bhrungalal bhuley
Jaagiye Brajaraja kunwar

In this song, Bhakta Soordas makes a morning wake-up call to Gopala – the prince of Braja. Through this song he creates the beauty and bounty of nature in the listener's mind.

The next song was a composition of the great musical saint Tyagaraja, whose compositions Swami Himself renders often times in His Divine Discourses. In the song, "Brova Bharama", the saint asks the Lord, "O Lord! The One who in Dwapara yuga lifted the mountain on His little finger, the One, in whom the entire world resides, can You not save me from this vicious cycle of birth and death." It was almost like a prayer from everyone sitting there in Kulwanth Hall to our Lord. The song was tuned to Bahudari raga, set to Adi taala.

The next song, "Baso more nainan mein Nandalal", was a composition by Mirabai. This poet-saint from Rajasthan was born in 1559 A.D. in a well known Rathore family. She was raised in an environment saturated with music and devotion. It is said that when she was merely five years old, she saw a marriage party passing by her home. Innocently she asked her mother, "Where is my bridegroom?" The mother took her to the family prayer chamber and gave her Krishna's idol and said, "This is your husband. Now on you serve and worship him." She poured her love towards the divine in the form of poetry and music. This is written in different languages such as Khadeboli, Braj Bhasha, Rajastani, Gujarathi and Punjabi. Her compositions are sung in highly classical Dhrupad singing style as well as in bhajans and kirtanas. Some of her popular bhajans sung all over India are 'Payo ji maine', 'Pag ghunghru', 'Mere toh Giridhara Gopal' and 'Baso more nainan mein Nandalal'. This last song is what the gifted singers of the music college sang next before Swami, the few lines of which went like this:

Baso more nainan mein Nandalal,
Mohan murti sanwari surat,
Adhar sudharas murli raajat,

Ur baijanti mala,

In this bhajan, Mira requests Lord Krishna, the one with the beautiful form, to reside in her eyes (vision), because Krishna is the One who gives perennial happiness to saints and is always compassionate to His devotees.

The next music piece came in the form of a Qawwali. The introduction gave detailed information on the origin and evolution of this style of music which is a Sufi way of offering prayers to the Lord. Qawwali, in the form we know it today, was essentially created by Amir Khusrau in the late 13th century in India. With catchy tunes, foot-tapping beats and profound meaning, the Qawwali has a lot of gusto and rhythm. A few lines of the composition (in Hindi and Urdu) that the students rendered in front of Swami went thus:

Khushbu ho sansoon ki, Dil ki pyaas ho tum,
Jiski thi hamein Baba who talaash ho tum,
Ab to sari duniya se begane hain,
O mere Maula tere chahna wale hain
Ke Sai paas hain, Baba paas hain, Dil mein vaas hain

Meaning,

You are the fragrance of every breath of ours,
You are the yearning of our heart.
O Baba! You are the One we searched all along,
O my Lord! We love You.
O Sai, You are near us. You reside in our heart.

The Qawwali drew the entire audience into it as everybody joined in clapping as the momentum gained pace. This was followed by the rendering of a Tillana.

Thillanas are the carnatic counterpart of Hindustani Tarana. Closely associated with dance, the Thillanas generally consists of percussionists syllables like 'nadru', 'deem', 'dirana', etc. with short lyrics. Modern composers of Thillanas include Lalgudi Jayaraman, M Balamuralikrishna and Chitravina Ravikiran. These are normally sung towards the end of a concert. What makes the rendering tough is the speed and the swara-singing. When students belonging to the age group 12-17 sang this with skill and finesse, it was well applauded. The hours of hard-work they had put in was clearly evident. One of the charanams (stanzas) of the Thillana went as follows:

Thanu gave thaka thai tha dhim
Thai tha thai tha tha na na thom
Dhim tha kita tha dhim dhim
Tha kita thaka dhim
That ha thom tha tha thom tha tha

A magical melody of Bhakta Tulsidas was rendered next in the programme. This great composer of the 'Ramacharit Manas' was one of the pillars of

bhakti movements in India during the Mughal period. Tulsidas, who hailed from the village, Rajapur, in the state of Rajasthan had a very lonely childhood. Once he got married he was deeply attached to his wife, Ratna. Such was his infatuation with his wife that once when she went to her mother's house, Tulsidas too followed her secretly braving rain and thunder. Seeing this desperate attempt, Ratna rebuked him and said, "If only you had so much love for Lord Rama, you would have overcome all the troubles in your life." This was the turning point in his life. Soon after this incident, Tulsidas renounced everything, reached Prayag and took refuge in singing the glory of Shri Rama to people. The students sang the song 'Raghuwara tumko meri laaj', in which Tulsidas beckons in all humility and surrender to Lord Rama to save his honor and reputation.

The feast of songs was followed by the dessert of instrumental music. The talented pool of young aspirants of music delighted the audience with a Sitar duet accompanied by Tabla. The entire music piece was in Raga Charukesi and was set to Teentaal (16 beat).

The icing on the cake came in the form of a fusion instrumental piece on the song 'Giriraja Sutha' composed by the great Telugu poet saint Tyagaraja. The song, supported by six instruments – Mrudangam, Tabla, Khanjira, Sitar, Veena and Taval, was sung in Raga Bangala and set to Aditaal (8 beat).

The variety portrayed by the music college students made the whole programme like a kaleidoscope, bringing out the vibrant colours of varied Indian music. When the students sang Swami had a look of a proud mother's admiration for the children. At some places, Swami Himself rendered the song along with them which made the programme even livelier.

It was George Jellinek, author of the book 'History Through the Opera Glass' who said, "The history of a people is found in its music". From time immemorial, the land of India is blessed with a rich history that has been enriched by the presence of poet saints who have used music as a medium to converse with God, and help mankind to establish a relation with the Almighty. The dear students from Bhagavan's Music College reminded one and all this rich and varied heritage of music that ranges from Tyagaraja in Andhra Pradesh to Meera in Rajasthan, from Bhakta Soordas to Saint Tulsidas and from the Thillanas to the Qawwalis.

VIII. Ram Navami Celebrations in Prasanthi: March 27, 2007

On the ninth day after Ugadi comes Rama Navami. It heralds the crystallization of Dharma in human form. When our Sai Rama narrates the nectarous stories from Ramayana, they attain added sweetness and enchant every listener.

This year's Rama Navami was celebrated on 27th of March. Swami arrived at 9:00 am to the start of bhajans. An apparently routine bhajan session was transformed into a special one when Swami directed the distribution of Sri Rama Idols among all the senior permanent residents of the ashram. It was a sight to behold all those octogenarian ladies receiving this surprise gift from

His hands. To see the unceasing flow of love from both directions flooded every beholder. The bhajans continued unabated for an hour and a half. The morning session ended at 10:45 am with mangala arthi and an announcement of the evening programme.

In the evening, Bhagavan arrived at 3:00 pm into the now befittingly decorated Sai Kulwanth Hall. The programme commenced at 4:15 pm when Swami beckoned Shri G. Venkataraman to speak. Shri Venkataraman elucidated inspiring anecdotes from the Ramayana to highlight the ideals that Lord Rama embodied. He was followed by Shri S.V.Giri who poetically elaborated on the divine qualities of Shri Rama.

Bhagavan in His divine discourse beautifully narrated the life story of Shri Rama in His own inimitable style. He started with the story of Sita's birth and how when she was playing and the ball went under the Shiva's Bow, she just moved the bow aside with her left hand. It was at that time that King Janaka decided that the one who would wed Sita should be of matching valour. Swami went on to give a detailed description of the celestial wedding. He even sang the songs that the people of Mithila danced on when they saw the young Rama and Lakshmana. The description of the bow breaking by Rama by Swami's Himself brought the whole scene alive.

Later, Swami also described the arrival of Parashurama in the wedding scene. He stressed that obedience to father's word was one of the greatest virtues that must be cultivated by everybody. Jealousy was the root cause for Manthara's actions, Swami said. He also dwelt at length the chaste qualities of Sumitra, Urmila and the other brothers.

The important message of the Rama Navami discourse was, "The same Atma Rama is imminent in every being. By whatever name you call Him, it is the same one who responds. Whether you call him, Krishna-Rama, or Sai Rama or Rama-Rama, it is the same Atma Rama who resides in every being." Swami exhorted all to realize that Atma Rama present within. The discourse ended with Swami exhorting everybody to sing along with Him "Rama Kodanda Rama....."

IX. 'Gratitude Programme' by III UG Students: March 28, 2007

On the 28th of March the students of the third year under-graduate class made a touching presentation to express their sense of gratitude to Swami. The Institute is an eclectic mix of various cultures and languages – all learning in unity and harmony. This was seen in the programme of the students when they all stood up to express their feelings in their own mother-tongues. Some of the students having spent more than 15 years starting from their 1st Standard right up to third year post graduation narrated some of their experiences as small primary school students. The whole programme was quite nostalgic. As one of the students expressed, "We had been practicing for more than one month and it was looking as though we may not get a chance. But we were also sure that Swami will never let us down and we are so happy our prayers were finally answered." It was an half hour programme

filled with songs and short-speeches made in different languages which included among others Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi, Sanskrit and Kannada. Swami, after their presentation, lovingly blessed every one with group photographs. All the boys had their time with Swami and were extremely thankful to the Lord for the memorable day.

X. The Drama “Daivam Manusha Roopena” by School Students: March 29, 2007

On the 29th, the eleventh class student of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School put up a drama entitled, “Daivam Manusha Roopena”. The drama, based in the life story of Shirdi Sai Baba, was captivating laced with wonderful songs sung by the students themselves. The dialogues were powerful and the costumes were perfect. Swami, of course, was immensely happy. Dear reader, we will bring you a detailed account of this drama in the next issue of H2H as there is little time to cover this event in detail for this issue.

The month of March is generally a busy month everywhere with the financial year closing and everybody trying to meet their targets in time. Well, it was busy here too as you can see from the length of this Prasanthi Diary. Being the end of the academic session, there were many activities by Swami’s students, apart from two important festivals falling in this month. With very limited time and resources available at our disposal, we have tried, by His grace, to present you the story in the best manner possible. We seek your pardon for any lapses, and hope the coming month too will be bliss-filled and we will have the opportunity to share with you Sai’s love – the nectar which nourishes the soul of every Sai devotee.

Jai Sai Ram.

SWAMI AND ME

LOVE MY UNCERTAINTY

By Sri Sanjay Sahani

Sri Sanjay Sahni, a former Sai student, is currently the Principal of the Brindavan Campus of Sri Sathya Sai University.

"You must have not only freedom from fear, but freedom from hope and expectation. Trust in My Wisdom. I do not make mistakes. Love My uncertainty, for it is not a mistake. It is My intent and Will. Remember nothing happens without My Will. Be still. Do not ask to understand. Do not want to understand. Relinquish the imperative that demands understanding."

- *Bhagavan Baba, Sanathana Sarathi, August, 1984.*

One Last Darshan - The Predicament...

"When are your examinations ending?" enquired Bhagavan, not once, twice, but thrice over a span of a couple of weeks. Each time I replied, "Thirtieth May, Swami." It was the summer of 1983. We were at that time completing our first year of the five-year integrated programme, launched by the newly born Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (which was renamed recently to Sri Sathya Sai University). The mind refused to explore the purport of the repeated questioning as the heart was immersed in the bliss of *sambhasanam* (divine conversation).

Swami left Puttaparthi for Brindavan on May 8, and we got busy with the University examinations, which commenced the next day. As the days passed, I felt that it would be highly inappropriate to leave for my native town without seeking Bhagavan's permission and blessings, especially after He had so lovingly enquired about the date of the last examination. Thus, it happened that on May 30 with a few of my classmates and the grandmother of one of the students, we boarded the bus for Bangalore and checked into a hotel late in the evening.

The next day we reached Brindavan and waited for our beloved Lord in the Kalyan Mandapam. Bhagavan's residential bungalow had been demolished and 'Trayee Brindavan' was under construction. Bhagavan had made Devi Nivas, the house of the Rajmata of Nawanagar (which lies between the ashram and the college), His temporary residence. He would come every day in a car from there; give Darshan to devotees in the Sai Ram shed and then sit with the students and the teachers in the Kalyan Mandapam. As it was vacation time, we appeared to be the only students around and were dreaming of the golden opportunity that awaited us. However, after Darshan Bhagavan moved over to inspect the construction site and thereafter got into the car and returned to Devi Nivas. The disappointment in our group of eight students was palpable for we had

railway bookings for that day's departure and our purpose of visiting Brindavan seemed to have been defeated with this turn of events.

A drowning man is willing to clutch even a straw. One of our teachers suggested that we go to Devi Nivas and try our luck. We rushed there but the gates were closed. Bhagavan was inside and we were outside.

Suddenly, a familiar face appeared on the scene. He was one of Bhagavan's car drivers. We recognized each other and he offered to take inside our letters, if there were any. We handed him all the letters for Bhagavan except one, which was with me. Just before leaving Puttaparthi, a senior brother had come to me and cautioning me that it was an important letter, requested that it be handed over to Bhagavan personally. I enquired with him whether I could deliver it through somebody else, in case I did not get the chance to do so myself. The boy was reluctant and said that in such a case I could return his letter after the vacations.

Some time later the warden of Brindavan boys' hostel came out in his car and we met him at the gate. We explained to him our predicament and he suggested that we write to Bhagavan a letter, which he would then take inside after a few minutes on his return. Thus, we sat and wrote this joint letter to our Lord:

Dearest Lord,

We are your children from Puttaparthi, enroute to our native towns. We pray for your Darshan and blessings before our departure.

Yours,

All eight of us signed the above letter. Within a few minutes the warden returned and took the letter inside. A few anxious moments passed. Then we saw someone waving to us from the portico of the building. The gates of heaven opened. We threw our *chappals* nearby and rushed in. As we were climbing the steps of the portico, the door opened and out walked Bhagavan with His charming smile.

"If you need Me, you deserve Me!"

Oh, the bliss of that moment! From the depths of despair we were transported to the heights of ecstasy. Bhagavan had already retired and for the sake of just a handful of students had come out once again. Even at that moment we did not fail to recognize the fortune that was ours. My hands were trembling when I held out my senior brother's letter. "*Haath me dene ko bola naa. Haath me dene ko bola*" (He asked you to give this to Me in My hands only, isn't it?), observed Bhagavan knowingly. My hair stood on end and a delightful current of thrill passed through my entire frame hearing His words. We were face to face with our God, the Omniscient Lord, the Eternal witness of the entire Cosmic play, but the very next moment we got deluded again. Bhagavan lovingly enquired about our native towns and we foolishly began to inform the All Knowing One. His awesome Omniscience was subsumed in the sweetness of His intimacy.

He distributed vibhuti prasadam to all of us. A student prayed for prasadam for parents and we had a second round of prasadam distribution. Another boy informed Swami that his grandmother was also accompanying us. "Take her in a helicopter."

Bhagavan's response again revealed His Omniscience for she had been grumbling the previous evening about all the difficulties we had in securing hotel accommodation for the night.

As Bhagavan turned to go inside, one of the boys, (who had to leave by 1.00 p.m. that afternoon) shouted, unable to contain his joy, "Sairam, Swami." "Sairam", responded Bhagavan and blessed us with His '*abhaya hasta*'. We were in raptures over His unexpected greeting and with it He sealed for all of us a cherished memory of a lifetime.

The poet William Blake once said,

To see the world in a grain of
sand and heaven in a wild flower
Hold infinity in the palm of your
hand and eternity in an hour.

The Vedas describe the Lord as '*Kalateetaya namah*' (The one who transcends time - the timeless being). Truly, in the presence of Bhagavan time stood still and what in reality must have been just a few minutes seemed like eternity.

We had no qualification whatsoever to recommend our case - neither wealth nor social status. We were literally nobody. All that we knew was that we were hungry for Him, hungry for His love. "If you need Me, you deserve Me", declares Bhagavan. "Love My uncertainty." We were being initiated into the ABC of His spiritual vocabulary.

Unpredictable, But Sure, is His Grace!

Years rolled by and I was nearing completion of my final year M. Com. The door of our classroom at the Institute in Puttaparthi opened into the corridor of the first floor and was always locked. Thus, entry to our classroom was possible only through the adjacent classroom. One morning as our class was going on, suddenly the door opened and there stood Bhagavan. It was very unusual and it had never happened before. Even when He had come earlier to the college, He would visit only the science labs, but not the commerce classrooms. That day He had brought some *sadhus* (saints), who were organizing the Sadhu Sammelan at Puttaparthi. They happened to have a commerce background and so the Lord decided to show them the commerce department. We all stood up in awe and delight as Swami greeted our professor. The Vice-Chancellor, Mr. S. N. Saraf, who followed Bhagavan into the class noticed one of my classmates and told Bhagavan - "Swami, this boy spoke in the prayer hall today on Swami Vivekananda." "How did he speak?" queried Bhagavan. "Very well", replied the Vice-chancellor. Bhagavan beckoned the student and asked him to take *padanamaskar*. Then, blessing all of us, He left. Later my classmate told me, "You have spoken many times in the presence of Bhagavan, and I never got that opportunity. The only time I gave a speech, was in the college. But Swami came all the way to our classroom to give me *padanamaskar*." When, where, how and on whom the Lord showers His grace nobody can predict. We have to love His uncertainty and be ever ready to receive His Grace.

A Divine Lesson

It was 30 December, 1997, the day of the Sri Sathya Sai Unity Cup match, the first-ever international cricket match at Puttaparthi between India XI and International XI. The students and the staff of the university had their task cut out as our Institute was hosting the match with the Prime Minister of India, Mr. I. K. Gujral, as the chief guest. There was excitement in the air, but we were busy with the background preparations. I was allotted the duty of transporting food preparations to different destinations from the three canteens in the ashram.

Nothing seemed to go right for me that day. From the disappearance of vehicle drivers, to the advancing of the lunch break by one hour, to the traffic jam on the road and the resulting confusion - many things went awry that day, upsetting all my plans. After a bizarre sequence of events, when all the guests had left, I was seated in the mandir portico that evening, dejected and utterly disappointed with myself that I had failed the trust Bhagavan had reposed on us with regard to the day's arrangements. I had done my best against all odds, at times even beyond my known capacities and against my own temperament. Yet it was not enough.

Bhagavan came amidst us and told the warden, "I am very happy with the work of the boys and the teachers." Then He walked upto the place where the teachers were seated and pointing to a couple of teachers enquired, "Who all worked today?" "We all worked together Swami," chorused all the teachers and Swami was pleased with our answer. Instantly, my spirits were lifted and the dejection and disappointment that clouded my mind vanished as if in a dream. On deeper reflection I realized that Sai had willed the day's events to be so. What He appreciated and applauded was the sincere, determined and devoted effort put in by each one of us. While the world enjoyed a cricket match, we were learning our own spiritual lessons of devotion and surrender.

Happiness Lies in Trusting His Wisdom!

Bhagavan's birthday festival in 1989 was fast approaching. Bhagavan had permitted me to leave for Delhi after the birthday celebrations to attend to some personal work and return in fifteen days. On November 24, I sought His guidance regarding my departure. He instructed me to leave the next day. After the bhajans, I went to a devotee who had reserved my ticket for that day as requested by me earlier. I apologized to Him and explained the new development. The devotee said that there was nothing to worry and that He would cancel the ticket. It did seem odd to abandon a confirmed railway ticket from Puttaparthi after the birthday and to travel unreserved. But if it was the Lord's plan, then that was it.

I reached Dharmavaram railway station on November 25 night to board the Karnataka Express to Delhi. As the train steamed into the station, I found the train strangely half empty. It was the time Mr. V. P. Singh got elected as the Prime Minister of India. Being election day, most people were in their respective native places and very few were traveling. I boarded one of the compartments and sat on an empty seat. No ticket collector came that night. Perhaps, they were also relaxing with the train being almost empty. I had a blissful sleep that night and the next day I got my ticket reserved. Literally, I

could choose my seat as it were. I was mentally thanking Bhagavan for the comfortable journey in spite of traveling on an unreserved ticket.

As I reached Delhi another revelation occurred. My sister, who was an artist, was putting up a painting exhibition. For some reason the date of the exhibition was postponed to the very day of my return journey. Had Bhagavan not delayed my departure from Puttaparthi, I would have left one day earlier as per Bhagavan's direction to return in fifteen days and missed my sister's exhibition. This would have disappointed her immensely. As it happened, due to lack of time I left our residence for the exhibition and from there proceeded straight to the railway station to embark on the return journey. When we live with Bhagavan, the frightening levels of uncertainty that surrounds Him may at times unnerve us, but if we learn to trust His Wisdom and love His uncertainty, He takes meticulous care of everything.

As we look at our chaotic world today, we may believe that God has a plan but it has gone hopelessly awry. The Divine mystery is revealed little by little, step by step. It is like an action packed thriller movie where the suspense is dispelled only after you sit through the entire movie.

We are indeed fortunate to be contemporaries of the living and loving Avatar of our age. It is our duty to rally around Him and join hands with Him in His glorious mission.

The play is His; the role is His gift; the lines are written by Him; He directs; He decides the dress and the decor, the gesture and the tone, the entrance and the exit.

We have to act the role well and receive His applause when the curtain falls. We have to earn by our efficiency and enthusiasm to play higher and higher roles - that is the meaning and purpose of life.

EXPERIENCING THE ETERNAL

By Prof. E. Mukundan

To define God is equal to denial of God. We cannot experiment on Him; we can only experience Him. And for this, there are certain stages of transformation which one has to pass through. A person with fever cannot taste the food items properly. Similarly when we are having the illness of attachment to worldly things, we cannot experience God.

Baba gives a beautiful example. It was the time of Deepavali. A wealthy person wanted to distribute sweets to poor children. He went to a bakery and tasted the *ladoo* there. Not of good taste; he felt. This was repeated in the second shop too. In the third one, the owner of the bakery asked him to wash his mouth before tasting the *ladoo*. He did so and the *ladoo* tasted very nice! As he was having the habit of keeping salt crystals in his mouth for toothache, he could not taste the *ladoo*'s properly in the earlier shops. The fault was not with the *ladoo*; but with the person.

L. O. V. E. – The Royal Road to Sai

For experiencing Swami, we have to have inner purity. Bhagawan Baba is equal to hundred percent Love. Only a heart filled with love can realize Him fully. Water can be mixed with water; not with oil. In the same way love can be merged only with Love. Love means four things: The letter 'L' denotes the Light Inside – the *Athma Jyothi*. 'O' means Oneness with God. 'V' stands for the Vision of Sai in all. 'E' represents Energy Divine - God is the basis of all our energy.

Love in action is service according to Bhagawan. To experience Sai one should indulge fully in selfless service. 'Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray'. There is a certain uniqueness in the seva activities that are done under the Sai umbrella. We do service - not to remove the sufferings of others; on the contrary, sufferings of others create pain in us - but we are engaged in seva activities to remove that pain. This feeling makes our seva selfless and Divine. To experience Him, one needs to possess a unique type of mental frame work. It is the way of life and attitude that makes one a real Sai devotee. We are to be positive and optimistic. The faith and confidence that we are the soldiers of Sai makes all ways clear for us. All stopping stones become stepping stones, and all stumbling blocks into building blocks.

In one of the personal interactions, Bhagawan asked the writer where positivism comes from. Many answers were not fully acceptable to our Lord. Swami said: "It is not to come from outside. It is inside already; one has to develop it by dropping the negative." **There should be a change from 'Why me?' to 'Try me!' As an instrument in the Divine Mission, we have no choice. Our duty is only to be always ready; ever ready. One should not miss opportunities given by the Divine.**

To realize or experience Swami, one ought to have *Shradha*. *Shradha* is a combination of sincerity, concentration, motivation, faith and urge. In many Bhajan halls, one can see a door exclusively for Swami. All devotees believe in His Omnipresence. We are to keep a door not only there but in our hearts too – the one that opens only to our Lord and to stop all unwanted entrants. Innocence takes us to our Lord. As Kabir said: "It is not the intelligent; but the innocent who reach God." Softening our heart by love and service makes our hearts innocent too.

Swami is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent. Once, Dr. K.M. Munshi got an interview with Bhagawan. He had 12 questions on a piece of paper to present before the Lord. But he had completely forgotten this in the Divine physical presence. But Swami gave answer to all questions without asking. **Then Bhagawan said: "Munshi, there is a 13th question which you have forgotten to write down and that is about your joint pain."**

Eschew Ego, and God is Possible

Who can move with God to God? There are three types of people. The first kinds are the ones who by thinking of their own difficulties, do not venture into tasks. The second type constitutes those who give up in the middle. And the third type includes the people who reach their goal inspite of the difficulties - only they can move with God. **Only men of character can realize Him. Character doesn't mean absence of vices. On the contrary, it is the harmony of thought word and deed. This is very important today because we are having more platform heroes and practical zeros.**

The following example depicts our greatest obstacle. Water is full in the tank. The pipes are also in good condition. But there is no water in the pipe. The tank said: 'I am ok'. So did water and the pipe. Then where is the problem? Why is the water not flowing? Oh, there is a wooden piece blocking the hole in the tank! That is our ego. Water is Divine Grace, the tank is Divinity and the pipe is human life. For the flow of Grace in human life, the obstacle of ego has to be removed. The removal of ego makes the experience of God possible.

It is the same case with selfishness too. Sharing has given way to capturing. *Nidhi* is more important than God's *Sannidhi*. Giving hands become Grabbing hands. 'I-ness' and 'My-ness' are the features of today's life. To experience God, all these negativities are to be transformed. How? IT (Information Technology) should be followed by TT. (Transformation Technology). **There should be another 'WWW.' i.e. Work, Worship and Wisdom. The only solution for the pollution of human heart is by the dilution of negativism by positivism and finally the latter should replace the former.** This positivism will help us to depend more and more on Swami and this dependence will make us really independent.

Bhagavan's Guarantee

During the last three decades, the writer had a number of opportunities to enjoy the Glory of Sri Sathya Sai. To watch Him and follow Him is real

education and real duty. A few years back at Brindavan, it was the day of Vishu celebration. Bhagawan commanded me to speak before His Divine Discourse. One point stressed was the Divine Guarantee that if we take one step; Swami will take a hundred steps. In His Divine Discourse that followed, Bhagawan repeated this Divine Guarantee and also added: "That one step should be in the right direction so that Swami will take a hundred and thousand steps!" Steps in the right direction are needed to experience and move with Sai.

Compassion and Love of Sai Ma are Infinite. In a personal interview, the writer got an opportunity to explain the various service activities in Kerala. Bhagawan was told about the service activities for the tribal people inside the forest. **When He was told about the confidence of seva-dal members moving inside the interior forest regions with the faith that Swami is in the front and back, Swami asked: "Only front and back? What about the middle?"** Yes, the Compassionate Lord protects us from all sides.

Instances of His Love and Compassion are many. He gives everything that we ask so that we will ask the thing for which He took the Avatarhood with Love and patience. Lord Sai is waiting and preparing us for that final question.

Beloved Lord, Bless us and make us ready for that. As mother cat is taking the kitten closer to her body; take us Lord, closer and closer to Thy Lotus Feet.

The author is presently the State President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization, Kerala

- Courtesy: Mathrubhumi's 'Divine Love'

ALL THAT REMAINS IS MY SAI - AHAM BRAHMASMI!

By Mrs. Karuna Munshi

Happiness is union with God. There is no place without God. Whatever you do, you should feel that it is God's work. God is acting through your body. He is thinking through your mind. He is working through your hands. If you work with this feeling, there is no chance for the ego to arise. The body is lifeless, just matter. The mind is a bundle of desires. It is just imagination. You are not the body; you are not the mind; you are the Atma (soul).—Baba

It was inevitable! I was born, embedded with the Sai chip. My genome map was carved along the Sai path. The Consciousness of the Avatar of the Kali age, Sri Sathya Sai was embedded in my DNA code. That Sai is an integral part of my genetic make-up became apparent when I took a natural plunge towards Him in my early childhood, upon seeing a picture of His. **In Swami I found everything my soul was seeking in order to make sense of my existence and its purpose, including the last piece that completed my puzzle.** Finally, my search had come a full circle. All seemed well with life once He came in. My quest was over and all questions had been answered.

From then on, I have pretty much lived a Sai-fi, or rather a Sai-hi life; often going through my daily routine, performing my worldly duties, while being high on the Sai awareness at the same time. There is no fiction in this experience, but only a reality that fulfils my consciousness, yet my limited vocabulary fails to describe.

Everyone has their one special moment with Swami. I clearly remember mine and it was quite un-dramatic compared to the accounts of people where Swami emerged from a wall or made a sudden physical appearance at an off-site location. Yet, this low key but deeply personal connection has continued to characterize my relationship with the Avatar of the Kali age - my personal hero, role model, my mentor, friend, Saichiatrist and the ultimate love and aim of my life - my beloved Sai, my true Self.

When God Casts His Divine Spell...

It was in July of 1978 at Whitefield that I had my first close *darshan* of Swami as an impressionable teenager. All I remember is my Mom and I stood in the porch of the college auditorium, waiting for Swami to come out after delivering His summer course Discourse. The volunteer had been unfriendly with us for quite some time and we were desperately hoping for a close encounter despite all her efforts to shoo us away. Somehow, we survived and lingered long enough till He came to the porch to get into the car. There, in that porch, as He walked up towards us, perhaps to take a letter, He came very close to where we stood and looked me straight in the eyes. **His powerful gaze peered through me, at something deep within me. It was my *Tat Twam Asi* ('I Am That') moment. My gaze was locked with God's gaze. He had**

cast His Divine spell on me and my soul had been awakened in the most sacred and pure way.

A floodgate of emotions just welled up from within me. All I remember was feeling extreme embarrassment - as any self-conscious teenager would - at my inability to stop crying uncontrollably. It wasn't just few drops of tears flowing down my eyes; I felt an intense need to unburden my soul of something. I had to wash it off with unstoppable tears. I wished the earth would swallow me and somewhere far away from the public gaze, I could just bury my face and cry uninhibited – forever! **Strangely, the more I wept, the better I felt. In fact, not just better, but happy, indeed very happy, light and joyous. The connection had been made.]]**

The Crests, Troughs and His Caring Touch

My next close *darshan* was a 'car *darshan*' at the airport, in our hometown in North India in the summer of 1980. Our flight had just landed and we were surprised to see our entire extended family there to receive us. The welcome was somewhat overwhelming. We soon figured out that they were actually there to have Swami's *darshan* as He was leaving by the same plane shortly. So we too joined the line along the road to the tarmac. As His car drove past us, we had another close *darshan*. A month or so later, I was in Parthi seeking admission in the Arts program at the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning.

The six years I spent at His College and hostel bore a deep impact on my character development and outlook in life. Those years had many highs and lows and the highs centered around close encounters with Bhagavan and the lows hit us when He was away in Whitefield, Kodaikanal or elsewhere, and we were not able to behold Him, hear Him and receive His direct Grace. I must however point out that the education and exposure to Sai values that I received at Anantapur was within a simulated environment where almost everyone was like-minded in their devotion to Swami and His teachings. And surprisingly, despite the conducive environment, it wasn't that easy to stay on path, razor thin as it has been described by the Vedas.

It was only after six years' of stay in Anantapur, when I returned home and got married did I really realize how much harder it is to live up to Sai ideals in the outside world. The challenge was to live in the world without letting the world suck me in. **I suddenly realized that Swami had now enrolled me in the school of some really hard knocks. Till then, I had been subconsciously programmed to view the world from the Sai lens.** Needless to say, my naivety and a serious lack of worldly wisdom proved my biggest challenges. I had so much learning and growing to do. And through my many failures, I learned and continue to learn all the time.

Initially, I was shocked to find that just being a good and sincere person was not enough to get on in life. I was flooded with so many conflicting expectations, values and opinions. It was hard to make sense of the world and my place in it. At times, it felt like I was hurtling down a dark tube, like the one in amusement parks, at super speed and had no control over anything.

At all such moments, I held on to Swami's Lotus Feet in my heart and recalled His Divine Form before my mind's eye. Chanting His name controlled the flow of my breath. Every time I took recourse in this medication, my palpitation subsided and I felt strong and courageous.

My Courage and Constant Companion - My Sai

When I got married, my parents sent me off with a beautiful picture of Swami, which He had autographed. This lovely gift came just in time from my friend in Anantapur. It was the most important item in my trousseau. I carried it as my shield and armor. Did I ever need it!

I vividly recall how I had stuck this picture of Swami, inside the back wall of my steel cupboard, which stood in a corner on the balcony of my flat. Every time I wanted a reassurance or needed to reset my internal button, I would step out into my secret corner on the balcony, part my saris on hangers to reveal the Beautiful Form of my Sai with a smile on His lips. I had my private moment with Swami right there, in that corner. My home bore no other image of my Sai at that time. I guess, as they say, the time was not right then. **Everything must happen at the right moment; and the right moment continued to elude me.**

Talking of time, what a strange control it has over our destinies. It is the eternal flow that defines an infinitely changing continuum-as past, present and future. When the going in my life got tough, I held on to Swami's advise to us during our final interview where He said that as long as we live well in the present moment, the future will be take care of itself. The present had emerged from the womb of the past just as the future lies dormant in our present, He had counseled. Embracing such consoling words and holding on to my faith that all would eventually settle down and become "normal", I continued to pray to Swami to become a wholesome part of my family life, so that I could claim my Sai heritage fearlessly.

Nearly two decades and a million humbling lessons later, I can stand tall and claim with utmost confidence that my Sai stood by me, with me and in me throughout, at every single moment, even though I consciously forgot Him many, many times.

With time, my expectations continued to evolve and the reality set in as I matured. Swami fulfilled so many of my desires beyond my wildest expectations. Even in the most bitter of experiences, I saw His saving Grace come to my rescue. He consoled me, chided me, corrected me and held me by His hand and guided me to the right decisions. As I look at my life now, in its every twist and turn I see His caring touch. I can never forget that New Year day, nearly two decades ago.

Wonders of His Grace

I had been married for less than a year and lived in New Delhi, India then. I woke up on January 1, 1988 totally ecstatic and proudly announced to my

husband that the coming year would be a wonderful one for us because I had seen Swamiji in my dream that morning and He had clearly granted me a *padnamaskar* and placed His hand on my head to bless me. I knew Swamiji's dreams were visions that conveyed deep meanings. Soon after, my husband left for Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh on some business. He had an early morning train or flight to catch. A few hours later, on my way to my office - not too far from our flat in Mayur Vihar - on the very first day of the new year, I met with a severe road accident where I was flung off a scooter on which I was pillion riding. I only remember sensing some danger, even as I was chanting the *Mahamrithyumjaya* mantra and then everything went blank.

I was later told that I somersaulted across a very busy road at one of Delhi's worst intersections at peak rush hour and landed on the other side of the road with my head hitting the curbside. By the time I gained consciousness - a kind family whose last name I still remember being Goyal - took me in their Maruti van back to my flat where my Dad was visiting us and then along with my Dad, they drove us to the Emergency ward at the Ram Manohar Lohia hospital. I was hurting everywhere and was diagnosed with multiple cuts, a dislocated shoulder and broken rib(s). And my head hurt unbearably due to a massive head concussion.

What was worse was that through all that pain, I was left to wait for a doctor to stitch the deep gash in my knee in a ward where some police officers were most callously recording the statement of a lady on a nearby bed. The dying person was burnt badly by her vicious husband and his mother because of some dowry dispute. I was traumatized by being within that poor victim's earshot and by hearing her heart-wrenching tale. What further aggravated my pain was the heartless nature of the two police officers who were recording the dying woman's statement in such a matter-of-fact manner. I wanted to scream out of fear. My Dad knew I would just break down by the tragedy of that other person more than by my own injuries. **So we decided to forego the stitching up of my knee and instead filled the deep gash with some *vibhuthi***, the sacred ash that he had in his wallet. He also applied it over my face and everywhere else where I was bleeding. There in that ward, together we prayed to Swami, cleansed the wounds and did what in our minds was the best cure and the fastest route to escape from that torture chamber where no medical professional was keen to attend to either the dying burn victim or I. We collected our X-rays and fled home in a taxi.

With time, my knee healed completely and the dislocated shoulder and ribs too were on the mend. Till date my chest x-ray shows a crack or two in my ribs. However, those ghastly headaches continued to haunt me and my parents and I continued to pray to Swamiji for help and guidance as He is and has always been our only anchor in life. I was advised to go for a CAT scan and consult a neurologist. Being new to the city, I did not know where to begin but then I immediately remembered Dr. A. N. Safaya, the Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, and currently the Director of the Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospitals in Prashanthi Nilayam, who I had met with my parents at Parthi when I was a student. I suggested to my husband

that we seek his help in getting me a quick CAT scan and neurologist appointment.

I arrived at Dr. Safaya's office feeling a bit anxious. I wrote *Aum Sai Ram* on the visiting card that I sent in with his personal assistant, hoping that the sacred name on it may jog his memory and he may make the connection and somehow remember me. I was getting nervous as I did not want him to get upset at my taking the liberty of calling on him without any prior notice. He was, as he still is, such an important and busy person. It had been a while and I had not kept in touch. I was hoping he hadn't forgotten me completely. As usual I was counting on Swami to do something.

He soon called us in to his office and was pleasantly surprised to see me. The first thing he said was that he and his wife had been remembering me just the other day as they were watching a video of Baba's 60th birthday celebrations and the University Convocation the previous day where they had seen me receive my degree from Swamiji. They both had wondered what had become of me and where I was. And now I was in his office, seeking his help with my head concussion! Is there a detail that Swamiji ever misses? **Needless to say, my CAT scan for the head concussion went off without a hitch and soon those awful headaches disappeared as well.**

I have had countless experiences where Swamiji has showered His protection and Grace upon me in the face of imminent grave danger and protected me just as the lid protects the eye. Such instances were usually preceded by a dream where He granted me a *padnamaskar*. I later changed my prayer, seeking dreams where we could converse and avoid the *padnamaskars*, ominous as they proved to be. The blessing He conferred upon me in my dream on January 1, 1988 was to brace me for the big bang that awaited me later that morning. I am happy to share this one of my many experiences to illustrate how He has watched over me for decades after I graduated from His University and continues to guide and protect my family. **I am convinced that Swamiji's Love and protection gave me the gift of life and saved me that day from something far worse.**

Reconnecting With Him Everywhere

In those days, when I was still deeply attached to Him by this invisible and secret umbilical cord in my heart, I often prayed for His dreams to feel connected to Him. At times, I just pined for Him with a broken heart. I begged for His sacred and blessed presence in my life. The pangs of separation were the hardest to bear on festival days because I was so used to celebrating them in Parthi with such devotion.

To make up for this lost inheritance, my visits to places of worship increased significantly, and I gladly seized every opportunity to visit temples, churches, gurudwaras and mosques. **I felt His presence in the hallowed premises of every cathedral I set foot in and saw His Divine Face in every deity I beheld.** In Goddess Durga, I beheld His compassionate and understanding

gaze. In Krishna, I visualized His mischievous smile, taunting at my misery and severe separation anxiety.

I remember vividly one day when I was scared for some reason, and I found a match box with an image of some deity on it and instantly I remembered Swami and prayed hard to Him, holding the match box tight in my sweaty palm as my talisman. Even though His physical form was not visible around me, He was the unseen centre of my being, filling all my experiences with His presence. While I joyfully shared all my dreams and visions of Baba with my husband, the experience of His endless help and love through the course of my day at home and office was entirely mine. Who in their right mind would believe that a “person” no matter how special, living in a distant village in South India could possibly be so involved in all my thoughts and actions? Each of us is destined to grow into that understanding in our own time.

The Superlative Sai-fi life

Today, nearly twenty years after graduating from His University, I continue to be His student, His child and daughter. My need to learn and grow never ends. In my newly acquired wisdom, **I have chosen to hand over the responsibility of raising me upright to my Divine parent. And what a good job Swami is doing of teaching me to trust His sense of timing!**

Time, the great determinator, has chosen the present moment when nearly all members of my family are directly or indirectly involved in Sai work and support my interest and enthusiasm towards the Sai movement.

His Grace has been the blissful anesthesia that has lulled my senses to any pain during bad times. His Grace has also kept me awake to His presence in all happy and good times. His Grace further makes me aware and reminds me to accept all times, good or otherwise as His *prasadam* and with unwavering confidence in His judgment. **I keep enjoying my Sai-fi life, savoring every blissful moment and accepting every not so blissful moment as His will also.** Once I surrender this sense of doership, all that remains is my Sai, my friend, my mentor, my hero, my role model, my Bhagavan and my true Self. What a peaceful realization, to be one with my *Tat* essence! *Aham Brahmasmi!*

H2H SPECIAL 1

MADRAS MEMORIES

Prof. G. Venkataraman

Last month, we had the cover story on the Chennai Citizens' Conclave held during Swami's recent visit to that city. This time, we have a general report on other aspects of Swami's visit. This will be continued in subsequent issues.

In the last issue of H2H, I offered you some glimpses of the memorable meeting that took place in Chennai on 21st January, 2007, in the Divine presence – I am referring to the Chennai Citizens' Conclave - during which prominent politicians expressed their gratitude to Swami for coming to the rescue of Chennai by providing with lots and lots of drinking water. In this piece, I would like to recall some of the other highlights of Swami's visit to Chennai in January this year.

The Blessed Sai Troupe!

I am able to do so because Bhagavan was gracious and kind enough to take me along with Him. Many others were in the party, including Mr. S.V. Giri, former Vice Chancellor and of course the evergreen Prof. Anil Kumar, who always makes any trip with him lively, spicy and absolutely jolly! The core of the team was, however, made up of several students, some selected for their various skills, and others for attending on Swami's personal needs. I must add that Mr. G. K. Raman, Convenor of the Sai Trust in Tamil Nadu, had specially come from Chennai to accompany Swami all the way to his city – this is the norm around here; the welcome commences right at the starting point of the journey!

With the Paramatma on the Paramount!

How do I describe this memorable ten-day trip? Maybe I should start from the beginning. We left on the morning of 19th January from Puttaparthi and flew directly to Chennai. It was a Friday and *Rahu Kalam* (inauspicious time) being between 10.30 am and 12 noon, all of us except Swami were expected to leave for the airport before the start of the *Rahu Kalam*. Don't ask my why, but the rule seems to be that if you kick off before *Rahu Kalam* starts, then *Rahu* (ill-omened planet) would not be able to kick you around! Anyway, there we were in the airport well before the scheduled departure time. The chartered aircraft, a small jet of Brazilian make – Embraer 170/175 - with a seating capacity of around 75 or so, was supposed to come from Chennai, and then fly us all to that city. The aircraft belonged to Paramount Airways, a new airline active in the southern region.

Talking of Embraer, I remember that some years ago when this company was making its debut, someone arranged for a small version [with a seating capacity of about 30 or so] to be brought to Puttaparthi for being shown to

Swami. I remember that event very well. In those days, Swami was physically much more mobile than now, and He went to the airport to see the aircraft. Actually, He was not at all keen about the whole thing but did so merely to oblige the devotee who had brought the plane to Puttaparthi. Apparently, the devotee wanted Swami to have one such plane! But Swami being Swami, saw the plane and left it at that; it was a case of meeting the wishes of the devotee half way, or to put it in Swami's own words, "If you cannot oblige, speak obligingly!" The visit to the airport took place around 1.30 or so. Swami climbed into the aircraft, saw the interior and all that but declined a joy ride over Puttaparthi. However, He graciously invited the crew and the company reps – all Brazilian of course – to Sai Kulwant, where He played the generous host, by offering them snacks, juice, etc!

Getting back to the present trip, on reaching the airport, we were told that there was some delay in the arrival of the aircraft from Chennai, but what with every one busily chatting in anticipation of the Divine journey, no one noticed the delay. The aircraft later arrived, looking nice, elegant and compact. Without much delay, all of us were boarded, and soon there was a buzz, which meant that Swami was about to arrive. We all craned our necks to get a peep out of the aircraft window, and managed to see Swami's car driving in. Looking out, I checked to make sure that our boys from the Studio were at work, documenting the event using both the still camera and the video.

Even God Become Helpless, for Devotees' Sake

For Swami to board, special arrangements had been made – in fact, this has now become the standard operating procedure. Basically, a portable lift used by Indian Airlines for taking up food is refurbished into an elegant and furnished elevator. The drill is as follows: Swami after alighting from the car, gets on to a small moving chair and boards this elevator, placed right next to the front door of the aircraft. The elevator is then raised up to the level of the aircraft door, and Swami's chair is moved in. From the chair, Swami then walks to His seat, always in the first row and near the window. This time too it was the same routine except that – I heard this later from Sri Satyajit – that the ground staff refused to operate the elevator until they had all taken photos and had *Padanamaskar*; almost a case of blackmail!

Sometimes, even God is rendered helpless, and I have seen this many times at airports and inside the aircraft! Anyway, Swami was finally seated but the photo session would still not stop! As if to say why not me too, the Brazilian pilots also took their turn to welcome Swami with flowers and offer their obeisance! After that, the Captain ordered the ground staff to deplane, had the doors shut and secured, and revved up the engines. That happened at 1.20 pm, after which a taxi and we were airborne by 1.25; the take off was from the Hospital side towards Yelumalapalli village; those who are familiar with Puttaparthi and its surroundings would understand what I mean. By the way, Sri Satyajit also told me that the elevator was covered with Swami's pictures practically everywhere!

In the past, I have seen Swami invariably give Darshan during flight but this time He did not; possibly because the duration of the flight was expected to be rather short. Anyway, the people in the aircraft, starting with the students, all went one by one to where Swami was seated and, in the name of having His Darshan managed to have their pictures taken. The boys are good at this sort of technique and the efficiency with which it was all done convinced me that the boys had all this worked out in advance. It was clearly a case of: If..., Then... as in formal logic. Anyway, this gave us an opening, and I said, if they can do it why not I? Thus it was that after the boys were finished a few of us elders also decided to act like boys! Result, I managed a photo of myself with Swami, up above in the sky!

One thing that amazed me was that one of the crew members who had taken a picture – by the way, picture shooting was 100 % digital, and so many had digital cameras; what a change from the old days! He even had a picture printed on board and showed it to Swami! I found it absolutely amazing; how on earth he did it, I do not know; maybe someone had a laptop with a small colour printer! Anyway, soon we were descending which meant that we would be landing soon. Having been blessed with a window seat, I looked out to see if I could catch any familiar sights. I could pick up a few and one thing I did see was a reservoir and later a canal. I was pretty certain I was looking at one of the big lakes that stored water for supplying to the city.

Re-living Memories of the Old Madras

Just before landing, I was told by Mr. Raman that we would be taken to the old airport for deplaning. Here I must explain that the old airport means that which served until the early eighties. Madras airport, called Meenambakkam after the place where it is located, goes back a long time, to pre-Independence days. I think my first visit to that aerodrome, as it used to be called in those days was sometime in 1946. I was then studying in Besant School in Madras, founded by Arundale and his wife Rukmini Devi, a great danseuse herself and also a great patron of classical arts. She also founded the Kalakshetra and was closely connected with the Theosophical Society both which still survive, although I am not sure about the school. Located on the southern bank of the Adyar River, and right next to the sea, the Theosophical Society has even now a wonderful park-like appearance and boasts of a serene atmosphere in a city overtaken by the madness of so-called progress. As for the school, it was located just to the south of the Society across a road that led to what was then called the Elliott Beach [favoured by the British, especially during the war years when there was a large presence of British troops].

Back in those days, all this was a wilderness but in the seventies, a huge colony grew up south of the school area known as Besant Nagar, named after Annie Besant of England, who made India her home, and Indian tradition her way of life. She was of course a key figure in the Theosophy movement and in the campaign for what was called Home Rule for India. When in Besant school, we were taken every Thursday to a temple in the Theosophical Society for Bhajans, and I distinctly remember Tiger Varadachari, a great

exponent of Carnatic Music used to sing there during Bhajan times. Tiger was also a teacher in the Kalakshetra and I have seen him tutor students under a tree in the true Gurukulam style.

Getting back to the story of my first ever visit to Meenambakkam aerodrome, all of us kids from the school were taken there to accord a warm welcome to Rukmini Devi on her return from one of her foreign tours. In those days, my father used to work in the Met Office just across the road from the aerodrome – that building still stands, though dwarfed by huge constructions that have cropped in the neighbourhood – and he took me once to see Lord Mountbatten arrive in Madras. This was just after Independence and Mountbatten was then the Governor General, having served earlier as the Viceroy, before the transfer of power. I still recall His Lordship arriving by his own plane, a York, given to him for his use by the British Governor. Mr. Archibald Nye was then the Governor of Madras, and he, of course, came to receive the GG. Very little security in those days and that is how my father was able to take me there. I also recall another such visit, and this was in 1948, soon after the fourth cricket test between India and the West Indies in Chepauk, a famous cricket ground and now a stadium named M.A. Chidambaram Stadium. That morning, the West Indies and Indian teams were flying off to Bombay I think, and there was not much of a crowd. I could easily move around and collect autographs of the big stars, all of whom are of course now no more.

I am mentioning all this because I was eagerly looking forward to seeing how that old airport looked now but as it turned out, we taxied to a stop close to the domestic terminal of the new airport. Looking through the window I could see a car waiting for Swami, driven by Mr. V. Srinivasan, who wears many Sai hats, one of which is as the All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation of India. After the aircraft came to a halt, all of us exited through the rear door while the specially decorated elevator came to enable Swami to deplane. By this time, we were in the bus meant to take us to the terminal building, but fortunately before the bus started moving, we managed to see the elevator come down, and Swami drive off. I instigated one of the boys to take pictures with his video camera, while a member of the ground staff of Paramount Airways cautioned us about that being against the rules. That was true, of course, but then sometimes, the rules are downright stupid and we hoped that we would be granted Divine pardon for transgressing a silly man-made rule.

Our bus was given the signal to drive off and after a short ride, we ended up in the terminal building through which I had passed so many times, when I was in service at the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research [IGCAR], while with the Department of Atomic Energy – that was in the seventies and eighties. As expected, there were many changes but in spite of them, I could still manage to recognise portions of the terminal that had defied change. One noticeable change was the strong presence of high power advertising, but in the midst of all that was a nice poster with a smiling face of Swami, welcoming everyone to the *Yajna*!

Travelling with Swami confers many blessings and privileges, one of which is that we do not have to worry about luggage when we board a plane or when we get off it. There is always someone to take care, and so it was here too. And we do not have to worry about transport to go to the city either, for that too is taken care of; an added bonus is that whatever may be the city, since traffic is always cleared for Swami's convoy, one is assured of a fast ride. However, this time, since Swami left much before us, we did not enjoy that luxury; we had to struggle through the traffic, which was heavy, but that was no surprise since the city has grown by leaps and bounds over the years. Often, disadvantages have a silver lining and so it was this time too; what I mean is that a slow ride enabled me to take in the changed landscape carefully, and boy, what a dramatic change there has been within a few short years!

The Metamorphosis of Madras into Chennai

The change was noticeable right in the air terminal. This is one through which I have passed many a time, both going in and coming out but now it was so very different. It was not that the place had been completely rebuilt or anything like that. Rather, the growth of traffic due to the economy boom had led to the addition of so many new frills that the place wore a very different look. The roads our vehicles went by were ones through which I had been many times in the past but this time they were totally unrecognisable – so many new constructions, buildings and so forth, all a signature of a new and vibrant city, bursting at the seams with auto manufacture, IT and what not. All this prosperity, I reminded myself, brought with it many problems too, one of which is the increased demand for drinking water, and I wondered how many of these Chennai citizens who were so desperately crying for water barely a few years ago were aware of Swami's contribution in rescuing them from acute distress.

As we move slowly towards Sundaram – for that was our destination – I found that I simply could not make out what street we were driving through. All these were roads through which I had gone many times before but now they looked very different. Philosophically, I reflected how life itself is like that. In our young age, we make so many friends but later in life when we meet after many decades, we are hardly able to recognise and reconnect.

Our route took us through a road that goes past the Governor's residence. I believe it is now called the Sardar Vallabhai Patel Road, after a renowned freedom fighter, India's first Home Minister, and a close associate of Gandhi. It is a long road that leads to Adyar, Theosophical Society and all that, and we had to take the same road to go to Sundaram. This road too is one that I have gone through many times, starting from 1946, when my father took me in a *Jatka* [a horse-drawn carriage] all the way from Saidapet station to Besant School. In those days, this was an absolutely desolate road.

On the right side was the huge Government House Estate with hundreds of acres of forest land, in which the Governor's Mansion occupied a tiny part; all the rest was a forest and in fact the British Governors used to hunt there. On

the left, there was only one solitary establishment, the Guindy Engineering College as it used to be known [now Anna University]. After getting past the Governor's estate, one crossed the famous Buckingham Canal which was operational as late as 1955 – I ought to know because me and my college buddies hired a boat for an all-night boat ride to the tourist destination Mahabalipuram, about sixty km to the south; it was full-moon night. Subsequently the canal became a gutter and now a terrible one, “decorated” by a horrible slum on its banks. In addition, all sorts of establishments have come during the past fifty years. For example, the famed IIT Madras was carved out of the erstwhile Governor's Estate, mercifully preserving much of the forest landscape. On the other side, we have the College of Chemical Technology, the Leather Research Institute and so on. Many of this I was already familiar with back in the seventies and eighties but what made the scene totally unrecognisable now was the presence of many flyovers and an elevated railway, plus of course a whole new battery of houses and business establishments, shops and what not, all connected with the IT boom. It was all so very confusing that after a while I simply gave up trying to recognise familiar places. More confusing scenario after we crossed the Adyar River, over a bridge that was new. The bridge might have been new but there were still a few landmarks left that I could make out.

With His children, Always the Most Caring Mother

At last, we entered the road leading to Sundaram and even as we approached all the tell-tale signs were there to indicate that Swami had already arrived – big crowds, smiling faces and what not. Our convoy stopped near the building and we all got out but going inside Sundaram was a different matter; there was a big crowd, everyone in the crowd absorbed in having a glimpse of Bhagavan, who after so many years was once again giving Darshan from the balcony. We joined the devotees thronging outside not only to catch a glimpse of Swami from afar, but also for getting a feel for what it is like to have distant Darshan for a mere fleeting instant. That lesson was valuable, calling to mind a remark made many decades ago when Swami forecast that the day would come when He would be visible merely as an orange dot.

Aarathi was offered after which Bhagavan withdrew inside, and the volunteers at the gate woke up to our presence. The moment of mesmerisation having passed, suddenly, they became hyper active, making a corridor for us to enter. VIP treatment once again, and we were escorted inside upstairs, where Swami had sat down for some snacks. A glance at my watch told me that it was 3.20 pm, while lunch had been offered on board the aircraft [that many merrily tucked into], Swami, as always, did not touch even a glass of water. Having some idea of Swami's eating habits as I do, I was sure that even now Swami was hardly hungry; but then He always makes it a point to sit down at appointed hours for meals or snacks or whatever, so that those in His company would get their fill. He was now with a dozen boys, and He had to play the Divine Mother and feed them; and so it was that the “stuffing game” commenced with much tenderness around 3.30.

During the “tiffin-break”, Swami made enquiries as to who would stay where – all of us in Swami’s party were to stay right there in Sundaram so that we could be physically close to Him and be at His beck and call. Having made sure we would all be duly accommodated, Swami made a few enquiries about what would happen later in the evening, after which He withdrew; and so did we, going in search of our luggage and settling down wherever we were supposed to be parked.

Later in the evening, Swami came out, went into the temple premises in Sundaram to formally light a lamp marking the commencement of the proceedings related to the *Yajna* and then blessed the priests who would officiate during the *Yajna*. This team was more or less the same as the one that did such a terrific job earlier in Prashanti Nilayam, and Swami was so impressed with the Head Priest that He ordered that it was this priest who must be in charge again; a great tribute I would say, considering that Chennai was full of highly qualified priests with much experience in Vedic traditions.

After blessing the priests, Swami came out into the porch-cum-balcony at the lower Darshan and signalled for *Bhajans*. While the *Bhajans* were being sung, He sat there giving Darshan and the crowd gathered there had its fill. How long they in Chennai had waited – around ten years or so I guess; no wonder there was such a thirst. After *Bhajan*, it was dinner a bit later and Swami retired for the night, after making enquiries about the next day’s program. Meanwhile, Sundaram burst into a flood of wonderful lights and presented a heavenly appearance bathed in tastefully arranged floodlighting.

Magical Transformations made for the Yajna Site!

I thought the day was over but Mr. G. K. Raman said it was not; he insisted that Mr. Giri and I take a ride with him to the site of the *Yajna* or *Yajna-salai* as it was known in vernacular. So for the *Yajna-Salai* we left, and after a ride of about eight km or so, we arrived at the site, which presented a fairy-land appearance. And busy as bees in that fairy-land were thousands of volunteers, mostly young, who for the next ten days would not know what sleep is. For the next two hours, we had a grand tour of the site which literally took my breath away. Till then, like all parochial natives, I was under the impression that the *Yajna* at Puttaparthi was the ultimate and could never be surpassed; but drinking in the sights of this *Yajna-salai*, I knew even before commencement, that this *Yajna* was going to be a truly mega affair. I whispered into Mr. Giri’s ears that while our *Yajna* was a mofussil [rural] affair, this one would be of metro dimensions! And so it was as the next days proved. While the Puttaparthi *Yajna* did not in any sense lack spiritual grandeur or religious rigour, it was in terms of sheer scale that the Chennai *Yajna* earned for itself the glory of becoming a symbol of massive devotion and Himalayan effort.

To start with, the arena was huge, and in the middle of that vast arena was the area where the *Yajna* was to be performed. This main action area, if I might call it that, consisted of a spacious region reserved for the *Yajna* proper, and surrounding it on three sides was a vast space meant for seating

devotees attending the ceremonies. On the fourth side was an elevated stage, with a railing reminiscent of that in Prasanthi. In fact, the main *Yajna* space itself was almost of replica of what we had in Prasanthi, though perhaps somewhat bigger.

Though the site was an open ground, the main action area was a covered space, a huge shed but well done and completely open on the sides. While I was drinking in the scene with all its details, Mr. Raman kept up a non-stop commentary on not only the various features but also all that had been done to get the site into the state of readiness it was now in. Barely forty or so days earlier, this same site presented a very different picture – rough, uneven and full of water, thanks to days of incessant rain. When the planners arrived to survey and decide what was to be done, their heart sank; can we really get this place in shape, was the question uppermost in all minds. When the going gets tough and things seem almost impossible, there is only one way out – to pray, which of course they all did; did they have any other choice?

Prayers have a magical quality. It was the Lord who had Willed and declared that the next *Yajna* would take place in Chennai and He it was who had decided also on the date. So while the devotees of Chennai were presented with a Herculean task of Himalayan proportions, they were also blessed with the firm determination that springs forth when one knows that the Lord is there to help and guide [which was certainly the case here]. And so, as thousands toiled day and night, the whole site transformed into something that appeared to be straight out of Arabian Nights.

Mr. Giri and I were taken from one wonder to another. “Take a look at all these wonderful decorations,” I heard Mr. Raman say; “last week they all were not there, but now, it is a huge wow!” Mr. Raman went on, and then with the legitimate pride of one who has done his best for the Lord, he pointed out the numerous posters depicting the Glory of the Avatar of the Kali Age and the miracles of Love He is constantly performing. As I gazed at this exhibition in amazement, I was pleased to see many pictures that had featured in H2H and other publications we had done earlier. Seeing the smile on my face, Mr. Raman said, “Yes of course, we have taken many things from your earlier works!” and added, “We do not know a thing about display technology but all this was made possible because Swami brought to us Mr. Adimoolam, [a devotee and the Publisher of a large Tamil daily, that regularly featured and prominently too, the Sai Ganga project both during execution and after completion].”

State-of-the-art Arrangements!

Even as I was trying to absorb the details, Mr. Raman dragged us away to see other things such as the arrangements made for seating, the “inner and outer ring roads” made for Swami to move on giving Darshan to devotees seated, vast arrangements made to provide drinking water, the toilet facilities, and the special Media room. Here I must make a special mention of the facilities made for audio and video recording. For the *Yajna* at Prashanti, we had done a lot of planning for the video coverage, while the Mandir staff took

care of the audio part. Together, we ensured a detailed coverage and the end-results were quite good; I am proud of that. But what I saw here was breathtaking. Cameras everywhere, dollies, a special camera with robotic control placed on the stage to focus exclusively on Swami, TV monitors in every corner, a control room with internet connections, remote camera control, a mobile van and what have you. Seeing all this, I felt like a village boy being overwhelmed by skyscrapers!

Once more, Mr. Raman yanked us away, this time to show the special back stage arrangements. Of special interest were the facilities made for Swami's Porte car to drive right up to the stage, and for Swami's car chair to be taken to main stage. Thus the public would see Swami appear from behind a huge picture [of Swami of course] and take His place on the stage. The stage itself was huge with plenty of space, all of which later proved to be very useful [good thoughtful planning I would say]. And tucked away from public view was a small but well done room for Swami to retire and rest, in case He chose to do so. He could even meet and talk to people if He so chose.

Boy, have they left anything, I asked myself. And even as I was doing so, Mr. Raman once more pulled Mr. Giri and myself to give us a tour of the wonderful approach roads inside the arena, and then led us to the command headquarters. This was located in a building at one corner of the site, to one side of the main entrance. There stood here a building that at one time housed the bio-medical laboratory of a medical university that has since been moved to another location. This building, complete with air-conditioning, was the nerve centre of the entire operation. Located within it were not only rooms that served as offices for the people [including Mr. Raman] engaged with various administrative and management tasks, but also an elaborate store where flowers and various other consumables as well as perishable items needed for the *Yajna* were stored. Next to it was a computer centre that kept track of all activities, up to the minute. Naturally, there was a communication room as well. I can tell you that back in Prasanthi we did not have any of these facilities; but then that was because in a sense, Swami did all this without any aids, especially mechanical!

What about the priests? Right next to this "administrative block", separate quarters had been specially built to accommodate the entire crew of priests [most of who had participated in the earlier *Yajna* too]. Of course, they had their own mess facilities. As for the Head Priest, he had his own room.

Swami's Grace Conferred on Mr. Udayar too!

I should not forget to mention that amidst all these preparations, Swami had not been forgotten. At a secluded corner of the entire site, properly screened by walls and with a lot of green space around it, there stood a building to which Mr. Raman took us; this was to be Swami's residence at the *Yajna* site. He could reside there if He chose to, or rest there anytime He wanted. The building was complete in every sense of the term. There was a bed room, a bath room, a dining room, a kitchen, a lounge and what have you. And as a finishing touch, an Interview Room with an independent door was also

provided! Can you beat that? This facility was created with much love by Mr. Udayar, and it was a pity that Swami did not stay there; His schedule simply did not permit Him to. However, on the evening of the day before departure, Swami visited the building and spent some time there, conferring joy and Grace on Mr. Udayar.

No Devotee is Spared of Darshan!

This is not all. There is a road, almost a km long, which leads to the *Yajna* site. This is a public road, popularly called the 100 feet road [because of its width]. The Police had declared this road out of bounds for cars, except those having a valid car pass issued by the *Yajna* authorities. [In fact, during the early days when I would be seated with Mr. Raman and others waiting in Sundaram premises for the signal from upstairs that Swami has emerged from His room, I noticed how often Mr. Raman would be called on his mobile, with requests for passes!] This proved a great blessing for the devotees attending the *Yajna*. Among other things, it enabled devotees to throng on either side of the road and catch a glimpse of Bhagavan as He drove to or from the *Yajna* site. As we saw later, thousands were benefited by this dispensation from the Police. I should also not forget to mention the fabulous canteen on this road, run of course by Sai devotees and volunteers, offering food and snacks throughout the day, at incredibly subsidised prices. This too was an enormous boon to the thousands coming from afar. Altogether, the Madras *Yajna* had the scale of a Metro-*Yajna*, in all its aspects! That's all for this issue and more next time!

Jai Sai Ram.

H2H SPECIAL 2

HOW I BECAME FASCINATED WITH SAI

Part - 2

This is the transcript of the second part of the conversation between Dr. Keki Mistry, an eminent consultant orthodontist and a long standing devotee from Mumbai, and Prof. G Venkataraman aired on Radio Sai a few weeks ago. In the March issue we had the first part of this conversation.

The Fainting Doctor

Dr. Mistry: Swami used to call us, doctors, many times to talk to. One of the doctors was Dr Bhaskar Rao from Andhra Pradesh who He is still there. Then there is one who retired from cement factory and he was working here in the hospital. He was a very nice gentleman, well built, but I don't remember his name now. He used to go for an evening walk all the time. Suddenly one day we saw about 5-6 people. Swami said, "Come upstairs, call the doctors upstairs."

We all went in and Swami counted us, "1, 2, 3... Where is the fourth?" and raised His closed fist as if holding something. We thought he was referring to the doctor. We said he has gone for his evening walk. Swami chatted with us, started talking about life and how life is not permanent and suddenly, a volunteer came upstairs and told him something in Telugu.

Swami said, "Oh that doctor friend who used to come upstairs, he has fainted downstairs." Three of the doctors rushed downstairs, I kept sitting near Swami. Swami said, "You are not going?" I said, "Swami, first of all, I am with you and you haven't told us. Secondly I am not a medical man, I am a dental man. What could I do rushing down to see? Three of the doctors have gone. I am not going to go, unless Swami wanted me to go." Swami said, "See Mistry, life is a bubble. Any moment the bubble may burst."

Somebody came upstairs, Swami said, "Go downstairs". We took him to the hospital, all four of the doctors. And then all four of us carried him to the burial ground also. He had gone. Only later I realized the import of the indication that Swami made earlier with His gesture as if holding something. He was referring to the fact that there are four persons needed to carry the corpse. Dr. Bhaskar Rao realized and believed the indication. I didn't catch it at that time.

The Story of Patel

I have another story. Do you know the famous story of Patel? Patel is a Parsi gentleman, used to work for Noble Paints factory.

Patel married late in life and after about 3-4 years he wanted a baby. He got a baby girl. God gives children - he should not give children like this. This girl was born with a muscular problem, a spinal problem.

If I took a kerchief and dropped, the kerchief would collapse, the same way the girl if left out, will collapse at the age of 3, she was nothing. She couldn't move her eyes, she made some gurgling sounds. And that was it!

Somebody in Patel's office told him about Baba. He took a picture. He was a poor man, a salesman. He had spent a fortune on this girl. Nothing could be done. Somebody said, "Why don't you go and see Baba in South of India who is supposed to cure incurable diseases?"

So he went to his wife and she said, "This is all black magic, I don't believe in this kind of things, I am not going to go." But he was desperate, so he took a photograph of the child and went to Puttaparthi. He didn't know where it was, they took directions. He arrived in the afternoon in the days of the old *mandiram* (old Prasanthi temple). And Swami used to give *darshan* on the first floor. He saw Swami standing there and He made a wish: "If you really are a man of God, then you will help me with my child." He says, his eyes never met Swami's eyes. Swami went inside. Then He asked people what to do. They asked him to sit for darshan. "Swami comes out, He calls people for interviews. You may get your chance," they said. He sat and waited for the evening interview. That day, Swami comes out, walks towards him, but not looking at him at all. He picks a person to the front of him, he picks a person to the right of him, left of him, takes a person behind him, but leaves him and walks off. He was bewildered. After Swami went inside the interview room, he started talking. He asked other people and somebody said he has been here for one week, another said they have been here for 3 months. He became very nervous. He had taken only 10 days leave. Anyway, somebody said, "Morning there is another interview. Swami will come tomorrow". So he went back. Next day same thing happened. He tried every means to try to catch Swami's eyes, but Swami never looked at him. In the evening too, it was the same thing.

Something happened to him. This went on for 10 days. Something in him made him stay. He sent a telegram to his office, asking to extend his leave. "On the 14th day," he said, "an old gentleman comes out of the ashram and says Swami is now leaving Puttaparthi. All may go, all are blessed." He obviously got very upset.

"In the meantime, Mistry," he said to me later, "I saw people coming in cars, some minister coming and getting interviews, I thought to myself, 'Oh you see, (the usual thought), I am not a big shot so I am not being able to meet Baba.'" These kinds of thoughts were flooding his mind. And on the 14th day when only about 200 people were left in the ashram including them, somebody said, "Swami says all are blessed, all may go home." But he said, "I cannot go back home. I cannot face my wife." He had already fought with his wife to come here. So he went on the railway track and put himself down. "Some train will come, I will commit suicide." But in India sometimes trains run late, so he was lying there for quite some time. The train didn't come for a long time. Then as he was lying there, he started thinking, "Is it fair to leave my wife alone with the child? Am I taking the right step?" So many thoughts filled his mind.

Finally he got up and reached home, 18 days after he had left his house. It was an evening and as he opened his door, there was this girl whom he had left as a vegetable, sitting up, playing and when she saw the father whom he had not seen for 18 days, he said, "She got up, toddled towards him and said 'papa'. I put my bags down and cried. I just cried." I am not saying this child became completely normal. But this child could take care of itself; this child could put the shoe laces on, put the shoes on.

She is still alive and parents are not really willing for her name to be spoken, but I have seen the child. I am not saying she is fully alright, but what a blessing from being completely unable to take care of herself to attending to herself. She was now able to do her own things, going to the toilet, etc. She was not there with Swami. Swami had not even met this man. Swami had not even spoken to this man. This man didn't go to Baba with any faith except desperation and he did not have any belief in Baba.

Swami Helps Those Who Help Themselves

Prof. Venkatraman: I want to change the wavelength for a brief period. Because you must come again and again to tell us your abundant stories. This point I just want to ask you one important question.

We all know about Swami that He is the Divine in Human Form. Of course He comes to rescue us - help us in our movements of difficulty in crisis as you have described, and He has also come to give a very profound message. You come from the city of Mumbai. There people are so busy. They don't have time for anything including God. You have lived there all your life. Do you think Mumbai now has a population approaching that of Australia? Will it wake up to Swami? If it doesn't, it is going to be in trouble.

Remember 1999, when Swami came, all those people who spoke in Cooperage, "Swami help us, Swami Help us." How can Swami help when people don't help themselves?

Dr. Mistry: That is very true. God has always said that He is there. His grace is there. Swami has put it very simple and more direct. If there is a *laddoo* (a sweet delicacy) in front of you and you chant "Ram Ram Ram," *Laddoo* is not going to leave the plate and come into your mouth. You should take the hand, pick up the *laddoo* and eat it. This is very profound, the message that you must act.

We have always heard that God helps those who help themselves. I think Bombay has woken up. I think there is a profound change, there is a hunger, as man evolves more, in the other dimensions of life, in physical things, in his financial things, he suddenly realizes there is an element of life that is missing in him.

You know when a person like Bhagavan Baba comes forward I think people would awake. Because one of His messages is He has not come for these

miracles. These are actually his calling cards, as he said. Believe me they were necessary for some individuals, like me, to go to Him, though I would consider that I was not spiritually raw, but I had no acceptance. I really believed in my arrogance in my ignorance, not disrespectfully that all these things were spiritual crutches. That has not made India progress. I have come to eat my words.

Be a Blazing Beacon

I have come to realize that these are not crutches but beacons of light showing us the pathway. Let me answer you like this, when George Bernard Shaw, one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century, was addressing a group of students, he wanted to motivate them. He said to those students - and I have said this before - maybe you have heard me in Puttaparthi: "I do not want to live life as a tiny flickering flame of candle or a spark of a flame, but rather, as a blazing beacon to be held for a while and then to be passed on as a roaring flame." So one of the students got up and said, "Sir, then how do you propose to change the world?" George Bernard Shaw fixed his eyes at him and said, "Why sir, do you want to change the world? Change yourself and there will be one fool less in this world."

Now Swami has made it still better for us: Change yourself. Swami has told us very clearly that: "You are not one person, but three. The one you think you are, the one you really are and the one others think you are." And Swami has said pointing to us: "Change the one you really are." Not for the sake of the world, not to make a pose, not for anything else or anyone else. Change the one you really are, Swami has pinpointed it to us.

Swami has not missed a single opportunity to drive a lesson home. Once in Parthi, we were walking down and volunteers were making chapattis.

Swami asked, "Chapatti *banate hi?* (Are you making chapattis?)"

"Yes Swami!"

"Flatten out your egos while you are doing this."

He doesn't miss a single chance.

Over the years Swami has not missed a single opportunity to convey the message best. Once I said, "Swami you told us 40 years ago to take advantage. You told us at that time: 'enjoy because the time will come when Swami will not be available.' I didn't think that what you meant was just that you will make yourself physically unapproachable. Now Swami, you have successfully limited the approach of people. You have confined yourself to a vehicle.

"You, who have made people like us walk, are taking steps like a baby, like a child. You are confining yourself. Not everyone can reach you. At least, when You used to walk, people had a hope of touching Your robe, now even that hope is gone, unless You stop Your car, people can't talk to You. I didn't think You were meaning this, Swami! This is not the lesson that we want."

Then He said, "Why are you full of yourself? Why are you so much attached to the body?" I said, "Swami please, for all our sake! We don't need this kind of a lesson. He says, "We should not be attached to the body. I have spoken for last so many years. Now germinate. There is no need for Swami to give any more lessons. There is no need for Swami to give any more talks. There is no need for Swami to give anyone grace. It is now you, your chance to act. There are enough lessons flowing. All of you must imbibe it."

He Tells us how to Approach Him

Prof. Venkataraman: So do you think the youth of Mumbai will be able to absorb Swami's lessons and practice?

Dr Mistry: I think so, I am a teacher, and I am 70 years old. I have been in teaching for 45 years. I think the youth of the world today are a completely different breed. They think they are more intelligent, they are more aware, they are more up to the mark and they are quick to grasp things that we with our intelligence or fettered ideas were slow to accept. I think the youth of today is very willing and very open but they need to be channeled with the Grace of Bhagavan.

Because I have come to one conclusion. You can knock your head against the wall; unless your time comes, you do not accept. There I ask Bhagavan's Grace. That He will give them that blessing, that time that they will accept Him easier and they don't need to knock. It is a fact.

Previously the sages and saints had to perform so many practices before the avatar. Now Bhagavan is available to us. He gives us, even tells us, how to approach Him. We don't listen.

Many times when we were alone or together, or when a group of us used to be there, Swami used to sing, "Where is the real devotee? Where is My real devotee?" I have heard Him. Swami is actually crying for a real devotee. I have heard this with my own ears.

Out of the blue He will suddenly say, "Where is My real devotee?" I think that the grace is there. The youth is prepared. The youth are intelligent, clever, they are eager to grasp. I think our generation may not be that easy as the youth. I think this is true for every generation.

I remember the words of the famous Sufi poet Omar Khayyam. He says in his *Rubaiyat* (it has been totally wrongly interpreted in the west) which contains a wealth of spiritual meaning.

I remember reading the *Rubaiyat* when I was 14, periodically I have read it. These are the two verses - "The moving finger writes", which is very famous. If you permit me, I will say it:

*"There was a door, to which I found no key.
There was a veil past which I could not see.*

*Some little talk a while between me and Thee.
And then no more of me and Thee.*

*Then to the rolling heavens itself I cry.
Asking our lamp and destiny to guide
The ailing millions tumbling at Thy door
An understanding awareness, haven't replied."*

It is not an awareness, It is an *Understanding Awareness!*

Understanding of the Self; an understanding of who you are, an understanding of what the circumstance is; just being aware; an understanding awareness.

That what all of us need, that's why I am saying, some amount of Grace is always there.

So I tell you, when Swami asked me to become Trustee of the State Trust, I told Him, "Swami, doctors are notorious. They can't read their own balance sheet."

He listened to me for a minute or two. Then He says, "Do you know what ego you have got?"

"Swami, what happened?"

"Do you know what ego you have? All the time 'I can't do this I can't do this'. I am there in front of you. Why are you worried? I am asking you to be. Don't you think My Grace is sufficient?"

I said, "Swami, you have put in a donkey in a place to show the world it can be done. Is it ok?" We laughed.

Same thing when he made me chairman of the Bombay Committee. "Swami there are so many leading industrialists, so many big shots. How will they all listen to me?" I was a young man then, about 35 years ago.

He said the same thing: **"So much ego! You are not the chairman, I am the Chairman. You are only there."**

Swami says, "Do your best."

And I must tell you by His grace, everyone listened to me and I had a glorious time as a Chairman and even as a Trustee.

So Swami is there for the youth. The time will come when the youth grasps it. I think the youth are more spiritually hungry than before. You hear of drugs. This is all I think an expression of hunger. The directions are different. At the moment certain things click, you know. I am sure even in society, I hear

spirituality word used 300 times more. Now different people have different concepts.

As Tukaram said, when he used to give 4 *annas* (paisa) to somebody to have *darshan* of the Lord, people used to tell him, “Swami why are you giving money? That fellow is going around the corner and going to an arrack shop and having his bit.”

Tukkaram says as long as he is asking God, anyone who asks in the Holy Name, I don't give up on Humanity. Swami says, “ Ask, so that one day you will really ask for what I have come to give you!”

Prof. Venakataraman: I am very glad because you are very optimistic about the youth. It is 33 years since I have left Mumbai, and I have had only occasional contacts, we hear a lot about crime, Bollywood and so many things. But behind all this, it looks like there is a lot of hope and I will take your word because you have lived in that confusion and chaos.

Doctor Saheb, I must really thank you and say you created a great appetite in all of us and I am sure all our listeners. So you have a duty to keep coming again and again and tell us more and more from your bounty.

Dr Mistry: It is a blessing that you have asked me to come. It is sheer pleasure to talk about Bhagavan Baba.

Prof. Venakataraman: It is a greater pleasure to listen about Bhagavan Baba. Thank you so much! Sai Ram!

Dr Mistry: Sai Ram!

GET INSPIRED

LEARNING FROM LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln became the President of the United States in 1861. He was well known all over the country as a kind hearted gentle man and as a lover of truth and justice. Even as a child Abraham Lincoln liked to help and serve people in need. Before he became president, Lincoln spent twenty years as an unsuccessful Illinois lawyer - at least he was unsuccessful in financial terms. But he was very rich in the way he led his life. For example, Lincoln didn't like to charge people much who were as poor as he was. For example, an old woman in dire poverty, the widow of a Revolutionary soldier, was charged \$200 for getting her \$400 pension. Lincoln sued the pension agent and won the case for the old woman. He didn't charge her for his services and, in fact, paid her hotel bill and gave her money to buy a ticket home! He was known at times to convince his clients to settle their issue out of court, saving them a lot of money, and earning nothing for himself.

He and his associate once prevented a con man from gaining possession of a tract of land owned by a mentally ill girl. The case took fifteen minutes. Lincoln's associate came to divide up their fee, but Lincoln reprimanded him. His associate argued that the girl's brother had agreed on the fee ahead of time, and he was completely satisfied. "That may be," said Lincoln, "but that money comes out of the pocket of a poor, mentally-challenged girl; and I would rather starve than swindle her in this manner. You return half the money at least, or I'll not take a cent of it as my share."

Before he became a lawyer, Lincoln managed a country store. Late one night, when he counted his cash, he found that he had taken a few extra cents from a customer. He closed the store, and walked a long distance to return the money to the customer. At another time, he discovered that there had been a weight on the scales when he weighed out a package of tea for a woman the night before, thus giving her too little for her money. He weighed out what was due, and carried it to her, much to the surprise of the woman.

Lincoln had compassion for all living creatures. Once, while riding through the country with some other lawyers, Lincoln saw two young birds that the wind had blown out of their nest. He stopped to put them back in their nest. "I could not have slept unless I had restored those little birds to their mother," he said.

Once when he was president, he went out with his friends for his daily walk. While returning home, he saw behind him a horse with a saddle and no rider. Lincoln asked his friends if anyone knew whose horse it was and why it was roaming about in this strange condition. The friends suspected that the horse belonged to a person they knew. "He is a drunkard," they said, "and he must have fallen down somewhere on the road."

Lincoln suggested that they might all go back and search for him. "Why should we?" asked the friends. "It is getting dark. Let us hurry along. We are already late. Let the drunkard learn a lesson." They started moving on, but

Lincoln did not join them. He turned to go back, saying "I feel the man needs help. He might have fallen and even gotten badly injured."

As his friends walked away, Lincoln went back along the road and looked for the unfortunate man. After walking some distance, he saw the drunken man lying unconscious on the roadside. Lincoln helped him up with some difficulty and brought him home. Everyone in Lincoln's home were angry with him for bringing in a drunken man. But Lincoln did not mind their harsh words. He calmly told them, "Look, he may be drunk, but he is a human being like us. It is our duty to help him." Lincoln took the drunken man to the bathroom and put him under the shower of water. When he regained full consciousness, Lincoln served him food. Then he was allowed to go home.

Lincoln believed that service done with love to man is service to God. He was unhappy to see slavery. He therefore fought to end slavery. Many people afterwards said, "God in heaven and Lincoln on earth - we have only these two to look after us."

April 15 is the death anniversary day of this great soul; as we remember him on this day let us also get inspired by his life and instil self-confidence and compassion in our lives.

THE BAND OF GOLD

Let us all be wise builders and role models. Take care of yourself, ... and those you love, ... today, and everyday!

A school boy went to see his teacher to talk about a problem that was troubling him.

"Everyone says I am good for nothing," he complained. "No one believes that I will ever achieve everything. They think I am stupid and lazy. How can I become a better person? What do I have to do for people to appreciate me?"

Without looking at him, the teacher answered, "I'm very sorry, lad, but at the moment I have a problem of my own that is occupying my mind, so I can't help you." He paused and then continued, "But perhaps if you first help me to solve my own problem I could look at how to help you with yours."

"Of course, Sir," said the boy. But inside he felt let down and small.

The teacher took a gold ring off his little finger and held it up saying, "Take your horse and go to the market. There you must sell this ring for me as I need the money to repay a debt. Obviously you must get the best price you can, but whatever you do, don't accept less than one gold coin for it. Go, and come back with the money as fast as you can."

The boy took the ring and left. When he arrived at the market, he started to show it to the stallholders. They seemed very interested and were keen to know how much the young boy wanted for it. But when he started to talk about a gold coin, some of them fell about laughing while others just walked off without a backwards glance.

Only one old man was kind enough to explain to him that a gold coin was far too much to ask for an old ring. Trying to help the young boy, he offered him a bronze coin for it, and then a silver coin. But following the instructions of his teacher not to let it go for less than one gold coin, the boy refused all offers.

After having approached every stallholder and passer-by in the market without success, feeling extremely downhearted at his failure, he got back on his horse and returned to his teacher. How he wished that he had a gold coin himself that he could use to buy the ring, thus freeing the teacher of debt so that he in turn could help him with his own problem!

He went up to his teacher and said, "I'm sorry, Sir, but I have failed to achieve what you asked of me. I could have got two or three silver coins for it, but I believe that we can't mislead anyone about the value of this ring."

"What you say is very important," replied the professor with a smile. "First of all we have to find out the real value of this ring. Get back on your horse and

take it to the jeweller. Who else can know its value better than he? But whatever he offers you for it, don't sell it to him. Come back to me with my ring."

The boy went to find the jeweller and held out the ring to him for him to examine. The jeweller scrutinised it through his magnifying glass, weighed it, and said, "Tell your teacher that if he wants to sell it today I can only give him 58 gold coins for it."

"58 gold coins!" exclaimed the boy.

"Yes. And in a while I might be able to give him 70, but if it's an urgent sale..."

The boy ran back to his teacher in a state of excitement to relate what had happened.

"Sit down," said the teacher. After having listened to the child's story, he said, "You are like this band of gold; a unique jewel of immense value. But it takes a specialist to recognise your true worth. Did you think just anybody would be able to realise your value?" So saying, he put his ring back on his finger.

- *SSEHV Newsletter, February 2007*

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SUN

Some of us are born to be extroverts and make friends with any Tom, Dick or Harry that comes our way. Such people can talk to any person and smile at strangers with ease. That's the way Vineet's father was. But Vineet seemed to be poles apart from his Dad. He was fifteen years old and yet had no friends. He spent his holidays in front of his best friend: the computer. There were no phone calls from friends. There were no outings or movies. School work seemed to be such a bore. He just wanted to be by himself... always.

Time and again, father pushed his son to get out of his shell. Father would ask Vineet to meet his own friends and discuss 'work' with them. But Vineet would barely get past opening his mouth.

At school, Vineet would talk to his friends only when it was unavoidable. He was a little more expressive at school than at home.

One evening his father said, "Son, did you go to the gym, to talk to the instructor?" "No, Dad," came the careless reply; Vineet was busy racing cars on the computer. His lack of attention towards Dad was as usual a cause of tension and annoyance. Every evening when father returned home from work, he would ask Vineet, "So son, how many hours did you study today"? There would be an endless lecture on the do's and don'ts of life, on time management, on priorities in life, on future plans, etc.

But instead of understanding that father was genuinely concerned about his son's future, the boy would get irritated at what he felt was 'a daily lecture.' When Dad would start, he would think, 'here he goes again...' and promptly shut his ears.

Days and months went by. The same scene was enacted every evening. But the boy was as non-serious about his work or his personality development as ever. He was a couch potato housing an extremely intelligent brain!

One day the father met a wise man. He discussed the attitude of his son with him. The wise man smiled. He said, "Have you ever observed the Sun?"

"Yes, of course," said the father not quite understanding what the wise man was referring to. "The Sun, when it rises, gives its light from an angle. At noon time, it's right overhead. Soon it starts its descent. When the sun is overhead, your shadow is the shortest. As the sun moves away and gives light from a distance the shadows become longer. The sun does not stay overhead for a long period of time. Most of the time, it's shining on you, from afar."

"That's true," said the father, with a puzzled look on his face. The wise man went on to clarify. "You too need to be like the Sun. Don't boss over your son. Don't stand on his head, so much that he feels suffocated by the heat. Watch him from a distance. Give him your protection and warmth from a distance. Whenever he looks up, he should see that you are watching him and shining your love upon him. If you tower over him, his shadow shall be short. If you keep a distance, you shall see his shadow growing longer. Give him the space he needs, don't suffocate him. Let him think with his own mind. Don't think on his behalf."

Give the warmth of your presence to your children; don't give them so much heat that they sizzle and burn out.

Yes, perhaps too many of us are bossing over our kids. We are crippling their ability to think. We influence their thinking before they get an opportunity to think.

It's a good idea to emulate the Sun. If a father could emulate 'Like father, like SUN', eventually he may end up having a son he is proud of and shall be happy to say, 'Like father, like SON!'

Did you ever hear of a hot hug? No! But warm hugs from Dad's are very comforting!

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

As this is exam season in India we begin with two questions concerning students.

1. How many hours of sleep does Swami recommend students should have?

- A. Five to six hours.
- B. Six to seven hours.
- C. Seven to eight hours.
- D. Eight to nine hours.

2. What is Bhagavan's advice on answering exam paper questions?

- A. Start at the beginning and work through the questions in order.
- B. Answer the questions randomly.
- C. Start with the questions we feel are easiest.
- D. Begin with the hardest and finish those first.

3. Which religion uses the symbol of the six-pointed star?

- A. Zoroastrianism
- B. Judaism
- C. Shinto
- D. Jainism

4. In the Ramayana, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were ferried across the river in Chieftain Guha's territory by one of Guha's boatmen. When the divine ones attempted to give the boatman a fee - one of Sita's rings - what was his response?

- A. The boatman rudely asked for more.
- B. The boatman threw the ring into the river as a blessing to all waters.
- C. The boatman gratefully accepted the ring and began to sing in ecstasy.
- D. The boatman refused saying he did not wish for any fee.

5. In Islam what is a *nasheed*? A *nasheed* is –

- A. a traditional vocal song.
- B. the call to prayer.
- C. the veil worn by Muslim ladies.
- D. a recital of the Koran.

6. 2nd April is Hanuman Jayanthi, a festival day when we remember Hanuman's qualities. In the Ramayana, at one point Hanuman found that Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna had compiled a list which detailed their services to Lord Rama and that he was not included! How did Hanuman react to this situation?

- A. By threatening to leave Lord Rama.
- B. By becoming so small that he could always be with Lord Rama unnoticed.
- C. By inventing a new service that would enable him to be with Lord Rama always.
- D. By taking Lord Rama to be with him in the monkey kingdom.

7. Thursday 5th April is celebrated as *Maundy Thursday* in the Christian faith. It celebrates the occasion during the last week of Jesus' life when He washed the feet of His disciples. What does the term Maundy refer to?

- A. An alternative spelling for 'Mourning Day' over the death of Jesus.
- B. It commemorates the name of the owner of the house where Jesus was staying.
- C. Maundy was the name of the Pope who instituted the remembrance of this day in the Christian calendar.
- D. It comes from the first word in Latin (*Mandatum*) of a well-known phrase that Jesus spoke at this time.

8. One of the Nine Points in the Code of Conduct for the Sai Organisation directs us to attend devotional singing and prayer – how often are we encouraged to do so?

- A. At least once a week with family and also at the Sai Centre.
- B. At least once a week at the Sai Centre and once a month with family.
- C. At least once a week with family and once a month at the Sai Centre.
- D. At least twice a week with family and once a week at the Sai Centre.

9. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born on the 15th April 1469, in Nankana Sahib, near Lahore in present-day Pakistan. He lived for seventy years and preached his message of unity and love for all God's children. At his death he had attracted both Muslim and Hindu followers and while the Hindus wanted to cremate his body the Muslims wanted to bury it. What happened next?

- A. A storm arose and everyone left the scene – on return they found the body had disappeared.
- B. On lifting the cloth only flowers were found.
- C. A disciple got a dream to bury the body at a particular sacred spot.
- D. Guru Nanak's sons took the body to a secret location.

10. In Buddhism what does the term *Bodhisattva* refer to?

- A. The state of complete peace that the Buddha attained.
- B. Knowledge of the scriptures.
- C. The next Buddha who will incarnate to save humanity.
- D. Someone who vows to help all beings attain enlightenment.

ANSWERS

1B

Swami recommends students should have six to seven hours of sleep.

Swami advises the following:

It is not right to study all through the night. Beverages like tea and coffee may help you stay awake, but studying during the night will diminish your memory power. Boys of your age need seven to eight hours of sleep. Go to bed early. Think of what you have studied till you go to sleep. This is manana.

2C

Start with the questions we feel are easiest.

Bhagavan advises us that:

It is always better to pause a little and read the entire question paper and select the ones that you can tackle with confidence and write the answers for these in the beginning. This will give you a good stimulus to exercise your brains for answering the more difficult questions later.

3B

Judaism uses the symbol of the six-pointed star.

The six-pointed star is known as the Star of David or as the Magen David (the shield of David). It is supposed to represent the shape of King David's shield, a great king who ruled over the Jews approximately three thousand years ago. An account of his life can be found in the Bible, in the books of First Samuel, Second Samuel, First Kings and Second Kings. He is also credited with writing many of the Psalms, which are beautiful hymns of praise to God.

4D

The boatman refused saying he did not wish for any fee.

Swami describes this touching incident as follows:

They (Rama, Sita and Lakshmana) attempted to persuade him to accept the gift. But the boatman protested, saying, "If I accept fees for taking you across this tiny stream, tell me how much are you receiving as wages for taking generations of my line, and billions of my fellowmen across the vast and terrifying ocean of Samsara which involves all beings in the fast moving current of change. I am immersed in Bliss since I got this chance. Please do not bind me further by forcing me to accept wages for this lucky chance that

fell my way.” These words touched the heart of Rama. He felt that it would not be good to put pressure on him. Rama blessed him most liberally and allowed him to depart.

(Ramakatha Rasavahini I p,361)

5A

A *nasheed* is a traditional vocal song.

Traditionally, *nasheeds* are sung a cappella (voice only), accompanied only by a daf, a tambourine-like drum. This musical style is used because many Muslim scholars interpret Islam as prohibiting the use of musical instruments, except for some basic percussion.

6C

By inventing a new service that would enable him to be with Lord Rama.

Swami tells us about this amusing incident as follows.

Hanuman said, there was one service, which was left over and he requested that this be given to him. When kings or elders or wealthy people yawn, at that time it is customary to make a noise with the fingers in front of the mouth. Hanuman asked that this service be allotted to him. From that time, Hanuman insisted that wherever Rama went, whether it is in his bedroom or in the bathroom, Hanuman must be present. Thus he insisted, because one does not know when Rama will yawn. When Rama yawns, he should be present there. Thus, it so turned out that the little service which was left to Hanuman necessitated his continuous presence and made Hanuman stay close to Rama always. What we should see here is that in spite of all the attempts made by Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna not to leave any service for Hanuman, it is the sacredness of Hanuman that has resulted in his getting a service by which he can be with Rama at all times. No one can separate a real devotee from his Lord.

(Summer Showers in Brindavan 1977, chapter 11)

7D

It is the first word in Latin in a well-known phrase that Jesus spoke at this time.

The use of Latin Bibles in previous centuries was widespread and the word *Mandatum* gave the name Maundy to this day. The full phrase in English that Jesus spoke at the time of washing the disciples feet was: “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you”

(Gospel of John 13:34)

8C

We are encouraged to attend bhajans, Nagasankeertan and prayer sessions at least once a week with family at home and once a month at the Centre of the Sai Organization.

9B

On lifting the cloth only flowers were found.

On raising the cloth under which the Guru's body lay, some fresh flowers were found which were shared between his followers. The Hindus cremated their flowers whereas the Muslims buried theirs.

10D

Someone who vows to help all beings attain enlightenment.

A Bodhisattva vows to aid all beings on their quest for full enlightenment. The Bodhisattva attempts to achieve Buddhahood as quickly as possible so he can teach Dharma until all beings have achieved enlightenment.

QUIZ ON HEART2HEART

1. In this issue of H2H we carry the wonderful work of the Sai doctors in Russia. In our October 2005 edition we informed you about another medical camp held in the mountains of Nepal, again guided by Dr. Upadhya. He related how at one point the gathering of patients became unnerved by the sight of a man who came to the camp for treatment. Why were the people disturbed by the man? Because -

- A. the man had leprosy.
- B. the man was holding a machine gun.
- C. the man was a notorious drunkard.
- D. the man was shouting that an avalanche had just killed many people.

2.

Last issue we had the fascinating account of the experiences of renowned Santoor maestro, Pandit Shiva Kumar Sharma. He related how at one time he had been invited to play at Bhagavan's 65th birthday concert. He was billed to play after Bhagavan's divine discourse, and was worried that everyone would leave before his concert. What comment did Bhagavan make about his concert during His discourse?

- A. "If you want to experience divinity, listen to his music, do not go."
- B. "As you leave, enjoy the maestro's playing."
- C. "Instead of bhajans, here is some Santoor music."
- D. "We are very fortunate to have Pandit Shiva Kumar Sharma play for us now."

3. In our June 2005 cover story, *The Gift of Life*, we told you breathtaking tales of how Swami had raised people from the dead. One concerned a Mr. Radhakrishna who was seemingly dead for three days when Swami then allowed him to 'come back'. What was the divinely given reason for this resurrection that Swami told the family?

- a. The man had to pay back more karma in this lifetime.
- b. Mr. Radhakrishnan had prayed to Swami to extend his life.
- c. His wife had prayed to Swami to extend his life.
- d. Swami's compassion alone had prompted the event.

4. In our November 2005 issue we carried the article, *Golden Memories of a Bygone Era: Conversation With The Venkatagiri Rajah's Son*. The Rajah's son told us about driving Swami from Puttaparthi to Venkatagiri during which time he had been asked to send his father telegrams detailing the progress of the journey so that a reception for Swami could be arranged. However, Swami told the son not to send the telegrams. On reaching home, what did the son find on apologizing to his father for not sending the telegrams.

- a. His father was most angry and threatened to throw him out, but Swami pacified him.
- b. All the telegrams were mysteriously with his father.
- c. His father said that an unknown man had come to tell him that Swami's car was approaching and to get the reception ready.
- d. All the elephants had started trumpeting heralding Swami's arrival.

5. In our January 2005 cover story *Bandmaster Divine* we informed you about Swami's nurturing of the Institute Brass Band, over the many years of its existence. Swami would often come and inspect the band and encourage their practice sessions. On one occasion, Swami reprimanded a boy who had lost his drum stick. Where was the stick eventually found?

- a. Sai Gita had taken it and was holding it in her trunk.
- b. Swami was hiding it behind His back.
- c. Swami had hidden it in His car.
- d. Swami had materialized it inside the drum.

ANSWERS

1A

The man had leprosy.

When you read our article you will be amazed at the sequence of events that leads to a family reunion for the man and also the care that he receives from the medical team.

2A

"If you want to experience divinity listen to his music, do not go."

Let us read how Pandit Sharma describes this episode:

It was first Baba's Discourse and then my Santoor recital. I was very worried, thinking that after Baba's discourse, who would stay there for my programme? After the discourse, suddenly Baba said, "Now Shiv Kumar Sharma will play Santoor, and he is a longtime devotee of Swami. So, if you want to experience divinity listen to his music, don't go." I was completely overwhelmed and tears started flowing from my eyes. I could not take it. I was unable to get up or move. I could not believe my ears, for in all these years Baba had never called me by my name.

3C

His wife had prayed to Swami to extend his life.

We can read the reason in the following account from the article:

*Swami reminded them how, four or five years ago, Mrs. Radhakrishna once had told Him, "Swami, in my husband's family, all his brothers died in their sixtieth year. Kindly save my husband." And how Swami had promised her then that He would save her husband. Swami then turned toward Mrs. Radhakrishna and said, **"You have forgotten that conversation. But I have not. Today, I have given the gift of life to your husband."** Then Swami*

placed His hand on Mrs. Radhakrishna's head, blessed the whole family and left the room.

4B

All the telegrams were mysteriously with his father.

5B

Swami had it all the time behind His back.

The account of this amusing incident follows:

A small drama unfolded when the drummer rushed back after hearing that Bhagawan had come. He could find only one stick. He searched frantically for the other stick, all over. Only some of us had noticed Swami pick up the stick. But Swami gestured to us with a smile to keep mum. Swami held the stick behind His back and asked us to begin playing. Band marches usually begin with a crisp drum roll, so we were waiting for the drummer and the poor chap could not begin simply because he could not find the second stick! He was embarrassed and feared that Swami and us boys would be upset with him for the delay. In fact, he thought that Swami, who was so busy, would leave and we would lose this chance to perform before Him. Just when he was at his wit's end, Swami innocently turned to this student, pulled the stick from behind His back, and asked, "Hey, is this what you are searching for?" We all burst out laughing!

THE HEALING TOUCH

FROM LIFELESS EXISTENCE TO A LIVING INSPIRATION.... THE RIVETING STORY OF GEORGE MELKAY

A Smooth Path to Prosperity

“It was a golden opportunity for me.” A blooming smile suddenly sported on his bespectacled face, as Mr. George Melkay recalled the rewarding job that came his way exactly three decades ago in 1977. It was the first time he was leaving the shores of India to Bahrain, the borderless island country in the Persian Gulf. And he was excited about it. Life could not have been better - at least it seemed so at that time. A chance to work in Bahrain Airport Service immediately after graduation in those days meant a sure route to prosperity. He knew about this very well as many of his relatives and countrymen stood as live testimonies. They had all taken this silken route and within a short span of time had become affluent.

In fact, even today it is common to find many skilled and semi-skilled Keralites in the middle-east chasing their ‘Gulf Dream’. It all started in the early seventies when the oil exporting countries of the Middle East experienced a rapid economic boom with the hike in oil prices in 1973. And from then on, labour outflows from India, especially from the state of Kerala, has only increased. What started as a mere 4,000 in 1976 rose to 2.76 lakhs in 1981 and now in these petrodollar-flush Middle East nations there are a staggering 18.4 lakhs Keralites! It will be also interesting to note that as on March 2006, remittances from Non Resident Keralites constituted nearly 40% of the deposits of the state of Kerala. And this emigration to these rich Islamic nations happens from across all communities. In fact, apart from a good number of Muslims, the majority of the expatriates in the Gulf are Hindus and even then, just as now, they also constitute a considerable number of Kerala Christians, just like Mr. Melkay.

The Road Leads to a Precipice

So, back in the seventies, with a flourishing career, many *Malayali* (Kerala natives) friends and his marriage which happened in the early eighties, George Melkay was a contented man with nothing to complain of...until life suddenly took a decisive turn in 1990. After enjoying perfect health for over a decade, he was down with a high temperature. But this viral fever was no ordinary malady, it was adamant and elusive. George was hospitalized in the American Mission Hospital, a century old private hospital in Bahrain’s capital city, Manama. Two weeks went by but there was no conclusive diagnosis. In desperate search for a cure, he then moved to the primary public hospital of Bahrain, the Salmania Hospital. Fifty days passed in the bed of this government hospital, still no doctor could precisely pinpoint his problem.

It was devastating for George, to say the least, for, all his dreams were now slowly turning to dust as he saw his years of savings gradually dissipate

away. The worst part was he was still not diagnosed, let alone receiving the necessary treatment. He was now scared. What could his disease be? What will it mean to get treated? Will it be curable at all?

On the fifty fourth day of his stay in the Salmania Hospital, thanks to an Irish lady doctor, George did get a confirmed diagnosis for his prolonged sickness. But he did not know whether to cry or smile. While on one hand, he was happy that after months of inconclusiveness and guessing, finally there was an unambiguous verdict; on the other hand, the diagnosis was daunting and dreadful.

From Pillar to Post, With Little Hope

“Both your heart valves – mitral and aortic – are completely damaged,” the doctor confided. “If you want to survive, go back to India and get a double-valve replacement done in a super specialty hospital - the sooner, the better.”

The doctor’s advice was clear. George now had no choice. He was in India on the next available flight. Such was the cruel twist of fate in his life that years ago he had gone to the ‘land of plenty’ empty-handed with his mind full of big dreams, and now, after putting in thirteen long years of service, he returned almost empty. Two and half months in Bahrain’s premier hospitals had set him back by several years.

After returning to his native village in the Calicut district of Kerala, George looked out for the nearest super specialty hospital. But, unlike today, in the early nineties the state of Kerala had very few premier hospitals offering quality tertiary care. His search took him to the largest city of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram (also called as Trivandrum), which is also the state’s capital. It was no less than a 12 hour bus ride from his village, and after a tiresome journey George, accompanied by his cousin brother, Baby, landed in the Sree Chitra Thirunal Institute of Medical Sciences and Technology. But the doctor there did little to enthuse his drooping heart. “It is a high risk case and you will have to wait” is all the doctor would say, apart from the fact that it was going to cost a fortune.

George returned to his village, disheartened. But his friends and well-wishers comforted him. “Do not worry. Take a second opinion,” everyone said. And George again set forth to Trivandrum. This time to Sri Avittom Thirunal Hospital, one of the premier specialty hospitals of Kerala, started more than 50 years ago catering to nearly 50,000 in-patients every year. The doctors here confirmed the diagnosis. “You must get operated soon,” said Dr. Jay Krishnan, an eminent Cardio Thoracic Surgeon. “But it cannot be done here,” he added. “It is better you go to Madras (now Chennai) and get it done at Madras Medical Mission Hospital or at the Apollo Hospital.”

Two and half months of hospitalization, kilometers of strenuous travel, four hospitals and dozens of consultations later, George was still clueless. Life had become a hopeless journey. As a last attempt, he went to Madras. The doctors in the Madras Medical Mission Hospital, which was known for its

finest super-specialty cardiac care, were ready to perform the operation. “You will need a double valve replacement surgery,” they said unambiguously. “But it is very expensive, at least one and a half lakh rupees!” Completely crestfallen, George gave up all hopes of any possible treatment. It was impossible for him to even think of such a huge amount (mind you, 150,000 rupees in 1990 would mean at least Rs. 400,000 now). The last few months in Bahrain had reduced him to a pauper. And it was not only the big money, the hospital also told him to arrange fifteen people who would donate blood for cross-matching, with instructions that they should be from his native village and not from the city of Madras, to be safe from HIV and other infections. Moreover, “It is a high-risk surgery,” the doctors cautioned.

Gloom and Doom, and Then...Divine Grace

It was George’s darkest hour. After months of struggle, he had found the panacea he was looking for, but it was completely beyond his reach. With no sign of hope and no doors open, George had begun to accept his cruel destiny. In fact, he reasoned the flip side of the sad circumstance and thought to himself, “I do not even know, if in case I get operated after begging and borrowing the amount, whether I will survive. What if I do not make it through? How is my wife with two little children going to manage the huge debt burden? I am not going to allow this.” Helpless George had decided and completely reconciled to his ruthless fate. “At least now for whatever years I am there, the children have a father,” he said to himself and returned home. Gloom and doom – that was where his life was headed; at least that was what it certainly looked like then. Little did he know then that, the ‘blackest’ period of his life he was going through, was in fact, the most blessed, for, it was during this time that God chose to make His presence felt. And from then on started one of the most beautiful periods of his life filled with exciting encounters, ecstatic experiences and blissful benedictions.

It was after he returned completely distraught from Madras that George met Mr. K P Aravindakshan; one of the seniors from his school and a Sai devotee, it was this concerned friend who first shared the good news. “Do you know Sai Baba has a Super Specialty Hospital in Puttaparthi which is completely free?” he asked George. Now, ‘Sai Baba’ was not completely new to George. Back in Bahrain, he had occasionally visited the Sai centre, but that was not because he believed in the divinity of Baba, but to give company to his friend, Sri Surendra, who was a Sai devotee. Besides, he enjoyed the ‘Bhajans, beautiful songs and the nice prasadam’ he confides now. But ‘Sai Baba’, at that time for him, was far from anything divine. He was more of a ‘magician’ than anything else.

Greatly influenced in his college days by the books of Mr. Bertrand Russell, a twentieth century British atheist-philosopher and rationalist, George, like many of his college mates, had turned into an atheist early in his life. Believing an ‘orange-clad South Indian saint’ as God in human form was completely out of question. Nevertheless, the news of a “free Super Specialty Hospital” was too alluring to let it go. If it really existed, he felt, that would mean the end of all his problems. He trusted his friend’s word and agreed to make the trip.

In January 1993, George, accompanied by Aravindakshan, set foot for the first time in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Puttaparthi. After conducting all the diagnostic tests and detailed consultation, the doctor confirmed that he needed a valve replacement, and that it will be done free, but he will have to wait for a year or two till he receives the invitation letter from the Hospital. This did dampen his spirits for a few moments but still George was much happier. In fact, he had not been in such a positive and pleasant state of mind for three years. Intuitively, he felt, all was not over with his life. He knew now he had hope - lots of it.

And the surgery apart, George was simply overwhelmed with the Hospital, its ambience and philosophy. **“I could not believe this Hospital was giving free treatment!” he says, his eyes lighting up instantaneously. “I had seen so many hospitals in Bahrain and this was much more sophisticated, neat, tidy, modern and more importantly, the atmosphere was so serene. Such a Hospital giving free treatment...it was out of the world! Immediately I fell in love with it,”** he recalls, but this experience also had an interesting fallout.

Mesmerized by the Lord’s Love

So impressed he was with the Hospital that he says, “Now, I wanted to see Sai Baba”. At that time, Baba was not in Puttaparthi, but in His ashram at Whitefield, Bangalore. George took a bus to Bangalore, but unfortunately could not reach the ashram and see Bhagavan as the transport operators during that period were on a strike. He was disheartened, but only momentarily. He returned home but as days passed by, his desire to see Bhagavan only became more intense. And later that year when some Sai devotees were leaving to Bangalore to celebrate the Kerala festival of Onam in the Divine Presence, George enthusiastically joined the party. And as if to compensate for the darshan missed in January, on the second day of his arrival at the ashram, George was lucky to find himself in the first line waiting for His darshan.

He had a letter, neatly written and carefully held in his hand, just in case he had an opportunity to hand it over to. As the darshan music started and George saw Swami, he was filled with happiness. **Not only that, he saw Swami coming towards the row in which he was sitting. His excitement only grew every second. Finally when Swami came near him, George says, “I began to cry! I do not know what happened. It was such an overwhelming experience!”** The compassionate Lord lovingly stood near him, took his letter, allowed him to touch His feet, and as George bent down to offer his obeisance, blessed him profusely. **This tremendous outpouring of pure love was too overpowering for the first-time visitor. “I was crying for nearly half an hour!”** George says recalling that unforgettable first encounter.

George then stayed in the Brindavan ashram for three days basking in His blissful darshan, before he returned to his village along with other devotees

after the conclusion of the festival. But his mind was filled with moving memories of those three days. His illness had in fact, gone into the background. And then something wonderful happened. It was just one week since he had returned and Swami, appearing in his dream, said, "There is nothing to worry. I am here. I will take care of you." Ecstatic, George wanted to interact with Swami more but just then his daughter, who was a two and half years baby then, cried and his dream instantly disappeared. Nevertheless, the 'dream assurance' of Swami had made George euphoric. He immediately woke his wife and said, "My Swami was here! He told me there is nothing to worry." But his wife, a staunch Christian who had little faith in Baba, just brushed the whole experience aside, and even talked lightly of the whole episode. "Oh! You probably did not read the Bible properly. You are always thinking of that Swami. Look here, nothing has happened. You must start making arrangements now to get the operation done in Madras."

The Lord Wins His Wife's Heart Too!

George did not know how to convince his wife about the truth of his Baba dream. He tried once or twice, but his wife was never receptive, she remained a skeptic. But suddenly on the third day after his dream, all this changed. Swami came to his rescue by appearing in his wife's dream too! It was life-changing experience for her. "From here on," she said, "I will not say anything about Swami." In fact, she was scared to even think or utter anything against Swami now.

By now, George had become a Sai devotee. The dream had instilled enough faith. He, in fact, now wanted to come to Puttaparthi to serve as a sevadal volunteer. When his friend Aravindakshan asked him in January 1994, if he would like to join the volunteer-group going to Puttaparthi, George grabbed the opportunity. But he had his own apprehensions about him being a Christian and if he will be allowed to serve, etc., but once he reached Puttaparthi, he realized all his fears were completely unfounded. Interestingly, he was allotted duty at the Super Specialty Hospital.

Divine Assurance Like No Other

It was a one week service opportunity and in those days on the conclusion of each batch's service, Swami would bless every volunteer with *padanamaskar* (chance to touch His feet) and Vibhuti prasadam. So on the eight day, which fell on February 1st, George along with other Kerala volunteers, waited for this unique chance. When Swami came that morning, He started walking slowly along the path made by the volunteers between them, and as He slowly moved along, He spoke to someone, smiled at the other, took a letter from the third, created Vibhuti for the fourth, and so on. **When He came near, George immediately went on his knees and tried to touch His feet, and the loving Swami kept both His hands on his shoulders and even before he could say much, the all-knowing one Himself spoke in George's native tongue (which was a mix of Malayalam and Tamil) and said, "Why are you afraid? You will be operated here! Nothing will happen to you," and walked away.**

George could understand every syllable that Swami had uttered and his happiness knew no bounds. His friends and other devotees congratulated and comforted him. They even went to the extent of saying that perhaps there is no need for the operation at all. "Swami will take care of everything," they said. Whatever be the case, George reached home with his heart brimming with joy.

It was twenty days after returning and now there was a telegram from Puttaparthi. 'Start immediately for observation and treatment, and if necessary, surgery' - the message from Swami's Hospital read. And exactly at the same time, George received another post. This was an envelope from Trivandrum sent by a sevadal-friend whom he had developed an acquaintance with while serving at the Super Specialty Hospital in January that year. When he opened the cover, George was thrilled! It was a photo of Swami blessing him! Somebody had taken a snap when he was kneeling after touching His Feet and the loving Lord was comforting him. And this friend from Trivandrum had apparently found this picture in a photo studio before he left Puttaparthi and so thoughtfully had bought it. But the most amazing aspect of this episode was that both these letters had arrived on the same day, at the same time!

George needed no more proof of His omniscient grace. His wife too, who was always worried about the high-risk nature of the surgery, felt more secure. The next day George started for Puttaparthi along with his father. His admission and double valve replacement surgery performed at the hospital on March 14, 1994, was completely uneventful. Recalling his in-patient days at the Hospital, an excited and happy George says, "I did not feel like it was a Hospital at all. The nurses and doctors were just like family members to me. The food was so good too. I have stayed in so many hospitals before – in India and Bahrain – but here, it was such a wonderful experience. Imagine everything best being offered to you completely free and with so much love. I did not realize how thirty days passed so quickly."

"As long as there is breath in this body, I will serve in this Hospital." - George Melkay

Not only the surgery, George was also given free medicines (to be replenished every six-months by the Hospital) which he had to take regularly to keep his new heart in perfect order. So overwhelmed was George with the care he received at the Hospital and grateful to Swami for all the love He bestowed on him at his hour of great need that immediately after he was discharged from the Hospital, he made an oath: **"As long as there is breath in this body, I will serve in this Hospital at every available opportunity."**

And true to his resolve, George Melkay has been serving at the Hospital traveling from Kerala twice every year continuously for the last fourteen years. When H2H saw him recently, it was his twenty-fifth hospital duty. Apart from these two trips to serve at the Hospital (which is usually in January and July every year for a period of seven or fourteen days), George also visits

Puttaparthi regularly for Swami's Birthday and the Kerala festival of Onam. So in all, it is at least four visits per year. Puttaparthi, for George, has become his second home. Though he may not have had many opportunities to interact with Swami physically, George knows fully well that Swami is taking care of him every moment. When his son secured admission into the XI class in Swami's school at Puttaparthi in 2000, Swami had answered another heartfelt prayer of George. He was now more convinced than ever that 'If one does God's work with sincerity and dedication, He does our work.'

A Heart Renewed, A Life Transformed

Today, George is a living inspiration to all the sevadal volunteers of Kerala. Ask him how his life has changed after coming to Swami and he says, **"Oh my God! My life has changed completely. Earlier I was an atheist, later I studied the Bible, but I could never believe or accept the Hindu way. But now wherever I go, be it a temple or a mosque or a church, I have the same feeling. Previously, I thought these statues had no power, but now I have had experiences which have completely transformed me! To me, now, Almighty God is One – no matter whatever be the religion. And as Swami says, 'If you are Christian, be a better Christian; a Hindu, a better Hindu; a Muslim, a better Muslim'. This message is important to me. Swami has taught me that love is God, that I should always help ever and hurt never. And this is precisely what I have been trying to practise in the last fourteen years."**

The Hospital may have replaced his heart-values but it is Swami and His love which has added real value to his life. "Swami has given me a re-birth," says Goerge Melkay, his face serene with gratitude to the Lord. "All I want is the chance to serve at His feet while this body exists."

This is the story of just one patient-turned-sevadal of the Super Specialty Hospital and we know for sure there are any numbers of such volunteers working silently in the Hospital. In fact, it is these 'unsung heroes' who are the real torch-bearers of His mission.

YOUR SAY

Feedback on the Cover Story

Sai Ram,

The cover story was excellent. Thanks much. I was there in person and your article brought me back there again!

Love
S.Krishnaswami

Feedback on the Article: Tsumani Of Love

Sairam and pranams at the lotus Feet.
I read the article and I was witness to the wonderful experience in Chennai. Swami showed the world how much He loves His devotees and also the whole humanity. We are all blessed by His visit to Chennai. When He was here we had no other thought except to attend the yagna somehow and everything else was unimportant. When He left Chennai we felt as though our closest relative had gone away and we all missed Him and we still miss HIM!
Thanks for the article. Sairam.

Feedback on the article "What to Ask From Swami?"

Dear Heart2Heart team,

Thank you for publishing the transcript of this brilliant and profound talk. It was most incisive and illuminating. The various scriptural quotations helped immensely as well, to illustrate the point that we often do not know what true happiness is - we look for it in the world while God waits until we are ready to seek it from its true Source! One of Swami's analogies fits here - that of the camel chewing the thorn-bushes, enjoying the taste of its own blood, and thinking that the thorn-bushes are responsible! We are much like that camel, thinking that external things give or remove our happiness, when truly, we are responsible for that! Thank you for this incredible article.

Ellesha Wanigasekera
Toronto, Canada

Feedback to the Article: Gita for Children

Sairam,

The writings of 'GITA FOR CHILDREN', with all its beautiful pictures and simplicity in language is commendable. Is it published in the form of a book and available for purchase, if so please do let us know about the same. Thanking you, Jai sairam.

Dr. GVS Murthy, Jamshedpur.

[Dear Mr. Murthy, all these articles are available in the book entitled "Krishna Arjuna Dialogue" sold in the Books and Publications Trust, Prasanthi Nilayam].

Feedback to the Sunday Special of March 11: Does Anyone Care?

Sir,

I am prompted to write this letter in response to your Sunday Special dated March 11, 2007. You have rightly highlighted the fall of values in our public life, especially in our elected house and how nobody seems to be bothered about it and instead are misled by the poor quality of our media dishing out trivia. You have also pointed out the frightful scenario of our educational system which is focused on imparting 'knowledge' to the near total exclusion of skills and values into our younger generation and how it contributes to the present national scenario of falling values and how it forebodes even graver implications for the future.

Fortunately we have our Swami who has been preparing us - His devotees, His students - to face the unfolding dismal scenario and has been equipping us with the skill and the wisdom to counter the situation. I am reminded of my article, written by Swami's Grace, titled - 'What is progress?' published in Sept. 2005 of Heart2Heart, proposing a mechanism to counter this situation. I pray to Swami that he blesses the concept so that it can be improved upon, if needed, and is made into a reality.

Yours Truly,
P.Vijayaraghavan
Chennai

Dear H2H team,

Thank you so much for all the wonderful articles and Swami's messages. I do read, enjoy and try to practice them. I do agree that values are very essential for us and they need to be taught at a young age. Today's curriculum needs to incorporate classes for ethical values and vocational skills.

I would like to see even meditation included in the curriculum. If the kids are taught from childhood, they would imbibe the values which helps them to become fine human beings. I will pray to Swami that He extend His system of teaching to all schools in all parts of India.

In my childhood I attended a primary school run by a Sai devotee called Sai Grace Primary school. I really liked the classes we had for moral values, bhajans, sloka recitals and story telling (which included various panchatantra tales and epic stories containing values). I hope and pray that at least some schools adopt this into their curriculum.

Thanks again for all the great articles, Regards, Sobha Gottipati

Sairam,

I agree that we have stopped listening fully, our concentration has been lost or should I say our lack of commitment to this great cause is missing. I am very worried about myself and my progress and the future of my children because of my progress in developing myself in the way that I should.

Swami has been screaming, appearing in our dreams, in our daily lives each and every day, yet our blindness and short sightedness is preventing us from seeing Him. Yes, He is there, every single moment; if we look at all the things happening around us and for us. Swami is making it happen just for us to recognize ourselves/God within these things. Daily life and all that happens around us is part of our spirituality. Seeing the everyday events in the right light and living life in the right way with everything that is happening around us is seeing "through what is happening".

I learnt this idea of seeing through things to the end or final goal which is only God, which is our only destination. We should keep our hands focused on the daily actions and work in God's workshop, but keep our mind looking through the suffering and pain, joy and successes to the eventual and final goal.

If I do not change, I cannot ask of anyone else to change, hence, I commit to changing myself from inside out before I can try to change the world. Swami by your Grace, may I succeed in this endeavour.

Jai Sai Ram, Nerven Maistry

Dear Editor, Sairam.

In these troubled times, the importance of value-based education propounded by Swami can't be over-emphasized. However, more than anything else, in my personal opinion, we also need to instill and reinforce similar teachings in the adults as well, more particularly the parents of the target audience, i.e. the impressionable youngsters. Moral living in our homes will help build stronger values in the children and will make the task of the gurus so much easier, as the young minds will be able to relate better to whatever is imparted in the Bal Vikas / EHV classes. Above all, we do need to stress the point that in the present-day context, a commercially successful existence has its role to play in our lives, however, not to the exclusion of higher values that can yield higher satisfaction and better harmony among people.

Mr. Ajit Kini, Abu Dhabi.

Sai Ram,

Thank you for this very important editor's article of today. It is a great pity that mother Bharat is also ailing from the same evils as the West suffers from. As to education: as a young boy I was trained vocationally as a carpenter. In those days we had value-oriented lessons in between the vocational training, the school being a Roman Catholic school. Nowadays we don't find this anymore. We should pray to Swami to set up a next generation of educational institutions, especially for vocational and professional training at different levels, interspersed with SSEHV.

Mr. Hein Vink, The Hague, Holland

Sairam,

I am very happy to see the article which agrees with my thoughts. For this same reason, I wonder how people spend hours together absolutely immersed in reading a paper every morning without fail. When I pick up the paper, I do not find anything worth reading. It's absolute junk.

Today, all the sources of entertainment are full of vulgarity, polluting the minds from a very tender age. A healthy home environment where children are taught to live an idealistic life showing basic common sense and human values is very much lacking today. Parents seem to grow in age - but maturity and responsibility towards family and society is lacking in them. Hence, the expectation that they will teach their children the way to live life is out of question. This is one of the reasons too why children do not respect them.

They do not find any love in the relationships, a sense of finishing one's duty by hook or crook is what is seen today, no matter whether one is harmed or hurt by the act. The literacy percentage in the country is increasing; men and women are seen in the rat race for name, fame, and money. Everybody around is highly educated, trying their level best to earn as much money as possible. I wonder where the rat race will end up and where people will land upon reaching the finishing line. In fact, it is then that one will realize that the finishing line that appeared so beautiful from distance, doesn't exist in real. It's all an illusion of the mind.

Ms. Jaya.

Sai Ram

Thanks for your recent articles which reiterate the value systems that need to be nourished and safeguarded amongst our growing numbers of Indian youth.

I am in full agreement that both newspapers and TV are responsible for the degradation of our youth. As you very rightly remarked, newspapers report sensational things about actors and actresses - their dressing, etc and the TV shows serials which are eroding the moral values of our children. None of the serials have values attached to it, they show splitting of families, love and sex,

divorces, violence, acts of terrorism which the children absorb and imbibe. Unless government takes strict measures to stop this press and newspaper menace, we will lose our children and the youth to this evil demon.

Thanks once again for coming out with these articles and it is my sincere hope that by reading this people would do all within their means to bring sanity to our rich culture and heritage.

Sai Ram, L V Subramanian

Feedback to the Sunday Special March 18: Game of Love & Unity

Dear H2H Team

Sai Ram to all of you!

The article on the 'The Game of Love and Unity' is excellent. Even the best of scholars (from my point of view) would not have compiled such an article. Everything written is very true. Thank you and waiting eagerly to read many more.

Ms. Ranjani Silva, Australia