

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Dear Reader,

A warm, happy and holy New Year to you from our hearts to your heart! On this year, we want to offer you a gift. Yes, a present which will give you the key to fill your 'now and forever' with perennial bliss, a happiness which can never diminish and can only enrich your being to make it beautiful and joyous. Imagine your life filled with love every moment! Everywhere you turn you see only goodness, happiness and beauty. It is a love that is unparalleled, so pristine and so powerfully perennial. It is a love, it seems, which is the source of all other happiness in this world. It is a love without conditions and constraints. It is constant and abundant. It is beatific and bliss-inducing. It is divine, you feel it. We want to open the door for this 'wealth of enduring bliss' for you this year. And how? Through a fascinating elephant.

Yes, we have been preparing for months to give you this gift and we are happy it is time. It is rather amusing, you might think, that we decided to begin our calendar of cover stories on the life of an animal. But when you finish reading the story, we are sure you will say, "There was no other better way we could have begun this year." For, what is a new year without love? If anybody ever wants to know what true love is and how it is practical, possible, powerful, and rewarding-beyond-measure, then all one has to do is look at the life of Sai Geetha. In her more than four decades of sojourn on earth what this beloved pet of the Lord has demonstrated to mankind is what is contained in the four Vedas and what man has been trying to perfect in more than four billion years of existence on this planet.

Just a week ago, in His divine discourse on Christmas Day, Swami, recalling His visit to East Africa and the African Safari, said, "The animals also have desires like human beings. But, their love towards us was unparalleled. By the time we reached the shore of that lake, we could see big herds of elephants moving about in herds. The African elephants have enormous fan-like ears. The wind caused by a wisp of their ears was enough to make people fall down. I went into their midst in a car. On seeing Me sitting in the car, they raised their trunks in veneration and paid obeisance to Me. The noble qualities in those wild animals are not to be found even in human beings."

Yes, the virtues that animals display is many a times sadly missing in humans. It is a common experience how animals love their owners with their heart and life. We know of dogs and cats who act as 'dearest friends', 'protective guards', 'reliable aids', 'caring partners', etc., who would sacrifice their lives for their owners; but have you heard of any animal, except from the scriptures, that has inspired thousands of minds and led them to their goal of everlasting happiness? Is there any animal which has put a multitude on the God-ward path and continues to do so? What the mute Sai Geetha has taught mankind is something which 'evolved souls' after decades of contemplation and then many more years of spiritual instruction could not communicate to their pupils so succinctly and convincingly. Sai Geetha symbolizes the

pinnacle of devotion that a devotee can aspire for. For more than forty years, her life is an example for every serious spiritual aspirant. It is no wonder Swami had christened her this way back in the early nineteen sixties. Truly, her life is a celestial song of love, that is and will continue to light the lives of millions just like the sacred Bhagavad Gita does, five thousand years after Lord Krishna revealed it to Arjuna. The Gita is 'Righteousness and Divine Love explained', while Sai Geetha is 'Divine Love Demonstrated and live-in-action'. And on the New Year we wanted to talk only about love, nothing else.

In fact, other than love, nothing is. Think about any question pertaining to creation, mystery and philosophy or life, music and science, love will be able to provide an answer, because, that is what man and the whole cosmos is based on, whether we realize it or not. There is this tremendous inner power in us waiting to be unlocked. And how do we harness this? Dr. Samuel Sandweiss, author of many widely read books on Swami, explains this to us in an enlightening article in the Swami and Me section. In the same section, you have more examples of 'pure love exemplified' when you read Ms. Deepti Bhagya's account of her experiments with divine love and also the revealing experiences of Air Marshall N. C. Suri.

True happiness in the New Year can come, Swami said on Jan 1, 1998, when "you redeem your lives practicing divine love." But how do we practice divine love? Prof. Venkataraman explains this, relating it, most beneficially, to the modern society and its sometimes debilitating dynamics in a special article entitled "Can a New Year Bring True Happiness?" This will answer many pondering questions of your mind, we are sure.

Happiness, they say, is doubled when shared, while sorrow, when shared, is halved. So let's magnify our joys this New Year. Let's exalt His name and exult in ecstasy, because we are blessed just by our existence on this planet at this point in time. We are able to see God, be in His presence and experience the purest form of love. Let's share this and light every heart till the whole world becomes one mighty conflagration of unsullied, unified and purifying love – a force that is as mighty as the Lord Himself.

On this New Year, let all beings everywhere be happy!

Ever in His service,
H2H Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Man's Life-Force

As we herald the New Year with gaiety and delight, let's recapitulate the illuminating message of Bhagavan given on this occasion more than two decades ago, in 1994.

Embodiments of love! *Brahman* (the supreme self) is full of love and, in fact, is the embodiment of love. Your love should merge with this love. It is the only one and there is no second; it is the non-dual state. The essential nature of love is sacrifice. Under any circumstance it does not give room for hatred. It is love that brings even a person far away closer and more intimate to you. It is love that drives away the feeling of separateness and promotes the feeling of oneness. Love also raises a person from the animal to the human. *Prema* (Love) is the *Praana* (Life-Force) of man; in fact, this *Praana* itself is *Prema*. One without love is like a corpse. Love is shown only to persons who are alive. No one loves a corpse. Love and life are therefore inter-related and intimately connected.

Three Chief Characteristics of Divine Love

In this worldly life, love manifests in several forms such as the love between mother and son, husband and wife, and between relatives. This love, based on physical relationships, arises out of selfish motives and self-interest. But the love of the Divine is devoid of any trace of self-interest. It is love for the sake of love alone. This is called *Bhakti* (devotion). One characteristic of this love is to give and not to receive. Secondly, love knows no fear. Thirdly, it is only for love's sake and not for selfish motive. All these three angles of love jointly connote *Prapatthi* (Surrender). When one revels in this attitude of *Prapatthi*, one experiences the bliss of the Divine. For this, the prime requisite is *Kshama* (forgiveness).

Only a person who has this attitude of forgiveness can be considered to be endowed with sacred love. This cannot be learned from textbooks; nor can it be acquired from preceptors, or from anyone else. It is to be cultivated by oneself in times of difficulties, trials and tribulations that one is forced to meet. Only when we face problems and difficulties that cause grief and misery, this quality of forbearance and forgiveness has the scope for taking root. When you are confronted with problems and difficulties, you should not get upset, and become victims of depression, which is a sign of weakness. You should bring tolerance and an attitude of forgiveness into play; and not get agitated giving rise to anger, hatred and revengeful attitude. You are embodiments of strength and not weakness. Therefore, in times of despair, you should be filled with the feeling of forbearance and be ready to forgive and forget. This quality of forgiveness is the greatest power for a human being. If one loses this quality, he becomes demonic. Forgiveness is Truth. It is Virtue, Non-Violence, Sacrifice, Happiness and Compassion. It is everything in this world.

Shine with Human Quality

The moment one gives up this great quality, the evil qualities of anger, hatred and jealousy creep in, making him lose his human nature itself, driving him to indulge in wicked deeds and even descend to animal nature. Human beings should shine with human quality.

...Happiness and sorrow have to be experienced in the worldly life as they are inevitable like the sunset and sunrise. You think New Year will give better experiences. It is not correct. It is the mind that is responsible for pleasure and pain. If your mind is good you will find anything good. You are embodiments of the Divine, which is nothing but bliss. While being so, is it not a folly on your part to say that you are suffering from pain and grieve over this?

God – Your True Friend

When devotees pray to Bhagavan sincerely making all their actions as offering to God, they will certainly receive appropriate grace from the Divine...Keeping God as your guide and saviour, whatever work you may do will yield sure success. God is your only true friend. All other friends may be with you as long as you have wealth, but the moment you lose everything, the friends will desert you. God is only friend who will be ever with you. He is always with you, in you and beside you. Therefore, the only way for prosperity is to develop friendship with the Lord. Being a human, you should make others happy. This is love.

Your heart is full of love. You should share it with others. When you have some edible dish, you have to eat it and serve to others. Otherwise, it gets spoiled. You must share your love with at least five persons per day. You should practise, experience and share with others this Divine Love.

Your New Year Resolve...

On this New Year day, you should make resolve that you will start every day with love, spend the day with love, fill the day with love, and end the day with love. There should be no difference of caste, creed, colour, religion or nationality. Love knows no distinction of any kind. You must wish everyone to be happy. Fill the heart with love. Then the country and the world will prosper, and everyone will be happy.

- Divine Discourse, 1st Jan 1994.

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI - Part 28

(Continued from the last issue)

(Hislop and an interpreter were having breakfast with Swami. Two men, Mr. XY and Mr. CD, entered the room, and Mr. XY fell at Swami's feet. He was in tears, and it was obvious that some grave and sad errand had brought him to Swami. Hislop and his companion immediately left the room. Shortly, the two men left and Baba called Hislop and the companion into His presence again. Names of persons have been changed so as not to disclose identities).

THE REAL RELATIVE

SAI: The case of Sri XY will illustrate how Swami takes care of His devotees. When Sai's mother died, the summer course was on. Sai sent the body to Puttaparthi, but did not accompany it. His duty was the summer course. At the XY house, there were only the women and the body of Mrs. XY. Nobody to take care. Not even a priest to chant the required Vedic hymns. Swami drove directly from Prasanthi Nilayam to the XY house taking a Vedic priest from the ashram in the car with Him. Swami comforted the women and made all the needed arrangements before driving on to Brindavan. Then He sent a senior man from the Brindavan household to the house so that the ladies would not be alone in the house overnight. Sai is the close and the real relative of His devotees. The ladies of the XY household left their sorrow and all became happy with Sai's shower of grace.

H: Swami was not told, but somehow He must have known when the lady died?

SAI: Swami knew well before the time of her death. He made all the necessary arrangements at that time, even sending a special message to Hislop on Tuesday the 16th that the college celebration would not be held on the 25th, but not to tell the students. Mrs. XY was born on a full moon day and she died on a full moon day.

SWAMI ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS

H: Why did she die? Was it that her time to die had arrived?

SAI: Her time to die arrived several years ago. But she prayed to Swami that before she died she wanted to see her grandson married, and she wanted to witness the celebration of Swami's birthday. Swami granted her prayer. She also had a third desire, although she did not mention it. She had the desire that prior to her death she would spend some days with her youngest son.

When she was at Prasanthi Nilayam in November, she said to Swami that her grandson had married and that she was now witnessing Swami's birthday celebration and that she was now content to die anytime. Her major desires in the life had all been fulfilled. Swami replied that if she died now, her husband, who was abroad, would not be here. She said that Swami was here and that she was holding to Him and to nobody else. Swami told her that she should go to the city of her youngest son and visit him for some days, and she did so.

On Dec. 18th, she was to return to her own home because her husband would arrive home from his trip abroad on Dec. 19th. On the 18th her son was driving her to the airport and she was talking to him from the back seat of the car. Then, there was no further talk from her. She became silent. The son turned to look and saw her fallen on her side. She was gone.

H: Without any pain?

SAI: No pain, no suffering. She was in good health and was gone in an instant. The son turned the car and returned home. Had the mother died at the airport, the body would have been impounded. The son turned the car around on the highway and immediately drove home. When he got to his house there was a phone call from Baba waiting for him. Baba had instructed one of the Ashram officials to place the phone call with the message to 'send the body at once to your father's house'. The Ashram official was puzzled at the message, since he knew nothing about 'a body.'

Swami then phoned Mr. CD, the man who just now brought Mr. XY to Swami, and had him fly to Bombay to meet Mr. XY at the airport and bring him to Brindavan. That was the occasion that you just now witnessed. Mr. CD was not to tell XY about the death of his wife until such time as they were just about to arrive here. When you saw XY, he was overcome by the sudden news. The sequence of events was perfectly harmonized. When devotees surrender their lives to God and obey Him, He takes the full responsibility and cares for His devotees even to the smallest detail.

One last point. When Swami reached the XY home after driving there from Prasanthi Nilayam, He arranged that the body be properly prepared and would remain so until XY drove home after seeing Baba and being comforted by Him. Thus, by harmoniously relating all details, Swami even allowed XY to see the features of his wife and take the correct farewell.

H: Swami! Here just now we actually witnessed a part of this amazing story. How can all that be? Swami holds the entire universe in His Hand. He bears the responsibility for the inconceivable, immense universe. And how can He at the same time give this detailed attention to the lives of individual devotees?

UNIVERSAL AND INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION

SAI: It is as you say. Swami holds the universe in His Hand. But devotees learn of the glory and majesty, through Swami's attention to each one, personally. That Swami holds the universe yet at the same time fully cares for the lives of His devotees even to the smallest details is a measure of His glory that the devotee can understand.

H: Swami! How is it that Swami makes a perfect harmony in one case, as with the death of Mrs. XY, and yet in another case, that of which we were speaking just before XY arrived, there is anything but harmony; indeed, there is a highly imperfect situation?

This is a big puzzle.

SAI: It depends on the people involved. In the case of a devotee who has pure thoughts and a pure heart and who has surrendered to Bhagavan, then Swami takes

full responsibility for that life and takes care of that devotee. But where a person has a big ego, relying on ego desire and not on Bhagavan, then Swami keeps at a distance and does not interfere.

H: Oh. I see the difference.

DESIRE AND CRITICISM

SAI: Swami could make the situation perfect in regard to that individual. But where there is a big ego and the person wishes to follow ego desire, Swami does not interfere, but allows the person to do as he wishes.

H: Swami says to cut the very roots of desire. What does "cutting the roots" mean?

SAI: If desire comes, analyse it. If it is good for you and not harmful to others, go ahead. If not good, put it aside at once. If you are uncertain, do nothing until the uncertainty is clarified.

H: Is it wrong to criticize a person?

SAI: It is not wrong to criticize a person if the evaluation has been arrived at slowly and carefully.

MEDITATION, CONTEMPLATION AND CONCENTRATION

A Visitor: How to get enough faith for even meditation? There is no time.

SAI: Not true. We always have enough time to talk, visit the cinema, etc. There is certainly time for meditation.

A Visitor: After meditation, there is a feeling of strength. Where does that power come from and what is its relation to meditation?

SAI: The power is from God. The relationship between God and the devotee is love. It is almost impossible to be aware of the relationship with God. God is the subtlest of the subtle, and the relationship with Him is of the same subtlety.

A Visitor: Swami said that meditation twice a day is best?

SAI: Early morning is best. Mind is quiet and there is not the pressure of responsibilities.

H: Is meditation from time to time during the day all right?

SAI: There is difficulty during the day. People are around, and there is work. If meditation is attempted, even work suffers.

A Visitor: What is meditation?

SAI: Real meditation is getting absorbed in God as the only thought, the only goal. God only, only God. Think God, breathe God, love God.

Visitor: What about concentration?

SAI: Concentration means when all senses fall away and there is only God. The concentration of Ramakrishna Paramahansa was naturally so strong that he grew

something of a tail when meditating on Hanuman, the monkey. His body was just a changing bubble, his concentration was so strong. Special work on concentration need not be a part of meditation. Concentration is already in force wherever mind, intelligence and senses are used. Without it you could not even walk. It needs no special practice. It is below the senses. Meditation is above the senses.

In between concentration and meditation, like a separation between the two, is contemplation; concentration to contemplation, then meditation. As long as one thinks 'I am meditating,' that is the mind and is not meditation. As long as one knows he is meditating, he is not meditating. In that absorption in God, one puts aside every form and merges into God. In that process the mind naturally stops.

A Visitor: Baba says to cut off (divine) form in meditation, but we worship Swami's form.

SAI: That is all right. But when one comes close to Baba, the visualization is abandoned. At this moment, you are looking at Baba directly. Are you still visualizing?

SELF ENQUIRY

A Visitor: What should I do? My meditation is the inquiry, 'Who am I?'

SAI: The Ramana Maharshi inquiry by itself is not good. It must be combined with meditation. Meditation for its proper practice, should be at the same place, at the same time. In that way, it surely will be successful. If one is away from home in travel, in his mind he can go to the accustomed place no matter where he is.

To search for truth is needless. Truth is in every place at all times. One must live truth, not search for it. 'Kohum' (Who am I) is the cry of the newborn child. After a life-time of *sadhana*, the old man says, 'Sohum' (I am God). When away from Swami, by remembering Him doing this or that, the battery is 'recharged'. That also is genuine meditation. Meditation is constant inner inquiry as to who am I, what is true, what is ego action, what is loving and what is harsh. Meditation is thinking on spiritual principles, searching out the application to oneself of what Baba says, and the like.

PRANAYAMA AND PRATYAHARA

H: Swami praises Pranayama and Pratyahara.

SAI: First there is control of the outer senses, then control of the inner senses, then a sense of balance with a limitation to freedom, because freedom is the end of wisdom. Then comes Pranayama and Pratyahara.

H: But Swami praises the two. In which way should devotees act on that?

SAI: All of these, like Hatha Yoga and so on, are like exams. You study and pass the exam and then you feel confident and proud. It is like going to college. There are eight principle stages and you work and reach each one. But they are necessary only if you go to college. For the one who has completely surrendered to God and whose heart is

filled with love for God, these 'college courses' are not needed and have no meaning and are quite unnecessary.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

You Cannot Paint The World Green

There was a millionaire once who was bothered by two aches, one in his stomach and the other in his head! He was diagnosed and treated. He was examined and treated by a galaxy of medical experts. He consumed heavy loads of drugs, and underwent centuries of injections. But the aches persisted with greater vigour than ever before!

At last, a monk arrived at the scene of his agony. He spoke very kindly to him, and pronounced the fault to be in his eye! Set right the eye, and the head on top and the stomach below would both behave very sweetly! To improve the eye, concentrate on only one colour. Concentrate on green, he suggested. Do not let your eyes fall on red or yellow, or any other colour.

The rich man got together a group of painters and purchased barrels of green colour and directed that every object on which his eye was likely to fall be painted thick green. Just as the *ashtagraha* calamity (the ominous astrological phenomenon of eight heavenly bodies reaching a straight line in space, which was sought to be avoided by superstitious persons through ceremonials of exorcism) resulted in a rich harvest for priests, the millionaire's malady resulted in a rich harvest for paint craftsmen. When the monk came back to him after about ten days, the craftsmen ran toward him with a bucket of green paint for he wore a red gown! He wondered why, and got the answer that their master dare not cast his eye on any colour other than green, lest the aches may return!

The holy man then reprimanded the patient, and said that he had wasted lakhs of rupees as a result of his monumental stupidity. "If only you had purchased a pair of green spectacles, worth perhaps four rupees, you could have saved these walls and trees and pots and pans, and chairs and sofas and also a pretty large share of your fortune! You cannot paint the world green."

- Baba

COVER STORY

SAI GEETHA

...A MYSTIFYING TALE OF UNMATCHED LOVE.

A Glimpse of Swami - A Day like No Other

This happened more than a decade and half ago. It was one serene morning in the hallowed hamlet of Puttaparthi. As the Sun cleared the dispiriting clutter of the night with its pleasantly penetrating rays of soothing morning light, Bhagavan, with His divine darshan, had filled the devotees' hearts with the warmth of His love. The bhajans ended as usual, at nine-thirty, and Swami retired to His room. The Ashram, again, was enveloped in powerful silence.

As the devotees dispersed carrying the serenity of the blissful morning in the chalices of their hearts, their minds and senses were submerged with only one thought: 'when can I have the Lord's darshan again?' To hear the darshan music once more waft through the silent settings of Prasanthi Mandir and still their bliss-seeking souls, they knew they will have to wait at least five hours.

This would be true, had it been any other day. But on this day they were in for a pleasant surprise. It was eleven thirty in the morning and quite unexpectedly they heard the siren of the police pilot that precedes Swamis' convoy! Suddenly there was excitement everywhere; it was as if the ashram was in one instant catapulted into fifth gear. Swami was on one of His 'unscheduled' drives around the Mandir, when at times He would go as far as the Super Specialty Hospital, located about five kilometers away.

But where exactly was He going that day? "Will He visit the Hostel?", "or the Hospital?", or "the School?" or "is it just a drive?" The guessing game was on in everyone's mind. Either side of the road was bursting with devotees somehow trying to carve a little space for their necks so that they would not miss this bonus blessing of the day. All the children of the Easwaramma High School and students from the Hostel lined up on either side of the road. As His car reached near the hostel, it slowed down, and His hands were raised in blessing for all the beaming faces that thrust themselves to have a precious glimpse.

Sai Geetha Pleads with Her Master

At that time, Sai Geetha, Swami's pet-elephant, had a huge vaulted roofed enclosure right in front of the Senior Boys' Hostel. Apparently, hearing the sound of the siren, she rushed towards the gate and had it not been for her caretaker, she would have crushed it. She was out on the road even before the boys lined up. She seemed unduly excited that day, making it difficult for her mahout to hold her in check. Swami's car approached and Sai Geetha moved forward. Everyone there, who had seen Sai Geetha raise her trunk in salutation whenever she saw Swami, were witness that day to an unusual scene. Her stocky trunk lay heavily on the bonnet of the car. She refused to

budge despite urgings. Her ears were flapping at an alarming rate; she seemed disturbed.

The glass door beside Swami slid down noiselessly and before anyone could crowd around, her trunk slickly slid off the bonnet into the window and ever so gently touched Swami's cheek and hair. It was such a delicate, charming and sweet sight. A silence descended over the gathering. No one wanted to miss even a minutest mini-second of the divine play. Something subtle transpired between the two – maybe a message understood only by the truly pure-hearted - and she slowly withdrew her trunk from the window of the car. Next, at a signal from Swami, the boy seated in the front seat swiftly opened the door.

Swami stepped out of the car and immediately the flapping ears stilled to a gentle wave. She undulated backward as Swami moved towards her, murmuring endearments while her trunk reached to caress His feet. He touched her and the ones closest could see a ripple run across her huge frame as she rejoiced at the blessing. Only the ones in the closest proximity heard the sweet conversation between Sai and His beloved Geetha. Swami, in His sweet Telugu, spoke to her softly.

"Come on Geetha, I have to go," He said, patting her trunk.

She protested softly and her trunk rose to lie on the bonnet again. It was a very loud "No!"

"I want to go Geetha, come on, come on, move," said Swami, reaching up to stroke her cheek. And suddenly a diamond glistened, a dew drop that was the coalescence of her love for Him, a silent expression of her feelings: a tear found its way down the very cheek upon which His hand rested. As the students and devotees watched, more tears coursed down and wet His hand. He looked up at her and nodded understandingly. Her ears stood still, unmoving, her massive domed-head drooping.

"Okay, okay, I will not go!" said Swami sympathetically.

Immediately the ears moved a whisker. She had not stirred an inch. Perhaps she did not want to break the contact. Perhaps, she did not want her Lord to remove His hand. She stood motionless with her head bowed listening to her master.

"Go, go back to your shed," said Swami, patting her and lowering His hand. She shook her head gently. It was again a big "No".

"Will you go back if I return to the ashram?" asked Swami.

She stepped back a fraction – but only a fraction - her trunk still lay on the bonnet.

"Okay, okay, I will not go, I am going back to the ashram. Are you happy?" He asked her.

She visibly trembled with joy and replied in her own language in the affirmative. He, of course, understood.

"Good girl, good girl," said Swami.

Sai is Overpowered by Sai Geetha's Love

He then turned to the students and accepted a handkerchief. Turning back to her, He wiped her tears and looking at the boys again, He said aloud casually, "I had planned to go to Brindavan (Bangalore) today."

The words came out of the blue! Dumbstruck, the boys just stared at Him. The exhilaration with which they were enjoying the divine romance just vaporized! The boys just 'blinked', for want of a better expression. "Swami was going to Brindavan? And none of us knew? No message, no hint whatsoever. We would have lost Swami?" All the boys stood there with their hands folded and heads baffled. His gaze ran over all the boys. Using the same handkerchief to wipe His hand, Swami continued, "I wanted to go quietly without much ado, but look at her." His eyes glanced at her and so did another hundred. "She knew it, she sensed it. She somehow figured out Swami was leaving and she was crying, *Paapam* (poor thing!)" He looked back at her, His eyes tracing her trunk which was now at His Feet. Some of the boys dropped their gaze and saw that she had gently moved aside the robe resting on the earth and was caressing the Lotus Feet. He gently, yet firmly, pushed her and she withdrew her worship.

"See *ra*, see!" He commented looking at the boys as He sat in the car. "She loves Swami so much that she can feel Swami's feelings. She came to Swami when she was a small baby, so many years have passed, but see? Her love has only increased – expansion love. That is devotion."

Devotion Turns 'My Mind' and 'His Mind' into 'One Mind'

If you can feel for the Lord in every cell of your being; if you pine for Him every single second of your life; if nothing else interests you in this world except His form and proximity, then 'my mind' and 'His mind' will no longer exist, but will all become 'One awareness'. You are then in perfect sync with God, just like Sai Geetha. Isn't it incredible to see an animal having so much love for the Lord?

You can find parallels only in the ancient epics: in Hanuman, the greatest monkey-devotee of Lord Rama; or in Jatayu, the bird which sacrificed her life fighting for Mother Sita; or the cows of Gokul which became lifeless without food and drink if Krishna did not accompany them to the pastoral groves. You need not read the scriptures and imagine in your mind's eye those beautiful scenes from the Bhagavatham to fill yourself with divine bliss. It is enough to just see Sai with His Geetha. The same divine *leela* is being replayed in this age. How fortunate we are! Sai Geetha's life is a demonstration for all humanity of that pinnacle of deep love and surrender which every devotee of the Lord should one day ascend.

It was Time for the Sacred Saga to Unfold...

It was on a trip along with few devotees to the Muddumalai forest in 1962 that Swami first noticed the tender and tiny toy of joy that Sai Geetha was then. His love and affection for this infant elephant that had lost her mother immediately after her birth, was phenomenal. When the forest officers offered the elephant calf to Swami, He gladly accepted. Soon arrangements were

made and the little lady arrived in Puttaparthi in an airy and comfy vehicle escorted by four Sai volunteers. And since then the motherless child has never missed her parents. In fact, the love and warmth she has received, no other being in the whole animal kingdom - nay, the living kingdom - can dream of it. She was blessed with a mother who made all other mothers in the world pale by comparison.

Yes, with Sai Geetha and Swami, from the beginning it has been a sweet mother-child relationship in every way. It was Swami who named her, fed and fondled her everyday, found medical experts to check on her, appointed people and allotted tasks to take care of her every need, and as a hardly three-feet cute kid she followed Swami everywhere, even into the interview room! Years later, Swami confirmed this to Sri B. N. Narasimha Murthy when He said, "What you have seen is nothing, she used to come to my room along with me!" Her first living space was, in fact, right next to Swami's bedroom. A small shed with a thick cushion of sand-bed was constructed attached to the Prasanthi Mandir on the western side wall and Swami could see her anytime from His bedroom. Sai Geetha grew, enveloped in His loving and guarding grace, into a disciplined and devoted soul. She was an example to emulate even as a kid.

Daily 'Appointment' with God

Recalling the fun 'n' frolic days of Sai Geetha, Mrs. Geetha Mohan Ram, who came to Swami as early as 1943, says:

"I have wonderful memories of Sai Geetha, the baby elephant, when she was first brought to Puttaparthi. We, the children, would follow her everywhere in the days of old when hardly a few hundred people would be present in the ashram. We were always amazed at her one-pointed devotion to Swami and her excitement as soon as she could sense His presence even from a distance. Swami, in those days, would quite often visit her shed and she would 'know' Swami was coming even before we had spotted Him.

"She would be up early in the morning at three and having been taken for a bath in the River Chitravati by the then caretaker Murali, would arrive looking very neat with the *Naamam* and *Kumkum* on her forehead to run around the Prasanthi Nilayam Mandir with us behind her circumambulating the sanctum sanctorum three times every morning. After this, she would patiently wait for Swami to come out near the lotus circle of the old days (where the students' Vedam group now sit); and as soon as she spotted Swami she would spring forward to garland Him and touch His beloved Feet with her trunk."

"This has never changed over the years," Sri Pedda Reddy, her current caretaker confides and continues, "Though her agility, with age, has reduced. Even now, the first thing she does whenever she gets a chance to be in His presence is touch His Feet."

Her Pure Devotion and the Lord: A Match Made in Heaven

In the early sixties, the regular evening ‘appointment’ of Swami with Sai Geetha was a sight which devotees looked forward to with great anticipation and elation. She would wait at the gate on the ladies’ side (where Swami’s car now enters Sai Kulwant Hall) and if for some reason Darshan was delayed, she would get very impatient. Twisting and twirling her tiny trunk, intermittently flapping her lotus-leaf-sized ears vigorously, and her swift and strong legs jumpy and restless, she would eagerly look at the Mandir unable to bear the delay. When Swami came, it was a divine thrill in totality, not only for Sai Geetha, but for every devotee witnessing the sublime play of pure love. Swami would first walk up to her and she would almost kneel down – her hind legs half-bent and front legs folded to the maximum extent possible. Her height now would be a mere two feet, and she would lift her tiny trunk up and down three times in salutation. After she had offered her prostrations at His feet, she would take a garland, raise her nimble trunk over the five feet frame of her beloved very carefully, and then with lots of glee slip it down Swami’s opulent hair onto His shoulders. Swami, in turn, would flash an enchanting smile, pat her cheeks so affectionately and would start speaking to her softly.

Time would stand still watching the Lord so much at ease with His dear devotee. Like a teacher who is never tired of talking to his best student, the Lord too is most happy to be with His perfect devotee. Swami would then feed her. There would be a bag full of fruits (all offered at the shrine in the Mandir) and a bucket of *Teertham* (consecrated liquid) for her to drink. One by one, Swami would put each apple (her favourite) in her mouth and she would want to be fed no other way. “Even to this day,” Sri Pedda Reddy says, “she will not accept fruits from Swami on her trunk, she will insist that Swami put it personally in her mouth. But if it were anybody else, she will either refuse it or accept it only in her trunk.” Just like a child who is most comfortable and secure with her mother, Sai Geetha is in ‘peace and bliss’ only with her Swami.

The Neighbourhood of God

Only after Swami had spent considerable time with her, would she reluctantly let Him go and continue the Darshan every evening. So, this is the drama that used to go on for many years when she was still a ‘teenager’. Those days, she lived just next door and it was as if she was sharing the Mandir with Swami. But as the number of devotees multiplied, Sai Geetha had to be shifted and Swami instructed an ashram officer to erect a shed for her on the northern end of the Mandir facing Bhagavan’s residence, just in front of the Gopuram (where the idols of Lord Rama, Lakshmana and Sita now stand). Her small enclosure was airy, had a drinking well beside it, but faced the East, which meant Sai Geetha could not see Swami during Darshan. And this is something she could not bear; the face of her home had to face south for her to watch Swami coming in and out of the Mandir. Apparently, Sai Geetha was so upset with the orientation of her new shed that in a rage one day, she brought the whole tin-and-concrete structure down with her massive trunk and sheer muscle power. The officer was, of course, later reprimanded for

ineffectively executing Swami's command and Sai Geetha, in no time, had a new room which faced the South. The happy elephant could now see Swami uninterrupted directly from her home.

Sai Geetha spent many good years in this home close to the Mandir during the late sixties and early seventies. But when preparations began for the fiftieth birthday celebrations of Bhagavan in 1975, Sai Geetha had to be moved from the Mandir premises to accommodate the mammoth crowd expected. (It was during this birthday that Swami gave darshan to the teeming crowds from a helicopter). Now, she was placed in a big shed in the South West corner of the ashram.

Rocks and Boulders – Not a Barrier

It was in this year that the Sri Sathya Sai Gokulam was inaugurated by Swami and soon Sai Geetha was relocated to live with the cows. For the first time, she was physically far away from her beloved, but that never diminished her devotion for her Lord even by an iota. Narrating a revealing incident during her stay in the Gokulam, Sri Pedda Reddy says:

“It was the year 1976. The primary school and the college buildings were under construction and these structures were coming up at the foot of two hills. The terrain was obviously undulating with big rocks, sharp-edged boulders and thorns. On Swami's bidding, the engineers had constructed a bund (barrier) which would facilitate the accumulation of water flowing down the hill. It was primarily meant for the buffaloes of the Gokulam to 'cool off' and bathe with pleasure. The distance between the Primary School work site, where Swami would visit occasionally to oversee the construction work, and Gokulam, where Sai Geetha lived with other cows, was around four hundred meters. One day, when Swami was on one such inspection tour to the school site, Sai Geetha somehow felt His presence and immediately set herself free and ran in Bhagavan's direction. Absolutely unmindful of the terrible terrain, she jumped across rocks, bounced on the boulders, cared least for the bund and in minutes crossed the half-kilometer 'hurdle track'; and once at the feet of Bhagavan, she bowed down obsequiously and was a picture of peace and serenity. Swami was deeply moved with her love and devotion. He lovingly cared for her, caressed her and said to all the devotees around, 'See her devotion, in comparison you are all *dunnapotus* (buffaloes).’”

Though an animal, truly Sai Geetha has divine instincts and we, though human by birth, give way to animal instincts many a time. Perhaps, one of the most profound demonstrations of her steadfast dedication and purity of devotion was an event that happened in the eighties.

This was the time when Sai Geetha was staying in the high-rise shed constructed exclusively for her in front of the Senior Boys' Hostel. She was moved here once the number of cows increased in Gokulam and a greater need was felt to give her more space, and increasing attention. The Central Trust then purchased this additional piece of land in front of the Hostel and thus was born this spacious enclosure padded with thick beds of sand, surrounded by coconut trees and actually nestled in a mangrove. It had plenty

of space for her to rove and relax in. Moreover the adjoining extra land was cultivated for her fodder. Of course, Sai Geetha was bereft of any company here but that is how she wanted her life to be. She was happy when alone, happier with her caretaker and happiest when Swami was beside her.

“She has come only for Swami” - Baba

It was during this time that certain elders mentioned to Swami the idea of sending her to the forest for a short while for breeding. Swami, from the start, never seemed convinced about the proposal. Nevertheless, He gave in, thanks to the dogged persuasion of senior members of the ashram. And so it happened that the reluctant Sai Geetha was sent to the forest along with two caretakers, Vasant Rao and Sathyanarayana. “It was a thirteen-day journey by walking with sufficient periods of rest on the way at various locations,” recalls Sathyanarayana. “Once we were there,” continues the former mahout, “Sai Geetha was least interested in any elephant of the jungle; she would never go near the elephants of the wild, let alone to find a companion. We used to keep two baby elephants around her to kindle in her the desire to have a ‘family’; but she would allow the small ones to be with her as long as we were around and once we were out of sight, she would disinterestedly drive them away. On many nights, she would even quietly escape from the jungle and sure enough, she would be on the road to Puttaparthi. We would follow her big footprints and identification marks left on the soil by the thick iron ring and chain, to find her the next morning, usually six to seven kilometers away. It went on in this fashion for three months; nothing could ever budge her focus from Swami even to a microscopic extent.” The mahouts had exhausted all the options.

“It was at this juncture,” continues Sathyanarayana, “that Swami visited the Mudhumalai forest one fine day, totally unanticipated. The forest had a canal and Swami’s car stopped at the left bank while we were on the right bank. The moment I shouted ‘Swami has come’, Sai Geetha, who was grazing nearby, acted as if possessed by a gigantic force. Without a second thought, she jumped into the canal and started swimming vigorously. Concerned about her, I too jumped and tried to catch hold of her ears or neck, but nothing could stop her that day. If we reached the other shore safely that momentous morning, it was purely His grace.

“Swami immediately opened the door and Sai Geetha was in bliss as Swami fondled her, patted her and enquiringly spoke to her with utmost love and concern. It was as if the mother had found her long-lost daughter. There were bags of fruits for her in the car and Swami lovingly put a few apples in her mouth. Sai Geetha was too overwhelmed with joy to eat; she just let them be in her jaws, did not even chew or swallow them.

“After a few minutes, Swami got inside His car with instructions to me that we should stay on for some more time, and as the car moved off, poor Sai Geetha’s condition became pathetic. She just could not accept it. It was as if she was dropped from heaven into hell in an instant. She spit out all the fruits and started crying loudly. I had never seen anybody so depressed earlier in

my life. I too wept. We were helpless. She was inconsolable. Dejected to the hilt, she went on grumbling; and from then on her 'night escapades' to Puttaparthi became more frequent.

"We concluded that she is never ever going to mate with any elephant and sent a message to Swami conveying Sai Geetha's mental frame. We were delighted when we received instructions that we could return to Puttaparthi."

But the story does not end there. In fact, the divine drama begins now. After Sai Geetha returned to Puttaparthi, again at the insistence of elders, a veterinary doctor was called. Upon testing the urine of Sai Geetha, he pronounced, "She is pregnant." Sathyanarayana and Vasant were doubly sure that no crossing took place in the forest, but nobody believed them. Even Swami, apparently, held to what the doctor said. The news that Sai Geetha is going to deliver a baby spread like hot smoke in Puttaparthi. The doctor who had come from Kerala stayed with her in the shed to attend to any eventuality and after a few days even declared, "Sai Geetha is going to deliver in a few weeks." In no time, a fence rose around her living area to give her 'needed privacy' and everyone was now more than convinced that Sai Geetha was going to be a mother. Not only this, even Swami used to visit her often and enquire about her with the doctor. On one occasion, it is said He even pointed to Sai Geetha's belly and said to Prof. Kasturi, "Kasturi, can you see the baby moving in her stomach?"

The d-day was approaching and the doctor finally announced that she would deliver in the next week. The much-awaited week arrived. The air was thick in anticipation, and everyone awaited the good news with bated breath and enthusiasm. One, two, three...slowly all the week days rolled by, but there was no activity in the Sai Geetha shed. People's suspicions grew and the whole bubble burst when a month later, the doctor did a complete u-turn to say, "She is not pregnant." What was Swami's immediate reaction to this news we do not know, but we are sure He must have smiled heartily and mischievously. Now, the whole drama was an alluring mix of comedy and mystery, was it not? But one wonders, "What was the purpose of this divine play?"

Sai Geetha – The Epitome of Purity

It all became crystal clear when immediately after this episode Swami emphatically declared to the devotees around, "Sai Geetha is a *Shuddha Brahmachari* (pristine and perfect celibate). She has come for me. She has never and will never mix with any elephant." At this point, one is reminded of the appalling tests that Mother Sita underwent (in the sacred epic Ramayana), even though the omniscient Lord Rama was fully aware of her purity and integrity. Every single twist in the Lord's story is to teach mankind a lesson. And He teaches it in a way that its impact resonates in the sphere of man's mind for centuries to come.

The bond between Swami and Geetha only strengthened after this whole drama, and her unwavering devotion to Swami was an inspiration which no

one could easily ignore. Whenever Swami used to go to Brindavan for long periods in those years, He would also make arrangements for Sai Geetha's stay near His residence in Bangalore. On most occasions, Sai Geetha would walk the way to Bangalore, escorted by her caretakers and Sai volunteers, with proper rest stations arranged for her at appropriate distances along the route. An indelible part of Bhagavan's life story, Sai Geetha's moments and movements on this earth were closely intertwined with her beloved's.

There is a hilarious incident, which Sri B. N. Narasimha Murthy, Warden of the Sri Sathya Sai Hostel in Brindavan (Bangalore) narrates, concerning Sai Geetha's arrival to Brindavan:

"This happened in the early eighties, when Swami used to stay in the 'old Brindavan bungalow' and Mr. Rama Brahman, the caretaker of the Bangalore ashram, also used to sleep inside this building. One day, it was late into the night, maybe past midnight, when Rama Brahman's sleep was disturbed by weird sounds outside the doors and windows. It was not very loud, but was a mystifying muffled clatter, some kind of 'hissing noise' in addition to other sounds. Perturbed, Rama Brahman looked through the window as it was strict instruction from Swami that he should not open the door unless he knows the person. What he saw through the window in that dark hour was only a trunk and he got really panicky. Interestingly, at the same instant, Swami came there from inside and Rama Brahman at once blurted out, 'Swami, something has come.' Swami only smiled and calmed him saying, 'Do not worry, it is Sai Geetha.' And then Swami opened the door, pacified Sai Geetha who was hungry for darshan, made arrangements for her stay and only then retired to His room."

Such is the Lord's mercy. When the devotee's love is pure, the Lord does not care whether it is midnight, mid-air, mid-forest or mid-ocean.

Her Pure Love And Love Incarnate - Inseparable

Sai Geetha's more than four decades of association with Swami is not only a love story, but also a tale which in its every facet demonstrates how inseparable the bond of pure love can be. Recalling a sweet experience from Sai Geetha's days in Brindavan, Mrs. Geetha Mohan Ram says:

"This happened in February, 1972. Swami was preparing to leave the Brindavan ashram to come and stay in my parent's (Dr. R. S. Padmanabhan and Kamala Padmanabhan) house in Bangalore city for two days. It was the time of the Akhanda Bhajan celebration and incidentally, it was my father and grandfather who actually initiated this concept of 24-hour non-stop bhajan singing those days. I was a young child of eight then. Four of us – my brother, aunt, father and I – had gone to Brindavan to bring Swami to our home in Jayanagar.

"As Swami was getting ready to leave, we could hear Sai Geetha trumpeting loudly from far behind Swami's residence. She somehow knew that Swami

was leaving and you could make out from her voice that she was desperate. Swami responded to her call and walked to the rear of the building. We followed Him as He marched towards Sai Geetha. Once there, He caressed her, gently stroked her cheeks, fed her with apples, and finally as He turned to leave, she put her trunk around His shoulders and pulled Him gently but firmly to her side. She held on to Him securely and would not let Him go. Swami could only sweetly plead and He kept telling her in Telugu, “ *vidu Geetha, vidu Geetha, ne povala. Podaya bangaaru ne vegara vastanu! Vidu Geetha!*” (Please leave me, Geetha; leave me, please; I have to go, it is late. Golden one, I will come back soon, leave me, please!”)

“It was after five minutes of gentle persuasion by Swami that Geetha let Him go reluctantly. And as He moved away, she lifted her trunk and still held on to His right arm and would not let go again for a few minutes. Swami tried offering her some fruits, but the apple was no consolation. She refused to accede. Finally, after a lot of cajoling, Swami extricated Himself from her, but by now His robe was covered by her saliva as she kept nuzzling Him all through. **Unmindful of the dribble on His gown, Swami then turned to all of us and what He said then was very profound. He said, ‘Your devotion should be one-pointed like her. She is not even tempted by the fruit I offer. She only wants me and thinks of me at all times. When you are like her you then receive *Darshanam, Sparshanam* and *Sambhashanam* (the fortune of vision, touch and conversation with the Lord).’** He then gave her one last loving pat and left. He had to go back to His room to change into a new robe and we were ready to leave.” How wonderful is her relationship with the Lord! How fortunate she is!

With Sai – No Pain, Only Gain

At the same time, it is not as if life has been always rosy-n-cozy for her, she has had her share of ailments and afflictions, and even now has difficulties mainly because of her advanced age; but these have least bothered her. “Somehow she does not feel the pain,” says Pedda Reddy, her current caretaker. Her mind is always fixed on the lord; and in turn, it is the same intensity with which Bhagavan looks after her welfare. When Sai Geetha suffered from a stomach disorder resulting in her tummy bulging inordinately, Swami immediately arranged expert vets from Kerala and Bangalore to attend on her; when the leather on the sole of her feet started peeling off due to Foot and Mouth disease, Swami encouraged the doctors to start treatment without any hesitation and assured them that she would be cured soon and that’s exactly what happened.

“On one occasion when it was reported to Swami that she was sick,” says Sri Chiranjeevi Rao, who was caretaker of the Prasanthi Nilayam ashram for many years, “Swami created vibhuti and asked me personally to deliver it to her. Whenever I went to Gokulam (which was frequent those days), He would invariably ask me to visit Sai Geetha on the way and check if she is

comfortable and well cared for. “Is she getting sugarcane leaves to eat?” He would enquire. Sai Geetha relished the sweet sugarcane leaves very much and Swami knew this too well. He was also aware that these leaves were not easy to come by in Puttaparthi, and so, He would say, “You must take pains to bring for her things she likes. Being an animal, she cannot express herself so categorically, but when we know what she wants, we should make all attempts to provide for her wishes and keep her happy. That is real service.”

Students Get a Role Model of Devotion

Incidentally, it was Sri Chiranjeevi Rao who was instrumental in building the new spacious shed for her with a high wall and lots of greenery around in the early eighties. Sai Geetha moving to this new location from the Gokulam in 1979-80 was the beginning of a new chapter in her life. Apart from having a comfortable place to stay, she was now the neighbor of Swami’s students, which brought along with it so many precious advantages. Her home now stood right opposite to the Senior Students’ Hostel.

“I remember this touching incident very vividly,” a former student tells H2H. “It was a bright festive morning – the exciting day of Christmas. After the captivating carol-singing and beautiful darshan in the Mandir, some of us just got up and prayed to Swami: ‘Swami, please come to the Hostel.’ We expected answers like ‘Why do you want me in the hostel? I am with you here all the time,’ or, ‘Wait...’, or, ‘Today I am very busy, see so many people have come from different countries,’ or simply a mischievous smile.

“But no, that day, Swami immediately asked, ‘Are you ready?’ And we loudly shouted, ‘Yes’ but within we were nervous to our bones. We had not made any arrangements, the dining hall was not decorated, the garden was not pruned, the entrance had not even *rangoli* and mango leaves, and then what about decorating Swami’s jhoola (swing)? What to offer to Swami? What programmes do we stage? Our minds were zapped. Even as we were lost in this avalanche of thoughts, Swami called for the car and said, ‘I am going now!’

“There was no time to even think. We ran like boys possessed. And by the time we reached the hostel, Swami was already there. Some boys, who would have undoubtedly broken national records in marathon running that day, reached the hostel well before Swami’s car and were fortunately there to welcome Him. And what a day it was! Everything was so informal. Swami was with us for half an hour and how He blessed each one of us: walking in the lawns, collecting letters, cracking jokes, blessing whatever we offered and obliging us in whatever we asked.

Sai Geetha Answers the Call

“But this is not what the highlight of this memorable visit was. The best part was yet to come and I remember those few moments so well: **Swami standing at the entrance of the Hostel all smiles, looking so radiant with the rays of the morning Sun adding to His divine luster, and then calling**

out with a voice that was so sweet, ‘Geetha...’, ‘Geetha...’ as if singing a divine melodious tune. It was so soft; maybe I and a few others who were close enough to Swami alone could have heard it; but Sai Geetha, standing hundred meters away, felt it and immediately the ten-thousand-pound body of Sai Geetha galloped like a race horse! Excited and overwhelmed-with-joy, Sai Geetha presented herself before Swami in the next instant and the next ten minutes it was only Swami and Sai Geetha.

“The purest-devotee-of-an-elephant went on caressing Swami, and how Swami, in turn, was so gentle and loving towards her, is a sight that remains embedded in gold in my memory forever. Sai Geetha was least concerned about the fruits that Swami was offering, she only wanted Swami to touch her, look at her eye-to-eye, speak to her and be next to her. Even an inch of separation was intolerable. For me, it was the greatest demonstration of pure love.”

While Sai Geetha gets her precious opportunities whenever Swami visits the Students’ Hostel, everyday the boys have a living example and inspiration of true divine love. This is how Sai Geetha’s abode being right opposite to the Students’ dwelling has been such a wonderful win-win situation. Both love each other, but love Swami more than each other. Every time Swami has visited the Hostel, it has been a red-letter-day for her. Recalling another similar incident, Sri Y. Arvind, another former student says:

“Years ago in Prashanti Nilayam, on the beautiful eve of Krishnashtami, Swami was standing on the portico enquiring about the arrangements for the imminent festival. The elders who had been given responsibilities informed Him about the arrangements: about where the cow procession would come and where they would be positioned, the order of procession, down to the last details of what prasadam to be distributed and what quantities were available. He was in a jolly mood and most of us felt it was the ideal time to pray to Him to visit the hostel. So we gently, with the words ‘please Swami’ generously sprinkled in our supplications, pleaded, prayed and cajoled. Well, we did all we could to get Him to bless the hostel with His Physical Presence. Swami played hard to get but finally said the magic words, ‘I will come’.

“The hostel’s look changed overnight. Different teams of boys worked on various areas of the hostel. Decorations sprang up everywhere with banners, festoons and plantain stalks at key positions. The little shrine for Lord Ganesha outside the hostel was elegantly decorated, all the corridors swept and mopped extra clean, the dormitories were tidied up, and by the early hours of the next morning the entire hostel was spick and span. In retrospect and with good humor, I feel that the response to Swami’s visit to the hostel galvanized all of us the way a drill sergeant’s inspection parade would! Of course, Swami is our loving mother and father, but the discipline He demands of His chosen ones...Well! You have to hand it to Him. Even the laziest of us would be on their toes.

“Coming back to the story, the opportunity taken to invite Him was because some students who had a green thumb, under the inspired leadership of their seniors, had made a beautiful garden in the hostel quadrangle. It was a combination of a Grecian rock garden, a Japanese water garden and a

regular floral layout. It had smooth tiled paths that vended around deeply embedded boulders and there was a water feature that included a cascade that led to a fish pond. A bamboo bridge arched over the pond and was painted a pleasing light green that matched the lawn around it. Creepers covered bamboo arches at strategic corners on the paths. Flowering shrubs lined the paths and filled every crevice that the rocks offered. There was a flat rock that served as a pedestal and a chair was placed for Swami there. Firmly anchored and well cushioned, it had steps leading to it so that Swami could walk with ease. A lot of effort had gone into making and maintaining the garden and the crowning glory would be that Swami should bless it. That was what was going on in our minds.

The morning session in the Mandir went off without a hitch. Swami granted us all Darshan wearing a Pitambara (yellow robe), the robe of Lord Krishna apt for the occasion of Janmashtami. The procession went like clockwork with Sai Geetha in the vanguard with all her majesty, all dressed up for the Lord – richly caparisoned in gold and silver with five foot silver ear hangings, gold brocaded saddle cloth on her back, beaten gold ornaments on her forehead – she looked royal. Swami walked down to her with a haste that belied His ‘impatience’ and His interaction with her was the cynosure of all attention – I would not be exaggerating if I said the cows were feeling jealous of her! Their Gopala (Lord Krishna’s another name literally meaning “caretaker of cows.”) was going to Sai Geetha! But they too had their chance when Swami came to feed them with bananas. Everything smoothly led to the point when Swami signaled for the bhajans to start. The procession was on its way back to the Gokulam, the prasadam distribution was complete and now expectant faces looked at every minute gesture of Swami – waiting for the signal. He knew it, and He tantalized us all... till the last moment and then the smile bloomed... “Go... I will come”. Immediately, their energy levels tripled and in a trice, they traversed the thousand metres to the hostel jet set like.

Swami came to the hostel and graciously blessed all of us standing along the path leading to the Hostel. Alighting from the car He walked slowly, taking in all the effort put in to beautify the place. The smile on His face was the greatest of blessings. He went towards the stage and sat on the decorated Jhula (swing) set for Him and for a while listened to the group songs sung by ebullient voices. He blessed the prasadam offered, and then indicated He wanted to leave. When Swami reached the path that lay across the quadrangle, the boys brought His attention to the new garden. His eyes lit up at the new sight and He gently undulated towards the picturesque setting. Swami picked up the scissors offered on a velvet platter, and cut the saffron silk ribbon that lay across the primary arch leading into the garden. Simultaneously, one of us started the cascade and the murmur of gently flowing water added to the sacred atmosphere. Swami walked along the paths laid out and touched the chair set for Him on the rock, blessing it. Then He stepped onto the bridge spanning the pond. One of the boys offered Him a silver bowl of fish food with a spoon and pointed to the water.

“What is this?” asked Swami.

“Swami, there are fish in the pond.”

Swami sweetly picked up the spoon and sprinkled a couple of spoonfuls and then He picked up the whole bowl and dumped it in at one go. Suddenly He seemed to be in a hurry! It was obvious, His gait quickened as He walked back to the main lobby. All of us were perplexed at the sudden change – then we understood, as we saw Swami make a beeline to Sai Geetha waiting outside the Hostel. He was speeding towards her.

All of us stepped aside and watched the show! Her heavy ornaments and other embellishments had been removed and she was oblivious to everything except her Swami. Baskets of fruits were offered, and Swami kept feeding her. His eyes were twinkling and His face beamed with a different joy as He patted her cheek, rubbed her trunk and murmured endearments to her. She responded in kind, speaking to her Master in her language. No doubt they understood each other. Well! One should be there to see the sight. Three hundred and fifty boys and teachers, a large bunch of them around Swami and Geetha, two long lines extending on either side of the path leading out of the Hostel, lots of devotees outside...all of us enjoying Swami's interaction with Geetha. If only we had an aerial photograph of the sight... for now, words will have to do. He spent more than ten minutes with her and then almost regretfully patted her good bye.

We offered Him *aarti* and hundreds of voices welled up in unison. She raised her trunk in salutation as Swami left the Hostel. Many of us took the opportunity to touch the one so much beloved by the Lord. After enduring the petting by all of us, she retired to her enclosure. But even as she crossed the road, she paused and turned towards the direction Swami's car had left. She watched for a few seconds and then silently returned to her enclosure. At times, she seems more than just an animal. Her love for Swami is far greater than ours because of its simplicity. She exists only to Love and adore Him. That is the highest form of devotion: To exist only for the love of God."

Yes, this is the lesson that she drives into the minds of everybody – be it student or devotee – that the whole purpose of life is to exist for the Lord and there is nothing holier or more purposeful. Swami has exalted her devotion often and asked students to learn from her. In a discourse to the boys in the Prasanthi Mandir on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi in 1992, Swami said,

"Those of you who are staying in the Hostel notice cars going up and down the road. On the other side of the Hostel is Sai Geetha. She takes no notice of the innumerable cars going on the road. But, without any notice, she 'smells', as it were, the passing of Swami's car and immediately comes out with a roar to greet Swami. That is her devotion to her Lord... It is steadfast love."

Ever Alert for Her Beloved

Come what may, Sai Geetha's focus has always been compass-like, pointing constantly in one direction. "The moment she hears the siren of the police jeep (an indication that Swami is on His way)," says Sri Pedda Reddy, "she will come off immediately from wherever she is; be it in the shed or in the tank and run to the road. Standing beside the tarmac she will scan every car that passes by and the moment she spots Swami's car, she will trumpet in glee

and sometimes make peculiar sounds of joy. When His car draws near, searchingly she will see where Swami is seated – in the front or rear, and if the car window is closed, she will embrace the front windshield with her trunk, and wait for the door glass to roll down. If it happens, she is ecstatic; she will slowly slide her snout in and start nuzzling Swami's hair and face. She loves Swami's crown; the Vibhuti smell enlivens her. She is in bliss. But if, for some reason, Swami's car does not stop, she is crestfallen, devastated. She will start crying and grumbling and 'hmm...hmmm...' would go on endlessly.

Some days if she is very disturbed, she would even start shouting and trumpeting as if calling out to Him with all the wind power at her disposal. Only after half an hour of pacifying phrases of, 'He will come', 'Maybe He is busy today', 'He saw you. Didn't He? Do not worry. Tomorrow He will come specially for you', etc. will she reconcile herself. And it will take another hour to persuade her to accept any food. That is the intensity of her love for Swami and it is this fervent yearning which has rewarded her with so many beautiful blessings from Swami."

Sai Geetha – The Royal Regal Elephant of God's Kingdom

Yes, when one yearns only for God, he gets God and everything else too, just like Jesus said, "Seek the Kingdom of God, and everything else shall be added unto you." One of the lovely blessings bestowed on Sai Geetha, for example, is how she has become an indelible part of all major celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam, be it Birthday, Dasara, Krishnastami or the students' Sportsmeet on January 11 every year. How does she feel being decorated like a royal and majestically leading the procession on special days? Does she get excited about it?

"Oh yes, very much," says Pedda Reddy, who has been her caretaker for nearly two decades. **"On any normal day, when I take her out for a walk, she will go about the whole process very casually and the few meters stroll would drag on for nearly two hours. But look at her going to Mandir on festival days, it is as if she has become twenty years younger! She wants to run.**" She knows she is going to see Swami and her eagerness takes the better of her. In fact, in the early morning itself, when I apply turmeric on her feet (which is the first thing I do whenever she has to be dressed up for the occasion), that is her first hint, and from then on she is just waiting for my command and the gates to open to quickly glide into Mandir. She is still as a statue when I start adorning her with more than twenty-seven types of ornaments. She patiently goes through the 'make up' session, which apart from smearing Vibhuti on her body, includes bedecking her with the exquisitely carved golden head-gear, the richly embroidered body blanket, shining silver anklets, the tiny, resounding golden bell, many dazzling necklaces, dangling earrings, gorgeous garlands and so on. In the procession, she enacts her role to perfection, walking gracefully and with regal air as befits the grandeur of the occasion."

The most beautiful part is how Swami, just like a mother, who would be very particular how her child should be properly dressed for an important occasion, would be concerned about her. He would check with Pedda Reddy if her silver anklets were polished, if her dress was in perfect order, if all her ornaments were in tact and so on. "Just a year ago before the eightieth birthday celebrations," Pedda Reddy recalls, "Swami wanted to see all her ornaments. So I went to His residence and discreetly displayed all her jewels. A few seconds of inspection, and then Swami asked, 'Where are all her ankle belts?' I was taken aback; I thought I had preserved all her belongings securely. Only when He asked again, did I realise that I had, in fact, sent two of her ankle belts to Bangalore because they needed repair. Immediately calls were made and the next day she was there for the Rathotsavam festival immaculately decked up. When Swami came near Sai Geetha that morning, His eyes first went to her feet. Only when I explained that the anklets arrived last evening and they are fitting her perfectly now, did He look satisfied.

Incidents like this are numerous. Very recently when I put a gaudy synthetic garland on her neck, Swami said, 'Why do you put the plastic garland there? It is covering all her gold and silver necklaces.' On another occasion, He thoughtfully remarked, 'Three elaborate silver bracelets on her neck is looking so cramped. Maybe you could try changing the position of some of them'. And so now I place two of her big shining bracelets on either side of the velvet jacket

For Swami, every detail about her is important; and for Sai Geetha, if there is anything significant, it is Swami.

Sai Geeta – Love, Fun, Joy, et al

And what is dear to Swami is dear to her too; and that is why even though she would always like to be left alone, one community for whom she has a soft corner is His students. She would allow the boys to touch her, be around her, speak to her and when in good mood, even play with them. Going down the memory lane and picking up one such exciting anecdote, Y Arvind, a former student, says:

"One evening I was in the Hill View Stadium when she came for her routine walk. I had finished a couple of games of volley ball and was sitting on the stone steps that run along the road leading uphill. Seeing her at a distance I climbed down and walked towards her. From afar I could hear her high pitched greeting. I felt a smile glow when I saw her patient eyes and sedate walk. She had all the time in the world. Even as she ambled up, her long trunk reached out sniffing at me. I gently patted her elephantine affection, grateful for the attention from someone so beloved of the Lord. Her trunk roamed over my hands and my pockets and with an indignant squeak she turned away. The boy who was accompanying her laughed and said, 'You used to give her something to eat every time you met her, today you disappointed her.'

'I am sorry Geethamma,' I said moving to an angle where I could catch her eye. But she turned away again playfully. Once again I moved around. Again she turned away. And together we completed a full circle. We must have been

a pretty comical sight because the laughter of bemused boys rent the air. I felt immensely happy. It was a feeling of total abandon. People do not trust what they don't know, and what they don't know they fear; an instinctual response despite having intellect and discrimination. Animals too have the same instincts...only more. But one thing I realized was the trust Sai Geetha placed in the people Swami loved. She too loved us. It really strikes me dumb just to contemplate on the power of love.

Then, the boys playing football kicked the ball towards her. Immediately she responded. Her huge ears flapped in excitement and she lumbered towards the ball and gave it a careful kick. It was so lovely to watch her raise her foreleg, swing it back and kick the ball. That was it! For the next twenty minutes, about thirty enthusiastic boys and one very jolly elephant played. Of course, no referee had the heart to tell her that using her trunk was against the rules but even so, the match was friendly and ended with a bell instead of a whistle. The hostel bell was ringing to call us in for Bhajans. It was with regret that she let us go and I saw many a head turn back and look at her as we returned to the hostel. She looked so massive, against the deepening sky of the summer evening; so huge, strong and powerful. I felt a vague stirring in me. Somehow a lump formed in my throat. She was missing her Swami, her Master. Her yearning was so intense. I sat down on one of the rocks that still dot the rear of the Easwaramma High School and watched her. She moved away and as though sensing that someone was watching turned back and threw one long look. I felt the lump dissolve and I was myself again. The grass seemed greener and the sky more vibrant with the colors of the setting sun. I smiled to myself as I carried the sight with me to the hostel."

Perfect Love Exemplified

How many lives have been inspired by her exalted example! Even though she is a five-toed pachyderm, whenever people have looked at her, it is always with awe and reverence. Showering affection on an animal and getting love and loyalty in return is an occurrence which many can relate to. We know of dogs who have given their lives for their owners; of pets who give more unconditional love to their keepers than their best friends; of cats who act as stress-busters and provide instant happiness to their possessors. But is there any pet in the world which has turned peoples' attention Godward? What Sai Geetha has taught humanity without speaking a word is what saints and noble persons take years to learn and then decades to impart. Just by her presence and example, she has goaded thousands of students and devotees to practise 'higher thinking' and aspire for the Highest and nothing else. To demonstrate how noble her life is and how much esteem Swami places on her faith and devotion, Sri Sanjay Sahani, Principal of the Brindavan campus of the Institute, shares a revealing incident:

"It was one of those occasions when Sai Geetha had 'sensed' Swami's arrival and was standing in full alertness beside the road much before we, the boys in the Hostel, heard the police siren and rushed towards the gate. If she is on the road, more often than not, Swami would invariably stop the car and that's what happened this particular day too. Swami alighted from the car and went near her. We, who did not want to miss even a millisecond of the divine

drama, rushed near Swami too. And suddenly there was a splash! This happens many times. Excited with happiness, Sai Geetha would start urinating. But that day, since it was on the tarmac it was splashing all over and so immediately many boys retreated and most of us were waiting and watching from a distance. But Swami was with her, standing right beside and His robe, evidently, was fully wet. After a minute or so, Swami looked at all of us and said something which sent shivers down our spine. "If you drink a cup of her urine, maybe you will get a fraction of her devotion," He said solemnly. We knew at what level our devotion was and how sacred was this saintly soul, encased in an elephant body.

Years later, when I quoted this incident in a small talk in Trayee Brindavan in His presence and said exactly what Swami had said on that occasion, Swami, sitting in the jhula and intently listening to the story, immediately said, '*Aaunuu, Aaunuu*' in Telugu, meaning, 'Yes, it is true, it is true.'

That was a certificate which would surpass any other achievement in this material world. It was a testimony to the purest love that this silent yet salient four-legged being had for the Lord. As Sri Chiranjeev Rao says, "What she has for Swami is – Perfect Love."

It is for this reason that she is always in Swami's mind. Even when lakhs had gathered in Prasanthi for the eightieth birthday celebrations and there were a million arrangements to be made for the devotees, Swami never forgot her; He was more concerned about her missing ankle belt. (A cup of cow's milk is more valuable than barrels of donkey milk, as they say).

A Palace of a Home for His Loved One

Very recently, when Swami gifted the students of the Institute with a world class indoor stadium christened as the 'Sri Sathya Sai International Centre for Sports', at the same time, He built a 'palace of a home' for Sai Geetha with exquisite carvings done by the same sculptor who had fashioned the beautiful domes that adorn the Prasanthi Mandir. But this was the culmination of another beautiful drama which began a few weeks earlier.

When the land was being cleared to start work for the Indoor Stadium, unfortunately Sai Geetha's shed could not be spared because of the vast area the new multi-game sporting complex mandated. And when it was brought to Swami's notice, He seemed upset. He was concerned and issued a strict instruction that in no case should Sai Geetha be moved unless she has another proper and peaceful accommodation built for her. At that time, nobody had a definite idea where exactly to build her new home. When someone suggested to Swami that a shed can be built for her beyond the indoor stadium, Swami immediately rejected the proposal saying, "No, it is too far, she will get afraid. She should be near."

And that is how plans were drawn to accommodate her before the new stadium inside the Planetarium complex itself. Swami liked this idea but still had many changes to it. He did not want a shed for her, He wanted a palatial

home. Also, He wanted it to be located closer to the road so that it would be easy for her to have darshan whenever Swami was passing by. But building this new structure would take at least a few weeks; then where is she going to stay in the interim period? This was Swami's anxiety. And so, a new temporary shed came up in just two or three days behind the planetarium complete with a bath tub, relaxing area, etc.

Swami almost visited this site daily and only when He was satisfied with the temporary shed was Sai Geetha moved. Even after that, He would visit many times to see if Sai Geetha was comfortable and ask Pedda Reddy if she was ok and all her needs taken care of. Then He would inspect the construction of her new 'grand home' and seem pleased.

Looking at the grandeur of the new enclosure, many people would ask, "Is this the place where Swami would sit and watch the boys play in the indoor stadium?" That is how captivating the new residence of the Lord's dearest devotee is. And that is what pure love can do. If anything matters to Swami when it comes to His devotees, it is devotion and devotion alone.

The Celestial Song of Love....

When we asked Sri Pedda Reddy what is the most precious lesson he has learnt in his twenty-year association with Sai Geetha, without thinking a second he said, "Devotion to Swami". "I have not seen anybody crave for Swami like she does. That is the greatest thing I have learnt from her," he says and continues, "In fact, I often pray to her and offer my gratitude saying, 'Geetha, it is only because of you I get a chance to go near Swami, that He speaks to me and I have this wonderful prospect to serve. I am fulfilled by this sacred opportunity.'"

It seems, Sri Pedda Reddy is no less an ideal, or maybe, years of relationship with Sai Geetha, has metamorphosed his life into a shining example of loving service and devotion. That is what happens when one comes in close contact with 'illuminated souls'. And all one needs to be illumined, as Swami often says, is not scriptures, spiritual practices or sermons, but just unsullied love. Perhaps, it is to prove this to the muddled mind of man that Sai made 'Sai Geetha'...the celestial song of pure love. Five thousand years ago, Swami in the form of Lord Krishna, sang the song of "Bhagavad Geeta" to impart man the wisdom to lead a life of perpetual harmony, and now we have the Lord demonstrate this precious knowledge through 'Sai Geeta'. Her life is a tale, which because of its immaculate purity and soul-entrancing sublimity, compels and inspires millions to transform their lives into beacons of beatific light, serene love and never-ending happiness. Maybe it will not be an exaggeration to borrow the quote of Sir Einstein about Gandhiji and modify it to say, "Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such an animal as this, ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY - PART ONE

By Prof G.Venkataraman

Getting Started

Sai Ram and warm greetings. Starting with this issue, I would like to take you on an interesting journey in which we shall together ***Search for Infinity***. The search for “Infinity” is nothing new, and has been going on for a long, long time. However, we shall do it in a different way, starting with the Universe we live in and examining what Modern Physics has to say about it. From there we shall travel still further, to things beyond, to the doorstep of True Infinity!

From The Seen to the Unseen

Our tour is going to be long, and so that you have an idea of where we are headed, let me tell you that though we start with the Seen, later we shall wander into the mysterious realm of the Unseen! So be prepared for a dizzy tour! In our long tour, we shall encounter many things we barely understand, but of one thing you can be sure; wherever we turn, we cannot fail to see the glory and the majesty of God! Hence, even if there are things we do not quite understand, let us not be deterred by that; instead, let us, at every opportunity possible, simply drink in the glory of God and experience *Ananda*!

All set to go? Have you fastened the seat belt? OK, we take off right now!

Stargazing

Let us go out into the open and look above. It is a clear, cloudless and beautiful night and the sky is full of stars. We should be thankful that we are able to see the stars. In many places on earth, people can no longer see stars. You know why? Two reasons; one is too much pollution and second there is too much of man-made light that obscures the light from the stars.

The sky is so beautiful, is it not? And we can see it for free, without buying any tickets or making any advance reservations! Yet, how many of us take time to do this? That is the tragedy of modern times! We all know the nursery rhyme that starts with the words:

*Twinkle, twinkle little star,
How I wonder what you are!*

We also delight in making our kids repeat this rhyme before visitors, in order to impress them. But do we wonder about these stars anymore? Let us spend time doing exactly that! Let us gaze deep into the sky. Do you know what we would see? I'll tell you! We would see all sorts of things, and here is a brief description of the scale and size of things we would catch a glimpse of.

Measuring Distance Using Light Years

A few words about the size of our Universe: It is huge, and I really mean huge. It is so huge, we need a measure of length much larger than the kilometre which is what we normally use for describing distances. It is ok to give the distance from Puttaparthi to New York in km, but when it comes to distances in the Universe, the km is too small. We shall instead use a measure called the light year [LY], which is the distance light travels in one year. You probably know that light travels [approximately] 300,000 km in one second, yes one second! Light takes about eight minutes to reach us after leaving the surface of the Sun. Obviously, a LY represents a much greater distance. In terms of numbers, it is $300,000 \times 3,600 \times 24 \times 365$ km; you can do the arithmetic! If you are too lazy to do the arithmetic, let me tell you that one LY is roughly nine trillion km. If you think that is a lot of km, just wait; you are going to be stunned!

Let us start with our own Solar system. The Sun, which is the focus of the solar system, is a star. As I told you, light from the Sun takes about eight minutes to reach the Earth. On the other hand, if you take planet Pluto, light from the Sun takes about five and a half hours to reach that planet.

Like our Sun, there are at least a billion stars, yes, at least a billion, that form a part of our own galaxy known as the Milky Way. The diameter of the Milky Way is roughly 100,000 light years. That is big; yes it is, but, as they say: "You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

Swami: Chancellor of our Galaxy and Beyond

Looking beyond the galaxy, there are the **Local Groups** [LG]. A Local Group may consist of about ten to fifty galaxies. The Milky Way belongs to a group of about twenty galaxies. The Andromeda galaxy, about which you must have surely heard, forms a member of the LG to which the Milky Way belongs. Based on the diameter of the Milky Way, we can say that typically, an average LG will have a size of about three million light years. We are now talking long distances, aren't we?

We move on and look at a bigger structure, the **Galaxy Cluster**. A typical cluster would have something like a thousand galaxies and a linear dimension of about fifteen million light years. Next comes the **Supercluster**, which is about ten times larger than a cluster, i.e., it has a linear extension of about one hundred million light years. Things sure are getting bigger and bigger, aren't they?

Structures of even larger scales are seen in the sky, and recently, astronomers have noted that something like filaments of bright objects exist. One of them has even been named the Great Wall! It is made up of several Superclusters.

What comes beyond? I am not too sure but **way** beyond all this comes what we might call the edge of the Physical Universe! **According to current estimates, what I refer to as the edge of the Universe is about fourteen**

billion LY away! What it means is that if light leaves the edge of the Universe right now, it would take fourteen billion years to reach the Earth (that is, if it is still there at that time!) Just for comparison, recall that light from our Sun takes about eight minutes to reach us.

As we let all of this sink in, let us take a moment to do a bit of philosophical reflection. Swami is sometimes described not only as the Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, but also as the Chancellor of the Universe. I wonder whether people who use this description have any idea of how big the Universe we are in actually is!

Our Ego: An Insignificant Spec in the Cosmos

Swami comments on the fact that man is so insignificant and yet has a Himalayan ego. We might take a moment to reflect on that, too. The Physical Universe may be finite but it is vast nevertheless. In this vast Universe, there are billions and billions of galaxies, each galaxy having billions and billions of stars. Our Sun is **one** such star in **one** particular galaxy that we call the Milky Way. And in the planetary system that exists around the Sun, our Earth is one small planet. And in that planet there are so many countries. **If we take all these factors into consideration, then each of us is one incredibly insignificant spec in Cosmos. And yet, how much ego we tend to have!** Any time we tend to feel egoistic, it would do us some good to look at the starry sky and reflect on the enormity of the Universe in which we are embedded! What should be huge within us is not ego but Divine Love, which the merciful Lord has deposited in full measure!

OK, let us get back on our tour. Did you realise that we are taking a peek into distant parts of the Universe, without even leaving planet Earth? How come I am able to talk so confidently about the various objects in the Universe? How do we know where and what exactly it is? Believe it or not, just by **Looking!** Just by looking from the Earth? Am I serious? Yes, just by looking, and I am dead serious when I say that.

Believe it or not, staying on the Earth and looking out all the time, man has discovered an incredible amount – that one fact alone ought to make clear the incredible power God has put into man, as opposed to the other living species.

Understanding Our Place in the Universe

The question now arises: “How exactly does man go about ‘looking’ out into the sky as it is said?” In ancient times, man had only the eyes as God gave him. Even with this, he was able to do quite a lot. Thus, astronomers in ancient India, Greece, Egypt and China knew a lot about the constellations of stars and the way planets moved amongst them. They could predict eclipses, and a number of other rare planetary configurations. Basically, all such information related to stellar movements and groupings. It was very useful and gave us the first idea of the solar system. Incidentally, this also gave the first almanacs.

The first quantum jump in this entire process of “looking” came with the invention of the optical telescope. Where astronomy was concerned, it was almost like the discovery of America. It is barely four centuries since the telescope was invented and what an extra-ordinary amount of information it has contributed! The moment man had the telescope, he could see so much more; not only that, he could see objects bigger and often more clearly – we have all wonderful pictures of the Moon complete with craters; that alone is sufficient to help us appreciate what a tremendous job the telescope has done.

As years went by, the telescopes kept getting not only bigger but also better and better all the time. What is the meaning of getting better? Basically there are two things that determine the quality of a telescope – its light gathering power, and its resolution. The bigger the lens, the greater is its light-gathering power; and the greater the light-gathering power, the farther one can see with the telescope. Next, the better the design of the lens, the clearer the picture one gets with the telescope – this we know from our experience with cameras. These two parameters, size and quality are what have pushed up the costs of telescopes; but all that expenditure has been very worth while.

Technology Helps Us See Further Faster

Today, technology has been pushed to the farthest limit and we may even say that further improvement for earth-based telescopes would entail enormous cost with very little return. What is it that sets this limit? The atmosphere! Atmosphere? Yes, atmosphere; we don't realise that it is the atmosphere that makes the stars twinkle, as the nursery rhyme so beautifully describes. You see, atmospheric density is not constant, being disturbed by all kinds of factors related to weather, wind, dust. etc. The net result is that the light rays reaching us from distant stars wobble a bit [due to refraction], giving the impression of twinkling. While the twinkling phenomenon is very nice for poets, for astronomers it is a terrible headache, especially when they want to photograph weak stars.

How to get rid of this botheration with twinkling? One way is to put the telescope in space, and that is how the idea for the Hubble telescope was born. This telescope was launched by America and put in space by one of Space Shuttle flights. It is fully automated and controlled remotely from the ground. In space there is no atmosphere and so no nuisance due to twinkling and all that – the pictures are therefore much better. I am sure you have all heard of the Hubble telescope and the wonderful pictures it has provided to astronomers.

Now even as the telescopes kept getting better all the time, astronomers discovered better ways of using them. In the good old days of Newton, one had to literally sit up all night and peer through the telescope. If one was looking at a nearby object like say Mars, it would move relatively rapidly across the sky and so the old-time observer was obliged to keep turning the telescope to keep the object in sight. In due course, a gadget based on

clockwork was invented that automatically turned the telescope. This was particularly useful where big telescopes were concerned.

The next intelligent idea was to replace the eye with a camera. A telescope with automatic movement and a camera attached meant that the astronomer could set it all up and even go away to have his dinner or whatever. Meanwhile, the telescope would be “staring” at the star or galaxy and keep on collecting the light coming from it. In this way, the photographic plate in the camera could be exposed for several hours at a time. This meant that one could catch very faint stars and find out what they were doing.

Fraunhofer Lines

Another very interesting trick that astronomers regularly employ is based on a finding by the German astronomer Fraunhofer way back in the early part of the nineteenth century. Fraunhofer directed his telescope to the Sun and found that when he introduced a prism, then not only was the sunlight split into seven colours but also that the multi-coloured spectrum had dark lines. These lines are now called Fraunhofer lines. No one knew at that time what they meant. Today we know why there are such lines. These dark lines are the “bar codes” of atoms in the Sun, as one scientist graphically describes them.

Fraunhofer lines tell us many things about the celestial object studied. In the case of the Sun, they have revealed an enormous amount – the types of chemical elements present in the Sun and the surface temperature, for example. Indeed, the study of spectral lines has been pushed to a very fine art and today, astronomers can examine spectral lines associated with light coming from the most distant objects in space called quasars (short for Quasi-stellar objects), which are almost at the edge of the Universe. And where distant objects are concerned, spectral lines also tell us about how fast the concerned object is moving! In fact, it is from a careful study of this nature that astronomer Edwin Hubble was able to establish that our Universe is actually expanding. That story later.

The optical telescope has been the workhorse of astronomers for centuries, and with fancy attachments like the CCD camera, it is continuing to do wonders. But a telescope no longer means just tubes and lenses or mirrors made of glass. Today there are all kinds of telescopes like the radio telescope, the microwave telescope, the infrared telescope, the x-ray telescope and the gamma-ray telescope. And in the not too distant future we might even have neutrino telescopes and gravity telescopes – the progress made in the second half of the twentieth century is simply unbelievable!

Visible and Non-Visible Light Radiation

Well, what do all these mean? To understand this in a simple manner, we start with sunlight. As all school-children know, when sunlight is passed through a glass prism it splits into the familiar seven rainbow colours. We describe this by saying that the Sun emits light at several wavelengths

ranging from the red at one end to the violet at the other. OK, this range represents a certain band of wavelengths from about say 6000 Å [Angstroms; one Angstrom is one tenth of a trillionth part of a metre!] to about say 3000 Å. Does the Sun emit radiation at other wavelengths also? If so, why can't we see it? We seem to see only seven colours all the time.

This is an interesting point, and shows the way God “designs” systems! Actually, the Sun emits radiation at all wavelengths, but God in His Wisdom has considered it sufficient if our eyes are sensitive to that portion of the spectrum where the Sun's light is brightest! Something similar happens in the case of sound also. All of us can hear sounds with frequencies only in a certain limited range. We cannot hear high frequency sound and likewise we cannot also hear sound of very low frequency. However, some animals can hear sound frequencies we cannot. God has designed the hearing system to suit the animal. Similarly, God has designed man's sensory systems to aid his survival (in the external world that is!) Man is intended to be a day bird, and that is why his eyesight has been designed to suit daylight and the sensitivity of the human eye is limited to the spectral regions where Sun shines brightest. On the other hand, there are animals that move about mainly in the night, and their eye-sensitivity is quite different. Who can deny that God is Great!

OK, what is the point of all this? Simply that objects in the Cosmos can emit radiation at many different wavelengths, which means that to study celestial objects we must really look at them at as many wavelengths as possible. Thus, while the early studies of our Sun were performed entirely on the basis of visible radiation, today astronomers study the Sun at all sorts of frequencies ranging from the infra-red to the x-ray region. This is possible on account of various developments in technology, thanks to which we now have all kinds of telescopes as I mentioned earlier. Such wide-spectrum and broad-band studies reveal a lot more. Some celestial objects do not emit visible radiation at all, in which case one has no choice but to resort to non-visible astronomy like radio astronomy, for example.

The Places to Appreciate the Glory of God

Advances in technology have also altered the culture of astronomical research. For example, optical telescopes are best located at high altitudes so that the disturbance from the atmosphere is minimised. At the present time, two favourite locations are Hawaii, and the Andes mountains in Chile. Telescopes located here have been built at very great expense, and research time is allotted on the basis of scientific proposals submitted by various research groups. There is, near Bombay/Mumbai, a huge radio telescope known as the GMRT (Giant Metre Radio Telescope.) This telescope has an array of antennas that look like TV satellite dishes, only they are much larger. There are over thirty of these, spread across an area of about thirty sq. km. This telescope has been designed to receive radio waves of 1 metre wavelength – many celestial objects emit at this wavelength. Radio astronomers from all over the world bid for time, and observation time is allotted, based on selections made by an international peer group. Has all this

been worth it? One would think so, judging by the amount of scientific information and knowledge that has been gained.

One might ask, and this is often done: “Why spend so much money on all this when people are dying of starvation, hunger etc.?” This does seem like a pertinent question, but this must be considered against the proper perspective. If one examines the world budget on exploring the Cosmos, that would be peanuts compared to the money spent on violent and unproductive ventures like war, harmful ventures like spreading profanity, gambling, etc. It is therefore not correct to dismiss all scientific research in one breath. Knowledge of the Universe that the merciful Almighty created for us to live in should be welcomed. In fact, such knowledge, though it is only about the physical Universe, would still help in appreciating the Glory of God and the wonders He has packed into Creation.

That is all for this instalment, and let me mention that we have barely started on our journey! There is so much more to come. Meanwhile, do spend a few moments looking up at the sky (if in your part of the world it is not covered with smoke and filled with man-made light.) There is God in all His Glory looking down, shining and smiling, and blessing us. Have His Darshan.

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Many of them did not even know Swami, but their cancers were cancelled and they continued to live for several years after their original diagnosis. What they knew was Swami's Vibhuti and prayers of Sai devotees; a child was still born, her father prayed fervently to Swami and to everyone's delight the little one became pink; a lady was declared infertile by doctors, but she did not give up. She took Vibhuti, trusted her faith in Baba and now is blessed with a beautiful daughter; a car ran over a devotee, the doctors gave little hope of recovery, but to everyone's amazement, today he walks normally; when Vibhuti was applied repeatedly, facial paralysis of another mysteriously disappeared; a person who had incurable AIDS now leads a normal life; 'Sairam', 'Sairam', a lady devotee shouted, when a herd of cattle appeared crossing the road in the night, and when she opened her eyes, the cows were behind her car, she does not know till today how she had gone through them without hitting any of them; an invalid had a vision in which Baba blessed him and immediately after that he started walking; driving her car, a devotee was listening to Gayatri, for some reason the car went out of control, rolled over and settled upside down, but the Gayatri was still playing, and yes, the devotee was completely unhurt... the story of every devotee in this Caribbean island is as captivating and enchanting as the island itself.

Land of the 'The Noble'

Not many would have heard of the Dominican Republic, much less about her white sandy beaches, unique geographical locale, vibrant culture or her five centuries old history. The indigenous inhabitants of the island of Hispaniola, on which the Dominican Republic is located, were the Taíno Amerindians. The Taínos (meaning "the good" or "noble" in the native language) were a seafaring branch of the South American Arawaks (Amerindians in Caribbean). They had a system of chiefdoms and among the cultural signs that they have left are cave paintings around the country, which have become tourist and national symbols of the Dominican Republic.

The island was subsequently explored and claimed by legendary explorer Christopher Columbus on his first voyage in 1492, and Hispaniola became a springboard for Spanish conquest of the Caribbean and the American mainland. In 1697, Spain recognized French dominion over the western third of the island, which in 1804 became Haiti. The remainder of the island, by then known as Santo Domingo, sought to gain its own independence in 1821, but was conquered and ruled by the Haitians for twenty two years; it finally attained independence as the Dominican Republic in 1844. In 1861, the Dominicans voluntarily returned as part of the Spanish Empire, but four years later they restored independence in 1865. Briefly, this is the circuitous contour of her political history.

Enthralling and Enchanting Caribbean Setting

While, over the years, the island's owners have changed many times with

varied political affiliations, one thing has remained the same – her entrancing beauty. More than a thousand miles of sugar-coloured sand gently lapped by warm waters so clear and blue; an underwater wonderland of exotic aquatic life and centuries-old shipwrecks; one of world's favourite locations for snorkeling enthusiasts and scuba divers; home of many international events of water sports including the Kiteboarding and Windsurfing World Cup competitions; harbouring the highest and the lowest sea level points in the Caribbean with Pico Duarte at 10,128 feet above and Lake Enriquillo at 144 feet below – which means, a playground of environments from tropical rainforest to arid desert apart from comfortable zones; home to thousands of humpback whales in the warm waters of winter – Dominican Republic, is truly a tropical paradise for adventurers, ecologists and tourists alike. At the same time, ask any tourist what impressed them the most about this Caribbean island and they will say, "More than the unspoilt beaches and silvery sand, it is the kind and loving nature of the people of this land." Yes, if year by year the island is teeming with tourists, it is because of the simple and easy-going nature of the brown-skinned Dominicans who treat everyone as one family. Their beaches may be wide but their hearts are wider.

Dominican Culture - 'Vibrant with a Heart'

The Dominican Republic is principally a Hispanic country (related to Spain), though heavily blended with African traditions and, to a much smaller degree, with indigenous Amerindian cultural elements. The Spanish cultural heritage is most evident in the national language and predominant religion — Catholicism. Here was built a huge church in the form of a cross which is lit up at night to form a cross in the sky. African cultural elements are most prominent in musical expressions and the carnival celebrations which are a testimony to the rich African heritage.

Church and Celebration

In this island where they say, "culture is adventure", sport is, undoubtedly, life. Though hugely popular for water and wind sports, baseball is by far the most dominant game in the country with many famous Dominicans in the Major League Baseball in United States, and in other countries. Another exciting aspect of Dominican culture is music. In fact, music and dance act as the sound track of the country and its people. Their dance music called Merengue, which is also their national dance, is extremely widespread and these islanders with pride and joy share their native movements with others. "Vibrant with a Heart" – that is what Dominican culture is all about. But when and how did Sai enter this lively nation?

Sai Enters, Becomes the Centre of their Lives

It was the month of May, 1988, when a few Dominicans grew inquisitive about Baba and in their eagerness to know more, invited Mrs. María Martin, from Miami, USA to visit them and share more about Baba. Maria gave a beautiful presentation, and even guided them about the operation of Sai Centers as well as the activities typical to a Sai Organisation.

Thus it was that in June, 1988, a little group got together, composed of Tirso Alcántara, Henry Alonzo and his wife Josefina, Edwin Mejía and his wife Mary, Cristina Rosario, Rafael Espejo and his wife, José Pérez, Elena Martínez and Sixto Incháustegui. This tiny group of few couples and individuals met outdoors every Sunday at the gardens of the Olympic Center.

Sai Groups the Devotees

In August 1988, the group moved to the house of one of its members. They made a small altar for Swami with flowers, incense, etc. on the gracious terrace in the garden of the devotee's house. It was here that Dominican bhajans were born. Edwin, with a beautiful voice, was the only song leader then while the rest sang in the chorus. Mary and Elena also assumed the role of song leaders. In that home, the group celebrated Baba's birthday for the first time; they began to compose their own devotional songs, and this activity, since then, has not stopped. In October 1988, the Sai Organization of Caracas, Venezuela, invited the members of this group to attend their meeting and it was here that the group received authorization to function as a Sai Group.

By 1989-90, the group moved again as the number of members started growing. This time it was to the house of Dr. Fausto Pérez and his wife Cristina. Devotees, more organised as a Sai group now, started study circles and community service projects.

The Education in Human Values programme too started. Small children of a school located in a very poor community were first to be taught lessons on human values. Luis Brouwer and Cristina Rosario, who monitored this program, received permission to use a room in the school and from then on the programme only expanded. With many activities, there were several new members too, and for the first time, the group celebrated Maha Shivaratri in Dominican Republic and began the operation of a small Sai library for its members.

The First Sai Centre in Dominican Republic

On May 1990, Dr. Michael Goldstein, Central Coordinator, and Mr. Leonardo Gutter, President of the Central Council, visited the island. They certified the group and announced the formation of the first Sri Sathya Sai Center in Dominican Republic. Two years ago, nobody knew who Sai Baba was on this island and now there was a cohesive group of staunch devotees. What is the mystery behind it? We can get a glimpse of the phenomena if we look into the lives of each member of the organisation. This is what one devotee narrates:

"Before becoming a devotee, I had badly burnt my face and eyes because of an unfortunate event. I was operated on and the doctors said I would lose one eye completely and might be able to see a little light with the other. That night Swami came to my bedside.

He materialized Vibhuti and put it in my eyes. He also took a bottle of pills which was on the night stand and emptied it in the waste basket. He, then, filled this container too with Vibuthi and said, 'You use this only'. In the morning the doctors were amazed at my recovery. I could see with both eyes!" Later, when this person became a devotee, he put photos of Swami in his home and all are producing Vibuthi for several years now. The ways of the Lord are inexplicable.

With more devotees joining in, on September 14, 1991, the members of the Sai Centre of Dominican Republic, organised the first public conference. It had the title "Life and Message of Sathya Sai Baba" and through this more islanders were now aware of Swami and His love. In 1992, there was a significant increase of members.

Some organized studies on Swami in their communities, and these community groups became study and devotional groups. They started singing bhajans along with their own rituals. Service activities also increased in diversity through visits to homes for elders, food distribution to the homeless and support for old persons with no families.

Numerous medical camps too were carried out. The Organization spread throughout the national territory; centers and groups were created in the provinces of Santiago, La Vega, Moca, Montecristy, San Francisco, Puerto Plata and the little towns nearby. Recently (2006) Nagua and Bonao province also integrated into the Organization.

The Phenomenal growth of the Organisation meant two things: the need for a larger space and a foundation to aid its activities. And so it was that the Sai Centre moved to the colonial zone and a mini-foundation was initiated by three devotees: Rosa Iris Polanco, Henry Alonzo and Elena Martinez. This foundation, since then, has been serving as the basis for the Sri Sathya Sai Foundation of the Dominican Republic which handles the import and sale of Sai Literature and also supports the various service activities.

Three years after the First Public Conference, in October 28, 1994, the first Human Values Conference was held with an encouraging attendance of four hundred persons. Many devotees from neighbouring countries like Puerto Rico, Ecuador and the USA too joined the discussion. From then on, the Organisation grew at a steady pace with activities like public meetings, projection of Sai documentaries, annual participation in the Book Fair of Dominican Republic, etc. going on regularly apart from service activities.

Sai Touches Each New Member

In four years, the organisation grew exponentially. Each new member had an experience of his own to narrate. "In February 1998," says one Dominican, "I was able to fulfil an intense desire to travel to India to see Sai Baba. When I returned, I just wanted to turn around and go back to India, but I discovered that my business was very bad and I had to close my office. Meanwhile, my debts were piling up, and my only option was to start operating out of my

home. This was my predicament in September 98, when I sat in front of Swami's photo telling Him how much I wanted to go to visit Him for His Birthday in November. But for this to happen, He should pay all my debts and send me the money for the airplane ticket as well as for my stay in India. I did not feel it right to travel while I owed so much money. My prayer, truly, was more of a wish than a petition, because it all looked so impossible.

But then something unexpected happened. All of a sudden, clients started calling, money started coming in very fast and my wife found an excellent job. To share the truth, the money I made from September to November 1998, I never had so much luck in such a short time, not before or since. My wife and I, then, understood the message clearly: Swami was responding to my desire to be with Him for the 73rd Birthday. But my desire to go was still pending because, with only fifteen days to go, we realised we were still short of two thousand dollars, which was about the price of the airfare.

In the living room of my home there is a large photo of Swami, and I let Him know that if I was to travel, there was still a matter of two thousand dollars which somehow must be sorted out. Just then the phone rang, and a client told me he needed me for some urgent work for which he could pay me two thousand dollars! So, there I was in India for His Birthday, every single event orchestrated by His divine will.

On another occasion, Swami came in my dream and asked me, "What do you want?" I told Him I always wanted to do whatever He willed, that my actions and thoughts should be according to His will. He, then, asked me a question about some aspects of my life, and said, "What do you want? A new car, or that I should pay the loan on your house, or a trip?" He closed His eyes and waited for my response. I made a selection and told Him. Then He asked another question and gave me some options and again I selected one. Finally, He asked me something else and gave me several choices. But this time when He closed His eyes waiting for my response, I suddenly remembered that I had told Him that I wanted to do His Will - but all along I was selecting things that He was offering. So this time I did not say anything, and when Swami opened His eyes, and asked if I had decided, I told Him He should choose and I would accept whatever He decided. When this happened, the dream ended. The powerful lesson had indeed gone home."

Baba in Bella Vista

It is because of such revealing experiences and the magic of His love and message that devotees started spiralling in this island and by 1988, the need became stronger than ever for a larger venue. The Sai Centre, now, established itself in the area of Bella Vista.

With a strengthened workforce, the Sathya Sai Organization of the Dominican Republic, now focused on service activities more than ever. Regular medical camps were conducted in the outskirts of the metropolitan capital of Santo Domingo. There is now (2006) also a free eye clinic where cataract operations and other eye surgeries are carried out with absolutely no cost to the patients.

The Organisation also adopted the community, Lecheria, which is a slum neighborhood of the city of Santo Domingo, about twenty kilometers away from downtown. Made up of Haitian immigrants who came to Dominican Republic as workers in the sugar cane mills and to harvest the cane, this community also works in the construction industry. For four years now, the Sai Organisation has provided free daily breakfast service for the seventy children of the Community school in Lecheria. Apart from providing food, volunteers also spend a lot of time with the kids to help them become better educated and more disciplined. And at every instance, the devotees feel His grace.

To cite one example, “There are several instances,” say the volunteers, “when the food multiplied when it looked like there would not be enough for all the children, or some other devotee showed up at the last minute with more food saying he had mistaken the day when he was supposed to come.” There is also another fascinating tale that the devotees narrate. “It was November 23, and five of us, Sai volunteers, were driving to the school with the breakfast. Just as we came over the hill and saw the school, there was a double rainbow right on top of it. We were amazed and grateful when we realised that it was all His play to remind us of the special day and make note of it.”

Sai, in His own ways, guides and inspires devotees to lead a purposeful life by instilling in them a spirit of service. “The greatest spiritual practice is to transform love into service.” Swami says and the devotees in this Caribbean island are constantly engaged in offering much help to the needy. To list a few, more than two thousand medical exams in the areas of General Medicine, Cardiology, Gynaecology, Paediatrics, Orthodontia and others have been conducted; there is a nutritional program for kids with inadequate calorie intake; free mosquito nets and Clorox are distributed to control mosquito-transmitted diseases like the deadly Dengue fever; targeted help is offered to mothers, children and the elderly with health problems; during festival celebrations food is served to all families and Christmas every year is marked with the donation of toys apart from regular items; there are free dental care programmes conducted specially for Children; and small housing projects too, like constructing a house for a needy family living in a cardboard shack. In addition, there are also regular free cataract surgeries. This on-going service activity extends to many communities like the Luisa La Prieta, Palamara, La Delgada and Limon.

Bal Vikas for the Youth Instil Faith and Devotion

Along with service, the Education in Human Values programme through Bal Vikas classes also received a fillip during this time. To demonstrate how these inputs really help the youngsters, here is the story of Miguel.

A ten year old Bal Vikas student, Miguel, went to New York with his mother to visit an aunt. The plane arrived at midnight, and then they went to New Jersey arriving at 1 AM. No one was waiting for them, so they took a subway train but did not know if it was the correct train. Mother decided to get down and ask, but the train door closed and Miguel was left still in the train.

The train took off, and the mother was frantic. Her son was in a strange city in a dangerous situation in the middle of the night with no identification. As the train disappeared into the darkness, the mother prayed to Swami. She went to a police station, and explained the problem. The police called ahead to the next few stations and sent officers to look for the missing boy.

Meanwhile, Miguel was remembering Lord Ganesha who removes obstacles and prayed sincerely to Him. Then he remembered Lord Rama and His bravery. He repeated the Gayatri for protection and calmly got down at the next station. He went and sat on a bench and started singing bhajans to himself. Shortly afterwards a police officer came up to him and identified him as the missing boy, radioing for his mother to come on the next train.

Like Miguel many Dominican children now have devotion in the hearts and prayer on their lips. They know somebody is there to take care of them. They know life without Him is not worth living. There are lot more activities on the education front and the Organization even established the Sathya Sai Institute of Human Values a few years ago to help more youngsters lead a life of character and morality.

Since the commencement of the 21st century, the Sai Movement in this island went into a new gear with many devotees joining in after being aware of His mission and message through a string of public events conducted throughout the island. On these occasions, many aspirant souls got a chance to see Him through the video “His Work” and read about Him from the literature distributed. Also, many senior devotees started visiting the island and appeasing the appetite of the new members. One such visit was by Dr. Choudary Voleti, a cardiac surgeon from Los Angeles, who now works at the Super Speciality Hospital in Prashanti Nilayam.

One unique event that occurred during his trip was that it was the first time people from Haiti came to the Dominican Republic responding to a heartfelt invitation. There is a long history of strife and a multitude of barriers between the two countries. But on this occasion, eighteen Haitian devotees arrived for the conference and there was a simultaneous translation of Dr. Choudhury’s talk into French and Spanish for the Haitians and Dominicans respectively. It was a real ‘unity in divinity’ experience and the Haitians were so happy that they could hardly wait to visit again. “Our cups are filled with love,” they said before they left.

Sai Miracles in the Midst of Catastrophe

Every event that was organised had a divine hand in it. When hurricane Jeanne hit the island one day prior to the scheduled day for a public meeting on Sep 18, 2004, the devotees were in a dilemma whether to continue with the meeting. With winds of over hundred kilometre per hour plus torrential rains leading to even loss of lives, the situation looked very bleak, but at the same time the guest speaker, Ismael Delorenz from Mexico had arrived. The devotees decided to go ahead with the conference even if a few showed up.

They chanted Sai Gayatri and prayed for His help. What happened the next day was nothing short of a Sai Miracle. The valley of La Vega, where the meeting was planned to be held, was sunny and bright while the rest of the Island continued to be bombarded by the hurricane. That evening, the auditorium overflowed with more than two hundred people. Until the next day, the weather held nicely so that the devotees had no inconvenience. But soon after this, the storm returned with a vengeance. The devotees needed no greater evidence of His protecting grace and loving care.

Sai's grace reaches the spirited people of this island through myriad ways. There is a revealing experience of a young lady who was studying in university and her knowledge of Swami was limited to an envelope with Vibhuti given to her by her mother, which she had kept for many years. A kidney ailment, which was bothering her for quite sometime, took her to many hospitals and finally even forced her to discontinue her studies. There was nothing the doctors could do and finally when her body became swollen, they advised her parents to get her treated in another country with more advanced medical techniques. However they did not have the money for travelling, or for the huge expenses treatments elsewhere would mean. **It was then that her mother remembered the Vibuthi. She told her daughter, "We must pray to Sai Baba, He will save you," and applied the Vibuthi on her. The daughter started to sweat, so much so that it looked like she had taken a bath. In about two hours the swelling of her body went down, and her kidneys started working normally. She had received a miracle cure from Swami. The doctors, palpably, were amazed.**

Now, ten years later, she is married and lives happily with two little children, even though the doctors had said she could never have children. There are no negative effects from her previous illness, nor has it returned to bother her.

But this is not all. When she went back to the university, she asked where she could register again to take the classes that she missed due to her illness. But her friends said, "What are you talking about. We saw you everyday, and we were so impressed with your strength in spite of your illness. And you did very well in all your examinations." At first she couldn't understand. She had been in the hospital and sick in bed during the entire semester. It was all a divine play and she knows for sure now that come what may, her Sai will never desert her.

Another devotee who went to India for Swami's darshan bought a calendar with several pictures of Swami. The calendar started to produce Vibhuti after he returned. When other photos of Swami were put in the same room, they too were covered with Vibhuthi. These photos have now become the altar for a Sai Center, and also have been producing Vibhuthi constantly for several years, and in quantities that permit it to be given to everyone who asks for it.

In yet another amusing incident, a Dominican had asked Swami for an inner cleansing. Swami came up to him in the darshan line and materialized Vibuthi. When he put it in his mouth, it tasted like detergent soap, he immediately remembered his prayer!

Sai touches the life of every devotee in a distinct and disparate way. It is an experience which lasts a lifetime and goads the devotee to lead a life of purity and purpose. And it is mind-boggling how Sai sitting far away physically on the other side of the globe pulls his devotees as if they were 'sparrows with strings tied on their feet' as Shirdi Baba used to say. Everything happens according to His divine plan and He knows whom to call, when and how. The day is not too far when overflowing with Sai experiences and His love, Dominican Republic will rediscover herself as the 'Divine Republic.'

We are grateful to Mr. John Behner and many devotees of Dominican Republic for their active cooperation and help in the making of this article.

THE QUINTESSENCE OF THE VEDAS IN SAI TEACHINGS

This is the transcription of the talk delivered by Shri B. N. Narasimha Murthy in the divine presence on August 19, 2006, eve of the 'poornahuthi' of the sacred event Athi Rudra Maha Yagna.

Om Sri Sai Ram. I offer my humble and loving *pranams* at the lotus feet of our Most Beloved Divine Master, Bhagavan Baba.

Respected Elders, the *Adhvaryu* (main priest) of this great *Yagna* - Shri Nanjunda Deekshith and his devoted band of *Rithviks*, my dear brothers and sisters,

(In Telugu)

Bharatha deshamu vedala pattukomma

Yagna yagadhi krathuvalakaatapattu

Pekku Avatharamula ganna pedda thalli

Neethi niyamala roopu ee Thyaga Bhoomi

"The great land of Bharath is the mainstay of the *Vedas*. She is the abode of all sacrificial ceremonies - *Yagas*, *Yagnas* and *Krathus*. She is the great mother who has given birth to many *Avatars*. This land of sacrifice is the very embodiment of morality and right conduct."

The Soul of India Speaks

This is the voice of the soul of India, which speaks through our Beloved Lord Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba today. In this most beautiful poem sung by Bhagavan at the beginning of one of His discourses on the *Vedas*, there are five entities. The Motherland Bharath (India); the *Vedas*; the *Yagas*, *Yagnas* and *Krathus* (*sacrifices*); the *Avatars*; and the morality and right conduct in human society. All these five are so inexorably intertwined, inseparably interdependent that they cannot exist apart from one another. Where there is one of them, there are the other four! That is why Romain Rolland, the great French philosopher and writer declared, "If there is a place on the face of the earth, which has been the home for the highest dreams of all living men, since the earliest times when man began the dream of existence, it is India!"

These are the highest dreams of men of any country. The exalted ideals set forth in the *Vedas*, the idealism that manifests in the *Yagas* and *Yagnas*, the divine mission of the *Avatar*, and the morality and right conduct in human society - these are the highest dreams of all noble men and women all over the world! That is why *Rigveda* says: "*Ano bhadrah krathavo yanthu vishwathah*" (Sanskrit) – 'May noble thoughts come from every side.'

Reviving the Vedas

These are the dreams of all great men, all great thinkers who are interested in the *Loka Kalyana* – welfare of the world. The great poet-saint Jayadeva sings at the beginning of his immortal poem *Gita Govinda* - the Song Celestial –

“*Vedan uddharathe Jagannivahathe Bhoogolamudhvibhrathe*” (Sanskrit) – ‘The *Avatar* revives the *Vedas* and redeems the world.’ The revival of the *Vedas* and the survival of this planet earth are interdependent; they are inseparably linked. That is why today, one of the prime missions of Bhagavan is *Veda poshana* – revival of the *Vedas*.

For the first time in the history of the world, we find the *Vedic* chants resounding in more than hundred countries all over the world; it is the Divine *Sankalpa* (will) of our Lord Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Never in the history of mankind has it happened! From Iceland in the North to New Zealand in the South, from Alaska in the Far West to Japan in the Far East, people are chanting the *Vedic* hymns. Where else but here - in the holy Presence of our Divine Master – can children from Iran, America and Russia chant the *Vedas*? It is possible here and only here!

We have been basking in the glory of the *Athi Rudhra Maha Yagna* for the last ten days. “*Atho Rudhrajapaadeva Bhukthimukthi prasiddhyathah*” (Sanskrit) This is one of the statements from the *Shivapurana*. By chanting the *Rudhram*, one gains both *bhukthi* and *mukthi* (devotion and material wealth); that is exactly what our Lord assures us - “*Nannu namminavariki Nenu annamu maathrame kaadhu, amrithamu kooda isthanu*” (Telugu). This is the promise made by our Lord - “I shall grant to those who trust me all their material needs and also spiritual fulfilment.” That is the benefit that accrues to the world from this *Yagna*.

On behalf of all those who are gathered here and all those who adhere to the spiritual cultures all over the world, I offer grateful *pranaams* at the lotus feet of Our Lord for granting us this marvellous opportunity.

I offer my congratulations to Shri Nanjunda Deekshith and his dedicated team of *Rithviks* who have been performing this *Yagna* with great *Bhakthi* and *Shraddha* – sincerity of purpose and devotion. Over the last ten days, we find a bond of love and affection developing between Bhagavan and the *Rithviks*. Swami said - yesterday evening - during His divine discourse, “*Meeru Nannu vidichi unda leri, Nenu Mimmalanu vidichi unda lenu*” (Telugu) - ‘You cannot live apart from Me and I cannot live apart from you.’ What greater tribute can be paid to the *Shraddha* and *Bhakthi* (sincerity and devotion) of these eminent *Vedic* scholars?

I also congratulate Sri Vinay Kumar, the leader of the youth-wing of Karnataka and his devout team of young men who have been managing this *Yagna* with impeccable efficiency and wonderful unity.

The Divine Mother Presides Over Us

Why did Swami permit the performance of this *Yagna* in His divine presence? It is the divine *sankalpa* (will) of Swami that it should take place here. Of course, there is a human instrument, whom Swami prompted to propose and pray for the performance of this *Yagna*.

In the *Lalithaa Sahasranaamam* (thousand eight names of Divine mother), the Divine Mother is adored with one thousand names which are enshrined in one hundred eighty three *shlokas* (or stanzas). The hundred sixty-fourth stanza runs thus:

Samsaarapankanirmagna Samuddharanapandithaa
Yagnapriyaa Yagnakarthree Yajamaanaswaroopini (Sanskrit)

These two lines form one *shloka*. If you study the *Lalithaa Sahasranaamam* meticulously, you will find that the two lines of any *shloka* generally have the same theme. To illustrate this point, let me quote the sixty-eighth stanza of the *Sahasranaamam*, which describes the relation between the Divine mother and the *Vedas*.

Shruthi seemantha sindhoori kruthapaadaabjadhoolika
Sakalaagamasandhoha shukthisamputamaukthika (Sanskrit)

Here you see that there is a common theme running through the *shloka*. This stanza is known for the beauty and melody of poetry of Hayagreevamuni (Sage Hayagreeva) who composed the *Lalithaa Sahasranamam*. The first line is ‘*Shruthi seemantha sindhoori kruthapaadaabjadhoolika*’. It means, “If the *Vedas* take the form of a maiden, you find a mark of *sindhoora* (vermillion) on her broad and radiant forehead. That *sindhura* on the forehead of the *Shruthi Devi* (or Mother of the *Vedas*) is marked with the dust on the feet of our Divine Mother.’ The next line is ‘*Sakalaagamasandhoha Shukthisamputamaukthika*.’ If all the *Vedas* form an oyster shell, there is a pearl hidden in it; that pearl adorns the nose of our divine mother as Her nose stud.

But in the stanza quoted by me earlier, that is the hundred sixty-fourth stanza, there is apparently no connecting link between the two lines. The first line of this stanza is - ‘*Samsaarapankanirmagna samuddharana Pandithaa*’, it means that She is an adept at redeeming men and women who are stuck in the slush of *samsaara* or the quagmire of materialism. She has got many strategies to do it; she does it in many ways. The second line is ‘*Yagnapriyaa Yagnakarthree Yajamaanaswaroopini*.’ It means, ‘She loves *Yagna*, She performs *Yagna* and She presides over the *Yagna*.’ You find here our Divine Mother, Sai *Lalithaa*, presiding over this *Athi Rudhra Maha Yagna* with so much of love and grace.

Yagna’s Principal Purpose

Apparently there seems to be no link between the themes of these two lines of the stanza. I felt so only till I came to Prashanthi Nilayam to participate in this *Yagnam*. Now it is very clear to me that there is a thematic relation between the two lines. By this time you will also know what I mean! *Yagna* is one of Her means to redeem all of us, to redeem the whole of mankind which is struggling and suffering in the slush of materialism. Through this *Yagna*, She wants to divert our minds from the mundane to the spiritual, from the world to God. That is the purpose of this *yagna*! Because therein lies the secret of *Loka Kalyana* - the welfare of the world.

It is not that there are some spiritual people and some materialists who form two separate groups and that in a fight or a conflict between the two, the people adhering to spirituality will triumph. Spirituality and materialism are together there in the hearts of all of us. Only when spirituality triumphs over materialism in our hearts, there is welfare of humanity. And Swami puts it in very simple words:

“If there be righteousness in the heart, there shall be beauty in character;
If there be beauty in character, there shall be harmony at home;
If there be harmony at home, there shall be order in the nation;
If there be order in the nation, there shall be peace in the world.”

That is where the process starts; it starts in the human heart!

Once in early 1970s, Swami chose *Vedas* and *Vedic Culture* as the main theme for a Summer Course in Indian Culture and Spirituality. Swami granted about twenty divine discourses on the *Vedas*. At that time, there were around Swami some great men of learning like *Amnaayaaartha Vachaspathi* Sri Kamavadhani - a great *Vedic* scholar, Dr. Vinayaka Krishna Gokak - a giant among men of letters and Dr. Bhagavantham - a well known scientist. When I remember the scene of those days, I am reminded of a beautiful line from the *Lalithaa Sahasranaamam* again. ‘*Sachamararamaavaani savyadhakshinasevithaa*’. On the left side of our Divine Mother, Lakshmi - the goddess of wealth, stands with a *chamara* (ceremonial hand fan) in her hand and serves Her; on the right side, there stands Saraswathi – the goddess of learning, with another *chamara*. That is the glory of our Divine Mother - Sai Lalithaa. It is highly symbolic. On one side, there are men of great learning, great knowledge and great wisdom at the beck and call of Swami, ready to serve Him. And on the other side, there are men of great wealth, many industrial and business magnates, who are ready to offer their wealth at the altar of His Divine Mission. That is the glory of our Divine Mother – Sai Lalithaa.

Swami spoke on the *Vedas* in that summer course. He quoted exhaustively from the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*; He quoted from the commentators, both eastern and western. He quoted from *Sayanaachaarya* and *Yaaskaachaarya*; He quoted from Max Mueller, Weber, Keith and Winternitz. Dr. Vinayaka Krishna Gokak was astounded. He wanted to know, when Swami studied all that. He went to Swami and submitted at His lotus Feet a question - “*Swami, Neevu yaavaaga idhannella odhidhiri?*” (Kannada) - ‘Swami, when did you study all this?’ Swami smiled and replied, “*Chadhive chadda alavaate naaku ledu.* (Telugu) *Odhuva ketta abhyaasave nanage illa!*” (Kannada) - ‘I don’t have the bad habit of reading books!’ That’s what He said!

Vedic Knowledge Already Exists in the Human Brain

Then Swami explained, “This is the secret of the emergence of the *Vedas* in the minds of sages and seers. All the knowledge in the universe is there in the human brain. There are many brain centres; each is a centre for one

particular branch of knowledge. If a man is able to control his mind and senses and focus his mind on a particular brain centre, all the knowledge pertaining to that branch of knowledge will stand revealed to him!"

That is the secret to why we call the *Vedas*, '*Apourasheyaas*'! We mean that the *Vedas* were not composed by any man or woman! We call the sages and seers as the '*Manthra Drashtaaras*' - those who saw the *mantras*; the significance of such an appellation was revealed by Swami when He told Dr. Gokak, "That was how the *Vedas* were unveiled to the sages and seers. This is the secret of emergence of the *Vedas*, which are eternal and which came into existence with the creation of the universe!"

In the mind of Dr. Bhagavantham who was translating Swami's Telugu discourses into English, there arose a doubt. Being a scientist, he started doubting whether all that Swami disclosed in the discourses was in the *Vedas*! He forgot for a while, the incident that had happened on the banks of the Chitravati River, when he came to Puttaparti for the first time. When Swami took a fistful of sand and poured it into Bhagavantham's hands, it instantly transformed into a book of the Bhagavad Gita! He went to Kamavadhani and asked him, "*Emandi, Swami cheppedhanthaa Vedamulo undha?*" (Telugu) – 'Will you please tell me, whether all that Swami spoke is in the *Vedas*?' Kamavadhani replied, "*Emi Bhagavantham garu, meeru ila adaguthunnaru? Swami cheppedanthaa Vedamulo undedhi maathram kaadu, Swami emi cheppithe ade Vedamu!*" (Telugu) 'It is not only that all that Swami says is in the *Veda*, but whatever He says is the *Veda*!' *Maate manthramu* (Telugu); His word is the *Veda*. He is the *Vedapurusha*; He is the *Vedajanani* (He is the embodiment of the *Vedas*).

Lighting the Fire Within: The Sai Way

That explains the purpose of this *Yagna*. Many decades ago, someone asked Swami, "Swami, You say that by performing *Yagas* and *Yagnas* (sacrifices), we can achieve *Loka Kalyana* (welfare of the world). But *Yagas* and *Yagnas* are performed only in India; how will it help other countries? Swami gave a beautiful answer – "The world is like a train and India is the engine! All other nations are like compartments of the train. We have to ignite fire only in the engine!"

That is why Arnold Toynbee, the British Historian, declared a few decades ago, "At this supremely dangerous moment of human history, there is only one way of salvation for mankind; that is the Indian way!" What is the Indian Way? It is the Sai Way. That is the way of the *Vedas*. That is the way of *Daiva Prema* and *Jeeva Karunya* - Love for God and compassion for fellow beings. That is the way which leads to the salvation of mankind. All the problems of the world today originate from the bankruptcy of *Daiva Prema* and *Jeeva Karunya* in the human heart.

Now, you look at the Sai Kulwant hall; the happenings here are so symbolic. You find a *Yagna* being performed here, which stands for *Daiva Prema* (Love of God). Just outside the gate, you also see a Mobile Hospital! It is symbolic

of Swami's *Jeeva Karunya* - His compassion for mankind. The Mobile Hospital, which is here, stands for Swami's compassion. The Mobile Hospital symbolises all the service projects undertaken by Him for alleviating the suffering of the mankind.

Merging the Ancient and the Modern - The Essence of the Upanishads

You find in Swami a great synthesizer of the ancient and modern. We see the ancient *Yagna*; the same *Vedic* chants which resounded in the *Naimishaaranya* (forests) thousands of years ago, resound now here, in our presence.

In Karnataka, there was a great philosopher poet by name 'DVG' – D. V. Gundappa. He wrote:

*"Haleberu hosa chiguru koodiralu mara sobagu
Hosayukthi halethathwadhodagoode Dharma
RishiVaakyadhodane vignanakale melavise
Jasavu janajeevanake Mankuthimma."* (Kannada)

"If a tree has to look beautiful there should be the age old roots and also the newly born, just sprouted leaves. That is why a tree looks beautiful in the season of the spring - the *Vasantharithu*. Similarly if the new strategies of science are blended with the ancient and the eternal, and with the immortal and fundamental philosophy revealed by the *Rishivaakya* (sages), it leads to the welfare of mankind."

Now let us have a look at the philosophy of the *Vedas*, which is symbolised by the sages' utterances. The essence of the *Vedas* is enshrined in the *Upanishads*. You find the zenith of sublimity of human experience in the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. I appeal to all my brothers and sisters here, who would like to know the essence of *Upanishads*, to study the little book written by Swami, the '*Upanishad Vahini*'. According to Swami, the ultimate philosophy of the *Upanishads* is "*Advaitadharshanam Gnaanam*." The vision of the unity or oneness of all existence is true wisdom. It is, "*Anekathwe Ekathwadharshanam*." – 'Seeing the unity in Diversity or Multiplicity'.

That is the essence of the *Upanishads*. How do you see it? You can't see it with your physical eyes; you have to experience it. And that is possible only if you control your mind and senses and conquer your body consciousness. The *Shwesthaashwathara Upanishad* says:

*Yasmin sarvaani bhoothani Athmaavaibhooth vjaanathah
Thathra ko moahah kasshokah Ekathwamanupashyathah* (Sanskrit)

What a beautiful way of putting the highest truth in the simplest words? "For the One who has realised that all the beings in the universe are the *Atma* (self) Himself, and the one who has experienced the oneness or the unity,

where is *Moha* – delusion? Where is *Shoka* - sorrow?” That is the ultimate essence of the Vedas.

If you study the *Vedic* literature, you find that this ultimate experience, which a man is capable of, is arrived at after going through several stages of evolution. It does not mean that *Vedic* thought and philosophy evolved over a period of time to reach the zenith. The right thing to understand is that the *Vedas* trace the progressive march of human mind towards the ultimate truth.

The Four Stages of Vedic Philosophy

Now I shall try to give you a bird's eye view of the four important stages of the *Vedic* philosophy. In the early part of the *Rigveda* you find, apparently, a kind of polytheism - worship of many gods and goddesses. There is a stanza which goes thus:

AgnirIndro Varuno Mitrho Aryamaa
Vayuh Poosha Saraswathi Sajoshah
Adhityah Vishnuh Maruthah Swarbruath
Somo Rudhro Adithihih Brahmanaspathih (Sanskrit)

Stage One: Polytheism

You find that there are originally thirty-three gods and goddesses in the *Rigveda* and they are categorized into three groups. The first among them are *Prithvisthaana Devathas* - those *Devathas* who are related to the earth. The second are *Antharikshasthaana Devathas* - those related to the terrestrial atmosphere. Finally we have *Dyuusthana Devathas*, related to the outer space. *Agni* (fire) is the chief amongst the gods related to earth; *Indra* is the prominent among the gods of the *Antharikshasthaana*, and *Varuna*, of the *Dyuusthaana*.

A question arises: Was it polytheism and worship of Nature? On the surface it appears as though it was nothing but a process of the deification of natural phenomena or forces. You take, for example, the goddess *Ushas*, the goddess of dawn; only God can compose such beautiful poetry with which *Ushas* is adored! Only the '*Kavinaam Kavih*' can create such imagery! That was the first stage; they performed *Yagas* and *Yagnas*, and prayed for material welfare, material gifts, good health, and all such things required for a comfortable and happy life. Of course, they prayed for the love and grace of various gods and goddesses.

Stage Two: Monotheism

In the second stage you find *polytheism* slowly lapsing into *monotheism*. They discovered the one God who manifests Himself as various gods and goddesses:

Indram Mithram Varunamagnimaahuh
Atho divyah sa Suparno Garuthhmaan

Ekam sath vipraah bahudhaa vadhanthi
Agnim Yamam Maatharishwanamaahuh (Sanskrit)

“There is only one God, only one truth. The wise ones address Him by many names. They call Him Indra, Mithra, Varuna, Agni, Suparna, Garuthmaan, Yama or Maatharishwaan.” That is *monotheism*: worship of one God. That is the second stage.

Stage Three: Finding God Within

In the third stage you find the aspirant realising that the God that he is looking for outside, is there inside him also. He is the *Antharaathman* (indweller).

Eko Devah sarva bhootheshu goodah
Sarvavyaapee sarvabhoothaantharathma
Karmaadhyakshah Sarvabhoothaadhivaasah:
Chetaa Sakshi Kevalo Nirgunascha (Sanskrit)

What a beautiful description of God! “There is only one God, who is the indweller in all beings. He pervades everything; He presides over all the activities in the universe. He is the consciousness – the *Chitaa*. He is the eternal witness - the *Sakshi*. He is the ultimate one - *Kevalah* and the attributeless one - *Nirgunah*.” The one who has created this wonderful universe with so many *Gunas* – qualities, *is Nirguna*! He has no attributes. In the third stage, the aspirant realises that the goal of life is to realise god who is within oneself. Only then can he find true joy and fulfilment in life.

Eko vashi Sarvabhoothantharaathma
Ekam roopam bahudha yah karothe
Thamaathmastham enupashyanthi dheerah
Theshaam sukham shashvatham nethareshaam (Sanskrit)

“There is only one *Atma* who is in everything and who is also within oneself. Only those heroes who realise that *Atma* within themselves shall enjoy eternal happiness and not others!” How can one do it? In the *Kathopanishad* *Yamadeva*, the god of death revealed that secret to Nachiketha. All of you know the beautiful story of *Nachiketa*. *Yama* says:

Paraanchi khaani vyathrunath Swayambhoo
Paraan pashyathi naantharaathman
Kaschith dheerah Prathyagaathmaanamaikshath
Aavruttha chakshuh amruthathvamicchan (Sanskrit)

“Lord *Swayambhoo*, the self-born, created the mind and senses of men and women in such a way that they go outwards; but a *dheera*, a hero who intends to attain immortality turns his mind and senses inwards and realises Him within.” That is the third stage.

Stage Four: God Realisation

In the fourth stage, after realising God, the seer exults:

*Vedaahametham Purusham Mahaantham
Adithyavarnam thamasasthu paare
Tameva vidhithvaathi mruthyumaithi
Nanya panthaah vidhyathe ayanaaya (Sanskrit)*

What an ecstatic effusion! The *Vedic* sage declares, "I have known that great *Purusha*; I have known God; I have realized God who is the embodiment of all radiance and effulgence and who is beyond all darkness. One can conquer death only by knowing Him and there is no other way." That is the stage of unity; that is the ultimate experience which any human can attain. These are the four stages of *Vedic* thought and philosophy, which take into consideration men and women at all stages of evolution and guide them with ideas and means for their further advancement.

Providing for All Stages of Spiritual Evolution

Once, when Swami addressed a meeting of intellectuals and scientists at Bombay after His return from Africa in the 1960s, a scientist asked Him, "Swami, people belonging to other religions worship only one God where as we, in India, worship many gods and goddesses. Why is it so?" Swami gave a very beautiful answer; He replied, "Suppose you go to a garment shop to purchase a shirt and the salesman there tells you that shirts of only one size are available and you find that the shirt available there does not fit you. Will you be satisfied? Here in India we have a Super Bazaar! We have shirts of all sizes and colours!" So the *Vedas*, like Swami's teachings, provide for the needs of all men and women at all stages of spiritual evolution.

Generally it is a human tendency to see multiplicity of gods. For example, Bhaktha Ramdas of Bhadrachalam sings, "*Nanu brovamani cheppave, Seethamma thalli!*" (Telugu) as if Seetha is different from Rama! "Oh mother, Seetha, please recommend my case to Sri Rama so that He showers His blessings on me!" – That is the devotee's prayer. Also he addresses her by many names. Looking at the *Shasranaamam* – a thousand names - in praise of a Deity, some may wonder why there should be so many names for one Deity. Here is Bhaktha Ramadas singing, "*Nanu brovamani cheppu Naarishironmani Janakuni koothura Jananee Janakamma!*" 'The crest jewel among women', 'Daughter of Janaka' and 'Mother Janaki' these are some of the names with which the devotee addresses the divine consort of Sri Rama! It takes some spiritual maturity on one's part to realise that there is only one God who takes upon Himself many forms to please His devotees according to their liking. For example, a devotee goes to Sri Balaji Venkatramana and prays for the fulfilment of his desires. If he doesn't get the desired result, he will go to Shirdi and pray to Sai Baba. If Sai Baba also does not respond, the devotee will come to Puttaparthi. It takes some time for him to realise that all the three are one and the same.

It is wrong on our part to think that there was a time when all people were polytheists and there was a time when all people were monotheists. Also there was never a time when all the people in the world aspired only for

spiritual realisation. This world is like a school, where there are students in all the twelve classes – from the first class to the twelfth class. At all times there will be men and women who are at various stages of spiritual growth.

Genuine Faith and Devotion is the Only Way

The next question is, “How do we reach the goal?” The answer of the *Upanishads*, which contain the essence of the *Vedas*, is very simple and straight. One attains the goal by cultivating faith and devotion. In the *Shwethashwara Upanishad*, after teaching all the highest truths, the *Guru* tells the disciple:

*Yasya Deve paraabakthih yatha deve thathaa Gurau
Thasyaithe kathithah arthaah prakaashanthe mahaathmanah.* (Sanskrit)

“All the highest truths enunciated in the *Vedas* shine forth only to that great soul who has unconditional devotion to God and the *Guru*.” That is it. There is no other way. Swami reveals the same in His inimitable style:

*Bahula vidhyalanni paakashaastrambolu
Vontakambolu Bhakthi okkate.
Vontakamu veedi paakashaastramadela
Vinudu Bharatheeya veerasuthuda* (Telugu)

“All the types of learning are like books on cooking. The actual act of cooking is *Bhakthi* or devotion alone. What is the use of books on cooking if one does not take to cooking at all?”

Devotion is the one and the only way; that is what *Vedas* say; that is what Swami also says. But devotion is not sentimentalism; it is a way of life! Rabindranath Tagore sings to his Lord:

“I shall keep my body pure, knowing that Thy living touch is upon all my limbs!
I shall drive away all evil from my heart and keep my love in flower,
Knowing that Thou hast Thy seat in the innermost shrine of my heart!
I shall endeavour to express Thee in all my actions, knowing that it is Thy power that makes me act!”

Thus, devotion is a way of life! Devotion is not a garb to be worn only on some occasions. That is why Swami tells us to be fulltime devotees and not part time devotees.

Essence of the Vedas...in Five Sentences

For the purpose of practising the teachings, the essence of the *Vedas*, which is also the essence of the Sai teachings, can be put in just five sentences. I will conclude my talk with those five sentences. These five sentences – the *Panchavaakyas* - are beautiful, profound and easy to remember and practise.

Look Behind...

The first is, 'Look behind; thank God!' What does it mean? If you look to your past life, you can find many situations when Swami came to your rescue at difficult times, helped you, supported you and saved you. Contemplate on those situations and develop gratitude towards Swami. That is what is meant by 'Look Behind; thank Swami!'

...Look Ahead...

The second sentence is, 'Look ahead; trust Swami!' Why are you worried about your future? Why are you anxious? The One who has led you by hand till today will not give you up now! Definitely He will not fail you. Yesterday we heard the wonderful stories of how Swami redeemed Smt. Sahukar Janaki and Smt. Anjali Devi in difficult times. If you have faith, you have everything! Swami assures us, "I am waiting to help you at all times, at all places. Only if you choose, I will lead you by the hand every moment of your life. I shall fulfil all your material needs, all your spiritual needs, and all your duty needs!" What else do you want? Therefore, 'Look ahead; trust God!'

...Look Around...

The third sentence is, 'Look around; serve God!' Those whom you see around you are not really others; they are your own Swami. Every being that lives in the universe is your own Swami. "*Vaasudevah sarvamidham sa Maahaatma sudhurlabhah*", says Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Geeta* – 'All this is *Vaasudeva* Himself!' Therefore 'Look around; serve God!'

...Look Within...

The fourth teaching is, 'Look within; see God!' God is within you. Undertake spiritual practices which will help you to turn your mind inward. Then, you will find Him as the eternal resident of your own heart.

...And Look Through

Finally, 'Look through; be God!' Look through the veil of *Maya*; look through the veil of multiplicity; rise above body consciousness. And you will find that there exists only One and none else – '*Ekameva Adhvitheeyam Brahma*'!

Brahmaiva idham amrutham purasthaath
Brahma paschaath Brahma dhakshinathahuttharena
Adhashcha urdhvamcha prashrutham
Brahmaiva idham vishvamidham varistam (Sanskrit)

"On your front there is God who is immortal; behind you there is God; on your right side there is God; on the left side there is God; inside you there is God. All this universe is God Himself!" '*Vishvam Vishnuswaroopam*.'

With the divine permission of Swami, I conclude the talk putting these five sentences together. These sentences form the quintessence of the *Vedas* and the Sai teachings:

“Look behind; thank God!
Look ahead; trust God!
Look around; serve God!
Look within; see God!
Look through; be God!”

Jai Sai Ram!

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI - Part 25 (Continued from the previous issue)

ACT VI - SCENE 1

The scene is a classroom in the Bukkapatnam High School. The Telugu teacher is conducting the class. He is asking questions, and the students are giving the answers.

TEACHER: Yesterday, I asked you to write the notes for the lesson I taught you. Have you brought the notes?

CHORUS: Yes sir, we did.

TEACHER: GoodSathyam let me see Your notes.

SATHYA: I did not write them.

TEACHER: What? Did not write? Why?

SATHYA: Because I already know the lesson, that's why.

TEACHER: It is immaterial whether You know the lesson or not. When you are told to write the lesson, you must. Haven't all the other boys done so?

SATHYA: Sir, all of them could not answer you, whereas I did.

TEACHER: So! You are proud, are You? Pride is not a qualification for students. I am certainly happy that You know the lesson. But, because You failed to write it down, You will have to stand up on the bench till the end of the class hour.

The class period is over. The bell rings. It is time for the Telugu teacher to leave and make way for the teacher who would handle the next period. That teacher is Mehboob Khan. Khan loves Sathya. He is aware of the innate Divinity in Sathya. It is to Khan that Sathya gave Vibhuti earlier. The Telugu teacher is unable to get off the chair. When he gets up, the chair also rises – he is stuck to the chair! This causes amusement to the students, all of whom except Sathya, roar with laughter.

ONE BOY: Sir, what are you doing?

TEACHER: Can't you see? I'm doing the chair dance!

Mehboob Khan enters at this stage.

KHAN: *[to the Telugu teacher]* What happened to you? You seem to be stuck to the chair! Do you like the chair so much? Or, is it that the chair likes you very much?

TEACHER: Do you think it is funny? I don't know why this chair has got stuck to me. But for you, it seems to be great fun!

KHAN: There is no surprise in this. Why did you punish Sathya? Ask Sathya to get down and you will be released from the chair.

TEACHER: Khan sir, is there any connection between Sathya standing up on the bench and my getting stuck to the chair?

KHAN: Yes, ask Sathya to step down, and you will know!

TEACHER: Sathya, sit down.

KHAN: *[to the Telugu teacher]* Now you get up from the chair!

The teacher becomes unstuck.

KHAN: *[to the Telugu teacher]* Now do you see the connection?.... Sathya may appear to be a student but He has Divine Power in Him. To demonstrate that, Sathya enacted this little drama when you punished Him. Understand?

TEACHER: Sathyam all along I thought of You as a mere student. Only now do I understand that a Divine Child is my student! You are the one Who teaches the master! *[to Khan]* You take over the class now!

KHAN: Thank you teacher!

SCENE 2

Sathya is sitting all alone. His classmates come there to talk to Him about the strange incident – the teacher getting stuck.

BOY: Raju, You taught a lesson to the Master!

BOY 2: Not an ordinary lesson but one on behaviour!

SATHYA: You are wrong! *Guru* or teacher is like God, and it is from him that the student receives instruction. It is such teaching that eventually leads the student to the Knowledge of the Self or God. And it is that Knowledge of the Self that in turn leads to Liberation.

BOY: Raju, I don't understand what you are saying!

SATHYA: Maybe, but that's the way it is.

BOY: Why did You get the chair stuck to the teacher?

SATHYA: You don't know? God loves the unusual. From time to time, He does such things for His pleasure! When He was a young boy, Krishna stole the dresses of the Gopis; that was a naughty prank. But that same Krishna, when He grew older, protected, in a moment of great crisis, the honour of Draupadhi by giving her an endless supply of clothes.

BOY: Yes, my mother also told me that story.

BOY 2: You seem to know everything! Why then are You studying in school?

SATHYA: God has been a student before when He incarnated. Sri Rama was a disciple of Sage Vishwamitra. Sri Krishna similarly was a student of Sandipani. This is the way incarnations receive instruction. The scriptures extol the *Guru* as God. They say: Mother is God, Father is God, and the *Guru* also is God.

BOY: That's fine Raju. Now You created *Vibhuti* by waving Your hand. Was it magic or a trick?

SATHYA: Neither. Divine Power is infused wherever God directs His Vision. If the hand is charged with Divinity, then Creation automatically follows. That's all!

BOY: Raju, are You saying You are God?

SATHYA: The Sun is referred to as the Sun, Rama is called Rama, and God is called God. God never tells anyone that He is God and that He has great powers! He does not open His lips! Only the one with deep faith knows who God is!

BOY: Raju, can You explain that in more detail?

SATHYA: When the time comes, I shall. Meanwhile, you think deeply about what you have been told. Then you will understand by yourself! It's getting dark. Come, let's go.

(Continued from the last issue)

GITA FOR CHILDREN

Chapter 13

1. Arjuna says to Krishna, 'People describe the Universe using pairs of words like Spirit and Matter, God and Nature, Consciousness and Energy, and so on. Sorry if I appear dumb, but frankly, I just don't understand any of these words. Please can You enlighten me on these?'
2. With a smile Krishna says, 'Why not? By the way, don't be under the impression that you have asked a dumb question. On the contrary, even scholars are often not clear about such matters, though they may make a lot of noise and pretend to deliver erudite lectures!'
3. 'The first thing you must understand is that Consciousness, or rather Absolute or Universal Consciousness as it is sometimes called, is where it all starts from.'
4. 'Some people refer to this Consciousness as Formless God or Brahman; others prefer the term *Atma*. Still others who are allergic to the word God would rather use the word Spirit. No matter which word you use, it is all the same.'
5. 'Next, as explained earlier, God exists even when there is no Creation. All that is now appearing as the Universe gets tucked into God as it were, when Creation has been dissolved.'
6. 'When the Universe is created, God pervades it in two complimentary aspects. This helps to 'run' the Universe. These two complimentary aspects are Consciousness and Energy, or Spirit and Matter, if you prefer.'
7. 'When you look at the sea, you see just water. Dissolved in this water is salt; yet when you look at the expanse of water, you never talk about the salt but only refer to the sea.'
8. 'You might have seen villages on the sea shore. Many villagers there make salt. Do you know how? They gather the sea water in shallow pans and allow the water to evaporate. After a while both water and salt are visible. It is the same in Creation. Before Creation, one cannot really talk separately of Consciousness and Energy. Energy is subsumed in Consciousness. But after the Universe comes into existence, it is meaningful and also convenient to talk separately of Consciousness and Divine Energy or Spirit and Matter. At the working level, these two entities can be separately experienced.'
9. 'Now there is an important point here that you must take note of. We both are standing on the earth. If you look up, you see the sky. The sky is supposed to be empty space, but here and there, there are celestial objects, like the Sun, the Moon, the planets, the stars and so on, all of which represent matter.'

10. 'The question now is the following: "Space seems to be largely empty, with a scattering of matter here and there. Where in this combination does one seek and find Consciousness?" The answer is that Consciousness is present everywhere, including in regions that seem to be empty. There is no place where Consciousness is absent. That is why the Wise always say that God is Omnipresent.'

11. 'This Consciousness is no ordinary Consciousness; it is **Universal** Consciousness. It is also the backdrop against which the whole of evolution takes place, the evolution of inanimate matter and also of living beings.'

12. Arjuna asks, 'Krishna, if Consciousness is present everywhere, is it present also in matter?'

13. Krishna replies, 'Of course! I have already told you that there is no place where God or the *Atma* does not exist. And you are forgetting that so soon!'

14. 'Some people may doubt all this and ask, "How can Consciousness be present in inert matter? It may be present in living matter, but in inert matter like a piece of rock, for example?"'

15. 'The answer is quite clear. Since Consciousness is primordial, it **must** be present everywhere, in a vacuum, in inert matter and in living matter as well. As regards the issue of inert versus animate matter, one might say that in inert matter Consciousness is present in a "passive" form, whereas in living beings it is present in an "active" form.'

16. 'Take your own self. I have already told you that the human body is a living "factory". All the activities within the body and the actions performed by the body constitute proof of the life-force that animates the body. You breathe, your stomach digests, your blood circulates – all these happen on account of *Praana*, or the life-force within you. Where does this *Praana* come from? From the *Atma*, or Consciousness. This *Praana*, my dear Arjuna, is a manifestation of the "active" form of Consciousness.'

17. Arjuna says, 'OK, I accept that. But we are told that when a person dies, the *Praana* departs from the body. Since You say the *Praana* comes from the *Atma*, does that mean that when a person dies, the *Atma* also quits and there is no *Atma* in the corpse?'

18. Krishna sighs and says, 'Arjuna, you must think carefully and clearly. I have already told you that the *Atma* must be everywhere.'

19. Arjuna shakes his head and says, 'But Krishna, the *Praana* has gone and what is left is just a corpse. How do you explain that *Atma* is present even in a corpse?'

20. With great patience Krishna explains, 'Arjuna, did I not tell you that Consciousness can be present in the active as well as the passive form? Well, when a person dies, all that happens is that Consciousness associated

with that mass of matter reverts from the active to the passive state - that is all. Death does not drain the *Atma*. You agree that the corpse too is made up of atoms? You agree that the *Atma* pervades the atoms even in inanimate matter? Then? Get this firmly into your head! Nobody can do anything to the *Atma*. I have already drawn your attention to this.'

21. 'The *Atma* is ever existent. Sometimes, it manifests in gross form. Sometimes, it manifests only in a subtle form, like the Mind, for example. In addition, it is also all by itself, beyond both the gross and the subtle. The gross can be directly felt, touched, etc. The subtle can not be touched or felt but can be inferred; the super-subtle is beyond intellectual inference; it can only be experienced; not by the senses or even the Mind, but only by the Heart.'

22. Arjuna now asks another question. He says, 'Krishna, You are in me, You are in Bhishma, and You are in X, Y, and Z. Have You divided Yourself into many Krishnas, allocating one Krishna to each individual?'

23. Krishna laughs and says, 'O no Arjuna, nothing like that. I am only One. Even an ignorant fool cannot parcel Me like that. I am indivisible.'

24. Arjuna is not satisfied and continues, 'In that case, how come You are present in all?'

25. Krishna replies, 'That can be understood as follows. You will agree that there is air in your lungs, will you not? You will also agree that air is present similarly in the lungs of all the people here on this battlefield. OK, now where did all this air come from? From the atmosphere, obviously. There is an inherent continuity of air, though some of it is free and some of it is in the lungs of various people. We do not pay much attention to this continuity, that is all. In the same way, the one Omnipresent God is seated in the Hearts of all. Got it?'

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

SELFLESS SERVICE

*By R Ramachandra Rao
A current student from Swami's Institute*

13th August, 2001. Swami summoned eleven boys from Hyderabad into the interview room. I was fortunate to be one amongst them. In the interview that lasted for one and a half hours Swami spoke on various topics. This was my cherished chance with Swami. I had the opportunity to put forward my queries to Swami. Here are some excerpts from the interview.

Filled with patriotic fervor, bolstered by Swami Vivekananda's teachings, I asked a few questions. Swami's responses to them were inspiring indeed.

Me: Swami, what fortune does the soil of Bharat possess that You (the Divine) bless it by incarnating here time and again?

Swami: I would incarnate here time and again because this land has pure yearning for the divine.

Me: Swami, will we ever have a chance to witness the past glory of Bharat?

Swami: Definitely you all will witness it. (*after a little pause*).....All of you may think that India is surviving because of Presidents and Prime ministers, but it is surviving only because of My grace and the divine vibrations sent by the great sages and yogis.

One of the brothers was about to talk to Swami regarding some project and during the process he used the word 'kashtam' meaning 'difficulty'. Immediately Swami responded elaborating on the attitude one requires to render service selflessly.

Swami: "Seva eppudu kashtapadi cheya vaddu, ishtapadi cheyali", meaning 'Never render service as an exertion, but do it with liking.' Then He narrated the following anecdote.

Once four youth were watching a small calf stuck in the slushy lake bed. They were eager to see how it would manage to get out. As the calf tried to lift one leg, the other three legs went deeper into the mud. The youths enjoyed the show. Meanwhile a sanyasi came that way. He spotted the calf struggling. Immediately he rushed towards the calf and lifted the calf onto his shoulders and walked back to the bank. The four young men greeted the sanyasi and told him that they had been enjoying the drama and he had come and spoilt the fun. They asked him what had made him do this. The sanyasi said, "Brothers, I didn't do it out of pity for the calf. Looking at the calf struggle I felt the pain myself and I felt extremely agitated; in order to find relief for myself I ran towards the calf and lifted it onto my shoulders."

Swami concluded by saying that seva should be done with a feeling of empathy towards the oppressed and the destitute; it is not just displaying superficial pity.

One of the senior brothers was about to mention to Swami his future plans. Swami immediately said, “Do not talk about things that would possibly be taken up in the future, talk only about that which you have completed. Just follow Me, I told the world about the water project and the Super-speciality hospital at Bangalore only after completing the projects.” He went on to add, “Always live in the present, past is the tree, present is the seed and future is the tree. The Present is very important and hence it is called Omnipresent.”

Some brothers mentioned a new software which they had developed for the organization. Swami responded immediately “Nowadays, every one needs the support of technology for every small thing; even women going into the garment shop for purchasing a small blouse piece need calculator support.” He talked about the redundant specialisms doctors were taking up these days and said, “There are separate specializations in dentistry for upper teeth and lower teeth; a cardiac specialist cannot treat a fever.”

One of the senior brothers wanted to ask Swami about matters like meditation. He just started to say, “Swami, japam, dhyanam...” Swami stopped him short and said. “No japam, no dhyanam, as long as you have strong muscles, keep serving the society.”

My Experience in Bangalore

Two years later I went to Bangalore for higher studies. By Swami’s grace ten of us, friends, formed an enthusiastic group and regularly conducted Narayana seva and distributed old clothes. One fine day, on our way back home, a friend and I, on the spur of the moment, visited an orphanage, Nirmala Sishu Sadan, on Bull Temple road. That evening we played with the kids and came to sense their longing for affection. From that day onwards for the next one and a half months we visited this place every evening. Then we decided that we should organize a cultural program for the kids. We decided Feb 29th (a leap year day) for the function. ‘Creation of the Universe’ as explained by Bhagavan, was the theme of the programme. By then we had spent whatever little money we had to purchase a few satchels for some kids and to prepare props for the presentation.

On Feb 24th afternoon, I was thinking that the rest of the kids should also be given some thing. My restlessness grew; I prayed to Swami and then slipped into sleep. Then I had a dream. Swami was standing right in front of me pointing His right index finger at a wooden cupboard that was next to me. The cupboard turned transparent; and the contents turned into golden blocks. I woke up.

The vision was vividly etched on my mind. I thought that it was a good omen. Within forty minutes of this vision, I got a call from a friend’s sister. Long back we had just casually told her about this program. She now told me that she

was prompted to mention this program to her colleagues. Immediately they decided to support the program. On the spot about ten thousand rupees was collected. When I heard this, my joy knew no bounds. I now just waited to see the smiles on the children's faces.

Well, the Lord never gives anything easily. My friend spent almost three sleepless nights in preparing the props for the program. The presentation on 'Creation', especially, needed uninterrupted power-supply and an audio system. On February 27th, we read in the papers that there would be a power cut in the entire state on 29th of Feb due to a grid problem. This was a shock to us. We tried out all alternatives, calling friends for help.

We also wanted to hire a generator but it would cost us two thousand five hundred rupees for five hours. We couldn't afford this at all. We sat in front of Swami's portrait on the altar and resolved to take up the program at any cost. Within a few minutes, the same sister called up and told us that when she had explained the situation to the electrical supervisor in her company, he appreciated the objective of the program: and agreed to provide us with a generator free of cost! We jumped around holding Swami's portrait unable to contain our joy.

Finally the day came and as announced, there was no power. We all moved to the orphanage for arranging the sets. Around 4.30 pm the program started. We assigned the job of running the generator to one of our brothers. The program went on smoothly and 'brilliantly' much to the delight of the children.

When it was all over the brother who was given the charge of running the generator came up and told me that there had been no power-cut at all; he had had no need to run the generator. Not just this: the moment we stepped out of the ashram the power cut resumed!

I had only one thought in my mind: He indeed is the true Generator.

Jai Sai Ram!

PRASHANTI DIARY

Srikakulam Teachers Parthi Yatra - 5th December 2006

The first week of December will remain indelible in the memories of eight hundred and fifty teachers from more than four hundred and twenty schools in the Srikakulam District of the State of Andhra Pradesh, who had gathered in Prasanthi Nilayam. For these teachers it was a feast of divine love and nectarine wisdom from the very Teacher of Teachers, Bhagavan, Himself. These teachers came to the lotus feet of the Jagadguru to learn the very essence of true education, namely, Sri Sathya Sai Education in Human Values.

A lot of preparation and hard work preceded this glorious event. The Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization, Srikakulam District, had organized several training programmes for these teachers at various places like Srikakulam, Kasibugga, Sompeta, Budithi and Palakonda. Before the commencement of their spiritual prigrimage to Prashanti, all the teachers went through twenty-one days of intense sadhana and selfless service which included distribution of books and uniforms to poor school children. Finally, all the teachers with their families, and the covenors and sevadals, totaling two thousand, arrived at Prashanti Nilayam on the 3rd of December, 2006.

Swami graciously blessed all the programmes the group had prepared. First there was a four day extensive training programme for the teachers inaugurated by Sri B. V. Ramana Rao, the National Service Wing Coordinator of Sri Sathya Sai Organization, at Prashanti Nilayam on December 3. Other eminent personalities were also in attendance such as Prof. Kamaraju Anil Kumar and Dr. M. Anil Kumar of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Bangalore, who gave the opening lectures. Thereafter eminent professors and Doctors of Swami's Institutions delivered their enlightening discourses on EHV with a helpful amount of visual and audio aids. Indeed, the teachers drank deep from the wealth of knowledge and authority of experience which the speakers cheerfully shared with all.

On the evening of the December 4, the group conducted a rally on Human Values depicting the glory and splendour of Indian Cultural Heritage from thirty-six cultural events in Srikakulam District. It was a sight to behold, a feast for the soul, a festival of colours and sounds, drums and costumes, dances and choruses. The group, like the armies of the Lord, marched from the old Mandir through the Stadium to the thrill and joy of the audience.

On December 5, in the Divine Presence of Swami, the group again went on a procession illustrating the integration of EHV into their lives. Their presentation emphasized that Human Values must become one's way of life. After the procession the teachers enthralled one and all with a series of musical songs directed by Sri Saluru Vasurao.

The climax of joy came when Bhagavan consented to the prayers of the District President, Sri Lakshmana Rao to bless the group with His Divine Discourse. In His Discourse, Beloved Swami showered upon the teachers the

very essence of His Divine Benediction. He revealed that the teachers from Srikakulam are great devotees who have experienced the Divine principle in thought, word and deed and enjoyed the bliss thereof. Swami exhorted the teachers in sweet endearing words to infuse self-confidence and spiritual thinking (that is contemplation of God) in the students and to bear all difficulties in bringing this about. Swami told the teachers: "Bear all difficulties and suffering and make every effort to inculcate goodness in children. That is your primary duty. Teachers are the true leaders of the country, not political leaders. Only teachers can make the children good."

Swami further encouraged the teachers to cultivate good habits and lead an ideal life. Only then will they be able to teach the children to cultivate good habits. "When the teacher is addicted to smoking, how can he tell the students not to do so? It is only when the teachers cultivate good habits and good conduct, can students emulate their example and strive for the welfare and progress of the country."

Swami finally concluded His Divine Discourse with these words: "I am very happy that many teachers have come from Srikakulam. Whatever good that you know, you must first put into practice and then teach the children."

To crown the bliss of the teachers, after His discourse, Swami, in His motherly compassion and love offered a divine dinner to all the participants. Their joy on learning of this most auspicious blessing cannot be translated into words.

What has a beginning must have an end. The valedictory function was held on the 6th morning. Sri Ravi Manchanda, President of Sri Sathya Sai Schools, UK gave the valedictory address while Prof. Anil Kumar, Dr. Sasi Bala and Smt K Vasumathi addressed the teachers. In the evening of the same day, all the teachers with their families returned home full of boundless happiness and bliss. Swami had endowed them with the Divine strength and wisdom to serve the world and to infuse the Sai gems of education in human values into their fortunate students.

Drama Presentation by the Rishikesh Sathya Sai School – 11th December

A huge group of hundred and nine boys from the Sri Sathya Sai School at Rishikesh made the visit to Puttaparthi on December 6, 2006. All the small boys who stayed for a week were from class 1 to class 9 and accompanied by ten teachers, a few staff members and the Principal of the school.

The Sri Sathya Sai School at Rishikesh was inaugurated by the Divine Hands on July 2, 2000. The school at Tapovan, Rishikesh is situated adjacent to the hallowed Laxman Jhula pedestrian bridge at a very scenic spot with the Ganges flowing majestically on the southern side and the serenely green and grand mountains standing sentinel on the northern side. This residential school that propagates human values along the lines practiced at Swami's school at Puttaparthi provides high quality English medium education for no fees, whatsoever.

On the evening of December 11, the Rishikesh Sathya Sai School presented their drama, "Life is a pilgrimage", depicting the story of Nara and Narayana doing penance for the downfall of the evil Sahasrakavacha Dambhodabhava. It started with three young students from the Rishikesh Sai School playing bhajans on flutes in the centre of the Hall, while a few tiny tots offered flowers at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet.

The story began with four students of the School going on a pilgrimage to sacred Badrinath. Awed by the serenity and peace, they contemplate on the legendary story associated with Badrinath. All of a sudden they hear someone chant "Narayana Narayana". They stand rooted to the ground stunned to see none other than Sage Narada himself. They offer their salutations to the sage who asks the students to introduce themselves. The sage is full of joy when he learns that the students are pursuing their education in Rishikesh High School. He, then, narrates the sacred legend of Badri and that of Nara-Narayana.

The story goes thus: The evil demon king Dambhodabhava, in pursuit of attaining the boon of immortality does penance and pleases the Sun God. Unfortunately for the demon, the Sun God refuses to make him immortal but grants him any other boon. So the witty demon conceives a plan and asks for such a boon that would indirectly grant him immortality.

The King of Gods, Indra, along with his ministers flee from the Heaven straight to Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu majestically reclining on the Adishesha assures Indra and his ministers that He will protect them.

Lord Vishnu then proceeds to the Himalayas where He finds, to His utter dismay, Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati performing the Tandava (cosmic dance). The witty Lord Mahavishnu assumes the form of an infant and starts wailing. Mother Parvati hears the desperate cries of the infant and pleads to Lord Shiva to allow Her to fondle the babe to stop it wailing. When the Divine Mother found the crying babe, within the blink of an eye the infant disappeared and instead stood the sustainer of the entire universe, Lord Mahavishnu.

Lord Vishnu then tells the Divine Mother that the spot where Lord Shiva was performing the cosmic dance with Mother Parvati was the very spot where He needed to perform penance to slay the wicked Demon king.

As Lord Vishnu is deep in penance, unmindful of the extreme weather, Mother Lakshmi is intensely troubled and worried due to the Lord's absence in Vaikuntha. She sets forth in Her search to locate Lord Vishnu. When She reaches the Himalayas, She meets Sage Narada who directs Goddess Lakshmi to the exact spot where Lord Vishnu was performing penance. Apprehensive about the cold winds and the frosty snow, Goddess Lakshmi assumes the form of the Badrika tree, spreading the branches over Her Beloved, protecting Him. It is only when He completes His penance that Lord Vishnu realises the concern and love with which Goddess Lakshmi bore the

acute weather and cold winds Herself with the only intention that Her Lord could perform His penance peacefully without any obstacles.

Pleased with this act of devotion, Lord Vishnu blesses Goddess Lakshmi profusely saying that this place would be henceforth known as Badrikadham and He would Himself reside as Lord Badrinath in this place for eternity. He also blessed Her saying that for ages to come, Her name would always precede the Lord's, as in Lakshmi-Narayana, Radha-Krishna or Sita-Ram.

The Lord then assumed two forms, one of Nara and the other Narayana. Both did penance at the same spot where Lord Vishnu did penance. The demon sent many dancers to distract Nara and Narayana from doing penance but absolutely nothing could stop them from their spiritual rigour. While Nara fought with the demon, Narayana performed penance for one day. In that one day Nara broke one of the one thousand kavacha's (protective shield). The next day Narayana continued the fight, destroying the second kavacha of Dambhodabhava while Nara performed penance. In this way they fought with Dambhodabhava until only one kavacha remained.

Petrified by the very thought of death, the wicked demon fled from the battlefield seeking refuge with the Sun God. Both the heroes of the war, Nara and Narayana chased him and demanded Lord Surya to return the demon to them. But Lord Surya who had given Dambhodabhava the promise to protect him, refused Nara and Narayana to hand over the demon. Finally it was Narayana who declared that the last of the thousand kavacha's would be broken by Nara in the Dwapara Yuga when Nara would be born as Arjuna and the wicked Dambhodabhava as Karna.

When Karna lay wounded on the battlefield waiting for the messengers of death, he asks Lord Krishna the reason for suffering such a death at the hands of Arjuna. Then Krishna reminds Karna of all the evil deeds he did when he was Dambhodabhava and how he fled from the battlefield and took refuge in Lord Surya and was destined to be slain at the hands of Arjuna.

The young students stood full of joy listening to the legend of Badrinath, picturing every scene in their mind's eye. The boys then pleaded to Sage Narada to narrate all the breathtaking events that took place when Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba visited this historic place of Badrinath.

Sage Narada, who said he was verily present when Bhagavan visited Badrikadham, relished in sharing with the students every moment of Bhagavan's stay in Badrikadham and how the Kaliyuga Avatar rejuvenated the holy pilgrim centre.

He recollected, "June 17, 1958 was a Day of Days, a Day that will be enshrined in the memory of everyone, for years and years. In pursuance of His Mission of re-infusing spiritual efficacy in all Holy Places where men congregate for acquiring peace and joy, Baba that day re-invigorated Narayana worship at Badrinath, by means of a unique ceremony, whose significance is beyond our tiny understanding! His Excellency the Governor of

Uttar Pradesh, Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao, who arranged the entire visit of Bhagavan was also present by His side.

During the morning Abhishekam to the idol of Badrinarayana, while Baba was inside the temple facing the shrine, about 8.15AM, Baba mysteriously materialised a four armed Narayana icon with Sankha, Chakra, Gada and Padma, about twelve inches, perhaps sublimating in that form the Divine Essence of the Narayana Tejas before Him. He also created a charming thousand petalled 'gold' Lotus, and before the wonder of the people around Him could express itself in an awe-stricken gasp, He waved His hand before the Shrine and, lo, there was a Jyothirlinga in His palm, which He placed on the shining Lotus.

Materialising a 'silver' Abhisheka Vessel full of holy water from Gangothri itself (as He announced), Baba Himself performed Abhisheka to that translucent Nethra Lingam. He had graciously taken the Linga round to everyone and made all to wonder at its quiet effulgence and at a clearly visible Eye that was somehow incorporated in it. Devotees recited Sri Rudram, Purushasuktham and Narayana Suktham, while Baba was pouring the sacred water on the Lingam. Then, Baba created hundred and eight miniature bilva leaves or rather replicas of that holy leaf, in 'gold'; they fell in a lightning shower from His Palm on to a silver plate.

He again waved His Hand and this time, O Blessed moment, hundred and eight actual 'thumme' flowers fresh with even the touch of the morning dew, fell from that Divine Palm! With these, Baba directed Dr.B.Ramakrishna Rao, presumably on behalf of all assembled to do Puja to the Linga, the Ashtottara Puja, as mentioned in the Sastras. After Puja, Baba collected the Abhisheka Ganga and gave a share of it to each one, Himself pouring it into the mouth with His own merciful Hand.

Needless to say, the Lingam, one of the Five, which according to Baba, Sankaracharya brought from Kailasa, and which he installed in a sacred spot in the shrine to vivify the Badarikasram returned to the place from which Baba had drawn it for this epoch making ritual of re-invigoration. The Lotus and the Icon, He granted to the devotees; the Bilva leaves of 'gold' He gave to members of the party, as mementoes of the Momentous Day, for being duly worshipped by them.

About 12.30 pm, the same day, Baba condescended to come to Brahmakapal, where the devotees had arrived to offer oblations to the pitris (forefathers). He advised everyone to pray for their ancestors and departed relations, in a spirit of faith and sincerity. Every member of the party had a rare good fortune of paying off the debt to the departed in the immediate presence of the Lord Himself!

Then Baba went down to the Alakananda and took from the surging torrent a glass of water, but, lo! The glass held also a lump of Vibhuthi with the mark of Pranava on it and the *til* essential for ancestral rites! He poured the water on to the palms of the devotees who were handicapped by disqualifications from

partaking in the *Pinda Pradan*, asking them to offer that water instead! Surely, the manes of all who shared in that day's Brahmakapal ceremony are thrice blessed!"

Having regaled us with the wonderful recollections of Lord Narayana incarnate, our very own Lord Sai, the programme came to a close. Bhagavan enjoyed their hour-long presentation. The students then sang a few group songs and fervently prayed to Bhagavan for group photographs. Bhagavan called a few small boys from the school and spoke to them. Then He went down from the stage and interacted with the actors. Swami, then, blessed them with a group photograph which had as a backdrop a picture of their school with all the students arranged in front of it.

But the love story did not end that evening. Next day, Swami called the boy who performed as Narada to the interview room and asked him questions like, "what is your name? Which class do you study in? Who is your Principal? How many boys from his class secured more than 90% marks in the last final exam? What would you like to become when you grow up?" and so on.

He also gave His word that He would spend time with all the boys in the afternoon in the Mandir.

Accordingly students and staff of the school assembled in the Mandir at 2:45 pm. Swami arrived soon thereafter and asked the boys to come nearer to Him. The boys could not control themselves with this motherly beckoning and soon surrounded Swami's chair sitting around Him.

Swami spent an electrifying ninety minutes during which unbounded love flowed towards each and every child. Swami asked them their names, what they would like to become in life, and advised them to be devoted to God. Everybody had tears in their eyes. Swami created three gold chains for three boys.

Swami also asked the boys to chant Vedam. They chanted for ten minutes. Swami was extremely delighted with their rendering, so much so that He too joined in the chanting. The boys then sang a song.

All through the session, boys were holding Swami's hand and Swami kept showering His love on them. He also permitted photos to be taken with a few boys at a time. Mother Sai gave Vibuthi Prasad, sweets and clothes distributed to the boys and teachers.

When asked about their impressions of the session with Swami, many boys found themselves speechless. The most common comment was that one came for Darshan but got a whole lot more. Several said that they were not devotees, but now they have become. Boys said that Swami is Mother Sai to them and Swami is the Lord of the Universe. The tears in their eyes told it all. The teachers too echoed similar sentiments repeatedly saying that the experience exceeded all expectations. They were simply overwhelmed with what they saw and felt.

The group left Prashanti Nilayam on December 13, 2006 enshrining Swami in their hearts.

Presentation by the 'Teen Youth Group' from Malaysia – 19th December

With a group of ninety eight Sai Teen Youths and twenty Sai Teen Youth facilitators, the Teen Youth Group from Malaysia were in Prashanti Nilayam for thirteen days, full of ardour to present their programme to Bhagavan and attain closeness to the Lord of love. The pilgrimage to Bhagavan also included very special insights into life in rural India by participating in Grama Seva projects in selected villages, during the journey to and from Puttaparthi. The interaction with the local villagers left an indelible but humbling impression in the minds of these Sai Teen Youths.

The coveted evening when all could stand and act in front of the Lord came on the December 19 when Bhagavan allowed the group of Malaysian SSSEHV Teens to present their adaptation of 'Dikir Barat' - a traditional song and dance cultural item from Malaysia. Fifty one Sai Teen Youth Sisters and forty seven Sai Teen Youth Brothers were involved in the presentation.

Dikir Barat is a traditional Malay art form where a lead singer transmits his message through a short song. The song is punctuated by a chorus sung by groups of men and women sitting separately but whose synchronized and energetic arm and body movements mesmerize and thrill the audience.

The performance was supported by Malay Kompangs (a cross between a drum and a tambourine), a Chinese Drum, and Indian Naals. These three types of instruments represent the three major races in Malaysia – the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

The Dikit Barat is believed to have originated in India where it was performed during the harvest season. It is a verbal art form known for its dynamic performance which revives the audience through its energetic melodies. The *Tukang Karut*, being the 'head' of the group, usually sings a long song comprising of a chorus and several verses.

The rest of the group is made up of the choir and the percussionists who play the instruments to make the music are called the 'Awok-Awok' means "you all". They are the life of the Dikir Barat group with their choral singing and synchronized body and hand movements which sway rhythmically to the beat of the song, thus, making it an awesome spectacle to watch.

The costumes are usually made up of the traditional Malay *baju melayu* for men and *baju kurung* for women. Several touches are added here and there to give the clothes a majestic feel and to liven up the group.

In their twenty minute programme which began just after 4 pm, the common cultural values of the three main ethnic groups of Malaysia were presented with instruments from the various races of Malaysia. The lyrics emphasized Bhagavan's teaching of unity in diversity.

The entire cultural program was based on Bhagavan's teaching of respecting one's parents. The Vedas proclaim "Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava" - "Mother is God, Father is God" And Bhagavan has been exhorting us to show respect and gratitude towards our parents.

The group portrayed this message by depicting the various traditional ways of worshipping one's parents, from each racial group. The introduction song was sung in the Kelantanese dialect.

The song went as follows:

Eh Wah Eh Wah, Eh Wah Bulan
Eh Wah Bulan teraju tiga
Ini hari sama sama
Sama sama bersuka ria
(meaning "Let all of us be happy and joyous today")

The chorus group followed with (English Chorus)...

Every morning, I pray to you Swami,
I pray, oh dear Lord, please guard and guide me,
In all my thoughts, my words, and my actions,
All through the day, with every breath I take.

The singer then sang the solo in English (English Solo):

I will love my mother and father,
Respect and follow every word they say,
Speak softly and lovingly always,
And to serve them till their dying days.

I will make them happy at all times,
With peace and love in my heart,
For I know they are my earthly gods,
Precious gifts from heaven above.

This really set the theme for the evening's program.

The group began with the depiction of a young Chinese boy worshipping his parents. The group of three (mother, father and their young son) walked up right in front of Bhagavan and then performed the formal way of worshipping parents. The boy sat on his knees and then offered a cup of tea, to both his mother and father. In the Chinese Tradition, one of the time honored ways that children show love and gratitude to their parents is through the traditional Tea Ceremony. The culture of offering tea symbolizes respect and gratitude to the parents. It is also a culture that during meal times when the family eats together, the children show respect for their parents by serving them first. The parents partook the tea and then the three walked back. Meanwhile in the

background the solo and chorus groups sang the songs that lay the code of conduct the boy should abide by.

The solo in Chinese:

Shi zun, wo mei ge qing chen xiang ni dao kuo,
Ah! Wo qing ai de zhu, Qing hu you wo, yin dao wo
Hu dao wo de si wei, yan lun, xing wei
Mei yi shun xi, mei yi shi ke, mei yi tian

Wo jiang ai xi wo de fu mu
Zun chong , ting zhong fu mu de jiao dao
Li mou, qing qie kuan dai fu mu
Shi feng fu mu zhi dao tian nian

Wo shi fu mu chang huan xin
Fa zhi nei xin de xiang he he ai,
Yin wei wo zhi dao, fu mu si wo chen shi jian de shen
Shi shang tian shi gei wo zui zhen gui de li wu

(The meaning of the song is the same as the English Chorus and the English Solo above).

The narrator then cited the guidelines set by Confucius. According to him, "When your father is alive observe his intentions. When he is deceased, model yourself on the memory of his behavior. If in three years after his death you have not deviated from your father's ways, then you may be considered a filial child." ("Confucian Teachings" 20).

According to Confucius, respect to one's father while he is alive is something that even animals do. But, to be a filial child, one must respect his parents even after their death. Confucius goes on to cite further specific examples of what a filial son should do for his parents. Among them, children should never offend their parents, never speak badly of them, not travel far away without purpose, always be conscious of their parent's age, and protect them whenever necessary. Filial piety is the root of virtue and the origin of culture. The body and hair and skin are received from the parents and may not be injured. This is the beginning of filial piety. To establish oneself and walk according to the right way in order to glorify one's parents is the culmination of filial piety. Filial piety begins with serving one's parents, leads to serving one's king and ends in establishing oneself.

A Malay boy then came dressed in the traditional attire and sang a Malay traditional song:

Setiap Pagi ku.. pohon.. MU
Tolonglah melindungi..ku
Dalam fikiranku dan tingkah laku-ku
Engkau menjadi pedo..manku

Saya sayang pada Ayah dan Ibu

Nasihat mereka kita turuti
Bersopan santun, budi bahasa,
Itulah ajaran me..re..ka

Saya akan mengembirakan Ibu
Saya akan membanggakan ayah
Merekalah tuhan kami
Tuhan kami di dunia ini

(The meaning being the same as the English Chorus and the English Solo songs)

Simultaneously, a group of three youth dressed as the Malay Couple with their young son walked up the path to where our beloved Bhagavan sat. Then they performed the Malay way of worshipping one's parents. The boy got down on his knees and kissed his parents' hands and asked for forgiveness for any wrongdoings they might have done. In the Malay tradition, parents are given the utmost respect by their children. It is a familiar saying among the Malays that "Heavens lie in the foot prints of your mother."

It is also part of the Muslim prayer each day during Solat or Namaz to first pray for forgiveness of the sins of their parents before praying for pardon of their own sins.

Supported by the pantomime, the narrator then shared with the audience the Malay tradition on filial piety, "A child should respect and appreciate his or her parents every day throughout the year. Allah has asked human beings to recognize their parents after recognition of Allah Himself. Throughout the Quran, we notice that parents are mentioned with appreciation and with respect, even if they are senile. In Surah Al-Isra' (Children of Israel) there is a very beautiful description of how parents are to be treated. The recognition and respect of parents is mentioned in the Quran eleven times. In every instance, Allah reminds children to recognize and to appreciate the care and love they have received from their parents."

The third race widely spread across Malaysia is that of the Hindus. In the Indian Tradition, respect for parents is generally shown by doing padanamaskar. The Hindus believe that when we prostrate with humility and respect, we invoke the good wishes and blessings of elders, which flow in the form of positive energy to envelop us. This is why the posture is assumed, so as to enable the entire body to receive the energy flow from the parents' blessings.

A Tamil song was then sung by a Malay teenager which denoted the same idea as in the English Chorus and English Solo:

Ovvoru Naalum Unnani Vannangindren
Unnai Vanngindrum Arulvai Irraivaa
En Ellam Yeannamum, Sollum Seyallum
En Ovvoru Mochum Nin Arul Bhagavan

Thandhai Thai Meethu Anbu Sellathuvom
Avargal Sollpaddi Endrum Nadapom
Inimai Menmai Endrum Nadapom
Aepothum Pesi Sevai Seivom

Anbum Amaithiyum Ithaiyatil Tekki
Aepothum Avargalai Mahillveppom
Mathavum Pithavum Munnarri Deivam
Irraivan Nammakalitha Kann Kanda Deivam

As the singer wholeheartedly rendered the song, simultaneously three Malay teenagers dressed in the traditional dress of the Hindu parents and their son came to the centre stage. The boy then prostrated at the feet of his parents with full love and respect.

Meanwhile, the narrator reminded the assembled devotees of Rama and Pundalika, the ideal sons of Bharat by saying, “Mata, Pita, Guru Daivam.” This is something that is propagated in the Hindu culture. In Hinduism, parents are looked upon as God Himself. It is stated in the Srimad Bhagawatham that: “Love and obedience to our parents is our first duty”.

God Himself has shown us an example of this. When Lord Rama was about to be crowned as prince of Ayodhya, at the last moment things took a strange turn. He was told to keep up the honour of his father’s word and so he went into exile for fourteen long years, forsaking his palace and kingdom.

The story of Pundalink clearly shows the importance of filial piety. Pundarika used to visit the temple of Lord Panduranga everyday. One day he was engrossed in serving his parents and hence could not visit the temple. So, Lord Panduranga Himself came to Pundarika. At that time Pundarika was pressing the feet of his parents and so he requested Lord Panduranga to take His seat and wait. So, saying, he passed a brick to the Lord as there were no chairs and sofas in those days. After attending to his parents, Pundarika offered his due respects to the Lord Panduranga.

The Lord was immensely pleased with his devotion to his parents and blessed him profusely, saying, “God comes to you on His own when your behaviour is good. There is no service greater than service to parents. Consider service to parents as service to the Lord.”

A Malay singer then came and sang a beautiful Hindi song, praying to Bhagavan to bless him to render incessant service of his parents, speak softly and lovingly with them and follow their every instruction.

The verses of the Hindi song:

Vinti hai Swami tumhe har savere,
Sharan de, raah de he prabhu mere
Har vachan, vichaar, har karm mein mere,

subah shyam har din har saans mein mere

Pooja karun hurdam mai mata aur pita ki,
maan karun hurdam unki har aagyaa ki,
Dheemi ho meethi sadaa meri boli,
seva Karun sadaa yahi hai pooja meri

Khushi doon hurdam unko hai pooja meri,
Dil mein hurdam ho Prem aur ho shaanti,
Dharti par mere hain Prabhu ke roop vahi,
Yahi Prabhu ki Kripa, anmol den yahi.

Now the entire group brimming with intense love for Bhagavan started praying to Bhagavan to bless them with His Love and Grace. Their prayer was in the form of an English song.

Take my Hand dear Sai Sathya Sai
Take My Hand and walk me through this land
Take my Hand dear Sai Sathya Sai
Take My Hand and walk me through this land

Take My Heart Dear Lord Sathya Sai
Take My Heart and fill it with Your Love
Let the love in me be love divine
Walk with me My Lord, Your Hand In mine

Sai Rama Ram Sai Ram
Sai Rama Rama Sai Ram
Sai Rama Ram, Sai Ram
Walk with me My Lord Your Hand in mine
We love you, Our Dearest Swami.

The singing reached a crescendo as the group prayed fervently to Swami to come amidst them and bless them with group photos. When a devotee calls out to the Lord with intense devotion, it is impossible for the sweet Lord to hold back Himself as He rushes to His devotee. This is what exactly happened that evening. Bhagavan walked down the steps and spoke to the group and blessed them with group photographs.

The function did not end with the photographs. He asked them to sing bhajans. As the group sang bhajans, Bhagavan called a Malay singer, Sri Manoj Nair Venugopalan, spoke to him and then materialized a gold chain for him. The ever-compassionate Lord called a Sai Sister from the group, Haanusia Privithi Raj and blessed her with a gold chain.

Bhagavan then received the Aarti and went back to the interview room. Later, the Bhajans were sung as usual at five o'clock in the Bhajan Hall and Swami retired to His residence after Aarti at 5.30 pm.

Christmas Celebrations in the Presence of the Divine Father

How can one truly translate into words what happens during Christmas at Prasanthi Nilayam? Words become dumb at the door of the spirit. Christmas celebration at Prasanthi can only be experienced to realize its full import! It is a celebration of divinity. Children of God from almost all countries, religions, cultures and races troop in their thousands to Prasanthi to experience their inner Divine principle in the manifest divine presence of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. They come to experience the feast of divine awakening; the outpouring of the universal Christ Consciousness; the realization of the wondrous truth of our common divine origin. The Divine Love magnet, Sai Baba, draws His children from all over the globe to taste the thrill and bliss of how humanity can unite in Divinity. Beyond race and beyond colour, beyond the barriers of creed and caste, Christmas in Prasanthi Nilayam brings all to the awareness of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. We are the children of the same Divine Mother.

A lot of preparation precedes the actual celebration of Christmas at Prasanthi Nilayam. So much work is done behind the curtains. First, the Christmas committee draws a comprehensive program in a planned format, decoration of the entire ashram, the adult choir, the children's choir, presentations of speeches and dramas, etc.

On December 7 Swami gave His blessings to the program presented by the Christmas committee. Thereafter, the wheels of transforming the entire ashram into the festive mood of Christmas were put into motion.

Organizing The Choir

The adult and children's choir were formed on December 15. The nine auspicious days of practice for these two choirs are a beauty to behold. Beyond coming from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, all spoke and sang in the language of Love. Everyday, there were two practice sessions: two hours in the morning and two in the evening at the "double-decker" building.

The adult and children's choir directors, Sylvia Olden from Australia and Elma Badings from Holland were simply channels of divine melody. Gradually but surely, they were able to mould the choirs into a body with one voice and one heart.

This year, about 680 ladies and 425 gents hailing from more than forty countries comprised the adult choir. Every rehearsal was a *satsang*. Sylvia, the director, knows the art of integrating episodes of her many soul-thrilling Divine encounters with the Lord at intermediate times of the rehearsal. Her stories were like "soul-snacks" and gave a lot of energy and morale boost to all in attendance.

Only the master of the dance knows of the agony and patience of teaching her children the steps of the dance. In nine days the children had to learn

every song and two were in Spanish. To bring these children to that Divine standard which our Lord Sathya Sai always expects was nothing but a miracle. Elma Badings, the children's choir director was a channel of this miracle. According to her, the children were very eager to give a wonderful gift to Swami in the form of their singing. The children's choir this year comprised of eighty-two kids between the ages of six and fourteen.

For both the adult and children's choirs, expert musicians including a pianist, violinists, flutists, drummers and other percussionists, guitar players and trumpeters were in abundance. Their expert instrumental harmony added beauty and bliss to the rehearsals.

The Decorations Team at Work

To put the ashram into 'Christmas costume' with glistening Christmas lights; adorned Christmas trees; nativity scenes; colourful candles and praying angels is the duty of the Christmas Decorations Committee. Swami gave His permission for the decorations to start going up on the 21st evening. The Team started with a garland for Ganesh in the Mandir and then moved to Swami's residence and the Poornachandra auditorium.

According to Milena Kunz, the decorations coordinator, the white trees that adorn the Ganesh idol symbolize purity of heart. The nativity scene this year has been designed to carry the message of Sarva Dharma - the unity of religions. Every year the decorations committee spends weeks of loving service in preparation for all these items that are used.

After three days of putting up the decorations, the Sai Kulwant Hall, gates and fences, canteens and temples had all taken on the Christmas look. And the whole ashram was in the spirit of Christmas.

Christmas Dinner

In God's house nothing is lacking. The Divine Mother knows how to give Her children the best of treats and on Christmas Eve Mother Sai gave Her children a divine dinner. The canteen hall had been decorated with candles on all the tables and the meal was eaten in candle light alone. More than 1,500 devotees were able to take this blessed feast and the room was filled with love.

The kitchen team had been preparing for a week. For this grand communion the menu was a wonder to behold: tomato soup, Chinese vegetables, lasagne, mashed potato with cheese, Russian salad, pancakes, and caramel nut ice cream. The Hungarian ladies made 2,000 pancakes in two days. Everyone who participated in the dinner could testify the truth of the biblical saying "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

Christmas Eve - 24th December

By 2 p.m., the whole of the Kulwant hall was already full to maximum capacity with devotees. It was a sea of heads waiting anxiously for the great appearance of their Lord. At about 4 p.m. the Vedic chanting started, a sign that the yearning of the devotees had melted the compassion of the Lord to reveal Himself. After giving darshan, beloved Swami came to the dais to light the Christmas candles. After Swami was seated, He blessed the director of the children's choir, Ms. Elma Badings to start the children's presentation. The children were like little sweet angels adorned in heavenly splendor. The purity and love of their songs melted the hearts of one and all. Among their many renditions were:

"Mantra Song", which gave praise to Lord Ganesha, Rama, Krishna, Shiva and Swami; "We wish you a Merry Christmas"; "Silent Night"; "O Come All Ye Faithful"; and "Joy to the World".

Next, Ms. Sylvia Olden went with flowers to the Lord to pray for His blessings upon the adult choir. The Lord of compassion gave His consent to start their presentation. Their renditions electrified the whole mandir with vibrant energy. Everyone was in a joyful mood, clapping, shaking heads, humming or waving. Even Swami Himself was tapping His fingers at the rhythm of the songs. How pleasant and how blissful it is when brothers and sisters share in such harmony. Indeed, there is no greater force than Love – unconditional Love, boundless and pure. Only the power of Divine Love can bind the hearts of humanity in an unbreakable bond of Unity. The adult choir presented about fifteen songs which included:

"You are my Shepherd in green pastures", "Come and serve the Lord with Joy", "Almighty God", "Jesus be with us", "Soham Sai Om", "Turn your eyes upon Swami".

After the presentations of the two choirs, Swami blessed all with prasadam and gifted the two lady conductors, Sylvia and Elma, with beautiful saris - only the Lord can cloth us with the garment of salvation.

The Christmas Eve programme came to an end with arathi offered to Bhagavan at about 5:30p.m.

The Christmas Morning Programme By Sathya Sai Students

At last, the long awaited moment arrived - Christmas morning - heralded by the radiance of the rising sun, to awake all to the light of Christ within. The aura of Christmas filled the whole ashram atmosphere with Atmic bliss and fragrance. One can feel the tingling sensations in the air. Christmas carols were sung by the children's and adult choir in the Sai Kulwant hall. Christmas melodies like "Silent Night", "Joy to the World", and "Come let us adore Him" reverberated in the pillars of the mandir. Meanwhile, nagasankeertan was going on around the usual route preceded by the Vedic chanters. Verily, Heaven and Earth were one in joy.

At about 8:50 a.m. there was a hush; silence descended like dew from Heaven – a sign that beloved Swami was about to appear for His divine darshan. Swami came in His car robed in ethereal white. After lighting the Christmas candles, Swami sat in His chair in the dais. All drank the nectarine bliss of Sai's tangible Divine Presence.

With Swami's blessings the Sri Sathya Sai Institute brass band and the primary school violin boys took the stage. The violin boys were the first to perform to the thrill and joy of all devotees present. As they ended with a jazzy version of "Jingle bells", little 'Santa Clauses' went around among the seated devotees to distribute sweets.

Next, Swami gave His blessing to the Institute Brass Band to start their presentation. It is true! Music is the 'food' of the soul. The Lord Himself is a lover of music. As the whole mandir resounded with the melody and rhythm of the flutes, piccolo, clarinets, trumpets, saxes, trombones, baritones, tuba, sousaphone, and percussion instruments, it was as if the heavens stooped down in awe and wonder: "Where comes this ethereal music that charms the ears of angels?". "It could be nowhere else but in Prasanthi Nilayam where the Lord of Lords and King of Kings has taken form as Sathya Sai Baba", they concluded.

As the brass band came to an end it was the turn of Swami's students from the eighth class up to the post-graduate level, to present their soul-thrilling Christmas songs. Each song like, "Jesus is alive today", "Jesus the Lord has shown the way to me", was preceded by words of wisdom between a child and his uncle. These students sung from their hearts and uplifted the souls of all to a realm beyond all worldly concerns.

This was not the end. Swami asked the boys to start bhajans. And while bhajans were going on, beloved soul-charming Swami delighted all by going round to give His darshan and to cut the Christmas cakes. This was an exciting moment of grace for thousand of devotees gathered at the Lotus Feet. Swami went first along the ladies' aisles, and then the gents' aisles – showering boundless Love and Ananda.

Christmas Evening Programme – Two Speakers

Christmas activities came to a crescendo with the Christmas evening programmes, which ended with Swami's Divine discourse that made all roll with laughter and bliss. At about 3:45 p.m. Bhagavan arrived for darshan robed in radiant red; his face radiating heavenly bliss and joy. It is a joy that told how much He loved Jesus, and how much He wants us to be like Jesus.

John Behner, the Christmas Committee chair person and the South American zonal coordinator, introduced the evening programme, and the speakers of the day: Mr. Arthur Hillcoat and Father Charles Ogada. In his introductory speech, John told a story of how Swami had recently healed his eye without surgery. Bhagavan is the surgeon who operates without surgical instruments. Four years back, Swami had told John that He Himself will fix his eye, and

that he should not go to any doctor. John then prayed to Swami to heal his 'spiritual' sight too.

The first speaker was Mr. Arthur Hillcoat. In his brief talk, he exhorted devotees to put into practice at least one teaching of Bhagavan. In this way their lives would be fulfilled. He also reminded us of our good fortune to be chosen as Swami's instruments of His Divine mission.

The next speaker was Father Charles Ogada, a Catholic priest from the state of Abia in Nigeria, currently teaching at the Sathya Sai school in Zambia. Father Charles said, "The essence of Christmas is to realize the Christ Consciousness which is but our inner Self. The purpose of our lives is to realize our true nature." He went on to narrate the thrilling story of how he came to the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan, or as he put it, how Bhagavan came to him.

He continued to say, "I had lead a normal life until the age of seventeen. I was to study medicine at a prestigious university in Nigeria. One day as I sat in solitude, I heard a Divine voice asking me what I wanted to do with my life. Recognizing the voice to be that of God, I replied, 'What else Father, but to offer this life to You.'" His life thus took an unexpected turn as he decided to study to be ordained as a Catholic priest. However, after nine years of religious studies, he was frustrated as he still could not come face to face with the God he was praying to. One day one of his teachers mentioned the name 'Sai Baba', and this name he said, "Shook the foundations of Heaven within me. There is tremendous power in that name."

A few weeks later, Bhagavan appeared in his dream and said without speaking, "I am the One you have been seeking". He came to Prasanthi Nilayam in 2001 and was overwhelmed by the Love of Bhagavan which he said was like the Love of millions of mothers. When he met Swami, he felt he was Jesus. For had Christ not said, "I and my Father are One". Father Ogada concluded his thrilling talk with a prayer to Swami to make the entire world aware that the Father, who Jesus had said had sent Him, is now with us.

After his speech, Swami was very happy and materialized a glistening gold chain for him with a golden pendant engraved in Swami's image. Swami's outpouring of Love was a sight for the gods to behold as He put the chain on his neck. Even the angels peeped down from Heaven to experience the thrill of the scene. Who can possibly describe what the Lord has prepared for those whom He loves?

Swami's Divine Christmas Discourse

The moment of moments came when Swami stood up to give His divine discourse. Swami thrilled one and all with memories of His Divine tour to Africa, namely Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Swami related how Mr. Idi Amin was very fond of Him and used to have the darshan of Swami both in the morning and evening. During His stay, he arranged a dinner for Swami and meticulously got all instructions from Dr. Patel as to Swami's menu and

how it should be prepared. On the day of the dinner, Idi Amin's wives stood in rows on either side and greeted Swami with veneration. Idi Amin himself introduced each of them one by one to Swami.

On the day Swami was to leave, which happened to be Guru Purnima day, Idi Amin was suffering from pangs of separation and started shedding tears pleading with Swami not to leave them. Not only did Amin but the Africans were all in tears and fell at the feet of Swami praying: "Bhagavan! Please spend this day with us." Their devotion melted the heart of Swami and made Him spend Guru Purnima with them. An important miracle happened on this day. The Africans had wished to take photos with Swami. Swami told them that they might silently pray in their heart so that their requests may be fulfilled. To their joy, each of them found a photo of Swami lying beside them.

Swami found the same deep devotion when He visited Tanzania and Kenya. Swami revealed that the gifts that the African devotees gave to Him (which comprised mainly of dinner sets, tea sets in gold colour, etc.) are still with Him and are used to host high dignitaries like prime-ministers and governors. According to Swami, "The devotion of Africans is indescribable".

It is not only the people of Africa that are devoted to Swami, but also the wildlife of Africa. Swami delighted all with stories of His journey through the wildlife habitats: how they gave apples to the crocodiles and how these crocodiles, captivated by the divine darshan, could not even remember to eat the apples, but kept them in their mouths while gazing constantly at Swami. When the big heads of mighty elephants saw Swami sitting in the car, they raised their trunks in veneration and paid obeisance to Swami. Swami concluded that the noble qualities in these animals are not to be found even in human beings, as there was no feeling of hatred whatsoever in those animals.

Swami stood for a full hour filling the hearts of the devotees with stories of His divine leelas. He concluded the discourse with the words: **"Truth is eternal. It is only when you follow this eternal truth that your name will remain in the annals of history forever. Eternal truth will earn eternal peace for you."**

At about 6 p.m. arthi was offered to Swami by the two speakers of the day to conclude the wonderful Christmas festivities and leave memories to be cherished for a long time.

Christmas Mass At Prasanthi Nilayam

It came as a pleasant surprise when beloved Swami graciously approved and gave His blessing for a Christmas Mass to be conducted in the very abode of Supreme Peace, Prasanthi Nilayam. This event was a historic moment in the annals of the Christian Church. It was an auspicious sign that Swami has accepted the prayers of the priest on Christmas evening for Swami to bring the whole Christian Church to His lotus Feet and lead her to the complete truth.

The Mass (Holy Eucharist) is the greatest symbol of the Christian Church. In fact, whenever the Mass is said the whole Church is believed to be present. When Swami gave His divine Blessing, the Mass became the very consummation, the seal and the fulfillment of all the prayers the Church has ever offered to the Father through the Son, Jesus Christ.

The Mass was conducted on 27th December by Father Charles Ogada as officiating priest and with him was a monk of the order of Satchitananda founded by the Benedictine priest, Father.....

For all in attendance the Mass was a deep moving spiritual encounter. It was a Mass that transcended the barriers of creed and caste, colour and language and transported the participants to the experiential awareness of Swami's words: "There is only one religion, the religion of Love." (*Radio Sai will be broadcasting this Mass on a forthcoming Sunday, in its new morning programme "Moments of Oneness".*)

SWAMI AND ME

FOOTSTEPS WALKING WITH ME...

This is the transcription of a talk delivered by Ms. Deepti Bhagia on September 30, 2003 in the divine presence of Bhagavan during the Dasara celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam.

Footsteps walking with me;
Footsteps I may not see;
But I know they are always with me.

Offering my most humble Pranams at the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan; Respected elders, sisters and brothers.

Agony or Ecstasy – Beside There is Always Almighty

Running as the deep under-current of my life; intricately intertwined with each and every fiber, is the presence of the Almighty. Indeed, God's touch upon our lives is like that of the cool autumn breeze on a hot flustered cheek – so cool, comforting, caressing and consoling. We have to learn to seek God hidden amidst the myriad facets of creation; through the thick and thin of life. The calm and the storm; the peace and the strife – it is His hand that governs everything!

Once we develop the faith that He is with us, every moment and everywhere; we will see that even the 'impossible' becomes *Himpossible*! God's Divine *leela*'s can never be fully described. They can only be experienced to some extent. In this context, I would like to share a few personal instances.

He 'Reads' an Unwritten Letter

It was in the year 1997 – in fact, at the end of the year – I was a student of Class XI, studying in the primary school. The practice sessions for the Annual Sports Meet (held on January 11 every year) were on in full fervor; and students remained on the field late into the night.

On one such evening, I found myself alone in the classroom, unable to concentrate on my books – for my heart was heavy. I had not received a glance from Bhagavan for a very long time. A hundred thoughts flooded my mind – thoughts of introspection, self-reproach and guilt. Unconsciously, I picked up my record sheet and began drawing a few scattered flowers on it. When it was completed, I thought of pouring my feelings onto that sheet, putting it in an envelope and offering it to Bhagavan. But when I picked up the pen, words failed me. With deep anguish, I could write just two sentences: "Bhagavan, I cannot put into the cold realms of speech this heart-felt turmoil. Please read my unwritten letter." With these words, I closed the letter; put it in an envelope and gave it to my father, requesting him to offer it to Bhagavan as and when he could.

Three days passed – there was no news from my father regarding the fate of that letter. I felt very sad. I thought, perhaps Bhagavan did not give him an opportunity, or maybe in the course of work, father would have forgotten my request.

It was December 31, 1997. Bhagavan sent word for the primary school students to come for Darshan. Dejected and with utter despair, I sat in the front line. Darshan soon ended and Bhagavan went in without even a casual glance in my direction. All hope in my heart died. As time for *bhajan* approached, I remarked bitterly to a classmate nearby: “See, even this year, 1997, has gone fruitlessly! Bhagavan did not respond to my prayer.”

As the bhajan started, I shut my eyes. At once, there was a tap on my shoulder. I opened my eyes to find Bhagavan in the verandah slowly moving towards where my father was seated. He went up to my father, stretched out His hand and asked for something kept in father’s pocket!

I held my breath! Bhagavan stood, opened the envelope, read it – as if reading something in great detail – replaced that letter into the envelope, walked slowly to me, all the while giving me a benevolent smile. I was taken aback. My response was a flood of tears – for, indeed, He had answered my prayer.

He Registers and Responds, Always

There comes a point in life, when all of us see that the situations that come to us are controlled by a Power beyond human comprehension. That very Power, that Cosmic Force, that mysterious Power has embodied Itself as our Bhagavan who sits amidst us so silently. The tumultuous times of our life come only to teach us to have unshakeable faith in Him; and once we develop this faith we see that the problems just melt as fog before the rays of the Sun.

Persistent ill-health has been an old companion of mine and it has proved to be a valuable one; for it has brought me much, much closer to the Divine. Once, while seated in class, I began experiencing some breathing difficulties. We were to have a class test in physics. With a sinking feeling, I realized that my strength was failing me – my mind was getting blank. Helpless, I began to pray to Bhagavan – the question required us to derive the first Faraday’s Law of Electrolysis based upon the second. With whatever strength I had, I began to write down all the topics I felt were concerned with the topic. In the end, I submitted an answer not knowing whether I had written a derivation or a confusion of the laws of electrolysis.

Three days later, the teacher entered the class holding up my paper and asked all the students to copy down that answer. She remarked she had not seen such a crisp explanation in any book. When my eyes fell on that paper, I was dazed! Indeed my head was spinning at the speed with which the earth revolves on its own axis. For, I could not recognize any word of that answer! The paper indeed was mine, the handwriting mine,

but the answer - I cannot even today remember having read such an answer – anywhere.

Verily, there is nothing that He cannot do; no situation that He cannot alter. Death itself is a puppet playing in His hands. Whatever prayer arises from the depth of our hearts, He listens, He responds, He answers in ways that are His own. No matter how small the thought and how insignificant the appeal may be; it is registered with Him!

Sai's Spiritual Presence – He is There Everywhere

Before I enrolled as a student of His Institute, Bhagavan blessed me saying He would be with me - always guiding and guarding me. During my fourth semester of the Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree, I began to find things were getting difficult. Life seemed tough. I could not cope up with the pressures, physical and mental. One gloomy afternoon, I thought: "Bhagavan, this is the time I really need help. But how are You going to help me? Physically, You are so far away from me!"

As I headed to the library to do some reference work, I was lost in such thoughts. Upon entering the library, I went to the central table to write down whatever I required. There, my eyes fell upon an old tattered book lying open. The words on that book were as follows:

"Do you think Me unreal because you cannot see Me? Do you think Me silent because you do not hear Me? Do you think Me inactive because you do not perceive My work? Do you think Me unloving because you do not feel My affection? I am here. Seek Me as the Spirit and you shall know My presence! For, when I give you My strength, what load can burden you? When I give you My wisdom, what problem will defy you? And when I give you My Spirit, what death can conquer you?"

In a flash, I realized this was the answer to the question arisen in my mind a few minutes ago. The next day I returned to the library with a view to issue that book. But as hard as I searched, I could not locate it anywhere! Puzzled, I went up to the attendant requesting her to help me. Upon coming to know what I was searching for, the attendant advised me to stop wasting my time as she said that no such book existed in the library.

Well, who do you think it was who put that book open with that very page on that table just for me? It was none other than our Bhagavan. The silent, tiny figure of our God, who sits amidst us, is nothing but the Embodiment of the Cosmic force, the Creator, the Controller of our very existence itself! He is willing to do anything for us - just about anything – provided we offer Him our heart in all sincerity with love.

A Remarkable Experience – Illumination in the Dead of Night

On a cool, dark night of January 1999, I lay on my bed too ill and weak to get up and walk across to my shelf and take the medicines lying therein. It was

around 1:00 am! There were nearly hundred ten students around me in the dormitory; each one blissful in the lap of sleep. As I was in this condition wondering what to do, the tube light suddenly came on. Puzzled, I looked in the direction of the switch board. My jaw fell! I could not speak! For there - near that switch board, I saw Bhagavan in flesh and blood smiling at me! Bhagavan slowly moved to my rack; touched the contents of the rack, stood for a few minutes all the while smiling at me and then vanished! The tube light continued to shine. It took me sometime to overcome this shock. Later, I went to the rack, picked up my medicines and slept.

The next morning, I wondered whether the entire episode was a hallucination of my fatigued body and mind. And so, I decided to keep quiet about it. But, by dinner time, I could no longer contain myself. I called aside one of my classmates; took her to the dormitory and narrated the entire incident to her. I ended by saying that if Bhagavan had really come in the night to save me, then I want to have His Darshan here and now!

Amazing Divine Synchronicity

It was a Wednesday, 7:30 pm. Just as I said those words, I felt I was being extremely ridiculous. For how could I expect to have Bhagavan's Darshan at 7:30 pm on a Wednesday! But as these controversial thoughts were in my mind, another classmate came running up to me saying I was wanted down urgently! I rushed down and saw a crowd of girls near the gate of the school.

Pushing my way through, I came and stood at the main entrance and beheld a beautiful red car standing outside. In a few moments, Bhagavan walked out from the opposite Institute gate, looked at me with deep compassion, raised His hands in Blessing, got into the car and sped away. I was rooted to the spot - numb with shock! Later I was told that Bhagavan had come to the Institute to see a film and was on His return to the Mandir when I had arrived on the scene.

Is there anyone on this planet who can know and satisfy my strangest whim? Is He not indeed the Controller and the Ruler of Time itself? For who else can synchronize and plan events with such mind-staggering precision?

“He Is Ever Present With Me”

Bhagavan has saved me from death many a time. He has breathed life into this lifeless body more than once. He has showered His love upon me in abundance! Truly, I owe my existence to Him and Him alone! Every breath that I have taken and am yet to take, is because of Bhagavan and for Bhagavan.

I would like to conclude with a small poem:

The Lord is my constant companion; there is no need He cannot fulfill.
Whether He scores for me points to the mountain tops of glorious ecstasy,
Or to the valleys of human suffering;

He is by my side, He is ever present with me.

He is beside me when I tread the dark streets of danger;
And when I flirt with death itself, He will not leave me.

When the pain is severe, He is near to console;
When the burden is heavy, He is there to lean upon.

When depression darkens my soul, He touches me with eternal joy;
And when I feel empty and alone, He fills the aching vacuum with His Power.

My security is in His promise to be with me always,
And in the knowledge that He will never, ever let me go.

Jai Sai Ram!

UNLOCKING OUR IMMENSE INNER POWER...

By Dr. Samuel Sandweiss

Dr. Samuel Sandweiss, an eminent Psychiatrist from California, USA, is one of the early devotees from America to visit Swami and recognize His divinity. He is also the author of widely-read books "Sai Baba: Holy Man and Psychiatrist" and "With Love Man is God". Here are extracts from the transcription of a talk delivered by him to Sai devotees in Atlanta, USA on June 4, 2005.

When I was a young psychiatrist (nine years into the practice of psychiatry, which was about thirty three years ago), I wondered, "What is the meaning of this life?" I have always thought of that. In fact, people used to think I was a little strange because I was so taken with being in this life – being born all of a sudden not understanding the rules! You wonder, "Why am I here? What is all of this around me, all of this creation around me? What is it all about? Is it just a social life? Is it a material life?"

Then I thought, perhaps I will learn a little bit more about it in psychiatry, so I went to school and became a psychiatrist. But after nine years into the practice, I realized that the deeper spiritual questions were not going to be solved by psychiatry.

So, why are we born? Who could answer that? What's the purpose of this life when we all die with nothing in our hands? What's the purpose when there's such a brief moment? Look at the stars and the skies. We are here for such a small moment! Why are we here? Just to buy a car, or a big house? What does all that mean? I wonder if there is a person who can actually show me something deeper about the meaning of life."

I started asking people. When asked, someone said: "Well, I have a martial arts instructor and when he puts his hand near your arm, you feel heat coming from him." I said, "Well, that's interesting, but why am I born? Where am I going?" That didn't do it for me.

The Mesmerising First Encounter

I heard of many people who had a sixth sense and people felt goodness and kindness from them. Then I heard about Sai Baba and the stories were all together of a different dimension! You can't even measure this dimension.

He knew everybody that came to Him. He knew who they were, all about them and could tell them about themselves. He could materialize what a person was thinking!

I said, "Wait! I'm from sort of a scientific background. What do you mean He could materialize something that you're thinking? Or materialize an object?" You know what that means to science if there was really somebody like that! To show that matter comes from Will or Love - or whatever it comes from - that a human has control over doing such a thing.

Some said, "He can cure illnesses, can be at two or more places at once, and even raise the dead!" I didn't believe a word, but I was interested. How could something like this happen? "Go see Him," they said, "and when you do, He can change you and then you won't change back! There is a large group of good people who are interested in Him doing good works. Go see Him."

So within a month or two, I was there. I landed in Bombay, now called Mumbai. I heard that Sai Baba was going to be at a stadium and fifty thousand people would be there to see Him.

Now that was something for me, being a young psychiatrist. Why would somebody come out to watch another person? He wasn't going to be playing a guitar, or singing or dancing - none of that. And yet, fifty thousand would come out just to see Him! "I have to see that," I said.

So I was invited by a devotee to have some lunch and a rest before I was going to go to the stadium. And this was way out in the outskirts of Mumbai. Mumbai is a city of seventeen million! I had some lunch at this apartment house and was resting, and then it was time to go. I walked down the stairs and somebody was rolling out a little red carpet. I said, "What is that for?" He said, "Sai Baba is coming to visit." I said, "There must be many, many Sai Baba's. This place must be filled with Sai Baba's!" You know it's a funny world, really. As you get into it, it's a mystery.

I walked out and I was going to the cab-station, and all of a sudden Sai Baba passes me and goes into this very same apartment building. I was stunned! My scientific mind knew this was almost impossible. I mean we were way in the outskirts. It was as if I was going to Rome to see the Pope, and I was in a little coffee shop on the outskirts of Rome and was getting up to go see him at the Vatican, and he walks in and sits in the seat that I am in!

I knew that it was unusual. I turn around and I start to run, but stopped myself and said, "Why are you running, you are not devoted to Him or anything?" But I knew I had to find out about Him. This was so unusual!

So I quickly went to the apartment that He was at – it was on the ninth floor. He was in a room with the people who owned this apartment. He came out. I wasn't really struck by Him that much; He was a little over five feet tall, about a hundred eight pounds, and He greeted people and then walked out.

I raced towards the stadium. It was a big football field. When I got there, it was too late to get in. I was at a gate maybe ten-fifteen rows back and He was way in the distance. I just watched Him, and as I watched, this small little figure turned and started walking towards me! It was the distance of an entire football field, and He came slowly, slowly, slowly, right up to the gate where I was, and just stood there in Bliss!

This was my first introduction to Sai Baba and I didn't understand what was happening. That was that. I could feel something stir inside; some connection with Him. How could you not feel something if you had that kind of a "Hallo!"

Visiting Swami In Whitefield

I went to Bangalore – five hundred miles south-east of Mumbai – to His ashram. He was having a summer school in Indian Culture and Spirituality. And there were about thousand students on the grounds. Other people were there: professors from around India; yogis from around India; people from other parts of the world were there to speak to youngsters. He would speak every evening. So I was going to see Him in that setting.

I was sitting fairly close-up one day when He was honoring one of the Professors who had come along and had just given a couple of talks. He moved His hand in the air like this <<makes swirling hand gesture>> and this Big necklace came out of His hand! I was very close and shaken, because something inside me broke.

Now you know that we have seen magicians, but I knew this was really happening; I knew it wasn't a magic trick. And I got very frightened, actually. I went back to my little hotel room and I looked into the closets and under the bed, making sure that the boogie man wasn't around! I didn't know my reality system was beginning to crumble!

But I said, "Nothing hurt me!" I went back and He was sweet and my fear left. And then I began to listen to what He had to say. What He said was something that I didn't like very much. And it's strange that I didn't like it. He said, "Why don't you try to be good?" The reason I didn't like it was because it was too simplistic! I was a psychiatrist and I wanted to hear some complex theory about the meaning of life and the nature of life and all of that and how spirit evolves and He said, "Be good. And why are you wearing tight pants and long hair, looking like a monkey?"

And the students liked it! They were dressed nicely in white and they had their hair cut short, they were all washed and they looked very clean.

I said, "This is too simplistic." For some reason, it really upset me. It was at the end of the day, Swami had just given a talk and I was at a distance from Him. A wall separated us; a whole house separated me from where He was at the back of this big backyard to the front of the house. I was sitting very dejected and all of a sudden, He came around the corner and came right up to me with His eyes beaming!

He gave me two little pieces of candy and said, "Sweets! Sweets! Eat!" He came right up to me! It was the first time He made this kind of a contact. He came up to me with this knowingness in His eyes, and with joy and love, He gave me these two little pieces of candy and I became a little baby, just giggling.

I saw two things: one was how rather weak our feeling-system is. Even our anxiety or depression that we think is so overpowering. Of course, when we are in the midst of it, it feels so very strong; but when you see a person like this, with His energy and His love and His Bliss radiating into you, it washes it away in a minute – in a second! The mind is nothing in the face of this force. I have never seen anybody have that effect on me, or have that Bliss and that Love penetrate me.

And then I recognized that it's probably something that all of us are capable of: great inner power. But how do you find that power? That's really something.

So I was sitting on the ashram grounds, deep in thought; all of these things happening to this poor little beggar psychiatrist. My eyes were closed and I was thinking, "Gosh, the laws that govern spiritual growth are more real than the laws of physics!" I was a scientific guy and this was more real than the laws that I knew of.

There was some rustling in the front and I opened my eyes to Swami standing in front of me. I thought He was responding to my thought - and you can never know when you see Swami - but there He was. It was very unusual, and the second time He made such contact with me. I thought, "I better start thinking about the laws that are more real than the laws of physics, because there must be laws that govern spiritual development."

"You are pure love"

So, thirty three years later, here I am with as much questioning as ever! But I came up with a few things to tell you about Sai Baba's teachings. His message: "Man has immense Inner Power and Love."

You know when somebody comes up to you and radiates this bliss, all of a sudden you become part of this bliss and you're giggling like a child.

One time I was in Russia trying to find a publisher for the book that I wrote about Sai Baba, *Sai Baba: The Holy Man And The Psychiatrist* (I am the Psychiatrist, Swami is the Holy Man.) It was 1989-90, and Russia and the U.S had not been real pals. I was sitting there wondering why I was not scared. I think that my room was bugged, but besides that, I felt pretty comfortable there. I picked up a journal that comes out of Sai Baba's ashram once a month. In it were His Discourses. I read the first paragraph, stopped, and couldn't read any further, because all psychiatry and spirituality was held in there!

It read: 'A man or a woman filled with love has great peace of mind, is pure of heart and is unaffected by adverse conditions, failures and losses.' A person filled with love – what is that love? Has great peace of mind? Some people think that if we get peace of mind in our lifetime, we have made a great leap in Consciousness. If we just have great peace of mind, we are not frightened, worried, upset and depressed. A man filled with love has great peace of mind,

is pure of heart, unpretentious, simple, and humble, without a big attitude. He is not pompous, but pure, simple and selfless – pure of heart, unaffected by adverse conditions, failures and losses.

Who of us can be unaffected if somebody cheats us or is angry with us and uses a bad word? What if we have drug problems in our family or our spouse is upset with us or leaves us? What if we get into drugs, or our children get into problems? If we lose power in our arms or we go blind or we have cancer? What if we know we're going to die? Who can be above that - *unaffected*? Who can find that Power? Where does it come from?

This Power is gained from the love of the Lord! That is God Loving you and you Loving God. The secret is in Loving God, which gives self-confidence. This self-confidence generates immense Inner-Power. But first we have to find that connection with Him.

I thought, "My goodness, how do you find that Love? How do you find God?"

One time I heard a story from a person who works for the U.S council. This lady came from South Africa and went into the book store inside the ashram. There are hundreds of titles in forty or more languages – it's huge book store - and she bought a book, went outside and opened it. Inside was a letter to her from Sai Baba! And the letter was written in German, which was a language that she knew and it made her feel very close to this letter. It read, "You are living your life on a small beam of light. You're playing the funny game between the elephant and the mouse. The elephant looks at the mouse and thinks it's the mouse. But you're not a mouse, and you're not an elephant; you're not even a human being: you are God! You're the All-Embracing Light that lights the entire Universe! You're All-Knowing power – you're Pure Love!"

The letter was dated in the future – about a week in the future. And on that day, Sai Baba picked her out of the crowd and brought her into the interview room and told her the same thing: "You're the All-Embracing Light that lights the entire Universe! You're All-Knowing Power - you're Pure Love!"

Well, is that who we really are? Most of us think that we are the body! But we actually are the All-Embracing Light that lights the entire Universe! I have heard Swami say, "I have come to show you who you are. I can do all of these things, because I have no limitations. And that's who you really are! I have come to stand in front of you to show you that."

"Swami, are You Divine?" He says, "Yes, I am. And so are you! You're not a lowly little person. You're actually Divine. To rise up and find out, that's the purpose of your life!"

We have immense Inner Power in our Love.

It Is All In The Mind

Why is it that we don't know this? Why do we think we are groveling around in the swamps? How do we get out of this? We don't know it because of ignorance. The key is to understand the mind. I was a psychiatrist, and I thought I knew something about the mind. The mind has a lot of powers and it's great; it gives us the amenities of life – we can buy a house and we can learn how to drive a car and we can do wonderful things for ourselves. But there is a problem in terms of our mind and our spirituality. We should understand its weakness, because the mind can be an obstacle.

Now, the mind is a very good thing and we don't want to destroy it, but we have to understand its weaknesses also – its central weaknesses. The mind thinks that the outside world, or the objects in the outside world, brings happiness. That just isn't so! It brings happiness for a short time, but it doesn't bring outside happiness. We think it does, and so we look outside.

I will use a simple illustration of a psychiatrist sitting with a patient. The patient is upset because they don't have enough money to buy a nice chair - all the cotton is coming out of the chair. The color is faded and so they don't like the chair. And the psychiatrist says, "You're sitting on a wonderful, beautiful chair – just the one you want." The person is filled with joy and is very, very happy. Yet, the chair didn't change. Something inside the patient changed. The patient found an inside place that was all happiness - infinite bliss and unending happiness.

Develop An Inner Relationship With God

So if it's inside, how do we start looking for it? We have to show restraint from letting the senses run wild into the world. First of all, don't jump into the world too fast! Swami has given us a little program called, *Ceiling on Desires*. You have to watch how much you get involved in food, energy, time and money, even knowledge. You have to restrain your senses a little bit so they can go inside.

Now, where do we go inside to develop a relationship with God? How do we do that? First, if you're lucky to have some devotion – this is a Universal teaching – and if there's a precept, principle, scripture or a God-man or a God-informed man; if there's something that can catch us and bring us inside with some love and some awe of our creation, then we should hold on to that. We have to hold on to it by saying a special name or hearing stories. We have to hold on to it, because that's the dawning of devotion and love.

And one good way of fanning this love is to bring the cold ember next to the live ember, so it could also become a live ember. That's what Swami says. You have to bring your own Consciousness towards the highest point; the highest level of spiritual contact that we have: the Higher Self or that devotional phrase that makes us realize the mystery of it all.

Act Through Selfless Service

We then have to offer some kind of activity - to offer some service. We have to actually act! And the way we do this is to act with the kind of enquiry: "I want to do something. I want to give something precious." This means we have to sacrifice something; to do it without selfishness, without any self-interest for fulfilling a desire and without all of the unwavering desires that get us into trouble: lust, anger, pride, greed, envy or jealousy. We have to try to make this as Pure as possible!

When we offer ourselves like this – with devotion as pure as we can get - then something opens up inside of us! This is the mystery of Swami's great humanitarian programs. We bring this devotion and self-enquiry into service towards the community. And then this happens! <<Pointing toward the slide of the Super Specialty Hospital>> When this happens, when you see these wonderful buildings and these wonderful programs (Swami's service projects), what is the meaning of it? It means that there's going to be freedom for the people that come - free services.

But for the people that work these programs, they are working this devotion and this service and what they are looking for is freedom inside. When we detach from the selfishness and from wanting extra applause; when we detach, evidently the consciousness is freed. It's freed into some kind of a love state! I don't know if this sounds a little strange, but this is sort of like fundamental spirituality: to bring ourselves a little away from being attached; to bring ourselves into the love state through service, to make ourselves as selfless as possible. Then this happens!

The Way To Own Liberation

What is the meaning? The meaning is an age-old teaching! The teaching is now being generated from Swami and vibrated off from Swami and radiating from Swami - this great vigor and vitality. That's why we should turn our attention just to see what's happening! And what is He saying? He says, "Look! Go to your own tradition and religion; follow this Loving God, fearing sin, and serve society, bringing the morality back into society!"

Do this with intensity, with great vigor and with great focus – this is the way to your own liberation. Liberation for the people that are coming – they get free service – and liberation from your own heart!

And so He is telling all of us, whether we follow Sai Baba or we are Christian, Jew or Muslim: get involved in your religion, because it is the way to Expansion, Love, Consciousness, Service and Love of all humanity. Love all and Serve all!

THE PERSONIFICATION OF DIVINITY

By Air Chief Marshal N C Suri (Retd)

Sri N C Suri served as the Chief of Air Staff of Indian Air Force from Aug 1991 to July 1993. A long standing devotee of Bhagavan, he was also awarded the "PARAM VISHISHT SEVA MEDAL" for his successful and most competent handling of his assignments at successively higher levels, exceptional devotion to duty and qualities of leadership.

It is our lack of perception that keeps us away from understanding the reality that encompasses Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It has been often said that spirituality among us humans only rests at the altar of temples, churches, mosques, Gurudwara, etc; consequently our understanding of Sri Sathya Sai Baba has large voids. There can be many reasons for this, primary among them being that the growth of spirituality is impaired largely because of the contemporary society lacking in-depth understanding and the sensitivity in terms of spiritual matters.

People who believe in the relevance of values in our educational system and in the dealings in the contemporary world often jump to conclusions without adequate investigation to find out the truth behind their enunciation or the realities which have led to their underscoring a point. Our media, who claim to be champions of ethics and morals, often publish a lot of unauthenticated material under the garb of freedom of press, particularly when it leads to boosting the sale of their magazine, newspaper, periodicals, etc. Similarly, some writers for reasons best known to them, write many untruths without any personal knowledge on the subject. In all fairness we cannot merely blame the newspaper or journalist for this inadequacy when our educational and ethical demands of the readers lend itself to the promotion of such garbage. I have no doubt that what I have said so far in respect of the untruth and irresponsible statements made about Sri Sathya Sai Baba would be voicing the feelings of nearly thirty million Sai devotees world over.

It is not my intention to say anything adverse about these people even though they may hurt our feelings, primarily because the fundamentals of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Baba's teachings are "Love Ever, Hurt Never". However, I do wish to point out that even highly rated journalists like late Mr. R K Karanjia, Senior Editor of Blitz Newsmagazine, who was respected for his journalistic abilities and notorious for seeing the negative side of people and events, never ever articulated his views without thorough investigation and personal knowledge. This, then gave him the moral right to express his opinions. Maybe the present journalists could emulate his example. This would not only be morally correct, but also prevent a human being from casting aspersions on someone who is well beyond their mental and intellectual comprehension. Media personalities may be well advised to read the contents of Mr. Karanjia's detailed interview with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in September 1976. This interview contains leading questions on Bhagavan, His mission as an

Avatar, His miracles, His work and all question that create a doubt in the minds of mortals.

My Personal Experience

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba came to me in my dream in mid-1971 and since then I have been His devotee. In the last two decades I have not only experienced His love and benedictions in great abundance but He has also shown me three of His Divine forms. Apart from this He has manifested twice in human form as Shirdi Baba in front of me and physically blessed me. I have also experienced many of His miracles on which I have written in some of my earlier articles and also lectured on both in England and in India. I have no hesitation in stating in unequivocal terms that based on my personal experience of Sri Sathya Sai Baba Divinity, He is God. This culminated in my surrendering to Him at the turn of this century. If I am asked to describe Him in two words, I would state categorically that He is “Prema Swaroopa” or “Embodiment of Love”. He can also be most aptly described as “Love in action for eight one years”. Let it suffice to say that any one who has gone to Him with genuine love in his heart has been rewarded with His loving attention and has more often than not experienced healing of body, mind and soul.

Quintessence of His Teachings

His teachings do not relate to any specific religion but to Spirituality. This is because religion is merely a system of faith based on a theory or a hypothesis of the creator whilst spirituality is far beyond the limits of religion and is the remedy for all worldly ills. His objective is to install the Vedas in our heart and promote among us Sanathana Dharma which believes in the concept of one God as propagated by the founders of all religions. The Vedas are most relevant today as they enunciate a way of life. This coupled with Sanathana Dharma (Eternal Wisdom) become the basic tenants for survival in an era of Globalization where de-facto there are no boundaries and co-existence is the hallmark for survival. The Vedas are wrongly looked at as of Hindu origin. It is actually the legacy of man and truly universal in character. Its applicability in the world today cannot be over-emphasized.

He is the only Avatar who has laid great stress on Universality of Faith and achieved such a great measure of success among His devotees. In fact it has become a commitment by His devotees not only to respect other faiths but also to participate in their festivities. His teachings truly transcend the barriers created by caste, creed, nationality and religion. He lays great emphasis on his devotees becoming noble which implies bringing about harmony of thought, words and deeds. They represent the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara. In order to achieve purity in terms of thought, word and deed, Bhagavan explains, “Take a glass chimney placed over a candle. After some time a thin layer of soot forms over the glass which results in the light becoming dim. It is only when you clean the glass that one can see the light clearly. The soot that one finds can be compared to ego that clouds ones mind. It is because of ego that one is not able to visualize the Divya Gyana Jyoti, or the divine flame of wisdom. Ego enters ones mind when one gives up

the path of truth. One becomes egoistic when one does not know one's true self and develops worldly thoughts and feelings. In order to drive away ego one should keep the worldly thoughts and feelings under control".

He designated 2005 as the year of Unity, Purity and Divinity. This was to make us conscious of the fact that Unity implied oneness or one Atma. In other words, the concept of brotherhood and camaraderie. Emphasis was laid on the fact that although Unity, Purity and Divinity appear to be three different words, they are interlinked and interdependent. For instance, Unity cannot exist without Purity and Purity cannot sustain itself without Divinity and vice-versa. However, the starting point is Unity and the devotees need to address themselves to this in all sincerity. Unity is the prime moving force in many aspects inclusive of thought, word and deed.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba's Cosmic Powers.

Every Avatar and Prophet has performed miracles primarily for drawing the non-believers towards spirituality and inducing the believers in promoting greater humility and devotion to God within themselves. Rama, Krishna, Jesus, Zoraster, etc. are a case in point. Since we mortals are subjected to the severe limitations of our mind and intellect, we are not able to comprehend their powers. This resulted in them becoming subject of skepticism and ridicule. History bears testimony to this. Similarly, doubts created on Sri Sathya Sai Baba's divine powers, is a projection of this syndrome.

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's powers to protect, heal, save people and materialize objects flow from His cosmic power which is manifest only in Avatars. However, to the ignorant or the ones who lack perception, the cosmic power of Swami is taken as a magical discipline. Some have even gone to the ridiculous extent of comparing this power as being also manifest in the case of magicians. This is particularly so in the case of materializing watches and pieces of jewelry. Sai Baba has time and again told His devotees that the talisman that He materializes and gives them is in fact His calling card. More specifically, these are symbolic of His protection to those he gives them to. Bhagwan says that when these people are in trouble or sense danger they grip the talisman and call out to him for protection. The call of the devotees comes to Him as if by wireless, and He comes to their rescue instantly. There are cases replete of devotees testifying their personal experience in this context and I am one of them.

It is unfortunate that people do not speak of the greatest divine magic that he performs in terms of His devotees. A Chinese proverb is possibly most appropriate in this case. "It is not a miracle to fly in the sky like a bird. It is not a miracle to walk on water. It is a miracle to walk on earth." Bhagavan teaches His devotees how to walk on earth, as a human being rather than like an animal, not only through the teachings of the Vedas, but more importantly through His personal guidance and attention whereby He transforms an individual to follow the correct path. This is very pertinent as transformation implies not merely a change away from ills of society but more importantly a

change towards God. This transformation becomes very pertinent in the case of the rich as they are victims of desire and thus generally tend to be poor spiritually. On the other hand, the poor have limited desires and thus generally are rich spiritually. Thus, the former need more time than the latter for transformation. This seems to be misunderstood by some as Swami devoting more time to the rich and powerful. Moreover attention given by Swami to the rich is easily noticed whilst sadly the time and energy that He spends on the poor some how goes un-noticed.

The Vibhuti that Sri Sathya Sai Baba materializes is a manifestation of His Divinity. This Holy Ash has a much deeper significance than being a Blessing or a cure for illness. Firstly it is symbolic as it reflects the cycle of life and death highlighting that every thing turns eventually into ash with no further change thereafter. Secondly it has a spiritual dimension to it wherein it is cautioning those who receive it to give up all worldly desires and attachment by burning it in the fire of worship and thus attain purity of thought, word and deed. Swami says, "It is in order to press home the lesson that people should shed their desires that I materialize Vibhuti for those who come to me with love and devotion. Like the other materializations, it also acts as a talisman healing the sick and giving protection to those who need it."

Sai Baba's Benevolence for the Poor & Needy.

Swami repeatedly tells us, "Serve the poor with love, which alone can redeem you. Service to the poor is service to God. Sacrifice your life for the cause of the poor. Service to the poor is my only motto. I have no other desire. Be compassionate and considerate to the poor".

He has continually demonstrated His commitment to the service of the poor by instituting much needed measures to alleviate their misery and suffering. The projects and activities promoted by Him are innumerable both on a daily and long term basis. It is unfortunate that those who are His detractors conveniently overlook these. I intend to briefly highlight only a few of the projects promoted for the needy. These include:

Education - Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning is among the very few institutions in the world which blends character building with academic excellence. This University is a non-profit and autonomous institution which serves students from all over India and also other countries. It offers full fledged undergraduate, postgraduate and professional programmes free of cost. In addition there are a number of Sathya Sai Schools in the world which are based on the guidelines of Swami's educational institutions.

Sri Sathya Sai Youth Programmes. This seeks to harness the energy and initiative of youth towards constructive and socially beneficial activities and projects. This has now become international in stature and is emulated by many countries the world over. Briefly, these programmes include visiting villages, organizing medical and sanitation camps, mobile clinics, adult education, etc.

Medical Care - Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences. This briefly is oriented towards globalization of medicine, de-commercialization of medicine, human values in medical care and spiritual well being irrespective of cast, creed, religion and nationality. In addition medical-care is free for all.

Super Specialty Hospitals in Puttaparthi and Bangalore. These are multi-specialty hospitals which provide the best medical care free of cost and comparable to any in the world.

Sri Sathya Sai Rural Service Programme - Mobile Dispensaries. These include pulse polio programme, cataract detection, detection of cardiovascular problems, leprosy detection, childhood disabilities, etc.

Sri Sathya Sai Water Supply Project. This was a prayer answered not only for seven hundred villages in Andra Pradesh but also for people in Chennai. These projects helped remove the misery of a million people in distress.

Conclusion.

I, as a mortal, am in no way capable of judging the magnitude of benevolence bestowed on us by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I am, therefore, merely highlighting a very small segment of the same not only for the consumption of the recent devotees but also for those who are delightfully ignorant of His mission, accomplishment and following. I would like to conclude this article by imploring the devotees to make it a New Year commitment to educate those who are not aware of Bhagavan's relevance and benevolence in this materialistic world that has largely distanced itself from Sathya, Dharma, Prema and Shanti, which is, Truth, Righteousness, Love and Peace.

SPORTING DIVINITY

By Dr. M Sainath

January 11 every year is the Inaugural Day of the Annual Sports and Cultural Meet of Swami's Institute in Prasanthi Nilayam. In the article below, Sri K P Gopinath, the Physical Instructor at the Brindavan Campus of the Institute since 1988, describes the genesis, purpose and fascinating aspects of this much-awaited annual event. Sri Gopinath, before joining the Institute, worked in various Public Sector Institutions and represented them in Cricket and Basket Ball.

'Janthunam Nara Janma Durlabham', human birth is the most precious and rarest of all births. It becomes more valuable when we are born as contemporaries of the greatest of all avatars - our beloved Swami. I bow with gratitude to my late parents who discovered Him by His grace and took my siblings and me to Him at a very tender age.

Sri Sathya Sai Arts, Science and Commerce College for Boys was established in Brindavan in 1969. Earlier in 1968, Swami had established a women's college at Anantapur. In the earlier days, teams from the boy's college used to go to Bangalore city and take part in the inter college matches and tournaments. The annual sports day (no specific date was fixed then) was an eagerly awaited event for Swami would specially come to Brindavan. The prime athletic events like 100m, 200m, the relays and tug-of-war would be held in His presence and Swami would enjoy every moment of it.

The Hill View Stadium

During the second week of December 1983, Swami asked the students and teachers to clear up the ground to the west of the Easwaramma School. Simultaneously a stage was coming up facing west and attached to the school building. Everyday Swami came with a tractor full of sweets, fruits and drinks for the students. One day He even distributed Parker pens. Another day He came along with late Sri Kasturi and Sri Narasimha Murthy and stood in the middle of the rocky terrain and said, "It will be nice if we have a stadium here." The Divine Will was in action. The next morning the work on the lower ground began.

The first major event on this new ground was the Bal Vikas Rally in January 1984. On 21st November 1984, the first major sports presentation was made. Students of the Prasanthi Nilayam campus put up a magnificent performance of gymnastics followed by a fire drill organized by the then Physical Directors Sri Venkateswaran and Sri Kishan Lal. The Brindavan campus under the leadership of Sri C Srinivas, who was himself an outstanding sportsman put up a very graceful and breathtaking cricket strokes drill, followed by an item titled "Cosmic Play" which had a huge boat. Swami came and sat in the boat. What a sight for the Gods to see! The next day He remarked, "Many people think that our boys can only sing bhajans. The performance last evening dispelled all such notions."

By 1985 the upper ground was also getting ready. Bulldozers came and leveled the hilly terrain. In January 1986 Swami was on a visit to Bombay and unfortunately the Sports Meet was held during that period. Swami was disappointed as He had brought loads of prizes for His students. At His command, a Sports Meet for staff members was held and He distributed the prizes. It was then decided that the Annual Sports and Cultural Meet would be held on the 11th of January every year and the prize distribution function would be held on the 14th of January – the Sankranthi day. Those days He would autograph footballs, cricket bats and other sports goods for the boys. In 1997 Swami decided to have a stadium of international standards. The whole place became one huge playground. The stands can easily take up to 50,000 people.

On the 29th of December we had an international cricket match held at the venue. The chief organizers were Sri Sunil Gavaskar, Sri E A S Prasanna, Sri G R Vishwanath and Sri Allwyn Kallicharan. Sri I K Gujral, the then Prime Minister of India, was the Chief Guest. The pitch was prepared with great care by the famous Curator Sri Kasturirangan. The Indian XI led by Sachin Tendulkar beat the World XI comprising of players from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and England led by Arjuna Ranatunga of Sri Lanka. At every step Swami was there to help and guide us. Nowhere in the world has a match of this stature been held where the entry was free. Needless to say the stadium was packed to capacity. Only Swami can do this and teach us valuable lessons in the process.

Beckoned and Blessed

My predecessors in Brindavan were Mr. Victor Basabara of USSR and then Mr. John Henn of the US. Both were outstanding international sportsmen. In fact John was a member of the US National Volleyball Team. Both were wonderful devotees of the Lord. In 1986, I quit my job and visited Parthi on weekends. For two long years the cleansing process went on and Swami observed His version of *mounam* with me. In June 1988, Swami was taking His third round of Darshan lines after the interviews. I was seated in the eighth row. He glided in gently and looked in my direction and beckoned to me. I literally froze and my mind went blank. He again indicated to me to come forward. I looked around - no one moved. The floodgates opened and I somehow managed to reach Him. "What are you doing now?" was His first question. He chided me for not seeking His permission to quit my job. The Lord then asked, "Will you work if I give you a job?" I held His feet and wept. "After Gurupoornima, I will tell you..." and He returned to the Mandir. When I informed my mother, she was the happiest person on earth.

Channeling Spiritual Energy through Sports

In our Institute, sports, games and yoga are on top of the list of integral items. Our Divine Chancellor Swami had visualized that sports and games was the best way to channel the youthful energy. The best way to learn spirituality is on a sports field: More practical, less theory. Leading a sports oriented life personally was different, but to lead 300 boys in the age group of 18-20 was a

different ball game altogether. Sports and games is a compulsory part of their lives in the campus. Swami says:

**Life is a dream, realize it
Life is a challenge, meet it
Life is a game, play it
Life is love, live it.**

Slowly but steadily the Sports Meet began to take shape as He desired. Each campus and school wanted to do only the very best for Him. There are two components in the Sports Meet on 11th morning. The Opening Ceremony and March Past followed by the presentation of the different campuses. After the procession led by Sai Geetha, the slow march contingent, the motor cycle escorts and the band, the march past begins.

Marching to a New Beat at the Annual Sports Meet

Swami commanded that each and every student participate in the march past and every student looks forward to the chance to salute the Divine Master. I have had a very humbling experience in this regard. There was a student who was disciplined, good in academics and a keen sportsman. In his first year when the march past practice began in early December, I noticed that He could not differentiate between left and right when he marched. Both of us struggled till Jan 5th and gave up. In his second year the story was slightly better, but the crucial moment near the dais, he would get it wrong again. To encourage him he was nominated as the reserve for march-past! He shed a tear or two and I too could not contain my disappointment. **In his final year he came to me in early June and said, “Sir, I practiced marching in my holidays.” Now he wanted to pass out of the campus as squad leader during the Sports Meet! He wanted to do it for his beloved Swami.** Indeed he practiced very hard and led the squad in January 2002. Our students love Swami and this is their greatest virtue and quality.

The second part of the programme is the real show piece. We used to go to Parthi to take Bhagavan’s approval after the events were finalized. His face would light up when enquired about the programme. He would ask for details in public and we would let out bits and pieces. He would then call us inside, listen and make suggestions and changes. He would command us to keep it a secret! He did not want each campus to know what the other campuses were planning. This would make us feel on top of the world.

In later years, some of the programmes became repetitive and we had representatives meeting and sorting out timings and events. The events became more adventurous and professional as the years rolled by. The only motivation for all the students and teachers was to please Swami.

Challenging the Boundaries: Becoming more Adventurous and Professional

I can say with pride that no institution, anywhere in the world, can come up with such wonderful programmes in such a short period of 15-20 days every year. The one and only goal of all our students is Swami, His love for them, and their love for Him. Our students have done everything which showcases their enthusiasm, balance, skill, courage, fitness and sportsman spirit of the highest order. Our students have learned to fly in a matter of fifteen-twenty days! Is this not a miracle? Our students have done para-sailing, para-motoring, para-gliding and landed in the midst of fifty thousand people. Even a professional flier will think twice as the conditions are really tough. The motor cycle events had earlier been performed only by the Army and BSF. Our students - both boys and girls - drive their bullets with speed and precision and perform breathtaking stunts which make even a seasoned driver sit back and take notice. Our students have done carabining from the top of the Hanuman hill to the ground. What a wonderful sight! They have done rock climbing, and performed gymnastics of the highest order. Stunts have been performed on moving cars, jeeps and even trucks.

The giant wheel of the Prasanthi Nilayam Campus is always an eagerly awaited event. The mono cycling event of the Anantapur campus is rarely seen in other parts of the country. One of the most spectacular events ever was called the 'celestial rhythm' performed at a height of 80 feet from the ground on a structure held up by a crane. The twenty boys who performed the show stole the hearts of one and all. Earlier, only the professional British navy sailors had done this event anywhere in the world. Col. Rajvardhan Singh Rathore, the country's pride at the Olympics, after watching the event, remarked that he has never seen anything like this before. Even the Army would need at least 6 months to prepare such a team.

Our students have done equestrian events, show jumping, tent pegging and what not! Our bungee jumpers had barely one or two practice jumps before the final jump and have even done the latest reverse bungee jumping. The latest additions are the most colourful Chinese Lion Dance and Dragon Dance.

The most awaited and heart warming performance comes from the tiny tots of the Primary School. The variety of dances, colorful formations, flexibility of the tiny gymnasts and agility of the skaters speak very highly of the standards we have set for ourselves. The Primary School Teachers themselves stitch all the costumes for the thousand odd children! I have seen Swami watching their programmes. He is so happy when the small children perform. If you wish to see what a true mother's love is – watch Swami during the Sports Meet.

The Students Bring out their Best for Swami

All the programmes are choreographed and set to music by the students themselves. I believe that the Sports Meet brings out the best in every student. The backdrops and sets are also made by the students. Some of them become expert carpenters, welders and some carve out the most exquisite designs ever.

On the 14th of January, Swami gives a huge silver cup to each Campus after His discourse. The individual prizes for athletics and games are given by Swami Himself. The articles He distributes as prizes are of daily use to the students such as electric shavers, soaps, walkmans, cameras, etc. The students cherish these tokens of love all their lives.

The Sports Meet has a cultural component. We have had wonderful drama presentations on the evening of the Prize Distribution function – Jayadeva, Surdas, Annamaya which have held the devotees spell bound. The costumes, dialogues, songs, music and the sets – all of these are done by the students themselves.

The most satisfying feeling for us teachers is that the Sports Meet is one event which brings every student closer to Swami. The bond of love brings out the best in them. They learn the value of hard work and discover the joy of sharing and caring. Discipline and determination come naturally to them. The spirit of sportsmanship enhances their love for Swami and inspires them to put into practice: “Life is Love, Live it”. For all of us at the Institute, He is the unbiased Selector, Stern Coach, Exemplary Captain, Ideal Umpire, and above all, the Omnipresent Scorer!

The only hope for the future are these boys and girls of Swami’s Institutions, who with their integrity, honesty, sincerity, and discipline, will inspire the youth of the world towards everything good and noble. Swami keeps reminding us that dark clouds will sometimes block the sunlight. Does it mean that the sun does not exist? When dark clouds fill our skies, hiding sunshine from our eyes, say His Name, see His Form – Hold on and then we are sure to be blessed.

Jai Sai Ram!

H2H SPECIAL

CAN A NEW YEAR BRING TRUE HAPPINESS?

By Prof. G Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. You will be hearing this talk on the last day of this year and since it is New Year's Day tomorrow, let me first wish all of you a happy New Year. For myself, I hope that 2007 would be free from the kind of nonsense we saw in the last days of this year, forcing me to talk on a topic that I thought had gone away. I am referring to a nasty anti-Swami article in the website of the **Hindustan Times** published from Delhi, and a Sunday night talk show in NDTV which also featured many anti-Swami comments.

Piercing the Veil of Ignorance

Before I get down to what I wish to say, I should perhaps recall what Krishna says in the *Gita*. He says:

O Arjuna, I know all beings of the past, the present and those to come in the future. But no one knows Me!

Concealed as I am by the power of My Creation, I am not manifest to all. The bewildered world does not recognise Me, birthless and changeless!

Deluded by the manifestations of the three Gunas [characteristics in-built into Creation], the world fails to recognise Me, the Imperishable, who transcends the transient aspects of Creation.

Verily, this Divine illusion of Mine [Maya] is hard to surmount. But those who take sole refuge in me, pierce this veil!

These words were spoken by Swami five thousand years ago. So we really should not be surprised if the world is full of people who talk through ignorance.

Let me now get down to the subject matter of today's talk. One thing about anti-Swami outbursts is that they suddenly awaken many of our devotees, who otherwise are dormant. In this case, not only did we get many mails as is usually the case, but also there was some strong response by a few of our ex-students, made directly to some of those responsible for the irresponsible comments. I shall deal elsewhere with the specific remarks of those who have spoken against Swami; here I shall deal with the general topic of negativity at a broader and somewhat philosophical level. I feel that such a reflection is required so that we understand why such things happen, and how we should deal with this phenomenon in an effective way instead of just letting off steam occasionally.

Rising Above the Senses and Instincts

Maybe I should begin all this by considering lower living forms like animals, and how they act and respond to stimuli in the external world. All living systems have what I would call I/O systems, namely the senses, which are like the input-output devices in computers. The senses are able to collect information about the external world and send it to the brain. The brain processes the information received and then sends signals to the body organs including the senses, about the manner in which the body must respond to the signals received.

In animals, this is more or less a hard-wired process. For example, when an animal sees or senses danger, it immediately reacts to protect itself. If there is rain, the animal tries to look for shelter, and so on. Since we have evolved from lower forms of life, we too have such a built-in system, naturally. But we also have some higher faculties that the lower living forms do not possess. There are aspects of our brain that allow us to learn significantly, and it is because of that learning process that we are able to do so many things. For example, it is through intelligence built up from the learning process, that man can tame animals and even make them work for him, refine ore and extract metals, make tools for use in various activities, build transportation systems, and so on. It is also intelligence coupled with the God-given flexibility of the tongue that enables to humans speak, develop language, etc.

Using Intelligence, Logic and Creativity

Beyond the learning process, comes the higher reasoning process that enables man to use logic to deduce complex results in mathematics and make non-trivial scientific discoveries. For example, just this year, using a fantastic satellite named COBE that for three years hovered in space monitoring the original radiation emitted soon after the Big Bang, we now know that our Universe came into existence about 13.7 billion years ago, with just a few percent error in the estimate. This is a remarkable discovery, especially the precision.

Going beyond breath-taking logical abilities, man has remarkable creative urges that have given to mankind priceless treasures through giants like Shakespeare, Leonardo, Mozart and so on. That truly is an impressive spectrum. Does anything else lie still further beyond? Indeed, there is and that is the infinite reservoir of basic human values. So there it is, a fantastic Mind-continuum all the way from simple reaction processes to learning to higher intelligence and reasoning, to sophisticated logic, to creative urges of the highest order and finally the noble feelings latent in the Heart. OK, all these are present in the human being; so what? What is the big deal? That is what I shall now consider.

You see all of us are a complex entities, that see a whole world outside of us, and react to it according to how we perceive that world from inside. This is a very important point that I would urge you to keep in mind. It all starts like this: We first see, hear, smell and so on, and take the information into the brain.

There we process and store the information. After this comes the response process. What we should realise is that the nature of the human response depends substantially on how deep the individual concerned is prepared to go inside into his or her mind before responding to external stimuli. My thesis is that the deeper one goes, the better is the quality of the response and the best comes when one goes to the deepest part wherein are packed God-given treasures of basic human values in abundant measure.

Quality of Response Varies with Depth of Mind

Let me now develop all that slowly and in stages. Don't worry, I shall, in due course, relate all this to anti-Swami propaganda, how we ought to respond based on Swami's teachings, etc. Let us start with how the response varies in quality as the person responding goes deeper and deeper into the mind. At the lowest level, the person is dull in personality, and his responses are instinctive and animal-like, knee-jerk type one might call it. There is no deep analysis of cause and effect and consequences.

At a much higher level, there is intelligence combined with reasoning and logic, but even this can be limited and not all-inclusive. The world of today is full of top-class experts who know how to "solve" problems systematically, analytically and so forth, using mathematical models, computer simulation and what not. But at the end of it all, they often fail. The classic case is that of Robert McNamara whose name was very well known in the late sixties but is probably unknown to most of today's youngsters. McNamara came to Washington from the Ford Motor Company where through sheer brilliance, he rose to be a top executive. In Washington, McNamara served as Defence Secretary to President Johnson and was closely connected with the Vietnam War.

There was Vietnam in far away South Asia, and here was America, a Super Power with hundreds of hydrogen and atom bombs, missiles etc., besides all kinds of attack weapons, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers making up an awesome army. Sitting in the Pentagon and surrounded by whiz kids as well as powerful computers – McNamara strongly believed in computers – America waged war in Vietnam against a small country with hardly any sophisticated weapons. The war dragged on for years producing a great toll in human life and brought immense suffering to millions. At the end of it all, the great power America simply threw in the towel and withdrew from Vietnam, abandoning its original objectives. All this is well-known history and I shall not go over it again. But this much I have to bring to your attention and that is in later life, Robert McNamara went carefully back over all he had done and America had done and admitted that it was one huge Himalayan blunder. The premise on which the war was fought was totally flawed. Why? Because the so-called facts gathered prior to the war were not analysed with the Heart but with the Head. I agree that McNamara did not quite put it that way, but in the end that is what it all boils down to really.

Lower, Middle and Higher Mind

If you go back to the picture I gave you earlier, the Head and the Heart form really one continuum. Indeed, the entire continuous structure all the way from brain function to what I call the Heart can also be described qualitatively in terms of three broad regions, namely, the Lower Mind, the Middle Mind and the Higher Mind, a description that would be in consonance with some of the writings of Aurobindo. Incidentally, in the Summer Course of 1994, Swami's evening Discourses were all on this very topic of the Mind-continuum. People's responses to events in the external world depend entirely on which part of the Mind-continuum they are connected and plugged into.

Let me at this point pause and gather together the points that I have made thus far. They are as follows:

1. Thanks to our physical body, for each of us there is a world outside as well as a world inside.
2. We perceive the world outside and get information about it via our senses.
3. Our response to the outside world and events or actions taking place there are conditioned by the way the information gathered is processed by the system within us.
4. This system called the Mind is a continuum with a long extension. However, not all parts of this continuum are activated in everyone. Different extents are switched on in different people and thus, different people react to the same situation in different ways. For example, during the Katrina disaster in America, when floods were sweeping New Orleans, some were trying to help, while a few were looting.
5. Sometimes, the response might give the impression of being the result of a very careful and studied analysis. However, as the Vietnam War as well as many recent events have shown, logical reasoning is often flawed because it is incomplete. No analysis, however rigorous it might appear to be superficially, is complete, if considerations of the Heart are excluded. That is the point I shall next consider.

Let us say there is a man sitting inside a house and looking out through his window. The window is wide, and covered with glass. In addition, there is a curtain inside. Now if the man does not pull aside the curtain fully when he tries to look out, his view would necessarily be very limited. If in addition, the window glass is covered with dust and grime, then the man inside can at best have only a murky view of what lies outside. With such a restricted and limited view, even Sherlock Holmes would have a lot of problems in coming to correct conclusions, based what he sees happening outside. That is the problem with many people today. Why is this happening and what are the contributing factors? That is our next issue.

To understand the question just raised, we must first understand that each of us is really two personalities within one body; it is a two-in-one affair. I am sure you all must be thinking I have gone bananas and I would not blame you for thinking so. In fact, a few years ago if someone had told me something like

this, I too would have thought the person needs to go to a mental asylum. What then has changed my mind? The *Bhagavad Gita* and Swami's Discourses. Swami's Discourses? Yes of course! Don't you remember in how many of His Discourses Bhagavan raises the question: "Who exactly are you?" The short answer to that question is that we are really one; but we often mistake a mirage of this one to be the real one. I am sure that must be a mouthful for you and so let me explain.

Ego and Atma: Two Personalities in One

Vedanta makes it very clear that there are two personalities within each of us, if I might put it that way. One is the Lower Self or the ego, and the other is the Real Self or the *Atma*. The Lower Self is a representation of our body and mind combined together. While the Real Self is what we really are, the Lower Self is really a mirage even though it might give the impression of being very real. I know you must be feeling dizzy and so let me go over all of this slowly.

If you don't mind, I would like to begin with Arjuna and Krishna out there in the battlefield, before the commencement of the famous war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. If you recall, Arjuna is trying to drop out and the very first thing that Krishna says is, "Arjuna, you are not the transient body, but the eternal *Atma*." What Krishna means - and this is something that Swami has stressed *ad nauseum* though it might have escaped us - is that we must act according to our intrinsic Divine nature latent within us, rather than on considerations of the body and mind. In Arjuna's case, he did not want to fight with blood relatives. Normally, that would be a valid argument, but when it is a case of *Dharma* versus *Adharma*, body-consciousness must not dictate judgement. In fact, through the stories of Prahlada, Maha Bali, Meera, etc., Swami has made it very clear that if it ever comes to a question God versus someone else, then the priority must always be God. And since Truth is God, *Dharma* is God, the same rule applies here also; and this was the rule that Arjuna was trying to flout, guided erroneously by his Lower Self which is a representation of body consciousness and all the rest that go with it. In short, ignorance of our true nature can lead us to making wrong judgement and wrong actions.

I must pause to make an important point here, which is that the Lower Self is not unique, meaning that it is different in different persons, depending on the extent to which they are driven by ego. The Real Self on the other hand, is the same in all. That is so because the Real Self is nothing other than the *Atma*. As Swami has pointed out that there is no such thing as your *Atma*, my *Atma*, etc. Thus, if a person looks at the world from the perspective of his Lower Self or the ego, the response of the person would basically be selfish. On the other hand, if the response is governed by the Real Self or the *Atma*, then there would be no trace of any selfishness; instead, it would be guided by considerations of selfless love, compassion, understanding, etc.

In simpler terms, either we react based on our personality as determined by our body-mind combination [Lower Self or ego] or based on our personality shaped by the Divine Spark within [Higher Self or the Real Self]. In the former

case one can legitimately say that the person concerned is ignorant of his true nature while in the latter case one can say that the person is fully conscious of his intrinsic Divine nature.

Education's Real Purpose

Which brings me to education and its real purpose. As Swami has described it, true education is that which a) enables a person to be fully conscious of his or her intrinsic Divine nature, that is to say, identify with the Real Self rather than the Lower Self, and b) react to events in the external world, in a manner consistent with the nature of the Real Self instead of the Lower Self. In practical terms, a person who is educated in the true sense of the word would be humble, ready to help and oblige, be understanding of the other person's point of view, and ever ready to serve, etc.

So how would all this make a difference to the world as it is today? Well, almost every educated person in today's world might be highly qualified in a worldly sense but totally ignorant of his or her true nature, namely, that the person is actually Divine in origin at the root. This ignorance can produce a huge difference in the way the person acts and reacts to worldly matters. Such a person would, believing to be highly rational, still not hesitate to attack those who believe in God, simply because he or she has concluded that there is no God.

All reasoning is done within a certain framework; a scientist, for example, thinks and functions within the boundary of space and time, since the Universe we live in is bounded by space and time. That is perfectly OK where the physical universe is concerned. I am a scientist by training and profession and that is how I did all my science. However, that does not give me the license to ridicule people who have faith in certain matters that go beyond space and time. To be honest, many atheists are quite fair in such matters and adopt a live and let live attitude. However, there are some fundamentalist atheists who would summarily dismiss all believers just because a handful of people who believe in God talk stupidly.

Having made briefly the point that even rationalists can be bigots when they have a closed mind, let me for a moment turn to the media. After all, a lot of the anti-Swami propaganda appears in the media and it is therefore relevant to briefly examine the evolution of the media. This is a long story into which I obviously cannot go here. But this much I can say:

In the beginning, the news media began mainly as an objective purveyor of news. Journalists and broadcasters of an earlier era were committed to professionalism, quality, accuracy and objectivity. For example, President Franklin Roosevelt was a polio victim and spent most of his later political life on a wheel chair. That fact never got mentioned in the press, nor did the press photographers ever take pictures showing him on a wheel chair. Today it is a different story, and I do not have to tell it.

Media Sold into Advertising Slavery

In the world of television, as everyone knows, it is in America that the TV industry really took firm roots. In the early fifties, American TV was dominated by three major TV networks and they all used TV to bring entertainment to the homes; there was no news program to start with. And TV broadcasting was hundred percent commercial. News was later added as a way of showing losses; thus, news programs did not carry any advertising; the soap manufacturers who dominated the advertisers, were not interested in news anyway. This turned out to be a blessing and TV broadcast journalism began to flourish, with journalists producing very good programs. Soon, people began to watch news programs avidly, whereupon the ballgame suddenly changed. The management made news an integral component of its mainstream program, and included it in its ratings game; advertising got connected to news also and thereafter it was always the tail that wagged the dog.

Meanwhile, politics in America began to become ever so expensive, thanks to candidates using the TV for promotional advertisements. Pretty soon, the media became a power of its own, with a lot of money power behind it, enhancing further its power to enter the minds of the masses and influence them. Thus it is that these days the mantra is: Good news is no longer news; crime is news, scandal is news, sleaze alone counts, and so on, because negativity is so easy to sell. Behind a sham veneer of objectivity and pretence of public concern and sensitivity, there is a lot of bias on the one hand and self interest on the other.

In Search of the Perfect Scandal

I recall at this point, a conversation with a local Vice Chancellor I had about twenty years ago in the city, Indore. The gentleman told me that a local newspaper regularly carried stories about how he the Vice Chancellor swindled money and used it to beautify his house. Among the allegations was that the VC had used University money to put marble tiles in his bathroom. The poor man was shattered by these false allegations. He told me, "I phoned the paper and told them that all these stories were utterly false; if they wanted they could come and inspect his bathroom. Do you know what the editor told me? We do not believe you but believe our reporter. There is no need to verify his statement." I asked the VC, "Can you not sue the paper?" With a tired smile he replied, "If I go to court, I have to pay the lawyer's expenses. I cannot afford it. The University will not take care of that. The newspaper people are clever; they would go on getting postponements and make me go broke, eventually forcing me to withdraw. They know I simply cannot afford the lawyer's fee and that they can therefore get away with any rubbish." I then asked, "But why do they want to target you? Have you offended the paper in anyway?" He said, "Not at all; you see, these people have run out of stories and they want some scandal or the other to fill their pages. They know they can slander me and that I would not be able to retaliate; it is as simple as that." I said, "Why not try the Press Council?" He replied in a pained voice, "At best they will tell me, forget it."

That is unfortunately true. There is the famous case of a person who was a member of the Cabinet of President Ronald Reagan. He was hounded by the press with allegations of corruption. These stories regularly made the front pages. This went on day after day till he had to resign. Then a lengthy investigation into the corruption charges followed. It was found that this man was completely innocent. The correction appeared as a small piece of news in small print on the 19th page of the leading Washington paper that hounded him out of office. His reputation was gone forever and nobody ever believed that he was actually innocent.

That is the media for you. They can print any story they want and if turns out they are wrong, at best they will print a small apology tucked away in an obscure corner. These days, almost every day, somebody or the other is prosecuted, tried and sentenced by the media, even before the trial commences. According the law, a person charged is innocent until proven guilty. But how can the person have a fair trial when the press is hounding him instead of merely reporting? What is all this talk about the rule of law, when there is only the rule of the media, most of the time?

It's a Ratings Game

These days, media is concerned mostly about ratings. This is true of newspapers and TV channels. Higher ratings mean higher advertising revenue. Sadly, advertising income is the bottom line. Thus it is that NDTV is running programs like Big Fight, Cricket Controversy, and so on - full of sound bytes as they say in America. People are encouraged to phone in, send SMS, etc. The popularity of the show is what is important, and not truth, although there would always be a veneer of fact-finding, being balanced and neutral, etc.

I am saying all this in a matter of fact way. I think we ought to realise that what is happening now is the new style, and that we have to swim against this strong current. Money pressures are making even the once fair and reputed newspapers lower their erstwhile standards of journalism. I see many of our formerly reputed newspapers looking rather like tabloids so popular in London. I wonder how many recall that some years ago, the famous **London Times** carried a nasty article on Swami, without bothering to do any checking. Normally, newspapers do the courtesy of giving some space to people who wish to contradict. So many of us wrote letters to the Editor of **London Times**, balanced letters I might add, but not a single rebuttal was published.

Let us face it, value systems have changed. And things once unthinkable are now regularly happening. Some years ago, Rusi Karanjia who then used to edit and publish the tabloid weekly **Blitz** from Bombay, ran a nasty campaign against Swami week after week. Someone then told Karanjia, "You are a journalist; how can you write about someone without even bothering to see Him and talk to Him and personally verifying that what you write is true?" Karanjia took this criticism to heart, came to Puttaparthi, talked to Swami and completely changed his opinion. You must give him credit for that. That kind

of objectivity has gone forever. The ratings game has wiped out that kind of fair-play.

At this point, let me make one thing very clear. I am not saying that all of today's media is black and that too all of the time. Far from it. Many TV and radio channels do at times bend backwards to be very fair in their reporting. However, the fact remains that even if the media does not wish to be unfair, bowing to the ratings pressure it often resorts to tactics that carry bias.

From Head to Heart

Before I wind up, there are some basic and philosophical remarks I would like to make. I will go back to where I started. I said that the response of individuals to the external world depends largely on the depth to which they go inside themselves. These days, the type of education that one receives makes even so-called very intelligent people stop short of the region where the Head ends and the Heart begins. Their responses might be very intelligent, highly logical, etc., but when matters extend beyond the domain of cold logic, such people are absolutely useless where problem solving is concerned. On the other hand, they often cause and compound problems. That was Robert McNamara's fatal mistake, which he had the courage to later acknowledge. But such honesty is often missing.

Talking of honesty, I should mention a radio program that I heard recently featuring an Israeli woman and a man from Palestine. Both had suffered tragedies; while the woman had lost her son who was killed by a Palestinian sniper, the Palestinian's brother was similarly killed by a sniper from Israel. Both had reason to feel bitter about the killer responsible for their personal tragedy, but, as the woman said, "I know that even though a Palestinian woman may declare that she is proud that her son sacrificed himself as a suicide bomber, when she is alone, she does not feel pride but pain, agonising pain." Likewise, the Palestinian man said that hatred made him see differences between himself and the Israelis but if he was honest, he would have to admit that he and the killer were both humans although they belonged to different religions. He said it was only when he harped on his rights as a Palestinian and forgot that he and all others are human, that hatred set in, bringing with it conflict.

This is an important point and I wish to spend some time on it. There are four key words, two used by the Israeli woman and two used by the Palestinian. The woman talked about **tragedy** and **pain** being a common bond rising above and wiping out all conceivable differences that prejudice and hatred can breed. Likewise, the Palestinian said that when he forgot about his **rights** and focussed on **honesty**, then the wall of mistrust vanished. If we think carefully, it is huge walls of mistrust built by minds that create most of the problems in the world. Walls are born from a lack of understanding and inadequate enquiry, and promote mistrust, suspicion, a deep sense of insecurity and finally, even promote conflict. Such walls always have an external cause, but they all arise because of one basic factor: we forget that we really are human beings before we are Hindus and Muslims, Catholics and

Protestants, Shias and Sunnis, Arabs and Europeans, Russians and Americans.

Heart Brings Consideration and Reconciliation

In the eighties, Ronald Regan, an arch capitalist American, sworn to free markets and all that, declared standing near the famous Berlin wall, "Mr. Gorbechev, tear down this wall!" Regan was known as a strong hawk, and few expected he would ever adopt a conciliatory tone toward the Soviets. And you know what happened? Together, Regan and Gorbechev set in motion a reconciliation process that brought down the Berlin wall, and suddenly made the Russia and America not regard each other as dangerous enemies. And what a change it made to the world! Almost overnight, a forty-year long bitter cold-war became history. Today, we no longer fear a nuclear holocaust brought about by a nuclear war between Russia and America.

Freedom and Truth

Let us similarly take a moment to recall a much-ignored event in South Africa. For over a hundred years, the White man, a small minority, ruled with an iron hand and in a most cruel manner in South Africa. In that utterly dark country in a dark continent, a frail Indian named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi started a new movement, curiously on September 11th, almost a hundred years before the more famous 9/11. And in the last decade of the 20th century, even as the Berlin wall crumbled, so did the Apartheid in South Africa. At last the black people were free and able to rule the country. That was good, but at the same time, everyone wondered what was going to happen to the White minority, which was about 20%. Was there going to be a bloodbath, an era of revenge? There was a huge reservoir of hate and anger to promote such a bloodbath, but the seeds sowed by Gandhi prevented that from happening. Nelson Mandela, after suffering for over twenty-five years in prison, initiated a novel Truth and Reconciliation procedure whereby the past would not be forgotten but forgiven with understanding.

This is an extra-ordinary event that must be taught to every schoolchild in every part of the world. Sadly it is not. But the Israeli woman I mentioned earlier remembered it. Along with it, we must remember also the following:

1. Gandhi was motivated by his quest for Truth, when he started the campaign of non-violence.
2. Gandhi's inspiration came from his extensive reading. He was not a highly educated man in the formal sense; but he read widely and absorbed. In particular, he let his entire life be governed by the *Gita*.
3. The *Gita* is the lesson Swami taught five thousand years ago.
4. That lesson was taught just once.
5. These days, Swami repeats those lessons in much greater detail, many, many times.

But are we paying attention? Is the world paying attention to the lessons of history? Are we in any way helping the world to learn the lessons that God in human form is teaching mankind so tirelessly right now?

In 1944, even as the Second World War was drawing to a close, humanity took the momentous step of establishing the United Nations, that everyone hoped would end all wars. But what happened since then? People continue to be killed due to wars, conflicts and genocide, and the sad fact is that even without the atom bombs, almost the same number of people have been killed due to violence since 1945, as died in the Second World War.

War: The Dehumanisation of Humanity

About wars, Swami once said:

Alongside the growth in scientific knowledge, ignorance is also growing pari passu. How else can we explain the fact that in five thousand years of recorded human history, there have been as many as fifteen thousand wars? Even now, men are not free from the fear of war. It is these wars that have progressively dehumanised mankind and eroded all human values.

Notice the key words: Growth of ignorance, and dehumanisation. What is the use of higher education if it does not lift us to the level of the Heart? That is the issue we raised recently in a Sunday Special and that is the issue I raise now. Here, we must see Swami's monumental contribution, by setting up a model University and training thousands of young men and women.

Swami has done His bit, but now it is up to the thousands who have gone forth into the wide world to spread the Message. We here in Prashanti Nilayam have for years been pleading for active support to us in this cause, but I am sorry to say there is not much of it. Oh yes, there is goodwill of sorts, and the words of praise now and then, but we are not seeking praise. We are looking for something else.

Higher Learning: How Will We Individually Promote Global Harmony?

The world today resembles a huge forest that is on fire. However, this forest is right next to a big lake with plenty of water in it, which can be used to put out the fire. But the fire will not die unless water is drawn and used to extinguish the fire. It is in that "fire-fighting" that we must all come together. Fire-fighting in the present context does not mean merely rebutting incorrect statements mouthed on talk shows. Where required, that must certainly be done; but we also need to do a lot more.

Right now, there is a lot of ignorance about what all Swami has done for humanity and what His teachings represent. Just to make my point, I would like to say that every day, hundreds of young people come as a group from different countries. They are all happy to be here. They sing songs, stage plays, do a bit of service here and there and go back. All this is fine and

nobody is grudging their right to be happy in the Divine presence. But should it all end right there?

If we are honest to ourselves, we would be forced to agree that silently, a lot more people outside the Sai Family are quietly doing much to promote global harmony. Just recall what the Palestinian man said about being honest and realising that he is a human first before he is a Muslim. If people who have never heard of Swami are able to feel love in their Hearts and use that Love to break down walls of hatred and prejudice, is not much more expected of us?

Wherever we look, hatred, conflict, violence and wars, all spring from a gap, with individuals, communities, and countries on two sides. Usually, one side is much stronger than the other. While both sides have the responsibility of looking above the wall in order to reach out, the stronger party has a greater obligation to do so. In rock climbing, it often happens that one person has gone a little up while his partner is below and struggling to climb up. On many such occasions, the person who is up often bends down and gives a hand to lift the person below. That is the attitude needed in most conflict zones today: understanding, the sharing of pain, forbearance, a sense of 'forgive and forget,' compassion and love. That is the essence of Swami's teaching, that is what higher learning is all about and that also what Swami taught in the *Gita*. When that lesson is absorbed, all walls of suspicion and hatred would crumble instantly.

A New Year's Resolution: Follow Swami's Teachings to Provide the Answer

Shortly before he laid down office, Kofi Annan, the outgoing Secretary General of the UN, said that Superiority must not be used to establish Supremacy, but for practicing enlightened leadership. While Annan was referring to the US, the only Super Power now on earth, I believe that his words apply to all sections of Society where there is a divide with the privileged on one side and the underprivileged on the other. If we reflect carefully, we would be forced to come to the conclusion that a systematic study and application of Swami's teachings alone can save the world. That study and application is what true education is all about, and I suggest that it is time we become earnest about absorbing at least a bit of Swami's teachings.

This is the time of the year when everyone goes around wishing everyone in sight a Happy New Year. Yes, we all want the coming year to bring us happiness. How many times have we offered that wish in the past? However, how many times have we done anything to promote true happiness?

I would like to conclude with the hope that 2007 will see more and more Sai devotees becoming passionately involved in spreading the Sweet Message of Universal Love. This is one thing that can really and truly redeem the world and pull humanity out of the quagmire it now is caught in. In this exercise, we need both the people and the tools. The tools are here with us, but you the people are out there. Can we both come together?

That is the question I shall now leave you all with.

Once again I wish you a Happy New Year. I also hope that we can make 2007 a really happy year, by working together closely in spreading the Divine Message.

Jai Sai Ram.

SAI WORLD NEWS

NATIONWIDE PRESS SALUTES SAI ON HIS BIRTHDAY

We at Heart2Heart are very happy to bring to our readers the wonderful reactions of the press to Swami's 81st birthday celebrations. You will read how the newspapers comment with befitting respect and admiration on the life of Bhagavan and His exemplary life of service to humanity.

"It is nothing but a wonder, how his divine discourses and replete with intricacies of *vedas*, *puranas* and the *upanishad* and all the scriptures of the world religions bring forth the essence of their wisdom," writes the *Gujarat Mitra* (Surat) of November 20th.

The papers also reported on the reverence of President APJ Abdul Kalam who was quoted in the New Indian Express, (Nov 24th) as saying, "I have immense love for Sathya Sai Baba" and in The Hindu of the same day as describing Swami as the "The divine light shining in front of us."

So please take a tour to relive the wondrous moments of Bhagavan's 81st Birthday through some (rarely reported) good news! Below are extracts from the articles.

Navbharat, Mumbai (Hindi), 21 November 2006:

"President will inaugurate Sathya Sai Baba Sports Centre tomorrow."

...On the occasion of the silver jubilee of Sri Sathya Sai Institute Of Higher Learning, the President Of India, Sri A P J Abdul Kalam will inaugurate The Sri Sathya Sai International Centre For Sports on November 22. Established with the most modern facilities this sports complex situated in the Vidyagiri Complex of Puttaparthi In Andhra Pradesh, will not only benefit the organisation but will also prove a gift to the sportsmen of the whole of India.

Matrubhumi, (Malayalam), 22 November, 2006:

"Indoor Sports Stadium at Prasanthi Nilayam to be inaugurated by the President today."

"...This indoor stadium can seat 4000 people and its main hall measures 58 x 98 metres... one basketball court, four badminton courts, six table-tennis courts, one volleyball court, two squash courts and a gymnastics stadium are included in the stadium complex. In the second phase of construction, a 400 metres athletics track with 8 lanes, two tennis courts, an aerobics hall and a yoga centre will be built...."

Divya Bhaskar, Mumbai (Gujarati) November 21, 2006:

“Sathya Sai Sports Complex will be inaugurated by Kalam.”

“...Kalam will be the chief guest at the 25th convocation of the university and will address the gathering. The sports complex has been constructed in a record time of 150 days and it will be among the biggest stadiums in the country. India and Sri Lanka volleyball match and also India and Indonesia badminton and basketball matches will be played. Greece and Switzerland gymnasts will present a show of gymnastics. More than 200 sports personalities from the country and abroad will attend. Sri Sathya Sai Baba will grace the inauguration of this sports complex opening function, which covers 4.8 acres of area. Sri Sathya Sai University is famous through out the world for its value based education.”

Janmabhoomi (Gujarati) – November 21, 2006:

“The President will inaugurate Sri Sathya Sai International Sports Centre on Wednesday in Puttaparthi.”

“Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (Deemed University), as a part of its silver jubilee celebration, the students will receive this international sports complex as a present. On this occasion of the silver jubilee celebration function the President will address the gathering.”

Gujarat Samachar, Mumbai (Gujarati) November 24, 2006:

“The spiritual leader of the present age being wished ‘long life’ by the President Apj Abdul Kalam. The President set the celebrations rolling for Sai Baba’s birthday which is being attended by devotees from all over the world.”

Deccan Chronicle, Anantapur (English), November 24, 2006:

“President sits with devotees in Puttaparthi.”

“Sathya Sai Baba called upon the people to strive for the progress of the society. ‘Human birth is great among all the births and one has to utilise it for the welfare of people.’...Speaking on the occasion, president A P J Abdul Kalam showered praises on Baba. “The services of Baba to people are immense and I am very happy to be part of his birthday celebrations,” he said. The President surprised everyone by sitting on the floor with other devotees...he sat beside Baba only when he occupied His seat. An added

attraction was the poems written by president Kalam on Sathya Sai Baba which were read out in Telugu.”

Deccan Chronicle, Anantapur (English), November 23, 2006:

President APJ Abdul Kalam on Wednesday advocated creation of a 'world knowledge platform' to integrate the research efforts of partner countries for making the world a safe, sustainable and peaceful place....delivering a speech at the 25th convocation address at the Sri Satya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Dr. Kalam said the 'world knowledge platform' could take up missions in areas of 'utmost urgency' like energy, efficient use of water resources, healthcare, hardware, software and networking products, automobile and traditional medicine. "The knowledge platform will be a launch pad for many innovations that are waiting to be unearthed," he said and called upon the devotees of Sai Baba to work through 'world knowledge platform'.

Divya Bhaskar "Dharma Darshan" (Gujarati), 20 November 2006:

“...After establishing the colleges and educational institutions... Baba willed that he would establish super specialities hospital in Puttaparthi where even open heart surgeries would be carried out free. He declared that with in one year the hospital would be functional, col. Joga Rao and Brig. Bose said, “Swami, how is this possible? Even in USA, a hospital of this type will take almost 7 years to build.” Swami replied, “It is my will and it will happen. You start working.” Not only the hospital was ready in five and half months but on the inauguration day four open heart surgeries were also performed. After that Swami made one super specialiys hospital in Bangalore and also one in Rajkot, where the heart operations are carried out free of charge.”

The Free Press Journal, Mumbai, (English), 21 November 2006:

“...The sprawling sports complex, being inaugurated as part of the silver jubilee celebrations of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute Of Higher Learning is spread over 4.8 acres, meets Olympic standards and boasts of one of the nation's largest indoor sports arenas, constructed in a record time of just 150 days.....the Sri Sathya Sai University has some of the finest academic and sports facilities like an outdoor stadium, gymnasium, music college and a planetarium. The sports centre adds another dimension to the existing cricket grounds.”

Matrubhumi, (Malayalam), 23 November 2006:

“The spirit of the almighty resides in each and every living thing. Then, serving others is really service to god. This is what Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba means by saying manava seva is madhava seva. And this is the inspiration behind the millions of Sathya Sai devotees all over the world who do silent service not only in spiritual activities, but also in the fields of educare, medicare and sociocare....”

“No-one needs to come all the way here to do service activities. Serve people in your own villages and towns”. Taking these words of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba to heart, a retired government schoolteacher in payyoli, Ms. Chandrika, distributes rice gruel to patients at the neighbouring government hospital....

Dr. Anandamohan stands in front of the Sai free clinic under construction in Shoranur in the picture. Sai water pipelines go through Naxalite regions to serve the agency areas in the Godavari districts in Andhra Pradesh.”

The New Indian Express, Hyderabad (English), 22, 23, 24 November 2006:

President APJ Abdul Kalam penned a poem in Tamil on Sri Satya Sai Baba and read it out today in the presence of thousands of Sai devotees who gathered here on the occasion of the 81st birthday of Sai Baba.

Immediately after the first citizen completed his poem, a delighted Satya Sai Baba shook hands with him. Kalam's poetry was translated by Anil Kumar into Telugu.

"I have immense love for Satya Sai Baba. I penned a poem in my mother tongue to greet Sai Baba on his birthday," said kalam. The poem was greeted with loud applause from the audience. Kalam, who was the chief guest at the function, started his speech by greeting the devotees saying 'namaskaram'. Kalam deviated from the protocol and squatted on the floor along with the other devotees....in his birthday message, Baba called upon the devotees to recognise that service to man is service to god. He asked the devotees to try to know the 'eternal truth' and not run after material things...he also recalled the bad propaganda by some persons about his 'miracles'...they made such propaganda out of envy, Baba said.

Eenadu, all editions (Telugu), 21, November 2006:

“...Sri Sathya Sai Seva organization which had supplied drinking water to hundreds of villages, now extends its helping hand in developing sports. With an expenditure of 40 crores; with olympic standards; with all the latest facilities and techniques, the indoor sports stadium will be opened with the name “Sri Sathya Sai International Centre Of Sports.” Bhagavan Baba will present this complex to the students of Sathya Sai Institute Of Higher

Learning in the event of their silver jubilee celebration of the University. This complex will be inaugurated on wednesday, the 22nd, by Dr. Abdul Kalam, President of India, in the presence of Bhagavan Baba.”

The Hindu, Bangalore Edition (English), 23 November 2006:

“...quoting Sai Baba, the President said many people thought that spirituality and social obligation had no relationship. But it was a mistake. True divinity was a combination of spirituality and social obligation. It was the divinity that would link spirituality and social existence, Dr. Kalam said. He hailed the value-based education offered by Satya Sai institutions that combined spirituality and social responsibility. The President interacted with a few students minutes before the commencement of the convocation.”

Andhra Bhoomi, Anantapur (Telugu), 22 November 2006:

“The S.S.S I.H.L. deemed ministry has earned a good name in the world since 1981 onwards as one of the rare opportunities to study in this ministry. Value-oriented education is the main attraction here. From kindergarten up, education will be available free of cost here, including hostel facilities. From botany to spiritual science, education in all fields is available here. Under the chancellorship of Baba, this education is growing here. Not only education, educare also is being thought.

In seven subjects, under-graduate courses and in five subjects, post-graduate courses, three professional courses were offered here. In the first two semesters in undergraduate and postgraduate courses, a special programme on natural resources was designed. Every student here must have spiritual knowledge.”

The Times Of India, Bangalore Edition (English), 23 November 2006:

“...Baba advised all students to develop self-confidence. "All of you are sparks of divinity. Therefore, you should imbibe divine qualities," he said. Delivering the convocation address, Kalam said, "Apart from this conducive environment and the great teachers you have in your school, there is a lot more you can learn about life from all the pain and sufferings that you witness around you. Not only are these an integral part of your learning process but it is also an opportunity for all of you to fulfill your social obligations. Only that would mean you have imbibed the combination of spirituality and social responsibility as propounded by Sathya Sai Baba."

Vartahar, Mumbai (Marathi), November 21, 2006.

“Spirituality and its Social Relevance”

Along with spiritual knowledge, propagation of peace and devotion, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is setting up an international centre for indoor sports at Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh. This is situated on a 4-8 acre plot near Prashanthi Nilayam in Vidyagiri campus. His Excellency, the President of India, Dr. Abdul Kalam will inaugurate the indoor stadium... Several sports luminaries and star athletes will be present on the occasion. This international centre will encourage sportsmen and athletes to hold international matches and programmes of excellence. The stadium has been set up without government aid or grants.

Navashakthi, Mumbai (Marathi) November 21, 2006

“Sri Sathya Sai International Centre For Sports - A Dream Fulfilled”

Indian culture gives importance to spiritual life as well as to sports and athletics. Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh has set up a sports complex of international standards. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, President of India will open the stadium on 22nd november....education in human values, which is propagated by the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Institute, has now taken up this sports stadium. Outdoor stadium, indoor gymnasium, music college and planetarium have been built earlier. Also provided by the institute are turf cricket grounds and a 58 by 18 metres sports hall with galleries on all sides. Approvals and standards have been met from relevant following sports agencies like ITF, AIVB, AIBA, ITTF, IHF, etc.

THE MALAYSIAN SAI ORGANISATION RECEIVES 'NSTP-PwC MALAYSIAN TEAM HUMANITARIAN AWARD'

It is extremely heartening to share the wonderful news that the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Central Council of Malaysia was awarded the prestigious 3rd NSTP-PwC Malaysian Humanitarian Award (MHA) on 5th December, 2006. The award seeks to bring national attention and accord recognition to Malaysians who have demonstrated outstanding public service and selfless deeds of a humanitarian nature. It was a further honour that YAB DatoSeri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, presented the award to the Sai Council.

The award is named after its sponsors: The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhard (affectionately known as NSTP) is Malaysia's oldest and largest newspaper publisher, while PricewaterhouseCoopers is an internationally renowned accounting firm that provides industry-focused assurance, tax and advisory services for its clients across 149 countries.

The NSTP-PwC Malaysian Humanitarian Award (MHA) honours humanitarian acts and deeds that would otherwise go unrecognised and in the process hopes to promote humanitarian principles and values.

This year saw a total of fifty-two nominees being selected across three categories of the award, viz.

- (a) Young Humanitarian Award
- (b) Team Humanitarian Award
- (c) Lifetime Humanitarian Award

The Sai Council of Malaysia won the runners-up of the Team Humanitarian Award.

All nominations were first verified by a professional consultant firm – The Liaison Combination Sdn Bhd (TLC) to ensure that only nominees who have met all criteria are eligible for judging by the Panel of Judges.

The Panel of Judges comprised of prominent and highly respected residents of Malaysia such as:

1. Dato' Paul Leong (Chief Judge) – the Minister of Primary Industries from 1978 – 1986 and a Member of Parliament from 1974 – 1990. He is currently an Independent Director of Air Asia Bhd, Executive Deputy Chairman of Sin Chew Media Corporation and Director of SBB Asset Management Sdn Bhd.
2. Mr. Kerk Kim Hock – member of the National Unity Advisory Panel. He was the former DAP Secretary General and Member of Parliament for Kota Melaka.

3. Mr. Morten Lundal – CEO of DIGI.COM Berhad and DIGI Telecommunications Sdn Bhd.

4. Dato' Faridah Merican – often referred to as the “First Lady of Malaysian Theatre”. She has carved an enduring niche as a theatre producer, director and actor.

5. Puan Sri T Ampikaipakan – a well known educationist and trainer. She is also a trustee of the Yayasan Raja Muda Selangor.

The serene ceremony was attended by representatives of many social voluntary organizations as well as captains of industries from the corporate sector of the country.

When Mr. Billy Fong Goon Poy, the President of the Sai Council of Malaysia, was called onto the stage to receive the award from the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the citation on the Sai Organisation read out by the master of ceremony noted that:

“The Sathya Sai Baba Central Council of Malaysia promotes human values across religious and social borders. It provides selfless service to the poor, sick and needy, promotes human values to youth and society at large as well as inter-racial and inter-religious harmony amongst the younger generation.”

Mr. Poy received a certificate of acknowledgement as well as the cheque of RM10,000.00 on behalf of all the dedicated members of the Sai Council of Malaysia. With joy and humility, Mr. Poy said,

“We are proud and very happy of the fact that the judges have recognized the good work done by our Sai Organisation for nation building. We are also proud of the fact that Bhagavan’s name has been recognized and glorified. This award is indeed a great honour for all of us in the Sai Movement in Malaysia. The credit for this award should go to all the active workers of our Sai Centres and Bhajan units. It is the collective report of all the selfless service work, the human values and interfaith activities done by all the active workers, that has won our Sai Organisation this prestigious award. The money that we received will be used to further enhance our Human Values and Service activities. On behalf of all the active workers of the Sai Council of Malaysia who should have actually been on stage to receive this recognition, we offer this award at the Lotus Feet of our beloved Lord”.

The NSTP-PwC Malaysian Humanitarian Award (MHA) has an apt logo which depicts two figures representing mankind as a whole, regardless of age and race. Leaning against each other, the two figures come together as one, symbolizing mankind’s need and reliance on one another to survive and succeed in life. It also signifies how we can gain strength and hope with support and/or help from others. The simple theme of black and white for the figures signifies “going back to basics” of reaching within ourselves to help others in need.

Time and again Bhagavan has been imploring one and all to follow the universal message of “Unity, Purity, and Divinity”. The first step for mankind to achieve divinity is to stand together in the spirit of unity and work for the common good of all irrespective of caste, colour and creed. The logo represents exactly this need for mankind to come together and work hand-in-hand in the spirit of unity.

Walking on the path set by Bhagawan, the brothers and sisters of the Sai Council of Malaysia, have been working over the past many years on various projects for the betterment of the people of Malaysia. It is a therefore a fitting mark of recognition that the Prime Minister of Malaysia gave this award to the Sai Organisation. We at Heart2Heart share the joy of the Sai family in Malaysia and around the world that good deeds, good thoughts and good words have been appreciated at the highest level and we pray that this will inspire many more projects of service that will transform the nation and the world.

GET INSPIRED

The Apple Tree

A long time ago, there was a huge apple tree. A little boy loved to come and play around it everyday. He climbed to the treetop, ate the apples, and took a nap in its shadow. He loved the tree and the tree loved to play with him. Time went by and the little boy had grown up and no longer played around the tree every day.

One day, the boy came back to the tree and he looked sad. "Come and play with me", the tree asked the boy. "I am no longer a kid and I don't play around trees any more," the boy replied. "I want toys. I need money to buy them." "Sorry, but I do not have money, but you can pick all my apples and sell them. Then, you will have money." The boy was so excited. He grabbed all the apples on the tree and left happily. The boy never came back after he picked the apples and the tree felt sad.

One day, many years later, the boy who had now turned into a man returned. The tree was excited and said, "Come and play with me." The boy replied, "I do not have time to play. I have to work for my family and we need a house for shelter. Can you help me?"

"Sorry, I do not have any house. But you can chop off my branches to build your house". So the man cut all the branches of the tree and left happily. The tree was glad to see him happy but the man never came back since then. The tree was again lonely and sad.

One hot summer day, the man returned and the tree was delighted. "Come and play with me!" the tree said. "I am getting old. I want to go sailing to relax myself. Can you give me a boat?" said the man. "Use my trunk to build your boat. You can sail far away and be happy." So the man cut the tree trunk to make a boat. He went sailing and never showed up for a long time.

Finally, the man returned after many years. "Sorry, my boy. But I do not have anything for you anymore. No more apples for you", the tree said. "No problem, I do not have any teeth to bite," the man replied. "No more trunk for you to climb on". "I am too old for that

now," the man said. "I really cannot give you anything, the only thing left is my dying roots," the tree said with tears.

"I do not need much now, just a place to rest. I am tired after all these years," the man replied. "Good! Old tree roots are the best place to lean on and rest, come sit down with me and rest." The man sat down and the tree was glad and smiled with tears.

Now, replace the tree in the story with parents. When we are young, we love to play with our Mum and Dad; but when we grow up, we leave them, only to come to them whenever we need support – material or emotional, or when we are in trouble. And no matter what, our parents always are there by our side and give us everything they can just to make us happy. Always, we take them for granted and don't appreciate all they do for us, until it's too late.

It's the same with our divine parent too. Whenever we are beset with problems, we cry out to Him for help, how many times do we think of Him when everything is going pleasant and beautiful in our lives?

From Nava Sarathi, December 2005

The Great Purifier

A woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest. It was just a curiosity about the process of refining silver, she said.

As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest in order to burn away all the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot. She pondered about the verse that says: "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver."

She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the entire time the silver was being heated and refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire, until it is completely refined. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed, he said.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?"

He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy – when I see my image in it."

What a significant lesson the silversmith had imparted! The woman wondered.

If today you are feeling the heat of the fire all around you, remember that God has His eyes on you and will keep watching you until He sees His image in you. And whatever you're going through, be sure, you will be a better person for it in the end.

A LETTER FROM GOD

Dear Friend,

As you got up this morning, I watched you, and hoped you would talk to me, even if it was just a few words, asking my opinion or thanking me for something good that happened in your life yesterday. But I noticed you were too busy, trying to find the right outfit to wear.

When you ran around the house getting ready, I knew there would be a few minutes for you to stop and say hello, but you were too busy. At one point you had to wait fifteen minutes with nothing to do except sit in a chair. Then I saw you spring to your feet. I thought you wanted to talk to me but you ran to the phone and called a friend to get the latest gossip instead. I watched patiently all day long. With all your activities I guess you were too busy to say anything to me.

I noticed that before lunch you looked around, maybe you felt embarrassed to talk to me, that is why you didn't bow your head. You glanced three or four tables over and you noticed some of your friends talking to me briefly before they ate, but you didn't. That's okay. There is still more time left, I told myself.

You went home and it seemed you had lots of things to do. After a few of them were done, you turned on the TV. I don't know if you like TV or not, just about anything goes and you spend a lot of time each day in front of it not thinking about anything, just enjoying the show. I waited patiently again as you watched the TV and ate your meal, but again you didn't talk to me.

At bedtime, I guess you felt too tired. After you said goodnight to your family you plopped into bed and fell asleep in no time. That's okay because you may not realize that I am always there for you. I've got patience, more than you will ever know. I even want to teach you how to be patient with others as well.

I love you so much that I wait everyday for a nod, prayer or thought, or a thankful part of your heart. It is hard to have a one-sided conversation.

Well, you are getting up once again. Once again I will wait, with nothing but love for you. Hoping that today you will give me some time.

Have a nice day!
Your friend,
GOD

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

1.

When Lord Krishna went as a peace ambassador to the court of Dhritharashtra, Duroyodhana and his brothers attempted to bind Him. What did Lord Krishna do at this point?

- A. Lord Krishna disappeared only to reappear outside the palace.
- B. Lord Krishna made Duryodhana and his brothers immobile.
- C. Lord Krishna assumed His Cosmic form.
- D. Lord Krishna let them bind Him and then assumed the form of the wind to escape.

2.

The Muslim new year begins on 20th January. The first month is one of the four most sacred months in Islam. What is its name?

- a. Muharram
- b. Ashura
- c. Eid-al Fitr
- d. Ramadam

3.

Swami uses the analogy of a rose flower to explain concentration, contemplation and meditation. He describes concentration as identifying the rose flower among the thorns and leaves; and contemplation as cutting the flower without touching the thorns. What illustration does Swami use to describe meditation?

- A. Offering the rose flower at the Feet of the Lord.
- B. Smelling the fragrance of the rose.
- C. Picking the petals of the flower.
- D. Placing the flower in a garland.

4.

On 28th January Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic Church celebrate the life of Saint Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–1274). For what great achievements is he remembered?

- A. For building many churches.
- B. For his melodious devotional music.
- C. For his theological writings.
- D. For being martyred in the cause of the Church.

5.

In the Ramayana, the eagle Jataayu fought unsuccessfully with Ravana to try and rescue Sita from his nefarious clutches, and was fatefully wounded. When Lord Rama found the heroic bird, what did He do?

- A. Rama asked Lakshmana to bring special herbs from the Himalayas to revive Jataayu.
- B. Rama promised Jataayu that his family would always be under His protection.
- C. Rama carried the Jataayu back to his home, so that he could pass away there.
- D. Rama embraced the bird in His lap and performed the last rites for him.

6.

Which religion practised in Japan has its New Year day falling on January 1st?

- A. Buddhism
- B. Confucianism
- C. Shinto
- D. Taoism

7.

Which religion uses the sweat lodge as part of its spiritual practices?

- A. Baha'i
- B. Islam
- C. Christianity
- D. Native American

8.

The 31st January is the birthday of the seventh Sikh guru, Guru Har Rai (1630-1661). In what matter was Guru Har Rai contacted by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for help.

- A. To understand the Sikh scriptures.
- B. To bring about a truce between the Sikhs and Muslims.
- C. To cure his son from a deadly sickness.
- D. To demonstrate his skill in singing.

9.

Lord Krishna delivered the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna between the two armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. What is the spiritual meaning of the Kurukshetra battle.

- A. That one should always fight for one's rights.
- B. That one should defeat the inner enemies within oneself.
- C. That 'life is a battle.'
- D. That good always triumphs.

10.

In Buddhism what is a mandala?

- A. A tent erected for a spiritual gathering.
- B. The yearly congregation of monks.
- C. A discourse that is taken in turns by different monks.
- D. A spiritual symbol.

ANSWERS

1C: Lord Krishna assumed His Cosmic form.

2A: Muharram. Muharram is a month in which it is unlawful to fight. The first ten days of the month commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the beloved grandson of Prophet Muhammad who was murdered with his companions. Thus, these ten days are remembered in a sombre manner, during which Muslims observe periods of fasting.

3A: Offering the rose flower at the Feet of the Lord.

4C: For his theological writings. Saint Thomas Aquinas is considered by many Catholics to be their greatest theologian. His most famous work the *Summa Theologica*, is notable for the five arguments he put forward to prove the existence of God. Just before his fiftieth year he had a powerful spiritual experience and declared "I cannot go on . . . All that I have written seems to me like so much straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me." He refused to write after this point and died four months later. Fifty years later the Church canonised him.

5D: Rama embraced the bird in His lap and performed the last rites for him. Swami tells us about this moving incident as follows:

The incapacitated bird could not move its limbs, nor could it turn on its side. So it crawled a little forward and raising its head, placed it at the Feet of Rama. Rama placed the head on his lap and gently fondled it into awareness and activity... He addressed the bird thus: "Oh Chief of Birds! I shall never forget your help. The good deed you have performed will give you Bliss in the next world. Do not feel sad." Thus saying, Rama dusted its wings with his own matted hair, while Lakshmana hurried to bring some water to slake its thirst and refresh it. Rama poured the water drop by drop into the bird's mouth... he cried "Rama" just once and drew his last breath. Rama allowed the vital breath of Jatayu to merge in Him. He performed the obsequies to the body of

the bird and took the valedictory bath.
Rasavahini II - extracts from p 67-69)

(Ramakatha

6C: Shinto. On this day millions of Japanese will go and visit Shinto shrines and pray to the deities for blessings for the coming year.

7D: Native American. The sweat lodge ritual takes place in a cabin made from wood and blankets within which hot stones and water are used to create a sauna. The ensuing ceremony utilises herbal inhalations, prayers, chanting and drumming as a purificatory and healing rite.

8C: To cure his son from a deadly sickness. When Shah Jahan's son, Dara Shikoh, fell dangerously ill, the emperor was advised that Guru Har Rai had the correct herbal preparation. After the emperor wrote him a letter, the Sikh Guru sent the required medicine and saved the life of Dara Shikoh. Guru Har Rai is also known for his love of listening to bhajans, his lectures on the Sikh faith and his efforts to spread the Sikh religion. Another fact of note, is though a keen hunter he never killed the animals he captured but kept them in his zoo.

9B: That one should defeat the inner enemies within oneself. Swami explains this in the following passage from *Sandeha Nivarini*:

Bhaktha: Excuse me, Swami; the Pandavas and the Kauravas waged a war, isn't it? How are they supposed to have waged the "subtle" war, these "subtle" Pandavas and their opposite number, the "subtle" Kauravas?

Swami: Why do you say "supposed to have waged?" They are waging it even today in the subtle form! In this war, the Evil qualities are the Kauravas; the Good qualities, Sathya, Dharma, *Santhi* (inner peace), Prema and *Ahimsa* (non-violence), are the five Pandava brothers. The evil qualities are many and so the Kauravas too are a horde. Each one under his own Hridhayaakasa, on his own *Chidbhum*i (causal world) is waging this struggle, every moment.
(*Sandeha Nivarini Ch 12 p 101*)

10D: A spiritual symbol. A mandala is usually used to create a representation of the world or universe and the disparate elements within it. It may depict gods, nature, different dimensions of being and the individual's inner spiritual path. The mandala can also be used as an object for contemplation and self-understanding.

HEALING TOUCH

The Grateful Granny from Bijapur

Bijapur – Cradled in History

Five hundred and thirty kms to the northwest of Bangalore is the ancient town of Bijapur, the capital of the Adil Shahi dynasty. Bijapur city in the Bijapur district, having been under different rulers all of whom were oriented towards the fine arts, has many places of historical, cultural and architectural interest. The city established in the 10th-11th centuries by the Chalukyas of Kalyani was referred to as Vijayapura (City of Victory). The city came under the influence of the Khilji Sultanate in Delhi by the late 13th century and then was conquered by the Bahmani Sultanate of Gulbarga. By this time the city was being referred to as Vijapur or Bijapur.

Bijapur has been influenced by different cultures and Islamic, Buddhist, Jain and Hindu architectural styles are found all around the district. Aihole a temple city, is famous as the 'Cradle of Indian Temple Architecture'. Pattadakal, at a distance of one hundred thirty four kms from Bijapur, is a World Heritage Center and has ten major temples representing early Chalukyan architecture. Badami, the capital of the early Chalukyas, is picturesquely situated at the mouth of a ravine between two rocky hills. It has four rock-cut cave temples, the largest being the third cave dedicated to Vishnu. Basavana Bagewadi is the birthplace of the great 12th century poet and reformer Saint Basaveshwara and Kudalasangama is a famous pilgrim centre associated with him.

The more recent Islamic influences include the Gol Gumbaz – mausoleum of Mohammad Adil Shah of the Bahamani Dynasty, the Ibrahim Roza - the tomb of Ibrahim Adil Shah II which is said to have inspired the design of the famous Taj Mahal, the Jumma Masjid (still in use today), Asar mahal, Gagan mahal and Barakaman all of which are architectural beauties to this day.

Kallavawa's Life in Jeopardy

From this same district of Karnataka, comes the simple housewife Kallavawa. Though she lives in a land with such a hoary past, history seems to have little to do with her day to day living. References to the famous historical, cultural and architectural landmarks of the district bring to her old wrinkled face a placid smile that speaks volumes of her lack of sophistication. To her, home, family and the present are important. Since generations her family earned their livelihood through farming. She lives in a village thirty kms away from main city of Bijapur. At the age of sixty, a mother of five sons and two daughters, she had lived a full life. Four of her sons continued the family tradition of farming but her last son chose the path of education and is now working as a part time school teacher. Having fulfilled the duties of a wife and a mother, now she felt, it was time to rest and enjoy the company of her grandchildren.

But that was not to be. Over four months ago she found that she was having trouble performing her daily tasks. Her attention tended to wander, her memory began to fail and she found herself inchoate with her behavioral patterns undergoing drastic changes. Her family suspected a neural disorder and took her to the local doctor who confirmed the same. He advised some basic tests but ultimately the solution was surgery.

‘Sai Baba Super Hospital’ – The Only Resort

The district of Bijapur has six allopathic medical colleges, but the family had no knowledge of any of them. They did not know where they were supposed to go. The doctor gave them their options and added that the cost of surgery alone would be around Rs.100000, further there would definitely be other medical costs. The family was disturbed for two reasons: the malady and the cost. The doctor then suggested that they could go to Bangalore where the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, (SSSIHMS WFD), generally called the Sai Baba Super Hospital, provided medical care free of all costs.

Skeptical though they were, they confirmed that this was true through a second source. It was hard for them to accept the fact that there was a Hospital that provided not just consultation, but diagnosis and treatment free of cost. But they came to the SSSIHMS Whitefield and after due consultation and tests, the diagnosis was confirmed as Glioblastoma Multiforme (GBM), the most aggressive form of the primary brain tumors known collectively as gliomas. These tumors arise from the supporting, glial cells of the brain during childhood and in adults. These growths do not spread throughout the body like other forms of cancer, but cause symptoms by invading the brain.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Gliomas

Gliomas are graded by their microscopic appearance. As a rule, their behavior can be predicted from this classification: grade I and grade II tumors grow slowly over many years while grade IV (GBM) grows rapidly, invading and altering brain function. Untreated, GBMs are rapidly lethal. Different areas of the brain control different functions of the body. The area of the brain first involved by the tumor influences the first symptoms of GBM. Apparently in her case the “eloquent” areas controlling the speech and visual functions were affected since her symptoms included loss of speech and incoherence. GBM’s usually arise on their own or may develop from lower grade gliomas after many years. Though genetic modifications have been found responsible for some forms of Gliomas they are not genetically transmitted.

The diagnosis of GBM requires tissue obtained by surgical methods. Computer image guidance is used for the process. The tumor can be imaged by contrast-enhanced MRI scan. An open or needle biopsy provides tissue for microscopic diagnosis. The treatment of GBM has evolved over the past 50 years. Modern, effective treatment for GBM includes the following: surgery to remove the maximum volume of tumor followed by radiation therapy and finally chemotherapy. Within a few days of surgery a MR scan is obtained to

document any residual tumor. Finally patients may elect to undergo chemotherapy after consultation with local oncologists (cancer specialists).

Healed by Love to Be Healthy Again

Kallavawa was admitted to our Hospital for treating the “Left Temporo Parietal Glioblastoma Multiforme Grade IV”. The surgery went on smoothly with a craniotomy (opening the skull) followed by tumor decomposition (removing the tumor). Following this she received Radio therapeutic treatment for thirty three days. The SSSIHMS transported her to Manipal Hospital everyday for the therapy. Post treatment scans showed her to be free of the disease and she was duly discharged. She returns regularly to the Hospital for her follow up and so far destiny has been kind to her with no sign of the disease.

When asked about her impression about the Hospital she is reticent since she feels words do no justice to the service imparted her. To one who is accustomed to eating only *jowar rotis*, the variety of food offered by the Hospital came as a literal feast. The beds that she slept on were those of her dreams. The linen provided was the cleanest she had ever seen. The attention given by both the medical and support staff left her with a feeling of immense gratitude to Swami.

Above all the most impressive aspect of the SSSIHMS was the ambiance of the Hospital. Peaceful and silent, calm and serene, she cannot imagine any hospital being different but she has also seen the hospital where she received her radiotherapy. The clinical dissociation of the other medical institutions and the warm comfort she received in the temple of healing has given her a new perspective towards life. She received the best totally free of charge and is very much conscious of the fact. In fact she has decided that she would definitely come to Prasanthinilayam and have the Darshan of her Benefactor as soon as possible.

Life is like a map. It only gives us an idea of where we are going but it does not tell you how the path is going to be. It is not a relief map that talks of the highs and lows, the hills and valleys, the joys and sorrows. They are there for us to learn how to remain equanimous under all adversity. For how can one appreciate light unless one has suffered darkness? How can one value joy unless one has experienced sorrow? To those of us who, by the grace of God are without any physical ailments – it is a reminder to serve our fellow beings in whatever capacity we can - and to do so with a feeling of love rather than duty. For all said and done, the greatest is Love. It is the pure unsullied pristine love that Swami has for all of us, His children, that He has blessed us with temples of education to correct our distorted visions and confused minds, and temples of healing to heal our bruised bodies. For a healthy body and healthy mind go hand in hand. That is what makes us complete. And a complete instrument is a perfect tool in the hands of God.

YOUR SAY

Reader's Feedback To The December Issue

Responses to the Cover Story of the December Issue

I read the Christmas Story, and it opened my heart. My feeling was to spread to everyone this beautiful lesson of humility and love. These stories could be written in Spanish for all Spanish speaking countries, as mine, Colombia. Thank-you, very much for this and others you have written and sent.

Merry Christmas and love from Irene, Bogotá, Colombia

Dear Heart 2 Heart team,

The article on Christmas was very peace-inspiring and brought a lot of joy to my heart. I understood the true meaning of all religions and various incarnations. I hope to see more and more articles like these in future.

Thanks for your service, Chitra

General

Dear Sai Brothers and sisters at the Radio Sai,
Happy birthday and many happy returns of the day. The service rendered by Radio Sai is tremendous. Those of us who live physically away from our beloved Lord are literally taken to His presence by the programs. I was sick on November 11th and could not attend the akhanda bhajan at the local Sai Centre, but I attended the wonderful sathsangh in Prashanthi!

The *Sai Inspires* messages always hit the nail! One day, out of frustrations and depression a friend of mine and I were blaming Swami during our conversation over the phone for all the mishaps in my life. A minute later, Sai Inspires in my e-mail points out to me that it is the lack of my faith and not Swami who is responsible!

The Sunday messages by the learned and devoted G.V are eye opening and a great resource for us to understand Swami better. The talks, interviews, bhajans, and more than anything our beloved Lord's sweet voice reverberating in our house - oh! I have no words to express my feelings of joy and gratitude. You are all the chosen ones by the Lord to spread His message of Love and you are doing it well. Keep it up and go on with the grace of Swami

Thank You, Sai Ram, Kanchana, Canada

Sai Ram to all,

I live in Toronto, Canada, and am enjoying the Radio Sai programmes, Sai Inspires and the e-magazine. I am working and so time is always short but I make it a point to open my email and read *Sai Inspires* which are very inspiring and thought provoking messages from Swami. And of course, I try not to miss the "Thought for the Day" and Prashanti Bulletin.

I really enjoy reading H2H magazine, I normally do that during my lunch time at work. I found the series on South America very informative. Also about Swami's institute and the Sai-lent revolution. We do not hear too much about the difference the lady students are making; maybe you may want to feature that in the future?

Tomorrow I will be flying to Mumbai but unfortunately after almost 13 years visiting Swami every year, this year I will not be able to come to Swami. But I know Swami is with me and everyone and He will be happier that I have chosen to serve my elderly in-laws in my short stay there.

I will miss the internet and Radio Sai when I am there. Last time when I came to Mumbai, I almost bought the digital radio when I was told that it is on subscription! I had not read or heard that before.

Please keep up the good work. May Swami's blessings be on you all for the wonderful, dedicated work you are doing.

Regards, Shobhna Mehta

Sai Ram,

My name is Grace O'Neal and I live in the U.S.A. I am 62 years old going on 63. However, when I read your articles pertaining to the Students and what they are doing all over the world, I feel as if I am a student also. I learned so much from their activities and service projects. They are so heart warming and inspiring. It gives me an incentive to do more and practice the Teachings of Baba on a daily basis. I don't see many articles about the Ladies and girls, I know they are just as active, aren't they? Instead of watching TV, I listen to Radio Sai all day, everyday. Keep up the excellent work.
Sai Ram, Grace O'Neal, Chicago, IL, USA

Sai Ram, Dear Heart 2 Heart,

Thank you for your excellent, very well produced, interesting and most helpful magazine. I read most of it over the course of a month. The articles of most interest to me have been: *Concerning the Vedas*, *Conversations with Sai*, the *Gita for Children* and articles by experienced Sai Devotees about Spirituality. I find the format and presentation very good as it is. I am not easily able to attend a Sai group as I live in the country, so H2H keeps me in touch with what is going on in the Sai world. I would like to be able to download some English

language bhajans.
Sai Ram, Sid Wilcox

Dear Heart2Heart! SAI RAM.

I am so happy to hear from you and am very much obliged to you for your messages. Dear Beloved Bhagavan is a Great Guru and God for me. My only wish is to Serve Him. My Heart and Soul are with you, with India - the HEART of the World! Bhagavan's Behest Is to spread Vedas and Vedic Knowledge all over the World. You can add some quotations from Vedic texts in Sanskrit. But what is more than Bhagavan's Divine LOVE? From all my Heart, with best regards to you and India!
Nataly.

Sai Ram:

I have been listening to Radio Sai for over a year now and I receive *Sai Inspires* every day in my email. I start my day by reading the *Sai Inspires* and have the radio on all day. It makes me feel close to Swami and I feel very blessed that I get to listen to the bhajans and hear the discourses and the experiences of the devotees every single day. The *Heart 2 Heart* website is the best Sai website. It gives us a lot of information. Keep up the good work. May Swami continue to shower His divine blessings to all the staff members. What a wonderful service you are providing. Thank you.
Anjana Kumar, Elk Grove Sai Center, CA.

Dear h2h,

I simply want to say thank you. I feel so fortunate to hear and read Swami's words through your media. I look forward to its sustenance greatly. I know I have the ability to help so many more people. I hope to be steadfast in being conscious of that desire and making it reality. It is through your daily messages, newsletters and Swami's discourses that will make it possible.
Thank you, thank you, thank you, John Fenn, Chesapeake, VA

Dear Heart to Heart team,

On this Sunday morning, I have been reading the article "When Divinity Descends...."(Dec. Cover Story). I am writing you to thank you not only for this wonderful enlightening article, but also for all your activities, including Radio Sai, *Sai Inspires*, the *Sunday Specials*, Swami's photos.

When I read the daily words from Swami or listen to Radio Sai or look at the photographs or videos, inside of me there is a 'yes' to all that I am reading, listening to, or looking at. There is no doubt about the truth of what I am reading, no feeling of not wanting to hear what I am hearing, no feeling of not wanting to see what I am looking at. Instead it gives me strength to live my life in a way that corresponds with that what I feel in my heart.

I hope that my words will convey the gratitude and joy I feel for the possibility to enjoy the fruits of your activities. Thank you once again.
With heartfelt greetings, Joke Cirkel, The Netherlands

Response to the Quiz in the December 2006 Issue

Dear Heart 2 Heart team Organiser,
The quiz was very interesting. A very good beginning, as it enables one to self check what we have understood from Swami's speeches. Questions indicate a sarvamadha approach which is pleasing. Kindly try to bring out many more covering various aspects of spiritualism, Swami's life history, etc. If this can feature in the monthly magazine *Sanathana Sarathi* too, many more can get the benefit.
With love and regards, N.Ramani, Adyar Samiti, Chennai

Response to the Feature Article The Mystery of Creation: Can Science and Religion Meet? of the December Issue

Dear Sirs,
The last paragraph of Prof. G.Venkatraman's article, is the sum and substance of the 'Evolution vs. Creation' debate:

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

Swami, I am sure should be watching all the debate that is going on and smiling to Himself. He must be happy that the simplest of persons, like the mother in the story, are also the wisest. Perhaps the so-called scientists are condemned to endlessly exert their grey matter till they are tired and finally give up trying to understand creation. I think this story needs to be made part of standard textbooks throughout the world.

Sairam and Pranams to the Lotus Feet, P.Vijayaraghavan, Chennai

Dear Heart2Heart team,
I very much enjoyed the article by Professor Venkataraman. It was a beautiful and intelligent fusion of science and spirituality - by a scientist, no less! The debate between science and spirituality has often been an issue in my university classes, and I have just as often been repulsed by the popular

attitudes among scientists towards spirituality. This, however, is a truly inspiring example that the two fields of knowledge need not be at war. Thank you, that was extremely interesting and encouraging!
Sai Ram, Ellesha Wanigasekera, Toronto, Canada

Responses to Sai Inspires

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

Every morning I receive the precious gift of Sai Baba's inspiring word. It uplifts my mind and leads me through my day. It answers the questions which turn in my mind. It gives peace to my mind and happiness to my heart. It helps me to understand.... My words are not enough to express my gratefulness.

With Love from Vienna, Austria
Friederike Kommer

Jai Sai Ram!

Here is Amanda. I'm representing every one from the Sathya Sai Center of Brasília (the capital of Brazil).

Your way of writing, the themes and everything is very cool. You know, some people wrote to us asking for more information about Swami and we were able to forward the December 1 Sai Inspires with the text "Is Sai Baba God?" This was a great opportunity to solve some people's doubts. So I want to thank you so much to represent Swami so perfectly.

It is a great pleasure for us to translate your messages into Portuguese and let everyone from our beloved country be blessed with Swami's Grace. Brazilians love you so much and are really thankful!

Take care and Keep doing the best you can! Sai Ram.

Om Sai Ram:

I would like to take this chance to thank you all for providing this wonderful service. Being away from loved ones, trying to lead a life with its ups and downs and having the longing to feel Sai Divinity, has been fulfilled by the daily 'Sai Inspires' messages. I feel more uplifted every time I see that message in my email box. I am sure that it touches others in a similar fashion.

Heart2Heart is a blessing the Swami has afforded to those of us not fortunate enough to experience Him physically by visiting Puttaparthi.

Thank you once again!

Anu Kare

I read Heart to Heart e-mail messages regularly and believe that the current format and contents are perfect. Every week, at our Sai center satsang, at the conclusion of the bhajan session, I read out the current week's H2H messages to our center's devotees. They all find Swami's messages powerful and inspiring.

Regards
Venki Ram

Dear Sir,
Om Sai Ram. I have been really blessed to have the wonderful messages of Baba every day and I cherish each one of them. The day starts off with a wonderful meaningful and helpful message and it is lucidly explained with a nice example for the reader to understand and absorb.
Om Sai Ram
Regards and love, L V Subramanian (Ramani)

Dear Sai Brothers and Sisters,
When I recently hit upon this link and subscribed to it, I did not realise how much it helped me be grounded to Swami. I love Him dearly, but sometimes I lost focus. Now, I use every thought to be my guiding force for my interactions with others. It is the most defining moment of my morning. I look forward eagerly to Swami's recent photos and thoughts. Please continue the good work and let us be part of Swami's world.
Veena, California, USA

Dear h2h team,
I only came to know about this service two months ago, although I am a strong devotee for several years. I am very happy to say that it has tremendously helped me to transform my son who is studying in USA at Kansas University.
At a time he was finding difficult to concentrate on his studies I told Swami to show me the way. Then it came to my mind that I should go to Prashanthi Nilayam and visit Swami. To find out where he will be in January, I went to the website. There I found the h2h service and I was very happy I immediately registered and started getting the mail daily which I forwarded to my son everyday.

To his surprise many of those messages gave solutions to his problem of lack of concentration. Now after nearly two months he has improved remarkably.
Thanks to dear Swami and h2h service.

Sai Ram, Ramani

Dear Team,
Every morning, I come into the office, log on the internet and eagerly await

an e-mail from Radio Sai. Daily inspiration and words of wisdom from Swami warm my heart and inspire me in more ways than one. I'd like to congratulate your team on doing a good job. I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Sai Ram.

Warm Regards, Micheline Doray, Sydney, Australia

Om Sai Ram,

Thank you so very much for the beautiful e-mail. Read every word and am so inspired and full of gratitude that I found your message on my computer. I have known and visited Sathya Sai Baba, in India many times, since 1987. This was such a marvellous experience this morning to read all the uplifting words and to see the photos of many evolved human beings. Thank you again and may you all have a Christmas of great blessings, Grace and joy.

With Love, Rosemary

Response to the Sunday Special, 3 December 2006- Is Sai Baba God?

Dear H2H team,

I am simply grateful and contented by the good work that you are doing. I used the word grateful because miles away and still we could feel the good heart beating behind all the efforts. That genuiness is the hallmark of all Sai endeavours. The article, *IS SAI BABA GOD?* is an eye-opener to all new devotees or to the ones who get dragged behind by all the doubts. Even when we know so many truths, it really needs to be hammered into our system again and again so that we can move closer to realising God.

We all feel proud when we do a little good. By going through the reports of enormous activities that go on in the presence of Baba, we feel the urge to do more. The search for divinity in others should be the primary requisite of any Sai devotee - our actions must speak about our Guru, our God.

One interactive channel, if possible, would have been useful in the H2H. Some senior person can advise people in mental distress in any part of the world, by advising them.
Sairam to all, Brinda, Kerala.

Sai Ram,

First I would like to thank Swami for such wonderful pieces of work being sent to many people all over the world. I whole heartedly thank each and every one contributing to Sai Inspires and Heart2Heart. I have the pleasure and divine opportunity of being embraced with Swami's Quotes, stories, teachings, through everyday emails. Many times I thought to myself, these are incredible stories. I love all the Sunday editions and appreciate the talent. I especially loved the Dec 3rd Sunday special. It was thought provoking, and very good. I

keep on looking forward to the excellent work by Heart2Heart Team. Thank you so much for spreading the Divine love.
Sairam, Mamata

Dear Heart2Heart Team,
I have enjoyed your fictional dialogue and I agree that exemplifying the virtues in the now (in the present) are most needed for being God realized. On a different note, I want to say a heart-felt thank you for the incredible service you do for devotees that are abroad. I enjoy and always look forward to the email everyday with Sai Inspires. Many, many, thanks!
In Loving Service, Prakash Bhakta, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

Sai Ram Heart2Heart team,

I really enjoyed your Sunday special "Is Sai Baba God?" The fictional conversation was very intelligently done, illustrating how to bring the discussion of God down to a more practical level. Often debates around God veer off into vague philosophical directions, and are usually of no real value. This conversation is an excellent paradigm for how we can handle these sorts of questions. Thank you so much, that was very helpful.
Sai Ram, Ellesha Wanigasekera, Toronto, Canada

Sai Ram Brothers, Sisters,
From time to time, readers need this type of article to refresh their minds. I am busy with Sathya Sai Education in Human Values, but my partner is not. Sometimes it is difficult to explain how these things work. By reading this article, they can understand. Thank you very much.
Greetings and regards from Holland, Malathy

Dear Sirs,
I rarely have the patience to read 'online' any article; I am a 'paper' person! But, today's article kept me reading on until the end, and I was hoping to read some more! What a brilliant explanation of "Divinity"! The 'superficial' dialogue is simply brilliant and informative as well as the 'right' guide for answering this constantly asked question: 'Do you believe that Sai Baba Is God?' May Swami inspire you always!
Jai Sai Ram, Shashikant Ambegaokar, Vista, California.

Sai Ram,
I read with great interest your lovely article 'Is Sai Baba God?' This was indeed a very simply put answer to that question which made it very easy for me to understand. So I thank you for that. This is something I think about a lot and believe that the world would be a happier place if we could all sit and reflect for a moment on how important it is to love, and remember those in the world who may be less fortunate than ourselves. Reminding ourselves that we

too are god is very important, as I believe we would all then be equally happy wherever we are in the world.

I have a challenge to face at present which I strongly believe will be resolved with my will to think happy thoughts, give love and support to my family who are feeling the impact of our situation, and not to judge or place blame on anyone or anything for this happening. I believe we have to meet challenges and tasks in life and learn from them and we can do this by remembering who we are: God, love and love for others.

Thank you for all the amazing articles that are lovingly written for us all to read, it's very hard work and I for one really appreciate reading them. Love and best wishes to you all, Jaki McLennan.

Response to the Sunday Special, 17 December 2006 - _Why Are Our Prayers Sometimes Not Answered?

Dear Sir, Sairam,

I read this Sunday's editorial. It cannot be more fitting for the time. It reminds us of the enormous responsibility we have as Swami's devotees. Sri Rama had the Vanar sena to conquer Ravana, Sri Krishna had the Pandavas to show His glory and the Gopees to shower His Love.

We have to play the role of Banar Sena, Pandavas and the Gopees combined to be the Lord's response in this infinitely more chaotic world of today. Today's editorial reminded us that today. Thank you so much.

With Love and gratitude, Debarshi Dey, CA, USA.

Sairam,

This is with regard to your article on last Sunday 17th. I feel sad that despite so many efforts by our Swami, mudslinging has been going on. But this is not new to us and I am sure that there will be no let up in the good work being done.

I think we should send a strong letter to the newspaper for hurting the sentiments of devotees. It is clear that there was absolutely no research done by the journalist prior to writing the article.

I am a regular reader of H2H and please continue the good work. Do not be disheartened just because there is no feedback from devotees. I am from Madras and now in USA as a part of official work here on a short visit. I happen to see the good work done by the devotees here silently without any fanfare. This is happening everywhere in US without Swami ever making a visit. This only proves that good work and thought travel much faster than such mudslinging. Just my thoughts....

SAIRAM, N.SEKAR

Dear H2H,

A very scientific analysis of the situation leading to the so called 'events'. For the media, negativity sells, sensationalism sells. They should thank Swami that by doing such articles, their income is being increased, viewership is more, but little do they realize that the viewers are neither blind nor deaf; they see all, hear all and are intelligent enough to reason and understand all.

True, for devotees of our Beloved Mother Sai, it is disturbing, but does not Swami teach us to maintain equanimity in success and adversity? It is not a test

for His 'true' (if one may be permitted to use that term) devotees, as we know (or think we know) our Sai; "His Life is His Message".

It is in this light that it is important for Sai Centres around the world and in India, to highlight the humanitarian work done by Swami in the fields of Educare, Sociocare and Medicare, touching only the positive outcome of His Work for society, leaving behind what the Sai sevaks did. Your article on 'Rural transformation in Andhra' is one such issue which could be provided to the 'intelligensia of the media'.

Sorry for such a long letter, but there are too many sentiments and one could go on and on endlessly and I am sure many of my fellow Sai family members worldwide feel the same.

In the Service of Sai, Narayan Ramachandran,
Orthopedic & Trauma Consultant, Armed Forces Hospital, Sultanate of Oman