

HEART 2 HEART

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Between You and Us

"What is the power which works these miracles in You?" The editor of 'Nava Kaal', a regional newspaper of Gujarat, India, asked Bhagavan Baba. The year was 1968, and the date, June 14. It was one of those rare occasions when a journalist had the opportunity to pose a few straight-forward questions to the Avatar. And Bhagavan kindly complied too. He said, "It is wrong to call them miracles or *chamatkars*, or to say that *chamatkars* are done in order to earn *namaskars* (respect and adoration)! It is only *nidarsan* (evidence) not *pradarsan* (exhibition). It is just like a play, a sport - My natural behaviour. It is a sign which helps others to turn into faith, devotion, inquiry and realisation of their own *atma*. As the intention or the will arises in the mind, the thing is made!" Now, the editor was baffled; he wanted to know more.

"It is said that by miracles, things that are already somewhere are transported. Are they moved from somewhere or created?"

Baba calmly answered, "They are all created newly.... Transporting means, they should come from somewhere else, isn't it? That would be deceit. Things are created at the very moment I will them. I give also things that are found nowhere. This Power is impossible to comprehend."

The editor's mind was now a flood of questions. "From when have you begun to give these signs of Divine Power?", "At what age did you actually acquire this Power?" "From My very Birth," Swami replied instantly, and then, after a pause, added with emphasis, "From before that!" The journalist was now dumbstruck; he exclaimed, "That is to say...?" And Baba continued: "That is to say, I resolved upon My Birth. I decided who should be My Mother. Mere humans can choose only who is to be their wife or husband; the Mother was chosen by the Son in the Rama incarnation and in the case of Lord Krishna. Then too, the task for which the birth was decided upon was, conferring Love on all, and through that Love, fostering righteous living.

"My acts are evidences of Divine Power, signs and signals of Divinity. I am granting things out of Love. My Love will never diminish. I have no desire of any kind. I talk of Love, I guide you along the Path of Love; I am Love."

Can the description of the life and message of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba get anything better than this? Can we identify any event, a single moment or one act of Bhagavan in these eight decades of His divine earthly sojourn that did not have the imprint of His immeasurable Love on it! Be it the time when as a young Sathya, He ran out of the house hearing the call of a beggar to offer His meal at the door, or walked miles with two big pots full of water hanging from a bamboo stem on his shoulders to obey His sister-in-law without even a murmur of protest, or even forgiving the malevolent lady who offered Him *vadas* that were poisoned, or the crude black magician who tortured His physical frame to death in the name of 'curing' Him; to the establishment of ultra-modern institutions of health and education to cater to the cries and needs of the poorest of the poor; to the incessant granting of

darshan, sparshan and sambhashan day after day for six decades now, and giving Himself away continuously and completely to save, support, and offer solace to His devotees – every second of His life has been an offering of Love to humanity

In fact, during His 60th Birthday, Bhagavan declared, "Let me tell you that no one else in the world today has as much wealth, property and treasure as I have, not even the World Bank, or even the richest emperors and kings. What is that wealth, that treasure? It is my selfless, Universal Love. That uniquely potent Love has kept this body radiant and young." He went on to explain how His mission actually operates, and said, "When I decide on a project, the wherewithal for accomplishing it is spontaneously available without any fund raising campaign. My Will has the power to concretize My plan. I willed that a College must rise in Puttaparthi; the Rajmatha of Nawanagar built it. In order to endow it with properly trained boys, I willed a Higher Secondary School; Bozzani from America asked that he be given the chance to build it. I thought that at this place education on Sai lines must be available to children from the Primary stage itself. Craxi, the brother of the Prime Minister of Italy, offered to build the School. At Bangalore, when I decided on a plan for a College and Hostel, Mrs. Elsie Cowan asked that she be given the privilege of completing it. Such is the might of My Will....Man justifies himself and proves his claim to be a worthy individual only through service, undertaken sincerely, selflessly, and with no thought of worldly reward. *Seva* is the only path to self-realization. It is the highest expression of love and of the sacrifice love involves."

The *modus operandi* of Bhagavan has been simple – To overwhelm every heart that comes to Him with His unconditional love. But how does Bhagavan Baba manage to melt the hearts of millions, individually? Every person who loves Him, experiences Him, feels His love, is guided by Him and fills their life with His bliss. This is the most beautiful aspect of Divinity – the One in fact becomes the 'Many' and all the 'Many' feel like the One. Bhagavan says, "I separated Myself from Myself so that I can love Myself." How this supreme Love actually plays out in the life of every individual, is in fact, the most fantastic love-tale in the world. And in this month of November, when we celebrate the Advent of the Love Incarnate on earth, what else can be more soul-filling than sharing and dwelling on these incredible manifestations of His magnificent love. Therefore, we have the cover story "Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba: Pure Love Unparalleled."

In part one of this story you will find how the Divine Magnet works His magic of Pure Love, and people from near and across oceans, belonging to different cultures, with allegiance to varied faiths, from the ruler of a land to the tiller of the soil, are drawn to Him, some slowly, others suddenly; some accidentally, others gradually. And what happens next, once they know Him and experience His love first hand? That story is even more exciting, because then starts the real thrill of this glorious adventure. "Well, all these might be fabulous stories, but how does it help the world?" One might ask. Does it have an answer to terrorism? Can it solve the problem of poverty? Can it prevent a bloodbath in some of the world's most respected financial behemoths? The

answer to this is an emphatic 'yes'. But how does it work? Read part two of our cover story.

There is no mission that is impossible for Pure Love, Bhagavan has demonstrated this in His life, time and again. During His 70th Birthday Celebrations in 1990, He proclaimed, "We have decided to establish a 100-crore hospital here in Prasanthi Nilayam itself! There are few who are ready to set up such institutions to provide free facilities for the poor. Just as higher education is free here, 'higher medicine' too will be free! The Hospital will be opened on November 22, 1991."

In this month, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram, celebrates its 17th Anniversary. Yes, every detail about this Hospital is extraordinary - be it Bhagavan's out-of-the-blue announcement, or its incredibly short 5-month construction time, or its amazing architecture and soothing ambience. But what's truly moving and mystifying is the miracle of love that happens literally everyday inside its holy premises. When you read the story of Chand Mohammad, a simple tailor who needed Rs 3 lakhs (US \$ 7500) for a cardiac operation to restore the health of his ailing wife in Jamshedpur, and how Bhagavan Himself beckoned, blessed and assured Him, you will know what is it that makes this Hospital truly one-of-its-kind. Or, in the same Healing Touch section read the life-altering tale of Jehangir. He was bed-ridden for life when he accidentally fell from a multistoried building while doing his masonry job, and doctors in most hospitals did not even entertain his case given the complexity involved; and when a few did, they asked for the moon as the price. But today, Jehangir's status in his community is like that of a phoenix. The Orthopaedic surgeon who operated on him in SSSIHMS, Puttaparthi, says, "I have never seen or read anything such as this anywhere! One will not find such a case even in the medical journals anywhere in the world.... All I can say is in Bhagavan's temple of healing, miracles happen time and again..."

There is a beautiful instance in Baba's biography, *Sathyam Shivam Sundaram*, where, during the 1950s, devotees one day pleaded with Bhagavan to visit the sands of Chitravathi in the evening, as He used to do often in those days, so that Baba would be prompted to perform some 'miracles'. When their requests become too persistent, Baba, who was gently pacing up and down the corridor, stopped, turned around and said, "You are My Miracle!"

Truly, we are His miracles because we have been touched by Him, we are fortunate to be born at a time when He is on earth, we can see Him, cherish Him, love Him and live for Him. Two weeks from now, Puttaparthi will witness a celebration that the world has never seen before. Multitudes will be at His Lotus Feet to savour His blessing on the occasion of *Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam Mahotsavam* – celebrating the life of one who has completed witnessing a thousand full moons. But how can we celebrate the birthday of the One who has Himself created the moon? On the final day of Dasara this year (2008), Swami said, "I truly have no desire, expect one. And

that is *Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavantu* – Let every being in every world be happy.”

The message for us is very clear. Let us live to sacrifice, to give a part of ourselves to another so that someone else too can lead a fuller life. If, at least, in a small measure, our lives can become a saga of love and selfless service, just as His has been for eight long decades now, we would have truly given Him a birthday gift that He would surely relish.

Let Love take a new birth in our lives to lighten and brighten lives around us!

Loving Regards,
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The Key to Immortal Bliss

This is the most sacred month of the year on which falls the Birthday of our beloved Lord, Bhagavan Baba. If there is one word that can sum up the message delivered by Bhagavan in His countless discourses right from the early days of His Avatarhood in 1940s, it is Love. He is the Avatar of Love. Period. As we celebrate the 83rd year of His Advent on this earth, let us recapitulate and ruminate on this immortal message of Love. Here are excerpts from His illuminating 71st Birthday discourse delivered in 1996.

The Supreme Principle - Love

The cosmos is filled with love. Love is righteousness. Love is Truth. The universe is based on love. Lost in the transient pleasures of worldly life, man is forgetting this supreme Love Principle. What is the reason? Selfishness has grown and selflessness has declined. Narrow mindedness is widespread. Broadness of heart is on the wane. Desires have increased. Ideals are vanishing. Human life is dominated by selfishness and self-interest.

The ancient sages enthroned *thyaga* (sacrifice) on the highest pedestal. They adored righteousness. Today these sublime ideals are forgotten. As a consequence, the country is racked by every kind of trouble. A heart without love is a cemetery. Love demonstrates the existence of the Divine. It is all-pervasive. It is the basis for human unity. Only when selfishness goes and faith in the Divine grows can mankind achieve unity. Hence, every human being should fill his heart with love.

*God is love; Love is God.
Love is linked to love.
When one is full of love
He is fit for oneness with God.*

It is most vital for everyone to recognize and practice this Love Principle. At all times love has existed among the good and the bad, in the forest or palace, in attachment or separation, in one's conduct as well as speech, in the mind as well as in action. It is all-pervasive.

The Most Potent Force - Love

The most powerful weapon to destroy the forces of evil rampant in the world today is love. Unfortunately, men are not pursuing the right path to acquire this sacred love. Love is the seed of love. It is also the branches, the flowers and the fruit. To enjoy the fruit of love, one has to practice love. Instead of seeking to know the true nature of love, man is engaged in the pursuit of wealth and power. No doubt, wealth and power are necessary, but only within

limits. The vast ocean, when it swells beyond its bounds, is censured for its misbehaviour. The human body and mind will be healthy only when food is consumed within limits. Excessive eating causes various disorders.

Everything in the world is governed by the bounds set for it. However, love has no limits. "*Anirvachaneeyam Prema*" (Love is beyond the power of words), declares the sage Narada. The flow of love is the life-giving water for everyone. How can one secure this love? Not by *Japa* (chanting the Lord's name), meditation or studying the scriptures. God does not dwell in the *Vedas* or the *Puranas* (ancient scriptures). God dwells in the heart and should be sought there. People should close their mouths and open their hearts. Then, they will experience Divine bliss.

Today love has been almost totally banished. Where love should prevail, there hatred permeates. Petty jealousy has usurped the place of compassion. Mankind can experience true happiness only when the appropriate qualities reside in their allotted places. Transform your entire life into a saga of love. You will then lack nothing to make you happy; all wealth and position will be added unto you. Love conquers all.

The Fifth Goal of Human Life

What is the nature of this love? When praying to God, you should have a feeling of total surrender. If you are really keen about realizing God, if you are hungry and thirsting for God, then you should cultivate this all-absorbing love. Mere expression of desire is not enough. You should endeavour to experience union with the Divine. If your heart is full of selfishness, how can you experience the Divine merely by a wish?

There is love of sorts today. It is related to the body consciousness and not to the Self, which is the basis. Spiritual love begins with the feeling of *Dasoham* (I am your servant) and culminates in the concept of *Soham* (He and I are one). Without the feeling of *Dasoham*, you cannot experience the feeling of *Soham*; *Soham* is the expression of Divine oneness, that is, "The *Aatma* and I are one." That *Athma* is Brahma. That is love. That is Truth. That is Righteousness. People have been concerned with the four goals of human life - the *Purusharthas* - *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kaama* and *Moksha* (Righteousness, wealth, desires and liberation). But there is a fifth goal: Love. Only when love is achieved, will the world become an earthly paradise.

Where love prevails, there will be no room for hatred or envy. Love cannot stay with evil thoughts and actions. Love should be steadfast and unwavering... God's love is reflected in your bodies. That is the meaning of the declaration in the Bhagavad Gita: "A fragment of mine is present in everyone in the cosmos."

That Divine element in you should not be misused. It should be used for the benefit of others. The Divine principle of love is being treated with narrow ideas. From ancient times, the sages welcomed this principle with open arms. Sage Narada declared, "*Yalabdhvaa pumaan siddho bhavathi, amrutho*

bhavathi, thriptho bhavathi" (Having gained Divine love, a person becomes perfect, immortal and contented). He considered Divine love as supreme over everything. Just as without sugar, no sweet will have sweetness; without love, nothing in life can have any value. Your heart is inherently filled with love, but you ignore this plenitude and go after the trivial. Your real sustenance will come from this Divine love and not from other petty pleasures.

Every cell in the human body is filled with love. It is this microcosmic love that fills the entire cosmos.

The Best Investment

You have no need to go in search of love elsewhere. It is all within you. A man makes every effort to accumulate wealth. An equal effort is needed to acquire the wealth of love. Men today invest their assets of love in pitiful ventures. Instead, they should invest all their love in the Divine bank of devotion. This deposit is not only safe, but will also yield you increasing returns by way of bliss. Your heart is the bank where your love for God should be deposited; deposits elsewhere are insecure. Deposits of money may be in danger of being lost, but the deposit in your heart is immune from any kind of theft or loss.

This love has been characterized as *Amritha-swaruupa* (the form of eternal nectar). Nectar pleases only the palate; but Divine love confers eternal bliss, which is sweeter than nectar. Everyone should resolve to acquire this nectarine love. Today, your foremost duty is to enthrone *thyaga* (sacrifice). Only when sacrifice reigns, love will come into its own. All your latent potentialities will then manifest themselves. You will succeed in all your legitimate undertakings. When love becomes the ruling principle, sorrow and disappointment will disappear. That was why the *Vedas* declared that sacrifice alone is the key to immortal bliss.

- *Divine Discourse on November 23, 1996 in the Sai Kulwant Hall*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - Part 10: Direct Directions from the Divine

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

This also is in the "question-answer" format that many devotees prefer, and has answers from Bhagavan on topics as wide-ranging as the origin of evil, the goals of human life, aspects of God – embodied and formless, to price hikes, women's liberation, vegetarianism and the generation gap of the present times.

Published in two parts by the author, these volumes have 270 questions in all, which are neatly grouped under separate chapters. In this issue, we continue the third chapter: Youth.

Chapter 3 - YOUTH (Continued from the previous issue)

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Today when we meet students and ask them what they are doing, we hear them say that they are in the computer line or doing an M. Tech. Course. We want to know Swami's views on this craze for computer studies?

Bhagavan: One of the most important things you should know is that all your modern education is within you. You are the 'Computer'. You are the 'Generator'. There is 'Electricity' in you. There is 'Heat' in you. You are the 'Magnet'. Everything around you is nothing but the 'reflection', 'reaction' and 'resound' of your inner being.

You say that a computer is great. You stand in front of a computer and put a question, "Who is my wife?" Do you get the answer? No. Why? The computer should be fed with some information which you get back as and when you want it, isn't it so? It shows only what has already been supplied to it. Nothing new! It was, after all, a man who made the computer. So, naturally, man is greater than a computer. Your brain is a computer with all your memories and experiences recorded therein. When a mosquito bites you even while you are talking to me, you will pick it up and throw it out. How? There is communication. On the way, when your eye finds a thorn, the leg automatically passes it, but doesn't step on it. Why? There is a magnetic force within you.

When I ask you, "What are you doing?" some of you may say, 'M. Tech'. What do you mean by 'M. Tech.'? You may reply, 'Master of Technology'. Then who is 'master'? What is "technology"? A person who has control over his senses

is a 'master', but not everybody. You are merely 'Misters' Mr. Rao, Mr. Kumar and so on, and not 'Master'. You should use your 'knowledge' for the advancement of society; otherwise, it turns into 'allergy'. You should go to society with your knowledge, 'Take knowledge'; this is 'technology'. Otherwise it is 'tricknology'; it can never be 'technology'.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! What are the qualities of a leader?

Bhagavan: There are mainly two qualities that every leader must possess. Since these are missing, we don't have good and ideal leaders today. Eventually we find disturbances, agitations, and tensions everywhere.

These two qualities are 'Individual Character' and 'National Character'. In the past, this country had leaders possessing these two qualities, leaders such as Tilak, Netaji, and Patel, and so on. You can't just call anyone a leader unless he possesses 'Individual Character'. A leader should lead, but not push from behind. A true follower becomes a good leader later on. Without being a servant; you can't be an ideal master. Every leader must always remember this, 'first be', 'then do', and 'then tell'. First, you must 'be' what you 'profess', and 'do' what you 'profess'. Then you will have the right to 'tell'. By doing good, an ideal leader tells others to be good. This is why I often tell my students, "Be good, Do good, and See good".

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We often wonder at the way you instruct and advise your students. We don't think that we, as parents, can ever do this in the same manner as you do. You are great and benevolent, offering free education to our children. You also teach them how they should conduct themselves as responsible citizens in society. Your love excels the love of even a thousand mothers. Your love is an ocean of fathomless depth. Some of the M.B.A. boys of your University are here. Would you please give them a message?

Bhagavan: Education is not for living, it is for life. This has to be known first. It is not the job or salary that matters. You have got to make use of your education for the betterment of society through service. Education is not meant to help you meet selfish ends and self-interests. It is very strange to see students nowadays opting for courses with one eye on the salary they are likely to get after their studies, rather than on their aptitude. Parents also think along the same lines. This is not proper or correct. It is most necessary to express gratitude to the society in which you are born and brought up, and where you get name and fame besides money. You must respect your parents, serve and please them. You should make them very happy every way. You say that Swami's love is equal to the love of a thousand mothers. You don't know even the love of your own mother. How can you, then, know and estimate the love of a thousand mothers!

The MBA boys, after getting their degree, are going to be appointed as managers. It is very good, no doubt. But you should also know certain things that you don't find in books. You have stuffed your brains with bookish knowledge. But you must put it into practice. You should also know that it is

not always possible to put into practice all that you have read in books. You have to apply your knowledge to the ground realities and work out solutions for the problems you face.

As a manager, you can't simply sit, dressed in a suit, and relax in a chair under a ceiling fan, having your tiffin and other refreshments. You have to put to yourself the question whether you are working justifying your salary. Otherwise, you should consider yourself a cheat or a betrayer of the company. You have to work sincerely. You shouldn't change your jobs and companies frequently. No one will trust you because the new company you want to join for higher emoluments will start feeling that you would quit any day for a little more money, if offered elsewhere. You can come up in your company with your skill, talent and hard work.

The MBA boys should know all the details with regard to raw materials, power supply, accounting, finances, marketing, advertisement and machinery as well. They should be aware of the trade unions and their activities, and also about the obligations of the company to the government. In no case should you compromise on quality, because then you lose your name in public. The rise and the rate of profits may be slow and low initially, yet this should not trouble you. One day it will stabilise. You should observe every worker and the way a machine is handled by him. You should ensure that every worker is able to do all kinds of assignments given to him from time to time such that you don't have to depend on one hand or a few hands to run the factory.

As an MBA degree holder, in the capacity of a company's manager, you will be under the control of the Managing Director or Board of Directors. At times, you may have to consult them before taking certain important decisions. You have to be very humble and polite in their presence. Even if you disagree with them on any issue, you shouldn't condemn or contradict them outright. You shouldn't oppose them openly then and there. Take another opportunity to meet them. Find out their mood and meet them when they are calm and cool, and then explain clearly the pros and cons of the problem, and try to bring them round to your point of view. Then, there will be every scope for them to find a point in what you say.

Today you need to know another subject, Re-engineering. When a factory or industry is closed or bankrupt, you should investigate the reasons for its closure. You should study every factor very clearly and find out proper solutions to the problem, and the appropriate steps to be taken to reopen and revitalise the factory and make it effectively function thereafter. You also have a paper on Rural Development in your MBA course. You need to know the background, resources and needs of the village, its atmosphere and socioeconomic conditions even before you start working in a particular village. Three or four of you may join and start an industry on your own. You have to uphold the basic human values unconditionally and uncompromisingly. You are valued only because of this reason. Always keep in view the needs of your country, the systems to be adopted, and the procedures to be followed, about her national resources and national development.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Listening to your spiritual elucidation of worldly studies, we are lost in wonder. Our Swami, who brings into the open the values of several disciplines, is the World Teacher. We learn that Swami had given a message to the M.B.A. students. If you consider us fit to receive it, kindly describe the salient points to us.

Bhagavan: Our institute offers M.B.A., and M.F.M. courses. But, first, what is meant by "business"? What does a "market" mean? Who is a "manager"? Students learn these things in the classroom and from their texts. However, business and marketing are spread across the entire globe. Know that wherever giving and taking occur, that is a market. This exchange, this give and take activity is business; not merely a shopping complex.

In the market called the world, what we call 'the Mind' is the Manager. This Mind has to manage well; then, the Heart is a Leader. Between one event and another, there is time; between one thing and another, there is space. What takes place between the two is *karma*.

Now let us turn to appreciate the love of a guru or preceptor. Teachers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are famous the world over. Of these, Socrates is quite familiar to you. The judge sentenced Socrates to death because he thought that under the 'evil' influence of Socrates, young men were taking to wicked ways instead of joining the army, as they should. But Socrates, who loved his students, was not prepared for that sort of death. Ordering them to obey him strictly, he bade them to procure some poison. He had them seated all around him, and asked them to touch the vessel of poison. He thought it is better to die among his students than at the hands of foolish judges. Such was his love for them. The disciples who realised this became illustrious later on.

Consider the founder of the Bata Company, a man of immense devotion to God. He used to make creaking shoes with a cushion of horse and donkey hair. He made a living out of selling these and served the people thus. His devotion and his spirit of service led to his rise to honour and fame. Therefore, love, devotion, and the spirit of service are essential for a manager

Alexander was getting ready to invade Bharat (India); he approached his teacher to seek his blessings. Then, the teacher said, "My son! I heard that some of the most highly esteemed objects are to be found in Bharat. Get them for me as your offering to the teacher. First, there are in Bharat wandering ascetics endowed with perfect devotion and absolute detachment. Bring along with you one such ascetic. Second, Bharat is a land sanctified by the feet of great spiritual aspirants, *mahants*, heads of mendicants, sages, and incarnations of God in the course of their wanderings. That dust is very sacred; bring some along. Third, they say river Ganga washes off all sins. My son! Bring some Ganga water in a vessel. Fourth, there is the riches of the Bhagavad Gita which underscores the right way to live and its goal. Procure a copy for me!"

Now, being born in the land of Bharat, you have to develop the spirit of sacrifice. Our high ideals and values help students to attain prestige and fame. *Sathya* and *Dharma* (Truth and Righteousness) are very important in life. They are as precious as the vital breath. Know that without these, life is barren. These qualities are absolutely essential for a manager.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We don't understand what wisdom actually is. Isn't the knowledge we gain in our educational institutions wisdom? If not, how are we to acquire it easily?

Bhagavan: Practical knowledge is *jnana* or wisdom. It is not textual information. Feeling the presence of God always, everywhere, within, and around is *jnanam*, true wisdom.

End of Chapter Three

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

The Secret to Success

Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful princess in Greece. She was not only charming but also adept in shooting, hunting and running. In fact, she had earned the title of "the fleet-footed princess." Many handsome and heroic princes desired to win her heart and hand.

So, the princess hit upon a clever plan. She announced that she would marry the young man who would beat her in a foot race. Hundreds of young warriors came to race with her but she always out-ran them.

At last one young hero was bent upon defeating her. He sought the advice of a wise man. He explained to him about the fleet-footed princess and her challenge. He also expressed his regret over the fact that the princess was putting many young warriors to shame.

The wise man said: "Don't worry; you take within your pocket several shining pieces of jewellery and gems. As you run, go on dropping one piece after another on the racing track at strategic points."

On the day fixed for the race, the young man equipped himself with fine pieces of jewellery. The young man and the princess started running. Both of them were good runners.

Whenever the princess was on the point of outstripping him, the young man would softly drop a dazzling piece of jewellery. The princess spontaneously stopped to pick up the lovely piece of jewellery that was on the racing track. She was confident that in spite of the halts she would be able to outrun her rival. These brief but frequent halts made him reach the goal ahead of her.

Thus, the young man won the race as well as the heart and the hand of the princess. Why did the fleet footed princess lose this time? It is all because of her love for jewellery. Love of lucre always makes man weak and prevents him from realising his real goal in life. If we want success in life, we have to give up attachment and be prepared to sacrifice what we have as the young man did.

- Baba

COVER STORY:

BHAGAVAN SRI SATHYA SAI BABA:

PURE LOVE UNPARALLELED

Part-1

Unprecedented is the word. Everything about Him is something that the world has never seen before. The Organisation bearing His name is the largest completely voluntary service organisation, with at least a million members spread in almost every nation on the face of this earth. The mammoth institutions established by Him in the most needed areas of education, health and rural upliftment offer service of the highest grade at absolutely no cost to the beneficiaries, and that too in an ambience that is holier and holistic than humanity's revered places of worship. Men and women, young and old, children and adults, Christians and Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, Jews and Parsis, Chinese and Russians, Americans and Africans, Aborigines and Europeans – literally everyone in which ever corner of the globe they may be, can feel His Presence; He guides, protects, counsels, comforts, cares, cures, and then elevates.

How did the born-in-a-poor-family 7th grade educated, Sathya Narayana Raju become the universally revered Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba? How did Puttaparthi, the remote village of under-developed India, transform into the Spiritual Lighthouse of the world, where one can find Presidents and Prime Ministers of nations, to peasants and daily-wage workers? The only answer to this in Baba's own words is "My top-to-toe selfless Love." And about the relationship with His followers, Baba says, it is "Heart to Heart, Love to Love". In real life, how do people feel His love? What attracts them? This is the focus of the first part of our cover story. And then, once they experience Him, what does it do to them? And ultimately, how does it help the world at large? The second part of this story will offer you insights into these latter questions. Read on and you will like it because quintessentially it is all about Pure Love, nothing else. Happy reading!

It was the worst nightmare anyone midair could ever go through. With the most menacing looking hijackers staring down at them, the horrified and helpless hostages watched the macabre dance of their imminent end, being played out right before their very eyes. Armed to the teeth, the hijackers had strewn broken liquor and perfume bottles along the aisles to ensure that when they did light the fire, the plane would burn brilliantly. Meanwhile, they were running out of fuel and had been denied landing at any of the European cities the flight was hovering over.

The hijackers had originally hoped to land in Athens, Greece. They were seeking the release of two of their compatriots imprisoned there for a former similar misadventure. Their ultimatum to the passengers hardly required any translation from Arabic to English. Their intent was clear enough. With their original plan thwarted, they planned to blow up the planeload of passengers over the North Sea.

The year was 1975 and caught in the thick of this horrifying episode were the American couple, Mr. Sidney Krystal, a prominent Los Angeles attorney, and his wife, Mrs. Phyllis Krystal, a psychotherapist. The Krystals were returning home from India, after a visit to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Reliving that dreadful moment, Mrs. Phyllis Krystal, now 95, recalled, "One of the hijackers was smoking a cigarette which was hanging out of his mouth. Sydney, being a lawyer, said, 'We know he is going to blow up the plane here if that cigarette drops on any of this ammunition...Now, you know, we have had a very good and a long life together....you are going to have to understand that you will not survive, and you will not see your daughters again.' And then out of my mouth came the most astonishing sentence. I said, 'Don't be so foolish! We are going to survive.' And I don't know where that came from.

Wielding the Ultimate Weapon of Conquest: Love

"I then remembered Baba's room when we were at Dharmakshetra, [Baba's residence in Mumbai] So, instantly I visualized it again, and really concentrated on that room and started to say in my very excited English accent, 'Baba! Baba! Baba! Please help!'

"And the next moment the most astonishing thing came into my mind. It was as if His voice was clearly heard. He said, '**Send love to them.**'

"And I remember saying, 'Are You crazy? Have you looked at their faces? Have you seen that they want to kill us and you expect me to send love to them?' And the next thing that came to my mind, which was again very clear, was that I should be able to send His Love because only Sai Baba could see the God even in the hijackers.

"I started to visualize Baba in His room in Dharmakshetra. I was breathing in His Love so consciously as I had never done before, and then I just directed it to the hijackers. As I did it, they got more, and more, and more nervous. They were trembling, they dropped the ammunition. One man dropped the cigarette and immediately put it out."

Through the force of this invisible energy that Phyllis Krystal was transmitting to the hijackers, the situation on the troubled flight began to change dramatically. The evil doers appeared visibly weakened in their resolve. Confessing her own shock at the effectiveness of the simple guidance she had received, she said, "I was so astonished! I was doing what I was told to do, but I suppose I didn't realize that it would really work! And so, I was really

quite surprised. But it was immediate! The one that was smoking started to tremble.

“Oh, and I forgot to tell you! He cut his wrist on one of the bottles! And then took a handkerchief and wound it around. And they really began to get extremely jittery and they were looking around wondering whatever was making them nervous and where it was coming from ... the entire atmosphere was changing rapidly. Thank God, they didn't suspect me!”

After hours of undergoing the horrific ordeal, the plane was allowed to land at Amsterdam and all the passengers had to slide down the emergency chute for their dear lives, leaving behind all their belongings, including passports, shoes and jackets. Within minutes, the hijackers set the plane ablaze. They were arrested shortly thereafter.

Later the same year, when Phyllis and Sidney Krystal were back in India to see Bhagavan Baba, He confirmed His direct intervention in the situation. Phyllis explained, “As soon as we got there, Swami came to us and I started to thank Him. And He interrupted me saying, ‘Yes, I heard you.’ And He mimicked my voice in a very English accent which, as my children always tell me, comes out very strongly when I was angry or excited or frightened. It was hysterical and we laughed so much because Baba mimicking an English accent was really very sweet! He invited us for lunch and then gave us a very quick interview. And when we were with him, He explained what had happened.... **From what I understood, the most important thing He said was that the entire plane loaded with people was saved because the plane was filled with His Love.**”

Love that Disarms

A love energy so powerful that it could disable the fierce hatred of the hijackers and disarm them enough to spare hundreds of lives at their mercy, had its source in the petite but potent presence that has graced the planet now for 83 years; an ocean of love that millions revere as the ultimate personification of the highest emotion ever known to any living being.

The phenomenon representing this Supreme and Sacred Love was born on November 23, 1926 to blessed parents Peda Venkama Raju and Eshwaramma, and named Sathya Narayan Raju. Today, millions of people from every known culture, religion, profession and race in every single country and continent that lie between the North Pole and the South Pole are celebrating the 83rd year of His advent as Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Rejoicing in their good fortune to be living in the awareness of His holy presence as their contemporary, they draw inspiration from His personal example of infinite compassion, organic and indescribable love and unhindered acceptance of all. Those who have studied His life, see it as an endless saga of giving and sacrificing, rescuing and guiding. Since His childhood, the simplicity of His gospel continues to transform millions of hearts. As His devotees vouch, His only weapon of choice for individual transformation and mass reformation of the world remains pure, unadulterated and absolutely inexhaustible love for all living beings on earth, and beyond.

During a discourse as recently as October 9, 2008, Bhagavan Baba reiterated His lifelong commitment to love when He declared:

“My love is supreme and pure. I love those who love Me. I love even those who develop hatred towards Me. I also extend My love to those who are demonic and who try to put Me to great inconvenience. There is no one in the world whom I do not love.”

Nothing Binds His Boundless Love

Today, the stories of His glory do repeated rounds of the globe, inspiring, empowering and guiding millions of seekers everywhere. Yet, any attempt to convert anyone to any form of a new-age philosophy or an ancient system of belief is starkly conspicuous by its absence in Sri Sathya Sai Baba's mission. Essentially a non-proselytizing movement, it is rooted in a heart-to-heart connection between Bhagavan Baba and each of His millions of devotees.

Without the use of any public relations campaign or a publicity drive, He has emerged as the **Supreme Universal Teacher** on the world stage today purely on the strength of this singular doctrine of Love.

Explaining His mission, on July 4, 1968, Baba declared: ***“I have come to light the lamp of Love in your hearts, to see that it shines day by day with added luster. I have not come on behalf of any exclusive religion. I have not come on a mission of publicity for a sect or creed or cause, nor have I come to collect followers for a doctrine. I have no plan to attract disciples or devotees into my fold or any fold. I have come to tell you of this unitary faith, this spiritual principle, this path of Love, this virtue of Love, this duty of Love, this obligation of Love.”***

Today, the Sai movement is guiding several million devotees through hundreds of chapters of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization spread over in almost every country. Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Native Americans, Zoroastrians, Baha'is, free thinkersstaying true to their own personal belief system and culture, people of every race are drawn to Sai Baba's guiding life principle of Love, which He urges them to express in action as service to their needy fellow beings.

Despite its enormity as a collective whole, the Sai movement is founded on Bhagavan Baba's love for the individual that has reached out to one precious life at a time. Today, millions of devotees have billions of interesting stories to share of how they were drawn to Him by the sheer power of His love. For every recorded episode of Bhagavan Baba's magnetism, there seem to be a million more that remain unrecorded. Yet, the common thread that runs through all of them is this phenomenal power of His love that makes its way to the blessed hearts, whenever the time and circumstances are right and ripe.

.....

***I wield the gigantic powers of Nature,
I hold life and healing,
I hold the fire of the soul,
And I radiate Love.
It is I Who sustain everything in Creation,
Beyond heaven and earth,
I create strife among men and I also bring peace,
I fill both heaven and earth with My presence.
Rig Veda***

Love That Knows No Borders

What drew a practicing Buddhist, and a commercial pilot by profession, Captain S. S. Ong of Singapore to Baba was "The beauty that lies in His nectarine message of universal love... Bhagavan extols one to love one's religion, so that one may practise it with greater faith and, when each one practises one's religion with faith, there can be no hatred in the world, for all religions are built on the foundation of universal love."

This all-inclusive vision of Bhagavan Baba points to universal love as the driving force behind all human aspirations and endeavours. It is the same force that is catapulting humanity above the religious divide to a state of spiritual oneness. Despite its intangible nature, the power of love as service to and concern for others is on the rise everywhere, proving once again that it is indeed selfless love that lends meaning and purpose to individual lives and groups bound by a higher purpose. This unprecedented rise in concern for the suffering of others in the world's trouble spots, points to a harvest of human empathy that is rooted in a massive seeding of the human consciousness that took place silently, much earlier on.

Imprints of Divine Love in the Cradle of Civilization

The seeds of Sai Baba's sacred love were planted in the African continent with His historic visit to Uganda and Kenya in July 1968. Decades later, the continent that some anthropologists believe to be the cradle of civilization, continues to draw its spiritual nourishment from the energy of that sacred odyssey. During that time, all forms of life, including Africa's untouched Nature and undisturbed wildlife yielded in adoration to His overpowering loving presence. The waves of warmth generated then are continuing to engulf millions even today. Once touched by His love, the reservoir of love within each heart is hard to hold back. As most of the devotees we interviewed for this feature vouch, it has to be experienced personally to understand its immeasurable magnitude.

Mr. Jay Ravji Jethva was a sickly little boy, growing up in Kampala, Uganda when Bhagavan Baba visited the country in 1968. An acute asthmatic, his condition debilitated his childhood to the extent that he never slept through the night; nor did his anxious mother who dispensed the pump a dozen odd times to help him breathe. There were times when his parents feared the worst.

During those days, Dr. C. G. Patel was the physician treating him and the very mention of this name sent shivers down the little boy's spine "Because all I remember of him was giving me inserting needles into me all the time. In those days there were not so many of those pharmaceutical tablets - mostly injections."

Love Relieves Pain and Suffering

When the news of Bhagavan Baba's arrival and glory swept through the city, Jethva learned that He was staying at the residence of his very own physician, Dr. C.G. Patel in Kampala! The irony of having the divine healer stay at the residence of his doctor was not lost on the young boy. Nevertheless, so troubled was he due to his poor health that without his parents' knowledge, he skipped school to catch a glimpse of the holy man everyone was talking about. His heart was desperate for hope.

Waiting with thousands of others on the street outside Dr. Patel's residence, Jethva recalled the momentous landmark in his life and said, "Swami actually came out of the house, and as He is walking in one part of the street ... outside ... He turns around and starts walking towards me. As He came in front of me, He actually looked at me. I knew He is calling me to Him. The first ever words Swami said to me are '**How is your asthma? How is your chest?**' That was amazing for me...my heart was still beating fast. I didn't know what to say. 'Go in' He said. I had no idea what that meant."

Love Confers Fearlessness

While waiting for his turn for a personal audience, young Jethva recalled being "so scared of Swami, ... I had no idea what He is going to do, He is this big fuzzy haired man, really all these thoughts were going on in my head. Next, He opens the door, looks at me and calls me in...And then He looks at me and breathes very, very deeply. It is actually as if I was having one of those asthma attacks... I said, 'Yes...Sai Baba, that's exactly what happens.' I am looking up to Him at his stage and He is amazing. Even when I think about it today, my hair stands on end. He then opens His right palm, and says, 'Look at My palm.' I keep looking. Then He says 'Touch it.' So I touch His palm. It was just as my hand now. Next thing I know, a liquid quietly forms in His hand. And He asks me to just keep looking. As I keep staring, more and more liquid comes out."

Today, 40 years later, Jethva hasn't forgotten the joy and freedom from the fear of the dreaded disease that he experienced from the healing ambrosia. "I was extremely ecstatic that He is actually going to cure me... it was overwhelming happiness, and finally a sense of hope, lots of emotions going on...He patted my shoulders and gave me some packets of *vibhuti*, the sacred ash. He said 'Look, no more asthma, from now on'."

Jethva reels with joy even today when he recalls that liberating moment, "I was feeling totally ecstatic. I took *padanamaskar* and left the room. You should have seen me run home like an African lion, and I threw my arms

around my mother, telling her all that had happened. She was really very happy...I told her that He said, 'No more asthma. No more suffering'."

That night, Jethva had yet another sleepless night. This time, it was not because of his asthma but the overwhelming love from his divine encounter that left him gasping in ecstasy. He couldn't contain his joy. From that day on, he has always remembered Sai with gratitude.

For the rest of the few days that Bhagavan Baba was in Kampala, all that little Jethva did was to run behind His car and listen to His public discourses. "Not that I understood them at that age, but I just wanted to hear Him, and see other people around me being so ecstatic, so happy beholding Him. I was completely and utterly captivated by Swami" he admitted. The bond of pure love had been secured for life.

Reaping the Harvest of Sai's Love in Africa, a Generation Later

Mr. Daniel Otieno is also from the African nation of Kenya. Born years after Sai's sacred sojourn to Africa, he was brought up in the Christian tradition. Growing up, he tried exploring Christianity through the Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal and Born Again churches. Finally, when he was in university, he was visiting a friend who owned an electrical store. While the latter was attending to a customer, the waiting Otieno glanced at a picture of Sai Baba on the wall and read His quotations under it and was simply blown away by the power of its wisdom.

"I looked at the photo and the quotations written on that. I was instantly impressed by the wisdom. I thought he was some kind of philosopher, or a highly educated person... My friend told me it is Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He is more than a philosopher. He gave me a book called *Education in Human Values* by Loraine Burrows from the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, Thailand. One Saturday morning, I woke up and started reading it. I did not put it down until I was through...that weekend I asked for another one. What did he give me? *Man of Miracles* by Howard Murphet. I read it within a day and I wanted meet this Sai Baba immediately...After a period of time, I finished my university [with a degree in Education]. That's when my friend told me that there was a conference in Puttaparthi for teachers!"

Arriving in Puttaparthi, in May 1988, while Daniel was smitten by Sai's wisdom, he still harboured some scepticism about the possibility of divinity incarnating in human form. The inner dilemma and doubting continued, as he thought it was preposterous to believe that "a human being like you could be a God? Because being a Christian, the concept of Avatar is very alien. Apart from Jesus Christ, we do not know any other reincarnations of God. So it was very usual for me, who has been brought up as Christian to have this scepticism."

Little did he know that this was all going to change within a week! He explained "We went for the first *darshan*. The moment I saw Swami, an

intense feeling of warmth came through my heart and I just felt this deep feeling of love ... it was heavenly."

Once the instrumental *darshan* music came on and the beautiful form of Sai gently glided by, Daniel Otieno was not the same person. "I imagined myself in heaven. This was something that was beyond the usual," he accepted.

Omniscience of Divinity and Maternal Concern

During the week-long trip, Daniel Otieno had a deep yearning for a personal audience with Baba. On the very last day, that dream too came true. He explained, "Swami took us inside the room. He said 'Ok. Boys from Kenya, how are you? Very good boys, very happy boys, but only one problem, you complain too much. Because, when you are out there, you are grumbling, doubting, if Swami is going to call us?' Swami told us exactly what we were talking about when we were outside."

Those who have direct experiences with Him often compare Sai Baba's love to that of a thousand mothers. Daniel Otieno experienced it first-hand when, during the course of that interview, Swami demonstrated concern for his poor health and advised him to "Eat more and eat well. Why are you so thin like this?" Otieno admitted that at that time, he was extremely emaciated and rather unconcerned about his health. He hardly cared about the well-being of his body, which Baba says, is the temple of God. His immediate response to Baba's motherly concern was to quit smoking forever. Even before he stepped out of the interview room, he had resolved to take better care of his health. Baba's magical love had set the pace for carving an instrument of choice out of Otieno.

Currently, he serves as the Principal of the Sathya Sai School, Uthiru in Nairobi, Kenya. He is also the Deputy Director of African Institute of Sathya Sai Education, Nairobi campus.

From Iran to India, Home is where the (Loving) Heart is

Janab Zade Naveed of Iran, studied Molecular Biology in Turkey and worked in a Clinical Laboratory for 15 years, before Sri Sathya Sai Baba's love drew him to India. Since the last four years, the Naveed family has moved to India and resides in Prasanthi Nilayam, the abode of Bhagavan Baba. Their little son attends the Primary wing of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School there while Naveed and his wife call the ashram their home.

Responding to His Call of Love

Janab Zade Naveed firmly believes that no one can come to Sai without His divine call. In his case, Sai summoned the family using the excuse of his mother-in-law's illness, as she was on dialysis. When conventional methods of treatment failed to help her, the couple decided to seek a cure for the mother from a higher power. Before this drastic recourse, they had taken her

to “many doctors ... even the kidney transplant was not successful. My mother-in-law was suffering very much” he recalled.

Tryst with Divinity Guided by a Higher Power

Fifteen years ago, Naveed's wife had been introduced to Baba through her spiritual friends in Iran. Under the trying circumstances, the young couple decided to come and meet Him and ask for a cure. They didn't even know His full name and it was their first trip to India and they managed to find their way to His ashram in Whitefield, on the outskirts of Bangalore city. It was as though the universe had synchronized the turning point in their lives that was about to unveil itself. Within a week of their arrival at His ashram at Trayee Brindavan, Whitefield, they were blessed with an interview.

Since that time, the Naveeds firmly believe that the incarnation of Love, Sri Sathya Sai Baba is guiding their lives, every step of the way. Recalling the decisive moment in their lives 14 years ago, they attribute that meeting with Sai Baba as the beginning of a new journey when their life's priorities underwent a dramatic change.

Fear of God Replaced by Love for God

Naveed cherishes the love for God and Islam that he has developed after coming to Bhagavan Baba. He says, “Although we were born Muslims we were not really bonded to our religion... I don't want to say we were faithless, but we were in fear of God. During the first *darshan* [my wife] heard His voice, that was telling her to read a particular Soorah of the Quran. She was trying to remember that Quran, but she couldn't. She saw one woman amongst the ladies sitting a few rows ahead of her, carrying with her a green book. She thought it may be the Quran and asked her if it was. That lady was from Algeria... That moment, Swami started coming, and music started. My wife closed her eyes and opened the Quran randomly and she found the same Soorah right there! It was telling answers to all her questions. The meaning of that Soorah was thus: **‘Do we just take the entire burden on your shoulder? You don't need to worry about the problems. Just have faith in God’.**”

“As I told you, the illness of my mother-in-law was only an excuse, it was just the reason we came to Swami. Swami didn't cure her. Swami cured us. He **made us faithful to not just His teachings, but to our own religion!**” he pointed out.

Love: Universal Cure for Individual Angst

Just as an Iranian Muslim family's fear of God turned into love for Allah and His message, decades earlier, a young and impressionable American woman had found an antidote to the angst of her times in Sri Sathya Sai Baba's brand of selfless and universal love.

A typical product of her times and the world, Janet Bicker had an unusually vast exposure to the social and political turmoil of the 1960s. During College, she had watched more than her fair share of the effects of violence in the world.

She had visited Korea, to entertain American troops. She recalled the era when "There was a group of us, who sang and danced and we performed entertainment for the troops. We were standing on a barren hill-side, singing to soldiers in a fox-hole, and you knew that the North Koreans had you on their gun-sight but, because it was such an honour to be able to do that, I wasn't afraid."

A rebel with a cause, Janet Bicker visited both East Germany and West Germany, and witnessed first-hand the devastation that still existed as a result of the war. She also drove through some Communist countries in Europe all by herself.

Reality Shatters the Idealism of Youth

Disillusioned with the state of the world due to violence, mistrust and hatred, she returned home to America at a time when the American conscience was undergoing a severe catharsis due to the prevalent political and social turmoil. She recalled this time "Which was extremely rebellious in America – lots of riots, religious and political leaders being assassinated – Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy Senior - the air was just filled with this kind of antagonism."

Seeking Refuge in the Oneness of Vedanta

Upon her return, one of the first experiences that she had was of going to visit a friend in Hollywood and Janet is unlikely to forget it. "At that time, you took the Hollywood freeway, and you passed this interesting looking building on the north side of the freeway, which was the Vedanta temple and it had a beautiful white dome ...that was my introduction to Vedanta. I read about Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and I especially read about Mother Sharada Devi," remembered Janet.

By age 24, the free-spirited explorer in Janet Bicker had been there and done that, and her introduction to the Vedantic thought was just timely, as it helped her "Make sense of the world. Yes, you have action, reaction, and then you have *karma*. You know, when you are growing up in the Christian Church, you learn the golden rule – 'Do unto others as you would want others to do to you.' But I feel they leave out the second part which says – they are going to do unto you what you do unto them! I mean, this is that *karmic* play where there's action, there is reaction, resound and reflection," she explained.

Shortly after, she got a job in Dick Bock's office. That is when she learnt that the legendary follower of Bhagavan Baba, Indira Devi, also known as the first lady of Yoga in the West, was coming to the East-West Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

A Rebel Finally Finds Her True Cause

Indira Devi's presentation on Bhagavan Baba and His message bore a powerful impact on Janet. She explains "The reading that I had done prior to this experience, set the stage so that the presence of Swami seemed a natural out-growth of what I had learnt from the Vedanta."

Against this background, when Janet took recourse in such books as Arthur Osborne's *The Incredible Sai Baba* and delved into the teachings of Shirdi Sai, and then got the book *Sathyam, Shivam, Sundaram, Part 1* about Sri Sathya Sai Baba from India, in her own words, "It is hard to describe how powerful something like this can be when you are living in an environment that is saturated with violence that is not always acted out but is internal and emotional and everybody is arguing with everybody else."

"That was the beginning of my experience with Swami and I would say it was the salvation of my life, turning me in a new direction; moving me away from that rebelliousness and revolutionary feeling that was so prevalent!"

Suddenly, in Bhagavan Baba's message of love, forgiveness, compassion and understanding, Janet saw the ultimate redemption of humanity, which she has so closely watched at war with itself. She was soon to receive an experiential lesson in the power of love to overcome all obstacles, including attachment.

Love Bestows Freedom from Attachment

By now, Janet hoped to one day visit Bhagavan Baba in India. That's when her house was broken into and a lot of her valuables stolen. A friend put even that unpleasant experience into perspective for Janet. She said, "A wise friend said later: 'You know, it is the vibration of the attachment that we put on objects, that draws somebody else who has vibrations of attachment.' So, what I am attached to actually attracts somebody who wants it by my feelings of attachment. So, of course, all the things that I had really loved, my guitar, camera, audio equipment that I had bought and brought home from Germany – all of these things were gone. But, there is this nice little feature of the tax system. If you had a robbery, and if you can corroborate with receipts and things, you can then deduct it from your taxes. So, I did that, and by the next year, the money came back, and it was enough for a ticket to India!" she recalled jubilantly. The rest of course is history, as shortly after responding to His love, Janet Bicker played a key role in recording on video and photographs, the early years of Bhagavan Baba's glory, creating a veritable treasure trove of divine memories for posterity.

Love: the Ultimate Unifier

Be it Janet Bicker, an American of Christian upbringing, growing up in the troubled 1960's in the United States, or an asthmatic child from a Hindu background in Kampala, Uganda, or a Muslim family from Iran that is now more devout in their faith than ever before, or a Buddhist from Singapore who

brings not just his body or mind to his job as a commercial airline pilot, but also his loving soul - what drew each of them and millions of others to Sathya Sai Baba was this call of Love.

Every person who has known Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has a personalized and unique account of how they were drawn to Him. Interesting and inspiring, these experiences are only the tip of the much larger iceberg, as the real journey of inner transformation begins only after devotees take the leap of faith and accept Him as their life coach and role model. This entails a firm resolve to live their lives in synchronicity with His teachings, based purely on the doctrine of unconditional and non-judgmental love towards all, including those who disagree with them! Once accepted in His school of inner transformation, the Universal Divine Teacher that is Bhagavan Baba, picks a course suited for the person's growth, and only once each level of challenge is cleared, often through some tough exams He poses, does the devotee move up their growth curve.

The process is intense. Sufi mystic **Jalal ad-Din Rumi** explains, ***"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."***

Once beckoned by a Master of Supreme Wisdom, what begins is a journey of the soul towards the final frontier – its self-fulfillment. The effect of love on individual lives is literally "life transforming" in every sense of the expression. Once drawn to Sai's circle of Love, how do the changes that are wrought from within lead to changes in personality, perspective, priorities and panache in life of the individuals involved? Does everyone experience it? Is the transformation universal across the board? How does one cope with moments of ecstasy involved, often followed by pangs of severe agony?

Part Two of this cover story addresses some of these issues. Do join us in the search for the real-life impact of the "L" factor in the lives of those who have dared to embrace it.

BHAGAVAN SRI SATHYA SAI BABA:

PURE LOVE UNPARALLELED

Part-2

Embracing the “L” Factor, Changing the Equation of Life

An alumna of the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Toronto based Kavita Kaul poignantly recalls her first ever participation in the celebration of the holiest of days in the Sai calendar - the sacred date of His advent on earth, November 23. The historic year was 1980 and she was blessed to be in Prasanthi Nilayam for the occasion.

“Having been recently accepted at His University, I enjoyed the perks that came as a part of being His blessed student. Most significant was access to the ringside seat from where I witnessed a sea of humanity from all corners of the world, speaking a myriad languages, wearing a variety of skin colours and costumes, pour into the *ashram* through the weeks leading up to the big day.

It was astonishing to watch people joyfully set up their belongings in the open, under the trees or spend the night in the corridors, as all the rooms in the area were taken up and all the dormitories were filled beyond capacities. Even the tents that had been set-up along the periphery of the *ashram* grounds for the corps of volunteers from all parts of India were jam packed. Just when the township seemed to be bursting at the seams, more busloads of eager seekers arrived!

“Due to our ignorance and His unassuming personality, we, the students, related to Swami more as our dearest friend and a caring parent than a Universal Divine Teacher. Witnessing the international draw of ‘our Swami’ was simply astounding. It was an eye-opener indeed, and put into perspective what a blessing it was to be so closely associated with the One who was loved by so many,” she recalls even today.

Heart-to-Heart Love

While multi-faith celebrations such as Dasara, Christmas, and Buddha Pournima are attended by thousands in His physical presence, there are millions of others who are replicating the same spiritual efforts in their Sai Centres and Samithis across the globe.

However, no celebration attracts bigger crowds in Prasanthi Nilayam, or in the thousands of Sai Centres all over the world than the one leading to the date when Bhagavan Baba was born. Come November, the ashram in India literally turns into a global village. It is quite common to find the *ashram* abuzz with silent activity as people start lining up for *darshan* as early as 12 a.m.! In the crowd, one can typically find Latin Americans rubbing shoulders with the local villagers, Americans guiding pilgrims from Russia and Europe, the Japanese contingent exchanging notes with the Australians and an entire India melting in

one proud pot as the blessed land that the incarnation of Love chose as His birthplace!

Explaining this unique occurrence, Bhagavan Baba points out ***“You are witnessing today the presence here of several thousands of persons. What is it that has drawn them here? Were any invitations sent to them? Was there any publicity in the media to bring them here? The only reason for their coming is the attraction of the Divine love.*”**

***“It is because that wish-fulfilling Jewel of Love is manifest here that these thousands of people from all parts of the world have come here. Whatever one may say, can anyone point to any person who can attract so many thousands? Elsewhere, even when people are brought in lorries, they choose to run away. Here, even when we try to dissuade people from coming for lack of proper accommodation, devotees will not desist from coming and staying under the trees or in the open. This is the love that flows from heart-to-heart. There is no compulsion on anyone to come here. It is the cord of love that binds them. That is the power of the Divine.*”**

“Only those who have experienced the power of Love can understand this phenomenon. Love is not something that can be bought. It is inherent in you. When you try to experience it naturally, you will realise it.”

Love: the Power of Attraction

This magnetic power of pure love is an unmistakable attribute of the purest of living beings on earth, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He points out that this ability to attract cannot be found in all. The ocean is vast and deep beyond measure. A tumbler of water taken from the ocean will have the same saline taste but it cannot possess its vastness. Individual human beings have the capacity to love according to the limitations of their past spiritual history and effort. For those who have caught glimpses of the vastness of Bhagavan Baba's love, it is His purity of intent that makes His Love totally spontaneous and infinite.

Practice Love Now and Here: Orissa Relief and Rehabilitation Project

A perfect instance of His spontaneity to Love wholehearted and rescue those in distress came through loud and clear just weeks ago when, at the peak of the Dasara festival, He asked, **Mr. V. Srinivasan, the President of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organizations of India** to announce publicly His decision to undertake the Orissa Flood Relief and Rehabilitation Project. When the government authorities were busy pointing fingers, the raging waters had mercilessly washed away thousands of precious lives and homes, destroying families and dreams. The callousness of the authorities in handling the tragic situation moved the compassionate heart of Sai to intercede immediately.

To deafening applause from the audience, the visibly moved Mr. Srinivasan spoke of Bhagavan Baba's concern for the hundreds of thousands of victims in the seven affected districts of Orissa.

"The people of Orissa have been struck by floods and in about 7 districts, thousands have been rendered homeless. Swami's is immediately sanctioning 10 crores for their relief." Mr. V. Srinivasan continued to say how Swami directed that along with houses, primary schools too will be built by the Sai Organisation for the devastated villagers. And these shelters, Swami said, will not be temporary; they would be permanent - not mere tents or wooden structures, but sturdy concrete homes. Then came another announcement from Swami through Mr. V. Srinivasan. "Swami would sell the hilltop building in Kodai Kanal and the Sri Sathya Sai Airport at Puttaparthi and utilize those funds for such service activities."

As the speaker narrated the troubled conditions of Orissa which he ascertained during his recent trip, Swami seemed deeply moved. The Lord seemed to be shedding a tear, His heart was going out fully for His children. As the speaker went on, Swami called him and issued another command, "Right after Vijayadashami (final day of Dasara), you, Mr. Kondal Rao of the Andhra Pradesh Government and Mr. A. Ramakrishna, the former Vice President of Larsen & Toubro, leave for Orissa and make plans so that in two months time, those people have homes!"

For the Lord, only the present moment exists. Right now, there is help needed and that will be rendered immediately, without any reserve. Financial estimates and practical difficulties are not to be given prominence when people are suffering, for everyone belongs to Him, and as He has said, "If you need me, you deserve me."

Divine Love: Million Connections Tap the One Source

He speaks to each one of His millions of devotees in the language of their choice, for even as a child, Bhagavan Baba declared that there is but only one language of universal communication, the language of the heart! His heart-to-heart hotlink that every single one of His millions of followers worldwide enjoys with Him requires no intermediaries; it is highly personalized and unique for each person concerned. Highlighting this fact, the **All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organizations, Mr. V. Srinivasan**, explained during a speech delivered on October 8, 2008, how Swami meant the world to every one who loves Him in their own special way. Commenting on this relationship, he defined it as being as diverse as that between a mother and her child, to that between friends!

Love Enables Universal Communication

Truly, reams can be written about the myriad ways in which devotees relate to Bhagavan. While for some He is the Divine Father, in whom they find protection and guidance, a few look up to Him for the emotional succor and warmth that only a Divine Mother can provide. And then there are those who share an unrivaled camaraderie with the Divine, while a few others worship Bhagavan as verily God. In short, if there are a zillion devotees, there then are as many ways to relate to Him. Today, Bhagavan Baba's life steeped in His

practice of Love has unfolded before humanity as a perfect example of how the “L” factor alone can relieve the agony of a planet and its inhabitants. And His approach has been simple – touch each individual heart and overwhelm it with unconditional love.

Love Transforms and Elevates

When the downpour of pure love soaks a soul, it washes off loads of emotional, psychological and mental debris, and clears the vision about the true purpose of life, which is to realize that we are here on this earth not for getting things for ourselves, but forgetting ourselves in giving ourselves to others. In the case of the **young Kenyan Daniel Otieno**, whose journey to Sai is chronicled in the part one of this cover story, the inner spring of love that welled up from within after that memorable encounter in Prasanthi Nilayam, translated itself as love in action, reforming young lives.

Love Cures the Pain of Dehumanization

A few years ago, the **Sathya Sai School Uthiru, Nairobi**, was an informal set up, meant to deal with destitute children. Since its inception in 1997, it has touched many a young life, and quite soulfully at that. Today, Mr. **Daniel Otieno**, as the Principal of this school, has played a pivotal role in rescuing tender lives from grave danger. He recalls a time when the street children first came to the school “with knives and weapons hidden in places we could never find. And they were sniffing glue. They sniffed it because it gave them a high and made them drunk. So we brought them into the school and told them to throw away their glue bottles. We asked them to take a shower, taught *bhajans* and showed them love.”

But that's where the challenge lay, for these children had been dehumanized beyond belief and had never experienced the emotion of love before! Principal Otieno says, “These children did not even know what we were talking about when we told them that we loved them! They were so used to being kicked in the street, spat upon, being locked up by the police in jails with hard core criminals - their life was so filled up with violence - that when we told them ‘we care for you’, they said they did not know what care means! They would have understood us had we said we hate you. If we had slapped them, they would have known, but when we hugged them they did not know what we were expressing!”

Music Unlocks the Floodgates of Love

Principal Otieno confesses that the unbelievable transformation he witnessed in these children over a period of time was nothing short of a miracle wrought by the magic potion of Sri Sathya Sai Baba's love. The first discernable sign of the change was in the form of a feeling of joy that overcame these children, it was something they had never known before. They experienced it as this giddy warmth that just oozed up unexpectedly from inside each of them when they participated soulfully in the congregational singing of *bhajans*. The power of group singing was so

tremendous that even the sacred ash *vibhuti*, a symbol of Baba's grace, manifested during one such session. The hardened hearts of these children started melting from within; they felt a higher power was responding to their little prayers. For them, it was a defining moment. Imperceptibly, a sacred bond of love was sealed!

He added, "Those who went through SSEHV (Sathya Sai Education in Human Values) are now a beauty to behold. There is one boy who is in the university and he looks back at his life in the street and thanks God... These children ordinarily would have ended up in a child rehabilitation center, or in a remand home for children, or in jail, or would even be dead. But now, after being exposed to Swami and *bhajans*, their lives have changed... They softened up and became more receptive, and have all proceeded to high school.

"All we did was to expose them to Swami and His teachings. It is He who slowly transformed them all so much so that some of these kids have indicated to us that they want to get good jobs. The main reason for this being they now want to influence other people's lives positively, just how their lives have been influenced."

Love is God, Live in Love

Like the Kenyan boys from the Sathya Sai School, Uthiru, Nairobi, those who open their hearts to His love realize they are a part of something larger than themselves; everything around them is but an extension of their own selves; there is interconnectivity between the individual and the environment at all levels, be it mental, emotional, physical or spiritual. Suddenly, the perspective changes dramatically when life is viewed from the prism of love, pure and unselfish.

To say that Bhagavan Baba's love has no limitations is an understatement for those who have known it in some form or shape, but what's more inspiring is the transformation it bears upon the people who receive it – even when they go miles away from His physical's presence. **Mr. Vassius Stantapopulus of Athens, Greece, explained**, "Whenever after interviews with Bhagavan I go to my room, I do not feel like eating for one or two days. I am just so overwhelmed by love... my lips just go on repeating 'love all serve all'. It is a feeling of serve... serve... serve... non-stop 24 hours service to the society."

After every such encounter, Swami, the heavenly consciousness that He is, makes His presence felt inside him stronger and stronger. He added further, "and this love from Swami, through us, flows to other people, especially the ones who are sick, by our words, touch and various other ways. With His grace, my faith and love is only growing. After all, we are all in His hands, I mean, everything that there is, belongs to Him. And He belongs to us... He is every moment with us... and that is a very great feeling. Imagine, every being you meet, everything that comes in your life you know it's His. All service activities need just an open heart that feels Swami's love every second. I cannot describe it... I now do not need so much 'outside', in terms of physical

guidance from Swami; everything is Swami. Like He says 'I am always with you, in you, around you'."

Practical Love: Work is Worship

Living in this continuous awareness of His omnipresence is something very profound. And there are any number of devotees of Bhagavan who attempt to live their lives by reminding themselves that they are working for God, and surrender even their routine work to Him through the day.

Captain S. S. Ong of Singapore confided, "When I first got to know Bhagavan, I sometimes wished I were a doctor, or an academician, rather than a commercial pilot. That would have allowed me to render service at His Hospital or School. Sensing this, He instructed me, 'Work is Worship'. There was no need to be in Prasanthi Nilayam to be with Him. I could be near and dear to Him by serving the 'Him' in my passengers."

Explaining how he applied this in his life, **Captain Ong** said, "I was recently blessed with an opportunity to put this dictum 'Work is Worship' into practice. A few weeks ago, a passenger fell too ill to travel just as our plane pulled away from the gate in Singapore on my flight bound for London. She and her parents were en route to London from Perth to see her first and newly born nephew. She left with her father with the intention of returning to Perth upon recovering. Normally, the offloading of passengers is handled by the ground staff, not the pilots, whose duties are to obtain a new air traffic clearance and prepare the airplane again for departure, in order to minimize the delay and inconvenience to the remaining three hundred and eighty passengers. Although the passenger had already been entrusted to the ground staff, her physical condition and unfortunate disruption in visiting her new born nephew compelled me to accompany the pair to the lounge, reassuring and comforting them all the while. I could feel Bhagavan's Love flowing to her through me; it was a most touching and ennobling experience. In seeking to encourage us on our spiritual journey, Bhagavan often leads us through incidents and events that though simple, are pregnant with subtle lessons."

"If we really want to experience Him we should go within" – John Tadeaga

"When you love you should not say, 'God is in my heart,' but rather, 'I am in the heart of God.' And think not you can direct the course of love, for love, if it finds you worthy, directs your course." - These words of the renowned poet **Kahlil Gibran**, beautifully capture the spirit of the all-pervading love consciousness.

While world bodies like the UNO and the WHO are debating their aid policies to sub-Saharan Africa, it is only the divine love of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, which is bearing the fruits of individual and communal reform, as perfectly exemplified by another Sai devotee, **Chief John Tadeaga**.

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Having undergone transformation many times over after coming under Swami's fold, **John Tadege, from Ghana (West Africa)**, said, "I believe Swami's love has expressed itself in many ways in my own personal transformation from the kind of person that I was to the person that I believe I am today. It is Swami's love that helped me in dealing with the relationship that I had with my parents. Swami has taught me from within how to deal with all the different processes of spiritual upliftment in ways that would be very philosophical if I tried to describe. He has brought me close in touch with something extraordinary within myself that it makes me truly believe that God lives within and is always around me, protecting and taking me through life. If we really want to experience Him we should go within us and take on the teachings that can be given only by God on how to discover Him within us, so that we can become instrumental in bringing change in the lives of others and in the upliftment of humanity. "

Love, the True Strength of a Leader

Today, a Ghanaian community in the African heartland is richer because its ruler has been touched by Sai's love and applies it to his life. **John Tadege is highly respected as a traditional ruler** for serving his community with success and proficiency. He adjudges his achievement to the constant 'Sai-Presence' in his life. "The awareness that love that can be shown to every being, because every body is a reflection of God has helped in making me a good chief of my people. I have come to appreciate how people actually can be changed, and I think the difficulties that I have faced have actually directed me into the field of politics. I found out that people are very difficult to change when they are hungry, poor, and are grappling for even pure water to drink. We must be able to provide them with the basics, so that we can then start to work on their value system. We have to bring this awareness at the national level for them to understand that there is a need for us to address poverty seriously, to be able to help people help themselves in the future. And one of the reasons I am able to easily relate to my people, is my simple life, which is an inspiration from Swami."

Be it a personal transformation, or building a relationship in one's family, or bonding with one's subjects in the case of a ruler, it is the "L" factor that lends a deeper meaning and worth to all human pursuits. In the end, it is the love energy that holds the key to the knottiest of human situations, for it is the panacea for all that ails us.

"His form represents to me, the God that I am, inside, the Love." – Reverend Karen

A living example of a personal crusade in this direction is **Reverend Karen Chenoweth of Denver USA**, who started believing in Swami after watching the video – *Man of Miracles* in the year 1975. She has since then come a long way in her spiritual journey. For this Church Minister "Swami now means everything, ... His form represents to me, the God that I am, inside, the Love. Basically, everybody and everything, ... Swami, in the larger context, is everything. He is the Love; the Compassion, the Truth, the Beauty and the

Goodness. It's hard to define with words. At an even larger level than that, He represents to me that which He said – 'I separated Myself from Myself, so that I can love Myself'. So, I am that Self that He split from Himself to Love. And so, He is the repository; the One who is responsible for the creation of this visible Universe. I think that's where the understanding of Brahman – 'I am That' lies," she explained.

Reverend Karen Chenoweth admitted that such a profound philosophy may not be easy for everyone to understand but its crux is simply Love, and that emotion is simple enough for anyone to relate to, pointing that in the end, everything in life may be complex, but God is simply Love, the current that lights every life bulb.

Love as Acceptance

If everyone is so deeply connected to each other, including all forms of life on our planet as Bhagavan Baba says; if we are looking for Love to be the reaction, resound and reflection of our emotions and experiences, then Love is what we must first exude in all our thoughts, words and deeds. Bhagavan Baba reminds us that all beings are beautiful when seen through the eyes of love.

If a Christian Minister's understanding of Sri Sathya Sai Baba is simply Love, in distant South Africa, the story is not that much different. Many inner treasures are unraveled in its wake, for love brings in its trail gifts of broadmindedness and acceptance, contentment and inner joy.

Segi Nayaka started his career as a **school teacher over 14 years ago and has been working with the African Institute of Sathya Sai Education**. When asked about what aspect of Swami's teachings has left an indelible mark in his life, he said, "It's the message of Love. As human beings, we are so thirsty. And when we have our Divine Mother and Father amidst us, we can only bask in His Glory and keep absorbing the Love. But then it is just not enough if we only absorb – we should share it too! The biggest thing that Swami has done to me is soften my heart to the point that even when I see misery and suffering in any film, I spontaneous start wiping my eyes as tears roll out. That's probably the reason why I am involved in a lot of Seva activities despite the fact I am restrained on a wheel chair or on crutches. I was away from the regular family life because we were all the while busy doing a lot of seva. But thanks to Swami, now the whole world has become my family."

Over two decades back, when **Mr. Nayaka** had sustained spinal injury as a result of serious car accident, doctors had told him he would never be able to walk again. While it is easier to lose faith, or at least accuse God for not having 'been there for you' during such challenging phases in life, Mr. Nayaka underwent this test in faith with a completely different perspective. He shared, "People always look at me and say 'how can you always wear a smile and not regret for anything in your life?' Over a time, I learnt that whatever happens is for good. At that time, you may think of it as a calamity and the worst thing to

happen. But it is His Grace and Love for me that sustained me through the difficult period. I did not have to do anything at all. I was already strongly devoted to Swami by then. I had become a vegetarian and had also given up the worldly friends that I had. The brothers in the organization were my only family. Yes, it was traumatic, a mind-altering, body-altering situation, but I just clung to His Lotus Feet and I knew that I was not alone."

It is only Swami's message of love, and in particular, His Educare program that has the power to alleviate human suffering and pain, surmised Mr. Nayaka, who has traveled across countries in Africa and Asia, working to spread human values, set up clean sanitation facilities and educate children. Putting in a nutshell the core of his life's learning, he said, "One should have Faith in Swami – faith that He will never let us down. He gives us pain only to the extent we can bear – not more than that. And whatever happens in our lives is actually a process of purifying us." 'Love is accepting His Will joyfully', is the *mantra* that Segi Nayaka lives by, as he spends every second of his life reaching out to the ones who are deprived and downtrodden.

Love as Action is Right Conduct: Baba

The saga of service, which is nothing but love in action, in fact, goes on in every continent. In Argentina for instance, the Sai devotees have achieved unprecedented success in serving their fellow citizens in need. Of the various service activities that Sai devotees in this part of the world carry out, **Carlos Fazzari, President of the Central Council of Argentina** says, "We have integrated all wings of the organization into these service camps so that people in the devotional and education wing also experience the joy of service. As far as medical service is concerned, we see about 100 patients routinely, and we also have eye camps where people receive prescription glasses. The people who are benefited are seeing how Sai's love works." He further added, "Most of the Sai Centers in Argentina are doing *Narayana Seva*. They prepare food during the week and give it to the homeless people in the parks and the streets; sometimes these people even come to the centers to eat. These people have lost interest in life, and when they see someone taking interest in their lives, they find it a motivation and an inspiration to change; and they begin to transform their lives."

Reviving the Power of Love

The silent Love revolution initiated by Bhagavan Baba decades ago has its source in individual reform for mankind's collective course-correction. For years now, without any fuss or fanfare, the son of humble parents Peda Venkama Raju and Mother Eswaramma, who grew up without any privileges, or formal education worth mentioning, has helped millions directly with His love in various forms, be it as individual guidance and intervention, or through His many humanitarian projects. When many loving individuals, inspired by His love for them and His loving example, join hands, inevitably, the team that emerges, achieves the impossible. When the driving force behind an effort is

pure love, not personal greed, then on the strength of the purity of intent, the project becomes foolproof.

Today, nations with scientific and economic prowess send missions to the Moon and the Mars, spending billions on wars and nuclear weapons' development. Yet, the most pressing of humanity's challenges remain poverty, pain, illiteracy, disease, hate, exploitation, crime and the relentless violation of our environment. The ill health of our planet is a serious indicator of how much pollution an uncaring generation can release into the environment and the existence of physical limits to how many resources we can extract from Mother Earth.

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Love: The True Bailout Package for Stressed Economies

Driven by pure greed, the prevailing model for human society is based on such indicators of growth as expansion in the market share, profits or Gross Domestic Production.

Yet, the recent collapse of modern capitalism that is paralyzing the world's leading economies is raising serious existential questions, even in hitherto unheard of circles. Many of the victims of the recent financial carnage are beginning to realize that perhaps a model driven ruthlessly on pure profits, needs to be rethought. Financial debacles and corporate scandals are prompting boardroom conversations around the issue of a conscious and conscientious corporate culture that includes the practice of values and ethics in the workplace.

As the pillars of the world's premier economies lick their wounds, the pain is deep and difficult to overcome for those whose lives have been shattered in the aftermath of its collapse. Even the multi-trillion bailout package is unable to restore the hoped-for stability in the markets, proving that the call of the moment requires way more than a band-aid solution to humanity's self-inflicted wounds.

Love and Corporate Karma

While the world's great powers and individuals bleed dry from the brutal cuts in spending and jobs, the pain is symptomatic of a larger problem. The pursuit of happiness based on a selfishness, greed, ego and a desire for instant gratification need to be exchanged for a broader vision that empowers leaders with a discretionary energy to realize that all human experiences and endeavours are connected to something larger than themselves. Market manipulations, quick profits and ruthless environmental exploitation are just a few loveless business practices that leave behind a trail of negative *karma* in the form of devastation and pain that no one is immune to.

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Now, awareness is on the rise that the only recourse to steer humanity away from self-annihilation is in the practice of utterly selfless and uninhibited, universal love in all walks of life, including business and policy making. Love and concern beyond the immediate is the key to turning around attitudes towards life and its true priorities. And this is exactly what Bhagavan Baba has demonstrated in every moment of His divine life for scores of decades now.

Eighty Three Years of Loving, Loving and Only Loving

Living, breathing, acting, sacrificing, and speaking only out of concern and unselfish love for all, this Ocean of Love has proven to the world repeatedly through His Life and incomparably grand altruistic achievements, that when we try to dedicate ourselves to collective good with a genuine intent, miracles abound naturally.

On November 23, 2008, the world celebrates the 83rd year of the birth of the most luminous, loving and guiding light to have ever shone upon the planet. If a mere visualization of His love by Phyllis Krystal could save a flight from fearsome hijackers, today, for seekers all around the globe it is this Supreme Love alone which is the final boarding pass to their highest spiritual plane.

In responding to His call to soar on the wings of love lies humanity's final salvation and its ultimate chance to evolve from the level of human to God consciousness, to awaken wide from a confusing dream to the truth of reality, to conquer all illusion and discover that the password to the final frontier of its divine destiny lies in four simple letters L-O-V-E, which, when translated into the language of the heart, define the sweet resident of the Yajur Mandir, and that of every heart that beats in the universe, the very rhythm of the universe itself, its source and sustenance, the most Loving Universal Teacher, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Dear reader, to sing the saga of Pure Love in Human Form, in its entirety, is as impossible as trying to measure the ocean with a tiny bowl. However, every drop of the ocean, quality wise, is as 'full' as the ocean. Hence, the aim of this cover story was to share just one such drop of the glory of Love Incarnate of this Age, Bhagavan Baba. We are aware that the dimensions of His love that are not dealt with in this article are too numerous to even enumerate. Therefore, this is the only the beginning, and in the future issues, we will endeavour to offer more such drops of the Divine Elixir, which is His Love, that is pristine and unparalleled.

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FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – 20

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. I hope I have not lost you after I made the change of gear that took you from the Cosmos to Basic Physics. Just to remind you, I first offered a lightning glimpse of Physics as it evolved under Newton and later physicists [almost every one of them from Europe], till the end of the nineteenth Century. The highpoint of this period was Maxwell's great Electromagnetic Theory of Radiation, into which all phenomena of optics could be neatly fitted. Indeed, Maxwell's theory led to incredible practical benefits that are being conferred upon us right to this day; take anything from cell phones to microwave ovens, and we have to thank Maxwell for all of them.

You might say: "OK, but what has all that got to do with our *Quest for Infinity*?" I am coming to that but would have to do it in stages, for now the ball game gets rather subtle; and we have first to go through the rather mysterious subject called Quantum Mechanics. Right now, I am trying to set the stage for describing its birth! Hope all that reassures you that I have really not lost my way!

19th Century Scientists Struggle with some Imponderables

Before I get to what I want to say this time, let us remember that Niels Bohr [see QFI 18] wanted to have a theory for why atoms were emitting the characteristic line spectra. To Bohr, it all seemed as if each atomic species was singing its own song, and he wanted to know why they were singing "songs" [read emitting spectra] in the first place, and why these songs [read spectra] were different from each other. I told you that Bohr came up with a model based on the idea that an atom was really like a mini solar system with a tiny, tiny nucleus at the centre [that played the role of the sun] while the electrons moved around like planets, revolving around the nucleus in various orbits. Bohr tried to apply this idea to the hydrogen atom because it was the simplest among the atoms with only one electron going round the nucleus, which, by the way, was nothing more than a single proton.

The model was utterly simple but the result that Bohr got was disastrous. Bohr applied Classical Mechanics, which was all that one had at that time. And when Bohr went through his calculation, he found to his horror that the atom hardly lived, in fact less than a second. Imagine that! Here we are in a Universe that is billions of years old with hydrogen atoms all over the place. We have them here on planet Earth too. In fact, chemistry students are taught how to make gaseous hydrogen with what is called the Kipp's apparatus. But Bohr's theory said that the hydrogen atom had no business to exist! The electron must rapidly spiral into the proton, wiping out the hydrogen atom! Bohr knew that there was something wrong, and very correctly he suspected

that the problem lay in the Classical Mechanics that he had applied to the hydrogen atom.

This is what I am trying to slowly draw your attention to. You see, even as the nineteenth century was drawing to a close and physicists were exuberantly celebrating the great triumphs scored during the nineteenth century, they were also getting signals that all was not quite OK with Classical Physics. The signals came from different directions, and often they did not seem connected. For example, there was Planck who found that a classical formula could not explain the spectrum of Blackbody Radiation [see QFI 19]. Then there was the photo-electric effect that defied explanation within the framework of Classical Physics. Meanwhile, J. J. Thomson discovered the electron; where did that come from? Becquerel discovered radioactivity; where did that come from? Rontgen discovered x-rays; where did those come from? It looked as if even as a new century was being ushered in, Nature was slowly raising the curtain on a whole new world of Physics! Some of that story we shall catch up with as we go along with our quest – by the way, that part of the story is very important to us!

Moving at the Speed of Light

Let me now make the point I have been slowly inching towards all this while. You see, as the twentieth century began, Physics slowly began to cross two new frontiers. Frontier One was associated with very high velocities; what is meant by high? By high, I mean speeds approaching close to that of light. Remember, light travels roughly at 300,000 km per second, and just to give you an idea of what that means, let me tell you that it takes light eight minutes to reach us from the moment it leaves the Sun. If you think that is long, let me tell you that if a spacecraft close to say Neptune were to send an electronic signal now, it would take hours for that signal to reach us - this in spite of the signal travelling at the speed of light! Imagine having a telephone conversation with an astronaut on that spacecraft! You say hello, and that message takes several hours to reach him; he asks 'how are you?', and that takes more hours to reach the earth! To get back to what I was trying to say, we could make a diagram as below:

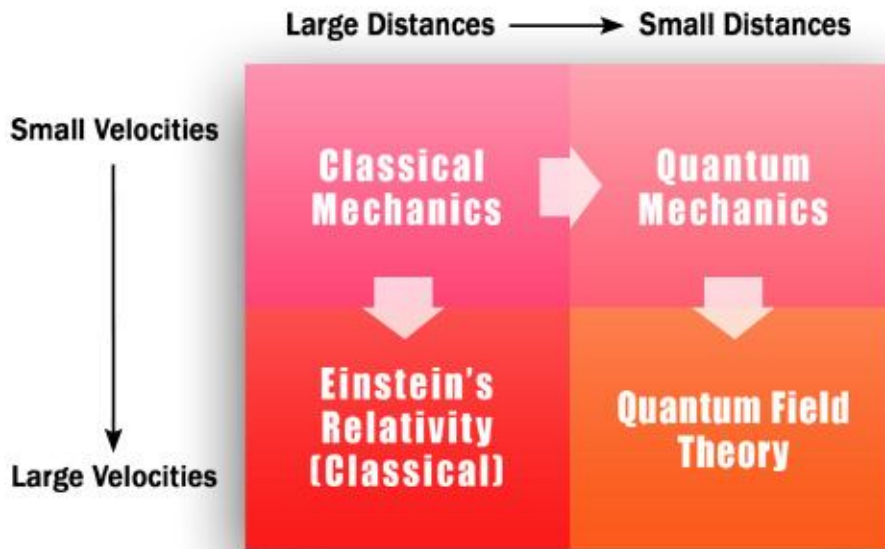


Fig. 1

FIGURE 1: This schematic shows that while it all began with exploration of physical phenomena on large scales and concerning objects moving at slow speeds, the dawn of the 20th century saw a strong drift towards exploration of matter on small scales of length on the one hand, and of phenomena involving very high velocities on the other. The former gave birth to Quantum Mechanics while the latter gave birth to Relativity. Interestingly, while Quantum Mechanics broke entirely new ground, Relativity continued to rest on a classical foundation. What happens when one has to deal with very high velocities in the world of the small? That is when one has to invoke Relativistic Quantum Mechanics. Here QM is non-traditional while Relativity still maintains its classical roots. Currently, we are on the verge of exploring distances so small that Relativity itself may have to be modified to have quantum roots. At present, no one knows how exactly to do it, but most people are agreed that one day, both these revolutionary disciplines would have to come together in some manner or the other, perhaps each of them giving up a bit for the sake of the merger!

The above diagram is merely to put in perspective the developments that began regularly to shake Physics from about 1900 onwards; the story is not over, not by any means, and the most exciting chapter is yet to be written! Meanwhile, let us go back about a hundred years, when exciting events had just begun to happen. The year was 1912. Bohr tried a classical model for the hydrogen atom and failed. He knew something was wrong, but what was wrong and where? Where to put the finger to get at the solution? Bohr thought hard, and came up with a very original thought.

Bohr said: "Let us go back to Planck's explanation for the blackbody radiation spectrum. There are two interesting aspects to his analysis. First is that the energy of mechanical oscillators is quantised [see Fig. 8 in QFI 19]. Next, we

must remember that according to Planck, radiation energy is itself quantised. These two facts seem to indicate that when we enter the world of the small, quantum effects apparently enter in some mysterious way and simply cannot be ignored. My classical model for the hydrogen atom failed to deliver because it totally ignored all quantum effects. Maybe, I should build in quantum effects in some manner or the other."

Starting thus, Bohr was able to tinker with his model and quickly come up with a brilliant improvisation. It was quite simple really, so simple that these days the Bohr model is taught even to high school students. So what was the great magic that Bohr performed? After a lot of thinking, Bohr argued, "When Planck tried to explain blackbody radiation, he assumed that the energy of the mechanical oscillators [remember the electrons on the walls of the cavity that were oscillating back and forth? See QFI 19] were quantised. This means that when one goes to very small distances, even mechanics begins to acquire some sort of quantum character. So why don't I suppose that when an electron moves in an orbit around the nucleus, the angular momentum of the electron is quantised?"

Atomic Equations

For the benefit of those of you who do not know, I should mention that when an object of mass m moves with a velocity v , we say it has a linear momentum mv . Similarly, when an object of mass m moves in a circular orbit of radius r with a velocity v , then it has an angular momentum mvr . Now what Bohr was essentially saying was that the value of the quantity mvr could not be any arbitrary number but has to be one of a fixed set. What was that set? Here, Bohr made an inspired guess: "He said that Nature's rule is that the angular momentum has to be an integer times the basic constant given to us by Planck, namely h ." Stated simply, Bohr's rule was:

$$\text{Angular momentum} = (nh) / 2\pi,$$

where n is an integer and takes on values 1, 2, 3,etc. Now if you take this rule literally pulled out of a hat by Bohr, and remember that angular momentum is given by mvr , and further that m the mass of the electron is fixed, then clearly, only certain orbits would be allowed and not all the ones we might imagine to be possible.

Thus, Bohr took a bold step and said: "Nature has ordained, that of all the orbits that might be possible in the classical picture, in reality only a set of preferred orbits [that obey the angular momentum quantisation rule] are allowed. The electron can move in these special orbits without the danger of spiralling down; these orbits are divinely ordained and therefore safe! These are stationary orbits, and what saves the electron from destruction when it moves in these orbits is the fact that they conform to the rule of quantisation of angular momentum [given above]."

OK, all this is fine. But what about the light the atom emits? How does that come about in this picture? Bohr said that was no problem. And to understand Bohr's explanation, take a look at Figure 2 below:

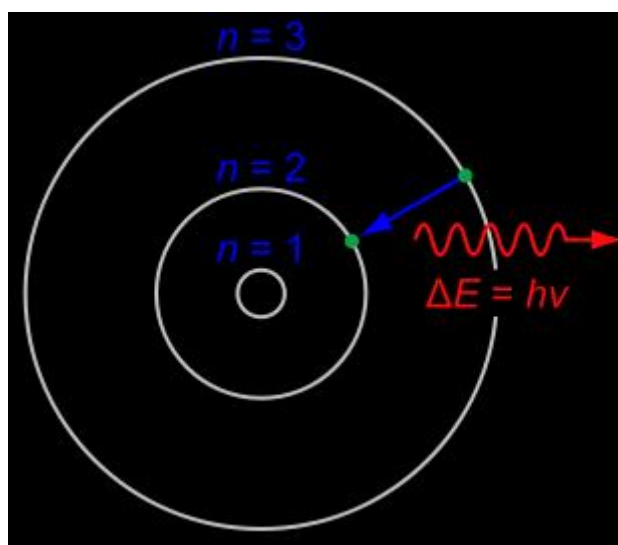
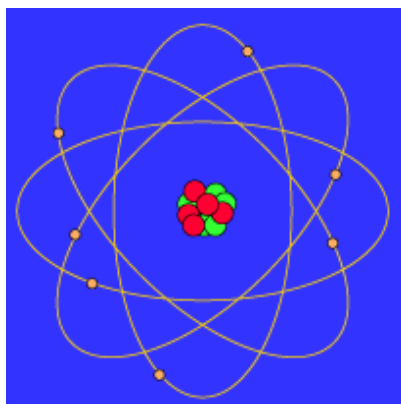


FIGURE 2: This figure has two parts. One of which (a) shows schematically, electrons orbiting around the atomic nucleus. The second part (b) is more indicative of what the Bohr atom model is all about. Here we see various orbits, each corresponding to particular value for n [remember, angular momentum must be n times Planck's constant h , divided by 2π]. Orbits with low n values correspond to states of lower energies while those with higher n values correspond to states of the atom having higher energy. Bohr said that when an electron jumps from an orbit of a higher n value to an orbit of a lower n value, the energy difference is emitted as electromagnetic radiation. Thus, when the electron is in the state $n = 3$, its energy is higher compared to what it would have if $n = 1$. The state $n = 1$ is called the ground state, while states with $n > 1$ are called excited states. When the electron jumps from a state with $n > 1$ to say the state $n = 1$, we say the atom makes a transition from an excited state to the ground state, and the difference in energy is emitted as electromagnetic radiation with a particular frequency.

So you see, by introducing the idea of quantisation of angular momentum, Bohr neatly brought the atom into the fold of the quantum world. And from that, explaining line spectra was no sweat at all. First, take a look at the figure below.

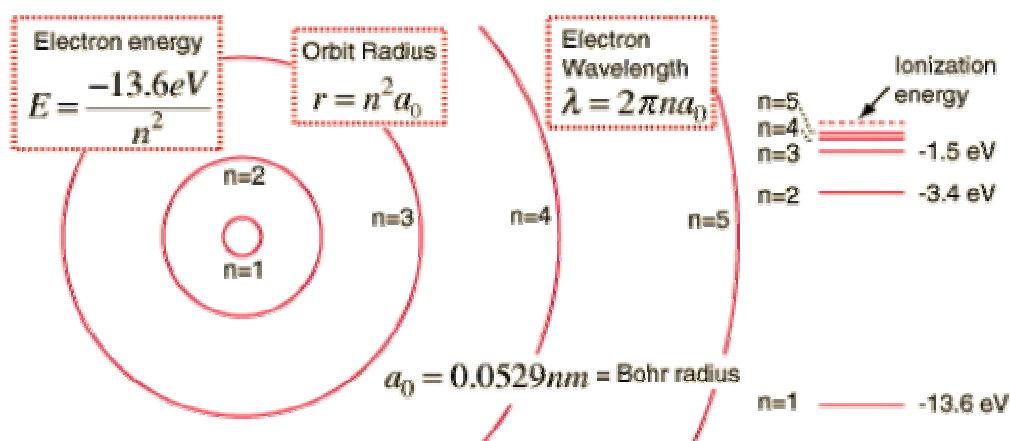


FIGURE 3. This figure shows [schematically] not only the various allowed orbits of the hydrogen atom but also the associated energy levels [see the sketch on the right]. Light is emitted when the electron makes a jump from an orbit with a higher energy to an orbit with a lower energy. The frequency ν of the emitted light is given by the simple formula: $h\nu = E_2 - E_1$, where E_2 and E_1 denote respectively the energies of the higher and the lower levels.

As they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it. So how good was Bohr's model of the hydrogen atom? It turned to be amazingly good! You see, physicists had already made a fairly detailed study of the spectrum of the hydrogen atom and found that the spectral lines could be divided neatly into various "families" known as the Balmer series, Lyman series, Paschen series etc., each series being named after the discoverer. Bohr showed that each series was the result of appropriate jump of the electron from higher energy levels to a particular lower energy level. Thus, as you would find from Figure 4.

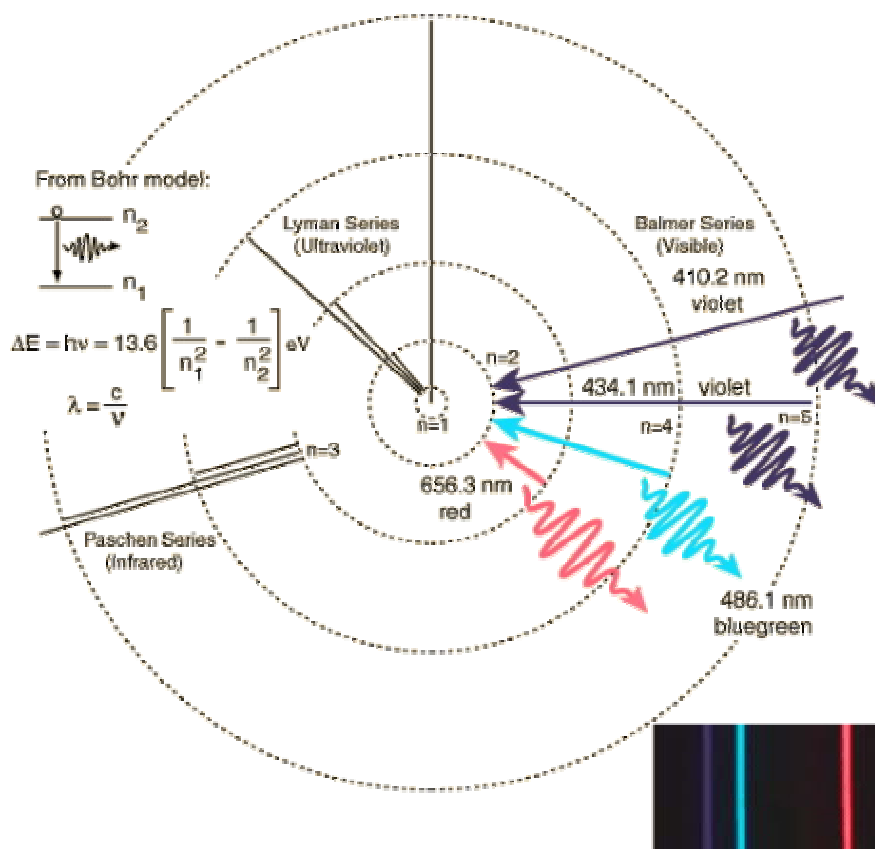


FIGURE 4. This figure illustrates how the Bohr model of the hydrogen atom helps to understand the origin of the various families identified earlier in the atomic spectrum of hydrogen. The so-called Lyman series of lines are those that involve a jump of the electron from a state of higher energy to the lowest state, namely that with $n = 1$. These lines occur in the ultraviolet. Next come the Balmer series, which arise when the electron makes a transition from a higher state to the state with $n = 2$. These lines occur in the visible part of the spectrum. After this come the Paschen series, where the final state of the electron corresponds to the energy level with $n = 3$, and so on. Before Bohr, people knew there were all these lines but no one understood how they arose. Bohr's model made it all so very simple!

Bohr's model was unquestionably a great step forward. However, very soon, after all the cheering was over, people began to realise that Bohr's model was just a model and not a theory. A theory is a regular grammar that lays down some basic rules which could then be applied to various situations. On the other hand, the model that Bohr gave was applicable only to the hydrogen atom. Indeed, as more careful experiments came to be done, it was found that it could not even explain everything about the spectrum of hydrogen, especially the finer details. Even worse, it was almost impossible to extend the model to the next simplest atom, namely helium, which had two electrons instead of one. If it was going to be so tough even for helium then what to say of more complex atoms like oxygen and so forth?

All this did not mean that people began to dismiss Bohr's work. On the other hand, they realised that it was trying to give a coded message. Part of the message was clear, which was that if one wanted to understand atoms, then one had better be ready to apply quantum ideas. But how exactly was this to be done? No one knew, indeed for nearly fifteen years. After that incubation period when ideas were being cooked, the answers came, and they were of a quite surprising nature; indeed, they did not come because people were looking at more complex models for the atom. Rather, they came because physicists were now looking for an honest to goodness quantum theory. That story is reserved for the next issue!

BOX

Biography of Niels Henrik David Bohr

Niels Henrik David Bohr was born in Copenhagen on October 7, 1885, as the son of Christian Bohr, Professor of Physiology at Copenhagen University, and his wife Ellen, née Adler. His father was an eminent physiologist and was largely responsible for awakening his interest in physics while still at school, his mother came from a family distinguished in the field of education.

After matriculation in 1903, Niels Bohr entered Copenhagen University. He took his Master's degree in Physics in 1909 and his Doctor's degree in 1911.

While still a student, he did some research work in his father's laboratory for which he won a gold medal. The study was published in the Transactions of the Royal Society, 1908. Bohr then went to England, where he first spent some time in Cavendish, then headed by Sir J. J. Thomson, the discoverer of the electron. Later he moved to Manchester, to work in the lab of Prof. Rutherford who had discovered the atomic nucleus. It was there that he discovered in 1913, the atom model for which he subsequently became famous. In 1922, Bohr received the Nobel Prize for Physics.

In 1920, he became the head of the Institute for Theoretical Physics in Copenhagen, a post he occupied till his death in 1962. From 1930 onwards, Bohr became more interested in nuclear physics and made many contributions to that field. Incidentally, his son Aage Bohr, later won the Nobel Prize for the contributions he made to Nuclear Physics, in the very Institute that his father headed for a long time.

Bohr also contributed a lot to the understanding of the philosophy underlying quantum mechanics, a topic to which we shall turn later. During the Nazi occupation of Denmark in World War II, Bohr escaped to Sweden and spent the last two years of the war in England and America, where he became associated with the Atomic Energy Project. In his later years, he devoted his work to the peaceful application of atomic physics and to political problems arising from the development of atomic weapons. In particular, he advocated a development towards full openness between nations. During the last years of his life, Bohr showed a keen interest in molecular biology.

BEYOND WESTERN PSYCHIATRY...THE BLISS OF 'SAI'CHIATRY

A personal and illuminating conversation with Dr. Samuel Sandweiss - Part 2

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

Dr. Sandweiss has visited the Radio Sai studio on many occasions. Continuing from the previous issue we present the second and final part of extracts from a conversation that Prof. G. Venkataraman, the former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University, had with him in June 2002.

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prof. G. Venkataraman (GV): Can you comment on how Swami's directive for all His devotees "Love All Serve All" has influenced your professional work as a psychotherapist?

Samuel Sandweiss (SS): Well, it's not a method; it's a way of living. First, good communication then comes understanding, and then adjustment. Our communication must be heart to heart - simple, caring, and genuine. Communication is very healing when we share it in an innocent and pure manner, free of superficiality.

Therapists may deal with post-traumatic stress exploring the experience that you would have had at the time of the injury and try to desensitize the feelings. They may try to encourage a person to be a little more occupied in their activities and learn how to reduce stress. Some of these stress reduction techniques are very similar to Swami's teachings such as regulating the breath and our thoughts.

GV: But Swami's teachings put all these techniques into a proper framework and perspective.

SS: Swami teaches about, "reflection, reaction, resound," which means that all we see in the outer world is only a projection of our own inner self. Psychotherapists understand this teaching as they see that patients project onto them feelings that belong to other relationships. This projection is called transference. For instance, a patient who had an abusive father might feel that the therapist is his abusive father and be fearful of the therapist when there is no apparent danger. The therapist's role is to help the patient detach from this transference, this projection, and see the therapist for who he/she truly is.

Frequently, the way the therapist teaches the patient to detach from a painful inner conflict is by being detached in the relationship that is, by being caring and real, and not by reacting to the patient's projection. For instance, if the patient on the surface seems happy with the therapist, but has hidden angry feeling toward the therapist who is seen as the abusive father, then the therapist feels the hidden anger. If the therapist is not aware of the projection, he might respond to the fear and anger by being angry in return. Being detached means that the therapist recognizes the projection from the patient, and does not react to it by responding in anger. The patient expects the therapist to be angry and abusive like the father, but when the therapist is detached and remains caring and receptive, even when feeling the transference of the patient, the patient begins to learn that the therapist is not his abusive father. To do this, the therapist must know how to detach from feelings, which is basically a spiritual technique.

Spiritual practice is a way of gaining mastery of our mind, which is attracted to the outer world of objects and ego gratifications. Swami teaches us sense control, ceiling on desires, not blaming others, looking within for our own faults, and non-attachment to the fruits of our actions. We practice looking for Swami in the outer world and recognizing that He is the doer. These practices teach us to not be so reactive to the outer world, but rather to see all as God and practice loving Him through service to others. This lifestyle teaches detachment and love, which are core ingredients of a good therapist.

GV: So, would you say that Swami has also helped you professionally?

SS: Yes, completely. Whatever I have learned in psychiatry is by practicing Swami's teachings; He gives us everything.

GV: Let me ask you something else that relates not to individuals, but to the society as a whole. This is a problem that is rather important, especially after the so called September 11 incident.

Generally speaking, I find it a bit strange. You know, the West is so advanced technologically, intellectually, scientifically, and the people there are very brilliant. They have so many accomplishments behind them; yet, some things that they do seem to be contradictory. In fact, you wonder, how could intelligent people do that?

Let me give you one simple example. Today, there is a lot of emphasis on building up the economy through over consumption and consumerism with no ceiling. However, this is very dangerous to the health of planet Earth. This danger is obvious. Yet, why do intelligent people shut their eyes to the obvious? This goes on everywhere, whether it is scientific research, political planning, military policy making, finance, or any other field. All these people are brilliant, but they wear blinkers. Why is that?

SS: Well, Swami's teachings on this are simple. Man is divine himself. He is pure love. But we don't know that and the key is the mind. If we turn our mind

to divinity, it is a way of opening us to freedom, and if we turn the mind to the world, it locks us.

The mind is very powerful. So if we turn our mind to the world, we are in a dungeon, we are locked in an inescapable jail, filled with desire and greed. And all the enemies – lust, anger, pride, greed, hatred, and attachment roam there as the gods of this worldly life.

As soon as you feel that it is desire and attachment to outside objects that brings gratification, you start chasing that, and there is no end to it.

GV: So desire is the blind spot.

SS: Well, it is a false understanding - the thought that outside objects bring gratification.

You know there is just a simple psychological experiment that shows gratification isn't from outside objects. All you have to do is to hypnotize somebody who wants a nice new car while they are sitting in a shabby old chair. You tell them that they are in a nice new car and they are very happy.

So where is the happiness? Is that from the object? It's all from inside. So the question is how to find happiness inside, not how to accumulate a lot of goods.

But that simple understanding is lacking in the Kali Yuga (the present age). We believe that the object outside is what brings us gratification. Therefore, you see these people on Wall Street or in the stock market with no end to their greed. Swami has told us that the fulfillment of desire breeds further desire. It's as simple as that. Unfulfilled desire leads to further birth, but at the same time, you cannot just tear yourself away; you cannot suppress and repress everything and just be a robot.

However, the trick is to offer everything to divinity. Now that is a very deep and vast subject. How do you do this? How do you release yourself to divinity?

This is a very important area to understand, but the first part of it is to realize that the fulfillment of desire leads to further desires. The mind is very strong and it binds itself to the outside world. Once you turn yourself into the world and keep following the selfish accumulation of objects, under the false belief that gratification of desires brings happiness, you enter hell.

This is a false idea and it is very hard for people to give that up. As a psychiatrist, one of the things that fascinate me is to challenge this attachment to external things. At first it looks simple.

You know, Swami challenges you by first helping you get over inconvenience and discomfort. He sees if you can take the car ride to come to Prashanti or can endure the plane ride. He checks to see how strong your attachment to physical comfort is.

And so, you have to have some discipline to do this, and it isn't an easy challenge. The mind just wants to be satisfied all the time. Then, you try to take yourself away from your sensual desires. "I am not going to eat as much", "I am not going to watch as much TV", and so on. Now, these are simple ones, but who has control? In the West, people gorge themselves and watch television like crazy. So then, you go a little bit deeper and look at the false thinking that you are your name, or your form, or fame, or fortune, or family, or friends, or power, or position, and all that.

Well, if somebody loses even one of those, say, their position, or money, it strikes him/her with terror, absolute terror!

So, going even deeper is to see that all this is transient and that everything in the external world is passing like a cloud. It's all a game.

To really see this brings on what I consider a very deep primal fear, which I called 'mortal fear'. I see that everything is transient and passing.

Swami has told me many times that "Everything is nothing. Nothing is everything" Well, to experience the nothingness in the external world, all of which you desire is 'nothing'. To actually feel that nothingness is profoundly frightening.

When we are aware of the impermanence of the outer world and that "everything (all objects that come and go) is nothing," we become afraid. The only solution is Swami's love, which applies balm and soothes. Love is the most powerful force in existence and is the cure for anxiety, depression, and fear. We find this love in our relationship with Swami, by holding onto His sacred robe.

GV: So, we hope more people will come and hold on to His robe.

SS: Well, without this, the world will destroy itself. As we are locked now in a level of terror and destruction, I can't see how any of us can get out of by our worldly thoughts, our human thoughts.

GV: Sometimes Swami does things that we don't even dream of. Take the case of Russia for example, if you know. I remember how it was in the 60s and 70s - we feared a nuclear holocaust all the time. Then all of a sudden things have changed and today we see so many Russians here in Prasanthi coming morning and evening for *darshan*! There are more Russians here now than ever before. Ten years ago I wonder whether you ever saw a Russian.

SS: I never saw one.

GV: So, maybe something has happened. Talking of Russia, you have been to Russia several times, so why don't you tell us something about what you saw.

SS: I first went to Russia in 1988.

GV: Was that still the Communist period?

SS: No, I think Perestroika (economic reforms) was going on and the people were opening up. What happened was that I was here at Brindavan and somebody gave me the Russian translation of my first book 'The Holy Man and the Psychiatrist'. So I brought it to Swami and said 'Swami, can I go to Russia and find a printer for this?' I didn't know anybody in Russia or anything about finding a publisher. I was innocent and just believed that Swami would lead me.

He thought a minute and said, "Why don't you have it done in Chicago?" And it happened that the translator of this, the Russian translator that is, was from Chicago. I mean it was unusual that He would know that. However, I said, "But Swami, it would be easier if I found a publishing company in Russia, so you wouldn't have to ship it over."

I was trying to teach Swami something! He thought a moment and said, "Okay, go!"

It was just like I need to go through my own *karma*. And I was stupid enough to believe that I could improve on Swami at that point. This is what I mean by saying that He was teaching me something.

And I said, "Well, when should I go?" He said, "Why wait?" So He was just speeding me along.

I didn't know anybody, let alone a publisher, in Russia. How was I going to go there?

But my first two phone calls trying to make contact were just flubbed terribly; it was a terrible nothing. And then the third one - I hit upon somebody who was trying to develop a relationship with Russia and who had been there many times; it was one of those unusual Sai-coincidences.

And so, I was soon in Russia. Well, at that time I wondered how in the world Swami's devotees would develop in this country, because they didn't know what this book meant at all. I wondered, how would it happen? It would be a miracle in a country which was very poor and in so much trouble. Would I ever be able to sit in a group and hear "A-U-M" "Ganesha charanam..." Would I ever be in a situation like that? Could it ever happen? I don't know how the Master does it.

GV: He sure does it though!

SS: He does it! And He never lets out how He does it, but we all know that it's Him.

GV: And next time you went you saw something totally out of this world?

SS: Well, then, the next time is when the Russians invited my wife and I to be speakers at a conference.

GV: Which year was that?

SS: This was three years ago. They met us at the airport, took care of us, sang to us, and were very loving. We spoke everyday at a different devotee's home. The homes were clean and smelled incense and it was so beautiful to see Swami's influence, to see His teaching about being good, clean, and honest being put into practice.

Then, we took part in their large conference in Moscow. In the early morning, sitting on this old tattered wooden floor with about 300 Russians, I chanted 'AUM'. Tears welled up my eyes, because all of a sudden I saw so many brothers and sisters chanting AUM together in front of Swami's picture.

GV: Can you tell us how it happened because, as you know, in America there was Hislop and in Australia there was Murphet. How did it happen in Russia?

SS: I just don't know! I don't know how all of a sudden it happened.

GV: But it's happened!

SS: Yes, it happened! And to be sitting there with brothers and sisters hearing the same bhajan, the same AUM, the same love and respect for His teaching was just breathtaking. How did it take seed and how did it develop like that? It's a miracle!

GV: You know I've once seen a group of devotees who were wearing a scarf with the name 'Siberia' on it. So Swami has gone all the way to Siberia... and people also come from Kazakhstan.

SS: Well, it is S-A-I-beria.

GV: That's a good one! I've never heard that before. I think it has become that way now and I believe there are big centers in Leningrad and St. Petersburg.

SS: Yes, that's where I was.

GV: And Ukraine too.

SS: Ukraine? Well, there were devotees from all over Eastern Europe, Siberia, and places I've never even heard of at the conference at Moscow. They would have traveled for days and days, often from poor backgrounds, just to get to the place and to be with Sai devotees; it was hard work for them.

GV: And don't you think that is the real power of Love?

SS: Who can do that? Who can put you in the biggest mystery? And it's always vital and exciting, and there's always something happening – to stir us

and to excite us. He's just full of *drama*; you don't know what is going to happen next.

GV: You know, I agree with you. You go to a strange country and suddenly you hear familiar *bhajans* and you feel you are at home. You don't feel you are in a different place at all! It's so wonderful.

SS: And to sense that we are witnessing an international movement with a universal language of love that's understood in all the languages and by all traditions and that it transcends all socio-economic barriers, political borders, and religious boundaries. It is truly remarkable.

GV: Just amazing...

SS: Yes. Especially with people that you never thought you'd have anything to do with. Even in your center! The person you dislike the most, you know you never have anything to do with him or her normally; you marvel at how you could be brought together and even try to learn how to get along with each other. What marvelous love is bringing us into this experiment!

GV: I heard Bob Bozzani saying once how wonderful it is to be able to see it happen right before our eyes.

SS: Oh, it is so. What grace it's been for us!

GV: I would like to thank you very much at this point of time for sharing so many of your thoughts with us. This is not the first and only time you are going to be here.

You are going to be here again because there are so many things I would like to talk to you about.

SS: Sure, thank you very much. It has been a pleasure. Sai Ram!

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 12

Living Up to the Challenge of Conscience in Daily Life

Dear Reader, in this series, we offer you real life stories from contemporary heroes who have demonstrated the courage to follow their conscience when confronted with difficult dilemmas or challenging circumstances in their daily lives. This segment is an ode to the strength of the brave-hearts who chose to listen to the voice of their conscience, thereby abiding by the values of Right Conduct, Truth, Love, Peace and Non-violence, even though the choice had appeared tough.

In our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories from Mrs. Priya K-Alldis, Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani, Mr. Karthik Ramesh, Mr. Amar Vivek, Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam, Mr. Hiten Morarji, Mr. N. Prabhakar, Mr. Sathya Jambunathan, Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi and part 11 (anonymous)

We now bring you a story from a gentleman rich in the experience of life. Mr. Shalabh Mittal, an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, seems to make all the right choices to cultivate the qualities of the heart, while he pursues a career in the field of social work. If it is caring for street kids, or those who are HIV+ve, he rises to the challenge and improves their lives. By dint of his hard earned credentials, he can now, as he says, keep his head high, when he meets his erstwhile alumni colleagues, who are now being highly paid in the corporate world. By sheer perseverance, he has made his heart the guiding light of his life, while turning the apparent painful stumbling blocks along the way into stepping stones to growth and maturity. Let's read his fascinating account called...

THE ZEAL OF THE HEART

...converting a soulful passion into a fulfilling profession

By Mr. Shalabh Mittal

After completing his Bachelors of Commerce and Masters in Financial Management at the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1999, Mr. Shalabh Mittal went on to qualify with a law degree, as well as a diploma in NGO Management. He has more than 10 years experience with various social development organisations, and currently works for a leading Non-Government Organisation in Delhi, India.

I completed my Masters in Financial Management from Sri Sathya Sai University (then Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning) in 1999. This institution, as many are aware, provides education for not just living; it imparts lessons for life which enables students to live a complete life, and not merely exist.

*"Great dreams of great dreamers are always transcended."
- Dr. Abdul Kalam*

For my parents, my post graduation degree in management increased their dreams of my forthcoming financial wellbeing through a rewarding job in a leading business house. Though they were doing sufficiently well even to have supported me, their aspiration, like many other parents, were to see me successful in the corporate world.

But my heart was somewhere else. My soul was already yearning to do something very different. Few people with my kind of academic background would have such ideas. Somehow, societal welfare always captured by imagination intensely, and so, my heart was set on looking for an opportunity in the non-profit sector. Yes, it was a very unlikely and economically unprofitable objective for a Post Graduate in Financial Management.

While friends of my age and qualification were getting into leading banks and multi national corporations, I was frantically searching for a job that would satisfy my inner self. It was no walk in the park, and even more difficult for me because I had no clue about it, except that deep yearning within me.

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(Robert Frost)*

Liberation Under a Tree!

Within nine months, I found something that interested me. I started working for a small Non-Government Organisation in Delhi as the Manager of a project that provided non-formal education and life skills to run-away children. It also offered counselling to people affected by HIV. My typical day used to start with teaching a group of children, usually escapees from home, under a tree near Hazrat Nizamuddin Dargah in New Delhi, India's capital city.

These boys were essentially rag-pickers and earned their beard by collecting all the trash that nobody liked to touch. They had absconded from their homes for various reasons, from petty issues like fighting with a sibling to being physically and psychologically abused by their drunkard fathers to unbearable hunger. Here I had the opportunity to interact with many such children, and they had come from various states of India.

I realised very soon that they were actually vulnerable to many evils of the society. In fact, this exposed me to many realities of life which I had not been exposed to, studying in the serene and protected environment of Sathya Sai institutions. Nevertheless, my education at Bhagavan's University had prepared me both physically and emotionally to understand and handle the situation.

The Power of Responsibility

Those days, I used to leave home at 6:00 a.m. in the morning to reach the railway station to mobilize the children, and then take them to our 'education tree' (which I used to fondly call Kalpavriksha!). This and the counselling to AIDS infected men and women used to be as fulfilling as they were challenging. Though in my formal education at Puttaparthi, I was not taught to do this, the emotional and spiritual training there had equipped me well to adapt to any role and strive for perfection.

The sustained demonstration of this capability of mine actually enhanced the trust of the Director of this NGO; with time, he started entrusting me with higher responsibilities. I was asked to write funding proposals, interact with donors, and make presentations at meetings sponsored by the United Nations at a relatively very young age. There were many senior people with degrees in social sciences and who had put in more years than me in that organisation, but my boss took me into confidence on important assignments. As months rolled by, my role in the organisation expanded.

Well, this was actually a tricky situation because I ran the risk of incurring the wrath of all the seniors in the organisation who were overlooked. What saved me the day during this period were my people skills, for which the credit surely goes to my alma mater, Sri Sathya Sai University. It is in Puttaparthi that I had learnt the vital tips like always speaking obligingly, respecting elders, listening more than speaking and doing before speaking. Therefore, with time, I gained the confidence and cooperation of everyone in the organisation. And as we worked together, I could even at times transform their attitudes.

Management by Collaboration

Once our organisation took a decision to employ HIV+ve persons to work with us, and I led this initiative. There were whispers of resistance in many corners of the organization, and I could see this evidently during my daily interactions with the staff. We were not a huge group, just about eight of us, and usually we used to have lunch together on one table, often sharing each other's food. But now this was going to be difficult, I realised. So, again I took the initiative to break the ice. Through many positive plans, I ensured that the existing staff and these new recruits worked and ate together.

*"Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted are the most terrible poverty."
(Mother Teresa)*

The only reason I could do this was Baba's dictum: "Fullness in life is marked by the harmony of thought, word and deed." During the counselling sessions conducted by our organisation, we used to emphasise strongly that HIV would not spread by touching each other or having food together, and I felt it was now for us to practice it. It did take a while, but then, slowly, we all became one family. And now, after seven years, we are all still in touch with each

other even though I have moved on from that organisation. In moments of solitude, when I look back, I realise that this ability to build teams and live harmoniously in communities has been one of my strengths right from my early days in school, which was reinforced during my 5 years stay in Baba's University. In fact, this aspect of my personality is what has taken me far in life today.

While I was working in the above organisation, I also realized that if I have to improve my effectiveness in my chosen field of work, it would serve me better to pursue a formal education in the discipline of Social Development. I figured that all the courses offered were either for 2 or 3 years, and were quite elaborate; I was looking for one that was short, integrated and holistic.

My work experience till then had given me insight into "social work" in the corporate, voluntary as well as academic arenas. I was convinced that to better understand the wider context, influence, and mechanics of social work, I should study it with a lot more focus.

Learning to Lead

I came across an advertisement sent through email to over 600 NGOs in India inviting offers to recruit its professional students, well trained in NGO Management, for internship. Initially, I discarded the mail thinking there were several other Social Work schools that were more popular. But there was something within me that motivated me to visit the website of that institute. And thus, my first online interaction with EDI India (Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India) happened.

I joined the course in 2003 and I am happy I had made the right choice. A decision to leave a job and pursue a course is not an easy one, and I had weighed it against many realities like cost, duration and placement prospects. There are several institutes in India that offer a variety of such courses but to have found this course and getting enrolled was, in hindsight, indeed a wise decision. This course specifically aimed to groom the second line leadership in NGOs.

Voluntary organizations are often thought to be merely charitable organizations and the science behind managing these organizations is often neglected. Many such institutions are run by a single individual who bring in much social capital by their passion and personality, but once the person is no more in the scene, the organisation just withers away. Institutionalizing the practices, approaches, innovations and ideas require professionally trained people who can spearhead the challenges involved in the sector.

'All labour that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.'
(Martin Luther King, Jr)

Once I embarked onto the social development sector after my education, many a times I had to face questions from my family, like 'Is this really what you want to do in your life?' But at the same time, I should confess that my family has been my biggest support and have let me follow my heart. During

my difficult times, they stood by me and provided strength. My father would always say, 'If your heart says you are right and this is what would make you happy without causing pain to others, then you should follow go ahead and do it'. When I was doing just this, and everything seemed to be happening as I had wished, I received a big blow. I lost my dear father. I was now half way through my one year course in Ahmedabad (in the state of Gujarat), while my mother was now alone in Faridabad in the state of Haryana, a distance of more than 300 kilometres.

Now, I was in a dilemma – to continue the course or leave it half way to be with my mother. Luckily for me, my older brother, who was living in Washington DC, and had a promising career ahead there, at this point decided to return to India to live with my mother. It is only because of his sacrifice that I could complete the course. I was following my heart and I knew God would always find a way for me. If there was a need for me to discontinue the course at that time to help my mother, I would have done it too, accepting it as God's will. In whatever situation life put me in, I never forgot God. Prayer was and is an indelible part of my life, and this attitude of relying on none else but on the Supreme is another salient trait that I had imbibed in Sri Sathya Sai University, which has really stood me in great stead all my life.

The Prayer Power

Here is just one instance. On one occasion I was frequently confronted by a very senior member of our board of directors. During every interaction, he would vent his anger at me and some of my colleagues. This was bringing down the morale of my team, and despite my sincere efforts, there was no improvement in this situation. In one of the forthcoming meetings, I had to present a proposal for future strategies, and here, the endorsement from the Board was critical. It was therefore a very crucial session.

I was very anxious and suspicious about its outcome, and hence, one day before the meeting I sincerely prayed to God before I slept. In the next day, to my utter astonishment, the proceedings in the meeting went on smoothly and all the board members came to my support and stood by me to take the proposal through. This was a total turn of events, and for me, a clear answer to my prayers.

*"God, our Creator, has stored within our minds and personalities, great potential strength and ability. Prayer helps us tap and develop these powers."
(Dr. Abdul Kalam)*

The Sweet Result of Empowerment

In 2005, I was working for an NGO in Ahmedabad as a Senior Programme Coordinator leading a team of over 22 people and 108 member organizations. It was a challenging job and truly a stepping stone in my career. In this office,

we had a receptionist, who in her usual work day would sit at her desk and answer phones, transfer calls and pass on messages. Her desktop job was not so exciting and she had at many times earned the administration's wrath, and even got branded as a 'non performing asset'. But I would often wonder why such a thing should happen to her.

Therefore, one day I spoke to her and asked if she would like to maintain a 'Thought for the day' board. And she readily agreed. Initially, I found a few quotations for her to write every day, and soon she got interested and continued to do it by herself. As days passed, more employees began to stop by at her desk to read the thought, and those few lines often become discussion topics during lunch sessions. In fact, the routine conversations now started having a philosophical and spiritual bent. Soon, the receptionist's profile in the mind of the employees changed; she had actually now found a special place in the heart of every employee.

*'Do not think that love, in order to be genuine, has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired'.
(Mother Teresa)*

What I practiced in this situation was what I had learnt from Bhagavan Baba. 'Man Management' Baba says is the summum bonum of management. And this has been my focus all through my professional life. In fact, based on this principle, over a period of time I have developed my own style of management wherein I do review workshops with the team I work. These sessions help all the members of the team to review the work in an open manner. Not only that, it also gives each one a sense of ownership of the work, which in turn builds trust and makes the team goal oriented. And one of the unique things about these workshops is that it provides a platform to interact with the staff right from the top to the person working at the grass roots level. If there are any issues to be sorted out at any stage, they get resolved then and there.

The head of an organization may make a fabulous plan with all nuts and bolts well thought of, but if it does not inspire the person responsible for executing it, it would never materialize. Thus, these get-togethers during every project helped individuals to perform better since they had now an opportunity to speak, be heard and get their points of view clarified.

Mother is Primary, Always

By putting all these ideas of man management into practice I was doing extremely well in my new organisation in 2005. But then, in the same year, my brother decided to join a partnership firm with his friends in Mumbai. This required him to shift from Faridabad, and I felt it was my calling now to be with my mother. Actually, I was to be promoted as the Executive Trustee of the Board of Trustees of the organisation I was working for - a position many aspire for and a real achievement for a young professional like me pretty early in life.

But I decided to quit and be with my mother. I came to my town and took up a job in Delhi, which is about 20 kms from my home. Today, I have no regrets, but my mother often feels sorry for me for having left a rewarding career for her sake. But I believe I have only followed Bhagavan's teaching that one should always be grateful to one's mother and be beside her whenever she needs us, and especially, during the evening of her life.

A Hearty Story...

I personally believe that whatever I am today is because of the blessings of my mother, and of course, the precious lessons I have learnt studying in the hallowed Sri Sathya Sai University. Eight years ago, I started with Rs. 4000/month, a ridiculous amount as salary for a post graduate in finance. My near and dear ones including my extended family did react to it very negatively. Some of them even accused me of being irresponsible. I spent many nights in tears. But all through I never gave up listening to my heart and walking on my chosen path. And today, as 'Director – Business Development' for an NGO, I stand as tall as my colleagues in the corporate sector. And not only that, there is no difference between my work and my passion; every moment of my professional life is fulfilling. Life can never go wrong when we allow our heart to be in the driving seat.

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

(Martin Luther King, Jr)

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part – 47

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT XXI - SCENE 1

EASWARAMMA: Sathyam, my child, if Your mother asks You to do something, You will do it, won't You?

SATHYA: I know what you want to ask.

EASWARAMMA: You know?

SATHYA: Yes... I know everything.

EASWARAMMA: Sathyam!

SATHYA: Yes, what I say is indeed *Sathyam* [Truth]! When I am here, neighbours come to you with all their problems... and you become their spokesperson, don't you?

EASWARAMMA: Yes! But son, what am I to do? When they worry so much and carry such a heavy burden in their hearts, how can I say no? So...

SATHYA: You carry their problems to Me! And I must give the solutions, isn't that so? You are becoming their postman!

EASWARAMMA: I don't know about that... If only I could help them a little bit... Poor things, they are so agitated. Sathyam... Sathyam... Please oblige this mother of Yours and provide the solutions to their problems.

SATHYA: Yes, I will do so, but...

EASWARAMMA: But? What is the meaning of this 'but'?

SATHYA: Will you prepare the dish *Bobbatlu* for Me?

EASWARAMMA: I shall certainly do so, my son! Why only *Bobbatlu*? I will make whatever You want, my dear son!

SATHYA: Poor thing! All these people are troubling you, are they not? Ask them to come to Me, and tell Me directly their problems. Without fail, I shall give them the solutions.

EASWARAMMA: So be it. As You say, my son!

SATHYA: Lady, don't forget the *Bobbatlu*...

EASWARAMMA: My son! My Sathyam! I won't forget; I certainly will not!

SCENE 2

The place is vibrant and colourfully decorated; many devotees come to have Swami's darshan.

GROUP: Get down... get down... slowly, get down slowly... (from the cart)

GROUP: We have come for Swami's *darshan*.

GROUP: Careful, you may fall down, get down slowly

There is a general murmur among the crowd.

(To be continued...)

Dear reader, this is the penultimate part of this serial. Yes, it is very short compared to the previous episodes, but that is because we have saved the best for last!

SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

By Prof. G Venkataraman

Since Heart2Heart started in 2003, readers have very often written to us seeking answers to many spiritual questions. We have answered them at times through appropriate articles in H2H. However, there are still many that have to be explained carefully and in detail. And in the recent past, a lot more queries have arrived on varied topics concerning spirituality and personal growth. We have now meticulously compiled and categorised these questions, and Prof. G. Venkataraman has offered to answer all these queries in a structured and systematic way as a series on Radio Sai as well as in H2H. In this way, these answers now remain always on our website as a ready reckoner on spiritual doubts.

A New Series

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. For quite some time, we have been receiving questions from various listeners as also from other sources such as **Heart2Heart**, requesting answers to spiritual questions. In the past, these questions were dealt with occasionally, sometimes over the air, and sometimes via e-mail. In addition, both in my classes in the University and whenever I give talks on Radio Sai, I am invariably asked many questions after the session. While sometimes the same questions are asked, at other times, the queries are novel and even quite challenging.

Last year (2007), I decided that it was about time that we made a serious effort to compile the various questions received and make an equally systematic effort to respond to doubts and queries; the present radio series which is also carried in H2H is the result. I should mention that our effort would not stop with this and we invite comments, supplementary questions, discussion, and so on in response to these series. Eventually, based on all these, we hope to come out with a formal book that would then serve as a ready reference for all those who are interested.

As I start, we have with us a question bank of over a hundred questions compiled from various sources and I expect as I go along that more questions would be added to the bank. I should mention that many have helped in the question collection, categorisation, and so on. In particular, I should mention the names of Mr. Rangarajan and Amey Deshpande, both of whom assist me in my Awareness classes in the University. And of course, there is Bishu Prusty, who is truly the heart and soul of H2H, and literally runs it almost all by himself. But for the staunch support that these people have given, this series on Radio Sai and H2H that I have been planning for long would never have taken off.

A Probable Book on Spiritual Questions and Answers

With that preamble and acknowledgement, let me now get down to business. I should mention that the questions are basically as received, and as I go along, some of them would necessarily overlap. I feel that this does not matter where a Radio/H2H series is concerned; but when, God willing, we finally come out with a book, it would, we hope, contain suitable cross references and the like, adding to its scholarly value and utility as a reference manual; but all that comes in the future. For now, it is just straightforward Q and A as in a talk or lecture.

The question bank that I referred to has been sorted out into suitable categories, and today, I wish to start with some questions in the category that has been entitled: Man's True Purpose. This is just a generic title, intended to convey the fact that the questions deal essentially with the purpose of life. By the way, the questions have not necessarily been lined up in the best possible logical order; in any case, the decision as to what exactly is the best order is of course somewhat subjective. So, skipping such semantic issues, let me get on with the job and see what we have in this issue's basket.

Living Like a Lotus

The first question, as received, is the following:

Q 1: How to live in the world, but not of the world?

I believe the questioner is basically asking: "How to go through life, without attachment." Now, before I answer this question, perhaps I should explain why at all such a question would arise. Clearly, whoever has asked this question has done so because he or she has heard a bit of *Vedanta*, about giving up attachment, and so on. I do not expect, for example, someone from the West who does not know anything about *Vedanta*, or for that matter, even someone from India, such as a present-day college student, to ask such a question. That, by the way, was meant to convey the fact that most students in this country today are almost completely cut off from their spiritual roots, and if someone told them that while living in this world we must not allow it to affect us, even as the water drops on the lotus leaf in the pond do not wet the leaf, they would ask exactly the kind of question I am now venturing to answer; hope you follow that.

The way I have introduced the question, clearly implies that detachment is a virtue while attachment is not only a burden but a spiritual obstruction as well. So, really speaking, I must explain why this is considered to be so; and that is what I shall try and do by way of responding to this question.

Now, if you think about it a bit, the word 'spirituality' has a lot to do with the word 'spirit'. People may frown upon hearing the word 'spirituality', but even an atheist would have no objection to the word 'spirit', the human spirit that is. Why? Because that word refers to something within each one of us, that all

recognise it exists, and which also has meaning. Let us say that the Indian cricket team has lost an important match not because they lacked the talent, but because the players did not apply themselves. I must here confess that like almost all Indians, I have a weakness for this game even though many consider it absolutely foolish. Be that as it may, let me get back to what I was trying to say. When say, our team loses, we often condemn our players with remarks like, "Our fellows simply caved in; they showed no spirit at all." I am sure many of you have heard such comments. Or else, people would say, "The human spirit is capable of tremendous drive; it can help man achieve anything, like conquering Everest, taking him to the Moon and outer space, to split the atom, to map the human genome, to unravel the cosmos, and so on."

Spirituality is the Science of the Spirit

What it all boils down to is that most people accept that one can talk of an intangible entity called the human spirit, though one cannot actually see it; and this includes believers, agonistics and even atheists. The problem starts when one wants to know something more about this mysterious entity called the spirit; and that is where all the arguments begin. Here, I must disclose that I belong to the school that believes in what is called Spirituality, which is nothing but the Science of the Spirit.

I am a physicist by training, and indeed, my career has been closely connected with physics in many different ways. Physics, chemistry, biology, and so on, are all sciences connected with the material world, and there is a particular methodology associated with exploring this world. Basically, the tools used are the method of theory, combined with the method of experimentation. These two are not disconnected, but feed each other. I cannot go into all that here, but for the sake of completeness, let me add that in the 20th century, a new tool has been added, namely computer simulation; a large part of what you hear these days about climate change, comes via simulation performed using various computer models.

Now what has all this got to do with Spirituality or the Science of the Spirit? I brought in all this because many say, "In science as we normally understand it, there are well laid down rules for exploration, hypothesis testing, experimental verification, and so on. The way spirituality seems to be practiced does not follow the rules laid down by us; so we cannot accept it." This is how non-believers tend to dismiss spirituality. However, spirituality is not as hollow as many would have us believe; rather, it is based on its own methodology of exploration, logical analysis, hypothesis testing, and so on. Very great minds have been engaged in this kind of activity for thousands of years, and their collective wisdom cannot be pooh-poohed or summarily dismissed just because the system they followed happens to be different from what those who explore the material world swear by.

Relying On Vedanta

The reason why I am going through this rather lengthy preamble is just to drive home the fact that my responses would be based on *Vedanta*, the

ancient Science of the Spirit. *Vedanta* must not be confused with cults, creeds and the like. It is a philosophy, indeed spiritual philosophy at its best that has grown out of the collective wisdom of thousands of unknown sages, and has found expression through the famous *Upanishads*. Indeed, so inspiring are its content, that Mahatma Gandhi made them the anchor of his entire service to humanity, while great physicists such as Erwin Schrodinger and Brian Josephson, both of whom won the Noble Prize, literally swore by *Vedanta*. I hope all that would lend credibility to what I would be saying, since my responses would be governed mainly by *Vedanta*.

And to wind up this part of the argument, let me mention two other facts that in a sense override all the above. The first is that the celebrated *Bhagavad Gita* is nothing but a restatement of the essence of *Vedanta* by the Lord Himself appearing as Sri Krishna, while the Divine Discourses of Swami are, at the core, nothing but a reiteration of all that *Vedanta* stands for. In other words, my responses would rely heavily on *Vedanta*, although I might, for purposes of illustration, resort to modern examples.

By way of assuring you once more that I have not got lost, let me return to the question I started with and face it frontally. Keeping in view all that I said just now, let me rephrase that question:

We live in this world and we are connected with it in innumerable ways. What sense does it make then to say that we must not be attached to this world? If we become detached, then we would be going through life essentially in a spiritless manner, if one might put it that way. It would mean that the purpose of spirituality is to quench and maybe even kill the human spirit! What do you say to this?

That would be the way the Devil's Advocate would argue, and perhaps many disbelievers in *Vedanta* also would! Let us try to answer this new question for if that is done, then the original question would also get answered; incidentally, this would also make the answering of questions that follow somewhat simpler.

Vedanta's response to all this is as follows: Yes, humans do have a spirit, and this spirit resides in a body. However, while the body is made up of gross matter, that is to say, of molecules and atoms, which in turn are made up of protons, neutrons, and electrons, the spirit is not. The spirit of any particular individual, says *Vedanta*, might operationally be regarded as a part of the Universal Spirit or Universal Soul; it is just that a part of this Universal Spirit finds itself "encased" in a gross human body.

Bursting The Balloon

The name that *Vedanta* uses for the Universal Spirit or Universal Soul is *Atma*, while the Individual Spirit or the Individualised Soul is called *Jivatma*. If you want an analogy, the *Jivatma* is like a balloon, in which the rubber casing is like the body and the air within is like the spirit. A balloon has air within it and there is also air surrounding it; however, while the air within is "trapped,"

the air outside is “free”. As long as the balloon has an existence, the air within is trapped and cannot mix with that which is outside and free. However, if the balloon bursts, then the air within gets released and becomes free, and immediately mixes with the air outside. Please keep this analogy in mind for it would come in very handy in what follows.

Let us move on and link all this to attachment, detachment, and so on, for that is the real core of the question we started with. The individual human soul has two options; one is to remain “trapped” and the other is to become “free”; but what exactly do these words “trapped” and “free” mean? *Vedanta* has the answer. It says that the Universal Soul or the *Atma* is not only eternal, but its nature is bliss. Thus, if the Individual Soul merges with the Universal Soul the same way the air in the balloon becomes free and merges with the air outside, then it becomes possible to be eternally in a state of bliss.

What happens if no such merger takes place? Well in that case, the Individual Soul, being tied to the human body, has to face all the usual worldly experiences. “So what?” one might ask. The answer is that life is never a bed of roses; there are moments of pleasure and there are also moments of pain. As Swami often reminds us, pleasure is an interval between two pains.

Duality: Two Sides of the Same Coin

The latter points needs a bit of elaboration. The world is a manifestation of duality, which means that it is a mixture of opposites such as pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, success and failure, happiness and misery, and so on. In other words, the opposites are tied together like the two sides of a coin are; in turn, it means that one cannot have happiness forever.

OK, may be all this is true, but what on earth does all this have to do with attachment and detachment? That is the point that I shall now consider. You see, as long as the Individual Soul is trapped in the body, this alternation of pleasure and pain is inevitable; that is to say, one simply cannot experience eternal bliss. If eternal bliss is what one wants [and who would not want that?] then, one must make every effort to see that the Soul breaks free of the body and set it free for ever; this is like making the balloon burst. I hope these remarks would help you to see how the two words “trapped” and “being free” acquire meaning.

To get back to the question we started with, the answer is that if one is to live in the world and not be of it, then one must give up attachment to the world. Clearly, I need to explain what precisely that statement means, but before I do that, may be I should talk about the benefit we get by giving up attachment. Basically, it prevents rebirth. This point would come for greater discussion when I get down to answering the next question, but for now we may take it that the less the attachment, the less the chance of being reborn. And once, one escapes rebirth, one can become one with the *Atma* or God and enjoy permanent bliss.

So the formula is: While on earth, do what you have to, but do not become attached to the things of the world. The less the attachment, the less the probability of being born again. If attachment is totally reduced, then one escapes rebirth; and that means that the Individual Soul becomes united forever with the *Atma* or the Universal Soul; in turn that means one would be in a state of bliss forever.

The Answer is Equanimity

Now one might say, "Listen, I know all that; what I am looking for is a recipe for how not to be attached, and not a long lecture on the Individual Soul becoming united forever with the *Atma*." I fully understand that my answer would not be complete without some remarks concerning that issue. However, it was in order to set the entire matter in a proper perspective that I took time off to discuss the issue of permanent union with the *Atma* and other subjects.

Let me now deal with the issue under consideration head on. The first thing one has to do is to ask oneself, "Am I interested in permanent bliss or not?" If one says, "I don't know whether at all there is such a thing as permanent bliss, and therefore I shall not waste time seeking the non-existent," then it is a different matter. However, if one believes in the *Atma*, one believes that the *Atma* is a state of eternal bliss, and that, as Swami has often told us, happiness is union with God or the *Atma*, and further that this goal is worth striving for, then one must go through life asking all the time, "Is what I am doing detrimental to my goal or not?"

Now comes a very practical point. Let us say there is a person who is a company executive. The question can be asked, "How can that person give up attachment? Would it at all be possible? Should he not be attached to his job? Without that passion, how can he do justice to the post he is holding?" and so on. Questions like these would make it seem that giving up attachment is impossible, adding that one simply cannot be in this world and not be of it. Actually, that is not correct. One can be a good company executive; one can work hard and so on, but at the same time, one could also do a few other things. One could always take the view, "I shall do my best and leave the outcome entirely to God; and I shall cheerfully accept the outcome of my efforts whatever they be. If the outcome is a success, I shall not seek any credit while if it is not a success, I shall not blame anybody or curse anybody and not allow my equanimity to be disturbed." That is the kind of attitude that one asks for.

The key word is equanimity. In the twelfth chapter of the *Gita*, Krishna strongly recommends equanimity; elsewhere He declares that equanimity is the best of all *Yogas*. Thus, living in the world and not being a part of it boils down to practicing equanimity. The less attached we become, the more easy it would be to achieve equanimity. And the benefits are, firstly, it would please the Lord immensely – He Himself says so in the twelfth chapter – and secondly, it would move us closer to permanent union to God, which as Swami tells us ever so often would bring permanent happiness. So, unless one is not keen on permanent happiness, one would have to learn the art of living in this

world, and not being affected too much by it; no escape from it; and one word says it all and that is equanimity.

It looks like my very first question has taken almost an entire talk, and at this rate to deal with over hundred questions, you might think I would may be close to two hundred Q and A sessions! Don't worry, the responses won't always be as long and elaborate in the future. This being the first such exercise, I thought I would work in a few extra points so that they serve me as an anchor in my later sessions.

I hope I did not do too badly and that you would continue to read this series, comment and supplement with your ideas and understanding. Thank you and all the best till we get together again. Jai Sai Ram!

PRASHANTI DIARY

October 1st, 2008 – Dasara in Prasanthi Nilayam

With the beginning of the new month on October 1, the whole of Prasanthi Nilayam shifted gears in preparation of the Dasara *Yagnam* called the Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna which was to start on October 3. The Kalasa Puja had already begun inside the Prasanthi Mandir the previous day.

By October 1, almost all the students had become acquainted with the Rudram after the 20 days of intensive coaching. It was about 5:15 p.m. that Swami arrived for *darshan* and was welcomed with the chants of the Rudram. He did not take the full round and used the detour after ladies side and went straight to the Bhajan Hall. Not very long after, Swami took a round in the Bhajan Hall, and then moving via the upper portico, came out to the main stage.

He sat listening to the Vedas being chanted. He was keenly observing as to who were chanting confidently and who were shaky, still learning. Even if we do not consider His divine all-seeing eye, Swami's observation and sight are so perfect that He immediately spots those who are not confident. And when He does so, it is actually to inspire them and breathe confidence into them. He sat swaying His hands and looking at everyone; it was a wonderful experience. All the students in the front few rows were stretching out their hands with letters to the fullest as if wanting Him also to stretch 10 times more and receive them! But on some occasions Swami just chooses to look at all of them nonchalantly in a relaxed manner. After a while however, He began calling boys from the front rows in a 'random' manner. Well, events in Swami's presence may seem 'random' at times, but that's only to a mind that has not yet experienced Him. Many things in the universe such as the way smoke twirls and rises into the skies or the way water eddies and flows in turbulent streams have been thought to be 'random' - till the time chaos theory made waves! The chaos theory, one that is in the frontiers of sciences today, is really about finding the underlying order in apparently random data. And so, with Swami too, when we think or talk about His 'randomness' it's actually a reflection of that wonderful underlying order that He alone knows!

And so, Swami began collecting letters. As a student would get up and go to Him, his place in the front row would be occupied by another student from behind who would have a letter! The first line therefore always had students holding out letters for Him! He called out for a member of the Veda group and asked him as to how many students were confident with the Rudram. Swami wanted to know at least an approximate number. The answer given to Him was 'about 50'. Swami then called the tray boys and blessed all of them. One Iranian Muslim boy from the Primary school had also come for blessings as it was the occasion of Id. Swami called out to him and blessed him too. That being done, Swami went back to taking letters from the boys. Each boy sitting there was pining for that personal call from Swami when he could go and handover his letter to Him.

It's all a matter of perspective as they say. As you sit there, just identify yourself with one of the students holding out the letters. And do the identifying a bit seriously. Feelings of devotion and desperation combine and make you think, "Swami, why not this letter? Why only from a few of them? What is special in others that is not in me?" Instead, sitting there if you identify yourself with Swami, there is the feeling of absolute impartiality, and thoughts that arise are, "The boys have to be picked 'randomly' for all are equal. What criteria can I use when, say, I want to take 20 letters?' And thus silently, amidst the loud chanting, goes on wonderful games of thoughts and feelings - games in which His decision is final and all abide by it!

Swami sat outside till about 5:45 p.m. and then He said that it was time for the *bhajans* to begin. He moved into the Bhajan Hall and the *bhajans* began. *Aarthi* was taken at about 6:10 p.m.

October 2, 2008 – Day three of Dasara in Prasanthi Nilayam

The evening of October 2, the third day since the Kalasa Puja started in Prasanthi Mandir marking the beginning of Dasara Celebrations, was very eventful even though Swami chose to remain indoors in the morning. At about 4:30 p.m. everyone became alert and signs that Swami was coming out was very evident. And the master of uncertainty that He is, Swami came in the car! As He neared the central marble blocks, He took a turn and drove out of the main Gopuram gate. At the same time, many of the devotees too headed towards the nearest exits.

The enthusiasm of the devotees to catch a glimpse of Him is so infectious that even those who are not able to or not inclined to run, find their legs moving faster and faster as they see others doing the same! Swami's car via the main road went to the Vidyagiri Stadium where the construction of a grand stage for the upcoming Sahasra Chandra Darshanam Homam was on. As always a huge following formed the tail of the car and athletic sevadal formed a security cordon of ropes alongside the car. Swami arrived at the stage and then the car halted. The glass was lowered and the chief engineers at the site went to Swami.

The Lord in all His love and magnanimity gives opportunities to all of us to enjoy the joy of interaction with Him. And next, armed with the different charts and sketches, the engineers explained to Swami the proposed plan of action and the progress achieved till then. All the workers stood with folded hands on either side of the car and were very happy at this wonderful *darshan* being conferred on them. Swami seemed to survey the Shanti Vedika and expressed satisfaction at the way things were going on there. He was there for about 5-10 minutes. Then blessing the workers and devotees gathered on either sides, Swami slowly moved across the Shanti Vedika. He was seated on the left side seat of the car while Shanti Vedika was on the right, and elders present there prayed to Swami that if the car came the other way, He could see the work better.

As Swami moved down the slope of the road, the workers from the Senior Boys' Hostel too offered their salutations. The warden was also there and He invited Swami to bless the new "Dhyanamandir" that had been constructed at the hostel. Swami assured that He would do so later and then drove on. It was a pleasant surprise when Swami took an about turn and returned back to the Shanti Vedika. One may be tempted to think that He did so to get a better view of the work in progress. But as one waited and watched, it dawned that it was for the workers' joy that He did so! The car slowly drove across and Swami blessed all the workers who had gathered in a straight line and drank in His beautiful form. The scene reminded one of the Brindavan days of the Dwapara Yuga where everyone would abandon whatever they were doing to have a look at the sweet Krishna. The Karma Yoga, like the mind, came to a stand still and the Bhakti Yoga, like the heart, continued at a frenetic pace. Swami, thus, drove out of the stadium leaving behind workers and devotees with cherished memories.

After this, Swami arrived at Sai Kulwant Hall and took a *darshan* round in the car itself. Then, He moved to the centre of the stage via the lower veranda. He sat out listening to the Vedic chants. He also began to participate in some of the chants and this encouraged everyone to exercise their vocal chords to a greater extent. Almost everyone in the first line held letters for Him. This is a wonderful type of game that goes on. Seeing that Swami was intent only on the Veda, the hands holding the letters began to drop down slowly. Finally, only two or three boys seemed to have letters. After a few minutes, Swami suddenly called one boy and took his letter, opened it and read through. The next moment, the "letter count" had risen dramatically as now even boys in the second and third lines held up their letters praying for acceptance! Smilingly, Swami called the boys one by one and took their letters. He read many of them there itself. One boy was reprimanded for writing long letters. "Write only what is necessary" seemed to be the message!

As most of the letters were taken, Swami emptied His hands and began to sway them gently to the rhythmic chanting. He instructed that *bhajans* should begin in the Bhajan Hall. All the singers were seated outside, and so, they rose and silently moved inside the hall. Swami looked at each of them as they passed by Him. The *bhajans* began soon afterwards and needless to say His presence outside made a world of difference to the singing volume and enthusiasm. Swami sat outside for about five *bhajans* and it was a wonderful *darshan cum bhajan* session. Then He moved into the Bhajan Hall and two *bhajans* later, received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

October 3, 2008 – The Start of Veda Purusha Sapthah Jnana Yagnam

The beginning of spring and start of autumn are two very important junctions of climatic and solar influence. These two periods are taken as sacred opportunities for the worship of the Divine Mother since ancient times in India. The Navarathri festival or the 'nine day festival' becomes 'ten days festival', Dasara, meaning 'ten days', with the addition of the last day, Vijaya Dashami which is its culmination. On all these ten days, the various forms of Mother Mahisasura-mardini (Durga) are worshipped with fervour and devotion. The

goddess is invoked as a spiritual force called Durga, also known as Kali in order to destroy all impurities during the first three days. The next three days, the Mother is adored as a giver of spiritual wealth, Lakshmi, who is considered to have the power of bestowing on her devotees inexhaustible wealth in all senses of the term. The final set of three days is spent in worshipping the goddess of wisdom, Saraswati. In order to have all-round success in life, devotees seek the blessings of all the three aspects of the Divine Mother and hence, the nine nights of worship.

At Puttaparthi, this festival is celebrated in all its fervour and spiritual intensity. It marks the beginning of the Vedapurusha Saptaha Jnana *Yagnam* with the Vedapurusha, our beloved Bhagavan, presiding over the *Yagnam* in the morning, and imparting Jnana in the evening, either through His own discourses or through the inspiration He lends to scholars. October 3 was to mark the beginning of this magnificent *homam* (fire sacrifice), which is a homage and prayer for all humanity. The Sai Kulwant Hall had been decked to its brilliant best. The strains of the sacred Nadaswaram filled the air and the smell of incense filled hearts with the sense of deepest devotion. A brightly caparisoned Sathya Gita marched regally, strutting around her tiny trunk, towards the Yajur Mandir. It was about 8:30 a.m. when an announcement was made that on this holy day Swami would grant *darshan* in the Sai Kulwant Hall, and then all could move silently into the Poornachandra Auditorium where the *Yagnam* would commence.

At about 8:50 a.m., Swami arrived, and He looked as fresh as a rose! Sathya Gita moved forward gently towards Him and with her tiny trumpet, offered Him a salute. Swami took apples from her caretaker and fed her. She happily accepted apples from His hand and popped it into her mouth. Swami observed her very sweetly and fed her many times. After that, Swami permitted the little elephant to move to the Sai Kulwant Hall from the back entrance, and He made His much awaited entry into the *darshan* hall. Moving through the ladies and gents side, He came to the front. Then, He moved into the Bhajan Hall where about a hundred students clad in saffron were chanting the Vedas along with the *purohits* (priests) who had arrived for the *Yagnam*. Swami sat there for a while listening to the chants. Then, He got the traditional clothes to be presented to the priests.

As per the custom, the head priest and his wife conduct a separate worship. Swami first gifted a green silk saree to the head priest's wife. Then, He proceeded to give dhotis and angavastrams to all the priests as they bowed at His feet and sought His blessings. They immediately changed into the new clothes and were ready for the commencement of the *yagnam*. Swami asked, "What about the turmeric and *kumkum*?" Those were also kept in readiness and Swami permitted them to leave for the auditorium. Before leaving they chanted loudly in unison, some hymns and mantras, and then began to file out. Swami, then, instructed the students also to follow suit. He sat by the side blessing everyone as they left for the Poornachandra auditorium.

As everyone left, Swami was almost alone except for 4-5 people in the entire Bhajan Hall. He sat there so serene and composed, looking at the altar, the

walls and the lights! He was at perfect ease with Himself and just looking at Him reminded one of His statement: "When I am alone, I am God!" He need not be isolated to be alone. His is a solitude that is perfect and He moves in and out of it at Will. After a few minutes, Swami moved into the interview room, after which He too made His way to the Poornachandra auditorium.

There is a plethora of activity that goes on the Poornachandra auditorium stage. From the conduction of the *Yagnam* while chanting Rudram to the silent reading of the Devi Bhagavatam to the strenuous stretching and exercising of the Surya Namaskar. And this is shared between two groups, the priests and the students. All were ready when Swami arrived on the stage. The priests sought His permission to churn the woods and begin the sacred fire to light up the *Yagnam*. He permitted them, and then they began to churn the embers in a wooden cradle.

As the first wisps of smoke rose into the air, they blew and fanned it lovingly into a flame. At the same time, they took great care that no breeze or external force put it out. Showing it to all assembled, they placed it in the pit and fuelled it into a wonderful flame! The same breeze that once threatened to put out the spark now inflamed the holy fire to greater heights! Like Swami says that there will be many hindrances in the spiritual path in the beginning. But later, these obstructions themselves hasten one's spiritual progress!

And thus, the *Yagnam* began and a silent thrill seemed to surge through the being of anyone who could comprehend, in part at least, the great blessing he/she was being conferred with. Swami accepted the garlands and also lit a candle with a matchstick. This candle was used to light up all the oil lamps on stage. The priest engaged in Surya Namaskar, as is the tradition, came to Swami and offered a flower at the beginning and fell in full prostration, the Sashtanga Namaskar, as it is called, to Him. Swami blessed Him, after which the priest circumambulated Swami before continuing His prayers. The students, a large group on stage, kept the chanting alive, and in one corner, the Devi Mahatmyam or reading the glories of the Divine Mother was on. After a while, Swami moved across the stage to the other corner where the head priest and his wife were involved in worship. He placed a garland and received their prayers. All the ladies rejoiced at the close *darshan* that they got as He came to their side. On His way back, Swami stopped at the *Homakundam*.

He sat observing the offerings made to the fire. A magnificent wooden, exquisitely carved statue depicting the Vishwa Roopa Darshanam from the immortal epic, Mahabharata, had been placed at the back of the stage. When Swami sat at the fire, the hood of the serpent on the statue seemed to form an arch over His head! Swami sat there for a while and then retired for the day. The *Yagnam* went on till the *aarathi* at about 12:00 p.m.

In the evening, Swami arrived again in the chair. He moved through the ladies side which was packed with children from the Primary school and the students of the Anantapur campus of the University. The Veda chanting welcomed Him into what used to be called the Prashanti Vidwan Mahasabha - not that it isn't

that anymore but it is not specifically called that way. The evenings during the Dasara are used as a platform for showering the wisdom of elders on all, besides Swami's own divine discourses whichever days He condescends to bless with. On this day, Swami went around showering the joy of His *darshan* on all assembled; nobody had the slightest idea as to what the proceedings of the evening would be. Swami came on the stage and asked for the chanting to cease. Then He called the priest who performs *aarthi* daily in the Prasanthi Mandir on to the stage. Sri Narayana Bhatta was the speaker for the evening.

As he was introduced, he prostrated and sought blessings from Swami. His topic was "Devi Bhagawatam". Using the 10 years of Vedic learning experience, he dwelt in a masterly manner on the significance of the Mother worship. He exhorted all to make attempts at least to read the Devi Purana as it was in very simple Sanskrit. As he concluded his half an hour talk, Swami asked him to speak some more on the Gayathri mantra. And thus, he dwelt on that too. When the speaker kept addressing the chant as "Gayathri", Swami corrected, "Gayathri Maata"(meaning Mother Gayathri). The Gayathri mantra is actually addressed to the Sun God and is not a goddess as common belief is, he said. "Gayathri" is actually a meter in Sanskrit and it is used to make some of the most powerful chants. He also went into the fascinating details and after he concluded, Swami applauded his effort.

For the next 10 minutes or so, Swami and the speaker were involved in a quite animated and deep discussion. After that, Swami smiled and called a student and asked, "Can you chant the Gayathri mantra?" He did so and Swami corrected him at some places. With a loving pat on his cheeks, Swami sent him back to his place and called another student - an American boy this time. This boy too was told to chant and he did so. Swami smilingly latched on to his errors and after a loving pat, sent him back. The next student tested was the Iranian boy Sathya from the primary school. He seemed to impress Swami with his chanting. Swami was in such a comfortable and calm poise. He called boys holding letters and accepted them interacting with all of them for some time. There were smiles everywhere and the silence that filled the hall was occupied with prayers from the devotees and Grace from the Lord. Swami then asked for *bhajans* to begin. Three *bhajans* were sung during which the prasadam distribution went on. After that, Swami received *Aarthi* and retired for the day.

October 5 and 6, 2008 – Third and Fourth Day of Dasara Yagmam

Navarathri in its direct sense means nine nights. But 'Nava' also stands for 'new'. It is this meaning that also finds equal fruition, if not greater with Swami. Swami continued in His beautiful flights of loving uncertainty and thrilled everyone filling them with eager anticipation and joyous guessing. The third and fourth days of the Vedapurusha Saptaha Jnana Yajna were beautiful and fulfilling.

On the morning of October 5, all had assembled in the Sai Kulwant Hall while the Yajna proceedings began in the Poorna Chandra auditorium. "*Where is Swami going to give darshan? In the auditorium or Sai Kulwant Hall?*" – were

the questions that were on everyone's mind. And so, while some people continued to sit in Sai Kulwant hall, a few others moved out to occupy vantage positions in the auditorium! That morning, it paid off for those who had laid their bets on the auditorium as Swami went straight there when He came out of Yajur Mandir! He arrived on the stage and saw the proceedings for a while. In the meantime, the priest performing the physical exercise of the suryanamaskars moved to Swami and offered the rose. This priest has the privilege of performing one *pradakshina* (circumambulation) and offerings directly to Swami whenever Bhagavan is physically present on the stage - on other occasions he does it to the Swami who is omnipresent! As the priest fell flat in full prostration, Swami accepted his rose and blessed him. Then He moved to the ladies corner of the stage where the head priest and his wife were engaged in worship. Behind Him all the other priests also gathered and chanted Vedic hymns aloud. Swami received *aarthi* there and as the camphor was waved He smiled at all the devotees and priests. All the ladies outside the auditorium heaped on each other and craned and strained to catch a glimpse of that sweet smiling face. Swami then returned to the gents' corner of the stage.

We just now said those devotees who placed their bets on the auditorium were lucky, but with Swami there is nothing like the losing side. Once you are on God's side, you are always on the winning side. Those who had held on to sitting in the Sai Kulwant Hall also won as Swami moved at a quick pace from the auditorium into the regular *darshan* grounds. The hall was now quite empty, and thus, the devotees who had held on and continued to sit had the opportunity to get wonderful *darshan* blessings. Swami completed a full round and then moved into the portico via the gents side. The Union Home Minister, Sri Shivaraj Patil had arrived, and Swami blessed him with an interview.

After the interview was over, Swami came out and sat listening to the chanting of the Rudram that was on. He listened to one complete cycle of the Rudram and that took more than 30 minutes.

The students have a tendency - to slowly move closer and closer to Swami as they sit near Him and who would not do so given the chance! As Swami wanted all the boys well-versed in the hymns in the front, the block was literally bursting at its seams and the students were seated almost till His lotus feet! He called a few students and then asked them what they had for breakfast. Later, He collected letters and interacted with many more students. He enquired into the well being of some of the members of the staff too. He interacted with some more students, asked one of them to demonstrate the 'Jaikar', and returned to His residence at 10.45 a.m. after some more 'Jaikars' from the assembled devotees. It was a wonderful session which concluded with *aarti* and 'Jaijaikars' to the Lord.

The evening session was again marked by a beautiful round of *darshan* after which Swami commanded Mr. Ajit Popat to speak. The next 40 minutes or so was an energetic and enthusiastic outpouring of love and devotion for the Lord by Mr. Popat in his characteristic style. He urged everyone to make the best of the Lord's availability and become dear to Him not just by touching

Him in the physical sense, but by touching His heart! "When the Ganges is flowing by our homes, why do we choose to bathe in our narrow bathrooms?" he questioned out aloud.

As he concluded his talk, Swami blessed him and asked for the *bhajans* to begin. As the *bhajans* started in the Sai Kulwant Hall, Swami made His way to the Bhajan Hall. The day concluded with the waving of the holy fire to the Lord.

The morning of October 6 was again another display of the wonder and beauty of His uncertainty. All the devotees assembled in the Sai Kulwant Hall and Poorna Chandra auditorium for the "holy sighting" or *darshan*, as it is called in daily parlance. It was about 10:15 a.m. when Swami arrived to Sai Kulwant Hall for *darshan*. Completing a full round, Swami went to the interview room. Swami had in His mind to distribute sarees to some of the ladies, and He did so as He moved from the Sai Kulwant Hall towards the Poornachandra auditorium. And the blessed ones accepted the gifts of Love with joy and gratitude. Once in the auditorium, Swami sat on the stage witnessing the Yajna. It is an amazing sight to see the way Swami sits at the ceremonies. The word "witness" is so apt to describe it. He is neither elated nor down, but seems to be in a state of steady serenity! And that serenity radiates to everyone in His physical ambit. Devotees seem to forget everything, and everyone sits calmly and reverentially as long as He is there. The magic of His presence proves that truly it is The Presence - like one is sitting face to face with one's innermost Self!

After a while, Swami moved to the western end of the stage, and blessed all the priests there. He received *aarthi* to mark the conclusion of the day's chanting for the Yajna. Having done that, He again distributed sarees to some of the priests' wives, and also to few other ladies. Sitting on top, Swami continued to distribute as the ladies gratefully accepted the sarees and had the privilege of performing *padanamaskar*. Then, Swami retired to Yajur Mandir.

In the evening, Swami came to the Bhajan Hall just before 5.30 after completing His *darshan* round. As the Vedam went on, He made two rounds down the aisle, distributing more sarees. The nine days during Dasara are dedicated to the Mother Goddess and it was so apt that Swami continued to distribute sarees. The students from the Anantapur campus of the University seated in the Bhajan Hall were all joy as they got bonus *darshan* blessings, and Swami accepted letters from some of them. At 5.50 p.m., He asked for the *bhajans* to begin and sat there for half an hour before accepting *arati*. But as He moved out, His eye met the eyes of the warden of the Brindavan campus, Mr. B. N. Narasimha Moorthy. With a sweet smile, Swami told him, "I will come out soon. Be ready to speak!"

And so when the whole Sai Kulwant Hall was expecting Him to retire for the day at 6:00 p.m., Swami called this elderly devotee and told him to speak! The warden requested, "Swami, it will be *shrama* (difficulty) for you as it has already been a long day." Swami replied, "*Shrama Kaadhu, Prema* (It's not

difficulty, its Love!)" He had a twinkle in the eyes as He came out and asked for the mike and podium to be placed for the speaker. For the next 35 minutes, the speaker spontaneously poured out his feelings of Love and gratitude to the Divine Mother. The climax of his speech was an incident where Swami had told him exactly the same words as on that day a few years ago.

In the summer of 2000 when he had been rendered almost immobile due to a severe backache, Swami had walked all the way to his room in the hostel climbing the steep steps! The warden had then asked Swami as to why He had taken so much "Shrama" (strain) and Swami had replied the same, "It's not *shrama* dear, it's *Prema!*"

He concluded his talk and everyone seemed overcome with emotion. When the glories of the Lord are relived and related, everyone feels overwhelmed. Only those that have transcended the realms of the world and have entered the higher planes of consciousness are untouched by emotion. Even those that are heartless by nature seem to find that noble organ within them and it wells with Love and emotion! As the speaker concluded, Swami blessed him and quickly moved back to the car and retired for the evening.

October 7 and 8, 2008 – Fifth and Sixth Day of Dasara Yagnam

The ninth day in Dasara is celebrated as Mahanavami day or *Ayudha* puja day. The festival is replete with many practices and rituals. For instance, there is a legend related to the exhibition of toys that is known as *Golu* (spelled *Kolu* in some regions). Since the goddess Durga needed tremendous power, all other gods and goddesses transferred their power to Goddess Durga and stood still as toys. To respect the self-sacrifice of these deities during the festival days, Hindus revere toys that are in shape of particular gods and goddesses.

After the slaying of Mahishasura and other demons by Durga or Chamundeshwari, there was no more use for her weapons. So, the weapons were kept aside and worshipped. This *Ayudha* puja is being celebrated since ancient times. It is a worship of whatever implements one may use in one's livelihood. On the preceding evening, it is traditional to place these implements on the Divine altar. If one can make a conscious effort to see the divine in the tools and objects one uses each day, it will help one to see one's work as an offering to God. It will also help one to maintain constant remembrance of the divine. In India, it is customary for one to prostrate before the tools one uses before starting one's work each day; this is an expression of gratitude to God for helping one to fulfill one's duties.

And so, in Puttaparthi too, all vehicles and implements are worshipped and revered this day. Swami's cars stood beside each other awaiting their Lord! In this place, not only the devotees from all parts of the world sit with each other, even machines and vehicles from all over the world rest side by side! An altar had been made amidst the cars and the whole place was spotless clean. A few minutes after 9:30 a.m. Swami arrived for *darshan*. There was a

Mangalavadyam (literally translated as "auspicious sound instruments") team standing in readiness to welcome Swami. Swami was not accepting letters this day and understandably so, for it was the day of the machines! As He crossed the students' area and entered the gents' side, the *Mangalavadyam* escorted Him.

The wonderful thing is with Swami anything looks beautiful and thrilling, for He is the one who lends beauty and Grace to everything. The escort group that led Swami for a short distance erupted wonderful feelings within every heart. As Swami neared the cars area, all the members of the escort party grabbed the opportunity to prostrate at His Lotus feet.

Swami then moved to the altar that had been made especially for the occasion. He sat in front of it looking and gazing at it. And for those few moments, amidst all the noise and celebrations, a kind of silence enveloped all those standing near Him. His silence is so powerful that it stills even the most turbulent of minds into placid calmness. Trays and bowls holding chocolates and coconuts were brought to Him for blessings. He placed His palms over all of them and blessed them to be broken in front of the decorated vehicles in the traditional manner. As Swami watched on, coconuts were broken in front of each of the cars. Then, bowls of prasadam and chocolates were blessed for distribution. Having done that, Swami continued His *darshan* rounds through the Veda chanting area and the Primary school blocks. Then, He arrived to the stage where He sat listening to the Veda chanting going on. The chanting of Rudram began and everyone vociferously joined in the chanting.

Swami then moved towards the Poorna Chandra Auditorium. As He moved out of Sai Kulwant Hall, everyone else rushed to secure a good place in the auditorium. In the meanwhile, there were two more garages and cars there too had been worshipped. Swami blessed coconuts to be broken. The first coconut hurled did not seem to have force enough to shatter. Swami smiled and told the person to take the coconut and break it properly; that smile reminded one of the days when Swami Himself would break the coconuts. He would hold one in each hand and smash them against each other. The coconut on the left would always be left as it never broke but the coconut in the right hand would break exactly into half! This would go on till the last pair of coconuts was left. This time however, when He would crack them against each other, both the nuts would crack! Leaving all the witnesses with nostalgic memories, Swami moved into the auditorium.

Swami sat on the stage as the Yagna progressed. The "Suryanamaskar priest" once again did his prostrations and prayers at the Lotus feet by placing a lotus there. All the various priests were deeply engrossed in the worship. We have often heard Swami say, "Work is worship". For these priests, it is so apt, as literally worship is their work! After a while, Swami moved across all the students chanting on the stage to the western end of the stage, and received *aarthi* as well as the chantings of all the priests who gathered there in a single file. Swami was there for about 10 minutes after which He moved back across the stage, and then retired for the morning.

In the evening, Swami arrived a few minutes after five o'clock. Once He came onstage after His *darshan* round, He asked the All India President of Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Mr. V. Srinivasan to speak at 5.15 p.m. The speaker dwelt on what Swami meant to everyone in all parts of the world. Talking about the relationships that one adopts with Swami, he stated that they can be as diverse as that between a mother and her child to that between friends! As he concluded his talk, Swami called him and told something in his ears. A kind of anticipative thrill spread across the hall and slowly the speaker came back to the podium. He stood still for a while, obviously contemplating and gathering thoughts and words on the magnificence and munificence of the words that the Lord had whispered to him.

And then he spoke with surging joy, "The people of Orissa have been struck by floods and in about 7 districts thousands have been rendered homeless. Swami's heart has gone out to them. He is immediately sanctioning 10 crores for their relief." The applause was deafening. While people everywhere else were blaming each other for the calamity, Swami had instead planned massive relief! Swami directed that houses be rebuilt by the Sai Organisation along with Primary Schools for the villagers. And these shelters, Swami had said will not be temporary; like Swami's glory the shelters would also be permanent - not mere tents or wooden structures, but sturdy concrete homes. Swami didn't want mere houses to be built; His intention was that homes be rebuilt! Swami also said that He would sell away the hilltop building in Kodaikanal and the Sri Sathya Sai Airport at Puttaparthi and utilize those funds for such service activities.

For the Lord, only the present moment exists. Right now, there is help needed and that will be rendered. Financial estimates and practical difficulties are not to be given prominence when people are suffering, for everyone belongs to Him and as He has said, "If you need me, you deserve me." As the speaker narrated the troubled conditions of Orissa which he ascertained during his recent trip, Swami seemed deeply moved. The Lord seemed to be shedding a tear, His heart was going out fully for His children. For the One who initiated everyone into chanting, "Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavanthu" since He wanted not only the people of this world but of all the worlds to be peaceful and happy, any suffering melts the heart. As the speaker went on, Swami called him and issued another command, "Right after Vijayadashami (final day of Dasara), you, Mr. Kondal Rao of the Andhra Pradesh Government and Mr. A Ramakrishna, the former Vice president of L&T leave for Orissa and make plans so that in two months time, those people have homes!" If the previous applause was deafening, this one was such that even the deaf would hear!

After these announcements, Swami asked for *bhajans*. Very aptly the *bhajan* chosen by the students was, "Deena Dukhiyon Se prem karo...". Prasadam was blessed and distributed to all. As that was done, Swami received *aarthi* and left.

The morning of October 8 was quite uneventful as Swami remained indoors. The Yagnam went on and all the devotees attended the function at the Poorna Chandra auditorium. In the evening, Swami arrived and completed the

darshan rounds. After coming on the stage, He blessed Mr. S. V. Giri, the former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University to speak. Mr. Giri spoke on the significance of Navarathri and Dasara. The greater part of his speech however was dedicated to what we should do in order to express our love and gratitude to Swami. He listed an eight point plan which was simple yet effective in its approach and implementation. Faith, respect for elders, love for children, good company and positive thoughts were some of them. Swami too applauded as he concluded. Then there were *bhajans*.

After about four *bhajans*, Swami subtly indicated to a student to sing the *bhajan* "Allahu Akbar"! And so the next *bhajan* was powerfully rendered with the introductory *aalaap*. Swami blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all and then received *aarthi*. He then went into the interview room for a short while. He retired as the announcement, that the next day would be *Poornahuthi* for the Yagna, was on.

October 9, 2008 – Vijayadasami Day

The grand day of Dasara arrived on October 9! It was the Vijayadasami Day, the final day of the Dasara celebrations, and also the concluding Poornahuti ceremony of the Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna. But this year it marked another very significant event. It was also the 90th year since Shirdi Sai had taken Maha Samadhi on this holy day, way back in 1918.

It is very rare that humanity does anything without the expectation of a reward. Even the *stotrams* (stanzas in praises of the Lord) or the *suprabhatam* (waking up prayer to the Lord) have the last portion dedicated to what is called the *Phalashruthi* which states the benefits that would accrue to one reciting them! In the similar fashion, the Poornahuthi day of the grand Yagnam during Dasara can be considered as its *Phalashruthi*, for it is on this day that the heart thrills and the eyes get a feast - the reward for the meticulous and sincere attendance of the week long prayer. The previous evening it had been announced that Swami would make the *Poornahuthi Poornam* (complete and sweet!) at 10 a.m. the next day. So, most of the devotees chose to go straight to the Poorna Chandra auditorium rather than wait in the Sai Kulwant Hall. But there were also many longing for His *darshan* in the Sai Kulwant Hall hoping that He would come there first, and then move to the auditorium.

It was about 9:15 a.m. when Swami arrived out of Yajur Mandir. The little Krishna Gita was waiting to be fed by the Lord and Swami fed apples to her. Then, to slake the thirst of the pining devotees, Swami moved towards the Sai Kulwant Hall on a magnificent "throne chair", golden in its colour and tall in its height. It became very evident that He had come only to give joy to those waiting in the hall as He took a small round, and then hurried towards the auditorium. Now everyone too rushed there and in a few minutes the Sai Kulwant Hall wore a deserted look with the only people there being the spillover crowd from the auditorium! Just past 9.30 Bhagavan arrived onstage, and interacting briefly with the priests, moved to the western end of the stage.

Along the way, all the teachers and students clad in orange and cream had a good *darshan* and formed a sort of backdrop for the Lord in orange!

At the western end of the stage, Swami blessed garlands to be placed on the mound of *kumkum* and turmeric that represent the Supreme and receives devotion during the conduct of the Yagna. The water to be sprinkled on all as a sign of divine blessing and benediction too was blessed and Swami received *aarathi*. The priests then sought permission to go to the Mandir and fetch the necessary tools to perform the *Poornahuthi*. Swami permitted them and moved backstage.

The priests literally rushed to the Bhajan Hall where the wooden tools and materials were placed. A long wooden pole with a channel through which *ghee* (clarified butter) would flow to feed the flames of the Yagna fire was the main among them all. They returned in a procession and Swami too came onstage as soon as they arrived. He then moved to the centre, and the priests chanted mantras to complete the final offerings into the sacrificial fire. The mop of lovely hair around His head marked Swami in the group of saffron bodies that surrounded the equally saffron flame. Swami, seated on the throne, looked magnificent and heavenly as the flames lapped up higher and higher as if attempting to look at Him in all His grandeur.

An orange bundle containing all the final offerings to the fire was opened before Swami. Bhagavan inspected it and then blessed it to be placed into the *Yagna Kundam*. As that was done, a burst of joyful applause filled the entire auditorium. Swami, then, moved around the stage and blessed everyone there with His proximity. The priests then gathered around Him once again after a brief visit to the western end of the hall.

Swami blessed the priests and the wife of the chief-priest with clothes, and they all went backstage, changed into the new clothes and returned. As they gathered around, the head priest and Swami asked for all the chanting to cease. All the priests now chanted at a very high pitch as Swami sat through intensely looking at all of them. Then, the head priest sang out some hymns and Swami was very touched with his rendition. After that, Swami received *aarathi* at about 10:15 a.m. and retired for the morning into Yajur Mandir.

Bhagavan arrived for *darshan* in the car at 5.30 that evening. Once He came onstage, Swami noticed Nepalese students seated in the front with huge *kumkum* marks embedded with rice grains on their foreheads. Swami asked them as to what that mark was all about. The 40 odd students went up to Swami and sought His blessings for the traditional Durga Pooja practice that is common in Nepal. Swami blessed all of them and accepted their letters. He spoke to a few of them too. A wonderful story has to be mentioned here. The Nepalese students from the University, Music College and the Higher Secondary School get together during the summer vacation to carry out seva activities in their region every year. The most impressive aspect of this service is that all the finance for this activity is obtained from the "spiritual savings" of these students. They put a ceiling on their desires and many of them wash their own clothes and save the *dhobi* fees. It is only such savings that are

directed towards the service activity. As Swami says, charity gets meaning when it involves sacrifice. The Rs. 100 given by a millionaire pales into insignificance before the single rupee saved by hard effort! The photos of the previous year's service activities were shown to Swami and Bhagavan was appreciative of them. After that He blessed all those students and then heard the Vedam chants for a while.

After this, Mr. T. G. Krishnamurthy, the former President of Sathya Sai Seva Organisation of Tamil Nadu, was asked to speak. After his half-hour speech, Prof. G. Venkataraman, former Vice-Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai University, shared his thoughts. The distinguished professor outlined as to how the world that does not root itself in Swami's teachings of Love undergoes one bust after another like the dotcom bubble and the housing bubble. Sensing that Swami would most probably deliver His Divine Discourse, the eloquent speaker concluded his talk after twenty minutes. Bhagavan then indicated that He would deliver His Divine Vijaya Dasami message and His microphone was brought up.

The discourse on that evening would become one of epic proportions in terms of its significance in reminding humanity and rendering a wake up call to it about one important aspect. Swami said:

Many people pass through pleasure and pain. When it is pleasure, we say, it is good luck and in the other case we say that it is misfortune. But it is all karma. "Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavathi" - as is the feeling, so is the experience. The whole world revolves around action. And so, the actions must be sacred. What is Dasara? It is nothing but the result of 10 days of action. The Poornahuthi can be considered as the culmination of the actions of the 10 senses. (5 senses each of perception and action). In this world, action is inevitable.

During the Navarathri, the Divine Mother is worshipped. The first is Devi Shakti, who gives the might to perform all the actions. Basing on this, Lakshmi confers all that is needed. And Saraswati fosters the knowledge. The worship of these three is called Navarathri. "Tridalam Trigunakaram Trinetrām cha Triyayudham" (three petalled, embodying the three gunas, three eyed and having the three weapons) applies for the Devi too. The inner significance of Navarathri is to get the Navavidha Shakti (The nine forms of strength).

For all this, Dharma is important. One has to always discriminate. The Buddhi (intellect) is very important and is embodied as Vishnu. Like the current in everything, the intellect pervades the body. Whether good or bad, you have to face the consequences. It is only their actions that make us hold people like the Pandavas in high regard. So, all must do sacred actions. Lakshmi is made out of the letters 'la', 'ksh', 'ma' and 'i'. She is forever seated in Narayana's heart. Lord Narayana is eternal and so is she. Sitting there, she confers blessings on all humanity. Lord Narayana is not Lakshmi Narayana but Sathya Narayana.

Sathyanarayana smiles and walks in human form in our midst. Just as

Lakshminarayana is Garudavahana, Sathyanarayana is sarpavahana. He looks like a normal human but His power is immense. He appears as if He does not know anything. But Sathya (Truth) is the essence of Sathya Narayana. He stresses on the principle of truth always. From truth, comes righteousness or dharma. **Sathyanarayana is the combination of Sathya and Dharma and He has incarnated to establish them.** Vishnu Himself says that Sathya Narayana Raju is very important; He is no ordinary one. People may consider Him so but what He says is the truth and the absolute truth. That means that He says what is in His heart and does what He speaks about. The entire creation has come from truth and to truth it will return. There is no place without truth and that is the pure truth. **Man is not careful. He thinks that Sathya Narayana is telling untruths or that He is joking. Sathya Narayana may speak smilingly or jokingly but it is the truth. Even those who are close also do not believe this. They neglect His words and take it in a very easy and light manner. All that Sathya Narayana says will manifest in the future.** Those who are incapable of thinking of the future alone think of them as untruths. You will soon see the manifestation of this truth.

The age of this body is 83 years. Till today, I have not forgotten anything. I may appear forgetful but there is nothing like forgetfulness in my life. **I am the eternal witness.** And today, that sakshi (witness) is being neglected. I have chosen to speak it today and I have never done so before. As the time is fast approaching, I have to reveal all this. People have spoken their thoughts in the past few days. That is not the truth. But there is nothing wrong in it since they have spoken of their own thoughts and feelings. People have to recognize the truth. Truth has no hatred, enmity, anger or differences. I have no difference. You consider others with differences. All are equal; all the children of Sathya.

Whoever comes and speaks to Me, I always smile. I am never angry with anyone. Even when I appear angry, it is a pretention to correct you. The students here wonder that they get disappointed, dejected and comment on others but how is it that Swami maintains composure. All are one; the shakthi (energy) in all is the same - that is the Atma shakti (power of the soul). There is only Atma Narayana (indweller). There may be many names and forms but God is one. You see bulbs here; but all the lights go out when the current is gone. God is the Atmic current. God has been doing a lot for the bliss of His devotees. But He has no likes or dislikes; He has no desires. God has only one desire and that is "Loka samastha sukhino bhavanthu".

Each one faces the consequences of one's karma, and so, some will have to face sorrow and misery. I do not have even one desire. I have incarnated for your happiness. But to make anyone happy is not My desire. Bulbs are many and you see that the intensity of their lights vary - some are bright and some are dim. But the current is the same and no one can find fault with the current. The lord is the current. Joys and sorrows are of your own making.

Sathya Narayana has also been called Vishnu, that is explained in detail in the Vishnu purana. Vishnu moves in the world as Sathya Narayana. Sathya is

His hallmark. Why did I not speak for 10 days? All spoke in their own ways. It is to declare the truth that I speak. I love those that love me and also those that hate me, the demons. But people do not understand this. They say Swami is not talking with me. Is He angry? I have only hunger for devotees and not anger towards them. God is the embodiment of love and Navaratri is celebrated to demonstrate this principle of truth. People worship in different ways that they choose. But there is no difference for Bhagavan. All are embodiments of love and must mingle as brothers and sisters. Remember that men are more valuable than all the wealth of the world. Have faith in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Have love and treat everyone well. People stay away from you till they are able to have a glimpse your love; once love is there, they will come instantly. All those who spoke based it on their experiences and feelings. That is not wrong. But there are very few who have known the path of truth.

Be the same to all. Have no differences. All are one. Though they look different at one moment you will realize that all are brothers and sisters at the next. All are one be alike to everyone. Love all - that is My message.

In a tree there are buds. Some of them flower immediately and become fruits while others take time. One must wait for that fragrance and sweetness. Today is Poornahuti. What is it? It is complete thyaga (sacrifice). Swami is complete thyaga always. "Poornamadah poornamidam poornath poornam udhachyathe" - This is full. That is full. And if you remove fullness from fullness it still remains full. Children are like buds and may not understand that depth now. As they grow and mature they will understand.

One more thing: Every child has a small cellphone today. It leads to misuse and bad thoughts of connection between boys and girls. If you do not want bad thoughts, do not have bad connections. Do not use a phone extensively; it may look and feel nice and savvy but will lead to misuse. For 83 years I have never used a phone. The devotees may cry but I will not pick up a phone. I have not spoken on a phone, that is why I have the right to advice you. You are all children and so act accordingly. Be careful. If you are careless the world will be careless towards you. You may say that I am speaking well and good. But others may take the wrong meaning. So do not give scope for misinterpretation. It is okay with elders, but people who are young completely misunderstand, and so you miss the understanding. If given a choice, throw the cellphone in the well. Do not buy them; if you do so have connections with the right people. Using the cellphone to gossip and carry tales about others is not good. If you do not use the phone and speak for a while you will think "Ayyo! I have not spoken to so and so" and get worried. Be very careful and get a good name.

Swami concluded His discourse with the *bhajan*, "Hari Bhajan Bina Sukh Shanti Nahi". Needless to say, everyone followed with gusto and vigour. Blessing *prasadam* to be distributed, Swami received *aarthi* and retired at almost 7:50 p.m.!

SWAMI AND ME

ILLUMINATING LESSONS AT HIS LOTUS FEET

By Mr. R.Venkatesh Prasad

Mr. Venkatesh Prasad is an alumnus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Prashanti Nilayam. He joined the university in 1987 and passed out of the portals in 1992 after completing his Bachelors in Commerce and Masters in Business Administration (MBA). Venkatesh currently lives in Bangalore and works for Polyflex India Private Limited as Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

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Many were the lessons that we learnt while we were students here. The experience was much more enriching at that point of time as Swami was amidst us, talking and spending so much time with us everyday; we learnt a lot from Him directly.

I would like to share a couple of my experiences that have made a lasting impression on my mind. I draw inspiration and courage from these lessons learned at the Lotus Feet on a day to day basis.

'I am permanent. You come and go.'

I very vividly recollect an incident which happened during my B.Com days at Brindavan. It was during the winter holidays. A few of us had stayed back as we wanted to spend the holidays with Swami.

One fine morning Swami gave us a surprise – He was blessing us all with an individual photograph with Him the next day. So, the next morning, we were all eagerly waiting for this rare opportunity inside Trayee Brindavan, Swami's abode in Bangalore. Swami decided to have this photo session on the lawns in front of His building and then Himself selected an appropriate location. A few of us stood to the right of Swami, while the others were on His left, awaiting His command. Swami had designated two of the institute lecturers to be the photographers for the day. After having ensured that all arrangements have been made, Swami commanded us to come quickly one by one for the photo session. We took our turns alternatively, a boy from the left side followed by a boy from the right, and so on. All the while Swami continued posing for the camera without moving even an inch from his selected posture. When it was my turn, I ran to Swami and stood near Him anxiously waiting for the prized photo to be taken. When there was a brief interlude as the film roll in one of the cameras had to be changed, Swami continued looking at the camera and then made a statement which had a very profound impact on all of us present there on that beautiful day.

Swami said, "I am permanent. You come and go, but I am always here."

On the face of it, it seemed a very matter-of-fact statement from Swami, but it contained in its essence the very secret of human life. At the Universal level - God is always there, we come and go. At the University level - Students come and go, but Swami is always there as the Divine Chancellor.

Swami used to always talk to us about *Sathyam* (Truth) and *Rutham* (Unity of thought, word and deed). Swami used to say *Rutham* is permanent; it is there for all times. Swami's statements are not just for the present moment, they are to be preserved and cherished for posterity. Each time one recollects the Divine Words, they communicate different messages to suit the occasion and time.

Being Swami's Student

This incident also occurred during my student days at Brindavan. During those days, Swami used to spend about two to two-and-a-half hours talking to us every day after evening *darshan* and *bhajans*. Our Trayee Brindavan sessions used to start at 4.30 in the evening and on some days it used to go on till even 8.00 p.m.! Swami used to speak to us on everything from the Ramayana and Mahabharata to the Bermuda Triangle! Swami literally covered everything. During those sessions, few elder devotees were invited to join and Swami used to ask them to address us and share their experiences. On one such occasion, Swami had asked an elderly lady devotee to speak to us. She narrated a couple of incidents from her life and advised us on how we need to lead our lives. During the course of her talk, she revealed that her son was also Swami's student and had passed out from Sathya Sai College, Brindavan about a decade earlier.

At that point, Swami suddenly said, "No". The speaker tried to clarify by giving her son's name, the year in which he had passed out, and so on. Swami again said, "No". Any further explanation only yielded a firm "No" from Swami.

After a brief pause, Swami said, "He was a student of Sathya Sai College, he was not Swami's student. Swami's student is different from the student of Sri Sathya Sai University or Sathya Sai College."

The message was clear – the title of Sai Student was to be earned by his Love and Grace, and not to be assumed by entering the portals of Sri Sathya Sai University.

Internal Examination Is Swami's Examination

During the 1980s, Swami used to spend a lot of time during *darshan* and *bhajans* standing and talking to us in the Mandir portico at Prashanti Nilayam. He used to talk to us for over an hour or so on many topics. I remember one such opportunity we had. During a morning *darshan*, Swami was in the portico and there were only about seven of us students sitting there. Swami walked towards us and we promptly surrounded him. Among the many topics, Swami discussed about examinations that day, and then broached the issue of the internal examination. The internal examinations in those days used to consist of slip tests, quizzes, and so on. It was continuous evaluation on a day-to-day

basis, right from the beginning of the semester till the semester-end examination. All the marks scored in the internal examinations went into the overall semester marks.

That day Swami posed us a query, "What is an internal test?" We all tried giving our response. However, Swami kept shaking His head saying that He did not agree with it. It so happened that I was kneeling right behind Swami, in fact, I was the only boy behind Him, while the other six were in a semi-circle in front of Him. Swami slowly turned and looked at me. I ventured to answer; however, I was trembling. I looked at Swami and said, "Swami, internal examination is Swami's examination."

Swami immediately patted my cheek and said, "*Bangaru* (golden one)! That is the right answer. Internal examination is Swami's examination." Swami's fun always has a meaning. In this occasion He wanted to drive home the point to us that as far as 'internal' examination is concerned, Swami is the only evaluator as He is the Indweller within all of us.

Keep It Simple

There is another incident related to examinations. This occurred during the period when I was pursuing my MBA course at the University. One day, I happened to get the opportunity to sit in the first row in the Mandir. During those days, Swami used to reside in the Mandir itself. When He came out for *darshan*, to my surprise, He came straight to me and asked, "What examination do you have tomorrow?"

"Swami, it is Operation Research."

"What?"

I inched closer and with all confidence and a louder voice said, "Swami, it is Operation Research." To my astonishment, I found Swami getting angry with me. He said, "What is this *pichivada* (crazy boy), operation... operation?" Saying that, with obvious displeasure, Swami walked away for *darshan*. Why was Swami angry? Did I say anything wrong? I could not understand. So, I asked my brothers who were seated beside.

"What did Swami ask? What did I say? Swami asked me what the examination was on the next day and I answered that it was Operation Research. Did I mispronounce it? Was my diction incorrect?"

They had heard me loud and clear. I had given the 'correct' answer. However, Swami was not happy. I pondered throughout *darshan*. Swami completed His rounds and came back to the Mandir, but He refused to look at me. He took people in for an interview, while I waited with bated breath to seek forgiveness from Swami. After a while, Swami came out and then it was time for the *bhajans*. In those days, evening *bhajans* used to start at six o'clock, and for fifteen minutes before this, there would be a flute recital by a devotee. On most days, while the music is going on, Swami used to come out and stand right at the edge of the portico. Looking towards the devotees' side, both

gents and ladies, He used to sway to the melody; none would speak. All eyes would feast upon His Divine Form. It was a blissful moment.

During such a divine moment, I was in the Mandir full of agony. Swami, only a few yards away from me, was enjoying the flute music. Once it was over, *bhajans* were about to start, and at that moment, Swami slowly turned, looked at me, and said, "You have Statistics exam tomorrow not Operation Research." So saying, He went in for *bhajans*.

What Swami said was absolutely correct! Operation Research is nothing but Statistics! Throughout *bhajans*, I tried to comprehend the inner significance of what Swami had said.

The message was clear - Simplify.

The lesson that I learnt that day was this - whatever you communicate, please do so in the simplest manner so that the listener gets the message straight. Even though Operation Research by itself may have been the name of the examination, conveying it as Statistics would have made it simpler.

This lesson has been of great value to me in my life. I have always applied this dictum in my various interactions with people both in my professional and personal life, and have found that it has worked wonders.

When Swami Is Happy, Everybody Is Happy

One more valuable lesson learnt at the Lotus Feet which has been of immense help to me in my life is this:

"How do you make everybody happy?", Swami asked one evening during *darshan* time at Prashanti Nilayam.

I knew that Swami was about to impart a very important message. I looked at Swami not knowing how to answer.

"How do you make everybody happy?" Swami repeated the question.

"Can you make everybody happy?" Swami asked me again. I now knelt down and awaited the message.

"No, it is not possible," Swami continued

"You have a house with taps in the kitchen, wash basin, and in the bathroom; you have taps everywhere. Do you give a separate water connection to every individual tap?

"What do you do?" Swami asked lovingly and continued in his infinite Love and Grace.

"Water flows from all the taps because they are all connected to an overhead tank. When the tank above is full, water automatically flows through all the

taps, whether you open the tap in the kitchen or the wash basin or in bathroom.

“The same is applicable in life too. Swami is the overhead tank and the people whom you meet in life are all taps in different rooms. It is not possible to make water flow (make people happy) by individually connecting each and every tap. So too, it is not possible to connect individually with every person or make every person happy. However, if you focus on keeping Swami happy, who is like the overhead tank; you automatically will make everybody happy. When Swami is happy, everybody is happy.”

I think there is one more truth in this. Swami used to say,

“Happy, happy, happy.

Be always happy.

Make others happy.

All will be happy

And God will be happy.”

But now Swami said, “Make Swami happy, everybody will be happy.” Isn't there a difference? The meaning to be understood from this is, ‘Yes, we make Swami happy by making the Swami present in everybody happy’. When we talk to a person, we should look at the Swami who resides in that person and try to make that Swami happy. Automatically whomever we meet in life will be happy.

The lessons learnt at His lotus feet are numerous; these are few that are etched in my mind forever.

(To be continued)

MY SOULMATE AND I

By Ms. Priya Mani

An alumna of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur Campus, Ms. Priya Mani came under Bhagavan Baba's fold as a young girl of eleven years, when she joined the Sri Sathya Sai Primary School for her sixth grade. She later went on to complete her graduation and post graduation in English Language and Literature from the Anantapur Campus, securing a Gold medal in both the courses in the years 2002 and 2004 respectively. She currently lives in Dubai and works as a freelance writer.

God - The Strict Task Master

Life with Bhagavan is suffused with the profoundest of lessons and the subtlest of transformations. And I have had the rare good fortune of learning life's lessons from the Divine Master Himself. When I look back on those sepia-tinted lanes of memory, my heart only warms up to the memorable sojourn of the twelve years I have spent at His Lotus Feet - twelve precious years during which Swami taught me lessons that stand me in good stead even today, when I am no longer day after day in His physical presence.

The most important lesson that Swami taught me was the priceless gift of loving Him as an intimate Friend and Companion, verily, my Soul mate. Here's my tale straight from the Workshop of the Divine Potter.

"Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is the Master of this House; a silent listener in every conversation and an unseen guest at every meal."

This poster of Bhagavan hung in our house for many years, and every time I passed by this quotation, I could not help but stop to ponder over the unmistakable incongruity between the quote and Swami's picture. The photo was of a beatific and benign Bhagavan, His right hand raised in a reassuring *abhayahastha* (posture of blessing). But those words would always stir in my mind the image of a patriarch, senior to my father in age, and of a sterner make; someone who would, unknown to all of us, partake of the meals my mother prepared, yet disapprove of the light, inconsequential chatter that invariably accompanied our gastronomic sessions; someone whose invisible presence loomed larger than life yet incontestable.

The quotation would remind me of the God, to whom my brother and I would pray as tiny tots. I was four years of age then and my brother, merely two and a half years old. My mother would spiff up the two of us after bath, and we would accompany our father to the shrine room, where, despite the pantheistic array of the deities, we would address ourselves to the One Supreme, repeating implicitly after our father -

God Almighty, Protect us all.
Grant us *Sadbuddhi* (good intellect).
May we eat well.

May we not regurgitate what we eat.
May we go to school without crying (This clause was for me).
May we not fight with each other.
May we not throw tantrums nor provoked by the whimsicalities of temperament.
May father not spank us!

This was, perhaps, a pre-schooler's edition of the *Sahanavavatu* prayer. And we chanted it without fail everyday, feeling quite pleased with ourselves at the completion of the recital. We had this deep, unshakeable belief that God was 'watching' over us, and that He would shower His munificence on us in direct proportion to our good conduct. By the same algorithm, if we transgressed the bounds of permissible unruliness, God would be displeased, even angry. The consequences, then, would be dire, something which we wouldn't even dare to name.

This concept of a puritanical God chaperoned me even when I joined Swami's school at Puttaparthi as an eleven year old. But now that I was entrusted to His custody, Swami decided to, first, get my basics right. One of the most important lessons that I learnt at His Lotus Feet was 'Love for God'. It was more of a process, a slowly yet sure metamorphosis from *Daiva Bheeti* to *Daiva Preeti* – doing/not doing a certain thing out of the Fear of God to doing/not doing the same out of Love for God. The first stemmed from Force (*bhayam*); the second from the Source (*bhaavam*). And in the idyllic environs of Puttaparthi, Swami brought about in me a fundamental attitudinal change – by making me shed my fears and misgivings towards Him and adopting Him as my Best Friend and Confidant. I do not say that Swami is not an austere disciplinarian. But, in my limited perception of His divinity, I was blinding myself to His other facets.

Swami, My Best Friend

But Swami was already at work, chisel and hammer, on my young, malleable mind. The change crept in gently, even imperceptibly, as I delved into the different types of *bhakti* (devotion). I must say that our daily curriculum at Sri Sathya Sai Primary School was such that it made us practice the *Navavidha Bhakti* (nine forms of devotion) in one form or the other – whether it was *Shravanam* (listening) in the form of excerpts from the Rama Katha Rasa Vahini/Bhagavatha Vahini/Satyam Shivam Sundaram that our teachers undertook to read, as a more peaceful and useful substitute for the noise that a 500 and odd restless audience of children were capable of generating, or *Keerthanam* (singing) in the form of evening *bhajans*. It could even be an assortment of *Archanam*, *Smaranam* and *Padasevanam* (worshipping, remembrance and serving His feet) as in case of the occasional Sunday *Laksharchana*, wherein we would offer *akshata* (holy rice) to a photograph of Swami's feet, simultaneously chanting His name a hundred thousand times and offering *manas pooja* (mental worship) to His tender feet. If this weren't enough, exams brought in their wake, fresh increments of devotion. Needless to say, the intensity and fervour of *Vishnusmaranam* (remembrance of the Lord) increased when the tests approached. And I am sure we must have

amused Swami with our childish attempts at *Atmanivedana* (surrender to the Lord), when, we invariably prefaced our answer sheets with 'Swami, write for me'.

Swami, for us, took on or, rather, began sharing the duties of Lord Ganesha as the Bestower of Success and Triumph in every sort of enterprise, be it academic or otherwise. Starting with supplicating Him for exams, then unit tests, even inter-house competitions to using His name, 'Sai Ram', to express emotions as varied as surprise, fear, relief, exhilaration or exasperation, or even by way of greeting - Swami was slowly and steadily ensuring that we called on Him, knowingly or unknowingly, for every little thing. Meanwhile, I was beginning to discover a Friend who had unobtrusively slipped into my life and grew to be at the receiving end of the day to day account of my life.

A sort of a role reversal occurred at this stage. To teach me the fundamentals of *Sakhyam* (friendship), Swami slid down to *Shravanam* (listening). I must say that Swami had to (as He does even now) put up with a lot of my talking. For, quite without my knowledge, I began to tell Him in my idle/prayerful moments of my hopes, fears, aspirations, and a hundred other things. And as He would have it, I was beginning to get hooked to carry on a constant, incessant chatter with Him – a sort of an internal dialogue. It was more of a monologue, wherein I spoke and Swami had no choice but to listen. One moment, it would be *Vandanam* (obeisance), where I would be all delight and gratitude for Him at having responded to my prayers. At another moment, when I thought He had turned a deaf ear to my pleas, Swami was in for a session of a different kind of *Archanam* (worship) – wherein after having ventilated my grievances, I would start berating and scolding His photo, then walk away in a huff after the tiff with Him. Tempers cooled, I would return, remorsefully, to my Divine Companion.

To me, then, I was sharing my thoughts and feelings with Him as a friend would to another. Not that He needed to be told in order to know. He is privy to every thought, good or bad, the moment it manifests in the mind. Just that my act of telling Him gave me satisfaction and happiness. I wished, I aspired, I prayed. Prayers came in all shapes and sizes. And Swami answered or didn't answer them. At least that was what I thought.

Then came another lesson along the way. I thought my role ended at telling Him things. What I didn't reflect upon or give thought to much, was the fact that Swami was 'actually' listening to everything I had been saying. Bhagavan taught me, in His own inimitable way, that He was not merely listening to whatever I said, but He was also aware of every passing thought and fleeting feeling in my mind. And that, He remembered things which even I had forgotten that I had asked of Him!

We May Forget, But The Lord Does Not Ever

Here is one such instance. We have the good fortune of hearing Swami discourse in Telugu on festive occasions. But to hear Swami talking to someone on a personal level is an experience in itself. Often Swami switches

to the mother tongue of the concerned person. It is a treat to listen to Swami speaking in, what to us, is an unfamiliar language for Swami to use! Wow! The very idea of having a purely personal conversation with Swami in one's own language! I always thought the experience as sublime joy that defied description. So I hoped that someday I would be a fortunate recipient of the same. Nurturing this ardent desire, even as a twelve-year-old, I often voiced my thoughts aloud to Swami, "Swami, if You were to talk to me someday, in what language would You converse with me?"

There was the big clause 'if'. But the mind clung on to the glimmer of a hope that, someday, He would talk to me on His own. I even ensured that I was on my best behavior as far as possible, for that would, perhaps, hasten the glorious occasion. But the most important clause was the medium, the language in which I was to relate to Swami, or rather, the vice versa. After all, it was to be a purely personal conversation. So I undertook to decide for Swami the language in which He was to converse with me! Now I considered it highly unlikely that Swami would talk to me in English. Moreover, I thought, it lacked the personal element. So I ruled it out. I did not comprehend Telugu. It was not my mother tongue either. So I forbade Swami from using the same with me. What about my mother tongue? Since I hailed from Palakkad (located in the south Indian state of Kerala), the language that I spoke had a distinct flavor of both Tamil and Malayalam. Now, wasn't that a bit too hard on Swami to expect Him to use the dialect that I spoke? But I did not want to be partial to one language at the cost of another. So finally, I zeroed in on Hindi to be the exclusive and lucky language for the impending Cosmic Chat! Moreover, I was better conversant with Hindi than even my mother tongue, having spent a good part of my early childhood at Bhopal.

A twelve-year-old's mind can work in such ingenious ways. Mine too, then, was under the influence of my age.

Years sped by. I did have numerous occasions of *Sameeepyam* (Physical Proximity of Swami), but *Sambhashanam* (Conversation with Swami) was something I wanted Swami to initiate. Moreover, I often found myself tongue-tied in His presence unable to muster the courage to talk to Him! My desire lay buried deep in my subconscious, while my conscious mind was busy tackling a horde of academic and extra-curricular priorities.

Then, in my final year of college I had the unique good fortune of offering a bouquet of flowers to Swami on the behalf of our girls' campus on the occasion of the Annual Sports and Cultural Meet. A batch mate of mine was also selected to offer the card to Him. I went up the steps of Shanti Vedika and walked up to where Swami was seated, throbbing with delight and anticipation. Swami, who was conversing with a guest, swung a sharp 90 degrees in His rotating chair as I approached, and gave me the most radiant, heartwarming smile. I knelt down, placing the bouquet on His lap. I do not know what elapsed in those few timeless seconds... just the Lord and I.... nothing else existed. I only remember Swami telling me "Leke Jao, Leke Jao" (Take it and go). My batch mate then offered the card to Swami as I waited

behind. Swami then blessed the two of us with a magnificent *abhayahastha*. We came down the steps with the bouquet and the card.

A little while later, I asked my batch mate as to what Swami told her. She repeated the exact words Swami had used. Swami had told her “Teeskelli po” (Take it and go), but in Telugu. While, He had conveyed the same to me in Hindi! It then struck me like an epiphany, the long cherished desire of an intimate audience I had sought of the Lord, in the very language that I had stipulated, eight years ago. I had forgotten. Swami had not. He had only bided His time to give me the big surprise.

“They Try To Please Me By Giving Up Sweets!”

“Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient” is something I had grown up hearing, ever since I joined Swami's school. In open-mouthed wonder, my little mind would try to fathom these stupendous attributes of God. The ever-merciful Swami taught me the meaning of these words in His unique way. For, He knew and heard everything, and responded too. But, in His time.

Often times, when life begins to resemble the Literature of the Absurd, we feel that God sits watching our plight with total dissociation of sensibility, distancing Himself from the dialogues, monologues and asides of our everyday lives. What we do forget is that He is the Omniscient, albeit unobtrusive, narrator of the drama; that the plot, and the sub-plots are already written replete with flashbacks, rising and falling action, catharsis, discovery and denouement. The resolution may take a while in coming such that we begin to doubt the credentials of His play in terms of unity of action. But whether He is staging a play or scripting a Bildungsroman, Swami has a well-knit story in place which He reveals and resolves at the ‘right’ time, verily like a Deus ex Machina.

I am reminded of a ‘sweet’ experience, that takes me back to my tenth grade, when I was sitting for *darshan* in the first line with a couple of students. It was a rain-kissed Onam morning and we were seated for special festival blessings. Given the crowds and the programme, it seemed highly unlikely that Swami would even come our way, let alone bless us. But would our hearts give up that easily? Each of us must have been praying to Swami; so was I, coaxing and begging Swami to ordain the winds of chance in our favor. In a moment of desperation, I decided to bribe Him with the lure of a much-loved sweetmeat. “Please, Swami, please,” I pleaded, “If You bless us today, I will give up eating *Gulabjamuns* for ever.” Even as the mind was engaged in the calisthenics of cajolery, the resounding *panchavadyam* heralded Swami's arrival. The programme commenced. Two hours elapsed in this manner. As our good fortune would have it, Swami did come our way and did bless us.

As ever, my human mind forgot about the incident, retaining only the memory of the promise made to Him, and this scene evoked every time someone triggered my tingling taste buds with a succulent bowl of *gulabjamuns*, and I valiantly resisted.

Two years sped by. We were in our twelfth grade diligently preparing for our approaching Board examinations. It was the dry and dismal month of March with Swami away at Brindavan. One night, Swami appeared in my dream. I saw Swami seated on a chair in our school lobby, and we students were seated on the floor facing Him. With an ever so slight gesture of the index finger, Swami pointed to one of the students, asking "What is your favorite sweet?" The student replied, "Swami, *sohanpapadi*." Swami then posed the same question to another student, to which the response came '*Badurshahi*'. Swami then asked me, "What is your favorite sweet?" I replied, "Swami, *Gulabjamun*." The Lord then remarked to the gentleman seated beside Him, "Do you know how foolish some people are? They try to please Me by giving up sweets." The dream ended there.

I woke up delighted and thrilled beyond words. But this was only just the beginning – the start of a lesson Swami was slowly unfolding to me. Later on, during the day, we were greeted in the dormitory with joyous shouts that Swami had sent *prasadam* (sweet) for us from Brindavan and that we should go downstairs to collect the same. It was *Sohanpapadi*! "Wow! What a coincidence. Well, well, all's sweet that ends sweet," I said to myself, helping myself to the ambrosial confection.

But Swami was in no mood for endings. The next day, He sent *prasadam* again. This time, it was *Badurshahi*! This set me thinking. Part One and Two of my dream had found fulfillment. And I was wondering how Bhagavan was going to execute Part Three. Would He dispatch barrellfuls of rosy *gulabjamuns* to school tomorrow from far-away Brindavan? Inconceivable by all standards of reason! Yet, I waited in anticipation for the next day. I did not have to wait for too long. For the very next afternoon, as we were plodding away with our books, our Headmistress Aunty walked in with a huge bowl of *gulabjamuns* she had prepared exclusively for us, the tenth and twelfth grade students. She said we had been slogging too hard, so she had decided to sweeten our labors with a savory surprise!

This incident taught me two lessons. One, God defies all definitions of possibility and probability. When He decides to do something (*Sankalpa*), He will find the ways and means (*Vikalpa*) to do it. Time and space cannot limit Him and His will. It is we who need to keep our minds and hearts open to receive that Will and Grace. Two, Swami does not desire our paltry offerings by way of giving up a much-desired food item. He doesn't even need them. What can we give Him but that which does not belong to Him already? We can only offer ourselves to Him, heart and soul, and let Him do His bidding through us. More importantly, Swami was gently reminding me as ever that He was privy to my every thought, word and deed; that 'Forgetting' was a word that simply did not exist in the Divine Dictionary! That I would 'get' and 'forget', but He only 'gave' and 'forgave'.

A sound lesson driven home with 'sweet' compliments!

My Biggest Lesson – Living in His Presence, Always

I can only be grateful to Bhagavan for every one of such lessons that He has painstakingly taught me. Especially, for the most precious lesson that He imparted to me – to live in the constant presence of His Divinity. Today, wherever I go, whatever I do, I know that Swami is there with me, feeling my every pleasure and pain, every happiness and sorrow. And wouldn't He when He "... sits in the bosom of the world and receives all its pangs in His own heart." He is the compassionate One, He is there to listen to me, share my little joys and delights, comfort and console me when I need Him, and to guide me on the path He would want me to tread – the True Friend that only He can be. Thank you, Swami.

WHEN TESTS BECOME HIS TASTE...

By Mrs. Neeta Banerjee

A devotee of Bhagavan Baba for the last 40 years, Mrs. Neeta Banerjee has spent the last two decades of her life in translating inspiring literature from many Indian languages like Assamese, Rajastani and English into Hindi. He has worked for leading Indian literary institutions like Sahitya Academy and Bharatiya Gyanpeeth, New Delhi, and has won awards. In 2000, she moved to Puttaparthi, where she currently resides with her family.

I vividly remember the Guru Purnima of 1972. My beloved Mother Sai had chosen that day to baptize all of us and take us under Her loving care so quietly that none of us had any inkling of the great change that was to come into our lives! At that time, I was going through a terrible phase in my life - my biological mother was counting her last days. She was in the final stage of cancer and was living on a diet of one or two teaspoons of water or juice, and continuous *namasmarana* (chanting of the Divine name) whole day long. She was the principal of a teachers' training centre and was working in spite of her illness. Every evening, after my husband returned from his office, we used to visit my mother. We spent the whole evening with her, talking, singing and joking, to fill her last few days with joy.

My mother's last wish was to come to Puttaparthi and have Swami's *darshan*. Her doctor had refused to give her permission to travel and my father agreed with him. We, my two brothers and two sisters, were with her, so we tried to cajole our father into accompanying her to Puttaparthi. He did not believe in either Sathya Sai Baba or Shirdi Sai Baba. Therefore, he was very reluctant, but under pressure from us and other Sai devotees from Kota, Rajasthan (where we lived at that time), he agreed. We used to pray to Sri Shirdi Sai, but had come to know of Swami a short while ago from Sai devotees of Kota. The devotees there conducted *bhajans* and did seva regularly.

Divine Light in the Night

On a very hot summer night in June, my mother was very restless and could not sleep. She suddenly saw Swami in His typical bright orange robe entering the bedroom from the door near which my father's bed was placed. Swami came near her bed, put His hand on her head and talked to her for a long time, caressing her forehead all the while. Mother asked Him many questions and He replied, sometimes in the affirmative, mostly in the negative. My father was watching this drama from barely eight feet away, wondering what was happening and who that person in the orange robe was! When Swami walked out of the room His robe touched my father's bed. Even in the dark room my father noticed the halo of hair, but Swami's face was blurred; he couldn't observe any of the features. My father was sure that it was some weird dream and went to sleep.

When we went to meet my mother, the day after this vision, she told us all about Swami and wished to have His *darshan*. She was hundred percent sure that she would reach Puttaparthi and have *darshan*, and only after that breathe her last. My father, on the other hand, had other ideas. However, after heated arguments with him followed by my husband allowing me to accompany her, my father agreed for the journey and booked our tickets via Mumbai (then Bombay) and Bangalore.

My mother applied for a fortnight's leave and I too packed my suitcase. On the day before the journey, my daughter suddenly fell ill. So, I was dropped, and my sister, who had just given her Bachelor of Sciences final exams, seemed the perfect person to accompany my mother as the proxy nurse on her last journey, as it turned out to be. I cried a lot and handed over my suitcase to my younger sister. Maybe it was still not time for me to have Swami's *darshan*.

“Mothers troubles will be over soon” - Swami

When they reached Mumbai, somebody told them that Baba was in Bangalore. So, after much inconvenience, my mother along with my father and sister reached Baba's ashram in Whitefield, Bangalore, only to be told that Swami had left for Puttaparthi. They traveled again, with my mother in that precarious condition, praying all the while for Swami's *darshan* to her before anything serious happened to her. Once in Puttaparthi, they received help from other devotees and the very presence of Swami filled them with a new life. They had *darshan* and received Swami's blessings twice every day and sometimes even thrice! Well, 'they' here refers to only my mother and sister; my father, being a non-believer, strolled away outside the *ashram* to have his fill of smoking.

On Guru Poornima day, Swami called them for an interview, but my father was nowhere to be seen. Swami sent someone saying that Mukherjee must be having a smoke outside. Father was literally made to throw away his cigarette and rushed to the interview room. Once he was inside, Swami told them many things about their past, the young 'revolutionary' days of my father and even his school days! Needless to say, everyone was awestruck.

Swami chided my father for bringing my mother to Him so late, even after His personal visit to their house! My father said that he did not believe it was Him as he could not see His face. Swami then pointing to my mother, clarified that He had indeed gone to Kota on that summer night and talked to my mother for a long time and then returned, walking past his cot. The next moment, Swami laughed and said, “*Face nahin dikha kyonki believe nahin karta. Amma Ko poocho main udhar aaya tha na!* (You didn't see my face because you didn't believe. Ask mother. Am I not correct?)”

Next, He asked my sister what she wanted. She had carried three slips with her which contained her requests. She now quietly handed over those to Swami. Bhagavan looked at the slips and then with a mischievous smile looked at her. Opening the first slip He said, “*Amma Ka takleef jaldi dur hojayega.*” (Your mother will be relieved of her troubles soon). Reading the

second slip He kept His hand on my sister's head and said "*Parva nahi, tum to already second division se pass ho gaya. Jao, be happy.*" (No problem. You have already cleared second division. Go, be happy). When Swami read the third slip, He turned to my mother and held her hand in His hands and then slowly reassured her saying, "*Amma, fikar nahin karna, iska shadi usi ladka se hoga jisko tum pasand kiya hai. Good boy!*" (Mother, do not worry. She will marry the boy that you have approved. He is a good boy!).

After this, Swami patted my father on the shoulder and gave him *Vibhuti*. My father, given his attitude about such things, he first looked suspiciously at the Vibhuti in his palm and then at the long sleeve of Swami's robe. Now, Swami's eyebrow rose and giving him a quizzical smile, He ordered, "Mukherjee, phenk do" (Mukherjee, throw it away). My father threw the Vibhuti, which immediately vanished. Now, Swami rolled His right sleeve up, much above His elbow, raised His hand and then materialized Vibhuti. He gave it to my mother, sister, and father too, and then lovingly said, "*Prasadam hai, kha lo*" (It is *prasad*, eat it). My father gave a sheepish smile and swallowed it.

After blessing them profusely, Swami told my father to take my mother back to Kota the next morning. Mother cried and touched Swami's lotus feet. To her Swami said, "*Jao Amma, talkleef bahut jaldi dur ho jayega. Sab theek ho jayega* (Go mother, your troubles will be solved very soon. Everything will be okay). She asked, "*Baba bachchon Ka Kya hoga?*" (Baba, what will happen to the children?) He said, "Don't worry *Amma*, Swami *sabko dekhega*" (Swami will take care of everybody). Swami gave Vibhuti to my sister and instructed her to mix it with water and give it to my mother whenever she wanted something. With moist eyes and a heavy heart they left Puttaparthi.

Mother's Blissful Final Journey

After reaching Bombay, they phoned us as they had missed the connecting train. Instead of reaching Kota on July 31, they said that they will now be reaching only on the morning of August 1. I was terribly depressed and disappointed. I could hardly sleep, but when I did I dreamt of my mother being taken out of the train compartment on a wheel chair, fully covered with garlands. It was shocking. In my heart of hearts I knew it was a message to prepare one for the inevitable. I kept crying and praying.

I had been waiting eagerly for my mother to come home, not only because she was sick and away from home, and I was so eager to know all that had happened at Puttaparthi, but also because something had happened in Kota about which I wanted to share with her.

A Guru Poornima special *bhajan* had been organized by the devotees and we were invited to come a little early before the *bhajans* commenced to help in the various chores. I was given the task of making the big white garland for Swami's main photo. It had a big red rose in the middle making it quite heavy. During the *bhajan*, when we were singing with great fervor and devotion, suddenly the main garland started surging and then broke at the middle! The

big red rose dropped down behind the lamp. And all the while, the *bhajans* continued and finished with the usual *arati*.

For me, the uninitiated, this was something unique. I took the *prasadam* and waited quietly for everyone else to leave so that I could pick that rose and take it home. When everybody, except one old devotee, Mr. Swami, had left, the owner of the house who was also the organizer of the *bhajan* session, Dr. Banerji, called me to the altar. As I was looking for the rose behind the lamp, Mr. Swami picked it up and touched it to his forehead. I was very disappointed that my rose had gone! He called my husband and asked me to bring my daughter, who was sleeping in another room. When three of us did salutations, Mr. Swami asked her to open her mouth and held the same flower in his palm over her open mouth. I could see something dripping from his fingers. As I had placed that rose in the garland, I wondered what that fluid was, and from where did it come from? Before I could ask anything, Mr. Swami had extended that rose towards me. I automatically cupped my hands, collected the golden syrup and consumed it. What fragrance! Truly, heavenly taste! I had never tasted anything even remotely resembling this. Ms. Banerjee told me that this was Baba's way of accepting our prayers. This is His blessing. She also told me that at that time my mother must have been praying to Baba for us and that probably He had accepted her prayers too! Mr. Swami then told my husband that we were indeed very fortunate as Baba had taken us into His fold. That was the Guru Poornima of 1972!

I wanted to share this news with my mother and sister, and wanted to know from them everything that had happened in Puttaparthi as early as I could. Four days had already passed since Guru Poornima day, and I was really waiting for the moment when I would hear from my mother of her experience of meeting Swami. But Baba had planned something else for me. I was not destined to hear anything from my mother...

In Bombay, at about 9.45 a.m., my mother asked for water with Swami's Vibhuti. She also asked my sister to open the suitcase. She wanted to wear her ring with Swami's photo on it. My sister tried to reason out with her that in an hour and a half they would be reaching Kota, and mother could then gift all the things they had bought such as books, rings, and Vibhuti to everybody, and then wear her own ring too. However, mother insisted to wear her ring right then. Very reluctantly my sister opened the suitcase and took out all the packets and tried the rings one by one on her finger. When mother got a ring, which was a perfect fit on her finger, she wore it and smiled. Then, she took a sip of Vibhuti water and looked far away from the window of the running train. Restful, smiling, and with a faraway look in her eyes, she breathed her last in the running train at 10.00 a.m.

On the morning of August 1, my husband received a phone call from his office, and he had to leave urgently on some official work. He assured me that he'll send the office car at 10.00 a.m. to fetch me. I was supposed to go to the station to receive my mother. As I was offering my *pranams* to Swami, my husband came quietly and stood behind me silently. When I turned around, he revealed to me, "It's all over! I am coming with you to the station." All the other

devotees who wanted to come to meet her were stopped by Swami, for on that day, for the first time in Kota, a *bandh* (strike) was declared.

Swami's Trial by Fire

I was shocked, to say the least. My whole world crumbled around me. My mother, who was my role model, inspiration, guide and guru was no more! I was dying to hear from her about her cherished last desire which Baba had fulfilled, but she died without saying a word! I was shaken, my faith was disturbed. Father had, in brief, told me the previous evening that Baba had blessed her and she was extremely calm and peaceful. But then what changed so suddenly?

On the way to the station our family doctor joined us in his car. A police jeep and the pick-up van, in which mother had gone to the far flung villages hundreds of times, accompanied the two cars. The driver cried so much that our doctor had to brief him and me not to cry at the station as my mother was being brought out as a serious patient. By Swami's grace, there was no problem with railways or the police, and we came home safely. Before we reached home, hundreds of people had gathered to have her last *darshan*. That was the end of an era!

My sister was inconsolable. She kept questioning Swami all the time and accused Him of not caring for her. We all know that Baba puts us through an *Agni Pariksha* (trial by fire) before accepting us as devotees. Our *pariksha* (test) had just begun. Too many things were happening at that time, but let me narrate only about the three promises made by Baba.

Swami Keeps His Promise

Baba had said that my mother's *takleef* (troubles) will be over – my mother was now dead. My sister was supposed to have passed Bachelors in Science in second division, but she failed in physics and when she appeared for the supplementary exams, she failed again! During those days, if one failed in the supplementary exams too, one had to go back to the first year again. A girl who had just lost her mother could not have passed that exam, but why did Baba tell her that she had already passed B.Sc.?

Coming to the third slip, Baba had assured my mother that her daughter will marry the boy whom she had chosen for her. Now who will tell us, who that boy was? I was not able to bear my younger sister's heart-wrenching cries and her pointed questions, because I had no answers for them. When the form was brought for her to fill, she declared that she would rather die than going back to the first year class; she had almost threatened us.

I folded the form, kept it at Swami's feet and offered an ultimatum, "Baba, if my sister dies. I will also leave this body and then people are not going to have faith in You. This is not our, but Your *pariskha* (test)! You have to prove Yourself." I closed the door of the altar. I did no *puja*, no lighting of lamps or offering any *prasadam*. All I did was to cry and pray.

One afternoon during these days, the local postman delivered a registered letter from the University of Rajasthan. It was a regret letter from the Registrar of the University apologizing for the mistake they had made, which had caused so much anguish and heartburn to my sister. Along with the letter was the new mark sheet in which my sister had secured 58% marks in the original B.Sc. final examination. We couldn't believe our eyes! It was not a dream. It was... a miracle!

The altar was now opened, cleaned and decorated; apologies and prayers were offered. My sister joined Masters in Sciences. A couple of months later a young and handsome boy came to my house. He offered his condolences and said that he had gone home on a long leave and hence, could not have my mother's last *darshan*. He told me that on a particular night, after the Bengali Community's Saraswati Puja, my mother had invited him for dinner and while he was eating she had enquired about his family, job, caste, and so on. He then hesitatingly told me that he liked my sister very much. He also thought that my mother approved of him. Since my father was out of station, he requested me to talk to father and get back to him. He also told me that he knew my husband as he was also working in the same organization.

This was Swami's reply to the third slip. Now we had only one question, which had the simplest answer - in death, my mother was freed from her *takleef* (troubles).

The Home Coming

So much has happened in the last 36 years, 25 of which have gone in yearning and pining for Swami. We tried to come to Puttaparthi so many times, but it didn't materialize. Since my planned first visit, which got abruptly cancelled and my sister went in my place, I was, in my heart of hearts, cross with Swami. Sometimes I used to cry and tell Him, I won't come till you call me Yourself.

One day, out of the blue, my friend called me to ask whether I was interested in going to Puttaparthi as a Sevalal. I had no inkling on the qualification of a Sevalal, but I immediately accepted.

In 1997, which was my first visit, whatever I asked for was granted immediately. He heard my prayers even though I was serving kilometers away in the Dietary Department of the Super Specialty Hospital.

When I returned Delhi, I was worried about a home, as my husband was about to retire in the very next month. Owning a house on your own land is not an easy affair in Delhi, it being the capital city of India, but Swami made it possible. When our house was built, I wrote a letter to Swami and prayed, "Swami, please always be with us in 'Prasanthi'." We had named our house thus, and felt Swami's presence there always. Baba seemed to say, "*Tathastu* (so be it)!" But with a little modification - Prasanthi became Prasanthi Nilayam. Within the next three years we moved ourselves lock, stock and barrel to His physical presence in Puttaparthi. Baba had promised my dying mother that He will look after us. He is doing just that!

H2H SPECIAL

MESMERIZING MOMENTS WITH THE DIVINE MASTER

Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 8

A devout and dedicated devotee for nearly sixty years, Mrs. Rani Subramanian, who originally hails from Tamil Nadu, came to Bhagavan Baba as early as 1950. Now eighty five years old and fondly called 'Rani Ma' by Bhagavan, her life is a treasure-chest of scintillating experiences from yester years. A sincere spiritual seeker, she currently resides in Puttaparthi and shares her elevating memories with eager devotees with deep conviction, insight and faith. This is the eighth part of her wonderful reminiscences, continued from the previous issue.

The Heavenly Dasara Celebrations of the Fifties

The Dasara celebrations during the 1950s and 60s were very different. We used to stay at the Patha Mandiram (Old Mandir) then. This was before we shifted to Prasanthi Nilayam. The celebrations were not as we see them now. Swami used to be taken in a procession. He was carried in a palanquin by four men. Naturally, Swami was in a higher position than us. We devotees used to sing *bhajans* facing Him, walking backwards! There were no proper roads and the procession used to start very late at night. We used to trip over stones and trample thorns, but we paid no heed to all that. We only saw Swami. It gave us so much joy. Each devotee saw Him differently. Some saw Him as the Divine Mother, others as their *Ishta Daivatha* (personal deity). Each one saw Swami the way they wanted to see Him; it was very personal.

In those days, Swami's dress was very grand; people today may not believe it. His dress used to be brocaded and had *zari* (silk) because the devotees wanted it that way. During Dasara, He is the embodiment of the Divine Mother. Hence, He cannot be in ochre. Devotees used to dress Him up very nicely, and He used to allow it too. Thus, the procession covered the entire Puttaparthi. However, Puttaparthi then was a very small place; they only had one or two roads. The entire place was like a forest, there were no houses or roads. In fact, the population was just about three hundred.

The procession used to end at about twelve or one at night, but nothing used to tire us. That is what I wanted to stress. See, we hardly had any sleep and very little to eat because there was no proper store here at that time. There was only one store that used to supply very poor quality rice, lentils and other items which used to take a long time to cook. Hence, we used to bring these things with us - pulses, cooking oil and other food stuffs – two trunk loads full. Also we couldn't cook fast as we depended on firewood. We used to cook in the open as there were no kitchens. So, that was how it was in those days, the 1950s.

The Joyful *Jhoola* Darshan

Later on, the *Jhoola darshan* (Swami on a swing) was introduced in Prasanthi Nilayam. On the last day of Dasara, that is, the day of Vijayadasami, Swami

used to sit on a beautifully decked *jhoola* (swing), which was decorated with numerous flower garlands. Swami too was very grandly dressed. Devotees sang songs and pushed the *jhoola* gently. This used to be at night on Vijayadashami. It was called the *Jhoola* programme and used to start only after dinner, at about 8.30 p.m.

During those days, everything was so very informal; everybody just sat around the swing. There were no restrictions then. If you went early, you got a place. After that things gradually changed. On His birthday, we could all go and offer Him a garland and do *namaskaram*. Everybody was let in and He gave that opportunity to anyone. He used to sit on a chair. Mother Easwamma used to anoint Him with oil. After she was done, we went to Him in a queue and offered Him a garland on His birthday, which He accepted. Today, of course, there is a lot of change; celebrations have changed completely. We used to get *Padanamaskar* (touching His feet) twice a day, every day. As there were only a few, it was physically possible. Today such a thing is not possible at the human level.

Fulfilling a Cherished Desire

I would like to share with you an incident about a little yellow pouch that is now with my daughter.

Earlier, during the 1950s and 60s, devotees in New Delhi were very lucky. Sometimes, during festivals such as Dasara or Swami's birthday, when devotees couldn't make it to Puttaparthi, others who had gone for the function used to return with *prasadam* for them. However, I was not so lucky, because in those days I lived in Indore, and there were no devotees there. My two sisters, on the other hand, lived in Delhi. I occasionally joined them in their trip to Puttaparthi; sometimes I could not. I used to feel sad and wallow in self-pity hearing about the *prasadam* opportunity that I missed.

I mentally said to Swami, "I am very unfortunate. I stay in Indore and there is no Sai devotee here. I am the only Sai devotee. I must have done some bad *karma* to be in a place like this." One afternoon, our cook, who was not residing with us, rang the door bell. I went to the door to open it for him. I saw a little yellow pouch on the floor before the door. It was a string pouch. Mistaking it for my cook's, I asked him whether it belonged to him. "No *Amma*," he said. Curious, I then proceeded to open it. To my utter surprise, I found it full of *vibhuti* and *kumkum* packets. I realized that Swami is indeed omnipresent. See! I was lamenting about the lack of *prasadam* opportunity and Bhagavan delivers one at my doorstep! That is the *krupa* (compassion) of Bhagavan. I have handed over the precious pouch to my daughter.

You may be a householder, but when you truly love God, and you know that you are living only for God, He listens.

He Listens To Every Prayer

Swami knows everything. We are mere *sadhujanas* - harmless people; not *sadhus* (ascetics). We pray, but that is all. We do not meditate or perform penance. However, when the call came and when we came to Prasanthi for the very first time, He transformed us!

How? Swami says if parents pray for their children, He will listen. If we pray that our children should be in a good position and earn a lot of money, He would listen; but that does not please Him much. However, if we pray that our children should love and serve Him with all their heart, He becomes very pleased. He fulfills such prayers. I guess my mother prayed so, because now, we sisters, are with Him! He once told us that our mother was a very devout lady. She died young. But her only wish was that her daughters should hold on to God very tightly. He once said, "Your mother's prayer has brought you three sisters here." How did He know about my mother? He has not even met her! This thought reinforced in me the belief that He does listen to our sincere and devout prayers. Here, I would like to add that even my grandmother was very God-fearing, and must have prayed in the same manner.

Bestowal of a Divine Task

In the course of his work, my husband was shifted to Bhopal. As you would know, Bhopal was made the capital of the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. It was while living in this place that I first visited Puttaparthi. I remember an incident concerning one such visit from Bhopal. One evening, in Prasanthi Nilayam, Swami called me upstairs and asked, "You now live in Madhya Pradesh, is it not?" I said, "Yes Swami. I come from Bhopal." He often used to enquire as to where we came from as we often used to shift our residence. He then said, "There is no Sathya Sai Seva Samithi in Bhopal. You start a Sathya Sai Seva Samithi there." He then gave me an apple as *prasadam*.

I did not know how to start a Samithi (Sai Centre), but I also could not say that I won't. I was very disturbed. I did not tell Him anything, but internally I was very uncomfortable. I prayed, "Swami, I don't know anybody there. I am new to the place. How do I contact people? How do I start? I have no experience." Later, I returned to Bhopal. I thought since Swami has chosen me for the task let me start somehow; He is always there! I started making enquiries through various friends about any group that knows about Sri Sathya Sai Baba. One lady said that she is aware of a group of mill workers, consisting of office attendants, clerks, peons, and the like, who perform Sai *bhajans* every Thursday.

I went to the flour mill. The place was huge and I did not know which door to knock. There were so many apartment quarters for the workers. I prayed, "Swami you must lead me to the right door." I went to the first floor and knocked on one door. A gentleman opened the door. I asked him whether he knew of any Sai devotees. He said that he was one, and invited me inside. There was a picture of Swami in his apartment. He said, "What can we do for you? Why have you come to us?" I told him about the directive from Puttaparthi and asked him whether he could help me. He said, "Yes *Ma*, what sort of help do you want?"

I asked him for a room where we could organize *bhajans*, some class for children and women to spread the word of Swami, and also teach *bhajans*. He said, "Yes, that is no problem. We have a prayer hall which we will give you." I asked him to join me and bring children as I had to start a class. "No problem," he said again. "We will help you." My daughter was staying with me then. So, I also asked for her help. I organized the ladies and conducted Bal Vikas classes. However, as I was unaware of the Bal Vikas course curriculum, I created one of my own.

Once, through a mutual friend, I called up the secretary of a Ladies club and told her that I wanted to visit the club and talk to the ladies about Swami. Having her permission to do so, the secretary, the mutual friend, another friend of mine, and I, went to the club. There I saw women playing billiards in a room. In another, they were playing cards, and in yet another, there was some other game going on. I was told that the members were informed about my visit and the purpose, but many were not interested. There were only three or four ladies sitting. It did not bother me. I lit a lamp, but did not display Swami's picture. Instead, on the table was a Sarva Dharma symbol which I had carried.

The women were skeptical. They thought I was out there to convert them to Sai devotees. I told them that Swami was for all religions and that I had no intention of converting them. They then seemed relaxed. I then started with a Tulsidas *bhajan*. I closed my eyes and sang about two or three such *bhajans*. When I opened my eyes, to my utter surprise, I found the place packed with about 20 - 25 women! They said that they would like to attend!

Later, I visited the expansive Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited's campus. It is actually a small township. I met the chairman, told him about my purpose, and explained about the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi. After due explanations, he was delighted and offered me a hall. I installed the Sarva Dharma symbol there. Many of my friends from the flour mill who joined me at the BHEL hall asked why I had not installed Swami's picture instead. I told them that doing so might put off people who are interested otherwise in the discussion. Besides, that is not the purpose. Swami told me that I had done the right thing. Swami Himself had stated during His 60th birthday discourse, "Don't take my picture when you start something. That will go against the organization. I don't represent just this Sathya Sai Roopa (form). I am universal. So, only put My symbol."

Overcoming Many Obstacles

I formed a committee, the members of this included about 8 to 10 workers of the flour mill. The committee in no way could be recognized as a Sri Sathya Sai Samithi. There was one gentleman who would visit Puttaparthi. So, I gave him a letter to deliver to Swami telling him, "Please try to sit in the first row and give this to Swami saying that it is from Rani Ma." I wanted him to seek Swami's blessings for the committee.

Swami took the letter. Nothing much was written in the letter; it was about the committee formed, giving the names of the president, secretary and other members. However, I did not add my name to the list. Swami saw the letter and returned it saying, "I refuse to sign this committee. Take it back. Tell Rani Ma

this is not the correct committee. This cannot function. Give it back to her. No blessings.”

The person came back and told me what Bhagavan had said. “Swami said that it is all wrong, not the proper committee. You have to change it,” he said. I sat and prayed. I told Swami that I do not know any big names.

Through a friend, I met the then Governor's wife, Mrs. Reddy. The friend fixed an appointment for me with this esteemed lady. Then, the first thing Mrs. Reddy asked me was the reason for my visit. I told her that we wanted to start a Sri Sathya Sai Samithi in Bhopal. She bluntly said, “I refuse to have anything to do with Sathya Sai. I don't believe in Him. Please do not expect any help from me.” I was shocked! She was very curt. I closed my eyes for a few seconds and prayed as to what to do. A voice inside told me not to give up. “You have to pursue, do not give up!” Though she tersely asked me to leave, I did not. I asked her the reason for her disbelief and she told me this: “I have been to Puttaparthi twice. I have also taken a friend of mine from Madurai to meet Sathya Sai Baba. The friend is the top man of Madurai Mills, a very rich person. I accompanied him and his family to Baba's ashram. He had a son, about 18-years old, who was very seriously ill. The doctors had given up hope and said he will not live for long. So I told him about Sai Baba. He asked whether I could accompany him and ask Sai Baba to bless and cure him. At Puttaparthi, the mill owner got an interview with Baba. He asked Baba to bless and asked Him if He can cure him. Sai Baba said that the boy would be alright, but the boy died. Why does He lie? Can He be God? If you convince me, I will help you.”

I tried to reason out with her. “Look Mrs. Reddy, we don't know the subject. Spirituality has to be understood first. That is what the Bhagavad Gita says. It is knowledge; our spiritual life is knowledge. One cannot blindly adhere to a religion. You will be disappointed, disturbed, and unhappy.”

‘For Me, the whole *Jagath* is false’ - Baba

I remember another incident that I shall briefly share to highlight this point. A lady and her daughter visited Puttaparthi. Her daughter was married for only two or three years, when the doctors diagnosed her with cancer. The mother was distraught. Swami called my sister who was serving there, and told her to take care of the duo. He told that mother that everything would be fine. However, after a couple of days, the daughter died. My sister approached Swami and questioned Him about the promise He had made. Swami replied, “I am *Mangala Swaroopa* (embodiment of auspiciousness). How can I tell anything that is not *mangala* (auspicious)? I only speak the truth. There is no difference between falsehood and truth, as the false does not exist for truth. What you people are experiencing is delusion.”

Swami told my sister, “Supposing I tell that lady that your daughter is going to die in five days or five months, she will suffer during the period night and day. Her daughter too will suffer for the duration. They will lose their sleep; they will be so unhappy, and would already start mourning. Have I come to disturb and create sorrow or have I come to give peace? I cannot work with you people at My level of truth; you can't take it. This is not falsehood. For Me, the whole

Jagath (world) is false. Be it your problem or someone else's, they are false." Swami says mere blind faith is of no use; there must be *bhakti* (devotion).

When I told her all this, there was a total transformation in Mrs. Reddy. She allowed the entire workforce of the Raj Bhavan (Governor's house) to join the class. I also requested her to be the president of the committee, adding that I did not want to hold any post. My aim was only to obey Swami.

However, after much argument I complied to be the joint secretary. Next, I wanted a vice president. I knew of one Sir Datar Singh. He was a very popular person and was knighted in England. I knew him because his daughters were the devotees of Anandamoyi Ma, and I was very close to her. I called up Datar Singh. He declined the post saying that he was a Sikh and that the organization was a Hindu outfit. "All the more a reason that you become the vice president as you are a Sikh," I said. He did not understand. I explained the concept to him. We have no difference, no cult, sect, or particular religion, but only one religion - Love. The idea is to unite the world. I told him, "Uncle, you pray to Guru Nanak. We are not telling you to pray to Baba. But give your name and accept His mission. You have to only accept His mission; you don't have to accept Him!" He agreed.

The committee was then formed with the governor's wife, Mrs. Reddy, as president, Sir Datar Singh as vice president, and other committee members, all of them seniors and holding authoritative positions in society.

Sometime later, another group went to Puttaparthi to show Swami the member list of the newly redrafted committee. Swami was happy. He said, "Very good committee. Tell Rani Ma I am very happy. This committee is correct." Later, He told me, "See, what can these ordinary people do for others? They themselves are not so well off. Respected people can start institutions; they can start a college, and so on." Swami has a reason for all that He does. He wants the right people to do the right thing at the right time in the right place. Can poor people start a hospital or a college?

It was truly miraculous, the way He started the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi in Bhopal. The potential members were initially not forth coming, but Swami gave me the *buddhi* (thought) to meet His requirements, to talk and convince the others. The crux of the issue here is that one must have no ego in His work. If you want to follow Baba, there is no place for ego. Abandon yourself to Him: *Twameva sarvam*. He then enters your life.

An Assistant in His Sacred Operation

I would like to share a singular incident with you. It concerns my daughter, Sheela. She was about nine years old then. In those days, the duration of *bhajans* was totally up to Swami's discretion. One day while I was in the Bhajan Hall, Mr. Kasturi came in and said that Swami wanted my daughter upstairs. As it was His wish, I sent her upstairs with Mr. Kasturi. Sheela was let into a room where Swami was along with another child, a young girl who was, I gathered, suffering from a severe throat problem. Swami told Sheela that He was to perform an operation, and He asked whether she would help Him. "Whenever I

ask you for scissors or cotton or anything else, give it to me, okay?" She did not fully comprehend the requirement, however, she agreed. Swami materialized the required operation instruments and medicines, and performed an operation on the suffering girl's throat.

After the surgery, Sheela came downstairs to the Bhajan Hall. "Why did Swami call you?" I asked her. "*Amma*, I don't know. He did some operation on a little girl. I was handing Him scissors, cotton, whatever He asked for." Can you believe it? I was so stunned. Needless to say, the little girl recovered absolutely!

He Alone Knows the Right Prescription

Allow me to share another incident. Sheela was about 10-years old when we were in Nagpur. All of a sudden, she started running a high temperature, about 100 degrees. We consulted many popular doctors of the region; however, none of them were able to identify the reason. They thought it might be due to tuberculosis. Tests were performed, but they indicated perfect health. So where was the problem? At that time a friend of my husband was returning from Delhi. He was a doctor and he agreed to examine Sheela. He said that it was not a serious issue. Some children may have a slow metabolic rate, and hence, this symptom. However, there was no sign of the high temperature abating. This went on for about two to three months. I lost faith in doctors. I asked my husband's permission to go to Puttaparthi. "There are no doctors there," he said. However, I was adamant. I wanted to go along with my daughter and see Swami.

I met Bhagavan. Swami asked us to stay in a portion of the garage as all the accommodation at the time was full. So my daughter, my sister (who was also there), and I put up at the garage. Swami told me, "I know why you have brought Sheela here. She is running a temperature, is it not? Don't worry, she will be alright. But you would have to stay here for a month."

Swami forbade me from allowing her outside the garage after nine o'clock in the morning. "She must not be exposed to the Sun," He said. "You must be very vigilant. When you go outside to wash clothes, lock her inside. I too will look after her."

After a month, Swami allowed us to go. During the one month period, He did not take her temperature or offer any treatment, neither did I. My husband took her temperature after we reached Nagpur – it was normal. I cannot explain to people the reasons for Swami's actions.

GET INSPIRED

THE EYES OF GOD

It was sometime during the hot month of June. The drama unfolded itself in a small street corner in the city of Cuttack, Orissa (a state in eastern India). Do I have to quote the date? It could be any day, and anyplace, where men have a tryst with themselves.

I was returning home from college for a late lunch. I did not have classes in the afternoon, so I thought I could afford to eat a little late that day to save myself from coming back in the grueling heat. As my mind was running away to home for a curd rice and *saag bhaji*, my favourite in summer, I was looking around in search of a fruit stall to buy a couple of bananas for *puja*. My wife specifically wanted them, for it was Thursday. The street looked almost deserted, every dog taking a nap in some shade and every puddle in the street simmering under the unrelenting Sun, struggling to hold on to every drop. Typical of human life, I mumbled on. We are in love with life, but hardly bother to add value to living. I discovered a small shop tucked away in a corner near a banyan tree in its last lap of life, not because it was too old to exist, but because men were too greedy for space to let it exist. City streets are now barren, forfeit of trees, in the excuse for expansion. But, are we really expanding?

I got down from the cycle rickshaw and went near the shop to buy a few bananas. On my right, a little away from where I stood, was unfolding the first scene of the drama. A blind beggar was sitting in the shade with the tell-tale tin in front of him. A vendor stepped into the shade and against the trunk of the tree, rested his wooden frame on which hung many little novelties. In villages and city side streets, we see these vendors selling a thousand different things, each not more than a rupee or two. They make a cross-like bamboo frame with three or four bars tied across a vertical pole. Then they arrange typical women's trinkets and cheap jewellery on them. One can find ribbons, balloons, tooth-picks, ear-picks, nail-clippers, hair-dressing items, locks, and a hundred other things hanging from those crossbars. They walk the street, stand in a corner, and ring a hand bell. Customers come to choose whatever they need. These vendors often lead a hand-to-mouth existence.

I overheard the conversation that ensued between the two, the blind beggar and the street side vendor.

Vendor – *Rahim bhayya, kya kuchh mila?* (Rahim brother, did you get anything?)

Rahim – *Kaun... Hari bhayya ? Allahki mehrbani, ek paisa bhi nahin.* (Who is it? Brother Hari? By the grace of Allah, not even a paisa.)

Hari – *Hmmm... to kya khaoge ?* (Then what will you eat?)

Rahim – *Allahki mehrbanise thoda pani milegi to achha hoga.* (By the grace of Allah if I get a little water to drink, it would be alright)

Hari - *Allah karega to panika sath aur kuchh bhi miljayega Rahim bhayya. Aj mujhe do rupayya munafa mila. Isi do rupayyame char puri to hoga. Tum baith raho. Mein abhi char puri lekar aata hun.* (If Allah wants, we can get something more besides water. Today I got two rupees as profit. Two rupees can buy four *puris*. You remain seated here, I will go and fetch four *puris*.)

I kept on standing there pretending; I was afraid to brave the Sun. In fact, I was struck by the piece of great humanity unfolding before me. The street vendor came back with two packets made of leaves, each containing two *puris* and a little chutney. Hari had brought a tinful of water too. He sat down and passed on one packet to Rahim. Both ate the *puris* with great relish, drank water from the tin, and fell to their inconsequential daily gossip. They do not talk of purpose of life, of new technologies, international politics, fashions and films; but of simple living. I left the shade, washed by the lyrics of life, by the quintessential beauty of an inconsequential life.

But that was not all. God had something more for me before the end of the day.

As I said, it was a Thursday. So after a short post-lunch nap, I washed, and went to a *bhajan* centre. Those were the early seventies, and bhajans were held in devotees' homes. It afforded a beautiful get together in homely environment. Now, *mandirs* (temples) have sprung up everywhere as public gathering places, and organized formality has cruelly replaced informal conviviality. I hailed a rickshaw and arrived at the centre before time. I was standing before the gentleman's house waiting for a friend. This was when the second part of the drama unfolded.

There was a big gate opening to their compound. A garage faced the gate and on the other side of the house was a sprawling balcony. The ground floor hall started under it and spread inside the house. That was the bhajan hall. The lady of the house and a daughter were standing in the balcony, probably looking for a known face. A couple of beggars appeared near the gate and asked for alms. There was a blind woman amidst them. She was middle aged, held a cane and was led by a girl of ten or twelve years, probably her daughter. They chanted a prayer a couple of times. The ladies on the balcony were watching them with some disapproval. When they heard it a fourth time they realized it was a *bhajan* day and that these people should be disposed off quickly. The lady of the house went inside, got a coin and tossed it to her from her overhead balcony. The coin fell on the hard floor below with a tong and rolled down the street. The blind woman bent down and groped for the precious coin, her little girl helping her. While both of them were frantically searching for the 'heaven's gift', the two ladies found it quite amusing, and laughed. Finally, they got the quarter-of-a-rupee coin, blessed the giver, and left.

I entered the hall and chose a spot at the rear of the congregation. The *bhajan* started, but I couldn't concentrate at all. The faces of Rahim, Hari, the old woman, and the ladies on the balcony kept disturbing me. I looked at the life-size standing picture of Bhagavan Baba on the pedestal. Suddenly, his eyes became alive, and in their place I saw another pair of eyes.

A few months earlier, during the puja vacation I had been to Prasanthi Nilayam. One day, I was sitting in the second row for *darshan*. A middle-aged man was sitting in front of me with his sick child, palsied limbs struck by some wasting disease. After some time, Bhagavan came along and stood before him, looking at the father and the child. He waved His hands, poured some *Vibhuti* into the hands of the father, applied the remaining *Vibhuti* on the forehead of the boy, and walked away. I had the good fortune of looking into His eyes. I felt the dewy eyes of Bhagavan reflected all the suffering of humanity, and all the compassion of God. It was such a soul-stirring vision.

I now saw those eyes, soft and glassy, so delicate and supple, yet they encircle all existence. I couldn't sing a song that day, for there was another song overflowing my heart. I remembered Wordsworth, "*...for the vale profound / was overflowing with the sound...*"

- Mr. B. K. Misra

MY MOTHER

This story begins when I was a child: I was born poor. Often we hadn't enough to eat. Whenever we had some food, Mother often gave me her portion of rice. While she was transferring her rice into my bowl, she would say 'Eat this rice, son! I'm not hungry.' This was my mother's first lie.

As I grew, mother gave up her spare time to cultivate vegetables on a small patch of land near our home. She hoped that she could give me some nutritious food for my growth. She would make delicious soups from the best of the seasonal crops she was able to grow. While I was eating the soup, mother would sit beside me and eat what was still left in the bowl. My heart was touched when I saw it. Once I gave her half my share but she immediately refused it and said, 'Please eat this soup, son! I don't really like soup so much.' This was my mother's second lie.

Then, in order to fund my education, mother went to a match factory to bring home some used matchboxes, which she filled with fresh matchsticks. This helped her get some money to cover our needs. One wintry night, I awoke to find mother filling the matchboxes by candlelight. So I said, 'Mother, go to sleep; it's late, you can continue working tomorrow morning.' Mother smiled and said, 'Go to sleep, son! I'm not tired.' This was my mother's third lie.

When I had to sit for my final examination, mother accompanied me. After dawn, mother waited for me for hours in the heat of the Sun. When the bell rang, I ran to meet her... Mother embraced me and poured me a glass of tea that she had prepared in a thermos. The tea was not as strong as my mother's love. Seeing mother covered with perspiration, I at once gave her my glass and asked her to drink too. Mother said 'Drink, son! I'm not thirsty!' This was my mother's fourth lie.

After my father's death, mother had to play the role of a single parent. She held on to her former job and somehow had to make ends meet alone. Our family's status was precarious and many a time we suffered from starvation. Seeing our family's condition worsening, my kind Uncle, who lived near my house, offered to help us solve our problems, big and small. Our other neighbors saw that we were poverty stricken, so they often advised my mother to marry again. But mother refused to remarry saying, 'I don't need love.' This was my mother's fifth lie.

After I had finished my studies and found a job, it was time for my old mother to retire, but she carried on going to the market every morning just to sell a few vegetables. I kept sending her money, but she was steadfast and even sent the amount back to me! She said, 'I have enough money.' That was my mother's sixth lie.

I continued my part-time studies for my master's degree. Funded by the American Corporation for which I worked, I succeeded in my studies. With a big jump in my salary, I decided to bring mother to enjoy life in America. But

mother

didn't want to bother her son; she said to me: 'I don't want a comfortable life.'
That was my mother's seventh lie.

In her dotage, Mother was attacked by cancer and had to be hospitalized. Now, living far across the ocean, I went home to visit mother who was bedridden after an operation. Mother tried to smile, but I was heartbroken because she was so thin and feeble. But mother said, 'Don't cry, son! I'm not in any pain.' That was my mother's eighth lie!

Telling me this, her eighth lie, she died. Yes, my mother was an angel!

It is for this reason that they define Mother this way –

M - O - T - H - E - R

'M' is for the Million things she gave me;
'O' means she became Old as she gave her life for me;
'T' is for the Tears she shed to save me;
'H' is for her Heart of gold;
'E' is for her Eyes with love-light shining in them;
'R' means the Righteous and exemplary life she lead.

Put them all together, they spell 'MOTHER' - a word that means the world to me.

The author of this story is unknown, but it can be anybody on this Earth who has had the fortune of being brought up by their mother. For those, who have been blessed with their mother's presence in their lives, this story is surely beautiful. For those who aren't so lucky, this is even more beautiful!

Bhagavan Baba has time and again exhorted everyone to adore their mother as their first God. During the Ladies Day celebration on November 19, 1999, Bhagavan started His Divine Discourse with this moving poem:

**More fragrant than the sweet-smelling flowers
like the Jasmine and the Champak,
Softer than the cheese and the butter,
More beautiful than eye of the peacock,
More pleasant than the moonlight,
Is the love of the mother!**

Again, on the occasion of Easwaramma Day on May 6, 2006, He said, **“There is no love greater than mother's love in this world. It is imbued with immense power... Love your mother. Then you will be loved by all... It is the foremost duty of children to fulfill the wishes of their mother and make her happy.”**

JENNY'S NECKLACE

Jenny was a bright-eyed, pretty five-year-old girl. One day when she and her mother were checking out at the grocery store, Jenny saw a plastic pearl necklace priced at \$2.50. How she wanted that necklace, and when she asked her mother if she would buy it for her, her mother said, "Well, it is a pretty necklace, but it costs an awful lot of money. I'll tell you what. I'll buy you the necklace, and when we get home we can make up a list of chores that you can do to pay for the necklace. And don't forget that for your birthday Grandma might just give you a whole dollar bill too. Okay?"

Jenny agreed and her mother bought the pearl necklace for her. Jenny worked on her chores very hard every day, and sure enough, her Grandma gave her a brand new dollar bill for her birthday. Soon Jenny had paid off the necklace.

How Jenny loved those pearls! She wore them everywhere - to kindergarten, bed, and even when she went out with her mother to run errands. The only time she didn't wear them was in the shower - her mother had told her that they would turn her neck green.

Now Jenny had a very loving daddy. When Jenny went to bed, he would get up from his favorite chair every night and read Jenny her favorite story. One night when he finished the story, he said, "Jenny, do you love me?"

"Oh yes daddy! You know I love you," the little girl said.

"Well, then, give me your pearls."

"Oh, daddy! Please, not my pearls!" Jenny said. "But you can have Rosie, my favorite doll. Remember her? You gave her to me last year for my birthday. And you can have her tea party outfit, too. Okay?"

"Oh no, darling, that's okay." Her father brushed her cheek with a kiss. "Good night, little one."

A week later, her father once again asked Jenny after her story, "Do you love me?"

"Oh yes, daddy! You know I love you."

"Well, then give me your pearls."

"Oh, daddy, not my pearls! But you can have Ribbons, my toy horse. Do you remember her? She's my favorite. Her hair is so soft, and you can play with it and braid it and everything. You can have Ribbons if you want her, daddy."

"No, that's okay," her father said and brushed her cheek again with a kiss. "God bless you, little one. Sweet dreams."

Several days later, when Jenny's father came in to read her a story, Jenny was sitting on her bed and her lips were trembling. "Here, daddy," she said, and held out her hand. She opened it and her beloved pearl necklace was inside. She let it slip into her father's hand. With one hand her father held the plastic pearls and with the other he pulled out of his pocket a blue velvet box.

Inside the box were real, genuine, beautiful pearls.

He had them all along. He was waiting for Jenny to give up the cheap stuff so he could give her the real thing.

So it is with our Heavenly Father. He is waiting for us to give up the cheap things in our lives so that he can give us His beautiful treasure.

We may ask ourselves, are we holding onto things which God wants us to let go of?

Are we holding onto harmful or unnecessary relationships, habits and activities which we have become so attached to that it seems impossible to let go?

Sometimes it is so hard to see what is in the other hand, but we must believe that God will never take away anything without giving us in return something precious in its place. For God, our Heavenly Father, truly loves each and every one of us!

It is for this reason that Bhagavan Baba says, **"I give you what you want, so that one day you will want, what I really want to give you..."**

Let us give up more so that He can fill us with things that are truly priceless.

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ ON LOVE

'Divine Love' is like the thread of the garland of all religions that adorn the world. Each faith has its own particular means, scriptures and rituals to help the seeker climb the uneven path to Unity with God. Yet the common experience enshrined within each course is the shining light of God's Love which acts like a beacon beckoning the aspirant ever onwards towards the goal of Self-Realisation. Here is a quiz on this sublime concept of "Divine Love" as enunciated by various world masters over many centuries.

1. In Buddhism, the Pali commentaries explain: One loves all beings: (a) by the non-harassment of all beings and thus avoids harassment; (b) by being inoffensive (to all beings) and thus avoids offensiveness; (c) by not torturing (all beings) and thus avoids torturing; (d) by the non-destruction (of all life) and thus avoids destructiveness; (e) by being non-vexing (to all beings) and thus avoids vexing; (f) by projecting the thought, "May all beings be friendly and not hostile"; (g) by projecting the thought, "May all beings be happy and not unhappy"; (h) by projecting the thought, "May all beings enjoy well-being and not be distressed.

In these eight ways, one loves all beings and sets the mind free; therefore, this method is called _____."

- A. 'Eight-fold expressions of Love.'
- B. 'Divine Love.'
- C. 'Universal Love.'
- D. 'Eternal Love.'

2. Lord Jesus Christ extolled the greatest commandment to be: **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... you shall love your neighbour as yourself."** The Bible says that of Faith, Hope, Love; the greatest of these is love. Christians believe that because God, the Source of all Love, has given His love to mankind, so is mankind enabled in his turn, to love God and his neighbour.

St Paul delivered a wonderful homily on Love, as found in one of his letters to the Corinthians:

"Love is patient, love is kind.
It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
It is not rude, it is not self-seeking.
It is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
Love _____."

- A. Always endures.
- B. Never fails.
- C. Is Eternal.
- D. Is Sublime.

3. In the Zoroastrian sacred book, the *Avesta*, the *Yasna* is a collection of the seventeen Holy Songs or "*gāthās*" of Zarathushtra and other longer hymns through which Zarathushtra teaches that Ahura Mazda created everything based on the 6 Amesha Spentas - which are in fact divine emanations or aspects of the Creator, and 'Spenta Armaiti', is chosen as the Spirit of Love and Devotion.

In one of the Yasnas, it states: "The person who is loving and beneficent is God's _____ in spirit."

- A. Most Beloved Child.
- B. Messenger
- C. Mirror
- D. Ally

4. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna affirms: "To love is to know Me, My innermost nature, the truth that I am."

"That one I love who is incapable of ill will, and returns love for hatred. Living beyond the reach of I and mind, and of pain and pleasure, full of mercy, contented, self-controlled, with all his heart and all his mind given to Me - with such a one I am in love."

What is that one method that Lord Krishna recommends to be united in love with Him?

"_____, without a doubt you shall be united with Me, Lord of Love, dwelling in your heart."

- A. "Recite the Geeta every day."
- B. "Still your mind in Me."
- C. "Spend time with Me"
- D. "Find a Guru."

5. In the Sikh scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, it states: "***To the fish, nothing is like water: But those immersed in the love of God feel love for all things.***"

Gurmukh (gur= Guru; mukh= face), is a word employed in Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, which literally means *To face the Guru*. It also means to follow the "ways of the Guru" and not to follow your animal instincts and basic desires of the mind. The opposite of **Gurmukh** is **Manmukh**, which means a person who follows his own uncontrolled mind or wild desires.

The Gurmukh embraces love for the Lord. Sikhs believe that those who have such pre-ordained destiny written on their foreheads - those Gurmukhs remain absorbed in the Lord's Love. They drink in the Ambrosial Nectar forever and ever, and they love the True Name.

How does a Gurmukh express his Love for the Lord?

- A. By serving one poor person everyday with food.
- B. By being absorbed in singing in the Temple.
- C. By only loving Truth.
- D. By having a constant cheerful disposition.

6. In the Hebrew Bible, it is said: "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God. But it was by a special love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image of God."

Jesus said: "I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." In other words, every individual is equally significant before God, since every man was created in His image.

When Jesus said: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love....He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Judas asked Him: "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?"

Stressing that obedience to Truth is the best form of love, Jesus answered and said unto him, "If a man love me, he will _____"

- A. Always be sincere.
- B. Keep my words.
- C. Never commit theft.
- D. Have a charitable disposition.

7. The essence of Islam is the love of Allah. The love of Allah stems from the love of the Prophet, the Holy Qur'an, faith, worship, charity, love for Muslims, love of brotherhood, love of humanity and alike. Whoever loves Allah also loves His creations, feels compassion and mercy for them.

Therefore, for a Muslim, to meet the demands of faith, it is not enough to worship and obey Allah. Rather, worship and obedience should be tempered with genuine love for Allah. Love for Him should surpass one's love for other worldly things. In the Qur'an, Allah shows two ways by which He bestows His love upon all:

***"Say (O Muhammad): 'If you do love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful.'"* (Qur'an 3:31)**

What is the second pathway to earning Allah's love?

- A. To do righteousness deeds.
- B. To always be grateful.
- C. To be in constant meditation.
- D. To pray five times every day.

8. Lord Mahavir, one of the founders of Jainism, preached that simplicity, non violence and love to all living beings of the universe are basic tools to still the thoughts of mind and are an entry point for self-realization, as well as perfection in meditation, leading to salvation. He emphasized that all living beings, irrespective of their size, shape, and form, however spiritually developed or undeveloped, are equal and we should love and respect them.

Some of the soul's natural qualities are love, kindness, compassion which easily leads to an act of _____.

What is that sublime act that Jains celebrate every year?

- A. Devotion
- B. Forgiveness
- C. Charity
- D. Pilgrimage

9. The "Hidden Words" is a love-song - the Love of God and Man, of the Creator and His creature, written by Bahá'u'lláh. In the human world there is no greater power than the love of God. 'Love Me, that I may love thee.' He says, 'If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. It is a two-way love relationship, as that between the sun and the tree or mother and son, which even in nature is the basis for growth.' Bahá'u'lláh says: "O Son of Man! For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and _____ under My trials."

- A. Surrender
- B. Faith
- C. Patience
- D. Servitude

10. In His Divine 2001 Discourse, Bhagavan Baba advocates the beauty of the "Sai Religion" which is the "The Religion of Love".

Swami says: "You are all members of the Sai Family, bound by the religion of Love. Though ostensibly you profess to belong to different faiths, faith in Sai has removed the barriers in your minds. Realizing that the *Atma* in everyone is the same, extend your love to all. It does not matter if you do not practice spirituality. Your _____ to others will raise you to the highest level of spirituality. Bear no ill-will towards anyone. When you harm anyone, realize you are doing harm to God."

- A. Service
- B. Charity
- C. Love
- D. Smiles

ANSWERS:

1C. 'Universal Love.'

The commentary explains: "In these eight ways one loves all beings; therefore, it is called Universal Love. And since one conceives (within) this quality (of love), it is of the mind. And since this mind is free from all thoughts of ill-will, the aggregate of love, mind and freedom is defined as Universal Love leading to freedom of mind."

He lets his mind pervade one quarter of the world with thoughts of love, and so the second, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, and everywhere, does he continue to pervade with the heart of love, far-reaching, exalted, beyond measure. Just as a mighty trumpeter makes himself heard - and that without difficulty - in all the four directions; even so of all things that have the shape of life there is not one that he passes by or leaves aside, but regards them all with mind set free, and deep-felt love. Verily this is the way to a state of union with Brahma.

Digha Nikaya xiii.76-77, Tevigga Sutta

2B. Never fails.

St. Paul also wrote in the same letter: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." 1 Corinthians 13:1

3D. Ally

"The person who is loving and beneficent is God's ally in spirit. He serves truth with good word and good action and is virtuous through truth. He makes the effort in harmony with good thinking, is nourished by good thinking, and receives the permanence of good thinking's alliance. This loving man watches over the heritage for all, is a world healer, and achieves salvation or paradise which is the attainment of God's divine attributes." Yasna 44:2

"One who is led by Thy Holy Spirit and Thy love, his thought, word and deed are good and in tune with truth. He shall be granted perfection and eternity by Mazda Ahura through his strength and love." Yasna 47:1

"One who led by Thy Holy Spirit lives the best life, his words shall be full of love and wisdom, and his hands shall fulfill the task of Armaiti through faith. His life shall be guided by one single thought that only Mazda is the source of truth." Yasna 47:2

4B. "Still your mind in Me."

In Chapter 12, Lord Krishna guarantees: **"Still your mind in Me, still yourself in Me, and without a doubt you shall be united with Me, Lord of Love, dwelling in your heart."**

"He who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving, ever content, steady in meditation, possessed of firm conviction, self-controlled, with mind and intellect dedicated to Me, he, My devotee, is dear to Me."

5C. By only loving Truth.

Gurmukh is a name that is used in the scriptures for a God-inspired or theocentric man — one who follows the way of life prescribed by the Guru and acts on his precepts. In this sense, he has his "face turned towards the Guru." Gurmukh is a Siddha or the perfect being.

The Gurmukhs do not like falsehood. They are imbued with Truth; they love only Truth. Those contented souls who meditate on the Lord with single-minded love, meet the True Lord who is the Source of Joy, when they listen to the Word [*Shabad*] of the Guru.

A Gurmukh loves to chant ecstatically: "Priceless is Love for Him, Priceless is absorption into Him. Sing, and listen, and let your mind be filled with love. Speak of Him continually, and remain absorbed in His Love. In the crucible of love, melt the Nectar of the Name; you are squandering this life uselessly in the love of Maya." - Guru Granth Sahib.

6B. Keep my words.

Jesus said to his followers: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Gospel of John chap 14 v23

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." Gospel of John chap 15 v10

7A. To do righteousness deeds.

"On those who believe and work deeds of righteousness will (Allah) Most Gracious bestow Love." (Qur'an 19:96)

Other pathways described are: "Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and **He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean. Allah loves those who are firm and steadfast. Allah loveth those who judge in equity. Allah loves those who act aright.** Surely those who believe and do good and humble themselves to their Lord, these are the dwellers of the garden, in it they will abide."

8B. Forgiveness.

Jains feel that the values such as love, joy and peace can be achieved only through caring for others, understanding the pain of others and reaching out to other human beings. Anger, confusion, egoism and intolerance cause harm to one's self and to the 'other'. But the negative energies suffocate, choke, distress and disturb. Love should not be in the form of words alone. It should reach out to people who need peace, mercy, joy, comfort, sympathy, food, clothing and medicines. This is love in its active, not passive manifestation, but true love is forgiveness for self sake.

Jains celebrate the act of forgiveness every year by seeking to forgive all fellow beings. The Jain way to forgive is to perceive the wholeness of life. To be forgiving is to live in the present and not cling to the past. To forgive is to have vision of a better future. Forgiveness is the foundation upon which reconciliation is built.

9C. Patience.

"O Son of Man! For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials. (Arabic 'Hidden Words', no.49)

One of the Bahá'í prayers is: "O Thou the Compassionate God! Bestow upon me a heart which, like unto glass, may be illumined with the light of Thy love, and confer upon me thoughts which may change this world into a rose garden through the outpourings of heavenly grace."

10C. Love.

Swami comforts us: **"It does not matter if you do not practice any *sadhana*. Your love to others will raise you to the highest level of spirituality.**

*Start the day with love,
Spend the day with love,
Fill the day with love,
End the day with love,
This is the way to God.*

All the worldly things come and go like passing clouds. But the principle of love comes and grows. There is no God other than love. Love is your life, your friend, your relative, your food and your everything. A heart that is filled with love can never be polluted. Love is nectarous. Once you fill it in your heart, the poison of evil will have no place in it. As you are not aware of the sacredness of love, you are wasting it by diverting it on worldly things. Love is the greatest wealth and treasure. Let the whole world be filled with love. Love alone can safeguard the country and make it prosperous. Let every action of yours be filled with love. Love begets sacred rewards."

QUIZ ON DIVINE DISCOURSES ON LOVE

The heart of any Divine Discourse of Bhagavan Baba is Love. In fact, this has been His singular message from day one of His declaration of Avatharhood. In a beautiful discourse, Swami said,

*A heart without love is lifeless;
Can you call that life
Merely because there is
Breath in the body?
It is just a pair of bellows.*

“Love, love, love. I love all and I ask all to love. My greatest wealth is love. People speak about My powers and My miracles, but My Love is My greatest miracle. Develop love for God. There is nothing more powerful than Divine love. All should share in this love. Only then there will be oneness.

All your actions must be aimed at purifying your minds and hearts to experience the Divine. When the heart is pure, the light of wisdom shines. The illumined heart becomes the receptacle of pure love. Love is everything. A person without love is a living corpse. Love is not the relationship between man and man, or between man and other objects. It is inherent in every being. *"Mamaatma Sarvabhootaatma"* ("I am the Spirit immanent in all beings"). The Divine *Atma* is present in all beings. The *Atma* has no form. It is experienced as Love. If there is no Love, there is no *Atma*. Hence, love is our life-breath. Love is our soul. Love is our everything. Acquire love through love. Only through love can unity in diversity be experienced.”

Such is the importance of Love. Though this concept on the face of it sounds simple, the nuances inherent in it are numerous. And Bhagavan on various occasions has explained this to us very elaborately. To recapitulate these precious pearls from the divine lips, we have this special quiz, offered to you with love!

1. In a Divine Discourse in 1982, Swami shares: “The entire world is filled with Love. Life devoid of Love can be described as lifeless. In Love, there are three levels.

The first is the best and the highest level (*utthama*). Men at this level have full faith and belief that God, who is the embodiment of eternal bliss, is present in all beings without exception. They will have the feeling that *Ishwara* is present everywhere and in everything in the form of Love. For such people, *"Adveshtaa Sarvabhuuthaanaam"* will be the feeling. They see nothing but love in every being. They see no difference between their ‘own’ people and others. Persons filled with such supreme love will experience bliss.

Those at the second level care only for their own good and the welfare of their own kith and kin, their comfort and happiness. They do not care about others, about their merits or their faults. These people can be termed as *madhyama*, or middle level persons.

There are others who don't feel happy if they see others happy; in fact they grow jealous of others' happiness. They will always be looking for faults in others and criticizing them. They cannot tolerate other people being happy. Thereby they ruin all aspects of love in themselves. Just as a crow feels jealous when a cuckoo sings well, these people feel jealous at others' attainments. Just as the crow ridicules the swan, these people ridicule good people. They are in the lowest level of love (*adhama*)."

According to Swami what is that one thing that is present in all three levels of love?

- A. Peace
- B. Love
- C. Compassion
- D. Unity

2. In a Divine Discourse in 1996, Swami further explains in depth on different kinds of Love: "Love of the Divine is of four kinds. One is *Svaartha-Prema* (love based on self-interest). The second is *Samanjasa-Prema*, the third is *Paraartha-Prema*, and the fourth is *Yatharthartha-Prema*. *Svaartha-Prema* is like a lamp kept in a room. The lamp illumines only the room. This kind of selfish love is confined to a limited group and does not extend to others. *Samanjasa-Prema* may be compared to the light from the moon. This moonlight is visible both outside and inside. It is, however, not very effulgent. The light is dim. This kind of love extends to a wider group but is not very intense. The third is *Paraartha-Prema*. It is like _____. It illumines both inside and outside with brilliance."

To what does Swami compare this love to?

- A. A diamond.
- B. A chandelier
- C. Sky-light
- D. Sun-light

3. In a Divine Discourse in 1970, Swami reveals: "Love unfolds first on the lap of the mother. The eyes of Love fasten themselves on the caressing face of the mother. It then spreads towards the father, brothers and sisters, kith and kin, friend and playmate, region and language, world and it's Maker.

The I that lives within the body is like a lion in a cave. It is the monarch of the forest; but it limits itself to the few square feet of rocky floor. Let it come out, renouncing the petty possessions. So long as you crib yourselves into the body-consciousness (I am the body), you are the lion moping in the musty cave! Do not feel, *Dhehoasmi* (I am the body). Roar, *Brahmaasmi* (I am

Brahman, I am all this and more, I am all this is, was, and will be) and littleness, time, space, ego, all will flee from your heart! You will be Love, Love, Love and nought else. That is to say, you will be Divine, one with the One.”

According to Swami, what is the essence of Love that can help one reach that stage of 'I am Brahman'?

- A. Practicing Dharma.
- B. Selfless Service.
- C. Expansion
- D. Charity

4. In a Divine Discourse in 2005, Swami teaches us a very profound lesson: “Non-dualism is true devotion. Share your love with others without any expectation. Love everybody only for the sake of love. When you extend your love to others, you can attain the state of non-dualism. The love that you experience at physical and worldly plane day in and day out is not true love at all! True love is that which is focused on one form, one path and one goal. Love is most sacred, sweet and non-dual. It is a great mistake to divide such love and associate it with multiplicity. Your love should remain steady in pleasure and pain. Love and devotion do not give any scope for differences. All differences are _____.”

- A. Hurdles to peaceful living.
- B. The making of our own mind.
- C. A result of selfishness.
- D. Impermanent.

5. In a Divine Discourse in 1985, Swami expands on the meaning of Love: “It should be understood that human birth is the progeny of Truth as father and Love as the mother. Even if one's natural parents are absent, one should not forget the real parents - Truth and Love. When Truth and Love beget *dhana* (Wisdom) as the son, the true lineage of man is established. Truth is sacred. It is valid for all time; past, present and future. It is unchanging. Love is eternal. It is indescribably sweet like nectar. Can such Truth and Love beget an unrighteous and evil-minded son? Only one who is wise and free from illusion and ignorance can be a true human being. Ignorance is not the inherent characteristic of man. There is no room for aberrations in him. Egoism is out of place. He should revel in the ecstasy of *dhana* (the consciousness of the Divine). His true form should be bliss. Discrimination should be natural to him. Today this true nature of man is being forgotten.

It may be asked whether Truth and Love have begotten only a son (*Jnana* - wisdom) and not a daughter. There is a daughter...”

According to Swami, who is the daughter of Truth and Love?

- A. Peace
- B. Laughter
- C. Compassion
- D. Joy

6. In a Divine Discourse in 1990, Swami guides us: 'Love is like the mariner's compass, which always points to the north. At any time, any place or in any circumstance love points only towards God. Hence, everyone should try to understand how the Love principle works. Love can be compared only with love. *Prema* (love) and *Anuraga* (affection) are one and the same. But affection, when it is directed towards worldly objects, gets tainted. Because of this pollution, joy and sorrow ensue. Man becomes a prey to desires and disappointments. However when Love is directed towards God, it becomes pure, selfless, enduring and divine.

Nectar is described by the scriptures as extremely sweet. But nectar nowhere approaches the sweetness of love. As against love, nectar appears insipid. The uniqueness of such love is beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. Such love arises only when you churn the ocean of bliss. Hence, all our actions should be based on Love. But in this mundane world, love assumes external forms. When pure gold is given to the goldsmith for making a jewel, he mixes copper and other metals with it and thereby its value is reduced. Likewise, because pure love is mixed with worldly attachments, it gets tainted."

According to Swami, then how can one purify love?

- A. By constant remembrance of God.
- B. By bathing in the Holy Ganges.
- C. By fasting.
- D. By rendering service.

7. In a Divine Discourse in 1996, Swami enlightens us further: "The hall-mark of love is *thyaaga* (selfless sacrifice). Love seeks nothing from anyone. It bears no ill-will towards anyone. It is utterly selfless and pure. Failing to understand the true nature of love, man yearns for it in various ways. Love has to be cherished with feelings of selflessness and sacrifice. In what is deemed as love in the world - whether it be maternal love, brotherly love, or friendship - there is an element of selfishness. Only God's love is totally free from the taint of selfishness. Divine love reaches out even to the remotest being. It brings together those who are separate. It raises man from animality to divinity. It transforms gradually all forms of worldly love to Divine love. To experience this Divine love, men must be prepared to give up selfishness and self-interest. They must develop purity and steadfastness. With firm faith in the Divine, they must foster the love of God regardless of all obstacles and

ordeals. However, even the feeling of universal brotherliness is not the same as the experience of _____."

- A. Maternal Love.
- B. Divine Love.
- C. Oneness.
- D. Renunciation.

8. In a Divine Discourse in 1999, Swami reiterates clearly: "God is not different from you. He is not confined to places like temples, mosques, and churches. He is Omnipresent. He is the resident of your heart. The body is the temple of God. So, you should strengthen the feelings of love within you. You do develop love, but it is based on bodily relations. You love your son, father, and mother. You identify yourself with the body, so you direct your love toward those with whom you have got a relationship at physical level. You are not able to manifest the kind of love that is _____."

- A. Beyond name and form.
- B. Universal
- C. Beyond Mind and Body.
- D. Needed for our spiritual growth.

9. In a Divine Discourse in 1989, Swami enlightens us with: "God is the very embodiment of *Prema* (Love). Man is the spark of the Divine. You may find a man without anger, without truth or without peace, but you cannot find anyone in the world devoid of love. Love is present equally in all human beings as the one effulgent divine quality. This love may be expressed in different ways, but its nature is the same. Man is thus an aspect of the Cosmic Consciousness. The Principle of Love is the greatest unifying force which unites all spiritual practices, all creeds, all the goals of life and all the scriptures. The foremost path for the spiritual aspirant is the path of _____."

- A. Serving all equally.
- B. Complete surrender.
- C. Being a part of His Divine Mission.
- D. Attending bhajans.

10. In a Divine Discourse in 1968, Swami says: "God is the source of all Love; Love God, Love the world as the vesture of God, no more, no less. Through Love, you can merge in the Ocean of Love. Love cures pettiness, hate and grief. Love loosens bonds; it saves man from the torment of birth and death. Love binds all hearts in a soft silken symphony. Seen through the eyes of

Love, all beings are beautiful, all deeds are dedicated, all thoughts are innocent. The world is one vast kin.

If you pay attention to the individual, differences thrust themselves on you. Fix your attention on _____, then points of identity will be more apparent.”

- A. The Soul
- B. Good deeds
- C. Devotion
- D. The Collective

ANSWERS:

1B. Love.

Swami reveals: **“Although love is present in all these three, they enjoy, experience and use this love in different ways.** In every tree of life, love is present in the form of sweet juice in its fruit. But this is covered by a skin called desire. Hence we are not aware of the sweet juice in the fruit. Only those persons who remove the skin of desire and throw away the hard seeds of anger and jealousy, can enjoy the sweet juice of the fruit of Love. When one throws away seeds of likes and dislikes and removes the skin of desire, he can enjoy *Parama Prema* - Divine Love, which is *Rasa Swaruupa* (sweetness personified).”

2D. Sunlight.

Swami expands on it further: **“The third is *Paraartha-Prema*. It is like sunlight.** It illumines both inside and outside with brilliance. But it is not continuous in the sense that the sun is not visible at night. But this is not a permanent absence, because the sun rises again. Actually, the sun is always there. Likewise, this selfless love may appear to be absent sometimes, but it will appear again.

The fourth one is *Yathaartha-Prema* or *Aathma-Prema*. This love is present always, inside and outside, in all places and at all times, in all circumstances. This is Divine Love. It is imperishable. It is eternal. It is immanent in everyone. When this love is manifested by a person, he achieves the peace that passeth understanding.”

3C. Expansion.

Swami simplifies it: **“Expansion is Love. Expansion is the essence of Love.** Love is God. Live in Love. When a lamp is lit from another, there are two where there was but one. The first one did not stop emitting light. You can

light a million lamps from one; but, yet, the first will not suffer a jot! Love too is like this. Share it with a million; it will still be as bright as when it was alone.”

4B. The making of our own mind.

Swami teaches us continuously: “**All differences are the making of your mind.** Develop the feeling of oneness that I and you are one. Never think that I and you are different. That is the sign of true devotion. The letter ‘I’ stands for oneness. ‘You’ (individual identity) will not exist when you develop purity and experience oneness with divinity. Hence, give up dualistic feeling. The principle of oneness has to be experienced through love. It cannot be explained in words. But you have not understood the true meaning of love. You are interpreting it in the physical and worldly sense. Consequently, your love is never steady. It keeps changing every now and then.

Love should not be tainted with body attachment. Body is made up of matter. All that is related to matter will never give you peace and happiness. Hence, transcend the matter and see the reality. Develop *Ekatma bhava* (feeling of oneness). All are one, be alike to everyone. It is a big mistake to attribute worldly feelings to love. There is no scope for dualism in love.”

5A. Peace.

Swami continues: “**There is a daughter, who can be identified as Shanthi (peace).** Hence, wisdom should be the characteristic quality of men and peace and serenity should be the distinguishing quality of women.

Your love should not be based only on the physical forms. Bodies are perishable and impermanent. Beyond the biological parents, there are permanent parents whom you should revere. They are Truth and Love. Though the body may go, Truth remains as the permanent father. Likewise Love is the eternal mother. It grows with the passage of time and never diminishes. By regarding Truth and Love as your parents, as essential for your existence as your eyes or as the two wings for a bird or the two wheels for a cart, lead worthy lives. On this sacred day of remembrance, firmly enshrine in your hearts reverence for Truth and Love, and make your lives sublime by rendering dedicated service to your fellowmen and women.”

6D. By rendering service.

Swami elaborates: “But **when such tainted love is directed towards seva (service) it gets purified.** Failing to understand pure love, man is leading a miserable existence. A man who is neck-deep in water would still be able to speak. But the man who is wholly submerged cannot speak. Likewise a man immersed in pure love cannot find words for his experience. It is those who are above the surface that attempt to describe it. How, then, is this divinity to be described?

There is a basic means for this. Some persons have a direct vision of the Divine. Some others in spite of all their *sadhana* are not able to get such an

experience. What is the reason? There are different kinds of *japamala* (rosaries). One is a *Rudraksha Japamala*. Another is a string of lotus seeds. There are coral *japamalas*. No one can see the string which runs through all the different beads. Only in a rosary made of transparent *sphatika* (crystal) beads can the thread be seen.

In the same way, in the hearts of all the persons *Brahmasutra* (the subtle thread of Divinity) is present. But only in a heart filled with pure love can Divinity be perceived. It is thus not easy to recognize the Divine. Hence, everyone should have the conviction that wherever he may render service and whomsoever he may serve, he is rendering service to God because God is omnipresent. Such service alone is true *sadhana*. Through *seva*, the mind gets purified. The body gets sanctified. Without a pure mind, the body is utterly useless. The natural state of the mind is purity. It is polluted by contacts with the world. When it is purified through love, it regains its natural state."

7C. Oneness.

Swami elaborates: "**However, even the feeling of universal brotherliness is not the same as the experience of *Ekathvam* (oneness).** Even in such a fraternal feeling there is an element of self-interest. Those who really wish to promote universal brotherhood should develop the consciousness of the one Spirit dwelling in all beings. Even brothers are often found engaged in mutual bickering and hatred. What is described as fraternity may not be real and unsullied love. True love should express itself in the awareness of the presence of the Divine in one and all. Names and forms may differ but the indwelling Spirit is the same in all."

8A. Beyond name and form.

Swami continues: "**You are not able to manifest the kind of love that is beyond name and form.** Love has no form. It does not differentiate between young and old or man and woman. Love is love. It cannot be compared to anything else. Love is the very form of the Divine. Love is God. Live in love. How to do that?

*Start the day with Love
Spend the day with Love
Fill the day with Love
End the day with Love
This is the way to God.*

...Strengthen love, saturate your lives with love and live in that Divine Love."

9B. Complete Surrender.

Swami reminds us further: **“The foremost path for the spiritual aspirant is the path of complete surrender to the Lord for earning His love and grace.** The devotee offers everything he has and does to the Lord in the same manner in which a bride renounces all that she had before her marriage in going to the home of her husband. God's love cannot be got without such renunciation by the devotee.”

10D. The Collective

Swami explains further: **“Fix your attention on the *Samahsthi* (the Collective); then points of identity will be more apparent,** concentrate on the outer labels - Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Parsi, Buddhist - then, you will develop pride or contempt or hatred! But if you concentrate on the struggle that man undergoes to raise himself from the flesh to reach the level of Divinity - then, you find all labels insignificant. Then, it is all love, co-operation, mutual encouragement and appreciation.

You are all caskets of divine Love; share it, spread it. Express that Love in acts of service, words of sympathy, thoughts of compassion. Just as when you awake from sleep, you know that the dream which you had was a matter of minutes, though the chain of events dreamed spanned many years, this life will appear a transient affair when you awake into *jnaana* after this brief 'dream of life.' Be always full of joy so that when death calls, you can quit with a light laugh, and not whimper in grief. I bless that you may so shape your lives and activities that this supreme joy will be your lasting possession.”

HEART2HEART QUIZ ON DIVINE LOVE

During this sacred 83rd birthday month of our beloved Bhagavan Baba, and in celebration of the monumental blessings of Divine Love that He has bestowed on humanity, here is a quiz on 'Divine Love', culled from previous issues of Heart2Heart.

1. In 'Learning to Love' from the October 2007 issue, Mr. Viswanath Das shares Swami's quote: "Humanness blossoms in a pure heart. When we come into this world, it is only love that comes with us. From love comes truth. When love and truth come together, humanness finds its sustenance.

The mansion of human life can be built with self-confidence as the foundation, self-satisfaction as pillars and self-sacrifice as the roof. Only then can you have self-realization in life. For self-satisfaction this self-realization is needed. Without self-satisfaction there can be no happiness in life. And the happiness comes from love within. One who does not have inner love does not see the happiness outside.

Love is experienced in three ways, rather love is of three types - *svaartha prema* (self-oriented love), *paraartha prema* (love towards all fellow beings), and *anyonya prema*...

According to Swami, what is this third type of love, *anyonya prema* experienced as?

- A. Love towards all animals.
- B. Love towards family and close kith and kin.
- C. Mutual give and take.
- D. Love towards the saints and the godly.

2. In 'The Greatest of All is Love' from the December 2006 issue, Mr. John Behner shares his experience that occurred at Christmas time in 1979. 'Actually when we first read about Swami, my wife said to me that if we had lived at the time of Christ wouldn't we have gone to see Him? Of course, I agreed.

That year the celebration was in Whitefield, Bangalore and the students presented a drama on the life of the Jesus Christ after which Swami gave His Christmas message. And after Swami's discourse, the boys came with large containers of rice delicacy which was served on plates.

It was so special those days as Swami Himself served every single one of us in that auditorium. After my wife received a plate, she said "Thank you" and Swami immediately said, '_____'.

- A. 'It's My pleasure.'
- B. 'Please don't mention it.'
- C. 'Tomorrow, you have to serve Me!'
- D. 'It's My duty.'

3. In our 'Searching The Truth, Understanding True Love' from the August 2006 issue, Mr. Arthur Hillcoat reminds us: "Swami tells us over and over again: 'Embodiments of Love.' Swami tells us that we are Divine. But do we really listen to Swami? Swami tells us beautiful words and they are lovely; and we get a good feeling about it but when we leave, do we think about that? Do we take time to search for understanding? Without that, without the understanding, how can we ever know the Truth? What are the things that get in the way? Things that get in the way are the fact that firstly we believe we are _____ and that we have free will and that we can do things and we can achieve things. How sad it is that we think that!"

- A. Separate.
- B. Better than others.
- C. Not divine.
- D. Inferior.

4. In 'When Staunch Catholics Met Sathya Sai... Part 1' from the October 2008 issue, we presented an interview conducted by Mrs. Varsha Jonnalagadda with Dr. Christian Moevs. One question posed to him was the following:

Q: Does Baba ask you about your own religious beliefs?

Answer: Oh, but there is only one religion - the religion of love. Baba teaches that everyone must follow their own religious path. They all lead to the same place. But do it with absolute intensity and follow it all the way. They will all merge in the same place. **Baba says, "Let all the religions flourish as long as they do not extinguish the flame of unity."**

Baba also gave a profound message on another occasion. **He said, "It is an excellent thing to be born into a _____ but not so good to die in one".**

- A. Spiritual lineage.
- B. Religion.
- C. Wealthy family.
- D. Good hospital.

5. In 'Love that Cannot Be Duplicated' from the June 2007 issue, Ms. Lakshmi S. Menon recollected: "To illustrate the simplicity of His Divine nature, I recall

yet another sweet moment from my student days. It is a healing that comes to mind. Once we girl-students had all come to Puttaparthi from Anantapur for Swami's Darshan and those days, we were allowed to take trays of toffees if it happened to be our birthday or some such occasion. I was sitting with a friend behind a girl holding a tray. Swami came near us, picked a whole fistful of chocolates and showered them merrily all over us and walked away. After He had gone quite a distance, I found this friend suddenly weeping uncontrollably."

What was the reason for her misery?

- A. She didn't get any chocolate.
- B. She wanted to give Bhagavan a letter.
- C. Her eye ailment got cured.
- D. She wanted Bhagavan to fulfil a wish.

ANSWERS:

1C. Mutual give and take.

Swami explains: "Love is experienced in three ways, rather love is of three types - *svaatha prema* (self-oriented love), *paraatha prema* (love towards all fellow beings), and *anyonya prema* (mutual give and take type of love). *Svaatha* love is comparable to the bulb that illuminates just one single room. *Anyonya* love is like moonlight. Though it illumines all directions, it is very dim. It does not help one to have a clear perception. *Paraatha prema* is like sunlight which is very bright and will not give room for any doubt."

2D. 'It's My duty'.

Mr. Behner continues his narration: "**Swami immediately said: 'It is My duty'**". Now imagine this: we come to India, to see the Divine in person and He is serving us a plate of food and saying that it is His duty!

At that time I was the General Manager of a multi-national corporation. I went to meetings with the Chairman of the Board in New York and he had never served me a plate of food! In fact it was difficult to give him a handshake.

So, this incident with Swami actually was the turning point for us and our family; it literally started us on our spiritual journey."

3A. Separate.

Mr. Hillcoat continues: "Things that get in the way are the fact that firstly we believe we are separate, and that we have free will and that we can do things and we can achieve things. How sad it is that we think that!

We think we are separated. I remember once in a hotel in Bangalore, it was evening and I wanted to write a letter. But I couldn't see right; all the lights were on. I looked at the globes - they were all 25 watts. But you see, if you had a 100 of those, you still wouldn't have had good light. So I went to the manager and I said: "Look, I can't see out there! Would you have a 100 watt lamp?" "Oh yes of course!" he said and gave it to me and I took the 25 watt out and put the 100 in and then I had plenty of light!

And then it dawned on me there's only one current that comes into this building. And that electrical current there was waiting to express itself as light. But the amount of light depended on the quality of the bulb! I thought: 'Isn't it just like God? The Divine current is ever ready to express itself as Love and Light through every one of these human globes. But it depends upon the quality of the globe as to how much Love and Light can be expressed.'

So we need to ask ourselves what sort of a globe am I? How much love and light am I expressing? One might be satisfied with a 25 watt. One might say well, perhaps 75 is okay or a 100. But whatever it is, we have to ask ourselves then how much do we really want to express? Some might say I would like to be a 100 watt globe; some might say a 500 candelabra; some might say a million candelabra; others may want to express that which can't be expressed. But we can't do that without understanding and making the effort to understand."

4B. Religion.

Dr. Moevs replied: **'He said, "It is an excellent thing to be born into a religion, but not so good to die in one".'**

If you think you are dying a Jew, or dying a Hindu and not dying in God, it means you have not reached the goal towards which all religions are leading

Question: Do you need to keep in touch with Baba?

Answer: Initially yes, but not anymore. When I began to really go inside myself, I realized what Baba said - that He is with me all the time."

5C. Her eye ailment got cured.

Ms. Menon continued: "All I knew was that she wasn't well; she had some eye ailment. And then she told me what had just occurred.

She had some problem in her eye, due to which she would see black spots in her line of sight. A doctor at home had advised minor surgery, but she was terrified of being operated upon. When Swami came for Darshan, these black spots in her eye covered Him too and she could not see Him clearly. She was very remorseful at this and that is when a toffee thrown casually and playfully by Swami hit her eye and dislodged her glasses. She was in tears but after a while, she wiped her eye, still throbbing with the direct hit from Swami, when

to her amazement she discovered she could see clearly! The black spots that had plagued her vision for weeks had simply melted away!

This is what Swami is – Sweet, Simple, Natural, Unostentatious, Jovial, and Compassionate beyond compare. His life is a silent saga of Love and our lives with Sai is a challenging journey of hope and love towards a truly meaningful existence.”

HEALING TOUCH

HEALED BY HIS LOVE

When Bhagavan Baba announced in 1990 that He would set up a Super Speciality Hospital which would offer the best possible tertiary treatment completely free of cost to the rich and poor alike, many sceptics dismissed it. It would be a miracle, if it happened, they said. In fact, this is what has exactly happened. More than a million miracles have occurred in these institutions, which are officially called Sri Sathya Sai Institutes of Higher Medical Sciences, but to anyone who has stepped into these premises, they are the 'Temples of healing'. In this H2H issue, we bring one more such miracle – a miracle of pure love.

When his dear wife, Shamshad Begum, who is also the mother of his two daughters, was diagnosed with a life-threatening cardiac ailment, Chand Mohammed had only God to look up to. And Allah did come to the rescue of this beleaguered fifty-five-year-old tailor with very limited means. The Good Lord even assured Chand that all will be well even before Shamshad was on the road to recovery. And now Chand's joy is beyond words. How did this story of agony to ecstasy unfold? Read this touching tale.

Chand Mohammad walked nervously, his left hand clutching the edge of the white stretcher, as his wife lay on it looking at him anxiously. Chand's jittery right hand held his wife's left hand.

The stretcher slipped effortlessly on the gleaming granite floor as the ward boy gently pushed it into the most sterile zone of the hospital. Chand had been summoned early that morning to remain alongside his wife, just for those few moments till the stretcher slid into the huge operation theatre. A martial arts expert, Chand had seldom felt so edgy in his life as he felt in those few tense moments. The only other occasion he had been so tense was when a doctor in his home town, Jamshedpur, in India's eastern state of Jharkhand, had diagnosed Shamshad Begum with a diseased heart valve.

A few paces more...he knew he would not be allowed to go any further. The huge glass doors in front of him declared, 'No Entry'. All that he could see through the glass door was another glass door, and beyond that another. He wished he could stay with his wife through out the operation, but knew it was not possible. It was time.

The ward boy stood waiting patiently. He knew how relatives became anxious, when they accompanied the patients till the glass doors leading to the operation theatre.

"My husband bent down and whispered in my ear to keep repeating the words of the holy *Darood Sharif*. Repeating *Darood Sharif* makes a person fearless," Shamshad said later. She was wheeled out of the operation theatre around three hours later. Chand did not mind the three hours of separation from his

ailing wife, because it was those 180 minutes which brought his dying wife back to him and their two children.

It was a new lease of life given to Shamshad by the surgeons of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS), Prashantigram, through a Mitral Valve Replacement (MVR) carried out on Shamshad's diseased heart. The operation, like all the other surgeries being performed at the hospital, was performed totally free of cost.

Called for a re-visit three months after her surgery in May 2008, Shamshad Begum and Chand Mohammad arrived at SSSIHMS, Prashantigram, in the first week of September this year (2008). Fifty-five-year-old Chand, a short, stout man with a muscular body, closely cropped greying hair, a trimmed beard and a *zebiba* mark on the forehead exudes the enthusiasm of a child when he speaks. Forty-year-old Shamshad on the other hand, dressed in a green Punjabi suit has the unassuming demeanour of a saint. When she speaks, it is with a calm dignity, punctured with pauses.

The Trials and Tribulations

Chand said he had noticed his wife getting fatigued easily and gasping for breath on several occasions. According to Shamshad, apart from the persistent fatigue, she also felt her hands and feet going cold on several occasions, and used to cough badly. "I also felt as if somebody had dropped a boulder on my chest. It used to pain that terribly," Shamshad said recollecting her hoary days.

"We consulted a doctor in Jamshedpur; he checked her and told us that something was wrong with my wife's heart," Chand said. The doctor told him that the surgery will cost around Rs. 3 lakh (US \$ 7500), which left Chand and his wife in a state of shock. "I am a tailor by profession, and have two school-going daughters. I was at my wits end when I heard that I will have to pay so much for my wife's operation.

"A doctor, to whom we had gone to consult, then suggested that there was a hospital in a remote corner of Andhra Pradesh, which conducted even the most expensive heart surgeries absolutely free."

Chand and his wife Shamshad then made enquiries about the hospital and found that it was located in Anantapur district and was called the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences. The couple soon boarded a train and reached the hospital.

"There is not even a billing counter anywhere in the hospital"- Chand Mohammad

"The doctors here told me that there was indeed a problem with my heart and I was asked to come in May 2008 for surgery. Both of us were amazed to find that nothing, absolutely nothing is charged from the patients here. Since the moment they step into the hospital to the moment they go out, every service is

provided free. Be it the surgery, be it the food..." Shamshad went on, ecstatically sharing about her new discovery.

"The hospital is so huge, it looks like a palace," she said and added, "Even in our imagination had we ever thought that such a big hospital can exist here! We don't feel as if we are entering a hospital at all. It is kept so clean, the doctors and nurses speak to us so lovingly. Though I was away from home in an alien land, this hospital felt like home," Shamshad's excitement seemed to have no end. For one moment it seemed as though Chand's enthusiasm had entered his wife. Chand then added, "I found out, there is not even a billing counter anywhere in the hospital!"

Constructed in a record time of a year, SSSIHMS, Prashantigram began functioning in 1991. The hospital is one of the two super-speciality hospitals started by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba as a part of His health mission to provide highly specialised health care to the needy. The second super-speciality hospital started work in 2001, and is located on the outskirts of Bangalore at Whitefield. The best of medical care is provided absolutely free of cost to anybody who visits the hospitals. Apart from cardiology, SSSIHMS, Prashantigram, also has specialities on ophthalmology, urology, orthopaedics, plastic surgery and gastroenterology. On the other hand SSSIHMS, Whitefield has the cardiology, neurology and neurosurgery departments.

During their September visit, the doctors checked Shamshad and told her to take adequate care just as she had been instructed in the post-operation counselling sessions, and with instructions to visit the hospital again the next year.

The Malignant Mitral Value Problem

According to Dr. Trushar Gajjar, one of the surgeons who operated upon Shamshad Begum at SSSIHMS, her heart's mitral valve had become diseased and had to be replaced with an artificial valve. The operation was conducted at 8:30 am in the morning of May 27 this year (2008).

The surgeon added that Shamshad, in her childhood, might have suffered from rheumatic fever. This disease, if neglected for a long period of time, affects the heart's valves. The mitral valve, which has two leaflets, opens only in one direction making sure that the oxygenated blood received from the lungs flows into the heart and does not return into the lungs. This blood is then pumped to the various parts of the body. In Shamshad's case, the opening in this valve had begun to reduce. Moreover, some of the blood which flowed through the valve started flowing back. Her ailment was therefore described as Mitral Stenosis — narrowing of the mitral valve orifice, and Mitral Regurgitation — flowing of the blood back into the left atrium from the left ventricle. In Shamshad's case, around 50 per cent of the blood entering her left ventricle was flowing back into the right atrium. In simple words, hers was a condition of an obstructed and a leaking valve.

When this fault occurs in a valve, the heart starts dilating (grows larger), and its walls thin out and eventually the heart fails. Due to obstruction in the valve, the pressure on the lungs increases. This is the reason why Shamshad was coughing terribly and breathing heavily. As enough blood was not reaching even to her limbs, her hands and feet also began growing cold.

After being wheeled into the operation theatre, Shamshad was given general anaesthesia. Recollecting that moment, Shamshad said, "A mask was put on my face, and afterwards they connected a tube to my hand. While doing so, a nurse asked me how many children I had, how they fared at school, in which class they studied... and suddenly there was darkness." The anaesthesia had taken effect.

"I got a new life" – Shamshad Begum

"I opened my eyes in the Intensive Care Unit and saw the doctors looking at me. They asked me how I felt. I told them I was fine. They smiled. I had got a new life," Shamshad said, a smile erupting on her gentle face.

Shamshad's two daughters had been praying the whole day for the success of the operation. Eventually, when Chand called them up, their happiness knew no bounds. "They were ecstatic. I could hear their shouts of joy over the phone," he said.

Chand confided that he was quietly confident that the operation would be a success and went on to explain the reason. "When I had come to the hospital for the first time, I had gone to visit Prashanti Nilayam. I sat in the *darshan* line and wanted to meet the person who had got this hospital constructed and was providing the treatment free of cost," he said referring to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

"Baba said all that I wished would be done" – Chand Mohammad

"I sat in the Sai Kulwant Hall far away from where Baba was, but I wanted to meet Him personally and tell Him about the plight of my wife. So, I just started walking towards Him. He was there standing on the portico in the large hall. The people with blue scarves (sevadal) did not allow me to go near Him. But Baba saw me and directed them to let me go. I went to Him and told him about my wife. He looked at me very lovingly and said all that I wished would be done." Chand revealed his most memorable encounter, and then added, "My wish has been fulfilled. The operation has been a success, and my wife is now free of the disease."

Shamshad now need not come again all the way to the hospital from Jamshedpur for a check-up. SSSIHMS has now set-up a Telemedicine Centre at Sri Sathya Sai Seva Kendra, Barrackpore in the Eastern Indian state of West Bengal. Consultants at SSSIHMS, Prashantigram can now directly interact with patients such as Shamshad Begum, and advise accordingly. How the new telemedicine initiative in SSSIHMS has made lives of so many

patients from the far corners of India easy is another moving story. Pure love knows no limitations; it's incessant, unconditional and perennial.

- **Heart2Heart Team**
in association with SSSIHMS

SIMPLY A MIRACLE

This month not only celebrates the 83rd year of the divine advent of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, but also the 17th anniversary of the inauguration of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram. Over the years this unique hospital has served millions of hapless patients on whom society closed its doors and who now owe their lives to this 'Temple of Healing'. It is a holy institution, not just because it was started by Bhagavan, or even for the reason that every treatment in this hospital from the day of its inception has been offered absolutely free of cost. This hospital is a trail-blazer because of its ability and ambience. Where else on earth can one find an ultra-modern hospital with no billing department and state-of-the-art facilities which heal everyone who steps into its premises not only physically, but also psychologically and spiritually? There is an invisible spirit that permeates this hospital which every patient and visitor feels, but cannot express. Have we ever been successful in describing the feeling of inner joy, bliss or love?

Over the years, in this Healing Touch section, we have brought stories of patients who have returned heartily after their operation from the Department of Cardiology and Neuro-surgery from Baba's hospitals in Puttaparthi and Whitefield, Bangalore. Now, here is a story, nay a real life miracle, from the Department of Orthopaedics, which started functioning from June 2006. In fact, 2008 saw the opening of another section, that of Gastroenterology; we will bring you stories from here too in the coming issues. Swami's love knows only expansion, for, as He says, "Expansion is life".

When you read the story below you will know why we call this tale a 'miracle'. In fact, the tale of every patient is extraordinary, but Jehangir's story was something which stunned not only the doctors, but also his family and his entire community. A poor mason from the outskirts of Kolkata, Jahangir is now a symbol of Divine love in action.

A Walking Wonder

A crowd of almost 300 men, women and children of Mohan Nagar village on the outskirts of Kolkata, India, had gathered around the yellow taxi, on a humid spring evening to witness a miracle.

Jehangir Molla was going to walk!

Jehangir, a short stout man with a round face, handle bar moustache and dried-wood complexion pushed the cab door open and put out his left leg, slowly. People watched curiously as his foot touched the ground. With a broad smile and twinkle in his eyes, he then put out his right leg and stood outside the cab on his two legs. A hush fell over the crowd. Then, Jehangir took his first step. The multitude stared incredulously; they looked at each other with

raised eyebrows. When it finally dawned on them that Jehangir could actually walk, they broke into an instantaneous cheer. Amidst the shouting and rejoicing Jehangir casually walked home, where his wife, mother and sister were eagerly waiting for him. The mass followed, keenly watching his steps.

"The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS), Prashantigram gave me a new life," Jehangir said, while on a revisit for a check up to the Orthopaedics Department of the hospital after a year.

A mason by profession, Jehangir had been paralysed waist down and confined to the bed with a fractured backbone after a fall from the second floor of a building under renovation. He was then taken to some of the well known hospitals of Kolkata; they either refused to operate, or demanded an exorbitant sum for the surgery, yet did not promise complete recovery. He was then brought to SSSIHMS, Prashantigram on a stretcher. Seven months later, he ambled home. "Had it not been for the doctors at this hospital, I would not have been able to walk again," he said, quite moved by the care he has received.

The residents of Mohan Nagar had received the message that Jehangir had started walking again and they reacted with disbelief. They could never imagine that he could actually be on his toes again. They knew how Jehangir had remained confined to his bed after that perilous fall. In fact, his situation was so bad that lying on the bed, he could not even turn on his side, let alone sit up. He experienced excruciating pain in the back, and his legs had gone numb. He was forced to eat, drink, speak and even attend to nature's calls lying down.

All this, however, changed within a span of seven months!

According to the Head of Department, Orthopaedics, SSSIHMS, Prashantigram, Dr Kailash Rao, Jehangir's case is unique. It is a rare situation of complete recovery. According to Dr V.R. Vasuki, one of the surgeons who had operated upon him, his revival was no less than a miracle.

A Near-Fatal Fall; All Hopes Lost

Jehangir remembers August 6, 2007 well. It was the day, which had threatened to snatch his life away from him. "I started from my home as usual at 6:30 AM. Being a mason, my job mainly involved laying bricks and plastering walls. The contractor, under whom I was working, had taken up the job of renovating an old school building near Diamond Harbour, Kolkata. I had my breakfast and cycled to the place by 8:30 AM," he said. He was soon on the second storey of the school building supporting himself on the bamboo scaffolding.

A swift swipe into the cement and sand mixture with the brick trowel, a splat on the wall and the concrete spread evenly. Next was the delicate job of evening out the cement with a plastering trowel. It was clockwork - swipe, splat and spread. Again, swipe, splat, spread. At around 10:00 AM Jehangir

moved to a different part of the wall. "I put my right leg on a section of the bamboo; it felt as strong as any other. I resumed my job."

But suddenly, Jehangir's swift movements were interrupted when he heard a crack under his feet. An experienced hand, he knew what that meant. He looked down in horror, his face drenched in perspiration. People below looked tiny. Jehangir's mind raced. A grab at the vertical bamboo could save him. In those moments of tense anticipation, the plastering trowel tumbled out his hand and he heard a distant clang as it hit the ground.

As he stood still and shocked, Jehangir's world collapsed under his feet. "As I fell, my head reeled and then everything went black," he said, recollecting that disastrous moment.

There was a big thud, which brought Jehangir's fellow masons and school children rushing to the spot. They saw him flat on his back, unable to move. "My lower back killed me with pain," he said. Jehangir's backbone had been fractured; he was paralysed waist down.

"The doctors in Kolkata's hospitals, which I visited, told me it was a difficult case. If an operation was to be performed, it would cost Rs. 6 lakh (US \$ 15,000), they said. With my income of Rs. 3,000 (US \$ 25) a month, I could never pay such an exorbitant amount. They also told me the operation would be risky. Other hospitals flatly refused to operate," he added. Shifted from one stretcher to another, transferred from one vehicle to another, moving from one hospital to another, without hope, devoid of any assurance, Jehangir and his family of five saw his life slipping away, moment by moment.

"A fellow villager then told me about the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prashantigram. He had come here to receive treatment for a urological ailment. He suggested that I should also visit SSSIHMS where cases such as mine were also treated," Jehangir said continuing his story.

"I came to know from that person that the treatment was free. I could not believe it! When I came here, I found out that I need not spend any money at all on anything! Be it the X-ray, my diet and medicines, or anything else; everything was free," he said, naturally excited.

"I mistook it for a temple, it is indeed one" - Jehangir

On September 11, 2007, about a month after the accident, Jehangir, along with his brother came to SSSIHMS, Prashantigram, on a stretcher. He and his brother, Zakir Hussain Molla boarded the East Coast Express from Howrah. They had to change trains at Vijaywada. From Vijaywada, they took the Prashanti Express, which dropped them at Sri Sathya Sai Prashanti Nilayam station. All this while Jehangir lay on a wooden frame, calling his brother to bring the pot, whenever he wanted to answer nature's calls.

All the while he experienced excruciating pain in the back with both his legs being absolutely numb.

The moment the doctors at the Department of Orthopaedics saw Jehangir's condition, they immediately admitted him. It was then decided to operate upon him on October 5, 2007. "I was elated when the doctors here said they would operate upon me," Jehangir said, a smile bursting on his face.

"Five people came from Puttaparthi town to donate blood for me. I did not know them; they did not know me either. I asked my brother to provide food for them and pay for their conveyance. But the donors refused to take anything from me. They said, 'It is our duty'. I was completely humbled," he said, his eyes now watery.

"This place is just not a hospital, this is a temple. The people here - the doctors, nurses and the staff are so honest. They speak softly and take perfect care of the patients. The hospital is kept spick and span, the floor is always shining, the staffs are so disciplined... Actually, I can go on and on praising the hospital. I was here for seven months, so I could see everything from close quarters," he added.

"In fact, when I came here first, I mistook it for a temple, and it is indeed a temple!" he continued. "When it was time for me to go back, I felt like staying back here," Jehangir added. One could see the genuineness of his feelings on his face.

A Shattered Spine

According to Dr Rao who attended on him, Jehangir had suffered from a burst fracture in the L1 vertebrae, the first vertebrae in the lumbar region of the backbone, which meant that Jehangir's L1 vertebrae had all but disintegrated. The shattered vertebrae had injured the spinal cord. The injury to the spinal cord had resulted in paraplegia.

A 10-hour operation was performed on him. In the surgery, the broken vertebrae was removed and in its place, metal rods and screws were inserted. This made sure that the spinal cord was not put under any pressure.

Jehangir's perfect recovery surprised everybody. On December 12, 2007, he was able to get up from bed for the first time after the fall. He then went through regular physiotherapy for three months. On March 10, 2008, to everybody's surprise, he just walked out of the cab and went home.

"I have never seen or read anything such as this anywhere!" – Dr. Vasuki

"Before leaving for my hometown, I bent down to touch Dr Vasuki's feet," Jehangir recollected, "but the doctor asked me to thank Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. He told me that it was due to Sai Baba that I had been cured and was able to walk again. He also said that he and the other staff were only instruments. It was His grace, which helped in my complete recovery."

According to Dr. Vasuki, Jehangir's case was one of its kind, in which the recovery had been total. "Let me put it this way, I have never seen or read anything such as this anywhere! One will not find such a case even in the medical journals anywhere in the world. His case could be one in 100,000 or even greater," he added. Normally in such cases, after surgery, there is a partial recovery, but Jehangir recovered completely. He does not even limp when he walks, the doctor added.

"All I can say is in Bhagavan's temple of healing, miracles happen time and again, and Jehangir's case is one such. It gives me immense pleasure to treat a patient and give him a new life. This feeling can only be experienced. We doctors are ever grateful to Bhagavan Baba for having selected us as His tools to deliver His message effectively. What more can I say, as a doctor, we have the immense fortune of being here and doing His work, "Dr Vasuki concluded.

Bhagavan Baba says the power of pure love is immeasurable. True, one can never comprehend this incredible ocean of pure love, but to have a glimpse of one drop, one visit to this 'Temple of Healing', the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, is enough!

- Heart2Heart Team in association with SSSIHMS

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the October 2008 issue

Feedback on the Cover Story: *Where Love Greeted You And Grace Cures...*

I congratulate and thank you for the wonderful cover story you brought about the hospital in your October issue. I am already receiving a number of calls from my friends and relatives saying they liked the article very much and that it was an eye opener for them as far as working at the General Hospital was concerned. It was a very good work of journalism indeed and I once again congratulate your whole team.

Sai Ram to you all.

Dr Chaya Hemadri, Staff Doctor at Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital

Sai Ram,

Reading this has made me very emotional. I was not able to read this article without a moment of tears in my eyes. The love and service spirit is purely "SWAMI" in all of us. I can feel Swami's presence at all times. Thank you.

Sai Ram,

Uma Naganathan, India

"Where Love greets you and Grace cures you" is a remarkable and classic example of His divine message of "Love All and Serve all". Bhagawan Baba acts what He preaches. His limitless Divine love for humanity is unparalleled in the history of mankind. His colleges, hospitals, water and medical institutions are the living examples of His Avataric mission. He is the only hope today for the suffering millions in India and elsewhere. It is high time for the medical profession, politicians and business giants to come forward to start such programmes for the needy in India and the world.

All of us also have responsibility towards our fellowmen, to share our physical and monetary resources as much as possible, with them. We should take inspiration from the unlimited love in action of Bhagawan Baba.

Gopal Mehta, Canada

Sai Ram,

I was very impressed and moved (to tears) by the all the information on the General Hospital at Puttaparthi. I cannot express in words how much SGH means to me.

With love and blessings

Derek Taylor, UK

Dear Team,

Your article on the above subject is an eye opener for the readers. I, in fact could visualize the scenes about which you had written such as the experiences of the patients and the doctors. I visit Parthi frequently and this article enabled me to know the names of the doctors and feel the presence of Swami in the Hospital. I'm looking forward for the 3rd part of this issue. Kudos to the team!

Best wishes,

Priya

The General Hospital is a symbol of His endless Love and Concern for all. We salute the dedicated band of Doctors for their untiring and selfless service. The article was very inspiring and moving - loved the fluid and easy style of depiction. Thanks a lot, looking forward to the Part 3.

Sairam,

Rameswar

Feedback on: *Musings On Avatars - Part 8*

Jai Sai Ram H2H Team,

I have just read Prof Venkataraman's Musings on Avatars and found it most inspiring. It was written in a very interesting and simplified way by Prof. Venkataraman. As I am a Chinese born and raised in Singapore (and therefore have no knowledge of the Mahabharata at all), I'm indeed grateful to be guided by Swami to read these articles.

I also enjoy the series on Mesmerizing Moments with the Divine Master and like to thank Mrs Rani Subramanian for sharing her experiences with us.

Last but not least, a big thank you to your team for your efforts in maintaining this website and giving much joy to your readers! I look forward to reading more inspiring articles!

With much love,

Julia Aich, Australia

Feedback on: *When Staunch Catholics Met Sathya Sai...*

Yes, this did help me a great deal. I started going to an Episcopalean church on June 16, 2008. Now I have been with Baba for about 10 or 12 years and have been to India to see His Divine Presence twice. This last January 2008 I was in India for one month to see Baba. I felt just bliss when I came to see Him this time, and I also experienced the same bliss when I went to the Episcopalean church. I have been going ever since June and am now helping to teach the children in Sunday school...

Thanks for putting this article up this month.

Joan Casper, Grass Valley, California USA

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for the article about an American Sai devotee. It is encouraging to read. I was raised a Catholic. Churches are part of my background and culture. I would like to go to mass regularly but I find the sermons unfulfilling. What is missing is the understanding that we are all divine. Generally, the sermons talk about us as children of God who can be good and receive grace, but there is no mention of Self-realisation and enlightenment.

It was therefore good to read that Sai has said: "It is good to be born in to religion but not to die in one". This shows that we are in the end to transcend dogma and find our spiritual centre which is boundless and free – the Atma.

Thanks

Louise

Greetings:

As a Roman Catholic who discovered Sai Baba about a year ago I'm happy for Dr. Christian and his wonderful experiences. Like Dr. Christian I came to know Jesus better because of Sai Baba's teachings; most of which I read in H2H.

I love reading the H2H daily email, keep up the good work. Seva is my primary focus for living a Loving life. Have a Peaceful week

Love to all,

Walt Henry

Feedback on: *Beyond Western Psychiatry....The Bliss Of 'Sai'chiatry*

Om Sai Ram,

Dear H2H,

Thank you for the interview with Dr. Sandweiss. It was a real treat. I find his experiences, both personal and professional, very inspiring and encouraging. I also have to commend the appropriate questions asked by Prof. Venkataraman. I'm looking forward to read 2nd part of the interview.

Trifunovic, Slovenia,

Om Sai Ram and greetings,

My name is Deveena Naicker and I am from South Africa. I felt deeply moved by this article and would like to receive more such articles about individuals' experiences and how things changed once they entered Swami's fold.

To the Heart to Heart team, I would like to say a big thank you for the work that you are doing, it helps me to be close to Swami, even though I sit here very far from Him. I hope that some day Baba will bring me to His ashram to see Him and receive His divine blessings.

Om Sai Ram,

Deveena Naicker, Chief Agricultural Food & Quarantine Technician, National Department of Agriculture

Feedback on: *The Love of My Life*

The article was very inspirational. Malini's words reminded me that Swami says He is always with us, wherever we are. All my life I have felt protected and guided by a Divine source. Swami is present with me at all times, even if I don't physically see Him.

Malini's words were a message I needed to read today. In gratitude, I say thank you to her for writing the article.

Shirley McCann

Dear Heart2heart Team,

I just read "The Love of My Life" by Ms. Malini Gadepally and tears of joy came to my eyes (as so often when I read your mails).

Thank you for your daily emails, which give me so much joy.

Loving Sai Ram from

Mogens Abildgaard, Denmark

Feedback on: *Take the Kindness Challenge!*

Sairam,

What a wonderful idea to "Take the Kindness Challenge..." - I had never thought about it and I can't wait to try some of it together as a family. I think Swami is doing this all the time and it is just to get glimpse of what He does for the whole of Humanity without any expectation.

I wanted to share something that happened during my recent dentist visit. I was at the dentist to have a wisdom tooth extraction. My husband had accompanied me and he was sitting right in front of the surgical chair that I was sitting on. I was nervous about the whole procedure, and as is my wont, I requested my husband to show me Swami's photo from my purse. He immediately removed a beautiful picture of Swami and Shirdi Baba and I prayed that Swami should take care of everything. The nurse who had checked my pressure etc. at this point said, I want to show you a video about wisdom teeth and the need to extract some. She turned on the TV and walked out. The first music out of the TV was a small bit that Radio Sai plays before the presenter announces a program. My eyes were wide open and I screamed "Radio Sai" and looked at my husband who also was surprised at the music we heard from that TV. Immediately the video commenced and the doctor who did the procedure came by and in seconds (literally -20 seconds!) the tooth was extracted and I was so peaceful.

Swami's act of kindness (not random - it is His very nature!) and His abundant grace to me in the form of Radio Sai music, was enough of a confirmation that He had taken control of the whole situation!

Thanks to Radio Sai for bringing such yeomen services to people like me living so far away from Parthi and longing to see or hear the Lord.

Sai Ram,

Kavitha Sriram, (Alumna ATP Campus), Shrewsbury Sai Centre, USA.

Feedback on the *Multi Faith Quiz*

Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters of the H2H team,

The Multi Faith Quiz is one of the best ways of helping Swami's followers to know about all religions, thereby helping to develop tolerance for all other religions of the world. Thanks for introducing such noble features to your site.

Sai pranams,

Venkatesh Murthy

Feedback on *Sai Inspires*, the free daily inspirational e-mail service

Sai Ram,

I write this with a profound sense of gratitude for enabling all of us who are physically at such a great distance from Puttaparthi to read and enjoy the bliss of Swami's words and grace.

I start with my day at work after reading the thought for the day and there have been more occasions than one, when Swami's message appears to be an answer to a problem or a doubt.

It is wonderful that you have developed such a platform through which all of us can derive such joy.

Sai Ram.

Vinod

Dear Sirs,

I have been receiving and reading mails from 'Heart 2 Heart' giving Sri Sathya Sai Baba's guidance everyday for the past few months. This is one of the first things I like to do in the morning. I am trying to put into practise His words of advice. I am generally deeply moved to read all the articles, especially in the 'Swami and Me' section. Many articles have brought tears spontaneously to my eyes. The article by Ms.Malini Gadepally was also very moving. As she says, 'He is with us at all times'... The only way we can exhibit our gratitude is to follow His teachings to the best of our ability.

Sai Ram,

Meenakshi Sriram.

Sai Ram,

The Sai Inspires sent everyday is so wonderful and it looks like Baba is answering every question of mine. It is as though He is reading my mind and replying to it. So wonderful and really inspiring.

Regards,

Shanmugam Venkatesh

Dear Heart to Heart Team,

Every day when I read the news letters I really get immense pleasure to be in touch with Sai's words which I rarely get time to read otherwise. I ensure that I go through your mail as and when possible and am sure with your noble efforts you are spreading Sai's words and peace the world over. I appreciate your efforts and thank you for the daily letters.□

Best regards,

Srinivas Pradeep□