

HEART 2 HEART

VOL 4 ISSUE 12, DECEMBER 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Section</u>
03	BETWEEN YOU AND US
	SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS
05	SATHYA SAI SPEAKS – The Message of Jesus
07	CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI BABA - Part 27
11	CHINNA KATHA – Where is God?
	COVER STORY
12	WHEN DIVINITY DESCENDS... THE UNTOLD STORY OF CHRISTMAS
	FEATURE ARTICLES
29	THE MYSTERY OF CREATION: CAN SCIENCE AND RELIGION MEET?
41	THE SAI MOVEMENT IN HONDURAS AND NICARAGUA
49	“I GIVE YOU WHAT YOU WANT...”
	SERIAL ARTICLES
57	THE DIVINE STORY OF SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI - Part 24
60	GITA FOR CHILDREN - Part 25
	WINDOW TO SAI SEVA
63	INSPIRING SEVA IN ABU DHABI
68	PRASHANTI DIARY
	SWAMI AND ME
78	THE GREATEST OF ALL.... IS LOVE
81	ELEVATING OUR INTENTIONS AND ACTIONS.... THE SAI WAY
86	HOW THE DIVINE DREW THE DUTIFUL DENTIST
	H2H SPECIAL
94	WITH THE LORD IN THE MOUNTAINS – PART 6

GET INSPIRED

- 102** ON CHRISTMAS EVE...
- 104** A PIECE OF TRUE LOVE
- 107** A PRECIOUS GOLD CONTAINER
- 108** DO IT ANYWAY

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

- 109** MULTI FAITH QUIZ

THE HEALING TOUCH

- 115** APEKSHA: HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL....
- 119** YOUR SAY

BETWEEN YOU AND US

Christmas. The very utterance of this nine-lettered divine word immediately conjures up images so lovely and lively – from twinkling stars, shining bells, glistening Christmas trees, colorful candles, variegated lights and gleaming snows on shop windows to plenty of cookies and cakes, heaps of tastefully wrapped gifts in red and white, long-awaited get-togethers with family and friends, lavish Christmas parties and much more. Celebrated by more than two billion people on the planet, it is the granddaddy of all celebrations. Truly, “Christmas waves a magic wand over this world,” as Norman Vincent Peale said, “And behold, everything is softer and more beautiful.”

And the timing is so appropriate – at the end of the year. It is like a grand finale to a whole year of humdrum routine and wading through the vicissitudes of life. Everybody now wants to relax, sport a smile and wish for happiness, joy and fun. The British Post Office handles over one hundred million cards each day, in the three weeks before Christmas. Between thirty-four to thirty-six million Christmas trees are produced every year to cope with the Christmas demand. An average person in the UK spends at least three hundred pounds in gifts and much more in food, drink and socializing. It is carnival time, unrestrained and fun-filled. In fact, in the modern times, they say, ‘Christmas is hijacked from Jesus by Santa’.

Though all Christians dutifully go to Church, attend midnight mass, listen to the story of Jesus’ birth and observe the rituals, what weighs in most of their minds is what kind of earrings should I gift my mom, which brand of shirt should I present my dad and which cycle to buy for my junior; very few ponder what should I offer to the One in whose name I celebrate this glorious festival. And there lies a glimpse of the true spirit of Christmas.

Is Christmas a celebration only for Christians? Who is a Christian? And who is Jesus really? Every Christmas we hear the story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour, who was born to Mary and Joseph in a manger in Bethlehem. But why did God choose the Virgin Mary? Why in a manger? Why was it Bethlehem? Is it a divine accident? Again, why at a time when Herod was king, because of which the infant Jesus had to be carried to Egypt? Could all this not be avoided? Ok, it was divine plan. But is it that God just wanted an interesting story surrounding His birth, or is there a lesson for us in every single twist of this divine story? What is it that mankind has to ‘take home’ from this tremendously significant event in history which changed the socio-economic-cultural-politico-spiritual and demographic profile of the world forever? The cover story of this issue is a sincere attempt to unravel these mysteries.

It is not an extrapolation of our interpretations; rather it is a sharing of our understanding of what He has revealed about Himself. Whether we accept it or not, realize it or not, we, living in the current era, are extremely fortunate. For, the same divine saga that was enacted two thousand years ago is being enacted now, albeit in a different setting and format, to suit the needs of the current times. When you read the cover story, you will know that, in fact, it is

the same drama that was performed even five thousand years ago. Out of immense love and concern for man, the crest jewel of His creation, the cosmic consciousness encapsulates Himself in human frame time and again, but the message and the mission always remains the same.

“Christ sacrificed his life for the sake of those who put their faith in him. The birthday of Jesus must be celebrated by all mankind, for such Divine personalities who are born with a purpose belong to the whole human race. They should not be confined to a single country or community,” said Bhagavan Baba in His Christmas discourse in 1970. And December 25th every year in Prashanti Nilayam is a living testimony to this statement of Baba, when thousands belonging to different faiths assemble, light candles, sing carols and share their joy. To relive those precious moments of pure love, we have for you a special Photo Album entitled “Christmas Bliss.”

As you immerse yourself in this bliss, pray that you remain in that state of total contentment forever, and as Baba says, “Be like Jesus, whose only joy was in spreading Divine Love, offering Divine Love, receiving Divine Love and living on Divine love.”

In fact, this is exactly the message that Bhagavan again reiterated in His just concluded wonderful 81st birthday celebrations, of which we have detailed accounts and plenty of pictures in our Prashanti Diary. On the Birthday morning, Baba said, “Love for God is like the main switch. If you have love for God, you have everything; without it, everything is nothing.”

The nine-lettered word ‘Christmas’ is like the nine paths of devotion starting with ‘C’, which can be referred to as Chanting His name, through the middle ‘S’ symbolizing Surrender, leading to the final ‘S’ of Salvation. “Christ taught people to love all beings and serve with compassion. It is only by practicing these ideals that one can truly celebrate His birthday”, Bhagavan says.

In this holy month of December, let’s fill not only our hearts with His love but also radiate it to all our friends and foes, relatives and neighbors alike, just as Jesus did then and our beloved Sai does every single day. Let us shine through the purification of our inner selves.

Let us engulf the world with love and joy celebrating His advent! A Happy and Merry Christmas to all!

H2H Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS -

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

On this holy month of Christmas, let's recapitulate the message that Bhagavan Baba gave on Christmas Day exactly a decade ago in 1996.

Embodiments of Love! It is essential to realise and act on the basis that the purpose of religion is to promote unity in diversity, banish divisive tendencies and make human beings lead ideal lives.

The Common Essence Of All Religions

The essence of all religions, the message of all scriptures and the destination for all mankind is the same. But because of selfishness, narrow-mindedness and concern for self-interest, religion is used as a pretext for promoting differences and conflicts. "All religions teach only what is good if they are studied intelligently. If your mind is good, what religion can be bad?" says a Telugu poem. Morality and integrity, righteousness and charity, truth and tradition, forbearance and nonviolence are basic tenets of all religions. But over the years men have forgotten these truths and have fostered divisive tendencies in the place of unity. As a result, respect for human values has gone. It is essential to recognise the Divine unity that suffuses all the diversity in human existence.

The Life of Jesus

(Bhagavan gave a brief account of the Jewish concept of the creation, of the cosmos and referred to the birth of Jesus as the son of Mary and Joseph). As the name and fame of Jesus spread, opposition to him developed among a section of Jews. After his father's death, young Jesus considered it his duty to help his mother and revere her as divine. Jesus preached the primary obligation of everyone to show one's gratitude to the parents. Jesus came with his mother to Jerusalem when he was eleven years old. His mother was worried about the activities of Jesus. Jesus was critical of the ways of the Jews in the temple in Jerusalem. He came out against the harmful practices in the temple and preached the omnipresence of God in all living beings. He exhorted the people not to cause harm to anyone.

What he preached was in accord with the basic teachings of all religions. He engaged himself in a mission of mercy to the sick and the poor. He offered food to the hungry. Seeing his acts of love and kindness, people declared that he was a 'Messenger of God'. Jesus constantly referred to God as the Father. Later he declared: 'I and my Father are one'. Jesus dedicated his life to the propagation of faith in one God who is common to all mankind.

Men today celebrate the birthdays of great holy men but they do not follow the teachings of the masters. There is nothing great about the celebration of

birthdays. People must resolve to uphold their ideals and act up to their teachings....

Love Binds All People

Embodiments of Love! If you want to realise God, if you wish to experience the Divinity within you, if you want to know your true self, you have to develop pure, unsullied love. It is this that binds all people. It is described as the *Prema-paasham* (tether of love).

Today there are numerous sects within Christianity all of which are engaged in propagating their respective doctrines. While this preaching goes on, there is very little of practice in daily life. Practice is most important. People may be entitled to propagate their creed. But that does not achieve anything lasting. Only practical example matters. When you practise what you preach, others will be inspired by your example. No one will care for the teaching of a person who does not practise what he preaches...

To develop true humanness, everyone has to foster the feeling of spiritual oneness. This sense of oneness constitutes true religion. Religion means "realisation" of your true self.

Develop the love of God. All other forms of love are not love at all, but only fleeting and impermanent attachments. Man's biggest folly is forgetting his divinity. All should realise that they come from God. All are children of God. Everyone should seek to get nearer and nearer to God. That is *saadhana* (spiritual practice). You must feel that God is *Hridhayavaasi* (indweller of our heart). You must develop compassion in the heart, because without it the heart is only a stone.

That is the message of Jesus - the message of love. Love is God. Live in love. Start the day with love. Spend the day with love. End the day with love. This is the way to God. Only the person who is filled with love will be dear to the Lord.

- Divine Discourse, 25th December 1996.

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI - Part 27

(Continued from the previous issue)

SAI: *(At the start of an interview with a group of westerners)* Follow the master, the inside *Atma*, the super-conscious. Life is a challenge; fight to the end. Life is a song; sing it. Life is divine; realize it. Life is character. There is one path, complete life.

SAI: *(To a young westerner, about age 16)* What do you want?

Boy: Liberation.

SAI: What is liberation?

Boy: *(After some hesitation)* End of the path.

SAI: Immortality is the meaning. Removal of immorality is the only way to immortality. Who are you? Not the outside, not body. Who are you? Inquire. Love is everything. Expansive love, not selfish love. Selfless love of the Self, not ego love.

All are ladies. None are men. Lady is weakness, not strength. The Sanskrit word for lady has the meaning of weakness, no strength at all. All humans are so. **Hate, anger, jealousy, sorrow - men may better control these, but their inside feeling is the same. Only God is above feeling. All others are equally affected. God is the only male person.** In a women's college, in a play, men characters may appear on the stage, but the male casts are women dressed as men. The world is women's college. There are just male roles. Inside all are the same, all women. Life is a cosmic stage on which we are the actors. In one scene an actor may take one role, and in other scenes different roles.

Creation means change and nothing is unchanging as every moment there is change. How can these changing things give bliss to persons who are also changing? Your bliss can be made permanent only by immortality where there is no change. Scientists experiment today and tomorrow their findings are outmoded. The world goes on overriding itself.

That which science knows is microscopic compared to the immensity of that which is to be known. Nothing exists without the atom. All things are produced from atoms. Atoms together also make the moon. Atoms are active and alert, never inert. How therefore, can the moon be called inert? The entire universe is active because of atoms. From where does this energy come? Electrons, neutrons, protons - from where does this science arise? Scientists ask 'How is it that these things go on?' But do not ask, 'Why?' The answer to 'why' leads you to the divine. The basic energy is *Shakti*. All is derived from this basic energy. Wherefrom this atom power? It is divine power.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDY CIRCLES

Hislop asked the question, 'What is a study circle?' It is not just reading books. Study circle means taking a point and each person discussing its meaning to them, like a round table conference. Each person gives his point of view, and finally values are derived from this. If people just read, there will be doubts. But if each one gives his view, doubts will be answered. The topic is viewed with the study circle looking at different facets. Like a diamond with different facets, there is one facet that is flat, the top facet, and all can be viewed from this. To discover the top facet is the task of the study circle.

You may take Swami's talks, or other scriptures. Take one point and let everyone think about it, discuss it, and come to the final point where doubts are resolved. If only one person reads, there will be only one meaning. After misunderstandings and different points of view are brought out, the study circle members will get confidence. There is no doubt about this. If only each one reads, this may go on for a year or two, then an allergy to reading develops. Centers must have study circles in this way, and none will note the passage of time. Each one listens eagerly and many will give their point of view. The *Bible*, the *Koran*, the *Gita* and Swami's books may be used. What is wanted is a study circle which rotates giving each one a chance.

A Scientist Visitor: (*Father of the 16-year-old boy earlier questioned by Swami*) Many fools do not make one wise man.

SAI: Only those who are intelligent will wish to bother with a study circle. They may be fools in other matters, perhaps. But we have here the example of a doctor who does operations but who in bandaging is a fool, relying upon his nurse to do a good job. Life means such a mixture. A man with a dual mind is half blind. Every one is half blind in some matters. Only he who knows the divine is an expert first class in one study. But in general, people have no common sense. But common sense is necessary in daily life and that is what counts. Each subject is only one road; but mastery, the development of common sense is a spiritual effort. In a house an elder is not respected because a younger member has studied some subjects, but common sense requires that the youth's attitude to the elder be respectful. Common sense is required. Humility and love are divine. If you become the master of a subject, but develop anger and ego, these are enemies on the spiritual path.

Scientist: But it is commonly agreed that science is of great value.

SAI: Up to a certain level, science helps. It is of service to mankind. But Baba knows that which science does not know. Baba is at a level that is beyond the reach of the senses. Not all that he knows can be brought to a lower level. Too much current burns out the bulb. Capacities must be known. **Swami's power is given according to capacity. Baba is the servant - He waits at the door of the shrine room to give you what you want. Swami's duty is to be the servant of His devotees. There is no place for any ego.**

A small example. America is not very big on a globe map of the world, California is just a small place, Hislop's house is just a dot and Hislop himself is not even visible. For a person so small as to be invisible, so temporary in the expanse of

the universe, it is shameful to live with ego. Any person with ego is a disgrace. If you expand your idea of yourself to be God, then there is no reason and no place for an ego. And if you shrink yourself to conform to your relative statue in the vast universe, also there is no place for ego. The lowest or the highest, it does not matter. It is the middle that has pressure.

H (Hislop): From Swami's description of the conversation to be accomplished in a study circle, the circle should be limited to about 10 people.

SAI: Why? It could be 100 people.

H: But Swami, not even one point would be able to get around such a big circle.

SAI: Not so. Of the group here, only the scientist and Hislop are asking questions. Not everyone in the study circle will be able to speak.

H: Oh, I see that situation.

THE LIMITS OF SCIENCE

Scientist: Here is this object. I spoke about Swami in Copenhagen, and some scientists who were interested made this object. What it is cannot be seen. The scientists know but it cannot be seen.

SAI: It is Baba's task to transform people's hearts.

H: They are trying to subject Baba to a test! *(The scientist and his associate had for several years past been trying to get Swami to subject Himself to wires and electronic measurement and so on.)*

SAI: Baba can transform the scientists, but scientists can transform themselves only by getting into the spiritual life. It is only physics in which they are engaged. Philosophy starts where physics ends. Physics is useful, but it is only information. Spiritual life is transformation.

Scientist: Baba does miracles to shake up disbelievers.

SAI: Baba does it for His own sake. Let the scientists come, and I will transform them. The spiritual world is beyond the material. Material things are involved in sorrow. Do great scientists have compassion and a peaceful mind? No. They worry and worry. What is needed is to unite spiritual life and worldly life. Develop a spiritual life first, and then live a spiritual life in the world, a dual life. Spiritual life is quality, and worldly life is quantity.

Scientist: It is of value to let scientists test you.

SAI: What is the value?

Scientist: If they can be convinced that the miracles are valid by scientific controls and standards, then belief in You will follow.

SAI: If they believe, what will the world gain? Their worldly desires will increase since their understanding is so poor.

Scientist: It takes time. Science consolidates its gains only gradually.

SAI: Even they do not understand their own science fully enough. It is good they go slow.

A Visitor: Is it not better to have a qualified nursemaid to care for a child when the mother is nervous and unable to give proper attention?

SAI: The nursemaid gives love that is purchased. The mother's love is real. Give a child to servants and the child's thoughts are cultured at the servant's level.

A Visitor: Swami, the cement floor in my room is very hard.

SAI: Baba instructs by life in the Ashram. Up early and to bed early so that the mind is bright and alert. Live on the floor to learn that the body has few genuine needs.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

Where is God?

Once upon a time, a monk wearing the ochre robe chanced to enter a village full of atheists. He fell in with a gang of defiant youth who challenged him to show them that the God, whom he was adoring, actually existed. He said he could, but before doing so, he asked for a cup of milk.

When the milk was placed before him, he did not drink it. He sat looking at it, long and silently with increasing curiosity. The youths became impatient. Their clamor became insistent.

The monk told them, "Wait a minute. I am told that there is butter in milk. I must say this cup does not have it, for I do not see any of it, however hard I look into it!"

The fellows laughed at his innocence and said, "Silly man! Don't rush to such absurd conclusions. Milk has butter in every drop. That is what makes it so nourishing. If you must see it as a separate, concrete entity, you have to boil the milk, cool it, add sour curd, wait for some hours for it to curdle, then churn it and roll the butter that floats into a ball."

"Ah," said the monk, "that makes my task of showing you God much easier! God is in everything, every being and atom of the Universe. It is because of this that they exist and we can cognize them and enjoy them. To see Him as a concrete entity, you have to follow a prescribed procedure, earnestly, strictly, and sincerely. Then at the end of it all, you can experience His Grace and His Glory."

- **Baba**

COVER STORY

WHEN DIVINITY DESCENDS...

THE UNTOLD STORY OF CHRISTMAS

In the Beginning was the Word

In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God,
And the Word was God

And the Word became flesh
And dwelt among us....
Full of Glory and Truth

All things were made and came into existence through Him
And without Him was not even one thing made
That has come into being

He came into the world,
And though the world was made through Him,
The world did not recognize Him.

But to as many that did receive and welcome Him,
He gave the authority,
To realize their inner Divinity.

This beautiful prologue of St. John eloquently describes the Divine phenomenon when the Formless Cosmic Consciousness decides to assume form and dwell among us. This time He chose a Name "Jesus" and pitched His tent in Nazareth, a humble hamlet in Galilee. Christians all over the world celebrate this Divine Drama at Christmas, a word coined from "Christ" and "Mass". "Christ" means "Messiah" or "Anointed One", the title given to Jesus, and "mass" is a religious festival.

Christmas is for the Whole of Humanity

Jesus is not only for Christians, Jesus is for humanity. Nay, Jesus is for the whole of Creation. As such the birth of Jesus is a cosmic event. It is therefore necessary to ponder, during this sacred season, the very meaning and significance of Jesus' birth. Who is Jesus? What was the purpose of His birth? What was the message He left for Humanity? How should we celebrate Christmas? How can we make the purpose of Jesus' birth the very purpose of our own birth? In other words, how can we live and die for the same purpose for which Jesus lived and died? These questions have become very urgent in our world today where people have lost the inner significance of the advent of Divinity.

The celebration of Christmas has become hollow with materialistic pomp and fanfare. For many, the season of Christmas has become synonymous with riotous festivities in sensual gratification, animal slaughter and financial turnovers. For others, Christmas is a time to go to church, sing carols and exchange Christmas presents with friends and relations. Today, more children believe in Father Christmas than in Jesus. The real meaning of Christmas has been forgotten.

We must remind ourselves that Christmas is the day Divinity is born in our hearts. The symbol of Christmas is the star; a light in the darkness. That light is not outside oneself but shining in the Heaven within. The celebration of Christmas must take the form of awakening to the Light of Eternal Reality. This is the very purpose of the Descent of Divinity: to make us realize our formless Divine state. How we realize this purpose depends greatly on our understanding and application of the inner significance of the Divine birth. Understanding gives clarity to our intentions; clarity of intentions lends righteousness to our actions and right actions leads man's steps back to his source, God.

The Hope of Israel Fulfilled

Long time ago, the Jewish Prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah. Seven hundred and thirty years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Micah had said,

"But you Bethlehem, though you are small,
Out of you will come for me one who will be shepherd over Israel,
One whose origins are from of Old, from ancient times" (Micah 5 .2)

The Prophet Isaiah had written extensively about the coming of the Messiah and His Nature. One of these says,

"A child is born to us! A son is given to us!
And the government will rest on his shoulders.
These will be His royal titles: "Wonderful Counselor",
"Mighty God" , "Eternal Father", "Prince of Peace".
His ever expanding peaceful government will never end.
He will rule forever with fairness and justice
From the throne of his ancestor David." (Isaiah 9:6)

Over the years, Israel had lived under many political subjugation. As time passed by, the idea of the Messiah was narrowed to a political figure who was to come to free the Jews from political bondage. This belief became very strong at the time of Jesus when the Jews were under Roman rule. (63 B.C) The Messianic prophecies made the Jews live in hope, waiting and watching for the time when the promised messiah will come. But when finally the messiah came, he came not as a political king with royal birth and prestige, but as a humble poor person born to a peasant family. ***Jesus came not as a warring and conquering king but as a humble Lamb. His Kingdom was not of this world. The Kingdom over which he rules is of the spiritual***

order. He came not to overthrow a political regime but to enthrone a spiritual revolution. It was a revolution which has turned around the history of humanity ever since He died on the cross.

The Immaculate Conception

Mary, the chosen mother of Jesus was a humble peasant teenage girl. She was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. According to the Jewish tradition, after betrothal, the young girl stays apart from the fiancé for a period of one year. The actual wedding takes place at the end of this period after which they come to live together. It was during this period of betrothal that God sent the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary in the City of Galilee named Nazareth.

The little room in which Mary was staying suddenly lit up with heavenly brilliance. The radiance of the light overflowed Mary's soul and filled her heart. The angel said to her: "Hail, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you". Mary was greatly troubled at these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be! "Is this a vision or am I day dreaming?" Mary wondered with awe. But the angel comforted Mary and said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David and He will give Him the house of Jacob forever. His Kingdom will never end".

At this, Mary was more confounded than ever. This Divine encounter was too much for her simple soul. She faltered and asked the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "**The Holy Ghost will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the One to be born will be called the Son of God.** Even Elizabeth your cousin is going to have a child in her old age and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God". When Mary heard this, she knew for sure that she has been caught in the Divine net. She pondered a while and as the impact of words sank into her soul she said to the angel, "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said it". At that very moment when Mary said 'yes' to God's Will, the Divine Word formed for Itself a niche in her womb, full of Glory and Truth. Then the angel disappeared.

Mary's 'yes' to God was an act of complete faith and surrender to the Divine Will. It was a faith that was totally blind to the sight and logic of reason, but open to the insight and power of the unseen Spirit. Mary understood very well the consequences of her "yes" to God. Who will believe her story? Pregnant through the Holy Spirit! She knew the possible outcome - public disgrace and stoning to death. And how is she going to convince Joseph? Mary pondered all these in her heart and put her trust in God to whom the angel had said: "Nothing is impossible".

Joseph's Dilemma

Joseph did not believe Mary at first. Who would? Yet Joseph was different from the common lot. The Bible calls him a 'righteous man' (Matthew 1:20). He thought over the story of Mary in his mind over and over again. Through long wearisome days and hours of sleepless nights Joseph contemplated this strange event. He knew Mary's innocence and crystal purity. The image of her humility and unalloyed devotion to the Lord was always before his eyes. Joseph knew that Mary could not have faked the story. Yet the social stigma haunted his soul. What will the people say? Who will believe our story?

Finally Joseph made up his mind to break the engagement quietly so as not to disgrace Mary publicly. But as he considered this, he fell into the slumber of sleep. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in the dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the Child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a Son and you are to name Him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins". When Joseph received this confirmation from the Lord, he took Mary home to be his wife.

One could only imagine the state of loneliness and mental turmoil that young Mary went through before this Divine resolution. Yet, in her loneliness she found solace in the Eternal One coiled in her womb. Her whole life from the time she said "yes" to God became one long chain of tests and temptations, trials and tribulations. This chain climaxed at the foot of mount Calvary where Mother Mary stood beside the cross and watched the crucifixion of her son on the gibbet of the cross. Indeed, the story of Mary and Joseph tells us that when God has made us special instruments in his Divine Drama, he does not render us immune from worldly troubles. On the contrary, He gives us the fullness of it. Like Mary, we must be ready to suffer all kinds of tribulations with a heart that is open and submissive to the Divine will. ***Mary's "yes" was a total "yes". It was a "yes" at all times, good and bad. It was a "yes" that was open to the uncertainties of the Omni Will. It was a "yes" whose only reason was the Love of the Beloved.***

Born in a Manger

Jesus' birth was attended by untold hardship. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, four days journey north of Bethlehem. It happened that the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered a tax census and Joseph was required to return to his ancestral home, Bethlehem, the city of David, for enrollment.

(The two gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus traced the genealogy of Jesus down to the Jewish King **David** – (**Deva**) and to the Jewish patriarch, **Abraham**, a name with Sanskrit roots: '**Aham Brahma**'. God changed the name of Abraham's wife from Sarai to **Sarah** – a name related to the Sanskrit **Saraswathi** who is the very consort of Brahma in the Hindu tradition. Is this a divine coincidence?)

At this time Mary was heavy with child. Mary had to travel with Joseph by foot and on donkey throughout this long journey. It was winter, and the fatigue of the long journey had weighed down on Mary. As Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, the labor pains started. Joseph searched frantically for a place where Mary could deliver her baby. Every house he knocked he was turned down with a stern retort: "There is no space here, please try the next inn". Joseph, finally, was able to find space only in a stable – the animals' house for cattle, sheep and cows. Sathya Sai Baba tells us that it was a cowshed and it was midnight! Joseph made ready the space between the cows and went out into the road to seek some woman who could help. Not only was there no place for the maker of space, there was also no nurse, no midwife and no doctor to help Mary deliver her first-born baby. As Joseph searched the streets in despair, he heard the baby's cry.

Jesus was born that night. As the parents had no bed for Him, they used an animal feeding box filled with the dry grass the animals ate. ***Jesus was wrapped in a swaddling cloth and placed in a manger.*** (Luke; 7:7) Christmas cards and pictures today make it look so lovely. But in reality, the manger must have been very ordinary with animal litter and dirt all around. Here Mary was in labor! Here the Babe of Bethlehem began His Divine mission.

Sometimes when we face difficulties in life we feel God has fled from us. We ask many crazy questions, one of which is always, "God! Where are you?" Sure, God replies, "I am where you are!" How can it be otherwise? Who could imagine that God was with Joseph and Mary during those hard conditions surrounding Jesus' birth? Yet, they were carrying God in the very palms of their hands. Emmanuel, the embodiment of "God with us" was with them in concrete material Presence. Just because we face hardships and obstacles is no indication that God is absent. This is only our imagination. The truth is that God is always with us! And this Presence is sometimes felt most during times of great difficulties. This is God's way of refining us and drawing us to that constant awareness of His abiding Presence; and so we find Mother Kunti (the mother of Arjuna to whom Lord Krishna taught the Sacred Bhagavad-Gita from the Indian epic, Mahabharata) praying to Krishna always to give her sufferings and hardship.

The Manger is a Symbol of Service

What is the inner significance of Jesus' birth in a manger? Why did the Maker and Lord of the Universe make do with the cattle's barn? Is this another Divine accident, or is there a hidden lesson for humanity? Jesus knew His Divinity but He did never brag about it. Instead He emptied Himself and took the position of a servant. He did not just take a low place; He took the lowest place. This is an example for all.

Once, Jesus' disciples were arguing who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus stopped them short and reminded them of the very purpose of His humble birth. "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark; 10:43)

The manger is a symbol of service. To serve is to stoop down. It is to take the lowest place. It is to empty oneself of every trace of ego. There can be no genuine service without this touch of humility. Our beloved Swami tells us, "The essence of service is selflessness and abnegation of the fruit thereof." (Jnana Vahini p. 24) But we always cling to our high estates and statuses. We hope and hold to exalted positions and powers. Even when we "condescend" to serve, we serve not as servants but as masters and lords! Again, Swami has emphasized: "If service is done for name and honor and fame and if there is a craving in the mind for the fruits of one's actions, then the statement 'Service to man is service to God' has no meaning, nor will one get the results expected." (Sandeha Vahini, p.61). The manger story teaches us that genuine service comes from a heart that has been emptied of all name and fame, power and position, pomp and show. The manger service is a service without ego.

Jesus Came to Save the Animals

There is another important message why Jesus was born amidst the animals. Jesus also came to save the animals! He came to put an end to animal sacrifice (including slaughtering the animals for the gods of our stomachs). Jesus showed this in unmistakable terms. First, He was born among the animals! The animals welcomed Him in their shed. They were fortunate to hear His very first infant cry – a cry that wiped away all the tears they have shed in the hands of humanity. They saw His Divine smile which told them that God was also with them! They were given the privilege to be the first to behold His Divine face filled with the radiance of Truth.

At the end of His earthly life Jesus also identified with the animals. He offered his body and his blood, as the final animal offering for all people for all eternity. (Hebrew 9:12, 10:10, 10: 14) In ancient times, animals were the "scapegoats" for the sins of people and bore the brunt of the evil and ignorance of humankind. This was a common practice at the time of Jesus. (Ref. John 2: 13-22) Jesus did not approve of this custom.

On the night of every Passover, the Jewish people celebrate the sacrificing of the paschal lamb in commemoration of their deliverance from the dominion of Pharaoh as slaves in Egypt. On this night millions of lambs are slaughtered (as each household is required to slay one lamb). At the last Passover night (the last supper) which Jesus ate with his disciples, Jesus began to talk about his own body and blood being shed and given up for the sins of the world. In a dramatic symbolic manner Jesus replaced the paschal lamb with the "bread" which He said was His body and the "wine" which He said was His Blood. "While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:26-28). Within hours Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified.

Jesus' disciples understood this symbolic Divine act. There was a shift in consciousness. The old covenant whereby animals are killed for the atonement of sins gave way to the "new and Eternal Covenant in the blood of Jesus". (Luke 22:20) Jesus had died at Passover in place of the sacrificial lamb. He became, literally, the Paschal Lamb, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1: 29)

Christmas is incomplete without grasping the inner significance of this Divine act. We must be kind to the animals. We must stop killing the animals. Instead, as Bhagavan Baba says, we must sacrifice the animal qualities in us: greed, anger, hatred, jealousy, lust and ego. When these animal qualities are eliminated, we will naturally be kind to the animals: Kind to brother lamb since Jesus referred to Himself as "The Lamb of God"; Loving to sister sheep because Jesus called Himself "The Good Shepherd"; Grateful to mother cow who watched the agony of Mother Mary bring forth her first born child; Merciful to little chicken because Jesus likened the love of God to that of the hen who gathers her chicks under her wings (Luke 13:34). The animal kingdom must be allowed to celebrate Christmas with joy and gladness because they played a vital role in the Divine birth. It is a human tragedy that these creatures suffer so terribly in the hands of man especially during the season of Christmas when billions of animals are slaughtered in order to "celebrate" the birthday of Jesus.

God's Action Has Deeper Meaning

It will be of no spiritual significance for us here to get into the rhetoric of whether Jesus accepted non-vegetarian meal or not. Suffice it to note that Divinity works through culture to transform culture. God does not work outside of the human condition. He stoops down to the level of humanity so as to raise humanity to the sublime height of Divinity. Jesus Himself said: "I have come not to abolish the laws, but to perfect them." (Matthew 5:17) Beloved Swami puts it more pointedly: "When the baby in the cradle wails and clamours for help, the mother stoops and takes it up in her arms. Her stoop is not to be described as a 'coming down'." (SSS 14, P53) Ramana Maharshi, the sage of Arunachala, in response to the same issue has said that what the Avatar eats does not affect His constitution. In fact, the Avatar eats not to satisfy the disease of hunger but in order to afford us the divine privilege to dine and commune with Him.

Many Divine Incarnations have acted in ways we might regard as "strange and unethical". But how can we interpret God's actions using human binoculars? Within every Divine action lies a deep seed of spiritual meaning; and it is only through spiritual inquiry that we can discern this inner truth. Shirdi Sai Baba, the first incarnation of the Sai Avatars, was known to smoke pipes. Once, a seeker (Balaram) came to visit Him with other devotees. This was his first visit to Baba. Baba was in the Masjid and smoking the chillim pipe. Balaram was taken aback when he saw this. He began to have some doubts. Then Baba advanced the pipe towards him. Balaram was not accustomed to smoking but accepted the pipe out of respect. He smoked with great difficulty. That moment however became the most auspicious moment

for Balaram. He was suffering from severe Asthma for six years. This one puff completely cured him of the disease which never troubled him again.

When God acts like man, His actions are like vaccine to the disease of man. The same medical principle operates even on the Divine level: "like cures like". Jesus did so many things that shocked and surprised the Jews and made them think that He was either mad, possessed or an outright sinner! Yes, Jesus identified with sinners. He did not condemn them nor did He try to force them to stop their bad habits just overnight. No! He was patient with them. His disciples were simple fishermen. The culture in which He began to propagate His message ate meat. He obviously knew the deep religious sentiments surrounding the Passover feast. He was well aware that the traditional Passover meal is incomplete without the meat of the paschal lamb. ***Jesus did not stop this tradition without providing a substitute, a perfect alternative. This He did at the last supper when He replaced the lamb with the "Eucharistic bread", a symbol of His body, and instructed His disciples to do this always in His memory.*** (Luke 22:19)

From then onwards whenever Christians gather to celebrate His Memory, the priest raises the Bread in his hands and declares to the congregation: "This is the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, Happy are we who are called to receive Him". But the celebration of Christ's memory should be a lived example in our everyday practical life. It must not be limited to the church. It is of no use replacing the sacrificial lamb with the Eucharistic bread -symbolic of Christ's body, and after the celebration in the church, to go home and roast the lambs to satisfy our appetite. Is this not religious hypocrisy? When we act like this, are we not defeating the very purpose for which Christ gave his life on the cross for all, namely, the spiritual evolution of the whole of creation? "For the whole of creation is waiting to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"! (Romans 9: 21)

The Shepherd's Story

Was it another Divine coincidence that the message of Jesus' birth came first to shepherds taking care of their sheep in the fields? (Luke; 2:8) At the time of Jesus, sheep farmers were regarded by other people as low in the social order. Yet it was to these shepherds that the birth of Jesus was first announced in an amazing and dramatic way. These shepherds were out there in the open field in the middle of the night keeping watch over their flock; and suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared among them and the radiance of the Lord's Glory surrounded them. They were awe stricken but the angel reassured them, "Don't be afraid!" He said, "I bring you good news of great joy for everyone!" Behold, Christ the Lord, has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! And this is how you will recognize Him: ***You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth lying in a manger.*** As the angel was speaking, a vast host of others – the armies of heaven – joined in chorus and started praising God:

***“Glory to God in the Highest Heaven
And Peace on earth
To all whom God favors”***

(We recall a similar event that occurred when Mother Easwaramma was carrying the Divine Child, Sathya Sai Baba. The house was awakened at midnight and sometimes later by the sweet heavenly music emanating spontaneously from the strings and percussion instruments kept in the home. The heavenly hosts were playing music to charm the baby!)

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds hurried to the village and found Mary, Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. They told everyone their story.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd

The metaphor of “shepherd” has been a powerful religious symbolism in the salvation history of Israel. God’s Love for His people is compared to that of a good shepherd who guards his flock over the rocky hills and leads them through the forests to pleasant green pastures (Psalm 23:2). Through the night the shepherd watches over them, guards them from wild beasts, saves them from lurking robbers, cares tenderly for the feeble and sickly ones, and lifts the little lambs close to his heart and comforts them in his bosom. (Isaiah 40:11). However large the flock may be, he knows each by name and calls them that way. (John 10:3). Psalm 23 brings out this analogy very beautifully.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

***He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters,
He restores my soul.***

***He guides me in paths of righteousness
for His name’s sake.
Even though I walk***

***Through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.***

***You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.***

***Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,***

***and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.***

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David were shepherds. Jesus compares His Love to that of a Good Shepherd. He says, "I am the Good Shepherd who lays His life for the sheep." (John 10:11) It is also interesting to know that Lord Krishna is adored as the "Cowherd boy".

God Comes to Rescue the Lost

The task of the Avatar is like that of the good shepherd. He comes to rescue lost and erring humanity and leads them back to their Divine origin. Jesus told the story of the lost sheep to show that nothing can hinder God's will to save us. Suppose you have a hundred sheep and when night falls one wanders away and is lost. What will you do? Surely you will leave the ninety-nine safe sheep together and go in search of the lost one. You will climb and comb the hills looking and searching until you find the lost sheep. Then you pick her up, put her on your shoulder and bring her down the hill to the camp. Then you ask your friends to rejoice with you. "Your Heavenly Father is like that", Jesus said. When you have lost your way he will rescue you and save you and never give up on you until He finds you and you find Him (Matthew; 18:11).

***That day we discover That
After all the wanderings and yearnings
After all the searching and longings***

***At the end of the journey
The spiritual quest
When the eureka is heard***

***Without a step
The Self has moved
From Itself to Itself
There is no other!***

This is good news for Humanity. ***It is the will of the Father that no one is lost. Everyone will be saved.*** This is the Truth. In fact how can any one ever be lost? From what and to where? Since everywhere is in God, where can we hide from Him? (Psalm 139:7). What can separate us from God? (Romans 8:35) The Bible affirms that "***in God we live and move and have our being***" – (Acts 17:28) ***True salvation is the realization that we and God are one and always inseparable just like the seed and the tree, the waves and the ocean, the rays and the sun.*** The day we realize this Truth is the day we find God and are found by God.

The First Christmas Presents

After Jesus was born, three Arabian Kings came to look for Him. They followed the direction of the star that had appeared at the birth of Jesus and eventually found the place where Mary, Joseph and Jesus were staying. To

bring honor to the child they brought rich gifts: gold, a gift for a King; frankincense, burnt in worship of God; and myrrh, oil used to bury the dead.

While returning the first king said to Mary, "Mother, you have given birth to a child who loves God". The second King said, "Mother, you have given birth to a child who will be loved by God. The third king said, "Mother Mary, your Child is not different from God; both are one and the same". Beloved Swami tells us that these three statements from the three kings summarize the three stages of our spiritual growth which Jesus came to teach us. The first statement indicates the role of Christ as the Messenger or Servant of God. The one who loves God is the messenger of God. Jesus first regarded Himself as the servant of God. (Matthew 12:18). This stage comprises all aspects of karma yoga (Union with God through Selfless service) as enunciated by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita.

The second statement shows Christ's role as the Son of God. The one whom God loves is the Son of God. During the Baptism of Jesus at the River Jordan by John the Baptist (Matthew 3: 18) and at his transfiguration on the Mountain (Mark 9:4) the Voice of the Father was heard from heaven saying to Jesus, "This is My Beloved Son and I am fully pleased with him". Jesus taught us to call God by the intimate title "ABBA Father" (that is "BABA Father") a name which expresses a very intimate and inseparable relationship between us and God. (Mark; 14:36) This second stage represents every aspect of Bhakthi Yoga. (Union with God through pure Devotion)

The last statement indicates the realization of our inherent oneness with God. The one who understands the principle of Unity becomes One with God. This is the Path of Jnana Yoga (Union with God through Wisdom). Jesus told the Jews, "The Father and I are One" (John; 10:30) and reminded us of our Oneness with the Father. He pointed out to the Jews this ancient Truth in their own Scriptures: "You are Gods and Children of the Most High". (Psalm 82:6 John; 10:34) To realize this Oneness with God is the precious Gift that God gives us at Christmas.

***At Christmas God Gives us a Gift,
A precious Presence,
Wrapped in Swaddling cloth,
Lying in a Manger.
It is the Gift of Himself
God Himself!***

***At Christmas God Gives us a Gift,
A precious Presence,
But we look for worldly gifts
And forget the Gift of Gifts;
The Giver of all gifts
God Himself!***

***At Christmas God Gives us a Gift,
A precious Presence,***

***But we throw Him away
Because He is wrapped in swaddling cloth:
S – for Service; W- for the Word made Flesh
A – for Adoration; DD – for Divine Descent
L – for Love; I – for Illumination
N – for Non-Violence; and G- for Gift of God!***

***At Christmas God Gives us a Gift,
A precious Presence.
But we cannot find Him
Because we look outside,
While He lies in the cave,
The manger of our Hearts!***

Unwrapping the Gift of God

We must understand this Divine secret. It is His play; a type of hide and seek game. Why was the Divine infant Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloth? God has wrapped Himself in the swaddling sheaths of the body - mind complex. (***The Webster's Dictionary defines the word 'swaddling' as: 1."to bind (an infant, esp. a newborn infant) with long, narrow strips of cloth to prevent free movement; wrap tightly with clothes". 2. "To wrap (anything) round with bandages"***). Our bodies are God's cloths wrapped in five fold layers. Discovering our true Divine identity, our true Self, involves a process of uncovering these sheaths (of *Maya* or illusion) through a regulated spiritual practice (*sadhana*).

The first layer is the gross physical body composed of the food we partake through the five senses. (*Anna Maya kosha*) Unwrapping this layer requires strict control of the five senses. It entails not only eating good and pure food, but also seeing no evil and seeing what is good; hearing no evil and hearing what is good; speaking no evil and speaking what is good; doing no evil and doing what is good.

The second sheath is the energy layer which is the vital force that produces the subtle vibrations related to breath (*Pranamaya Kosha*). The third is the level of processing thoughts and emotions that characterize the mind (*Manamaya Kosha*). The fourth is the sheath of wisdom (intellect) and the seat of ego consciousness. The Energy, the mental and the intellectual sheaths constitute the subtle body through which we experience dreams. The Spiritual disciplines appropriate to these three are thought control and spiritual inquiry: "Who am I?" By cultivating holy thoughts and emotions untouched by attachments to the senses and unaffected by joy and grief, we penetrate into that Sheath of **silence** where the first flickering Light of the Pure Self is felt. The undisturbed Stillness of Bliss is the fifth wrapping of the soul (*Anandamaya kosha*). It is the causal body that veils the Supreme Self and is associated with dreamless sleep and Samadhi. When we reach this layer, we begin to experience that super conscious state of total absorption in pure bliss without an object. Yet even this last scale has to be shaded off in order to realize the highest stage.

When we think that we are the body – gross, subtle or causal – we confuse the wrapper with the Gift. This confusion is the delusion created by body consciousness. The feeling, “I am the Body” is the root of all ignorance. It is the greatest handicap on the spiritual path. Jesus, the Christmas gift of God came to teach us how to overcome this root ignorance. He was given to us wrapped in **s-w-a-d-d-l-i-n-g** cloths in order to teach us this one solitary purpose of life: how to unwrap the gift of God in our hearts. When we do this we tap into that ancient and eternal secret of Divine Opulence where Life lives only by giving and forgiving.

The Flight to Egypt

Not so long after Jesus was born, King Herod was after his life. The three Arabian kings had paid a visit to King Herod to inquire from him the place where the promised messiah will be born. Their visit provoked jealousy in the heart of Herod because he thought of Jesus as a political Messiah. He had the evil intention of destroying the child. He therefore requested the kings to report back to him the whereabouts of this child as soon as they found him. But God warned both the kings and Joseph in a dream about the evil intention of Herod. The kings were asked to go home through another route while Joseph was instructed to flee with the child and the Mother to the land of Egypt. Joseph took his family and left for Egypt.

This was another hardship in the life of the young family. They had to travel all the way to Egypt seeking refuge in a land where their forefathers were refugees close to 2000 years ago. When God came as Rama He was exiled to the Forest for fourteen years. When He incarnated as Krishna He was carried away in a basket to *Gokul* to save His life from the bloodthirsty hands of King Kamsa. Now the Divine infant Jesus was exiled into Egypt. This was no Divine accident. Just as Rama was destined to go to the Forest to confer blessings and protection to the sages and saints harassed by the *rakshakas* (demons), the infant Jesus went to Egypt to confer blessings and auspiciousness to the land that so generously harbored the people of Israel for more than 400 years.

Shortly after Jesus was spirited away to Egypt, Herod ordered a decree of infanticide in a rage to eliminate Jesus. All male children who were two years old and under were put to death. Then was the ancient prophecy of Jeremiah fulfilled:

“In Ramah, a voice was heard
Lamentation and weeping, and great mourning,
Rachael weeping for her children,
And would not be comforted,
because they were not” (Jeremiah 31:15)

This same episode reminds us of King *Kamsa* who had killed all the seven children born of *Devaki* and *Vasudeva* in an attempt to kill Krishna who was prophesied to come as the eighth child. In the war between righteousness and

unrighteousness, the Avatar comes with a host of heavenly armies that play different roles. The infants killed by Herod and *Kamsa* in the Divine Dramas of Christ (= *Krist*) and *Krishna* were part of the Divine entourage that gave their lives for the enthronement of Dharma (eternal righteousness).

The Universality of Divine Incarnations

Sometimes Christians tend to think: "Jesus is the Highest"; the Muslims assume: "Allah is the Greatest"; and the Hindus assert: "Krishna is the Supreme". But when we peep into the conceptions of Divine Incarnations down the ages, their striking similarity and universality reveals to us that "Jesus", "Allah", "Krishna", etc., are simply names which we ascribe to the same one and undivided 'Reality' that assumes different forms from age to age in different cultural settings.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba

Let's start with our Beloved Sri Sathya Sai Baba whose conception was shrouded in mystery until a pundit well versed in the Holy Puranas felt a sudden urge to ask a question. "Swami! Was your Incarnation a *Pravesa* (Entrance) or a *Prasava* (Encience)?" To answer his question, Swami turned to Mother Easwaramma, the chosen Mother, and said to her, "Tell Rama Sarma what happened that day near the well after your mother-in-law had warned you."

The Mother said, "I had dreamt of Sathya Narayana Deva and she cautioned me that I should not be frightened if something happened to me through the Will of God. That morning when I was at the well drawing water, a big ball of blue light came rolling towards me and I fainted and fell. I felt it glided into me". Swami then turned to Rama Sarma with a smile and said, "There you have the answer, I was not begotten. It was *Pravesa*, not *Prasava*".

Lord Rama

The conception of Lord Rama was also a *Pravesa*. During a sacrifice designed to secure the blessings of fatherhood, a mighty being of immeasurable splendour arose out from the fire and announced itself as the messenger of *Prajapati* (God). Giving King Dasaratha, the chosen "father", a vessel of burnished gold filled with milk prepared by the Gods, he said, "Give this to your consorts, and you will have children of them". It was through this pure white milk of Holiness that Lord Rama and His three brothers came forth.

Lord Buddha

The Buddha's birth was no different. When the Cosmic Essence had again decided to help the world, this time it chose the Sakyas under the southward snows of Himalaya where a just king lived. In the "Light of Asia" by Edwin Arnold, we read the strange dream Maya, the Queen of King Suddhodana. She dreamt a star from Heaven of splendid hue, six-rayed, of rosy-pearl colour shot through the void entering her womb upon the right." Thus the Buddha formed for Himself a body within the womb of Maya and thereby conferred the status of 'father' to King Suddhodana.

RamaKrishna Paramahansa

Sri RamaKrishna Paramahansa's conception affirms the same Divine phenomenon. His father Khudiram Battacharya was only a 'fiction' and His mother Chandramani Devi a chosen vessel. Khudiram had walked to Guya, hundred miles away to perform rituals propitiating his forefathers. There, Khudiram visited the Shrine of *Gadadhar* (*Narayana* with the Mace). Within the Shrine he heard the mysterious message that he was to be the father of an Avatar. He pleaded humbly that he was not worthy to contain the Lord in his poor home and heart. But the Lord did not retract. Dazed with delight and afraid to reveal this message to anyone Khudiram reached home.

Back home, before he could overcome his reluctance to reveal his vision, his wife Chandramani Devi confided her secret to him. "When I went to the temple while you were away," she said, "a sudden flash of unbearable Light entered me, flowed over me, overwhelmed me, and pervaded me all through. It then reduced itself to a charming flame that stays installed within me now. I am aware of its soft sublime illumination ever since and more patently while I speak to you". Khudiram was wonderstruck and then revealed his own experience at the shrine to his wife.

Lord Krishna

The story of Lord Krishna is another proof of the Immaculate Conception of the Divine Child. The Bhagavatha narrates the descent of the Omniwill in response to the agony of mother earth. When Devaki, the consort of Vasudeva, had given birth to seven children and had offered each one of them to her brother as promised, the Will decides that the time for the Advent had arrived. The Bhagavatha says: "The Lord who is the Sovereign of the Universe designed to enter the mind of Vasudeva as a facet of Himself in order to confer fearlessness to the good and godly".

These narratives of the conception of Avatars reveal an important quality of Divine Incarnations. Avatars are not born like ordinary mortals whose births are determined by karma. For ordinary mortals, karma decides the time and the place, the parents and the potentials, the caste and the creed. On the other hand, when Cosmic Consciousness decides to cloth itself in human vesture, He alone decides the time and the place, the persons who are to be addressed as its parents and the womb in which it could initiate its career as a foetus filled with infinite power.

All the above Divine conceptions also reveal that Avatars are not begotten by flesh and blood. When Divinity decides to take a human role, it enters directly into the womb of Its Chosen mother without any human mediation. As such, the body of the Avatar is a pure substance with no blemish and no trace of human characteristics (or *gunas*).

One God, Different Religions

The splendour of the truth of our religious oneness shines out brightly when we understand our common Divine heritage. God is One. This same and Only Cosmic Divine Consciousness assumes different names and forms at different ages and cultural settings throughout the history of man's spiritual evolution.

The Rama is the RamaKrishna!
The RamaKrishna is the Krishna!
The Krishna is the Christ!
The Christ is the Buddha!
The Buddha is the Baba!

The Christians must understand that Christ is the same God whom the Buddhists call Buddha and Muslims must realize that Allah is the same Reality whom Hindus call Krishna or Rama. When this understanding dawns, how can the Hindu say, "Our God is more powerful than the God of the Christians"; or the Buddhist say, "Our path is the only way"; or the Christian say, "Only those who profess our faith will go to Heaven". True brotherhood of man and Fatherhood of God is possible only when we eradicate these differences at all levels of thought, word and action.

The more we study the Phenomenon of Divine Incarnations, the more we understand the truth that among all the Divine Incarnations, there is no higher and there is no lower since it is the same One Divine Principle that incarnates from age to age whenever there is a decline in rightousnes. The purpose and setting for which and in which they come determine the degree of Divine Power they assume. For example, when God comes in the Kali age, it is appropriate that He comes with much Divine Power because in this age, the disease of evil has infected and eaten deep into the whole tree of humanity. Our Beloved Swami gives a beautiful analogy. He says, if you want to cut your finger nail you use only a razor blade or nail cutter. But when you want to cut down the tree, you don't use the razor blade. You employ an axe. The instruments are different but the person is one. In the same way, God is One but He incarnates from age to age assuming different Divine powers depending on the circumstances.

Faith is the True Test

Jesus always used this expression: "Your faith has healed you" or "Your faith has saved you". Never did He say, "I healed you". What does this mean? It means that the high and the low, the partial and the full does not depend on the name and form of God we adopt, but on the strength of faith of the believer. The fullness of Divinity opens unto us according to the measure of our faith. It is therefore wrong for the Christian, or the Muslim, or the Hindu, to think that he is blessed because of his religious affiliations. This is religious pride. Our Blessedness lies elsewhere! and Sathya Sai Baba tells us where. "If you are a Christian, be a good Christian; if you are a Muslim, be a good Muslim; if you are a Hindu, be a good Hindu". To be GOOD is to be GOD! To

be a good Christian is to live the life of God incarnate as Christ; to be a good Muslim is to live according to the teachings contained in the Koran, as exemplified in the life of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him); to be a good Hindu is to live the life of God as dramatized in the panorama of Lord Rama.

We must understand that God is beyond religion and that although it is good to be born into a religion, it is a sin to die in it. All religious denominations are like different schools of spirituality. It is a good thing to be born in one. But we must graduate at one time or the other. To graduate from the school of religion is to realize the oneness behind the many. Only then can we receive our graduation certificate: "All are one, be alike to everyone". This is the primary message of Jesus' birth.

May this Christmas be for us
A moment when we receive the Divine Gift in our Hearts.
May this Christmas be for us
A time to unfold our inherent Divinity
And realize the One behind the Many.
May this Christmas be for us
A time to love as God loved us,
By emptying ourselves in the service of others.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

The author of this story, Father Charles Ogada, is a Catholic Priest of the Order of the Holy Ghost Fathers. He is presently teaching at the Sathya Sai School Ndola, Zambia, run by Mr. Victor Kanu.

FEATURE ARTICLES

PRASHANTI MUSINGS

THE MYSTERY OF CREATION: CAN SCIENCE AND RELIGION MEET?

This is the transcription of a talk delivered by Prof. G Venkataraman on Radio Sai nearly a year ago.

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

Today, I wish to speak about an interesting controversy raging currently in the United States. It is all about teaching biology. You might wonder what biology teaching has got to do with Spirituality, which is the topic that I normally deal with in these talks. It turns out that in this particular case, there *is* a lot of connection. In this controversy, on one side are the so-called scientists, and on the other side are people who take religion seriously. In my opinion, there is really no need for any controversy, but then, when one becomes narrow-minded, one can become swayed by prejudice and lose all perspective.

Swami often talks of *Vishala Bhavam* and *Vishala Buddhi*. What do these words mean? Very simply, they mean Broad Vision and Broadmindedness. The present controversy is the result of the absence of both.

Creationism's Strong Roots

To start at the beginning, I must take you back to the year 1925, and to a small town named Dayton in the State of Tennessee in Southern United States. This State, along with many others in the South, forms a part of what is often described as the Bible Belt. The people in these States have, for over a hundred years or even more, been used to taking religion, that is to say the Bible, very seriously. Very seriously means that they believe every single word of it, including the description of how God created the Universe, the beings, and man. Thus, according to these people, God finished creating everything in six days flat, and that there cannot be any question about it.

On the face of it, this attitude might seem strange but then, there are often historical reasons for social behaviour. If you go back to the history of the immigration from England into America, you will remember that the people who came first were the Puritans. They felt they did not have the freedom in their Mother Country to practice religious austerity the way they wanted to. In America, they could do exactly as they pleased, and that exactly is what they did. I am not for a moment suggesting that Puritanism was perfect - far from it; but that imperfection is a part of history and we just cannot ignore it.

America, we must remember, is really a huge country, huge by any standards, and in those pioneering days, people lived in small communities. Especially in the South, these people remained cut-off from all urban influences, and lived happily with their perception of life and religion, though it was flawed in many respects, for example, in aiding and abetting slavery.

Challenging Tradition

To get back to my story, when these God-fearing people discovered that in the name of teaching biology, the teachers were teaching Darwin's Theory of Evolution, they decided to put their foot down. In the State of Tennessee, a law was passed that prohibited such teaching because it was in direct contradiction to the Bible. Encouraged by this, many other States were thinking about passing a similar law, when the Scope Trial erupted on the scene and produced deep convulsions.

John Scope was a biology teacher in a high school in Dayton, Tennessee. Some civil liberties activists approached Scope and asked him to teach Darwin's theory. They argued that State Law or no State Law, a course on biology would be incomplete without some reference to Darwin's Theory of Evolution of Species. John Scope allowed himself to be persuaded, went ahead and taught Darwin's Theory in the class.

The public felt outraged, and Scope was charged with criminal intent and brought to trial. News about this immediately spread, and attracted the attention of many. The American Civil Liberties Union, which decided to support the defendant, initially wanted the famous science-fiction writer H. G. Wells to be the defence lawyer, but Wells showed no interest in the case. That was when a famous Chicago Lawyer, Clarence Darrow, jumped into the case. Darrow was over seventy, but so staunch an atheist that he decided to take the Southern Christian Fundamentalists head on. If the defence could line up star lawyers, so could the prosecution, which had in its corner William Jennings Bryan, a three-time Democratic candidate for President. As someone said, during the trial, Bryan transformed himself into a "Fundamentalist Pope".

With star lawyers getting into the act, naturally the trial of John Scope began to attract wide attention. Dayton, Tennessee became a tourist destination, and people flocked there to watch the fun. The town wore a carnival atmosphere with banners and lemonade stalls everywhere. Many chimpanzees were brought in, supposedly for testifying for the Prosecution, and they performed in a sideshow in Main Street. On opening day, a thousand people packed into the small Courtroom, and fearing that the building might collapse, the Judge moved the venue to the lawn in front of the building, where a tent was hurriedly put up.

A Heated Debate Begins

As was to be expected, there were fireworks right from the start when the Prosecution wanted the trial to begin with a prayer. Darrow objected fiercely, but was overruled. Bryan claimed that if Evolution won, Christianity would lose, while Darrow roared that it was not Scope who was on trial, but the whole of Civilization.

The Prosecution put many on the witness stand, mostly teachers and students, all of whom testified that John Scope did teach evolution. Darrow was quite soft and gentle with the witnesses. He was not interested in Scope's acquittal; on the contrary, he actually wanted Scope to be found guilty. This might seem strange, but Darrow had a deep master plan. He knew that one could expect nothing but bigotry in a small conservative town. The matter was too important to be decided in a small court and really had to be ruled by the State Supreme Court or even the Nation's Supreme Court.

When it came to the turn of the defence, Darrow's first witness was Dr. Maynard Metcalf, a professor of zoology in Johns Hopkins University. The prosecution objected to Dr. Metcalf being introduced as a witness, but the Judge overruled. Bryan therefore decided to mock the professor. He said that the witness was not merely saying that man descended from monkeys; what was even worse was that man descended not from American monkeys, but old world monkeys! However, in the end, the Judge ruled that the entire evidence of Dr. Metcalf was inadmissible. This angered Darrow who made some caustic remarks. The Judge asked, "I hope you do not mean to reflect upon the Court?" Darrow replied with a tinge of sarcasm, "Well, your honour has the right to hope!" The Judge retorted, "I have the right to do something else." Realising he might be held for contempt, Darrow apologised and shook hands with the Judge.

Darrow next put Bryan himself on the witness stand and then began the battle between titans. Bryan sought refuge in the Bible, while Darrow used every known courtroom trick to show Bryan in a poor light. It was a debate that Darrow won. The whole thing was so bizarre that the *New York Times* described it as the most amazing spectacle in Anglo Saxon history.

It was time for the two sides to sum up their case. Where Darrow was concerned, he wanted (as I have already explained), a guilty verdict. He presented the case to the jury in such a manner that the accused was pronounced guilty and fined a hundred dollars. Darrow immediately went on to appeal to a higher Court, which quashed the verdict. However, it was on technical grounds and not on constitutional grounds as Darrow had hoped for. Anyway, the point was made and the Creationists, as they were called, went into retreat.

All this happened way back in 1925 but among the faithful, the fire was still kept alive. Meanwhile, in the mid-fifties, a film was made on the Scope trial, with Frederick March, famous for his role in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde playing the role of Bryan and Spencer Tracy playing the role of Darrow. I have seen the film and it was a memorable one. In 1975, the scientific community in America celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Scope trial.

Darwin's Theory

I think I have said enough about this amazing episode, and now, let me say a few words about Charles Darwin himself and his theory. Charles Darwin was born in England in the year 1809. As a boy, he did not show any extra-

ordinary talents. At the age of 16, he was sent to Scotland to study medicine but young Charles found medicine to be rather dull. Instead, he spent a lot of time attending lectures on natural history. His father then suggested that Charles study for the clergy, and that was what brought him to Cambridge. Here again, Charles Darwin spent more time on subjects not connected with the course he was enrolled in. Darwin struck up a friendship with one John Henslow, a professor of zoology, and held long discussions with him. Ultimately, it all ended with Henslow recommending Charles Darwin to the post of Naturalist on the expedition ship HMS Beagle that had been chartered for a five-year voyage of mapping and collection of specimens.

During the five-year trip, Darwin suffered from seasickness. The Captain of HMS Beagle would therefore drop off Darwin in different places and pick him up later. Charles Darwin was thus able to explore in depth and collect many specimens. His most extensive studies were made in the island Galapagos off the west coast of South America. A lot of thinking followed, and finally in 1859, Darwin published the famous book: *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

The essence of Darwin's theory might be stated as follows: In the beginning, there was one living being – the ancestor of all of us. Darwin assumed this. This being was far from complex. From this being emerged, in due course, other species, of greater and greater complexity, species that were better suited to survive.

Now how did this happen? Darwin suggested that it was due to random mutation of the genes. When genes of a species suffer mutation, it leads to the emergence of another species, with slightly different characteristics. So from one species, there come a family of species; these then compete for survival, and the fittest species emerges as the victor. And once again, mutation, more descendent species, competition for survival, and finally a victor. This goes on and on for millions and millions of years and at the end of it all we have fishes, amphibians, birds, mammals of various kinds, monkeys, and finally man.

We must remember that Darwin did all his hypothesising in the middle of the nineteenth century when Science was yet to cross many, many new frontiers. In effect, it was a broad-brush theory. Of course, Darwin himself made additions and subtractions later, but in spite of it all, at the time of the John Scope trial, Darwin's Theory still had huge gaps. Yet it provided a plausible, scientific framework, and that was what excited biologists.

Science Seeks Answers to Our Origins

OK, let us move on and come to say the sixties of the twentieth century. By this time, many developments had taken place in the field of Science. The most important from the point of evolutionary biology was the discovery of the molecular structure of DNA by Crick and Watson in 1955, for which they duly received the Noble Prize. Thanks to this, one could now talk about mutation at a molecular level, which of course made a lot of sense.

The second important development concerned intensive studies on the origin of life itself. You will recall that Darwin assumed a primitive ancestor. Where did this ancestor come from and how? It was known by then that the age of the Universe was around fifteen billion years, the age of our earth is about five billion years, and life probably first appeared on earth about four billion years ago. The question was, how?

This made scientists go back to the condition that existed on the face of the earth four billion years ago. They had a reasonably good idea of the nature of the atmosphere, which, incidentally, was very different from what it is today. Believe it or not, there was little or no oxygen then. But there were various other gases like methane and so forth. So people started doing experiments to see what would happen in such atmospheres if there were powerful lightning discharges. They found that a huge variety of complex molecules would be formed in the atmosphere, which would then come down with rain - methane rain perhaps - and get into the ocean. Thus, in due course, the ocean was expected to be teeming with all kinds of molecules colliding with each other constantly.

Now, when molecules collide, many things could happen. They could, for example, break up. But they could also combine to form a bigger and more complex molecule. It was then hypothesised that this process of constant collisions threw up one day, purely by chance, a big molecule that contained life.

This raises the question: What exactly is life? We still don't have a precise scientific answer to this question but in those days, most people went along with Academician Oparin of Russia who said that a living entity must exhibit three characteristics: Firstly it must exhibit metabolism, meaning it must take in high-grade energy and, after using it, throw out the waste as low-grade energy. Next it must grow, then decay, and finally die. In addition, it must be able to reproduce. This was a reasonably good working definition and this is what most people accepted then.

Life: A Matter of Probability?

OK, has anybody been able to find anything definite about this primordial and prehistoric ancestor of ours? The answer is NO. The speculation still remains but meanwhile, many people have questioned the entire idea on purely probabilistic grounds. These people simply said, "Let us assume that indeed, due to random collisions, a living molecule was produced about four billion years ago. But let us do a little calculation involving collisions and check how long it would take for such a chance event to occur." When that mathematics was done it was found that it would take a billion times the present age of the Universe.

Let us pause and absorb the whole argument. There are three points to consider here. The first is the outcome, the second is the process by which the outcome is realised, and the third is the probability. In this case, the outcome is the production of a living molecule in the ocean of those times,

which is often called the primordial soup. As for the process, it is, as I have already mentioned, random collisions. Lastly, there is the probability business.

To appreciate this point better, let us consider the following example: I start tossing a coin. As you know, when I do that, I would get either heads or tails. Everyone knows that on the average, heads would occur fifty percent of the time and tails would occur fifty percent of the time. OK. Now it is quite likely that sometimes I may get two heads in succession. Let us suppose that I go on tossing in the hope that I get a thousand heads in succession. In principle, this is possible, but in practical terms, it is highly improbable. How does one quantify this highly improbable business? One says, using math, that the chance of this happening is one in trillion, trillion, trillion or something like that, and then one adds, "If I do one toss every second, this would mean so many billion, billion years of wait before I get thousand heads in a row."

One has to carry over this kind of argument into the business of a living molecule being formed in the primordial soup as the result of random collisions. When that is done, one finds that the current age of the universe is too small for such a molecule to have emerged. Remember, in Darwin's theory, not only the primordial living molecule, but everything including plants, trees, crocodiles, tigers, monkeys and humans, must come through as the result of random processes within fourteen to fifteen billion years, the approximate age of the Universe. So you see, probability puts a huge roadblock up right at the beginning. Keeping in mind the enormous complexity of living systems, Fred Hoyle, a great astronomer, put it like this: "The current scenario of the origin of life is about as likely as the assembly of a fully operational Boeing 747 by a tornado whirling about in a junk yard."

A New Piece of the Puzzle: DNA and Genes

That raises the question: "Where then did Darwin's ancestor come from?" Hoyle has made some interesting suggestions concerning that but I shall not get into that topic here. Let me move on to other aspects. Let me get back to the DNA, to which I made a brief reference earlier. This molecule, whose full name - *de-oxyribo nucleic acid* - has a remarkable structure: that of two spirals twisted around each, with innumerable steps linking them. DNA is sometimes called the molecule of life, and with good reason.

DNA gave genetics its backbone and brought it down from the macro to the micro-level. Naturally, the discovery of the structure of the DNA spurred evolutionists to look at Darwin's Theory from a molecular point of view. No doubt, this has led to huge leaps in understanding, but many questions and big gaps still remain. I am not an expert in this topic and I obviously cannot go into the details. But I can certainly point out some of the issues.

By and large, most people seem to be convinced that Darwin's Theory with all its modern nuances, *does* offer a concrete framework for understanding evolution. But, difficulties that cannot be swept under the rug include the question of the primordial ancestor, to which I have already made a reference. There was the additional question of random mutations followed by natural

selection. I went over this rather quickly earlier; maybe I should say a few more words at this juncture, because it is an important issue.

In Darwin's Theory, species 'B' say, emerges from parent species 'A', through random mutation of the genes of A. Along with B, there may also be species 'C', 'D', and so on. All these newly emergent species, B, C, D etc., would be similar to their ancestor species A, but also different in many respects. Now all these species would compete for survival, and eventually, among the daughter species, that which is best suited to survive would actually survive. This is the basic idea behind the survival of the fittest hypothesis.

It all looks fine, especially on a macro scale, except for one problem thrown up by statisticians. I have already made a reference to this earlier when I quoted Fred Hoyle. In the context, there is one more famous quote that is sometimes used, a quote that goes back to Sir James Jeans, a famous astronomer who lived in the early part of the twentieth century. Jeans said that if we had a group of monkeys all trained to press the keys of a typewriter, and if these monkeys were allowed to keep on typing endlessly, then, even though they would be pressing the keys in a purely random fashion, it is possible for one of the monkeys, perhaps after millions of years, to type out completely a sonnet of Shakespeare, by sheer chance of course. By the way, if you browse the net, you will find a lot of interesting material about this monkey business. What I am driving at is that though in principle, a monkey might one fine day actually crank out an entire sonnet of Shakespeare, it is in practice highly improbable, unless one waits a trillion, trillion years or something like that. In the same way, for a series of lucky random mutations to occur to bring us to where we are would require an impossibly long time. So people started asking the question: "It looks like evolution did occur due to gene mutation, but is it possible that the mutation was not entirely random?"

The Arrow of Evolution

This is where a new element has entered the picture and that is what has revived the entire Creation debate that raged fiercely in the US in the nineteen twenties. Before I describe this new twist, I must say something about what is known to mathematicians as biased random walk.

Let us say I toss a coin. Everyone knows that on the average, I will get heads fifty percent of the time and tails the other fifty percent of the time. Suppose I deliberately make a coin with non-uniform density so that there is lead on one side and say aluminium on the other. Because this coin has non-uniform density, when this coin is tossed, the old rule will not work; that is because a bias has been built into the system, and this bias would necessarily alter the outcome. With such a coin, one may expect say more of heads than tails, if aluminium is on the head side. (By the way, it is sometimes said that in the famous dice game in the Indian epic, *Mahabharatha*, Sakuni tricked the Pandavas with a loaded dice.)

Now what has all this got to do with Darwin's evolution? Quite a lot, according to some people. They say, "Look, we agree that species have evolved from

one another, in a sequence. However, according to us, this evolution has NOT been the result of a sequence of purely random occurrences. On the other hand, it is pseudo-random, that is to say, randomness with a bias. We believe that because of this bias, there is a definite ARROW of evolution that takes the species along a particular evolutionary path.”

The question arises, what is this path, if any, and what is directing the arrow? The proponents of what I call directed evolution have an answer for that. They say, “You want to know what that path is? Very simple: Evolution tends to take place in such a manner that whenever a new species emerges, it generally tends to have greater complexity. And in the long run, species evolve towards not only greater complexity, but more so towards greater intelligence.” This idea is known as INTELLIGENT DESIGN or ID for short. The essence of the ID hypothesis is that there is an agency out there with intelligence that is driving evolution along a particular path. Thus, evolution is by no means the result of endless purely random occurrences. Most likely, it is due to biased random processes, the bias originating from ID.

Now ID is an interesting idea and one would have thought that its arrival on the scene would merely have led to a debate between the Darwinian Evolutionists and the ID supporters. Actually, the scientific community ignored the ID supporters and ID should have disappeared with a whimper, as they say. But that is not what happened. Why? Because some supporters of ID decided to take their battle to the schoolroom. This is roughly the way it happened.

Intelligent Design vs. Darwinian Evolution

In America, they have committees that decide on the textbooks that would be used in schools. These committees include not only teachers, as is only to be expected, but also others, like the representation of parents, state education officers, and so on. This is where the ID lobby made its entry. Basically, the ID supporters said, “Listen, for so many years, we have been teaching Darwin’s Theory to our students. This is supposed to be science but it has huge holes; it is an incomplete theory. We cannot have our students exposed to half knowledge. They must be given an opportunity to know the great deficiencies of the Darwin Theory, and how the ID Theory offers a way out of an important crisis.” As is to be expected, there was an intense debate, sometimes noisy I suppose, but the net result of it all is that many States, like Pennsylvania and Ohio, for example, ruled that ID must be taught along with Darwin’s Theory, so that students will get equal exposure to both ideas and could make their choice based on which theory they believe in.

The story of course does not end here. Enter now the scientists, who are shocked, appalled and dismayed. They are furious that the issue, which they thought the Scope trial had settled once and for all, has now been given a new lease of life through what they dismiss as junk science. They scream that it is all a clever conspiracy to introduce God into the classroom by the backdoor. The ID protagonists argue back, “Listen, we have never used the word God even once. All we are saying is that evolution must be a directed

process and that direction is coming from an information bank, which directs evolution to proceed in a particular direction. Without ID, you cannot have evolution the way Darwin's Theory supposes. That would take a trillion times the age of the Universe. What's wrong with telling students some facts? Why should the scientists be so upset?"

Mainstream Science Fights Back

Well, no matter what the ID camp says, the fact is that all the "intellectual" magazines, newspapers, science magazines, etc., have unanimously debunked ID. Some of the scientists have been particularly aggressive and sometimes even abrasive. The attack is on God rather than ID *per se*.

Perhaps the most vocal spokesman for the Darwin Theory is Richard Dawkin of Oxford University. Born in East Africa, Richard Dawkin is a zoologist, who is a passionate advocate of the Darwin's Theory. Dawkin prides himself as being the world's Number One Atheist, and not surprisingly, he has been described as the Devil's Chaplin.

Dawkin does not mince words, as the following quotes would show:

"If there is only one Creator who made the tiger and the lamb, the cheetah and the gazelle, what is He playing at? Is He a sadist who enjoys spectator blood sports? Is He manoeuvring to maximize David Attenborough's television ratings?"

"Science offers us an explanation of how complexity arose out of simplicity. The hypothesis of God offers no worthwhile explanation for anything, for it simply postulates what we are trying to explain and leaves it at that. We cannot prove that there is no God, but we can safely conclude that He is very, very improbable indeed."

"I do not say that Science knows everything, but I most certainly say that religion knows nothing."

"Either admit that God is a scientific hypothesis and let Him submit to the same judgement as any other scientific hypothesis, or admit that His status is no higher than that of fairies and river sprites."

"It is fashionable to wax apocalyptic eloquent about the threat to humanity posed by the AIDS virus, mad cow disease, and many others, but I think a case can be made that faith is one of the world's greatest evils, comparable to the small pox virus, but harder to eradicate."

"I don't think God is an explanation at all. It is simply re-describing the problem."

I guess I have given enough of a sample of how vitriolic the atheist/scientist can be. By the way, let me hasten to assure you that not all scientists are like

that. I am a scientist too, but unlike the Oxford Don whom I have quoted, I believe in God and I also love God dearly.

You might at this point say: "All this story telling is fine, but what have you got to say about this indecent and highly objectionable God-bashing that scientists are doing? Why has Science turned so evil?" and so on.

It's the Scientists, not the Science

Good point, and I have an obligation to say something on this matter before I wind up. First and foremost, I would like you to make a clear distinction between Science and Scientists. People often mix up the two; that is wrong and the distinction that I have called attention to is very important.

You see, Science is Knowledge; it is knowledge about the Universe, the Universe that God created, the Universe that we all live in. It should be obvious then that Scientific Knowledge cannot be bad *per se*; that means we should not blame Science. It is just a set of facts or truths - call it what you will - about the Universe. These facts are valid, whether one believes in the existence of God. Now if we accept that it was God who created the Universe, then it follows that the knowledge relating to Creation also cannot be bad. In short, let us not blame Science as such for our problems.

What about scientists? Ah, here the situation is very different. Consider two people, one a doctor and the other a criminal. A doctor uses the knife to heal while a criminal uses the same knife to wound. Should one blame the knife or the person holding it? In the same way, blame scientists as much as you want and not Science. By the way, if you blame scientists, then I am with you all the way; today's scientists are absolutely blind and why on earth should we be lead by blind people?

Getting back to the schoolroom debate for a moment, the scientists' lobby says that ID is at best a philosophy; so, let it be taught as unverifiable philosophy and not as science. But one intellectual has asked: "Why is science totally preoccupied with the object it is studying? Why does it not ask something about who is the one who is studying science? How is this scientist able to cognise? What is consciousness?" Most scientists dodge this question or dismiss it with contempt as irrelevant and meaningless.

At this point, I must also caution you. Don't imagine that all scientists are atheists. Many distinguished scientists have believed strongly in God. Einstein, for example, saw God as something beyond the Universe, a mysterious force that filled him with awe, wonder and joy. He believed in God. Charles Townes, who got the Noble Prize for discovering the principle of the maser, the laser, and for building the first maser, said that Science explains the how of the Universe while Religion explains the why of the Universe. And then there was Abdus Salam, the Pakistani physicist who won the Nobel Prize for his work on electro-weak unification. I had the pleasure of meeting Salam once. He was a very religious man, and when a Westerner asked him how, he a scientist, could believe in God, you know what he said? This was his reply:

"I do not see any contradiction. Science is all about the outer world whereas God is all about the Inner World." So you see, not all scientists are disbelievers.

Spirituality, Religion and Theology

OK. Now to the next question. Is there any contradiction between Science and Religion? I would say that in dealing with this question, we must make a careful distinction between Spirituality, Religion and Theology. Spirituality provides the basic foundation. It deals with the real basics such as the Soul, Consciousness, etc. I personally believe that Spirituality as I see it, rises above traditional religion. Indeed many scientists are willing to admit that while they do not profess any particular religion, they are Spiritual. Religion, I maintain, is largely Applied Spirituality, shaped to a large extent by social and other such factors associated with the time of its emergence and the region where it took root. Theology is a kind of bridge between Religion and Spirituality; in other words, it is an attempt to understand the principles of Religion by giving it a Spiritual and Philosophical base.

There is a reason why I am making all these distinctions. The point may be better understood by recalling what Swami Vivekananda once said. He declared that where Indian scriptures were concerned, he believed in the Upanishads, the Vedas and the Puraanas, in that order. In other words, he had greater belief in what the Upanishad said than what was written in the Puraanas. This is typical of the attitude of an intellectual, and we must make an effort to understand it.

Take the Ramayana, for example. People in India have absolutely no difficulty in accepting everything in the Ramayana as absolutely true, including Hanuman, the so-called Monkey God. People in other countries might accept the basic teaching of the Ramayana, namely that one must abide by Sathya (Truth) under all circumstances, but might shake their head when it comes to Hanuman. There are thus two points of view but there is no clash or conflict; each group holds on to its belief and there is no fight.

Now consider the description of Creation in the Bible. I personally do not find anything objectionable about it. To me, it is a beautiful allegorical description of how the Universe came into being. I love the statement: "God said let there be light and there was light." Some of you might have listened to a series on Radio Sai presented some time ago on the *Purusha Sukhtam*. As was pointed out in that presentation, the description of Creation given in the Purusha Sukhtam is not to be taken literally but as a poetic and allegorical description.

Narrow-Mindedness Creates Controversy

The problem that has arisen in the United States is largely the result of religious fundamentalism acquiring political clout. When that happens, there can be fireworks. To put it mildly, this controversy is more the result of narrow-mindedness rather than any problem with either the Bible or Science. In fact,

like the Bible, mythologies everywhere have colourful descriptions of how God made man and beasts. Yet, is there any controversy raging elsewhere? No.

By the way, even Science has its quota of unbelievable scenarios. For example, according to modern theories of the Universe, there can be parallel universes! This is the many-universe theory. Let us say there is a person who is travelling in a plane in our universe. The plane crashes, but this person survives. In a parallel universe also there is a crash and in that the person may die! I mean this kind of bizarre scenario is possible according to modern physics, and people accept it. Why? Because it is all backed up by fancy mathematics!

Science Below, Spirituality Beyond

All this reminds me of the core of Vedanta's teachings: what seems real is unreal and what seems unreal is real! One common objection raised by scientists is the following: "Listen. Science has predictability that can be tested. If a prediction is proved false, then Science drops that hypothesis. Your religion has no predictability. It is thus nothing but junk." Well, there is no point in arguing such points with the diehards. One thing we must remember: Science deals with that which is BELOW Space and Time and is restricted to what we can cognise with the senses. Spirituality, however, is BEYOND the senses, and TRANSCENDS Space and Time. As of now, scientists do not have the wisdom to see beyond Space and Time, while Spirituality cannot be reduced entirely to Space and Time, obliterating the higher dimensions. So, one need not be unduly perturbed by the self-appointed chaplains of the devil.

Maybe I could end all this with a nice little story that describes how such controversies are best handled. It is about a little girl in England who was taught Darwin's Theory in the class. On Sundays, she attended Sunday School where the teacher instructed her in the Bible. One day, the little girl came to her mother and said, "Mummy, I have a doubt." "What is it, my dear?" asked the mother. The little girl then said, "Mummy, the class teacher says that humans evolved from animals while the Sunday School Teacher says that God created everything. Who is right?" The mother smiled and said, "Both are right!" The little girl was puzzled, naturally, and asked, "How can that be?" The mother replied, "You see, God created all the beings and Darwin just explained how – that is all!"

Great story, is it not? Jai Sai Ram.

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN HONDURAS AND IN NICARAGUA

Two Tropical Paradises

In our fascinating tour of the Sai Movement in the continent South America, we now move on to two small countries which have been blessed to come into the Sai fold. One is Honduras and the other Nicaragua, both of which lie next to each other in the middle of Central America. These picturesque paradises on the Caribbean Sea are famed not only for their tropical beauty and breathtaking coastlines but also for their bio-diversity, vast natural resources and cultural richness.

Though on the opposite side of the world to India, it is amazing how Baba's love has touched the lives of many ordinary people in these far off lands for many years now; and the number is increasing every day. Swami has never set His foot outside India, except for a lone trip to East Africa in 1968, but mysteriously people feel His presence, experience His love and get drawn to Him; and for us to listen to these stories, it is equally enthralling. Before we get on with this exciting Sai journey, let's know a little more about these two tiny nations which lie on the isthmus that connects the large landmasses of South America and North America.

Honduras and Nicaragua – Central to Central American civilisation

Honduras and Nicaragua, together constitute nearly fifty percent of Central America. While Nicaragua (roughly the size of Greece or the state of New York) is the largest country in this region; Honduras, with an area slightly larger than the state of Tennessee (in USA), is the second largest. In its 112,092 km² area, Honduras hosts more than 6,000 species of vascular plants, of which 630 are orchids; around 250 reptiles and amphibians; more than 700 bird species; and 110 mammal species, half of them being bats. On the northeast of Honduras lies the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, a lowland rainforest, home to a great diversity of life. Sometimes called 'The Last Lungs of Central America', the Reserve was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites List in 1982. Honduras also harbors the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System. In the Bay Islands, one can swim with bottlenose dolphins, manta rays, parrot fish, schools of blue tang and even the colossal whale shark.

Nicaragua is no less gifted, with eight percent of its territory protected as national parks or biological reserves. Home to many large rivers, it also has one of the largest lakes in the world, the Gran Lago de Nicaragua, which is unique in that it contains fresh water sharks and other fish species normally found only in salt water, that have adapted to sweet water. The Rio Escalante-Chacocente Wildlife Refuge (or Chacocente) contains one of the largest and most biologically diverse dry forests in both Nicaragua and the Pacific coast of Central America, and is also a protected nature reserve for turtles.

Thanks to their bio-diversity as well as the white sands, tall coconut palms, many islands and the easy going Caribbean atmosphere, these shores have

always been a toast for tourists for all kinds – science enthusiasts, adventure-seeking daredevils and fun-loving holidaymakers seeking to ‘chill out’, especially from the busy cities of the Americans.

Their Modern History and Dynamic Demography

It was the legendary maritime explorer, Christopher Columbus, who on his fourth and final voyage to the New World, landed on what is now the coast of Honduras in 1502. For approximately three centuries, Spain ruled the area as part of the Kingdom of Guatemala. In 1821, along with the rest of Central America, Honduras and Nicaragua declared independence from Spain, and became independent in their own right in 1838.

Apart from Mestizos (mixed European and indigenous non-European ancestry), people of European descent, and a minority of East Asian and Middle Eastern origin, the newest ethnic addition to these countries is the Garifuna. Unlike other people of African descent who came to the Americas, these were never slaves. The Garifuna live along the north coast in Honduras and in the islands in Nicaragua. With about nine percent of its population from Africa, Nicaragua has the second largest population of African descent in Central America after Panama. In spite of the tide of immigrants, the indigenous people of both these countries still thrive. Tribes like the Chortí (Mayan descent), Pech or Paya, Tolupan or Xicaque, Lenca, Sumo or Tawahka, and Miskito exist even now, and maintain their languages in Honduras, while five percent of Nicaragua’s demography consists of Nahuatl-speaking Nicarao people of the western region after whom the country is named, and six other ethnic groups including the Miskitos, Ramas and Sumos along the Caribbean coast.

For Them, Future is “God Willing”

Though Hondurians (or Hondureños as they like to call themselves in Spanish) and Nicaraguans are predominantly of Mestizo descent and of Roman Catholic faith, there are also several Evangelical denominations. While the Virgin of Suyapa, another name for Virgin Mary, is the patron saint of Honduras, the high point of Nicaragua’s religious calendar for the masses is neither Christmas nor Easter, but *La Purísima*, a week of festivities in early December dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, during which elaborate altars to the Virgin Mary are constructed in homes and workplaces. Therefore, the similarity in culture, tradition, festivities between the two nations is evident, and this is furthered with Spanish being their common official tongue.

Fascinating Capitals

The nomenclatures of both these countries’ capitals is interesting. The capital of Honduras, Tegucigalpa, means “silver hills” in indigenous Nahuatl language and Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua, implies “a place of many springs” or a site “surrounded by water”. And both are so apt as at one time Tegucigalpa was a centre of silver and gold mining, and Managua is on the banks of a large lake called Xolotlan and has no less than four smaller lakes

or lagoons within the city limits. Once upon a time, this city was populated by fishermen and craftsmen, ruins of whose settlements can still be seen. Though Managua has seen the rise and fall of many political powers and survived two devastating earthquakes, it has proved to be a tenacious city. Today, harbouring nearly one-fifth of Nicaraguan population, it is considered to be the safest city in Central America and one of the safest cities in all of the Americas, surprisingly much more than many North American cities.

Though tourism remains an important sector in these Caribbean economies, thanks to their geographical location and biological diversity, Honduras is also rich in natural resources such as timber, gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, iron ore, antimony, coal, and fish, and both these countries export bananas and coffee.

Their Invaluable Asset – Their Good Hearts

With 500 islands and reefs on both coasts, Nicaragua is very beautiful and there are many volcanoes which are active which attract a lot of tourists every year. But what is more noteworthy is the character of these people and their hospitality. Frank and open in expressing their opinions in a country which allows freedom of worship, Nicaraguans like Hondurans treat guests with a great deal of kindness and love. It is these priceless characteristics which have made them what they are today - tropical paradises on earth, and for many, suitable places to be reminded of God, even though they may be seemingly obscure and not developed like the Americas. Therefore, it is no wonder that the first Hondurian to visit Puttaparthi was as early as 1969, though the first Mexicans who came to see Sathya Sai Baba was in 1973.

History of the Honduras Sai Organization

It was Miss Rosa Ravaneau, who was the first person from Honduras, to visit Bhagavan Baba in 1969. Originally from Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, she was living in New York. She narrowly missed death or serious injury when, one day in 1969, her Volkswagen van rolled over in an accident. This brush with mortality prompted her to begin questioning herself, "What if I had died? What is this life all about? Am I wasting it without knowing why I am here?"

These thoughts led her to read different spiritual texts and at one point her roommate remarked, "Why don't you go to India, you're reading so many books from there." Rosa wanted to go to Russia, but when she called her travel agent, he told her about a \$400 round trip available for India. This was too good to pass up.

The Eventful First Journey

An artist friend called and advised her to go to Goa and Puttaparthi, without mentioning Sai Baba. When Miss Ravaneau was traveling in India, she met a Mr. Gupta and his family in Madras (now Chennai). They were en route to Puttaparthi the next day and offered her the one space available in their car.

Rosa recalled the name Puttaparthi from her friend and agreed to go along. The Gupta family were travelling in two cars and Rosa rode with the ladies, who did not speak English. Only Sri Gupta spoke English, but he was in the other vehicle.

So she came to Puttaparthi without any idea about Sai Baba, and arriving late at night found rooms in the village. In those days there were no facilities for visitors, people used the Chitravati River for bathing, the hill for a bathroom, and slept on the floor in a rented room in the village. No one sold mattresses, and food other than South Indian spicy fare was difficult to come by. The only thing in abundance were the mosquitoes.

At that time, a total of five foreigners were at Prashanti Nilayam. When Miss Ravaneau arrived, she thought she made a mistake, but there were no buses or taxis, so she had to live with her supposed blunder. Soon however, she saw Swami as an enchanting personality. She wanted to talk to Him and approached Professor Kasturi (Baba's biographer) while he was at his ancient typewriter. He explained it was up to Swami to call someone in.

Rosa thought that if she could find Swami's cook, she might help her get an appointment with Baba while He was eating. She found the cook in a tin hut behind the Mandir. The lady was very nice and said she would help. Over the following days, she told Rosa to come in the morning or afternoon and that Swami said He would see her. However, all the appointments were cancelled.

Finally, she was escorted into a small room at the end of the Mandir where the lady indicated she was to wait. There was only one chair, so she sat down. Of course, it was Swami's chair. She waited more than an hour until Professor Kasturi came to report that Swami was tired and had retired for the evening and would not be seeing anyone.

As she came out, she noticed one of the American boys staying there reading Howard Murphet's, *Man of Miracles*. She asked to look at it, and when she saw, it was about Swami. She said, "Wow, this guy must be something if there is a book written about Him." Then she opened the book and read that no one could visit Sai Baba without Him bringing them to His presence. This was too much for her, so she asked to borrow it, and retired to her room to read.

The next day passed without an interview, but Rosa was reading avidly about Swami. That night she had a dream. She was riding in a taxi with Baba and He put a garland around her neck. The next day, a minor miracle occurred: a taxi arrived to drop off some passengers, so Rosa, feeling she had His blessing, left in it to return to the West.

Maurice's Mind is Metamorphosed

She visited many more times in subsequent years and in 1972 came with her husband and mother-in-law to Whitefield to attend the first Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality on invitation. Maurice, her husband, wore his hair long. After the first day of the Summer Course, Dr. Gokak, a senior

devotee close to Bhagavan, called Maurice aside and told him how Indians were conservative and not used to western styles and men with long hair. He suggested it would be a nice gesture to get a haircut. At first Maurice thought this old fellow doesn't understand or respect our culture. The next night, Dr. Gokak again asked him politely to trim his hair. However, Maurice was still in rebellion. But then the next day, the thought came that it would be an indication that he could become Swami's devotee if he had his hairdo. So he had his head shaved and now looked like a monk. When he was walking in front of Swami's residence, Swami came out on the balcony, looked at Maurice and said, "Very nice, very nice."

That year the Summer Course was held in a big tent. After the course was over, Swami called Rosa, Maurice, and his mother for an interview, during which He materialized a small silver medal for Maurice's mother. When they left the interview room, Rosa said, "What a cheap medal. He should at least have made something from Tiffany's." Next day, to their surprise, Swami called them in again. Rosa stood at the back as she was embarrassed about what she had said regarding the medal.

"How did you like your mother-in-law's medal?" - Swami

Swami saw her immediately, and asked, "How did you like your mother-in-law's medal?" Rosa said, "Oh, it is very beautiful Swami." Then Swami waved his hand through the air as if to say, you don't really mean that, but at the same time a similar medal flew across the room. Without realizing it, at that moment Rosa put her hand up and the medal landed in her palm. It was identical to her mother-in-law's and she has it to this day.

All these divine experiences instilled a lot of faith in Rosa and her husband and eventually they started a Sai Center in their apartment in New York and have been holding meetings there now for many years.

The First Sai Centre in Honduras

In 1990, they visited Honduras, and helped the Sai Organization from Central America hold a public meeting which was attended by about hundred people. At this time, Jose Gonzalo Rodriguez, a devotee from Guatemala, was studying at the Samorano Agricultural University in Tegucigalpa. He helped form the first Sai Center in the home of Manuel Fontecha. The devotees from El Salvador helped by singing bhajans and several more public meetings and retreats were held.

When Manuel was offered a job in Costa Rica, the family had to move, and so did the Sai Center, to the home of Jivaduck Samayoa. His wife Bernadette started Bal Vikas classes for the children, and Jivaduck, a dynamic devotee, took Swami's message to other cities in Honduras. A center was started in San Pedro Sula, another in Tela, and also in La Ceba.

At one point more than hundred devotees congregated for a retreat at the Lake, El Yojoa. An eleven-year-old girl from the Tela Sai Center, claimed to

see Swami and that He gave her messages, such as the devotees should go to the hospital and do service. However, when Swami was consulted, He said He was not the one who appeared to her and sent her vibhuti prasad. It seems she liked the attention, but after taking Swami's vibhuti the appearances stopped. Then Jivaduck hit the lottery, and won \$80,000, which he used to bring his son to India to visit Swami and to add a large room to his home for the Sai Center.

This was a wonderful miracle for everyone to see. But then Jivaduck moved to Guatemala and Pepe Gonzalo Rodriguez graduated from the University and went back to Guatemala, so the Sai Organization was left with some staunch devotees such as Ada Jadeed, Lea Galinda, Manuel Chavez, Otto Weiss and Rafael Sosa, but without a central meeting place. For a time, the meetings were held in the home of Florencia Rodriguez, then in the home of Lea Galinda, and the apartment of Manuel Chavez. In 2005, a public meeting was held in San Pedro Sula, which was followed by regular study circles in the home of Rafael and Yamelth.

Ever Watchful Sai

Ada's sister was also a Sai devotee. She was visiting her two daughters who were studying in San Diego, California. One daughter, Diana, was driving on the freeway with her mother and sister in the back. The mother remembered that she had a photo of Swami with her which she wanted to give to Diana and took it out of her purse and passed it to Diana, who placed it on the seat. Soon after, the car went out of control and hit a concrete barrier at high speed. The vehicle was crushed. The police came and called for emergency equipment. They needed acetylene torches to cut the three women out of the car, but all of them were safe without so much as a scratch. The police asked for Diana's driver's license, and when she opened her purse, there was Swami's photo inside, even though it was on the seat before the crash. They all offered prayers of gratitude to Swami for saving their lives. A few days later they were in a supermarket and Diana ran into a friend. She introduced her mother and sister and they exchanged a few pleasantries. While saying goodbye, Diana's mother put her hand out, as it is customary in the USA to shake hands when meeting someone. The lady was a clairvoyant, and when she touched the mother's hand, she exclaimed, "You have just been saved from death by someone very powerful." They then told her the story of what happened on the freeway a few days before.

Now there is more good news for Honduras. Rosa and Maurice have retired and they are leaving New York to settle in Tegucigalpa and will take up leadership of the Sai Organization. The Organisation is growing steadily in this tiny nation and the devotees are engaged in lot of service and spiritual activities, stories of which we will bring you in a later issue of H2H, but for now let's turn to Nicaragua and its wonderful Sai movement.

How did Swami Come to Nicaragua?

About 1985, Norman Cuadra brought the first book on Swami in Spanish, "Sai Baba, El Hombre Milagroso" (Sai Baba: Man of Miracles) by Howard Murphet. He was hosting two radio programs at the time, called 'Pirimids and Energy' and 'Our Next Horizon', and he serialised parts of this book on both programs, which created a sensation in the country.

One listener was Mrs Juana Domínguez, whose sister was living in El Salvador. When she was on a visit to her sister, she walked in front of a house where bhajans were in session. She went closer to listen, and they invited her inside. She became enthralled with the music and discovered the same book which Norman had referred to on his radio program. Juana started taking books and other materials to her home in Managua and that is how the first Sai Center was born in 1988. Later, Mr. John Behner and Mr. Nassin Mechaan, senior members of Sai Organisation from neighbouring countries, visited Nicaragua to hold public meetings, and other devotees from El Salvador went to help teach bhajans, start study circles and motivate service activities.

Dreams and Realities

One of the first devotees was Delmy Suarez, who relates a beautiful experience of how she discovered Swami. She had several dreams of a 'person in an orange robe' where He would raise His hand and say 'Om Sai Ram'. She was left confused, unable to interpret the dreams. Then, one day around this time, she was invited to attend a public meeting and discovered that the person in her dreams was the theme of the conference. She was amazed to hear about the *Leelas* of the Lord and purchased some books and started assisting at the home of Mrs. Carmen de Solorzono.

Mrs Carmen de Solorzono discovered Sai Baba in 1994 from her sister who had travelled to India from her home in Venezuela. Carmen embraced Swami's teaching from the very beginning after listening to her sisters experiences and reading about Him and soon opened her home for Sai meetings. This small Sai group started many service activities and Delmy Suarez along with her daughter started serving at a hospital every week. Slowly the glory of Sai spread in this triangle-shaped nation and soon Mrs. Carmen Murillo, the wife of the President of Nicaragua, became a frequent visitor to the Sai centre to buy books. Eventually, a public meeting was planned and many devotees as well as leaders of the organization from other countries came to participate in the event.

Treat of Sai Retreats

From 2004, many devotees from Nicaragua travelled to El Salvador and attended the retreats with Dr. Sandweiss, Dr. Voleti, and Mrs. Carol Bass – all very experienced and senior devotees of Bhagavan Baba. Norman Cuadra and Elena Murillo helped organize the groups who visited. Motivated by these meetings, the retreat in Managua was organized, following which a Sai Group

was started in the home of Reina Cisneros. And it is this group which has taken up the service of feeding the homeless regularly.

One very unique meeting which was held in 2005 was a two day retreat for the public. This retreat was a joint effort by the local organization and the office bearers of the Central Council of Sai Organisation in Latin America. As different aspects of Swami's teaching were being presented, some newcomers were taken by surprise and they stayed for both days. This led to the opening of a new Sai group in Nicaragua.

There is one experience that Mrs. Carmen de Solorzono narrates. One day she went to consult a lady doctor about her health and while she was sitting in the waiting room, she noticed a photo of Shirdi Sai Baba on the wall. The doctor was Mrs Elba Ubeda, a devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba, but she remarked that she had never heard of Sathya Sai Baba. Out of love for Swami, Carmen brought her some books, and very shortly Dr. Ubeda converted her waiting room into a Sai Centre where as many as forty people would meet weekly.

There were public meetings held recently (2006) at the Hotel Princess in Managua and in Granada which were well attended where even members of the clergy of the Catholic Church were present and asked several searching questions about Swami and His message. The film *His Work* on Baba moved many hearts and many Sai books were in demand. A major TV channel gave coverage to the meetings and two newspapers carried the message of love and peace of Baba. There are only increasingly encouraging signs of Sai's teachings and message percolating into different segments of the society including the government. When eventually selfless service and pure love suffuses every nick and corner of Nicaragua, it would have truly transformed into a 'paradise of peace and light' on the high seas, linking not large landmasses but connecting hearts and building bridges of love.

Dear Reader, this is only the beginning of the Sai story of these Central American Countries. Tell us how you liked these and we will be back with more Sai stories, service activities and sublime transformations happening in this part of the world in the coming issues.

“I GIVE YOU WHAT YOU WANT ...”

By Dr. Sara Pavan

Life is an onward journey, an evolutionary process to awaken to the realisation of the Truth, as to what we are and who we are. Ultimately, there are no failures and everyone would eventually realise their inherent divinity. After all, we are made of the divine essence, but made to forget this Truth whilst earth-bound, in this vast, timeless and magnificent process of life. In this process, the formless infinite God and source of everything became the multitudes of finite forms, which became unconscious of its origin. Baba confirms this by saying: **“I separated Myself from Myself so that I can love Myself. My beloved one, you are My very own Self.”** Having reached this point in evolution and endowed with the potential to awaken from this amnesia, man alone can not only experience his own inherent divinity, but also realise that the entire creation is nothing but the vesture of God.

SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

Creation began with the mineral and evolved to plant life; plants to animals; animals to human; who finally awaken to the Truth that everything is God. Darwin gave a scientific expression to this process of evolution at the material plane. Now, let us give it a spiritual expression at a subtler plane – from a being unconscious of itself to becoming fully conscious.

Consciousness may be compared with the infinite cosmic space which contains all celestial objects. When we look at the night sky we see only the countless number of stars (creation) but are unable to fathom the depth of thousands of light-years of space containing them. Likewise, consciousness, which is the One all pervasive spirit, is beyond the realm of the senses. We could state, “In the beginning, I did not pray because I did not know, and in the end, I stopped praying because I know.” Through millions of years man has evolved and continues to evolve until he is totally Aware of this ‘Oneness’ – **That Thou Art**. Swami had explained this progression to Dr. Hislop in this order: “rock, vegetable, animal, human, super-human, cosmic and finally God.”

LOVE ERASES EGO

The mind is the instrument of perception from the animal kingdom upwards. It harbours all kinds of fears and beliefs, which are carried forward in recurring cycles of life in all species, especially so in the human. Fear is the product of the mind, and Ego arises only through body identification. It will persist as long as the ‘I’ and ‘my’ feelings remain. Mind, being the reflection of the physical body, keeps identifying itself with the physical body. A human, an ape and an elephant alone can recognise their own body in the mirror, which is impossible for other species. We know the elephant never forgets and we, who have observed Sai Geeta (Baba’s pet elephant) closely, know this only too well!

This kind of self-identification creates individuality, which is the basis of ego, which will always breed fear. Love is just the opposite of fear. Love is God, and God is the basis of all, the golden thread that runs through every being. Realisation of this fact alone dispels all fear. Bhagavan Baba keeps reassuring us: “Why fear when I am here?” Gerry Jampolski, a world renowned psychologist, affirms: “Love is letting go of fear.”

In His previous Avataric Advent as Lord Krishna, Bhagavan Baba had emphatically declared in the Gita that the True Self, the Atma, cannot be injured by a weapon, burnt by fire, wet by water or dried by the wind; that it is unsullied, eternal and imperishable; and that the Self or the indweller merely moves from one body to another. That means, every Person represents God, but every Personality wallows in Ego! Animal qualities, like lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and envy, get carried forth in the process of evolution and must be discarded to go further towards the goal of returning to the Divine Self. Of all the species in creation, the human alone can achieve this.

CONQUERING THE MIND

The mind harbours all the impediments to spiritual progress and eludes us from peace and fulfilment. Human birth is like reaching the half-way house between animal and God. Unless animal propensities are discarded, man has no hope of realising his Divine destiny. Endowed with the faculty of reason or discrimination, which humans alone have, we have to overcome the feeling of separateness from God. Throughout the ages Prophets, Messiahs and Sages have walked on earth to reveal this Truth to humanity and have shown us the path of realising this goal. Just as in the metaphor, where Adam ate the forbidden fruit, the pull of the mind and the senses consumes the naturally divine nature in man and leads him astray into bondage and suffering. It is therefore incumbent upon us to make some effort to withstand the vagaries of the mind and curb our senses through inquiry as to who we really are. This can be achieved by practising the cardinal principles of proper living exemplified by such pioneering men and women of the spirit, who conquered their own minds and senses – Prophets, Messiahs, the Saints and sages.

DIVINE AMBASSADORS

When we celebrate the birth anniversaries of these Masters, in whose names the various religions came to exist – Zoroaster, Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed and others, it must serve as a reminder that we should understand their Message correctly and practise them in our daily life, not limiting it to showcasing their forms and extolling their identity with pompous outer trappings. With proper understanding we will certainly know that their Message is essentially one and the same, based on Love and Unity. These Masters neither had any intention to start a new religion nor cause any division among people. They were all ambassadors of the divine for establishing Love and Unity, Peace and Prosperity.

Lord Buddha was a Hindu prince and not a Buddhist at birth, and Lord Jesus was born into a Jewish family. The story of Jesus is even more of a puzzle for

anyone who wishes to know it in full. When one looks deep into the matter, much to anybody's surprise, Jesus' most formative years of life are noticeably missing. Where was Jesus between the ages 12 – 29? The fact is Jesus was the man who became the Christ. It is widely known that he spent all these missing years in India and Tibet and, as destined, was influenced by the essence of the Vedas and Buddhist ideals. Truth is Only One, seen as many. Paths are many, but the destination only One.

RELIGION'S TRUE MESSAGE

With good intentions and an eagerness to propagate the Message, the followers created various religions in the name of their Masters. With the passage of time, divisions have taken place within each religion due to Ego and misunderstandings among the leaders, resulting in the creation of sects and schisms. This kind of divisive spree is already hurting the lives of people of all faiths. Let us search our souls and see if we can bring some unity, not only within each religion, but also between religions, by properly understanding their core tenets.

What we see in religions these days are merely the outer trappings, which are mostly man-made, historical and traditional. If all humanity would follow the tenets of their respective religion - what was originally taught by the Masters - certainly there would be peace on earth and goodwill to all mankind. Unfortunately, religions around the world are at conflict with each other today, even creating factions and schisms within their own faith! This is because of the selfishness of religious leaders and their misinterpretation of the teachings of the great Masters to suit their dogma and creed. Human Values have been insidiously eroded because of politicisation within religions and people wanting to grab power for dominance over others. If we examine the tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and all the other major religions, they all carry the Universal Message of Love, which is the hallmark of the Avatar of the Age, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. "A religion bereft of Love is no religion at all," Baba says!

SWAMI IS BEYOND RELIGION: HE IS LOVE

At this most critical juncture, the 'Kali-yuga' avatar, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, is in our midst to bring back unity through Love and Service, to build bridges across the various Faiths and foster a caring and sharing society, and thereby bring Peace and Prosperity to the entire world. *Most certainly, Bhagavan Baba has not come to start a new religion.* He has tirelessly gone a long way in laying a strong foundation for the re-establishment of Sanathana Dharma (Eternal Righteousness). On the subject of Righteousness, Baba says:

If there is Righteousness in your Heart, there will be Beauty in Character.

If there is Beauty in Character, there will be Harmony in the Home.

If there is Harmony in the Home, there will be Order in the Nation.

If there is Order in the Nation, there will be Peace in the World.

Bhagavan Baba has also declared emphatically that He has not taken His body to foster one creed or another, but to bring back into the Hearts of all people the principle of Love. The practice of Human Values alone – **Truth, Righteousness, Love, Peace and Non-Violence** - can redeem humanity from the shallows of misery. **“Unity is Divinity; Purity is Enlightenment,”** Swami declares; **Unity – Purity – Divinity** in that sequence. First there must be Unity and this will lead to Purity and finally Divinity. In what way does this contradict with the core teachings of any religion? This spiritual renaissance alone can make life truly meaningful and bring all the fragments that have been created by Ego and selfishness into a united whole: fusion and synthesis through Love.

SAVING OUR WORLD

Today, we see strife the world over – nation against nation, communities fighting against each other and even unprecedented feuding within families on account of religion, language or socio-economic divide. There is no solution to all this by means of ‘clever’ worldly ways. Spirituality, which is the practice of the fundamental tenets of religion, is the only answer. If the lamp of love and compassion towards fellow beings is extinguished, religion loses its purpose and becomes a weapon of hate and destruction.

Bhagavan Baba has taken advent to save humanity from this peril. His Message is not only universal and contemporary, but also truly reflects the core teachings of the great Masters, in whose names the various religions have come to exist. Bhagavan is the source and the force behind this kaleidoscope of life on earth. The Messages of all God-men of the past are essentially the same. However, the differences seem to be based on available historical accounts of culture, tradition, conflicts, etc. that were prevalent then, complicated by semantics, misinterpretations and outer formats. This beautiful planet of ours can no longer endure this kind of a stormy course, and appears to be in danger of destroying itself. Instead of being good stewards, humanity is blinded by greed and ignorance and appears to preside over this decadence.

Bhagavan Baba, the contemporary avatar, has come to protect the virtuous and transform the evil doers. His Message is Universal and His Mission is to establish Dharma on a firm footing by fostering the Vedas. It is incorrect and misleading to limit the Vedas to Hinduism; they are the timeless Eternal Truths, given by God through the pure and highly evolved sages of yore for the entirety of humanity. So, it cannot be confined to any particular religion. Vedas formed the foundation of ‘Sanathana Dharma’ or Eternal Righteousness. Sanathana Dharma, again, is not a religion; it is a way of life where peace and prosperity, selflessness and charity, knowledge and wisdom, humaneness and justice, human values and fraternity and other such virtues are extolled and practised.

Bhagavan Baba has already laid the foundation for the emancipation of all humanity. The seeds have to sprout and bear fruit. Time is fast approaching

when the whole world will awaken to this fact. The forces of Truth and Righteousness will redeem humanity from the grip of all dark and divisive forces, and this revolution is taking place in silence in the hearts of people who have had enough suffering and injustice. We have to be patient and trust our Lord and His Righteousness. His ways are beyond human comprehension; they are so unique and multidimensional. Even the things we see erroneously as 'destruction' with our limited perception are indeed part of His great rebuilding process. Over centuries our race has been deluded merely by the outer facade. Now, our planet is embraced by The Timeless and Eternal Principle, which is embodied in Bhagavan Baba. We have to see everything in terms of 'Wholeness' and the 'Cosmic Oneness' in this gigantic process of regeneration in our lives. The Message of Sai is for the whole world. There is only the One Truth in all our religions: LOVE. Love alone can save the world and we have His assurance that all will be saved.

RELIGIOUS UNITY

Here are some of the Basic Tenets of Christianity:

- There is one eternally living God who is Creator of all else that exists
- He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.
- God manifests Himself in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Bible is God inspired.
- The Holy Bible contains all the truth necessary for salvation.
- Different translations of the Bible give various interpretations and may contain errors, but in all major translations the errors are not a barrier to salvation.
- Salvation is by grace, a gift from God.
- To love God and to love our neighbour is the fulfilment of all spiritual law.
- Everyone sins and breaks the spiritual law.
- God's forgiveness is ongoing and limitless.
- God will never leave us, nor forsake us.

Can we truly find any significant difference with the Vedic Message through Sanathana Dharma? Not at all, but only in the way it is packaged. This is so with all other religions. However, the 'minders' of religions make it **exclusive**, as we see for example in some tenets of the Christian Church:

- There is one Christian church. The church is composed of all Christians.
- A Christian is one in whom the one true God dwells.
- He is their personal saviour for those who truly accept Jesus Christ

The basic tenets of Buddhism give a practical guidance to Realisation and Peace. Suffering is enlisted in the Four Noble Truths, and the Eight-fold Path shows the way out of suffering.

The Four Noble Truths: The Truth of suffering, The Truth of the cause of suffering, The Truth of the end of suffering and The Truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering.

The Eight-fold Path: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

We can list similarities in essence and the outer differences in other religions as well. We need to emphasize here that *the only True Religion is Love, and it is ALL-INCLUSIVE*. The Vedas proclaim: "Truth is only One, but the wise call It by many names." Bhagavan Baba has declared: **"There is only One Religion - The Religion of Love."**

Bhagavan Baba's teachings are the core of all religions based on Eternal Values, reinforcing the Message of Love. Religions differ only on the surface, based on region, ritual, culture, tradition, language, as well as social and economic factors. Each human being is an inimitable expression of Pure Consciousness in this infinite field of time and space. We have unwittingly allowed ourselves to be deluded by vested interests for centuries.

'IMITATION IS OUR LIMITATION.'

Each one of us is a spark of the divine and unique expressions of His Will. But we continue to remain in the 'sleep-mode.' Without self-confidence and proper inquiry we keep imitating others, generation after generation, and remain in limitation. Hence, history keeps repeating itself and people and nations draw their ideas from the past which are bound to fail in the contemporary world. Humanity the world over is crying out for a solution to the present impasse, where the world is torn apart by violence and hatred. Spirituality is the answer, not religion.

Let us explore our hidden potential truly by following the tenets of the religion we are born into; they have to be lived, not merely talked about. Every religion has an esoteric side to it. If we are sincere in our quest, there is always help and guidance coming from someone or something up above and beyond our senses. Let us explore and experience our hidden potential and achieve the great future that lies ahead of us. Human life is too precious to be squandered away, pursuing the path of hatred and division. All are children of the One God, the Supreme Consciousness.

BABA WAKES US UP

We must be able to say:

"I am a child of immortality. My body is merely a costume and although I am born into a particular ethnic and religious community, 'I' will always remain 'I' and I will fulfill my life through whatever path that is destined for me, always remembering that I am One in Spirit. When I awaken from this

self-hypnosis of bodily identification and its affiliates, I will know who 'I AM'. I AM Sat-Chit-Ananda: Being, Awareness, and Bliss."

Bhagavan Baba, who is God made flesh, is here to set us free from our pains and sorrows. The Supreme Divinity has heard our cry to be saved. At the kindergarten level of our life, He has attracted us by fulfilling our desires and worldly aspirations. Over the past 80 years Bhagavan Baba has been giving, giving, and giving, responding to our prayers for worldly fulfillment – helping us in every worldly pursuit and curing illnesses. His miracles were and still are His calling cards. These are '**Chamatkars**' which attract us to begin with. From then on, the all knowing God and the divine alchemist start our 'operation transformation' - '**Samskar**'- where the refining process continues unabated until we experience an evolved state of consciousness: '**Paropakar**'. We begin to notice great changes in our lives and start experiencing inner peace, irrespective of outer circumstances. These are the treasures Bhagavan has actually come to give us, which will eventually lead us to Universal Love and Full Consciousness: '**Sakshatkar**'.

Baba has often reminded us that we should ask from Him what He has come to give us. He is ever full of Grace and Grace shall set us free. Bhagavan says: "**When you come to me with your hands filled with tinsel, what can I fill you with? I have come to fill you with the treasure of Ananda.**" Therefore, it is vital that we ask from Him what He has come to give us. When every thought, word and deed are filled with desires and attachments, how can we attain freedom from bondage? Our time and opportunities are indeed running thin. The years are rolling fast and we need to make the most of our few remaining years with Swami.

THE TREASURE OF ANANDA

Bhagavan is tirelessly luring us so that we will begin to want from Him what He has come to give us. The following would exemplify this:

On November 21, 1999, a very dear devotee of Bhagavan was seated next to me. He had a mountain of problems. When Swami reached the veranda after the full round of darshan, He stood next to this gentleman and the conversation went like this:

Swami: **Look! So many letters ... so heavy!** (Both of Swami's hands were full of letters)

Devotee: **Baba! So much of Love!**

Swami: **Yes sir! Yes sir!! Two hands full ... not Baba black sheep three bags full. I am not black sheep ... I am White Ship ... not sheep ... S H I P ... Ship. I have come to take you safely ashore.**

Our Beloved Lord has come on earth to give us the treasure of Ananda; the Real Freedom: *Liberation itself!*

**“I GIVE YOU WHAT YOU WANT ... SO THAT YOU WILL ONE DAY BEGIN
TO WANT WHAT I HAVE COME TO GIVE YOU.” – Baba.**

Jai Sai Ram.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI – Part 24

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT 5 SCENE 4

Sathya is admitted to the Bukkapatnam High School. Every day He has to walk several kilometres to reach the School. He goes there in the company of some friends. While many like Raju, some are jealous of Him. One day, they decide to tease and humiliate Him, while He is on His way to School. They lie in wait for Him near the river. Soon, Sathya comes that way along with His friends. They are all singing Bhajans.

BOY 1: We will sit here on this boulder till He comes.

BOY 2: This is Raju's route, is it not? We will sit here.

BOY 3: Yes, today we will take care of Him! Hey look! He is coming!

BOY 4: Look at our dress; it is dirty. But His dress, it is shining!

BOY 5: Look at Raju's dress; it is not crumpled.

BOY 6: We will make His dress dirty and look like ours!

BOY 7: Come!

BOY 8: *[to Sathya]* Hey You! Stop singing!

BOY 9: Come!

Boys throw mud at Sathya and laugh

A BOY IN SATHYA'S GROUP: Stop!

ANOTHER BOY IN THAT GROUP: It is wrong. You shouldn't throw like that.

SATHYA: Why did you stop? Throw more mud! Come on, throw!

AN ATTACKING BOY: Raju, are You not angry?

SATHYA: Why should I be angry? My clothes have become dirty and that has made you all happy. But has My dress becoming dirty made your dresses new?

The attacking boys now splash water over Sathya's dress, instead of throwing mud.

SATHYA: Do you see? You first dirtied My dress but have now also cleaned it! It is so easy to hurt a person.

ATTACKING BOY: Raju!

SATHYA: It is easy to make a dress dirty but impossible to contaminate a pure mind.

ATTACKING BOY: Raju, does it mean You are not angry?

SATHYA: No, I am not angry. You did what you did out of just ignorance. Come, let's all go to school together.

BOY: Yes, let's go together.

ANOTHER BOY: Come, let's go.

ANOTHER BOY: Raju is a very nice fellow. He does not ever get angry.

SCENE 5

Sathya and a few of His friends are on their way to School. On the way, they offer worship to an idol of Ganesha.

BOY: Sathyam, how do you get these flowers and fruits everyday?

SATHYAM: In My house there is a Power that gives Me all these things, which I then offer to Ganapathi.

BOY: Will that Power give us also various things?

SATHYA: Most certainly yes, but only at the appropriate time! When the time comes, I will give you even without your asking.

BOY: You always give to Ganapathi. What about me?

SATHYA: Ganapathi never asks but you do! That's why there is a delay!

*Don't ask O mind!
If you demand, there will be a delay!
But if you don't ask, you will get it faster!
Did Sabari ask for the opportunity to serve the Lord?
Jatayu did not ask and earned a glorious end.
Don't ask O mind!*

Sathya waves His hand and materialises Vibhuti. The boys who are with Him are wonder-struck.

BOYS: Ah! *Vibhuti!*

ONE BOY: Raju, please give me!

BOY 2: Raju, give me also!

BOY 3: Raju, please give me!

BOY 4: Give me also some, Raju!

A Muslim Teacher of the Bukkapatnam High School comes there, and he too receives Vibhuti.

BOY: Raju, how did *Vibhuti* come into Your hands?

SATHYA: Did I not tell you that there is a power in My house? That Power is also in Me!

BOY: Raju, You are a small boy like me; yet You talk profound things. I don't follow anything!

CHORUS: Yes Raju, we just don't understand anything!

SATHYA: Those who need to know understand! Come, it is time for school.

END OF ACT 5

(To be continued)

GITA FOR CHILDREN - PART 25

CHAPTER 12

1. Arjuna asks, 'Lord, You say You are Formless, but can also assume any Form, especially to please Your devotees. This being the case, I want to know how exactly am I to worship You? Should I worship You as the Formless God or as the God with Form? Of the two methods, which is better for me?'
2. Krishna smiles as usual and replies, 'Arjuna, I am glad you have asked Me this question. At the outset I must mention that both types of worship, if followed with great sincerity, would lead to the same goal, that is, merger with Me. But considering the practical aspects, I would suggest that you focus on worship of the God with Form. Indeed, this is the advice that I would give to 99.99 % of the devotees.'
3. 'There is a definite reason for My saying so. You see Arjuna, it is easy to say that God is without Form and all that, and that therefore He should be worshipped in the Formless aspect. He certainly can be, but that is not easy I assure you.'
4. 'Man's true nature is infinite and so is his Mind. But when man's outlook is largely external, being focused on the world and all that it has to offer, his vision becomes narrow. Tell Me, how can a person with limited vision, really and truly worship the Infinite?'
5. 'The one who worships the Formless God has to look inside rather than outside. Do you know why? Simple. Inner space is Infinite whereas the outer space or the physical Universe is finite.'
6. 'Quite apart from this technicality, there is a practical problem. The mental discipline and concentration needed for worshipping the Formless God are enormous. Tell Me, how can a person used to seeing and experiencing the finite all the time, concentrate on the Infinite, and that too in its Formless aspect? Wouldn't you agree that it is not easy? Well, that is exactly what I am saying.'
7. 'So, what is the alternative? Simple, worship God with Form. Are you asking which particular Form? Any Form that pleases you!'
8. 'Incidentally, this is one of the reasons why God incarnates as a human and spends a long time here on earth. This gives mankind a good chance to see God, spend a lot of time in His company, talk to Him, directly experience His infinite Love and compassion, witness His miracles, etc. In turn this leads to stories about the *Avatar*, songs composed in His honour, and so on, all of which make worship of the *Avatar* so very easy, and build up a Heart to Heart relationship with Him.'
9. 'Arjuna, people sometimes criticise idol worship. This is wrong. What is a mere idol for the critic is a live representation of the personal God for the

devotee who is absorbed in worship. If a man has stone in his Heart, he will see merely a stone statue. But if a man has God in his Heart, the stone would verily appear to him as God.'

10. 'In short, it is all a matter of attitude. With the right attitude, even a picture would become God. But with the wrong attitude, even if God were to stand in front, the Divine aspect would be totally missed.'

11. 'Thus, pictures and idols are not to be sneered at. They have their own place in the scheme of things, especially as the Form can help in leading to the Formless.'

12. 'Here is an example. I am now pointing with My forefinger at that hill far away on the horizon. You first look at My finger, follow the direction in which the finger is pointing, and then look at the hill. Once you have seen the hill, the finger ceases to be relevant. It is the same thing with idols and pictures – they all point in the direction in which you must look. They lead you from the Form to the Formless – that is their utility.'

13. 'I hope all this is clear to you. Let Me now describe who amongst My devotees is really dear to Me.'

14. Arjuna interrupts and asks, 'Krishna, I thought all were alike to You. You seem to have favourites, and that is surprising!'

15. With His usual smile Krishna replies, 'You are right, all are indeed equal to Me. But you see, if I say such and such a type of devotee is dear to Me, then it would induce people to do certain things beneficial to them! Let me illustrate in the following way.'

16. 'Imagine a large circle, and God to be at the centre. Seated on the circumference are the devotees. You would agree that all are the same distance from God. Suppose a whistle is blown and devotees are asked to run towards God. Who would get there first? Obviously it would be the one who can run the fastest. Right?'

17. 'Similarly, a devotee who does the things that I am now going to mention, would reach Me real quick. It is to induce people to reach Me quick that I used the phrase "dear to Me!" Understand?'

18. 'OK, how does one come real quick to Me? These are some of the things the person would have to do.'

19. 'To start with, the person should have no trace of hatred in his Heart – not even an iota. Why? Because hatred is sheer poison. I am Pure Love, Love that is nectarine. Is it desirable for poison to contaminate nectar? That is why I say that a person who is free from hatred is dear to Me; got it?'

20. 'Hear some more. An ideal devotee treats pleasure and pain alike. He does not go seeking pleasure nor does he try to duck misery when it visits

him. He never broods over the past nor worries about the future. Immersed in the present he would be busy thinking of Me. For him, the present is no ordinary present – it is OMNIPRESENT!

21. 'Ever balanced, such a person does not feel heady when praised nor depressed when criticised.'

22. 'Arjuna, equanimity is what I like most, and equanimity means being balanced with respect to the opposites. One must be balanced about everything that one does in life. If you possess equanimity, you can face life squarely and do not have to hide yourself in the forest. According to Me, equanimity is the best form of *Yoga*.'

23. 'It does not matter whether you are soldier or a musician or even a cobbler. All that is required is to remain calm and accept things as they come. No matter what happens, such a person would always say, "This is good for me!"'

24. Arjuna asks, 'How is one to recognise such a person?'

25. Krishna replies, 'Very simple! He is the one who loves all and serves all. He always helps and never hurts! And such a one comes with great speed to Me!'

(To be continued)...

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

INSPIRING SEVA IN ABU DHABI

Twelve Medical Camps in Indian Embassy Premises, Abu Dhabi, UAE

By Serve And Inspire (SAI)

A word to ease the troubled mind,
A soothing hand to one in pain,
A softly spoken word of cheer and
A SAI brother lifts someone from despair.

The Serve And Inspire slogan

The United Arab Emirates – Home to Many Nationalities

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven sheikhdoms located in the southeastern corner of the Arab peninsula. Bordered by the Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf of Oman to the east; Saudi Arabia to the south and west; and by the Arabian Gulf to the north, the total land area, including 20 islands, is 83,000 sq km (32,278 sq mi). The seven emirates of UAE are Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Qaiwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah. The capital and the largest city of the federation, Abu Dhabi is located in the emirate of the same name.

The U.A.E. has approximately 4.1 million people (2006 estimate) from all over the Arab world and also Asia, Europe, Africa and America. Approximately 80% of the population are non-UAE nationals in this country which has Arabic as the official language, though other languages such as English, Hindi and Farsi are also spoken. Islam is the religion professed by the majority of the population but Christianity, Hinduism, and other religions are also practised.

The UAE, which beautifully blends traditional Arab and Islamic cultures with the modernity of a cosmopolitan living environment, has one of the world's highest standards of living and the average life expectancy is 72 years. In recent years, there has been a huge increase in the number of tourists who visit this Middle Eastern country endowed with warm seas and cozy beaches. Visitors are attracted by award winning hotels, sports events and shopping spectacles, apart from a mild winter climate. Each emirate has its own beauty and splendors of the desert. Aqua Park in Umm Al quain, Mall of the Emirates, and Bin Batoota Mall are some of the recent attractions in this country which makes an ultimate shopping destination.

SAI – Serve And Inspire

Abu Dhabi, the largest of the seven emirates and the capital of UAE, is an enchanting city, which also has a Sai Center. The Abu Dhabi Sai Center, otherwise known as Serve and Inspire (SAI) Group, focuses on Ideal Sai health care and regularly conducts free medical and health awareness camps

for the continual benefit of those patients who have no access to quality health care.

The camps are organized in the Indian embassy premises for the last one year, beginning from the holy month of Ramadan 2005, thanks to H.E, the Indian Ambassador, who readily accepted the request of Sai center to host the camps within four months of his tenure in UAE. This gave a new dimension of care to the role of the embassy as is evident from what Sri Barjeet Singh and Sri Raveendran –both suffering from hypertension, detected for the first time in the SAI camps – tell H2H,

“We used to come to the Indian embassy for Visa and passport renewals or attestation of document papers. Some workers come here for legal support. Now Sai Baba is bringing us to the embassy every month to get free health checkups and free medicines. We are very happy.”

The SAI group conducted twelve successful medical camps in the last one year for the welfare of needy laborers and the working community in and around the industrial town of Mussafah, the suburb of Abu Dhabi city. Many devotees feel it is a SAI Miracle.

In one of His divine discourses, Bhagavan said: “The word SAI means the following - **S** for Service, **A** for Adoration and **I** for Illumination. In the word SAI the first and foremost importance is Service. The SAI group consider that they have taken birth only to render service to society as a sacred deed. “This is my duty, and I am born to Serve and become inspired”. With this determination in heart, the Serve And Inspire devotee team of Abu Dhabi, conducted the dozen Medical camps successfully.

Addressing the Health Needs of the Poor

The industrial and hygiene workers from India spend a lot of money to come to UAE in search of future prosperity. Once they find that they cannot earn enough money as they dreamt, many become depressed or suffer physical ailments. The situation of laborers is all the more critical as many of them have borrowed cash from moneylenders on high interest. Moreover their dwelling places are congested and their calorie intake does not match their needs from hard labour in adverse weather conditions. The companies provide only meager medical support and patients with chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension need to have a health card or medical insurance, which for them is an impossible task.

These camps go a long way in maintaining the workers' health and even saving lives as a tearful Dasarathan, who works for a construction company, says, “My brother came to Abu Dhabi six months before by paying an agent Rs 90,000. He was unable to work as he was not eating properly, vomiting whatever he eats, and he had a bad cough. He was becoming very thin and weak. I phoned the SAI camp doctor and took him there. The doctor arranged X-rays and gave a lot of medicines for his serious lung infection. SAI brothers also collected some money for his return ticket to India. Now my brother is in

Nizamabad, living with his family. To me it seems like he was saved from the gallows of death. SAI RAM to your doctor and BABA whose grace gave new life to my brother.”

“When we don’t get enough money and salary for basic maintenance how can we afford to go to private doctors or Government hospitals,” say many of the patients who visit Sai camps.

Serve and Inspire (SAI) endeavors to extend medical seva to those who need it the most. The Medical seva is conducted every month on a Friday subject to the availability of the embassy premises. It begins around two in the afternoon and extends till the last patient is seen. As soon as patients arrive, they are received with a warm welcome by SAI volunteers and registered to the concerned doctor. General physicians carry out a thorough clinical examination, followed by screening for silent killer diseases like Diabetes and Hypertension in all high-risk patients.

Shyam Lal, one beneficiary of the camp, told H2H, “My blood pressure and sugar were very high. I used to spend a lot of money in a private clinic, borrowing from friends. Now I get free medicines through the SAI clinic every month. My sugar level and blood pressure are under control these days.”

The SAI medical team dispenses the prescribed medicines and in the cases of diabetes and hypertension they give medication to last for fifteen days. The doctors also make prescriptions which are valid in their home country where the prices of medicines are cheaper.

Earlier SAI volunteers used to go to the workers’ accommodation and bring the patients to the medical camps, transporting them back home after treatment. More recently, patients are making the journey themselves to save time and get there first! Many patients ring up the embassy or the volunteers on the previous day to reconfirm camp dates and also to arrange the visits of their co-workers. The date of the next camp is usually announced while the patients are leaving after their consultation and medication and they have become indispensable in the lives of the workers, as Devaraj, a patient with low back pain, tells H2H, “I was having shoulder and back pains. The SAI Doctor gave some medicines from India, which are very effective and my pain is becoming less. I am also doing exercises shown to me which is helping a lot.”

Enthusiastic SAI Doctors Give Lifesaving Treatment

Swami says, “Whoever comes seeking service from you is the one you must attend at that time. It will be your duty to give that person some satisfaction through your service, and that will be the best work that you can do at that time.”

Following this teaching, devotee doctors and volunteers attend to all patients without any distinction. They also carry out regular check ups and follow-ups. The patients who attend these camps are from different parts of the world with

different faiths. But they all have the common belief that it is Baba who is healing and curing them.

Caring for the Eyes

It is only through the gift of our eyes that we can see and visualize the creator in human form and His creations, and experience His Divine Grace. Another mission of the Serve and Inspire (SAI) group is to provide clear and healthy vision for those affected with eye ailments. The two dedicated devotee ophthalmologists regularly attend to fifteen to twenty-five patients per camp, but during the seventh medical camp, they treated a record number of sixty six. They corrected ocular ailments and provided free reading glasses to patients with presbiopia for near vision. "Before I was unable to read letters or newspapers, which I thought was due to my general weakness. I am happy that after checking my eyes, the SAI clinic doctor gave me glasses and now I can clearly read letters from home," said one joyful patient.

'Be A Patient Patient, Don't Be Impatient'

The message of quality medical service offered by the SAI devotee doctors and the medical team volunteers has been well received. It is touching to see patients starting to arrive at the embassy premises right from ten in the morning though the camp is scheduled at two in the afternoon. "Be a Patient, Patient - Don't be Impatient" has been a well followed maxim in all medical and awareness camps. Of different nationalities, the patients wait their turn patiently and help the more needy to be treated first. During eight medical camps, a record number of 236 patients were examined and provided treatment. Seeing the overwhelming response, His Excellency, the Indian ambassador, announced that medical camps should be carried out twice in a month, thereby fulfilling the needs of patients such as Koteswar Rao, a diabetic patient requiring frequent monitoring and treatment, who had remarked, "Is it possible for the embassy to invite the SAI doctors to organize medical camps once every 15 days for people like us?"

Care for the Soul

While in the waiting room, the patients were able to watch inspiring DVDs on Baba such as 'His Works', 'Pure Love' and videos of the Sports Day and the 80th Birthday celebrations.

His Excellency, the Indian Ambassador, addressed the patients on many occasions and advised them to keep away from bad thoughts, habits and bad company. His Excellency assured the patients of his continuous consular support and medical help through the SAI organization. He also stressed on the importance of *pranayama*, the art of breathing and enlightened them on the importance of vegetarian diet, meditation and *Namasmarana*, both in the morning and evening at a chosen time, emphasizing that SAI health care involves treatment of the body, mind and soul.

The number of patients treated in all the 12 medical camps

1 st Medical camp- 28 th October 2005	90
2 nd Medical camp- 25 th November 2005	122
3 rd Medical camp- 23 rd December 2005	105
4 th medical camp-20 th January 2006	120
5 th Medical camp-24 th February 2006	129
6 th medical camp- 7 th April 2006	160
7 th Medical camp-28 th April 2006	176
8 th Medical camp- 26 th may 2006	225
9 th Medical camp-23 rd June 2006	105
10 th medical camp-24 th July 2006	143
11 th Medical camp-25 th August 2006	124
12 th Medical camp- 29 th September 2006	195
TOTAL PATIENTS	1694

Blood Donation Seva

In addition to the monthly medical seva and Narayana seva, the Serve And Inspire group also conducts blood donation seva throughout the year. On the occasion of the 80th Birthday of Swami sixty three blood donations were received keeping in mind **Parapakaram Idam Sareeram** - the human body is gifted to render service to the needy.

Bhagavan says - blood donation is liquid love given to the needy. Love is the language that can be heard by the deaf and seen by the blind. SAI brothers and sisters feel they are donating this liquid love.

Till date thirty five 'blood donation days' have been held to mark the occasion of the 81st birthday of beloved Bhagavan. Apart from the mental satisfaction of helping a fellow human being, giving blood dilutes the donor's blood and improves blood circulation and prevents heart attacks.

The Serve And Inspire seva team thanks Bhagavan for giving them an opportunity to serve the needy and prays for His blessings to continue this noble service every year. We, at H2H, thank the devotees in UAE for lovingly sharing these stories, which we are sure, will inspire many of our readers to undertake similar ennobling tasks.

PRASHANTI DIARY

It was Kahlil Gibran who said, "You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give yourself that you truly give." Bhagavan, the ever compassionate Lord, truly gave Himself completely to His devotees in this sacred month of November, as expected huge masses thronged Prashanti Nilayam to witness the 81st Advent Year of the Avatar. The birthday festivities began with the Global Akhanda Bhajans starting on November 11th. This was followed by the Rathotsavam and the Ladies Day Celebrations. The 25th Convocation of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning witnessed a wonderful celebration, with the President of India as the Chief Guest. And devotees who had gathered on November 23 were rewarded with a double bonanza - the Darshan of the Lord in His sparkling white robe in the morning and a resplendent yellow robe in the evening of the birthday. Let us now go back to the beginning of the month.

November 11 and 12, 2006: Global Akhanda Bhajans

It was more than six decades ago, in the year 1940, when the Lord conveyed His first message to mankind through the medium of a bhajan: "Manasa Bhajare Gurucharanam ..." In fact, this bhajan was the seed that has today grown into a gigantic Sai movement. Singing Bhajans with full devotion is the simplest way of remembering God; and numerous are the instances where the devotees of the Lord have enjoyed His proximity through their soulful renderings.

It was December 18, 1994 that Bhagavan said in His Discourse:

"...During community singing, divine vibrations emerge sanctifying the whole atmosphere. The same result cannot be expected when one sings alone. Community singing promotes unity, which leads to purity and divinity. Today there is no unity, purity or divinity. What mankind needs today is unity based on the spiritual oneness of humanity..."

Let us take a moment and ponder on the positive effect that would result if people across the globe join together in singing His name. It was in this spirit of spreading divine vibrations, that Bhagavan started the Global Akhanda Bhajans by lighting the lamp in the Bhajan Hall at 6 P.M. on the 11th of November. Sai Organizations in every nation started the Akhanda Bhajans at 6.00 P.M. at their local time. In the evening, Bhagavan sat for more than an hour enjoying the bhajans and encouraging the students to sing with greater enthusiasm. Later in the evening and throughout the night many students, youth from various places in India and overseas devotees sang their choicest bhajans electrifying the atmosphere with spiritual vibrations and their devotional fervour.

The next morning Bhagavan blessed the students by listening to the bhajans for half an hour and out of His compassion, before He left, He instructed that apart from the usual bhajan singers others should also be given a chance to lead the bhajans, so that all are blessed with the priceless opportunity to be a part of the sacred event. In the evening Bhagavan again sat for more than an hour listening intently to the devotees' devotional offerings and exactly at 6

P.M. lit the camphor and marked the end of the twenty-four hour bhajans session. After the aarthi, all the devotees received the Prasadam – Tamarind rice and laddu (sweet) and returned carrying the blissful memories and sublime vibrations with them.

November 16, 2006: Distribution of Bicycles by Anantapur Campus

On this morning, as part of Bhagavan's 81st Birthday Celebrations, the Anantapur Campus of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, made a humble offering of their love and devotion to Bhagavan, in the form of bicycles for eighty-one deserving girl-students. These girls were selected – irrespective of caste or religion - from various educational institutions in Anantapur - such as the Government Girls' High School, the Guild of Service School, the PVKK College, the Sri Sathya Sai Junior College, etc.

Most of the girls belong to the 8th and 9th Standard with some of them being in 11th, and a couple of them in 12th Standard too. Many of these girls hailed from severely challenged economic backgrounds, yet had the ardent desire to come up in life. Therefore, they walked long distances to their schools and back everyday. The gift of these bicycles by Bhagavan meant the end of their daily drudgery of trudging such long distances. Some of the girls hailed from villages 8 to 15 kms. from Anantapur town - places like Kattakindapalli (which is 8 kms. from Anantapur), Narpala (10 kms.), Lingampalli (13 kms.) Bukkarayasamudrum (15 kms.) and Kothapalli (also 15 kms. from Anantapur).

On this eventful morning they came one by one, bowed down to Bhagavan, placed a rose at His Divine Lotus Feet, and then walked past the dais wheeling away the bicycles given to them. Bhagavan graciously acknowledged their pranams and blessed them all. One of the girls, Kum. Aswini from Ambedkar Nagar, studying in the 8th Standard of the Govt. Girls' High School was physically challenged and used to be carried by her classmates from one class to the other. A wheelchair awarded to her was a divine boon.

After the distribution of the bicycles was over, the Brass Band of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Anantapur Campus, played a few tunes that captivated the audience. The morning function was over by 9.30 am after which Bhagavan returned to the Interview Room. This was followed by Bhajans in the Mandir. Bhagavan took arati at around 10 am, and returned to the Yajur Mandir marking the conclusion of the morning program.

November 18, 2006: Rathotsavam and Inauguration of Sai Geeta's New Residence

The yearly Rathotsavam day marks the occasion when idols of deities are taken in a procession in the village, so that the village folk have an opportunity to have a closer look of their Gods and offer worship. This morning Bhagavan came for Darshan at 7.30 am. The procession with bedecked Sai Gita, Bhagavan's pet elephant, was waiting at the front gate of the Sai Kulwant Hall. As Swami's car reached her, He paused and fed her with apples from the car.

It was a sight to savour for all, but especially touching for the small children who were able to witness this.

After those few minutes with Sai Geeta, Swami continued His Darshan round. Swami's car came to the Verandah and He alighted, went to the stage area and sat there for ten minutes listening to the Vedic chants and the Panchavadyam by the students, along with the village band. Later He went inside the Bhajan Hall where the palanquins with the Rama-Lakshmana-Sita-Hanuman and Krishna idols were kept ready decorated with flowers. Dressed in orange dhotis the Vedam group boys chanted the sacred hymns in the Bhajan Hall. The priest brought the ceremonial thread to be blessed by Bhagavan and then adorned Sita devi with it, and then waved camphor in front of the palanquins.

This marked the beginning of the procession, with the Vedam group leading the palanquins carried by specially trained Sevadals from Hyderabad, followed by the Bhajan group. The devotees gathered in Sai Kulwant Hall were in for a pleasant surprise when Swami followed the idols right up to the Gopuram gate, granting Darshan to all. The procession went to the Pedda Venkappa Raju Kalyanamantapam which was the former Bhajan Mandir. Led by the Naadaswaram, Vedam and Bhajan groups, the procession paused every twenty feet where many devotees who had gathered came with their offerings of coconuts and flowers. Bhagavan returned to the interview room till the procession returned a few minutes after nine o'clock. The Bhajan group members started singing once the Rama statue was reinstalled in the Bhajan Hall. Bhagavan came in soon after, sat for a few Bhajans, accepted Arati and then returned to His residence at 9.45.

But the morning program did not end there. At 10:45 A.M. Bhagavan gave more joy to His devotees as He went to inaugurate the new residence for Sai Geeta which is located next to the Sri Sathya Sai Space Theatre (Planetarium). The Planetarium grounds were beautifully decorated with buntings and flower arrangements. Bhagavan alighted right next to Sai Gita who was expectantly standing at the entrance of her new building. After feeding her, Swami went into the building and stayed there for some time, while some people connected with the construction presented Him with bouquets. A priest made puja and broke a coconut in front of Sai Gita. Bhagavan blessed clothes and food prasadam to be distributed to the workers involved in the constructions who were sitting close by and also sent watches to be distributed to them. Sai Gita then entered her new abode, and Swami fed her again with apples and sugarcane. Bhagavan finally left at 11.10 A.M accepting Arati and blessing some ladies who were seated near the entrance.

The evening programme commenced at 3:45pm when Swami arrived at the tastefully decorated Sai Kulwant Hall. Much to the joy of the devotees gathered there, He took centre stage and was keenly observing and occasionally even chanting vedam. At 4:10 He asked for the evening program to begin and was greeted by our Sai brothers and sisters from Russia with their traditional folk musical presentation. They used a rare traditional harp, called a psaltery, for the programme, which featured an eleven-year old treble

along with other singers, an accordion and guitars. Bhagavan enjoyed the programme including the boy's rendering of the catchy "Kalinka". The wonderful performance lasted a blissful forty minutes, following which Swami blessed the whole performing group with photographs. The intimate interaction between Swami and the group was a treat for the eyes. Bhagavan then asked the bhajan boys to start bhajans. After fifty minutes of enchanting bhajans Swami signaled for aarathi and then proceeded to His residence.

November 19, 2006: Ladies Day Celebrations

This day is much anticipated by the lady devotees every year in memory of Mother Easwaramma, who stands as a crest jewel of womanhood. On this landmark day, the Sai Kulwant Hall bedecked with flowers of every shade appeared verily heaven on earth. Swami entered the Sai Kulwant Hall at 8:00 a.m. led by the girls of the bagpipe band of the Sri Sathya Sai Primary school, amidst vedam chanting by the senior girl students. As Bhagavan entered the Hall, the strains of the song "E Malik Tere Bande Hum" filled the air. Bhagavan commenced the morning's programme by lighting the ceremonial lamp. Children dressed in different traditional costumes and carrying flags of different countries representing women throughout the world, paid homage to Bhagavan by placing flower bouquets in front of Him.

The first item of the morning was a bagpipe musical performance by the primary school band. This was followed by a ten minute choir medley by Sai Youth of the UK. There were two speeches, one in Telugu and the other in English, by Mrs. Vasumathi Bhaskar Rao and Dr. Ronne Marantz respectively. Mrs. Vasumathi, a Mahila Seva dal convenor from Andhra Pradesh, spoke about her experiences of seva working shoulder to shoulder with Mother Easwaramma. Dr. Ronne is a member of the international Sri Sathya Sai Education Committee and Principal, Scarsdale Public Schools, New York. She spoke of how her interactions with Swami and His EHV programme helped her implement value education in her school. It was nearing 9 o'clock as the speeches concluded; Bhagavan then received the Mangala Aarthi and retired to His room.

The celebrations continued in the afternoon when Swami came for Darshan at 3:10 p.m. Lamps were lit in ordered rows in front of Swami's chair which received His appreciative looks. Bhagavan came to the verandha at 3.20, and a small girl from the Primary school dressed for their dance programme later in the evening went up to Him and gave Him a card. Bhagavan responded by giving her a chain! At 3:30 p.m., Bhagavan delighted the lady devotees by signalling for silk sarees to be distributed. Little did anyone expect that He would personally gift those to about four hundred ladies! Out of His immeasurable love, our Lord deigned to do so, even though it took a whole forty-five minutes to distribute, grant Padanamaskar to each lady and speak a few words to each one of them. Their beaming faces said it all. After the elderly lady devotees, it was now the turn of the little flowers of the Primary School. After the saree distribution He proceeded to the centre of the stage, indicating the Primary School children to begin their dance. The primary school girls presented an enchanting dance programme at 4:30 P.M. In

appreciation, Swami came down from the dais and took photographs with them. When Bhagavan came back, the Priya sisters went up to Bhagavan for His blessings for their concert. The scintillating Carnatic vocals of sisters Shanmukhapriya and Haripriya wafted in the Sai Kulwant Hall for the next hour. Their musical rendering befitted and complemented the sublime mood of the evening. At six, Bhagavan asked for Arati and just as the Arati was drawing to a close, students brought prasadam for Bhagavan's blessings, and after the distribution was over, He retired to His residence.

November 20, 2006: Annual Day of Easwaramma Women's Welfare Trust

A day after Ladies Day, the Eswaramma Women's Welfare Trust, which was formed by Bhagavan in memory of Mother Easwaramma, celebrated its annual day. As Bhagavan's car was ushered in the Sai Kulwant Hall at 3.45 pm, the village percussion troupe began their homage to the Lord. The function began with bicycle distribution and Bhagavan moved down from the stage and sat in the centre of the hall and watched as bicycles were given to economically disadvantaged girls. This was followed by the Chakkabhajan dance (a south Indian traditional dance) by small children from the village. Bhagavan called the smallest boy from the group and to everyone's surprise materialised a chain for him.

One more village dance followed – this time performed by the elders. They were dressed in black costumes fringed with peacock feathers. The dance program ended at 4:40 P.M. after which some of the village women presented short speeches and songs, expressing their gratitude to Bhagavan for all that He has done for them. Mrs. Chetana Raju, the organiser of the function, then announced the distribution of material for mothers and mothers-to-be in the surrounding villages, a thousand of whom had gathered in Bhagavan's presence. Bhagavan handed over the material to representatives from each village. Each "token of love" comprised of water purifiers and bags containing utensils and toys for the children. The doctors who were working for mother and child welfare with the Mobile Hospital were also presented with gifts of grace by Bhagavan.

The Mobile Hospital is a great service activity started by Bhagavan wherein doctors travel to far away villages with a fully equipped bus that has state of the art equipment to perform various medical tests. The idea for this noble work emerged when Bhagavan asked what could be done for the sick who are unable to come to the Super Speciality Hospital on account of severe health problems, acute financial crisis or other handicaps. The solution Bhagavan gave was very simple. He said that if they cannot come here then we should go to them. Thus started the Mobile Hospital that reaches out to the sick and needy and serves them with timely medical aid.

The next item in line was a video projected on a large screen in the centre of the hall. But this required the daylight to dim further. So, Bhagavan instructed His students to present their dance. A few days ago, Bhagavan had indicated the Institute dance group to be ready to dance on the 20th, so they were dressed in costumes waiting for the Divine command. Bhagavan came to the

veranda and watched as the boys danced for the next forty minutes. We were all fortunate to watch the programme which featured praises to Lord Ganesha followed by a Yakshagana presenting the Krishna story, a Dashavatara dance and finally a dance on Bhagavan's glory, after which Swami graciously called up the boys for a group photo.

Then a video entitled "The One Sri Sathya Sai" began. Beginning with the story of creation, this twenty minute film traced Man's fall from his divine origins and his final redemption by Mother Sai's Love. The video reiterated that God descends so that Man can ascend and realise his innate true divinity. Bhagavan accepted Arati at 6.20 pm and returned to His residence.

November 22, 2006: The Twenty-fifth Convocation of the Institute

This year marks the 25th convocation of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning and on this grand occasion Bhagavan gave yet another momentous gift to the students in the form of an Olympic standard indoor stadium. The Sri Sathya Sai Centre for Sports was constructed by Larsen and Toubro in a mere 122 days - yet another miracle from Bhagavan.

Nadaswaram music filled the Sai Kulwant Hall from around 7:00 A.M. as devotees waited for Bhagavan to appear for morning Darshan. There was an impressive array of international sportsmen and athletes who had come to celebrate the inauguration: the national volleyball teams from India and Sri Lanka; the national basketball teams from India and Indonesia; and Olympic athletes and gymnasts from Greece and Switzerland.

Bhagavan arrived at 8.20 A.M and sat onstage for half an hour listening to the Vedic chants. Then He slowly walked towards the interview room, glancing benignly at all on the way. Bhajans began at nine with the UK youth group singers alternating with the regular bhajan singers.

The afternoon programme was the inauguration of the Sri Sathya Sai Centre for Sports, which was followed by the 25th Convocation of the Deemed University - Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. Televisions had been arranged in the Sai Kulwant Hall, the Higher Secondary School and the Hill View Stadium so that all those who could not be in the Indoor Stadium could witness the event. The Chief Guest for the function was the President of India, His Excellency Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Other dignitaries included Governors of the States of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka along with the Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

The President went to the mandir first to have the Darshan and blessings of Bhagavan. At 3.30 pm, Bhagavan arrived at the venue accompanied by the President. The Centre for Sports has a domed building at the entrance, with a tasteful exhibition commemorating twenty five years of the Sathya Sai University. The inauguration of this Commemorative building was performed by the President after which Swami and the President then climbed into a golf cart and took a small trip around the building and then entered the stadium.

Then they took a full round as a special song sung by the students specially for Bhagavan's 81st Birthday was played.

As Swami and the President approached, distinguished sportsmen and the teams participating in the inaugural functions were introduced - Cricketer Kapil Dev, Olympic shooter Rajyavardhan Rathod, Badminton whiz Prakash Padukone, the basketball and volleyball teams and officials. The Institute brass band, as always, played melodious tunes as the Convocation procession joined the Divine Chancellor.

Bhagavan and the Chief Guest went to the gallery to take their seats in the special stands above the entrance. The Vice-Chancellor then spoke a few words about Dr. and Mrs. Ram Setty who had endowed the indoor stadium. Dr. Ram Setty then expressed his gratitude to Bhagavan in a short speech. Sri Kapil Dev, the living legend of Indian Cricket, gave a brief talk, complementing the world class facility built in just 122 days. The function began with a ten minute video presentation "Life is a Game" by filmmaker Manishankar. Then the sports events started.

First, there was a short gymnastics display by the Greek and Swiss athletes who were actually recipients of gold medals at Olympics. They had been praying to Bhagavan for many years to allow them to perform in His Presence and that afternoon it was a dream realised for them. Next, was an international volleyball match, India vs Sri Lanka - the second match in Sri Lanka's tour of India. The first match was won by India in Bangalore. The second match which was played in the Divine Presence lasted forty minutes and was also won by India in straight sets 25-15, 25-13. The Indonesian and Indian basketball teams offered their pranaams to Bhagavan - their match was slotted for later.

The 25th Convocation of the Institute began at 5.35 after a short break. The students seated themselves in the centre of the stadium in their ceremonial robes and hats. Waiting for Bhagavan to arrive, our most admired President, who is ever enthusiastic to speak to youth, took a few moments off to interact with the students onstage who were to start the proceedings with Vedam chanting. The Convocation ceremony formally began when the Divine Chancellor, in His sweet and blissful voice, declared the Convocation open. The Vice-Chancellor next thanked the President profusely for his visit and then enumerated the achievements of the Institute in various spheres in the last twenty-five years. This was followed by the Chief Guest's thirty-five minute Convocation Address. As mentioned by the President, his convocation address became available on his website five minutes after he concluded his speech.

Bhagavan then rose to deliver His Benedictory message, in which He exhorted the students to emulate Tenali Ramakrishna and know the inner meaning of the letters, words and phrases they use. "The main root words we must learn are just five: Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi, Prema and Ahimsa," Swami said. After Bhagavan's Discourse, Sri Mandolin U. Srinivas accompanied by his brother U. Rajesh and the illustrious percussionist A.

Shivamani gave a half hour concert. The function concluded with the National Anthem at 8.05 P.M. after which Bhagavan returned to His residence.

November 23, 2006: 81st Birthday Celebrations

The grand day finally arrived – the Birthday of the One who is beyond Birth and Death. Devotees queued outside the Ganesh Gate from early morning itself. Thousands of devotees who were not able to enter the hall packed all the approach roads. The Mandir verandah was lined with birthday cakes of different sizes and designs.

At 8.10 A.M. the packed procession began from Bhagavan's residence - the Anantapur girls' band, the primary school girls' bagpipes, primary school boys chanting vedam, primary school boys' recorders and drums, the Institute Brass Band and finally the Vedam group with Poorna Kumbham. All these fortunate and eager youngsters were able to take part in the Lord's procession, as Bhagavan, dressed in a shining white robe, seated in the special Lamborghini open vehicle entered the Hall. Bhagavan took a full round and reached the Mandir verandah where He was greeted by President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.

At 8.30 A.M. Bhagavan sat onstage with the President beside Him. Swami indicated that the President could address the gathering. Dr. Kalam greeted everyone on Bhagavan's 81st Birthday, and presented the Telugu translation of a poem written by him, to be read out by Prof. Anil Kumar.

The President's Poem

Earth shining in Glory

Our Milky Way is shining, with millions and millions of stars.
Our beloved star Sun, along with eight other planets around.
Orbits the Milky Way, finishing one orbit in two hundred and fifty million years.
Somewhere in the galaxy, echoed a voice in surprise. "See there the Earth shining in glory: how come it has its light?"
A sweet and soft reply comes:
"It is not the mere light, It is the light of knowledge, It is the light of service, It is the light of peace,
Specially radiating from Prashanti Nilayam,
When Earth completes its eightieth orbit Carrying a great soul in its bosom."

After the reading, President Kalam, with Baba's blessings, took His leave. The function continued, with the All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisations, Sri. V. Srinivasan, praying for Bhagavan's Birthday message.

Bhagavan stood up at 9 o'clock and began His hour long Discourse. Bhagavan spoke about the devotion and love of Mother Eswaramma and Karnam Subbamma. Swami told the students that whatever they did in life, they should never forget God. He even blessed all gathered that they would

never forget God. Bhagavan concluded His Divine Discourse with the bhajan - 'Bhajan Bina Sukha Shanti Nahin', He accepted Aarati and went into the interview room. Later Swami cut cakes on the verandah and retired to His residence.

The Birthday evening program was scheduled at two locations: first in the Indoor Stadium and later in the Sai Kulwant hall. Bhagavan arrived at the Sri Sathya Sai Centre for Sports at 4.15 pm, resplendent in a yellow robe. As He entered the stadium, a song performed by the students filled the air, and all of Swami's students joined in the chorus as Bhagavan alighted from the car and went towards the badminton courts which were ready for the first match: a forty minute doubles exhibition match between India and Indonesia. India recovered after losing the first set to win the match two sets to one. Bhagavan watched the matches with keen interest and great delight.

Bhagavan then moved in His chair to the other half of the stadium which had the basketball court, for the entertaining display by the Harlem Globetrotters. The Harlem Globetrotters are a band of highly talented stunt basketball players who tour the world as ambassadors of goodwill. Till now they have toured across 183 countries. This evening, the New York Nationals were their opponents in a friendly demonstration match. The proceedings began with the mascot Globie (dressed up in a costume with a globe of the Earth as a head) endearing the audience with his antics. He arranged a musical chairs contest with some primary school boys and made everyone laugh. The Nationals and the Globetrotters then took over, dancing with the basketball as if it were glued to their hands. After a few minutes of demonstrations set to music, the game play began. During timeouts, the players kept up the entertaining mood by involving some children. First a small girl from the Primary School was chosen and a Harlem player helped her balance a rotating basketball on her fingertip and later gifted her a tiny ball. Similarly they picked a small boy and asked him to shoot the ball into basket - when he came out with flying colours they gifted him with a Harlem Globetrotters t-shirt.

The players also created humorous interludes, horsing around with a pail of water which finally landed on the referee! Their programme concluded after an hour, after which Swami gave Darshan to all the players moving by them as they lined up. Then Bhagavan had group photos taken with them and also presented them with watches. Bhagavan even materialised two rings, one for an official and the other for a player. Bhagavan then left for the Sai Kulwant hall. Arriving at the Mandir at 6.45 pm, Swami asked the artistes Parveen Sultana and Mandolin Srinivas if they were ready for their programme. First was Begum Parveen Sultana's forty minute Hindustani classical vocal concert. Mandolin Srinivas, once again accompanied by his brother and A. Shivamani, came next. The musical fete concluded at 8.20 P.M. with Mangala Arati to Bhagavan, bringing the curtain down on the day - but not the celebrations!

November 24, 2006: The Sai Symphony Orchestra

The Birthday Celebrations continued on the next day with the Sai Symphony Orchestra. The programme was presented by 50 musicians from 22 countries. Just as in the Gurupournima celebrations, Klaus Maurer conducted and Paul Erhard introduced each piece. The repertoire comprised of masterpieces composed by Ludwig van Beethoven, Joaquin Rodrigo, Mauro Giuliani, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky - to mention a few names. The Symphony began with a Ganesha bhajan, and then moved on to present seven enthralling compositions, including some where the guitar featured prominently. All the themes reflected gaiety and celebration. After the hour-long concert Bhagavan asked for prasadam to be distributed to the participants and then coming down from the verandha, blessed them with group photographs and a few minutes of Divine interaction.

November 25, 2006: Drama by Italian Sai Devotees

After Bhagavan came for Darshan this evening, He enquired about "the drama" from Dr. Michael Goldstein, the Prasanthi Council chairman, which came as an unexpected blessing for the Italian group. They immediately rushed to get dressed and make the sets ready in the Sai Kulwant Hall. At 5.15P.M., Bhagavan came out of the interview room, and five minutes later, the Italian group started the drama in which some Argentinian devotees also participated. The forty minute presentation was on Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, with a voice-over of the English translation of selected extracts. The poet Dante Alighieri wrote about the journey from hell to heaven, with purgatory being a stage between hell and heaven where the soul is purified. The topics of the three canticles were compared to Bhagavan's teachings so as to highlight the common aspects between them. The participants did an admirable job of presenting the abstract themes with expressive gestures. At the end of the programme, Bhagavan gave some of the members chocolates, and then asked for the rest of the chocolates to be distributed. As prasadam was being distributed, Bhagavan retired for the day with Arati.

Thus concluded the wonderful celebrations of Bhagavan's 81st Birthday. We will be back with stories of other events and Christmas Celebrations next month. Till then, Sairam.

SWAMI AND ME

THE GREATEST OF ALL...IS LOVE

This is the transcription of Mr. John Behner's talk during Christmas, 2005 in the divine presence of Bhagavan Baba in the Kulwant Hall. Mr. Behner is the Zonal Chairman of International Sai Organisation, Zone-II (Latin America).

My loving Pranams, at Bhagavan's glorious Feet. Dear brothers, sisters, and students. I am here exactly 25 years to the day, to tell you our experience that occurred at Christmas time in 1979. Actually when we first read about Swami, my wife said to me that if we had lived at the time of Christ wouldn't we have gone to see Him? Of course, I agreed.

That year the celebration was in Whitefield, Bangalore and the students presented a drama on the life of the Jesus Christ after which Swami gave His Christmas message. And after Swami's discourse, the boys came with large containers of rice delicacy which was served on plates.

Served by the Divine

It was so special those days as Swami Himself served every single one of us in that auditorium. After my wife received a plate, she said "Thank you" and Swami immediately said, "It is My duty". Now imagine this: we come to India, to see the Divine in person and He is serving us a plate of food and saying that it is His duty!

At that time I was the General Manager of a multi-national corporation. I went to meetings with the Chairman of the Board in New York and he had never served me a plate of food! In fact it was difficult to give him a handshake. So, this incident with Swami actually was the turning point for us and our family; it literally started us on our spiritual journey.

Jesus' Life

We also know that Jesus Christ was teaching the same thing when He told us "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." And this idea of serving others is not something new but we do have to put it into practice. We actually know little about the life of Jesus. It's strange because we know a lot about Lord Krishna, we know a lot about Lord Rama, but only Swami can tell us many of the details of Christ's life.

The little we do know about Jesus when He was young was that He came to India when He was still a teenager and He must have come looking for spiritual information, but we don't know too much about the details. You could ask whether Jesus had a guru? Rama had a guru, Krishna had a guru and Jesus must have had a guru but what was Jesus learning? The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* were all available 2000 years ago. Wouldn't Jesus' experience have been very similar to our experience when we come here to Prashanti Nilayam? Wouldn't He have

learned many of the same things of what we are learning? I am sure that's what happened.

Jesus learned that Man has the potential to discover his true divine nature and to have a personal relationship with God, and when Jesus took this message back to Jerusalem and started preaching, this gave a lot of hope to many people, especially the poor. They were used to dealing with a very structured theology with intermediaries between them and God, and they were so happy to hear this message. Fishermen, tax collectors, and even a soldier became Jesus' followers and some of them His disciples.

Now Jesus was seen as a revolutionary I would guess, because His message was so wonderful for so many people, but it actually turned your attention away from the structured high power religion that people were following. So then the priests went to the Roman authorities and were able to convince them that Jesus should be crucified.

Jesus' Teachings were Preserved by the Essenes

After the crucifixion of Christ, we know that His disciples went out and they preached and told people what His message was, going to different cities and towns. And we also know that James, one of the brothers of Jesus, was the head of the community of the Essenes and he was the main person in charge of Jesus' teachings. The Essenes were a small group of people who lived in the desert. They were disciplined, vegetarians and they respected women. So, these people were given the job of writing down many of Jesus' teachings, the manuscripts of which were at some point hidden in caves in the desert.

As time passed many of Jesus' disciples and followers were killed or died, and when James was killed, about 30 years after Christ was crucified, His teachings were no longer available and they stayed hidden for almost 2000 years. In 1948, the caves were discovered by a shepherd boy and the manuscripts which came to light came to be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

After studying these texts we can understand that one of the things that Christ believed in was the importance of considering the body as a Temple and that it was necessary to keep the body clean, to have good dietary habits. Vegetarian food was extremely important in order to be able to have communication with the divine.

Faith, Hope And Love

I would like to read a passage on the teachings of Jesus on Love, from His greatest missionary, St Paul, who writes:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

Thus, we can see how close Swami's teachings are to the teachings of Jesus.

ELEVATING OUR INTENTIONS AND ACTIONS....THE SAI WAY

By Dr. M Sainath

This is the transcription of the talk delivered by Dr. Sainath in the divine presence of Bhagavan Baba during the Dasara Celebrations on October 12, 2005.

I offer my most prayerful pranams at the Divine Lotus Feet, revered elders, sisters, and brothers.

What Is Peace?

A soldier once went to a Zen Master and said, "Master, I have fought many a pitched battle. I have undergone the rigors and the training and the discipline of being a soldier. Yet, I do not know what peace is. Pray! Tell me what is hell, what is heaven?" The Master looked at the soldier and asked, "Who are you?" And the soldier said, "I am a samurai!"

The Master then exploded, and asked, "You! A samurai? Who on this earth would take you as a soldier?" This infuriated the samurai. He drew out his sharp sword and rushed at the Zen Master. The Zen Master calmly said, "Here opens the gate of hell." The samurai then realized in whose presence he was, sheathed his sword, bowed down in humility and surrendered. And the Master then said, "Here opens the gate of heaven."

If there were to be a moral to this story, it is that we are the architects of our own hell, and our own heaven. When we contract the world into ourselves, and take in all the dualities that the world is associated with, in the process we open the gates of our hell. But when we expand to encompass the entire world, we see unity in diversity and open the gates of our heaven.

The Right Direction of Action

At one point of time, Bhagavan identified six important qualities that a devotee needs to have to attain peace and happiness. As stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, He said:

"These are: *Anapeksha*, not desiring any fruits;
Suchihi, purity of purpose and action;
Dakshaha, determination;
Udhasino, detachment;
Ghatavytaha, not pondering over the past;
and most importantly, giving up all pomp and show."

A devotee went up to Bhagavan and said, "Bhagavan, in these days how are we to develop these six qualities?" And Bhagavan said: "Very simple! You dedicate all your actions to God with purity of heart and action."

Action is verily the road to success but the main question to ponder here is in which direction? Many of us are so busy climbing the ladder of success that we do not have the time to see if the ladder is propped against the right wall or not, before it is too late! On this holy day, in this august assembly, I would like to share with you all, a few of my thoughts and experiences on this point of action and progress.

The Intention Behind Action

The first point I would like to touch on relates to what my elder brother spoke on just before me: the purity of action. Bhagavan was once saying, while illustrating this very point: "You can clap your hands to keep in tune with the bhajans; you can also clap your hands to squat mosquitoes." A patient is forced to fast because of the illness that is afflicting him, but a devotee fasts with the purpose of penitence. Which action gives merit, which action does not?

Bhagavan lays enormous stress on the intention behind the action. For one convocation ceremony of the Institute, the late President of India, Dr. S. D. Sharma, was the chief guest. During the interval between the convocation and the cultural drama program which the students were to put on, it started to rain. Bhagavan sent word to the President of India: "Since it is raining, you may choose not to come, it is all right." But Bhagavan was going and the President, who was a very ardent devotee of Bhagavan, said, "How can I stay back when Bhagavan is going?" And so he too went, even though it was raining. And in the car he asked: "Bhagavan, why are You choosing to go when it is raining?" The answer was very illustrative.

Bhagavan said: "For the last twenty days my boys have been struggling, giving up their food, giving up their sleep with the sole intention of making me happy, with the soul intention of getting one word out of my mouth 'Chaala bagundi'. When they have worked so hard for my sake, how can I let them down? Rain or no rain I am going!"

This illustration is very important in the sense, that it drives home the very important point: *The intent is as important - if not more - than the content.*

'You Look to Me, I Look to You'

We now go over to this next point. There was a time during darshan when Bhagavan picked me out of the students and He named the place where my father was posted at that time and said, "Such a small place, but so many dangers! But, you don't worry, Swami's protection is always there." I was perplexed! What danger? What protection?

And so I went back to the hostel, I rang up home and they told me that recently there was a spate of robberies in the locality and every house was falling victim to these thieves. And for the next few days, I was very upset. Worrying what was happening there, I was unable to concentrate on my work.

Sometime later Bhagavan picked me out once again and asked, "*Vachaara?*" (Did they come?). I asked Swami, "Who?" and He said, "*Dongalu! Inka Evaru?*" (Thieves, who else?)

I was alarmed! Thieves! Swami said: "Don't worry, everything is all right!" Once again I called home and this time I got the news that the previous night there had been a break-in. The glass panes of one of the windows were removed and the wire mesh was cut! But what was surprising was that not a single soul had entered through the window. And when I went back in the evening to thank Bhagavan, He said: "*Naku Thelsuney!* (I know) You did your duty here, I did mine there."

This is an example of the mercy that God has for us when we focus all our actions on pleasing Him - He takes care of all our needs. There is nothing to worry about and that is an important aspect of all our activities.

The True Riches

For illustrating the third point, I would like to take up an example which Bhagavan often uses. This is about King Bhatruhari, who had once performed a great sacrifice. And in the process of the sacrifice, he had given away everything that he had: his clothes, his riches, even his kingdom. At that point of time, one renunciate came and said, "Oh king! What will you give me?" And the king said, "I have only my kingdom left. You can take it." And the renunciate took the kingdom.

He then told the king, "Oh king! You have nothing now! You have lost everything. You have been reduced to a pauper. You have a family to maintain. Shall I give you something so that you can start your life all over again?" King Bhatruhari, a very wise man, said, "**Master, what I had given away in the form of riches and gold was never mine. I was a custodian of the people's wealth. What is really mine is my own Character, my own Strength, my own Truthfulness, my own Bliss. It remains with me, no one can take it.** And regarding me being a pauper, how can I be a pauper when all of you have blessed me for giving and sacrificing so much? I have not lost anything, I have gained much."

What really matters is the strength within us - the strength of our character. As Bhagavan says: "To depend on the ephemeral to gain the eternal is a folly of the highest order."

Acting in the Omnipresence

For the next point, which I consider to be perhaps the most important point to be held in mind while we go about our lives, I would like use an illustration from my own life. Those were the times when I was doing my Ph D; I was working very late in my laboratory and at that point of time there were some important sets of readings which I had to take once every couple of hours. I had taken the last set, and since it was very late at night, I was relaxing. When suddenly some unknown force threw me literally out of bed to rush into

the lab like a madman, and there in front of my eyes I found catastrophe unfolding!

I had forgotten to tighten the clamp or the pressure was too much on the water cooling pump circuit, and the clamp was slowly unfolding with the result that the water pipe was coming out right in front of my eyes. Before I could do anything, water was spewing all over the lab where there were open circuits and expensive instruments! **I did not know what to do. I just shouted, “Sai Ram!” and went in. In my eagerness to undo the damage, I did not see the water pool below me on the floor and before I knew what was happening, I was being electrocuted. I did not know how long I was there; but I did feel some powerful hand pull me back! I recovered, I undid the damage but the matter did not end there.**

I always used to feel that among all the laboratories in the Institute, the nuclear physics lab was one place where Bhagavan had - please note this word - *directly* never inaugurated. And I used to pray to Swami, “Swami, why is it that you never came into this lab?”

It was a couple of days after this accident, when one of the student-brothers came from Brindavan and he wanted to see me. He had a message for me. I came to see him and he said, “I have message for you from Swami. Swami wants to know how you are.” I had never informed anybody about all that had happened. Swami wanted to know how I was. Swami had even said, He told me: “You need to be more careful and not careless.”

A few days later, when I went to Bhagavan to offer my gratitude in person, Swami put His hand on my shoulder and said, “Why do you want to invite me to a place when I am already there?” If our actions do not take into consideration the Omniscience and Omnipotence of God, it is not going to get us anywhere. Two actions performed with different intentions, are bound to invoke two different reactions. An act which is done considering the Omnipotence and Omniscience of Bhagavan is bound to get the desired result.

Spontaneous Acts of Love

I would like to conclude with a very touching incident. When I was passing out of the higher secondary school, my headmistress told us: **“You cannot distribute the perfume of joy to others without getting a few drops of it on yourself.”** And this was illustrated to me - much later I would say - when I was in the hostel.

All of us are with Bhagavan and we have been touched by Him in various means. There was a time when the department of physics was holding its viva for the second year post graduate students. One batch had finished their viva, and the second batch was scheduled to be held the next day. It was quite late in the night and the photocopying room is right next to mine in the hostel. I heard some activity going on in there, so I just walked in to see what was

happening. I discovered that all those students who had finished their viva were very busy photocopying and binding their books and reports.

I asked, "What are you doing here?" And they said, "Sir, we are binding and photocopying the reports of the batch which is going tomorrow." Then I said, "Why aren't they doing it?" Their answer made me very proud - very proud because I had brothers who had taken that spring of Love from Bhagavan, who had learnt to act without anybody coaxing them. **Their reply was: "Sir, we sent them away. This is a menial job; we did not want them to get disturbed with this. We had already finished our viva, and as they had not yet finished, we sent them away to study; we are sitting and doing it here."**

No one had forced them to do it. No one had asked them to do it; they had done it spontaneously. That spontaneous expression of love which is characteristic of Bhagavan is what we need to see here. Each one of us sitting here has been touched by Bhagavan in various ways - direct, indirect, with our knowledge, or without our knowledge. But the fact remains that the spark of His love is there somewhere within each one of us. And the greatest activity which we can do is uncover this spark.

Speaking on an occasion Bhagavan said: "The syllable *Ra* stands for destruction. *Nara*, or man, therefore stands for the indestructible. Man is basically indestructible, he is Eternal. But the syllable *Ka* when you add it to *Nara* becomes *Naraka* or hell. And this *Ka*," Bhagavan said, "represents *Kaama* and *Krodha*. When we associate ourselves with this *Ka* syllable of *Kaama* and *Krodha*, what was Eternal now becomes extinguishable, we become destructible."

On this auspicious conclusion of Dussehra celebrations, this is the greatest sacrifice that we need to do: **The sacrifice of excluding this *Ka* or *Kaama* and *Krodha* from our activities, purifying our hearts, performing our actions with this purified heart, and then offering it at the Lotus Feet.**

Jai Sai Ram!

HOW THE DIVINE DREW THE DUTIFUL DENTIST

By Dr. Digish Patel

Dr. Digish Patel from the United Kingdom is a dental surgeon at Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Whitefield. He is also a visiting dental surgeon to a Dental Clinic in Birmingham, UK and to the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prashanthi Nilayam.

I offer this brief account of my experiences and life after meeting Bhagavan Baba, with love and humility at the lotus Feet of our dearest Lord of Love, Baba. There are billions of experiences relating to Bhagavan Baba and how lives have been touched and transformed by Him. Oceans of joy and light have been given by Baba to so many people in the past eighty years.

I was brought up and educated in the UK graduating as a dental surgeon in 1991. But, my real life began in 1993 when I first met Bhagavan Baba - until then it was as if I was asleep.

It was December 1993, about three weeks before Christmas in the UK. I had gone out to work and later met some friends. For some reason, I couldn't sleep and was sitting up in bed in the early hours of the morning. (I usually have no trouble sleeping and can even sleep standing up!). I found myself contemplating on what I should do with my life; I was not satisfied with my job or my recreation time. I was thinking about the meaning of life and my mind was full of worries.

An Astonishing Visitation Out of the Blue

Just then, in my room, I had the darshan of Bhagavan Baba! He looked extremely beautiful and effulgent and emanated the most aromatic fragrance. I was totally shocked. There was Baba standing in my room in Tamworth, Staffordshire (UK), wearing an orange robe and appearing most resplendent!

I knew who He was as my family always keeps a photo of Baba in our shrine and my mother prays to Him everyday. But I never followed her example. So you can imagine how I felt: I knew that Baba was thousands of miles away in Puttaparthi and yet He had manifested in my room. Baba broke my stunned silence by saying 'Come' and I somehow found the courage to ask, 'When?' He replied, 'Come at Christmas'. Then He just disappeared.

The next morning I woke up and doubted the whole experience. I thought maybe my friends had intoxicated me or I might need psychiatric help! I looked in my medical reference books and I searched for symptoms of paranoia and schizophrenia.

A Fast Flight to Parthi

Who could I ask about this? But nevertheless I decided I should go to India. I found it very difficult to get a flight to India and those around me were surprised that I was suddenly interested to go to India. My family had left India seventy years ago and there was no family out there. But I surely wanted to go. When I contacted the travel agents, they said, "All flights to India are fully reserved." I was thinking, 'If Baba wants me to go to India, He had better arrange it.'

That day I finished treating a patient who told me that he was a travel agent and had many tickets to Mumbai. He asked me, "Do you know of anyone who wants to go to India?" I was amazed. They were cheap tickets to Mumbai on an airline that would take 24 hours to get there, stopping all over the Middle East. I grabbed the offer. (Since then Bhagavan always looks after me on all my flight dates and I even get free upgrades - He is too kind!).

I found Baba's address from my mother and left for Mumbai. I reached Mumbai after the long flight and then bought a return ticket to Bangalore. At Bangalore airport I got a taxi to Puttaparthi and within minutes of entering the Prasanthi Nilayam gates I was in the sheds (community halls). It really felt that somebody wanted me in Puttaparthi fast! The shed was full of devotees from eighty different countries; some places I hadn't even heard of and people of different religions too.

An Unforgettable First Darshan

The devotee next to me told me a little about Baba and took me to darshan. We lined up and when we were asked to go in I found myself in the first line. My friend from the shed was very happy that we were first. You see there was a token system and tokens were picked from a bag for each row. I was mentally calculating that there were thirty lines with thirty tokens and the probability of this happening was a one-in-thirty chance.

It was December 23, 1993. There were thousands gathered as it was two days before Christmas. The ashram was getting ready for the celebrations. That morning it was very quiet, the sun was shining in a blue sky and we were seated on the sands opposite the most beautiful mandir I had ever seen in my life. To this day, I feel the cool breeze that caressed me; and even remember the birds and monkeys settled on the trees at the time.

Beautiful music started and Bhagavan came out of His residence, looking exactly as He did in my room. My mind started wondering: 'I bet He can't remember me?' I looked up and there was Baba standing right in front of me. He said, 'I called and you came'. He then lifted His robe slightly and the boy next to me indicated I should touch His feet. Baba silently smiled and walked away. I tried to give letters to Him which a staunch devotee in my town had given me, but Baba did not take them. I went back to the shed after darshan, threw the letters on the floor-mattress, and

told the devotee next to me, “Baba did not take this letter, therefore He does not care about anyone.” (A big mistake, I realised later).

The very next darshan I found myself again in the first line and literally looked up and found my nose touching Baba’s robe. He kindly looked down and asked, ‘Letters?’ I was dumbstruck and started muttering and pointing to the sheds where I had thrown the letters. He said, ‘I know!’ The omnipresent all knowing Baba had already given me a glimpse of His powers.

For the next ten days I felt that Bhagavan Baba was an old friend of mine from somewhere. I had many darshans and listened to Baba’s discourses and enjoyed the atmosphere of Prasanthi Nilayam. I felt at home. I heard from one discourse that all matter is God and that God pervades the whole universe. I read the message: ‘Love all and serve all’. I loved this message, thought about it a lot and prayed Baba always to show me what it really means. (Over time He has shown me that if we have love, we get all the other values very quickly, be it peace, truth, non-violence, righteousness or service.)

I found myself very uncomfortable in the ashram physically, nevertheless I was very happy. I even got the chance to serve. I gladly washed thousands of cups and baked cakes; something which I had never done in my life. When I was leaving for the UK, I was tearful. I prayed that Baba would call me back.

Changed by the Power of Love

After this memorable trip I visited Puttaparthi many times for short periods, whenever I had a break from my clinics in the UK. Each trip was special and I had the chance for close darshans and even little conversations with Baba.

During one of those early visits, I read a message in the ashram: ‘Mother and Father are God’. Since that day I have loved and respected my parents as much as I can. Earlier, I did not show any gratitude to them. I realised we all owe a lot to our parents for loving and nurturing us.

While I was in Lichfield, in Staffordshire (UK), where my clinic was located, I read a lot of spiritual books and missed Baba and the ashram a lot. **I found the treatment to my patients improved too, and I tried to love them more. My clinic was, in fact, blessed by Baba. It was He who blessed the plan of the treatment centre and even mentioned its exact location. When I told my friends and relatives that Baba has asked me to start my health centre at Lichfield, they said, “Give up this idea. You are not going to make any money there.” But to everybody’s surprise, there were nearly sixty patients on the first day of my clinic. It is amazing how His will works!** I was occupied every minute and some days I was busy working till 10 o clock in the night. I felt His guiding hand during every treatment.

There were many other positive changes in my life too. I visited nursing homes to see patients who were terminally ill and gave the best treatment possible. Once Bhagavan came in a dream and told me to

work in a prison. Next morning there was an advertisement in the British Dental Journal for a Prison Dental Officer to work once a week in a nearby prison. I applied, even though I had no experience of working in prisons. I told the interviewer that a friend of mine told me I should work in a prison and that I was sure I would take good care of them. They gave me the job.

I visited the prison once a week and Baba guided me in dreams telling me he loved the prisoners very much. The prisoners were 15-25 years of age and were some of the toughest in the land, however they were very nice to me. While in prison, some had turned to spirituality and various religions for comfort and succour. They taught me a lot. There was a window in the ceiling of the dental room and they used to love to see the sky and appreciated the view of the outside whilst they were being treated. I felt Baba's presence all the time in the prison and never felt worried about my safety.

Baba, in so many ways, had a huge impact on my life; He made me think more about Love and Care. A little more discipline too came with all this. I found I wasn't wasting time watching TV and gossiping. I got rid of clutter in my house and took care not to waste food or energy, putting more money into 'good' work.

On my visits to the ashram, I used to pray in my heart, "Lord, I want a greater purpose in my life, not just earn more." And He answered my prayers. I had dreams showing me how miserable my life would be if I did not go to India to work. I came to Prasanthi and was fortunate that Baba told me I should come and work near Him. I asked Baba if I could sell my clinic, and prayed that He does it smoothly within twenty four hours after valuation of the practice. And it did happen most wonderfully and effortlessly.

Change of Inner and Outer Practice

After selling the practice, I waited twenty four months before Baba kindly and with immense joy sent me to serve in the Dental Department at the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Whitefield. During the waiting period, I got an opportunity to serve in the Sathya Sai School, Ndola, Zambia in July 2001. I saw the way the students at the school applied Bhagavan's human values in their studies, the sacrifice and dedication of Mr. and Mrs. Victor Kanu and all the staff who run the school. I saw the way the people of Zambia suffered from HIV, hunger and violence. All these things sometimes left me very tearful. It made me very grateful for the life I had been given; I felt so much compassion in my heart.

Then in February 2002, with His permission, I went to Rajasthan (a state in North India) to work for one month in the desert at a dental clinic attached to an ophthalmic hospital. Here I met rural people and saw how they lived without all the high-tech gadgets we take for granted. They were happy people and were very grateful for the services we offered them. It was a joy to relieve them of suffering. There were many dedicated doctors and staff in the

hospital who sacrificed so much to help the patients. The desert was very silent; and Baba often tells us that in the depth of silence the voice of God can be heard. But I found my mind very unstable; it was difficult for me, as I had never experienced so much silence in my life. Imagine experiencing a month of silence, when you are not used to even an hour of silence! Only by reading about the glories of the Lord and chanting His name, could I bring my mind under control.

Before these two memorable trips happened, I was busy serving where ever there was an opportunity in Prasanthi Nilayam. During the eightieth birthday celebrations in 2000, I worked in a mobile dental van, and while I was with the first patient in the chair, Baba Himself came past us and blessed us both (the patient and me). His grace and kindness is infinite.

In the same year (2000), a few months of seva in the canteen too gave me a chance to serve food with love and built up my stamina for standing and working in the heat of India. I travelled around the globe starting from the UK and stopping at sixteen cities; yet didn't find the same pain and suffering as in India. Here people adjust with each other on the roads, put up with power problems, water problems, food and medical problems with great tolerance and patience. India, truly, is a land of *sadhana* and spirituality.

Once I visited a poor patient in a hospital in Bangalore and asked the patient's wife what she ate and where she slept. She slept on the floor by the husband's bed and was 'on call' for him twenty four hours as he was bed ridden. They shared the food that the hospital provided for the patient, and were so content with that arrangement. That is Love, I understood.

Working in the Hospital of Love

In September, 2002 I joined Baba's General Hospital in Whitefield, Bangalore. I was thirty-three then. Here I am addicted to serving and love every moment of my duty. Many surgeons and doctors render free service in this 'heaven for the poor' and work with love and dedication. They are also experts in their fields but work with so much humility. As heartening as this, the staff and doctors have great devotion for Baba and I feel blessed that I am in good company.

Baba's Hospitals give all treatment for free and yet I notice that there are the same standards of care as my clinics in the UK. However, the healing is much faster, with deep surgical extractions and wounds healing so well which is a testimony to His love which pervades all His institutions.

Often cardiac patients come to get dentally healthy before their operations. After their dental treatment we ask them to rest for sometime on a chair in the room, so we can watch them. Then we give them vibhuthi, toothbrushes and send them to the Super Speciality Hospital for their heart operations.

Once I was going to Puttaparthi wondering if Baba was really omnipresent and knew exactly what we did in the dental department at the General Hospital? That day Bhagavan lovingly conversed with me, describing the exact time our department opens, the way cardiac patients rest on the chair; and even imitated how I act in the dental department to exact perfection! He was very happy and I was filled with joy.

Once, a patient, looking very desolate, came to see us from North India. He was a cardiac patient about to undergo a cardiac by-pass operation in the Super Hospital, but needed sixteen septic teeth removed. As he appeared very weak, one of our staff enquired about his wellbeing and living conditions. The patient said that since the time of arrival, he was sleeping outside in Bangalore and was cold and hungry. Our staff provided him with warm tea, food, a blanket and recommended free accommodation for him. His dental treatment was completed promptly and he was sent for his heart operation. After the operation he came to see us in a joyful mood. He related to us how his sons had died and his wife relied on what he earned as a porter. But he couldn't work due to his heart problem. Baba was his only hope, he said and further explained how all his life he went to the mosque but thought Allah did not listen to him until he came to Baba's Hospital and was operated upon for free and with love. At sixty, he finally felt that God exists and Allah had, in fact, helped him and He does exist! He shed many tears of gratitude.

Baba Does Not Miss the Missed Meal

The omnipresent Baba always catches me out. Once I went back to the UK for Christmas and I missed a meal. On my return to Prasanthi, Baba was upset that I had not eaten. When I told him I was so big that it would make no difference, He explained that as He resided in my heart He missed the offering of food that mealtime.

On occasions, Bhagavan has even described my house in the UK and Bangalore and narrated what goes on in each place – even what time prasadam is offered to Him. He has really changed my life and entered my heart. There are so many things that He has taught me which I try to follow. **He has imparted His wisdom even on dental issues, once telling me that 'Dental decay is caused by mental decay'. On studying this teaching I find it to be very true. Our mental health affects our immune responses and is responsible for a lot of diseases.** He tells us to brush our teeth and keep our tongues clean - simple and good advice for us. He tells us that if we have peace we can stay healthy.

In July 2003, on the occasion of Doctor's Day, Baba said, 'Sacrifice is the hallmark of a doctor'. If we think about this, it means doctors should not be too interested in profits; they should lead a simple life, give time to patients and be kind and caring. They should be, in fact, ideal devotees of God.

He Looks After Every Aspect of My Life

Baba is there every moment guiding me, and I have experienced this on umpteen occasions, as recently as a few months ago. Early this year, in April 2006, I went to the UK again to update my skills, do postgraduate studies and maintain my registration with the Dental Council of the UK. I attended many courses and even drove myself seven hundred kilometres roundtrip to the south coast of England for a one-day update on root canal procedure.

I wanted to finish the courses in a month so that I could get back to my dear Lord's Hospital. One day as I was travelling doing these various courses, which were mostly on root canals, I was having this mental dialogue: "I wonder if Baba knows the trouble I go to get back to His service and whether He will ever know about the courses I have just done on root canals?"

It was during this time that my mother one day told me, "If you get a chance to talk to Bhagavan, please ask if you can open a practice in UK again and maybe do seva a few months a year." Mother was very worried about my personal and financial situation and my future. That is the duty of the mother of our physical bodies, is it not?

On my return back to Whitefield at the end of April 2006, Bhagavan Baba was there already. Immediately I was called to General Hospital to attend to a root canal! I went to meet Baba in His residence, in Trayee Brindavan, with the treatment plan for this patient. I had a most wonderful darshan of Bhagavan and when He asked me to come to Him He checked the schedules of the courses I had attended and then went into detail about how I must carry out the root canal operation in the exact way I was taught on the courses - with a few extra divine hints! I took the opportunity to ask Him whether or not I should set up practice in UK? Bhagavan emphatically said, 'No'. He even told me I would get a job in UK where I could visit for a few weeks a year and serve the rest of the time here in Whitefield.

In August, with Bhagavan's blessings, I went back to the UK to find the practice that would suit me, giving me the chance to work a few weeks a year, and I registered with agencies that gave work on a temporary basis throughout UK. One morning I woke up with the name of one of my old bosses in my mind and I sent a resume to his surgery unit. Interestingly, that particular day he was thinking that he needed a dentist to work part-time in his practice so that he could do seva and spend time with his Sikh Babaji and his family, as his associate dentist had left recently! So I was called immediately and the exact weeks I needed to work were the exact weeks he wanted off!

I completed all the paper work, signed contracts, etc., and in no time was back in Prasanthi to thank Bhagavan. For, I knew that omnipresent Bhagavan Baba was with me on the courses and had taught me more about root canals; I was convinced that He had found the perfect job that would support me financially. The way Sai guides and moulds our lives, taking care of every little detail is so amazing. It is an experience that has no parallel in the worldly plane.

My closing prayer is that we treasure every moment fully aware that Bhagavan Baba is with us and try to imbibe some of the joy He wants to share with us; and detach ourselves from all the petty things we are asking Him for. We must promise always to be happy and serve as much and in whatever way we can, and above all, learn from the great master and Avatar that Sri Sathya Sai Baba is.

H2H SPECIAL

WITH THE LORD IN THE MOUNTAINS – Part 6

By Prof. G. VENKATARAMAN

The day dawns; it would be our first day in Kodai with Swami in 2006. My mind goes to my earlier experience in 2003. Let us peep a bit into the diary. That time, I stayed in the only guest room that existed in Sai Sruthi; it was right next to the canteen, and adjoining the main hall where all the Kodai sessions take place. In fact, many a time our “room” was used as the Interview Room, and believe it or not, my bed served as Swami’s chair! Honest, I am not kidding! So that was the setting then, and now a flashback to the first day of Kodai 2003.

A Brief Recall from 2003

The alarm is set for 4.00 A.M. but Warden is up at three and the getting-ready process is under way, one hour ahead of schedule. I discover that this guestroom is also used by the teachers to keep their luggage! I did not know about it until in the morning they came one by one unobtrusively to take some day-wear. Space is obviously at a premium here. One advantage of the teachers sharing our room, at least for keeping their suitcases, is that we can have early morning coffee! I make sure this drill is properly instituted and everyone is happy. The Warden, being an elevated soul, has risen above coffee, but that is one attachment I guess that will stay with me till the end. The way things are, I suppose I would be worrying about morning coffee even when I go to hell or heaven, wherever I am destined!

Road Rules

At 5.30 A.M., Mr. Balram drops in, looking fresh as a daisy, in spite of all the driving the previous day. We eagerly ask him for news about Swami’s drive from Madurai to Kodai. When did Swami reach Kodai? Oh, it was about eight. How was the ride? Was there much traffic? Well, there was some, but road indiscipline made the problem worse. Mr. Balram then told us how Swami gave a mini discourse on road rules and how they should be observed, especially when driving on ghat roads. Swami said, so Mr. Balram told us, that when going up, and one is not able to see what is on the other side of the topmost point, one must sound the horn. Similarly, while going around bends, especially sharp ones, one must again sound the horn. People, Swami said, misuse the horn. They make a lot of noise when there was no need to but do not use the horn when they really ought to. On ghat roads, the rule was that vehicles going up must be given the right of way. Also, at night, one must dim the headlights when a vehicle is coming from the other side. In this respect, I am afraid most of our drivers, especially those driving trucks, are absolutely like demons. They always drive in the middle of the road, and do not ever dim the headlights as the rules require. On narrow mountain roads, it is even more important to observe this rule about dimming lights, but who cares? Mr. Balram said that Swami wondered what ever happened to the old practice of painting the top half of headlights black?

Even as we were having this mini symposium on road discipline, I was telling myself, “How amazing! Here is God Himself, and He is talking about mundane things like headlights and all that!” That is the essential beauty of the Avatar. Scholars will wax eloquent about the Atma and all that. But the Avatar? Quietly He will tell us about dimming headlights. Why? To remind us that by doing so we show respect to the other driver, who also is an embodiment of God, the same God who is in us. The Avatar spends more time explaining how to put Vedanta into practice than about Vedanta itself – that is His greatness!

A Special Breakfast

The talk then shifts to Balram’s experiences. Warden says, “Sir, you must share these with our students. You don’t know how beneficial it would be for them.” Mr. Balram smiles, but pleads that he is not used to giving talks. At this stage, we become aware of some activity in the adjacent main hall. It looks like Swami is coming. I look at my watch: it shows 6.15; a bit early, and no first day concession.

We move into the hall. Swami comes from upstairs where His room is, stands in the middle, slowly looks around at the elders and teachers gathered there – just about half a dozen – and smiles. What a way to begin the day, with a beautiful Divine smile!

This time (in 2006) – we are all ready by 6.30 and waiting. Everyone is looking fresh and bright, expectation written all over the face. Instruction comes down from above: “All of you go and have breakfast first in the new Cafeteria and then assemble here in the main hall.” So we make our way to the Canteen. As we walk towards it, I feel the nip in the air, and see the mist over the lake. It is a beautiful sight. How wonderful it really is to be with the Lord in the Mountains!

There is hot steaming breakfast being served. What a tempting sight! But I sigh and tell myself “No!” Then along comes Mr. V. Srinivasan to tempt me like even Satan cannot. He says, “What sir! You come to Kodai and refuse breakfast in this Divine Canteen so lovingly prepared by our people here? You cannot insult us that way!” So I compromise and yield. Maybe I really wanted to and just was waiting for someone to push me over! I tasted just a wee bit, but boy was it great! To hell with the stomach!

Sai Ma, the Divine Mother

Stuffed, we return to the hall and wait. And then Sun appears and how the flowers suddenly bloom! I mean how the room is full of smiles as Swami enters! As always, the first question: “Boys, how are you? Did you rest properly? Did you sleep well?” “How was the breakfast? Liked it?” “Did you get hot water?” etc. Was it God or the mother, I was debating within myself; and soon the answer came: *both*! It was Sai Ma, the Divine Mother!

Mr. Ramani, the President of the Sai Organisation of Tamil Nadu (the State in which Kodai is located) reports to say that the Darshan queue had started forming as early as 5.00 A.M. and that as always, there were many foreigners. Swami is happy to hear this and gives some instructions regarding the Darshan schedule; this is particularly necessary as this is the first day of this Kodai season.

Meanwhile, I am thinking: “Come on Swami! When will the distribution of goodies start?” I don’t have to wait; it starts instantly! Santa Claus in Kodai (read Swami) has to be seen to be believed. One of the most memorable give-away sessions – and I have seen many in different settings – was in 2003. Maybe I should recall a bit of what happened then.

Flashback Again to 2003

Gifts, Gifts and More Gifts

7.45 A.M., and a quiet signal. Some of the teachers and senior scholars go upstairs and bring various items. Looks like there is going to be a distribution session. I have heard the fabulous Kodai distribution sessions, and it looks like tradition is being maintained. First item: a sweater. A sweater has always been the first item, and no surprise in that. Kodai can suddenly get very chilly and our most thoughtful Swami always makes sure that everyone will be warm. So, He gives away sweaters just in case people have not packed one in - and many haven’t!

Sweater distribution goes on for quite a while, first for the gents, then for the students, and finally for the ladies. While giving to the gents, one of them says, “Swami, You are always giving, giving, giving..” Swami responds, “Because it is cold, cold, cold!” This draws a big laugh. For the students and the gents, Swami distributes from where He is seated. He just throws accurately and the item goes straight to the person for whom it is intended, who catches it. For distributing to the ladies, Swami goes to their side, moving from person to person to hand over. Sweater distribution is over, but what next?

One more signal and the boys scamper upstairs to bring more stuff. What is it going to be now? Shawls! Nice big white shawls. Why do we need shawls when there are sweaters? That is logic, but Swami’s Heart has never heard of it! He simply must give, give and give – that’s all!

It is not over yet and there is going to be round three. What will it be this time? Towels, big bath towels! Distribution of towels takes Swami once more to the ladies side, and when towels have been handed out, there is one more item – a tape recorder! Whenever Swami distributes a packaged item, the first time He hands it over, He makes a point of opening the packet and showing the contents to everybody! That’s what He does now, and by the way, the tape recorder is only for the ladies!

Next come cameras, and after that, film for the cameras! Wow, I say to myself, even Santa at Christmas-time is not so generous. What next? I don’t

have to guess or wait for long to know. It is ladies handbags in assorted colours, and Swami has some fun in matching the colour of the bags to the colour of the saree worn by the recipient! After this: ladies umbrellas! It looks like it is ladies day, and I wonder whether the men are getting a bit jealous! As earlier, just before handing out the first umbrella, Swami opens it to show it to all! At this stage, one of the ladies makes bold and says, "Baba, You now have to give a suitcase to put all these things in!" Boy, these ladies sure must have a lot of guts to say such things. I wouldn't dare make such a remark even if I was offered a million dollars! Ignoring the application for suitcases and carrying an umbrella, Swami now walks over to the gents side and asks, "Any ladies here?" Big laughter.

You would think that Swami has by now distributed enough. No, alarm clocks next, this time for all!

Back to 2006

"All good things must come to an end," goes the saying, and distribution is finally over. The conversation resumes. As always, the topic wanders. This morning, it starts off with some reference to election rallies in and around the town, with lorries carrying volunteers and loudspeakers fitted to the lorries blaring political propaganda. The noise apparently disturbed the sleep of many, and Swami was asked whether His sleep was disturbed. His reply: "I never sleep; I am always thinking of students; and I am always concerned about their welfare!" This makes Mr. C. Sreenivas say, "Swami, it is the sleeplessness of Selflessness!" An apt way of putting it, I would say.

Swami's Concern for Our Welfare

9.00 A.M., and the signal is given for morning Darshan. Quickly we move to a spot on the veranda usually meant for seating Swami's party, while Swami walks out to the porch. It is bright and sunny, a glorious day – a real fine way to begin the Kodai season. Slowly, Swami walks down the ramp and He is doing it with bare feet. This is not Parthi and it sure is chilly out here, especially in the morning. I worry, but God in human form does not; pleasing devotees, for whose sake He has incarnated, is obviously uppermost in His Mind, and not whether the ground is cold. There is a narrow mat rolled out on the ramp, but the Lord chooses to walk His own course, as if to signal, "See O man, I do not bother about My bodily comforts; your welfare alone is of concern to Me." I wonder how many took note of that. Hardly a few, I guess. Again and again, I have seen devotees imposing themselves on Swami and straining Him physically beyond human limits. Yes He is God but, as He often reminds us, He has donned a human body, placing at the same time a restraint not to invoke Divine powers in aid of that body, especially by way of getting rid of pain. That has been His hallmark from way back, even as a small boy; no change in that resolve, and this cold is nothing compared to the pain His body has undergone on numerous occasions, like during the brief paralysis attack in 1963, an attack that was part of His Divine Leelas.

With Swami giving Darshan from the balcony ramp, His wonderful smile together with the wonderful weather, He immediately transports everyone

assembled for Darshan into the very heavens. Everyone is looking up from the Darshan area below while Swami is looking down at them smiling and occasionally blessing. The world is forgotten!

Bhajans

Swami then comes near the boys, whispers some instructions, goes briefly into the building, emerges and takes His seat on a chair, provided on the ramp. Meanwhile, boys start singing Bhajans. For those of you who are not aware, I should mention that when selections for “Team Kodai” are made, Swami makes certain that there is a small group of good Bhajan singers; and this year, there sure were some very good ones.

Good Bhajans this morning. *Aarathi* at 9.50 and when we all say *LOKA SAMAASTHA...*, I can see Swami whispering the same; I make this out by lip reading. I am thrilled! God Himself wills that we all should be happy. What more can we ask for?! We assemble back again in the main hall, and this is when we shall be having the first of the “real” sessions. The nature of the sessions vary, and I am wondering what form it would take this morning. I do not have to wait for long: it is going to be a musical session.

I should perhaps mention that this time Swami has taken a bunch of good singers (as I understand He did last year too), many of them from the Music College. Last year, Swami spent a lot of time giving chances to the Music Boys to sing for Him. It is interesting how the profile of boys Swami takes with Him to Kodai has been changing over the years. Ultimately of course, it is all a matter of Divine Grace. No one can say or predict whom Swami would take, when and why. Yet, at the human level, one can see some broad trends. Years ago, it used to be the MBA boys. They used to be groomed in Kodai, in preparation for service in the wide world. Very recently, it appears to be the Music Boys.

In a way I am happy about it, because I am very partial to devotional music. Both in the North and South of India, over the centuries, many devotees have attained the Lotus Feet by singing their hearts out for the Lord. And in the process, they have left behind a treasure. These days, not many are aware how much the Lord loves music. Indeed, He is, as Swami has explained, Music itself, which is why one of God’s Names is *Nada Brahman*. Remember the line *Nada Brahman Jagannaatha ... in the Aarathi?*

Preparing God’s Music

Swami often uses music as a bond to connect with students. In the past, I have seen it happen in many different ways, for example, when preparations are made for the Convocation Drama. Things are appearing to change lately but in the olden days, Convocation Drama was a big thing, with Swami getting deeply involved in all aspects of it. Where music was concerned, He would first take a critical look at the lyrics; then, the process of adding a tune to it, an interesting exercise that would take place in the evening session in the Interview Room, after Darshan is over. Swami would settle down inside and a

signal would go out to Dr. Sailesh Srivatsava, a former student and now a teacher in the High School. He would enter, carrying a small parcel, but those of us who are in the know of things are aware that the parcel contains a tiny musical keyboard, about the size of a flat pencil box.

Inside, Sailesh would play the tune for one of the chosen songs and also softly hum the words; a long drawn exercise that would go on till almost Bhajan time, during which the tune for the song would slowly take shape. Swami is a superb Music Director, who knows not only how to arrange the scale but also introduce all kinds of subtle variations that bring out the *Bhavam*, or the spirit of the song. The story does not end here, for next Sailesh has to coach the chosen singer; this is after the first round of Divine approval has been obtained. The preliminary coaching over, the singer and Sailesh both walk into the Interview Room during the evening sessions, while all of us sit outside and wait patiently, trying to visualise the proceedings inside!

There are many sessions of this type, and slowly the song comes alive, with Swami often singing with the chosen singer to indicate how to do voice modulation. One must see all this to believe it. A few sessions later, the actors get into the act, shall I say? What I mean is that dialog delivery is now practiced; and so on it goes, day after day. Swami is certainly the task master but He is also very considerate. After a gruelling session, He would personally go inside while students wait in the Interview Room. And when He appears, He would be accompanied by the kitchen boy carrying a tray with juice, sliced apples and what not! Is it any wonder why boys are very keen to get into the Drama?

To get back to the proceedings of our first day in Kodai in 2006, I now begin to see a replay of sorts of what I just described. Swami is rehearsing the boys, making them sing song after song. Are we in for a special Musical Evening? I guess we would soon know, but this much is certain: this Kodai season, music is going to dominate, just as management issues used to take the centre stage in earlier years. Meanwhile I notice that Swami is giving instructions to the singers about taking care of their voice. "Make sure you drink only warm water, and cover your neck with a scarf!"

So Many Letters

Session over, we adjourn for lunch. There is no pre-tea session like in earlier years; Swami is taking it a bit easy, which makes me happy. I am not sure about the boys though, but I am not bothered about them. People have siesta, have tea and snacks as per their preferences, and gather in the Bhajan Hall to wait for Swami. Bhajan starts at 4.40 P.M. and during the session, Swami walks a bit down the aisle. Boy how many letters during that short walk of just a few metres! Nobody knew He would be walking, but there are always some devotees who are ready to grab the slightest chance, and they wait patiently to slip in a letter; for His part, the Lord also obliges. That is our compassionate Swami.

Always Giving...

At 5.25 P.M., Bhajan session is over and we assemble again for what I would call the evening get-together with Bhagavan. There is another distribution session, this time of cameras; all the boys get cameras. I recall Swami distributed cameras in 2003 also, but unlike then, this time the elders do not get cameras. These are the film cameras, and so the film is distributed next. It is amazing how Swami takes care of all these details; what I mean is that He makes sure He brings all these gifts with Him to Kodai. In fact, few are aware of how much time He spends before leaving on gift selection.

Many lessons there are, but few bother to learn them; instead, the talk is all about, "What did Swami give this time? He did not give after-shave lotion this time? What about alarm clocks? No clocks? My, it was a bonanza during my trip!"

After cameras come torches! After that, what? Mercifully, every boy wants his camera inaugurated by Swami. Imagine that! That is how bold Kodai makes the boys. Swami just smiles and says "not now," because the distribution is not over yet. Shirts come next, and each according to his size. One by one, the boys go near Swami while He tosses a correct size shirt, joking the whole time. That is the real interesting part of the distribution show: a Divine and humorous running commentary. I am almost tempted to call it, at the risk of seeming blasphemous, the *Divine Comedy Hour!*

...Never Receiving

It is all finally over and then the punch line: *Nobody gives Me anything!* Swami means it as a joke, but the fact is that few of us ever think of that, do we? I mean, giving Swami something He really likes (not watches and stuff like that)? And after all that softening up, there is a gentle change of gear towards matters spiritual, with references to the Mind, and its symbolic connection with the Moon. Swami has talked about this many times in olden days, especially as there are references to all this in the Vedas. But this is a different batch and a different time, so maybe once more.

After some serious moments, there is a signal that the session is about to end. How do I know? Because Swami is talking about tomorrow's program. He wants the boys to go on a bus tour and do some sight seeing in Kodai. After that there come ominous words: "Day after tomorrow, shopping!" Shopping usually comes at the end of the Kodai stay, and here, Swami is talking about it on day one! Is He joking or is He serious? If He is, then the matter is serious, because a sudden and abrupt shortening of the Kodai trip means He is not happy about something. What exactly is it? I decide I shall not worry about it and take things as they come.

Finishing Day One

The talk now shifts to the Tamil New Year Day, due to be celebrated on April 14th, along with the Malayalam New Year day, Vishu, which also happens to

fall on that same date. Swami wants to know about arrangements connected with the celebration, after which it is curtains. Swami retires and we move towards the Canteen Dining Hall for dinner. A great meal as expected, and to digest it all, almost every one goes for a walk round the lake. No rain in sight and such beautiful weather; everyone enjoys a great walk.

So, that is how day one ended! See you again next month with more about Kodai 2006!! Jai Sai Ram.

GET INSPIRED

ON CHRISTMAS EVE...

War raged closer and closer. Guns boomed and bombs exploded sending sound waves through the tiny village. A German mother decided to move her children to the safety of a cabin deep in the woods outside the village. After building a fire in the fireplace, she and her family settled in to celebrate the sanctity of the holiday. It was Christmas Eve in Germany.

The rising smoke attracted visitors and a knock on the door startled her. "Who can that be?" she wondered. Bravely she opened the door to three American soldiers, the enemy.

"We're lost and hungry and one of us is wounded. May we come in to the warmth", one of the young soldiers asked. The German woman's heart thumped with indecision. "What would happen to me and my family if the German army learned that I harboured the enemy?" she thought. She looked at the shivering young men and thought of their mothers.

"Come in", she said in broken English as she eyed the guns at their sides. "Put your guns on the woodpile, please. They will scare the children", she added as she helped the wounded man to the fire. After feeding them, everyone sat in the glow of the flames and tried to converse as best they could. It was an unusual gathering.

There was another knock on the door, strong and demanding. In German, a voice called out, "Let us in. We are so cold." The lady turned pale with fear. "What should I do", she thought frantically, "they are German soldiers". The rapping continued and she hustled to the door. Without an alternative she opened it and explained to the soldiers that she had taken in three American soldiers. "They were so cold and one of them is wounded. It is Christmas Eve, there is no reason to fight and have bloodshed on this night", she pleaded.

The two German soldiers stomped the snow off their boots and stepped inside. "Leave your guns there with the Americans", she asked. Quietly, they removed their weapons and placed them beside the others. Together the German and American soldiers sat in front of the fire. One of the German officers was a medical man and tended the wound of his enemy. When midnight arrived, the group sang Silent Night, wished each other a Merry Christmas and slept side by side on the floor.

In the morning the German mother who made friends of enemies, directed the lost Americans to their line and hugged the young German Patrol officers as they departed.

Friendship is the only cement that will hold this world together! “Brotherhood of Man and Fatherhood of God” is what will ensure lasting peace in this world.

Illustrations: Sai Aditya, SSSIHL

A PIECE OF TRUE LOVE

At a fund-raising dinner for a school that serves learning disabled children, the father of one of the students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended.

After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he offered a question:

"When not interfered with by outside influences, everything nature does is done with perfection. Yet my son, Shay, cannot learn things as other children do. He cannot understand things as other children do.

Where is the natural order of things in my son?"

The audience was stilled by the query.

The father continued. "I believe that when a child like Shay, physically and mentally handicapped comes into the world, an opportunity to realise true human nature presents itself, and it comes, in the way other people treat that child."

Then he told the following story: Shay and his father had walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they'll let me play?"

Shay's father knew that most of the boys would not want someone like Shay on their team, but the father also understood that if his son were allowed to play, it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging and some confidence to be accepted by others in spite of his handicaps.

Shay's father approached one of the boys on the field and asked if Shay could play, not expecting much! The boy looked around for guidance and a few boys nodded approval, why not?

So he took matters into his own hands and said, "We're losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him in to bat in the ninth inning."

Shay struggled over to the team's bench put on a team shirt with a broad smile and his father had a small tear in his eye and warmth in his heart. The boys saw the father's joy at his son being accepted.

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the right field. Even though no hits came his way, he was obviously ecstatic just to be in the game and on the field, grinning from ear to ear as his father waved to him from the stands.

In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again.

Now, with two outs and the bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base and Shay was scheduled to be next at bat. At this juncture, do they let Shay bat and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible 'cause Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball.

However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher, recognizing the other team putting winning aside for this moment in Shay's life, moved in a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay could at least be able to make contact.

The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly towards Shay.

As the pitch came in, Shay swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball right back to the pitcher. The game would now be over, but the pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could have easily thrown the ball to the first baseman.

Shay would have been out and that would have been the end of the game. Instead, the pitcher threw the ball right over the head of the first baseman, out of reach of all team mates. Everyone from the stands and both teams started yelling, "Shay, run to first! Run to first!"

Never in his life had Shay ever ran that far but made it to first base. He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled. Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second!" Catching his breath, Shay awkwardly ran towards second, gleaming and struggling to make it to second base.

By the time Shay rounded towards second base, the right fielder had the ball, the smallest guy on their team, who had a chance to be the hero for his team for the first time.

He could have thrown the ball to the second-baseman for the tag, but he understood the pitcher's intentions and he too intentionally threw the ball high and far over the third-baseman's head. Shay ran toward third base deliriously as the runners ahead of him circled the bases toward home.

All were screaming, "Shay, Shay, Shay, all the way Shay".

Shay reached third base, the opposing shortstop ran to help him and turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third! Shay, run to third."

As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams and those watching were on their feet were screaming, "Shay, run home!"

Shay ran to home, stepped on the plate, and was cheered as the hero who hit the "grand slam" and won the game for his team.

"That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of true love and humanity into this world."

Shay didn't make it to another summer and died that winter, having never forgotten being the hero and making his father so happy and coming home and having his mother tearfully embrace her little hero of the day!

THE PRECIOUS GOLD CONTAINER

One day a man punished his young daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight and he was furious when the child tried to decorate a box.

Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, "This is for you, Daddy." He was embarrassed by his earlier overreaction, but his anger flared again when he found the box was empty. He yelled at her, "Don't you know when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside it?"

His daughter looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, "Oh, Daddy, it's not empty, I blew kisses into the box. All for you, Daddy."

The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl, and he begged for her forgiveness.

An accident took the life of the child only a short time later and it is told that the man kept that gold box by his bed for many years, and whenever he was discouraged, he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.

In a very real sense, each of us has been given a gold container filled with unconditional love - love and kisses from our children, our friends, our family and from God - despite how we have behaved toward them.

What must we do in order to truly express our response to such gifts?

DO IT ANYWAY

People are often unreasonable, illogical and self centered

Forgive them anyway

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives

Be kind anyway

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies

Succeed anyway

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you

Be honest and frank anyway

What you spend years building, someone may destroy overnight

Build anyway

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous

Be happy anyway

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow

Do good anyway

Give the world the best you have and it may just not be enough

Give the world the best you have anyway

You see, in the final analysis it is all between you and God

It was never between you and them anyway.

This poem, sent to us by one of our readers, Sri Rajeev Mittal, is inscribed on the wall of Mother Teresa's childrens' home in Calcutta.

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

1.

In Swami's education programme, what does the term 3-HV stand for?

- A. The '3' refers to unity in the triplicity of thoughts, words and deeds, leading to 'HV' meaning heaven.
- B. The 3 values of Sathya, Dharma and Shanti, leading to 'HV' or heaven.
- C. The 3H refers to Head, Heart and Hand and 'V' means values.
- D. The 3H refers to Happiness, Health and Hope and the 'V' refers to Veneration.

2.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna elucidates the seven divine qualities of women. "Among women I am fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and -----." (Chapter 10 v 34) What is the missing quality?

- a. Patience
- b. Love
- c. Generosity
- d. Truth

3. After the crucifixion of Jesus, He appeared again as the Resurrected Jesus to His close disciples. One disciple, named Thomas, was not present at the time and he did not believe that Jesus had appeared to them. What factual proof did Thomas want to confirm that Jesus had been resurrected?

- a. If he could speak to Jesus.
- b. If he could go to the place where Jesus was living.
- c. If he could place his fingers on the wounds of Jesus' body which were made by the crucifixion.
- d. If he could have a written letter from Jesus.

4.

In what context does Swami use the example of a *registered letter* to teach us an important lesson?

- a. When we are unhappy over a lost article.
- b. When we have been insulted by someone.
- c. When we are missing our friends and family.
- d. When we want a reply from God to our prayers.

5.

The Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha falls on Sunday, 31st of December this year. It is celebrated at the conclusion of the last day of the Hajj pilgrimage to Makkah. Apart from special ceremonies in Makkah, it is also a time when Muslims around the world go to the Mosque for prayers dressed in their best clothes, and thank Allah for all the blessings they have received. It is a time for visiting family and friends as well as offering presents. The festival commemorates the faith of Prophet Abraham who was asked by God in a dream to sacrifice his son, Isaac. How did Abraham react to the dream?

- a. Abraham refused to sacrifice Isaac and runs away.
- b. Abraham did not believe that it was God who is telling him to sacrifice Isaac.
- c. Abraham refused to make the sacrifice and argued with the Lord for seven days.
- d. Abraham made ready to perform the sacrifice, but then God told him not to do so.

6.

Some of the medallions created by Baba in former years carried the initials T.P.S. on them. What does Baba say these letters stand for?

- a. The star of heaven born in human form and the three Incarnations of Sai.
- b. Truth, Purity, Service.
- c. The Puttaparthi Saviour.
- d. Talk less, Practise more, Serve always.

7.

The 8 day Jewish festival of Hanukkah occurs from 16th to 23rd December this year. Jews light one candle every evening for the 8 days with special prayers, placing the candles in a special menorah (see picture). What does the festival refer to?

- a. Veneration of eight holy spirits who watch over the Jewish nation.
- b. The miraculous burning of candles in the Jerusalem Temple for 8 days without oil.
- c. Eight holy prophets of the Jewish nation.
- d. Eight light rays that emanate from the Sun and give life to all.

8.

In which year's Gurupoornima did Bhagavan announce that He is the divine Incarnation of Shiva-Shakthi?

- a. 1969
- b. 1973
- c. 1963
- d. 1957

9.

Who was the last of the ten Sikh Gurus?

- a. Guru Teg Bahadur
- b. Guru Arjun Dev
- c. Guru Har Gobind
- d. Guru Gobind Singh

10.

Swami tells us that there are the five D's that students have to cultivate in order to become successful in life. Four of them are dedication, devotion, discipline and discrimination – what is the missing 'D'.

- a. Duty
- b. Determination
- c. Desirelessness
- d. Dynamism

Answers

1C - The 3H refers to Head, Heart and Hand and 'V' means values.

2A - Patience

Swami informs us that:

The Bhagavad Gita says that a woman has seven qualities, while men have only three. So never look down upon women. They are very virtuous. They are the very embodiments of nature.

(Sanathana Sarathi, June, 1998)

3C If he could place his fingers on the wounds of Jesus' body which were made by the crucifixion.

We find the following account in the Bible:

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. (The Bible, Gospel of John, chap 20 v 24 onwards)

4B - When we have been insulted by someone.

Bhagavan tells us that a registered letter only becomes ours when we sign for it, otherwise it will return to the sender. Similarly, if we stay quiet and keep calm when someone abuses us, the insult will not affect us and will return to the person who sent it.

5D - Abraham made ready to perform the sacrifice, but then God told him not to do so.

The Koran carries the account of this event as follows:

When [the son] reached the stage of working alongside him, he (Abraham) said: "My son, I saw in my sleep that I must sacrifice you. Look for whatever you may see [in it]." He said: "My father, do anything you are ordered to; you will find me to be patient, if God so wishes." When they both had committed themselves peacefully [to God] and he had placed him face down, We called out to him: "Abraham, you have already confirmed the dream!" Thus We reward those who act kindly. This was an obvious test. We ransomed him by means of a Splendid victim, and left [him to be mentioned] among later men: "Peace be upon Abraham!" Thus We reward those who act kindly. He was one of Our believing servants. We announced to him that Isaac would become a prophet who was honorable.

(The Holy Koran, chap 37 from v 102)

6A - The star of heaven born in human form and the three Incarnations of Sai. Swami tells us that 'T' means Thaara or 'star of heaven born in human form', and P.S. stands for Pathri Sai, Parthi Sai, Prema Sai. He further mentioned that all the three Sai incarnations have T.P.S. as their trade mark. The picture is taken from "Vision of the Divine" by Eruch B. Fanibunda.

7B - The miraculous burning of candles in the Jerusalem Temple for 8 days without oil.

In 167 BC, the Jews were under Syrian rule who ordered an altar to Zeus erected in the Jerusalem Temple. Two years later, a Jewish revolt was successful and the Temple was liberated and rededicated with a new altar and holy vessels. Oil was needed for the menorah in the Temple, which was supposed to burn throughout the night. Though there was only enough oil to burn for one day, miraculously the oil lamps burned for eight days, which led to the eight-day festival of Hanukkah, commemorating this event.

8A - 1963

During this momentous discourse Swami revealed the following:

Bharadhwaaja decided on performing the yaaga; Indhra taught him how to do it; all preparations were completed. The sage wanted that Shakthi must preside and bless the yaaga. So he went to Kailaasa but, the time was not opportune for presenting his petition. Shiva and Shakthi were engaged in a competitive dance, trying to find out who could dance longer. Eight days passed thus, before Shakthi noticed Bharadhwaaja standing in the cold. She just cast a smile at him and danced along as before! The sage mistook the smile as a cynical refusal to notice him; so he turned his back on Kailaasa and started to descend. To his dismay, he found his left leg, hand and eye put out of action by a stroke. Shiva saw him fall; He came up to him and consoled him; Bharadhwaaja was told that Shakthi had indeed blessed him and his yaaga. Then, Shiva revived him and cured him, sprinkling water from the Kamandalu. Both Shiva and Shakthi granted the Rishi (sage) boons: They would both attend the yaaga, they said. After the yaaga was over, They were so pleased that They conferred even more boons on the sage. Shiva said that They would take human form and be born in the Bharadhwaaja Gothra (lineage) thrice: Shiva alone as Shirdi Sai Baaba, Shiva and Shakthi together at Puttaparthi as Sathya Sai Baaba and Shakthi alone as Prema Sai."

9D - Guru Gobind Singh

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) instructed the Sikhs that after his death there would be no more human Gurus and that henceforth they should revere the Sikh holy scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib as their Guru. Among his great deeds, He evolved the Khalsa Order, instituted the five articles of faith (Kakars) and was a prolific spiritual writer. Bhagavan writes this about Guru Gobind Singh:

Among those who shone as heroic supporters of the Hindu culture unto the last, the foremost was Guru Gobind Singh. Undeterred by tortures that forced him to shed his own blood and the blood of his own beloved, deserted by those for whom he had undergone such torture, he did not utter a word of blame against his compatriots, but, entered the Deccan and gave up his life, as the King of Beasts does when his heart is hurt. May that great person's fame persist for ever on earth! Such eminent leaders render the whole of mankind indebted to them, for they serve the best interests of all men everywhere.

10 B - Determination

Swami tells us that:

Determination does not mean stubbornness. You should have determination to do good and sacred deeds. You should have determination to attain God's grace, Divine power and Divine qualities. Because of strong determination you may face setbacks, but they are all to be recognised as stepping stones to success. For instance a painter uses a brush, paints with it and then cleans it, doing this several times. All these are foundations for development and improvement.

(Man Management p,19)

THE HEALING TOUCH

Apeksha: Hope Springs Eternal...

Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never Is, but always To be blest:
The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come. –

Alexander Pope,
An Essay on Man, Epistle I, 1733

Jagdish and Suma Shetty – Nestled in Mumbai

Mumbai is the city of light and glitz. This commercial capital of India has a very complicated history. It is a city built out of seven islands Colaba, Mazagaon, Old Woman's Island, Wadala, Mahim, Parel, and Matunga-Sion. The original name given by the Portuguese was '*Bom Baia*' which means 'Good Bay' in Portuguese. The British later corrupted it to '*Bombay*' and the name now is the name that the original fisher folk inhabitants of the islands, the Kolis gave – '*Mumba*' after *Mumbadevi*, the Hindu deity to whom a temple is dedicated at Babulnath near Chowpatty's sandy beaches.

There can be no front without a back. All the glitz and glamour of Mumbai hides the very real existence of equally real people with their joys and sorrows, pleasure and pain, successes and failures...in short it is a city like any other. In this city lived a couple Jagdish and Suma Shetty in the Dadar area of Mumbai. Mr. Jagdish Shetty, self employed in business also ran a hotel in Mumbai. They were expecting their second child. Already the proud parents of Priyanka, their first daughter, they were looking forward to adding to their threesome after seven years.

Their Lives Turn 'Inside Out'...

But fate had a terrible shock in store. Their little girl was born with a congenital anomaly called "Bladder Exstrophy". **Bladder exstrophy**, more properly, the **exstrophy-epispadias complex**, is a rare congenital birth defect occurring once every 40,000-50,000 live births with a 2:1 male:female ratio. This defect involves the malformation of the bladder and urethra, in which the bladder is turned "inside out". The bladder does not form into its normal round shape but instead is flattened and exposed outside the body. The lower portion of the bladder, a funnel-shaped bladder neck, made up of muscles that open and close the bladder, fails to form correctly. The urethra and genitalia are not formed completely and the Uro-genital organs appear displaced forward. Additionally, the pelvic bones are widely separated. The diagnosis involves a lot of anomalies of the lower abdominal wall, bladder, anterior bony pelvis, and external genitalia. Treatment is with surgical correction of the defect, but patients can still have long term issues with urinary tract infections and other problems.

The urine drips continuously and this irritates the skin. In addition, there is no control over bladder movement. Moreover there is also likelihood of urinary infection for the child. The fear of infection involves continuous prophylactic (preventive) antibiotic treatment. Initial surgery is carried out within 24 to 48 hours after birth, for closure of bladder by bladder neck reconstruction. The second stage surgery is done after three years or so. This is to repair the genitalia, achieve urinary continence and urethric reimplantation.

A Slim Chance

They named their daughter “Apeksha”. One of the connotations of the name is “hope”. It was all they had when beset by this vagary of fate. They visited the Holy family hospital in Mumbai and after consultation with Dr. Nishant Nanavati (pediatric surgeon) the vital initial surgery was done; and the second stage had to wait for the required three years. The doctors in Mumbai had estimated the costs at Rupees four lakhs for this surgery, with only 50% chances of success. Dr Ransley of USA, an authority on these surgeries said: “Life-long bag carriage for the patient or life-long catheter usage.” In plain English it means: the patient would have to carry a urine bag always to collect the urine since there will be no control or a urinary catheter would have to be inserted to drain the urine as and when it collects in the bladder. Both the situations condemn the patient to a life of ignominy and social embarrassment.

Despite having major hospitals like the Hinduja hospital and the Lilavati hospital, the assurances the parents received did little to assuage the fact that it would take a miracle for their little daughter to lead a normal life. But as it is often said, to be normal in itself is a miracle. And miracles as all of us know – do happen. All of us ‘normal’ people stand testimony to that – come to think of it God is always a part of our lives whether we accept it or not and it is He who decides the *when*, *what* and *how* of all Destiny.

The Dawn of Hope

One day some of their family friends came home with the good tidings that there was a free hospital in Prasanthi Nilayam called the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS) which had a department of urology and nephrology which offered all medical care free of cost; from diagnosis to surgery. They did not know anything about the hospital but then what is destined will happen. After spending more than five lakhs in medical bills, they were overjoyed that such an institution existed that offered free medical care of such high standards.

They came to Puttaparthi and approached the SSSIHMS. Apeksha was admitted and things were moving smoothly but the parents out of their sincere devotion to the Lord whom they had accepted as the head of their family, poured out their anguish into a letter and offered it to Swami. During one darshan session He accepted the letter and blessed them with the go ahead for the surgery.

Thereafter the surgery commenced expeditiously. Her congenital condition was rare, delicate and complicated and required sufficient advance preparation. So she was treated with special care so that she did not contract any infections from other patients. To make sure that all would go well, in

Apeksha's words, "I was given a royal treatment by the staff. A special single room, lots of toys and physically carried about, instead of on a stretcher!" She was definitely a special child not because of her medical condition; but because she spread sunshine wherever she was. The nurses who were taking care of her recollect her to be a very sprightly and cheerful child despite her physical discomfort. Truly it is a blessing to be able to make another smile unmindful of one's own suffering. Her innocence warmed every heart that came to know her.

The Big Day

The big day arrived and Apeksha, then five years old, was operated on January 14, 2003. It was not by coincidence that the day also happened to be the holy day of Makara Sankranti, the harvest festival, and the auspicious time when the sun begins to move northward. In God's plans there are no coincidences.

The surgery was performed in the Operation Theatres of the Department of Urology, SSSIHMS, Prashantigram. Dr. K.S. Ramgopal was the chief surgeon and he operated on her for a marathon seven hours. He stopped only when he was sure that the entire procedure was complete and nothing else was left to be done. He covered every base and anticipated every complication and worked with prophylactic intent. Apeksha was wheeled out of the theatres and was under constant, intensive observation for the next twelve hours. Her vital signs stabilized and slowly, yet steadily she improved. Times passed and Apeksha lived up to her name – hope that burns eternal in man's heart found expression in her life. The turning point came when the doctors advised the parents that the anti-biotic drugs which she was receiving since birth were stopped a mere six months after the surgery. The pain and fever is gone, no more bed wetting, and no signs of the adverse effects of long term anti-biotic usage.

Apeksha on the Ascent!

The operation was a great success. Almost two years and ten months later, Apeksha now is a normal, active child, bubbling with joy. Fair and fit as a fiddle, bright, charming and very exuberant, talking nineteen to the dozen, it is really amazing to see her recovery in such a short period of time. Academically too she is shining and her star seems only on the ascent. She stood 1st in her class IV and is now maintaining her high standards even in class VI. She wins prizes in elocutions and is the Compeer for Annual Day programs in school. Gifted with a good voice she sings well and has Sai bhajans in her house every Thursday, and the entire family participates. Her father Mr. Jagdish Shetty, mother Suma and sister Priyanka, who is also a brilliant student, all have full faith that Swami is the Divine power which they had been praying to all the while. They look forward to opportunities to pass on the great blessing of good health that God provided to their family – Free of cost – with no strings attached.

What we receive in life is destiny how we face it is self effort. More often than not we fight circumstances in life unable to understand them. What we don't understand, we fear! And fear leads to insecurity. Insecurity weakens the spirit and this leads to further lack of understanding. That is the reason why it is

said: Don't fight circumstance – use it as the eagle does the winds to soar or the fish to the currents in the ocean. There is a time and place for everything and it is God who decides when, how and what! The only duty of ours is, in the words of H.W Longfellow in his Psalm of life:

“...Act Act in the living present, Heart within and God overhead...”

YOUR SAY

Reader's Feedback To The November Issue

GENERAL

Dear Sir,

For the past several years, I have been having the Darshan, Sparshan and Sambashan of Swami by way of your monthly publication. This conveys so much of important news that is really expressions of Swami's love for humanity. This in turn encourages us to be more civil and understanding in our daily life. Coming to old age and being far away, this is a great solace to my mind and to my soul. My sincere wish is to be born as many times as I am destined to, but always be in Swami's grace and remember Him at all times. Sai Ram and love to all, Krishnan (USA)

Dear H2H Staff, Volunteers, and Students,

I would like to express my deepest thanks to you all for what you have done, what you are doing, and what you continue to do. You are making a difference in my life and many others because of the inspiration you all are sharing. Keep up the good work because it is light and love to all who know of it.

Jai Sai Ram, Vinesh Nambiar, California State University, Sacramento, USA

Dear H2H,

I must tell you what you are writing here is so true. Besides the occasional worries and normal pressures of life that we must all handle, leaving the worry to Swami and not causing unnecessary tension that we as humans make for ourselves, makes life bearable. This, in fact, helps us on our mission to the final goal which is becoming one with God. Once we realize this, making sure we put problems to sleep and work towards being free of unnecessary burdens is certainly a start. I have done this for many years and now I have the freedom of leaving the worry behind and focusing on being productive and happy. Oh, did I say Happy? Yes this is the key to success. I am Happy, and I have my friend, Swami. What more could I ask for; He has given me a beautiful family consisting of a wonderful wife, two great boys, a wonderful dog, and four cats. Did I mention that I was happy? Sai Ram and have a Babarific day. (Terrific is great, Babarific is wonderful!)

Lots of love, David Wolff

Dear All, Om Sri Sai Ram,

Thank you once again for an enlightening article, and I can assure you I read the H2H journal as soon as it is available on line. There is always so much to

learn and appreciate in every publication. Getting a divine email every day is pure delight, please keep them coming.
Loving Sai Ram to you all from Susan Hardwick, England

COVER STORY

Sairam!

Thank you all in H2H team. By telling us about the wonderful collections of Swami's teachings and other news, you are doing a tremendous job. I am glad to learn that on 22 November 2006, the Sri Sathya Sai University is celebrating its 25th convocation year. The university is one of the modern day wonders. Year after year high quality students pass out. These students, without exception, carry the stamp of Swami's teachings.

My company has been fortunate to induct graduates from the Institute. We have been doing that for two years now. I have had several opportunities to observe them at close quarters. They are sincere, dedicated, disciplined and are always eager to learn. When put in direct customer engagements, they sparkle. Many of our international customers have commended their positive approach to work. They just love them!

Humanity, leave alone companies, needs individuals who have the right spiritual balance of knowledge, skills and attitude. Year after year, the University has been doing just that! Indeed, another sterling example of Swami's infinite love for all us.

Once again, thank you H2H team for your great service. I am certain that Swami's blessings will take you to greater heights.
Regards, Dr. JK Nair, California, USA.

Sairam,

It is a matter of *ananda* that Sai Education is completing 25 years. It is really a matter of regret that there is only one University rendering real service to society, through Education. But, as I understand, it will be now, that the first batch of Baba's students will come out in society for real service. This does not mean that the students until now were not Baba's students. They were also trained by Baba and in the same spiritual atmosphere. But the major difference is that the batch which has entered society today is trained by Baba in the spiritual atmosphere right from KG and we very well know that the teachings during childhood have permanent impressions on one's life. These students in turn will produce similar batches and also provide examples in the society, encouraging others to follow Sai Teachings.

As I understand, this is a cumulative process and a lengthy one also. Baba is initiating the process for the world from Kaliyuga towards Krutayuga. We shall have to wait. Time will automatically do the rest.

Our duty is just to read and listen to the teachings of Baba (Shravana), understand them with true perspective, ruminate and think over them deeply (Manana) and then translate them in deeds in our day to day life with constant awareness (Nididhyasana). We have to live an exemplary life and leave everything else to Him. In due course of time the whole world will accept His teachings.

Sairam, Kundansairam

Sai brothers of H2h team, Sairam!

What a wonderful experience to go through the "Cover story! It was a sumptuous intellectual and inspirational feast of exceptional emotional fragrance! You have blended the narration of MBA students of Swami's Institution distinguishing themselves under very trying professional situations! They serve as a happy prelude to the narration of the historical evolution of the structure of the University under the direct guidance of Swami! The service oriented approach of the students adds to the real blossoming of their personalities.

As a former Visiting faculty to the English Dept. of SSSIHL, I feel elated to be in touch with such enlightening success stories of our young brothers brought out so touchingly by the editorial team of H2H!

Sairam, Subramanian, Chennai

Sai Ram,

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this article. It was so enlightening and uplifting. I am so proud to be a part of Sathya Sai Baba's team. I feel truly blessed and happy to know that such a beautiful, peaceful, compassionate, caring, and loving Baba is walking the planet. I am blessed just to hear about the awesome things being done by Him and through Him. What a blessed world we live in just because he is.

Melba

Aum Sri Sairam!

Many thanks for this article which is so inspiring and enlightening. This has certainly provided an inspiring insight about the way Swamy has been transforming the lives of individuals to motivate them to lead a meaningful life and preparing them to benefit the society, nation and the world. Please continue to publish the case histories and the experiences of our beloved Sai brothers/ Executives. Thanking you once again, Sairam!

S.Balaiah, Pune, India

Om Sai Ram dear brothers,

Your cover story "Modern Education's Divine Manifestation...Blending the Ancient with the New" was a brilliant and inspiring article that provided all the inspiration I needed to do and be that which I consider all students of Sai (well, even though I live in SA, I consider myself still a student Sai) should aspire towards: Living His message in our world.

Regarding these inspirational stories, please do continue making known to us Sai aspirants what Swami's students are bringing to the world (especially the corporate and business world, as that is the environment that is contaminated the most).

Jai Sai Ram, Sandthiren Nadraj Mudaly, Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Editor,

Your Cover Story "Modern Education and Divine Manifestation" has been brought out so well - I wish it had a few more pages! I am one of the fortunate Sai students from 1983. I am working in New Zealand. H2H is powerful tonic for my entire family. Great work - Kudos!

Regards, Venu

HEALING TOUCH

Hi,

I am Selvarani Pillay, a Malaysian residing in Singapore. Loved your story on Poonam, and it reinforces my belief that my present life in this material world is a miracle, a special gift from Swami.

Sairam, Selvarani

Sairam,

The article about Poonam's ailment and the surgery she underwent, with the meticulous planning of the Medical team is very absorbing. It is Bhagavan's blessing that gave her full recovery, over coming so many obstacles. We would like to read more such articles and request you to include at least one in every issue of H2H. Thank you and Sairam.

Sarma Ananthabhotla, New York, USA

CONCERNING THE VEDAS - THE GLORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Sir, Sai Ram,

First and foremost I am grateful to Prof. Venkataraman for his elucidation on this complex subject that would baffle the vast majority of us. What is offered to readers is concise, simple, sequential and understandable. I enjoyed reading it and made it in WORD format for anyone to take a hard copy to read, without pictures.

With what little I know, and intuitively, I feel 100% comfortable with this excellent account on the subject. With reference to ascending awareness of consciousness in the human foetus, Swami too had said that the soul enters the foetus around the 20th week of pregnancy, which corresponds to foetal movements in the womb. The entry of the soul in otherwise a biological material must have a quantum leap of awareness of consciousness in the foetus. In Mahabaratha it is said that Abimanyu heard the conversation between Arjuna and Subhadra! Obviously, here, the foetus must have been

well in an advanced stage. In spiritualist circles it is well known that the human alone has an individual soul, while animals have collective souls.

I sincerely thank Prof. GV for bringing out so clearly, Matter-Energy-Consciousness and relating it with Newtonian Physics, Quantum mechanics, Einstein's persistence with duality and Relativity, Neils Bohr's conviction on Quantum mechanics and finally George Wald's expression on Global Connectivity in the Oneness - all tying in with the timeless Vedic Science. This will go a long way towards helping young inquiring minds among the youth of this scientific era.

With love and Best wishes, S. Pavan

Sai Ram Brothers and Sisters,

I would like you to extend to Professor G. Venkataraman my gratitude in his writing of the above mentioned article. It brought together for me a difficult concept I have tried to decipher. I have always believed in the Primal Consciousness. Although, relating to "humans" as sparks of the Divine was difficult for me with their choices of behaviors. I have never felt separate from the rest of Nature, insentient and sentient. Professor Venkataraman put into words what I have always felt. I now have a deeper sense of peace. Thank you and Namaste, Michele Miley.

SAI INSPIRES

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for Heart2Heart. The inspiring messages have really helped me to understand how Swami would like me to live. I enjoy reading all the stories and I look forward to receiving Sai Inspires by email every day. Thank you for the great effort and work you are doing by producing and sharing Heart2Heart!

Om Sai Ram, Neha, Gold Coast, Australia

Dear H2H, Sairam,

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for making this e-contact between Prasanthi Nilayam and other places possible. My foremost gratitude to Bhagavan for inspiring and encouraging all of you in this mission. I must admit, the daily message that comes into my mailbox is something I eagerly await. It almost makes me think of the eagerness for 'morning Darshan' that filled every Thursday and Sunday mornings back in School...well they have now become 'good old days of student life'.

Staying physically far away, entangled in the activities of the world, busy enacting the role given by the Divine Director to the best possible extent, the H2H messages and bulletin indeed helps us reconnect, and may I say, relive moments spent in divine proximity. For people like me who stay at hostel (away from home) it is not really possible to carry a big chunk of Sai Literature though we would like to read Bhagavan's teachings every day. You

may argue: 'How is it useful, if you just keep reading and not practising?' Well, to speak the truth, in the midst of the pressure of academic courses that we pursue where no time is set apart in the curriculum for any spiritual activity, it is a boon to even 'think'

of Swami for just ten continuous minutes. And in such a scene, it is indeed fortunate that as Swami's messages come through the mail, and as His loving 'Abhayahasta' greets us on the computer screen, we are more easily able to take short 'bites' of Ananda in between the usual work. Let me tell you, it makes a huge difference...it rejuvenates like a magic tonic...it encourages and instills a kind of zeal that nothing else could possibly evoke.

I am sure thanking by mere words can never be sufficient, for the Lord will feel truly gratified the day we are able to inculcate His message into our life, so that He can proudly proclaim: "Look! Their life is My message." Nevertheless, I express my gratitude for the enormous Seva that H2H is doing for all of us.
Sairam, K Padmini

Thank you for a commendable service. I eagerly wait to read Sai inspires. The first thing that I do when I enter my office in the mornings, is to first offer my humble pranams to our beloved Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Immediately thereafter I open my email to read Bhagavan's message. This sets the attitude and mood for my whole day. It uplifts and recharges me and helps to keep me focused, and for this I am grateful. Even though I only subscribed to this service for just over a week, I am totally hooked onto this. Keep up the good work. Ramulu Ramiah, Johannesburg, South Africa

SUNDAY SPECIAL NOV 5 - THE CROWN JEWEL AMONGST GOD'S GIFTS TO MANKIND

Sairam H2H team,

I eagerly wait every month for the H2H journal. To me it is a real feast, and a bonanza, I want to gobble it all up in a single day. Some articles are so good that I want to read them again and again, I don't know how many I can download.

I read your Sunday Special and noted the underlying feeling of irritation and disappointment. Just imagine how Swami will be feeling. He has been shouting His voice hoarse from the time He was sixteen about values and only a handful are living up to His expectations. This is nishkama karma. Carry on your good work. It is the nature of the world to exploit even good people and good things.

Sairam, Latha

Dear Sirs,

I was moved by the apparent 'gripes, moans, etc.' expressed at the beginning of the Sunday special of Nov 5th! I do wish to admit apologetically that I am not able to read the whole H2H magazine so diligently (and lovingly) put together and submitted promptly on the 1st of every month as you bemoan.

The reason is simply this: I am not a savvy 'computer reader' and do not enjoy reading articles on-line since I am an 'old-fashioned paper article reader'! I am more comfortable holding a piece of printed paper than to read staring at a glaring screen, looking at sometimes small fonts. And yes, there are other e-mails to be attended to in the short time I allow myself at the computer!

Yet, let me assure you that I always read the daily "inspirational" messages you send me with the h2h issue. And, on occasions, like today, I did take time to read the Sunday special article. These articles are well written, very thoughtful and thought-provoking.

I did read today's 'Sunday Special' and was very much moved by reading the performance of the students of the Sathya Sai University - not that I needed to be reminded of that. Without being a part of the institution, I instinctively know the facts enumerated, as it is headed by none other than the Lord Himself! It would be a wonder if the results were not as described in the article! Swami's sankalpa can never be wrong and must be fulfilled.

My heartiest congratulations to the fortunate students of the Lord! I am indeed looking forward to see them lead the World as promised by the Lord Himself! I hope to live long enough to enjoy that experience of my life. The last century and the present times are such an anti-thesis of what the Lord's vision and promise are!

Please keep the work going without any disillusion - it is based on His Sankalpa only!

Jai Sai Ram, Shashikant Ambegaokar, Vista, California, USA

SUNDAY SPECIAL ARTICLE ON OCT 29 – WHY ARE OUR PRAYERS SOMETIMES NOT ANSWERED?

Dear H2H,

Your article is wonderful. I have seen in my own case, whenever I pray for others it works, but mostly not when I pray for myself. However, there is one thing for sure, as you've said, 'He knows better than us what is good for us' and He grants just that. Again, as you said, if you're a spiritual aspirant, He'll give you only what is congenial to spiritual growth. So even though, you may ask for a material thing, He'll grant it only if it will give us spiritual benefits.

Thanks for a nice thought provoking article.

Yours in Sai Seva, Ashok Mehta

Dear H2H Team, Om Sai Ram!

Indeed, we can have a hidden agenda or a "belief system" in our subconscious mind that creates a blockage to our prayer. These subconscious beliefs can be: "I am not good enough", or "I don't want to be healthy", or "I don't love myself". Without exception, I find that patients who have problems, either psychological or physical, have a causal belief underlying their condition. Some even believe that God wants to punish them

for past sins, or for the very fact that they are human beings. These beliefs have to be eliminated before the person feels free to become healthy. Of course, that is only part of the solution, as we very well know, if we take into consideration Swami's teachings. That, I surmise, is why total surrender is more effective than a prayer for a specific outcome, such as saying, for example: "Lord, I entrust this problem to Your care because You know best".

With Love, Jacqueline Trost

Hello,

Thank you very much for today's article. It was just what I needed to find out about prayer. I also consider it as a present from God because it is my birthday today. God does talk to me and this makes me happy. What I can do is to translate the article and give it out to all my friends. Thank you very much again.

Best Wishes, Sylvia, Bulgaria

A big bouquet of congrats to the Heart2Heart Team for today's excellent article on the effectiveness of prayer. Prayer is an honest and sincere dialogue between you and your Maker. I fully agree with you that non-directed prayer is very potent and is answered almost immediately. His love and mercy which is showered on us as His blessings creates such wonderful feelings in our hearts that make our life on this earth so beautiful. Look forward to more such inspiring articles from a great team.

Regards, Usha

Om Sai Ram,

Thank you so very much for the article on Prayer that was printed with the Oct 29th Sai message. It was extremely timely for myself and family since we are in the midst of being blessed financially. I too agree that the non-direct approach to prayer using those powerful words 'Thy Will Be Done' is most effective and works everytime in my life when I just surrender and hand everything over to God.

Om Shanti, Brahmachandri