



HEART TO HEART



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Cover Story

॥ the message of the vedas ॥

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PRANAMS AT THE LOTUS FEET

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Dear Reader,

We hope that you enjoyed the previous Issue of Heart to Heart. We generally receive prompt feedback from many readers soon after the Issue is uploaded. But this time, we did not receive many mails. We are sure that we have not reached perfection. We are also sure that we need your active participation to help us achieve perfection. So, do not keep your valuable suggestions to yourself! Send them to us, today!

Coming to this Issue, the Cover Story is on the Vedas. Veda chanting has always been popular at Prashanti Nilayam and of late it has become a daily feature in Darshan. Swami has been evincing keen interest in His students learning the Vedam and this has rubbed off on to everybody. There are many people who are keen to understand the Vedas and to learn them. Keeping this demand in view, Heart to Heart presents to you two articles. The first one is an introduction to the Vedas for beginners. The second one concerns the message of the Vedas, in particular those hymns chanted at Prashanti Nilayam.

There are other interesting articles and features, but two of them deserve special mention. One is the article titled 'The Other 9/11' in Feature Articles and the other titled 'Sacred Psychiatry' in Miscellaneous. Both are thought provoking so do get back to us on these and the other articles.

We hope that you all enjoyed the Lord's 79th Birthday. We wish you a Happy and Joyous Christmas in advance.

*Sairam,
SGH Team.*

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

On December 25th, when Jesus was born, three kings came to His birthplace. These three gave expression to three different views about the newborn babe. One of them, looking at the infant, said: "This child looks like one who will be a lover of God." A second king said: "God will love this child." The third king declared: "Verily, this child is God Himself." The first one viewed the child from the physical point of view. The second saw the child from the mental viewpoint. The third saw from the Atmic (spiritual) point of view.

These three declarations indicate how one can progress from the human to the divine level. What is needed is the destruction of the animal and demonic qualities in man. Today man worships inanimate idols and images, but makes no attempt to love his fellow human beings in flesh and blood. This was the first message of Jesus. Though one sees his neighbours day after day, he does not choose to love them. How can one believe that such a person can love an invisible God? If a man cannot love a fellow human being who is visible before his eyes, how can he love what is invisible to him? This is not possible. Only a man who loves living beings around him can love the invisible Divine. Love must start with love for beings that have form. It must be extended to all beings. This is the primary stage in spirituality.

Spirituality does not mean preoccupation with meditation, worship, etc. It involves total extinction of the animal and demonic qualities in man and the manifestation of his inherent divinity. When the attachments and hatreds in which man is enveloped are removed, the inherent divinity in man, the Sat-Chit-Ananda in him, will manifest itself.

There is no need to search for the omnipresent Divine in any specific place. When you are yourself Divine, why search for the Divine elsewhere? It is a mark of ignorance.

Jesus performed many miraculous deeds, relieved the sufferings of many in distress, preached sublime truths to the people, and ultimately sacrificed His life. For over a hundred years after His martyrdom, Christ's message did not have any impact. Four centuries later, Christianity was accepted by Roman emperors. Even after many centuries humanity is yet to realise its inherent Divinity.

-BABA

Spiritual Blossoms

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI BABA

PART 3

(Continued from last Issue)

SAI:The word, 'surrender', in English, is not quite correct; it is not the right word. Because, when you say, 'surrender', you are separate and God is separate. That is the meaning you get. But God is not separate.

A Visitor: The word, 'surrender', is not the correct word, so Self-realisation...

SAI: Self-realisation that is why they call it so. You are You. You realise your own Self. You are you, not your wife. You are You.

A Second Visitor: Where is our responsibility? We are supposed to share, to help others.

A Third Visitor: Help oneself first.

SAI: 'Self' is the base, or foundation. 'Help' is the wall. God is the roof or top of the building. 'Light' is the owner.

A Visitor: But she was asking, 'what is the limit?' Where is the limit of one's responsibility? How far should she go?

SAI: First you should look after yourself and not be a burden. That is the first thing. If you are not able to help so many people, it doesn't matter. But if you don't do anything that is harmful, that is real help. If you can't help a person, never mind. But don't harm anybody. To harm is bad. But the very feeling you have that you can't help, itself is good.

You must have physical strength, spiritual strength, and mental strength; and only when you have the three, then you can really do service. Food, head, and God. Food is for the body; and you want a good body so the brain can function properly, so you can think. And why do you want this head and that intellect? To realise that which is beyond this - and that is God.

Visitor: But it hurts me to see people in need, beggars and innocent little children who are ill.

A Second Visitor: Is it not egoistic to have everything for yourself?

Translator: But Swami did not mean in that sense. What Swami said is that when you do not have the physical, mental and spiritual strength, how can you really help another person?

SAI: Sometimes when we are not balanced and have not realised the proper truth, we will mislead so many other people.

A Visitor: It is that you cannot give what you do not have. A Second Visitor: Nothing before straightening yourself.

H: Is it possible for Swami to give the lady Self-realisation?

A Third Visitor: Swami says it is possible. Since He gives the Truth, cannot He also give Self-realisation to the heart?

SAI: When there is that feeling, that depth of feeling, Swami can give it. Oh, yes. She has such a depth of feeling for the body. If she has the same intensity for God-realisation, Swami can give it - just now.

H: So, that is what Swami means by, 'Before you can help people'.

SAI: The more intensity, the greater the result. If you are digging a well, the deeper you dig the higher will be the wall formed by the mud you bring out. The depth is in the form of the height. (The deeper you dig the higher the wall).

H: Swami says that He cannot give to a dry heart. Why is the heart dry?

SAI: God gives even that for our own good. When you aren't hungry, why should He give you food? When you're hungry and receive food, it is useful; but if you aren't hungry and He gives you food, you will have indigestion. Sometimes, even if you are hungry, God doesn't give you food - just to keep you in check and control.

Suppose you are in the hospital; they can't give you everything you might ask for. There is a proper time and a proper way for your own sake. Sometimes God withholds even a spiritual experience because God does everything for man's good. He never does anything to harm man or give him sorrow. But you must have that faith. First you must grapple with the fact that duty is God, and start doing your duty.

H: Is it that the heart is dry because one is not doing one's duty?

SAI: Nobody's heart is really dry. At least men have sense love. At least you have worldly love for children, family and others. It is the same love but given to some only. You only have to take it all and give it to God.

(To be continued.)

Spiritual Blossoms

GETTING RID OF MAYA

Maya has the capacity to ruin our life. If we understand the nature of Maya well, it will go away from us in one moment. If we give a high place to it without understanding, then it will get the upper hand and will begin to dance on our heads.

In one village, a marriage was to take place. The party of the bridegroom came to the village and was staying in a house. The party of the bride was staying in another house. In between these two parties, there was one individual who wanted all kinds of comforts and was demanding them from both the parties. This individual used to go to the bridegroom's place and tell them that they were always coming late and causing a lot of problems to the bride's party. People belonging to the bridegroom's party thought that he was some respected elder from the side of the bride. Similarly he went to the bride's house and told them that they were not respecting the bridegroom and members of his party and were not giving them all the respect that was due to them.

This individual was enacting a drama. He was going to the bridegroom's party and was behaving as if he was a respected elder from the bride's side; and he was going to the bride's people and behaving as if he was a respected elder from the bridegroom's side. When this drama went too far, the two parties started investigating and found that he belonged to neither side.

Once you make an inquiry and find out the origin of Maya, it will disappear; even as the individual in our story disappeared.

-BABA

The Vedas and other Scriptural Texts of Ancient India

Swami never commences any function or Divine Discourse without a chant from the Vedas by His students. At one time, He even declared that He had come to protect the Vedas. What are these Vedas? When did they come into existence? Who wrote them? How many Vedas are there? What is their special significance if any? This article attempts an answer to these questions.

Swami says:

The Vedas are the most ancient amongst the world's scriptures. They are a vast storehouse of Wisdom. Manu has declared that everything is derived from the Vedas. The Vedas are immeasurable, unrivaled and filled with Bliss. The word Veda is derived from the verb 'Vid' which means 'to know'. Knowledge of the Supreme is Veda.

The Vedas are called Apourusheya i.e., not of human origin and Anaadi i.e., without a beginning in terms of time. One might wonder: "How could that be? After all, even the Universe has had a beginning, and the Rishis who gave us the Vedas came after Creation. So how could it be claimed that the Vedas have no beginning?" Interestingly, the answer to all this is provided by the Vedas themselves in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. It is declared therein that the Vedas are the Supreme Lord Ishwara's breath. In other words, the Vedas have always been in coexistence with Him as His very breath. Since Ishwara is Eternal, so are the Vedas. And when the Lord created Brahma (Brahma's purpose is to attend to the practical details of Creation) as a prelude to full-fledged creation, He transmitted via His breath the full knowledge of the Vedas to His son Brahma. Thus Brahma was the first Being to have the Divine revelation of the Vedas. Guided by the vibrations he received from Ishwara's Heart, Brahma then created the Universe.

The vibrations that Brahma received are Cosmic Vibrations. At the physical level, a common form of vibration is sound. The Vedic verses one usually hears chanted are transcriptions of Cosmic Vibrations into sound vibrations; and in this manner, we are able to hear and cognize Divine Vibrations. The transcription into sound just referred to was accomplished through the ages by a host of unknown Rishis who, while in deep meditation, established direct rapport with Cosmic Vibrations during which process the latter became audible to them as sound. The Rishis committed these to memory and later passed them on to their disciples, which is how Vedic Mantras (hymns) were handed down from generation to generation, long before there was even a written script. Equally remarkable is the fact that the Rishis who received the revelations did not claim any authorship nor leave any trace of their identity. If ever there was any unselfish sharing of Divine gifts, this was it.

Divine revelations are not all that unusual and have occurred throughout history to various people in different places. Indeed even in science, the sudden flash of a discovery is a revelation of a kind; and all great scientists have had such experiences - from Archimedes to Einstein. Likewise there are many examples of revelations to religious prophets. What is unique about the Vedas is that the hymns that constitute them not only have a powerful tonal quality but their structure has defied corruption and mutation through the ages. Whereas languages evolve with time, including sometimes over short periods, the Vedic language has remained unchanged over several thousands of years (during which the revelations occurred) which suggests that in this case, even the very words came from Brahman Himself. As Swami says:

The Vedas took form, only to demonstrate and emphasize the existence of God. The Veda is the collation of words that are the Truth, which were visualised by sages who had attained the capacity to receive them into their enlightened awareness. In reality, the Word is the very Breath of God, the Supreme Person. The unique importance of the Veda rests on this fact.

Thanks to losses of some texts over the ages, the Vedic Mantras available today are only a fraction of what was once revealed to the meditating Rishis. Be that as it may, even what the Rishis could grasp was but a tiny drop in the limitless ocean that are the Vedas. A story is sometimes told to illustrate the limitless nature of the Vedas.


The great Sage Bharadwaja - to whose lineage Swami belongs - was specially granted three lives to study and

absorb the Vedas. Appreciative of his effort, Lord Siva appeared before the sage and said: "If I give you another span of life, what would you do with it?" The Rishi replied that as in earlier births, he would spend his life in the study of the Vedas. Siva was pleased but wanted to impress on the sage that the Vedas were limitless. So with a wave of His hand, He created several mighty mountains after which He picked up a handful of mud. Stretching His hand towards Bharadwaja, Siva said: "What you have so far studied is equal to this handful of earth. What you have yet to study is a million times more than these mountains!"

The Vedic Mantras are the fountain head of ancient Indian scriptures. Scholars usually classify the scriptures as follows:

Aaranyaka	Aaranyaka	Aaranyaka	Aaranyaka	Kalpa Jyothisha	Dharma Saastras
Braahmana	Braahmana	Braahmana	Braahmana	Nirukta Chandas	Puraanas Nyaaya
Samhita	Samhita	Samhita	Samhita	Vyaakarna Siksha	Meemamsa

Rig
Saama
Yajur
Atharvana



VEDAS

VEDANGAS

UPANGAS

The different divisions that are illustrated above are called Vidyas, and there are fourteen of them - four Vedas, six Vedangas and four Upangas. Sage Vyasa codified the Vedas into four groups and thus came into existence what we now refer to as the Rig, the Saama, the Yajur and the Atharva (also called the Atharvana) Vedas.

The Vedas are also referred to as Sruti which means 'that which is heard'. The real reason for calling them Sruti is that Cosmic Vibrations which are normally inaudible were heard by the meditating Rishis of yore as actual sounds. The sound aspect of the Vedas is considered very important and great stress is laid on the correct pronunciation of the words as well as the intonation during chanting. Elaborate recitation drills were conceived by the ancients, thanks to which the chanting that is done today is precisely the same as it was thousands of years ago. Succeeding generations have worked hard to ensure this purity without recording media, paper or even a written language. It is doubtful if there are any other instances of the spoken word which have defied mutation and corruption over such an extended period of time.

Regarding the spiritual significance of the proper chanting, the late Paramacharya Sri Chandrasekara has this to say:

Vedas must be chanted with grandeur so that the sound can be properly heard. Vedic Mantras not only produce beneficial vibrations in the pulse of the one who chants them properly, but also similar vibrations in those who may hear them. Since it is spread in the atmosphere, it ensures well-being here and hereafter.... The outstanding feature of the Vedas lies in the fact that the sound of the Mantras by itself when chanted has a meaning, apart from the words themselves, which too are pregnant with significance.

In each Veda, it is customary to recognise three portions called the Samhitas, the Braahmanas and the Aaranyakas. Samhita means that which has been collected and arranged. The Samhitas project the purport of a Veda in the shape of Mantras suitably organised and structured. What one normally hears during Vedic chants is from the Samhita portion.

The Samhitas of all the four Vedas together contain about twenty thousand Mantras of which a little over ten

thousand belong to the Rig Veda Samhita. The Mantra belonging to the Rig Veda is called Rik/Rk (a later word for which is Sloka); a collection of Riks constitutes a Sookta. However, Sooktas are not peculiar to the Rig Veda alone and a few of them are found in the other Vedas as well. Some Sooktas like the Purusha Sooktam, Narayana Sooktam, Rudram and Chamakam are particularly famous and are often to be heard at Prashanti Nilayam. About the Rig Veda, Swami says:

The very first experience in the history of Indian thought is the thrill of wonder. This is expressed in the Rik or hymns found in the Rig Veda.... The Riks are all about the gods or the Shining Ones (the Devas). Of these Devas, there are many: Indra, Varuna, Mitra, Parjanya - these are the names of a few.

The Mantras of the Rig Veda are largely devoted to singing the praise of the Devas (e.g., Agni). The Yajur Veda on the other hand, is more concerned with spelling out ritualistic procedures. In fact, the words Yajur and Yajna are both derived from the root Yaj which means worship. Thus the accent in the Yajur Veda is on worship through austerities, rites and rituals. Saama means to bring Shanti or peace to the mind, and the Saama Veda achieves this by setting Mantras to music with lengthened tones. Although most of the Mantras themselves are derived from the Rig Veda, it is the distinctively lengthened musical intonation that sets the Saama Veda apart. The uniqueness of the Saama Veda is proclaimed by Lord Krishna Himself when He declares that among the Vedas, He is Saama. Is it any wonder then that Ravana was able to influence Lord Siva with his singing of the Saama Veda?

The Atharva Veda is named after a Rishi of the same name, who first brought these Mantras to light. The hymns are intended to ward off evil and hardships, as also to destroy enemies (not necessarily humans). Swami comments on this Veda as follows:

Many have described it in diverse ways. Some have denied it the status of a Veda. In the other Vedas, the might and the mystery of the gods are described. But in this Veda, the possibility of man acquiring certain powers and mysteries by his own effort and exercises are mentioned. This is its specialty.

Superficially, the four Vedas seem different but a closer scrutiny would reveal that they all have the common goal of ensuring well-being. This in fact was the reason why the kings of yore greatly encouraged the constant chanting of the Vedas. In the Ramayana it states that when Hanuman went around Lanka searching for Sita, he heard the chanting of the Vedas in some places. Another important point is that none of the Vedas claim that there is only one way to God. Rather they stress that any good path followed with faith, sincerity and devotion will lead one to the ultimate goal. As Swami puts it,

The Vedas are concerned with and expound the Supreme Person, the Ishwara, Who created this Universe, Who fosters it, in Whom it merges in accordance with the process of time, and from Whom again it manifests as His Form - this amazing Universe.

The Samhita portion of the Vedas is understandably better known considering it contains the most popular chants. In a sense, the Samhitas form the core of the Vedas. The Braahmanas are texts which serve as working manuals, spelling out how the rites and rituals ought to be performed.

Turning next to the Aaranyakas, the word is derived from Aaranya which means forest; these texts are therefore sometimes referred to as 'forest books', and there is a reason why they are called this. Neither the Samhitas nor the Braahmanas enjoin that a person in pursuit of spiritual development must retire to the forest; rather, the accent is on serving Society through the chanting of the Vedas and the performance of the various ordained rituals. However, while constant chanting and performing rituals no doubt promotes mental purity (Chitta Suddhi), something quite different is required for further spiritual progress. That is to seek the solitude of the forest for meditation and contemplation; the Aaranyaka texts prove suitable to this phase of spiritual development. The famous Upanishads come at the end of the Aaranyakas, and represent the quintessence of Vedic knowledge. Commenting on the different roles of Braahmanas and the Aaranyakas (which essentially mean the Upanishads), Swami remarks:

The Braahmanas constitute an important part of the Vedas, and deal with the correct procedures for performing Yajnas and Yagas. Being ceremonial rites for acquiring mundane pleasures, such ceremonies, however, cannot offer Atmananda or the pure Bliss of the Atma. They can only enhance sensory enjoyment and provide epicurean pleasures which are intrinsically transient. The search for the pure abiding Bliss of the Atma led the ancient Rishis to the solitude of the forests.... these sages have communicated the spiritual wisdom revealed to them through the Upanishads.

Given the above wide spectrum of the scriptural texts, one sometimes divides them into two broad categories:

the Karma Kanda and the Jnana Kanda; the former being largely devoted to rituals and the latter to philosophical knowledge. Coming as they do at the end of the Vedas, the Upanishads are also referred to as Vedanta meaning that which is at the end of the Vedas. In this sense, Vedanta represents the end of the quest that a person starts on when he gets initiated into the Vedas. Understandably, Vedanta belongs to Jnana Kanda.

Returning to the Samhitas, it turns out that many types of recitation exist, each belonging to a particular school. These schools are called Saakhas or branches. Thus the Vedas stand in majesty like a vast banyan tree with numerous branches.

We now come to the Vedaangas. The word Anga means limb or organ. Thus, Vedaangas are texts which are like the limbs of the Vedas. The most important of these is Siksha which deals with Vedic phonetics. Since syllable and tonal purity are considered the very breath of the Vedas, Siksha is regarded as the nose of the Vedas. Next is Vyaakarana or grammar, which is considered the mouth of the Vedas. This is followed by Chandas or metre, constituting the feet of the Vedas; Nirukta or etymology (the ear of the Vedas); Jyotisha or astronomy cum astrology (the eye); and finally, Kalpa or procedure (the arm).

Vyaakarana, Chandas and Nirukta one can understand but how does Jyotisha apply? It turns out that the ancients of India believed that there was a right time and place for every spiritual activity, and Jyotisha came into existence to guide people on how to select the right time; and it was on account of this guiding role that Jyotisha came to be regarded as the eyes of the Vedas.

The five Angas which precede the Kalpa enable the student of the Veda to become proficient in faultless pronunciation (through Siksha), to understand the grammar (via Vyaakarana) and the metre (through Chandas), and to comprehend the meanings of rare and uncommon words (through Nirukta). Having progressed thus far, the Kalpas then instruct the Vedic aspirant on the do's and don'ts connected with the numerous rituals.

Related to the ten Vidyas discussed so far are the Upaangas which literally means 'subsidiary limbs'; in the present context, they mean 'auxiliary texts'. There are four of them and they are: Meemamsa, Nyaya, Puraanas and the Dharma Saastras. While the literal meanings of the Vedic Mantras may be found in the Niruktas, their purport and significance are detailed in the Meemamsa. Meemamsa itself is regarded as made of two portions - the Poorva Meemamsa and the Uttara Meemamsa. While the former emphasises rituals (i.e., concentrates on the Karma Kanda portion of the Vedas), the latter focuses on the importance of Self-realisation (i.e., on Jnana). After Meemamsa comes Nyaya which deals with the logical inference of the existence of Brahman. Unlike these high-flown disciplines, the Puraanas cater to general tastes, dealing as they do with mythological stories intended to illustrate the substance of the Vedas. As the Paramacharya says:

The Puraanas can be called the 'magnifying glass' of the Vedas as they magnify small images into big images. The Vedic injunctions which are contained in the form of pithy statements are magnified or elaborated in the form of stories or anecdotes in the Puraanas.

The Puraanas of Bharat have played an extraordinary role in sustaining spirituality amongst the common folk throughout the ages. Indeed, it was the Puraanic story of King Harishchandra which, within living memory, made such a profound impact on Gandhi that he swore eternal commitment to Sathya, which in turn made him into a legend of his own.

Of the fourteen disciplines, the Dharma Shastra comes last. Commenting on it, the Paramacharya says

The Puraanas have Bhakti as their theme. But can we spend all the twenty-four hours doing Puja, and singing the praise of the Lord? We have to do our duty to the family. We have to eat, bathe etc., and attend to personal and bodily needs. Even to devote the balance of the time to Puja is not possible. Boredom sets in. We require therefore directions and guidance to perform our deeds. Where from do we learn these? From the Dharma Saastra. The Dharma Saastra tells us what we should do in our daily life, and how secular life and religious life are not separate. Secularism is also designed to lead to religion as per Vedic Dharma. Whatever job is done should be Dharma-orientated and be a part of the process of evolution of the self.

Dharma Shastra lays down the code of conduct for man covering all aspects of his life, the codification having been contributed to by several Rishis (of whom Manu is the most famous). The Dharma Saastra is also called Smriti. A Smriti is an aide-memoire for the Vedas. All the do's and don'ts are spelt out in pitiless detail and Manu advises that when in doubt, one should consult the Smritis. From the time a Jiva enters a mother's womb, through birth, growth, marriage, running the household etc., the Smriti lays down all that has to be done in minute detail. It is interesting that

even today the Smriti is accepted as an authority in the law courts of India when doubts on Hindu law arise. Equally noteworthy is the fact that while the Dharma Shastra lays down a whole spectrum of guidelines, it persuades rather than compels. Referring to all these texts, Swami comments:

The Vedas teach man his duties from birth to death. They describe his rights and duties, obligations and responsibilities, in all stages of life - as a student, householder, recluse and monk. In order to make plain the Vedic dicta and axioms and enable all to understand the meaning and purpose of the do's and the don'ts, the Vedaangas, the Puraanas, and the Epic texts appeared in course of time. Therefore, if man is eager to grasp his own significance and true Reality, he has to understand the importance of these later explanatory compositions also. This is the reason why the ancients taught the Vedaangas and other related texts, even before the pupils learnt the Vedas.

The scriptural texts of India - the Vedas, Vedaangas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puraanas and Ithihasas - are repositories of profound wisdom. Each of them is an ocean of sweet sustaining milk.

Finally, mention must be made of the Brahma Sutra. A Sutra is an aphorism which projects a thought with minimal use of words. The Brahma Sutra is a text containing the essence of all Upanishadic teachings in the form of a string of Sutras. We owe these also to Sage Vyasa. Swami's Sutra Vahini offers a commentary on the Brahma Sutra.

The Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutra form a trinity of scriptural texts known as Prasthaana Trayi (the Three Source Texts). They are entirely consistent with each other, and in matters philosophical, they are regarded as the ultimate authority.

We hope that this article has given you a fair idea about the Vedas and other scriptural texts. For further enlightenment concerning the Vedas, see the Leela Kaivalya Vahini and Summer Showers in Brindavan, 1974, by Bhagavan Baba.

ROADMAPS TO ETERNAL BLISS:

The Message of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*

“What is the basic teaching of the *Vedas*? It is that to whichever economic or social or intellectual group you belong, you are a child of immortality.”

- *Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

Devotees coming to Prashanti Nilayam must have noticed that no important function or Divine Discourse starts without chanting from the *Vedas* first. They would have also heard extensive chanting of the *Vedas* during the *Dasara* celebrations. More recently, *Veda* chanting has become a regular part of *Darshan*, especially in the afternoons. Swami listens to the sonorous chants for extended periods, often lost in Bliss.

In this article we shall examine the meaning of these *Vedic* chants and why Swami attaches so much importance to them.

Bhagavan Baba says that the *Vedas* are the most ancient amongst the world's religious scriptures and represent a vast storehouse of Wisdom. What is chanted as *Vedas* is essentially a compilation of Supreme Knowledge as revealed to the Sages whilst in meditation. Divine revelations are not all that unusual and have occurred throughout history to many people. But what is unique about the *Vedas* is that the hymns have a powerful tonal quality, so much so that listening to the sounds without even understanding their meaning produces stirring vibrations in the listener.

The revelations accumulated over a period of time were classified in due course into four major *Vedas*. The *Vedas* comprise of core texts and diverse auxiliary texts. Those that came later in time were highly philosophical in content. Because they came at the end, they are collectively referred to as *Vedanta* [*Vedanta* = *Veda* + *anta*], the suffix *anta* denoting the later appearance. What is popularly referred to as *Vedanta* actually consists of texts called *Upanishads*. In other words, the *Upanishads* represent the culmination of the *Vedas*. There are many *Upanishads*, but scholars consider ten of them to be the most important.

Swami has often given the meaning of the word *Upanishad*. Literally, it means to “sit down near”. Who sits near to whom? The disciple sits near the *Guru*, thereby absorbing Wisdom and becoming enlightened. This is the outward meaning. The deeper meaning is that the individual must move nearer and nearer to the True Inner Self. The individual, as Swami often reminds us, is an Embodiment of the Eternal *Atma* - that is to say, *Atma* cloaked in a Mind and a body. This combination is also referred to as the *Jivatma*.

The *Upanishads* help the *Jivatma* to embark on a voyage of discovery of the *Jivatma*'s True Nature which is the Pure, Unadorned, Unembodied and Infinite *Atma*. As Professor Radhakrishnan says, “The *Atma* is what remains when everything that is not the True Self is discarded.” *Sadhana* is the process by which the *Jivatma* discards all the unnecessary trappings that cloud the *Atma*.

The *Upanishads* represent the highest Truth, whose value has been recognised by scholars the world over. Professor Radhakrishnan quotes the Greek scholar Plotinus who long ago independently observed:

One that seeks to penetrate the nature of the Divine Mind must see deep into the nature of his own Soul, into the most Divine point in himself. He must first make abstraction of the body, then of the lower soul which built up that body, then of all the faculties of the senses, of all desires and emotions and every such triviality, of all that leans towards the mortal. What is left after this abstraction is the part we describe as the Image of the Divine Mind, an emanation preserving some of that Divine Light.

No one can deny that this is a remarkable and independent perception of the essence of *Upanishadic* Truth. But the fact remains that the *Upanishads* outweigh in sheer depth as well as quantity, the insights gained by seekers elsewhere. This is not to comment adversely on other philosophical traditions. Rather, it is a fact of history that in ancient India, seeking the Inner Self literally became a way of life for a very large number of people. Thus it is that Max Mueller, to whom Swami often makes references, says:

It is surely astounding that such a system as Vedanta should have slowly been elaborated by the indefatigable and intrepid thinkers of India thousands of years ago, a system that even now makes us feel giddy as in mounting the last steps of the swaying spire of a Gothic cathedral. None of our philosophers, including Heraclitus, Plato, Kant, or Hegel has ventured to erect such a spire. In the beginning there was but One, and in the end also there will but One, whether we call it Atman or Brahman.

The *Upanishads* proclaim some very important Truths. The first is:

That which is permanent, is beyond creation. It always exists. It cannot be either created or dissolved.

The second is an obvious corollary. It is:

That which is temporary cannot ever be permanent.

The third follows readily:

That which is permanent cannot be cognised by that which is temporary.

In trying to appreciate the deeper implications of the *Upanishads*, one must have the following mental picture in mind. We must go back thousands of years to *Vedic* India when young students, between the ages of five and eighteen gathered in small groups, and lived with their *Guru* in an Ashram. The Ashram was called *Gurukulam*, and the young seekers were called *Brahmacharis*, or 'the seekers of the Supreme God', known in Sanskrit as *Brahman*. The *Guru* instructed, guided and counselled the disciples, *Sishyas* as they were called. *Siksha* means instruction, and thus, *Sikshavalli* is all about the instruction that the *Guru* gives to the disciples.

What exactly is the meaning of seeking *Brahman*? Why were these young men in quest of God Almighty? If indeed the young disciples were in quest of the Supreme One, then why did most of them marry, thereby immersing themselves in the turbulent sea called family life? Some clarifications concerning these are necessary so that we can appreciate better the teachings and the purpose of the *Upanishads*.

Before we come to the issues mentioned above, we need a quick survey of the evolution of human thought and understanding so that the *Upanishads* may be placed in the proper context.

Long ago when man first appeared on Earth, he wondered about the many things surrounding him. He was both awed and fascinated by what he saw, like lightning and thunder for example. He assumed that these were controlled by agencies beyond what was visible, and he assigned spirits or supernatural agencies to various natural phenomena. Thus it is that quite independently, tribes and communities in different parts of the world conceived of the Rain God, the Fire God, the God of Thunder, and so on. Ancient India was no exception, and people then believed that various deities were in charge of the five elements and the various forces of Nature. These deities were called *Devas*, a word that is often translated as demigod. Names like *Indra*, *Varuna*, *Vayu*, *Agni*, etc., that we hear so often during *Vedic* chants are all the names of various deities. The *Devas*, it was believed, lived in a world of their own which was, in popular language, heaven; the technical name for this is *Devalokam*. It was believed that here in the land of the *Devas*, one could enjoy uninterrupted pleasure.

This popular belief must be seen against what happens on Earth; here, as Swami reminds us, pleasure is an interval between two pains. Unwilling to accept pain, man invented a world where there was no pain! And he also devised rituals whereby *Devas* could be propitiated for gaining entry into their world. This is how many rituals first came into existence in ancient India, as perhaps in other parts of the world too.

In due course, many societies and communities of people became more spiritually evolved and they now began to recognise that there was something way above the so-called spirits that controlled the forces of Nature. In ancient India the learned ones said that there was a God Supreme, above and beyond anything else. Aspects of Nature regarded as *Devas* were nothing but aspects of this Supreme One, referred to by the ancients of India as *Brahman*, *Paramatma*, etc.

The idea that there is God Almighty above everything else, Who is also the Creator of the Universe is nothing unique to the philosophy of the ancient Indians, the philosophy known as *Sanathana Dharma*. All the major religions of the world emphatically proclaim the existence of an Almighty God who is the Creator and is beyond Space and Time. All religions also teach how this God must be obeyed and worshipped. But what is unique about the philosophy of ancient Indians is that it delves far deeper than what is usually accepted as the proper relationship between man and God. *Vedanta* is unique because it not only declares that there is nothing other than God, but also how man, normally tied down by the body and the Mind, can by special effort, actually experience and become one with the Supreme State. This is the extraordinary road map that the *Upanishads* unfold, step by step.

What is truly remarkable about the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* is that they do not dismiss anything in Creation; everything has a place and a purpose and evolution must take place against this background. Thus it is that Swami Nikhilananda says:

In spiritual evolution, one cannot skip any of the stages. Hence, for those who, prompted by their natural impulses, seek physical

pleasures on earth, the Upanishads lay down the injunctions to discharge various duties and obligations. For those who seek pleasures in heavens the Upanishads prescribe rituals and meditations by which one can commune with the gods, or higher powers. Gods, men and subhuman beings, in the tradition of the Upanishads, depend on each other for their welfare. The key to enduring happiness lies in co-operation with all created beings and not in ruthless competition.

(The last remark is perhaps relevant in the context of what is happening today, when man is not only dominating but even wiping out many species.)

The uniqueness of the *Upanishads*, lies in that they not only instruct us in rituals but, (besides giving hints of their inner meanings) indicate how man, bound as he presently is, can elevate himself to experience the Divine, or the 'Ultimate-Ultimate' as Prof. Radhakrishnan refers to *Brahman*. We are concerned here primarily with the Universal aspects of the teachings of the *Upanishads*.

As mentioned earlier, the *Upanishads* cater to the entire spectrum of aspirants. In a modern school, we have many classes like the first standard, the second standard and so on, all the way to high school level. Naturally, the level of instruction varies with the class. In the *Gurukulas* of ancient times, there were no classes because the number of disciples was usually a handful. Keeping this in mind, the hymns catered to students with all levels of spiritual evolution. There was no such thing as the same formula for all; instead, it was a case of "each according to his capacity". Krishna and Swami are of the same opinion that: in whatever way the devotee relates to the Lord, the Lord relates in the same way back to him.

The ancients of India understood human psychology very clearly. They knew that most people are strongly attached to the world, and for such people the directive was, in Swami's language, "ceiling on desires", and a strict adherence to *Dharmic* life. It was this strict adherence to morality in daily life that established what is today referred to as the rule of law; only the law was not that of man but that of God. Everyone from the king to the pauper recognised that there is a Moral Law governing the Universe and adhered to it within the framework of the individual's position in life.

However, merely being a good person is not enough. Something more is required if one is to experience the Divine and become one with It, and that too is explored in the *Upanishads*.

Swami says, "The purpose of life is to prepare you to return to your natural habitat. You have come from God and you must return to God." What does this mean and how does one go about it?

Swami says that God is the Embodiment of Pure Bliss. That is why He once sang: "Bliss is My Form," a song familiar to all of us. The Sanskrit word for Bliss is *Ananda*. The word *Ananda* is not easy to translate. Often, *Ananda* is translated as joy or happiness. Both these words are totally inadequate; by comparison, Bliss does a better job.

Joy and happiness relate to experiences we have in this world. These experiences are no doubt nice but they also have an opposite, which is pain or misery. By contrast, Bliss or *Ananda* has no opposite because Bliss belongs to the non-dual world - that is the world of God.

In as much as man is a child of God, his true nature also is Bliss. But once man gets immersed in the world, he becomes easily deluded and readily accepts fakes like pleasure as being Bliss. The senses deceive him, and he falls into a trap. It is nice to be a good person, perform all duties and rituals diligently and so forth. But that cannot ever lead to union with God because of residual attachments. Even a good man has desires, though they may seem harmless. For example, many good people want to go to heaven after death. This may seem acceptable superficially but heaven is the wrong destination! That is why Swami says that even *Sattva* binds; it is like a golden rope! Then what does one do? One must become unbound, which means one must shed all body-consciousness.

In the *Upanishads*, the Teacher gently draws the attention of the young disciple to what exactly the goal of life ought to be. One ought not to get sucked in and overwhelmed by the turbulence of life. One must look far beyond, never losing sight of the final destination which is where Eternal Joy and Bliss are found.

The *Upanishads* speak of the five *Koshas* or five sheaths that envelope the Self. The imagery is that when the *Atma* becomes embodied and takes on a human form, then five sheaths cover it, so to speak. The seeker who wants to become one with God must penetrate or pierce through these five sheaths. Concerning this, Swami says:

The Divine Power that vibrates in Annamaya Kosha or the Food Sheath is nothing but body-consciousness. The Divine Power that functions in the Praanamaya Kosha or the Life Sheath is nervous consciousness. The Divine Power that shines in the Manomaya Kosha or the Intelligence Sheath is Intelligence consciousness. And the Power that pervades the Anandamaya Kosha or the Sheath of Bliss is nothing but the Pure Divine Self.

Swami elaborates further in the *Prashnottara Vahini* and discusses in detail the nature of the five sheaths as

follows:

Kosha means a sheath, a case, a cover. A sword is put into a scabbard, and money is kept in a treasury. The Real 'I' is similarly encased in five sheaths. To get at the Absolute Truth, one must remove these five sheaths.

The body grew in the womb of the mother with the help of the food partaken by the mother. After birth, it is food that helps to not only sustain the body but also helps it grow. After death, the body returns to the elements and the earth which produces food. Thus it is that the body is referred to Annamaya Kosha.

The Praanamaya Kosha is basically the sheath of the five senses. Senses delude and this delusion must be overcome.

Beyond the Praanamaya Kosha is the Manomaya Kosha which is the sheath of the Mind. It is the Mind that creates the feeling of 'mine and thine'. It follows the senses and runs out into the world in order to experience transient pleasure. It is very unsteady and is always flitting.

The body is not evident before birth or after death. The Wise man thus tells himself: "I always exist. I am not material. I am separate from the body. So I cannot be the Annamaya Kosha or any of the other Koshas up to Vijnanamaya Kosha. I am the Witness of these Koshas.

In short, the *Upanishads* are a road map to Eternal Bliss. The goal of Eternal Bliss can be attained only when man realises from where he originated, and has an intense urge to return to his natural state. If, on the other hand, he chooses to become immersed in the world seeking pleasure, he will for sure be ever immersed in the world through repeated rebirths. Swami often calls attention to this foolishness, via the teachings of Adi Shankara, and the *Bhajan "Bhaja Govindam"*, which He sings from time to time.

There is an interesting story in the *Upanishads* relating to our subject. Bhrigu, the son of *Rishi* Varuna asks a question to his father about *Brahman*. The father, who in this case is also the *Guru*, asks his disciple-son to think and meditate, and come back with the answer himself. In other words, the answer is to be found by self-enquiry and not via tuition. The disciple does as told and comes back with what he thinks is the answer. The father tells him to go back and meditate some more because his answer is not complete and represents only part of the Truth. The disciple returns a few more times and every time he is sent back to enquire more. However, this is not a futile exercise because in every attempt, the disciple manages to refine the answer he found earlier. Finally there comes a stage when the disciple does not come back to report to his father. This is because having found that *Brahman* is nothing but Absolute Bliss or *Ananda*, he becomes one with It! Thus, the *Upanishads* give us hints about how one must enquire while seeking the Ultimate Truth.

Swami says,

The Upanishads are very important for those seeking Brahmajnana or Knowledge of Brahman. It is in the nature of things that Avidya or ignorance prompts men to crave for plentiful fruits through the performance of actions. This craving produces despondency when there is failure. And such attachment binds further, making it even more difficult to become free. Even though the turmoil called life involving birth, decay and death is frightening, man finds that the clutches of attachment are difficult to shake off.

Change is the sign of untruth while Constancy or Changelessness is the sign of Truth. Brahman is Truth, that is to say, It is Changeless. All that is that not Brahman that is, the Universe that is projected out of Brahman, is subject to change. All objects subject to change come within the purview of the intellect. Here, the Knower, that which is to be known and the process of knowing, appear separate. But beyond, there is that Oneness which is Brahman.

The Upanishads exhort you not to swerve from the path of duty and learning. Listening, rumination, and meditation are the three steps in Realisation. Listening refers to the Vedas, which have to be revered in faith and learnt by heart from a Guru. Rumination of what is learnt, fixes the notion of Brahman in the Mind. Meditation helps in single-minded attention on the Principle so installed in the Mind.

We hope that by now you have a fair idea about the message of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. In a recent Discourse, delivered during *Dasara*, during October 2004, Swami stressed that those who do not know *Vedas* should learn them. Those who have learnt them ought to chant them. And those who chant them ought to digest them and put them into practice.

Swami has given the formula for the easiest way to practise the teachings of the *Vedas*:

There are today countless number of scholars who expound the Vedanta and they have numerous listeners. The outcome of it all is precious little. This is because there is no practice of the teachings of Vedanta. All study of Vedanta is of no avail if the precepts are not practised.

People have to find out what are the easy methods of putting into practice the precepts of Vedanta. The easiest way is to cultivate harmony in thought, word and deed. Rather than listening to a ton of precept, it is better to practice an ounce of teaching.

Such a simple formula! Given with such Love by Swami, the formless God of the *Vedas*, who has come again with a form to uplift His children!

Let us make the most of this great chance by putting His words into practice!

ARE WE LIKE THE HOUSE OF MIRRORS?

The House of Mirrors on the Isle of White in the south of England is a well known tourist attraction. Those who have been there or to a similar place will appreciate what incredible distortions these mirrors cause. Mirrors of different sizes and curvatures are seen mounted on all walls of the mansion. In front of one mirror we see our image with a large head, small belly and 'matchstick' legs. Another mirror may show a large rounded belly, 'daddy longlegs' and small 'peanut' head. As we move on among the mirrors we see various contortions - twisted faces, disproportionate limbs, monstrous looking faces and so on. The same individual, but distorted in a multitude of ways according to the curvature of each mirror.

Jagadguru Adi Shankara, the founder of the doctrine of *Advaita* or non-dualism, has said that the entire manifest Universe, *Prakriti*, is like a mirror and that is the purpose it serves. Everything perceived by the senses are merely reflections of the 'One' that became many. Swami has this interesting example to illustrate this point. A dog sees itself in a mirror. Thinking it is seeing another dog it starts barking. When the 'other dog' starts barking, 'this dog' becomes furious and begins to attack the 'other dog' in the mirror and breaks the mirror in the process. As it sees several 'other dogs', one in each of the broken pieces it starts behaving like a mad dog. Swami also gives another example where a dog bites its own tongue causing it to bleed while chewing a dog bone and continues to chew furiously thinking that all the juicy blood is oozing out from the bone!

In His own words Bhagavan Baba says, "I separated Myself from Myself so that I can love Myself." He declares, "Everything is a Reaction, Reflection and Resound." Many enlightened Masters compare the human mind to a mirror. The mind of each individual is so unique and inimitable. Like the 'House of Mirrors' the mind also causes untrue or distorted impressions of our sensory input. Nisargadata Maharaj says: "Knowledge and ignorance are in the areas known externally and therefore not Truth. Truth is in the realm of the unknown, not in the externally known, but known deep within after withdrawing the senses (mind) and intellect."

The outer five sense organs - eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin - receive the signals from the outer world of objects, people and events, and transmit them to the mind, which is the inner instrument of cognition. The cognitive aspect of the mind will process the signals received from the outer five sense organs according to its inherent conditioning. This conditioning influences the cognitive process and interprets the signals received accordingly. Thus what we see, hear, feel, think and do is the result of our own distorted perception. Perceptions differ from one individual to another in spite of the fact that the original the same object, person or event remains common to all. Hence, it is quite obvious that such false impressions or perversions are taking place entirely at the level of the mind. We therefore have to see ourselves as walking mirrors encasing the Divine Essence, Love.

Therefore the fault lies within us and we need to acknowledge this basic fact to begin with that our individual interpretations and reactions are erroneous. Due to delusion and ignorance our ego will not admit or acknowledge this fundamental flaw. No amount of reasoning will be of avail. Swami says, "We are seeing through coloured glasses (mind) and when we point a finger at another, three fingers are pointing at us!" Jesus also said, "Don't look at the mote in another's eye when there is a beam across your own." The mind is therefore at the centre stage and needs to be looked at dispassionately and in depth. Why does it cause such distortions? The answer is simple. Impurities in the mind are like the dust on the surface of the mirror, which make the reflection hazy. The deep-seated impressions (*vasanas*) brought forward from past lives and childhood are like the curvatures on the mirror, causing distortions or perversions. In addition the desires and dreams for a better future lure the mind into further deception.

Like any phenomenal object or entity, the human body also has no independent existence, autonomy and choice of action. However, through ignorance and delusion (*Maya*) a sense of separate identity or individuality is caused and wrongly believed to be functioning independently. Our attachment to the body as a separate entity is entirely due to the conditioning received from our parents, elders and environment. From the earliest moments of understanding we are told that we are a particular body with a particular name. It is so easy to comprehend this delusion if we realise that the body is merely a vehicle, a 'body-car,' to carry the *Jivatma* (individual soul) through its sojourn on earth. Even the names we carry are comparable to the registration numbers on motor vehicles, merely to identify us as separate entities. What we think of ourselves and how others perceive us are subject to infinitely complex and latent attributes within each individual. Further, these perceptions are themselves so transient and unreliable. The drama of life verily hinges on such warped mental aberrations in this aspect of the mind.

God, who is the brilliant producer, director and actor of this entire 'dream-show', plays all roles in this great 'dream-drama.' Each individual is acting the assigned role 'unconsciously,' without being aware of this truth, but wrongly identifying with the body that is merely a vesture or costume. Swami has often reminded us that death is a dress of life. We leave behind our heavy overcoat of flesh and bone and move on to play another role, in another dimension in time and space.

Many a time Swami has reminded us that contrary to our belief we do not have free will. Swami also has said that we are not all that helpless and trapped in an iron cage, and that we are endowed with awesome resources within, if tapped and utilised for our ascent. Paradoxical as these two statements may seem, given the proper understanding, they are contextual. By believing that we are the doers we attract a sense of responsibility, guilt, fear, blame and suffering, including praise and blame, which becomes the 'iron cage' that binds us to past repetitive tendencies - hence we have no free will. Shakespeare too has said, "The world is a stage and each one is an actor, with entrance and exit, and playing many roles in one life." Bhagavan Baba says, "Life is a game, play it; life is a dream, realise it." Only through Constant Integrated Awareness, CIA, of our True Nature and remaining detached from the role this body of ours is playing can we experience true freedom.

Just as the eye cannot see itself while seeing everything outside itself, the mind can only see the outer 'appearances', but not its own nature and faults. Limited by the veil of 'Maya' we are limiting our capacity to use our full resources to no more than 10%, like an iceberg that hides 90% of itself below the surface. Our life too begins like a grand appearance but ends up like the sinking of the Titanic! We have to wake up to this basic fact, an all important truth about the hidden part of our 'iceberg' not merely the *vasanas* and *karmas* but also the awesome spiritual potential inherent in us. Bhagavan Baba is like a perfect and pure mirror and He reflects the faults that are deeply hidden in our mind. When we are in His proximity, meaning our inner proximity, our hidden potential begins to manifest. Thus we have the best opportunity to recognise our own defects and take the corrective steps. By His grace and our determination we will have the opportunity and the right circumstances to achieve the impossible. Just as changing our 'coloured glasses' to plain glasses, we need to see things in the light of true awareness and apply fundamental discrimination for a collective gain.

Due to a divided mind that is under the influence of 'me' and 'mine' our opinions are limited to an individual viewpoint, not a collective or integral perception. Our discrimination is flawed for the same reason and we become selfish and self-centred. Swami also tells us that 'individual discrimination' is fragmented and serves a selfish purpose, as opposed to 'Fundamental Discrimination', which sees things in its entirety. We see and hear through a divided a mind, which is the cause of our narrow outlook, disunity and conflict. The attachment to the body as a separate entity, as already mentioned, is due to the conditioning that one is a particular body with a particular name. Thus one becomes convinced beyond doubt of the identity with the body that is endowed with life-force and breath, and functions as a separate individual with a unique personality.

Ego gets cultivated from infancy. While every person is divine, the personality is the result of ego that believes itself as a separate body-entity - a kind of superimposition on the 'Divine Person', which is the underlying Reality. Divinity is immanent in every manifestation but the divine essence is not apparent. Divinity is like pure rain water. When the rain water falls on the soil it will naturally take the colour and smell of the soil and flow as streams. Nevertheless, it is still the same rain water but now mixed with earthly contaminants. When the sun shines and the clouds arise from the streams it becomes pure once again, back to its pristine state - clear and uncontaminated. Likewise, *Sadhana* is refinement towards our true nature and it is a process of 'self-distillation' to bring out the pure essence, the true 'Self', or the divinity that we are.

Thus, the removal of perversion of the mind is true *Sadhana*. Only then will we become the pure and divine 'moving mirrors,' and reflect the true light of Pure Consciousness, the Divine Essence within. Bhagavan Baba's advent is for this ultimate purpose. May we be worthy recipients of His grace, so vital to release ourselves from bondage and realise our ultimate divine destiny.

Jai Sai Ram.

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THE OTHER 9/11

Musings from Prashanti Nilayam

By Dr. G. Venkataraman

Loving *Pranaams* at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet and Greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

Two anniversaries were observed recently, one with some public notice and the other with scant interest. The first anniversary was the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11th, 2001, an event which is now simply referred to as 9/11. Shortly after that came October 2nd, Gandhi's birthday. Hardly anyone took notice of it in India, which is very sad to say the least. But that is not the reason why I am mentioning Gandhi's birthday. There is another reason to which I shall now come.

You see on the day following Gandhi's birthday, I was casually scanning the headlines of one of India's leading newspapers. These days I hardly read newspapers since most of them have degenerated into low class tabloids. But on this occasion it so happened that I was waiting to see someone and during that time picked up a newspaper that was lying nearby. I started glancing through it when one headline caught my attention. It said: "The Other 9/11". I was naturally struck by that headline and asked myself: "What on earth is this?" The newspaper did not give many details but did give me an important clue, and that was that way back in 1906, Gandhi did something important on September 11, when he was in South Africa.

My curiosity was aroused and I made some research. I was astonished to learn that almost a hundred years before the better known and infamous 9/11 that we all are familiar with, on that very date that is September 11th, Gandhi gave a *Mantra* that was in fact an answer to the violence now sweeping the globe, including terrorism. I cannot go into that history now in entirety, but let me give a gist of it.

It all started in the 19th century, with the colonisation of South Africa in particular. Two European powers competed for control of that part of the African continent. The British defeated the Dutch in the Boer War. South Africa now became a colony under the British Crown, with however, a significant white population of Dutch origin. By the way, it might interest you to know that Gandhi formed an ambulance brigade that helped the British troops during the Boer War. Later the British duly commended Gandhi for his humanitarian aid.

Of course, the country was mainly populated by the indigenous Africans. There were also many Asians mostly from India. These latter belonged to two distinct groups - those employed in menial labour and those in the service sector. To understand why this occurred we have to take note of the following.

We first recall that at its height, the British Colonial Empire stretched from the Fiji islands in the Pacific to Canada and the Caribbean in the western hemisphere. That is why it used to be said in those days: "The Sun never sets on the British Empire". But it did, and that is how history throws in unexpected curves!

When the British started colonising different countries, they wanted labourers to work on the various projects they embarked on. They realised that India was a land where civilisation had thrived for thousands of years and as such, there were people with all kinds of skills ranging from making swords to sculpturing. The Indians were mostly brought in to work on tea and sugarcane plantations, but in some cases, there were other reasons why Indian labour was imported. For example in Malaya now Malaysia, it was forestry while in East Africa it was laying railway tracks. Many of the other territories colonised by the British were populated for the main by primitive tribes. Therefore, when the colonial masters wanted to develop the land they had occupied and exploit its resources, it was natural for them to tap Indian labour which was ready to be used. Thus it was that tens of thousands of poor Indians were shipped off to work in faraway lands, and thus it is that today there are over twenty six million people of Indian origin overseas, more than the entire population of Canada today!

The British took tens of thousands of labourers to South Africa and this was, so to speak, the first wave of Indian immigration. These people needed shops where they could buy the things they were used to; they needed many support services, including doctors, barbers etc. This need for the service sector led to the second wave of immigration in many places like Fiji and West Indies; and naturally, there was a second wave in South Africa too. In fact, Gandhi went to South Africa as a young barrister to represent an Indian client there in a court case.

Thus, the Indian community in South Africa was, at that time, made up essentially of two segments the original immigrants who were brought in as forced labour, and the Indians who came later as traders etc., to offer services to the Indian labourers who were already settled there.

You might then ask: "What about the whites and the native Africans?" Well, the British knew how to take care of themselves. There were service companies from Britain with branches in South Africa and they took care of providing all the major requirements from legal matters to making travel arrangements for going to Europe etc. Where health was concerned, there was the Government Health Service run by whites mainly for the whites. As for the native tribes, they managed the way they had for thousands of years - no organised service really!

In short, the demographic situation in the late nineteenth century was as follows: the Dutch had been defeated no doubt but the Dutch settlers were accepted as full-fledged members of the white community. The dust of the Boer War had settled down and the British rulers took a hard look at the demographic composition of their new colony. There were the whites, a minority but obviously privileged because they were the rulers. The native blacks had to be "suffered with" - but they could be kept in their place. Then there were the Indians; of these, the labourers did not cause any problem, because they had been brought in to do various menial chores that the natives could not do. But the rulers did not see much use for the other Indian immigrants who tended to corner a share of the support services. So a law was passed concerning civic and citizenship rights.

According to this, the whites of course enjoyed first class status. The natives were relegated to the bottom of the totem pole no problems were foreseen in doing so. The natives were "subhuman" in their opinion, and they had no place except at the bottom. As for the Indians who were seen as troublesome, the law was designed to be highly discriminatory and even insulting. The idea was to harass them to the point of forcing them out of South Africa. This was done by requiring all Indians to carry a permit at all times. The permit rule was designed to be obnoxious from the beginning, and it permitted limitless scope for harassment. For example, newborn Indian babies would be taken into detention because they did not have a permit! Can you imagine anything more horrible than that? But that was the way it was then.

At that time, Gandhi had not yet taken up cudgels against the British Empire and colonialism that came later, after his return to India. He was then quite prepared to accept British rule but wanted fairness for all within that system. The way the law was passed, it granted divine rights to the whites, condemned the blacks and discriminated against the brown. What was to be done under the circumstances?

Committed as he was to the due processes of law, Gandhi attempted legal redress. He wrote to higher authorities in South Africa and wrote to influential Members of the British Parliament. Among those he wrote to was Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Indian to be elected a Member of the British House of Commons. None of this was effective. Then he decided to take the next step, which was the beginning of a new chapter in the never-ending fight against human injustice.

So that's it! The famous *Sathyagraha* movement that was to form the cornerstone of India's fight for Independence was actually born in South Africa, interestingly enough on 9/11, though of a much earlier era. Just compare the two 9/11's - what a difference! If one goes by the happenings of today, one would probably jump to the conclusion that the only way to fight violence is with more violence. Well, that is the myth that has been handed down from the ages. And it is because belief in that myth is increasing that we have been having wars, more wars, and still more wars. I wonder how many of you know about the birth of the United Nations in 1944, and the Declaration that is part of its birth certificate, so to speak? Just try to find out how many bloody wars have been fought after World War II and how for decades humanity was shivering about the possible outbreak of World War III.

People say that *Himsa* is the only workable *Mantra* and that evil can be vanquished only by a strong physical response read 'heavy blows'! OK, a lot of people chant that *Mantra* and many powerful people and indeed nations also practise that *Mantra*. But that does not mean it is correct. People tend to forget that Martin Luther King successfully used the Gandhi formula in his struggle for equal rights for the black people in America, and Nelson Mandela too successfully used it in his programme of reconciliation after apartheid was thrown out in South Africa. In fact, the Mandela experience demonstrates that *Ahimsa* or non-violence should not merely be seen as a weapon of resistance; on the contrary, it is also a powerful instrument for achieving reconciliation.

Mandela did not pull the idea out of a hat he freely acknowledges his debt to Gandhi. In fact as he often says to India: "You sent us a Gandhi and we sent back a Mahatma!" By the way, when Bill Clinton spoke on the occasion

of Mandela's 85th birthday, he said that the only politician who influenced his life was Gandhi. Note that he mentioned Gandhi in the context of politics, which means that Gandhi is relevant even for politics, something that most people dismiss. In fact, since politics is tied up intimately with Society or *Samashti* as Swami would put it, *Ahimsa* is more relevant there than anywhere else.

This brings me to the question: "What really is Ahimsa?" The clearest answer to that was given by Swami one afternoon many years ago in Trayee. It is only appropriate that I conclude with this story. It was the month of March, Swami was in Brindavan and I happened to be teaching there at that time. One evening as the famous Trayee session was under way, Swami asked me to speak. In my talk I made a reference to a speech given by a student that morning in the Prayer Assembly. In that talk, the student referred to the "Naxalite problem". For the benefit of those who do not know, I must mention that the Naxalites are a group of extremists who, fed up with the slow processes of democracy, have taken to arms as the only solution to the problems of inequality. Essentially they are Marxists who have no use for the ballot box, feeling that bullets will attain their goal.

When I sat down after finishing my talk, which by the way was in good part about why violence does not pay, Swami who was seated on the *jhoola* slowly asked: "Who was that boy who spoke about Naxalites?" Everyone was looking round to see who would get up and acknowledge himself. The boy in question must obviously have been frozen with fear! After what seemed an eternity, the boy stood up. Swami asked him: "You are the boy who spoke about Naxalites?" "Yes Swami." "Have you ever seen a Naxalite?" "No Swami." "Then how do you know about Naxalites?" "I have read about them in newspapers and magazines." "Oh I see," said Swami and then asked the boy to sit down. I am sure that boy must have been tremendously relieved. Slowly Swami then said, "All of you are worse than Naxalites!" This sure came a great big bomb shell and a devotee whom we all know very well who was seated right next to Swami exclaimed, "Swami!" Bhagavan looked him squarely in the eye and said, "You are the worst of them all!"

Believe me, we were all completely bewildered and did not have an idea of what Swami was meaning. Swami then stood up and gave a Discourse. In that He said that Naxalites use weapons and cause bodily harm. Injuries caused to the body heal in course of time but injuries caused to the Mind with vicious words never heal. Thus mental violence is far worse than physical violence. From that Swami led on to how violence originates in the Mind and how it is in the Mind that violence has to end. The extinction of violence in the Mind cannot ever be achieved with guns and bombs as people and even countries are currently attempting to do.

The truth of the matter is, and it is a very simple truth actually - violence begets more violence. Maybe in the short term, violence may appear to achieve control; but the wound that it causes will, at sometime or the other rebound - this is the famous law of reflection, reaction, resound. There is no escape from it whether we like it or not, we will always reap what we sow. Unfortunately, humanity does not want ever to learn this lesson, despite the Declaration of the United Nations. Peace through terror was the philosophy during the Cold War period. Is that real Peace? Peace through overwhelming violence now seems to be the fashion! Can that ever work in the long term? Incidentally, it is worth recalling what Swami has to say about war. This is what He has said in part:

"It is meaningless to aspire for peace in the streets and villages without peace at home. These days it has become a fashion to pray for peace! Meetings are arranged for establishing peace in the world. Keeping the atom bomb in the hand, people shout for peace! Even by journeying to the Moon, man cannot get peace. Peace is within you and not on the Moon! It is better to travel half an inch into the heart than to journey hundreds of thousands of miles to the Moon!"

I do hope you realise how important is the message of *Ahimsa* that Swami teaches, especially in today's world. Baba often says: "The earlier *Avatars* used weapons to vanquish evil but this *Avatar* will use only LOVE." Devotees invariably clap but later shake their heads and say, "No, *Ahimsa* will not work anymore."

I ask you: "Is it that *Prema* and *Ahimsa* will not work or that bigoted minorities of all shades are not prepared to allow them to work, while the rest watch supinely?"

Think about it and do write to us with your views.

JAI SAI RAM.

Serial Articles - Getting Spiritually Better

Dear Reader,

Continuing our series on Getting Spiritually Better, we present you with a discussion on the concept of the Creation as God's Divine play.

THE COSMIC DRAMA

It is often said that the Universe is a stage and Creation is God's Cosmic Drama. Further, according to Baba, it is God Himself Who dons all the various costumes, playing all the different roles. At first sight this might seem a far-fetched idea, and not easy to accept. Be that as it may, let us examine this subject.

Let us first consider the Creation and the subsequent evolution of the Universe from a purely scientific point of view. The widely accepted view at present is that the Universe originated in what is referred to as the "Big Bang" that occurred about fifteen to twenty billion years ago. Both Space and Time came into existence at the instant of the Big Bang, and the Universe subsequently expanded. Into this space emerged gross matter made up of electrons, protons, neutrons etc. The neutrons, protons and electrons formed within a few seconds after the Big Bang but it took much longer, about 300,000 years before atoms as we know them started forming. A vast amount of primordial hydrogen and helium formed in the Universe, and almost all the objects we see in the Universe today [including ourselves] came basically out of this primordial hydrogen and helium.

From Einstein's theory we know that matter must come only from energy. It follows that at the time of the Big Bang, there was enough of an initial deposit of energy, to start the process of matter formation in the Universe. By the way, this initial deposit was a mind-boggling amount! All that has been tersely mentioned here has been spelt out in detail by science and well corroborated by unimpeachable experimental evidence. One question that Science does not discuss is: where did the initial deposit of energy come from?

Let us now turn to *Vedanta* or ancient spiritual wisdom as enshrined in the *Vedas* that Baba so often refers to. Unlike Science, *Vedanta* is sparse on the technical details but, though it gives only an overview of Creation and evolution, it fills in with some crucial details that are missing in the picture painted by Science. The most important of these are: "Why is there the Universe? Why does it exist?" These questions are beyond Science, with good reason. For the answer, let us turn to Swami. He says:

There was no one to know who I am, till I created the world at My pleasure with one word. Immediately, mountains rose up; immediately, rivers started running; earth below and the skies overhead; oceans, seas, lands and watersheds; Sun, Moon and desert sands sprang up from nowhere to prove My existence. Came all forms, human beings, mankind, beasts and birds flying. Speaking, hearing and all powers were bestowed upon them under My orders. The first place was given to mankind and My knowledge was placed in man's mind.

Let us try to understand the above with the help of an analogy. We know that water vapour that is present everywhere can manifest in different places in various visible forms such as rain water, lake water, icebergs, etc. In the same way, God manifests in the physical Universe in diverse forms basing on His twin aspects of Consciousness [*Siva*] and Energy [*Shakti*]. Since God who embodies these twin aspects of Consciousness and Energy is Love, every entity in Creation is also based on Love. Thus, there is a divinely ordained force of Love that exists between all the entities in Creation, whose apparent difference is purely superficial. [Incidentally, it is this Divine force of Love that draws devotees irresistibly to Baba.] In other words, God created the Universe as a stage wherein the different entities can visibly express their Love for each other. These different entities are nothing but God Himself, playing out the different roles!

Many questions arise at this point, one of which is: "It is understandable to say that a living being has Consciousness. But does a stone have Consciousness?" The answer according to *Vedanta* is that a stone does have Consciousness. Indeed the famous story of the weeping *saris* that Hislop has recorded proves precisely this point; namely that even so-called inanimate objects possess a certain measure of Consciousness.

A new question now arises: “In that case, what is the difference between a piece of rock and a living person? Surely there is an enormous difference!” Yes indeed, that is in the “quantum” of Consciousness energy [Consciousness also can be looked upon as a form of Divine energy] and the “type” of Consciousness energy. The “quantity” and the “quality” are such that the animate entity has a manifest sense of self-awareness. We can see that a living being knows about its existence. For example, when a cat approaches a rat, the latter runs for its life. That is because it knows it exists and it wants to protect its existence. This capacity for self-awareness is associated with what is called the *Praana*. Baba often refers to it. It is this *Pranaa* that exits when a person dies. Thereafter, whatever Consciousness is left in the corpse is just the “inert” type of Consciousness that is present in all atoms.

In the picture painted above, the emergence of life through an evolutionary process is like a nuclear reactor becoming critical and starting to generate energy on its own, when there is a critical mass of uranium in it. In terms of this analogy, death occurs when the Consciousness energy becomes sub-critical following the exit of the *Praana*. In a similar manner, for the first few weeks, the fetus that grows in the womb is just a mass of flesh but, as Baba has pointed out, when *Praana* enters the fetus [around the fourth month or so], it becomes a living entity of its own with its own distinctive Consciousness the “mass of flesh” now attains criticality, to use the reactor terminology.

To understand how this is related to the Cosmic Drama we have to first appreciate that the Universe is inherently diverse. Thus, superficially, the constituent entities of the Universe all appear very different. In fact, one cannot even find two blades of grass that are identical. Yet, behind all this bewildering diversity there is an underlying unity. It is to call attention to this two-sided nature of Creation that Baba often reminds us: “BULBS ARE MANY BUT CURRENT IS ONE”. Yes, in an illuminated building one would see many different bulbs of different colours and different levels of brilliance; yet they all shine on account of the same current that passes through all of them. In the same manner, though we may see stars, planets, mountains, elephants, tigers, snakes, plants and humans of all shades and colours, they all are embodiments of one God and carry the Divine spark in them. That is the ‘unity in diversity’ to which Baba directs our attention.

God is playing all the roles in this drama; that of the good guy as well as the villain. This would be most mystifying to most of us and we would wonder: “Now why on earth does God do this?” Before we consider that, let us remind ourselves that little children who play all by themselves often do this. They speak to themselves, playing many roles! God is like a child and He does this to amuse Himself and to express His Love for Himself [via the various forms]. That is why ancients in India referred to Creation as a God's *Leela* or His sport. Playing this game, God can love Himself through His various forms.

One objection to this proposition might be: “Listen, this is all wrong. In this world, there is more hatred than love. There is something wrong with this hypothesis”. Therefore, let us examine further. God's Drama is not a simple one but a rather complex one. Would any creative dramatist write a naïve play where nothing really happens? No. In the same way, God has scripted His play with a lot of spice! He has thrown in some good guys and lots of bad guys, setting in motion a pendulum as it were. At times the pendulum swings towards evil and at times it swings towards good. In fact, to make the pendulum swing towards good, God sometimes has to put in a personal appearance as an *Avatar*!

In short, the entire Universe is by God, for God and of God! That is why Baba often tells us “You are God.” In that case, why don't we behave like God would? That is because we have forgotten our true nature and that is precisely why Swami often tells us to ask ourselves: “WHO AM I?” A man who does not know that he is God is like an actor who is lost in his role and has forgotten his true identity. But one who knows his real-ID is not only aware that he is God but also that everyone else he sees is God.

Thus, we are reminded often that life is a drama so that we begin to see God in all. In an act of extreme kindness, Baba taught this lesson to Hislop in a unique way. This is how Hislop tells it:

After I had been going to Prasantinilayam for about three years, coming back to America, as I got off the plane, I felt that Swami's head and shoulders were superimposed on mine. I felt that way. I was aware of the hair. So I said, “Well, welcome to America, Swami!” That feeling lasted for three years. Every place I would go, there would be Swami standing in the room. When I would talk to people at the Centre, Swami would be standing behind every person in that room! Behind every person would be Swami's head. When I look at the wall there would be a row of Swamis standing along the wall. That vision finally came to an end, and I told Swami, “Swami, that phenomenon

has come to an end now.” Swami said, “Hislop, don't you know that all phenomena come to an end?” He added, “You have had that vision of Swami without any effort on your part whatsoever. Now you have to deliberately see Swami wherever you look!” So I do that.

A relevant doubt might be: “OK, God is in all, but what about the apparent evil one sees all around? How does one deal with it?” The answer is, “Just as in a play two people play the role of the good and the bad guy respectively, but neither is evil. However, as far as the play is concerned, one acts like the bad guy and the other appears to deal firmly with the bad guy. But in all this there is no hatred or anger.” In other words, we play our roles as we are called upon to but without any malice, hatred or anger.

In the same spirit, we go through life as the Trustee of God. That is, nothing that we might seem to have is really ours, be it wealth, or intelligence or even physical strength. Every form of wealth belongs to God, a portion of which has been given to us for “safe custody”. Thus, if a person is rich, he does not think that the money with him is his; instead he regards it as God's money given to him in trust, and spends that money as God would like him to. Similarly, if a person is very intelligent, he uses that intelligence for service to humanity.

A minor additional clarification and that is the relationship between the view of Creation as presented by Science and the view as presented by *Vedanta*. This relationship is indicated in the diagram below:

We see from the above the following facts: 1) Science gives a good and detailed picture of what happened after the Big Bang, but it does not explain why the Big Bang occurred, nor where the initial deposit of physical energy came from. 2) *Vedanta* on the other hand says that God willed Creation whereupon the energy of Consciousness filtered down through various layers to the physical level to provide the initial deposit of energy for the Big Bang to occur. 3) Science is able to describe the evolution of gross matter from the time of the Big Bang but can only speculate where the origin of life is concerned. 4) Even if Science can explain how the first living molecule emerged from the primordial soup that filled the earth four billion years ago, it cannot explain the blossoming of Consciousness in man. 5) *Vedanta* comments on this by saying that the evolution of living species actually occurred against a prevailing background of Consciousness that filled the entire Universe from the beginning. More Consciousness was placed into the higher species as it were, triggering “criticality” in man, giving him the capacity to realise that He is God. When a person realises he is God, he leaves the stage permanently, while the others continue. And the play goes on, even as the pendulum of fortune swings all the time from the side of *Dharma* to *Adharma* and back again.

ADDITIONAL POINTS RELATING TO THE ABOVE

- Poets have described the world as a stage and life as a drama, but we generally dismiss all that as just beautiful metaphor. On the contrary, the Universe is a Divine stage, and life is a part of the Cosmic Drama.
- Every drama or play must have a playwright, a producer, a director, plus of course actors, etc. In the Cosmic Drama, God plays all the roles!
- This is a sport of the Lord, rather like the games that little children sometimes play, where they engage themselves in elaborate playacting on their own. That is why this particular sport is called a *Leela* of God.
- Why does God do this? We cannot really say, but Swami has given us a clue. He says God plays this game so that His different aspects manifesting as different entities in Creation can show love to each other. So, in a manner of speaking, it is a game of Love wherein God in one particular form shows His Love to another particular form.
- We mortals fail to see or understand this. We are so immersed in externals, that we see only the outer differences, failing to recognise the Inner unity. That is why Swami repeatedly tells us: “Remember, when you abuse another person you are really abusing God!” Likewise, when His boys went out to serve in the villages, He told them, “Don't think you are serving others; you are in fact serving your own self!” This is just another way of saying that the same God resides in all.
- If God is truly the core of all beings, how come we fail to see that, and perceive only the difference? This is due to

the play of the *Gunas*, an important aspect of *Prakriti* or Nature. But at the core, all are sparks of the Divine.

- Science also concedes that all entities in Creation are constituted of the same building blocks, and in that sense at least there is a thread of unity running across the entire Universe. The tiger, the mountain, the planets are all so different. Yet all of them are made up of molecules and all these molecules are made up of atoms of hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and so on. Further, the ancestry of all these atoms can be traced all the way back to the Big Bang! Thus, even according to Science, the one has become many.
- This is not all. A plant has life, a fish has life, an ant has life, a whale has life, an elephant has life, and man too has life. Though superficially all these species are very different from each other, the core of the Life principle is the same in all. Once again, there is a common connecting thread.
- However, Science is not able to offer any explanation for the reason why such a thread exists or the cause for it. For that, one must necessarily turn to spirituality.
- People in ancient India believed that while the core principle reflected the Divine undercurrent, the external diversity was imposed by Nature to facilitate the Cosmic Drama. After all, can there be a play with just one person and no other characters?
- Thus, ancient Indians accepted diversity in day to day life; but at the same time, they never forgot the underlying Cosmic thread of unity, the Divine undercurrent. Thus, they would never deliberately hurt another species, always declaring, "That being is also a *Jiva*," meaning that the other entity also contained the same Divine Life Principle.
- In short:
 - * Everything in the physical Universe has come from the primordial "Cosmic soup" that existed at the time of the Big Bang.
 - * Diversity in Nature is due to the play of the *Gunas*.
 - * However the core principle is the same.
 - * In particular, in the living species, the *Atma* manifests also as the Life Principle.
 - * In life, one must have a balanced approach taking cognizance of the core principle and the external diversity at the same time.
- In this context, it is useful to keep in mind what Sage Ramakrishna once told his disciples. He said, "It is said the tiger also is God, but it is practical to maintain a respectable distance from it, especially during its lunch hour!"
- All this is fine but what is the practical implication of saying that all that happens in the Universe is a part of a Cosmic Drama? What does it really mean?
- To understand this, let us suppose there is a drama company which is staging Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar. The play features characters like Caesar who is stabbed to death, Brutus who participates in the assassination, and Cassius who masterminds the plot. There is also Mark Anthony the friend of Caesar, who wants to avenge the death of his king. According to script of the play, Cassius hates Caesar, and in the drama speaks lines that convey his hatred. Again, according to the script, Brutus stabs Caesar. But what really happens when the play is enacted? The man playing the role of Cassius pours venom when he speaks his part of the dialogue but really he does not hate the man playing Caesar. Similarly, Brutus has no hatred and merely appears to stab Caesar. In fact, after the curtain finally comes down, it is quite likely that all these actors who acted as if they were enemies quietly enjoy a cup of coffee together! This is the lesson that one must carry over into life.
- The life of Lincoln provides an example. He had to wage war against the Confederate States, but he did so without malice or hatred. Gandhi fought against British Imperialism, but he had no hatred for the British people. These examples teach us how to go through life performing routine functions, but with an extraordinary attitude that is without anger, malice, jealousy, hatred, greed, avarice, etc.

- The following doubts can arise: “How can we take all this seriously? What about protecting my honour? What if I am insulted?” Well, as regards these matters, one must function in a worldly manner, within bounds of course, but in the spirit mentioned. For example, even Gandhi agreed that self defence is acceptable, provided one's life is threatened. Not everyone can be like a *Jnani* who is ever ready to show the other cheek or even give up his life without the least struggle. But all that is done must be done in the spirit of the Cosmic Drama.
- One might still argue: “But it is all so confusing! What is the big deal? Why on earth must one go through life as if it were a Cosmic Drama?” The answer to this is: “Life is a Cosmic Drama, whether we like it or not! Once we realise it, we would be able to go through life looking upon everyone as God in disguise that is the real point. Once one sees God in every being, including the lower forms of life, one has arrived!” Finally, when the body is shed, the individual merges with the Divine, and journey is over at last! The purpose of life is fully served.
- In short, realising that life is a Cosmic Drama is an important component of the purpose of life.
- One might still argue: “It is one thing to theoretically declare that life is a drama, and quite another to actually go through it that way. Is there any clear prescription for all this?”
- There is and that is where the Trusteeship principle that Gandhi strongly advocated applies. The idea is not new at all, and is a part of the ancient Indian heritage. The idea is simply that everyone no matter to what station of life they belong is an employee of God as far as work is concerned and a trustee of God where resources are concerned.
- As far as being a trustee pertains we can take the example of a king. While from a worldly point of view he is looked up to, the King for his part must feel that he is a servant of God. This is not as preposterous as it might sound. In India, Government Officials are supposed to be Public Servants. In this sense, the President is not merely the First Citizen but actually the First Servant. In fact, many years ago, Baba declared to a *Seva Dal* conference that He was the First *Seva Dal*.
- When everyone feels that he or she is a servant of God doing his or her work for and on behalf of God, [and does it diligently in a manner that would actually please God!], then half the world's problems are solved right away.
- The other part, trusteeship, relates to relinquishing “ownership”. It starts with one's children. One goes through life with the attitude that one is actually a foster parent, looking after God's child, given as a trustee. Kasturi describes how his parents took him as a tiny baby to a Siva temple and, after thanking the Lord, took a pledge to discharge their duties as foster parents.
- In this spirit, everything is owned by God health, wealth, knowledge, property etc. One is merely a trustee using that particular resource for and on behalf of God.
- Once upon a time, the Trusteeship concept was widely prevalent in Indian society. Maybe whole societies can no longer revert to such an attitude in this day and age, but certainly individual seekers can very well adopt such an attitude. In fact they must, and that is when playing a proper role in the Cosmic Drama becomes easy.
- For example, a man may have to wear an expensive costume in a play. He does not wear it believing that it belongs to him; he knows that when the curtain comes down, he must return the dress to the property department! Likewise, a man acting the part of a king merely acts the role and does not strut about behind stage like a monarch!
- In short, with the right attitude, going through life in the spirit of an actor in a Cosmic Drama is not an impossible task.

POINTS TO PONDER OVER

- The concept of Trusteeship has just been discussed. Basically, it amounts to cultivating the feeling that one owns

nothing, not even the body! Everything belongs to God, and is used for and on behalf of God. Indeed, even eating is to be regarded as an act intended to sustain the body that is God's instrument.

- The last remark may sound crazy but there is a story that underscores the idea. The *Gopikas*, the village girls who lived in Brindavan during Krishna's time were once trying to cross the River Yamuna. But the river was in spate and there was also no boat in sight. How to cross? Just then Sage Vyasa happened to come that way. The *Gopikas* then appealed to Vyasa saying, "O venerable Sage, please help to go across somehow." The Sage agreed but on one condition. He told them, "You must all give me a little of the fresh butter that you are carrying." The girls agreed and gave him some their butter. The Sage ate it all with great relish. After wiping his hands, he then went to the river and said, "O Mother Yamuna, if it is true that I have been fasting today, then please stop the water flow so that we all can easily cross and go over to the other side." Lo and behold, the flood waters began to subside immediately, and everyone was able to cross the river without any difficulty. On reaching the other side, the *Gopikas* thanked Vyasa profusely and then said, "O Sage, why did you tell Mother Yamuna that you had fasted after eating all that butter? And she seemed to believe you! What is the mystery behind all this?" With a smile Vyasa replied, "O young ladies, you all thought that it was I who was feasting. No, that is not so. Today, I am observing a fast. But I merely put all that butter into my mouth to despatch it to Krishna. It was He who really ate all that butter!" All this might be very difficult for us in this hard-boiled age to swallow but such was their faith in those days. This example is an illustration of how a trustee operates.
- Once again the standard question: "How would you explain this important but difficult concept of the Cosmic Drama to children?" Think about it.

SWAMI'S OBSERVATIONS ON THE COSMIC DRAMA

- All living beings are actors on the stage called the world. They make their exit when the curtain is rung down or their part is over. On this stage, one may play the part of a thief; another may be cast as a king; a third may be a clown and another a beggar. For all these characters in the play, there is One that gives the cue. Here, some points have to be understood clearly. The prompter in worldly drama will not come upon the stage and give the cue in full view of all. If he does so, the drama will lose interest. Therefore, standing behind a screen at the back of the stage, he gives cue to all the actors, irrespective of the role, be it dialogue, speech or song, just when each is in need of some help. In the same way, the Lord is behind the stage of *Prakriti*, giving the cue to all the actors for their various parts. So, every actor must be conscious of His Presence behind the screen of *Maya*. The actor must be anxious to catch the faintest suggestion He might give, always watching Him out of the corner of his eyes, and having his ears primed to catch His voice. Instead of this, if a person forgets the plot and the story, [that is to say the work one is supposed to do and the duty one has to discharge], and neglects to watch the Presence behind the screen, and simply stands dumb on the stage, the audience will laugh at his folly and accuse him of spoiling the show. Hence, every actor who has to play the role of man on the world stage must first learn the lines well, and then, remembering the Lord behind the screen, await His orders. Both aspects must receive due attention.
- You are only actors on the stage before the footlights. The Director Who knows the play, Who gives the cue, Who calls you in and puts you on is behind the curtain. You are a puppet; He holds the strings.
- Place yourself at His disposal. He knows. He has written the play, and He knows how it would go and how it would end. Yours is but to act. Pray that you may act well and earn His appreciation.
- Do all action as actors in a play, keeping your identity separate, and not attaching yourself too much to your role. Remember that the whole thing is a just play and that the Lord has assigned you a part. Act your part well. There ends your duty. He has designed the play and He enjoys it!
- Do not feel that your role is low and that of the other person is high. Likewise, do not feel proud when you get a high role. Do the best you can, whatever the role; that is the way to earn Grace.
- Thought, word and deed must all be filled with belief that it is His play. That is the genuine path.

- The world is a stage. All human beings are actors in this world-drama. Actions are motivated by the Will of God Who controls man's Immortal Soul and perishable bodies. We must play the game without displaying any sort of weakness or timidity.

Serial Articles - Gita for Children

Dear Reader,

Here is the second installment of the Gita for Children that we started in the last Issue. We hope that you enjoyed the previous one. In case you have any questions, please write to h2h@radiosai.org.

11. 'Now who is this “I” that is wearing the body? It is the Atma Arjuna, it is the Atma! By the way, there is no such thing as My Atma, your Atma and so on. It is the same Atma that is present everywhere, wearing many dresses. There is only one Atma, period.'

12. 'Are you wondering how this is possible? Maybe an example would make things a bit clearer. Just look up in the sky during the daytime. You will see some clouds here and there and empty sky in between. There is water vapour everywhere, including in the spaces between clouds. In some places this water vapour shows itself up as clouds; elsewhere, it is not visible, but it is present all the same.'

13. 'Notice two other points. Firstly, the clouds keep on changing their shapes, and secondly, no two clouds are alike.'

14. 'The same sort of thing happens in the world. The Atma pervades the entire world, indeed the entire Universe. Here and there, it manifests via the “dresses” called bodies, not only of humans but also animals, insects, etc. Thus, all living beings are the embodiments of the one Universal Atma.'

15. 'Recall what I told you about clouds changing their shapes with time. The same sort of thing happens to a living being or the embodied Atma. The being passes through various stages such as childhood, youth, middle age, and old age.'

16. 'When the body becomes old, the Atma just casts off the body and wears a new “dress”, that is it acquires another new body!'

17. 'Arjuna, I am telling you all this because you started feeling sad about death. There is no need to because death is just a change of dress, that is all!'

18. 'Your problem is that like all people you are totally focused on the body. You think you are the body. Tell me; are those clothes that you are wearing Arjuna? No, it is just your clothing. You are not the clothes but different from them.'

19. 'In the same way, neither you nor I or for that matter anyone else is the body. The Atma is our real nature. Death makes people sad because they foolishly identify themselves with the body and become upset when it is gone or about to go.'

20. 'Arjuna, just think. You are a warrior and you have fought battles before. I am sure you have on occasions slain people in those battles. But all that killing earlier does not seem to have bothered you at all. Yet today, you are feeling miserable even before you have taken the bow in your hand. Why Arjuna, why?'

21. 'Well, you wouldn't know the answer and so let Me tell you. Arjuna, you are feeling miserable today because the people likely to die in this war are yours. It is this feeling of “mine” that is really troubling and not death per se. After all, you have slain adversaries before.'

22. 'Arjuna, this feeling of “mine” comes because of body-consciousness or body attachment. And such an attitude automatically arises when a person thinks he is the body. But I remind you once again, you are NOT the perishable body but the Eternal Atma!'

LOVE IN ACTION GRAMA SEVA 2004

It all started suddenly and most unexpectedly. Swami came as usual in his golf cart to the verandah on the afternoon of 15th October, 2004. He stopped His cart on the outer verandah and was engrossed in the *Veda* chanting. Suddenly He gestured to Prof. Anil Kumar, who went up respectfully and listened to what He had to say. One could see that Prof. Anil Kumar's natural enthusiasm was growing and he seemed to be fairly bubbling with exuberance as he went up to the mike to make the important announcement that Swami has blessed that the *Grama Seva* start in 2 days time.

Things began moving rapidly. Soon people realized that much had already been accomplished. God always works silently and most efficiently. Everything was already in place for the *Grama Seva* to begin and no one was even aware of it. A sufficient quantity of *laddus* had already been prepared for the initial distribution. All the ingredients for the *Prasadam* preparation and the clothes for distribution had already been procured and the infrastructure was well in place even before the announcement was made!

The faculty and staff of the Institute quickly organised themselves for the *Seva*. Steering and planning committees were formed. The boys and the staff from the Puttaparthi and Brindavan College campuses as well as the Puttaparthi High School students were divided into 6 groups with an A and a B section in each group. Thus the A section of all the 6 groups would go for *Grama Seva* one day, while the B section would go the following day. This not only provided a day of rest, but also the boys staying back ensured that the *Mandir* activities, like *Veda* chanting for the *Dasara* festival, leading the *Bhajan* singing in Sai Kulwant Hall, and the afternoon programmes went on simultaneously and were not affected at all!

Each group going for the *Grama Seva* had 4 trucks for transportation along with a tractor for the heavier loads. All the 24 vehicles and 6 tractors were connected through a mobile communication facility with each other and a 'home base' that provided updates as well as kept track of the progress of each group. This helped them anticipate and respond well to emergency situations like shortage of clothes or *Prasadam* and respond to vehicle breakdowns. Each vehicle also had a uniformed policeman to provide security to the convoy, and to have a salutary effect by his presence and prevent any untoward incidents. In addition there were 2 SUVs (Sports Utility Vehicles) used by two of the project coordinators, assisted by a couple of students, who visited multiple sites between them to co-ordinate the distribution better. This system of 32 vehicles was the lifeline that helped the *Grama Seva* move forward smoothly and efficiently.

A daily schedule was drawn up outlining the villages to be visited for the day and allocating each of the 6 groups with the villages to be visited by them based on the population and the number of houses in each village. An estimate of the food to be loaded in each vehicle was thus arrived at from these figures as well as the food for the students doing the distribution. This was rolled up for all the vehicles to arrive at a "master production plan" for the number of packets of *Prasadam* to be distributed each day. Excess food was also loaded for contingencies and also to distribute to the poor people along the way. A *sari* and a *dhoti* for each household in each village to be visited for the day, also had to be planned for and loaded properly in each truck.

The *Prasadam* that was distributed to each person was a food packet of *pulihora* or tamarind rice and a *laddu*, a sweet in the shape of a small ball. The girls of the Anantapur campus had perhaps the more difficult task. They did most of the 'behind the scenes' work like the rice packing and the *laddu* preparation. The girls came up with a schedule so that they could start by early evening working through the night in shifts, so that the food packets were ready for loading into the trucks in the wee morning hours making the vehicle ready for an 8:30 a.m. departure. They not only toiled through the night but also attended both the morning and afternoon *Darshan* and *Bhajans* in Sai Kulwant Hall. Theirs was truly a spectacular effort and we salute all of them.

In a day about 12 to 15 villages were covered by the 6 groups and the students knocked at the doors of 5,000 homes to share Swami's *Prasadam* and love with the residents. Thus over 20,000 packets of *Prasadam* were distributed each day. This snippet of statistic is provided just to give an insight to the magnitude of the project, but statistics don't tell the full story. The *Grama Seva* is essentially a love story; a story of the compassion of our dear Lord for the

inhabitants of the villages, who depend only on Him.

On the morning of the 16th October there was another announcement. Swami said that tee shirts and caps would be distributed to all the students and staff members so that they could wear it and go for distribution the next day, chanting the *Sai Gayathri*. The packets of tee shirts were brought out and stacked in a pile in front of the verandah and a shirt was first shown to Swami. The white coloured tee shirt had the Institute emblem embossed on the front left side and the words LOVE ALL SERVE ALL on the back of the shirt, in red. After looking at the shirt Swami called a student and asked him to try the shirt on. The student immediately put the tee shirt on, over his regular white shirt. It was a tight fit. Swami asked that a larger size shirt be brought, personally inspected it to make sure it was now the right size and then gave it to the student and asked him to put it on. When the shirt fit correctly, Swami broke into a broad smile of motherly affection and love. He sat on the verandah for a long time that day listening to the *Veda* chanting and looking lovingly at all the boys who were eager to begin His work the next day.

Generally the daily schedule used to follow a more or less set pattern. After giving *Darshan* in the morning Swami would come to the verandah and would generally ask a staff member where they were going for the day. The staff members would be well prepared to brief Swami with maps and a list of villages that they intended to visit that day. It was a real sight to see Swami pouring over the maps along with the staff members and asking relevant questions to make sure that nothing had been missed out. Swami would then give His Divine Blessing for the day's distribution. At that point, two students would bring the food out in buckets to be blessed by Bhagavan and the sanctified food (*Prasadam*) was now ready for distribution!

Soon the boys scheduled to go that day, either section A or B, would leave Sai Kulwant Hall and rush to put on their shoes and collect their hats etc. and hurry to their designated trucks. The boys remaining in the *Mandir* would continue with the *Veda* chanting so that the *Mandir* activities were not interrupted.

The trucks numbered 1 to 24, the 6 tractors (numbered T1 through T6) and the two special vans, were lined up in a numerical sequence along the main road of the Ashram starting from the Gopuram gate and extending up to and beyond Shanti Bhavan. These trucks had already been loaded by the recently graduated alumni in the wee hours of the morning and were all ready to go. A quick inventory was taken to ensure that the truck had been stocked correctly, a quick headcount and everything was ready to roll.

When everything was accounted for, the coordinator gave the signal and the convoy started to go out slowly. As each truck reached Sai Kulwant Hall a resounding chant of '*Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Babaji Ki Jai*' rang out, and the long convoy slowly wound out of the Ashram like a long snake. They did not go far though. Only up to the Institute Hostel, where they made a 'pit' stop. This is where they collect goodies for the students (usually biscuits, chips or potato patties and a fruit) so thoughtfully provided by Mother Sai, and cans of drinking water. A can of *majiga*, or spicy buttermilk, one for each truck, is also loaded, and thus equipped, the convoy moves out bringing Swami's love to the countryside!

The first two days of the *Grama Seva* was concentrated around Puttaparthi and the adjoining villages. October 17th, the day one of the distribution is centered on Puttaparthi, up to and including the Chitravathi Road. The boys walk up in *Nagarsankeertan* up to the village, starting around 10:00 a.m., followed by the trucks with the food, after the end of the morning's programme of the first day of the *Saptaha Yagna* in Sai Kulwant Hall. Puttaparthi is home for most of the boys so they experience no real problems and the distribution moves fast.

The next day the action moved to the adjoining villages like Brahmanapalli, Kovillaguttapalli, Gokulam and so on. In the morning, around 8 a.m., the coordinators asked permission to leave so that they could start and finish the distribution early. Swami remarks that all the villages are close by so where is the need to hurry? Only then we realise that it being a Monday, *Rahukalam* was from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. We had forgotten, but He had not! At 9:20 a.m. Swami's blessing is obtained and the boys hurry out eager to get started and come back in time for Swami's *Dasara* Discourse in the afternoon.

At each of these villages the roads have been washed clean and welcome banners strung up. The washed roads are decorated with floral patterns and all the boys are welcomed as if they were welcoming Swami Himself! The boys are touched. The planning and coordination has been fine-tuned after 4 years of *Grama Seva* so everything proceeds like clockwork without any hiccups. Some of the villages have a sizeable Muslim population. So more often than not the response to our "Sai Ram" is a "*Salaam Alaikum*". The Muslims also eagerly accept Swami's *Prasadam* coming as it

does during the month of *Ramazan*, the most holy month for the Muslims. Truly, Swami's love knows no boundaries. After 2-3 hours almost everyone is finished, tired from the unaccustomed labour in the Sun, but elated also at having done His work satisfactorily.

From now onwards the distribution has to move further afield. The trucks have now to take the road less travelled, most of the time over dirt tracks, to reach remote villages and distribute under trying conditions. I decide to hitch-hike a ride on one of the trucks and accompany the boys so I could take some photographs and experience the *Seva* first hand. Please join me on my journey.....

October 19th, I join Group 3 which is distributing to Venkatagaripalli village. It is a big village with a sizeable population, so half the group (i.e. 2 out of the 4 trucks) is assigned to this one single village. My truck is mostly full of Brindavan boys with some Brindavan teachers. We leave a little after 9 a.m., as the village is quite near. We soon take a turn off the main road, on the diversion to the village. The villagers walking along the dirt track all say "Sai Ram" to us as we lurch along. The boys all call back "Sai Ram" in unison. Soon the truck in front of us comes to a stop rather suddenly and we wonder if we have reached the village. We peer out but no huts are seen. A teacher gets down hurriedly from the lead truck and is seen negotiating with a village woman. He buys a basketful of freshly plucked guavas. He must have been a good negotiator for he gets it relatively cheap at Rs 100.00. All the boys are happy at the prospect of eating some garden-fresh guavas.

In a few moments we reach the village to a heartwarming sight. The village is well decorated with buntings and pictures of Bhagavan. The streets have been nicely cleaned. And all the villagers are waiting to welcome us at the village entrance and start singing Sai *Bhajans* as soon as our buses are sighted. The boys all hop off the bus and join the singing. A couple of teachers in the meantime go ahead to scout the village and plan the distribution strategy. After we sing *Bhajans* for a few minutes, the villagers do *Arathi* to Bhagavan's picture in the front of the bus. And now we are ready to start the distribution.

The village "main road" is rather long and houses and huts are laid out on both sides. The road is quite narrow and the trucks would not be able to negotiate it easily. So the thoughtful villagers provide us with a bullock cart to help us transport the *Prasadam* packets from the trucks at the village entrance up to the current distribution point. One of the more enterprising boys hops onto the cart and takes charge of the bullock cart loading operation.

The boys break up into sub-groups. About 8-10 boys are assigned to a teacher and the distribution area is well coordinated between the sub-groups so that there is no duplication or overlap. The 8-10 boys in each group all have different tasks. 2 boys carry the crate containing rice *Prasadam* packets. One or two boys carry the plastic bags of *laddus*. One boy carries the bundle of *dhotis* and another boy carries the bundle of *saris*. The remaining boys and the teachers act as Swami's messengers to hand over His *Prasadam* to the villagers.

The modus operandi of the distribution is quite simple. We knock at a house and politely say, "Sai Ram" with folded hands. Then we tell the villagers that Swami from Puttaparthi has sent some *Prasadam* for them. We ask them for the number of inmates in each house and hand over the requisite food packets and *laddus* to them. Some of them accept it in their hands. Some nip back in to get a plate and some ladies accept the food in the folds of their sari in the rural fashion. Quite a few of them touch the food to their eyes in a gesture of respect to show their thanks at Swami's immense grace. The teacher or designated elder then hands over the *sari* and *dhoti* to the elder in the house. A small picture of Swami is also given to each household.

When the crates of food or stack of clothes is getting low, the boys act as runners and rush up to the bullock cart which is somewhere along the main road (so as to be equally accessible to all groups) to get replenishments. It is demanding work and the boys are soon sweating from the morning sun, but the distribution is proceeding fairly fast. They get a break when the bullock cart has to go back to the truck to get additional supplies.

Whenever we come to a fork in the road, the lead group decides to take a path and posts a lookout to inform the groups following them as to which areas they are going to cover. A teacher brings up the rear (behind all the groups) to ensure that no house has been left out.

I am busy taking pictures of the village scene and the distribution but soon have a sizeable crowd of small kids following me. I now feel like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, with the kids going wherever I lead. I find out from them that their village school has closed for the day as we were coming down to distribute *Prasadam*, so the whole village

wears a festive look. The kids all clamor for a photograph, so I oblige them. I then ask them to go and wait in their respective houses to receive the *Prasadam* when we come to their doorstep.

For most of the students this is their first visit to a village. Some of them are surprised at the number of people living in such small houses and under such spartan conditions. But all of them appreciate the villagers' warmth, their spontaneous simplicity and devotion to Bhagavan.

The village itself is very clean and as is true of all villages in India, is full of domesticated animals that roam freely everywhere. Goats, sheep, pigs, cows, hens, stray dogs that growl menacingly and even monkeys, all are well represented. A goat that has just had a couple day old kids catch the students' fancy and they cuddle the small little goat kids that can barely stand on their four legs.

In about a couple of hours all the groups that have spread out to distribute the food are almost done and we wend our way back to the main entrance of the village and wait for everyone to join us. After everyone is gathered, the villagers want to do *Arathi* and thus show their thanks to Swami. We again gather around the truck which has a picture of Swami attached to the windshield and the village elders do *Arathi*. Slowly we say our good-byes to the villagers and the two trucks move out. About a kilometre from the village we stop in the shade of a large tree as we are famished and we tuck into the refreshments and the buttermilk that has been provided. And of course, the fresh guavas.

On October 20th, I join Group 1, and am assigned to Vehicle number 3 that is headed to Satarlapalli village, a village at a distance of just over 45 kms as the crow flies. But the road winds over really difficult terrain so it is estimated that it could take 2-3 hours to reach.

In the morning the coordinators again ask permission to leave early. Swami says "Yes" and so we leave around 8:45 a.m. Group 1 consists of Vehicles 1 through 4 and the assigned tractor (T1). Right outside the Ashram, near the Kalyana Mantapam, Vehicle 1 develops a puncture. It takes a while to get the puncture fixed, as there was a power failure so we could not get the tire inflated. Finally around 10:00 a.m. we are ready to roll. We finally realised that we need to act according to His will and not hurry up so we could be back in time to listen to the afternoon Discourse.

After about 20 kms, while we are in the rural countryside, we had to wait again as Vehicle 2 had an accelerator cable ruptured right in the middle of nowhere. It takes about a half hour but some of the boys manage to repair it with some makeshift wires that are available. The driver of the truck is amazed at their versatility.

I am in a truck with High school boys and a couple of their teachers. The young boys are beginning to feel tired as it is not exactly pleasant travelling in a pickup truck along bumpy roads. At this one of the teachers suggest we play a game. My ears immediately perk up. Memories of many journeys done in my youth come to mind where we played idle games just to "pass the time". I wonder what kind of games will be played by the boys from the High School, where God-centered education and character building is given so much premium. I was not to be disappointed. The teacher announces that it is going to be a memory game. He said that I will say, "I love Swami". The next boy will add to this, "I love Swami and Jesus". And so on it goes, with each boy adding His favourite name of God or a Holy teacher. The trick is to remember the right sequence of names - if you get the sequence wrong then you are out of the game. What a revelation!! A game consisting of names of the Gods just to pass the time. Soon everyone is engrossed, and it becomes quite complex after 8-10 names are added. And of course, lots of fun. Attention is thus easily diverted from the aching body and before we know it we are at the crossroads that would takes us the last kilometre in to Satarlapalli village.

We wait at the crossroad till all the trucks catch up. It is already 11:30 in the morning so we decide to partake of some of the goodies that Swami has sent. That and the glass of buttermilk refresh everyone and all are now keen to start. While truck 3 goes to Satarlapalli village, the other trucks move on to their assigned villages 3-4 kms further down the road. We take a diversion and one kilometre of bone-jarring ride on a goat track brings us to this remote, isolated village. We pull up and soon the entire village gathers around the truck. The boys quickly form a line while the group co-ordinator talks to the village head. We go in a *Nagarsankeertan* from the truck up to the Rama temple in the centre of the village. It has been our experience that no matter how poor and destitute the village is, it still has a neatly maintained temple in the village square. That is why Swami always says that the true *Bharatiya* culture is to be found

only in India's villages.

All the village kids join us in the *Nagarsankeertan* and clap wildly to the *Bhajans* in unrestrained excitement that is the province of the young and truly innocent. The *Nagarsankeertan* winds its way up to the temple along a very narrow cobbled pathway, avoiding cow and goat droppings and other such items strewn all over the road. At the Rama temple we stop and continue singing *Bhajans* till it seems all the inhabitants of the village join us. The leader of our group then announces that we have come from Puttaparthi to distribute Swami's *Prasadam* and request everyone to wait in their respective homes and that we will come and deliver at their doorstep.

Soon we get organized into 4 small groups and the area of distribution for each group is quickly earmarked after studying the layout of the village. Very soon the distribution is in full swing and the 4 small groups spread quickly in all the 4 directions. I have a difficult time tracking down the next group after finishing taking pictures of one group as they have moved so quickly.

As in the other village I am again surrounded by the kids. These kids are very friendly and take me to the back of the village and proudly show me their village well which is full of water. This is welcome as all the wells in the village which we visited the day before were dry. I take some pictures and the kids are very happy and delighted, just like a tour guide showing off the Taj Mahal to some gawking tourists.

Again another two hours of non-stop distribution and we are done. But we find a number of ladies and gents waiting and clamouring for the *Prasadam* and clothes right beside our truck. Enquiries reveal that they are residents of hamlets that are close to the village. As these people are really poor, we seat them all next to the truck, the 30 odd ladies in front and the 10 or so gents behind. We take a quick inventory and feel that the *Prasadam* and the clothes would suffice but just barely. We give one *sari* to each lady and a *dhotti* to a gentleman, apart from a packet of food and a *laddu* each. By Swami's grace, the number of *saris* is just exactly enough to give to all the women and not one extra *sari* is left over! Everyone is wreathed in smiles and very happy to have received these tangible gifts of Bhagavan's love.

We all board the truck and it is time to leave. A pained and embarrassed silence follows, similar to what we experience before the imminent departure of our loved ones at the railway station or an airport. The innocent villagers do not know how to express their thanks to Swami and stand quietly shuffling their legs. The young kids stare at us with their large eyes that say it all. Suddenly on an impulse, I lean out of the truck and extend my hand to the nearest kid and say "Sai Ram". He immediately takes it and pumps it up and down vigorously yelling "Sai Ram, Sai Ram" at the top of his voice. All the kids now join in and want to shake hands. A little physical touch that enables them to give us a proper send-off. Even the adults hanging shyly in the back, now come forward and jostle each other in their eagerness to shake hands. By now all the students are also hanging out of the truck shaking hands with the villagers. Slowly the truck starts and we leave the village with about 40 kids running behind us shouting "Sai Ram" and waving their hands wildly.

We take the dirt road back and go ahead to join the other trucks in the group that are 3-4 kms down the road. They are still not done with their distribution and we wait for about a half-hour for them to finish. We compare notes and find that they had got all the little children into the village school and had taught them the Sai *Gayathri*.

Soon it is time to go home. We decide to continue ahead and loop back to Puttaparthi from a small town called Pedapalli, rather than retrace our steps back the same way we had come. The road is bumpy but motorable the drivers assure us. We pass through some 3 kms of forest land that is very tranquil and soon reach the town and are back home at around 3:45 p.m. A quick shower and it is immediately to the *Mandir* and I am gratified to find that Swami's Divine Discourse had not started yet.

And the list goes on. Everyday we visit different villages to different experiences and memories that would last a lifetime. Villages like Cherlopalli, Chendrayanipalli, Kottalapalli, Buchaiahgaripalli and Venugopalapuram.

So many memories flood the mind and will remain in the heart for a lifetime. For example, when we were the last bus finishing the distribution in Cherlopalli village and running about 15 minutes behind the others, the villagers ask us to visit their village temple for *Arathi*. We decide to oblige and trudge back up wearily about half a kilometer to the top of the hill and what did we find - a bigger-than-life size picture of Bhagavan in a temple devoted solely to Swami. Or on the way to Yerrapalli village, when we stop for snacks under a railway bridge and all the students climb up the embankment up to the railway line so I could take their picture. Or the total innocence of the very isolated village of

Venugopalapuram where we taught the little school children the Sai Gayathri; or the exquisite scenic beauty of Reddivaripalli, that was situated miles in the interior and surrounded by hills with a deep red soil and thick green vegetation that gave it a surreal look. Above all, the most lasting memory would be of the love and reverence that all the villagers showed us, with no exceptions, as Swami's emissaries.

On the way back to Parthi, the excess food packets left over were usually distributed to the people working the fields on both sides of the road. The sight of the villagers running up to the road, sometimes as much as half a kilometer, as soon as our truck with its yellow *Grama Seva* banner is spotted is a sight that has to be experienced. We always stopped for them and gave them a *Prasadam* packet and *laddus* and receive their blessings and good wishes in turn.

And soon we are done, many days ahead of schedule. Immaculate planning and the availability of 32 vehicles enable us to finish the distribution in the targeted *mandals* (sub-districts) of Puttaparthi, Bukkapatnam and Kottacheruvu - about 142 villages in all.

The boys are tired but very, very satisfied. It has been a soul elevating experience for them. Swami always says that service begets humbleness in a man. And humbleness is perhaps the most important prerequisite on our spiritual path back to God.

And the villagers! Would just a meal and clothing make a real difference in their lives? No, but the very thought that the God in Puttaparthi is looking after them and thinking about them gives them so much hope, nourishment, and love and meaning that the entire exercise has become one of the most rewarding lifetime experiences for all. And it is all just because of His love!!

Jai Sai Ram.

OCTOBER 17th 23rd, 2004: DASARA CELEBRATIONS IN PRASHANTI NILAYAM.

Over the past many years the festival of *Dasara* in Prashanti Nilayam, has been synonymous with the '*Veda Purusha Sapthaha Jnana Yagna*', the week-long sacrificial ritual conducted every morning in the Divine Presence in Poornachandra Hall, for the welfare of the whole world.

The evening programmes under the auspices of the *Prashanti Vidwan Mahasabha*, usually sees many speakers, mainly students and staff of Bhagavan's institutions and elderly devotees, who address the august gathering in Sai Kulwant Hall. Following these talks, heeding to the prayers of the devotees, Bhagavan usually blesses everyone with His Divine Discourse.

The first day, October 17th, saw thousands gathered in Sai Kulwant Hall awaiting Bhagavan's *Darshan*. Soon after the *Darshan*, a procession of the 18 priests and Swami's students marched into Poornachandra Hall chanting the *Vedas*, lead by a richly caparisoned Sai Gita, Swami's pet elephant. All the priests and students were clad in the traditional attire of a saffron coloured silk *dhoti* and a white *angavastram* (a cloth wrapped around the shoulders). At 9.00 a.m., the *Yagnam* commenced with the rubbing of wooden blocks to produce fire through friction. Thereafter, the sacred fire thus produced, was placed in the '*Yagna Kunda*' (the sacrificial altar into which oblations are offered) and the *Veda Purusha Sapthaha Jnana Yagna* commenced.

The most important component of the *Yagnam* is the '*Rudra Homam*', an invocation to Lord Siva, in which the oblations of clarified butter are poured into the *Yagna Kunda* while chanting hymns from the '*Sri Rudram*'. Other rituals also take place simultaneously like the *Surya Namaskar*, or the worship of the Sun as the visible symbol of the Supreme. The *Srimad Bhagavatham Parayana*, and the *Ramayana Parayana* and the *Devi Mahatmyam* are simultaneously performed by noted scholars, and a few pundits and Bhagavan's students simultaneously chant various hymns from the *Vedas*. Another priest worships the *Sri Chakra*, a mystic drawing representing the Supreme Mother. The first 6 days the *Yagna* follows this routine daily.

The *Dasara* Celebrations came to an auspicious close on 23rd October, *Vijaya Dasami* Day, the 7th day of the *Yagna*. That morning, the *Poornahuthi* or the Valedictory Offering is made. This year, the *Yagnam* took place at 8.10 a.m., after Bhagavan was seated in front of the *Yagna Kunda* amidst the priests. After seeking the blessings of Bhagavan, the priests made the final offering of clarified butter into the fire while chanting hymns from the '*Chamakam*', praying for the physical and spiritual welfare of all the beings of the world. Bhagavan blessed all the priests by sprinkling sacred water and *akshada* (turmeric coated rice) on them. Bhagavan also gave all the priests a silver bowl and a silver goblet as gifts. Everyone present was filled with reverence at the morning's sublime scene.

In the afternoons, Swami gave four Discourses under the auspices of the *Prashanti Vidhwan Maha Sabha*. The Discourses are not included here, but the full text can be accessed at www.srisatysai.org.in

OCTOBER 18th: HYDERABAD BALA VIKAS DRAMA 'ASHTA GUNA PUSHPAM'.

On the evening of 18th October, the *Bal Vikas* children from Hyderabad presented a drama entitled "*Ashta Guna Pushpamulu*", the eight flowers representing eight virtues that are to be offered to God. Swami has often said that worshipping God with the Eight Flowers of the Eight Virtues would please Him more than worshipping with worldly flowers that fade and wither away the next day. The flowers of virtues being perennial do not wither with the passage of time. The importance and value of worshipping God by the Eight Virtues are highlighted in this drama. In the drama a *Guru* explains this truth to his disciple by the illustrative examples of the lives of devotees who

attained bliss and God's blessings by offering these flowers in their lives. The Eight Flowers of Virtues are *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), *Indriya Nigraham* (Control of the senses), *Daya Pushpam* (Compassion or Universal Love), *Kshama Pushpam* (Forbearance or Forgiveness), *Sathyam* (Truth), *Tapas* (Praising the Glory of the Lord), *Dhyana* (Meditation) and finally *Shanti* (Peace or Equanimity).

OCTOBER 22nd: PANEL DISCUSSION BY THE ANANTAPUR CAMPUS AND A MUSIC PROGRAMME.

On 22nd evening, there was a panel discussion on '*Upanishadic Messages in the light of Bhagavan's Teachings*'. The six-woman panel comprising of teachers and alumni of the Anantapur College of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, dealt with the message of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* and correlated them with Bhagavan's teachings. The panelists had researched their subject extensively from the books written by Bhagavan like *Dharma Vahini*, *Jnana Vahini*, *Upanishad Vahini* etc. and Swami's discourses over the years. The panelists said that the *Vedas* were not only a source of spiritual wisdom, but also a treasure trove of worldly knowledge pertaining to the day-to-day life of man. They amply corroborated their statements by quoting extensively from the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and Bhagavan's Discourses. They concluded with a note of gratitude to Bhagavan for guiding us on the path back to God and for giving us the profound teachings of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* in simple terms.

The panel members were Dr. Dwaraka Rani Rao, Dr. K.P. Sai Leela, Dr. Sarada Subramanyam and Kum. Kiran Gupta, faculty members of the Anantapur Campus and Ms. Prasoon, teacher in the Sri Sathya Sai Primary School. The panel discussion was moderated by Smt. Chetana Raju, an alumnus of the Anantapur campus.

Following the panel discussion, there was a *Carnatic* music recital by Mrs. Anuradha Krishnamurthy, a renowned artist who has rendered concerts in many countries. She began with a performance of the famous composition of Saint Thyagaraja - "*Endaro Mahanubhavulu*" in *Sree Ragam*, and thereafter sang two more songs and concluded with the *Bhajan* - "*Koti Pranam Shata Koti Pranam*." After her presentation, Swami blessed her and her accompanying artists, as well as all the panelists, who had spoken earlier, with a grand silk *sari* each as a measure of His appreciation.

OCTOBER 23rd: A DRAMA BY HYDERABAD SAI YOUTH.

In the evening of October 23rd, the Youth Wing of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization from Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh presented a play entitled - "*Lakshala? Lakshyaala?*" ("Money or Ideals?") that highlighted the conflicting questions faced by the youth of today. The play that started after the evening's Divine Discourse ran till quite late in the evening.

The play highlights the dilemma faced by a graduate who is drawn by career and money but at the same time questions if life has a higher purpose. This dilemma is resolved through the teaching that true and lasting happiness lies in *Seva* or service to others. The play also had a strong undercurrent of patriotism as its theme, containing vigorous dances, songs, very good Telugu dialogues and music, all blended into a fine tapestry that provided for an enjoyable evening. The play moved fairly quickly and picked up a very fast pace at the climax with firecrackers and showers of coloured paper that resonated well with the audience. At the end of the programme, Bhagavan posed for photographs with the participants.

OCTOBER 24th: A MUSIC PROGRAMME BY ANDHRA PRADESH SEVA ORGANIZATIONS.

About 24 people from Vishakapatnam, Vijayanagaram, and Srikakulam districts of Andhra Pradesh presented a music programme in Sai Kulwant Hall on the evening of October 24th. They sang haunting melodies like *Parthi Ganesam Pranamamyaham*, *Maa Amman Neevamma*, *Unnara Yuvakulu*, *Andari Devudu Sai Ramudu*, and *Hindu Muslim Bhai Bhai* and so on. The one hour programme with melodious tunes and unforgettable lyrics made the evening very enjoyable for all. These songs were then followed by *Bhajans* by the Institute boys.

OCTOBER 30th: A DRAMA ON RAMAKRISHNA BY THE BRINDAVAN CAMPUS OF THE SSSIHL.

The boys of the Brindavan campus of the SSSIHL presented a drama depicting some important scenes from the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The drama, which began with the appointment of Sri Ramakrishna as the temple priest in Dakshineswar, presented the total surrender and devotion of Ramakrishna to the Divine Mother and His complete dependence on Her for everything in His life. Moving on, it also showed the meeting with Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda) and Narendranath testing the renunciation of Ramakrishna by putting a coin under His pillow. The famous incident when Narendranath was reprimanded by Ramakrishna for showing belligerence instead of forbearance, when the fishermen on a boat ridiculed Ramakrishna was also shown. Earlier Ramakrishna had reprimanded another devotee for not showing enough spirit and remaining mute under the same circumstances. Thus the lesson that spiritual instruction is different for different persons based on their development and personal characteristics was forcefully brought out. Swami was most happy and posed for group pictures with the students and also materialized a ring for the student playing the part of Ramakrishna.

NOVEMBER 6th: 'SRI KALAHASTI', A DRAMA BY THE PRASHANTI NILAYAM CAMPUS OF SSSIHL.

On November 6, the undergraduate students of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Prashanti Nilayam campus, presented a drama entitled '*Sri Kalahasti*'. This drama is a depiction of how this small pilgrim town in Andhra Pradesh, Sri Kalahasti, got its name. It is a story of Sri - a spider; Kala - a snake; and Hasti - an elephant, all of whom surrendered completely to Lord Shiva and exhibited intense devotion to Him for which the Lord granted them salvation.

A hunter and tribal King Thinna listens to this story of the spider's, snake's and elephant's struggle against one another to please the Lord the most, from a sage. He is deeply moved and inspired to surrender himself completely to the Lord.

One day during the course of his prayers to Lord Shiva, he observes that the eyes of the Shiva *Lingam* are bleeding. Unable to bear the Lord's plight, he offers his own eyes to the Lord. At this act of total selfless devotion, the Lord appears before him and blesses him profusely for his intense devotion and complete surrender.

NOVEMBER 8th: BURRA KATHA BY THE PRASHANTI NILAYAM STUDENTS.

Burra Katha is an ancient rural art form to spread the *Leelas* of the Lord to the common man. A *burra katha* is presented by three characters: a *Kadakudu* who narrates the main story in form of songs, a *Rajakeeyam* and a *Hasyam* who give various interpretations and hilarious interludes to the story as it unfolds.

The really enchanting *burra katha* essentially told Swami's story. It related how He kept His word to Mother Easwaramma who asked Him for three boons. He responded in a magnificent way and there arose the University, the Super Speciality Hospitals and the Sri Sathya Sai Water Project in response to His mother's request to provide a school, a small dispensary and drinking water for the village.

While in the *Treta Yuga*, the Lord chose Hanuman for His mission, in the *Dwapara Yuga* He chose Arjuna as His instrument to restore *Dharma*. In the *Kali Yuga*, however, our sweet Lord has chosen the youth for His mission. At the age of 14, Swami declared His *Avatarhood* and then began His mission: a mission to inspire the youth and motivate them to serve, to enable them to love and teach them to forgive. They spoke of the *Grama Seva* and the beneficial effect it has had. The three boys presenting the *katha* received a thunderous ovation at the conclusion of their presentation. Swami was immensely pleased and posed for treasured group photographs with all the boys who were involved in bringing out this very memorable programme.

NOVEMBER 12th & 13th: DIWALI CELEBRATIONS IN PRASHANTI NILAYAM.

Diwali, the Festival Of Lights, symbolic of the triumph of good over evil, was celebrated in a fitting manner in Prashanti Nilayam. *Diwali* also marks the beginning of the New Year for the people of Gujarat, so our Gujarati brothers consider it most auspicious to usher in the New Year at the Feet of the Lord. The mood for the celebration

was set on Friday evening when they staged a short drama entitled “Transformation” to signify the theme of the victory of good over evil in one's own heart.

“Transformation” is the story of a school headmaster who is a staunch follower of our Lord. Desisting from sending the students for tuition classes outside the school in order for them to score good marks, he instead convinces the teachers to spare some extra time to coach the students in certain subjects. He thus runs afoul of a Mr. Nagappa who runs a string of coaching classes. Mr. Nagappa meets the headmaster and offers him a monetary consideration to entice the students to joining his tuition classes. The headmaster does not change his mind. Mr. Nagappa now orders a physical assault on the Headmaster in an effort to intimidate him.

Though knowing full well the identity of the assailant, the Headmaster refuses to lodge a complaint with the police or take any other action, adhering to Swami's dictum - “Condemn the crime and not the criminal”. This act has a profound effect on Mr. Nagappa who becomes Bhagavan's devotee and commits to starting a new life by following Swami's Teachings.

The morning of November 13th, *Diwali* Day, dawns bright and we enter to see Sai Kulwant Hall beautifully decorated. A floral arch around Ganesha in the veranda is the centrepiece and a floral pattern on the balcony proclaims the celebration of the Gujarati New Year. At the back of Sai Kulwant Hall there hangs a huge painting of a village scene that forms the backdrop for the drama to be staged that morning. On the steps of the verandah is arranged a stack of pots at various places to give an authentic Gujarati look. Swami is welcomed to Sai Kulwant Hall by a mellifluous song and He stops a moment to admire the backdrop. After He sits down, the *Bal Vikas* children perform a vigorous tribal *garba* dance followed by a drama.

The drama, “Shantinagar The Sai *Gram*”, a true story, revolves around the Sri Sathya Sai *Seva Dals* who plan to carry out *Gram Seva* in the village of Shantinagar. Initially, the villagers are very suspicious and suspect their motives. They also resort to violence to drive them away. The *Seva Dals* persist in their endeavour and win the villagers over by their commitment. They clean the village, provide medicine to the sick and teach the children Sanskrit *Slokas*. They promote personal hygiene and even bathe the dirty children themselves. All these activities affect a miraculous transformation and Shantinagar becomes a Sai *Gram* or a Sai Village. The well rendered drama was very touching and poignant and well received by the crowd. Swami walked down the steps and posed for photographs with the children and then had chocolates and *Prasadam* distributed to them. A very enjoyable and appropriate *Diwali* celebration indeed!

NOVEMBER 13th 14th: AKHANDA BHAJAN CELEBRATION.

The *Akhanda Bhajan* or the 24 hour non-stop singing of *Bhajans* for global harmony and peace was celebrated in Sai Kulwant Hall from 6 p.m. on the 13th to 6 p.m. on the 14th. A total of 433 *Bhajans* were sung in this 24 hour period, starting with the Ganapathi *Bhajan* “*Vigna Vinashaka Gana Natha*” and ending with the *Bhajan* “*Aum Sivaya, Aum Sivaya*”. The *Akhanda Bhajan*, which was well attended even during the late hours of the night and the early morning hours, kick-starts the birthday celebrations. Swami came into the *Bhajan* Hall early on the evening of the 13th and listened to some melodious flute music for about 20 minutes. Promptly at 6 p.m., the *Bhajans* were started. At the end of 24 hours of singing the *Akhanda Bhajan* was brought to a close by Swami and *Arathi* was taken. Before leaving the hall, Swami playfully threw some *laddus* to the lead singers on both sides of the aisle, to express His deep pleasure at their meritorious service. *Prasadam* was then served to all.

As we bring these chronicles to a close, the campus is abuzz preparing for the upcoming Convocation and the Birthday celebrations, which we will bring to you in the next Issue. Till then, we say Sai Ram and may Swami's love and blessings pour in abundant measure on you and your family.

TAKE ONE STEP...

This is the story of one Ramachandran, a native of the State of Kerala in the south west part of India. Way back in 1972, Ramachandran, then barely out of his teens, joined the State Police Service. As a constable, he was expected to assist in the maintenance of law and order but guess how that enemy inside, namely anger, made him act? One day during a quarrel with a neighbour, Ramachandran became so angry that he killed the man.

Arrest followed and then came the trial. Ramachandran realised soon after killing the neighbour that he done a most terrible thing. He was full of remorse but it was too late as far as the dead man was concerned. Ramachandran felt deeply for his action and as a result refused any defence during the trial. Instead he admitted his guilt and awaited the verdict.

In those days the death penalty was common unlike now, when it is awarded only in the rarest of rare cases. So inevitably Ramachandran was sentenced to death, a sentence that was confirmed by the higher courts as required by law. Ramachandran did not at all feel sorry that his life was due to be terminated; on the contrary he felt that he was getting what he deserved.

But then, destiny has its own way of steering events. The process of higher courts confirming the sentence etc., took its own time and in the meanwhile, back in the prison, Ramachandran came across some books by Bhagavan Baba and also books on Him. He read them all and his life took a sharp turn. He now began to do *Puja* regularly in the temple within the prison premises and also started helping others as much as he could. The prison authorities were surprised, happy and also moved with pity. Thus it was that they filed a mercy petition on his behalf; normally these petitions are filed by the prisoner or his relatives. But in this case, the Law itself rose in appeal on Ramachandran's behalf. The petition was received favourably, and the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

Years rolled by and by due process of Law, one fine day Ramachandran found himself to be a free man. News about him spread and a young lady came forward to actually marry him! And do you know how Ramachandran spends a good deal of his time now? On loving all and serving all; exactly as Swami wants us to do. Ramachandran's wife cooks food which he then packs and delivers to the inmates of the mental hospital in Kollam where the Ramachandrans now live.

Most of us are accustomed to typecast individuals by saying: So and so is evil, so and so is a cheat, so and so is a good man, and so on. But in actual fact, there is both good as well as evil within each one of us. It is up to us to progressively eliminate evil through *Sadhana* as Swami has advised us to. If we do, then our lives would indeed be redeemed as it happened for Ramachandran who everyone thought would swing from the gallows. Man may propose but it is ultimately God who disposes; but then we must make it possible for Him to do so, and thus it is that the ball is really in our court! Take one step and I shall take ten towards you, God said. But the first step should be ours.

SGH TEAM.

AL-NUR: The Light (1.)

A Sufi view that perceives God as Light,
on seeing Baba standing as Veda Purusha on 27-10-1982.

Ocean of Light; Thou eternally Beautiful
All ablaze
In Red Robed Majesty
Spinning the spheres with mystic fingers of radiance.
Thus You must have stood,
O Lord, the embodiment of selfless actions,
On the first day of Creation
With a smile of Love on Your lips,
The beaded sweat sparkling, star-like,
In the silk soft darkness of Your hair.
Thus You might have viewed
As You do the crowds this day
Your own work: a galaxy of luminous world upon world,
A mighty, heaving ocean of sparks,
Ever-changing, ever-bright,
Rippled in a million forms and countless choirs.
Each age has sung its hymns
At Your shrines of light
And left at Your altar a *Veda*, a *Bible*, a *Quran*.
Or, are they the Words
You whispered to Your lovers
As they bent to Kiss Your lovely Feet?
O resplendent Divine Beloved,
Thus You will stand, perhaps,
On the brink of the final hour,
All a-glow
In a Robe of deepening twilight
And draw with starry fingers of Light
The Creation to the silence of Your Feet,
Sweetly murmuring to Yourself,
“All is Mine, and returns to Me at last.” (2.)

- Mrs. Zeba Bashiruddin

Notes:

1. In Islamic Sufi tradition God has ninety nine attributes and *al-Nur* (the Light) is one of them.
2. *Quranic* statement that all belongs to God (Allah) and finally returns to Him.

LOVE IS LIKE ICE CREAM

It was Sunday morning at Prashanti Nilayam. After finishing the morning Interviews, Baba went to the western side of the *Mandir* where the children from the primary school were seated. Baba does not like anyone to sit in the hot sun, and certainly not the sweet little ones. [This was in the days before the present roof was built.]

He made them all sit in the shade in the porch near the Interview room. The children beamed as they trooped in and sat in an orderly fashion, followed by Baba who came from behind them, beaming with a big smile!

He came to the first row and all of a sudden started singing “*Love is My form...*” He asked the children to join in. All of us who were fortunate to be there were exhilarated at this unexpected gift of Grace! Grace always comes unexpectedly.

Halfway, He stopped and asked the children, “*What is Love?*” smiling mischievously. The children were taken by surprise at this question and smiled nonplussed!

Baba obliging gave the answer and said, “Love is ice cream!” Baba allowed the children's laughter and the adult's surprise to die down before He explained further. Baba, the ideal teacher, is a Master of the technique of teaching. A startling question to evoke attention, provoke curiosity and hold the interest of the listener is the Master's method! All ears were now alert, awaiting Baba's explanation:

“Love is sweet like ice cream;

Love is joy like ice cream;

Love is cool like ice cream

and Love is pure like white ice cream.”

Apparently meant for the children, but it was a gift from Baba to all of us, this extraordinarily original definition of love from Love Incarnate!

Images are sketched by poets to make the abstract concrete; Baba the Poet of poets gives images which have great spiritual depths, and the *Avatar* of the Age uses the most modern of them to make us understand what He wants to convey. In the *Krishna Avatar*, it was milk, curds and butter; in the *Sai Avatar* it is Love, Joy and ice cream!

From “Spiritual Blueprints of My Journey” by Indulal Shah

SACRED PSYCHIATRY

David Gersten, M.D.

In 1975 I left the snow country of Colorado for the warm beaches of California, where I began my psychiatry residency at the La Jolla Veterans Administration Hospital at the University of California in San Diego. Within the first month, a nurse named Madeleine approached me and gave me a photograph of an Indian holy man with a big Afro and an orange robe. "You're a spiritual person, and I want you to have this picture. His name is Sai Baba. I think you need to know about him." That was all she said. I kept the photo, but had no interest at all in Sai Baba. Both my chief resident and ward chief mentioned that, at one time, a Dr. Sandweiss had supervised them regarding spiritual issues. Supervision often included lessons in meditation and yoga *asanas*. I was interested in this Sandweiss...but not yet intrigued by his spiritual teacher, Sathya Sai Baba.

In my second year, I phoned San Diego psychiatrist, Dr. Samuel Sandweiss, requesting supervision in spirituality and psychiatry. We met for two years and he told me stories of this man of miracles. The miracle stories shook my very foundation of reality. Sometimes I thought that Dr. Sandweiss was out of his mind. To a second year psychiatry resident, Dr. Sandweiss seemed to "fit the criteria" for schizophrenia. His entire life revolved around one "magical being" who performed miracles that defied all the laws of science. Sandweiss' thinking was totally dominated by one single entity, one single thought, namely Sai Baba.

According to traditional textbooks, Sam Sandweiss sounded a crazy. But there was a problem for me in coming to grips with Sandweiss and ultimately Sai Baba. Sam was friendly, intelligent, and sociable, with a loving wife and four daughters. He was never even moody and just did not "feel" schizophrenic to me. He seemed very well adjusted. For the first year, I left our supervision sessions spinning, confused, and quite literally nauseated.

When I finished my residency, I traveled with Sam to India to see Sai Baba. Obviously, I had concluded that Sam was quite sane. Baba deluged me with so many miracles that after four days I couldn't take any more and left on the fifth day. During that brief visit I observed and experienced Sai Baba manifesting material objects out of thin air. He manifests sacred ash, called "*vibhuti*," rings, medallions, even candy, with a wave of his hand. If you think this was sleight of hand, let me say that Sai Baba even materialized a three-foot-high gold brooch for His pet elephant. During the closing moments of that first trip, I was called in for a personal interview. Sai Baba knew everything about me. Now, I'm obviously interested in things that most doctors and psychiatrists shy away from. But it was as if Sai Baba had been living inside my head every moment of my life. He didn't know "about" me. He "knew" me.

But we've just scratched the surface. There is no miracle known to humankind that Sai Baba has not performed. I personally know two people who had a loved one resurrected from the dead. The most astounding was a woman whose husband died while at the ashram. She refused to let anyone take the body for cremation. She told people, "Baba said he would come help him." Five days after the man's death, Sai Baba came to the room, which reeked with the odor of the decaying body. Half an hour later, Sai Baba walked out of the room with the resurrected man, arm in arm, cheerfully greeting the wife.

Isaac Tigrett, founder of The Hard Rock Café and The House of Blues, is a devotee of Sai Baba. In Isaac's younger days, he says he was sailing around the curves of the Malibu hills in his sports car when it flew over the cliff. Sai Baba appeared in the car, held His arms around Isaac and protected him completely. The car lay demolished at the bottom of the cliff with the waves pouring over it. Isaac was unharmed.

These stories are jarring to the average American, but more so to the average psychiatrist. "Magical thinking" they call this stuff. Yet, if one dares to explore what I have said, then we are faced with more than a challenge to the theories of modern psychiatry. Psychiatry is a speck of dust compared to the infinite mystery of God. Sai Baba says, "I am God and you are God. The only difference is that I know it and you don't." And so, yes, this psychiatrist is saying that after his puny, medical ego had been sufficiently deflated - I know that God is now walking on Earth.

Is Sai Baba my *Guru*? The short answer is, “Yes”. We, in the West, have a very hard time with the idea of a real *Guru*. We're tough-minded individualists, and surrendering to Sai Baba has been a tough lesson. What is a *Guru*, anyway? The word means “He or she who removes the darkness.” These people are like human magnets, their power of attraction is so great. Although *Gurus* throughout the ages have developed immense powers, these are not what attract. It is the boundless love one feels in such a presence, a love so great that one can be permanently changed. The Infinite Consciousness of Sai Baba can transform us, raising our consciousness simply by being in His Presence ... or even just by thinking about Him or focusing on a photograph of Him.

How has this transformed my clinical practice? Because I have witnessed miracles, I now expect miracles. It's my job to create the atmosphere in which miracles can occur. The mere belief in miracles is like a fertilized garden. I now know that deep change need not take eight to fifteen years of psychoanalysis, four times a week. Deep change can be instantaneous, and that is a miracle. But there are “real” miracles that I have been part of in my clinical work, and I stand in awe before them. Take Carmen, a friend who came to me for help after being diagnosed with lung cancer.

I gave Carmen the works: meditation, mental imagery techniques, nutritional supplements (I specialize in amino acid therapy), and some *Lingham* water. A *Lingham* is an egg-shaped stone. Sai Baba materialized one for a friend of mine and said, “This is for healing purposes. I will send you patients.” She returned to America and made bottles of water prepared with the *Lingham*.

Carmen's entire right lung was filled with cancer. Then came the call. “David, you just won't believe this. Then again, you probably will. I had the surgery. They opened my chest and discovered that the cancer had spread into the left lung and was wrapped around the big blood vessels. They closed me up and sent me home to die. Well, I was meditating one morning, and suddenly Sai Baba appeared in front of me. He was reaching inside my body, pulling cancer out of me. They gave me one radiation treatment and sent me home to die. And you know what. The cancer has shrunk by 75%.”

Six months later Carmen walked into my office and said, “David, I am 100% cancer-free. But why would Sai Baba do this for me? I hardly know Him. I'm not a devotee. I have only heard of Him through you.”

I replied, “Carmen, it is impossible for me to begin to know why this miracle has happened to you. It is impossible to understand why Sai Baba performs overt miracles for some and not for others. But, I do have one guess and it is this. When you came to me for help, you were not personally concerned about dying. Your younger sister died of ovarian cancer a few years ago, and you told me you just couldn't bear for your mother to lose both daughters while she was still living. Your desire for help was completely motivated by your love for your mother. You were not that concerned whether you lived or died. You've had a great life and felt that if it were your time to go, you could be happy with the life you've had. Perhaps, your truly selfless motivation for help was part of the miracle, for Sai Baba is always encouraging us to let go of our personal ego and desires, to move from “me to we,” to be motivated to “give and forgive” rather than to “get and forget.” Perhaps, that was part of Sai Baba's motivation. I can never know. All I know is that the fundamental Teachings of Sai Baba are about love, and you have shared your heart in a most loving way.”

The question arises, when going beyond traditional medical and psychiatric boundaries, what to do with spiritual experience, how to “treat” it? Before each session with a patient, I say a silent prayer for guidance in working with the next person. I imagine my *Guru*, Sathya Sai Baba, in the office with me and I dedicate the work to Sai Baba, so that I can regard the work as worship, and surrender the healing process to Sai Baba. When I am stuck, I will silently ask Baba for advice. Part of my spiritual practice is to look for the spark of God in every person, including the craziest of my patients. Sometimes this can be quite a challenge, but I've learned to find wisdom in the midst of insanity, and divinity amidst the darkest depressions or psychotic episodes.

A few years ago, I was working with a woman named Penny, who suffered from a full-blown manic psychosis. Mania is interesting. These people have an ability to zero in on your personal weaknesses in an instant. When Penny and I met, she was loud, angry, and threatening. I managed to simply listen, remaining centred. Toward the end of that first meeting, she asked about my family. I told her I had a 22-year-old daughter. “Do you tell her you love her?” she asked. “Yes,” I said, “I do.” “But do you tell her every day?” she insisted. “Yes,” I said, “every single

day.” And then the kicker “But do you really tell her from deep in your heart? I want you to tell her tonight from the bottom of your heart how much you love her.”

I agreed. I knew that the divine part of Penny had spoken, and that I had better pay attention. I went home that night and told my daughter how much I love her, from the bottom of my heart. Sacred psychiatry is about bringing my patients to a point of serenity they may never have experienced, but it is also about finding the divine in another person and connecting soul-to-soul.

Through decades of putting Sai Baba's Teachings into practice, I have been able to largely give up comparisons, judgments, and the idea of separation. I am not better than my patients in anyway whatsoever, and so I have come to a new doctor-patient relationship. Based on our unity and equality, my patients have taught me a great deal. It's a two-way street.

I have brought Sai Baba's Teachings into clinical practice in a number of very direct ways. He says that the entirety of the *Vedas* can be summed up in the phrase, “*Sathyam vada dharmam chara*,” which means, “Speak the truth and practice *Dharma*, or powerful right action.” This is where I start with my patients. In order to change, first one must want to know the truth and the Truth. If a person does not want to know their truth, I can't be of much help. But if they do, then they discover that the truth automatically reveals the *Dharma*, the right action. I have shared this simple equation with people from all faiths, and I will tell them in both Sanskrit and English.

A second teaching of Sai Baba's that is central to my work is His strong recommendation that chanting the Name of God is the most effective spiritual practice during this age, called the “*Kali Yuga*.” I have taken this teaching and moved it into clinical practice. I ask my patients to close their eyes for 30 seconds, but not to meditate. After 30 seconds, I ask them to tell me every thought, feeling, image, or sensation they experienced. The average person has 5 thoughts in 30 seconds, 10 per minute, and about 5,000 random thoughts per day, depending on how much time they spend in focused work or other activity. Once they understand the nature of the mind, and that by age 40 they may have churned out 100 million random thoughts, they are ready to listen to what I have to say.

Everyone knows that the mental noise creates tension and a lack of peace. I help my patients create a *Mantra*, based on their religious tradition. I explain that *Mantra* meditation is like weeding the garden of the mind. The modality I use the most is mental imagery. Once the garden of the mind is weeded through *Mantra* meditation, when we begin mental imagery work, we will be planting healthy seeds in healthy soil. If you don't “weed the garden,” then weeds and flowers will come up.

Whether I am working with mental illness, physical illness, stress, or peak performance (I have trained professional golfers, basketball players, Olympic hurdlers and equestrians), I teach everyone to quiet their mind and create a “mental home base” through *Mantra* meditation.

This is the psychiatry of the future, a psychiatry of love, hope, faith, and miracles; a psychiatry that heals and uplifts that helps people see that they “have a mind” but that they “are not their mind.” Sacred psychiatry sees pain as part of the spiritual journey, knows that spiritual ecstasy is real, and that God exists. This new psychiatry dares to bring God into the office, dares to offer miracles, and considers Paxil medication the last choice and not the first.

(David Gersten, M.D is a psychiatrist in private practice who employs a spiritual approach to therapy. He is an expert in imagery techniques and lives in San Diego, California. He publishes 'Atlantis: The Imagery Newsletter' and has authored 'The POW Survival Guide'.)

Hospital Statistics

BANGALORE SUPERSPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 19th January 2001 to 31st October 2004.

Cardiac Surgeries:	4,819
Cardiac Catheterisation:	8,731 [4,302-Diagnostic; 4,429-Interventional]
Neuro Surgeries:	4,219
CT Scans:	14,060
MRI Exams:	15,961

PUTTAPARTHI SUPERSPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 22nd November 1991 to 31st October 2004.

Heart Surgeries:	14,388
Cath Procedures:	14,765
Urology Surgeries:	24,709
Ophthalmology Surgeries:	24,570
CT Scans:	3,899

Dear Reader,

Bhagawan's mission reaches out far beyond the circle of His devotees. The Super Speciality hospitals founded by Him provide continuous relief of an enduring nature to thousands who cannot dream of such care.

We propose to include one article in each issue that gives us a glimpse of how Bhagawan's Love is translated into action in these Temples of Healing. In this issue we place before you an introductory article titled...

THE DIVINE WILL

THE INSIDE STORY OF HOW BABA'S FREE HOSPITALS CONTINUE TO HELP THOUSANDS

During these times when commercial gain seems to be the major motivating force behind almost any sort of activity, it seems strange and difficult to believe that one person would come up with an idea that is original, deeply rooted in compassion, requires intensive effort to translate into reality and is unimaginably difficult to sustain.

So often and with such interest, we read and retell the stories of entrepreneurial and political success, but rarely do we dwell on the noble and sacred idea and implementation of an enterprise that is totally targeted at the gain of our poor and needy fellow men, without looking for any self-gain whatsoever. For it is as Bhagawan says, "Love without Duty is Divine".

You do not have to look far to see why the Sri Sathya Sai Super Speciality Hospital is a dream Hospital. This magnificent edifice came to life in one of the most backward areas of this country with its 346 million people below the poverty line. It was not the affluent societies of the West with their rich trusts and foundations but the Sri Sathya Sai Trust Founded by revered Bhagawan that ventured into such uncharted territory and the result was splendid!

Puttaparthi and the region around it is perennially drought prone. Power is scarce. Schools and colleges are few and skilled manpower is hard to come by. Availability of essential commodities, leave alone life saving equipment, their maintenance and upkeep were unimaginable.

Not only were the idea and the choice of its location totally unique in that there has never existed a completely Free Tertiary Care Hospital anywhere in the world, but the fact that Bhagawan insisted on beginning with the Cardiac Surgery Department is noteworthy. No doubt, the University runs entirely free courses right up to MBA, M.Tech & even Ph.D, but then providing free Cardiac Surgery and top level Cardiology is an entirely different matter and cannot be equated or compared with. In fact it is astonishing!

Unlike other specialties, Cardiac work involves huge initial capital investment in infrastructure. Blood bank services that can manage the demand; laboratories; microbiology; a reliable gas supply for oxygen and other gases for anaesthesia and ventilation of patients for several days at time; a dedicated laundry; and central sterilisation services; theatres equipped with operating tables; expensive heart-lung machines; anesthesia machines; operating lights; cautery and surgical instruments etc.; several echocardiography machines with TEE probes; cath labs costing over a core of rupees for diagnostic and interventional work; post-operative recovery ICUs equipped with multiparameter monitors; ventilators; blood gas machines and so much other equipment. Several patients need radiology services, CT scans and stress Thallium tests.

Add to the many crores of rupees invested, the personnel needed to run these complicated equipment and you

have the perfect recipe for a hospital administrator's nightmare, especially considering where Puttaparthi is located! Doctors specialized in so many different areas, nurses in three shifts in each unit, technicians to man the equipment with expertise, biomedical and other engineers, besides other technical staff to run generators, air-conditioning equipment and carry out various types of repairs.

As if that were not enough the recurring costs are high too. Heart operations are very expensive. The cost of oxygenators for open heart operations, valves, suture material, injections and drugs is very high because like the equipment, most of these have to be imported.

Some believed that the Hospital would start working, but that it would do just run for a while and then stop to recover from the financial crisis it would engender. Others were more generous and thought that it could function only with visiting teams and that eventually it would be mired in problems. Then there were those who called it an "experiment".

None of that ever happened. Even now after 10 years of continuous, unparalleled, 100 % Free service by this Institute, it stands out tall. Not a single rupee has been collected from patients in this Hospital. Top quality medical treatment is available without barter. The Hospital is living proof of a love that knows no mathematics. How true each statement of Swami is! "Love lives by giving & forgiving."

The Hospital is a beacon of hope. Elegant in structure and humming internally with redeeming activity, with its own permanent staff working hard to satisfy an uninvited but welcome throng of ailing humanity that has known rejection only because they do not possess enough money. For Bhagavan it is inconceivable that someone should be without help if He can assist.

Swamiji always feels the pulse of the people. No government, no leader feels as much and also has the capability to translate sympathy into action.

Many of us feel for others, but can do little or nothing about another's need. But in Bhagavan's case it is different. He sees and His heart goes out to suffering humanity....and He acts.

Bhagavan has set new benchmarks for the leaders of the world. One cannot even do so much for ones' loved ones. Here is Baba accomplishing the unimaginable, the impossible for strangers, for people from afar, for people who have never heard of Him, for people who may not believe in or practice the ideals and truths He stands for. What greater example of large heartedness, what greater example of unconditional love does the world need?

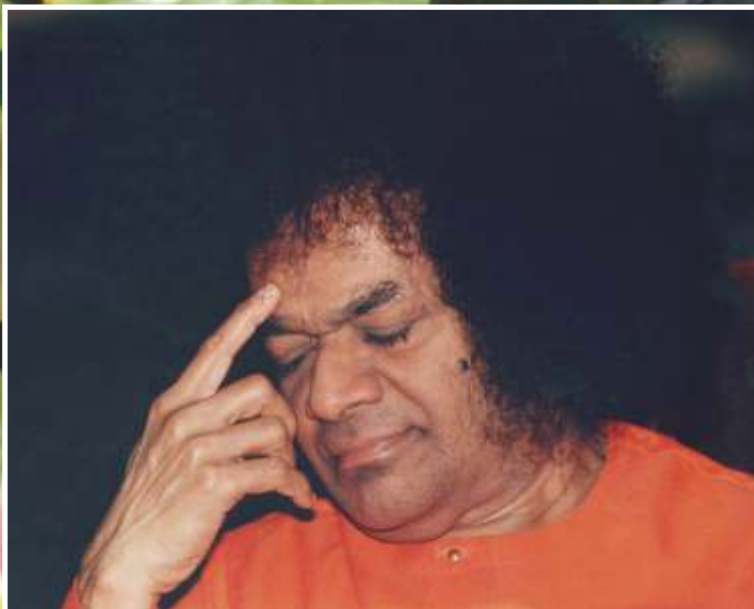
Compassion without frontiers and service without self-gain! It is the same universal love that one reads of in the scriptures and makes you wonder. Only, now it is open to appreciation and study.

Swamiji has a way of making difficult things look easy. Many thought this project would lead other trusts and philanthropic organisations to follow suit after Swami had set a precedent -after He had set the trend. No one has been able to replicate this effort even on a smaller scale despite there being so many philanthropic organizations.

A decade and 12,000 heart operations and nearly as many Urology and Ophthalmology operations later, no one had even tried. Bhagavan, seeing the overwhelming need of so many patients flocking to this Hospital, took the gracious step of starting another Hospital this time offering Neuro-surgery and Neurology, besides Cardiac facilities.

Dear Reader, so much has happened only due to an amazing degree of Baba's personal involvement and that too without any trace of strain or compromise on His numerous other spiritual and service activities!

The Lord's mission is vast and embraces new frontiers but the kindness and meaning it brings into individual lives is unimaginable. Blessed are we to be His contemporaries and witness first hand His work of Love.



When you have attained true wisdom, you will find that good fortune should not be gloated over, nor bad fortune grieved over. The wise one treats both the good and the bad with equal unconcern. They are the gentle breeze and storms that cannot affect the depths of the Ocean of Bliss in the heart of man.

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba



LOVE ALL SERVE ALL