

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

It is probably the oldest revealed religion in the world. It was the most important faith for at least a thousand years - five hundred years before and five hundred years after Christ - and the most prevalent religion during the time of Christ. It was once the state religion of the world's most powerful empire, in fact, the first transnational empire in recorded history which spanned from Africa to Europe and from Central Asia to India. It was the first religion to clearly teach the doctrines of individual judgment, Heaven and Hell, the concept of Satan, the future resurrection of the body, the functioning of Angels and Evil spirits, the general Last Judgment and life everlasting for the reunited soul, which have now become familiar articles of faith to much of mankind through Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It first gave to mankind a well-defined code of conduct - practical do's and don'ts - bereft of rituals and austerities, towards attainment of his glorious mission on earth and eternal illuminated life thereafter. Yet it is also a religion that was driven from its native land, lost all political influence, survived through debilitating circumstances in different regions under diverse rulers, and is professed now by only a handful of earnest and fervent followers (who may be numerically small but possess considerable economic and cultural influence) and may be on the verge of extinction. All this and more is what makes Zoroastrianism so fascinating.

This unique religion, established by the great Prophet, poet and philosopher Zarathushtra, even after three millennia, is still illuminating hearts and mesmerizing minds because of, firstly, its profound philosophy solidly based on the eternal truths of Righteousness, Morality and Love, secondly, the missionary zeal with which its dynamic founder propagated the timeless treasure of precious wisdom revealed to him directly by Ahura Mazda, the Supreme Creator, and thirdly, the unhesitating fervor with which the small but significant community of its practitioners (who have the highest literacy rate in India and are present worldwide) profess and practice their faith. When you read the cover story of this issue, we hope you will gain a new insight into this dynamic religion.

You will learn of the striking commonality between this ancient Aryan religion and the *Sanathana Dharma* (of Vedic times) that Swami often talks about. Be it belief in one Supreme Creator, revering elements of nature, the law of Karma, the importance of *Namasmarana* (chanting the Lord's name), the emphasis on righteousness or the remarkable similarity of the Avestan language (in which most original Zoroastrian scriptures exist) to Sanskrit, and social customs and practices which synchronize with ancient Indian traditions – there are innumerable such fascinating facets which make Zoroastrianism so special and of interest to all seekers of the truth.

The philosophy of a good life in this religion is based on three essential pillars, "Homaato, Hokhto, Hovarasht," or, "Good thoughts, good words and good deeds," just as Swami has been tirelessly teaching us for decades. Zarathushtra [literally, "He of the Golden Light"] ignited the flame of righteousness and inspired his followers to lead a life of purity, like their symbol, fire, which is always pure and bright. He encouraged humankind to take life as a sacred challenge and with the strength of their inner fire fight *Angra Mainyu* (the Evil spirit, representing immoral tendencies) just as Swami says: "Face the Devil, Fight Till the End, and Finish the Game." Zarathustra Himself was an indomitable spiritual warrior and God's chosen messenger. And if Zoroastrianism

survives till this day in spite of adverse and challenging circumstances, it is because he remains a colossus of strength and inspiration for millions. It is to pay tribute to this Golden Messenger of God during this month of his advent and to celebrate this enigmatic religion that we have chosen Zoroastrian for our cover story in this issue.

If one studies the whole of Zend-Avesta (the Zoroastrian Bible), two concepts which pop up again and again with vigor and emphasis are Purity and Perseverance. "Purity is all the strength that man needs," our Swami says. When you read in this issue how Sai devotees from Singapore risked their lives and safety to venture into inaccessible regions of Laos to provide for the wellbeing of poor and neglected villagers, or how the zeal and dedication of the Sai Youth of Hyderabad has transformed the lives of innumerable high school dropouts through their innovative approach to service, and how Sai Human Values has enlightened young minds throughout the Islamic nation of Oman, you will see how purity and perseverance can uplift our world.

This purity of feeling can also be seen in the hundreds of Japanese Youth, the large contingent of young Indonesian Sai soldiers, the engaging children from the Sathya Sai School of Canada and the solemn assembly of Buddhist monks – all of whom presented lovely programmes during the recently concluded Guru Purnima celebrations. Extensive reports of all this will be found in our Prashanti Diary.

While the month of July was exciting in Prashanti Nilayam, the coming month will be nothing less than awesome. A very powerful and potent Yagnam (sacrifice) called the "Ati Rudra Maha Yagam" will be presided over by Swami Himself for 11 days, from August 9th through the 20th. What is so significant about it and why is Swami conducting it? How is it going to affect our world? For answers to these profound questions, stay tuned for the next issue's cover story.

Where there is purity, happiness follows like a shadow. To live in that undisturbed state of contentment and bliss, let's sacrifice all our impurities in the inner fire of our hearts and emerge as great, grand and godly. Then life will truly become the blissful journey of pure love God wishes it to be for us.

In Sai Service,
H2H Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

CULTIVATE LOVE IN ITS PUREST FORM

Krishnastami, the holy festival celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna, falls on the 15th of August. Love was Lord Krishna's message and same it is with Sai. Let's recapitulate Swami's message on this day, more than a decade and half ago in 1992.

To Experience Pure Love, Lead a Spiritual Life

Prema (Love) is like a most precious diamond. It will not remain even for a single moment with selfish persons. It will not stay for even half a moment with egoistic persons. It will not remain at all with ostentatious persons. Love is alien to persons who are selfish, conceited or ostentatious. Where, then, is this love to be found? This precious diamond can only be got in the Kingdom of Love, in the Street of Love, in the Shop of Love. It can be obtained only through a loving heart. It may be asked, "Is not the whole world permeated with Love? Why, then, is not Love readily available?" The love with which the world is considered to be filled is not real love. *Prema* cannot be associated with the body, the senses, the mind and the intellect. Anything associated with these is only *Anuraaga* (attachment). The *Aatmic* (spiritual) life alone is a Love-filled life. Therefore, people must lead a spiritual life, not a life subject to the body, the mind, the senses and the intellect. A life related to the body, the senses the mind and the intellect can never be free from selfishness, conceit and ostentation.

To experience real *Prema* there is no need to practice any kind of meditation, worship or rituals. That is because in the practice of all these there is an element of selfishness. *Prema* can only be obtained by complete absorption in spirituality. It was for this reason that Sri Krishna declared in the Gita: "*Sarva Dharmam Parithyajya*" (transcending all rules). Likewise, Jesus also declared: "I am the Path." Buddha, conveying the same meaning, declared, "*Sarvam Sharanam Gachchaami*" (I am surrendering everything). This means that the essence of all religions, the root of all scriptures, the goal of all virtues, is *Sarvaathmika Bhaavam* (the experience of spiritual unity). The *Gopikas* exemplified such a spirit of surrender and oneness.

Restrain Selfishness and Self-interest

It may be asked whether in this mundane world it is possible to develop such a spirit of complete surrender. It may not be possible for all to be free completely from selfishness, self-interest and self-conceit. But there should be a limit to all of them. Nothing great can be achieved without restraint "*Na Shreyo Niyamam vinaa.*" When the normal temperature of the body is exceeded, the fever is a sign of illness. Likewise, there is a limit to selfishness. When this limit is exceeded it becomes a disease. *Ahamkaara* (egoism) is a disease. Ostentation is a disease. Excessive *Swaprayojanam* (self-interest) is a disease. All these diseases have been described as *Bhavaroga* (the disease of worldliness). These are the diseases which are prevalent in the world today.

When the Divine is present in everyone it is not fitting that one should fail to recognise this. One may have the faith that God resides within him, but this is not sufficient. It is not a great thing to feel that God resides within you. You have to see yourself in God. That is the true *Prema Thathwa* (principle of Love). As long as you do not see yourself in the Divine, you remain selfish and self-centred...

Selfless Devotion of the *Gopikas*

Today, in the name of *Prema*, men are playing a game of musical chairs with their hearts. The chair of the heart is being used for occupation by different persons at different times. The *Gopikas*, however, dedicated their hearts to one person alone. All their thoughts were centred on Krishna. All their senses were dedicated to the Divine. They spoke only about God. Their thoughts were centred on God. They listened only to the Divine words. Their hands were engaged in Divine work. All their limbs and senses were dedicated to the Divine. They did not consider anything as their own. Krishna was their all...

Cultivate Love in its Purest Form

The *Prema Thathwa* (Love Principle) is the essence of *Krishna Thathwa* (Krishna Principle). It is associated with the Divine. Worldly love cannot be equated with Divine Love (*Prema*). The term *Prema* is used in ordinary parlance to describe what is really worldly attachment. People are attached more to names and forms than to the inner spirit of things. To get over this false attachment to external forms and names, it is essential to cultivate love in its purest form. There is no greater path to the Divine than this love. To manifest this love, the first requisite is to get rid of selfishness and self-interest.

- *Divine Discourse in the Poornachandra Auditorium, 21 Aug 1992*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI – Part 23

(Continued from the previous issue)

A Visitor: How to surrender to God and to life?

SAI: Surrender to God and to life means the absence of duality and being of the same nature as God. But such a state is beyond man's will. Surrender is when doer, deed, and object are all God. It cannot be forced. It comes naturally to a heart filled with love for God. God is as a spring of fresh and sweet water in the heart. The best tool to dig a well to that inexhaustible source and savour its sweetness is Japa, the repetition of the Name of the Lord. Dedicate every action to the Lord and there will be no place for ego. That is the quickest way for the ego to subside.

LOVE IS THE PATH

A Visitor: How to progress fast on the path?

SAI: Love is the path. Start the day with love. Spend the day with love. Fill the day with love. End the day with love. This is the way to God. Expansion is love, not contraction and selfishness, not 'my'. Such practices as meditation, Japa, mantra, bhajan are like soap. Without water, soap is not of use. The water is likened to love. It is the water that is important. Without love you live in death. Love is life. All are one; be alike to every one.

Inquiry is of great importance. Who am I? Body? No. House? No. I am 'I'; that is the truth. The body is like a water bubble. The mind is like a mad monkey. The mind is worse, it has no reason and season; even a monkey has this.

A Visitor: Is it all right to say 'Sai Ram'?

SAI: 'Sa' means divine. 'Ai' means mother. 'Ram' means 'He who is in the heart as pure delight'. 'Sai Ram' means Divine Mother and Father. Sohum, Sai Ram, Sivohum, Sambasiva, all mean the same.

EXPAND YOUR HEART

A Visitor: Baba, I am so tired. I am without energy. How may I get energy?

SAI: Energy arises from surrender to God.

A Visitor: Would it be all right for me to go for a reading from the book of Bhrighu?

SAI: That is not Swami's business whether you go or not. What is written is true, but the interpretation is faulty.

A Visitor: Baba, my energy?

SAI: Energy comes from the heart expanding. A small, closed heart -no energy. If Baba is known in the heart, then the heart expands. Body is the temple. Heart is the seat. God is installed there.

A Visitor: Are you satisfied?

SAI: I am always happy. Love is my form. Always happy - sometimes to correct a situation, the sound of Swami's voice may change, but inside there is no anger.

H: (Hislop) Swami, excuse me. A person observing Swami moving amongst people, and choosing some of them for special attention or interview, is puzzled why some are chosen and why some are not.

SAI: Yes, it is quite natural that you are puzzled. One looking from the outside cannot know who is worthy and who is not.

H: Swami says that one should not speak of the Lord with those who are not devotees. What are the implications?

SAI: It is all right to speak to groups. The leaders will become interested and they, in turn, will tell their followers. But to engage in individual private conversations with those who have no faith will just result in argument and discussion and will be a waste of time.

H: Each devotee is so anxious to touch Swami's Feet. What is the meaning of touching the Feet?

SAI: **God is positive. Man is negative. If contact is made, the divine current flows from positive to negative.** For this reason, the Indians have the tradition of touching a divine person. But without some form of discipline and limitation, people would be touching the face and body. Hence, the custom of touching the lotus Feet.

H: Swami says, 'keep water out of the boat'. How is that done?

SAI: How can one keep water out of the boat of one's life? Turn fully to God and there is no boat, no boat is needed, God is in every place. The connection to Him is inside, in the heart.

SADHANA AND LIBERATION

H: Must a certain length of time pass before liberation?

SAI: **The time needed for liberation is like this. Somebody asks, how long do you need to eat? The answer may be, 'Five minutes to half an hour.' It is wrong answer. It will take as long to eat as needed to fill the stomach.**

H: Is there naturally a desire for liberation in man?

SAI: Sadhana does not bring liberation. It only calms and controls the rajasic and thamasik gunas. The Sathwic guna has always the liberation desire. When the Sathwic guna in man is in control, liberation comes.

H: In the West, sadhana is generally taken to be a process of self-improvement. But that implies identification with the changing personality?

SAI: **First there may be the urge to self-improvement. Moral nature and character may be seen to need improvement. But the next stage is inquiry. Inquiry into the reality of this and that. Seven tenths (7/10) of sadhana is inquiry. 'I' as generally used by people, refers to the body.**

H: Mahayana Buddhism says that one has the choice to merge or not, even at the last moment before final liberation.

SAI: The choice of merging or of rebirth upon the dawn of freedom rests with the wish. There is no selfishness in the wish to merge in God. It is not contraction, it is expansion.

In the following conversation a visitor, a prince from another state of India, came to Bhagavan, and offered some acres of land for a yoga centre. He asked that Bhagavan please visit his state and use His will to avert the danger of political violence.

SAI: (to the visitor) Swami's love is the same for all, even for those who engage in bad actions. These suffer not because of Swami's anger, but because only through suffering do their minds turn inward in self-inquiry. And only through self-inquiry will they be free of the illusion that separates them from God.

The only gift acceptable to Swami is the heart. Acres of land are of no interest to Him. Presently, there is great disorder amongst both politicians and students. This will continue for a time, but at a certain point Swami will step in and bring about some order.

H: How about order in America and Europe?

SAI: Countries are like carriages. The engine is God. The first carriage is India. The other carriages will follow. According to the astrology of ancient times, the change in world conditions to be brought by Swami's influence will come in about 15 years (this conversation was in December 1968). This was predicted 5600 years ago in the Upanishads. The coming of Baba, the Sai Avathar, which includes the three incarnations, is all forecast quite clearly. People born in this present generation may consider themselves quite fortunate.

SAINTS IN THE PRESENT DAY WORLD

H: Is today's world without saints who have direct and deep God experience?

SAI: There are people even today who have the genuine experience of divine vision and Self-realization. But they do not travel here and there in the world, building up a following of disciples. They stay very quietly away from public view and do sadhana.

If you were to find such a one and ask for guidance, he would not be interested in you. If the life of a 'guru' who is out in the world is closely examined, it will be found that he has desires and problems. His knowledge is from books and other persons and he has no full and real experience of the divine of whom he speaks. Such persons are caught in the bog of samsara, just as you are. How can they pull you to firm ground? **Nowadays, God is the only genuine guru. Call on Him and He will guide you. He is in your heart, ever ready to help, Protect and guide you.**

H: Swami says that these are people who have divine vision, How can one achieve that vision?

SEE ONLY THAT WHICH IS REAL

SAI: Divine vision erases from the mind the seeing of that which is impermanent. Name, form and characteristic will in time disappear, so why wait? Erase them from the vision now. Erase them from the mind now and see only that which is real. Why bother about the illusion, that which disappears? It is far better to give one's time and attention to

reality. Divine vision is seeing through the ephemeral illusion and abiding in and with the reality. God is the eternal reality. He is the changeless basis of every phenomenon.

King Janaka became firmly established in the divine vision. Name, form, personality, attributes had been so thoroughly seen through that they never again came into his vision during the balance of his lifetime. Divine vision is the result of practice and of God's grace. At times, divine vision may appear to arise spontaneously, but it is because of work done by the person in a previous life.

DIVINE VISION AND THE JIVANMUKTHA

H: What is the difference between a person of divine vision and a person who is fully God-realized?

SAI: There is a difference. The God-realised person, the Jivanmukta, no longer has any identification whatsoever with the body. He is one in whom only the divine vision is active. He pays no attention to the body, and it wastes away and dries up. He does not bother with food and water. They do not even come to mind.

As a result, 21 days is the time that life can remain in the body under these circumstances. He has lost all body identification and neither eats nor drinks except when force fed. The 21 days may vary a little due to the condition of the person. King Janaka retired to the forest and became a Jivanmukta. Life remained in his body for 19 days.

The person of divine vision is known as a Raja Yogi. He retains some body identification, and thus continues to live with the body. King Janaka reigned for many years as a Raja Yogi.

Jivanmukti is permanent God-realization. It is merging with God. There can be a temporary God-realization for a few hours or a day or so in deep meditation, or at various levels of samadhi, but that is not permanent. It is not merging.

H: Sorry, Swami, divine vision is still not clearly understood.

SAI: There is a piece of clear glass. From one side one can look through and see the object on the other side. If the clear glass is plated with a silver film on one side, it becomes a mirror in which one may see himself; and objects on the other side of the mirror are not seen. Likewise, through consciousness one may see the outside sensory world. Or, with his intelligence, he may look to and become aware of that which may be found within himself.

If one lives and keeps himself within the reality found within, with Godly thoughts, desires, and interests, if one keeps his life centered on the Godly side of consciousness, the consciousness becomes a mirror coated on its outer surface with the dust of the sensory world. On the pure inward surface of this mirror, on the pure mind and the pure heart, one may see the reality of himself reflected and this constitutes Self-realization. That is Raja Yoga. King Janaka became one who lived his life in this way.

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

H: Swami, even perfect men seem to have troubles.

SAI: Various saints (Swami mentioned some names) had endless troubles in their lives with family, harsh treatment from others, and so on. But their faith in God remained untouched.

H: But Swami, since these men were already purified saints, why did suffering and troubles continue for them?

SAI: **They themselves did not suffer. Jesus did not suffer. But it was necessary they go through what is generally regarded as suffering so the world could have noble examples of worldly detachment and unshakable faith in God.**

H: In the scriptures there are a number of stories about very great sages who had very big tempers. How could that be?

SAI: The angry sages of the scriptures were in error in their sadhana. Their reactions were rajasic. The sathvic sadhanas are best; they give trouble to nobody.

H: When reading, I found a passage saying that sage Viswamitra created a duplicate universe. Could such a thing be possible?

SAI: Yes. The sage agreed to transport one of his disciples to the heavenly regions with the disciple remaining in his physical body. The Gods did not agree. Viswamitra became very angry and created a universe, even though God came to him and asked him not to. Viswamitra created even a pantheon of Gods in the subtle space and then transported his disciple there in body. But that which is contrary to God's will cannot last, and Viswamitra's universe did not endure.

H: Prahlada was not fully God-realized since his body continued to live. How could he, therefore, be so firmly established in the Atma that he could endure extreme torture with a smile?

SAI: **Prahlada was a special case, created by God as an example of perfect faith in the Name of God, an absolute unchanging faith that God was in all things, even inanimate pillars and idols. Prahlada felt no pain during his torture. Because of his perfect faith that God would come when called, God blocked out all pain.**

H: One would greatly wish to see God only.

SAI: It is not that one takes every object in the world and changes it into God. One is not able to do that. It is not possible to take nature and all objects and make them one shade of colour? But if one puts on glasses of a certain colour, then everything is seen in that colour. One is able to change his eyes so that everything they see is that 'one colour', God.

H: Swami says that all should be seen as God. One should also see his wife as God?

SAI: Wife should not be seen as God. If so seen, she will sit on your head. She should be treated as wife. And God should be seen as her inner reality.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

MOHAKSHAYA

Once Sage Agastya during his sojourn on earth happened to meet a farmer who was struggling hard to maintain his family. The sage out of compassion for the man told him, "My dear fellow, do not worry, all your troubles will cease to bother you. I have the power to free you of all the bondage. Come with me to Vaikunta, the abode of the Lord." The farmer replied, "Oh revered one! How can I leave my children? Come after ten years. I will be ready to accompany you." The sage did come after ten years and reminded the farmer; "My dear fellow, the period of ten years stipulated by you ended yesterday. Come with me to Vaikunta and there experience eternal bliss." The farmer said, "Oh revered one! My eldest son was just recently married. I am eager to see my grandchildren. Come after ten years."

The sage appeared at the door of the house of the farmer again after ten years. He was told that the farmer had died. He saw a dog at the door. He could intuitively divine that the farmer had been reborn as a dog. He bestowed the dog with the power of speech and awareness of the knowledge of the previous birth. He asked the dog, "Oh man! Are you not ashamed to be born as a dog? Come, I shall free you of this mean life." The dog said, "Oh Sage! I wish to be a watch dog at the door of my son's house. He is very careless. Robbers may come and take away all the wealth I had hoarded for him and his family. Come after ten years."

The sage did come after ten years. The very look of the locality had changed and in the place of the farmer's small house, stood a big mansion. He could intuitively divine that the farmer had been born again as a serpent and living inside an ant hill in the backyard of the mansion, guarding the wealth underneath. The sage went near the ant-hill and whispered, "Oh My dear man! What a miserable fate! You have taken the birth of a deadly serpent. Do come with me I shall liberate you." The serpent replied, from within "Oh revered one! I cannot come, I must guard the wealth that I had kept hidden underneath." The sage at once approached the inmates of the house and said, "My dear children, there is an ant-hill in your backyard. A deadly serpent is living there guarding all the wealth that your grandfather had hoarded for you. You better kill the serpent and possess the wealth."

The grandchildren were only too glad to execute the job. The serpent was killed and at last freed. The pity is that those very people for whom the farmer had hoarded wealth and taken so many births mercilessly killed him. So long as the knots of attachment continue, there is no hope of salvation to the Jiva.

- BABA

COVER STORY

ZOROASTRIANISM – SHIMMERING FLAME OF ETERNAL WISDOM

PREAMBLE

In the June issue of H2H, we had a cover story on the fascinating religion and teachings of Buddhism. In continuance of our endeavour to present to you articles on the great religions of the world at irregular intervals, we have for you in this issue a comprehensive cover story on Zoroastrianism, one of the ancient and important religions of the human race. Today, the followers of this great religion might have dwindled in numbers but historically, Zoroastrianism has not only held wide sway but also influenced many religions that came after it.

We spent a considerable amount of time researching for this feature and consulted many sources of information, besides many books. It turned out that while historical details were often scant, information about the philosophy and the theology of this ancient religion were more easily accessible. This uneven balance between history and theology would be reflected in what we present!

H2H has taken every possible care in preparing this article, and we trust it is free of inaccuracies and misrepresentations. Errors present, if any, are unintentional and we trust we would be forgiven for the same!

We hope you like this article and would welcome your comments on it.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Thousands of years ago, there lived in the Northern Asian Valleys, a race of people called the Aryans. The word 'Aryan' means noble in character. In course of time, this Indo-European stock divided into two major sections. One went west to Europe while the other group drifted east. The eastern group itself split into two, one settling in what is now Iran while the other entered the Indian plains to settle there. In the language of those times, modern Iran or Persia was known as *Aryanam Vaego*, which means Land of the Aryans. The name Iran is derived from this original name. Interestingly, the Aryans who settled in what we know as India also gave a similar name to their new homeland – *Arya Varta*, meaning land of the Aryans.

As everyone knows, in olden times, Iran used to be known as Persia. The name Persia comes from a region in the south called *Fars* or *Pars* in the Persian language. *Persis* is the Greek form of *Pars*, based on which other European nations referred to it as Persia. The Greek writer Eratosthenes, however, refers to this region as Iran in his writings. This means that the name Iran goes back a long time.

This region was the core of all great Persian Empires. In 1935, at the specific request of the then King of Persia, the international community agreed to call this country Iran.

The religion followed by the ancient settlers in Persia was known as *Mazdasyani Din*. *Din* means faith, while *Mazdasyani* means the Worship of One Creator.

The Aryans who came to Persia encountered many tribes already established there. Naturally there were clashes, especially because these aboriginal tribes worshipped many gods. Eventually, the Aryans overcame the local tribes and established their hegemony.

Late Dr. Fanibanda, a great devotee of Swami and who was a Zoroastrian, says that when the clashes became serious, the Soul of the Earth, *Geush Urva*, cried out to the Lord, seeking His protection:

*To You, the Soul of Mother Earth complained:
"Wherefrom Ye gave me birth? Who fashioned me?
Passion and rapine, outrage everywhere
And violence enmesh me all round;
No other help than Yours I see, Ye Lords;
Reveal to me a strong one, who can save."*

Dr. Fanibanda says that the Divine response was as follows:

*"One such, here present, is well-known to Me,
The only one who kept all our commandments,
The Holy Zarathushtra Spitama;
Eager is he and willing to proclaim
Through songs and hymns Mazda's Eternal Law,
Sweetness of speech, therefore to him we grant."*

Thus was born the Prophet Zoroaster [sometimes referred to as Zarathushtra] who gave substance and shape to earlier concepts, leading to what we now know as *Zoroastrianism*. This is one of the earliest revealed religions of the world. It is also historically significant due to the influences it has had on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which came later [and in the same geographical region]. The early history of this religion is a bit obscure but after the appearance of Prophet Zoroaster, one can clearly recognise the basis for a formal religion. Further comments on this religion would be offered below.

ZOROASTER THE PROPHET

It would appear that there are two distinct periods in the history of Zoroastrianism – before the advent of the Prophet and after his advent. As already mentioned, prior to his advent, the religious faith was known as *Mazdasyani Din*, the core concept of which was that there was a Supreme Creator, known as *Ahura Mazda*. As regards the details of what *Ahura* wanted His children on earth to do, they appear to have been somewhat fuzzy. It was

when Zoroaster was given Divine Revelation that the religion became substantially codified.

Little is known about Prophet Zoroaster himself and indeed, there is much dispute even about when he was born and when he lived. According to tradition, he was born in Bactria during the reign of King Vishtasp. The language spoken at that time was *Avesta*. Zoroaster was born to Pourushaspa and Dugdhoa and was regarded as special, right from birth. Legend has it that Zoroaster was born laughing and that his brain throbbed so powerfully that if person placed his hand on the head of the child, the hand would be thrown off!

We do not know by what name Zoroaster was known as a child but this much can be said: In the *Avesta* language, Zarathushtra = Zara [golden] + thush [shining] + Stra [star]. It is said that he actually illumined the place he was born. In English, his name has been rendered as "He of the Golden Light," just as Prince Siddhartha came to be known as the Buddha [The Enlightened One] and Jesus as the Christ [the Anointed One].

At the age of six, the young boy was placed under the care of a wise man, who was to teach and guide the lad. It is said that many attempts were made to kill the boy by evil-minded people who recognised his importance to humanity.

At the age of fifteen, Zoroaster/Zarathushtra took seriously to religion and when he turned twenty, he left home for the mountains where he spent ten years in a cave, devoting himself to meditation and contemplation on spiritual matters. He wrestled with ancient questions, as reflected in the following passages:

*This I ask Thee, tell me truly, Mazda Ahura,
Who upholds the earth beneath and the firmament from falling?
Who the waters and the planets?
Who yoked swiftness to winds and clouds?
Who is, O Mazda, creator of Good Thought?*

*This I ask Thee, tell me truly, Ahura,
What artist made light and darkness?
What artist made sleep and waking?
Who made morning, noon and night,
That call the understanding man to his duty?*

After this year long period of isolation, Zoroaster emerged enlightened, ready to teach the masses about righteousness and the revelations made to him by *Ahura*. That is when Zoroastrianism may be said to have been formally born.

Initially, Zoroaster had very few followers but about a decade after he emerged from his withdrawal, King Vishtaspa in Bactria wanted Zoroaster to enter into debates to prove that his new message was superior to the old one. This was done by Zoroaster. Vishtaspa then demanded for some miraculous

signals to prove that Zoroaster was a messenger of God. In response, Zoroaster created a ball of fire that glowed without any fuel and did not burn anyone when held in the palm. A live plant was also produced, whose leaves contained a command to the King to patronise the new faith. Vishtaspa then demanded that God must speak to him through angels. Angels then appeared in his dream and reassured the King.

Around this time, the enemies of Zoroaster plotted to place putrid articles under his bed. They then told the King that Zoroaster was actually practicing black magic, and though he advised that only pure articles ought to be used for worship, putrid articles would be found under his bed because he secretly worshipped evil forces. A search was ordered by the King and the false evidence planted by the plotters was duly found. The King then threw Zoroaster into prison.

Meanwhile, the King's favourite horse was stricken by palsy and none could cure it. Zoroaster was asked to cure the horse, and was told that if he healed the horse, the King and his family would help Zoroaster to spread his message far and wide. The horse was cured, and thereafter, King Vishtaspa willingly aided Zoroaster.

Sometime later, a neighbouring ruler invaded the kingdom to protest the new faith. While armed conflict was raging outside, Zoroaster was in a temple, absorbed in his devotion. A soldier of the attacking forces entered the temple and stabbed Zoroaster to death. At that time, Zoroaster was 77 years old.

THE THEOLOGY OF ZOROASTRIANISM

Theology of a religion essentially means what that particular religion has to say about God. Presently, we shall briefly discuss the theology underlying Zoroastrianism.

Zoroastrianism is the first monotheistic religion, that is to say it holds that there is only ONE God. Zoroaster named this God *Aura Mazda*, or **MAZDA AHURA** meaning WISE LORD.

Dr. Fanibanda explains that *Ahura* means the Creator of Life and *Mazda* means the Creator of Matter. Thus, says Dr. Fanibanda, *Ahura* is identical with Siva while *Mazda* is identical with Parvathi, in the Hindu tradition.

Although there is only one God, in the world created by Him, there are evil forces. It is not clear wherefrom these evil forces emerged, although one might say evil surfaces when man forgets God. In any case, Zoroaster, says Dr. Fanibanda, asks man to lend his ears to the highest Righteousness/Truth, and, using one's own illuminated mind, make a choice between the path of Good and the path of Evil.

Good and Evil are represented by separate spirits which are "Twins". They are opposite to each other in thought, word and deed. One is the Increasing

Spirit and the other is the Decreasing Spirit. One is Good and the other is Bad. Only the Wise are capable of fostering the right one. Duality is the very nature of the Universe and as the human body is a part of the Universe, it also must experience these Twin opposites. By the way, it is interesting to note that the two kinds of spirits are named *ahuras* and *daevas*. One cannot miss seeing the similarity to the *asuras* and *devas* of Hindu mythology; only, in Zoroastrianism, the *ahuras* are the good spirits and the *daevas* are the evil ones.

Dr. Fanibanda sums it all crisply as follows: “While Zoroastrian theology is monotheistic, its philosophy is dualistic and the ethics are based on the trilogy of good thoughts, good words and good deeds.” Love, Wisdom & Knowledge and Service are the anchors of Zoroastrian philosophy.

Zoroastrian scholar Dastur Dabu reduces the essence of the teachings to some simple rules as follows:

- A Zoroastrian must always be good and never harm others.
- He should see unity in the midst of apparent diversity.
- He should lead a life of self-abnegation, by selfless conduct and service to the world at large.
- He should never force his belief on others – in other words, he should practice religious tolerance.
- He should maintain purity of body, thought, emotions and soul; live a life of moderation; be responsible, progressive, productive and peaceful; take care of the environment – respecting and loving all living beings.
- When a saintly person is totally altruistic and disinterested, he performs all meritorious deeds without expecting any personal benefit or personal gain.

Are these not amazingly similar to Swami’s teachings?!

The Zoroastrian scripture is called the *Avesta*. Thanks to the forces of history, it consists of fragmentary and sometimes corrupted texts. It is written in old Iranian, a language similar to Sanskrit.

The major sections of the *Avesta* are:

- *Gathas*, the holy hymns of Zarathustra, are his own words and were preserved in oral tradition for many centuries as there was no written script in Zarathustra’s times.
- *Yasna*, a liturgical work that deals with worship, ceremonies, and offerings. The *Yasna* includes texts called the *Gathas*, believed to be sung by Zoroaster himself.
- *Vispered*, a supplement to the *Yasna*.
- *Yashts*, containing mostly hymns of praise.
- *Videvad*, a detailed code of ritual purification.

Examples Of Writing From Avestan Manuscripts

Zoroaster taught that humans bear responsibility for all their actions. Good befalls those who do good, those who engage in evil, have only themselves to blame when they suffer later. This is nothing but the Law of *Karma*, which Swami refers to as the Law of Reflection, Reaction, Resound. In the scriptures, there are clear references to this law as follows:

- “God has the best memory of all acts of men and demons – even foresight with regard to what might happen later on.” *Gatha* [29 – 4].
- “Evil plight for those who are evil, add good reward to those who are righteous. This is to be Thy regulation, O God, till the end of the Universe.” *Gatha* [43-5].
- “God has fixed two great laws for the education of men. O Men! You get happiness or misery in accordance with the laws, namely: Bliss for the righteous, and a long drawn out suffering for the evil-doer.” *Gatha* [30-11].
- “God has the knowledge of every living being who is good in self-sacrifice, through his righteousness.” *Yasna* [7-27].
- “All good thoughts, words and deeds, done through wisdom, lead to the heavenly condition. All evil thoughts, words and deeds, done through the absence of wisdom, lead to the worst plight.” *Vispa Humata*

Interestingly, chanting the Divine Name finds an important place in Zoroastrianism also. Zoroaster asks *Ahura Mazda*, “Reveal unto me that Name of Thine that is the greatest, best, fairest, most effective, best healing, that which destroyeth best the malice of men and demons.”

Ahura Mazda then replied: [extracted from: **THE RELIGION OF GOOD LIFE, ZOROASTRIANISM**, P.P. Masani, George Allen and Unwin, LONDON, 1938]

- O holy Zoroaster, My first Name is, “I am”.
- My second Name is the Giver of Herds.
- My third Name is the Strong One.
- My fourth Name is Perfect Holiness.
- My fifth Name is the All-Good created by *Mazda*, the offering of the Holy Principle.
- My sixth Name is Understanding.
- My seventh Name is He that possesses Understanding.
- My eighth Name is Knowledge.
- My ninth Name is He that possesses Knowledge.
- My tenth Name is Blessing.
- My eleventh Name is He that grants Blessing.
- My twelfth Name is *Ahura*, the All-wise.
- My thirteenth Name is the Most Beneficent.
- My fourteenth Name is He in whom there is no harm.
- My fifteenth Name is Unconquerable.
- My sixteenth Name is He that maketh the true account.
- My seventeenth Name is the All-seeing.

- My eighteenth Name is the Healer.
- My nineteenth Name is the Creator.
- My twentieth Name is *Mazda* [Omniscient].

Compilations exist listing many more Names. 101 names of Ahura Mazda form a part of a Zoroastrian's daily prayers. What is one supposed to do with these Names? Masani has the answer: "Whoever takes it [the Name] on his lips and is engaged in meditation of His attributes, armours to protect himself against the inroads of evil. Even the Prophet himself is asked by *Ahura Mazda* to repeat His Names.

*"If thou wilt, O Zarathushtra,
Vanquish all that hate malignant,
Hate of demons, hate of mortals,
Of Faith's perverse oppressors,
Two-foot heretics and liars,
Four foot wolves, wide fronted armies,
Bearing on the bloodstained banner,
Then these Names repeat bemuttering,
All the day and all the night time."*

So we see that *Namasmaranam*, or chanting of the Name that Swami prescribes to us, ever so often finds a place in Zoroastrianism also. By the way, it finds a place in Islam too, but we shall deal with that matter elsewhere.

We must now make a reference to an aspect of Zoroastrianism often referred to as *Mithraism*. Scholar R. P. Masani notes that though the *Vedas* speak of the Supreme Lord and the One Truth, the Vedic liturgy allowed room for many minor deities. In the same way, says Masani, although Zoroaster held *Ahura Mazda* to be Supreme, in due course, many celestial beings came to be worshipped. Thus many angels known as *Yazata* came to be worshipped. It was believed that the worship of these angels would confer various benefits and rewards.

Among the *Yazata*, a prominent one was *Mithra*. This is very interesting because *Mithra* figures prominently in Vedic rituals and worship also, which testifies to the strong similarities between ancient religious practices in Iran and in India. Masani says that of all the celestial beings that ruled the earth, *Mithra* was regarded as the strongest of the strong, the sturdiest of the sturdy, the most diligent and intelligent among the deities, the most victorious and glorious. Masani adds, "In the scriptures, *Mithra* and *Ahura* are often invoked together. Their union is actually pre-Zoroastrian and corresponds to Vedic *Mithra Varuna*." Mithraism which pre-dates Zoroaster, regained popularity for a while after him.

Incidentally, *Mithraism* is of some interest because it penetrated the Roman Empire. It is said that it was quite popular among Roman garrisons, and was also a rival to Christianity. Some are of the view that a few Mithraic rituals and even beliefs became incorporated into Christianity. The twenty-fifth of December, for example, was actually the date on which the Romans

celebrated the birthday of *Mithra*, and was adopted as a convenience by the early Christians as the birthday of Jesus since it was a public holiday in the Roman Empire.

There has been quite a lot of discussion amongst scholars concerning the relationship between Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity. This is not surprising, given the historical fact that all these religions originated in the same geographical region. For a while, the belief prevailed that Zoroastrianism had borrowed form Judaism and even Christianity but later scholars who have thoroughly analysed this question have rejected this view.

It now appears that around six hundred BC, a large number of Jews were carried away to Babylon as captives. Contact with Iranians during the long period of exile made the exiles absorb many doctrines from Zoroastrianism, such as the immortality of the Soul, the resurrection of the body, and reward and punishment in accordance with one's moral track record. In this context, the famous German scholar Max Mueller says, "It is well known that these doctrines were entirely or almost entirely absent from the oldest phase of the religion among the Jews." Another scholar Dr. West has compared Jewish texts written before and after the Persian contact and remarks that the Book of Job in the Old Testament has "some appearance of being a translation or adaptation from a Persian, or Assyrian text."

In an article entitled ***Zoroaster and the Bible*** written in 1894, scholar L. H. Mills says that "it pleased the Divine Power to reveal some of the most important articles of our Catholic creed first to the Zoroastrians, and through their literature to the Jews and ourselves." He then goes on to add: "To sum up, I would say, as speaking from an orthodox point of view, that while the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are unrivalled in their majesty and fervour, constituting perhaps the most impressive objects of their kind known to the human mind, and fully entitled to be described as 'inspired,' yet the humbler but to a certain extent prior religion of the *Mazda* worshippers was useful in giving point and body to many loose conceptions among the Jewish religious teachers, and introducing many ideas which are entirely new, while as to the doctrines of Immortality and Resurrection, the most important of all, it positively determined belief. But the greatest and by far the noblest service which it rendered was the propagation of the doctrine that 'virtue is chiefly its own reward,' even in the great religious reckoning, and 'vice is its own punishment.'"

In passing we might add that Zoroastrianism has made a contribution to Islam too, in the shape of five daily prayers. The use of water by Zoroastrians in ablutions and their emphasis on ritual purity, is also common to Judaism.

Perhaps the best way of concluding this section is to quote the concluding paragraph of Dastur Dabu's book, ***Handbook of Information on Zoroastrianism*** [Published by the P.N Mehta Educational Trust, Bombay].

A Zoroastrian's life should be an open book for others to examine. Religion should permeate every thought, word and deed; as one

should be judged from his behaviour and not mere lip-profession of beliefs and creeds.

Head and Heart should be co-ordinated so that there is no lop-sided development. A Zoroastrian should have Purity as the key note of his life – physical, moral, mental and spiritual. We have to seek Truth through humility and honesty. ‘With heart within and God overhead,’ there should be courage to encounter all handicaps of life. If the Zoroastrian concept of life is based on struggle against evil, we must be watchful of temptations. We have to some day return to our heavenly abode, and must keep the record of our deeds clean and fair.

Can anyone dispute any of these stipulations?

HISTORY OF PERSIA, AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE HISTORY OF ZOROASTRIANISM

In terms of history, Zoroastrianism is quite unlike many of the other ancient religions such as Christianity and Islam, for example, which also had their origins in the Middle East. While Christianity and Islam spread far and wide and are flourishing to this day, Zoroastrianism had its innings long ago, and is now almost on the throes of becoming extinguished.

As already mentioned, the religion took root in ancient Persia, and the Zoroastrian-Persians established the first known international empire. The Achaemenian [Hakkamanishya] Empire founded by Cyrus [Kurush] the Great stretched from Greece to Egypt and from Central Asia to India. There were many illustrious kings in the dynasty like Cambyses [Kambastha], Xerxes [Ksharaya], and Darius [Darayavayush]. This dynasty ruled from 550 BC up to 330 BC.

The second Zoroastrian dynasty was that of the Sasanians which was founded by Artaxerses [Artakshira or Ardeshir]. The Sasanians ruled from 211 AD up to 634 AD, till the Arab conquest of Iran.

In the early seventh century AD, Islam was growing out of Arabia, even as the Romans and the Sasanians were fighting with each other. In 634 AD, the Arabs sent an ultimatum to both the Persian Emperor Hormazd and the reigning Roman [Byzantine] emperor to embrace Islam or face war. Both empires decided on war.

The Arabs decided to attack first the Persians [Sasanians], and dealt a shattering blow at the Battle of Cadesia [Quadisiviyah] and captured the Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon [modern Baghdad]. The Romans [Byzantines] fared no better. Finally, in 642 AD, Islam firmly established itself in Persia.

Putting all this together, one can basically distinguish four important periods as follows:

- The reign of the Achaemenian Dynasty: 559 BC to 334 BC
- The Greek period following the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great 334 BC to 224 AD
- The Sasanian Dynasty: 224 AD to 642 AD
- The Islamic period: 642 AD to present day.

It was during the reign of Cyrus the Great of the Achaemenian Dynasty, that the Persian Empire reached its first great pinnacle. In his time, the Persian Empire was a Super Power. Cyrus conquered many lands but was a benevolent ruler, who respected local traditions, laws, languages and religions.

In 539 BC, Babylonia surrendered peacefully to Cyrus, and he was welcomed as a great liberator because of his compassionate policies. He freed the Jews from captivity and helped them to migrate to their homeland, and to reconstruct their temple in Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, there are references to Cyrus as follows:

Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah, might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing.

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, 'All his kingdoms of earth hath the Lord given me; and he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him and let him go up.' II Chronicles - 36: 22, 23

That saith of Cyrus. 'He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem. Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.' Isaiah 44: 28

After Cyrus came Darius, whose reign marked the zenith of the Persian Empire. Upholding the tradition established by Cyrus, Darius valued the rights of all people under his rule. He built the great city of Persepolis.

In 334 BC, Alexander invaded Persia and defeated the Persian army. He allowed his soldiers to loot and plunder and torch Persepolis. At the same time, Alexander considered himself to be a successor to the Achaemenian kings and paid a tribute to Cyrus the Great at his tomb. He emulated many of the court customs of the Persians, and attempted to create a mixed culture, part Hellenic and part Persian. He married a Persian woman, and ordered all his generals and about ten thousand of his soldiers to do the same.

In 323 BC, Alexander died, and his empire was divided amongst his generals. In this process, the Seleucid Dynasty was established in Persia by one of the generals. Thereafter, there was a constant battle between the Seleucids and the Parthians, a tribal kingdom in the north east of Persia. By 224 AD, the Parthians consolidated their control over the whole of Persia. This led to the

founding of the Sasanian Dynasty by Ardeshir I, and once again, Persia became a major power.

Their rule ended in 642 AD, when nomadic tribesmen from Arabia, fiercely proclaiming the newly founded faith of Islam, finally overran Persia. Thereafter, using the sword, all the natives were rapidly converted to Islam, and this saw the near extinction of Zoroastrianism in Persia. A small group of Zoroastrians escaped to India and sought asylum there. Their story now follows.

THE EXODUS OF ZOROASTRIANS TO INDIA

Zoroastrian refugees fleeing from religious persecution in their native land Iran, came to India about 1,200 years ago. Their descendants are called Parsis, meaning people from *Pars* or Persia. As one scholar puts it, when the Parsis came to India as refugees, fleeing from Arab intolerance, it was providentially a reunion of "cousins"! The reference of course is not only to the common ancestry of the Aryans settled in India and the Aryans who settled in Persia but also to many features common between Zoroastrianism and Hinduism.

According to Parsi folklore, the immigrants landed on the west coast of India and spent the first nineteen years on the island of Diu [later to become a Portuguese colony]. After that they set sail again and landed this time in Sanjan also on the west coast of India, either in the year 936AD or in 716AD [many an intense argument has raged amongst Parsis over which date is more accurate.]

The story goes that upon landing at Sanjan on the shores of Gujarat, the Parsi refugees pleaded with Jadhav Rana, the then King of Gujarat for refuge. There is an oft-repeated story that the King had doubts about the intentions of the asylum-seekers, and gave a glass full of milk to the chief Parsi priest, indicating that their land is full and that there was no place for outsiders or new settlers.

It is said that to remove the King's doubts about the intentions of the refugees, the priest took the glass of milk full to the brim, and added sugar to it. While doing so, he assured the King that just as the sugar blended into the milk without displacing any of it so too would he and his people blend into and sweeten the land. The King was apparently impressed by this assurance, and then granted Parsis permission to settle in Gujarat. It would of interest here to mention the 5 conditions laid by the king:

1. To put their weapons down.
2. To explain the religion.
3. Women should adopt the dress of the land namely the Sari.
4. To speak the Indian language (Gujarati)
5. To perform weddings after the sun set.

Incidentally, India was already known for its tolerance and generously accommodating immigrants from other lands and as one scholar writes, it has become a second homeland to many new comers like Jews, Syrian Christians, Central Asian and African communities. All were free to follow their own faith and take up different pursuits. The Parsis were one of the last to come in this manner.

For about three hundred years after landing at Sanjan, the Parsis lived in peace and harmony with the local community. They practiced their own religion but adopted Gujarati as their language, with however, a good mixture of many Persian words, naturally. Most practiced agriculture while some took to trade, carpentry etc.

The immigrants also accepted many of the local customs. Parsi women, in particular, dressed like Gujarati women, wearing *sarees* with reverse *pallu* and long-sleeved blouses. They even wore nose rings. Men wore trousers with long coats and tall cornered black caps. In passing we might add that nowadays there is nothing special to distinguish them from other highly westernized Indians except their fair complexion and sharp features.

In due course, the population of Parsis increased, and many moved from Sanjan to other parts of India like Cambay, Navsari, Anklesvar, Variav, Vankaner and Surat in the north, and to Thane and Chaul in the south. Pockets of Parsis were also found in Upper India, in Sind, Dehra-Dun and Punjab.

But not all climes were as hospitable as Sanjan. In Sind, Ibrahim the Ghaznavid perceived the Parsis as a colony of fire-worshippers and attacked them. In Thana, which was ruled by the Portuguese, they were seen as idolaters and pressurized by missionaries to convert to Christianity.

In Sanjan too, Islam caught up with them. In 1465 Sanjan was sacked and destroyed by the Muslim Sultanate. Parsis fought valiantly, side by side with their Hindu benefactors.

Many settled down in the port town of Surat, in Gujarat, where in the fifteenth century, Europeans (the Portuguese, the British and the Dutch) had been given permission by the Mughals to establish trading factories. Unhampered by caste prejudices, Surat provided an ideal opportunity for Parsis to engage in occupations that they had never attempted before. Farmers became traders and chief native agents, while carpenters became shipbuilders. An adventurous few left Surat and moved south to Bombay, then only a set of islands in the wilderness. Here, they acted as brokers between the Indians and the Portuguese. They were in Bombay when it was ceded by Portugal to England in 1665 and three years later when the Crown handed over the island to the East India Company, Parsis were already a presence.

The East India Company had grand plans for Bombay, wanting to make this settlement a vibrant trading and commercial centre. In order to do so they needed to attract Indian traders, merchants and artisans to settle in and

develop this frontier land. The terms they offered to native communities were generous and to an immigrant community like the Parsis, must have seemed almost heaven-sent. All persons born in Bombay would become natural subjects of England. All communities migrating to Bombay were guaranteed religious freedom and were permitted to build their houses within the fort walls, alongside the British, where they would be protected from any hostile attacks.

The Parsis were quick to recognize and seize this unique historical opportunity and came to Bombay earlier than most, and in large numbers too. About them, a Governor of the Company in charge of Bombay wrote: "They are an industrious people, and ingenious in trade, therein they totally employ themselves."

During the British period, the Parsis prospered very much, because they took easily to English education, as well as British trade and commercial practices. Many adventurous Parsis entered overseas trade; several excelled in banking and commerce. In short, thanks to Western education, Parsi men and women shone in different fields. With prosperity came charity. Many charitable hospitals, schools, colleges, orphanages, choultries in Surat, Bombay [now Mumbai] and Poona [now Pune] bear witness to the munificence of the community, which reached all strata of society.

They also excelled as lawyers, solicitors, doctors and administrators. Dadabhai Naoroji was the first Indian to be elected to the British House of Commons. Jamshedji Tata founded the great Tata industrial empire, more than a hundred years ago; he also founded the Indian Institute of Science, the premier science research centre in India, located in Bangalore. The famous conductor Zubin Mehta is a Parsi. India's only living Field Marshal, Sam Manekshaw is a Parsi. Homi Bhabha the brilliant nuclear scientist, often hailed as the Father of Nuclear Science in India was a Parsi. So was late J.R.D Tata, the doyen of Indian Industrialists, and the man who gave shape to commercial aviation in India.

However, the Parsi population has declined, not only in India but also globally. Population experts fear that in a few decades, Parsis may become extinct! The Census conducted in India in 2001 recorded that there were only about 69,000 Parsis left in India. About five thousand are supposed to be in Pakistan, mostly in Karachi. In Iran itself, the number is supposed to be down to about three thousand. Many Parsis have migrated to North America and it is believe about fifteen thousand or so have settled there.

The Government of Tajikistan persuaded the UNESCO to celebrate the year 2003 as "3000th Anniversary of Zoroastrian Culture." It is believed that the Tajiks were originally Zoroastrians and a large majority of them continued to secretly practice their religion through many centuries of Muslim rule followed by communism, as part of the Soviet Union.

In passing, it must be mentioned that a small group of Zoroastrians came to India around the nineteenth century. In India, they are usually referred to Iranis.

In Iran, though Zoroastrians were generally persecuted, a few managed to rise to positions of eminence. Possibly the most famous Iranian Zoroastrian is Dr. Farhang Mehr, former Deputy Prime Minister of Iran, and also professor emeritus in Boston University.

PARSI CUSTOMS

We now turn to the customs followed by Zoroastrians, and inevitably this reduces to customs followed by the Parsis, since they constitute more than 95% of the Zoroastrian survivors. We discuss the customs under the subheadings: Dress; Navjot or the initiation ceremony; Fire Temples; Marriage; Conversion; and Eschatology [the funeral rites and the doctrine of life after death].

Dress

In a large concourse of people, it is necessary to proclaim certain powers and privileges of a brigade or corps, by means of such badges. In Iran, the Mazdayasins had such a uniform, which, because of its religious significance, was held to be sacred so that even kings used to wear it with the same reverence. The uniform has two main elements, the *Sudreh*, which is a shirt, and *Kushti*, which is a waistband.

The shirt is a loose garment of white cotton, the colour implying *Asha*, the fundamental doctrine of Zoroaster's Faith. It is called *Sudreh*, which means 'the Good Path'. It is usually short-sleeved and reaches down nearly to the knees. It has no collar and is cut low down over the chest; and in the centre there is a small pouch or bag-shaped attachment sewn on. This is called the *gireh-ban*. This is the most important part of the garment, for it is the symbolical repository of the good thoughts, the good words and the good deeds of the wearer.

The *Kushti* is woven out of white lamb's wool and the process of weaving it is a complex one. It is prepared, as a rule, only by women of the priestly class, though nowadays sometimes non-priestly women also may weave it. First, the wool is spun into a fine thread, and two threads of the requisite length are twisted together, symbolising the union of the Two Spirits for manifestation. Then seventy-two such double strands are taken and woven together into a long thin hollow tape. The number seventy-two represents the seventy-two chapters of the *Yasna*, the most important book of the Scriptures. The hollow tape is then turned carefully inside out after which there is a ceremonial washing and finally it is rolled up tightly. Every detail in the preparation of the *Kushti* is symbolical, the seventy-two strands are divided into six groups of twelve each, these numbers also having definite significance.

As worn over the *Sudreh*, the *Kushti* goes round the waist thrice, to signify the three commandments of Zoroaster-*humata, hukhta, huvarshata*. It is secured by 'a sailor's knot' before and behind. Each twist of these knots is meant to bring one important truth to the mind of the wearer: (1) that God is the One Eternal Being, (2) that the *Mazdayasni* Faith is the true Faith, (3) that Zoroaster is the true inspired Prophet of God, and (4) that the wearer shall try to obey the three commandments.

In short, the *Sudreh* and the *Kushti* are emblems that are supposed to remind the wearer that he/she is a valiant soldier of *Ahura Mazda*, and must fight against vices such as envy, anger, lust, greed, etc.

Navjot

The *Navjot* (literally, 'the New Birth') ceremony marks the second birth of the child, i.e., into the Zoroastrian fold. It is rather like the *Upanayanam* ceremony amongst Hindus, except that the both boys and girls are permitted to undergo *Navjot*. The *Navjot* is a confirmation ceremony wherein a new believer is initiated into the Zarthusti (Zoroastrian) Religion. On this auspicious day, the child for the first time wears the sacred 'Sudreh' and 'Kushti' – a white muslin undershirt around which is tied a consecrated hand-woven thread made from lamb's wool. These vestments are unique to the Zoroastrian faith and their ritualistic wearing serves as a daily affirmation of the doctrines of Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Light and Wisdom.

The ceremony, it is enjoined, should take place between the ages of seven and fifteen, but it is rarely postponed beyond the age of puberty and usually the age is between seven and nine. After this investiture the Zoroastrian has to wear the shirt and the girdle day and night (except while bathing), and these constitute the dress of the body of a Zoroastrian when it is carried to the last resting place.

Navjot has two purposes: 1) Priests, relatives etc., invited on the occasion are witnesses to the candidate's "creed". The creed contains the announcement, that the new initiate accepts the religion as revealed to Zoroaster by God. The congregation having approved of this open declaration, the leading priest then offers to the candidate two sacred emblems of the community – *Sudreh* and the *Kushti*. In Iran, this function is called *Sedreh-Pushi*. 2) Having gone through this ceremony, the neophyte is a Parsi by birth and a Zoroastrian by choice.

The formal ceremony has four parts:

- 1) The sacred ablution, preparing the neophyte with purity of the body, and also attuning his mind, so as to benefit from blessings and higher influences. He or she accepts a sacramental drink during this part of the ritual.
- 2) The solemn declaration of the creed and granting of the *Sudreh*.
- 3) The recitation of prescribed verses.

4) The priest showers blessings.

Holy fire is kept burning throughout the function. Both Parsi boys and girls are initiated with a uniform ritual.

Fire Temples

Fire has been worshipped in many communities from ancient times. The cult of fire was common among the Aryans from times of antiquity and was carried over to the nations and communities descended from the ancient Aryans. Thus it is that we find the cult of fire among the Romans in the West, as also among the Zoroastrians in Iran and the Aryans of India. The Romans, for example, had fire priests whose job it was to kindle the fire. The fire of their hearths could not be carried away except for sacred purposes. The hearth of Vesta at the foot of the Palantine Hill in Rome was the sacred centre for the whole Roman State. The eternal fire in it symbolised the presence of God and the protection of Heaven and of the State's existence. So also among the Greeks, there was at Olympia, an altar of Pan, the fire on which was never allowed to be extinguished.

The ancient Germans had an ever-burning lamp placed before the statue of their god Thor. The Jewish religion had its shining flames and burning fires as emblems of God's majesty and presence. "The fire on the altar," said the Lord speaking to Moses, "shall always burn and the priest feed it, putting wood on it every day in the morning. This is the perpetual fire that shall never go out on the altar."

Although Fire occupies an important position in the religious system of Zoroastrians, R. P. Masani [a Parsi commentator] remarks that Zoroaster merely recognized in fire a "type of Immortal Light and the spiritual resurrection of the Soul". He adds, "Nowhere does he [Zoroaster] enjoin the worship of fire". Max Mueller too disposed of the claim sometimes made that Zoroastrians were fire worshippers with the observation "that if the religion of Zoroaster were called fire-worship, the same name would have to be applied to the religion of India, any, even to the religion of the Jews."

Fire temples are unique to the Zoroastrian culture. Originally, there does not appear to have been any fire temples. For example, there is no mention of fire temples in Zoroaster's *Gathas*. Nor is there even an *Avestan* word for fire temples.

It seems the first fire temples were built in the time of the Parthians, and possibly as early as the Achaemenid dynasty. These temples were built atop artificial earthen mounds, but their architecture was open and had no roof. Apparently, the Zoroastrians of those times believed that God could not be shut into walls.

Apart from the fire burning in these minor fire temples of those times, there were supposed to be three Great Fires, said to have been brought forth by

Ahura Mazda. These fires and the minor fires continued to burn in the places they were established, till the Arab conquest of Persia.

After the Arab conquest, fire temples were seized or destroyed, even as the native religion went underground. Zoroastrians then began worshipping fire privately in buildings.

The last Zoroastrian Emperor of Persia, Yazdegard III came to the throne in 632 AD, and he died in 651 AD. After that, the Zoroastrians in Iran were chased from place to place for about fifty years by bigoted Arabs. After this, they are believed to have lived for nearly a hundred years in the mountains of Kohistan, and after that at Hormzud for nearly fifteen years. The first convoy to India arrived at Diu, bringing in a metal urn, one of the great holy fires [Adur Burzen Mihr]. in a metal urn and the implements and apparatus or the Alats to consecrate the Fire. As we saw earlier, these original immigrants then moved from Diu to Sanjan. After successfully settling in Sanjan, as thanks giving they consecrated an Atash-Behram fire dedicated to Behram Yazat and named the fire IranShah meaning King of Iran. The fire continues to burn to this day, for over 1200 years.

During this interim period when the Parsis had not fully settled down in India, they kept moving the holy fire from place to place, before establishing it in Navasari, where they kept it for 318 years.

When the Muslims attacked Gujarat, the fire was moved from Navasari to many places, including the Bahrot caves, and ultimately to its current location at Udwada, where it was established on 27th October, 1742. This fire has been burning ever since, and has been derived from a fire brought to India soon after the Zoroastrians came to India in the seventh century. And that fire brought in a metal urn was derived from another ancient fire whose history is hardly known. Thus, the Udwada is certainly one of the oldest fires we know of!

To get back to the cult of fire embedded in Zoroastrianism, some scholars are of the opinion that Zoroastrians revere God through nature. They perceive Divine presence in the Universe, which is like an image of God. Humans, animals, fire, sky, earth, waters and plants remind one of Nature's architect. So, a Zoroastrian can offer his homage to this Invisible Presence of God all around him.

The visible fire is the material emblem of that energy which is present in all the atoms in the universe and many other flames and light on a higher plane e.g., our vital essence, the pure flame of love and compassion, the intuitional flash guiding us. There is a special prayer that says: "Our Inner Fire may teach and enlighten us as the Monitor." In other words, Inner Fire is equated with Conscience.

In the litany *Atarsh Niyaesh*, the symbol of Fire is personified as the son of *Ahura Mazda*, and in *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, as the most beautiful Body of God. These references are not to the actual physical Fire but to the Divine Spark or

the Inner Fire in man, and therefore the Fire is our Inner Teacher or *Guru*. “Gu’ means darkness and ‘Ru’ means remover or destroyer. The word means He who destroys the Darkness of Ignorance. We see here a very close parallel to certain Vedic concepts, according to which the Fire of *Agni* burns *Agnana* or spiritual ignorance, through the Self-effulgent Illumination within the Heart.

In the Litany of Fire, *Atarsh-Niyaesh* already alluded to, it is also said that the Fire looks at the hand of all those who approach it and asks, “What has the walking friend brought as gift for the sitting Friend? The Sitting Friend is the Inner Fire, and the walking friend is the body which goes forth in the outer world. All actions performed by the body are to be dedicated to the Inner Friend, and thus the fruits of these actions are not desired by the individual. By offering everything to this Inner Friend, one emerges grand, great and Godly.

Fire is also regarded as a symbol of *Asha* [equivalent to Dharma], and the “original light of God”. It is a glowing symbol of God, and thus holds a special place of esteem in the religion. The visible fire is also regarded as a material emblem of many other forms of fire and light on a higher plane, e.g., Pure Love, Compassion, etc. There is a special prayer that says: “Our Inner Fire may teach and enlighten us.” Prayer is often done in front of a fire and consecrated fires are kept perpetually burning in major temples.

A few remarks now about the so-called Fire Temples. There are actually three grades of Zoroastrian temples. They are:

- *Atash-e-Behram*. This is the highest form of consecrated fire, made out of 16 different types of fires, dedicated to the Angel of Victory. There are eight such temples in India (four of which are in Bombay), and one in Iran.
- *Adaran*: This consecrated fire is made out of four different fires, dedicated to the Angel Adar, who confers joy and courage.
- *Dadgah* or the hearth fire is an unconsecrated house fire. The Temple in which this fire is enthroned is called Dar-e-Meher. This temple is dedicated to the Angel *Mithra* presiding over Truth and Justice. It is in this temple that priest in charge administers oaths and delivers judgements on disputed matters.

In Zoroastrian temples, there is a fire in the innermost sanctum sanctorum,, that is always kept burning by a priest. Non-Zoroastrians are not allowed to enter the temple, out of fear that someone not of the faith, might pollute the place. The typical Zoroastrian devotee enters the temple after a wash, says certain prayers and offers a donation and an offering of sandalwood, before entering the room with the fire. There the sandalwood is offered to the sacred fire. The offering is the symbolic gift made to the sitting friend by the walking friend – alluded to above. The rooms are tiled mostly in marble, and sparse in decoration. There are about 60 such temples all over the world out of which about 48 are located in India.

Marriage

The state of matrimony has always been regarded as the most important part of life by all Aryans. In the *Vendidad* it is clearly stated that *Ahura Mazda* is better pleased with a married man than with an unmarried one, and that He is better pleased with a man having progeny than with one who has none. It has always been regarded as the bounden duty of the Zoroastrian to marry and to bring up a family, and thus to ensure the continuance of the race and the religion.

Parsi marriages are celebrated immediately after sunset. The essential part of the ceremony consists of the recital three times of the marriage contract by the officiating priest. The original formula is in the Pahlavi language, which was the language of Iran at the time of the Arab conquest. The same ceremony is often repeated in Sanskrit as well, out of deference to a promise given to the king of Gujarat who gave asylum, that the marriage ceremony should also be conducted in a language intelligible to the rulers of the land where they had been permitted to settle down.

The actual marriage ritual has much in common with Hindu practices. To start with, the couple go through preparatory rites that involve ablution, prayer etc. They then proceed to the wedding hall where they are received with *Aarathi* in the Indian style. The bride and the groom sit opposite to each other with a temporary veil between them. This typifies the initial stage of Divine Creation, with the groom representing the Spirit and the bride representing Matter. Their palms are then joined, symbolizing abiding promise. All along there is chanting by the priests. The veil is then removed, after which the bride sits next to the groom. Then follows the essential part of the marriage ceremony. Basically, it consists of questions from the Priest to the witness of the bridegroom and of the bride. The questions and answers proceed as follows:

The Priest: 'In the presence of this assembly, that has met together in the city of, on the....day of month of the year....of the Emperor Yazdagard Shahriar of the Sasanian dynasty of auspicious Iran, say whether you have agreed to take this maiden named....in marriage for this bridegroom, in accordance with the rites and customs of the Mazda worshippers, promising to pay her 2,000 dirams of pure white silver and two dinars of standard gold of Nishapur coinage?

The Witness of Bridegroom: "I have."

The Priest: 'And have you and your family with pure mind and truthful thoughts, words and deeds and for the increase of righteousness, agreed to give for ever and aye, this bride in marriage to?

The Witness of Bride: "I have agreed."

The Priest to the couple: "Have you desired to enter into this contract with pure mind and until Death do ye part?"

Both reply: "We have agreed".

The rest of the ceremony is the invocation of the blessings of God and of the *Amesha-Spentas* and of the *Yazatas* upon the newly joined couple and an address from the Priest to them as to their conduct in life. This part of the ceremony is in fact called *Ashirwad*, the Sanskrit word for blessing.

Conversion

Though the message of Zarathushtra is universal and the Zoroastrian religion is considered to be a religion of choice "Daena Vanghuim", there is a rule amongst Parsis that to be a Parsi [read Zoroastrian], one must be born a Parsi; there is no such thing as conversion. It is not clear whether such a practice is integral to the religion or was a custom adopted by the Parsis, when they were granted refuge in India. Some historians believe that when they were granted asylum, the local ruler stipulated that Parsis shall not spread their religion through conversion. Others, however dispute this view and say that the ban on conversion is integral to the religion. Dr. R. Karanjia, Principal of the *Dadar Athornan Madressa*, a school that imparts religious education, says that conversion is a non-issue. "Zoroastrianism is an ethnic religion. We believe that religion is decided by birth."

Inevitably, the passage of time has weakened the orthodoxy and many reformists want to change the diktat that one has to be born a Parsi. In the twentieth century, to some extent this rule of the faith was relaxed for children born of Parsi fathers and non-Parsi mothers. But the rule is rigidly adhered to if the opposite is the case. Reformists now advocate the following: a Parsi woman either married to or divorced from a non-Parsi man be allowed to practice her faith; a child born of a marriage between a non-Parsi man and a Parsi woman be accepted into the faith; the community accept conversion to Zoroastrianism.

The issue of conversion came to a head when Ratan Tata, the father of the famous industrialist J.R.D Tata married a French woman named Suzanne. Finally, Suzanne went through the *Navjot* ceremony and changed her name to Sooni. Everybody thought that Suzanne/Sooni had been converted and was now a Parsi. But when Sooni tried to enter a fire temple, she was denied entry, ironically by the very same priests who had officiated during the *Navjot* ceremony.

Following this, the Bombay Parsi Panchayat filed a suit in the Bombay High Court, contending that the so-called conversion of Suzanne to Zoroastrianism was invalid and that Zoroastrians had never carried out religious conversions in accordance with the promise given to the ruler who gave asylum to the first Zoroastrians.

Justices Davar and Beamon, who presided over the case, traced the history of Parsis and came to the conclusion that the ban on conversion was not integral to the religion. The verdict was, however, strongly disputed by the orthodoxy, who never really accepted Sooni as a Parsi.

The issue of conversions evokes strong opinions. The late Dastur Peshotan Peer, a hardliner, said that Parsis who married outside the community were “living in adultery”. The choice, he said, was clear: “If Parsis marry non-Parsis, they should no longer consider themselves part of the community.” Peer was firm in his conviction that conversion is forbidden by the religious texts. He argued: “Zoroastrians left Iran to preserve their religion and to preserve the purity of their blood and race. To marry into other faiths is to betray our ancestors.”

The Association of Inter-Married Zoroastrians (AMZ) was formed to “protect and safeguard the rights, privileges and benefits of Parsi Zoroastrians married outside their group”. With regard to the rights of children born to Parsi mothers and non-Parsi fathers, the AMZ asks that children of such a marriage be allowed to have their *Navjotes* openly in *baugs* (traditional areas for ceremonies, often in the compound of a fire temple) and that they be accepted as Zoroastrians. The AMZ contends that if the spouse has no objection to this arrangement, there is no reason why anyone should object.

Notwithstanding all this, prejudice often reigns strong. One such high-profile controversy concerned the Bombay Parsi Panchayat’s refusal to allow a Parsi woman who had married a Hindu Gujarati to be given the last rites at the Tower of Silence. It was only after a great din was created by the community that the Panchayat rescinded its decision and allowed the rites on the basis of an affidavit by the next of kin swearing that the deceased had been a practicing Zoroastrian.

In 1994 an almost complete turnaround of this attitude was seen in the case of Nusli Wadia. This story is very interesting. It starts with Neville Wadia, a member of the Wadia family converting to Christianity way back, and adopting the name Neville. In due course, Neville married Dina, the daughter of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, then a resident of Bombay. Later Jinnah was to become the founder of Pakistan. Jinnah was furious when he learnt that his daughter wanted to marry a Parsi/Christian. He tersely asked her, “When there are millions of Muslim boys to choose from, do you have to marry this non-Muslim?” Dina was ready with a reply, based on the fact that her father had married a Parsi woman named Rattanbai. She asked, “Father, when there were millions of Muslim girls to choose from why did you marry a non-Muslim?” Jinnah did not like what his daughter said. He merely muttered, “But she became a Muslim afterwards.”

Neville and Dina had a son Nusli and in 1994 Nusli went through the *Navjot* ceremony to become a Zoroastrian! This time, the orthodoxy did not raise a rumpus; on the other hand, this conversion back to the ancestral religion was widely welcomed.

Jurist Nani Palkivala observes: “One of the wonders of Zoroastrianism is that it places great emphasis on the freedom to choose. And apart from this, both the Constitution of India and the Special Marriages Act, 1954 ensure equality between the sexes. Yet there is a marked discrimination between intermarried males and females among Parsis.”

While the reformists argue that they are not bent on changing the precepts of the religion but are merely trying to ensure its continuance, the orthodoxy sees these changes as sacrilege. Dastur Dr. Firoze Kotwal, one of the seven high priests, said: "We have to preserve the identity and purity of our race. I say this entirely from a religious perspective and not from any contempt towards other races or peoples."

There is one argument in favour of preserving the racial stock. Another opinion is that racial purity should be secondary to the continuance of the religion. Noshir Dadrawalla, who edits a pamphlet called *Deen Parast* (The Faithful), disputes the argument that the religion is dying. He says: "We have survived Alexander, we have survived the Arabs. We have lost empires. We have lost the status of being a state religion but we have always risen from the ashes. There is absolutely no reason why we cannot survive." Dadrawalla believes that the parameter for this survival is religion. "It is religion that gives a well-defined code of living and regulates the community's social life. Unless we see Zoroastrianism as a vital factor in our daily lives, our survival is endangered. We must strengthen our sense of community and set aside individualism." Dadrawalla has no hesitation in identifying intermarriage as "the greatest threat to the community". His comment is also a reference to the late age at which most *Parsis* marry and to the prevalence of single-child families.

While purists want orthodoxy, many worry that if there is such a rigid structure, *Parsis*, whose numbers are constantly diminishing, would soon become extinct. The community places a high premium on education, viewing marriage as secondary to it. Its members postpone marriage until they can afford housing. The result is late marriage and fewer children. Statistics available with *Parsiana*, a community magazine with a balanced perspective, show that of every 100 women between the ages of 19 and 45, roughly 30 per cent do not marry at all, 20 per cent marry outside the religion, and of the remaining 50 per cent (who do marry and do so within the community), the total number of children borne do not exceed their own numbers.

Water in Zoroastrianism

Having descended from the Aryans, Zoroastrians, like their Hindu counterparts, venerate water. Of course, Zoroaster proclaimed that there was only one God, but, as already noted, allowed room for deities and angels who would do God's work here on earth. It is said that Ahura Mazda Himself called upon Zoroaster to revere Aredvi Sura Anahita, a mighty goddess who represented a mythical river, pointing out that water is essential for life, for crops, for generating wealth etc.

The homage originally offered to the pure waters of natural springs was later extended also to wells and rivers. In turn, this inspired many *Parsis* to dig wells for public use. In this context, particular mention ought to be made of Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy who lived in the eighteenth century. Jeejeebhoy was born in a poor family but with determination learnt many languages including English. Full of enterprise, he visited China, entered into various business

deals, and made a lot of money. Unfortunately for him, there was a disastrous fire in the Fort area [a walled city built by the British] where he lived. And in that fire, Jeejeebhoy lost most of his possessions. Undeterred, he again went to China and earned a lot of wealth – two crores of rupees, which at that time was like having billions of dollars!

But like most Parsis, Jeejeebhoy gave liberally to many public charities, over a hundred of them. He founded, among other things, the Sir J. J. School of Arts, the Sir J. J. School of Architecture, and the Sir J. J. School of Commercial Art, which exist to this day. As his fame spread, the residents of Poona approached him to build a bund in order to contain the raging waters of the Mulla and Mutha rivers, and the kind man obliged. He built wells and tanks all over Bombay, hospitals and schools in Surat and Navsari, Agiaries (Temples of worship) in Bombay and Poona. His charity was not just confined to human beings. He contributed Rs. 80,000 to a shelter for animals, distributed money for the feeding of stray dogs, and built water places for cattle and horses.

By way of highlighting Parsi veneration for the elements, we quote the following passage due to Andrew Carnegie [extracted from Masani's invaluable book *The Religion of The Good Life: Zoroastrianism*, already referred to.]

“This evening, we were more surprised to see, as we strolled along the beach, more Parsee ladies, richly dressed, all wending their way towards the sea..... Here on the shore of the ocean, as the Sun was sinking in the sea, and the slender silver thread of the crescent Moon was faintly shining on the horizon, they congregated to perform their religious rites. Fire was there in the grandest form, the setting Sun, and water in the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean outstretched before them. The Earth was under their feet, and, wafted across the sea, the air came laden with the perfumes of “Araby the Blest”. Surely, no time or place could be more fitly chosen than this for lifting up the soul to the realms beyond the seas. I could not but participate with these worshippers in what was so grandly beautiful!”

Disposal of the Dead

As in the case of all religions, the funeral ceremonies of the Parsis are conveniently discussed under two headings:

- (a) Disposal of the dead.
- (b) Ceremonies relating the Soul

The Zoroastrian system for disposal of dead bodies is unique in the world. It is based on the Zoroastrian principle that the elements, fire, water, and earth must never be defiled and be maintained pure. It is thus enjoined that after death, the body of the person must be disposed off in such a manner as not to defile the elements or to injure the living. The guiding principle is: sanitation, segregation, and purification. The actual procedure adopted combines the features of economy, hygiene and speed.

In ancient Iran, mountaintops were utilised for the disposal. Large voracious birds like the vultures would eat the flesh and sinews, leaving only the skeleton. The bones remained exposed for a year until they became quite dry. They were then buried as “bone meal manure” in fields; no tombs were permitted on the spot.

The distinguishing features of the system are:

- Speedy disposal of the fleshy parts. It takes about 25 minutes for the birds to finish the corpse.
- It is economical in the sense that disposal by birds costs nothing and is free.
- It has the element of charity in offering food to hungry birds.
- It displays the ideal of equality. The remains of the rich and the poor lie side by side in niches on a common platform.

The birds never attack the corpse-bearers. They wait in the walls until the body is laid out for them. In the absence of a monument etc., death is treated without fuss as a natural phenomenon ordained by God.

In keeping with this ancient custom, the Parsis of India erected enclosures known as Towers of Silence, within which the bodies of the dead are disposed of in accordance with stipulated procedures. In the Towers, vultures come and eat the flesh. The Towers are also intended to utilise the sterilizing rays of the Sun, and the system is called *Khushed-negireshna*, meaning exposure to the sun in order to return the body's vital essence to its source. The Tower is so designed that none of the elements, air, water, earth or fire are polluted by decaying flesh. Even rainwater is not allowed to issue from the tower to surrounding fields. It enters underground wells through special filters.

A good example of a Parsi Tower of Silence is the one in Bombay/Mumbai. It is a massive stone structure, round in shape. A few steps from the ground lead to a massive iron gate that opens onto a circular platform of solid stone with a well in the middle. The circular platform inside the Tower is about a hundred metres in circumference, and divided into three rows of shallow, open receptacles. The first row is used for corpses of men, the second for corpses of women, and the third for corpses of children. In the compound of the Tower there is a small building called *sagri*, where a sacred fire is kept burning day and night.

A few words now about the final ceremonies. Soon after death, the corpse is washed and a clean suit of clothes is put around it. The *Kushti* or the sacred thread is then put around the body with a prayer. The corpse is placed on the ground in a corner of the front room on large slabs of stone or impermeable hard, dry clods of earth. Three circles or *Kashas* are drawn around the corpse to mark the space reserved for the corpse while chanting the prayers, to keep the putrefying bacteria enclosed, so that it does not harm the living beings.

The dead body is then shown to a dog with two eye-like spots above the eyes. Such a dog is supposed to have four eyes [*chatur chasma*]. This “four-eyed” dog is supposed to have the faculty to detect whether life in the body is extinct or not. If the dog stares steadily at the body, then life is not extinct; if the dog does not look at the body, the life is gone.

Fire is then brought into the room and kept burning with sandalwood. A priest sitting before the fire, chants verses from the Avestan texts. The body must be moved to the Tower before sunset, as the body must be exposed to the Sun.

After relatives and others gathered have paid their last respects, the face of the body is covered with a piece of cloth. The body is then secured to the bier, and removed to the Tower. Inside the Tower, the pall bearers place the dead body in the space reserved for it. The clothes are then torn off and the body is placed finally on the floor of the Tower. Naked one comes into the world and naked one must leave – that is the idea.

As regards Zoroastrian belief concerning the soul of the dead, the soul is supposed to linger within the precincts of this world for three nights. Special prayers are therefore said for the soul of the departed during these three days. On the dawn of the third night, the soul is believed to pass to the other world, crossing the bridge called *Chinvat*. The bridge is supposed to be guarded by *Mithra*.

Zoroastrian religion is the first religion, which gave the concept of heaven and hell to the world. The word paradise comes from the Avestan word “Paradi”. Heaven and Hell are not considered as different geographical regions. It is the consciousness of the soul “Baodang” which as per the earthly life led by the deceased, makes it feel like it is in Paradise or otherwise.

Here at the border crossing, the actions of the dead person are evaluated. If the good deeds outweigh the bad even by a miniscule amount, the soul is allowed to pass over the bridge into Paradise. If the good and bad deeds exactly balance, the soul is directed to a place called *Hamestagan* [something like Purgatory, perhaps]. But if the bad deeds outweigh the good even by the tiniest amount, the soul is hurled deep down into the abyss of hell.

Zoroastrians also believe that the spirit of the dead continues to take interest in the surviving members of the family. If the surviving members cherish the memory of the departed soul, remember him/her with gratitude, and try to please with good thoughts, meritorious deeds etc., the departed soul takes interest in their welfare. Days are set apart for remembrance of the dead, during which charity is given, and prayers offered.

As already mentioned, most of the Parsis live in Bombay/Mumbai, which has now become highly urbanised and immensely crowded. In earlier times, the Towers were outside the residential areas but now, with the phenomenal growth of the metro, the Towers are in the midst of the city. Vultures avoid crowds and have become almost extinct. Thus, Towers have become a health hazard. Special efforts are on to breed carnivorous vultures. Meanwhile, many

enlightened Parsis are opting for cremation these days. These developments are causing concern to elders and religious heads of a fast diminishing community whose birth rate has fallen ominously down.

POST SCRIPT

This is our first attempt at taking a comprehensive look at some of the leading religions of the world. We are aware that our presentation might not be as complete as it could be, and we trust you would generously overlook that limitation. Even so, we do believe that most of you would find something new that you did not know before. Speaking for ourselves, two points strike us. The first is how Universal in concept Zoroastrianism is, in terms of One Universal and Omnipresent God, how compassion, humility, and all such virtues must form the core of one's life, etc. The second point is how such a great religion that once had so many followers and dominated large parts of the Middle East is now almost extinct, because its followers are rapidly diminishing in numbers to the point of vanishing almost completely.

Do write to us and tell us what you think of this article, what you liked about it, what you did not quite approve of, what you would like to see in future articles etc. We always consider it a privilege to serve you, and we thought that telling you something about the different religions could be one of the ways of rendering service. We hope you liked our effort.

Jai Sai Ram.

SGH TEAM.

FEATURE ARTICLES

Prashanti Musings - Concerning To The Vedas – 07

LIFE IN VEDIC TIMES – DIVINE VENERATION FOR EVERY OCCASION

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

Introduction

Last time, I gave you a glimpse of some of the rites associated with Vedic marriage. Marriage, I reminded you, was seen then as an act that related to the sustenance of *Dharma* and of humanity. In this venture, the husband and wife were joint stakeholders. This is an important concept and we should make some effort to absorb its essence. Today all such thinking might seem irrelevant and even nonsensical but the ancients had a different view of life and Society. Yes, if the emphasis is entirely on the individual and his so-called liberty to do as he or she pleases, then all these Vedic concepts would appear outdated. On the other hand, if we feel that humans must be in total harmony with their surroundings, then the Vedic concepts do acquire great importance.

The *Rig Veda* sings the praise of a harmonious couple thus:

*Husband and wife in sweet accord,
Give milk to the Gods,
And press and strain the Soma.*

*They acquire a plenteous store of food,
They come united to the altar,
Their rewards never lessen.*

*They do not wander from the Gods,
Or seek to hide their favours granted,
Thus they acquire great glory.*

*With sons and daughters at their side,
They live a good long span of years,
Both decked with precious gold.*

*Devoted to sacrifice, gathering wealth,
They serve the Immortal and honour the Gods,
United in mutual love.*

One unfortunate thing that has happened in recent times is that the modern generation's view of the *Vedas* and Vedic customs has been shaped entirely by what happened subsequent to the early Vedic period. It was in that period that many aberrations

crept in, masking the original intentions of the Vedic seers. Few realise that systems and organisations often start off splendidly but later suffer atrophy. This happens whenever people get cut off from the original objectives. Such degradation has happened repeatedly in history, in organisations, in social systems, and in governments; and it has happened all over the world. However, where people have been watchful, systems have retained their original character for extended periods of time.

I am mentioning all this for a good reason. **There is a popular belief in India that the Vedas explicitly prohibit women from doing many things. This is not true. In Vedic times, the husband and the wife had equal rights.** In fact, Swami sometimes narrates a story relating to King Harishchandra to stress this.

I will not go into the whole of the Harishchandra story though it is very important as well as fascinating; my interest in that story in the present context is very limited. Briefly speaking, you may recall that King Harishchandra was being put through a series of gruelling tests by Sage Viswamitra to see if the King really abided by Truth. In one incident, the King is forced to give away all his property to the Sage. When the King prepares to formally hand over, the Sage stops him and says, "You cannot give it away just like that. Your wife has fifty percent share, and she too must consent." What I am driving at is that the family was a joint venture and not what it became later, a patriarchal one.

Swami often talks about education for life rather than just living. In a sense, that is exactly what the Vedas offer. The thousands and thousands of hymns cater to all aspects of life, keeping in mind the centrality of God. Society can never be made up of just geniuses; ordinary people too are very much needed for the existence of Society, and without them Society just cannot function. And these ordinary people, by their very nature and outlook, cannot be expected to understand high philosophy. Yet, they do need a code of life suited to them but based on the highest principles. Thus it is there are Vedic prayers for everybody and for every occasion.

Vedic Prayers for the Home

Let us start with the home. The craving for a home has been there from time immemorial. In Vedic times, the home was seen as an extension of the body, rather than as something that was a property that belonged to a particular person. The home was considered to be the first real extension of man's world. To take leave of the home was to take leave of the world. Thus it is that the ascetic who renounced the world left the home for ever as a symbolic gesture.

Hymns in dedication of the home are many. Here is a sample that gives the feelings that prevailed when a person occupied the house he has built. He says in invocation, with the assistance of a priest of course:

*This house is founded on worship,
Designed and built by the wise.
May Indra and Agni the Immortals
Protect this house, the abode of Soma.*

Notice the house is not described as the property of the one who built it but as the House of Soma, one of the names of Siva. The prayer continues:

*Facing you, O House who is facing me,
I approach you peacefully.
Sacred fire and water are within,
The main doors Cosmic Order.*

*I bring here these waters free from disease,
Destroyers of disease,
In this House, together with Fire Immortal,
I take up my abode.*

*From the eastern direction, I summon a blessing
To the glory of this House.
Praise to the Gods, the praiseworthy,
For ever and for ever.*

*From the southern direction,
From the western direction,
From the northern direction,
From the depths below,
From the heights above,
I summon a blessing,
To the glory of this House,
Praise to the Gods, the praiseworthy,
For ever and for ever.*

God is always the sole provider and Vedic seers made sure that ordinary people were continuously reminded of that through various prayers chanted on various occasions.

Prayers for a Long life

For example, here is a prayer to God for a long and happy life that everyone aspires for. This prayer is addressed to the Rudra aspect of God. We need not go into the technicalities, but for our

purpose, it is enough to say that Rudra is synonymous with Lord Siva. A selection of hymns from this prayer to Lord Siva follows:

*O Father of Storms, may Your favour fall on us!
Do not deprive us of the sight of the sun.
May the hero mounted on his charger spare us.
Grant us, O God, to live forth in our children.*

*How I long, O God, for the gracious touch
Of your hand which heals and brings refreshment,
Which softens the chastisements of the Gods,
Regard me, O Mighty One, with an indulgent eye.*

*As a son salutes with reverence his father,
So I bow down, O God, at Your approach.
I praise You, mighty Lord, giver of treasures,
Grant us Your medicines when we extol You.*

*O mighty Power, the God who never slumbers,
Be here attentive, O Lord; hear our cry.
Not for You, O God, to be angry or destroy!
May we speak, as men of valour, a strong word.*

Prayers for a Regulated Life - The Purusharthas

Desire is a part of existence, and no living creature is exempt from it. Some desires are in-built, like the desire for survival, for example. Feelings of thirst and hunger are so intimately connected with life, that one does not discuss these instincts in terms of desires. But desires there certainly are, like the desire for progeny, desire for house, desire for property and so on. While those spiritually evolved can break free from desires, it is impractical to expect the ordinary folk to do so, including those who have studied the *Vedas*.

Recognising this, Vedic Society sought to regulate desires rather than to totally eliminate them. This regulation was recommended through the *Purusharthas*, to which Swami often makes a reference. The four *Purusharthas* are: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*. They mean: Righteousness, wealth, desires, and liberation.

Notice that the starting point is *Dharma*. What it means is that whatever it is that one does in life, it must be based on *Dharma*; no exemptions from that. One may seek wealth, but within the bounds of *Dharma*. Desires one might have but again within the bounds of *Dharma*. And if *Dharma* is made the beacon of life, then one can aspire for liberation from the recurring cycle of birth and death.

The constant stress on *Dharma* is noteworthy. Scholars tell us that there really is no such thing as Hinduism in the sense one has say Judaism, Christianity, Islam etc. The word Hinduism in fact came into existence only after the advent of the British. What is popularly referred to as Hinduism is actually a way of life called *Sanathana Dharma*, meaning essentially Timeless and Eternal *Dharma*. Within a basic framework, *Sanathana Dharma* offered considerable flexibility. It is also noteworthy that while most religions have a founder, *Sanathana Dharma* has none.

A Sacred Attitude to the Earth

The importance of food for life and existence was fully recognised, and food was thus revered in the Vedic age as the gift of God. Not merely that. All aspects of human activity associated with the production of food were duly sanctified, and all agencies of Nature that assist in food production were duly revered. Here is a sample of the hymns chanted at the time of ploughing the field. The hymns are addressed to *Kshetrapati*, the Lord of the Field.

*We, with the Lord of the Field as the friend,
And helper, obtain for our cattle and horses,
Food in plenty, that they may be well fed.
May the Lord graciously grant us His favour!*

*O Lord of the Field, like a cow yielding milk,
Pour forth upon us copious rivers of sweetness,
Dripping honey like nectar and pure as ghee,
May the Lord grant us mercy!*

*Plough and ploughshare, to our chant be propitious!
Take of the milk you have made in heaven
And let it fall here on earth.*

*Auspicious furrow, we venerate you.
We pray you, come near us to prosper and bless
And bring abundant harvests.*

*In contentment may the ploughshare turn up sod,
In contentment, the ploughman follow the oxen,
Celestial rain pour down honey and water,
Ploughshare and Plough, grant us joy.*

There is in many cultures a thanksgiving prayer after a bountiful harvest but the people of Vedic times, chanted a prayer even as they were ploughing.

Invocation to the God of Rain

Let me now turn to rain. If there were no rain, life on earth simply cannot exist. Rain was personified as the god Parjanya, and many are the verses sung in praise of Parjanya. He is adored, venerated and also feared. He can be gentle and also fearsome. He has to be propitiated appropriately because without him life is not possible. Here are some verses sung in his praise:

*Invoke with this song, the powerful God,
The renowned Parjanya; win him by your worship.
Like a bellowing bull with quickening streams
He deposits a seed of life in the plants.*

*He flattens trees and smites the demons;
The whole world fears his powerful stroke.
Even the innocent flee from this God's strength,
When Parjanya thundering strikes the wicked.
Like a driver urging with a whip,
We see him driving his heralds of storm.
From afar is heard the roar of the lion
When Parjanya makes the heavy rain clouds.*

*The winds burst forth, the lightnings flash,
The plants shoot up, the heavens stream,
The sap surges up every stem,
When Parjanya quickens the earth with his seed.*

*You, at whose bidding the earth bows low,
You, at whose bidding the hoofed creatures scamper,
You, at whose bidding the flowers don various colours
and shapes,
O Parjanya! Grant us protection.*

*Gladden us, O Storm God, with rain from heaven;
May the stallion emit his life-producing flow,
Bring here your thunder and pour forth the rain,
You are Divine our heavenly Father!*

Rain is necessary no doubt, but too much rain can also be a problem. So, there is a special appeal when the downpour is excessive.

*You have poured down the rain;
Now withhold it we pray you!
You have made the deserts fit for travel.
To serve as food you have made the plants flourish.
Receive from us in return grateful praise.*

This is just one example from the vast collection that the *Vedas* represent. Every gift of God is respectfully acknowledged. Poets have written about rain and storm but one does not hear of thanksgiving to every aspect of Nature in this vein. I may be completely wrong but till today, I have not come across any adoration in any other culture that matches that which can be found in the *Vedas*.

It is amazing that nothing auspicious or good was ever done without first propitiating the gods. Mercifully, at least some of these customs have survived to this day. When a child is born, there is a remembrance of the Lord and prayers addressed to Him. I have already made a reference to this in an earlier article [[Click here to read that again](#)]. There are similar expressions of gratitude at every stage in the child's life, for example, when it is given a name, when it is given the first morsel of solid food, when it is taught the first alphabet, and so on.

When a house is built, there is a ritual called *Bhoomi Pooja* at the time the ground is broken. Likewise, when the house is completed and is to be occupied, there is a similar ritual involving thanksgiving. So on it goes. Today's sceptic might argue: "All this might have been OK in an age when we did not understand the forces of Nature, but they are clearly meaningless in today's world." This view stems basically from the negation of the Creator. Swami says, if there is a watch, there surely must have been a watchmaker. If a small thing like a watch needs a maker, does it not follow that the Universe too must have a Creator? Could it have popped from nowhere just like that?

We see here a fundamental difference in the outlook of people of modern times as compared with people of the Vedic era. The modern outlook is largely analytic, where the whole is seen in terms of parts. The Vedic approach is just the opposite, being entirely holistic. Everything - man, Nature etc., is seen as an integrated whole, with God in the centre. God thus is not only central to everything but also most essential. Anything, or activity, without God was just inconceivable.

Veneration to Breath

Consider, for example, how breath was venerated. Breath, we all know, is synonymous with life, and life is a gift of God. Yet, where else can one find a celebration of breath except in the *Vedas*? Here are a few hymns in praise of breath:

Praise to the Breath of Life!
He rules this world,
Master of all things,
On which all things are based.

*Praise to you Breath of Life,
Breathing both in and out!
To your turning this side and to that,
To the whole of you, praise.*

*Breath of Life clothes all beings with care
As a father his son;
Master of all things,
Whether they breathe or not.*

*Of all that is born, is he Lord,
Of all that moves, is he Lord.
Of swift bow like the rest,
To you, O Breath of Life, homage!*

*Breath of Life, do not forsake me.
You are, indeed, I.
Like the Embryo of the Waters
I bind you to me that I may live!*

Raimundo Panickkar, whose work, let me remind you, is what I am basing these talks on, says the phrase “You are indeed I”, is an echo of Upanishadic philosophy that the individual is in fact God. This is an important point. Life is God, and when *Praana* is equated with the Self, it means Self is God.

Time – Verily God

Let me next consider Time. St. Augustine says, “I know what Time is but cannot describe it.” A modern physicist would describe Time as one of the four dimensions of space-time. But for people of the Vedic age, Time was verily God. Here are a few verses in praise of Time.

*In Time is Consciousness and Life,
In Time is concentrated Name.
By Time, when He draws close at hand,
All creatures with gladness are filled.*

*In Time is energy, in Time the highest good.
In Time is the holy utterance.
Time is the Lord of all that is,
The Father, he of the Creator.*

*Time created the creatures,
Time created in the beginning the Lord of the creatures,
From Time comes the self-existent.
Energy likewise from Time derives.*

Those were some verses from the *Atharvana Veda*. Now a couple more from the *Maitri Upanishad*, once again on Time:

*From Time all things emerge,
From Time they advance and grow,
In Time, too, they come to rest,
Time is embodied and also bodiless.*

*It is Time that cooks all created things,
In the vast cauldron of His great Self,
In what, however, is this same Time cooked?
He who knows this, knows the whole Vedas!*

With today's scientific knowledge, we may pick holes here and there in the above verses, but no one can take away the fact that the ancients revered Time as God and also understood that Time itself was a creation of the Absolute God. Superstition, stupidity? So it would appear from today's perspective but from the holistic point of view that dominated Vedic life, such adoration and acknowledgement represented the height of wisdom.

Death and Rebirth

I now come to death and the last journey. There are many *Mantras* and rites associated with death. Having evolved over centuries, they reflect the attitude at various times. Panickkar says that in the Vedic *Mantras* chanted during a funeral, there is no sign of grief. The hymns are markedly sober in tone. There is no regret, and death is seen as an event that unites the dead person with his forefathers. Here is a sample of such hymns:

*Proceed, proceed along the ancient pathways
Whereon our forefathers have passed before us.
There you shall see God Varuna and Yama,
The two kings, rejoice in the offerings.*

*Meet Yama and the Fathers in the highest heaven
Along with your offerings and praiseworthy deeds.
Rid of imperfection, seek again your dwelling
And assume a body, bright with glory.*

As can be seen, there is a clear reference to rebirth. Here are some hymns that make this aspect more explicit.

*Your spirit which has gone far
To Yama, son of Vivasvat,
May it return to you again
That it may live and dwell here.*

Your spirit which has gone afar

*To heaven and earth,
May it return to you again
That it may live and dwell here.*

*Your spirit which has gone afar
To the four corners of the earth,
May it return to you again
That it may live and dwell here.*

*Your spirit which has gone afar,
To the four directions of space,
May it return to you again
That it may live and dwell here.*

*Your spirit which has gone afar,
To the waves of the ocean,
May it return to you again
That it may live and dwell here.*

*Your spirit which has gone afar,
To the farthest realms,
May it return to you again
That it may live and dwell here.*

The *Sathapatha Brahmana* too views death as a mere prelude to birth. It says:

*Of a truth, a man is born three times over.
First he is born from his mother and father.
He is born a second time
While performing the sacrifice that is his share.
He is born a third time, when he dies
And they place him on the pyre,
For proceeding to a new existence.
Therefore they say: "Man is born three times!"*

The question might arise: these hymns seem to focus on rebirth whereas the highest Upanishadic truths direct attention to Immortality. That is a valid point, and may be I shall start my next article on that note. For the present, let me hope that I have, to some extent at least, managed to give you a broad brush overview of the Vedic heritage, guided by Panickkar's monumental work.

Jai Sai Ram.

Heart2Heart Team

PRIMORDIAL DEITY - POWERFUL INSPIRATION

By Dr. T Ravi Kumar

Introduction: The Six dimensions of Religion

Every major religion has six dimensions. These are: ritual, doctrine, ethics, social, experiential aspects and mythology. *Ritual* forms an important part in all religions. But these differ from religion to religion. In *doctrine* or theology, beliefs and religious experiences are systematised. Religions also have a tendency to incorporate moral codes and this is how the *ethical dimension* of religion arises. Religions tend to be organised in institutional form and so there is a social aspect. All major religions have a *mythological* component. The core of all religions, though, is the experiential element. The word 'myth' has often come to be known particularly in the west as something not true or factual. A myth is a story which encapsulates something believed to be true by a large group of people bound together by common beliefs. In using a form of story the myth does not concede that it is 'only a story'. It tries to find a way of conveying a truth too profound to be dealt with in a matter-of-fact manner. It may not be something that can be measured or analyzed in an empirical way. The western world because of the dramatic impact of science and technology is suspicious of anything not literally true and too hastily discards myths.

The Symbolism of Lord Ganesha

There is a grand mythology surrounding Lord Ganesha. The very image of Lord Ganesha invokes awe and surprise. He has a huge body matched by a huge head. His vehicle is a small mouse. A large trunk and two tusks, one half broken. He holds in his hands a noose, a goad, a plate of sweets and in the fourth hand holds forth the promise of *abhaya*. All these have messages for us.

The noose in his hands reminds us that our attachments must be under our control. We should not get too attached to fleeting objects of the world. The goad is the device a mahout uses to discipline the elephant. By holding the goad in His hands, Ganesha teaches us that self discipline is the best discipline. The *abhaya hasta* reminds us that we are all safe and under His protection. Lastly the plate of sweets reminds us that life is meant to be enjoyed. It is God's gift to us and like all of His gifts it is extremely valuable.

Irrespective of the incongruities of the form He has a large following. All denizens of the three worlds worship him and no activity is started without His consent. He is the one whose worship is multi-religious and multi-cultural. There are images of Ganesha found in Churches in New York as well as in Indonesia.

Mother Parvati Creates Ganesha

People celebrate his birthday with great joy and religious fervor. The advent of Ganesha is lost in the mists of time but He is mentioned even in Vedic literature. The mythological story relating to His birth is well known. Goddess Parvathi wanted a reliable person to ensure that her privacy is not intruded and so created a baby from her own body and breathed life into it. And the baby boy was very handsome and brave. She armed him and asked him to stand guard. Lord Shiva returned from his meditation and wanted to enter the house. The boy challenged him and no amount of persuasion worked. Lord Shiva ordered his *ganas* to wage war. But the boy was too hot to handle even for the *ganas* and their leaders who beat a hasty retreat. It required almighty Shiva Himself to behead him. Parvathi entered at that very moment and saw her creation destroyed and was distraught. The Lord offered to restore the life of the kid with the head of any being lying down with his head pointing south and thus Ganesha received an elephant's head.

This story is just symbolic. It shows we are created for God's own pleasure and have a role to play in this world. Utter loyalty to the mother ensures Her blessings and invincibility. The beheading and subsequent crowning with an elephant head may just be symbolic of bookish knowledge being converted to practical knowledge, of knowledge being converted to wisdom.

Shiva's choice of an elephant's head is to show us that we should be intelligent in our choice. Sai Geeta seems to be smarter than us as she pines incessantly for Swami's presence. In the olden days when Swami used to go to Brindavan for the summer, Sai Geeta would shed tears and not eat until she was brought to Brindavan. Recently when the place was being cleared for the indoor stadium in Parthi, the engineers realised that Sai Geeta's shed would have to be relocated. They went with a proposal to build a shed near gokulam but Swami insisted that Sai Geeta would feel bad and hence she should be relocated nearer to the mandir!

The big ears of an elephant remind us to listen patiently to other's point of view before taking decisions. When an elephant walks through a forest it creates a path for all to follow. In this sense we should become trendsetters. We should do things which the world will follow and not merely ape others – particularly in things like our dress and conduct. Lord Ganesha broke His tusk and used it for recording Vyasa's dictation of the Mahabharatha. The Mahabharatha was sure to benefit mankind and He gave His all for it. This is the true meaning of the saying '*Paropakartham idam shareeram*' (Utilise the body in the service of others).

How Ganesha Inspires Us

A very popular stotram in praise of Lord Ganesha runs thus:

*'Suklambharadhram vishnum, sasi varnam chatur bhujam prasanna
vadhanam dyayeh sarvavigna upashantaye'*

Thus Lord Ganesha holds Himself forth as an ideal for all in this stotram (and more so for the Sai students). Consider this:

Suklambharadharam [the one with white garment on]: wear immaculate white (pure) clothes

Vishnum [all-pervading]: be present everywhere where you supposed to be in time.

Sashi varnam [of bright complexion]: have the vibhuti spot on your forehead.

Chatur bhujam [who has four hands]: be an achiever, be industrious.

Prasanna vadhanam [ever smiling face]: be cheerful and joyous (“no castor oil face” in Swami’s words!)

If one follows this example all challenges meekly submit to you...

The other story commonly narrated is that of the fruit and the competition Shiva and Parvathi arrange for Ganesha and Karthikeya to see who can tour around the world faster and how Lord Ganesha just circumambulates around his parents to win the race. This story tells us:

1. Whatever the Ferari or Merc you may have, nothing can compare to your use of intelligence - your mind. Machines can never match the mind or the power of an idea!
2. Improvise. Do not follow the beaten track and most importantly...
3. Any venture undertaken that honours our parents will surely make us victorious.

So to sum up, the lessons that Lord Ganesha teaches us are:

1. Be trend setters not mere imitators; set ideals for the world to follow, do not be mere slaves following fashion trends set by others.
2. Master the mind to win the rat race
3. Keep your attachments in check
4. Be self disciplined
5. Listen attentively to all
6. Improvise
7. Make life a celebration

Thank You and Sairam.

(From a talk given in the assembly at the Brindavan Campus on 10th June 2006 by Dr. T. Ravi Kumar, a faculty member in the Department of Chemistry)

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN BRAZIL

Brazil – A Large Country With a Long History

Brazil is the largest nation in South American, covering 8.5 million km². As well as being the sixth largest country in the world, it also has the sixth largest population. Half of the 180 million inhabitants are children and young people. The national language is Portuguese.

The Portuguese first arrived here in April 1500, finding natives which they mistakenly called Indians because they thought they had arrived in India, their goal. During the centuries of Portuguese colonization, African people were brought in as slaves to work the sugar cane plantations and later the coffee plantations. What is unique during the colonial period is that the Portuguese, unlike most other Europeans, mixed with the Indians and Africans, thus creating a diverse nation without a singular defined race.

The People of Brazil – A Unique Fusion of Cultures

By the time Independence was attained in September 1822, and during the First and Second Empires, Brazil was known as a rich and prosperous land, always in expansion. After the Slavery Abolition Act of May 1888, Don Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil, donated wide tracts of land to immigrants from European countries, especially Italy, and also to Japanese people, in order to work the plantations and small farms. Besides economic growth, a cultural, artistic and linguistic tapestry was created as descendants of immigrants kept their customs and traditions while integrating with their new countrymen. Brazil has truly become a melting pot of humanity in which varied races and ethnic groups have come together harmoniously to forge a new country, while also maintaining the rich diversity of their ancestors.

All this has produced a very tolerant nation and population which easily accepts the differences among human beings. Being a crossbred country, people live together peacefully within the framework of their varied social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Brazilians are known to be a friendly, generous and welcoming people who also enjoy a strong sense of unity.

The Social and Political Brazil

However, no society is perfect and without need of addressing social, political and fiscal problems. Under recent governments, economic strides have been made, with inflation under control and greater stability in the financial sector, which has positively affected the quality of life for all citizens. Brazil is engaged in improving the educational system and the living standards of needy communities through various social programs such as bringing basic sanitation and electricity to poor and rural areas and the improvement of public health services. There is still much more to do though to decrease the social disparities in this most populous country in South America which borders every South American country except Equador and Chile.

Brazil - Beautiful and Bountiful

Brazil is blessed with a cornucopia of natural beauty and resources. Most of the Amazonian Forest, a bountiful source of innumerable species of life and oxygen for the entire planet, lies within Brazil's borders and has been named

“Patrimony of Humanity” by UNESCO. The largest urban forest in the world, the National Park of Tijuca, is located in Rio de Janeiro.

One of the largest and most important cities in South America, Sao Paulo, is the capital of the state with the same name. Tourism has been growing steadily, partly due to the popularity of the many cultural celebrations, such as the June Feast in many northeast cities; the famous Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Recife, the Bumba-meu-boi Feast in Parintins, Tocantins state, and the Oktoberfest in Blumenau. These regional events continue to attract ever-growing numbers of tourists both from within and without the country.

An enormous statue of Christ the Redeemer looks down upon Rio de Janeiro, His arms open wide to all who live and visit here. Religious traditions and faith have always been strong in this land which has the largest Catholic population in the world (more than 70%), yet Brazilians are open to embracing new ideas and beliefs. During difficult times the nation has demonstrated its solidarity, and there is a basic feeling of Love and Fraternity in the spirit of the people.

Indian Spirituality Reaches Brazil

During the 1960s, the concepts of reincarnation and the karmic cycle of cause and effect began to spread around the country as many looked into Eastern philosophy and discovered Hatha Yoga and meditation for balancing the body and mind. Due to a serious lung illness in his early youth, writer and Professor Jose Hermogenes took on the practice of Yoga and in 1962 created the Hermogenes Academy of Yoga. His wife Maria called it ‘the room of the seven windows’, and it was near a big financial center in Rio de Janeiro. There, hundreds of people of all ages – executives, housewives, retired and young people – learned Indian Spirituality. About every two months, about 100 people went out to a near highland city to study sacred scriptures, practice yoga, meditation, nature walks, “laughter therapy” and devotional singing. The joy of the Hermogenes endeared them to all present as they shared their knowledge and experiences about many spiritual subjects.

The Glory of Sai Spreads to Brazil

After returning from a pilgrimage to India, Hermogenes began to speak of an embodied Avatar in the south of that country and exhibited the video, “The Aura of Divinity.” A Mexican Sai devotee, married to a Brazilian man, narrated her nearly instantaneous cure of a malignant tumor in her mouth after ingesting *Vibhuti* materialized by Sai Baba during an interview with Him. Her testimony was very convincing, as were the anecdotes of an Italian devotee married to a Brazilian lady who lived in the northeast of Brazil.

Nevertheless, it was of the nature of the Brazilian people not to be overly impressed by such cures and miracles, as the country had a large number of mediums and healers and such miraculous occurrences were not uncommon through the practices of spiritualism. However, when Sai Baba’s message arrived, it nevertheless quickly began taking root in the country. Professor Hermogenes spoke of Sai Baba not only in his lectures and workshops and gatherings with friends, but also in radio and television interviews.

The First Interview – Amazing Experiences

In their first visit to Puttaparthi in 1986, the Brazilian group was graced with an interview during which they observed the materialization of *Vibhuti* and sweets to everyone present. This *Vibhuti* made its way back to Brazil and was credited with various cures and help with personal problems, i.e., infertile women became pregnant, those seeking marriage found partners, some persons received properties, while others attained degrees in universities and became professionals. However, the greatest miracle of all was the transformation of people from their contact with Sai Baba, sometimes through dreams, and the bliss they experienced.

Dr. Hermogenes confessed that at the beginning his rational mind resisted accepting the Divinity of Sai Baba. He had already witnessed many miraculous phenomena in Brazil, so by themselves they could not convince him. His wife Maria, though, immediately became enchanted with Sathya Sai, declaring her love for Him and without hesitation declaring, “He is God! He is God!” She also composed many beautiful songs to Swami. Later that year, when he came back to Brazil, Hermogenes, immersed in books and pictures, dedicated himself to discovering the history of this embodied God and translated and published Howard Murphet’s book, *Sai Baba, Man of Miracles*, which portrays the life of Sai Baba with documented testimony and facts in a studied and journalistic style. In a short time, people began recognizing Sathya Sai Baba as an Embodiment of the Divine – a manifestation of Shiva, the transformer aspect of the three divine personifications of cosmic forces Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, as well as the avatars of Rama and Krishna.

Their Second Interview – All Grace And Love

In 1987, Dr. Hermogenes lead a second group to Prashanti Nilayam, after which he would found the first Sai Baba Center in Brazil, located in Rio de Janeiro in the quarter of Vila Isabel. On this trip, the group of twenty-eight was dressed in white, with golden-yellow scarves tied around their necks. Swami granted them a lovely interview in which they experienced the grace of the Avatar. He materialized a diamond ring for an African devotee and asked if all were fine. **One of the group members asked for a blessing for Brazil, explaining that there was political turmoil and fear among the people that the army might seize power. In a sweet and reassuring way, Swami said: “Be calm. Governments come and go; but just God remains. God is Love, live in God and live in Love. Everything will get better.”**

Swami inquired if anyone had health problems. He asked one lady, “Do you do *japamala* (rosary), mother?” and materialized a crystal rosary for her. She was surprised and cried and thanked Him. Next, He asked a young woman about the illness in her eyes, which she confirmed. He said, “You will become fine,” and manifested a yellow *lingam*, instructing her to bathe her eyes with water from the lingam and to change the water, adding, “Don’t throw away the old water but distribute it to other people who need it.” She wept while Baba sweetly comforted her. “Don’t cry, I want everybody to be happy.” Both men and women broke into tears of bliss.

Like a dear Father and loving Mother, Baba caressed Professor Hermogenes' and Maria's hands, seated on each side of Him. He transmitted much love and compassion to all and said, "I will receive you again in privacy." He said with much tenderness, "I am always with you, I know all your problems. I love you profoundly." He emphasized, "Live the present moment with much love. Don't worry too much. Always look for the truth."

The group left the interview room touched and intoxicated by the Divine Presence. They discussed how to go about the process of correcting and transforming themselves. They decided to create a library with Baba's books and to meet in groups to study *bhajans*, in essence, to establish a Sai Center. It was an auspicious time, a turning point, and they knew in that moment it was the beginning of a great effort, one which that carries on to this day. The women hugged each other, their hearts full of joy and peace, chanting *Om Sai Ram*. All were happy and feeling confident of their future. The generous and loving support and guidance of Sai brothers and sisters from Argentina, who enchanted them with their miraculous tales, cannot go unmentioned. Over the following years, Sai devotees from both the countries met each other several times in Latin America Congresses and soon the guidelines for the Sai Organization in Brazil were formed.

The Leelas of the Lord

Of the numerous Sai leelas occurring in Brazil over the last twenty years, there are three described here.

As mentioned previously, Sai Baba materialized a *lingam* for a Brazilian lady in 1987 and instructed her to bath her eyes with *lingam* water every day. By that time she had lost more than 80% of her vision, but not only was she completely healed, dozens of others have been cured of glaucoma by using the *lingam* water as well.

In 1985, a Brazilian couple went to see Sai Baba. The wife had been diagnosed as infertile. In an interview, Swami materialized *Vibhuti* for her but did not allow her husband to ingest it. Today, they have a family of three healthy children. The oldest is named Ananda and was born one year after the interview.

Another young woman was yearning to see Sai Baba but was anxious about spending all of her financial resources that she had at the time. While preparing for an examination in Spanish the following day, something extraordinary occurred. While studying, she saw the sentence: ***Next year I will go to India.*** She was taken aback by this astonishing coincidence. Consulting with her teacher, they checked the text and confirmed that the sentence in question was not to be found anywhere.

The Brazilian Sai Organization

Currently, the Brazil Sai Organization has a Central Council overseeing 9 Regions. There are also 7 Coordinating Committees, 32 Sai Centers and 38 Sai Groups. The Sai Foundation established in 1992 is the management agent of the property of the Sai Organization in Brazil. Besides other

functions, it publishes Sai Baba books in Portuguese and produces CDs, DVDs and VCDs. The Brazil Organization maintains a website – www.sathyasai.org.br – with information about Sri Sathya Sai Baba, a calendar of events, available books, Swami’s discourses, and seva projects in progress.

The Numbers Continue to Grow...

One could not have imagined in 1986, while celebrating the 60th birthday of the Avatar, that His work would achieve such heights. Baba’s spirit of seva has certainly caught on among Brazilians, many of whom are eager to serve. “Swami fills our hearts making us experience that the path of Service is the solution,” say the Brazilian Sai Devotees. The numbers of the Sai movement in Brazil continue to grow. 23 Public Meetings were held with a combined attendance of almost 5600 people – an average of 245 per event – spread all over the Brazilian states.

“We also held seven National Congresses with an average of 450 in attendance, and three National Education Meetings, promoted by the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Education of Brazil, including two of them with a wider reach which included participants from other countries in Latin America,” the devotees share with H2H.

Sai Family Elders Share Much Joy and Love

“We have also hosted many well-known speakers from the International Sai Organization, all of them living examples of love and dedication to Sai Service. During his stay with us, Dr. Choudary Voleti, cardiologist at the Super Specialty Hospital of Prashanti, also spoke in several hospitals in Brazil, such as the Hospital João XXIII in Belo Horizonte, the largest facility in Latin America specializing in traumatology. The doctors and nurses who attended his talks were inspired and encouraged to lovingly serve all those in their care.

John Behner, Leonardo Gutter, Artung Junsai, and Michael Goldstein have also visited as guest speakers and examples of selfless service. Their actions and words convey their dedication to *dharma*, discipline and perseverance. The Berra Family from Argentina, Dr. Jorge, Mrs. Rosana and their daughter Alma, also gifted us with their presence. Alma recently returned to Brazil in the 4th National Sai Youth Meeting and shared her wonderful experiences with us.

In 2006, Dr. Choudary Voleti, Dr. Sara Pavan, Dr. Samuel Sandweiss and his wife Sharon, and Professor Anil Kumar visited and spoke to us as well. Anil Kumar, Professor and Doctor in Biology, stayed with us for a week. His enthusiasm, intelligence and wit were inspiring and his spontaneous joyful energy left a memorable impression in our hearts,” the Sai devotees recall with great enthusiasm and joy.

Educare in Brazil

Over the last twenty years, the Education Program in Human Values has stirred the interest of countless educators and parents, and achieved a boost after the establishment of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Education of Brazil in 2001. The EHV Program in Brazil continues to turn out more and more graduate teachers each passing year.

This is a time when educators and parents alike are anxiously watching as rampant materialism is negatively influencing the formation of their children's character. This urgency and concern has been reflected in an increasing interest in Sai Baba's messages, especially in the area of education. To help fill this need, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Education of Brazil – ISSSEB – offers free basic, intermediary and specialization courses, bringing to educators and professionals of the country the unique Sai Teachings in education and spirituality.

In 1992, the first Sathya Sai School was established in a very poor community in Vila Isabel, in Rio de Janeiro. It has served as an inspiration and a model for the founding of other Sai Schools in the country, such as the Sai Schools in Recife, Goiania, Ribeirão Preto and Minas Gerais.

All the schools are supported by volunteer donations and are regulated by the laws of the country. "We dream of our children in a better world: more humane, more secure, more creative, and ultimately happier," say the passionately-devoted-to-His-cause devotees.

Service Projects All Over the Country

Inspired by the example of students of Baba's University, Brazilian brothers and sisters developed many action projects in the needy communities called Community Assistance and Medical Camps. Since 2005, these activities have developed into more systematic forms, enabling them to efficiently mobilize an increasing number of professionals from many areas, including volunteers not linked to the Organization.

The first Medical Camp in Brazil occurred in April 2005 and was a pilot project that brought many blessings to the volunteers and participants.

Odontological and ophthalmological treatments were carried out, the latter supported by the donation of fifty pairs of eyeglasses. The group effort of doctors, nurses, dentists and pharmacists served approximately 700 people. The young adults took care of the food items while other volunteers helped with the reception and registration of the patients. In this inaugural project, procedures were outlined, establishing models which can be applied in the rest of the country.

Since then, these activities have expanded throughout Brazil. In a bit more than one year, three large Community Assistance projects were held – two of them in areas of dire poverty – besides numerous Medical Camps held in various Brazilian cities.

Brazilian Music Before the Lord

“Swami blessed us in a very special way, allowing Brazilian music and rhythm to be heard in Prashanti Nilayam on three different occasions,” say the devotees with great jubilation, “The first was Guru Poornima in July 2002, when about thirty Brazilians chanted beautiful songs in Portuguese. They sang Brazilian classics for forty minutes, such as ‘Trenzinho Caipira’ from Villa Lobos, ‘Aquarela do Brasil’ from Ary Barroso, as well as many *bhajans* in Portuguese.”

In November 2004, a group of professional Brazilian musicians presented Indian *bhajans* to Swami, utilizing Brazilian rhythms. The third time occurred on January 1, of 2005, when the World Choir comprised of 175 voices from 45 countries, sang a song in Portuguese composed by a Brazilian conductor. The choir members felt moved while singing in Portuguese, a language unfamiliar to most of them. “Swami gently moved to the rhythm of the songs, making our hearts happy and enchanting us with His kindness and generosity,” say the devotees recalling those blissful moments.

Portuguese on Radio Sai – A Divine Gift

The broadcast of the first Radio Sai program in Portuguese came as an early Christmas gift on November 25, 2004. Since then, Radio Sai has been airing programs in Portuguese at least three times a week, giving joy, sharing information, and fostering devotion by providing Sai devotees in Brazil the chance to listen to Swami’s message in their native tongue.

“Our Love for Swami,” say the dedicated Sai devotees, “can be compared to a fresh and lovely cake, whose recipe includes healthy helpings of compassion, will power, joy and dashes of bliss. Whenever we offer it to Swami, however, He always gives us the first slice: His Unconditional Love.”

What a wonderful story of love, of service, of bliss! We, at heart2Heart, thank the Brazilian Sai devotees for sharing with us their wonderful story and pray that Sai travels to every village and every inch of Brazil so that the Big Brazil shines beautifully reflecting His love and becomes a beacon of inspiration for the whole world.

- Heart2Heart Team

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI – Part 20

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT 4 SCENE 2

Sathya's education commences in the traditional manner with a formal religious initiation ceremony performed at home, with Kondama presiding. Sathya who is not supposed to know anything yet, surprises the priest. He is given a slate and the priest tries to get the young student to write a salutation to God.

PRIEST: I shall show You how to write. We shall begin with the salutation:
Om Namaha!

SATHYA (*writes*): *Om Namaha, Sivahaya, Siddam Namaha.*

Everyone is stunned. The priest realises that he is no longer needed and prepares to withdraw.

PRIEST: [*to Kondama*] The formal initiation into learning is over. You can now admit Him to School and let Him study there. Sathya is very intelligent.

K.RAJU: My grandson will not only write on the slate but, when He grows up, will rewrite the lives of people by lighting the lamp of Wisdom in their hearts. Is that not true Sathyam?

SCENE 3

Sathya is about to be taken to the school in Puttaparthi for admission. His sisters are dressing Him up while His mother is packing the school bag. Everyone is ready with advice!

V.RAJU: Sathya, You must listen carefully, and absorb the lessons taught by the teacher. You must study diligently and earn a good name!

K.RAJU: *[laughs]* You will know later how well Sathya will be studying! Hey grandson! Come, I'll walk with You up to the end of the street.

Meanwhile, friends come to pick up Sathya and accompany Him to school.

FRIENDS: Sathyam, Sathyam!

E.AMMA: *[to Sathya]* Your friends have come. *[to the boys]* All of you stay together and go carefully.

BOYS: We will.

K.RAJU: Come on boys! I too will come with you.

V.RAJU: *[to E.Amma]* Looks like your father-in-law is going to school to study!

E.AMMA: Is there a better school than him? Is there a greater temple than his mind? Sathyam is very lucky to be his grandson. I feel so happy!

V.RAJU: Let's go inside; I am feeling hungry!

END OF ACT 4 SCENE 3

(To be continued...)

GITA FOR CHILDREN - Part 22

(Continued from the previous issue)

CHAPTER 9

1. Krishna says to Arjuna, 'I hope you have been absorbing all the things I have been telling you. Print them on your Heart and not just in your head! For it is the Heart that is the real fountainhead of life!'
2. 'Just so that you don't forget, let Me briefly recall some of the important things I have told you so far. Firstly, I am the Creator of this Universe and everything here flows directly from Me. Next, I am present in everything that you see around you, and also in things that you cannot see, like the tiny atom, for example.'
3. 'Even though I am present everywhere, from the galaxies to the mountains and rivers, you cannot see Me with just your physical eyes. The physical eye is a mere sense organ whereas I am far, far beyond the senses. However, if you decide to experience Me via your Heart, then I am easily accessible.'
4. 'I am not only present everywhere but in addition, every entity carries within it a small portion of My Infinite Power and Glory. And that is how they are able to go about their various jobs. Take the Sun, for example. How do you think it is able to shine so brilliantly? Because of the power I have endowed to it.'
5. 'Most people do not understand all this. Instead, as if they are men of enlightenment, they declare, "There is nothing strange about the Sun shining. Such things happen on account of the Laws of Nature". Little do they understand that these so-called Laws of Nature flow actually from Me and Me alone! But let that pass.'
6. Arjuna asks, 'Krishna, what do You do after having created the Universe?'
7. Krishna replies, 'Basically I just sit back, so to say, and watch everything that goes on. Since I am Omnipresent, I know exactly what goes on where, all the time. I also know what everyone is doing, since I am the Indweller. In short, I play the role of a Cosmic Witness.'
8. Arjuna seems puzzled and asks, 'I don't quite follow. If all You want to do is to sit back and watch, why did You create the Universe?'
9. Krishna laughs and replies, 'Oh, that is simple. Let us say there is an inventor. He designs a fancy mechanical toy; having done so, he sets it in motion and then spends hours in enjoyment, watching the toy do all kinds of things.'

10. Arjuna intervenes and says, 'Krishna, that is what we humans do. But You are God!'

11. Most benevolently, Krishna replies, with His usual smile of course, 'You seem to forget that man too is God, in human form, that is. If man can amuse himself that way, why not I? You may not understand all that but the Wise do and that is why they often describe Creation as a *Leela* or the Sport of God.'

12. 'Now in this *Leela*, occasionally, I put in a direct and personal appearance.'

13. To this Arjuna says, 'Krishna, are You referring to Your Incarnation as an *Avatar*?'

14. Krishna replies, 'Exactly. I appear in human form to be physically close to man, help him in many ways, guide him, and so forth. However, misguided by My human form, most people do not comprehend that I am truly Divine. Somehow, they always imagine that God must be something Super-human.'

15. Hesitantly, Arjuna asks a question, 'Krishna, God can do miracles – so we are told. And we know that You have done many. But we ordinary men cannot do such things. I, for example, cannot perform any miracles. Therefore, what is wrong in supposing that God is Super-human?'

16. Krishna says in reply, 'Contrary to your impression, I do not perform any miracles as you call them. Whatever I want just happens, that is all.'

17. Arjuna asks, 'OK, why does that happen only for You? If God is not Super-human, and I am also God as You declare, then why is it that the things that I want fail to happen? What is going wrong where? Something is obviously missing somewhere!'

18. Krishna laughs and says, 'Arjuna, the answer to that puzzle is simple. When a person is perfectly Pure, then whatever that person wills, would happen exactly as he wants. I am 100% Pure, and remain so always. Hence whatever I want always happens. Moreover, you would notice that these miracles as you call them are never performed for My benefit. I do not want anything for Myself, ever. Whatever I do is always for the benefit of others. That aspect also is important.'

19. Arjuna then asks, 'Krishna, in that case, if I were to become 100% Pure, would what I want instantly happen like in Your case?'

20. Krishna replies, 'Of course, without a doubt. By the way, when you become 100% Pure, all the present and apparent difference between you and Me would disappear. You would have become one with Me, and there would be no Arjuna exercising separately a will of his own!'

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

REPROGRAMMING LIVES... THROUGH LOVE AND SERVICE

A 'Blanket Change'

"We have a small announcement to make. Over the past few days, many of us have saved some money and bought a few blankets. We request you to kindly distribute these blankets to the poor beggars who sit outside Sivam temple. Please consider this as our token of love and our promise to keep up the Seva activities from today" said Harish, a student of the 'Free Basic Computer Classes' course which was recently held in Shivam, Swami's holy abode in Hyderabad.

He and his friends had actually saved their little pocket money to be able to offer blankets to the needy. And these youngsters, mind you, are not from the section of society which has all its needs met and now aspires only to answer their latest desires, instead these grown-ups are school drop-outs, unemployed and directionless. As you read how the lives of over 60 young people have been transformed so beautifully, thanks to the Sai-inspired youth of Hyderabad (South India), you will know how service done with purity of purpose and sincerity actually always overwhelms you with the rewards. And service does not mean only medical camps or feeding the poor - there are opportunities to serve everywhere. If only we look around and feel for our fellowmen, there are avenues galore and our offer of help can become more and more innovative too.

From Career Skills to Character Skills

The Hyderabad Sai Youth wanted to render service that has a long lasting impact upon society - just like Swami's projects - and the idea that came up was to hold a Free Computer Skills Teachings Course. The reason was the sad plight of thousands of teenagers who face the misery of unemployment every year because of inadequate skills. And unemployment brings in its wake other problems too. Faced with little prospects in their lives many youth become wayward. So the objective of the program was not only to instill self-confidence and make the youngsters self-reliant but also to bring about a sea-change in their outlook and attitude towards life. And did they succeed? The mother of Balaraj, one of the students who underwent the course, told H2H,

"My son used to roam around on the streets with a bunch of friends without purpose and would never study or listen to me. But, during this period, I noticed a change in him; he became more respectful and responsible. He also developed tremendous self confidence."

There is nothing more that the organizers can ask for. The corporate world is hungry to recruit talented and skilled youth in order to meet their project demands but people with the right skills and attitude are hard to find. The

course made the hitherto 'left high and dry' drop-outs more employable not only by equipping them with the required skills but also at the same time ensuring that they also received the requisite inputs in Value education to endow them with a holistic perspective on life.

Conducting the course was not entirely a new experience to the Sai Youth as they had in the recent past conducted similar training workshops for youngsters called "Management Saptaham" [A Week of management], "Success Planning" and "Voices From the Field" [Click here to read this story from our previous issue]. The new 54 days Free Basic Computer Classes Course was yet another step in the same direction, in trying to help and guide the younger generation to a better life qualitatively and quantitatively. This course focused on the world of DTP (desktop publishing) skills.

Setting Up the Course

So how did the youth go about it? The Sai Organisation set up banners at various places across the city and many Sai volunteers worked night and day for over 2 months to offer the best possible to the participants. When H2H contacted one of the coordinators after the event, recalling the dedicated spirit of the Sai Youth, with a great sense of fulfillment he said,

"Most of us felt that this was perhaps the most challenging yet satisfying activity we had undertaken in the city. It was a challenge to run a course for 54 days continuously considering that most of the faculty were working in multinational companies. There was one Sai brother who works as a Project Manager in Infosys who drove down from Gachibowli to Sivam (around 30kms) everyday and then from Sivam to his home in Kukatapally (25 kms), all this after grueling client meetings and a 12 hour day at work."

The youth gave a press release a week before the classes began and approached corporate houses to be a part of this project. And they welcomed it so enthusiastically. One of the corporates, Nokia, provided chairs and tables and another multinational, GE, provided computers to run the classes. To do good all you need to do is to determine to do good. "Be clear," as Swami says "and the rest will follow."

Labour of Love to the Neediest

An air conditioning unit was also fitted to give respite to the students in the peak of summer and a temporary lab was set up on the first floor of the Sivam bhajan hall. Nearly 300 students from various sections of society attended the first session where Basic Computer Hardware knowledge was imparted for the first 2 days with a concluding test.

Keeping in mind the available infrastructure at Sivam, 60 needy students were selected to attend the course. **The criteria for selection was that the students should be either 10th or 12th or degree dropouts who could not afford to continue education and they should be desperately in need of a job.**

As mentioned earlier, the whole training was conducted not by hired professionals but by Sai Youth volunteers. Sharing his experience on how the course went on for the two month period and what really moved him in those sessions of close encounters with the youngsters, one of the organizers said,

“With the vibrant Sivam premises playing host, the mood was always upbeat and our thoughts very positive. After a month into the classes we asked some of the students what changes they found in themselves after attending the classes, and the response was stirring. One of the students said that he started speaking politely with others after observing how the faculty (Seva Dal members) treated him and others with utmost love and concern. And another one mentioned that he was so inspired by what he saw us doing that he too wanted to participate actively in the Nation Building agenda, which we took up as an inspiration from Swami.”

The course was as much a learning experience for the organizers as for the participants, or maybe even more. And every youth who played a part in this novel Sai seva has a story to narrate, each more revealing and riveting than the other.

Valuable Lessons

“Initially when we started the program we were not sure how to inculcate the “Human Values” concept in the curriculum,” says one of the Youth Organisers, “We started the course and never spoke about the Sai Organisation or what it represents. The students were very observant of how we conducted ourselves and the classes in the initial couple of weeks. They couldn’t hold their inquisitiveness for long and one day they requested us to tell them a little about the Organisation. **Soon, without any prodding from any one of us, they themselves wanted us to teach something more than the Basic Computer Skills, inline with what we always wanted to share...Human Values.** It taught us an important lesson that what we are, speaks louder than what we want to present.” A profound learning experience.

The elders in the Sai Organisation also were extremely happy not only to see the youth taking initiative and doing His work, but also to see the Sivam premises transform itself into a Centre of Service, apart from being a Spiritual Centre for which it was already popular. Hundreds of students who have attended various workshops in the Sivam premises now stand as a witness to this welcome transformation of Sivam.

Love Unifies... Inspires

There were other lessons to be learnt too. It was the power of selfless service and love bridging the gaps in the community and forging all into one common unit. There were students from all faiths participating in the classes. One of the students who follows Islam participated in the Bhajans. It was really inspiring to see the solidarity that participants showed to each other. **There were also**

three deaf and dumb boys who attended the classes daily. Although they could not hear anything and could not ask questions, it was amazing that they turned out to perform as well as anybody else in the class. In fact, the father of one of the deaf boys who attended the course said, “I never thought that my son would ever pick up computer skills. It is indeed a miracle that he has made a presentation today. I thank the organization from the bottom of my heart.”

To do miracles, all you need is love. Just pure love that is unconditional, selfless and genuine. The Sai Youth showered this love on the participants. No wonder, there was such a wonderful spirit of camaraderie during the course. The participants, coming from a background which had only battered their heart and tortured their body with little or no love, found real joy in life as the organizers left no stone unturned to see to it that they feel ‘one’ with each other as well as with the Sai Youth, as one organizer shares,

“Apart from the regular classes we also celebrated birthdays by cutting cakes and singing the birthday song. This had become an extended family where the students spent a significant amount of their time in a day. Many students asked us why we were doing all this and what self-interest we had in spending so much time and resources. Our only response was that it was in the spirit of Brotherhood of Mankind.” This was something very unusual for the participants. It made them think and re-think about life and its purpose.

During all the 54 days, the Computer Lab started at 8 am and ran till 6 pm everyday. There were theory classes again from 6 pm to 9pm. The faculty were youth from the Sai Organisation who are professionals in different software companies like Infosys, Wipro, Microsoft, GE, Nokia etc. It was inspiring to see two of them actually moving into Sivam for the entire duration of the course to ensure that everything went on as planned without a slightest glitch and the students got the best opportunity to learn. They stayed in Sivam for 54 days and maintained the temporary lab set up in the Bhajan Hall in the first floor of Sivam. There was also formal sessions on family values, respect for parents and elders, the importance of keeping away from vices like smoking, drinking etc. apart from what the students imbibed observing the Sai Youth.

The 54-day course came to a magnanimous end on June 25, 2006 (Sunday). The students had now gained proficiency in MS Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Pagemaker and typing. These students, who had not even seen a computer from close quarters 2 months ago were now ready to use these skills.

The Graduation Day – A Glorious Finale

A graduation ceremony was held on the final day. All the students received certificates and the parents and guardians of all the students who attended the course were also invited so that they could share in this joyful occasion. The parents’ joy came more from the change in the attitude of their wards than from their technical skills, as the mother of Nagu, told H2H,

“My son was given to bad habits like eating *gutkha* (chewing tobacco) and smoking. But, during this period, he gave up these habits and has now got a job because of the course.”

During the graduation ceremony the students summarized what they learnt in the near 2 month course and presented it in front of the audience on the Graduation day. The response was truly overwhelming with the students expressing their immense gratitude to Swami, the teachers, and the Organization. Using the skills that they learnt, they chose to make Powerpoint presentations as a medium to present their learning experience and also expressed a strong desire to participate in Nation-Building activities which was like icing on the cake for the Organisers.

The students spoke so confidently on the stage that one of the guests of the function asked if they had been taught public speaking skills! They made professional presentations which stood as testimonies of all they had learnt on the course and which would have been impossible but for Bhagawan’s Grace. The Organisers were in fact delighted to say the least as one of them expressed, “We enjoyed conducting the course. It was extremely satisfying to see so many happy parents on the graduation day. What was even more satisfying was that they ended up getting jobs with good salaries. This will ensure that their families will not have to struggle anymore. We would love to participate in such life-building activities in the future. It was also a learning experience for us to see how goodness actually inspires goodness. It spurs us on to do more such activities in the city.”

Plaudits from the Participants

The students were deeply touched by the immense value addition that had taken place in their lives over the last few days. For them the valuable lessons of life were more important than computer skills. **“What I have learnt over the past few days here,” said a transformed Ravi Kiran, “is that one should serve and help others for having taken birth as a human being. I learnt this after seeing our elder brothers (organization youth) working so hard to make our lives better.”**

Another fortunate student, K Ramu, commented, “When I joined this course in Sivam, I thought that we will be told about Sai Baba and will be influenced to become devotees. But I was surprised that not once was anything mentioned about Sai Baba. At the end of the course, I felt that I understand Sai Baba better by seeing the dedication and commitment of all these youth who are working selflessly”

“Hello Sir, my name is Madhava Aravind. Yesterday’s (25-06-06) graduation ceremony function was a memorable day in my life. The 50 day course was very important to me and very interesting to learn. We also learnt how to be good citizens.” These were the kind of noble sentiments that every student participant echoed on the final day.

Impressing the Corporate World

One of the course objectives was to make the students more employable. This came to fruition when 6 students received job offers with a pay-pack of approximately Rs.90,000 per year! The HR representative of the First India Corporation (a wholly owned subsidiary of First American Corporation) which hired the students was one of the guests for the ceremony. He said that they had interviewed nearly 1000 students for the job opportunities and selected only 35 people after the first round. 13 students from this course attended the interview and all of them were among those 35 short listed. And why? "Because" he said, "All of these 13 students were different from the rest. **They exhibited tremendous self-confidence and sense of purpose. One of the critical questions is to find out what the goal of the student is. Normally when many others said we have not thought about it as yet—these students said that their goal apart from living well is to be useful to society in some way.**" The HR representative was so impressed that he intends to hire the remaining students also from the graduating class, the Sai Youth told H2H.

The course, as you would have gauged, achieved all its objectives and more. What can be achieved when there is purity of purpose and pure love is really amazing! Swami is the living example of this, demonstrating it to us every day and every moment. Here we have the Sai Youth of Hyderabad who have tried to live His example in their own small, yet significant way. It is really inspiring and we at H2H pray that this noble endeavour from the Sai Youth of Hyderabad reaches newer and nobler heights each year, spreading the joy of His love and His message to the community and the nation at large.

Jai Sai Ram

-Heart2Heart Team

SAINET PROJECT IN LAOS - SPREADING THE NET OF HIS LOVE IN LAOS

Motivation

The motivation for the Laos project came from the pioneering work done in Kenya by Bro. Kalyan Ray and his dedicated team. The Kenyan Sai Organization had purchased thousands of specially treated mosquito nets and handed them over to the poor families to protect them from Malaria. WHO studies have shown that this is one of the most effective ways to prevent Malaria. The programme was so successful that Bro. Ray presented it at the medical conference in Parthi in July 2005. Moved by the plight of Malaria affected poor people, and inspired by the teachings of Bhagavan, a team in Singapore led by Bro. Prof. Yeoh Kian Hian started looking at the region for areas affected by Malaria. Laos, a land-locked poor country, was an obvious choice in Southeast Asia, especially as the leading cause of mortality was Malaria.

Investigation and Early Preparation

Bro. Prof. Yeoh planned a visit to Laos in October 2005 to meet with the Sai Organization there to investigate the need for Malaria prevention in Laos and other needs of the people there. During his visit to Vientiane, he met with Bro. Avi Sarkar from the Lao Sai Organization and Lao Government officials as well as the Singapore Ambassador to Laos. The Lao Sai Organization was very enthusiastic and offered its full support. The Singapore team learnt that:

The terrain of Laotian villages is extremely difficult and dangerous and for much of the year the roads are impassable. The monsoon season would start in April, thus making March the last month any such activity could be undertaken.

The villages are dispersed over wide mountainous territory, with a low density of population making it difficult to distribute to each village; it would be better to invite the villagers to travel to pre-determined collection points. However, it turned out subsequently that distribution was in fact carried out to every village.

Since the villagers have to travel long distances to collection points and the villagers also face food shortages, it would be effective if food (rice) was distributed along with the nets.

Bro. Prof. Yeoh returned to Singapore and started a detailed planning process to procure and deliver the nets and food aid to the inaccessible villages of Laos. This had to be completed before March 2006. That way, the programme could still be executed during the 80th Year of the advent of the Divine Avatar. It was decided that the project would be undertaken by Sathya Sai Social

Service, Singapore, which has extensive experience in undertaking social service projects.

The Trip to Kenya

In January 2006, Bro. Prof. Yeoh visited Kenya to participate in the project and receive first-hand appreciation of the Sainet project in execution and to learn from the Kenyan experience. He came back with a lot of information on the detailed operational planning of the Sainet operation.

After this trip, the Singapore team had a lot of ideas how to plan the project in Laos. Detailed planning started in January, and it was felt that another recce (reconnaissance) trip was needed to determine the exact routes, distribution points, and have coordinated joint planning with the Laotian team. The dates for the recce trip were fixed for early February and the final delivery for early March 2006.

Bro. Dr. Yeoh, along with Bros. CS Teng & Loka, made a recce trip on 9 th of February 2006, and met with the Lao Sai organization, the Lao Government officials, and visited the forward areas of distribution. They met the Governor of Xieng Khuang Province and received his support for the project. He also met the UXO Lao officials (the organization responsible for clearing unexploded ordnance), who made heavy-duty trucks available to carry the relief material to the villages. They also met a Buddhist monk, who declared 'Baba is God'. All of these people enthusiastically supported the project, and he came back with detailed blueprints of the operation. It was decided that the target area for this mission would be in Phoukhout district of Xieng Khuang Province. Dr. Yeoh subsequently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Lao Sai Organization and the Government of Lao for the project.

Having surveyed the forward areas, Bro. Dr. Yeoh had some idea of the terrain, lifestyles of the people, and broadly what to expect when the main party of Sevadals reached the forward distribution area. Then the rest of the team was briefed in Singapore. Final detailed plans were arranged and 5,000 treated, long-lasting nets were purchased. While being more expensive than the normal treated nets, these are ideal for the Laos project, since the villages are so inaccessible. Also, plans were completed to purchase 20 tonnes of rice for distribution in the villages and for transporting them. The team structures were developed. A medical doctor, Dr. Ho Soon Lye, volunteered to accompany the team and conduct a medical camp in the forward areas. He would also serve as the medical officer for the team. Dr. Ho briefed all the volunteers and provided them anti-malarial drugs and a host of vitamins to prepare them for the trip.

The Advance Party

On 6th of March, Bro. Dr. Yeoh, along with Bro. CS Teng, went to Laos as the advance party to make preparations for the main group. The advance party held final consultations with all concerned and did a physical inventory of the 5,000 nets, 20 tonnes of rice, and 12 heavy-duty trucks that would be used for

the delivery. The advance party also held detailed discussions with the truck drivers and other members to study the routes, and made adjustments to the directions and the villages to be covered. The earlier plan to bring the villagers to collection points was dropped and it was decided that the volunteers would go deep into the remote villages to deliver relief at their doorsteps. Once this was done, they made preparations to brief the main party.

The Distribution

The main party, consisting of 22 volunteers from Singapore, left Singapore on 9th March 2006 under the leadership of Bro. Thiagarajan. They reached the forward area (Phon Savanh) on the night of 10th March after a 14-hour bus journey and met with the advance party. They were joined by 60 volunteers and others from Laos and Thailand, besides a number of Lao Government officials and Buddhist monks. The distribution was planned for March 11th and 12th. The volunteers were divided into 12 teams and these teams went in different directions with their route maps and briefs. Each team carried a pre-determined number of 'Sainets' and a tonne of rice per village. They planned to leave very early in the morning, reach the village, complete the distribution within 2-3 hours, and return to base camp in Phon Savanh by night fall. The volunteers sat on top of the rice bags at the back of the trucks—a unique experience for the Singaporeans. When the Singapore team reached the Laotian border, some of the volunteers were not allowed entry by immigration officials. Then all the volunteers prayed together, chanted the Gayatri mantra and again approached the officials. This time, they received approval to enter! The team saw this as Bhagavan's leela.

Teams 1A (Bros. Karthik & Sujoy, along with Lao and Thai volunteers) and 1B (Bros. Siva and Mathi, along with Lao and Thai volunteers) had the toughest tasks of reaching the most remote villages, traveling on specialized military-spec trucks called GAT66s. They had to travel over 7 hours each way through the most rugged terrain, holding on to rods on the back of the truck, and to their lives! The dirt tracks they traveled through had enough space for one truck, and one mistake by the driver would crash them 3,000 ft down the cliff. They traveled up the mountains, through streams and rivers without bridges. Their satellite communication systems failed to work in the mountainous territory, and they couldn't communicate with anyone else—even between team 1A and 1B. They felt Swami's presence all the way and owe their survival to His blessings. The cooked food they carried became spoilt and they had to survive on dry rations. One of the team members, who had served in the Singapore army, felt that this was far tougher than any army expedition he had ever undertaken. All through the journey they experienced continuous bouncing and pounding.

At the village, the team delivered the nets and the food to the villagers. The villagers brought with them their 'family book', which contained their details. Based on this, they were given 1 or 2 family-sized Sainets. The rice was delivered to the 'rice-banks', which are collectively used by the villagers in emergencies. The whole distribution took under 3 hours. All the villagers assembled to meet the team and were very hospitable. By the time the two

teams headed back to base, it was already dark. On the return journey, team 1B's truck ran out of fuel in the middle of nowhere, and since their communications equipment was not working, they were stranded. Meanwhile, team 1A, which finished early, got delayed on the way when a broken-down truck blocked their way. When they finally were able to proceed, they found the stranded team 1B and rescued them. Had their return not been delayed, they wouldn't have been able to rescue them. Again, the team members viewed this as Bhagavan's leela. All through the operations, everyone felt Bhagavan coming to their aid at every stage. Throughout the perilous journey, all the team members were singing bhajans and saying 'Sairam'.

Next to team 1, teams 2 (Bros. Viva & Raju) and 3 (Bros. Muthu & Steven) had the toughest routes. Bro. Viva noted that the roads were so dangerous that even one mistake would have caused the vehicle to slip into the deep valleys below. The road conditions were so rough that if they didn't hold on to the rails they could have been bumped off the truck, perhaps into the valley. And holding on to the truck for so many hours all day long was a big challenge for the volunteers. At some points on the way, the gradients were so steep that the volunteers had to alight for the truck to have enough horsepower to pull itself up the slope. After delivery of the nets and rice, the trucks returned empty, and the volunteers were sitting on the bare floor of the truck. The team suffered shortages of food and water, and fuel ran precariously low. Nevertheless, the team's spirits remained high; the Laotian drivers were excellent, and their faith in Bhagavan kept them going through this dangerous mission. It was gratifying to see the gratitude and happiness on the faces of the villagers at receiving the relief material which they so sorely needed.

Team 3 (Bros. Muthu and Steven) had a unique and difficult experience. Firstly, they also had a very hard and long route. When they finished their distribution of nets and rice, they discovered that the lights on their truck had failed. As it was already getting dark, it was impossible to navigate through the dangerous route back home. So the team was forced to stay back in the village—something they had not prepared for. The villagers were very hospitable, and by nightfall the mosquitoes had arrived in strength. The team members used the Sainets to protect themselves and spent that night sleeping on mats in huts without any amenities. They had run out of bottled water and had to drink the village water. Thus, this team was not only exposed to the perils of the journey but also to health risks. It was only through Bhagavan's grace that they all remained safe.

Team 4 (Bros. Ramesh & Vijay) and Team 5 (Bros. Priveen) had similar experiences to report. They found the villagers to be friendly, dignified, and clean. The officials were very cooperative.

Team 6 (Bro. Sathya) and Team 7 (Bro. Kuna) reported communication problems since they didn't speak Laotian. However, the Lao and Thai volunteers were able to speak with the villagers, and bridge the communication challenge. It was an excellent multinational relief operation and each team complemented the other.

Team 8 (Bros. CS Teng, Thiaga and Sis. Shantini) visited villages like Mian, Khoung and Sack, which were closer to Phon Savanh. The team returned to base earlier and waited for the others to return. This team met with villages which are more developed and have electricity and TV.

Team 9 (Bros. Chong Ah Man & Bro. Dilip) were delayed due to their truck breaking down. They were amazed to watch the driver open up the engine and repair the truck on the spot, and get it back on track. Because of the delay, villagers from the neighboring village who had come and waited went home. So, after unloading the vehicles, the team sent their truck to the other village to bring them their supplies so both the villages could equally benefit.

The Medical Camp

Bro. Dr. Ho Soon Lye set up a medical camp at the forward base. He saw about 200 patients in two days, mostly in the ages of 40-80 years. He found the people reasonably healthy. There was no signs of diarrhea or heart diseases. There were, however, many people with skin diseases caused by overexposure to the elements. Most had ulcers and pains on account of fatigue. There were also appeared to be cases of iodine deficiency. He gave out anti-fungal cream, antibiotics and dressings.

The Water Project Investigation

The team had 2 engineers, Bros. Loka and Vashi, who had gone to Laos to investigate the water problem there. They examined the water sources in several villages. There is no public water supply system to these remote villages. The team returned with water samples and suggestions on how to provide water to some of the villages in an inexpensive manner, should the organization decide to launch a future water project in Laos.

Recounting a volunteer's experience - as told by Bro. Palghat Sivaramakrishnan

"Thanks to Swami, I was fortunate to take part in this noble project. I would like to give a short prelude to the trip.

When the announcement was made in our Sai Centre sometime in early February about this project and a request for volunteers to take part, I was among those who signed up early. As the D-day approached, I received a call from the coordinator that the team needed to be reduced due to certain constraints. I was disappointed as I was looking forward to the trip.

The following Monday I received an e-mail stating that some of the senior Corporate Officers (from USA) were visiting Singapore during the same week of the proposed trip to Laos. I thought perhaps that Swami wanted me to be in Singapore and that was reason why I was not part of the team. On the following Saturday, I received a call from the coordinator that there was a need for several more volunteers and asked whether I would be interested. Without a second thought I jumped with the answer 'Yes!'

Then, the realization dawned about the Corporate Officers' visit to Singapore. I just let Swami take care of it. The early Monday morning mail had a surprise in store: the impending visit of the officers was cancelled!

This is how it all began. We reached the main district Phon Savan in Laos around 7:00 pm. Immediately there was a briefing about the villages that needed to be covered, specific instructions about the route, the time restrictions which we had to adhere and an umpteen number of do's and don'ts.

During the briefing it was mentioned that they were 10 villages to be reached on the first day and they were numbered 1 to 9, with the first village split into 1A and 1B. It was also explained that the first route (no.1) would be the most difficult one and the last route (no.9) the least difficult. At this time, no one had the faintest idea about the difficulty involved.

After that, teams were formed for each route. Brother Mathi and I chose route 1B. Once this was completed, we were provided a route map which had the approximate time plan. There was a side note saying 'Vehicle GAS 66-4 X 4' on our map. We wondered what that meant and were later informed that only a special vehicle, the 'GAS 66-4 X 4', could traverse the rough terrain of routes 1A and 1B. Fortunately for us, Swami's grace buffered us against the shocking reality of what lay in store.

The following morning, we were all set by 7:00. A few Thai and Laotian Brothers and Sisters joined each team. One Buddhist Monk and one district official also joined us. The only commonality amongst us was "Sai". The vehicle we were going to use was a Russian made gas-run military truck with a huge wheel base which was about 4-5 feet in diameter. Some of the vehicles were open trucks and some were closed with tarpaulin.

Our spiritual journey started at around 8.30 am. We drove on a tar road for about 30 minutes until the vehicle took a turn onto a dusty path. This went on for about an hour and a half. We assumed the driver was taking a short cut. Finally the dusty road ended at the foot of a mountain. There was no sign of any path or road. The vehicle labored up the hill very slowly and then we went all the way down only to reach the foot of another mountain! For the next 6 hours we continued on like this, climbing up and down mountain after mountain without any sign of a village or a road.

Since we were sitting in the rear part of the truck, we were continually thrown up and down as if on a roller coaster. At times we had to quickly duck and crouch down to avoid being struck by thick branches and thorny bushes. On both sides of us were deep ravines. We traveled precariously close to the edge of the mountainside and each time the truck dangerously swerved to the rim we shouted, "Sairam, Sairam". Similarly, whenever the vehicle struggled up or go down a mountain, the thunderous roar of 'Sairam' would encourage it onward!

We finally reached the village at 2.45 pm. We were behind schedule by 3 hours. It took us a few hours to distribute the nets. We left the village around 5:00 pm returning through the same mountainous route, with every part of our bodies being battered and bruised. On our return journey in the pitch darkness we encountered even more problems and it was Sai's grace which undoubtedly pulled us through.

To summarize, it was the most humbling experience I ever had. It was His will that the neediest persons on earth should receive His grace however remote they were situated. It was He who made it happen. We were just fortunate to be part of the project.

When we reached the village, young and old, boys and girls and children were all eagerly waiting for us. After our distribution, the entire village saw us off with innocent and loving looks on their faces. For the first time, I saw divinity in each one of them. The journey was a potent reminder to me that the 'Spiritual Path' requires steadfast devotion and Atmanivedana (total surrender) to Swami."

Some Lessons

The team learnt through direct experience how Bhagavan protected them all through their difficult missions. It also helped them improve teamwork. Even though the project was planned for nearly six months, lack of information threw up a lot of surprises. Overall, the team is now in a better position to execute future projects under the umbrella of Sathya Sai Social Service, Singapore. The most important lesson was that when we undertake Swami's projects, no matter how daunting, Sathya Sai is always there to see us through them safely and successfully.

– Heart2Heart Team

PRASHANTI DIARY

The Chronicles of Heaven on Earth

Just as the month of December instantly triggers the thoughts of Christmas, the month of July is intimately linked in the Ashram with the celebration of the *Ashadi Ekadashi* and the Guru Poornima Festivals. It is a mega event that triggers the first big celebration of the new academic year, when the students have just returned after the summer holidays and Bhagavan Himself has also come back after His summer sojourn in Kodaikanal and Brindavan.

It is the devotees from the States of Maharashtra and Goa that kick-start this event with the two-day long celebration of the *Ashadi Ekadashi* festival by hundreds of Bala Vikas children from these States. We bring you a report of the two dramas staged by these children as well as the rich musical fare offered by talented musicians from Maharashtra. *Bhumi puja* (consecrating the ground before construction), for the proposed indoor stadium of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, was also done on this auspicious day.

Close on the heels of the *Ashadi Ekadashi* festival comes the Guru Poornima celebrations. Traditionally the students sing *stothrams* to Bhagavan, their Sadguru in the morning on this holy day. Tricycles were also distributed to a few handicapped villagers during the morning. The evening of Guru Poornima day saw the Sai Symphony Orchestra regale the crowd. This year we saw, in addition to this international orchestra, the Bala Vikas children from Indonesia and Canada present dramas in the Divine Presence. We bring you a report of these as well as other programmes that were celebrated this month.

JULY 3rd – 6th, 2006: THE DINDI YATRA OF ASHADI EKADASHI

Ashadi Ekadashi is a religious procession and is celebrated during the months of June - July (*Aashaadh Shukla paksha*). It consists of a procession in which people collectively go singing and dancing the glory of the Lord in what are called as 'Dindis'. This custom of taking out a holy procession is said to have started as far back as the year 1810.

Tradition has it that two of the greatest devotees of the Lord from the State of Maharashtra, Sant Gyaneshwar and Sant Tukaram had set out on a pilgrimage to the temple of Lord Vittala from their respective places and reached the Divine Abode in fifteen days time on the auspicious day of *Ashadi Ekadashi*.

Vithal, or Vitthal, or Vithoba, or Pandurang (a form of Krishna) is worshipped in some temples in Kerala. Vitthala's original temple is at Pandharpur, Maharashtra. Pandharpur is located 65 km West of Sholapur, on the banks of the river Bhimarathi also known as Chandrabhaga. Vitthala is said to have been derived from the word Vishnu in Kannada. Panduranga is a Sanskritized form of Pandarga, the old name of Pandharpur.

Following this tradition established by these great souls centuries ago, even today devotees from the entire length and breadth of the state of Maharashtra and even from outside the state set out for Pandharpur, to the famous temple of Lord Vittala, wearing basil beads and singing His glory on a pilgrimage scheduled so that they reach Pandarpur on the auspicious day of *Ashadi Ekadashi* to have His Divine Darshan. This pilgrimage is traditionally called the *Dindi Yatra*.

A similar (*yatra*) procession is being carried out by the devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba by carrying a palanquin with the *Paduka* (sandals) of our beloved Sai from Dharmavaram to reach Prashanti Nilayam (Puttaparthi) (a distance of about 35 kilometres) on the day of *Ashadi Ekadasi*.

This journey is performed as a *sadhana* by the *warkaris* (as the devotees of Lord Vittala are called) by singing the name of Sai Vittala together with rendering of *Dindi Seva* – wherein the people on pilgrimage undertake selfless service to the poor and needy en route - like *annadhanam* (donation of food-grains), medical seva, building & repairing rural infrastructure, etc.

Participation in the *Ashadi Dindi Yatra* and *Dindi Seva* helps an individual in many ways by bringing good health, peace & prosperity in his life. By continuously chanting the glory of the God in the *Ashadi Dindi* procession and by performing the *Dindi Seva*, an inner cleansing takes place in Mind, Body and Spirit and the participants experience immeasurable bliss. It is believed that this holy pilgrimage removes all the sins committed knowingly or unknowingly and helps in one's spiritual progress.

The Dindi Yatra

The Dindi *yatra* commenced on July 3rd, 2006 from the Sri Rama temple at Dharmavaram and continued for three days to reach Prashanti Nilayam on July 6, 2006. The Dindi was offered to Bhagavan on July 7, 2006, the day of *Ashadi Ekadasi*. The Dindi procession passed through over 40 villages of Ananthapur District before reaching Prashanti Nilayam. In all about 600 people, at various points, participated in the procession. The stay and food arrangements for the participants were done at various villages along the way. This year the procession was lead by *sevaks* chanting the Veda. This was followed by folk dances from different parts of Maharashtra, *bhajans / kirtans* and the palanquin carrying the *padukas* of Sai Vittala. *Harikhata* (relating the glories of the Lord) was performed by Shri Netra Guruji on all days during the evenings.

It was a great sight to see people participating in the procession with great joy and enthusiasm and the atmosphere was filled with love, divinity and bliss. This is great *sadhana* by itself and one has to be blessed by the Almighty to participate in the procession. On the 6th afternoon when the procession reached Prashanti Nilayam, Sai Mata blessed all the 400 *warkaris* with the divine *darshan* which lasted over two and half hours. The *warkaris*, who were seated in the front of the veranda and were dressed in their *yatra* clothes with

scarves and caps on, then joined in the divine *bhajan* and offered the same to the Lord.

Box Text

A NOTE ON THE DINDI SEVA ACTIVITIES

Dindi Seva or selfless service to the poor encompasses activities like distribution of foodgrains (*annadhanam*), improving rural infrastructure and medical camps.

ANNADHANAM - Distribution of Dindi Amruta Kalash

Amruta Kalash is a bundle of love; it is Bhagavan's *prasadam* in the form of nine essential grocery items required for cooking meals for 5 days for a family. About 1008 *kalash* packets were distributed to the most backward families enroute to Prashanti Nilayam.

In terms of poverty, Anantapur district is one of the poorest districts in India. The economy is principally agrarian with very few industries. With very little rainfall this district is one of the most backward provinces in the state and chronically drought prone. Infant mortality rate is 70 per 1,000 births in the district as against the State average of 59. Monthly per capita rural consumption is Rs.400 per month (one of the lowest in the state). It is frequently in the news for farmers' deaths through suicides due to acute financial problems, has a high incidence of brain fever and also low agriculture productivity. Distribution of *Amruta Kalash* is a small symbolic act expressing solidarity with the people and spreading Swami's message of love and care and assuring the people that our Bhagavan is there to take care of all.

The contents of the *Amruta Kalash* are,

Rice	5 kg
Thur Dal	0.5 kg
Tamarind	0.5 kg
Jaggery	0.5 kg
Atta / Nachni	1 kg
Oil/ Cooking Salt	0.5 kg each
Swami's Photo	1 No
Laddu, Vibhuti	1 No
Sai Protein	1 No

The Dindi Grama Seva

As part of *Dindi seva* some work is undertaken in terms of improving village infrastructure in a small way. This year two toilets were constructed for the use of the children of the Medapuram High school - one for the girls and the other for the boys. Besides these 9 ceiling fans and tube lights were installed in the class rooms. A few tube lights were installed in the Basampalli temple for the use of the villagers.

In addition, a project to educate the village on the awareness of healthy living was undertaken. 3 tableaux were made on the themes of National Integration, the ill effects of the consumption of tobacco & liquor, health and hygiene. These tableaux visited all the nearby villages and spread the awareness on the themes mentioned above. 27 Youth from Navi Mumbai and Thane district staged plays in Telugu in the village square to convey important spiritual messages. All the villagers lent a patient hearing and understood the importance of the themes presented.

The Dindi Medical Seva

In Anantapur district health spending is amongst the fastest growing components of rural family debt. Public hospitals are starved of funds, medicines and drugs. Lack of adequate primary health centres leads to last stage diagnosis of serious health problems. Poor agriculture output, coupled with rising inflation leaves little savings for other needs. The net result is a lack of money for health needs resulting in a vicious cycle of poverty and ill health. Anantapur district also has acute Fluorosis related problems (a disease caused due to excessive fluoride levels in the ground water).

Early diagnosis through public medical camps, timely treatment and medicine for the lesser problems before it becomes grave and an awareness campaign for preventive care and hygiene could reduce the impact of the vicious cycle, even if it cannot completely break it.

The annual Dindi medical seva is thus an offering at His lotus feet to supplement in a small way the initiatives taken by Bhagavan in rural health care. The objectives of the camps are "Early diagnosis and damage control" with the focus being the children of these communities. The areas of specialization included General Pediatric, Heart ailments, Congenital abnormalities or Primary complex, Dental check up and timely help for treatable problems, Eye check up for errors of refraction or other problems, a Skin specialist check up to rule out Leprosy and an ENT check up.

The camps catered to 1495 children and about 2500 adults, who were treated in 3 different camps all through the seva period. The Camps were organized for 3 days in 4 village cluster centers. Spectacles were made and delivered after 2/3 days. Children with heart, eye and neurological problems were referred to the nearest hospitals.

Health education & Fluorosis awareness was done through a poster exhibition. Bala Vikas Classes were held in the various villages and in addition *Bal Amrut Kalash* containing Sai Protein and Health biscuits, Peanut *chikki*, Iron Tonic/Multivitamin tablets, Health education booklet /Toy, anti-worm tablets, Toothbrush, Toothpaste, comb, towel, and soap were also distributed to the children.

Free lunch was served to all who visited the medical camp.

In all about 20 specialists and 15 general physicians and many pharmacists and *sevadals* participated in the medical camp. The students from the Anantapur Medical College also assisted the team of doctors in the above mission.

A veterinary camp was also organized during the above days. A total of 280 animals were treated and medicines prescribed. The doctors explained the need to take care of the health of the animals to the villagers.

Heart2Heart would like to gratefully acknowledge the receipt of the text and photographs on the Dindi *Yatra* and Dindi *Seva* which were provided to us by the State President, Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization of Maharashtra.

END OF BOX

JULY 7: THE ASHADI EKADASHI CELEBRATIONS AND BHUMI PUJA FOR THE INDOOR STADIUM

The morning of *Ashadi Ekadashi* was greeted by an elegantly decorated Sai Kulwant hall. The entire Hall was decorated by pithy sayings like MAN IS DIVINE and MAN MUST RISE ABOVE HIS ANIMAL QUALITIES. From the ceiling suspended by ropes hung a 'logo' (modelled on the lines of the famous MGM symbol through which the lion roars at the opening scene of every MGM movie) which proclaimed the SAI GOLDEN ERA, THE MARVEL OF DIVINE LOVE. We were wondering about this unique contraption and its significance but it became clear only later in the morning when the Lion King in the children's drama roared through the opening to proclaim '*AHAM ASMI*' – 'I AM I' after the "logo" was lowered during the drama in a dramatic scene.

There was also an intriguing back-drop (situated behind Swami's chair) that merits some explanation. At the centre was Lord Vittala (an *avatar* of Lord Vishnu) and He had a halo behind the head of the *sarva dharma* symbol with the 5 petals showing the 5 human values of Love, Non-Violence, Truth, Right Conduct and Peace. Thus cleverly Lord Vittala was linked to Swami to show that "They are One". Furthermore on one side was Moses, the founder of Judaism, and the other side was a depiction of Swami's students and Lord Vittala is shown balancing both. Thus they wanted to show that it was Swami Himself who had given Moses the Ten Commandments in the aeons past as guiding principles for humanity. And now in this present age, Swami has given

the human values as guidelines for youngsters and humanity at large. The mountain and the popular depiction of the stone slabs containing the Ten Commandments as given by God to Moses are also shown. On the other side the sky shows a message representing one of Swami's immortal teachings depicted as a scroll, LOVE ALL MEN WITHOUT DISTINCTION. KNOW THAT MANKIND IS A SINGLE COMMUNITY. A rainbow bridges the gap between both the eras. A discerning viewer can even make out faint outlines of the Chaitanya Jyothi and the Museum just behind the rainbow. A meaningful and strong back-drop well befitting the occasion!

Swami was escorted into Sai Kulwant Hall by a group of children dressed as *warkaris*, devotees of Sai Vittala. Four men, also appropriately dressed, blew conch shells in the traditional welcome ceremony from ages past as Swami's car passed by. After Swami reached the stage and had given His benedictory *darshan* to the assembled multitude, He graciously lit the lamp to signify the start of the two day ceremony.

After Swami was seated He was first welcomed with a rose by Sri Ramesh Sawant, President of the Maharashtra State Sathya Sai Seva Organisations. Following this a number of the State Officials also welcomed Him in turn either with a rose or a plate of fruits.

As part of the birthday celebrations in Maharashtra last year, they had organised an evening of enchanting divine music inviting some of the top musicians from Mumbai and other parts of India. A DVD of this musical extravaganza was also presented to Swami who blessed it.

The first item on the agenda was the *warkaris* to end their dindi yatra, the 400 devotees who had walked with the sandals of the Lord from Dharmavaram; who made a dramatic entrance carrying the palanquin with the sandals of the Lord. They came in to the strains of the Dindi song celebrating the glory of the Sathya Sai Avatar and also paying obeisance to the great saints of Maharashtra like Nivrutti, Gnanadev, Eknath and Tukaram who have blessed everyone gathered there that day. This was the culmination of their Dindi Yatra from Dharmavaram; and it was completely fulfilled by having the *darshan* of Sai Vittala on *Ashadi Ekadashi* Day.

After these formalities were dealt with, Swami blessed the morning's program to start. After a few *bhajans* sung by a group of about 25 singers from Maharashtra, the first item was the customary opening dance wherein a group of boys (also dresses as *warkaris*) performed a traditional dance from the state of Maharashtra. The highlight of the dance was when they formed a colourful pyramid in front of Swami

'The Divine Commandment' Drama By The Bala Vikas Children.

This was followed by a musical entitled "The Divine Commandment", with the cast comprising of 150 children (95 boys and 65 girls) of the Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas, Mumbai, Maharashtra and about 150 participants (50 boys and 100 girls) belonging to the youth wing.

All the State officials heaved a sigh of relief when the drama started as the days preceding were filled with tension and high drama. It had started raining heavily in Mumbai before the children were to leave by train to Puttaparthi. There was a lot of anxiety if the train would be allowed to leave Mumbai station at all. But leave it did, and was perhaps one of the last trains to leave Mumbai, before the train service was shut down due to inundation of the railway lines. Swami assured the office bearers not to worry and that they could have the programme after the children arrived. The train in which they were travelling had to proceed very slowly as the tracks were under water at many places, but with Swami's grace they all arrived safely and **in time** for the programme to be held as scheduled on the morning of July 7th.

The *Ashadi Ekadashi* drama is a popular fixture in the Prashanti Nilayam calendar and people look forward to it all year. And this year was no exception. The *Ashadi Ekadashi* dramas are characterised by a clever and novel theme, colourful costumes, catchy tunes and well choreographed dances all calculated to drive home one or two of Swami's selected teachings for that year.

In the saga of the amelioration of Man, similes of animals have often been used to describe his negative qualities. However the state of Man today is such that even the animals have taken umbrage to these similes. The labelling of a deceitful liar as – “as cunning as a fox”, the description of a hypocrite as shedding crocodile tears, a silly and narrow-minded person being referred to as a frog in a well, associating the bull with anger and the pig with greed and referring to a treacherous person as a snake in the grass and the humorous complaint of the duck that when a man is out for a zero in the game of cricket he is supposed to have scored a duck, all raise the ire of the Lion King who commands that Man be brought before him for judgement.

The Conference of Animals convened by the Lion King has unanimously decried the overtures of Man and have put forth their case that the animals are followers of Human Values and it is they who have successfully maintained the balance of Nature, while Man survives on exploitation of other creations. (The drama has numerous animals singing songs like the Chimpanzees rap Song of Invitation at the beginning of the Conference and the Peacock Dance Song make the opening scene very memorable and enjoyable)

Man is captured and brought before the king. The Lion king gives man a chance to defend himself, but man is shown to be weaker than the animals - slower of foot, conniving and harmful to even the members of his own species. Even the horse complains that man has dragged him to fight his numerous wars, and man's best friend the dog also turns against him. Man tries to boast of his technological accomplishments but the elephant asks him if he has conquered his own petty mind (The elephant's song making the point that “without adherence to *dharma* man is just an animal” was very poignant). The tiger mocks man for not following *dharma* but living a life of vice, where desires only increase but man has no peace.

All the animals thus proclaim in turn that they have a reason and season for everything they do, but Man has none. Man then uses his clinching argument by stating that only he has the power to know God. The animals reply that man today has forgotten God but the animals still remember Him, for serving the Lord is the motto of all the subjects in the Lion King's kingdom.

For it is not only man but even animals have been the chosen instruments of the Lord, for rendering yeomen service in the form of the different *vahanas* (divine vehicles of transportation). At this juncture there was the Medley of Vahanas song where different colourful *vahanas* – like the Hamsa *vahana* (Swan), the Nandi *vahana* (Bull), the Garuda *vahana* (eagle), the Simha *vahana* (the Lion), the mayur *vahana* (peacock), the mushaka *vahana* (rat) and so on - strutted across the stage to some meaningful Sanskrit *slokas* being chanted in the back-ground.

Going further, in the drama the animals also assert that God assumed the animal form in several Avatars to reiterate the fact that animals are also children of God and that we all belong to the Kingdom of God. The Song of Avatars then plays with appropriate *slokas* while the Avatars' form of the fish, the boar and the half-lion and so on, all gracefully stride across the stage.

The Lion King then proclaims that the animals are supreme. The animals cheer and man hangs his head down in shame.

The wise elephant, however, extols that Man is indeed a reflection of God, and that Man seems to have forgotten this Divine Commandment "I AM I - AHAM ASMI "and the Lord God Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is here to remind him of the same and to redeem Man from the illusion of Maya. At this point the sage Narada enters and pointing to the pig (who is really Indra) asks if he is ready to enter back to Indraloka. (This was referring to a popular story often related by Swami to show the powerful influence of *maya* where Lord Indra becomes a pig and thinks he is in "hog heaven" in company with his piggy wife and piglets as children, forgetting his own divine heritage). Narada's song then asks man to shed Desire, Anger, Greed and Attachment and see the Divine Atma.

The wise elephant avers that the spiritual regeneration of mankind can only happen through the divine programme of Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas given to us by our dear Bhagavan. This programme awakens man to his reality by touching and transforming the lives of children, parents and gurus.

A contemporary class is then shown where the students are taught inane nursery rhymes like Baa Baa Black Sheep. This is followed by a Bala Vikas class where the children learn that God really resides in all of them.

The School Song ("Sai Baba Who are you; Yes Dear I am You") is then sung and the musical culminates with all the animals joining the Bal Vikas children in their class, contemplating on their real nature. By the divine grace of our Bhagavan, not only humans but even the animals can realize that we all belong to the Kingdom of God.

The musical was a huge success and was greeted with prolonged clapping. Swami sent clothes and other goodies for distribution as a sign of His pleasure. But Swami was not yet done for the day. There was still an important event to take place, an event that He had been referring to often when he was in Brindavan during the Summer – the “Bhumi Puja” or the ground consecration ceremony before the start of the construction of the new Sri Sathya Sai Centre for Sports or what is informally being referred to as the “Indoor Stadium”. To commemorate 25 years of the Institute, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, as the Chancellor of the Institute has graciously gifted the students with an indoor sports complex that will meet Olympic standards.

The Sports complex, when it is built, will be spread over 4.6 acres and has a spacious 58 metres x 98 metres multi-sport hall with elliptical galleries on all sides and will offer six disciplines – badminton, basketball, table-tennis, squash, volleyball and gymnastics. The complex will have an octagonal display centre with a diameter of 60 feet. The stadium hall will hold a capacity of 4000 people and the building will have 6 entrances. The facility will also offer a 400 metre 8 lane outdoor running track, two outdoor tennis courts, a Yoga Centre and a Hall for Aerobics.

The preliminary work of clearing the land and making it fit for construction had been going on soon after Swami’s return to Parthi from Brindavan. Unfortunately a number of trees that had graced these grounds had to be levelled to make way for the new Centre for Sports. Sai Gita also had her home within the confines of these grounds and a new residence had to be built for her. Swami had earlier, on July 1st, made a visit to the Planetarium for the express purpose of picking a site for Sai Gita’s new residence.

So after the morning’s *Ashadi Ekadashi* celebration was over, after the *prasadam* was distributed, Swami came to the Planetarium to first do the *Bhumi Puja* for Sai Gita’s new residence. Swami was welcomed by a well bedecked Sai Gita who welcomed Her Lord and Master with a squeal and a garland in her trunk. Swami stayed for a few minutes and blessed the stones that would be used in the construction. He also asked some elders to break a few coconuts and made other offerings as a sign of auspiciousness, while the students of the Institute chanted the Vedas.

After blessing the construction of Sai Gita’s new home, Swami’s car went next door where a huge tent had been erected with a gathering of press, construction workers, interested well-wishers and students for the *Bhumi Puja* of the Indoor Stadium. The same ritual was again repeated albeit on a bigger scale, and we not only had auspicious offerings of rice, flower petals and other precious and auspicious items as a part of the *Bhumi Puja*, but elders like the Vice-Chancellor, Ashram Officials and long-term devotees like Sri Audikesavulu, Dr Narendra Reddy, and Sri Balaram also broke coconuts to render the ground sacred and invoke the blessings of the Gods for the safe, efficient and speedy construction of this mammoth edifice.

The Evening Programme – ‘The Ten Commandments’ Drama

After Swami had sat on the dais, He asked for *bhajans* to be sung. The bhajan troupe from Maharashtra sang 5 bhajans – *Jaya Gabaraya Sri Ganaraya, Sadguru Sai Saraswati, Jaya Sai Narayan Keshava, Nanda Nandan Hari Govind Gopal, and Chandravadana Kamalanayana* before Swami asked the evening's main programme, a drama called *The Ten Commandments*, to begin. The evening programme was presented by the Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas children of Buldhana district of Maharashtra comprising of 67 boys and about 21 girls.

Long long ago, the Hebrews came to Egypt, fertile with the magnificent river Nile, in search of food during a famine which affected the ancient near East. At first, they were welcomed but after about four hundred years, the Hebrews were perceived as a threat and were enslaved. Yet, there was a ray of hope. The Hebrews believed that a Deliverer, a Messenger of God would come, set them free and lead them to the Promised Land. The Deliverer, the Messenger of God who came to set free the Hebrews and lead them to the Promised Land was none other than Moses.

The drama opens to show Pharaoh's order that all newborn male Hebrew babies be killed and their bodies cast in the Nile, so that the deliverer of the Hebrews will also perish. The next scene shows Jocheved, the mother of Moses, putting him in a basket and float him on the river Nile to save him from the mass murder of all the children. The basket was found by Batyah, the sister of the Pharaoh and she brought Moses up as her baby in spite of her maid warning her that the cloth in the basket was woven by Hebrew hands.

The scene shifts to a full grown Moses who has won favour with Seti after conquering Ethiopia and is now put in charge of building a new city for Seti – the Pharaoh. Continuing on, the next dramatic scene shows an old woman whose dress is caught under a stone being moved for construction. The Egyptian taskmasters do not allow the stone to be stopped and she is in danger of being crushed. Lilia runs to Moses for help when Joshua is restrained, and Prince Moses frees the old lady.

Moses then questions Joshua why the Hebrews work so slowly. Joshua asks for enough food to eat and a day of rest to recover, to which Moses agrees. Seti hears about this and comes to visit, and sees the slaves working hard to raise an obelisk. In appreciation, Seti calls Moses a Pharaoh in-the-making and thus raises the ire of Ramesses, the son of Seti.

The next scene shows the transformation of Moses as he hears the maid-servant discuss with his mother that Moses is a Hebrew by birth from the cloth in the baby basket. The Pharaoh to-be spurns the throne and lives among the slaves. Batyah pleads with him that the truth will never be told and he should come back to the palace, but Moses refuses as truth was his very life.

One day an Egyptian taskmaster was beating a slave cruelly, and an angry Moses kills the task-master and saved the slave. For this he was shackled and brought before Seti. In a dramatic scene between Moses and Seti, Moses explains that there is only one caste - the caste of humanity. He says it is evil to enslave men

because of their caste and creed. The angry Seti left after telling Ramesses to sentence Moses, and after announcing that Ramesses will be the future Pharaoh. Ramesses banishes Moses into the desert.

Moses with a staff in hand wandered over the desert till he reached Median, met Jethro and married his daughter Zipporah. He became a shepherd and tended sheep. One day Joshua came and implored Moses to redeem the Hebrews. Seti was dead and Ramesses was persecuting the Hebrews more than ever. Refusing to accept that he was the deliverer, Moses climbs up the mountain, where the Voice of God asks Moses to redeem the Hebrews and take them out of Egypt. For 7 day and 7 nights, Moses argued but God was adamant and His will prevailed.

Moses then came to the Pharaoh and asked him to free the slaves. The Pharaoh laughs. Moses turns the river Nile into a river of blood. The pharaoh pleads with Moses to turn it back into water and that he will let the people go. Ramesses does not keep his word (because of the taunts of his queen) and Moses says that now a deadly plague will enter Egypt and kill the first born in every home. The pharaoh's own son is dead and even his God Sokar could not save him.

Finally, in humiliation, the Pharaoh asks Moses to take his people and leave. A song and dance of celebration is then shown. After Moses leaves, the queen sways Ramesses again to go behind Moses and avenge his son's death. He leads his cavalry, pursues Moses and catches up with them on the shores of the Red Sea. In the most trying moment of his life, Moses remains calm. The Lord tests and brings one to the point of complete surrender – and at the last moment, when there is no ray of hope, He rushes to help.

Moses prays to God and raises his staff over the sea. A wind blows and the waters of the red Sea are immediately divided and gather into a wall on either side leaving a dry passage in the middle. The children of Israel were thus safely taken to the other shore, but when the soldiers tried to pursue them the waters closed in and the Egyptian army was destroyed. The song of praise was then heard. Leaving the Red Sea behind, the children of Israel finally reached Mount Sinai. One day in prayer, Moses heard God's voice asking him to ascend Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments.

If one has to enquire why Moses was the chosen Instrument of the Lord for the deliverance of the people from slavery at the hands of the Egyptian Pharaohs, the answer will indicate that his principal qualification was his adherence to truth, his upright character, unity of thought, word and deed, a great sense of justice and his ability to be equanimous both in glory and in fall. Moses was the rare combination of confidence and humility. Real humility means transcendence of the self. He lived with the slaves and worked with them.

Thus, Moses was for God -"a treasure out of all people ". Moses was exhorted by God to ascend Mount Sinai and receive the Ten Commandments. Two tablets of the Ten Commandments written by God himself and the entire Torah were given to him. At this point the Ten Commandments were read to the entire gathering, to a dramatic effect.

In Moses' absence the word was spread that Moses would not return. The Jews start arguing about selecting a new leader. They finally made a golden calf with all the gold they had and they worshipped it. Moses was blazing when he came down and saw all the revelry and ritual. He chides them for how soon their faith in God is shaken. All are repentant and vow to follow him. Moses went up Mt. Sinai again and pleaded forgiveness from God for the behaviour of the children of Israel. Moses is a great example of the teachings of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba where Man is exhorted to manifest Human values in action and wear the jewel of character in day to day life. This was clearly expressed in the finale song.

The entire drama was very moving with good visual and sound effects that created a sense of realism and the feeling of being transported through time back into Egypt. But the celebrations were not over yet. There was more on the morrow.

JULY 8: ASHADI EKADASHI - A FULL DAY OF MUSIC

The following day was a veritable treat for music lovers. We were treated to high quality Indian classical music fare, both in the morning and in the evening, by musicians from the state of Maharashtra as a continuation of the *Ashadi Ekadashi* celebrations from the previous day. In the morning we had a Carnatic vocal concert by Sri Krishnamurthy, a Music Director, vocalist, flautist, percussionist and a pianist hailing from Mumbai. After this presentation we had further excellent musical treats in store in the afternoon with an instrumental music performance followed by a Ms. Richa Sharma concert.

The Morning Programme

Sri Krishnamurthy is not only a music director of repute but is a rare breed of musician who is not only adept at playing the flute, the piano and percussion but also penning lyrics in Indian languages and Sanskrit. He has toured the USA, the UK, France, Germany, Russia and the gulf countries and has commanded great respect for all his musical works.

Sr Krishnamurthy combines youthful zest, a firm grounding in classical music with progressive expressions to reach out to all music lovers from all parts of the world. Sri Krishnamurthy has released many albums in different genres. His devotional *bhajans* and flute vocal concerts' albums have been well received. He also has released many Sai *bhajan* albums like Sai Prem Avataara, Sai Prem Tarama, Mohan Sai and Sai Amrit.

Sri Krishnamurthy sang the vocals while playing the harmonium. He was accompanied by Sri Vinod Sehgal on the flute, Sri Shantanu on the *tabla*, and Sri Rajesh on the violin. He sang *Swaagatham Krishna* (in *raag* Mohanam), *Brochvarevarura* (*raag* Khamas) and a Meera Bhajan *Baso Mere* and finally *Vittala Vere* (in *raag* Janardan Sarum). Swami made a chain for Sri

Krishnamurthy and lovingly put it around his neck. He also manifested a ring for the flute player Sri Vinod Sehgal.

The Evening Programme

The evening programme was a double header with the first being an instrument medley followed by a vocal concert by the very popular playback singer Ms. Richa Sharma.

The first item was an instrument medley comprising the *tihayee* (trio) of instruments – the sitar, the sarod and the tabla. Playing on the *sarod* was Sri Surmani Rajan Vinayak Kulkarni, with Sri Sudhir Phadke on the *sitar* and Sri Nishikant Barodekar on the *tabla*.

Sri Kulkarni received his first music training under his father the Late Pt. Vinayakrao Kulkarni and his uncle the late Pt. Raghunathrao Kulkarni from the age of 2. Initially he trained on the *tabla* till the age of 17 and had accompanied top musicians all over India. Attracted to the deep tonal quality of the *sarod*, at the age of 18, his interests shifted. In 1978, he became the disciple of Pt. Ratnakar Vyas of Mumbai and received formal training in the *sarod*. In his playing style, he concentrates mainly on the 'Gayaki Ang' during the 'Alap' and 'Jod' but shifts to instrumental style when the *tabla* picks up. He has had a distinguished career playing for All India Radio and Doordarshan, as well as making music for television serials, ballets, documentary films and advertisements.

The sitarist Sri Sudhir Phadke was born in Pune, Maharashtra in a musical family where his father used to conduct *sitar* and vocal classes. Sri Phadke thus began his initial lessons with his father. Later he was accepted as a student by the great sitarist Smt. Annapurna devi (sister of Ust. Ali Akbar Khan and the wife of Pt. Ravishankar), under whom artistes like Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia are still learning. Sudhir has performed in all the major festivals in the country and has been to the USA, S. Africa, and Dubai for concerts. He also has several music albums to his credit and regularly performs for All India Radio and Doordarshan.

The young *tabla* player, Nishikant Barodekar began imbibing Indian classical Music from his grandmother, the legendary vocalist Smt. Hirabai Barodekar, and under the initial guidance from the veteran musician Ust. Ghulam Rasool Khan, Nishikant began his tabla lessons and after 7 years of training with his guru mastered the intricacies of the Delhi *gharana* style of table and was awarded the national Scholarship for the years 1979 and 1980. Since 1982, Nishikant has been a traditional 'Ganda-Bandh-Shagird' of the world renowned *tabla* maestro Ustad Alla Rakha. Under the keen tutelage of the Ustad of the Punjab *Gharana* and an abundant training in the traditional percussion style from the maestro's eldest son, the genius Sri Zakir Hussain, Nishikant has developed a style that is distinguished for a fine sense of rhythm, versatility and eloquence. Nishikant has performed with artists like Ust. Vilayat Khan, Pt. Birju Maharaj, Pt. Shivkumar Sharma, Pt. Bhimsen Joshi, Pt. Jasraj, John Maclaughlin, L. Shankar, Ust. Sultan Khan and with

Ust. Zakir Hussain. The ease with which Nishikant accompanies veteran as well as young Indian classical instrumentalists, vocalists, South Indian and Western instrumentalists especially fusion Jazz speaks of the discipline and dedication with which this talented young musician has pursued music. Sri Nishikant is also a visiting faculty with the Sai Mirpuri College of Music and his young students have many a time expressed to us their gratitude for the training that he is giving them.

The trio played two *ragas* - Hemant and Mishra Pahadi. At the end of the concert Swami made a ring for Sri Kulkarni, the *sarod* player, to his unabashed astonishment and joy.

The next was an absorbing vocal concert by Ms. Richa Sharma. Ms. Richa Sharma today is one of the most respected and talented singers in Bollywood (the Indian version of Hollywood based in Mumbai) having worked with almost everybody in the music fraternity. And what sets this young singer apart is her full throated classy voice!

Richa Sharma is the youngest of seven children of a temple priest in Faridabad (Haryana). Her father Pandit Daya Shankar Upadhyaya and mother Manorma Devi taught young Richa the art of singing *bhajans*, particularly Mata Ke Jagran, which slowly and steadily became Richa's destiny in the initial years of her life. When she was eight years old, she was invited to sing before religious congregations in and around Delhi. She got herself enrolled in the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. Under the tutelage of Pandit Aaskaran Sharma, Richa went on to get proper training in Indian classical and light music. Ms Richa added *ghazals*, film songs, Punjabi and Rajasthani folk songs to her repertoire, thus making her voice reach out to more and more people in a variety of sounds.

While music was at its peak in Richa's life, academic education had to be sacrificed and without any backing but with a dream to make it big in the music world, Richa landed in Mumbai in 1994. She sang cover versions and *bhajans* in order to ensure she had her bread and butter and simultaneously continued her struggle in Bollywood. She made her debut in Bollywood with Sawan Kumar's SALMA PE DIL AA GAYA in 1996 and followed it up by a number of films until the big hit came by in the form of TAAL where she sang for AR Rahman. Thereafter a spate of hits followed one after the other and today Ms. Richa is riding high on the wave of success. The versatile playback singer has also done quite a few albums to showcase her talent.

A small town girl who began life singing at God's home is today one of Bollywood's biggest success stories. And the wheel has come full circle for after striking it rich she came today to sing again in God's home in the divine presence of God Himself! And Swami showed His appreciation by manifesting a *navarathna mala* for her at the end of her concert.

Ms. Richa Sharma was accompanied by Sri Narasiha Kulkarni on the harmonium, Sri Vinod Sehgal on the flute, Rakesh on the *tabla* and Sri Lala Ram on the *dholak*. The chorus singers were Mrs. Thanu Pandit, Ms. Jyothi,

Sri Rajesh Sharma, Sri Vinu, Sri Yogesh, Sri Ashok and Sri Shishunath. Ms. Richu Sharma sang 4 songs that evening – *Dham Dham Mast Kalandar*, *Meera Kahe*, *Chap Tilak*, and the *bhajan Sai Baba Tera Naam*.

JULY 09: CHANTING BY TIBETAN MONKS

They came quite suddenly to the Ashram and graced the Sai Kulwant Hall for a couple of days - tall, graceful Tibetan monks in long red robes. Everyone was curious – where did these dignified monks come from.

These Tibetan monks were also graced by Swami when after seeing them seated on the side on July 8th during the music concert in the evening, He explicitly signalled to them to seat themselves right in front of the dais. Signal honour indeed!

The humbleness of spirituality and nobility of the innocent was reflected in the hearts and faces of these eighteen Tibetan Buddhists masters when they chanted 5 specially selected Tibetan Mantras on the 9th of July, right before the Guru Pournima festival.

The programme of getting these Tibetan monks to chant these *mantras* in the Divine Presence was initiated by a Sai family from Singapore to give thanks for the Divine Love, Blessings and Guidance that our Most Loving Bhagavan has constantly bestowed on all of us.

These Tibetan Buddhist masters hail from the Sera Jhe monastery, an austere community with over five thousand monks, each serving the Buddha and cultivating his Bodhicita. Sera Jhe was founded in Tibet in the 15th Century. After the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the 1950s, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama reestablished the monastery in Byalakuppe in the district of Mysore, Karnataka. This is the largest Buddhist institution in India today and is reputedly one of the greatest institutions of spiritual learning.

On that auspicious afternoon, Swami came out early, at about 2.15 PM and called the Tibetan Buddhist Masters for an interview. In the interview room, Swami had a casual chat with them, asking their names and background, and discussing Buddhism with them in general. Our Most Loving Bhagavan blessed the Tibetan Buddhist Masters so that they will 'always serve with a smile.'

He expounded that "forms and names are many but God is one" and that the unhappiness in one's life is caused by one's desires. Such simple yet profound words had a visible effect on the Tibetan Buddhists masters, and they mentioned in the *satsang* held later that evening, that they were speechless, and being with Baba had permeated their entire souls with nothing but peace. Swami too manifested His love in the form of three gold medallions with the image of Chenrezig, Guan Yin (Goddess of Mercy) and Lord Buddha and a gold Rudraksha japa mala with 108 beads for the high Tibetan Buddhists masters. Such gifts were significant for the Tibetan Buddhists masters, not for the material value they held, but for the symbolism

and love they represented. The Tibetan Buddhists masters also mentioned that it was blissful being with Swami, and they would have stayed the night with Him in the interview room if possible, as it seemed that Swami had no concern with regards to time. Indeed the interview stretched for an hour and a half.

Permission was given by Our Divine Gracious Bhagavan at 5:30 pm for the programme to commence. An intricate statue of the thousand-armed Chenrezig was offered to our Most Loving Bhagavan. Along with the Chenrezig statue an offering of 5 Jnani Buddha Katas (a Tibetan tradition of greeting respected individuals with an offering of 5 different coloured silk cloth). "Dorje's" (a Tibetan amulet), specially handcrafted by Tibetan Lamas were then blessed. As these dorjes were being handcrafted, the Lamas would chant the Avalokitesvara mantra to invoke His blessings. The dorje is the quintessential symbol of the "diamond vehicle" or Vajrayana Buddhist path. The vajra essentially symbolizes the impenetrable, immovable, immutable, indivisible, and indestructible state of enlightenment or Buddhahood as vajra mind. In ancient India, the vajra, as a thunderbolt, became the chief weapon of the Vedic Sky-God Indra. According to a Buddhist legend, Buddha Skakyamuni took the vajra weapon from Indra and forced its wrathful open prongs together to form a peaceful Buddhist scepter. This auspicious dorje symbol can be used to ward off negative energies, and for protection against harm.

After the graceful introduction by two MCs, a 13 years old boy, Ong Sai Keet from Singapore and an 18 year old girl, Fong Sook Ling from Malaysia, the Tibetan Buddhist Masters initiated their chant. The audience was uplifted by the chants and was mesmerized by the powerful vibrations emitted. Put in the words of one devotee, "Each climax brought about a surge in energy. It was like both the ebbing and crashing of the ocean's waves on the shore."

A total of six *mantras* were chanted (in the order given below):

Mantra of Avalokiteshvara is to generate love and compassion.

The Mantra of Medicine Buddha is not only to eliminate the pains of diseases but also helps to overcome the inner sickness of attachment, hatred, jealousy, desire, greed and ignorance.

The Mantra of White Tara has the power to grant longevity and overcome life's obstacles.

The Amitabha Buddha Pure Land Mantra grants one to be reborn in the Pure Land where in the absence of suffering one can pursue the practice of Enlightenment.

The Kalachakra Mantra is a prayer for universal peace and harmony.

These Tibetan Buddhist mantras are always recited silently within oneself just like *Namasmaranas*. But these masters made exception that day, to chant

aloud in our Most Loving Bhagavan's divine, pure, and holy presence. In accordance with Tibetan religious tradition, the chanting was concluded with dedications done in both Tibetan and English so that all the merits generated by this chanting would be dedicated to all the beings in the 6 realms and all the worlds.

Permission was given to the 5 senior Tibetan Buddhist Masters; Geshe Wangdu, Geshe Lobsang Gyaltzen, Geshe Tsewang Dorji, Geshe Tsetan Tashi, and Captain Ong to present our Most Loving Bhagavan with yellow "long life" katas to reaffirm their wish for a long and healthy life for our Most Loving Bhagavan to continue His Mission in His Present Form.

Prasadam in the form of "dorjes" and apples were then blessed and distributed.

Heart2Heart requested their leader, who is currently in Singapore, to give us a first person account of his experiences. In response to this request, Sri Geshe Choyin has written the following account in his own words - to make the meaning clearer, we have included some explanations in the parenthesis -

Geshe Choyin writes, "I went with 18 lamas to do some prayers at Puttparthi. For a long time I couldn't whether decide to go on this trip or not. On one hand, I think it is good to see him and do some prayers there, but on the other hand, I was concerned about missing my class. (Geshe Choyin is the resident teacher in the Amitabha Buddhist Center in Singapore and he didn't want to miss teaching his pupils.) It was not till the last minute that I'd decided to go to Puttparthi for the prayers.

I flew to Bangalore the next day and arrived at Bangalore about 10PM. I spent a night there. The next morning, I took a cab to Puttparthi and arrived there at about 9:30 AM. We were going to start the prayer in the afternoon at 3:00PM. Somehow, Baba came earlier at 2:30PM. He called all the lamas to meet with Him (Swami called them in for an interview) and we all gathered around Him. He smiled at us and asked each one of us our names and where we came from. Later, Baba asked 2 monks what they wanted and they both replied that they wanted Buddha. Baba then performed a miraculous act of manifesting 2 Buddha pendants from His hand and gave them to the 2 monks. Then He turned to His right, looked at me and commented that I am a happy person. He asked who is doing the chanting; then again He performed another miracle. A rudraksha mala manifested from His hand and He put it around my neck. During the course of the meeting, He also manifested a diamond ring for Dorje (the Buddhist name of the young MC for the evening, Sai Keet Ong). It was quite amazing how He manifested these miracles. The audience with Baba lasted about 1 1/2 hours. During this time, He gave much good and beneficial advice to us.

I had heard of Baba's miraculous acts before but this time I actually saw it with my own eyes. I think what is even more amazing than those miraculous manifestations are His acts of good deeds for so many sentient beings. I have seen many devotees who have strong faith in Him. He has done many wonderful things such as building hospitals, providing food and education,

helping the poor and the sick etc. He even provides vegetarian meals. Not only does this help human beings, it also helps to save many other sentient beings. I truly admire Baba's compassion and His wonderful deeds."

JULY 10: A DANCE BY THE SSSIHL BOYS AND SONGS BY THE BAILEY SISTERS FROM NEW YORK

The evening before the celebration of Guru Poornima is always one of high expectations. Many programs are prepared and vie with each other to fill this coveted time slot. This year we had two programs blessed by Swami Himself to be performed in front of the festival crowd in Sai Kulwant Hall. One was a dance program called "Abhinayanjali" by the students of the Institute and the other was a concert by the Bailey sisters and troupe from New York City.

A Dance By The Students Of SSSIHL

These boys had performed a dance program earlier on July 6th using 4 specially choreographed dance sequences. Swami was pleased with their performance that day and had honoured them then by asking them to change and assemble in the *mandir* before the start of the *bhajans*, where He talked with all of them for a few minutes as a visible sign of His pleasure and benediction. He further blessed them to perform again in front of the massive crowd that had assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall on the eve of Guru Poornima.

The boys had presented these dance forms not only as an offering to their beloved Lord but also as an outward expression of their innermost feelings and reverence towards Him and their gratitude for all that He has taught them. So each dance was preceded by a small commentary in Telugu and in English, followed by the dance set to a song specially chosen for the lyrics and the *bhava* it conveys. For this special concert the boys had added two more songs and presented a beautiful bouquet of six well choreographed dances to the immense delight of all.

The first dance was a Shiva Tandava dance, set to the song "Aananda Thandava Maade, Mahadaananda Thandava Maade", a song that extols Shiva in His Tandava - *tandava* means dance. Dance is an expression of duality just like Matter and Energy, Purusha and Prakrithi, Shiva and Shakthi. Life dances to the tunes of desires, suffering dances to the tunes of duality, and Creation dances to the tune of the Creator. This feeling was well conveyed in the dance performed by 10 boys.

10 dancers again expressed the sentiment in the next dance that the Divine Effulgence is so magnanimous that language cannot bear the burden of its expression and understanding becomes numb in front of the beauty of ecstasy. One can then only bow down in submission and servitude. Set to the song, *Ramayye Rajayye nantaa raghupathi, Aaanandam andinche nanta. Seethamma samethudantaa Dhasharadhi, Sirulenno Kuripinchi nanta*, which extols Rama as the bestower of the ultimate bliss – *Ananda*, the giver of imperishable wealth, the protector and father of everyone.

The next dance expressed one of the profoundest of thoughts - of the unity of everyone and everything. Perceiving inequality in existence, the boys said, is an outward expression of innate ignorance. Diversity in outward appearance is a channel through which human understanding shall flow, to merge in the endless ocean of unity. Set to the very popular song "Brahmam Okkate, para Brahmam okkate" which tells us about the oneness that is seen in the world. It tells us that the hot scorching Sun is the same for both – the mighty elephant and the dog. It also tells that highly learned Brahmin and the ignorant and the untouchable are born and lead their lives on the same soil. There is no difference between any of them. All are but different forms of Brahman and that Brahman is one!

"O Lord! Thy name is a path to my feet and a lamp to my life. Thy name is Thy Hand that wipes the tears of my soul and tends the wounds of my heart. In thy name shall I lay my life and my love". This was the sentiment of the fourth dance rendered to the song, "Oh Raama nee naama entho ruchira. Entho ruchi (2x) entho ruchi ra". The lyrics of the song highlights the value of the name of the Lord (Rama). In this age the only way to liberation, one's final goal is *namasmarana* or chanting the name of the Lord. Most sweet is the name of Lord Rama. Sing His name and in that lies all the eternal bliss.

The next was a very vibrant dance set to a fast pace as it expressed the rhythm of life. "Rhythm is the instinct of creation, Harmony is its intuition. In the droplets of rain, in the surging waves of the sea, in the humming of the bee, in the twinkle of the star, I see it, I feel it and I call it as DANCE." The song was *Bhavyamaina Aatma bhavam, Ramyamaina Jeeva ragam, navyamaina Nithya thalam, Akila Jagathi moolam*. Or in other words: The grand Atmic feeling, the enchanting song of life, the ever new beat is the foundation of the entire creation. This vigorous dance was well rendered by 19 dancers.

The last song of the evening was a Hindi song *Thaal se Thaal milakar, Jhoom (3x) Jhoom ke nacho aaj* or dance enthusiastically today in tune to the beat, conveying that the boundaries of the mind are the barriers to evolution. The eternal knowledge redefines the boundaries. In the inner-most realms of my heart, I found the destination of evolution, I called it Oneness. I called it Unity. I called it Love!

The Bailey Sisters

The Bailey Sisters, Audrey and April, hail from a spiritual and musical family in New York. They grew up singing at myriad family school and church affairs. The sisters first learned of Sai Baba while watching the film, "The Lost Years of Jesus" but could not find any additional information about him until 1986. During the Christian Easter celebration, in the Spring of 1986, they finally found a book entitled "Baba" by Arnold Schulman. They identified with Baba's teachings "Help ever, Hurt Never" and "Start the day with Love, fill the day with Love, end the day with Love" because these principles mirrored the Christian theology of Jesus Christ, and so the sisters became devotees. April was the first to travel to Prashanti Nilayam to see Swami in the winter of 1986.

In 1988, Audrey, her younger son Christopher and their brother Warren Bailey accompanied April to see Sai Baba, and Warren also became a devotee on that trip.

April began composing songs of love and devotion for Sai Baba and His Divine Mission. Upon returning to the U.S.A., the sisters began travelling to events sponsored and hosted by Sai devotees. These two were the initial singing members of what would eventually develop into Sai's Nine Singing Group. The group grew as they continued to travel and sing at more Sai organization events, as several knowledgeable Sai devotees expressed a desire to join with the sisters in singing these musical expressions of Swami's divinity and love.

In their concert, the Bailey Sisters and Sai's Nine sang five songs from their CD "God Lives in India". The inspiration for this CD as well as the song "God Lives in India" came from a gospel song and a speech of our beloved Lord. April Bailey recalls hearing a gospel tune with the theme that people should acknowledge their belief in God. It states, *"If you are aware that you have been helped and blessed by the Lord, you must never be afraid to say so"*. A similar theme was published in Vol. 2 of Sathya Sai Speaks, wherein in Chapter 47 entitled "On to Victory", Bhagavan says, *"When someone asks you in great earnestness, where the Lord is to be found, do not try to dodge the question. Give them the answer that rises up to your tongue from the heart. Direct them. He is here in Prashanti Nilayam"*.

The five songs that the Bailey Sisters and Sai's Nine sang that evening are "Celebrate the Birth of Sathya Sai", "I am Never Alone", "Why Fear When I am Here", "Our Only weapon" and of course the theme song, "God Lives in India".

JULY 11: THE GURU POORNIMA CELEBRATIONS

The Morning Programme

Swami was welcomed into Sai Kulwant Hall by the boys playing Nadaswaram Music on the morning of Guru Pournima. After Swami got down from His car, the first thing He did was cut the massive Guru Pournima cake prepared by Italian devotees. This cake preparation has become a staple in all major festivals and is artistically done and decorated usually to a motif befitting the occasion. After giving His *darshan* Swami blessed the boys by asking them to start the morning's programme.

All the 500 boys of the Institute had been practising for the last few days a list of *stothrams* to sing in the divine presence on this holy day and all the *stothrams* selected had a special significance for the Guru. One of the boys had prepared a special card outlining the *stothrams* that they would be singing and showed it to Swami for His blessings. The Institute boys chanted the following *stothrams* in the morning: *Guru Paduka Stothram, Guru Nathudave Goori Choophive, Sume Supta Gandham, Easwaramba Sutani Devomi and Madhuram Nee Ganam Yento Madhuram Madhuram Nee Ganam*.

Swami's attention was then drawn to the back of the Hall where a number of tricycles were arranged for distribution to the needy. These were hand-pedalled tricycles and were for distribution to those special people who had lost their legs or were unable to use them. The recipients had been selected from the villages close to Puttaparthi and were brought to Sai Kulwant Hall to be blessed by receiving the tricycles from the divine hands directly. As the State President of the Sathya Sai Seva Organizations of Andhra Pradesh called the names of the recipients, they were helped onto the tricycle and it was wheeled up to Swami so that they could receive His blessings on this auspicious morning. A total of 51 people (41 males and 10 females) were benefited this day.

Swami then asked the boys to sing *bhajans*. The *bhajans* sung by the boys were *Sakshat para Brahma Sai*, *Sadguru Brahma Sanathana*, *Guru vara Naam*, and *Guru Baba* and a few more. They were accompanied by 2 keyboards, 2 *tablas*, 1 flute, and 1 violin and had 3 lead singers. After distribution of *prasadam* and *arathi*, Guru Poornima's morning celebration came to a close.

The Evening Programme

The evening of the Guru Poornima festival is now synonymous with the Sai Symphony orchestra, a mix of musicians from the different countries of the world who come to the Lotus feet and play in harmony – all reading from the same sheet of music. This year 67 musicians assembled in Sai Kulwant hall from 21 countries around the world. The countries included Japan, Italy, the USA, Switzerland, India, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Lithuania, New Zealand, Germany, Austria, Macedonia, Spain, Malaysia, Russia, the Netherlands, France, Colombia, Denmark, Belgium and Croatia.

These 67 musicians played on a number of musical instruments like the violin, the violas, cellos, bass, oboe, bassoons, the clarinet and the bass clarinet, the flute – Piccolo, the flute, the trumpet, the trombone, the French horn and the English horn, the keyboard harp, the timpani, cymbals, the tambour and an assortment of percussion instruments.

Sai Kulwant Hall had become an opera house for the evening. On both sides of the veranda – a huge banner of the La Scala Opera House, one of the most famous opera houses in the world in Milan, North Italy, was hung and lent the right ambience for this Western classical fare.

Chairs were laid out in concentric semi-circles with all like instruments sitting together - the violins in the front and the big percussion instruments in the back. The 67 musicians lent a very dignified air to the entire proceedings when all of them tramped in, dressed in black and white 'penguin suits', carrying their oversized instruments and quietly took their allotted places. Quickly and efficiently they tuned their instruments or else quietly meditated, preparing themselves mentally to give their best when they played for the Lord. We could not help but reflect on how much trouble they must have taken and how much effort they must have expended in not only freeing their

schedule to be available to play in Sai Kulwant Hall in July in what must be the middle of their busy summer season, but also in transporting their oversized and heavy instruments carefully through myriad airport and plane transfers and the bone jarring ride from Bangalore in order to reach this rural hamlet of Puttaparthi. Truly it is only divine love that can invoke such sentiments and inspire such sacrifices!

Swami Himself came to Sai Kulwant Hall looking exuberant. It was purely the patent love of these musicians and their unalloyed devotion which drew Swami quickly to Sai Kulwant Hall, we felt. The musicians well conducted by Klaus Maurer of Switzerland, quickly got into their routine. The first song they played was a Karl Maria von Weber composition, Invitation to dance – Op. 65 – Rondo' Brillante.

They followed this up with a Franz Lehar composition, Guld und Silber – Op 79 – Walzer. George Friederich's Handel's Watermusic – Suite II was played next followed by Gioacchino Rossini's Il Barbiere di Siviglia – Ouverture. Charles Gounod's composition for flute and piano enthralled the audience and N. Rimsky Korsakov's Capriccio Espagnol – Op 34 – Fandango Asturiano was next. The last 2 pieces that the orchestra played for the audience were Giuseppe Verdi's Aida – Marcia Trionfale – No. 5 (Finale Atto II) and Edward Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance – Op 39 – No. I in D Major.

At the end of the concert there was a moments silence while the audience drank everything in and then realized that it was finally over and broke into loud applause. And what followed next can only be vaguely termed as a "love feast". Swami invited the musicians to come in groups and have their photos taken with Him. But when each group went up to Him, they did not want to tear their eyes away from that enchanting face and look back to face the cameraman. Many endearing words were said, He blessed many a musician by placing His beneficent Hand over their heads and it went on for quite a while, till everyone had drunk their fill and there was scarce a dry eye.

And finally Swami went in for a few moments into the interview room. We thought it was all over but no – when He came back. He wanted to move around where the musicians were seated blessing them all once again. Finally *arathi* was taken; bringing to an end what must surely be a memorable Guru Poonima evening!

JULY 12: INDONESIAN BALA VIKAS DRAMA – BE A STAR IN GOD'S HEAVEN

After a gap of two years, the children of the Sai Centre of Jakarta, Indonesia, were given another opportunity to perform in the Divine Presence. They had last performed in the year 2004 when they had put up a drama called "From Humanness to Divinity". Though the time given was short and even with examinations looming around the corner, the Bala Vikas teachers seized this opportunity of performing before the beloved Lord, and joined together to prepare the programme.

The team arrived in Puttaparthi on the 6th of July. As everyone experiences at one time or the other, they were put to the 'test' this time around. It was after *darshan* on the morning of the 12th and still there was no news as to when the children would be allowed to perform. They were all scheduled to return back on the evening of the 13th and so they thought that they had just one more chance to perform on the morning of the 13th (if they were informed on the evening of the 12th). None of them thought that Swami would allow them to perform on the evening of the 12th.

At around 3 PM on the 12th, Swami sent word that the Indonesians were to perform that evening itself! And they were given thirty minutes to get ready. 30 minutes for all the children to go to their rooms, wear their costumes, put on their make-up and return to Sai Kulwant Hall! And as if this test was not severe enough, after all the children reached their rooms it started raining very heavily. A couple of the organisers went to the bus-stand across the road, to see if they could rent a bus to bring the children back in their costumes without them getting wet. And what did they find – that due to a state-wide strike called by the Opposition party all public transport buses were off the road for the day. And this mini-drama was happening in the full view of the entire crowd of devotees present in Sai Kulwant Hall that day.

The Indonesians were grace personified under all this pressure. They went about their tasks gamely, still happy that they had been given the coveted chance to perform in front of the Lord. And the Lord who often says "Your test is my taste" then quickly came to their rescue. The owners of a couple of large vans which were parked just outside Sai Kulwant Hall put them at the disposal of the Indonesians to transport the children and their sets and props. Some of the Indonesians worked unitedly as a team to put up the props, the others quickly dressed up the kids and brought them to Sai Kulwant Hall by 4 PM. And by the time the kids were dressed the sudden downpour had stopped equally suddenly and everyone could come comfortably to Sai Kulwant Hall without getting wet.

And the all merciful Lord gave them some more time to settle down. He came out only at 4:20 PM, looking very innocent with perhaps just the slightest trace of a mischievous smile on the corners of His lips.

The Indonesian children had won everyone's hearts (including His) even before the drama had started! It was an abject lesson in surrender, a lesson that if we accept everything as His Grace and go about our tasks cheerfully, He cannot help but come to our rescue in full measure, unasked and unsolicited.

They had elected to put up one of the enduring tales of God's love from the Bhagavatham - the story of Dhruva. This Holy Scripture contains the lives of exalted souls, which when read and ruminated upon sanctifies our lives. The Bhagavatham is nothing but God's love from start to the finish.

The girls started with a colourful dance to the song - "Jai Jai Ram Sai Ram. Do Akshar Ka Pyaara Naam", a melodious song that hails the glory and love

of Sai, before depicting the story of Dhruva. The Dhruva story is shown as if it is related by a grandfather to his grandchildren.

Prince Dhruva, a tender and young boy of five years, obtained immortal fame, and was graced with the Lord's love and constant presence within himself through the strength of his determination and devotion to the Lord.

Thousands of years ago, in India, there lived a king by the name of Uttanpada. He had two sons, Dhruva and Uttama. Dhruva was born to Suniti, the elder queen. She was a noble and pious lady. Uttama was the son of Queen Suruchi, the younger queen who was arrogant in nature but was the king's favourite.

One day while the King sat on the throne, Queen Suruchi denied Dhruva a place on the king's lap. This hurt Dhruva deeply and he vowed to achieve a place significantly higher than his father's lap. He took his mother's blessings and left the palace one night to attain his goal.

On his way to the forest, he met the sage Narada, who instructed him to worship Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe, and gave him the *manthra* "Om Namoh Bhagavathe Vasudevaya". After long and arduous *tapasya* (prayers), Lord Vishnu was very pleased with this tender lad and granted him a high place in the Heavens. He became Dhruva Tara, the North Pole star, whose position in the sky remains constant, symbolizing his unwavering devotion in fulfilling his ambition. The play contained two more enchanting dances set to the songs "The five D's" and "Be a Flower in God's Garden, Be a Star in God's Heaven".

Through His actions, not only in the Bhagavatham and the story of Dhruva, but also in the sequence of events that preceded the staging of the drama this afternoon, God has always demonstrated that there is no force greater than the power of devotion. Thus by developing the noble values of Duty, Discipline, Devotion, Discrimination and Determination, Dhruva contemplated on Divinity and earned the Vision of the Lord. These same noble qualities won also for these kids from Indonesia the Lord's heart. He was very pleased with their performance and stood up and gave everyone the golden opportunity to have their photographs taken with Him.

JULY 13: A DRAMA BY THE CHILDREN OF THE SRI SATHYA SAI SCHOOL IN TORONTO – THE POWER OF ONE

This presentation by the students of the Sri Sathya Sai School of Canada was an offering of love, reverence and gratitude to the ONE who started and created it all. It was dedicated to the vision and the teachings of the School's founder – Sri Sathya Sai Baba – for founding the school and making such a difference in the lives of its students.

The Sathya Sai School of Canada was established in September 2000 as Sri Sathya Sai Baba's gift to His devotees on His 75th birthday. The purpose of

the school is to integrate character education and academic excellence within the mainstream Canadian school system.

When Swami blessed the school project on November 17, 1999, He said, “*Start small, grow big*”. And they have done exactly that. The school began six years ago with 60 students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 1. They now have 160 students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6. On the occasion of the celebration of Swami’s 75th birthday, the garlands on Swami’s photograph continued to grow and grew by an astonishing 75 inches. Just as the garlands which adorned his picture have multiplied in length, so too do the number of children who benefit from His education programme continue to multiply and increase.

This year, their first group of students are graduating and leaving the School to spread the message of Love that they have learnt through the SSSEHV Programme at the school. As an expression of gratitude, the students came to Prashanti Nilayam to meet the founder of the school and offer this programme of love, with love, to the incarnation of love.

The programme was a dramatic presentation of what ONE individual can achieve, if the purpose is noble. Much of the dramatization was in the form of a flash-back that traced the history of the School, highlighting its uniqueness and the impact at the individual, family, social, national and global levels.

It began as a conversation between three generations, namely – a grandmother, a mother and the grandchildren – in the year 2070. The grandmother reminisces about her childhood when, as a young child, she went to a very special school in Toronto that moulded her to be the person she had become, namely a very successful humanitarian of outstanding accomplishments.

Grandma Dr. Karen Joy shares the memories of her childhood with her daughter, grand-daughter Hope, and grand-son Earnest. She tells them about her life as a student of the Sathya Sai School of Canada. Later the grandmother is interviewed on a TV talk show “Heart to Heart”. During the course of the interview the talk show hosts pull out a film from the archives of a programme that the grandmother and her classmates had presented in front of the founder in July 2006, when they were little children.

The main metaphor that weaved through this presentation was the growing garland and its significance. The garland is a potent symbol and the miracle of the growing garland meant many things to many people. But for everyone, it signifies something that is sacred and blessed. They see every student of the school as a petal in the growing garland of God.

JULY 15th – 17th: AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE and A SSSIHL DRAMA ENTITLED ‘FROM I TO WE TO HE’

To celebrate 25 years of the Institute, all the departments are organising conferences and seminars in their respective fields inviting eminent men to

share their knowledge and current research with all. The Department of Mathematics and Computer Science also organised a very well attended 3 day conference on NEXT GENERATION INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR SOCIETAL ADVANCEMENT AND INTEGRATION between the 15th and 17th of July.

The conference was inaugurated by Sri Rajeeva Ratna Shah, Member Secretary of the Planning Commission, Government of India. The conference focussed on topics like Societal Applications of Information technology (IT), Next Generation Information Technologies, IT for Societal Applications, IT in Health and IT in Disaster/Emergency management. The conference was well attended by eminent IT practitioners and teachers from abroad representing Cornell University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign IBM Corporation East Fishkill, New York, Intel Corporation, Arizona State University, the Weill Medical College of Cornell University, Philips Research laboratories in the Netherlands and General Motors, Detroit. There were also eminent speakers from India from Government Organizations like the National Remote Sensing Agency, and the Ministry of Information Technology, the Indian branches of Multi-National Corporations like Honeywell, Sathyam Computers, Motorola and so on. There was a poster board exhibition of research papers and also a panel discussion on Next generation technology. There were a total of 160 participants from India and abroad.

As part of the IT conference, the M.Tech students in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science put up a drama on the 15th July entitled "From I To We To He". The drama tried to focus attention on the fact that while technology has no doubt helped man, however the basis of technology is a selfish mind - with desires solely for his own concern.

In the beginning, as a cave man, man invented tools such as clubs and stone implements (technology) to kill and thus fill his stomach. Since then the wheel, the fire, metal processing, the IC engine, the Industrial revolution, and now finally the IT Age have all symbolised man's evolved mind to satisfy more and more of his desires. Technology is helping man crunch more and more activities in less and less time, thus freeing up more time. But unfortunately technology does not teach man how to effectively use the extra time. Thus the rat race for fulfilling more and more of our desires goes on incessantly at the cost of degrading our environment. Technology has helped Man travel from *Vyashti* (Individual) to *Samashti* (Society). Now he has to travel from *Samashti* to *Shrushti* (Nature) and from *Shrushti* to *Parameshti* (God).

The drama starts with a company called Futronix building a nano-robot which can do amazing things for the human body. The Managing Director – Sampath, the Chief Finance Officer – Mani, the Chief Designer of this nano-robot (Avinash), his colleague (Manas) are very positive about it. They have an internal advisor Vivek who tells them what is right and what is wrong. But they do not listen and their product fails and the company is facing a huge crisis.

At such a time Vivek brings a consultant to bail them out – Mr Gyan Prakash. Mr Gyan Prakash gives them a solution and explains to them the entire concept of desire and the theme of selfless service is revealed. Aninash and Manas want to know if there is any place where we can see technology being used selflessly. Gyan Prakash tells them about Swami's projects (Hospitals, Educational Institutes, Water Projects, etc.) where the state of the art technology is used for the betterment of society and nature. Well choreographed dances set to melodious songs provide an interlude. The drama ends with "Aao Sab milkar gaye...."

The sets used in the drama were simple, but detailed and expressive. Though prepared at the last minute - as the boys were also busy making the hundred odd arrangements for the Conference as well as taking care of the needs of the guests and keeping up with their studies as well as making the time to practise - the 100 boys who participated in the making of the drama pulled it all off without a hitch or hiccup, just like everything else where the grace of God is obtained!

JULY 18: A MUSIC COLLEGE CONCERT – RAMA NAMAMRUTHAM

The Music College boys after a hiatus put up a very creditable programme this evening called "RAMA NAMAMRUTHAM" – The Nectarine name of Lord Rama.

Three boys of the Music College (Sri S. Harish, Sri K.R. Gokul and Sri Roopesh Chandran - all pursuing their Diploma Course in Music) sang the first part of the concert - a vocal recital. The first song was *Namo Namu Raghavaya Anisham* in *raag* Deshiya Thodi set to Rupaki *Thalam*. This is a *divya nama sankirtana* in Sanskrit which is in praise of Lord Rama. This composition is considered as the first composition of Thyagaraja Swami.

The next song was a long one – NAMA RAMAYANAM, which depicts the whole Ramayanam divided into 7 *kaandams* or sections. The first is Bala *kaandam*, which is in *raag* Yamuna Kalyani and starting with "Suddha Brahma Parathpara Ram, Kaalath Maka Parameshwar Ram". The next is Ayodhya *kaandam* in *raag* Durbari Kanada followed by Aaranya *kaandam* in *raag* Valachi. Following this was Kishkindha *kaandam* in *raag* Hamsanadam, Sundara *kaandam* in *raag* Desh, Yuddha *kaandam* in *raag* Madhyamavathy, and finally Utthara *kaandam* in *raag* Kaapi. Each *kaandam* ends with the chorus "Ram Ram Jaya Raja Ram, Ram Ram Jaya Seetha Ram" in the respective *ragas*.

The third song was another *divya Nama sankirthana* (divine song extolling the Lord's name) composed by Thyagaraja Swami in Aananda Bhairavi set to Adi *thalam*. This song in praise of Lord Sri Rama in Telugu starts with "Rama Rama Neevaramu Kaava Rama Seetha Rama, Sadhu Jana Prema Ra Ra Rama".

The fourth song is also in Telugu, which is in *raag* Attana, set to Aadi *thalam* and starting with “Ra Ra Raghu Veera Venta Ra Ra”. This song is also in praise of Lord Rama and composed by Sri Thyagaraja.

The fifth song was a *thillana* (*thillana* refers to a certain set of phrases like *Nadiri diri dhim than na na*) rendered by Sri S. Harish, a diploma student of Carnatic Vocal Music. The song is “Nadiri diri dhim than na na” in *raag* Kathanakuthuhalam. This was followed by “Entharo Mahanu Bhavalu”, one of the five *pancharathnas* of Sri Thyagaraja, set in Sri *ragam*. The RAMA NAMAMRUTHAM concert ended with a short piece in *raag* Kurinchi set to Adi *thalam*. The song is “Bruhi Mukunde dhi rasane” in Sanskrit, a song in praise of Sri Krishna. The 3 singers were accompanied on the *mridangam* and *kol* by Kishore Shastry, on the *tabla* by Sri Mayur Mudaliyar and on the harmonium by Roopesh Chandran and Bhaskar. *Talam* was provided by Sri R. Harish.

The vocal concert was followed by a sitar programme by Sri Soorya Narayana Murthy of the Sri Sathya Sai Mirpuri College of Music. He played his own composition first – a short *alap* (a slow elaboration of the *ragam*) in *raag* Vrindabani Sarang set to *ek taal*. The second piece was in *raag* Durga set to *teentaal* followed by 2 *bhajans* played on this instrument – *Ganga Gadha Dhara Gauri Shankara* and *Sri Guru Parthi Vasa*.

He was accompanied by Sri Abhisekh Narayana Acharya on the *tabla*. At the end of the concert, Swami was so pleased with the student’s dedication to his art as reflected in his mastery over the sitar, that he called the student over, manifested a gold chain for him and with His own hands put it around his neck.

JULY 20: A PROGRAMME BY DEVOTEES FROM JAPAN

About 250 devotees from Japan (180 ladies and 70 gents) were in Puttaparthi for a few days. The group was brimming with suppressed excitement for they had a story to relate to the Lord. A story about how from Vijayadasami day onwards in the year 2004, the devotees in Japan had the extreme good fortune of studying the Vedas. They had prepared to tell this story in the form of a short skit and were also looking forward to chant and show their new found knowledge at the feet of the Veda Purusha Himself. And in a few days they got their chance on the evening of July 20th.

After Swami was seated in His chair, a Japanese lady in the traditional *kimono* welcomed Him with a rose and then gave Him a small brochure outlining the programme they had planned for Him this evening.

The programme started with a dance prepared by the Bala Vikas children. The dance programme entitled EISA is a dance from the Southern island of Japan called Okinawa. This traditional dance, which has been passed down from generation to generation, invokes the spirit of the ancestors and prays for the good health of the people and the eternal prosperity of society. Through this dance, it is believed, the performers as well as the audience connect the co-existence of Man with God and Nature.

The smart children dressed in traditional attire put up a very creditable, well rehearsed and choreographed item to the absolute delight of the crowd. Their martial-art style yells, keeping time in military precision movements and meaningful gestures and dance steps won the hearts of all. And in true Japanese style at the end, they all bowed in unison - first to the Lord and then turning back bowed to the entire congregation and then they turned back again and bowed to the Lord once more to signal the end of the dance. And at the end of the entire programme, after the crowd had left, I noticed that now in true Indian style the Bala Vikas kids touched the feet of the “gurus” who had taught them the dance steps with great reverence in a small informal ceremony.

After this brief but entertaining dance, the Japanese presented their short skit entitled “Vedas, the Breath of Truth; Vedas, the Breath of Sathya” to tell the audience the true story of how the Vedas came to Japan. The Vedas were taught to them by the alumni of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning who currently live and work in Japan.

The skit starts with a Japanese devotee praying ardently to Swami to give him a chance to learn the Vedas. He bemoans the fact that being Japanese, he neither knows English nor Sanskrit, yet he prays that his entire soul is captured by the Vedas. He prays, *“Baba, O Baba! I wish to recite that language of the Gods with my own tongue. I want my whole body and heart to vibrate in the sound of truth”*.

In the next scene three students of the SSSIHL are just about to graduate and are grief stricken at the thought of having to leave the Divine presence. Prashanth says that Swami wants us to serve in society and be a good example to others. Prem concurs but still avers that his heart is bound with Swami and it is painful to separate from Him. The third student, Anand says, *“In this kind of separation there is no separation at all, but rather a precious experience welcomed with joy and determination. It is the beginning of a great adventure filled with sacred surprise and the supreme pleasure of going along with God”*. Anand further adds that he is going to a Japanese University for further study and research.

The next scene shifts to show Anand in Japan – missing Swami very much. He visits the Sathya Sai Osaka Centre for worship, where the time spent with Sai’s devotees revives his enthusiasm. One day the Japanese devotee, who had in the opening scene prayed to Swami, talks to Anand and earnestly requests him to teach the Japanese the Vedas. Anand is at first very hesitant as he does not feel competent or qualified enough to accomplish this sacred task. After many devotees appeal to him, Anand finally relents and agrees to do his best.

In the next scene another Sai student Prashanth comes to Tokyo for a collaborative research between his company in India and a Japanese company. Feeling lonely, Prashanth locates Anand, who invites him to a *sadhana* camp in Osaka and they are happy to be with their Japanese Sai

family. A devotee from Tokyo requests Prashanth to teach the Vedas in Tokyo also. Seeing the aspiration of the devotees in Tokyo, Prashanth decides to undertake this Sai mission as an instrument of Sai.

One day Anand visits Fukuoka, a major city in the South-West of Japan, to attend a Veda conference when he receives a call to his cell phone from Prem, who informs him that he has left India and now (very coincidentally) he is in Fukuoka. The 2 friends are overjoyed and they go the Sai Centre in Fukuoka. The skit narrated that these sequences of “coincidences” of three of Sai’s students coming to Japan at the same time (one to Osaka, one to Tokyo and the third to Fukuoka) is verily Sai’s answer to a pure prayer for learning the Vedas.

In the last scene, the “Veda class” is shown wherein the three students are shown explaining that not only the Japanese but all the people in the world can learn and chant the Vedas. The Veda is a great heritage, a supreme treasure, a source of wisdom for all mankind. There is also an explanation that merely chanting the Veda without practising what it represents is meaningless. Finally the entire class chants the Vedas for Swami’s benefit. They recite the Ganapathi Prarthana, followed by the Manthra Pushpam and the Narayana Upanishad.

While the Veda chanting by the entire Japanese congregation was going on, Swami asks two current students - one from Lithuania (which was formerly a part of the Soviet Union) and the other from the United States of America to come up and stand in front of Him and recite the Vedas also. It was an uncommonly precious scene. The Japanese chanting the Vedas sitting in front of Swami; the two students from the USA and Lithuania united as brothers in Sai’s love; and the entire student fraternity from the primary school kids to the post graduate students all chanting the Vedas in unison - with Swami beaming in happiness. Yes, His Mission is really well underway! The Golden Age of Sai is here and the age is now!

But their programme was not over yet. In 1999, when the Japanese had sung at the Buddha Poornima festival, Swami had told them, “*Practise hard. Practise more and more. Practise will make you much, much better*”. Ever since then intense practise was emphasized in Japan for all the Japanese *bhajans* they were singing. Set to Japanese melody lines, these *bhajans* express God’s beauty, and their thoughts of God and heart-felt gratitude to Him. So the entire Japanese group next joyously sang Swami’s glory expressed in the beauty of the Japanese language.

Starting with *Gajanana Om gajanana (2x) Warera wo michibiku Seinary Chikara yo....*, they followed it with *Jaya Guru jaya Guru Jaya Guru Sai Ram, Nanak lesu Buddha Zorashtra, Subete no Guru wa Ai no guru....*

The third *bhajan* they sang was the melodious *Gopala Sai Gopala* followed by *Krishna Krishna Kagayaku hitomi, Amai hohoemi Kokoro wo Mitasu*. The fifth one was *Hare Hare Sai Hare Hare Sai* with a Japanese twist. The next one was the popular *Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare ...*The next

bhajan was Kami no Ai no Nakade Ikiru Yorokobi, Osore mo Urei mo naku Mikokoro no Mama ni and the last one was Arigatou Swami Arigatou Swami Kokoro no naka ni owasu Kami.

At this point Swami left the dais to go the interview room as the governor of one of the states of India was waiting for an audience with Him. Before he left, however, Swami asked the Japanese group to continue singing the *bhajans*. And they sang with gusto for the next 20 minutes or so, till Swami returned and *arathi* was taken for the day.

JULY 23rd: “GEETHA MALLIKA” – A PRESENTATION BY THE BRINDAVAN BHAJAN GROUP

The Brindavan Bhajan Group presented a musical ensemble called “Geetha Mallika” comprising of devotional songs in Hindi, Sanskrit, Kannada and the Telugu languages, on the evening of Sunday, 23rd July 2006, in the Divine Presence of Bhagavan.

This was a repeat (with a couple of songs added) of the programme presented by the group in Brindavan in May (and reported in our June 1st Issue). At that time Bhagavan had commanded them to come and perform it again in Prashanti Nilayam. It was in direct response to this divine command that the gents of the Brindavan Bhajan Group had assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall on this day.

Without going into detail (again) since it has been already been reported extensively, we will just say that the following were the songs that they sang this evening:

1. Gayiye Ganapathi Jagavandana – Hindi
2. Tava Karam Amrutham Ati Ati Madhuram – Sanskrit
3. Enu Daha Yava Moha – Kannada
4. Govinda Shrita Gokula Brinda – Sanskrit
5. Teliyaga Tarama – Telugu
6. Nee Kaiya Bidade – Kannada
7. Daras bina Sai Man Nahi Laage – Hindi
8. Sai ram Meghashyam – Telugu
9. Dekha Bhagavan Dhanyavad – Hindi
10. Sai Nama Kirtana Kaliyuga Sadhana Saram – Telugu

The Brindavan Bhajan Group is quite unique in more ways than one. The group consists of individuals with different, educational and professional skills and age group, including alumni from Swami’s Institutions. All of them despite their busy occupational constraints take the time to practise songs regularly. The songs presented by them were the result of more than a year’s sustained practise.

Swami signalled the programme to start after the co-ordinator of the group explained the contents of the programme to Him. As the song presentation were in different languages, *ragas*, *swaras*, and rhythm, it all added variety

and melody to the rendition. A short explanation mentioning the gist of the song was read out before each song.

After the presentation, Swami gestured to one of the singers to sing the song "Tavakaram Amrutham.." for a second time and was in bliss enjoying the *Sindhu bhairavi* song describing the sweetness of Bhagavan's *darshan*, *sparshan* and *sambhashan*.

At the conclusion of their prepared programme, Bhagavan asked the students to sing some devotional songs. At the conclusion Swami graciously agreed for a group photograph, and also permitted them to take *padanamaskar* individually.

The Group singers pleaded with Bhagavan to talk to all of them separately. To divert the attention from their pleading, Swami jokingly asked all to look at the camera for the group shot. He also asked one of the photographers to yell 'Ready' and then click and thus "succeeded" in diverting everyone's attention much to the joy and happiness of the participants as well as the devotees at this divine *leela*. The evening concluded with *arati* and distribution of *prasadam*.

And on this note we also conclude this month's chronicles. There have been a lot of programmes squeezed into a few days, but nevertheless it has been an engaging month. On the days when there were no programmes, Swami would either be busy granting interviews to the numerous devotees or groups from around the world that had come to Prashanti Nilayam for Guru Pournima. He would also occasionally sit outside in the evening and listen attentively to the sonorous chants of the Vedas. But what distinguished this month also is the number of letters that He has taken, from the doctors when He gets down from the car or on occasions from devotees and from the students when He is sitting on the veranda. Sometimes He would take letters from as many as 25 students one after the other. And all of them would give Him their letters, ask His precious advice, and then with His permission take the coveted *padanamaskar*.

The month of August also promises to be a busy one. There is the *Vara Lakshmi Puja* followed by the *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam* planned for 12 days from the 9th to the 20th of August, 2006, performed for the peace and prosperity of humanity. Additionally there are the festivals of Krishna Janmastami and Ganesh Chaturthi that also falls in this month.

So till next time we wish you the best in all your endeavours.

Jai Sai Ram.

-Heart2Heart Team

SWAMI AND ME

SEARCHING THE TRUTH...UNDERSTANDING TRUE LOVE

By Mr. Arthur Hillcoat

This is the transcription of the talk given by Mr. Arthur Hillcoat at a meeting of Sathya Sai devotees in Ebell Club, Los Angeles, California on the 7th of Sep, 2003. Arthur and Poppy Hillcoat have been serving Swami for many years since '79. Arthur was a management consultant and the chairman for Sathya Sai Council of Australia. Later, Swami nominated him to be a central coordinator of Sai Organisations and for many years he was in charge of the Christmas celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam. In the last issue of H2H, we had the transcription of Poppy Hillcoat's talk [[click here to read it again](#)] and now we have excerpts from Arthur's talk.

My most humble and loving pranaams at the Lotus Feet of Our Beloved Lord and our very best Friend.

I heard something mentioned a little while ago about the fact that Swami calls me a 'lion' but I don't want you to have any fears; I am really only a little pussy cat. I don't have a lot of time for stories. But I'll tell a couple of short stories to begin with. Swami - when we were planning to come away on this journey - said to talk about Unity and Love. So that's something that I have to do.

Bring on the Smiling Lion

But of course, we must see the love and the fun loving side of Swami. On this day He was talking to the students inside. And then He came outside where they couldn't see Him. He called me and I said: "Yes, Swami?" He said: "The boys just want to see you." I said: "See me Swami?" He said: "Yes, they want to see you. Go inside!" and so I stepped inside.

There was a great roar from the students - hilarious; and then I knew that Swami had been up to mischief. When I saw one of the students later I asked: "What was the roar about when I came in?" He said: "Oh, Swami was teasing us." I said: "What do you mean teasing?" He said: "Swami pulled up His sleeve, and started to move His hand and said: 'Would you like to see a lion?' And the students said: 'Yes Swami!' So He called me.

You see, our Lord has a beautiful sense of humor and He teases the students and you become a part of it and it's wonderful. But you also make mistakes sometimes...

Golden Dancer

We were down here in the Hill View stadium on the sixty fifth birthday and there was a cultural program in the evening. Swami was in the orchestra pit. I

was a few feet away from Swami. And the children put on a drama. And after it was stated that a special dance of Shiva would be demonstrated; and since that was near to my heart, I looked forward to it. And this beautiful lady had come on stage in gold - fully in gold, with long eyelashes and beautiful - and started to dance.

Then I start to get concerned: "What's this young lady doing dancing in front of Swami?" As you know in India, once ladies reach the age of 12, they don't dance any longer in front of all. So I was bit concerned about it. So I just looked to see if Swami was alright. But there was nothing showing on His face, it was just blank!

When it was over, Swami walked across quietly towards me and asked: "Have you ever seen that dance before?" I said: "No Swami, but it was very, very beautiful." "Oh yes," He said. **There was a twinkle in His eye and He leaned over to me and said: "But that wasn't a girl; that was a boy!"** So you see, these are the things that happen sometimes.

Loving God, Not limiting God

That's a lot's more of these, but I really must move into more important things. When I was very young; in my teenage years; early teenage years – actually about 20 years ago - I had this yearning to speak about God; a very deep yearning. Fortunately no one asked me to; because I wouldn't have known what to say. But the yearning was there.

I'd go to any church, and I was with one particular one. And there was a fight and I had to order the ice-creams. There was a last meeting and I said: "The soft drinks will be here, and the ice-creams will be here." One lady rather fiercely said to me: "Who did you order the soft drinks from?" It didn't sound too good to me but I said: "Tramackeys" and then she really abused me. "How dare you do that? How can you do this sort of thing?" I said: "What have I done wrong? I don't know, they have the best soft drinks!" She said "That's beside the point; they are Catholics!" you see.

So I stepped back because here one moment they were talking about a loving God; but only for us; not for any one else. We can never limit God but it limits us if we think that way.

Anyway, I am side tracked just a little bit. I want to talk what Swami told me to talk about. And I probably only used these words in the beginning "Unity and Love." Firstly, we cannot have unity unless there is love. Secondly unity just doesn't mean in our center.

So, firstly we have to look at one's self and that's what I want to talk about mostly today. Because, unless we can understand and find the Truth, one will be coming back lifetime after lifetime. Jesus said two thousand years ago: "The Kingdom of God is within". How much notice did we take at that time? Of course communication wasn't as good those days as it is now.

Years ago I used to ask over and over again: “Why of all the people in the world, why me? Why has the Avatar drawn me to Him?” I asked that many times. But Swami eventually said to us one day if it’s your good fortune in coming to me you must give thanks to the merits earned in previous lives. So, it is good if we can play our roles well in this particular life.

Change and Understanding

What is it that we need to do? It’s very simple to say that we should change or we should do this or that. But how do we go about that? First, we must understand that the only thing in life - Swami tells us - is change. However, Swami has also said to us if you are looking for self-realization or if you’re looking for enlightenment; then you are selfish. He said that because you are looking for something for yourself when you should be looking for something to share with others.

So what is it that is the most important thing to search for? In my mind it’s your search for understanding. Understanding what life is all about. Understanding what steps one has to take to come to know the Truth. The more one understands, the more simple life becomes. We must continue to search to understand so that the time will come when we are open to the total Truth.

The search we have must come from an understanding. We must continue to search, make the effort that at such times as our understanding reaches a point that we realize that even the effort is a stumbling block - because there is nothing to reach! You are that at this moment; but don’t know it. Most misery is caused because one has forgotten who one really is.

Swami tells us over and over again: “Embodiments of Love.” Swami tells us that we are Divine. But do we really listen to Swami? Swami tells us beautiful words and they are lovely; and we get a good feeling about it but when we leave, do we think about that? Do we take time to search for understanding? Without that, without the understanding, how can we ever know the Truth? What are the things that get in the way? Things that get in the way are the fact that firstly we believe we are separate, and that we have free will and that we can do things and we can achieve things. How sad it is that we think that!

Light Bulbs Lesson

We think we are separated. I remember once in a hotel in Bangalore, it was evening and I wanted to write a letter. But I couldn’t see right; all the lights were on. I looked at the globes - they were all 25 watts. But you see, if you had a 100 of those, you still wouldn’t have had good light. So I went to the manager and I said: “Look, I can’t see out there! Would you have a 100 watt lamp?” “Oh yes of course!” he said and gave it to me and I took the 25 watt out and put the 100 in and then I had plenty of light!

And then it dawned on me there's only one current that comes into this building. And that electrical current there was waiting to express itself as light. But the amount of light depended on the quality of the bulb! I thought: "Isn't it just like God? The Divine current is ever ready to express itself as Love and Light through every one of these human globes. But it depends upon the quality of the globe as to how much Love and Light can be expressed."

So we need to ask ourselves what sort of a globe am I? How much love and light am I expressing? One might be satisfied with a 25 watt. One might say well, perhaps 75 is okay or a 100. But whatever it is, we have to ask ourselves then how much do we really want to express? Some might say I would like to be a 100 watt globe; some might say a 500 candelpar; some might say a million candelpar; others may want to express that which can't be expressed. But we can't do that without understanding and making the effort to understand.

Video View

You know, a video is a great concept. What happens when we are watching a video? Our eyes tend to go a little bit square; and we are looking at it. We are looking at what's on the screen. We are not sitting there worrying about that bit that's being played - which we might call the past; and we're not fearing that little bit of the tape that still has to come - which we might call the future! We are watching what's on the screen at that very moment; right at that very moment. You see, if we can live our lives that way, life would be much more simple. If we didn't get caught up in the past.

The Search and the Suffering

Once you start searching, then you will start to see changes. I used to see that years ago; I went through some heavy parts in my life and I used to look up and say "Lord, why me? Why me again?" And it was as if the Lord was saying: "Why not you? And here's a little more for you!" You know the feeling? Because I was so upset, I was asking the question: "Why me? Why me? Poor me!" you know.

But when one gets enough suffering - that's why I say; suffering, pain, loss, grief - any type of suffering is God's grace at its very best. Because when we get enough of suffering, we will start to question. And then one starts to ask "What's the purpose of my existence? What is life all about? Why is there suffering? Why do some seem to suffer more than others? Who am I? Who am I really?" And it's only then that we start to get answers. Then God reaches out a hand to us and then our life begins to unfold with greater understanding. But we first must ask those questions.

You know, life is very beautiful. Wherever we go in the world, we find love. And you know it is interesting; I used to simply say that you find love mostly in countries which have suffered - like Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Russia - but that's not quite true - but the intensity is a little more. Because they are forever asking, asking, because they are searching so much for understanding. But

as Swami says: "All this is only in our imagination." What an imagination! And this is hard to understand; very hard to understand. But if we keep working towards it, it will be understood.

You see, only God exists. It's very simple; only God exists. And all else that we can see, touch, smell, taste, exists within God; like the fish in the fish bowl. But that which you are is that in which all exists. Swami tells us that over and over again. He says: "You are God!" The only thing is that if you come to understand this and feel that to be so; then you don't go down the main street tomorrow calling out that you are God! Know it within yourself! If you call it out too much around the ridges, you'll find a vehicle come and two men with white jackets will take you for a drive somewhere! But this is what Swami is here for! It's the Avatar. Why do we keep putting it off all the time? Why is it that we don't seek to understand what He is telling us? Over and over again.

Our True Nature

You know, a couple of years ago a tragedy happened! Swami got up to give a discourse, and then walked off; and didn't give a discourse! And said He would never give a discourse again! It's terrible; when the Avatar is here and He has to do this to try and get our attention! Two days later He gave a discourse to explain. He said: "Why are you not listening to me? Nobody is listening! I've told you in every way possible. Tell me what you want me to do so that you'll understand?"

So you see when the Avatar does this; He is not doing it for fun: "Oh this is the thing that I'll do today." He is trying to get our attention that one's own true nature is that which you have always prayed to; that - that which is expressing itself through the form of Sai is who you are! And we have to make an effort to reach this. And isn't it worth it?

As I said earlier, Jesus said the kingdom of God is within. Why do we deny ourselves? Years ago I used to say why should we limit Sai; why should we limit God by not making this search? But of course I realized later one cannot limit God; we limit ourselves by not listening, by not taking some action to understand; and to understand the purity of His teachings.

We must come to understand that our own true nature is Divinity. Some people say: "Well what am I going to do? If I realize that, who's going to do my work?" You see, that's a misunderstanding. The body must remain until its appointed time to leave. The body must still carry out the role that it has been given in this lifetime.

You see, there are two roles to play then - a role of understanding and living a Godly life and allowing the body to play out its role. But people think that once you have come to understand something, you have to give up your body or something! It's not the case! What it brings is a greater life; a greater understanding and the joy of understanding this great hoax.

'All is Imagination'

What does Swami mean when He said: "All this is your own imagination!"? It's hard. But you see, I always call it the waking dream. But people say to me: "But it's not a dream at all! It's tough sometimes. And you have to suffer; and sometimes you go through a lot of pain; sometime you get happiness; it's the pleasure/pain principle all the time!"

My usual response to that is: "But isn't it like that in the sleeping dream also?" I am sure we have all had a bad dream as we call it! If you had a bad dream when you are being chased by a lion and your little legs won't move fast enough, and the lion is gaining; and you know the fear is so great; it is a reality! And you wake up with your heart pounding and you're perspiring and when you realize, you say: "Oh thank God it was only a dream!" We've had that, you see! But then we think this one is real. The sleeping dream and the waking dream are only different in the fact that the waking dream seems longer.

The Body is Beautiful; the Love that comes is Beautiful; and we love that Form. But we should also love the Formless and relate more to the Formless because that can be with you and is with you wherever you are in the world; it cannot be away from you, you see!

Heartfelt Call

I have called on Swami at times and I haven't had to shout. There was one time in 1986, when I woke at four o' clock in the morning with great pain across the chest and down both the arms. It was a frightening thing because it felt as if the body is going to explode and I would splatter all around the room; you know that sort of a feeling. So we rang for a doctor. And while the doctor was coming, it grew worse.

As I reached for the *vibhuti*, monkey mind is always there to challenge things. So as I picked up this *vibhuti*, monkey mind says: "I wonder if this is as good as the real stuff." Because you see, this came off of a photo in Malaysia. But I continued to do what I was doing; regardless of the mind, and I put that in my mouth and boom! All pain stopped! Immediately! Totally gone!

The doctor arrived and asked: "So who is the patient?" I said: "I am!" He said: "What's wrong?" I said: "I am okay." He said: "You wouldn't ring me at this hour in the morning unless you had a good reason; tell me about it." So I explained it to him and he said: "You must go to the hospital immediately; you've had a massive heart attack!" And I said: "But I am okay!" He said: "I will not leave the house until you agree to go!" I said alright I'll get one of my daughters to get me to go." And he said: "No, No! It must be in the heart ambulance!" So I said alright. He left.

The heart ambulance arrived and they rushed in with their kick start gear and everything else. And they said: "Who's the patient?" – since I was walking around the house! I said: "I am!" They dropped everything and actually picked

me up and carried me to a chair! And while one was checking me out, the other one was trying to sell me a very bad program: “No longer can you do the things that you used to do. Once this has happened to you, you must change your way of life. You’ve got to go very quietly now; be very careful!” So I listened to them all the way to the hospital. When I got there; there was a young Chinese doctor - very nice young man – and he checked the ECG. He said: “Everything’s alright. I can’t find anything wrong.”

So you see Sai is there. Sai is within oneself. At least that which is expressing itself through Sai is within oneself. And if one asks - with faith - the Lord will look after you.

Most of you would know the story of Krishna when someone was calling Him: “Krishna! Krishna! I need You!” For four days! And finally Krishna turned up and the chap spoke harshly to Him: “What’s taken you so long?” And He said: “You had placed me so far away from you that it took so long for me to get here.” We don’t have to do that, do we? Because we know that the formless God is within oneself. Why is it that we find it so difficult to believe to really take on board that which Swami tells us?

For instance, if we took on board the words of Jesus when He said: “Love ye one another, as I love thee!” - everything in the world would change. If we take on Swami’s words – “Love All, Serve All”; if we just lived that one teaching, it would change everything within the world. But what will change it more; if only one can realize the Truth - that would bring changes in the world.

So, as we go out and be of service to the world we should not go and sit in a corner somewhere and think about your own true nature; or try to understand it. The thing is to do this while one is being of service to others.

The Lessons Of Love

There was a young man who came to me into the ashram once and he said to me: “Can I talk to you?” I said: “Yes, of course!” Then he said: “I am from Bosnia. This is my first visit. And the reason for me coming is that in Bosnia, when the shells were falling, there were people running around there helping others; helping to give them shelter; binding up their injuries and so forth. And I thought what’s wrong with these people? Are they mad being in the middle of this? So I said to a couple of the people: ‘Who are you? What are you doing? Why are you out here like this risking your lives?’ They told me they are devotees of Sai Baba; a holy man in India. And I thought: ‘What’s that got to do with it?’ But you know I talked a bit more to them and I decided I had to come to India to see what it was that inspired these people to risk their lives?” But what a wonderful inspiration for that young man to see what the organization was doing in that country.

Nothing is as it appears to be - absolutely nothing. As I said each one’s world is different but the basics are the same. If we focused on the anger and hate and bloodshed in the world then that’s the way that our world will be.

You see, it's so simple. Be loving to everybody - and I mean everybody! Think of the person that you consider to be the most cruel man in the world - just pick one out, it doesn't matter which one - and then think about you loving him or her. That doesn't mean to say that you let everyone walk all over you - of course it doesn't mean that. We must do our duty and our duty is to protect ourselves should something like that happen. But the action we take must be against the behaviour; never against the person. Even if you have to use force to restrain the person; you still love that person.

Money Comes and Goes

I will give you an example of this - I am not talking from something I've read in a book - but it's come to me from being with Swami for so long. When we were coming back from Bosnia, we were called into the ashram to be with Swami and while we were there; we received word that our investment advisor had stolen our money. It was a very large sum. We didn't go into a panic and rush to change our flights to go home. We were there with Swami! Where we were to be! And before we left for home, at the appointed time, we had an interview and I didn't even need to discuss it. **I simply said to Swami: "Swami, you know what happened to our money! But we have got another house there; we'll sell that to get our money so we could continue to do our work." He looked at me and said: "No don't sell."**

You'd think that having that money in hand would have made things easier. Someone said: "What are you going to do? How can you go to different countries in the world now?" I said: "You don't understand! If the Lord gives you a role to play, the Lord also gives you all that's necessary to carry out that role." It's as simple as that! But we have to have faith in that; it's not just something to have roll off your tongue; you have to believe in that - and not only believe in it - we did not have one unhappy day about that or about that money going! So for us it was an understanding there was something in our lives that had to come to us; either it was our *karma* - perhaps we had robbed somebody in some other lives or it was a test being given to us by the Lord to see what our reactions would be - whether we were really living what we were talking about.

So we went through it for three years; nothing came. Money in hand was running down to the point just before we were to leave to come on this journey, it was down to 5,000 Australian dollars. We could have sold this house you know. But Swami said: "No, don't sell it." And we did just that. We weren't tempted to say: "Well things don't look well, should we sell it?" But just before we left, we got about 40% back; whether anything else comes, who is to know?

Why should we feel angry about the man who did this? Why should we want to see him suffer? Why should we want to get even with him? Why should we want to see him go to jail as he has now? The sadness I saw is what is terrible. He had three young children. The other children in school were teasing and telling their father was a thief. The family has broken up. The

family has come to America now to get away from all the strain that went on, and he is in jail.

Why should we feel bad about him? If we met him in the street tomorrow, we would give him a big hug because He is playing out his role in life. How do we blame him? Now if we had lost our money through bad judgment or something by accident then that's another matter, you see. But this time, he did it with the intent to steal. And therefore he is getting his *karma* fairly quickly, but it gives us no joy for that.

The Path of Love

We must get to the point where we can love everybody. Love is not something that is a commodity that you can grab a piece and hand it to somebody! When you search within yourself and continue that search until you can sit in true silence; after some time you will come face to face with God and then you will see your Self for the very first time.

Love is not something that is apart. Love is your own true nature. You are the Love itself! Why does one deny seeing that, experiencing that and being that Love? It's there already - we don't have to make it happen. We just have to get to the point of realizing that one's true nature is Love itself.

Then of course, one never has to make an effort to be loving and kind to anybody ever again. Why should you? You are the love itself and its there for all. Then it's like the mango tree. The mango tree doesn't say it's George coming up the road, he's a nice fellow he can have a mango. He's Arthur, he's not so good, he doesn't get one. Of course the mango tree doesn't do that; the fruit of the mango tree is for everybody - it's not judgmental.

Then if someone experiences the love you are, you don't feel elated; if someone doesn't, you don't feel disappointed - because there are no expectations; you are the Love, you just be that!

Swami is giving us this opportunity to see that, to be that love and to understand the Truth because you are Divine Love not worldly love. You are the Truth, you are the Peace; you are that in which all this exists. Hasn't Swami been telling us this all these years? What have we done? This is our opportunity in this life time to realize the Truth and to be that.

Love All

Looking around the room, I see so much love and so much fear of having the audacity to be that love, to express that love. Stop the search and be as you are. Look within and see that. This is not reserved just for the men; it's for ladies also. It's not reserved just for the king and not the beggar; this is for every individual - regardless of what role is being played in life. Understand that your role is very important in life and it is becoming more important

because you've been drawn to Sai. Now you must become the torch bearers, you must become that which sheds Light and Love wherever it goes.

And as you go back into the centers or your homes; realize that it's one's duty to shed that light and that love to all that one sees. Never let it be restricted because someone appears to be playing a bad role.

A man said to Swami: "Swami I am confused! You tell me that we are all God; and then you tell me not to mix with bad people. I am confused!" Swami said: "There is no confusion. You see the tiger and the cobra, God is there also, but do you play with them?"

We move ourselves away from the behaviors you see, not from the person. If we move away from the person, it's because of the behavior not because a person doesn't seem to be good.

So be the Love you are. Don't doubt that that is your own true nature. And you have the ability to shed that Light and Love into the world. You see; the world really needs it now. And what would we be doing by doing that? We are playing our role to assist Swami's mission to bring change - to bring the Golden Age. And you know, Swami is not going to walk out in darshan time one morning and ring a bell and say: "The Golden Age is here, everybody change!" No! We must change! The Golden Age is within one's self and once you see that, you will shed that Light that is necessary not only for the Age, but for Swami's mission.

Aum Jai Sai Ram.

-Heart2Heart Team

HE IS THE TOTALITY, ALL OF IT

By Dr. Sara Pavan

On our very first visit to Puttaparthi in December 1980 I had brought along my first video camera. It was a hefty two piece Panasonic VHS Video Camera and Cassette Recorder. With a 10 kg recorder hanging on my left shoulder and a 7 kg camera resting on my right shoulder, I started capturing my first video of the Lord of the Universe as He glided majestically on the golden sand of the haloed darshan grounds of Prasanthi Nilayam. Cameras were allowed those days and the merciful Bhagavan gave me the strength to carry such a load on my shoulders and keep the tape rolling. Thereafter the compassionate Lord enabled me to place the burden of the camera upon a tripod planted at a vantage spot inside the compound with the recorder on the ground. The sevadals were very helpful and I videoed all the darshans during the five days of our brief visit to the Abode of Peace.

On our way back to Australia we visited Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore and had the opportunity to show my raw footage of Sai Darshan there, as well as in Australia. Several hundreds of devotees were thrilled to see such a video for the first time. It was not until a month prior to my second visit to Prasanthi Nilayam in October 1981 that I got down to editing, which included adding some music, titles and some occasional commentary. It was real hard work due to my limited experience and meagre resources. My experience was limited to making personal home movies with Super 8 movie cameras and splicing the developed Kodak film reels. There was no music during darshan those days. But for the occasional chirping of a bird there was pin-drop silence during darshan, and one could even hear one's own breath! Somehow, I managed to make a master of my "Sai Darshan" video, which I hoped would be blessed by Swami.

I also made four copies hoping to give a copy to Swami and the rest to Sri. Balasingam, an uncle of mine in Colombo, who was then a member of the world council, Dr. Pillay from Singapore and Mr. Jegadesan from Malaysia, all of whom were of great help to a totally fledgling devotee like me. En route to Bangalore I stopped over in Colombo and gave Mr. Balasingam his copy. When I landed at Madras airport I had a rough time with the customs who took a full inventory of all the items I had brought with me, even the four video cassettes – a master and three copies, all of which were entered on my passport for export when I left India ! **I requested the officer to change the number of cassettes to three and explained to him that I was hoping to give a copy to Sai Baba.** He gave an amused look at me and obliged me.

I left behind one bag in a hotel in Madras with two copies of my video that were intended for Malaysia and Singapore along with clothing and other items I didn't need in the ashram. With less baggage I proceeded to Bangalore taking with me the master copy of 'Sai Darshan' and one copy of the video intended for Swami. At Bangalore airport the secretary to the Governor of Karnataka with his aides received me on the tarmac and drove me to his residence within the Rashtrapati Bhavan compound. This gentleman

happened to visit our home in Sydney for a bhajan a couple of months earlier and was keen to host me in Bangalore. I got carried away by the red-carpet treatment in Bangalore, given the rough time I had at Madras airport just the previous day. So foolishly I gave away to the governor's secretary the copy of 'Sai Darshan' that was meant for Swami. My mind had tricked me into an assumption that Puttaparthi was far behind the rest of the world with modern amenities and presumed that there might not even be a VCR or TV in the ashram!

The Master Ignores the Master Tape

Days went by in Prasanthi Nilayam and Swami continued ignoring me. I prayed to Him to bless my master copy of 'Sai Darshan' and take the bundle of letters as well as a small gift I had brought for Him. An adhesive blank strip of paper was stuck on the master copy for Swami's blessing and autograph. I kept offering the cassette to Swami every time at darshan with a pen in hand. All this was of no avail. Swami was completely ignoring me. At the end of a week I was distraught and an old time photographer of Swami tried to pacify me by telling me that Baba had already blessed the video by the very fact that He had allowed me to take it in the first place. I told him that I wanted Swami to sign on the cassette and that would be proof that He had blessed the master. Bang came the question: "Do you need to prove this to anybody?" and I had no answer.

When I returned to my room what I had told the customs officer at Madras airport flashed into my memory, that I had wanted him to count one cassette less because I wanted to give it to Swami! I realised that Swami might be giving me a hard lesson for me to remember His Omnipresence, and that He Himself was there overhearing my conversation with the customs officer! I decided to make a day-return dash to Bangalore by taxi and get the copy of the video back from my friend at Rashtrapati Bhavan. As I was arranging a taxi I came to know that Swami was leaving for Brindavan the next day and I too decided to leave for Bangalore the following day.

Accidental Miracle

Swami left Prasanthi Nilayam next morning and I left an hour later. I was heading towards Bangalore by taxi. **Somewhere around Devanahali our taxi knocked down a little boy who darted across the road with a basket full of peanuts on his head. Just before the impact I screamed 'Sai Ram!' The boy went rolling on the road after the impact and lay unconscious.** The monkeys nearby started gathering at the scene and were busy grabbing the scattered peanuts. I rushed towards the boy and examined him, ran my hands over every part of his body to check if he had any broken bones. A small crowd started gathering around us. Miraculously he did not appear to have any fracture and soon became conscious. Squatting swiftly the boy went about salvaging as much of the scattered peanuts as possible and I joined him to minimise his losses.

Suddenly I saw with the corner of my eye a white car appearing and coming to a stop. As I turned my head I saw Swami in His white Mercedes Benz looking penetratingly at me and the boy. I stood up and offered my namaskar. Before I could approach His car Swami signalled the driver to move on. I was stunned to have this most unusual darshan.

Here I am, totally ignored in Prasanthi Nilayam, now experiencing an intimate one-to-one darshan in such an exceptional situation! I stood still gazing at the white car until it disappeared from my sight. By then the boy had started walking away from the scene with his basket of peanuts. I began to wonder how Swami had made His mysterious appearance at this time despite leaving Prasanthi Nilayam an hour before me! I also was puzzled as to why He left without a word of inquiry. I then realised it was unnecessary for Him to speak with me, as Swami, the Omniscient Lord Himself, had already saved the boy from nasty injury in response to my calling "Sai Ram", just as Krishna had made His mysterious appearance to protect Draupadai in the court of Kauravas. I am able to re-live this experience a number of times.

As soon as I reached Bangalore I got the copy of the video back from my friend, promising him that I would send him another copy later and checked into a hotel. I wrapped the cassette nicely and took it along with the bundle of letters and the small gift in a shoulder bag for darshan the following morning. Confidence so low, I did not even have the slightest desire to get Swami to bless my master tape and all I wanted was for Swami to forgive me and positively indicate to me that He had done so. It happened to be a Thursday and it was my first visit to Brindavan. I was given a seat in the third row, a few feet away in front of Swami's chair on the right hand side in the shed, commonly known as the 'Sai Ram Shed,' under the huge tree. Behind the chair stood a beautiful statue of Muralidara on an elevated platform next to the tree trunk. The atmosphere was vibrant with expectation and all eyes were glued to the archway entrance of Swami's Brindavan residence.

The Lord Forgives All

No sooner had the bhajan commenced, Swami appeared at the gate and swiftly walked towards the shed, some 75 yards away. He took a few letters and gave padanamaskar to a few devotees seated along His passage and slowly moved towards His chair and sat down. For sometime Swami was deeply immersed in the bhajan and showed a multitude of expressions, both of His radiant face and His divine hands. I was literally pleading with Swami to forgive me for all my failings. Choked with emotion I could not join in bhajan singing. With tears welling up I prayed to Swami in silence: "Swami! Please forgive me for my blunder. You have reminded me of your Omnipresence. I have with me the copy for you ... please take it from me as an act of your mercy and forgiveness."

Swami's gaze fell on me and my tears started rolling down. His gaze locked with mine and Swami gracefully stood up and glided in my direction and stood in front of me still not taking His gaze away from me. I had three items to hand over – the cassette, the letters and the small gift of love. I was still able to get my priorities right. I did not have the

confidence to give all three of them in one go. So, I pulled out the cassette from the bag first and stretched my hand over the heads of the couple of rows of men. Swami stretched His right hand and graciously received the cassette and passed it on to the sevadal accompanying Him, while the men in the front row blissfully clasped His Lotus Feet in timelessness. Still staring at me He stood there and I quickly dug my hand into my bag and pulled out the bundle of letters devotees from our centre had given me. Swami received all the letters and, turning away slowly, He walked back to His chair to take arati to end the bhajan. The small gift I had brought for Swami was still in my bag, but that did not matter because a mountain of mental burden had been offloaded. After lunch and satsang with Bob Lowenburg at his residence in Whitefield I returned to my hotel in Bangalore . Mr. Lowenburg was a well known Sai devotee from South Africa residing in Whitefield and who had authored a well known book, '*At the Feet of Sai.*' He was also the chairman of the Whitefield samithi. I was scheduled to fly to Madras the next day for my return journey to Australia .

The thought of leaving Swami triggered deep in me a divine discontent because I had neither spoken with Swami nor touched His Lotus Feet on this visit, let alone having failed to hand Swami the small gift I had brought from Australia. At least, I thought, I could send the gift to Swami by registered post. I directed the taxi driver to take me to a post office in the city. When I handed the parcel over the counter postal staff wouldn't accept my paper wrapped parcel for registered post but had to be wrapped in cloth and sewn. This was totally new to me. However they suggested that I could ask a tailor across the road to make the cloth bag that would fit the packet.

While the cloth bag was being sewn I quickly wrote a letter to Swami for inclusion with the parcel. I expressed my gratitude to Swami for forgiving me by taking the copy of the video, but lamented that I would be returning to Australia without a padanamaskar (*sparshan*) and conversation (*sambhashan*). After dispatching the parcel I reached my hotel late afternoon to take rest. Having unloaded both my physical and mental baggage by then, I decided to revisit Brindavan in the evening, even if Swami didn't come out, just to sit there peacefully and absorb the divine vibration on the eve of my departure. On the way I saw Mr. & Mrs. Lowenburg walking towards the ashram and I gave them a lift. They told me that Swami generally did not come out in the evening. There were no more than 40 devotees in the Sai Ram shed. I prayed to Bhagavan and meditated for some time.

A Wonderful Last Divine Encounter

Dusk was setting in and many devotees had left leaving just a few of us. Most unexpectedly Swami appeared at the gate and looked in our direction. My heart was pounding away with great excitement, but Swami disappeared behind the Kalyana Mandapam and a few more devotees left the shed. Only a handful stayed behind and prayed. **Ten minutes later Swami emerged from behind the mandapam and again looked in our direction. It was almost dark and yet He suddenly headed towards us and my joy had no bounds. When He was in front of me I told Swami how grateful I was for**

His love and forgiveness and mentioned to Him that I was leaving for Australia the next morning. As Swami replied, "Happy," I touched His Lotus Feet.

The parcel with my letter was handed over at the Post office in the city only at 3.00 PM that day and was not expected to reach Brindavan before the next couple of days. The Omniscient Lord most compassionately responded to my plea in my letter and came out of His way, so late in the evening, to converse with me and let me take padanamaskar. There is nothing that Swami does not know or anything that He cannot do. He is the TOTALITY, ALL OF IT.

Jai Sai Ram

- Heart2Heart Team

THE GREAT TRUTH

By Sri Sanjay Mahalingam

This is the transcription of Sri Sanjay Mahalingam's talk in the divine presence of Bhagavan Baba on the 29th of July 2005.

Most Beloved Bhagavan, Revered Elders, Sisters and Brothers,

Swami starts His Discourses with melodiously sung couplets. On one such glorious occasion - whenever Bhagavan gives a Discourse, it is a Glorious Occasion - Swami started by saying:

*Na Hum Manushyo, Nacha Deva, Yaksho;
Na Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra;
Na Bramhachari, Na Grihi Vanastho, Bikshur, Na Chaham;
Sathya Bodhaka: Sathyam, Shivam, Sundaram!*

I am not Man; I am not an angel, nor a demi-god;
I do not belong to any Caste
be it Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas or Shudras;
I am not a Bachelor, I am not a Householder,
neither am I a Recluse, nor a Mendicant.
**I am the Teacher of Truth:
I am Truth, Auspiciousness and Beauty.**

What 'Truth'? Before we come back to this question: 'What Truth is Swami talking about?' Let me share with you three incidents that readily come to my mind.

The Omniscient Presence of Sai

Some months back, a few students of Bhagavan who are currently working in Delhi had come to have Bhagavan's Darshan and were blessed with a private audience. **One brother said: "Swami, in Delhi I cannot feel Your Presence!" Swami said: "In Delhi, can you feel your presence?" The boy said: "Yes Swami, I can feel my presence, but not Your Presence!" Swami said: "Your Presence is My Presence!"**

A few months back, Bhagavan had blessed me with an interview. And Swami casually asked: "*Ha inka emi samacharam?*" [meaning, 'what news?'] I said: "Swami, an Akhanda Bhajan was held. My sister who is staying here told me that she attended the full Akhanda Bhajan...24 hours non-stop!" Actually she had told me that for two hours she had gone out. I thought why burden Bhagavan with such insignificant details. I told Swami she sat for 24 hours. **Swami looked at me suspiciously and said: "24 hours? No, no, no she went out for two hours and came back."**

And then Bhagavan said; Listen to this...He said six words. He said: "**I know. I am always watching.**"

Another incident that comes to my mind is this year's Kodaikanal trip. When one devotee casually remarked to Swami: "Swami, unlike in Brindavan, unlike in Parthi, you seem to be so much happier in Kodaikanal. You seem to be devoid of all Your burden; You seem to be so much cheerful and happy in Kodaikanal!"

Bhagavan retorted quickly in an instant and said: **"No! I am the same Everywhere, and Always!"**

What Truth?

Now let us come back to the question when Swami says: "*Aham Sathya Bodhaka!*" "I am the Teacher of Truth!" - what 'Truth' is Bhagavan is talking about?

I am reminded of a beautiful story. We all have heard of the great King Janaka, a Raja Yogi. In fact, he is one of the most oft repeated personalities in our *Shastras* and *Puranas* (ancient scriptural texts), King Janaka, the great *jignasu* [man of wisdom]; the great spiritual aspirant that he was, assembled all the scholars in his kingdom, and brought them to his court, so that they can inculcate to him the Ultimate Truth.

When the discussions were going on, a man, awful to look at - body bent at eight places and therefore called Ashtavakara - happened to enter the court. On seeing him, all the scholars burst into laughter. A smile escaped even the lips of the great King Janaka. And seeing them laugh, this man started roaring in laughter. Everybody was confused. Then King Janaka asked: "Man, all the people are laughing at you, what makes you laugh?" And Ashtavakara said: "King! I pity your situation. You expect to find the Ultimate Truth in this assembly of cobblers?"

This was too much for the King to take! No body dares come into his court and call the most erudite scholars of his kingdom cobblers! King Janaka said: "You better justify your statement!" And Ashtavakara said: "King! Cobblers know only leather. And these scholars know only the skin! They look at this body and laugh that it is deformed at eight places! **But these scholars do not know the Effulgent, Splendorous, and Glorious Atma that shines within this body!** They consider me to be this bag of leather with filth, flesh, bone, and laugh! But they do not know that **I am the Chaitanya, I am the Truth, and I am Sat Chit Ananda!** And then I pity you that you expect to find the Ultimate Truth in this assembly of cobblers!"

King Janaka knew that he was face to face with a *Jnani* [wise man]. He fell at Sage Ashtavakara's feet. And we all know what followed was one of the greatest exposition's of *Advaita* (Non-dualistic) philosophy: *The Ashtavakra Maha Gita*.

The *Brihadarayanika Upanishad* says:

Asato Maa Sad Gamaya, Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya, Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya. (A prayer that all of us chant daily in our Institute).

Asato Maa Sad Gamaya: Lead me from Untruth to Truth; from Unreality to Reality.

Shri Adi Shankaracharya, the greatest proponent of Non-dualistic wisdom, once said:

Shlokar Dhena Parikshyami Yedukhtam Grantha Koti Vihi

“Let me propound to you in half hours what is written in crores of scriptures.”

Bramha Satyam, Jagan Mithya, Jivo Brahmai Vana Para

Brahman is Real; the World is an Illusion. And you the Individual Soul is none other than the Universal Consciousness and that is the Truth!

And Bhagavan Always points us to that Truth!

Our Forgotten Treasure of Bliss

There was it seems a beggar, who begged all his life standing at the same place. When the time came for him to join the majority - that is when he died - it was thought prudent to bury him at the same place where he spent all his life begging. When they started digging, after just 5 feet they heard the clink of metal. They excavated further and found that the beggar had been standing over a vast treasure all his life and begging.

Bhagavan says that our situation is very similar! We are the Embodiment of all bliss. It is our nature; but forgetting it we spend our lives begging for little sensual pleasures, ignorant of our Reality!

If only the beggar had stopped begging, and had started digging, he would have found the treasure. If only we stop begging from the world's sense pleasures, and started digging our own selves, we will find the ocean of Bliss within.

This much I can surely tell you that **if we once, for even a second come face to face with our own Reality, with that untarnished, untainted, unblemished, splendid Self, it will become impossible for us to ever crave for anything ever again!**

The *Shweta Shwetur Upanishad* says:

*Swachai Tanaye, Swayam Sthasaye, Swathma Rajaye, Sukhey Ramey
Swathma Sinhasaney Sthitva, Swatmano Nyanya Chintai.*

Established in my own Self, thinking about my own Self, established on the Throne of my own Self, and enjoying the Bliss of my own Self, I pass my time.

Bhagavan says: "Boys should have the Head of Shankara, the Heart of Buddha, and the Hands of Janaka!"

You are You

Just some days back, we had the opportunity to witness the Inter-Faith Conference, re-christened by Mr. Goldstein as "Intra-Faith Conference." And we discussed what is common amongst all Faiths. And if there is anything common, then it is this:

Every faith, every religion, every true doctrine, always endeavors to point out to man his own reality;

To point out to man that you are not this body; a leather bag filled with bone and flesh!

You are not this mind which is a squadron of anxieties, fears and curiosities!

You are you! You are just you! And when you can be just You, You will be Everything!

And this is the Truth that Bhagavan, through all His actions and endeavors, always drives home, and it is that great Truth that we are here to learn and imbibe in our lives.

With these words, I thank Bhagavan, for this most sanctifying experience to stand in His Presence and speak on His Glory.

Thank you,

Jai Sai Ram!

-Heart2Heart Team

H2H SPECIAL

WITH THE LORD IN THE MOUNTAINS PART 02

In the last instalment, I gave a general introduction to Kodaikanal and included for you a clip from a recording of my conversation with Mr. V. Srinivasan, which offered glimpses of Swami's return to Kodai in the early eighties. Today, let me offer you some glimpse of the first time Swami took some students with Him to Kodai. This was in 1987. By this time, a small plot had been acquired by the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, and a building constructed on the plot, that would serve as Swami's residence when He visited Kodai.

Dr. Siva Shankar Sai, currently a member of the Physics faculty in Swami's Institute and also the Warden of the Hostel here in Prashanti Nilayam, was one of those who accompanied Swami then. Let us hear about that trip from Dr. Shiva Shankar Sai himself.

Dr. Shiva Shankar Sai: "In 1987 one year was over after we joined the post graduate programme and it was the opening of Sai Shruti and in fact the first day we stayed in Jaya Hotel because Sai Shruti was to be inaugurated the next day."

Prof G Venkataraman: "Did Swami stay in the hotel?"

Dr. Shiva Shankar Sai: "Swami stayed in Srinivasan's house and Swami said "Because there are 25 of you, tonight you stay in the hotel and come back tomorrow." We had reached Kodai Kanal very late because there was a breakdown in our bus and we reached about 12 O'clock at night. Swami was waiting upstairs and as soon as we came He asked for the food which had been kept ready to be served to us. And after we finished eating Swami was there in a white robe and He enquired about our bus journey - it was a very touching moment as He received us then.

The next morning we had a session with Swami in Srinivasan's house. He asked us to suggest the new name for the building and we came up with 'Sai Vandana', 'Sai Spandana' and then finally Swami Himself said 'Sai Shruti'. And that was a very memorable moment as Swami had asked us what do we think the name of the building should be. Then it was inaugurated and we were staying next to it. This is the chance that students get as there were very few others outsiders there. There was Mr. Srinivasan's family and very few people from outside.

Swami would sit with us morning, afternoon and evening. He was teaching us the Ramayana and He spoke a lot about Shiva. He created a Shiva Lingam and showed it to us and He explained to us about Hiranya Garba at that time. It was a nice trip, but short – only seven days."

Now why does Swami take students to Kodai? Here are two views of about that. First we hear Srirangarajan, a former student and now a teacher in Swami's University.

Prof G Venkataraman: "Describe briefly what happens in Kodai."

Srirangarajan: "Now what is happening is that Kodai should be seen in the light of a very special process that is taking place to mould the personality and character of the student. Definitely it should not be taken in a light way, or as a vacation. So as Swami Himself said it is a spiritual picnic, if at all you call it a picnic. Now what happens in the daily routine is that Swami comes out early in the morning – this is in the earlier years – Swami would come out at 6.30 or 6.45 in the morning and from that point onwards till 7.30 at night He would always be in the midst of students and you could see Him guiding, coordinating every activity that goes on.

Right from organizing the breakfast for the students and looking into every detail as to what items are made; how it is served; are the students happy?; and do they need anything more? And most of the time Swami would not even have breakfast with us as He was all the time moving around and watching that everything was done well. He was the perfect host, though of course He was part of us, but He always played the role of a perfect host.

And immediately after the breakfast we would have a very special session in the hall. And here was Bhagavan who would not give one of those formal discourses that we hear in the Kulwant Hall or out in public, but it was a very informal, very friendly "chat" which He would have with all the students. But in the midst of all that suddenly He would take us to lofty heights, suddenly revealing His divinity making us realize some very important lessons through stories. Many times Swami would narrate - you know normally people relate experiences with Bhagavan - but here was Swami narrating His experiences with devotees in the past. And at the end of each one, there was something very important for us students to learn. This would go on in the morning.

And then, when He would go out for Darshan, we students would have a brief exercise stroll, because one of the main features of Kodai is the sumptuous food that Bhagavan feeds us with. He literally satiates all the senses so the senses go to sleep and the inner intellect opens up and the inner heart opens up to receive the flow of wisdom from Bhagavan. So He literally satiates all the basic needs that anyone might have - one of the most important being food. So you have all sorts of unimaginable food that no one could have heard or thought of. It becomes very difficult to digest this, so Swami would compulsorily order the students to take a stroll and take some exercise.

Meanwhile He would do His regular duty of giving Darshan and giving interviews and then we would hardly come back and then it was lunchtime and there would be a whole banquet of delicious dishes. After this, Bhagavan would again supervise the session and there would be many invitees and so it would go on for 3-4 sessions. All the while Swami would wait till the last person had had his food and then quickly He would have his meal.

After that Swami would retire for a very brief period and after that we would have the afternoon session which would again start with tea and snacks which were really heavy. And after this we would have one more session with Bhagavan in the hall. This was again an informal session but more focused in the sense that Swami was giving us more inputs about various spiritual aspects and students were very free to ask Him whatever they wanted. Swami would give them individual advice and also collective advice and this would go on up to 4-5 and then we would have the regular bhajan sessions outside, during which one elder would be asked to speak.

And after that we would come back to the hall and we would have something like a debriefing session and Swami would talk about all that happened in the day. And usually this post bhajan session was a very formal one, where Swami would give a very valuable divine discourse and some of the things He mentioned were never said outside. They were very practical deep insights into life. So by the time we came to 7pm the mind and the heart would be saturated with so much wisdom. So to top it all, we would have a very heavy and grand dinner - so finally there was no need to ask any students to sleep as they would literally hit the sack because they would have to be up again by 4am! So this was typically what happens in Kodai Kanal.”

Prof G Venkataraman: “Can you recall any instance of something very unique and precious being mentioned in this post bhajan discourse.”

Srirangarajan: “Yes, I remember something that made a very deep impact on my mind and heart when Swami was saying how God looks after a devotee. And to draw an analogy He took up the example of a mother and child. He says here is a devotee who is totally attracted to the world. And somehow God has to pull him to Himself - Swami says, ‘I alone know the agony that I face in teaching you every step of the dance.’ So in this case, He says ‘What does a mother do when her child has stomach pain?’ It has to be given castor oil and the child refuses saying ‘I will not take it’. So there is no use in forcing the child, so what does the mother do? She asks him ‘What do you want - a banana?’ The child is very happy and says ‘Yes, mummy I want a banana’. What the mother does is to take the banana, peel it and take a piece and put the castor oil pill into it, covering it up, then giving it to the child. **And then Bhagavan goes on to say ‘This is exactly what I do when you ask me for so many worldly boons. I also pack it nicely with all the spiritual lessons inside and I give it to you. You feel very happy and slowly the spiritual knowledge and insights sink into you.’**

And then extending this analogy He gave one more example. The child cries “Mummy, mummy, I want juice”; so the mother prepares some lemonade. But then the child says ‘I want red juice’ and another child says ‘I want green juice’. And each child wants a different colour, but the mother only has lemonade. So what the mother does is to put it in different colour glasses and then it appears very colourful and she gives it to the child.

So Swami says, these are the ways in which, though normally we do not understand, God goes out of His way to cater to each devotee in a way that is appropriate to him. Absolutely tailor made, custom built exclusively for him, but the lessons are the same. So these are some very beautiful gems that we received at Kodai Kanal.”

That was Srirangarajan offering his perspective on why Swami takes students to Kodai. Listen now to what Dr. Sainath has to say on the same subject. Dr. Sainath is a former student, and is currently a member of the Physics faculty in Swami’s University. This is what he says:

Prof G Venkataraman: “Tell us about the whole works about Kodi, how Swami gets excited, starts preparing, how He selects them, why He takes them there, what does He get out of it, what do the students get out of it?”

Dr. Sainath: “Actually the whole crux of that is in a single word is ‘giving’. He just loves giving, that’s all. Planning initially is done secretly, because everybody cannot go. And Swami doesn’t want to disappoint the others, so the planning part of it is done very secretly. Everybody is on red alert during those few days.”

Prof G Venkataraman: Everybody knows about the secret! (Laughing)

Dr. Sainath: So Swami just has to give a smile to a devotee, and that devotee is included on the devotees’ list to Kodai Kanal. It’s like that. I’ve had a few opportunities to see Swami when He plans for this trip, and every item that we bring, and we ask swami, “Can we take this?” He thinks so deeply about it. First, he begins with what is the kind of crowd that is coming there, like the stratum of the students and the guests who are coming there. Then He will see whether the majority will find it useful, and if He finds that majority will not, He will say “no”. And then He will see the cost of the item, and whether the students will be able to maintain it. It’s not in terms of spending, but it’s a question of after spending so much on it, will the students find any use for it. And if it’s not exactly useful for them, then He would drop it.

I’ve also seen Him purchase very expensive items, because He knows the students will use it and preserve it with great love. So the money aspect doesn’t come into the picture anywhere. All these angles he discusses and selects each and every item very carefully with great love, and then He takes it to Kodicanal.

Prof G Venkataraman: He also selects students with great Love and very carefully.

Dr. Sainath. Yes, He selects his students very carefully, because the selection of His students has various parameters which is very difficult to fathom actually. But with items, I’ve seen that He selects with great love and takes it with Him.

Prof G Venkataraman: So what happens in Kodai Kanal, what's the routine like?

Dr. Sainath: That also has undergone a change. If I'm to construe from what I've heard over the years. In the early years, 99% of the group consisted of students, 1% were some invited guests, and they would come with us. Invariably, a couple of elderly people would come because they are the ones who would knock some sense into us occasionally when it is required. Later on, as you can very well see sir, the group started becoming more heterogeneous, and many other groups started coming.

Prof G Venkataraman: Let's go back to the period when it was 99% students.

Dr. Sainath: Ok, it was something like in '89, that was when I went to Kodai Kanal with Bhagavan, that was when I was just about to enter my second year of post-graduation. At that time there were only 4 elders in the group. One was the late Mr. V. K. Narasimhan, and he was the only person who was not associated with the institute in any way. The other 3 I wouldn't call elders because they were a part of the institute - so they were all associated with the institute and we were used to seeing them around. So, strictly speaking the only one person in the group that was not related to the students in any way was Mr. V. K. Narasimhan. We were taken to Bangalore which was the year Bhagavan bought a special bus for us.

He was so worried along the way that we would get dehydrated or suffer from starvation, that the back of the bus was loaded with every possible drink item and food item - that was apart from the feast once we reached Kodai Kanal. And Bhagavan would set off in his car and the bus would stop at pre-designated spots that would be identified wherein the bus carrying the students would wait. In our case it happened to be Mysore, where the vice-chancellor of Mysore University at the time invited us to her bungalow. And we were to stop there for breakfast, and that happened after 10 o'clock (laughter).

So we went there for a very sumptuous meal, and we could hardly eat anything because Swami expected everything loaded into the bus. And He also used to tell us that, "These items are to be finished the time you reach here." And, "Nothing should be in the bus by the time you reach Kodai Kanal." So He would get pretty upset actually, if He finds that something gets left behind. He would give so much Love.

After all, we never had any place to eat an early breakfast until 10 o'clock, and then at 12 o'clock, we would have a proper lunch. So, it was too much eating all along the way. But, the funny part was that Swami would ensure that none of us put on weight because He would urge us to take a brisk walk around the lake, and He would fix the time. He said, "I want you back here in 20 minutes." So we would take a brisk walk for 5 kilometers.

So, it was a totally different Swami that we get to see while we're there. And we would also have some very nice sessions wherein He would suddenly switch gears and become the Avatar that He is. But, by in large the majority of the time He would spend with us as a friend, as close guide, and someone who was very intimate with us.

Prof G Venkataraman: What is His objective in taking a bunch of students to Kodai Canal according to you?

Dr. Sainath: There are certain discourses that He wants those students to hear, but mostly, those students have an opportunity to observe Him at close-quarters. I've always felt that we learn more about life, spirituality and perhaps Bhagavan himself, by silently observing Him, rather than listening to him.

Prof G Venkataraman: What can one learn?

Dr. Sainath: Plenty, we just observe His day-to-day activities, the way He takes care of His personal needs, the way He interacts with people, the way He tackles a problem, and the way He speaks to various kinds of people. I feel that our daily life lessons are more explicit when we just silently observe Bhagavan. In His discourses we get a chance to hear about spirituality and philosophy, but that comes secondary, because Bhagavan teaches us how to live our life just by His actions. I think that's one of the first lessons to learn when we can observe Him at such close proximity.

Prof G Venkataraman: In Kodaicanal, one can get a ring-side view of 'His Life being His message'.

Dr. Sainath: Ah yes, that is a very nice way of putting it. Apart from the discourses, He discussed the entire Avataric mission of Krishna with our group. He drew excellent examples between Krishna and how during a previous avatar, He gave promises to various people and how He actually fulfilled those promises. He drew parallels between various characters, and then He also spoke to us about the seven wives of Krishna, and the spiritual significance of these wives and the 16 thousand gopikas.

I also remember that He expressly forbade Mr. V. K. Narasimhan from publishing anything that He discussed in the Sanathana Sarathi. Mr. V. K. Narasimhan was planning to leave before the rest of us and told Swami that He was going to put it in the Sanathana Sarathi. Then Swami said, "The moment you start publishing it there, I will stop speaking here." He was explicit about that. Swami said, "This is meant especially for you, and meant only for you." So apart from those discourses and talks, we get to see the daily activities and what Love actually means, and how beautifully He can take care of us.

Regarding the dining hall that you now see there: it was our group that was blessed with the opportunity to dig the hillside completely so that the dining hall could be extended. So we took heavy crowbars, broke the hillside to

push it further back. And during the process, we carried heavy mud and rocks.

The beautiful thing about Bhagavan is that He is so observant. Many of us got blisters on our hands because of the heavy crowbars. And so, we had trouble eating with our hands, although we could still eat with a spoon. But we were holding the spoons very clumsily. And Bhagavan said, "What happened to your hands?" So, we just showed Him our hands and He saw the blisters.

The next day, He had leather gauntlets bought for each one of us, and said, "Don't go to work without these gauntlets." By the time we finished our work in about 20 days, all the gauntlets were torn and sweaty, but most of us preserved them because they were given to us with so much love. Various aspects of His divinity were manifested at that time. And like you rightly said sir, it is like getting a 'ring-side' view."

There is a popular saying that Prashanti Nilayam is Swami's Office, Brindavan is His home and Kodai is His playground. Superficially it might appear so but behind all the fun, frolic and picnicking, there is a serious purpose, and that is what I wanted to bring out by playing for you clips of what Srirangarajan and Sainath told me.

I should here mention that in the old days, Swami travelled by road. The students would all be packed into a bus while Swami would travel by car. In those days, not many elders accompanied Swami, as they do now. In fact, in the very first trip with students, it was almost entirely students, apart from two teachers and late Mr. V. K. Narasimhan, then Editor of Sanathana Sarathi. This way, Swami could devote attention totally to students.

Later, Swami began taking a few elders, but even so, the attention was almost entirely on students. Soon, devotees began to flock to Kodai to have the Darshan of the Lord amongst those beautiful hills, and slowly, Darshan began to become an important component of the Kodai visits of Swami. Soon after this, Swami started calling people for interviews and when the original dining hall was extended, Bhagavan also began to invite people for lunch.

The Kodai format keeps on changing constantly in terms of details but the basic purpose remains the same. In the next instalment, I shall begin my description of Swami's latest trip that is, in April 2006. There you will find a corroboration of the statement that I just made.

-Heart2Heart Team

RECOLLECTIONS OF CHIDAMBARAM KRISHNAN PART 6

We continue with our presentation of the wonderful recollections of Mr. Chidambaram Krishnan, a long-time devotee of Bhagavan Baba who came to the Lord under somewhat unusual circumstances. In the last Instalment [05], we broke off at the point where Mr. Krishnan's eldest brother has a dramatic change of heart. In this the sixth instalment, we now have Mr. Krishnan telling us about his marriage in Puttaparthi and what happened after that. Read on.

Grand Marriage Festivities

The day came and our marriage party left our hometown for Puttaparthi in a big convoy of cars and buses. After travelling for a long time, we finally came near the troublesome stream near Locherla, and we had a tough time crossing it. The father of the bride then said to me, "Look, we have so many Swamijis near our place. If you wanted a Swamiji to perform your marriage, we need not have come this far, facing so much trouble too." I was certainly not happy with the comment nor was this time for a long argument. I simply said, "Sir, Sai Baba is no run of the mill Swamiji. He is truly Divine. Presently, you do not know anything about Him. I therefore request you to kindly hold back your opinions till you actually see Him."

My father-in-law to be was not happy with my response but he did not argue further. He only said, "Remember, after the wedding, we all are going to Tirupathi to worship Lord Venkateswara there. We are not returning to our native place without first worshipping the Lord of Tirupathi." I should mention that right from the time we started on the journey to Puttaparthi for the marriage, the father of the bride was constantly talking about the trip to Tirupathi. Puttaparthi was much closer to Tirupathi than our native place, and having come thus far, this gentleman was keen to make the pilgrimage to that holy town. He was a great devotee of Lord Venkateswara and there was a vow he had to fulfil; hence the constant reminder. I tried to make him comfortable by saying, "Have no worry; you will certainly have the Darshan of Lord Venkateswara."

Tirupathi Comes to Puttaparthi

At last, after a tiring journey, we arrived in Puttaparthi. Swami was most gracious, and He took care of everything, I mean literally everything, attending to all details like a most loving father would. The marriage function started, and as the crucial moment approached, Swami materialised a *Mangal Sutra* for the bride. Holding it in His hand, Swami turned to me and asked, "Yesterday, as you were coming here, what was it that the father of the bride told you?" I recalled the unpleasant remarks about Swamijis being available in plenty near our hometown and all that. Hesitantly I replied, "Swami, this gentleman does not know anything about You. So please ignore the remarks he made about You." Swami smiled and replied, "No, no, I am not referring to that. He told you something else about going somewhere, did he not? What was that? Did he not say he wanted the Darshan of Lord Venkateswara?"

Now look and see what is on this *Mangal Sutram*. What you see here is an exact replica of the idol in Tirupathi!"

I saw and was absolutely amazed. I mean there we were, travelling to Puttaparthi and having a conversation as we were trying to negotiate a difficult stream near Locherla. How on earth did Swami who was here in Puttaparthi know about it? Those were still early days for me, when I had not fully appreciated the totally Divine nature of Swami.

After the marriage ceremony was over, Swami said to my father-in-law, "When you were coming here, you were talking to the bridegroom and mentioned something about going to some place after the marriage, did you not?" My father-in-law became very scared because he had then said some uncomplimentary things about Swami. So he started to be apologetic and said, "Baba, I was rambling about all kinds of things. Please do not take notice of them." Swami smiled and replied, "I am talking about a place you wanted to visit after the marriage. What was that place?" My father-in-law said, "That was Tirupathi."

Swami then said, "Look at the *mangalyam* on your daughter's neck. You will find the Lord of Tirupathi right there. Knowing your desire, I have brought Him to you right here!" I was present when Swami spoke those words to my father-in-law but neither of us realised then that those words had a much deeper meaning. We came to know about that only later.

Miraculous Meals Multiplication

After the grand marriage ceremony, it was time for lunch. Remember I earlier mentioned when lunch arrangements were first discussed Suraiya had flatly refused to accept that people from the neighbouring villages would show up for lunch? What actually happened was when the villagers saw a huge convoy of about seventy vehicles consisting of many cars and some big buses coming to Puttaparthi for the marriage, they began to think, "This looks like a big marriage that is about to take place. Surely the wedding feast would be grand."

You see, these villagers were all very poor and accustomed to eating coarse grains as their staple diet. Here was a chance to have a royal meal. Why miss it? That was now their line of thinking. Suddenly they all forgot their hostility to Swami and eagerly showed up for lunch. Swami had anticipated this long ago and that was why He instructed Suraiya to prepare lunch for over fifteen hundred people. Suraiya, however, did his own calculations and did not pay any heed to Swami's words. But now there was a crisis because about fifteen hundred people showed up from the village and there were about three hundred and fifty in our party.

Meanwhile, Swami walked casually into the kitchen to make sure everything was ready. And He saw that Suraiya had cooked for a much smaller number than what he had been instructed to do. So Swami turned to Suraiya and said,

“Suriaya! What have you done? Did I not tell you repeatedly to prepare lunch for fifteen hundred people? And now, you have cooked for a much smaller number!” Turning to my brother-in-law Kailasam, Swami said, “You, you there, at least you could have told this Suriaya to follow My instructions. If you had done so, provisions could have been bought in an appropriate manner and we would not have been in this mess!” Kailasam almost broke down. In a choking voice he replied, “Swami I repeatedly advised Suriaya to follow your instructions to the letter and make purchases accordingly but he did not listen.” Suriaya of course became panic stricken and was silent, wringing his hands all the time.

Something had to be done but nobody knew what. Meanwhile, people were already seated for lunch, and eagerly awaiting it. Swami then said, “Look, we cannot keep people waiting. Just go ahead and start serving. Let us see afterwards.”

The serving commenced. And you know what happened? Although Suriaya had prepared food only for about three hundred and fifty or so, that is just enough for our marriage party, lunch could actually be served for over eighteen hundred people. And, believe it or not, after all that serving, there was enough food left for evening dinner for our party!”

After the marriage, Swami asked our party to stay for five or six days, during which period He gave interviews to everyone. They were all very happy. Our party was really big and consisted not only of members from my family and that of the bride, but also the local *Tasildar*, the Sub Inspector, the Constable, all sorts of village officials and so on. For all of them, this was an incredible experience.

Five days after my marriage, Swami told me, “Let’s all go to Bangalore. I will come in your car.” That was the first time I had a chance to travel in the same car as Swami. Seated in the back were Swami, Kasturi and Raja Reddy. I was driving and my wife was in the front by my side. When we reached Bangalore Swami said to me, “All of you take rest. Tomorrow you go with your family to Mysore. And see the Brindavan gardens there. Before you leave in the morning, come to Me and take Padanamaskar.”

We left Swami in the Ashram, drove to the city and checked into the Woodlands Hotel. There we got a message that the son of my father-in-law’s younger brother had died suddenly. So my father-in-law, along with his younger brother has to rush back home. That meant he could not go to Tirupathi, which made him sadder. I consoled him saying, “Swami knew in advance that you would face this difficulty. That was why He brought the Lord of Tirupathi to you via the *mangalsutram* of your daughter. Take that as a sign of His Grace. Now please go back home to arrange for the funeral rites and obsequies.”

Having done all this, I went the following morning to Swami’s Ashram in Brindavan, did *namaskar* and sought permission to go to Mysore. Swami

graciously gave that and said, "Before returning to your hometown, you go to Tirupathi now on behalf of your father-in-law." I said yes and left.

As instructed by Swami, from Mysore I went to Tirupathi, worshipped the Lord there and returned home. And when I did, my eldest brother who at one time was so much opposed to my marriage, gave me a hearty welcome and showered me with love. It was a sign of Swami's Grace. **In fact, even during my marriage, Swami told me privately, "You made such a big fuss about your eldest brother. Look at him now. He is here, attending your marriage, and participating in it with great joy."** I was deeply touched and said in a feeble voice, "Swami, it is all Your Grace and nothing else. It was my *Karma* that my brother should oppose me. But out of compassion, You set aside my *Karma* and miraculously transformed him in just one instant."

'Preserve Harmony at Home!'

I will now narrate another incident where the person transformed was myself. One of my sons married against my wish. As I result, I broke off relationship with him and stopped talking to him. This went on for about two years.

One day, I went to Brindavan for Swami's Darshan. Those were the days of the Sai Ram Shed. I was seated there awaiting the arrival of Swami for Darshan, when my son also came for Darshan along with his wife. Someone came and gave me this information. I simply told the person who told me about my son's arrival that I was not on talking terms with my son.

Meanwhile, Swami came and Bhajans started. And then, something very strange happened. Swami stopped the Bhajans, got hold of microphone and started talking. He said, "People claim to be devotees of Mine. However, they also imagine that I do not know many things. They do not seem to understand that in fact, I know everything. These devotees do not know how to get along with their children and maintain peace at home. They have absolutely no capacity for adjustment."

When I heard this, I was knocked out; I mean, imagine that! Swami suddenly stopping Bhajans and saying something that applied hundred percent to me. It was like a whiplash for me. **Meanwhile, Swami continued, "Things happen in life according to the Law of *Karma*. No one has the right to decide what is right and what is wrong. A true devotee must do his best to preserve harmony at home."** After saying that, Swami walked away!

I was in a state of shock. I knew pretty well for whom that message was intended. It did not end with just this. Swami then sent for me and commanded me to resume talking to my son.

It is all very exciting, is it not? Want to know more? Well, for that you have to wait for the next instalment!

- Heart2Heart Team

SAI WORLD NEWS

SPREADING THE LIGHT THROUGH HUMAN VALUES IN OMAN

How It All Began

Guru Pournima 2002 – the Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas children from Oman came to Prashanti Nilayam to humbly offer at the Divine Lotus Feet a dance drama ballet titled “Vision, Mission and the Task.” Mr. Chakravarty, Secretary of Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, while interacting with the team coordinators enquired as to how many of the children were local Omanis. When told that all the children were of Indian origin, he made a pertinent point that efforts should have been made to integrate at least some Omani children, while representing Oman in front of the Lord. Thus were the seeds sown for the spread of human values amongst the Omani children.

A First Step

As a beginning, a storytelling competition was organized for children of non-devotees in Oman attending the classes on “Education in Human Values.” This was held on November 20, 2002. The idea for taking a similar concept into the local community then grew.

Serve And Inspire (SAI) Teams Up With The Times Of Oman

As the Serve And Inspire (SAI) Group – the local nomenclature for the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization in Oman – had no *‘locus standi’* to organize an event of any nature, the *Times of Oman*, a local English daily of substantial circulation, was approached. After listening to the proposal, which envisaged a Human Values based Essay Writing & Poster Making competition for schoolchildren, the owner of the Times of Oman Group agreed to be a media sponsor for the event, paving the way for the SAI Group to engage the official agencies of the country.

Swami Opens the First Door

It was essential to have in hand all the lists of private English medium schools in Oman, including the Omani and International schools. When the Project Coordinator approached the Deputy Director of Private Schools at the Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman, Mr. Mohamed Amer Al Shidany, he was curious at first to know as to why a group of expatriates were eager to do something of this nature involving local school students. After his concerns were allayed regarding any ulterior motive behind the event, his outlook totally changed and the doors to the Ministry of Education were opened. **From the Director down to the officials in the Department of Private Schools, the Ministry of Education offered total cooperation, support never seen before with any expatriate group. The reason – the Ministry officials were of the opinion that such a Human Values based Event was their responsibility and the SAI Group had taken the initiative to do it on their behalf.**

The Planning Gets Underway

The event was divided into two major categories – Essay Writing and Poster Making. The children were divided into four age groups: Group A, 6 – 9 years; Group B, 9 – 12 years; Group C, 12 – 15 years; Group D, 15 – 18 years. The topics for the Competition according to the different age groups were: “Love All, Serve All,” “Help Ever, Hurt Never,” “Service Begins at Home,” and “Work is Worship.” The topics were released to the students 4 to 6 weeks in advance, with a write-up being provided about the topics and the five basic human values and sub values. Each school was allowed to send three children in each age group and in each category, a total of 24 applicants from each school. Entries were channeled through the Ministry of Education with a cover letter in Arabic. The entries were judged on content relevance, language, presentation (introduction, subject development and conclusion), neatness and efficacy of conveying the Human Values selected. A three member judging committee of two judges from the community and one from the organizing body independently evaluated each entry and their assessments were separately tabulated to compute the overall points and their ranking. The identities of the participants were not disclosed to the judges. Also, it was ensured that the judges did not receive papers from the schools they were involved with.

“The Day” Dawns

The first edition of “Spreading the Light Through Human Values” got underway on Thursday, February, 20, 2003. After a brief prayer at the Divine Lotus Feet, the volunteers got into place to set things into motion. There was a lot of effort and work behind the scenes that saw 579 children from 39 schools arriving at the Indian School Al Ghubra, the venue for the event. At 10:00 a.m., the proceedings were inaugurated by Mrs. Fatma Abdul Abbas Noorani, Director, Department of Private Schools, in the presence of senior officials of the Ministry of Education. The whole atmosphere was exuberant and vibrating with the good wishes of one and all.

The Awards Ceremony 2003

As is the cultural practice in the Arab world, the program was initiated with a recitation from the Holy Quran by an Omani schoolchild. This was followed by a rendition of Human Values songs by Omani girls from the Ahmed bin Majid Private School, Oman. The prize distribution to all the winners was handed over by Her Excellency Dr. Fawzia Nasser Al Farsi, Under Secretary in the Ministry of Education, along with other senior members of the Ministry of Education.

“Sai” Moves Forward In 2004

The Serve And Inspire (SAI) Group conducted the eagerly awaited “Spreading The Light Through Human Values 2004” on April 22 at the Indian School Al

Ghubra. This year, with the tremendous encouragement from the Ministry of Education, the event was thrown open to the Arabic medium schools as well, which were nominated by the Ministry of Education. **1105 students from 86 schools – Omani Arabic, Omani Bilingual, International Community Schools and for the first time, standing shoulder to shoulder with their compatriots, students from the Schools for Children with Special Needs – participated in 2004.**

The topics for both Poster Making and Essay Writing for 2004 were “Good Manners” for Group A, “Be Good, See Good, Do Good” for Group B, “Sharing and Caring” for Group C, and “Give and Forgive” for Group D.

The Awards Ceremony 2004

What began as a humble beginning in 2003 by planting a seed was over the next year nurtured by the Ministry of Education and tended by the SAI Group, and thus grew into a tender sapling in 2004. “We are sure that in the years to come this sapling will mature into a sturdy tree bearing the fruits of every person’s efforts, with its roots deeply embedded in Human Values,” say the members of the SAI group full of confidence and love.

The awards ceremony in 2004 was conducted on June 2nd in a grand manner. His Excellency Mustafa Abdul Latif, Undersecretary for Administrative & Financial Affairs, Ministry of Education, was the Chief Guest. Br. G B Choithram Jethwani, Regional Coordinator, Gulf & Middle Eastern Countries of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations, gave the keynote address.

Mrs. Aisha Ahmed Al Blushi, Director, Department of Private Schools, who spoke on behalf of the Ministry of Education, said that it was of immense satisfaction to have had 1105 participants from 86 schools and the outcome of the event was remarkable. She pointed out the vital need for Education in Human Values and praised the efforts of the SAI Group as truly inspirational. She complimented all the participants and said that their quality of work was of a very high standard.

Another Step Forward In 2005

The 14th of April 2005 witnessed the staging of this mega event for the third year in succession. Her Excellency Dr. Muna Salim Al Jardany, Undersecretary for Education and Curricula, Ministry of Education, inaugurated the event.

1059 Students from 94 schools such as Omani Arabic Schools, Omani Bilingual Schools, International Community Schools and Special Education Schools in Oman, registered for the competition. The topics for 2005 for both Poster Making and Essay Writing this time were “Kindness is Goodness” for Group A, “Nature is the Best Teacher” for Group B, “Watch Your Words” for Group C, and “Service to Community” for Group D.

After declaring the event open, Dr. Muna said that she was thrilled to see small children thinking about deep ideas, which intrigue even adults. When children have an idea and think about it for more than two weeks, they tend to absorb it in their personality and it reflects in their character. Competitions such as these help the children better than what they learn from textbooks as they are excited to go out and get involved in activities.

The Awards Ceremony 2005

“To be good is noble, but to show others how to be good is nobler. You are now in the first stage of the long journey of life. There are many great tasks before you. You have many duties to discharge. The children of today will be the doctors, engineers, educators, traders, administrators, and farmers of tomorrow, developing and contributing to the growth of the nations where you live. The world has huge material resources, but your hand and hearts have to supply the will and skill to use those resources for the good of mankind.’

This was what our Beloved Swami spoke to his students on one occasion. “We hope that what we do today, what the children in Oman learn from this Tree of Human Values, will prepare them for that role tomorrow,” say the dedicated Sai devotees in Oman.

The Awards Ceremony was held on May 18 in a grand manner. His Excellency Mohammed Hamdan Al Toubi, Undersecretary for Educational Planning and Projects, Ministry of Education, was the chief guest. A brochure with full details of the event as well as highlighting the activities of the SAI Group and containing a wealth of information on Sathya Sai Education in Human Values was released on the occasion by the Chief Guest.

In her address, Aisha Ahmed Suweidan Al Blushi, Acting Director, Department of Private Schools, Ministry of Education, Oman mentioned that under the umbrella of the Serve And Inspire (SAI) Group, many groups like the Ministry of Education, *Times of Oman*, and the Indian School Al-Ghubra, worked hand in hand to ensure the success of this event. Teachers also put in hard work to inspire and train the students. The creative talents exhibited by all the participants created a difficult task for the judges, who meticulously marked the entries. She congratulated the winners and all the students participating and in the process learning a human value, thus reinforcing the saying, “Education is for life and not for living.”

2006: Omani Students Throng to the Human Values Competition Conducted by the SAI Group

The Serve And Inspire (SAI) Group conducted the fourth edition of “Spreading the Light Through Human Values,” on April 13th 2006 in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. Her Excellency Dr, Muna Salim Al Jardany, Undersecretary for Education and Curricula, Ministry of Education, inaugurated the event.

Bhagavan emphasizes that the “End of Education is Character.” This competition in Oman has been the vehicle to take Swami’s message on human values to the community at large with special emphasis on the student community.

In 2006 the event attracted a record registration of 2020 entries from 103 schools. Due to a long unscheduled weekend holidays, the actual turn out was 1496, which is still almost a 75% increase over the previous year. The value-based topics that were given for both Poster Making and Essay Writing this time were “Help the Needy” for Group A, “Unity is Strength” for Group B, “Charity Begins at Home” for Group C, and “Water is Life” for Group D.

There was a special presentation by the SAI Group to the dignitaries, highlighting the various human values and service programs of the SSSSO in Oman such as a Workshop for teachers in inculcating human values, Seminar on Value Parenting, Value based winter camp for school children, public seminars on human values, blood donation campaigns for two decades, health awareness camps, etc. The presentation also touched upon some of the fascinating projects done by the SSSSO in other parts of the world.

After declaring the event open, Her Excellency Dr. Muna bint Salim Al Jardany, said that events such as this provide a real life experience to the students as they come here and find children from other schools all engaged in interpreting values in the essays and posters. By thinking about these topics and preparing for the event with the help of parents, families and teachers, the values find a place in their inner selves, inner consciousness, which is very important. Dr. Muna expressed the hope that the competitions would grow even bigger and more students would participate next year by sponsoring the competitions in other areas of Oman as well.

Essa Mohammed Al Zadjali, Founder and Chief Editor, *Times of Oman*, expressed his joy at seeing so many children from all parts of Oman. He wished the SAI Group would expand their efforts and take the program to the different regions so that even more children can participate. Speaking on the role of *The Times of Oman*, which has been doing yeoman service to the student community by the program along with the SAI Group, Essa Al Zadjali pointed out the social responsibility the press has in seeing that such programs extend to all parts of the country and motivate the children to participate in large numbers so they can derive maximum benefit.

Dr. Madiha Al Shaibany, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Education, having heard of the program in the past few years, witnessed it first hand this year and was full of praise for the organization of an event of such magnitude. She observed that the inclusion of human values in the educational program is a must and activities such as these enhance the curriculum and enlarges the student’s participation. She spoke of the unique diversity that the event offers as it brings together the student community under one roof irrespective of religion, culture and nationality thereby complementing the goal of the UN and UNESCO courses.

Dr. Sana Sabeel Al Balushi, Director, Technical Office, Ministry of Education, who has been coming to the competitions right from the start of the event in 2003, enjoyed seeing the children from different backgrounds working together for the larger purpose of living together in peace and hoped this will be transferred to the entire society and the country at large. Children are the core of the community and the country and as educators, Dr. Sana is conscious of the responsibility it enjoins in the need to work together in imparting human values from the beginning to ensure the world will be a safe place for all of us to live in.

Michelle Ni Thoghda, Special Projects and Curriculum Development Officer at the Department of Private Schools, Ministry of Education, referred to the need for a sustained campaign in seeing that human values are applied in everyday life. The students should go back to their classes and families and discuss these topics again and again and ruminate on them constantly. She further suggested that teachers should follow up in the classroom by encouraging debates and speeches on these topics and articles for the school magazines. Students are like sponges and absorb all they see and hear and therefore it is important as educators to lead by example.

The watertight judgment process had a team of 40 judges, professionals in the area of art and literature who evaluated the entries independent of each other and without knowing the identity of the participants. Each entry was assessed by three judges (two from the community reputed in the field of art and literature and one from the organizers).

The Awards Ceremony 2006

As the students walked from the dais proudly holding the beautiful plaques they had won in the *Times of Oman* Open Essay Writing and Poster Making Competition organized by the SAI Group in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, it was the fulfillment of a great dream. For the organizers, the mission to spread human values had reached another high. For the children, it was an exciting exploration of new ideas and values, accomplished in an entertaining way.

The Award Presentation Ceremony of “Spreading the Light Through Human Values” held on May 17, 2006, at the Indian School Al Ghubrah, got off to a colorful start with the arrival of the chief guest, His Excellency Munir Abdulnabi Yousuf Makki, member of the Council of Higher Education. Essa Mohammed Al Zedjali, Chairman of *Times of Oman* and Al Shabiba Group, was the guest of honor. Many officials from the Ministry of Education also participated.

The program commenced with the recitation from the Holy Quran by Jawad Mujtaba Al Lawati, a student of Al Huda Private School. The students of the Azzan bin Qais Private School presented a vibrant dance reflecting the traditional Omani culture.

“Musings” by Muadh Ghalib Al Rashdi, a grade five student of Ahmed bin Majid Private School was quite a stunner considering the age of the boy. He narrated how he had prepared for the competition by listening to his parents, grandfather and siblings. He pointed out that this process of exchanging thoughts and ideas on human values not only helped him towards his preparation but helped all his family members to appreciate the importance of working together in harmony and being a good person. He concluded by revealing his special plan to keep spreading human values which is important for both kids as well as adults and which would help make the world a better place.

A brochure with full details of the event as well as highlighting the activities of the SAI Group and containing a wealth of information on Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) was released on the occasion by the chief guest.

Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Madiha Ahmed Nasser Al Shibani, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Education, applauded the wonderful opportunity that has been created which has facilitated the coming together of students from Omani government, bi-lingual, special education and international schools. She pointed out that this unique opportunity has resulted in a very positive exchange of ideas and views. She emphasized that education cannot be confined merely to academic achievement nor should it become confused with the gleaning of information from books. Real education must develop and promote compassion and concern for others.

The event was widely covered in the local and regional newspapers such as *Times of Oman*, *Al Shabiba*, *Oman Daily Observer*, *Oman Tribune* and *Khaleej Times* as well as Radio Oman FM. In its Thursday magazine, the *Times of Oman* carried a special cover story on human values spotlighting the worldwide human values programs of the SAI Group and their service activities.

Feedback from a Cross-Section of Dignitaries, Teachers and Parents

Ashok Suvarna, Executive Director, National Publishing and Advertising: “Even though there are many activities in this part of the world, there are very few opportunities for children to take part in such value based events. One visible gain seen over the years is that the parents and the schools have reaffirmed their commitment to this event. The presentation made by the SAI Group today was innovative and commendable.”

Ahmed Rayees, President, School Management Committee, Indian School Ghubra: “Most of the school curriculum lays emphasis on academics and misses out on human values. When the SAI Group comes into picture, they bring in the human values. The passion of the SAI Group volunteers is really inspiring. The Indian School Al Ghubra and the SAI Group walk the same path as far as human values are concerned and we at ISG believe that the value based education has to be instilled at a young age.”

Ramesh Mathur, Educational Advisor to Indian Schools in Oman: "I am quite amazed by the numbers. The incentive and the atmosphere generated by the organizers is fascinating. The parents are very satisfied and it is obvious from the fact that there is a huge turnout, despite the long holidays. The impartiality of the SAI Group is appreciated as their honesty and transparency is visible."

Said Abdelaziz Abdullah El Sisi, English Teacher, Anwar El Huda Private School: "This competition has good benefits for the students as it helps them to be good and marked with good human values. This in turn helps the society and future generations."

Fahad Nasser Al Balushi, English Teacher, Khambash bin Mohd Basic Education School: "I feel so happy to be associated and witnessing such an important event."

Abdul Qayyum, English Teacher, Pakistan School, Muscat: "Such competitions are extremely important and the more we arrange them the better! By arranging such competitions, we as teachers play a catalytic role while focusing primarily on the production and inculcation of meaningful and healthy characteristics among the young learners."

Shaiara Zulfiqar, Teacher, Bangladesh School, Jalan: "Although we teach about values at home and school, it is really necessary that children get to express their ideas about human values. Through this competition they have a chance to do so. They can also exchange ideas and enhance their grasp about the basic values."

Deepa Rajamuni, Teacher, Srilankan School: "The students who take part in the event understand that every element in the world is incorporated with human values."

Rose Lina G Palo, Teacher: "This competition helps a lot because children are able to think positively what they could write or draw related to the given topic which promotes human values."

We thank Mr. G B Choithram and many other Sai devotees of Oman for sharing with us this inspiring account of Sai activity in the field of education in their country.

-Heart2Heart Team

OPEN DAY AT SATHYA SAI SCHOOL LEICESTER, U.K.

'I Want the Best for My Child' – A Parent

"I have been here a few times because I want the best for my child. I know that at this school she will receive spiritual education as well as academic." This is what the parents of one tiny-tot who visited the Sathya Sai School Leicester on its first open day said.

"Although our child is too young, we want to give him the best all round education; that's why we came here," said another parent when asked what motivated them to visit the Sathya Sai School. What was a tiny bud is now a beautiful flower attracting streams of parents every year. This was very evident recently on the 24th of June 2006 when the School held its first Open Day. So many parents and children visiting the school so enthusiastically to see the facilities and ambience with little or no publicity, is itself testimony to the wonderful service being offered at this 'school with a difference'. So what is so unique about this school? How did it start in the first place?

The Sri Sathya Sai School Leicester was established under the auspices of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organization, UK, by Mrs. Usha Lim, current head teacher, and her husband Cheng Hoe Lim, in September 2001 as a non-denominational independent school providing primary education. The curriculum is based on Sathya Sai Education in Human Values and currently it has 37 pupils, of which some 50% are from Sai families, and four teachers. The Sai Organisation established another school on the same lines at St. Andrews, Scotland in 2002.

Praise from the UK Schools' Inspectorate

The Leicester School is managed by a Board of Governors, in line with the requirements set out in "Sai 2000" and received its full inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) for England. In its full report, published on November 23, 2004, Ofsted concluded:

"This is a distinctive school that is successful in achieving its aims. It provides a secure spiritual environment in which pupils can learn and make good progress. It is permeated by the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) programme which is based on the five values of right conduct, truth, love, non-violence and peace. The welfare, health and safety of pupils are well promoted. Pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum. They feel valued as individuals, well supported and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Teaching is mainly good or very good. Parents are very supportive of the school."

The Parents are Impressed

What is more heartening are the responses from the parents of the current students. "We feel very lucky that our children are students at the school.

They look forward to school and since starting both children have blossomed academically, physically, spiritually and in confidence,” say the parents of two children enrolled in the school. Another parent remarked, “My son started only six weeks ago. He had been going through behavioral problems which we found requires a lot of time and energy, but within this short space of time he has blossomed into a lovely, well-mannered boy.”

So it was no wonder that on the Open Day of the school many new parents were keen to look at the whole school and speak to the staff. The good news of the school has reached them through their friends and neighbours and this was evident by the number of parents and children who attended on the Open Day from 10 am to 4 pm. "We came today to see this school because we have heard so much about it from our friends whose children come here. Our neighbor's son who joined this school just a few months ago has changed so much," said the one of the parents holding their little one by his hand.

"Our friends' children come here, and when we saw the changes in them we wanted the same for our children." This was the kind of common refrain that most of the parents echoed. "My child is very hyper and I'm hoping that by coming here she'll change, just as another child we know has changed after he joined Sathya Sai School," said the parents of another tiny-tot. There were others who found in the school the culmination of the search for 'their kind of school'. For example, one couple said, "We follow the saint Shankaracharya's teachings and we haven't sent our child to school yet because we were looking for a spiritual school. Then we heard about this school and decided to come and see it."

A Beacon of Light

Wherever there is purity of purpose and a passion to serve selflessly, unmindful of personal sacrifices, with every act an offering to the Divine, such institutions become true beacons of light. And light needs no publicity, just like a fragrant rose.

In fact, now the school has almost outgrown the capacity of its current premises at Belper Street in Leicester, as more and more parents wish to send their children. In addition, the parents of older pupils wish to see their children continue with the value-oriented education and so there are plans to provide secondary education too.

Apart from the Value based education, if you ask the head teacher what is the most salient aspect which has made the school what it is today, she will say it is the “Love” inspired by the founder of the School, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It is His love that the teachers shower in abundance and that has brought out miraculous transformations in the little hearts and minds of the young ones. The reform and transformation that this school has silently brought about is really a tremendous source of inspiration and an eye-opener not only for other schools in the same area but for the whole community.

-Heart2Heart Team

GET INSPIRED

OUR PARENTS

An eighty-year-old man was sitting on the sofa in his house along with his forty-five-year-old highly educated son. Suddenly a crow perched on their window. The father asked his son, "What is this?" The son replied, "It is a crow".

After a few minutes, the father asked his son a second time, "What is this?" The son said, "Father, I have just now told you, it's a crow."

After a little while, the old father again asked his son the third time, "What is this?" This time, a hint of irritation was heard in the son's tone when he said to his father with a rebuff, "It's a crow, father, a crow!"

A little afterwards, the father again asked his son for the fourth time, "What is this?" This time the son shouted at his father, "Why do you keep asking me the same question again and again, although I have told you so many times IT'S A CROW! Why can't you understand this?"

A little later the father went to his room and came back with an old tattered diary, which he had maintained since his son was born. On opening it, he asked his son to read that page. The son read the following words written in the diary:

"Today my little son aged three was sitting with me on the sofa when a crow perched on the window. He asked me twenty-three times what it was, and I replied to him all twenty-three times that it was a crow. I hugged him lovingly each time he asked me the same question over and over twenty-three times! I did not at all feel irritated. Rather, I felt affection for my innocent child."

While the little child asked him twenty-three times, "What is this," his father felt no impatience in replying to the same question again and again, but this day, when the father asked his son the same question only four times, the son became irritated and ill-tempered.

So, if your parents attain old age, do not repulse them or look at them as a burden, but speak to them graciously. Be cool, obedient, humble and kind to them, as they were to you when you were a child. Be considerate to your parents.

From today onward, say this aloud: "I want to see my parents happy forever. They have cared for me ever since I was a baby. They have showered their selfless love on me. They sacrificed, crossing mountains and valleys, bearing storms and strife to make me a person presentable in society." Say a prayer to God: "I will serve my old parents in the *best* way. I will always speak kindly and courteously to my dear parents, no matter how they behave."

-Heart2Heart Team

THE KING'S GRACE AND GOD'S GRACE

Once upon a time a King by the name of Sundaravadanan ruled over the kingdom of Kannapuri. He was great in all respects except that he never believed in God. One night, he was traveling through his city in disguise. He heard two beggars beseeching loudly. One was invoking Lord Rama's grace and the other was invoking the King's grace.

The King was intrigued and had both the beggars brought to the court. His minister asked the question, "Yesterday, you both were begging. One of you invoked Rama's grace and other the King's grace. Now what does that mean?"

The one who invoked Rama's grace replied, "Sir, this whole world is protected by the Lord Rama. He is the one who gives wealth and riches to everyone."

The minister now spoke to the other beggar. He replied, "Sir, God is invisible but the King is the visible God. If he so desires, he can make anyone rich."

That night, the King argued with the minister that the one who called on the King was the cleverer man. The minister, however, disagreed. He said, "However a man may try to help, if the receiver does not have God's grace it will never reach him." The King decided to put "King's grace" and "Rama's grace" to the test.

The next day a King's order was announced. "On Rama Navami Day the King will distribute presents to everyone. All can come and receive the presents." Accordingly people gathered. The two beggars were also present. The King gave out a new piece of cloth and a pumpkin to everyone. When the "King's grace" beggar's turn came up, the King recognized him and whispered something in the minister's ears. The minister went in and brought a pumpkin. The pumpkin and the cloth were given to the beggar.

After sometime, the King and his minister went around the city in disguise. They noticed the "Kings' grace" beggar still begging the same way. The King summoned the beggar to the court the next day and asked him, "Are you still a beggar despite my presents?" The beggar replied, "King! I sold the pumpkin in the market for two silver coins. How can I become rich with that?" The King replied, "You are a fool. That pumpkin contained precious jewels and pearls. If you had only cut open the pumpkin you would have become rich."

After sometime when the King was on his rounds he noticed a rich man in a palanquin. The minister recognized him as "Rama's grace" beggar. This man was also summoned to court. The King asked, "Aren't you the beggar who used to beg in the streets? How did you become so rich?"

This man replied, "King! By the grace of Rama, I was to feed the Brahmins on a particular day to bring peace to my dead father. All I could purchase was a pumpkin. But, to my surprise, when I cut open the pumpkin, I found jewels! By the grace of Rama I became rich."

The King understood that one truly required God's grace to prosper in this world. The power of faith is amazing. Swami says, "The man of faith need not worry about who will take care of him if he devotes all his time to thoughts of the divine." Let's surrender every moment to the divine and live in the faith of His constant presence and confidence of His loving care.

Adpated from Nava Sarathi October 2003

- Heart2Heart Team

LOOK TO THE FEELING

Some time ago there reigned a king named Raja Singh Bhadur in Bihar. There was a large Ashram for Sannyasins in his kingdom at Anandapuri. Once the Ministers reported to the King that the Sannyasins and Brahmacharis (celibates) at the Ashram were always engaged in eating sweetmeats and *kheer* (pudding) and they feasted at least once a week. Most of their time was spent sleeping and they were not doing any austerities, spiritual practices or meditation.

The King sent a messenger to bring the Mahant, Swami Niralambananda, to his presence. On his entering the court, the King wasted no time and immediately confronted the Mahant with his complaint. "The ministers have reported to me that the Swamis and Brahmacharis are not doing any spiritual practice. They are only eating sweetmeats and sleeping."

Swami Niralambananda did not appear upset at the King's criticism. He smiled and replied "Your Majesty, we would be most honored if you would pay a visit to the Ashram in the early morning and you will learn the true facts. I will come and wake you up at three in the morning."

The King was satisfied with this answer, and so the next morning Swami Niralambananda went to the palace and woke the King at 3:00. He asked the King's attendant to take a pot of water along with them and on the Swami's request they went first to the homes of the Ministers.

The Swami asked the attendant to throw water on the faces of the sleeping Ministers. They all woke up uttering, "You fool", "Damn nonsense," and "Who has disturbed my sleep?" The King was rather mystified and asked the Swami why this was all necessary. But the Swami persuaded him to accompany him to the stables and later to the ashram where all would be made clear.

At the stables the Swami asked the attendant to throw water on the faces of the grooms. They also woke up uttering, "Sala," "Badmash," etc.

Next the party proceeded to the Ashram. Water was then thrown on the faces of the Sannyasins and Brahmacharis, who all awoke uttering "Sivoham," "Hari Om," and "Ram, Ram."

With a benevolent smile the Swami addressed the King. "Look, oh King! Have you noticed the difference? Have you noted the attitude, feeling and the words that came out of the mouths of these different kinds of people? The words reveal the contents of the heart and mind and show the culture of the person.

"Sadhus and Sannyasins also work and take food, but their attitude is very different. Worldly people judge persons by their external actions. Sannyasins take food for the maintenance of the body. They do not fill their stomachs to please the palate, to fatten themselves and indulge in sensual indulgence."

"They work as witnesses of their actions. They work for the good of the world. They know that hunger is a characteristic of the physical sheath and not of the Self or Atman. They do not identify themselves with the body, mind, *Prana*, senses or intellect."

The Swami went on to add, "They have no thought of the world. Their motives and thoughts are always pure. They have no thought of the morrow and they fill their minds with pure, sublime thoughts."

"They never think: 'What will I get by doing this action? How much money will I make from this?' These thoughts never occupy their minds. They only think, 'How can I serve the world to the maximum degree? How can I make people ethical and religious-minded? How can I make them Yogis and Jnanis? How can I make them happy and wise?'"

"They may appear to you to be sitting silently, as if Tamasic, but internally they are vibrant, radiant, full of purity and elevating thoughts. O King! Judge not people by external acts. Look to their motives and attitude."

"A Sannyasin," the Swami went on, "will not keep anything for himself. He will always share what he has with others. Whenever there is any calamity in the land, he will dedicate his life in doing such deeds as will relieve human suffering. He lives to serve. When the test comes to sacrifice life, you will discover the difference between a householder and a Sannyasin."

"As for feasts, they have no interest in them whatsoever," the Swami laughed. "They always want simple food - dhal and bread. To bring auspiciousness and prosperity to the people, they arrange feasts at their sincere request."

"O adorable Swamiji" cried the King, "please pardon me. Now I understand the philosophy of motives and internal attitude. Your remarks have been illuminating and inspiring. Your instructions have opened my eyes. I was judging people only by their external actions. You have imparted inspiring knowledge to me."

"I shall be ever grateful to you, O revered Swamiji, crores of prostrations and adorations unto thee! Om Namo Narayanaya! Thou art my Guru from now on."

Adapted from Nava Sarathi July 04

- Heart2Heart Team

FUNNY HOW.....

Funny how a donation looks so big when you give it to the temple -
but the same amount seems so small when you use it for shopping.

Funny how long it takes to serve God for an hour -
but how quickly a team plays 60 minutes of sport.

Funny how long a couple of hours spent at temple are -
but how short they are when watching a movie.

Funny how we can't think of anything to say when we pray -
but have no difficulty thinking of things to talk about to a friend.

Funny how we get thrilled when a match goes into extra innings -
but we complain when a spiritual talk is longer than the regular time.

Funny how hard it is to read a chapter in the scriptures -
but how easy is to read 100 pages of a best selling novel.

Funny how people want to get a front seat at any game or concert -
but scramble to get a back seat at the bhajan centre.

Funny how we need 2 weeks advance notice to fit a seva event into our
schedule -
but can adjust our schedule for other events at the last moment.

Funny how hard it is for people to learn a prayer well enough to teach others-
but how simple it is to understand and repeat gossip.

Funny how we believe what the newspapers say -
but question what Swami says.

Funny how everyone wants to go to heaven -
but do not want to believe, or think, or say, or do anything for God.

- Heart2Heart Team

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI FAITH QUIZ

1. For many years devotees had Darshan of Bhagavan in Brindavan around the Sai Ram shed, under the shade of an enormous tree. When was the new Darshan hall called the 'Sai Ramesh Hall' inaugurated?

- a. 1990
- b. 1989
- c. 1992
- d. 1995

2. In the Mahabharata, Dronachaarya, the preceptor, tested his archery disciples' powers of concentration by asking them what they saw when aiming at a bird on a tree. How did Arjuna respond, thus proving his superlative ability to concentrate?

- a. That he saw the bird upon the branch.
- b. That he saw only the bird.
- c. That he saw the bird and surrounding leaves.
- d. That he saw equally the tree, the branch and the bird.

3. One of Jesus' best known parables refers to a comparison of heaven with a mustard seed. What was the comparison based on?

- a. That the mustard seed will increase in size.
- b. That the mustard seed is of great value.
- c. That the mustard seed is very rare.
- d. That the mustard seed has a good taste.

4. The four Yugas (cosmic cycles) have the names of Kritha; Thretha; Dwarapa; and Kali. Each Yuga is associated with a particular spiritual practice that is most efficacious during its period. What is the spiritual activity that should be practised in the present Kali Yuga?

- a. Meditation
- b. Chanting the Name
- c. Yoga
- d. Worship

5. In Islam, there are six 'articles of faith'. What do these refer to? A collection of six -

- a. Religious beliefs.
- b. Ritualistic behaviours.
- c. Items of special clothing.
- d. Holiest scriptures.

6. Can you answer the following question put by Swami during one of his discourses?

“In the first twelve years of Rama's life, He encountered three types of women. When he went with the sage Vishwamitra to protect his sacrifice, he encountered the ogress Thataki. He put an end to her without any compunction or aversion. After Vishwamitra's sacrifice was completed, Rama went with the sage to Mithila. On the way, he came across Ahalya, who had been transformed into a stone. He gave her life, absolved her of sin through penitence and restored her to her husband. At Mithila, he encountered Sita. He accepted Sita without any hesitation. What is the inner meaning of these three incidents?”

7. Vipassana Meditation is a well-known practice in Buddhism. What is it based on?

- a. Following the breath.
- b. Insight and awareness.
- c. Devotion to the Buddha.
- d. Repetition of mantras.

8. What attitude does Swami advise us to have towards the world?

‘Serve the world as you would serve a’

- a. Relative
- b. Beggar at your door
- c. Hospital patient
- d. Master

9. How did Rama suggest to Lakshman to cut off the ears of the demoness Shurpananka?

- a. By instructing to do so in two-three syllables.
- b. By holding up four fingers towards the sky.
- c. By pointing to his own ears and the sky.
- d. By quickly drawing the shape of an ear in the dust.

10. Which religion did Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) found?

- a. The Bahá'í Faith.
- b. Mormonism.
- c. Zen Buddhism.
- d. None of the above.

ANSWERS

IC

The Inauguration of the Sai Ramesh Hall at Brindavan occurred on 5th December 1992.

2B

Dronaacharya's other disciples gave varying answers such as that they could see the bird sitting on the whole tree, or that they could see the bird surrounded by the tree's leaves, but only Arjuna saw the bird alone, thus proving his power of fixed concentration.

3A

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."

The Bible, Gospel of Matthew 13 v31

4B

Swami tells us that

"Of the various types of Bhakthi, Namasmarana Bhakthi is the best. In the Kali Yuga, the Name is the Path for saving oneself. Jayadeva, Gouranga, Thyagayya, Thukaram, Kabir, Ramdas, all these great Bhakthas attained the Lord, through just this one Nama. Why speak of a thousand things? Even Prahlada and Dhruva were able to enjoy the *Darsan*, *Sparsan* and *Sambhashana* of the Lord through Nama only. Therefore, if every Saadhaka will consider the name of the Lord as the very breath of his life; and having complete faith in good deeds and good thoughts, if he will develop the spirit of service and equal Love for all, then there can be no better Path for Mukthi."

Prema Vahini p,109

(The most suitable practice in the Kritha Yuga was meditation, Yagnas (sacrifice) in the Thretha Yuga, and worship in the Dhwarapa Yuga.)

5A

There are six articles of faith in Islam: (1) Belief in Allah (2) Belief in Angels (3) Belief in the Books (Scriptures) of Allah (4) Belief in the Prophets of Allah (5) Belief in the Day of Judgment and (6) Belief in the Divine Laws.

6A

Swami gives the answer as follows,

"They show that even from his boyhood Rama displayed extraordinary qualities and stood out as an example to the world. Thataki, the first woman he encountered Symbolises the *Tamas* quality. He destroyed the *Tamasic* quality. Ahalya represents the *Rajo guna*. He taught the right lesson to Ahalya, purified her and sent her safely to her place. He took to himself Sita who represented the *Satwic* quality. Bhagavan approves of and accepts only that which is *Satwic*. He values the *Satwic* quality. He protects and fosters it."

Discourse at "Sai Sruti", Kodaikanal, on Sri Rama Navami Day, 14-4-1989.

7B

Vipassanā is a Pali word and is often translated as ‘insight’ or ‘clear-seeing’. Vipassanā meditation is a simple technique which depends on direct experience and observation. It aims at direct perception, as opposed to knowledge derived from reasoning or argument.

8D

“Serve the world as you would serve a Master; be humble, be eager, be efficient in that service. If you dare treat the world as your servant, you will be dragged down into disaster.”

9B

Swami gives the full details of the encounter here.

He (Rama) raised his hand up, and counted four on his fingers, looking at Lakshmana. Lakshmana immediately grasped the meaning of that command! By counting four, Rama indicated the Four Vedas, which are collectively called Sruthi, that is to say, “The Heard,” which means the Ear. Lakshmana had a sharp vigilant intellect and so, he could rightly interpret the slightest gesture of Rama. Rama had held his hand up, towards the sky. The sky or *Akasa* is the fifth elemental force, characterised by Sound. Sound is the symbol for Brahman, known as *Sabda* Brahman, or God. God resides in heaven, and heaven is also indicated by the raised pointing hand. Heaven is known as ‘*naaka*’ in Sanskrit. It has also another meaning, ‘Nose!’ No sooner did Rama make those two gestures, Lakshmana rushed towards the demonic woman with his sword drawn. He dragged her down to the ground; and shouting that her effrontery must be punished, he slashed off her ears and nose!

Ramakatha Rasavahini – II p 30-31

10A

Bahá'u'lláh founded the Bahá'í Faith which is based on His teachings. He was born in 1817 in Iran, and seemed very gifted right from childhood. He demonstrated a particular devotion to the relief of the poor. Because of his teachings, he was banished into exile, eventually lasting forty years. Throughout his exile Bahá'u'lláh composed mystical writings and ethical teachings and exhorted world leaders to follow the path of peace.

THE HEALING TOUCH

AMITA'S AMAZING JOURNEY – FROM DOUBT AND DESPAIR TO LIGHT AND DELIGHT

The Often Unnoticed Miracle

Every moment is an aeon when you always have the shadow of the grim reaper over you. The shadow is dark and at other times recedes into a not so distant horizon. Happy moments pass us by like fireflies in the dark. Glowing and dimming, so fast that we can hardly enjoy them when they are with us; we can only reminisce wistfully. Moments of pain seem to last ages, festering sores in the conscious, leaving indelible scars in the unconscious. To be alive is a miracle...to be born healthy is the greatest of miracles. Witnessing the excess of physical ailments in the world, congenital and acquired, one *must* be grateful to one's maker were one to be "normal". To all those of us who take life for granted, who crib about every little inconvenience, every little cold and cough...to us who are "fortunate to be normal" here is a small story about the not so fortunate Amita Sahoo.

The second child of Raj Kishore Sahoo and Renu Bala Sahoo entered the world with the plaintive cry of a newborn ejected into the cold world from the warm cocoon of the womb. Prayers and tokens of gratitude were immediately offered to the mother Goddess: the presiding deity of their family, village clan, and town. Kantapada, the village of her birth close to Niali town, falls under the Khurda District of Orissa. It is also close to Kakatpur, which is famous for the deity Kakatpur Mangala, a form of the Mother Goddess. Legend goes that the Divine Mother willed that sixteen of her forms should govern sixteen parts of Orissa, and Kakatpur Mangala is one of those forms.

Amita's Plight

The parents named their child Amita – meaning plethora or plenty (in their tongue 'Oriya'); one other connotation is "unlimited". They were blissfully unaware of what fate held in store, behind the beautiful dark eyes of their little daughter. It was in the seventh month of Amita's earthly sojourn that she was diagnosed as having a congenital heart disease. Dr. Minati Padhi, pediatrician at Bhubaneshwar Unit VI Government hospital, who diagnosed the disease, opined that medical management was of no avail and only surgical intervention could help.

"The problem is too complicated and the child needs to grow up for anything to be done. Bring her back when she is older and stronger, we will see what can be done. Till then we can only hope that the problem will not worsen and lead to irreversible complications. And there is no medicine that can be administered as a remedy."

The parents could only accept the play of destiny as an act of God, but they were a practical couple. They did not allow this Damocles' sword to influence

their daughter's normal life. From their end they endeavored to help Amita lead as normal a life as possible. On the occasion when the malady raised its hood and things skewed out of control they took her to pediatricians in different medical institutions like Dr.Gangadhar Saranghi, a pediatrician in a private clinic and the Kalinga hospital in Bhubaneshwar. But all this was only to assuage their conscience that they were trying their best for her. They knew that surgery was the only option. But what was the surgery and who would do it? They at last approached a cardiologist, the late Dr. Mrityunjay Satpathi in Cuttack, who gave the final diagnosis as: DORV VSD PS (Double Outlet Right Ventricle, Ventricular Septal Defect, Pulmonary Stenosis). He pegged the cost of surgery at about 1,70,000/-. He also warned them that post operatively she may have to take different types of medication depending upon what complications arose. It was not a pretty picture - but he gave them hope.

The risk to life was a glaring reality. Surgery would help their daughter but...there was a risk and without surgery she was *definitely* at risk. Between a rock and a hard place, they sent out messages to their kith and kin asking for a good reference – a good center where they could have the surgery done with minimum expense. They had already spent more than Rs10,000/- in just diagnostic and radiological procedures. And they even had to plan for the post operative contingencies.

There is Hope, Finally

It is said the night is darkest before dawn and the hill steepest near the summit. When the shadow loomed over them dark and foreboding, they received a call. Renu Bala's brother, Krishna Ranjan Sahoo working as a software engineer at Oracle in Bangalore called up to tell them about the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield. "...a super specialty hospital that offers Medicare totally free of cost. Come and try, this may be her chance," he advised. Raj Kishore said, "To be honest, in a hospital where we pay money we can demand services – but we had our doubts that since this is a free hospital will our voice be heard? Will we be able to get what is needed? We anticipated that we would have to accept what was given and keep quiet." But, with hope carrying them on its wings, they came to Bangalore. And to their amazement, their child was immediately admitted into the hospital.

The Medical Diagnosis and Prognosis

After examining her, the Cardiologists gave their clinical diagnosis: DORV with Single large S/A VSD, Severe Valvular and infundibular PS, Left juxtaposition of RA Appendage. Good sized Confluent PA's. Good biventricular function. Normal coronaries, no additional VSD, AR , PDA, COA. Aorta anterior to PA.

A normal heart has four chambers, two atria on top and two ventricles at the bottom. To put it simply, this is what happens in the heart - deoxygenated blood enters the right atrium flows to the right ventricle, is pumped to the

lungs, gets oxygenated, flows to the left atrium, drains into the left ventricle and is then pumped to the rest of the body. In Amita's case the wall between the ventricles (inter ventricular septum) had a big hole in it (VSD - Ventricular Septal Defect) so big that both ventricles were almost a single ventricle. This caused the pure and impure blood to mix and a total variation in the pumping capacity of the heart. Also her pulmonary valve was stenosed (blocked/hardened). She also had a small Left Superior Vena Cava (which drains impure blood from the head to the heart). In addition, the two great arteries were almost arising out of one single ventricle. These were the major problem makers. Generally when a patient has a hole in the ventricle wall it is surgically closed using a pericardial or a Dacron patch. But when the hole is so large as to almost combine both the ventricles into one chamber, a normal closure is not possible. A different approach has to be taken.

The surgeons had choices: the Kawashima procedure and the Fontan procedure. Whatever they did, the procedure would only be palliative and not curative; such was the anomaly. They finally decided upon the corrective procedure of TCPC: Total Cavo Pulmonary Correction – Fontan procedure.

The Complex Operation Commences

On the 28th of June 2006, Amita was wheeled into the operation theatre and the 'Extracardiac Fenestrated Fontan' operation done. The Inferior Vena Cava that drains blood from the lower parts of the body into the heart was connected to the Main Pulmonary Artery that directs the blood to the lungs, using an 18mm Haemashield graft, with a fenestration (hole) connecting to the Right Atrium. The Superior Vena Cava draining blood from the head was attached to the Right Pulmonary Artery. The Left Superior Vena Cava was attached to the Left Pulmonary Artery. Procedure completed, she was shifted to the Intensive Care Unit and kept under observation.

After the first 24 hours the surgeons noted a new complication. Though her pressures were fine, her cardiac output was falling. This could lead to failure if not corrected soon. So the surgeons once again discussed the options with the cardiologists and then decided to partially undo the previous procedure. A procedure called 'takedown Fontan' was decided upon and to also convert the correction into a Bilateral Bidirectional Glenn or Kawashima with Septostomy (the surgical creation of an opening). When shifted to the ICU and under observation for 24 hours, her condition improved and all the parameters returned to acceptable levels. The second surgery was a success and she was on the path to recovery.

Amita's Life – Truly 'Unlimited' Now

Gradually, she recovered and is now ready to lead an "Amita" life – a life filled with a plethora of "unlimited" opportunity and enterprise. On being asked what future plans they have for their daughter the father replied, "Amita is a good artist, she draws well!"

“She cannot do much hard work,” continued her father. “So we will allow her to pursue her hobby of sketching and drawing and perhaps in the future with sufficient training she can take it up as a profession.” The daughter smiled bashfully as the father continued describing her skills.

Amita will now be able to watch every sunrise and sunset tinted with her favorite color - red. The color that rushes through her heart and the color that rushes into her cheeks when she blushes. She does not have to be told how lucky she is to be alive and be able to lead a normal life. To be alive is a miracle - and Amita knows that she *is* a miracle.

‘This Hospital is Veritably Heaven’

The original doubts of her parents have dissolved and have been replaced with a conviction that this Hospital embodies their concept of heaven, “This Hospital is veritably heaven; everyone is so pleasant and we were treated very well! Were we to receive an opportunity we would like to come and do seva here once our daughter recovers her health.” They came with trepidation and left with contentment. They were afraid of what to expect and now leave with the confidence that they are always welcome.

Raj echoed this sentiment when he said, “We did not expect so much to be available. The hospitals we visited elsewhere were so different. Here it is so peaceful and quiet. The doctors, sisters and sevadals are polite and well mannered and we did not face any problems. Here we found people are willing to listen to us and sometimes go out of the way to help us and make us feel comfortable. And we got the best of treatment for our daughter totally free of cost. We have not seen or heard of any heaven. For us, truly this is heaven.”

In this temple of healing there is no room for negativity. Could this recovery be possible elsewhere? Yes, for sure the surgical procedures are performed elsewhere and prognosis has been good. But is that what can change minds? Lives yes, but minds? To be able to excise the misery and implant hope; to truncate despair and anastomose a new lease of life is far more complicated than Fontans and Kawashimas. There is always a silver lining to the cloud. And more often than not the dark cloud blows away revealing the dazzling Sun behind. There is always a “Tomorrow”.

– Heart2Heart Team

YOUR SAY

- FEEDBACK FROM OUR READERS

Response To The July Issue Of H2h

Dear Heart2Heart team,

Your cover story was a delight. Never too long! When I cannot sleep, I switch on my computer and read the Heart2Heart articles. I am then enabled to meditate more profoundly. It is always helpful to be reminded of Swami's teachings and I find that these seem to run constantly in the background of my conscious mind – and also my subconscious mind. It keeps me on my toes! I also enjoy reading about other people's experiences with Swami as it reinforces the link between us Sai followers.

As I am finding it difficult to go to India for the time being, keeping in touch with you is second best to visiting the ashram. Om Sai Ram!

Jacqueline Trost, Australia.

What a Divine Blessing even to be fortunate enough to read this! His Grace overflows and oozes through each and every episode. We are indeed blessed. Very appropriate in this month of Gurupoornima.

Shanti Chakravarti
Arlington, Texas, U.S.A

Dear H2H Team,

At the end of your articles you always invite us to respond and give feedback, but I usually hold back because if I were to do so for every article that I read, you would be inundated with extremely frequent emails from me. I succumb today to your questions at the end of the July 2006 cover story on the Guru - yes, I enjoyed it very much. Yes, I found it inspiring. No, I did not find it too long - for me, the anecdotes and quotes did their job wonderfully, even those we may have heard or read before. So glad you include links and cross-references. As usual, I find myself marvelling gratefully for the scholarly and thoughtful work your team does in crafting and presenting such a large amount of reflective material each month. What an incredible archive you are amassing. Loving Sai Rams,
Corinn Codye, USA.

Sairam,

I have just finished reading your article 'The Matchless Cosmic Splendour'. You asked if it was too long. No, it was not long enough. I was enthralled with the whole article and did not want to stop reading it. The photographs were

wonderful. Thank you so very much for all that fine work that H2H is doing. I am from California, USA, a town about 62 miles above our capitol, Sacramento. Blessings to you all. Thank you Swami.

Joan, California.

Hello,

I am writing you to express the happiness and gratitude that I feel during reading articles about Sai, in particular the cover story. Thank you for supporting my understanding of God and our divinity. I am from Bulgaria and I hope here is much to be done for spreading Sai-love all over the world. Let us pray in his feet of light to do so. Sai Ram.

Vihra Iordanova, Bulgaria.

Hi, Lucinda here from Australia. I just want to say thank you for all your wonderful work: your daily messages of inspiration; the Sunday messages and the amazingly lucid, profound and articulate cover stories. This month's is not too long; not too short, just perfect. I felt amazing peace and harmony while reading it and a wonderful tingling warmth and peace all over my body. I feel truly blessed to be hooked in with you.

Sai Ram and love,
Lucinda.

Dear Heart2Heart friends,

What a heartwarming storytelling article! All the different little stories are so special because the different experiences of the people from different cultures and different backgrounds. This makes it known that "Sai" is not a religion but an overall cosmic world -educare manifestation! Swami "on the telephone picture" brought a smile on my face and touched my heart. The picture is so near and dear, every second of my life is communication with Swami, and the picture that of Him listening with the phone in his hand is so daily life.

Thank you, all of you, from the bottom of my heart. Tears are welling up now because I am so touched, knowing that Swami leads us all as different personalities into ONE LOVING BEING.

With gratitude, and thank you much love,
Titia de Groot-Boelens, Holland.

Response to the Healing Touch article "An Unprecedented Miracle of Life And Divine Love".

Sairam,

It is a very good experience to note the history of Chy. Sai Satyanarayana. The presentation is very impressive and I congratulate Mr. Aravind for his efforts. I wish all the Doctors will be blessed by Swami. I feel that this type of mail should be sent to the doctors who examined first. They can appreciate the recovery of the patient and realise the services of the doctors. I hope that

they may notice the value and divinity of Swami. More of such type of articles and devotees experiences will be quite interesting.
Sairam, Lavnya.

Dear All,

Firstly it must be mentioned here that both Sri Sathya Sai Super Specialty Hospitals may be classified as simply "Out of this World". It is hard to fathom that the gigantic structures of the Super Specialty Hospitals were constructed and completed in such short durations of time, which itself are simply Miraculous!

A glance at the statistics of the specialized operations performed at these hospitals amply depicts the superhuman nature of the services it has rendered to the poor and needy patients, which far exceeds all comparable humanitarian health care services of the whole World. It's splendor can only be explained as "Divinity at Play".

The medical teams and the staff who carry out the wonderful services to humanity under the guidance of Bhagawan are indeed among the most fortunate in the World as it would undoubtedly lead them to "Moksha".

Sincerely,

Ashok Wijeratna.

Dear Members of the H2H team,

It is such a heart moving article to read. Millions of Sai devotees around the world offer their *Shatha koti* (million) pranams to our beloved Bhagawan who has saved the two and half kg and few days old baby Sathya Narayana (born to the young couple from Vishakapattanam). I am sure that this type of rarest-of-the-rare cardiac operation was only possible at Sri Sathya Sai Super Speciality Hospital mighty healing temple at Whitefield and it will go into the annals of medical history. All His will.

Jai Sai Ram,
Krishna Prasad.

Sairam H2H Team,

Congratulations for your work. I have just read this article about the wondrous healing of baby Sai Sathyanarayana who recovered from cardiac disease. I work as a pediatrician in Argentina and it would be nice to see some more reports like this one when they are available. Thank you and best regards,
Dr. Ricardo Gutierrez, Argentina.

Response to the feature article "The Wonderful Swami I Have Seen".

Sai Ram !

A really wonderful lifetime experience shared by Mrs. Geeta Mohanram. The many intricate, subtle and divine experiences told, made me speechless and thoughtful as how Swami moulds one into His divinity so lovingly! A fortunate soul indeed!

One has to think not twice but many a time regarding one thing. Those like Mrs Geetha and her father who undertook horrendous journeys with a lot of physical suffering to reach Puttaparthi were very sincere and surrendered fully to Swami and experienced the fathomless Love of Swami. But now, with all good transport facilities and easy access to Puttaparthi, how many of us are surrendering fully to Swami and follow His teachings? Really this article is an eye opener to one and all. Thanks to H2H team!

Sairam,
Sivarajakumar Sitharaman.

Response to the Sai World News article "A Glorious 'Walk For Values' In Canada".

I am delighted to include an edited version of this article in our Sathya Sai Newsletter, Ireland. It is very up-lifting and hopefully will be an example for other cities/countries in the future. Congratulations! Sai Ram.

Patrick
Chairman, Sathya Sai Org., Ireland.

Gallivan,

Sai Ram,

Firstly, I wanted to say what a brilliant job you are doing with Heart2Heart, I always start my day with it and it really connects me to what's important in life. So thank you for all your hard work - it is appreciated.

I was very interested in the Walk for Values article, especially as you mentioned that walks are held in Scotland. If you have any information or an article on the Scottish walks I would be very grateful as I would love to attend next year's. No problem if you can't help.

Kindest
Alice, London, UK.

regards,

General Response to the July Issue

Sai Ram!

I have been thoroughly enjoying the inspiration I receive in Heart2Heart's daily newsletters, including that gleaned from an article written by one of Swami's students in which life's challenges are compared to those found in a soccer match. [Sunday Special article]. I would just like to pass on to you that I appreciate everything you do, particularly since we are living far from any other Sai devotees at this time (in a mountain valley in Montana, USA). My children used to attend SSE meetings when we lived in Austin, Texas, but we moved last summer to be near my parents and have been isolated from our old Sai friends, at least in body, if not in spirit.

It came to my mind that the articles you publish from Swami's students may be particularly helpful for my children who are now unable to attend SSE classes and are having to make their way in the public schools here in Montana with children who know nothing about Swami. Through reading

these articles they may be able to feel some connection to others nearer their own age who are also consciously in Swami's fold (all are in His fold in Truth, of course), and perhaps derive inspiration from their messages. Their lives are His message, too! Once again, thank you all for your seva - the inspiration that we derive from the daily messages you send is truly a God-send!

In Sai's Love,

Wendy Harmsworth (and Donald, Sarah and David Harmsworth), USA.

My humble Pranams to Swami,

I am Sujeethra Ashok from Chennai, India. I am a regular visitor of the Radiosai website. I feel Swami communicates and talks to me through this website. Everyday I get the free inspirational service with a part of Swami's discourse. I begin my day with that. I have felt so many times (and not only me but many of us would have felt) that some of them were answers to our prayers. I feel Swami communicates to me through them.

I am very touched by the article on Mr. Jagdish Chandra Ghosh [Healing Touch Section, June Issue]. I would like to read more about the miracles of Swami. The Healing Touch is a wonderful section where we are given an opportunity to express our gratitude for Swami, His grace, His love and so on. There was another article by Mrs. Geetha, and her wonderful moments with Swami. Swami was so close to her and when I read the article, I was moved to tears. Indirectly I am also thankful to Radio Sai and the Heart2Heart team for having published it in the website enabling so many of us read such a wonderful article. Kindly publish more and nourish us with more of Swami's love for us, which serves as an energy tonic for all of us. If I am asked to write about Swami, I would write pages and pages. That's my love for Him.

Thanking
Sujeethra Ashok.

you

sincerely,

Jai Sai Ram,

Reading the H2H issue gives me the feeling of drinking nectar directly given to me by our Swami. The efforts and the speed with which the H2H team work is truly amazing. Please continue your excellent Sai service and spread our Swami's message. I wish that instead of a monthly schedule, the H2H issue should come on a weekly basis (daily - even better) and constantly keep us thinking about our Swami and the purpose for which we are born here.

With love,

J Venkataraghavan.

Responses To Sai Inspires

[Sai Inspires is a free daily inspirational email service sent to all subscribers.]

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

A friend subscribed my e-mail address and I am thrilled. Please accept my heartfelt thanks for keeping in touch with so many of us. The picture and message of our beloved Lord is the most precious daily gift, we can possibly receive.

Three days after I started receiving your messages, I was asked for advice by a friend and lo and behold, the advice was right there on my screen from the previous day. But that will not surprise you, of course, I just wanted to be another one of many, who confirms this to you in writing.

So, may you continue to make us happy; your service is very much appreciated.

With gratitude and love,

Granny Ruth from the Czech Republic.

Loving Sai Ram to Heart2Heart team. It is a divine experience to read Swami's message everyday. He speaks appropriately: sometimes giving advice and sometimes comforting and at times checking our behaviour in a very soft manner. Congratulations for starting this kind of service which lights the lamp of Sai in many a heart.

SaiRam, Santha.

My family and I are extremely happy to read the message and blessings from Swamy and it gives all of us extra strength and energy to do our daily work more effectively. It really helps us to keep our mind refined and pure to the maximum extent. Our Namaskarams to Swamy.

Sairam, N.Sattanathan.

Sairam,

I haven't the slightest idea how to write to you but what I'd like to say is, thank you very much. Somehow, every morning, every message seems to be so crystal clear, so apt to the problems, trials and tribulations myself and my family face. The message somehow just seems to pop out of the screen, onto my lap and into my heart and makes me smile and think that perhaps I am not alone, that perhaps all the problems will vanish soon and good times will come. The cover story "When God Becomes the Guru" is never long enough. The more there is, the more my mind is put to rest that I somehow just have to lie back and enjoy what I can learn from these problems rather than worry. The service you do and the goodness and the hope you instill in many millions around the world is immeasurable. Thank you a million times over.

Love,

Dr. Anitha Vaidhyanathan.

Responses To Sunday Special Articles

Every Sunday the subscribers to Sai Inspires also receive a spiritual discussion on a topic of current relevance called Sunday Special Articles.

Responses to the Sunday Special "Can Money Alone Bring Happiness And Security?" sent on 16th July 2006.

Sairam,

Thanks for treating a wonderful subject with such intensity and clarity of thought. When you mention Bombay and the millions who live on the streets and all the others who pass by them as if they do not exist - Swami said that it is only when you experience their suffering as your own that human nature is manifested. It is true that most people go through life without feeling this experience of others' suffering, it is as if it is 'us vs them'. We can never become that and so even when we see someone downtrodden we do not stop to help but how wrong we are, as the recent events have shown. When the bomb blast happened it was the slum dwellers who came and helped out first, they are the ones who experienced the suffering of others and came out to help!!!

A lesson for all of us who think of slumdwellers as us vs them. This incident itself can be an eye opener. When Swami says experience the suffering of others as your own, it shows us that the divinity manifest in us is the same that is there in others. Such thoughts and practices that Swami said will help us to realise the divinity that is always present in ourselves.

Also in this discussion of money vs happiness, you could at a later stage bring out the excellent tradition of American billionaires such as Andrew Carnegie, Ford and now Bill Gates and the very recent Warren Buffet who have pledged to give away most of their wealth back to society and the needy. These philanthropists do not believe in dynastic wealth. This need not be restricted to them, all of us can practice it. In business we try to maximise our resources and earn maximum profit. Why not maximise this profit by spending it on where it has the most value i.e., where it is needed most? Frankly, that is what these people have done.

Andrew Carnegie, the richest man in the world at the start of the 20th century, wrote the treatise called the 'Gospel of Wealth' where he said that the way capitalism is structured, there are some privileged few who can accumulate capital and earn a lot of wealth. With this wealth comes a responsibility i.e., to live modestly and also take care of the others in society who are in need of help. Basically when we accept capitalism which gives us riches, we need to take care of the underprivileged who are part of the capitalistic society and who help perpetuate the structure which makes us rich in the first place.

Thanks again,
Vinod Ullal.

Sai Ram,

The Sunday special is a very clear and lucid explanation on the subject. Any person with an open and receptive mind can see the point in a flash. Please keep up the Sunday Special with more of analogical explanations on spiritual subjects.

Sai Ram and Love To The Team,
Sudhir Kalidas.

Dear Radio Sai Brothers,

Sairam. I have read with interest the Sunday Special article. It is excellent, the language and substance are well brought out and I wish every one reads, understands and practices the same. The second half is marvellous indeed. Our Pranams to Sri G.Venkatraman Sir! God bless all! Love, regards and Sairam,

Srinivasulu.

– Heart2Heart Team