

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Come December 25th and the character of Prasanthi changes. Like the past few decades, the whole milieu of Puttaparthi acquires a different aura with hanging bells, angels shining and stars glistening all around the ashram. It was no different in the just completed year too, or rather, it was more special than previous years because the Divine Lord willed the celebrations to be spread over three days, with He delivering His much-awaited and prayed for discourse on the evening of December 26. [We have detailed accounts, accompanied by lots of pictures, of this joyous festival in the Prasanthi Diary Section]. Bhagavan stressed that Jesus was no ordinary mortal and everybody heard with rapt attention as the Father hailed the Son.

While half the world celebrates on December 25th the Birthday of the favourite Son of God, very few are aware, let alone commemorate, another story of His Glory that also had its genesis on this same sacred day. It is not the story of a Son of God, but one of God's most precious, proficient and powerful instruments. It is the tale of one whom God held in His Hand to pen the uplifting account of His advent and mission; of one whose inner self was so pure and clear that the Sweet Lord held Him unto His lips like a flute and out came a surreal symphony of His miracles and manifestations in most captivating notes and narrations; of one in whose company the Lord was regaled with his repartees and rib-ticklers; of one who had become an indispensable part of His entourage whether He went to Ernakulam or East Africa; of one who assiduously assimilated every syllable that slipped from the Divine lips and not only documented it with great clarity and dexterity but also announced it with great alacrity to as many people as possible; of one who was a perfect conduit between the Lord and His message, rendering with ease and finesse the language of the Avatar into not only the Anglo-Saxon tongue but also into many Indian lingoes; of one whose speech was so soft, soothing and comforting that the captivated listeners imagined him to be the 'pied piper of Hamelin'; of one whose nature was so gentle and attitude so refined that one could never observe scornfulness or a tinge of sadness, come what may, in his countenance; of one who started his day by placing at His Lotus Feet the sacred *Tulsi* and *Bilva* leaves for not one or two weeks, months, or years, but for more than three decades; of one whose relationship with Swami was so special and childlike that he could say anything he wanted without any apprehension and after thought, and the Lord too listened, punned and played, jeered and joked with him, and one on occasion even asked for his lap to rest His Divine Self; of one whom Prof. Anil Kumar describes as the one "whose communication with Swami was celestial and the relationship in the Sai Saga which is rare and without a parallel."

But at the same time, this special devotee of the Lord was the first postmaster of Prasanthi Nilayam, who at one time even was the accommodation in charge looking after the well-being of devotees and acting as their guide, counselor and comforter, who also saw to it that the canteen in the Ashram fed all the pilgrims without any problems, who was a type-setter, binder, writer and editor – all rolled into one – of the Ashram monthly magazine, who religiously made the announcements during every major festival in Puttaparthi in six Indian languages, who always traveled in public buses and not in a private car even though he was a State President of the Sai Organization of a state, who knew no stranger and had a warm hello oozing from his being on whoever his eyes fell, and who knew no worship other than serving His Master through sharing the tales of His Grandeur, Greatness and Glory. That was Prof. Kasturi, the Lord's ambassador, emissary, effective instrument, efficient

translator, brilliant biographer, charismatic orator, fascinating playwright, gifted writer, master story-teller, an incomparable comrade and most importantly a beloved devotee like no other. In fact, Prof. Kasturi is one of those rare souls to whom in a letter before his final merge with Him, the Lord addressed as “Bhaktha” or devotee. In that letter He said, “Know this, O devotee! The Resident of Puttaparthi, the Compassionate One, will guard you always, and ever hold your hand, to save you ever, everywhere. Forget it not.”

What facet of Kasturi's personality endeared him to the Lord? Was it his literary and oratory skills? Or his special sense of spontaneous humour? Or, the respect he commanded as a great intellectual and luminary in Kanada literature? Or, his credentials as a capable educator and administrator, having turned around a notable and formerly notorious college during his tenure as principal? Or, was it his association with the Ramakrishna Mission having served as a secretary there for many years? What was so unique about him that every devotee looked up to him with awe, admiration and love, and Swami held him so close to his heart virtually carrying him in His arms every moment of his life till his last breath? And how did He finally embrace him into eternity? The cover story of this issue will not only be an eye-opener for you into the life of this great devotee of the Lord but also instruct and illumine you as to what it means being a true devotee of the Lord - what are the responsibilities and rules, characteristics and challenges.

Basking in the divine proximity of the Lord did not mean the life of Kasturi was a bed of roses - still the fragrance of his smile never faded. Whether rock or sand, gorges or grass, he never grumbled in the least and just like the river, always steadfast towards its goal with willpower and vigour, Kasturi was unassailable. “He was like the Rock of Gibraltar”, recalls Sri B V Raja Reddy. “His faith in Swami was unassailable.” In fact, when you read our comprehensive cover story and contemplate, you will realize that the life of Kasturi epitomizes the life of every sincere spiritual aspirant. There is no glory of God without the story of His devotees, and Sri Kasturi's life is one such golden chapter in the grand epic of the Sai Avatar. In fact, the Lord Himself had prompted Kasturi to write his own life's story which he titled as “Loving God” and placed it at His Lotus Feet on his 85th birthday. Just like Bhagavan's Schools and Colleges, and Institutes of Higher Medical Sciences are models to be appreciated and emulated, Prof. Kasturi's life too is a ‘university’ by itself from which every sincere Sai worker should learn, imbibe and fortify his love and faith for Baba. It is for this reason that we have this cover story on this New Year month, besides commemorating the hundred and tenth birth anniversary of this great soul, which happened the day the lovers of God sang “Silent Night...” a few weeks ago.

Kasturi's story, by Divine design, is fortunately intertwined with the story of Sai Avatar, he being a blessed recipient of His divine proximity for nearly four decades. But there are many other deeply inspiring souls in recent times who may not have had any physical contact with the present incarnation, but the Lord fondly remembers them for their purity, sincerity and nobility. And one such is the fiery patriot of India, Sri Subhas Chandra Bose. During India's Independence Day in 2007 Swami surprised everyone when He rose to give an unscheduled discourse and said, “Never forget Bose...such glorious personalities are not to be forgotten.” And that triggered us to tell the tale of this great son of Mother India, and we are happy to offer it to you this month which happens to be his birthday month. If only we look around and have the eyes to see, there are many personalities whose lives are filled with devotion and

dedication, but for the most part they are silent, letting their deeds do the talking. But God never forgets such sincere selfless souls. A case in point is Sri Gopal Rao, who has been living in Prasanthi Nilayam ashram for nearly four decades. Though a champion in the banking industry who served as the chairman of the Andhra Bank, besides being on the board of many other prestigious companies, when he settled down in Puttaparthi in late sixties, serving water in the canteen was the task Sri Gopal Rao undertook with great joy and sincerity. This spirit of service is what has touched the Lord, but more than this, for what Bhagavan always remembers him is his undeterred faith. At one time, when Sri Gopal Rao was under pressure from the powers that be of the country to act against his conscience, he stood firm and did not yield even a little. And this is what, Swami says, is the hallmark of every true devotee of the Lord. He honored and blessed this dear devotee profusely on his 100th birthday a few days ago (See Prasanthi Diary).

In the most recent Christmas Discourse, Swami said, “Everyone must have Masterfaith (a superlative of faith). The rest is useless. You can achieve anything with it. So, develop faith. Without faith, there is no life.” In this New Year, when we are busy contemplating how we can redirect ourselves to make the most out of our lives, let us not forget to incorporate this essential element in our lives, thoughts and actions. For, without this, all else might be like walls without a firm foundation.

Let unflinching faith at His Feet be our resolution in 2008. For, the power of His Love is great!

Loving regards,
H2H Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Decide and Do

This evening, we have met here since it is New Year Day, the first of January 1964! Well, this is a delusion within the larger Delusion! This Day is welcomed as marking some big change, as if yesterday was something quite different for it belonged to 1963 and today is something quite distinct, for it is 1964! This day is celebrated by people, in picnics, in gambling, in drinking and feasting; they attend cinema shows, wear new clothes, give presents, to each other and greet all with joy and hilarity. They exhaust their money and their energy in the pursuit of frivolity, thrill and excitement.

Every Second is New

All this is due to the custom that views this day as something unique. In fact, the 'year' is just a convention. There are as many New Year Days as there are days in the year; many communities and countries have their own distinct calendars. It is not the first of January or the first of *Chaithra* (first month of Telugu New Year) that is unique. The year is just a name to indicate a number of days, a day to indicate a number of hours, the hour is a period to indicate a number of months, the month, a number of time counted in minutes, and the minute is a name for sixty seconds. Each second is new. It is a gift, a chance, an opportunity, a thing to be celebrated, to be used for your uplift. That is to say, each second is a fresh chance given to you for training the mind, refining the intellect, purifying the emotions, strengthening the will, for getting confirmed in the conviction that you are the deathless *Aathma* (Self, the Infinite Consciousness).

Fix Your Eye on the Goal

Man is blinded by the objective world and he believes that world to be real, meaningful and worthy of pursuit. The cataract grows in the eye and robs it of its efficiency. The cataract is the enemy of the eye. Ignorance, the cataract of the inner eye, blinds the intellect and robs it of its efficiency. So, it cannot see the Divinity that is your real nature. It misleads you into the impression that you are a man (*Maanava*), whereas you are really God (*Maadhava*)....

Fix it (the Absolute Reality) in your inner consciousness. That is the path of Liberation, which you must start treading and, today is as good a day as any, for deciding to do so. You have meditated too long on riches, status, salary, children, relatives, fame and the standard of living. They are all of minor interest, momentary value, dubious profit. Meditate, fix your urge on the *Nithya*, the *Sathya*, the *Nirmala*, the *Nischala* – the Eternal, the Real, the Pure and the Immovable.

There Is No Two

There are two birds sitting on one tree, the Upanishad says: the *jeevaathma* and the *Paramaathma* – the individual soul and the Supreme Soul – on the tree of this body,

this World. One bird eats the fruits of that tree, while the other simply looks on, as a witness. But, the wonder is, the two birds are really one, though they appear as two; they cannot be separated, since they are two aspects of the same entity. Steam in the air cannot be seen; it has no shape or form; but it is the same as ice, which is hard, heavy and cold. *Niraakaara* and *Saakaara* (without Form and with Form), are just two ways in which the One manifests Itself.

The minute hand of the clock is the individual soul the bird that eats the fruits. It goes round and round but, the hour hand moves silently and slowly, with a certain dignity. The hour hand can be said to be the Supreme Soul. Once an hour the two meet, but, the individual soul does not get that consummation fixed for ever. It loses the precious chance and so has to go round and round again and again. Liberation is when the two merge, and only one remains. When the obstacles in the path of truth are laid low, deliverance is achieved. That is why *moksha* (liberation) is something that can be won, here and now; one need not wait for the dissolution of the physical body for that.

Let Him Mend Your Mind

Action must not be felt as a burden, for that feeling is a sure sign, indicating that it is against the grain. No action which helps your progress will weigh heavily on you. It is only when you go counter to your innermost nature that you feel it a burden. A time comes when you look back on your achievement and sigh at the futility of it all. Entrust to the Lord, before it is too late, your mind and let Him shape it as He likes. Assign to your mind the task of serving the Lord and it will grow tame. You do not hand over the goldsmith an ornament that is quite nice; you give him for repairs or reshaping, the ornaments you feel have been broken or dented or gone out of fashion. So too, give the Lord your mind that certainly needs repair, if not complete reconstruction.

The Mind Creates Its Own Prison

Like the silk-worm that spins from out of itself the cocoon that proves to be its tomb, man spins from out of his own mind, the cage in which he gets trapped. But, there is a way of escape, which the spiritual teacher (Guru) can teach you, or which the God in you will reveal to you. Take to the spiritual practice which will bring relief. Be away with the roles of clown and clout, which you have acted all the ages. Take on the role of the Hero, not the Zero! Forget the past, do not worry about possible errors or disappointments. Decide and do.

- *Divine Discourse on January 1st, 1964*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI – Part 40

(Continued from the last issue)

H (HISLOP): What is duty to society?

SAI: Duty is the exercise of your freedom, but in such a way that you do not deny others their freedom. For example, a teacher's freedom to leave the classroom is dependent on his duty to teach the students. A politician's freedom to run for public office is dependant on his ability to serve the people.

H: Is duty to society universal and binding on every person?

SAI: If a man is living on spirit, he has no duty or obligation to society.

H: Living on spirit must be having total faith in God and total dependence on Him?

SAI: Faith in the Divine is single and cannot be gained by reason. Either there is or there is not faith. It can arise through *sadhana*...Why are people unhappy?

H: Because they are not fully surrendered to God.

SAI: That is overall. But what is the immediate reason? **The reason is they do not live in the present. Young people think of the future. Old people think of the past. While you are here, do not think of the world, or the Sai Organization. Be only in the present. Think only of Swami and be happy.**

Transcending Humanity to Realise Our Divinity

H: If the world is unique, no other place like it in the universe, then the destiny of its inhabitants must be likewise unique. What is the man's destiny?

SAI: **Man's destiny is to return to his source, and merge into that source.**

H: If the world is unique, perhaps it is an accident?

SAI: No, not an accident.

H: If there are no other beings in the universe comparable to man, their destinies must be different from the destiny of man?

SAI: No. All life has the same destiny, to merge into God, just as rain drops wherever they fall eventually merge with the sea, their source.

H: How is mankind different?

SAI: Only man has intellect and conscience. By means of these he may in full consciousness realize that he is the Divine. If a God, manifest with form, should fall, he would again have to seek human birth to again realize himself.

H: If the other being of the universe are lacking in conscience and intellect (*Buddhi*) then how can they realize their destiny?

SAI: They each have their own means of fulfilling destiny, just as man has his means. Man measures and judges by what he knows of himself. To man it seems impossible that beings could live in circumstances unlike his own. Whereas, in fact, countless beings live within the unimaginable heat of the sun; other multitudes live in the cold of ice. **At this very point (*Swami jamming his thumb down on the arms of the chair*) there are countless multitudes of beings. There is life in every place throughout the cosmos. Wherever God is, there is life.**

H: There seems to be something about Earth, life that is different in a different way. Swami, the Lord Himself, is giving pointed attention to life here. Is there any other place in the universe where Baba needs to give such pointed attention?

SAI: There is no life apart from God's "beingness". God is everywhere at all times. Man sees Him as an all-powerful being with human form, whereas to a frog He would appear to be a giant frog, and so on.

H: I still don't see how other beings realize their destiny, when they do not have the instruments of intellect and conscience.

SAI: Other beings do not worry about achieving their destiny. They live happily within nature. For example, fish live and sport in water without anxiety to be other than they are. **Throughout the universe, beings achieve their own destiny through their own unique inherent nature. Only man transcends his humanity to self-consciously realize his divinity.**

H: Swami, a question I am constantly asked and which I am unable to answer - that is, about UFO's, beings from other planets visiting us here. This is a big thing in the USA. Books are published, and there is all sort of verified evidence.

SAI: It is imagination only.

H: But Swami, there is evidence -- the metal of a crashed spacecraft in the hands of the Government. People are examined by qualified specialists and they are not inventing their experiences. When I tell questioners that it is all imagination, the persons who ask are unable to accept that answer.

SAI: Nevertheless, it is imagination. Imagination can project physical evidence. There is life in every place and those societies have their own cultures. They have no interest whatsoever in the Earth or about the Earth's society. They do not visit the Earth.

H: Then, Swami, I should reply to people that despite all evidence cited to the contrary that UFO's and alien visitors, the whole thing is a product of imagination and imagination only?

SAI: There is no problem. You can enjoy the praise.

H: But I do not, Swami. There is no person there to receive the praise, There is only a void there. No person is found.

SAI: You do not have to receive the praise. Regard it as part of the impersonal stream of happenings that you see.

H: That which I observe is not me.

SAI: Exactly

H: When Swami said he would give me strong sight, what sight did he mean?

A Healing Gift

SAI: All sight. Physical sight and wisdom too. I will see that you are dependent on no one of either physical sight, or wisdom.

H: Swamiji, is there an encouraging word for her illness that I can tell Victoria?

SAI: *(Baba, moving his hand, creates a lingam)* See - this has two different halves. One half is for your eyes. The other half is for your wife's illness. There is nothing wrong with the body's mechanism. It is an infection only. Put a little water on the lingam and drink the water. Place a drop of the water in each eye also.

H: Swamiji, at this very moment, now, I abandon life, concepts and individuality -- I pray there will be no need for another birth.

SAI: Another birth is best for you.

H: No freedom yet!

SAI: Yes, another birth is best. In that you will get total, final Liberation.

H: But, Swami, I don't want to go through Youth again. Youth is not a good experience - it is dangerous and difficult.

SAI: It will be better life than this one. Don't waste time thinking of the future. Where is the lingam?

H: Here, Swami.

SAI: *(Swami took the lingam and showed it to the others in the room: Then the lingam disappeared from Swami's hand and a Shakti-Siva symbol was there).* Baba said, "This is the beginning and the end, very sacred. The base is Shakti and the remainder is Siva. Would you like the lingam or this?"

H: Swami, how can I choose? I don't know enough. *(Then the Shakti-Siva symbol was gone, the lingam reappeared and Baba handed it back to me.)*

SAI: You did not make up your mind. You waited too long.

H: *Just before bringing forth the Shakti-Siva symbol, Baba asked me if I would prefer a large lingam. I replied, 'I don't know, Swami, Swami knows what I need. He*

must decide.' Then, after the Shakti-Siva was taken away from me, and after some further conversation with the other men present, there was a moment of silence. Then I said,

Swami, cannot I have both the lingam and the Shakti-Siva?

SAI: *(Laughing and poking me on the forehead, Swami then said:)* Both! You are greedy! *(Then he settled back in his chair, smiling, then moved His hand and there again was the Shakti-Siva symbol. He held it out to me, smiling, and said):* See, this is the wish-fulfilling tree - whatever you wish for you may have.

H: Swamiji, even though one finds himself much devoted, the intelligence still wants to understand.

SAI: When devotion grows intense, the wish to understand does not continue. There is no further wish to understand. There is only devotion. Body lasts for only a few days and there is only bliss, bliss on all sides, bliss only. One only, the Ocean of Bliss.

H: When, I turn attention inwards, a state is found where there is no God and no "I" can be found, no focus, no point. I see that this state exists from the earliest childhood memories and nothing has been learned or changed. What should be my next step?

SAI: That is very good. Just continue with that. No Hislop and no God. That state is called Samadhi. It is correct.

H: When I look at myself inside, just beyond the surface of consciousness, it seems to me that it is Swami there, not me.

Finding the Right Level

SAI: That is not permanent. It comes and goes. It will become steady. Then there is Swami only. In your talk to the foreigners yesterday, you confused people.

H: How is that, Swami?

SAI: You said ideas above their understanding. Then they would ask questions based on what you said, thus creating further confusion. Your understanding is very high; theirs is very low. They need to know Swami's teaching, not concepts above their understanding. **Your replies have great value, but it is beyond them. You should evaluate the level of a group and tell Swami's teachings at their level.**

H: But Swami, if I do not say what I understand, I feel that I am cheating them.

SAI: It is not the medicine they need. It is your medicine. They have need of Swami's teachings said in terms of their level.

H: Very well, Swami. I will do better next-time. But Swami, you are in this small room and the lecture hall is far away. In this room only these walls can be seen.

SAI: Yes, these walls only. But don't you know that Swami has a thousand ears, a thousand eyes? He hears and sees everything.

H: But in what aspect of Himself does Baba see all and hear all? Is it His aspect as Iswara?

SAI: Swami sees all and hears all as Universal Consciousness. *(Note: The question-answer session which Swami was fully aware of as Universal Consciousness, hearing all questions and answers and knowing the reactions in the various minds, was some 300 yards away from the interview room in the Mandir).*

H: *(The following day)* Swami, did I do any better with the Italians yesterday?

SAI: Yes, better. You spoke of Swami's teachings. One person was confused about what was said about Jesus, and there was a language problem.

H: Yes, Swami. Only the interpreter spoke English.

SAI: How many there?

H: I think about 60 people.

Note: Shed #25 where I met with the Italian group is a long distance from Swami's room in the Mandir. There are multi-story residence buildings in between.

Pure Untainted Witnessing

H: Swami, liberation does not make much sense to me. What can be the value of that idea? There is always manifestation. If not the Hislop form, then some other form.

SAI: There is a conscious being; then consciousness-awareness universal. That is liberation.

H: Swami, as I watch, I see what it is to be conscious of experience moving across the field of being conscious of things - fear, pleasure, anger, events observed and events happening to me, but at the same time there is the watching of that, not affected by what is watched. But I wonder if all that is not just a division in the state of being conscious?

SAI: Yes, there can be a mixture. Watching mixed with consciousness, back and forth, mixed up. **But there is also the pure untainted witnessing, and that itself is liberation.**

H: Swami, the witnessing is by itself, not involved with the happening. Is it correct, then, to continue watching and seeing the witnessing as separate from experiencing?

SAI: Yes, that is good. That is the correct way. We will talk further about your *sadhana*.

(Sunday, Feb. 18, 1990, before Bhajans, about 8.10 a.m., Swami called me in with a new interpreter. As soon as we were seated I handed Swami three notes. The first was to ask about departure on the night plane to Bombay on Feb. 23. Flights were being cancelled and I wondered if I should leave a day early. Baba studied the note for a moment or so and then said that I should continue as originally planned. Next note said the Central office asked me to give a talk. Swami said to do so. Final note was to ask something in connection with Sri P.K. Suri, Convenor, Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust, to which Swami replied, "Yes".

Balancing Discipline with Love

SAI: How are the American Sai Centres?

H: Slow, Swami. We should have 300 or 400 instead of just over 100.

SAI: One reason for the slow growth is that Hislop's discipline is too harsh. The Sai Organization works through softness, kindness, love and harmony. In America the people are outspoken with strong and often harsh ideas and opinions, and when they are confronted with an equally harsh ruling there is a confrontation and cessation of advancement and progress. **Persuasion should be applied softly and with kindness. Before long the people will accept that and they will change and do as they should.**

H: Swamiji, I do months of soft persuasion without effect; then I have to act with firmness.

SAI: That is because people see you in the disciplinary role and not as a spiritual leader. In America, the women are like the men. They face life with the same strong and harsh opinions as do the men. You have considerable spiritual power, long and broad experience in spiritual matters and you are a perfectionist in your devotion to Sai. This perfectionism is viewed as harshness by the devotees. You must modify so that people will see you as a spiritual man and as a spiritual leader, then they will agree to do the things that are essential for the Sai Organization.

When you apply discipline and are met with resistance it affects you. You feel depressed and your mind is agitated and worried. You are advancing in age and the depressed feeling and worried mind affect the body. The body suffers from this and gets older. Swami tells you the plain truth for your own good.

The identical situation arises in your house. Your wife is a spiritual lady with long and deep spiritual experience. She has a short temper and this temper and worry affect her health. You react to this and this adds to the factors which diminish your own health. **All this does not affect your spiritual power which exists undiminished. You must resolve to be happy and not accept or tolerate worry and depression.**

Because of your spiritual power, your long experience and your devotion to Sai, you are the senior devotee in America. Sai has absolute confidence in Hislop. There are some organizational matters?

H: Yes, Swami. Since I am held responsible, it is necessary that I have the authority to veto when needed, and act when needed.

SAI: You have the authority to say what is needed. Then use gentle, patient persuasion. In all matters concerning America, you can consult with responsible people there and see if general agreement can be reached. But you have the authority to say what you see to be correct.

Feb. 21, 1990, Swami called me in with a group of devotees. When it became my turn for a few private words with Baba, He said:

SAI: You are a good devotee. Swami knows it, and so do you. Swami will take care of everything for you. Be happy. When are you leaving?

H: On the 23rd, at 11 a.m. Swami.

SAI: I will see you before then and give you special *prasad* for your wife.

END OF THE BOOK

CHINNA KATHA

The Sacred Fruits of Action

One Saturday, a father was involved in worshipping the Lord and called his son asking him to get some plantains for one rupee. This son was a good boy and went out to purchase the plantains. But on the way home he saw a mother and her son, who were standing on the road looking famished.

When the little hungry boy saw the plantains, he started running towards them. His mother also ran to catch him but then both of them collapsed from hunger. When the young man saw these people suffering so much from hunger, he thought that it was much better to give them the bananas than to take them home. Accordingly, he gave the bananas to the mother and her child and also brought them water.

Relieved of their hunger and thirst they began to express their gratitude in many different ways and shed tears of joy. The youngster then went home empty handed and when his father asked him if he had brought the bananas, he replied in the affirmative. When asked where the bananas were, he replied that the bananas he brought were sacred, will not rot and could not be seen.

The son explained that he had fed two hungry souls with the bananas and the fruits which he brought home are the sacred fruits of action. His father felt that the boy was a worthy son and that all his prayers had been answered that day. He developed great affection for his son from that day and the bonds of their love grew closer.

- Baba

COVER STORY

SAI'S KASTURI...

A PHANTASMAGORIC FRAGRANCE FOREVER

I firmly believe there is none kinder than You,
to shower Grace on me.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I am at Your Lotus feet?

I firmly believe You will respond quick
When I do pray and plead.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I am crying aloud for you?

I firmly believe You are ever beside me
To guide my steps aright.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I am Yours thro' day and night?

I firmly believe You can never say 'No'
Whatever I ask from You.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I long for a glance from You?

What have You designed for me this time?
Why this dire delay to offer boons?
However long You make me wait and wail
I will not leave. I will be standing still
Until Your loving eyes do turn to me.

Such a soul-stirring prayer, isn't it? It makes you feel someone has so perfectly penned every pang of your heart, expressing every intimate emotion of your inner self. What if we say this was actually written by your Indweller! Imagine Swami preparing a greeting card especially for you to wish you Happy New Year and then penning this pearl of a prayer inside the card with the endearing words, "My dear one! Begin the New Year with the above Prayer." And not only this, He inundates you with more love and blessings with the magic message: "Endowed with long life and sound health, surrounded by children, grandchildren and friends, keep on imbibing joy through devotion and wisdom. I bless that your days be spent in the service of *Sarveshwara*, the Lord of All. Spend your life in abundant peace and happiness. - Baba."

Your heart would have skipped a few beats leaping with inexplicable ecstasy, isn't it? Sounds too good to be true! But let us tell you, this is no imagination. This is exactly what Swami did for Professor Kasturi, His darling devotee, way back in 1960. And this is only half of the story. The way Swami passed on this specially crafted card to Professor Kasturi was even more exciting. The Lord did not just hand over this poem

to Professor Kasturi when he came for His blessings on the dawn of the New Year day; on the contrary, the Greeting Card came gleefully to Professor Kasturi searching for him. The Sweet Lord had sent the card through someone to be dropped in Bukkapatnam, five miles away the previous day, though the addressee was living five metres away! Recalling that momentous morning, Mr. Kasturi writes, “When the Blessing was delivered by the postman along with other mail, the surprise, the thrill, the gratitude and the yearning to express it direct to Him, rendered me incapable of speech or movement.”

Sai and Kasturi - An Unparalleled Relationship

The man who could weave magic with his words and is often hailed as “Vyasa and Valmiki of the Kali Age” for his unsurpassable documentation of the Life of the present Avatar, was dumbfounded and drowned in the Love of his Master and Beloved. And this was no exception; rather it was only a glimpse of the glorious relationship that persisted between this pure devotee and his Lord, for, the most part of Professor Kasturi’s life was a serial of such sweet exchanges with the divine.

“No one was as close to Swami as Professor Kasturi! His level of communication was different,” recalls Professor Anil Kumar who had the privilege of observing, interacting and imbibing many important instructions for life from this distinguished devotee of the Lord. “His level of communication was celestial. He was the only man who could communicate with Swami at that religious, philosophical, *vedantic*, Himalayan plane of thoughts. I don’t think anybody could do that – not even Sri Kamavadhani (a distinguished Vedic scholar close to Swami in those days). What does the goldsmith do to ascertain if the gold is genuine or not? He rubs it against a touchstone. Believe me, Swami would ask Professor Kasturi how His speech was! He would not ask anybody else! Swami would find in him an intellectual, a scholar, a man of great wisdom and a true seeker. And Kasturi too would pick up pertinent points which fascinated him and left indelible imprints in his heart. That interaction and sacred bonding was something extraordinary!”

“Yes, his relationship with Swami was very unique,” recalls Mr. B N Narasimha Murthy, Warden of the Brindavan campus of Bhagavan’s University, who too was fortunate to spend many summers and winters witnessing this one-of-its-kind devotee-Deity relationship. “I remember, one day in 1982, Swami had gone to Vidyagiri to oversee some construction work, and He had taken Professor Kasturi along with him in the car. And three of us were waiting in the portico of the Mandir for Swami to return. After He came, Bhagavan noticed and called us immediately inside the interview room. Professor Kasturi, who alighted from the car after Swami, took a while to come in, and by the time he came to the interview room, Swami was about to close the door. But Professor Kasturi, quite nonchalantly, just walked in. Swami then looked at him and said, ‘See Kasturi, there are only ‘Moorthis’ inside – Sathya Moorthy, Krishna Moorthy and Narasimha Moorthy.’ And then pointing to Himself, he added, ‘I am also Moorthy (the name by which the idol of a deity is called in many Indian languages). So, there is no place for Kasturi inside.’ The way the smart and simple Kasturi reacted in this tricky situation was simply superb. It still lingers in my memory.

With a sweet smile dancing on his lips, he said (in Telugu), ‘Swami, *neenu osthe antha poorthi aipotundi.*’ Which meant, ‘Swami, when I come in, the “Moorthies”

assembly will become "*Poorthi*", that is, "complete" in Telugu. Swami instantly had such a hearty laugh and let him in. That was the kind of special relationship, the divine friendship that he shared with the Lord."

A Bond that was Sweet and Beautiful

Such interesting and enchanting instances in the life of this great devotee were numerous. One day, spotting Professor Kasturi sitting in a corner where there was not much light in the veranda in Whitefield, with Vibhuti drawn on his forehead, which was like a part of his personal attire everyday, Swami said, "Aye Kasturi! Come here under the light," and then He mischievously smiled and continued, "Otherwise others will say, 'What is that bandage on your forehead!'" The ever affable Kasturi answered, "This is not a bandage Swami; this actually removes me from bondage! From the bondage of birth and death." The Lord, of course, liberally laughed.

"He was the only one who could joke with Swami," recalls Professor Anil Kumar. "Many would be scared and tight-lipped in front of Bhagavan; they dare not cut a joke, but not Professor Kasturi." And Swami would enjoy his innovative and entertaining responses and repartees. "In fact, such was the close chemistry between the two that when he used to go to see Him in the afternoon everyday, Swami used to say, 'See, my newspaper is coming! He is going to give me news.' And the child-like Kasturi would innocently narrate all the 'hot news' of the world he had heard with his tiny transistor glued to his ear at 1.30 every afternoon to the Master of all the Worlds. His role in the Divine Drama was really a prized one.

"It is this beautiful synthesis of child like innocence and sage like wisdom that endeared him to the Lord, and as the Bible quotes, exalted him in the Kingdom of God, literally!" says Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy.

On one occasion when Professor Kasturi was with Baba motoring from Mumbai to Bangalore, while in the car Swami took out, one by one, luscious apples from a bag kept near Him, carefully sliced each of them, and started distributing to all inside the car. It was the conclusion of a small prayer session wherein Swami asked all to sing bhajans and devotional songs. Everybody heartily accepted the apple-pieces from the Lord and started assimilating the juicy fruit with joy, but not Professor Kasturi. He sat there holding the piece in his closed palm, scared that chewing the skin and swallowing the fruit would be an ordeal beyond the ability of his artificial teeth. "I dared not spit the stuff through the window for fear the denture might follow the skin!" he writes. But the Loving God glanced at him for a moment and recognized his embarrassment, though Professor Kasturi never stated anything explicitly. And the next piece that He gave Professor Kasturi had the skin neatly and nicely removed by the Lord Himself. "Whenever somebody brought sweets to Him, Swami would keep a few for my father saying, 'Aye, this is for Kasturi. Let him enjoy it!'" recalls Mrs. Padma Kasturi, Professor Kasturi's daughter. "The intimacy that existed between them had to be seen to be believed. It was a relationship that was legendary in so many ways."

In His autobiography, "Loving God", Mr. Kasturi writes, "Mine is, let me confide in you, a Love Story."

It, truly, is a Love Story that every Sai devotee can only dream of. The greatest of the romances that have reverberated in the consciousness of mankind, inspiring, instructing and illumining minds for eons together, are those of the devotee and the Divine. And the ones the Supreme Self chooses for these great dramas on earth are blessed beings whose fortune is unimaginable. In the present age, this pure hearted Professor was one such privileged one 'hand picked' by the Divine, and the games that the Primordial One played with this pristine soul were plenty and profound.

Mothering the Lord of Love

Professor Kasturi, recounting one such remarkable experience, writes, "We were at Chebrole that evening," referring to a town in the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh where Baba had been many years ago. "During dinner, He suddenly announced that we were to leave for Madras (now Chennai). His face was flushed and He was in evident hurry. I surmised that He had assuaged the rigor of someone's fever and had decided to assume a dire disease which had come upon him. He preferred the home of devotees at Madras, because they are more familiar with the role-plays (trances) He enacts, as part of the Avataric mission. Baba was in the back seat. I happened to be the only other occupant of the car, apart from the man at the wheel. And, I found myself on the back seat. A few miles later, Baba showed an inclination to stretch rather uncomfortably on the space available. I called on the chauffeur to help so that I could scramble into the vacuum on his left. But Baba said, 'No'. I realized then that we had no pillow and my old affirmative answer to afford a prop stood valid."

And what happened next was, perhaps, one of Professor Kasturi's life's most exhilarating and ecstatic moments. The Mother of all Creation was now a Cosmic Child, comfortable and calm in the lap of his dearest devotee. "I sat stroking the hair and soothing the brow until dawn broke on the outskirts of Madras," he writes. For eight hours through the night he 'mothered' his Beloved Master, and the next morning Swami sent Professor Kasturi back to Puttaparthi asking him to travel by First Class in the train and convey His Message, in lieu of His absence, to the devotees who had assembled in Puttaparthi for the festival of Vaikunta Ekadashi.

Why did the Lord enact such a drama? What could be the concealed Cosmic Design in this play? Was it a harbinger of a higher role that the Lord wanted to assign this gem of a devotee? Is it true that Professor Kasturi would actually mother the future incarnation of the present Avatar? All these dilemmas will remain as enigmas until the Divine decides to decode them some day; we do not know now and will probably never know. But what we do know is that, just as Swami was Professor Kasturi's life-breath, Kasturi too was Swami's beloved and 'the chosen one', upon whom the Lord doted, not for decades, but for, perhaps, centuries and life times.

In "Loving God" Kasturi himself reveals, "Bhagavan's Love has sustained me, not only since 1948 when I stood in His Presence, but, at least, since my birth in 1897 when He watched over me in the cradle. (In fact) Bhagavan once told me that He knew me even before the latest birth in Kerala."

Blessed as a Baby

Is it not the Almighty's alacrity that Kasturi Ranganatha Sharma (which was his initial name, later trimmed by his parents to its one third) commenced his earthly career on

the day when half of the globe was glorying the Father, for so mercifully sending His Beloved Son to rescue and redeem them? By this, the Lord perhaps ensured that as everybody remembers and reveres His Darling Son on the Christmas Day, they do not forget His Dear devotee too. And he arrived braced with conspicuous signs of Grace and good luck. The yet-to-be-named newborn had six fingers on each palm and equal number of toes on each foot! Though out of ignorance and impatience, his granny surreptitiously scissored off the visible proofs of Providence, the blessings that destiny had bestowed on him befriended and buttressed him, whether he realized it or not, at every crucial juncture of his life.

When he was 11-days old and carried by his mother to the Shrine of Lord Parthasarathy (the local temple dedicated to Lord Krishna), and placed on a stone slab under the big lamp hanging in front of the idol, the flames on the lamps placed on either side of the idol flickered for a moment, and his mother in her heart 'saw' the smile that the Lord subtly conveyed and returned home filled with contentment. For most of his formative years, this Parthasarathy was Kasturi's pillar of support, private friend and much prayed God. Be it pencils or peppermints, attires or assignments, Kasturi emptied his heart out everyday to Him with his prayers, pleadings and petitions. Half a century later, when Kasturi saw his Parthasarathy in flesh and blood in Puttaparthi, he realized he had secured the One he steadfastly beseeched for years. And the rewards he received for all his pure-hearted prayers of his childhood was overpowering. The Lord adorned him with the editorship of "Sanathana Sarathi", the conduit that carried His Message to all continents, much to his disbelief and delight.

When he was a few months old and his parents took him to the Siva temple at Vycome to fulfill the vow of offering their first child to the Deity as His bond-slave, they placed him on a banana leaf in front of the open door of the shrine, and then began to circumambulate the sanctum sanctorum, when in the middle of this, they were stopped by the priest who said, "I have a Message from Siva Himself: 'I have a child on My Hands. Take it and foster it for Me with care and devotion.'" The overjoyed parents prostrated full length at the feet of Lord Siva thanking Him profusely for His Acceptance and Munificence.

Sustained by His Munificence, All Through

When, out of sheer lack of financial sustenance, the grandfather of Kasturi wanted to deprive the fatherless boy professional education, the Lord in the form of his mother stood courageously by him and ensured that he mastered the mysteries of language and literature, which would, in future, enable him to be His most proficient and prized instrument. Though his mother's family had no means to even provide him his minimum calorie requirement to keep his flesh and bone together, let alone make him smart and sturdy, the Lord saw to it that wherever he studied - be it in Tripunittura where he did his schooling, or in Ernakulam where he attended Pre-University, or even in the college at Trivandrum, from where he emerged with an Honours degree in History - there were always free 'eating houses' which would offer him two square meals everyday. Again, it was the Hidden Hand which tied his destiny with another diamond of a personality (early in life as was the custom those days) who not only nourished his body with the financial largesse she got from her father during marriage, but also was a perfect partner who propped up his spirits and energized his soul whenever he felt defeated in his life.

After his degree at the age of 21, when he was desperately devouring newspaper columns to catch a vacancy that could put a full stop to the fiscal conundrum of his life, it was the Merciful Lord again who made him stumble on an advertisement for the post of a lecturer in a High School in the city of Mysore, for, it was in this Land of Gold Mines and Sandalwood that the world would get a glimpse of the 'Literary Gold', the genius, that he was, and revel in the fragrance of his classic articles and charming anecdotes, tantalizing essays and tutoring tactics and antics, humorous plays and humanitarian programmes.

The Lord Rescues and Kasturi Blossoms

Again, when he longed to liberate himself from this High School, vexed with the variegated inclinations of the founder of the school, which compelled him and his wards to engage themselves in all activities, except sound learning, it was the Ever-watchful Benevolent Lord who made his old comrade and classmate-turned-monk appear at his door one fine morning. But for this miracle meeting with Gopala Marar transmuted into Swami Siddeshwarananda of the Ramakrishna order, he would probably have never become Professor Kasturi, because during that time, Kasturi was seriously contemplating on a career in Law, to escape from the unpleasant association with the High School and also to prop up his financial situation.

In the next few years the Divine Director saw to it that the latent spiritual potential of this spirited young man in his twenties blossomed and found expression in excellent acts of elaboration on the sacred teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. As secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, Mysore chapter, he not only lectured eloquently and extensively, in Kannada and English, on the philosophy and practice of his 'Gurudev', but also led the way in undertaking many projects of social upliftment – a task he liked the most.

And around this time in 1928, the Munificent Lord placed him in the Maharaja's College of Arts affiliated to the Mysore University, which was the perfect fertile ground for his literary talents to flourish and allowed him to take on many fascinating roles – as a proficient playwright who directed many an entertaining and educating drama to break social stigmas and stimulate unity in villages and towns; as a capable composer who shared the lives and messages of Saints, epic-heroes and Avatars through his highly popular *Harikathas*; as a prolific writer who penned a battery of novels in Kannada, most of them laced with significant or subtle humour exposing the muddled and mediocre adventures of the ordinary mind; as the chief contributor of puns and parodies, quips and quixotic essays to the Kannada humour monthly "Koravanji" as well as The Sankar's Weekly in which it appeared under the title "Mere Prattle" for seven long years; as the Assistant Director of the All India Radio, wherein he not only coined the name "Akashvani" for the broadcasting station (which remains to this day), but also raised the Radio to historic heights by his consistent creativity, weaving numerous novel programmes which appeased and aggravated the listeners' appetite constantly.

By the time India achieved Independence in 1947, Baba had already transferred Kasturi to Bangalore where Venkatadri, his younger son had joined the Engineering college, while Murthy, his elder one was in Glaslow, Sweden, pursuing his Ph. D in

Geology. And it is in this city, after the country was re-born, that the golden chapter in Kasturi's life, for which God was waiting, also began.

He Meets the Love of His Life

The swashbuckling Kasturi of the Kannada Literature fame was stunned into silence when the very first time his eyes met Baba in a devotee's residence in Bangalore, Swami read him like an open book! "You are glad I fixed that boy?" He asked, flabbergasting him with His Omniscience and Omnipresence. A few days prior to this Swami had instructed in a dream to Mr. Potti Iyer, an acquaintance of Kasturi, to give his son's hand to Kasturi's daughter in marriage, though Potti Iyer had initially disinclined hoping to find a more prosperous family to align himself with. "You wished that I intercede with Potti Iyer and make them agree," He continued. Seeing the unstinted veneration Potti Iyer had for Baba, Kasturi had earlier said to himself, "They consider this Silent Sai as their Master. If only He says a word, they will receive Padma into their home." And now, he was dazed when Sai declared that He had in fact heard his inner mumbling! "You lost a son, poor fellow! This boy will be a son-in-law and a son to you. Do not worry. I know you have not received from the University the status you deserve. Very soon, you will receive that too. Your old mother will be happy now...." Swami went on and on, and every syllable that Sai uttered only left Kasturi mesmerized, triggering in him mental gymnastics of a genre he had never indulged till then. It was hard for him to believe what he was seeing and experiencing.

How could this 22 year old with "a huge fluff of kinky hair and ochre robe" know everything? As he was trying to reason it out, Bhagavan dropped a bomb shell. "After retiring from the University, stay with Me. You can write My biography." "Me?" Kasturi immediately ejaculated. "Yes, I shall tell you whom to consult for details – parents, brothers, kinsmen, neighbours, teachers, etc. I shall also help." It was July, 1948 and Kasturi's mind had become a complete conundrum. "Was this a reprimand, a dig at my decrying him, a joke at my conceit as a writer, a warning that I should not merely prattle in weeklies.....? Did He really mean it?"

Well, that was, in brief, the mind-boggling manner how the Lord, who had been directing his life undetectably for nearly five decades, decided to reveal Himself when the time had finally arrived. Describing this moment, Mr. Kasturi writes in his autobiography, "It was too good to be true, too sweet to swallow, too sudden to sink in, too light to keep in mind! Oh! The gifts He showered!" From the wedding of his daughter, to his promotion, his mother's happiness...Swami submerged him with His spontaneous and unceasing love. In fact, He virtually held him by the hand from there on through every single second of his life, with great care, concern and affection, which overwhelmed him time and again transmuting every cell of his being into an inspired instrument of the Divine.

When the dilemma of reconciling his devotion to Sri Ramakrishna and the irresistible love for Baba overwhelmed his mind, the all-knowing Swami dispelled it when He said to his wife within his earshot, "Poor fellow, he does not know that it was Ramakrishna who brought him to me." The next few years, till he settled in Baba's physical proximity, Kasturi's heart was in Prasanthi and if there was any comma, semicolon or question mark in his life at Bangalore, he found himself at his Beloved's feet in the "Heaven of Peace". And each such encounter with the Lord was an eye-opener. Swami was steady, shaping and sharpening His dearest devotee at every

available opportunity. On one occasion, He asked him, "Which does taste better – hot milk made lukewarm by being poured from one cup to another a number of times or hot milk cooled to the temperature of the tongue by the cup being kept for sometime in a basin of cold water?" Kasturi was imaginably befuddled. Swami gave a clue too. "When you go back, ask your mother. Also tell her what she does is not correct." Only when Kasturi returned and discovered that her mother quickly cooled the milk everyday using a basin of cold water before placing it front of His picture, did he realize the all-pervasive Presence of his Magnificent Master.

Sai Wills and Kasturi Shines as an Illustrious Principal

Soon, Baba's promise of higher salary and status in his career materialized. A University Order sent Mr. Kasturi to the Intermediate College, Davangere as its Principal. But the Davangere College was no walk, or even dance, in the park, so to say, and as he described, it was "a Damocles sword". But Mr. Kasturi, through his patient and loving personality, his *Harikathas* and seva to *Harijans*, educational exhibitions and persuasive and powerful presentations successfully canalized the exuding energy of the youth, and in the process created history in that hostile environment. On the day he retired after five years, the love the college and the place had for him was patent. The crowd that had gathered to see him off was huge and the flower garlands that were heaped upon him nearly covered his whole face. Later, when Kasturi offered his gratitude to Bhagavan for seeing him through in that 'notorious' place, the Kind Lord immediately transmuted the sky in His hand into a rosary of *Tulsi* beads and placed it lovingly around his neck. Kasturi, conquered yet again by His Pure Love, was left wondering how the Lord who actually is the Doer takes great pleasure in decorating His devotees with laurels and rewards.

But those five years of Kasturi in Davangere (1949-1954) were riddled with remarkable experiences, both at the college and at His physical presence in Prasanthi Nilayam, to where he visited as often as he could. In December 1951, Kasturi was surprised to find in his day's mail a letter from Baba, in the language Kannada, written in Anglo-Saxon script, requesting him (!) to unveil His portrait at the School Day Function of Sathya Sai Baba District Board High School at Bukkapatnam (10 kms from Puttaparthi). When Mr. Kasturi reached the Divine Presence a few days later with a well-prepared manuscript of his Telugu speech, written in Kannada (for, then he neither knew how to read, write or understand the Andhra Tongue) which he thought would impress all, Baba, without a moment, massacred the idea saying, "It must be 'Heartificial'".

Mr. Kasturi, on the appointed day, not only gave an inspiring speech in English, but also was immensely humbled when he saw the boards declare himself as "N Kasturi, M A, B L., Ph. D, Principal, DRM College, Davangere". He fell at Baba's feet. "Swami, I am not a Ph. D." But the compassionate Sai only smiled, patted and said, "You are a Ph. D". "Of which University, Swami?" The Lord turned to him again and said, "Puttaparthi University." Little did he realize then that it was not a casual utterance, sans concrete meaning; Professor Kasturi, in this episode, was in fact, the Lord's chosen instrument through whom He intimated the world about the most salient facet of His Grand Mission, of which the Bukkapatnam school was only a starting point. Three decades later when the Sri Sathya Sai University was inaugurated in Puttaparthi, Professor Kasturi was present savouring every second of that significant occasion.

Captivated by His Compassion

In these five initial years of his acquaintance with the Avatar, the ever-inquisitive and enterprising Kasturi, who was mesmerized by His Miracles and Manifestations, even tried to instigate Swami into performing these Divine Acts in his own 'tactful' way. When he heard that Swami had, for some reason, become very cold to the evening Chitravathi sessions (which were, invariably, breathtaking 'Creation hours' when the Lord would produce anything – idols, lockets, sweets, etc. - from the sands), eager to enjoy the fun again, he went near Him and pleaded, "Swami! It is Full Moon today. We shall have the gathering on the sands." "Do you think I can transform only Chitravathi sands? Is there no sand around the Mandir under construction?" Stumped but still strong, Kasturi persisted, "Swami! We shall go to that site and sit on one heap and do bhajan." "I know it is not Bhajan you are interested. You desire that I entertain you with miracles. You think I must have sand for that," the Lord laughed. Now that the cat was out of the bag, someone said, "Very well, Swami! We know you can create things right out of air...Let us gather in Mandir itself. A miracle can happen here, now if you are gracious." At this point, Swami, who was till then pacing up and down, stopped and stared at the pleaders and said, "Miracle, miracle – you clamour! But you have no knowledge of one miracle – You, everyone one of you. Your very existence is My Miracle." Recalling that lightning Divine Disclosure, Mr. Kasturi writes, "Through that simple-looking statement, He revealed that He was far more phenomenal than anyone we had learnt about in human history!"

But the inventive mind of Kasturi did not cease its schemes. On one occasion when he learnt from a few people who had close encounters with Baba that if He saw a gem-set ring in the finger of the devotee, He would, more often than not, ask for it, blow His breath over it and transform it into a ring with His portrait embedded on it, he got a big gold-ring made for himself. But Baba made him suffer for two full years without asking for it even though he tried in every way to make it as conspicuous as possible whenever he was in His Presence. On the next day after his "Bukkapatnam speech" when he was inside the interview room, Baba held out His hand for the ring! Shaking with excitement, he placed it immediately in His palms. "Oh! You desire to have a big picture so that you can preen yourself as a big devotee! So everyone would envy you and it would make you famous...No! Have Me in your heart instead. That is My Home." Next, the Divine blew His breath and lo! The ring disappeared! The poor Professor's face was like a punctured balloon, all air puffed out. Then Swami gave Kasturi Vibhuti packets as parting prasadam and opened the door for him to step out.

With a heavy heart, the old head stepped out. But scarcely had he made a few steps, when the Compassionate Lord beckoned him near and looking sympathetically at him asked, "You want your ring back, no?" A charming smile crossed His lips, His Hand waved and weaved out of the thin air a ring extolled in the legends. It was a *navaratna* – a nine-gemmed beauty, three in each row, which, it is believed, could bestow one with boons from the nine planets. The gracious Lord slipped it onto his finger and then said, "Now, you will not be announcing me, as yours, even before I acknowledge that you are mine. This ring is worn by many who believe that the *Navagrahas* (the nine planets) have to be propitiated. By and by, you will discover that my *Anugraha* (Grace) can overcome the sinister designs of the nine planets. Until then, have this."

“I will save you from every hurt” - Baba

And how many times did the Ever-Guarding and Gracious Lord not rescue him? During a vacation month when he was at Bangalore, his office at Davangere sent him a cheque to be signed and returned in the official envelope that was enclosed. When Kasturi alighted from a city bus and arrived at the post office to send it, it was pouring cats and dogs. He was petrified, not because of the rain, but because of his wet pockets that were empty! He searched frantically for the cheque on all the roads he had crossed, but no avail. And worse, he had not noted the number of cheque anywhere to be able to inform the Treasury about mishap and save its misuse. In panic, he climbed the night train to Davangere, was at his office at 8 am, and summoned his Accountant to explore ways to repair the damage. And in the next few minutes, he finds in his room the Postman with a bundle of covers. He inspects the just-arrived mail and voila! One of them is the same registered post, with the cheque safely inside, that he lost at Bangalore! Some kind soul (Baba?) had picked it up and dropped it in the post box, and as Kasturi narrates, “It had traveled with me by the night train and come to my office as soon as I reached there!” Who else, but his Sai, had saved him from embarrassment, ignominy and a blotch of inefficiency in his illustrious rein as the Principal.

Again, during the University exam, when he opened and distributed the question papers for “History of India” while the Time Table had all the students come prepared for “History of Great Britain”, he did not know where to hide his face. He closed the door and cried in front of the portrait of Baba. It was a no ordinary blunder. The whole process of preparing a new question paper, printing and parceling it to fifteen centres has to be undertaken by the University head office in six days! It was impossible! Kasturi was devastated; with tears, he spelt out his gruesome fate in front of Baba’s photo, and then gathering courage boarded the night train to Mysore, the city of the University head office.

He landed early morning and straight went to the house of the Registrar who was fortunately, a friend. He comforted Kasturi when he said that the other two members of the Board of Examiners for History were in the city at that time and if he can get the new question paper by 2 pm, he could arrange to get it printed in the Government Press and have dispatched it by the night. But before anything can be done, Kasturi had to first meet the Vice chancellor, who will be available only at 10.30 am after a historic meeting on Education being attended by the Chief Minister of the state. That meeting was punctuated with unruly scenes with a few students at the back of the Hall creating a ruckus.

When Kasturi caught him at his office after the session ended, he saw him crestfallen. Expecting more bad news from another student population at Davangere, the Vice-Chancellor asked coldly, “What is the news?” And then Kasturi presented his plight. The University Vice-Chancellor was glad. Kasturi was actually pleasantly shocked. “During all these years you have kept Davangere students quiet. Look at the students here! Don’t worry, Kasturi! Such mistakes do happen even in the best regulated institutions...” and next, he summoned the Registrar in. Once the new question paper was set, signed by required authorities and sent for dispatch, the Vice Chancellor even gave a friendly pat on his back and said, “Carry on Mr. Kasturi! Do not loose your sense of humour.” The next day Kasturi was in Puttaparthi and when Baba called him in, he pleaded, “Swami! I do not want to continue as the head of the

college. It is too much of a ...” Swami cut in with “What did happen, really? I know you opened one packet instead of another. You wept before me. And, that in the Office Room.... Well, your boss sent you with a pat on your back, don’t I know? This is not the first time...Go on stumbling! I will follow, saving you from the hurt”.

And exactly as He said, the Benevolent Baba, cared, comforted and virtually carried him in His arms for all the rest of the thirty years of his life that He spent in His close proximity. When he retired in 1954 with a full year’s pension, Swami suggested that he go on a spiritual pilgrimage to North India taking his mother and wife along, and added, “Purchase three railway tickets for the journey. We four can travel on those.” When their hostess in Delhi sent a phonogram to the Ramakrishna ashram in Brindavan informing them of Kasturi’s arrival, at the receiver’s end, the decoded message had, instead of ‘Kasturi’, ‘Baba’ in it. The whole trip, similarly, was a series of visible and invisible manifestations of His Love and Presence, and after reaching Bangalore when Kasturi wrote a letter to Swami, who was in Kodai Kanal then, describing all the thrilling tales of His Grace, Baba replied, “I am happy you returned full of joy...How can delay, disappointment or danger cross your plans when Swami is ever with you? My Name is not distinct from My Form...”

In Joyous Company as His Neighbour

Such a Loving Lord, whom Kasturi calls, the “Embodiment of Inexhaustible Compassion”, blessed him with the opportunity of being an inmate of His hallowed heaven with a tiny tenement to the right of the Prasanthi Nilayam Mandir in 1954. His was one among the eight which stood in a row. In his autobiography, Kasturi shares many accounts of how Swami used to play and pun with them through His plethora of pranks, and at the same time prick and purify their habits and attitudes, which explains why Swami had aptly named their block “Brindavan”, reminiscent of where Lord Krishna spent His charming childhood, playing with his peers.

One day, when Kasturi and his family were looking towards the northern direction waiting for Him to Grace their house, as He was in there already in their neighbour’s house and could step out any moment, the Sweet Lord managed to tactfully get through their backdoor, tip-toe silently from behind and quickly place His palms on Kasturi’s eyes and ask, “Tell, who?” That was how much He loved the company of this sixty year old dear devotee. It was a fantastic period of “spiritual honeymoon” for Kasturi and his family when Sai would suddenly walk into their house any day and regale them with His melodious voice singing great Carnatic music classics, or drown them with laughter with His on-the-spot constructed rib-ticklers.

Beholding Amazing Facets of His Brilliance

During this time, Kasturi not only had the fabulous fortune of witnessing thrilling miracles and manifestations of the Lord associated with festivals like Dasara when from the Divine Brow of the Lord would emerge Vibhuti, the sacred *kumkum* (vermillion) or flashes of light (Swami even materialized ‘Kailas Vibhuti’ specially for him which was hot and could have scalded his palm!); or during Rama Navami when He transfigured the sands of Chitravathi into scintillating idols of Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman followed by a shining silver plate saying, “How can these four remain separate entities? They have to be together”; or on the festival celebrating the birth of Krishna when He Himself so deftly, diligently and delightfully

decorated the statue of Lord Krishna with bracelets and bands, gems and jewellery; or the one and only Vaikunta Ekadashi festival when Swami opened the vault of heaven for all the devotees when He materialized the legendary Amrith (nectar), not by a wave of His hand or pouring it from His cupped palms, but from “which nectar was first gained” as He said - Baba brought out from the sands a large and white conch and from that empty shining shell nectar fell, slowly and fragrantly, till it filled a silver vessel to its brim; or the stunning Shivarathri when from Baba’s gullet gushed forth, one after one, nine lingams (!) and the munificent Sai Shiva later graced and sanctified Kasturi when He gave one of these to him for his daily worship; or, of course, the Birthday of his beloved Lord when He blessed him and his wife with the unparalleled chance of anointing His hair....Kasturi was literally in heaven, spending every moment of his retired life with great relish.

From Akashvani to ‘Saivani’

But in 1956, the Divine decided to ‘re-tyre’ him for the world, and in spite of his reluctance to leave His presence, convinced him to accept the offer of the post of Producer of Programmes for the newly established All India Radio Station, Bangalore, saying, “Your talents must not lie fallow...Do you think you will be serving ‘someone else’ there? All jobs are for Me...This is a gift of Grace, Go! You are not going away from me...” The architect of Akashvani was once again engaged creating and crafting radio programmes and infusing them with vigour and color, variety and candour. At every slightest opportunity Kasturi rushed the hundred miles to bask in His presence, and the Compassionate Lord even allowed him during this time to take a long leave and accompany Him to Delhi, Rishikesh, Brindavan and Kashmir.

And after this trip, there were more blessings waiting! Swami now wanted to celebrate his sixtieth birthday! A priest arrived from Bukkapatnam, musicians came from Mysore and many All India Radio fans and friends gathered from Bangalore. Complete with Vedic recitals, rich decoration and sacred music - there was no compromise on style or celebration in any manner. Swami allowed the fortunate couple to adorn His Lotus Feet with flowers, one by one, as they chanted the 1008 names of the Lord, and at the end, His Hand moved in circular motion and out came a Mangala sutra and a medallion. While Mr. Kasturi tied the golden thread round his better half’s neck, and she placed the golden pendant over his head, the Magnanimous Lord, standing in the middle, just shook His empty Hand over their heads and the next minute they were covered with a shower of rice grains, *kumkum* and *haldi dust* – all considered very auspicious.

Having savoured His unmatched and unceasing love, and with his penchant for penning radio programmes tapering off, Kasturi now longed to return to His Presence permanently and to serve none but Him. And that day did arrive, in a matter of few weeks, when Swami, during a visit to Bangalore in 1958, spotted him at the residence of Mr. Vittal Rao and said, “Now, you have to work at Puttaparthi. A monthly magazine will start soon. Guess! How is it named?” And then Himself revealed, “Sanathana Sarathi!” This Divine instrument of the Lord, the ashram’s mouthpiece, which was to carry His Message to the multitudes, was instrumental in bringing another chosen instrument into His proximity at Puttaparthi. Kasturi’s dream of living in Baba’s Presence materialised again, and now truly every moment of his life each day, from dawn till dusk, was spent with the Divine.

Starting the Day with Sai...

Recalling his daily early morning schedule, his daughter, Mrs. Padma Kasturi, says, "Much before 6 am, my father would be ready to go the Mandir and my mother would have kept ready for him *Bilva* and *Tulsi* leaves - washed, dried and neatly bundled in a cloth - which he would take and go to see Swami. First thing he would do, once in His Presence, is place these fresh and serene offerings at His Lotus Feet and prostrate, and then return home bringing along with him the sanctified 'green gifts' from the Divine. My mother would be anxiously waiting for him and only after he returned would she touch coffee or breakfast. Again, after the conclusion of bhajans, which was around 9.30, father used to go up the Mandir to His Presence and return an hour or two later." "At this time, Swami would generally discuss matters relating to the Sai Organisation as the sixties and seventies was the time when the Organisation was taking concrete shape," adds Mr. Ramesh Kasturi, Mrs. Padma's son.

And once he returned, there would be people waiting for him to hear from the horse's mouth, as it were, pearls and gems of Divine Play and Grace, and he would lovingly share too. "He was enormously generous with his experiences of Swami, and also, extremely perceptive of His ways and words, and at the same time had a very sweet voice," says Mrs. Janet Bicker, who along with her husband produced many films on Baba in 1960s and 70s. "When I would arrive after not being here for two years or more," she continues, "I would go to him and show him what I had been working on, the articles that I had been writing, and he would sweetly point out mistakes and say, 'It might be better, you know, if you took this approach...' and it was just something that was extremely helpful to me personally and to the writing that appeared later in the films as the narration... And if you approached Professor Kasturi with your question, you would feel confident that you were getting an answer that Swami would be pleased with or approve of....I, therefore, have many things to be thankful for to Professor Kasturi."

Professor Kasturi - Gentleness at its Zenith

Professor Anil Kumar, similarly, has unforgettable memories of the gentle Kasturi. "What really fascinated me," he says, "is this: In the year 1970, when I first came to Puttaparthi with my family, the eldest of my four kids was five years old and I was carrying the youngest in my arms. As I was moving about in the campus, the children felt very thirsty. I could not ask for water to anyone because everyone seemed to be so busy, going to the Mandir; I didn't know where to get water from. And then I saw Professor Kasturi come out of his residence. I went to him and said, "Sir, I am a Professor from the Christian College in Guntur; my children want some water. I know it's time for you to go for Darshan..." He immediately said, "Mr. Anil Kumar, giving water to your children is more important to me than the usual *Darshan!*" And after serving my children, he added, "This is service to Swami; such acts will please Him." I can never forget that in my life – which is not only the message of his life, it is also a message to me and to our Sai brothers and sisters all over the world."

Spontaneous selfless service and empathy were as natural to Kasturi as fragrance to a flower. "Right from his early days, his heart always went out to the deprived and desolate," recalls Mrs. Padma. "He would create *Harikathas* (composition of song and dialogue) on noble people and perform them in the prisons, and such would be the

impact of his inspired presentations that the stone-hearted would soon start sobbing and repenting, even prostrating in front of him. And he liked the *Harijans* (the untouchables) the most. He would take his enthusiastic and energetic band of boys and entertain those in misery, bringing on their faces forgotten smiles.”

Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy, who is now continuing the biography of Bhagavan from where Professor Kasturi left off, met him when he was only 19 years old, and he remembers vividly how Mr. Kasturi was diligently and tirelessly typing away on the typewriter, totally oblivious to the clutter and confusion around. “But anybody could go and interrupt him; he was so simple, gentle and welcoming,” he recalls. “He knew no strangers; he will not even ask the person’s name and willingly share Swami’s glory. And if anybody came to him with any ailment – mental, physical or emotional, he would empathise immediately. In fact, he would even go to the extent of interceding on a devotee’s behalf with Swami, though this can often be dangerous for people living in His close proximity.

“I remember one such incident,” says Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy. “It was in 1981 and we had organized a spiritual retreat in the Muddanahalli Sai School campus, where I was a warden then. On that occasion, along with Professor Kasturi were Professor K V Ramakrishna Rao and Jagadanandaji Maharaj. The latter, who was a monk from the Ramakrishna Mission, gave a wonderful discourse, and after his talk asked Mr. Kasturi if he could accompany him to Puttaparthi to see Swami. And Professor Kasturi agreed to this readily. So, all of us came to Prasanthi Nilayam, but by that time the bhajans had concluded and Swami had gone upstairs. We all waited down, while Mr. Kasturi went up and informed Swami about our arrival. And in the next few minutes, the Kind Lord granted all of us an interview! And it was an interesting session. Jagadanandaji had a chronic health problem and Swami, graciously, materialized vibhuti and gave him. Then he told Swami, ‘I have this ailment for many years now.’ The reply that Bhagavan gave him that day was revealing. ‘Develop more faith and devotion in Guru Maharaj. You will be cured,’ He said. Swami was referring to his master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.” That is how Mr. Kasturi helped a spiritual aspirant secure the Grace of Sai, but on occasions Swami severely censured him too for such ‘Gatekeeper to God’ endeavours to ensure that his ego was never inflated.

How Sai Chiseled His Kasturi

Professor Nanjundiah, the Controller of Examinations of the Sri Sathya Sai University, who has spent many years watching and working with Professor Kasturi, narrates one such example to illustrate this.

“One day when Kasturi was going to His Presence in the first floor of Prashanti Nilayam Mandir, as was His daily routine, an old-time friend who was aware of his proximity to Bhagavan, caught him and started coaxing him. ‘You should recommend my case to Swami...Bhagavan should give me an interview. Please don’t say ‘No’! You must do this..,” he went on. Professor Kasturi, kind-hearted that he was, could not afford to hurt him nor could he reply in affirmative, so, with an indirect reply ‘I have to go to Swami’, he moved on and went upstairs. After he saw Swami, He allowed him to convey all that he wanted to convey and then asked, ‘What happened when you were coming up to me?’ Professor Kasturi couldn’t immediately get Him.

Swami again queried, 'What happened on the way?' Then, as if suddenly recollected, Kasturi exclaimed, 'Oh, that Swami! One old friend met me on the way.'

'What did he tell you?' The Lord probed further. Kasturi said, 'Swami, You know everything. He wanted an interview from you. He told me to recommend his case.' Then, immediately Swami said, 'O ho! Recommendation! You have grown so big in Prashanti Nilayam as to recommend other people's cases to Swami! O ho!'

'No Swami, I am an ordinary fellow; just a dust of Your Lotus Feet. Can I recommend anyone to you, Swami? That gentleman thought so many things and told me to do this.' Professor Kasturi explained and implored. Still, Bhagavan commanded, "Go and tell him: 'I am nobody here, an absolutely ordinary person. Can any person recommend about others to Swami? Swami is God. Please don't expect me to do such things. I am really no one here.'" Tell him and return.'

But when Kasturi went down to pass this message onto his friend the whole episode took an unexpected turn. That person was stone-deaf. And when Kasturi softly, with a serious face, communicated Swami's message, that gentleman thought his friend was only being too clever, and given his closeness to Bhagavan, he has really acquired for him a Divine audience. He began to rejoice. Kasturi, then, had to repeat His message, twice or thrice, and as loudly as possible, and as a result not only that particular gentleman but everyone around heard it carefully and clearly, apart from it being reiterated repeatedly to Kasturi himself.

For someone who really does not understand Swami's love for Professor Kasturi, it may seem like an unkind way of humiliating the respectable elder. But that is not the real point. Apart from making the world know that recommendations are not the route to His receive His Grace, Swami, who had very special love for Professor Kasturi and the concern for the full blossoming of his personality, actually was nipping in the bud any possible tinge of even the slightest ego in him, which could impede his progress towards his spiritual goal. He wanted his Kasturi to be humble, noble and divine, just like Him."

Prof. Kasturi – Humility and Humour in Human Form

And this choicest disciple of the Supreme Spiritual Master, did live up to His expectations on occasions that are too numerous to enumerate. "He was no ordinary man, a scholar par excellence and a matchless writer," says Professor Anil Kumar. "He knew Upanishadic, Ramakrishna and Aurobindo literature through and through, but never took the opportunity to showcase his scholarship. His talks were not to get into your head, they touched your heart. They were not full of quotations, meant for you to appreciate his great wisdom, but to gladden your heart and make you grow in faith and devotion. It was a communication worthy of the statement – heart to heart! That's why, when he narrated any incident, you never forgot for a lifetime! I remember all the stories he said long ago, in the 1970's!... He could speak on one single incident for one hour! And nobody would get up! There was no parallel! You may perhaps, call this an expression of audacity, but I am sincere when I make the statement: 'If Baba is number one in story-telling, Kasturi would be number two! His expressions had so much power and colour. His simplicity, humility and endearing nature towards all was really great!'"

Julius, a septuagenarian Sai devotee from United Kingdom, who had spent many days in the Ashram listening to Kasturi's talks in the 1980s, says, "Even if Swami had made him turn stone into wine in front of our eyes, we would have accepted it, because we knew he would have said: 'Oh! It's not me, it's Swami!' He wouldn't ever dream of arrogance! That's what made him everybody's dream God-father beside their bed, telling them bed-time stories about God and the Universe. And you just were taken in! I don't think he ever thought he was giving anything of his own; he was interpreting to us, what Swami had given to him. I don't think he ever thought of himself or realized that he had wisdom, no way absolutely...He knew and was completely aware that Swami had allowed him to be Kasturi! And truly nobody can ever be like him just like nobody can ever be like Shakespeare or Hamlet. They are all totally unique, made forever! ... I would say, personally, that the most outstanding concept and attribute of Professor Kasturi was - he emanated love, with humility. And we were spellbound with love for him! And that's what Swami is, when you begin to realize what He is – He is Love, and when you discover that Love, you love Him. And I think – this makes me cry – Kasturi discovered that! And I think that's why we loved him; because he did it with humour!"

"He was a perfect picture of a cultured Indian" – Mrs. Jayalakshmi Gopinath

Ask anybody who has seen and interacted with Kasturi, and they say, if simplicity and humility was his first nature, humour was his second. Mrs. Jayalakshmi Gopinath, the Warden of the Anantapur Campus of Bhagavan's University, saw Mr. Kasturi when she was in her teens. She recalls, "As a young girl, I had a great deal of reverence for him. You could ask me 'why'. Because in my mind, I had a picture of a cultured, Hindu, Indian; and he was typical of that! He was pretty tall, broad-shouldered, his lower waist always straight and would meticulously wear a spotless white dhoti and on the top would be a clean, white *jhubba*, right up to the knees. On his forehead, you would find the marks of vibhuti standing out, and in the middle, a *kumkum* spot - a person who exuded Indian culture!

"Principally because, in spite of all his attainments, he was never ostentatious. But he had a dignity of his own. And I used to admire him for so many things as a young girl. One was, of course, because he was so near and dear to Swami! He was always around Him in the same attire. And another, was his talks. Swami would always call him to give speeches to the devotees, and though an intellectual and scholar, he would speak in simple English. There was no show, but the most wonderful aspect of it was, with all his devotion and reverence for Bhagavan, he would spice it with a lot of humour – that was one thing so typical of Professor Kasturi! And it used to be so subtle; we could catch it, but he would not laugh on the stage!"

Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy, who had many years of association with him, was a witness to this witty side of this great personality any number of times. Citing one instance, he says, "Swami, on one occasion, had warned Professor Kasturi against taking a lift in a car from Bangalore to Puttaparthi or vice versa anytime, and therefore, Kasturi always traveled only by bus. Unless Swami permitted, he would not get inside a car. And Swami allowed him on occasions, especially when he had to visit villages as the State President of the Sai Organisation of Karnataka. Once, I remember, he was talking about Swami for two hours in Mangalore. Immersed in his scintillating talk, nobody had kept track of the time, and when I suddenly saw my

watch, it was 9 pm. We had planned to conclude the session by 8.30 pm, which would give us enough time to catch our bus at 9.30. But now I feared that we may not be able to make it. I immediately took a chit and wrote "BUS" and held it up. I was sitting, not at the front, but beside him. Kasturi saw my raised chit and told the audience, 'See, Narasimha Murthy is telling me in Hindi, 'Stop!' ('Bus' means 'Stop' in Hindi) And the audience burst in laughter.'" Such was the spontaneity in his humour.

But if humour was what dominant in his career before he came under Sai's direct care, it was replaced later with humility. "When he came to Swami and settled in His Presence in the Ashram in the fifties, they were too few men around at Prashanthi Nilayam, and therefore, whenever any work had to be done, everybody would have to volunteer," says Mr. Sanjay Sahani, Principal of the Brindavan Campus of Swami's University. "And therefore, though by Profession he was a lecturer, a Professor and a former Principal of a College, when he came to Bhagavan, he would have to carry out any number of errands for which he had no training or background. Once, the Post Master General at Hyderabad came up with a proposal to start a Post Office at Prashanthi Nilayam, provided a pensioner of some local authority or Government Authority was willing to become the Post Master. When they looked around in the Ashram, Professor Kasturi found that he was the only person qualified to take up the job. And swallowing his ego, he volunteered to accept that job. Describing this episode, Professor Kasturi once said, 'Swami was very carefully observing my reactions! With a concealed mischievous smile, He stated: "Professor Kasturi, Post Master!" This does not sound appropriate, isn't it?' As "Professor Kasturi, former Principal" was how he was known and respected.

But the smart disciple of the Divine Master that Kasturi was, said, 'Swami, not any Post Master - Post Master of Prashanthi Nilayam'. Needless to say, the Supreme Teacher was too pleased to hear this from His trainee. And through this simple episode, Professor Kasturi also explained how when we take to the service of Swami, we should forget our individual selves, and always remind ourselves that wherever the need is the utmost, we should be there and ready to take up any work."

The Perfect Choice and Voice of the Avatar

In fact, it is this sense of service sans any ego, coupled with humility and humour, which not only made him a favourite Sai brother in the ever-expanding Sai Family, but also endeared him to the Lord the most. He was His "Chosen Instrument" for a variety of valuable roles in His Divine Mission. And He dedicated all his God-gifted talents – as a proficient linguist, excellent writer, talented playwright, scintillating speaker, expert dramatist, brilliant biographer, passionate Professor of History, inspired social reformer, sincere humanist, master story teller, gem of a journalist, and a spirited spiritual seeker – every facet of his illustrious personality was dedicated to serve in His Divine Mission, with utmost proficiency, humility and gratitude.

He was 'the man for announcements' in Prashanthi Nilayam. In the early days of the Ashram, Baba was particular that the devotees be informed about rules and regulations, schedules and safety precautions, whenever there was a considerable congregation and He would always beckon Mr. Kasturi to do it. And the soft spoken senior member of the Sai Family would candidly and clearly convey the message in six languages – English, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Hindi, one after the

other. Mrs. Padma Kasturi recalls, “Swami used to say to him, chidingly yet caringly: ‘Go, get the Instructions Book and read it out carefully, else I will get cross with you and the whole festival is going to be, for you, a sorrowful affair!’”

And countless were the occasions when He called on the master orator Kasturi to speak and he would passionately and perfectly share the mysteries and the miracles, manifestations and the *mahimas* of the Avatar in His Physical Presence, and otherwise too. And he loved doing this to the hilt. In fact, Mr. Ramesh Kasturi, his grandson, recalls, “Whenever he was sick, with cold or fever, Swami used to tell him: ‘*Poyi Lecture cheyi, ade neeku biksha*’ meaning, ‘Go and speak about Swami, that lecture is your medicinal mixture’. And it was so wonderfully true. He always forgot about himself once he started the story of His Glory. That was his sustenance.”

In fact, on one occasion, Professor Kasturi conveyed this truth of his life to His Beloved, so skillfully and spontaneously. “It was the time when there were only two cottages on either side of the Prasanthi Mandir, and Mr. Kasturi lived on the right side,” narrates Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy. “With not many devotees around, Swami would often drop inside these tiny tenements, without announcing, to the Divine delight of the fortunate few. And during one such surprise stopover, Swami saw Kasturi sitting on a chair and spending time, childlike, with a bear doll that had a kettle drum tied to its waist. The mischievous Sai, stepped silently in, and before Kasturi could realize anything, pushed the plaything away from the Professor’s hands. The toy toppled and fell down on its back, but the bear was still relentlessly beating the drum; though it was down and it was not out. Kasturi stood up startled! And then Swami said, ‘Hey Kasturi, *neeku itle chestnanu nenu*’ that is, ‘Hey Kasturi, this is the same thing I will do to you too.’ Mr. Kasturi looked at the vanquished yet valiantly playing baby bear and then reverentially retorted, “Swami, if you do this to me, I too am going to do exactly the same thing; I will still announce the world about the Avatar, the splendid Sai.”

And if we look at the life of this great soul, right from the time the Lord drew Him near, every cell of his body and ounce of his energy has been spent only in speaking and sharing, collecting and circulating His stories and glories, be whatever may the challenges and constraints, difficulties and deadlines.

Syndicating the Sai Saga

In the initial days of ***Sanathana Sarathi***, with no professional or skilled help of any kind, be it in writing and editing to printing, pasting and parceling, it was a tremendous responsibility for Professor Kasturi to ensure that the issue, flawless in every aspect, reached the readers on time. And, in spite of his age and position, Kasturi took to every task with equal enthusiasm and interest. “Once hundreds of copies had been made in English, Professor Kasturi, the editor, would himself type-set the whole text of Swami’s articles in Telugu,” recalls Mrs. Geeta Ram, who watched and played with Professor Kasturi as a tiny girl in those days. “The whole process of type-setting would be repeated so many times,” she continues. “And after the sheets were printed, the ink would still be wet. They would then have to be spread all over the floor to dry, so the ink would not smear. Later, the pages were carefully collated, stapled together, packed and addressed in preparation for mailing – all done by hand. Although there were a few volunteers to help him, I remember

Professor Kasturi doing all these jobs, month in and month out, for so many years. This was truly his labor of love for Swami."

Yes, for Kasturi, the documentation and dissemination of his Sai's Life and Message was the only guiding principle and goal in life. And towards this end, he was ever alert, agile and eager to go any length.

"With no drop of verbal ambrosia falling from Baba's divine lips left unlettered, Professor Kasturi made sure that any delicious delicacy of a delivery from the divine lips would be feasted through his ears and then shared in full with his immediate neighbours and others. Blessed with a sharp intelligence, sturdy physique and a retentive memory, he was the unassailable and humble Kasturi," says Mr. B V Raja Reddy, who, for decades, was closely associated with Professor Kasturi in serving Swami. Professor Nanjundaiah, who also knew him very closely, says, "I would not be wrong if I say he is Valmiki and Vyasa to Bhagavan, who is the Avatar of the Age. In fact, I would add that Professor Kasturi was more effectively suited because He had access to Swami and could directly interact with Him to seek clarifications about His discourses and writings. Today, Sai's Life 'Sathyam Shivam Sundaram' is more historic than Ramayana or Mahabharatha! And for this, he was Swami's chosen instrument."

The Master Testing His Masterpiece

And His choices are always perfect. And if they are not where He wants them to be, He trains and tests, goads and guides till they shine with that sublime splendour that every instrument of His should radiate. Professor Nanjundaiah narrates an interesting incident where Swami tickled and taunted Professor Kasturi's ego to see if it raised its hood or was humble as ever.

"This happened in Brindavan, Bangalore. Swami had just delivered a discourse, which was translated by Professor Kasturi, and as usual he had done a good job, though it was difficult at some places. Swami then asked both of us to go upstairs, and there as He sat on the sofa, He graced us with the opportunity to serve His Feet. So I was gently massaging His one leg, while Professor Kasturi was intently engaged on the other. And now Swami commenced His play! He said, 'What Nanjundaiah, how was Kasturi's translation today?' Professor Kasturi, immersed in His seva, had his face bent down. But when Swami uttered my name, I looked up. He again asked, 'How was Kasturi's translation?' And then silently shook his head indicating to me that I should reply in negative. I, therefore, implicitly obeyed Him like a child and said, 'Swami, it was not good.' Professor Kasturi, who was not ruffled in the least, and had his head fixed at His feet, said, 'Yes Swami...it is true...here and there, there were many defects in my translation...I hope, overall, it was good'. That was the type of relationship Professor Kasturi had with Swami. He could always tell anything that he wanted, like a child. He was here giving a certificate to himself about his translation (!) and at the same time giving credit to me, although I didn't really mean it. But Swami continued, 'Tell me Nanjundaiah, was it bad here and there, or was it totally bad?' And again He shook His head suggesting me to give an emphatic 'No'. The Divine appraisal was still on.

With no choice, I retorted, 'It was completely not alright, Swami' and you could imagine mine and Professor Kasturi's plight! Because, Professor Kasturi is one whom

I had venerated and in terms of age, experience, efficiency, proficiency, proximity to Swami, and in every other way, I stood nowhere before him, and for me to make such a comment on Professor Kasturi's translation was something which only Swami could do!

Here Swami also was testing me to see if I am capable enough of unquestioningly obeying His command or do I still suffer from the attractions of worldly name, acceptability, other's opinion, etc. And to Professor Kasturi, it was an assessment of his spiritual evolution. Swami wanted to see when a young fellow, who doesn't have the competency to comment on His discourse or translation, makes such a disparaging statement, how does Professor Kasturi react? Is he able to maintain the same calmness and composure or does he get enticed into an argument or making unwelcome comments? Professor Kasturi, in this episode, was silent for most of the time; his serenity was never shaken. Swami allowed us to do 'Padaseva' for some more time and then said, 'You can go.' And I didn't share the true drama behind this enactment to Kasturi for at least seven long years, as I knew, through experience that Swami would not like me to do so. Professor Kasturi's humility, understanding and application of His Directions were outstanding."

A Clean Conduit of His Message

And it is for this reason that whenever and wherever he spoke about Swami, it always left a deep impact in the minds and hearts of the listeners. "He was *satwic* to the core, and that is probably the reason why he had such a soft voice," says Professor Anil Kumar. "And his style of speeches was fantastic! The whole presentation always had a powerful continuity, an interesting underlying theme linking every incident and anecdote, event and explanation, such that you never forgot it for a lifetime!"

"For the foreigners, he was a special Ambassador of Swami's Message," says Julius from the UK. "We absolutely adulated him. He was the *pi* to the equation! Swami was the equation, but he was the *p!* It multiplied with him because he spoke such beautiful English; we understood it from him, but we didn't really get it from the books...to experience the great *leelas* of Swami, you didn't have to be there; you could listen to Mr. Kasturi and in your imagination he would lead you there! That was the natural power of his narration. He was another Shakespeare in a way....For example, when Swami went to Gokulam to feed the cows, he would spend those few spare moments telling us a little story, and then he would transpose it into our daily life! I don't know how he did it! It was just like we were little children – he was like the Pied Piper of Hamelin! We were just mesmerized!"

Delighting in Every Facet of the Divine

Such was the impact of this very important man of His Mission. Swami had so beautifully groomed this great soul such that he was His 'one man army', emissary, ambassador, associate, translator, writer and even a comrade. Kasturi was part of almost every entourage of Swami, be it the visit to Kanyakumari or Kashmir, Srinagar or Simla, or Rishikesh or Rajahmundry, Kerala or Coimbatore, Delhi or Dwarka or even Africa.

In fact, among all the trips with Swami, which were always filled with amazing instances of Grace and great revelations of His Divinity, the odyssey to Africa was

something very special to Kasturi, not because it was Baba's first foreign tour but for an altogether alternate reason. Ironically, it was because of a car accident. The few injuries sustained in that mishap reaped such huge dividends of His love and attention that Kasturi wished he was sick like that forever. "Swami showered unimaginable love on him during that period," says Mrs. Padma. "He reached the spot immediately after the eventuality, wiped his blood with His own handkerchief, and when he was confined to the bed for a few days, He would come every now and then to enquire and be concerned about his every little need and convenience. The attention that the Divine gave was overwhelming". Mr. Ramesh Kasturi says, "In fact, grandfather wished for such a thing with the intense desire to experience that motherly love of Bhagavan."

And so the Lord granted him his every wish. When he went to Tirupathi, there he saw not Lord Venkateswara, but Sai; and when he touched the Feet of the stone idol of Lord Ranganatha at Sri Rangam, he found it "soft, tender, fair, familiar and alive – they were Baba's" as he describes in Loving God. "In fact, the merciful Lord blessed him with a vision of Shiva-Shakthi too, but he would never reveal much about it saying it is 'Daiva-rasaya' meaning, 'Divine mystery' and 'I do not want to talk about it'," recalls his daughter, Mrs. Padma. Mr. Kasturi was blessed not only to be just next to the Avatar when Narayana Himself went to Badri Narayana and Sai Krishna journeyed to Dwaraka, and watch mind-boggling manifestations, but also record every little delicate and divine detail for posterity. He was there when the Sea God adorned Swami's Feet with a string of pearls and when the Benevolent Lord bestowed the highest blessing to Swami Purushottamananda inside a cave in Rishikesh.

"Being almost a constant companion of Swami in every trip, Kasturi would joke 'I am the luggage of Swami. I am like a suitcase, which has no freewill. I go wherever He takes me!'" says Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy.

An Exemplary Devotee like a Lotus on the Water

This characteristic humility and unconditional devotion at His Lotus Feet was what stood by Him in every tragedy of his life. Yes, tragedies. Life was not all hunky-dory as one might imagine it to be for Professor Kasturi; his personal life was riddled with terrible losses, disappointments and diseases in the family. In fact, the number of devastating moments in his life was way above the ordinary.

His life-partner, Mrs. Rajamma, who was his pillar of strength and support, was paralyzed for eleven years and predeceased him; he lost his elder son at the prime of his life, just when he was blossoming into a promising adult; at the age of 85, he had to see his another son, die at 60; his daughter's marital life was beset with on-going problems....to quote a few of his life's dreadful moments. "But the great Kasturi never for a moment put on a melancholic face," says Mr. Anil Kumar. "Like Lord Shiva swallowing the poison, holding it in His throat and shedding only coolness, Kasturi accepted every obstacle as an event in the course of life, meant for his ultimate good, and spread only sweetness. He never complained to Swami and told anybody about them. Nothing ever disturbed his equanimity and intense devotion to Swami".

One word from Swami, they say, was enough to console Him. When his son, who was a reputed geologist retired and soon after passed away because of an ailment,

all Kasturi said was, "His station has come, so he got down; mine has not yet come." "Truly it was Swami who gave him that courage and stoicism," says Mrs. Padma Kasturi. "Even though he was living with us as if very emotionally involved, from within, he was very detached. In fact, many a times, I used to wonder, as sometimes I felt he was very much attached because whenever my sons came from Bangalore he was very endearing to them, but at other times, I used to feel he was very detached. One day I did ask him, 'Father, I am not able to understand you. Why is that sometimes you are so wonderful that I feel you are very much attached but at other times, you seem to be so very removed?' And he said, 'Oh, oh I am duping you too. See how well I am playing my drama'. Of course he considered everything as just a game.

"One day when he returned home after a lecture to foreign devotees, I simply burst out," continues Mrs. Padma. I was beset with many problems and I said, 'What is this? You go and talk for hours on how Swami helped this person or rescued those people, but what has He done for you? Your wife is sick. For 11 years she has been lying on the bed and see my marital problems!' He listened calmly and said, 'It is ok for you to talk in this vein, but I don't want Swami to do anything for me or my family. Whatever He does, He is Perfect, He is God. I have that faith in Him. Whomever He does it to, I consider them as my own. I do not have any attachment with you, my wife and family. From your point of view what you are saying is appreciable, but I do not have the feeling at all that He must do some miracle to me, my family, or my people'.

Swami's "Chairman"

Such was the spiritual height Sai had raised His Kasturi to! Though till the last moment of his life, Swami was assiduously shaping His dearest devotee, He never stopped entertaining him too. When Kasturi became too weak to walk, he would come to the Mandir on the wheelchair which would be placed right in front of Swami's interview room door. And one morning, seeing him on his chair, Swami flashed a mischievous smile, and said, "What Kasturi?...No election, no selection and you have become a Chairman!" Another day He came out of the interview room, walked up to him, and pointing to his body, said, 'Kasturi! This is a 19th century model!' (Kasturi was born in 1897). Swami, then, turned and now pointing towards the interview room, said, "Even this repair workshop cannot fix this model now." The next moment He looked deep into his eyes and asked, "Kasturi, are you afraid?" "No, Swami" came the soft but solid reply. Swami then advised: "Take Swami's name. Don't worry!" And this is exactly what Professor Kasturi ceaselessly did till the Lord set his soul free.

Describing the last months of this illustrious being, which is a spiritual treatise by itself, Mrs. Padma says, "One year before he became one with The Eternal, he had severe back pain. This was in 1986. He could no longer climb the stairs to go to His Presence in the Mandir. The Lord, who was eagerly enquiring about his absence, Himself came to our little room in the South Block to see him. On the first occasion, He suddenly stepped in one day after morning bhajans and asked him, 'What happened? Why aren't you coming?' 'Swami, this back pain is terrible,' answered my father, lying on the cot. Swami then materialized Vibhuti, filled his palm with it and walked away. Eight days passed, but father still could not go to see Him. The concerned Sai came again. And this time, my father said, 'Swami, You please give me a thump on my back and I will just be alright.' But the Lord only lovingly looked at him and said, 'No, that is not the way. You come to the Mandir in a wheelchair.'"

So that is how Kasturi became a 'Chairman' as Swami joked and the charming saga of this devotee and his beloved continued, though now, much subdued, if you saw it superficially. Unfortunately, a few days after this, the respectable octogenarian, who had battled through more than eighty five summers and winters, chills and thrills, hailstones and storms, was suddenly down with a jeopardising jaundice. "Swami was not here then; it was the month of April and He was in Bangalore," recalls Mrs. Padma. "My father became very weak, and when this news was conveyed to Swami, He sent him Vibhuti through many people. But, for whatever inscrutable reason of the Divine and destiny, nothing seemed to work. His voice lost the usual power. The doctors said he was low on sugar, and his speech became feeble. They wanted to administer him glucose but my father would have nothing of it. Having never done a thing in his life, without Divine Permission, he insisted on instructions from Swami. Message was sent to Him and only after that did he relent to the needle and the much needed supplement. Still, any sign of recovery seemed like a fantasy and his frame became even frailer.

He Pined for Him Piteously

"During this time in Brindavan, Swami had taken upon Himself the heart attack of a devotee and did not grant *darshan* for three days. It was the year 1987. And after He finally gave *darshan*, one devotee who had seen Swami there came to my father and said, 'Swami was looking so weak! He has become very thin.' Immediately my father began to cry, 'Oh, I want to see Swami! I want to see my Swami, please!' Lying on the bed, he told me, 'You take me early in the morning. Swami must be coming out at about 9 O'clock. I will have just one glimpse, at least, and then we can be back. I do not want anything else. Everybody is saying He has become very weak. I have to see my Swami somehow'. But I was in a dilemma.

The position of his health was too precarious to travel, but at the same time, his desire to see Him was too intense. Finally, when I could no longer withstand his piteous pleading, I said to myself, 'Alright, let me take him to Brindavan, even if it means taking a huge, and actually dreadful, risk', as one could not really exclude any serious untoward happening on the way. In any case, I arranged for a cab, but he said, 'Do not go and tell Mr. Kutumba Rao (the then Ashram caretaker) now itself, because, I know, he will call and inform Swami, and Baba will refuse to my going there. I do not want this to happen'. But I said, 'Father, you are a property of Prasanthi Nilayam, not just my father. The whole ashram will blame me if anything happens to you on the way. I cannot take such a chance, so, let me please inform Mr. Kutumba Rao.'

"Then he said, 'Okay, you go to him, but only after 10 o'clock' because by then, my father reasoned, Swami would already have retired. So, the cab arrived, I had finished packing, and then went to Mr. Kutumba Rao. As soon as he heard my plan, he said, 'You are taking a risk!' 'I have to,' I said, 'because father is giving me no other choice! His pleadings are so heart-breaking. If anything has to happen in the way, let it be. I just cannot help it. Whatever the case may be, his mind is completely fixed on Swami, and as a daughter, it is very difficult for me to resist his painful pleas.' But he said, 'No, this is not the right thing to do. I will come and convince him'. And so, the next minute, Mr. Kutumba Rao, along with Dr. Alreja, came to our room and tried to persuade him to give up the idea. But when nothing worked, they finally said,

'Kasturi *garu*, this cab is not a good one; it is very shaky and uncomfortable. We will arrange a good car for you and inform Swami too, and then you can go.'

"Wait for Sai" - Swami

So, father, in spite of desperate desire, could not see Swami that day, and the whole night, he spent only sobbing and shedding tears. 'How pathetic is my fate!...This has to befall on me!...I cannot even go to see Swami!..' he went on and on. Then he wrote a letter to Swami; but his hand was highly unsteady and it looked like a sorry scribble on a sheet of paper. I, therefore, suggested that it is better I keep a note along with his paper so that the content of his letter is clear to Swami, but he said, 'No, you cannot keep a note along with my letter. If you want, you write a separate one and post it on your own. You cannot send it through Mr. Kutumba Rao; he is not a postman to take everybody's letter to Swami. He can only take my letter, that's it'. He was very strict in these matters, and therefore I wrote and posted mine, while he sent his through Mr. Kutumba Rao. And then the most wonderful thing happened. Swami replied to him! It was an inspiring instruction from the Divine. The letter was dated April 1987 and it read, 'Kasturi, accept my blessings! Do not have fear of any kind. Swami is always with you, in you and around you. Be brave. Think of Him only. Give up any other thoughts. The body is a water bubble. Do not worry about it. Spend your time thinking of Swami only. - Yours, Baba'. Father was, of course, happy to read this, but the agony of his unfulfilled *darshan* remained.

"Swami did not return till it was June. But before He came, as if responding to his intense yearning to have at least one glance, Swami wrote him another letter. This was in June, 1987. 'Kasturi, accept my blessings! Sai is always with you, in you and around you. Be in bliss. Do not think of anything else. Be always in the thought of God. That is the main *sadhana* (spiritual practice) that you have to be engaged in now. I will come back soon. Wait for Sai'. And to father's relief and rejoice, Swami returned in June, and he eagerly went in the wheelchair to watch and savour His Beloved again. But when Swami came near him, He said (in Telugu), '*nee asthamana samayam osthavundi*' meaning, 'your evening time is approaching...be ready'.

"In spite of his irresistible desire to be in His Presence, he could not make it to the Mandir everyday. His health was deteriorating by the day, and so, we sent word to Swami about his condition through Sri Karunyananda and Mr. Kutumba Rao. Swami, then, sent the message: 'I will come, I will come'. And because of this, from that day onwards, even if there was a slightest sound of footsteps in the room, he would get up and expectantly ask, 'Is that Swami?...?', 'Has He come?...?', 'He must have come!...' It was heart-rending to see how much he clamoured and craved for Him. But Swami, in the meanwhile, sent us the message that there would a big crowd and the resultant confusion if He came to our home, and therefore, He said, 'Ask them to admit Kasturi in the hospital and I will come there and see him.'

Liberation Here and Now

"But before this, there is one significant event that happened which I must mention. It was the Guru Pournima Day in June 1987. Swami was delivering His Divine Discourse in Poorna Chandra Auditorium, and I was keen to hear Him on that significant day. As my son, Ramesh, was also there that day taking care of him, I

came out of the room and sat on the steps near the South Block with my ears glued to His booming voice. But during this time, it seems, father called Ramesh and said, 'Kasturi is dead. I'm *Atma*'. My son was shocked. But father persisted, 'Go and tell everybody that Kasturi is dead!' So Ramesh got worried and frightened, and immediately came to me. When I went, he said the same thing to me again. 'Kasturi is dead. I'm only *Atma*. Don't force me food or anything.' I replied, 'No, I won't force you. But until the body is here, we have to take good care of it. So please cooperate. I won't coax you any more to eat or do anything, but please if you want anything, just ask without a second thought, and it will be done.'

"From that day, he stopped talking on anything other than Swami. He did not even crave for Him as pathetically as before. He was just immersed in himself. Maybe that was the realization. Because, once, many years ago, a *naadi* (ancient palm leaf inscriptions about the future) scholar, by name, Gunjoor Narayan Shastrigal had come to Swami when He was in Brindavan and reading my father's *naadi*, he had said that he will attain *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* in his last moments. It seems, when he said this, my father, at that time, laughed. 'I? Getting *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*? This is all bogus!' He told Swami. But Bhagavan then had apparently said, 'No, don't laugh. Why not? You might get it. Don't laugh at this.' Therefore, when father was totally with himself, oblivious to every external sound or stimulus, during this time, I remembered this incident; I thought, maybe, he is going through that transcendental liberating experience, because after that 'I am the *Atma*' moment, he only wanted silence; never liked us conversing with people who came to meet him. When somebody suggested that we play *Vishnusahasranama* (thousand eight names of Lord Vishnu), he outrightly refused. He wanted absolute serenity and silence around him at all times.

"And as Swami had instructed, we admitted him in the General Hospital on August 7, and true to His word, the very next day He arrived. The Loving Lord made him drink one full glass of water and before He left, said the same thing: "Don't think of anything. Think of Swami only". And to others he said that no visitors are to be allowed to see him. Father was completely in a different plane. He didn't like even us, mother and son, talking to each other. 'No...Silence' he would indicate but never utter a syllable. Therefore, if we had to talk about anything often we would come out of the room. We maintained the ambience as quiet as possible. And then, the momentous day arrived – August 14. But two days prior to this, he had started bleeding because of liver complications, and when Swami was asked if blood transfusion should be done, He said, 'No, nothing needs to be done. His time is coming. Just give him slow glucose.'

And on the morning of that eventful day, he was semi-conscious. We could see his breathing had become an ordeal; he was trying to deep breathe with great difficulty. I tried to call him, but there was no response. My son, with whose voice he was very familiar, called out to him too, but there was no sign of consciousness. Worried, we sent word to Swami through Dr. Alreja, but Swami said, 'No, he is fine; the time is coming close. I will come and see him at the hospital'. The morning bhajan ended and we were expecting Swami, but instead of coming to the hospital, He drove into the Institute Auditorium."

'I have to go, Kasturi is not well' - Swami

Narrating the happenings at the Auditorium, Mr B N Narasimha Murthy, who was there with Swami on that morning, says, "Swami came to see the rehearsal of the drama to be staged by the boys on the first anniversary of the MBA course, and He seemed deeply engrossed watching the performance. But at 11.30, He suddenly stood up and said, 'I have to go, Kasturi is not well,' and went to the General Hospital. When Swami arrived at the Hospital, the only noise in Kasturi's room was the trickling of water from a tap in the bathroom. Swami called a nurse and said, 'Stop it'. Then Swami went to the bedside of his dear devotee and into his ear He gently called, 'Kasturi...Kasturi' and immediately he opened his eyes and started to fold his palms." "He wanted to offer his salutations," says Mrs. Padma. "But Swami caught hold of both his hands with much love and created *vibhuthi*."

He applied the Divine Ash Himself on his forehead, neck and hands, and whatever was still remaining in His Hand, He gave it to me and asked, 'Did he take anything since morning?' 'No food, Swami,' I said. 'I'm only wetting his lips with coconut water whenever it gets dry'. Then He looked at me and said firmly, '*Chesko...*' (do) pointing to His Feet. The next moment I prostrated at His feet and looking at His eyes I understood that it was His way of saying, 'Now, it's my responsibility to take care of you. It's over.' Then He asked my son too to do the same. After that He went down and told the doctors, 'There is one hour more. You all go and repeat "Sairam" "Sairam".' And before He finally left, He said, 'We have to arrange a band for his funeral procession. He is a respectable world figure; the procession should be grand.'

And after Swami left, all the staff of the Hospital came and started chanting "Om Sri Sai Ram", "Om Sri Sai Ram". The difficulty in breathing which was there before Swami came had disappeared. Now, it was smooth and slow; and exactly after one hour, just as Swami had stated, around 12.30 pm, his breathing stopped. The doctor attending on him started chanting "Shri Ganesha", "Shri Ganesha"; father was onto a new road, a new journey.

Immediately the word was sent to Swami and He instructed that the body be kept in the guest house, which was located just beside the Hospital building then, and everybody could go there and pay their homage. Later, as many arrived to bow down reverentially where his body lay, He sent another message: 'Start bhajans,' and Sri Karunyananda arrived with a garland from Swami. A few minutes and there were further instructions. 'Continue bhajans till 7 pm and then lock the room. Nobody needs to be there. It can be opened again at 6 am the next morning,' was Bhagavan's command. But many expressed reservations and apprehensions. 'No, a dead body should not be kept in this manner. Somebody should be there,' they said. 'Otherwise, ants may come.' But Swami sent word again. 'No ants will come. I will take care of it. You just lock it now and open again only at 6 in the morning.' So all of us returned home.

A Grand Reunion

"In the meantime, Swami sent Mr. Chiranjeevi Rao to us to find out if it was okay to use a band for the funeral as it was not a custom in our caste. But I said, 'It is Swami's Kasturi; it is not at all my Kasturi, or my father. Whatever Swami wants, He may do. We are all happy.' So we closed the bhajan at 7 pm and returned at 6 in the

morning, and when we opened the door, what did we find? The whole room was permeated with a divine fragrance! And his face! It was shining! Though it was all sunken, dry and dark because of extreme weakness and bleeding the previous night. The whole ambience was so dramatically and divinely different. It seems when Dr. Shantha, who was along with me, opened the door she felt as if something or somebody was pushing her from inside. And Swami, the next morning, told the boys in the Mandir, 'I was there with him the whole night'. That was the glorious finale of a great saga of 'appetizing adjacency' (as Kasturi himself calls it) with the Divine of a devotee that again will never be.

On August 15, Swami even closed the Ashram Canteen and asked everyone present to attend the funeral procession which was an elaborate affair with music, *vedam*, band, etc. But ladies were restricted for this journey from the Hospital to the Chiravathi as the Ashram authorities felt there was every chance of a stampede, the gathering assuming gargantuan proportions. "After the cremation was complete," Mrs Padma recalls, "Sri Karunyananda came to me and said, '*Amma*, your father was a superlatively great man. He attained "*Kapala moksha*", the kind of liberation-release that happens when the '*atma*' or the '*life-force*' floats away from the body breaking the centre of the skull. I am fortunate to be able to see this.' Not only he, many expressed similar sentiments of their immense good luck to be present and be part of the occasion. And in the evening, Swami came near me and said, 'He attained what he has to attain. So have no worries; you do not need to do any rituals either. He has merged in Swami!'"

Kasturi – Sai's Favourite and for Generations a Beacon Light

In the last chapter of "Loving God", Professor Kasturi writes, "I am clinging to my beloved, and I hope that the Beloved will accept me." And what did his beloved do? He not only accepted him, but also assimilated and integrated him into Himself. And why did He do it? We find the answer in the next line of the same paragraph, where Kasturi says, "I love Sai not for the reason that I get back the love, but because I know that He is the most lovable Person on earth." Love for love's sake and nothing else, is what is true, unblemished, pristine, precious and most potent. And if Kasturi could secure such a special corner in the Lord's heart, it is because he not only understood, but exercised and exemplified in his daily life, this purest form of the highest virtue in this universe.

"My dearest *sadhana*" Kasturi continues in the last line of the same section, "is to present my Beloved to all whom He loves, to exult when my Beloved is adulated and adored, to hear those who love Him narrate stories of His boundless Mercy, Majesty and Munificence." And this is exactly what this great instrument, inch by inch shaped by His Master, did. If the lost, depressed and diseased, or the intellectual, inquisitive and the learned, find solace, sustenance and support from the numerous volumes of Sathya Sai Speaks, it is because Professor Kasturi painstakingly, but with love, compiled them. If the world today relishes, regales and rejuvenates its spirits reading the life story of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, it is because Professor Kasturi created masterpieces of literature that would stand the test of time for centuries and eons.

"People may come and go, there may be many speakers and writers, any number in the past, numerous in the present and many more in the future, but none can equal

Kasturi in the art of oration and narration. His poetic style, nectarine language, convincing candour, and his soft and tender, appealing and devoted voice... Professor Kasturi is a legend, a personality too extraordinary to imitate or emulate," says Professor Anil Kumar. Yes, like there is only one Luke, one Matthew or Mark; or one Meera, Shabari or Hanuman; or even one Arjuna or Vyasa, there will always be one Kasturi, but the mesmerizing fragrance of his personality will, for generations, mould the minds and motivate the hearts of millions in leading them towards their true goal.

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 12

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. I must first of all thank the many readers who have taken the trouble to convey their reactions to this series; for me personally, this is most encouraging. Many are impatient to get to God! Believe me, everything I am telling you right now is all about God and His Omnipresence! However, there are many subtleties where Divinity is concerned, and we must get there step by step. Meanwhile, I do hope you are finding this journey and the quest we are involved in to be exciting.

One month has gone by since we last got together, and it is only appropriate that I begin with small recall of where we had reached last time. It all started with our going on a grand tour of the Universe. We then tried to enquire into how the Universe came into existence and that, we discovered, required us to brush up a little bit about the basics of physics of the small. After that we found out that till recently, even big-shot physicists did not know much about microscopic world, and are only recently beginning to explore it with great intensity and much passion. Part of the reason why such studies are being undertaken only now is that when one starts looking at the basic building blocks of matter, experimental studies become very difficult. They also become very expensive, making it necessary for many countries to get together to perform such experiments.

However, to recall briefly the essence of what we covered in the last few issues, the big shift is that physicists have now started building up a picture of matter based on tiny strings rather than particles. This is what String Theory is all about. String Theory started on a rather modest tone and at that time it was hardly noticed; quite normal. Then came many jumps and exciting developments and soon many young bright “kids” began to enter the String Theory arena, because it was full of elegant mathematical challenges. This may sound very strange to you but maths has a great beauty and charm; it may be called the “classical music” of science.

The “elders” of particle physics who in the beginning ignored all this and then became condescending, now began to turn cynical, asking, “So what good does all this do? String Theory has not helped in understanding anything specific and spectacular in physics. Big deal!” Well, that bridge could in fact be crossed in the not too distant future, and this issue is going to start on that part of the story. In brief, it is going to be about what String Theory has to say about the ultimate fate of the Universe.

There are many ways in which this connection can be presented; I wish to do it basing myself on a very interesting book I recently came across. This book entitled ***Endless Universe – Beyond the Big Bang*** is what I am going to base my narrative on. There are, of course, any number of books and later, I shall cite some of them. The book I am drawing from is perhaps as good as many others; I am using this as the template because someone was kind enough to give that to me as a gift [!] and it certainly is most absorbing.

This book has two authors, Paul Steinhardt of America and Neil Turok from England. In the beginning, they did not even know each other; each entered Physics with his own personal interest but destiny brought them together against a background of a series of international events and these events illustrate beautifully how Physics evolves by people with very different talents and perspectives coming together. By the way, this often happens and one of the classic examples I can think right off the bat is the incredible discovery made by Francis Crick and James Watson of the structure of the DNA. I am sure you must have read the amazing story of that discovery in Watson's immensely popular book ***The Double Helix***.

Our story begins in March 1980, Paul Steinhardt then being a Junior Fellow in the Society of Fellows, Harvard University. He comes to know that one Dr. Alan Guth of Stanford is going to deliver a seminar on the Inflationary Universe, and decides to attend. He goes because this is a weekly seminar where one often hears bold ideas discussed by people working in frontier areas. The seminars focussed on topics in particle physics, the area in which Paul was immersed in at that time; a talk on cosmology in the Harvard Seminar was somewhat unusual and Paul decided to give it a try. And when he went there, he was happy to see all the local stars including many Nobel Prize winners and his own Ph.D thesis advisor were there. So far so good.

To continue, Guth gave his talk. It was very unusual – not surprising since the topic, cosmology was something only a few bothered about. Paul recalls, “I was stupefied. Guth had pieced together concepts from three disparate-disciplines of physics – grand unification theories [which try to unify the electromagnetic, weak and strong forces under one umbrella], general relativity and thermodynamics (the study of how systems change with temperature) all areas that I enjoyed and knew well, and he had applied them to a subject I knew nothing about, cosmology, with revolutionary effect.”

Even as Paul was beginning to be thrilled, something happened; Paul again: “Then came the crash.....[Guth then] explained why the bold and beautiful inflationary idea was doomed to dismal failure. The very mechanism that solved the cosmological problems made it impossible for the rapid explosion to end. Inflation, once begun, would continue for ever!”

Reading this, you might wonder why I did not mention anything about this in the earlier issue wherein I introduced you to the idea of cosmic inflation. There I told you that the incredible inflation was shut off pretty quickly. I was telling you there about something what emerged after the initial bug had been fixed.

Back to Paul: “I simply could not believe that such a beautiful idea could fail so catastrophically. Immediately after the lecture, I tried to see if I could find a flaw by examining each step of the analysis and by checking it using other methods. As I became more frustrated, I became more excited. I realized that whether inflation could be saved or not, there were more important problems to be solved. If inflation failed, it only meant that a new solution to the cosmological problems had to be found. I figured that I would divert my attention from my ongoing research for a month or two to see if I could concoct a solution; then, after this brief sojourn into cosmology, I would return to my research on quantum field theory. Needless to say, I was naïve; twenty-six years later, I am still working on cosmology.”

Well, that tells you something about the compelling magnetism of this subject, does it not?! Let me get on with the story, Paul's side that is. He was now hooked on cosmology, and struggling to fix the problems that existed then in the inflation picture. Slowly, he drifted towards making a place for quantum fluctuations. As you might recall, in an earlier issue, I had pointed out how Linde had independently incorporated this feature and finally came to a model of his own; what we now learn is that Paul Steinhardt also was drifting in the same direction, along with a few associates of course. On the way, there were moments of doubt; as Paul recalls, "Turner [a collaborator at that time] and I realised that the quantum fluctuations could spell triumph or tragedy for inflation."

Many were on the same track and, as Paul notes, by the summer of 1982, it had become a red-hot topic. Around that time, Stephen Hawking in Cambridge was organising a workshop, intended to bring together some of the active workers, so that ideas could be exchanged and the fog cleared to some extent, if possible. Over to Paul now, for his recall of the workshop: "So, the workshop began with three draft papers with three different answers, and four different mathematical approaches, some spelled out and some not. Despite the chaos it caused at the outset of the meeting, having different approaches proved to be important for cracking the problem, because the calculation was subtle and complex mistakes were easy to make no matter which method was used. Also, each method was approximate, to some degree, invoking various simplifications and assumptions that made the calculations tractable. It was essential to have alternative methods to see if the different approximations gave answers."

May be I should clarify one point here. One thing the inflation picture **had** to make room for was for galaxies to be born, in billions really! You might ask, "what's the problem?" Well, let us say the inflation fattened the Baby Universe enormously and then ended. Fine. However, if at the end of the inflation, the resulting Universe is **very smooth**, then there would be no chance for galaxies to nucleate and grow; there **must** be some tiny fluctuations in density at the end of the inflation so that in some regions of space at least, there **are** pockets of higher density that form the seeds from which galaxies could sprout and grow.

At the end of the workshop organised by Hawkins, the models did allow room for seeds for galaxies, that is to say, the Universe which emerged after inflation did have density fluctuations that allowed galaxies to form and grow. But there was a problem and a big one too – the fluctuations in density that the various models offered were **far too big** for comfort. The prediction proved to be wrong soon after results from the satellite WMAP started becoming available. If you recall, and I had described earlier what this satellite and the later one COBE did, the satellites measured temperature fluctuations in the background cosmic radiation. While the theory forecast fluctuations of several degrees, experiments reported something a thousand times or more smaller. Clearly, that was a big set back.

In the summer of 1983, many theorists gathered at the resort station Aspen in Colorado to ponder about the whole issue. Paul goes there and along the side, he has another job – to conduct a Ph.D viva voce examination of a candidate named Neil Turok of Imperial College, London, whose thesis had been sent earlier to Paul for scrutiny. And this is where Neil enters the picture and let us now turn to his part of the story. But before that, a few parting words from Paul: "Because both Neil and his

adviser, David Olive, were attending the Aspen workshop, Neil's oral presentation was arranged to take place at the Aspen Institute on some afternoon during our time there – a fanciful location for a thesis defence, to be sure. Although Neil's thesis was mostly mathematical in nature, with only one section somewhat related to cosmology, I decided to focus on that portion during the oral presentation. I wanted to test whether he had any serious interest in this area. I was very impressed by the outcome. Although he was obviously new to cosmology, Neil displayed an unusual combination of technical prowess, creativity, and self-confidence. I passed him, of course. But in addition to that, I made a mental note to follow this talented fellow's career and look for an opportunity to collaborate with him in the future." That had to wait for many years though.

We now turn to Neil Turok whose love affair with physics began in 1980 during the final year of his undergraduate studies in Cambridge University. At that time, he attended a lecture given by Stephen Hawking; the title was provocative: ***Is the End in sight for Physics?*** Basically, Hawking was thinking aloud whether a Theory of Everything was finally in sight. Neil found that talk so stimulating that he decided that he would plunge into Theoretical Physics and immediately went around looking for a suitable thesis adviser. He found one in David Olive, a brilliant and original mathematical physicist.

When the time came, Olive set Neil Turok a real tough problem to solve, very mathematical in character. At this point, let us hear Neil himself: "Near the end of the project, concerned that my research was too formal and abstract to connect with the real world, I wandered into the office of one of my professors, Tom Kibble, to express my frustration. Kibble is one of the United Kingdom's most distinguished theoretical physicists. A few years earlier, Kibble had realized that many unified theories automatically predicted that objects called *cosmic strings* would form in the extreme conditions of the hot early universe. Cosmic strings are thin strands of concentrated energy that crisscross space in a spaghetti-like network and progressively straighten themselves out as the universe expands." There were even suggestions that there could be some connection between cosmic strings and galaxy formation. Neil again: "Intrigued by the potentially spectacular link between fundamental physics and cosmology, I started working with Kibble on cosmic strings while finishing my main Ph.D project."

So that was how Neil Turok started working on topics that bridged particle physics and cosmology, involving strings in particular. Before I proceed further, I cannot resist the temptation to make a comment or two about the father of Tom Kibble. The reason is simply this; Tom's father, Dr. W.F. Kibble was a Professor of Mathematics in the college where I had studied, the Madras Christian College in Madras – that was in the late forties and early fifties. I never attended any classes taken by Dr. Kibble but he was very well known as an extremely absent-minded professor. And sure enough, there were many Kibble jokes, all harmless of course, poking mild fun at this very fine and kindly gentleman. One of these is the following: There used to be right in front of the college building a big sun-dial – a clock where you read the time via the shadow cast by the sun on the specially made dial. The story goes that one evening, Dr. Kibble returning from a long walk wanted to know what time it was. It was dark and he had no watch. But he had a torch and he then went to the sundial and shone the torch on it to find out the time! Bit unfair but then, as always, I suppose boys would be boys. By the way, I wonder whether son Tom ever spent time in the campus with his

father. Probably he went to school in England but I am sure he must have come now and then to India to be with his parents.

Anyway, getting on with our main story, we now cut to Aspen where Neil went with his adviser and there faced the viva by Paul, his future collaborator. Back to Neil: "After my thesis defence in Aspen, there was champagne all around. As all of us celebrated, we speculated about where the new field of particle cosmology might lead. The growing problems in the theories of inflation and grand unification [of all the fundamental forces in physics] were worrisome, but the mood was nevertheless sanguine. Many anticipated that the setbacks would be minor and that particle physicists, cosmologists, and astronomers would henceforth work together in a powerful, combined discipline that would advance our knowledge of, simultaneously, the very large and the very small."

Things did not quite turn out that way. Not only did the anticipated collaboration between Paul and Neil not form immediately, but, even more generally, particle physicists and cosmologists went their own ways. We cut now to 1996 when Neil, after a spell in America, was now back in Cambridge. The big interest was on what kind of temperature fluctuations were required in the early universe to trigger galaxy formation. Over now to Neil to hear what happened then:

"It was with a very open mind that I decided to propose a scientific program at the Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences in Cambridge devoted to cutting-edge issues in cosmology. To develop the proposal I needed some co-organizers, and it did not take me long to decide who the ideal choices would be." It would be Paul Steinhardt in America and Valery Rubakov, of the Institute for Nuclear Research in Moscow. Neil again: "To my delight, both Paul and Valery accepted immediately. We decided to kick off the program with two conferences: one on the latest developments on the observational side and one on new theoretical ideas. In the final month as the [second] meeting approached, more and more people signed up to attend. The meeting was a huge success The Isaac Newton Institute meeting was above all, a vital stimulus to our own research. It convinced us that, finally, string theory and super-gravity has something really interesting and new to say about the cosmos. After more than a decade, Paul and I had finally converged on a project we wanted to pursue together."

What was that? Well, the short answer to that is: Giving the Big Bang a new and original twist! That is exciting, is it not? What exactly was that new twist? Ah, for that you would have to wait till the next issue!

Meanwhile, I wish to make just two comments here. The first is that what we get as science news in books, magazines, radio and TV is like a finished movie; we get to see and hear only about the end-result. In the present instalment, I have made a deliberate attempt to give you a glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes, how scientists too stumble, grope for, fail and try once more, and so on in their quest to unravel the mysteries of Nature. Also, how they are obsessed with the quest. That is why a famous Indian scientist Sir C. V. Raman [about whom Swami often speaks to students] once said, "Science is a very jealous mistress," meaning she does not allow her devotees much time to get involved in other things. When two scientists who are intensely engaged in research meet, they start talking shop before even saying hello. And if they happen to be competitors, they carefully guard all information about what

they are doing, even as the other person is desperately engaged in a fishing expedition!

All this is fascinating colour and background no doubt but one reason why I am making a special point about including this "local flavour" if I might call it that is to stress that when the chips are down, all so-called great people, be they artists, musicians, writers, sportspersons, scientists, and so on, are as much susceptible to human weaknesses such as rivalry, jealousy, and so on. That said, it is an empirical fact that a large percentage of scientists who are properly trained, do try to be as objective as possible while making their judgement – that is their nature; this is just like doctors by and large being instinctively compassionate.

Now what is the point I am trying to make with all this blah? In fact, is there any? You bet there is! And that is the following: Science today has become too powerful; which means its management and steering must be overseen by society as a whole so that science and technology are not hijacked by unscrupulous interests whose only goal is to make a fast buck. If you think about it for a while, you would quickly realise how important this responsibility is.

How is society to make sure that it acts as a good watch-dog? By itself being solidly committed to morals, to *Sathya* and *Dharma*. And when would that happen? When each and every individual human being himself or herself as the case may be, becomes a devotee of *Sathya* and *Dharma*. So, if we call ourselves devotees of Swami, we had better start with a simple self-check: "I call myself a devotee of Swami but am I also a **REAL** devotee of *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Prema*, *Shanti* and *Ahimsa*?" Let our Conscience speak and give the answer; don't let ego reply!

So long, and take care! May all be well with you in the meanwhile!! Jai Sai Ram.

Paul J. Steinhardt, the Albert Einstein Professor in Science at Princeton University, is on the faculty of the Department of Physics and the Department of Astrophysical Sciences, and Associate Director of the Princeton Center for Theoretical Physics. He received his B.S. in Physics at Caltech in 1974; his M.A. in Physics in 1975 and Ph.D. in Physics in 1978 at Harvard University. He was a Junior Fellow in the Harvard Society of Fellows from 1978-81 and on the faculty of the Department of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Pennsylvania from 1981-98, where he was Mary Amanda Wood Professor from 1989-98. He is a Fellow in the American Physical Society and a member of the National Academy of Sciences. In 2002, he received the P.A.M. Dirac Medal from the International Centre for Theoretical Physics.

Steinhardt is a theorist whose research spans problems in particle physics, astrophysics, cosmology and condensed matter physics. He is one of the architects of the "inflationary model" of the universe, an important modification of the standard big bang picture which explains the homogeneity and geometry of the universe and the origin of the fluctuations that seeded the formation of galaxies and large-scale structure. He introduced the concepts of "quintessence," a dynamical form of dark energy that may account for the recently discovered cosmic acceleration. He has also explored novel models for dark matter.

In condensed matter physics, Steinhardt and Dov Levine (Technion) introduced the concept of quasicrystals, a new phase of solid matter with disallowed crystallographic symmetries, and Steinhardt has continued to make contributions to understanding their unique mathematical and physical properties. Recently, he has worked with Weining Man (Princeton) and Paul Chaikin (NYU) to develop a photonic quasicrystal for efficiently trapping and manipulating light in selected wavebands.

He has written over 200 papers, has edited 4 books, and has several U.S. patents.

Neil Geoffrey Turok was born in 1958 in Johannesburg, South Africa, the son of Mary and Ben Turok activists in the anti-apartheid movement and the African National Congress.. Currently he holds the Chair of Mathematical Physics at Cambridge University.

After graduating from Churchill College, Cambridge, Neil gained his doctorate from Imperial College, London, under the supervision of Professor David Olive, one of the inventors of superstring theory. After a postdoctoral post at Santa Barbara, he was an associate scientist at Fermilab, Chicago.

In 1992 he was awarded the James Clerk Maxwell medal of the Institute of Physics for his contributions to theoretical physics. In 1994 he was appointed Professor of Physics at Princeton University, and before moving to his current position in Cambridge in 1997. Turok has worked in a number of areas of mathematical physics and early universe physics, focusing on observational tests of fundamental physics in cosmology.

In the early 90's his group showed how the polarisation and temperature anisotropies of the cosmic background radiation [CMB] would be correlated, a prediction which has been confirmed in detail by recent precision measurements by the WMAP satellite. They also developed a key test for the presence of a cosmological constant, also recently confirmed. Turok and collaborators developed the theory of open inflation. With Stephen Hawking, he later developed the so-called Hawking-Turok instanton solutions, which can describe the birth of an inflationary universe..

In 2003, Professor Turok founded the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences in Muizenberg, a postgraduate educational centre supporting the development of mathematics and science across the African continent. He was awarded the 2008 TED Prize for his work in mathematical physics and his work through the Institute in Muizenberg.

A digression on **Aspen** is very essential to highlight how much scientific research has changed from the highly individual enterprise it used to be till the end of the nineteenth century. Since then, the emergence of rapid transport, advanced communication facilities, and of course generous funding by enlightened agencies, have together promoted retreats, that earlier were the privilege of philosophers and writers.

Aspen is a scenic spot nestling in the American Rockies in State of Colorado. For long, it was a much-sought-after hide out for city folk wanting to escape the rat race. In the post-war years, it also became a retreat for scholars who could withdraw there to reflect deeply on various scholarly matters. And, out of this practice was born the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies.

In 1961, two physicists approached The Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies with an intriguing idea. The scientists, George Stranahan of the Carnegie Institute of Technology and Michael Cohen of the University of Pennsylvania, proposed a unique sort of research center where theoretical physicists might gather in the summer. It would be an unstructured environment, free from distractions, where physicists could work unfettered by their normal responsibilities.

The idea was warmly received and soon it was agreed that as a part of the Aspen Institute, there would be a new division called the Aspen Institute for Theoretical Physics [AITP] would be the newest division of the Aspen Institute. The Aspen Institute would set aside part of its Aspen Meadows campus for use by the physicists. In turn, the physicists would be responsible for raising funds for their own buildings and operations and would depend on their own institutions or research grants for their summer salaries and living expenses. By 1962, the AITP was functional and by 1968, it had become a great success, gaining world-wide recognition.

The Aspen Centre for Physics is specifically designed to promote innovative research and collaboration. Aspen is a chic little town nestled high up in the Rocky Mountain. The Centre for Physics provides a relaxed atmosphere where people could work, talk, and just hang out. There are of course formal presentations but most of the work is actually done during informal sessions, long walks and even picnics. The usual rat-race atmosphere is absent, and with people with diverse interests and backgrounds converging, many novel ideas are born and new collaborations are forged. At lunch time, everyone joined in volleyball games, but even here, people on the sidelines waiting for their turn to play discussed physics. It all might sound like a holiday camp but behind the apparent relaxed atmosphere, the focus on physics is intense.

Today, along with the Aspen Institute, the Music Associates of Aspen and the International Design Conference in Aspen, it is part of the Aspen Meadows Campus, which exists as a unique and special community of artists, scholars and scientists. Here, the essence of the work lies in thought and communication. Often, it takes place on the benches under the trees, in the halls between the offices, on the trails behind the campus or hiking in the surrounding mountains. There are few distractions or responsibilities, few rules or demands. Physicists work at their own speeds and in their own ways: alone or together, at the desk, at the blackboard or in a chair on the lawn. Frequently, a casual, spontaneous discussion gives rise to a new collaboration.

Activities outside the Center are encouraged. Dozens of bicycles fill the racks outside the buildings. Topographical maps cover the lobby walls suggesting hiking locations. The shady streets of Aspen's West End invite long walks. The musicians in the nearby Music Festival Tent fill the air with music. And as the founders anticipated, even while participating in these activities, the physicists continue to exchange ideas, returning refreshed, and eager to immerse themselves once again in their individual research subjects.

Physicists who come to Aspen in the summer often bring their families. Evening picnics at the Center have become a tradition, encouraging ties that are personal as well as professional. In a few cases, children who came to the Center with their parents are now young physicists attending summer sessions in their own right.

The international participants come from universities, private research laboratories and government laboratories and they include young scientists as well as those who are better established. While participants must provide their own salaries, the Center does offer a "dislocation" allowance based upon need to help defray the cost of housing. All of the housing is provided through the Center.

The Physics Center makes a special effort to bring distinguished physicists from abroad by paying part of the cost of their foreign travel. The Center has also hosted several joint U.S./U.S.S.R. cooperative programs.

Physicists have found the Aspen-sojourn a real God-send. For many, the demands of teaching and administration often interfered with research and scientific thought. For these and many such others, who had an urgent need to catch up, Aspen was where they could re-charge their batteries, because, among other things, the wonderful setting offered an excellent chance for quiet reflection, and gearing up to new challenges.

SPELLBINDING SAI - PART III

By late Prof. N. Kasturi

(Continued from the last issue)

This is third and final part of the transcript of a talk delivered by late Prof. Kasturi many years ago. This is being brought to you from our archives and we regret that we do not have the exact date of this talk, but we can say with reasonable surety that it was in the year 1987.

All these miracles are mysterious happenings. We can't understand them and we are not able to explain them. Why does Baba perform these miracles? It is in order to draw people to Himself.

Strengtheners of Hearts

There is one Dr. Bhaskaran Nair, a professor of zoology, who spoke at the Summer Showers course the other day. He was in Trivandaram, far down in the south-west of India. He had a son who had a weak heart, which was palpitating. Every morning he would peep into his son's bedroom to find out whether he was still alive because his heart was so bad. He did not know of Baba in any way.

Then one day, the boy told his father he had dreamt of someone with a big halo of hair Who said: "You come to Puttaparthi!" which was a name unheard of by both of them.

So Bhaskar Nair asked his son if this name was entirely clear. "Yes! It was clear - 'Puttaparthi'" his son said. So the father got a railway timetable, to find out if Puttaparthi is actually a place. He did not find it there. Then he got a post office guide and found there was indeed a place called Puttaparthi! He embraced his son and said: "Your dream is true! There is a place called Puttaparthi in India! What a wonderful thing! And you have been asked to come to Puttaparthi! What a great act of Grace is this?" So he wrote to the post master of Puttaparthi whether there was any one who was an expert in the treatment of heart problems? That is what he imagined this was all about.

Then he received a reply which said: "It is not simply heart. He who accused Arjuna of weakness of heart and strengthened his heart to fight the battle, He is here!" Based on this scant, but incredible information, he then made the journey over here (Prasanthi) with his son.

Because I am also a Kerala man, Baba asked me to look after this boy. I was told this nine years old boy was pretty weak. Baba gave him vibhuti and he became much better. He had to be given some special dishes, and I could prepare it along with my people, and he gained his health.

As the years passed, there is a sequel to the story. He passed his BSC in electronics or something and he applied to the Atomic Energy Commission in reply to an advert for a vacant post. In the medical examination they put the stethoscope in the proper

places, and they discovered that his heart condition was not satisfactory. So, a nine year boy, cured by Baba, came up to his MSC, and a doctor then discovers he apparently still needs help. So the poor fellow, Dr. Bhaskar Nair and his son came to Puttaparthi. They said, "Is it lost after all this? Just when he was about to enter a career!"

So the man was broken in spirits and he came to Puttaparthi and caught hold of me during Shivaratri, when 35,000 people were here. How could he see Baba at that time? Luckily this Bhaskar Nair was a good speaker and spotting him among the crowd, Baba said: "You ask that Bhaskar Nair to speak in the evening" because usually Baba wants somebody to speak before Him. So as Bhaskar Nair was to speak, I told him: "Look, here is a wonderful chance! You'll be sitting next to Him on the dais; and you will have one ear of Baba available. So tell Him about this problem!"

So he spoke to Him: "Swami this calamity has happened." Swami asked him: "How many doctors have examined him?" "One, Swami." And He advised that a panel of doctors should examine his son and that he will be alright. So, you know among doctors they have got a kind of a professional courtesy that if even one doctor says the patient is 'dead', all other doctors will declare him 'dead' - though he may not have died. It is kind of professional togetherness - they hang together, so that they may not hang separately!

And this panel of doctors certified that the boy's heart is alright! He duly entered the Atomic Energy department and did his PHD, and I think now he is in the electronics department of a telephone factory. His name is Dr. Radhakrishna. So here is a case of drawing the boy, the parents and the family. Like that people who have absolutely no faith, people who are denying God or denying Baba, He catches them by some miracle like this.

Headman Healed

The North Eastern frontier – the China-India border – is a very nervous area and the tribals' loyalty was always wavering. Our people (Indians) had to leave a large portion of that area and come away, because they were not sure of the loyalties of the tribals around them. Lieutenant Colonel Raja, who is the Lieutenant Governor of Arunachal Pradesh now, was then advisor to the Governor on tribal affairs.

And the leader of these tribals was a man called Bukanate whose word was law for at least some 10,000 square miles of that area. For some time he had been suffering with a severe stomachache and the government of India tried their best to cure him. That was the talk of the tribals - wherever they met at markets, or at the bazaar. They took him to this and that hospital, even to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi and spent a lot of money upon him. Every doctor famous for profession put his finger on his stomach to examine him - and nothing happened.

So the talk of the tribal area was: "What was happening to Bukanate's stomachache?" And this Raja, who is a devotee, the then tribal affairs man, said: "He must be sent to Puttaparthi". Therefore he arranged what is called a "*Bharath Darshan*". He collected a number of tribals and put them into a train and prepared a time table so that they can go all around India - and he included Puttaparthi.

They spent a lot of money upon these tribals and they were given whatever they wanted, so that they might support India rather than China. And they came to Puttaparthi - this group of about 15 people accompanied by a secretary to the government who was arranging this entire trip and who had to prepare a report to the government about the tour.

And Baba spoke to them in their language – the Adi language. This is mentioned in the government report. And He discovered that this man had a stomachache. So He materialized vibhuti, and gave it to him and the report says that night he ate 3 chapattis at the canteen. And after that day, every day his bill came to thirty rupees! In those old days!

And when Bukanate went back, everybody asked what happened to his stomachache? “Gone!” “Where?” “Puttaparthi!” “How did it happen?” “Sathya Sai Baba!”

The other day Bukanate stood in election for Arunachal Pradesh assembly, and he won. I telegraphed to him: “Congratulations.” And he sent a reply saying: “Thanks! It’s the blessings of Baba!”

So Baba is now the family deity of the entire tribal area. The Defense Minister was saying: “He has saved us five divisions of the Indian army.” So, the tribals are now definitely on the side of Puttaparthi - though not of India! And they wanted to build a temple there for their God; which is Dono Polo - the Sun and the Moon. Wonderful Gods to select – Sun and the Moon. And Baba has drawn them a kind of an architectural plan. They consult Baba for everything now. And they wanted an idol to be installed in the temple.

Somebody was saying: “Cannot Baba produce a pumpkin which can be held in one fist?” But in that report, you will find Baba waved both His hands and materialized a 10 by 18 inches copper plate - or five metals plate - in which you’ve got the Sun and the Moon and that is now installed in that temple in the North Eastern frontier. So Baba has become a tribal deity of that area.

I told you that He spoke Adi language. In Africa, He spoke the Swahili language. If He must speak to somebody who knows only a particular language; ad hoc, in that situation, He will use that language. A mother uses only that language which the child understands. Baba’s love is so powerful!

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN SWITZERLAND

Home to pristine and scenic vistas, constitutionally strong, a forward thinking, progressive, and determined direct democracy, philanthropic, peace loving, environmentally responsible, independent willed, popular tourist destination in the heart of Europeif this description instantly conjures up the image of Switzerland, then the story of the Swiss Sai movement cannot be far behind.

Despite their modest numbers, the devotees of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in Switzerland have been blazing effective and efficient trails, by creating an appreciation for His universal message of love and harmony among various sectors of the Swiss society, proving once again that good things often come in small packages. The Swiss Sai Organization is a reflection of the country's overall culture of high work ethic and professionalism, representing the microcosm within the macrocosm that is Switzerland, of quality over quantity.

The Swiss Surreal Beauty

Switzerland is of course famous for its scenic variety and natural beauty. What is special in this small country is the fact that one is able to admire and enjoy all this natural beauty over a very small geographical area: almost every place has its picture-postcard views and may be reached very quickly and without problems, thanks to the excellent public transport system. From the ice paradise of Europe's highest railway station on the Jungfrauoch (3454 m. above sea level), using public transit one can reach the shores of the sun drenched Lake of Lugano, with its Southern atmosphere and its palm trees, in just eight hours!

Among Switzerland's most well known natural wonders is, of course, the whole Alpine landscape with its permanent snow and glaciers. Mountains cover two-thirds of the country's total area and within are packed many wonders. Very famous are the high peaks – for example the Matterhorn or the Jungfrau, which are among the highest of the whole European Alpine chain.

The Swiss Fascination

Switzerland is an important water reservoir for Europe. Two of the largest and longest rivers in Europe have their source in the Swiss Alps: the Rhine and the Rhone. In what was originally largely an agricultural country, today only about 4% of the population is engaged in agriculture. Switzerland is not rich in raw materials and obtains very little from the ground, so that the services sector, tourism and industry have become all the more important.

It is also well-known as one of the world's leading manufacturers of watches and other precision instruments, pharmaceutical and chemical products, food items, including the world's largest food manufacturers, Nestlé, and recently also of medical technology. In the services sector it is mainly the Swiss banks and insurance companies that operate successfully throughout the world. Tourism however remains as one of the most important contributors to the Swiss economy.

Every year millions of foreign tourists spend their holidays in Switzerland, with more than 30 million overnight stays per year. Then there are also other important

characteristics that play their part as by words to live by in this country: cleanliness, punctuality, precision, quality, reliability, honesty, and respect.

Swiss Culture – Leading the Way

The current population of this landlocked country in Western Europe is about 7.5 million. More than 20% of them are foreigners, making the society more cosmopolitan and international in its composition. Originally the two large Christian religions, Protestantism and Catholicism, each accounted for about 50% of the population. Today they each account for about 40%, with increasing proportions of other religions, such as Orthodox Christianity and Islam, as well as Buddhist and Hindu religious communities.

Although the European Headquarters of the United Nations have been in Switzerland from the beginning, it was not until 2002, in a popular referendum that the Swiss people decided on membership of this international organisation. In contrast, they are still not a member of the European Union as there is still not the necessary majority for this. Switzerland will have to decide whether, with the policy of complete neutrality, the country could and should also become a significant and valuable member of this international community.

The Historic Heart of Europe

For its size, Switzerland enjoys a rich linguistic mix. Four languages - Swiss German, French, Italian and Romansch - are spoken over a relatively small area of about 40,000 square kilometres!

The Swiss are proud of this cultural diversity. It makes the country cosmopolitan and tolerant, and provides an important boost to its hospitality sector, that forms the foundation of Swiss tourism industry.

The oldest document of Swiss history dates from 1291 and has remained one of the most important pieces of writing to this day: "In nomine domini, Amen" – so begins this pact. And since then this declaration has remained valid for the whole of Switzerland and those words, "**In the name of Almighty God...**" are in fact the preamble to the Swiss Federal Constitution right up to today. Although Switzerland is a secular state, this invocation of God has remained. In this the Swiss nation sees a trust in a higher power, and gratitude and responsibility to creation and to the creator, which apply to all people, irrespective of each individual religion.

The national anthem which has been the official anthem of Switzerland since 1981, also begins with this invocation of God:

*When the morning skies grow red
And o'er us their radiance shed,
Thou, O Lord, appearest in their light.
When the Alps glow bright with splendour,
Pray to God, to Him surrender,
For you feel and understand,
That He dwelleth in this land.*

The Swiss cross, as the country's official flag, was defined in its official form in 1889: "The emblem of the Confederation is an upright white cross on a red field, the four equal arms of which are each one-sixth longer than they are wide".

The same flag, but with the two colours reversed, was deliberately chosen as the symbol of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1864, in honour of the Swiss founder of the Red Cross, Henry Dunant.

An Outstanding Democracy

At the time of the foundation of the Swiss state in 1848, the political system was largely based on the Constitution of the United States: two chambers represent on the one hand the people (based on the population of each Canton) and on the other the 26 Cantons (each with two representatives), and constitute the legislative assembly.

A special feature of the political system however is the executive, that is, the Federal Council, which is made up of seven members who, all with equal rights, form the Government. Each year, in rotation, one of the members acts as President of the Confederation, in the sense of a *primus inter pares* (first among equals).

The seven members of the Federal Council are bound by the so-called "concordance": this means that in the final analysis all the different political parties and interests have to be in agreement.

Switzerland is a free, independent country, which means that **the people always consider themselves as belonging to one nation – and this in spite of the many cultural and linguistic differences**. The most important element of the Swiss political system, however, is the concept of **direct democracy**, through which decisions made by the Parliament can be contested by means of a popular vote (for such a referendum 50,000 signatures are needed). The people also have the possibility, by means of an initiative with 100,000 signatures (collected within 100 days), of demanding a vote on almost any subject.

Thanks to its neutrality, this small country has always played an important mediating role on the international stage.

Switzerland - Sustained by the Power of Unity

The unofficial motto of Switzerland appears in the dome of the Federal Parliament building in Berne, in its Latin form: *Unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno* (One for all, all for one).

This wise old saying for solidarity, fraternity, alliance, fellowship, etc. forms the core of the Swiss Confederation. Even though in the everyday political conflicts and troubles this great, sacred and lofty maxim is often forgotten, the political will continually finds, in this concept, renewed sustenance for maintenance of the high principles of typically Swiss hospitality and readiness to help – as exemplified by such great Swiss celebrities as Henry Dunant (1828-1910, founder of the Red Cross), Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827, philanthropist, philosopher and pedagogue)

or Niklaus von Flüh (1417-1487, recluse and mystic). So, into this hallowed and heavenly beautiful land, how and when did Sai manifest Himself?

The Sai Movement is Born

It was in August 1975, after returning from his first Darshan of Swami, a visionary named Dr Ali Hussein, at that time assigned to the WHO (World Health Organisation) in Geneva, sprung into action to share his joyful encounter with a being whose love and divinity had touched him deeply. Along with a few other Indian families he had met, who were already devotees of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Dr. Ali Hussein's family began the bhajan or devotional singing sessions at their respective homes.

Today, Dr. Ali Hussein is considered and fondly remembered by all Swiss devotees as a pioneer and the father of the Swiss Sai Organisation. As one of the most active members of the Sai Organisation, he dedicated his life to Swami from the moment of his first Darshan. From August 1975 until his last breath in 2006, he propagated Swami's message with love and dedication. His tireless effort to teach Bhajan singing to all the Swiss devotees and create awareness about His universal teachings is duly and gratefully remembered by all.

The Early Years...

From 1976 until 1980 sporadic Bhajan sessions, in rotation, were taking place in the homes of various devotees in Geneva. In 1979 regular study circles and the first Balvikas classes for devotees' children were organised and headed by Mrs. Saroj Iyer, a devotee from the Geneva Centre, who is now living in Prashanti Nilayam, where she is in charge of the Western Canteen. In summer 1980 Ali Hussein, together with a Swiss devotee who had already visited Swami many times, took a first group of 28 people from Geneva to Prashanti Nilayam. They remained for 3 weeks, enjoying Swami's Darshan in Prashanti Nilayam and in Whitefield, and during this stay the Geneva Group was registered at the Prashanti Nilayam Head Office as the Sai Centre of Geneva.

After returning from Prashanti Nilayam in August 1980, Dr. Hussein began to organise regular Bhajan sessions in his home. By 1984 the Group had become too big to be hosted in a private home and they finally transferred to a public hall for their meetings. On 10th of November 1984 and every year onwards, a regular 24-hour Akanda Bhajan has taken place in Geneva, organised by Dr. Hussein and the devotees from the French-speaking region. Many devotees from other parts of Switzerland also joined.

Already in 1980 Dr. Hussein, together with his wife Mrs. Zahra Hussein and other devotees, had started visiting Indian devotees in the German-speaking towns of Basel and Berne to help organise Bhajan sessions. On the sacred date of 23rd November of the same year, the Berne Sai Centre (in the German-speaking region) was officially established by nine members. From then onward the Geneva and Berne Centres have been active with His activities and have been enthusiastically sending reports of their activities to the head office in Prashanti Nilayam.

A first Swiss Retreat was organised in May 1983 in a private home, and devotees from all over the country were invited. Many more devotees soon joined and in

October 1985 a mixed group from Geneva and other French and German parts of Switzerland went to Prasanthi Nilayam to celebrate Swami's 60th Birthday and to attend the fourth World Conference. Between 1980 and 1988 several small Groups of devotees met in private homes intermittently to sing Bhajans and exchange experiences in study circles in Basel, Zürich, Aarau and Lucerne (German-speaking region), Veytaux/Montreux and Renens (French-speaking region) and in Locarno (Italian-speaking region).

Miracles Abound...

In January 1980 the former Italian Naval Officer Eugene Wolk Sr, a Swiss resident living in the Italian part of Switzerland, now deceased, came across the book "Sai Baba, Man of Miracles" by Howard Murphet. Stunned by what he had read, Mr. Wolk immediately decided to see the "miracle man" with his own eyes. He travelled to Prasanthi Nilayam the following Christmas with his wife and 8-year-old son. Swami blessed them with three interviews and spoke in loving and revealing details of their life and past experiences and materialised several keepsakes. **During this first visit, the Wolk family witnessed several more miracles and materialisations, foremost of which were the sacred ash vibhuti which Sai Baba uses for healing, the sweet honey-like nectar, called amrith, the healing of the crushed knee of an Englishman who, unable to walk, could throw off his crutches the moment Swami commanded him to stand up.**

But the most marvellous miracle happened on the second day of Christmas. At four o'clock in the morning, Mrs Wolk, like other devotees, was absorbed in her prayers, walking around the temple, and suddenly she became aware of a hush in the crowd - all, one after the other, were looking up to the sky. There manifested the most brilliant band of light in a circle covering the ashram and the village of Puttaparthi. The full moon shone right at the tip of the top of the mandir.

All who saw this extraordinary manifestation knelt upon witnessing this phenomenon, a proof that "God was there and only He could manifest His glory and presence in such a miraculous way." It was a very happy experience. With daylight this manifestation vanished. Later, Swami confirmed that such unique happenings only occur at special times and in coincidence with certain constellations.

As a result of such marvels and astounding manifestations all doubts whatsoever disappeared and the realisation of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba as Avatar of the age became clear and evident.

Another grace which Swami conferred on the Wolk family was the opportunity to assist at the inauguration of the Administration Building of the University in Prasanthi Nilayam. **On the occasion of this first visit, Mrs. Wolk in a personal prayer asked Him: "Swami, if you are God, the one who I am looking for, please chain me to you in order that I shall never be separated from you." In the years that followed, Swami materialised three chains for Mrs. Wolk, each with a different significance.**

Also during this first visit, Mrs Wolk bought a small sandalwood container to keep Swami's vibhuti in. Unfortunately, upon arriving home, each time she attempted to

consume the vibhuti, she found the taste bitter as if it was a poison. During the next eagerly awaited visit she questioned Swami about this strange phenomenon. Swami took the little container and banged it three times, then told Mrs. Wolk: "Put a little sugar in it and it will be all right. Any sugar will do, I will give you lot of sugar." At the next attempt to consume it the bitterness and seemingly poisonous taste of the vibhuti were gone. Some weeks later Mrs Wolk received a letter from a friend in Florida who had visited Shirdi. The letter contained a postcard with a picture of Shirdi Sai and a little nylon packet divided in two parts, one part containing vibhuti, the other sugar. She phoned her friend to ask an explanation and her friend replied it was a custom in Shirdi to distribute vibhuti with sugar, sugar being the symbol of wisdom. Years later, Mrs. Wolk realised that Swami, in His miraculous way, by symbolically banging the little vibhuti container, took out all bitterness and poison from her life.

Swami also materialised a Lingam, which cured several family members of illnesses. And once, invited as a guest in His house in Kodaikanal, He materialised a marvellous mother-of-pearl shell full of sacred vibuthi for their son, which replenished itself for years.

The Sai Organisation Crystallises

In 1988, the Central Office and World Council in Prasanthi Nilayam requested that a Sai Organisation be established in every country. On Gurupurnima, in August 1988, on a visit with a Group from Ticino, Switzerland, Swami asked Mrs. Wolk to act as coordinator of the newly emerging Organisation and Sai Centre of Switzerland.

At Swami's direction, the Sai Organisation in Switzerland was started and was inaugurated on 3rd December 1988 with the first meeting of the Coordinating Committee of five devotees, representing 4 Sai Centres and 5 Groups from the different language regions of the country.

The Groups started to gather regularly and to integrate activities suggested by the Central Office in Prasanthi Nilayam, to establish the rules and regulations and to develop the three wings of the organisation: the spiritual wing with Bhajan sessions and study circles; the service wing with several kinds of service activities for elderly, handicapped and socially disadvantaged people; and the educational wing with Balvikas and Education in Human Values classes, holiday camps for children and workshops for adults. A teacher-training course lasting several weeks was added in conjunction with the Education in Human Values programme. In addition, a two-day retreat was organised for all members to foster the unity between the three language-groups.

In May 1990, the "Sathya Sai Association Switzerland" (the name has recently been changed to "Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee of Switzerland") established on the basis of the principles and rules of the Charter of the Sai Organisation was registered legally under Swiss Law.

The Sai Centres and Groups operating under the name of the Sai Organisation, have since evolved and expanded. **Today there are 8 Centres and 9 Groups and information points with a total of nearly 270 devotees as members and around 70 persons as visitors.** The Centres and Groups are distributed evenly over the whole country in all the language-regions. "Again, we are proud of our many

languages – but on the other hand this also involves a lot of extra work: all the information and printed matters have to be translated in the various languages and meetings require simultaneous translations. But we are happy to do this, “ say the dedicated Sai devotees.

Several public meetings, as well as pilot projects for introducing Education in Human Values were added in the Centres to bring Bhagavan’s teachings to more and more people.

Stimulating Public Meetings

On the national level, many very interesting and invaluable meetings took place, organised mostly in Aarau, located in the centre of Switzerland. “We remember those worthwhile moments with such eminent and inspiring speakers as Mr. J. Jagadeesan from Malaysia, Dr. Art-Ong Jumsai from Thailand, Mrs. Phyllis Krystal and Dr. Michael Goldstein from the United States of America. These meetings were very well attended and proved to be a great stimulus for revitalizing the work of the organization,” says an active worker.

The Ticino Centre (in the Italian-speaking region of Southern Switzerland) organised many public meetings. Best remembered is the meeting with the late Don Mario Mazzoleni, a well known Catholic priest, who on account of the publishing of his book “A Catholic Priest Meets Sai Baba” was excommunicated by the Catholic Church. Don Mario, a fervent devotee of Bhagavan, although terminally ill, continued his valuable work of propagating Swami’s message in several European countries till his end.

Talking About Sai at the UN in Geneva

It is in fact a great honour for Switzerland to be the host to many UN organisations in Geneva. Thanks to personal contacts, in 1995 and 2004 two major conferences, held on United Nations premises, were organised by the Sathya Sai Organisation. For the first of these conferences, under the title “Universal Peace through Human Values”, **Sathya Sai Baba sent a personal message which began with the words “My Dears! Accept my Love and Blessings!”**

The whole event was really a great blessing for all concerned. Eminent speakers such as the then International Chairman Mr. Indulal Shah delivered the welcome address while Justice P. N. Bhagwati, member of the UN Human Rights Commission and former Chief Justice of India spoke on “Human values, human rights and world peace”; Mr. Jacques Pillet-Will, the late national coordinator for France, addressed the gathering on the topic of “The way to peace: A brief historical review”; Mr. Art-Ong Jumsai, Member of Parliament and NASA scientist of Thailand discussed “The role of education in human values for world peace”; Dr. A. N. Safaya, Director of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences in Puttaparthi, enlightened everyone on the “Free high-tech health care: a unique example”. Other eminent speakers and their topics included Mr. Carlos Fortin (“Human values in a globalising economy”); and Mr. Ryuko Hira, Zone Coordinator and businessman from Japan (“Human values in business for promoting world peace”). Each of them delivered inspiring talks to a large audience. These talks were later published by the Swiss Sai Organisation in a booklet which was distributed free of charge.

Nine years later in 2004, on the same date of 9 July, there was a second conference organised at the ILO (International Labour Organisation) Geneva on the topic of "Peace and Goodwill in our Troubled World". A panel of distinguished speakers caught the attention of an audience of over 100 people, many of whom were UN and NGO (Non-governmental organisation) officials.

Justice P.N. Bhagwati opened the meeting with an inspiring talk stressing the worldwide need to recover Human Values in all areas of society. As he gradually revealed the full meaning of Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Non-violence, Justice Bhagwati mentioned the 6 inner enemies – anger, lust, envy, jealousy, hatred and ego, and how it is necessary for humankind to overcome these by educating its innate divinity. "Wars are made in the minds of men and it is the minds of men that must be transformed through the inculcation of human values..." he said... "With the right understanding that not hurting others means also not hurting others' interests". Two musts were absolutely clear: personal effort and transformation. Finally, as a synthesis to his introductory speech, Justice Bhagwati stated that Humanism is nothing but human rights in action, and that respect for human rights is impossible if not backed up by human values practised in thought, word and deed.

Professor Eric Arnott, (Hon. Professor of Ophthalmology, Retired Consultant, Charing Cross Hospital and Arnott Eye Centre, London, England) then took the floor. His focus on the unity of faiths and service can be condensed into a few words: 'health is wealth' and, quoting Jesus, "the body without spirit is dead; faith without deeds is dead". The service activity he and his wife initiated together, and which was presented during the conference, was a living comment on these words.

Professor Keith Critchlow, A.R.C.A., Professor Emeritus of the Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts Department of the Prince of Wales' School of Traditional Arts, London, England, and architect of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences in Puttaparthi, enlightened the gathering with his presentation where he brought values, health and architecture harmoniously together by explaining that "When the human form and the cosmic form are in proportion we have health". With the help of his slides, Prof. Critchlow unveiled a minute of mystery to his entranced audience, who realised how all architectural components, i.e. all shapes and forms, are an expression of inner meaning, which interconnects and resonates at subtle levels with our surroundings and ourselves; and how with the right understanding of this truth we can build our architectural environment and shape it to our true and most uplifting needs. In this light, the Superspeciality hospital of Puttaparthi was introduced in its essential identity: a temple of healing in which Vitruvius's words find fulfilment: "A healthy piece of architecture is like a healthy body, its requirements are the same: strength, convenience and beauty".

Finally Dr. Surendra Upadhyay (Hon. Professor of Ophthalmology, Consultant Ophthalmologist, London, England) touched everyone's heart by presenting his extensive medical endeavours with both the Sathya Sai Service Organisation and Mother Teresa. The outstanding words "Somebody has not come to help them but to love them" and "Serve them as you would serve your own mother or father" echoed the essence of true service: that which springs forth from love and not self-interest or compulsion.

Service to the needy and love in action based on unchanging truth and the will to do good were the leading lines of the day, while Sathya Sai Baba's presence, teachings and social work highlighted the various talks of the eminent speakers who for one reason or another had become acquainted with his message and since then instrumental to the same.

The Conference ended with a questions and answers. An NGO delegate expressed the need for adding the word 'love' to the UN charters as a key commitment. A few comments were made on this, while a final reflection shed light on how important it is to first love ourselves, transform ourselves and, as a result, merge our consciousness into pure, divine love. More important, in fact, than inscribing the word 'love' to any charter, is the humbling attitude and choice of cherishing it in one's heart and acting on it from there. The power of pure feelings works in silence.

The Conference was generously organised by the Sathya Sai Centre, Geneva, Switzerland, grateful for the opportunity to hold a public meeting of merit, whose members arranged all the details necessary for its Sai success.

The Mission in Full Swing – Public Meetings Galore!

Four public meetings took place during 2005 and 2006. The meetings welcomed the support of outside speakers such as Mr. George Bebedelis (EHV Coordinator for Greece and ESSE & ESSE Academy faculty member); Dr. Giancarlo Rosati, esteemed author of many books on science and spirituality, Prof. Thorbjörn Meyer, (Director of ESSE and the ESSE Academy), and Father Anthony Elenjmittam, Dominican priest (1915), disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, author of many books on religion and spirituality.

The meetings introduced topics such as: "Is a Spiritual Approach Viable? The spiritual teachings and social work of Sathya Sai Baba"; "Is Peace possible in a world of Pieces?", "The importance of a spiritual Master today"; "Human Values and Human Rights: the Essence of Love" and "The Human Mind: Fountain of Serenity and Key of Non-Violence".

The concept behind these meetings was to initiate a step-by-step process of exchange and spiritual inquiry with the local community by providing practical key questions with a socio-existential and spiritual orientation, elaborating on the same. Sathya Sai Baba's teachings were gently brought in, inspirational for further individual and group inquiry.

The initial step of the global programme of meetings was to clarify the essence of Sathya Sai teachings, their spiritual principles and their moral and ethical implications. In this light George Bebedelis provided an overview of ancient Greek philosophy, linking it with subsequent western thought and culture, emphasising its unity with what Sathya Sai Baba professes; Dr. Rosati skipped from down to earth advice on vegetarianism, the risk of misinterpretation of the teachings and fanaticism, to a higher metaphysical focus and Prof. Thorbjörn Meyer pointed out the inner significance of Human Value (i.e. Values) and how the issue of 'Human Rights' cannot be tackled properly, and even less achieved, before a deeper understanding and practice of true humanness is properly secured. Finally, Father Anthony highlighted the two key tools of introspection (self-inquiry) and meditation.

The video, “Sathya Sai Baba - His works”, closed the meetings, showering the Grace of Swami’s Darshan and blessings on all who attended. Between 40 and 100 persons attended each of these various meetings.

Discovering Novel Opportunities to Reach Out

Though the Sai Organisation has not undertaken any major service project at the national level, mainly because the prosperous country already has a very well organised network of charities which deal with the various problems and tasks very well, they have initiated and are engaged in various service activities at the local level – all done with great love and commitment. These include visits to, and the care of, people in homes for the elderly, care of the disabled and Alzheimer patients, food for the homeless and many other useful and valuable contributions to the well-being of the less fortunate in our country. Great importance is attached to international solidarity, expressed by the fact that in the event of disasters and other emergencies the Swiss respond with generosity and great heart.

The Far Reaching Service Initiative of Swiss Med

On the individual level, with their natural and professional gifts and within their possibilities, Swiss devotees are always active in the service of others. A good example with international effects is the work of the service project of a small group from Zurich: In September 2006 the service project of this small Baba group came to a successful conclusion. It had been the plan to publish a live interview with Dr A. N. Safaya, Director of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Medical Sciences in Puttaparthi, in the Swiss Medical Journal **Swiss Med**. Such an interview would serve two purposes. First it would make the readers of a well-known, neutral, ordinary medical journal which had been published for 28 years, acquainted with Sathya Sai Baba’s work and His teaching in the field of health care, readers who were mostly non-devotees and had never heard of Baba before.

Secondly it was planned to distribute the journal worldwide in a circulation of 10,000 copies in order to draw the readers’ attention to the then forthcoming International Medical Conference on “Ideal Health Care for All”, which was scheduled for September 3 and 4, 2005 and formed part of the events staged on the occasion of Sathya Sai Baba’s eightieth birthday.

The plan was subsequently realised. **Swiss Med**, a Swiss journal of medicine and medical technology, published a long live interview which Dr A. N. Safaya granted to the editor-in-chief of the journal on February 12, 2005. The issue, heralded by a foreword by Prof. Thorbjörn Meyer, Chairman of Zone 7 of the Sathya Sai Organisation (Europe), Chairman ESSE Institute and ESSE Academy, also contained an article by Dr Narendranath Reddy, the Chairman of the International Medical Committee, and Dr Michael Goldstein, the Chairman of the Overseas Sri Sathya Sai Organisation, on the concept and the aims of the International Medical Conference mentioned above. In addition, Dr Narendranath Reddy and Dr Michael Goldstein also provided an overview of the programme “Sai Ideal Health Care for All” and its activities worldwide.

In a fascinating article Professor Dr Mitchell W. Krucoff, a famous American cardiologist who works at the Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, describes

how he, who did not know anything about Baba, was miraculously led to Him and became a member of the planning staff of the Hospital in Puttaparthi. Another contribution in this remarkable issue is of a purely technological nature and describes a software product solution for the capture, storage and transmission of echocardiogram images. The man who invented and developed the system is a Sai devotee and presented the first prototype of the machine to the Puttaparthi Super Speciality Hospital where it was installed and has been successfully operated since. In the article Dr Safaya and some of his colleagues testify to the benefits of this new medical technology.

More than 3,000 copies of **Swiss Med** 1/05 were sent to Puttaparthi. Each and every participant in the Medical Conference (there were nearly 1,000 people from India and abroad), all the delegates from all over the world, VIPs and guests on the veranda, all received their personal copy of this special issue of **Swiss Med**. Dr N. Reddy, member of Prasanthi Council, received 1,200 copies to circulate to his medical colleagues and friends in the United States. The issue was also sent to about 600 addresses in Switzerland and a further 500 addresses in other countries, mainly to members of governments and to people involved in health care administration. Some 160 embassies, diplomatic representatives of their countries accredited to the Government of Switzerland, received a copy of the **Swiss Med** issue along with a friendly letter. A mailing list was compiled of 700 of the most eminent people in culture, medicine and politics all over the world. Within the Sai Organisation a copy was sent to all Zone Coordinators, Regional Coordinators, and National Sai Organisations worldwide. The Swiss Sathya Sai Bookshop and through them our friends in Germany received 1,200 copies to be given to visitors.

This concerted effort by a small yet sincere group proved highly effective in creating awareness about the unique Sathya Sai Healthcare system among peoples from various walks of life, including decision makers, policy pundits and most importantly, medical professionals the world over.

Immediately after the Medical Conference the second part of the project was started. Dr N. Reddy wrote a report on the Medical Conference and thus made it possible to follow up **Swiss Med** 1/05 with the post-congress issue **Swiss Med** 2/05, also in English. The translation of the English version into all the languages spoken in Switzerland had been started. It was simply overwhelming, how Sai devotees from the French and Italian speaking parts of Switzerland, as well as devotees from Italy, Germany, France and Belgium spontaneously offered their help and support, so that it was possible to realise the various issues in translations into the languages mentioned. The English publication can be seen as a PDF document on the website of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences: http://www.sssihms.org.in/pdf/SWISS_MED.pdf. For the German, Italian and French languages one can visit <http://www.sathyasai.ch/html/journal.html>

The Spiritual Wing – Always on a Song!

As already mentioned, it was mainly the dedication of a single person, late Dr. Ali Hussein and his family that created an interest in bhajan songs which are so very unusual for a Western culture. They travelled tirelessly from group to group and taught this spiritual music. At the same time they took great trouble to collect and

foster songs in all the languages of Switzerland and this led to the cooperation with another musical group and to the creation of a special Swiss song-book, which has translations of the songs into different languages and is of enormous help to all the devotees. For the Bhajan part a new group – enthusiastic lovers of Indian music from the Sai Centre of Basel – were prepared to transcribe the Indian songs into our musical notation (as far as this was possible). This led to publication of the Bhajan song-book, which aroused considerable international interest and is now on sale in the bookshop in Prashanti. This work is ongoing and can be followed on the website: www.bhajan.ch

In the Spiritual Wing those responsible also prepare the work and the teachings of Sai Baba for study circles and compile explanatory texts. In this way the level of the study circles is raised, step by step.

The organisation's own printed medium, the "Sathya Sai Bulletin", appears twice a year and besides the latest of Baba's talks it also publishes extremely interesting articles on the different activities both in Switzerland and abroad. To a certain extent this important journal forms the link between the Organisation and the individual members.

Another such link is the Sathya Sai Book and Media Shop (www.sathya.ch), which was inaugurated in autumn 1999, in Aarau. Its premises also serve as a meeting centre for people who want to find out more about Sathya Sai Baba.

Finally, the Swiss Sai Organisation also has its own website under the address www.sathyasai.ch. Here, too, all the information of course has to be translated into at least three languages, a requirement that is sometimes difficult for our small country to fulfil. But with goodwill it has up till now always been possible to find the necessary people who can help with this.

Empowering Education with Human Values

When the first Balvikas programmes were started in 1980 in the Geneva Centre, about ten children took part in the classes. After the founding of the Sathya Sai Organisation Switzerland in 1990, the activities of the Education Wing were expanded. Regular satsangs, training sessions and workshops were held throughout the country in the 1990s. Camps for children and adolescents were also arranged. Many devotees attended courses abroad which were organised by the ESSE Institute. High points were the three-day workshop with June Auton in 1994 and the weekend workshop with General M. L. Chibber on the theme of his leadership book in 1996.

From 2000 to 2002 a major seminar was held at different venues in Switzerland, with more than 100 participants and 14 facilitators. The programme was divided into 5 basic units, with follow-up meetings at both Centre and regional level, as well as preparatory meetings with the facilitators. The programme produced much resource material in four languages! It was conceived as a synthesis of ESSE, ISSE and the personal experience of the two leading facilitators. Each of the 5 units were studied during a national 2-day seminar plus regional follow-up meetings. Individual presentations covered the practical application of Human Values in education and other spheres of life. These presentations were given in small groups of 8-10 people

and were monitored by a facilitator. They lasted between 15 and 30 minutes and were submitted in writing. Certificates were delivered by the Coordinating Committee of the Swiss Sathya Sai Organisation.

As a follow-up to this orientation-training activity, a three-day seminar entitled “Business with Heart” was held in 2003. Special focus was placed on values *at the workplace*. Three one-day workshops were held during the months of January, February and March 2003 at the Sai Centre of Ticino, within the context of regional-Centre activity. The meetings were held in English and Italian, which made it possible to open the programme to participants coming from other Swiss Sai Centres as well as devotees from Northern Italy, over 50 people were welcomed in all.

The cultural diversity of the participants – owing to the foreign origin of many Swiss devotees – created an enriching international setting, in favour however of the unifying factor of common purpose: the desire to explore the topic of values at work, to learn how to manifest them in everyday life and to improve the working atmosphere by fostering right human relations, self confidence and character, and the quality of life in general. The structure of the programme proposed the modules which had proved valuable in the earlier training programme: text sheets, toolboxes, work with group facilitators, presentations in plenary sessions and in-depth work in sub-groups.

The very meaningful programme entitled: **‘Unlocking the Power of Human Values in the Workplace: Business with Heart’** – was made possible thanks to the contributions of many people. Immediate focus was placed on the meaning of one’s work, i.e. profession, to understand one’s working relationship, what our job/profession/activity is teaching us; what challenges we must face and overcome; how all this is an opportunity for spiritual discipline and personal transformation.

One meeting introduced the concept of the ‘Inner Manager’ to the participants – and focused on the necessity of strengthening one’s dialogue with Conscience. Tangible questions such as: When and how did you know that your conscience was guiding you in your decisions? How did you feel? Did you follow the inner guidance or resist it? What happened?.... were put forward to help the group examine this inner relationship – giving specific focus to ‘the workplace’ and becoming aware of how the leading principles and universal values are there to guide us, inherent in ourselves.

The topics that emanated from this close-up on heart-to-heart communication were self-confidence and true leadership. The third workshop of this programme tackled the topic of Character and was conducted by Mr. Jack Hawley – business consultant and author of the book, ‘How to Reawaken the Spirit at Work: Dharmic Management’.

The programme ‘Business with Heart’ was a new step along our way; it was an opportunity for fostering further inquiry, solution-finding for practice and also a chance to experiment with training modules with an eye to the future possibilities for a non-devotional public. This training programme not only confirmed the previous one but added something new to it, as each new step always does.

The feedback received was all very positive and encouraging. A few non-devotees who were there (friends of members/devotees who had expressed a sincere interest

and need for this kind of training) were also extremely happy with both the informal setting and the high quality of the training itself.

To have also been able to include a group of over 10 participants from Northern Italy was a positive factor that we feel paves the way for further activity that could be jointly prepared, organised and carried out together, so as to strengthen mutual efforts and endeavour.

Demonstrating Values Creatively

A creative exhibition on Human Values was opened in the year 2003 in Aarau, Switzerland, thanks to the inspiration, skills and talents of the many Sai devotees who eagerly participated. The exhibition, which was based on a low budget set-up, was the first step towards a more professional exhibition and was seen as a 'family rehearsal' of what could be proposed to a non-devotee public in the future.

For two days 25 people were occupied in preparing the exhibition, installing its many components in 5 small rooms and one big hall. A specific colour was given to each room, combined with a value. The overall exhibition was conceived to be as interactive as possible, and this meant learning alone or with other members and devotee visitors.

The idea of putting one's 'creative energy' to work... was the natural continuation of 9 years of service activity which the Basel Centre had previously carried out. Regularly participating in an annual birthday celebration at the local retirement home, its members would offer what they could, with music and any other talents they had.

The realisation of the exhibition was a much larger process that helped all people feel how the energy of service can be connected to human values, and how this energy creates, by simply expressing it creatively from within, as one participant recalls,

"Thanks to what was a truly heartfelt experience for us all, we realised to what extent it is necessary to live and practise Human Values. Neither the pictures nor the description of the work done can reflect our gratitude to the team of four ladies who planned the work with so much harmony and devotion, portraying an example of God's grace and love. We also learned that when you try again and again... with full trust in God, one day He will make your aspirations come true!"

Sai Parenting – Making it Work

There is no official parenting programme (though some Centres choose to continue to focus on this topic), but during the year 2004 Switzerland chose parenting as a national focus topic: major importance was given to communication. A paper was produced entitled 'Understanding as a condition for Unity', translated into German, Italian and French (the original is in English).

The inspirational reference material normally used – both from a practical (activity and results) point of view and content-wise – are the books by P. and T. Dhall (e.g. Human Values – The Heart of Dynamic Parenting) and by Rita Bruce (Parenting). Furthermore, Rita Bruce's workshop on parenting – organised in the Ticino Centre -

has provided us with an excellent concept programme that can be easily adopted in Centres both in study-circle format and also in a workshop format.

The Spirited Sai Youth

The Youth Wing in Switzerland has a varied history – ranging from enthusiastic activity to short spells of hibernation. A small but very committed and keen group is at present working on the restructuring of the Youth Wing. This group consists of about 10 to 15 young adults aged between 25 and 35 years. But there were always older devotees who were there to give advice to these young people. The highlight of last year's activities was the visit to the World Youth Conference in Prasanthi Nilayam. The young people all returned to their own country full of enthusiasm and were able to report on their experiences and what they had learned, at a national meeting or satsang.

Swiss Authority Recognises the Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee

The Swiss Sai Organisation, under its new name, "Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee of Switzerland", has its legal domicile in Berne, the beautiful and historical capital of Switzerland (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Town_of_Berne). Since 14 October 1993 it has been recognised as being an organisation of public utility.

In accordance with the "Officers' Guidelines" issued by the International Sai Organisation on 17 May 2005, the Swiss Sai Organisation had to change its name to "Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee of Switzerland", and as a consequence of this it also had to draw up new Statutes.

Another important consequence of these changes was that the Swiss devotees had to prove to the authorities that they are still, and in the future will continue to be, an organisation of public utility, thus being granted the status of exemption from payment of the direct cantonal and community taxes, the direct federal tax, inheritance tax and the tax on donations *inter vivos*.

The Swiss Sai Organisation therefore submitted to the tax authority a copy of its new Statutes and detailed documentation on all its activities, such as education in human values, service to the community and to individuals, spiritual activities etc. Based on these documents, the Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee of Switzerland received from the tax authorities of the Canton of Berne, in their letter of 23 October 2006, notification of the decision that the new Statutes were approved and that the Swiss Sai Organisation is granted the status of public utility and is thus exempt from the payment of taxes.

We quote as follows the first and last paragraphs of this letter – sent to the Swiss Sai Organisation, written on the stationery of a Swiss tax authority!

"Under the name 'Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee of Switzerland', an association exists in the sense of Art. 60 ff. of the Swiss Civil Code (ZGB), with its legal domicile in Berne. According to its Statutes, this association is an organisation of public utility which helps the individual to become aware of his inherent divinity and to behave accordingly, in that it allows divine love and the unity of thought, words and deeds to pass into the sphere of everyday life. The aim of the institution is the dissemination of

the basic human values – sathya (truth), dharma (justice), prema (love), shanti (peace) and ahimsa (non-violence). A further objective of the association is to promote a culture in which the unity of all beliefs is recognised, without regard to religion, race, caste or creed. In its letter of 4 September 2006, this institution submitted to the Board of Taxation of the Canton of Berne an application for exemption from taxes.”

“The documentation of the association, ‘Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee of Switzerland’, which was submitted shows that it pursues the following activities: collection of clothing and materials for the victims of the tsunami, care of elderly and/or handicapped persons, kitchen service and distribution of food for the homeless and for drug addicts, holiday camps for children and adolescents and other activities that are adapted to the local needs (e.g. care of children, holidays for the elderly, for people living alone and for children at Christmas-time, aid in the event of natural catastrophes etc.). This work is carried out by members of the Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee of Switzerland in an honorary capacity.

The activities of the association, ‘Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee of Switzerland’ in the humanitarian, social and educational fields contribute towards the promotion of the common good. The circle of those who may benefit from this promotion of the common good is open. The question of the common interest can thus be affirmed. The condition that an activity is not pursued out of self-interest is met, since adequate sacrifices are made: the association is financed through donations and contributions from its members, and very many hours of voluntary work are carried out.”

The Sai-Suffused Switzerland

The National Coordinator of Swiss Sai Organisation recently had a pleasant experience in connection with the international registration of the name “Sathya Sai Baba” with the World Intellectual Property Organisation in Geneva. This also involved some correspondence from Ireland. This letter was addressed by the Irish Patent Office to the Sathya Sai Coordinating Committee Switzerland at the private address of the National Coordinator. Instead of the letter, the Coordinator received a written enquiry from the rather irritated Swiss Postal Service, which read as follows: “Does a Mr. Sathya Sai live at this address?” The question was quickly answered with a heartfelt “Yes!”, because – as we know – **Sai is everywhere!** And the letter then found its way to the right recipient.

NETAJI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE:
FIERY WILL AND NERVES OF STEEL

By Col S K Bose

India's Independence Day falls on August 15 and Republic Day on January 26. Traditionally, there are no celebrations of these days in the Ashram. Events are restricted to the College Campus, where there is a brief flag-hoisting ceremony followed by a brief speech by the Vice Chancellor. It is all over in about 30 minutes, after which the students rush to the Mandir for Darshan. In the previous year (2007) too, which was the 60th year of Indian Independence, it was no different. However, in the afternoon, in a surprise departure from tradition, Swami asked a few elders to speak on Independence. Understandably, all speakers, conscious of the spiritual nature of the assembly, spoke, after a few references to India's Independence and what it really meant, on the independence of the mind from desires.

Swami was not officially scheduled to speak, but suddenly He decided to. It was a most unusual event, with Swami not delivering a Discourse but making remarks and giving a lot of advice, as He used to do in private sessions in Trayee Brindavan, Bangalore. While Swami's emphasis was largely on the importance of sacrifice, which people generally forget soon after they have achieved what they wanted to, He spent quite a lot of time on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose elaborating and highlighting his sacrificial nature and passionate patriotism. He said, "None of you asked me to speak. But it is my love for Bose that made me speak today. Such people must be born again in Bharat (India). Never forget Bose....Such glorious personalities are not to be forgotten."

Bose is a legendary figure hardly known now, except through pictures and statues, and the various committees that are set up from time to time to probe his mysterious disappearance towards the end of World War II. Lately, we have received many requests for an authoritative account of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his contributions. Fortunately for us, that account has been provided by Col. Bose, [no relative!] son of Brig. S.K. Bose.

As many of you may be aware, both the father and the son are well known in Prasanthi Nilayam. The father [now no more but who was once dramatically brought back from the dead by Swami during Dasara celebrations many years ago] served in the Indian Army during World War II, and later as Director of two prestigious IITs [Indian Institute of Technology]. After retirement, he served Swami by supervising many a construction here, from the famous Sarva Dharma Stupa to the Super Specialty Hospital building.

As for the son, namely Col. Bose, he too is a familiar figure, especially to those who have visited Chaitanya Jyothi. Col. Bose, the author of the article we are presenting, not only oversaw the construction of the Chaitanya Jyothi and its commissioning, but is fully involved in running it. If Chaitanya Jyothi really shines, it is in no small measure due to the tireless service put in by Col. Bose with typical military precision and discipline. The same can be seen in his article, which presents amazing details that are hardly known. H2H is deeply indebted to Col. Bose for his

labour of love, and offers his article with much pleasure and gratitude on the birthday month of this precious son of Mother India, who was born on January 23, 1897.

If one looks at the history of Indian Freedom Movement, after Mahatma Gandhi, the name that stands out is of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. His contribution is no less than those of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, who have been given much of the credit for the successful culmination of India's freedom struggle. It is unfortunate that Netaji has been denied his rightful place in the annals of Indian history and remains largely forgotten. It is more than 60 years since India's Independence, and it is only pertinent that Netaji's remarkable and stirring deeds need to be brought to light in the proper perspective.

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“Swatantra’ (or freedom) as it is called does not relate to the body or the mind. It is in reality ‘Swaatantra’ where ‘Swaa’ means the ‘Atma’ or Self. When you follow the ‘Atma’, there is nothing else left to be achieved. There is no use of just rejoicing on this day without even realizing the meaning of ‘Swaatantra’. Bose knew what it meant. The patriotic fervour that he displayed is worthy of emulation. Without the patriotic spirit one is more dead than alive! It was only Bose who fought for ‘Swaatantra’; others had selfish agendas. They were the ones who divided people. ‘Swaatantra’ makes you realize that the country is one because all are one.”

- Baba on India's Independence Day, 2007

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An Impassioned Leader

The British rulers acknowledged with serious concern Netaji as the most dynamic and influential political leader in all sections and religious groups of the country. They saw how Netaji's ideas always inspired young idealists to fight more strongly for freedom and saw in this firebrand, charismatic leader a fearsome adversary. Netaji's popularity cut across religious lines. Muslims acknowledged and appreciated the leading role played by Netaji. Even Mohamed Ali Jinnah, who is acknowledged by all as the Father of Pakistan, had so much trust and regard for Netaji that he was willing to give up his idea of a religiously divided India, if Netaji led the nation. Muslim leaders of India's eastern states echoed the same sentiment during the thirties.

The revival of INA (Indian National Army) by Netaji shook the confidence of the British regarding the loyalty of the British Indian Soldiers in the Army on whom the

British Rule depended in India. The apprehension was strengthened in 1946 when there was a mutiny by the British Indian Navy in Mumbai. The British saw the writing on the wall. Their efforts were now directed towards an honourable withdrawal. When historian Dr Mazumdar spoke to the then Prime Minister of Britain, Lord Clement Atlee on Britain's decision to grant independence to India, he says, "In his reply Atlee cited among several reasons, the principal among them being the erosion of loyalty to the British Crown among the Indian Army and Navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Netaji".

Subhas Chandra Bose was born of 23 Jan 1897 to Srimati Prabhavati Devi and Janakinath Bose, a prominent advocate of Cuttack, who later became a member of the Bengal Legislative Council. He was later awarded the title of Rai Bahadur by the British. On account of the anti-Indian policies of the British rulers, Janakinath returned the title and also resigned from the post of Public Prosecutor.

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"Patriotism, the love for the land of one's birth, is extremely important. Once when Subhas Chandra Bose was a student of the Calcutta University, a British Lecturer spoke disparagingly about India and Indians. Young Subhas Chandra was upset by this, but restrained himself from retaliation for quite some time. However, when he found the Lecturer exceeding the limits of decency and decorum, he could not contain himself any longer. He sprang to his feet, swiftly jumped across the benches and pouncing upon the Lecturer, thrashed him with his shoe. In a few minutes the news spread like wild fire throughout the University Campus. The authorities held an emergency meeting and passed orders debarring Subhas from the University for a period of five years. Thus, Subhas sacrificed his education for the sake of upholding the honour of his motherland. Consequently his father sent Subhas to London for his higher studies. There, too, Subhas evinced his sense of patriotism. He had distinguished himself in his studies there and hence even had good opportunities to stay back in London, had he been interested in his self-advancement, career-wise. But prodded by his patriotic fervour, Subhas returned to India after passing I.C.S. (Indian Civil Service) examination with a high rank and entered politics instead of Government service. Students should follow his example and sacrifice their "swartha" (selfish interest) for paratha (the welfare of others) and attain Paramartha (the supreme goal of life)."

- *Baba During Summer Showers, 1990.*

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Excelling in Education

Subhas was the ninth among fourteen siblings and was a brilliant scholar. After matriculation from Ravenshaw Collegiate School, he joined the prestigious Presidency College, Calcutta. His stay was short lived as he could not tolerate the

derogatory remarks of Professor Oaten against India and Indians. As a result the Professor had him expelled from the college and rusticated from the Calcutta University in 1916. On the intervention of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, Subhash gained admission in the Scottish Church College from where he graduated with a first class in philosophy in 1919, thus emulating his idol, Narendra Nath Dutt (Swami Vivekananda) and left for England to appear in the ICS examination. In 1920 he passed the examination with the highest marks in English and 4th overall. He joined Cambridge University and obtained his Tripos in 1921. He joined the ICS but being a firebrand nationalist, refused to continue and resigned.

His Political Career Shines

He returned to India, being deeply disturbed by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. He met Mahatma Gandhi and on his advice, met Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das (CR), who remained his political Guru till he passed away in 1925. When CR Das was Mayor of Calcutta, Netaji was his CEO. His nationalist fervour drew the wrath of the British and he was arrested and deported to Mandalay, Burma. He was released in 1927 and in 1929 he was elected as President of All India Trade Union Congress. In 1930 he was elected Mayor of Calcutta. He greatly admired Gandhiji and took part in the Salt Satyagraha when he was arrested. After his release, he publicly denounced the Gandhi-Irwin pact and was arrested again. He was released on health grounds and went to Europe for treatment. While there he established contacts with various European nations to elicit their sympathy and support for India's Freedom struggle. He met Mussolini in Italy, Felder in Germany, D. Valera in Ireland and Romain Rolland in France.

Netaji returned to India defying government orders prohibiting his entry into India and was arrested. He was released on account of the overwhelming victory of the Congress in the 1937 Elections. In 1938, at Haripura Congress Session he was elected as President of the Indian National Congress and elected again in 1939 defeating Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya who was the Congress nominee. He brought a resolution to give 6 months time to the British to hand over India to Indians, or face a revolt. This was strongly opposed by Gandhiji.

The result was that Netaji resigned within a few months and formed a progressive group known as the Forward Bloc within Congress. Netaji's stand was that there could be no compromise with the British on the issue of full independence and that on no account should the country be partitioned. Although their strategies were diametrically opposite, Gandhiji and Netaji had the highest regard for each other. Both Netaji and Nehru were identified with the Left Wing of the Congress Party, well to the Left of other respected leaders like C Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad. Netaji was firmly of the view that a more direct and militant approach was required to gain independence. Not for him, the

peaceful passive non-cooperation movement of Gandhiji and of Congress. At this point of time the British perceived Netaji as a bigger threat than Gandhiji.

War Protest

In September 1939, World War II broke out and as apprehended by Netaji, India was declared as a warring state (on behalf of the British) by the Viceroy, without consulting the Indian leaders. The Congress government in seven major states resigned in protest. Netaji now started a mass movement against using India's resources and men. To him it made no sense to make Indians shed their blood for the sake of colonial imperial nations. There was a tremendous response to his call and the British promptly imprisoned him. He went on hunger strike and on the 11th day, after his health deteriorated, he was released from prison and put under house arrest. The British were afraid that there would be violent reactions all over the country should something happen to Netaji in prison. Because of his outspoken anti-British stance, he was jailed 11 times between 1920 and 1941 for periods varying between 6 months and 3 years. By this time it had become increasingly clear to him that he could not achieve anything worthwhile by remaining in India. That would bring him in direct confrontation with Gandhiji whom he loved and greatly admired. It would suit the British and harm India's cause for freedom.

Scouting for Support Abroad

On 17 January, 1941, he disappeared from house arrest. His nephew, Sisir Bose, drove him out of Calcutta in great secrecy. Thus began a hazardous and arduous journey by foot, train and car to Kabul, with the support of the Kirti Party affiliated to the Communist Party of India. His plan was to travel to Russia and enlist Stalin's help to drive out the British from India, but unknown to Netaji, the British had secretly entered into a strategic non-aggression pact with Russia. As a result the Russian Embassy at Kabul gave a cold shoulder to Netaji but he still decided to try to enlist Russian help. Netaji's journey from Peshawar to Kabul was an epic in itself. Only his iron will and the burning desire to free India from foreign rule, enabled him to endure the rugged mountainous route, great risks of capture and freezing weather. Accompanied by Bhagatram, he reached Kabul. Armed with an assumed identity and passport from the Italian Legation in Kabul, in the name of Signor Orlando Mazzito, a supposed wireless operator, and accompanied by Dr Voelger, Netaji left Kabul for Samarkand on 18 March 1941, from where they boarded a train for Moscow on 20 March. Disappointed with the lack of response from Stalin, Netaji decided to leave for Berlin. Although, he despised Nazism, he was prepared to make friends with the devil if that would help his cause.

In League with the Axis Powers

Contact with German leaders was not easy, busy as they were with the conduct of the War, in spite of being well aware of Netaji's well known anti-British stand. Netaji's burning desire, his endless patience and untiring perseverance succeeded in the end and he was able to interact with Adam Von Trott Zu Solz (head of the German Eastern Affairs) and his deputy Alexander Werth. Later Werth wrote, "Very soon we felt the strength of his will power, the honesty of his intentions and the inexorability of his personal dedication to India's cause, we could not help being influenced by his ideas and wishes". On his initiative, Netaji obtained the release of all Indian prisoners from POW camps and started the Free India Centre, Azad Hind Radio Centre in Oct 1941 and finally the Indian Legion (Azad Hind Fauj), comprising enthusiastic Indian students, political activists and Indian prisoners captured by Rommel from various battles in Africa. It was difficult to change the mindset of the Indian POWs but Netaji was not to be stopped.

Netaji met Hitler on 26 May 1942 to plead the urgency of his case. The latter, preoccupied by the German offensive towards Leningrad, was a little hesitant and wanted to know exactly what kind of 'political concept' Netaji had in mind. Extremely annoyed at this, he asked von Trott to tell 'His Excellency' that he had been in politics all his life and did not need advice from any side. Nobody else would have dared to tick off Hitler at the height of his powers, but this was a man of steel, who had no fear.

In the meanwhile, Japanese forces had gained control over the entire area from the Sea of Japan to Bay of Bengal. By May 1942, Hongkong, Singapore, Manila, Penang and Rangoon had fallen to the Japanese. Another Indian revolutionary, Rash Behari Bose persuaded and obtained from the Japanese Government, wholehearted support for the fight against the British Raj. Netaji, who was still trying to persuade Hitler to support an Indian Government in exile, was greatly encouraged by the latest development in Japan. German motives and intentions with relation to India were complex. While the German foreign office wanted to support the Indian revolutionary, Hitler's personal belief was that the Aryan British had the right to rule over the unfit Indian masses.

A Hazardous Japanese Voyage

The developments in Japan convinced Netaji that he could play a much more active role from the soil of Asia rather than spending agonizingly prolonged periods staying in Berlin. Time was running out. He had to be where the action was. He was able to convince Germany and Italy to help him reach Japan. After long and complicated discussions with the Italian and the Japanese Embassies in Berlin and Rome and German authorities, the following plan was drawn up. Netaji, accompanied by one

friend, would be taken by a German submarine by way of the English Channel, Bay of Biscay, West Africa, around South Africa to the South of Madagascar, where he would be transferred to a Japanese submarine, which would take him to the nearest base in East Asia.

Eventually on the night of 7 Feb 1943, Netaji and his deputy, Nambiar, German State Secretary, Keppler and Alexander Werth, from the Special India Division, took Netaji and his companion Abid Hassan to Kiel, to where a submarine was waiting. Thus began another epic journey of great risk and danger undertaken by Netaji. Two and a half months later on 26 Apr 1943, visual contact was made by the two submarines. As the sea was pretty rough, the two submarines travelled further North East. On 28 April 1943, despite inclement weather, Netaji and Abid Hassan were transferred from the German submarine to the Japanese by means of a rubber boat. On 6 May 1943 they landed at Saban, not Penang as originally intended. He was welcomed by Yamamoto, the Japanese Military Attache at Berlin Embassy, who had reached earlier. Finally on 16 May 1943 Netaji reached Tokyo.

Enlisting Help from the Japanese Thus the stage was set for Netaji to emerge as the leader of the independence movement in East Asia. He met Prime Minister Tojo on 10 June 1943. In "The Springing Tiger" (pl77-178), Hugh Toye observed "For most the personality of the man was overwhelming, there was great genius of enthusiasm, of inspiration. Men found that when they were with him only the cause mattered, they saw only through his eyes, through the thoughts he gave them, could deny him nothing". General Tojo was no exception. He was charmed as Netaji stood before him and spoke of his iron will and determination to secure India's independence from the British. He saw fire in the man's belly, hunger for freedom in his eye and nothing in his words but great devotion to his motherland.

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"No one acts. Everyone delivers speeches. I feel a stabbing pain that there is not a single Bose today. Tell me is there any one? One Bose is enough. Bose truly understood the plight of India. "

- Baba on India's Independence Day, 2007

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Meanwhile in India, following the failure of the Cripps mission, Congress became increasingly more impatient and was not prepared to wait till the end of the war

for Independence. Even Gandhiji started to look a little moved by Netaji's activities in Europe and Jayprakash Narain openly supported Netaji's armed revolution. Netaji's cry "Quit India" became the slogan and his call "Do or Die" became the motto. In August 1942 most of the important political leaders were imprisoned by the British. This was the kind of electric energy Netaji radiated from long distance. R Coupland ("Indian Politics" p-268) wrote, "The Revolutionaries of extreme left, specially in Bengal, were still ready to take orders from Mr Subhash Chandra Bose, even if they came by radio from Berlin". The British retaliated by disbanding the provincial Congress Committee of Bengal on 10 August, 1942.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, president of the Congress from 1939 to 1946, states in his book "India Wins Freedom" (published posthumously), that Gandhiji had not approved many actions of Netaji, but the courage shown by him in escaping into Germany and the resourcefulness displayed there by him in mobilizing a campaign for liberating India, unconsciously coloured Gandhiji's views about the whole situation. This is reflected in the launching of the Quit India Movement on 8 August 1942, which echoed Netaji's war cry "Do or Die", a slogan not consistent with the policy of pacifism. After the imprisonment of the Congress leaders, the movement quickly deteriorated into acts of defiance, anarchy and mayhem at the local level. The movement created alarm amongst the British and significantly hindered the Allied war effort.

In Tokyo, Netaji met Prime Minister, Gen Tojo again on 14 June, who agreed to extend every possible support for the cause of Indian independence. He then left for Singapore. When he arrived on 2 July, he received a tumultuous welcome there from soldiers and civilians alike. Hugh Toye writes, "His personal enthusiasm, his vitality, his authority and his world view won him the real allegiance of Indians in East Asia". On 4 July 43 a reception was held in his honour, during which Rash Behari Bose transferred the mantle of the Indian Independence League to Netaji. On 25 August 1943 he was formally appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the INA. On 23 October 1943 Japan announced its official recognition of the Provisional Government of India of Subhas Chandra Bose. Recognition from the German Government followed on 29 October 1943 and from Italy on 9 November 1943.

The Story of the Indian National Army

No story about Netaji would be complete without the exploits of his Azad Hind Fauz (INA). The story of INA began much earlier. By the end of 1941, India had started featuring prominently in the Japanese policies. An organization was set up by the Japanese Government, headed by Major Fujiwara Iwaichi. His initial contact was with Giani Pritam Singh, and after the Malayan invasion, with Capt Mohan Singh. Between the three of them, they started recruiting from amongst those captured by the Japanese in Malaya prior to the fall of Singapore. Thus was born the

nucleus of what later came to be known as the Indian National Army. The volunteers were organized into units and trained under Capt Mohan Singh and worked along with those under Pritam Singh in Malaya and Thailand. Capt Mohan Singh saw action with 1/14 Punjab against Japanese forces at Jitra. Singapore surrendered on 15 February 1942. On the morning of 17 February 1942 some 45,000 Indian POWs gathered at Farrer Park. They were first addressed by Col Hunt of the Malaya Command and then by Maj Fujiwara, who spoke of Japanese intentions of raising a "liberation army". Thereupon he passed on the responsibilities and command to Capt Mohan Singh. The POWs felt that they had been abandoned and handed over like cattle to the Japanese. Nearly half of those present, joined the INA.

By late 1942, disillusionment set in and Indian volunteers felt like pawns in the hands of the Japanese. In Dec 42, Capt Mohan Singh and INA leaders ordered the INA to disband. Capt Mohan Singh was arrested and exiled to Pulau Ubin. Between December 1942 and February 1943, Rash Behari Bose tried to keep the ML and INA going but failed. Thousands of INA soldiers returned to POW status again. In a series of meetings with the Japanese, a large number of officers and troops of INA made it known that they would regroup only if Netaji assumed command. Netaji's exploits in Germany had become common knowledge. A policy forming body for the INA was formed consisting of Lt Col Bhonsle, Lt Col Shah Nawaz Khan, Maj P K Sehgal, Maj Habibur Rahman and Lt Col AC Chatterji.

The INA is Rejuvenated

Netaji's stirring speech on 5 July 1943 at Singapore on assuming charge of President of ML from Rash Behari Bose, re-ignited the flame of liberation of the motherland from the British. His impact was significant and immediate. A new life had been infused in the INA. Besides POWs local civilians with no military experience, from barristers to plantation workers, joined the INA and doubled its troop strength. An Officers Training School for INA officers and the Azad School of civilian volunteers was set up. A group of 45 young Indians personally chosen by Netaji (known as Tokyo Boys) was sent to Japan's Imperial Military Academy to train as fighter pilots. For the first time, outside USSR, a women's regiment, the Rani of Jhansi Regiment under Capt Lakshmi Sehgal was raised as a combat force. Dr Lakshmi Swaminadhan (as she was then) gave up a prosperous practice as a gynaecologist in Singapore to join the INA. The clarion call of INA was 'Jai Hind' and 'Chalo Delhi'.

The preparation for assault moved at a fast pace and the INA HQ was moved from Singapore to Rangoon on 7 January 1944. It was decided inter alia, that the only flag to fly over the Indian soil would be the National Tricolour and that any soldier, Japanese or Indian, found looting or raping, would be shot at once.

.....

Bose was very strong and powerful, in body, mind and in spiritual splendour. He always desired that India must be foremost, pure and grand. There is none equal to him in wanting the progress of the nation. Other prominent leaders at that time were actually jealous of him and they did everything to keep him away. They say that he died in an accident. At that time he was actually in a steamer...

- Baba on India's Independence Day, 2007

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A String of Triumphs

The first success of INA came in Arakan's Maya Valley by Maj L S Misra's unit against the 7 Indian Division. Success stories continued. Kohima fell to INA's Subhas Brigade on 8 April 1944 under the command of Col Thakur Singh. Moirang fell to INA on 18 April 1944 when troops under Col Shaukat Malik, raised the National Tricolour. Maj Gen Kiani's troops and Col Shah Nawaz Khan's Subhas Brigade surrounded the British troops in Imphal for 3 months. The success of the INA caused Mountbatten grave concern. Under his directions the 3rd Indian Division facing the INA at Imphal remained Indian in name only. Twenty four of its battalions had English, Nigerian and Burmese soldiers, because he feared that Indian soldiers would join the INA.

The siege of Imphal was to be the turning in the saga of the INA. It was not the British army, but the monsoon, which became the biggest adversary. Logistics became the major problem as B 29 bombers disrupted the lines of supply. INA was left without air cover as Japanese aircraft were diverted elsewhere to combat the air power of America, which entered the War after Pearl Harbour, giving exact INA positions. Outbreaks of malaria and dysentery in the face of lack of medical facilities and supplies took a heavy toll. Netaji was forced by circumstances to issue instructions to INA to withdraw. The extent of loss during the long withdrawal was significant in its impact on the INA.

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“People keep saying that Bose died in an accident. That is wrong. He never met with any accident. He was the greatest. He authored a book, ‘My India’ and that was later

translated into English. He was married and his daughter was Lalita Bose. She in fact came to Parthi and followed Swami everywhere, whether it was Ooty, Kodaikanal or Madurai. She always kept Swami's name on her lips and sang bhajans and songs. She often lamented, 'My father was a patriotic Indian. I am so proud of Bharat; but today the unity has been shattered, there is no unity among people.'

- Baba on India's Independence Day, 2007

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The Axis Surrender Blights the INA

Netaji did not give up and the task of rebuilding the INA continued in Burma. They continued to provide stiff resistance to the Allied advance, but the tide turned inexorably. On the Western front on 6 June 1944 Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy and the thrust towards Berlin began, just as the thrust towards Rangoon had already started on the Eastern front. On 7 May 1945 Germany formally surrendered following the death of Hitler. Japan continued, but it was a losing battle. On 7 August 1945 the first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima followed by the second bomb on 9 August 1945 on Nagasaki. Inevitably Japan surrendered. Netaji announced in his calm voice, "Japan's surrender is not India's surrender. The INA would not admit defeat".

Netaji wanted to stay on in Singapore but under extreme pressure from his cabinet colleagues, decided to leave. He travelled to Saigon and from there to Taiwan and then he disappeared. Nobody believed the story that he died in an air crash. The remnants of the INA were to surrender when the Allied forces captured Burma. The British tried to put Shah Nawaz Khan and other INA officers on trial to set an example, but fears of a violent backlash put paid to their plans. According to Md Muktadir Arif Mozammel, the cause of India's independence was greatly advanced by the spirit of nationalism aroused by the INA. Although the term INA has been used, Netaji loved to call it Azad Hind Fauj.

Bose's Tremendous Legacy

Gandhiji and Netaji had great love for each other. Netaji reportedly said, "It will be tragic for me if I succeeded in winning the confidence of the people but failed to win the confidence of India's greatest man (Mahatma Gandhi). Gandhiji wondered in 1945 how Netaji could die when Swaraj was yet to be achieved. This conviction caused much dismay to the British Government. He wrote in the 24-2-1946 issue of 'Harijan' that "Subhash Chandra Bose's patriotism is second to none".

When Gandhiji became reconciled to the fact that Netaji had died, he stressed that, "He is living with us in his message and ideals he placed before the world". Shah Nawaz Khan told Gandhiji that Netaji had made it clear to the INA soldiers that in an independent India, they would be expected to serve their country not by means of swords but through non-violence. P N Oak, one of the earliest to join Netaji's INA and had helped organize broadcasts from Azad Hind Radio in Saigon and Singapore, says that Netaji was totally disinterested in worldly pursuits and ambitions. He repeatedly and emphatically declared in his public speeches that if INA succeeded liberating India, he would toss over that freedom to the people and retire into spiritual oblivion. Thus a common belief of political observers that Nehru and Netaji were rival contenders for political leadership, was basically wrong. Netaji had no such ambitions. Whether Nehru perceived Netaji as a threat to his position, remains a moot point.

The stories of the deeds of the INA that became public knowledge during the trials of soldiers of the INA in 1945 were perceived as so inflammatory that the British Government forbade the BBC from broadcasting their story, fearing mass revolts and uprisings. The Naval mutiny in Bombay was followed by another among the ground crew in the Royal Indian Air Force.

An army mutiny broke out at Jabalpur during the last week of Feb 1946, which had to be put down with difficulty. The weekly intelligence summary of 25 March 1946 admitted that the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force units could not be relied upon to put down mass revolt. Thus what Netaji and the Azad Hind Fauj failed to achieve directly, was successful posthumously. The trials were carried out in the Red Fort, New Delhi, thus ironically enabling the INA remnants to achieve Netaji's War Cry, "Chalo Delhi."

A number of commissions have probed Netaji's disappearance, but nothing has come out of them. On this month of January when he was born a hundred and ten years ago, let us shed a tear and refresh our memory of this great son of India, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his intrepid band of freedom fighters.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part - 37

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT XII - SCENE 1

The scene is Seshama Raju's house. Word has spread that Sathya has given a blank answer. Seshama has heard the news; he is worried and questioning Sathya about it.

SESHAMA RAJU: Sathyam, it seems You have given blank answer books in the exam. Are You not serious about studies?

SATHYA: It is not correct to say that I have not written the exam. I have done so.

SESHAMA: But Your Teacher told me that You did not write even a single word in the answer paper!

SATHYA: He will himself tell you that I answered very well.

SESHAMA: I don't like this attitude. You are behaving like a crazy person. Tomorrow when the marks are announced, we will know the stuff You are made of. I shall then teach You a fitting lesson!

SUSEELA:[to husband] Please take this.....Sathyam, freshen Yourself, and come for tiffin.

SCENE 2

The scene now shifts to the Staff Room in the School. The Telugu Teacher Koteeswara Rao, who was supervising during the examination continues to be puzzled about what happened. He expresses his misgivings to two colleagues.

TELUGU TEACHER: Vasudeva Murthy, it is very interesting! Not a single letter was written on the answer sheet that Sathyam had on His desk. Yet, when I sat down to evaluate, I found that the answers were all there and absolutely correct too! What do you have to say about this?

THE THIRD TEACHER: Really?

VASUDEVA MURTHY: What do you mean by asking "really", when Koteeswara Rao Master telling you what actually happened! Are you suggesting that he is uttering falsehood?

THE OTHER TEACHER: No sir, I didn't mean it that way!

TELUGU TEACHER: Shut up!A few days ago, I asked Sathyam to materialise a citrus fruit for me. Just as He was about to give the fruit to me, I wanted it changed to a custard apple, which He did. I did not give much thought to this incident, dismissing

it as mere magic. But from this miracle it would appear that Sathyam is a boy with a Divine aspect in Him.

OTHER TEACHER: Sir, if you want to believe in it do so, or else forget the whole thing. Don't believe and entertain doubts at the same time.

TELUGU TEACHER: It is not quite like that. Those two dunces Ramesh and Mahesh who normally are unable to answer any question, they too have answered very well!

THIRD TEACHER: What is there so surprising about it? Were they not sitting near Sathyam? Obviously, His intelligence has rubbed off on them too.

TELUGU TEACHER: Are you saying that's all there is to it?

THIRD TEACHER: Yes sir, that's all there is to it.

TELUGU TEACHER: I am not too sure; I have my own doubts. ... *[summons the School assistant]* Yadagiri, go and fetch Ramesh and Mahesh.

YADAGIRI: Yes sir!

Yadagiri goes out. He finds Ramesh and Mahesh playing there along with other boys.

YADAGIRI: Ramesh! Mahesh! The Telugu Master is calling for you both. Go, and hurry up!

RAMESH & MAHESH: We will come.

OTHER BOYS: OK fellows, let's continue our game.

Staff Room again.

TELUGU TEACHER: Listen you two! Never in your life have you answered any questions properly in the class, and yet you two have answered so well in the exam. Between us, tell me, did you copy?

RAMESH: No sir! How could we copy when you were there invigilating? Besides, we would never do such a thing!

TELUGU TEACHER: Then how come all your answers are correct?

MAHESH: Sir, we studied hard and prepared well at home.

TELUGU TEACHER: In that case, I shall ask those questions now, and you had better answer them!

RAMESH: At that time we knew the answers....

MAHESH: Sir, we wrote very fast,.....

RAMESH: And now we have forgotten all the answers!

TELUGU TEACHER: Oh I see, you have forgotten, have you?!

TEACHER: What is so strange about it Sir? Although I was taught about the Indus Valley civilisation so many times, I don't remember a thing!

TELUGU TEACHER: [to Ramesh and Mahesh] Great souls! Do you know that in the entire class, only three have passed? And Sathyam has done so in the First Class! Go and tell the others.

RAMESH & MAHESH: Thank you sir!

SCENE 3

News spreads that in Sathya's class, only three boys pass – Sathya, Ramesh, and Mahesh. Among the three, Sathya secures a First Class. By way of celebration, Sathya is carried through the streets of the village by His classmates in a sort of 'victory parade'. They hail His success. The cheer leader shouts "RAJU" and the others shout "FIRST CLASS" in chorus.

BOYS: Raju,..... First Class! Raju,.....First Class! Raju,.....First Class.

The villagers watch with surprise. They want to know what is going on.

A MAN: [to one of the boys in the procession] Hey boy, come here. What's this carnival procession all about?

BOY: This is no carnival sir, but a celebration of the announcement of the exam results. Our Raju has passed First Class in our School.

ANOTHER MAN: That is strange! It appears that Raju didn't write anything; and yet He gets a First Class!

FIRST MAN: The boy must be a favourite of the teacher – that is all there is to it!

Meanwhile, the procession moves ahead.

BOYS [chorus]: Raju,First Class! Raju,..... First Class! Raju,First Class!....

Another group of people sees the procession, and starts its analysis.

MAN 1: The exam results have been announced.

MAN2: That is the reason for all this excitement among the boys.

MAN1: It seems that Raju knows all the *Mantras* and the tricks!

MAN2: They say that Raju even has Divine powers.

AN OLD MAN: These are not miracles. Sathyam does not have to write exams; He knows everything anyway. Sathyam is not an ordinary boy but a Divine one; He is an Incarnation of God.

SCENE 4

Seshama Raju's house. Sathya comes home to announce the outcome of the examinations.

SATHYA: Brother,brother, I have passed in the First Class!

SESHAMA: What?!

SUSEELA: [to husband] Sathyam has just entered; hold on and wait! Don't start your questions right away!

SESHAMA: I know very well when to talk, what to talk and to whom! You go and attend to your work. ... [to Sathya] Sathyam,..... Hey Sathyam, come here. It seems your friends carried You on their shoulders and paraded You all over the town like a God being taken in a chariot? What for? Is it because You have passed?

SATHYA: Yes brother. In our class, only three students passed, and among these, I alone secured a First Class. That was the reason for the parade.

SESHAMA: Why were the other two who also passed not paraded like You?

SATHYA: That's because they also were lifting Me!

SESHAMA: I see. But your Teacher said that You did not write anything and gave a blank paper. Is that true, or even though You wrote all the answers, the Master falsely declared to me, "Your boy gave me a blank answer sheet!" ?

SATHYA: What the Master said is true. It is also true that he saw all the answers on the paper while correcting. That is why I passed.

SESHAMA: If You knew the answers, then why did You not write them in the first place? You could have answered the questions even then!

SATHYA: The Master saw all the answers in the answer book, and that is why I passed.

SESHAMA: I will get furious if You keep on giving such irritating replies. It is good that You enjoy Divine Grace. But others should not dismiss it all as magic, trickery, and sorcery. It would be better if You behave like all normal boys do.

SATHYA: Brother, I did not do anything wrong. I know no magic or trickery. God is in everyone. I have identified Myself with the Divine in Me, and I follow My own way – that's all.

SESHAMA: [totally perplexed] I don't know whether You understand what You are saying; I certainly don't!

SCENE 5

Staff Room in the School. Three teachers, the Telugu Teacher, the Maths Teacher, and the Teacher for Social Sciences are having a conversation.

MATHS TEACHER: I am not able to find my pen; I had left it on this table here, and I am exhausted searching for it.

TELUGU TEACHER: Did the pen acquire legs and walk away from the table? You must have left in some class. Try to remember.

MATHS TEACHER: Is a pen a desire like what people give up when they go to the holy city of Benares?

SOC. SC. TEACHER: After all it is a pen, and you are making a big fuss as though you lost something precious. By the way, where do you think you lost the pen?

TELUGU TEACHER: If he knew that, would he be bothering us so much? First he severely boxed the ears of the boys, then searched all the servants and now has begun to suspect everyone he sees! As if it is a new pen! It is old, and belongs to the Aurangazeb era! The nib had become blunt and the cap was just junk!

MATHS TEACHER: So what if it is old? Old is gold!

SOC. SC. TEACHER: So you lost gold?!

MATHS TEACHER: For me, my pen is like gold.

TELUGU TEACHER: Listen, let's not argue. We will call Sathyam and ask Him. In just a snap, He will tell us who has the pen, who stole it, etc. Master, you do one thing; go and fetch Sathyam.

SOC. SC. TEACHER: I shall *[goes out]*.

TELUGU TEACHER: I wonder where your pen has disappeared?

MATHS TEACHER: Me too.

The Social Science Teacher locates Sathya and asks Him to come to the Staff Room.

SOCIAL SC. TEACHER: Sathyam my boy, come with me.

SATHYA: Yes sir.

SOCIAL TEACHER: Come boy. The two go to the Staff Room.

TELUGU TEACHER: Sathyam, come my boy, come. Master here has lost his pen, which for him is very precious like gold. Can You tell us where it is, and who has taken it?

SATHYA: Sir, servant Yadagiri has taken it.

MATHS TEACHER: Yadagiri?Yadagiri will never do such a thing. I have full faith in his honesty.

TELUGU TEACHER: You may have that belief, but know that what Sathyam says is the truth. Trust Sathyam!

At this stage, the Head Master of the School walks in.

HEAD MASTER: What's all this? Looks like you teachers are having a meeting?

MATHS TEACHER: No sir; just that I lost my pen.

TELUGU TEACHER: And Sathyam says that servant Yadagiri has taken it.

HEAD MASTER: Sathyam said that? Then that must be the truth. Yadagiri, did you take the pen?

YADAGIRI: Sir, what pen? What will an illiterate like me do with a pen?

SATHYA: You may be illiterate but your son is studying, is he not?

YADAGIR: But he is not here!

SATHYA: He is studying in Anantapur and using that pen there, is he not?

YADAGIRI: I am here all the time; how then did the pen find its way to Anantapur?

SATHYA: You sent the pen through the boy's mother. The pen is red in colour!

MATHS TEACHER: That's right! The pen is red in colour!

HEAD MASTER: Yadagiri, is what Sathyam saying correct?

YADAGIRI: The boy has described it as though He had personally seen it! Forgive me sir, I did take the pen.

HEAD MASTER: Everyone used to say that you were most reliable, faithful, and humble. But Sathyam has revealed your true colours. Listen, never do such a thing again..... Sathyam, come with me; I must speak to you.

The Head Master leaves along with Sathya.

TELUGU TEACHER:[*with folded hands*] Great man! [to Yadagiri] The Moghuls robbed our temples, the British stole our trade, and now our own people are robbing us! At least spare the chalk and pens!

(To be continued)

GITA FOR CHILDREN - Part 39
(Continued from the previous issue)

Chapter 18

24. 'Let Me now turn to certain subtle aspects of action that I have not mentioned so far. Here also many factors are involved. They are: 1) the Knowledge possessed by the person involved in the action, 2) the action itself, and 3) the nature of the person performing the action. Thanks to the play of the *Gunas* and the combination of these factors just mentioned, one gets a wide variety.'

25. 'A *Sattvic* person always tries to see Unity in diversity. That is to say, the knowledge-base of this person and his motivation for action are both shaped by his desire to see Unity in diversity.'

26. 'The person of *Rajasic* temperament is just the opposite. His vision is clouded by ego, pride, ambition, attachment and also greed. The net result is that he keeps on seeing only diversity even when there is Unity.'

27. 'As for the *Tamasic* person, how at all can one talk about his knowledge? Steeped in ignorance, wallowing in sloth, his perceptions are extremely superficial. Consequently, his actions are frequently irrational, often born out of sheer pig-headedness!'

28. 'So much for the knowledge aspect that triggers action. Let me now say a few words about the actions performed by these three types. Starting with the *Sattvic* type, I am sure you would, even without My mentioning it, guess that his actions would be gentle, in accordance with the scriptures, and performed with love and compassion. They would in general reflect virtues that are an ornament to man.'

29. 'The *Rajasic* person is, of course, a live wire, bursting at the seams as they say, with energy. That is because he is ever driven by self-interest and selfishness. Ambition is a great driving force, you know. But invariably, it lands one in deep trouble and this people forget. That is what *Maya* is all about! People refuse to see what is to be seen and insist on seeing what does not exist! Given the selfish nature of the *Rajasic* person, it should be no surprise that he is ever ready to trample on the feet of other people.'

30. 'The actions of a *Tamasic* person are rash, reckless, and absolutely foolhardy. But that should not come as a surprise.'

31. 'Now about the doer of the action. I have already described the three types in several contexts and shall therefore be brief. The *Sattvic* person goes about performing tasks in a cool and collected manner, accepting whatever is the outcome as God's Will.'

32. 'Driven as he is by ego, the *Rajasic* person exhibits brashness while engaged in action. Not for him the virtues of humility and politeness. He is happy when successful and becomes depressed when he fails.'

33. 'The *Tamasic* person is totally disorganised, lacks even elementary discipline, is vulgar and also stubborn. He is so rash that he does not even bother whether his actions would cause harm to himself! As if all this is not enough, he can also be deceitful!'

34. 'Let Me now move on to how *Buddhi* operates in these three types - if at all! The *Buddhi* of a Sattvic person is generally sharp, because he makes good use of it! He can clearly distinguish between good and bad, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done.'

35. 'The *Rajasic* person is a tragic figure really. In his Heart he knows for sure what is right and what is wrong. In fact he wants to do the right thing, but so powerful is his ego and so strong is his ambition, that he ends up doing the wrong thing, making it worse by justifying it with untenable excuses!'

36. 'As for the *Tamasic* person, the fool that he is, he does not know even the elementary difference between right and wrong. Thus, he has no compunction about hurting others. Cruelty comes easily to him.'

37. 'Actions are closely linked to the convictions that people have. People are very much influenced by their capacity for understanding, belief and faith; all these add up to conviction one might say.'

38. 'What is the meaning of understanding? What is it that one must understand in the context of action? Well, one must understand clearly what is right and what is wrong. Once one is clear about this, one can make sure that one's actions are in conformity with *Dharma*. This is where understanding becomes important.'

39. 'Obviously, the understanding of a Sattvic person is good and that is why he shines in Society as a pillar of *Dharma*. By contrast, the understanding of a Rajasic person is a bit clouded. He imagines he is free to do what he pleases, little realising that the Law of *Karma* would bind him to the consequences of his actions. As for the Tamasic person, where is the question of his having any understanding, when he is deep in the darkness of ignorance?'

40. 'Now about the quest for happiness. As you know Arjuna, everyone wants to be happy and seeks happiness in his own particular way. There is a deep and fundamental reason why man wants to be always happy. You see, man has come from Me and I am the Embodiment of Bliss. No wonder then that man too wants to be Blissful always.'

41. 'But unfortunately, man does not quite understand what Bliss really means, much less where to look for it. Indeed this is the root cause of most of man's problems. In the end, almost everyone ends up with counterfeits! Bliss comes when you become united with God, that is, within your Heart; it cannot be found in the outside world, as people mistakenly imagine, despite being told any number of times that they are wrong. That is the tragedy of mankind.'

42. 'Let Me amplify. The world is full of things that attract and promise pleasure. They are all nothing but sugar-coated poison. The Sattvic man is careful; guided by his

Buddhi he opts for things that most consider “bitter”. The Sattvic man does not mind. He foregoes worldly pleasures for the sake of pleasing God, and in the end he reaps huge benefits. In short, what starts off as honey turns into poison in the end and what seems like bitter neem turns out finally to be Nectar. This truth the Sattvic person understands.’

43. ‘The Rajasic fellow goes after pleasure consciously. He firmly believes that life is meant for enjoyment and nothing else, and that life would be a waste if one did not seek pleasure. Sense gratification thus becomes an important goal for him. Needless to say that in the end he pays, heavily too, but by then it is too late to become wise!’

44. ‘I don’t think I have to spell out the attitude of the Tamasic fellow! Arjuna, man is given the opportunity for pleasure on earth on account of good deeds performed earlier. It is foolish to waste past merit by falling for this bait. Misery that people complain so much about is the treasure for the future. Accumulate merit; do not exhaust it. Welcome misery, add to your merit, and use it all to come to Me. You can then be happy and Blissful for ever!’

45. ‘Arjuna! All along, I have, in one manner or the other, been telling you about how to sanctify action. Life is one unending sequence of actions, and if these are sanctified, then you will go where you really ought to. But unfortunately, the journey to God is not smooth because the *Gun*as come in the way as road-blocks. That is why I have spent time explaining the various nuances of the *Gun*as.’

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

IN RUSSIA WITH THE LOVE OF SAI

In the middle of 2007, a spirited band of Sai workers constituting eminent doctors, paramedics and other supporting staff from UK, led by Dr. Upadhyay, traveled to a silent and secluded corner of Russia to help assuage the ailments – physical, mental and psychological, of a largely ignored and innocent population of a small hamlet. “It was an absolutely humbling and overwhelming experience!” recalls Dr. Nikhila Pandya, her eyes big with exclamation and excitement, who was part of this enthusiastic group, serving principally as a pediatrician. When she was in Prasanthi Nilayam recently, in the first half of December 2007, H2H asked her to share this Russian Sai adventure through an interview. Also present on this occasion in the Studio was Mr. Rainer, a Sai devotee from Germany who participated in this Russian Sai medical camp. Here are some interesting excerpts from the inspiring conversation.

H2H: Sairam Dr. Nikhila. We are glad to have you in our studio and are really eager to know about your Russian Sai Medical Service experience because we have heard about it till only in bits and pieces from various sources, and now we can get it from the horse’s mouth, as they say. So, tell us, when was this camp held? And who organised this camp?

Dr. Nikhila Pandya (NP): Sairam - I am so happy to be here. The Russian experience was truly an eye-opener for me and nothing gives me more pleasure than sharing this story with Sai brothers and sisters. The camp was held by the Medical wing of the U.K. Sai Organization, and it was in the month of June 2007 – between the end of that month and the beginning of July. From the UK contingent, we were comprised of the pediatricians, ophthalmologists, psychiatrists, homeopathy specialists, optometrists and dentists. The latter were very busy and were in great demand because dental care, we noticed, was quite poor there, as it was expensive and people couldn’t afford it.

The whole trip, from the day we started and returned to the UK was for 9 days, though the camp itself ran for 5 full days. We saw the last patient who came and nobody went away without treatment. Every single patient was attended to, however late it was.

H2H: You must have needed help of interpreters.

NP: Yes, we had interpreters with us all the time. In fact, the youngest interpreter was a girl named Macha and she was only ten. And when she was asked how she felt, she said, “I am very grateful to Swami and my parents for having sent me here,” and she would stay up till 12 and 1 o’clock, busy with the patients! There was no sleep for her either, because she was such a good interpreter in English! In fact, the interpreters wouldn’t leave us even for a moment – they were with us all the time! They were our ears, our mouth – everything. We couldn’t have done it without them.

H2H: As a pediatrician, what was your experience in treating the kids?

NP: Well, Paediatrics was not busy, because the child care in Russia is good. But the problem with the children is their teeth. In Russia, they have a drink called Compoth It is basically made of a lot of dried fruits, boiled in sugar water, and they drink this all the time; the sugar present there rots their teeth. So they have extremely poor dentition. Therefore, having a dentist at hand for these children, was a big help to get their teeth sorted out.

Since my counter was not that busy, on the second day, I was wondering if pediatrics-wise, I could do something else, or if could I make home visits in that Russian village. So my team said, "Yes! Go do the home visits". So we decided to visit the children who are handicapped, who can't really travel and can't be brought to the center. I asked the nurse at the center if she could be kind enough to come along, because she knew where the people lived in the old little huts. She agreed and we sat in this really rickety van, and went to this house and if there was one reason for Swami sending me to Russia, it was for this child I found there.

Her name is Shwetlana; 'Shweta' which means 'brightness'. In Sanskrit it has the same meaning as in Russian. Seven years old, she is the only child of her parents, but stricken with epilepsy and severe spastic cerebral palsy. She did not have many problems cognitively or intellectually, but had severe cerebral palsy because of lack of oxygen during birth. And the house that Shwethlana lived in was, literally, just a temporary shed-like shelter, really basic.

So I went in, it was just a small dark room, and because of her cerebral palsy, she had lots of contractures making any movement of her body almost impossible; she was all folded up and her whole body was completely twisted! She was sitting in a pram that was made just for her, and it was not even a regular pram. So, I saw this crumpled child in the pram and the only thing that would have been important for her, was posture. She couldn't even see to look up because she was so twisted! And my heart really bled! My hands were tied and I thought, "What can I do for this child?" because if she doesn't have a proper chair, a wheel chair, with the positioning of her neck and her spine, there's no way this child can ever go anywhere or travel, or even function – she was so convoluted!

So I came back quite dejected after visiting her, and tried to speak to her mother. I adjusted her anti-epileptic dose as she was having epileptic fits in front of us. I told the mother whatever little physiotherapy she could manage. But I knew, the main thing was this chair! So I came back quite despondent and was thinking, "What was the point of my visit?" because there was nothing that we could do for this child.

Suddenly, one of the Russians came to my room with an interpreter. Dr. Upadhyaya was in the dining room, it was 12 midnight. I went down and Dr. Upadhyaya asked me, "How is the Camp going?" I said, "Well, it is not very busy at all for the pediatricians but, I was wondering whether I could discuss something with you?" And he said, "Yes." Then I mentioned about this child. The next moment he said, "We will buy her the chair from our Organization." And I went back and visited her again and told her mother, "Just give us the details and we will buy her the chair."

So this went on, and I visited her every day. On the third day, when I went there with the interpreter, just like all previous days her mother never smiled, but every time we visited Shwethlana, she had the most winsome smile in the world. She always

beamed and recognized us, when we went to see her, but not her mother. The poor lady, truly, didn't have anything to smile about; she had this child and was poor.

I asked the interpreter whether we could buy something for Shwethlana next time, so we would not go empty handed. And so, we went to the store - there were little stores there – and picked up a mixture of little buns, breads and eggs, and something that they could use. And I took the bag to the clinic. It was the last day and I thought 'Today when I go, I won't go empty handed' because I knew how poor they were. Food is something that if you can give to the one who needs, then that is the most you can do. Medicine is secondary - you can't have medicines in a vacuum, you have to have food.

So we picked up the food and I kept the bag aside. At two o'clock in the afternoon, one of the Russian interpreters came and said, "Dr. Nikila, you have to pack up now and leave immediately to the other site!" (The medical team was divided into two groups attending to two villages.) I said, "Okay. Today?" He said, "Yes, go pack up and leave; there's an orphanage there where you have to go and see the other children." So here I had this packet of food, not knowing what to do with it. There was no way that this packet of food could have been delivered unless I went with one of the Russians to Shwethlana's house.

I was stuck! I said, "Okay, never mind, maybe it wasn't meant to go." So I picked up the bag and I walked out of the clinic, and who do I see? Shwethlana's mother standing there saying she came late for the dentist's appointment! There was Swami again! I just handed her the bag and for the first time in three days, I saw her smile. So, the Russian trip for us pediatricians was not that busy; but I felt that Swami sent us for Shwethlana.

The chair details were given and after we returned we told them what chairs we wanted. I was in email contact with the Sai brother and I hadn't heard back from them and was wondering what had happened to the chair. I felt that I had to share my Russian experience with my local group at Rochester, in UK in the form of a power point presentation, telling them all the stories. So, that evening, we had Sai bhajans, and the presentation. I came home, it was about 12 at night and I thought 'let me just email our Russian Sai brother and find out why he hasn't written to me'. When I emailed him, he wrote back immediately saying, "Thank you sister for writing; I had lost your email!" And he sent me the details of the chair and it was delivered to Shwethlana!

H2H: It is truly amazing how Sai works these miracles in our lives! You said you served in the orphanages. What was your experience there?

NP: Well, there are a lot of orphanages and in Russia they are quite different. These orphanages help out because the children are not taken care of by the parents, either due to drug addiction or alcoholism. There's a lot of drug addiction there, especially in the lower economic strata, so the children are taken away in care. The orphanages are very well organized. The kids are very well looked after, very well-fed and given good clothes, but they are kept in the orphanage till they are adopted or till they are able to go to another place – it's a temporary place before they go off.

So, we were just screening the children, and the kind of problems we saw there were children with psychological problems, because of change of places from one orphanage to another till they went to the care-takers, or before they were adopted. So they had psychological problems, and were quite withdrawn.

They (Orphanage managers) asked if there was anything we could do for them, so, we said, "Basically, they just need counseling - to be with them." That is where our psychiatrists were very helpful and at one of the camps, there was a young adolescent, who came to the Camp to see them and said he was feeling suicidal. So, at the end of the Camp, on the last day, he was taken to the other Camp and the psychiatrist talked to him. All that the boy needed was to be talked to; he didn't have anybody to talk to earlier. So the team of two psychiatrists talked to this boy about why he was having these problems and gave him various measures to manage his depression, which was all the psychological help he needed.

H2H: So the impact the camp had was substantial. Okay, before we proceed further, why do not you tell us about the genesis of the camp? When and how did it all begin?

NP: Yes, I think the Camp actually began from the airport itself! We have a very interesting story to share here. We were all allowed 8 kilos each and the rest of it had to be equipment, machinery and gloves because we had to take everything personally. All the equipment, be it the ophthalmic, dental or the sterilizers, were quite heavy. So we were all busy re-packing at the airport and putting everything in the bags, and the lady at the counter was told that we are actually a Medical Charity Camp going across, although we had only tourist visas for Russia because that's the way the system works.

At the airport, she was quite kind – she allowed each of us extra 5 kilos and at the end of it, we were still very over-weight. And she said she could only do so much and we had to pay just the little bit of the excess after what she had already given us. And the amount came to 405 British Pounds - which is quite a substantial amount. Although we were a bit unnerved, all of us said that each of us could share the amount and there wouldn't be a problem.

In the mean time, one of the organizers, Urvi, suddenly said, "No, it's 405; that adds up to 9. Swami is with us on this one." And she asked the lady at the desk whether she could speak with the manager. Then the manager came down and he said, "How much more luggage do you want to put through? You don't have to pay the 405 pounds." So we got away absolutely free with the entire extra luggage into Russia, without paying a single penny! So Swami was there right at the start as well!

The Camp was fixed to be held at a site called Vellsk, which is quite further up-north. It was an 18 hour train journey from St. Petersburg, where we landed. Our fellow brothers and sisters - the Russians and the Germans - had gone earlier to Vellsk to set up the Camp, which was planned in the school premises of a very poor area, where there was hardly any medical care available. The Camp, therefore, was for that community.

The Russian and German team traveled all the way up to Vellsk to set it up. When they began setting it up, they were told by the Church authorities there that they

would have to fold up. They were not allowed to hold the Camp there for various reasons. So they had an 18 hour journey, all the way back. Therefore, in all, it was a 36 hour journey for them in the preparation for the Camp, but they had an interesting experience to tell of how they were extremely brave at the start of the camp. Rainer is here and he can tell you more about it.

H2H: Yes, Mr. Rainer please narrate to us that inspiring incident.

RN: You mean the experience with the bus! Well, the drive back from Vellsk to the area around St. Petersburg was 18 hours, but it was really fun – we were always singing bhajans, German and international songs. So, it was a very bright atmosphere together. It was the first opportunity to have personal contact because we had time. There were two buses, around twenty people in each of them. We were four Germans and the rest were Russians; the English group wasn't there at that time.

In one of the buses, a lady said, "Let us start with the Gayatri singing." And all of a sudden, impulsively she sang and everybody joined in. Everybody was singing the Gayatri and immediately after that, one of the smaller buses – there was a third, small bus with about 8 people or so in it – got off the street and just fell down the slope. It turned over and came to lie with the wheels upside down!

Everybody stopped and we were rather frightened, but still calm. Then, we saw people coming out, but the bus was wrecked. By Swami's Grace nobody was hurt! We could just continue normally without any fear.

H2H: That was dramatic. So what happened next? You had an alternate site?

NP: Yes, the Camp site had to be changed, but at the last moment, somehow, we had another Camp site which was only four hours away from St. Petersburg, in a village called Alokofshina. The new site was placed in a 'holy triangle' with three famous churches as places of pilgrimage around us. Our camp started with a visit to the church of St. Alexander Svirisky, a monk so pure who had the holy vision of the Trinity. It is a church of healing and miracles, where his body has been kept for over 200 years without any decay. We were able to touch his feet and seek blessings on the first day itself. The Frescos on the walls, which are old, have not needed restoration and with every year the colors are getting clearer on their own!

We then branched out into two groups – the psychiatrists and some doctors in one group; while dentists, ophthalmologists, pediatricians in another group, so we could cover two villages and mix between the two. The group itself was therefore, separated at that time.

H2H: How was the village where you worked first? Can you describe their living conditions, environment, etc.?

NP: Yes, the village had a sizeable elderly population. The youngsters in Russia leave the rural areas to go away to the city to work. It was summer holidays for the children, and so all the grandchildren from the towns were sent to the villages to be with their grandparents. Therefore, we saw lots of little children running about.

The village was quite small in itself with quite a tiny population. It had one shop, a little hospital which provides basic care, and a maternal and child health dispensary, where we were working as pediatricians. But in Russia, there's lots of space, and it is filled with trees. And we were fortunate to go at the time of the year when it's called the White Night, since it gets dark only for a few hours. So, it was very bright and just beautiful. My first experience of Russia was one of, "What a beautiful country it is!"

The people are very friendly there; you will find all these grandparents, working on their little patches of gardens, growing their own potatoes and vegetables. They were extremely poor! They have very limited income and the medical facilities for them are quite minimal. Dental care is something that they don't easily find and it's quite expensive. So all of them suffer from severe dental problems like caries, and the dentists, therefore, on the camp were very busy.

Although the villages we visited in Russia were only four hours away from St. Petersburg, which is quite opulent, large, and beautiful, and is, in fact, one of the most beautiful cities in the world, the villages somehow don't get the benefit of that kind of money. And ever since Communism changed, health-care facilities are not quite optimum, especially for the old-age pensioners and the poor children. Dental and ophthalmic care are beyond the means of the villagers; they do not have money to buy the prescription glasses. So the two groups were extremely busy, and for the ophthalmologists and dentists, it was non-stop work.

Dr. Girish - whom we endearingly call Girishbhai - the dentist in the trip, was most busy, and allow me to share one of his stories. There was an old lady, 80 or 90 years old, who came to him. Her tooth had broken in half and the half-tooth remained stuck in the gums. I was watching the extraction that Girishbhai was working on, in between seeing my patients, and he said to me, "Please pray very hard because when such a thing happens in old age, it is a very delicate situation. The teeth that break get stuck to the bone and you have to fracture the bone." So we all said a big "Sairam" and the tooth came out effortlessly! The lady was so happy that she was kissing the hands of Girishbhai and even proposed to him! It was such a sweet moment! She said the tooth had been giving her so much trouble!

Another time an Estonian middle heavy weight boxer came due to broken and destroyed teeth, which meant he could never smile. His teeth and smile were restored, and as a sign of gratitude he brought 2 big jugs of milk for us at the campsite! The patients were grateful for the kindness shown and often brought bouquets of hand picked forest flowers with so much love, or fresh vegetables from their little kitchen gardens.

Similarly, the ophthalmologists were very busy. The old people were waiting in lines and queues from the morning just to get the prescription glasses so that they would be able to see! Unable to afford the normal prescription glasses, they couldn't see! The glasses were such a bonus to them! The doctors therefore worked all day. As we were split in two groups, we could cover two villages at one time. We were put up in a school which had closed down because of summer vacation.

H2H: Was the accommodation comfortable?

NP: Well, as I said, we stayed in a school – there was a big room which was converted into a dormitory. And the nicest part was staying with all the Russian Sai devotees. We got to know them on a one-to-one basis. It was lovely.

The lady doing seva in the kitchen and cooking the most delicious meals for us, I later realized was the secretary of the Sai Organisation in Russia. Such humility was touching. The Russian devotees, I felt, are true devotees - humble, loving, kind and compassionate. They follow Swami's teachings with great dedication.

So many of them hadn't even visited Prasanthi, because it is quite expensive to travel. But their devout faith and devotion really moved us. And they follow Swami's teachings absolutely to a T! They have tailored their life to that! I have a very interesting story. This lady, who was driving us, was doing seva, and she had a car. So I asked her, "Is this your car?" She said, "Yes, Swami gifted it to me, because I am very poor; I can't afford a car, but somehow, I could buy this car." And she was using that car for transporting doctors, and ferrying people across from site to site for the Medical Service of the Sai Organization.

H2H: So while you were busy serving the Russians rural folk, the Sai devotees from Russia were serving you! Were your activities restricted to consultation and treatment, or did you engage in any other activities too?

NP: Yes, we were busy offering Health Education. The Dentists had printed out things in Russian, explaining to them how to prevent caries, what should be eaten, how one should brush their teeth at night and things like that. Most of the things they weren't aware of!

H2H: Mr. Rainer, you came with three other Germans to help at the Camp. Were they doctors? How did you participate in the project?

RN: Yes, we were the German group of four and being non-medical people, we were not taking part in seeing the patients. We, on the other hand, were busy doing renovation work in the school building - repairing windows, re-plumbing the toilets, etc.

And the funny thing for me, personally, was that there was nobody who had a guitar, and at the last moment before I started, I had, just by intuition, picked up my guitar along. Although it wasn't customary to sing bhajans, or spiritual songs, I just took my instrument wherever I could and I sang along. So that was a little contribution for everybody because the Russians like singing; they love music. There was an older lady who had an accordion who used to play in the evenings. So, there were cultural programs and we shared joyfully Sai love thorough rejuvenating music. We used to sing for the devotees who were doing work, in the mornings or in the evenings; we were all contributing whatever we could. This was one thing that we four could do to make the atmosphere lively.

And the other idea was of the re-conciliation of the Germans and the Russians. Though I cannot tell all stories that happened, it was just about getting in contact and knowing them at a deeper level. When we sat at the tables, there were so many discussions about the past - the Second World War when the Germans invaded - and for me, personally, my father was a soldier, and he was on the front in St. Petersburg

as part of the group of invaders. After that, he was a Russian prisoner for 5 years, and he came back to Germany, when I was 5 years old, in 1950. So there is a cloudy history of the past between the Germans and the Russians.

There was always this topic of the past, of the war period, and this brought so much healing for the Germans and the Russians, because it was easy to confess that my father was here fighting against you, but now I am here and can find friendship. Just being there as a family under Swami's guidance and under the idea of unity, was wonderful. We felt we are all one.

H2H: All brought about by Swami's Love!

RN: Yes! And it was on a very deep level; there were people saying we had our father being killed by the Germans, and we were always against Germany, but now we see you here! So all these bitter feelings were gone, we were just one! And I experienced that all past problems were solved all of a sudden when we were together, and would sing, eat, enjoy and smile. It was just so wonderful!

And when we came back to Germany, everybody was talking about this Camp and the friendship between the Russians and the Germans, and Swami has stressed often that we, the Russians and the Germans, should do things together.

H2H: Returning to patient care, what do you think was the most important thing that those villagers needed?

NP: Well, I think they surely needed dental care. They may have had ophthalmologists, but earlier they couldn't get their glasses. The other important thing was the health education because there were so many young mothers who came to the clinic, who really didn't have an idea about how to rear the child, what things are good and not so good for the young one. There were so many mothers who came with these little babies – very healthy babies – but they just needed the right advice, like the teeth care, not to give a sugary drink with the bottle, other little things like what else they can give them to eat, etc.

There was a young mother, who had been told apparently by a hospital earlier, that her baby had problems at delivery. The tiny one was really thriving, but when the mother came to the clinic, she was really scared, and she said that she had been told that her child's brain had been damaged. But there was nothing in the child to even indicate that she was even remotely brain damaged – the baby was so healthy! So, just letting her know that the baby is normal relieved her so much!

So, I think, it was spending time with them which was most important and vital. The old, especially, were very lonely; they don't have people to talk to, are poor, and have lots of medical complications – hypertension, diabetes, arthritis – and now that the longevity has gone up, they live longer. It is therefore that I feel giving them quality time was more than enough, which was, in fact, more important than just giving them glasses and food. And of course, our interpreters were extremely helpful in that aspect.

H2H: At any point of time, did the villagers wonder who you were? Why were you doing all this for them? Did you have any other interesting interactions with them?

NP: Yes, the villagers did ask about us and we told them we were from the Sai Organization, but they weren't so inquisitive, they just wanted help. There was a little incident with a Homeopathic Doctor, who was also there with us and she had all these little pills in her small box. Her clinic was very busy.

So, there was an old lady in the line, and she had asthmatic symptoms. This doctor gave her all the asthma medications, and she went away very happy. She was trying to tell the doctor that, "Here in this country, we don't keep buying medicines because they are quite expensive, but we use some roots and some leaves, [some kind of herbal preparation] and that makes the cough better as well." "That is very interesting! I wasn't aware of it," our doctor replied. And then, the conversation ended, and she left.

Next day, the line was still long and this lady returned again! So the Homeopathic doctor said, "I already saw you yesterday, I have to see the others today. I have actually given you medicines for at least a month. You won't need to see me back again soon; you need to try those medicines first." But she said, "No, no, I am not here for the medicines." She had a little bag with her, she opened that up and said, "I have come to give you this." The doctor asked, "What is this?" She had brought for him special roots and leaves – she had gone in the night, into the woods, picked up all the roots and leaves and come to give it to the Homeopathic doctor! So that was her way of saying 'Thank you'. It was very touching to see that.

H2H: Every story and anecdote connected with this camp is so moving! Each day was filled with so many surprises and instances of His love. How was the last day?

NP: On the last day of the Camp, our Russian and German brothers and sisters, had organized a sort of entertainment program in a hall where we were having our meals; and that's when Rainer's guitar too proved very useful. And there were lovely Sai bhajans, just impromptu, the UK group sang four bhajans, which were quite easy bhajans even for the Russian devotees to join in.

For the whole evening we enjoyed songs, dances and bhajans, and there was a very famous opera singer. In fact, she is almost equivalent to India's famous singer Lata Mangeshkar! All her operas and theatrical programs are fully packed. She is Russian, and a great Sai devotee; I forget her name, but she had the most divine voice and she sang at the church for us. She was delighted to be there and to do the seva. She said she comes and does this Camp to just get rid of her ego. She cleans the bathrooms, and does any work, seven days in a year, so that she can grow spiritually.

So, on the last day she entertained us with her mellifluous voice. It felt so divine listening to her. I had an old Shirdi Baba pendant which I gave her. Her joy knew no bounds. She wept and said, "I have been wanting a Shirdi Baba pendant for so long..... How did you know?" I knew Swami knew and used me as an instrument. Also, on this final day there was a beautiful double rainbow. I feel Swami is smiling at us every time I see a rainbow. I told this to Dr. Upadhyaya and he had a lovely story to share.

Dr. Upadhyaya was going on his first Seva mission to Russia a few years ago and was a little apprehensive. He prayed to Swami to be with him. On the flight he looked out of the window and saw a “round rainbow” which is very unusual. Being an ophthalmologist he was worried about a condition called glaucoma which can cause blindness quickly! One often sees haloes in this condition. Not believing what he had just seen, wondering if others could see this as well, he asked the stewardess. She said, “How unusual – a round rainbow!” Then, at the airport he was drawn to a smaller taxi for no reason. The Russian brother with him suggested they take a bigger taxi, but he insisted on the smaller one. Sitting in the taxi on the dash board was Swami’s picture surrounded by a round rainbow!

H2H: Absolutely amazing! Swami every time has a new and interesting way to say, “I am there...why fear, when I am here”.

NP: Oh yes, every time he surprises us and fill us with His love.

H2H: Thank you Dr. Nikhila and Mr. Rainer. We would love to hear you again, about other similar service projects, especially the one done in Malawi, though we did have a story on this project in H2H in the November issue. We hope we will have the opportunity of more such sessions in the future. Do drop in at the studio next time you are here. You are always welcome.

NP: Sure. It is our joy and privilege to share His love. Thank you. Sairam.

H2H: Sairam.

PRASANTHI DIARY

30 November, 2007 – Programme by Karnataka Bal Vikas

The devotees from Karnataka had come for a three day Parthi Yathra. In the evening of November 30, the Balvikas children of Karnataka presented a series of folk dances. Swami came out for darshan and took a complete round. Then He came on stage and asked for the programme to begin. The entire evening had been planned along the lines of a rally where atleast 11 different types of dances from Karnataka were presented.

The forty minute programme commenced when Swami came onstage after His darshan round at 5.30 pm. There were about 10- 20 children in each of the dances and they were all decked in the traditional costumes. One by one, each group came ahead, performed for Him, made their bow and left. Karaga and Yakshagana were the very popular dances that were also performed. At the end of the dances, Swami blessed the dozen groups of children with group photographs, then with prasadam and clothes, too. Swami sat smilingly as each group came upto Him and posed for the photo. The Karnataka devotees sang Bhajans as the prasadam was distributed. Swami accepted Arati at 7 pm and went into the interview room, emerging after ten minutes to retire for the day.

2 December 2007: Shirdi Nivasa Sai Drama

The first Sunday of the new month witnessed the charming children from the Sathya Sai Vidya Niketan in Bagepalli as they performed the dance drama, "Shirdi Nivaasa Sai" in Swami's presence in the evening. Swami came out at about 4:10 pm and completed His darshan round. He went into the interview room for a short while and then sat outside towards the ladies side of the stage. However, after ten minutes of sitting and listening to the Vedic chants, Swami went towards the interview room again. He spoke to many sitting in the portico and went through a few letters that they offered to Him. Then, He came out again, but this time, He moved over to the gents side of the stage and sat there, asking for the programme to begin.

The customary card and flower offerings followed and then the drama began. The backdrop was formed by a giant screen and had a movable scroll so that the different backgrounds could just be rolled down as scenes progressed. The drama began with many children rushing to "Pedda bottu" (A great devotee of Shirdi Sai who later came to Swami too. She was called Pedda bottu meaning the lady with the "big red dot on her forehead") and asking her to relive the divine stories of Shirdi Sai Baba. The whole drama was in the words of the venerable lady devotee as she recounts first how Baba came to live at Shirdi and Mahalsapati recognises Him as Sai Baba. The famous incident when all the shopkeepers at Shirdi refused to give Baba oil and He lit lamps with water itself was narrated next. The incidents of Baba asking for wheat flour to be sprinkled along the borders of Shirdi to keep out cholera; when He recognized the "sugarless" *Sadhana* of Mr. Cholkar and encouraged the chanting of the divine name - however loud or soft - were the other incidents depicted.

All the different scenes were interspersed with well choreographed dances which were performed by the sweet children. The drama concluded and the children came into a final formation. Swami very eagerly went down and posed for group pictures with them. He spoke with the main coordinator and asked how many children there were and then blessed pens and chocolates to be given to all of them. As most of the children had letters which they offered to Swami, He smilingly accepted all and then went back on stage. He then distributed sarees to all the girls and white cloth pieces to the boys. He also called the teachers involved in the programme and gifted them sarees. They were very touched at this loving gesture from Swami. He then spoke to the main coordinator and also his wife for a while. Then there were bhajans by the Karnataka devotees after which Swami received Aarthi and left.

5 December 2007: Dramas from Haryana and the Punjab - "God is the Only Creator" and "Glorious Sikh Heritage"

The youth from the northern states of Punjab and Haryana had arrived at Puttaparthi as a pilgrimage to Sai. Swami had agreed for both the states to put up their respective programmes in His presence on December 5. At about 4:20 pm Swami went around for darshan rounds in the car and alighted near the interview room. He spoke to a few of the doctors and also some others as He made His way to the interview room. After a few minutes, Swami came and sat outside and asked for the programme to begin.

The Haryana programme entitled, "God is the Only Creator" had a unique beginning. All the actors involved came in a *nagar sankirtan* style Veda chanting. The chantings were very high pitched and all sat up straight to see what was happening! One by one, the members came up to Swami offering roses, cards and the details of the programme. One of them offered cloves to Swami which He accepted. Then the drama began.

The story was about a sculptor whose fame spreads far and wide as a person with the ability to make lifelike statues. The top aristocrats and bureaucrats of the region visit and lavish praises on him. One night, on seeing the beauty of the statues representing Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa, he prays to the Lord for the strength to put real life into the idols! Sure enough, God appears before him and fulfills his desire. But like it happens in the case of every man, ego takes over and the sculptor is on the road to his doom till finally God takes back the boons He granted. Soon the sculptor is reduced to a pauper and has a tough time fending for himself.

Swami often says that talent is God. It has the capacity to transform lives if utilised properly. It should be considered by everyone as Swami's gift to us. With a single talent, we can bring smiles on a hundred faces and wipe away sorrow and pain from a hundred hearts. Whether it is the skill of painting, music, or athletics - God has gifted that special power to us because He felt that we would be able to wield it best for the betterment of everyone around. Talent is His gift to us and what we do with the talent should be our gift to Him. As the drama portrayed, we ruin our talents if we offer it to the world, to our ego in particular, instead of using it for God.

To get back to the play, the sculptor then gets diseased and is struggling until some members of the Sai Youth find him and tell him about Swami. He learns his lessons and finds solace at Swami's feet. The drama ends with a song of gratitude.

After this was another skit by the youth of the state of Punjab. The skit was about an NRI (Non Resident Indian) who comes and lands in Chandigarh Airport. There he meets up with some of the Sai Youth of Punjab. He is reeling with negativity about the country in general and the Punjab villages in particular. What begins next is a virtual tour of Punjab - with its great Sikh history and patriotic fervour forming the basis. Coming to know of the great patriots and the glory of the Sikh Masters who shaped the collective consciousness of the people of Punjab, the NRI is bowled over. No member of the youth brigade can resist from talking about Swami. The NRI is told about Swami and all that He has done. Wanting to make his life meaningful too, he too joins the youth in their final prayer song to Swami.

Next all were captured by Swami's reaction - He seemed to be in a mood to thrill all the youth and set their hearts afire. He literally gave Himself to the youth. He waded into them and using the group photo as an excuse, He spoke and interacted with each and every one of them. He then gifted everyone with white cloth pieces. The joy and enthusiasm was evident on the faces of every youth member. Seeing them one felt that they are ready to do anything for Swami. It thrills the heart to see so many youth coming to Him from everywhere. Definitely a silent, or rather 'Sailent', revolution is on. And this is a revolution of Love. Swami then told them to sing bhajans. After a few bhajans, He received Aarthi, blessed the youth with a double handed *Abhayahasta* and then retired.

9 December, 2007: Drama from Srikakulam - "Jagame Sarvam Sai Mayam"

From the district of Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh, thousands had flocked to the abode of supreme peace by way of a pilgrimage. On December 9, Swami had agreed for a programme to be presented by them. It was about 4:15 pm when Swami came out to grant darshan. As He went around in the car, the excitement and more importantly, joy was evident in the radiant faces of all the devotees. Swami alighted from the car and there were several rounds of applause.

Puttaparthi is a place that has grown with a lot of emphasis on discipline. Everyone is expected to be seated in their respective places and in this beautiful temple, the Lord Himself comes to each devotee to grant Darshan. Swami also stresses a lot on discipline. But on occasions like today, when there is an overwhelming outflow of devotion, it becomes difficult to restrain. The devotee, finding himself in a very difficult situation where he is not allowed either to shout out or get up and dance in glee at the joy he is experiencing seeing the sweet Lord, takes recourse to the 'decent' and more importantly permitted mode of celebration - applause. A round of applause

carries many emotions at Prashanti Nilayam, but one thing for certain is that it is a spontaneous, emotional and overwhelming outburst.

Swami went into the interview for a short while and then returned to take His place on the stage. The lamp being brought up to Swami to be lit and mark the beginning of the programme too has undergone a lot of transformations. On that day, it was a beautifully carved Mandir fully in silver that was brought up to Him and He lit it up just as He had lit up the entire hall minutes before with His darshan. The traditional roses and dry fruits plate were offered to Swami. Finally the children, who were part of the drama, offered flowers to Swami. The programme was entitled, "Jagame Sarvam Sai Mayam".

The drama began with the activities of the Sai Youth in the villages. The joy of everyone sharing the feeling that Swami Himself had arrived to their village was brought out nicely. The father of one of the members of the youth, the hero in this drama, feels that his son is wasting all his time and energy on futile activities. Like all deluded people of today, he measures the success of any activity undertaken from the money it fetches. He tries to drill "wisdom" into his son through a friend of his who has agreed to employ the boy. They are not prepared for a reversal of argument that the boy has in store for them!

When the eternal values of Sathya and Dharma are attacked, the boy resorts to the example of King Harishchandra. The king never gives up on the Truth even in the face of death saying, "Just because something impermanent is passing away, should I sacrifice the only permanent entity in this Universe?" Quoting Swami's words, he says that it is only adherence to Sathya and Dharma that can provide everlasting happiness and peace for they alone are eternal. "But they will not give you the money needed to live", exclaims the worldly wise uncle. "Swami's name is my greatest treasure. If I call out 'Sai', He will respond with 'Oyi' and if I cry out 'Swami', He will respond with 'Emi'. I may not be able to do anything with so little money, but with Him and so little money, there is nothing in this Universe I cannot attain."

Listening to the powerfully scripted dialogues, one could not but help marveling at the conviction and faith of the writer. Swami also appeared moved by the words being spoken. The whole drama was interspersed with dances and songs which again were very touching in their emotion and powerful in their meaning. The dialogues had such an impact on Swami that in between the drama itself, He called the hero and materialized a beautiful gold chain for him.

Again, the applause began, as Swami lovingly put the chain around the boy's neck. After that short "break", the drama continued. The final scene of the drama was one in which Mother Eashwaramma came to life speaking of how much Love Swami had showered on her and everyone. She sang out her love for Him and it was such a tender sight to see the one with the Love of a thousand mothers well up with emotion on being reminded of His earthly mother's love. The final song described the beautiful image of Swami gently swinging on the *Jhoola*. Then all the actors and dancers came close together in the final formation. The Jhoola was also brought as part of the formation.

Swami called the scriptwriter and created a gold ring for him - an apt reward for the fingers that had created the writing which had moved thousands of hearts. He also told him to be a part of the group for the final photo. Swami went down in the wheel sofa and then to the joyous amazement of everyone around, said that He would sit on the decorated swing! He got up from the chair and walked slowly towards the *Jhoola*. Then, very gently, He sat on the *Jhoola* and the people celebrated with another round of applause! Gently rocking Himself, Swami blessed everyone with smiles and loving words and pats. All the children were just diving at His feet and so sweetly Swami was telling them, "Sit down. Sit down. I will come." True to His word, after getting up from the *Jhoola*, He walked up to the stage, passing in between rows of Love hungry children!

After going on stage, He gifted every child with clothes. The girls received sarees and the boys had white cloth pieces. He then permitted the Srikakulam group to sing bhajans which they did so with gusto. There were two bhajans new to the Sai fraternity at Puttaparthi. After that, He asked for the camphor to be waved after which He retired to Yajur Mandir.

15 December, 2007: Special Bhajans by USA Devotees

A group of devotees from the USA had been permitted to sing bhajans as a part of their programme in front of Swami on the evening of December 15. Swami came out at about 5:05 pm and went straight to the group. He asked for their programme to begin. It was a session of "chain bhajans". It began with Shuklambaradharam Ganapati Mantram and then moved on to other ones without a break - a good blending of the different beats and ragas. Swami sat tapping His hands and watching them intently as they sang. The "chain" of bhajans got completed so to say, and they then began to sing "normal" bhajans.

But the beauty of the evening came after the programme. In fact, it came after the Aarthi was performed at about 6:00 pm. Swami did not move even after the Aarthi was completed. He called Mr. Bob Bozzani who was seated right in the front row of the American devotees and asked him to speak! Mr. Bozzani gave a short and sweet talk on the topic of reaction, reflection and resound. Everyone was thrilled at this extra dose of *darshan*. But they were totally unprepared for what was to come next. Swami signaled for His mike to be brought! Then He to everybody surprise and delight, He began to speak! This is what He said,

"We bother ourselves too much with the world because of the difficulties we face. Everything is actually bliss. The Lord, who is creator, is full of bliss and so is the creation - be it an insect, animal or bird. Difficulties and problems are imaginations of man. Pleasure is in an interval between two pains. You cannot experience the joy in pleasure without pain. Remember, whatever happens is God's prasadam. Never consider anything as painful. To remove severe pain in the abdomen, the doctor uses surgery which itself is painful. Difficulties are ultimately responsible for removal of pain.

"The crores of beings are in fact the product of the same *Atma*. The same God dwells in all. The names are different - Jesus, Allah, Rama and Krishna. The *Atma* is nothing but Love. The exact name for the *Atma* is Love. All of you have come from America only because of your love for Swami. This love will ensure that you achieve anything. Love holds everyone. Unity leads to success. It leads to Purity and finally to Divinity. I and you are one. Swami is not separate from you. You have to strengthen the feeling that 'I am God'. In that oneness you will find bliss. The mind wavers like a monkey only for some time. If there is Love, it gets subdued. What we have to learn today is that we have to love all because God loves all and hates none. God will never leave you and will be with you always, everywhere. '*Sarvam Brahmamaya*' - God is in you, with you, above you and around you. You are God, in fact. So, you do not have to search for God.

"It is only with the physical body that you have all the difficulties. Do not go by the form. Mind is a mad monkey and the body is a water bubble. The 'I' is the real you. The true answer to the question 'Where is God?' is 'I am God'. So I say, take Love as the basis. Without Love, all spiritual activities are useless. If Love exists, then there is no need for any other spiritual activity. To understand the importance of Love, spiritual activities are needed. All physical relationships are like passing clouds. Have total control over the mind, then you are moving towards realizing God. Love has no birth or death. It is immortal. This is the Truth and Truth is God. God manifests and moves about in the form of Love.

"Your breath itself is God. If you observe it, it says, 'Soooo....Hamm....' meaning, 'I am That'. The same Love pervades all. So do everything with Love, even if it is facing your enemy. Look at the enemy and say 'Hello'. Everything is reaction, reflection and resound. Nothing is impossible for Love. The creation, sustenance and destruction are all done out of Love. Since there is nothing beyond God, there is nothing beyond Love. Love is one and the same. It is pure and unsullied. Adherence to the principle of Love equals to loads of spiritual effort. Do not have differences based on the names and forms as Love is one. It is like this: You have rice. With it you can make either *idlis* (Pancakes), or *dosas* or *roti* and with sugar, it can be made into *payasam* (pudding) too. But all these different names and forms arise from the same rice. God or Love is the same - made into different names and forms by man. God is beyond everything. If there is no unity, there will be diversity. God is the only one.

"If you have a 1, put as many zeroes after it. Each zero gains value. But remove the 1 and all the zeroes lose value even if they are a thousand in number. Without God, everything is of no value. With God, everything's value gets enhanced. This is the truth, howsoever anybody may say it. '*Ekam Sat, vipraah Bahuda Vadanti.*'

"Do not hate anyone. 'Help ever hurt never' is the quality of a true devotee. Being a devotee, it is not right to get lost in mine and thine. Do not observe differences. Swami's wish is that all should be happy always. Some say 'today is my birthday.' That is only related to the body. You are all eternal and

immortal. Be happy always. Swami is very happy with your bhajans today. They were full of harmony and thus were in perfect unity. Keep singing bhajans always, throughout the day - from the time you rise till you sleep."

Then Swami sang "Hari Bhajana Bina..."

After this, Swami so sweetly asked, "Is Aarthi over?" He asked for the Aarthi to be done! And so it was a double bonus for the boys and devotees selected to give Aarthi to Swami. After filling everyone with His mellifluous words and the vision of His delicate yet powerful form, Swami retired at 6:50 pm.

17 December, 2007 – Talk by Prof. G Venkataraman

The talk in the air was that Swami would maybe see a "Burra Katha" programme by the students of the Institute. The students concerned were dressed and ready. Swami came out for darshan after the bhajans had begun at about 5:10 pm. Everyone had the feeling that He would go straight into the bhajan hall for bhajans. But as Swami got down from the car, a gentle smile danced on His lips. People had already started streaming in steadily into Prashanti Nilayam for the impending Christmas celebrations. Hungarians, Australians, Singaporeans, Americans...name them and almost all were present. Swami asked for the wheel sofa to be taken outside directly.

He came and sat just next to the teachers block on the gents side. As would be expected, the enthusiasm levels of the bhajan singing shot up so much that the clapping outside began to dictate the rhythm to the singers inside. Swami was all smiles. He asked for *Prasadam* to be distributed. It was the ber fruits (medium sized reddish berries) Swami picked up one from the vessel and gifted it to the boy holding the vessel who accepted it gleefully. He also picked up one and kept it clutched in His palms. As the distribution went on, Swami threw the fruit in His hand to a boy sitting in the first line. The ber reached its initial destination of the boy's hand after bouncing off the steps, and then in a short while reached its final destination into his stomach too! He then beckoned to the birthday boys who were sitting with hopes of *sparshan* and *sambashan*. He blessed all of them by sprinkling grains on their head and taking their letters. At about 5:40 pm, Swami sent word for Prof. G. Venkataraman to speak a few words to the audience.

Clearly taken aback by the sudden opportunity, the professor, reiterated Swami's message in the previous discourse on how Love and pure Love alone is the panacea for all the ills of the world. He said that in reality there were no problems in the world and that everything arises because man is not able to understand the inherent unity and underlying divinity of the entire creation. His talk was for about 25 minutes. After he concluded and bowed to Swami, Swami asked for the *veda* chanting to begin. It was a beautiful and sublime evening with Swami. After a while, Swami too joined in the chanting at a few points and this acted as a trigger for very vigorous chanting all around. The piece selected was also the very popular *Purusha Suktam* and so everyone joined whole heartedly and full throatedly.

After about 10 minutes of the chanting, Swami waved the chanting to a gentle stop. Then with another smile, He asked for *Aarathi*. It was about 6:40 pm when Swami finally retired into Yajur Mandir.

20 December, 2007 – Programme by Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh Youth

The youth from Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh had the chance to present their programme in front of Bhagavan on December 20 evening. It turned out to be a bit of a testing time as the clocked showed 5:30 pm and there was still no sign of Swami's arrival. Just as faces were about to droop, the lights all around the hall came on and there was also a wave of cheer. Swami had arrived and one could not make out whether there was a sigh of relief or an expression of collective joy! Whatever it be, it immediately had magical effect and there was "light" and the heavy cloud of anticipation vapourised.

Their programme got underway at 5.45 pm, after Bhagavan came onstage and blessed the various cards and bouquets offered by the youth. A drama "Manava Seva is Madhava Seva" was the first item. The story of a golden plate appearing at Kasi with the injunction that it belongs to the dearest devotee of the Lord was presented, with the dearest devotee turning out to be a Sai Youth engaged in selfless social service. There were famous bhajans like "Deena Dukhiyon Se Prem Karo" embedded in the play. The drama concluded with a group song on Seva. As the youth came forward and sat in the final formation, they requested Swami for a group photo. Swami seemed to say that it had become very late and that there was yet another programme to be performed. They pleaded but Swami seemed firm. There was one particular boy who had done a dance in the drama. He seemed very disappointed not to have got the picture with Swami. The second programme then began.

Sri Gautam Kale, a Sai Youth from Indore and a disciple of Pandit Jasraj, presented very popular and wonderfully composed songs. After he sang about three songs, Swami was very pleased. He created a ring for the singer and blessed him with clothes. Swami then asked for Bhajans to be sung. Prasadam was distributed and Swami now brought more cheer as He called all the drama participants for a group photo. He blessed them with white cloth pieces too. As they sat near Him singing, Swami called out for the lad who had danced in the drama and materialized a chain for him. Like the mists clearing before the sun, his gloom lifted away with a bright smile. Swami patted him and put the chain around his neck. Then blessing all, He received Aarathi and left.

23 December, 2007 – Drama on Lord Rama by Institute Students

As per Swami's instructions, the boys from the Institute had prepared a drama basing it on the Ramayana - specially the episode of Shravan Kumar on December 23. Swami came out at about 5:10 pm. He completed the *darshan* round and after alighting near the interview room went straight into the bhajan hall where the students in costumes had gathered. Swami seemed specially

interested in the characters of Shravan Kumar, his parents, Shabari, Rama and Lakshmana. He interacted with all the students there and then told them, "All of you go out and then start the play."

Next came another pleasant surprise that none really expected. Swami came out and saw the sets being moved to their place as He sat on the stage. He told the boys arranging the sets to turn them around in such a manner that they faced the audience. He then said that He would come down and sit so that everyone in the audience could also see the drama! Accordingly the wheel sofa was brought down and Swami smiled at everyone. The next five minutes saw a quick but massive reorganization of everything - acting positions, sets, mike positions, camera positions - and Swami seemed so comfortable. Finally the drama began.

The whole presentation had been beautifully conceived. It begins with Lava and Kusha coming up in front of Rama on one side (and Swami on the other.) They begin to sing the Telugu Ramakatha. Rama listens very intently and is enjoying it. The singing twins are interrupted by Rama himself at appropriate spots where they are reminded that they have forgotten some important characters. The story of Shravan Kumara is narrated. Shravan gives up everything in life to fulfill the desires of his parents. Even when king Dasharatha shoots an arrow at him and he is dying, the only thought in his mind is that his thirsty parents must be given water to drink.

The next interruption in the twins' narrative comes when Rama recollects the wonderful service that was imparted to him by Guha. Rama, refuses to allow Guha to touch his feet telling him that he mustn't embarrass him as Guha was himself a king among the boatmen. Guha then tells, "Oh Rama! I heard that the dust of your feet has great power. It transformed a rock into a woman. If the same happens to my boat, how am I going to survive? So I will allow you into my boat only after ridding your feet of all the dust!" Rama, then, is taken across the river and when he tries to pay Guha for his service, Guha says, "Oh Lord! It is not required that one boatman pay another. When you came here, I took you across. When I come to the shores of this Bhava Saagara (Ocean of life), you just take me across."

Finally when the twins begin to sing about the glory of Hanuman, Rama reminds them of the devotion of Shabari. Shabari keeps cleaning the path to be tread by Rama and Lakshmana for 40 years! People mock at her and think that she is crazy. She is indeed mad and as Swami says madness for God is the least harmful and the most beneficial. Finally Rama grants her heart's desire by being a guest at her humble abode and even partaking berries that have been bitten and tasted by her. (She does so with the intention that only the sweetest berries must go to Rama!)

As the drama came to a close after these three episodes, Swami was moved and very happy. He got emotional like many around Him as the different scenes progressed. It is such a cleansing process to get soaked in the love between the Lord and devotee. Anybody who sees or even just hears it is transformed. Small wonder then that it is said that as long as the mountains

stand and rivers flow, the Ramayana will touch hearts of people. Even the stone hearted, if they existed (for in the presence of Swami can there be anyone who is stone hearted?) would have felt something warm in their hearts seeing the immortal characters come to life before them. Swami got up and went walking towards all the characters. He called Lava and Kusha (and the students who had lent voice for their singing) and expressed His joy to them. He created a beautiful chain for the boy who had so soulfully acted the part of Shabari. The group photos had a kind of new flavour thrust onto them as Swami called the main characters of each scene to keep exchanging for the coveted position right next to Him as the photographers clicked on!

Swami then went on stage and blessed all the boys once again. He said that He would like to see more of such dramas put up on much larger scales. He said that He would like to see such dramas in Poornachandra Auditorium too. Then He received Aarthi and retired for the evening.

24 December, 2007 – Christmas Eve Celebrations

Puttaparthi had undergone a transformation, like it always does on the different occasions to suit the taste of the devotees gathered at His Feet. Christmas trees, small and big, seemed to have sprouted up in different parts of the ashram. Frosty had arrived in front of the western canteen and a smiling Santa with his sleigh and gifts too sat on the lawns near the canteen. The climate too chipped in with its contribution, chilling the air and making every night into a truly "silent" and "holy" one. Though the air was cold, there seemed a warmth in everyone's heart as they prepared for an evening of carols in front of their dear Swami. In the evening, the whole of Kulwant hall had been decked and a huge gathering of the overseas devotees waited for Swami's arrival. He came in the car and went around slowly granting *darshan*. He alighted near the interview room and came straight outside. Three big candles had been kept on the stage and they were lit in Swami's presence as He smilingly watched on. With a gentle movement of His hand, Swami halted the Vedam chanting and then beckoned the overseas devotees to begin.

The first part of the programme was the children's choir. The little ones began with *shlokas* (verses) from the Bhagawad Gita adapted to the western style of soft music. It had a very pleasing effect and one could observe the effort that had gone into getting all the pronunciations clear. It sounded very pleasing to the ear and in the middle, during one of the *shlokas*, Swami began to nod His head in affirmation. What was the *shloka* being chanted? *Ananyaschinta Yantomaam...* - meaning "whomsoever thinks of me without any other thought, I shall take care of their ultimate salvation without doubt." Anyone who could catch the import was thrilled - the others were thrilled simply seeing His reaction! There was a small enactment by the children for the carol, "We three kings of Orient". The choir lasted about 20 minutes after which the adult Christmas choir began.

They began with the triple chanting of the Ganesha Gayathri. Wow! What a great feeling it was as more than two thousand voices chanted it with the bass

and alto harmonics, so natural to the foreign throat, and sent a feeling of reverberation in the mighty Kulwant hall. More than two thousand years ago, the angels in the heavens sang out as the father and mother of Christ, Joseph and Mary, waited for the divine child to arrive, in a stable. Today the privilege of the angels had been given to the blessed humans to sing out as the Father of Christ waited to shower His Divine Love on them!

They began with a carol - "Listen". It literally made everyone sit up and listen as the ladies and gents alternated beautifully doing justice to the wonderful lyrics and composition. The carols that followed had been subtly modified and the devotees used them as a medium to convey their deep Love and yearning for Swami. There were smiles on every face and they reflected the Love being radiated from every heart. Some of the songs were fast, others were gentle; some had the power of God being expressed, while still others reflected on His tenderness. They sang eleven carols and the final concluding piece was "O Holy Night".

As they concluded, Swami beamed with joy and benediction. He sent *Prasadam* to be distributed to all. Then, the conductor came upto Him and offered, "Swami, would you like some bhajans?" Swami smiled, "Yes, please." With a quick swing of her arms, just like the way she had been conducting the whole evening, she signaled for the bhajans. The bhajans began with great earnest. As they progressed, Swami called out for a lady instrumentalist to come on stage. With a wave of His hand He got a chain with a pendant for her. There was bliss on her face as He put the chain around her neck. She was in tears of joy and was finding a dire shortage of words to express her feelings. Even then, her eyes spoke eloquently of the feelings coursing through her and Swami, of course, understood everything.

The bhajan, "Hari bhajan Bina" started and Swami seemed so happy. He enquired as to who was singing and the singer was blessed with a padanamaskar too! After that, Swami received Aarthi and left. Before that He got it announced that the next day there would be a programme by the students.

25 December, 2007 – Christmas Day Celebrations

Finally, the day for which preparations had been on for past few weeks dawned. In Puttaparthi, it began with the Nagarsankeertan choir at 5:45 am. After that, Kulwant Hall was full again by about 7:30 am. Swami came out for darshan at about 8:20am and was welcomed by children holding candles. He went around for a complete round of darshan. He was in orange and that was a sort of surprise again as all many expected Him to be in whites!

Four cakes had been placed for Him to bless in the portico. The cakes were marvelous, to say the least. Two of them depicted the nativity scene so beautifully. The cake and icing formed the stable and surroundings while beautiful idols of Jesus, Mother Mary and Joseph had been placed to perfection. One another cake that could not be missed was the one from the General Hospital. The icing on the cake was a literal 'icing on the cakes' made

on Christmas day. Well, believe it or not, the nativity scene was painted on it with icing! The pictures spoke for themselves. Swami appreciated each cake as He lit the candle and cut them. It was after the cake cutting that Swami came out and sat on the stage.

As soon as He sat, He saw the primary school children sitting right in the front with their violins. He immediately asked them as to what they were upto. Two kids went up to Him and offered the card that carried the details of the programme. The violin concert began. The tiny tots played with beautiful synchronisation and in unison. The final piece they played was the famous Jingle Bells. Not one, but six Santas came up to the stage with their bags full of goodies. Swami smiled and as the Santas showed their bags, as though asking for His approval, He picked chocolates from their bags and put them in other bags. He also threw a few of them to the boys sitting in the front. Then the Santas went about in all directions, hurling the chocolates to a gleeful crowd. Meanwhile, the violins became silent and the children bowed down to Swami. Like a mother, Swami called the children up in the front and gifted them with Hazelnut chocolate bars. Then came the beautiful sight as the Santas were at the receiving end of the gifts! Swami gave each of them chocolate bars too.

The second programme of the day was the one by the Institute brass band. The bandmaster and another student went up to Swami with the card bearing the programme details. Swami blessed the programme and it began. The band played four beautiful pieces and everyone applauded in joy and appreciation. Then Swami signaled in a sweet manner, "Is it over?" "Just one more piece Swami!" was the answer. Swami nodded in agreement. The band began playing the piece, "Love is my form." The whole audience clapped to the rhythm of the song. After that, they bowed to Swami and sat.

The final programme was the carol singing by the students. Two students again took a card to Swami. Swami saw through the details of the programme. The carols began with, "We wish you a merry Christmas." It was threaded along by Fred, Scrooge and the spirit of Christmas (characters from the famous Dickensian play, "A Christmas Carol.") The whole programme went along crisply and everyone seemed to enjoy it. The students sang about nine carols and in the middle, the carol, "Jingle Bell Rock" was sung. It was at this time that the senior Santas arrived! They too received blessings from Swami and went about distributing that to everyone seated. As the carols progressed, Mr. Scrooge was getting transformed by the Christmas spirit and Swami asked, "How many more?" "Swami two more" "OK" was the reply with a smile. Swami sat listening to the carols and at about 9:45 am received *Aarthi* as *Prasadam* was blessed for distribution. Swami then retired.

The evening programme had four speakers scheduled. Swami came out for darshan at about 5:10 pm. He went straight on the stage and after a short while of Veda chanting, He asked for the speeches to begin. Mr. John Behner of Latin America introduced the four speakers of the day - Ms. Inez from Argentina, Mr. Sumeet Tappoo from Fiji, Ms. Poppy Hillcoat from Australia and Dr. Michael Congleton from the USA. The first two Youth speakers spoke

of the transformation Sai has brought in their lives. Ms. Hillcoat spoke of the joy she experienced in past Christmases at Prasanthi Nilayam, and Mr. Congleton spoke of the joy derived from selfless service. After the four speakers, Mr. Behner requested Swami to bless everyone with His divine discourse. The time was already 6:30 pm. Swami said, "All are tired now. They will be fresh tomorrow and then I will speak to them all."

A roar of applause made its way throughout the hall as everyone cheered at this promise. Swami was all smiles. He asked for bhajans. As bhajans went on *prasadam* was distributed and then receiving *Aarthi*, Swami left.

26 December, 2007 – Christmas Mass

For the second year in a row, a Roman Catholic Christmas Mass was celebrated at Prasanthi Nilayam with the Divine approval of Bhagavan Baba, conducted by a priest from Nigeria, Father Charles Ogada. The word "catholic" means *universal*, and the spirit of the Mass was on behalf of the universal spirituality that men and women share everywhere.

The structure of this worship service has been preserved since the 1st century, with four parts:

1. Coming together in reverence for God
2. Listening and reflecting on the Word of God
3. Uniting ourselves with God through the Eucharist liturgy
4. Going forth to love and serve God in the world

The highlight is always the Eucharist liturgy, where the word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word for *gratitude* and *grace* – our rejoicing at the grace of receiving the very substance of Jesus Christ in a holy communion service.

After the opening entrance songs from the choir – "Come and serve the Lord in joy" and the "Sarva Dharma" prayer – Father Ogada greeted the hundreds of us who had gathered the hall with: "May the grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you." After he asked God to "bring light to those who are in darkness" (similar to the Sanskrit "asatoma sadgamaya" prayer), the choir sang a rousing "Glory and praise to the Lord. Here is here! He is here!" in 3-part harmony.

The second portion of the Mass featured two readings, the first from the Bible's "Book of Revelations," written by St. John the Apostle:

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem ["Jerusalem" means "the abode of supreme peace"] descending out of heaven from God... Then I heard a mighty voice, saying, "See! The abode of God is with men, and He will live among them; and they shall be His people, and God shall personally be with them and be their God. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and

death shall be no more... for the old conditions and the former order of things have passed away."

The second reading was from Sai Baba:

I call upon you to radiate bhakti (devotion) within you so that its unseen power will envelop all who come within your orbit. Be ever pure of heart and soul, and mankind in your lifetime will benefit from your unique qualities. The time is approaching when all humanity will live in harmony. That time will be here sooner than one expects. Before it arrives, be prepared for whatever is needed to reveal to every living thing the true purpose of existence.

Members of the congregation then offered prayers for the world in many languages including Russian, German, Italian, Spanish and Telugu.

In the 3rd part of the Mass, Father Ogada led us in the Eucharistic prayer:

Priest: *The Lord is with you.*

All: *He is also with you.*

Priest: *Lift up your hearts.*

All: *We have lifted them up to the Lord.*

Priest: *Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.*

All: *It is right to give him thanks and praise.*

Finally the time came for the transubstantiation of bread and "wine" (non-alcoholic grape juice) into the very substance of Jesus. As Father Ogada recited:

Before Jesus was given up in death, a death he freely accepted, he took bread and gave thanks. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

Take this, all of you, and eat it; this is my body which will be given up for you.

He consecrated the "wine" as well. And before the distribution of this Prasad to all, everyone prayed:

"Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever. "

Communion was then distributed at tables set around the room. Afterwards, silence reigned as each one felt the presence of God within their hearts.

Concluding the Mass, Father Ogada reminded everybody, "The Lord is with you," to which all responded, "He is also with you." A final invocation was

given to "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord," and the choir sang, "Love all. Serve all. That is the way to God."

The Mass had ended. Still, it took more than 40 minutes for the hall to be emptied – no one wanted to leave! One man was so moved that he was in tears "more than I have ever cried before – especially with so much joy."

Everyone present was grateful for the grace of being able to have such a wondrous Christmas Mass within the abode of supreme peace and prayed that this becomes a tradition for every Christmas in Prasanthi Nilayam.

26 December, 2007 – Christmas Discourse

Everyone was eagerly awaiting His arrival on the evening of December 26 as the previous evening He had promised that He would be speaking the next day. Swami came and took His usual rounds and then came on stage. He first asked the Telugu professor, Sri. Veerabhadriah, to speak, who was slightly taken aback. One could sympathize with him, for on a Christmas Day, when the majority of the people are non-Telugu speaking no one would expect Swami to ask a Telugu professor to speak. But that's the nature of Love. It knows no reason or season and that is exactly how the Professor began his speech - with wonder at Swami's spontaneous Love. He spoke for about 15 minutes on the inner significance of the Cross as propounded by Swami. Then he concluded.

With a smile on His face, Swami rose to speak. There was a thrilled applause. He refused to use the discourse table. He stood up holding the railings and then began His discourse. Given below is a summary:

"One with anger is the one who commits sin repeatedly. God is Love and Love is God. All the problems, differences and conflicts that you see today are due to the absence of love. They are all due our imagination alone. There is nothing actually like difficulties or restlessness (Ashanti). There is peace everywhere. So I don't understand why you complain that there is no peace. When the heart is peaceful, everything around is peaceful. That is because everything is reaction, reflection and resound. And we get carried away by our imagination. Even our names are not true. Boy there! What's your name?

(The boy answers – 'Vikas')

This boy answers as Vikas and everyone seated here will respond in a similar manner. But if God is asked what His name is, He will answer, "Aham Brahmaasmi" (literally translated as "I am God"). That should be our response too. That is our name. And that is possible only if one has Love.

But we do not understand Love. We think it is physical or worldly. You are not one person but three. The one you think you are, the one others think you are, and the one you truly are. What you and others think is only imagination. Who is your true self? It is the 'I'. This 'I' is common to all. The Christians have the cross. How is it formed? Take the false 'I' and cross it. Kill the ego to get the

true 'I'. All those who are born of Karma must realise, "Aham Brahmasmi". Then alone can you experience the Truth. Till then keep any names that you want. You are not born with the name. Parents have named you thus. That's why when they are asked, "What is the child's name?" they sometimes answer, "We have not yet kept a name!" The name is only for identification.

There are so many people in this world. But there is not even one who says, "I am God." We just carry on this life with given names. Remember, your name at birth is Brahma (God). It is the principle of 'I'ness. It is not anyone else's creation but your own will. See here. I will and...(waving His hands, materializes a chain and puts it over the mike for all to see) Creation always has two aspects - Truth and Illusion (Maya). If there is no illusion, there will be no creation. But still, Maya is only a shadow and there can be no journey without a shadow. At the time of sunrise the shadow is 20 feet long but by midday, it is absent, under one's feet!

Love is the basis of faith. None seem to know the origin of Love. The 'L' in Love stands for Lord. Everything has come from God and to God it will return. Even a blade of grass cannot move without God's will. People may argue, debate, etc. but is there anyone who knows the end fate. Without God there is no creation. The sprouts come up because of the rain. The rain is due to the clouds and the clouds are created because of the sun. The sun is the creation of God. Without God, nothing is possible. We forget God and remember everything else. If you forget God, you forget everything. Without the foundation, the wall and roof cannot exist and there can be no life. Self confidence is the foundation. Self satisfaction is the walls. Self sacrifice is the roof and life is one of Self realization.

Jesus was the son of the carpenter Joseph. Joseph stayed with a girl Mary who was pregnant. It was a kind of election time then. So they had to move from village to village. Those days there was no car, cycle or rickshaw. They used only a donkey. All the rooms were full then and they came to a donkey shed. In the corner in a manger, the baby was born. Joseph thought that it was because of the strain of the journey that Mary delivered early. Those days, the methods of calculation had not been developed. Exactly nine months had been completed. The parents brought leaves and hay and put an old cloth over it to comfort the baby. The child then was fed by the mother and began to grow.

Once there was a function in Jerusalem. The lad Jesus was lost in the crowd there. The parents hunted from morning to night but could not locate Jesus. As they wept and were about to go to bed, there was a knock on the door. Jesus came and said, "Mother I did not go anywhere. I was with the priests and learned men." The mother was very happy hearing this.

Jesus knew that the Truth lay in Him and that everything else was false. He roamed the mountains. When He came down to the river, he met the boatmen and Peter. There were some people knitting. They said, "Yesterday, we got no fish." Jesus worked His first miracle. He said, "Go over there. You will reap a rich harvest." He later distributed bread to all. Everyone hailed Him for the

miracles. "Jesus is our Guru," they said. The followers grew and so did the enemies. Wherever there are friends, there are bound to be enemies. Jesus said that all were divine. "Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavathi" - (One who knows God becomes God). When He was asked, "What is your name?" Jesus" -

"Who named you?" - "I myself" - "Who are you?" - "I am God."

He was taken for crucifixion. He did not try to argue or explain as He knew that it would all be in vain. When His mother cried at the cross, He said, "Oh Mary! The body is a water bubble. Why do you weep for it? None can kill or destroy me. I am the only one. All are sparks of my Divinity."

Jesus is not a mere mortal. He is totally divine. But some of the people had no faith. The same thing is happening today too. It is the faith that protects. Hold a stone and call it God, it will respond. Jesus was one who was very good. He gave food, clothing and shelter to all. He said, "All come from me and from my will" Remember that everything is the will of God. People with faith will be protected. Faith is the foremost. People today have been blinded because they have lost the eyes of faith. Faith and Love alone are the cause of all creation. They are like the positive and negative ends of a circuit. Grow in love and trust.

Many foreigners have faith but they lack Love. Faith is useless without Love. When Jesus was questioned in the court he said, "Go ahead! It is only my body. I can do as I will." Everyone must have the Masterfaith. The rest is useless. You can achieve anything with it. So, students, develop faith. Without faith, there is no life. Without faith there is no self. Even today, those with faith in Jesus have progressed. Whether your desires are fulfilled or not, keep your faith. Faith can make the blind see and the dumb speak. Never doubt. Some things just keep happening in this world. People thought that Jesus was ordinary man. Likewise, many think that Swami is an ordinary man. That is a big mistake. It is all the fault in your sight (Drishti). There is no mistake in Swami. It is all the disease in your eyes. If you are good and happy, Swami will be happy. Swami's happiness is in all of you.

You are all in me. I am yours and you are mine. Do not consider me separate. This is the fundamental Truth. You are all instruments. Grow in faith and Swami will make you instruments. It is only the spiritual life that protects. If that lacks, it is only emptiness. Fill your hearts with devotion. God is in you, above you, below you, with you and around you. If you have to be ripe fruits, you must have the sweet juice of devotion within. Any name you give God, have faith in it. Jewels are many but gold is one. Never loose the gold. No jewels without gold. Grow in Love.

Students, you are here not for studies but for learning from Swami. If you have this, you will be successful everywhere."

Then Swami sang the bhajan Hari Bhajan Bina..... After this, Swami called the boy Vikas up in the front and put the chain that was resting on the mike, to his

neck. Everybody burst into big applause. Then He blessed the prasadam to be distributed and received Aarthi.

27 December, 2008 – Programme by USA Devotees

Swami had permitted a group of devotees from USA to put up a programme on the December 27. The stage was set in a very cozy manner. It was a small backdrop and the devotees - on both the gents and ladies side sat close forming the borders of a stage to put up the play. Swami came out for darshan and saw the backdrop as He went on His rounds. Then as He came out of the car, He went straight to Sri Gopal Rao who was celebrating his 100th birthday. Swami blessed him and showered him with *akshatha* grains. Then He came out and sat for the programme.

The first part of the programme was a musical Christmas Play in One act taken from the Gospels of Luke, Mathew and Mark. It was entitled "The Boy Jesus." The play takes place in the day of the rule of Herod. Angel Gabriel informs Mary that she was chosen to bear Jesus. Joseph and Mary wander about in search of an inn and finally come to a shed where Jesus is born. It is then that, Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar from Mesopotamia, Persia and Ethiopia reach the babe following a star and gift gold, frankincense and myrrh. Jesus grows into boyhood and impresses and inspires everyone with wisdom far beyond his age. Jesus reminds all that the kingdom of God is within one and all. The whole skit was interspersed with carols – "Silent Night", "O Little town of Bethlehem", "We three kings of Orient", etc. The final song was "Joy to the World" and the children came front and sang out the final portions.

Swami called the boy who acted as Jesus and spoke for a while with him asking his name, place, etc. Then He materialized a chain for him. Swami took some time for opening the link to put the chain around his neck. The boy told Swami, "Swami, please do not trouble Yourself." Swami smiled and Himself put the chain around his neck. Then the second part of the programme began. It was a musical program by the "Sathya Sai Singers of Southern California and Hawaii." For the next 40 minutes or so, they sang out wonderfully to the Lord. All the songs were with beautiful meaning and all directed towards Swami. After they concluded, Swami went into the interview room and came out with sarees and white cloth pieces. He gave gold coin chocolates to the kids who had performed in the drama and the clothes to the gents and ladies. After that, He blessed them all and receiving Aarthi, retired for the day.

28 December, 2007 – Felicitation of Mr. Gopal Rao

Swami had set aside the evening of December 28 for a very dear devotee of His - Sri Gopal Rao - who had turned hundred. Swami had blessed him the previous day, the day of His birthday, but He did not seem satisfied with that. He came and took a full round of *darshan* and then alighted near the interview room. Taking a round around the portico, He came out on the stage and very soon asked for Mr Gopal Rao to be brought on stage. The 100-year old shining and smiling gentleman was wheeled on to the stage. Swami then

called Prof. G. Venkataraman and assigned to him the pleasant task of speaking in felicitation of Mr. Gopal Rao.

The professor deemed it as a special privilege to speak on this occasion. He spoke of how Gopal Rao's life had been saturated with faith and love for Swami. He had been cured of a cancer of the urinary bladder in 1960s simply by the force of a word from Swami. And now, in 2007, he was very fine and healthy. It was his steadfast faith in Swami's word that made him stand firm during the Andhra Bank strike during which he was thoroughly tested. From the age of eighty, till late nineties, he served water for devotees in the canteen. The professor's talk was very well appreciated and naturally so for it was the description of a most loved and respected centurion. In the speech he also made public a revelation that Swami made, "As per the scriptures, Sri Gopal Rao is not 100 but 105 actually!"

As he concluded, Swami asked the "Birthday boy" to speak. A mike was placed before the centurion and the mike volumes must have been turned very high in anticipation of a feeble voice. Sri Gopal Rao boomed forth and his voice was surprisingly clear and loud considering his age. He started with a very recent anecdote. His eyes and ears were weakening and the doctors had prescribed operations. Swami came to him and told him, "Gopal Rao, you have seen enough, you have heard enough. No need of any operation now!" He then narrated of how he first came to Swami as a proposed translator and then was saved the blushes when Mr. B Ramakrishna Rao stepped in at the right time. He expressed his deep sense of love and gratitude to Swami and also to Radio Sai for giving him Swami throughout the day. He spoke for about 40 minutes and everyone listened with rapt attention as words of wisdom poured forth. "Swami keeps telling that we are all God. All the problems are only because we do not seem to listen how many ever times He tells. I try to follow that and it is so elevating."

With that statement, he offered himself to Swami. Swami got Gopal Rao publicly garlanded by Mr Chakravarthi and there was a thunderous applause. Then Swami came to him and put a shawl to felicitate him. Both of them had an intimate conversation. Gopal Rao told Swami that he had seen all in his life and that He was ready. He had no desires left. He said that the whole day, he could not step into his house for so many came to see him. It was all Swami's love and grace, he said. Swami got up and posed for photographs with him and blessed him so many times by placing His hands on his head. Swami was smiling so sweetly and Gopal Rao chose to speak through his eyes which were now shedding drops of Love.

God's love is so overwhelming and overpowering. None can resist its flow and grandeur. Swami gives Himself up completely to anyone who has said from the depths of his heart, "Lord, I am yours. I Love you." It was so touching to see Swami blessing and showering His Love on a dear devotee. After that was done, the time was around 6:40pm. Swami had prasadam distributed and then sat in a joyous pose as Aarthi was performed. Then He retired for the evening.

SWAMI AND ME

SKETCHES ON THE SAND

By Mr Howard Murphet

This is a thrilling account of a Divine Manifestation personally witnessed and narrated by Mr. Howard Murphet, an ardent devotee from Australia and the author of many popular books on Baba including the famous "Sai Baba: Man of Miracles", to Mr. Richard Bock in 1977.

"There are many a miracles of course; I am not going to attempt to tell you all of them! I want to tell you about one that I witnessed, which I found very impressive and interesting. This one had to do with the production of *Amrita* (nectar) from the sand.

How long has it been since Swami produced *Amrita*? Previously, I had talked about it to Mr. Raja Reddy (a long time devotee who enjoyed many years of proximity with Baba). He said it must have been at least two or three years since He had done this. He told me he wished I had seen it. Of course, Swami always knows what you are thinking and feeling, and Swami did perform that *mahima*, that special miracle. Let me tell you the story!

I'd like to start by saying a word or two about the meaning of *amrita*, something I found most interesting, and I think you will too. The derivation of it is 'A' '*mrithi*'. 'A' means "not" and *Mrithi* means "death" or mortality, or mortification. So *Amriti* means "*not mortal*." And it is generally used as a name of a drink - the drink of the immortals. You find it in other customs called *ambrosia* or nectar. It is a symbol of Divine love, which is very much like *amrita*. So, that is a little bit about this Divine Elixir. On one occasion, I saw Swami perform a miracle which He hasn't performed many times and it is precious.

When I returned to Horsley Hills, Swami said that we would go down the hills, where we'd find some sand. He has performed some of His phenomenal miracles from sand and some from air; sometimes sand is the medium He wants. For the sceptics, I will narrate one or two points that will remove any doubts.

The first point is that I travelled in the car with Swami in the front. It was a big car with Mr. Raja Reddy driving with Swami and myself and He was wearing His small usual robe in which there are no pockets of any kind - He was even carrying His handkerchief in His hand. He has no pockets to put it in. If anybody tells you that He takes things from pockets, from His robes, I could show you they couldn't be more wrong.

Anyway, nothing was carried in the car. Nobody carried anything. We all went down empty handed. There was another carload of other people, ladies and many visitors who came, behind us. We came out of the car and first, Swami asked the young men to create a small stage for Him. About half a dozen young men immediately took the sand, pushed it up and made it into a flat

platform, probably 3-4 feet across, each way. This stage was about 18 inches high.

I made note of all these things. I had to, because I was writing a book about Swami, His Miracles and Teachings. And I am one of the most skeptical persons in the world, people say. Therefore, when people tell you about this miracle from sand, they may say perhaps He did not really do it! If anyone thought something was hidden in the sand before we got there, the above point shows that that was impossible. You will also see this as we go on.

So, He sat on this platform alone, and in a kind of sacred circle, all of us sat around Him. He did not have anyone else sitting on the platform - He was there in the middle of it. So He sat down cross-legged and began to teach us, talking to us on spiritual matters. Usually, He talks about many spiritual matters, before He performs a miracle. Eventually, He paused in His discourse and He flattened up the sand, just in front of Him and made it nice and smooth. He did some nice drawings with His finger. And I was sitting close to him in the platform trying to see what image it was.

Sketches on the Sand

So He turned to me and asked, "What is that?" I said, "It looks like a human figure." Then He piled up some more sand and on top of that drawing, He made a little hill of sand, like a child might make a sand castle. We were watching Him do this with His Hands very intently. He started to talk some more and presently He put His hand just on top of the hill. Remember, if anything was buried in there, it was deep in there, not on the top!

He put his hand on the top of this little mound of the sand, the sand castle, with the original sand, right on the top of the pile on the platform, less than a half an inch inside. Then He pulled out a statue, of silvery colour *Panchaloka* metal; this is an alloy of 5 metals, used for making the idols of God. I won't go into those details - I want to get to the *Amrita*. After showing this to us and flattening the sand He made another drawing, and asked, "What is that?" I replied, "It looks like a bowl, Swami." A spherical bowl. **He said, "It is Nectar."**

He piled sand on top of the drawing and spoke again and I could see Him reach a state of great happiness. He was always happy but now He was particularly ecstatic and laughing, almost as happy as a child, playing in the sand. He paused for a moment and put His hand on the mound again and there, He pulled this beautiful silvery coloured bowl, again of the same metal I think, of the same type, looking like silver, which has not tarnished.

This was from the top of the sand, not from the air, not from deep down. He pulled this out, and there arose a beautiful perfume. It was a wonderful fragrance. He smoothed over the sand again, this time He made a drawing, and He took out a gold teaspoon. He put the spoon in the bowl, stirred up whatever was inside the bowl and there was more fragrant perfume all around the place. He was full of joy.

The Taste of God

He stood up and came and gave a spoonful to every person there. There were many people there, not just a small group of people. He went around all the men and all the visitors giving them a spoonful each. Of course, that is the first time I tasted the nectar of God. It is indescribable - the essence of all Heavenly fruits rolled into one.

You just cannot imagine the beauty and wonder of that taste. I truly believe, the most powerful and most loving Hand of God stretched down to earth today is the One who can produce the inward *amrita* of devotional love and the outward visible signs, and that is His Holiness Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.”

PRECIOUS ASSOCIATION

This is the transcript of a talk delivered by Mr Subhash Subramaniam, a research scholar in Bhagavan's University, on the occasion of the 21st anniversary of the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance, Prashanthi Nilayam, on August 21, 2007 in the Divine Presence of Bhagavan Baba.

With Love and Humility, I offer myself at the Lotus feet of Our Most Beloved Bhagavan, revered elders, my dear brothers and sisters, Sai Ram to one and all.

Having been at Prashanthi Nilayam for quite a while, I often wondered if the management students of our University could possibly have an impact on the corporate world outside. I wondered if the definition of 'Manager' (it starts with 'M' for 'Mind of man' and ends with 'R' for 'Role of rules'), as given by Bhagavan, could be applicable in today's fiercely competitive business world. I had to wait for my answers.

"Sai Baba's students are unique" – A Top Financial Executive

Previous year (2006), I had the opportunity to present a couple of research papers at a Premier Conference called the "Capital Markets Conference", organized by the Indian Institute of Capital Markets at Mumbai. The paper presentations went well and were received with acclaim by the galaxy of academicians and practitioners from the corporate world. Incidentally, the paper from our Business School was adjudged the outstanding paper. I was naturally thrilled at this recognition, but what happened later during the day filled me with joy unspeakable, with a feeling that I cannot express.

There was a coffee and tea finale after this ceremony and during this, one very senior executive from one of the big financial majors of this country came up to me and said, **"Mr Subramaniam, I noted that you come from Sai Baba's University. And I have come here to tell you that I have two of the students of your Management School working with my company. The way these two students look at problems and the way they conduct themselves, I can only tell you, that Sai Baba's students are unique. I wish to tell you that I want more and more students from your Institute. Please convey this to your Institute authorities."**

Mind you, this gentleman was not a devotee of Bhagavan. He knew nothing about Swami or about Prashanthi Nilayam or for that matter about the Institute and its Philosophy, except for the titbits that he had gathered from the two students working with him in the company.

But the impression that these two students had left on him was there to see that day on his face. As I travelled back from the venue of the conference to my home, the words of this gentleman kept ringing in my ears...and I was wondering within myself what it was that made the students of Bhagavan unique?

Living with God is True Education

Was it the quality of education? Was it the skill-sets? Was it the routine in the hostel, at the Institute and in the playground? Or was it the infrastructure of the University? And I reasoned within myself that “yes, these are factors that do significantly influence the integrated personality development of a Sai Student. But if there is one single factor that distinguishes a Sai Student, it is the ‘**Association with Bhagavan**’”. It is the Association with God. Living with God is true education! We are living with a God who does not reside in some far off heaven or *Vaikuntam*. We are living with a God who sits right before us, each day of our lives at Prasanthi Nilayam. And that is our life’s gift!

***Kanula mundhara Kadhali Aade
Karuna Roopamu Neevu
Pilachi Nanthare Paluka Rinche Prema Bhavamu Neevu
Neeve Maa Sarvam, Neeve Maa Praanam.
Neeve Maa Sarvam, Neeve Maa Praanam.***

*Dearest Lord, you are right before our eyes;
You are the embodiment of Compassion;
You are Our Loving God who responds to our call instantly;
Swami, You are everything to us, You are our very life-breath.*

The literature of management given by the various gurus and theorists envisaged several roles for a Manager. Here we see Bhagavan embodying each one of these roles to perfection.

All-Embracing Mother

He is the Mother, the affectionate Mother, who walks up to the kid on the Primary School block, questioning him, “What did you have for breakfast today” or “How many *idlis* did you eat” or for that matter, “Why did you eat only 2 *idlis* today” and then walks back to the senior most students of the post graduate classes, asking the very same question!

He is the Mother, who enquires after not just our physical well-being, but also our mental and spiritual well-being. To such a mother I have a little song.

M is for Mother, Most Marvellous Mother to Me.
O for the One and Only Good Thing that ever happened to me.
T is for the Tender Love, You’ve given me since birth.
H is for the Heaven that all Mothers represent on Earth.
E is for an ever-loving Swami, who else can that be?
R for the Reassuring Comfort Sai Brings to Me.
Mother, Dearest Mother, without you - where would I be?
Could I have been where I am today, had it not been for Thee?
Your greatest gift to me .. Sai Dearest, that’s You.
Thank You Lord for this precious gift,
Your Love so sweet, so true.

*Thank You Lord for blessing me with Your love, so sweet, so true!
Thank You Lord for blessing me for Your love, so sweet, so true!*

An Electric Experience

During the olden days, the decoration in the *Mandir* would be done by the students during the festive occasions. And on one such occasion, the students were putting up serial bulbs as part of the decoration. And it so happened that they needed to use a live wire to complete this particular task. A part of this live wire was bare, exposed and un-insulated. Somebody had very thoughtfully placed a stool, where the exposed part of the wire lay, so that no harm would occur to any of the students accidentally through an electric shock. But in the hurry that ensued, during the decoration, somebody moved the stool away from its position.

Swami was watching. He saw the stool being moved away and He quietly moved to the area where the exposed bare wire lay and stood with His legs across on both the sides, so that, the exposed part of the wire was right under Him and so that no harm would befall on any of His students.

From there, He continued supervising the work and giving directions. Till the entire decoration was over, Swami stood right there, in that very same place and exact posture, and finally, when the decoration was over, and there was no necessity for this wire, only then did He move away. And it was at this moment that the students too realized what Bhagavan had taken upon Himself to prevent any suffering to His students. The Lord voluntarily takes up the suffering of His devotees.

If a friend or a colleague commits an error, we know how we react in such a situation. But here was the Lord, who did not utter a word, but volunteered to take away the sufferings and avoid the harm to His devotees, saving the mistake of His devotee.

***Har pal har kshan bhool kare ham,
Pag pag thokkar khayen,
Ek pag aage, do pag peeche,
Tum tak kaise aayen?
Karuna Sagar, Parama Dayalu Sai.***

*Dearest Loving Sai,
We make mistakes every second, every moment;
We stumble again and again at every step;
When we take one step forward, we have already moved two steps behind;
How can we ever reach You, Lord?
The Dearest Lord, the Ocean of Mercy and Compassion.*

Our Joy is His Bliss

In one of the summer trips at Ooty on one morning, Swami was distributing blankets to the poor and the needy. And after the blankets have been distributed to all the poor assembled there, there were still many that were left. So the students who were helping with the distribution proceeded to the store room to put the blankets away. But Bhagavan called the students and told them to load all of them in the van, got into His car ahead of the van and went on a drive on the road.

He stopped by each poor and each needy man, woman, or child, and personally handed over the blankets to each one of them. He did not ask any of the students or the teachers to do this, but chose to do it Himself, personally.

Later when Swami came back, one of the senior Professors mustered up courage to ask Bhagavan why He did not let them do this? Then Swami said, **“Bangaru, Ala Kaadhu, Aa Beedhavaluku nenu isthe, valu chaala aanandistharu.”** **“My dear, it’s not like that. If I distribute the blankets to those poor people, they will truly rejoice.”**

That is the love of Bhagavan for the poor and to the needy.

***Daya ku prema ku roopu dhachina daivama Sai Dhaivama?
Dikku leni Deena Janula Brova Ochina Dhaivama?
Naa Dhaivama, Sai Dhaivama? Naa Dhaivama, Sai Dhaivama?
Daya Ku, Premaku Roopu Dhaachina Dhaivama Sai Dhaivama?***

*Dearest Sai, did Love and Compassion take an Earthly Form as You?
Have You come down to protect the distressed and unfortunate?
My dear lord, God, my dearest Sai*

Way back in 1947, Swami had written in a letter to His elder brother Sri Seshamma Raju, *“I have a task – to foster all mankind and to fill their lives full of bliss. I have a vow, to lead all who stray away from the paths of goodness and lead them to the right path. I have a work that I am attached to. That I love to remove the sufferings of the poor and the needy and to grant them what they lack.”*

Even before that, as the young Sathya, He had given three promises to Mother Eshwaramma. To establish a little school for the children of the village of Puttaparthi; to establish a little dispensary for the villages of Puttaparthi and the nearby villages; and for making arrangements for drinking water.

Today, the magnitude of fulfilment of these words is there for all of us to see. The rest is history! The rest is His story! It is a story of His Glory. It is a story of His Grandeur. It is a story that is wrapped in the deepest of mysteries. It is a story without a beginning. It is a story without an end.

The Pencil Preaches...

Long ago, the pencil maker made a beautiful pencil. Gave it a beautiful form and told the pencil, "My dear Pencil, in order to be useful for the purpose for which you have been created by me, you have to always remember these five lessons:

1. *To be useful, you have to allow yourself to be in the hands of someone else to be used.*
2. *From time to time, you may have to undergo a sharpening, a painful sharpening, but the sharpening is good for you.*
3. *The most important part of you lies inside you.*
4. *You will always have the opportunity to correct your mistakes, to correct your errors, and*
5. *Come what may, you will have to keep writing. You will have to keep going on and on...non-stop..!*

Dear Lord, allow us to be a pencil, to be an instrument in Your hands – that can write, if not an episode, an alphabet in the Divine Saga of Your Life!
Lead us, guide us, for You are our only hope, our Beacon Light.

***Thum Aasha, Vishwas Hamare.
Thum Aasha, Vishwas Hamare.
Thum Dharthi, Aakash Hamare.
Thum Dharthi, Aakash Hamare Rama.
Thum Aasha, Vishwas Hamare.***

*You are our only Hope, You are our Beacon Light.
You are verily our Earth and Sky.
Dearest Lord, You are verily our only Hope and Beacon Light.*

The Opportunity Unparalleled

As we celebrate the 21st Anniversary of the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance, let me take this opportunity to remind each one of us gathered here in this Sai Kulwant Hall, and each one of us who has had this opportunity to be associated with Bhagavan:

"To be contemporaries of this Avatar, living at the same time as He, to be walking on the same ground as He, and to be breathing the same air as He - it is our single most good fortune!"

Could we ever possibly count our blessings?"

***Kya kush naseeb jo Sai ko pale,
Use paakar dukh dardh mitale
Sahara vahi hai, kinara vahi hai, yaara vahi hai,
Oho.. Yaara vahi hai!***

What great good fortune it is for the one who has got Sai?
Once you have got Him, all pains and agonies disappear;
He is the support, He is the destination, He is the true friend;
The only true friend!

HOW BABA REINVENTED ME

By Szilvia Szawaz, Hungary

After working as a marketing manager for many years, Szilvia, now a housewife and a mother, is completely into Sai work - translating books, organising programmes and meetings for newcomers, and leading a self-awareness course. She has been a Sai Centre member since 2001, Centre leader since 2003, and was appointed as a National Coordinator of Hungary in 2006. When she was in Prasanthi Nilayam recently (in Dec 2007) along with the Hungarian group, Heart2Heart caught up with her and here are excerpts of the interesting conversation we had with her in the form of an article.

When I was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1976, the communist rule was on. As a result, life was pretty simple as we did not have many things to buy. In a way, it was healthy for family life, because we were protected from many desires and temptations that the West is flooded with.

Growing Up in a Testing Time

In my family, I had my brother who is older than me, and we grew up with no great problems; we enjoyed a good relationship with our parents. But when I reached 14 - an age when teenagers change a lot, especially in the West - I felt a little strange because I discovered that I had a different way of thinking. I did not find society's ways fulfilling and I wanted to find my own way to be happy. I felt something was missing. At just that time, Communism in Hungary was nearing its end; life, in the whole country, was undergoing a sea change, and I was changing too. After 40 years of communism, everybody was searching for something new, and as a teenager, I too could feel this excitement and turmoil.

In my school the teachers wanted every student to obey them unquestioningly. But I was a bit rebellious and this did not go well with them. Though I was a talented kid, I did not feel comfortable in that educational system, as I felt so deeply that something was lacking. Now, of course, I know that we had ignored our inner human values. But at that time, I could not figure out what could fill my emptiness. My life was in complete disharmony, be it in the school, with friends or anywhere.

Finding the Path to Self Enquiry

But there was one saving Grace. I had a teacher, a kind lady who taught us like Plato and Socrates, always asking us questions and encouraging interaction. I really enjoyed her classes in literature. Now, when I look back, I think this was the basis of my later inner searching. She always made us question and probe, and that was very good for me, because I then started to

enquire into myself “Why do I do certain things?”, “Why do I act like this?” That was the beginning of my search, and the journey inside. It helped me to understand people, and more importantly, myself. I did not know then that she was a very spiritual lady. Today, I am extremely grateful to her because what she did then is what every teacher should be doing with their students.

The ‘Pleasures’ of Freedom

When the country opened up too quickly, society started to get westernised vigorously. Gone were the days of less choices and limited freedom, now everyone thought they would be the happiest in the planet because they had so many things to buy. Everyone was trying out new things and I was no exception. I went out with friends and ventured into discotheques, took to alcohol, tried drugs, etc. - I did not want to miss out on anything that was ‘fun’. Different kinds of things were coming into Hungary – all at once, and for a few years, I thought it was all good excitement.

But when I reached 20, there was still something missing! I felt a deep emptiness within. I had started working when I was 17, refusing university as I thought it would be too restrictive. So, I went into media and learned how to sell advertising for newspapers and was quite proficient at my job. I had to call different companies and advise them about the best ways to sell their products. At that time, this was a new concept and big companies had no advertising agency, so they listened to my advice on where they should spend their money. I earned a good amount and with it came freedom. I wanted to be independent from my family; so I saved money and bought my own flat. I travelled a lot too to different countries, as I was searching for something that could quieten my inner disharmony. For the next five years I explored a lot outside, as that was where I believed my happiness lay.

Captivated by Pure Love

When I was 21, I read a well-known book *The Celestine Prophecy*, written by an American James Redfield. That touched my heart; it taught me to look inside. That was the first step, and after that I read many spiritual books. And intuitively I felt ‘at home’ with the ideas and philosophies some of these books were talking about. I got more interested in this line of thought and joined a metaphysical school when I was 22. This will give me in depth knowledge, I surmised. The teacher of the school happened to be a Sai devotee and one day, he showed us a video about Sathya Sai Baba, it was called *Pure Love*. When I saw that video, I do not know why, I cried a lot. Baba instantaneously touched my heart. As He walked slowly with the beautiful music playing in the background, my whole being was overhauled. I asked my teacher, “Who is this person? I want to see Him.” He said, “We are going to India shortly, you can join us.”

So, late in that year, 1999, I was in Puttaparthi and my first Darshan was from about 50 meters away. The moment I had a glimpse of Him in the car, I began to cry! It was as if my heart was just pouring out. “I’ve arrived home,” I knew,

very strongly. I was simply ecstatic to be in Puttaparthi; He touched my heart so deeply.

I realised I had found what I was searching for so many years outside. It was a moment of great revelation because that which I had journeyed from country to country seeking, was here in Puttaparthi! I started to study His teachings and feel the Love that He is. Imagine a kid who had lost her parents in a big shopping mall, pitifully crying and frantically searching, when all of a sudden, she finds her mother! That was how ecstatic I was when I came to Puttaparthi and saw Baba. And as I read His books more, I realized I had to change many things in my life - how I act, look, think, everything had to go through the Sai workshop. My life took a complete U-turn. I changed comprehensively.

Learning at the Sai School

I stayed for five weeks on that first trip to His Lotus Feet and had to spend a lot of time in introspection. It was a painful and profound moment in my life when I had to finally leave, painful because I did not want to return to my old environment which did not give me happiness, and at the same time profound as now I had found my life's purpose. I had always felt that my life had a unique objective, a great task was awaiting me, but I could never understand what it really was, though at times I sensed that maybe something nice will happen to me. But when I met Sai Baba I understood what I needed to do - that is, to work with people. When I was a kid and somebody asked me, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" I would say, "I want to work with people." I didn't really understand much of what I said then, but everything became clear in that first visit to Puttaparthi.

When I met Him, I realized I have to live His way. He was truly what I was looking for. He found me and gave me meaning in my life. I have not had much physical interaction or interviews with Swami, but I have had many "inner-views". I feel Him inside, around me, and in my house. I know He is with me and helping me in my work and every situation.

When we started to build a house in 2000, He came in my dream and said, "I'm very happy that you're building. Build." The word "build" has two meanings in Hungarian. It also means to 'build' or improve oneself. Therefore, when He said, "I'm very happy that you're building", I woke up and was filled with joy.

Sometimes I feel God is prompting me to act in ways I could not do by myself. Once I was sitting in a crowded Metro train in Budapest. There was a man standing in front of me and next to him, very close, was a lady. I realized that the lady was actually a pick-pocket. I was not a very courageous or confronting person at that time, but at that moment I instantaneously hit the lady's hand hard when she tried to steal the purse - that was surely not 'me' acting as I did not think about it. The thief was shocked and immediately took to her heels.

On another occasion, we were on a trailer carrying some fencing posts and wire, with my father on the driving seat. It was a heavy load and suddenly, one of the wheels just gave away. And the car went totally out of control. We were swinging directionless from one side of the road to the other. And at this time, we saw another vehicle approaching us from the front. My father was panic-stricken. I just prayed, "Oh, my God, please, help me! Help me!" And the next moment, you may not believe, the car suddenly stopped! It was as if the car reacted on its volition. The accident was timely averted. And the next best thing that happened was that the people in the cars behind us, who could not go forward because of the posts that had fallen on the road, came out and wholeheartedly helped us in clearing the road. There were so many willing to help! I was overwhelmed and thanked the Lord immensely.

Pilgrimage of Grace

I have felt His Love in so many situations. The story of how I made it to Puttaparthi this year (December 2007) is also amazing. My husband and I wanted to join the Hungarian group, but we were not in a position to afford it, so we gave up the idea. When there were two weeks left for the group to leave Hungary, I received a phone call from one of the office bearers in Budapest. She said that some of the group members had collected enough money for me to travel as they felt, being a national coordinator, I must be part of the group. But they had only enough to pay for mine and our little son's ticket. They could not arrange resources for my husband.

On one hand, I was touched at this gift from Sai Baba through others. I felt His presence - that He's calling me to Puttaparthi with the group. I had a glimpse of Baba touching my heart. But on the other hand, it was a very difficult situation too. I was sad that Baba had apparently called only me and my son, and not my husband. He was concerned as my son is only 15 months old. He slowly reconciled to this fact and said to himself, "If Baba is calling them, I should let them go" and started practicing detachment from me and our child. Our journey was just seven days away and now I get another phone call from one of the centre leaders who were responsible for organising the journey to India. She tells me that a lady had cancelled her trip to India and is offering her ticket to my husband! Moreover, after we return, we could pay in instalments. And later, when the lady learnt that my husband is a graphic designer, she said, "Oh, very good, then he can do some work for me, he doesn't have to pay anything at all". So the whole trip was a gift from Sai! He shows us His love in so many ways, through so many people.

I had another experience a few years ago during an earlier visit to Puttaparthi. I had seen many times that whenever Swami creates Vibhuti, after distributing it to the blessed recipient, He would accept a handkerchief from the sevadal lady sitting near by to wipe His Hand. I developed a strong desire to have such a kerchief.

There was a lady doing security duty, with whom we had some contact, and one day as we were talking to her about our Baba experiences, she invited us to her home. During our conversation at her place, she said, "You know what

happened? I was sitting working in the Mandir and Sai Baba materialized vibhuti quite some distance away. But He called me over to give Him the handkerchief. And this was unusual, because He always asks for the handkerchief from the person closest to Him.” And then she showed us the handkerchief touched by the Lord, and said, “You know, I would like to give this to you.” I was thrilled. Sai Baba had fulfilled my innermost wish! Today if we have any illness, we put this sacred cloth touched by Sai on that part of our body. He cares for us in many different ways.

Today, when I look back and see the last eight years of my life, that is after I had my first *darshan* in 1999, I notice a tremendous change in my personality. I have become calmer and friendlier. I am no more arrogant or aloof. I have realised that I’m not different from others and all I need to do is to be humble. And most importantly, if I have any talents, I have to use it to help others, and not for my own ambitions and desires.

A Sign of Responsibility

How I became the National Coordinator of Hungary is also an interesting story. When I returned to my country after the first trip, I joined the Sai Organization and started to work hard in translating many English books into Hungarian. The founder of the Organization was a lady who served as the National Coordinator for thirteen years. Earlier, she had been living in Australia for many years, but after seeing Bhagavan she felt that she must bring His message back home, and therefore, returned to Hungary and started the Sai Organization.

After being in charge for such a long period, she felt it was time to move on but couldn’t find anyone who could speak English, work hard and also had other exemplary qualities. But after knowing me for some time, she thought I was the right person, but it took a few years before I could fill the position. (I needed a minimum of two years experiences as a center leader too.)

Before taking the responsibility, I came to Puttaparthi with my husband in 2005, and I was asking myself, “Am I the right person for the job?” I wanted Swami’s opinion, and was looking for any confirmatory divine sign. One day, in the Mandir, the National Coordinator of Belgium saw me sitting in the public area and called me to the coordinator’s place where she was, and said, “Why are you sitting there, Szilvia?” At that time I was a Deputy National Coordinator. “Your place is here as the Coordinator, why do not you come and sit in front with us?” she continued. For me, it was a sign from Swami that I should take the new role. And the founder lady said, “You are the right person. Be courageous. Don’t be afraid.” So I went and asked permission to sit with the national coordinators and as time went by Swami helped me to be more self-confident and hear His voice inside.

Listening to the True Self

I underwent a process of coming to trust my inner voice and conscience. One day I was sitting in the first row and saw a Brazilian lady who always came

late and sat at the back for *darshan*. I felt I should give her my place because I thought maybe she has a genuine reason for being late. I was still a little confused and asked Sai Baba inside, "Please Sai Baba, show me if I am doing the right thing in giving her a place. Please open your window during Darshan and look at me if this is right." And when Baba came out after few minutes, He turned down the glass of the widow and looked straight into my eyes! I instantly realized what I felt inside was right. Later, I met that lady and learnt that she was a doctor and was very busy with the patients in the General Hospital. I was then completely convinced that I must always be self-confident and follow my heart.

There was another situation which happened after a couple of weeks, concerning a lady who was leaving Puttaparthi shortly. I was in the first row again and had a feeling that I should give her my place. But another lady told me to give up the idea and so persuaded by her, I did not move. When Swami came near where I was sitting, He just turned His face suddenly to the other side and after He passed me returned His looks again to my side. That was a definite sign for me that I didn't do the right thing. I learnt again to listen to what He tells me from within – my conscience. I should not listen to others; He is inside me, leading me and teaching me. I feel He is directing me every moment. This self-confidence has helped me to carry out my role as National Coordinator more self-assuredly. I enjoyed giving presentations during our youth meeting the previous year (2006), we had lectures on "spirituality in marriage" and how Sai Baba guides us in our lives to progress together on the spiritual path.

In Budapest, we have been able to undertake many service activities. One we worked on last year was to build a house for a poor lady in the countryside. We toiled together and did it all by our selves. We also give food to the homeless and visit the old, talk to them, stage a program to give them joy and gift them with articles they need. In other cities we are working with orphans by providing them with a sports program and craft activities, and poor families are offered means to earn their livelihood, not just food.

Swami continues to test and teach us in many ways. On this (Dec 2007) pilgrimage we came with an extensive programme of singing to Him. We practiced a lot but for some reason He knows best, we never got an opportunity to perform before Him. But we accepted this to be His will. Moreover, more than songs, what this music program did to us was great because for so many days we were together, singing, practising and working hard. This has created a wonderful team spirit within us. And this certainly is a big plus for the Organisation. Now, all I want is to be a good instrument in His Hands and find God in myself.

SAI WORLD NEWS

MULTI-FAITH AKHANDA BHAJAN FOR WORLD PEACE IN UK

The story of how the Milton Keynes and Luton Sai Centres in the UK, for the Fifth Year, host a unique session of continuous devotional prayers for universal peace and harmony.

In Milton Keynes, a city of some 230,000, about 50 miles north of London, on 10/11 November another successful Multi-Faith Akhanda Bhajan took place, the fifth such annual event, organised by the Sai Centres of Luton and Milton Keynes. The event started at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday the 10th, and over the following 24 hours, a series of devotional singing sessions conducted by Groups from different faiths, took place. Amongst the participants were representatives from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and Hindu traditions.

The planning of the event began some months before November. Through interfaith organisations in both Milton Keynes and Luton, various faith groups were contacted and invited to participate in the Akhanda Bhajan, after explaining to them what it was.

The arrangements for setting up the hall, preparing refreshments for 150 people (including hot meals at the appropriate times), establishing the sound system (duty and stand-by [one never knows what will happen!]) and organising the 'seva' rota (with eight different duties, ranging from Catering to managing the Car Park), were all enthusiastically undertaken, with excellent teamwork shown by the two Sai Centres involved.

As background, Milton Keynes Sai Centre was established in January 2002, by Seelan Moodley, an IT Consultant from South Africa, and has attendance of about 40 at its weekly Bhajans. Most of the devotees are from South Africa, and bring with them a refreshing new outlook from a different continent.

Luton Sai Centre, located about 20 miles south of Milton Keynes has a much longer history, having been established in 1979. It draws about 50 people to its monthly Bhajans. Luton counts Brother Victor (Krishna) Kanu, a long standing respected devotee of Bhagavan, amongst its founding devotees. Both Centres celebrate all the major festivals in the Sai Calendar, and at such events massive numbers of devotees attend.

The 10th of November saw feverish activity at the hall, with cleaning and decorating taking place both inside and outside. The neighbouring houses were all informed of the forthcoming event, and invitations extended to them.

Indira Vasantlal Thakker (affectionately known as 'Indu-Ma' by everyone) and her team beautifully and lovingly set up the altar. There was a portrait of Swami, together with flowers and the Sarva Dharma emblem. Outside the hall, a banner welcomed all to the event.

The event began right on time with two children from the Sai Spiritual Education classes at Milton Keynes and Luton lighting two candles near Swami's picture. Naveenbhai Maharaj, the Chairperson of Milton Keynes Sai Centre, gave a brief welcome speech and vote of thanks. Vedic Chants led by Shankar Hariharan, an ex-student from Prashanti, followed this.

The first Group to sing Bhajans was the Milton Keynes Sai Centre, who rendered both Sanskrit and English songs to uplift everyone present. Then came Cookie and Vijeyan, a talented couple from South Africa, whose melodious Carnatic-trained voices, and fantastic music with the harmonium and tabla, really gripped the crowd.

Next came the Bedford Sai Centre, accompanied by a Group from the Valmiki Temple at Bedford (about 18 miles east of Milton Keynes). The senior citizens from the temple lent a certain air of serenity to the event. It was commendable that the Group came on a coach, rather than drive individually to the Hall. Apart from being environmentally favourable, this also meant that everyone was under less stress.

During the Akhanda Bhajan, the handover between participants and Groups was always seamless. Wherever there was a gap, say, in order to set up instruments, the mantra 'Aum Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba ya Namah' was chanted continuously in order to avoid a break and to maintain good vibrations.

Following the Bedford group were David Rennie and Louise Rawlence from the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's 'Family Federation for World Peace and Unification'. David and his family spent about 10 years working in India, and have a deep regard for the spirituality of the country. David and Louise sang both popular sacred songs and their own compositions related to Peace and Love, playing a combination of guitars (Louise) and flute (David). For the finale, David sang most beautifully a 1,000-year old Korean song on 'Loyalty', which moved many members of the audience. David told the live BBC radio broadcast that Reverend Moon's teaching of high spiritual and family values "living for the sake of others" makes partnership with Sai Baba devotees both a natural and a joyful experience. David and Christa Rennie are committee members of Milton Keynes Interfaith and are very active in the local voluntary sector.

All the attendees (participants and well-wishers) at the Akhanda Bhajan were treated to welcome hospitality, with lovingly prepared food provided by Sai devotees. The event was graced on Saturday evening by Deputy Mayor of Milton Keynes Jan Lloyd, who arrived during David and Louise's hour. She spent 90 minutes with everyone and was very keen to know more about the Sai Organisation.

Among the attendees at the Akhanda Bhajan were UK Council members, Kishor Kumar, National Secretary of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisation, UK, and Sunthar Uthayanan, the Region 3 Chairperson.

At this point it should be said that both the Luton and Milton Keynes Sai Centres undertake a number of community-based Service Projects involving:

- Visits to Residential and Nursing Homes to entertain elderly residents
- Feeding and entertaining the needy and the homeless of Luton
- Working with the charity 'Age Concern' to provide a Befriending scheme for elderly citizens
- Working in the Faith Woodland Project, whose aim is to promote mutual understanding between peoples of all faiths, through the common ground of the natural world. (As part of the project, a permanent spiritual and educational space is being created in Moulden Wood, an ancient woodland near Luton.)
- Renovation and garden maintenance undertaken at schools and the local Buddhist Temple in Milton Keynes
- Conducting Prayer sessions for Hindu prisoners at Her Majesty's Prison, Woodhill, in Milton Keynes
- Co-ordinating a Literacy Programme (called Toe-by-Toe) at Woodhill Prison, whereby literate prisoners teach those needing help.

After David and Louise, came the lady members of Milton Keynes and Luton Sai Centres, led by Ranjan Maisuria (lovingly called 'Ranjan-Ma' by all), who chanted the 'Hanuman Chalisa' and sang Bhajans. Ranjan-Ma is a long-time resident of Milton Keynes, and her house-bhajans paved the way for the establishment of the Sai Centre here.

It was now 11:00 p.m. and time for the Group from the 'Well at Willen' to take to the stage. The 'Well at Willen' is a family-based ecumenical community, which fosters spiritual growth. We were treated to their moving music for an hour.

There was a tangible spiritual atmosphere in the Hall, and the strength of love was immense. Many of the Groups had come to the event in previous years, and so it was a great time to catch up with old friends, and re-affirm our love and respect for each other.

From midnight to 2:00 a.m. saw devotional songs being sung by a Bhajan Group from Bedford. There were devotees who accompanied them at this inhospitable hour, all in an effort to keep the vibrations going.

A maestro, Balubhai, then took over for an hour. A modest musician with much talent, Balubhai has been on the Milton Keynes scene for over 20 years, singing with various Hindu groups.

The lively Luton Youth Group came on next, with superb playing of tabla and *dholak* accompanying the bhajans. Then came the adults from Luton and Milton Keynes, who continued till 5:00 a.m.

The slot from 5:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. saw the 'In2Self Foundation' take the floor. Led by Jiten Patel, this small, select group conducts courses on

Spiritual, Personal and Corporate Development for people of all denominations in the UK and internationally. The principle driving the 'In2Self Foundation' is a belief in the innate potential of everyone for self-advancement and transformation.

A change of tempo took place at 7:00 a.m. when the Milton Keynes Hare Krishna Group took over. Michael Howson, the leader of the Group, born in India, was a familiar face, having given the Milton Keynes devotees classes on the Bhagavad Gita. After an hour, the Hare Krishna Group took a break whilst a Sikh Group took over with their 'kirtans'. The Hare Krishna Group came back at 9:00 a.m. for a further hour, after which they were treated to a hearty breakfast!

From 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. something special took place at the Akhanda Bhajan. It became the location for a live BBC local radio programme called 'Melting Pot' which brings together news and views of spiritual groups in the counties of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire (which encompass Luton and Milton Keynes). Ian Pearce, the host of the radio programme, is well known to Sai members in this part of England, having broadcast his radio programme from Akhanda Bhajan sessions in the past. He interviewed three of the participants over the course of the programme. They were:

Dhirubhai Mistry, the Chairperson of Luton Sai Centre who (not having slept for at least 25 hours!) gave a summary of Swami's teachings and how the Akhanda Bhajan was being simultaneously conducted worldwide.

David Rennie presented a good case for promoting world harmony, as he said, *"When we don't wish for animosity between given members of a family, why should we wish for it between nations?"*

Michael Howson emphasised the oneness of all peoples, and the significance of good vibrations to rekindle our spirituality. Feedback from participants at the Akhanda Bhajan was prompt. The Valmiki Temple sent an e-mail:

"With the Grace of the Paramatma that is the indweller of everything that has been created by Him, we take this opportunity to thank you and your Organisation for inviting us to the Akhanda Bhajan. We truly feel blessed that we were able to participate in an event that was surely arranged by God Himself. On entering the Divine abode, we were inspired more so by the vibrations that were being created, which were immensely uplifting".

At 10:00 a.m. the children from the Milton Keynes Sai Spiritual Education Classes began their Bhajans. Aged 5 to 14, these children showed great discipline and enthusiasm in all the songs that they sang.

Sunday, the 11th being Armistice Day conferred a sense of solemnity to the morning's proceedings. All the non-singers in a side room observed a two-minute silence at 11:00 a.m. Nirasha Ramlugan, the teacher who was instrumental in getting the various faith groups together for the Akhanda

Bhajan, made a display of posters related to 'Peace', created by children from her school. Following the SSE children, were another set of talented youngsters, from the Bal Ambika Mandir. The four children, all cousins aged 12 and below, played a harmonium and tabla and sang in a professional manner for a whole hour!

Next came Uma Gandhi, from the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Sect, who attend an ornate, Japanese-style Buddhist Temple in Milton Keynes. Uma chanted the Sect's mantra for Peace - *Namu Myo Ho Reng Ge Kyo*, during her hour.

It was lunchtime by now. One of the devotee families lovingly provided a full Indian meal for all present, and this was well received.

Messers King and Patkunan captured the whole of the Akhanda Bhajan on film (both video and still) so that a life-long record was made.

During lunchtime, a set of young parents from a local Playgroup performed, with the music being provided by a versatile keyboard player. A Christian Group from the landmark church in Milton Keynes, Christ - the Cornerstone, followed the Playgroup parents. It was apparent that they had practiced quite hard, as they were impeccable in their rendition.

Next came the 'Dosti Club', a lunch club for the elders in the Hindu Community, run by the Milton Keynes Hindu Association. It felt good to have such esteemed members of the Community at the Akhanda Bhajan.

They were followed by the Jewish Ladies Choir, a small group of enthusiastic ladies keen to maintain their ancient heritage through music. They shared the one-hour slot with the Milton Keynes Youth whose enthusiasm was quite infectious!

Over the many years of the Multi-Faith Akhanda Bhajan being held in Milton Keynes, several Groups and individuals have supported the event. Muslim colleagues have always attended, and here a special mention must be made of Fazle Khundkar, a much-respected citizen of Milton Keynes, and long-standing friend of Sai devotees.

Then, arrived the final hour – by then 23 hours of uplifting music and chanting had really overwhelmed everybody present. The Luton Sai Centre took the floor, and the event reached a climax at 6:00 p.m. The end was both emotional and joyful. The sense of camaraderie was intense, and everyone just knew that they wanted to repeat the event in 2008.

"The Akhanda Bhajan served to bring together different faiths, something that is desperately needed in these troubled times. It also enabled us to work together towards the principal aim of our Guru, that is, to make us realise that we are all indeed one. It was quite plain that this message had been perceived by all who attended the 2007 Multi-Faith Akhanda Bhajan," say the Sai Devotees who organised this unique event.

H2H SPECIAL

A PSYCHIATRIST'S TRYST WITH SAI:

CONVERSATION WITH DR. MICHAEL W. CONGLETON , PART 2

This is the second and final part of the transcript of the conversation between Dr. Michael Congleton, MD, Ph. D, President of the South Pacific Region of the Sathya Sai Organisation, USA and Prof. G Venkataraman, eminent physicist and former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University.

Michael Congleton (MC): He (Baba) called each person back for a private interview, and He came out and said to me, "You are next!" He then called me inside. I was carrying a *japa mala* (rosary) and a quartz egg with me that was like a *shivalingam*, and I wanted Swami to bless those items for me. At first, He said, "You worry too much! You worry about the past, the future, your family, and you worry about your job! I will worry about all those for you; you just worry about the present!" And then He pointed His fingers toward Himself and swept them up and down and He said, "The Omnipresent!"

Then He looked at the items I was carrying, He picked up the quartz egg and said, "This isn't a *shivalingam*. I will make you a real *shivalingam* tomorrow; be ready."

He told me several other things of a personal nature, and then we went back to the outer interview room. He continued seeing others, and when He was finished, He passed vibhuti out to everybody. He carried a small basket full of vibhuti packets, and handed each person a handful of packets! I was the last person leaving the room, and someone had dropped a packet of the vibhuti, and as I reached down to pick it up, He laughed and said, "You want some more?" I turned around and said, "Sure!" So He gave me another big handful of vibhuti packets.

So I left the interview room with everyone else, and later that night, I was wondering: 'What did He mean when He said 'be prepared'? That evening I didn't want to talk to anyone, I just wanted to remember and think about the interview with Swami. Suddenly, there was a knock at my door. I had been staying in a room at someone's home right across the street from the main ashram gate. I opened the door, and a lady with an English accent said, "We just got here from Australia. Can my son stay with you?" I wasn't really that anxious to have a guest that night because I just wanted to remember my interview with Swami earlier that day. However, I quickly thought about her request and said, "Sure! Why not?"

She left to go get her son, and 15 minutes later there was another knock on the door. I had expected her son to be small 10 or 11 years old. Instead, her son was at least 6 and half feet tall and must have weighed over 200 pounds. He was the size of a football player, but he was wearing cowboy boots,

cowboy hat, and cowboy clothes. He was an Australian cowboy! I looked up at him and said, "You're welcome to stay here, come on in." He laughed and said, "No, I'll sleep out here on the porch!"

The next morning, as I was leaving for Darshan, he was still asleep on the porch. I woke him up and said, "We need to go over for Darshan; Swami is coming out very soon." And I left for *darshan*. I was lucky to get a seat on the front line in the *darshan* area, and I was sitting there, anxious about what Swami had meant when He said: 'Be prepared.' I thought that Swami might do something in the *darshan* area, so, I asked someone sitting near me to take a picture if anything happens. At that time, you could carry a camera into the *darshan* area.

As Swami passed by me during *darshan*, He said: "Go!" So I went to the waiting area outside His residence. As I turned the corner to join the other devotees in the waiting area who had been picked for an interview, I saw the Australian cowboy and his mother standing there with the other devotees! Swami had also picked them out for an interview.

Everyone went into the interview room, and Swami said something to them immediately. He called him back for a private interview. When they were out, He motioned for me to come forward and gave Him that quartz egg I had been carrying.

He took the quartz egg, held it up for everyone to see, and asked the group, "What is this?" He held it up so everyone could see it, but nobody answered Him. He then said, "This is glass; it's only glass. I am going to make a real *Shivalingam*." And He put the quartz egg into the palm of His right hand and held His hand, palm up, for everyone to see. He gently blew on it several times without moving His hand. It transformed from a reticulated quartz egg into a solid black *Shivalingam*!

He held it up and said: "This is a real *Shivalingam*." He continued, "It is made of the five elements." He stopped and looked at me asking, "Who does this belong to?" I looked up to Him and said, "To You, Swami." He smiled, nodded yes, and pulled a silk handkerchief out of my pocket. He wrapped the *Shivalingam* in the silk handkerchief and put it in my shirt pocket. He then said to me, "Put it in water every night, and it will help calm your mind." I have been carrying His *Shivalingam* with me for twenty years, and I have put it in water every night. The *Shivalingam* is on loan from Swami. It still belongs to Swami.

Many nights, when I take it from the silk handkerchief to put it in water, I wonder, "Is it still here or did Swami take it back?" I believe He is beyond space and time, and His reach is unlimited. During the last twenty years, I have traveled over 2 million miles on job related trips and vacations, and the *Shivalingam* has always traveled with me. In fact, it is with me today.

GV: Maybe we can take a look at it.

MC: Yes.

(Micheal takes it out and shows it to Prof. Venkataraman)

GV: Can I ask you a question? Was the glass piece that you were having, of the same size or is this bigger?

MC: I have been asked that question before. I can't say if it is the same size or if it's smaller or bigger. I can say that it's about the same size. Swami has unlimited power, and He can create what He wants, when He wants. I believe He can transform His creation and His created as He wills.

GV: Oh yes! You must have heard the story of Jack Hislop's cross?

MC: Yes, I am fortunate to have known him very well.

GV: Oh, you did!

MC: Yes. In fact, he let me hold that cross and examine it closely. Swami reconstituted the wood for the cross from the True Cross on which Christ was crucified. It had dissolved into its basic elements, and Swami pulled the dissolved elements back together to make the cross He gave to Jack.

GV: Since you mentioned about the *Shivalingam* and your pocket, would you mind if I narrate a short story?

MC: Please do!

GV: This happened in the early nineties – I don't remember the year – during the Summer Course. In those days, we used to have Summer Showers in the month of May – just before the college re-opened when the boys would get orientation on spirituality and the highlight was a Discourse by Swami in the evenings. And He waved His hand and produced a *lingam*. And then, later on, He gave it to the Vice Chancellor, Mr. Sampat, and said: "Be very careful; don't lose it. It's very precious." He wrapped it in a piece of paper and He then put it in his pocket. Then He said: "Come on, let's go for a drive."

Normally, what He used to do was He would get into the car and go in the opposite direction of the traffic! The traffic would go towards Bangalore and He would go away, so that the crowd melts and then He would go back to the ashram.

The Discourse was in the College Auditorium. He got into the car and Professor Sampat was sitting in the front, next to the driver and Swami was sitting at the back. After they went for some distance, He said, "Sampat! I gave you a *lingam*, now I want you to give it back to Me." And Professor Sampat put his hand in his pocket and he couldn't find it! And he began to sweat like anything!

MC: Oh!

GV: He was muttering and stuttering; he didn't know what to do! Swami said: "I want the *lingam* back! I told you; didn't you hear Me?" And he said, "I am trying to get that Swami!" Swami said: "What do you mean you are trying to get that? You have to just pull it out of your pocket and give it to Me!" Then he said, "Swami, I think it might have fallen down in the car." And he began to look on the floor of the car and Swami said, "You are very careless! I told you it was very precious; what on earth is going on? Why did I make you the Vice-Chancellor?" Of course He was just pulling his leg! And Sampat was just panic-stricken! He wished he was probably at the end of the world somewhere – the North Pole or the South Pole!

Then Swami said, "Don't worry! It is too precious to be with you; so I have already taken it away from you!" This man finally came back to normal! So this has happened; sometimes He doesn't want it to be with a human, sometimes He just allows them to look and not touch. So there have been various such instances.

MC: Yes

GV: Sometimes He gives it away; but with regard to the *lingam*, I have heard many people being given the same instruction – do oblations with water to it, and then drink that water. There is an old student of ours - alumna of the Anantapur College - she is the daughter of a Doctor from Sri Lanka who works in our Hospital here. She studied many years ago, got married to another Sri Lankan and they both settled in New Zealand, because now he works for the United Nations and they are in Cypress.

I have been to their house in New Zealand, and Swami had given her a *lingam* like this. She used to meditate and pour water over it and drink it. Her husband had a colleague who was a New Zealander, a Kiwi, who had some incurable disease. He tried everything and nothing worked and he was in frightening pain. He said, "Look! I don't know what to do! I want to commit suicide!" or something like that; he was in a real desperate state.

Then this man said, "If you have tried everything; I suggest one more thing. Are you willing to try it?" "I am ready for anything! I am desperate!" He replied. But this man again said, "You must have faith." "What's that?" He said. Then this man said, "I will give you some water everyday, you have to drink it." He said, "Okay, I will try." And within a week or few days, that fellow's pain began to go down and pretty soon he got cured - because he was willing to have faith. So there are many such stories.

MC: That's wonderful!

GV: Have you had any sort of out-of-the-ordinary experiences on account of this *lingam* that has saved you from any calamity?

MC: Well, probably many times I have been saved.

GV: Is that right? I want you to share at least one experience.

MC: I have carried this *lingam* with me wherever I have traveled, and I have traveled a lot as I mentioned. As a result of so much traveling, I am exposed to a lot of unstable situations and I have come through those situations with flying colours!

GV: You mean, while traveling with the Navy?

MC: In my travel with the Navy and in my travel as a healthcare professional with the company I worked for. When I left the Navy, I was recruited by a company to help manage some of their large healthcare projects. One of the projects was to create a large hospital information system which has become one of the largest hospitals information systems in the world today.

As a result of my working in the hospital automation business, I traveled around the world, briefing some Ministries of Health about the value of moving from manual, paper-based medical records to automated electronic medical records. In the process of traveling a lot, one goes through many airports catching connecting flights, and once when I was traveling through the Frankfurt airport, the German Police created a barricade in the middle of the airport. The police searched everyone and all the possessions they were carrying. As one of the policemen was patting me down, he noticed the small pouch I was wearing around my neck. He said, "Let's see what that is?" So I took the pouch out slowly and I said, "Please don't touch!" I took the *Shivalingam* out, held it up, and he squinted his eyes, looking at it closely. Satisfied that it was safe, he said, "Okay." So I put it back in the silk handkerchief, kissed it, and touched it to my forehead. He laughed and exclaimed, "Oh! A good luck charm!"

Swami has saved me, and He has saved all of us before on many occasions. An example is the experience my wife and daughter-in-law had during their recent trip here (to Puttaparthi) a week ago. During their trip, when they were in Heathrow Airport just last week, there was a bomb scare and the authorities closed the airport. The authorities evacuated about 3,000 people, including my wife and daughter-in-law from the airport terminal to the airport parking lot. They announced that all the flights to Europe had been cancelled, and all the long haul flights had also been cancelled. My wife and daughter-in-law started to worry that they might not be able continue their trip to Bangalore. The authorities said that only those passengers on flights that were announced could return to the airport. They also learned that their flight to Bangalore had not been cancelled. They had been listening very closely for the announcement of their flight for several hours.

As they waited outside in the airport parking lot, it started to rain. The stranded passengers started to move closer and closer to the front door of the Airport hoping to go inside and subsequently blocking the doors for all other passengers.

As my wife and daughter-in-law were waiting, a man walked up to them and asked, "Are you ladies going to Bangalore?"

GV: Was this man an Indian?

MC: No, he wasn't, and Carol, my wife, told me his name was Andy. They answered him, "Yes, we're going to Bangalore." As I mentioned, they had been listening very closely for any announcement concerning their flight – they had heard nothing. However, Andy said, "I'm going to Bangalore too, and your flight was just announced! You need to go back into the terminal and go through security."

He then helped guide them up through the packed mass of people to the front door of the terminal. As they entered the terminal, they turned around to thank him, and he had disappeared! They looked for him on the plane to Bangalore when they got on board; he was not on the plane; he didn't fly to Bangalore.

GV: Andy's job had been done!

MC: Yes, that's what I was thinking – Andy? I think he really said 'Handy'! This definitely was Swami's doing! Thank you, Swami! These miracles happen in our daily lives, and most of the time we take it for granted! Many times in our lives, someone has unexpectedly helped us, and I think that many times, Swami has prompted that to happen. To tell you the truth; many times I think that it is Swami who is actually doing the helping!

GV: No question about it! He always says I come in so many Forms.

MC: Yes!

GV: I am sure you have read the famous story of Tolstoy – 'Martin the Cobbler'. Have you read that?

MC: No.

GV: It was one of my favourite stories. It's about a Russian cobbler; and it is a cold wintry day, the previous night he had a vision. Christ says: "Martin, tomorrow I will come." So he is all very anxious to welcome Christ. The first thing that happens after he gets up in the morning is that a little later, a young boy comes – hungry and cold. He gives him some tea and some bread. Sometime later, a young lady comes – cold and shivering with a small baby. He accommodates them, makes them sit near the stove, and pours out some tea and something else for the kid.

Later on, an old man comes. Again, he plays the host. But he is very disappointed. When he closes the door at night and he is preparing to go to bed, he goes near the altar and says, "Lord, I was expecting You so eagerly! I was waiting for You! Why didn't You come?" He hears a voice that says: "Martin! Martin! I came three times! You didn't recognize Me?"

So, the Lord does come in many different ways; there is no question about it! It is a beautiful story and it conveys the same truth that Lord comes in many Forms; but we don't recognize it.

MC: Yes, yes, it really is true!

GV: I now want to ask you a couple of quick questions, before I let you go - as they say in American shows. The first question is: Did you have any difficulty in reconciling Swami with all your scientific background? Because you know, your background trains you for a certain point of view; especially if you come from hard-core physics, which I have also done.

MC: Yes. Well, let me back-step a little bit to my physics training then.

GV: Sure!

MC: Swami helped prepare me for things a bit out of the ordinary from a scientific perspective. When I was a graduate student in physics, I worked on an advanced degree experimental physics. I built most of my experimental equipment, and I built my own high vacuum glassware. I really liked experimental physics. One afternoon my major professor came and told me he had a graduate student coming from China who would be working on her Master's degree and he wanted me to help her set up her lab equipment for the experiment.

I agreed to help, and subsequently, I met with her to learn what she would need help with. Up to that point in my scientific career, if anyone tried to convince me of the possibility of telepathy, ghosts, telekinesis, or other paranormal subjects, I would start to doubt their own credibility. I would think, 'Maybe they are not that normal!'

During our meeting, the graduate student from China said, "I want to prove that plants have feelings." At the time, as a pure scientist, you can imagine how that struck me.

GV: You thought she had gone bananas?

MC: Yes! I thought: 'What am I getting into? How did he accept her as a Master's degree student?' In spite of my doubts, I agreed to help her set up her experiment. I hooked up some sensory equipment to the root systems of her plants, and I showed her how to operate the equipment.

At that time, I was completing my Ph.D. in experimental physics, and I worked every night in the lab collecting data and writing my dissertation. While working in the lab late one night, about two weeks after meeting the Master's degree student from China, I wondered how she was getting on with her experiment. I went down to her lab and no one was there. I just turned on the equipment, and I stood on the other side of the room, away from the plants. Silently, I thought 'Let's see if they have any feelings or emotions.' So I just thought strongly, 'I'm going to rip you out of those pots, set you on fire, and

throw you out of the window.’ Immediately, the experimental equipment readings peaked. Many were suddenly oscillating at their extremes! I was very startled. So I thought: ‘I wonder if I can repeat this.’

Once again, I strongly threatened the plants again (to rip apart, burn, and throw away). However, the meter readings were much lower than before. I tried again, and this time, the meter readings did not change.

Now I was asking myself, ‘I wonder if they realize I was bluffing?’ This experience made me start considering that there must be something beyond the purely physical.

GV: Have you heard about these experiments of Robert Jahn in Princeton?

MC: Yes

GV: Robert Jahn did quantitative experiments. He was a professor of Aeronautical Engineering. And one of his colleagues was going out on vacation or something. And he said, “You take care of my graduate student.” And Jahn agreed to do so. It was something to do with telekinetic experiments, where you have a machine and you try to influence the machine with your mind. ‘Oh machine, behave like this!’

MC: Hmm!

GV: He thought that was nuts! But he had given his word, so he helped that student with the equipment and things like that. He was a good Engineer. Then, after a while, the students showed results that he was not prepared to believe; but anyway, he told him: “Analyze it like this...test for statistical repeatability” and so on...

Then he thought: ‘Let me give it a try.’ And he had a random number generator which would give a normal distribution. And then he had volunteers to go and sort of focus on the machine and say: ‘No, you don’t behave randomly; you don’t behave randomly.’ Or something like that and they began to give distributions that were away from the normal random Gaussian distribution. And then he said, “This can’t be true! I don’t believe this.” And so he tightened his controls and so on.

Ultimately he ended up setting up a whole laboratory and spending two years and he even wrote the ‘Quantum Theory of Consciousness’ papers on that. He was a Princeton man, now he is pretty old. But he published some of these in the Proceedings of the IEEE which is a pure science journal. Of course, many people said that it is junk science. But you know, he was a thoroughbred Princeton Professor, not to be sneered at. So I think people who didn’t want to believe him, dismissed him.

I am reminded of Dr. Krucoff who was from Durham Medical Center and who had come to Swami. He did some experiments on patients; of course, it was with controls and all that. And one set of patients would be prayed for, in

different places – in Jerusalem, in some Buddhist monastery in Tibet, and some Muslim group in Turkey or something like that, and some group in Washington and so on. And they got cured better than another group.

So, the long and short of it is, there is a possibility of this telepathic thing. You have heard Hislop describe his experience anytime? The sari's crying?

MC: Oh yes, yes!

GV: You heard that. So that was an extreme case which Swami enacted just to make Hislop realize that even inanimate matter has a bit of consciousness; it is not completely free. But, talking of inert matter and everything else, that is born of inert matter coming from consciousness, the most powerful statement I read was of George Wald who got a Nobel prize for medicines for his investigations with the eye – something to do with the way the eye works and so forth.

And he said: "As a scientist, I hate to say it, but I got to admit that matter is mind stuff, and human being is the ultimate avatar of the mind stuff because that's where the consciousness feeling blooms." I don't remember the exact words. But that was a sort of a reluctant acknowledgement by Howard Don. He says: "You got to admit it, and all those things, coupled with the reading of the Bhagavad Gita; it did convince me that if you go back far enough, you will get to the Primordial Source of Energy which is the Energy of Consciousness."

And it's rather interesting that Freeman Dyson, whom you must have heard of, did all this fabulous work in Quantum Electro Dynamics and then of course, he sold his soul to the devil as he described it. He worked in Los Alamos making the hydrogen bombs. He, as a McArthur fellow, wrote several papers in the Reviews of Modern Physics on: 'Life without flesh and blood' - consciousness existing all by itself on the Universe, that is, when the planets become too hostile to support life of this form, and so on; it is very serious stuff. Of course, he does a lot of calculations and all that.

So when I read all that and the fact that Schrödinger read Vedanta and believed in the *Atma*, I felt that there is something much beyond what we normally deal with and it is too immature to be skeptical about these things.

MC: Yes, I definitely have come to believe in the same thing that if we follow Swami's teachings, we can experience our spirituality more.

GV: What aspect of Swami's teachings appeals to you most?

MC: To love Him above all, and to love our fellow man as our self; these are the most meaningful.

GV: There are lots of people who don't believe that love is going to work. This is an age of violence, you see violence everywhere – violence is the only answer.

MC: If you look at the results, you will see that that's not true – violence begets violence.

GV: Supposing somebody asks you: "Come on, don't tell me that you can transform people with love!" What would your reply be?

MC: Well, I would say: "That was hearsay information; you haven't tried it to see if it works."

GV: Do you know of any example where love has triumphed over reasonably at least?

MC: Well, Gandhi – non-violence and love!

GV: No, anybody you know from a little personal experience? Has Hislop or Sandweiss or Hal Honig or anybody else told you of any experience?

MC: I know a story of a man I was talking to recently - Dr. Upadhyia.

GV: He is an Ophthalmologist in UK.

MC: Yes. He was saying that he had gone to Bosnia. And while he was there, they had trucks full of medical and other supplies they needed to get to the refugee camps to save lives. But the problem was that in order to get the trucks to the camps, they had to drive through a very hostile territory. There was a high probability that the driver and the truck would not make it. They couldn't get anyone to volunteer to drive the trucks.

One day, he was asked to see someone who wanted to end his life. This person came to Dr. Upadhyia as a patient. He said that he was a wealthy man but he was very unhappy. He was upset and was going to commit suicide. He said that there was no God, and there was no reason to live. Dr. Upadhyia thought for a moment, and then asked him, "Could you do me a favour and put off taking your life for thirty days?"

The man said, "What do you mean?" Dr. Upadhyia continued, "Well, we have a job that's very dangerous, and there's a strong likelihood that you could become injured or killed while doing the job. The job involves driving medical supplies and other supplies to people in need of help. We can't get anyone to take the equipment and the supplies."

The man said, "Yes, I will do that. I will drive the supplies." So, he got into the truck, took off, made it to the villages, and started distributing the supplies. The recipients of the supplies were overwhelmed with joy because of his arrival and they showered him with their gratitude and love!

This experience transformed him! He changed from someone who was ready to end his life into a loving, caring person who practices active love, two hands selflessly serving those in need. He continues to carry needed supplies all over that country into and through hostile territories. He has

became very well-known by the authorities, and he is the one man who can go anywhere in that country.

GV: You mean, he keeps on doing it.

MC: Yes, he keeps on doing it and the people in charge, even though they disagree with each other, see the need to help their own and to allow him to come and do his work. I think it's the expression of the love of those people to him that transformed him. I believe the same thing can happen too when you have an outpouring of love. That love transforms whoever you are interacting with.

GV: But this is a very interesting thing. A man, who wanted to end his life, put it off, took to loving service, and has changed his life.

MC: Yes.

GV: That's a very striking example. I wish we could get more people to know about these things and turn away from desperation to something more constructive and positive, and if more people become oriented towards positive work, and positive thinking and they connect, then there can be a groundswell and that can produce a change. So that's a very nice thing to hear.

MC: And you know, it's just as Swami teaches - desires result in frustration and anger.

GV: That's absolutely true.

MC: And the satisfying of desires never brings true happiness – especially in the material world. In my experience, the more that I get, the harder it is for me to keep everything repaired.

GV: That's true!

MC: Like Swami said, "The lighter the luggage, the more pleasant the trip." So, I am trying to do that, to lead a simple life. It's a lot happier life.

GV: Once I went with Swami to Bombay. And the host gave all of us a small brief-case like thing. And Swami handed it out to all the people in the party and there were about 6 or 7 of us; I was one of them and I looked at Swami and said, "Swami, You say less luggage, and You are giving me luggage!" He said, "I didn't mean this kind of luggage!" Because He wanted to get rid of it, He gave it to me! So He said I didn't mean this luggage. That was a good one!

So, I would like to thank you, I have kept you here for more than an hour almost. It was a pleasure. Your son is missing but next time we will have all three of you.

MC: He attended Summer Showers in '95, he has been an active young adult, and he will have a lot to talk about it.

GV: Yes, we will take a shot at you – not with the guns, but with the cameras, not just the microphone – all three of you. You said you wanted to prepare, you have 6-7 months ahead to prepare with notes and get ready for a stiff examination.

MC: I will do that! Thanks for the invitation; it was a pleasure being here.

GV: No, it was my pleasure. Are you going on Wednesday?

MC: Yes.

GV: Well, have a nice trip back home, and thanks for spending some time with us.

MC: Thank you and we look forward to seeing you when we come back here for Christmas!

GV: Sure, Thank you. Sairam!

MC: Sairam.

GET INSPIRED

IT'S ATTITUDE, ULTIMATELY

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the great philosopher and former President of India, made his first visit to the United States when John F. Kennedy was the President. The weather was dark and stormy in Washington and when Dr. Radhakrishnan alighted from the plane, it began to pour cats and dogs, as the expression goes.

The young American President greeted his Indian counterpart with a warm handshake and a smile. "I'm so sorry we have such bad weather during your visit," he remarked courteously. The philosopher-statesman smiled. "We can't change bad things, Mr. President," he observed. "But we can change our attitude to them."

A few years ago I was in Delhi, I was invited by Doordarshan to visit their studios. There I met a wonderful man. He had lost both his arms in an accident. But he had a positive attitude. He trained his feet so that he could take up the job of composing in a press. With a smile on his face and a feeling of joy, he said, "I earn Rs. 500 a month. I am not a burden on anyone."

There was another man whom I met in Pune. He was sitting by the wayside, and he had no legs, only stumps beneath his hips.

"What happened to you?" I asked him.

"Nothing!" he replied. "I was born this way."

"May I ask, who takes care of you, my friend?" I enquired.

"My mother - and above all, God."

"Do you find it difficult, inconvenient to move about?"

"Do you find it difficult and inconvenient that you don't have wings?" he asked me. "Don't you think it would be far better if you could fly on your own, rather than wait to catch a plane?"

"Life is a matter of habit," he added. "If you start complaining, there is so much to complain about. It is the attitude that counts."

EAST AND WEST JULY 2005

A WINNING SMILE

This story concerns the legendary sage Mulla Nasruddin, whose humorous tales contain a delightful down to earth wisdom which cross cultures and centuries. Many different middle-eastern regions claim him to be their own, where the ever popular Nasruddin is often shown besting his worldly superiors. As in the following anecdote, he somehow always manages to score the winning point.

The Sultan of Arabia had grown very fond of Mulla Nasruddin and often took him along on his travels. Once, while on a journey, the royal caravan approached a small nondescript town in the desert.

On a whim, the Sultan said to the Mulla, "I wonder if people would know me in this small place. Let us stop my entourage here and enter the town on foot, and then we'll see if they can recognize me."

Accordingly, they dismounted and walked down the main road of the dusty town. The Sultan was surprised to see that many people smiled at Nasruddin, but ignored him completely.

Irritated and a trifle angry, he said, "I see that the people here know you but they don't know me!"

"They don't know me either, Your Excellency!" replied the Mulla, innocently.

"Then why did they only smile at you?" questioned the Sultan.

"Because I smiled at them." said Nasruddin, smiling.

This simple tale beautifully portrays how the simplicity of a childlike smile can speak more than worldly finery and authority. Often we may believe in the power of our intelligence, or our ability to impress or argue a point, but fundamentally when we express the five human values as 'love in action' we will more often than not receive a response from people's hearts and create little miracles of love. Sometimes the silent strength hidden in our soul can blossom forth in a simple smile – try it!

DISSOLVING THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE

Once a young man came to a revered teacher, who was seated under a tree near a beautiful lake, and asked for the solution for his unhappiness. After some minutes of conversation the old master kindly instructed the visitor to put a handful of salt in a glass of water and then to drink a few mouthfuls.

"How does it taste?" the teacher asked. "Awful," said the apprentice after he had spat out the revolting liquid a few paces away. The teacher chuckled and then asked the young man to take another handful of salt and put it in the lake. The two walked in silence to the nearby lake and when the youngster swirled his handful of salt into the lake, the old man told him, "Now drink from the lake."

As the water dripped down the young man's chin, the master asked him again, "How does it taste?" "Good!" he replied. "Do you taste the salt?" asked the Master. "No," said the young man. The Master sat beside the troubled youth, took his hands, and said,

"The pain of life is pure salt; no more, no less. The amount of pain in life remains the same, exactly the same. But the level of 'pain we taste' depends on the container we put it into. So when you are in pain, the only thing you can do is to enlarge your sense of things. Stop being a glass. Become a lake.

And you can become a lake when you broaden your outlook; when you stop looking only at yourself and your own miseries. Look at life as a whole and the many things without which you would not be what you are today – your friends, family, hobbies, nature around you.

When you are confronted with a problem, you see only the problem and ruminate over it endlessly which only makes the situation more tragic. Think of previous instances when things were better. Look at all the blessings that God has filled your life with about which you never give a thought.

Never compare yourself negatively with others. You are a unique person and if you have the faith, God will provide what you need. When you have a difficulty in your life, put it in front of GOD - then it will surely lessen. Do not put it in front of yourself – as you cannot see beyond it.

God is Infinite. Tap this source, with confidence.

The young man left, and his viewpoint on his problems had totally changed. As the saying goes:

Tell your problems how big your God is.

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

A QUIZ ON SWAMI'S DIVINE NEW YEAR DISCOURSES

1. In His 1961 New Year Discourse, how did Swami bless us to start the New Year: "Today, you are celebrating the arrival of a New Year with a new name, a name that you will use to identify this year for the twelve coming months. But remember, it is not the Year alone that is new once in 365 days. Every day is new, every hour and minute, every second is new. Do not celebrate only the New Year Day in _____; celebrate every second in _____.

- A. Joy
- B. Silence
- C. Service
- D. Meditation

2. In His 1964 New Year Discourse, Swami said: "There are as many New Year Days as there are days in the year; many communities and countries have their own distinct calendars. It is not the first of January that is unique. The year is just a name to indicate a number of months; the month, a number of days; a day, to indicate a number of hours; the hour is a period of time counted in minutes, and the minute is a name for sixty seconds. Each second is new. It is a gift, a chance, an opportunity, a thing to be celebrated, to be used for _____"

- A. Meditation
- B. Your education
- C. Your uplift
- D. Your self-control

3. In His 1967 New Year Discourse, Swami advised us by saying: "The year becomes new; the day becomes holy, when you sanctify it by *sadhana*, not otherwise. *Sadhana* can grow only in a field fertilized by _____."

- A. Waking up early.
- B. Controlling of desires.
- C. Reading Holy Scriptures.
- D. Love

4. In His 1971 New Year Discourse, Swami taught us: "Every year, man has been bidding farewell to the old year and giving welcome to the New Year; this has been going on since the history of man began. But, what is the net result? Only despair and distress, anxiety and insane fear! This is an occasion

to inquire and discover why it has been so. How then can man achieve peace? Only through Love! *Shaanthi* (peace) is the fruit of the tree of life; without it, the tree is a barren stump. It has no value or validity.

The fruit is encased in a bitter skin, you must have noticed, so that the sweet juice may be preserved and guarded against marauders; you have to remove the skin, before tasting the sweetness within, and strengthening yourself. The thick rind is symbolic of _____”

- A. The Ego.
- B. The six evil passions.
- C. Our inert laziness.
- D. Our ignorance.

5. In His 1983 New Year's Eve Discourse, Swami showed us the means to realize the Divine: "Every second is a new moment in your life. Do not wait for a whole year to celebrate the New Year and make New Year resolutions. Utilize every second to purify your heart and fill it with love. You will then realize that God is yours and you are with love. _____ is the means to realize the Divine."

- A. Chanting the Lord's Name repeatedly.
- B. Fasting regularly.
- C. True devotion.
- D. Attending Bhajans regularly.

6. On this New Year day, you should make a resolve that you will start every day with love, spend the day with love, fill the day with love, and end the day with love. There should be no difference of caste, creed, colour, religion or nationality. Love knows no distinction of any kind. You must wish everyone _____”

- A. To be happy.
- B. To attain good health.
- C. To be wise.
- D. To be blessed with spiritual progress.

7. In His 1996 New Year Discourse, Swami enlightened us by stating: "The New Year comes regularly year after year. But do you have any new thoughts? You do not shed your old, mistaken ideas. They should be given up, yielding place to new, sacred and sublime thoughts. Of what use is it to celebrate New Year days if you do not change your old ways of thinking and

behaving? Make proper use of _____ which is both precious and sacred.”

- A. Intelligence
- B. Discrimination
- C. Time
- D. Spiritual Endeavour

8. In His 1998 New Year Discourse, Swami declared: “The New Year or a new month does not bring with it any new joy or sorrow. Every second is new, because it heralds the march of time...It is only when every moment is cherished as new, will the New Year become new. The sacred way in which every moment is spent will determine the fruitfulness of the year. If you wish to lead a sacred life and have sacred experiences, you must engage yourself in _____.”

- A. Sacred Thoughts
- B. Sacred Feelings
- C. Sacred Actions
- D. Sacred Talks

9. In His 2000 New Year Discourse, Swami taught us by saying: “Give up selfishness and work for the unity of your country. Pray for the welfare of all and lead an ideal life. Human life is not gifted to you to hanker after worldly objects. You have to set an ideal to the world. What is the ideal that you have to set? You must help all to your utmost capacity. The best way to love God is _____.”

- A. Help always.
- B. Be good and see good.
- C. Follow the Master; Face the Devil; Fight to the End; and Finish the Goal.
- D. Love All, Serve All.

10. In His 2001 New Year Discourse, Swami explained: “Every man expects the New Year to confer on him peace, happiness and prosperity. New Year does not bring happiness or sorrow with it. Yesterday was same as today and tomorrow will be same as today. Days are the same, but one experiences either pleasure or pain depending on _____.”

- A. One's own actions.
- B. One's emotional outlook in life.
- C. One's physical and mental capacity.
- D. One's spiritual relationship with God.

ANSWERS:

1A

Swami went on to declare: "Do not celebrate only the New Year Day in Joy; celebrate every second in Joy. Start from today, not that today is a New Year - there are so many New Years celebrated as such by one or the other community that every day is a New Year to some one set of people - but because it is today and the matter brooks no delay, start from today a new chapter in your life, the chapter of *Japam* (recitation of holy name) and *Dhyaanam* (meditation), *Japa-sahitha dhyaanam* (recitation-oriented meditation) or *Dhyaana-sahitha japam* (meditation-oriented recitation). In the *Thretha Yuga*, the Name was *Seethaaraama*; in the *Dwaapara Yuga*, it was *Raadheshyaama*; in this *Kali Yuga*, it is *Sarvanaama*, that is to say, all Names of the Lord; you can select any one that appeals to you. The New Year is called, *Plava* or Boat. Make it a boat to cross the Sea of *Samsaara* (worldly life). That is My Blessing to you this day."

2C

Swami continued: "It is a gift, a chance, an opportunity, a thing to be celebrated, to be used for your uplift. That is to say, each second is a fresh chance given to you for training the mind, refining the intellect, purifying the emotions, strengthening the will, for getting confirmed in the conviction that you are the deathless *Aathma* (Self, the Infinite Consciousness)."

3D

Swami reminds us: "*Sadhana* can grow only in a field fertilized by Love. Love or *Prema* is the *sine qua non* of *bhakthi* (devotion to God). The love you have towards material objects, name, fame, wife and children, etc., should be sanctified by being subsumed by the more overpowering Love of God."

4B

Swami explains this comparison: "The thick rind is symbolic of the six evil passions that encase the loving heart of man: lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and hate. Those who can remove the rind and contact the sweetness within, through hard consistent discipline attain the peace we all desire; that peace is everlasting, unchanging, overwhelming."

5C

Swami said: "True devotion is the means to realize the Divine. Devotion means love of God without any desire for reward. Such devotion can be developed only through good conduct. There can be no devotion without righteousness. Purity of mind is an essential for enjoying Divine Bliss as purity of body is essential for bodily health."

6A

Swami encourages us with: "You must wish everyone to be happy. Fill the heart with love. The country will prosper and the world will prosper and everyone will be happy."

7C

Swami exhorted us: "Make proper use of time which is both precious and sacred. Do not indulge in useless gossip. Develop good qualities like compassion, love and sympathy. Act as your own monitor and correct yourself by self-punishment. By a simple method you can control your wandering mind or your anger. Moreover, place your reliance on God."

8C

Swami further states: "If you wish to lead a sacred life and have sacred experiences, you must engage yourself in sacred actions. The good and evil in the world can be changed only by the change in men's actions. Transformation of society must start with transformation of individuals."

9D

Swami uplifted us by saying: "The best way to love God is to love all and serve all. Adopting service and love as your ideals, you must start a new life from this moment - this is My blessing and benediction to you."

10A

Swami tells us clearly: "Days are the same, but one experiences either pleasure or pain depending on one's own actions. Meritorious deeds will not confer misery and sinful deeds cannot give happiness. One is bound to face the consequences of one's actions. But one treats pleasure and pain alike when one becomes the recipient of God's grace. God's grace destroys mountains of sins and confers peace. But due to the impact of Kali Age, man has lost faith in God. He is after money and power. How can such a man attain Divinity? Man can rise from the level of the human to the Divine only by practicing human values. So, man should cultivate human values."

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

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

1. Shinto is a native religion of Japan and was once its state religion. Shinto is commonly translated as "the Way of the Gods." The Shinto New Year's Day, is called 'Gantan Sai'. Starting on January 1, for how many days does their celebration last?

- A. 1 day
- B. 2 days
- C. 5 days
- D. 7 days

2. On January 5, Sikhs celebrate the birth of the 10th and last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh who is remembered for having transformed the Sikh faith by instituting the *panj kakke*, or five K's - five physical symbols that Sikh's must wear, namely: *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kanga* (small comb), *Kara* (circular heavy metal bracelet), *Kirpan* (ceremonial dagger) and *Kacha* (long underwear), thereby establishing the order of the *Khalsa*.

What does the word *khalsa* mean?

- A. Strong
- B. Courageous
- C. Pure
- D. Desireless

3. The term 'Epiphany' is derived from the Greek term 'epiphaneia' which implies manifestation or appearance. Along with Easter and Christmas, it is one of the major Christian celebrations. This holy day is usually celebrated on January 6, to mark the presentation of the newborn Jesus to the Magi or the Three Wise Men - Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. What is this feast also known as?

- A. Second Christmas Day
- B. Three Kings' Day
- C. Manifestation Day
- D. Magi Day

4. In most Islamic countries, on January 10, 'Al Hijra', the Islamic New Year, is celebrated on the first day of 'Muharram', the month in which Prophet

_____ emigrated from Mecca to Medina. The holiday is also known simply as Muharram. Which one of these Prophets was he?

- A. Adam
- B. Muhammad
- C. Ibrahim
- D. Yusuf

5. 'Makar Sankranti' is the first Hindu festival of the solar calendar year, falling around January 14. 'Makar' means Capricorn and 'Sankranti' is the transition from one place to another place. Transition of the Sun from Sagittarius to Capricorn during the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere (Uttarayana) is known as Makar Sankranti.

In His Discourses, Swami has alluded to the word 'Sankranti' and said that 'kranti' means _____?

- A. Revolution
- B. New
- C. Peace
- D. Change

6. January 21 is observed as World Religion Day. This day is observed on the Third Sunday in January each year, in all Continents, from major cities to the most rural of localities. World Religion Day events help foster interfaith understanding and harmony.

Which major Religion started this celebration?

- A. Bahá'í
- B. Buddhist
- C. Sikh
- D. Jain

7. Wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates - these seven foods are customarily eaten on the Jewish festival of 'Tu B'Shevat'. In the Hebrew Bible, the Torah, they are enumerated as being special products of the Land of Israel and they are considered more important than other fruits, and a special blessing is recited after eating them.

Hence, January 22 is the Jewish New Year for _____.

- A. Seeds
 - B. Flowers
 - C. Fruits
 - D. Trees
-

8. Buddhists celebrate many different holidays throughout the year. The events and dates vary depending on the particular country. In Mahayana Buddhist countries - Tibet, China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Nepal - on which day is the Buddhist New Year celebrated?

- A. The first full moon of the year.
 - B. New moon day.
 - C. The last day of January.
 - D. The first day of January.
-

9. Every year, on 30 January, thousands of Zoroastrians in Iran and other countries celebrate the religious feast of 'Sadeh' or 'Jashn-e Sadeh', by burning firewood in an open space to signify the coming of spring. On this day a huge holy bonfire is lit in the street, with a flame from the fire temple, and there is chanting from sacred texts. 'Sadeh' in Persian means "hundred" and refers to one hundred days and nights left to the beginning of the New Year. For how long is this fire kept burning?

- A. Until it burns itself out.
 - B. All night.
 - C. For 100 days.
 - D. All year round.
-

10. The word 'Guru' in Sanskrit means teacher, honoured person, religious person or saint. Sikhism though, has a very specific definition of the word 'Guru'. It means the descent of Divine guidance to mankind provided through ten Enlightened Masters. This honour of being called a Sikh Guru applies only to the ten Gurus who founded the religion.

On January 31, the Birth of Guru Har Rai is celebrated. While Guru Nanak is the first Sikh Guru, which is Guru Har Rai's position?

- A. 3rd
- B. 5th
- C. 7th
- D. 9th

ANSWERS:

1D

The Shinto New Year's festival lasts seven days and is marked by a three-day holiday in Japan. People traditionally celebrate the occasion by worshipping at shrines, mainly at midnight, where they give thanks to spirits or shrine deities, known as kami for the blessings of the previous year and pray for safety, health, prosperity and spiritual renewal in the coming year. The first shrine or temple visit of the year is called Hatsumoude. During the seven days of the holiday, people visit one another's homes to offer good wishes for the New Year.

2C

The word "Khalsa" has several meanings. The most common is "Pure." Khalsa is the highest, and the most glorified state of a Sikh, who has attained spiritual perfection. The term 'Khalsa Panth' is used to indicate a fellowship of Sikhs who are adherent to the principles taught by the Ten Sikh Masters.

The definition of Khalsa in the words of The Tenth Master is: "Day and night, he worships the Living Light. He does not entertain any thought of duality. Perfect Love and perfect conviction adorn his personality. How can he follow fasting (rituals) or, even by accident, pray to an idol or a grave? His pilgrimage will be Daan (giving), mercy, self-discipline of tolerance, and self-control. He sees only the One, One God everywhere. Only when The Perfect Light fully illuminates his heart, can you call him Khalsa. Otherwise, he is not Khalsa."

3B

The feast of the Epiphany is celebrated by Christians, on the Twelfth day of Christmas, which commemorates the Revelation of the Divine God to Mankind in the human form, or in the person of Jesus. In Hispanic and the Latin culture, the Epiphany is known as the 'Three Kings' Day'. The Magi, who brought the gifts to the infant Jesus, were the first followers to acknowledge Christ as the Lord. This worship of Christ by the Magi, first indicated that Jesus came for all the people, of all races, of all nations and His work for God would be for the whole world and not be limited to only a few.

4B

Prophet Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca, Arabia. His name means "Highly Praised." He was the last Prophet of the religion of Islam. Unlike the important holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, there are few rituals associated with Islamic New Year. There are no prescribed religious observances. Most Muslims regard the day as a time for reflection on the Hijira and on the year to come and regard this as a good time for 'New Year Resolutions'.

5D

Swami has said that “Kranti” means change. Hence, everyone should change and become happy and blissful. True happiness, He has said, is only in union with God and cannot be found in the temporary and fleeting pleasures of the world. Everlasting bliss emanates from within and He exhorts everyone to find the God within and claim their legacy of bliss.

6A

To address the need for religious unity, World Religion Day was initiated in 1950 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, the U.S. Baha'i governing body, and increasingly by people around the globe. The day is celebrated by hosting interfaith discussions, conferences and other events that foster understanding and communication among the followers of all religions. Through World Religion Day observances, dedicated towards encouraging the leaders and followers of every religion to acknowledge the similarities in each of the sacred Faiths, a unified approach to the changes that confront humanity can be agreed upon and then applied on an ever-expanding scale to permeate the very psyche of mankind, so that we can see the whole earth as a single country and humanity its citizenry.

7D

'Tu B'Shevat' is a time for Jews to focus on "the Tree" - the Tree of Torah and the Tree of our own spiritual growth, and our potential for growth. A lot can be learnt from trees. One thing is patience. A tree, which starts from a tiny seedling, takes many years before it grows tall and produces its delicious fruit. So too, we should try to be patient and know that all good things will eventually 'bear fruit' if we are willing to wait.

Trees reach upward - so too we should always strive to grow. Trees give generously of their fruit - we too should be generous. Trees are sustained by their roots - we should feel connected to and draw from our 'roots' too. Trees can look dead and dormant in the winter, but suddenly blossom in the spring - we should know that even when in our lives we feel like we're dormant and getting nowhere, as long as we try to do good, things will eventually bloom.

8A

Mahayana Buddhist New Year is celebrated on the day of the first full moon in January – which will be January 22 in the year 2007. Most Buddhist holidays are very joyous occasions that focus on the important events in the life of the Buddha - the founder of Buddhism. Typically on a festival day, people go the local temple or monastery and offer food to the monks and take the Five Precepts and listen to a Dharma talk. In the afternoon, they distribute food to the poor to make merit and in the evening perhaps join in a ceremony of circumambulation of a *stupa* three times as a sign of respect to the *Buddha*,

Dhamma, and *Sangha*. The day concludes with evening chanting of the Buddha's teachings and meditation.

9D

'Sadeh' or 'Jashan-e Sadeh' is an ancient Iranian tradition celebrated 50 days before their New Year 'Nowrouz'. It is a festivity to honor fire and to defeat the forces of darkness, frost, and cold. According to religious beliefs, 'Jashn-e Sadeh' recalls the importance of light, fire and energy; light which comes from God is found in the hearts of His creatures. The fire is kept burning all night. The day after, women go to the fire in the morning, each taking a small portion of the fire back to their homes to make new glowing fire from the "blessed fire" of the temple. This is to spread the blessing of the 'Sadeh' fire to every household in the neighborhood. Whatever is left from the fire would be taken back to the shrine to be placed in one container and kept at the temple until the next year. This way the fire is kept burning all year round. The "eternal fire" also symbolizes the love of homeland which is always alive like a fervent fire in the people's hearts.

10C

The seventh Sikh Guru was Guru Har Rai who was very kind hearted and taught the essential values of Sikhism – such as the need to partake in Seva (selfless service) and Simran (meditation). The Guru in Sikhism is a perfect Prophet or Messenger of God in whom the Light of God shines fully, visibly and completely. Guru is in union with Divine. Thus he ushers the devotees, the seekers of Truth into a spiritual birth. Through him the Glory of the Lord is transmitted to humanity. On account of his Divine prerogatives, the Guru, though human in form, is Divine in Spirit.

THE HEALING TOUCH

HOW GOD BUILT THE LIFE OF A 'LITTLE BUILDER'

By Mr Y Arvind

This is the story of Bikas, the teenage son of a poor farmer from the state of Orissa, for whom life had become a hopeless end, until he came to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Bangalore, just a few weeks ago...

I entered the cardiac post operative recovery ward at the end of a long day, to have a word with the sister in-charge. It was just a minor clarification. I was about to leave the ward when from the corner of my eye I noticed a small green figure standing by the nurses' station. Turning I saw a young lad, his face beaming up with a broad impish smile. Returning his smile I noticed the puckered skin of the sternotomy (incision on the breastbone for heart surgery) scar peeping up from the décolletage of the patient gown.

Turning to the sister I asked, "What is he here for?"

She checked the neat register on the counter and replied, "MVR" (Mitral Value Replacement).

"MVR?" I echoed in surprise. He looked too young for an MVR.

"What is your name? I asked in Hindi.

"Bikas", he replied.

"Can I talk to you for some time?" I continued in Hindi.

He fidgeted uncertainly.

"Which language do you speak?" I asked guessing he was having trouble understanding me.

"Oriya" he replied, then added, "Hindi, *mera uncle...*" (My uncle knows Hindi..) pointing beyond my shoulder.

"Call your uncle," I said slowly in Hindi.

He grinned happily and in a brisk walk that belied his physical condition he sped off to the pre-operative ward.

I returned with my laptop and he excitedly pointed to his uncle. A short dark wiry man offered his salutation with a bow. He had a strong jaw that spoke of determination; dark iris glowed with defiant will, well muscled forearms betrayed an occupation that involved hard work.

Bikas climbed onto his bed and sat cross legged. His uncle stood humbly with his arms folded. I drew a chair and only after I was seated did he sit.

"I would like to write an article about your boy." I said.

"Sir?"

"I would like the world to know about how your boy received a new life in our hospital." I said opening my laptop.

"Yes, yes definitely... The world should know about what good is going on in this Hospital. There are so many more that need the help of hospitals like this." He said enthusiastically.

"Tell me about it." I said settling back into the chair flexing my fingers on the keypad.

16 year old Bikas Ranjan Pradhan was born to late Abhimanyu Pradhan and Draupadi Pradhan. He was in the 10th standard studying at Sahadev Vidhyapeeth Khadagpur, Jajpur District in the North East state of Orissa. His father was the eldest among six brothers and two sisters. For generations they had been living in Khadagpur village, about 60 kilometers from Cuttack, one of the main cities of Orissa.

"I didn't get your name," I interrupted when he stopped.

"Narayan Pradhan", the voice was strong and confident.

"What do you do for a living?"

"I am a farmer, we have four acres and we grow *moong*, *badam*, *dhar*...all seasonal crops. Our land is next to a canal and we have no problem of irrigation." He paused and continued. "Everything seemed fine till he started to fall ill."

We both looked at Bikas.

"When did it start?" I asked softly.

Bikas seemed a healthy young lad who used to play cricket right from the age of five. He started to fall ill frequently and complained of feeling cold. In the millennium year, He was taken to a pediatrician at Cuttack, Dr. Sunil Sen, who diagnosed a cardiac ailment, and referred them to Sri Ramchandra Bhanja Medical College in the same city. Dr. Mrutyunjay Behra, the Head of the Department of Cardiac Sciences confirmed the diagnosis as a rheumatic heart disease (RHD) with Mitral Valve failure. (Mitral Valve is one of the four crucial valves of the heart which control blood flow). So the Mitral valve of Bikas was beyond salvage and the only option left was to replace it. The cost of surgery was Rs 2,00,000, an astronomical sum for the Pradhans.

The boy was put on medical management (cure through definite drugs) and the rest was left to destiny. They returned to the hospital every year for checkup and in the year 2003 they met a Sai Worker who told them of the SSSIHMS at Whitefield, Bangalore. They came for the first time in July 2003 for a check up. Since the boy was too young for valve replacement, he was advised specific medicines which could better his condition till he was old enough for surgery. But in 2006 the condition deteriorated and he was immediately rushed to Cuttack and treated since he could not be moved to Bangalore under his present circumstances. His kidneys began to give way and edema (accumulation of fluid) set in. The family spent 10,000 Rupees on his treatment. It was then that they decided they would come to Bangalore and stay there till the surgery was done – come what may.

Narayan began reeling out the dates, "November 24 we started from our place, November 26 we came to Bangalore, on 27th, we were in the Hospital and were sent for dental check up at St. Johns Medical College Hospital,

Bangalore. There two of Bikas's teeth needed to be filled and a couple of others cleaned and capped. Finally on December 12, he was admitted into the Hospital. His surgery was done on the December 20 and today is his sixth day in the hospital." He paused smiling at his accuracy.

"What brought you only to this hospital, why not another?" I asked, testing the waters carefully.

"We wanted our son back...and we could not afford it elsewhere..." the directness of the reply shook me. Many would cut a religious angle and talk of the will of God...yet others would wax rhapsodic about the greatness of the hospital and Sai mission but this answer was straight on the mark...Bulls eye!

"That's all?"

"That's all."

I loosened up, looked at the boy and switched tracks, "Now that you are back on your feet, how do you feel? What do you want to do with your life?"

His uncle translated, and the boy replied, "Engineer", and added "Civil" as an afterthought.

"What will you build?" The boy merely smiled in reply.

"What will he build?" I jested, looking at Narayan.

I was surprised to see red eyes with unshed tears. Choking back a sob, the man replied, "He is what is now because of God. Baba will decide what he will build. Baba will guide him." The conviction in his voice was infectious. I smiled and all around us the patients smiled and nodded in assent. It was a communed recognition of the invisible hand of God.

"Do you feel relieved and happy after the operation?"

The dam holding emotions in check broke and tears coursed down the oaken cheeks as the joy of relief overcame his forbearance.

"I am very happy", said Narayan, sniffing and wiping his eyes and face. "I am happy that my son has got another life..." tears swallowed the rest of the words. I understood and shared his feeling...life is precious. Very precious, indeed.

"I like this Hospital..." Narayan suddenly continued. My fingers began dancing on the keyboard to keep up with his flow. "The people here are so different. Sevadal, sisters, doctors...I have seen so many hospitals. Back at Cuttack, here at Vydehi, at St. Johns...but the behavior here is different; in fact, totally different. When they perform seva here they do it in the real sense of service. This is the only place I have seen real seva. Elsewhere it is all just duty, a job...but here it is different. I am convinced that the love and friendship that we have experienced here, we will never get anywhere else in this world...not in this lifetime..." his voice was firm and his eyes gazed at me steadily.

"Those are strong words Narayan *bhai*," I said holding his gaze.

A beautiful smile cleaved the strong features and a soft voice replied, "They are strong because they come from my heart".

Silence reigned supreme.

YOUR SAY

Feedback from our readers on the December issue

Feedback on the Cover Story: *The Divine Reality Revealed... The Truth of the Father and the Son.*

Dear H2H,

The interview with Father Charles Ogada is very enlightening and fulfilling. His analysis of how one can be an Instrument of the Divine is brilliant. One important link on "He who sendth me would come again..." is Swami's declaration in person in front of thousands of people during the 1972 Christmas. I had the good fortune to be in the precincts of Prashanthi Nilayam that day. This Declaration of Swami makes an important connection to what Father Charles said in the beginning of his speech - Christmas celebration 2006.

Regards and best wishes,
Indra Deo, Suva, Fiji

Sairam,

I went through the article which I believe will help to serve as an eye opener to bring our Christian brothers into the religion of love thus helping themselves to become better Christians. The whole magazine was truly informative!!

Sathya

Sai Ram,

I just wanted to tell you that there have been many occasions when I have had a question on my mind, thought about it for some time, and within a week or so, there it is! The questions I was thinking about and the answers are right there in the Sai Inspires daily postings.

Most recently, I was wondering if Sai Baba ever spoke about Jesus. Then, there it was: "The Divine Reality Revealed... The Truth of the Father and the Son."

I love reading every day the stories and articles and pictures you post. These are wonderful teachings. In America, it is hard to stay focused with all the materialistic bombardment and negative thoughts blasted upon us each day. This certainly helps and I thank you from my heart.

Wishing you a Happy, Holy and Merry Christmas!

Karen Lonkey

Dear Heart to Heart Team,

Splendid, splendid, splendid article "The Divine Reality Revealed..."
Thank you.

With best wishes,

Brijmohan Thapar

Dear Heart2Heart,

I have just finished reading the Father Charles article and am moved to tears. This is a wonderful expression of the true teachings of Love as taught by Jesus and by Sathya Sai Baba. I will read this again and again. Thank you for helping me through this article and all the other heart-opening-sustaining teachings in this e-journal.

Sai Ram!

Barbara Woolley

Feedback on *Being a Star in His Sky...*

Sai Ram,

The article by Sri Amey Deshpande not only inspires: it loudly declares the glory of our Lord. My heart pains as billions in the world are not fortunate enough to know that God has come down to earth to guide us and protect the entire world from disasters of ignorance.

Ever in service to Lord Sai Baba,

Louis Martin

Sairam brothers @ Radio Sai,

This talk by Mr. A. Deshpandey was very well presented by you all. We listeners can read as well as listen in audio form to his talk which was very educating and heartfelt. Please keep publishing such talks by present or past students and teachers of Swami's University in both audio and printed form. My sincere thanks to you @ Radio Sai for your great work in providing the great message of Bhagawan's love and grace to all of us. Jai Sairam.

M. Mehta, Toronto, Canada

Feedback on *In Quest Of Infinity – Part 11*

Now I better understand the 'airport incident' and why so many that night could not see any thing of particular note. Swami, as Creator, of course sees all universes. Now for the sake of just 1mm, if we could simply invent bifocals.....but no, we must earn that right to see as He sees. Thanks so much for the article.

Tom Elliott.

Feedback on *If You Want To Be Perfect*

Thank you so very much for this article for it addressed a question that I have been struggling with for quite some time.

I have been wondering how does one balance the material and spiritual worlds, i.e., how would I begin to address the apparent conflict in my desires. On the one hand I wanted professional "success" and the trappings that come with it; while on the other hand I really want to pursue a path of Oneness. Your article helped me see there is no real conflict, only illusion. It confirmed my recent realization that by committing to a path of service and Oneness, all I need will be provided. And that while living in the material world, material resources are all around us, I do not have to define my worth or anyone else's by possessions, wealth, or any material thing.

I grew up in a religious framework that said perfection is impossible and that we humans are inherently flawed. But your article confirmed my conclusion that this was a misinterpretation --- that "perfection is all about the optical medium with which we see Reality." Thank you! In fact, all the struggles I have endured have been the result of looking at Life through an optical medium that was not appropriate to living Oneness. I have decided to stop struggling and this article is an excellent explanation of how we can live and flourish apart from the values that pour from illusion.

With Love,

Jacqueline Mosley

Feedback on *From 'God-Forsaken' To God-Blessed*

The ways of the Lord are many and it is not for us to ask why but to do the best in small and big ways when an opportunity presents itself. Thank you very much for sharing with us this great piece of service news. We are thrilled with your courage, patience and conviction.

Sai Ram to you all, Usha & Bala

Sairam,

What a moving article it was - I wept on reading this because we keep cribbing for so many things not knowing that there are fellow countrymen who do not have even the basic necessities of life.

Regards,

Gopalakrishnank

Dear organizer,

Sai Ram. Thanks a lot for covering this wonderful project and giving us opportunity to know about it. It really dwarfs all the other activities done by us all.

Words fail to appreciate the tremendous task accomplished by the youth wing of Andhra. The Sai organization takes up jobs neglected by the people who should be responsible for them! We thank Swami that we could at least read about it.

Sai Ram

The story of the transformation of a 'lost tribe' and the Sai youth who brought it about has to be inspiring even to one who is not a Sai devotee, so what of us who cannot live without thinking of Sai even for a second! To all Sai devotees it is indeed a heart warming confirmation of His Grace and 'leelas'! Yes indeed! He has, is and will be taking care of everything in His creation. What is heart warming is to read about the thoughts of the Sai youth group regarding their own 'inner transformation'.

Please keep us informed of the news of these 'lost people' as well as of the Sai youth activities. With lots of Love for these youths, for their mentors and for the heart2heart team,

Sai Ram,

Shashikant Ambegaokar, Vista, California

This article with all its photographs of the work done by dedicated Sai-volunteers of Andra Pradesh is excellent, amazing and inspiring seva work. Their strong and undaunted faith in Swami's teachings and grace, brought about this amazing miracle of providing a more comfortable life to people who otherwise would have lived without shelter and essential medical aid. May Bhagavan bless all these and others who help society's forgotten and downtrodden people.

Gopal Mehta, Toronto, Canada

Feedback on *The Wonder Years*

This testimony of the young Canadian girl is indeed of great value, and I thank you for the opportunity of reading such life stories of Swami's devotees. It helps me a lot, to hear about people who have been in Swami's physical presence. I certainly am very grateful to Him also, for many are the occasions when I know He is around helping me in many ways.

Where I live, very few people have heard of Swami's presence and work. I am a "lone" believer in these surroundings. Your website is very rich and easy to use. Thank you for your work, bringing news to inspire people far away.

Myriam Barbosa, São Paulo, Brazil

Feedback on *God's Letter*

Sai Ram,

I really have no words to express my feelings after reading that article. I am really thankful to one and all for publishing such a nice article.

In my childhood, I too thought in the same way. But the thing is, I used to write it in my diary and keep it safe because I believe that 'God is always with me.

'Till date I believe the same.

I visited Puttaparthi and White Field and felt very happy. Please do post such articles as they are relaxing for the people like me who work right from morning 9 am to 7 pm.

Thank you for your time.

Madhuri.

General Feedback

Sai Ram,

Thank you for the inspiration and guidance that fills my inbox every day in the form of the Sai Inspires email service. I can without a doubt say that Swami must tailor those messages every day personally for Me, as everyday they seem to answer some question or confusion on my mind.

The Heart2Heart E Journal is beyond words - towards the end of every month I look forward to reading the inspiring articles. Some of them I read over and over again...just wanted to say a big THANK YOU - however I know those words are simply not enough. All I can do is send my gratitude and love...

I also wanted to let you know that in Sydney, we the Youths love the Sunday Special of Sai Inspires - we were actually thinking of having a study circle on the topic covered in one of the latest topics "Do we deserve Swami?" We really do love this service and therefore are wondering if it would be possible to have them more regularly.

Also H2H has inspired us so much that in Sydney we were motivated to start our very own e-journal so the Sydney Youths have a chance to share their experiences and ideas. It is called "Expressions of Love" - we hope you don't mind us 'borrowing' that name.

With lots of Love,

Vani

Sai Ram, my most humble Pranaams at the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan Baba,

Every time I connect to this website I feel Swami's Presence. Reading devotees' experiences fills us with bliss and gratitude towards Swami. Every time I have Swami's Darshan I know that I am being transformed. He made me realise that 19 years of my life have been wasted except for the little time spent in His Thought. I am reminded of my obligation towards society on reading your articles. My heartfelt gratitude to H2H team.

Sai Ram

L. M. Rajeswari, Bangalore

Sai Ram to you all,

Just wanted to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for this wonderful article in SwaMi and Me: The Cosmic Lion's Roar - Oct 2007. I'm a student of Vedanta and my only mission is to attain Self-realization (I like calling it Baba/Sai-realization). And when I come across such articles - it is so very inspiring. We have to put in our best efforts and surely out of His infinite compassion Swami will certainly grant us Self-realization - allowing us to merge in that Reality, becoming one with Him.

I request you all to please thank Mr G S Srirangarajan, for sharing these highly philosophical gems of our Beloved Swami with us. Articles such as these should be given more importance and be made more frequent so that we can fulfil our one and only mission in life - Baba/Sai-realization. Thanks a million/billion again for this outstanding article,

Love you all,

Rishi Kewalramani, Mumbai, India.

Feedback on *Sai Inspires*, the daily inspirational email service

Om Shri Gurubhyo Namaha,

I am extremely happy to receive the daily inspiring messages from you. I am working in a private firm in Dubai. Every day I start my duty after seeing Swami's mail from Heart2Heart and "thought for the day". Every time I am rich in filling up with Swami's presence!

With Pranams and Love,

Ramesh
