

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

This happened nearly four decades ago. Swami landed in Mumbai after His fourteen day East African trip and was in a great hurry to visit Anantapur en route to Bangalore. It was June 1968. Just after a month, Swami returned to the city of Anantapur, the official capital and the biggest town of the district, to unfold to the world His advent's one very significant mission. He was inaugurating a college for women in Anantapur. What He said on that occasion set the pace for the Sri Sathya Sai education mission.

"The prompting behind this College is not the search for reputation or the desire to propagate a cult, or the hope of monetary profit. Fame is a fickle figment! Reputation rots quite soon. Profit, when it is calculated in terms of cash, defiles. I have allowed this College to rise because it will install in the minds of the students, the ideals of Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love - ideals delineated in the Vedas, described in the ancient scriptures, illustrated in the Epics, practised by countless generations and confirmed by experience, as best suited for individual and social progress. Every child born...has the right to know and benefit by this precious heritage....(just like) agriculture is for living; *Atma*-culture is for success in life."

Three years later, Swami was in this city again, now to preside over the inauguration of the college's magnificent new building. And what He said on that Guru Poornima day, the day dedicated to the Supreme Preceptor, in the presence of the then President of India and his wife, was as prophetic as it was profound.

"India is being forged into a *Bhogabhoomi* - land of luxury - a land of skyscrapers, tinned foods, air-conditioning and television. Indians are being shaped into an imitative, insurgent, ill-disciplined mass. They are being transplanted on other soils and encouraged to grow, without roots.... This is the reason, I have decided that this college has to be inaugurated on Guru Poornima Day on *Guruvar* - Thursday - as a *Gurukula* - the hermitage school of ancient India in which the highest ideals of life were instilled by personal example and guidance by the Guru to the pupils eager to imbibe." Swami concluded with a visionary declaration: "The seed has been planted; it will sprout and spread, heavy with fruits, providing shade, security and sustenance to all."

And forty years later what do we see? The hallowed Sri Sathya Sai University which completed twenty-five years of its glorious existence just last year was christened recently as the 'crest jewel' among universities in India by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council. And it is not only the University with its three campuses - there is also the higher secondary school with its primary wing performing the difficult task of laying sturdy foundations on which the beautiful mansions of character are later built. Incidentally, in the just-out XII class CBSE results of the higher secondary school, all the 116 students secured above 75 percent and more than 50 percent have obtained more than 90 percent marks. Though discipline, service and *sadhana* are the first, second and third languages of this school, academics are never a

casualty. In fact, emphasis on character-building has only ensured and encouraged sharp learning, be it secular or otherwise.

But it is not only the Sathya Sai University or the high school in Puttaparthi where Swami's education mission is firing on all cylinders making enlightened citizens out of ordinary boys and girls. It has now become a revolution. Swami's concept of Educare (manifesting the latent values within) has now spread to literally every corner of the globe, from Mexico and Ecuador, to Zambia and South Africa, to Fiji and Australia. And what is being done in these temples of learning - some tiny and some mighty – is truly eye-opening.

Did you know that the Sathya Sai School in Canada, which is in its sixth year now, was awarded a 'Perfect Ten' score in academics by the Fraser Institute, the British Columbia based think tank, because all the students met or exceeded the expectations of the Ontario curriculum? But equally significant is this: every year the young hearts here collect over half a tonne of vegetarian, non-perishable food items for the Food Bank used by the needy residents of the city of Toronto. And do you know how they celebrate Valentine's Day? Interestingly, for these children it is Valuentine's Day when they go to the old age homes and sing songs and share gifts with the elderly who long for such love. And in February every year, while all the trees are covered with snow in Toronto, these kids have a "mitten tree" which only grows in size every day of this month with their personal contributions of mittens, gloves, scarf's, hats, etc., for the homeless. Darini, one sweet kid of this school, says, "CHC - Children Helping Children is my favourite project....In the last two years I have worked hard, done chores at home, sacrificed birthday parties and new year gifts to raise \$700 to bring joy to children I haven't met...I love to make a difference."

Thanks to its dedicated teachers, spirited volunteers and enthusiastic and eager students, yes, this school is surely making a difference. It has enlightened parents, awakened the local community, and inspired hundreds every year to take to the path of Truth, Peace and Love. When you read the cover story of this issue, you will know how the "seed" that Swami planted years ago has sprouted and spread its fragrance thousands of miles away from Prasanthi Nilayam. What inspires teachers here to put in tremendous man-hours to integrate human values into the Ontario curriculum? Why do volunteers here do practically every odd job here from vacuuming and mopping to secretarial services (apart from helping in teaching) so much so that the school has no janitorial staff? Why do the parents of this school go out of their way to help the school and organize mega events to promote human values?

Many of the people working in this school have not even seen Swami physically; some have had a fleeting glance maybe once in their lives, and for many He is what they see only in the big photo that is framed on the school wall. Nevertheless one thing is common – no matter what, they feel Him there every moment. His love inspires them to stretch themselves to their limits to create beautiful beings out of young minds. And this is true not only in the Sai School in Toronto. In Greece, Sai devotees are cleaning an area of some

hectares of litter (tins, bottles, plastic bags, papers, etc.) in Parnitha forest; in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sai volunteers have conducted medical camps for the neglected; in Slovenia a family of five was saved from pitiable poverty; and in Switzerland, an eighty-three year old day, whom nobody cared for, now has a house as bright as her smile. And back in India, a mother who had resigned herself to the cruel fate of losing her only child now says, "This Swami's hospital is God" speaking of the Sri Sathya Sai Heart Hospital in Rajkot.

Truly, all beautiful things in the world have their origin in love. In fact, this world itself is born from love. As Swami says, "I separated Myself from Myself so that I can love Myself." Umpteen are the occasions when Swami has said to the students, "All you need to develop is love... if you have the quality of love within you, you can secure anything for yourself and others...you can change the world." That is what the Sathya Sai School in Toronto is doing, the same is happening in Puttaparthi's Universities and schools and this is exactly what each one of us has to do. Just improve our LQ – Love Quotient and soon heaven will not be a utopia.

Let us allow love to rule us!

Loving Regards,
H2H Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The Key To Lasting Bliss

All worldly pleasures are transient and temporary. Very often they result in sorrow and disappointment. God alone is the source of enduring bliss. The purpose of human birth is to realise the inherent divinity in man.

Once, a great *Maharaja* (ruler) held a big exhibition of paintings and art products. The finest works of art were on display. The exhibition was open to one and all. The king announced that anyone could walk in and take away whatever one liked. Large numbers of men and women went to the exhibition and took back with them whatever they fancied.

Among them was a lady. She saw everything in the exhibition. She came out through the main door without taking anything with her. The *Maharaja* noticed that of all the persons visiting the exhibition she was the only one to come out empty-handed. He was curious to know what the reason for this was. He asked the lady: "Madam, how is it you have found nothing to interest you in the exhibition? There are so many attractive things on display. Was there nothing that pleased you?" She replied: "There are innumerable desirable things in the exhibition." The Maharaja asked: "But was there nothing which you wanted?" "No," she said. The Maharaja said: "If that is so, tell me what you desire and I shall give it to you." She said: "Maharaja, will you promise to give me what I want? Is your offer genuine? Will you keep your word?" "Certainly," replied the *Maharaja*. "If that is so, I want only you," said the lady. True to his word the Maharaja surrendered himself to her. When the Maharaja himself became hers, all that was in the exhibition also became hers.

The Whole Universe Can Become Yours

This cosmos is a vast exhibition. It is the creation of the Lord. All are entering this exhibition and taking whatever they choose. Some seek jobs, others wealth and so on. They are content to take objects of their choice. But no one asks the question: "Swami! If I take away one thing or another, what is it that I gain? If You become mine all these will become mine." When you have entered the Cosmic exhibition, you must seek the Divine. Then, the whole universe becomes yours. You must seek that which is lasting and unchanging.

There is no meaning in going after one thing after another. There is no end to that process. There is no satisfaction in that. What you acquire today, loses its charm the next day and you desire something new. But once the Divine is attained, all things are obtained.

In the cosmic exhibition, you are seeing, hearing and experiencing innumerable things. You experience depression, confusion and disappointment. You have no contentment. "*Asantrupto nijo nashtah.*" (Lack of contentment is the true loss). The man who is not content is continually experiencing loss. There is no limit to desires. One feels hungry, another is thirsty. If the thirsty man is offered water, he is not satisfied, he wants a cool drink. When he is given a cool drink, he is not satisfied, he wants ice cream. And so on. He is not satisfied with anything.

There is no end to desires for material things in the world. To get rid of these desires, man must turn his mind towards God. That is the way to achieve contentment and lasting bliss.

Divine Discourse to students in Ooty, 16 April, 1988.

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI
PART 33
(continued from the previous issue)

The Purity of Sai

H (Hislop): I have asked important persons around Sai if Sai is all-knowing at all times, or only when He so chooses. They give different answers.

SAI: Sai knows everything. That people are in doubt due to the Maya of the Avathar. You know that Sai is in your heart, yet you think, "Is Sai upstairs in His room, or is He elsewhere?" It is the human element. The body has the name of Hislop, but you are not the body. You are the *Atma* (spirit). **There is no desire in Sai. There is total purity only. This entire body is *Amrith* (nectar). Where is there space for desire in Sai? Everything is already mine. Sai does not think. My will is immediately realized.**

Whatever it may be, it instantly appears; an envelope, gold, everything. Where is there room for desire? I have no thought. If I think, it is for you, it is not for Me. Sai requires no food. If I eat, it is for the benefit of everyone. If I give Darshan, it is not for Me, it is for others. I am talking to you now - it is for you, not for Me. A point does not appear in Sai. First a point, then disappoint! I am always the same. I am love, always love. If there are angry words, that is action. Inwardly, I remain the same. I have the same tender love for that person.

H: Swami, some tragedy happens to a person, and they try to find a reason for it in the actions of this lifetime.

SAI: Yes, that can be.

H: But I thought that all that happens in this life is the result of our behaviour in past existences.

SAI: Not always. Something could happen with its cause in this life.

The Goal is to Realise Our Divinity

H: Swami, please restate or redefine the goal, the objective of the American Sathya Sai Organization.

SAI: It is not just the American, it is the objective for the worldwide Sathya Sai Organizations.

People, the world over, do not know they are Divine. They do not even realize what it is to be human. They have ego, anger, greed, envy, lust, hatred. These are not human qualities; they are animal qualities.

Unless Sai devotees are, at the very least, human persons free of animal qualities or characteristics, how can such devotees suggest spiritual life to others? Such suggestions will have no impact, if devotees in general are not yet free of animal characteristics. There should be in each Sathya Sai Baba Center two or three members who live a life as true human beings.

The individual does not progress alone. He is not separate from Society, and he must do his bit to uplift the society. Therefore, the individual's work to free himself from animal characteristics and to live a spiritual life is not done for himself, but is done for all of God's creatures. The work of freeing the individual's nature from animal qualities is done, in love, for God, and done in His Name and with His help.

Each member of the Sathya Sai Baba Center should work very hard to purify the quality of his life, and the goal should be to lead a perfect life, an ideal life; to be an ideal exemplar of the divine teachings of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

The world will respond to the ideal life of a Sai devotee. The world is yearning for the ideal life and will, of its own accord, adopt such a life if it comes into view. They will respond, and they will follow such a life.

H: Swami, does that mean that our Centers should now move beyond the task of working with Center members and tackle the world?

SAI: The Center members must carefully work to become truly human before they venture to instruct the world.

SAI: How do you like the pictures? (i.e. portrait photographs for the college building to be dedicated on the 23rd).

Robert Bozzani (RB): We were afraid they were too large.

SAI: They are not too large. Swami's picture will be the same size. Do you like the pictures?

H: Bozzani looks like a movie star!

SAI: No, no. He is smiling, whereas Mrs. Bozzani is more serious. Come, sit down.

Evolution to the Human

SAI: At the center everything is liquid.

RB: Does Swami mean the world?

SAI: Yes, everything is melted. No temperature.

RB: No heat, Swami?

SAI: No temperature. Everything is liquid. Like water, Gold, iron, silver, gems, all are liquid. Next there is solid. Then trees.

H: Trees, Swami? Trees like we see around us?

SAI: Yes, trees. Then human beings and animals. At the very center is the Divine. It is the support of everything. First is liquid, chemistry. Then solid, physics. Then trees, botany. Then man, the pinnacle of life. But at the center, supporting all, is the Divine. Without the Divine, where is chemistry, physics, botany? This will be the teaching of all courses at the University. The students will understand the full picture.

H: In this picture, Swami, where do the devas and demigods and other creatures of the cosmos fit in?

SAI: They are above the senses. Man is below the senses. Those others are above the senses.

H: But all must come to be humans in order to merge with God, is it not so?

SAI: Not totally so. There is love.

H: Then, can man take a further step and go into the world above the senses.

SAI: That is possible

H: But is it not possible to realize the Self, or merge with God, while in the human state?

SAI: Oh, yes. That can be done.

H: Does Swami mean that both possibilities exist, that man could go one way or the other?

SAI: Yes, one way or the other.

H: Then what makes the difference? What is the difference in man that he would make one choice or the other?

RB: That is what I want to know, too.

Realising God Through Love

SAI: Love is the dominant reason. Compassionate love is pure love, unselfish. In the animal there is love, but it is mixed with lust. But compassion is pure love. Only man has compassion. Through love he may realize the oneness of life, and in this way, by love, he will be one with God.

H: Then, Swami, man can definitely realize God while in the human birth?

SAI: Yes.

H: But suppose he fails in that, and thus eventually finds himself as a being above the sensory level, what then?

SAI: The same holds true. God is love and wherever there is pure love and love only, that is God. Love is everything, but people do not understand love. Their understanding is confused. For example: There is a child. Mother and father love the child with pure love. The child is kissed and fondled and showered with affection. This

is the action of pure love. In this action there is no lust; there is no lust in that love. Another example: A father is 40 years old. There is the wife and the daughter who is 18 years of age. The love of the father for his family leads him to kiss his daughter. In this action of love, there is no lust. It is pure love, compassion. The husband also kisses his wife, and in this kiss there is some mixture of lust. In both cases, the kiss was the action of love, but the love was different.

H: Swami, that is a wonderful explanation. The difference is very clear, and very important to understand.

SAI: Pure love, Divine love is everything.

RB: How do human beings realize and become that divine, pure compassionate love?

SAI: It will come with sadhana. **There is a big mistake in the consideration of meditation as the principal sadhana. What is meditation? Meditation controls the mind. It is mental. The genuine sadhana is that pure love which is not different from the Divine.**

Seeing the Good in All

H: In America, when they hear of Sai, some people declare that he is the Anti-Christ.

SAI: Some individual ideas of some people. Goldstein has individual ideas. Hislop has individual ideas. I know what is not good, and I know what is good. All my ideas and actions are based on what is good for the world. I am pure, I have no worries, I have no anxieties, I am happy always, I have no anger. I want nothing, take nothing, do nothing for myself. All I think, all I do at all times is for the good of the world.

H: We could also have the same ideas by doing as Swami does.

SAI: Yes, to follow Swami is the important thing. To follow this example is best.

RB: I am trying to follow Swami's instructions.

SAI: Trying? Trying is no good. Do it! Do it!

H: We can ask Swami for strength!

SAI: I will give strength! Sometimes there is wavering of faith in Sai. Thoughts arise, "Why does Sai do this? Why does He do that?" Peter was near and dear to Christ. But he denied Christ.

H: Did he deny Christ because of fear for the safety of his body? Because of feeling that he was the body?

SAI: **Yes. It was because of body identification. Judas was also near and dear. He was a good devotee. Jesus did not divide the disciples into good and bad.**

H: I pray that my faith in Sai will not waver.

SAI: The important thing is to do good and be good. Do not see the bad. See only the good.

Swami's Work Never Ends

(Conversation while in a car)

SAI: This land (on our left beside the University) was bought today.

H: Today! How far does it go?

SAI: All of it, 28 acres. Cost is a lakh of rupees per acre.

H: That is expensive. The new buildings have raised the price.

SAI: Some owners are asking 3 lakhs per acre. Some years ago, the land was 100 rupees per acre.

H: Will more buildings go up on this new land?

SAI: Yes. More buildings. Laboratory, library, and housing for instructors and their families.

H: This year, with the new University and the teachers' training plan for instruction in human values throughout the entire school system of India, I can see that Sai is getting hold of India.

SAI: Amongst the spiritual leaders of India there is some jealousy.

H: But they do not have public works. Only Swami is doing that.

SAI: Sai Baba is working for the public twenty-four hours a day. Even the interviews are public work. Twenty-four hours per day, 365 days per year. Not even one holiday.

H: But that is beyond man. It is possible only for the Divine.

SAI: Yes. Only for the Divine. I need no holiday. I am always happy, always in bliss.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

Self-Confidence, Success And God's Grace

Tenali Ramakrishna, the famous poet, humorist and philosopher, from the state of Andhra Pradesh once happened to lose his way while traversing an area of thick jungle. He lived in the reign of the famous Emperor Krishnadeva Raya, of the Vijayanagara Dynasty, about 1500 AD. He was attached to the Court and was honoured as a wise and quick-witted minister. While he was wandering desperately in the jungle, he saw an old sage. Ramakrishna ran forward and fell at his feet, in reverential homage. He asked the sage, how he had become caught in that wild forest. The sage said, "The same Mysterious Force that dragged you here has dragged me too to this spot. The moment when I have to cast away the body which I have occupied so long, has arrived! I shall initiate you, now, into the *manthra* (sacred hymn) which I have recited all these years as my talisman and treasure." It was the *Manthra* of Mother Goddess Kali, and he whispered it into the ear of Ramakrishna.

Ramakrishna was overjoyed at the great gift. He retired into a temple of the Mother, deep in the recesses of the jungle and was intent on the meditation of the Mother, propitiated by the *manthra*.

At midnight one day, the aboriginal Koyas of the forest came into the temple with a goat which they sought to offer as sacrifice to please Her and propitiate Her. Ramakrishna hid behind the idol and when the knife was about to fall on the neck of the victim, he exclaimed, "I am the Mother of all living beings, including you. If you kill my child, I will curse you, I cannot bless you!" Believing that it was Kali who spoke, the Koyas desisted and went away.

Now, Kali manifested before Ramakrishna. She asked him what he would like to receive from Her! She was pleased with his *Sadhana* (spiritual practice). "Which do you want?" she queried, holding a plate of curds-rice in one hand and a plate of milk-rice in another. He wanted to know the consequences of eating either plate before deciding which plate to ask for. She explained, "The curds-rice will endow you with riches and economic prosperity; the milk-rice will make you a wise scholar. Now, make your choice."

Ramakrishna thought within himself, "It is no good being a fool in possession of vast riches; nor, will scholarship fill the stomach, three times a day." He was a clever person! So, he asked a further question, "I see two plates before me. Before I make the choice, tell me how each will taste."

She laughed and said, "How can I describe the taste and make you understand the difference? You will have to taste them yourself," and gave him both the plates, for that purpose.

The clever Ramakrishna hastily put them both in his mouth and managed to swallow the curds and the milk, the entire quantity of rice from both plates!

Kali was indignant and exclaimed that his impertinence called for dire punishment. Ramakrishna accepted his mistake and invited the punishment she proposed to inflict. But can the Mother's punishment destroy the child, however reprehensible the conduct of the child may be? "My sentence will certainly save you, do not tremble," said Kali. Then she pronounced the sentence thus: "Become a *Vikatakavi*." That is to say, "Be a clever clown, having great influence at court, accumulating much wealth and guiding all those who approach you with good advice."

God loves those who have self-confidence and the courage of their convictions and who seize every opportunity to improve their spiritual status.

- BABA

COVER STORY

CANADA'S CROWN JEWEL:

THE SATHYA SAI SCHOOL IN TORONTO

"I am an eleven year old girl. And I am learning about the world around me, and yes, inside of me too. Every morning I look forward to coming to school as there is a warm environment welcoming me. It was like that on my first day of school and seven years later, it still is.

My training ground is extraordinary; every wall, ceiling and door is made up of love and sacrifice. I feel it everyday. This is something that can never be recreated. We're all one big family.

And to tell you the truth, this school is my motivation, because it fuels me to only do what I know is right. Here, I am taught to respect everyone, because each of us is special and unique and no one can ever change that. I have learnt to be understanding of the differences around me, and most importantly I am learning to accept who I am. I can say that we are trees that stand strong in the garden of life.

Another wonderful aspect is that here every student, just like me, has a close relationship with their teacher. We have the freedom to express ourselves and feel the love and respect that vibrates in the environment. It is this sublime milieu that has made me achieve so many goals and dreams. I am truly, truly grateful. I know God has created this entire universe for a reason, and we all are on this earth to find our purpose in life."

- Confessions of a Grade 6 North American student

Myth or Fact?

Anyone familiar with the life and challenges of a typical Grade 6 student in a North American school is likely to dismiss the above confession as a myth or a utopian fantasy. Some may define it as a concoction of someone's wishful thinking; yet others may consider it to be every educator and parent's dream, and quite understandably so. The realities of a typical 11 year old girl's school life in North America tend to be a stark contrast to the above confession, and the experience is universal, be it in California or Calgary, Tulsa or Toronto. The issues more likely to dominate the "tween" scene are peer pressure, stress, low self-esteem, poor body image, weak impulse control, rebelling against parental and teacher authority, excessive TV, internet and cell phone dependency, obsession with clothes, make-up and may even include anorexia, bulimia, and experimentation with substance abuse – a far cry from the wishful reflection above. Yet, there is a very real girl named Prarthana Tirikollur and the utopian scenario painted above is no myth for her. It is indeed a page from her life, her experience and her truth. And yes, she lives in a North American metropolis. It is her reality.

Ontario Wakes Up to Character Education

Given the state of our world, it is not surprising that one of the great conversations of our times has centered on the issue of education, its aim and purpose. Recognizing the poverty and stark disparities around us as symptomatic of the systemic decay in our values, stemming largely from ignorance, greed and insensitivity towards others, policy pundits in North America and elsewhere have been calling lately for the renewal of ethical commitment and deepening of the spiritual sense among all people. Shocking incidents such as the recent massacre at Virginia Tech or the Columbine high school killings a couple of years ago in the USA send educators scrambling to the drawing table, seeking solutions for a system that is increasingly failing to deliver. Some of the buzz words emerging as possible solutions from this animated dialogue are “character education” or “values-based learning”, “environmentally sustainable development” and “carbon footprints”.

Recently, Canada’s largest province, Ontario appointed a special task force to oversee the development and implementation of the province’s Character Education program for Ontario’s public schools and to develop appropriate teaching aids and methodologies, a move received warmly by observers and parents. While some see it as the government’s response to the growing problems of indiscipline, bullying, racism and such in Ontario schools, others point to Character Education as the key to making Ontario’s schools relevant to the current reality and its challenges.

Values Education – The Need of the Hour

As we strive to progress in a world that has shrunk into a global village with economic interdependence, as well as social and racial osmosis, cultural sensitizing is now the critical driver to harmonize diverse peoples and aspirations and to ensure what emerges is not chaos, but a fragrant potpourri. Business magnets today are waking up to the realization that Character Education makes good business sense in a world where corporate conglomerates are more multicultural than ever before. Political leaders are realizing that a values-based, tolerant, environmentally responsible and transparent work ethic and an equitable work environment are the keys to both, political longevity and long term profitability. Suddenly, being smart is not enough. Good is in, and the term ‘character’ has a ‘cool’ ring to it! A policy paper entitled “Finding Common Ground” published by the Ontario Ministry of Education, states:

“Quality education includes the education of the heart as well as the head; it includes a focus on the whole person—the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of learning. It means preparing students to be concerned citizens who have empathy and respect for people within their increasingly diverse communities. It means providing opportunities for students to understand deeply the importance of civic engagement and what it means to be a global citizen in an increasingly interdependent global community. An approach to teaching that is infused with character development is education at its best.”

Finding Common Ground, Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12

For those versed in Sathya Sai Education, the above quote sounds so familiar. For decades now, Baba has emphasized the holistic approach to education that harmonizes the head, the hand and the heart.

“True education should make a person compassionate and humane. It should not make him self-centered and narrow-minded. Spontaneous sympathy and regard for all beings should flow from the heart of one who is properly educated. He should be keen to serve society rather than be preoccupied with his own acquisitive aspirations. ...A person should strive to use every talent and skill they have, not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the whole world. Understand that society is the source of whatever pleasure one derives and whatever wealth one achieves in life. We owe everything to society and should be grateful to society for all that we receive from it. We have to repay this debt by helping at least as many people as we can.”

Sathya Sai Baba

The Sai Mission Unfolds...

While the government initiatives aimed at reviving the place of values of acceptance and tolerance in the school systems in North America are still in their infancy, it was way back on November 17, 1999 that Swami approved the founding of the very first school in North America that would specialize exclusively in Character Education. It was to be set up in Toronto, Canada – a school whose motto would sum up the Sri Sathya Sai philosophy of education, namely “the End of Education is Character”. For all the activities in the school, the following advice from Swami has become the eternal guide:

Love as thought is Truth.

Love as action is Right Conduct.

Love as feeling is Peace.

Love as understanding is Non-violence.

While Canadians embarked into the 21st century with the first Sathya Sai School in North America taking shape in a Toronto suburb, the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) program had, in fact, already been successfully implemented in Canada and elsewhere in the world for over three decades by then, encouraging millions to live selfless lives, helping, loving and serving anyone in need, inspired by the personal example and teachings of Baba.

Dr. V. P. Singh, the Central Coordinator of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization in Canada and Chairman of the Sathya Sai School Trust, points out that **“SSEHV classes were being conducted across Canada at Sai Centres and in some public schools, many years before the Sathya Sai School of Canada was established in the year 2000. Training of teachers**

in Education in Human Values (EHV) is continuing, with the aim to bring awareness of the eternal human values into the public school system. School boards and other educational institutes are also being contacted and informed of the SSEHV program. Presently, in Canada there are large numbers of volunteers who are dedicated to serving humanity and propagating Sri Sathya Sai Baba's message of Human Values."

"The school is My project" - Baba

Going down memory lane, Dr. Singh recalls,

"In the year 1999, Swami answered our prayers to start the school in Toronto. He blessed the school and gave specific instructions as to how the school should function. His instructions were clear - the education in the school should be based on the Human Values of Love, Truth, Peace, Right Conduct and Non-violence. The Sathya Sai School is unique as it combines the standard curriculum offered by the provincial school boards along with character building human values education. It teaches the mind and reaches the hearts of the children."

"I bless you and the project. I am always with you," Swami had said while approving the setting up of the Sathya Sai School of Canada. He had further added, "Land and building do not make a school. It is the children who make a school... First, start small, and then grow big - Yes, the school is my project. I will protect and bless you..."

Recalling that blissful morning of November 17, 1999, Mr. Dayal Mirchandani, President of the Sri Sathya Sai Education Trust of Canada, says, "When He called me into the interview room, He said, 'I am always with you, make this happen and take charge'. He then asked me to open my mouth and with His divine hands, fed me a clove and then granted me *padanamaskar*."

With His guaranteed blessings, the school blossomed.

Demonstrating a New Dimension...

It is interesting that Baba chose Canadians, the peacekeepers to the world, the nation with the longest unguarded borders, safe haven for displaced peoples from around the planet's disturbed areas... "the true north strong and free" as the seat for reviving perennial values that are as old as civilization and as relevant to our lives today as love, fresh air, and life itself.

Founded by a teacher of such unparalleled vision and wisdom, the Sathya Sai School of Canada was inaugurated on September 2, 2000 by Dr. Art-Ong Jumsai, the Director of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Education, Thailand. Within the first six years of its operation, the school attracted much attention from mainstream educators and the media, and recently it once again made national headlines for its perfect score in the province's standardized examination, making it **to the number one spot in terms of academic excellence with 15 other schools in the Greater Toronto Area and 36**

others in the entire province of Ontario, out of a total of 2812 public, private and separate schools.

The February 14, 2007 edition of the Scarborough Mirror, a popular Toronto newspaper, ran the following front page story:

“Scarborough’s Sathya Sai School has a unique recipe for outstanding achievement. Start with dedication to academic excellence balanced with character education so students of the private, non-denominational school learn the value of civic responsibility. Finally throw in light meditation in the morning and yoga exercises in the afternoon to keep the pupils calm and focused. The blend has resulted in a winning combination for the school on Ellesmere Road, east of Warden Avenue. The English-language co-educational school of 160 students is one of 37 elementary schools to receive top grade in an annual report card released this week by the Fraser Institute.”

School Scores Perfect 10 in Academics

The Fraser Institute, the British Columbia based think tank, awarded the top Ontario schools perfect ten score based on Reading, Writing and Math tests administered to Grade 3 and 6 students by the province’s Education Quality and Accountability Office (**EQAO**). It meant every single student had met and/or exceeded the expectations of the Ontario curriculum in the province-wide standardization test.

EQAO Results Place Sai School in Top Position

EQAO is a province-wide standardization test conducted by the province of Ontario to assess students’ levels of proficiency in three areas, namely, Reading, Writing and Math. The Sathya Sai School of Canada, follows the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Academic Curriculum and further enriches it with its own unique Character Education program. They are one of the few private schools in the province who participate in this annual test, held for Grade 3 and Grade 6 students in all public and Catholic elementary schools across the province.

Last June (2006), the third batch of Grade 3 students appeared in this test and once again Sathya Sai students performed way above their provincial peers. The students’ most recent performance versus the Ontario average in Grade 3 goes like this:

Grade 3	Sathya Sai School	Ontario Average
Reading	95	62
Writing	100	64

Math	100	68
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Furthermore, being a young school, in 2006, their very first batch of Grade 6 students participated in EQAO for Grade 6 students and the results speak for themselves:

Grade 6	Sathya Sai School	Ontario Average
Reading	100	64
Writing	100	61
Math	100	61

The results indicate the percentage of students who have achieved or exceeded provincial expectations in all three areas.

In light of the exceptional academic performance of the Sathya Sai School students, the Fraser Institute placed the school in the number one position in all of Ontario.

Academic Success Only Part of the Equation

With this superior rating, the Sathya Sai School has emerged as a key player in the field of academic excellence on the Canadian national scene. Yet, its academic success is only a part of the many laurels the school has won in its young life of a mere six years, and this ranking comes as no surprise to those who are familiar with the vision and mission of this unique school.

Founding Principal of the School, Mr. T.R. Pillay, believes the report validates not only the excellent work of the teachers, and the calibre of the students, but also the school's mission to balance character education with academic excellence. "This high ranking of the school is reassuring, and further proof that the Sathya Sai ideals of education and its unique school climate bring out the best in the children. I am convinced that if our students were tested on moral issues and ethical values, they would shine with equal brilliance."

If the school has become a resounding success story today, it is largely because of the highly trained and dedicated educators who serve the Sathya Sai School of Canada with unparalleled levels of commitment and sacrifice, drawing their inspiration directly from the personal example of Baba, who is not only the Founder but also the soul and the life-force of the school.

Mrs. Koushi Premachandran, who has been teaching Kindergarten since the school's inception, explaining her program's phenomenal results, says,

"I always seek God's input and guidance to make the most of my time with my students. In the year 2002, while viewing the exhibition on the five elements at the Chaitanya Jyothi museum in Prashanthi Nilayam, I had an epiphany that made me revisit my teaching strategies and methodology.

Upon my return, I rearranged the entire Ontario Curriculum for Kindergarten to align with the five elements, the five senses and the five values to better facilitate the children's understanding of the interconnectivity of all life. I redesigned all my long range plans, ensuring all aspects of the curriculum were covered but the units were layered in sync with the rhythm of the creation of our universe. The net result was that not only did we successfully meet all the Kindergarten expectations, but exceeded them beyond the wildest imagination of my fellow teachers and school parents. Since then, each year, every single graduate of my Kindergarten program exceeds the curriculum expectations in Reading, Math, Science and Writing. Several of them have reading skills comparable to Grade 2 level Ontario curriculum expectations!

The supreme teacher, beloved Baba is responsible for this achievement for had it not been for His wisdom, we would never have known that a simple reordering of the topics will exponentially enhance students' learning ability."

For Grade 2 teacher Mrs. Aditi Jain, every day at the school holds a surprise. She says: "As we go through our daily lesson plans, there is that special moment, when a student does, says or asks something so precious and priceless that it jolts me out of my complacency, making me wonder if such a profound eureka moment would ever have been possible in a school system without character education? That one spark of divine radiance that flashes from deep within a child illuminates the atmosphere in the classroom, charging us all with renewed energy...

"This rare combination of sublimity and wisdom can only arise when a pure mind is plugged into the universal intelligence."

The school's character education program and a values-permeated environment are greatly responsible for the students' wholesome attitude to learning, keen sense of engagement and service to the community. Swami says, "Education is for life, not merely for earning a living". Even as a good report card from the Fraser Institute is welcome news, it is only a part of the school's greater goal, to promote human excellence by balancing academic excellence with character education.

Since its inception in September 2000, the Sathya Sai School has been a pioneer in integrating values into the core academic curriculum. All members of the school's teaching faculty have outstanding professional qualifications from leading universities in Canada and abroad as well as additional training in integrating the SSEHV program into the academic curriculum throughout the school day. One example of successful integration is the annual Science Fair. It integrates the learning of Science with the Sathya Sai Education in

Human Values program while providing a perfect opportunity for family bonding, a practice highly encouraged in the school's culture.

Grade 5 teacher Miss Tanushree Das says: "While integrating each strand of the curriculum expectation with values, my students come up with insights that make them realize that nothing stands in isolation. All aspects of our awareness, learning and experience are interconnected. True learning occurs when we unearth this fundamental that all is connected within precious life lessons. A water cycle is nothing but a cycle of *karma*, or as Swami says: reaction, reflection, and resound.

"I am blessed to teach 10 year olds in a grade 5 classroom. These students come to me with well defined basic skills of logical thinking and daily classroom behaviour, thanks to my hardworking colleagues in previous grades. Most of them have been in the Sathya Sai School system and are at various stages of articulating their emotional growth and seeking a definitive spiritual path, which has a personal meaning to them. This seeking comes through in their questions which are at once simple and profound, like: "How can I control my mind?" or "Who is the 'I' and what exactly is 'my'?" Their ability to articulate their process of "becoming" gives me an opportunity to break down the discussion to explain such concepts as consciousness and ego. It is pure joy, the high point for me as an educator to be able to explain the different levels of consciousness and perils of letting our ego take over. I have to know, and practice myself what I am attempting to explain. The profundity of the students' aspirations forces an inner learning and growth for me. To be effective, I must walk the talk myself. I must be the change I seek in them. I must first practice what I profess, or else the lesson will be lost."

According to Michael Greenwood, Grade 6 teacher, "The teaching profession is fundamentally based on spiritual principles." For him, "Service rendered to the students is service to Swami Himself" and teaching is not a profession, rather, "a *sadhana* or a spiritual practice to realize God" which has to be done in utmost purity and sincerity.

It is this enlightened attitude of the teachers which has made this school so special. Looking back at the many trails the school has blazed in the past six years, fundamentally because of its adherence to the five human values, the school's now retired Founding Principal Mr. T.R. Pillay describes his tenure here as the ultimate high point of his career of over four decades as an educator. He left the school with a treasure trove of priceless memories. He recalls: "I shall remember the student who was asked: What is the difference between a dream and reality? And his reply: 'They are just different levels of consciousness'.

"I will treasure memories of individual achievements and individual acts of concern for fellow men. One student spelt his way to the Regional Spelling Bee Finals three times and even donated his prize money to the school. Another student showed kindness and caring when he offered his chair to a visitor who had been standing too long in his classroom or to his Principal who

had dropped in to watch a class presentation. I shall remember the earnest plea of the student who wanted me to send light and love to her every morning as she was moving to another part of the province; and the student who reminded his mother who was about to punish him: 'Hands are for helping, not hurting'", Mr. Pillay reminiscences with pride and nostalgia.

Overwhelming Response to the School's Annual Open House

According to Principal Dr. Revathi Chennabathni, the school's 7th annual Open House on April 4, 2007 saw the gym packed with nearly 300 interested families eager to understand the unique vision and mission of the only school in Canada and the USA that offers what may be termed a full-time "Character Immersion" program. Over 150 applications were received for 20 spots in the Junior Kindergarten program and against any possible vacancies that may arise in other classes (Senior Kindergarten to Grade 6) should any of the existing students leave the school. The school caps class size at 20 students per grade, the optimum number recommended by the Ministry of Education.

With each passing year, the buy-in by potential parents continues to be overwhelming. Despite the many demands that the school's programs place on them as partners, Canadian families are drawn to the school for various reasons.

For Eugene and Inesa Akimov, the parents of Grade 6 student Kristian Akimov, it was the self-confidence of the Sathya Sai School students that struck a chord. "Our first visit to the school was during the Open House. We were impressed by the students' ability to express their opinions and thoughts clearly and with confidence...it felt we were speaking to grown up persons. We also noticed the teachers and students shared a relationship of deep and sincere respect and every student was treated as a unique individual.

"After our son Kristian joined the school, it is a great insight for us as parents to learn and practice the five human values together with our son in our everyday lives."

"As North American parents, we wanted our children to grow in an environment where the fundamental five human values defined the culture - values that are timeless and can be easily related to regardless of one's culture, race, faith or religion," say Shanthi and Bob Balakumar, parents of Alagan, in Junior Kindergarten and Paary, in Grade 1. "After extensive research, the Sathya Sai School emerged as the ideal and only choice for us. We love the atmosphere that engulfs us as we step in through the doors of the school. We appreciate and value the creative teaching methodologies used by the teachers. As well, the partnership and communication between the staff at the school and parents ensures that the children receive care and coaching almost 24/7."

For Mullafer Shanawaz and his wife Kaushy, the draw of the school was the universal appeal of the virtues the Sathya Sai model of learning promotes. "My wife is a Hindu and I am a Muslim. One of our challenges was which religion our daughters would follow and, more importantly, what values they should practice in their daily life. Frequently we tend to forget that all faiths point to the universal values and a life of peace, tolerance and compassion. We wanted to provide our daughters Shivaani and Shaayini the best possible education with proper guidance. Initially, I was skeptical about the Sathya Sai School's claim of balancing human excellence with character education. I then visited Prashanthi Nilayam personally to check out the claims. The trip was a life-altering experience. Upon return we were determined to seek admission here. Today, this is the best gift we have given our daughters. This is the only school we can relate to. It offers the best character based education that is academically superior too.

"Our girls are more fortunate than us. We didn't grow up learning these values and broad-mindedness. We were only told what is good and bad and that our religion is superior to all other religions. Today, when both our kids talk to us, we can see their maturity and their respect for everything in the world, from human to animal life and from stones to plants. Amazingly, we are learning more about being good human beings from our children than we are teaching them...my wife and I are both practicing our respective faiths and maintaining our culture without any discrepancy while practicing the five human values as a family - values that are common to both our faiths. We have all grown after our daughters joined the school."

It is a variety of facets of the school such as daily universal prayers (which are conspicuous by their absence in the public school system where even the term "God" is a taboo) to the school's lovingdiscipline policy, smart uniform, high academic standard, weekly yoga classes, daily tuning-in time, insistence on healthy and vegetarian food, and so on that has attracted Canadian parents.

Junior Kindergarten student Dante Morris' mom Michelle Ward admits: "My interest in the Sathya Sai School of Canada peaked when I discovered this school still believed in saying a school prayer, which I believe, is very important for any child. As I accessed the school website, I was in total awe because it was at this time I realized how much the school had to offer and I right away decided this would be Dante's school, without even contacting anyone at the school. I was most impressed with the fact that the school started the day with a prayer and even three 3 year olds were taught meditation and silent sitting and basic yoga techniques. To me the school on the whole is one that other schools should do their very best to model after. I feel very proud to say my son Dante attends the Sathya Sai School of Canada and I feel very blessed to have him there."

Aruna and Mohan Gopal, who have been associated with the school since its inception, recalling how it all began, say, "In the spring of the year 2000, we were at the crossroads in terms of where we would be sending our daughter to study for her first year at school...we were keen to provide her

with a firm foundation of human values that had to be interwoven into the regular academic curriculum and would permeate the entire school environment. At that very juncture, we attended a presentation on the opening of the Sathya Sai School of Canada...this was indeed an answer to our prayers and could not have come at a more opportune time.

“Over the years, our daughter Kavita Anjana Gopal, currently in Grade 5 at the Sathya Sai School of Canada, has blossomed into a beautiful person, showing a deep understanding of the human values in her words, actions and choices.”

The School's Unique Teaching Methodology

What has made this school stand out so splendidly is its distinctive teaching methodology that is modelled on the Sathya Sai system of education. It calls for an integrated approach to learning that nurtures the mind, the body and the spirit. Based on this philosophy of educare, the school's program aims to draw the infinite intelligence and goodness latent in every individual, using a variety of effective teaching methods. Teachers, here, specialise not in teaching a subject, rather they are experts in using the subject as a means to help the child in his or her own development. The educators principally use five teaching components:

1. Thought for the Day
2. Light Meditation
3. Group Singing & Music
4. Group Activities
5. Story Telling

These are used to impart lessons with a variety of adaptive methodologies in two principal ways:

- 1) The Integral approach
- 2) The Direct approach

The First Approach – Adding Values to Academics

The first is integration of values within the academic and extra-curricular school activities wherein specially trained teachers incorporate the human values lessons within the learning of traditional subjects such as Math, Science, Language, Social Studies and Physical Education, and also integrate the program into extra-curricular activities like clubs, playground activities, sports and field trips.

Citing an example of how this is done and what impact it has in the students minds, Mrs. Ahalya Ganesh a Grade 4 teacher, says, “I remember the day when the officials from the Premier of Ontario's task force on Character Education came to observe my language lesson in progress and to see how we integrate universal values into Language Arts. A student felt compelled to

raise his hand randomly when the ministry officials were asking some questions.

“When asked to speak up, he was bubbling to share with them a profound insight. Out of the blue, he began to explain the dilemma of the ice cube! He felt that the ice cube is all confused, thinking it is different from water. What the ice cube does not know is that it too is made of water. It may look and feel different but it really is not. It is just a little bit of water frozen up. Just like all of us, having come from God, we assume we are different or separate from Him. But in actual we are all made of God. We really are God.

“I will never forget the expression of the government officials to this sudden outburst of wisdom in the middle of a Grade 4 Language lesson! Talk of integration raised to the power of infinity!

“There is a pure love energy that runs this school like an invisible, silent fuel. This energy engulfs everyone into one, uniting us to pursue a higher purpose; functioning and guiding us through our daily decisions. Each day I realize what a special and incredible project I am associated with. The experience is beyond words.”

The Second Approach – Instilling Values the Direct Way

While that is the tremendous impact the integration of values into the curriculum creates, there is also a second and more direct method which the educators use, wherein instructional techniques are used to teach one of the five human values. And the impression this approach leaves on the young minds is no less.

The direct method utilizes all five teaching components through a number of specifically designed lesson plans, to be used directly in the classroom unlike the previous integral method which incorporates the five values into the curriculum and learning environment.

This program is designed not as an attempt to dictate or impose values, but rather to provide the children with a frame of reference which they can use to inform their future decisions and behaviour. The whole endeavour is based on five basic Human Values that are universal and held in the highest esteem in all cultures, faiths and societies, namely Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-Violence. These are nurtured through various methods and approaches. Some examples of practicing values include:

Living Truth in life by practicing:

- Honesty
- Quest for Knowledge
- Dignity
- Integrity
- Self-analysis
- Equality

Practicing Right Conduct through:

- Respect for others
- Responsibility
- Discipline
- Courage
- Helpfulness
- Gratitude

Fostering Peace by developing:

- Patience and Calmness
- Perseverance
- Understanding
- Healthy Living
- Contentment
- Self-respect

Nurturing Love in life by:

- Caring and Sharing
- Friendship
- Tolerance
- Compassion
- Kindness
- Generosity

Imbibing Non-violence in daily life through activities that exhibit:

- Concern for all Life
- Selfless Service
- Global Awareness
- Forgiveness
- Citizenship
- Unity

Other salient features of this approach include universal prayers at the start of each day, the daily tuning-in and reflection time when the students meditate on the light of a candle and discuss the Daily Thought for the Day during the ensuing circle time discussion and weekly yoga classes.

The Third and The Most Potent Approach – Walking The Talk

In spite of the tremendous positive results both have, possibly the most effective way of teaching values is by example. Teachers here are remembered for who they are more than for what they teach. If a teacher is loving and kind, then everything he/she teaches will automatically be full of values. Teaching that the composition of water is H₂O is academic knowledge. Teaching the value of water and the proper way to use and conserve it is Sathya Sai Education in Human Values. Both kinds of teaching

must be used together to deliver a more balanced education. Once a teacher starts to practice values in his or her life, then thinking of ways to integrate values into the classroom becomes easy. This program, in fact, offers a unique opportunity to both teachers and students. It is an opportunity to grow and develop together.

Miss Seema Poddar, a grade 1 teacher who has been actively involved since the school's planning stages, says: "Given that as a student I remembered my teachers more than the material they taught me, I realized that if I was to take up the teaching profession, I would like to be a teacher who would leave a positive impression on the lives of my students. I didn't want to teach *subjects*, I wanted to teach *children*. I wanted to be able to create a lasting, supportive relationship with my students. I wanted to give my students a glimpse of the infinite beauty that lies in their hearts, and to inspire them to tap into that inherent potential in order to realize all their dreams..."

She further admits, "In order to teach the Human Values to my students, I have had to reflect on my own understanding of these values as well as my ability to practice them. Every year, during the period of Lent, leading to Easter, together, my Grade 1 students and I, reflect on the spiritual significance of this Christian tradition. Along with my children, I too search my heart and then give up a favourite indulgence to experience first-hand the spirit of sacrifice and compassion."

Grade 3 teacher Miss Minoli Chandrakanthan realized this right at the outset. She recalls: "I came to meet the school's former Principal Mr. T.R. Pillay to learn more about private schools and how they compare with the public schools. When he began to explain what this school was all about, I remember wondering how authentic his tall claims were. In my head I was questioning if any of what he was saying was verifiable. What I was hearing did not tally with any of my experiences during my practicum in the public school system.

"A little while later, as I walked down the hallway, I started to check out some of the students' work and saw for myself the genuinely high caliber of students and more so of their teachers. Everything they did around this place seemed so high end. As I left the school, I remember feeling a deep sense of admiration and awe for both those who deliver the program and those who seemed to be thriving in it. How I wished I too could be part of this professional environment!

"I realized though that if I was to seek an opportunity to join this team of highly motivated and driven educators, I needed to further augment my professional and spiritual qualifications. At once, I signed up for a course in SSEHV integration for elementary teachers at the British Institute of EHV in Leicester, UK.

"Thanks to its early introduction in Junior Kindergarten, by Grade 3, morning meditation is a pretty intense experience. Many of my students receive clear insights and visions during this quiet tuning-in time, which we share during the

circle discussion right after. I believe it is because of such sincere introspection at this early age that the children are able to follow the straight and narrow path.”

We can observe this blossoming of values in Lavanya Sivakumar of Grade 2 who says, “I like to care for and share with my sisters a lot more than I used to. When they are happy, I am happy. I help my mom around the house so she wouldn’t have to do as much work. I really love the teachers in our school because they are very patient with me and help me understand anything I need help with.”

Kunj and Suresh Mehendiratta, parents of Karn and Sanya, acknowledge this reality: “We are so blessed to have our kids attend the best school where they are loved and taught by the best and highly dedicated teachers, volunteers and other staff members, who put their heart and soul into helping our children get better each day.”

Why The Children Love This School?

The relationship that the students have with this school is something which can rarely be found elsewhere. The impression that it leaves on their hearts and minds in the few formative years of their life is indelible.

Shaumithri Kulendran belongs to the first batch of Sathya Sai School students who completed Grade 6 and graduated last June (2006). One of the things she misses the most about the Sathya Sai School is the smart uniforms, which are not part of the public school system. “Uniforms brought out our inherent goodness and likeness. They don’t let people judge others by their looks or the brand names they wear. Uniforms put us all on the same pedestal. The students can be of any race or religion, they can be rich or maybe not as well-off, but no one really cares about it. No one is worried about each other’s outer appearance or the price tag on their designer clothes, shoes, accessories. We are able to concentrate on inner strengths of every person rather than the superficial and outer identities...I miss wearing the uniform that bears the name of this special school.”

Kirthana Sasitharan is another Sathya Sai School alumna who misses the school. “Everyone was so cooperative and willing to help. I felt I had over 100 brothers and sisters all of whom loved and cared for me. My teachers gave me so much love and compassion and sat down patiently to explain stuff till I got it. We were like one big family,” she fondly recollects.

Shrishti Ahuja joined the school in Grade 4 in the year 2005. Coming from a public school, Shrishti was overwhelmed by the warm welcome her peers and teachers gave her. “I will never forget this school. It is like a second home. My favourite part is figuring out that the real purpose of life is... to enjoy it and learn from my mistakes. Can you imagine living a life without knowing why you were born? This school has taught me how to build my character.”

With three more years to go before she graduates, Grade 3 student Devanshi Shukla already knows what she will miss the most about the school when she leaves it. “The loving and peaceful atmosphere of our school is my favourite. It always keeps me calm. Daily meditation makes my tensions, worries, anxieties and bad thoughts go away. I like sending light to everyone who is suffering during meditation. It helps me feel one with the entire universe.”

Keshan Sritharan of Grade 5 began his seven years at this school in Junior Kindergarten. “The meditation at the start of each day allows me to begin my morning peacefully, in awareness of the light within me and my connection to the rest of the universe...The most important lesson I have learned is to treat everyone the same way I would like to be treated. I will carry this with me throughout my life.”

“The most valuable life lessons I will take to my new environment are the five human values and their many sub-values. How can I ever forget what my family and I learned from this school?” asks Janani Nandakumar of Grade 3.

Innovative Ideas to Instill Values

While the great debate on the need for character education rages among educators and decision makers in North America, for six years now, the Sathya Sai School of Canada has successfully balanced academic excellence and character education, carving a niche for itself as a unique private school. Values are unmistakably evident in the overall climate of the school, and this is because the school has found innovative ways to instill these timeless principles in the young minds. One such interesting concept is the ‘value under the spotlight for a two month period’.

Under this program, the ten months (September-June) of the school year are divided into 5 segments of 2 months each, to coincide with the five human values that form the foundation of the school’s Character Education Program.

Every two months of the school calendar have a value under focus.

During morning announcements, the Grade 2 students who broadcast from the ‘Valueland Radio Station’ read the daily Thought for the Day which is related to the value under spotlight. Following the morning assembly, each class has a tuning-in time where the students and the teacher sit down in a circle and meditate on the light of a candle which they visualize internally and then expand to envelope the universe and all its inhabitants, feeling a sense of oneness with all the beings in all the worlds and praying for universal peace, happiness and harmony.

Following the quiet meditation time, students discuss the day’s Thought for the Day and its application and relevance in their daily lives. Apart from Swami’s precious sayings, quotes are also selected from many great leaders, teachers and thinkers, past and present, such as Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama and even the Berenstain Bears (popular children books with value stories).

Starting the school day with the first period dedicated to Sathya Sai Education in Human Values sets the tone for focused and calm learning ahead for the rest of the day. While the lessons plans of every teacher from period two onwards conform to the expectations of the Ontario Academic Curriculum, the teachers of the Sathya Sai School of Canada further fine-tune the outcome of their teaching strategies to ensure a values connection.

Whether it is a lesson in Math, Language Arts, Physical Education, Social Studies, Science and so on, the teachers plan the lessons, teaching aids, and outcomes from a values lens. In the end, the students are able to make the connection between life experiences and the place of human values in them.

Each school year begins with the spotlight on the value of Right Conduct for the months of September and October. This ties in perfectly with laying out the rules and regulations governing good conduct in the classroom, gym, playground, bus and other areas. Team building, cooperation and respect for peers and teachers during group dynamics are some of the important lessons students imbibe early in the academic year, minimizing time wasted on disciplining and conflict resolution during class time.

November and December are devoted to the value of Peace, connecting well with the theme of peace on earth. During this season, the school community honours the nation's World War II veterans on Remembrance Day and they joyfully celebrate such festivals as Eid, Diwali, Hanukkah, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Representatives from various faith groups are invited to special assemblies organized in this connection. Most guest speakers are impressed by the depth of understanding of their faith and its tenets displayed by the multi-faith student body during the question and answer sessions.

and January and February spell Love in the Air, expressed in many different ways. Students replace the rampant consumerism associated with Valentine's day into a valuable learning experience by visiting and singing value songs at two major facilities that are home to the elderly in Toronto. They bring joy and good cheer to the lonely senior citizens turning it into a truly 'Valentine' experience.

Every year, they also collect over half a tonne of vegetarian, non-perishable food items for the Food Bank used by the needy residents of the city of Toronto. The youngest scholars, the little kindergartners, take over the Christmas tree every January and February and transform it into a mitten tree, decorating it with mittens and warm accessories for the homeless.

The Mitten Tree – Mighty in Love

Despite the freezing, arctic weather conditions, there is but one tree, a truly special one that blooms every February in the heart of Toronto, its branches laden heavy with a bumper crop of love. The Kindergarten-led initiative of the mitten tree has become a proud tradition of the Sathya Sai School of Canada. Typically, every year, when school reopens in January, the school's Christmas tree sheds all its shiny trimmings and reincarnates as the mitten tree. Kindergartners then begin their annual campaign of making a small personal sacrifice, such as foregoing a chocolate bar or a similar treat to buy

a pair of warm mittens, gloves, scarf or a hat for their homeless sisters and brothers in the city of Toronto. These tokens of love are then hung on the mitten tree in place of the Christmas decorations.

Inspired by the leadership and compassion demonstrated by the youngest of our students, children from all other grades, namely Grade 1 to Grade 6, join in enthusiastically to augment their efforts by bringing in warm accessories for those who are left to brave the severe elements without proper winter gear. By the time Valentine's month approaches, the mitten tree is laden and drooping with tokens of students' heart-felt love and sacrifice. These are then packaged in specially decorated boxes that the kindergartners prepare as a part of their Art curriculum. Covered with pink hearts and loving quotes from Swami who inspires them to feel kinship with all creation, the Kindergartners prepare these gift hampers which are then delivered to shelters for the homeless in the city.

The heart-shaped cards carry loving messages such as "With extra love to keep you warm."

In the current year (2007), for instance, a total of 254 pairs of woollen accessories were collected which included a high quality jacket, loads of mittens, scarves and hats and even sweaters.

March and April usher hope, renewal and spring, making Non-violence the ideal value of the season. Students participate in observing Lent, Easter and Earth day by cleansing their hearts, minds and their environment. The entire school community participates in the Mayor of Toronto's call for a 20 minute make-over every year in April to clean up the elegant city by stepping out and picking litter in open spaces around the school and in public parks.

For weeks leading up to Good Friday and Easter, Miss Poddar and her Grade 1 students try to understand the spirit behind the tradition by developing selfless love themselves. They maintain a personalized daily assessment diary where they note their personal sacrifices, if any, on a daily basis and how much money, time, energy and food they are able to save by giving up a personal pleasure, which is then directed towards a good cause such as supporting their adopted sister Murni in Indonesia. In the end, they add up the total savings generated as a result of their self-control.

Every year, a large number of students make a significant discovery, namely that there is life without television! They give up their favourite addiction, namely watching TV in favour of playing sports or reading a good book. Other Grade 1 students help out their parents by performing extra chores at home, such as loading the dishwasher, sorting and folding laundry, serving breakfast to their family on weekends, cleaning their rooms and making beds. Many of them give up candy, gum and chocolates for the entire 40 days leading to Easter. Instead, they switch to healthier snacks such as fruits and vegetables. Other creative students resolve that upon return from school, instead of running into the house, with a trail of woollen accessories strewn around, they ought to sort and store their own and family members' gloves, hats, mittens and other easy-to-misplace accessories neatly in their designated place, thus

saving time and energy required while looking for them the next time, when they are stepping out.

The last two months of the school year, namely May and June, bring the value of Truth to the forefront. This season coincides with the school's annual Walk for Values, a brain-child of the Sathya Sai School of Canada's Parent Council. What began as a local community outreach project has now inspired sister events nationally across Canadian cities and internationally in countries as far as Australia.

The Walk for Values this year will be held on June 10 and the staff, students and parents of the school are leaving no stone unturned to make the event inspiring and memorable for everybody, especially the local community. They had a promotion for this event in Dundas square in downtown Toronto on May 27 and will be following this up with another similar event on June 3.

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Exceptional Experiential Learning – 'Learning Through Serving'

The learning in the school is not confined to only value-based lessons in classrooms, there is also another significant 'practical workshop', so to say, which is inspired by Swami's ideals of community outreach service projects. And the kind of virtues that this program instills in young hearts is profound. In bite size servings, customized for easy assimilation, the students learn the priceless lesson of the underlying connectivity that exists behind all manifest life.

Several times each school year, students collect vegetarian, non-perishable food items for the Daily Bread Food Bank and visit lonely elderly senior citizens in their lodges at Christmas time and on Valentine's Day to serenade them by singing value songs and presenting them with hand-made gifts.

By doing chores like the child humanitarian Ryan Hreljac (a Canadian child who at the age of six, began raising money for the world's most needy, and has since raised over \$1.5 million for water projects in Africa), they have raised more money than any other school in Canada for water wells in Africa where two wells have been dug in the name of the Sathya Sai School of Canada. They continue to support their adopted sister Murni in Indonesia through the Foster Parents Plan of Canada as well as other disadvantaged children globally by making personal sacrifices and performing extra chores. They are not allowed to seek handouts from family members.

Students are excited to participate in various other experiential lessons, having oodles of fun along the way. Says Darini Hariharan of Grade 2: "My school gives me lots of opportunities to help others. Children Helping Children (CHC) is my favourite project. It allows me to perform extra chores at home and earn money to help my brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world who are poor. Last year, I told my parents that I did not want to celebrate my birthday with a party. I also worked hard, performing many extra

chores around the house to earn money. I then shared all this money with the children who live in an orphanage run by our beloved Swami in India. That made me so happy. This year, I again help my Dad to vacuum and dust the house and my Mom in the kitchen. I also fold washed clothes. I perform many extra chores for which my parents gave me money towards my CHC collection. I also sacrificed the \$100 my parents gave me on Tamil New Year for spending when I grow up. I decided I would work and earn money on my own when I grow up. For now, I added the \$100 to my CHC collection. In the last two years, I worked hard and sacrificed my birthday parties and New Year gifts to raise more than \$700 to bring joy to children I have not met but who may be sad or sick and who I would like to be happy, just like me. My school teaches me that when others are happy, our hearts grow and glow with joy. I love to make a difference.”

For Nikita Jariwala of Grade 6 bringing joy to others is the ultimate gratification. “I feel so happy that I’m doing something good for someone else. I love to see the smiles on their faces...I have learned many life lessons: always speaking the truth, respecting elders, forgive and forget, think before performing an action and always keeping the big picture in mind before doing anything. Truly, my learning experience here has been spectacular, both for my self development and academic growth...I have enjoyed learning the fun way by participating in the Science Fair, Public Speaking Contest, Spelling Bee and by representing our school at the Terry Fox Run to find a cure for cancer, visiting Seniors’ homes, our annual Christmas concert and the famous Walk for Values. Last year, our class was on the float. We danced and sang songs throughout the walk and I pledged to practice more patience. I love yoga and meditation because they improve my ability to focus and concentrate. I’m also able to relax, feel calm and reflect.”

Experiential learning is indeed the key to the school’s successful implementation of the Character Education Program, and the earlier mentioned kindergarten initiative, the mitten tree service project, is one such with sets the ball rolling quite early and has deep positive impact in the students’ psyche.

Truly, future Canadians are being groomed here day in and day out in the art of responsible citizenship. One such student is Krithika Ragupathi of Grade 3. A high achiever in both character education and academic excellence, Krithika loves her school because of who she can look up to as her role models. “I liked our former Principal Mr. Pillay’s smile the most. I love my current Principal Dr. Revathi and my teachers. Everyone here is so nice. One day I would like to be nice like them. When I leave this school, I will miss them all but the thing I will miss the most is our Beloved Founder Sathya Sai Baba’s picture in our school. Looking at it, I feel very happy. After graduating, I am going to spread the values to the other schools I go to and I will set a good example for people so that they too will be inspired to practice the human values.”

Parents as Partners

The students of the school are not the only ones who are being transformed due to the values education. Their parents, siblings and members of extended family too are reaping the rich harvest of the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values program. And in fact, one of the principal reasons for the success of the programme is the parents. Swami says, ***“Parents and teachers are the sculptors who have to mould the shape of the students for whom they are responsible. If parents and teachers set the right example, the students will automatically blossom into models of excellence and bring glory to the nation.”***

It is heartening that the Ministry of Education, Government of Ontario too echoed the same sentiments. Their document ‘Finding Common Ground’ said:

“Parents and guardians have the primary responsibility for character development, with the support of others in the community.”

In fact, research shows that there is a clear connection between genuine parent involvement in schools and student achievement. If it takes a village to raise a child, raising him/her upright takes an entire community of people who practice the virtues themselves.

In the Sathya Sai School of Canada, the admission process is as rigorous for the parents as it is for the students. Recalling her experience, Anu Jain, parent of Grade 2 student Alisha Bapoo, says: “I will never forget the interview process. I work for a multi-media company and let me assure you my job interview was much easier than the grueling interview that Akbar and I went through to get Alisha into the school. I was sweating on that cold winter afternoon by the time the meeting was over. Looking back, today, I realize why it is important to make sure that the applicant’s family is the right fit for the school environment. It is such an engaging partnership.”

In this School, while accepting their child’s admission, every parent has to commit to completing the 15-week Dynamic Value Parenting Workshop within the first year of their child’s enrolment at the School. This is mandatory.

The aim of this program is two-fold:

- Recognizing that home is the fundamental political, economic and social unit of society and a society’s economic well-being and stability rests on the foundation of good practice of values at home, this program supports the establishment of a stable social system based on tolerance, love, equality, respect, compassion and justice.
- To create happiness and fulfillment in the lives of members of a family so that each functions optimally in the physical, mental,

emotional and social spheres, which will create stable family and social systems.

To put it simply, the program asks the parents to become aware of their own and their child's developmental needs and make a commitment to implement the five human values (Truth, Right Conduct, Love, Peace and Non-Violence) in their life. And this is conveyed through 15 two-hour workshops which are interesting and practical.

Some of the topics dealt with are - How are parents suited to implement Sathya Sai Education in Human Values, Role of Parents in the Moral Development of the Child, Seizing opportunities for Teaching Human Values, Identifying dynamic, Enabling & disabling processes in daily family life, Human Value of Love: Spouse Bond, etc.

At the end of each module, participants apply the shared knowledge and experiences to their own family circumstances by setting a personal goal for improvement or change. And this takes the form of an action plan, which they try to put into practice during the week. When the children of parents who had participated in the workshops, were asked if they noticed any changes in their parents, they indicated that their parents have changed and have become more loving, open in communication, supportive and were spending more time with them. Of course, true and lasting change takes time but the parents at least know how to go about it and keep the momentum.

Ron and Beena Mucklestone, parents of Divakshi, Grade 2 and Sumeer, Junior Kindergarten, are both graduates of the Value Parenting program. They both say: "The Dynamic Value Parenting course provided a 'toolbox' of good parenting skills and techniques. As and when situations arise, as parents, we are now aware of these tools and try our best to use them in our daily activities as parents and in our relationships with our children. Before taking the course, we were not so consciously aware of these techniques and were less able to reflect on the right course of action to take as parents. Fortunately we took this course while our children were small – before we could do too much damage to them.

"As Canadian parents, who are also believers in the message of Sri Sathya Sai, we find that the values taught in the school both complement the positive values of Canadian culture and help to fill the 'gaps' where mainstream Canadian culture has shortcomings. The school's emphasis on the universal values of punctuality, self-reliance, respect for diverse cultures, and charitable work are definite reinforcements of the positive values that are present in Canadian society. Where modern Canadian society often falls short is in the areas of civic values: respect for elders, responsibility to society, serving one's parents and society as a whole - these values are present in the Sathya Sai School, and make for a more well-rounded, well-cultured student." Now, Ron is also a trained facilitator of this workshop.

Another couple, Raanu and Mohan Singh of Toronto are busy parents raising four young children, one of whom currently attends the Sathya Sai School. "Our four year old son Jayden is currently in Junior Kindergarten...Value Parenting neatly tied together all the inspirational books we had been reading on parenting. It taught us to deal with our kids by the tone we use to communicate with them. We have also become more mindful of how we relate to each other as husband and wife. Prior to Jayden attending the Sai School, it was a challenge getting all the children to pray regularly. Since Jayden started light meditation and prayer, it changed the atmosphere at home and the two oldest children are more receptive to praying and are more contemplative and conscientious in their behaviour. Our entire family of six members has undergone transformation ever since Jayden enrolled at the Sathya Sai School."

Vince and Indi Rico, the parents of Amy of Senior Kindergarten, admit that "at the end of the Dynamic Value Parenting course, we understood how it allows all new parents to find a level playing field as we all are on the same page with regarding our responsibilities as the school's partners. We are now more mindful about continuing the same character education program at home while our children are in our care... As a Roman Catholic I find these values are life-affirming and transcend the limitations of race and religion. They further reiterate the fundamentals of all faiths. We have not seen another school that has such a consistent quality of administration, and people who really care and exemplify the values themselves "

Without parents on side, the school knows it cannot successfully implement its Character Education program. Therefore the school administrators treat this aspect with a lot of care and these parent workshops are conducted always by specially trained facilitators from the larger Sai family, who are, in fact, the backbone of the school. There are also events like Family Nights which are held several times a school year, grade-wise. On these occasions, teachers or invited guests who are experts in their respective fields make presentations to the school parents on topics of concern and interest which range from preparing nutritious vegetarian meals/snacks to the effect of television and computer games on young children as well as responsible internet surfing, enabling study habits and preparing for EQAO exams. This is yet another step to ensure that the school and every home work effectively as partners to help students blossom into beautiful beings.

The 'Parents as partners' programme has become so successful that currently one of the most successful outreach projects of the school is in fact a parent council sponsored programme – The Walk for Values, in which over 3,000 people participate annually, pledging to practice a value for self-transformation and the improvement of family and community life. Since 2006, the Walk for Values has become a national event with Sai Centres participating across the country, raising awareness about Baba's teachings on character and values education, spirituality and morality. This year (2007), the event became international with Australia replicating the novel idea with its own national Walk for Values.

Volunteers – Exemplars of Values in Action

It comes as a surprise to many that though the Sathya Sai School of Canada with a student population of 160 in eight grades (JK, SK, Gr. 1 – 6) has been functioning smoothly for the last six years, yet till recently, it had no janitorial staff! It was and still is served by the loving hands of many committed volunteers.

From polishing the floors, to vacuuming, mopping, dusting, maintenance of classrooms, washrooms, corridors, gym, playground and school equipment... all cleaning and secretarial services are provided by men and women who operate with clock-work precision, according to their assigned schedule and undertake these chores as a part of their personal discipline. While many volunteers are grateful school parents, others are members of the Sathya Sai fraternity across the Greater Toronto Area, all committed to the highest social and civic ideals befitting responsible citizenship.

The grateful school community consists of students, their families, staff, Trustees, the Sai Organization of Canada and scores of selfless volunteers, friends and supporters who work during and after school hours and behind the scenes to ensure its smooth and seamless running.

Three retired Ontario teachers Mr. Chetan Ahooja, Mr. Mohinder Kapoor and Mrs. Vinay Nehru are volunteers who run the school's Technical Studies Program, teaching computer applications to students from Senior Kindergarten to Grade 6.

Mrs. Vinay Nehru explains her motivation for driving a fair distance to report for work: "As a high school teacher in Ontario's public school system, I wasted half my teaching life maintaining discipline. As though to reward my patience and perseverance, now in my old age, I have finally discovered a school where I come to do what I am meant to do--that is teach children, not discipline them. Oh, what a pleasure!

"It is my hope that some day, all education, in all schools, all over the world will be imparted through the medium of love, as it is at Sathya Sai School." To read more from Mrs. Vinay Nehru, [click here](#).

Her fellow volunteer teacher Mr. Mohinder Kapoor relocated to work here. "Even though I lived in Cornwall, about 400 kilometres away from the school's location in Toronto, I felt that my qualifications and experience as a retired educator would be best utilized here. So I made the move...I derive a great sense of inner satisfaction by doing this little service at the Sathya Sai School. My mind is at peace when I am in the company of the students, staff, and many dedicated volunteers there," he says. [Click here](#) to read Mr. Mohinder Kapoor's full story.

Loved by her students, Mrs. Sangeeta Rajwani is the school's highly creative Visual Arts volunteer teacher. She has been with the school for seven years now. Describing her experiences, she says, "It's heaven on earth to be at the

school. The children are angels. When I'm there, I forget everything about the outside world. I love His children. The moment I enter the building, I am able to live in the present with no thought of where I just came from or where I will be going when I leave.Here you ooze with joy while you grow in your mind and heart." To read more from Mrs. Sangeeta Rajwani, [click here](#).

It takes many hands, hearts and minds and thousands of man-hours of hard work to make this beautiful school happen. Yet the common energy that propels everyone involved to such altruism and selflessness is the powerful personality of Sri Sathya Sai and His compelling example of boundless love.

Every act of service performed at the school is an expression of gratitude to Swami for His gift of this institution to Canada, a project that has now become a personal legend for each individual involved with it. To be associated with an institution that bears Sathya Sai Baba's sacred name is a blessing and a responsibility that no one ever takes for granted. The President of the Sri Sathya Sai Education Trust of Canada, Mr. Dayal Mirchandani sees the school as "An ideal opportunity to unite all those who share this sacred vision of a contemplative, values-based model of education. When we work in unity for a greater cause, not only the students, but everyone involved experiences a spurt in inner growth."

What makes the Sathya Sai School and every Sai project around the globe so sacred is that everyone and everything involved is directly inspired by Swami and His selfless nature. Like His life, Baba's service projects come without any catch, fine print, strings attached, hidden agendas, expectation of gratitude or publicity of any kind.

The Sun Behind the Shine

Though always not apparent to all, Swami is, in fact, the life and soul of this hallowed school. He, is in fact, their perfect role model and hero. One day, each of them aspires to be as loving, selfless, caring, compassionate and wise as He is. The students know it is a privilege to wear a uniform that bears the crest of His unique school, which many of them describe as a temple of learning.

"Sri Sathya Sai Baba is my favourite teacher. He tells us to watch who we hang out with. He says: 'Tell me your company and I will tell you who you are'. He teaches us truth, honesty and optimism. He tells us to live in unity because even though we all look different on the outside, we are all the same inside. Isn't that so cool?" says Archana Thayanithy of Grade 3.

Much of the student population has never met or seen their beloved Founder in person, yet He looms large on their emotional, mental and spiritual radar as a beacon of all things good and positive. Many saw Him for the first time when they came as a big bubbly group to Prasanthi Nilayam in July 2006 to have the rare chance of seeing Him, hearing Him, talking to Him and also presenting a drama titled Power of One. That is when Saivijay Bhat of Grade

2 *"Knew that our Founder loves His students where ever in the world they may be. I am very happy and thankful to be a student of the Sathya Sai School of Canada. "*

What touched Grade 1 student SaiSwaran Manorathan the most was the opportunity to hear His voice. "I heard Baba speak for the first time in person. Baba has the sweetest voice in the world. I know He always tells us to speak softly and sweetly. He speaks softly and sweetly Himself!"

Describing the *ashram* vibe, Saiprashani Jeyandran of Grade 2 says: "The atmosphere in Puttaparti was very quiet and peaceful. I felt very powerful and gained spiritual guidance. I actually touched Him gently by keeping my hand on His leg. That touch made me feel powerful and blessed."

GanashSai Vannithamby of Grade 2 is a confident actor who got to say some powerful lines to Baba up close and personally. Recalling his good fortune, he says, "Looking straight at Swami, I said 'I am *Sat, Chit, Ananda*' (Awareness, Consciousness and Bliss) with a lot of force and confidence. It was a great feeling. Then the most important time came... My heart was beating so fast. I walked with the garland towards Swami. Swami touched my forehead. I really don't know how to explain my joy during this most precious moment. Even now, I feel His touch on my forehead every time I think about Swami. I believe Swami really and truly loves me and accepted me as His child. I really am the luckiest kid in the world."

Prem Sai Ramani, now a school alumna, treasures his own precious memory. "There sat Swami, staring at us, sharing His love. It was bliss. You could feel His power like a fireplace heating up a room. I looked up at Him for every line I said, and whenever I did, He smiled, smiling a Swami smile. It was one of those half smiles. I can see that smile right now. It was a beautiful smile. It was the highlight of my trip. Today, I still think of that smile. And I think of that experience, the experience of a lifetime!"

Each student relates to Swami in their own way. For Prashant Munshi of Grade 1, "Sai Baba is Love, Truth, Right Conduct, Peace and Non-violence. On July 13, when we performed in front of Sai Baba, I didn't take my eyes off of Him even for a second. After the Grand Finale, He asked me my name. I said "Prashant". I felt very, very happy. I felt as though I had fainted and my spirit just went out of my body and I felt very good. I was filled with love. My gift for His love is that I will never get into any bad habits. I will remember Him and chant His name and I will always keep Him in the centre of my heart."

Grade 4 student Phillip Hannides' spiritual odyssey began "Even before I arrived in India, I felt love coming from our Founder. I knew nothing would go wrong because Swami was there and He would protect me. I felt like I was going to have a good time there and felt very loved.

"When I arrived in India, I already felt Swami's energy radiating through my heart. When I saw our Founder for the very first time, I felt very special. I realized He is always watching over us and guiding us."

His brother Nikita Hannides of Grade 6 received a life lesson during the play. He recalls: "When we were singing the grand finale song at end of the play **Power of One**, I wanted to make Swami happy. So I smiled as big as I could and the next moment, all of a sudden, Swami had this huge smile on his face. Swami proved to me that very second that if you truly love somebody, then that person will always love you back. In the end, all our experiences are a reflection and resound of our own feelings. I learned an important lesson in pure love."

Saejjith Nair of Grade 3 returned inspired to live up to the name of the character he played in front of his Founder. "Now, my challenge in life is to become an earnest person and a good human being, like the character Ernest that I played in the drama. With His love and His teachings to guide me, I know I can do it."

It was a close tryst that Ganesh Naidoo of Grade 5 will never forget. "When I touched His feet, I felt an electric shock or energy shoot up my hand. I also felt really warm for a little while after that. I was surprised that I wasn't nervous or scared to perform for our Founder. I think that is because I consider Him as an incarnation of Love and a wonderful leader," he remembers.

For Grade 6 student Raajat Gupta, the experience of being within Baba's aura was fascinating. He says: "Every day, when our Founder passed by me, I could feel an uplifting feeling in my heart, as if all my burdens were gone. But that's not all. After performing the play, when He came to take pictures with us, I got to touch His feet. The experience was amazing and simultaneously gave me an incredible energy surge. It was as if a bolt of lightning had struck me. I felt as if good qualities had replaced any bad habits. I felt perfect. That one moment, I will cherish forever!"

An accomplished actor, Sindhura Thirumal of Grade 5 landed herself the lead role in the play. She took it to heart and gave it her all and received so much more. She reflects: "After the whole play was over, He looked at me and said, 'Come near me'. Later when I thought about what He had said, I realized He meant for me to come close to Him spiritually because physically I was already beside Him, at His right hand side. I felt extremely blessed knowing that I would be closer to Him spiritually because of what He had said. I now feel drawn to my spirit, the Power of the One within me."

Whatever their equation with the embodiment of love, Sri Sathya Sai, all students of His Canadian school enjoy an indescribable and special relationship with him. Their pure hearts are drawn to the warmth of their beloved Founder whose generosity and loving care provides them with such a nurturing environment to learn and grow.

Touching Testimonials from Community Members and Institutions

Given their outstanding behaviour and excellence in academics and extra-curricular activities, it is no wonder that the students of the school have won many awards and accolades, but what is more important is that all these laurels have gone a long way in raising awareness of the importance of values and character education in their community too. Their keen sense of engagement, discipline, public speaking and singing skills endear them to people wherever they go. They have addressed rallies and assemblies on the place of the five human values in their lives, which include an Inter-faith prayer after the World Trade Centre tragedy and a welcome dinner for the Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu and various other community and political forums. At various Spelling Bee contests, students continue to secure top positions in both the Senior and Junior categories each year. This exposure has resulted in self-assured, eager to learn, calm, model students, often wise beyond their years.

From time to time, students from the Faculties of Education from the University of Toronto and York University visit the school to observe the Sathya Sai School model as part of their research on alternate schools. This is what two B.Ed. students, who spent some time in the classrooms experiencing the life in a typical day at the Sathya Sai School of Canada for a week, said:

“The impact of positive encouragement from the teachers demonstrates the well-behaved character of the students. Having visited various classrooms, I am impressed with the integration of the curriculum and the five human values. As a future educator, I hope one day I will be able to be a part of this dynamic institution.” – Meron Keleta

The character education program is “something extraordinary and so complimentary to the emotional development of children.” – Sumi Arif

Upon return to their school, the teachers held an exhibition on the unique Sathya Sai education model. In their email, they reported, “We presented Sathya Sai School for our alternate school awareness storefront at York University Keele campus on 13th April. Our professors and classmates were amazed. They all said this school is unbelievable, unique and extraordinary! We presented all the information in a seminar and made a poster for the storefront. Twenty five alternate schools were presented on that day by our classmates. Sai School is now on the York University’s list of best alternate schools.”

A local librarian was so impressed with the good behaviour of the Sathya Sai students in her library that she insisted the school call a meeting of parents in her library so that she could tell them how special and different and well-behaved Sathya Sai School students were. At her request, the school held one of the school-wide Family Nights at the Toronto Public Library where Mrs. Linda Kennedy shared her admiration of Sathya Sai School students with the parents of the school.

Upon hearing of the school's stellar academic performance in the media in February this year, Mrs Kennedy wrote: "It was so wonderful to see that Sathya Sai School is considered one of the best in the country! Having worked with students and teachers since the school's inception, I have the greatest respect for Sathya Sai School and have always felt that it is the best school I have ever known! The teachers and students have been a joy to work with. The students demonstrate academic excellence, but what really stands out about them is how full of love and empathy they are. They will change the world with their example! Your top standing is well deserved. It has truly been an honour to work with such a wonderful school. Congratulations!"

The peaceful atmosphere in the school draws the awe of even the most casual visitor to the school, be it the locksmith, or the mail carrier from Canada Post who once spontaneously commented, "It feels awfully nice in here...unlike any school I have ever delivered mail at."

A gentleman who drove a mobile dental hospital for a special Brush-o-mania assembly two years ago, walked into the school premises and wept because of what he described as "a self-cleansing experience ... I feel my soul has been washed here."

[The Brush-o-mania is an annual event organized by Rotarians in which the every student of the school participates. The students get a guided educational tour of a mobile dental van and learn about dental hygiene integrated with human values.]

The professional school photography company *Lifetouch Canada* that comes for the annual picture day routine is also pleased with the discipline of the children. Every year the photographers comment on the smoothness with which they are able to accomplish their job at the Sathya Sai School as compared to other schools. The manager had once vowed that if she ever had a child, this was the school she would send him/her to.

Sathya Sai's love energy pervades the atmosphere palpably and is evident in many ways, including the unusual phenomenon of the 'growing garland' - the lovely garland on Baba's photo that has mysteriously grown longer to unimaginable lengths, sometimes double the size on rare occasions.

The growing garland for the school is a potent symbol, latent with valuable lessons. The common thread that runs through the diverse petals tying them into a whole, symbolize the underlying sap of life that runs through all diversity connecting everyone and everything in the universe. Many see it as a symbol of the growing influence of the school's values-based Character Education program in the community.

For eight year old Parnika Godkhindi of Grade 2 her most treasured experiences at the school include "those overgrown garlands on our Founder Sri Sathya Sai Baba's picture. They make me feel His divine presence in our

school, filling the atmosphere with divinity, warmth, love and peace. I will also never forget when I joined the school in Junior Kindergarten, our Principal Mr. Pillay addressed each of us by our first name and greeted us every morning and bid us goodbye at the doorstep after school. I felt so loved... The most important lesson I have learned is that no matter how highly educated I am or whatever position I achieve in life, the only thing that matters is my character. In order to develop my character, I have to work on it right from my childhood and apply all the five human values to everything I do in life.” Parnika is a recipient of the school’s coveted MODEL 3 award which stands for the characteristics of a true practitioner of the five human values. Decoded, it means, **Motivated, Organised, Disciplined, Exemplary and Loving** in three ways – Love for Learning, Love for Humanity and the Environment, and Love for God.

One parent who is all too familiar with the school’s loving environment is Irina Visotskaya whose children Nikita Hannides and Phillip Hannides attend Grades 6 and 4 at the Sathya Sai School. For Irina, “God is Time. God answered our prayers at the hardest time of our life. A few months after my children had joined the school, their father passed away. The love and support we received from everyone at the school was so heartwarming and exactly what the boys and I needed at that time. God’s love is so amazing! He takes the world away but gives His immeasurable, unconditional love instead...in our case, God washed us with an abundance of this love through our association with the school community...Learning your true nature by practicing love is what the Sathya Sai School of Canada teaches.”

For Grade 2 student Sindu’s parents Lini and Jeyapalan Rajalingam, this wisdom is quite apparent: “Day in and day out, we find that Sindu is learning and growing a lot as a student of Sathya Sai and is also teaching us life lessons. Sometimes, he comments on our behaviours when we least expect it and those comments are profound and very meaningful that you would not otherwise hear from an average seven year old.”

Sensitizing Public Educators

As part of its efforts to create awareness about values among educators of other schools and institutions as well as members of local community, on March 23, 2005, the Sathya Sai School of Canada sponsored a National Symposium on Character Education, followed by a Four-Day Workshop presented by Carole Alderman of the British Institute of Sathya Sai Education in which nearly 100 teachers and community workers participated. According to Dr. M.V. Kanchana, the National Education Coordinator of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization of Canada, “The Workshop and Symposium were well attended by teachers showing interest in the integration of values in the curriculum. The presentation made by the teachers of the Sathya Sai School, at the symposium, provided a model for integrating values in the existing curriculum. The message was very well received and appreciated by the educators who attended the symposium. The symposium stressed on character education as the key to deal with the

decline in the moral values, growing violence and drug abuse among children and society in general.

“To take the effort to its next logical step, the Sathya Sai School also hosted a 4 day workshop on Character Education for teachers, again free of cost, over the Easter weekend. One hundred participants, many of whom are educators, from all over Canada, attended the workshop conducted by Carol Alderman, the Director of the British Institute of Sathya Sai Education. All of them went home well equipped with the necessary tools to implement SSEHV in their respective places,” adds Dr. Kanchana.

Carol Alderman has extensive experience in training teachers in the UK to organize their daily lesson plans, learning activities inside and outside the classroom from a values perspective. Participants from across Canada attended the workshop to learn ways to integrate the universal human values, through song, story and hands-on activities, within the daily academic curriculum.

Summer Camp Inspires Inner City Students

The Summer Camp was one of the first initiatives emerging from the Character Education Symposium and SSEHV Workshop in March 2005. One hundred participants had received training in the SSEHV program and as a result, members of the Sai Organization under the guidance of the Principal and Staff of the Sathya Sai School of Canada were well prepared to take it into the wider community.

The request to conduct an EHV Summer Camp in a public school came immediately after the symposium from the Principal of Brookview Middle School that is situated in a low-income area in Toronto. It was the opportunity the Sai Organization was waiting for, and the timing was perfect.

In her appreciation letter, the Principal wrote:

“Many thanks for introducing the values program in the form of a summer camp. The young facilitators (youth volunteers) were superb and of the highest caliber. The Brookview students were sad at the end of the program and made incredible gains from all the activities and relationships which were forged and fostered through your magnificent program.”

As a result of the camp, the Principal of Brookview Public School invited Mr. T.R. Pillay, the then Principal of the Sathya Sai School of Canada to speak to her staff on Character Education at her school’s professional retreat in August 2005. He was accompanied by the teachers of the Sathya Sai School who presented the public school teachers with practical ideas on how to integrate values into the Ontario curriculum. These presentations were well-received.

Crown Jewel of Canada Sai Organization

British Columbia based school Trustee Dr. S.V. Evani described the school that binds the devotees of Swami across Canada, from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, as “the crown jewel of the Canadian Sai organization”.

And how true it is! It is in fact, a beacon of light, committed to revitalizing timeless values. Today, the Sathya Sai School of Canada has emerged as the learning ground for all stakeholders, young and old, who treasure it as Sathya Sai's priceless token of love to Canada. For the group of 333 which included school students, staff, trustees, volunteers and their families, who traveled to Prashanthi in July 2006 to express their gratitude to Swami, though their presentation “Power of One”, Sai is the ‘Only One’ soul and goal of their lives. July 13, 2006, the day when Swami witnessed the drama remains etched in gold in the annals of the school's history.

The geographic distance between Prashanthi Nilayam and the school in Toronto might be huge, but that does not dampen or diminish the warmth and the spirit of pure love that everyone and everything at this special school reflects. Every morning, future world leaders, arrive at the Sathya Sai School of Canada, looking bright in their neat uniforms, ready to allow the infinite goodness within them to unfold. Many of them are too young to realize the many vital responsibilities that await them as the harbingers of a brave new world order, one where the human values will govern all fields of life. Also unknown to them is their imminent and good fortune to usher in a new age where entire humanity will realize the oneness and sacredness of all creation, thereby fulfilling the prophecies that reflect humanity's highest aspirations.

With complete confidence in the validity of the organic values that make it so unique, the Sathya Sai School of Canada is forging ahead, pioneering the integration of Character Education with Academic Excellence. It is focused on promoting human excellence by raising good, wholesome future Canadian leaders and global citizens, instead of merely great whiz kids.

Kumaran Subendran of Grade 4 is one such future leader. He joined the school in Junior Kindergarten. He is already concerned about his graduation coming up in two years. “I will miss my beloved school, my friends and the most loving teachers. It is the best school ever. I hope to take the values in my heart wherever I go. I will be a leader and help others. I will not use bad language and hurt anyone. I will show compassion and be a good role model, just like my teachers here. To inspire others to follow my example, I will have to let go of my bad qualities. I will continue to work and improve my character and in the coming years, I will possess the qualities of a good leader and role model.”

Prarthana Tirikollur, of Grade 6 will be completing seven years at the school in June when she will graduate and join the public school system. Her take-away from her school experience, is a boost in self-confidence, the most vital

ingredient in a person's character. "We are amazing people and we are capable of anything. I know that no matter what, I will always stay special and I know that no one can ever change that. I know that I am perfect the way I am. When a person has confidence, the universe will change its way to yours. It is wonderful. I know for sure, God has made us for a purpose and that purpose, only we know. I will be ready to face the world and its ways and I know in my heart that I can achieve anything as long as I stay rooted to my practice of the five human values."

Drawing guidance and inspiration from its matchless Founder, universal teacher, Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the school community is looking forward to further growth, both within and without, to achieve greater success. The school aspires to be a model of holistic learning in North America, growing to a middle and high school. Some parents hope that one day it will become the Sathya Sai University of Canada, just as Sathya Sai Baba said on 17 November, 1999: "**start small and grow big**" for it is His school, a school He has blessed! As Prarthana echoed the sentiment so prophetically, when we have confidence in our vision, the universe will change its ways to ours, and luckily for those, who have experienced the impact of the Sathya Sai School of Canada, there is no dearth of trust in the Power of One that started it all!

To know more about the school, please visit www.sathyasaischool.ca

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FEATURE ARTICLES

THE GREATEST WONDER OF THE WORLD

By Prof. G Venkataraman

This year, the Sri Sathya Sai University has passed its twenty-fifth anniversary. [This article was written in November 2006]. The University is fairly well known in the country today, and understandably there are many visitors. Some come to just look around; some to attend Seminars and Conferences here, some to teach, some others as examiners; a few come for discussions, or for evaluation; many come to attend the annual Convocation; many more visit to witness the Sports Festival. Everyone unfailingly sees the fine buildings, the wonderful campuses, the admirable discipline, the spirit of self-confidence and self-reliance amongst the students, etc. All these are what readily meet the eye. I would rather like to describe and discuss in this article what visitors do not normally see. It is said in *Vedanta* that what seems real is unreal and what does not seem real is Real. In the same way, where Swami's Institute is concerned, it is what people do not normally see that tells the real story of this truly remarkable University.

Unique Philosophy - Unique Personality

To put matters in perspective, I would like to begin by referring to two points. The first concerns the philosophy underlying the educational system adopted here, while the second pertains to Swami's unique relationship with His students. As far as the first is concerned, Swami is quite clear that education must not be reduced to just stuffing the brain; instead, it must address in a balanced manner the needs of the body, the mind, and the soul. Swami often says that Education must be for life and not for merely eking out a living. If life is to be lived the way it really ought to be, then clearly a good and noble character must be the foundation; Integral Education is what facilitates the development and moulding of good character. This system of *Integral Education* was conceived and crafted by Bhagavan Baba and implemented by the first Vice Chancellor Prof. V K Gokak, from which time it has been operating most successfully.

As for the second of the two points mentioned above, in His Benedictory Address delivered on November 22, 1986, on the occasion of the Fifth Convocation, Swami said,

"Education must reveal the path, which enables man to tap the dormant spring of Divinity within, without becoming entangled with the mass of created objects. It has to lay stress on spiritual transformation, which is more fundamental than even moral uplift. The real sign of an educated person is his equal attitude towards all. He sees in Society, the manifestation of Divinity. Education does not divert man from Nature to the all-pervading Atma. Rather, it leads man to study Nature with the unifying Atmic outlook."

This statement is very important, especially the last two sentences, because they give us a clue to the remarkable and intimate relationship that Swami has with His students. Let us turn now to the history of the Institute.

Ladies First

The seeds were sown way back in 1968, when Swami established in Anantapur, a College for women. It was significant that His first College was for women rather than men; that in itself tells a story. One thing about Swami is that once He wills/wishes/decides to do something, He wastes no time in getting started. Thus, without waiting for the buildings to be ready, the Women's College started functioning right away in temporary quarters. The buildings came later and were duly inaugurated by the then President of India, Mr. V V Giri. That was in the year 1968. Speaking on that occasion, Bhagavan Baba said,

“India is being forged into Bhogabhoomi [land of luxury], a land of skyscrapers, tinned food, air-conditioning, and television. Indians are being shaped into an imitative, insurgent, ill-disciplined mass. They are being transplanted on other soils and encouraged to grow without roots. This is an insult to the past and a dangerous defiance of history. It is a sacrilege on the history of Time, and on the sole purpose of the human body. That is the reason I have decided that this College be inaugurated on Gurupournima Day, as a reminder of the highest tradition, in which the highest ideals of life were instilled by personal example and guidance by the Guru, to pupils eager to imbibe...The seed has been planted; it will sprout and spread, heavy with fruits, providing shade, security, and sustenance to all.”

Yes, the seed had indeed been planted, and what a majestic and magnificent tree has emerged from that tiny seed! Education being dear to Swami, He did not stop with merely establishing the Anantapur College. Rather, He became deeply involved in its functioning and made regular visits to Anantapur, spending several days at a time. There, He would talk to students and teachers, listen to Bhajans for extended periods, go on inspection trips around the Campus, and give Discourses. He would even drop into classrooms, sit at the back and quietly listen to the lecture in progress! Dr. Rajeswari Patel, formerly a student of the Anantapur Campus and now a teacher there, recalls those events:

The beautiful thing is He used to come and sit inside the classroom, when the classes were going on. He would sit behind, and listen to the lecture. And if the students turned round to look at Him, which they often did, He would say, “No, no, turn back and listen to your Teacher!” He used to be that casual! (From Radio Sai Archives).

Now why did Swami occasionally visit the classroom? Was it to check on the Teacher? Not entirely; He would, at the end of the class, often place the lesson taught in a wider perspective, far beyond what even the Teacher was aware of.

Whenever there was something important going on in Prasanthi Nilayam, Swami would send for the Anantapur students and give them a chance to participate in the local activities. For example, they often used to come to help with the construction of the *Sarva Dharma Stupa* that now majestically stands near the *Mandir*, and with the construction of the Poornachandra Auditorium. Here is a charming recollection of those days from Dr. Rajeswari Patel:

When the Sarva Dharma Stupa was being built, every week a bus used to be sent to Anantapur and we used to come to Puttaparthi to help in the construction. Today when we see that structure, we feel an intimate association with it. Swami used to come, go round, and supervise. I remember He once gave us an Interview right there, sitting on a small chair. We all sat around Him on the sand near the Stupa – under construction. He then brought oranges, even as we were singing Bhajans. The song went: “Aao Sai!” Swami smiled and responded: “Aatha hoon! Aatha hoon!” He then came near and started tossing oranges to each one of us. It was all so wonderful! (From Radio Sai Archives).

Brindavan Blessings

The next step in Swami's Educational Mission was the founding of a College for men in Brindavan. This happened in 1969, and this is how late Mr. Kasturi recalls that event.

On the opening day, the College looked spick and span On 9th June, 1969, the Chief Minister of Mysore State, Mr. Veerendra Patil had the honour of inaugurating the College. Speaking on that occasion, Dr. V K Gokak, Vice Chancellor of Bangalore University to which the College is affiliated welcomed the new addition as “a gem in the crown of the Bangalore University.” Dr. Gokak added,

“This College would set the pattern for College education, not only in the academic field but also in the ethical and spiritual fields. This is a College conceived, devised, and completed by Baba's Love, Grace, and Wisdom. Brick by brick, plank by plank, He attended to every detail. It is a lesson for all who seek to do sincere loving service.”

(Sathyam Sivam Sundaram - Part III, SSSBPT, Prasanthi Nilayam, 1974, pp.54-55)

In those days, Swami spent most of His time in Brindavan, which meant that He became even more deeply involved in shaping the students of the Brindavan College than He had been with the Anantapur students. Here is how Kasturi describes it.

There is no activity of the College in which Baba does not evince interest, for He knows that it is the atmosphere in which education is imparted and imbibed that really counts. Since the College and the Hostel are situated

within the compound, Baba walks in during the Prayer Session, presides over Moral Instruction Lectures, and Himself supplements the Instructor. He writes and directs plays for the College Dramatic Society. Often, He pats a good student on the back, pulls up a Lecturer who saunters into the Lecture Hall a few minutes after the bell, inquires from a sluggard the percentage of marks he secured at the monthly test, creates a fountain pen or a watch for some diligent, well-behaved boy about whom the Principal has given a report that confirms His own opinion, advises the Librarian about classification, peeps into the dissection room of the budding zoologists and generally moves about as the Guardian Deity of the Institution. (Sathyam Sivam Sundaram - Part III, SSSBPT, Prasanthi Nilayam, 1974, p.58)

Kasturi was no doubt a keen witness to all that Swami was engaged in during those days, but it is from the students that we get a more detailed picture, and what an amazing picture that is! Those were the days before the present Trayee came into existence. At that time, there used to be a building known as the “Old Bungalow” which was Swami’s residence. Swami’s quarters were upstairs, and one of the rooms below, which in earlier days had apparently served as a garage, was the Hostel! This gave the boys of that era an unimaginable proximity that students of today would scarcely believe.

Many a morning, Swami would come down and personally wake up the boys for the *Suprabhatham*. There were a few cows attached to the Ashram, and it was the boys who did the milking! Often Swami would ask about the yield, the health of the cows and so forth. The boys had to help the cook, and their duties included making *chapathis*! Swami would drop in, watch the boys rolling *chapathis*, rally them on the odd shapes they were producing, and at other times give tips on how to get the shape right! When old students recall those days, the dominant feeling one gets is that they were all living like one big family. Work was not always specifically assigned but the boys instinctively knew what had to be done and when. The spectrum of work the boys were involved in during those days is astounding – everything from security duty, to whitewashing, tree planting, and taking care of the birds and deer that used to live in a cage adjoining the Bungalow.

Swami no doubt gave boys many liberties but that did not mean He compromised on discipline. Here is a recall from Dr. S Siva Sankar Sai, now a senior member of the Physics Faculty and Warden of the Prasanthi Nilayam hostel; at the time of the incident, he was a student; this is what he says:

One day, Swami got very angry about the discipline of the students. He told us He was going away and left for Prasanthi Nilayam. We all became upset and did not know what to do. The then Warden blasted us and said, “If you behave like this, you would lose the opportunity to enjoy Divine proximity. Now repent for what you have done.” All the boys prayed intensely and the Bhajan sessions became passionate and emotional; they were very nice. About a week later, Swami wrote a most beautiful and loving letter. He said, “Boys! Though I came off here, I just cannot help thinking about you. All of you are so dear to Me! Even though I went away from there in a huff, you should not become depressed. I did so in the interest of discipline. I want all of

you to become good boys, God's boys! That alone would save you!" That letter really touched us all! (From Radio Sai Archives)

In short, during those glorious Brindavan days, the boys were literally living with God, picking up innumerable lessons most unconsciously. I shall comment on the lessons themselves a little later but let me now offer an example of how close the bond between Swami and the students is, and how He responds to their wishes. The incident happened sometime after the permanent buildings for the Brindavan College had been built – this is the fine edifice that we all see today, beyond the sports field. Though the College had a new building, the students continued to live in the improvised Hostel, and Swami was not too happy about that. So He asked late Col. Joga Rao, a retired Civil Engineer who planned and built all the buildings in those days, to plan a good Hostel for the Brindavan boys.

Joga Rao did as told, located a site adjacent to the new College building, got it cleared, drew up a plan for the Hostel, got Swami's approval and even fixed a date for Swami to lay the foundation stone. On the previous day, Swami dropped in at the temporary Hostel and started talking about the new Hostel, the wonderful facilities it would have, etc. Something amazing happened then, and this is how Mr. Veda Narayanan, then a student and now a Teacher in Swami's High School for Boys recalls that incident.

The day before that, Swami came to the garage that served then as the Hostel, sat down, looked around and said, "Boys, soon you will have a new Hostel. Here you are all cramped and have absolutely no convenience whatsoever. Swami is not happy about that. In the new Hostel, things would be much better and you would have many facilities that are absolutely lacking here. Tomorrow, I shall be laying the foundation stone."

There was a small boy standing next to Swami, and he was holding a letter in his hand. Swami turned to that boy and picked up that letter. He then read it, after which He turned to the boy and said, "Shall I read out this letter to the boys assembled here?" The boy who gave the letter replied, "Swami, as You wish." Swami then called the Warden and asked him to read aloud the letter. The Warden did so. The boy had written, "Swami, we do not want any new Hostel. The present accommodation can easily take in another two hundred boys. We can always adjust. If we go to the new Hostel, we would be far away from Swami's Mandir. We just do not want to go away from Swami. If Swami is so particular about the new Hostel building planned next to the College, then Swami must have a new Mandir constructed right next to the proposed new Hostel. Then we are prepared to move into the new Hostel; otherwise, we would like to stay here, right next to Swami."

Swami was so touched that He immediately sent for Col. Joga Rao and said, "Joga Rao, the boys say they do not want to move from here. Can the Hostel be built right next to the Mandir?" Joga Rao replied, "Swami, that is not possible; there is no place around here. In the only open spot available, we

have a tank here.” And then, something amazing happened. Right there, Swami started explaining to Joga Rao how a building could be constructed around the tank! And that is how the Brindavan Hostel came to be where it now is, right next to Swami’s Mandir, all because one boy spoke so feelingly, touching Swami’s Heart! (From Radio Sai Archives)

Lastly a University in Prasanthi Too

In 1979, Swami established the third College, this time in Prasanthi Nilayam. Unlike the other Colleges, this was to be substantially a Post-graduate institution. Once again, the classes commenced first in improvised locations, the building coming up later. Swami now began to spend more time in Prasanthi Nilayam, but His interactions with the boys remained as intimate and vibrant as ever before. Caring for students did not always mean talking directly to students. He did this in many ways, as Mr. Venkatachalam, who for many years has been supervising the Mess and other facilities in the Senior Boys Hostel in Prasanthi Nilayam recalls:

In those days, Bhajans used to be held very late, around 11 a.m. So Swami would find time to come to the Hostel around 10 o’clock. I would be alone then since all the students, barring those who had fallen sick, would have gone away to attend classes. Swami would come to the Hostel in His car and I would open the door – it was all very casual. The first thing Swami would ask is, “What’s the news? Have all gone to the classes or are some boys sick?” Swami would then ask me to lead Him to the rooms where the sick boys were staying. There He would drag a chair, sit on it, and then talk to the boys. It would be just a small talk but very soothing for the sick boys, since it was always full of Love. Swami would then materialise vibhuti for the sick boys and tell me, “Take good care of the boys. When I get back, I shall send a doctor to attend on the boys.” After that, Swami would go on an inspection tour, visiting the dining hall, the kitchen and even the bathrooms! If the place was not clean, He would pull me up saying, “You fellows keep everything clean when Swami is coming for a function, but rest of the time? No, the place must be clean all the time.” Swami never scolded me or ever got angry with me. Yes, He criticised me and chided me for my lapses but it was always tinged with a lot of good humour. To me, He was ever intimate but also Divine!

(From Radio Sai Archives)

Teachers too were quietly taught many valuable lessons. Here is a recall by Dr. Sainath of the Physics Department, going back to the time when Swami often used to casually drop in at the sports field to witness matches in progress. This is what happened when Swami came to witness a volleyball match:

During that time when the volleyball match was going on, Swami turned to one of the Teachers and said to him, “You see this game? There is a big lesson in it. You see that person serving the ball? Once he serves the ball, his teammates would do anything, including crawl on their knees, bruise their forearms and elbows, to make sure the ball does not touch the ground. Your

job is something like that. I serve the ball, and you must ensure that the ball does not touch the ground. I give the initial push and it is up to the Teachers and senior students to make sure that the enthusiasm, the discipline and the lessons that I teach, never slack. They must maintain them always. (From Radio Sai Archives)

I can go on and on in this vein, recalling innumerable instances of how Swami grants Divine intimacy to His students and teachers, moulding and shaping them in amazing ways, but I shall not since that is beyond the scope of the present article. Instead, let me place all the above in the context of the second of the two points mentioned in the beginning.

Learning by Divine Example

By being close and intimate with students and teachers, Swami grants them a chance to observe Him in action. And what is it He wants them to see? He wants them to see how Swami deals with the world. Where dealing with the world is concerned, Swami is very practical. Yes, He does want students to worship God, pray to Him, meditate on Him, and so on. However, Swami does not want them to become monks or recluses. Instead, He wants His students to look at the world and nature in a practical and yet divine way.

Take the enforcement of discipline; it has to be a carrot and stick approach. Take games and sports; they are very much needed for a healthy body. However, be careful and avoid aggression; and make sure you do not get hurt. As for food, eat well, but in moderation. Go ahead and eat ice cream if you want to! (In fact, Swami Himself distributes ice cream on many occasions.) But let everything be within limits. You want to go on a picnic? Go ahead and enjoy nature – nothing wrong in it. (In fact, when He goes to Kodai Kanal, Swami Himself takes the boys out for picnic, complete with games and snacks!) The long and short of it is: “Live in this world and don’t try to run away from it. Lead a full life; but live seeing God always and everywhere.” Swami tells us that this is precisely what Emperor Janaka did; and now, He is quietly teaching that same lesson all the time.

All this is fine but does it really work? Does it all rub off on the students, and how do they behave when they go out into the wide world? I can write chapter and verse on this subject but shall restrict myself to citing just one example, a powerful example I might add, brought to public attention by Sanjay Sahni, now Principal, Brindavan Campus. This is what Sanjay said during a Panel Discussion at the time of the Summer Course in 2002. It is all about a Sai student who was caught up in a city torn by riots, and how he put Swami’s teachings into practice in an hour of crisis:

Character Shines in a Crisis

There was this youngster who was in Ahmedabad, when the riots broke out. To his utter horror, this boy found that people whom he had known for years, his friends, his neighbours whom he used to address as uncle, people who

were well-to-do, people who were well educated, all of them were leaving their homes to join the mob.

The mob was in a frenzy and in a killing spree. The youngster asked himself the question: "What should I do? What is my duty? What is my Dharma in this particular situation?" After pondering for a while, the boy came to the conclusion that he would not join the mob; if he did, he would himself turn crazy. He said to himself, "The least I can do is not to join the mob; if I cannot help, at least let me not cause harm." That is the first principle of service.

His next thought was: "I cannot stop the riot; I cannot put out this raging fire. But there are people out there whom I know. Perhaps if I talk to them, I might convince at least some of them not to participate in arson." He did talk to a few and succeeded in preventing them from joining the mob. To prevent people from doing evil is also service.

Finally, he asked himself: "There are so many people affected by the riots. Can I help them in some way, say by talking to them and consoling them?" He did just that. That was positive action, and it did not cost a penny.

What better testimony is needed to highlight the impact Bhagavan Baba makes on His students!

I have had the privilege to see many Universities all over the world, but I can honestly say that I have never seen anything like Swami's Institute. The more I become familiar with it, the more I am amazed. Officially, Swami is supposed to be the Chancellor of the Institute. In practice, He is anything but the Statutory Chancellor. Students hail Him as Father, Mother, Teacher, Friend, Philosopher, Guide, etc. All these roles He undoubtedly plays. But beyond all that, as Dr. Gokak so aptly described Him once, Swami guides them all silently as the very Chancellor of the Universe.

Yes, Swami has been quietly teaching that there is really nothing airy-fairy about the *Atma*. And one can deal with the Omnipresent *Atma* immanent in the diversity of Creation, without any mumbo jumbo, enjoying the good things in life, and by being helpful, kind and compassionate as much as possible. What is unique about the Institute is that though it has many Campuses, Departments and Teachers, in essence, there is only One Teacher, and that is Swami.

Truly speaking the Institute is a modern *Gurukulam*, with Swami playing the role of the *Guru*. The students live with the *Guru*, learning constantly from Him. Only, this *Guru* is no ordinary *Guru*, but the *Guru* of *Gurus*, that is, God. That is what makes this Institute, at least for me, the greatest wonder of the world.

Jai Sai Ram!

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN CHILE

"In the beginning of time, God created the wonders of the world. When he was finished, however, he saw that he had many leftover pieces. He had parts of rivers and valleys, of oceans and lakes, of glaciers and deserts, of mountains and forests, and of meadows and hills. Rather than to let such beauty go to waste, God put them all together and cast them to the most remote corner of the earth. This is how Chile was born."

- A Chilean Legend

Charismatic Chile - Bountifully Blessed

It's amazing how this long thin narrow strip of land which stretches 4630 kms north to south but is only 260 miles in its widest point east to west is packed with some of nature's stunning treasures. From the highest volcano in the world to the world's southern-most city to one of the most isolated and intriguing isles on this planet; from the driest place on earth to the wettest place in South America; from one of the highest geyser fields in the world to mind-boggling rock and sand formations; from world-renowned vineyards to flamingo filled lakes; enormous glaciers to awe-inspiring mountains; the highest peaks in the Americas to rich untamed forests; the finest agricultural lands to captivating National Parks; world-class ski resorts to hot springs and unbeatable beaches – the astonishing landscape of Chile is all this and much more.

A land of great beauty and even greater contrasts, Chile, the longest north-south country in the world with its southwest coast covering roughly the same distance between Edinburgh and Baghdad is truly a natural inspiration. The country is located along the Pacific coast of South America, and is bounded by Peru in the north, by Bolivia and Argentina in the east, and by the Pacific Ocean in the west and the south. And it is a non-stop exciting journey as one moves from region to region of this fascinating country.

Northern Chile – Bewildering Beauty

Northern Chile is a land of extreme contrast, where two uniquely Andean environments, Altiplano and the Atacama Desert, combine with unpredictable and overwhelmingly beautiful results. While the vast and striking Atacama Desert is the driest desert in the world (which has some parts where no precipitation has ever been recorded!), Altiplano is the most extensive area of high plateau on earth outside of Tibet. It receives some tropical rains in January and February and altitude, rather than aridity, is the limiting factor governing life on this airy plateau. Only the hardiest and most highly specialized flora and fauna survive in the vagaries of life at a staggering 12,000 ft. The breathtaking barren landscape of the north extends from the coast to the Andes, where lovely snowcapped peaks tower above the desert, presenting a unique contrast. The meandering Loa River here is its only perennial stream.

This northern part, at the same time, is a mineral rich region too – blessed with one of the world's largest copper reserves (Chuquibambilla). It is not only the burgeoning trade in minerals but also its many ports, where a variety of goods from Asia are distributed to neighboring countries, which has kept its economy always buoyant. And add to this the tourists, whose number is only rapidly increasing, thanks to its beautiful Andean-range mountains, salt lakes on their high plateau, filled with unique species of Pink Flamingos and Condors and animals like Llamas, Alpacas and Guanacos. Northern Chile is prosperous, beautiful and serene, all at the same time.

Moon on Earth!

But we are not done with Northern Chile yet. There is another fascinating and oft visited place in this region which is extraordinarily attractive by its similarity with the moon surface and natural coliseo of great dimensions. Aptly known as “the Moon Valley” and wonderfully formed by the natural forces of the encounter of the Atacama desert with the Andes mountain range, this region is, infact, a slice of the moon surface, complete with interesting sand and stone formations, absolutely majestic in its silence bereft of plant or animal life. It is imposing yet beautiful, especially in the twilight hours when the Sun makes escarpments of green, blue, red and yellow colors with the most diverse and surprising forms. This is the place NASA tests vehicles designed for Martian or Lunar grounds.

Santiago - Stunning and Booming

Coming to the central region of this country, it is a different feel altogether with a pleasant Mediterranean type of climate. More than half the country's population live here. Santiago, the capital city of six millions inhabitants, is a bustling city and quite modern: new highways pass under the river that runs through it while tunnels and fast roads crisscross the city. The underground transport system is a spick-and-span system known for its efficiency and moderate cost. The omnipresent Andes are the backdrop for the city. The amazing feature of this place is that within one hour you can be at the office, skiing at one of the many ski resorts or resting at a beach by the Pacific Ocean!

With its fertile soils, and political as well as economic stability, this middle portion of the country, is the nation's most populous and productive region and as a consequence, the country's political and cultural center. It contains Chile's largest cities - Santiago, Valparaíso (the seat of the Chilean congress), and Concepción. Understandably, the regional headquarters of many international enterprises have their headquarters here. This highly industrialized section of Chile produces a large variety of quality manufactured products and is abundant in mineral deposits like copper, coal, and silver. Besides, its myriad rivers, principally the Bío-Bío, have been harnessed to generate electricity making hydroelectricity responsible for 70% of Chile's power. Between the Andes and the Coast Ranges is the Vale of Chile, a long

valley divided into basins by Andean spurs. This is the heart of the republic, having the highest population density and the highest agricultural and industrial output.

Spellbinding South - Lakes, Volcanoes, forests, et al

Finally, the southern region of Chile which extends from the Bío-Bío River to Cape Horn is full of special natural attractions with a fascinating mix of dense forests, heavy rainfall, snow-covered peaks, glaciers, and islands. Sections of this region, which is in the direct path of moist westerly winds, receive more than 100 in. (254 cm) of precipitation annually.

This southern region is blessed with an alpine-like climate and has many pellucid lakes and untouched wooded areas. Lake Villarica and its volcano of the same name, are part of this beautiful expanse; the volcano resembles Mount Fuji (Japan) because of its perfect shape. This area's most attractive feature is perhaps its unexplored and unmapped character. The road that traverses this region for more than a thousand kilometers, represents one of the greatest man-made attempts to exert some control in such an impossible territory. The Carretera Austral (southern road), starts in Puerto Montt, and after a thousand-kilometer journey, ends in Villa O' Higgins, a step away from the Campo de Hielo Sur (Southern Ice Cap).

Also, Lakes Llanquihue and Todos los Santos are some of the many in the region which are surrounded by forests and beautiful cities. Immigrants during the 19th century, mostly from Germany, developed this area; one can still find a certain Germanic flavour in the southern cities, not only in their architectural style, but also in their excellent pastries like Strudel, Kuchen and many others delicacies, which can be found not only here but all over Chile.

Because of subsidence of the earth's crust, the Coast Ranges and the central lowlands have been partially submerged, forming the extensive archipelago of South Chile, an area of craggy islands (notably Chiloé), numerous channels, and deep fjords. The Chilean lake district is a noted resort area for thousands of visitors every year.

Although all of Southern Chile is forested, only the drier northern part has exploitable timber resources; Puerto Montt and Temuco are major timber-handling centers. The rest of the region is a wilderness of mid-latitude rain forest, which has been extensively logged. Because of the climate, agriculture is limited but livestock raising (cattle and pigs) is an important activity. A portion of extreme Southern Chile lies in the rain shadow of the Andes and is covered by natural grasslands. Here, extensive sheep grazing is found, with wool, mutton, and skins, being the chief products. Interestingly, this area also yields petroleum. Valdivia, a port on the Pacific Ocean, is the fourth largest industrial center of Chile. And the world's southernmost city, Punta Arenas, is found here, on the Strait of Magellan.

Patagonia's Incredible *Torres del Paine*

From Campo de Hielo Sur (the southern ice-cap) to the Chilean Antarctic Territory, this is one of the most spectacular areas of the planet. Among all the attractions, the Torres del Paine peaks are, undoubtedly, one of the most popular, and deservedly so, due to their incredible scenery and wealth of possible activities for the visitor, such as climbing, hiking and photography. This is a land of lagoons, lakes, glaciers and snowcaps, as well as a great variety of species endemic to Chile. Reaching up from the massif stand the Torres y Cuernos (towers and horns) which give the park its name and pose challenges for climbers from all over the world.

Enigmatic Easter Island and Robinson Crusoe Isle

Another must-see for visitors here is Easter Island, with its famous giant monoliths called *Moai* statues which stand several meters tall and provide an intriguing archeological mystery. This is one of the most isolated places on earth and part of the Rapa Nui National Park of Chile's oceanic territories. The natives call this land 'Te Pito te Henua' which means 'the Navel of the World'.

In the Chilean-controlled Juan Fernández archipelago of this region, Robinson Crusoe is the largest island. Named so by the Chilean government after it was made world famous by Daniel Defoe's eponymous classic novel, this island along with two others are recognized World Biosphere Reserves because of the endemic species of flora and fauna. Red humming bird, spiny lobsters and scuba diving are some of the few things which draw people to this interesting island every year in hundreds and thousands.

Chileans – A Race of Sterling Character

Just like its "out-of-this-world" natural beauty, the people of Chile too are splendid. Friendly and hospitable, Chileans are a resilient race having endured serious earthquakes (among the world's strongest at 9.8 Richter in the Lakes Region) and in times of need, it is all one big family. No wonder, their economy is strong, law trustworthy and education given high importance. This land has produced great poets, among them two Nobel Prize winners, Gabriela Mistral (1945) and Pablo Neruda (1971).

The majority of Chile's population is mestizo (a result of frequent intermarriage between early Spanish settlers and indigenous inhabitants), with Spanish being the official language. Traditionally a Catholic nation, 70% of its population belong to the Church and it is blessed with two saints - Saint Teresa de los Andes and Saint Alberto Hurtado. So how and when did Sai enter this multi-faceted and charismatic land? This story too, just like everything else about this country, is no less captivating.

Sai Reaches Out...

At a beautiful place near the capital Santiago called “Cajon del Maipo” sit the slopes of the Cordillera de los Andes, the famous mountain range that stretches for thousands of kilometers with its beautiful massive white, snow-covered mountains, valleys and rivers crawling like serpents, and old trees witnessing the beauty and peace. And this is the fitting setting where the Sai Movement in Chile began.

Enrique Garrido was a young lad, and in spite of him being just seventeen, spirituality fascinated him a lot. He was in a cabin his family had in these sylvan surroundings. One room was lent to a hermit, called Pablo, who had taken the vow of silence. This ‘silent hermit’, gave Enrique a copy of “Prema Vahini” (Swami’s treatise on divine love), in his own handwritten Spanish translation. Enrique thought it had to be something very special, for the hermit to leave his routine of meditation and spiritual practices and take the trouble of translating this book. He says:

“When I was reading this handwritten book I got the feeling, the sensation that God was speaking to me through this book, it was very real, God’s presence was very real for me at that time. Communicating through a handwritten piece of paper, I wrote to Pablo about my experience and feelings on reading this book. He answered me, also in writing, that he would speak to me next afternoon under an ancient almond tree, at 5 pm.

At the appointed hour, under the big tree, the hermit broke his silence vow (at least for this day) and said: ‘Sai Baba is God; He is the only one in this age capable of liberating anyone.’”

This was 1978, certainly a special day for Chileans. Who could imagine Sai Baba’s divine plan would include this far away land? This is as far you can get from Prashanti Nilayam! But for Swami as He has often said, the whole world is His house and countries are only different rooms therein - so He was just going from one room to another!

Beautiful Beginnings

Coming back to the story, from then on, Enrique started dreaming repeatedly of Sai. “In dreams, Sai taught me Bhajans, how to sing correctly! He took me to a classroom, sat down and taught me the tones and pronunciation, that is how I learned *Chitta Chora Yashoda Ke Bal...* I went back to my family in the city of Villa Alemana, about 110 kilometers from the Capital. There I started weekly spiritual meetings, bhajans, meditation and rigorous fasting once a week.”

Enrique maintained correspondence with Arlette Meyer, a translator from Venezuela and it was she who suggested contacting John Hislop who gave official sanction for the first centre in Chile in 1980.

A similar mystical means of communication reached Bernardo who was a Rosicrucian follower (an esoteric order with its roots in the western mystery tradition). Once, when meditating, a 'Guru of dark complexion' appeared in his meditation. He was puzzled but the Guru appeared again and motioned to follow Him. Who was He? Finally he recognized the master on the cover of the book "Sai Baba and the Psychiatrist". Bernardo soon joined the newly founded Sai group in the city of Villa Alemana located in the province of Valparaíso.

He Draws His Instruments...

Sai's divine masterplan had begun unfolding. Later in Santiago, it was now the turn for Julio Vejar to become Baba's instrument. Julio was a young Buddhist studying Philosophy at the prestigious University of Chile. On a regular basis he received spiritual literature from Canada, but this time the parcel coming from abroad changed his life!

He received a parcel containing books on Sai and some Vibhuti and after reading these books his enthusiasm grew to a point where he was keen on more about Sai, and so he asked his friend in Canada to send more information.

Another parcel came with more Sai books, and these only increased his "Sai" thirst. This "Sai"-thirst was contagious, his fiancé Soledad (now his wife) and friends too longed for more about Sai. "I felt Baba's presence everywhere, all the time", says Soledad.

In 1983, Julio and Soledad, now husband and wife, traveled to Buenos Aires, Argentina on their honeymoon. They visited several areas of the city and on one occasion, while on a local bus, Julio suddenly decided to get out. When they stepped down on the sidewalk, he saw a small poster about a Sai centre! As soon as they got back to the hotel, he called the number published on that and was told that the next day a meeting was going to be held there.

The following day they arrived at the Sai centre and met Mr. Leonardo Gutter, who has been helping to spread the message of Bhagavan in Latin America. He gave them the movie "The Aura of Divinity" and suggested they should form a Centre in Santiago. Neither Leonardo nor Julio then knew about the Sai centre in Villa Alemana in Chile.

They returned to Santiago and a few months later on 21 August 1983 the Sai centre of Santiago officially opened its first meeting. This centre functioned in the house of Hanni Horowitz and a few devotees assisted at this event, who would further on play significant roles in furthering Swami's teachings and message. Tomas Herrera was one of them, who later began the first internet site on Sai Baba in Chile (www.saibabachile.cl).

Ms. Herta Pfeifer also participated at this inauguration. She had first heard about Sai in 1979 from Mr. Basil Pitt, High Commissioner of Trinidad and Tobago in Canada, whom she met in the city of La Paz, Bolivia. He gave her

the first book about Baba, “Man of Miracles” by Howard Murphet, which she translated immediately. She then started to translate Sai literature into Spanish and has produced more than 100 books, innumerable speeches, discourses, daily thoughts and much more. During her first interview, Sai told her about His Will that she should “translate for Latin people” as He put it. She has done so ever since.

Coralí Balsera, a devotee residing in USA brought books, music and gifts for the newly created centre. She also was the instrument in bringing the news of another Sai centre in Chile, only 110 kilometers away. The two centres visited each other and exchanged books and news, this was the ‘pre-internet era’. But divine love followed in different ways attracting more people every day.

It so happened that one gentleman by name Sergio, participated in a radio programme speaking about Sai Baba and the healing powers of Vibhuti. Next Thursday, after the ceremony ended, a gentleman told him that in a few days he was going to undergo surgery due to a severe case of stomach ulcers. The gentleman also said he had listened to the radio programme and decided to give the Vibhuti a try. Sergio told him that Vibhuti was miraculous, but that at the end everything depended on Baba and one’s faith. He instructed the gentleman, ‘You can drink it with water every morning’.

Next Thursday this same gentleman came, and Sergio saw that he was a changed man – all his worried frowns had gone and he looked relaxed and happy. He told Sergio that on the last medical examination before the scheduled surgery the doctors had seen that his ulcers were gone! The doctors could not believe it, but admitted that there was no reason to operate anymore! It was an incredible healing from God and they felt so fortunate and blessed.

Panamanian Present

With more people coming in, the Sai Centre of Santiago moved from smaller to bigger locations and at one point of time, the devotees were renting a house in a street called Seminario. The owner of this building decided to sell the house, but the devotees were in no position to buy, even if they wanted to do.

By His mysterious will, this time it was a Panamanian devotee who came to their rescue. Full of love and gratefulness God, as his son in Panama was liberated after being kidnapped just then, this noble gentleman traveled to Chile, attended Sai bhajans and later donated the entire money required to buy the house. This is how the Sai Centre of Seminario was born.

This house of Sai has witnessed many Akhanda Bhajans; EHV activities; and holds free lunches every Sunday where more than 50 people receive food in a harmonious ambience. Many senior and elderly devotees like Dr. Sara Pavan, Dr. Voleti, John Behner and Leonardo Gutter have visited this centre and shared Swami’s love on several occasions.

Apart from this, there are two more centres in the capital city of Santiago and also in Viña del Mar and Quilpue, both in the vicinity of the Valparaíso, the country's cultural capital. There are Sai groups also in cities like Iquique in Northern Chile, Puerto Varas in the South, Talagante in Central Chile and in La Serena, the second oldest city located 470 kms north of Santiago.

The Sai centre of Condell in the province of Santiago hosts a free lunch on Saturdays which is one of their happiest activities: many come to enjoy the meal and good company, peace and love. Some of the attendees are paper and cardboard collectors and now one can see their smiles and also Swami's picture or an Om symbol adorning their tricycles.

This centre was located in a big house where many Sai brothers and sisters came together in satsangs, study circles and to receive many experienced visitors who shared about Swami's love and His mission. But they have had their lot of challenges too. Unfortunately, they do not have the big house anymore but their perseverance and faith has only grown. They know Sai always has a plan and they love Him more each day because He never ceases to amaze them. Take the case of Lucy.

Light for Lucy

Lucy had many problems in her life; smoked heavily, drank alcohol and ate meat. She was about to cross a street when she saw a fortune-teller. She approached her and started asking about her trade. "Does this come from India?" asked Lucy. The person started explaining that fortune-telling had nothing to do with India... and from there somehow the conversation turned to Baba. This happened on a Thursday and it ended with Lucy being invited to a Sai meeting. "As soon as I stepped into the Centre everything seemed to have a kind of brilliance, I was amazed. From that moment on, smoking was not attractive anymore; the same happened with drinking and meat eating! I wanted to quit every bad habit! Baba made it happen in just a few minutes. My love, my life, is not mine anymore - it is His. It is like having a new life again, thank you Swami!" says Lucy today.

One can only stand stupefied in wonder reading about such instantaneous transformations! And beautiful instances like this were happening everywhere in Chile.

He Introduces Himself to Many More...

In Viña del Mar, the beautiful coastal city, we mentioned that there is a Sai centre. But there is something more unique going on here. Right in the middle of a small pine forest there is a small cabin, from which on every Thursday one can hear bhajans accompanied by an Andean instrument ("palo de agua" - a hollow piece of cactus with small stones inside and nails on the inner walls and closed ends. Whenever the cactus "stick" is turned, it makes a sound like a river slowly carrying thousand of pebbles.) Most of the devotees are teenagers; they sing bhajans with lots of energy and zest. On Mondays

they lovingly serve meals to needy people at the nearby port of Valparaíso, and this is something which has been going on for several years now.

In another Sai Centre, in the city of Quilpue, (called by locals “Sunny City” because it has more sunny days than Valparaíso, its nearest big city) on a Saturday morning while a group of devotees were chanting a series of 108 Gayatri mantras, suddenly something unexplainable happened. One of them was keeping count on a *japamala*, and almost at the end of the 108th round, a bead materialized out of thin air and fell onto the floor. Now there were 109 beads...the ways the omnipresent Swami makes His presence felt are unfathomable.

All these experiences of Sai which increased as the days passed by not only brought more people to the centres but it also resulted in the Centres expanding their activities and trying to make a positive difference in the local community. One such thing that took shape was EHV – the all important Education in Human Values programme. And how Swami brought instruments for this work too is fascinating.

Manuel, a very enthusiastic devotee, never missed an opportunity to speak about Baba, be it in a bus or anywhere. Once, Marisol, a lady living in La Serena, was riding in a bus when Manuel, who happened to be sitting next to her, started talking about Baba. Marisol says, “Normally I don’t talk to strangers, but this time something made me listen to this gentleman. What he said was very interesting, he was very well prepared; he opened a small business briefcase and started pulling photocopies and pictures of Baba. He invited me to a Thursday meeting. As soon I got home, I went through all the reading material and then saw the picture he had given me. I noticed it was covered with dust. I cleaned it and after a while the same ‘dust’ covered the picture of Baba again. It puzzled me. Only in the Thursday meeting, I learned that this strange ‘dust’ was Vibhuti and Baba’s calling card.” This was enough to instill faith in Marisol and soon she became involved with Sai activities and later on did a lot of work on EHV.

EHV – Heralding a Glorious Chile

350 kilometers north of Santiago lies the city of La Serena and on the outskirts of the city one can hear tender and soft voices intoning omkars. This is no hermitage of spiritual aspirants, it is the Sai School of La Serena. On March 2003 Antonio Bustamante and Diana Wagner, with lots of effort and perseverance opened the first Sai school in Chile. Many devotees, including Mr. J. Jagadeesan from Malaysia, attended the inauguration ceremony. It started with only one grade and 9 students. Each year another grade was added. Also the Sai Institute started in this same year, which trained many teachers and held many EHV courses and workshops. God’s work is beautiful and fulfilling but never easy. The school has had many ups and downs, and but the devotees’ perseverance and love for Sai remain undiminished.

Many sweet experiences happened in this Sai school. One day a bird entered the classroom, flew into a glass window and fell to the floor. The children

surrounded the bird and the teacher told the children to pray and send lots of love to the little winged being. Holding each others' hands they prayed with all their hearts, in their pure childlike love. Suddenly, to their joy and amazement, the bird shook itself and flew away. As the bird flew away, the kids rejoiced. It was a great lesson in love.

Betty, the director of the school, said that during a recess she noticed a small child sitting on the office steps, with his face in his hands. Thinking the little one is probably disturbed for some reason and needed help, she went to him and enquired with concern, "What's the matter, dear one?" The sweet child answered lovingly, "Aunty, I am talking to God". If more and more Chilean children do what this little one was doing (and they surely will), the future of Chile is surely more glorious than what can be imagined now.

They Feel Him All the Time

This land, as somebody said, is as far as one can be from Prashanti Nilayam, from the physical presence of the Avathar, but for God distance is no barrier. Only a microscopic minority from Chile would have seen the Lord in person, yet their faith is exemplary. It is really amazing how the Lord touches everybody's hearts and cleanses them so that He can reflect more clearly in their personalities. On a visit, Dr Sara Pavan told them: "This sacred Sai organization is like a washing machine, everybody has to go through a cleaning process" - that is surely so. For, without the hammer and heat, the gold cannot shine.

Sometimes, their urge to be in the Lord's physical presence is so great. On one occasion a group of devotees felt so anxious to be at the first Athi Rudra Maha Yagna that was being held in Prashanti Nilayam, that they prayed, got together everyday and eagerly downloaded every bit of information related to the Yagna. On the first day of the Yagna they got up before 5 am so they would be ready to chant and pray when the ceremony started in Prashanti, considering the time difference. Omnipotent Swami, at 5 am sharp, sent three huge lightning flashes and thunderbolts and then an incredible rain-shower that lasted only for 20 minutes. Then the sky cleared and a bright moon shone as if nothing had happened. Lightning and heavy downpours are quite unusual events in that area. Everybody there felt Swami's presence as if to say: "I am with you, and you are with Me in this Yagna."

These sorts of mind-boggling experiences and many others are deeply embedded in the devotees' hearts: love for SAI is ever present, it might be the Lord's way of saying, 'I am in you, always, for ever and ever, wherever you are, in Chile, Prashanti or anywhere'.

IS THE WORLD A STAGE?

By Dr. Sara Pavan

“Brahma Sathyam – Jagam Mithyam”

(God is Truth – World is unreal) – Adi Shankara

“Man returns to earth again and again until he has perfected his acting.” - Yogananda

“All the world’s a stage, and all men and women are merely players” - Shakespeare

“The soul is never born and never dies; it was not born and will not be born; without birth, without end, eternal, ancient; it is not killed when the body in which it lives is killed. Just as one casts off old clothes, so the soul casts off bodies in order to take on new ones.” - Lord Krishna, Bhagavad Gita

“As the apparel is to the body, the body is to the soul, a mere superficial, illusory covering. I have no affiliations based on this transitory body and am bound only by the permanent relationship arising out of pure Love.” – Baba

“Life is a dream; Realise it.” – Baba

“Man has no free-will whatsoever” – Baba

“Nature is your Preacher; your life is your Teacher.” – Baba

“Each of you has struggled upwards from stone to plant, from plant to animal, from animal to man! You have earned the human body by accumulated merit of many lives. Do not expect to find happiness in the ‘other world;’ that world too is impermanent! Once you have exhausted your merit there, you will have to return to earthly life once again.” – Baba

“I separated Myself from Myself so that I can become Myself”

“The inescapable destiny of every living being is the attainment of Fullness.” – Baba

From The Womb...To The Tomb...‘Life’ Is One Big School...

All of the above revelations from great personages and Avatars imply that life on earth is nothing but an evolutionary process towards a higher consciousness, one incarnation after another. So, our earthly sojourn is like a school of learning. We are exposed to a wide spectrum of experiences from all the outer and apparent imperfections and inconsistencies that are transient and unreal, but beheld from a human perspective as real. Indeed, earthly life is a school of wisdom, where souls learn from direct and personal experiences and evolve from lesser truth to greater truth, and finally to fullness or enlightenment. No event ever happens on earth without a reason, and each soul learns its unique lessons while embodied in the human form. Bhagavan Baba had reminded the writer on several occasions during personal interviews: **“There is nothing bad whatsoever in My entire**

creation.” Hence, even what we refer to as bad is also a good experience, at least from an evolutionary standpoint.

‘Self-realisation is the awakening of the spirit to its highest potential (fullness, perfection), wherein one is in constant awareness of the perfection within, in the midst of outer imperfections and chaos.’

This was an inspirational thought that had kept haunting the writer a few years ago. During a personal interview this statement was written on a piece of paper and handed to Bhagavan Baba to ascertain if He was the source of these forceful words. Bhagavan graciously took the piece of paper, read it and returned it to the writer without any comment! “*Mounam Angeekara Sookchakam*,” is an ancient wisdom in Sanskrit, which means: “Silence is indication of acceptance.” Otherwise, Swami would have refuted the same. Also, by not making any comment Bhagavan may have dampened the writer’s ego.

Vedas, the Word of God, perceived by ancient sages, as well as the sacred scriptures God had given through the various Messiahs of the past, reveal the truth as to what earthly life is about. Truth is multidimensional, eternal and universal and cannot change from any perspective. A surgeon cannot be a surgeon if he is not thorough with his knowledge of the human anatomy. Operating on a patient without a sound knowledge of anatomy is tantamount to butchery! Likewise, we have to dissect the truth about ourselves under a ‘spiritual microscope’ to know who we are and what we are made of.

Are We Just the Body?

A human being is not just the body, the manifested physical aspect, but much larger than what meets the senses. The body is merely an instrument to perform action. It is a vehicle for the ‘person within,’ the ‘*Persona*,’ to manifest and express. Every person deep within is God, but this Divinity is shrouded in the personality, the body consciousness, with a feeling of separateness as an individual human being. Our physical or gross body is only made of earthly material, consisting of the five elements – space, air, fire, water and earth - from the food consumed and therefore referred to as the ‘food-sheath’ (*annamaya-kosha*). The physical body is like a costume, tailor-made for us, which is **‘what we think we are.’**

At a deeper level we will see the subtle and causal bodies, which are the non-material and invisible aspects of our being, beyond the senses. The subtle body consists of the mind, intellect, memory and ego (*manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara*) correspondingly in association with the next three sheaths (*pranamaya, manomaya and vijñanamaya koshas*). The mind is the cause of all aberrations, and the subject of **‘what others think we are.’** Beyond the subtle body is the causal body forming the bliss sheath (*anandamaya-kosha*), **‘what we really are.’** The body is merely a temporary dwelling for the resident within, the Atma, the Immortal and Eternal Self.

What Holds Man’s Evolution?

The soul (*Jivatma*) is a minute fragment of the over-soul, the totality of the all pervading Consciousness (*Paramatma*). Manifesting itself through a physical form, the soul continues to evolve through eons of earthly time on the

worldly stage as a separate entity until it finally awakens to its own Reality, God or Total Consciousness. The soul, in association with the physical body on its earthly sojourn, had identified itself with the body, giving an illusory feeling of separateness, and yet, in reality, has never ever been separate from the One Totality. In fact, the soul or the Atma is beyond the bounds of time and space, which exists only in the realm of the created. At the time of death, when the soul is released from the physical body, it accepts the inevitable reality that its association with its temporal body is impermanent. It overcomes the desire to return to the body it had occupied, after an initial period of 'confusion' and 'mental exhaustion'. Freed from its incarceration in the physical body the soul sees the larger picture of the Cosmic Drama with its expanded awareness. After some 'rest' and adapting to its 'new surroundings' the soul begins a totally different life in the astral plane. The writer knows of such experiences a few of his close friends have had after their death, through responsible mediums.

The causal body draws all its past impressions from the subtle body and carries them forward into several future lives on earth until all such impressions of separateness or ego of the soul dissolve in the vastness of the oneness. Because it carries the causes (impressions) of the past it is also termed the causal body, where the individual soul, now in the matrix of total consciousness, is preparing itself for another sojourn on earth. We can compare this to a driver who, not only identifies himself with his car, but even carries with him all his bad driving habits with him onto his new car, long after vacating the old car! Unless an actor remembers that he is just an actor on stage and has to act his role perfectly, he will get caught up with his momentary role and the costume he dons while on stage. Past memories and attachments hinder man's evolution and hold him back in his ascent to Godhood.

'Cause and Effect' – The Supreme Clause of Creation

Adi Shankara states so eloquently in one of his stanzas in *Bhaja Govindam* about the recurring cycles of birth and death (*Punarapi Jananam, Punarapi Maranam*). There is no effect without a cause and there is no cause that goes without creating an effect. Now, let us consider the nature of the world. From what we see around us, from information gathered from other's experiences, by inference from scientific investigation and theories, we know that the Universe is a vast, complex entity; the human body itself is a miraculous mechanism; the vegetable and animal kingdoms, the planets, the stars, the galaxies, the black holes, the particles, the waves, matter, antimatter and what not – are all miracles. There is no effect without a cause. So, we cannot but postulate the existence of an Omniscient and Omnipotent creator or Divine Intelligence beyond our limited understanding.

The cause is the effect concealed and the effect is the cause revealed and the time between the two can be extremes. According to Newton's third law: Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. When the reaction of an action is immediate and we are able to see it or measure it at the sensory level we call it scientific. However, if the reaction time is immense, perhaps after several lifetimes, when one has no recollection of the cause, the effect may appear to stand alone! Just because the cause is not visible at the

mundane plane one cannot deny this principle of causation. The cause is like a seedling waiting for the opportune moment to sprout. This 'seedling' is deep in the sub-conscious mind. Mind and matter are interconnected as well as interdependent. For those familiar with computer jargon, it is not unrealistic to compare the conscious mind to RAM (Random Access Memory) and the subconscious mind to the HDD (Hard Disk Drive). All manifestations are projections of the mind and sustained by it.

All Action is God and all Reaction is Man!

We study the life-cycles of various parasites in biological sciences. Most parasites have more than two hosts in their life-cycle. For example the malarial parasite has two hosts – the mosquito and the human. When it infests the human host it causes the disease called malaria. To prevent the spread of the disease in the human we have to break the life-cycle of the parasite by killing the other host, the mosquito. By eradicating mosquitoes we will have succeeded in stopping the spread of malaria. In biochemistry too we could end the cyclic chemical events by enzyme antagonists. Similarly, the prospect of interrupting the recurring cycles of birth and death will rest on eliminating the deficits in the 'balance-sheet,' that are 'carried-forward' from one life into another. The solution is in surrendering whatever outcome to the Supreme Will, having played our 'pre-ordained' role well; that is to act our respective roles whole-heartedly and without resistance – just action without reaction. With proper understanding and acceptance we develop equanimity over whatever happens in our life. With this realisation we would experience 'Non-Duality' and will incur no future karma (*Agami-karma*). It is said, "*Advaita darshanam jnanam*," meaning 'Experiencing Oneness with the Totality is Wisdom.' All action is God and all reaction is man. In other words, as we surrender more and more, we begin to react less and less, and finally live in perfect equanimity.

The Soul's Preparation for a New Advent...

Now, let us attempt to study the movement of the soul, the 'life-cycle' of man, from one birth to another, both in the worldly material plane as well as in the subtle astral plane beyond. The writer requests readers to permit some degree of indulgence in constructive and explicable imagination. Let us imagine there are two 'hosts' in the recurring human cycle - the worldly and the astral planes. We shall enquire into where we came from, what we are doing here now and where we do proceed hereon? We need to imagine some point in the cycle the soul goes through to start with and trace the path until a circle is completed. Since all births have a cause, and so are all our experiences, we shall attempt to trace the cycle starting from the point of entry in the astral plane after death.

Before plunging back to earthly life and entering a new body in another mother's womb each individual soul has to go through the various stages of preparation in the astral world. Freed from the limitation of the gross body and gaining full awareness of its own reality, the soul is able to take stock of the 'cargo' of karma it carries - gains and losses, the missed opportunities and

failed lessons of past incarnations. With the help of astral guides, the soul is able to determine impartially the course it should take in the next birth, even several future births, to get rid of the 'cargo.' Earthly life is akin to a school where each individual learns to evolve. The earthly role of each individual is thus predetermined as per the soul's needs, and in accordance with its past life experiences, strengths and weaknesses, to include new lessons to learn and to revise some past lessons as the case may be. Hence, events to follow in the ensuing incarnations on earth are 'worked-out,' as if a new 'syllabus' (destiny) is 'written' in the astral dimension, for souls to experience in each earthly life for their onward journey towards fullness.

The Drama That is Life

The life of an individual on earth now and where he had been prior to this birth can be prudently illustrated by using a drama theatre as a model. The stage, the back-stage and actors represent the world, the astral plane and the souls respectively and the actors are preparing in the back-stage to enter the stage. These days we are able to follow the movement of many species of animal life on earth, like 'tagging' whales and tracking their movements in the oceans using satellites. Just imagine the roof of the drama theatre has been removed and one could see from above the full view of the stage as well as the back-stage at the same time, even the several partitions 'back-stage' while those on the floor cannot see beyond the limitation of barriers. They would only see everything within the confines of the partition and not beyond. Seen from above we are able to see in one sweep the entire drama theatre, the 'back-stage' where the actors at various stages of preparation prior to their entry onto the front-stage. In reality, none of these partitions are separate arenas, but they are multiple dimensions of one's own subconscious mind. As long as the mind clings on to the ephemeral and fleeting worldly things, the soul of the individual is trapped in the earthly realm, and keeps returning to earthly life over and over again. In other words all unfinished business in the earthly life can only be cleared in a subsequent incarnation on earth. So, let us begin the cycle from the moment a soul enters the astral plane, after shedding the physical body. It is analogous to an actor returning to the back-stage at the end of his stage performance. On entering the astral plane the departed soul is received by other souls. After a brief period of rest, the soul is refreshed to the change from the dense vibrations of the earth to the subtle and fine vibrations of the astral and moves from the 'receiving area' to the adjoining 'sorting area.'

This is a very critical phase when decisions have to be made as to what kind of earthly life should each one of the returning souls lead in its next birth. There is a 'log-book' for each soul that has a complete record of all the past earthly experiences and lessons, which is comparable to a warehouse of accumulated karma, which we call *sanchita karma*. It is a reservoir of stored experiences and tendencies, *karmas* and *vasanas*, good as well as bad within the relative plane of earthly experience, deep down the subconscious. With the help and guidance available in abundance there, the soul would gather onto itself the best possible combination of unresolved karmas from this storehouse and package it, *prarabdha karma*. This will provide the soul with

opportunities to dispose of some karmic deficits in the next incarnation. Helped by astral guides, the souls make wise choices for the ensuing earthly life, be it new lessons or revisions, another opportunity given to free itself from ignorance and bondage.

Just as a director of a theatre production would assign different roles to different actors, appropriate to their experience and attributes, souls too get channelled in the 'back-stage' of their astral interlude to take up befitting roles for their next earthly sojourn, as if tailor-made for their own spiritual needs. For example, if a man is extremely cruel to his wife in this life, he could possibly be born as a woman in the next life to suffer in the hands of a cruel man! Such 'eye for an eye' and 'tooth for a tooth' kind of reaction need not happen to every soul, as there are many other ways and opportunities given to neutralise past karmas. Christ too has said, "As you sow, so shall you reap." Souls undergo streaming according to their needs at the 'curriculum zone,' getting another chance to get things right. Therefore, **no soul is damned, but opportunities are given repeatedly for mastering these lessons until fullness of enlightenment or true freedom is attained.** Armed with the 'script' for their next incarnation, the souls move on to the 'practicing and 'rehearsing' zone and begin to memorise and accept the assignment for the next life, fully aware that it is for their highest good. As the time nears for the souls to reincarnate they move to the penultimate stage of finding a suitable body, which is merely a costume.

The Body – A Suitable Vehicle

Where do these souls pick their 'costumes' from? They have already chosen their mothers while in the astral plane. The soul enters a developing foetus at around the 20th week of pregnancy. We may compare the womb to a closet. Just as the actor picks his costume from the closet, the soul would find its matching apparel in the developing foetus in a mother's womb, and several weeks later make its final entry onto the stage of the world as a new born baby. The body of the foetus is entirely made of earthly material from the food consumed by the mother, right from the single fertilised egg cell to a fully grown newborn. The infant passes through many stages until old age, continuing its physical growth from the earthly food consumed. That is why the body is referred to as the 'food-sheath.'

We may also compare the human body to a motor car or vehicle for the earthly journey and the individual soul, its driver. So long as the car is in the production line or in the dealer's yard it carries no registration number plate. It has to bear the registration plate the moment it is driven away from the showroom. The foetus too bears no name and has to be registered at birth, with a name, which is its 'number-plate,' to function in the world! One thing comes absolutely clear out of this illustration - just as the driver is not the car, man must realise he is not his body. As the driver discards the old car and drives a new car until the journey is completed, the soul too keeps discarding old tattered bodies to take new ones in its journey to freedom and enlightenment.

He Alone Is!

The foetus chosen by the soul has its own DNA coding, which will determine the uniqueness of the physical aspects of the body for the rest of the life. The subtle body, consisting of the mind, intellect, memory and ego, also has its own uniqueness and inimitable nature. This kind of perfect 'match-making' between the subtle and the gross body, or the actor and his costume, could only be possible by God, the All-knowing and All-pervading Supreme Consciousness that is producing this grand drama of life on the stage of the earth. Everything in life is pre-ordained – gender, role to be played, achievements and failures, gains and losses, health and sickness, and a whole heap of opposites in worldly expressions and activities. We have to act our roles perfectly and remember that we are on the earthly stage doing His Will alone. Complete surrender is impossible as long as man is influenced by his mind, with all its waywardness. To free oneself from recurring cycles of birth and death man must have a perfect understanding of non-duality and experience his life as being completely in God's Hands. This is true surrender.

There is no other, but He alone in the entire Universe, in many names, forms and situations!

The play is His; the role is His gift;

The lines are written by Him; He directs;

He decides the dress and décor; the gesture and the tone;

The entrance and the exit.

Is There Such a Thing as 'Free Will'?

Does this mean man has no free will or choices to make in his life on earth? A pre-destined life is comparable to a dog's leash and the dog is free to move within its limits. **Man too has chosen his own limitations prior to birth**, and we call it his Prapthi (Prarabdha karma), which is already determined in the astral plane. It is the writer's firm belief that man has some choice as to how he could play his role on earth, and with what kind of attitude; but he has neither a choice over his role he plays nor over the events that surround him. He is born with his script, and this cannot be altered on the stage of the earth, except when the Avatar intervenes. With what attitude one plays his role is influenced by his tendencies (vasanas) from past lives as well as the conditioning since birth. If human life will unfold according to a pre-destined path, one may cleverly argue why on earth should anyone bother to work or strive for anything?

Lord Krishna Himself gives the answer to this question. Arjuna, the great warrior, was in a quandary and his ego got the better of him. Arjuna wanted to walk away from the battlefield, as if he was the one to decide whether he was to fight or not. He turned to the Lord in such a confused state, but Bhagavan Krishna emphatically told Arjuna, **"In spite of you, you will do what you are destined to do. You are a warrior and your role is to fight injustice."** Here Lord Krishna hinted that the outcome of the war and Arjuna's

role in it were already pre-determined, long before the event was to occur. Arjuna's choice was limited to his understanding as to how he would fight and with what kind of attitude he would face the situation. It also implied that Arjuna had no free-will to decide upon his role in the war, whether to fight or walk away, neither its outcome. Arjuna had the choice of destroying the enemies with hatred, anger and doership, which would have added to his karmic load, or, become an instrument of the Lord and surrender to His Supreme Will, thereby absolving himself from incurring any karma to be carried forward, but fight he must. Both ways, the outcome would have remained unchanged. Christians pray to the Heavenly Father: ".... **Thy kingdom come; Thy Will be done on Earth, as it is in heaven.**" It means, our life has already been 'landscaped' in the astral life before taking birth and events in our life are inevitable. It is like a movie film already containing what is being projected. So, where is the question of Free-Will?

The Golden Path – Unconditional Surrender

By God's grace alone man can overcome attachment, bondage and ignorance. First man has to surrender to the Supreme Will, with peace in his mind and love in his heart and make every effort himself to be a worthy recipient of His grace. Our Lord, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, has among His 108 names, 'Om Sri Sai Karma Dwamsine Namaha', meaning the Sai who has come wipe out all our karma and free us from the karmic web that brings us again and again to the worldly stage. Let us remember Bhagavan Baba's first ever bhajan – "*Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam, Dustara Bhava Sagara Taranam.*" (O man! Without worshipping the Lotus Feet of the Guru [Lord Sai] it is not possible to cross the ocean of life and death.)

"I separated Myself from Myself so that I can become Myself," says Bhagavan. Only by one's awareness, attitude and deeds, that is, seeing God in everything, everywhere and all the time, can one experience this oneness to the full and feel: "Having realised who I am Lord, I have become Yourself again, 'I am I,' just as the waves merge back with the ocean.

The writer offers his heartfelt gratitude to Bhagavan Baba for His inspiration and boundless Grace for the intuitive understanding of the drama of life, with love, humility and dedication. *Jai Sai Ram.*

"If our present is but the result of our past, the habits formed are over a long period. But, whatever be the nature of the character one has come by, it can certainly be modified by modifying the accustomed processes of thought and imagination. No one is incorrigible. By conscious effort, habits can be changed and the character refined. By selfless service, by renunciation, by devotion, by prayer and by methodical reasoning and logic, old habits can be discarded and new one's acquired for taking us along the divine path." – Baba. (Sai Inspires - 26th August 2005, H2H)

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part - 30

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT VIII - SCENE 1

A group of boys are playing on the bank of the river. They are jumping around and catching frogs.

CHORUS: Look, there's a frog! See, a small frog here! Jump like frogs!! I got one! I got two frogs!!

BOY 1: Hey, don't touch them; it is not good.

BOY 2: We'll take all these home.

BOY 3: How shall we take them?

BOY 4: Here's a basket; put them all in.

Sathya comes along and watches the boys causing pain to the frogs.

SATHYA: Stop, stop! Poor things, let them be free and play happily; don't imprison them in the basket.

BOY: If they are happy playing, so are we.

SATHYA: If play is what you want, let us all play together. Does anyone play with frogs? See how they are suffering. Let them go. You must not kill living beings.

ANOTHER BOY: We are not killing them but just taking them home.

THIRD BOY: We will play with them.

SATHYA: Causing pain to dumb animals is a great sin.

BOY: It is not a sin. Frogs can survive anywhere. They will be safer in the basket than in water.

SATHYA: Will you be safe if you are thrown into water? Every species must be in its own habitat. This is the secret of Creation.

BOY: I too will tell you a secret. There are snakes in the water. And do you know what snakes do when they see a frog? They grab them and swallow them!

ANOTHER BOY: But will not the frog then die?

FIRST BOY: It will. And it is to protect the frogs that we are putting them all in the basket and taking them home.

SATHYA: God alone knows whom to protect, whom to save, and whom to punish. We don't.

BOY: That's why we are saving them.

SATHYA: You think you are very clever? Release the frogs, or else....

BOY: I will not release them.

SATHYA: Release, or else....

BOY: I will not!

Sathya waves His hand. The frogs all turn into pigeons and fly away. The boys are astounded.

BOYS: Hey! The frogs have changed into pigeons!!

ONE BOY: Raju, we don't understand your words but we understand your heart. You are not an ordinary person like us. We made a terrible mistake. Please forgive us!

SATHYA: It is good that you have realised your mistake. No one must ever again do this kind of thing.

BOYS: Yes Raju.

SATHYA: Come, let us go.

In this manner, Sathya exhibited noble qualities from a very young age and taught virtues to people. He transformed them in many ways. He always corrected those who inflicted pain or spoke harshly.

SCENE 2

During the period Sathya was studying in the Bukkapatnam School, His elder brother Seshama Raju got married to one Suseelamma, the daughter of Pasupathi Subbaraju of Kamalapuram. Seshama Raju then went to Kamalapuram. There he stayed with his in-laws. Sathya was sent along with

Seshama, so that He could pursue higher studies there under the direct supervision of His elder brother.

Before all this happens, while Seshama is still in Puttaparthi, one day, Seshama is walking along a street in Puttaparthi. At that time, two people seated under a tree are talking to each other.

MAN UNDER TREE: Look, Seshama Raju is coming. I'll talk to him.

THE OTHER MAN: [to Seshama] Look, sir, is it proper for you to do this?

SESHAMA RAJU: What are you talking about?

FIRST MAN: Great! You talk as though you know nothing! The whole village is talking about your younger brother Raju, and you act as if you don't know anything. I understand!

SECOND MAN: It appears that Raju does magic and chants strange hymns. He is apparently claiming to have great powers.

FIRST MAN: If this sort of thing continues, we will not keep quiet. We have put up with it so far on account of the prestige of your grandfather and father. Din some sense into your younger brother and ask him to act according to his age.

SECOND MAN: It seems that he is preaching that cock fighting and other such games are harmful to animals. He is even composing and singing provocative songs to campaign against such sports. Haven't we been having these sports for ages?

SESHAMA RAJU: Yes sir, I will advise my brother suitably. Please understand that I am not supporting my brother Sathyam, but in childhood, does not one do many things in sheer innocence? You should therefore not be too much disturbed by these things.

FIRST MAN: Matters have gone too far, Seshama Raju. We don't hate or dislike your brother. Rather, it is out of concern for him that we are reporting to you; he is a son of the Raju family, is he not? Well, it is all up to you now.

SESHAMA RAJU: Don't worry sir, I shall do the needful.

SECOND MAN: You had better do something before matters get out of hand!

FIRST MAN: Well said sir!

SCENE 3

House of Venkama Raju. Members of the family have gathered and are discussing the complaints against Sathya, being made by various people in the village. Kondama Raju also is present.

VENKAMA RAJU: Sathyam's behaviour is causing increasing anxiety day by day. He does not speak like young boys ought to, and His behaviour is not what is expected of Him.

EASWARAMMA: Sathyam is young and He does not know the difference between good and bad. But then please, sometimes, there is profound meaning in the words of children. And we may not always understand them, isn't that so?

VENKAMA RAJU: What you say is certainly true, Easwari but as I said earlier, His behaviour is not in conformity with what is expected. He seems to think that there is some Power in Him, but will others accept that? Many are even ridiculing Him.

SESHAMA RAJU: Yes mother. The other day He made all the pupils in the Puttaparthi School go on strike. Is this what children of His age do? And when the Telugu master in the Bukkapatnam School asked why He had not written the notes, He gave a peculiar answer. The Teacher let Him off lightly but Sathyam got the Teacher stuck to the chair. When asked why He had done so, He replied that He had done it for fun, and not as an insult to the Teacher. Now, He has created another problem. For generations the people in the village have been having cock fighting and horse racing; but He has attacked these traditional sports and incited people to sing songs against these past-times. The elders of the village are agitated and are asking if this is the sort of thing a young kid ought to do.

KONDAMA RAJU: Sathyam, it seems there are many complaints against You!

SATHYA: Grandfather! I did not do anything wrong. Medicine may be bitter but when taken it does good, does it not? Good advice is like medicine; why don't people understand that?

KONDAMA RAJU: Well said my dear grandson! That's the way to teach lessons to people!!

SESHAMA RAJU: *[to Kondama]* You alone are impressed by the words of your grandson; others are not. No one understands what He says and even if they do, they will not accept. In this Kali Age, how many people will listen to

good advice? And, is He of the right age to talk about such matters as good and bad, Morality and Justice, *Dharma* and Divinity?

KONDAMA RAJU: [to Sathya] Answer him!

SATHYA: Good and bad, Morality and Justice, *Dharma* and Divinity, have nothing to do with age!

SESHAMA RAJU: Mother! Do you see how He answers back with scant respect for my seniority in age?

EASWARAMMA: [to Seshama] He is not arguing with you but, out of affection for you, telling you what you should know! Look Seshama, why don't you think of a solution that would prevent Sathyam, from coming to harm?

VENKAMA RAJU: There is only one way – let us send Sathyam to Kamalapuram.

SESHAMA RAJU: Yes father, I too wanted to make the same suggestion.

EASWARAMMA: Kamalapuram?

VENKAMA RAJU: Yes, Kamalapuram has a High School suitable for higher studies, once one completes studies in the Bukkapatnam School. Seshama is already there, undergoing Teacher's training, and staying with his in-laws. Sathyam can stay along with Seshama and study there.

KONDAMA RAJU: Well Sathyam, will you go to Kamalapuram?

SATHYA: Grandpa, who are we to decide what should be done and what should not be? God alone decides! As for Me, all places are the same to Me.

VENKAMA RAJU: That looks like a good solution. You will get good education there, that will prepare You well for a Government job. What do you say, Easwari?

EAAWARAMMA: There are still three months more for Vijayadasami [*the admission time*]. We'll think about it when the time comes. But then, father-in-law has to agree, has he not?

KONDAMA.RAJU: What can I say my dear? I am an old man, and it is all the same to me. Just that I am very much attached to the young one. Seshama, Venkama! You both want Him to go to Kamalapuram so that His behaviour changes, so that He can study better, so that no harm befalls Him, and so that He eventually becomes a great man, is that not? Well then, send Him there! Even He has agreed!! It is not in Sathya's nature to offend or hurt anyone.

(To be continued)

GITA FOR CHILDREN
PART 31
(Continued from the previous issue)

Chapter 14

20. 'Depending on the *Guna* of the person, Destiny bestows different kinds of rewards on different people. A *Tamasic* person would be condemned to a state of ignorance, naturally. I mean how can a lazy person ever hope to become wise or knowledgeable?'

21. 'As for the *Rajasic* person, he might know a lot about the world but his greed and avarice would often plunge him into misery.'

22. Arjuna asks, 'Krishna, there is something here that I do not understand. My observation is that in this world, it is often the *Sattvic* person who suffers most and not the *Rajasic* person. In fact, frequently, it is the *Rajasic* person who inflicts suffering on *Sattvic* persons.'

23. Krishna replies, 'Superficially, what you say might seem to be correct. But know this to be true: The pain that the *Sattvic* person undergoes is actually meant to purify him and increase his eligibility for God! Everything has a purpose in My Master Plan!'

24. 'All that I have told you so far is about how these people behave while alive. What is their fate after death? The *Tamasic* person would be reborn somewhere at the bottom. He might even lose his human form, if his track record has been poor. Does that mean that there is no hope? Not really. Just that in his case the due process of refinement would take longer, that is all. It is like travel; a person would cover distance slower if he walks, than he would if he rides a horse, that is all.'

25. 'The *Rajasic* person would be born in an environment of activity. All his life would be immersed in activity, like business, for example. Such people are full of unfulfilled desires. They would therefore be born again and again till their thirst for worldly attractions and pleasures get exhausted.'

26. 'Worldly desire is the main cause for rebirth. Every person has desires peculiar to his personality. I have not yet said anything about the *Sattvic* person. What about him? Believe it or not, he too has desires of his own! His desire may not be rooted in greed or avarice, but gentle people too have desires! They want good children, for example.'

27. Arjuna asks, 'Krishna, God that is to say, You have to be reasonable! How can man ever get rid of desires? We have stories in the epics that tell us that even great souls succumbed to desires of various kinds. Surely You can't be serious when You are talking of getting rid of desires.'

28. Krishna replies, 'You have a valid point there. But there is one thing that can be done and that is to change the direction of desire. Instead of desiring the pleasures of the world, have an intense desire for God and seek the Bliss that the Lord alone can confer. Thus, by converting one type of desire into another type, all problems get solved!'

29. 'A person who desires only God automatically rises above the *Gunas*. Such a person is called a *Gunatheetha*.

30. Arjuna asks, 'Above the *Gunas*?'

31. Krishna replies, 'Yes, above the *Gunas*!'

32. Arjuna continues, 'What does that mean?'

33. Krishna replies, 'It simply means that person is not *Tamasic*, he is not *Rajasic*, and he is not *Sattvic* either. He is beyond all the three standard types.'

34. Arjuna shakes his head and mutters, 'I can't understand. What sort of person is this?'

35. Krishna says in reply, 'Arjuna, I have in fact already described such a person earlier. Only, I did not use the term *Gunatheetha* then. Such a person couldn't care less about the attractions of the world; that is because the only thing he wants is God. He is not bothered about friend and foe, about joy and sorrow, etc. That is to say, he is completely above the pairs of opposites. Things like joy and sorrow bother only a person with a dual mind, or one who is below the *Gunas*. But our friend has a one-track mind; he is concerned only with God and nothing else. Thus, he is immersed in the world of Oneness. That is why he is said to be beyond the *Gunas*.'

36. Sounding skeptical, Arjuna mutters, 'Sounds like a tough job.'

37. Krishna comments, 'Oh yes? What is not difficult in this world? Listen, if you want something desperately, you will not really bother about difficulties, obstacles etc. Both you and I have seen people struggling against impossible odds to achieve all kinds of worldly objectives. But when it comes to God, people seem to quit even before trying!'

38. 'Reaching God is no more difficult than many of the stupid stunts that people are trying all the time. People do many mad things for fame; they want to become immortal! How foolish! Removal of immorality is the proper way to Immortality. Love Me and become one with Me; that is the right and proper and indeed the only way to become Immortal. Let not stunts delude you!'

39. 'Well, to wrap it all up, people get what they deserve; and that is determined essentially by their *Gunas*. The *Sattvic* type get the best deal shall I say? They go to Heaven. However, their stay there will end for sure one day,

and they have to come back and face the hassle all over once again! But there is an even better deal, that is, coming to Me! He who makes Me his goal, comes to Me for sure, and stays with Me for ever. That is certain!

END OF CHAPTER 14

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

GLIMPSES OF STIRRING SEVA IN EUROPE

Earlier this year we had offered you stories of Sai Seva being done in countries like Russia, New Zealand and from three places in India (To see a list of all the seva articles we have had so far, [click here](#)). In this issue, we present you accounts of inspiring service carried out all across the European continent from Zone 6 regions 61 and 62. These have been taken from a book 'Sai Challenge' given to us lovingly by Sai devotees of these regions. In all we feature glimpses of worthy work from eight countries and we hope to follow these up in later issues with more such accounts and in greater detail. We start with Bosnia And Herzegovina.

Medical Camp in Bosnia And Herzegovina

In the town of Samac, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 27 Sai devotees conducted a medical camp, supported by 67 Doctors, social workers, the Women's Association, the Red Cross and local volunteers. Medicines were donated by Sai members from all over Europe, and the Bosnian firms Euroliljek and Brcko helped with other supplies.

The local school director, aware of the work carried out by the Sathya Sai Organization, offered his school premises to hold the camp in. As a result, the Sai organisation held its biggest ever camp, serving 295 patients from the town and the surrounding villages, comprising of 86 men, 167 women and 42 children.

During the camp, a brother and a sister from Germany looked after 24 children during a "painting" workshop, thereby giving them an opportunity to heal their war traumas, and enabling their parents to be free to see the doctors.

The whole place was crowded with doctors and patients. The ophthalmologist alone conducted over 100 examinations. The school headmaster was present for the whole day, assisted by some associates, and at the end of the day they helped to clean up, while Sai members re-ordered the classrooms.

Following the medical camp, devotees also distributed some clothes and food supplies. All the people openly showed their happiness and gratitude and the Seva attracted the press agency Srna, as well as a local TV reporter, and both these institutions interviewed the representative of the Sathya Sai Organisation of Bosnia And Herzegovina.

The camp also served the needs of some animals after some country folk from a nearby village brought over some animals to be examined by the vet.

Making Greece Great 1

During a regular Saturday food distribution at St George's court, devotees met an Albanian gypsy, mother of 5 children aged between 1 and 15 years old. She worked all day selling clothes in an outdoor market, whereas the alcoholic father is unemployed. They decided to help them and 4 Sai members as well as 4 non-members took on this task.

After visiting the family they took one of the daughters, 4 year-old Diane, to see a children's theatre show. They quickly realised that the child was very sick, suffering from head lice, malnutrition and poor physical hygiene. As she was kept at home all day she also had poor social skills. After taking her back home, the team became extremely concerned as they discovered two other two children were also very sick.

The following day they took the three children to a local Public hospital. One child was diagnosed suffering from acute pneumonia and the other had a 'bronchial cough' which could turn into asthma if untreated. Doctors fully examined the kids and offered all the required medicine, including antibiotics, inhalers, and food, free of charge. They also promised to bring clothes, toys and whatever else they might need.

The Sai team then took the children to have a bath, cut their hair and apply lice medication. Properly fed and with a clean blanket for each one of them, they took them back home, where they collected all their clothes for washing. The following day one child, Diane developed a high fever, and they lovingly took her home and looked after her all night.

On subsequent visits the devotees instructed the older sister how to take care of the younger children. Since the children wished to be baptized and to attend school, they discussed these issues with the mother who agreed and accepted these proposals.

The team also took the children on their *first ever* visit to a playground which they really enjoyed. When they took them to the church to meet the priest who was to baptize them, he was so touched by their story that he made arrangements to provide them food on a daily basis. Also, a second hand washing machine, refrigerator and stove have been delivered to the family. The devotees felt they discovered that by acting sincerely to alleviate human problems all doors open up and help comes from many places.

Making Greece Great - 2

The local Sai group decided to clean an area of some acres from the litter that visitors carelessly leave behind in Parnitha forest. Mount Parnitha, one of the most beautiful mountains in Greece, now part of a national park that surrounds Athens, is a unique natural retreat for the inhabitants of the capital.

The devotees contacted the chief officer of the local council who accepted their offer of help and agreed to give them such assistance as was available regarding the cleaning of the area. The first day an inspection team visited the

mountain and selected the prime areas where the visitors were found to be leaving litter.

On a second visit, the same team worked out where the collections would be undertaken. A careful plan was formulated as to how the members would be positioned at the starting point and where they would move onto in order to achieve the best results.

On the third visit, the actual collection took place. 14 participating Sai members from a few Centres with three friends who were non-members took part, using dozens of huge litter bags, and wearing work gloves.

After filling many bags with litter, they carried them to a specific point on the trail for collection. The items gathered included sleeping bags, plastic and glass bottles, tins, broken toys and pieces of furniture, paper, tires and numerous other items. At a specified time a municipality truck arrived and the bags were loaded for disposal.

They also gave ecology lessons to some families that were picnicking in the area asking them to take their litter away in their cars and dispose of it correctly. They pointed out that even though litter had been left in sealed bags, stray dogs would easily tear the packages open, and strew the litter all around the place.

The team felt great fulfillment and satisfaction with the team spirit and cooperation that united all of them during the service. Their work also attracted an article in the local paper "Acharness" as an example for imitation.

Helping a Slovenian Family

The Ljubljana Sai Centre had been arranging joint service with the Novo Mesto Centre and the Velenje group for quite some time. So when the Slovenian Youth Friends' Association and the Social Services informed them about a family in need of help they wanted to answer the call.

The family has five members: Father, 54 years, who is retired due to being a disabled person: Mother, 38 years, is registered as unemployed and can hardly find a job as she has two small children who are ill. The boy is five and is short-sighted, having 7.5 diopters in one eye. The girl is two and a half and suffers from bronchitis. The family depends on social assistance and spends the majority of their income to pay the rent for one half of an old house where they live and they have very little money left for food and fuel. The family receives clothes from the Humanitarian Organization and the Red Cross.

The devotees visited the family to find out their most urgent needs discovering that their most essential requisite was heating for the winter, when temperatures can drop below freezing. They also asked for food, used clothes and a bicycle for the small girl.

After few service meetings at the Centres where members were advised about the family and their needs they were able to collect food, clothes, books, toys and bicycles for both children. Then two donors offered to provide the firewood and others to transport it to the family's house.

34 members from the Sai Centre and nearby Sai groups joined in the service. The house grounds needed a good cleaning, so they started by collecting all the litter and garbage that was spread around in plastic bags. When the area was tidied up, some members started to prepare the food, and others distributed all the goods collected for them.

A big pile of firewood - about 8 cubic meters - that was unloaded earlier that morning, had to be stored in its proper place. More than 10 Sai members made a chain and passed the wood from the pile as far as the wood shed, while others carried firewood to a place under the eaves of the house using wheelbarrows. All the wood was moved and stored after two hours.

After all this help the family was very satisfied and openly expressed their gratitude.

Let Us Not Litter in France

One devotee often passes by a public housing estate in Clichy-Sous-Bois about 20 km from Paris. She noticed that the grounds around this estate were always extremely dirty, full of litter. Her observations spawned the idea for some Seva to make this site more pleasant for its residents, more welcoming to visitors and passers-by, and eventually to become an example.

Office bearers from the Paris 1 and Paris 3 Centres took part in a preliminary reconnaissance mission and took photos to be able to organise the work. They fixed the rendezvous point, the equipment needed and the vehicle to transport the collected rubbish to the public dump.

28 members participated in this challenge: 25 Sai members (including 5 youths), plus 3 Canadian non-members on vacation in Paris, who delayed their departure so that they could take part in the activity. While they were busy working, two young children who were walking their dogs were intrigued by what they saw. They came close to watch the devotees picking up rubbish thrown from the estate windows and one of the members told them, "See how dirty the estate is? What a lack of respect for nature and for everybody who lives here. This is a not a good example." The children immediately replied, "Ma'm, we'd like to help you clean. We're going to ask our mother for permission". They hurried away, and very soon they came back to help.

Several passers-by watched with amazement, murmuring and smiling a "thank you". One man thought they were from the City Hall. Apparently, the residents of the estate had been asking for over a year for the city authorities to send someone from the "Streets and Roads Department" to pick up the burned garbage and empty oil cans thrown around this improvised parking area! They replied that they were not from the City Hall, but just a group of friends that preferred to spend their time in this way instead of watching television. He couldn't believe his ears and couldn't stop thanking them "from the bottom of his heart".

After a joyful picnic lunch in the adjoining woods, that was made more pleasant by a short play on the theme of nonviolence acted by the young people, they started work again. They saw with regret that some of the areas cleaned that morning were already dirty again from garbage thrown out of the estate windows! But now five kids living there were waiting to help them again. Finally, they gathered approximately 80 garbage bags together with some large other items and performed two trips to the public dump, located several kilometres away.

At the end of the afternoon they left tired but very happy.

Beautifying Croatia

Four members from Croatian Centres were selected to clean one of the most beautiful coasts to be found in the country, which had become terribly neglected despite its popularity. Even in autumnal September, people come to enjoy its blue waters and golden sand, yet neglect to collect their litter when they leave. As a consequence, garbage had been amassed and strewn throughout the whole area.

The challenge of cleaning the coast began with only a few people but soon some visitors, who were watching from nearby, joined in and started to collect the garbage too. Everybody enjoyed doing the service, and they cleaned the beaches on several other occasions. As before, ordinary visitors came to take part and all worked together as a team. This simple work helped all the participants enjoy themselves and led to a great sense of satisfaction.

Ensuring Italian Hospitality

The Sai Organisation in Italy has been working on the maintenance and restructuring of a cottage guest house in the woods inside "Mother Sai" premises. This is part of a larger and more demanding challenge that they are executing so that the entire complex operates efficiently.

All the work was coordinated by professional builders, carpenters, painters, ably aided by Sai members from all over Italy. And many tasks were successfully completed like:

- Painting the walls, ceilings, doors and window frames.
- The installation of a new roof.
- Finishing touches to fixtures.
- Cleaning of gutter and rain-pipes.
- Renovating the external fence.
- The construction of a new gate.
- Leveling the surrounding land of the cottage.

The Mother Sai guest house is now ready to accommodate Sai members and visitors from all over Europe, and ensures them a hearty and hospitable welcome.

Super Music from Spain

The Spanish Organisation came together in a truly harmonious way to create a CD of devotional songs which are easy to assimilate by the public in general. The idea was to spend a weekend together and to record the songs in two days with the help of technicians and professional friends. As a result, a beautiful CD was produced.

They first looked for the necessary human resources. They selected a dedicated member to coordinate the project, and then had to select members from different parts of Spain who had good voices and were able to perform as singers and musicians alike. Finally, the co-ordinator arranged for the participation of a professional musician and a recording technician from "Rec Studios" in Valencia. These friends who were non-members, worked hand in hand with the project's director and their selfless and generous assistance made the final results possible. So at the end the team achieved the collaboration of 21 people.

The team stayed in the residence of a local member and in just one intense weekend recorded all the main voices, accompanied by the guitar and percussion. The songs had already been selected by the music director, who had also composed a number of new songs, and these were recorded one after the other under the supervision of the National Coordinator. The remaining features such as additional musical arrangements, blending, etc. were then completed by the music director with the assistance of professional experts from the small studio where all the recording took place.

As an expression of their love to Sai and the community the CD was titled "We Surrender". They state that their motivation was to uplift the consciousness and reach the hearts of people through devotional and spiritual singing. Their CD includes 18 devotional songs.

Service from Switzerland

Some time ago, two Sai members travelled to Prashanti Nilayam, and after hearing so much from them about Sathya Sai Baba, one of their neighbours, an 83 year old lady decided to travel with them all the way to India. The trip made them all feel extremely happy and joyful and back home in Sissach near Basel, the old lady was still touched by the immense Love and light of Sai that she had received. However, she now came to notice how gloomy her apartment was, in direct contrast to the light she carried inside.

Some Sai members heard of her discomfort and decided to intervene. On a Spring Saturday morning, three members from the Centre of Basel visited her home equipped with a ladder and all the essentials they needed to decorate the apartment. They worked with great enthusiasm for the whole day, in the name of Sai. The old lady helped as much as she could and by that evening, all rooms were freshly-painted and the place was full of light. The old lady is very happy now that Sathya Sai Baba's light is shining both within her and around her.

PRASHANTI DIARY

As we informed you in our last issue, Swami left for Kodai Kanal on 26th April. Bhagavan graced those sylvan hills for 22 days – a welcome respite to all from the blazing sun at Puttaparthi. Twenty-six students and several elders had the good fortune of being invited as Bhagawan's entourage, and all had a holy, joy-filled time there. Many devotees travelled from the surrounding areas to have their Darshan of Bhagavan in that unique setting. During the three weeks Eashwaramma day celebrations were carried out with great enthusiasm and there were numerous special concerts and talks. Bhagavan organised Narayana Seva on a grand scale and the students and elders alike participated in the distribution of gifts of food and clothes. Swami also visited some devotees' homes. We are sure that you, dear reader, would like to know more about all this and we will be covering the amazing Kodai story on a serial basis starting from next issue in the 'H2H Special' section of H2H!

Swami's Return to Prashanti Nialayam on 18 May 2007

There was a lot of anticipation and excitement in the air as news that Swami would be arriving in Parthi had spread far and wide. The aircraft was scheduled to land at Parthi anytime after 3:00pm from Coimbatore. Banners and buntings, flowers and mango leaves had been put up everywhere in order to accord a warm welcome to the Lord.

There was an eager murmur at about 3:15pm as the Indian Airlines flight made its first appearance in the horizon. It approached the airport from the eastern direction and gently landed, taxiing along the runway. As it came to a halt, the airport staff got into action immediately and a "roomy" platform was raised to the front door of the plane.

There was a cheer as the orange robe made its first appearance at the door. Swami too seemed to mirror the eagerness and anticipation of everyone at Parthi. He came out of the plane blessing everyone and looking down at all those who had gathered. He sat in the front seat of the Sonata car waiting for Him and then began the journey to the mandir- and what a journey it was!

Devotees and the local people had gathered en masse along the entire stretch of the road. Swami too seemed to have instructed the driver to slow down wherever the devotees had gathered. He was smiling at all and blessing everybody. The tinted glass of the car could in no way reduce the ceaseless and spontaneous outpouring of love from both the sides. It is indeed a scene to be seen - the relationship between Swami and His devotees. Coconuts broke by the hundreds and flowers of myriad colours were showered on the car. The flower shower was so profuse that the security guards had to constantly remove the flowers on the windscreen so that Swami could see the devotees ahead and vice versa. There was also a special motorcycle escort squad of the Puttaparthi youth to lead the

convoy. The convoy slowly wended its way along the serpentine roads cleaned with water and lined with *rangolis*. A band of drummers also joined the convoy near the Vidyagiri arch. From the gopuram gate as Swami entered, the students conducted a vedam procession led by dancers and music. A welcome song filled the air that was already heavy with love and devotion.

Swami alighted near the interview room and sat on the sofa looking at the devotees on both the ladies and gents side for a while. He received Aarthi and then went into the interview room. Swami went to Yajur Mandir for a short while and then returned for the evening bhajans.

Buddha Poornima Morning Programme on 21 May

Devotees from many Buddhist countries: Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and also Indian devotees with Buddhist roots arrived to celebrate Buddha poornima in the divine presence of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The morning programme for today commenced with Swami's arrival after Rahu Kaalam at 9:10am. The hall had been decorated in Japanese Buddhist style and two altars for Bhagavan Buddha had been set on the main stage. On one altar was the child Buddha and the other had Buddha in the meditative pose.

Swami was welcomed with Japanese drumming. The drummer stood in the centre of the hall gracefully moving and powerfully playing the single traditional drum - the Taiko. These drums have a tradition going back more than 2000 years old and are used for ceremonies in temples and shrines, inviting God to the place of ceremony.

Swami took a complete darshan round and arrived at the portico near the interview room. There He alighted and lit a candle on the cake specially made for the occasion. Swami then formally inaugurated the celebrations by lighting the lamp in front of the Buddha altar. There was a dance by the Japanese youth accompanied by the Taiko drums. After a short presentation, there was the "Buddha Bathing" ritual. As a symbol of inner purification, a little Buddha is bathed with fragrant water. This ritual highlights the universal message that it is simple to wash away physical dirt but much more difficult to cleanse one's inner dirt of ignorance, greed and anger. The ritual was performed by ladies dressed in traditional dresses while holy chants rended the air. The monks too performed worship at the "meditative Buddha" altar.

A lady monk master then presented Swami the Ta Bei Chou. This is an ancient Buddhist scripture which contains mantras of mercy and compassion. It contains 84 different names and forms of Buddha as Kuan Yin, with illustrations of each form done by Master Wu Cheng. Swami accepted the manuscript and leafed through it. The monk then took padanamaskar and went back to her place with a smile beaming on her face.

Then Swami permitted bhajans to begin. Devotees from the host countries lead the bhajans and Swami blessed the prasadam to be distributed to all. The prasadam was a Japanese jellied sweet- Yokan made in Hokkaido. Swami then went into the interview room as the bhajans continued. He came out and at 10:15 am received Aarthi, cut the cake on which He had earlier lit a candle and then left for Yajur Mandir.

Buddha Poornima Evening Programme on 21 May

In the afternoon, Swami came out at 4:05 pm. The backdrop for the drama had already been put up and Swami eyed it intently as He passed by it in the car. He completed a full darshan round and then sat onstage. The most amazing thing was the welcome Vedic chants. The Vedas were being chanted by the Japanese and other Buddhist devotees at the mike. The pronunciation and delivery were impressive. Swami sat listening to the chants for about 5-6 minutes. Then the programme began. Mr Nari Chugani, Chairman for Zone 5 introduced the two speakers for the evening. The first speaker was Dr. Venerable Bellanvilla Wimalaratna from Sri Lanka . Dr. Wimalaratna is the chancellor of University of Sri Jayawardhapura , Sri Lanka . He is also serving as the Secretary General of the World Buddhist Sanga Council in Sri Lanka . He dilated at length on the teachings of Buddha. Describing Buddha as the perfect man he exhorted everyone to make efforts to attain that state.

The second speaker was Reverend Tulku Karma Gyurme Sonam Rinpoche . He continued where the first speaker had left off and further detailed on the teachings of Buddha. He was profusely grateful to Swami for having given him this opportunity to speak in His presence. It was his first public speech to a Sai audience.

Swami then consented for the drama on Buddha to be put on. Before the drama could begin, Swami called Reverend Tulku Karma Gyurme Sonam Rinpoche to Him. As Swami spoke to him, the entire hall came to a perfect standstill witnessing the interaction between the Lord and His devotee. The announcer also stopped the drama announcement. A loving interaction followed after which Swami materialised a beautiful *Navaratna* ring for him. He was overjoyed and returned to his place after taking *Padanamaskar*.

Then three Japanese ladies came up on stage to offer the new book "Enlightened Beings" to Swami. Swami accepted the roses and browsed through the book and accepted it. A lady then offered the programme schedule. The drama was titled "Buddha No Monogatari". Swami had a look at it and then the three ladies bowed down to Him and left. This was followed by the inauguration of some more books by Swami which were offered by Mr. Ashok Sakhrani, the National Chairperson of Hong Kong . Then the Drama began.

The drama was based on the life of Gautama Buddha. It was introduced and connected throughout with commentary by two "*soothra dharas*" or stage managers. It opens with the scene where a prediction is made to

King Shuddhodhana about his son, the little prince Siddhartha, would become a renunciant and a great seeker. Shuddhodhana, trying to thwart the prophetic words, limits Siddhartha to the confines of the palace. However, when he is old enough, Siddhartha tours his kingdom where he sees sights that he had never seen before. Sickness, old age and death shake him up and the calming sight of a monk in meditation drives him to seek the ultimate source of never ending bliss. Siddhartha is well on his path to becoming the Buddha. He receives enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and finds that the ultimate secret of life is love and it is expressed as non violence.

Buddha spends his entire life spreading love and nonviolence and is tolerant towards all. When some village folks advise him against breaking bread in the house of a woman of supposedly bad character, Buddha lovingly tells them, "A single hand cannot produce clapping sounds. It needs the other hand to co-operate too. So too, left to themselves, individuals are not bad." Then he goes ahead to say, "There are 5 sinners - those who commit the sin, those who accompany the sinner, those who help the sinner, those who watch the sin and those who know that the sin is being committed and yet do nothing about it."

The drama also made use of a demoness to represent symbolically how the evil qualities of hate and jealousy etc fade away in the face of love. The conclusion came when the Buddha gives up his mortal coil peacefully and inspires his disciple Ananda to go within. "Oh Ananda, all the while I searched for the Truth. But it was forever within. Seek within oh Ananda, seek within."

The drama concluded with all the participants coming forward in a formation. Swami appeared very pleased and He descended from the stage to grant them group photos. He spoke with many of the participants as they gathered around Him. After blessing them thus, Swami received Aarthi near the interview room and left.

Evening Programme on 22 May

Swami came out today evening at about 4:25 pm. Since the devotees could not see Him in the morning, His arrival was celebrated in glee and clapping. He was accorded a traditional welcome again with the drums and dances.

The first programme of the evening was a solo drum-dance-vocal performance by a member of the youth. This was followed by a dance by Japanese women with traditional fans in their hands. Swami then permitted the Hong Kong Ladies choir to begin their recital. The conductor offered a rose and pranaams to Swami and then the Choir began. The first song which ran as "Chuen Zhun Chuen Shan" was the translation of the popular bhajan, "Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma". Two English songs specially composed for the occasion were sung which were in prayer and devotion to Lord Buddha and Swami. They rendered

songs for 20-25 minutes and received applause from the audience and a benevolent smile from Swami.

The final programme was the "Gomadaki" ceremony. The priests lit the sacred fire with incense sticks. As the chants went on, the flames lit up with a flicker. They rose higher and higher and soon an impressive flame glowed bright just like the Dusshera yajnam days, as the Buddhist yajna was on, Swami asked for bhajans to begin. After the Gomadaki, Swami said that chairs for the priests must be laid out right in front of Him and the priests must be seated comfortably there. It was a wonderful opportunity for them and they sat there, palms folded in love and reverence. Prasadam was distributed. Swami then received Aarthi and left.

This year was also significant in the fact that after more than twenty years, Swami returned to Puttaparthi and not to Brindavan in Bangalore. Many strongly feel that this was an act of Grace for His very special devotee, Sai Gita, who passed away a few days after Swami's return on 22 May in the evening. On the 23 May, Swami visited her body at 8:30 am. Pedda Reddy, Gita's caretaker for many years, burst into tears. After consoling Pedda Reddy, Swami lovingly patted Gita calling, "Gita, Gita..." and opened up a packet of Vibhuti to shower it on her trunk. Swami left after giving exact instructions on what should be done.

But again at 11 am Swami came to see the body which was being transported by a crane. It took nearly one and a half hours to finally lower Gita to her final resting place in the same palatial shed she lived in which was a recent gift from the Lord. The most wonderful thing was that Swami was there all the while - sitting patiently in the car and in the sun (a sunshade was brought after a while). He left only at 12:15 pm! Such was the respect that Sai Geeta holds in our hearts that more than 2,000 devotees thronged to the place to make their final pranaams to the great soul. It is true to say that Parthi has been experiencing a void and news of her passing away has been received as a shock.

We hope to pay our respects to this divine being by offering you another cover story on Sai Geeta in July 2007, which will follow on from our January 2007 cover story: *Sai Geeta ...A Mystifying Tale Of Unmatched Love*.

Thank you for being with us. Sairam.

SWAMI AND ME

THE SOURCE, SWEETNESS AND SUSTENANCE OF MY LIFE – MY SAI

By Dr. Narendranath Reddy

Dr. Narendranath Reddy, a practicing internist-endocrinologist in California and Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, is Chairman, International Medical Committee of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization and also a member of the Prasanthi Council which oversees the activities of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations worldover.

First Divine Darshan

I had first darshan of Swami in Puttaparthi when I was about five years old. I was taken by my parents to see Bhagavan during the 1950 Dasara celebrations. However, my father being an ardent follower of Sri Ramakrishna, was not attracted to Swami thinking that he was a man of miracles. Sri Ramakrishna warned that miracles are obstacles for spiritual seekers. Unfortunately, we applied to the Avatar the restriction meant for a spiritual aspirant. For, miracles are the natural expression of the divine love of an Avatar. Because we did not have faith, even the *kumkum* (vermillion) that was given as *prasad* disappeared on our way back home. My father was surprised that Swami was taken in a procession on a palanquin just like a deity in a temple. More surprising to him was the fact that the devotees walked backward in the procession, facing Swami, unlike the normal practice of the people marching forward with their back, facing the deity. Later on, he and the other family members learnt that the devotees faced Baba to observe the changes in His visage (e.g. as Rama, Krishna, Durga, Laxmi, Saraswati), and also to catch the sweets and medallions materialized and thrown by Him from time to time.

Later on, we heard Swami's discourse in Hyderabad in 1970. We admired His speech as that of a holy man but did not recognize Him as an avatar. Only after coming to USA, Swami attracted us to Him through the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Center in Hollywood in 1977. After my father's retirement my parents came to USA to live with us as immigrants in May 1981, and all of us regularly attended the Hollywood Sathya Sai Center. Very soon, the whole family was attracted to Swami's unique and universal teachings.

My father developed an intense desire to move back to India and stay in the presence of the avatar and do some service in His ashram. Accordingly my parents left for India in July 1983 and reached Prasanthi Nilayam on 15 July. Bhagavan Baba graciously fulfilled my father's desire of doing service in His Ashram by giving him an appointment in Sri Sathya Sai University and have him serve as a member of Sathya Sai Central Office and Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust.

‘This is the right time for you’

After my parents settled in Prasanthi Nilayam, I used to visit the Ashram periodically along with my family. During my first interview with Swami in 1984, I asked Him why He made me wait all these years, although I had been worshipping Shirdi Sai from my childhood and also I had first darshan of Parthi Sai in 1950 itself. **Pat came the reply from Swami: "My child, everything has its right time and this is the right time for you.** For example, when we have a cataract, the doctor operates it only when it is mature; otherwise the eye gets damaged. Also if you have a wound on your body and if you remove the scab before the wound heals completely, there will be bleeding; when the wound heals naturally, the crust will fall off by itself. Further, if there is a fruit in the tree, and when it is ripe and falls, it is very sweet. But if you pluck it when it is unripe you are wasting the fruit because it will not be sweet. Thus, for everything, time has to be right. So, this is the right time for you."

From then on, the divine romance continued with increasing visits to Swami and interactions with Swami. The main attraction which pulled us to the lotus feet of Bhagavan is His unique and universal message of truth and love which go straight in to one's heart. I have been interested in studying scriptures from my early childhood. But only Swami made me understand spirituality very clearly. Before exposure to Him, it was more like intellectual gymnastics rather than practical experience.

The Divine Wills a Family of Doctors

Swami is the master of time - past, present and future; and we should carefully listen to His every syllable and letter because He mixes the past, present, and future, leading to our confusion at times. During one of those early visits when I wanted to take leave I said as usual, "Swami I am leaving". He said, "coming and going, coming and going". Now I understand what He meant at that time because of my frequent visits to the ashram recently. Also, interestingly when Swami called our family for interview one time He introduced us to a different group that we are all doctors. At that time, only my wife and myself were doctors; but my two daughters who were not even in their teens, were also included by Swami as doctors. However, Swami's words always come true and now both of my daughters are practicing physicians married to physician husbands.

Blessings for Daughter's Wedding

Swami showered His grace on our family on several occasions but we can never forget one special occasion for which we are all indebted to Him forever. It was Swami performing the wedding of my first daughter in June 1995 in Brindavan, Whitefield. Swami decided the place and date of marriage and guided us all the way. Before I left Prasanthi Nilayam I asked Swami when I should come. Swami said, "June 9" which was the day after the wedding. I unperturbedly said, "I will come on June 9th if it is your divine command". Swami laughed and told me to come three days before marriage.

Accordingly, my wife and I arrived at Brindavan three days prior to wedding. Friends like Col. Jogarao were joking at us, "Oh! The chief guests are coming". Though they were joking, it was true because Swami was the chief organizer who made all the arrangements like menu, military band, and accommodation for the guests, and arrangements in the wedding hall. Swami took personal interest in every minute detail including what tablecloth to be used and how the servants were to be dressed and whether they should wear gloves and how the guests should be properly treated. One day He scolded me for not visiting and greeting the bridegroom party housed in the guesthouse of Swami. Because when I am with Swami I am oblivious to everything else.

Prior to the wedding, even while I was going with Swami in the car He was discussing every minute detail of the wedding arrangements. On the wedding day, Swami was sitting in the hall throughout the ceremony and was guiding us at every step. He was explaining to the people sitting around Him about the spiritual significance of the Hindu wedding. He was very loving and materialized the *mangala sootra* (sacred wedding necklace) and came to the stage and blessed the bride, bridegroom and whole family and posed for the photographs.

After the wedding when it was time for food arrangements, Swami came and personally gave directions about food items to be served and showered an abundance of love and blessings on the invitees. He gave all of us bountiful gifts in the form of clothes and jewelry but the greatest gift was His motherly love. When my daughter was 10 years old He had promised that He would arrange the wedding procession with a military band. He fulfilled the promise by arranging a wonderful military band during the wedding. He also took part in *Narayana Seva* which immediately followed the wedding by serving the food and giving the clothes to the few fortunate souls with His divine hands before the rest of us followed His example.

My son-in-law who was new to Swami did not realize what he was getting and was naive in his behavior. But Swami, the great divine master, made him feel very comfortable and began attracting him slowly by His nectarine pure divine love. Then there was a reception party arranged in Hyderabad after the marriage. I was not willing to go for the same. But Swami persuaded me to go and even made arrangements for our family to be received in Hyderabad airport and shown around Swami's temple 'Sivam' and the famous Kalyana Mantapam in Hyderabad. When His grace comes, there is a torrential downpour. There were many instances of His divine healing of various physical ailments in different family members. I would like to share some of them here.

Swami Saves Family Members

My second daughter who is a practicing obstetrician and gynecologist, during her teenage years after her return to USA from pilgrimage trip to Puttaparthi, developed a high fever with toxicity. We consulted an infectious disease specialist who diagnosed it to be typhoid pending the blood cultures and started her on an intravenous antibiotics. Meanwhile both my daughters

started praying to Swami because this has a major implication in USA. If this were typhoid my daughter won't be allowed to come to school for many months and the whole family will be investigated for a carrier state. To our pleasant surprise as they were finishing their prayers we got a call from the laboratory that blood cultures were negative for any bacterial growth. When we made our next trip to see Swami, He confirmed how He cured her serious illness. We were all moved to tears with His Love.

My father had acute and severe back pain in 1996 when he was seventy-five years old and he was severely incapacitated. In desperation my mother summoned me to come and help them in this critical situation. I immediately started from Los Angeles and came to Bangalore where my father was brought by ambulance from Puttaparthi. The MRI of the spine was done which showed two huge disc protrusions impinging on the nerves causing excruciating pain. We consulted an orthopedic surgeon in Bangalore, a Neuro-Radiologist and a Neuro Surgeon in USA. They all recommended that he should go through surgery right away to relieve the pressure on the nerves. When I asked Swami He advised the surgery to be cancelled and gave the best medicine: materialized vibhuthi from His Divine hands to be rubbed at the site of the pain. Needless to say the pain improved remarkably and till to-date he is able to function well without any neurological deficit. In contrast at the same time, I had a forty-six year old patient in my practice with an identical problem seen in 1996. She went through neuro-surgery in USA and was later permanently disabled and had to quit her job. This shows how our sweet Lord is better than the best neuro-surgeons.

There was a major health crisis in February of 2000 when my father had convulsive seizures and we had to call paramedics for emergency medical attention. He was unresponsive and was taken to the closest emergency room immediately. He had extensive medical work up and the neurologist feared he might be having a brain tumor. However the final diagnosis was encephalopathy due to electrolyte imbalance namely severe hyponatremia. By Bhagavan's grace and blessings to our pleasant surprise all this was corrected by intravenous fluids and he was discharged home within 24 hours. When the paramedics were attending on my father, my mother ran to the shrine room where she was loudly and frantically calling for Swami's help. During our next trip Swami was telling us how my mother was holding on to His feet and crying for help. Again this shows His omnipresence and prompt loving response to the devotee's prayers.

In 1985, I was involved in an auto accident in California, USA when a large 30-foot-truck hit my car. The car was badly damaged, but I didn't have even a minor injury. When I saw Swami in Prashanthi Nilayam, He narrated the details of the accident and how He saved me from the danger. In addition, He remarked that I remembered Him only after the accident, but not at the time of the collision. Compassionate Lord! He remembers and protects us all the time, though we forget Him at times.

Swami's Personal Lessons

Once when I asked Swami that if life is a dream, whether He is also a part of the dream. Right away came the answer from the Lord of Truth—that He is in all the four states of waking, dreaming, dreamless and *turiya* (transcendental) states. Thereby He revealed that He is the Supreme attributeless and formless Brahman, everything, everywhere, forever. For all the grace and love Swami showers on us I felt we never did enough service to the Lord. In my humble way I expressed to our dear Lord Sai my desire to do service by translating His discourses on the life of Shirdi Sai from Telugu into English. However, Sai Shiva gracefully admonished me with the revelation that real service is to find out "Who am I." I pleaded with the Lord about the difficulty of this path, because of the Vasanas of several life times, standing as obstacles. Bhagavan kindly encouraged me by saying that one can get rid of the darkness of a cave prevailing for thousands of years in an instant by lighting a lamp. So does the light of wisdom dawn on us with His grace and our sincere yearning.

My chosen deity was Shirdi Sai before I came to Swami. So in my first encounter with Swami I told him that during my worship I offer flowers first to Shirdi Sai and then to Sathya Sai. Swami in His large-heartedness said it is all right to do that because all names and forms are His. In fact He said I could put flowers on my own head because I am also Divine. Another time Swami conveyed a similar message when I was going in the car with Him. Many devotees throw flowers on Swami's car and one western lady devotee was trying to throw a flower on Swami's car but because she was weak it fell on herself and it did not reach the car. Swami looked at me and said, "See the poor lady. She wanted to worship Swami with a flower but it fell on herself; without knowing she did the right thing because she herself is Divine".

During our first visit to Prasanthi Nilayam my wife was seriously ill with dysentery and could not come for darshan for three days. I felt she had to be taken to Bangalore to be hospitalized but by Bhagavan's grace she recovered and came for darshan on the fourth day and sat on a chair along with disabled people. That day Swami came to me while sitting in the darshan line on the sand and said, "Your wife has come". I did not realize that she came for darshan till I went home to my room. I wondered how He knew her among thousands of devotees recognizing her presence. As He says, God knows everything but pretends as if He knows nothing; whereas man knows nothing but pretends as if he knows everything. Another time when we were in the interview room, there were many devotees and one of the men was trying to introduce a young boy as the son of his brother devotee. Even before he introduced, Swami said he knows everyone and confirmed the statement made above.

During my first interview I gave a book for Swami to bless with His signature and right at that time lights went off and there was no electricity. I wondered how He could see and sign. Meanwhile, He looked straight into my eyes and

said, "I can see even in darkness a small ant crawling at a distance". That time I was wearing glasses and Swami pointed out how His vision is better than mine even without glasses. I said, "Swami, that is because of your Divine power". But Swami corrected me saying that He does not use His Divine power for such personal things but it is because of His disciplined way of living and eating. He said I could also have similar capacity if I also lead a disciplined life like Him.

Let me relate an incident, which indicates Bhagavan's spontaneous revelation of His divinity in a casual conversation. One time we expressed concern to Swami that the small amount of food He takes cannot sustain a human being and prayed to Him to increase His caloric intake. My father remarked that like Yogis, Swami perhaps derives energy directly from the five elements. Spontaneous was the Divine rebuff that the five elements depend on Him for their sustenance!

The Truth, from the Lord of Truth

When in Brindavan Whitefield Swami used to call me along with late Mr. V.K. Narasimhan, Sanathana Sarathi editor and on many occasions He used to talk about spiritual topics with us. One day Swami was talking highest advaita because He mentioned everything is a dream and said what we experience in the daytime is daydreaming like the night dreams we have in the night. After our session when I was with V.K. Narasimhan who is a strong vaishnavite and follower of Ramanujam, he expressed strongly that the Advaita philosophy of Sankara has ruined India. He said, "Who will be interested in God where all the flowers are of the same color and there is no variety of the flowers, and who will be interested to see the empty screen when there is no projection of the beautiful pictures on the screen?" I just listened to him and kept quiet though I did not agree with his views.

The next day again Swami called both of us and I innocently told Swami about the discussion we had in the previous evening and I wanted Swami to tell me the truth. Swami replied clearly, "I am telling you the absolute truth that experience of oneness is alone real and everything else is an illusion like a dream. Don't be influenced by V.K. Narasimhan's viewpoint which is applicable to him but not the highest truth." On another occasion I was with Swami in his house in poornachandra during a session when Swami poured lot of love on me.

I exclaimed, "Swami, let this bond of love be for ever, and I want to be born again in Your next avatar to love You and serve You". Swami said, "That is not correct; your aim should be to have this as your last birth and you should desire for no rebirth. How can you be sure that you can be close to Swami like this in your next birth?" I also told Swami, "Let this relationship of love be permanent and never changing". **Swami said, "Why should you have such doubt? I am a powerful magnet and always will attract a pure needle and metal. If metal is not attracted that is because of the rust and dust covering the metal. So keep yourself pure and your relationship will be the same forever".**

When I said, "Swami, let me have *prapthi* (fulfillment) like this". He said, "If I want I can create *prapthi*; I can make the vessel bigger so that it can receive more grace. It means that Divine grace can transcend all spiritual laws".

Another time when I was going with Swami in the car, Swami said, "*Emi Samacharam* (what news?); say something". I said, "Swami, please grant me the boon that I will always remember your divinity and never be deluded by your world-bewitching *maya*". **Swami said, "Do you think you are greater than the sages like Vasishta, Viswamitra and Jamadagni who were also deluded by the *maya* of the Lord? Be always alert."**

Miracles in Kodai

In 1994 Swami invited me and my wife as His guests to Kodaikanal. During that time we had many wonderful experiences including going on a picnic with Swami. During one of the days, Swami went to one devotee's house and plucked two plums from a bougainvillea vine and gave them to two of the students to eat. I felt I wish I could have them. We were resting in a house arranged by Swami that evening and when we woke up next morning, there were two plums on the nightstand next to the bed. Myself and my wife shared them both and enjoyed the delicious plums. Then we enquired if anybody had left them there, but nobody was aware of the plums. Then I realized how Swami fulfills even minor desires of His children without even asking. Swami gave me a chance to share this incident in Trayee Brindavan with the students after our return from the Kodaikanal trip.

During this trip Swami gave me a chance to sing to Him on two occasions. When in Kodaikanal it was cold in the mornings and I used to wear a sweater. Swami pointed out my sweater and mentioned how He was simply wearing a robe without sweater. From that day onwards I did not wear sweater learning a lesson from Swami to transcend the pairs of opposites like heat and cold. When we went for picnic with Swami there was a big caravan that went with Him. When we got down I was wearing my sports shoes and then Swami pointed to them; then I got the hint and right away I removed my shoes. Consequently I didn't have a fall because of the floor that was slippery due to soft pine tree branches on the ground. Some of the students who were wearing shoes fell because of the slippery ground. Following Swami's hint saved me from the fall. During this trip Swami gave me five chances to speak in front of Him and He was telling how though I was in USA I was good in Sanskrit and that I learned devotion from my mother.

But during my last talk Swami cut me short suddenly with a sharp remark when I quoted a Bhaja Govindam sloka about how man wastes his energy during his childhood playing with toys and when he is youth with sensual pleasures. Swami felt it was not proper to say such things in front of students. However, late Mr. Sampath, V.C. of Swami's University supported me saying that it was Adi Shankara's composition. Still Swami did not agree. Then I realized that Swami was trying to crush my ego which was showing its head because everybody including Swami was praising my talks. Swami is thus an

ego-crushing machine because for spiritual seekers ego is the greatest obstacle.

How blessed and fortunate we are to have this beautiful, Sweet and loving Lord to protect us and guide us! Let us make use of this unique chance to adore Him, Worship Him, practice His teachings and merge in Him, Who is our Source.

THE BLISS OF HIS PRESENCE

By Mr. Maharaj Krishen Kaw

Mr. Maharaj Krishen Kaw, IAS, has held many prestigious positions in the state and central governments of India including Principal Secretary to Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh; Joint Secretary (Public Sector) in the Department of Defence Production (1990-93); Additional Secretary in the Department of Revenue (1993-94) and Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation (1997-98). His last assignment from which he superannuated was Secretary, Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development. He is also a keen poet and has penned five volumes of poetry in English and two in Hindi.

IAS (Indian Administrative Service) officers are also human beings. It is but natural that quite a few of them have been attracted to the Sai Avathar. Baba himself told me once that there was an intimate connection between him and the IAS. Many persons who are serving him are or have been in the IAS. Sri Chakravarthy, earlier Registrar, Sri Sathya Sai University and now Secretary of the Central Trust is one. Sri S.V. Giri, former Vice-chancellor of the University is another. Sri P. Sitapati, former PRO is a third. Baba says half in jest: "The same three letters form both SAI and IAS."

A Special Blessing for Anurag

My first darshan of the Avathar took place in 1973, when I was Deputy Commissioner of Solan district in Himachal Pradesh. Baba was enroute from Chandigarh to Shimla and was passing through Solan town. The local devotees were electrified into activity and organized an impromptu halt for him. The S. P. (Superintendent of Police) and I stood at the main crossing to ensure that Baba was not mobbed.

Soon, the cavalcade arrived. The car was a white Ambassador and Baba was seated in the middle of the back seat, with one person on either side. Devotees surrounded the car and tried to persuade Baba to descend for a few minutes. Baba finally relented and stood briefly in the car itself with the door open, so that people could have His darshan. Before the devotees could realize what had happened, Baba had gone inside, the door closed and the car raced away towards Shimla.

We were all disappointed. My wife especially, as she was in the bhajan group a few yards away and had not even got a fleeting glimpse of the Avathar. When we reached home, another story unfolded itself. **My police orderly had picked up Anurag (my one-year old son) in his arms and was standing by the roadside, when Swami's car stopped, Swami came out and placed His hand on the child's head to bless him.**

That was the beginning of a series of miracles with special focus on this child. All along, one could sense the active interest Baba took in his welfare,

education, health, marriage and so on, till this day. Anurag also has a special love for Swami and wherever he goes he is soon discovered as a natural leader of the local bhajan mandali.

My daughter Iti has many great qualities. The only defect she has is her temper. She gets irritated too quickly. Then the decibel count of her voice increases sharply, her tongue acquires pungency. **Whenever she meets Baba, He tells her the same thing: "You are a very good girl. Control your temper."** It has come to a situation where she has become highly sensitized to the weakness. And she tries. I am sure that one day she will overcome the weakness.

God Gives Concentration

My son Anurag is a wonderful person. His sole problem used to be a disinclination to study. In Shimla, we would often see him looking at the deodars outside for hours, attention not at all on the open book before him. In 1988, my wife complained to Swami, "Baba! Please do something to tighten his concentration." **Swami said: "Why can't he remember? He remembers film songs all night. There is nothing wrong with his brains. He does not pay attention. That is all."** Anurag took the hint. Today (Nov, 2001), he is studying for the M.Ch. programme in Cardiac Surgery.

My wife Raj is a tremendous person in every respect. Baba diagnosed "too much attachment" as her malady. "She worries too much about you and the children." Over the years, she has acquired a lot of calm. Now she complains that she cannot meditate because she can't concentrate. **Baba says: "Why meditate? Do your work. Only don't distinguish between work and worship. Don't say that this is my work and that is God's work. Take everything as God's work only. That is real meditation."**

Baba gives much practical advice to each member of the family. When my mother once threatened to come and live in the Ashram, He said, "No need to come here, *Amma*. Your duty is to serve your husband. Do that." And she did it till the day my father died.

How The Divine Works!

I would like to narrate a few miraculous events, which took place in my own experience. One evening, I was at the Delhi airport, waiting for a flight to Hyderabad. The flight had been delayed and I had a few hours to kill. After walking up and down for some time, I thought I would request for Baba's help.

I sent an inward prayer to Swami, "Baba! Please create some drama. Let my waiting period be enlivened somehow." As I opened my eyes, I noticed a young man pushing a wheelchair, in which an old lady sat. He obviously had a problem. I saw him go from functionary to functionary, but no one seemed to be in a mood to help him. I decided to intervene. As he passed by, I called out, "Excuse me, Sir! Do you have any problem?" He was obviously relieved. He was from Bulgaria. His mother had cancer. He had brought her to India for

treatment. He found that the pedestal of the wheelchair had broken loose. Without it, his mother could not keep her feet on a pedestal as the wheelchair moved. He wanted someone to repair the pedestal.

Where would I find a repairman in the airport departure lounge? The problem seemed insoluble. I decided to try the constable in-charge of security, who was x-raying the hand-baggage. 'No, Sir', he said, "There is no such facility of repairs available in the airport."

I turned back. Suddenly his companion who was looking at the incoming baggage shouted, 'Sir, wait!' I was tensed. What now? The cop held an offending piece of baggage that had crossed his x-ray screen. "What is this?" he demanded. A meek looking person claimed ownership. "Please open the bag. Sir, we have to search it."

The man was puzzled, but complied. The bag was unzipped. From its entrails, the cop took out what looked like a tool-kit. "What is this?" he wanted to know. The man said, "It is my set of tools." "Does it belong to you?" the cop asked. "Yes", said the man. "Can you use these tools?" the cop enquired. "Yes," said the man. "Can you set this wheelchair right?" asked the cop. Again the man said, "Yes", after looking at the pedestal in the young man's hand.

The man suited the action to the word and within a few minutes had set the wheelchair right. The cop gave him the bag and the man moved ahead. When I looked for him a few minutes later, he had vanished!

Meanwhile, the youth had struck a conversation with me. I wanted to know which doctor was going to treat his mother. "No, not a doctor", he said, "All doctors have said there is no treatment". "Then where are you going?" I asked. He was looking for one Sathya Sai Baba.

I was intrigued. He was going to Sai. "Who is he", I asked him, now enjoying the fun. "How did you come to know about Him?" He said he had friends who had been to India. They said that Christ had been reborn in India and He could heal incurable diseases. So he had started for India. Did he know where Baba lived? "No", he admitted, "But they said when you reach Hyderabad, someone will tell you."

I looked in my purse. A few months back, Baba had in an interview given me one of His materializations - a visiting card with His photograph and full address. It was a treasured possession, but did I need it? I decided to give the card to him. On the reverse, I wrote a letter to a friend, "If you are in Puttaparthi, do guide this gentleman."

A man standing next to me whipped out a railway time-table. "You will get a train for Puttaparthi at such and such time tomorrow afternoon," he volunteered and wrote out the details on a piece of paper for him. Another man asked, "Where are you staying?" "I have no place", the young man admitted. The man said he knew a good hotel, reasonably priced, located near the

railway station. "And as I am passing that way, I can give you and your mother a lift up to the hotel."

Our flight was announced and left some minutes thereafter. Later, I learnt from my friend that the Bulgarian had been given an interview by Swami, and the mother's cancer was cured.

Overwhelming Omniscience

A dramatic instance of Baba's omniscience was exhibited one day, when in a long interview with Him we had exhausted all the family subjects. As Baba showed no impatience, our courage grew. My mother said, "Baba, there is a neighbour of ours. He has got paralysis recently..." **Before she could finish, Baba said, "Yes, Amma. A sad case. He lost his young son when he was only 25.** The trauma was so much, he developed hypertension. He has had a paralytic attack, but he will recover. Only his right leg and hand will remain affected for life."

I asked, "Swami, Mr. X has been diagnosed for cancer of the prostate." "Yes", said Baba, "They operated upon him but the cancer was discovered too late. They have removed the cancer, but the roots are still there. I will give vibhuti...."

Then I said, "Mr. Y is embroiled in a litigation." "Why are you pleading for him?" Baba replied, "If he had not been a fool, he would not have got involved with that lady. He has only himself to blame. Anyway, let him not worry. Nothing will come out of the case." A remarkable illustration of instant communication and divine intercession in three unconnected cases of strangers!

Further Life for Father

Let me now narrate the story of my father's illness in 1976, which really brought us into intimate contact with the Sai miracle for the first time. My father had jaundice which had been diagnosed as infective hepatitis and treated as such by very good physicians in Delhi. His doctor declared that he was cured and could travel to Dharamsala, where I was posted then as Deputy Commissioner.

Hardly a month had passed, when suddenly *Papaji* (affectionate name for father) developed high fever with severe rigor. His temperature shot up to 105° and he shivered so much we were frightened out of our wits. The local doctors first thought it was malaria, then viral fever, and finally, some unknown dreaded disease which they would not name. One day, Dr. Jha, the Chief Medical Officer took me aside and said, "I strongly advise you to remove your father to Delhi at once. After three days, you may not be in a position to shift him, even if you wish to."

Overnight, all arrangements were made. We rushed by ambulance to Pathankot, boarded the train and were received with an ambulance at the

railway station, Delhi. *Papaji* was admitted at once to the AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) where the doctors struggled with his daily rises and falls of temperature.

On the third day, the doctors held a conference. I was told, "Your father has hepatitis. We suspect it is obstructive hepatitis. If we operate on him, his chances are 2%. If we don't, he will move into an irreversible coma. Please decide."

Naturally, I chose surgery. We prayed to Lord Sai day and night. When he was taken to the OT, Mr. Chaman Lal smeared some vibhuti on his forehead. The operation was successful. Five minutes later, he had cardiac arrest. He was revived. He had respiratory failure and was put on a ventilator. He had black motions. His kidneys stopped. One by one, all his systems collapsed and came back. Doctors said he might survive, but he would be an invalid all his life. Two months later, he was attending office! He lived a near-normal life, except for the usual symptoms of old age, for another 25 years.

My mother had promised herself that if *Papaji* came out of the ordeal alive, she would take him to Baba at Puttaparthi. What with one thing and another, the visit kept on getting postponed. In 1988, we finally went to Puttaparthi. As soon as Swami saw my mother, **He exclaimed, "At last, you have come. For years you had the desire to bring father here. Now you have made it! How is he now?"**, thus confirming that it was indeed He who had answered my mother's prayers in 1976.

Bhagavan is today the focal point of our family. His portrait adorns every room. He is the central topic of our spiritual discussions. He is the resident of our hearts.

- Courtesy: 'Sai Prem', Mathrubhumi's supplement in 2001

LOVE THAT CANNOT BE DUPLICATED

By Ms. Lakshmi S. Menon

Ms. Lakshmi S. Menon is a former student of the Anantapur Campus of Sri Sathya Sai University and currently is engaged in service activities at Bhagavan's ashram in Prasanthi Nilayam.

Many moments make up a life - some happy, some sad, some remarkable, some mundane. But there are certain moments which stand out in our lives because they are moments filled with the Presence of God. What then of moments when we experience the tender love and infinite compassion of a living, loving God who showers us with His Love and Grace in His physical presence and envelopes us with His Divine protection when we are away from Him physically? Such moments are many in the lives of the devotees of Bhagavan; however, the bond that He shares with His students is something truly unique.

God is a Part of Our Every Moment

When we enter the portals of Bhagavan's holy University, the Sri Sathya Sai University, either at the women's college at Anantapur or at the men's campuses at Puttaparthi or Brindavan, it is as though we have entered a new world, a tranquil world, untouched by the noise and turmoil of the world outside. In these sanctuaries of Bhagavan's immense love, we learn many lessons. To my mind, the most important lesson we learn is that spirituality is not something separate from daily living. In fact, the way of the Spirit is the base on which the way of the world truly rests. God is not to be worshipped on certain days, or at certain times; God is a part of every moment. God is not separate from anything; He is Omnipresent because nothing is too small for Him. He is in everything. From the smallest need to the biggest emergency, we experience Swami's watchful and loving care that manifests in the most practical of ways. To our amazement, we realise that God wants to be totally involved in our lives. He wants to help us in every way; it is we who distance Him because sometimes we think we should not 'trouble' Swami for silly matters. The Omnipotent and Omnipresent One cannot be troubled! The Omniscient One is aware of everything, but He likes us to pray so that we become aware of what we truly want and through our dependence on Him, we build up this sweet relationship with the Divine.

"How can I rest?"

During my days as a student in Anantapur, more than a decade ago, when the holidays approached, we girls used to face some problems getting confirmed railway reservations, especially for students from far-off places states of India like West Bengal, Delhi and the North-east. Those days, in the eighties, direct trains were not that many, and railway ticketing was not computerised. Typically, our journeys took a couple of days. From the sheltered environs of the Anantapur campus, to suddenly enter the hustle-

bustle of cities like Bangalore, Madras or Calcutta was like a minor culture-shock!

But while travelling, we used to concretely experience Swami's presence. People would mysteriously appear to help us on our way and then just as mysteriously disappear when we turned around to thank them. Meanwhile our confidence got further boosted when once we heard of Bhagavan's response to the words of some devotees. These people, well-meaning no doubt, told Swami that now that the students were all going home for holidays, Swami could take some rest, finally. Swami often used to declare those days that His only property consisted of His students and that He spent 75% of His time with them, because all His hopes for the world rested on His students. Swami's reply to these people was very thrilling for us. He said, **"How can I take rest now? I have to go with each and every one of them, travel with them and see that they reach their homes safely. So how can I rest?"** The following incident stands testimony to this wonderful statement of the Lord.

Superior Love at Play

It was the spring of 1992. We were a group of 21, travelling from Anantapur to Kerala. Many of us had completed our courses of study, and so we had a lot of luggage too. I still do not know how it happened; now, it would be an unthinkable risk to take, but on the day of our home-ward journey, we had only 'current' tickets and no reservation. We boarded the train at mid-morning from Anantapur station and we would all be reaching different parts of Kerala the next day. The train came, we got into the carriage that came in front of us, many of us stuck like refugees near the wash-rooms; but the resilience of youth did not deter our high spirits! We thought we would handle the Train Ticket Examiner (TTE) when he came and not worry till then. Cross the bridge when you come to it! After some time, to our dismay we learnt that this particular coach would be going a relatively shorter distance with this train, and then it would get attached to some other train, at a station that we would reach at mid-night. So we decided to get down at Dharmavaram railway station and relocate to another coach that would go all the way to our destination.

With tons of luggage, it was indeed a daunting task. As planned, we got down at Dharmavaram, and forming a human 'chain', were passing on pieces of luggage quite a further way off, when a TTE accosted me and demanded what we were up to. I had really no time to explain, so I mumbled something incoherent and continued to pass luggage. The train would be leaving any moment. He watched us for some time and then he asked me, a little impatiently, "Are you students from Sai Baba's college at Anantapur?" On hearing Swami's name from a total stranger, I stopped in my tracks and paid attention. **Then he went on. "See madam, we got a message from our 'superior officer' that a group of girl-students from Sai Baba's college at Anantapur would be coming by this train and that we were to keep 21 berths ready for them at Dharmavaram." As I listened open-mouthed, He went on, "If you don't care to claim those berths right now, I am going to dispose them off to others." There was nothing else to do. After that we**

quickly re-assembled and triumphantly went to claim our reserved berths. I tried to ask the TTE who this 'superior' officer was, and how did he send the message and so on, but he was extremely vague and after checking our tickets, disappeared. We had told no one of our plight. Also, we would never have known that this arrangement had been made for us, and whom to approach to avail of this facility.

But for the fact of having got into the 'wrong' coach we would not have met this TTE either. In this world, even when you plead for help, not many people bother, or even if they do, it seldom comes free. But in this case, it was sudden, unexpected help that came unasked, in our time of need. We had been anxious, but perhaps, in the exuberant and trusting faith of the young had truly surrendered to Swami. We believed that somehow things would be taken care of. We never imagined it would be done in such a royal way though!

Self-confidence is Sai-confidence

The story does not end here. I was to travel till Trivandrum, but I had to get down at a small station called Alwaye, and then board another train, since this one wasn't going all the way. I got down and went to the ladies' waiting room that was next to a small cafeteria. The room rapidly filled up with many women, but after a while, I heard some commotion and then to my surprise, I saw that people were hastily leaving en-masse. On enquiring, I was told, some rioting had suddenly erupted in the town, on account of a religious issue and a violent mob was approaching the railway station. I was stuck there, all alone with my entire luggage and nowhere to go. **I could hear the mob coming nearer. I just quietly sat inside, and strangely, I did not feel any sense of panic. It was one of those times when I was sure Swami would protect me.** So I waited. I heard sounds of shattering glass next door, and shouts and yells. After some time there was silence. Slowly, people started coming back. I too got up and went to investigate. I found out then that the mob of rioters had come till the cafeteria next door, smashed the windows and so on and then simply retreated back the way they came. Some **"invisible hand"** had made them turn back and go away from where I was sitting all alone, relying on the Lord without whose Will, not even a blade of grass can move. The same Lord, who had assumed the guise of a **"superior officer"** of the Railways, the one who mysteriously answered unasked, unwritten petitions, was at work here too.

The Inimitable Divine

When you live in the proximity of the Divine, miracles are very common-place. After a while, you even take them for granted. Once I was asked by a priest of a Church, who was a visiting examiner while I was studying for B.Ed at Trivandrum, whether Sai Baba's miracles are true. Does He really create things? And what I told him then was, miracles are not miracles in Swami's presence, but very natural to Swami. That the sun should rise every day and send beams of energy to sustain the earth is a great miracle. But we take it for granted. We do not question why there should be life only on Earth and not on

Venus or on Mars. We do not stop to marvel at the wonder of it. We simply believe and it becomes a part of our psyche and we accept it. So too it is with Bhagavan Baba. His devotees, after having experienced Him, believe in Him and so for them, nothing is impossible for Him. Why talk of the para-normal or the super-natural?

In the crass materialistic and divisive world that we inhabit, what could be a greater miracle than someone providing free medicare, educare and socio-care of the highest quality to thousands of people, with no strings attached, no questions asked about caste, creed, religion, nationality, race, or any such consideration? Need is the only criterion here. That is why, from the 'naxalite' regions of interior Andhra to the parched city of Chennai, Swami's Drinking Water Supply Project reaches out with the same concern – of alleviating human distress. There are people who try to prove scientifically, that this is all very clever trickery, that there is some 'catch' somewhere and certain TV programmes even have so-called magicians reduplicating the creation of vibhuti, in front of small children, in order to 'enlighten' them. It is typical of science to destroy the essence of phenomena and to focus its narrow-minded gaze at the 'how' of things and never on the 'why'. That is why very often, they miss out on the bigger picture or miss the most obvious facts that are clear to the layman. Hence, these so-called rationalists do not even pause to realise, that Swami's vibhuti has certain qualities which can never be duplicated. **The vibhuti of our beloved Lord has healed, cured, 'cancelled' cancers, warded off calamities, averted accidents, made the dumb speak, the crippled walk, the blind see and the same vibhuti manifested at one time can taste bitter to one and sweet to another.** It would be interesting to see a re-duplication of all this, and that too outside the confines of a laboratory, without controlled conditions. Swami cannot be copied because of Who He Is and Why He has come.

Finally, miracles are natural to Swami, because they are an expression of His immense, all-encompassing love for suffering humanity. It is His infinite compassion that gushes forth as holy ash and chains and rings and talismans or a golden siva lingam in response to the prayers of millions of devotees on Sivaratri day. However, to comprehend even a minute fraction of this Divine phenomenon, one has to have a heart that can believe in the possibility of Love in a loveless world. Such a Love that seeks no returns, which is gentle, immediate, patient, forgiving and kind and radiates to all beings, human and animal and insect, irrespective of whether it is understood or not and very often misunderstood by narrow human minds is something that can only be experienced, never explained.

Another Sweet Moment

To illustrate the simplicity of His Divine nature, I recall yet another sweet moment from my student days. It is a healing that comes to mind. Once we girl-students had all come to Puttaparthi from Anantapur for Swami's Darshan and those days, we were allowed to take trays of toffees if it happened to be our birthday or some such occasion. I was sitting with a friend behind a girl holding a tray. **Swami came near us, picked a whole fistful of chocolates**

and showered them merrily all over us and walked away. After He had gone quite a distance, I found this friend suddenly weeping uncontrollably. All I knew was that she wasn't well; she had some eye ailment. And then she told me what had just occurred. She had some problem in her eye, due to which she would see black spots in her line of sight. A doctor at home had advised minor surgery, but she was terrified of being operated upon. When Swami came for Darshan, these black spots in her eye covered Him too and she could not see Him clearly. She was very remorseful at this and that is when a toffee thrown casually and playfully by Swami hit her eye and dislodged her glasses. She was in tears but after a while, she wiped her eye, still throbbing with the direct hit from Swami, when to her amazement she discovered she could see clearly! The black spots that had plagued her vision for weeks had simply melted away!

Life with Sai – Journey Extraordinaire

This is what Swami is – Sweet, Simple, Natural, Unostentatious, Jovial, and Compassionate beyond compare. He watches over us, as He often says, like how the eye-lids guard the eyes. And yet, He never expects anything back. He used to tell us about the value of gratitude; of showing it to our alma mater, our parents. The only thing He ever expects from His students is to bring a good name to Him and to be ideals in society. His life is a silent saga of Love and our lives with Sai is a challenging journey of hope and love towards a truly meaningful existence. Jai Sai Ram.

Courtesy: Mathrubhumi's "Divine Love".

H2H SPECIAL

“HE IS MY SWAMI”

Part 2

- Conversation with Mrs. Padma Kasturi

(Continued from the last issue)

This is the second part of a transcript of the conversation between Mrs. Padma Kasturi (PK), daughter of Sri N Kasturi, Swami's biographer and Ms. Rajeshwari Patel (RP), a former student and faculty member in the Anantapur campus of Sathya Sai University aired on Radio Sai a few weeks ago. To read the first part again, [click here](#).

RP: Okay. Let's first finish talking about your father. Then we will go to you – because I am sure you have a lot of things to share with the listeners of Radio Sai! What were the last years of Prof. Kasturi like?

PK: You mean his ailment or...

RP: We know that the intimacy was growing towards the end; no doubt! But he himself must have said certain things about those last few years – from '85 on towards '87? Did he ever talk about how the University was formed? There were so many vast changes that were taking place! Did he have any intimations of his end – that he would be missing all this?

PK: No. He never missed Him because he would go to see Swami everyday! So he never missed that intimacy.

RP: No, I mean the remaining part of whatever we have seen now in the last 10-15 years?

Doctorate Conferred By the Divine

PK: He was very happy with all that was going on and how Swami's glories were spreading, and His University, etc. He was getting old and when he saw so many youngsters coming, he was very happy!

RP: That is what I was getting at – it is so beautiful that he saw that the vision of Swami was now being passed on and another generation would take over.

PK: In 1954 Swami had called my father for unveiling His portrait in the Bukkapatnam High School. In that invitation He had put his name as: “Dr. Kasturi, Ph. D” and when somebody asked Swami: “In which University did this Kasturi get his Ph. D?” Swami said: “Puttaparthi University!” I think Swami had a plan already about this University and all that! [The University came into being only in 1981]

RP: Yes! He had – no doubt about that! What else about those last years? He was ailing you said – tell us a little bit about that.

PK: He had a little back ache and he used to go to Swami by wheel-chair. But he couldn't go upstairs.

RP: When was this?

PK: His backache started in '85 and he passed away in '87. Swami had come to our house to see him twice.

His Beloved Instrument till the End

RP: But he continued to do the *Sanathana Sarathi* (the ashram monthly)?

PK: Oh yes. But he pleaded with Him: "Swami I can't do this editor's job anymore. Please hand it over to someone else!" But Swami said: "No! You are the editor and you will continue to be the editor till your last!"

RP: So he was working until the end?

PK: Yes. He passed away on August 14 and even though he couldn't write that month, but he would dictate and my son would write and help him out and also take care of him.

RP: Oh good. So he did Swami's work till the last moment! Do you have any mementos of that period?

PK: He got an attack of jaundice in April and he passed away in August. Somebody told him that Swami was not well and that He was then in Brindavan; Bangalore and that He hadn't given Darshan for 3 days – it seems He had taken on somebody's heart attack or something like that – and He had become very weak. He had that attachment towards Swami so he said: "I must go to see Swami! Please arrange a taxi and take me to Him! We can start early and leave at 5 o'clock and just have His Darshan and we will come back!"

His jaundice was severe and his glucose was low but he still pleaded me to arrange a taxi! I said: "How can I go? You are not just my father; you are Prashanti Nilayam's property too! If something happens they will scold me and I don't know what Swami will say?"

That evening he almost cried and said: "We can call Shri Kutumba Rao and ask him to call Swami and get His permission. You can go at 10 to ask him."

Exceptional Love

RP: He was worrying about Swami even though he himself was not well!

PK: Yes. So I went at about 10 and told Mr. Kutumba Rao that we had made arrangements for everything.” He said: “You are taking a risk!” I said: “I have to take a risk because he is pleading with me!”

Then he asked me: “What if something happens on the way?” I said: “That’s good. He is thinking of Swami’s Darshan on the way; if anything has to happen, let it happen.” He said: “No! It is a risk.” Then he and Dr. Alreja came and convinced him saying: “We will call Swami and get His permission and then we can go.”

That whole night he was crying: “Oh! This is my fate! I can’t go to see Swami!” Then he wrote a letter to Swami and Swami sent a reply: “Kasturi, accept My Blessings. Don’t have any fear! Swami is with you and around you. Be courageous, think of Him! Give up other thoughts! The body is a water bubble; on its account do not feel sad. Spend your time in thinking of God. Yours, Baba.” - Dated April, 1987 – from Brindavan.

Then, two months later, he wrote another letter to Swami - in June ’87 because he didn’t have Darshan for so many months, so the agony of wanting to see Him was there.

RP: Did he write to Swami himself?

PK: Yes. Even though he couldn’t write, he scribbled. Then one day I told him: “See, you are scribbling and Swami may not be able to read this! I think I better write and put yours along with this. He said: “No! Not with my letter! If you want, you can write yours and post it separately!”

RP: So this second letter that He sent in June’87 is much bigger than the letter in April – which seems quite normal. But apparently Bhagavan has written every word separately and much bigger letters.

PK: Yes, because he had become very weak by that time.

RP: And Bhagavan wanted him to be able to read it himself.

“Wait For Sai”

PK: Yes. He wrote: “Kasturi, Accept My Blessings. Sai is with you and around you. Be happy. Don’t think of anything. Be constantly in the thought of God. This is the chief *sadhana* (spiritual practice) that you must do now. I will come soon; wait for Sai. Yours, Baba.”

RP: He said: “Wait for Sai. So did Swami come?”

PK: Yes. Before my father passed away on August 14, he was in the hospital for a week. And when anybody would pass by our house, he would think it was Swami!

RP: Swami was constantly in his thoughts!

PK: Yes! He wanted to meet Swami! Then Swami sent word that: "I cannot come to your home; for if I do, the whole crowd will come! Admit him in the hospital and I will come there and give him Darshan."

RP: So Swami came from Brindavan a week before he passed away?

PK: No. Swami came in June!

RP: Oh! So He returned from Brindavan in June when He wrote in that letter: "Wait for Swami!"

PK: Yes. Swami came to see him the day he was admitted to the hospital and made him drink a glass full of water and told him to just think of God and not to worry about anything. He said: "Ask the Doctors not to allow any visitors to come and disturb him." He didn't want any one to talk to him - the only two persons there were me and my son.

RP: Because he wanted him to follow Swami's command – to think constantly only of Him!

PK: Yes. Someone suggested I should play the *sahasranaam* but when I played that he said: "No! I don't want anything!"

RP: His whole life was totally immersed in thoughts of just Swami only!

Realising the Ultimate

PK: Yes. One day, in June – before *Gurupurnima* – he suddenly called my son and said: "I am *Atma* (the spirit)! Kasturi is dead! Go and tell everybody that!"

RP: He said that?

PK: Yes. I think he had spiritually realized it. My son was disturbed as to what he was saying and why he was talking like this. So I went to ask him and he said the same thing to me too!

RP: So in those few months of ailment, Swami had uplifted his consciousness to that level!

PK: I think so. In the end he told me: "Please don't force any food on me." I said: "Your body is still here and I have to take care of your body! So I won't force you but please eat whatever you want and how much ever you want!" And he said: "Okay. But don't force me anymore."

After that, he didn't say anything and I think inwardly he was thinking about Swami – only Swami!

“Freedom has come!”

RP: *Bhagavat-chintana!*

PK: So since the day Swami came to the hospital, no visitors were allowed and the day he passed away, he was a little breathless. He didn't reply to anything, he didn't show any response to my son's calling either – even though he knew his voice and was there on that day taking care of him.

Then Dr. Alreja went and told Swami that he is feeling breathless and Swami said: “He has served Me for forty years! Freedom has come!” Then He told Dr. Alreja: “I will come to the hospital to see him, so don't give him anything” - they were giving him glucose in a very small dose; about four drops a minute or so.

About 11:30 or so Swami had gone to the College to see some drama practice and then he came to the hospital immediately. We were all there. The breathlessness was still there and suddenly there was some agony in Swami's face as He came in calling: “Kasturi! Kasturi!” Immediately my father opened his eyes!

RP: He was not responding to your calls?

PK: No. Only to Swami! I think he was waiting for that call!

RP: Oh! And when Swami came, he opened his eyes immediately!

PK: Yes, immediately! Then he was trying to fold his hands to do *namaskaram* and Swami touched both his hands and created *vibhuti* and applied it on his forehead and He gave me some and told me to mix it with some water. Then He asked me if he took any food since morning? I said: “No Swami. I am just giving him some drops of coconut water because his lips and mouth are dry.” Then He was just standing there for 2-3 minutes.

RP: What was the expression on Swami's face?

PK: After that, Swami was cool because the breathlessness was not that much. Then He immediately asked me to take His *namaskaaram*. I felt like He was saying that the responsibility is now mine. He commanded me and my son. Then He went down and told the Doctors: “Just one more hour.” Then He added: “He was a very famous man; he worked in the All-India Radio. We have to make a grand procession because he was world-famous!”

RP: Definitely. He was a world-famous teacher; so it had to be grand!

PK: And He asked all the Doctors and the nurses to go to the room and to repeat ‘Aum Shri Sai Ram’ and He asked the Doctor to inform Him when it was all over. We were all repeating ‘Aum Shri Sai Ram’ till 12:30.

Attainment of the Highest

RP: And then there was the grand procession!

PK: Yes, on the next day. It was India's Independence Day too. It was a grand procession. Swami had asked the canteen to be closed and sent all the students to the procession! There was Veda recitation and bhajans during cremation. After cremation, Karunyananda (a monk very close to Swami those days) came and told me that there was this *kapalamoksha* – the soul escapes the *brahmanantra* – so it was not a usual death!

RP: So the skull had split and the soul had left the body through the skull.

PK: Yes.

RP: And that is a sign of someone who has attained total mergence with God!

PK: Yes. So in the evening when I was sitting in the line, Swami told me: "He has attained what he has got to attain! So there is no need to do any *karma* or anything for him!"

RP: No rituals - because we do the rituals to pray for the souls mergence; and in this case it was not needed. So Swami didn't want any rituals to be done.

PK: No. He said: "On the 12th day, I will Myself do some *Narayana Seva* (feeding the poor) and I will arrange for everything for some *puja* (worship) in the house."

RP: And He did all that!

(To be continued in the next issue...)

GET INSPIRED

DO WE NEED CHALLENGES?

An old matured, seasoned farmer, one day, was very angry with God though he was a great devotee. He said to God in his morning prayer, "I have to tell it as it is — enough is enough! You don't understand even the ABC of agriculture! When the rains are needed, there are no rains; when the rains are not needed, You go on pouring them. What nonsense is this? If you don't understand agriculture, You can ask me — I have devoted my whole life to it. Give me one chance; the coming season, let me decide and see, what happens."

It is an ancient story. In those days people had such trust that they could talk directly to God, and their trust was such that the answer was bound to happen. God said, "Okay, this season you decide!" So the farmer decided, and he was very happy because whenever he wanted sun there was sun, whenever he wanted rain there was rain, whenever he wanted clouds there were clouds.

And he avoided all dangers, all the dangers that could be destructive for his crops; he simply rejected them — no strong winds, no possibility of any destruction to his crops. And his wheat started growing higher than anybody had ever seen; it was going above a man's height. And he was very happy.

He thought, "Now I will show Him!" And then the crop was cut and he was very puzzled. There was no wheat at all — just empty husks. What happened? Such big plants — plants big enough to have given wheat four times bigger than ordinary wheat — but there was no wheat at all. And suddenly he heard laughter from the clouds.

God laughed and He said, "Now what do you say?" The farmer said, "I am puzzled, because there was no possibility of destruction and all that was helpful was provided. And the plants were growing so well, and the crop was so green and so beautiful! What happened to my wheat?" God said, "Because there was no danger — you avoided all danger — it was impossible for the wheat to grow. It needs challenges."

We all flee from pain and seek pleasure forgetting there are times in everyone's life when something constructive is born out of adversity. When things seem so bad it prompts us to escape the burden and realize our strength, either through creating healthy changes in our outer world or transforming ourselves inside and realizing our hidden potential.

Bhagavan Baba has explained the mystery of suffering to us in the following words:

“When suffering comes, why do you estrange yourselves from the Lord? He gives you suffering for your own good, for the advancement of your devotion. If suffering is granted, you seek peace, you search for

knowledge of the mystery, you go to wise men to listen to aspects of the truth. Without suffering, sweetness cannot arise.”

Story from East and West – Feb 2007

A BEAUTIFUL RELATIONSHIP

The young mother set her foot on the path of life. "Is this the long way?" she asked. And the guide said: "Yes, and the way is hard. And you will be old before you reach the end of it. But the end will be better than the beginning."

But the young mother was happy, and she would not believe that anything could be better than these years. So she played with her children, and gathered flowers for them along the way, and bathed them in the clear streams; and the sun shone on them, and the young Mother cried, "Nothing will ever be lovelier than this."

Then the night came, and the storm, and the path was dark, and the children shook with fear and cold, and the mother drew them close and covered them with her mantle, and the children said, "Mother, we are not afraid, for you are near, and no harm can come."

And the morning came, and there was a hill ahead, and the children climbed and grew weary, and the mother was weary. But at all times she said to the children, "A little patience and we are there."

So the children climbed, and when they reached the top they said, "Mother, we would not have done it without you."

And the mother, when she lay down at night looked up at the stars and said, "This is a better day than the last, for my children have learned fortitude in the face of hardness. Yesterday I gave them courage. Today, I've given them strength."

And the next day came strange clouds which darkened the earth, clouds of war and hate and evil, and the children groped and stumbled, and the mother said: "Look up. Lift your eyes to the light." And the children looked and saw above the clouds an everlasting glory, and it guided them beyond the darkness. And that night the Mother said, "This is the best day of all, for I have shown my children God."

And the days went on, and the weeks and the months and the years, and the mother grew old and she was little and bent. But her children were tall and strong, and walked with courage. And when the way was rough, they lifted her, for she was as light as a feather; and at last they came to a hill, and beyond they could see a shining road and golden gates flung wide. And mother said, "I have reached the end of my journey. And now I know the end is better than the beginning, for my children can walk alone, and their children after them."

And the children said, "You will always walk with us, Mother, even when you have gone through the gates." And they stood and watched her as she went on alone, and the gates closed after her. And they said: "We cannot see her but she is with us still. A Mother like ours is more than a memory. She is a living presence....."

Your Mother is always with you...she is the tender care that God nurtured you with; she is the cool hand on your brow when you're not well. Your Mother rejoices in your laughter and watches over your every step, giving up everything to be by your side.

She is the place you came from, your first home; and she provides the map you follow on the path to God. She is your first love and nothing on earth can separate you from her. Not time, not space... not even death!

May we never take our mothers for granted. Swami says,

“It is impossible to describe the love that exists between the mother and her child...Once you earn the blessings of your mother, you can achieve anything... The world is sustained by the prayers of mothers. A woman’s prayer is more powerful than a thousand prayers of men, because women are pure and tender-hearted. Never cause displeasure to your mother, then God will help you in all your endeavours.”

IN THE COMPANY OF THE VIRTUOUS -

The Story of Venerable Channa

While residing at the Jetavana Monastery, the Buddha spoke this verse, with reference to Venerable Channa.

Channa was the attendant who accompanied Prince Siddhartha when he renounced the world and left the palace on horseback. When the prince attained Buddhahood, Channa also became a monk. As a monk, he was very arrogant and overbearing because of his close connection with the Buddha. Channa used to say, "I came along with my master when he left the palace for the forest. At that time, I was the only companion of my master and there was no one else. But now, Sariputta and Moggallana are saying, 'We are the chief disciples' and are strutting about the place."

When the Buddha sent for him and admonished him for his behaviour, he kept silent but continued to abuse and taunt the two chief disciples. Thus the Buddha sent for him and admonished him three times; still, he did not change. And again, the Buddha sent for Channa and said, "Channa, these two noble monks are good friends to you; you should associate with them and be on good terms with them."

In spite of repeated admonitions and advice given by the Buddha, Channa did as he pleased and continued to scold and abuse the monks. The Buddha, knowing this, said that Channa would not change during the Buddha's lifetime but after his demise (Parinirvana) Channa would surely change.

On the eve of his parinirvana, the Buddha called Venerable Ananda, his closest disciple to his bedside and instructed him to impose the brahma-punishment (Brahmadana) to Channa; i.e., for the monks to simply ignore him and to have nothing to do with him.

After the parinirvana of the Buddha, Channa learning about the punishment from monks, felt a deep and bitter remorse for having done wrong and he fainted three times. Then he owned up his guilt to the monks and asked for pardon. From that moment, he changed his ways and outlook. He also obeyed their instructions in his meditation practice and soon attained arahatship (that is, the condition of the noble one who has attained the last stage of the path).

The Meaning of the Story – True Friendship

This story highlights the invaluable significance of good friendship. Sharing quality time with someone creates a bond. In any relationship, these factors often give rise to people identifying themselves as special in regard to each other.

When the Buddha renounced his royal heritage, only Venerable Channa left with him, and he remained with the Buddha until the Buddha attained Nirvana.

Thereby, he shared an important stage in the Buddha's life, and also spent substantial time with him.

Relying solely on this association with the Buddha, Venerable Channa developed a misguided notion of an elitist self-importance. He made no attempt to earn his status through self-effort.

The Buddha rebuked Venerable Channa three times for his improper behavior towards the two chief disciples. Then, the Buddha counseled him to forge a friendship with them, because they offered him genuine friendship.

He had, however, become imprisoned in his own ego-centric self-aggrandizement and ignored the Buddha. He had lost sight of the goals of self-transformation, and self-realization, which the Buddha's teachings were imparting.

He continued his stubborn defiance to the very end of the Buddha's earthly sojourn. Still, the compassionate Buddha left behind pertinent instructions, which ensured his spiritual progress and liberation.

For his *dharmic* progress, his repentance, and deference to the chief disciples, was definitely crucial. However, the friendship of the chief disciples, was of paramount importance.

The Buddha described friendship, in the *Sigalovada Sutta*. He pointed out 8 definitions of friendship, highlighting 4 bad types and 4 good types.

Those who are bad friends:

- 1) Are eager to benefit from you.
- 2) Only pay lip service and do not follow their words with commensurate actions.
- 3) Approve both your good and bad actions.
- 4) Influence you towards harmful habits, like drinking alcohol.

Also, the Buddha mentioned friends, who only seek you out for self-gratification, personal gain and selfish motives. Such friends are manipulative and temporary. They quickly absent themselves, when their needs are not met.

Baba illustrates this point beautifully, with the following analogy:

"When a pond is full of water in the rainy season, there are a million frogs in it; but when the water runs dry, the frogs jump out of it. In the same way, when one has power and wealth, people gather around him in this world but as soon as he falls upon evil days and adversity stares him in the face, all his best friends leave him."

Genuine friendships are not based on status, wealth, elitist association, or self-serving needs.

According to the Buddha, good friends:

- 1) Help in times of need.
- 2) Are prepared to even forfeit their lives.
- 3) Protect you from evil.
- 4) Rejoice in your success, and honor those who praise you.

The Buddha's definition of friendship is centered around spiritual advancement. Genuine friends lead you towards spiritual and *dharmic* progress. They always dissuade you from wrong and harmful actions. Good friendships are based on selfless love, and incorporate human values.

When we are able to understand these definitions of good friendship and translate that into genuine expression, in all our interactions, in every relationship, then, the divine spark ignites in ourselves and others.

"It is essential to suffuse all our actions with Dharma. That Dharma should be dedicated to the Divine. When this happens, life becomes sanctified," Swami says.

Realistically, friendship with everyone, may not be possible, but it is certainly possible, and essential, to befriend God, who resides in every heart. We are then inviting God into our life. God, who ultimately, is our only true friend.

References:

*Dhammapada Chapter 6 verse 3
and Sathya Sai Speaks 21 - 8*

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

1. During His Ugadi discourse Bhagavan related that on His visit to Chennai ten years ago He had described the circumstances of His return to the city. What were the circumstances that He mentioned?

- a. When proper rains fall invoked by the people's devotion.
- b. After Bhagavan provides clean drinking water to the city.
- c. When the numbers of the year add up to nine.
- d. When there is less pollution in the city.

2. 29th June is observed as St. Peter's day within the Christian church. At one point, Peter famously contests his Master's prediction that he would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Later, Peter denies that he knew Jesus, exactly as Lord Jesus had stated. When did this event take place?

- a. Just after Jesus had been imprisoned by the Romans.
- b. After the crucifixion of Jesus.
- c. After the Resurrection of Jesus.
- d. While Peter was in Rome.

3. In the Ramayana, what is the book Sundara Kanda about?

- a. The exploits and heroics of Hanuman.
- b. The battle of Rama with Ravana.
- c. The period of exile of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana in the forest.
- d. The boyhood of Rama.

4. "Time waste is life waste" is one of Bhagavan's well-known sayings. How does Bhagavan direct us to spend our time during the evening?

- a. In study.
- b. In exercise.
- c. In relaxation.
- d. In sadhana.

5. For Sikhs, 16th June commemorates the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606). For what event in Guru Arjan Dev's life is the 16th June remembered?

- a. *The day when Guru Arjan Dev inaugurated the Golden Temple of Amritsar.*
- b. *Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom.*

- c. *The day when Guru Arjan Dev completed compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib.*
- d. *Guru Arjan Dev's birth.*

6. In Prasnottara Vahini Bhagavan formulated this question with its answer to follow:

Q: 'What are the traits of character that we have to avoid, that is to say, which are the obstacles in the path of one who seeks Liberation from the cycle of Birth and Death?'

A: 'The six, the *Arishadvarga*: Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada and Maathsarya; these are to be avoided.'

What is the English meaning of Kama, the first of the six?

- a. Desire
- b. Delusion
- c. Hate
- d. Jealousy

7. In the Ramayana, the young Kausalya was imprisoned by Ravana in a wooden box and placed in the ocean, as he wished to avert her future marriage to Dasaratha. Who rescued her?

- a. Sumantra - Dasaratha's prime minister.
- b. Guha, the tribal chieftain, when the box strayed to his shores.
- c. Garuda, sent by Lord Vishnu.
- d. Hanuman who came upon the box by chance.

8. In Islam what does the word 'Hijra' refer to?

- a. The pilgrimage to Mecca.
- b. Obligatory charitable giving.
- c. A holy city of Islam.
- d. The emigration of Prophet Muhammad to Medina.

9. How does Bhagavan classify the yugas ie the Kali-yuga, Dwapara-yuga Thretha-yuga and Kritha-yuga?

- a. According to planetary positions.
- b. According to the passage of years.
- c. According to a person's character.
- d. By reference to the scriptures.

10. 17th May 2007, marks Ascension Day for Christians. What does this day commemorate?

- a. The last day of Jesus' earthly mission.
- b. The day of Jesus' resurrection.
- c. The day that Jesus' mother, Mary, ascended to Heaven.
- d. The day that all souls come closer to the Heavenly Father.

ANSWERS

1B: After Bhagavan provides clean drinking water to the city.

There is a place called Red Hills near Chennai, where a huge reservoir was built to store water. I was told that drinking water is supplied from that reservoir to the entire city of Chennai. But, there was no water in the reservoir itself at that time. How can water be supplied to the city? There were of course, a few places in the reservoir where rain water collected as small cesspools. I saw some children drinking polluted water from those cesspools. I was also informed that the same water is being used for drinking and cooking as well. There were a few devotees travelling along with Me in the car. They enquired, "Swami! When would this reservoir get filled?" For everything, there is a time, action, reason and duty, which shall go together. I kept these aspects in view and told them, "I will not step into this city of Chennai till the next ten years. It is only after supplying water for drinking and irrigation purposes, and the people of Chennai drink pure water that I would visit Chennai again." Ten years passed by. I fulfilled My promise of supplying drinking water to the entire city of Chennai. Besides, it is also being used for irrigation purposes. Accordingly I visited Chennai during January this year.

(First Ugadi Divine Discourse, 20 March 2007)

2A: Just after Jesus had been imprisoned by the Romans.

We can read the account as given in the Bible:

Peter said to him, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me." "No!" Peter declared emphatically. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!" And all the others vowed the same.

Meanwhile, Peter was in the courtyard below. One of the servant girls who worked for the high priest came by and noticed Peter warming himself at the fire. She looked at him closely and said, "You were one of those with Jesus of

Nazareth.” But Peter denied it. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said, and he went out into the entryway. Just then, a rooster crowed. When the servant girl saw him standing there, she began telling the others, “This man is definitely one of them!” But Peter denied it again. A little later some of the other bystanders confronted Peter and said, “You must be one of them, because you are a Galilean.” Peter swore, “A curse on me if I’m lying—I don’t know this man you’re talking about!” And immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Suddenly, Jesus’ words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny three times that you even know me.” And he broke down and wept.

(The Bible, Gospel of Matthew, v 29-31 and v 66-72)

3A: The exploits and heroics of Hanuman.

Sundara Kanda was composed by Valmiki and translated into English means "beautiful book". It describes Hanuman's successful search for Sita, who, kidnapped by the demon Ravana, is confined to a small garden inside his palace. This chapter is recited on Tuesdays and/or Saturdays to invoke harmony and the blessings of Hanuman.

4D: In sadhana.

When evening descends, one hurries home, eats one’s fill, and is overpowered by sleep. But a duty still remains. To eat and sleep is the fate of idlers and drones. When the worst of the qualities (gunas), the dull (thamas), threatens to rule, one must make a special effort to escape its coils by resorting to prayer in the company of those who extol the Lord, reading about the glory of God, the cultivation of good virtues, and the purposeful nursing of good rules of conduct. This is the prescribed evening worship (Sandhyavandana).

(Dharma Vahini, chapter 8)

5B: Guru Arjan Dev’s martyrdom.

Guru Arjan Dev had attracted the anger of Emperor Jehangir on account of his popularity and his inclusion of both Hindu and Muslim holy writings in the Guru Granth Sahib. Refusing to bow to the Emperor’s demands to censor the Guru Granth Sahib, he was tortured and became the first Sikh martyr.

Before his untimely death, he had become the Guru of all Sikhs when only eighteen years of age, and instituted many developments to the Sikh faith, such as the compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib, (the holy book of the Sikhs) and the building of the main Sikh shrine, the Golden temple at Amritsar.

6A: Desire

Bhagavan went on to explain what kama exactly entails:

*Desire for riches, property, honour, status, fame, children; why list the lot?
Attachment to all things of this sensory world, this false, temporary, impure
world.* (Prasnottara Vahini,
chapter 6)

7A: Sumantra - Dasaratha's prime minister.

We can read this episode from the divine words of our own Beloved Sai:

The box was carried by the waves onto the shore. The place where it landed was a fine recreation area. The next day, Sumantra, the Prime Minister of Dasaratha happened to visit the place on a quiet holiday, to be spent in discussing within himself the problems of the State. His eyes fell on the box. He retrieved it and opened it. He was surprised to find in it a charming girl, with attractive shining eyes and a halo of divine splendour. Sumantra was overcome with pity. He spoke soft and sweet to the girl, "Little one! How did it happen that you were placed inside this box?"... Sumantra placed her in his chariot and proceeded to Kosala, where he restored her to the King and recited before the Court the details known to him. The King too, interrogated Sumantra in various ways. He discovered that he was none other than the minister at the Court of Dasaratha, Emperor of Ayodhya, and that his master was still unmarried. He was filled with joy at the discovery. He said, "Minister! You brought back to me this child of mine, saving her from destruction. So, I have resolved to give her in marriage to your master himself. Please inform the king of my offer."

(Ramakatha Rasavahini p, 29)

8D: The emigration of Prophet Muhammad to Medina.

Muhammad and his followers were being violently persecuted in Mecca. Muhammad then sent seventy of his followers to the northern town of Medina. Later, he learned of a plot to murder him and set off to join the emigrants. However he was pursued and took refuge in a cave where, as he hid from the pursuers, a spider spun its web across the cave's mouth. When the pursuers saw that the web was unbroken, they passed by and Muhammad went on to the safe haven of Medina. The date of this event, 622, marks the beginning of the Muslim era; in other words, year one. This is written in Roman script as 1 AH standing for 'anno hegirae' or 'in the year of the Hijra'.

9C: According to a person's character.

Bhagavan describes the yugas in this way:

The ages (yugas) are classified on the basis of the dominant mental role. In the age of truth (Kritha-yuga), it is said that dharma walked about on four legs, happy and safe. In the second age (Thretha-yuga), dharma had only three legs, while in the third age (Dwapara-yuga), it had to totter about on just two! In the present Kali-yuga, dharma has only one leg, according to this tradition.

The four legs are truth, compassion, austerity, and giving (sathya, daya, tapas, and dana). A person with all four can be said to be in the Golden Age (Kritha-yuga), whatever the age in the calendar. If truth is not steady but one has the other three qualities, one is in the Thretha-yuga. If truth and compassion are absent but austerity and giving persist, one is in the Dwapara-yuga. If only giving remains out of the four, it is as if dharma is standing on one leg, and the person sticking to giving, in spite of everything else having disappeared, is in the Iron Age (Kali-yuga) —even if it is chronologically the Golden Age.

The ages (yugas) change only with the change in dharma, not with the mere passage of time. The wicked Hiranyakasipu and the pure-hearted Prahlada lived in the selfsame chronological yuga; the same yuga saw Dharmaja, the personification of righteousness and peace (santhi), as well as the arch cheat Duryodhana. So, dharma is what makes the yuga for each; one can always be in the Golden Age (Kritha-yuga), if only one has all four qualities of dharma. The conduct of man makes and mars history and changes the Golden Age to the Iron Age.

(Dharma Vahini, chapter 9)

10A: The last day of Jesus' earthly mission.

After the resurrection, Jesus spent forty days with His disciples, after which He ascended to heaven as described from the Bible:

...He was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"

(The Bible, Book of Acts, chapter 1 v 9-11)

QUIZ ON H2H

We now bring you a quiz to test your recall power from reading Heart2Heart.

1. One morning while Bhagavan was on the portico conversing with the young school boys, He suddenly asked them, "Boys, what do you think God is like?" The small boys had no reply for this rather grand question. Bhagavan then went on to tell them just what God is like, as follows, but can you fill in the answer? (The blanks are two words repeated throughout.)

"God is sweet like ____ ____!" The boys became attentive. Swami continued, "God is soft like ____ ____!" ...Swami went on, "God is cool like ____ ____!" And then the punch line: "He gives joy like ____ ____!"

What are the repeated two missing words, as reported in our 31 Aug 2003 issue?

- a. Mother's smile
- b. Gentle rain
- c. Ice cream
- d. Soothing words

2. In our July 2006 edition we had a talk by Mrs Geetha Mohan. She informed us that when, in 1943, her grandfather Sheshagiri Rao, a devout worshipper of Lord Shiva, came to see Swami for the first time he had a closed mind and only came to protect the ladies in the family group. What happened when he first saw Swami, at that time, a young lad of 16 years.

- a. He started to cry and did not stop for four hours.
- b. He jumped into the air and started to sing that he had seen God.
- c. He fainted and did not get up for two days.
- d. He refused to speak for the next year.

3. In our November 2004 cover story - *A Play Within The Play* - we dwelt on the wonderful interactions and guidance that Swami has with His students during the Convocation dramas. At one point the boys were rehearsing and Bhagavan stopped the performance when a bad character came on the stage. What did Bhagavan then tell the students?

- a. To leave out the bad character from the play.
- b. To choose another play entirely.
- c. To tone down the amount of immorality in the character.
- d. To make the bad character more pronounced.

4. In our February, 2007 issue we had the transcript of a talk delivered in the divine presence by Dr. T. Ravi Kumar. He enthralled us by relating his father's first amazing encounter with Bhagavan, when he was suffering from the ravages of cancer. Swami had approached him and remarked:

"Why did you have twenty-five operations?" My father sat up! Swami said, "The doctor is saying that you will die; he has given you only few days."

What did Swami continue to say?

- a. "Your faith has made you well."
- b. "Come for interview – I will heal you."
- c. "Bring your son to me. He will work in the institute."
- d. "You will not die! Your cancer is cancelled!"

5. In a story from Swami's Hospital in the 31 August 2003 issue, we learnt how a patient did not recover heart function after an operation and was causing everyone concern about his condition. What happened next?

- a. The patient recovered after prayers were said for him.
- b. Bhagavan came to the theatre 'by chance' and touched the man causing a recovery.
- c. The man died and then came back to life after having a 'near death experience'.
- d. After a marathon session the man recovered and was heard to be chanting the pranava mantra under his breath.

ANSWERS

1C: Ice cream

2C: He fainted and did not get up for two days.

The story is as follows:

He takes one look at Swami that he had vowed not to - because he was going to go away - he takes one look at Him; two seconds, and bang! He has fainted on the floor... So, for one and a half days, Swami looks after this old man - 58 years old, puts water in his mouth every two hours, materializes *vibhuti*, puts it on his head every two hours... Two days later he gets up and he is a completely changed man! He said: "You ladies, you two daughters of mine, you can go back to Bangalore, but I am not coming back." They said: "You said you were not going to come here! What do you mean you are not coming back with us?" He says: "No, when I walked in into that compound, and I saw the young boy sitting on the rock, in His face, I had the vision of Lord Shiva. In His head, I saw the moon, and on His forehead, I saw the third eye! This is

the Lord Shiva that I have been worshipping for the past fifty years. And now that I have seen Him, why would I leave Him? I am not coming back.” So he resigned his job from Puttaparthi and he never came back.

3C: To tone down the amount of immorality in the character.

Swami was concerned at the influence that playing a bad character would have on the boys, as we read from the account:

In the year 1998, the play involved a strong negative role of a person who for selfish reasons causes many impediments to the protagonist and his associates. During the initial rehearsals Swami did not comment much but after a while he was distinctly uncomfortable during scenes that involved this character and one day during the rehearsals, He stopped the play immediately after the character came on stage. He called for the actors in the play and explained that He did not appreciate the extent of evil in that character. He said that we may feel that we are just portraying a negative character, only acting the part - but real acting demands that we become the part. So when we think more and more about the negative part, our subconscious is affected and our real life attitudes also undergo subtle changes which can later be harmful. As we think so we become. So no character should be portrayed with too much of negativity. Who would think of a role in such a way, except the one who knows us inside out? This is a vindication of the truth that God knows us more than we know ourselves.

4D: “You will not die! Your cancer is cancelled!”

Dr. T. Ravi Kumar goes on to say:

This was in the year 1968 and my father was alive for thirty eight long years! He died a couple of months back when he was touching 89 years - out of old age.

5A: The patient recovered after prayers were said for him.

The narrator of the incident, Mr Ravi Mariwala, recalls that:

We were absolutely helpless. It occurred to me that we had tried everything but prayer. Prayer for a person not known to me? Would it work? I think that is why it did. As I had been in the theatre for five hours already, I was briefly relieved by a colleague. I came into the corridor outside the theatre and stood silently for a minute, trying to recollect Sai's face in my mind's eye. I said a silent prayer for the patient's recovery. Immediately thereafter, I returned to the theatre. The situation had changed completely. The blood pressure had improved, and the heart had recovered! Strangely, no one knew how or why; I did not say anything to anyone. The incident passed and the patient's recovery was smooth.

On the Sunday that followed, Swami came to me, created vibhuti, put it into my hands and lovingly said, "This is for the prayer that you said for that patient." He then proceeded to describe the incident to others. Here was Swami rewarding me for the miracle cure that He in His Mercy had effected!"

THE HEALING TOUCH

A MOTHER'S AGONY...

When desperation evokes divine intervention

The dollar daze can't be more apparent than in the dazzle of the burgeoning city of Mehasana, in the state of Gujarat in western India. Among its many claims to fame, Mehasana is well-known for its "foreign content". It is believed that one or more members of every family here have ventured abroad in pursuit of economic prosperity. A substantial segment of the highly successful Gujarati community settled in the United States of America traces its roots to the Mehasana region. The lure of the American greenback is so strong that it is believed that people of this region do not shy away from paying huge amounts in dollars to go USA.

The area also enjoys substantial in-house economic growth and activity. Some indicators of this prosperity are the large presence of the ONGC (Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Limited). Natural resources are aplenty in the region. Mehasana enjoys a rich crop of peanuts, mustard, psyllium (isabgol) and other agricultural produce. The municipality is also looking forward to reaping an improved harvest of water from the state's Narmada Dam Water Project. Located not far from the city of Ahmedabad which is the commercial hub of the state of Gujarat, Mehasana is also home to the Dudhsagar Dairy Cooperative, known as one of India's greatest milk collection centres. The local breed of Mehasana buffalo has acquired a reputation for its high yield. In addition, Mehasana also has the biggest iron and steel market in India. And what good would all the wealth be without some fun and recreation? Mehasana is also the home of India's largest water amusement park, the Shanku Water Park.

Thanks to the economic boom from within and the high rate of foreign exchange remittances from abroad, the gloss of growth cannot be missed in Mehasana.

The Divide Between Two Hemispheres

Yet, while Mehasana's wealthy elite may enjoy enviable lifestyles and prosperity, this apparent achievement has an ugly underbelly. Alongside the glitzy skyscrapers and sky rocketing land prices is the grim urban squalor. Like most cities in the developing world, the north-side divide in Mehasana is sharp and severe.

The co-existence of two hemispheres, divorced from each other like day and night are the two opposing zones that have two totally contrasting realities. While the financial boom is rapidly adding wealth to the coffers of the rich, this prosperous but caste-conscious city also has a huge segment of a poor and illiterate population that remains untouched by this prosperity. They are barely surviving on the periphery of its economic epicenter: marginalized men, women and children who are yet to enjoy any of the

fundamental rights guaranteed to them in the Indian constitution, let alone ride the wave of Mehasana's recent tide in fortunes.

Children of a Lesser God

This is the story of one such child of a lesser God and his mother, a single parent, who wept, wailed and besieged a higher power out there, to help her out of her desperation when she faced a parent's worst nightmare – to helplessly watch her child die a slow death before her eyes. She felt totally powerless, unable to reverse this tragedy only because she was poor and lacked a social support and health-care system. It is a story of how those who support and sustain the giddy economic boom at the grass-roots level are so not valued and manage to slip and fall through the cracks in the system which offers no safety net to them. This is a tale of a victim of the utter despair and callousness that a society's capitalist conscience could not care less about.

This is the story of Bhavesh Chamar, the only child of Pittiben and Ramabhai Chamar of Nugar village, near the prosperous town of Mehasana. Early in his childhood, Bhavesh lost his father Ramabhai. As suggested by their last name, the family belongs to the Chamar community that represents the lowest rung of a class-conscious society. The Chamars were, and still are by many unenlightened people, considered outcasts and untouchables.

With such social stigmas and the obvious disadvantages of an illiterate and poor widow, Pittiben struggled to make ends meet and to provide for her son Bhavesh. She worked as a construction labourer in a ceramic tile unit. She made Rs. 20 a day. Her typical monthly income was barely Rs. 300-400 (less than US \$10). Bhavesh attended the village municipal school at no cost.

A Mother's Worst Nightmare

By the time Bhavesh reached the age of 11 years, he started getting tired very easily; he could not walk more than 20 yards without taking a break. Consulting a doctor was not a choice his mother could afford. His condition continued to deteriorate finally forcing his mother to seek medical help at the Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad. The diagnosis struck her like a bolt of lightning. Bhavesh had a hole in the heart, a condition also known as Ventricular Septale Defect (VSD). He could not play, walk or perform any of the activities of a normal 11 year old child.

The news shattered the poor and desperate family. Initially, they struggled and managed to get by with the medication provided to them by the hospital. However, misery loves company and soon Bhavesh developed appendicitis and had to undergo treatment for the same. The local Member of the Legislative Assembly, neighbours, and relatives chipped in then and paid for the surgery that was performed in a local private hospital. Subsequently, his condition deteriorated further and this time around an operation for his heart became imperative for his survival.

The surgery was estimated to cost Rs. 1.25 lakhs (approximately US \$ 3000). Given the fact that the family could barely feed themselves one decent meal a day, such medical treatment was out of question. Recalls Bhavesh's uncle Mr. Ambalal Shankarbhai, also a construction labourer: "We felt that this family will not survive."

In their desperation, they approached the local Member of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly who wrote a letter of recommendation to the Government Hospital in Ahmedabad. They were offered a subsidy from the Gujarat Chief Ministers Relief fund to the tune of 33% of the cost of the operation that was estimated to cost Rs 1.25 lakhs (around US \$3000).

But this was no relief. An expense of another Rs. 80,000 (US \$ 2000) odd was unimaginable, on her monthly income of less than \$10 or Rs. 300-400. Her only child was dying a slow death each day and she could do nothing to help him. Pittiben was inconsolable. Her last resort was to beseech God. In her moments of frustration, she even fought with the Goddess, the presiding diety of the Chamar community. She was frequently found at the small temple near her house praying to the Goddess for the life of her precious and only child. She would weep and wail in front of the Goddess. The Chamar Vas (Chamar colony) in Nugar village echoed with the cries of this helpless mother who had no one to turn to except the Divine mother.

Meanwhile, Bhavesh's uncle Ambalal continued to meet with and seek help from various government officials in the hope of getting some money or medical subsidy that would solve his nephew's problem. However, no help materialized. With each passing day, the family's hopes for Bhavesh's medical treatment and survival were ending on a sliding scale.

Somebody, Anybody Out There?

An utterly distraught Pittiben continued to send out her pleas for help into the vast nothingness, hoping some power out there would care and take note of her situation. She was desperate and had no one else to turn to. Her pleas for a divine intervention were not lost.

It was sometime in the second week of February 2007 that a Sai devotee and leading doctor of Mehasana, Dr. P.D. Patel informed Bhavesh's uncle Ambalal of a diagnostic heart camp scheduled to be conducted in Mehasana on February 25, 2007. The information was based on an article in the local newspaper which also said that patients requiring surgery would be operated upon free of cost! Various centers for pre-registration in the heart camp were listed too in the article. Ambalal immediately took Bhavesh and his medical records to the nearest prescreening center for registration. This prescreening camp was held in Dr. P D Patel's clinic.

The medical camp was about to come to Bhavesh's doorstep as a part of the community outreach program of the Sri Sathya Sai Hospital of Rajkot, a city located at a distance of 200 kilometres from Mehasana, about a four and a half hours drive by public transport – an option out of Bhavesh's reach and awareness, given his situation.

Seek And Seize The Opportunity To Help: Baba

The idea of conducting prescreening medical camps in the remotest and economically disadvantaged areas of the state and to actively seek out patients suffering without any hope or access to a healthcare system is the brainchild of Bhagavan Baba. At the time of the hospital's founding, Bhagavan had advised His devotees in Gujarat to take relief to those who are the most in need of it. Bhagavan had categorically directed and guided them to seek out those who are caught in the viscous cycle of abject poverty, helplessness and hopelessness. ***"Do not wait for an opportunity to serve: go out and seize the opportunity which is already available,"*** Baba had said.

In direct adherence to this command from the source of ultimate compassion, the Sri Sathya Sai Hospital, Rajkot, has been, since its founding in the year 2000, conducting regular diagnostic cardiac camps in different districts of Gujarat, going to great lengths to specifically target the most backward and neglected areas. These camps spread awareness among the poor about the free tertiary care facilities available at the Hospital and offer prescreening camps. Patients are examined and necessary tests are undertaken on the spot; those requiring surgical intervention and further diagnostic attention are identified, and then given all necessary information to come to the hospital in Rajkot for the necessary treatment, as always, free of cost. The patients and their family members accompanying them are offered free meals. In cases of severe deprivation, even the bus/train fare to the hospital is reimbursed.

The Sri Sathya Sai Hospital of Rajkot is but a reflection of the teachings of Bhagavan who repeatedly reminds us that "Service to man is service to God." Swami says: ***"God has two forms: Lakshmi Narayana and Daridra Narayana. Most of the people are engaged in serving Lakshmi Narayana; few people serve Daridra Narayana... Service to Daridra Naranya is the highest form of Sadhana."***

The hospital actively seeks God by seeking to serve the poor and alleviating their pain and misery. All involved, from those who flex their monetary muscle, to those who perform hard labour and every body in between, including highly specialized and dedicated medical professionals, gear all their efforts, energy and knowledge to help the forgotten, neglected and destitute members of society.

“Service to any being amounts to serving Me, for I am in all,” Bhagavan reminds us. “The relief and joy that you give to the sick and the sorrowing reach Me, for I am in their hearts, and I am the One whom they call out to. God has no need of your service. Try to serve the Godly; become the servants of the servants of the Lord. Service of man is the only means by which you can serve God.”

Camps Exemplify Compassion and Coordination

For those involved in organizing the various aspects of such heart camps, it is a very special opportunity for *narayana seva* or service to God. In Rajkot, the Sai devotees like to call it a ‘heart *narayan seva*’. “We are going to the people rather than waiting for them to come to us,” says Manoj Bhimani, Trustee of the SSS Hospital, Rajkot. “The awareness of this world-class health facility has to penetrate to those who feel most neglected and forgotten by governments, NGO’s and the world. Bhagavan’s mission is to uplift the downtrodden and infuse hope, love and health in their lives.”

The hospital administrators routinely monitor patient data to determine the patterns in the district-wise access to the hospital. Based on the geographical trends that emerge, the districts that indicate lower patient access to the hospital become the administrators’ top priority. These districts are then aggressively targeted through media campaigns and the local population is informed of upcoming prescreening heart camps. Once the word spreads, villagers from the remotest of areas turn up. Most patients and their families have usually given up all hope and simply resigned to their fate. Once they experience the heart camps, a renewed sense of hope is rekindled in their hearts, often reaffirming their faith in the goodness of society and in God, as they see it as a direct response to their prayers from a higher power.

This mammoth effort is made possible due to the close coordination between the SSS Hospital of Rajkot, the service wing of the local chapter of the Sai organization and the Sri Sathya Sai Organization of the state of Gujarat. The synergies result in a well-oiled living organization that has successfully been translating Bhagavan Baba’s message of love and service into reality for such forlorn souls as Bhavesh Chamar of Nugar village in the municipal jurisdiction of Mehasana.

The entire operation is conducted with a clock-wise precision. For starters, a number of pre-registration centers are identified. Publicity about the event is conducted using local newspapers, radio, word of mouth, posters, and pamphlets. Local councils, health authorities and local government authorities are apprised of the camp information so that the maximum number of local people can derive benefit from the effort.

Typically, clinics are spread across the districts, with specific emphasis on covering areas that emerge as weaker points of contact from the hospital administrators’ data base. These are manned by the doctors of the SSS Hospital of Rajkot as well as volunteer doctors from other reputed hospitals. Patients are made to fill out a form to provide such information

as patient's name, age, address, contact coordinates etc. Many patients are from economically challenged backgrounds and do not have telephones. Patients are given appointment tokens for consulting cardiac surgeons at the camp.

Heart Camps – Therapeutic For Volunteers and Local Leaders As Well

On the day of the camp the location is a beehive of activity with doctors, the ever dedicated seva dal volunteers and administrators trying to do their best. The camp starts in front of Swami's portrait with the chanting of three Omkars and prayers. The Seva Dal leaders give their final instructions to their respective groups reminding them of spirit in which they must perform their duties. The camp then opens its doors to the long lines of patients.

Patients who have already registered are directly sent to the top-notch surgeons who spare their valuable time to serve at these camps. Seeing the scale and sincerity of the SSS Hospital of Rajkot, there is no dearth of such dedicated medical professionals who volunteer their time, energy and medical know-how and join the SSS Hospital's effort to bring healthcare to the remotest corners of Gujarat.

Typically, the surgeons review the patient's previous medical record and refer the patient for ECG and/or ECHO tests, as required. These diagnostic machines are available at the camp itself. Based on the patient evaluation, the doctors then recommend them for surgery at the SSS Hospital, Rajkot.

As in the Rajkot hospital, the camps also offer all tests, checkup by consultants, meals and other medical services totally free of cost to the patients. Even the relatives of the patients accompanying them receive free meals.

The experience of both who serve and those who are served is poignantly moving. As everyone goes on with their duties in the spirit of love, an overpowering sense of compassion fills the environment. After medical tests are concluded, the patients are referred back to the surgeons. Given the magnitude of these camps and the selfless spirit in which they provide the much-needed relief to the suffering villages, they are often graced by local dignitaries.

One such guest at a recent camp was Mr. Mangal Patel, the Speaker of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly who visited the heart camp in Mehasana on February 25, 2007. It was the same fateful camp that would offer the very first glimpse of hope to Bhavesh Chamar and his mother Pittiben.

Speaking at the camp, a former teacher and now the Speaker of the state legislature, Mr. Mangal Patel said: "What you see before your eyes is not an ordinary event. The kind of activity and the scale at

which you are doing the same is not possible without the grace of the Sadguru. It is His energy which allows you to serve in this way."

The Member of Parliament from Mehasana Mr. Jayantibhai Barot donated Rs. 25 lakhs (approximately US \$55, 000) from his MPLAD fund (a corpus fund that Members of the Indian Parliament can utilize and allocate for initiatives directed at the development of their constituency) to the SSS Hospital in Rajkot. So moved was he by what he saw that he confessed if he could help it, he "would donate all the money from the fund if the government permits me."

Such is the grace of our Bhagavan that the work done under His banner and supervision motivates, inspires, touches and helps many others, apart from the patients of course. From the volunteers, doctors, medical assistants, lab technicians, visiting dignitaries to the families of the patients, all find the energy in the camp both therapeutic and moving.

In the words of the Lord, ***"Work done with no desire is the supreme ideal of man."***

"Serve others, visualising them as kindred atmas"

Rajesh Krishnani is a Seva Dal leader who has participated actively in such camps. For him, "The finest reward I get during this camps is to see the face of the patient when they are allotted a date for surgery at the hospital. I see love and hope in their eyes. At this time you feel God is somewhere near us. You get the feeling you really are doing God's work."

God Listens: Hope and Happiness Descends on the Hapless Mother

By now Bhavesh was in the 9th grade and his future looked grim and dismal. The fateful day finally came in the lives of Bhavesh Chamar and his distraught mother Pittiben. On February 25, 2007 at the recommendation of Dr. P.D. Patel, a Sai devotee and a prominent doctor of Mehasana, the patient and his mother arrived at the camp in their own vicinity to seek the much needed medical intervention to save Bhavesh's life.

Upon being lovingly received by the volunteers and directed promptly to the right channels, Pittiben heaved an unexpected sigh of relief. Somewhere deep within her she sensed that her cries for help over the last five years had not gone unheard after all. The divine Mother whom she had been praying to and fighting with all these years had actually been listening and was finally interceding. The once unheard of and distant Rajkot hospital had come to their doorstep, seeking her and Bhavesh. Perhaps there was hope at the end of their tunnel, that could indeed end their plight.

Ever since she had lost her husband and her world had turned topsy-turvy with her son's diagnosis, she had carried the burden of gloom, hopelessness and despair in her heart. On February 25, 2007, for the first time ever, in years, Pittiben felt at ease. She felt wanted and her son's

survival mattered. The visit to the camp was a first step towards restoring a sense of dignity to their otherwise pathetic existence.

After being examined at the camp, Bhavesh was speedily referred to the hospital in Rajkot where within a fortnight he was operated upon and granted a new lease of life. How can Bhavesh, Pittiben, Uncle Ambalal or the Chamar community of Nugar village ever forget the date March 14, 2007 when a frantic woman who thought she had lost all in life, found hope and the gift of life for her dying child.

Despite the initial misgivings of her community about subjecting her child to a free operation, an idea that sounded too good to be true, Pittiben was desperate enough to explore the option and in the process she discovered pure love and an affirmation of her faith in God's compassion.

havesh's uncle Ambalal Shankarbhai now says: "The Sathya Sai Hospital is our God". His neighbor Hargovind concurs: "We could not dream about doing this operation in seven lives". When Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba stepped in, all it took was two weeks to permanently restore a child's health and his mother's faith in the power of her prayers. If the mother is the child's first God, Pittiben, a woman of no formal education, epitomizes such Godliness, for in her simplicity lay her trust in God and her sense of surrender to save her son when no government, health care system or social safety net came to her rescue.

There are numerous Pittibens and Bhaveshs whose prayers are answered by the SSSH of Rajkot. Over 26 people from Mehsana were operated upon within 20 days of the camp held on February 25. These include patients who required serious heart operations with valve replacements and other such procedures.

Sai – The Saviour of the Forlorn

The hospital is keen to serve those who grace its camps in a spirit of love as advised by Swami. When the SSSH, Rajkot was being built, Swami had told the trustees to provide the best services and to consider every patient as *Narayan Swarup* (Embodiment of the Supreme God). The SSSH Rajkot is following Swami's words in spirit and to the letter.

Sai is the sole inspiration for this unique healthcare set up that seeks out the poor and the helpless and delivers to them, free of cost, the best possible healthcare services in an efficient manner at the Rajkot Hospital. Verily God Himself arrives in the form of the poor, helpless and uneducated patients such as Bhavesh Chamar presenting an opportunity to serve. And while the patients receive relief from their physical ailments, the experience also restores their sense of dignity and emotional well-being.

In fact, the healing occurs from within and without and at multiple levels for all parties concerned. Some are cured of their physical maladies, others are touched and inspired to selflessness and yet others grow in their hearts to experience the joy of serving God. From the doctors to the seva dal volunteers and everyone in between, all parties involved agree the hospital is their personal healing centre where each one of them is receiving their individual treatments at deeper levels for the own spiritual health and well-being! The devotees of Gujarat are beholden to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba for considering them worthy of participating in such noble work. Their sentiments of gratitude are well captured in St. Francis of Assisi's prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console,

To be understood as to understand,

To be loved, as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

It is in dying to self that we are born to Eternal Life.

Amen.

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from Our Readers

Feedback on the Cover Story: 'A 'Moving' Marvel Of Holistic Medicare ...The Story Of Sri Sathya Sai Mobile Hospital.'

Dear H2H Team,

Your seva has been so helpful, motivating and inspirational. Your good deeds will be well rewarded. Well done with the excellent work that you are doing. Your insight at going to homes to provide a service is way beyond words.

Devi Reddy, Campus Health & Wellness Centre

Om Sai Ram,

I read the full story about the messenger of God - the white mobile hospital and was touched by the whole narration, it is definitely the work of the divine. His blessings always help in healing and work faster than medicines.

Jai Sai Ram, Vasudev Raheja

Sai Ram,

This article was truly inspiring. I wish I could be there to give the parties a hand. I was in tears when I looked at the last 2 photos.

K. Mohan, Perth, Australia

Sairam,

The article on the Bhagavan's mobile hospital is superb in all respects. By Swami's sankalpa the entire rural Bharath will get such magnanimous facility to the benefit of everybody. After reading the article one can understand that it is not just a giant bus and the various diagnostic equipments that matters, but the accompanying dedicated doctors, volunteers, work force, faithful patients and more than all Swami's grace that really matters.

Jai Sai Raama, Krishna Prasad

Sai Ram!

I was fortunate to read this article. I could not hold myself in letting you know how much it helps to read this type of article. Swami's grace and love is boundless. His method of reaching out is even more wonderful.

Sai Ram, Anil Sundar Sishtla, Bloomington, IL, USA

Aum Sai Ram,

I read your articles and news regarding the Sai mobile medical camp in India. It is amazing the work the doctors and nurses and volunteers do to help the poor people. I like the part on the little boy who had polio and lost all his teeth and was unable to walk...what transformation within weeks of receiving the treatment from Sai's mobile medical camp. All the doctors and nurses and volunteers are so dedicated and treat the people with respect and love.

I am from UK and there is going to be a team from UK going to Russia and Malawi this year for Sai Baba's medical camp and I have submitted my CV and am waiting for confirmation whether I get accepted or not. I would go as a volunteer to help the doctors/nurses and patients.

With Sai Ram love, Jaishri Mistry, Preston, UK

Sai Ram,

Thank you for a very inspiring account of the mobile hospital and its tremendous impact on the quality of life of the poor and distressed villagers. A very moving account indeed.

Sai Ram, Saranga Pani.

Dear Sirs,

This is an article that moves any individual who reads it. This is another of Swami's innovative projects and it is unique in all respects. This is the real transformation process. This is the only way that the whole country can be changed to a different dimension - a shift in the attitude paradigm. This is the shining example of selfless service. This where every participant is elevated to the level of Mother Theresa. Fantastic Sir. I did read the whole article without leaving a single word and it is so inspiring. I shared this news with many people. Thank you very much for this kind of excellent service. Please continue with this kind of inspiring articles.

Thanks and regards, Nagesh.

Feedback on the H2H Special "He Is My Swami" by Mrs. Padma Kasturi.

Dear H2H team,

Loving Sai Ram. The article with Padmamma was spiritual awakening to me. While going through the written conversation of Ms P Kasturi an electrifying current flowed inside me. Thank you and looking forward for the next continuation of the conversation.

May Swami always bless you. Nandini Tamang from Nepal

Sai Ram!

Your very inspiring interview with Kasturi's daughter has left me with fond memories of my interactions with Sri Kasturi in the 70s and 80s. Mrs. Padma Kasturi's understanding of the place in which Swami now resides in our memories is very touching to me and helpful to my own development. Thank you once again for the wonderful work you are sharing with the world.

In His service with Love, Bea Flaig.

Sai Ram,

I enjoyed reading the article of Mrs Padmamma. It was very inspiring. I would just love to read such conversations of Sai devotees. They are all very fortunate to be close to Swami...I wish I was.

Sai Ram, Tushna, Panama

Sai Ram

In fact while reading this interview I felt the presence of Baba in my office. I am very grateful to Prof Kasturi Ji that he translated so many discourses of

our Baba and we were all able to read and experience bliss. Please send me further interviews from devotees as it increases my faith.
Jai Sai Ram, Nilla Chamroo.

Dear H2H Team,
Thank you very much for bringing Mrs. Padma Kasturi's interview. We are truly blessed to listen to Swami's earlier devotees' experiences and please I request that you bring more in the future - with Bhagavan's Grace.
Jai Sairam, V. Jayaraman, Toronto, Canada.

Sairam,
I read with interest the interview "He is my Swami". It was wonderful. As I am simultaneously reading Prof Kasturi's "Loving God", it is all the more memorable.
The only sad thing is that I have wait for one more month for the next instalment of H2H! How nice it would be if you can increase the periodicity?
Sairam, Dilip, Chennai.

Feedback on the article 'In Quest Of Infinity Part 5' By Prof G. Venkataraman.

Dear Sirs,
The article is fantastic. This should continue as it is a great gift to appreciate God who is the creator of all these mysteries. Prof. Venkataraman's presentation of the most difficult scientific theories in a understandable and easy way is very much appreciated. Many thanks to Prof. Venkataraman and his team for bringing these articles to all of us.
Nagesh Gurram

Dear Prof. Venkataraman,
Thank you so much for sharing your vast knowledge in Physics and make it available to laymen like me. I just read the article on the topic of Black Hole and it was simply amazing. The language is so lucid that I didn't want to stop. It is also kept at a level that keeps even the interest of a high school kid, sustained. I always wanted to know about this subject matter, but many articles/books were simple turn-offs, only because the language used was not brought down to the average reader's level. Thanks a lot again, and keep providing us with these kind of stimulating articles with a lot of historical anecdotes in other topics of Physics as well. Looking forward to more of your articles.
Sai Ram, Nagesh Avadhany, San Francisco, USA

Sai Ram Professor Venkataraman,
Your articles on the above topic are simply mind-boggling. It is a wonderful insight into our Father's creation. Please keep the articles coming to help those of us with very little understanding of science and the great mysteries of creation. Although I do not claim to understand everything (not your fault) - the articles are very beneficial. I hope to share them with my children and others at our Sai Centre. You have a wonderful gift to explain complex matters in simple language.

Many Thanks.

Loving Sai Ram, Ravi Rudra, Auckland, New Zealand .

Dear Team, Sai Ram,

Will you please convey my appreciation for his 'cosmic lectures' to Prof. Venkataraman. I read them always, print them out and hand them on to friends. He is such a good story-teller and writes in such a way that the interested layman is easily gripped by the intricacies of nature in the physicist realm. Bravo!

Kindest regards, Hein Vink, The Hague, Holland

Om Sri Sai Ram,

Just a short e-mail to say what a wonderful, informative and sometimes, mind boggling series "In Quest Of Infinity" is. Please, please keep this series going, it is fantastic, 'out of this world' if I may also add!!! Keep up the excellent work that you are all doing and may Baba bless you all immensely.

Jai Sai Ram, Love Ron from U.K.

Feedback on the article 'Teach Children The Joy of Giving' by Mrs. Rita Bruce.

Sai Ram,

I am a young parent. I think parents now need more info like this to do their parenting duties properly. The world is in such a state that raising kids is becoming a challenging task for poor parents. Please put more articles about Sai parenting and how parents should handle the teenage years of their kids. I think teenage years are the most difficult parenting time.

Regards, Saiyinthie Yogesan, Perth, Australia.

Aum Sai Ram,

I am a single parent (widowed), with 2 little kids (ages 6 and 8) and over the years, I cannot explain how Sai Parenting has influenced my life! If I cannot find a solution to an issue in my home, I take my Sai Parenting out and read it. I call it my bible. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to give this as a gift to many parents, showing them very simply what our beloved Sai requires.

Thank you and I hope every parent will be blessed with a copy. Please forward more articles on parenting so that we can live the correct way with Swami's teachings at hand.

Joan Reddy, RMB Private Bank, Relationship Manager.

Feedback on the article 'A Mother Like No Other' by Mrs. Mallika Desu

Sairam,

Mallika Desu's article was indeed very moving and thrilling. We can vividly imagine Sai ma extending the same love and protection to us too at **all** times! Please do publish more articles like this in future issues.

Thank you and Sairam to you, with love, Saraswathy, Chennai

Sai Ram,

I enjoyed this powerful testimony to Swami's omnipresent love. The story was written beautifully, with dramatic tension and release. I have not read any material on this website before, but because I know Mallika and have read her story, I will check in with Heart 2 Heart in the future.

Barbara Robbins, Connecticut, USA.

Dear Heart to Heart Team,

Thank you very much for the touching article. It reminds us that provided we are focussed on God and immersed in Him, He is always there to take care of us.

Sairam, P.Vijayaraghavan, Chennai.

Feedback on the article 'The Wonderful Mother That I Have' by Mrs. Geeta Mohan Ram.

Dear Sir,

I loved the article so much that I made prints of them to be distributed to those who come for bhajans. I know Swami is God but time and again I need to be reminded of this. 20 years ago I was told that Swami likes the ladies to be dressed well and I did not believe it - how wrong I was. Please tell us more about devotees' experiences with Swami. I live through these experiences and I get a glimpse of His Power and Glory.

Navena

Feedback on the article 'From Lord Buddha To Loving Sai' By Mr. Ananda Perera

Dear Sir,

I read this article on the Poornima day this month. I feel I am trice blessed by our beloved Sai (buddha). "Buddha Poornima or Vesak is considered a thrice blessed day by Buddhists." I would like to consciously follow the 8 fold path and discover and be aware of my inner-self. I would like to attain harmony of thoughts, words and deed and follow ahimsa in every facet of life.

Love Sai Ram, Raji Bala, Indianapolis, USA.

Feedback on the Photo Album: Sweetness Unsurpassable!

Dear Radio Sai, Sairam,

We all are blessed to see such most wonderful and loving photographs of Bhagavan with children. As I was going through the slide show, I felt as if Bhagavan has come to my office to bless me in Abu Dhabi and to remind me that I am His child. I was very happy to see this slide show of our Lord Bhagavan with children and it reminds me to express love for children.

I am grateful to Radio Sai for taking all the pains and sincere efforts to show us such beautiful photographs which we can never dream of seeing. The photographs of touching moments of our most dearest and beloved Bhagavan (our Mother Sai) also remind us of the recent celebration of Easwarama day. I once again request you to send us more such beautiful photographs, so that

we can enjoy more and more happiness.
With Love and regards, Sairam, G.Ramprasad, Abu Dhabi.

General Feedback

Dear H2H team,
Thank you for such inspirational stories. We all tend to lose faith sometimes when things don't go our way. But after reading these stories I think that at any given circumstance we should keep our faith strong. Shraddha and Saburi should be the only things we should keep in our minds.
Sonal Acharya.

Sai Ram.
As with many articles I've read, I'm touched by the many experiences of devotees, especially the students and how much Swami cares for them under various circumstances. I'm starting to feel the closeness although I've not seen Swami so far physically and have not been a Balvikas student. Please keep publishing such stories of reassurance. For those like me, who started late in life to realize Swami, this is a sure way in training ourselves to leave everything at HIS will and keep Him at our side at all times.
Jeyanthi Ghatraju, USA.

Dear Heart2Heart team!
First of all let me thank you for your great job you are doing for people. I read the article and felt how my heart responded. My name is Olga. I was born and studied in Ukraine and then got married and moved to Estonia. It happened that my marriage ended in divorce and it was the most difficult time for me. I lived with my son, but was depressed and miserable. I started searching for help when once I met Swami's devotee who literally saved my life. I am so thankful to her for her love, support and patience. I am also thankful to my parents who taught me that everything in life is achieved through nothing but hard work. It also helps me to survive.

Thank you for the opportunity to read Swami's teachings. The topic of education is very close to me since I am bringing up a boy and work at school. This article helped me to realise how important is bringing up a good character, how far I was from it and to do something to make things happen to sow at least one seed of love, peace and happiness.
Thank you, Olga Borodina.

Dear Sai Devotees,
Sai Ram. Thanks for the lovely interviews you send to all of us through Heart2Heart. I enjoy these interviews especially with people who were so intimately involved with Swami -- I just read the one with Prof Kasturi's daughter. Thanks a lot - please continue to do Swami's work — we appreciate all that you do. I am originally from Mumbai, India but have been living all over the world (Japan, Korea, UK, Qatar, Singapore,) and presently in Jakarta Indonesia. And I have seen Swami's manifestations all over the world.
Regards, Sai Ram, Bina Mayur

Sai Ram,
My name is Suman Govindan. I am writing from the US. I read both articles on Swami as the Mother written by Karuna Munshi and Mallika Desu, both of whom graduated from Anantapur College. The articles were beautifully written, articulate and inspiring and I'm so grateful that you bring these to us . It's wonderful to be at home and receive these treats without leaving one's desk!
Sai Ram, Suman Govindan, New Canaan, USA.

Feedback on Sai Inspires, our daily inspirational e-mail service.

Sai Ram,
Eight years back I lived in Sri Lanka, and every morning after I dropped my daughter to her girls college in Colombo, I went to the Sai Centre to read the daily message and spent five minutes per day to make my mind calm and clear. Now I am in Australia, and I have the opportunity to read the daily message at my work. How wonderful it is. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.
Regards, Ashini Kangaraarachchi, Data Management Engineer, Canada.

To all of you at Heart to Heart, Sai Ram.
Thank you for all these beautiful and true messages I receive from Swami everyday. For some strange reason there is always an answer in these messages over things I have been pondering over or thinking of and looking for an answer! It helps and guides me through my days and I'm so glad I have this contact with Swami and yourselves. I do hope that I would one day get the opportunity to meet with Swami and yourselves!
Take Care, Kind regards, Suvani Naidoo, South Africa.

Sai Ram,
I just wish to let you know how much I like Sai Inspires and its link with The Thought for the Day. Swami is so generous with us and has given and does continue to give us so much helpful information that it is difficult to find your way through it all. But I find Sai Inspires helpful because it is brief, easy to look at, has a nice picture of Swami, and because there is a little statement telling what it is that Swami wishes us to think about. I like being helped out that way because my mind is not very objective in its outlook and I have trouble summing things up.

So besides having the thought that someone has so nicely chosen this for us to think about, there is The Thought for the Day which keeps us up to date with what Swami is saying right now. That is very nice. Just those two pieces are all I can manage for the day. What treasures you offer us. Thank you ever so much for all your kindness and consideration.
Sai Ram to you all at Heart 2 Heart, Lakshmi Parimala Mahadevan, New York, USA.

Dear Editors of Heart2Heart,

This thank you note is long overdue. Thank you for this excellent service--the words you select from the vast collection of Swami's writings and speeches always seem the right message at right time.

Sai Ram, With lots of love and gratitude, Jeroo Captain.

