

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

For a moment just fantasize. If you had unimaginable wealth and power at your disposal, how would you imagine your childhood?

Would you ever want to grow up surrounded by poverty, starvation and superstition ... in a hamlet where kerosene lanterns are the only source of light after every dusk; where snakes and scorpions lurk in and around your decrepit dwelling, and mud walls make houses; where you have only one or two pairs of clothes for a whole year; where people die suddenly from mysterious diseases, and half of the village seems to be 'possessed' by evil spirits; where toiling night and day in the fields is the only viable occupation and most of the produce of the people is snatched away by greedy landowners and exploitative foreigners; where the rural population is religious but at the same time so outrageously orthodox that they will not allow the shadow of the lower castes to fall on them, and fights between religious communities are as common as seasons in the year; where one has to walk miles on thorn-ridden, and undulating muddy paths, and swim across a river to reach the closest town, and the best means of transport is the bullock cart; where the only way to procure drinking water is to physically draw pots of water from a couple of wells available for the entire settlement; and the menu for every meal, made of poor man's millet, remains the same for months together; where an electric bulb is a wonder to be possessed only by the privileged?

Would any of the current 53 billionaires of India whose combined wealth amounts to 31% of the country's GDP or the top 1% of the Americans who own \$ 17 trillion, which is greater than the total value of the national output of Japan, Germany, the U.K., and France, have chosen to be born in such a setting? Even if they were forced to do so, would they have spent their youth in such an isolated and obsolete habitation, and still, stayed on for their entire life?

That is exactly what Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who commands the love and respect of millions around the globe today, did. Though He has within His reach every kind of wealth and affluence, power and prosperity that anyone can dream of, eighty-three years ago He chose to be born, not in a palace, but in the poor and pathetic hamlet of Puttaparthi. If that wasn't enough, He was determined to make that very impoverished valley the epicenter of His grand mission. And from then on, slowly but amazingly, He began to heal the hearts and minds of hundreds and thousands, starting with the inhabitants of that poor, but now holy locality.

As a child, young Sathya (Baba's childhood name), would rush to give away His share of food to any beggar standing at His door step. When on a rare occasion, His father procured clothes for all the children of the house, and asked Sathya to pick His choice, He declined the offer and said, 'Let every one be given the clothes they want; what remains is good enough for Me.' Again, when He went to the Fair and Cattle show held at Pushpagiri to lead

His school's scout group, He lead by example. Little Sathya got busy supplying drinking water to the weary, ensuring the safety of small children, giving a helping hand to the old and handicapped and providing first-aid to the injured. Sathya did not have money to even buy food for Himself there; in fact, unlike all the other boys who reached there by bus, Sathya walked the entire 12 miles! He had a meager sum in His pocket for the Fair which He had raised by selling His own books to a poor boy belonging to the lower caste at half the price. Although He suffered physically, He could not stand to see anyone else in pain, be it human beings or animals. Once He began to be adored as the 'guru' by all His classmates because of His profound wisdom and incredible powers, He stopped all the children from witnessing the annual bullock-cart race where the poor bovines were bullied by twisting their tails and flaying them mercilessly for the vicarious glory of their masters.

As days rolled by, His Glory only grew. Hundreds, afflicted with severe physical illnesses or mental worries, flocked to Him from neighbouring villages and cities. If for Mr. Tirumala Rao, a divine pat on the stomach was enough to cure months of painful ulcer attacks, His gift of Vibhuti to another not only removed years of head ache but also granted him a promotion at his office; and to a third Baba performed his abdominal operation Himself with only His bare hands! (Read 'H2H Special' of this issue). In a few years, Puttaparthi transformed into "Prasanthi Nilayam" - the abode which removes suffering of all kinds and confers permanent peace. And now, the Lord's masterplan of alleviating the pains of multitudes of humanity and then elevating them to higher levels of conscientious living started unfolding with astounding precision and scale.

As early as 1954, Swami laid the foundation stone of the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital on a hillock to the South of Prasanthi Nilayam. What started as a two-bed hospital with a single doctor and two nurses, is now a 100 bed hospital, with twelve specialties, and nearly 1,50,000 patients walking out of the outpatient department every year while 2500 babies are safely delivered annually. When it comes to helping the sick and the needy, Bhagavan does not know where the full stop is. Soon, a sister Hospital appeared in Whitefield, Bangalore and this was a more sophisticated one, what with dozens of doctors from the city of Bangalore willingly volunteering to offer their time and energy to be a part of His mission.

After setting up the two general hospitals, in 1990, Bhagavan stunned the world with the announcement of the first completely free Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi. Even now, after 18 years of its successful operation, people, especially in the West, refuse to believe that such an institution can actually exist, that too in a developing country. Read the story 'Reaching Out to the Stars' to get a glimpse of how this "Marvel of Healing" has been creating beautiful lives, day after day. This feat was repeated, only on a larger scale in Whitefield, Bangalore, where another Super Speciality Hospital serves hundreds of thousands of patients each year, once again, without charging them a penny.

Just like these Hospitals, the Sri Sathya Sai Drinking Water Project which Swami launched in the drought-stricken districts of Anantapur, Medak and Mahaboobnagar, became a lifeline for millions in the state of Andhra Pradesh. While the magnitude and scope of the project baffled the bureaucrats in the United Nations, for the simple village folk of these Rayalseema areas, it was a divine deliverance from perennial suffering. Again, when a distraught mother in a neighbouring village committed suicide after poisoning her children because of lack of food, His heart bled; He immediately started the Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva programme. Every year, hundreds of students of His University visit these villages, go to every home, and personally offer food, clothes and the assurance that Sai is there to look after their every need. Over the years, Bhagavan Himself has given so many guidelines on how to do such Grama Seva in its true spirit. Try our 'Special Quiz on Grama Seva' to know about this in more detail.

Even though for years now, dozens of mega service initiatives offering free health, education, water and food directly under Bhagavan's guidance have been in place on a daily basis, the Lord, being the ocean of compassion, is extremely eager to reach out to anybody crying for help elsewhere too. When a massive earthquake hit the state of Gujarat in 2001, Bhagavan immediately sent truckloads of relief material and also a team of trusted senior devotees to supervise the distribution. It was the same when the devastating Tsunami rocked the coasts of Tamil Nadu in December 2004 [H2H published a special issue on this in March 2005].

And now, more recently, when severe flooding inundated over 2500 villages and marooned nearly 2.5 million lives in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, how could the Lord rest? During the Dasara celebrations in October 2008, at Swami's command, Mr. V. Srinivasan, the All India President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, announced that Bhagavan had immediately sanctioned rupees 10 crores to build permanent and solid homes for the marooned families of this historically impoverished state of India. Mr. Srinivasan very rightly added, "Where there is suffering, there is Sai to rescue!"

Since the declaration four months ago, what has unfolded in this 'least developed' but now 'most fortunate' state of Orissa is a story that will move anybody who has a caring heart. Fortunately, the H2H Team had an opportunity to visit this state in the first week of February and what you find in our cover story "Abodes of Happiness...The Abounding Grace of Sai to Orissa" is an eye-witness account. Another flood has now swept these regions, but this one is different and divine; it has converted these hundreds of isolated and ostracized societies into 'oases of love'. What Pure Love can do is absolutely incredible. Don't miss this comprehensive account of the immeasurable compassion of Sai, which is in two parts.

And there are two more articles in this issue, which are must-reads, both in the features section. While "Making Miracles in Life...Through Love" will emphatically demonstrate to you, through real-life examples, how Love indeed is the only facet we need to cultivate in our personalities to celebrate life in its full glory every moment, the other "He Lived His Message...and Shared His

Love” will reveal to you, again by a true story, how the best way to practice love is to manifest it as selfless service.

There can be no better time than the present moment to divinize our lives, when God is physically with us, demonstrating by His own very example how to Love selflessly, and unconditionally. What we have with us now is a 'present' that is more precious than all the wealth of the world. Let's treasure this gift, cherish it, and make our lives also a saga of service, in whatever capacity or miniscule measure we can. Ultimately, what makes the Lord happy is the sincerity, not the quantity.

Let service be the passion of our lives! Let's live like Sai, in Sai, for Sai!

Loving Regards,
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The Sai Way Of Service

Indulging in flimsy gossip and watching scenes of violence and cruelty, men today are wasting and missing a big portion of their precious lives. Time is condemned, because it is too little, or because it runs too fast to fulfill galloping greed. Men are not aware that time sanctified by service offers high rewards to themselves as well as those whom they serve. All acts of service are not equally sanctifying or uniform in the benefits they confer. When service is undertaken by power-hungry people, or under compulsion or by imitative urges, it results in more harm than good. Self-aggrandizement or competition or ostentation, are motives that pollute the sacred spiritual practice of service. The candidate for this activity has to avoid *ahamkara* (egoism), *adambara* (exhibitionism) and *abhimana* (favouritism). Before embarking on a service project one must introspect and examine their equipment, which is, whether their heart is full of selfless love, humility and compassion; whether their head has an intelligent understanding and knowledge of the problem and its solution; whether their hands are eager to offer the healing touch; and finally whether he/she can gladly spare and share time, energy and skill to help others in dire need.

How to Sublimate Service into Seva

These qualities can sprout and grow only when the 'Reality of Unity' is implanted in the consciousness. All men, and all living beings, are cells in the Body of God. Their origin, continued existence, and progress are all in God, by God, and for God. The individual is a unit in this unity. There are no other aliens. When one is ill, all suffer. When one is happy, all are partners of that happiness. Faith in this truth is the fundamental equipment the *sevak* (volunteer) must acquire.

Leaders and guides of service organisations offer charity, and claim that they are motivated by generosity and accept homage from recipients. This is the reason why such service all over the world does not yield lasting results. In order to deserve the sacred name, *Seva*, the activity must be freed from all attachment to the individual self and based on firm faith in the Divine resident in every being. *Seva* has to be considered as worshipping the form that God has assumed to give the volunteer the chance of worship. When a hungry *nara* (man) is served a hearty meal, what is being done is *Narayana Seva* (serving the supreme lord), for, *nara* (man) is only 'a form and a name' projected by *maya* (human ignorance) on *Narayana* (God).

Do not allow your service activities to turn into shops which concentrate on window dressing, in order to attract attention and patronage. Service rendered to villagers, who are denied the ways and means of decent lives, draws Divine Grace, more than service elsewhere. Give a helping hand to the helpless, who are afflicted with many ailments and handicaps.

The True Purpose of Human Birth

But, before attempting to advise them, you must endeavour to advise yourselves; before venturing to reform them, reform yourselves. Care must be taken to avoid boasting before them about your superiority; it will hurt them and keep them away. Do not indulge in lectures. Action alone can inspire action. Example alone can instruct. Tall talk is a barren exercise.

Service activities in all lands can thrive only through selfless dedication. Fanfare is a sign of insincerity. Silent, unsullied work alone can appeal. The villager has enough common sense to see through the show. Remember that, though illiterate, he is aware of the ideals propounded by the scriptures, saints and sages of the land. Clever propaganda may achieve some temporary results but, in the long run, it will bring disappointment and disillusion. Like the 'rockets' lit by children on Deepavali night, it will flare up and fizzle down. Today, we are confronted everywhere by statistics parading quantities and reports in glowing terms. Do not bother about adding to the number or achieving a target. I value quality, not quantity. Genuine and intensive devoted service offered in a few villages is more fruitful than casual contacts and superficial service offered to a large number.

Convince yourselves that life cannot continue long without others serving you, and you serving others. Master-servant, ruler-ruled, guru-disciple, employer-employee, parents-children, all these are bound by mutual service. Every one is a *sevak* (servant). The farmer and labourer whom you serve produce by their toil your food and clothing as their service to you. Remember that the body, with its senses-mind-brain complex has been awarded to you to be used for helping the helpless. *Seva* is the highest of paths of devotion which wins the Grace of God. It promotes mental purity, diminishes egoism and enables one to experience, through sympathetic understanding, the unity of mankind.

Divine Discourse at the Poorna Chandra Auditorium on November 21, 1986.

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI
Satyopanishad - part 14
Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear Reader,

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

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

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

Chapter 4 - The Outer Door
(Continued from the previous issue)

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! In spite of a long period of desiring to be devoted to God, devotion somehow does not grow as intense as it should. What is essential to develop devotion of the magnitude and intensity expected of a true devotee?

Bhagavan: Here it is not time that matters. An iron ball in a pond, however long it might stay there, will never change. It will remain as it is without any change in it. You should know that it is transformation that is important. It is the goal you set for yourself that matters most. Until then, you should pursue your goal not mindful of the time involved.

You know a lamp has a container, a wick, and oil. With a wick kept for long in water, you can never light a lamp even if you use any number of matchsticks. Impossible! What you should do is, take the wick out of water, keep it in sunshine for some time and dry it. Then you will be able to light the wick easily. Here, the process of drying the wick in sunlight is renunciation. The procedure of lighting it with a matchstick is *sadhana* (spiritual practice) and the light you get thereby is devotion or intense Love for God. The lamp is the human body. The same process is applicable to those who are not devoted, as you have said. The more they are drenched and drowned in worldly life, the farther they are from God, the source of all light; they can never light the lamp of their life. Dry it in the sunshine of detachment so as to be benefited by the light of devotion. Some people, in spite of a prolonged period of stay (in

the divine proximity) and divine association, are not devoted as much as they should be, for this simple reason: They lack detachment from worldly things. Therefore, intense devotion is not given to everybody.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We beg you to suggest to us a spiritual path that can be followed in the present circumstances. The situation around us seems to be dispiriting. Kindly give us the direction?

Bhagavan: It is said that man is the most precious being among all the living creatures. Therefore, it is imperative on your part to lead your lives in full realisation of the value of life. For example, in the kitchen you make *dal* (an Indian side dish) to eat for lunch. If salt is added in excess by mistake, the *dal* loses its taste; it is unfit for consumption anymore. Even though the dish, if taken, is going to be digested in three hours or so, still, it is kept aside once it is not tasty. Then, how about a long life? Should it not be tasty?

Suppose you are waiting at the bus stand to board the bus that takes you to your office. If the vehicle is delayed, you lose your patience. You start complaining, "What is this! Drivers don't have a sense of responsibility in this country. Conductors too don't discharge their duties properly. The Road Transport Corporation is inefficient; the Government seems to be lenient towards them" and so on. A bus is lifeless; it is a vehicle and a means of transport. Man, on the other hand, is the embodiment of awareness: He is active and intelligent. If such a man forgets his human value, and leads life unbecoming of a human being, don't you know that society will blame him?

Man has 85% of divinity in him while an animal has only 15%. It is only a human being who has a chance to realise and experience his divinity. Just as a stone dropped from above falls to the ground due to the unseen gravitational force, the unseen values and virtues should guide man. For this, however, determination is necessary.

Here is another example. If a machine is not put to use, it gets rusted. Don't you think it is the same with the human body too if it is not used properly? It is because of dust that the machine gets rusted and loses its power. Once this happens, it is sent to a workshop and repaired. Isn't it so? Now, what should you do with yourself? You must ensure that the dust of bad thoughts do not get into you. Why? Otherwise your faith begins to shake and becomes unsteady. Take your mind to the workshop of surrender to God for rest. Then, you are the best.

Hence, you should always preserve and maintain human values. In fact, no spiritual path can be practiced with a sense of ego. Since all the methods adopted by you are done with your mind, ego, or 'I'ness, you couldn't progress spiritually till now.

Some begin their spiritual practice, identifying themselves with the body - *aham dehosmi*. This will never take you to the true spiritual goal. The demons, Ravana, Kamsa, Bhasmasura, and others belong to this category. Some expect progress by changing even their faith and religion. It is not *matamu*,

religion, which is to be changed. It is *mati*, the mind, that has to be transformed. You are the embodiment of love. Don't merely be a lover and narrow down the vistas of love. To feel and experience the same divinity in all living beings is true love.

One day, Krishna decided to lead his cows to a nearby forest for grazing. He asked Mother Yashoda to permit him to do so. She said, "My dear son! All along the way to the forest, you find rocks, thorny bushes and stones. It is better you go tomorrow. I will get your footwear ready for you". The smiling Krishna said, "Mother! Do I need footwear? Why and for what? Cows don't have any footwear. Then, why should there be footwear for me alone?" Yashoda replied, "Look! They are animals. We are human beings. We need footwears." Krishna responded with a fitting reply, "Mother! You mean to say cows are ordinary and simple animals. Do we have as much gratitude as they have? They eat grass and yield milk. The moment they hear any voice they stop grazing and run towards Me. Calves even stop sucking milk and come to Me. Their skin is useful after their death to make footwears." Cows are symbols of sacrifice and forbearance. Such noble qualities are very essential for spiritual seekers.

In agriculture, the land is ploughed well, watered, manured, weeded, and finally the seeds are sown. The human heart, likewise, is a field. This has to be tilled and watered with love. You have to take the plough of self-enquiry to plough the field of the human heart. You have to raise the fence of discipline. Bad qualities are the weeds that have to be removed totally. Then you can cultivate the crop of bliss. It is enough if you have a small area of fertile land. Why have many acres of barren land?

A small example: You see an orange fruit. It is covered with a green bitter rind or skin. This is ego or pomp. You find hard seeds inside; they are the wicked thoughts and bad actions. Then you find the fibrous soft pulp; this is attachment. In order to have the sweet juice you need to remove the outer bitter skin, the hard seeds and squeeze the soft fibrous pulp. The sweet juice is love that you need. This is the essence, *raso vai sah*.

You need both the positive and the negative wires for the electric current to flow. The negative may be very powerful. It is powerless without joining the positive. The fan and bulb may be very good and of high voltage. But without power supply they are useless. This current is positive. Divinity is positive. The bulb and the fan are merely negative. All that pertains to the name and form is negative. Your journey on the spiritual path will be successful only if there is love. You have to reform yourself first. This transformation is not taking place today.

You can carve a statue out of a boulder. By removing the husk, you can have the grain. With the vegetables you bring from the market, you can cook well and make delicious items of food. Difficulties, pain, blame, loss, etc., will help to refine you, improve you, nurture faith and take you to spiritual heights.

You have to face and resolve all problems of life and proceed in your *sadhana*. Follow your own experience and develop faith (*visvasa*) thereby. Can you breathe (*svasa*) on behalf of anybody? You see with your own eyes, don't you? The eyes of the other man may be bright and beautiful. You cannot see through his eyes. Can you close your eyes and see through the eyes of somebody else? You have to stand on your own legs and not on anybody else's.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! At times it appears that others may influence and lead us to a total change in our life style, making us ask ourselves the question, 'Why should we not be like others? Why should we adopt this special type of living?' I am afraid we may change! What is to be done now?

Bhagavan: This is not proper and can't be justified either. In fact, it is your innate weakness that brings about change. If your faith is strong, and your values are deep-rooted, none can do anything to you. You will not change at any time. But if your faith is weak, then the values you speak about are only superficial.

Under any circumstances, you should not change your moral and spiritual way of life. If anyone comes to you and says, "There is no God", how should you reply? You should say, "You may deny your God, but what right do you have to deny my God? How can you negate my faith and devotion?" You should never change your convictions.

A boy saw a scorpion that fell into a tank and was struggling to come out. He went and picked it up. The scorpion stung him. Immediately he dropped it back into the tank. On seeing it struggle there, he picked it up to save it. But it stung him again. The process went on and on. An elderly person watching the whole scene asked him, "Oh boy! Why do you want to save the scorpion when it is stinging you?" He replied, "Sir! The scorpion is teaching me a good lesson. When it is not giving up its own nature of stinging, why should I give up my nature of protecting one struggling for life?" So, you should not change your nature.

Maitreyi, who felt very sad on hearing the difficulties that the Pandavas were passing through in the forest Kamyavana, started thinking like this: "It is true that noble people suffer! What a lesson does a parrot in a cage teach us! A crow flies freely, but it doesn't mean that we are prepared to lead the life of a crow rather than that of a parrot in a cage. Will a parrot ever become a crow?" Similarly, we should not change our path.

In the army, we have thousands of soldiers. But, the Army Chief is the only one who commands. Captains are always a few while their followers are many. It is they, the few, who train the many. This is possible if you don't leave your path.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! You have complete faith in us. But, our faith in you is wavering; it is not consistently steady and deep. Why is this so?

Bhagavan: *Eko vasi sarvabh utantar atma* - God is in everyone moving about with different names and forms. *deho devalayah prokto ji vo devas sanatanah* - the body is the temple. The individual *jiva* is none other than Deva, the ancient and eternal, *sanatana*. It is only one God who has manifested Himself as many. I am present in all of you. Since I know this truth, I have faith in you. But you consider yourself separate from me, and so your faith is not strong, deep, and unwavering. In fact, I can change you all by Myself. But I don't do it that way. I want to bring about your transformation through and by you.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We are dissatisfied and unhappy when our desires are not fulfilled. Why should it happen to devotees?

Bhagavan: First, put a question to yourself. Can you call yourself a devotee if your sense of happiness and gratification depends on your fleeting desires? In fact, ask yourself, if you have followed the command of God, if you have made Him happy with your faith and devotion. When Swami is happy with you, the whole world will be happy with you. When you displease Swami by your conduct, everyone else will be displeased with you. Act according to Swami's teachings. Everything will then happen in your favour conferring peace and joy on you.

CHINNA KATHA

Revere Parents and Receive God's Grace

Once when Adi Sankara's parents were to leave the house for some work, his father instructed him thus, "My dear son, you know that I daily worship the Goddess in our house and later distribute the *naivedya* (offerings) to all the people. Similarly, when your mother and I are away, will you please make the offering to Goddess?" The obedient son that Sankara was he immediately agreed to fulfill his father's commands. And so after his parents left, he poured some milk into a cup and kept it before the idol of the Goddess and prayed to her "Mother! Please accept this milk which I am offering". But despite his fervent prayers, the Mother neither took the milk, nor did she appear. The young boy was understandably disappointed, but did not give up. He prayed again, "Mother! Mother! You accept the offerings that my father makes to you daily! What sins have these hands of mine committed that you are not accepting the offering which I am giving to you?"

He continued to pray to her earnestly from the innermost depths of his heart, so much so that he was even prepared to sacrifice his life! Sankara told himself, "My father asked me to offer this milk to the goddess but I am not able to do so because the goddess is not receiving the offering, which I made. It is better that I die". He went out and brought a big stone to kill himself. But the compassionate Mother, the Mother of the Universe could not keep herself away for too long. Moved by Sankara's unsullied devotion and sincerity, she at once appeared before him and drank the milk that he had offered and then placed the empty cup before him. The boy was very glad that the Mother of the Universe came and drank the milk. But now there was nothing left in the cup.

He thought that his father would certainly ask for the *naiveidya* (consecrated offering) of the God when he returned. He feared that the father may think that he drank away all the milk and hence may become angry with him. And therefore he prayed to the Goddess again. This time asking her, "O Mother, Please give me at least a drop of milk so that I may be able to give it to my father". But the Goddess did not come. He again sincerely continued to pray; the Goddess was yet again moved by his love and faith and she appeared before him. But since she was not able to give the milk that she drank, she gave her own milk and filled the cup!

It is believed that because Sankara was blessed to taste the Divine milk, he could attain the highest pinnacle of knowledge and wisdom. But the main essence of the story lies in the son's blind and complete devotion to fulfill his father's wishes. Because Sankara tried hard to please his father, he was able to get the Goddess of the Universe to manifest Herself before him.

Revering and obeying the orders of our parents hence is but only a way to earn the grace and blessings of our divine parent.

- Baba

COVER STORY

ABODES OF HAPPINESS

...The Abounding Grace of Sai to Orissa – Part 1

Divine compassion of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba rushes to the aid of the shattered lives in the deprived east Indian state of Orissa in the aftermath of the devastating flood, which ruined nearly 2.5 million lives, in the third week of September 2008. His love not only immediately provides much-needed food, clothes and medicines, but also recreates their lives and heals their pain of generations by building for them solid and permanent homes, and enveloping their lives with a joy and peace they had never experienced before in their lives.

A Nightmare on a Dark Night

"The menacing waters rushed in at great speed; we just fled leaving everything behind. We had no other choice; we could carry nothing with us. It was such a big horror; there was water everywhere! We swam like mad through the swirling waters and some way or the other reached high land. Somehow we managed to save our lives, but all our cattle were washed away. When we returned to our village after a week, there was no trace of our house; in the same area was now a stagnant pool of mud and flotsam."

- Mrs. Tara Jena, village resident, Nadiabarai, Kendrapada district, Orissa.

"It was 2 a.m. when the embankment of the river right in front of our house just collapsed! Imagine 6 feet high water gushing towards you with maddening velocity in the dead of night... everybody was in absolute panic! We ran for our lives; we could take nothing except the clothes that were on our bodies. After 3-4 days, when the water receded, we returned and what we saw just broke our hearts. The river had dug up a huge hole where our house once stood! We could not find even a single bamboo pole of our thatched dwelling!"

- Mr. Pramod Kumar Jena, farmer, Samsara, Kendrapada district, Orissa

Fear of a Watery Grave Kicked in the Survival Instinct

"On September 17, the volume of water was high but well within the height of the embankment. But the next day, it reached dangerous levels. We started bolstering the bank by adding sand bags and more soil. At the same time, we feared the worst, and therefore, relocated our cattle to other high land. We kept inspecting the hedge very frequently on September 18. And to our shock, we found that in one area, the heavy force of the water was slowly eroding the base of the bank. Now, we were left with only 8-10 sand bags, which was really too little. At 5.10 the next morning, all hell broke loose.

"We collected our families and kept running till we found a concrete building. We climbed the top of this structure and stayed put there for four continuous days. I cannot describe the hardship we went through at that time...all we had to eat was a few biscuits that we managed to carry as we fled that morning, and this was over in no time. What was very difficult for me was the suffering of my children. I was helpless, I was unable to feed my two daughters and a son; they became extremely sick. I cried before God, day and night, to keep them alive till the water recedes. It was truly His mercy that they survived, and that is my only consolation even though we lost literally everything – our house, paddy, clothes, kitchen utensils..."

- Mrs. Pushpalata Behera, a village resident, Manibad, Cuttack District, Orissa.

Furious Flood Uprooted and Destroyed Everything in its Path

In the coastal districts of Puri, Cuttack, Kendrapada and Jagatsinghpur in the east Indian state of Orissa such first-hand accounts of heartrending stories abound, each one pathetic enough to leave the listener numb with sorrow and speechless at the magnitude of the tragedy left behind in the aftermath of the devastating deluge that swept away men, women, children, cattle, homes, crops, trees, roads and much more in its fury.

As the Heart2Heart team from Radio Sai was keenly listening to one such sorry tale at Billipada village in Puri district, a weak and handicapped lady, probably in her seventies, emerged from inside a decrepit mud hut, struggling to move even with the help of a stick. Somehow, she ambled forward towards us, and added, "You can see my pitiable condition; I cannot even walk properly, let alone run. When the flood waters started entering our village in a rage, someone on a bicycle virtually hauled me by my shoulders and took me to safety. I survived all those dreadful days with whatever food and other relief material my children could collect and bring for me. When I returned here, the place was full of mud and slush, snakes and other reptiles. It took us days together to clean the area and erect another thatched hut. I tell you, I have been living here since the time of the British (pre-independence India), but had never experienced so much suffering in my life ever before."

Trail of Devastation, Too Huge for Man to Handle

Indeed, the calamity that struck Orissa, one of the least developed states of India, on the third week of September 2008 was a colossal catastrophe. Even though the worst hit areas were in the four coastal districts of Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack and Puri, 15 out of the 30 districts of this state were affected. It is estimated that 2 to 2.4 million people were marooned by the fury of the raging waters. The state government calculated the fiscal loss to the state to the tune of 24 billion rupees or about US \$ 48 million. Over 400,000 hectares of paddy crop were destroyed in the areas where 70% of the population is dependent on agriculture for a living. At least 2500 villages were completely submerged under water. The loss of lives, however,

fortunately was less than 50 because of the fore warning which made tens and thousands flock to high-rise buildings and the national highways for safety. The Chief Minister of the state urged the central government to declare the tragedy as a national calamity and requested assistance of rupees 150 billion (US \$ 300 million) to undertake rescue and relief operations.

Even though floods are not new to Orissa, the magnitude of the current nemesis numbed everybody including the government's Relief and Disaster Management department. And at the root of this cataclysm, were strong winds and a severe depression in the Bay of Bengal, which led to heavy rains in the east of Orissa. As a result, Mahanadi, the biggest river of the state, swelled unimaginably causing at least 60 breaches in the river's embankments. It was not Mahanadi alone, many of her tributaries like Chitrotpala, Devi, Luna, Kathajodi and so on, overflowed too, each one mercilessly submerging hundreds of villages along the trajectory.

Poverty Stricken Villagers at Man and Nature's Mercy

Another frightening consequence of this heavy downpour was the filling up to the brim of the state's largest reservoir in Hirakud. This dam has a capacity of 630 feet, and when the water reached up to the 629 level, the officials had no option but to open the gates of this gigantic lake. So, 46 out of 64 sluices of the dam were unlocked and over 6.93 lakh cusecs of water was allowed to flow freely into the coastal districts. This unregulated and gushing stream obviously caused great havoc. In this sense, the disaster was man-made even though it had its source in nature's fury.

The government did undertake immediate steps, and evacuate thousands. There were two copters in service to locate and rehabilitate stranded lives; there were others which air-dropped food, clothes and other life saving materials. Nevertheless, their relief operations were grossly inadequate and often mismanaged.

"The helicopters dropped food and other articles, but many would just fall into the water. And when we did receive a bag, there were fights to grab the material as all were desperate," said a lady in Jharkota, in the district of Cuttack.

In the village Billipada (Puri district), as we walked through the broken mud houses, uprooted trees, large craters on the ground, unclothed and undernourished village children, stray and skinny cattle, downcast village ladies either collecting firewood or hay, or boiling something in their open kitchens, surprisingly we found an old lady who was smiling. She must have been in her seventies, if not beyond, and we could not contain our curiosity. We went to her and said, "*Maa*, you delight us with your smile. What makes you so glad?"

When All Else Failed, Sai Conferred Hope

Her smile now broadened to the maximum extent possible and she replied, "From the day, Sai Baba has come into our lives, we are so happy. You do not know what pain and terrible misery we had to go through." Now, her face turned grim. She picked up a little one from the ground, probably her grand child, and fondling the baby, continued, "I do not know how we all survived. We stayed on the roof top of a house on a piece of polythene for as long as 8 days. We had not only lost literally everything, but now had practically nothing to eat. We fell sick horribly. I am actually an asthma patient for the last 18 years, and during those days, I went completely hungry for three days at a stretch. And this trial continued until the 'Sai Baba people' found us. When they noticed our condition, they immediately offered us cooked rice, *dal*, biscuits, flattened rice, drinking water, milk powder, medicines and clothes. Not only this, after that first time, they returned many times and gave us mats, blankets, warm clothing and tarpaulin sheets. We have now made our shelter with the help of those thick polythene sheets, and my sons now go out everyday to do daily labour and earn some money."

Sai Youth Swing into Action

This is the first step the Sai Youth of Orissa took when they heard of the terrible tragedy. Mr. Narayan Sar, the Joint Youth Coordinator of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Orissa, recalled, "Actually, when we heard of this depressing news, we were busy in a state level meeting in Bhubaneswar. Without a moment of delay, we packed all the food that had been cooked for the participants of the meeting and rushed on our motorbikes to the troubled areas. The challenge was to reach the affected sites, as they were totally inaccessible. The level of water, in general, was 7 ft deep and our youth had no option but to swim through the tide carefully carrying the food packets."

Sai Youth Set-up Crisis Management Centre for Efficient Relief Work

The immensely motivated Sai Youth immediately formed a task force and toiled virtually 24 hours non-stop for ten days to save the lives of thousands. "We left early in the morning every day carrying the 'ready to eat' food packets made over night by our Sai Youth sisters, and went into interior and isolated areas where no government or any other external aid had reached," recalled Mr. Akshay, a young and enthusiastic Sai worker. He continued, "On many occasions, apart from distributing food and clothes, we also rescued a few lives from the strong water currents. When we left every morning, we were not sure if we would return as the journey was perilous. We survived on biscuits and apples; there was no way we could think of ourselves when we saw thousands suffering so gravely. It was always beyond nine in the night when we finally got back. But we had no time to rest as we had to discuss the plan of action for the next day including arranging for sufficient supplies and tying up the logistics of our operation."

True Service – Selfless Love with All Heart

Though the Youth contingent of about 300 was busy with a million things, they never lost sight of Swami's main guidelines on how the recipients should be treated. That is why they bought brand new clothes for men, women and children, and offered the food packets, which would last each beneficiary for 15 days. Guided by Bhagavan's personal example, they delivered all these services in the spirit of utmost reverence and love.

Apart from reaching out to the abandoned villagers, what was also difficult was procuring raw materials from the market to make the food packets. "Once the disaster was officially declared, it became very difficult to find rice, sugar, etc.," shared Akshay, and continued, "We had to directly approach the factory owners/manufacturers for groceries. And here we did see the unseen hand of God helping us. When we went to a few large bakeries seeking bread for the flood victims, these proprietors stopped their routine production and redirected all their efforts to meet our request. Like this, somehow or the other we were able to gather the required groceries. Little did we know then that, by His Grace, we would soon be receiving truckloads of materials."

Outpouring of Relief Supplies from All India Sai Organisation Overwhelms Sai Youth of Orissa

Yes, that's exactly what happened. One and half crore rupees (US \$ 300000) worth of medicines, clothes, blankets, polythene sheets and other essential supplies arrived at Bhubaneswar from many Indian states like West Bengal, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and so on. The massive relief supplies were a spontaneous outpouring of love from the state chapters of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation in response to a call from their All India President, Mr. V. Srinivasan, to rise to the occasion in the spirit of Sai's selfless love. With access to all this overwhelmingly well thought-out stock of aid supplies, the youth of Orissa were now able to concentrate all their energies only on packing and properly distributing the comprehensive relief kits to the neediest and those stranded in the remotest of areas.

"It was a very fulfilling experience as we could provide them food in time and also gift them woolen clothing just before the onset of the winter season. But at the same time, it was a very touching and eye-opening endeavour for other reasons." Elaborating further Mr. Narayana Sar said, "Let me quote just one instance. In one village, before distributing the relief material, we selected the most devastated families and gave them tokens for identification. We had only 1000 tokens; so there were a few people who were left out. Now, these villagers started crying, literally, not because they were being deprived of the packets, but because they felt they were so unfortunate that even Sai Baba did not want to bless them! This very thought was more painful to them than the trauma of the flood. Seeing their heartrending love for Bhagavan, our eyes too overflowed. It was a revelation to us.

"We promised them that we would be back with more supplies, and we did visit that village many times after that day to not only deliver food and clothes,

but also to conduct health checkups, veterinary camps, clean their surroundings, and listen to their problems with brotherly love. And we did this not only in this village but in many other areas too.”

Sai Relief Operations Delivered Much-Needed Supplies, Restored Hope and Faith

Thus, the relief efforts of the Sai Youth went on in great vigour immediately after the flood, but continued later too expanding into many other village development activities. In early October 2008, twenty members of the core team of these relief operations visited Prasanthi Nilayam, and the Lord of Supreme Mercy and Compassion, Bhagavan Baba, intently reviewed the pictures they had brought and blessed them profusely for their selfless work.

While the relief activities continued, there were so many invisible ways too through which the Lord was touching the lives of these poor villagers. Mrs. Pushpalata Behera, who lost everything to the waters, was very despondent immediately after the flood, but when we spoke to her in the first week of February 2009, she said, “From the day we started thinking of Sai Baba and praying to Him, we found all our problems being solved, one by one. Actually, it is purely Baba’s grace that my husband is still alive, and is now able to go to work. He suffered with fatal diarrhea after the flood. We somehow took him to a hospital where he was closely monitored for 8 days. Even there, his condition did not improve; it almost seemed as if he was in the last stage of his life. This, second tragedy, was impossible for me to endure. But what could I do, except pray. So I went to the Sai Baba Mandir and cried my heart out to Him. I told Him, ‘If you are really God, please save the life of my husband’. The next day, his health improved considerably, and the day after he was back home, hale and hearty!”

Mr. Rishi Malik, another poor, old, bedraggled, and lean farmer, said, “It is only the ‘Sai Baba people’ who treated us like human beings. Apart from giving us what we really need, they were really concerned about us. Even though life is still very difficult for us as I earn 50 rupees (US \$ 1) a day, and have five children to look after with only two broken walls as my house, it is only because of Baba’s blessings that we are carrying along.”

Undoubtedly, the distraught rural folk were going through the most testing times of their lives; nevertheless, their love for Bhagavan was only getting stronger and steadier. They still had no houses, or continuous income or stock of agricultural produce, but one thing they did have now with certainty, and that is, faith in their prayers. Despite their pathetic circumstances, they trusted Him and believed He would come to their aid. And so He did! He entered their lives gloriously!

In the second part of this cover story we have the fascinating story of how Sai’s love seeped into the hearts and souls of these downtrodden but devoted rural folk, and rebuilt their lives in a manner they had never imagined before. Life, for them, is now a heaven of hope and a journey of love.

ABODES OF HAPPINESS

...The Abounding Grace of Sai to Orissa – Part 2

While the Sai Organisation of the State of Orissa was in full swing, delivering relief supplies along with comforting and consoling words to those who had lost all hope of ever piecing their lives together, their prayers had touched the powerhouse of compassion and caring, that is Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

As the Dasara celebrations in Puttaparthi were reaching their crescendo in October 2008, out of the blue, Bhagavan Baba advised Mr. V. Srinivasan, the All India President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, to announce to the huge concourse of devotees assembled on October 7 that He had willed to undertake the Orissa Flood Relief and Rehabilitation Project Himself!

Leading by Example, Sai Demonstrates True Love Involves Sacrifice

To a deafening applause, the visibly moved Mr. V. Srinivasan spoke of Bhagavan's love for the poor, suffering and devastated, and said, "Seven districts of Orissa are totally inundated. Hundreds of villages are completely destroyed. Bhagavan's heart has gone out to them. Everyday He is in pain thinking about them. And now Bhagavan has decided that immediately a sum of 10 crore rupees (US \$ 100 million) will be given to the state of Orissa for construction of new houses for those who have lost them."

Taking more instructions from Swami, He again took the podium and declared, "These houses that will be built for the marooned villagers, will not be temporary; they will be strong and sturdy concrete structures which would be permanent. Also, it would not only be homes, it would be supplemented with schools and other necessities." And then came another announcement from Swami through Mr. Srinivasan, "Swami would sell the hilltop building in Kodaikanal and the Sri Sathya Sai Airport at Puttaparthi and utilize those funds for such service activities."

Sai Sanctions Instant Action, Appoints High Profile Team to Assess Magnitude of Devastation and Action Plan

As the All India President narrated the pathetic condition prevailing in the coastal districts of Orissa which he had himself seen during his recent trip, the compassionate Lord was deeply moved. His tender heart seemed unable to bear the suffering of His children. As the speaker went on, Swami again called Mr. Srinivasan and issued another command, "Right after Vijayadashami (the 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!"

That was how concerned and eager the Lord was to relieve the plight of the rural folk in Orissa. As per His divine command, the distinguished team He had appointed to assess the situation, left for Orissa immediately after the festival, and surveyed the four severely affected districts, namely, Cuttack, Puri, Kendrapada and Jagatsinghpur. After they reported to Swami the extent of the damage and the rough estimate of the houses that needed to be built in each of the four affected districts, Swami sent them again to Orissa on November 3. This time they were to meet the officials at the Secretariat of the state Government of Orissa and discuss the nitty-gritty details for the construction of houses, right from acquiring land to identifying the beneficiaries, to working out the finance and logistics of the entire project. During this second trip, Swami added another member to the team, the ashram's in-house civil engineer, Mr. C. Prusty, who has been serving the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust at Prasanthi Nilayam for over 8 years.

Orissa Government Welcomes Sai Initiative, Offers Full Cooperation

Summarising the meeting with the officials of the state Government of Orissa, Mr. Prusty said, "We presented to the government the location and list of houses that Swami would like to build, and sought their cooperation in getting us land clearances and approach roads built to reach the devastated hamlets, as well as electricity, water supply and other civic amenities for the proposed homes. The Chief Secretary of the state consented to all our requests, and then and there instructed his subordinates to take relevant action at various levels."

After this second trip concluded successfully with all the issues sorted out, Swami was now eager to start the actual work. And for this, He sent Mr. C. Prusty again on November 24, the very next day after His 83rd birthday.

State's Chief Secretary Lauds Sai Project

The duo reached Orissa on November 26 and on November 30, the first ground breaking ceremony was performed by Mr. Ajit Kumar Tripathy, the Chief Secretary of the Government of Orissa, who was the honourable chief guest of the occasion. Speaking on that morning in the village of Nadiabarai (Kendrapada District), Mr. Tripathy, said,

"I am so grateful to Swami for this opportunity to be a part of His project. Generally, I am so occupied that making time for occasions like this is extremely difficult, but I surely wanted to be present for this ceremony, and I am glad to be here today. Also, I usually keep away from all public occasions whenever government projects are concerned; I would rather leave it to the politicians to do the honours. But this project is absolutely different. Swami has been deeply concerned about providing relief to you. Dear villagers, we are fortunate for this great blessing from the Divine. Therefore, keeping aside any differences you may have among yourselves, extend whole-hearted cooperation to the engineers and contractors of this project."

Sai Rescues with His Mission, Men and Message of Oneness

He went on to explain in detail the various problems that could erupt as the project proceeded and suggested their remedies too. He urged the villagers to unite, and quoting Swami, he said, "There is only one Caste, the caste of Humanity; there is only one Religion, the Religion of Love; there is only one Language, the Language of the heart; there is only one God and He is Omnipresent. And He is as much here as He is in Puttaparthi or in Puri. He is in all of us in the same measure. Let's work for Him."

After his riveting talk, food was served and blankets were distributed to all the rural folk of that area. And from that moment onwards, the project started in full swing. Just four days later, the second ground breaking ceremony was performed, this time in Manibad, Cuttack district. Soon, construction started in Penta and Samsara, two more villages in the Kendrapada district, followed by Billipada in the district of Puri. In a matter of 15 days, work was in progress in 5 simultaneous sites, and this number grew to 12 by the end of the first 30 days.

Project Poses Unique Challenges, None Insurmountable by Sai Will

The construction agency involved in this project was M/s MSRamaraao. When we met the firm's director, Mr. Sridhar, and asked him what he felt was really exceptional about this project, he said,

"From a construction standpoint, the uniqueness of this project is also its major challenge. Here we are building houses for people who would have never dreamt in their lives of having such permanent homes, and it is happening right in front of their eyes, in their own lands. While this is a great feeling, the flip side of this is that all the houses are scattered widely. To construct 5000 houses in one fixed site which has easy access to raw material and good roads, is not so challenging as building 500 houses, spread over more than a dozen locations, which are remote and isolated, have pathetic connectivity in all respects. For example, the distance between the first and second site is 200 kilometres! Like this, work is going on in parallel in 12 sites. To monitor all of these simultaneously and conform to the strict timetable is no small task. Besides, even within one village, the distance between the houses posed a great test.

"Apart from this, given the under-developed condition of these areas, everything is a challenge, right from finding the right kind of labour to procuring raw materials to recruiting experienced engineers to expedite the work. Therefore, the sheer width, scope and location of the project are all huge differentiating factors than any work we have done so far.

"But at the same time, the most amazing thing about this whole endeavour is that we are able to do it! I still cannot believe that it is happening! For example, in the villages Manibad-Jharkota, we performed the *bhoomi puja* on December 4 and soon after we were supposed to start the construction. Before this, we had to finish the layout of every house, and it was taking one day to come up with the drawing of one house. And there were 51 houses, which meant two months! I was not getting anywhere. None of the raw

materials, be it laterite stones or flyash bricks was reaching that place. I had 15 people working in that site at that time, and when Mr. C. Prusty enquired about the progress, I confidently said, 'More people are coming'. I had no clue from where the additional human resource was going to materialise. But today, the strength of people there is 65! And the project there is nearing completion. I am sure something is working behind the scenes to make all this happen."

"So, what has been your approach to this project?" We quizzed him again.

High Quality, Tight Timelines Define Sai Project

"Our motivation here is completely different; we are not here for money. Financial constraint does not delay any aspect of this work; our focus is to only deliver quality and on time. We are virtually running with the project."

In fact, 'quality' and 'time' is what Bhagavan too emphasized when He announced about this project for the first time, and on many subsequent occasions to Mr. V. Srinivasan and others involved in this project.

Engineering marvels, attention to detail and futuristic vision are typical of all projects that are inspired by Sai. Explaining clearly the explicit directions given by Bhagavan, Mr. C. Prusty, said,

"Swami instructed that the houses should be built at a higher ground level, so that it protects them from heavy rains next time. Therefore, wherever the land is low, we are increasing the height of the plinth in the foundation of the house. Also we are placing a three inches RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) band in the plinth, so that even if there is any pressure from the ground below, it would not transmit to the super structure. Similarly, we are placing one more band at the door level. These two bands should take care of either upward or downward pressure, and protect the house if exposed to calamities like the recent flood again in the future. Additionally, we are providing lintels above the windows. Thus, in this manner, we are following the best practices of construction to ensure that the houses are built really strong.

Leaving No Brick Unturned to Ensure Structural Stability

"Another clear instruction from Bhagavan was that each house should be a complete dwelling unit by itself with one big room, kitchen, bathroom and a verandah. Swami also mentioned that there should be racks in the house and a wash area adjacent to the kitchen. The toilet is separated from the house as per Government standards. Though there are many single units, wherever possible we are doing double houses and placing them as close to each other as we can, so that it helps to create a sizable colony.

"Also, to ensure that quality is not compromised in anyway, we are testing every batch of bricks in a laboratory to check their water absorption capacity and compressive strength. Every red brick should be able to withstand 40-50

kilograms per sq. cm, while fly ash bricks can take up to 70-80 kilograms per sq. cm. If the bricks do not conform to these standards, we reject the lot. Also, to be sure about the uniform application of such quality standards at every site, we organized a special classroom session for all the engineers and gave them the blue print of our plan and procedure. This interaction programme helped a great deal in clearing many doubts lurking in the minds of some of the fresh engineers.”

Very dedicated to His mission, since the time Bhagavan entrusted him with the job, Mr. Prusty has stationed himself centrally in the state capital Bhubaneswar, to oversee all these construction sites and projects. We asked this ashram resident, “Don’t you miss *darshans* having to stay away from Prasanthi Nilayam since November 26?”

“I do,” said the short and sexagenarian engineer, adding, “But, at the same time, ‘Duty is God’. I feel very blessed that Swami has given me such a golden opportunity to be a part of His work. I remember, when we left, Swami had lovingly said, ‘Go, I will look after everything; have no worries whatsoever.’ And I feel He is with me all the time. The problems that arise today, fade away tomorrow. Besides, Swami is constantly guiding us by sending instructions through the All India President. Therefore, I am only beholden to the Lord for granting me this chance to be a part of this divine mission.”

Hope of a Home Evokes Villagers’ Participation

As we walked along with this humble and committed instrument of Bhagavan in one of the sites, he pointed towards a semi-completed house where small children along with their parents were gleefully pouring water on the construction, and said, “This is what gladdens my heart. Even without our suggestion, people themselves are carrying water and curing the brick work.” We saw two little kids lugging small bags of sand in a mason’s pail and filling the plinth of the houses enthusiastically. It was absolutely moving.

“There is so much unity in these villagers now, after we started the project. I feel they are being united by a spiritual power,” added Mr. Prusty, and continued, “This has helped us greatly in expediting the progress of the work. We are now building 253 houses in Cuttack district which are spread in the villages of Maniwad, Jharkota, Khondohota, Rahamba, Sithala and Keutapatna. Similarly, 150 of them are coming up in the district of Puri, and another 199 in the Kendrapada district. We have already completed one model house and sent the pictures to Swami. We were happy to know that it met His expectations.”

A New, Concrete Home is a Dream Come True

When we went to this model house in the Kendrapada district, we were thrilled to see the devotion of people in that area. There was a marquee (or *shamiana*) and altar for Swami right at the entrance of the village. As we keenly took pictures of the new, light pink and mellow yellow building, the beneficiaries of that house soon gathered. Now, we could not but engage them in a conversation.

"How do you feel seeing this house?"

"Our eyes are filled with tears of joy," said the lady of the family. "Who else, but God, can give us such a beautiful home?" Her voice was choked and she bent her head to wipe her overflowing eyes with a corner of her saree. We too were speechless. After a pause, we asked again.

"Did you know Sai Baba before?"

Project Appeases Physical and Spiritual Hunger

"No. After we had lost everything, including our house, to the flood, survival had become very difficult. It was at this time that some people came to our village, and presented us with flattened rice, sugar, candles, matchboxes, blankets, tarpaulin sheets, etc. More than this, they helped us to clear the mud-filled hole which was once our house, and spoke to us very lovingly. They assured us that they would take care of us, and help us rebuild our ruined home. Not only this, they checked our health too and brought us medicines. And later new clothes, rice, etc. When we asked them who they were, they said Sai Baba has sent them. It was only then that we heard about Sai Baba.

"And the next day, they came and told us they are going to build an absolutely new house for us! We could not believe our ears! Only God can do such a thing for unfortunate people like us... Now, we are sure we will spend the rest of our lives in peace and happiness as Baba's compassion is there on us. We worship Him everyday."

After this, the lady called all the small children standing around her, and together the small group, with folded hands and closed eyes, started singing, "*Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam...*" (The first *bhajan* that Baba Himself sang in 1940s when He declared that He was 'Sai Baba')

We were spellbound, to the say the least. We congratulated the children, saluted the lady and walked out of the house with our cameras. There was nothing more we wanted to ask.

Sai Provides Homes, Hope, Employment and Life's Purpose

In the next site, at Sithala (Cuttack district), when we saw a worker slogging it out in the hot sun, we approached him at an opportune time when he took a breather, and said, "You are working so hard, does it not bother you?"

"No sir, I am enjoying this," said the man, to our astonishment. "Sai Baba is giving us these houses; we are extremely happy. We are daily wage poor labourers; even in our wildest of imaginations we could have never built such homes for ourselves. For years, we have lived in only temporary thatched houses which get destroyed every other season. We had thought *pucca* (concrete) houses are not for people like us, but Sai Baba is so kind; He is making such beautiful houses for us." His eyes now overflowed. Another worker, who was standing next to him took over and continued, "These houses are Baba's mercy to us. That is why we are working here with all our energy and vigour, as many hours as possible in a day... actually after this is over, we want to build a temple for Sai Baba in this village and worship Him to our heart's content."

Topographically Sustainable Construction Planned

The devotion of these poor labourers which translated into hard and dedicated work for long hours everyday was simply heart touching. We saw them pouring pails of concrete into huge holes dug into the earth. It was evident that the foundation work of the houses was in progress; still what was being done there, in Sithala, was very different. Unlike other areas, they were no columns of huge pits dug on the ground; instead, there were only small holes into which long pipes were being inserted and cement mix poured. We clearly wanted to know more, and seeing our puzzled faces, the Convenor of the Sri Sathya Sai Trust, Orissa, Mr. S. Mahapatra, came to our rescue. Explaining the procedure being done, he said,

"What you see here is a 'Pile foundation'. Unlike open foundations, where 3-4 feet is dug below the ground level; in this case, the 'piles' or simply, 'concrete columns' go up to 10 feet underground. This type of foundation is best suited for areas where there is clay soil or if the ground is very loose. In this type of foundation, even if there is an erosion due to water leakage or flooding, the base remains intact. In fact, we have adopted this system of foundation in half of our total sites, as the earth in these areas, being coastal regions, is not firm enough."

Elaborating more on the details on this procedure, Mr. Mahapatra, who is a civil engineer himself, said, "The method here is to drill a hole using a 'bore drill' and fill it up with concrete. Generally, for every house we make nine such deep pits which are then connected using a 'grid beam' on the top of the piles. Above this, are built the walls and floors of the house. Interestingly, even though this foundation is actually cheaper and faster than open foundations, the common people here neither know about this procedure nor do they have the special tools needed to adopt this technique."

Disbelief, Gratitude and Higher Inspiration Fill the Environment

As we looked around, we did see the sophisticated equipment being used at the site. No surprise then that the villagers are giving their heart and soul to this work and are so grateful to Bhagavan.

The overwhelming sense of gratitude and disbelief was not limited to the beneficiaries of the project. Mr. Sridhar, the director of the construction agency also has a deep personal involvement at stake in this sacred project. When we asked him, "What impact has the project had on you as a person?" this industrial engineer, who had actually spent 14 years of professional life in the USA, took a deep breath and said, "For me, it is the most self-fulfilling work. I had never dreamt that one day I would be walking along with farmers and fishermen, and building houses for them. The sense of urgency and efficiency is also what I have learnt from being associated with this project. Everybody seems to be so disciplined and focused about their job with one single objective in their minds; nobody is laid back. I think that is what is making a world of difference in the unfolding of this project. Besides, if there is one virtue to which this project has opened my eyes, it is humility. And as days go by, I am realizing its value more and more.

"Actually, now I am an inspired man. As a company we too want to be involved in some philanthropic activity in these villages. I have indeed called a couple of my friends, who are doctors, to organize a medical camp here. The 39 years and 9 months of my life before I came here was a different story, from now on it is going to be a new ball game altogether..."

Project Divinely Supervised and Executed

When God touches someone, directly or indirectly, he/she can never be the same again. And we found plenty of such instances in our interactions with villagers, Sai workers, labourers, officials and engineers. The District President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Kendrapada, Mr. Ramachandra Swain, said,

"In reality, the issue of land ownership in these villages is a very sensitive one. Often people can come to blows because of such conflicts, as no one would be prepared to concede even an inch. But as far as this project is concerned, they are so moved by what Bhagavan has done for them that they have forgotten their conflicts, and gladly offered their lands; often, at lower than the prevailing market price."

Continuing to narrate another story of His grace, he said,

"I must share with you a small but delightful incident. A few weeks ago, we needed an additional plot of 2178 square feet to add more houses to the row of construction in the village Samsara. That would make a colony of 24 houses. Now, the owner of this additional plot of land promised to give it to us, but for some reason was dilly-dallying. I was in tension as I was soon nearing my deadline to submit the papers. I did not want to present a plan which had many deserving landless persons being left out. I had no other go but to pray hard that night. In the next morning, unexpectedly, the owner's son landed

from Mumbai and handed over the relevant papers to me in 24 hours. I have seen the 'hand of Sai' in so many small instances like this. In fact, before we arrived here, there were two groups in this village, but now all are one. They are united in their devotion to Bhagavan."

Energised by 'Sainergy', Selfless Work Brings Ineffable Joy

Mr. Ramachandra must have been in his sixties, but he seemed to be one of the most active Sai workers in the region. "What propels you to work so hard?" we asked him.

"I do not know, I feel I am fired by a tremendous energy which keeps me on my feet 28 days a month! I work round the clock but don't feel exhausted. What really energises me is speaking to these poor villagers, mingling with them and sharing my love with them. I was just a science teacher all my life, but Bhagavan has now blessed me with such a precious opportunity to do His work. I feel it is the reward for all my years of sincerity and hard work. I am really filled with joy. I have no words to express my gratitude to Swami."

One could see the thrill in his eyes as he went on to narrate how he has planned to undertake plenty of other spiritual and social welfare activities which would unite the villagers more strongly and promote harmony in the area. "I feel His presence all the time," is how the inspiring and elderly Sai worker signed off.

It is the same enthusiasm and gratitude that inspires everyone from the State President of Sai Organizations in Orissa to every daily wage labourer involved in this project. "We are very happy to work for God. This is truly a dream house. We feel as if God Himself is coming to stay in our house. There is no end to our happiness. It is just overwhelming," said a mason we spoke to in Penta (Kendrapada district). When we asked him if he needed anything more in his life, he spontaneously said, "All we want now is a temple in this village, so that we can worship Bhagavan, and deserve His compassion for us. We want to be closer to Him; we want to live in peace and in His love." The sincerity of his words was evident in his unsophisticated expressions. As soon as we thanked him for the conversation, he picked up his trowel and returned to his work. It seemed as if he did not want to lose a single second in anything unnecessary.

"By the end of March, we want to complete these houses," said another young mason, Mr. Bhagavat Jena, in the village, Penta. Turbaned with a red cloth to protect himself from concrete and water, and wearing a simple smile on his lips, he added, "I have not seen Sai Baba in person; nevertheless, I am so thrilled looking at these houses. If Baba asks me today, 'How are you?' I would say, 'Earlier we were in great distress; the flood waters had caused havoc in our lives. But now, we are extremely happy'. In fact, His very name now removes all fears from our lives. Often times, I return to my temporary shelter very late in the night, but it does not bother me. I work gladly for more than 12 hours a day here. I am thoroughly enjoying this experience."

The smile of Bhagavat Jena said more than his words. And even while he was speaking to us, he continued to plaster the walls. It was as if the work was more like a blessing to him than an assigned job.

Sai, the Provider of Life, Shelter and Mental Peace

And everybody in these villages, big or small, skilled or unskilled, joined in to do their bit joyfully, including the tiny tots of Mrs. Pushpalata Behera, the devout lady who saved the life of her husband with her sincere prayers. When we asked her, "Do you now have full confidence in your prayers?" She said, "The God who saved our life, is now giving us shelter too. And I know He will look after us all the way through. In fact, from the day the devotees of Sai Baba placed their foot on the soil of my village, life has only got better. Mentally, I feel so relieved."

Poor Rishi Malik of Billipada (Puri district), who had been suffering due to no income and no house to provide for his five children and wife, said after seeing the foundation of his new house being laid right in front of his eyes: "Our years of prayers to God are now being answered. Once we have a shelter to return to at the end of the day, we can surely eke our livelihood and live happily. However, now we have only one request. We have not seen Sai Baba physically. Can you please take us to Him? Can my old wife too join me? Please, can you make this possible? Without seeing Him, we cannot rest in peace... He has given us so much. I only have one photo of Him and we worship that picture everyday with flowers and sandalwood paste. But once, we want to see Him with our own eyes..."

We could not but stare at him dazedly. He humbled everyone around with his sincere pining to be blessed with just one *darshan*. After a pause, we said, "Definitely. You are going to see Sai Baba! The Lord, who has given you so much unasked, will certainly grant you your wish." We had no clue how he was going to see Swami physically, but we just knew it was going to happen, somehow, someday, surely.

Craving to Meet and Behold their Divine Benefactor

In reality, this was not the wish of Rishi Malik alone. Every village we went, this was the common request. Mr. Pramod Jena in Samsara (Kendrapada district) said,

"Rootless people like us are now being gifted concrete homes! But the greatest gift is that along with these houses, we are getting God! Now, we will live in a shelter where God Himself lives! We will convert every home into a place of worship. We want to dedicate our lives completely to Bhagavan. But our only desire is to go to Prasanthi Nilayam. Once, we want to see the face of our Lord....we will work very hard in the next few weeks to save whatever money we can. Please take us one time to Prasanthi."

Keys to Unlock a Whole New Life

On February 8, 2009, when Mr. C. Prusty, and his son Rameswar Prusty (who too was sent by Swami to stay with his father and help in executing the project) and the media team from Radio Sai that had just returned from their visit to Orissa, presented to Swami the pictures of the progress of the work and shared with Him the heartfelt feelings of the poor village folk, the Lord was very touched. He wanted the houses to be completed at the earliest, so that He could personally present the keys and bless the affected families. The very mention of these villagers moistened His eyes, overwhelming Him. It was as if He was aware of every pang of their aching hearts.

The Lord knows when to bless, where to shower His grace, and how to fill His devotees' hearts with His all encompassing love. The sacred festival of Rama Navami, which falls on April 3, is the red-letter date when Bhagavan is scheduled to hand over the gift of His 'mansions of love' to the first batch of His much loved poor devotees. That day, history will etch, in golden letters, another stirring saga of His ever-full and ever-flowing Pure Love.

SSSVIP to Usher New Hope and a New Way of Life along with New Homes

Meanwhile, the Sai Youth of Orissa have not become silent after the flood relief operations. "Our vision now is to convert all these villages into Pilgrim Centres," said Mr. Narayan Sar, the Sai Youth Coordinator. "We will pray to Swami to include all these villages into our Sri Sathya Sai Village Improvement Programme (SSSVIP), and work towards making them model Sai villages," he added.

Mr. Hare Krishna Dash, the State President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Orissa, said, "When Bhagavan awards these villages with the key of their houses, it will be no ordinary key. That will, in fact, be the 'Master key' gifted by the Master Himself which will unlock the hidden treasures of their lives. And as a spiritual organisation, it will be our endeavour not to only improve the all round physical, mental and social health of these rural folk, but also strive to instill in them the divine purpose of their existence. Each one has to be made to realize that he/she is, indeed, a spark of God and it is to God again one has to finally return. And to make this journey of our lives easy and simple, we have with us the most loving guide in our Beloved Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba."

Where there was death, devastation and distress, now there is love, harmony and peace. It is as if another flood has swept the coastal districts of Orissa, like a healing balm, soothing the sharp pain inflicted by its predecessor. This avalanche of love brings all positive and life changing developments in its trail, making it the most welcome and wholesome experience ever. The communities that were isolated, neglected and ostracized for generations have now become oases of Love. Orissa, is now no more a deprived state, it is, in fact, a divine state; one that has won a special corner for itself in the heart of the all-loving and ever-giving Lord Sai.

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 24

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. We are now in the fascinating but highly intriguing borderland called Quantum Philosophy that is one step away from what is usually called meta-Physics. You might wonder: "Earlier, we were told about Quantum Mechanics and all that; now there is a reference to Quantum Philosophy. What's the difference between the two?" I made a reference to this before but now is the time to stress that difference once more.

You see, Quantum Mechanics refers to the tool box, a new type of "calculus" if you will, that enables one to make accurate and reliable calculations and predictions relating to the world of the small. Stretching the idea a bit, a "quantum mechanic" would be like an auto-garage mechanic who is very good in fixing problems that cars develop. A more evolved version of the "quantum mechanic" would be a person who, using the tool box, is able to make new predictions, discoveries and so on. However, at the end of the day, these people, while very well-known and with many papers to their credit and so forth, would not be able to say much about a question that hides behind this new and wonderful calculus or tool box, which is: "So what is the picture of Physical Reality that QM presents?" And this is precisely where Philosophy enters the picture.

Beyond the Calculations

There are of course the hard-core "calculators" who look down upon the Philosophers and say that these egg heads do nothing but waste time talking. Thus it is that many of them tell their students, "Shut up and calculate!" Thanks to that down-to-earth approach, there are today thousands and thousands of "quantum mechanics" who, like plumbers, can take care of many a complex calculation problem. Some of these, by the way, are quite horrendous, and it takes a lot of skill to solve these problems; which means that one should not necessarily look down upon these "mechanics" as some kind of second-rate species. Nevertheless, as Science advances throwing up more and more fascinating and intriguing questions, the question, "What does all this mean in the final analysis?" does keep popping up again and again. The question cannot be entirely swept under the rug, and keeping that in mind, many have dared to deal with the issue, no matter how much out of sync they might be with the world of "mechanics".

I have already made, in earlier issues of H2H, some reference to the questions related to the philosophy underlying QM. In this issue, I wish to pursue that angle a bit further; and given various self-evident constraints, my aim would be to give you a broad flavour of what the debate is all about, rather than to give an exhaustive account of what happened and where things stand at present. The important point I wish to make is that behind the seen there hides a strange Reality, the nature of which is not easy to fathom.

Equally important, this Quantum Reality, if I might call it that, has tantalising similarities to many concepts of *Vedanta*. In fact, it is because of that subtle connection that I have been taking you through this rather long tour – if I am not mistaken, it is already two years since we got started!

Just to set the stage, let me remind you of what was available before the advent of QM. We had then what we now describe as Classical Mechanics [CM], which provided a formalism and also physical content, namely, a view of Physical Reality. CM worked fine, as long as one did quite enter the realm of the “small”. Starting about the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the discoveries and developments that came rapidly in succession of each other compelled physicists to deal with the world of the “small” namely, the world of atoms, electrons and nuclei, etc. Here CM failed miserably, and a new mechanics was needed. That new tool box, now called QM, became available by about 1928 or so. It worked beautifully [to the extent it was used then], but when it came to what the tool box meant in relation to Physical reality, everyone was left wondering.

Einstein and Bohr Make a Quantum-Physical Friendship

Two great and daring minds then decided to explore what exactly was the Reality underlying the newfangled QM; they were Niels Bohr and Einstein, both of whom we have met before. The curious part of it is that while in their own ways these two had been instrumental in ushering in the quantum era, they had not made any major, landmark contribution to the birth of QM; that was done [as described earlier] almost entirely by Schrodinger, Heisenberg and Dirac. Yet, when it came to the debate, it was Einstein and Bohr who were in the forefront, with all others watching keenly from the ringside.

Bohr and Einstein knew each other even before they had met – no surprise in that, since both were already big names by 1920 or so. As Einstein once wrote to Planck [who, if you remember, “kicked” the ball first in the quantum game – see QFI - 06] “...his [Bohr's] must be a first-rate mind, extremely critical and far-seeing, which never loses sight of the grand design”.

Bohr and Einstein met for the first time in 1920 in Berlin. It was a meeting of giants, each with his own reputation. And it was also the beginning of a life-long friendship that was deep, emotional and firm as the Rock of Gibraltar, despite serious differences on matters scientific and philosophical. About this meeting, Bohr later commented:

When I had the great experience of meeting Einstein for the first time during a visit to Berlin in 1920, these fundamental questions [the problems of old quantum theory (meaning the problems that existed prior to the development of formal QM)] formed the theme of our conversations. The discussions, to which I have often referred to in my thoughts, added to all my admiration for Einstein, a deep impression of his detached attitude.

Soon after this meeting, Einstein wrote to Bohr,

Not often in life has a human being caused me so much joy by his mere presence as you did.

To this, Bohr replied,
To meet you and talk to you was one of the greatest experiences I ever had.

So you can see how they held each other in great esteem. Yet, later, deep differences in opinion developed, but the remarkable thing is that till they end, they friendship never suffered one bit. That story would follow soon.

Towards the end of 1927, there was a big scientific meeting called the Fifth Solvay Congress [held in Belgium], at which all the big guns were present. While critical issues relating to the **meaning** of QM did not feature in the main agenda, outside the Conference Hall, there was much animated discussion in groups of twos and threes. Bohr recollects:

Einstein had from the very beginning been a most prominent figure, and several of us came to the conference with great anticipation to learn his reaction to the latest stage of development which, in our view, went far in clarifying the problems which he had himself from the outset elucidated so ingeniously. During the discussions.....Einstein expressed, however, a deep concern over the extent to which causal account in space and time was abandoned in quantum mechanics.

You can see from this comment where Einstein was having reservations; as I mentioned in an earlier issue [see QFI – 23] Einstein believed strongly in a cause-and-effect scenario; that scenario and logic was central to CM and Einstein was so steeped in that philosophy, it seemed outrageous to him for anyone to suggest that Nature behaved otherwise; and he argued vehemently with anyone who said that in QM causality had no place!

The Big Guns Contest in Thought Experiments

The big guns who stuck around during these back room conversations included of course Einstein and Bohr, and also Pauli and Heisenberg. Most of the Einstein-Bohr arguments centred around what were called *gedanken* experiments. *Gedanken* was the German word for thought, and thus, a *gedanken* experiment essentially meant a thought-experiment. Basically, Einstein would get up and say, “Professor Bohr, suppose we do an experiment of this kind”; a lot of details would then follow, after which, Einstein would say, “but you see Professor, when we try to draw conclusions from this experiment on the basis of your QM, we are faced with the following logical contradictions. You would agree of course that Science cannot be based on contradictions. So what does that mean? It means, according to me, that your QM fails under its own assumptions!” Smiling triumphantly, Einstein would then sit down, pull out his pipe and light it, while Bohr would be scratching his head not knowing what to do.

After a while, Bohr would get up slowly, go to the board and say, “Professor Einstein, I heard you very carefully and I must agree that you made a brilliant

point. It would seem from what you say that QM appears to flounder and that its logic is incomplete and inadequate. But I have a small difficulty, and I would be grateful to you if you can kindly clear my doubt.” Starting on this apologetic note, Bohr would then launch into a detailed, step-by-step analysis of the entire argument presented by Einstein, and then quietly but with great certainty, demonstrate that along the line Einstein had made a huge logical blunder, which was why he ended up with the conclusion that QM was all wrong. After literally demolishing Einstein's entire argument, Bohr would then wind up saying, “I am sorry I am not quite able to follow all that Professor Einstein said and maybe I have to do a lot more thinking in private; but as of now, I am having a lot of difficulty. Perhaps, someone would sort it all out for us later.”

Hardly anyone present took part in this Einstein-Bohr debate as it is now known; but they all followed the argument carefully. Two people who ignored the entire debate in disdain were Pauli and Heisenberg; they both were die-hard supporters of QM and did not pay any attention to objections, even if they came from Einstein; and they wondered why Bohr was “wasting” so much time trying to answer Einstein!

The argument between Bohr and Einstein went on; every time Einstein came up with an objection, Bohr would find a clever way of refuting. Nevertheless, Einstein did not give up. At one point, a noted physicist named Ehrenfest chided Einstein by saying,

Einstein! You are beginning to sound like the critics of your own theories of relativity. Again and again your arguments have been refuted, but instead of applying your own rule that physics must be built on measurable relationships and not on preconceived notions, you continue to invent arguments based on those same preconceived notions!

It was indeed a powerful criticism of Einstein, not easy to make, given Einstein's rock star like status. But Einstein did not give up and during one of these many debates, Einstein decided to attack the Uncertainty Principle. As Bohr later put it, “our discussions then took quite a dramatic turn”. What happened was that as usual, Einstein came up with a *gedanken* experiment, which, he claimed, showed that the Uncertainty Principle was false. Bohr contested Einstein's views. Patiently, step by step, using Einstein's own arguments, Bohr showed that Einstein was wrong! It was just too much and Einstein gave up, at least for a while. Recalling the first innings of that encounter when Einstein had the upper hand, the Dutch physicist Rosenfeld, an eyewitness said,

I shall never forget the vision of the two giants leaving the club; Einstein a tall majestic figure, walking quietly, with a somewhat ironic smile, and Bohr trotting near him, very excited.....The next morning came Bohr's triumph.

Soon after this famous encounter, Einstein left Germany for good and settled in America. Three years later, Bohr and Einstein met in America, but no

matter what Bohr said, Einstein continued to remain sceptical about QM. As Bohr later recalled,

I had an opportunity to talk with him again about epistemological aspects of atomic physics, but the difference between our ways of approach and expression still presented obstacles to mutual understanding.

The Charm of Niels Bohr

The story does not end here; not the one to give up easily, Einstein fired a major salvo in 1936 that subsequently led to a most startling discovery. But before I get on to that, I must present a personal recall of a lecture that Bohr delivered while he was visiting India in 1960 [I believe]. This lecture that I am referring to was delivered in the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bombay. At that time, the magnificent building that now houses the Institute was still under construction, and thus it was that Bohr's address was delivered in a small lecture hall in a building called the Old Yacht Club right next to the famous Gateway of India, and adjoining the Bombay docks.

I was present in the audience, and the room was simply packed – no wonder, for Bohr was a big name. Bohr was then over seventy, and he spoke extensively about his protracted debate with Einstein. He presented slide after slide of the apparatuses associated with the *gedanken* experiments proposed by Einstein and also by himself. The sound system in the auditorium was terrible, and to make matters worse, Bohr's voice was not always at its best. Altogether, I did not understand one single word of what Bohr said; and I am sure that applied to almost everyone in the audience. Yet we all sat there silently, as homage to the great man who was speaking and to the great Einstein whom the talk was largely about. Although I did not understand a single word of Bohr's lecture, this I do remember most vividly. When he came to end, Bohr began to weep! It was clearly a genuine feeling of regret over the pain he had caused to his dear friend by defeating him in the scientific debate.

That was a different era and a different set of values. I make a special mention of this because in January 1968, I was present in Chicago at the annual meeting of the American Physical Society [APS], a big event then and perhaps even now. For three days or so, this meeting was full of sessions where specialist papers were presented, but there were certain events where special invited lectures were delivered. I was present at one such session which was a joint session of the APS and the American Association of Physics Teachers [AAPT]. The meeting venue was a huge ball room or something of that kind in a five star hotel. Two invited lectures were to be given that afternoon; the first was by George Gamow, whose name I have mentioned earlier on this series; if you recall, the idea of the Big Bang is often attributed to him.

The other lecture was by Freeman Dyson, a brilliant physicist, if ever there was one. Of the two, Gamow was rather old by the time he gave this lecture, while Dyson was, I would say something like in his mid-fifties. The two lectures were sort of interconnected. Dyson was to speak first and refute a

claim made by Gamow in a recent paper of his. This paper had something to do with the radioactive decay of some nuclei or the other, I do not remember the detail. But this I do remember; the conclusions drawn had a lot of implications for the history of the earth, its evolution etc.

Letting Emotions Upset Our Values

Anyway, to get on with the story, what had happened was that soon after Gamow published his paper, Dyson detected a fatal flaw in Gamow's argument and published a rebuttal. Essentially Dyson said in his paper, "Gamow has made the following mistake and therefore all his conclusions are invalid." Fine. This occasionally does happen, with a person making a genuine mistake, for which he later apologises. I have gone through this painful experience myself, and I know what it is all about. On this day of the public meeting, both Dyson and Gamow were to speak. First it would be Dyson, pointing out why Gamow was wrong and all that, and later it would be Gamow, explaining how this mistake happened. I hope you appreciate that these lectures were special because not every time there is a mistake, is this kind back-to-back lecture arranged, and that too in a big public session. The lecture was special because the topic was special, that is what I am trying to say.

The session was being presided over by Prof. Charles Townes, a Nobel Prize winner – he got the Nobel for discovering the principle of the Maser and the Laser and also building the first Maser. There was huge audience of about four thousand or so, and the scene was very impressive. Prof. Townes first called upon Dyson to speak, and after Townes said a few words by way of introduction, Dyson went to the podium to give his lecture. His presentation showed his unquestionable scientific brilliance, but I must say I was totally unprepared for the almost contemptuous manner in which he dismissed Gamow, almost to the point of ridiculing him. Gamow was then quite old, and used as I was to giving respect to elders, this public display of insolence on the part of Dyson stunned me and was totally unacceptable to me. Townes sat through the talk in cold silence, and I could see that he was not happy either about the condescension with which Dyson spoke.

Finally, Dyson finished, and there was a light and scattered applause, after which Townes introduced the next speaker, namely Prof. Gamow. He did not stop there; after welcoming Gamow, Townes got down from the stage, walked all the way to Gamow and helped him to come to the stage, that is to say, he showed a lot of courtesy and respect. And when Gamow finished, not only did Townes thank Gamow and all that as those who preside normally do, but helped Gamow to walk back to his seat. I was so happy to see what Townes did, and it made a deep impression on me. It is one thing to have scientific differences but quite another to let that poison one's mind.

The Loss of Humility and Poise

You might recall my telling in an issue a long time ago about how young Chandra [Prof. Chandrasekhar] was put down by Eddington, but how they still

remained friends to the end, with in fact Chandra delivering the Eddington Centenary Lecture in Cambridge. And here in this issue, I described how Bohr and Einstein differed on matters scientific but remained friends till the end. The incident I just narrated shows that things were changing; today, competition is so fierce that hostility is pretty common among many of the top guns. That is because, like in the movie, TV and newspaper industry, sadly, ratings have become the name of the game. People do not seem to appreciate that whatever discoveries they are blessed to make are the direct result of (a) the Grace of God, (b) the creative abilities with which God has blessed them, and (c) the opportunities for creative work that God has placed in their way.

When I was in school, I had to study a poem by Thomas Gray called the *Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard*. One stanza in the poem goes as follows:

*Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.*

I am sure the meaning is clear; for every one person who shines, there are many more who, though blessed with talent, do not have the opportunity to give expression to them, due to the circumstances in which they are placed. Knowledge is meaningless if it does not go hand in hand with humility. Thus it is that Newton, hailed by Chandra as the greatest scientist of the second millennium [notwithstanding Einstein!] said that if he was able to see farther than others, it was because he was standing on the shoulders of those who went ahead of him! Yes, it is a mixed bag, with some humble and others not so humble. Having been a witness for over seventy years, I can say that lately, humility seems to have become a lost virtue! I shall say goodbye at this point, allowing you to reflect on it all. We shall meet again in the next issue, and till then, I hope all goes well with you.

Jai Sai Ram.

HE LIVED HIS MESSAGE... AND SHARED HIS LOVE

A humble tribute to Prof. D. S. Habbu, the chosen instrument of the divine for a number of missions, the most significant of them being spearheading the moulding of young minds of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School during its fledgling years.

"I have brought the best principal to the Higher Secondary School," Bhagavan said, nay declared, as He lovingly held the arm of Prof. D. S. Habbu and introduced him to the dignitaries seated in the Prasanthi Nilayam Mandir. It was the initial months of 1983, the first year of Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School. For many, who were witness to this episode, it was another beautiful evening with the Lord; but for the bespectacled and humble professor, it was a bolt from the blue. He did not know how to react, but to bend down with folded hands, and express how beholden he was to the Lord for granting him such a precious opportunity to play a part in His mission.

"It was the chance of a lifetime, no doubt, but a great challenge too," Prof. Habbu recalled speaking to the H2H Team in July 2008. "In the next nine years, I toiled day and night, and gave my time, energy, everything, to live up to that word of Bhagavan. I have no idea to what extent I matched His expectations, but this much I do know – I tried my very best. That is my only plus point."

And today, 26years after Swami unfurled this school which has become one of the best in the country offering high quality, secondary school education completely free of cost, the alumni of this esteemed institution find it hard to articulate their heartfelt feelings for their very dear and revered Principal.

Prof. Habbu – An Exemplary Teacher Who Walked His Talk

"Habbu Sir was not just our principal; he was truly our unmistakable friend, philosopher and guide. Though a strict disciplinarian, he had a heart of gold. He left an indelible impression on me," says Mr. P. Satyanarayan, currently a Credit Review Analyst in the Commercial Bank of Kuwait. "Habbu Sir is my legend," says Mr. Ajishnu Sharma, another alumnus who graduated in the year 1988. He adds, "He was not just an efficient teacher, but a very kind man; he had a smile that could melt even the sternest of hearts." For Mr. Partish Kumar Dubey, who completed his XII grade in the school in 1990 and is currently an Asset Manager with Barclays Capital, London, "Habbu Sir was a man of principles who taught us values by His own example. What a fine personality he was! His life had a fine balance between the inner world of self-discovery and outer world of achievement. He taught us to be spiritual, not religious. He inspired us to achieve, not for self- aggrandizement, but to please the Lord for the talent He has bestowed us with. Indubitably, he was a true Sai jewel! He had a personal relationship with each and every student. Bhagavan could not have entrusted those impressionable years of our lives to another better person; I feel so fortunate."

That is how many of the former students of Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam, love their first principal. If there is one virtue of Prof. Habbu, which was like a formidable foundation on which was built the solid mansion of his sterling character, it was his absolute dedication to Swami's word and mission.

Prof. Anil Kumar, the former Principal of the Brindavan campus of Sri Sathya Sai University, says, "One facet of Prof. Habbu, which is matchless, is his devotion to Swami. He never complained about anything and was extremely positive in his outlook. Even if there was an adverse remark from any quarter, whether genuine or false, all he used to say was, 'We may not have lived up to His vision'. He judged his every emotion and act, sentiment and decision with the touchstone of Swami's direction and mission. He was truly a role model for all administrators."

The Most Memorable Turning Point - Prof. Habbu's First Meeting With Bhagavan

It is little surprise that Swami picked such a personality to oversee the blossoming of the characters of the children of His own school. In fact, the Lord, after choosing to reward him a place at His lotus feet in 1973, lovingly guided and chiseled him for nine years before assigning him the prized responsibility of spearheading a part of His education mission.

"It was in 1965 that someone told me about Bhagavan and placed in my hand one of His photos," Prof. Habbu said recalling the initial days of his journey to Sai. "I saw the picture and immediately developed 100 % faith in Him; something within me strongly said that He was divine. I never had a doubt since then. That photo of Bhagavan straight away adorned our altar and we worshipped Him everyday. In those days, I was working in SDL College in Hannavar, in the state of Karnataka, as a Reader in History. And every minute of my spare time was spent in Sai work. And in 1970, when the local Sai devotees in that region started a Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi (Sai Centre), they chose me to be the president of the organization, and I served in this position as best as I could. We undertook many service activities, started Bal Vikas classes to train young minds, soon there were pre-sevadal courses, and I was very much involved in teaching not only many Vedic and spiritual hymns to the students but also instilling in them noble values of truth, integrity and reverence for one's culture. I engaged myself completely in this sacred work for three years, till I moved to His physical proximity in Brindavan."

Prof. Habbu physically saw Bhagavan for the first time only in May of 1973. Reminiscing that sweet memory, he said, "My first beautiful moment with the Lord unfolded at nine in the morning that memorable day. I was seated in the lines in the 'Sai Ram' shed at 8.30 and there were not many people those days, probably a hundred. After about half an hour, the gates opened, and I saw, to my delight, the sublime form of Swami walking gently towards us. I remember having a letter in my hand, and Swami, to my surprise, walked straight to me, lovingly picked the letter, and then moved away. He didn't speak a word, but truly said so much. I was spellbound."

It was this first encounter which intensified his love for Bhagavan and the dedicated professor now longed to be in His physical presence as often as he could. It was at this time that he heard of a vacancy in the department of history in the Sri Sathya Sai Arts, Science and Commerce College, Brindavan (when the Sri Sathya Sai University opened in 1981, this college became one of its campuses). Fortunately, the then Vice Principal of this college, Mr. R. J. Kulkarni was known to him, and suggested to Prof. Habbu that he could apply to Swami's college.

Without any delay, Prof. Habbu wrote a letter to Swami praying for an opportunity to serve in His institution. Just like the first letter, the Lord accepted this one too very lovingly from his hands.

Emboldened by this, once the professor returned home, he sent his application letter to the college. Soon, he received a positive response and was called for an interview.

"Two stalwarts, Prof. V.K. Gokak and Dr. S. Bhagavantham, interviewed me." Prof. Habbu continued the story. "After the 15 minute interview, I was asked to return to my hometown. Within a week, I received the call: 'Join on Thursday, July 19, 1973'. From that day, I never looked back. I resigned right away and came to Brindavan; I was on duty on that appointed date."

Luckily for Prof. Habbu, within a week Swami came to Brindavan. "When we heard about His arrival, we rushed to the Mandir," He recalled. "At that time, the Trayee Brindavan building, that we see now, did not exist; in its place was the Old Bungalow. We were standing in line at the portico, and after Swami alighted from His car, He came near us and looked at each one of us keenly. And when His eyes met mine, He smiled, and said in Kannada (my mother tongue), *Enu, Habbu anuva?* ('Are you not Habbu?') I said, 'Yes, Swami!' At this moment, I was happy and sad; happy because I had finally come to His lotus feet, but, at the same time, sad, as I had taken 46 long years."

The Unforgettable Nine Divine Years: Prof. Habbu – The Enterprising Secretary of Sri Sathya Sai Cooperative Stores, Brindavan.

After Prof. Habbu joined Swami's college, his first responsibility was to teach history, but soon the Lord gifted him with many other parallel opportunities. The following year, in May 1974, Bhagavan organized the Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality, and at this time, He decided to start a Cooperative Society to cater to the daily needs of the students. Prof. Habbu was now made the secretary of this new service initiative. It started in a small way. Prof. Habbu prayed to Bhagavan for Rs. 2,000 (which was quite an amount those days, even though very little for a shop) and with this amount, which Swami readily gave, he bought the first provisions. It was a mix of soaps, hair oils, and a few brands of biscuits, which was arranged in just one shelf. And Bhagavan Himself came to inaugurate this store! Not only that - He was the first customer too.

"I still remember that day, May 29, 1974," Prof. Habbu recalled. "Swami picked up a big-sized swastik hair oil, and then looked at it and said, 'It is for Sai Geeta (His pet elephant)'. There was one person accompanying Swami who immediately offered money for that bottle. Just like a businessman, I took the amount, prepared a bill and wrote it out in the divine name of 'Sai Baba' with the item 'Swastik Hair oil' and the price was Rs. 9.80. I checked the price again, signed the voucher, and gave it to that person."

"After about half an hour, Mr. Sudarshan, the warden of the boys' hostel came and said, 'How could you write Baba's name on the bill?' Now, I was perturbed. 'Is Swami unhappy?' I asked him. 'No, He is smiling,' he said. I too relaxed and felt so relieved."

During the nine years of his stay in Brindavan, working in the cooperative store was a great privilege of Prof. Habbu not only because of many such sweet moments with the Lord but also because of Swami's active involvement in the growth and expansion of this small enterprise.

"There were many occasions when Swami would drop in unannounced and take us completely by surprise," Prof. Habbu recalled. "One such day, He entered inside, inspected the different items on the shelves and finally His eyes rested on the handkerchiefs, which were all of different colours. Swami next put His hand on these kerchiefs and looked at me. I instantly got the message; Swami was not happy with that bunch. The same evening, I collected all the eight dozen handkerchiefs and rushed to the city. I returned with only white kerchiefs and placed them in their place in the store."

"After two days, Swami came again. Like on many occasions, He casually looked at the various shelves, and finally His eyes fell on the white handkerchiefs. Now, He looked at me and smiled. For me, it was a day of great joy."

"On another occasion, Swami suddenly started walking towards our store about forty five minutes after the evening *darshan*. We had just then concluded our business and the whole area was actually very untidy. The table was full of articles and now there was no time as Swami was already close by. So, we immediately dumped everything underneath the table and placed a nice table cloth on top."

"Not even a few seconds had passed and Swami came in. Like always, He looked around, smiled, talked to one or two boys, and seemed very happy. And then, just before He left, with a mischievous smile, He simply lifted the table cloth and said, 'What a mess!' But, thankfully, He continued to smile as He left the premises. The plays of the All-knowing Lord were numerous and at the same time, it was He who protected, guided and guarded us."

"There is one incident here which I can never forget. This was probably in 1978 or 79. Every year on May 29, we prayed to Swami to visit the store as that was the anniversary day. But in that particular year, Swami had already visited us a week earlier, and so when we requested Him for this special visit,

He simply said, 'I already went a week ago.' We pleaded again, but all we received was a smile.

"Just the day before, on May 28, our store became almost empty as the hundreds of boys attending the summer course had bought out everything. I saw that there were absolutely no notebooks. So, I went to the city and purchased Rs. 10,000 worth of books. I loaded them into a mini truck and started my journey back to Brindavan. After a few kilometers, the truck suddenly stopped. Unfortunately, this happened in a very isolated area. The driver tried his best to fire the engine, but the vehicle would just not start. Finally, he told me to push the vehicle, while he tried to control the steering with one hand.

"For me it was no easy task. Mind you, I was 51 at that time and it was 1.30 in the afternoon in the hottest month of the year. At this time, usually, one would not find anyone even walking on the streets, let alone pushing a truck! In any case, I went through that ordeal, and while I was sweating it out a thought came to me: 'Swami, at least because of what I am going through here, please do come to the store tomorrow'. This prayer just emerged from my heart spontaneously.

"And after pushing for a kilometer or two, fortunately there was a slope and the driver told me to sit inside. Now, the truck began to work and without any more hurdles we reached Brindavan.

"All the items were arranged very neatly in the shelves the next day, and we eagerly waited for Bhagavan's arrival. But we were not sure, so we kept praying. After the morning *darshan* was over that day, to our delight, Swami started walking towards our store. Oh! Can you imagine our joy at that time! As soon as He came, I said, 'Swami, I am so grateful that You have come.' And do you know what Swami said? 'You prayed so hard, I had to come.' And He repeated this very lovingly 2-3 times as he stepped inside the building."

Prof. Habbu – The Most Principled and Inspiring First Principal of Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam

These were only a tiny glimpse of the glorious moments and grace that the Lord bestowed on Prof. Habbu during the first nine years of His physical proximity with the Lord. It is after this memorable first innings, when Bhagavan personally guided him at every step and imparted many precious lessons, directly and indirectly, that He brought this efficient instrument of His to Prasanthi Nilayam. Now, the Lord entrusted him with the highly responsible position of being the principal of His own school.

"In the very first week of my tenure Swami told me 'speak everyday in the assembly'," Prof. Habbu recalled. And this, the dedicated professor did, sincerely and unsurpassably.

"I vividly remember his inspiring speeches to students," says Mr. Ram Mohan Rao, a senior teacher of the school. "His talks were so full of love for the

country and devotion towards Bhagavan. He elevated the students by his stirring descriptions of the Indian freedom struggle. He would speak from his heart with tremendous feeling and that would definitely touch every student."

"Without Habbu Sir, I would not have been what I am today," says Lt. Colonel Jogeshwar Kar, who completed his education in Swami's school in 1989. "He inspired through his conduct and speech, and preached only what he practiced. For me, he was a *Karmaveer*, a hero in the performance of his duties. Without the training and discipline he instilled in me, I would have never been able to endure four years of training at the NDA (National Defence Academy) and IMA (Indian Military Academy) without a moment of frustration or depression and become an officer in the Indian Army. I feel humbled and proud to have been nurtured by such a great soul who was an institution by himself."

Prof. Habbu was a very strict disciplinarian, undoubtedly. But unlike many of that tribe, he was loved immensely too. "He was a hard task master with a kind heart. Students did not mind being taken to task by him since they knew he loved them genuinely and selflessly," explains Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy, the current warden of the Brindavan campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University.

"The greatest facet of his personality was he taught every value by his own example," says Dr KVSS Sai Kiran, a school alumnus who is currently a Cardiothoracic Surgeon in Swami's Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi. He goes on to amplify this and says, "There was not even a single day when he was not present in the school before we reached it. Not a day would pass without our having an experience of a lifetime with him, because there was never a day he was not available! He meant so much to each one of us...even now if I close my eyes, I can visualize his inspiring personality...the tall figure in crisp *khadi* whites, meticulously cleaned, starched and pressed to perfection, a diary and a couple of books in his left hand hugged to his chest, an upright and confident stride with his head held aloft but the eyes looking at the road ahead always, and lips constantly uttering 'Sai Ram, Sai Ram'."

He was perhaps the last surviving sincere Gandhian of Modern India, feels Mr. Partish Kumar Dubey. After he was moved to Prasanthi Nilayam, Prof. Habbu's daily routine would begin at 4 a.m. and after his morning prayers at home, he would be in time for the Suprabhatam in the Prasanthi Mandir. Immediately after this, he would go to the ground to oversee the jogging and morning exercises of the boys, and at 7 a.m. he would be back in Mandir for morning *darshan*. After this, he would rush home to have his breakfast and at 8 a.m. he would be in school, much before the students arrived. "I still remember, in all the nine years I was the principal, there were two days when I was late to school because of problems at home," Prof. Habbu said recalling his principalship. And everyday, he would address the students in the assembly for at least 5-6 minutes. Similarly, in the evenings, after the *bhajan* session in the Mandir, he would again visit the class and monitor the extra classes being conducted for a few boys, and then accompany all these students till the hostel gate as he felt that was his responsibility. And very

often he would visit the hostel in the night to interact and inspire the students to rise up to their potential.

"He truly believed that 'Hard work is the only investment that never fails'," says Mr. P. Satyanarayana, a school alumnus. "I remember Habbu Sir's daily visits to the hostel during our pre-final exams (around Jan – Feb, 1990). On these evenings, he would make it a point to speak to each one of us to ascertain our progress and plan of action for the ensuing exam. He would suggest corrective action to ensure that we do not fall behind schedule. What was also amazing about him was his remarkable memory; he would remember what each one of us had discussed with him regarding their academic progress. And these hostel rounds were done by him religiously, almost on a daily basis."

Therefore, it was never before 10 or 11 in the night that Habbu Sir returned home to have his dinner. His dedication to Swami's mission was impeccable.

"The goal of education," he said, "was to promote the all round development of each and every student, and make them physically strong, emotionally stable, intellectually sharp and spiritually advanced." This was his guiding principle and he literally struggled day and night working towards this objective.

It was he who started the morning jogging and *suryanamaskar* exercises for all the boys, under Swami's direction and guidance. In 1986, when Swami decided to deliver discourses on the 12th and 17th chapters of Bhagavad Gita, he took the initiative to teach all the verses of these chapters to the students, and finally when the boys chanted them in His presence, Swami was immensely pleased. Again, when Mr. Veda Narayana joined the school, he immediately started the practice of teaching Vedic hymns to the students in the school assembly itself. Similarly, when a westerner Mr. Drucker from USA volunteered to teach Christmas carols to the students, he gave him his complete support and the boys sang so well that since then the morning of the Christmas day has always been earmarked for the boys.

He also started the concept of SUPW hours wherein students engaged in Socially Useful Productive Work every week. Dr. Sai Kiran recalls, "There were some days when we used to weed out 'parthenium plants' from the school playground, and our dear Habbu Sir would join hands with us in doing this, even though it was very hot in the afternoon."

There was not a single student who came to the school or to the Mandir without combing his hair well or wearing a dress that was untidy. The enforcement of discipline during his time was complete.

While the boys developed their skills in various extra curricular activities and appreciated the value of time and discipline, he never allowed academics to falter. In fact, Habbu Sir devised ingenious ways of pairing up strong and weak students, and conducting separate tutor-ward sessions frequently to ensure that every student performed to the best of his ability.

When the school achieved 100 % first class results in 1991, the smile that lit up Swami's face was indescribable. "It was a sight for the gods to see! When I placed the results in His hand, He was so full of joy!" Habbu Sir recalled with jubilation and continued, "He went from one end of the building to the other and proudly displayed the results to all the elders present. More than 600 people witnessed this spectacle. When I returned to Puttaparthi, I called a meeting of all the teachers and said, 'To give those five minutes of pure joy to Bhagavan, we have to work tirelessly for 364 days, 23 hours and 55 minutes.' And in the next year, the results were fantastic. More than 80% of the students had secured above 80% and 27 students were awarded 90% and more. The school had truly scaled a new peak, and Swami, of course, was delighted. But at the same time, now He raised the bar for us."

"Currently, for the last five years, the school has been achieving 95% distinction apart from 100% first class," says Mr. Sivaramakrishnaiah, the present principal of the school, and adds, "The school is what it is today because of Swami's grace and the noble traditions established by Prof. Habbu."

"He was a strict disciplinarian, no doubt, but he was extremely fair to each and every student. Beneath his strict external attire lay the warmth heart of a loving father," says Partish. Recalling one instance, Ajishnu, another alumnus, says, "I was then in my 9th grade and I had just returned from my winter break. After I alighted from the bus that carted us from Bangalore to Puttaparthi, to my great disappointment, I found my luggage missing. I was actually devastated, because the suitcase contained all my essentials – clothes, goodies from home, et al.

"And so I turned up next day at the morning assembly in a peculiar fashion – I was the only boy in a colored trouser. Of course, it caught Habbu Sir's eye. When I explained to him my situation, he calmly asked me to sit down. During the lunch break, he called me again and told me to meet him after evening *darshan*. When I saw him that evening, he asked me to walk along with him.

"I was curious as to where we were going, but did not feel bold enough to ask. At the end of our brief trip, I found myself in a tailoring shop, with Sir instructing him to stitch for me two pairs of whites. I was really moved.

"The story does not end there. A few weeks passed, and one morning I was informed that my luggage was safe; it was actually sitting at the travel agency's office in Bangalore! I was overjoyed and later found that behind this find was the persistent inquiry silently initiated by Habbu Sir. He truly cared for each one of us."

Such stories of Habbu Sir's genuine concern are numerous. To quote just one more instance, here is what Dr. Surendra Patnaik, a school alumnus, now an Orthopaedic Surgeon at East Surrey Hospital, Redhill, UK, says:

"Habbu Sir would take personal interest in our academic progress from our IX grade itself as the next year we would be writing the All India CBSE examination. He used to encourage us through many ways, but despite several reminders from him, I was not entirely focused on my academics.

"One day, I was summoned to the Principal's office, and was shocked to see my father there as it was not time for vacation. On my entry into the office, I was given a stern warning and asked to improve my conduct and performance. My father was perturbed and started reprimanding me then and there. Seeing this, Habbu Sir immediately interrupted my father, and in an even more authoritative tone told him, 'You have no right to scold our children in front of us; we are well aware of the ways and we can handle our children.' That day I realized how Habbu Sir truly considered us as His own children. My eyes swell up even today as I recollect this incident. My friends from junior batches tell me that even after I graduated from the school, Habbu Sir would often mention about my academic progress to all in the school assembly. And not only that, until his last breath he kept himself abreast of the progression in my career. Such was his love; I can never forget him."

Substantiating this priceless aspect of his personality, Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy, adds, "I had the privilege of working with Prof. Habbu for four years from 1983 to 87 as the Warden of the Hostel at Prasanthi Nilayam. He truly treated his students as his own children, and I fondly remember his visits to the hostel in the evenings for spending time with sick students who could not attend classes in the school.

His son, Upendra, too was a student of the University then and resided in the hostel. Prof. Habbu was a highly responsible parent who expected his son to be an ideal student in every sense. His strictness with his son sometimes made me think that he treated his students as his children, and his children as his students! In many years of my experience as the warden of four hostels under the divine auspices of Bhagavan Baba, I have very rarely come across such parents. He was absolutely exceptional."

The virtues of this chosen instrument of the Lord are many. Yes, he was a man of principles, integrity and discipline who worked very hard. But he also had a fine sense of humour. The current principal, Mr. Sivaramkrishnaiah recalls, "On some days when we would finish the work quickly and start to leave, he used to joke saying, 'If we go too early, at home they might think that we have lost the job!'"

Prof. Habbu – A Marvel of a Man, Multifaceted and Caring

With old age catching up, in 1993, Prof. Habbu handed over the reins of the school to Mr. Y. Sivaramkrishnaiah under divine directions. Still, he continued to teach history in the Sri Sathya Sai University. Remembering those days, Mr. Biju Mukund, says,

"I had the good fortune of being his student through school and also in my degree course where he was specially appointed to teach us History. His

classes were full of life. From personal experiences, to current socio-economic situations, to debates on historical events, he had a technique to seamlessly interface topics into the right context and make us think. As time went by we experienced Habbu Sir in every form - the strict general in school, a scholar, patriot, sportsman, spiritual seeker, devotee, and most of all, a child. For me, he remains a friend who held my hand when no one was ready to take me across a very difficult time of my life. I salute this soldier of Swami's army who has given me and thousands of students a proud legacy which we will take forward in our personal and professional lives."

During this period when Prof. Habbu was busy in the university, he was also, for a brief period, head of the Hostel Management Committee.

Mr. Shiva Shankar Sai, the current warden of the Senior Boys Hostel in Prasanthi Nilayam, who worked very closely with him during those days, says, "Prof. Habbu had such a great sense of wit and humor that I could not help loving him deeply. Besides, I learnt my first lessons in management of the hostel from him. He was very particular about the quality of food prepared. He would daily go for a round in the dinning hall during the dinning sessions and find out for himself from the boys about the quality of the preparations. He would then pass on all the feedback to the kitchen management for immediate action and improvement."

The Man with a Heart of Gold

It is these subtle but very significant traits which endeared him to everyone. He was a man who always governed not from his head, but from his heart.

"Even as we grew up to complete our studies and take up careers in the world, the bond with Habbu Sir remained as strong as ever," says Partish and adds, "He would always enquire about our family and careers, and remind us of Swami's words and expectations from His students. Not only that he would invite us to his home and make tea for us himself! We really felt like his very own children."

Another alumnus, Mr. S.B.S.S. Madhav, adds, "When I visited him at his house in July 2007, even though he was recuperating from a surgery, he insisted that he make some tea for us and he did make great tea! What a noble man he was!"

"The last time I saw him was in July 2008. And my meeting with him often ended with 'I have got something for you', and he would then pull out a small calendar photo of Swami from his shirt pocket and hand it over saying, 'Next time, stay here longer'," says Mr. Rakendu Suren, a student who graduated from the school in 1989.

Even after being relieved of duties in the hostel in 1994 because of his ill-health, upon his recovery, Prof. Habbu continued to teach history in the University for many years. But he was not happy with this; he wanted to do more. And so, with the help of a band of enthusiastic youngsters, he started a

village empowerment programme in the neighbouring rural areas of Puttaparthi. Often he would go to these under developed hamlets, collect the children and provide them basic education as well as train them with Vedic hymns. And He continued to do this almost till his last breadth, even after he was diagnosed with cancer in July 2007.

A Rare Divine Farewell

"Father was 82 years when he was diagnosed with advanced bone metastatic prostate cancer," shares Ms. Sumana, Prof. Habbu's daughter. Patients, in such cases, usually suffer excruciating pain in their bones. Actually, when one is in the terminal stage, even morphine cannot suppress the suffering. But father did not experience any pain till his very end.

"During every bone-scan, which was done once in three months, the doctors would advise father to visit the hospital immediately if he experienced severe pain. But such a situation never arose. And that is probably because he was already on divine therapy; the daily *darshans* of Swami, for him, were tranquilizers with 'potency infinity'.

"The progress of the cancer could be ascertained only from the scans as he didn't seem to suffer any more or less as time progressed. It was as if Swami was taking him through his karmic experience without letting him feel the real impact.

"But father's health took a downward slope a week after Swami's 83rd Birthday celebrations. He actually stopped going to Mandir; he was no more inclined to see Swami physically. Even when we made repeated requests to him to have His *darshan*, he simply said, 'I will see Swami on December 31'. We have never understood from where he got that date.

"But, on December 31, he was in the I.C.U. and his body's vitals were constantly monitored. When he recovered from the semi-conscious state that morning, he realized that he wasn't able to see Bhagavan's photo on the wall from his bed because his view was blocked by a pillar. There was actually a large photograph of Swami sitting on the swing. Not being able to see Swami's picture bothered him a lot and he called out, 'Baba, I am unable to see you! I am not able to see you!' What really happened after this is known only to him and Swami.

"However, in his own words, father said, 'Swami got up from the swing, in flesh and blood, came down, blessed me and returned to His seat on the swing.' He kept stressing on 'in flesh and blood'. He called out to the sisters and said, 'Look, Swami is here.' That very day, in the afternoon, Swami sent vibhuti for father.

"At first, I wasn't sure of the authenticity of father's words as I thought he was still in a state of delirium. But his face was radiant. It was only two days later, when he was shifted back to the Urology ward and was his normal self, and then recollected the entire incident again very clearly that I realized Swami

had indeed chosen to give him *darshan* on that appointed day as per his wish. It was as if the Lord was telling him 'I am seeing you' when he was in the ICU.

"On January 3, when father was still in the Urology ward, his former students from Swami's school and college came to see him, and he immediately remembered each student by his name. But that was not all. He also recollected their basketball scores! And finally, He said, 'Swami has great expectations from you. He wants His students to be torchbearers of His Mission. Don't fall short of meeting His expectations.'

"On January 4, father went into a semi-conscious state and shut his eyes. He completely stopped intake of food. He would also not respond to any questions, but if someone were to whisper 'Sairam' in his ears, he would respond with a 'Sairam.' In fact, that was the only word that escaped his mouth.

"Two days later, he was admitted in the ICU again because of hemorrhaging of the stomach. Swami again sent vibhuti, but now with instructions that *bhajans* should be played continuously by his side.

"On the next day, January 7, which was sacred as Vaikuntha Ekadashi (the day when, in the days of yore, Swami materialized *amritha* and personally gifted to all the devotees), father merged at His Lotus Feet. The kind Lord sent vibhuti and white *dhoti* for the funeral, with specific instructions that he should be draped in the white *dhoti* after the ceremonial bath, and that the sacred vibhuti should be smeared on him.

In a solemn procession, amidst Veda chants and *bhajans*, he went on his final journey to Him."

It was a divine farewell that the Lord awarded to His dedicated devotee. There was never a moment in Prof. Habbu's life when his lips were not busy chanting His name or reciting a *mantra*. He never forgot the Lord and the Lord too was with him till his last moment. "Prof. Habbu is a role model for all those who decide to lead a spiritual life," says Prof. Anil Kumar, and adds, "I have never seen him indulge in any unnecessary talk. His lips were always chanting. He was really a personification of ideal spiritual practice; the very metaphor of *namasmarana*."

Prof. Habbu was an ideal in life and in death. Just like the ones who have seen Gandhiji can never forget him in their lives, the ones who were privileged to be associated with Habbu Sir, or at least seen him at work, will carry him in their hearts till there is blood flowing in their veins. He continues and will continue to inspire thousands of students to be ramrod straight in their gait and character, and yet be filled with softness in their voice and heart. The 'H' in Habbu verily stood for 'Heart'.

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 16

Living Up to the Challenge of Conscience in Daily Life

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

In our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories from around the globe. These included the experiences of Mrs. Priya K-Aldis, Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani, Mr. Karthik Ramesh, Mr. Amar Vivek, Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam, Mr. Hiten Morarji, Mr. N. Prabhakar, Mr. Sathya Jambunathan, Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi, A courageous woman executive (Part 11), Mr. Shalabh Mittal, Mr. P. S. Kannan, Mr. Sai Mudigonda and an anonymous charity board member (Part 15).

Pledged to put into practice the most precious of Swami's teachings, Love, with every fibre of his being, the writer of the current article takes us on a fascinating journey through rare and intense experiences which have tested his resolve to live by the principle of love, whatever be the moral or physical challenge. This account vividly illustrates the power of the conscience when it has been vivified by adherence to human values. Each one of us loves miracles, we are at awe when we hear about them or even see them, but wish if only we could do them. Well, this present author proves that it is possible, not through parables of the bygone eras, but by his own personal experiences. Read it, this is surely exciting!

MAKING MIRACLES IN LIFE...THROUGH LOVE

By Mr. Vivekananda Sahoo

The writer of the following article is an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University. Mr. Vivekananda Sahoo joined the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School in 1996 and went on to do his Bachelors in Commerce in the Brindavan campus of Sri Sathya Sai University in 1998. After completing his graduation there, he moved on to the Prasanthi Nilayam campus to pursue his Masters in Business Management during the years 2001-03. He has worked in leading IT Multi National Companies managing the organizations' corporate strategic efforts. Currently he is the Head, Business Development and Strategic Initiatives at RuralShores, an organization which is a socio-economic venture to bring job opportunities to rural youth in the BPO sector. He is also a Director of a Non Government Organisation, "Prem Daan Sansthan" and Founder member of Sai Anandam Trust (an orphanage for small children), Orissa.

"Love in speech is truth. Love in action is righteousness. Love in thought is peace. Love in understanding is non-violence.

Of these five vital principles, Love is the foremost. It is Love that flows as the under-current for the other four values. How does it flow this way? When Love is associated with our thoughts, it manifests itself as Truth. When Love is associated with feelings, it produces Peace. When Love animates actions, it results in Right Action. When Love is combined with understanding, it becomes Non-violence. Therefore, whenever you feel angry, think of love, develop thoughts of love in your heart. You will have peace."

– *Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

What has appealed to me most about Love is its aspect of being unconditional and needing no requital. It is that aspect of the universe which connects us back to every strand and fibre of the universe; it is this unconditional state of human nature, and a form of knowledge that is always there for us. It is, in fact, inherent in every man

Over a period of time, living with this eternal value and expressing it in my daily life has been my constant endeavor. Of course, there have been challenging and difficult times in the process of practicing this, but I have experienced that as we continue to send out love, the energy returns to us in a regenerating spiral. Be it in the workplace or home, if we can tap into this huge reservoir of energy in our day to day existence, it keeps one in perfect balance and harmony. Love is not a mechanical force which like a software programme runs our life; it takes lot of effort, constant awareness of our true being and loads of practice. It's just the way I learnt riding my bicycle and doing gymnastics. The entire universe is the playground that allows this practice. Everyone we meet in our life is either a coach or a teammate presented to us to help us better the game. In this exercise, Love is the tool, and what is more, love is the *end* product too.

Love in Speech Is Truth

Soon after my Masters in Business Administration from the Sri Sathya Sai University, Puttaparthi, I joined a UK-based IT Multi National Company as a management trainee. We were a team of 8 people responsible for providing all support to the top executives of the Company in decision making. We prepared key reports which were used by the finance department as input for billing the clients. Along with another senior colleague, I used to access a common system to communicate with the onsite client and receive the relevant documents from them.

Once, unfortunately owing to communication gap, we missed a mail that contained vital information about the billing details of an important customer account. And as expected this had a major impact on the entire billing cycle; there was a discrepancy of Rs. 2 Million in the books. Only a few days later when I came across the above mentioned mail, did I realize this omission. I was aghast and very nervous imagining the possible consequences it would

have on all of us. I shared this with my senior colleague and his first reaction was to sweep this under the carpet and feign complete ignorance.

I was feeling very uncomfortable with the way we were dealing with the situation. I mustered all courage and told my senior that we should go and explain everything in detail to our manager and seek his guidance to address the entire issue. He looked at me and said, "I have been working here for the past 7 years and you joined just a few months ago. It will be foolishness to go to the manager and open our mouths; we will simply lose our jobs. So, just keep quiet about this whole episode and it will all resolve by itself."

It seemed a very logical way of survival but I knew that there was something fundamentally wrong in this approach; I was unable to bring myself to accept this suggestion. I tried reasoning it out with him but he almost threatened me emotionally, and said that I had no right to jeopardize his career along with mine. I spent a sleepless night. I was sure that if I don't deal with this situation right now, my other team mates would be affected adversely. And the biggest impact will be on my manager. He will be held accountable for this entire mishap. I prayed and introspected so that I have the courage to do the right thing. And at that particular moment a wave of energy flooded my being; it was a strong wish for the well being of my managers and other team mates. If I look back now, I know it was a trickle of that unconditional love which gave me inner strength and permission to be who I was and express myself without any fear. The next day the first thing I walked into my manager's cabin and disclosed to him the entire fiasco. He was exasperated and shocked. Controlling his fury, he blurted out, "How can you all be so irresponsible? This is very disappointing."

However, we then got into damage control mode and first communicated to the concerned authorities at all levels about this lapse. Then we started working to make sure that the data was processed and sent across to the required department. And sure enough in the next few hours what looked like an impossible task was done. All it required was a little courage, presence of mind and love.

Later, my manager called me and said, "I was initially very disappointed with the negligence, but I am extremely happy that you had the courage to admit it and take accountability for what had happened. And the management has decided to entrust to you with one of our most important and biggest customer accounts from here on." It was unbelievable that this most coveted customer landed on my lap despite the fact that I was the junior-most person in the entire team.

My stint in this company played a significant role in living the values that I had learnt during my stay at Sri Sathya Sai University. The entire team expressed a lot of confidence in me and my abilities. The people, who a year back were of the view that I was completely ineffective, were now freely sharing their personal and professional thoughts with me. I was their confidante partly because I believe I just listened to them without any judgment and biases in my mind. This is what I had learnt from my Master, Bhagavan Baba.

In fact, the Director of HR went on record to say “I do not know why, but the students from Sri Sathya Sai University are so unique and completely different. In my entire corporate life I have come across many professionals, but never witnessed the display of a sterling character like you boys have. Parents like me have a vision for our children and it's a comfortable life, success and money. It's a conglomeration of consumer durables, all comforts that modern life can offer, a great career and the citizenship of a developed country. Success, to start with is, academics: ranks, stars, medals, and the work, soon followed by career options. But after seeing the students of this University it has made me realize that I would be a proud mother if my son possesses a character like you all. “

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Love in Action Is Righteousness

It was during the summer holidays, of my final year Bachelors of Commerce degree in the Brindavan Campus of Sri Sathya Sai University. The exams had ended and the holidays had begun, but the majority of us had decided to stay back in Brindavan as Bhagavan Baba was there. This was until one fine evening. We were seated around Baba in Trayee Brindavan that day when He asked our warden “Why are these boys here? They should go home.” Then He looked at us and said, “All of you leave for your home towns by tomorrow.”

We replied prayerfully, “Swami, this is our home.” He said, “Yes, this is your home....but you must also go and be with your parents, serve them and make them happy too.” Then He again looked at the warden and said, “Make sure all these boys leave home tomorrow. “Later, our warden called us and said that we must leave for our home towns immediately as per Swami's directions. “Please book your tickets immediately and make the necessary preparations,” he told us.

There were no confirmed tickets available. I boarded the train and approached the Train Ticket Examiner to confirm reservation for my ticket from the next station, since a few seats were getting vacant. The Ticket Examiner said, “Sure, but you have to pay Rs.300”. I was surprised, and asked him as to why I should pay this amount, when I already had a ticket”. He was irked at my statement and, looking at me irritably, said, “I don't have time to waste. Do you want a seat or not? If yes, then better pay the price and you will have your seat right now. If not, don't bother me and ruin my time.”

I looked at him straight into his eyes and told him, “Sir, do you think your life will be wonderful with this extra money? You think you can live with many more comforts? One can never digest the money earned in this *adharmic* (or unrighteous) way. I am not hoping anything bad for you or your family. I am

genuinely concerned about you, and hence I want to tell you the way nature reacts. Any money which has been earned in an unscrupulous way can never be relished; it would get spent in meeting the expenses of sudden illness, accidents of loved ones or such other unexpected circumstances. This cash will spell more troubles in the longer run for you than anything else. When you protect *dharma* (righteousness), *dharma* protects you.”

I said with confidence and no fear. For a moment, there was absolute silence. And then I don't know what exactly happened, but this gentleman just took out the ticket receipt and gave me my confirmed seat berth. It did not stop here; he did the same for every other passenger without taking a single penny more than the official fare.

Looking back I now realize that he might have felt a glint of that love and concern that I had for him and his family, which would have clearly reflected in my eyes.

Our true identity is to love without fear and insecurity.

Our true identity is to love without fear and insecurity. Our higher potential finds us when we set our course in that direction. The power of love and compassion transforms insecurity. For me, life in the Sri Sathya Sai Hostel was all about getting to know people and trusting them to be what they are. And the valuable lessons of life that were instilled in me during my stay there have brought forth beautiful virtues in my characters which were always there but hidden. And these have now become powerful assets in my personality.

Many a time in life, we judge or form opinions about everything and everyone. And at those times, it looks like nothing else but the truth. When I was working in my second organisation, there was an individual, in my team, who had the reputation of messing any work that was allotted to him. I called him near one day and said, “You are going to play a major role in this entire session. And I genuinely feel that you are the perfect fit for this job. All the best.” That day, his performance not only surprised everyone, but was also way beyond anyone's imagination. He excelled at the job.

Later in the evening, as I was about to leave after the program, he came over and held my hands. There were tears in his eyes, and he said, “I will never forget what you have done to me and my life. Whatever I did today was just because you had expressed your confidence in me.”

Life will have amazing and extraordinary results, provided we do things which are beyond the rationale of our views and opinions. There are miracles waiting to happen. There is a wonderful law of nature which states that the three things we crave most in our lives - happiness, freedom, and peace of mind – are attained only by giving them to others.

There is a wonderful law of nature. The three things we crave most in life - happiness, freedom, and peace of mind – are attained by giving them to others.

Love in Understanding Is Non-Violence

In my previous company, I was involved in a lot of strategic initiatives. One day, all the employees received a common mail from an anonymous email id. This letter, which can be termed as very vindictive and venomous, was directed against me and some other key people in the organization. It clearly looked like the work of a frustrated employee whose designs and expectations were thwarted. Later, accidentally, I stumbled upon some evidence which clearly pointed towards the person who was involved in this malicious work. That individual was actually a friend and colleague with whom I shared a very good rapport and relationship.

I had the urge in me to confront this person and take him to task, but I never did that. I knew that if I brought this to the notice of the management, his career would get ruined. He would be blacklisted as our company would file a legal suit against him and no organisation would give him a job.

On this occasion, I chose love over vindictiveness.

"I am in the image of my Lord – an image of unconditional love and joy. And no matter whatever be the provocation I will allow only this possibility of love to be expressed to all around me."

It was not easy to overcome the feelings to humiliate him and pay him back in his coins. The only thing that I kept repeating to myself was "I am in the image of my Lord – an image of unconditional love and joy. And no matter whatever be the provocation I will allow only this possibility of love to be expressed to all around me." Whenever I met this colleague of mine, I just allowed myself to love him without any bias or revulsion. I think, this unexpected behavior of mine dissolved the hatred or complaints that he nurtured in his heart. On one occasion, he came and expressed his gratitude to me, and shared with me how I had shaped his career and supported him. Even though he never acknowledged or owned up his misdemeanour, he hugged me and emphasized that I should always consider him as my younger brother. We both still share a wonderful relationship based on transparency and trust.

"To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love. In return, you will receive untold peace and happiness."

It was again summer vacation time. I was waiting on platform 1 of the Bangalore Railway station waiting for my train to arrive. It was early morning, around 6 a.m. and there weren't many passengers in the station. It wore quite a deserted look. As I was munching a sandwich, I noticed two elderly ladies

walking past me. And then, I heard a sound of an anklet falling on the ground. I noticed that it was a silver anklet and looked quite expensive too; it lay behind in the trail. As I was about to rise and collect the precious belonging and give it back to the owner, I saw a railway sweeper quickly picking it up.

He looked at the two ladies and walked towards them. I thought that he was going to return them their jewel, but to my utter dismay, he slipped the anklet into the huge pocket of his overcoat, and nonchalantly walked past the ladies. Soon, another person joined him. He was very well built and looked intimidating. I got up and walked up to these two men and told them to hand over the anklet to me. The guy growled at me and looking at me menacingly, said, "What do you want?" "What I want from you is very well known to you!" I said, without getting perturbed.

"Do they belong to you?" he asked, and continued, "You better mind your own business." Without flinching a bit, effortlessly I replied, "Yes, the anklet belongs to my mother. Hand it over right now." The man was then taken aback and pulled out the silver from his pocket.

When I walked over and handed back the jewel to the ladies, they were surprised! Only then she realized that indeed an anklet was missing from her left leg. They thanked me profusely, and as I was about to leave, she asked me, "Are you a Sai Student?" Now, it was my turn to be taken aback! They said, "We are Sai devotees, and I just felt that you must be His student."

The crisis, as well as the opportunity, of our time is to surrender our ego and conditioned fear mechanisms to the primary torsion energy of unconditional love that is seeking to evolve us and is calling us as a species home.

Love in Thought Is Peace

I was on a business trip to Munich in 2007. My company deployed me there to perform the due diligence for the acquisition of another company.

Our team would have food together, which would usually spill over to drinks. I was cordial and always had food with them, but would never indulge in liquor. One evening, the Chief Technology Officer, who had a reputation of being quite a boisterous and demanding person, joined us for dinner. During the few days that I had worked with him, I found that he was always very dominant in every conversation. During this particular dinner, he told me, "You have come to Germany and if you don't drink beer, it's a personal insult to me." He insisted that I drink as he said he cannot stand teetotalers. I replied, "I will do so, but you have to answer a question of mine." He nodded amusingly.

"How was your relationship with your father? If I am not wrong, I feel he probably would have never allowed you to express yourself. He would have been very dominant and now, you behave with everyone around you, the same way your father used to behave with you. Is this the case?"

For a moment, he was stunned and tongue-tied. He said with surprise in his voice – “How do you know this? Yes, my father was very overriding and never allowed me to do what I wanted to do in life. And I bear a grievance against him. Whenever I interact with someone, I just am the way he was to me. And because of this I have had a failed marriage; my children don't love me and my colleagues don't like me. To me, my entire life has been trying to impose myself on others in every sphere of life – at office, home, be it anywhere. I am sorry I tried to force you into something that you did not want to do.”

Even today when I think of this incident I don't think I did anything magical. All I did was relate myself completely with the person and listen to him, and allow myself to reach out to him without any preconceived notions or view points. Shouldn't we lead a life that is lived in the joyous expression of our divinity which is absolute awareness and unconditional love. Any other life is utterly missing the point of being born in His Image.”

A tranquil mind, a truth-filled speech, and a body dedicated to love and service - one who has these three qualities is described as the embodiment of ‘Triputi’ (the Triple purity). Such a one is the noblest of human beings. – Baba

Making Life a Miracle of Love

“I separated myself from myself to love myself...” This particular declaration of Bhagavan Baba is very dear to my heart and gives me all the inspiration to strive in living a life suffused with love. Whomever I meet, I know it will be Him and Him alone – my Beloved Lord.

Albert Einstein said, “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” And truly every episode our life would turn into something absolutely fabulous if only we maintain our focus on this supreme virtue – Love.

And we can love all and serve all, as Bhagavan Baba always advises us, if we are pure; if we strive to be egoless; and learn to allow the inner power within us to work for us. If we care for conscience, we can be sure we will always be pure, and our life will be a wonder - a life that is the expression of His love.

*Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure,
knowing that Thy living touch is upon all my limbs.
I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts,
knowing that Thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my
mind.
I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in
flower, knowing that Thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.
And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions,
knowing it is Thy power gives me strength to act.*

- Sri Rabindranath Tagore

SERIAL ARTICLES

SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PART 5

(Continued from the previous issue)

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

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

We have now meticulously compiled and categorised these questions, and Prof. G. Venkataraman has offered to answer all these queries in a structured and systematic way as a series on Radio Sai as well as in H2H. In this way, these answers now remain always on our website as a ready reckoner on spiritual doubts. This is a suitably adapted transcript of our radio series bearing the same name.

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. Welcome once more to our Q and A session and this time we have three questions in our bag. As earlier, the questions broadly touch upon the same theme, and of course, therefore have some overlap. I shall first read out the three questions and then take them up for response, one by one. The questions I shall be dealing with today are as follows:

QUESTION 1: How can we make the *atma* control the mind and the body?

QUESTION 2: Why is man still attached to the world when he knows well that he must reach God?

QUESTION 3: How can we understand the principle of "I AM I"?

Let me start with the first question namely, how do we put the *atma* in the driving seat and make it control our mind, senses, and the body? Evidently, the questioner knows, as Swami has told us ever so often, that the human being is a composite of three entities, namely the gross body plus the senses, the subtle mind and the even more subtle *atma*, that forms the core, as it were, of our personality, and indeed our entire nature.

The question now is among these three, who bosses whom and what is the pecking order? There are basically two options, the first of which is *atma* first, mind next, and body-cum-senses last; in fact this is the order God wants us to

follow. However, in reality, more than 99 % of humans adopt a different hierarchy in which the body and the senses come first, the mind next, and as for the *atma*, it is sidelined if not shut out.

God wants us to follow a particular hierarchy with good reason; and that reason is that this approach would lead us to Him, and eventually unite us with Him; and once that happens, we would be in bliss for ever. Of course, this is not a cakewalk and one has to strive hard, an important portion of which is strict sense and mind control. Both the senses and the mind do not like this discipline one bit, and that precisely is where all the troubles start. It was thousands of years ago, and it is so even now; only, the difficulties of taming the mind at the present time have become Himalayan, thanks to huge industries that have come up for pandering to the senses. And of course there is the media which constantly parades all these “goodies and attractions” both via titillating stories and massive advertising. What the questioner wants to know is how, in the midst of this huge storm created by the wrong hierarchy, can one stick to the agenda that God want us to, which is to put *atma* in the primary place.

This is a very good question and I would like to deal with it in stages. Firstly, why do the senses and the mind gain ascendance over the individual and manage to establish themselves on the throne reserved for the *atma*? Next, what happens as a result? And finally, how to set things right, which is really what the questioner wants to know.

It all starts with the fact that everyone without exception always wants to be happy; I mean who would want to be miserable and strive for mental depression? On the other hand, people do make a lot of effort to seek happiness. The question now becomes, “Where do I find this happiness?” Even as one is asking oneself this question, a lot of agents appear suddenly, seemingly from nowhere. Actually, these agents are lurking in the corners of the mind and waiting for an opportunity, and once they get an opening, they unleash their full marketing force.

The agency that gets busy to lead man up the garden path has no formal name but we might call it Desire Inc. The agents of this powerful corporation come out, complete with brochures and all the information one would want, and start a never-ending campaign. One agent would say, “Sir, if it is happiness you want, I can tell you where exactly to find it. It is in this bottle; just try it, and see how many heavens become accessible to you? You do not have to perform any *yagas* and *yagnas* (sacrifices or rituals) to go heaven after you die. You can have heaven right now. This is an offer you simply cannot refuse!” And so on it goes, with agents of Desire Inc. tempting humans to try sense gratification of various kinds. Man falls for this, forgetting completely why God gave him the senses and the body. Instead, he allows his senses and the mind to be completely under the control of various enemy corporations, of which Desire Inc. is just one.

So, what is the net result? It all starts off appearing to be fabulous but soon there is trouble which thereafter sticks to the individual like a leech. Once

trouble attaches itself, it is quite difficult to remove it, and so, if one were sensible and wise, he or she would do all that is necessary to avoid getting into trouble in the first place.

The reader might say, "OK, all this is fine, I know about it all since I have heard it so many times in Baba's discourses. What I want to know is how to produce a regime change, kicking out the mind from the throne and installing *atma* in its place; anyway, God intended the *atma* to sit there and rule; how do I make that happen? Got any ideas?" I must necessarily now attend to that part of the overall issue.

According to me, the first step in this is to recognise, that by having a wrong operating system, we have got it all wrong. That is to say, we must first of all be conscious of the enormous mistake we make when we keep the *atma* out and install the mind as the boss of our destiny. Having recognised this fatal mistake, we must next do all we can to make the mind vacate that spot – not easy but the effort must be made.

Now, desires invariably breed addiction; thus people acquire addiction to drinking, drugs, gambling and so on. How to get rid of these terrible and well-entrenched bad habits? Swami gives a nice strategy. He says: "Suppose every morning as you sit down with your newspaper and cup of tea, a stray dog walks into your room. It wags its tail and touched by it you throw a biscuit. The dog eats the biscuits and feels very happy. Next day, the same thing happens and soon the dog becomes a regular visitor; it has got used to the habit. Not only that, it becomes a nuisance as well. If some day you are busy doing something else, it barks loud, disturbing everybody. One day, your child might be sick and you are rushing to the doctor, but the dog is there, insisting on its feed; and incidentally, the demand of the dog has grown; it is no longer satisfied with just one biscuit; it wants many. You are now sick and tired of this dog and are desperate to get rid of the dog once and for all, but do not know how to."

Swami says there is a simple trick for dealing with this problem – just deny the dog what it is demanding from you. Next time you are with the paper and sipping tea and the dog shows up, just ignore it; the dog would do all it can including rolling over, to catch your attention but just ignore it and make it frustrated. Do it one day, two days, three days and so on; slowly, the dog would get frustrated and stop bothering you, and try to find some other "customer".

In fact, Swami has summarised this recipe into a neat formula that has just two words: *Daiva Preethi* and *Paapa Bheethi*, meaning respectively, "Love of God" and "Fear of Sin". How does this magic formula operate? Swami says it is really simple. When you love God dearly, and I really mean dearly, then when some temptation arises you would tell yourself, "Maybe I can indulge in this but would God be pleased? He would not; on the other hand, He would be most disappointed, saying I gave this fellow this most precious life so that he could purify himself and become united with Me for ever; instead, he is simply blowing away his golden opportunity!" In short, the first step in

restoring control back to the *atma* is to develop a strong love for God. This love must not be an intermittent affair, like erratic electric power that comes on and goes off quite unpredictably. On the contrary, it must be both strong and steady.

OK, what about the second part of the formula, namely the *Paapa Bheethi* or "Fear of Sin"? Well, that is a natural corollary to love for God, is it not? I mean if we really love God, how can one ever indulge in sin? Thus, fear of sin must go hand in hand with love for God. This raises an important question: "What exactly is sin?" If this question is asked, most people would rapidly list all the standard list of sins ranging from theft and stealing to gambling and adultery. All these are no doubt undesirable traits and must be avoided; however, sin means much more. In a larger sense, sin means any act that would displease God and delay our union with Him. Seen from this perspective, being selfish is a sin. Similarly, being angry or jealous is a sin and so on. In the Twelfth Chapter of the *Gita*, Lord Krishna spells out crisply all the specifications for becoming dear to Him. If we violate anyone of those, then we are committing a sin. What it all boils down to is that if we really love God, we would think a thousand times before doing anything that is not pleasing to Him. So, at the end of that somewhat elaborate discussion, I would say we just have to start loving God dearly and do all we can to stay away from anything that God would not like us to do. If we get that right, then we are well on the way to restoring the *atma* to its rightful position in the internal hierarchy!

I hope you made some sense of all that! Let me now move on to the second question which is:

Why is man still attached to the world when he knows well that he must reach God?

I believe I have earlier already touched upon aspects of the answer to this question; nevertheless, I shall repeat all that once more since this is an important question. In fact, this is a standard problem. Let me start with the second part of the question for that contains the clue. The questioner says in that part, "When he knows well that he must reach God?" I wonder. I mean if one were to do a poll and ask, say, "Do you know the purpose of life?" how many of them do you think would say the purpose of life is to go back to God? Or, suppose one asked, "Do you know that you are supposed to become one with God eventually?" I am sure 99.9999 % of the people polled would simply be unaware of it! And that is exactly where the problem really starts. So really speaking, we should first ask, "What is the purpose of life?" or "Why has God given this life?" and so on; and after having asked that question, seek to answer it seriously.

Actually, Swami has dealt with this question several times. In His discourses, Swami has often asked, "Has life been given by God to humans just for eating, drinking, sleeping and dying [*khana, peena, sonaa aur marna*]? God expects something more from the life gifted to man? What is that something?" That is what Swami has explained in detail in not only His discourses but also in many of His *Vahinis*, particularly the *Gita Vahini*. I cannot obviously deal

with all that in detail here but would confine myself to the core issue, which is the pursuit of happiness.

The famous Declaration of Rights prepared by the founding fathers of America talks of fundamental entitlements of all human beings, which includes life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Yes, much of life is conditioned by man's quest for happiness. Like most valuable things available in the market today, we have in the "happiness bazaar", if I may say so, only fake happiness. What do I mean by fake happiness? Suppose a person buys a gold ring thinking it to be made of gold, because the salesperson said so. Actually, the ring is made of brass and simply plated with gold. So, after a while, the gold covering comes off and all that remains is the brass ring! Clearly, the buyer has been taken for a ride. In the happiness market too, there is the genuine stuff and umpteen fakes.

The fake stuff is the temporary happiness that is available in plenty in the transient world, while the genuine stuff as I call it is 'bliss', is available only when one unites with God. By giving the human form to us, God in His infinite mercy is giving all of us a chance to become one with Him and enjoy permanent bliss. But man does not understand that, and, misled by the mind [which is very good at selling fakes], he gets duped and goes around looking for permanent happiness in an impermanent world. Man thinks he can get God in this world on his terms, and that is the fundamental mistake he is making. And that mistake is being made because man insists on being spiritually ignorant.

What is this ignorance am I talking about? It is the belief that what seems real, namely the world, is actually real; no, it is not. It is God who is the basis of this world, who is Real, though He might not be seen. In short, man is attached to the world on account of ignorance and delusion. He may want to reach God, but if he adopts the wrong methods, how can he?

I now come to the last question in today's session, which is:

How can we understand the principle of "I AM I"?

The phrase "I am I" might sound mystifying to many who are hearing it for the first time, and so, maybe, I should make some comments on it. Suppose you were to ask someone you come across the question, "Who are you?" Most likely, the person would begin by saying, "I am so and so," and in the process give his name. Did this man appear in this world with that name tag attached to his body? No; the name he bears, as Swami often reminds us, was given to him by his parents, after his birth.

Ask anyone his name, and he would reply, "I am Smith," or "I am Amar," or whatever. Notice, that everyone, no matter who he or she is, always starts with the word "I". It is always: I am Smith, or Amar or whatever. That "I" is common to all; bear this point in mind and I shall come back to it soon.

Let us now turn to God. God, as we all know, is both formless and nameless [it is a different matter we give Him all kinds of names!]. Suppose God were to appear before us and we ask Him, "Who are You?" How do you think He would reply? He cannot say "I am so and so" and give a name for He has none. He would simply say, "I am I". That of course would not make much sense to us; but suppose God were to put it this way: "You want to know who I am? Well, when you answer 'I am Rama' or 'I am Krishna' who is that 'I' you are referring to? Have you ever thought about that?" Understanding the "I am I" principle boils down to answering the question I just posed.

Let us go back to the answer "I am Smith," or "I am Rama" or whatever. Suppose the person says instead, "You asked me who am I? Well, I am really three entities combined into one. These entities are: 1) The *atma*, which is really the core of my personality, 2) the mind, and 3) the physical body that you see before me. If you are asking me about my body, then that body answers to the name Smith. When I go around in the world, that is the name I use for operational purposes. However, if you want to know about the Real me, that is the *atma*. Thus, even when I say, "I am Mr. Smith," I should really say, "I am really the *atma*, but this *atma* is encased in a body that goes by the name Mr. Smith. I certainly am Mr. Smith for worldly purposes, but in reality I am actually the *atma* or God." Indeed, it is in recognition of this that *Vedanta* declares, *Aham Brahmasmi*, meaning, "I am God".

Given all this background, the question I am trying to answer now becomes, "How do I realise I am God?" This is an important point. Swami has told us many times, "You are God". Surely, that fact must have registered in our heads. However, that does not mean we realise that we are God! That realisation would come only when we quite naturally act like God. What does that mean? It means we act with zero selfishness, with absolutely no anger or hatred ever to anyone, are always full of love for all, and see all to be alike, are ever compassionate and full of forbearance and so on. These things must become quite natural, almost like breathing; are we ever conscious that we are breathing? And yet we are breathing all the time, aren't we? If in the same way Pure Love becomes a natural part of our life, then we become God even if we have a body, and that body answers to a particular name, Smith, or Akbar or Rama, whatever it be.

I am not sure if I got through, but I do hope that I have at least given you enough to think about!

THE DRAMAS OF LIFE DIVINE - Part 3

Dear readers, till the December 2008 issue, in this section we serialized for you "Shirdi Sai Parthi Sai", the glorious saga of Shirdi Sai and the divine life of Sathya Sai till His early childhood. This series continued for 48 episodes, and we received very positive responses to this serial. In fact, now that the script is available, this television serial has been re-enacted as a play in many Sai centres.

Encouraged with this, we decided to continue this section and offer something in a similar format. And now, after the Divine Life story of Bhagavan Baba, it is the innumerable dramas presented in the Divine Presence by the students of Bhagavan's Schools and University, as well as by the Bal Vikas students and Sai devotees from all corners of the world. We hope the current series, which is accompanied with lots of pictures and video stills/clips, will not only make an enriching and edifying reading experience, but also will help devotees everywhere to redo these inspiring plays in their own settings with little effort. So, enjoy these divine dramas where the Divine was a keen spectator and the hidden director!

The following drama "Krishna Rayabharam: Krishna – The Peace Ambassador" was staged by the post graduate students of Sri Sathya Sai University on January 15, 2007.

The play relives the tense and momentous period which precluded the start of the Kurukshetra War between the Pandava brothers, who were aided by their beloved Lord Krishna, and the evil Kaurava clan, who were bent on their destruction. We join the fray when the Kauravas' emissary, Suyodhana, has arrived to seek Krishna's help, just at the same time as Arjuna, the trusted confidant of Krishna, enters on the same purpose.

The Cast of the Play

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

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

KRISHNA - THE PEACE AMBASSADOR – Part 1

Sports Meet Drama, 2007

Clot...clot...clot...

Vyaasa: *Satya Sai Roopena Krishnaaya Namaha.* The world recognizes me as Ved Vyaasa, the author of the greatest epic of all times. The Mahabharata that the Lord blessed me to compose is not just an ordinary story. The conflict between the forces of the good and the dark forces of evil is timeless and eternal - a daily battle going on within every being. The battle of Kurukshetra resulting ultimately in the victory of Dharma must be the fitting finale that one must seek to complete the Mahabharata of one's life.

The manas is the powerful king who can lead the individual to either peace or utter ruin. Unfortunately, the mind gets blinded by *mamakara*, *ahamkara*, *kama*, *krodha* and *lobha*, and in relentless pursuit of their demands, becomes deaf to the unrelenting advice of the *buddhi* and *viveka*. It begins with the seed of attachment...

“What can I do? Indraprastha is under Duryodhana's control.”
...and grows up nourished by pride and ego...

“With my bow and arrows, I shall romp among the frightened Pandavas like a bloodthirsty tiger”
Viveka or discrimination, the mind's eternal companion always guides it along the enlightened path of righteousness.

“You may not listen to me but I am bound to you and I will always speak the truth, however harsh it might seem to your ears.”

“Listen to the voice of your conscience in solemnity and reverence and pay heed to its advice.”

“Let not wild ambition ascend the throne that rightfully belongs to wisdom.”

Vinaashakaale vipareetha buddhi. Manas pays no heed to the wise counsel and chooses *preyas* over *shreyas*. It hurtles towards disaster fed by hatred and caressed by greed.

“Tell them even a speck of land needed to place the tip of a needle will not be granted to them.”

When the mind is lost in these dark alleys, the compassion of the Lord shines forth as the voice of the peace loving conscience. The onus lies on the mind to seek this light and redeem itself forever. The Mahabharata is not just an ordinary story –it is your story, my story, everyone's story and most importantly, HIS story.

SCENE 1 ME OR MY ARMY?

Preamble

The Pandavas have completed their harsh exile and have sent a head priest as their emissary to Hastinapura seeking their kingdom back. The emissary has been disgraced by the Kauravas, and in turn the spineless Dhritarashtra has sent Sanjaya to tell the Pandavas to be happy where they are, making war the only option for both the sides. At the behest of the cunning Shakuni, Suyodhana has arrived at Dwarka to seek help from Krishna for the war.

Krishna: Paartha, when did you come? You could have called Me.

Arjuna: O Risikesha; having had Your Darshan my raging mind was benumbed into humble stillness and sitting in Your solemn presence I forgot all my worries.

Krishna: But...Kounteya you must have been waiting for so long...

Suyodhana: Hmm...hmm..

Krishna: Bava (brother-in-law)

Suyodhana: *Emi Mahanubhava (What, O great one)*

Krishna: (sings a couplet)

Suyodhana: Now the war is imminent, I stand here to seek Your help, O Krishna! You are as dear to us as to the Pandavas.

Krishna: But what about Arjuna? He too must have come to seek My help.

Suyodhana: Vasudeva, it was me who arrived first. You should consider helping me before You help Arjuna.

Krishna: But Suyodhana it was Arjuna whom I noticed first. Anyway, both of you seek all that you want and I promise not to disappoint anyone.

Suyodhana: Disappointment..... disappointment is inevitable Keshava. In war you cannot fight on both sides.

Krishna: Suyodhana! I spoke not of war but only of help. On one side, you have the invincible Narayani Sena in whose march the thunders roll, to whose shouts even the Gods shudder. I shall stand on the other side - alone and unarmed.

Suyodhana: Unarmed!?

Krishna: Both of you are equally dear to me. Against whom shall I raise my weapons? Choose then O Phalguna, either the mightiest of men or this solitary soul.

Suyodhana: Vasudeva, I should have the first choice.

Krishna: Bava Suyodhana, Arjuna is much younger to you in age. Will not the Pandavas later blot your immaculate character with the accusations of injustice? Let Arjuna make the first choice.

Suyodhana: *Kapata Naataka Sutradhaari* (the mastermind behind all clever twists)! Yet another ploy to assign all His armies to His dear Arjuna.

Arjuna: Vasudeva! Of what avail is that army in reckon with the Lord of the worlds. I have not come to seek the help of the Narayana Sena. I have come to seek Narayana Himself. I want thee alone my lord.

Suyodhana: Ha Ha Ha (*checks himself*) Oh Krishna! Above all enmities, Arjuna is my brother. I shall abide by his decision. He has left me with

no other choice. I will satisfy myself with Your army. And now if You permit, I will move on. You may now continue to take rest.

Krishna: Arjuna, tell me why is it that you chose this unarmed soul leaving aside the fiercest of armies in the world.

Arjuna: Madhava, You are the master of all men and matter. No knowledge, no secret, no passage lies unknown to You. My Lord, Your single glance can vanquish mighty multitudes in a trice. In Your hands lie the reins of my life itself, oh Sanatana Sarathi. You must guide me amidst the death, destruction and ruin to peace and victory during this war.

SCENE 2

VIRATA'S COURT: KRISHNA SALLIES FOR PEACE

Preamble

Cannot the Lord see the epic war is inevitable? Doesn't He know that Suyodhana and the blind Dhritarashtra are in no mood to give Indraprastha back to the Pandavas? He is the all knowing one yet to present before mankind an example, He is staging this drama. Moreover He is an extremely shrewd statesman. He wishes to inject a few doses of instability and insecurity in the minds of the Kauravas. Krishna has set forth on the historic mission to Hastinapura.

Announcement is made that Drupada and Virata are arriving.

Virata: O people of matchless valour! All the shastras and scriptures make it the obligation of every king to goad all mankind along the right path. Suggest the wise, teach the ignorant, guide the innocent, punish the wicked and ensure that *dharma* is upheld. If anyone resists its reign, hesitate not to draw his obedience through death.

Drupada: It is in this injunction that the war with the Kauravas becomes our only resort to uphold *dharma*.

Krishna: But oh king of Panchala! The solution for a headache is not in chopping off the head. My heart shudders to heap horrors of death and pain on humanity. I implore thee not to drown hearts in the wretchedness of a selfish revenge.

Drupada: What selfishness is it to scathe those awful beasts that have slain *dharma* on the altar of greed and jealousy. Was it not their wretchedness that watched in shameless silence when my daughter was disrobed in the royal court? In the flames of their funeral pyres I shall pour my agony and unburden my heart.

Krishna: Then dress not your revenge in the guise of *dharma*. Mingle not your ire in the obligations of a king. Let not your emotions cloud your wisdom. Oh wise men, all doors to peace are not yet shut.

Nakula: Madhusudana, it is not that we have not tried peace before. The head priest was sent as our messenger, to convey that we have served the term of exile. But he was mocked and sent back.

Sahadeva: Sanjaya too came from Hastinapura but alas the message of the king was, "Be wherever you are and be at peace."

Arjuna: Patience is of no avail. No matter how hard you try, Suyodhana would not yield.

Krishna: It is not about Suyodhana. Forget not the noble men like Bheeshma and Drona. They should certainly be given a chance.

Virata: Speak not of their nobility Krishna that dissolves into silence in the royal court.

Krishna: O men of noble birth, let not the meanness of revenge, ignorance of logic, weakness of instinct and blindness of anger smite your souls. Place your discrimination on the pedestal of brotherhood. Let us talk only of peace and let them propose war.

Bheema: We are not meek to beg them time and again for peace. The lances of Dharmaja have broken the bosoms of countless demons, the mace of Bheema mightier than the vajrayudha (the invisible weapon made of

diamond), shall deport thousands to the portals of death in a single sweep, the Gandiva of Arjuna is the third eye of Mahadeva spitting fire, and the swords of Sahadeva and Nakula shall spell doom with every slice.

Krishna: But history will not talk of your might Vayunandana. It weighs you by your values. Your valour is but a curse on humanity if it cannot usher peace to you fellowmen. Go, fan the storms of hatred and ravage the world and let history mock 'O how supremely foolish art thou men! Thou sold your souls to the wily anger's lust'.

Drupada: What about the unfulfilled vows of the Pandavas and of my daughter's untied hair?

Krishna: Is a droplet of blood, O King, on your daughter's hair much worthier than the tears of countless mothers? Transcend your petty selves and weigh them on the scales of greater good. Where hath all your compassion gone? Let not those words uttered in mindless rage be foolish bindings upon your actions.

(Krishna goes around...)

Dharmaja: Madhava, we know not what to do, smitten by failure, haunted by misery, confused, we stand. Lead us Oh lord, for you know what is right. We surrender to thee.

Krishna: Thus we unanimously decide to be patient and make one last attempt for peace. Let me visit the royal court of Hastinapur. I shall be your messenger of peace.

SCENE 3 THE 'AMBASSADOR' ARRIVES

Preamble

The Lord's ways are subtle and profound. By choosing Vidura's abode as His residence, He has not only conveyed that He can be befriended by a pure heart alone, He has also blessed the lifelong penance of Vidura - the penance of upholding Dharma at any cost - even if that means mockery and disgrace. This is the moment Vidura has been waiting for all his life.

[Vidura and Bheeshma welcome Krishna]

Dhritarashtra: O Ambassador of Peace, Vasudeva – *pranams* to you. Hastinapur welcomes you.

[Krishna greets everyone present]

Dhritarashtra: Please accept this gift as a humble offering O Madhusudana. *[Claps and a cow is brought on the stage.]*

Krishna: O Maharaja! I am honoured to receive such a gift. But in return, I am afraid I have got nothing but peace to offer.

Bheeshma: O Kesava! You must be exhausted from the arduous journey, we can talk leisurely later. Please take rest now.

Suyodhana: Krishna, I cordially invite You to dine at my place with me. Thereafter you can go ahead to rest at Dusyasana's palace.

Krishna: Thank you for your request brother Suyodhan. But I will reside at Mahatma Vidura's home. Moreover, mother Kunti is also waiting for me there.

Suyodhana: O Krishna! Your refusal will hurt me forever.

Krishna: Forever..... Forever is a very broad term brother. First let us come to a truce. Unless we reconcile, how can I accept your hospitality?

Shakuni: Hey Kesava! I don't understand Your perspective. What does agreeing to be a guest have anything to do with the outcome of talks?

Karna: Yes Madhava! We have no enmity with You. How can a perfect gentleman like You insult Your host?

Krishna: O Angaraj! I cannot forsake Dharma at any cost. Moreover, one accepts an invitation only when one is either hungry, or when one is a friend. Neither am I hungry, nor am I dear to brother Suyodhana.

Dusyasana: But Krishna, how can you say that You are not dear to us?

Krishna: If I was dear to you, then Suyodhana would have fought with Arjuna for Me and not My monumental army.

Shakuni: But that does not prove anything Madhusudana. Arjuna had already sought You and You had given Yourself to him. How then could dear Suyodhana get You?

Krishna: Ah haa! If I have already given myself to Arjuna O King of Gandhar, how then can I partake the salt of his enemy? He who is not a friend of the Pandavas is not my friend either. Also don't forget, *Dharma* is on the Pandavas' side and where there is *Dharma* there I am. I am not only an ambassador of peace but also an ambassador of *Dharma*. If I break bread with Suyodhana I would have trespassed *Dharma*.

Suyodhana: *[trying to control his anger]* Its time for food Vasudeva. My offer is still open. I am humbly requesting You

Krishna: O Suyodhana! If you had really wanted to dine with Me, by now you would have accepted my peace proposal. Meal..... that I will have only at Vidura's place *[Krishna leaves the stage]*.

Suyodhana: Haah! What does this cowherd think of himself? He would have been honoured to have a meal with me. But it is fit that a cowherd dines with a son of a maid servant. Mamashri, I am telling you, if tomorrow He tries to act smart in the court I will make him my prisoner.

SCENE 4 VIDURA BHAKTI

Preamble

There are probably only two people who realize the significance of Krishna Himself coming as a peace messenger. Dhritarashtra's intense and blind attachment for his son has brought the Kuru race to the verge of destruction. The king is blind but at least he can hear. However a man who has stopped listening to the dictates of his conscience requires a stern prodding. And that needs to be done by Viveka (conscience) and Buddhi (intellect) symbolized by Bheeshma and Vidura.

Vidura: Oh Compassionate one! What have You done? Instead of the comforts of the royal palace You chose this poor man's abode as Your residence.

Krishna: It is not poverty of the abode but the richness of the heart that attracts Me. Know Me as *Bhaavapriya* (one who goes by the inner feeling) and not *Baahyapriya* (one who is attracted by external pomp and show). Oh Mahatma! We are bound, heart to heart, and love to love.

(A verse in Hindi) **Sabse Ooncbhi prem sagai**

Vidura: **Duryodhan ka meva tyaaga**
Saag Vidur ghar khayo...Sabse oonchi prem sagai

(Animation and music piece)

Vidura: We did not have an inkling of Your arrival Oh Keshava. Forgive us; the food is not a banquet worthy of You.

Krishna: **Hari to bas Prem ke bhooke**
Prem ka saag khilayo *(Krishna eats the banana peel)*

Vidura: O Premaswaroop! Who can ever fathom You? Lost in the ecstasy of Your presence, I foolishly offered the peels throwing away the fruit! But You...

Narayana Vaikuntha Ko Tyago
Nara Ko prem Padhayo... Sabse oonchi prem sagai

Krishna: Oh Vidura! Your bliss alone is My food. Indeed fruitful is Your life for it has been spent for God. Any call from the depths of the heart, rest assured that I will respond.

Prem Ke Basa Ek Pag Leejo
Sau Pag Daud Ke Aayo.

(Part 2 will follow in the next issue)

PRASHANTI DIARY

February 10, 2009 – Songs by Devotees from Hyderabad

One aspect of the evening schedule in Prasanthi Nilayam changed since the month of middle of January as Swami asked the evening *bhajans* to be held in the Sai Kulwant Hall and not inside the Bhajan Hall as was the normal practice before. And most often Swami arrived for *darshan* after the *bhajans* started.

It is a different experience to see Swami granting *darshan* as the *bhajans* go on. Earlier, the expressions of spontaneous joy as He nears would manifest in hands going up and people craning so hard that they would culminate in standing up to offer prostrations! Now, another dimension has been added to this and that is the increase in decibel levels as Swami nears. Once Swami moves up the stage and sits listening to the *bhajans*, there is a visible and audible enthusiasm in the singing. Sometimes Swami thrills the singer by Himself singing a few lines of the *bhajan*!

On February 10, the script of the past few days changed as Swami noticed a group of ladies who had scarves on them and had come from Hyderabad. They prayed to Him for an opportunity to sing in His presence. It was about 4:40 p.m. and Swami enquired from them as to what they wished to sing. A short conversation ensued and then Swami called the Secretary of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust and had a few moments of discussion. Soon, the students seated in the marbled blocks were asked to make some space available and the group was granted its wish!

Swami went into the interview room and after a short while arrived on the stage and asked the ladies to begin their presentation. They started with Vedic chanting and as it went on, Swami asked for them to start singing. Now this needed the instrumental support and all the instrumentalists were gents. Since this was a programme which had been divinely conjured out of the blue, the accompanists were not in place.

It was then that Swami did something so beautiful. He simply moved into the interview room for a while. This gave the members of the group precious minutes to reorganize themselves. As if that was not enough, the Lord sweetly sent word too asking whether all were ready! Once all were set and the first song started, Swami came out and sat on the stage. Roses and other offerings had already been made and the songs continued. The songs were all in Telugu on the glory of Sai. So profound and beautiful were the meanings of the songs that Swami too seemed very interested in knowing the exact lyrics! He asked for the booklet that had been prepared for Him containing all the songs and began to leaf through it. As each song was being sung, Swami seemed to be reading the lyrics of that particular song. After about 35 minutes of group singing by these ladies which was ably assisted instrumentally by the gents, Swami told something to the student sitting beside Him. Taking this as a signal for *arthi*, the ladies started to prepare the camphor and the wicks. Seeing this, Swami smilingly told them to wait and asked them to continue

singing. And thus it was that the singing went on as Swami inspected the sarees and safari cloth pieces that He planned to distribute to the performers. After the final song concluded, Swami called a little boy sitting right in the front (presumably, the son of the keyboard player). He accepted his letter and spoke a few loving words with the boy. He asked his name and then planted a loving pat on his cheek. After this, Swami distributed the clothes and sarees. In the meanwhile, the main organisers and the key musicians came up to Swami seeking His blessings. Swami blessed them all profusely and patted many on their cheeks.

Sweets were brought for blessings after which they were distributed to all present as holy *prasadam*. Finally, Swami asked the students to sing a few *bhajans* and in an atmosphere that had been surcharged with devotional songs, the *bhajans* acted as an outlet for all to pour out their love for Swami. Swami sat, moving rhythmically to the lovely tunes of the *bhajans*. *Aarathi* was taken at the end of the second *bhajan* and Swami sat through the entire *aarathi*. At the end, He raised both His hands in loving benediction and people exclaimed with joy; some of the devotees too raised both their hands in humble reception! It was about 6:10 p.m. when Swami drove back to His residence.

February 12 and 13, 2009 – Parthi Yatra of Prakasam District

The devotees from Prakasam district had arrived and it was their second Parthi Yathra (Pilgrimage to Puttaparthi). As has become a custom in the last one year or two, they had a drama ready which they wished to present before Swami. And the Lord too permitted them to put it up on the evening of February 12. The bold backdrop announced the intended programme, "Prema Sankranthi" (The festival of Love). It was 4:45 p.m. when Swami arrived and He went around the whole hall granting *darshan*. When He neared the centre of the hall, He looked at the backdrop and the assemblage of the flag-bearing kids with childlike curiosity! After a brief visit to the interview room, Swami came on stage and asked for the programme to begin.

The first part of any programme at Puttaparthi is the floral offerings to Swami! That day was no exception. An abundance of roses along with their bearers headed to Swami and the Lord patiently and lovingly blessed them all. The cards carrying the details of the programme also were presented to Him. After blessing about 10-15 people who had moved onstage, Swami seemed very eager to see the actual drama! He commanded that the drama should begin and that's exactly what happened. The opening was made by the appearance of the many illustrious "sons of the soil" from Prakasam district. That was followed by a play in which the protagonist, who is a headmaster was immersed in teaching true value education to all his students. The drama moves towards the scene where some of the parents of his students come up to him with complaints that he is trying to make their children into religious zealots.

A sudden turn of events in which one of the students gets both his legs damaged in a motor accident brings to the fore the price of disobedience and the value of human values. In the aftermath of the tragedy, the headmaster and all his students tend and nurse the victim with love and brotherhood. The power of their care is such that the boy who had previously given up all hopes of ever getting mobile in his life again, "stands on his own feet" and moves about in the joy of having received back his mobility. Now praises are heaped on the headmaster and he makes no secret of his source of inspiration and life - Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The entire drama was interspersed with songs and dances containing His message.

Swami watched the drama completely except for a brief visit He made to the interview room. Many times, people may wonder as to why Swami goes into the interview room in the middle of a programme. When He goes into the interview room, it is because He wants to surprise His children with His bounty! At the end of the programmes, it is a common sight to see Swami gifting the participants with cloth pieces, sarees, watches or photo frames. When He goes inside, He usually picks the tokens of Love that He wants to distribute to all the participants. He personally chooses the gifts and having satisfied Himself that everything is in order, He returns and resumes watching the programme. As far as the drama is concerned, there is nothing that He doesn't know. The drama that He sees in front is actually a small drama in His bigger drama called Life! He watches our dramas to shower joy on the participants and bless all the devotees with valuable *darshan*.

As soon as the drama concluded, Swami moved down the stage and posed for photos with all the children. He told the photographers to move to the left and right, and ensured that every child got properly covered. Then He began to distribute T-shirts to all the participants. He took out one piece and called one of the boys from the programme. He held it out and checked whether the measurement was okay! This act roused the crowd into appreciative applause. Swami said that the T-shirts were a little bigger for the smaller children, and so He gifted them with cloth pieces that could be stitched. To some of the elderly participants, Swami gave *dhotis*. To a few others, He gifted Safari cloth pieces. To each one, He gave what was necessary (And isn't that what God always does?). As this was going on, the devotees started *bhajans*. The *bhajans* culminated with *prasadam* distribution and *aarathi*. Swami, however, asked the students to sing the 'Sri Raghavam' *bhajan* with *alaap*, and some more *bhajans* by the students followed. Fifteen minutes later, Swami left for His residence as *arati* was offered again. Thus, ended a memorable day of the Parthi Yatra for the devotees of the Prakasam district.

The second day's programme, on February 13, was a distribution of necessary equipment to the needy. The centre of Sai Kulwant Hall was filled with items for distribution to the poor and disadvantaged: irons, electrician kits, wet-grinders, bicycles, push-carts and more, arranged by devotees from Prakasam district. Bhagavan came for *darshan* at 4.10 p.m. and went into the interview room. After half an hour, He came onstage and moved down among the materials for distribution, interacting with some of the Sai youth seated there. He personally had a look at all of the items and blessed many of them

with His touch. The youth with whom He spoke and blessed were all lost in the joy of having those precious moments with Him.

Paraskavedekatriaphobia is a very common phenomenon though the word is rarely used. It is the fear of Friday, the 13th, which is considered as the unluckiest day. But with God, anything and any day becomes lucky. Just ask the youth from Prakasam district about their memories of Friday, the 13th.

Swami returned onstage and then asked for the proceedings to begin. It began with Prof. Anil Kumar relating the His-story of Prakasam district and moving Swami into a mood of nostalgia. As always, his speech was liberally sprinkled with humor and feelings. Swami began by smiling, then was moved into laughter and finally there were tears that fell out of His eyes as He laughed whole heartedly when the professor narrated as to how Swami had to teach the bhajan mandalis in the district how to clap. "You seem to be killing mosquitoes rather than keep rhythm to the bhajans" He had said! Ask the professor what he feels about Friday, the 13th and he will speak of the wonderful good fortune it brings!

After the 15 minute speech, the names of the recipients of the various utility items were read out and they came up to the front to receive them. They placed roses near Swami's feet as a token of their gratitude to Him. Though there were a few volunteers manning the area near Swami, many of the recipients, in their overwhelming sense of gratitude and Love for Him, rushed forward and placed the rose at His feet as He sweetly smiled and blessed them. Their faces spoke of the joy they felt within. The day turned out to be very lucky for them! As the distribution concluded, the leader of the group from Prakasam district spoke next, also in Telugu, about the service activities being done there. Having concluded, he requested Swami to speak. The Lord just smiled. Had He not spoken in His own way to each and every one of the people seated there?

The items for distribution were then moved away from the centre of the Hall. Swami indicated with a slight movement of His eyes for the boys to start *bhajans*. That small indication led to a huge movement as all the students rushed to occupy the now vacant marble blocks and began *bhajans*. It is popularly said that we speak very loudly when we are angry because anger separates our hearts! At the same time, when in love, we speak softly for love brings our hearts together. The Love that we share with Swami is so intense that even slight indications from Him are clearly understood! And that was how the *bhajans* began and Swami sat through a few of them, rhythmically moving and smiling. It was 6 p.m. when Swami accepted *aarthi*. At that time, one of the members of the youth jumped up and seemed to rush to Swami. He was quelled by the security. However, Swami asked one of the students next to Him, "What does he want?" The boy wanted *padanamaskar*. Swami called him and told him to take *padanamaskar*. That youth was in highest bliss and he cried like a child at Swami's feet. For everyone, that Friday, the 13th, was just divine! And that is how our life is with God! Nothing inauspicious can ever happen in His Presence.

February 14, 2009 – Swami's Visit to Muddenahalli

Muddenahalli's great penance finally came to fruition on February 14. Though the picturesque hilly terrain that houses a residential model school in the name of Bhagavan had been blessed by His Divine Presence on many an occasion earlier, February 14, 2009 for them was a red-letter day. It was destined on this day to receive the sanctifying touch of blessing from the Lord when the foundation stone was laid atop the picturesque hills in Muddenahalli as the privileged fourth campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University. The University has three campuses at Prasanthi Nilayam, Brindavan and Anantapur. On November 23, 2008, Swami took everyone by a pleasant storm as He announced in between His discourse:

"Today I have decided to have a separate campus affiliated to Sri Sathya Sai University in Muddenahalli. Bhagavan's Will is bound to happen. The work will start from tomorrow. Therefore, Swami has Willed to have Sri Sathya Sai University in Muddenahalli. The people living in Muddenahalli are village folk. They live by physical labour. To pursue higher studies, they have to go to cities or towns. Once they have completed their education, they can go elsewhere to earn a living. Swami has decided to inculcate spirituality through Bhagavatam, Bhagawad Gita and Ramayana."

The complete happening of that day is present in the December 2008 issue of H2H.

And so it was that a lot of ground work and preparations had been made. It is very interesting that Swami chose February 14 for the ground breaking ceremony. This day is symbolic for the celebration of love the world over. Muddenahalli got the privilege of being the Divine valentine as Swami decided to shower His Love, grace and bounty on it. The entire campus wore a festive look with dainty decorations and bold banners. Flags and festoons spread a colour riot everywhere. Thousands, students and teachers clad in immaculate white and nearly 10,000 other devotees who had gathered under the *shamiyanas* on the vast lawns in front of "Premdeep", the Divine abode, were delighted at the arrival of the Lord in Sathya Sai Grama. Elaborate arrangements had been made with meticulous planning to receive Swami. The Divine convoy comprised of Mr. Chakravarthi (Secretary, Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust), Prof. G. Venkatraman (formerly Vice Chancellor, Sri Sathya Sai University), Mr. S. V. Giri (formerly Vice-chancellor, Sri Sathya Sai University), Mr. Vishwanath Pandit (current Vice-chancellor), Mr. V. Srinivasan (President, Sri Sathya Sai Organisations), Mr. C. Srinivas (Member, Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust), Mr. S. S. Naganand (Trustee, Sri Sathya Sai Medical Trust and Sri Sathya Sai Sadhana Trust), and others. After spending a few minutes in "Premadeep", Swami proceeded to the hillock in the southern direction of the campus, where the land had been levelled for laying the foundation stone for the Administrative Block and Residence of the Divine Chancellor.

Atop the hill, the venue for the foundation stone laying ceremony, Swami was accorded a grand traditional reception with the 'Poorna Kumbham'. Amidst

sonorous chanting of the vedas by the students, Swami laid the foundation stone inside the specially erected 'mantapam'. The mantapam and the entire area had a celestial atmosphere with gorgeous flower decorations, colorful balloons and a wide-variety of lush green plants. Swami glanced through the event card and looked at the plans for the college building designed by the L&T Ltd. After laying the foundation stone, Swami returned to "Premadeep". He blessed a group of old students of the institution, who sought His Divine sanction to construct 'Prema Kutir', a residential block for the dedicated teachers (thyagajeevis) of Muddenahalli. Another group of well-wishers of the Institution, who proposed to build some guest houses for the comfortable stay of parents of students and other guests, was also blessed by Swami in the Prayer-hall of "Premdeep". Meanwhile, students were singing *bhajans* on the sprawling lawns under the huge *shamiyanas* where thousands of people had gathered well in advance to have the *darshan* of the Lord and listen to His nectarine words. Alighting the specially erected dais in front of the "Premdeep", Swami granted the coveted Divine *darshan* to the thousands assembled.

The public function began with the chanting of Veda by a group of students after which Mr. U. Gangadhar Bhat, Chairman of Sri Sathya Sai Loka Seva Trust spoke for a few minutes expressing heartfelt gratitude to Bhagavan for conferring the boon of the University Campus to Muddenahalli. Mr. B. Narayana Rao, the Secretary of Sri Sathya Sai Loka Seva Trust, speaking next prayed to Bhagavan to give strength to all the teachers and office bearers to carry out His wishes by becoming His worthy servitors. Mr. B. N. Narasimha Murthy, Warden, Sri Sathya Sai Boys' Hostel, Brindavan described the unfathomable compassion and concern of Bhagavan for the entire mankind and the service activities undertaken by Him for the amelioration of the difficulties of people. He had been associated with the Muddenahalli school right from its inception, and he spoke his heart out expressing his gratitude to Bhagavan. He cited the examples of the Super Speciality Hospitals built by Bhagavan at Prasanthi Nilayam and Whitefield within a record time and how they were a boon to the suffering humanity. Before concluding He made a fervent prayer to the Divine to bless the occasion His Divine Discourse.

Reasoning out His newest endeavour to impart quality education, Bhagavan said that children from the area were poor and could not afford to go to cities for pursuing higher education. Referring to the declining spiritual progress in villages, He said, this campus would give emphasis on scriptural studies that should help the children to grow into noble citizens. The campus would be inaugurated in one year time, barring all obstacles as it was His Divine Sankalpa, declared the Lord, amidst cheers from the audience. The entire project would be borne by Him alone, assured the Lord, advising the patrons not to accept any money from outside. He said, "When Lakshmi resides in my *Vakshasthala* (heart region of the chest), why do I need anyone's financial assistance?" The Divine Discourse in Telugu lasted for 45 minutes.

"During My very first visit to Muddenahalli, I had provided the campus with many facilities and now I have decided to start a campus of Sri Sathya Sai

University here and start courses like B.A, M.A, B.Sc, M.Sc, B.Com in this college. I have laid the foundation stone today for the building. Just like the magnificent buildings on the hills in Prasanthi Nilayam, a grand building will raise its head on the hillocks here and this and other imposing buildings will be ready for inauguration by next February. Now, people in society have become very greedy. Greed brings in its train sorrow and suffering. To get rid of this, people should tread on the path of 'Atmaanveshana' (self-discovery) which will confer on them bliss.

Now, even in villages people have many facilities but they do not have any spiritual inclination; they have given up the practice of remembering God. So, I have decided to arrange for the teaching of Ramayana, Mahabharatha and Bhagavad Gita to the students in the college here so that they will impart to the villagers the message and the values of these sacred scriptures.

One should have self confidence. You know that Abraham Lincoln was penurious; other students in the school treated him contemptuously when he went to school wearing torn clothes. When he sorrowfully told his mother how he was subjected to scorn and disdain, his mother advised him to develop faith in God. As a result, he became the President of America. Before occupying the seat of the President, he prostrated to his mother; he knew that he could rise to such a high position only by his mother's advice and blessings.

You too should develop in you such self-confidence. Atma, God, I – all these are one and not different. "Ekam Sath Viprah Bahudha Vadhanthi". From the same gold, different ornaments are made. If you develop such self-confidence in you, you can become leaders of tomorrow. Only those leaders who have faith in God can cure the ills and ameliorate the sufferings which the society is afflicted with at present. You should serve the society with self-confidence and with the feeling that you are a humble servant. The positions like M.L.A, M.P or ministers are all but temporary.

I started the educational institution here with the purpose of providing the children with good education, food and clothing. Magnificent buildings which will cause a sense of wonder will come up here. I, Myself, will inaugurate the college and other buildings here on February 14 next year. When Goddess Lakshmi herself is here in My heart, what is the necessity to ask anyone for money? You should remember that God dwells in your heart. You may give up anything but you should not give up devotion for God. With unshakable devotion you can achieve anything".

In between, Bhagavan turned to Mr. Narasimha Murthy and advised him to camp in Muddenahalli for some time to give proper guidance to the teachers and office bearers. Telling this, He materialized and blessed him with a glittering ring. Calling Mr. Narayan Rao, He advised him not to accept money from anyone for the project. Entire project would be borne by Bhagavan alone, assured the Lord, advising the patrons not to accept any money from outside. He advised him that all the teachers and office bearers should work in unison.

Continuing His Divine Discourse, Bhagavan said: "You are indeed fortunate because you have got this opportunity of *Darshan*, *Sparshan* and *Sambhashan*. It is your duty to keep your parents happy. So many foreigners come to Prasanthi Nilayam and learn to lead a peaceful and happy life. Within the next 18 years the whole of the world will become one big family and Hindu way of life will be adopted by everyone.

Bhagavan concluded His Divine Discourse with the *bhajan*, "Prema Mudita Manse kaho Rama Rama Ram..."

Prasadam was distributed to all who had assembled, after which *Bhagavan* started on His return journey to Prasanthi Nilayam. With sweet memories and abundant hopes, Muddenahalli would be looking forward for an eventful year when the Divine Sankalpa would come true, and when He would be setting His Divine Feet yet again, a date that would go in the annals of His story as a very special day.

February 16, 2009 – Music Programme by Devotees from Hungary

Prasanthi Nilayam is a potpourri of people from various countries of the world. From the second week of February a group of nearly 50-100 devotees from the mid-European nation of Hungary have been eagerly waiting for a chance to sing in the Divine presence. Puttaparthi is not a totally new place for these devotees. They had come here earlier too, in December 2007, prepared with a music programme for their dear Lord. Each member of the group burned with intense love for Swami and the Heart2Heart team had a chance to speak with them and get their awe-inspiring stories of love and devotion. One of the members was on the verge of suicide after his problems and frustrations got compounded with deafness in both his ears. His ears returned to sound health in a matter of hours with Swami's grace at Puttaparthi! One can read these stories of amazing devotion and profound Grace in the April 2008 and January 2008 issues of Heart2Heart.

That trip turned a little disappointing for some of the members as they could not put up the programme they had prepared for Him. The relatively senior devotees consoled and assured everyone else of their group that disappointment is a sure sign to 'Hisappointment' and that His delays are not His denials. Whatever the situation was, these people never let despair get a hold on them. They continued with their daily routine with the same enthusiasm and joy. They would pray and sing in devotion and move about in the ashram in neat lines, chanting the name of the Lord. True to their faith and conviction, the February 15 saw "Hisappointment" being arranged! As the *bhajans* concluded that evening, Swami called the secretary of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, Mr. Chakravarthy on stage. And as per His command, Mr.Chakravarthy announced, "There will be a programme by the disciplined group of devotees from Hungary tomorrow evening at the Sai Kulwant Hall." The adjective, 'disciplined', had been added at the insistence of the all-knowing Swami. Prof. Anil Kumar happened to be sitting next to Swami and Swami told him to make the same announcement in Telugu too! He did it in

his own imitable style. How the professor happened to be sitting next to Swami is an interesting event in itself.

A student had made a sketch of Prof. Anil Kumar and Swami noticed it. He called the student and on closer scrutiny, He felt that the sketch was a very good likeness of the professor. So He called him and presented the sketch to him. The student was overjoyed at this unexpected recognition from Swami, and the professor was delighted at this sudden gift of Grace. And then, after talking to Swami and cracking a few funny lines that brought a smile to the Divine face, the professor settled beside Swami. That's how he happened to be there as the announcement of the Hungarian programme was made.

February 16 saw all the Hungarian devotees seated in neat rows in the marbled blocks of Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami arrived at 4:30 p.m. for *darshan* and taking a complete round, arrived onstage. Swami took a mini round around the children from the Primary School and needless to say, their Vedic chanting reached boisterous levels. Then He moved via the veranda to the gents' side of the stage where about 30 *sadhus* from the Nilgiris, who had arrived in the morning, were seated. There was great awe and respect on the faces of these holy men as Swami neared them. All of them got onto their knees and bowed down to Swami. A list of all the holy men who had arrived was presented to Him and Swami blessed it. A request for a programme by the residents of the hills of the Nilgiris was also made to Swami and the Lord seemed to consent for it. He blessed all the *sadhus* and the joy was writ large on their faces. Then, Swami moved to the centre stage and asked for the programme to begin.

Two ladies came forward and presented Swami with the programme card and a rose. They were so filled with joy, and smiles abounded as Swami blessed them. They were followed by two members of the gents presenting roses to Swami. After a short speech in which they thanked Swami with all their hearts for the most coveted opportunity to sing in His presence, they started with "Aumkaram" and chants from the Sanathana Dharma scriptures! The songs then began - and ah! How melodious they were! The accompaniments were the keyboard, guitars, violins, a flute and beaming smiles! The conductor's movement was all grace and beauty as she carried the group forward through the highs and lows of the melodies. The songs were in a foreign tongue no doubt, but the expressions on the faces and the feelings in the air would have been understood by anyone conversant in the language of the heart! The holy men and women from Nilgiris too seemed engrossed in this, for devotion has no barriers of language or religion. It is Love in its purest form towards the Lord who is One. As each song concluded, the worshippers (performers would be a very wrong word to use here) would bow down to Swami and then begin the next. Hearts, throats and mouths opened wide as notes from Hungary filled the air. It was very evident that these people were 'hunger'ing for Divine Love and had decided to partake in the feast that He had so lovingly served. The music was so full of life and energy and yet meditative in its effect. 12 songs were sung in no time and Swami asked, "Any more songs?"

They were simply thrilled. The conductor and the leader came up to Swami and receiving those words of Love from Him, began the second innings. One more song later, Swami's hand was going round, materializing a beautiful gold chain for the conductor! Calling her closer, Swami put it around her neck. She just smiled ever so broadly and no words seemed to issue forth from her. Swami then gifted every lady with a beautiful, parrot green sari and every gent with white safari cloth. *Prasadam* was also blessed for distribution and as this went on, two ladies presented to Swami white hand kerchiefs that they had made for Him. The Hungarian experience proved that the Lord hungers as much for those who hunger for Him for He opened the ribbon that held the kerchiefs then and there. Taking one of them, Swami immediately wiped His face and the worshippers and the audience clapped in joy. Another man presented Swami with a lamination of mother Mary with infant Jesus and Swami blessed it for him.

Swami accepted all the letters that were given and the way these people moved and conducted themselves made it very clear as to why Swami had added the adjective, "disciplined" for them the previous day. Swami told them to sing *bhajans* and they sang two *bhajans* very well. That was followed by a few *bhajans* by the students. The *bhajans* concluded and *aarathi* was taken, after which Swami retired to Yajur Mandir.

February 17, 2009 – Dance Programme by Devotees from Nilgiris

On February 16 Swami satiated the Hungarian hunger and on the next day it was the blessed time for the devotees from Ooty. These devotees from the Western Ghats had arrived and accompanying them were about 30 *sadhus* - men and women. These devotees have been continuously rendering service and spreading His message in the Nilgiri hills for many years now. Nestled among the mountains, the story of transformation of places near and around Ooty is really inspiring. H2H had an article about their beautiful seva in the January 2006 issue.

Swami had acceded to their prayers and requests the previous day and had permitted them to put up their programme in the Divine presence. A huge backdrop depicting the "*Raasa leela*" dance of Lord Krishna with the gopikas had been suspended in the centre of the hall. It was 4:40 p.m. when Swami arrived for *darshan*. As He moved through the ladies side, His attention seemed to be captured by the backdrop. He kept looking at it for quite a while and also blessed the performers for the day who were seated in front of it. Moving through the gents' side, He completed His rounds and took a small round through the portico too. Just before 5 p.m., Swami arrived on the stage and the programme was underway.

The simple village folk and tribal people had prepared a sequence of dances under the theme, "Brindavan folk dances". A brief summary of the programme would be, "The village folk danced to the tune of songs on Krishna in their language for more than 45 minutes." And what was "their" language? It was a mixture of Kannada, Tamil and Tulu. A single sentence in a song would be

composed of a harmonious blend of words from these different languages. It was evident that the language of the heart was in full swing and the *gopalas* and Krishna danced in front of Swami. For some of the songs which involved the *gopikas*, the *gopalas* themselves doubled up as the *gopikas*! Very often, while presenting, we often try to get the best possible costumes and make up. Here were simple folk and they laid emphasis on the spirit rather than the physical. All their depictions were in the way they moved and expressions on their faces. They never felt it out of place if a man doubled up as a *gopika* in the dance!

The dance went on for 45 minutes. In between, Swami visited the interview room briefly and the dancers continued with no drop in enthusiasm or energy. Swami called the "Krishna" of the dance troupe and materialised a gold chain for him. He also gave clothes to all the performers as they came up to Him one by one. They all utilised that opportunity to take *padanamaskar*. Then Swami said that He would move down and gift them with group pictures too. Slowly, He moved down the stage and sat amidst them, smiling and blessing all of them. They too poured out their love for Swami and returned His smiles. Swami then returned to the stage. Meanwhile, the students had started singing *bhajans*, and that too, Krishna *bhajans* in particular. Swami was back on the stage and the elderly person, who was the leader of the group, went to Swami. Swami called the Krishna too on stage and they all posed for photographs. After that unfolded a beautiful scene.

"Krishna" was lost in the ecstasy of the moment. So much so that, he began to dance with the *bhajan*, "Govinda Krishna Jai" that was going on! He moved down the stage and continued to dance. Swami seemed to watch him with amusement at his innocent joy. And frankly, the audience seemed to enjoy this dance the most - it was so spontaneous and forthcoming. After this, *prasadam* was distributed and Swami received *aarthi*. It was about 6:15 p.m. by the time the Lord returned to His residence.

February 21, 2009 – Divine Discourse before Shivarathri

There was a sweet pleasant surprise for all the devotees assembling for Shivarathri on February 21. As usual, the *bhajans* had begun and were on in full swing that evening. Swami completed the *darshan* rounds and after sitting for a few *bhajans*, called out to Mr. Ajit Popat, the "puppet" as he calls himself. Offering his salutations, Mr. Popat learnt that Swami wanted him to address the gathering. In his inimitable style, he began with his *Namaste Premaroopaya* poem. He spoke with energy and gusto for about 45 minutes. Swami advised him to speak long and strong! And he continued on the joy of being in the Divine presence.

After that, there seemed to be a slight confusion! Swami told Popat that he could speak more. So he promptly obeyed and came to the mike. Then Swami said, "I'll speak." Mr. Popat said over the mike, "It is only Swami who speaks. I am just a puppet!" Swami then said again that He wanted to speak. It was with a thunderous applause that devotees woke up to the beautiful fact

that there would be a flow of nectarine words from the Divine lips! And yes, Swami began to speak:

The *Bharatiyas* are like the elephant which does not know its own strength. It gets trained by the mahout and meekly sits down or gets up as commanded. Following the foreign culture, the *Bharatiyas* are forgetting their own culture which is so sacred, noble and immortal. How can you call yourselves *Bharatiyas* if you forget this? It is said to treat one's Mother, Father, Preceptor and Guest as God. If you forget the mother who is also the first Guru, what is the use of life then?

We speak for hours because we see changes all around. The *Jagat* (world) is negative. All that we 'see' - the forests, the cities - all are negative and a product of our imagination, the reflections of our mind. The *atma* is positive, the *mayaka* or the leader. There is nothing other than the *atma*. Where is the *atma*? *Mamaivamsho Jeevaloke Jeevabhootha Sanathana* - The entire Universe and beings that are seen are parts of the *atma*. That is One with no second. Duality is only an imagination, and hence, it is said that a man with dual mind is half blind. Only One exists and that is only known as the *Sahasra Sheersha Purusha* (One with a thousand heads). But today, you are dividing the heads! For Unity, to be achieved, you need Purity. For Purity, you need to realize the inherent divinity in all.

Never forget the inherent unity. Even the Taittiriya Upanishad stresses on the *atmic* principle. Without that, there is no existence. Everything is a mere reflection of that. Whatever be the caste, creed or country, there is only one *atmic* principle. Rama, Krishna and others incarnated. Their bodies, however, lasted only a while. Nothing is permanent. Nothing in the *Jagat* is the Truth. However great one may become, he is not permanent. Only the *atma* is permanent. It has neither beginning, nor end. That consciousness is Truth and Existence. Everyone here is a form of the *atma*. Forgetting that, you imagine the ephemeral as permanent. All that is a hallucination and it leads to plurality. Only the *atma* is *Sathya* (Truth) and *Nitya* (Permanent).

We undergo changes as we move from infancy to childhood to adulthood. But we remain the same! We should have faith in that changeless reality. Man today is immersed in changing things. A true *Manava* (man) is one who is changeless. And to achieve that, Self-Confidence is needed. You know that Abraham Lincoln was born poor; other students in the school treated him contemptuously when he went to school wearing torn clothes. His friends mocked and jeered at him. He became sad and ran to his mother who consoled him thus, "Child, do not cry. The world is like this, but just don't you pay heed to it. Have *Atma Vishwasam*. (Self-Confidence)" That word struck deep inside. As a result, he became the President of America. Before occupying the seat of the President, he prostrated to his mother; he knew that he could rise to such a high position only by his mother's advice and blessings. Everyone was surprised and his friends too were amazed - a poor boy became the President only by implicitly obeying the Mother and developing Self-confidence. The mother was a tailor by profession and she

charged a dollar or half for clothes that she stitched. Her blessings and good wishes ensured that he completed a successful 5 years.

There is nothing great in studying. Teachers and books will help you do that. Self-Confidence is important. The nine fold path of devotion is of no use if there is no self-confidence. Cultivate that. Even if you have big friends, there is no use. Help ever, hurt never. And the Mother's teaching is the greatest help. That is why the mother is worshipped. Never disobey her command. Her love will always be with you, around you, above you, below you and in you. People think they are big and forget their mothers. They treat them like servant maids. Let the mother say anything, you must follow her. The mother alone is the true teacher; all others are mere helpers. There is no greatness in staying abroad or earning money. Follow the mother and all problems will dissolve. Otherwise, life is a total failure. To follow the mother's command is the main goal of life. And one must do this not as a duty; but out of love.

In Bharat, never consider the woman as insignificant. None actually can comprehend the power of a woman. Savitri brought her dead husband back to life while Sita passed through the test of fire. It is the chastity of the woman that brings greatness to the country. Bharat is great and it has survived all the problems. It is a land of merit and glory. You are all so special, having been born in Bharat. See that you fulfill that boon. High grades are not needed. Have the culture of Bharat and life will be a victory. It may not have the affluence of the west but it enjoys spirituality and sanctity. Thus, the *Bharatiyas* enjoy great bliss. To get this, people from everywhere else come to Bharat. It is the spiritual power that attracts.

There are three stages - Concentration, contemplation and meditation. It does not mean just sitting steady, but steadying the mind. Concentration is like primary school. Contemplation is secondary school while meditation is the University level. Then you should get good degrees. You become true students only after reaching the meditation level. That is the state of ever steadiness. From God's point of view, you do not need high percentage of marks, but meditation to pass!

Dear students! Do not crave for first class. Marks are not that important. Ensure that you do not get remarks. True marks are determined by your self-confidence.

Swami concluded with *Hari Bhajan Bina....* After His hour-long discourse, Swami accepted *arati* and returned to His residence in the chair itself, accepting many letters on the way.

February 23 and 24, 2008 – Shivarathri Celebrations in the Divine Presence

In Indian culture, there are as many ways to reach God as there are aspirants! And so it is that every form and every name is venerated as Divine. *Cheemalo Brahmalo...* As the great saint-musician Tyagaraja put it, the Lord is prevalent

in the ant as well as in the cosmos! In such a land, even if one hour is dedicated for a particular deity, a whole year would not suffice to worship even half of the forms revered and 'idolised'. In this scenario, just the importance given and religious adherence to the festival of Maha Shivarathri, in itself makes one realize that it is a very special occasion in the annals of the culture of India. It is celebrated every year on the 13th night/14th day in the *Krishna Paksha* (waning moon) of the month of *Maagha* (as per *Shalivahana*) or *Phalguna* (as per *Vikrama*) in the Hindu calendar (that is, the night before and day of the new moon) with great fervour and devotion.

Shivaratri at Puttaparthi has a long and fruitful history. It dates back to 1945 when the Prashanthi Nilayam Mandir was being planned for construction. Swami personally was immersed in all the details. There was a person by name, Gooni Venkata, who was serving Swami. When Gooni Venkata (meaning, Venkata with the hump), dug at the spot indicated by Sai Baba, so that consecrated stones could be laid as foundation, a large number of stone bases used as stands for *lingams* (emblems of the Form merging in the Formless, or emerging from the Formless) were discovered! But strangely enough, no *lingams* could be found, though a vigorous search was made. So, there were dozens of bases, but not a single *lingam*. People gathered around Baba and sought the answer. Swami told them cryptically, pointing a finger at his stomach, "The *lingams* are all here." Those fortunate to be present at the abode of highest peace during Shivaratri would have realized the secret behind Swami's action and the hideout of the missing *lingams*.

The *lingams* that emanate from Bhagavan on many Shivaratri nights differ in number, size and composition. Sometimes only one is formed; the material is apparently *sphatika* (glass), gold, or silver. Often times, they are more in number - three, five, seven, or nine! Mostly they are about an inch and a half in height, larger at times. This, materialization of the *lingams*, is indeed a unique and mysterious manifestation of the Divine Will. Another awe-inspiring and profoundly spiritual ritual that Baba performed on Shivaratri was the *Vibhuti-abhisheka* (shower of sacred ash) to the silver idol of His previous incarnation – Shirdi Sai Baba.

From that day till now, many things have changed, but the atmosphere of devotion and austerity still remains. A huge gathering that converged in Prashanthi Nilayam on February 23, thoroughly unmindful of the inconveniences that are natural for an assemblage of gigantic proportions, is an apparent testimony to the inner urge of man to realise his essential Truth. The enthusiastic devotees filled every inch of space available in Prashanthi Nilayam from two days in advance in the run up to the festivity. One could see long disciplined queues making a beeline, much before the first rays of the Sun peeped through the eastern horizon, to ensure a place on the coveted occasion in the Sai Kulwant Hall.

At 7:30 a.m., seated majestically on the golden raised chair, Swami arrived and completed His *darshan* rounds. More than 1000 youth had assembled in the hall to chant the *Rudram*. Swami took a complete round and then moved to the stage. Along the way, He blessed and cut a huge cake that had been

adorned with statues - the one of Rama worshipping the *linga* being the most prominent. After lighting the candle on the cake, Swami moved out on to the stage. He sat listening to the *Rudram* chants that were looped over and over again.

After a while, Swami began to physically orchestrate the morning's proceedings. He told the people chanting in the mikes to stop doing so. He wanted to listen to the strength of the 1000 vocal chords, and they did not disappoint. As the Vedic vibrations shook the hall, Swami continued to guide as He said that only those in the back rows must chant. It is not unusual among youth to become back benchers to get away with a lackadaisical attitude. But here that was not the case! Those in the back rows were there simply because all cannot sit in the front rows! (Akin to the philosophy where even a good team loses a game because there can be only one winner!) Building up the crescendo, Swami once again opened the floodgates for the vocal chords as He asked for all to chant in unison. The Primary school students also arrived and joined in. The chorus now seemed complete with the bass, midtones and trebles rocketing high to chant the glory of *Rudra* on Shivarathri. Wall calendars and *prasadam* was distributed to all after being blessed by Swami. Swami then accepted *arati* just after 9 a.m. Before retiring, Swami told all the youth and students, "Go and eat well. Then sleep and return here fresh at 3:00". He told the same twice or thrice to different people and it was such a sweet sight to see Swami enact those instructions as all were beyond the hearing range!

For the evening, anticipating a surge of devotees, arrangements had been made to put up huge screens to show the programmes live to those who could not have a good view from their spot. Such screens were put on both sides, ladies' and gents' in the Sai Kulwant Hall, and a massive screen was hung in the Poorna Chandra Auditorium too. The youth from Karanataka had brought a huge ice-lingam, 5 feet in height, which was placed at Swami's residence. It was after 4:15 p.m. that Swami arrived and He had a complete look at the ice lingam. The University brass band stood in attention to escort Swami. But Swami had other plans. He asked the band boys to make way and proceeded towards the back entrance of the Poorna Chandra Auditorium! The devotees had assembled there and though a huge screen would show them their Lord, all of us know that the thrill and joy of seeing Him in person is something very special. There was a huge applause and shouts of "Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Ji Ki Jai" rent the air. Everyone was thrilled by this act of Grace. Swami saw the devotees and blessed them with *darshan* for about 5 minutes. Then He moved into the Sai Kulwant Hall, led in procession by the brass band.

Swami was resplendent in a yellow robe, seated on the golden raised chair, and just behind Him, the ice lingam in all its majesty, was wheeled into the Hall. Swami arrived on stage and asked for the ice lingam to be brought up front and placed in such a manner so that all could see it. Then the session began with an address by former Vice Chancellor Mr. S. V. Giri, who dwelt upon the greater significance of the sacred night, calling the festivity as a cultural representation of the India. Mr. V. Srinivasan, All India President, Sri

Sathya Sai Seva Organisations was categorical in expressing the greater benediction that befell on the capacity crowd assembled in Prasanthi Nilayam to celebrate the festivity in His Divine Presence. The third speaker, Mr. Ajit Popat gave an electrifying speech, an appetizer warming up for the lofty Divine Discourse that was in waiting.

As Swami asked for His mikes to be brought, there was a loud cheer of joy and approval. What else can be better than listening to Shiva on Shivarathri? Hailing Mother India and her greater cultural heritage, Swami said that having been born in Bharath, people of the country have the responsibility to upkeep her cultural heritage. Referring to the auspicious Shivarathri night, He was candid in expressing that many nights that we pass could not be compared with the auspicious Shivarathri Night. The holy night should be utilized in chanting His Divine Name. Exhorting us to listen to the glory of Lord Shiva, He said, when you spend the night in constant contemplation, it verily becomes Shivarathri. Shiva is beyond physical form. We assign Him a physical form out of our imagination. Hari and Hara are beyond the physical.

Dwelling upon the story wherein Mother Parvathi, being prodded by Goddess Lakshmi, questions Lord Shiva of His odd credentials to be her husband, Bhagavan brought home the point quoting Lord's reply to Mother Parvathi that Lord was beyond names, caste and lineage; He has no name and no form; He is changeless; He has neither birth nor death; neither beginning nor end; He is eternal and *Atma Swarupa*. Talking about the greater importance of meditation, He said one should advance through the three levels of concentration, contemplation, and thereafter Meditation. Meditation results out of a steady unwavering mind. True identity with the Divine could be achieved only by sacrificial action, by leaving the feeling of doer ship. Even if you experience any amount of discomforts, never give up the Consciousness (God), Swami said and emphasised that, as a prerequisite to attain peace, one needs to start with *Sathya* and *Dharma* by rooting out all negative tendencies/qualities.

Referring to all the criticism being poured unto Him, He asserted that He is not affected by any of them and He remains to be the same. He only has Love to give back to all of them as He does not have any trace of hatred or anger. Bhagavan exhorted all to follow the path of *Sathya* and *Dharma* and to Love All and Serve All. When *Sathya* joins *Dharma*, there comes *Prema*..., He said. "While singing *Prema Muditha Manase Kaho*...think of Him, meditate upon His Name wholeheartedly with Love". He concluded the Divine Discourse calling upon the devotees to 'Be Happy'.

The discourse concluded and Swami asked for the *bhajans* to begin. Swami wanted the *aarthi* to be performed! The priest went in to get the *aarthi* plate. Meanwhile, a member of the *bhajan* group requested Swami for the chance to sing *bhajans* all night. Swami then smiled and agreed. (Many a times, we take many things for granted, but in reality every moment with the Divine, every opportunity to sing His name, is a boon conferred upon us.)

And so, the *bhajans* began. Swami sat for a few *bhajans* and then retired into Yajur Mandir even as the *bhajans* went on in the Sai Kulwant Hall.

The next morning, Swami arrived in a magical maroon robe! The blessing of seeing Him in this attire first, once again went to the devotees waiting eagerly in the Poorna Chandra auditorium. Swami sweetly made His way towards them and granted *darshan* there before heading to the Sai Kulwant Hall. By 8:30 a.m., Swami was amidst the students in the centre of the hall. There, He was 'informed' of the *prasadam* that had been kept ready at the northern gates of the hall. He moved down towards the main gate and blessed the *prasadam*. Taking a bunch of holy grass, Swami sprinkled water on all the bowls containing tamarind rice and *laddoos*. He spent about 5 minutes there and then moved to the stage area through the gents' side. He sat listening to a few more *bhajans* after which the grand *mangala aarthi* was performed. Swami then personally supervised the distribution of *prasadam* to all. Many broke their fast with Swami's *prasadam*.

Beautiful minutes ticked by as Swami sat silently watching all who were eating. The devotees were contented looking at their Lord and so was the Lord looking at His devotees. Swami told a few people to start eating. The photographers in the front were busy capturing these beautiful moments. Swami told them also to eat. When they continued shooting, Swami sweetly asked, "Why? Is the *prasadam* not tasty or cooked well?" Immediately, the cameras were put down and the *prasadam* was given importance! The food prayer was chanted twice, once by the University students and once by the Primary school students. Swami seemed to relish watching everyone eat. One could feel the message, *Aham Vaishvanarobhutva Praninaam Dehamaashritaha* – "I am the One inside all, who digests the food they eat". After sitting onstage for nearly forty-five minutes during the *prasadam* distribution, Swami returned to His residence.

SWAMI AND ME

HOW SAI TURNED MY LIFE 180 DEGREES

By Mr. Priveen Raj

Mr. Priveen Raj lives in Singapore where for the past 6 years he has worked as a business strategy specialist in various companies such as Airasia and Atos Global. He is 30 years old and is a committed member of the Singapore Sai Movement, being the bhajan convener and also actively involved in the local Sai youth group.

The Perfect Family

A swanky car, palatial bungalow, costly presents, and the best food. This was 'Life' for the first 14 years of my life. My father was a high flyer with an American offshore company. He simply adored my brother and me, and was always buying my mother the most expensive jewellery. In a pure, innocent way, I was proud of my family. I knew we were the envy of many.

My parents were gods to me, especially my father. He was my ideal, my star, my hero. I stood the way he stood. I combed my hair the way he would. I even bit the insides of my mouth the way he did.

Then, one day, everything changed forever.

Everything Falls Apart

It was around 8:00 a.m. in the morning. I was skittering down the stairs to go for my football training, when I heard sobs amidst the chirping of the birds outside my house. I hastened downstairs, and was aghast to find my relatives pacifying my mother. My mother was hysterical, and my aunt and my brother (senior to me by nine years) were trying to console her.

The earth collapsed beneath my feet, when I learnt the reason behind her heart-rending wails. My father had been unfaithful to my mother!

In less than a second, the god I had looked up to and emulated had turned into a villain. My whole world crumbled. My father had befouled our family's dignity, and shattered our happiness. I had never felt such seething anger and hatred.

Distraught and raging, I went into the *mandir* (shrine room). I can vividly remember the prayer I said then – "To the so-called gods, this will be the last time I step into this *mandir* or any other *mandir*!" That day was the worst day in my life. Nothing made sense. The leaves, the wind, my very existence...

Over time, things at home became intolerable. I cannot really put in words the trauma that my mother and I underwent. My brother had just joined an airline company and was traveling a lot. But where could I go? Lacking love and attention at home, I sought attention elsewhere. I fell into bad company, and, in no time, took to smoking and drinking with a clique of “friends”, many of whom were members of triad gangs. A top-scorer earlier, my grades now toppled to ‘C’s and ‘D’s. Even that didn’t make any difference to me. Nothing was more important to me then, than “my crew”. We did the most unimaginable things. In every sense of the word, I had hit the rock bottom. But I persisted with my ways. After all, the alcohol gave me the high, and my ‘friends’, the strength to face the atrocities at home.

The courts back then took a long time to finalize divorce cases. The proceedings would drag on for years. By the time my parents’ divorce was sorted out, four years had gone by and I was about 18. From a lavish lifestyle and a palace-like home, my mother, brother and I moved into a tiny two-bedroom apartment. The court gave my dad most of the assets!

“He is God and His Name is Sai Baba”

My mother had set up a small altar in the living area of our tiny apartment as there was hardly enough space to set up a proper *mandir*. This *mandir* was visible from the dining table in the kitchen. One Thursday afternoon, as I was having my food, I glanced at the *mandir* (mind you I had not stepped into a place of worship from that fateful day), and noticed, next to the picture of Ganesha, a picture of a holy man with a huge Afro hairdo! Immediately, I asked my mother who that was and she said – **“He is God and His Name is Sai Baba!”** She then related the story of how she had received Baba’s picture from a well-wisher just at the time when her marriage had hit the rocks!

But I was skeptical. It was the easiest thing to fall into these ‘faith traps’, especially when we were going through vulnerable times. I warned my mother about these ‘Guru dudes’ who were out to make quick bucks, and admonished her for her blind faith. I then finished my lunch and went on to take my usual afternoon nap.

“You’re Sai Baba, Aren’t You?”

As soon as I fell asleep, I had a strange dream. At the foot of my bed was the holy man with the “weird hairdo”, I had just spoken to my mother about! I remember looking at Him, and asking if He was Jimi Hendrix (a famous guitarist of the Woodstock Era of the late 60s), as I was a guitarist myself. He smiled and shook his head in disagreement. I then took a huge breath and asked **“You’re Sai Baba, aren’t You?”** He broke into a gorgeous smile and said – “Yes”. Baba then went on to bless me with rose petals.

I woke up from my sleep, thoroughly confounded. I thought to myself that this would be the perfect dream *if I had been a devotee*, but I wasn’t. Had Sai Baba heard what I had said about Him? I hadn’t really had pleasant words for

Him. So I panicked. I thought I was now marked for persecution by this Sai Baba person!

I ran to the kitchen and told my mother about the dream. To my utter disappointment, she had tears of joy! I was really angry now, and more than a little scared. I told her that I'm going to go to Sai Baba's study circle and make a donation so that He wouldn't "harass" me anymore!

"You Don't Choose Me, I Do"

I went to the temple that night where the *bhajans* were held. I was shocked to see a devotee-crowd in the hundreds, especially when they were praying to this "Indian guy with the Afro hairdo"!

I didn't mind the session as I was into music, and the *bhajans* attracted me, albeit from a purely musical standpoint. After the *bhajans*, I donated \$10 and bought a picture of Sai Baba in a white robe in the hope that He wouldn't "bother" me anymore!

As the days went by, I started attending the weekly *bhajan* sessions, though it was for the enjoyment factor alone and not at all for Swami. Of course, my lifestyle hadn't changed even then. I was still smoking, drinking and freaking out with my gang.

One day after school, I came home and fell asleep. And, then came the life changing moment.

"I Have Come For You"

It came in the form of a dream, that afternoon, although, throughout the dream, I had this uncanny feeling of being awake and aware. I dreamt that someone was calling me and as I entered a room, I saw Swami sitting there, as majestic as only He can be. I ran to Swami and fell at His feet. But Swami drew them away from me. He said, **"Why touch My feet when you don't believe in Me? You have doubts. Ask Me and I will answer. I have come for you."**

We then started talking about karma and the things that happened in my life – about my family, about all my bad habits, the world in general, and Him being God. Swami then allowed me to ceremoniously wash His feet with the pristine waters of the nine holy rivers. When He was leaving, I asked, "Swami, this is just a dream. How do I know if this is real?" Swami replied, "When the time comes, My vibhuti and voice will come to you."

The dream marked the end of my vices. I started off by giving up meat and became a vegetarian. I gave up drugs, even my 'friends'. My life revolved only around Swami thereafter.

Six months after the dream, I sang my first *bhajan*. And I had a manifestation of vibhuti on a picture of Mother Mary on the eve of my

20th Birthday! Swami even spoke to me three times during my trips to Puttaparthi thereafter.

Journey of Joy

In 2007, about 250 youths conducted a spiritual campaign themed 'Journey of Joy' that concluded with a trip to see Swami in the month of December. Although we didn't get to perform in front of Swami, the campaign was well taken up by the youth.

On the last day, before a majority of us left for Singapore, Swami came for *darshan* in His car. As He approached our group, the window of His car rolled down. Even as we waited with bated breath, Swami beckoned to me. I presented Him the card that we had prepared, and told Him, "Swami, this card was made for You by all our youth from Singapore with all our love!" Swami smiled in response. Then He held my right hand and said, "**Santosham, Santosham**" (very happy, very happy), before driving away.

Needless to say, we were all ecstatic. It was only later I realized that Swami had chosen to speak to me that day for a reason – another experience of Swami's boundless love.

Why Fear When I am Here?

Two days after I came back from the 'Journey of Joy' trip, I went out for dinner with my fiancé. While I was at my dinner, I suddenly experienced an excruciating pain and found myself unable to move. I was rushed to the hospital, where I started getting seizures every other minute. The doctors diagnosed my condition as acute viral infection.

I was fed with morphine to mask the pain, and eventually I started losing my memory. Being in extreme physical pain, and suffering memory loss isn't a nice place to be. On December 31, the situation worsened when my blood pressure dropped and vital signs became weak. The doctors were extremely worried. They had even informed my family.

I was asleep when I had a dream of Swami. Swami held my hand and asked, "Are you afraid?" I replied saying, "Why should I be? You are here with me!" Swami smiled, patted my cheeks and said, "Yes, Yes!"

Over the next few days, much to the surprise of the doctors and the entire hospital staff, I started to recover. The whole recovery took about four to five months as my spine had been completely affected, and even basic tasks like walking and sitting proved laborious.

By the time I recovered, it was already April 2008. And a new "Sai Project" was awaiting me.

Creating A Positive World in a Negative Environment

My friend Tien wanted to set up a restaurant. But, when he disclosed to me the location he had in mind, I almost fell off my chair. Tien wanted to set up his restaurant right in the heart of a notorious red light district in Singapore! I counselled my friend against executing his harebrained ideas until I heard him out.

Tien had a noble intention in mind – to start something positive in a negative environment. So impressed was I with Tien's unflinching idealism and resoluteness that I too came aboard the team. As my strengths lay in branding and marketing, I offered to look into the commercial aspect of the restaurant. The restaurant served organic Mediterranean vegetarian food. This was not our main source of revenue. We took it up more as a service project.

As days went by, I felt that the best way to spread the love of Swami would be to actually employ the illegal workers in the locality, and deter them from illicit sources of income. So we started talking to these workers, and offering them jobs. Though we could nowhere meet their existing monetary revenue, we could, at least, give them their rightful identity as human beings with reason and purpose, and not merely merchandise to be bartered and sold. Our mission wasn't easy. We were threatened with dire consequences, even death, by the procurers who used our employees for their illegal activities. But all through our endeavor, Swami made His presence felt, to assure us that He was with us always, and that it was 'His Project'. What is more is that, spending time with these workers, and learning about their lives made me hold on to Swami even more, for which I can only be grateful to Him.

My Guru, My Guide, My Mother Sai

Looking back, I can say it with unshakable conviction that God puts a person in the deepest waters, not to drown him but to cleanse him. And when He does put one through fire, it is because He knows best.

I am so thankful Bhagavan came in my life when He did. He made me go through a tumultuous past, so that I would have the skills to do His work. Many a times, I wished I had it easy, but *"If life were a bed of roses, would I cherish You, my Lord?"*

Swami, I now offer a heartfelt poem to You:

"My Guru, My Guide, My Mother Sai"

*If life was a bed of roses, would I cherish You, My Lord?
If You gave everything I wanted, would I still need You, My Lord?
The thorns of life that have pricked, You remove so lovingly.
You keep what I want, just giving me what I need,
My guru, my guide, my mother Sai.*

*As I walk this lonely rocky path, I forget that You are there.
As the shadow that follows every step, and that which merges in times of
need,*

*You are the breeze beneath the scorching sun,
You are shelter from the pouring rain,
My guru, my guide, my mother Sai.*

*Teach me O Father, Teach Me My Lord, that You're in Me and that I'm in You.
Let me remember with every breath I take
That I'm your child.
Hold Me Close O Mother.
My guru, my guide, my mother Sai*

Jai Sai Ram!

MY SAI – THE SOUL OF MY LIFE

By Ms. S. Lakshmi

An alumna of the Anantapur campus of Sri Sathya Sai University, Ms. S. Lakshmi completed her Bachelors in Sciences in 1990. She continued in the same campus for one more year to pursue her Bachelors in Education. She has authored many books in English which includes "A Comprehensive Life Sketch of Shirdi Sai Baba" and "Venka Avadhootha". Additionally, she has also translated "Autobiography of Peda Bottu" and "Divine Revelations" from Telugu to English. Currently, she is pursuing her Ph. D in English Literature from Sri Venkateswara University.

My tryst with Divinity began long before I made my tryst with the world. For, my mother was an ardent devotee of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba right from her childhood. And, my father, a devout follower of Shirdi Sai Baba. I had my first darshan of Swami in Shivam, His abode in Hyderabad, even as I was on my mother's lap, merely eight months old. Swami blessed me and told my mother that I would be in Puttaparthi and that He would take care of me.

Faith and love for God were, therefore, two things I inculcated from my very childhood, thanks to Swami's blessings and my two wonderful parents. Even as a child, I loved my father very much, and therefore had great love for Shirdi Baba. My father taught me how to do *japa* (chanting His name) and *dhyana* (meditation). Shirdi Baba would even appear in my dreams and talk to me. My faith in God grew as I felt His constant presence, ready to guide and guard me.

'Seek Only True Bliss' - Baba

When I completed school, my grandfather passed away. This was my first personal experience with death. The pain and anguish of losing a beloved grandparent left a deep vacuum within me, an emptiness that sought to be consoled and comforted. I prayed to God for solace, that He grant me the understanding and fortitude to accept the inexorable reality. That night I dreamt of Bhagavan for the first time. **Swami said, "Yad Drushyam Tad Nashyam. Whatever we see with our eyes is evanescent. Whatever we do not see, but can still experience, is true. So, do not cry for illusory things. Come out of *maya* and seek only true bliss."** Later, I saw Him lying down on a cot in a room. On the door to the room was written 'Room No. 43'. Swami said, "Come! I will give you place here and help you attain bliss."

That was His clarion call to me. And I simply knew that I wanted to be with Him.

I told my father that I wanted to apply to Swami's college at Anantapur, while my father wanted me to pursue Engineering. I did not want to disappoint him either so I wrote the Engineering Entrance Examination too. I got through both. However, by Bhagavan's grace, my father agreed to send me to the Anantapur Campus of Sri Sathya Sai University. This could happen only because Bhagavan had willed it so. For hadn't He promised my mother when I was an infant?

Wonder of wonders, the day I joined Swami's college in Anantapur, I was put in Room No. 43! I had barely come out of my elation, when, within minutes, an announcement was made saying that Swami had called all of us to Puttaparthi. My joy knew no bounds. And even before we knew, we were all seated in the mandir, waiting for His *darshan*.

"You and I are one" – Baba

That evening, I saw Bhagavan for the first time in the holy abode of Puttaparthi. As soon as I saw Him coming out, I started reciting a prayer within my heart, a prayer that my mother had taught me as a child – *Tvameva mata cha pita tvameva, Tvameva bandhuscha sakha tvameva, Tvameva vidya dravinam tvameva, Tvameva sarvam mama sai deva* (O Lord! You are my mother and You are my father. You are my relative and You are my friend too. You are knowledge and wealth unto me. You are my all-in-all, O Lord Sai). **Bhagavan came, stood in front of me, and said, "You are my mother. You are my father. What is all this? Who are you? And Who am I?"** What a statement! I could only exult in His nectarine omniscience, and bowed down to Him.

Life in the college was beautiful. For even as I imbibed academic lessons, prescribed by the college syllabi, Bhagavan, the Universal Chancellor, was painstakingly teaching me a lesson or two from the Cosmic Syllabi – priceless personal lessons in concepts of the Divine Doership and the Desirability of Surrender. To share an instance, I was very timid by nature. I was afraid of talking to even a group of four people. Once, it so happened that I was to give a prayer talk in the college auditorium. I tried my best to wriggle out of my difficult situation but to no avail. As the D-day approached, my anxiety grew intense and so did my prayers. **The Compassionate Lord appeared in my dream, and said, "You stand. I shall speak." In the dream, Swami actually made me speak even as He told me what I should be saying, and in what sequence.**

Letting God Speak

I got up in the morning, relieved and thrilled, and jotted down all that Swami had told me. Needless to say, the prayer talk was well-received, not only because Swami had authored the content, but also because I had spoken in the comforting knowledge that it was not me but He who was speaking, that I was merely a mouthpiece of the Divine Flutist. And that to me, was a big

lesson from Bhagavan on the sweetness of surrender; that I was just an instrument in His hands, and He was the Doer.

And if a little trace of fear remained within, Swami removed even that completely, by advising me, on another occasion. **He said, “You are neither a beast to scare others nor an animal to be afraid of someone. Always keep repeating ‘I am God’.”** That statement from Bhagavan gave me lot of self-confidence. And one of its several benefits has been to exorcise my fear of public speaking, transforming it, instead, into a thrilling exercise in *advaitic* surrender!

Swami's nectarine lessons did not end with our stay as students. He continued to give us glimpses into His enlightening omniscience, even as we had completed our studies and had returned joyfully to attend the Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality. In fact, Swami Himself had invited us, outgoing students, to the Summer Course, which He said He would be reviving again from that year. The year was 1991.

During the Summer Course, in the afternoons, Swami would pass through our dining hall, go through a particular door into the boys' hostel, have His meal there, and return via the same door. We all scrambled to sit near that door as Swami usually spoke to the first girl sitting there, asking questions like “What is the curry?” or “Is everything tasty?” or “Are you eating in the first batch or second batch?” and so on. Bitten by the Divine frenzy, I too would rush to occupy that coveted spot, and secure for myself the first place.

He Knows Even the *Rasam*!

One day, I noticed that the *rasam* (a south Indian side dish) looked like tap water sprinkled with chilly powder. Nevertheless, when I sat to have my lunch, I found the *rasam* so tasty that I kept licking my fingers. That day, I missed the first place and was second in line. Within a short while, Swami came and asked the first girl, “What is the curry today?” She replied, “Rajma” and Swami joked, “Oh Rajmatha!” I was feeling bad as He would not talk to me that day. Hardly had the thought crossed my mind, Swami, who was now standing before the third girl, turned back and asked me, **“Hey! *Rasam Kaisa Hai* (How was the *rasam*)?” I immediately said, “Very tasty Swami.” Swami made a mischievous face and said impishly, “Tap water! Chilly powder!”** He knew what I thought in my heart, the very words! I learnt the delectable lesson never to criticize food even in my thoughts. Food was God, and criticizing food was tantamount to criticizing God. Even if I did, He would know it instantly! For, there was nothing one could hide from the All-knowing Bhagavan.

When I completed studies in June 1991, I was fortunate enough to be selected by Bhagavan, among ten others, to work in His Super Speciality Hospital at Puttaparthi, which was to be inaugurated in November that year. Bhagavan gave us an interview, and then sent us to Brindavan to undergo a four months' training program at various hospitals in Bangalore. Food and transportation too were arranged by Bhagavan. Not just that, Swami told us

that He would personally come to see how we were progressing with our training, and even asked us to write letters to Him once a week.

So it was that the ten of us were accommodated in a spacious cottage. We had a huge hall to sleep in and also a store room to keep our belongings. The hall had two fans running at full speed, and I slept right under one of them.

An Amazing Rescue from Rotating Blades

One night, while I was fast asleep, I dreamt that something was falling on me, and I was simply repeating Swami's name. Meanwhile, my friends tried to wake me up, and I got up wondering why they had to disturb me from a deep sleep. That is when I realized that the fan had actually fallen on me! I had felt a warm sensation but nothing else had happened. Instead, it seemed as if the fan had borne the brunt of the fall. Two of the blades were bent in an L-shape, while the other one was straight. Moreover, the fan was carefully placed away, as if to avoid any injury to my body. In fact, I was the only one who had heard nothing. Our neighbours had all come running, when they heard the loud thud. They all said that I should thank Swami for saving my life. But I took the incident for granted, and neither thanked Swami nor mentioned the incident in my weekly letters to Him. Instead, I slept as ever, peaceful, unmindful of the entire episode. And, over a period of time, I totally forgot about the incident.

A few weeks later, Swami came to Brindavan. But our training program was such that a van would come to pick us up from the *ashram* and take us to the city at 6.30 a.m. sharp. And we would return to the *ashram* at around 6 in the evening. That meant, we missed both morning and evening *darshans*. Though we were living in the *ashram*, right behind Swami's residence, we could not see Swami for two days. Our hearts longed for Swami's *darshan*. And we poured out our hearts to Him through letters in which we reproached Swami for not looking at us, not talking to us, not concerned about us, and so on. We even quoted a song *Brindavanam adi andaridi govindudu andari vadene* (the Krishna of Brindavan belongs to all). But we berated Swami as *kondari vadene* meaning (belonging to only a few).

On the following day, we were desperate to have Swami's *darshan*, even if it meant missing out on our Hospital visit. So we prayed hard so that our van would not turn up and take us away. The all-merciful Bhagavan would have arrested the movement of the vehicle somewhere, for even at 8.30 a.m., there was still no sign of the van. Meanwhile, the *darshan* music had started. So, we requested a lady volunteer to permit us to sit near the gate. This gate is exactly opposite to the one which Swami uses for going out to give *darshan*. There were only animals gamboling near our gate. We knew that Swami would never look at our side but we were feeling wonderful to see Him, at least, from that distance.

As we sat watching the rabbits and deer, Swami came out and looked at us. We were thrilled that He had noticed us from that distance. **Swami then went on to the other side of the Trayee gate to give *darshan*, and asked the**

volunteer, “Why did you make My children sit near that gate there? They are My children, and they should be sitting on the V.I.P lawn.” That was Swami's love for His students, His property.

After *darshan*, the volunteer came to us conveying this message of Swami, and asked us to be ready by 2:30 p.m. for the evening *darshan*. We were thrilled beyond words. At that appointed time, we were all ready to have a closer glimpse of our Beloved Lord. As soon as He came, Bhagavan asked, ***Dasavatharalu, Bagunnara? (How are you, ten incarnations?)*** We replied that we were all fine by His grace. Swami then asked, “Why did you not go to the hospital today?” I replied, saying, “Swami, by Your Grace, the van did not come, and we are enjoying the fortune of Your *darshan*”. Swami then took some rice grains from one of my friend's plate, and showering it on my head, said, **“Grace is there. If not, when the fan fell, your neck would have been chopped off. You have written that Brindavan song and also that Swami does not talk to you, look at you and does not bother about you. If I am not always with you, then who do you think protected you? Is it possible to bend the blades of the fan in an L-shape?”** He continued, pointing at me, **“You were sleeping like a buffalo, not bothering to see if the nuts and bolts are tight or not. Never say that Swami is not with you. I am always with you, in you, around you, above you, below you.”**

I did not open my mouth after that. I was grateful to Bhagavan for giving me a new life. I then decided that this life given by Him should be lived only for Him. And ever since that day, I stopped taking things for granted and started thanking Him for each and everything in my life. Truly, a major lesson in gratitude.

On another occasion, Swami visited the Hospital and asked out of the blue, “Where is *prana* (life force)?” Each one gave a different answer. But Swami was not satisfied. Finally, He gave the correct answer Himself, ***Neelatho yada madhyastha vidhyulekhe va bhasvara... Like a blue flame of light, prana moves between the ninth and fourteenth ring of the vertebral column. Heart is only the main switch. If this blue flame is off, then there is no life.*** A very vital lesson, indeed, from the Divine Physician.

Swami had the right answers. But, at no point of time, did Swami emphasize that He knew everything. Since we got trained at a Cancer Institution in Bangalore, Bhagavan called the doctors there for an interview. He asked the group of doctors as to what caused cancer. There were generic answers like ‘tobacco’ and ‘smoking’, but Swami was not happy with the replies. He then said, “Children don't smoke, yet they get cancer. You are all learned. You know a lot in this field. But, in my opinion, cancer is caused by sugar.” Here was the Lord, the Supreme Specialist, humbling Himself before a group of surgeons and specialists. Many of them were not devotees of Bhagavan. Probably, that was the reason why Swami used the words ‘in my opinion’.

Tears welled up in my eyes. Swami always says ‘Speak obligingly. You may not always be able to oblige a person but you can always speak obligingly.’

And here He was, talking so lovingly, and with concern for everyone. Another important lesson Bhagavan demonstrated before my eyes!

The ultimate lesson came during one interview when Swami asked me the meaning of my name Lakshmi. I replied, "Goddess of Wealth". **Swami then clarified, "No. There is much more than that. The word Lakshmi comes from the root word 'Lakshma' which means "a trace or copy". Lakshmi is a trace or copy of Narayana, i.e, the Lord. If there is a picture of Swami and you trace it or make a copy of it, someone who sees the trace or copy will understand that it is Swami's. Likewise, your life should be like a trace or copy of God's existence. Seeing you, other people should know that God exists. Come what may your faith should not shatter."**

My life, thenceforth, has been an endeavor to live up to the Ideal Swami Himself charted for me.

Where do I begin, and how do I wrap up the endless tales of His infinite glory? I can only say with utmost gratitude and confidence – Whatever I am today, I am because of Him. Without Him I am a zero. He always guides me, guards me and protects me as the apple of His eye. Every second I feel His presence. For, is it not He, the indweller within each and every one of us, who is holding the reigns of our souls, and taking us along the journey of life?

H2H SPECIAL

ENTHRALLING REMINISCENCES OF THE DAYS OF YORE

From the mental diary of Mrs. Karunamba Ramamurthy - Part 3

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

Q: When did Swami visit your house and how did you react to Swami's presence in your household whenever He came on a visit? Also, how old was He then?

K: Swami was only a young lad of about nineteen or twenty years. Whenever devotees performed *padapuja* (worshipping His Lotus feet) to Him, He accepted it all. Swami used to talk to the *puja* participants and give them vibhuti *prasadam*. Food was then served to Swami and to all who had gathered.

During the meals Swami Himself used to offer *prasadam* to all; He used to eat a little and distribute the rest as *prasadam* to all!

Mr. Ramachandra Shetty of Mysore used to invite Swami to his house. Those of us who were nearby also used to go there during Swami's visits. In fact, Swami used to visit all our houses – we were only about three or four devotees in Mysore then.

Q: Did you have a separate room for Swami?

K: No, we were not aware of such formalities back then. We were not even aware of how to arrange for things during His visit or even how to look after Him! Swami also never said that He wanted to stay here or there. Whatever we offered was accepted by Him. He used to partake whatever we offered. If we offered water or a cup of coffee, He used to drink. He did not seem as a new person in our house. However, slowly we learned how to offer our services to Swami.

Q: Your mother was very devoted to Bhagavan and was fortunate to have interacted with Him. Could you narrate a few of her experiences?

K: There once lived a woman called Venkata Lakshamma in a hamlet called Namadala near Dharmavaram town. This woman was referred to by the villagers as a *yogini* (ascetic).

This woman once visited our house. Unaware of who she was, we used to find her ways amusing. She used to be very silent, not talking too much to anyone. Often at nights, she used to sit and do *japam* (chanting His name); she wouldn't lie down and sleep. My mother was impressed and thought that Venkata Lakshamma was powerful, practicing *pranayama* and other spiritual exercises.

My mother was enthusiastic to learn from her. And eventually, she invited my mother to her village to initiate her to a sacred *mantra*. She told my mother that she would be emancipated by the chanting of that *mantra*. That is why, as I told you in an earlier interview, Swami refused to initiate my mother saying she was already initiated and asked her to continue with the same *mantra*.

Whenever Swami went to the Chitravati river, He took devotees and children along with Him, without leaving anyone in the Mandir. Just like a flock of sheep we used to follow Him.

Once we all went for such a trip to the holy river. My mother sat a little away from the group. Swami created many things and distributed to all around. He also created medicine for those in need. One minor, though interesting, point to note is that even though His hands were under the sand, not a grain of sand used to stick to His fingers. After distributing such *prasadam* and things to those around, He called my mother. Swami commanded her to take a handful of sand herself and see what was inside it. To her surprise, she found a small paper roll. My mother told Swami that as her vision was not clear, she would read it once inside the Mandir. Swami agreed. When she opened the small roll of paper later, much to her surprise, she read the same *mantra* that Venkata Lakshamma had initiated her to. Any vapor of doubt totally vanished after that.

My mother treasured that small piece of paper all her life.

About a year later, the new Mandir came up. Hearing about Swami, Venkata Lakshamma came to Puttaparthi to see Him. There she met Mother Easwamma. She also met my mother here and enquired about her about the progress of her spiritual efforts or *sadhana*. My mother told her that Swami had confirmed the initiation and the *mantra*. My mother, however, also told her that despite constant repetition of the *mantra*, she seemed to be going nowhere. She had doubts about her emancipation. To this the *yogini* said, "You have just caught a big branch of a tree. Swami will look after you forever, don't worry!" Mother replied, "Swami is not saying anything. He keeps silent. Will I get emancipated?" The *yogini* replied that Swami was retaining my mother in His presence and that He was watching her progress. She said, "Once Swami has told you to stay only here, he has to uplift you totally. Never leave this place. You need not do anything else."

Venkata Lakshamma used to live near the old Mandir. Once, Easwamma visited the old Mandir. When they met, they both hugged together and felt very happy. It was more than a coincidence that earlier Easwamma and Venkata Lakshamma lived together in a house in Kothacheruvu village.

Q: We have heard that Swami Himself had operated upon a devotee called Tirumala Rao. Could you please narrate to us about that divine operation?

K: The operation took place during the inauguration of the new Prasanthi Mandir. At that time Saubhra, Sundramma and I were present. The operation occurred a few days before the inauguration of the new Mandir. Tirumala Rao was an ardent devotee of Bhagavan. When his wife was working in Madras (now known as Chennai), he suffered a terrible stomach ache, something similar to appendicitis. He and his wife consulted doctors in the city. The doctors examined him and concluded that there was a severe problem and that even an operation may not solve the problem, in fact, they did not even guarantee his life. They emphasized that only if he signs the risk clause, would they consider operating him.

His wife then thought that if he has to die, why should he die in the hands of these doctors? Rather, it is better to exit this world in Prasanthi Nilayam in Swami's presence. Thinking thus, she brought him to Swami's physical presence. She surrendered to Swami. "Oh Swami, I don't know whether You will save him or not. With full faith in You I have brought him to Your feet." Swami asked them to wait. The next morning was the inauguration of the new Mandir. All items required for the inauguration ceremony were stored in the old Mandir. Swami said, "You let him sleep beside Me in Subbamma's house." Hence, Tirumala Rao slept there. But lo! When he got up next morning there was no pain in his stomach. There was no trace of ulcer or any unusual growth inside! Everyone was amazed.

On that night, Swami patted on his stomach and cured every thing miraculously with one touch and with in a day or two he got the New Mandir inaugurated.

Tirummala Rao was supervising the construction of New Prasanthi Nilayam work along with two other devotees. His wife was actually worried that they may not be able to attend the inauguration function.

Q: I think that was the first operation that Swami performed.

K: Yes! It was His first operation. Tirumala Rao did not know even that an operation was performed on him!

Q: You told us earlier that Venkamma used to ask Swami to offer *arathi*! Please share some details.

K: In those days Swami used to offer *arathi* to His previous incarnation, Sri Shirdi Sai Baba, whenever a devotee came to Him complaining about a snake bite or scorpion sting. After Swami offered the *arathi*, the devotee's pain used to vanish miraculously!

In fact, whenever Swami was hungry, He offered *naivediyam* (sacred food) to Shirdi Sai first and then ate. Swami used to offer fruits and flowers to deities Himself.

In fact, even when Swami was present at the Venugopal Swami temple, whenever a marriage procession came there, they used to offer *aarthi* only to the deity and neglected Swami! The village folk of those days were still not aware of His divinity.

At other times, whenever someone wanted to cast away an evil spirit, they used to come to Swami. Swami even in those days never used to touch women. He used to take hair from His feet and tie them together. He would then create a *yantra* and place the hair inside the *yantra*. This was tied to the wrist of the sufferer as a talisman. The evil spirit would be instantly exorcised!

Some onlookers would question Swami as to whether the spirit would return on their children. To this Swami would say, "I have closed its nose so that it cannot breathe. Further, I've controlled it by the *yantra*." In those days such 'spirit' possessed sufferers occupied almost half of the old Mandir hall.

Many young men used to visit Swami in those days. They had all sorts of queries in their minds. Some wanted to know whether they would get married, others wanted to know about their jobs. Swami used to advise some people to marry while others He dissuaded. He questioned the young men about the jobs they sought. He insisted that they should not join the police force or become advocates. If anybody professed an interest to join these vocations, He became unhappy. He used to say that these jobs had the power to punish. He was against any innocent being punished wrongly on the basis of false witnesses.

Swami advised young men not to be lured by foreign countries. He used to say that people can go to foreign countries, but should not settle there. They should always remember India's eternal heritage. He used to emphasize that there is no other country which can be compared to India in the upkeep of eternal heritage.

In those days, rich Zamindars (land owners) used to visit Swami. However, they feared Him because Swami spoke openly about their secrets amidst all devotees. Some village folks misunderstood Swami and felt very angry. They felt that Swami would take money from the rich and would materially look after the welfare of the village. When Swami didn't seem 'material' enough, they became dissatisfied and started dissuading devotees and visitors from visiting Swami.

The Story of Venugopal Swami Temple

In the place where the old Mandir was constructed there once existed a big Tulsi garden. A sage called Narayana Rishi is said to have performed austerities here a long time ago. Also, this is the place where Valamiki Maharishi is also believed to have performed penance. That is why this place

acquired prominence. Once Swami asked us whether we knew the story of this temple.

The story goes like this: One day a cowherd noticed that his favorite cow contained no milk in its udder when she returned after the day's grazing. To know what was happening, he secretly followed her and watched her movements. What he saw astonished him! The cow slipped out of the shed leaving her young calf with her sister and proceeded to an ant hill on the outskirts of the village. He followed her to her rendezvous only to witness an even more astounding spectacle! From the anthill emerged a snake and started feeding itself from the cow's udder. Enraged at the loss he was subjected to, the villager lifted a stone and taking a good aim hit the snake. However, before it died it cursed all the cowherds of the village. Its last words foretold that the village would soon be full of anthills. Needless to say, very shortly anthills spread all over the place and the village came to be known as Puttaparthi.

Later, a cowherd went and dug the snake pit and found an idol of Venugopala Swami. The idol had a wedge on one side and red streak over it, suggestive of the blood of the killed snake. Sometime later, a local chief known as Palegras built a temple and installed the idol in it. From that day onwards, the curse lost its potency and cattle began to thrive at Puttaparthi.

Swami's Tapovanam - Peace, Happiness and Wisdom Granting Meditation Tree

We all have read about saints meditating while sitting under banyan trees. Even the Buddha did penance under a 'Bodhi' tree and got enlightenment. Swami once told to us that He will create a copper plate *yantra* and plant a tree over it. In the future, this place would also become a Tapovanam (place of penance).

Swami once materialized a copper plate bearing inscriptions, from the sands of Chitravathi. On that day we were seated around Swami. He levelled the sand before Him and wrote something on it with His finger. He then dug His fingers in the sand and brought out a thick plate of copper with inscriptions on it. Then Swami declared that the next day He would take this plate and install it under the roots of the Vata Vriksha tree. He also stated that whoever sits under the tree and meditates, would be granted peace, happiness and wisdom.

The next day Swami called all the devotees who were there at that time, and established Tapovanam. This was on the June 29, 1959. (*This is the meditation tree that is still flourishing up the hill, on way to the Museum and the Sri Sathya Sai University Administration block.—H2H Team*)

A Divine Revelation...

During one conversation Swami said that in His next avatar He would be in a village between Mysore and Bangalore. He said that the essence of His

teachings in this avatar would be received in full by devotees in His next avatar. On why He chose to take three avatars sequentially, He said that humanity will not be able to withstand His colossal power had He come as a single avatar.

Sakamma (a respected coffee estate owner who was very devoted to Swami) told me this amazing news once during a conversation. Once while travelling to Bangalore from Mysore, Swami had mentioned to the group that was travelling along with Him (of which Sakamma was a part) that he will take birth again in Karnataka. Swami had got down on the road and told the group that this would be the place. He had also mentioned that he would take birth in the household of a poor basket maker. He then resumed His journey.

Swami Performs another Operation

Once (during the days of the old Mandir) my mother and I were seated along with a couple of other women devotees during *darshan*. A woman and her husband had come to see Swami. The gentleman seemed to be suffering from constant stomach ache. He felt that it was due to excessive heat as he had the habit of eating spicy food. Hence he ate everything that reduced heat. When Swami came out, we asked Him to cure the poor gentleman as he was suffering greatly. Swami said that He would do something for the devotee, but he did nothing and six months passed by.

On a certain day, my mother and younger sister happened to be sitting in the bhajan hall of old Mandir. Swami sent for the suffering devotee and told him to lie down. Swami told the man that He himself would perform an operation on him to cure him of the ailment. "It will not give you any pain. You can eat fully afterwards," Swami said. All the devotees present were looking on. There appeared to be a bud-like projection that was emitting pus. Swami washed His hands and with just His finger made an incision into the man's stomach. He then removed the lumpy mass with His bare hands. Swami then cleaned his stomach and washed His hand. He did not stitch the wound. Four stitches formed automatically closing the incision. Swami then told the devotee to rest and to consume substantial food only at nights.

The devotee's wife asked her husband as to how his stomach felt to which he replied that there was totally no pain.

In the evening Swami asked us to cook food and serve the devotee. Swami was looking on while the gentleman was eating. There appeared to be a projection on his stomach. Swami with His bare fingers removed the lump of pus. No knife was used, no running doctors nor attending nurses.

The Sai Avatars are Unique

Swami was once talking to Dr. Alreja in the bhajan hall of the old Mandir. Swami told him that the Rama avatar and Krishna avatar had come, completed their mission, and left in their respective eras... and they would do so again in the next cycle. But the Sai avatars are unique. The Sai trinity

would not come again in subsequent Kali Yugas. So do not miss this opportunity. He added that this is the first and last of its kind so make full use of this avatar. He also told the devotees to spread the message of the Avatar for the benefit of mankind.

Swami Cures Relative's Diabetic Condition with Sugar

My mother's brother-in-law worked at the Julas railway station in Karnataka. He was a severe diabetic. To top it, he was very short tempered and used to often scold people. He even used to beat my aunt. One day he scolded my mother at the railway station. My aunt was unable to bear this behavior of my uncle. She beseeched my mother to take him to Swami as He alone could cure the person of his problems. My mother agreed. My uncle overheard this conversation, but he agreed to come to have Swami's *darshan*!

They planned to go to Puttaparthi during the Dassara festival. As a part of the celebration, devotees had prepared varieties of food. There were sweets and rice dishes of many kinds. Swami asked all devotees to sit down while He served them Himself!

As Swami came down the aisle serving all, He put a large measure of Sweet rice (*chakarapongal*) on my uncle's leaf. My uncle pushed the portion out of his leaf due to his condition. However, Swami turned back and told him, "I know that you are a diabetic, however, I want you to eat it!" My uncle took back the portion he had pushed away and ate it.

Three days later when he went to the doctor to get his blood-sugar level tested, the doctor was surprised. There was no trace of diabetes in him – he was miraculously cured of the condition!

Due to his anger Swami used to call him Durvasa, after the popular sage of yore who too was known to be very short tempered. Swami told my uncle that his health is okay. However He also warned my uncle not to give vent to anger anymore and to control his tongue. Swami then created a *Rudraksha mala* (special rosary) and presented it to him, asking him to wear it.

From that moment on, my uncle became a changed man!

GET INSPIRED

THE TRAIL AND THE TASTE

Isn't it a typical human reaction to question God when we face rough weather or when it gets incredibly tough to confront certain situations in life? Do we not fret and fume and wonder when something we think we badly need is denied to us? Don't we at times even accuse God for all the denials that we think we deserve? Well, if only we constantly reminded ourselves that He decides each and every situation for us based on what we really need and deserve. For, God can only do good to us. He is our creator and only wishes to see smiles on our faces, even though it may not always seem that way. And this is because, unfortunately, our vision is often narrow. All we need to do is believe that everything that happens is for our best, and that there could be no other way to progress in life.

Here is a beautiful story. Jimmy found a cocoon of a moth in his back garden one evening. He decided to take it indoors to watch it break through its shell and arrive in this world safe and sound. After a few days, he saw that the cocoon cracked at a point through which he could see the moth struggle to get out. Feeling pity for the moth, and assuming that the fighting creature needed his help, he enlarged the hole through which he could see the moth trying to break free. The scissors did the job alright, and Jimmy was excited in anticipation of watching the moth turn into a butterfly. But he noticed that the moth seemed to have an unusually oversized body with wings that looked weak, feeble, and shrivelled.

Isn't it the normal way for a moth to transform into a butterfly once out of the cocoon? Did Jimmy even doubt that things would go wrong? Well, while Jimmy waited and watched to see the moth grow into a beautiful butterfly, the moth really never grew anymore. He was hoping that the moth would spread its wings that would eventually get large enough to pick its body for its first flight. Unfortunately, such a thing never happened. The body of the moth remained strangely large, and it stayed there, crippled with shrivelled wings.

Jimmy's heart broke when he realized that in his concern and impatience to get the moth to be a butterfly, he had actually deprived that fly of a normal life. The apparent struggle of the moth that Jimmy had witnessed was the time required by it to gain enough strength in its wings to fly its shell. The struggle to break the cocoon was very much necessary for its wings to become strong.

That one moment of ill-timed intervention had crippled the life of the moth forever. It could never become what it came into the world to be – a butterfly. Therefore, all that we go through in our lives is for our good, whether we realise it at that point or not. We must trust Him and accept everything, pleasant and sad, that happens in our lives as His gifts. There is no other better way to lead a happy, contented and fulfilling life.

Bhagavan Baba says, "Tests are the taste of God. The most precious ornaments arise from the fiercest of fires... A spiritual aspirant is one who undergoes all suffering smilingly."

THE UNKNOWN HERO

For all my years as a student of Sri Sathya Sai University, I have so much to be grateful for. I am indebted to Bhagavan Baba for this life, for so many humbling experiences one of which I wish to share. This is indeed a rare happening that opened my eyes; it was a lesson of a lifetime in the form of an accidental meeting with one whom I love to call "The unknown hero".

After having received my Bachelor's degree in Mathematics at Sri Sathya Sai University in 2001, I felt the need to continue my studies and opted to pursue my Master's degree in Maths and Computer Science. It was the easiest way, I felt, to be with Bhagavan Baba for another couple of years. I spent two more years, after five years of under graduation and post graduation, in Prasanthi Nilayam to complete my Master of Technology in Computer Science in 2008.

It was in my second year of post graduation that I had the good fortune of meeting this great man, Mr. Dashrath Manjhi. This unassuming person won my admiration instantly; he had, in fact, created a marvel with his 22 years of generosity and goodness. Dashrath was a daily wage labourer by profession who took pride in what he did for a living. He hailed from a village called Gahlar nestled in the state of Bihar. The nearest town that had a reliable hospital was 80 kilometers away. Water and sanitation, let alone a decent school, was a huge problem in this village. In other words, a child in that village had hard time surviving, let alone dreaming to build a prosperous life.

People with health problems found it burdensome to walk on a muddy road for 80 kilometers to get their first ray of hope in the form of a pill or a doctor's advice. Some even died on the way to the nearest hospital. Now, there was a short cut (relatively) across a hill to the nearest town. Well, the short cut wasn't exactly an easy path to take, as one had to climb up a mountain and go down its rocky and dangerous slope. This meant it didn't really serve the purpose of an alternative at all. Dashrath's family was no exception to the inconvenience. Many, who took the "mountain path", were often injured.

One day it so happened that Dashrath's wife fell down on that very path when she was on the way carrying the midday meal of her husband. It was at that moment Dashrath decided to build a tunnel through the hill to make life easier for his village folk. Obviously, the whole village thought Dashrath had gone insane. How could he think that he could dig a tunnel through a huge hill? Some dream it was! We all claim to welcome new ideas, but this didn't seem to go down too well with his people in the village. People laughed and dismissed it even before they heard him out.

Dashrath remained unfazed and began his task of cutting through rocks in his attempt to build a tunnel. The year was 1984 and he continued to work, slowly, day after day. His children abandoned him calling him a madman. The new name caught on and the rest of the village called him the same. He earned his daily wages as a coolie, and then devoted a few hours everyday to this new challenge.

22 long years passed him by, but not without the realization of his dream. The tunnel that he had visualized in his mind did materialize. It was a glorious 25 feet in diameter and 1 kilometer long beautiful pathway. Trucks from nearby cities could now pass through that tunnel into his village! People now rejoiced; they could now reach the nearest hospital in 10 minutes! The hamlet had been blessed with a new lifeline.

When the road finally lay in front of him, the eyes of Dashrath shone with pride. It is another story that his wife was not there, who was the original reason for this noble gesture. But he felt tremendous peace in his heart as he knew the inhabitants of an entire community benefited from his work of art. Didn't Shah Jahan take 22 years to build the lovely Taj Mahal for his wife? Well, there's a difference though. While the Mughal emperor had the aid of 20,000 labourers, all Dashrath had was a chisel and a hammer. Such is the strength of the human spirit! It is easier said than done, but Dashrath did it!

The then President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam honoured him with the Padmashree (one of the highest civilian awards of India) Award for this selfless act. The government offered to give him a piece of land and a house. For Dashrath, it was more of an embarrassment than an honour. He requested the officials to build a hospital in the land given to him. His eyes shone with selflessness.

My friends and I were intrigued by his great achievement. We could not but ask him a few questions.

Q: What is your educational qualification, dear Mr. Dashrath?

Ans: Why do you need a qualification? Educated people only know four things: **ka, kha, gha and ma.**

ka: *kaam karna* (work for a living)

kha: *khana* (eat)

gha: *ghar banana* (build a house)

ma: *marna* (die)

In his wisdom, he said: "Educated people work for themselves with selfish interests. They make massive buildings but have small hearts. Modern education is making people increasingly selfish."

Dashrath Manjhi went to Prasanthi Nilayam to have Swami's darshan along with a group from Hyderabad. We could see Swami talking to this hero when Dashrath pointed out his cap to Swami that had details of his name, the size of the tunnel he had dug single-handedly, and the time it took to complete this mammoth task.

If a daily wage labourer could do so much for his entire village, isn't there something that we can do? The choice is ours to define life beyond the four words: **ka, kha, gha and ma.**

Dashrath Manjhi is no more, but lives as a flaming inspiration.

Swami always says, "Education is not for making a living, but to make a life."
And what is life if we cannot go beyond our little selves and try to bring a smile
on another's face?

- Mr. Sandip Pradhan

DROP YOUR DOTS AND STARS

Once upon a time there lived a woodsman in a village beyond the hills yonder. People called him Alex. His little pieces of creation were called Wemmicks, only they resembled people like you and me. Some were tall; some short, then there were others who had massive feet, and a few who had long noses. Some dressed up in grandeur with accessories one too many, whilst some chose to stick to simple coats. In other words, Wemmicks of all sizes and shapes constituted the village.

All that Alex did day after day was create more Wemmicks, thus mastering his craft. He worked ceaselessly, tirelessly, silently. No one really saw him around, few caught sight of him at the baker's or the barber's shop. Alex just chose to be immersed in his world of wooden creations.

Judgement by Public Approval

The Wemmicks were unique not only because they were made and felt like wood, but also for the fact that they had a rather unusual way of expressing their opinions of one another. Stars were meant for any Wemmick who looked great or beautiful or even talented. Dots were for the ones who received unflattering remarks, basically the ones no one really wanted to befriend or be proud of.

Stars were based on talent, appearance and popularity. A Wemmick received a star from a fellow Wemmick if he could show off his speed at which he did things. Some could jump high over heaps of furniture, while there were others who could sing sweet songs. There were a few who were handsome, and so everyone wanted to be their friend. One star on a Wemmick would lead to another. So, some had hundreds of stars on them, and that made them do more and more great things to earn even more stars.

You didn't have to do much to get a dot. If a Wemmick was plain looking or dull, it would attract a dot. Or if a Wemmick was slow at his work or couldn't really jump very high in the air. Here again, one dot would lead to another, and so, some Wemmicks didn't really feel good about having to be seen with so many dots as part of their attire.

The dotted Wemmicks were objects of ridicule and all they were adorned with were dots, reminders of their lack of self-worth and what the rest of the Wemmicks thought of them. The typical star-studded Wemmick was obviously one who could throw back his head, walk with a swagger, and have those airs as if half the village was his. The stars seemed to give him the feeling of confidence and the keenness to do better.

Down in the Dots

In this Wemmick-filled hamlet, there was a certain dotted character by the name Punilito. He was an unhappy soul as he wasn't smart like the rest of the Wemmicks, all people had to offer him were dots after dots. Punilito felt miserable everyday, uncared for, and basically considered himself a loser. He tried his best to do things like the others, but failed badly. He would end up falling flat on his face and get chipped off even more, making it easier for his neighbours to dot him further.

The constant negative remarks from his village folk convinced Punilito that he was quite a picture of shame indeed. He began to live in seclusion and would seldom step out of his house. He hated the idea of people seeing him to tell him for the millionth time that he was a thorough waste of space, and that he'd best leave their community. It seemed that the opinions of the entire village were working as Punilito began to sink into depression.

Punilito wondered for days as to what he could possibly do to change his situation. Who would want to be in his shoes anyway, would you? He had no friends. He was always shunned by people, unless they had to come up to him to give him yet another dot. As his sorry state of affairs got worse, he suddenly came upon a rare sight. A Wemmick who had absolutely no star or dot! "Am I dreaming?" thought Punilito to himself.

Punilito approached this new person rather hesitantly, with his confidence shattered to smithereens. Layla was the pleasant spectacle who had neither marks of honour nor criticism on her. Punilito couldn't contain his curiosity anymore, and said aloud what was on his mind, "If only I could be like you! How do you manage to be free from the approval or disapproval of this place? Would you please share your secret with me? I promise to be mum about it?" "Well, well, dear friend, I go to Alex everyday!" replied Layla. "Oh what do you mean? Please help me understand this better."

Layla explained, "All I do is watch Alex at work everyday! Nothing more, nothing less really!" "What's your visit got to do with your unique status?" begged Punilito. "Go on and find that out for yourself, you poor thing", said Layla with a sigh.

Meeting His Maker

So off Punilito went in search of the woodworker Alex with little faith that any real solution could be guaranteed. Alex was seen in the company of loads of wood, his tools, and his new creations. "Welcome, my dear Punilito! Where have you been all this time? I've been thinking of you often."

"What? So do you know my name? I've never met you before, have I?" Punilito was visibly shocked beyond words. "Of course I know you, silly boy, because it is I who created you. You are my creation. You are one of my masterpieces. It's not as if I don't see you filled with dots, I most certainly do, but that's got nothing with how I value you."

Punilito began to choke and in a slight snuffle muttered, "You know, Alex, I've done my best to be someone. Really. It just hasn't worked so far, and I'm getting tired of who I am and how others perceive me." "Stop apologising for who you are, my son, as what the world thinks of you makes little difference to me. Some things can never change; you'll always be perfect, perfectly special to me. Could you keep that in mind always, please?" Alex sounded as if he meant it sincerely.

"But Alex, how is it that lovely Layla has no such thing as stars and dots? Is she more special to you than the rest of us?" Punilito had many unanswered questions, it seemed. "No, my precious. Layla cares not what others think of her, she ignores compliments the same way as she does rude comments. Her only focus is on what I think of her. I think she's perfect. Stars and dots simply refuse to stick on her as she's above it all."

Punilito wasn't sure he understood it fully. "Alex, but why won't the stars and dots stick to her?" Alex in his kind voice reassured, "Don't worry about understanding this strange phenomenon. Go home for now, but remember to come over everyday because I need to tell you how much I care about you."

Shedding Negative Self Conceptions

It felt like heaven to Punilito's ears. He felt the sincerity in Alex's words. Alex picked him up from the wooden bench on which he sat and placed him back on the ground with the parting words for the day: "Again, Punilito, you're special. I have created you, and I make no mistakes." Just as Punilito walked away feeling less of the torture he normally felt, he saw a dot fall on the ground.

Alex is none other than our Divine Master, our beloved God. Bhagavan has created each and every one of us, chiselled us to perfection, He has chosen unique roles for all of us on this planet, and He tells us everyday that we are special. Swami always reminds us that we must avoid seeing the bad in others, and concentrate on only the good. Good vibrations, good feelings and good words create a positive, happy effect on us. If we have the tendency to judge, we must tell ourselves, "Swami, I leave it to you to judge this person or situation. It is your job, not mine. "

As Mother Teresa famously said, "If we are busy judging others, we will have no time to love them." Therefore, let's love all unconditionally, just the Lord does, and at the same time, love ourselves too. Because, no matter what the world thinks of us, to the One who matters the most in our lives, we are special!

- *Adapted from the original version of Max Lucado*

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ ON SERVICE CULLED FROM WORLD SCRIPTURES

All religions have service to humanity as one facet in the jewel of their teachings, as Bhagavan Baba Himself says:

"How can anyone contemplate on God - who loves the poor and the grief-stricken - and yet be cold-hearted when the poor and the grief-stricken are around them? Love for God must be manifested as love for man, and love must express itself as service. Service to man is service to God. When God comes embodied as man to serve man, how delighted He must be to find man himself taking up the role and serving brother-man to get rid of disease, distress or doubt!"

Here is a quiz which presents the common thread of love expressed as service, found in all world faiths.

1. The Bible teaches Christians how to do seva correctly: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."

What is the Bible's advice for Christians while doing seva for the needy?

- A. Give in secret.
- B. Give only to your local Church.
- C. Encourage others to give by example.
- D. Always go in groups to do seva.

2. From *Deuteronomy 15.7-11*, Jews learn how to serve the poor: "If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.... You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and the poor, in the land."

What do the Jewish scriptures teach on how one should view someone who is needy and poor?

- A. As a lesson on humility.
- B. To be scared of our future.
- C. As a present from God.
- D. As a test of our love for God.

3. The *Qur'an* speaks on *seva* in this way: "Be kind to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighbor who is of kin, and to the neighbor who is a stranger, and to the companion at your side, and to the traveler, and to [slaves] that your right hands own." *Qur'an* 4.36-37

The *Qur'an* also highly praises families who do selfless *seva*. What does the *Qur'an* say about the motive behind such families who do *seva*?

- A. They hope for redemption in next life.
- B. They hope for more Prosperity.
- C. They do not wish for any reward.
- D. They are after name and fame.

4. In the Bahá'í Scriptures, Abdu'l-Bahá teaches *seva* thus: "Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged.

Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. Pay ye no heed to aversion and rejection, to disdain, hostility, injustice: act ye in the opposite way. Be ye sincerely kind, not in appearance only."

According to Abdu'l-Bahá, what should one center their attention on while doing *seva*?

- A. To do it to please the Lord.
- B. To be the Lord's mercy to man.
- C. To be indebted to man for the opportunity.
- D. To never give up the task undertaken.

5. Sikhism is founded on principles of '*Sarbat da bhalla*' - working towards the "common good of all". For Sikhs, this means reaching out to serve and uplift all of humanity as an expression or devotion to the Creator. This point is highlighted by the Guru in many places in the while it also explains the spiritual benefits of doing *seva* and the ways in which one should perform it.

According to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, besides doing *seva*, what is one of the three things that can help one attain salvation?

- A. Chanting the Lord's Name.
- B. Holding bhajans at one's own home.
- C. Offering charity every day.
- D. Feeding all the homeless in the neighbourhood.

6. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna extols *seva* thus: "Every selfless act, Arjuna, is born from the eternal, infinite Godhead. God is present in every act of service. All life turns on this law, O Arjuna."

According to Krishna, what happens to one who has found the joy of doing *seva*?

- A. They need less food and sleep.
- B. They can now leave their families and live alone.
- C. They feel safe and secure within society.
- D. Nothing can affect their security.

7. In the Jain dictum *parasparopagraho jivanam*, which means, "souls render service to one another", lies therein the central theme governing Jain philosophy; the welfare of the whole universe, not only of humanity. It teaches us to love and help one another for the benefit of all. It preaches that having friendship with all living things, amity between all humanity and all life is the true wealth of our planet.

What facet of spirituality is described in one of the Jain scriptures *Kundakunda, Pancastikaya*? "To be moved at the sight of the thirsty, the hungry, and the miserable and to offer relief to them - is the spring of virtue."

- A. Humility.
- B. Wisdom.
- C. Charity.
- D. Peacefulness.

8. Buddha once said, "When you see someone practicing the way of giving, aid him joyously, and you will obtain vast and great blessings." A disciple asked: "Is there an end to those blessings?" The Buddha said, "Consider the flame of a single lamp. Though a hundred thousand people come and light their own lamps from it so that they can cook their food and ward off the darkness, the first lamp remains the same as before. Blessings are like this, too."

The Buddhist scripture *Itivuttaka* explains the nature of a person who is fit for *seva* thus: "There are three kinds of persons existing in the world: one is like a drought, one who rains locally, and _____."

- A. One who rains depending on his mood.
- B. One who rains for publicity.
- C. One who rains in floods causing problems.
- D. One who rains everywhere.

9. In the *Gathas*, what is the prerequisite for Zoroastrians in order to be worthy of serving mankind?

- A. To be truthful in thoughts, words and acts.
- B. To be brave enough to overcome obstacles.
- C. To be a strong leader.
- D. To become a priest first.

10. During an All India Conference in November 1970, Swami said someone once asked Him a question about *seva*: "We are serving others, relieving their pain or misery. We are feeding the hungry, poor; we are engaged in many good acts; are these not *sadhana*?"

Swami replied by giving an example: "But, this is not service to others, it is service to yourself. A person may invite all of you Office-bearers for a dinner! And he may declare afterwards, 'I gave a dinner to all the delegates.' He too sat and ate with all the delegates and so, he served himself too, when he served the others, did not he? He derived joy as a result of the dinner he arranged and so, it was a piece of service rendered to himself ultimately."

According to Swami, what is the cause of desiring to do *seva*?

- A. Good karmas.
- B. Good company.
- C. Good thoughts.
- D. Good financial resources.

ANSWERS:

1A. Give in secret.

In Mathew 6:1-4, it clearly states: "**But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.** And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

"Give, and it will be given to you... for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." *Luke 6.38*

"He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." *Luke 3.11*

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." *Galatians 6.2*

2C. As a present from God.

"When the Holy One loves a man, He sends him a present in the shape of a poor man, so that he should perform some good deed to him, through the merit of which he may draw a cord of grace. *Zohar, Genesis 104a*

"Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord delivers him in the day of trouble." *Psalms 41.1*

3C. They do not wish for any reward.

"They feed with food the needy wretch, the orphan, and the prisoner, for love of Him, saying, '**We wish for no reward nor thanks from you.**'" *Qur'an 76.8-9*

The Qur'an teaches that the family that does seva and extends itself to others is enriched many-fold. The varied experiences and warm friendships which accrue to such a family are treasures more precious than gold. Beyond that, the family is showered with divine love beyond measure.

There are also relevant portions from the Hadith, (the sayings and deeds of prophet Mohammed) which speak on this subject.

"Whoever removes a worldly grief from a believer, Allah will remove from him one of the griefs on the Day of Judgment. Whosoever alleviates the lot of a needy person, Allah will alleviate his lot in this world and the next. Whosoever shields a Muslim, Allah will shield him in this world and the next. Allah will aid a servant of His so long as the servant aids his brother." *Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi 36*

"The best of men are those who are useful to others." *Hadith of Bukhari*

4B. To be the Lord's mercy to man.

"Let each one of God's loved ones center his attention on this: to be the Lord's mercy to man; to be the Lord's grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him.

Let him improve the character of each and all, and reorient the minds of men. In this way, the light of divine guidance will shine forth, and the blessings of God will cradle all mankind: for love is light, no matter in what abode it dwelleth; and hate is darkness, no matter where it may make its nest. *Selections From the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá: 1*

"To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues." is what Bahá'ís have learnt from *The Hidden Words* – 49

5A. Chanting the Lord's Name.

The importance of selfless seva is highlighted by the Guru in this verse: "One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward, shall attain his Lord and Master." (GGS p 286)

The Guru tells the followers that peace can be obtained through Seva: "You shall find peace, doing seva" (GGS p 25)

A Sikh has to make a concerted effort to seek opportunities to perform Seva. One has to focus one's mind on this duty and not waste the opportunities of this life. When you perform Seva, the mind should recite Gurbani: "Center your awareness on seva and focus your consciousness on the Word of the Shabad." (GGS p 110)

Three things are necessary to obtain salvation and liberty and they are: "Do seva, follow the Guru's Teachings, and vibrate on the Lord's Name, Har, Har." (GGS p 176)

Finally, in the following verse the Guru informs the devotee that performing seva in the correct fashion will bring you "honour in the Lord's Court" thus: "In the midst of this world, do seva, and you shall be given a place of honor in the Court of the Lord." (GGS p 26)

6D. Nothing can affect their security.

"Whoever violates this law, indulging his senses for his own pleasure and ignoring the needs of others, has wasted his life. But those who realize the God within are always satisfied. Having found the source of joy and fulfillment, they no longer seek happiness from the external world. They have nothing to gain or lose by any action; **neither people nor things can affect their security.**

Through selfless service, you will always be fruitful and find the fulfillment of your desires" *Bhagavad Gita 3.10-26*

"Let the rich man satisfy one who seeks help and let him look upon the long view:

For wealth revolves like the wheels of a chariot; coming now to one, now to another." *Rig Veda 10:117:5*

7C. Charity.

"Charity: To be moved at the sight of the thirsty, the hungry, and the miserable and to offer relief to them - is the spring of virtue."
Kundakunda, Pancastikaya 137

Jain teachings of peace, harmony and renunciation are thus promoted by teaching sharing; by being charitable rather than greedy.

Anger destroys goodwill,
Pride destroys humility,
Deceit destroys friendship,
but everything is destroyed by greed.

"Rendering help to another is the function of all human beings."
Tattvarthasutra 5.21

8D. One who rains everywhere.

"There are three kinds of persons existing in the world: one is like a drought, one who rains locally, and one who rains everywhere."

How is a person like a drought? He gives nothing to all alike, not giving food and drink, clothing and vehicle, flowers, scents and ointments, bed, lodging and lamps, neither to recluses and *brahmins* nor to wretched and needy beggars. In this way, a person is like a drought.

How is a person like a local rainfall? He is a giver to some, but to others he gives not.... In this way, a person is like a local rainfall.

"How does a person rain down everywhere? He gives to all, be they recluses and *brahmins* or wretched, needy beggars; he is a giver of food and drink, clothing... lodging and lights. In this way a person rains down everywhere." *Itivuttaka 75*

He who leads a very simple and calm life in the service of the people; and who is unselfish and free from greed, is a man of Holy Life.

"Enlightening beings are magnanimous givers, bestowing whatever they have with equanimity, without regret, without hoping for reward, without seeking honor, without coveting material benefits, but only to rescue and safeguard all living beings." *Garland Sutra 21*

9A. To be truthful in thoughts, words and acts.

The *Gathas* proclaim: "The Lord of Wisdom and Life shall, through His wisdom, perfection and inspiring power, bestow upon persons who are faithful to Him in thought and deed, perfection, eternity, purity, spiritual power and strength of serving mankind."

O, Mazda Ahura, **the wise and clever man is the person who realizes the truth and is aware of the Lord's Law by His thought. He protects the truth and purity through His spiritual power, and will neither speak nor act except in truth.** He shall try his best for the spread of truth. **Such a man, O Mazda, shall be faithful to Thee and shall be regarded as the worthiest man for helping the people.**" *Yasna 31, Verse 21:22*

"Happiness be the lot of him who works for the happiness of others. May the Lord grant him health and endurance." *Yasna 43:1*

"Let one practice here good industry; let one make the needy prosperous." *Avesta Visparad 15.1*

10 C. Good Thoughts.

Swami explains: "**Good thoughts will get desires in good forms.** When you feel that it is not the 'other' whom you are serving - but yourself then, your service will be better and more effective. Establish this attitude more and more firmly in your mind. If you do good, you get good from those around you and from the universal entity, God. If you do bad, you get bad. Divinity but resounds, reflects, reacts! God has no favourites, no prejudices. **The thought creates a desire; the desire creates a form through which it is expressed. Have good thoughts, you get desires in good forms.**"

"Do not believe that you can by means of service reform or reshape the world. You may or may not; that does not matter. The real value of service, its most visible result, is that it reforms you, reshapes you. Do service as a spiritual discipline; then you will be humble and happy." - Baba

QUIZ ON DIVINE DISCOURSES ON THE THEME OF GRAMA SEVA

*'Know, oh man, Grama Seva is Rama Seva!
When love overflows it is Rama Rajya
There is no progress without Love
Without Service there is no hope for man.'* - Baba

Bhagavan Baba's Grama Seva programme is famous the world over for providing a heart-felt response to the problems faced by India's village population. As a special feature of Grama Seva, from 2002, Baba sent His most precious property, namely His students, to serve in the villages surrounding Puttaparthi. It was a love-experience for both the students and the villagers who have been used to years of neglect. As Baba stated:

"People in the villages have no medical and educational facilities. They have no drinking water, no sanitary arrangements. They have no food to eat. Provide these facilities for them and thereby realize Divinity. The need of the hour is the man of action, not the one who only talks.

"Serving the poor in the villages is the best form of sadhana. Engage yourselves in social service for the uplift of your village. Banish all differences and unite in the cause of promoting the welfare of everyone in the village. When the villages grow, the cities and the States grow and the Nation on the whole prospers. The progress of the Nation is based upon the progress of the villages. Everyone should be interested in the welfare of the villages."

Here is a quiz based on this important grass-roots aspect of Bhagavan's all-encompassing service projects.

For a comprehensive hands-on write up of the Grama Seva experience, please go to our article 'Love in Action' in the December 2004 edition.

1. Regarding the attitude of people who depend on the Government for the development of society, Swami has often mentioned: "There are villages where people struggle for want of water to drink. The Government cannot by itself provide all these conveniences. Without the cooperation of the people, the Government cannot do anything. Government is not a free entity. It is based on people's support. It can work only when the people cooperate actively. Without depending on Government, you must carry on the development of society through your own strength. That is real *saadhana*, real *seva*."

On His 62nd birthday, Swami confirmed His declaration: "Take up service in the villages whole-heartedly. I have often declared: *Grama seva is Rama seva* (service to villages is service to Rama) *Ramarajya* is the reign of love. Keep aloof from the Government."

Besides this, what is one of the other three main things that Swami wants us to remember while doing *Grama Seva*?

- A. Give freely and wholeheartedly.
- B. Avoid finding faults in others.
- C. Focus on our home first.
- D. Find out the full details from the head of the village first.

2. In a Divine 1972 Discourse, Swami helps us learn what should be stressed on for those who are motivated to participate in *Grama Seva*: "Every village has to be equipped with four *Aalayas* (Houses). First, the *Bhojan-aalaya* (the Eating-house or Hotel), which must provide for a moderate price, clean sustaining food. Of course, man does not feed on such food only. He feeds on pure water and air and the food that he gorges through the eye, the tongue and the sense of touch has also to be free from pollution and poison. Next, the *Aarogya-aalaya* (the Medicine-House, the Hospital). This has become essential, since man has neither healthy eating habits nor the inclination to adopt them. Third, the *Vidhyaalaya* (the Learning-House, the School), which is a lamp lit to keep darkness away. The School must instruct the young and inspire the old, keep alive the roots of one's native culture. Last, the _____."

According to Swami, then what is the most important fourth House that every village should be equipped with to make it a fruitful *Grama Seva*?

- A. House for the Aged.
- B. House for the Handicapped.
- C. House for God.
- D. House for Entertainment.

3. In a Divine 2002 Discourse, Swami guides us further: "How should one serve? One should do it in the true spirit of service. When you go to a village for service, you should involve the villagers also in the service activities and motivate them to undertake such sacred work everyday in their village. It is not possible for you to go to the villages everyday. You may go to a village once in a month or two. Therefore, when you involve the villagers in the service activities, they will learn to _____."

- A. Serve themselves.
- B. Pray more.
- C. Get rid of addictions if any.
- D. Teach neighboring villages.

4. In a Divine 1975 Discourse, while visiting a village, Swami reiterates the most important *Seva* of all: "The best type of *seva* is feeding the hungry; the

gift of food is referred as *Anna-dhaana* (the charity of food). But, no one has the authority to give in charity what has been given by God or be proud of it or even to feel that he has given something in charity. God gave the rains, God fostered the sapling and God ripened the grain; what right have you to call it yours and give it in charity? It is not *dhaana* (charity) that you do; you are only offering gratitude to God; you are _____."

- A. "You are just a mediator."
- B. "You are sanctifying the grain."
- C. "You are an instrument for inspiration."
- D. "You are simply sharing your abundance."

5. During the 1995 Summer Showers, Swami prompted us to think: "Help pious and needy people alone. If a man is beating another man, will you help him in that act? Always discriminate before jumping to help. Someone asks you for money. You must ask him why he wants money. If he says he is hungry, give him food, not money. His real need is food. If he insists on money, such a person should not be helped. If he is cold, give warm clothes. If he is ill, give medicine. But don't give money. Why?"

- A. He will keep asking for more!
- B. Instead of helping him, we will hurt him!
- C. Next, his friends will want money too!
- D. We will not be motivated to help again

6. In a Divine Discourse from 1976, Swami guides us on how to educate the villagers on the value of nutrients of foods while doing *Grama Seva*: "Advise the villagers about environmental hygiene and preventive measures. The members of the Sathya Sai Seva Dhal have a special duty for this type of service. They have to visit the villages, and after winning the confidence and love of the people, advise them on good food habits and other means of maintaining health. They must also exhort them to resort to the hospital as soon as the first symptoms of ill-health are evident. Early treatment will save the villagers from spending many days in bed away from the fields."

To what does Swami compare this activity to be?

- A. As meritorious as worship itself.
- B. As rewarding as looking after our own health.
- C. As useful as a good night's rest.
- D. As helpful as going on pilgrimage.

7. In a Divine Discourse from 1981, Swami encourages women in doing *Grama Seva* by giving an example: "Old students of the Women's College at Anantapur have an Association working on similar lines. They have named it the Kingdom of Mother Sai. They too are taking on village after village as centres for their educational and health service activities. Girls build walls, put up roofs and thatch houses in order to provide shelter for the homeless! The village folk are struck with admiration and amazement at the skill and enthusiasm the students evince. They visit slums and, with the co-operation of the hutment-dwellers, clean the areas. They move into bazaars and markets and exhort the people to share with them the joy of cleansing the by-lanes and drains. They are trying to provide electric lights to villages which are plunged in darkness when the sun sets."

What does Bhagavan emphasise will ensure that God will always be with them in their work?

- A. Absence of loose talk.
- B. A jolly disposition.
- C. Prepared talks on Swami's teachings.
- D. The intention to perform good deeds.

8. In a 1971 Discourse, Swami talks about the benefits of teaching *Bala Vikas* to kids as an integral part of *Grama Seva* in the villages: "I desire that you should run a *Bala Vikas* for your children, where they will learn stories from the scriptures, the epics and the lives of saints belonging to all religions. Children must also be taught habits of cleanliness and mutual help and co-operation. They can also be taught to sing *bhajan* songs and enact little plays on themes selected from classics. They will also learn habits of discipline, for, these alone can ensure happiness, individual and social."

According to Swami, what is more important than even the syllabus content while carrying out *Bala Vikas*?

- A. The all round physical development of the children.
- B. The spreading of the name of Sai in the villages.
- C. The creation of an atmosphere where noble habits and ideals can grow.
- D. Habits of cleanliness taken up by the villagers.

9. In a Divine Discourse from 1985, Swami stresses on the importance of the role of youth in *Grama Seva*: "Youth alone can transform youth. The youth of the villages will be inspired when they find you, graduate and post-graduate students, in Khaki work clothes, evincing practical interest in the cleanliness of the environs, the health of the villagers and in fulfilling their needs."

What tip does Swami give to the youth that will make it easier for them to do the *Grama Seva*?

- A. Play the same games with them.
- B. Sing their favorite bhajans with them.
- C. Speak the same language.
- D. Transport them to school everyday.

10. In a Divine Discourse from 1981, Swami further guides us as to what He would really love to see: "My *sankalpa* (resolve) is to promote the advancement of villages. The children who come from villages must spend their lives in their own villages in order to develop them in every way. That alone can make their lives worthwhile. This is the *Sai Sankalpa* - to adopt methods by which they can improve their villages, to implement those methods and to instruct them how to succeed in this mission. Since those born in villages are trekking into towns and settling there, villages are declining. But, towns cannot exist without villages. Villages have to be fostered first. The village is the heart of the town; without it, the town becomes lifeless. Krishna was born in a village; He grew up in the village and developed its prosperity. Its fame became worldwide, on account of Him. So, we should protect and promote the village to such an extent that its renown will spread in all the quarters."

According to Swami, what should be the ideal set by youth to make any *Grama Seva* successful?

- A. Be examples of moral living to the community.
- B. Never indulge in slander and gossip.
- C. Always keep studying hard and make Swami proud.
- D. Only strive for spiritual advancement.

ANSWERS:

1B. Avoid finding fault of others.

Swami stresses on the three things to be borne in mind: "One more thing will have to be borne in mind by everyone connected with Sai Organisations. Whatever activities they may undertake, our organization should have no connection with the Government. Let the Government do its job. Our activities should be confined to what we can do, to the limits of our capacity, without depending on the Government. There is no need to attempt something big. Even a small bit of service done well is enough.

Bear these three things in mind: First, our service organizations should keep aloof from the Government. Second, plunging into the society, render service. Third, avoid finding fault or talking ill of others. This is the

real *sadhana*. Henceforth, engage yourselves in social service, remembering and worshipping God and recognizing your inherent Divinity. This is the way to sanctify your lives.”

2C. House for God.

Swami finished the list with: **“Last, the *Deva-aalya* (the House of God, the Temple, the Heart of the Community), pumping the life-blood of Faith, Reverence and Steadfastness throughout the body politic.”**

3A. Serve themselves.

Swami continues: **“When you involve the villagers in the service activities, they will learn to serve themselves.** You should teach them the importance of cleanliness. Usually, villagers live in unhygienic conditions, which cause various diseases. So, you should teach them to keep their village clean. The water that we drink and the air that we breathe should be free from pollution. Only then can we lead a happy and healthy life.”

4B. “You are sanctifying the grain”.

Swami enlightens us to have a more spiritual outlook: “God gave the rains, God fostered the sapling and God ripened the grain; what right have you to call it yours and give it in charity? It is not *dhaana* (charity) that you do; **you are only offering gratitude to God; you are sanctifying the grain you have harvested by offering the food prepared out of it to these *Naaraayanas* (Gods in human form). Call it *Naaraayana Seva*!** That will be more correct.

Anyway, since you are doing it with love and humility, in spirit of Divine worship, I have come to your village to bless you. Do not cast all responsibility on a committee, or a group of enthusiasts; join them wholeheartedly and offer to share the burden. I want everyone to join in this *Naaraayana Seva* and that it should be done, not once a month as now, but even at more frequent intervals.”

5B. Instead of helping him, we will hurt him!

Swami explains: “He will spend it on liquor, go home and drown himself and his family in misery. **By giving money you have not helped him, but hurt him!** So, always inquire whom you should help, when, where and how. This is true *seva*. People think, ‘I am the giver, he is the recipient.’ This is not *seva*.

Once upon a time a man resolved to perform *seva*. He told himself, ‘I am a servant. That is why I serve.’ The Divinity present in servitude is not present in authority. He prayed:

*Daasaanudaasudanu Kaavalenu Ra,
Daasulaku Sevane Cheyavale Ra.*

O Lord! Let me be the servant of Your servant.
Let me be busy serving Your servants.

What is the meaning? The goal of service is to subdue egoism. The egoist can never serve and the real servant is egoless. Proceed into service with such an outlook. There is nothing greater than service. We should develop humility. Authority and power do not stay forever. Wealth can vanish any moment. But virtues are permanent.”

6A. As meritorious as worship itself.

Swami explains further: “The villager now lives on food that is deficient in vitamins and proteins, though he is growing vegetables and food that provide these ingredients in plenty and selling them to city-dwellers. He has to be told of the value of fruits and vegetables as a source of nutrients that will promote and preserve his health, for healthy parents mean healthy children, and sick parents pass on their ill-health to the coming generations. Members of the units of the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation can also join the Seva Dhal in this campaign of educating the villagers. **This activity is as meritorious as worship itself.**”

7D. . The intention to perform good deeds.

Swami guarantees us: “By such *seva* they are giving great *aananda* to Swami. I bless them that they may offer *seva* in even greater measure, so that Swami can give them greater *aananda*. These activities cannot be taken up and fulfilled by spirit of service alone. They require funds too. And, they are finding it by utilizing a portion of the salaries they get as teachers. **They know that so long as they are intent on good deeds of *seva*, they will not be deserted.** *Dharma* will guard those who observe *dharma*.”

8C. The creation of an atmosphere where noble habits and ideals can grow.

Swami encourages us: “The ideal of the *Bala Vikas* is to raise a generation of boys and girls who have a clean and clear conscience. **The actual syllabus is not so important as the creation of an atmosphere where noble habits and ideals can grow and fructify.** The *Baala Vikas* pupils follow *Bala Vikas* discipline and curriculum only for one day in the week and attend their usual schools on the other days. So the impact of the *Guru* has got to be extra strong if it has to act as a catalyst in the process of modification of the behaviour patterns of these pupils.”

9C. Speak the same language.

Swami advises the youth: “You must bring the youth together and form them into a group, which can with the guidance of the elders, maintain and expand the work done by you. Discover what their needs are, so that you can attend to them. We can, for instance, open food centers for the aged poor and their dependents. You have to win their hearts through love. When Love is planted

and fostered, factions will disappear from the villages. Villagers are basically good-natured, God-fearing folk. But politics as well as attractions for city life, have led them to the present impasse. When they hear wise counsel from the lips of the children, they are bound to be affected. **Train yourselves to speak in their own language to gatherings of villagers.**"

10A. Be examples of moral living to the community.

Swami vowed: "*Sai Sankalpam* is this - children who come from a village must, after education, settle in the village itself, develop the village and purify the village atmosphere. Educated villagers now rush towards towns seeking *udhyoga* (jobs) there. How can any one deserve an *udhyoga* without first acquiring *yoga*? Your lives should have *yoga* as the goal, not *udhyoga*! Engage in some profession in order to secure the means to live and let the society in which you live benefit by your services to your self, to society and to the country - these are the stages which should follow one another.

Dear students! Become aware of your truth, start living in the light of that awareness, be humble before your parents and render obedience to them. Offer reverence to the elders of the village and speak politely to them, and **be examples of moral living to the community.**"

HEART2HEART QUIZ ON SAI SEVA

This quiz tests your recall powers from reading Heart2Heart, and all the questions here are related to our 'Window to Sai Seva' stories. In the answers we have included the links to all the articles from which they have been taken. So, please click on these links and enjoy reading about how Bhagavan has been inspiring His devotees to tread the joyful path of selfless service to mankind.

1. In 'Serving with the Mind'– from the September 2005 issue, we presented an excerpt from the book "The Touch of the Lord – on the Life of the O'Brien Twins" written by Dorothy and Moyia O'Brien from Australia, who were referred to by Swami as "The Pink Twins". They have dedicated their lives in the service of others through SWARA (Sunshine Welfare and Remedial Association), a home for physically challenged people.

"This is a particularly sweet story: There were two women, one with a new baby, who came up to us one day at Brindavan - they felt that Sai Baba had guided them to speak with us. We did not have time to see them in our room so they came to our rickshaw after *Darshan*. Many problems had suddenly come into their lives, and they asked us to pray for them. There was a lot of fear, particularly for the baby, and Sai Baba had told them to stay and not move on.

We advised them not to say to Baba how bad everything is; but have faith and tell Him that they trust Him and have faith in Him and to pray...then we were getting ready to leave. However, one of the girls began to cry quite hysterically and said, '*You don't understand.*' We were still trying to talk to her when we had to move - Sai Baba's car was coming and we were in the rickshaw inside the grounds of the College. We drove outside and parked, but in our minds we could still see her poor little tearful face as we had driven away."

Being ruffled by the situation, what did the Pink sisters do while seeking Swami's guidance?

- A. They called Swami's residence.
- B. They sat outside His room until Swami noticed them.
- C. They poured love on the women.
- D. Swami talked to them when they put a special pink vibhuti in their mouth.

2. In 'The Golden Principles of Service' from the July 2005 issue, we featured a talk given by Mr. Rangarajan in the presence of Bhagavan. He said: "Let us recall what Bhagavan has mentioned about service. Work can be transformed into service only when it follows certain conditions; only when it is carried out in a particular way, and Bhagavan lays so much stress on service that He says **'Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray'**."

Next, he shared five different aspects of Swami's teachings on service. "The first aspect of service that Bhagavan mentions is that it should be done with the feeling of oneness."

Of the other four aspects, what was the last teaching of Swami on seva that he talked about?

- A. Quality Not Quantity.
- B. Silent Service.
- C. Offer Every Act to God.
- D. Pure Selfless Love for God.

3. In 'Sai Seva In New Zealand Prisons' from the December 2005 issue, we presented an article which beautifully conveyed the tension and reward in undertaking a challenging service project - trying to bring light into the lives of prison inmates in Auckland, New Zealand, where the Sathya Sai Service Organization began a pilot programme of visiting prison inmates in Mt. Eden Remand prison.

The programme was first set up to visit the Women's Wing of the prison because the prison authorities felt that there would be less tension if a pilot programme could be tried with women inmates first.

A devotee who took part on that eventful day shared: "We explained that we were followers of Sathya Sai Baba, a wonderful Spiritual Teacher who resides in India and whose message of love and tolerance encompasses all religions and races. We told them that we had a quantity of small pocket photographs of Him and some holy ash (*vibhuti*) and would gladly give them out if requested to.

All agreed afterwards that the session was very successful, the need was there and that it should be on a permanent basis...We were next asked to take the programme into the men's part of the prison. As one of our devotees put a small photo of Swami away in his pocket one of the inmates - a heavily tattooed gang member came up to him and said: '_____.'"

- A. "He came in my dream last night and promised to set me free!"
- B. "He came into my cell, blessed me and disappeared!"
- C. "I see Him talk to the guard every morning!"
- D. "Next time, can you please bring a big photo to put up on the wall of my room?"

4. In 'The Shanti School in Kuwait' – from the October 2005 issue, we had featured an article on the 'Shanthi School' of Kuwait where Sai volunteers are serving the needs of mentally challenged children with great love and bringing about amazing transformation in these special children.

The Kuwait Sai Centre opened the School for Special Needs Children as a service project, dedicated to their beloved Sai Children aged between 4 and 16 who have conditions such as Down's syndrome, Autism, Cerebral Palsy and other learning disabilities.

Anybody who visits the school will see that the School offers the children opportunities to realize their full potential and to make them as independent as possible in daily life.

After being able to be independent through this seva, what have some of these special children been able to do?

- A. Convince the government to fund for more such schools.
- B. Some children are in the process of joining schools for normal children.
- C. Some children are taking up challenging careers.
- D. It has invoked transformation in others to see the divinity in them too.

5. In 'Immeasurable Service In A Mental Hospital' from the September 2006 issue, we featured an article on the Sai Youth of Vishakapatnam who have been rendering yeoman service to special adults in a mental hospital for years:

"When we interviewed Theresa, a trained nurse of 6 years service, we asked if she knew of the services being rendered by the Sathya Sai youth wing. She said: 'I know it very well and ever since I joined I have noticed the service of the Sathya Sai youth wing with great interest. They come every Sunday and bring such things as soap, biscuits, food, vessels, plates, coconut oil, nail cutters and combs. They first bathe the patients, clean any eczema and other skin diseases and apply ointments. They cut the patients' nails whenever necessary. They apply coconut oil to their hair and provide them with sumptuous food such as tamarind rice, pulav, and curd rice. They also sing bhajans with the patients joining in, distribute Baba's photos and vibuthi. They also help us in cleaning the toilets and wards if it is necessary.'"

What was her answer when she was asked about the affect on the patients of the seva done by the Sai Youth?

- A. "The patients are now doing this same seva on the younger kids!"
- B. "They don't want to go home anymore!"
- C. "They are looking younger!"
- D. "They keep on asking whether the Sai Youth will come again tomorrow."

ANSWERS:

1C. They poured love on the women

The narration continued thus: "So we said to the driver, '*Go back and find them. We have to get them happy before we leave them.*' When we have a problem, or when we are trying to think of an answer for someone, we touch our ring from Sai Baba and ask Him, '*Help us to say the right thing,*' and then we just put love on people. We believe, no matter how angry or distressed somebody might be, if we pour love on them, a gradual change will come. **So we were pouring love on her, repeating, 'Warm love, love.'** The driver found her, and when she came back to us she was smiling and was quite settled down. **We were surprised, but then realized that by telling her in our heart, 'Love. Love. Love,' it was much stronger than words."**

2A. Quality Not Quantity.

Mr. Rangarajan continued: "**The last aspect of Swami's teachings on service concerns quality and not quantity.** An example of this is one of Swami's students who had to urge to contribute in a small way to the Hospital when it was being built. Being a young boy he did not know what to do. But he stopped giving his clothes to the washer man and in a few days managed to save 100 rupees. He then came to *Darshan* with the money and a letter for Bhagavan, which said, 'Swami, so many devotees give you so much. I do not have anything to give materially. All I have is this 100 rupee note for the hundred crore hospital. Will You be gracious enough to accept it - for if it can be used for one brick then I will be happy.'

Bhagavan rushed out of the interview room came straight to this boy and asked for the letter, read it and then for the next hour kept on mentioning this boy concerning how much love and feeling he has! We realized how much importance Swami gives to the feelings behind our actions. The feeling and intentions behind what one does are very important. Therefore, Bhagavan says that it is not quantity that is important - we need not do big things - but whatever little role we have in our lives, if we do that as an offering to the Lord, with pure selfless love, with a feeling of oneness and humility, then I think it can be termed service in the true sense."

3B. "He came into my cell, blessed me and disappeared!"

The inmate said: "Hey bro, the fella in that picture you have there is not just for you guys. Two weeks ago **He came into my cell raised His hands as if He was blessing me then disappeared.** I have not told any of my prison mates this as they would think I am going soft, but it's the truth!"

All of our people knew then instantly what they had felt all along – that our dear Lord was always with us, especially when acts of service without any expectation of any rewards are done, and also that He is always there helping those who are genuinely trying to change their ways and become better human beings.

4B. Some children are in the process of joining schools for normal children.

Here they learn, they share, they respond and most importantly, they blossom. Essentially Love is the primary medium of instruction. And this is their key to success.

Gross motor activities such as running, throwing, catching, jumping are encouraged in the children through group activities...Skills to enable the children to be more independent are taught through steps like brushing the teeth, washing, feeding, toilet training, personal hygiene, grooming etc.

They are also given wholesome encouragement to perform cultural activities. For example, during the celebrations of Bhagavan's birthday by the Kuwait Sai Centre, the children usually perform small skits on stage and this has always been a highlight of the stage programs. The audience looks forward to their performance every year.

Some of these special children have been able to achieve better skills in their thinking activities and believe it or not, they are in the process of joining schools for normal children!

5D. "They keep on asking whether the Sai Youth will come again tomorrow."

Nurse Theresa said: "They feel very happy when the Sai youth come and sing with them. They relish the food served by them and enjoy the services. I can say from my heart that the services rendered by the Sai Youth are of superior quality. The patients are very happy and active and join the Sai youth in bhajans. **When the Sai youth leave they keep on asking whether they will come again tomorrow.**

There are a lot of benefits - in some cases the patients get cured early. Some patients get cured and wait for their relatives to come and take them back to their houses. But in some cases, their relatives do not turn up and so the patients become sad waiting for them. In such cases the Sai youth get them discharged from the hospital and give them personal assistance to get back to their native place. They safely hand them to their relatives bearing all the expenditure - that is very moving. One more thing: some service organizations distribute fruits in the hospital, but what the Sathya Sai devotees do is real service."

THE HEALING TOUCH

REACHING OUT TO THE STARS

Child of the Mountains

From high up in the Himalayas where he stays, Dorjee Sherpa says the stars look pretty close. It is as if one could just stretch out a hand to the dark blanket above and scoop out a handful of them. The fascination with the night sky seems to have given the nine-year-old a desire to reach out to the stars and the unknown beyond.

"When I become a rocket scientist one day, I will send many Indian rockets out there to the stars," he says. Sitting next to him on the bed, caressing his parted hair, is his young mother, Lalita Sherpa. She smiles. She knows her son, a brilliant student, can do it now.

A Fault Within

The sutured wounds on Dorjee's chest are just healing. A deep red scar is still visible from in between the folds of his blue hospital gown. It runs right down the middle of his puny chest. But on Dorjee's fair, round face, right beneath his small nose, dances a gleeful pink smile. There is no more fear, just relief, and in his dark eyes is hope - the hope of a new tomorrow.

Dorjee is from Lamata Sherpa Gaon, Darjeeling, West Bengal (East India). He has a sense of quick repartee, and the winsome impishness that children of his age naturally possess. What Dorjee did lack, however, was a normal human heart. Through a hole in his heart, the pure and the impure blood started mixing.

A Mother's Anguish

Lalita Sherpa suspected something amiss with her son's heart right from the start. "His heart would beat hard. I feared something was wrong," she said.

The concerned mother took a month-old Dorjee to a local doctor in Darjeeling. The doctor dismissed Lalita's fears. "It is nothing, just gas. After you feed him milk, put him on your shoulder and pat his back. He will belch, and he would be all right," the doctor said. Lalita was not convinced, but she remained quiet.

When Dorjee was one year old, his mother took him to a hospital in Darjeeling, this time, about 11 km away from his home. Upon examining Dorjee, the doctors found that his heart did not function the way a normal human heart did. They heard the measured "lub dub", but with a distinct murmur. The doctors confirmed Lalita's worst fears. Dorjee had a hole in the heart, in clinical terms, a Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD). "The sooner you get it operated, the better," the doctors advised.

A Parent's Privation

The tiny hamlet of Lamata Sherpa Gaon, adjoining the famous Lopchu tea gardens, is wedged between the famous hill resort of Darjeeling on one side and the placid township of Kalimpong on the other side. The village folk depend primarily on manual labour and agriculture for subsistence. Education for children is not a liability in these parts. But health is. For any major ailment or surgery, the patients need to visit either Kolkata or Bangalore.

"Do not go to Kolkata," the doctors told Lalita, "It would be better if you went straight to Bangalore. The surgery would be expensive, though. You may have to spend around Rs. 2 to 3 lakhs," the doctors warned.

Dorjee's father, Lacheling Sherpa, is a farmer. He grows carrots, potatoes, beet root, and cauliflower in the family's piece of land. The income from agriculture is too meagre to sustain the family. Dorjee's parents, therefore, work as manual labourers in others' fields. Their family income is irregular, scaling up in the harvest season, and slumping in the lean seasons. There was no way Dorjee's parents could afford a whopping sum of Rs. 3 lakh for the heart surgery. So they let things be.

Crippling Cardiac

As Dorjee grew up, he could not run, frolic or make merry, matters which came naturally to him. Instead, he watched, sitting on the edge of his school playground, as his friends romped about. He was also forced to take an exemption from physical training activities. "Even the slightest exertion would have me panting for breath," Dorjee said.

In Darjeeling, it is cold and rainy almost throughout the year. Summer comes to Darjeeling as an evanescent guest in April. By the end of June, it is already on its way out. But even when it is hot, it never gets beyond 15 degrees Celsius.

The weather only worsened Dorjee's woes. According to the doctor, the defect in his heart induced an unwholesome overload on Dorjee's lungs by recirculating into them an increased volume of impure blood, thus making Dorjee extremely vulnerable to cold and cough. Needless to say, the cold clime of Darjeeling kept the perky chap frequently down with a debilitating cold and cough.

Dorjee pulled on somehow till he was nine, but after that life started getting unmanageable. His heart would pound hard; he would be unable to even walk a few paces without getting tired. He coughed incessantly. A bright pupil, Dorjee, just in the fourth standard, could concentrate no longer on his studies. He would always be restless.

Lalita and Lacheling desperately wanted their son treated, but could not think of a way out. They contacted several hospitals in Bangalore, but received the

same reply, everywhere. "The surgery would cost at least Rs. 2 lakh to 3 lakhs."

The Benefactor Next Door

Dorjee's neighbour was a devotee of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. On several occasions, Lalita had heard *bhajans* being sung in the house. Oftentimes, Lalita had seen men and women in blue and yellow scarves (Sevadals) assembling at her neighbour's house and then dispersing to clean the village roads.

Not only that, Lalita had also heard something about a hospital in some remote part of Andhra Pradesh, associated with the Sai Samithi (Organization), which dispensed treatment wholly free of cost. Lalita had her doubts. Still she decided to ask.

The reply Lalita got from her neighbour, whom she calls Sai *bhaiyya* (Sai brother), thrilled her immensely. She was told of a super-specialty hospital where an entire treatment, inclusive of the surgery, medicines, diet, and hospital stay, was free of cost. It was the first time that she had heard the name Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prashantigram.

Completely taken by surprise, Lalita shared the news with her husband. He too received it with utter disbelief. "It is difficult for anyone to believe that there exists a hospital, which performs heart surgeries without charging even a single pie," Lalita said.

Both Lalita and Lacheling were so impressed that they wanted to know more about the various activities of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation. Sai *bhaiyya*, therefore, told them everything.

Fixing Holes and Hearts

The Sherpa family rushed to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prashantigram, and admitted Dorjee. On December 12, 2008, Dorjee was operated upon. The moment Dr. Trushar Gajjar, the surgeon, cut open Dorjee's chest, he found the heart too large for the young lad's age. The hole had aggravated the pressure on the heart causing it to expand abnormally.

Yet, could the hole in the heart stand a chance when the Divine Physician had already set His heart on making Dorjee whole? The surgery was completed in one and a half hours, after which Dorjee remained in the Intensive Care Unit for three days. Dorjee's surgery was the 1,352nd hole in the heart to be operated upon successfully, ever since the inception of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prashantigram.

"Though Dorjee had come late for the operation, the situation had not gone out of control yet. I am confident that Dorjee will be able to lead a perfectly

normal life after the surgery,” the surgeon said. The hole in the heart was closed successfully.

Elsewhere, another heart was opening to the magic of Bhagavan's Love. Filled with gratitude for the priceless gift of well-being Bhagavan had bestowed on his son, Lacheling, Dorjee's father, decided to, somehow, try and repay Bhagavan for His overwhelming grace in his own small way. He came as a part of the Darjeeling North Sevalal to Puttaparthi, and served at a sevalal point near Brahmanapalli village, while his son got treated at the hospital.

Dreaming of the Stars Again

Soon, Dorjee will be back in the mountains. And will be running and frolicking, verily reclaiming his childhood. Yes, he will be close to the stars again, dreaming of becoming a rocket scientist one day. Only this time, it will not just remain a dream.

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the February 2009 issue

Feedback on the cover story: *The Scintillating Story of His Splendour Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam - An overview and inner view*

Dear Heart2Heart Team, Sai Ram,

Thank you for bringing us in such extraordinary and exquisite detail the mammoth Mahotsavam of the Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Yagnam and Swami's Splendour on the Golden Chariot. I had the opportunity to travel to Bangalore and then be in Prasanthinilayam on the 17th of November for just a few hours and remain at the fringes of the Hill View Stadium.

I was craning my neck to see Swami's orange robe on the dais from the outside and could finally see him from outside the gates of the stadium from certain angles on the large screens that were set up.

The Heart2Heart Cover Story has now given me the front row view of the proceedings and the celebrations and I feel immensely pleased and bliss-filled not only to watch what was happening inside the stadium, but also learn about all that went on in the background.

It is heart warming to read about the innumerable devotees who invisibly and silently served in the background to make everything happen so flawlessly. I have sat mesmerized after reading the Cover Story.

Please accept my 'Heartfelt Thank you' for bringing us this Bliss and the Grace of God with the power of your words and narration!

In Swami's love,

Radha, Champaign-Urbana Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre

I am from United States of America, Northern California. Your article is wonderful. Thank you so very much. I watched the events as they happened from my computer each of the days and now I got to relive it all over again.

Blessings to you all, Joan Casper, USA

The cover story this time is beautiful. The pictures and descriptions transport us back to November '08 and the glory of those celebrations! Thank you again. It was also amazing to read of the logistical details of providing for the masses during the celebrations.

Lalita Rao

Dear Radio Sai,

I would like to say after reading this it has really inspired me a lot. I wanted to be there for this special occasion, however it was not possible. I can't really find words to really express how I really feel.

Sai Ram,

Linda David, USA

Dearest Heart2Heart Team,

Though we are physically far away from Swami, Heart2Heart is making us mentally and spiritually nearer and dearer to Bhagavan every day, every month and every year, day after day, month after month and year after year. I have been downloading, reading, studying and also seriously trying to put into practice the messages, lessons and teachings of Bhagavan as we get from Heart2Heart as Divine Prasadams.

How can we thank you for your dedication, devotion, discipline, Love and Service. How can we thank you for your sincere efforts to spread the messages of Bhagavan to those physically far. It is Bhagavan's Will, Bhagavan's Plan and Bhagavan's Leela unfolding through Heart2Heart.

Earlier we had the good fortune to view the videos of Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam Yagnam as and when it was going on and now with the Scintillating Story we are enjoying the beauty, the splendour and the bliss once again.

Sahasra Poorna "Thanks" to Bhagavan and to Heart2Heart Team.

Jai Sai Ram, Sathyapalan, Abu Dhabi

Sai Ram,

My sincere thanks to Radio Sai for all the beautiful articles - and especially the cover story of this month. This article brought the total picture of the Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Yagnam and satiated everyone who missed it physically. I could just visualize and feel one among the crowd while reading the article. The way it describes the Lord on His Chariot and devotees' emotions leaves me in bliss.

Thanks again for such a wonderful work,

Sreelakshmi

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

The cover story was so beautifully presented, with sublime expressions, photos, videos and interviews that although I wasn't there physically I felt that I was!

And I experienced the "Love" of our Lord. Reading about the selfless work of the seva-dals is totally inspirational. Thank you again keep up your magnificent work and may Swami's blessings be with your team always.

Mrs Nalini Randall, United Kingdom

Feedback on *From the Joy of Symphony to the Bliss of Sai*

Dear Sir,

The article is very interesting and thought provoking. The caste prejudices are very much there in our society and perhaps to some extent among the devotees also. For spiritual seekers, Swami perhaps wanted to lift or break this barrier through Mr. Hariharan, who is a spiritual seeker. I would like to share the thoughts expressed, with others through a talk after Bhajans.

Sai Ram,

C. V. Ratnam

Sai Ram,

This story about the joy of symphony was lovely! It reminds me that true music, which I adore so much becomes so much more than music when it is played with love. Love really is Swami Himself. Whenever I hear the virtuosity of students and there are many fine ones in this country (USA) one

can always see that the music that is played with love speaks to the soul in a different way. You can actually hear the love through the heart as it is played with the player's heart.

There are so many lessons in this student's story and I still need to hear the lessons as well as the music!

Om Sai Ram!

Miriam Smith, USA

Feedback on *Spiritual Questions And Answers - Part 4*

Jai Sai Ram,

Very thoughtful and scholarly answers to all four questions. And they are very clear and easy to understand. It will definitely satisfy many curious and confused minds.

Feedback on *In Quest Of Infinity – Part 23*

Dear H2H,

I have enjoyed this article about infinity very much, that is to say, as much as I am able to understand it. I am not a mathematician, yet, on a spiritual level, I have been blessed to have had some insights about our Beingness and its surroundings, which have verified what I felt was true. All things *live*.

Om Sai Ram,

Douglas Wilson

Sai Ram Radio Sai,

Your series of articles on "In Quest Of Infinity" are really wonderful. The lecture series are so good that somebody with no prior science knowledge can read and appreciate them. They are like Richard Feynman's lecture notes which develop enthusiasm in people for science.

Thanks for publishing them and thanks to Dr Prof. G. Venkataraman for explaining them in such a beautiful way.

Sai Ram,

Sridhar, USA

Feedback on *A Pure Desire... And a Profound Blessing*

Sai Ram,

Thank you so much for your story about Gayatri. I am so grateful to learn how the Sai Baba Hospital helped and the doctors were wonderful. I am very inspired by this story. Please do publish more. Your readers are eager to hear more good news.

In Sai's Divine Love,

Cathy Maniscalco, USA

Jai Sai Ram,

I just read your article on Gayatri recovery from polio. Please do write more articles like this. They are so inspiring and display Baba's tremendous powers and miracles. It just confirms our belief that Baba is God. Thanks

Savita Varma

Thank you for sharing this beautiful story of just how awesome our dear Swami is and the miracles that happen at His hospitals.

Sai Ram,

Clara Minadeo, Cleveland Sai centre, USA

Sairam,

I happened to read the story of Gayathri and her cure of polio affected legs in SSIHMS. I am really overwhelmed by the touch of divinity and the service of the Hospital. I thank Swami for having given this opportunity to read this.

I would be grateful if you send me more of these miracles-stories. My little daughter is very attached to Swami. She will get her moral guidance from the stories of patients from the Super Speciality Hospital.

Regards,

Sumathy Dilip, Singapore

Feedback on the Quizzes

The quiz on the Divine Discourses on Lord Shiva was an excellent quiz. I enjoyed every bit of it. I am a software developer and I must commend the

way in which the quiz provides instant interactivity. Well Done!

Kind Regards,

Annelee Harripersad, South Africa

General Feedback

Dear H2H team, Sai Ram!

Once more I want to thank you very much for your service with the H2H activities every day and every month. With this I have a strong and perfect 'physical' connection with all the activities of Swami in Puttaparthi and this nurtures again and again my spiritual connection with Swami.

May Swami bless you all!

With love and Sai Ram,

Joop Sturkenboom, Holland

Dear H2H Team,

Thank you for ***The Daffodil Principle*** story and all the others, and special thanks to Ms Vidya, for beautifully illustrating this and other stories.

Sairam!

Rema Nandakumar

Sai Ram Brothers and Sisters of Radio Sai,

How very wonderful it is, unbelievably so, to read the stories from Sai devotees about our Dearest Sai. I am from the USA - halfway round the world from the Epicenter of Sai Bliss - and very happy to receive these thoughtful and loving missives from Sai brothers and sisters. Please keep up the good work!

In Sai Love,

Jon Kline

Thank you for the web site and the daily emails. To have such information, knowledge and wisdom before me on the PC at my fingertips is truly a blessing.

Love and best wishes

Jeremy Edgar, Senior Editor, Mexico

Sai Ram,

Yes, I love all the articles that I read and they do inspire me to read more and more so that I can have more and more faith in Swami. A lot of times, my life is faced with so many downturns that reading these articles brings me to believe that Swami is there trying to test me. Please continue with your good work.

Sai Ram,

Rema Chandran, Canada

I love reading all the stories you provide on this journal. It helps me through everyday situations and it literally lights up my day. It brings me closer to Prashanti Nilayam and to physical nearness to Baba. Although He is always with us we all cherish the moments we can spend near His physical self.

Thank you so much for the love and the effort you put in the stories, reports and pictures - it helps us overseas devotees yearn just a little bit less for the next time Baba calls us to his Ashram. May Baba bless you and keep up the great work that makes me happy every day.

Sai Ram, Helena Emling, Croatia

Sai Ram Dear Brothers: As always, when ever I read any of your articles, there is a surge of bliss flowing within me, to signify how the stories of our Lord creates reverberation in this heart and mind,

Ever grateful,

Bhuwan, USA