

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

When hundreds of farmers in Cholamaari of Anantapur district were selling away their cattle and bullocks to slaughter houses, simply because they could not afford to feed them when they themselves were going without food for days, the Sai Youth of Andhra Pradesh stepped in. And now even though the dreadful drought continues in its sixth successive year, the villagers in and around Cholamaari are not committing suicide. In fact, their produce has doubled, they are selling milk from their cows, cultivating more land and jubilant like never before. How did all this happen?

Again, the youngsters of Cholamaari who used to leave their village in search of elusive dreams in big cities reducing their village to an old men's ghetto now do not want to leave their village any more at any cost. They are not only earning good money and are prosperous but are also providing employment to other unemployed youth. "We will never leave this village," now the teenagers of Cholamaari emphatically say. What exactly did the Sai Youth do?

Thousands of village children who never went to school because their parents did not know what a school was and how it will help their children, are now enthusiastically going to school. Teachers deputed to village schools who either paid occasional visits or sent their proxies now want to make the village children good citizens of the country. How did this transformation come about?

The guileless hundred odd villagers of Guntapalli who lived in dingy dilapidated houses made of burnt mud and had to walk six kilometers through stone and rubble to catch a bus and at least twenty kilometers to see a physician, are now proud owners of houses made of reinforced cement concrete. They, who have never seen Baba or heard of Him, now say, "We all want to see Sai Baba. If He can inspire so many youngsters to come so far and construct houses for someone they don't even know, He must be great indeed. Over the years, we had lost faith in humanity. But now we know they are people who do what they profess to do." Did the Sai Youth only construct houses here? What else did they do? How did they reach this god-forsaken village in the first place?

These are just tiny glimpses of what the Sai Youth of Andhra Pradesh under the banner of Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust have done in the last few years. There is much more and when you read our comprehensive cover story on this saga of stupendous selfless service, we are sure you will never be the same again. What the Sai Youth has achieved in just three years is truly remarkable and mind-boggling. No wonder, Swami speaking to this group of Youth in the year 2003 said, "It is enough if there are one or two organisations like this; Bharat can be restored to its pristine glory."

You will be amazed to know that the Sai Youth conceived and implemented a string of critical service projects - first in a cluster of villages and then scaled

up later to cover the whole state of Andhra Pradesh – benefiting thousands of villagers yet without spending a single rupee. Their ideas were revolutionary and implementation as perfect as it can be. And, of course, there was the unseen hand. The ways of the divine are mysterious. You will find another fascinating instance of this when you read how Swami began to be loved in the enchanting isthmus of Panama in our feature articles section. Here too, it is selfless service by Sai volunteers which made miracles happen, hearts healed and bridges built.

“Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray” is oft quoted and may sound quite straightforward. But the real issues surface when one tries to apply this principle in one’s professional and personal life. It suddenly becomes complex. Many people do not understand where to draw the line. What exactly is Service? Whom should we actually serve? Is not doing our office work service? Where will it ultimately lead to? These jab the mind again and again. It is to provide a clear perspective on all these concepts that we have in this issue a special panel discussion in the Sai Seva section. And you will find a practical demonstration of these ideas when you read the article “Where there is His Will, There is a Way” by a former student of Swami’s institute in the Swami and Me section.

It was six decades and six years ago in this same month of October that Swami revealed to the world for the first time His identity, His advent and His Mission. If we have to describe all these three facets in one phrase, it would be - Selfless Love. “The joy that you can derive from selfless service,” Swami says, “cannot be compared to any amount of worldly accomplishments.” Truly, deep in his heart, every wise man knows that the only way he can help himself is by helping others. Not to lose oneself in being of help to others is to miss the elixir of life. Opportunities knock only once. So, let’s take every chance that comes our way to experience this supreme feeling of love through service. For there is actually no other way to perennial joy.

Let’s make our lives a saga of love and service.

Loving regards,
H2H Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Yearn For God Alone

Oct 2nd is the Poornahuti Day of the Veda Purusha Sapthaha Jnana Yagna, the vedic sacrifice performed during Dasara Celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam. Let's recapitulate Swami's divine message during this occasion more than a decade and a half ago in 1989.

The man who is filled with love has great peace of mind, is pure at heart and is unruffled by any adverse circumstances, failures or losses. This fortitude is derived from love of the Lord, which endows him with self-confidence. Self-confidence generates an immense internal power. Everyone has to develop this power. Everyone has to develop this self-confidence so that the *Atma-Ananda* (bliss of the Self) may be experienced.

The Bounden Duty of Man

Love should be free from feelings of expectation of any return or reward. Love which arises out of a desire for something in return is not true love. Utterly selfless and motiveless love should be developed. This is the bounden duty of man.

You should not pray to God seeking this favour or that. The reason is no one can know what immensely precious, Divine and magnificent treasures lie in the treasure-house of Divine Grace. No one can know what God intends or desires to give to a devotee. In such a situation by asking for trivial and petty things, man is demeaning his Divine estate.

No one can understand what valuable, sacred and Divine favours God chooses to confer on a deserving devotee. Hence man should not seek from God, nor desire, nor pray for some petty trifles. More precious and desirable than anything else is God's love.

If you wish to ask for anything from God pray to Him thus "Oh Lord! Let me have you alone." Once you have secured the Lord, you can get anything you want. That was why Mira sang: "Oh heart, drink the nectar of Divine love." When you can have Divine love, to crave for anything else is like asking for coffee powder from the *Kalpataru!* (Wish-fulfilling Tree)....

Consider God As Friend

God has a partiality for the human form. "*Daivam maanusha rupena*," it is said. (God has to be experienced in the human form). It is only when God is regarded as friend and a companion that He is pleased most. By addressing Him as: "Oh, my dearest friend! My beloved one! The darling of my heart," you can give Him the greatest joy. Instead of that, if He is described as one who is beyond praise by Brahma and other gods, who is not accessible to mind

and speech, whose glories are beyond description, who prevailed over the God of Death, who was born as the son of Devaki and Vasudeva...and so on, and then He is entreated to confer His grace on you, there is an element of the ludicrous in the comparisons made. Such praise even savours of envy. When you say, "Oh Lord! You have talked to them and given them so much! Why don't you come to my help?" the comparison seems to stem from jealousy.

It is only when God is approached as a loving friend who has the power to come to our aid that our desires will be fulfilled. We use words of praise towards an unfamiliar person to show him respect and regard as a stranger. But we welcome an old friend with easy familiarity and intimacy.

Thyagaraja performed *sadhana* over many years to obtain a vision of the Lord. By that *sadhana* he established intimate relationship with Sri Rama. Because of this, he could greet Rama with friendly familiarity and welcome Him to his house as a companion in the song: "*Raara maa intidaaka*" (Rama, come to our house!). Because of his intimacy, Thyagaraja could address Rama in the second person singular.

In the context of the Navarathri celebrations, on this Purnaahuti day, we must learn to recognise the Divine in this intimate manner. Reduce your desires. Don't pray for trifles. Don't go to a shrine with the intention to seek fulfilment of some petty desires. It is an unfortunate sign of the *Kali* age that everyone goes to a temple or pilgrim centre only to get some trivial benefits.

If you can win over the Lord Himself, what is it that is beyond your reach? Thyagaraja declared: "Rama! If only I have Your *anugraha* (grace) all *grahas* (planets) will be in my palm."

*Discourse in the Poornachandra Auditorium on the Poornahuti day of
Veda Purusha Jnana Yajna, 9-10-1989.*

- Heart2Heart Team

CONVERSATIONS WITH Sai - Part 25 (Continued from the previous issue)

The Goa Incident

H (Hislop): Baba's dramatic recovery from what the doctors considered as sure death, during the Goa incident, must have amazed and puzzled the doctors?

SAI: The next morning, after Baba had at 4 p.m. walked down the 150 steps from the palace to the platform from which He delivered a spiritual discourse, there was a conference of the 25 doctors who had been called by the Governor to consult over Baba, along with quite a number of their medical students. The argument was 'How could a body with a ruptured appendix and without operation continue to live?' The top doctor said, 'We are in a useless discussion. Sri Sathya Sai is divine'. Baba created 25 rings all at once, one for each doctor. They have now all surrendered to Baba, and they call 'Sai Ram' before treating any patient. The radio reported Baba as dying. The best doctors in India were called in. Baba was black in colour. The doctors gave Him varying times of up to maximum of ten minutes or so to live. Baba then declared that He would lecture in the afternoon, and that He had taken on the illness of a devotee. India 's most prominent doctor said, 'That may be so, but I say you are about to die.' Baba said, 'See at 4 p.m.'

Stories From Swami's Childhood

H: Is it true that Swami suffered some extreme abuse from doctors when He was a boy?

SAI: Baba underwent torture at the hands of the village doctors when He first allowed His divine powers to manifest on a fairly large scale. This was around the age of 10. The doctors drilled holes in His head and stuck in hot irons, cut open His skin and poured in burning fluids, buried Him in a trench with sand up to His neck and used iron bars to keep Him fixed in position. Here, He would just move and be free despite the iron bars. **During all the torture, He smiled and felt no pain. He at no time had even the slightest body identification.** When Baba was born, He knew His divinity and that He was God Himself. The universe is held in Baba's hand and He could in an instant, make the entire universe vanish.

H: Swami, please say some things about the early childhood?

SAI: Swami had two shirts and pants to last a year. There was no money even for a pin - thorns were used to hold torn places together. Tears in the cloth came from schoolmates who would punish Baba for always knowing the answers at school. Only He would know the answer. If He gave the answer the boys would beat Him. If He did not give it, the teacher would beat Him. On some occasions, the pupil who answered had to slap the faces of those who did not. Since Swami was small, He had to stand on a

chair to slap. But He would slap gently. Then the teacher would slap Him hard as many times as he Had slapped gently.

Of course, after the immediate retaliation on the boys, they would be loving and affectionate to Baba. Even though Baba had not even a pin for Himself, He would produce pens, pencils, notebook, paper, or whatever the boys needed. This, at length, led to some fear in the village. Because, how could it be explained to the authorities as to how these things were present? At one stage, after the age of 11, Baba was kept more or less out of circulation for a couple of years. At that time the liberation of India was in process, the police were moving in the villages and arresting Congress members, and so on.

H: The early stories are extraordinary! They do not conform to anything we could imagine. Those childhood companions, they must have been quite special. Was their further destiny unusual also?

SAI: In the school, there were two boys who sat with Swami in the same seat. It was for three. When Swami declared that He would no longer go to school, one boy committed suicide. The other boy went mad. He would call, 'Raju Raju' all the time. At length he died.

H: It is very strange. A great mystery. But his death was a good death because his mind was fixed on Swami and constantly calling Swami's name?

SAI: He merged with Me. There was also a Telugu teacher who took pains to get himself appointed to Swami's school, and who left the school as soon as Swami left.

The Place Of Exercise In One's Life

A Visitor: Is an exercise programme important? In the West, exercise is considered to be of great value.

SAI: Exercise is extolled in the West as a way to digest excess food and sublimate the sex drive. Swami who is completely removed from the area of sensory thoughts, takes a very small quantity of food, and needs no exercise. Yet this body is very strong. For those engaged in work, there is exercise. The idea of exercise comes to those who are idle and who do not have the full responsibility of work. Moderation in life is necessary, otherwise there is no reserve of energy. Food must be in the body for some time for the benefit of the energy reserve. Too much exercise uses up the food energy before it can be added to the reserve. So there is no gain. Likewise, the human system cannot withstand too much talking. One M.P. talked for two hours and felt dizzy. Nobody can continue talking - that is, nobody except Swami who has been doing it for years and years.

H: Swami, hippies are seen wherever one goes. It is difficult for an older person to relate to that sub-culture. It does not seem to express values that can be taken seriously.

SAI: The hippie ideas are based on no work, drugs, begging, and free relationship between the sexes. Baba gave some of them work to do in the print shop. They did not do it. Baba offered funds to go home, they did not want to go. They do not understand 'karma', that work produces results, as it is understood in India. Dharma does not have an equivalent word in English. Righteousness is work. Truth in words, and truth and love in the heart is dharma.

‘Feel Another’s Hunger As Your Own’

H: How does one determine the particular dharma appropriate to himself?

SAI: One has to enquire. Ask questions such as, 'I am a man, what is animal work? Am I male or female? Am I young or old?' And so forth. Because animal behaviour is not correct for humans. And a man should not behave like a woman. If an old person plays with dolls, like a child, he is ridiculous. If a youngster takes a cane and walks like an old person, he is ridiculous. That work which is righteous, true, well-considered in truth, is dharma. Thought, word and deed must coincide. **The other person must be understood. Do you feel hunger if another person is hungry? You must feel his hunger as your own.**

H: When does one really experience that he is the same as another? Because now, one feels for another through compassion. But compassion is not direct experience. When someone hit a dog, Shirdi Sai Baba had bruises. That is the actual experience of unity.

SAI: All is divine. When you are firmly established in the fact of your divinity, then you will directly know that others are divine. Compassion for others is felt as long as you consider yourself as a separate entity. The story about Shirdi Sai Baba as related in books is not fully correct. The facts are that a lady made a plate of sweets for Shirdi Baba, and a dog ate them. The lady drove the dog away with blows. She then carried another platter of sweets to Shirdi Baba, who refused them, saying that He had eaten the sweets she previously provided and His hunger was satisfied. The lady objected that this was the first time the sweets had been offered, so how could Baba say to the contrary? Baba said, 'No', that she had offered them before and had also beaten Him. In this way, He gave a lesson that He was omnipresent and that there was only one life.

During the lifetime of Shirdi Baba not much attention was paid to Him. Recognition of Him as an Avathar, and interest in His life developed only after His 'death'. Thus, various incidents are recalled from memory now by devotees and written down in books. The same lack of recognition of divinity is illustrated in the lives of Rama and Krishna. Krishna was considered as just a cow-herd boy, and then as just a charioteer. **Even the life of Shirdi Baba prior to age 18 is known only to Baba, and the divinity was known only to a very few genuine devotees.**

Recognising The Avathar

H: It seems strange that only a few people recognize the Avathar.

SAI: No, not strange. How would you know the Avathar?

H: By faith.

SAI: Faith is one thing, knowing is another. Your wife may have faith in you, but she does not also know you. The Avathar may be known at one time, but doubt arises and recognition wavers. An example is Viswamitra the great sage, who asked for the company of the young lads Rama and Lakshmana, to help him overcome the demons who were disrupting his performance of Vedic ceremonies. He said to the King that he did not want the King's powerful armies, that the two boys, who were divine incarnations, were sufficient. Yet, upon reaching their destination, he called Rama in order to instruct Him in mantras that would overcome the demons. Waves of *maya* make recognition of the Avathar almost impossible.

H: But Swami, that is still very strange. Recognition of the Avathar was so difficult in those ancient, simpler days, yet in this corrupt and complicated society, recognition of the Avathar is almost world-wide.

SAI: Is it widespread? **There are stories and articles about Swami, but how many persons are sure that He is the Avathar, and how many of those who are sure are free of doubt? Another example: you know Swami as the Avathar?**

H: Yes.

SAI: No doubts?

H: No doubts whatsoever.

SAI: Your own experience is that Swami is omnipresent.

H: Yes, that is my direct experience.

SAI: Yet, when you leave Swami at Brindavan and arrive at your hotel you think of Swami as being at Brindavan. You see, it is not so easy to know the omnipresent Avathar. Of course, there are always some who know. In the Krishna Avathara there were some who knew. Likewise, there were some who knew the Rama Avathara. Not every blossom opens to the sun when it rises. Only some are ready. There is the factor of ripeness. Not every fruit on a tree is ripe at the same time. Another example: who offers that new house, and to whom is it given?

H: To the divine form.

SAI: What? Divine form. This is the divine form? This is a human body. When the name of Swami is placed on a transfer deed, to whom is the deed transferred, and who makes the transfer? Is it not from that body to this body?

H: Yes, from body to body.

SAI: Exactly. *(The implication being that if Swami were really recognized as the Avathar, both offer and question of acceptance would have no meaning, and neither would occur.)*

(To be continued)

– Heart2Heart Team

CHINNA KATHA
- A Little Story from Bhagavan

The Faith Of The Disciple

In South India, in the Tamil country, there was a certain Adigal or Dasa, in a village, Thangalur by name. He had heard of the spiritual grandeur of Saint Appar and developed great admiration for him. So he built resthouses in his name and named his children after him so that they might grow up in the halo of his glory. He donated lands and houses, all in the name of the Saint he had not seen. See how faith preceded experience here. There are others who require experience before they fix their faith. The first path is more thrilling and lasting.

Well, one day by chance Appar himself walked into Thangalur for he had missed his way and had to deviate. He noticed everywhere in the town Appar Resthouses and Appar Charities, and wondered how his name had preceded him. Then Adigal ran forward to His Guru and took him home and prepared a grand feast for him.

When his eldest son went to his garden to cut a few plantain leaves for the dinner, a snake bit him and he died on the spot. Adigal however, was not affected in the least. He covered up the corpse, heaping dry leaves upon it and proceeded with the formalities of hospitality for the long-sought Guru. The Guru, however, insisted on all the children of Adigal sitting around him during the meal, and he ordered the father, "Go, call everyone here." Adigal did as he was commanded. He called and the dead son rose. He too came and sat for dinner with the rest. When he knew what had happened, Appar said, "Your Bhakthi is greater than my Sakthi."

- BABA

- Heart2Heart Team

COVER STORY

A 'Sai'lent Revolution Of Rural Rejuvenation

The story of how the Sai Youth of Andhra Pradesh under the banner of the Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust reached out into the most interior of rural areas, discovered the distressed and converted what were 'god-forsaken places' into clusters of sustainable development and 'islands of delight'...all inspired by His Love.

The Case of a Community's Collapse

Ramadasu was a statue of dejection and despair. His three sons had deserted him. They had no more faith in their father's profession. It was the fourth year in succession when Ramadasu found only a dry dreary earth for all the long hours of toil that he had put in under the unforgiving Sun. "I can swallow converting my sweat into blood to cultivate my land and still get a piece of burnt earth, but what do I do about the loan?" Ramadasu was almost in tears. That was the year 2003 and since 1999, the five hundred odd residents of Cholarri – the village where Ramadasu was born and brought up – had never seen a single good rain. "It had never been so bad," says Ramadasu who has lived through more than forty summers and winters in his hamlet.

Every year he would borrow Rs. 10000 or Rs. 15000 from the bank to buy seeds and plow his land hoping against hope, "If this year I get a good yield, I can repay all my loans". And every year it would be a disaster more severe than the previous. He has a large area of land – 12 acres. But no food to eat. He is one of the poorest in the village with at least Rs. 50,000 against his name as arrears in the bank. He can sell his eight animals – a few buffalos and cows – and clear his loan. But how will he cultivate again without the plough? With eight animals and a big patch of land, Ramadasu is tragically still very poor. And now he resorts to the final option – sell his animals. With tears Ramadasu every year sends one or two of his buffaloes to the slaughter house for half the price he bought them for a few years ago. It was as if he was he was cutting his own stomach with a knife. But what else could he do?

Swami Implements 'Sustained Rural Development'

In the November of 2003, when Sai Youth from Andhra Pradesh reached this obscure village and asked the villagers how they could help, "Fodder" was the unanimous reply. "Please save our cattle, Sir. They are dying. Without them our profession is doomed."

But how to grow fodder in this dry land? The youth were clueless. Getting them fodder from outside for one year will not solve their problem. They needed a sustained development project. In fact, that was what Swami had specifically instructed them just a few months ago when they had all assembled in hundreds in Prasanthi Nilayam on the 20th of October 2003.

“All these years you have been visiting villages and conducting medical camps or have been doing some physical activity going once in a while. But, this is not going to help the villagers much. You must concentrate on the long pending unsolved issues the villagers are facing. Look to focus more on sustained rural development activity which will help them in the long run,” Swami said.

In fact, Swami took all the youth by surprise when He declared out of the blue, “I have decided to form a Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust to facilitate you to continue lasting village service.” He even immediately gave the first cheque. “Where shall we start the work, Swami?” The youth wanted explicit directions and guidance. “Start with A – Anantapur district,” Swami said.

That was the beginning of what turned into an avalanche of Sai Seva of gigantic proportions. Since then the Youth have embarked upon half a dozen sustainable development activities for rural areas and as you read along you will see how the success of one activity led to another. The Youth virtually covered the whole spectrum of village development in the state of Andhra Pradesh with resounding success. For now, let’s return to Cholamaari.

I. Providing Fodder to the Starving Cattle And Crafting a Turnaround - The Sai Youth's First Project

So, it is with this renewed enthusiasm and direction from Bhagawan that the youth had come to Cholamaari after a long search of different villages in the Anantapur district looking for the neediest. And having come they were now determined to evolve a solution to this “fodder” problem. They conducted an extensive survey of the village, spoke to the villagers, had brainstorming sessions among themselves and out came an idea. “Can we not use the village lake bed? The lake bed of the village has inherent moisture and this could just suffice to grow fodder,” they contemplated. The sporadic and scanty rains that the village received did contribute to the wetness of the earth which was once a lake spread over more than four hundred acres.

But there were several knotty issues to be resolved. The lake bed, by order of the government, could not be cultivated. It did not belong to any specific village either as it was shared by a cluster of five villages spread all around the lake – Cholamaari being the biggest. So the first step was to meet the district Collector. Getting an appointment, they were soon in the office of Ms. Anuradha, the former Collector of Anantapur.

‘You Must Not Delay Good Work’ - Swami

The Collector seemed impressed and was more than eager to help the inspired Sai Youth. She immediately came to Prasanthi Nilayam and Swami graciously blessed her with an interview. A few minutes into the interview and Swami was out. He beckoned to Sri Y Srinivas, the

President of the Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust and said, “You must not delay good work. Start this immediately.”

The Youth now were literally unstoppable! They had no more apprehensions whatsoever – should they deal with the government, should they speak to all the five villages, what if the project just did not succeed, and the like.

The Collector cautioned them that it was not going to be easy. It was going to be a Herculean task to convince the villagers of the efficacy of the project and persuade them to take to the soft earth with their ploughs. And the even trickier issue was that there was no way they could do the project unless they forged a consensus about it in all the five villages around the lake. Otherwise it would be a war - the youth knew this well and this was the last thing they wanted.

The Collector on her part did all she could. The seeds for cultivation - a special variety of drought resistant seeds called the African Grass Sudan Variety which would cost tens of thousands - came from the government free of cost. The Collector even shared with the Youth that there are good sums of government funds under different schemes which are available for the villagers, but most of the time they remain unspent. And she is most happy releasing those funds to the youth as she is impressed with their sincerity of purpose and is confident about their ability to deliver results. Soon the requisite permissions to cultivate the land arrived too.

Having won the confidence of the local administration, the next step was to build a cordial relationship with the villagers of Cholamaari and then unite all its five neighboring villagers. The youth achieved this more by actions than by words. The village was not new to Sai as Swami’s drinking water project had reached their surrounding areas. And the village had a small Bhajan mandali established a few years ago. The youth taking Swami’s Name conducted medical camps, visited the villages frequently and gave a sympathetic ear to all their problems – all this sent very positive signals to the village community. They started to believe “Yes, these Youth are really concerned about us. They are here to help us with no ulterior motives.” Once the villagers became more receptive, the youth then convinced them of the many positive fallouts of the fodder project and how if all the villagers would unite it would do maximum good to maximum people. And in a few weeks the five villages began to work as one cohesive unit. For the villagers themselves, it was a miracle!

“We never thought we would work with untouchables before” – a Village Community

“We had never thought that we would work with people from the Harijanwada (untouchable colony) before,” said one community of villagers, “But, today we do not feel the same inhibition anymore as we were working with them throughout these few months. We have learnt that all are humans and that there is no other difference.”

It is this sense of camaraderie which the youth feel was the most potent fallout of the project apart from the nearly 500 bullock–cart loads of fodder that grew in three months in mid-2004. “It grew 5 to 6 feet high. I got three bullock-cart loads,” say Govindappa with jubilation. He, like all his 150 odd brethren, had worked for three days on the fields with his plough in January of 2004. And every drop of sweat was worth it.

“The fodder is like a goldmine” - Ramadasu

Ecstatic Ramadasu now says, “The fodder that we cultivate in this lake bed is like a gold mine. I use it very sparingly. It is my reserve for the dry months. I will not sell my remaining animals. Now I even sell milk from my cow everyday in the village.” The villagers have cultivated fodder many times after 2004 and do so with great enthusiasm every year.

Another group of villagers from the neighboring village said to H2H, “These Sai Baba people (organization) have saved us.” With immense gratitude on their faces they continue, “We would have definitely left the village for lack of sustenance (just like Ramadasu’s sons) if not for this project. God bless them all.”

“This project has brought so much unity amongst us” – Sri Kulyappa, the Village Sarpanch

When H2H asked the Sarpanch (local government head) of the village, Sri Kulyappa, if they would continue this project, he said, “Yes. We want to continue this every year at all costs. This project has brought so much unity among us. It has shown us what we can achieve if work together for each other. We will even borrow bullocks if required and do this project to save our remaining animals. The whole atmosphere has changed so much since the Sai Youth came to this village.” “We are waiting when the Grama Seva youth will come again to our village. We want them,” said Ramaiyya, another elder of the village who coordinates all the activities with respect to the project with the villagers.

When the fodder was cut for the first time in 2004, it was the culmination of a series of sincere efforts by the youth. It was a great occasion to celebrate and an occasion to reflect too. The youth were more confident than ever in their abilities and had learnt very salient lessons. First and foremost is that if the project addresses an urgent need of the village, then the beneficiaries of the project can be convinced about it with minimum effort. And once they are convinced, the work is already half-done. As Sai Prasad Gollapudi, a member of the Grama Seva Trust said to H2H, “If you noticed, the need of the villagers drove them to work with unity towards the completion of the project. We know that we should look at such projects where the need is so great that the villagers themselves come forward to work for it. For example, this project had most of the village farmers working and not the volunteers.”

“The whole project was accomplished with just three Sai volunteers and without spending a single pie!” – Sri Y Srinivas

“Yes, that was another amazing feature of this Project, “adds Y Sreenivas, “Here we had hundreds of families benefiting from five villages from a big project involving so many parties – the Collector, the village heads and different groups of farmers – but all this was achieved with just three Sai volunteers and without spending a single pie!” It just shows how to undertake large projects, and that what is necessary is the sincerity of purpose and clarity of thought and a sense of surrender to His will. Funds for any worthy undertaking are the last thing to worry about - the Sai Youth were more convinced than ever before about this fact.

The “Fodder Project” was a grand success no doubt but still it was not a comprehensive solution to the villagers’ miseries. At best, it served only the animals in the lean months and kept the families together. But the primary problem with the villagers was the single dreaded thing – drought. And this was the issue that the Youth next wanted to tackle.

II. Taking the Scientists to the Villages to Deal with the Droughts – Their Second Project

The farmers never had timely rainfall and the three main crops they would cultivate - groundnut, castor and pigeon pea were all dependent on rains. And there was no groundwater either to be able to sink bore wells. Surely, you can do little about the vagaries of nature but the Youth believed they could do something with aspects which were under the control of the villagers like the seeds, the land, the pesticides, etc. They examined various factors and thought it was best to take guidance from experts in the field. And this was how they found themselves in the campus of ICRISAT- International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics [a UNO arm which works primarily in Africa] in the city of Hyderabad.

“Do the scientists at ICRISAT have a solution to the woes of the villagers of Cholamaari cluster?” was their moot agenda. And the answer - an emphatic “Yes.” The Chief Scientist, Mr. S.P Vani and his colleague Mr. Gowda, the Global Theme Leader, took the Youth around their labs and fields where they were testing drought resistant varieties of crops. The Youth were indeed glad. They immediately knew they had come to the right place. And the Scientists too working for the UN, which is also essentially a non profit organization, evinced keen interest in helping the farmers of the drought-affected Anantapur district. They even mentioned, “It is sad that despite there being such a great need in our country we are here trying to help only farmers in Africa.” So this was a welcome opportunity for them and they looked forward to visiting the village and sharing their research with the farmers. And this happened very soon.

ICRISAT Scientists at the Farmers Meet in Cholamaari

In a matter of days, on one sunny weekend the Scientists drove down along with members of the Grama Seva Trust to Cholamarri. Incidentally, that was the day of Raitu Mela – the farmer's meet. The villagers knew about the scientist's visit and had all assembled before they arrived. And then began an illuminating session for the villagers where the scientists explained farming techniques like Inter-Cropping and Integrated Pest Management. Everything they heard was new to them. They listened with rapt attention. The scientists also showed them the quality seeds they had produced. The villagers saw the drought-resistant and superior quality groundnut and castor seeds. The farmers seemed to assimilate all that was conveyed to them. Many of them were proactive and asked questions narrating their practical problems. Having understood all that, the next important hurdle was, whether the villagers were willing to try these seeds the coming season? Will they be willing to take the risk? When the Sai Youth asked, "How many farmers are willing to experiment with the new seeds?" There was fortunately an encouraging response. The visit of the ICRISAT scientists had paid off. The scientists finally took samples of the soil and promised to provide the first lot of drought resistant seeds to the farmers free of cost for their first experiment.

And true to their word, on a subsequent weekend, Dr. Lingaraj Jangvad, an ICRISAT scientist arrived at the village with a UN mini-truck loaded with seeds. Each farmer was given seeds according to the amount of land he was willing to set aside to try the new seeds. They got drought resistant groundnut, castor and pigeon pea seeds. The scientists also spent a lot of time explaining to the farmers how they should cultivate these crops, what pesticide to use, how to maintain the cultivation, etc. The scientists also gave them Azola - a bio pesticide.

When we asked Yadagiri, a farmer, why did he believe the scientists and what gave him the confidence to go ahead with the new crop, he admitted, "Initially, I was very apprehensive about the seeds and so many strangers (scientists) coming to the village. But, once they showed us the seeds and we tasted them, I was convinced. Moreover, the "Sairam people" had brought these scientists so I knew it would be for our benefit, so I decided to try out the seeds. I have 8 acres and had set aside 2 acres for experimenting. This time I will use all 8 acres with the produce I got. I also got a good price in the market." Yadagiri is all smiles. And Rangaswamy, an elder in the village, is actually on cloud nine. "I got double the produce I used to get with the normal seeds. I am willing to cultivate all my 20 acres with the new seeds now," he said to H2H, with a gentle grin on his face hiding his inner exuberance, in consonance with his age.

"The government may have forgotten us but God has not forgotten us" – Ramaiyya, a Village Elder

What Ramaiyya, another village elder said to the Sai Youth literally turned their hearts into sponge. "We always looked forward to the government to come forward to help us. But, you people have come. The

government may have forgotten us but God has not forgotten us. That is why He has sent you.”

For the Sai Youth the whole project was another soul-stirring experience. It was yet another exercise where they acted as just able facilitators. In the “fodder project”, they brought the government and villagers together and now in this the intellectuals and farmers were face to face sharing each others’ experience. “It is precisely this role that we want to play,” says Balachandra, a Sai Youth. “There are a number of government schemes, agricultural institutions, ideas and more ideas which are not reaching the people they are meant for. All we need to do is to create a forum where the experts and the people who can benefit from this expertise meet.”

Sri Y Sreenivas, the President of the Grama Seva Trust, says, “Despite being involved in rural activities for the last decade, we have never done anything like this before. We will monitor this for some time and if it turns out to be successful, we will implement it in other areas of the state which are prone to droughts. This has been such a wonderful learning experience for all of us.”

The ICRISAT project is still in its pilot phase in Cholamaari cluster. Not every attempt was completely successful. While the new variety of groundnut seeds did extremely well, this could not be said of other seeds where the yield did not match up to the scientists’ expectations. With the youth submitting the feedback report from the villagers to the scientists there is further research going on now in ICRISAT. Therefore, just like the fodder project which had its utility limited to a few lean months, the ICRISAT project too, though successful, had its own shortcomings. There is more research needed on some seeds and there was an element of dependence on nature, however, small that may be. To really yield good crops the drought-resistant seeds needed blessings from heaven - even if it is a little at the right time. And with no groundwater whatsoever, the farmer had absolutely no backup. So in spite of continuing their efforts to make these projects fool-proof, the Sai Youth were still exploring other options which could provide lasting self-employment to the villagers all the year round and where the uncertainties to deal with were minimal.

III. An Innovative Scheme that Made Precious Youth Stay in the Villages! – The Youth’s Third Endeavour

In their quest for such alternate schemes, the members of the Grama Seva Trust constantly interacted now with the youngsters of the village. Every passing day the village was losing its young men. Just like Ramadasu’s sons, no youngster wanted to take up agriculture and was only dreaming of ‘doing it big in the city’, and were moving away from their homeland. For the village elders, this was a major concern, but they were helpless, the Sai Youth gathered.

“My dream had become dust” - Ramakrishna

B Ramakrishna, a youngster of the Nallur village (one of the villages in the Cholamaari cluster) has no parents. Filled with the zeal to make a life for himself, he fled the village to the nearby town of Hindupur when he was not even fifteen. “I worked as a labourer under a Handloom weaver in Hindupur,” he says, “But even after three years of dedicated labour, he still paid me very little. I could not even make ends meet. My skill and dedication was never rewarded. In the city, the expenses too were very high. I realized I can never do anything on my own in this city. I never wanted to be a labourer forever. I was thoroughly dejected. My dream had become dust. I returned to Cholamaari,” shares Ramakrishna. In the meantime, Ramakrishna got married and thanks to his in-laws he had a thatched hut to stay in the village. With no land, no parents, no assets whatsoever, Ramakrishna had no option but to work as a labourer now in his own village, however much he disliked it. “For two years I worked as a daily wage labourer earning Rs. 30 or Rs. 40 on the days I found work. There were times when for days I would find no work. It was so terrible,” Ramakrishna’s face shrinks. He does not want to talk about those horrific days of his life.

It was during this time, that the Sai Youth approached Ramakrishna and asked him if he was willing to go the Anantapur District Vocational Training Centre in Hindupur for two months. There he would learn weaving from experts and at the end of it he will also get a certificate, the Sai Youth explained to him. Ramakrishna gave his name. “And this was the turning point of my life,” says Ramakrishna.

Like Ramakrishna another 20 youngsters went to the Vocational Training Centre. Their food and accommodation were taken care of by the Grama Seva Trust. In two months, these boys were ready to set up their own handlooms. And now the Sai Youth approached the Anantha Grameena Bank, a government-sponsored organization which is supportive of self-employment schemes for villagers. “But even they were reluctant to offer a loan. These youngsters, the bank knew, were very poor and did not have any property against which the bank could sanction a loan,” says a Sai Youth. It needed a lot of persuasion at the highest level by the Youth. To convince the bank officials of their idea to make these youngsters self-reliant, the members of the Grama Seva Trust persuaded the Chairman of the bank to visit the village and see the work being done by the Grama Seva Trust and the Sai Organisation. The Chairman came and was impressed. He was convinced of their noble motives and sincerity of purpose. The Bank finally conceded to offer a loan of over two lakhs to be repaid in installments. The Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust gave the surety to the bank.

“This is a dream come true for me” - Ramakrishna

So this is the story of how Ramakrishna is now a proud owner of a handloom in his own house. Brimming with confidence and surfing on delight, Ramakrishna says, “It is a dream realized for me. I know in one more year I will have paid the entire loan and then this handloom will be mine wholly. The

'Sairam people' have given me so much confidence. They have unlocked my creativity. I want to do quality work. I want to work hard. I will never leave this village again. My life has found a new meaning."

It is not only Ramakrishna - the story of every unemployed-youth-turned-skilled-weaver in the village is as moving as this. And all this did not happen without many more hurdles. Getting the loan and buying a handloom set cannot generate employment. There has to be a market for the produce and also a supplier who will give the raw materials – the yarn, the colours and other essentials.

And for this, the Sai Youth reached out to Saree sellers in Anantapur and the nearby town of Dharmavaram. They fortunately found a willing trader who was a devotee of Bhagawan. This good Samaritan not only offered to buy the sarees from the village youngsters but also provided them with all the raw material they needed at cost. Now the loop was complete. And what more, the Sai Youth themselves bought the first few sarees. This filled the young artisans with tremendous confidence. Indeed, the sarees were of high quality and so beautiful, every Youth vouchsafes. "It is amazing what these youngsters can do when they are given the opportunity and environment to blossom," says a member of the Grama Seva Trust.

On their first visit to the village after setting up all the handlooms, a young weaver came up to one Sai Youth and offered a saree. When the Youth was about to pay him for it, the weaver said, "No, no sir. If my parents were alive today, I would have offered clothes from my first product. But since they are not here, I am offering them to you, as you are like them. Please do not give me money for this." That is not all.

Another young weaver Basha went to the Youth and said, "It was my long cherished dream to have a handloom. However, I could never afford to get one because I did not have the money. But you have helped me realize this dream. I am extremely grateful to you. Please accept this saree. It is the first one I have woven."

All these youngsters now spare Rs. 200 from every saree they sell to repay the loan. "Of the Rs. 2,06,000 loan we had taken, the weavers had already paid Rs. 54,000 and within one more year, they would have paid all the amount due," says Mr. C R Rao, a senior member of Sai Organisation who coordinates with the bank, the weavers and the Grama Seva Trust members. "They are all very serious about repaying their loan and owning the handloom", he adds.

"We will never let you down at any time" - Yellaiah

In fact, when a Sai Youth visited them recently, Yellaiah, a beneficiary of this project said, "We are indeed grateful to you brothers who have given us this livelihood. We have decided that we should not let you down at any time and have therefore formed an association. This will ensure that none of us

defaults the loan payment so that you are never put to any embarrassment. If any one of us defaults payment, the rest of us will ensure that the payment is made.” This is the commitment that these youngsters exude now towards the project. There is nothing more satisfying for the Sai Youth.

“Livelihood projects have been on our mind for sometime. We are looking at many ways of providing self employment for the villagers so that they don’t have to leave their villages when crops fail. The success of this experiment is such a heartening feeling for all of us. It worked essentially because of the dedication of the villagers themselves,” says a Grama Seva Trust member.

Yes, the dedication of the villagers is the key to the success of every project. In fact, it is this which is now changing the demography of Cholamaari. Ramakrishna who was unemployed a year ago is now training Venkatesan, another teenager of the village, in the skill in which he has become expert now. “I do not want any teenager to go out of the village and suffer like me,” he says “I will train as many teenagers as possible, so that they also learn this skill and feel secure about their future. I want them to lead a settled and happy life in the village itself just like mine,” says a jubilant Ramakrishna.

“The handloom project is a boon from heaven” – Sri C R Rao

“What the Handloom project has done to the village is beyond estimation. Now every youth in the village wants to be a weaver and the skill is being imparted now from one to the other. The positive effects of this project are much beyond providing livelihood to a few individuals. The Fodder project takes care of a few lean months, the ICRISAT project helps a few farmers but is still dependent on a little rain, but the handloom project is a perennial income-generating project which is successful in every way. There is suddenly so much opportunity in the village itself,” says Sri C R Rao, a member of the Sai Organisation, who stays in the village and coordinates various activities of the Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust.

The Cholamaari village, which derives its name from the Chola kings who once ruled that area five hundred years ago, still has certain buildings with the ornate architecture of the 15th century. But they are no more ruled by anybody. If anybody has captured their imagination, it is only “Sairam”. Bal Vikas classes are held regularly in this village and it is these students who are ideals for the village now. When we went to the small Sai Centre there, the little girls folded their hands and welcomed us with a loud “Sairam.” But what was astounding was that they were next chanting a Vedic hymn “Shanno mitrah Shann Varunaha....” This was Shiskshavalli which Swami’s students generally chant in front of Him in the Sai Kulwant Hall. How did they learn Vedam? It baffled us. And all the students who come to the Bal Vikas, we learnt, are the top 50 in the local school. But what is more amazing is that it is these sweet children who have persuaded their parents to stop eating non-veg. They take baths everyday, wear clean clothes and keep their surroundings clean. Their devotion and dedication to Swami is something to be emulated by all. The Cholamaari cluster today is a “Sai cluster” in every sense. There is nobody who does not love Swami in these villages. The ways

of the divine are mysterious but for those who can see there is an invisible element guiding and directing every selfless activity in the village.

IV. The Sai Youth Resurrect Hundreds of Schools – The Gurukula Seva Maha Yagnam Project

Enthused with the success of the activities in a village cluster, the Sai Youth next wanted to expand their horizon. They had gained profound experience from the Cholamaari service projects. Now they wanted to make a difference to the whole state. As they surveyed the state visiting a number of villages in different districts of Andhra Pradesh, one aspect which struck them the most was the dilapidated and neglected state of Schools in virtually every district of the state. And in many villages, the shade of a big tree was the classroom. It was pathetic to see how the future citizens of the country were being taught and trained. The Youth immediately knew what they should be doing next.

They got in touch with the right authorities - the District Education Officers and the Chief Secretary for Education for the state of Andhra Pradesh. The plan was to work on about 100 schools throughout the state. This included constructing new school buildings in many villages and renovating the existing schools in places where the building was in a pitiable state. It being a state wide project, the amount of planning and coordination needed was phenomenal and it is for this reason that the Grama Seva Trust teamed up with the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization of the state.

Primarily, there were 3 aspects they knew they had to work on:

1. Firstly, to ensuring that there is proper infrastructure for primary education which included the building, the teaching aids and the playing equipment;
2. Secondly, ensuring that there is the right attitude among the teachers;
3. And finally, seeing to it that the villagers understood the importance of sending their children to the school and encouraging the little ones to study.

To put it in a nutshell, the total ecosystem of the school was to be built and sustained.

In dealing with the first issue pertaining to infrastructure, the Sai Organisation gave directives to each district to construct/renovate schools depending upon its capacity in terms of finances and manpower. All the 23 districts responded positively and in just a span of six months 110 schools were worked upon in various parts of the state.

Where schools had only one or two rooms, more rooms were added. In schools where the drains were blocked, they were cleared and surroundings of the school made hygienic for the students. Many did not have any teaching aids at all - be it blackboards or maps, charts or scales - these were made available. Many did not have electricity - they now had a power connection.

And where the students were sitting under trees, new buildings were constructed. Nearly 48 schools were constructed from the foundation up.

It was not easy. Many Samithis lacked funds or manpower to be able to execute such a project. But resources poured in just at the right moment mysteriously. As Gangadhar, a youth leader from Hyderabad says, "There would always be a stage where we would feel that the water is getting over our heads. The costs would seem to be going beyond our estimates. But there would always, arise some solution and it was during such times that I would feel Swami's unseen hand." This is an experience which every Samithi involved in this project can relate to. Swami says for any selfless activity money is never a hindrance and every Sai worker knows what it means.

The 'Software Aspects' Now Had to be Dealt With

While the buildings took care of the "hardware" aspect of the project what was more important to sustain this program were the "software" aspects, namely the teachers and the children.

It was shocking to note that a number of schools did not even have teachers appointed to them. And where there were teachers appointed, they either never turned up to teach or made an occasional visit - or even worse, they sent a proxy to go on their behalf to the village while they pocketed the salary from the government and continued an alternate profession. In short, what was needed was a complete change in the mindset of the teachers. And to this end, the Youth undertook many initiatives.

They approached the District Education Officers and organized special training sessions for the teachers. They even brought 175 of them to Puttaparthi on a special mission and while they were here, they arranged talks by eminent educationists and inspiring teachers from Swami's institute. Prof. Anil Kumar regaled them and at the same time illuminated them. They were now aware of the Sai system of education. They understood the nobility of their profession. They were told how the President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam, says he always wanted to retire as a teacher. And when somebody asked what he would prefer to do once his presidential term expires, without a second thought he mentioned that he would go back to the teaching profession.

All these conferences and interactions did strike a chord in their hearts and the Youth noticed a visible change in their attitude. All of them promised they would contribute positively to the society now. But the Youth did not stop there. They conducted another teachers' training camp and invited the State's Chief Secretary of the Education department, Sri I. V. Subba Rao, to the grace the occasion.

But the chief guest's presence was kept a secret and he was requested to sit in the last row and observe the proceedings of the camp. During the interactive session at the end of the camp, the teachers came out

with many of their grievances. They mentioned how it was difficult for them to travel long distances to reach the village they were appointed to; how they could not visit it everyday due to lack of proper transportation facility; how they could in no way settle in a village because there were no quality schools there for their own children and so on.

The Chief Secretary then was called onto the dais. The teachers were understandably surprised. But the Chief Secretary put everyone at ease. He said, "These issues would have never surfaced in a formal meeting," and promised to do everything possible to address their concerns. He expressed his immense gratitude to the Sai Organization for making him aware of such subtle and important issues pertaining to his department.

"This one project (of Sai Org.) is enough to clean all the dirt that is in our system" – The Chief Secretary of Education

A few weeks later at the District Education Officers' meet in West Godavari district, the Chief Secretary said, "It is a shame that we have not been able to address these issues so far. The Sai Organization has taken up this wonderful task of revamping the educational system. This one project is enough to clean all the dirt that is in our system." For the youth and the Organisation, it was a well deserved pat, no doubt.

But the project was nowhere near its objective still. There was the third and most important aspect to deal with – the children. Actually it was more to do with the villagers who would never encourage their children to go to school. Creating awareness among the village populace was the next herculean task.

The only way it could be done was speaking to each family of the village personally, the Youth thought. So, they launched a door-to-door campaign and patiently explained the importance of education to the parents of every child. They were told how knowing a little bit of mathematics and knowing how to read and write would prevent them from getting cheated. They understood how their children could earn much more than what they are earning now and lead a better life if they studied in the high school. All this persuasive talking actually did wonders. Encouragingly, the villagers seemed willing to send their children to school once they were approached. Many of them even said that no one had ever told them earlier that it was so important to get educated.

They not only sent their children to school, they even agreed to keep the premises of the school clean for the sake of their children. They were told that the school is like a temple and if they misused it for playing cards or gambling, etc., it would defile the atmosphere of the place. The villagers seemed convinced and even agreed to take responsibility to keep the surroundings of the school clean.

Building the Bond of Love with the Village Children

Having impressed the elders about the cleanliness aspect, the Youth now wanted to drive home this aspect very strongly in the minds of the kids. And for this, they thought of an interesting idea. They conceptualized what they called as the '**Premabandham Kit**' – literally meaning 'the bond of love'.

The kit consisted of hair oil, nail cutters, toothbrush and toothpaste, shampoo sachets, soaps, first aid kit, needle and thread and a small first aid box. The idea was to inculcate the value of self-grooming among the children. Sai Youth would visit the villages every Sunday and practically demonstrate how to maintain cleanliness using the Premabandham Kit. The youth would give the children a bath, haircut, cut their nails, oil the hair; teach them to stitch their own clothes, and also the use of first aid. And this effort which continued for a few weeks really paid off. The children of the village became so friendly with the youth that they would wait and long for their visit. As Kalyan, a youth member says, "The villagers initially did not know who we are and why we came there. But later, they got so attached to us that they would all assemble around us as soon as we came. They would offer us buttermilk and pamper us. The children would keep running around us. They also learnt a number of Bhajans. I do not know how much impact the project had on their lives, but it has surely left a deep impression on me."

That was the invaluable bond that was established between the Youth and the Bal Vikas children of the villages. For every youth it was a memorable experience just like Kalyan's. "I never knew that the villagers lived in such pathetic conditions. When I first saw them, I decided that this project was a golden opportunity to do something concrete. I would go every weekend to the village and take up Bal Vikas for the children. It has been such a satisfying experience," says another Youth member.

So ultimately it was love which transformed the children. To give more exposure to these children from the village, the Youth organized another interesting event. They did a small camp in the campus of the Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar School, Hyderabad so that children from the city could have one to one interaction with their counterparts from the village and be sensitive to their needs. When the Youth members narrated the conditions under which the village children were studying, the children of Vidya Vihar School immediately came forward and gave away pencils, toys and many other such things. The senior students shared their study materials which were photocopied, spiral bound and distributed all across the state during the project. It was indeed a moving sight to see a practical demonstration of sacrifice and sharing in the students of the city.

All these efforts yielded positive results and within six months all the 110 schools had a proper building and teaching aids while the students were given school uniforms, Premabandham kits, study materials, notebooks, pencils, erasers, slates, etc. There were even many teachers appointed by talking to the District Education Officers. The culmination of this grand project happened in Prasanthi Nilayam when in 2004 more

than 8000 Youth from all over the state assembled for the Dasara festival and performed a delightful drama in the divine presence.

“How can I take money from you?” – a Fruit Seller

All the beneficiaries of this project express their deep sense of gratitude whenever they see Sai Youth. For instance, it so happened that one day, one of the Youth members, Raju, was in the fruit market picking fruits. He was dressed in white as he had just returned from a seva activity, that day being a Sunday. As he was trying to bargain for some custard apples, the fruit seller asked, “You are Sai Baba people, isn’t it?” Raju was taken aback. He said, “Yes.” The fruit seller’s expression changed immediately. With glee he said, “You can take the whole basket for free.” Raju was at loss. “What’s wrong with this person?” he began to ponder. The fruit seller then replied, “Sir, you have constructed a school in our village. Because of that my child is getting education today. How can we take money from you?” There were tears in his eyes. Raju stood there transfixed. This incident probably just about sums up the impact the whole education project has had on the villagers across the state.

In the words of Sri Y Srinivas, President of the Grama Seva Trust, “The results have been fantastic. This was the first time the whole state worked on a single theme as a cohesive unit. It was a challenge, no doubt, to work on a focused time bound activity with tangible deliverables. But the amazing results have now only encouraged us to take up more such statewide rural projects.”

V. The Pharmacy Bank – a Pioneering Concept

And since then the Grama Seva Trust indeed has taken up many more such state wide projects, notable among them being the establishment of the Sri Sathya Sai Pharma Bank in 2005.

After statewide education, healthcare was the next major focus of the Trust. The Youth deduced that medical camps were one of the most common activities undertaken by every Samithi in the state. While the doctors available did not charge for their services, the Organisation ended up spending huge amounts in the purchase and procurement of medicines. The Youth wanted to explore if they could spare the Organisation this expenditure. Their idea very simply was to set up a Pharmacy Bank located in Hyderabad from where medicines could be supplied to wherever there is a need across the state freely.

But why Hyderabad? Because Hyderabad was host to most of the major pharma giants in Andhra Pradesh, apart from many other small companies. What they had in mind was a hub-and-spoke approach where Hyderabad would be the hub with a dedicated team involved in keeping all the Pharma companies in the loop and collecting medicines, maintaining an inventory of the medicines and dispatching them whenever need arises to various districts which were the spokes in the model. Quite convinced about their idea, the

Youth then took the next important step. They secured an appointment with the Andhra Pradesh Drug Controller.

At the drug controller's office, they made presentations of their concept and explained their idea and intentions. Fortunately for them, the man in charge was a devotee of Bhagawan. He immediately endorsed the idea and even agreed to organize a Pharma Manufacturers' Meet. The meet was held in the premises of Bhagawan's temple in "Shivam" and had representatives from most of the Pharma companies of Hyderabad. When the Sai Youth explained their idea of the Pharmacy Bank many of the representatives showed a positive response and came forward to donate medicines on a regular basis to the bank. They were impressed by the noble cause of the project. "Around 20,000 patients would be benefited every month by this effort," the Youth calculated.

'Sri Sathya Sai Aushadhalayam' is Born

It was then that the Pharmacy Bank was registered as 'Sri Sathya Sai Aushadhalayam' on January 4, 2005. And since then it has served thousands of patients all across the state. However, there is an interesting anecdote connected to this. When the Pharmacy Bank was to be registered, there was a minor hiccup as in the government's rule book there was no clause for any registered Pharmacy to disburse medicines free of cost. This was an unheard of undertaking and the government did not know how to register such a body. So, interestingly a new clause was added to the existing Registration Act which incorporated the allowance of a Pharmacy set up for disbursing medicines free of cost. Bhagawan's projects have always baffled government officials be it their concept, timely implementation or perfect execution. And this was yet another revealing tale.

So the registration done and working with perfect coordination, the Pharmacy Bank is now a great success story of the Grama Seva Trust. On a regular basis medicines are being sent to various places across the state to conduct medical camps, mostly to the areas where there is sustained medical service activity all round the year. The Grama Seva Trust has now labeled these centres as 'Grama Seva Kendras'. Incidentally, Cholamaari is now one of the Grama Seva Kendras.

More than thirty seven lakhs worth of medicines have been dispatched to date by the Pharmacy Bank and there are twenty companies which regularly donate to the bank. This is truly a great example of how a neat idea could do wonders. If we look closely, we can see that here too the Youth played the role of an effective enabler. Without a paisa of expenditure, the Youth is now removing the distress of hundreds of villagers just by bringing the Pharma companies and the Sai Samithis together. An idea can change the world, they say and the Youth is precisely doing that albeit within the confines of a single state.

VI. Building Houses - Rebuilding Lives – The Youth's Recent Project

Having contributed on the education front and on the Healthcare front, the Youth next wanted to do more. They wanted to go into the interiors of the state - places where no government machinery or voluntary organizations ever reaches - and look into their problems. This time, they chose first the district of Prakasam. They extensively toured this district looking for a village where the need is greatest. In two days, they visited twenty seven villages - until they found Guntapalli.

Guntapalli was the kind of village they were in search of. Cut off from mainstream life and leading an island-like existence, the nearest road to the village was 6kms away. This meant if a villager had to catch a bus, he/she would have to walk at least 6 kms. Moreover, there was no Primary Health Center in the village. There was a primary school but it was functional only once a week. And if any villager needed medical attention, it was not before he traveled 20 kms. The road to the village was arduous, to say the least. Full of rocks and mud, it was a challenge for the vehicle as well as the passenger to reach the village in one piece. And how were the houses? Sorry, there were only dilapidated huts, which looked more like slums. It was in this condition that the Sai Organization found the village.

The youth, after a lot of discussion and deliberation, decided that they would work first to provide proper dwelling places to the villagers. Initially, their idea was to provide asbestos roofs and cement and with the help of the villagers build the walls. However, this changed dramatically when someone suggested, "Why don't we try the government. Maybe they will have some schemes for the villagers?"

The Youth team immediately met the Collector of the district. It was heartening when the Collector, Smt. Udaya Lakshmi, confirmed their notion and told them, "Yes, there is a housing scheme available," and extended her full support to the project. She was impressed with the noble intentions behind the project.

According to the scheme, the Collector explained, the owner of the house should pay an initial sum and get a basement for the house constructed. Only then would the government provide the remaining amount for the house to be completed.

How Swami Helped Through Trying Times

This scheme appealed to the Youth. The villagers however, were not in a position to finance themselves even for the basement. And so, the Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust decided to take care of the initial funding. To support them in this venture was the telecom giant, Nokia. "Finances were never a problem," says Surrendera, Youth coordinator of Prakasam District, "By Swami's grace, everything fell in place. I remember Swami's words - He had said in the interview that He blessed us with in 2003 that we should work on

rural development and He would ensure that money comes at the snap of our fingers. That is what exactly happened in this project.”

With funds available, the Youth of the Prakasam district went into action and started collecting information about the logistics involved. Within days, all the necessary government clearances were obtained, thanks to the local MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly). Twenty eight houses were sanctioned for the village in the first phase of the project.

It was no mean task getting materials like bricks, cement, steel, etc., to an isolated place like Guntapalli which had only stones and mud as roads. But if the project proceeded, it was purely because of the constant prayer of the Youth and their determined effort. The commitment of the district youth was commendable. In fact, one of the youth members would drive down 200 kms every week to ensure that the project moved as scheduled. The villagers too showed great unity and put in their labour and sweat in the construction work.

While the construction activity was going on, the Youth noticed that there were other crying needs in the village. The villagers did not have any medical facilities. They did not even have proper clothing to protect them from the winter. The Youth soon organized three medical camps and one eye camp with the help of the Sai Organisation. They also distributed blankets for use during the cold months. The school children received school bags, books and pencils. Although the village had a well with water, they had no storage facility. The Sai Organization got a water storage tank made.

“All the villagers are changed today” – Surendra

All these activities went a long way in building a healthy rapport with the villagers. Their suspicions reduced with every new activity. “The villagers were not responsive initially. They had lost faith in humanity. They did not trust us even when we said that we had come there to help them,” says Surendra, “But today, they are a transformed lot. They do their own work. They respond with love. Many of them have given up bad habits like drinking and this was the change we wanted to see.”

After three months of relentless effort, the first phase of the project saw 28 houses finally completed. The 11th of June 2006 was set as the inauguration date.

The inauguration ceremony was no small occasion. It was replete with celebrations. The Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust president, Sri Y.Srinivas and Sri Sai Prasad Gollapudi, Director, Nokia who is also a member of the Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust, arrived in the village along with the District President of the organization and a few elders. The morning began with the hoisting of the organization flag. The local MLA, Sri Pagadala Ramayya then inaugurated the houses. He was so touched by the project that he declared that a road has been sanctioned to the village and very soon there would even be bus services to the village.

The villagers were ecstatic. They received new clothes from the Youth that morning. With beaming faces and adorned in their new sarees and shirts the villagers entered their new homes. But wait a minute. They did not enter first. They would first take Swami's padukas into the house and then set their feet inside. Such is their love for Swami now. Many of them did not even now who Sai Baba is just a few weeks ago.

“We want to see Sai Baba now” – Dastagiri

“We have not seen Sai Baba. But now, we all want to see Him,” said Dastagiri, a youth from the village, “If He can inspire so many youngsters to come so far and construct houses for someone who they don't even know, He must be great indeed. We have decided that we will go and see Him after all the houses are completed.”

Ramanjaneyulu, another villager said, “We had lost faith in all of humanity because over the years many people have visited this place and promised to do many things. But, no one has done anything. But now, you have proved our conviction wrong. There are people who do what they profess to do.” Ramanjaneyulu's eyes were wide and his face suddenly had a rare shine.

“For me, it is Christ who has come” – A Christian Lady

The villagers were not joyful - they were in bliss. It was an experience they never had before. “We have heard of stories where God comes to give food, clothing and shelter as told in the Bible. But here we see you giving us just these. We feel that Christ has come to give us all this,” said a Christian lady of the village. Their cup of joy was full and overflowing. So too were the hearts of the Sai Youth. Even for them it was a rare experience of inner joy and tremendous peace. Swami says, “What joy you experience doing selfless service cannot ever be compared to any amount of worldly accomplishments.” The Youth had practical experience of this.

Of the 350 houses sanctioned in the Komarolu Mandal (to which Guntapalli belonged) by the government only 28 houses in Guntapalli village have been completed. And all these houses complied with the directives given by the Andhra Pradesh State Housing Corporation (APSHC). They were all 17 feet by 9 feet halls with a bathroom and a toilet. They all had RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) structures painted in beautiful colours with a door, window, shelves and an attic. The houses truly are a testimony to Bhagavan's Divine Grace and the constant perseverance and prayer of the organization's youth. It was also the first time that the Youth had undertaken a housing project of such magnitude in a district. And the success has now spurred all the Youth to do more with greater confidence. “It has given us really tremendous motivation to undertake long term projects which will have a sustainable impact,” says a senior member of the Grama Seva Trust. The Youth is now busy completing the second phase of the Project wherein they will be offering another 32 houses to the villagers of Guntapalli.

The Irrepressible 'Sai'lent Revolution

What the Sai Youth of Andhra Pradesh has achieved through the Sri Sathya Sai Grama Seva Trust and with support of the Sai Organisation in just three years is nothing short of a revolution. It is surely a silent revolution (the press seldom carries such stories in their front pages), or rather a "Sai"lent revolution which, when it gains more momentum, will one day change the complete profile of the state – be it demographically, economically or spiritually.

And just recently the Youth have embarked upon another project, again spanning the whole state of Andhra Pradesh, but much larger in its scope and impact. Christened as "HEART", this is a five pronged project which will cater to the **H**ealthcare, **E**ducare, **A**gricare, **R**ural Infrastructure and **T**ransformational activities of 80 clusters of villagers, (mind you, it is 80 clusters which could mean at least 500 villages) in the twenty three districts of Andhra Pradesh. **Fifteen thousand Sai volunteers over four years will complete the project. Just imagine what it will do to India, when every state of the country has such a critical mass of enlightened Sai Youth going into the villages.** The golden age for India will have arrived, or at least, will not be spoken of as a fanciful utopia. When God walks on earth, peace, righteousness and love are no longer utopian dreams.

Dear reader, while what the Andhra Pradesh Sai Youth have done is commendable, we are doubly sure that this is no isolated activity in just one state of India. In every region of India, the Sai Youth are making a difference and we at H2H would consider it as a blessing to place all these 'labours of love' with the larger Sai family spread all over the globe. So please let us know. Let us share and let us fill the world with selfless love.

- Heart2Heart Team

FEATURE ARTICLES

MAN, SOCIETY, NATURE AND GOD – THE VEDIC VIEW

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

This is my ninth talk in the Veda Walkthrough series, and in my previous talks, I have attempted to give a reasonable, broad-brush overview of the *Vedas*. In this talk, I wish to consider some matters that highlight how important and relevant the *Vedas* are to modern times also. In presenting my views, I shall closely follow two important leads given by Swami.

Sacrifice Leads Us to the Goal

Many of you, I am sure, have heard Swami say from time to time that merely by chanting the *Vedas*, one cannot attain Immortality and that sacrifice alone can lead to that goal. This would be the first of the two leads I shall take from Swami. The second concerns the hierarchy in Creation. As Swami puts it, the hierarchy is: the Individual, Society, Nature and finally God. The words that Swami actually uses are: *Vyashti*, *Samashti*, *Srishti*, and *Parameshti*. In short, in this talk, I shall focus on (1) how man must make sacrifice an important aspect of his life, and (2) how man must, especially in today's world, pay careful attention to the inter-linkages in Creation.

Let me start with sacrifice. No doubt I have already said something on this subject in my last talk, but I wish to add something more now. The word sacrifice as used in English has a slightly bitter flavour, because sacrifice implies giving up something that we like very much. However, there are other angles, spiritual angles to be explicit, and that is what I would like to stress.

Sacrifice Enhances Purity

Swami often says in His Discourses – and I am paraphrasing His words here – “I don't want you to give up your job, position, wealth, family, etc., for Me. All I want you to do when you come here is to offer your bad habits to Me. If you are a smoker, just say, ‘Baba, I give up my smoking habit for You.’ That is the sacrifice I want. Now when you give up smoking, do you lose anything? Nothing; on the other hand, you gain health. What you are losing if anything is your attachment to a bad habit – that is all.”

You see how nicely Swami puts it. In the Vedic context, the word sacrifice always goes hand in hand with something good and even sublime; and sacrifice **always** enhances purity. Thus, as Swami says, the scriptures ask you to sacrifice so that you grow in purity.

OK, let us say that we have a person who, out of Love for Swami, gives up all his undesirable habits one by one. He grows in purity and is now a good man. Does sacrifice come to a stop? Not quite; it continues. Only, sacrifice is now made in a different spirit, so different that one no longer even thinks of it as sacrifice. This may sound a bit confusing and so let me add a few words of explanation.

The Dual Nature of Sacrifice

You see, in the Vedic world the word sacrifice is used in two distinct senses. The first is in terms of giving up something to which one is very attached, including bad habits. The other meaning given to the word sacrifice is OFFERING. Thus, when a person becomes good by giving up all bad habits to God, he now starts offering to God something good. He offers to God the food he has cooked, he offers poems he has written, he offers songs he has composed, and so on.

In short, sacrifice becomes a non-stop process in which the devotee, swept by his love for God, keeps on making offerings to God. In the beginning, he offers bad habits. When he has run out of bad habits, he makes noble offerings to God. All offerings, both the bad habits and the noble actions, please God because they are all done with the same motive, namely to please God. God is pleased when we offer our bad habits to Him, because that is a signal that we are trying to improve ourselves. He is equally pleased when we offer our creations to Him, because that is a sign that we acknowledge our creativity to Him. I hope all this is clear!

Sacrifice, the Vedic seers understood, was not an open-ended or a one-way street. Rather, it was a loop; you sacrifice for others and others then sacrifice to sustain you. Here of course, the word sacrifice is to be understood in a larger sense – not just that of giving up, but making an offering, not only in material terms but in spiritual terms.

Let us take the Sun. Everyone including atheists, would agree that if the Sun were not there we too would not exist. Whether we like it or not, it is the Sun that sustains life on earth. The Sun sustains life literally by burning itself out, that is to say, by sustaining a nuclear fire deep within and pouring out massive amounts of energy. Now one might argue, “Listen, the Sun is an inanimate object. It burns because of the laws of Nature. That is what it is programmed to do. Thus, there can be no question of the Sun sacrificing for you and me. After all, there are billions of other stars in our own galaxy, the Milky Way. Every one of these billions of stars burns just like our Sun. Most of these stars do not have satellite planets, and therefore they do not sustain any life. So where is the question of sacrifice? And where is the question of being grateful to the Sun?” This is precisely the way in which most atheists of today would argue.

I have heard such arguments in plenty. They are high sounding and very appealing to so-called intellectual minds. Often the people who make such arguments are high-profile people, and many, especially the young, tend to imitate them. The net result is that ego runs amuck; and when ego runs amuck, you can bet there would be nothing but disaster. Returning to the question of the Sun, what do we offer in return? We can always offer gratitude. But do we do that?

Man's Equation with Society and Nature – The Vedic View

Let me now move on to the other aspect of Vedic thought, namely man's equation with Society and Nature. Swami says that anything that man does must not harm Society, must not disturb Nature in any way, and finally must not go against God. Since God is the Creator of both the Universe and man, it follows, that man must be in harmony with both Society and Nature, both of which are parts or components of Creation. I have already commented on this point in my previous talk, but like the subject of sacrifice, this topic too needs to be underscored further.

Earlier I pointed out that in the *Purusha Sukhtam*, Society is clearly and explicitly identified with God. I personally find this to be a remarkable identification, especially considering the fact that thousands of years ago not only was the population of the earth very small, but, in addition, there was really no worthwhile means of transport or communications that could bring different segments of the population together easily, as is possible these days. If Society is God, then it automatically follows that one should not do anything that is against the interests of Society. Supposing, for the sake of argument, one had done this in Vedic times, that is, going against God; in spite of it, the impact on Society in those days would mostly have been minimal. Nevertheless, this concern for the impact of one's actions on Society was very much there. Taking all these points into account, I feel the Vedic view in this matter was a very far-sighted approach.

Consider, for example, the remark made by Arjuna to Krishna about the futility of war. He says,

With the destruction of the family perish the age-old traditions. And virtue having been lost, vice seizes the entire race.

What Arjuna is implying is that when men are killed in tens of thousands, families would be left without heads, and this would cause all kinds of problems. Children would be fatherless and become undisciplined, while women may take to vice to sustain themselves. In other words, war would destabilise Society in a big way. Just look at the conflicts raging now in different parts of the world. It becomes immediately clear that what Arjuna feared is **actually** happening these days. But who is bothered?

Wherever we turn, we not only see acts that destabilise Society, but also severely disturb Nature. Let me give some examples, starting with **excessive** consumerism.

Excessive Consumerism - Where does it lead to?

The business world is constantly compelling us through heavy advertisement to buy all sorts of things, a good many of which we do not really need. To illustrate my point, let me take the example of video games. First and foremost, video games are a huge distraction. These days when children have to study hard, video games keep many away from studies. As a result, children score low marks and that makes many things difficult for them. Next, thanks to the keeping-up-with-the-Jones syndrome, every time there is a new videogame, the parent is obliged to shell out money to keep his kids happy. As if this is not enough, the game machines themselves keep on changing with newer and newer frills added all the time, and this means more expenditure.

Apart from the disturbance caused to children, few realise that disposing off the obsolete game machines is a problem. Let us say fifty million of these machines have to be disposed off. Are you aware how much beryllium, lead, mercury and such poisonous stuff get thrown out into the environment? And do you know how hazardous this job of dismantling discarded electronic equipment is? By the way, a lot of this dismantling is done in India, Vietnam and China because labour is so cheap here. Thus, the videogame machines used in and discarded by the First World, end up in the Third World for dismantling!

Then again, take cars. The big companies, especially in overseas countries, want to sell lots and lots of cars in countries like India. In one sense of course this looks like a good idea – it makes transport easier, creates jobs, and so on. But look at the flip side. Firstly, every car adds to pollution. Next, thanks to our congested roads, accidents increase sharply. Of course the people selling cars would say, “Oh no, it’s not our fault, people must drive more carefully.” Those things are easily said but we must learn to live with ground realities. Thirdly, in a country like India where there is such a disparity in income, does it make sense for some to go around in a Roll Royce – yes, the Rolls has entered the Indian market again – when many don’t even have enough to eat? Is it at all decent? Is not such flaunting of wealth a vulgar display?

Then there is the print media. There are so many magazines. Every magazine needs paper for printing, and paper comes from trees. They may say paper can be recycled but I don’t think we do much of recycling in countries like India. In effect, more printing means cutting more trees. Is that a good idea, especially when much of what gets printed is pure rubbish?

And then there is television. My God, this TV is pure poison. How much money is wasted on worthless TV. And how much electricity is

consumed by this monster. Television keeps children away from the playground, spoils their eyes, and makes them obese not merely due to lack of exercise but by driving them to consume soft drinks full of sugar and eat fatty food. There is a strong correlation between the advent of TV and the increase in child obesity and juvenile diabetes.

The Hidden Costs of Consumerism

In all the cases mentioned above, a few people, in the name of making more profit, are taking Society for a ride. And the entire game is so cleverly marketed that people are made to think that all this is very good for them, giving them freedom to do what they please, etc. As a result of all this brain-washing, people have become so insensitive that they do not pay any attention to the social costs involved in giving free play to media, consumption, etc.

Let me turn now to smoking. Smoking is promoted heavily by the tobacco industry, in spite of the fact that more than forty years ago the Surgeon General of the United States categorically went on record saying that smoking causes lung cancer and greatly promotes heart disease. In the US, this warning caused an alarm and made many give up smoking. When the markets went down in America, the big tobacco companies started targeting people in foreign countries, particularly countries like India. In fact, there is evidence now about how these companies issued secret internal memos to get the very young addicted. Recently it was discovered that the tobacco companies persuaded the film industry in India, with money of course, to show a lot of smoking scenes so that the young would start imitating what their screen heroes do.

Here then is a glaring example of how, for the sake of money, a few unscrupulous people and corporations are prepared to take the whole of Society for a ride. When there is mass obesity or heavy incidence of lung cancer, leading to thousands of preventable deaths, who is it that pays for it? Society!

Consider also the excessive display of violence in the cinema and TV. I remember many years ago, an American friend of mine who spent twenty-five years in India teaching physics in a college in Madurai telling me, "Do you know how many muggings, hold-ups, rapes, murders, etc., a young person in America sees from the time he or she is 5 to the age 20?" He then gave me an astounding number. Add to this all the violence that is news, like the Iraq war and so forth, and one gets a frightening picture. I mean if a person grows up seeing violence in some form or the other day in and day out, don't tell me it is not going to have any effect on the person. Tell all this to the media people and they retort, "If you don't like it, you can switch off the TV, can you not?" That might sound like a clever argument but the fact of the matter is that money power throws the average person into a deep gutter and tells him that he does

not have to be in the gutter if he does not want to. One may score debating points but where does that leave Society?

So you see, concern for Society is a **must** and in Vedic times this concern was built in to the way of life. I talked about marriage in an earlier talk. Marriage too was seen in Vedic times as an instrument for the sustenance of Society. The couple married not merely to have children but more so for sustaining *Dharma*.

Responsibility versus Rights: What do the Vedas Say

In short, **the Vedic norm of existence was always responsibility rather than rights**. Acting with responsibility meant acting with restraint, and that in turn meant having a mechanism for checks and balance so that there was moral stability. Wise people everywhere have understood the importance of checks and balances in Society. The framers of the American Constitution understood this very well. They realised, as did the people of England, that there are three primary institutions that regulate Government. These are referred to as the three Estates. They are: the Executive Branch, the Legislature and the Judiciary. The founding fathers of America took great pains to devise all kinds of checks and balances so that no one branch or Estate could totally dominate the others.

All this happened towards the end of the eighteenth century, that is, in the late seventeen hundreds. Then came the newspapers and thus was born the so-called Fourth Estate. Until about seventy five years ago, the Fourth Estate meant only newspapers but today, the Fourth Estate is taken to mean the whole of the media, which includes cinema, TV, Internet and what not. The interesting thing is that while the other three Estates have mutual checks, the Fourth Estate has none – it is supposed to be self-regulatory. This is a right that the Fourth Estate has more or less seized, aided and abetted by the courts. Thus, freedom of the press has become a sacred mantra – nobody dare say anything against it. It has been elevated almost to the status of a divine right.

I will not say much about this issue, which incidentally is supposed to be a very sensitive issue, but the fact of the matter is if the members of the Fourth Estate are supposed to be accountable only to themselves, then, like Shakespeare said, they must be **true** to their selves. Good journalists and reporters are still there, but increasingly one finds too many charlatans. What does one do in such circumstances?

The Unchecked Power of the Media

I remember a conversation I had about twenty years ago with a person who was then the Vice Chancellor of the University in the city of Indore. He said he was being hounded by a reporter who was writing that he, the Vice Chancellor, was swindling money from the University and had lined the bathroom with expensive marble. This man told me, “I called the

Editor and said, 'Look, please come to my house and see for yourself if my bathroom is tiled with marble. If you did come and see, you would realise that your reporter is writing falsehood.' The Editor could not care less. Lamenting his fate, this man then said to me, "People say, go to court. How can I? I don't have that kind of money. The newspaper has a lot of money and can employ a smart lawyer who will make sure the case drags on. Ultimately, I would be forced to withdraw my complaint after spending a lot of money on lawyer's fees. Others say go to the Press Council. That is all right in principle but in practice the Press Council is always favourable to the media."

So the long and short of it is that often, if one falls foul with the media, then the media can literally bury that person. I am here reminded of a person who held a cabinet position in Ronald Reagan's Administration. The press in America kicked up a big row against this person – corruption charges etc. It was all over the front pages; this person's reputation was totally ruined and he had to quit in ignominy. Then followed a long inquiry at the end of which this person was honourably exonerated. The Commission that inquired into the whole matter ruled that this man was the victim of character assassination. So what happened after that? Nothing. As this person said, his exoneration appeared as a small news item on the 18th page; few paid attention to it. What remained in people's mind was the guilt pronounced by the press on the front pages.

"Freedom Brings Responsibility" – Pt. Nehru

What I am driving at is the connection between freedom and accountability as well as responsibility. I remember in the years after India got its freedom, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister, often used to say, "Freedom brings responsibility." But few paid attention to his words.

The Indian Constitution has been, in many respects, influenced by the US Constitution. Thus, there is a lot of stuff about rights. However, later some elders realised that the Constitution must, in the Indian tradition, also spell out the prime responsibilities of the citizens. A Committee was then set up and it came up with a list of mandatory duties. Unfortunately, however, when the matter came up for discussion before Parliament, the members did not agree to amend the Constitution to include the duties and responsibilities of citizens. What was finally adopted was a set of recommendatory responsibilities. In other words, Parliament said, "Listen folks, we think it would be nice if you discharged the following duties but you don't have to if you don't feel like it." I find this absolutely amazing, considering that the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution not only recommended *Sathyameva Jayate* or "Truth alone Triumphs" as the National Motto but also included the Wheel of *Dharma* in the flag to remind us of *Dharma*.

I fail to understand how duties can be optional. To declare duties to be optional is, in my opinion, utter nonsense. This is where one must admire Vedic Society. It made *Dharma* mandatory for all; from the king to the cobbler, no one was exempt. And one became answerable to one's conscience if one did not follow or abide by *Dharma*. Remember what Vedic Acharyas told their disciples when they left the Ashram? They said *Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara*, meaning: Always speak the Truth and always abide by *Dharma*. Incidentally, these two Vedic dictates are the motto of Swami's University.

From Man, to Society, to Nature, then God

Let me now go back to the hierarchy that I referred to earlier and say something more about it. Swami says that man is a limb of Society, Society is a limb of Nature and Nature is a limb of God. This is like saying the finger is a part of the hand, the hand is a part of the forearm, the forearm is a part of the total arm which is a part of the body. Now would the finger deliberately try to harm the body? No way. That being the case, why should man who is a limb of Society do things that harm Society and Nature? He really should not and if he did, it would not only be an irresponsible act but also a criminal one.

Here we must appreciate an important point stated by Sri Krishna in the *Gita*. He says in effect that the whole Universe is heavily interconnected, and every entity in some way or the other depends on other entities. Further, all entities give and all entities also receive. I have pointed all this out in one of my earlier talks. It so happens that in God's scheme of things, all entities except man are programmed to do what they are supposed to do. Thus they receive and also give. But man is different – he can either do what he is supposed to do or refrain from doing so. In other words, man will certainly accept but duck from giving.

Sri Krishna says that while man may have such freedom to do or not to do, to refrain from discharging one's duty is a sin. Once man commits a sin, he also has to pay for it – there is no getting away with it. Few these days realise how important it is for everyone to discharge his or her duties properly. The *Gita* is all about doing one's duty properly and in the right spirit. Indeed, until recently, the concept of duty was understood the world over. Thus it is that Lord Nelson famously said, "England expects every man to do his duty."

Somehow, these days few understand how vital the discharge of one's duty is. Railways, airlines, hospitals, schools – all such institutions would not run if the people employed there abandoned their duties. By way of stressing this, Swami said in Delhi in March of 1999 that service does not mean sweeping the village streets but doing one's duty properly.

Today in India, it is often said that if one tax rupee is spent for public purposes, only about one tenth of it actually reaches the public – the rest of it gets wasted or swallowed on the way. This is appalling but true.

People ask: “How is this happening in a land where the Avatars have repeatedly taken birth? Whatever happened to *Sathya*, *Dharma*, etc?” The answer is simple. In the name of progress, we have cleverly packaged devotion into watertight compartments. We still perform worship etc., sometimes painstakingly. We also go regularly to temples, offer token charity, and so on. We offer flowers and fruits to God. We go on pilgrimages and take dips in holy rivers. But is this what God wants? I would like you to recall a bhajan which begins with the words: *Deena dukhiyon se prem karo, mera Sai prasanna hoga*. Meaning, ‘show love to the poor and forlorn and my Sai will be pleased’.

Yes, Sai will be pleased if we see God everywhere and offer love to Him in some manner or the other. Take the Vedic attitude toward work. The musician worshipped his instruments, the carpenter worshipped his instruments. Before starting on a task, the person said reverentially, *Tasmai namaha karmane*, meaning, ‘I offer my obeisance to work’. Work was regarded as worship and not something to be shirked.

When Society Benefits, You Benefit

In short, people did **honest** work because they understood that was the way to keep Society going and they realised if Society moves smoothly then they too would benefit. It is something like the way they meticulously observe traffic rules in America. There are millions and millions of cars; but drivers stick to rules; they stay in their lanes, they signal when changing lanes and so on. They do all this because they know that by following rules they in turn will be benefited. It is the same thing about standing in queues.

In India people take a different attitude. You can see it for example right in front of the Brindavan Ashram. Vehicles are all the time jockeying for positions, sometimes in such a manner that they even block the opposite lanes. People do not seem to be bothered about road rules – it always seems to be: me and my advantage.

Just contrast all this with Vedic Philosophy. We often hear the chant *Sahana vavatu*..... what does this mean? It essentially means that let us all cooperate and do things together. This is not only an eminently practical philosophy but also the essence of spirituality. The theme of the last World Conference during Baba’s 80th Birthday was - Unity, Purity, Divinity. Without unity, how can there be purity and without purity what chance do we have to attain Divinity, that is, if we are at all interested in that?

What I am driving at is that we should not just dismiss the *Vedas* summarily as something nice but not quite relevant to this day and age. On the contrary, I would say that the *Vedas* were actually designed for this age, though they were launched a long time ago.

You do not have to take my word for it. Just reflect deeply and objectively and see what conclusion you come to. I would be most interested in hearing your thoughts. You can write to h2h@radiosai.org.

Jai Sai Ram.

- Heart2Heart Team

YAJNOTSAVA –

The Thrilling Dasara of the Sixties

Every year during the Dasara celebrations Puttaparthi is witness to a grand spectacle “The Veda Purusha Sapthaha Gyana Yagna” – a Vedic sacrifice performed in the divine presence of Bhagawan Baba for seven days. This festival in Puttaparthi is more than six decades old. With time, celebrations and events see a lot of change but certain things remain the same just like the powerful and sublime nature of this sacred sacrifice. But yes, five decades ago it had a totally different charm and it is a very rewarding experience revisiting those golden moments when Baba’s physical body was in its 40s. So here we have a journey into the precious past, a riveting description of Dasara in Puttaparthi in the words of Prof. Kasturi in the year 1962.

The Rudrahoma – From a Bygone Era

It was an unforgettable scene: the sweet melody of *Nadaswaram* filling the air; the fragrance of flowers, incense, and sandalwood wafting about; the cow with its charming little calf proud of the necklaces, bangles and jingles it wore strutting in front; women waving *arati* and holding up plates of fruits on either side; Baba in His resplendent robe emerging from the Prashanti Nilayam mandir with Sri Boorgala Ramakrishna Rao and Brahmasri Kameswara Ghanapad on either side, behind Him a bevy of a hundred ritwiks, pundits and scholars from all parts of India, decked in multicolored silk (each according to the function allotted to him in the Yagna: white for those reciting the Vedas, red for those partaking in the Rudrahoma, yellow for the others); thousands of bhaktas, their faces bright with joy born of the recognition of the uniqueness of the day – the day when the Avatar of the Lord was assuming the guardianship of the Veda-Bhaktas from Kerala to Kashmir, men, women and children (children born in the Sai Era, blessed to spend their entire lives in the sunshine of His Grace) – this stream of joy moving in serene sublimity to the Yagasala; the charming Mantapa erected with intense devotion by hands, which though new to the task, were charged with skill and artistry by Bhagavan Himself. The intonation of the Vedic mantras by the entire group in ecstatic harmony thrilled every heart, for the sacred vibration was suffused with the glory of God.

“I Am the One Who Accepts the Yagna”

The Yagna began at 9:30 a.m. on the first day of October 1962. The gods were invoked and installed and worshipped as the Vedas dictated. Athi Rudrahoma was done, the Bhagavatham and the Ramayana and the Devi Bhagavantham were read, the Sankarabhashyas were repeated, Suryanamaskaram with the appropriate Vedic chants was performed, the Saligrama and the Sahasialinga were ritually worshipped, the Yajurveda, in its two rescensions were recited, and the Samaveda and the Atharva Veda were chanted. The huge gathering of bhaktas sat stilled with awe and admiration and filled their hearts with the perfume of the Sanatana mantra. Bhagavan was present in the Yagasala every day sitting in the midst of the Vedic pundits or moving among the bhaktas. The hills around the Nilayam which had the privilege of echoing the mantras will long

remember the heavenly harmony of the mantra which woke the sleeping rocks. Yes, many a stone awoke to that age-old voice and melted at its magnificent message of hope.

Baba said to the assembly of ritwiks pundits and bhaktas: **"I am not the person who is doing this Yagna: I am the Person who is accepting it."** Ruminates for a moment on that declaration and then you will realize the atmosphere of Devaloka, of Vaikuntha itself (as some of the eminent Vedic pundits announced) that pervaded the Yagashala.

And the Jnana Yagna. Every evening for eight days, from 3:30 to 8:00 p.m., the galaxy of pundits, from Secunderabad, Warangal, Guntur, Rajahmundry, Amalapuram, Pithapuram, etc., pundits famed as specialists in scriptural lore and as popular exponents of the Vedic message, gave the gathering the substance of their long and arduous studies. And the President Brahmasri Uppaluri Ganapathi Sastri, the undisputed Master of Vedic Scholarship, in his own effortless analytical disquisition of Vedic mantras explained the Vedic conception of Yagna with all its attendant rituals and the Vedic conception of Divinity which described Baba Himself, as he realized and revealed more and more clearly as the Yagna proceeded.

Baba Will Foster and Protect the Vedas

Baba spoke at the end of every series of speeches, summing up the scholarly expositions in parables and stories, revealing new facets of Dharma or lifting the veil of Maya for a moment from His Own Mystery. **He assured the Vedic Pundits that He was on the task of *Dharmasthapana* (establishing righteousness) for which He had assumed human form; that they need no longer pine in neglect and dishonor, that He will provide them shade and shelter and reestablish in the world the real value of Vedic religion.** A program of prayer and Jnana offerings was arranged spontaneously by the pundits, with Baba seated on an effulgent Seshathalpa, named by them, "Tribhuvana-vijaya." It was a reminder of the Vijaya Yatra which Baba has entered upon in answer to the prayers of good men.

Baba has often said that He could be understood only by those who have studied the Sastras. Bhaktas, ritwiks and pundits saw the truth of that declaration demonstrated before them. He called, they came; they saw, they recognized; they merged in the sea of *bhakti* (devotion).

Every evening during the *Saptha* (week), the pundits and scholars who came for the Vedapurusha Jnana Yagna gave erudite discourses and Baba elucidated the points raised by them from the Vedas, Vedanta and Sastras.

Excerpts from Swami's Divine Discourses on the Yagna in 1962

Baba also emphasized many points for the uplift and correction of the bhaktas who had gathered in the thousands:

“Some critics are raising a hue and cry that the Yagna is the occasion when a good deal of cow’s ghee is wasted and a large quantity of sandalwood is burnt. Perhaps they value ghee and fuel higher than life. They calculate the price of ghee and sandalwood in rupees and paisa and bewail the cost of these purchasable articles forgetting the joy that is attained through the Yagna. **Well, each one of these critics has consumed so far many a bag of rice; what, may I ask, is the great benefit they have done for mankind? How is the world better for all the ghee that they have consumed? Do they at least lead joyful lives? Do their relatives lead happy lives on account of them?** What is the criteria for condemning a thing as ‘waste’? We have not asked anyone for these articles; I am not obliged to anyone for anything in this Yagna. No one is put to loss on this account. It has given us and all of you great and lasting joy. Let the critics add up the rupee value of things; we shall be happy with the incalculable, unforgettable *Ananda* (bliss) derived.”

Offer Your Innermost Self

“The ghee and the sandalwood are but symbols for other more valuable offerings, which these critics ignore. **The cow or “go” means the Jivi and since the ghee is the most precious product of the cow, the idea symbolized by the offering of ghee is that man must offer his most precious treasure, the inner core of his entire personality, to the gods.** The *Adhitya* (sun) is the presiding deity of the eye and the Adhityayajna seeks to teach the need for all eyes to cooperate in developing a united vision. Similarly, the Indrayajna seeks to link all hands, that is to say all the instruments of Kriyasakthi, in one common coordinated effort. Likewise, the Chandrayajna is an exercise in the union of hearts and the Suryayajna tries to symbolize the concentration of all intellects on the solution of common problems. It is only those who do not know the significance of Yagna for those who participate in it and its deeper symbolism that will drag in the jargon of the marketplace and disparage it.”

All Grief is Assuaged by Dharma

“Everyone is aware of the principles of the Dharma yet they walk in the path of Adharma. That is the tragedy. Hunger is appeased by food; so too all grief is assuaged by Dharma. Birth is for giving Dharma a chance. Good deeds are Dharma, bad deeds are Adharma. So long as there is breath in the body, Dharma must be adhered to. The animals and birds have not deviated from their Dharma at any time; it is only man that strays and falls. **So the Avatar has to come in human form in order to reestablish Dharma among those who are ignoring it. Dharma and Sastra are the two bunds that regulate the flood waters of sensual desire and egoism.**”

A Warning from Swami

“I must now issue a warning. Whenever a particular article becomes the object of popular demand, greedy people begin to trade on it; this is quite natural, but you should be careful not to be duped. Now, many people have

started using My Name and trying to eke out a livelihood, moving among devotees. Some of them say, "I have been sent by Baba to you, to your town, to your area, in order to spread His Name and His Glory." Some others say, "I have been specially blessed by Baba thus and thus, He has revealed to me this, or He has given me this boon." Others say that Baba comes upon them and talks through them and uses them as a medium. All types of such persons have sprouted now in many districts. These people have brokers who canvass on their behalf and collect funds for them and arrange meetings to honor them. **Well, My blessings are not for publicity and I am no ghost or spirit to 'possess' someone and talk through them. I wonder how such things are believed by devotees. Surely, the level of their intelligence must be very low, indeed."**

Honoring the Vedas and Vedic Scholars

"Nowadays, the thorn bush of Atheism has spread and it threatens to destroy the valuable crop of faith in God. **To counteract this, the Asthikas, the Sadhakas, those who follow the Vedic path and study the Vedas and Sastras have to be tended with loving care and honored for their genuine greatness.** You must have seen some feasts, where the men who serve, simply pass along the line shouting, "Laddu! Laddu!" carrying a basket-load of laddus on their shoulders. They do not bend before your leaf and serve you a laddu, they are not interested in giving you a laddu to eat, they simply cry out its name and pass on. Persons who declare that the Vedas are the very foundation of Indian culture and therefore Vedic scholars must be encouraged and honored are like the laddu servers; no one bends and serves. But, I make this declaration now: ***That is the task for which I have come. I shall plant the Vedic tree here and in many other places until all can take shelter in its shade.*** I am opening a Vedasastra Patasala at Prasanthi Nilayam this Birthday festival. The scholarship that you have all so laboriously acquired will find its reward; you may shed all fear and pursue your studies and ideals unhampered."

"A traveler draws his coat tighter to himself when the wind blows hard, but when it begins to get warmer, he takes his coat off. When the wind of argument blows, the coat of secular attachment is drawn closer to the body; argumentation multiplies differences and fosters the ego, but bhakti gives the warmth that forces you to remove the coat. *Vaada* (argument) leads to *bheda* (differences); *bhakti* leads to *moda* or joy."

- From Sanathana Sarathi, October 1962

-Heart2Heart Team

BANGAAROO! YOU ARE DIVINE

Can one be a tool to transform another?

By Dr. Sara Pavan

There is an old adage: **“The pathway to God is strewn with stones and thorns.”** History is replete with men and women having undergone enormous suffering on their way to sainthood. They were vilified and martyred by those intoxicated with worldly power. But, today, by the grace of our Living and Loving Lord, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, a devotee would be spared such a treacherous path.

Of course we would encounter our share of karmic problems, but with Swami’s mercy and guidance their impact upon us would be minimal, because Swami enables us to witness these events from a higher plane of awareness.

Two millennia ago there were two men with the same initials: **J.C.** One used his army to conquer more land for his kingdom on earth; the other used the power of his love to secure the kingdom of heaven. They were **Julius Caesar** and **Jesus Christ** respectively. We remember only the latter this day and worship him. He showed humanity the way to the Eternal Kingdom. One cannot reach the summit without transformation into the Pure-Self again, from where it all began.

Why Difficulties For Devotees?

Many devotees do face innumerable difficulties and suffer significant losses. People often ask why spiritual aspirants should encounter such problems, while those in worldly pursuits seem to be happily living without such hardships! Those of us who have been attracted by Bhagavan not only have experienced His boundless love but also had many of our worldly desires fulfilled. We have floated in this new-found joy and prayed for even more worldly dreams to be fulfilled, committing ourselves to spend our spare time in various ‘Sai-activities.’ In the beginning we could hardly stop talking about our experiences with Swami and all our achievements. In the next stage we started publicising our achievements, forgetting Who the Real Doer was! In the third stage we encountered several problems and our ego, pride and possessiveness was brought down to the ground. We backed-off in silence consequent to humiliations, conflicts and various kinds of losses.

The late Prof. Kasturi calls these three stages: ‘Chatter-ji, Banner-ji and Mukher-ji!’ By His grace alone our faith in Swami remains intact and we persevere with our *sadhana* of introspection. We pass through our ‘spiritual-winter’ with patience and wait for the spiritual springtime to dawn and to rejoice seeing the spiritual blossoms of higher values and virtues. By this unique way Swami fulfils the great task He has taken advent for: transformation of the human to the divine. In this article, the writer is attempting convey some complex but subtle ideas, based on his personal

experiences with Bhagavan for almost three decades, with the hope that the readers would read this contribution in the proper context, and lay themselves in the hands of the Divine Master.

We are *Bangaroo*

The Universe originated from God and is the manifestation of God. Divinity pervades everything in creation. The essence in every person is Divine. No wonder our Beloved Swami addresses us all as *Bangaaroo* (gold). Just as the jeweller removes all impurities from 'raw gold' before making an ornament, the Avatar, in His inimitable way, removes our animal-nature (*vasanas*) and transforms us into Divine beings. We may attempt to explore this mystery basing it on our own experiences, the learning curves we go through, and the trials and tribulations we encounter.

Of all the 8.4 million species of life-forms on earth, human birth is the most precious. Life on this planet has been evolving over five billions years, beginning with minerals, plants, the animals and finally the human. Life in the human form emerged some 900,000 years ago, through 55,000 generations, to reach this point in time of earthly evolution. Of the six and half billion people on this planet only a few aspire to explore and experience their true nature, both from the physical and spiritual perspectives. Amongst them are those extremely fortunate ones who have come face-to-face with God.

We have the All-inclusive and Causal Phenomenon, the source of all creation in the Human Form in our midst. Bhagawan Baba's advent is for the spiritual uplift of the entire humanity and to hasten the awakening of their inherent Divinity.

Creation And Its Crown Jewel

The universe has manifested from the formless primeval Energy, which is Consciousness or Brahman itself. From this Pure Energy, the primordial source of creation, the five elements – ether, air, fire, water and earth - manifested first, giving a form to the created. Evolution began with the mineral kingdom which was unaware of its own consciousness. With each upward step in evolution, through the plant and animal kingdoms, this awareness kept expanding until it reached its zenith in the human being. Humanity has reached the threshold of the final breakthrough to experience the Self within and live in full awareness. Being seen as the crown of nature, evolution has achieved an 'organ' that has 'Self-consciousness' and can think into the living Universe and commune with Higher Intelligence. That is, the human alone can experience oneness with the infinite source and lose any feeling of separateness from the entire creation.

Birds and beasts are completely under the control of the mind, whereas a human being is capable of bringing the mind under his/her control. Animals by and large live by instinct on the physical plane. They do not think or worry like human beings. Their energy and vitality is governed by other modalities, more at the bio-physical plane. Most animals react in a mirror-like fashion on account of their primitive mind. A dog will bark in return seeing another dog

bark or wag its tail in response to another likewise. Unlike animals the human mind is more evolved and can think and discriminate. Hence, when man reacts like an animal he falls short of being a human.

Experience Unity – Realise Divinity

Thought itself is energy and generates its own vibes. The vitality and energy of a person is a reflection of the state of his/her mind. Pure, loving and inclusive thoughts generate positive energy that vibrate at higher frequencies, while negative energy permeates selfish and exclusive thoughts, which vibrate at lower frequencies and drain one's own energy. These vibrations are so subtle that they are perceived unconsciously even by the lower species, let alone fellow humans. There are seven chakras or centres of energy in the human. The lower three chakras vibrate at lower frequencies and the upper three chakras vibrate at higher frequencies, the heart chakra being the central divide. Only when bestial qualities are shed one begins to manifest divine qualities. Energy levels soar high and vibrate through higher chakras. This energy or vibration is at the quantum level in every cell and not limited to any organ, not even the spinal cord, which is merely a channel. **“The principle of unity in diversity and diversity in unity is a natural and sacred phenomenon of God's creation.”** – Baba [p. 41, *Mind and its Mysteries*]

Only by feeling the Oneness with the entire creation can one experience divinity. But bestial qualities that have been carried forward from the past (**vasanas**) preclude us from such an experience. These have to be shed. Until then these characteristics will keep showing up in many circumstances. One has to be exposed to a wide range of experiences that will stir up these bad qualities for elimination. The human alone, endowed with the intellect, is able to discriminate and dispatch such animal qualities as they surface.

“What is the reason for this great fall? His own desires. For all the beastly acts, mutual differences (conflicts), jealousy and hatred it is the desires of the human being that is responsible. His own *vasanas* are responsible. Hence one has to strive to remove *vasanas* and desires in him that would turn him into an animal or an insect and develop qualities that would take him nearer to God.” – Baba [p. 29, *Mind and its Mysteries*]

By saying “... remove **vasanas** and desires in him that would turn him into an animal or an insect ...” we have to understand that Swami does not mean regression of a human into an animal or an insect in a future incarnation. He is merely referring to the recurrence or persistence of the qualities of animals and insects in human behaviour and consequently having to encounter being treated the way animals and insects are treated, and suffer the consequences.

Again Swami says (page 31): **“Identification with the senses and enjoying carnal pleasures is not something great. Even the animals, birds and beasts do that. Having obtained the sacred and invaluable human birth, if people behave in the same way the birds and beasts do, then what is**

their greatness? The animals, birds and beasts are completely under the control of the mind, whereas a human being is capable of bringing the mind under his control.”

Without devotion, discipline and determination one cannot achieve this. The intellect derives its strength from the Atma, which is in its close proximity. We are given opportunities several times, even over several incarnations, to decimate these qualities and move upwards.

Nature – A Tireless Teacher

Although nature is the preacher and our life is the teacher, we fail to learn our lessons from nature on account of our arrogance and superiority. Instead of being good stewards of nature, deluded by our belief that humans are ultimate masters, we exploit nature, as if it was there for our pleasure. On account of their ego and selfishness some even take advantage of the weaker ones in society and subjugate them in many ways. The law of nature is divine and shows no partiality. Every action causes a reaction, reflection and a resound. That explains how and why nature hits back when we exploit it and causes great damage. Individuals and nations also continue to feud because of selfishness, not realising that they are hurting only themselves. When will this all end? If we continue to destroy nature it will hit back even more furiously – tidal waves, earthquakes, raging bush fires, floods, droughts, soil degradation, climate change, ozone holes and many more.

We cannot continue to remain unaware and keep ignoring the malfeasant power of the mind, which Swami refers to as the demonic mind. Individually and collectively we are creating calamities around us and all over the world. Conflicts and wars have their origins in the human mind. Even vain gossip and slander can cause great distress. When we look closely at the so-called modern civilisation, modern education, material prosperity and the unrestrained media for profit and sensation, it is quite evident that human beings today are selfish and showing more of the animal qualities. Animals have their fair share of fights in the jungle, where herds of animals battle against each other to carve out a territory for themselves. Yes, we have to concede that we humans too show such qualities at times, provoked or unprovoked. Remembering that the divine is in everyone we must be steadfast in avoiding such evil thoughts and deeds. Swami's benign advice to us is to remind ourselves that we are human beings and not animals. Dominated by ego and selfishness, the recurring animal behaviour would be hard to eradicate. But we have to be earnest in our sadhana and Swami's grace will flow in abundance.

“There is no unity, purity or divinity,” Swami says. This should be the hallmark of every human being practising the five Human Values. We are desecrating ourselves and destroying nature ever more. Our travesty of natural values has reached a critical point when God Himself has descended upon the earth to intercede and salvage the situation. Bhagavan Baba is doing just that, to transform the ‘animal-man’ to ‘God-man’. His ways are inexplicable, unique and subtle. Swami says, “Nature is the best preacher and

your own life is your teacher.” Nature is also the manifestation of divine energy and consciousness, but we continue to remain ignorant and too egotistic to learn from nature. Providence gives unique opportunities for us to learn from our own mistakes, in our relationship with family, friends and associates. Sometimes one has to face even harder lessons to eliminate such animal qualities and transform. When karmas are inextricably linked between individuals as well as in life situations, one has no option but to endure these difficulties and ask, “What is that in me that has attracted all this?” God alone knows what is best for each one of us. He will send the right kind of people as instruments to chisel out some of our undesirable qualities. In some of His discourses Swami has compared our behaviour to those of animals – dogs, cats, rats, pigs, donkeys, monkeys, snakes, etc. Swami has even commented that animals have a reason and season, but man has no reason or season.

God is Chiselling us...At Every Opportunity

For those earnest on the spiritual path, Bhagavan gives His devotees more opportunities to transform. Just as doctors prescribe different medications to patients suffering from different diseases and keeping an eye on their progress, our ‘Divine Doctor’ may place us in tailor-made life situations for us to learn valuable lessons and endure certain difficulties. Wisely we should learn to resolve conflicts within ourselves and with others, without any bitterness or enmity. Such testing times may arise both in our private and public life.

The conflict within us is a battle against our own conscience, which would be the ultimate winner on the spiritual path. Inter-personal conflicts are due to ego, selfishness and domineering nature, and this can be overcome only by fraternal love and forbearance. Decades ago Bhagavan Baba had cautioned His devotees that they have to overcome many hardships. With the right perception we would realise that such hardships and conflicts do have the power to exorcise some of our negative traits.

With Bhagavan’s grace conflicts do not go out of control within His fold; they neither cause material hardship nor collateral damage. The suffering is only mental, which will vanish with proper spiritual training of the mind. One would never, even in the wildest dream, contemplate on a law suit against another, especially a fellow devotee, as we often see elsewhere. Instead, we would develop a deeper understanding of the matter and accept that the setback was for a higher purpose. With greater determination, discrimination and love, all our attachments and enmities melt away into peace and forbearance.

A few years ago, in one of the Trayee sessions, Swami told those gathered around Him that they should make every effort to clear up all enmities and blessed them. Otherwise these haunting feelings would get carried into future births, He cautioned! His universal presence and loving guidance is always there in whatever task a devotee undertakes, remembering His Divine Name.

Only A Diamond Can Cut Another Diamond

The following metaphor would illustrate how an individual could transform another individual. Imagine, finding a gold nugget by chance while digging the ground. Let us place the nugget alongside a beautifully handcrafted necklace in a locked showcase. The nugget is now in the company of the necklace, which itself was once a raw nugget. Would this gold nugget change by itself merely by its proximity (satsang) with the necklace? No, because it has not gone through the tools of transformation in the hands of the jeweller - fire, anvil, hammer, tweezers, cutters, polishers, etc. He has to use these tools to work on the nugget to transform it into a beautiful ornament. What are these tools made of? Neither plastic nor wood; but another metal like steel, dark and ugly looking compared to the brilliance of gold. Only a metal can transform another metal, we infer, just as a diamond alone can cut another diamond. The same applies to humans too, where only a human would prove to be an effective tool to transform another!

Many aren't aware of their own inner blemishes, but readily see faults in others. Even if we are unaware of our hidden traits, Swami can clearly see them all, being the God-in-every-human. We cannot conceal anything from Him because Bhagavan is the indweller in everyone. In His infinite mercy and compassion He is ever forgiving and patiently guiding those who have taken their first step towards Him. Jesus said: "When you see a mote in another's eyes you fail to see a beam sticking across your own." Bhagavan Baba reiterates this by saying, "When you point a finger at another, three fingers point at you." We find fault in another person only because the same blemish lies hidden within us. How come, not everybody can see that fault? They cannot see it because they do not have the same fault in them. They are like innocent children, so pure! We may compare this to two computers with 'matching' files. Hence, when we see a particular behaviour or fault in another, it simply means such a defect is within us as well! But the power of delusion and ego will not entertain such a thought.

Sooner we learn to accept and abide by this truth the greater would be our gain. This would give us the strength to eliminate our negative qualities as they surface. Swami has told the writer a few times that there is nothing bad whatsoever in His entire creation. Even what we consider as bad in the present may not be bad after all on hindsight! "If you have a thorn in your foot hurting you, you will need another thorn to dig it out. Then, you can throw away both the thorns and be free of pain," says Swami. Only a 'minus' can interact with another minus to make it 'plus'. No amount of 'plus' can make the 'minus' become a 'plus'. So also, when we enter into a relationship with other individuals with similar negative traits the divine alchemist begins His work stealthily to eliminate these blemishes in both - of course not without pain and anguish to begin with. Such experiences are painful to one's ego only. Individuals in whom we see faults are merely reminding us that the same fault is also in us. We have to seize upon every opportunity to weed out our own faults, just as a thorn is useful to remove the one embedded in our foot. This mechanism is also comparable to active immunisation, where a controlled dose of the same germ that causes a particular infectious disease is given as

vaccine. Rigors, fever and pain will ensue, but immunity gained would ward off a potentially lethal infection later.

He Tutors, Trains and Transforms....All Suffused With Love

God too comes in the human form as Avatar to transform humanity and lead them towards God realisation. Swami Himself has said that if He had come as a ferocious lion, we would have caged Him; as a benign inimitable form with many heads and limbs we would have exhibited this unique 'creature' and collected money.

If we envisage Him manifesting as a scary lightening and thunder, hurricane or earthquake, we would rush into our bunkers for safety. So, God also has to descend in the human form to befriend us and lovingly guide and transform us into true human beings and make us realise that we too are divine.

Bhagavan, by His infinite love, glory and compassion, has attracted millions of people from all corners of the world, irrespective of caste, creed or social status into His fold, not to mention His countless miracles, which Swami refers to as His calling cards. His power of attraction power is called '*Chamatkar*'. Once in, the 'operation-transformation' begins, tailor made to suit each individual. This stage of refinement is called '*samskar*' – that is to transform the 'animal-man' into a 'God-man.' Our Omniscient and merciful Bhagavan would place His devotees, striving to realise the highest truth, in such situations in life that would be perfect to hasten their spiritual growth. Life can become a melting pot where undesirable qualities get distilled away!

When we enter this stage we encounter obstacles, disappointments and conflict with others with greater intensity. Institutions and centres we associate with also serve as the cutting edge of our ego; to destroy the animal, selfish, qualities within us. We could draw a parallel with a washing machine where soiled clothes are exposed to detergents and agitators for removal of the dirt before the dirty water is spun out. Thus, many Sai centres and the various institutions we associate with do provide us with unique opportunities to transform ourselves, to 'wash' away our selfishness and ego and make us worthy instruments to fulfil the grand purpose of Bhagavan's Divine Mission. Bhagavan Himself is touching the hearts of millions and spreading His Love, Light and Message. He alone is doing everything, but lets us to take all the credit, thus imbuing us with even greater interest to undertake more selfless service. He had once said, "Unfortunate are those who leave the organisation"

Expanding Love....Becoming Love

The 'animal-man' has great limitations, most importantly because of the identification with the body. Mirrored by the mind, one thinks of oneself as the body. We can only see a very small facet of our totality, which is like an iceberg, but we are unable to see the enormity of our subconscious mind ('mindberg') with all its trappings, negativities and animal tendencies that manifest as lust, anger, greed, possessiveness, pride in outer strength (ego),

envy and jealousies! They cannot be destroyed by worldly means, but can only be annihilated through spiritual practise. Only through personal experience and self-inquiry can one engage in any meaningful and soul-searching transformation. Just as a fruit ripens at the right time in the warmth of sunlight, we too would grow in spiritual stature with the loving grace of our Beloved Swami and reach the third stage of expanded Love, *Paraopakar*, and finally God-Realisation, *Shaksatkar*.

Bhagavan has often reminded us that He is fully aware of our past as well as our future. His ways are inscrutable and He has the power to transform any human being into a good and Godly person. He is the source of the Universal and Infinite Energy of Love. Bhagavan is LOVE. His Love has no bounds and is not only the greatest of all healers but also transmutes each and every person who has come within His orbit.

Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu.

– Heart2Heart Team

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN PANAMA

Enchanting Panama

A narrow strip of land that is bordered on two sides with gigantic water bodies, the most popular isthmus which forms a natural land bridge between the two large continents of North America and South America, one of the rarest places in the world where you can go from the wild untamed nature of the Pacific coast to the laid-back influence of the Caribbean – from one paradise of nature to the other - in a matter of hours; host to seven living Indian cultures, a Miami-style capital city, exotic tropical rainforests, bewitching beaches and a world renowned engineering marvel, the Panama Canal – this is the fascinating land of Panama.

So how and when did Sai enter this beautiful land of Panama? We will come to that interesting story later, but before that let us know a little more about this Central American country which is often hailed as the Bridge of the World.

Panama – A Paradise of Abundance

Located in the middle of the Western Hemisphere, on an isthmus only 80 kilometers wide in its narrowest section, Panama, is a relatively thin stretch of land that rose from the seas 2.4 million years ago, it is believed, to unite the Americas. Ironically, the work of nature was somewhat undone when Panama was split in two by the construction of the now famous Panama Canal. Though geographically tiny, by virtue of its unique setting on the schema of world's landmass, Panama is a country where the concept of exotic begins in its name, which means "abundance of fish and butterflies" in the indigenous language of the land.

Panama lies between the Caribbean Sea at the North, the Pacific Ocean to the South, with Colombia at the East and Costa Rica to the West. The mountainous topography on the Caribbean side contrasts with the low hills and extensive savannahs by the Pacific. The climate is tropical, pleasant and warm, with an average temperature of 27°C (80°F) maintained almost all year long in this southern most Central American country. With 900 species of birds, 1500 species of trees and over 7000 vascular plants, for nature lovers Panama is a real tropical paradise.

Panama and Its People - Diverse, Dynamic and Delighting

Since the discovery of this isthmus in 1501 by Rodrigo de Bastidas, followed by Columbus, Panama and its eponymous capital city have been an important international center purely due to its strategic geographic position. The Colon Free Zone [a free zone in the province of Colon] located at the entrance of the Panama Canal is the second largest of its kind in the world and the first in the Western Hemisphere. With easy access to four major ports, built with most modern facilities and covering an area of 600 acres, it is the most advanced International Shipping Center in Latin America.

Panama is a melting pot of many cultures. The majority of population is Mestizo (or mixed Spanish, Indian, Chinese and African descent) and 80% of them are Roman Catholic, though the state has no official religion. More than half of its 3.2 million population is urban and live in the Panama City-Colon metropolitan corridor. The dominant language for the fun loving and get-along Panamanians is Spanish, which is also their official language, but English is very common in this culturally dynamic and aesthetic land.

We can go on talking about Panama's modern cities, its world class infrastructure, its flourishing trade with the US, its banana export, etc. but what is more interesting is how the Sai movement took off in this country which is thousands of miles and seas away from Puttaparthi.

The First Panamanian In Puttaparthi

The first visitor to Prashanti Nilayam from Panama was Dany Nandwani. He waded through the Chitravati River to see Sai Baba in 1962. He recalls that in those early days, there was no altar in the Mandir as there is today, just Swami's chair and a wooden shelf with a photo of Shirdi Sai and another of Abraham Lincoln. Dany was only 19 years old then, but he was taken with Baba and became devoted for life. And since then his family always basked under the divine love and protective umbrella of Lord Sai. Just six years ago, in the year 2000, the Nandwani family was conferred a great blessing though after a huge test by Baba. Dani Nandwani's son, Ashok N. Nandwani, president of a chain of stores in a booming commercial center, was kidnapped.

"My Angels Are Taking Care Of Him" – Baba

A relative, who was living in Prashanti Nilayam at the time, conveyed a message to Swami about the kidnapping and was given an interview. Baba said: "My angels are taking care of him. Don't worry, he is with Me and after seven days I will return him, but he needs lots of prayers from everybody, so tell everyone to pray for him."

The person asked, why seven days? Swami replied: "God took one week to make the world - I promised one week. You don't have faith, and Panama is not praying enough."

Back home, many people chanted the Gayatri Mantra daily. Mr. Nandwani was worried about his son's condition, his health, what he was eating, and on the fourth day a Sai devotee heard a voice during meditation say: "I have already fed him."

On the seventh day, the relative staying in Prashanti got an interview in which he told Swami that there was no news yet. Baba replied: "Where is your faith? He will be back soon." At the same moment, Mr. Nandwani got a phone call from the police informing him that his son had been found and was safe and was being taken to the hospital for a checkup. He escaped from his abductors

and spent seven days lost in the jungle avoiding wild animals and crocodiles until he found his way back to civilization.

The ways of the Lord are mysterious. Although Panama has a large East Indian population, the Sai Organization in Panama actually traces its roots to Jesus Arauz, a Panamanian, who heard about Baba and went to India in the 1980s. Upon his return, he initiated study circles in his home. And that is how the movement began growing. There are more than 100 fortunate active members in the Organisation now.

Devotional Wing of the Sai Organisation

There are presently five Sai Centers, one each in Panama City and Colon City, the second largest city and three in Chiriqui City. All the centers conduct weekly bhajans and celebrate with great joy the calendar of events and festivals observed by Baba's devotees everywhere.

At one of the public meetings in Panama, Mr. John Behner, a very senior member of Latin America Sai Organisation came to talk about Sai Baba from El Salvador and said, "If Jesus were to come to you and tell you, 'I am the son of God,' would you believe Him or not? His acts will prove His identity, His works, His love and His truthfulness. The same applies to the Sathya Sai Avatar." Many devotees left the meeting stronger in their faith and joyous in their outlook.

Bal Vikas In Panama – A Silent Sai Revolution

Bal Vikas, we know, is based on the five universal human values. It is education in Human Values which develop the finer and more important aspects of a child's character, thereby cultivating a complete and well-rounded personality. In Panama, this is accomplished through the five teaching techniques of silent sitting, storytelling, prayer, group singing, and group activities.

Bal Vikas classes are innovatively divided into four age groups:

- Ages 4 to 6 - based on Love
- Ages 7 to 9 - based on Peace
- Ages 10 to 12 - based on Truth
- Ages 13 to 15 - based on Right Conduct

Held once a week on Fridays, the Bal Vikas Classes are looked forward to eagerly by the little children. How do the classes help them? What do the children actually do in a Bal Vikas class? This is how one child narrates a typical Bal Vikas session –

"I Will Surely Forgive" – A Bal Vikas Student

"At 3:38 p.m. I get ready. I tell my Mum to please take me to my class on time, which begins at 4 o'clock. I know Baba likes punctuality. Later on, I close my

eyes and chant three OMs. I suddenly feel relaxed and soooooo good. Then, while the meditation is going on, I feel like I am flying through the sky on Aladdin's magic carpet, as my teacher takes us to this magic ride with our eyes closed. I have learned that if one concentrates, you can really feel as if you are somewhere else. After my teacher asks us to open my eyes; I am back in class after a really enjoyable ride on the clouds.

I enjoy stories, especially about the lion and the rat. When the rat was pleading for forgiveness asking the lion not to kill him, I had tears in my eyes. I could feel the fear in his little body, so when the lion forgave him I almost jumped up with joy. I actually live in the story, depending on how the teacher tells it. At home now when my brother asks for forgiveness I will surely forgive him – that is what I learned today. Nobody is too big or too small to be forgiven or to be helped. I love singing especially when we are allowed to stand up, clap and sometimes dance. I leave my class very happy with a chocolate, biscuit or sweet. Sai Ram, God Bless All.”

Isn't this wonderful? The transformed outlook of the children towards their parents, elders, teachers and the respect the children develop for other religious views is the sweet fruit that the Bal Vikas classes confer on the small children. And this is something very precious which formal academic education never provides. Every three months there is a Bal Vikas newsletter which carries the impressions of these young enlightened minds.

In the May of 2006, Bal Vikas gurus organized a sports day with 40 children participating in the Panama City. There are around 65 children with 12 teachers, in Colon and Panama currently. Every three months the Bal Vikas children enthusiastically organize the bhajan ceremony by themselves.

On Guru Poornima, the Sai Youth organized the Laksha Archana Japa, comprised of 1008 Malas [chanting the divine name a lakh times collectively]. About 125 children took part during Baba's birthday celebration program, performing dances, plays, and singing bhajans.

Teaching Profound Lessons Practically

In the Bal Vikas classes the students, apart from learning how to sing bhajans, prayers, meditate, etc. learn the very important virtue of Seva. They understand why one must do seva and get the practical feel of its benefits. Seva programs are organized for the children many times in a year. Accompanied by their teachers and mothers, they go to a senior citizens' home and make sandwiches and give out milk, juice and fruits. They also visit Mother Teresa's Home for old people and SOS, an orphanage, and spend hours playing, talking and serving.

“There is nothing more precious in the world than true education. It reveals the Divinity that sustains the Universe and promotes the welfare of mankind materially, mentally, and socially. Only through education do we understand creation and the truth about humanity,” Swami says. And by His grace, little children in far away Panama are now learning true education. Education that

will liberate not only them but also through them a whole section of humanity and confer joy to all.

Seminars and Adopted Schools

Apart from Bal Vikas classes, Human Values events are organized by devotees in different city schools to train teachers how to teach the children to be better human beings and enlightened citizens.

In Panama City, the Centro Educativo en Busca de una Mañana school has been adopted by the Sai Organization. Also, King's School in Panama City and Escuela Las Lomas in Chiriqui have immensely benefited from these seminars. The first of these is a school and detention center for children convicted of minor crimes, such as drugs or theft. After the Sathya Sai Human Values program was in place for over a year, the Director of the school, Mrs. Gloria Powers, said that two boys started fighting. One of them ran to the kitchen and got a knife and was chasing the other boy. Gloria was afraid, but she intercepted the boy with the knife. As soon as he saw her, he dropped the knife, embraced her and started to cry. The Sathya Sai values had saved the day, she says.

Serving The Needy

Panama, though blessed abundantly with natural resources and a vibrant economy, it has its own share of health problems as well. And the Sai Organisation under the banner of Sathya Sai Medical Service have been engaged in various service projects to help those in need.

For example, more than 200 cataract patients and over 80 hernia surgeries have been performed in the last six years free of cost. Every month the Sai devotees provide milk and food to the malnourished population of the city which includes many children and elderly people in dire need of nutrition and support.

Devotees also donate blood to the hospitals and on occasions distribute food, and drinks to the needy in the hospitals. To mothers of newborns, the devotees distribute specially made baskets with all the items the mothers would need for their little ones. "Actually it is Baba who keeps doing all these loving acts through us, we are just tiny particles of Himself. We pray that He will continue to help us put his words into action: Love all, Serve all," say the devotees with gratitude and humility. However small the service activity may be, the love and dedication with which the devotees undertake the task is truly heart warming. And it is Sai who fills them with His love, guides them and guards them as they go on doing His work.

"Sai Ram" and Sai Rushes To Rescue!

Recalling an incident of how Swami came to the rescue of devotees, a Panamanian narrates,

"A devotee was driving her car which was full of ladies who were going to do service at the Mother Teresa old peoples home in Colon City, Panama. They go there every Thursday with food for everyone. This home is close to the Free Zone of the Panama Canal, so there is lots of container traffic. The lady who was driving failed to halt at a stop sign and a huge container was approaching down on their car. The ladies in the car screamed, and when she saw it she screamed too - "Sai Ram". The only way to avoid the accident was to accelerate the car, but in her nervousness she hit the brake instead of the gas. Somehow the car was surprisingly accelerated by hitting the brake and the accident was avoided. Her friends said why did you stop now? The brakes worked after they had got out of the way of the container. She said, note down the time, because when we get home you will see there is a message for us.

When they returned home, the devotee and the friends asked her maid if there were any messages. The maid said a strange thing had happened. In the shrine room, Swamis picture had fallen off the wall, and when the maid went to pick it up, she said Swami had winked at her from the picture. The picture had fallen off the wall at 12:20 PM, just the hour that the ladies had noted down. The maid is not a devotee and some of the ladies were also not devotees, but this miracle of Baba has now opened a new dimension in their lives."

A Continuous Saga of Service

Baba in His own inexplicable ways has entered the hearts of many in this tiny nation. And it is His love which inspires them to reach out to the downtrodden and the needy. Every week, the Sai devotees organize Narayan Seva for the underprivileged people on the streets, and distribute packets of milk, bananas and biscuits. Sometimes even the street dogs are given milk. As Shirdi Sai said, even in them I reside. Also, there is another Narayan Seva organized once a month for families of sick people who are in the hospitals.

Giving Clothes To Families With Limited Resources

Five days a week, the devotees send milk to the MUCEC Center, where street children receive education. Once a month, 50 to 60 undernourished children come to the Center, where the devotees provide them with breakfast, consisting of milk, cereal, fruit, buns, biscuits and chocolates.

"On the recent Janmasthanmi day [celebrating Lord Krishna's advent], we gave breakfast, a notebook, pencil, sharpener, and a colored pencil to each child," says a Sai volunteer. "On Easwaramma Day [commemorating the death anniversary of Baba's mother] on May 6th, 30 bags of groceries were distributed. For Baba's birthday 4 to 5 seva events were organized in the space of a week. This year we plan to complete 15 cataract operations," say the devotees with great enthusiasm, great love and broad smiles.

In the city of Chiriqui, a devotee runs a grocery store and people who need raw food go to him and he provides it to them free. Advanced Medical care is

freely given to undernourished children, who are taken to a clinic and then followed up on their cases. Clothes, food, shoes, and school supplies are distributed many times during the year to people with low resources while comprehensive Medical Camps are organized once a year.

Sai Devotees – “Bridges” to Eternal Joy

“Coming in contact with Sai often brings with it new experiences, through dreams, leelas, and realizations, but the most significant aspect is the transformation that occurs within us. He changes us for the better, and with His guidance helps us to expand spiritually and grow closer to God. We develop faith, and know that wherever we go, we can meet Baba through His followers,” say the Sai devotees of this land.

The nation may be small but the hearts of Panamanians are big. With their ever expansive love and dedication to the Lord one can only expect that soon the Sai movement will be a pan-Panama phenomenon. “The devotees of Panama welcome all those who come to our country to visit our Centers and experience the divine presence of Baba,” say the devotees with jubilant smiles on their faces. Yes, the joy they radiate and love they share is but a reflection of His love and their national motto *Pro Mundi Beneficio* meaning ‘for the benefit of the world’. It is these Sai soldiers who will be the “bridges” which will connect hundreds and thousands as days go by to the eternal source of all Bliss, Power, Love and Glory.

-Heart2Heart Team

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI – PART 22

(Continued from the previous issue)

Act 4 Scene 6

Puttaparthi Elementary School again. On this day, the boys are bringing vegetables as gifts for the teacher.

SATHYA: Why have you brought all this?

BOY: To give to the teacher.

SATHYA: To the teacher? But I have not brought anything!

BOY: If we give all this, the teacher will not beat us.

BOY 2: Otherwise, he will accuse us of coming late and punish us.

SATHYA: But you have not come late!

BOY: Maybe. But did not the master say that we must be here at least fifteen minutes before the bell rings? Did he not warn that if we failed to do so he would beat us?

SATHYA: Are you saying that if you gave him all these vegetables he would not beat you?

CHORUS: Yes!

SATHYA: You should not give all this! It's wrong!! When we have done no wrong, we should not be afraid. We should not give all this to the teacher.

CHORUS: You do not know!

SATHYA: I know! If you give now, he will keep on asking again and again. It is wrong to give such things.

BOY: Then You tell us what we are supposed to do.

SATHYA: Come with Me, and I shall tell you what to do.

CHORUS: Come on fellows, let's go. We'll do as He says. Come, let's go!

Sathya leads all the boys to a big tree in the neighbourhood, and asks the boys to sit under the tree.

SATHYA: We will all sit here, and not go to the class. Come, sit down! Don't go. When the Headmaster comes and asks, "Why have not gone to the class?" we will say, "Because the Master beats us!" We will tell the truth. We will report that everyday the Master demands vegetables, milk, ghee, and the like.

BOY: My God! If we say that, the Master will thrash us!

SATHYA: Look, did I not tell you that you should not be afraid? Listen to Me and sit here. Am I not with you?

The Head Master comes, and is surprised to see all the boys under the tree instead of in the class.

HEADMASTER (HM): Are you all not going to the class?

SATHYA: No Sir!

HM: Why not?

SATHYA: Sir, everyday the teacher is beating the boys. He insists that the boys must come well before the bell rings, and if they fail to he beats them severely.

CHORUS: Yes, Sir! He also asks us to bring vegetables everyday. If we don't we get beaten!

BOY 1: He asked me to bring pumpkin; I did not and he beat me.

BOY 2: He asked me to bring milk and curds and punished me for not bringing them.

BOY 3: And I was asked to bring ghee!

HM: Is that so? What else?

SATHYA: Sir, if the boys give these vegetables, then the Master will not beat them. Otherwise, they get a thrashing. Is this not wrong?

CHORUS: Yes Sir! You tell us if it is not wrong?

At this stage, the class teacher comes there and is surprised to see what is going on. He acts as if he is disciplining the students.

TEACHER: *[to a boy]* Put your hands down! ... *[To HM]* Salutations Sir!!

HM: Salutations later! These boys are refusing to go to the class!

TEACHER: *[acting surprised]* What! They are refusing?! Hey, who is there who dares to stay away? *[To HM]* Sir, I'll take care of these fellows.

HM: Is this the way you run the School? Instead of teaching lessons, you are demanding vegetables, milk, curds and the like! Is this not wrong? Unable to bear your harassment and punishment, the students are going on a strike! This is a great insult to the School and to me personally. ... Listen, from now on you will never beat the children; if they misbehave, report to me and I'll deal with the problem. Boys, all of you now go to the class. Go now!

CHORUS: Yes Sir!

Scene 7

Classroom in Puttaparthi School. Boys have placed the vegetables they have brought, on the table. The teacher enters the room and sees the vegetables.

TEACHER: Why do I need all this? I don't want this tomato, this potato.....*[sweeps everything off]* Henceforth, I do not want all these things! I am your mother, father, God and all the rest of it.

SATHYA: Students worship Goddess Saraswati, the Fountainhead of Knowledge, and the Teacher is Her Instrument who imparts this sacred Knowledge. Sir, there should only be a sacred relationship between the Teacher and the taught. It is to drive this lesson home that I did all this and not to insult anybody.

TEACHER: Yes my boy! Such sweet words from one so young!

Scene 8

The scene is the bedroom in Kondama's house. Sathya is lying on the bed. Kondama enters and sees the boy. For a brief moment, he has the vision of Lord Krishna lying there, instead of his beloved grandson. Sathya reveals Himself as the Lord. Kondama is filled with ecstasy.

K.RAJU: Krishna! My life has been fulfilled! It truly has been fulfilled!!

SATHYA: *[pretending He does not understand]* Grandfather! What are you saying?

End of Act 4 Scene 8

(To be continued...)

GITA FOR CHILDREN – Part 23
(Continued from the previous issue)

Chapter 10

1. Krishna says to Arjuna, 'There are many aspects to Divinity, and I have described some of these, such as Manifest and Unmanifest Divinity, Creation, and My Cosmic Drama. I have also explained how I occasionally incarnate to play a role in My own Drama. Many of these subtleties are not known even to the demi-gods.'
2. 'People have all kinds of confused and mixed-up notions about God and Divinity. This is inevitable when one is immersed entirely in worldly affairs. Preoccupation with this transient world inevitably produces delusion. Tell me, how can a deluded person have a vision of the Divine?'
3. 'Nevertheless, there are some souls who, on account of their intense faith in Me, see Me as the Supreme God, beyond Space and Time, beyond Creation, Eternal in the full sense of the word, and the Fountainhead of everything that was, is, and will be.'
4. 'At the same time, deluded people look around and ask, "Where is this God you are talking about? I can't see Him anywhere!" The arrogant ones go even further and sarcastically remark, "How can you see God when He does not exist?!"'
5. 'Arjuna, never allow yourself to be misled by such foolish talk. If you want to, you can see God everywhere. Just look at yourself; you are God! Don't focus on your transient body but on your Heart. God is present in your Heart all the time, and you can have His vision there any time you want.'
6. 'When a man is good, the Divinity in him automatically shines via various virtues. All those virtues, like *Kshama* or forbearance, for example, are manifestations of God. Indeed, there are innumerable manifestations of God in this Universe. The beauty of a peacock is God. The glory of a sunset is God. The majesty of mountains is God. Everything is God. And yet people complain they cannot see God! How strange!!'
7. 'Having said all this, I must point out why people sometimes find it difficult to see God in others, even though they might reluctantly concede that Nature's beauty is a manifestation of God.'
8. 'Let us say that there is a house in which shines a bright lamp. Suppose all the doors, windows and the ventilators of this house are completely shut. A person walking past the house outside will not see any light coming from within. He is therefore likely to assume that there is no lamp within, even though there is in fact a bright lamp there.'
9. 'Something similar happens in the world. God is the Divine Lamp shining from man's Heart. He shines so in all beings, including the so-called evil ones.'

In the case of good people, the effulgence is evident via their loving actions, sweet words, etc. It is like a house with its doors and windows open – in this case, the light within is visible outside. Contrarily, an evil person is like the house I described earlier, where all the windows etc., are completely shut.'

10. 'What are the signatures of Divinity in humans? In other words, how does one recognise the Divine Effulgence within a person? Simple; look for Spiritual Wisdom, discrimination, equanimity, compassion, selfless Love, forbearance, the spirit of sacrifice, calmness, contentment, etc. If you see all these, you can be certain you have seen God.'

11. 'A person who is wedded to Truth and Righteous Action is verily an embodiment of God. God must be seen not as a magician as many tend to do, but as Love, Purity, Absolute Goodness, nobility, and virtue. With this approach, you can see God all over the place. Remember, God is not merely Beauty, Grandeur, and Majesty. He is much more. He is Love, He is Truth and He is Compassion. Those are the real signatures of God.'

12. 'People whose discrimination is not blunted by the attractions of this ephemeral world have no difficulty at all in seeing Me everywhere! Believe Me, wherever they turn they see only Me and nothing else!'

13. 'Do you know why they have no problem in seeing Me whereas all the others do? That is because they do not try to see Me with their physical eyes. Arjuna, if you try to see Me with your Heart, how can I possibly hide from you?'

14. Breaking his long silence, Arjuna says, 'Krishna, at last I am beginning to get a faint glimpse of Who exactly You are. I am now filled with a deep desire to know more about You! Who can tell me all that except Yourself? Please, oh Lord, would You most kindly confer on me the Grace of hearing directly from You about Your Glory and Grandeur?'

15. Smiling broadly, Krishna replies, 'Of course Arjuna, I most certainly shall. But you must remember that My Glories are literally infinite, and we have very little time right now since the war is about to start. So, I can give you only the barest glimpse at present. However, since you are very intelligent, even that tiny sample ought to be sufficient. Later, using your imagination, you can on your own contemplate on My Limitless and Incomparable Glory and Grandeur.'

16. 'Since I pervade everything My Glory also is spread everywhere. Anything beautiful, grand, wondrous, magnificent, and marvelous that you see in Creation is just Me greeting you via that channel! It can be anything – a starry sky, a majestic mountain, a roaring waterfall, a mighty river or even a gentle stream, a fabulous beach, the atolls, the coral reefs, the soaring birds, the coloured fishes, the royal tiger – it can be any such thing; all these are nothing but Me in various disguises. I appear in diverse forms to make people happy in many different ways.'

17. 'Let Me amplify with a specific example. Because of earth's rotation, you have the phenomenon of day and night. The day begins with a sunrise and the nightfall commences with a sunset. Are the sunrise and sunset just bland events? No! I make them specially glorious. Why? So as to make man happy! I let man have My *Darshan* via beauty in Creation. But the fool that he is, man merely enjoys the superficial beauty without marvelling about the Source of that beauty!"

18. 'Some have My *Darshan* via the beauty of Nature. Some experience Me through soulful music. Some create works of art, thereby giving expression to the Divinity latent in them. Of course, not everyone realises the Divine to be source of creativity but those who do, are raised to special heights of ecstasy. And then there are people who worship Me by seeing Love and Compassion radiating from others.'

19. 'Arjuna, I am ever ready to oblige and give *Ananda* or Bliss to all those who seek it. In whatever way people seek Me in that very same way do I respond.'

20. 'By the way, are you aware of the Divine wonders within your own body? Just look at your fingers. Do you have any idea of their extra-ordinary capability? Thanks to this, man can paint, sculpt, write, stitch, and do so many wonderful things that no other species on earth can. But for this remarkable capacity of the fingers, do you think you could have become the super archer that you are?'

21. Stunned by these revelations, Arjuna humbly says, 'Lord, You have not included the playing of musical instruments in Your list! Perhaps You play the flute not only to remind us of the dexterity of human fingers, but also to convey that music itself is Divine in origin!'

22. Krishna smiles and replies, 'Correct! You sure are getting smart! In a nutshell Arjuna, I am the quintessence of all the creative power and the excellence that you see in the world. Of course, some distort the gifts given to them but, as I explained earlier, I am not responsible for that.'

23. 'I am the origin and the source of everything in the Universe, be it small like the atom or large like the galaxy. There is no being or entity, moving or stationary, that can exist without Me.'

24. 'There is no end to My Divine Power and Glory, and what you have heard about is not even the equivalent of a tiny speck.'

25. 'Arjuna, there is really no need for Me to catalogue My Powers, nor for you to learn all about them. Far more important it is for you to repose total faith in Me and obey My command implicitly!'

(To be continued)

-Heart2Heart Team

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

“HANDS THAT SERVE ARE HOLIER THAN LIPS THAT PRAY”

- An Enlightening Panel Discussion

“Hands That Serve are Holier than Lips That Pray”. Sounds very simple, isn’t it? Yes, it is very pretty straightforward to understand and talk about but the real issues arise when one tries to practice this every day, in every situation, in every moment of one’s life. Because that’s when one encounters situations when one is unable to decide “to do or not to do”. Given the great significance of this saying of Baba in one’s daily life, especially for the youngsters, there was a panel discussion held in the Brindavan campus of Swami’s Institute during the “Summer Course On Indian Culture and Spirituality” in May 2002. The discussion paneled by very eminent guests and staff of the Institute was a comprehensive elaboration on this subject. We have aired this panel discussion on Radio Sai on many occasions and many listeners have expressed their desire to have the text of the discussion emailed to them. For the benefit of those listeners and others who want guidance on this subject of “Service and Prayer”, we now bring the first part of this valuable discussion. The second part will be carried in the next issue of H2H on November 1st.

The Panelists

The moderator of the session was Prof. G. Venkataraman, eminent scientist and former Vice Chancellor of Swami’s Institute. The panel members were -

- Prof. Anil Kumar, former principal of Brindavan Campus of the Institute and currently a Senior Faculty Member in the Prashanti Nilayam Campus.*
- Prof. Ramamurthy, Assistant Dean of School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance, Prashanti Nilayam Campus.*
- Sri Sanjay Sahani, formerly warden of Prashanti Nilayam campus and currently the Principal of Brindavan campus of the Institute.*

The Moderator’s Opening Remarks

Sai Ram. I extend a special welcome to our distinguished guests. You already heard about the theme of the panel discussion. It is bit of a tongue in cheek theme, if I might say so.

First, let me describe the way the panel discussion will be conducted. There will be several rounds. In the opening round, the panelists will make a brief opening statement relevant to the topic under discussion. After this I will ask the panelists specific questions in relation to the points they have made. This will then evolve into a dialogue followed by a general conversation. At that

stage, I hope you will be sending us questions based on what you have heard; this is an important aspect of today's exercise. We want you to ask questions. Write them down and they will be collected by volunteers and I will pose them to the panelists. At the end the panelists will make a one-minute summary statement and the discussion will be concluded with a brief summary by myself, the moderator.

The Panel Discussion Begins...

The theme for today is "Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray." To use the words of the distinguished speaker who gave us a very stimulating address, service can be a very important aspect of the psycho-social evolution of mankind. Let me tell you a brief story, and then the objectives.

The story is an incident that was narrated in the foyer of Prashanti Nilayam Campus by a teacher many years ago. It relates to Baba Amte, a well-known activist and social worker. In the early days of his life, he did a tremendous amount of work for the uplift of lepers. One day a person came and said, "You are doing so much for the lepers, you are such a good man. Why don't you take five minutes off and go to the temple and offer prayers to Narayana?"

Baba Amte replied, "Why do I have to go to a temple to worship Narayana when Narayana is coming to me all the time and asking me to serve Him?" You may think it is a blasphemous remark, but I submit to you that it is a remark that ought to get us thinking. While the panel discussion is going on, I would like you to contemplate and ponder over the following questions.

What really is service?

When must service be done?

How exactly must service be rendered?

What are the different types of service that one could undertake?

How must service benefit others?

And last but not least - **How must service benefit the doer?**

When Swami gave the inaugural address at the time of the Sathya Sai Educational Conference, he started with five or six questions. In the same way I have posed before you the questions above.

With these remarks, I now invite the panelists to make their opening statement concerning today's topic with the request that they be brief. May I request each panelist take 2.5 to 3 minutes?

I will start with our friend Sanjay Sahani, who has a unique experience. Why don't you tell us something about the topic, Sanjay?

Prayer and Service

Sri Sanjay Sahani: Offering my loving pranams at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet, respected fellow panel members, members of this august assembly.

Prayer and service are integral aspects of both the Sri Sathya Sai Organization and the Sai Educational Institutions. It is not our objective to discount the value of prayer, but to explore the significance of service. Then why this statement "Hands that serve are holier than lips that pray."

In this context, I am reminded of a graphic description Bhagavan gives for certain kinds of devotees of modern times. Let me give a verbal description to you of the incident that occurred one morning. A man was in his puja room, meditating on God: "OM Namashivaya, OM Namashivaya, OM Namashivaya.....*Mannu ki ma, dhobi aaya?* [Has the washerman come?] OM Namashivaya, OM Namashivaya OM Namashivaya, *Mannu ki ma, breakfast thayar he?* [Is the breakfast ready?] OM Namashivaya, OM Namashivaya, OM Namashivaya."

It is a vivid description that shows for the vast majority of people it is not possible to concentrate on God even for a few minutes. For such people not to be wasting their time in apparent spiritual activities service is the prescription.

"Serve others and you will experience spiritual joy easily, quickly."

In our Indian culture it is said, *Paropakaram idham shariram* – The body is given to serve others. In the nine paths of devotion, *Nava Vidha Bhakti*, one of the forms of service is *Pada Seva*, worship of the Lotus Feet.

What is Pada Seva? The *Purusha Sooktham* says, "*Padosaya vishwa bhuthani, thripathasyam rythm dhivi*" – One portion of the Lord's splendor is this manifested universe and three portions of it is unmanifested, transcendental.

The practical implication of worshipping the Feet is to serve mankind, to serve the world. Bhagavan says, "*Dil mey Ram Hath mey Kam*" – "Lord in the heart, work through the hands." There are so many organizations, so many individuals, who do service. What is unique about Sai Service?

The uniqueness of Sai service is the spiritual attitude which we have to look at, sometime later. Sai Ram.

Prof. GV: Thank you Sanjay for that good opening. The most important point he made is we are not easily geared to *bhakti* (or devotion) the way it should be practiced. To start with, he said, service is a good starting point; you can add *bhakti* later on like sugar as you go along. He made other important statements, which I hope you will remember. Now to the one and only Anil Kumar, you have only three minutes.

Prof. Kumar: Sir, I make statements and I don't dare to explain. Let me say what Bhagavan has to say on the matter. Here are three statements.

Statement 1:

Karmamuna puttunarudu – Man is born for actions

Karmamuni vrudhichandi chanun – In the field of action he is totally involved during his life sojourn and ultimately ends his life.

Karmame karanamu narunaruku sukha dhukhamulalo – Action is responsible both for bondage and liberation

Statement 2:

Karma margambu kali bata – The path of action is something like walking along the journey

Gnana margambu vimana yanamu – The path of knowledge is something like traveling by flight from one area to another

Bhakthi margambu bandi bata – The path of devotion is something like traveling in a bullock cart

Yoga mana jaladhi pai odakkade – Traveling by ship is yoga. This is what Bhagavan has described.

Statement 3:

Prayer is the root, service is the fruit. Sai Ram.

Service is Prayer in Action and Prayer is Communion with God

Prof. GV: Now Professor, why don't you increase our appetite with what you have to say?

Prof. Ramamurthy: Pranams to the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan. Before I venture into this statement, there is an angle that has to be resolved. Service is prayer in action. Action is communion with God. In order that seva be properly done, it is essential that it should be done with love and humility. In-depth prayer and a constant prayerful attitude will fill you with love and humility and therefore for the service to be done properly, it must flow from God's grace arising out of prayer. Only then will you be able to provide selfless, spontaneous service of the nature it deserves.

Unless you have connection to the powerhouse, you can't have the electric light. So prayer leads you to God almighty, from where you get the faith and love, and with that armor you can render effective, fruitful service.

Man starts his spiritual life with an objective to see the external God in simple ways, at a primary level. Later on he tries to see God as *Hrudayavasi*, the Indweller, when he matures. And further on he sees God as pervading all, or omnipresence. At that stage he sees God in man. That is when service to man becomes service to God.

Mother Theresa has what she calls a business card which she gives to those who come to her:

*'The fruit of faith is prayer.
The fruit of prayer is love.
The fruit of love is service.'*

Swami has also mentioned that Lord Krishna said in the Bhagavad Gita, any devotee has got to have these three attributes together. *Tan mana* – they always perceive the Lord and enjoy the bliss in His presence ever and keep Him in their mind; *Tathbhakthi* – intense devotion to the Lord; and *Thathchidhi* – you are willing to give dedicated selfless service.

Prayer, bhakti and devotion have to be combined. They are not mutually exclusive. Depending upon the nature of the individual and his temperament, the degree to which each can access one or the other will vary, but these options are available to all, and depending upon situations, they have to make the choice.

Prof. GV: Thank you, Prof. Ramamurthy. Just to remind everyone, service is prayer in action and prayer is communion with God. And if they go hand in hand, you can see God within you when you pray. You can see God in the outside world and you can see God inside when you pray. You have had three gems from our panelists. This is more than I bargained for.

The Bliss of Service

Here is a question: Sanjay, using an example, you said service helps us focus more easily on God than sitting in the puja room. Can you give me an example of how service helps you focus better on God, from your own example as a teacher and as a student?

Sri Sanjay Sahani: Who is God? God defined is God defied. One of the descriptions of God is *Satchitananda* [God is Bliss]. Service is a means to that bliss. You asked me to narrate a personal experience. In this context I am reminded of the first gram seva [service to villagers] we had two years ago. In the course of gram seva, teachers were assigned duties to go one day earlier to the villages, survey the villages, and decide on the logistics and come back with suggestions.

We went in search of a particular village near Puttaparthi and in the course of our exploration we discovered a small settlement of about 30 to 35 houses which was not even slated for our visit. We came back and reported to our elders. On that particular instance, we had planned to distribute clothes to the

villages in accordance with the names given to us by the government officials, and this village was not even in the government roles.

We requested them, "If you can give us 35 saris and dhotis we can distribute them to the poor villagers." They agreed. On that day, one of my teacher brothers requested of me, "Why don't you personally distribute these clothes to the villagers?" Normally elders would do it, but he requested me to do it. So we called them from their huts and they were seated together, One by one, with innocence and humility, they received the clothes from us.

At that point in time I had a strange experience, it was like being uplifted from the ground floor of a building to the 25th floor. The joy that I experienced at that time cannot be explained by words. It is much more than a thousand rasagullas [a sweet delicacy] that we can have. That is experience. It was not even the clothes that we were distributing. Swami gave us all the material, but just by handing it over to those villagers, on that occasion, my mind was refusing to come down from the supernatural heights it had attained. When you experience that bliss, you know what God is, what Divinity is. Thank you, sir.

Prof. GV: Thank you Sanjay. You brought up an important point. Ultimately, what we have to do is experience bliss. When you experience bliss, you have experienced God.

Service offers an easy and a simple way of experiencing bliss. Experiencing bliss from meditation is more difficult and the point that Sanjay mentioned is that you can experience bliss through service. I can corroborate and verify the statement; I have seen thousands of our students experiencing this bliss.

Now, Prof. Kumar, more about the root and fruit, how sweet it is.

Prof. Anil Kumar: When I say the word root, I mean it is the foundation. The fruit cannot exist without the root underneath. It is the root that finds its fulfillment in the fruit. This root will supply all that spirit of humility, respect, reverence needed for fruition in the form of service. Prayer is the foundation that inculcates or supplies the spirit, the required background, reverence and respect which is needed for the service.

This is *thriveni sangamam* [confluence of the sacred three]. In other words, root is *karma yoga*, fruit is *gnana yoga*. In between, bhakti yoga. As I work with all humility, I will have the experience that gives the joy, what we call *gnana* (wisdom).

The first six chapters of the Bhagavad Gita is this: what we call karma shaka, bhakti shaka, gnana shaka. A kind of evolution, transition from the stage of action to devotion and on to wisdom. Finally, sir, one note I would like to share from the learned scholar this morning. What a wonderful statement: "The individual soul is connected to the universal soul only by means of service." Sai Ram.

Humility – the Basis of Service

Prof. GV: Thank you, Prof. Kumar. I would like to make a brief comment on what you said for the benefit of all of us, particularly the students.

Prof. Anil Kumar said when you go out for service, you should not do so with a feeling of condescension, arrogance or pride or ego or anything like that. There must be reverence, humility, a sense of responsibility.

To underscore this, I would like to recall what happened at the time of the Gujarat earthquake. Bhagavan sent relief supplies to the people in Gujarat along with many people to distribute them and do the needful. Many NGOs from all over the world also sent relief supplies. Mr. Chiranjeevi Rao, though he was past 80, was personally sent by Swami to go all the way to Gujarat. That is the confidence Swami had in Mr. Chiranjeevi Rao. Mr. Rao told me when they arrived there, they saw the non-NGOs throwing the blankets and food from the trucks.

The people were saying, “Why do you do this? Don’t treat us like beggars. We are well-to-do people, we lost our house, don’t treat us like beggars!”

In contrast, our people served those in distress with great humility. I have a beautiful photograph of a sevadal combing the hair of a boy sitting in a chair. Where would you see this? I thought he was giving him a haircut. He was actually combing his hair.

Respect, humility, reverence, they are core to service. That is a wonderful point you brought.

Prof. Ramamurthy: In Buddhism, one said that if you want to lead others to salvation, you have to experience it first. Otherwise it will be the blind leading the blind. Another group of Bodhisattvas said, “Service will take you along that path, so the higher priority is to provide service at all costs.”

Again we must remember that while service will take us along the direction we deserve, the attitude becomes most important. Sanjay Sahani is deeply devoted to Bhagavan Baba and when he renders service, love and affection flow through him.

When an opportunity for service was given to him, he said, “This is the ultimate.” He can have a counterpart elsewhere, of comparable age, and position. Given the opportunity to provide a service of similar type, he might give it with an air of condescension, a sense of arrogance. It is essential that before we do service, ego is removed from your heart.

There are many institutions where individuals are found of various types. One is interested in his name being embossed as having been charitable, having made such and such contribution. Attitude is very important.

Prayer should not come from the lips; it should come from the heart. Service also has to flow from feelings arising from the heart. Therefore a sense of devotion becomes essential. Prayer is for the unmanifested. Service is for the manifested God.

Service gives you a direct response. When you render service, you find out whether the person is happy or not. A smile is the reward you get for service. Service provided with the right attitude is service to God. That is what I would like to say.

Chitta Shuddhi – Purifying Your Heart

Prof. GV: What the Professor is saying now is closely related to what our learned speaker said as *Kshara* and *Akshara*. Now we enter into round 3. I have a general question to all members of the panel:

We say we are interested in doing service. We are interested in motivating our students into doing service, not only here but in the future as well. Let us remember we didn't invent service. Today there are hundreds of organizations performing service, we cannot discount it, they have good intentions, they are doing it with noble motives. Under the circumstances, is there any distinguishing feature between the services rendered by others and the service that we want our students and ourselves to do? If there is a difference, please tell us what it is.

Sri Sanjay Sahani: The fundamental difference between the service rendered by Sai students or Sai Organizations and the service rendered by others is the spiritual attitude. You may be familiar with the story of the stonecutters. A question was posed to one stonecutter, "Why are you cutting stones?" He said "I am earning my livelihood." The same question was posed to another. He said, "I am cutting stones; I want to be the best stonecutter around." He wanted professional excellence. When the third person was asked, he said, "I am building a church for my God." See, that is a spiritual attitude.

Why is spiritual attitude important in service? When you do service, let us not labor under the illusion that there will not be difficulties, there will not be hardships, and there will not be obstacles. There will be difficulties. If you do not have a spiritual attitude it is very easy to lose one's moorings, to lose interest, or to meander into pride and power. In this context, I am reminded of a dialogue from Dr. Fanibunda, a dentist from Bombay and ardent devotee of Bhagavan. He posed this question to Bhagavan:

"Swami, what is the role of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization in Your mission?"

To his utter amazement, Bhagavan said, "Nothing."

It was so startling!

Dr. Fanibunda continued, "Swami...nothing?"

Swami confirmed, “Yes...nothing.”

Dr Fanibunda couldn't help but ask this question: “Swami, then why is there such a huge organization setup?”

Swami explained, “It is only for your chitta shuddhi – purifying your heart.”

If we keep this in mind, we will never lose our moorings when we take up service activities, we will always remain on track on reaching the goal. This is the important and distinguishing feature.

Prof. GV: This is a very important factor. Someone asked Baba: “Swami, no matter how much we do, the problems of the world still remain.” Swami replied, “You are not serving in order to solve the problems, you are serving in order to make an offering to God and to improve yourself.” That is the sum and substance of what Sanjay said. We are not the NGOs, doing service with an attempt to provide relief and support and trying to solve a problem. We are not involved in problem solving. We do try to offer relief, and we have a higher spiritual objective.

I now request Prof. Anil Kumar, who has a distinguished track record in Andhra Pradesh in doing tremendous service. Drawing from your own experience, why don't you tell us something unique about Sai seva?

Prof. Kumar: Kindly remember these points.

Point 1: You should have strong desire, intense desire to do service. That is called *karma jignasa*. You should know that this karma [service] is your dharma [duty]. Service is a duty. It is not an obligation; it is not anything remunerative, not for any selfish interest.

The next one is *dharma jignasa*. You should have the feeling that service is your duty. Karma jignasa, interested in the field of service. Dharma jignasa, accept it as a part of your duty and then it takes you to Brahman the divine, *Brahma jignasa*. Karma jignasa takes you to dharma jignasa. From dharma jignasa, the finale happens to be Brahma jignasa.

Point 2: We should know the *modus operandi*. How do we go about service, how do we do it? It is the *marma* [secret]. So karma, dharma, *marma*, Brahma, are the four steps. *Marma* means the technical aspects of the service. Like one cannot serve fruits to a diabetic patient. “I am serving you; I cannot give you mango fruits.” You are doing disservice. I cannot carry a packet of Pulla Reddy Sweets to a diabetic patient. I am not supposed to do it.

Doing Narayan seva, a sevadal volunteer was carrying a basket of sweets. He went on shouting “Laddu, laddu” [sweet]. He did not give a single laddu to a single person. There is no *marma*, there is no secret. He doesn't know the procedural aspect of it, that is the next point. This karma, the service, what is its aim, what is its purpose? For chitta shuddhi – the purity of the heart.

Service elsewhere is for statistics, for data, for publicity, propaganda, advertisement, for enrolling more and more people, or for recognition. But here, karma is absolutely spiritual, for your own purification. Chitta shuddhi, the purity. Because this chitta shuddhi gives you gnana shuddhi at the final stage. That is the third point.

Service is an Opportunity

The next point is this: we begin our service with a prayer as Sanjay said in the beginning. Grama seva started with a prayer at every center of its activity. To quote Bhagavan here, "*Thasmai namaha karmane*." – "I bow down to my own actions."

Service is not a duty, service is an opportunity. Service is a blessing, service is a benediction. Service to fellowmen is service unto myself. Thank you, sir.

Prof. GV: Prof. Ramamurthy, do you have anything to add?

Prof. Ramamurthy: When you talk of serving with a sense of duty, there is a limitation about it, there is an obligation to do the service. Service is beyond that. Service is done absolutely freely, voluntarily, unconditionally. Swami has also explained that desire for the result of action or expecting a return when you provide service amounts to *rajoguna*. Because there is no *faida* [result], let us desist from taking the action that is *tamoguna*. Engaging in seva without looking at the outcome, totally in a detached sense, is *satvaguna*. This distinction will also have to be combined.

Prof. GV: Thank you, Prof. Ramamurthy. I recall one thing that emerged from Prof. Anil Kumar, that service must be rendered as a duty, service must be seen as a dharma. Before I go to a related point about dharma, which is important, I would like to briefly narrate a story you may have heard. Mother Theresa in Calcutta was saving a dying man from a gutter. A tourist was passing by and said, "Jeez, I wouldn't do that for a million dollars. How come you're doing it?"

Mother Theresa smiled and said, "I wouldn't do it for a million dollars either."

The tourist said, "What? You won't do it for a million dollars?"

Mother Theresa smiled and said, "No I won't do it for two million dollars."

"But you are doing it!"

"It is different. I am doing it for God," she said.

This conveys the point that Prof. Anil Kumar made. We see service as a duty. And when we do the duty, we are not doing it for someone else; we are doing it for God.

Dear Reader, is this presentation inspiring? In the next issue of H2H, we will have the second part of this presentation where the panelists will discuss issues like – Can we serve wherever we are and whatever we do? What is the best kind of service? Why should one part with one's hard earned money to help others? What is the ultimate aim of service? What does Swami say is the best approach to service? For answers to all these questions and more, look up this section in the next issue. Thank You.

- Heart2Heart Team

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PRASHANTI DIARY

The Chronicles of Heaven on Earth

When we ended last month's chronicles we had described for you the Ganesha Chaturthi ceremony on Aug 27th where numerous clay Ganesha idols were blessed by the Lord. These idols are then worshipped for a few days (3 to 5 days) and then in a "Ganesha Immersion Ceremony" are immersed into a body of water so that the clay idols get dissolved and Lord Ganesha "returns" back home. We bring you a complete account of this impressive immersion ceremony held on August 31st in this month's account. This past month also saw the celebration of the Onam festival of Kerala wherein about 800 Malayalis (as the people of Kerala are called) came to Sai Kulwant Hall to spend this holy day with their divine mother and father.

August 31st 2006: The Ganesha Immersion Ceremony

The idols of Lord Ganesha worshipped in schools, colleges, and the different departments of the Central Trust by the students and staff of Swami's Institutions were brought in a procession on floats on what is called the "Ganesha Immersion Day" ceremony. There were a total of 23 floats in the procession that day. Leading them was a float by the Primary School followed by the Deenajanodharana Pathakamu (Swami's orphanage). Occupying 3rd to 6th positions in the procession were the Ganesha floats by the staff of the General Hospital, Airport, Gokulam, the Chaitanya Jyoti Museum, and the Super Specialty Hospital. Ganesha floats of the 8th and 9th class, the 10th class and the High School main chariot followed by the Institute main chariot were next in line. The 2nd Post Graduate, 3rd Under Graduate (UG) and the 11th class floats followed by the Music College float and a clutch of school boys dressed as priests were next. In the 16th to 19th place were floats by the 1st UG boys, the 2nd UG boys, and the 1st P.G. boys and the Poorna Kumbham Group. Alumni working in Swami's institutions (in Central Trust and Book Trust) and alumni working elsewhere but visiting Parthi for the festival were next. The last two floats were from the Mandir and the Easwaramma High School.

These floats are creative affairs and are either well decorated chariots or palanquins of all shapes and sizes and colors and hues. They each have a theme with one being shaped like the marble lingam of the just concluded Ati Rudra Maha Yagna or another being shaped like the yagna kunda where two young boys dressed like priests continuously poured oblations. Some floats were made up like peacocks or butterflies while one was like an open lotus flower in which Lord Ganesha was seated. But each float was colorful and unique representing the creative effort of the group that had lovingly worked on it for days.

The whole procession was well planned and each float had a designated point from which they would join the procession as it started from the Senior Boys' Hostel till it reached Sai Kulwant Hall. All the floats entered Sai Kulwant either from the Main gate or from the East Gate and were directed to their respective

positions in the Hall. The biggest floats got the pride of place in the middle of Sai Kulwant Hall. After all the floats were in place, Swami drove past the entire procession blessing all the students and the staff.

After Swami reached the veranda and occupied His place on the dais, the boys from the Poorna Khumbham group brought their khumbhams (an ornate vessel with a coconut surrounded by mango leaves) to be blessed by Swami. Children from the primary school also brought handicrafts that they prepared with Lord Ganesha as the theme to show Swami. Following this the boys dressed as priests and each carrying his own Ganesha brought them to be blessed by Swami. Lord Ganesha certainly kept Swami very busy that afternoon.

After this the Institute boys put up a skit to explain the meaning of this immersion process to the crowd, some of whom were quite wide-eyed and perplexed at this rather clamorous and colorful ceremony in an otherwise normally serene and dignified Sai Kulwant Hall.

The skit started with two elders around 35 years old walking by when two children named Srineel and Ashish were creating a noise. One of the elders reprimands them to which they protest by saying that they are just enjoying their Ganesha Chaturthi holiday. This triggers off a discussion between the elders and the children on the significance of Ganesha Chaturthi. The two elders (Ram and Nikhil) then recollect their Sai student days when such a celebration was different and full of meaning. Each class used to have their own Ganesha idol nicely decorated in their hostel room for 3 days. They had their own class pundits who had learnt the mantras and used to perform puja every morning and evening for these 3 days. During this time the entire class would be enthusiastically engaged in preparing the chariots in which they would carry their Ganesha idol from the hostel to the mandir (accompanied by Veda chanting and bhajans), where Bhagavan would be eagerly waiting for them.

Inside the mandir, Bhagavan would go to each chariot and give the boys class photos with their Ganesha. Following this the boys would then go for the immersion ceremony. The skit thus not only explained to the crowd what was going on that day, but also elaborated that the inner significance of the immersion of the idol was that the seeker should start worshipping the God with form and then progress to the formless God. This skit was followed by a vigorous dance by five high school students dressed in red to round off the program.

The Warden then approached Swami and requested His permission for everyone to circumambulate the Prasanthi Mandir, to which He readily agreed. The nearly 1000 strong Veda chanting or bhajan singing staff and students then circumambulated the temple and occupied their respective places and waited for the rest to finish.

After the circumambulation was over (it took 20 minutes for all of them to finish), each group then brought their chariots carrying their Ganesha into the

center of the Hall in front of Swami for His blessing and then took their idols out for immersion into a big pond just outside the town.

Generally, all the roads in Puttaparthi also have their own Ganeshas and after this ceremony is performed in Sai Kulwant Hall by the students and staff, these Ganeshas from different streets of Puttaparthi are also taken in procession for the immersion ceremony over the next 2-3 days before the Ganesha Chaturthi ceremony is finally over.

Sept 2nd: the 34th Anniversary Celebrations of the Central Trust

September 2nd marks the anniversary of a special day in the mission of our Lord Sai, for it was on this day, thirty-four years back, that Bhagavan founded the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust to play an important role in His Divine mission.

Elaborating on what constitutes His task, Bhagavan Himself declared in a letter to Sri Seshama Raju Garu in the year 1947:

“Beeda Saadhalakaina Penu Baadha Tholaginchi Lemini Baapute Prema Naaku.”

“I am attached to My work – that of alleviating the sufferings of the poor and granting them what they lack.”

The Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust has been instrumental in setting up and supporting various projects of Bhagavan to this end. It has been the conduit for Bhagavan’s love to reach millions and transform their lives. Today, nearly six decades after that historic declaration, when we see the schools, the university, the hospitals, the mammoth water supply projects, the Grama Seva programs and many other such social welfare activities, we know that that they are but the concrete materializations of His Divine will, His vision, and His words.

To mark this epochal event, the alumni of the SSSIHL working in one of Swami’s institutions – either the Central Trust or the Book Trust, the Institute or in the Hospital – arranged a special program in Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami is never one to note the anniversary of any of His projects or to publicly celebrate any of the achievements of the Institutions which bear His name. This public function was set up entirely at the initiative of the alumni working in His institutions to express their love and gratitude to Bhagavan for having bestowed upon them two very sacred boons:

1. The gift of free education in His school and university
2. The rare opportunity of serving at His Lotus Feet.

Expressing their combined feelings, they said, “Swami, it’s due to your immense compassion and the result of our good deeds in many previous lives that we have this unique blessing. And what better way to convey our

sweetest feelings to our dear Lord than through the language of melody. For is He not 'Gaana Priya' and 'Gaana Lola'? [Lover of Music]"

So on the afternoon of September 2nd, 14 alumni serving in the various Sai Institutions, as well as 5 current students, offered a bouquet of songs at the Divine Lotus Feet. The boys prepared a cake that Swami graciously cut as soon as He alighted from the car. After He took His seat on the dais, all the artists took His blessings before starting the concert. A card the boys made was shown to Him before the start of the program.

Great is the singing talent among Swami's students and on this day there assembled a veritable crowd of 9 singers, 5 percussionists, 3 keyboardists, a sitar player and flutist to regale the crowd gathered there with the melodious music of 13 songs sung straight from the heart.

Sri Ravi Kumar, an alumnus currently working in the Super Specialty Hospital in Puttaparthi, set the ball rolling with his "Sai Ram Sumiran." Sri Srinivasulu, a 1991 graduate now working in the Book Trust, sang "Dayaku Premaku" next, followed by Sri Prashanth, from the Sri Sathya Sai Bhakta Sahayak Sangh, with "Ninnu Gani Saranamani."

Sri Ashwin, working in the Super Specialty Hospital in Whitefield, then sang "Vande Janani" with Sri Aswath Narayan, a current student, following this with his "Aanathineeyara Hara." Ravi, Srinivaslu and Prashanth then sang the solo songs "Hey Giridhar Gopal," "Ghanaghana Sundara," and "Om Namah Shivaya." This was followed by Sri S. Srinivasa Rao and Sri Subhash Subramaniam with their duet, "Sumar Manuva." Current students Sri Guru Prasad and Sri Omprasad then sang in turn the solo songs "Nee Madhu Murali Gaana Leela," and "Hey Shiva Shankar Hey Karunakar." Two well-sung, fast-paced group songs formed the finale to this beautiful concert: "Sai ke Darbar Mein," and "Pyare Sai Hamare."

At the end of the concert, Swami walked over and personally distributed clothes to all the artists. He was obviously very pleased for He blessed everyone individually with a kind word, a pat on the cheek, or with His Hand placed on the head, small but tangible signs of His immense love for His students and their immense love for Him. Finally, He posed for group photographs, holding the hands of the students nearest to Him.

Sept 3rd to 5th: Onam Celebrations in Sai Kulwant Hall

Sama-bhavana, or the feeling of oneness between man and man, was the rhythm when Emperor Mahabali ruled his kingdom of Kerala in erstwhile days. The Keralites experienced this same sama-bhavana again when men and women of all castes and creeds, from Members of Parliament and Chief Justices of High Courts, musicians, electricians, clerks and others from all walks of life flocked to Prashanti Nilayam to celebrate Onam for three full days in the presence of our beloved Lord Sai.

Onam is basically a family oriented festival when the nuclear family that characterizes this Age of Kali gathers together at their native place in Kerala, returning home at this auspicious time to be with their kin and reestablish their roots and catch up on the times when they were away. The Kerala members of the Sai family on this day overcame their attachment to their own close relations and chose to spend this auspicious time in the presence of their divine mother and father Lord Sai and celebrate this festival with their Sai brothers and sisters not only from Kerala but from all parts of the world. While Onam is celebrated over 10 days, the Keralites came to celebrate the last three (and most important) days of this 10-day festival.

The celebration of Onam is linked to the following story of emperor Bali. Emperor Mahabali was a just ruler, fair-minded in his approach, a man of impeccable character and generous to a fault. Lord Vishnu once wanted to test His devotee and so came to the emperor's court disguised as a dwarf (Vamana Avatar) and asked the emperor to gift Him the land that He could cover in three steps. The emperor laughed and without recognizing the divinity in the Vamana Avatar, suggested the "dwarf" ask of him something more realistic. The emperor's preceptor however, recognized Lord Vishnu and warned the emperor about agreeing to this strange request. The emperor did not go back on his word and agreed to it. At this the dwarf began to grow and soon assumed immense proportions. With His first step He covered all the land on earth and with His next step He covered all the space in the sky. Now He had nowhere to keep the third step! At this the emperor offered his own head for the Lord's third step.

As Swami explained in His discourse later on, the emperor had a tinge of ego that was a stain on his otherwise sterling qualities. So Lord Vishnu wanted to actually bless him by removing this trace of ego and hence took up the Vamana Avatar. What a glorious lesson for posterity and what a deeper meaning attached to the celebration of the Onam festival by the Avatar of this age! Three steps for Mahabali to learn the lessons of surrender, three days to celebrate the Onam festival in Prashanti Nilayam and immerse ourselves in the bliss of Bhagavan's love.

The Onam celebrations started on the evening of the 3rd after Bhagavan's arrival at Sai Kulwant Hall to the sonorous sounds of the Veda chants. After he had taken His seat on the dais, He gave permission for the evening program to start. 33 Bal Vikas children from Calicut in Kerala performed a play for Him entitled "Bhakti and Vibhakti" – "Devotion and Grammatical Accuracy."

This drama presented several remarkable episodes from the lives of Sri Poonthanam Nambudiri and Sri Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri, two famous devotees who lived in the 17th century and worshipped Lord Bala Krishna in His form as Lord Guruvayurappan at the Guruvayur temple in Kerala.

Poothanam Nambudiri, author of the popular Malayalam poem "Gnanappana," was a simple, pious, pure hearted scholar and an ardent devotee who used to visit the Guruvayur temple which was far from his home.

On one such journey he was attacked by dacoits and was saved by the Lord Himself who came in the guise of the Commander-in-Chief of the king.

Another innocent devotee of the Lord, a young girl named Manjula, used to offer flower garlands to adorn the idol of the Lord Guruvayur. One day, she was unable to make her offering as she was late and the temple doors were already closed. Poonthanam advised the sorrowful girl to place the garland on the stone near the banyan tree on the Eastern gate of the temple as the Lord is all knowing and omniscient, and she did so with full faith in his words. The next day, everyone was surprised to find the very same garland adorning the idol in the sanctum sanctorum when the doors opened in the morning and the garland could not be removed till Manjula saw it.

The eminent Sanskrit scholar Sri Melpathur Narayan Bhattathiri came to Guruvayur to worship the Lord to rid himself of paralysis. As per the advice given to him by Sri Thunjat Ezhuthachan, also known as Kerala's Vysya, Melpathur started composing the "Narayaneeyam," a Sanskrit version of the story of Lord Krishna, within 100 days. On one such day, he noticed Poonthanam chanting the Vishnu Sahasranama in a faulty way. When Sri Poonthanam chanted "Mara-Prabhu," Sri Melpathur corrected him in a rude and imperious manner by saying "Amara-Prabhu." Then they heard the voice of God saying "Melpathur, I am also the God of Mara i.e., the trees."

On the 99th day of his goal of writing the "Narayaneeyam" in 100 days, Melpathur had darshan of the Lord and realized his disease had been completely cured. He praised the mercy and beauty of the Lord. A few days after Melpathur was cured, Sri Poonthanam, after completing his poem "Gnanappana," approached Melpathur and requested him to correct the mistakes in the manuscript. Melpathur in his pride refused the request and said it was full of mistakes as it was written in Malayalam (and not Sanskrit) and Poonthanam felt humiliated.

The Lord did not tarry even a moment when his devotee was thus humiliated. Melpathur was again attacked by the same paralytic stroke of which he had just been cured and cried out in anguish asking the Lord for the reason. The Lord replied that He likes pure devotion – bhakti – rather than grammatical accuracy – vibhakti. The repentant Melpathur rushed towards Poonthanam and accepted his manuscript, not just for correction but for God realization. He was immediately cured again and both devotees praised the Lord for His love towards His devotees.

The story itself was engaging and well produced. The sets were simple but conveyed a profound message that the Lord likes humbleness and purity of heart rather than scholarship and pride of knowledge. The whole drama was very well served by the young dancers, who performed at the beginning of the drama and between each scene to melodious songs. The choreography was intricate and elaborate but the Bal Vikas girls carried it off with élan, reflecting their many hours of hard work and practice.

September 4th was Uthradam Day. Uthrada Pachil in Kerala means the frenzied rush and gaiety and hilarity attached to shopping for new clothes, vegetables and other savories from the market to prepare for Thiruvonam, or the last day of the Onam festival. In Prashanti Nilayam, the Uthrada Pachil on the Uthradam Day was the great inflow of devotees from all parts of Kerala and even abroad, just to be present at the Lotus Feet on this glorious day. The entire hall was packed early in the morning and the sacred sounds of the pancha vadyam, a medley of 5 different instruments, rent the air as an invitation for the Lord to come and bless all the devotees assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall.

The morning of the 4th saw a glorious Carnatic vocal concert by Sri M. K. Sankaran Namboothiri, an eminent and prominent musician of Kerala. Sri Namboothiri, renowned as a child prodigy, started learning music at age 10 under the tutelage of Sri C. S. Narayanan Namboothiri and pursued his studies under stalwarts like Sri T. V. Gopalakrishnan, Prof. Sri Mavelikkara, R. Praphakara Verma, and Palakkad Sri V. Narayana Swamy. Sri Sankaran Namboodiri began performing at the age of 11 and by the time he was 13 had already started taking the famous musical sabhas by storm. He has not only performed in all the major centers in India but has also performed concerts outside India in the USA, France, Germany, UK, Switzerland and Holland. Currently he is involved in treatment of patients by Music Therapy in various hospitals in Kerala.

The songs that Sri Sankaran sang included “Gajavadana” by Purandaradasar in Hamsadvani, “Nadatanumanisam,” a Thyagaraja composition in Chittaranjani ragam, “Dasa Dasa” by Kanakadas in Hindolam, a Meera bhajan “Hari Tum Haro” in Darbari, a Bhadrachalam Ramdas composition “Raguveera” in Desh and an Annamacharya krithi “Bhavayami Gopala.” He also sang Malayalam devotional songs such as “Oru Neramenkilum” and Sai bhajans to keep everyone entranced for a full 45 minutes. Sri Sankaran Namboothiri was accompanied on the violin by Sri Tiruvizha Viju S. Aanand and on the mridangam by Sri Balakrishna Kamath. This program was followed by bhajans by the Sai youth of Kerala.

On the evening of the 4th a dance drama about a devotee of Lord Panduranga named Pundarika was staged. The drama, presented by the students of Sri Vidya Vihar, Alwaye, entitled “Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava,” was woven around the concept that the blessings of one’s own mother and father is the easiest path to win the grace of God and also depicted the transformation of Purandarika. The opening scene shows Purandarika going with his parents to Kashi. The aged parents cannot keep pace and request Purandarika to go slowly. Purandarika expresses his unhappiness and walks away. The drama then proceeds in the ashram of Sage Kukkuda. Purandarika sees three ugly women go inside and come out transformed as beautiful women. On enquiry he finds out that these three women are in reality the personification of the divine rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi and they had come only to redeem the sins of the devotees who had bathed in them. They informed Purandarika that Sage Kukkuda obtained this power to transform people only through reverence to his parents.

This brings about a transformation in Purandarika and he is now reverential and caring to his parents. The Lord is pleased and appears before Purandarika and blesses him. The students also pointed out that Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Himself fulfilled the wishes of His own mother Easwaramma for building a school, a hospital and providing water for the village by providing all three in abundant and unimaginable measure not only to the village but also to the states of Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Swami posed for group photographs with the Bal Vikas after the drama and also brought them joy by conversing with them.

This dance drama was followed by a Carnatic vocal concert by Prof. Vayyankara Madhusoodhan, a professor of music at the Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar Memorial Government College of Music in Palakkad. Starting with “Vathapi Ganapathim” in ragam Hamsadhvani, followed by “Nagumo” in Abheri ragam and by “Krishna Harejaya” in Fatdeep ragam. Two more songs, “Ennathavam Seythane” in Kappi ragam, and “Thamburimetti” in Sindhubhairavi ragam concluded a memorable concert. Vocal support was provided by Sri Payyannar Mahendran, accompaniment on the violin was provided by Prof. S. Easwara Verma, on the mridangam was Prof. Mavelikkara S.R. Raju, on the ghatam was Sri Anjal Krishna and on the musersang was Sri Thiruvananthapuram Saji Kumar. With the distribution of prasadam, the day’s program came to a close.

Sept 5th was Thirvonam Day, and Swami was formally received and escorted into Sai Kulwant Hall in the morning by the State President and the Convenor of the State Trust. Swami was also accompanied by a procession of ‘Poornakumba,’ ‘Talapoli,’ and Veda chanting Bal Vikas students and Sai youth. Youngsters also played the panchavadyam as an additional attraction. The spill-over crowd craned their necks to catch a glimpse of Swami as His car slowly glided into Sai Kulwant Hall at the end of this long procession and went around the entire Hall giving the bliss of His darshan to one and all before taking His place on the dais.

After Swami was seated, the “Swagatha Ganam” or “Welcome Song” was sung by the Sai youth of Kerala as a sign of the start of the Thiruvonam celebrations in the Divine Presence. The Welcome Song was specifically written for this occasion by the elderly and beloved poet of Kerala, Sri Kavalam Narayana Panicker and set to melodious music by Sri Perumbavoor Ramachandran. This song in Malayalam enumerated the glory of our Lord and also depicted the unique features of the beautiful land of Kerala. The song ended with a prayer to Swami to make Kerala a Sai-Samrajya – Sai’s empire.

After this, Swami gave His blessing for the next item on the morning’s program, a drama entitled “Sai Tips to Fly High,” by the Bal Vikas children of Kollam District of Kerala. About 63 children between the ages of 6 to 14 participated in this musical presentation of Swami’s teachings. It was a neat concept using this live medium to inculcate in everyone the ideals of a value-based lifestyle on the basis of the teachings and instructions of Bhagavan Sri

Sathya Sai Baba. Starting with a welcome dance, the drama soon shifted gears and children on the basis of song and a placard hung around their necks stressed the values we should adopt and the vices we should avoid. Thus they said drop the 'I' and develop the 'We'; avoid 'Rumor' but accept and embrace 'Love.' They demonstrated how values like Knowledge and Confidence are important.

There were also small dance skits to bring home simple homilies. As an example, a young girl wanted a new pair of shoes though the ones she had were perfectly good. In a park, she sees how her friend could not participate in the games because her new shoes pinched and hurt her feet rendering her unable to walk. Though reading this account may sound nothing exciting but the kids with their spry acting, catchy lyrics and fast-paced music managed to convey this message in an interesting and lively manner that engaged everyone's attention throughout. There was never a dull moment. After this drama there were bhajans by the youth of Kerala and the morning's program came to a close with the distribution of prasadam and arathi.

In the afternoon of the 5th, there were speeches by distinguished guests before Swami's divine discourse and the scheduled evening program. The initial introduction and welcome speech was given by Prof. Mukundan, President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations, Kerala. With Bhagavan's permission, he explained how the Sai activities are spreading in all 14 districts of the small state of Kerala. The various projects taken up by each wing of the organization were stressed. He ended by praying to Bhagavan for more and more grace to experience His love and share and spread His love because Swami had said that only this is true education. Next, Prof. Mukundan introduced the two distinguished speakers for the evening.

Speaking first was Sri Veerendra Kumar, a Member of Parliament representing Calicut and a Director of the Press Trust of India. Hailing the advent of the Avatar and praising Bhagavan, Sri Veerendra Kumar said that only Baba can solve the vexing problems of this modern world. Referring to the massive social service projects undertaken by Bhagavan, he said that such projects cannot even be imagined let alone be executed by government. In a devotional tone, he said that his source of inspiration in fighting injustice and social evils, pollution, and commercialization of the panchabhutas was his devotion to Bhagavan Baba and His teachings.

Speaking after him was Justice Sreedharan, who recently retired as Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court. After his retirement he said he was offered the post of a Lokayuktha of Kerala (a post similar to that of an ombudsman to whom an ordinary citizen can go to address his problems with government officials or departments) and had come to obtain Swami's blessings on the offer. Swami urged him in unmistakable terms to take up the appointment telling him that dispensing justice to the people was the Avatar's duty and hence he would in reality be doing His work. Justice Sreedharan also touched upon many other instances of the help and guidance that Swami had provided him in his life.

Swami then slowly rose to give His divine Onam discourse to the applause from the crowd. Swami initially talked upon the significance of Onam and also provided a deeper significance to the Emperor Mahabali story (as related earlier). Addressing all the people to develop broad-mindedness and live in bliss, He said,

“Anger, jealousy, hatred, etc., are evil qualities befitting an animal. How can a person with such animal qualities be called a human being? A human being is one who has good qualities. Follow truth. Truth is God. Cultivate love. Love is God. Live in love....

The human body is like an iron safe. The Atma residing inside this iron safe is like a precious diamond. You are supposed to give value to the precious diamond-studded ornaments inside, not to the outer iron safe. There are invaluable ornaments like Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa inside the human body. The physical body which is made up of the five elements is bound to perish one day or the other....

People repose their faith in such a frail and impermanent physical body. This body is like a puppet with nine holes in it, and it may collapse at any time with a mere sneeze. Reposing their faith in such a perishable body, people forget the invaluable ornaments stored in it. That is the reason why they suffer mental agitation. Peace is very much in your inner self. Hence, search for it by inward journey. That is your duty. When you are able to manifest your own innate noble qualities, you can experience true and eternal peace.”

Swami then praised the devotional qualities of the people of Kerala and said that they are broad-minded, good and noble and always prayed for the welfare of all people in the world (*Loka samastas sukhino bhavantu*). Swami then gave the most valuable advice on how we could progress. He said:

“The Sadhana we have to undertake to cleanse this polluted atmosphere is Bhagawath Prarthana (prayer to God). It is only when we are able to remove this pollution and make our hearts pure we deserve to be called real human beings. Divinity can be attained only by purity. And, that purity can be achieved by unity. Unity, Purity and Divinity are interrelated....

Thyaga is not going to the forest, leaving behind one’s wife and children and property. What is to be sacrificed is the result of the fruit of desires. That is the real sacrifice. We have to renounce indiscriminate desires. Then only will our heart become pure like a piece of white cloth. God desires only such a pure and sacred heart. God does not desire anything from you. He has no desires at all. It is only you who have desires. If you develop sacred desires, God will be happy. It is only then your family, society and the country will experience peace and happiness.”

After Swami’s discourse there was a drama enacted by 16 students from the Sri Sathya Sai Vidyapeeth, Sri Sailam, called “Na Me Bhakthi Pranasyati,” a playlet in 5 scenes that celebrated the bhakti of Sakubai.

The housewife Sakubai happens to come across a group of devotees heading to Lord Panduranga's shrine in order to participate in the Ekadashi celebrations. These devotees are led by Kabir and his son Kamal. Sakubai is desirous of joining the group but is asked to get her husband's consent first.

Her husband is not at all supportive of Sakubai's devotional activities. Her earnest entreaties to him to let her participate in the Ekadashi pilgrimage to Lord Panduranga's shrine along with the Saint Kabir is turned down obdurately by her husband Midru Rao. He beats her, locks her up and denies her food. The Lord always comes to the rescue of His devotees. This time He comes to her aid in the guise of Sundari, Saku's neighbour. Sundari takes care of her and her husband in her absence.

The next scene shows the arrival of Sakubai in Pandarpur (along with Kabir and his followers) in Lord Panduranga's shrine, where she immerses herself in devotional services. She is sent to collect flowers and while she is gathering them is bitten by a venomous snake. The Lord Himself comes disguised as a yogi and ensures His devotee's safety. Mesmerized by the divine darshan of the Lord, Sakubai spends three days in the shrine completely losing track of time.

In the next scene Sakubai comes running wildly to Sundari and apologizes. Sundari has been waiting patiently for her with a frown on her face and reprehends her for leaving home for Panduranga's darshan without her husband's knowledge and is advised to apologize to him. A reluctant Saku says that she is ready to sacrifice all, even herself for the sake of her Lord. The Lord then manifests and completely amazed at the Lord's darshan, she runs to Him and falls at His feet.

In Sakubai's absence God had taken the form of Sakubai and served her husband Midru Rao. All these past days, Midru Rao had experienced ineffable happiness at God's presence and proximity (as "Sakubai") though he was completely unaware of it. Now that the real Sakubai is back, he is unable to enjoy the same bliss and even the food that Sakubai cooks for him is not as tasty as it was just a few days ago. He is in a quandary when he finally comes to know that Sakubai was away from home for Panduranga's darshan for the past 3 days and he was served by God Himself in disguise. Midru Rao gets angry and questions the chastity of Sakubai and pulls out his sword in order to cut her head off. The Lord then manifests before them. A transformation occurs in Midru Rao and he determines to get himself attuned to the divine.

After this touching drama, the last item for the evening was a devotional song by Sri Vellikoth Vishnu Bhat from Kasarkode district called "Guru Ganapa" in Hindolam ragam. After this, arathi was taken and prasadam was distributed to all to bring to a close a memorable 3-day celebration of the Onam festival in Sai Kulwant Hall. Though the festival lasted three days, it was so chockfull of engrossing programs that it seemed just a fraction of the time before it was time again to say goodbye to our brothers and sisters from Kerala and wish them a safe journey back home.

Sept 21st: High School Drama – Love is God, Live in Love

On 21st September, the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School put up a short drama in Sai Kulwant Hall in the divine presence. It was a powerful depiction of one of the most memorable and wonderful utterances of Bhagavan, “Start the day with love, fill the day with love, spend the day with love, end the day with love; that is the way to God”.

Swami, after His arrival, briefly meets with the boys in the mandir and talks to a few characters and asks them what their role is in the drama. He then asks them to get ready and that He would come out. After Swami is seated, the boys first show Him a card that they have prepared for Him. Swami chats with the two boys who have lovingly prepared the card for Him, giving them great joy. He then signals for the drama to start.

The drama starts with a rigorous welcome dance. The drama itself opens with a young man Raghu, contemplating this wonderful saying of Bhagavan when he is confronted by two friends – Kamal and Shyamal. These 2 friends are typical agnostics and scoffers of the sacred and holy, and challenge Raghu to demonstrate to them the effect of this “simplistic” statement. Raghu then brings into the play an atypical character from the busy corporate world – Ramesh Sahani – to show them how he practices love in his daily life.

Ramesh gets up in the morning with a heart full of prayers and thanks for all the kind and loving acts that God has done for him through his friends and the incidents in his life. He refuses to be upset even when his servant Vasudev fails to provide him with hot water for bath and even his break-fast. He leaves for his office with a calm demeanour. In the office Sahani is met by two of his colleagues who reveal to him how a third one, Hrushikesh, had scuttled a plan to send him to Japan for some special training that would have won him a higher position and pay on return. By poisoning the mind of his boss with lies about Ramesh, Hrushikesh won the training for himself. Ramesh simply laughs away the episode and tells his unbelieving colleagues that he is happy wherever God has put him, and has no ill-feelings for anyone.

(Raghu thus points out to his friends how Ramesh Sahani spends the day with love and easily frustrates the temptation to lose his balance and get angry. Later in the day his boss calls Ramesh to ask him to do a certain thing that Ramesh considers unethical. He holds his ground with remarkable calmness against the threats of his boss to fire him from the job that he has held for the last 10 years. Ramesh tells his boss politely but firmly that God is the boss of his life and he would never compromise his values. Spending the day with love gives Ramesh the courage and strength in such a challenging situation, Raghu tells his friends Kamal and Shyamal.

Then there is a dramatic turn in the play. Ramesh’s boss call him to confess that he had been unfair to him, but is extremely pleased by his stand on values, and as a reward has recommended him for a much higher position. The boss wonders how Ramesh could remain unruffled in a situation that would break almost anybody. Ramesh smiles happily and tells him that God is

the first priority in his life and there is nothing more important for him than loving God. Raghu again points out to his friends how filling the day with love gives Ramesh the necessary strength to lose nothing – neither his calmness nor his job.

Now how about ending the day with love? For that we have to go to the last part of Ramesh Sahani's day. He comes back home from work to discover that his servant Vasudev has had a fall, and is lying immobile with an injured leg. Another challenge – but Ramesh knows how to deal it – with his heart overflowing with love for God! He carries Vasudev to his own bed and despite the servant's protests tells him, "So long the God in you has served the God in me. Now the God in me shall serve the God in you".

And this ordinary character is transmuted into an extraordinary being through the practicing this apparently "simple" statement of Bhagavan. To conclude the drama a *sadhu* comes along singing "Chal re man..." and establishing the message of love. In the finale scene all the actors gather together and immensely please Swami with the songs, "Start the day with love...", "I will keep feeling your love in me", and "When dark clouds fill the sky".

Now was this not a sweet drama? If you have any experiences of practicing this simple statement of Swami and have achieved satisfaction, please do write and tell us. We will be happy to print the best ones for the benefit of all of us. And Swami was so visibly pleased that He insisted on walking down to the students from His position on the veranda. And after He walked back, he asked them to sing one more song for Him and they responded with the song again – "Start the day with love ...". And Swami then created vibhuti and in a sweet gesture, cupped His palm upwards and towards the students and blew on His palm twice so as to spread the sacred vibhuti out towards all the students and leaving no-one out. Truly His love is all inclusive.

A lot of people have wondered how Sai Gita, Swami's pet elephant is faring now that an indoor stadium is coming up on the site where she used to live. A temporary shed has been built for her behind the Planetarium while a new residence is coming up fast along the Southern side of the Planetarium. She is very happy in her sylvan surroundings and her residence is going to look grand because after the structure is built a shilpi (a temple artisan) is going to decorate it and make it look like a temple facade. And, of course, as usual, Sai Gita is at her best greeting all the numerous visitors who come to see her after the evening bhajans.

The work on the indoor stadium is also moving quickly and the eastern skyline is fast taking shape. The work is going on all day and night, with about 600 workers during the day and 300 working through the night in an effort to make it ready for a Birthday opening. And as you read this on October 1st, the Grama Seva and Dassera celebrations will be underway. The Poorna Ahuti celebrations are on October 2nd and we shall of course bring detailed reports with pictures of these activities in next month's issue. So till next time, Jai Sai Ram.

-Heart2Heart Team

SWAMI AND ME

“I AM THE SUPPORT OF THE DEVOTEES...”

This is the transcription of the talk delivered by Sri B N Narasimha Murthy, in the divine presence of Bhagawan Baba in Prasanthi Nilayam on the 11th of Oct 2005. Sri Narasimha Murthy is the author of the fifth volume of Baba's biography Sathyam Shivam Sundaram and is the warden of Swami's students' hostel in Brindavan, Bangalore.

I offer my humble and loving pranams at the lotus Feet of our Most Beloved Divine Master, our Lord, our Loving Swami.

*"Avajananthi Mam Mudha
Manushim thanum ashriatham
Param Bhavam Ajanantho
Mama Bhuta Maheshvaram"*

Swami said this on the battlefield of Kurukshetra when He made His advent as another Poorna Avatar, Lord Sri Krishna:

“When I take recourse to the human body and come down as the Avatar, foolish men do not comprehend My real nature. They fail to recognize that I am the Lord of all beings.”

*"Bhaktha hamare hum bhakthana ke
Sun arjuna pratignya meri
Jahu jahu veera paraiye bhakthanu par
Tahu tahu hoth sahai"*

This is a beautiful composition of Saint Surdas and these are the words composed by Surdas and spoken by Sri Krishna Himself:

"Bhaktha hamare hum bhakthanu ke."

Which means “I belong to My devotees and My devotees belong to Me.”

At this point of time, I remember one such revelation of Swami. He said:

*"Bhakthulu naa ku aadharam
Nenu Bhakthulu ku Adharam."*

“I am the support of the devotees and devotees are My support.” That is His magnanimity. There in the words of Surdas, He goes on to assure, “I belong to My devotees and My devotees belong to Me.” “Whenever adversities, troubles and difficulties befall My devotees, I go to rescue them.” That is the assurance given. *“Abhayam sarva bhootheybhyo dadhamyedhath twatham mama.”*

In the Rama avatar, Bhagavan, our Most Beloved Swami, said this as his oath: “I give the assurance of freedom from fear not only to men, but for all beings.”

*“Sakrudeva prabhannaya thavaath meedicha uchchathey
Abhayam sarva bhootheybhyo
Dadhamyethath pratham mama.”*

One need not be a human. That is why we find in the Ramayana army only Sri Rama and Lakshmana were men. All the others were monkeys, bears, and even little squirrels.

“Whoever comes to me and tells me, Lord, 'I belong to you', He has to tell Me that only once and to him, I grant freedom from all misery, freedom from all sorrow, freedom from all fear.”

“I am what you think me to be.”

I would like to narrate to you one such wonderful revelation to which I was a witness, a revelation made by our Bhagavan, our Lord, our Swami. This happened two years before in Brindavan when Swami was there, in the month of April. Mr. Bhuthia, the custodian of Brindavan Ashram, was complaining of a chronic headache and cold for many months. He ignored it completely and said, “My medicine is only vibhuti, Swami’s vibhuti.” When Swami came to Brindavan and was informed, He called him and told him: “No! You go to our Super Specialty Hospital in Bangalore and get yourself checked up.”

It was my privilege to take him to the Hospital, and there in the Department of Neuro Sciences it was diagnosed that some fluid had collected around the brain and was responsible for this chronic headache. The doctors suggested immediate surgery, and when it was reported to Swami this is what ought to be done, Swami said, “Let us perform the operation tomorrow morning.”

Swami told me that morning, “Call the surgeon and all the doctors here at 3:00.” I called the surgeon who was to perform the operation and the anesthetist and other medical professionals who would help in the procedure to come at 3:00. Swami came down at 2:00 and said, “Where are the doctors?” Immediately I again called the surgeon and other doctors and told them, “Swami is already down, please come immediately.”

They rushed over, and when they arrived, Swami was already in the interview room in Brindavan. In that beautiful interview room, you look through the window, you see the beautiful tree. That tree is of great significance for me, but I will not go into the story of that tree right now.

When the doctors came, Swami made them sit on the sofa. Swami went into the minute details of the surgery; how the surgery is done; how many days Mr. Bhuthia must stay in the Hospital. And then Swami said, “You perform the surgery tomorrow morning.” Then the doctors were offered cool drinks. They were given a royal treatment.

After the doctors went away, I was all alone with Swami. I was really overwhelmed by the love of Swami for His devotees. I just submitted to Him. “Swami, *Meeruentha care theeskontaru?*” Meaning, “Swami, how much care do You take of Your devotees?” Swami put His finger on His chest and said: “***Entha Mathramune Evaru thalichithey antha mathramey nenu.***” That is, “I am what you think Me to be.”

Such declarations by the Avatar are not made even once in millennia. We have heard the beautiful song of Saint Annamacharya who sang: “*Entha Mathramune Evaru thalichithey antha mathramey neevu.*” Meaning, “Whatever one thinks of You, whatever one believes You to be, You are that.”

That’s what Annamacharya said. Here Swami said, “I am what you think me to be.” He is what I think him to be for me, and for each and every one of you, He is what you think Him to be. When you believe that He is God, then He is God! He takes care of us as only God can.

And I have many such gestures of divine mercy and divine kindness to share. But in the time given to me, let me narrate only one such experience of mine, for which I should be indebted to Him, I should be grateful to Him, not only in this life, but for all lives to come.

“Sir, Swami is coming!”

This also happened in the year 2000 on Ugadi day [Telugu New Year Day], the 5th of April. That morning when I went to meet Swami, He said, “You also dance a little this morning.” All of you know what that means. He meant, “You can also speak for a few minutes this morning.” When the command comes from Swami, who are we to say no? I accepted.

What had happened was the previous night I was up very late because of the preparations and the decorations that were going on there and that morning I sat behind Swami on the stage in Brindavan. When my turn came, I tried to get up. Literally, I had to dance! I really could not get up! There was a catch in my back. I struggled to get up and spoke for some time, and after that there was the beautiful discourse from Swami.

After the Ugadi message, Swami went back to the mandir, and then later went to inaugurate the new guesthouse in Brindavan. We followed, but only with great difficulty could I walk. When I came back after the morning function and laid down for a short rest in my room, after a half an hour I found I could not get up. I was wondering what I could do?

One of my teacher friends came to my room and I explained what had happened. I requested my friend, please submit to Swami my prayer that I should not miss even a single Darshan. Every evening I want to go for Darshan. And please pray to Swami for His prasadam. He went there and Swami heard, but Swami did not send any prasadam.

But once the news spread, many of our good friends came to my room. One of them was Sri Yadalam Gangadhar Shetty, the convener of Sri Sathya Sai Trust of Karnataka. That time my only thought was not to miss any Darshan. He came and told me the same thing had happened to him two years before and he had to rest for three months. That was too much for me! Then a doctor came and examined me and said a minimum of two weeks of bed rest was needed. That evening I could not go for Darshan. I was really feeling miserable.

The next morning I requested one of my teacher friends to again please submit to Swami my prayer and get me some prasadam. That morning he came back and said, "Sir, I reported to Swami. Swami has not given me any prasadam." From my window I can see the window of the Trayee Brindavan where Swami resides. When I looked outside, I shed a few tears. "Swami, you are in Brindavan and I am not able to have your Darshan."

Suddenly there was a great commotion outside and the teacher friend of mine came in and said, "Sir, Swami is coming!" I tell you, my dear brothers and sisters, I just got up and went to the door and Swami was already there at the door and Swami said:

"Lecha thanuki kadhani cheppinare!" - "They said you cannot get up!"

Only then did I realize that I had gotten up! Then I apologized to Swami:

"Entha shrama theeskunnaru Swami?" - "How much trouble You have taken, Swami?"

I was on the first floor. Imagine Swami walking up the steps to the first floor of the hostel building. I should tell you those steps are not designed for Swami, they are designed for students, young students. You can understand what that means. Swami came in and said: *"Shrama kadhu bangaru, Anandam."* - "It is not any trouble, it is Anandam, it is bliss." Again He said: *"Shrama kadhu bangaru, idhi prema."* - "It is not any trouble, it is My love."

He took me inside and made me lie down on the cot and sat on a chair in front of me. He materialized vibhuti. He applied it on my back and said, "Tomorrow morning you will come for Darshan." I was very very happy. Already I am sitting in the presence of Swami and He is saying, "You can come to Darshan tomorrow." I wanted to take *Namaskar*. See this is what Swami is:

*"Entha mathramuna eveari thalichite
Antha mathrame nenu."*

"I am what you think me to be."

"Your Mother is Sai Matha."

Twenty years before He had told me, "Your mother is Sai Matha." - *"Ninna thai Sai matha."*

Like a mother, when I wanted to take Namaskar, He said, “No, No! You don’t get up, you don’t bend.” He pulled the chair near to the cot, put up both Feet on the cot and asked me to put my head on those Feet. When He got up to go, I remembered the beautiful song of Thyagaraja. I cannot sing, so I just chanted the line: “*Nanu palimpu nadichi vachithivo oh prana natha.*” - “Oh Lord of my life, you came all the way walking to come to my rescue.” Swami said, “**Ledu Ledu, aeroplanelu ochchanu.**” - “No, I have come in an airplane.” That’s what He said. If we think He is our mother, He is our mother. If we think He is our father, He is our father.

Annada Vasuda Bhakthida Mukthida. She can give us *annam* (food) and *amrutham* (divine Nectar) together. If we ask for wealth, He will give us wealth. If we ask for bhakti (devotion), He will give us bhakti, If we ask for mukthi (liberation), He will give us mukthi also.

The Most Compassionate Divine Master

Once Swami was asking some of the students, “**Emi Samacharam?**” All of us know He knows everything, but He wants to know what we know. “What is the news?” When all the news was exhausted, He asked me, “**Emi Samacharam?**” I said, “Swami on account of the penance of my parents, merit earned by my parents and your immense grace, I have come to your Lotus Feet. Bless us, Bless me so that I find the fulfillment of my life in this very life.”

“*Ee janmaluno tharinchali Swami,*” I prayed. Swami said: “*Ee janmanthyamu variki enthuku kacho konali?*” - “Why do you want to wait till the end of this life? How can we offer our gratitude to such a wonderful mother, a great father, and the wisest supreme divine master? On behalf of all my brothers and sisters here, I offer a prayer:

Swami, may I feel Your presence at all times, at all places, may I enjoy the blessedness of being Your instrument, always. May I always remember that all that happens in this world is Your leela. You are in everything, You are everything. Everything goes on according to Your will. Let me accept, trust and surrender to Thy will. Jai Sai Ram.

Aum Jai Sai Ram.

- Heart2Heart Team

FEEL HIM FROM WITHIN

Questions and answers with Prof. Anil Kumar

In the September issue, we had the transcription of a talk delivered by Prof. Anil Kumar in the USA recently in the article "Life Is A Celebration". His talk was followed by many questions from devotees seeking clarifications on Swami and Spirituality. We now present an excerpt of that question and answer session.

1) Can you please talk about a day in the life of Swami?

Nobody can answer that question 100% accurately, but a normal day in Swami's life is very, very busy. It starts around 4:00 in the morning, and goes till 7:00 – 7:30 in the evening. Morning darshan, followed by interviews, bhajans and then talking to members of the organizations, giving them directions, afternoon darshan, more interviews and then bhajans. But, let me tell you something that happened in this context – I am sure that you will take it in the right spirit.

It was in Brindavan and Swami was laughing when I said, "Swami, you always say, 'You are God! You are God!' It's nice to hear that I am God. Now I want to say a few words, Bhagavan, please permit me; do not misunderstand me; don't reprimand me later." I sought all sorts of assurances that could be thought of on this planet Earth. He said, "Don't worry, you can say." Then I said, "Swami, you say: 'You are God!' Now, I am God!" My name is Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba; I am God, right? My program begins at 3:30 in the morning which is not possible in this body – 3:30, I can't get up everyday. Then come down – around 6:30 – to give Darshan, after just drinking a glass of water, that's all. By the time I come for Darshan, I will have three rounds of coffee already. Well, I am not comfortable that way.

Then start giving Darshan and see the devotees who occupy the front row continuously, as if it is their birthright, not giving a chance to freshers anytime even in the wildest of their dreams. They can successfully leave their families and properties but not that particular seat on which they sit. This sitting attachment, I do not understand."

So Bhagavan has to see the same old faces, and He has to receive letters. What letters? Letters of demands: 'I want this, I want that! Grant me at least an interview, if not a chain!' And there are some complaining letters. No letter ever says: "Swami, thank you for all that you have done. Swami, I am grateful to you." No letters of gratitude or thanksgiving, but letters of regrets and demands and complaints. Well, I will be vexed with that!

Then grant interview to some selected group; take every opportunity to pass on some spiritual doctrines, some spiritual truths, because the Incarnation takes every chance to communicate to make everyone know about Divinity – the experience of God; that's the purpose of the Incarnation! Bhagavan says,

“Whatever I say, whatever I do, whatever I act is only to educate you in terms of Divinity.” That’s what Bhagavan said. But those of you who are called for an interview are always bothered when You take letters – joint pains, arthritis, spondilitis and what not. So, watching those faces who are indifferent to Your talk, always bothered by the talk, of the letters and of other people. Really, that bothers everybody. Well, I cannot bear it.

Then sit there at bhajans and listen to some songs which are not to the taste of Bhagavan. Sometimes He wants the Sarva Dharma prayer songs to be sung. Some boys don’t do that in spite of repeated warnings. So He calls them and asks, “Are you singers or sinners?”

And then go for lunch. There He sits with two or three honoured guests. While the guests are given so many items to eat, Bhagavan takes just a spoonful of ragi malt. I cannot do that really! The guest will have at least twenty items; a royal banquet. So, I prefer to be a guest than being Bhagavan Baba Himself – very difficult! Then go and listen to all kinds of things from administrators, so many demands, so many things they want.

And then again pass through the same – evening Darshan, same thing and retire by 7:30 and go back. Swami, I am comfortable as a human being. I don’t want to be God right now. I am not prepared. So can you please talk about a day in the life of Swami? Please imagine yourself in His steps; just put yourself in His shoes. I don’t think you would wish to be Swami right now.

2) Can you explain more of what Swami said in the discourse of March 16th 2003?

People have been sending Him ointments, syrups, and other things, thinking that He is having pain in the joints, but Bhagavan said it’s not like that. Don’t be worried. It is because of some gravitational force which He explained is pulling Him that He is not able to walk as fast as He used to. And when He asked Sri Narsimha Murthy – the warden of the Brindavan Campus – when He was walking; He could not lift His leg there. It was gravitational force activity. Bhagavan spoke in terms of having a magnetic force – the magnetism that is holding on more and more to this planet Earth. To that extent I can tell you.

3) How did you become Swami’s translator?

I did not become; this was thrust upon me. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them! I fall under the third category.

4) To what extent do you practice His speeches as a translator?

Very embarrassing question! I have the speaker in front of me; it just amplifies; it will pass on my voice to reach you. You can’t expect this speaker to practice whatever I am telling. So also Anil Kumar.

If everyone follows Swami's talk they will say Swami's speech is excellent. Suppose they don't follow, they blame the translator. So this translator job is an unenviable job. Nobody would compete to be a translator because you will be exposed of your ignorance and innocence. When Swami speaks at a very fast rate, you cannot be slow. And Swami initially asks you to be slow. But you are two engines; He goes fast, and you cannot go that fast. If both of us are fast, you will hear voice only; in the beginning there is only a word – you don't catch that word. So, it is a tough job indeed. But He will make you comfortable and He will see to it that you are successful. And in my humble opinion, from my experience and a firm conviction, no one is indispensable. He can get anything done by anybody, anytime, anywhere.

So many people, to whom Telugu is not their mother tongue, were asked to translate His discourses earlier. Tamilians, who speak Tamil, were asked to translate Telugu discourses in English. So, I cannot take any credit in that area. So far as of now, I am quite sane about it. He can make anyone do anything at any point of time.

5) What are the practical steps to surrender?

There are no practical steps to surrender.

6) What are the practical steps to move towards light?

Only one step: get away from darkness! That is the way of being in the light. So there are no steps to surrender. When once we give up our selfishness, *that* is surrender.

7) Is Swami the reincarnation of Shirdi Baba?

He said He is. He Himself said that He is the reincarnation of Shirdi Baba. There is no doubt about it.

8) Why does Baba need a translator?

He needs a translator because He wants to give some chance to a poor individual. Do you want to be a translator? The one who put this question; I pray on your behalf to make you a translator! A chance for somebody – to build a college, to raise a bridge, to treat a patient – these are all chances given to devotees. Different chances to do sadhana for one's own upliftment and elevation. There is nothing special about it; He can manage it all on His own.

Since this question has been put to me, I will give you one example. There were two young boys sitting there. One boy spoke Oriya language; he hails from Orissa. The other boy spoke Hindi; he hailed from Delhi. Swami was speaking to that Hindi boy from Delhi, in Hindi. Whereas the response is coming from the Oriya boy, whose mother tongue is Oriya language. He is smiling to whom he is talking. Because I was sitting there, I was watching these two boys.

After Swami went to His interview room I went straight to the Oriya boy. "Why do you smile? In fact Swami spoke in Hindi. The questions were directed to him and he should answer, so why are you answering?" He said, "Sir, what nonsense you are speaking. He spoke in Oriya language. You have not heard it? Why do you correct me like this?"

9) Do you have any messages from Swami about the USA and its future?

Swami does not speak about the USA. He speaks from the point of God, the universe, not from the point of the United States, India, Tamil Nadu. No, no, no. The whole thing is One after all; it's all One composition; One unit. Creator, Creation. Creation is the reflection of the Creator. *Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagat*. The whole thing is Divine. He doesn't have to bifurcate, or segment, or fragment, or cut into pieces, and view in a limited sense. It's not so. Loka Samastas Sukhino Bhavantu. Let the whole world, the whole Universe progress, and advance. That's the view of Bhagavan.

10) Did Swami say anything about difficult times in this world?

The world is composed of human beings. The world is comfortable, it's going on well, but we invite difficult times when we bring problems and make life problematic. Life as such is without a problem, but we make it problematic. Therefore, the world as such will not have difficult times unless we bring it in. It is for that purpose, educational programs and human values is introduced to such an organization, so that we will not have any difficult times. The human perspective, human psychology, the fabric of human thought all need a total change. It is not a revolution but a sort of evolution which is needed today.

11) Please elaborate on God's will and free will.

My friends, this question has been put to me quite a number of times. We often mistake human effort for free will. Human effort is different from free will. We think human effort means free will. What are Swami's views about it? Free Will. First, are you free? No. Why? I see that what I am not supposed to; I hear that what I should not. I go there where I am not supposed to go. The senses are not under our control. I am not able to control my tongue. I always like spicy stuff though I speak about sattwic food. I absolutely relish Rajasic food. What can I do? Perhaps in the next life I should try. So the point is I am not free. So where there is no free will, where is the question of exercising your free will?

12) Why should there be a word like free will?

The word free will is more or less meant for human options, human effort, and human preference. But there is only one who is absolutely free, God Himself. God is beyond the senses. Why? I can explain it this way. Some people say, "Sir, I am very weak because I am carried away by the senses." Some say "I have total control over my senses; I am above my senses." But both are wrong. One is indulgence, the other is avoidance. If I say I am not sensual, it means avoidance. If one says I am sensual, it is indulgence.

But spirituality is neither avoidance nor indulgence but Transcendence! Transcendence is spirituality. So in that way, we can understand that we are yet to transcend the limitations. And so we are not free. But God is Transcendence. Transcendence, non-dualistic. So He has got free will, but not so the human being.

13) I am being selfish when asked to help a relative's physical suffering.

If you help everybody that suffers you can cross this limitation of suffering. Not merely your relative; suffering is suffering everywhere. When we know Swami is within us, then why are we having so much yearning? This yearning is only to feel Him from within. Not that He is missing. Yearning means deep, intense pining for God, intense feeling for God. An attempt to go within. A kind of expectation to get identified with the Self, to be the Self, of the Self alone. That is what is called yearning. So yearning is a spiritual exercise.

Tamaso maa jyotir gamaya mrityor maa mrityung maya.

A travel from death to eternity; from falsehood to truth; from darkness to light; that is pining.' Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free', so declares the holy Bible. 'Seek ye the kingdom of heaven; everything shall be added on to you', says the holy Bible. This is what is called yearning. Not that without yearning that there's no God within. Yearning is a spiritual pursuit; it is a spiritual endeavor.

14) How do I conquer fear? What are Swami's views on this?

Fear arises because of a sense of guilt. The Gita says: *Shudram HrudayaDurbalayam*: Fear is the sign of weakness. *Chakto chitha param tapa*. Oh Arjuna, get up from sleep and slumber. Don't fear. We fear because of our own mistakes. We fear because of the sense of guilt. But truly speaking, the feeling of this sort of guilt is much worse than the guilt itself. Guilt is less dangerous than the feeling of guilt. To feel guilty is more dangerous than the committing of something guilty. So this feeling of guilty is the cause of fear. How do I substantiate this statement? Many times when people come and say to Swami, "Swami, I am at fault. I have committed many sins. I have not been alright all these days. Pardon me." He says: "Past is past, already past; forget the past."

Fear comes because of that sense of guilt. Fear is because of uncertainty of the future and what is going to happen. There are some people who are worried about what will happen to them twenty years after retirement. Where is the guaranty that you will live till then?

There are some bachelors who reserve seats for their future born children, in kindergarten schools, elementary schools, before getting married because of the fear that they may not get seats later. So fear is because of uncertainty, because of the risk factor, because of a lack of a sense of security. Yes, this is fear. And the fear is because of a complex. Fear is a psychological ailment.

How to get over his fear? Only one solution: "Why fear when I am here." When once we are convinced that He is there, there will be no fear. Because we don't understand it, we don't have total faith in it, one finds comfort in this spirit of being fearful. "I have fear." No. Actually people say this: "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." But Swami changed all this. "Fear of sin and love of God!" Fear sin and love God. That is what He meant: *Paapa Bhiti*, *Daiva Preeti*. *Daiva Preeti* – Love of God. *Paapa Bheeti* – fear of sin. *Sangha Neeti* – Morality in society. So, one can cross over this fear; there's no worry about it.

Once there was a gentleman there in Kodaikanal. He hardly speaks. Swami wanted him one day. "Come on, speak!" "Swami I have never spoken before." He forced him to speak and he made an excellent speech. Because he said, "Swami, You should do it; I cannot do it."

But when once he submitted to Him, He spoke through him. This is how to conquer fear. When one is absolutely sure and has surrendered to God, one can certainly do his job to the best of his ability.

- Heart2Heart Team

WHERE THERE IS HIS WILL, THERE IS A WAY

By Mr. Vipin Prabhakar,

A former student of Swami's Institute

Swami Sends Me to School in Ooty

Swami always says that unless God wills it, nothing can happen. It was at the age of seven, when after an entrance exam and an interview, I was chosen for the 3rd standard in the Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar, Ootacamund. My parents had neither seen Swami before nor had even heard of Him.

It came as a surprise to my family that though I had taken the examination in Puttaparthi, I was selected for the Ooty School. My father was not particularly comfortable about admitting me to a school in Ooty, but He willed it and both of us left for Ooty. Once we reached the school, there was no looking back. My father was very inspired by the school and above all by the school Principal.

Having joined the Ooty School in the 3rd standard, it was a sweet journey all the way. In the year 1990, it was decided to close down the Ooty School and all of us were transferred to Parthi. After completing my 10th standard, though I was interested in the science group, I was picked for the commerce group. Again there was a debate in the house as my family was not very keen on my pursuing the commerce line. But He willed it, and I went on to complete my Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) from Brindavan Campus, and then an MBA from Parthi.

Entering the Business World

After completing my MBA degree in 2002, I was going to take my first step into the competitive world of business. The competition was fierce and fear of unemployment loomed large, but then I knew He was always there with me.

There was only one question that my relatives, neighbors and anyone I knew asked me. "Were there no placements in your Institute, or did you not get placed?" My answer was straight and simple. "Swami gave me world class education right from K.G. to P.G. without charging even a single penny. Having gotten the best MBA degree from a top institute, can I not secure a job myself? It is my conviction that any student from this Institute will get the job of his liking within a period of 6 months after completion of the academic program, and I am sure I will not be an exception."

I came out of the portals of the Institute in June 2002 and exactly 6 months later I landed up as a Purchase Officer in Asia's premier Aerospace Industry – Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. My selection was nothing short of a miracle and was all accomplished by His Divine Will.

A First-Rate Job, Through His Will

It is a well-known fact that it is not easy to get a first-rate job in the public sector. HAL had posted their advertisement in the month of June in all the leading newspapers and on the Internet. Like any other candidate, I put in my application. To my disappointment, I did not find my name on the short list for the entrance exam. I did not take this to heart, although it was disconcerting that having scored 91% in MFM (Masters in Financial Management), my name was not included. I tried to think of all the possible reasons for this.

A week before the exam, I received my call card through the post. This was nothing short of a miracle! It was the most pleasant surprise of my life and my joy knew no bounds. But my preparations for the exam were nil.

I came to Parthi, took Bhagavan's blessings and took the exam in Bangalore. Later I discovered that at least a thousand candidates had appeared for the test. I was fairly confident of being called for an interview. Two months went by but there was no response from HAL. In fact, I even forgot about this job and continued my part-time lectureship in a degree college that I had taken up in June.

All of a sudden, in September, I got a call for the interview. This was going to be my first interview and I was competing with more than a hundred candidates for only fifteen posts. I went for the interview fully prepared in all areas of Materials, Management and Finance. However, to my utter surprise, all the members of the interview panel only asked me questions about Swami. All of them were impressed with my answers. Swami was in Bangalore then, and at the end of the interview they asked me for the darshan timings and about the best route to reach Brindavan. The rest is history. I was one of the fifteen candidates selected.

This job was very important to me because the company my father worked at was in financial distress and all the employees were offered retirement under the Voluntary Retirement Scheme. As it turned out, both my appointment and my father's retirement came about on the exact same day in December 2002.

Spreading Swami's Message

After a year of training in Bangalore, in January 2004 I was posted in my home town of Hyderabad. HAL-Hyderabad consists of around 3000 employees. During my first month, I was on job rotation in all the departments. In each of these departments, apart from work, everyone had questions to ask about Swami. By the end of the month, I did not know if I had been able to spread Swami's message adequately, but I knew that many people had sent in applications for admitting their children to school in Parthi. Later that year, when I came to Prashanti Nilayam for Swami's darshan, I met several of my co-workers who had come to see Him for the first time.

But as every coin has two sides, there were also a handful of colleagues who criticized Swami. Whenever I came across these people, I did not try to

convince them that Baba is God because I knew it would lead to unnecessary arguments. I would only say, "I am not telling you to believe that He is God or to start worshipping Him. I am only informing you about the amount of service He has been doing for humanity. A free world class hospital for the poor, premier education from K.G. to P.G., clean drinking water for the poorest villages, etc. Tell me any other individual or government agency which has accomplished anything even close to this. If, at the minimum, we try to walk in His footsteps, the world would definitely be a better place to live in."

Slowly, word spread in the company that a Sai student had joined HAL-Hyderabad. And now it was our Executive Director himself who called me for an informal discussion about Swami. The following week, the Executive Director visited Shivam (the Sai Center in Hyderabad) and also bought some books on Bhagavan Baba.

A Miracle at HAL

We were coming to the end of the financial year 2004-05, and our production seemed nowhere close to our target goals. One night, at around 11:00 p.m., when I was asleep, the Executive Director rang me up. He sounded perturbed. He asked me, "Can't Swami do something? Why don't you pray?" I replied, "Swami always says '*Karmanye Vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana*' – "Act and don't think about the fruits." Though I could not convince him with this reply, I satisfied him by saying that I would pray. This material target, however, was never in my daily prayers. But then to the utter surprise of the entire division and HAL as a whole, all the materials required for production started pouring in from our suppliers and the employees worked three shifts and today HAL-Hyderabad has exceeded its targets by a significant margin.

Truly, anything is possible when He wills it.

Thank you, Jai Sai Ram!

- Heart2Heart Team

H2H SPECIAL

WITH THE LORD IN THE MOUNTAINS – Part 4

I think I have said enough by way of preamble and let me now come to this year's Kodai trip. I should perhaps mention that this was my second Kodai trip, the first one being in 2003. That time we were in Brindavan and Swami's party flew out of Bangalore. This time, Swami left from Puttaparthi and flew direct to Madurai, as He did last year also, that is in 2005. In 2004, Swami spent the entire summer in Bangalore and did not go to Kodai.

Up, Up and Away with Sai

In the last issue, I came up to the point where the aircraft carrying us to Madurai had lifted off and was flying over the control building in the Sri Sathya Sai Airport in Puttaparthi. As we rapidly gain height, I look out of the window and see below the Prashanti Nilayam Railway Station with its magnificent building and facilities – very few stations can match that, I must say. Seeing it brings to my mind accounts by old time devotees about how they used to come to Penukonda by train, alight there, take a ramshackle bus to Bukkapatnam [a journey of several hours], transfer to a bullock cart, crawl to Karnatakanagepalli on the east bank of the Chitravati and then cross the river on foot, etc. Now, devotees can come direct to Puttaparthi by bus, air-conditioned taxi, train, and even air. And, as late as 1968, Arthur Schulman of Hollywood described Puttaparthi as being 160 km from Bangalore and ten minutes past the Stone Age!

Barely a few seconds later, I see below the road from Penukonda Railway Station to Kothacheruvu, traversed by devotees for decades. Soon the view becomes hazy and I turn my attention to what's happening inside the aircraft. The cabin crew have begun serving breakfast – prepared by the famous Taj Hotel in Chennai and flown in from there. Looks good and inviting but since I know my stomach very well, I decide to skip it.

As a part of the routine, the crew try to offer Swami some breakfast. Poor things, how would they know about Swami! He never eats or drinks anything while travelling, no matter how long the journey. Just to please them, Swami accepts a glass of water and barely sips it.

While breakfast service is in progress, the front end of the cabin becomes a sort of Interview room for the crew. One by one they come for Swami's darshan, while someone else is clicking away photos. One lucky person even gets a ring.

Darshan in the Clouds

After a while, Swami gets up and starts slowly walking down the aisle, all the way to the other end of the aircraft. He always does this. One more darshan, of a rare variety too; how many can say, "I had Swami's darshan way up in the clouds!"

While Swami goes to the other end, I notice that Satya Jit is sneaking into the cockpit. I have always wanted to have a cockpit view and at last after so many years of flying, I see a chance; I immediately seize it. Even as I go in and admire the view from there, I think, “Can one dream of such a thing these days what with so much security and all that?” But when Swami is there, He is the ultimate security, and everyone becomes so very friendly. I learn that the Captain of the flight is Vivek Shanbag, and the co-pilot is Srinivas Reddy. The Captain tells me that we should be touching down at Madurai at 10:35 a.m. Having fulfilled a long-standing ambition, I don’t want to stay too long and bother the Captain, so I return to my seat.

10:25: The aircraft has now descended and is flying much closer to the ground – no wonder, since Madurai is approaching. The ride becomes quite bumpy, thanks to turbulence. I look around and find that Swami is still giving darshan though it is so very bumpy.

Prasadam for the Passengers...

I take a quick peep out of the window and see directly below me the Kodai Hills towards which we will be heading later in the day. Darshan still on and meanwhile a surprise – boys are distributing Prasadam in midair. With Swami, wonders never cease.

The plane is now almost over the airport and Swami is still busy with darshan! Wheels out, and Swami just makes it back to His seat.

The stewardess makes the announcement that we have landed in Madurai and tells us we should exit from the front. This is the standard routine; she obviously is not aware that for this flight the passengers exit from the rear while Swami gets out from the front using a special elevator.

As the aircraft comes to a stop, I look out of the window, and see that the airport has undergone many improvements since I was there in 2003. I then try to see who have come to receive Swami.

...and the Flight Attendants

Even as I am taking in the scene outside, I notice that Swami is busy giving sarees to the stewardesses. They express gratitude with padnamaskar.

We all quickly get out of the rear exit and make our way towards the front of the aircraft to catch a glimpse of Swami coming out. There is a big crowd milling around. Swami’s Benz comes close to the aircraft, while Swami comes down from the aircraft using the special elevator. There are many people on the tarmac, all barefoot of course, and since it is very hot, practically everyone is dancing. Not us though – we have our footwear on. Lots of camera clicking going on.

The New Improved Madurai Airport

Swami gets into the car with Balram at the wheel (as usual), and He drives away. All the rest of us in the party slowly walk towards the arrival building. I take in the scene and see many changes since my last view of this place in 2003 – lots of luggage trolleys for arriving passengers to use and display boards giving info about planes arriving and departing, like they have in all good airports. From a quick glance, I find that there are many services flying into and from Madurai, not only to Chennai/Madras but to other places as well, like Tuticorin, for example. Signs of the economy improving?

We come out of the building without the worry of picking up our baggage, and this is one of the “freedoms” we get when travelling as a part of Swami’s party – all these details are taken care of. Outside the arrival building, I see two big air-conditioned buses waiting, obviously to carry our party to Kodai. But there are also cars for VIPs, and wonder of wonders, I am a VIP – helps to have held the post of Vice Chancellor, even if it was many, many years ago. By the way, in 2003, all of us had to ride by bus – looks like a promotion in status.

While I am waiting to be informed about which car to get into, I notice Mrs. Ratan Lal getting in a car that quickly speeds away. She is going direct to Kodai without stopping over in Madurai, like all of us will do, including Swami. Mrs. Ratan Lal has been taking care of Swami’s meal arrangements during most of His travels; certainly she does this every time Swami goes to Kodai. And she is ever anxious to reach there well ahead of Swami to get the kitchen up and running.

Even as my eyes are taking in the scene, I am busy scribbling notes in a pocket notebook; in fact, I have been doing this literally from the moment I left Parthi Ashram – Radio Sai and H2H obligations. Vice Chancellor Gokak sees me busy and remarks, “Ah, you are busy taking notes like a student.” The place is full of Seva Dals, all from the State of Tamil Nadu, of course, as that is the state in which Kodai is located, and soon one of them comes to me and guides me to the car I am supposed to ride in. As I get in, I notice that the Vice Chancellor and his wife are also travelling in the same car.

As we get in, I take my seat next to the driver, a young IT professional named Sai Ram from Chennai. The Seva Dal who shows me to the car says, “Sir, you will travel by this car till you reach Kodai.” I nod. Then, he slips some packets of eatables to all of us in the car; typical Swami arrangement: snacks for the road. With boys this is a regular ritual, going back to the eighties. In those days, Swami would travel by car from Bangalore to Kodai and His boys would accompany Him in a big bus. The bus would be packed with stuff to eat and juice packets as well. On the road, there would be many stops where Swami would give darshan, but boys, as per instructions, would be stuffed by the local hosts. And when the party reached Kodai, Swami would check to see if the boys had eaten all that was put in the bus. I have heard many boys recall this with great pleasure, giving graphic accounts of how hard it was to eat all that stuff. Those bus trip days are gone, but the food packets are still

there, without, however, the “Divine Customs” examination. At least not for us. Usually, when they get an opportunity, elders give it away to Seva Dals.

Ananda Nilayam, Swami’s Mandir in Madurai

Our car is very nice, a red Chevy. I ask Mr. Sai Ram whether he knows where to go and he replies, “Sir, we are to go Ananda Nilayam for a brief stopover.” Ananda Nilayam is Swami’s Mandir in Madurai. It was blessed by Swami in 1999 during a Kodai trip like the present one. In 2003, there was a long stop by our party in Ananda Nilayam but more about that soon. I then ask Mr. Sai Ram, “Do you know the roads here?” He says no. I ask him how he will drive us to our destination and he gives a very simple answer, “My job is to simply follow the vehicle ahead.”

Madurai Airport is located in a place called Avaniaypuram, near the town of Tirupparankunram, famous for its temple for Lord Subrahmanya. This temple is located at the foot of a huge rock. Years ago, I went up the rock and saw the airport from there. Tirupparankunram is on the outskirts of Madurai city and if one follows the old road, the distance to the city is not very great. However, the roads are poor and go through crowded districts. These days, however, there is a nice big road leading out of the airport but it takes a circuitous route. We took that route, as we did in 2003.

Trading Stories with Vice Chancellor Gokak

Since the distance is longer, it takes more time but one has to negotiate less traffic. During this long ride, I get to talking with Vice Chancellor Gokak, something both of us rarely have time for in Parthi. I realise he is a person with a flair for witty and humorous anecdotes and has a nice way with words. Back when we were both in Parthi airport waiting for the flight to be called, we shared stories and he told me a nice one – almost all his stories were from his experience as a Government Officer. It went like this:

There was in Delhi an officer named Shanti Prasad, who was given to literary flourishes. As a bureaucrat, Shanti Prasad had to write all kinds of notes for his boss but they would not be the usual dry ones; instead, they would be peppered with all kinds of digressions done in a literary style. This is really not expected but Shanti Prasad’s boss was obviously a tolerant person. One day, Mr. Prasad exceeded himself and began to worry. So at the end of the note he wrote an apology, saying that he was sorry if he got carried away, that his boss must forgive him, and that he would not do that sort of thing again, etc. The boss read Shanti Prasad’s note and sent the file back. He had only one comment: ‘Om Shanti, Shanti, Shantih!’

I look out of the car and find that Madurai has changed hugely – so many small industries. Soon we go past Tirunagar not far from Tirupparankunram. This is where my father used to live and I know this place quite well. In 2003, when we went by the same route, I could still pick up a few landmarks known to me, but this time I simply could not recognise Tirunagar. It went past without my being able to spot it.

We are at Ananda Nilayam. Swami has already arrived there and met briefly with Srinivasa Chettiar, son of late Subramania Chettiar, famous for his golden chariot, Paduka festivals, etc. Ananda Nilayam is right next to Srinivasa Chettiar's residence, and in 1999 Swami came there to inaugurate Ananda Nilayam, the construction of which the Chettiar family played an important role.

In 2003, we made a long stop over at Ananda Nilayam. Here is what my diary from that trip recounts:

A Peek into the Past

We arrive at Ananda Nilayam. We are told to leave our slippers and handbags in the bus as we will be going to Kodai in the same vehicle. So we troop out, taking just our cameras with us. Big crowd, and no surprise in that. Somehow, we manage to get in and once we are in, the welcome is truly royal. Swami is already there and He waves us all upstairs. Apparently, the refreshments have been arranged there. So we go up, and what happens? Swami follows, climbing the entire staircase. Devotees beg Him not to since He has lately been experiencing some difficulty in climbing and even walking on level ground. But Swami refuses to listen to these prayers because He wants to be with His flock. As He comes up, I manage to snap some precious pictures, and even as I am feeling pleased with my contribution to posterity, I get a rap on the knuckles, "Why are you wasting time? Don't you know we have to leave for Kodai?" Giving me a stern look, Swami directs me to the food table. And boy, what a table it is!

Apparently, the Madurai people were instructed to provide some snacks and not lunch, as we would be arriving at around 3:30 or so. The Madurai hosts were instead now offering us breakfast, lunch and dinner all rolled into one, and of absolutely fabulous quality too. It truly required enormous strength of mind on my part to just look and not touch those great looking goodies, even as our hungry boys were merrily tucking in. I hope in due course I will be rewarded in Heaven for this great display of restraint!

Swami Visits the Chettiar Home

Meanwhile, Swami disappears, and we are told that He has gone next door to pay a brief visit to the house of Srinivasa Chettiar. There is an active debate about what Swami will do next. Some are saying Swami will come back for Arathi; He is never known to skip Arathi. Others are saying, no, it is getting late and it would delay us if Swami were to wade through the crowd and come back just for Arathi. He will therefore skip Arathi and go straight to Kodai. Meanwhile, I manage to exchange a few words with people I know who have come here to Madurai specially to be a part of the welcome party. Among these are Mr. Ramani, the President of the Tamil Nadu Seva Organisation, and Mr. Raman, Chairman of Sundaram Finance and President of the State Trust.

Mr. Raman tells me, "I think you will face a severe traffic problem. Today is Sunday and there will be huge crowds of weekenders returning from the hills to the plains. This downhill traffic is bound to slow you." Mr Raman also stuns me with the news that he has been constantly shuttling between Madurai and Kodai during the past two days and had in fact made four trips. Amazing, and that is what devotion to Swami does to people.

Meanwhile, Swami comes back to Ananda Nilayam, takes Arathi and drives off to Kodai, putting an end to the speculation, "Will He or won't He?" We slowly head for the buses and take our seats. It is very hot, and the buses are not showing any signs of moving. We find out why. It appears that the van carrying the luggage is overloaded, and someone has thoughtfully advised that some of the luggage be transferred to the buses as otherwise the van would not be able to climb uphill...

Back to the Present and a Visit to TAFE

Well, that was last time. This time, it is an altogether different story. Our vehicles stop and even as all of us are trying to get out, we are told, "Don't get out of your vehicles. Drivers, all of you proceed straight to TAFE." Apparently, Swami already left and was heading towards TAFE, and so our vehicles now get going to catch up.

TAFE, I must explain at this point, is the abbreviation for Tractors and Farm Equipment. It is the name of a company that (obviously) makes farm equipment, and has many factories; one of them is a few miles out of Madurai on the National Highway to Chennai, and we were headed there. Why? Because Swami was going there. Why was Swami going there? He was doing so in response to the ardent prayers of a family of long-time devotees. And who were they? Well, at the head of them all was Mr. Sivasailam, who for years managed TAFE. Some of you who have participated in Gram Seva will have noticed trucks marked TAFE carrying sarees and dhothis. These were placed at the disposal of Swami for use during Gram Seva. The Company has also donated many tractors for use in the Ashram. Presently, the company is being managed by Mr. Sivasailam's daughter, Mrs. Mallika Srinivasan, who is continuing the noble family tradition.

Her husband, Mr. Venu Srinivasan, has also been helping Swami's institutions in his own unique way. He is the Chairman and Managing Director of TVS Motors Ltd. which makes famous motorcycles. His bikes have helped our students to stage many a sports thriller, besides riding with Swami as His escort on Sports festival days. In addition, Mr. Venu Srinivasan frequently addresses the students of the Business School in Swami's University. All in all, the entire family is highly devoted to Swami and has been so for many, many years. Prayer, they say, is God's only "weakness". Is it any wonder then that Swami agreed to stop over at TAFE on His way to Kodai? That's all for now; more of the story next time!

Jai Sai Ram.

– Heart2Heart Team

UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS WITH SAI

Recollections of Chidambaram Krishnan - Part 8

This is the eighth installment of the wonderful recollections of Mr. Chidambaram Krishnan, a long-time devotee of Bhagavan Baba who came to the Lord under somewhat unusual circumstances. In the previous episode [07], we ended with Swami dramatically saving Mr. Krishnan from murderous assault, literally at the last minute.

In this, the eighth installment, Mr. Krishnan recalls a more recent and poignant incident concerning a serious leg injury, how he escaped from a Nursing Home where he had been admitted for amputation and dragged himself to Puttaparthi and what happened there. Read on.

From Assassin to Able Guardian

Having transformed in a second, expressed remorse and having promised that he would protect me during my entire stay in Ceylon, my driver Jaffer went inside to have a wash. Meanwhile, the Local Manager and his staff came back and were trying to peek through the window to see what was happening inside. The Manager saw me and asked with surprise, "What! You are still alive?" I retorted, "Do you mean to say you want to see me dead?"

At that instant, Jaffer came into the room, and seeing the Manager yelled, "You evil fellow! Even if we were misguided and wanted to attack the boss, how could you so selfishly abandon him?" Jaffer was so mad that he actually wanted to beat up the Manager but I prevented him from doing that.

I was in Ceylon for nine days during which period Jaffer took care of everything – driving me around, bringing me food, having my clothes laundered and so on. He was really very helpful.

After I returned to India, I went to Puttaparthi. Swami innocently asked me [as if He knew nothing], "What happened in Ceylon?" I just said, "Swami, how do I describe Your Glory and Power?" He just laughed. What an amazing drama it was. One moment I was about to be killed, and the very next moment the gang of four that came to finish me off were all full of remorse. And Jaffer Ali, the ringleader, was at my feet, sobbing away and pleading for punishment. Incredible. It seemed as if Swami had pushed me to the edge of a precipice and when I thought that even Swami had abandoned me, He pulled me back. The message was: "Son, do you think I would abandon you like that when I had given you My word that I would protect you?"

All this is clearly stranger than fiction. I went into the details just to illustrate how dramatically Swami can bring about a miraculous change, transforming a potential murderer into a friend, in a fraction of a second. There are so many such instances I can recall.

The Trademark Leela

Let me now tell you about the Trademark business. You remember when I went to Swami in Puttaparthi I told Him, “Swami, You have asked my brother not to go to Ceylon for the Trademark renewal. But Swami, if the Trademark has to be renewed, then my brother has to physically go there and sign all the relevant papers himself. That is mandated by the laws of the country. I cannot sign for my brother. If my brother does not go, what happens to the Trademark renewal?” Swami had replied tersely, “Leave it all to Me. I shall take care of the Trademark problem.”

When I was in Ceylon, after the change of heart of Jaffer, I tried calling my brother in India by phone. Those days, long distance phone calls were very difficult to make. And where India/Ceylon phone connection was concerned, there was an undersea cable that was especially unreliable. For one whole day, the cable was out of order and I could not book a call to my brother. Next day, I tried booking a call again. I waited for three hours before the call came through. I told my brother all about the Jaffer incident. My brother was overwhelmed and said, “Swami has showered His Grace in an amazing manner. He stopped me from going. In your case, He allowed you to go but saved your life. If Jaffer has transformed, it is a miracle. We owe an infinite debt to Baba.”

I then said to my brother, “Let me now come to the Trademark business. What is the latest?” My brother said, “Oh that! I wanted to tell you but forgot when we started talking about Jaffer. You know something? Normally, there are so many formalities involved and even after signing in person, the renewal order takes about nine days to be issued. In this case, I just don’t know what Swami did but believe it or not, the renewal order is actually with me, without my having to go to Ceylon and signing all the papers in person. I simply can’t imagine how it has happened, but I tell you, it sure has.”

When I heard this, I too was amazed. When I discussed this matter with Swami, He warned: “Don’t be nosey and go to the Trademark Office in Ceylon to make enquiries. Just mind your business and leave everything to Me. Understand?” Well, I must confess I do not understand how He did it, but it was a fact that He did.

A Serious Injury

I shall now narrate an incident that happened in Jan 2003 at Makarasankaranthi time [mid-January]. This too is an amazing experience. Ignorant people sometimes tell me, “Your Sai Baba seems to pay attention only to rich devotees.” My reply has always been, “Look, I am no longer a rich man now. In material terms, I am simply not in any position to make any big donations or offer any big things to Swami. Nor am I a highly qualified man who can render specialized service to Swami. And yet, Swami does so much for me, even now, when I have lost all my wealth. How do you explain that?”

Just to substantiate this statement, let me now describe how Swami saved me yet another time from a very gruesome fate. It all started the day after Sankranthi. My son Manohar had a small house in Tirunelveli that he rented out. Two months prior to Sankranthi, the tenant vacated the house. There were many plants in the compound but since there was no one to water them, they began to wither. I went to Tirunelveli and when I saw the plants drying up, I began to water them myself. I did so for four days. On the fifth day, I could not do the watering because there was no electricity to run the pump – there was a power cut.

I went back at night when there was power and started watering the plants. I did so for a long time and it was 3:30 a.m. when I was through. I was satisfied and happy. That was when I saw a plant full of beautiful hibiscus flowers. I said to myself, “Why not collect some of them for Puja?” So saying, I went to that plant and started plucking flowers. It was still quite dark, and I could not see clearly. As a result I slipped and fell into an eight-foot deep ditch, full of water pipes sticking out here and there. As a result of the fall, I was badly injured and suffered many fractures. It was just horrible and painful too.

Somehow, I managed to pull myself out of that ditch – I simply do not know how; but I was out. I then discovered that my feet were so badly injured that I just could not move anymore. I was stuck there, wondering how I could make it to my son’s house. It was now around 3:45 a.m. Just then, by God’s Grace, an auto rickshaw came that way. I signaled to the rickshaw to stop and told the driver, “Please can you take me and drop me off at my son’s house?” He wanted to know where the house was and I gave the address. He took me to my son’s house and dropped me off. Seeing my condition, he refused to accept payment. He could see huge blood stains and that I was badly injured.

My son was shocked to see my condition and rushed me to an orthopedic doctor. The doctor examined me and then told my son, “Your father has a sugar problem. I am afraid I cannot treat him. Take him to a more experienced doctor in town.” But that did not help and my son started phoning the big hospital in Vellore and also clinics in Madras. A doctor in Madras said to my son, “Bring him by flight to Madras to my clinic.” So they took me to Madras but that did not help me in anyway. In fact, the treatment that the doctor gave made my condition worse.

My condition was deteriorating and the Madras doctor told my son, “I am afraid I have to amputate the leg; if that is not done, your father’s life will be in danger.” When I heard this, I was taken aback. I simply could not consider a life without my leg. My sons assured me, “Don’t worry, father, we are there to take care of you. You mean a lot to us.” They applied a lot of pressure on me to agree to amputation but I was not too keen about it. Somehow, I wanted to live and with my leg. Finally I said, “OK, we have discussed it. Now all of you go to the hotel where you are staying and come back in the evening. We shall talk more then.” My sons then left, leaving me to rest.

Engineering an Escape

Some time after they departed, I managed to drag myself out of the Nursing Home to which I had been admitted and came out to the road. It was around 4:30 p.m. I checked my pocket and found I had exactly 375 rupees. I signaled an auto rickshaw. I told the driver, "Take me to the Interstate Bus Stand." The driver took a good look at me. He knew I had been admitted by my sons and was in no condition to travel. He replied, "Listen, I normally ply from the auto rickshaw stand near this Nursing Home. If your sons find out that I took you to the Bus Stand, they will ask me, 'Just because that old man asked you take him to the Bus Stand, how dare you take him there in the condition he was in?' How can I answer that? What reply can I give? They would simply finish me off! If I were to take you to the Bus Stand as you say, it would be a very bad thing and not good for you. Besides, the doctor here knows me very well. Do you think he would approve of what I did?"

I patiently listened and then said, "You know, all these people want to cut my leg off. If I stay here, my leg will go and I do not want that. I have tremendous faith in Sai Baba and I am sure if I go see Him, my leg will be saved. Actually, even if I die there, it does not matter. But this much I am sure of: I simply do not want to live with my leg cut off." The auto rickshaw driver said in reply, "Frankly, I am confused and caught in two minds. On the one hand, I am scared of your sons and fear they may beat me up. On the other hand, when I hear you talk, I am full of pity and want to help you. OK, come what may, I shall take you to the bus stand. May God protect me."

I was thrilled and said, "I shall pay you whatever you ask." He grunted, "It is enough if you pay me a hundred rupees." I was happy to hear that because as you know, I did not have a lot of money. In fact, all the time I was praying to Swami that the driver would not demand an unreasonable amount. After all, I needed enough money to go to Puttaparthi. I did not bother about what would happen after reaching Parthi; at that moment, my mind was focused entirely on somehow reaching there. I had the blind faith that once I reached Parthi, things would somehow work out.

The Bus to Puttaparthi

To continue with my story, the driver took me to the Interstate Bus Stand and most kindly put me on the bus to Puttaparthi. Many in the bus were aghast when they saw my condition. They asked, "What do you mean by traveling with your leg in this horrible condition? Sai Baba is so busy. Do you think He will have time for you and your problem?" I simply replied, "With all the problems and the uncertainties, I prefer to go to Puttaparthi than staying at home. I have infinite faith in Sai Baba." The co-passengers were not at all convinced but remained silent thereafter.

The bus reached Puttaparthi and somehow I managed to get out of the bus. I dragged myself to the Accommodation Office. Luckily, they did not notice the condition of my leg and gave me a place in shed number 26. Painfully, I dragged myself to shed 26. The moment they saw me, the inmates there

became both scared and angry. They said, "Listen! You ought to be in the Hospital! What do you mean by coming here?" I did not reply. I simply withdrew to a corner and lay down. Sometime later, I dragged myself to the bathroom, cleaned myself and managed to crawl to Darshan. The pain was unbearable but I did not allow even a gasp to escape my lips.

Suffering In the Shed: A Test of Faith

Days slowly passed – one, two and then three. Meanwhile, not only did the swelling in my legs increase, but more disturbing, a foul odor started emanating from the wound, which obviously had become badly infected. At that time, a North Indian volunteer was in charge of that particular shed. He came to me and said, "Hey you! Your leg is in a pretty bad shape. Tomorrow morning I am going to have you admitted in the hospital here. What do you mean by staying here in this horrible condition? Don't you realize if something were to happen to you it would tarnish Swami's name? So tomorrow you are going out of here to the hospital."

Those words were like daggers to me. Silently I prayed, "Swami, I came here to save my leg but it looks like I am going to lose my leg here instead of losing it in Madras. I will wait till the morning. If the swelling does not come down, somehow I shall drag myself to the Chitravati River and go to an obscure corner. There I shall lie without food and water and allow my life to ebb away. I am determined to do this."

The Turning Point

Thinking and resolving thus, I dozed off to sleep. It looks like Swami heard me. He probably said to Himself, "This mad fellow is even capable of doing exactly what he says." Around 3:30 a.m. I woke up. People were already up and there was quite a bit of activity. I looked at my leg; and miracle of miracles, the swelling had come down by half. I managed to go to the Volunteer in Charge and said, "Please take a look at my leg." He did and was stunned. He murmured, "How is this possible?" He then asked me, "Did you apply any medicine?" I said, "No, I applied only vibhuti."

The man was shaking his head. He muttered, "I have seen many people come here. When they become sick, they go to the hospital. I have never seen anything like this. Oh yes, I have read about such things happening, but actually seeing something like this? Never! I am amazed. But wait a minute. This decrease in swelling might just be temporary. It is quite possible that tomorrow it might go up again and even become worse." However, despite his doubts, he allowed me to stay in the shed and did not send me off to the hospital.

Witness to a Miracle

I dragged myself to Darshan. I saw Swami from a distance; that is all. The next day, the swelling came down even further. By the fifth day or so, the leg was normal. The Volunteer in Charge was a constant witness and was amazed by the dramatic turn of events. He then began to ply me with a lot of

questions and I told him of my numerous experiences. I said to him, “If I am alive today, it is entirely because of Swami. He never lets down those who have full faith in Him. It is very easy to earn Swami’s Grace. All that is required is total purity of thought, word and deed.” The man heard all this and asked, “Do you mean to say it is really all that simple?” I smiled and replied, “Well, why don’t you give it a try?”

Home at Last by Swami’s Grace

That evening, I went back to Madras. Meanwhile, my sons had found out what had happened and had a big fight with the auto rickshaw driver. They feared that in my move to save my leg I might have lost my life itself. There was a lot of chaos there when I landed, quite understandably. They gazed at me in shocked surprise and when they recovered, they asked, “What happened? Did Sai Baba talk to you?” I replied, “No, Swami was busy, and I was busy too in my own way, being absorbed in Him. Our job is to have total and unconditional faith in Him and His job is to shower Grace on us.”

The last several months, we have been carrying English translations of the transcripts of video recordings made last year during Mr. Krishnan’s visit to our studio. Mr. Krishnan spoke in his native language Tamil. The narration was then translated into English, entered into a computer and processed for publication in H2H. We hope you enjoyed this series.

While this installment brings to a close the present series by Mr. Krishnan, we assure our readers that we have many such recordings in our archives and when we have the resources to prepare them for publication, we shall, without fail, help you to share the thrilling experiences of devotees who have generously shared their memories with us. Thank you for joining us in this series. Jai Sai Ram.

-Heart2Heart Team

GET INSPIRED

COFFEE TALK

A group of prosperous and well-off alumni, all of them highly established in their respective careers, decided to pay a visit on their favorite former university professor. It was a happy reunion for all, with much laughter, good cheer and feelings of camaraderie as the first few hours of the afternoon were spent recollecting their college years, from their trials and struggles, through their youthful pranks and foolishness, to their ultimate successes. However, after the reminiscing was done and the topic of talk turned to the present, their laughter gradually subsided until it was replaced by a vague gloominess. Complaints about problems at work, in family matters, health issues, financial worries, and other difficulties soon became the central theme of their conversation. When political differences arose, the former feeling of unity and comradeship was lost. What had begun as a celebration of their lives together slowly turned sour. It was at that point that the old professor interrupted the proceedings.

He stood and asked jokingly, "Class, now pay attention. Who among you would like a coffee break?" All present raised their hands. He disappeared into the kitchen and in short order returned with a large steaming pot of coffee and a large assortment of cups – everything from Chinese porcelain, cut crystal, fine glassware, handcrafted ceramics, to plastic and simple old mugs, some expensive and exquisite and others common and plain looking. He told his guests to help themselves to the coffee and let them choose whichever cup they liked.

When everyone was settled with a cup of hot coffee in hand, the professor said: "If you notice, all the fancy and ornate cups were quickly scooped up, leaving behind the simple and ordinary ones. Certainly, it is common for one to choose the finest available for oneself. That is the normal course of things, but it is also the source of the problems and stress you have all been complaining about since our conversation turned to your present situations. All any of you really wanted was to enjoy a good hot cup of coffee, and for that, the cup itself bears no importance at all – anyone without a hole will do the job! – yet each one of you became consumed with having the best cup available and even surreptitiously eyed each other's cups in comparison to your own."

The old professor sat back and enjoyed a sip from a plain simple mug he had chosen. "Now," he went on, "let us propose for the moment that life is coffee, and the jobs, money and position in society deemed so important are the cups. What are they truly? Nothing but tools, implements with which to hold life, but the quality of life, the coffee inside, doesn't change a whit and remains the same no matter the cup selected. Sometimes, by concentrating too much on the cup, and those of others," he smiled, "we fail to fully taste and experience the coffee within it. So don't let the cups drive you and take all your attention...simply enjoy the coffee instead, no matter the container you find it in."

And with that, the old professor toasted them, and sat back and heartily drank his coffee in the same old stained but sturdy mug he had been using for forty odd years now, the one he found for five cents in a used goods store the day he began his career as a teacher.

Swami has often emphasized that what matters to God is quality, not quantity. And what is the true quality of every human being? He says, **“There is no nobler quality in the world than love. It is wisdom. It is righteousness. It is wealth. It is Truth.”** It is love alone which can bring unity in this world of apparent diversity.

-Heart2Heart Team

THE HOLY SHADOW

There once lived a man so godly that even the angels rejoiced at the sight of him. But, in spite of his great holiness, he had no notion that he was holy. He just went about his humdrum tasks diffusing goodness the way flowers unselfconsciously diffuse their fragrance and street-lamps their glow.

His holiness lay in this that he forgot each person's past and looked at them as they were now, and he looked beyond each person's appearance to the very centre of their being where they were innocent and blameless and too ignorant to know what they were doing. Thus he loved and forgave everyone he met—and he saw nothing extraordinary in this for it was the result of his way of looking at people.

One day an angel said to him, "I have been sent to you by God. Ask for anything you wish and it will be given to you. Would you wish to have the gift of healing?" "No," said the man, "I'd rather God did the healing himself." "Would you want to bring sinners back to the path of righteousness?" "No," he said, "it is not for me to touch human hearts. That is the work of angels." "Would you like to be such a model of virtue that people will be drawn to imitate you?" "No," said the saint, "for that would make me the centre of attention."

"What then do you wish for?" asked the angel. "The grace of God," was the man's reply. "Having that, I have all I desire." "No, you must ask for some miracle," said the angel, "or one will be forced on you." "Well, then I shall ask for this: let good be done through me without my being aware of it."

So it was decreed that the holy man's shadow would be endowed with healing properties whenever it fell behind him. So everywhere his shadow fell—provided he had his back to it—the sick were healed, the land became fertile, fountains sprang to life and colour returned to the faces of those who were weighed down by life's sorrow.

But the saint knew nothing of this because the attention of people was so centred on the shadow that they forgot about the man and so his wish that good be done through him and he forgotten was abundantly fulfilled.

There is no limit to what a person can achieve if he does not want the credits. Humility and egoless ness, Swami says, are the hallmark of true education.

-Heart2Heart Team

TEACH HIM.....

Dear reader, on the 3rd of September, we had a special Sunday Special article called "An Amazing appreciation of a Basic Truth" for all our Sai Inspires Subscribers. We received many positive responses for that article and we are grateful for that. However, we wish to bring to your attention one interesting response from a reader by name N Sekar who said,

"This with reference to the Sunday article dated 3rd September. It is quite interesting to see the parallel between what the great leaders said and Swami's teachings. Thank you for the great article. I would like to share with you the letter written by Mr. Abraham Lincoln to the Head master of a School where his son was studying. Truly, amazing. You may like to share with other readers at an appropriate time."

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States of America (1861-1865) was one of the world's greatest statesmen, and this letter is so typical of a man who bore malice towards none and charity for all. This is the inspiring letter that he wrote to the headmaster of his son's school:

"He will have to learn. I know that all men are not just, all men are not true. But teach him also that for every scoundrel there is a hero; that for every selfish politician, there is a dedicated leader...

Teach him that for every enemy there is a friend. It will take time, I know; but teach him, if you can, that a dollar earned is of far more value than five spent...Teach him to learn to lose and also enjoy winning. Steer him away from envy, if you can. Teach him the secret of quiet laughter. Let him learn early that the bullies are the easiest to lick... Teach him, if you can, the wonder of books... but also give him quiet time to ponder over the eternal mystery of birds in the sky, bees in the sun, and flowers on a green hill-side.

In school teach him it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat...Teach him to have faith in his own ideas, even if everyone tells him they are wrong... Teach him to be gentle with the gentle people and tough with the tough. Try to give my son the strength not to follow the crowd when everyone is getting on the bandwagon. Teach him to listen to all men but also teach him to filter all he hears on a screen of truth and take only the good that comes through.

Teach him, if you can, how to laugh when he is sad...Teach him there is no shame in tears. Teach him to scoff at cynics and to be beware of too much sweetness. Teach him to sell his brawn and brain to the highest bidders; but never to put a price tag on his heart and soul. Teach him to close his ears to a howling mob... and to stand and fight if he thinks he's right.

Treat him gently; but do not cuddle him because only the test of fire makes fine steel. Let him have the courage to always have sublime faith in himself because then he will have sublime faith in mankind. This is a big order; but see that you can do... He is such a fine little fellow, my son."

-Heart2Heart Team

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

Multi-Faith Quiz

1. On 20th October 1940, a golden collar pin that had been presented to Swami was lost after a visit to the temple at Hampi. What did Swami say was the significance of this event?

- a. That all worldly ties had been extinguished.
- b. That we should not wear gold ornaments.
- c. That one should never offer such items to Swami.
- d. That the money used on the pin should have been spent on feeding the poor.

2. In Sikhism, what does the Akhand Path refer to?

- a. The singing of Bhajans for 24 hours.
- b. It means the equivalent of the words 'Sanathana Dharma'.
- c. The reading of the Guru Granth Sahib from beginning to end.
- d. A particular sect within Sikhism.

3. In the Mahabharata what did the Pandavas decide to do after the passing away of Lord Krishna?

- a. To retire to the forest and spend time in meditation and austerities.
- b. To give away their kingdom and all their riches to the poor.
- c. To vow to walk on until their bodies dropped dead.
- d. To build a samadhi temple to Lord Krishna.

4. In the Koran, where do we find the important verse of 'Al-Fatiha'?

- a. At the beginning.
- b. At the end.
- c. In the middle.
- d. At the beginning and end.

5. What does Swami advise us to do when we are angry?

- a. Express it, as we should not suppress our emotions.
- b. Avoid the anger through various means.
- c. Express it sometimes, suppress it sometimes.
- d. Shout out aloud, if need be and let the pent up energy go.

6. Who was the founding father of the Jewish nation?

- a. Moses
- b. Ishmael
- c. Israel
- d. Abraham

7. What does Swami say is the spiritual significance of the word 'diamond'?

- a. That we should end our desire-filled mind.
- b. That we should be hard as diamonds.
- c. That we must shine like a diamond.
- d. That we must reform ourselves, as a diamond is cut and chiseled.

8. What was the name of the disciple who betrayed Jesus to the Roman soldiers?

- a. Jonathan
- b. Peter
- c. Judas
- d. Judah

9. Once Swami went as a young boy to the Hanuman temple in Puttaparthi, with some other children. The boys started to circumambulate the temple but Swami was reluctant to join them until persuaded to by the boys. What happened next?

- a. A storm arose and they had to seek shelter inside the temple.
- b. Hanuman appeared and stopped Swami from going around the temple.
- c. The boys saw Hanuman standing in the place of Swami.
- d. Swami encouraged the children to sing bhajans vigorously as they went around the temple.

10. What is the name of the place where the Buddha attained enlightenment?

- a. Lumbini
- b. Kathmandu
- c. Lucknow
- d. Bodhgaya

ANSWERS

1A

Swami tells us about the event's significance as follows:

'That day was the day of change. The link with worldly ties had gone in the form of the pin; the pilgrimage to Hampi also served its purpose. Baba left home saying that Maya could not bind Him any longer... They questioned Me, "What do You want? Is it the pin or God?" I told them, "I don't need a pin. I can get any number of pins, for everything is in My hand. Then, do you think that I am searching for God? He is everywhere. I don't need to search for Him."

2C

This is the non-stop, cover to cover reading of Sri Guru Granth Sahib which is undertaken to commemorate special occasions and takes approximately 48 hours.

3C

Swami recounts this event as follows:

'The Pandavas stuck to the vow of *Mahaprasthanam*. That vow required that they should not eat or drink anything on the way, they should not rest, they must proceed straight on, in the northern direction, until they fell dead. This is the vow they observed, so grim and tight... The Pandavas were journeying along with their eyes fixed straight ahead, awaiting the moment when their bodies will collapse out of sheer exhaustion and death finishes their earthly career. Their hearts were filled with emotions centering around Krishna, His play and pranks,

His Grace and Glory... The Pandavas, too, walked on in staunch discipline and met their separate ends at the times and places in which each had to shed his body. The body became dust, but the soul merged in Krishna. They attained immortality, losing themselves in the immortal essence of Krishna."

(extracted from Bhagavatha Vahini, chapters 14 and 15)

4A

This is the opening chapter of the Holy Koran and is said to be an embodiment of the entire scripture. This is the customary invocation used in Islamic ceremonies of all kinds, and it forms a true prayer, occupying somewhat the same place in Islam as the Lord's prayer does with Christians. It comprises of seven verses, an English translation of which follows:

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, and ever Merciful.

All Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds,

Most Gracious, Ever Merciful,

Master of the Day of Judgement.

You alone do we worship and You alone do we implore for help.

Guide us on the right path;

The path of those on whom you have bestowed Your blessings, those who have not incurred Your displeasure and who have not gone astray.

5B

'The easiest way to control anger is this: the moment you become aware that anger is arising in you, just laugh very loudly. Or go to the bathroom and have a cool bath. You can also take a glass of cool water and relax in a cool place. The moment anger comes it is helpful to leave the place where you are and go somewhere else...(also) stand in front of the mirror and examine your face; after seeing your appearance you will feel so much disgust that at once you will be able to control your anger.' *Divine Discourse 21st Oct 2003*

6D

The answer is, Abraham, which means 'father of many nations'. The relevant passage can be found in the Jewish Torah in the book of Genesis chapter 17: 'When Abram (his earlier name) was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.'"

7A

Swami relates the word diamond to 'die-mind' as follows:

'When desires go one by one there is die-mind. Then there is peace of mind.'

8C

We find an account of the betrayal of Jesus in the Bible as follows:

'While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for."

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.' (*The Bible, Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26 v47-56*)

9B

Swami recounts this event as follows:

'Thus, when they were pressurizing Me so lovingly, I could not say no. I, therefore, started doing circumambulation to the Anjaneya Temple, along with them. Believe it or not! A big monkey suddenly appeared from nowhere and stood in front of Me, obstructing My way. The children around Me wondered "We did not see such a big monkey in this village, so far! From where did it come!" They tried their best to drive it away; but it did not move. Who was that monkey! It was Hanuman, the servant of Lord Rama, verily! They did not realise this Truth. Hanuman himself had come in the form of that monkey and prayed "Swami! I am the one who had to do circumambulation to You. You should not do it for me." Accordingly, I informed the children "Hanuman did not like My circumambulation to him. Hence, I will give it up." (*His Story As Told By Himself*)

10D

The Buddha attained enlightenment while meditating under a bodhi tree. This place then became a place of veneration for followers of the Buddha and later Emperor Asoka built the Mahabodhi Temple that now stands at the site. The present bodhi tree is not the original one which the Buddha sat under, but probably a direct descendant of it. Bodhgaya is located in the state of Bihar, India.

-Heart2Heart Team

THE HEALING TOUCH

WHERE LOVE IS THE THERAPY..... AND FAITH IS THE REMEDY

“How many cases for tomorrow, sir?” asked the Technical Officer while working on a presentation at his notebook computer. Dr. Anil Kumar opened the preoperative ward register. “Well, since it is a Saturday, we could have only two pumps with the academic sessions.” “Alright, sir, but nothing serious, I hope.”

“No, just straight forward pumps” [surgeries involving the heart/lung machine] “but actually,” the Doctor continued, “we have a really good case in the ward, a coronary” [a generic term for a patient with blocked heart arteries]. The officer raised his hand in mock protest “But not for tomorrow, for Monday.” The officer relaxed and continued working on the presentation. Dr. Kumar focused on the Operation Theater List for the next few days. He had to draw a balance between resource and operation, optimizing the former to maximize the latter. Silence reigned as they worked.

The Hospital for One and All

“What do you think makes people come here, sir?” the Technical Officer suddenly asked. Dr. Kumar looked up from his work. The question came out of the blue. The doctor’s eyes glanced over at the photograph of Swami on the wall. “Faith,” he replied, “faith brings people to this temple of healing.”

“How about desperation and penury...free medical care is for those who cannot afford it elsewhere. Circumstances dictate decisions. Like there are occasions when you changed the operating procedure when you found that the pathology was different from what you anticipated.”

“But what if a patient could afford it elsewhere and still wanted to come here for medical care?” the Doctor asked. “Well, sir, our Hospital caters to one and all alike. We make no distinctions. Every patient has an equal opportunity.” The officer paused and then said slowly, “Is that what you mean?” “Correct,” replied Dr. Kumar, leaning back in his chair. “But we come into the picture only *after* the patient comes to us. The decision to come here or go elsewhere is theirs, right?”

“That may be so, sir. But in this world, people feel that nothing comes free, and if it is free, they suspect there is a catch. There are some who say that since we are offering free medical care...” He raised his hands and shrugged. “They feel we compromise, we don’t do quality work.”

“We don’t have to prove anything to anybody,” said Dr. Kumar. “Our work speaks for itself. Five years here and fifteen in Parthi. Look at our record: free service is not only possible, it is *sustainable*,” emphasizing the last word. He picked up a case file. “Look at this patient. A professor of pathology from Orissa. The surprising thing is he can afford to have this surgery done

anywhere and his own Institution will do it for him but he comes here. What brought him here as opposed to the other premier institutions in the country?" The officer nodded his head thoughtfully.

"So," continued Dr. Kumar, "We need to find out more about this professor. His name..." he looked at the register, "is Dr. Radheshyam Hota. Why don't we have a chat with him now?" "It's late, sir." The wall clock said 8:00 p.m. "He'll probably be resting after his dinner." "I'm going to the pre-operative ward now anyway, so join me in five minutes and I'll introduce you and you take over from there," Dr. Kumar instructed while closing the pre-op register with finality.

The cardiac ward, also called the preoperative ward, was full of patients of all ages. The older ones were walking up and down the length of the hall, having a post dinner walk, while others lay back on their beds, reading or talking to their relatives. At the far end of the ward was the "kid's corner" where toys and games for children were kept. It was, naturally, the liveliest part of the ward. What else would you expect from children with nothing to do than to play? Despite being in a hospital, it looked more like playtime at a daycare center. Of course, the parents had their watchful eyes wide open, for these were children not so fortunate as to be "normal."

Life was truly uncertain; at times to the extreme for these children. Sometimes one feels that here are people who are afraid to be happy. What a paradox. To be happy is the very nature of the human spirit and yet one is denied this greatest of joys.

Why do anomalies exist in a perfect world? When God is perfect why is the world imperfect? the officer pondered. "There is not anomaly in creation, it is the anomaly of vision," the words of Sri Sathya Sai Baba echoed in reply.

Vision? What vision? This is reality. How can reality be a vision? "Reality is as real as you want it to be. You are not what you think you are. You are a child of immortality." *Then why is there so much suffering? Why am I blessed to be healthy while there are so many others who are suffering?*

"You are indeed blessed to be healthy, so that you may serve those who are suffering. This body has been gifted to you to serve others and perform your dharma." Questions and answers meandered through the mind of the officer as his eyes took in the sights in the ward.

From the simple-minded to the most erudite, a doctor is in a class of his own, particularly if he holds the key to the well-being of one's loved one; in that case, the respect increases manifold. This feeling was most apparent when the pair, Dr. Kumar and the officer, entered the ward. As if by silent command, the noise in the playpen stopped and the children quickly scrambled onto their beds. Those that were walking about returned to their beds and the ones lying down sat up. There was a hushed feeling of silent respect. The Doctor had come.

Dr Hota – Amazing Faith

“Dr. Radheshyam Hota. Admitted for coronary artery disease, please,” said Dr. Kumar to the sister at the nursing station. Quickly referring to a list on her desk she directed them to the last cubicle on the left of the ward. They traversed the length of the ward and found Dr. Hota seated on his bed reading a magazine.

“Sai Ram, Hota *Saab*,” Dr. Anil Kumar said cheerfully. “Sai Ram, Dr. *Saab*,” came the soft reply. “Your case has been posted for Monday,” said Kumar while opening the case file and scanning the contents. “Can you tell me what brings you here?” Being a medical professional, Dr. Hota summarized his condition starting from the first symptoms of cardiac disease to the present situation in succinct terms. It was impressive to watch two professionals in their individual fields in conference. It was a lesson in clinical detachment. Each knew that the issue was subjective but their entire conversation was objective. No emotional involvement at all. Dr. Hota even took in the risk factor without batting an eyelid. He only smiled and said, “God is there, He will take care.”

“Hota *Saab*, I will leave you now,” said Dr. Kumar at the end of their professional discussion. “One thing that intrigued us was that despite being financially able to have the surgery done in any of the best hospitals in the country, you came here. Why is that?”

Dr. Hota replied unhesitatingly, “This is Swami’s Hospital and I know I will receive the best quality treatment here.” The words rang clear and honest. They had come from a medical professional who had seen the best in the country, who could afford the finest treatment, yet he had chosen to come to Swami’s Hospital because he was convinced that he would receive quality treatment there. Dr. Kumar looked at the officer and nodded. “The officer here would like to know more about you. Spend some time with him, if you don’t mind.” The last few words were to Dr. Hota, who nodded with a smile on his placid face.

The Doctor Relates His Stirring Story

The officer sat down and listened as Dr. Hota began his long story, and it was an interesting one: he was fifty-seven-years-old and hailed from Balangir, 360 kilometers from Bhubaneshwar, the capital city of Orissa. Born to a middle class farming community and part of a large family, Dr. Hota had been educated by his parents to become a doctor. He did his MBBS in 1972 from VSS Medical College in Burla, Orissa, and his MD in Pathology and Bacteriology in 1980 from the same college.

He was married with one son planning to join TCS after completing his engineering in electronics. A doctor and a professor in pathology, he worked in various hospitals in Orissa during a career spanning three decades and was presently the Blood Bank Officer and Pathology Specialist in Balangir.

Disease is ruthless and doesn't discriminate between the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate. The turning point in Dr. Hota's life came in August, 1994, on the Rakhi Purnima day [a festival day] when he was posted as the Blood Bank Officer in Balangir.

He had a heart attack. Dr. Hota was diagnosed with a 99% block in the LAD. [Left Anterior Descending, an artery supplying blood to the heart.] The clinical diagnosis read as the first anterior wall MI [Class II Ischemic heart disease]. Final diagnosis was: CAD – S/P AWMi: Coronary Artery Disease, blocks in the arteries supplying blood to the heart, Anterior Wall Myocardial Infarct. When the upper surface of the heart does not receive sufficient blood for a long period of time it stops beating. When it stops, it is a heart attack. Dr. Hota narrated what happened that day. "I was urgently summoned to the hospital to issue blood to a patient. I issued the blood and was about to return home when suddenly I developed severe chest pains. The Medicine Specialist prescribed some medication but the pain did not abate. An important function was to be held over the next few days in which the Governor was to preside and since protocol demanded my presence as the Blood Bank Officer, I wanted to be fit enough to attend the function."

"I immediately went to a reputed medical college where the doctor refused to see me as it was not an out-patient day. I was quite taken aback by his attitude." The doctor, instead of treating him, referred him to the Emergency Department. "I was desperately waiting for medical attention at Emergency when I had a myocardial infarction [heart-attack]. Thankfully, another doctor arrived and I was promptly given streptokinase and hospitalized for three weeks."

It seemed as if Dr. Hota's immense faith in Swami pulled him through this rough patch. During the time he was hospitalized one of his colleagues brought him vibhuti from both Shirdi and Parthi. He always kept some vibhuti materialized by Swami close by. During this time he recalled a dream Baba blessed him with when He came in the form of Krishna and took him away from his home and led him into a house where bhajans were being conducted. To him it appeared as if Swami was carrying him away from the pain to a place where there is eternal peace and happiness.

After a three-month rest period, Dr. Hota reported for duty. He was advised by the doctors to undergo a coronary angiogram, or CAG, a process where a long catheter is put all the way up to the heart and a radioactive dye is introduced to diagnose the blocks in the blood flow path in the coronary arteries. In those days Orissa was very backward in medical infrastructure and lacked facilities for performing a CAG. Dr. Hota was referred to a private hospital in Hyderabad. Very soon, he left for Hyderabad and was admitted in the hospital. The angiogram done there indicated a 99% block in the Left Anterior Descending artery – the main supply to the left side of the heart – and found 20-30% blockages in other arteries. The doctors told him his condition was serious and advised him to come back within seven days for an angioplasty. They estimated the surgery would cost him Rs. 1.6 lakhs.

“Though being a doctor, I wasn’t very comfortable with my fellow doctors’ diagnosis. I didn’t want to rush in for the angioplasty. I needed a second opinion, and where else can we turn but to Swami.” Dr. Hota’s faith in Swami was so strong that he immediately came to Puttaparthi for consultation with the doctors in Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prashanti Gram, Swami’s first Super Specialty Hospital, inaugurated in 1991.

“During darshan, I got the blessed opportunity to hand over a letter explaining my situation to Swami. The cardiologists at the Hospital went through my angiogram and gave me hope that even with the type of blocks I had, with life-style modifications it would be possible to live a normal life. They assured me that once my turn for angioplasty came, I would be called,” narrated Dr. Hota.

After the fearful prognosis by the private hospitals, the visit to Swami’s institute helped Dr. Hota cope with the situation. He went back home a relieved man. He was certain Swami would take care of him and he would be called when He deemed fit. However, at work it was a difficult period for him. Friends and colleagues ridiculed him for relying on Baba when the private hospital advised immediate surgery. However, Dr. Hota did not buckle under this pressure. He continued to do Swami’s work with his usual gusto.

Later, during the same year, when Dr. Hota got a call from the Hospital, it appeared that his faith paid off and in 1995 a PTCA [Percutaneous Transluminal Coronary Angioplasty – a procedure in which the arteries are dilated using an inflatable balloon threaded into the artery] was performed on him. He was discharged post-procedure in a healthy state and continued his customary life with some diet restrictions.

Since 2002, Dr. Hota had been coming to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Bangalore, for his regular checkups. In April this year, during a routine TMT test, Dr. Hota came up with a positive result.

An angiogram was subsequently done, which showed multiple blocks in the LAD and other arteries. The doctors decided that he would need to undergo a coronary artery by-pass surgery. In early July, Dr. Hota was admitted to the pre-operative ward. Just before his surgery, he sent a letter to Swami. Sure enough, the surgery went off smoothly, under the expert guidance of Dr. Anil Kumar Mulpur, HOD, CTVS Department. After an uneventful recovery and a successful discharge, Dr. Hota is back at his work as before.

Golden Chances in the Good Olden Days

Unlike many other patients who come to the Hospital first and only then hear about Him, Swami had entered Dr. Hota’s life many years ago, before the temples of healing came into existence. He was a long-time devotee and an active worker in the Sai movement in Orissa. “I heard about Swami in 1975 when I was posted in a remote part of Orissa. Having heard of Him, I first came to Parthi to participate in the 50th Birthday celebrations,” recalled Dr. Hota. “I vividly remember Swami giving the first aerial darshan in a helicopter that year. Since then I’ve been coming to Baba almost once a year or every

other year. I've been very fortunate to have had close physical interaction with Him in those good old days, when access to Him was much easier."

"One of my cherished interactions dates back to 1976, when I had an intense but subtle desire of obtaining the Divine touch. It was when the Easwaramma High School was being constructed. One day when Swami had gone to see the progress, I followed Him to the site. After Swami went around, He came and sat in the car. During those days, access to Swami was so close.

I was standing very near to the car, with my hands folded in prayer. Suddenly, Swami opened the door, got out of the car, and then caressed my shoulders and gave me padnamaskar. He spoke to me in Telugu, which I couldn't quite understand. This incident was my most thrilling experience."

Dr. Hota's job in the Government hospitals ensured that he was constantly on the move and at each place he would take active part in the Sai activities. He served the Sai Organisation in various capacities, as a Convener of the Bhajan Mandali, as a Sevalal Convener, and later on as the District President of the Sai Samitis in Sambalpur, Bolangir, and Gajapati districts of Orissa.

"I also attended a number of World Conferences, and sevalal conferences at Puttaparthi. In 1984, I attended the large-scale medical camp conducted in over 100 villages around Puttaparthi on the eve of the Birthday celebrations that year. These medical camps were generally conducted under the guidance of Dr. Bapi Raju and they used to be inaugurated by Swami in the Poornachandra Auditorium. It was during these times that Baba distributed thermometers to the doctors," he said, remembering the special times he had with Baba.

One of the cherished moments in his life occurred during this period, when Swami, after a medical camp, gifted him a Parker pen with the advice, "Write your prescriptions with this pen," and blessed the doctors with a group photograph which Dr. Hota still preserves. Dr. Hota said:

"The beautiful thing is that a few weeks earlier Swami had come in my dream and had given me a box, which when opened had the pictures of Shirdi Sai and Parthi Sai on the inside. I was so moved to find that when I saw the Parker pen case, I was seeing again the same box from my dream."

During his three and a half decades of medical service in Orissa, Dr. Hota organized numerous medical camps and created awareness about Swami. He even authored a few books such as 'First Aid, a Health Guide for the Active Worker' and also a book in Oriya, *Pilanka Swasthya*, or *Children's Health*.

Where Love Is The Therapy....

"Paropakaaartham idam shareeram" ... "This body is for the service of others," say the Upanishads. Swami has said many times, "You do My work and I will do yours, and My work is to serve your fellowman. Help ever hurt

never, Love all, Serve all.” The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences embodies this spirit of selfless service. Dr. Hota has lived a full life, performing admirably well in every role destiny has granted him. His opinion about the Hospital is reflected in his words:

“All the staff working at Swami's Hospital are so lucky to have received the grace of Swami. I am so very obliged to everyone at the Hospital who has taken care of me. This experience has further reinforced my faith in Swami and I shall endeavor to engage myself in Swami's work with full vigor from now on.”

“Here is where everyone practices Love as therapy. When the doctor smiles, the patient also smiles. Here is where Divinity is watching everything and taking care of everything. Here is where there is no difference between the rich and the poor and all are welcome, from whichever nationality. Divinity is for everybody and Swami’s Hospitals stand as an example to this truth.”

– Heart2Heart Team

A RARE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING AT THE TEMPLE OF HEALING

The first hand experience of a premed student undergoing internship at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Bangalore

"Many are called but few are chosen," is an aphorism with biblical references. The opportunity of learning from an existing institution that free medical care is both possible and sustainable is open to all. The choice to come and learn is left to the interest and commitment of the individual. People from many walks of life have visited the SSSIHMS both at Prasanthigram and Whitefield and the outcome of consequent interactions has definitely been synergistic.

The requirement for admission into medical schools is changing, especially in the West. Students are asked to get exposed to practical aspects in hospitals before embarking on a medical career. The making of a doctor requires unique skills and psychological makeup apart from sheer scholastic excellence. One student from the USA, Suraj Yalamuri, visited SSSIHMS Whitefield on that mission. He observed clinical work and participated in research. He also helped in preparing a presentation and participated in the symposium "Spirituality and Sai Health Mission." This is his story in his own words.

Suraj Yalamuri Narrates His Story - The Preparation

Over the last few years the number of students applying to medical schools has been on the rise. To choose from this sea of well-qualified applicants, school committees are increasingly relying on extracurricular activities. In a recent Kaplan article [Kaplan University, USA], it mentioned the most sought after extracurricular activity was clinical experience. The article said:

While not an official requirement, it's become increasingly difficult to get into a top med school without clinical experience. Whereas applicants were once asked, "Do you have any clinical experience?" they're now being told, "Please discuss your clinical experience."

The one phrase I kept hearing from medical applicants and professors was "intent to practice medicine." How would I show the medical colleges I could handle the rigors of training and the resulting profession if I had never been exposed to it? How would I get across my passion for the field? Simply saying, "I want to help people," is not enough. The question becomes, "Why do you want to help people medically?" and "What experience have you had that makes you think so?" So how does one gain clinical experience even before entering medical school?

These questions racked my brain during the summer of 2005. My interest in medicine and my desire to help people began quite early. Coming from a devout Hindu family, we went to temple every Saturday. Outside the temple, there sat a group of disabled beggars and I always borrowed money from my dad and gave it to them. There was one man who sat at the very end. His legs looked normal but he could not walk. I asked my mom why and she simply

said, "I don't know. But I bet a doctor might." Later, as I was putting on my shoes, she said, "You know a doctor is the only person who can *directly* make a difference in someone's life."

This incident inspired my interest in medicine. I remember at my first visit to the optometrist I was fascinated by the model of the eye resting on the reception counter. After coming home, I questioned my dad on how the eye worked. Being an engineer he drew an analogy between the parts of the video camera and those of the eye. I remember staying up past my bedtime learning about the differences and similarities between cameras and eyes. As I went to my room, my dad jokingly mentioned that if he were to replace my eyes with a camera I might not trip over myself and walk properly. Little did I know at the time that in the near future this would become a potential alternative for providing vision to blind people and I would be spending vast amounts of my free time researching the topic.

This initial kernel of interest in medicine developed into a passion. In high school, I took rigorous and Advanced Placement courses to learn the basics of physical and biological sciences to better prepare myself for college. Outside of school, I attended seminars and talks given by visiting scientists and medical doctors to the Portland Metropolitan area. One of my favorite and inspiring lectures was on medical engineering marvels. The topics covered included the artificial heart, artificial blood, and electronic glasses providing vision to blind people. These embodied the application of knowledge and drove my interest into research.

Throughout my junior and senior years in high school, I worked on a research project which resulted in a computer model of the environmental impact of greenhouse gases. The resulting project was awarded second place in the Intel Northwest Science Expo in the field of Chemistry and Environmental Sciences. Even though the project was not directly related to the field of medicine, it provided me with the basics of scientific inquiry and methods I now use regularly in the research lab at the Institute of Neuroscience at the University of Oregon. My research focuses on the synaptic cell adhesion molecule SynCAM and I am characterizing the six different isoforms of this molecule found in the brains of mice.

Having been involved in the technical and research area of biosciences, I was eager to gain clinical experience and have direct interaction with patients. The problem was I did not know what to look for in the profiles of the internships being offered. I made independent research and found programs designed for premedical students at Harvard, Duke, and the Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU).

But what caught my eye was the mention of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS) in India, on the website of AID for India. Besides being a Super Specialty Neurosurgery and Cardiothoracic and Vascular surgery hospital, all the medical care provided to the patient is *absolutely free*. Immediately, I wanted to know more and understand the driving force and mechanism of such a concept. So I set up a self-arranged

medical internship at the hospital through the University of Oregon with help from the chief surgeon, Dr. Anil Kumar Mulpur. I couldn't wait for the summer to arrive!

Interning at SSSIHMS

A first look at the hospital will tell you it is unlike any other. The architecture escapes the normal constraints of a regular hospital. It is neither a steel high-rise building nor a concrete monolith. The first thing you notice is a huge dome and vast expansive lawn. The Hospital looks like a big home. This sense of space is prominent even inside with wide corridors and high ceilings. The building is divided so that half the space is used for the cardiac sciences and the other half for the neuro sciences. The majority of my internship was in the Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery Department.

In the first few weeks I had the privilege of witnessing open-heart surgeries, went on rounds through the ICU and the CCU with resident doctors, and was exposed to many technological marvels that assist doctors in and out of the operating theater. I had the opportunity to follow the course of the patients pre-operatively, intra-operatively, and post-operatively. My most memorable experience was when the chief surgeon asked me to watch one of the surgeries on my first day. He explained the details of the operation, the anatomy of the heart, and the process of circulation during the procedure.

At the beginning of my internship, I spent several days in the Neurology Department with Dr. Suresh. I observed clinical diagnosis of patients and consultations with the doctor. It was enlightening to see how a physician is able to get across the diagnosis to patients who are not well educated and from very poor backgrounds. Dr. Suresh took the time to help the patients understand. I was surprised he was able to speak many Indian languages and always asked the patient what language was best for them. He also explained the details of each case to me and discussed the differences in practicing medicine in the West and in India. As part of my stay at the Neurology Department, I was allowed to see an EEG and an ENMG actively performed on patients. Dr. Suresh clarified how these can be useful diagnostic tools in identifying neurological conditions.

Since my interest lay in the technology that assisted doctors, I was glad to be given a tour of the Radiology Department. Here I saw the MRI, CT scan, X-ray, and ultrasound machines in action. I remember what Dr. Kumar told me my first day: "Gone are the days when the doctor goes around with a stethoscope and a flashlight providing a diagnosis." Technology is being used to provide the best possible care for the patient.

As mentioned, the bulk of my time was spent in Cardiothoracic Surgery. I gained more from this department and interaction with its staff than I did from my volunteer time at local hospitals and reading textbooks. What follows is a brief description of my daily routine.

The Daily Routine

Each morning I checked in with the chief surgeon. He would go over the cases scheduled that day in the theater. If any one was of particular interest, he would go through the details of the procedure. He would explain the normal condition and compare it to that of the patient. He would then show how the surgery would correct the defect. I was then allowed to observe the procedure in the theater.

In the theater I interacted with the operating surgeon and the perfusionist [a trained health professional who runs the heart-lung machine during cardiac surgery]. I learned how the machines in the OT worked and their roles in the surgery. It was enlightening and educational to see the parts of the heart up close. I was privileged to witness a multitude of cases and the types are mentioned in the attached list. After observing a procedure, I would go to the library or on-line to study the theory behind it to obtain a deeper understanding. I was accumulating theoretical knowledge and also able to see the practical application.

Besides watching surgical procedures, Dr. Kumar and I also discussed the clinical research work I was conducting during my stay. The research focused on the post-operative effects of doing the Modified Blalock-Taussig shunt on the left vs. the right side. We were examining the flows in 200 patients.

I was also involved in creating presentations on various topics, both academic and administrative. These presentations helped in my education as I was exposed to new topics and facts regarding metabolic pathways within the body. The administrative presentations expanded my understanding of the profession of a doctor, the duties of a hospital, and how to perform those duties in the best possible manner. In doing these presentations, I read academic journals and books which provided new perspectives on the medical profession and cardiac surgery procedures and drugs.

Dr. Kumar and I did not stop here. Every week he gave me a list of new terms, basic biological pathways, medicines, and theories to study. I learned about Heparin and Protamine, two drugs used during cardiac surgery to control blood clotting. Learning these basic science terms improved my understanding of procedures in the OT and how they benefited the patient.

A Rare Rewarding Experience

Furthermore, during my ten weeks of internship I participated in a clinical research study and wrote an article about an uncommon case that could potentially be published in an academic journal. This is a rare and rewarding experience for a premedical student. To realize that the work you have done could be of value to other scientists and doctors is very gratifying.

At the end of my internship, I walked away with a mountain of knowledge, experience, and memories. However, it is not enough for one person to feel this way. The hospital is unique and has much to offer to someone interested

in medicine. Now my anxious feelings about the practice of medicine have rational answers and I know for certain that I want to enter the field of medicine. I wish other premed students could experience this. I believe almost no other institution has a program as well knit as this one or provides more experience.

For example, in the July 2006 volume of *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery*, an article appeared titled "Attracting Outstanding Students (Premedical and Medical) to a Career in Cardiothoracic Surgery." The article is a summary of John Hopkins University's intersession and summer session programs providing students with medical and clinical research practice in the Cardiothoracic Surgery Department. Over the past four years eighteen premed students have been admitted to the program. The following describes their daily schedule:

Each day began with a cardiothoracic faculty person reviewing the operative cases for the day. Catheterization cines were reviewed for all cardiac cases and critical x-rays, cardiothoracic and magnetic resonance imaging scans were reviewed when appropriate. The students were able to observe the cardiac and thoracic operations each day.

The students attended all clinical and teaching conferences on both of our services. They also met several times during their three-week rotation with members of our cardiac and thoracic faculty. These meetings included several "Recap Sessions" with each of the division chiefs and power-point presentations by faculty members on topics such as thoracic transplantation, ventricular assist devices, congenital cardiac surgery, and the history of cardiothoracic surgery.

The students who participated in the program have been surveyed and report their rotation on [Hopkins'] services was the most rewarding experience they have had in three years of college. In addition, Hopkins also created a summer session program for both premedical and medical students to participate in clinical research. Following is the description of the program:

We have had a total of fourteen medical or premedical students in our laboratory during the past three summers. They have all commented on the unique opportunities they have had to participate in clinical database studies and in the writing of research publications. They also greatly appreciated the opportunity to attend our national cardiothoracic meetings and for a few, the opportunity to present a paper at one of these meetings.

The experience of conducting research is not easily obtainable for a premedical student and it is difficult to gain clinical exposure. Hopkins has created a way to gain experience in both fields. Its success stories require no embellishing. All of the eighteen premedical students are either currently in or have gained admission into competitive medical schools.

Unknowingly, Dr. Kumar and I followed the same outline during my internship. I met with him every morning to discuss the cases in OT for that day. I then saw the procedure. I also attended weekly cardiac audit meetings and was fortunate enough to give a presentation on Homocysteine, an amino acid that is a potential risk factor of cardiovascular disease. In addition, I sat in on teaching conferences where Dr. Kumar gave power point presentations on subjects such as esophageal dilation.

This same format applied to my clinical research. I was given the opportunity to do data bank research and then observe the procedure firsthand. I was even lucky enough to catch up with a patient who had come in for a definitive surgery after having the LMBT. Similar to the students at Hopkins, I was given a chance to potentially publish my work. I am in the process of creating a presentation for the IE3 committee and surgeons' conferences.

“This Hospital Has Lot To Offer....”

Furthermore, the programs at Hopkins are independent and there is strict competition for admission. Therefore, a student may gain clinical exposure without research experience and vice versa. During my internship at SSSIHMS, I was able to do both. The time span of ten weeks was adequate and the pace was just right, without being too hectic to work or too slow as to be dull.

The incorporation of two success stories where students have repeatedly expressed their utmost satisfaction into one comprehensive program is something that has not been done before. I highly recommend this program to students considering medicine as their profession. I hope the Hospital has received at least a fraction of the benefit it has provided me. As said before, this Hospital has a lot to offer to an incoming premedical student in the way of experience. I hope more students can profit from such a program.

- Heart2Heart Team

YOUR SAY

Readers' Responses to the September 2006 issue of H2H

Sairam dear brothers:

I have been wanting to write to congratulate you folks on the multi-faceted articles that are appearing in your columns in recent issues. Only people with real sraddha and bhakti can articulate in such a beautiful manner various articles and present the wonderful photos that appear week after week. Great teamwork. Your coverage of Atirudram and commentaries were outstanding. Sri Y. Arvind's dramatic articles from the hospital sidelines literally takes the reader through an emotional rollercoaster. Prof. Venkatraman's presentation of Chidambaram Krishnan's story is really captivating as well as his interesting articles on the Vedas. We eagerly await the next installment of these stories/articles. Your coverage of Sai news from South America is really an eye-opener for most of the readers. We used to wonder what will happen after Prof. Kasturiji's departure, but Swami always finds the best ones to fill the vacuum! Praying for Swami's continued blessings on all of you and keep up the good work.

Swaminathan Kollengode

Sai Ram,

Dear Heart-to-Heart team,

I am a Kenyan devotee of Baba's of Indian of origin. I would like to commend you guys for the marvelous job you do out there – especially on Sundays! Every morning at work I sneak into my email account to view the enlightening message for the day. Keep it up and well done. I am sure I am not the only one who feels this way, as several times we have received messages that almost answer personal queries in our daily lives. It almost feels like Baba is responding in person!

If possible, can you please find a story or guiding messages on marriage, and adherence to morality and responsibility in marriages? I think this is such an important issue that is overlooked by many; and several youngsters can find some encouragement and Baba's message in these words/stories.

Thank you and Sai Ram,

(Name withheld by request)

[Sairam, we will be having a Sunday special or a feature article on issues more pertinent to the youth in the coming weeks – H2H Team]

Dear Heart2Heart team:

I have just been reading your Sunday message and once again I was struck by the quality of the service you provide for Sai Baba's devotees. As a veteran South African journalist I am constantly impressed by the scope and style of your monthly magazine. I am painfully aware how standards have slipped in my profession and how dross and sensationalism hold sway in many publications. Your journalism, on the other hand, is like a refreshing draught of

spirituality, a tonic for the soul. The Truth rings forth from your words. Thank you. With Swami's blessings, long may you prosper.

Sai Ram,
Roy Christie

Responses To The Cover Story The Athi Rudra Maha YagnamA Powerful Prayer For Universal Peace

Sai Ram,

Just finished reading the cover story on the Yagnam - what an insight into such an amazing unique experience! I wish I was a part of it all! Thank you once again for this enlightening issue of H2H - it keeps me closer to what's happening in the abode of peace. One thing I have realized in the past is that Swami has drawn more and more people closer to him than before. I am increasingly witnessing hundreds of devotees from places like Europe, Africa and South America thronging the ashram to absorb Swami's grace and blessings. What's more amazing is that people I have known before who dismissed Swami as a fake guru have begun to turn to him and his teachings during prayer. This is truly incredible; His message is reaching everyone.

I am actually an undergraduate student in the United States (I am originally from Nepal and have been a devotee since I was 7) and was delighted to see that our library has several books on Swami, by authors such as Murphet and Mazzoleni, and several other Shirdi Sai Books. To think that his teachings have reached this remote part of the US is absolutely incredible. My older brother's faculty advisor is also a devotee. They even went to Bhajans together in a nearby town. I am truly speechless! Swami and his leelas will always bring joy to all of us! Om Sai Ram and thank you for this issue. It has put a smile on my face after a hard and almost disappointing day.

Sagar Adhikary
308 Unit M
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg VA 23186

Sai Ram, Dear Heart to Heart Team,

With reference to: 'The Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam - The Profound Significance Behind The Powerful Sacrifice'. I found the above article both interesting and informative. I feel that such articles and dissertations are very helpful in bringing about a practical understanding of sacred and meaningful spiritual practices in a world lost in materialism.

Richard J Wallis, New Zealand

Dear Heart to Heart,

I loved your cover article today. It is important to try to understand the significance of the rituals that we attend when we see Swami. I was at the yagna and have never experienced such a profound experience. The whole

hall was filled with love and it only seemed to increase with every passing day. Thanks for all your good work. Sai Ram.

Love,
Patricia Graybill,
Atascadero, California

Sairam and Sathakoti Pranams to Thy Lotus Feet,
The cover story on Atirudra Maha Yagnam is as good as the yagnam itself. The photos, participant comments, Swami's quotes all are very inspiring. It covered the significance of such yagnams in simple English that can be understood by everyone. This yagnam once again signifies the selfless nature of Swami in uplifting humanity. I am sure that the powerful vibrations have reached and continue to reach us as well as the entire world and the world will be a much better place after this yagnam. The entire world is indebted to Swami for making such selfless acts that benefit humanity at large. Thanks again to Radio Sai for the hard work done in providing us such coverage.

Sairam and Sathakoti Pranams to Thy Lotus Feet.
Syam Rajasekharuni,
Sydney, Australia

Dear Heart2Heart team,

In answer to your question, "How did you like the cover story about the Yagna?" it was wonderful and inspiring! The computer doesn't see a lot of me, except for some mail for work, but everyday I look forward to reading Swami's message you send me. During the Yagna I was so thankful to be able to follow (from Zandvoort, Holland, on the other side of the world) the beautiful sounds, images and speeches. It often felt like I was truly there. I felt the glow of Baba's divine love, I felt deeply touched in my heart beyond description. This Yagna has worked and still works through all the cells and atoms of the whole living creation, the Lord's Leela. Thank you, Baba, for enabling the world to experience this, for this Supreme Love boost in the divine irrigation system. Thank you Heart2Heart team for all your loving effort and work that is surely felt on this side of the world and I'm sure by many many others.

Sai Ram Greetings,
Kika Keus, Holland

Sairam,
Pranams to the lotus Feet of our Loving God.

I was one among the fortunate people who by our Lord's immense grace could be present for a few days during the Yagna. Your write up really helped me to relive those glorious divine moments and as I read through it I could feel the same blissful feeling running through me which I had during the yagna. I salute and bow my head in reverence to devotees like the old man who picked up waste papers, the people who served sacrificing their physical presence during the Yagna and the great Sardarji who did the "Gurdwara act." The report is a class act, like every act of our God, and kudos to the team for the excellent compilation. Please continue the good work.

Sairam,
P. Sekar

Your beautiful summary of the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam brought me to tears. I was so happy that so many "other parts of me," – brothers and sisters who were in attendance – were so blessed by the ritual. Their blessing is my blessing. And the story of the old man picking up the Prasad wrappers...I will never forget that story. Thank you for giving so much sweet detail about your experiences.

Trish,
Pennsylvania, USA

Responses to the article 'Understanding And Attaining The Supreme Being - The Vedic Way'

Dear Heart2Heart team,

I am in the middle of reading this wonderful article with all the great sound bytes - which are of a really high quality, very clear. It's really brilliant to explain this Vedic verse in such a universal way, and to include music from other religions. Where else can one find something like this?

I also recently purchased a copy of "The Vedic Experience" by Raimundo Panikkar, which I was introduced to from the excellent articles on the Vedas. It is thrilling to have a copy of such a masterpiece and it will surely help me a great deal, personally and probably professionally as well. Dr. Venkataraman expressed some doubt about the interest of the younger generation in the Vedas, but here is one member of the younger generation who is deeply interested in the Vedas, and whose burning interest is greatly fueled by your excellent service. My university classes are not even half as interesting as these articles. Please keep up your world-class work - I am so deeply grateful for it.

Sai Ram,
Ellesha Wanigasekera,
Toronto, Canada

Responses to the article 'Faith Fortitude and the Divine Touch!'

Sairam,

May Baba's blessing always be with you for doing such fantastic work. I read the heart-wrenching story of Pinku and his family. It is really wonderful how Swami is guiding all of us in this sojourn of eternal life. Yes, please do post more medical stories. It really helps to see how people follow and practice Swami's teachings in day-to-day life.

Lalit Mohanty,
USA

Dear Heart to Heart,

This is truly a touching story. I had tears in my eyes, especially reading the part when the mother says, "Whatever has happened so far has happened with the Will of God. And what will happen, will also be His Will. We will make

our efforts to get back to our normal life in our place but now we are sure that there will always be someone somewhere who will help us. Without that our child would not be with us today.”

I have circulated this story to more than 100 of my friends. Nice to have more articles like this as it will kindle the little flame of love and belief in God in the readers.

Love,

K. Ravindran

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Sai Ram,

I was deeply moved by the story in the September issue which speaks about the illness of Pinku and his subsequent recovery after his operation. I literally had tears in my eyes when I read this story. Hats off to Dr. Anil who took up the initiative to do the difficult operation. I really believe there is someone who is looking over us and supervising our actions. At this point I am speechless and unable to express myself any further.

Thanks and regards,

K. Venkatesh

Responses to the Spiritual Quiz

Om Sai Ram to all at Heart2Heart:

Thank you for all your effort to bring us all that we receive via the net. It is a great way for those of us who are so far away to enjoy the moment as if we were at Prashanti and feel spiritually awakened daily. Thank you for the spiritual quiz. I look forward to more in the future. Take care.

My loving Sai Rams to all.

Shamala Naidoo

Kibler Park, South Africa

Response to Radio Sai Programmes

Sai Ram Dear Members of Radio Sai and Heart to Heart,

I wanted to thank you with the utmost gratitude for so faithfully and so beautifully running the Radio Sai program so that we can have Prashanti in our hearts 24/7 on the other side of the world. As a youth growing up in Western society it is very hard to keep our lives in perspective and to keep Bhagavan in our hearts and Radio Sai makes it so much easier for us to do that. Even now as I type there are soul-stirring devotional songs playing on my speakers at home courtesy of Radio Sai – they keep me company during my most difficult times and give me strength and inspiration when I need it. I seriously don't know what I'd do without Radio Sai. Thank you so very much! And may Bhagavan bless you and your program so that it may run for the benefit of all mankind for all eternity!

Jai Sai Ram

Shamini

Responses to Sai Inspires

H2H team,

I must take the time to thank you for your quotes from Swami, and for your helping those of us who cannot travel easily to Prashanti Nilayam to experience His Presence through reports, stories, pictures and radio broadcasts. A few weeks ago I was in deep emotional distress. Although there are many sayings of Swami's that would have some bearing on the issue, the one you printed that day was so perfect ("Consider as unimportant the evil that others do to you...") it could only have been the Lord Himself saving me. I printed it out as a poster and read it over and over until it was memorized. Moreover, the quote the next day was the icing on the cake. Reflecting on those two quotes changed me so much that I was able to act completely differently in the situation. It is hard to remember a time that I have felt so protected and cared for by the Lord. Sai Ram and thank you for this seva.

Rosi

Responses To The Sunday Special On Gratitude

Dear H2H team,

I was cogitating about the difference between a superficial thank you and one that expresses true gratitude. It struck me that the first comes from the lips and the other comes from the heart. There is little doubt that we are vortexes of energy and that we are constantly using this energy to affect the world around us. I am sure that I do not need to remind you of the incredible love energy emanating from Swami when being close in His presence. The first time I had a personal interview with Swami, which was also the first time I had come to India to case out this strange holy man, I was standing in front of Swami and He was asking me a few questions. I felt overwhelmed, not by what He did, not by what He said, but by this extraordinary feeling that prompted me to say to our group leader when I came out of the interview room: "I thought I knew what love was, but I have never experienced love like that." Note that I had practically no preparation for this interview in terms of what to expect.

When we thank from the heart, it has an affect on our expression, our posture and the sound of our voice. It is wonderful to observe the lighting up in people's faces and the change in their attitude as a response to our own behavior. As you may know, even plants respond to our loving vibes, not to mention animals.

In my practice as a psychologist, I constantly direct people on this path of love. It has just occurred to me that I need to instill in them more gratitude.

Thank you!

Om Sai Ram,

Jacqueline Trost

Responses To The Sunday Special 'Why Are We So Desperate About Exceeding The Speed Limit?'

Dear Dr. G. Venkataraman,

Om Sri Sai Ram,

Your H2H Sunday special of 10th August on the fast pace of life was very good. This should be made available for reading at all educational and management institutes and all corporations all over the world. That would hopefully make people pause and look at life from right perspective (sudarsana, right vision).

Jai Sai Ram,
With Love,
Narendra

Responses To The Sunday Special “God, Man, Nature”

Om Sri Sai Ram,
Dear Heart2Heart Team,

I am an Italian teacher of Italian writing and geography and I want to thank you and Swami for the “Sai Inspires” I receive every day. I also receive “The Thought for the Day” from Prashanti Nilayam, and they are very good company in Italy.

About today’s article, “God, Man, Nature,” I think that if we look with attention at the world, we can see the miracle of life: one green tree that grows, one yellow or pink flower with its perfume, a kernel of wheat that gives us our daily bread, the white snow on the mountains, the rain from the clouds, the wonderful rainbow in the sky, the brilliant stars, the fresh moon, and the bright sunshine that nurtures life on our planet. If we defend nature, we defend life and God’s creation at the same time. We don’t always pay attention to this miracle before our eyes because we have other interests and ruin nature without realizing it is God too.

"Swami, Ekatma Sarva Bhutantaratra" – “Help us to understand the mystery and miracle of Your Creation.” Heart2Heart Team: thank you for listening to these simple reflections. I wanted to share my thoughts with you and Swami on this Sunday. Thank you again for your precious company!

With a lot of love
Carla

-Heart2Heart Team

