

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Open the Qu’ran and the very first verses that greet you are “In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful (1:1); Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe (1:2); You alone we worship; You alone we ask for help (1:5).” Turn a few more pages and the Holy Book says, “There is no God, but Allah, and Mohammed is His Messenger”; “Those who disbelieve the revelations of Allah, theirs will be a heavy doom (3:4)”.

Now, turn to the sacred Bible. “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth... (Genesis 1)” This is the way this Divine Work starts, and further on it declares: “For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16)”.

Next, look through the Vedas. The *Ganapati Atharva Sirsham*, which is a prayer to Lord Ganesha, says, “The whole universe emerges from You; is sustained by You and merges in You; You are indeed the all conquering Supreme Lord.” In the same Yajur Veda, the hymn *Narayana Upanishad* declares, “Narayana willed to create all beings...Narayana pervades the whole Universe...Ultimately everything merges in Him...It is Narayana alone who exists.”

On the face of it, every faith looks so dogmatic, isn’t it? “And this is precisely why we do not like religion” many so called rationalists and atheists will emphatically say. They will go on to add, it is religion which is the reason for so much unrest in the world today. To concur with their viewpoint is akin to accepting that the Sun moves around the Earth, as that is how it seems everyday to an ignorant onlooker. Only when one investigates further does he uncover that it is actually the Earth which is moving, not the Sun. It is the same with religion and the current world situation too. Only when we dwell deeper do we realise that, in truth, it is not the Faith, but partial, convenient, selective and shallow understanding and practice of the message of every Master which is at the root of every evil mankind is grappling with today.

And what we often fail to notice, realise and appreciate is that in spite of so many problems plaguing human society now, if there is one factor that always brings unity and harmony and confers solace, peace and strength continuously, it is the soul of every religion. It connects man to that infinite source of all joy, life and bliss, like no other object or event can ever do. In a revealing discourse on Oct 1st, 1976, Bhagavan Baba said, “The goal and the essence of all creeds, faiths and religions is just this – To sublimate the mind of man so as to guarantee liberation to the individual concerned, and also confer happiness to the society of which he/she is a unit.”

Bhagavan further explained, “Instead of uniting mankind in a common endeavour, religion today has become a system of walled enclosures, guarded by hate and fanaticism. Therefore, each religion has become an armed camp sunk in self-aggrandizement, trying to wean others into itself and preventing defections from itself. And that is why religion is being condemned

as the root of chaos and conflict....It has to be emphasized that religion is not the root cause of this state of affairs. The factional fights and fanatic hatred are due to the unruly ego that is given free play. In fact, religion strives to destroy just this vicious tendency. So, it has to be supported, not condemned. What has to be condemned is the narrow, perverted attitude of hating those who do not agree with you or who hold different opinions of the mysterious force that animates the universe...If only each one lives up to the ideals propounded by the founders of one's religion, unaffected by greed or hate, the world will be a happier and more peaceful habitation for man."

What this clearly means is that for religion to work for us the way it was originally intended, it has to be first understood in its undiluted, pristine form. Every word in the holy scriptures is the word of God, and they are not to be understood superficially. Just as every look or vision of the Lord is to be felt, experienced, relived and ruminated upon repeatedly to make the most of the divine blessing; so also every phrase and parable, hymn and sentence of these holy books has to be meditated upon to assimilate its truest essence. And only then should one put them into action. Only a few enlightened ones in every faith do this and they alone gain access to the nectar of divine bliss; but the majority miss the crucial essence, taken over by the literal and light meaning of the divine word.

Therefore, to help you, in not only understanding every Faith in its true richness and glory, and derive complete benefit, but also, more importantly, not be misled by its sometimes seemingly fanatic and inflexible pronouncements, we, in H2H, have periodically offered comprehensive articles on world religions explaining their tenets and facets, message and mission. In the March 2008 issue, we had as the cover story "The Enigma of Islam...Enlightened by Sai." And the response to this was truly overwhelming. Wilbert M. Stephenson, from New York, wrote, "I never trusted any Muslim, and, after 9/11, I took a combative stance against the religion of Islam. But this article has dramatically changed my perspective...Now I must begin loving my Muslim brothers and sisters." Ms. Piyali, from USA, said, "I really enjoyed and learnt so much...I would love to read more on all the Five Pillars of Islam and other concepts like Jihad, etc." Similarly, Jean Dixon, from South Africa, wrote, "I was blown away by it! Please could you continue the story...?" It is so many requests like these which propelled us to work on the second part of the cover story on Islam, and here it is, now offered to you, in this sacred month of Ramadan.

Ramadan is a month of fasting and prayer, and appropriately, the current cover story has, as its focus, the second pillar of Islam which is *Salah* or remembrance of the Lord. Few truly realise and harness the power of true prayer. In fact, there is no problem as knotty in this world that prayer cannot solve. This may sound hyperbolic, but unless you experiment it yourself, you will never be convinced. If, sometimes, you do not get the desired results, then what is probably wrong is the method, not the medium. What is the right way to pray? And why has the Prophet enjoined Muslims to pray five times a day? Is this practical? And further, why, at all, should we pray? What can

prayer really do? You will find illuminating answers to all these and much more when you read our cover story “Salah – The Flag of Islam”.

In reality, 90 % of the articles in every issue of H2H have prayer as its undercurrent, though it may be obvious only at times. It is the same with this issue too. When you read the moving story of how Sai doctors and volunteers from the USA, UK, Russia and Belarus gathered in the small town of Bogodohovo, Ukraine, to offer much-needed medical help, counseling and brotherly love, you will see how it was the sheer power of the prayer and faith in the Almighty that made the entire mission so successful and rewarding. It is the same with the stirring tale of Ravinder in the Healing Touch section. A 23-year old from the north Indian state of Punjab, life, for him, had become a hopeless endeavour when a seemingly small accident threatened to make him permanently handicapped. And to add insult to injury, he was taken for a ride by doctors in a private hospital, who not only misdiagnosed and mistreated his case, but also made his poor parents part with their life’s savings with damaging consequences to the family. Finally, it was the prayers of Ravinder’s mother which did the magic. Today he is raring to jump into life with a new vigour. How did this happen? Read “The Revivified Ravinder”.

And in this vein goes every story in this issue of H2H. Be it the amazing reminiscences of Mrs. Rani Subramaniam in the H2H Special section, or the story of Mr. Sivaramakrishnaiah in the Swami and Me section or the fascinating story of the Sai Movement of Costa Rica – each one is a testimony of this incredible power of remembering His name, holding onto His feet and surrendering one’s life to Him completely, which is in fact, the crux of Islam.

There is a vast difference between saying prayers and praying. As Mahatma Gandhi said, “It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart.” When we immerse ourselves in sincere prayer, we truly lose ourselves in Him. There even may be something impossible for God, but nothing is impossible with His Name, for such is its power.

So, let us not lose this great opportunity! Let every second of our lives and every cell of our being, consciously or unconsciously, be engaged in His Name and His form. Let us live for Him and Him alone.

Loving Regards
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The Primordial Force

On September 3 this year, falls Ganesh Chaturthi – the festival celebrating the advent of Lord Ganesha. Who is truly Lord Ganapathi? What is the meaning behind observing this festival when Lord Ganesha is actually beyond time? Swami revealed these important aspects and much more in a beautiful discourse delivered on this occasion five years ago in 2002. Let us recapitulate a few significant revelations made during that occasion by Bhagavan Baba.

Today is the sacred festival of Ganesh Chaturthi. ‘Ga’ symbolises *buddhi* (intellect), ‘Na’ stands for *vijnana* (wisdom). So, ‘Ganapati’ is the master of *buddhi* and *vijnana*. The universe is sustained by *Ganas* (gods) and Ganapati is their master. In this world, everybody has a master, but Ganapati has none. He is a master by Himself. This is the birthday of the Master of Masters. Ganapati is also called *Mooshika Vahana* (one who has a mouse as his vehicle). You may wonder how a small mouse can carry on its back a hefty personality like Vinayaka (another name of Ganapati). Here *mooshika* does not mean a mere mouse. It symbolises the darkness of ignorance because it is in darkness that the mouse moves about. Hence, *Mooshika Vahana* is one who subdues ignorance and dispels darkness. It is only when we understand the inner significance of the Vinayaka principle that we will be able to celebrate Vinayaka Chaturthi properly.

One of the main teachings of the Bhagavad Gita is contained in the *sloka*:

*“Sarvadharmam Parityaja
Maamekam Saranam Vraja,
Aham Twa Sarvapapebhyo
Mokshaishyami Ma Suchah”*

(Surrender unto Me and perform all your actions as an offering to Me. I will destroy all your sins and confer liberation on you.)

So long as man is immersed in body attachment, all types of hardships and misery haunt him. Body attachment is the root cause of *sankalpas* (thoughts). That is why Lord Krishna exhorted man to give up body attachment. The inner meaning of this statement is that man should experience unity in diversity. Without *vyashti* (individual), there cannot be *samashti* (society). Without *samashti*, there cannot be *srishti* (creation). So, first of all we have to recognize the role of *vyashti*, the individual. Only then can we understand the principle of *samashti*, which will in turn lead to the understanding of *srishti*, the creation. One who understands *srishti* becomes one with *parameshti* (God). In fact, the principles of *samashti*, *srishti* and *parameshti* are very much present

in *vyashti*. Hence, one has to make efforts to understand *vyashti* in the first instance.

Vyashti symbolizes the individual (*Jeeva*) whereas *samashti* stands for God (*Deva*). There is not much difference between the individual soul and the Cosmic Spirit. So long as the *vyashti* identifies himself with the body he leads a very ordinary life. It is only when one identifies himself with *samashti* can he understand the principle of creation. So, firstly, man should make efforts to understand the true meaning of *vyashti*. This is the message of *Vinayaka*. The letter ‘Ga’ (intellect) in the name Ganapati symbolizes this aspect. The letter ‘Na’

stands for *vijnana* (wisdom). So, Ganapati is one who grants good intellect and confers wisdom.

Today, people perform Vinayaka worship without actually understanding its significance. Vinayaka symbolises the qualities of a true leader in all aspects. “*Viyate Nayake Iti Vinayaka*” meaning, “He is a master unto Himself”. In this world Vinayaka is worshipped by many. However, Vinayaka does not worship anyone as He has no master above Him. Even Easwara, the father, worships His son Vinayaka, but it does not happen the other way.

These days few make an attempt to know the principle of *Parameshti*, who is the fundamental force behind *Vyashti*, *Samashti* and *Srishti*. *Parameshti* is the Master of all. In this world, man undertakes various activities, of which some are good and others bad. Man’s *sankalpa* (thought) is the root cause of this duality. Good thoughts lead to good actions, and vice versa. Man is an embodiment of *sankalpas* and *vikalpas* (resolutions and negations). True spiritual practice lies in controlling these thoughts and their aberrations....

On this day of Vinayaka Chaturthi, people make *kudumulu* and *undrallu* as special dishes and offer them to Vinayaka. They are special and unique in the sense that they are cooked on steam without any oil content. *Til* seeds, rice flour and *jaggery* are mixed, made into balls, cooked in steam and offered to Vinayaka. You should enquire into the purpose of making such an offering. *Til* seeds are good for the eyes. Steam-cooked preparations without any oil content are good for your digestive system. One who partakes of such food will be free from blood pressure and blood sugar, and will always enjoy sound health and happiness. Food preparations, which are cooked on fire with oil content, are harmful to *Jatharagni* (digestive fire). Such food gives rise to various diseases. One can lead a long, happy and healthy life, if one avoids food with oil content. Vinayaka has a potbelly but he has perfect health as He partakes of steam-cooked food without oil content.

Vinayaka is also called *Vighneswara* (remover of obstacles). No obstacle can come in the way of one who prays to Vinayaka. Worship of Vinayaka confers success in spiritual as well as worldly endeavours. God grants happiness at two levels, *pravritti* (outward) and *nivritti* (inward). *Pravritti* is related to physical body whereas *Nivritti* relates to the intellect. The former undergoes change with the passage of time, whereas the latter remains unchanged.

Hence, one should try to reduce body attachment with proper food and habits....

On this day of Vinayaka Chaturthi, students place their textbooks in front of the Vinayaka idol and offer their prayers. The inner meaning is that they should pray for the divine wisdom to be bestowed on them. It is most essential for the students to worship Vinayaka on this auspicious day. He fulfils the desires of his devotees. He has no *agraha* (anger); He confers only *anugraha* (grace).

- *Divine Discourse on Ganesh Chaturthi Day, September 10, 2002*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - Part 8: Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear reader, in response to positive feedback to this section where we have a dialogue with the Divine, we continue with Prof. Anil Kumar's "Satyopanishad" after completing the serial Dr. John Hislop's "Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba" in January 2008.

This also is in the "question-answer" format that many devotees prefer, and has answers from Bhagavan on topics as wide-ranging as the origin of evil, the goals of human life, aspects of God – embodied and formless, to price hikes, women's liberation, vegetarianism and the generation gap of the present times.

Published in two parts by the author, these volumes have 270 questions in all, which are neatly grouped under separate chapters. In this issue, we begin the third chapter: Youth.

Chapter 3 - Youth

(Continued from the previous issue)

Anil Kumar: Swami! We go to colleges and universities for studies and acquire knowledge. We take up some employment thereafter. We draw our salaries, but, the pity is whomsoever we meet they say, "I don't have peace of mind". Why is this so? What is to be done?

Bhagavan: Mere education will not give you peace of mind. Sage Vyasa compiled all the Vedas, wrote the great epic Mahabharata, the eighteen Puranas and the Brahmasutras. Yet, his mind was restless; he was without peace. At this stage of Vyasa's anguish, sage Narada advised him to write the Bhagavata, a work, which incorporated the *leelas* (Divine Sport) of the Lord and life sketches of some of the most outstanding devotees of the Lord who sang the full glory of His miracles. It was only then that he enjoyed peace and bliss. Neither position, nor status, nor scholarship, nor influence, nor wealth, nor fame - no, none of these achievements can ever give you peace of mind. It can't be received from anyone nor can it be located at a place. No external objects, articles, or possessions can give you peace of mind.

The root cause of loss of peace is the bundle of desires. So, I often tell you "less luggage, more comfort, makes travel a pleasure" - the maxim of the Indian Railways. Therefore, a ceiling on desires is most important.

Don't feel sad that you don't have *koti* (one crore of rupees), but be happy that you have enough for *roti* (food).

Don't feel unhappy over not having a car, but be happy that you have a *kalu* (legs).

Don't cry over a scorpion bite, but be happy that you are not bitten by an enormous snake.

Don't grieve that a snake has bitten you, but be grateful to God that you didn't die because of that.

It is in contentment that peace and happiness are present. Who is the richest man? The man with contentment is the richest man. Who is the poorest man? He who has many desires is the poorest man.

Many come to me and say, "I want peace". I tell everyone, "The answer is in your request itself. When you say, "I want peace", there are two components "I" and "want". "I" is *mamakara* or the ego or attachment, and "want" is *kama* or desire. When you give up these two - ego and desire, peace is already there.

Anil Kumar: Swami! Many of us are helpless when we interact with youngsters. They often say, "Don't interfere with us; it is our freedom. We are independent and act in the way we choose." We find it difficult to convince them about what we think is right, and to guide them in the right direction. What should we do in the present circumstances?

Bhagavan: From your statement, it is very clear that modern youth do not know what freedom is. They use terms like *sveccha*, freedom and *svatantra*, independence, indiscriminately without knowing their correct meaning.

What is freedom? What is independence? If freedom means behaving as we like, without any norms, in what way then are we different from birds and beasts which act as they like? They move about freely without any restrictions. They also procreate producing dozens and dozens of young ones. If that is what the youngsters mean and want by 'freedom', insects, birds, and animals, without attending any universities and getting degrees are able to manage to secure food and shelter and live freely as ordained by nature. Then, in what way does your freedom benefit you? What is your specialty? What is your education for? Animals are better than you, as they have some reason and season. You have neither reason nor season.

What is *sveccha*, freedom? If the Sanskrit word *sveccha* is analysed properly, it is *sva + iccha*. *Sva* means 'yourself', i.e. soul, spirit, *Atma*, *iccha* means 'will'. Thus, *sva*, (*Atma*) plus *iccha*, (will), means 'the will power of *Atma* (Self)'. So this relates to our *Atma*. Is it that *sveccha* that our youngsters want today? The pity is they do not know the meaning of the word they use.

Then, modern man says, "I have *svatantra*, independence, to do anything I like. Can't I be independent?" Here, also youngsters do not know the meaning of *svatantra*. Does *svatantra* mean reckless, careless, and irresponsible behaviour? No. If you think that moving and roaming around, eating and drinking anything to your liking, are the signs of independence, don't you see that cats and rats also enjoy themselves in the same manner? Does independence mean food and drink? You are spending your entire lifetime

anyway on these two: food and drink. Life has come down to the level of just loading and unloading.

Then, what is *svatantra*, independence? You have to remember in this context one important point. True, you have independence. But, there is a limit. Your independence should not come in the way of the independence of others. So you have independence up to the point that it does not affect the independence of others. A small example: One gentleman on a fine morning started his stroll, waving his walking stick and swinging it freely. After some time a man passing that way pointed out, "Do not swing your walking stick like that!" Then, this man said, "Why not? I have independence and can move my walking stick in any way I like." But, the other said, "Sir, it is true. But your independence to swing your walking stick ends where my nose begins to appear because while swinging your walking stick, I am afraid, you might hit my nose." This is the limitation of your independence.

We also hear people say, "We are celebrating *svarajya*, Independence Day." Is it true? No. Here, *sva* means 'self'. Have you mastered yourself? Do you have control over your senses? Usually *svatantra* means becoming independent of foreign rule. You break the chains of slavery under the yoke of the rulers and declare independence. This is political independence. This is not enough.

Spiritually also you should be independent by controlling your senses, conquering your weaknesses and checking your evil tendencies. This is independence in the kingdom of *Atma*. You become truly independent only after you have conquered desire, lust, greed, anger, hatred, avarice, sense of vengeance, etc. You have to understand the meaning of *svatantra* in this sense.

Anil Kumar: Swami! What is the ideal ambience of a classroom?

Bhagavan: You should follow your ancient traditional culture. A student with *vinaya*, humility, and *vidheyata*, obedience will be able to acquire thorough knowledge. Students should evince keen interest in the subject they study, and even ask questions. Whenever they have doubts, they should seek clarifications from their teachers. Therefore, a student should be seated at a lower level than a teacher who occupies his seat at a higher level on a chair. Water always flows downwards, so does knowledge. Fire travels upwards. Similarly, the fire of wisdom of a student travels upwards.

Anil Kumar: Swami! Today we find imitation in all spheres of life. In particular, this imitation is very common among youngsters. What does Swami say about it?

Bhagavan: Imitation is weakness. This is a defect in the modern youth. Imitation is human, creation is divine. Imitation makes you forget your natural behaviour too.

A crow happened to see a swan and was very much attracted by its graceful and dignified gait. The crow started imitating. It started walking slowly for a while, then started jumping and finally was about to fly with the result that it had lost its own way of walking. It looked so awkward and artificial. Therefore, one has to be natural. Imitation is not only unnatural, but also ridiculous.

Anil Kumar: Swami! Today many people, particularly youngsters, are wasting their time. Many are lazy, and idle away their precious time. So, in spite of rich resources, the country is not progressing. Kindly suggest a cure for this malady.

Bhagavan: There is no dearth of anything in this country. We have sufficient resources. People are also highly resourceful and talented: There is nothing in the world outside which is not here in Bharat (India). As the Kannada saying goes, *enna bharate tanna bharati*.

History tells you that in the past this country was the target of invasions and attacks by many foreigners drawn by the riches and the resources here. But today, we find many lazy people wasting their precious time. Though they draw fat salaries, they don't work proportionately. Thus, the country is betrayed and cheated. You should follow Time. Time will not follow you. God is time, *samvatsaraya namah*. Time is God. *Kalaya namah, kalatitaya namah, kaladarpadamanaya namah* are some of the epithets of God, depicting Him as the Master, the Designer and the Controller of Time. The Namavali emphasises this aspect of Divinity. So, if you waste your time, it is a sin. You should spend time in the most sacred way.

I tell the students often:

'See no evil, see what is good. Speak no evil, speak what is good. Hear no evil, hear what is good. Do no evil, do what is good.'

Therefore, it can be concluded that 'casting evil looks, hearing evil words, talking evil, thinking evil and acting evil', amounts to a waste of time.

You should work hard. "Thou shalt live by the sweat of thy brow," says the Holy Bible. But, today it is not like that; people would rather like to have their earnings without putting in any effort. Any work you do, do it with *Namasmarana*, repeating God's name. This is *bhakti marga*, the path of devotion. Such work turns itself into an offering to God. This is *anubhava jnana* or Wisdom borne out of experience or Practical Knowledge.

Idle and lazy people can't achieve anything in life. Truly, if you work with both hands, couldn't you feed one stomach? You know how a photographer clicks a camera. He adjusts his lens calculating the distance and asks you to be ready before he clicks. Doesn't he? But, *Kaludu*, the God of Death, does not give you any time nor does he ask you to be ready as he clicks the camera of life. He takes away your life all of a sudden, unnoticed. So, you should be ever ready to face death. Hence, it is absolutely necessary to make the best use of time in the most sacred way. Observe God's creation: the Sun, the

Moon, the Stars and the Planets. All of them move in their orbits so that you have day and night in your life, constituting time. Trees and rivers follow time and are an ideal to humanity. So, it is said that nature is the best teacher.

Swami has no holiday. You have at least a Sunday as a holiday during the week. I receive thousands of letters everyday. I read them all. I attend to all my work. I walk miles everyday moving amidst you. I supervise, monitor, guide and direct all matters relating to the University, the Super Specialty Hospital and the Water Project personally, besides thousands of Sai Centres spread all over the world. I don't take rest; I don't have any interval or a holiday. Your happiness is My happiness. God incarnates to show you the ideal way of life. So, don't waste time. By *Karma*, proper action, uphold *Dharma*, righteousness, and merge in Brahman (Divinity), and thus redeem your lives.

[To be continued]

CHINNA KATHA

The Pundit and the Milkmaid

There was a pundit who led a disciplined life, and always stuck to a prearranged timetable. He woke up from sleep in the early hours of the morning, recited Pranava (Om) and later, after ablutions, drank a cup of milk exactly at 7 a.m. every day. This meant a lot also depended on how punctual his milk maid was.

But sometimes the milkmaid would arrive late, for she lived on the other side of a river. The river flowed between where she lived and the pundit's hut. She had to catch a ferry to cross over the river with the milk. The ferryboat would sometimes either start a little early or a little late. So, on those days by the time she reached the Pundit's house it used to be very late.

One day, the Pundit admonished her. He said, "You are disrupting my disciplined life. Don't you know that I must have my cup of milk at 7 a.m. everyday? Why do you depend on that boat to take you across? Just repeat the name of Rama. The river will part and you will be able to walk across. Rama will see that you do not get drowned."

The maid being very simple and unsophisticated had faith in the words of the Pundit. Next day, the maid repeated the name of Rama and just walked across the river!

The Pundit questioned her: "So, how did you manage to come on time today?" The milkmaid replied, "Sir, I repeated the name of Rama as you had instructed yesterday, and I could just walk across."

The Pundit was now flabbergasted; he did not believe her account. He just drank the milk and said, "Let's now go to the bank of the river. Let me see you walk across the river."

The maid stepped into the river repeating the name of Rama, and she could just walk across! The maid requested the Pundit to follow her. But the Pundit knew that he would not be able to do it, because he did not have faith in what he himself had said. In spite of his scholarship, he did not have faith in the power of the Name.

Dear readers, this is a story narrated by Bhagavan Baba in a divine discourse delivered on April 25th 1998. Swami has always emphasized that the Lord of the Universe always responds to those with faith in Him. One need not have any worldly education and degrees to qualify in His school; it is enough if we have complete Faith in Him. For faith, as we know, can do much more than just move mountains; with faith in God we can develop tremendous confidence and witness the blossoming of talents placed within us by the Lord Himself!

COVER STORY:

THE ENIGMA OF ISLAM...UNDERSTANDING ITS TRUE GLORY

VOLUME II SALAH: THE FLAG OF ISLAM

Dear readers, in the first volume of *The Enigma of Islam – Enlightened by Sai* which we had in March 2008, we recall the very quintessential essence of Islam, which is the Oneness of Allah. “Allah is One. There is none apart from Allah,” says the Quran emphatically.

“Truly, your God is truly One.” (Qur’an 37:4)

“In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say He is Allah, the One and Only, Allah, the Eternal, He begetteth not, and He is not begotten;

“And there is none like unto Him.” (Qur’an 112)

The Unity of God is most fundamental and the heart of God’s revelations to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) in the Qur’an. This is expressed in the primary *Kalimah* of Islam as “God Alone is” (*La ilaha illa allah*). This beautiful phrase is the bedrock of Islam. The Prophet himself said that this verse alone constitutes one third of the whole of the Qur’an and it is the expression of this belief which differentiates a true Muslim from a *kafir* (non-believer).

Islam, therefore, is pure *advaita*, the philosophy of non-dualism. But this philosophy is not an academic idealism. Islam is a way of life. It represents that state of consciousness where one has realised the Oneness of Allah.

The first pillar of Islam, the *Shahada* gives us a revealed knowledge of the Oneness of Allah (we covered this in our first article on Islam). The rest of the four pillars in this religion tell us *how* to realise this Unity of Divinity. The foremost among these four is *Salah* which builds the foundation of faith in Allah through prayer. This, truly, is Self- Confidence. The second pillar is *Sawm* which creates the walls of total dependence on Allah through fasting or putting a ceiling on desires. This is Self-Satisfaction. The third is *Zakat* which builds the roof of Self-Sacrifice through charity given to the needy. And the fourth is *Haji* which gives the bliss of Self-Realization through association with the Holy. Thus, the last four pillars of Islam are the practical aspects of Islam which groom the faithful in Self-Confidence, Self-Satisfaction, Self-Sacrifice and Self-Realization.

In the present cover story we shall concentrate on how **Salah** (Prayer) brings the devotee to the Unity of Allah. This has been done in four major parts:

Part one: [Islam, The Path of Total Submission](#) – This section x-rays out the very nature of the mind, which is actually the root cause of our feeling of separation from Allah, and explains how total surrender of this mind to Allah is the only way to the realisation of the Oneness of Allah;

Part two: [Dikr, The Essence of Salah](#) – This article deals with the most effective tool with which the tree of the mind can be uprooted, which is the Name of God;

Part Three: [Key to the Secret of God's Name](#) – This part gives very practical suggestions on how to unify the three levels of consciousness with the Name of God; and

Part Four: [The Power of God's Name](#) – This final section is a crown of gems which bear testimonies of the Power of God's Name.

☾ **PART 1: ISLAM, THE PATH OF TOTAL SUBMISSION**

“Nay, whoever submits himself whole-heartedly to Allah, and he is a doer of good to others, he shall have his reward from his Lord. And there is no fear for such people nor do they grieve.” (2:112)

To preserve the Unity of Allah, Islam lays great emphasis on total submission or surrender of one’s will to Allah. In fact, Islam is all about ‘Total Surrender of the Mind to God’. A true Muslim is a person who has surrendered his/her mind completely to Allah.

The reason for this is very evident. The Unity of Divinity is attained only when the mind is surrendered. The mind is at the very root of our illusionary impression that we are separate from the Oneness of Allah. It is the mind that makes one think that he/she is different from their brothers and sisters, diverse from creation and in fact, singular from Allah Himself. Once you think you are different from Allah, you make yourself another god! And so, there is multiplicity of gods and you begin to “join gods with Allah” as Qu’ran warns us against. It is the mind that creates this false impression of ‘others’ where indeed there are no others.

“Follow what thou art taught by inspiration from thy Lord: there is none but Allah: and turn aside from those who join gods with Allah”

- The Holy Quran, 6.106

It is the mind that sees many where there is only One and creates this grand illusion of many gods! It separates that which, in essence, is inseparable and joins that which, in Truth, is not composite. Just read the story below and it will become clearer.

☾ ***Where there is Unity, there is Love; Where there is Difference, there is Hate***

One afternoon, a person was eating a delicious meal. Then, all of a sudden his teeth bit his tongue and there came out oozes of fresh blood. If you were this person, what would you do?

What is the natural reaction when one meets with such a 'mishap'? Surely, one does not get a pair of pliers to pull out the culprits, namely, the set of teeth! Or does one beat the teeth in retaliation for what it has done to the tongue! There is absolutely no sense of reaction or retaliation or revenge. The only feelings that arise at such times are those of how to heal and comfort the tongue, and of means to stop the bleeding. In fact, one is tempted to swallow one's own blood!

Why are there no feelings of hate and anger, or judgements and condemnation on who is right and who is wrong? It is because one feels no sense of difference between the teeth and the tongue. There is a natural feeling of Unity. And where there is Unity, Love flows spontaneously. And the power of this Love heals every hurt.

But imagine that 'another' person (remember there is no other!) has just given you a blow on your mouth and your tongue is oozing with fresh blood! What will your reaction be? Surely, a strong feeling of revenge will begin to well up within you. And this may be followed by acts of retaliation, or at the least, a suppression of fitful anger.

Why are the reactions in both cases of the injured tongue different? This is because in the first case, there is a feeling of Oneness; while in the second, there is a feeling of difference or separation.

What is the cause of this different feeling in the second case? It is the mind! Once this mind goes, One can feel the whole cosmos as One's own body, and His reaction in both cases will be the same; that of Love and Healing. This Love is beyond good and evil, and it is beyond judgment and condemnation. Love is beyond the duality of opposites, because there is only One. He is Allah. ***La ilaha illa allah, there is none but Allah.***

☪ ***The Mind is the Cause of the Sense of 'I am Different.'***

Once we were engaged in a medical camp (using Sai Ram Healing Vibronics) in a remote village in Nigeria. One day, a person came to the camp with an injured limb. While cultivating his farm in the thick of the jungles, he had cut his left hand with the machete and the wound was quite severe. Then, the following interaction followed:

Fr. Ogada: What happened to your hand?

Mr. Okonkwo: I cut it while clearing the bush for cultivation

Fr. Ogada: Well, we shall give you all the medicine you need only if you are able to give correct answers to all the questions I ask you.

Mr. Okonkwo: Go ahead Father. I am ready.

Fr. Ogada: Did your left hand cut itself or was it the right hand that cut the left?

Mr. Okonkwo: My right hand cut the left.

Fr. Ogada: What did your left hand do when the right cut it? Did you give the axe to the left to cut the right in revenge?

Mr. Okonkwo: (laughing) No Father, there was no such thought in my mind.

Fr. Ogada: Why? What did you do when the right hand cut the left?

Mr. Okonkwo: The right tried to stop the flow of blood from the left.

Fr. Ogada: Now tell me sincerely, Mr. Okonkwo. If it were your wife that had cut your left hand with the axe leaving you with such a severe wound, what would you do?

Mr. Okonkwo: To tell you the truth, Father, I would chop off her head!

Fr. Ogada: Why? Is it not the same injury caused by your right hand? Why would you react differently when it was your wife?

Mr. Okonkwo: Father, a man does not kill himself unless his mind has gone crazy.

Fr. Ogada: Right, you got the answer. But you think that your wife is different from you. You think that your wife is not your Self.

Mr. Okonkwo: It is obvious because our bodies are different.

Fr. Ogada: What makes you think so?

Mr. Okonkwo: I see it.

Fr. Ogada: What makes you see it?

Mr. Okonkwo: My mind.

Fr. Ogada: Why do you say 'my mind' instead of 'my eyes'?

Mr. Okonkwo: Father, if I were blind, still I would 'see' the bodies as different.

Fr. Ogada: Good, Mr. Okonkwo. So your mind makes you react to your wife differently and it is the same mind that makes a man to kill himself when it goes crazy?

Mr. Okonkwo: You are right there, Father.

Fr. Ogada: What to do with this mind?

Mr. Okonkwo: I do not know Father.

Fr. Ogada: Try to get rid of it. Cut it with the axe! (This is the holy war which the Prophet of Islam preached.)

Mr. Okonkwo: Hum! How do I kill my mind?

Fr. Ogada: Surrender it to God. Only God can.

Mr. Okonkwo: How do I surrender my mind to God?

Fr. Ogada: By making it to think of God at all times. God’s Name is the Axe.

Mr. Okonkwo: If I think only of God, who will take care of my family?

Fr. Ogada: God! That is what remains once the mind is surrendered.

Mr. Okonkwo: Father, this is another medicine which you are giving to me!

Fr. Ogada: A greater medicine. We give you the first only as bait for the second.

“Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and His Messenger have prohibited, nor follow the religion of Truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection”

- The Glorious Quran 9.29

The total annihilation of the mind - to bring the mind to complete submission to Allah, the Supreme Self, is the Holy War, the Jihad that the Prophet tirelessly propagated.

If we realize this important truth:

- ⊙ That every Muslim is enjoined by the Holy Quran to fight the unbeliever until they are in a state of total submission (**Qur’an 9:29**).
- ⊙ That this unbeliever is one who joins gods unto God by thinking that there is something apart from Allah (**Qur’an 3:57**).
- ⊙ And that this culprit who joins That which has no parts and separates That which is indivisible is none other than the mind

Then we cannot but accept:

- ⊙ That the real Jihad for a Muslim is the war against one's mind,
- ⊙ That anyone who is engaged in this Holy war is a true Muslim,
- ⊙ And that one attains Islam only when one has conquered the mind and has brought it under total submission to the Will of Allah.

'Islam' is the state of total submission of the will to Allah. But what is this will that must be brought under complete surrender? What is it that wills? It is the 'I' – the individuated consciousness. This 'I' or 'ego' is also at the root of the mind. Without the 'I' there is no willing and without the act of willing, there are no thoughts. Without thoughts, there is no mind. And without the mind, there are no images. Without images, the illusion of separation disappears and what remains is Allah who has no second.

The Way of Islam is the process of submitting the will to Allah. Willing occurs when the 'I' moves out of Itself as 'I am this' or 'I am that'; 'I want this' or 'I want that'. When the will is submitted to Allah, there is no willing and there is no wanting. In this state of stillness, the individuated "I – Consciousness" dissolves in the Universal undifferentiated Existence. The small "I" that separates disappears and what remains is the Universal "I AM". This Universal "I AM" is Allah. "Allah is That which IS". Allah is pure Existence. Everything that is, is Allah. There is nothing apart from Allah.

Once we destroy the root cause of our separation with Allah, which is the ego, we reach that highest state of awareness where we realize that there is none apart from Allah and that we are not and cannot, and have never been separated from Him. We are One with God.

The fundamental sin in Islam is to join "gods unto God" which amounts to the disunity of Allah's Oneness. This sin is called fundamental because it is the root of all other sins. This is also the "original sin" in Christianity, namely, Adam's ancient forgetfulness of his Oneness with Yahweh. When one thinks that there is more than One, then one tries to join or separate that which is inseparable. It is the mind that separates. It is also the same mind that tries to join that which it has separated. Once we succeed in surrendering this mind to God, we not only uproot the very root of all sins but we also attain the goal of Islam: namely the Unity of Divinity. The primary duty of a Muslim is to attain Islam which entails the total annihilation of the mind. This is referred in Islam as "*Fana*".

**"Holy is the warrior who wrestles ("struggles") with himself" -
Prophet Muhammad**

☪ **First Understand the Nature of the Mind**

“The mind is a bundle of thoughts. Look at this handkerchief. You call it a cloth; but it is, in fact, a bundle of threads. The threads constitute the cloth. If you want to do away with the cloth, you should remove the threads one by one. Similarly, if you remove the thoughts, the mind is dissolved”

- Sathya Sai Speaks Volume 33

Our beloved Baba has in many of His Divine Discourses compared the mind with the handkerchief. The mind is like a veil that covers the Oneness of Allah. Because it covers, the mind also separates. But we must first find out the basis or root of the mind. Once we are able to get to the root of the mind, then it is very easy to uproot the mind permanently from its very source.

But since the mind is like the handkerchief, let us first find out the basis for the handkerchief? The handkerchief has been woven from intricate webs and interlocks of single threads. But where have the threads come from? The threads are made from the cotton. Hence, the handkerchief cannot be made without the cotton. The cotton is the fundamental object that forms the basis for the thread and the handkerchief. But where has the cotton come from? It has come from the cotton tree. Without the cotton tree, there would be no cotton and without the cotton there would be no threads and handkerchief. When we inquire further, we discover that even the cotton tree has grown from the cotton seed. The point is that even when all the handkerchiefs in the world are burnt, and all the cotton trees cut down, new handkerchiefs could always be produced once we have the cotton seed. The cotton seed is the root and once we succeed in destroying the seed, we would be able to destroy permanently the veil of the handkerchief! Hence, without destroying the basis of the veil, all other efforts will yield only a temporary result.

☪ **The Seed of Desire**

The mind is like the handkerchief. The threads are the thoughts. When the single threads of thought are woven together, they form an intricate web of strong desires which are binding and blinding. Where has the thoughts originated? They have arisen from the root “I” thought. Without the root “I” thought, no other thought is possible. The root “I” thought may be regarded as the cotton which forms the threads of thought. Beyond the root “I” thought, there is a feeling of “I” ness which is not a thought. It is a feeling or awareness of being which has its source in the Heart. This “I” ness is the tree of life. It is the tree which produces the cotton of the “I” thought which in turn form the threads from which the veil of the mind is woven.

Now we notice that in the deep sleep state, there is no feeling of “I” ness! There is total ignorance or darkness. The tree seems to be dead but alas the seed is still alive! And immediately we wake up from deep sleep, the seed sprouts up again into a tree and within seconds one is cut up in a web of

desires. This is also what happens in deep meditation when one reaches the state of thoughtlessness. But because the seed has not been destroyed immediately, one wakes up from deep sleep or from deep meditation, and one is caught up again in a web of thoughts and desires.

What is this seed of desire? It is the “I” impulse or the primal urge to create. Until this seed is roasted or destroyed, it is impossible to get rid of the mind.

How does Islam annihilate this seed - the “I” impulse? The first and foremost tool is **Salah** - the second pillar of Islam. But before we get into this, let us have a short break and recreate our souls with a few heavenly stories narrated by Ms. Nooshin Mehrabani on the Power of Prayer.

Nooshin is a Muslim. She was born in the capital city of Iran and worked in the United States as a journalist and reporter for Iranian TV in Los Angeles, California. She tells us how Divinity came into her life at a time when her only need was God and how this encounter transformed her especially through the Power of Prayer.

☪ **Prayer Breaks Bad Habits**

‘Because of what we see happening in the world today, I pray all the time. There is power in prayer. I learnt from Baba how important it is to pray. Prayer is talking to God all the time. I just talk to God. I talk to Swami all the time.

Our son was just 3 months old when my husband decided to return to Iran. The government had confiscated his properties, and he hoped to reclaim them. After we came to Iran, my husband found his old friends, and unfortunately started again his old bad habits. Because of this I was very unhappy and sad. At that time, the Iran-Iraq war was going on and my married life was falling apart. I had no peace inside or outside.

One day I prayed to God to give me peace of mind. I remember, that afternoon I had visited a friend and she knew how I had hit the bottom in my life and had gone through so much pain and suffering because of my husband’s problems with drugs. She gave me a little *Vibhuthi* (sacred ash) that Swami had given to her and said, “Why don’t you ask Sai Baba? Maybe He can help you.”

This was the first time I ever heard His name. The same night I used the *Vibhuti* and I prayed, “Oh Sai Baba, I don’t know who you are and how much power you have, but please, if you can, help my husband.” And then, I went to sleep.

☪ **In the Light of Sai**

Around 3 o’clock in the morning, someone began to shake my shoulders to wake me up. On the wall across from me was a beautiful white light, shaped like a diamond. It was glowing like the Sun. Inside was written an “Aum” sign,

in light. I didn’t know what “Aum” was at that time. But I kept repeating, “This is Sai Baba’s light. This is Sai Baba’s light.”

After five minutes the light faded. Nine o’clock in the morning when I woke up again, my husband gave me very good news; he had decided to change his bad habit. I was so shocked, because I knew it was extremely difficult to quit that habit. I was so happy. This happened surely as a result of this effulgence of God which entered our room.

☪ ***Prayer can Cancel Cancers***

When I returned from my first visit to India to see Sai Baba, I found that my mother-in-law had been taken to sixteen doctors. Every physician had given the same diagnosis - cancer and tuberculosis. She was 75 years old at that time and very sick.

Everyone was afraid to go near her because of the contagion. They thought she would die. But in my heart, now I had Swami and I knew I could ask Him anything. I took one of the *Vibhuti* bags Swami had given me during the interview and dropped it on my mother-in-law’s chest and prayed to Swami. I gave her a pendant with Swami on one side and Shirdi Baba on the other, and asked her to wear it all the time.

That night, after I came home I slept as I was reading Swami’s book. In the middle of the night, I woke up and remembered my mother-in-law. I started to pray to Swami. I opened up my hands and reached for Him in front of His picture, asking for His help. The room was very dark, but as soon as I started to pray the tips of my fingers began to glow with a blue light. Then, within me, I knew that my mother-in-law would not die. In the morning, I called my sister-in-law and told her that we should take my mother-in-law for another x-ray. That same week we took her to a new doctor – a specialist – and she had another test. As soon as he saw the x-ray film, he said, “She doesn’t have cancer, only tuberculosis.” I knew that Baba had helped her. After eight months, she had no sign of the disease. Today, after 10 years, she is still alive!

A few nights after the good news about my mother-in-law, Swami came to my dream. He made so much *Vibhuti* for me that it filled both my hands. He told me to eat it. He was lying down on the bed and I was sitting on the floor in front of Him. Very lovingly, He asked me, “What do you want?” I said, “Baba, I want peace of mind.” He said, “I already gave it to you. I give you liberation.” I didn’t know what liberation was at that time. But I said, “Thank you, Baba,” and I woke up. We should always ask God for one thing in our prayer: Liberation.

☪ ***Prayer – the Miracle of Sai-naz***

My love for Swami was growing – and so were the problems in my life. Swami had become my constant companion and friend, the only one I had. I placed His picture all over my house, because I wanted to see Him everywhere I

went - looking into His eyes, His face and talking to Him all the time. My life was all about Swami.

Now, He gave me the opportunity to do much service. I was very grateful to be able to work once a week at a hospital for mentally and physically challenged children. Another devotee friend of mine and I spent each Thursday with the children, feeding them and hugging them.

☪ ***Abandoned in God’s Temple***

There was this new child whose parents had abandoned her in a mosque in Northern Iran a few months earlier. She was found and taken to a hospital where the doctors diagnosed her as having microcephaly. Through a genetic disease, her brain was smaller than normal. Not knowing anything about her parents or her background, the hospital staff had named her Sanaz. I fell in love with this little girl. Since she had been left in a mosque, I thought her parents had prayed that God would care for her, and perhaps her soul had a close connection to God.

After three months the nurses recognised the bond that Sanaz and I had developed. They informed me that this little girl was all alone in the world. They asked if I would like to take her home for a weekend and give her some time with a family. My husband agreed. I was so excited and bought beautiful clothes to dress her in when I picked her up. Three different times I tried to take her home. Each time I went I found that she had been sent to children’s hospital for one illness or another. On the third week, I was told that she had bleeding in her stomach and that the hospital would be keeping her for more tests.

☪ ***Nobody but God***

I was worried. I found the address of the hospital and went to visit her. There was only one other child in the room with Sanaz and she looked so little and lonely. I had purchased a beautiful doll for her, but it was me she was looking at. As soon as she saw me, she called me “Mom.” This was the first time I heard her talk! I hid my tears as I held her. She had nobody but God in this world to help her. I went to see her at least three times a week. I prayed to Swami about her all the time, asking Him to help her. She was seventeen months old, but her legs were so weak; she was unable to stand. None of the doctors or nurses thought she would get any better or that her life would be very long.

I asked the nurses if they knew of an orphanage who could take Sanaz in her condition. But there was none. I looked all through Tehran, but no place would even consider Sanaz.

I asked the authorities to let Sanaz come and stay in my home for a few months. There, I would be able to take her to private doctors and give her the care and love she needed. Finally, one day, an ambulance arrived at my house with little Sanaz in the back, covered with a hospital blanket. I was glad I was going to be able to take her to the private doctors.

On the first night, I gave her a bath. My son was so excited to meet the little girl I had talked about so much. At night Sanaz slept with me in my bed, while my husband graciously moved to another room. Sanaz and I felt so bonded together, like she was my own daughter. Every night before I went to bed I kissed Swami’s picture next to my bed and placed His *Vibhuti* into my mouth. Sanaz joyfully did the same thing. The second word I heard her say was “Baba”. She had *Vibhuti* every night before she went to sleep and every morning she woke me up, calling, “Mom, Mom!”

I used my connections to make appointments for her with some of the best specialists we had in Tehran. They all told me the same thing - “Don’t waste your time. Don’t bring her here anymore. She won’t get better.” But in my heart, I didn’t want to give up hope. Swami had taught me the power of prayer.

Sanaz had lived with us for two months already. Then, one day I had a call from one of the orphanages. They told me to bring Sanaz there that very day. Our whole family cried, but legally we had no choice, and Swami also had not given His permission for us to adopt her. This was one of the most difficult times of my life. I took her to the orphanage, where I was told not to come back for at least one month. They wanted her to adjust to this place as her new home, which would be easier if she did not see me.

☪ ***We have to Pass through our Destiny***

I went to bed with tears that night. But this was the night that Swami broke His silence and came to my dream. I told Swami how much I loved this baby. Swami looked at me in a very stern way and asked, “Are you a hero?” “I’m not, but I’d like to be,” I answered. “No. No. No.” He said, shaking His head. He was not at all happy with the answer I had given Him. After some time He called me to sit next to His chair. He placed His hand on my head and smiled. That was my answer. Swami did not want me to change Sanaz’s destiny or her *karma*. One important lesson I learned was that I shouldn’t be attached to the seva I am giving for others.

☪ ***But Prayers can Change even our Destiny***

I kept up my prayers to Swami for Sanaz. I asked Him at the very least to let her walk and talk and do the basic things of life. After one month, I began to visit her regularly in the orphanage. All the caretakers knew how much I loved Sanaz. I was relieved to see that they paid a lot of attention to her and gave her so much love.

After four months I decided to take a picture of Sanaz to Swami directly and ask for His blessing. When Swami finally called us for an interview, I did not have a chance to speak with Swami or to ask Him to bless her picture. This was the only time I left the interview room with tears in my eyes. I had gone all the way to Puttaparthi to ask Swami to bless her, but had returned from the interview room disappointed.

Every day I took the picture of Sanaz to darshan. I was almost always in the last line and had no opportunity to ask Swami for a blessing. Finally, with one week left before I returned to Iran, Swami came to my dream. He stood in my room, and I immediately thought to give Him the picture of Sanaz to bless – now that He was so close. I went to get the picture, but when I came back I saw that Sanaz herself was already with Swami. She was walking around Him, playing. Swami said, “You wanted to talk about her? She’s walking now.” Then I woke up. In my heart I knew then that something would happen.

The day after my return to Iran I went to the orphanage to see Sanaz. The caretakers were happy to see me, but they told me, “Wait here. We want to show you something.”

I will never forget this sight. Sanaz was wearing little red shoes; the caretaker was holding her hand and she was walking! This was one of the most beautiful days of my life. I began to cry, thanking Swami for hearing my prayers, for healing her.

I got permission from the orphanage to take her back to the specialist to check on how she had progressed. The doctor could not believe it was the same child he had seen a few months before. When he measured her head, he found that her brain had also grown: something quite unusual. The heads of children with microcephaly usually remain very small.

☺ ***Our True Birth Certificate***

Sanaz lived in that orphanage for four years. During that time she learned to talk with no problem, she could now eat and do little things by herself. When she was six, they sent her to another girls-only orphanage, where she was able to go to school. The last time I visited her, she was learning how to read and write.

Swami has been taking care of her all this time. Looking back, I remember a dream my husband had during the time Sanaz was living with us. We were all walking in a forest. He saw a piece of paper in his path and picked it up. It was a birth certificate for Sanaz. The name, however, was “Sai-naz”. What a beautiful confirmation that she, like all of us, is God’s child and her destiny is in His Hands.’

COVER STORY:

PART 2: DIKHR, THE ESSENCE OF SALAH

The Prophet said:

"Everything has its polish and the polish of hearts is the Remembrance of Allah."

"For those who believe, and whose hearts find Rest in the remembrance of Allah, for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find Rest."

-The Holy Qur'an 13:27-28

The Obligation of Five Prayers

In the sacred Hadith (words and deeds of the Prophet), it is narrated by Ana bin Malik how the angel Gabriel took the Prophet through the seven gates of Heaven (which are the seven *chakras* of the Hindu religion and the Seven churches of the book of Revelation in the Christian Bible) until he reached the Lote Tree beyond which none may pass. Then Allah approached and came closer to the Prophet. Among the things which God revealed to him was "Fifty prayers were enjoined on his followers in a day and a night."

But as the Prophet was descending he met Moses at the entrance of one of the gates of Heaven. (The sixth gate) Moses stopped the Prophet and told him to ascend back to Allah. Moses knew that the followers of Mohammed cannot keep this command of fifty prayers in a day and a night. The Prophet went back and prayed to Allah, and Allah deducted for him ten prayers. Each time the Prophet returned, Moses sent him back to Allah to request Him to reduce the prayer. After the fifth ascent Allah had reduced the enjoined prayer to five times.

Again Moses sent the Prophet back to Allah to reduce the prayer one last time. (Moses knew from his own experience how hard it was for his people to keep the ten commandments of Yahweh). But when Mohammed ascended this time, Allah did not withdraw His Word but gave the Prophet a promise: "Every good deed will be rewarded as ten times, so it is fifty when you perform five prayers."

-Hadith, Book 001, Number 0314

The inner meaning of this story is that one should begin with the requirement to pray five times a day at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night fall until the whole of one's life becomes an uninterrupted awareness of Allah's Presence. One should, in the beginning at least, remember Allah five times a

day until one's consciousness is totally unified with the Name of Allah in the three levels of awareness. For, Allah says to His Prophet (Peace be upon Him) in the Glorious Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa, chapter 4:v103:

"Then when you have finished the prayer, remember Allah while standing and sitting and lying down"

In other words, the very goal of **Salah** is to remember Allah at all times of the day and night, and in the three states of consciousness – while waking (that is standing), while dreaming (that is sitting) and while sleeping (that is lying down).

All prayers and worship, all rituals and spiritual disciplines have this final goal: **Dhikr** - the Remembrance of Allah. **Dhikr** is the Soul of Islam. Without remembering Allah, according to the Prophet (peace be upon him) the whole of man's actions and indeed the whole of his life is a mere waste. In the Hadith, Bukhari, Abu Musa al-Ashcari related that the Prophet said:

"The difference between the one who makes dhikr and the one who doesn't make dhikr is like the difference between the living and the dead."

-Hadith, Book 004, Number 170

Muadh ibn Jabul also said that the Prophet stated:

"The people of Paradise will not regret except one thing alone: the hour that passed them by and in which they made no remembrance of God"

The Prophet, peace be upon him, would often tell his Companions:

"Shall I tell you about the best of deeds, the most pure in the sight of your Lord, about the one that is of the highest order and is far better for you than spending gold and silver,... The Companions replied, "Yes, O Messenger of Allah!" The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "Remembrance of Allah."

- Hadith. Narrated by Tirmidhi, Ahmad. and Hakim

Why is Remembrance of Allah so important? The mind can only surrender at the feet of a Superior Authority. This Authority which has the power to subdue the mind is the Name of God.

The nature of the mind is sound. The vibrations of thought waves in the mind produce very subtle sound which cannot be heard by the physical ear. Nevertheless, the inner ear can hear these sounds. In fact, the physical sound is only a resound of the sound of thought. The interval between two

consecutive thought waves is the gate to Silence. The Name of God is the key to this gate. The Name of Allah is the key to the Infinite. To enter this gate is to enter the Heart of Islam. For, Allah says to His Prophet (Peace be upon Him) in the Glorious Qur'an: Al-Anaam, chapter 6.v125, "**Of whosoever it is Allah's Will to guide, he expands his Heart into Islam**". The 'Heart' here means Absolute Silence. When the mind is unified with the Name of God, it dissolves into Silence. This is because the Name of God is the Primordial Sound of Silence.

***"Chanting of God's Name (Namasmarana) is the easiest path to liberation".
- Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. 35 p87***

Allah, the Primordial Sound of Silence

God is Silence. Silence cannot be described. The moment you describe it, it ceases to be Silence! It is neither being nor non-being. It is not emptiness and it cannot be described as something. It is That which is beyond attributes.

**"Remember Me and I will remember you."
[Holy Quran 2:152]**

Every sound is born from the womb of Silence. Every sound dies too in the tomb of Silence. The whole of creation as sound has emerged from the womb of Silence and will finally dissolve in the tomb of Silence. The first Sound that arose from the womb of Silence is the Name of God. And from this Primal Sound, the whole of Creation came forth. It is also through this Primal Sound that the whole of Creation will return into Silence.

The Name of God is the Primal Sound which leads one back into the Soundless.

Different religions refer to this Primal Sound of Silence by different Names: Allah, Aum, Jesus, Rama, Krishna, etc.

In the Mandukya Upanishad (chapter1:v1) of the Sanathana Dharma (ancient Indian religion), it is said:

AUM, the Word is all this, the whole Universe
All that is past, present and future is indeed AUM
And whatever else there is, beyond the threefold division of Time
That too is AUM

Again in the Gospel of St. John (Chapter 1:v1) of the Christian Bible, it is said:

In the Beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
And the Word was God...

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

The Name of God therefore is both the efficient and material cause of the Universe. Everything in the Universe is a vibration of God's Name. Every atom in the Cosmos is a resound of the Primal Sound. The Heart of Creation beats with the Name of Allah. When the mind is unified with God's Name, it becomes one with the whole of creation; one with the music of being and becoming; one with the all-pervading Sound Stream which has no direction because you cannot point where it is coming from. When the mind is unified with God's Name, like the Prophet (Peace be upon him), one will begin to hear the echo of the Divine Word in everything; as if the Sky, the Earth, the Moon and the Universe, all said the same Name that he was repeating.

"The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not a thing but hymneth his praise; but ye understand not their praise. Lo! He is ever Clement, Most Forgiving".

-The Holy Quran 17:44

In this state of Oneness, one's heart expands into Islam.

How does Dikhr Annihilate the Seed "I" Impulse?

The Prophet said, Allah says:

"I am just as My Devotee thinks I am. I am with him if he remembers Me. If he remembers Me in himself, I too, remember him in Myself, and if he remembers Me in a group of people, I mention him in a better group in My presence. If he comes one span nearer to Me, I go one cubit nearer to him; and if he comes one cubit nearer to Me, I go a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running." "

-As narrated by Abu Huraira in the Hadith, Volume 9, book 93 number

Our Beloved Sathya Sai Baba reiterates this same Truth:

"Remember that with every step, you are nearing God; and God too, takes ten steps towards you when you take one step towards Him. There is no stopping place in this pilgrimage; it is one continuous journey, through day and night, through valley and desert; through tears and smiles; through death and birth, through tomb and womb.

When the road ends, and the Goal is gained, the pilgrim finds that he has traveled only from himself to himself."

-Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. 8 (22-7-1968)

How does one unify the mind with the Name of God? This is the most practical question for which Prophet Mohammad’s paradigm is the best solution.

☾ ***Wife = Worries Invited For Ever = Thoughts***

Like the deer yearning for running streams my heart longed to behold the Physical Divine Presence of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I was by then an associate priest in a parish in the archdiocese of Lagos, Nigeria. This dream came true in September, 2001. Just to set my eyes on Him who has stolen my heart was all I desired.

On the second day of my visit, I was sitting among other devotees in the second row waiting for His *Darshan*. Then, He came and stopped in front of me. He was looking at me with an everlasting Love. When He broke His Silence, the following conversation took place:

Swami: “Where do you come from?”

Me: ‘Swami, from Nigeria’. (Truly we came from God)

Swami: “How many are you?”

Me: “One, Swami”. (Yes, there is only One; Allah)

Swami: “Go!” (Go means to let go of everything that separates you from the One)

After His *Darshan*, Swami came and ushered all those He had called into the interview room. I was sitting at a far end of the room. Truly, I was totally lost in the beauty and bliss of His Form. Swami was busy talking to other devotees and materialising different objects for them. Then, like a thunder from the blues, He turned to me and asked: “**How are your wives?**”

This question woke me up from my sleep of bliss. One could imagine the confusion that the Lord threw me into. Here I was, a catholic priest, without even one wife. On the other hand, I knew without a doubt that He knew me inside and outside, and that there was nothing I could hide from Him. I also knew that the Lord does not waste words and that every Divine utterance is replete not only with inner meaning and also with the power to actualise this meaning in one’s life.

I opened my mouth several times and simply closed it without saying a word. The rest of the devotees in the interview room were wondering why this African was not answering Swami’s question. Then the Lord ignored me in my ignorance. I was glad that the rest did not know that I was a Catholic priest and was not supposed to have even a wife and not to talk about wives!

☪ **Wife = Wisdom Invited For Ever = Allah**

On another occasion, Swami had called a number of Muslim devotees for an interview. During this interview, one lady threw a question to Swami: “**Swami, why is it that Mohammed married eleven wives?**” Swami looked up with surprise in His face and said: “**Mohammed...?**” “**Eleven wives!...**” **No, No. Mohammed had only one wife! ...Allah.**”

When I heard this story, I understood in an instant what Swami meant by asking me, “How are your wives?” True marriage is that state of Divine union where one’s mind has been totally unified with God. Until this state is realized, no one can say he has no wife. Since your wife is what you think. Although the Prophet had many wives, truly he had none because his one thought was Allah. Whereas the priest was unmarried but he had many wives since many thoughts occupied his mind. When the mind is filled with thoughts, the mind is full of worries. When the mind is filled with God, it is turned into a house of Wisdom.

"O ye who believe let not your riches or your children divert you from the Remembrance of Allah. If any act thus, the loss is their own."

-The Holy Quran 63:9

"Listen Oh Israel, the Lord thy God is One. And thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy entire Mind and with thy entire Heart and with thy entire Strength"

- Deuteronomy, chapter 6:4

To love God with the entire mind happens when one has unified the “I” Consciousness with the Name of Allah. This requires integrating the three levels of consciousness with God’s Name. The ‘I’ consciousness is operative in the waking and dreaming states and remains as a latent seed impulse in the deep sleep state. When the ‘I’ consciousness is operative, one is mindful of the ‘I’ as the ‘doer’ and ‘experiencer’. From dawn to dusk and vice versa the ‘I’ parades itself as: ‘I am a doctor’ and ‘I am a Professor’, ‘I am a husband’, ‘I am a devotee’, ‘my property’, etc. But once the “I” has been unified with the Name of God, one is only conscious of God.

"I forgot myself so that I may remember You."

When this unification is attained, the three levels of consciousness become automatically integrated with the primal Sound of Silence. Then, the little individuated “I” is replaced with the Name of God. The cry of “I”, “I”, “I” turns into a Divine call: “Allah”, “Allah”, “Allah”. The self pride of “I am this” and “I am that” turns into a Divine glorification: “Allah is this” and “Allah is that”. The greed of “This is Mine” and “That is yours” is converted into ***La ilaha illa allah: there is none but Allah.***

Islam is attained when the "I" forgets itself in the remembrance of Allah. St. Paul attained this essence when he said: "It is no longer "I" who lives, but God living in me". (Galatians 2:20)

"Do not say, 'I am nothing'; neither say, 'I am something.' Do not say: 'I need such and such a thing'; nor yet: 'I need nothing.' But say: 'Allah,' and you will see marvels."

- Mulay al-^cArabi ad-Darqawi in, Letters of a Sufi Master

COVER STORY:

☾ PART 3: KEY TO THE SECRET OF GOD'S NAME

***"My Devotees are those who remember their Lord while standing, sitting and lying on their sides"
- Glorious Qur'an 3:191***

After all is said, the practical question which many sincere seekers would ask is how one can remember God **while standing**, which refers to the waking consciousness where both the body and the mind are standing (that is active); **while sitting**, which alludes to the dreaming consciousness where only the mind is active and **while lying down**, which is the state of deep sleep consciousness where both the body and the mind are inactive.

***"All obligations imposed upon man by Allah are clearly marked and one is exempted from them in the presence of a genuine cause. The only exception is the obligation of dhikr. Allah has set no specific limits for it, and under no circumstances is one allowed to be negligent of it. We are commanded to 'remember Allah standing, sitting, and reclining on your sides,' in the morning, during the day, and in the night, at sea or on land, on journey or at home, in poverty and in prosperity, in sickness or in health, openly and secretly, and, in fact, at all times throughout one's life and in all circumstances."
- (the saying of Ibn Abbas as related by Ali b. Abi Talha in the book "Fiqh us-Sunnah" by as-Sayyid Sabiq)***

☾ Remembering Allah while Standing

How do we fill the whole day with the remembrance of God? There is a very practical and easy way of unifying the 'I' consciousness with the Name of God during the waking state when the body and the mind are both active. In order to integrate the whole of the waking consciousness with the Name of God, there are a number of steps which we must follow systematically.

☾ Step one: Discover the Primal Sound of Silence in Every Sound and Scene

***Aisha said, as narrated by Muslim, that the Prophet remembered God at all times of the day and night.
-Hadith, Book 003, Number 0724***

In the earlier parts of this cover story, we have elaborated on how everything in this entire Universe is a vibration of the Primal Sound of Silence, which we call 'The Name of God'. Again, the sounds which all the objects in the cosmos (animate and inanimate) produce are only a variation or modification of the Primal sound of God. Our body-mind complex is made up of sound, and they produce sound continuously – the sound of the heart beat, the breath of life, the noise produced while eating, bathing, walking, brushing the teeth, or for that matter while sweeping the house or doing other house chores like washing clothes, cutting vegetables, cooking, gardening, and so on; the list is endless. We must discover and realise that all these sounds are but modifications of the primordial Sound of God; they are actually a resound of the Name of God. In fact, every sound which our body produces and receives is a call to prayer: a call to remember Allah. But Alas! Do we listen? Do we pay heed?

***Say, O Muhammad, unto mankind: "I warn you only by the Inspiration. But the deaf hear not the call when they are warned".
Glorious Qur'an 21:45***

☾ Step two: Harmonize and Integrate the Name of God with Every Sound Produced in Daily Activity

"In order to attain purity, it is not enough if chanting of the divine name is confined to a limited period. It has to be a continuous spiritual exercise throughout one's life. Only then will the divine name get imprinted on one's heart. You may attend to your daily routine. But, while attending to your duties in your own house or in the outside world, constantly remind yourself of the Name of God."

- Sathya Sai Baba

The second step is when we harmonise and integrate the Name of God with every sound which our body-mind complex produces during the waking state. First, we must form the habit of waking up with the Name of Allah. The first thought of the day must be "Allah" or any Name which one chooses to call the Primal Sound of Silence. It should be any Name which evokes a strong feeling of Love and emotion in our heart; When we call It, our heart should melt in tears. Our passion for this Name should be irresistible. This is our direct line to Divinity. For, Allah says to His Prophet, (Peace be upon him); "I am just as my devotee thinks I am". The Name is the line, the Love is the connection. The call is the switch. When we go to bed with this Name and we will always wake up with the Name of God in our heart and on our lips.

Allah said in His Book: "And mention the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with a complete devotion"

- The Holy Quran 73:8

Once we wake up, an action which almost everyone must perform every morning is brushing of the teeth. What do we normally think when we are brushing our teeth in the morning? Are we present to the simple action of cleaning our mouth? Most of us are not ‘present’ because our minds are far away engaged in other affairs. And we are unconscious to the call of God in the sound of the brush. Man is never at home even when he is at home because his mind is always at some other place. The mind is rarely in the body which is his true home. Man can only experience the Power of the Present when his mind and his body are in the same place at the same time. And the best and most practical way to achieve this is to **attune** to the sound produced by every action, and harmonise this sound with the Name of God.

"O you who believe! Remember Allah with much remembrance; and glorify Him morning and evening."

- The Glorious Quran 41-42

Then, we come to the action which no human being can ever miss and remain alive – eating. This is the most sacred of all human acts. In the Hindu religion, food is regarded as God - "**Annam Brahma**". In the Christian tradition, when Jesus was eating with his disciples during the Last Supper, He took bread and after giving thanks, He gave the bread to His disciples saying: "Take and eat. This is My body". He then commanded His disciples to always do this in Remembrance of Him (Luke 22:19). In this way, Jesus was teaching that the food we eat is His body, and that whenever we eat, we should remember God. Every meal is a Holy Communion in the body of Christ.

We must therefore harmonise and integrate the Name of God with the sounds which are produced while engaged in this most sacred obligation. And what are these sounds? They are the clashing and grindings of the molars and premolars, and the tearing and biting of the canines and incisors. Let us listen to the crunches and the chomps, the mastication and the swallowing, and merge the Sound with the Sound of God’s Name.

This means that we have to endeavor to eat our food in Silence. After saying the blessings, the actual eating of the food must be an act in remembrance of the Name of God. And every bite will take us beyond the beat of the sound to the One Who digests the food within us in the form of fire.

"If you talk while taking food, the digestive system will be spoiled. Once the digestive system is spoiled, several diseases will confront you... Most of the children do not know this rule. Take your food in silence in a calm atmosphere. Do not howl, talk, and chit chat. Do not laugh or cry while taking food."

- Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. 35, p283 – (2002)

Could you imagine what will happen when the entire sound-producing activities of the body-mind complex during the waking consciousness are

harmonised and integrated with the Name of God! The bath will cease to be an ordinary bath but a shower of Divine drizzles of the Primordial Sound! The walk will no longer be a mere exercise in transporting the body from one place to another, but a rhythm in the dance of Allah’s Name. The very act of breathing is attuned to the Primal Sound of God’s Name and one’s daily duty is converted into a *japa* (rosary) of God’s Name. It will be ecstasy when every association is spent in the remembrance of Allah and every action is sweetened by the immortal honey of God’s Name.

When we enter the bathroom, we will automatically remember God. Our Bedroom will become a Mosque of prayer and our dining room a table of Divine communion. A Living Presence of God’s Holy Name will surround us like a heavenly fragrance welling up from the depth of nothingness. An unseen Power will anchor our soul making us feel as if we can fly with the wings of an eagle. Our Heart will be filled with a Divine music which is hidden to the ears of mortal man. In short, our soul will get so suffused with the ethereal Sound of Silence that people will think we have gone out of our minds! And this is true because at this point, the mind is about to drop.

“The Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: “Remember Allah as much as you want, until people say that you are crazy and foolish.”

- As narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad, Ibn Hibban in his Sahih

Step Three: Awaken the Soul Resonance Within

The third stage is reached when the devotee has awakened the *resonance* of God’s Name in his heart. At the beginning, the remembrance of God’s name will have to be mechanical. In other words, one has to make constant and consistent effort to harmonise and integrate the Name of God in all the actions he or she performs during the day. But a time will come, depending on the intensity of one’s constancy, when the Name of God will begin to repeat itself within the heart of the Devotee. This is called the **Power of Soul Resonance**. The heart will literally reverberate with the Sound of God’s Name. One hears in his inner self the echo of the Divine Name arising from the core of Silence. It is like a song which you like so much. You sing this song often and then after a time, without any conscious effort, you ‘hear’ the song singing itself within you. This is the Power of Soul Resonance. This is the Power of Lord Hanuman who has so much unified His Consciousness with the Name of Rama that every hair in His body vibrated with the Sound of “Ram”.

“With the heart remember Allah, secretly from creation, soundlessly and speechlessly. That remembrance is best of all: out of it flowed the sayings of the saints.

(Sheikh Amin al-Kurdi; *The Enlightenment of Hearts (Tanwir al-Qulub)* p. 522

When the Heart is awakened to the Sound of Silence, just like the physical heart would pump blood to every cell and organ in the physical body, the waves of the Divine Name from the Spiritual Heart will invigorate the vital life

force of the devotee. And every cell will tingle with the sound of the Name of Allah; every hair will stand like violin strings tuned to the frequency of God’s Name. At this stage, the Heart of the devotee will connect to the Heart of God and to the soul of the soil. Everything will speak to him. The trees, the mountains, the ocean and the sky will converse with him. Beast and birds, fish and reptiles and all the creeping and crawling creatures will talk to him, and he will understand their language. It is the language of the Heart. And every sound will draw him nearer and nearer into the womb of Silence.

David said - peace be upon him: "I shall praise God with a kind of praise that none among his creatures ever used before." Thereupon a frog called out to him: "Do you pride yourself before God for your praise, while for seventy years my tongue has been moist from remembering Him, and I have eaten nothing in the past ten nights because I kept busy uttering two sentences?" David said: "What are these two sentences?" The frog replied: "O Praiser of Thyself with every tongue, O remembered One in every place!"

This is the stage where the devotee has to develop and deepen the art of inner listening. To listen is to be silent. To be silent is to be aware. This Awareness is the “Living Presence of Allah”.

And how do we remember Allah while sitting - that is, when the body is at rest and the mind is awake in the world of dreams? Before we get into this, let’s first wet our spiritual appetite a bit. Let’s stop for a moment and have a little glimpse, nay, a peep into eternity, of someone whose heart has been awakened by the call of Silence, someone whose ego has been burnt by the flames of Love, and someone who embodies in His Soul, the Essence of Islam.

How can one gauge the depth of the Heart of he whom Allah has expanded his heart into Islam? Or how can one understand that which has no stand, or fathom that which has no top or bottom! Who can measure the Heart of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi? He was the perfect Muslim.

His life was so completely transformed into prayer, that everyone who saw him wanted a prayer from him. One night, he spent the whole dark hours in prayer in the mosque. It was the dead of winter, and in the course of praying, he wept so profusely that his beard, wet by his tears, froze and clung to the ground. His disciples had to rescue him in the morning.

‘Wherever I put my head, that is my place of worship. No matter where I am, that is where God is. Vineyards, roses, nightingales, the *sema* and loving . . . They are all symbols, the reason is always Him.’
- Rumi

"One day Rumi asked one of his young, snotty disciples to give him an enormous amount of rich and delicious food. This young disciple was rather alarmed because he thought Rumi was living an ascetic lifestyle. Rumi used to pray all night and eat hardly anything. The disciple thought, 'Aha, now I've really got the master — what he really wants to do is to go off somewhere secretly and eat all this food!' So he decided to follow Rumi.

He followed him through the streets of Konya, out into the fields, into yet further fields. Then he saw Rumi go into a ruined tomb. 'I'm finally going to unmask his pretensions,' the young disciple thought. But what he found was a totally exhausted bitch with six puppies, and Rumi was feeding the dog with his own hands so that she could survive to feed her children.

Rumi, of course, knew that the disciple was following him, and turned to him smiling and said, 'See?' The disciple, extremely moved, said, 'But how on earth did you know that she was here? How did you know that she was hungry? This is miles away from where you are!' Rumi laughed and said, 'When you have become awake, your ears are so acute that they can hear the cries of a sparrow ten thousand miles away.' "

Rumi's World: The Life and Work of the Great Sufi poet

And how did Rumi's awakening happen?

'A friend is needed; travel not the road alone,
Take not thy own way through this desert!
Whoso travels this road alone
Only does so by aid of the might of holy men.
- Rumi

Rumi used to teach his students with big piles of books stacked up in front of him. One day a man in rags, blew in from the dessert and rather rudely interrupted the class. He was a sage, and he approached Rumi appearing like a savage. The first thing he did was to seize Rumi's manuscripts and throw them into a nearby tank.

Rumi looked at him in wonder and asked him the reason for it. The seeming vagrant said, 'Haven't you had enough of reading and study? Now, study life instead of a book! All things which seem of importance, what are they on the day when you depart? What is rank, power and position? A far greater problem is, what will go with you, for, the solution of that problem will lead you to eternity. The problems of this world, you may solve them and solve them, yet they are never finished. What have you understood about God, about man? What relationship have you found between man and God? If you worship God, why do you worship Him? What is limitation, what is perfection? And how can one seek for it?'

After this conversation, Rumi was so won by him that he wrote down in his diary, 'The God whom I have been worshipping all my life has today appeared before me in the form of a man.'

This seer was the great Shams-i Tabriz. And the first lesson he gave to Rumi was: unlearn all that you have learnt. Rumi realised that it is not learning, but living the knowledge that counts. For, he had read much and had thought much, but he suddenly saw that what was important was not saying, but being.

Rumi had to give up his position as professor at the University of Konya, Turkey, and wandered from place to place with Shams-i Tabriz. After he had followed Shams-i Tabriz for several months with everyone blaming him for this action, one day the Master disappeared. This left Rumi in very great sorrow. On the one hand, he had given up his position and work, and on the other hand, the teacher whom he followed had left him. However, this was his initiation. For Rumi, this was the birth of the soul.

Don't search for the water,
just get thirsty,
so that the water may arrive,
just as the cry of the
newborn babe
brings the mothers milk.
- Rumi

Why are you so afraid of
Silence,
Silence is the root of
everything.

If you spiral into its void
a hundred voices will thunder
messages you long to hear.
- Rumi

From that moment on, Rumi was set ablaze with the Flames of Divine Love and his soul poured forth this Love in streams of poetry (Contained in his massive spiritual epic called the Masnavi). His poems are so deep, perfect and touching that when one man repeats them, hundreds and thousands of people are moved to tears. They cannot help penetrating the heart. This shows how much Rumi himself was moved to have been able to pour out such living words.

'O sleep, in thee I find the divine bliss. Thou makest patients forget their illness; thou makest kings forget for the moment that they are in a palace; thou makest the prisoners forget for a moment that they are in captivity. What bliss, what joy of bliss when the soul is freed from these limitations, from the presence of the different aspects of life that are keeping it captive!'

- Rumi

When Rumi passed away in 1273 in the full radiance of enlightenment, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Arabs, Persians, Turks and Romans honored him at his funeral, and men of five faiths followed his bier. That night was named

Sheb-ul Arus (The Night of Union with the Divine). Ever since, the Mevlevi dervishes have kept that date as a festival.

☾ Remembering Allah While Sitting

Allah's Apostle said, "Do not fast continuously day and night and if anyone of you intends to fast continuously day and night, he should continue till the Suhur time." They said, "But you fast continuously day and night O Allah's Apostle!" The Prophet said, "I am not similar to you; during my sleep I have One Who makes me eat and drink."

-Hadith, Volume 3, Book 31, Number 188 as narrated by Abu Said Al-Khudri

One would wonder how on earth one could remember God while dreaming. But this aspect of our life is so important and so vast that when utilised properly, the amount of progress one makes on the spiritual path is like making a two hundred years' journey just in two days. The reason is evident. The world which we experience in the dreaming consciousness is the storage house of our subconscious mind. Our subconscious mind is the record of all our past deeds, thoughts, words and emotions. It holds the imprint of all our impulses and tendencies, our past desires and future determinations. It is the seed of Adam's regeneration and preservation and the driving urge of Eve's passive and active tastes.

When we gain access into the subconscious mind, a lot of things happen very fast. This is because the world of the dreaming state has an entirely different time scale. Just two minutes spent in the dream world may be equivalent to forty years on the ordinary waking consciousness. One may fall asleep and start dreaming. Within what looks like two minutes he goes to America, settles down there, marries a wife, builds a house and bears three children. Then, he experiences a bomb blast and wakes up sweating. Hence, the dreaming state is characterized by the absence of time.

☾ ***Divinize your Dreams***

What happens when our dreams are divinised? A whole vast of the subconscious mind is erased with God's Name! It is like we have a cassette with junk music which we want to replace with spiritual music. What do we do? We simply tape over the spiritual song on it. Then, the old song is not only wiped out but it becomes irretraceable. This is what happens when we divinise our dreams. A large chunk of the storage of our past tendencies, etc, just get wiped out! And one may not achieve this feat in many life times of ordinary waking consciousness. Hence, we must sleep with the Name of God by injecting the Primal Sound of Silence into our subconscious mind.

☾ **The Power of Auto Suggestion**

This is very simple to do. There is a little gap which separates the waking and the sleeping consciousness. This interval is called the door to the subconscious mind. This is that moment when we are neither awake nor asleep. If we auto suggest the Name of God into this opening, then this Sound of Silence will weave its miracle even when we slumber. The Name will clean and purify. It will scrub and wash. It will churn and remove all the dirt from the inner recesses of our subconscious mind.

The Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "I was near the House (ie. Ka'bah) in a state between sleep and wakefulness when I heard someone say: 'He is the third among the two persons'. Then he came to me and took me with him. Then a golden basin containing the water of Zamzam was brought to me and my heart was opened up... My heart was extracted and it was washed with the water of Zamzam and then it was restored in its original position, after which it was filled with faith and wisdom".

-Hadith, Book 001, Number 0314

How do we auto suggest the Name of God into the door of our subconscious mind? First, we must not fall asleep any how. We must practice the art of falling asleep with the Name of God. After night prayers, there are a number of methods one could employ. For those who fall asleep facing up, harmonising and integrating the Name of God with the breath of life until one falls asleep would be the best. And this does not require any effort. It means that one should relax thoroughly and simply watch the breath as it repeats the Primal Sound of Silence. In a short time, one is carried away in the bosom of sleep. But as he sleeps, the Lord will be working for him even as the mother would clean and feed the baby while the baby sleeps.

Another method which will be appropriate for those who sleep lying by the sides would be to hug the Name of Allah in the cavity of the heart. This is like the hug of Silence. It is a living closeness which one feels with the Reality of one's chosen Name. **"I am as My devotee thinks I am. If he remembers Me in himself, I will remember him in Myself"**.

"If you seek to know where the Atma is, it is the Chaitanya (Consciousness) between one state of consciousness and another. This is not easily understandable by all. There is a state which is between waking and sleep. Few know what this state is. We seem to be in the waking state and then we close the eyes and fall asleep. Only the yogis have observed this phenomenon. That which is conscious between the waking and sleeping states is the Atmic principle.

-Sathya Sai Baba, Summer Course in Brindavan, on 29-5-1990

Instead of hugging the teddy bear, we can hug the Name of Allah and sleep in the bosom of His Heart. Even though we cannot see or touch Him, we can feel His Presence, and embrace this Presence in our sleep. With practice, this Presence will grow and become more concrete than the mattress on which our body rests. It is better to hug Allah without images, so that, we experience God from the Heart and not with the head. The Heart is Silence. The head is only a reflection, an image of what is in the Heart. No matter how much we play with a toy elephant, we can never experience the live elephant. This is the difference between the head and the Heart.

A third method would be general. Just as the mother would sing a lovely lullaby to lull the baby to sleep, sleep with a soft and cool background music replaying the holy Names of God. Let this music be a repetition of our chosen and adored Name. We will have to empty our head of all thoughts and connect our heart with the Sound of Silence in the music until we fall asleep. Once we have been careful to choose an appropriate music, we should not change it when the mind tells us: ‘I am getting bored with the same music all the time’. The mind gets bored, so it wants change. But, the Heart is Eternal; it is changeless. It is full of fun. We have to maintain consistency and constancy with our chosen Name until our mind seeks into our Heart. Then, we will know what it means to laugh without a reason.

“Our wakeful state represents the state of activity, the deep-sleep state symbolizes the state of inertia; and the transition between the waking and sleeping states represents the state of equilibrium and equipoise, which is of the nature of the Self.”

-Sathya Sai Baba, Summer Showers, 1990.

Remembering Allah While Lying Down

“Allah! There is none but Him, - the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep.”

- The Glorious Quran 2-255

How do we remember Allah while lying down, that is in the deep sleep state?

In deep sleep (that is dreamless sleep) there is no feeling of “I” ness. There is total ignorance or complete darkness. In deep sleep, the self is unaware of itself. We come to know that we enjoyed a deep sleep only when we wake up from it. And after a deep sleep we feel a profound sense of refreshment and peace because during this state the Self remained in itself as itself. This is true **Rest**. We can attain the **rest of the soul** only when the body and the mind are totally withdrawn from activity. This happens to us **unconsciously** when we fall into deep sleep. In other words, in deep sleep we contact Silence in ignorance. But this experience is not lasting because, first, it is experienced

in ignorance. And secondly, even though there is no feeling of “I” ness, the “I” still remains alive as a seed impulse waiting to germinate immediately we wake up. But to contact Silence in full awareness is the goal of Islam. To **consciously** enter into deep sleep is the very essence of spirituality. This means to **consciously** bring the body-mind activity to a complete stop. In this state one is awake while asleep.

**'Your thoughts are the bar behind the door! Set the wood on fire!
Silence, heart!
- Jalaluddin Rumi**

In meditation, we **consciously** enter into deep sleep. When this state is sustained, the seed “I” impulse is annihilated. Just like any seed subjected to a certain temperature would cease to germinate when it is planted, the seed “I” impulse when subjected to the heat of Silence for an uninterrupted period of time becomes dead.

And those whose seed “I” impulse is dead are perpetually asleep. That is, they are perpetually in the state of rest. But because they entered into this state of rest **consciously**, they are awake in their rest. We can say they are asleep because they do not see the world; but they are awake because for them, there is no other but Allah. They see nothing but Allah; hear nothing but Allah; do nothing but Allah. In this state, “*La ilaha illa allah*” becomes a living realisation.

**“Our souls are restless until they rest in God”
-St Augustine of Hippo**

For those who have attained Islam, (total surrender) the “I” seed impulse is dead, that is, annihilated. So that the three levels of consciousness: waking, dreaming and sleeping are unified into one. These are the Holy Ones who have attained the Unity of Allah.

They are eternally at rest because the seed “I” impulse, which is the very cause of man’s unrest is gone. They do not experience suffering or sorrow because it is the “I” that suffers and it is the “I” that gets hurt. They do not experience birth and death, because it is the “I” that is born and it is the “I” that comes again. To them there is no up or down, no inside or outside, no male or female, no young or old, because the “I” that divides and joins is deceased.

**“All are One. Be alike to everyone”
- Jesus the Christ**

This is the symbol of Christianity and its essence. When the “I” is cut across, one cannot suffer or die. Jesus never suffered; He never died; because Jesus had no “I”. Jesus went through the way of the cross to teach humanity how

not to suffer in suffering, and how not to die in death, by simply destroying the root of suffering and death – which is the ego.

We do not experience pain or suffering in deep sleep because in deep sleep there is no "I" feeling. We might go to bed with a severe tooth ache. But this pain disappears immediately we enter into deep sleep. Why is the pain not experienced? This is because the "I" is temporally withdrawn. But the moment the "I" wakes up again, the pain returns in full force. But when the "I" is permanently and consciously dissolved in Silence, there can be no experience of pain although one is fully conscious of the pain. They know the pain because they are conscious, but they do not suffer the pain because there is no "I" feeling.

As long as this "I" dominates in one's life, one will continue to experience the dualities of suffering and release, pain and pleasure, depression and elation, good and bad, birth and death. In fact, one's happiness is indirectly proportional to the predominance of this "I" in one's life. When the "I" is replaced by "Allah", one begins a return journey into Paradise.

COVER STORY:

☾ *PART 4: THE POWER OF GOD’S NAME*

“The divine Name is highly potent. Each one of the several names of God has one type of power specific to it. If you wish to make good use of this power and derive lasting benefit out of it, you have to participate in Akhanda bhajan (unbroken chanting of God’s Name)”.

- Sathya Sai Baba

The goal of Islam, and indeed of every religion, is to lead man into the Eternal Presence of Allah which is beyond the three states of consciousness. We attain this Holy Presence when the seed “I” impulse which is the cause of the three states is annihilated.

The final annihilation of the seed “I” impulse happens in meditation. When the mind has been totally unified with the name of God during the waking and dreaming states, through the harmonization and integration of the Primal Sound into every action and through the power of auto suggestion, during meditation, it becomes very easy for the mind sink into Silence.

The constant and unbroken remembrance of Allah’s Name during the waking state and the habit of falling asleep with the Name of Allah endows the mind with the all important quality of one pointed focus.

God’s Name is the arrow – this one pointed focus - that helps us escape, with one leap, the gravitational pull of the mind and enter into the space-less-ness of Silence.

The Science of matter tells us that the physical universe is governed by the laws of gravity. But we must realize that the gravitation of the mind is infinitely more powerful than the physical gravity. In fact, the only gravity is the mental gravity because it is the mind that bears the weight of the body. When there is no mind the body becomes weightless. The body levitates! It is the Name of Allah that helps us escape the gravity of the mind. When we sit in meditation with the single Name of God, we are able to cross the world of thought, and enter the paradise of Allah’s Presence.

☾ *The Power of Lord Hanuman*

The power of Lord Hanuman lies in chanting of the Name of Rama. His whole consciousness was completely unified with the Name of Rama that it could be said that Hanuman was Rama and Rama was Hanuman. This is the Power of God’s Name! This is the Power of Hanuman! With the Name of Ram, Hanuman lifted the mountain harboring the Sanjivini herb – the elixir of life – and brought it to Rama to save the life of Lakshmana. With the Name of Ram Hanuman set ablaze the entire city of Lanka with the fire of right conduct. With

the Name of Ram the monkey mind of Hanuman was transformed into an illumination of Divine Love! With the name of Ram every hair, every cell, every atom in the body of Hanuman resounded with the echo of the Divine name Ram, Ram, Ram. With the Name Ram Lord Hanuman was able to cross the ocean of Lanka with just one leap. This means that when our minds are unified with the Name of God, we are able to cross the ocean of birth and death with just one leap. Such is the power of the Divine Name!

Our Beloved Swami told the dazzling story, when Hanuman demonstrated beyond any doubt, the power of Divine name.

☾ ***More Precious than Silver, More Costly than Gold, More Beautiful than Diamonds***

“Vibhishana came forward with a dazzling necklace of gems, which the Lord of the Sea had offered to Ravana. Sita accepted it. Its brilliance shone all over the vast Hall and struck everyone as a unique string of gems. But with the necklace in her hand, she cast a questioning glance at the face of Rama. Rama knew what was passing in her mind. He said, ‘Sita! You can grant it as a gift to anyone among those here who deserves your grace.’ Sita thought just for a second and looked at Hanuman. Becoming aware of the compassion in her look, Hanuman approached her in great humility and stood before Sita with bowed head. The necklace was given by Sita to Hanuman.

“Hanuman turned it around many times in his hand, its dazzle enrapturing everyone in that vast assembly. He was struggling to discover its special quality, with unslaked curiosity. He plucked every gem, put it between his teeth, and placed it adjacent to his ear, and with a face indicating disappointment, he threw the gem away in disgust! All eyes were watching this peculiar behaviour with increasing amazement. They were stunned into silence and inactivity. Until he treated the last gem in the same cavalier manner, no one dared interrupt or condemn.

They could only protest in whispers among themselves! ‘Who is this monkey that treats the diamond necklace so lovingly and so compassionately presented to him by Sita?’ was the question on most lips.

Even Vibhishana was sad that Hanuman had so brazenly insulted the priceless jewel that he had brought. ‘He has pulled it to pieces and cast the gems aside,’ he told himself. Everyone in the Hall surmised the reason for this strange behaviour in his own way. At last, one vassal Ruler could not restrain himself. He rose and gave vent to his resentment: ‘Peerless Hero! Why did you break that necklace of gems into so many bits? Was it right to do so? Tell us the reason why? Give us some explanation and remove our doubts.’

☾ ***Nothing I Desire Compares with You!***

Hanuman listened to him patiently and replied. ‘Oh King! I examined each gem in order to discover whether each had in it the sacred Name of Rama. I could not find it in any gem. Without that Name of Rama, they are but stones

and pebbles. So, I cast them on the ground.’ The ruler was not silenced by this. He asked, ‘Hanuman! If it is your desire that in every article and particle there should be the Name of Rama, are you not asking for something impossible?’

Hanuman replied. ‘Of what good, of what profit, is anything which has not in it the Name of Rama? I have no need of such.’ The valiant hero, Hanuman, dismissed the argument of the ruler thus. The ruler, however continued his objections. He said, ‘You would not wear anything that has not got in it the Name of Rama. Well, you are wearing your body. You are carrying it about with you. Prove to us that you have the Name in it.’

When God gives Himself...

Hanuman laughed aloud. He said, ‘I shall prove, see!’ He pulled a single hair from off his forearm and held it very near the ear of the Ruler. He could hear the Name, Rama, Rama, Rama uttered by the single hair! At this, he was overcome with a sense of wonder. He fell at the feet of Hanuman and prayed for pardon.

Rama called Hanuman near himself and warmly embraced him. He asked him, ‘Hanuman! What can I offer you on this occasion? I have no gift worthy to be given to you. I am giving you myself as my gift to you.’ Then, he offered his body to be clasped by Hanuman’s hands. The assembly was moved into shouts of ‘Jai’ at this unique act of Grace. They praised Hanuman and declared that there was no one to equal him in all the worlds. They praised the devotion and dedication of Hanuman.”

***I died as a mineral, and rose a plant,
I died as a plant, and rose again an
animal.
I died as an animal, and rose a man.
Why then should I fear to become less
by dying?

I shall die once again as a man,
To rise an angel, perfect from head to
foot.
Again, when I suffer dissolution as an
angel,
I shall become what passes the
conception of man.***

-Rumi

The Name of God Gives a Quantum Leap in Consciousness

The magic of God’s Name cannot be described. Its wonder cannot be explained. It is the one thing which when you have it, you have everything- and without it everything you have is worthless. It is the secret of creation’s

evolution. In a recent discourse... our Beloved Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has revealed through a very interesting story, the power of God's Name and its ability to give a quantum leap in consciousness when it is chanted only once. Chanting the Name of God only once means that the whole mind has been unified with God's Name so that the only thought in the mind is the uninterrupted Sound of Allah.... Or one's chosen Name. When this Primal Sound is sustained, without the wavering of the mind and without any interruption, Sai Baba says that there is a transmutation in consciousness; a leap from the animal consciousness to the human and from the human to the Divine.

☾ **The Power of Rama's Name**

Once, sage Narada approached Lord Vishnu and prayed, "Oh Lord! People speak very highly about the efficacy of Rama's Name. Will you kindly explain?"

Lord Vishnu wished to demonstrate the power of the Name of Rama by an illustration. He therefore advised Narada, "Oh Narada, go to a crow and utter the word 'Rama'. Let the crow repeat the name."

Narada went to a crow and said, "Oh crow, your entire body is black, without a trace of whiteness. Hence, chant the Name of Rama just once." The crow uttered "Rama", and immediately it fell down dead. Narada was sad that the crow died just by chanting Rama's Name once.

He went to Lord Vishnu and informed Him of the crow's death. Lord Vishnu told him, "Don't worry. This time, go to the beautiful peacock that was just born and ask it to chant the Name of Rama once."

As per the instructions of Lord Vishnu, Narada went to the newly born peacock and said, "Oh peacock, your beauty and grace are enchanting to the entire world. You are very lovable and attractive. Please utter the word 'Rama' just once." The moment the peacock uttered "Rama", it also collapsed immediately. Narada again went to Lord Vishnu and reported the death of the peacock after chanting the Name of Rama just one time.

Lord Vishnu again advised Narada, "Narada, a cow in the shed nearby just gave birth to a calf. Please go to that new-born calf and ask her to chant Rama's Name once." Narada did accordingly. As soon as the new-born calf heard the word "Rama", it also dropped down dead.

When Narada informed Lord Vishnu, Lord Vishnu again instructed him, "Narada, this time, go to the King's palace, where a baby boy was just born. Ask him to chant Rama's Name once."

Narada was very much afraid to approach the newly born prince, since the crow, peacock, and calf had died just by listening to the word "Rama" once. He pleaded with Lord Vishnu to spare his life, since the King would put him to

death if something happened to the new-born baby by chanting the Name of Rama. But Lord Vishnu insisted that Narada obey His command.

Narada went to the palace and asked the newly born prince to chant the Name of Rama once. The prince saluted sage Narada and informed him that by the mere chanting of Rama's Name just once, he was transformed from a crow to peacock, from a peacock to a calf, and from a calf to a human being as a Prince. He expressed his gratitude to sage Narada for initiating him in the Name of Rama.

It is only the Divine Name that confers human birth on a being. It is evident from the illustration narrated above that the birds and animals were able to get a human birth by listening to the holy name just once. Thus, the Name of God confers a human birth, which is considered to be a rare gift.

Unfortunately, no transformation is taking place in humans, in spite of repeating the divine name several times. You should chant the divine name wholeheartedly, with full faith. No doubt, people today are repeating the holy name, but not with love and steady faith. They are chanting the Name of God with a wavering mind. There can be no transformation by such fickle-minded repetition of God's Name, in spite of doing it for hours together.

The chanting of God's Name has to be done with absolute concentration and steady faith like a *yogi*. One can achieve great transformation if the mind is steadily fixed on the Divine Name.

May Allah bring Rest to our Hearts through Remembrance of Him!

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – 19

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. In the last issue, I gave you a glimpse of the evolution of Classical Mechanics and how when it came to modelling the atom using the solar system as a guide, Classical Mechanics seemed to give way. This is a major turning point in the history of Physics, and was one of the many precursors to the birth of what is called Quantum Mechanics. Very soon, we are going to delve into some of the mysteries of Quantum Mechanics because it would take us to the very doorstep of Meta Physics. It is therefore useful to spend some time recalling a few bits of early history, so that we get a better idea of how many pieces of the jigsaw puzzle popped and how in a remarkable way, the pieces began to slowly fit together to reveal an amazing tapestry that underlies Creation.

The Sun’s Medley of Colours

I would like to begin with what are called atomic spectra. The story of atomic spectra is intimately connected with the work of Niels Bohr that I started to describe in the last issue, and unless we get to know something about atomic spectra, it would not be possible to understand why Bohr was trying to come up with a model for the atom. To being at the beginning, I must really go back to Newton, who clearly demonstrated that what we regard as white light coming from the Sun is actually a medley of colours – this was sort of known for a long time thanks to the rainbow – but Newton it was who confirmed it by first splitting the white light of the Sun into seven colours of the rainbow, and then recombining the colours to get back white light. What it all showed was that sunlight consisted of a broad spectrum of colours.

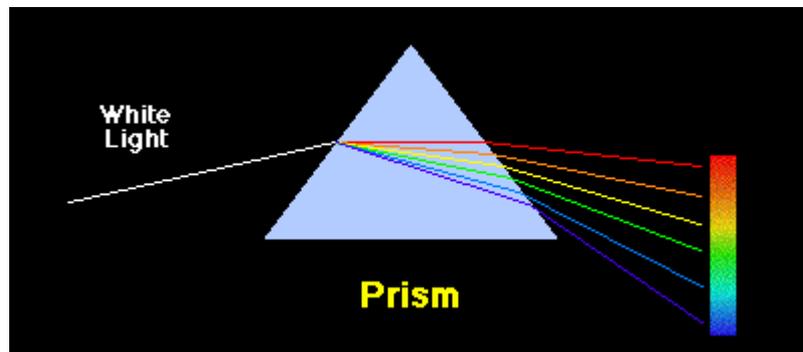


Figure 1: This figure shows how sunlight that normally appears to us as “white” is really made of the famous seven colours violet, blue etc., all the way to red. This was known for a long time from the rainbow with its famous seven colours. The spread out of white light into its component colours is called a spectrum and was first demonstrated in a clear-cut manner by Newton. Clearly, the spectrum of sunlight is continuous. Experiments also showed that

by combining the seven colours of the rainbow, one could recover back “white” light.

Darkness Within Light

In 1802, Wollaston tinkered with the slit a bit by way of improving the instrument resolution and he discovered that the spectrum of sunlight had some dark lines. In 1814, Fraunhofer used improved techniques and discovered that the spectrum had plenty of dark lines, hundreds of them. He had no idea of why these lines were present, but having discovered something new, his name automatically got attached to these lines – they are called Fraunhofer lines see Figure 2.

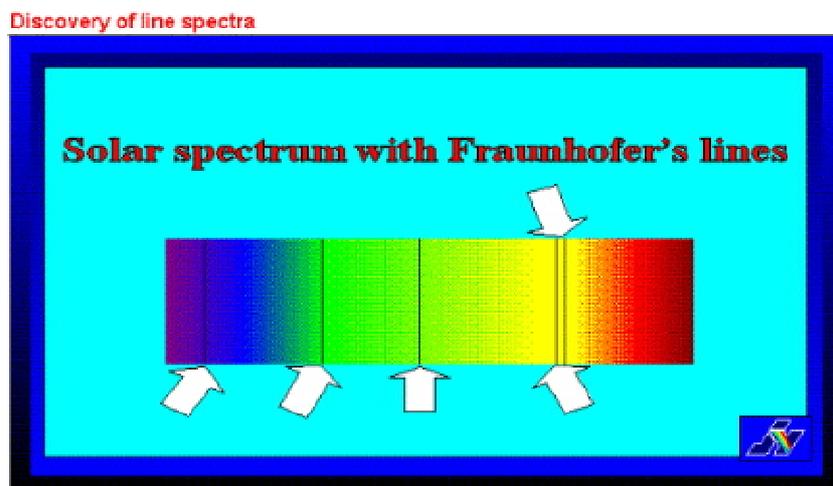


Figure 2: This figure shows what Fraunhofer observed. He found that the continuous spectrum of sunlight was riddled with dark lines. At that time, no one clearly understood where from these dark lines came; but the lines were there and they were called Fraunhofer lines.

In 1851, Masson did the experiment shown in Figure 3. What he found was that sparks created with rods of metals, when examined with a spectroscope revealed sharp lines. These lines were of different colours and they began to be called spectral lines. Masson further found that different rods made of different metals yielded different sets of lines. People learnt to photograph these line spectra and such spectra became a way of finger printing different metals. Indeed, this was the beginning of what has come to be called emission spectroscopy.

Early spectroscopes

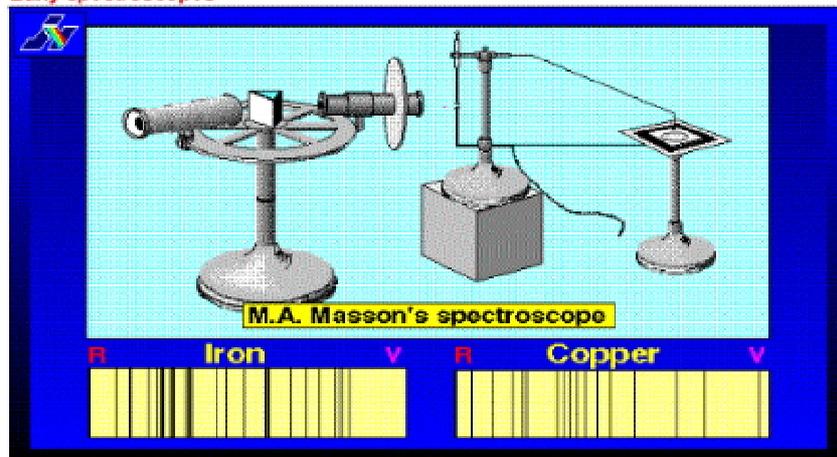


Figure 3: This figure illustrates the schematics of what Masson did, as described above.

In 1859, Kirchoff and Bunsen demonstrated that while metals when made hot emit spectral lines, something interesting happens when light from a continuous, broad-spectrum source is made to pass through a metallic vapour that is cold. When the light emerging from the vapour is examined with a spectroscope dark lines appear precisely at those frequencies where bright lines appear in emission spectra. Thus, absorption and emission of light by different substances are complementary phenomena. Everyone knew that different atoms had different characteristic spectra and in fact atoms could be finger-printed [these days people talk of DNA finger-printing; spectroscopic finger-printing of atoms started much earlier]. See also Figure 4.

Spectrochemistry fundamentals

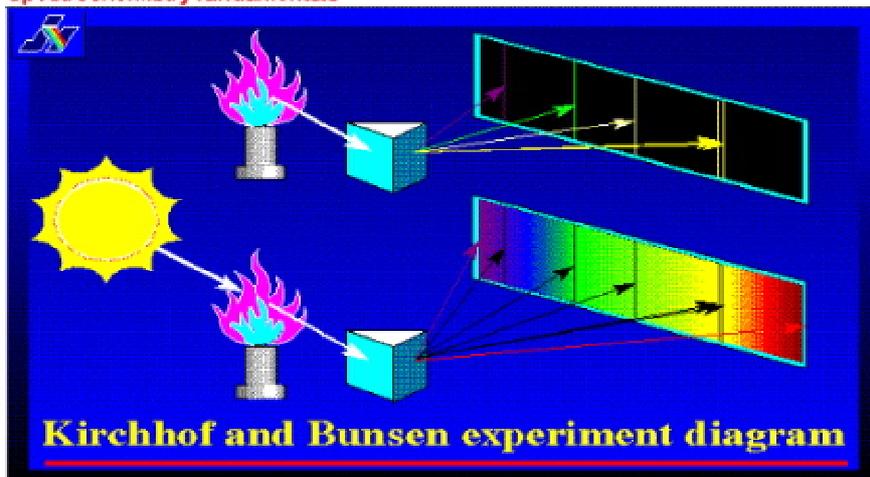


Figure 4: This figure illustrates a very crucial experiment performed by Kirchoff and Bunsen. They showed that elements when heated to a high enough temperature, emit light consisting of characteristic spectral lines. In a photograph, these lines appear bright and the spectra are called emission spectra. However, if the elements are maintained as a cold vapour, and a continuous spectrum passed through it, frequencies corresponding to the characteristic spectrum are selectively absorbed, and the spectrum that is

photographed shows dark lines against the background of a continuous spectrum. In other words, Kirchoff and Bunsen showed that the bright lines in emission spectra and dark lines in absorption spectra occur at precisely the same frequencies and are complimentary. This discovery of complementarity was an important milestone in the history of optical spectroscopy.

Once Kirchoff and Bunsen understood all about this complementarity that I just mentioned, it was simple for them to explain the Fraunhofer lines; the dark lines in the spectrum of sunlight were due to absorption by different kinds of atoms in the Sun. But where exactly were these atoms? Kirchoff and Bunsen had an answer for that also – see Figure 5. They said that while the interior of the Sun was very hot, the outer layer was relatively cool and had vapours of many elements. The light coming from the interior of the Sun was a continuous spectrum, and when that light passed through the outer layers, atoms of different species grabbed bits and pieces of light to cause dark lines. Given the fact that these two had already demonstrated the principle of complementarity between emission and absorption, this explanation for the Fraunhofer lines seemed acceptable.

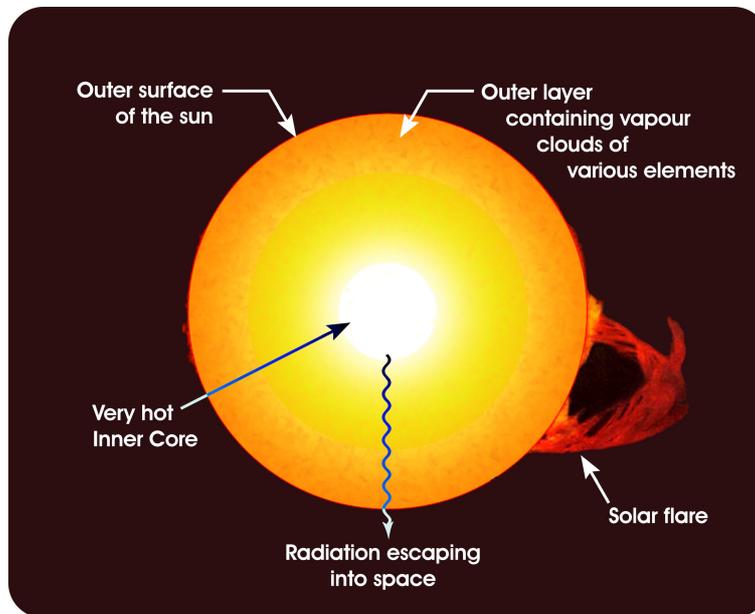


Figure 5: This schematic shows how Fraunhofer lines arise. Basically, the continuous spectrum of the Sun arises in the deep interior regions where temperature is very high. As the light moves outward and escapes from the surface of the Sun, it passes first through the outer layers that are made up largely by vapours of various elements of which the Sun is made. These vapours, being relatively cold compared to the interior, absorb selectively certain frequencies as per the Kirchoff and Bunsen rules, resulting in some of the dark lines Fraunhofer saw. The complete set of dark [Fraunhofer] lines give a clue to the elements that are present in the outer layers of the Sun.

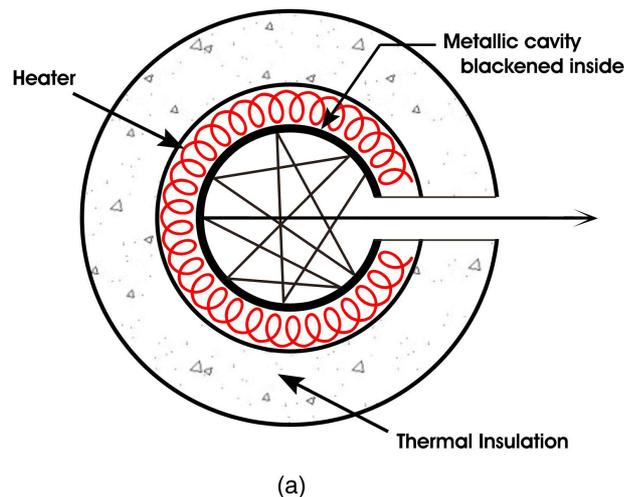
In 1859, Angstrom in Sweden who had been observing the solar spectrum for years, published a detailed compilation of all the dark lines he could catch in his years of painstaking study.

Black-Body Radiation

We now move to the year 1900, when the new century was heralded with a major discovery by Max Planck of Germany. That story goes as follows, and before I tell you what happened in 1900, I must give you some background. Let me start with what is called a black body. In physics, a **black body** is an object that absorbs all light that falls on it. No electromagnetic radiation passes through it and none is reflected. Because no light is reflected or transmitted, the object appears black when it is cold.

If the black body is hot, these properties make it an ideal source of thermal radiation. If a perfect black body at a certain temperature is surrounded by other objects in thermal equilibrium at the same temperature, it will on average emit exactly as much as it absorbs, at every wavelength. Since the absorption is easy to understand—every ray that hits the body is absorbed—the emission is just as easy to understand.

The term "black body" was introduced by Kirchoff in 1860. The light emitted by a black body is called **black-body radiation**. At this stage, I would like you to take a look at Figure 6, which would give you some details about a black body and the radiation it emits.



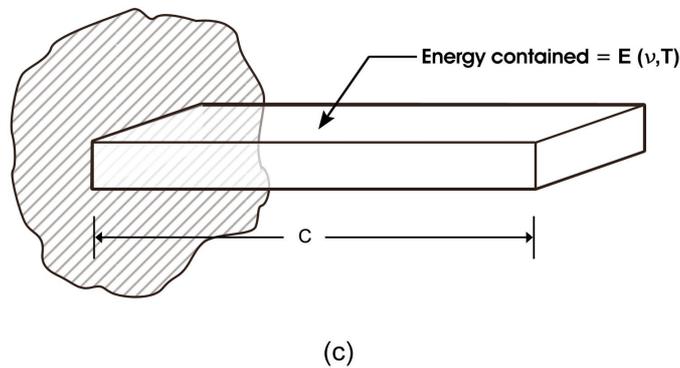
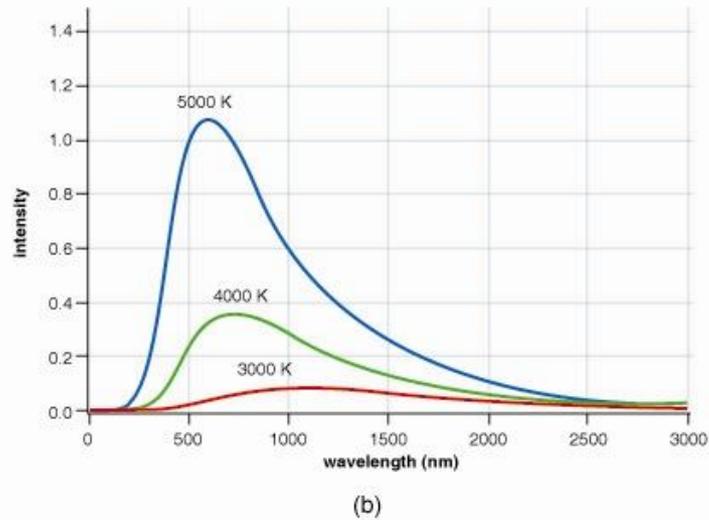


Figure 6: This figure that is made of three parts, gives us the essentially of what a black body and black body radiation are all about. (a) the schematic of a black body; basically it is a hollow vessel, coated black inside, and heated uniformly from outside. There is a small opening through which the radiation in the cavity can escape. What escapes is of course black body radiation, and the question in those days was: “What is the spectrum of this black body spectrum?” Over the years, more and more accurate measurements were made of the spectrum emerging from the black body, and the onus was now on theoreticians to explain the observed spectrum. (b) shows actually measured spectra. Note that the shape changes with temperature as also the peak position. (c) shows the aperture in the black body and radiation streaming out. If the aperture is opened for exactly one second, the radiation that merges would fill a parallelpiped of length c , where c is the velocity of light. The question now becomes: What is the value of $E(\nu, T)$, the energy emitted at frequency ν and at [absolute] temperature T ?

If a small window is opened into an oven, any light that enters the window has a very low probability of leaving without being absorbed. Conversely, the hole acts as a nearly ideal black-body radiator. This makes peepholes into furnaces good sources of blackbody radiation, and some people call it **cavity radiation** for this reason.

As the temperature decreases, the peak of the black-body radiation curve moves to lower intensities and longer wavelengths. The black-body radiation graph is also compared with the classical model of Rayleigh and Jeans.

I would now like to pick up from the quantity $E(\nu, T)$ introduced in Fig. 6. Kirchoff noted that the shape of the curve $E(\nu, T)$ would depend on the absolute temperature T of the black body and challenged experimentalists to measure it accurately; he also challenged theorists to explain the form determined by experiments. So that became the game for many decades preceding the dawn of the 20th century. What happened was that from the side of the theorists, there were two formulae that worked but only for a limited region. One was called the Rayleigh-Jeans formula and that worked at the low frequency end. There was another formula called Wien's law that appeared to work at the high-frequency end. All this was patch work; obviously what was needed was one formula that worked all the way, that is, for the entire spectrum.

Planck's Brainwave

In October 1900, the German scientist Rubens who was then doing experiments on black body radiation, paid a visit to Planck. Rubens was accompanied by his wife and it was a social call. But during the conversation Rubens told Planck that his latest data did not agree with Wien's formula, which was therefore suspect. Planck then began to think about the problem; at that time, he was not aware of the work of Lord Rayleigh. By the next day, Planck invented a formula, which seemed to agree with the result of Rubens. Planck then scribbled the formula on a post card and mailed it to Rubens. The formula was not derived, but simply pulled out of a hat by sheer intuition but it was an amazing guess. In the formula, Planck had a constant, for which we now use the symbol h ; in honour of Planck, it is now called the Planck's constant.

All this happened in October 1900. Planck's formula worked very well but Planck was not satisfied with that. Was his formula a mere fluke or did Nature have something behind it? Planck thought about it deeply for a couple of months, Planck was actually able to derive the formula; it was no longer magic but based on a model or theory, shall I say? The way Planck argued is summarised in BOX 1, and so I shall not go through it here. But I do have to make a reference to the implications of his theory because the implications were profound.

To appreciate the importance of the discovery that Planck made, let us first consider a simple pendulum, as illustrated in Figure 7. I am sure you would agree that we could, in principle make the pendulum oscillate with different amplitudes, simply by pulling it from equilibrium to different distances and letting it go. I am sure you would also agree that the larger the amplitude of oscillation, the greater would be energy of pendulum.

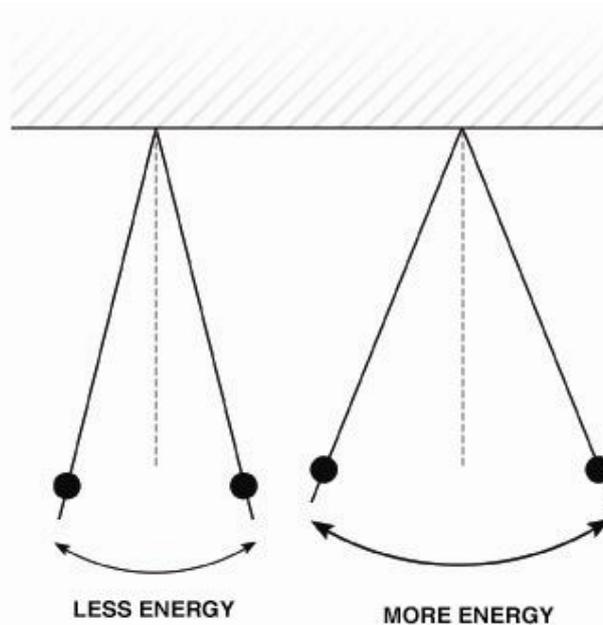
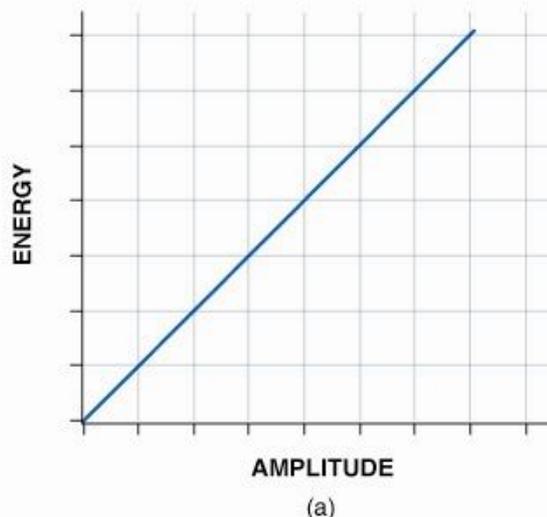


Figure 7: This figure shows a classical pendulum, which is in fact a very good example of what is called a simple harmonic oscillator. The amplitude of oscillation of the pendulum depends upon how far one pulls it before letting it go. Classically, the more the amplitude, the more the energy of the oscillator; and this energy could be various CONTINUOUSLY – that is the important point about classical oscillators.

If now I were to make a graph of energy of the pendulum versus the amplitude, it is reasonable to expect it to go as in Fig. 8a. What Planck discovered was [to his amazement of course], that when very low energies are involved, the energy of an oscillator [for that is really what the pendulum represents] cannot be increased continuously but only in a step-wise fashion as in Fig. 8b, that is to say, **energy can be increased only in fixed quanta**. This led to the view that the energy of light is bundled in quanta, something that no had ever suspected till then.



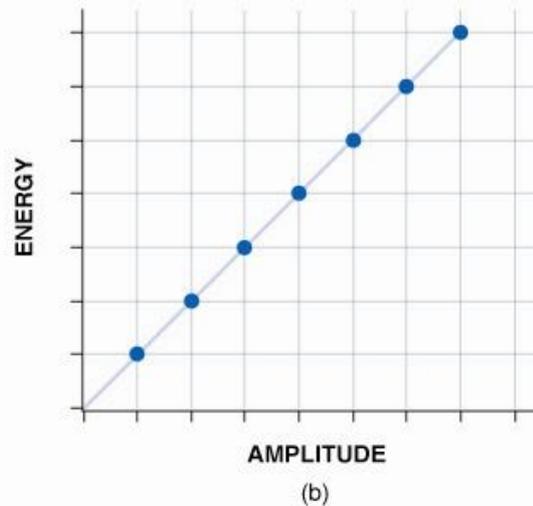


Figure 8: This figure seeks to show how the energy of an pendulum type oscillator is expected to vary in the classical sense and how that changes as a result of Planck's discovery. This difference is brought out in 8(a) and 8(b). The essential point is that the energy increases in step wise quanta. Is this actually observed in the laboratory. Well, if we did the experiment with the usual pendulums that high schools students use, we would never observe such a phenomenon; why? Because, energy quantisation reveals itself only when one goes to very small levels of energies such as obtain in individual atoms. That is what Bohr discovered, though there were in fact many indicators earlier; however, most of these were missed in those days but later, after Planck and Bohr made their discoveries, all of the "old testament" was rewritten to some extent!

Now this implication of Planck's discovery made everyone rather uncomfortable. Why? That is what I shall try to explain next. You see, when we have a light source that emits light, that source is actually emitting energy; and this energy is carried by the light waves – by the way, for nearly two hundred years, physicists firmly believed that light consisted of waves, that is to say when a source emits light, the energy radiated is carried in the form of waves. This is true whether the source of light is an ordinary electric bulb or the Sun itself – that is point number one.

Point number two was that this energy is continuous. Now what do I mean by that? Suppose we have a light source that emits at just one frequency; such a light source would be called a monochromatic source and these days it is possible to have such a source [almost!]. So we have this source and use a control knob to slowly make this source emit more and more light; this control, by the way, is assumed to be extremely sensitive and capable of being operated in such a manner that the light intensity is increased truly by infinitesimal amounts – all this is hypothetical of course, but that does not matter. The point is that if there is such a source and we did increase the intensity gradually [say by increasing the voltage], then the graph of voltage versus intensity we would expect would be as in Fig 9b; this is what we would expect from the wave theory of light, which is what everyone believed in, and

which was also sanctified by Maxwell [remember his name from the last issue?].

OK, all this is fine, but what has all this to do with Planck and his discovery? That is what I am coming to now. Planck found, much to his discomfort I should say, that radiation energy is actually bundled; he was forced to this conclusion by his attempt to explain the character of black body radiation. In this picture, the graph that you saw in Fig 9b changes to that in Fig 9c; the curve does not increase smoothly but in steps. Not very comfortable, thanks to at least a century [if not more] of firm belief in the wave theory of light, given the ultimate seal of approval by Maxwell himself. It looked that Nature was not all that simple but hiding a lot of secrets that she was not yet ready to reveal fully!

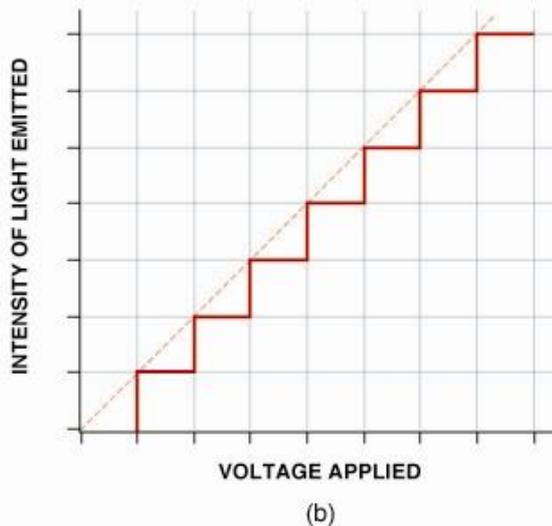
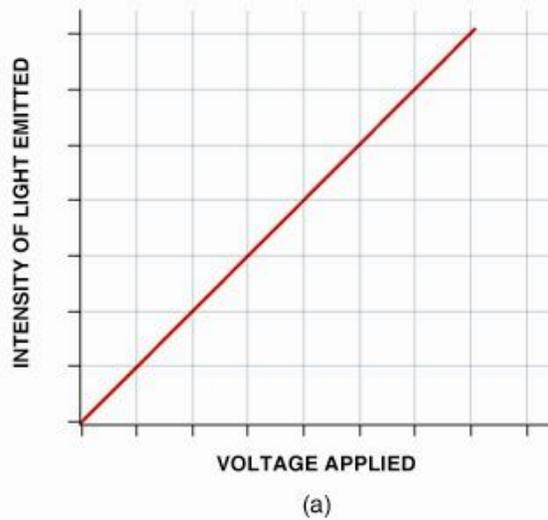


Figure 9: This figure further amplifies the content of the previous figure. Here in 9a, we have a light source whose emission can be very finely tuned by varying the voltage applied to it. Suppose the voltage is indeed varied very slowly and by incredibly small steps. The curve in 9b shows how the light intensity would vary in the classical picture – no surprises here. But look at 9c and here there is a surprise; the light intensity increases in steps. The first step occurs when the voltage is enough to kick out light bundles with energy $h\nu$; the next step occurs when the voltage is high enough to kick out energy bundles with energy $2 h\nu$ and so on.

Einstein Makes Another Historic Discovery

As always, one thing leads to another, and the next step was taken by Einstein. The year was 1905, during which, Einstein, who was then a clerk in the Swiss Patents Office [did you know that!] working in his spare time [those were days when the boss did not chase his minions all the time with cell phones, blackberrys and all that!], wrote three amazing papers, each worth a Nobel Prize; however, he ended up getting only one, and that too only as late as 1922! [But much before that he had become world famous, achieving what we would now call rock-star status.] So what was the great thing that Einstein did that shed some light on the puzzling discovery of Planck? That story next.

The story that I just referred to has to do with what is called photo-electric effect. Basically what it means is that when light falls on a metallic plate, electrons are emitted. The phenomenon was discovered by Hertz of Germany, while it was his student Lenard who established that the electrically charged particles emitted when light falls on a metallic plate are actually electrons. Figure 10 below explains what the effect is all about.

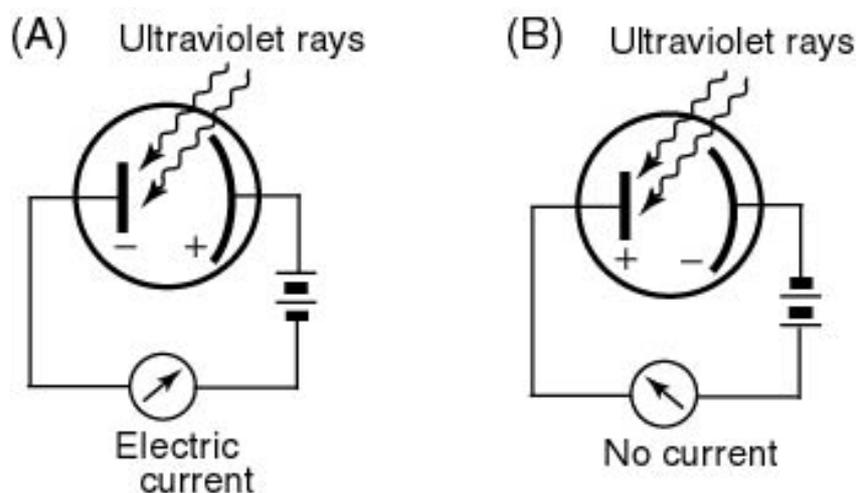


Figure 10: This figure shows the schematic of the apparatus to demonstrate the photoelectric effect. Two plates or electrodes are put in a vacuum glass tube. When ultraviolet rays are illuminated on one of the plates, an electric current flows if the illuminated plate is electrically negative as in (A). However, there is no current, if the plate is positive as in (B); this is because the electrons that are caused to be emitted by the ultraviolet light are pulled back

the positive charge on the plate [remember the electrons are negatively charged and opposite charges attract each other]. Emission of electrons due to light illumination is what the photoelectric effect is all about. The subtle details were clarified one by one, and in 1905, Einstein explained them all. Later, more painstaking experiments by Milliken verified every one of Einstein's predictions and there was now a quantum explanation for the photoelectric effect. It could no longer be denied that light energy did have a quantum aspect to it, and this was a great, though most puzzling breakthrough.

There is more to the story, and that is really what it makes it both interesting and important as well. To take the story further, we go back in time to the year 1905, and find out what Einstein was doing then. I already told you that it was in that year that Einstein made three monumental discoveries, and one of them was his explanation for the photo-electric effect. By the way, remembering the amazing contribution that Einstein made way back in 1905, the year 2005, was declared to be and celebrated throughout the world as the Year of Physics. Now what was the big deal about Einstein's work on photo-electricity?

Well, prior to Einstein's work, it had been found that emission of photo-electrons had the following properties:

1. The *number* of electrons emitted by the metal depends on the *intensity* of the light beam applied on the metal; more intense the beam, higher the number of electrons emitted.
2. The emitted electrons move with greater *speed* if the applied light has a higher *frequency*.
3. No electron is emitted until the light has a *threshold* frequency, *no matter how intense the light is*.

These observations baffled physicists for many decades because they all tried to explain the experimental observations on the basis that light energy existed and propagated as waves. This was a perfectly normal thing to do in those days because everyone firmly believed that light existed as waves and that that was all there was to it. Now, if light were to be a wave, *both* the energy and the number of the electrons emitted from the metal should increase with an increase in the intensity of light. Observations contradicted this prediction; only the number, and not the energy, of the electrons increased with the increase of the intensity of the light. Why was this so? No one could give the answer, and that was where Einstein stepped in.

Einstein was aware of the recent work of Planck and he said to himself: "Everybody says that light exists as waves but the wave theory could not explain the spectrum of black body radiation. This guy Planck says he can explain the spectrum, provided one assumes the light energy comes bundled. If there is light of some particular frequency ν say, energy associated with that frequency is available in Nature only in packets containing $h\nu$, $2h\nu$, $3h\nu$, of energy. Making this assumption, Planck managed to explain the black body radiation spectrum. Now in the case of the photo-electric effect, the wave

theory of light seems to be going nowhere. So why don’t I give this fellow Planck’s idea a try and see where it takes us?” Essentially that is how Einstein got started, and lo and behold, he literally hit the jackpot, meaning that he actually succeeded in explaining the till-then-mysterious photo-electric effect.

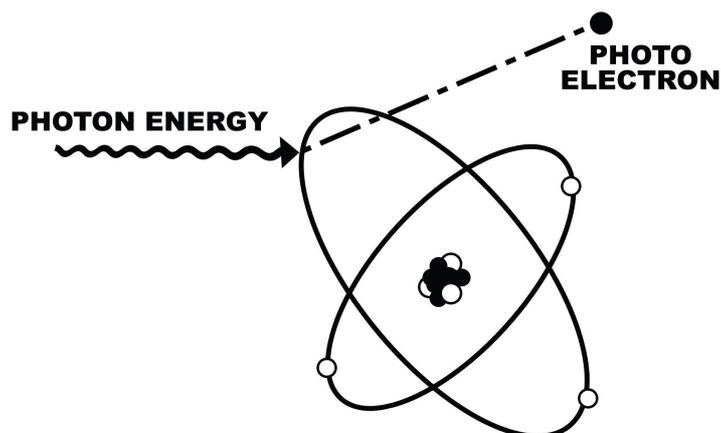


Figure 11: This is a schematic of how Einstein visualised the photoelectric effect. He said [in 1905, remember], there are electrons inside an atom; does not matter how exactly the electrons are tucked inside the atom. When light falls on the atom, it kicks out an electron. The best way of visualising this is to suppose that the light is made up of energy bundles the same way Planck said it was. Once this assumption was made, it became a simple matter to explain many observed features of photo-electricity. Later Milliken verified all of Einstein’s predictions via very careful experiments.

Einstein basic idea is illustrated in Figure 11 above. He said first let us assume that light energy comes bundled in **quanta**, the way Planck says they would. Now when a light quantum hits an atom, it knocks out an electron. Now in the actual experiments, they allow light to fall on a metallic plate. The electron emitted may not quite be able to fly away from the plate and might be held by the plate; this was known from earlier experiments, and a physicist named Richardson had actually determined the minimum energy an electron at the surface would need in order to escape for various metals. This minimum energy was called the **work function** of the metal and was denoted by the symbol W . Keeping this in mind, Einstein argued That if a light quantum of energy $h\nu$ kicked out an electron from the atom, the plate would grab its share W and therefore the maximum kinetic energy the electron could have when it came out of the plate would be

$$E = h\nu - W.$$

In 1916, Millikan in America did a series of very thorough experiments and he not only proved that all the implications of Einstein’s theory were correct but was also able to determine the value of the universal constant h introduced by Planck [which, I told you earlier, is now called the Planck’s constant].

In spite of all this, there was a lot of reluctance to accept the idea that light energy actually was bundled up in quanta, and it was not until 1922 that the Nobel Committee in Stockholm finally decided that they had to honour Einstein [who in the meantime had already become a great celebrity] with the Nobel Prize. Actually there was a problem for which discovery they should honour Einstein, and the wise men of Stockholm decided it would be for his explanation of the photo-electric effect. Those were the days when they did not have jet planes; in fact, even air travel, especially over long distances was simply unthinkable.

The Nobel Prize announcements were made towards late October I believe, and by that time, Einstein, on account of prior commitments, was on a long tour to Japan and many other places. Thus, on the day when the prizes were actually handed out, he could not be physically present in Stockholm actually to receive the Prize from the King of Sweden; but then, as many said, it was the Prize that was honoured rather than Einstein himself!

Atomic Quantities

It is time to come back to a question that I left you with in the last issue, namely Bohr and his attempt to construct a model of the atom. If you recall, the year was around 1910/1911 or so, and Bohr was trying to construct a model of the atom, that included a tiny nucleus that carried all the positive charge in the atom, and equally tiny electrons whirling around this nucleus, rather in the manner planets move around the Sun. OK, but why would Bohr want to do all that? What was the immediate objective, if any?

The first and foremost point is that atomic spectra seemed to consist mainly of lines bundled together. See figure 12.

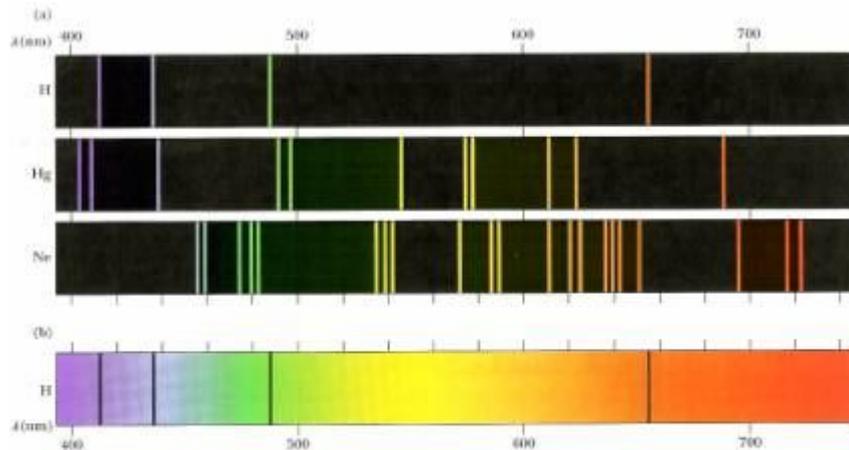


Figure 12: This figure shows some typical line [emission] spectra of different elements [such as hydrogen, mercury and neon]. Also shown at the bottom are the Fraunhofer lines of hydrogen that appear as dark lines against the continuous spectrum of the Sun. Remember that in the solar spectrum, the lines appear dark because of absorption, as explained earlier.

The question was why do atoms emit line spectra? Further, could one explain the spectrum of different elements by making some model of the atom? That was what Niels Bohr was really after. As we saw last time, he started by imagining that atoms were tiny, tiny replicas of the solar system and applied classical mechanics but that got him nowhere.

Bohr now began to do some serious thinking. He told himself, "Looks like for some reason classical mechanics is not working. Could this in any way have anything to do with the fact that light energy is bundled in quanta? After all, that is what Planck said and Einstein has gone further and argued that unless one takes the idea of light energy being bundled in quanta, one simply could not explain the photo-electric effect. Maybe, since I am dealing with light emitted by atoms, I too have to somehow work in the idea of quantisation into my model of the atom." By rather clever ideas, Bohr actually managed to pull it off. That story next time!

Hope you are liking this narrative. By the way, these days even high-school students learn about the Bohr model of the atom. But that does not reduce its revolutionary nature and the tremendous impact it made on physics at the time of its discovery. In fact, it was something like a turning point. What happened was the Bohr atom suddenly gave a clue to why atomic spectra were organised in lines; not only that; Bohr was completely able to explain the spectrum of hydrogen, the simplest of elements. However, when his model was applied to helium, the next simplest element, there was trouble galore. So once again the same story – part of the truth no doubt but something is missing. And so step by step, chasing one missing link after another, physicists were led to Quantum Mechanics – that happened roughly during the years 1925-1930. That was the major turning point that I am slowly taking you to. You know what? So spectacular were these developments that some people – that included even some big shots – said physics was over and the rest was all chemistry. How wrong they were! All that comes later.

And don't worry, hidden in all this mystery is the INFINITY that we are after. I have not forgotten that goal even if you might have! See you again next month; meanwhile, take care! Jai Sai Ram.

Box 1:

MAX PLANCK

Planck was born in Germany to Johann Julius Wilhelm Planck and his second wife, Emma Patzig. He was baptised with the name of *Karl Ernst Ludwig Marx Planck*; of his given names, *Marx* was indicated as the primary name. However, already by the age of ten he signed with the name *Max*, which he used for the rest of his life.

As a child, Planck was gifted when it came to music. He took singing lessons and played piano, organ and cello, and composed songs and operas. However, instead of music he chose to study physics.

Planck's professor in Munich advised him against going into physics, saying, "In this field, almost everything is already discovered, and all that remains is to fill a few holes." Planck replied that he did not wish to discover new things, only to understand the known fundamentals of the field, and began his studies in 1874 at the University of Munich, starting with experiments first and later switching to theory.

In October 1878 Planck passed his qualifying exams and in February 1879 defended his dissertation. He briefly taught mathematics and physics at his former school in Munich. Soon Planck became an unpaid private lecturer in Munich, waiting until he was offered an academic position. Although he was initially ignored by the academic community, in April 1885, he got an appointment as an associate professor of theoretical physics. Four years later, he became a professor in Berlin. It was there he made his famous discovery.

The discovery of Planck's constant enabled him to define a new universal set of physical units now called the Planck units, much used when one deals with the Baby Universe. The remarkable thing about the Planck units is that they all are based on the fundamental constants of Physics. Later, Max Born wrote about Planck: "He was by nature and by the tradition of his family conservative, averse to revolutionary novelties and skeptical towards speculations. But his belief in the imperative power of logical thinking based on facts was so strong that he did not hesitate to express a claim contradicting to all tradition, because he had convinced himself that no other resort was possible."

During the First World War, Planck at first supported the German Emperor but later disagreed sharply with his imperialistic policies. When the Nazis seized power in 1933, Planck was 74. He witnessed many Jewish friends and colleagues expelled from their positions and humiliated, and hundreds of scientists emigrated from Germany. He did what he could to help Jewish scientists emigrate and secure good positions abroad. In the beginning, the Nazi Government was a bit cautious about being tough with Planck because of his reputation. Moreover, he was the head of the prestigious Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft, the German Academy for Science, and that also gave him some protection. In 1936, his term as the President of KWG ended, and Planck became more vulnerable, especially as he, along with Sommerfeld and Heisenberg was accused of slighting German Science by continuing to teach Jewish Science, meaning Einstein's Theory of Relativity! Sometimes, absolute power can blind rulers to the point of absolute stupidity!

In 1938 Planck celebrated his 80th birthday. He maintained good health, and travelled frequently giving numerous public talks, such as his talk on Religion and Science. Even at that age, he was sufficiently fit to climb 3,000-meter peaks in the Alps.

During the World War II, the increasing number of Allied bombing campaigns against Berlin forced Planck and his wife to leave the city temporarily and live in the countryside. In 1942 he wrote: "In me an ardent desire has grown to persevere this crisis and live long enough to be able to witness the turning

point, the beginning of a new rise." In February 1944 his home in Berlin was completely destroyed by an air raid, annihilating all his scientific records and correspondence. Finally, he got into a dangerous situation in his rural retreat due to the rapid advance of the Allied armies from both sides. After the end of the war he was brought to a relative in Gottingen.

As a family man, Planck suffered many personal tragedies, bearing them stoically. In January 1945 his second son, Erwin, to whom he had been particularly close, was sentenced to death because of his participation in the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler. Erwin was hanged on 23 January 1945.

Max Planck was always a devout Christian, but at the same time, he was very tolerant of other religions; thus, he strongly disapproved the demands of the Church for unquestioning belief. The God in which Max Planck believed was an almighty, all-knowing, benevolent but unintelligible God that permeated everything, manifest by symbols, including physical laws. Planck was interested in truth and Universe beyond observation, and objected to atheism as an obsession with symbols. Planck regarded the scientist as a man of imagination and faith, "faith" interpreted as being similar to "having a working hypothesis".

In 1918, Planck received the Noble Prize in Physics. He died in 1947. And now, some words about what exactly Planck did, that opened up an entirely new chapter in Physics. If you recall, Planck was trying to discover a formula that explained the observed black body spectrum. At first, he just pulled a formula out of the hat so to speak, and if you remember, it had a mysterious constant that we now identify as Planck's constant, one of the fundamental constants of Nature. Later, Planck tried to come up with a model that would actually result in such a formula. This is basically how Planck proceeded.

He first assumed that the atoms in the cavity had electrons in them that could vibrate. Next, Planck made the reasonable assumption that when the cavity was heated, the electrons in the atoms were set in motion, that is to say, they started vibrating. Planck further supposed that a) these vibrations were of the simple harmonic type, that is to say like those of a simple pendulum, and b) the vibrations could be of all sorts of frequencies. Planck also made the reasonable assumption that the higher the temperature, the more was the energy carried by the vibrations.

So far so good but what does all this have to do with radiation filling the cavity? Remember Maxwell and his theory? Maxwell said that an accelerating charge would radiate electromagnetic energy in the form of electromagnetic waves. Recalling that, Planck now said, "Well, electrons are charged particles and when they vibrate, their speed is constantly changing, which means they are accelerating. Therefore, they must radiate energy in the form of electromagnetic waves. Thus, I shall assume that when an electron vibrates with frequency ν it would radiate electromagnetic waves with that same frequency. In other words, what we call heat energy filling the cavity is nothing but the energy contained in waves of various frequencies filling the cavity, the waves having been emitted by the electrons in the atoms very near the inner

surface of the cavity. What about atoms deeper inside? Oh yes, the electrons in those atoms would also emit radiation but most likely they would get absorbed in their journey to the inner surface before they emerge into the cavity."

All this is nice but a mere qualitative picture. What about something quantitative, like a formula, that one could use for comparing with the measure curve? Planck did attempt that and that precisely is also where his breakthrough came. You see in some manner or the other, it all came down to this: Suppose one increases the temperature of the cavity, then what happens? Clearly, more energy would get thrown into the cavity, but what about the mechanism underlying it? At first, Planck used the ideas of classical physics but that got him nowhere, as others had already discovered. So he decided to change the rules of the game and see what happens. Planck said: "Let me argue that the amount of energy $E(\nu, T)$ present at frequency ν at [absolute] temperature T would depend on $N \times \nu$.

The question now is what is this number N ? At this stage, Planck said let me go back to the magic formula that I pulled out of a hat according to which $h\nu$ stood up waiting to be recognized, where h was a universal constant. Remembering that, I shall now assume that energy of the electronic oscillator can exist only as $h\nu, 2h\nu, 3h\nu, \dots$ it is quantized. I could perhaps say this by stating that the electron is excited to various quantum levels, rather in the manner a classical vibrating string can be excited to various harmonics, with frequencies $\nu, 2\nu, 3\nu$, and so on. Let us say that electronic oscillator is excited to its N th quantum state of energy. In turn, this means that the cavity would have, at the frequency ν , an energy of $Nh\nu$. Putting all this together, Planck now said

$$N \times \nu = Nh\nu,$$

Where N is an integer [1, 2, 3,]. This was Planck's key point, namely, electromagnetic energy comes bundled in quanta, with each quanta carrying an energy $h\nu$. This was a fundamental departure from the classical point of view and this concept was built into the rest of the analysis, a formula for $E(\nu, T)$ could be derived which was the same as the one guessed earlier. This formula is now known as the Planck distribution [for black body radiation] and it revolutionized physics for it gave a clear hint, for the first time, that deep inside Nature was hiding a quantum aspect. In the years that followed, many amazing discoveries were required to unravel that quantum mystery step by step.

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 10

...LIVING UP TO THE CHALLENGE OF CONSCIENCE IN DAILY LIFE

Dear Reader, in this series, we offer you real life stories from contemporary heroes who have demonstrated the courage to follow their conscience when confronted with difficult dilemmas or challenging circumstances in their daily lives. This segment is an ode to the strength of the brave-hearts who chose to listen to the voice of their conscience, thereby abiding by the values of Right Conduct, Truth, Love, Peace and Non-violence, even though the choice had appeared tough.

In our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories from [Mrs. Priya K-Alldis](#), [Mr. Dev Taneja](#), [Mr. C. B. S. Mani](#), [Mr. Karthik Ramesh](#), [Mr. Amar Vivek](#), [Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam](#), [Mr. Hiten Morarji](#), [Mr. N. Prabhakar](#) and [Mr. Sathya Jambunathan](#).

How do we react when faced with a corrupt railway official who demands a bribe for a berth? Do we succumb to allay our comfort, or turn away and strengthen our moral fibre? How about a tetchy colleague at work – do we grin and bear it, feeling disturbed inside; or shout back; or win him over with tact and good will. What decides our choices? Is it our past life’s karma, our conditioning, or higher conscience? The current article explores all these issues in a frank and fresh style, which might well lead you to reflect on your own life and its difficult moments. As the author, Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi, states, it is only when we come up against adversity that we know the inner work of purification still to be done - then we can make the required progress in our life’s journey to reach the final destination gloriously.

AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED!

By Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi

Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi is a Sai youth, originally from Andhra Pradesh, India, who is currently working as a Senior Software Expert in Cyprus. After completing his Masters in Pilani, India, he worked in France and India, before moving to Cyprus. Having been in the fold of Sai for over ten years, he considers Bhagavan Baba as the guiding force behind every phase in his life, taking him closer to his inner self through the various events designed in his life.

Follow the Master!

Sometimes the whole world says one thing and deep down inside, you know it isn't going to work that way.

It was last December (2007) that I was asked to implement this new software testing tool. I was the first one to work with it; no one really had an iota of an idea on how consistently problematic it was. The management had high hopes of its success and expected results in very short timelines. The people I

had to work with were new to their roles, and the tool posed many challenges. To satisfy the managers, who were not ready to agree that the tool was too primitive, and were beginning to doubt my efficiency, the only way I figured was to give them a quick but a weak solution. It would show them the glittering results that would fill their hearts for the moment, but might not be good for the company on a long run. But I said to myself that I would only provide a full-fledged solution, even if it meant taking more time initially. Though I myself had little belief in my ideas, I could not but follow the dictates of the Master within.

So, when the tool was built, it was on a strong foundation and when the results showed up, the same people, who doubted me, appreciated me! Yes, people desert you, and later embrace you - all for their own reasons; but, the voice of the Master inside remains constant - the only unchanging and reliable guide. Only the path it shows can bring a complete solution and true solace to the heart.

Yet, not all times, the beauty of following the inner voice is so apparent. A few years ago, I was traveling to Puttaparthi with my mother, grandmother, aunt and sister. A couple of tickets were under R.A.C (Reservation after Cancellation), which meant only one berth would be given per two passengers.

We got into the train which seemed to have a few vacant berths. In any case, we waited for the Ticket Collector. He came to us and asked right away for a bribe in order to give us the extra berth that we needed. I refused to pay him the money, and he refused to give us the berth. We somehow adjusted ourselves in the berths that we got officially. In the middle of the night, to make sure that atleast my grandmother got enough place to rest in the berth, I spent my time sitting on a suitcase near the toilets. The ticket collector was watching it all; and there were some vacant berths too. Still, he did not care to give me one.

By the time I reached Puttaparthi, I had a whole sleepless night. I was not sure if on seeing me stick to the path of righteousness, despite the physical suffering, the ticket collector felt anything. But when I questioned myself about what I got from the experience, I realised that only this act in this situation brought a meaning to my journey to the abode of the One who has taught right conduct through every act of His, right from day One of His advent.

Face the devil!

Once you start to rely on your inner promptings, then the inputs from the world, the external support, is cut off even more, so as to strengthen the spirit further. And the enemies become more internal than external.

I was under the impression that I had no serious threat from the enemy called anger until I met this colleague, Harry. I was asked to allot tasks to Harry and execute a crucial project on which there was a lot of attention from our company's customer, but Harry would just not co-operate with me. He was rude to me all the time, never caring to complete the tasks given to him.

Escalating this issue wasn't going to help me, as he had strong support from the senior management with whom he had a personal bond.

This was not a professionally encouraging situation, but I had to deal with it. However obligingly I spoke to Harry, he would only give me harsh answers, and the work was just not progressing. Every interaction with him was a challenge to my peace of mind. I now had only two choices: Stop sharing work with Harry and do it all myself; or face him and try to make the collaboration work. I took the first option; it was the easier one. I had to work longer hours, but on the other hand, my mind was at peace. But soon enough, I strongly felt that by avoiding Harry, I was actually missing a spiritual exercise which God intended me to go through. Had Harry been a part of my physical family, it wouldn't have been so simple to escape him, after all.

So, I changed my mind and started sharing work with Harry again. Every day, before going to work, I would pray to God ardently, to make me treat the rudeness of Harry with composure and without hatred. I would strive all the time, to look upon him as an actor in the play which was devised to teach me patience. And at the end of what seemed to be two long months, the project was a big success! We got special rewards and appreciation from the customer. But the thing that made me smile was the fact that Harry also got engrossed a lot as the project progressed; he gave his best and we had a good time over all. And even more interesting than this was the lesson that the entire episode taught me. Initially, I tried to run away from Harry seeking peace by remaining alone. But then unless there is someone to challenge your patience, how will you ever know how much of it you really got in there? It was a clear practical lesson to me in treating life as a drama and my colleagues and friends as co-actors. The Lord was the conscience inside, indicating to me not to avoid it, but to take up the challenge, saving me from passing on with the unidentified defect of anger inside.

Fight to the End!

My last vacation in this April (2008) had even more profound lessons. Neither the decision on the course of action, nor its execution would be straightforward. And the results of it would only reveal their grandeur over time, when pondered with a mind free from attachment.

Vijayamma, my sweet grandmother, was diagnosed with cancer. I actually work in an island called Cyprus, away from my family which stays in India. And I got this news through a telephone call. It was impossible for me not to cry every time I thought of this development even after weeks. But I was sure of one thing, that I would take her to Prasanthi Nilayam. This idea, however, was totally unacceptable to most of my family members, who felt that my grandmother who was unable to stay even 10 minutes at a stretch in the sitting position, may not be able to survive the trip. She had adenocarcinoma (cancer) of stomach, and would vomit everything, even a few gulps of water that she took.

I flew back and saw her with my own eyes. She had become so thin, and I just could not bear the sight. In all the distressing shock, I proposed again to take her to Prasanthi Nilayam. Against many odds, and umpteen disagreements, I finally did bring her to Puttaparthi. And she could eat the *Prasadam* (meals) from the South Indian canteen, without vomiting, which was the only wish she had for herself. She was, indeed, speaking normally and quite incredibly, sat happily in the Sai Kulwant Hall for six hours everyday! Everyone around was astonished! From where did she get this energy, they wondered. The step that I took by listening to my conscience, thus, only made everyone happy.

And when we came back from Puttaparthi, the story took even more uncertain turns. She became extremely weak and we started giving her intravenous fluids continuously and every now and then blood infusion. Finally, at one point, the doctor strongly advised me that continuing this further would only increase her pain and suffering terribly, since it was impossible to find veins on her extremely fragile body.

I turned to my inner voice again. Should I increase her suffering by giving her more fluids for sustenance or just resign myself to the inevitable? Everyone around was asking me to give up. Much against the wishes of everyone and the doctor herself, I requested the doctor to go ahead with blood transfusion. I had no greater medical knowledge than the doctor to contradict her; I only knew I had to 'fight to the end' and not give up in the middle.

After the transfusion was done, the doctor was surprised to see how my grandmother picked up brightness. I remember the words the doctor said to me in my mother tongue, Telugu, that day. Looking at his rejuvenated patient, he said to me, "**Mothaaniki saadhinchaavu**" (You did it, finally!). But I knew who the doer was! The next few days when my grandmother remained in her role on earth, were the days when the entire family, whether they believed in God or not, cheered up and chanted God's name continuously and recounted His glory. All those who had disagreements over the various decisions that I had taken, now came together as one family and shared the joy. There was a devotional atmosphere all around with *bhajans* and stories of the Lord!

My grandmother passed away peacefully on a Thursday, leaving us all the memories of those days spent in constant contemplation of the Lord. Had we given up earlier, it would have just been a sad memory; but now – we remember the whole experience as a period of devotional upheaval in the hearts of everyone in the family. While Vijayamma, my grandmother, played her role in this drama embodying absolute faith and unbelievable patience, it was a deep exercise to all of us to just believe in ourselves and walk through the night in hope.

Finish the Game!

What the Lord has taught me through this experience is something amazing. Listening to the conscience is not a one-time job; it is not just a Yes/No, Go/No-Go decision that is taken at the spur of the moment. It is making the choice with faith in the self and Self, and thereby, facing all the odds that

might come as a result with a smile, and living for it with the same enthusiasm till the game is finished.

During the days when my grandmother was sick, if for two days she appeared healthy, the next day she would turn extremely weak and vomit everything. Do I smile for two days and droop down on the next day? Where should I search for an unabated joy and peace? In this life as such, if there is a period of what is supposed to be "all is well", it might as well slip into "nothing is going right" phase sometime soon. Now, where is the permanent bliss that was promised by the Almighty?

Bhagavan Baba explains in "Rama Katha Rasavahini" that the war between Ram and Ravana is not a one-time event, but it is what happens in the heart of every man, all the time. Every minute, the mind is faced with choices between good and bad, eternal and ephemeral. Despair and despondence are bound to strike when one is attached to the temporal. But joy is bound to manifest when one sticks boldly to his path of discovering the inner light within oneself.

There is a voice which constantly asks us not to fall for the urges of the senses, to be careful and not get carried away by praise and blame. It invites us into a universe of peace and changeless joy within, despite all the turbulence and the darkness outside.

The conscience is the torch each of us carries in this world filled with darkness of *maya*. Taking one step in the path lighted up by the torch does not finish the journey. We need to tread it all unswervingly, minimizing the false steps.

Just as a traveler of a chariot gives control to the charioteer who would thereby, slowly and patiently train the horses to travel on the right path, man has to surrender the control to the Divine Charioteer, the *Sanathana Sarathi*, who as his inner conscience would harness his heart to travel on the path of *Dharma* and thereby take him to the destination, the Ultimate Truth.

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN COSTA RICA

Costa Rica – Colorful and Rich

True to its name, Costa Rica, means ‘Rich Coast’, as it is a veritable treasure garden of the earth’s natural wealth. While the country has only about 0.1% of the world’s landmass, it contains 5% of the world’s biodiversity! An amazing 25% of the country’s land is in protected national parks and protected areas, representing the largest percentage of protected areas in the world.

Due to this environmental reputation, the country has become a popular destination for affluent retirees and eco-tourists. Visitors are also attracted by Costa Rica’s standard of living with the best life expectancy rate of Latin America which is at 78 years, and San José, its capital city is ranked fourth among Latin America’s cities with the best quality of life. Ninety-five percent of the population has access to safe drinking water.

Costa Rica – Another name for ‘Peace’

Apart from their love and respect for the environment, Costa Ricans are peace and harmony loving by nature and the same principles guide their lives in other areas as well. Costa Rica, for instance, became the world’s first country to constitutionally abolish its army. There is also a strong democratic spirit, with 60 years of popularly elected governments – quite a contrast to other countries in the region that have been affected by many civil wars and coups.

All Costa Ricans, totaling four million, speak Spanish as their first language and the state religion is Christianity with three out of four people professing the Roman Catholic faith, the other quarter being from the Protestant churches.

The ‘Coming’ of Costa Rica

Caribbean Indians inhabited the region when Christopher Columbus, the first European explorer to reach Costa Rica, arrived. The date was September 25, 1502, and Columbus was making his fourth and final voyage to the New World. When he arrived, a crowd of local Carib Indians paddled out in canoes and greeted his crew warmly. Later, possibly the gold ornaments that the region’s inhabitants were wearing would inspire the name Costa Rica, which means ‘rich coast’.

Archaeologists now know that many talented and ancient cultures existed in Costa Rica before the arrival of Columbus. Some archeological sites in the central highlands and Nicoya peninsula have shown evidence of influence from the Mexican Olmec and Nahuatl civilizations dating back to 5th century. By the time Columbus arrived, there were several indigenous tribes living in Costa Rica, along the Caribbean and Pacific coasts and in the Highlands. There remain eight indigenous groups in the country that still

represent the rich glory of the ancient cultures that thrived on the values of love, mutual respect, harmony and peace.

More recently, in 1987, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez garnered world recognition when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending a period of Central American civil wars. He was able to get all five Central American presidents to sign the Esquipulas Peace Plan. It would be fair to say that the middle name of this rich coast or Costa Rica could well be 'Peace' for its history, culture, people and overall political climate point to a peaceful outlook.

No surprise then that Costa Rica was selected by the United Nations Organisation as the seat of its unique initiative, The University for Peace, which offers a master's degree in Communications for Peace.

Strategic Location and Steady Growth

This beautiful country located on the Central American Isthmus, borders both the Caribbean Sea (to the east) and the North Pacific Ocean (to the west) and shares a border with Nicaragua to the north and with Panama to the south.

The country's economic development has been helped by this location, which provides easy access to the North and South American markets and direct ocean access to the European and Asian Continents. Costa Rica's major economic resources are its fertile land with frequent rainfall, and its well-educated population.

This nation used to be known principally as a producer of bananas and coffee, but pineapples have surpassed coffee as the number two agricultural export. In recent years, Costa Rica has successfully attracted important investments. Manufacturing and industry's contribution to GDP overtook agriculture over the course of the 1990s, led by foreign investment in Costa Rica's free trade zone.

A Highly Cultured People – Costa Rica's Core Strength

Costa Rica has a highly literate population, estimated at ninety three percent. Many of the country's early fathers like the first President, José Maria Castro, were former teachers who were concerned about education in Costa Rica. In 1869, the country became one of the first in the world to make education free and obligatory, funded by the state's share of the great coffee wealth.

Elementary and High schools are to be found in every community, and as if that were not enough, students here are not required to pay for assistance in this country. Costa Rica now has four state-funded universities, contributing successfully to the nation's high literacy rate.

Panoply of Forests and River Valleys, Volcanoes and Mountains

Costa Rica's landscapes include ample coastlines, mountain ridges, rivers and volcanoes. This incredible diversity creates numerous ecosystems and micro-climates within the country's borders.

Even though there are at least 60 dormant or extinct volcanoes, only seven are active. Some of the most spectacular national parks are created around volcanoes like Poás or Irazú. Adventure tourists, environmentalists and nature-lovers, from around the world, flock to the dense and untouched forests of Costa Rica to connect with Nature at its pristine glory.

Where Beauty and Goodness Abound, Can Truth be far behind?

In this peace-loving country with a rich cultural past, a reasonable standard of living and an educated population, the quest for a higher purpose in life, the drive to rise above the basic physical desires was a natural progression of the nation's spiritual destiny. Given the deeply religious leaning of its population, it is no surprise that many spiritual seekers of this unique land were drawn to the light and love of the Sai Avatar, in the distant land of India. This happened in the early 1980's and this is how it unfolded.

History of the Sai Organization in Costa Rica

Former Finance Minister is Early Devotee

An economist by training, Rigoberto Martínez was a former minister of Finance in El Salvador. His wife was one of the first people to hear about Swami in that region. In 1982, Rigoberto accompanied his wife to Prasanthi Nilayam as a chaperon while she came as a devotee. But, Swami captured his heart there and then. Later, when he returned to El Salvador, he was appointed to a post in Costa Rica with the World Health Organization. And Rigoberto, who was so moved with his trip to Puttaparthi, began to share his newfound devotion with other like-minded souls in his new home. In this way, he started screening a few of the old Richard Bock films on Sai Baba and holding study circles with a few interested people.

Initially, Rigoberto started meeting with 8 to 10 devotees to sing *bhajans* (devotional songs) in Costa Rica's capital city, San José, once a week in the humble surroundings of a leather workshop. The space was completely inadequate, but the devotees learned to sing *bhajans* and conduct study circles.

Early participants in these meetings included Mireya Méndez and her husband Guillermo Hidalgo. The couple owned a bookstore specializing in occult books. Mireya believed in Sai Baba long before her husband. But after reading a couple of books, such as Sai Baba, Man of Miracles, Mr. Hidalgo decided to accompany his wife to one of the meetings. It was at this meeting that he met Rigoberto Martínez and his deep devotion for Baba began.

Sai Guides His Mission in Costa Rica

After this experience, Mr. and Mrs. Hidalgo decided to look for a bigger and better place to continue the Sai meetings and study circles. While thinking about this in their home, they smelt a very strong fragrance. “This was a clear sign that Baba blessed our desire to have a new room for the Sai meetings,” he says. Next day, Mireya found a beautiful and large place at a low price, which had recently been painted in soft pink. It had previously been used as part of a Catholic convent, and still had a painted glass window with Jesus on it. On April 2, 1984, they opened its doors for Sai meetings and were ready to receive more Sai followers.

God Stamps Approval on Devotees’ Efforts

Mr. Hidalgo experienced two other *leelas* or signs of divine affirmation at this time. When he first tried to open the door to the new room, rose oil began to spread over the keys, and this scent lasted for several days. On another occasion, when he was about to begin a study circle, he had no idea about the topic for that day. But after intensely praying to Baba for His directions, when he opened a book, and *vibhuti* began to pour from that page. And there, on that vibhuti-blessed page, was the topic!

Their love and devotion only grew with every passing day. Finally Mrs. Hidalgo traveled to see Swami in 1985, together with Jesús Arauz from Panamá and Rigoberto Martinez, the economist who had played a pivotal role in starting the Sai movement in San José, the capital of Costa Rica.

Within a short period of time, the Sai awareness had spread far and wide in Costa Rica. In 1987, Leonardo Gutter and Dr. Goldstein came to Costa Rica, and the first public meeting about Sai Baba was conducted in this small country.

Sai Seed Germinates in Cartago in 1985

Meanwhile, other parts of Costa Rica such as the province of Cartago, were also embracing the good news of the arrival of the Avatar.

In 1985 Vidal Sandoval, resident of Peñas Blancas, Cachí, in the province of Cartago, met a Spanish man named Joaquín Villaplana, who initiated him into yoga. Mr. Villaplana also introduced Mr. Sandoval to Sathya Sai Baba and advised him to buy books about Swami at Mr. and Mrs. Hidalgo’s bookshop. He bought several books and, after reading them, asked the owners of the bookstore to visit him and teach him how to conduct the Sai meetings. At that time, there were only 10 devotees. Later on, ten more joined the group. Their first devotional practices included *bhajans* (devotional songs) at 4 a.m. and study circles, which were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays. With few resources, all members worked hard in several different areas and, in the process, were also putting Swami’s teachings into practice. In 1988 Vidal Sandoval became the President of the Sai Center in Cachi. A homeopathic doctor by profession, Vidal, after coming into contact with Sai Baba’s

teachings, was inspired to serve the poor from his clinic one day a week at no charge. An interesting fact about Vidal is that being a strict vegetarian, Vidal, always eats only raw food raised on his home farm.

A couple of years later, Alfredo Lizano, a lawyer, and his wife joined the Sai Center in San Jose. They traveled to see Swami in the 1990's and this visit inspired Alfredo to become the Sai Center President in the Sai centre, San José.

Sai Plants Each Instrument to Sow the Seeds of Sai Awareness

In this manner, the Sai movement in Costa Rica continued to grow, and in retrospect, what is clear is a divine plan that orchestrated the growth of Sai awareness, one devotee at a time. Each of the chosen instruments of God had a personal tryst with divinity that eventually led them to work as His functionaries, joining the dots of individual efforts into a collective, larger whole known today as the Sai Movement in Costa Rica.

Leticia Wille is one such chosen one. Her father was a scientist who liked to read about Indian philosophy. She first heard about Sai Baba from him. In 1978, when she was 18 years old, he gave her the book, Sai Baba: The Man of Miracles to read. Her reaction was immediate acceptance of Sathya Sai Baba as the Avatar who had come to redeem mankind. She thought, "Wow, this is the Avatar of Avatars, I want to see him!"

However, it was not until 1990, that she could travel to see Him in person. In January 1991, Leticia Wille joined the Sai Center in San José. A few years later, around 1997, Leticia began a Study Circle group in a place called Belén, and by the year 2000, had a full-time Sai job as a secretary for the Sai Center.

A recurring theme running through the milestones of the Sai Movement in Costa Rica, well, for that matter everywhere, is that Swami seems to place the right person in the right place at the right moment to carry out His will.

Hand-picked Devotees Serve Sai Mission

By 1998, two Sai devotees, Dr. José Cabezas (currently Vice-President of the Central Council of Central America) and Elisabeth Mevissen (a German devotee living in Costa Rica at that time) were helping the Sai Center a great deal. They both had their own transportation and also had easier ways of communicating with other Sai devotees abroad. Thus the Sai Center began to use internet to get connected and share His love.

Elisabeth Mevissen, who had traveled many times to see Baba, and is a melodious singer, taught many Sai devotees in Costa Rica the proper way to sing *bhajans*. She was very active in all areas, teaching devotees a great deal about Swami's teachings and also served as National President till she returned to live in Germany in 2005, after serving the Sai cause in Costa Rica for a number of years.

Recalling her time as President, she says, “In the many years of being blessed as a member of the Sai Organisation of Costa Rica, there is no way to account the numerous experiences and endless teachings of our beloved Swamiji. The most important understanding I gained from His divine guidance, through leadership within the Sai Organisation was and is, ‘Love is all and He is the Love incarnate on Earth!’ Baba opened my inner vision, foremost the spiritual heart, to listen and surrender to His will. This assurance made it possible to unify the Sai family on many occasions and encounter blessed moments of service and meditation.

“We all remember the unforgettable event of Akhand Bhajans in 2002, when a harmonious group of singers gathered for the first time to sing for twenty four hours, which is quite difficult in such a small (in number) group of active members. Nevertheless, enthusiasm and devotion filled the air with increasing vibration. I still can hear the guitar, the swinging sound of purity and love, and voices flavored by our beloved Sai’s own inspiration. The sense of service and contribution to peace was brought forward throughout the whole country; it was indeed a high meditation.

“It is this experience of Him being in us, around us, above us and within us that lifts the spirit far beyond the material. Therefore, my utmost gratitude to our beloved Mother Sai for sending me to Costa Rica, where through humble service, I was granted this overwhelming gift.”

Unity, Purity, Divinity: Many Voices, One Song

This singularity of vision has played a significant role in taking the message of the Sai Avatar effectively to Costa Ricans. Towards this end, many visitors from abroad have helped to improve the effort of the Costa Rican Sai devotees.

On September 19, 2001, Salvador Demallistre from the Dominican Republic conducted a very valuable workshop on leadership and donated excellent materials for use by the Sai Center.

Again, a Sai devotee from Argentina, Verónica Hadad, was very active at the Sai Center in San José, teaching and organising many activities, especially Seva. In June 2003, one day, she had a wonderful experience. She was at the Sai Center in San José, cleaning it up before the evening *bhajans*. Jorge Cervantes, the current National President, had brought some booklets containing the 108 Names of Sai in Spanish. After the cleaning was finished, she sat down to take a look at the booklets.

Divine Fragrance Signifies Divine Presence

Veronica opened one of the tiny volumes at a paragraph where Prof. Kasturi (Baba’s biographer) beautifully described Swami as the One with a beautiful form, whose hands are full of nectar. Suddenly, she felt a very strong perfume of nectar or Amrith and realised all the booklets were emanating a strong sweet smell of Amrith. This wonderful experience, she says, will stay with her for ever.

Costa Rica’s current National President, Jorge Cervantes learned about Swami in 1998 from Roxana Guadamez who worked in the same company. She gave him several books about Swami, and he read them with great interest and became a believer in His divinity. In the year 2001, he was invited to attend the Birthday Celebrations of Swami in San José, and as a result started to attend the Sai Center. Then, towards the end of 2002, he was given the job of secretary for distribution of messages for the devotees. Over a period of time, he had several dreams with Sai Baba; dreams which were wonderful and helped both him and his family. In 2005, he was a witness to a violent assault in which he invoked Swami’s help by chanting “Om Sai Ram, Om Sai Ram”, and miraculously he was protected even though the other two people with him were robbed of their possessions. “Swami must have made me invisible to the robbers,” he says with a smile.

In 2006, he was able to visit Swami in India. His wonderful experience that year began on December 14. On this date, at 6:30 a.m., Jorge arrived in Prasanthi Nilayam. With the help of a devotee named Santiago, from Argentina, Jorge registered at the accommodation office. He was filled with extreme joy when he realised he would be allowed to enter the Mandir. This is what he says:

“After singing *bhajans*, my heart began to beat rapidly as Sai Baba was coming out of the front door. My inner eye had seen Him before my physical eyes saw His human body.” Swami looked at each devotee and at that moment, Jorge thanked Him, inwardly, for listening to his prayers and for letting him arrive at His Divine Feet. On December 24, the day when the Christmas choir presented their songs, Jorge felt it was one of the greatest moments of his life. “To be able to sing to God for one hour and receive His *darshan* is a unique experience,” he says. On January 1, 2007, he got up very early to participate in the Omkar and chanted Suprabhatam. “This was my way of thanking Swami for everything He has given me.” Jorge says with a voice filled with emotion.

Like this, the story of every devotee is precious and profound. Juliana Pulgar, a younger devotee and Roxana Guadamuz, Costa Rica’s current Service Coordinator, traveled together to Prasanthi Nilayam in year 2007. Their holy trip began long before take-off, as they trained themselves spiritually, physically and mentally, in preparation for the blessings they would receive in beholding God.

Childhood Tryst with Shirdi Sai Baba Reaffirmed

Going back decades in time, Roxana Guadamuz recalls, “One of the important questions which I wished to get answered while there in Prasanthi was that Swami should confirm for me the truth of an experience which I had had when I was 8 or 9 years old. I was watering the plants in the garden of my home when an old man with a white beard came up to me. He was wearing a strange dress which I had never seen in Costa Rica. It was a tunic tied with a cord, and he had a white cloth tied around his head. He was barefoot and his clothes were somewhat tattered and old. He carried a walking stick. He sat

down on a stump and crossed one leg over the other, close to me and asked me if I could give him something to eat. I went into the house and told my mother that an old man wanted something to satiate his hunger. She was busy, so she did not go outside, but gave me a plate of food to give it to him. I took the food to him, and he started to eat slowly with his hand, even though my mother had given a spoon, and he was looking at me all the time with a profound look; his eyes were filled with love. When he finished, he said ‘thank you’, and started to walk away.

“I took my eyes off of him for just a second or two, and when I looked back again he was gone! I ran out into the street but could not see him. Then, I ran into the house declaring to my mother that the old man was not a beggar but an angel! She came out to look for him too, but to no avail. I can still remember his look of peace and love. I started telling all my family and friends in school that I had seen an angel. Even a year later I was still telling those that would listen about my angel. Years later, when I knew about Sathya Sai Baba, someone showed me a photo of Shirdi Sai Baba, and I recognised him as being the same man who had come to me in the garden. Now, in my last *darshan* before parting for Costa Rica, Swami passed in front of me in His car, I heard His voice inside saying, "Everything that has occurred here is true, and you have known Me since you were a little girl."

Shirdi Sai Blesses Childhood, Sathya Sai Blesses Couple with Child

Roxana Guadamuz is the wife of Mr. Rafael Rodriguez, the current President of the Sai Centre in San José. She was also interviewed by the Heart2Heart team, while at Prashanti Nilayam in December 2007.

“In 1997, my husband and I were keen to have a baby, but four years had passed and nothing happened. Subsequently, we decided to get medical help. When we walked into the doctor’s office, we saw large photograph of Swami. We wanted to know more about this picture and the doctor told us that His Name was Sai Baba and that He is a spiritual Teacher who lives in India, and can do miracles. We were actually captivated by His form and the stories we heard about Him. After we left the clinic, as we were driving in the car, we were surrounded by a wonderful fragrance. It was something that I had never smelt before, and I was really astonished. When that sweet smell started permeating me from head to feet, I started crying because of the emotion that overpowered me so deeply. Nine months after that, we had our first son – truly, a gift from Swami. After that, we learnt a lot more about Him and soon took an active part in the Sai Organisation. About a decade later, we had the opportunity to be in Prasanthi, His Abode of Supreme Peace. We are so grateful to Him.”

Roxana’s husband Rafael Rodríguez, sharing his memories of visiting Prasanthi Nilayam in 2006, says:

“After about eight years of being aware of the presence of Sathya Sai Baba as the Avatar of this age, I missed seeing Him in person. I had been saving for

several years for a trip as I felt it was as if Jesus was again among us, so any effort was worthwhile to meet Him.

“Something unusual happened to me before the journey. Flying scares me a lot and the day before the flight, when I was driving in front of the airport I felt great fear. Just at that moment I looked at a beautiful orange light over the rear-view mirror. It was the setting of the sun, but I also observed a beautiful rainbow. I had never seen both phenomena together, and I accepted this as a sign that everything would go well, that I would have a good trip, and that Sai Baba was waiting for me.”

Mr. Rodríguez did not sleep that night, neither the following three days. Even so, he felt great energy and enthusiasm when he arrived in India. “It was wonderful that on the first nine-hour flight, I was sitting alone in my line of seats, even when the airplane was totally booked up. I was able to relax in this long trip.”

In his first morning in Prasanthi Nilayam, Rafael saw Sai Baba from a distance. He had the opportunity to be in *darshan* several times and was able to deliver the letters written to Baba from devotees in Costa Rica.

One day, when Baba was almost in front of Rafael, he said: “Swami, Costa Rica loves you”, in English. Swami heard this message and answered with a friendly smile. “It was always enchanting to wait daily for His *darshan*. Even when He was not there physically, one could feel His presence while listening to the spiritual chants,” says Rafael.

From a merely human point of view, Mr. Rodríguez could not believe that a non-profit Organization had built that huge infrastructure and that it was so efficient. Rafael was looking at a real miracle in Prasanthi Nilayam. He says: “Certainly, only God Himself on Earth could have driven so many people to work together in harmony, just for love.”

Despite Milling Crowds, Sai Answers Individual Prayers

Speaking of her recent experience in Prasanthi, his wife Roxana tells us, “During the last two or three days, Swami had not left His house, except for one or two *darshans*. Because of that, I was asking Him to let us see His Divine Form before our departure for Costa Rica. I wanted Him to come up to us and say ‘Goodbye.’ Juliana was asking for the same thing in her meditation, when suddenly, the people around us became excited – Swami was approaching the Mandir, where we were meditating. While people were applauding, Swami entered the Mandir, left, and then came in again. It was at the time of Swami’s second entrance that Juliana was able to touch His Divine Leg (not feet) and Hand! She lapsed into a state of ecstasy. As for myself, I hadn’t been aware of Swami’s first entrance, because I was in a state of deep meditation, bordering in a state of *Ananda* (bliss), perceiving nothing around me. Baba was the One Who had granted this state, and Baba was the One Who wakened me in time to see Him enter the room the second time. And

there He stayed, allowing many minutes of *darshan* while accepting arathi. What an amazing gift of Divine Love for those of us inside the Mandir!

"He then left the Mandir for the Sai Kulwant Hall. The group of devotees inside the Mandir followed Him and joined the rest of devotees in the Hall. As He was passing in front of us in His little car, the car stopped, the window came down and Swami looked at all of us and raised His Hand! So, for those who had been in the temple, it was a double blessing. And He had said "Goodbye" to us!"

Hearing the Voice of God in the Depths of Inner Silence

Roxana Guadamuz adds more to her unforgettable experience in Prasanthi Nilayam: "For many travelers, to arrive in Prashanti means a spiritual and emotional journey, but it also includes a physical effort. I am included among those travelers, who even had the sense of Swami whispering to us.

"The first day we were at the Accommodation area. They had put us in a very big, yet a very crowded shelter and said that there was no other possibility for another place to keep our luggage and rest. We actually did not care much, but it was so crowded that we could never sleep. That same night and for the first time, I felt I heard Swami whispering: 'I will find a room for you both tomorrow.' I brushed it aside thinking my mind was playing tricks on me."

But the next day, when they were having lunch, Catalina, a devotee who had flown with Roxana and Juliana from Caracas to Paris, talked to them. She said that she was going to make arrangements for them to move to a much less crowded place. Four hours later, Roxana and Juliana moved to Catalina's room. For Roxana, this was clear proof that Swami had actually talked to her.

Roxana says: "This Voice talked to me several times when I was in Prasanthi Nilayam. On some occasions, He said: 'Do not go outside the Ashram, remain in meditation. Go to the little Mandir'."

Besides listening to this Voice, Roxana was taught by Swami that anything that happens in Prasanthi Nilayam to each one has a meaning, a purpose for one's spiritual growth. She explains:

Sai, the Light of all Religions

"My dreams during those three weeks in this Abode of Highest Peace played an important role in my life. One night I dreamed about my aunt who had died six months earlier. She was coming inside through the door, walking towards me, and I was looking at my roommates sleeping. When my aunt was close to me she told me: 'I am glad you came, I am here with God.' "

These words meant a lot to Roxana. She explained that her aunt was a devoted catholic, a woman who would go every day to church and help the priests in all the Eucharist celebrations. Before she died, she had told her

sons she was ready to go to God, but she was worried for Roxana because she was not a Catholic anymore and was following a 'guru' from India. Soon after her aunt said that, she died. On the day of her death, Roxana dreamt that she was looking at Swami and her aunt was going towards Him and into Him. Swami had said: "She is in me."

Roxana continues, "And in Prasanthi Nilayam, I had a dream that completed this wonderful circle: my aunt confirmed she was with Him and expressed her joy at my presence in that holy place. This fact showed me that Swami is the One and Only God, He is the God of all religions."

The experience of Ana Yancy is also worth a mention. Hailing from a family of strict Catholics, Ana's mother and her 8 siblings did not take it kindly when she started believing in Swami. They decided to ask her not to come to family gatherings because of her following this 'Guru' from India. But after a couple of years, they relaxed the rule, and allowed her to come to family gatherings, but only if there was no mention of her Guru. At one of these gatherings, her mother declared that her youngest brother was her favorite child. While this did not go over very well with the other family members and became a sore spot, it was like a family secret that no one would ever mention.

But one day Baba appeared physically in the conference room at the University where her youngest brother was studying. Her brother was the last one to leave and was alone when Baba went up to him. Seeing Baba, her brother said, "get away from me, my mother has told me about your tricks". On hearing this, Swami said, "Oh! so you are the favorite one" and then turned around and walked out. When the younger brother could get to a phone, he immediately phoned Ana Yancy, and said, "How dare you reveal our family secrets to Sai Baba". Ana Yancy tried to explain to her brother that Swami was in India. But nothing she could say would convince him that Sai Baba was not visiting Costa Rica, and that she had revealed the family secret. To this day her brother refuses to discuss the matter.

National Sai Conventions

With such moving experiences and revelations of His Love and glory, devotees in this tiny country only grew. Over the years, many Sai National Meetings were held; there was one practically every month. And each one has been a unique experience with its own teachings, but the learning process of sharing and loving each other has been remarkable during these activities. Although all the meetings have been significant in some way or the other, a few of them stand out:

Educare in Orosi

On March 22, 1998, there was a one-day Sai retreat at "Finca Los Maestros," a beautiful property in the mountains of the Tapanti National Park. A Sai devotee, who lived here, taught in a school in a little town called Orosi. Over the years, she has used the techniques taught by Bhagavan Baba in His divine program called Educare. As a result, many children in the Orosi School

had, through her, learned Sai values. So, it came as no surprise during the Sai retreat, when talks about Swami’s teachings, including experiences, questions and answers captivated all.

Meetings Revive, Renew and Rejuvenate Sai Workers’ Devotion

In July 4, 1999, the country had two special visitors: John Behner (Central Coordinator of Region II) and Betty Richard (Vice-President, Central Council of Latin America, Northern Zone). A Sai Center meeting was organised at a devotee’s property in Belén, a town near the Alajuela airport. Both Mr. Behner and Mrs. Richard gave talks about Human Values, the Five Aspects of the Personality, and the behavior code. There was also a workshop on ‘Meditation on the Light’ and an explanation about the Gayatri Mantra.

In the same year, on August 14 the Sai centre in Costa Rica was visited by Mr. Héctor Castañeda (Service Coordinator, Northern Zone) and Isabel De Sola (Vice-President of the Coordinating Committee of El Salvador). They gave enlightening talks on selfless service which helped all the devotees to understand the deep meaning of seva.

The meetings became bigger every passing year and in April 2000, there was a large National Meeting which was held on a big farm in Grecia, Alajuela. Héctor Castañeda, Betty Richard, and John Behner were also there. At the end of this meeting, the strength of the Coordinating Committee of the country increased from five to ten. This has boosted the activities of the Sai centre significantly.

Spreading Sai’s Message of Love

The Sai movement switched gears in September 2003, when there was a public conference and a meeting of all Sai Coordinators from Central America. This two day retreat was attended by Mr. Leonardo Gutter, Chairman of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization in Latin American countries. “Who is Sai Baba?” (His life, work and message) was the title of the public address and it had a big impact on many new comers.

Sai Youth Usher New Dynamism

Youth, as Bhagavan says, is the backbone of any nation. It was no different in Costa Rica. For all the activities and festival celebrations organised by the Sai Centres in Costa Rica, the Sai youth had been a potent force. Many have dedicated their lives towards the cause of spreading Swami’s message. Costa Rican youth members like Julianaana Pulgar, Ronald Chacón and Raúl Alfaro, even gave beautiful presentation to the public based on the inaugural Divine Discourse to the delegates of the Sai World Youth Conference in July 2007. Needless to say, they captured the hearts of the assembly with their enthusiasm, clarity and candid expression.

Spreading the Good Word: Disseminating the Sai Message in the Media

Dr. José Cabezas, who is currently the Vice President of the Central Council of Central America, is also a journalist and a lawyer. He has been working tirelessly to disseminate Bhagavan's teachings and share His love. The story of how he came into the Sai fold is interesting.

In 1996, Mr. Cabezas wrote his first article on Baba in the Revista Rumbo Centroamericana, a magazine distributed all over Central America. And this is how it happened. Even though this magazine was about economics and politics, José was hired to write on new spiritual movements. As he was looking for information on this topic, he learnt about the existence of Bhagavan Baba. He had to write about seven spiritual movements. For each one, he dedicated just half a page, except for the article on Sai Baba and His message, in which he wrote an entire page with pictures.

Two years later, in 1998, the Sai Organization appointed Dr. José Cabezas as a Disseminator of Sai Teachings in Central America. His new Sai responsibilities encouraged him to be a part of the Sai Center in Costa Rica, which he had not visited earlier. While engaged in this holy task, Dr. José has had plenty of Sai experiences. Here is a wonderful story of following his inner voice in his own words:

"I first knew about the existence of Bhagavan when I conducted an interview for a Central American magazine that hired me to write an article about modern spiritual movements. They referred me to a Cuban man named Oswald, whose last name I do not remember. When I met Oswald apart from granting me a meeting, he also gave me as a gift a poster from which, months later, amritha (nectar) came out in two thin threads. This was in 1996 and it was my first contact with Sai Baba; I still keep that poster in my office, in a special place. But the story does not end here, in fact, it has an interesting twist

The Medium is the Message: Devotee Exemplifies Sai Spirit of Truth and Righteousness

"In February 2006, I bought a house in a rural area outside of the city of San José, in order to get away from the stress of living in a big city. I got the house by buying a company which owned the property. At that time, I studied the balance sheet of the company to ensure that it did not have any debts and was financially healthy. My interest, in any case, was always the house which could be of use in doing Sai's work in Costa Rica.

"One day in December of that same year, I received a call from an eminent fellow lawyer in Costa Rica, informing me that a client of his wanted to sell a building for 200,000 dollars and, when he initiated the paperwork, he realised that the building belonged to the company I had bought. Because of an incredible mistake, this person did not remember that in the company he had sold to me there was also included this other building. That is to say, I had bought two buildings instead of one. The same lawyer confessed to me that

the possibility of winning back the building for his client was very remote, as the purchase was performed with all the legal requirements. To demonstrate the mistake would take several years in court, and if I denied the existence of such a mistake the outcome will be almost impossible for them to win a favourable decision. His client had all his savings in this building, and he told me that his client had become completely unnerved and confused when he got the news of this huge goof up.

“I investigated the situation and after realising that everything was true, I asked them to come to my office. When they arrived I told them that I would immediately give back their property. They asked me what I wanted as payment. They knew that if I requested 5, 10 or 50 thousand dollars they would have no other choice as that was better than a lawsuit.

“I answered that I only wanted thanks and a smile. They were rather flabbergasted, and even asked for permission to publish the story in a newspaper, which I refused, of course.

“While I myself was writing the deed to return the building, almost an hour later, the lawyer asked me if I was a devotee of Sai Baba. I was surprised and asked him how he suspected this. He answered because of the hanging poster, as he knew Sai Baba from pictures. ‘Of course’, I said and asked how he knew about Baba. Then he replied:

“About fifteen years ago I had a client who invited me to his house. I went and he talked to me and showed videos of Sai Baba. When I asked him the name of the client, my skin turned cold with his answer: ‘He was a Cuban named Oswald’.”

“This meant that Bhagavan had made a circle and that, most surely, He had laid this test for me and showed me that He was watching this situation from its very beginning.

“Of course, I felt very pleased for not having failed Him, by giving back voluntarily a property that legally arrived to my patrimony, but that ethically did not belong to me, without expecting any kind of reward.”

Reputed Journalist Committed to Sharing Sai Message through Mass Media

It is Baba’s mystery and grace that people of such integrity are now spearheading the Sai movement in Costa Rica. Dr. José, for the last 16 years, has been writing articles continuously for La Prensa Libre, a national newspaper. There have been approximately 400 columns on Bhagavan’s discourses apart from a number of reports on Sai activities, Sai study circles and so on.

In Radio Columbia, a national radio station with the greatest audience in the country, Dr. José has broadcast four two-hour programs, on Bhagavan Baba’s Life and Message. Currently, he prepares a weekly radio program for Radio

America, which is aired on Saturdays at 2:00 p.m., and reaches the whole world through its web page (www.780america.com). This program, which is filled with Baba's teachings, devotees' experiences and Sai activities, has become a tool for study circle in many Sai centres in Central America. Dr. José is now helped by many eager and enthusiastic young devotees like Juliana Pulgar in this noble endeavour. The program is now broadcast on the Spanish hour of Radio Sai Global Harmony.

One Million View His Works

Dissemination of Sai ideals is not restricted to print and radio alone; there have been many strides in the video and TV media as well. In 1999, a few videos on Baba were broadcast on Channel 54 (UHF). In 2008, a national TV channel became interested in the Avatar and interviewed Juliana Pulgar and Dr. José for seven minutes. This interview, layered with images taken from the video called Su Trabajo (His Work), has been broadcast on four different occasions and an estimated one million people in Costa Rica have seen this programme.

SAI Education – EHV Making a Mark

Besides all these initiatives to spread the good news of the Avatar, what has drawn many into the Sai fold are the selfless service projects and also the efforts taken to impart Education in Human Values (EHV) to the young minds.

As far as EHV is concerned, there are many inspired devotees dedicated to this task. Ms. Mireya Aguilar, who lives near the Tapanti National Park, has implemented Educare passionately in a local school; while the same is being done by Mr. Vidal Sandoval, President of the Sai Center in Cachí; he imparts EHV teachings to many children in this little town.

Similarly, in the big city of San José, two excellent teachers, Damaris Guerrero and Ana Yansy Vega, have introduced EHV in many schools. The EHV movement was enriched in 2000 by Mrs. Ofelina de Medeiros, a special visitor from Panama, who not only brought many useful books and cassettes, but also, together with Ana Yansy Vega, gave a valuable workshop on human values.

This event coincided with Bhagavan's birthday celebrations and the Sai children of this region presented a beautiful play entitled Muchas Lámparas, Una Sola Luz (Many Lamps, One Light), written by Juliana Rangel from Venezuela. This was a scintillating performance and gladdened the heart of every Sai devotee present.

Ana Yansy Vega, along with her husband, Daniel Soto, has been very active in taking the EHV programme to many schools in Costa Rica. In 2001 they impressed on the young minds to be more responsible towards the environment and many children responded positively. For example, the fifth grade students in República Dominicana School decided not to throw garbage on the streets and maintain its cleanliness.

In the previous year (2000), a few devotees led by Ernestina de Geovanny, a dedicated devotee, gave oral presentations, with videos, about drugs and Sai Values. Children from many schools like the Chile School, Paraguay School, España School including the children in the Sai Center in Cachí benefited from this immensely.

Service Activities – Creating Lives Anew

The other important activity has been various service initiatives which have started right from the day Sai Centres in Costa Rica were born and continues till this day with the same vigour. Over time, as expected, the number of activities has only increased. Some of these include:

- a) Medical assistance in the province of Cartago guided by Dr. Carlos Carvajal.
- b) Nursing Home visits to help with cleaning, cooking, and to spend time with those extraordinary elderly people.
- c) Food delivery to homeless people.
- d) Street cleaning and repairing which has been done by the Sai devotees of the small town, Cachí.
- e) Free lessons to mentally challenged children with love
- g) Tree planting along roads in San José.

Apart from these, Sai devotees also began visiting a shelter for alcoholics and drug addicts from September, 1999. With no support from the government, all the work in this shelter used to be done by a single woman who used to work hard but could do only so much. The scene in this place is much different now with Sai devotees gladly cleaning the toilets, listening patiently to the depressing tales of the inmates, hugging them whole heartedly, sharing their love in different ways, and motivating them to get better and happier each day.

Moving Community Service in “La Promesa”

In reality, there is lot more happening in the area of reaching out to the downtrodden and rebuilding lives in recent times. There is a beautiful community service programme in progress in “La Promesa” and this is what Veronica Hadad, one of the active Sai volunteers in San José, has to say:

“A most remarkable milestone happened in 2003 and 2004. At this time, members from the Sai Center of San José felt the need to start a new service activity, and they unanimously chose to adopt an underprivileged community on the outskirts of the capital city. These devotees prayed to Swami for

guidance and then symbolically placed the service project in His hands. Then, they watched in amazement as many separate events coalesced into a workable seva activity, as if directed by an invisible hand.

“The chosen community consisted of 80 families who had previously lived in very poor conditions, without proper housing and facilities. Though some of them had received brick and mortar houses from the local government a few months ago, there were still many important issues haunting them like domestic violence, poverty, unemployment, and lack of unity amongst them.”

The Proper Study of Mankind is Man

Therefore, there were complex issues in that locality and the Sai devotees went about reforming this place slowly but with a definite plan. First, they contacted the village leader, and arranged a meeting with groups of women to discuss their concerns. They were happy to find out that several of them were seeking help but at the same time did not want to be given "hand-outs" to solve everything. Instead, they wanted to engage themselves in a constructive work or project which could take care of their financial woes, without neglecting their families and children.

To achieve this objective, there was first a need to create unity in the community. And so, the Sai devotees undertook various measures like conducting workshops for the men and women, introducing human value classes for children and others, inspiring and interesting meetings for youngsters and so on. And all these efforts paid off. There were occasions when the teenagers chose to miss their favorite soccer team's game to attend the sessions! Once the bond between the families in the community became stronger, the Sai Organisation helped them legalise the Association of the community as “Asociación de Niños, Mujeres y Jóvenes Cumpliendo La Promesa” (Children, Women and Youth Association Fulfilling the Promise). This was an important step which was achieved with the help of a devotee who was a lawyer.

Empathy and Understanding - Cornerstones of Collective Success

Next, a community hall was built on a small plot in a public area and the Association received tables and chairs as donation. Mother's Day was celebrated in grand fashion for the first time in the community. Now, the community was made anew in their outlook and attitude.

Finally, the Sai group helped them move towards choosing a productive gardening project which could improve their financial situation. The new Association selected a project that best fulfilled their particular needs. And this project extended over a period of one year. After that, the Association continued on its own with the community managing all the affairs which looked after their needs. This wonderful experience made both the Sai devotees and the community members, richer in love and brotherly affection.

Devotion Wing – Providing the Vital Source of Strength

Supporting all these activities in the educational and service field are the initiatives taken in the devotional wing of the Organisation. Apart from learning *bhajans*, devotees have learnt the nuances of celebrating major festivals such as Mahashivarathri and Akhanda Bhajans. Now, they have not only Hindi and Sanskrit *bhajans* translated into English and Spanish, but also new Spanish songs. To aid the devotees, there are currently five different books on Sai *bhajans* and songs.

A few years ago, in 2000, with the inspiration from María José Velasquez (from Guatemala) and Isabel de Sola (from El Salvador) the devotees included many new programs in devotional wing catering especially to the youth like study circles and special activities.

Costa Rica Embraces Sai Gloriously

Though Costa Rica is a small country (158th in the world in size) and on the other side of the world as far as Prasanthi Nilayam is concerned, the way Sai has installed Himself in the hearts of many is most heartening. The Lord has inspired them to become better husbands, better wives, better citizens, and most of all, loving human beings

This supreme gift of Love from Bhagavan Baba has opened for them a whole new world of exciting possibilities and a divine vision to aspire for. They now know how to make their already gifted and beautiful country a true paradise. In fact, Costa Rica, with its incredible history of always marching for peace, is a role model for not only other nations in Latin and Central America but for the whole world. And going by the way Sai Movement is touching hearts of thousands, the day is not far when Costa Rica will be called so not for its richness in gold or nature's bounties, but for the golden hearts of its people, who reflect in their words, actions, smiles and gestures only pure Love.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part – 45

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT XIX - SCENE 1

LADY 1: Did you hear that this Young Swami is God? It seems that people from all the surrounding places are flocking to have the *darshan* of Bala Swami.

LADY 2: Sister, I too want to have the *darshan* of this Young Swami. Shall we all go together for *darshan*?

GROUP: Alright.

LADY: Come sister, we shall all go together.

GROUP: Alright. What do you say? Come on, come!.....Come mother.....Here auntie..... I am coming!

MAN 1: Kondama Raju is Guru for all of us but for him, his Grandson is the Guru!

MAN 2: Not just Guru but God in human form, with miraculous powers.

EASWARAMMA: What is it that people are saying about our Sathyam?

VENKAMA RAJU: They believe that Sathyam is God. In many neighbouring places also, Sathyam is revered as God. But there are also some that disbelieve, while others attribute it all to magic and *mantras*. Easwari, what can we do about the way people think?

EASWARAMMA: Even father-in-law thinks that Sathyam is God.

VENKAMA: That is true. Once he said to me that his Guru Venkavadoota told him that in order to protect the world, Lord Narayana would Himself be born in the Ratnakara lineage. Based on that prediction, father believes that our Sathyam is Lord Sriman Narayana.

EASWARAMMA: Is it? Listening to all that you say, perhaps what Venkavadoota said has come true. In any case, whatever happens, Sathyam must always be near me.

SCENE 2

GROUP: Salutations!

VENKAMA RAJU: Salutations!

PERSON: Salutations, Mr. Venkama Raju!

PERSON 2: We are from Kottacheruvu.

PERSON 3: We have heard a lot about the Young Swami.

VENKAMA: Very happy.

LADY: We have come from Uravakonda to see Young Swami.

EASWARAMMA: Is that so?

LADY 2: Is she Easwaramma?... Salutations mother!

EASWARAMMA: Salutations.

LADY 3: Mother, we consider it a great fortune to have your *darshan!*

SUBBAMMA: Easwaramma,.....Easwaramma!

EASWARAMMA: Come, Subbamma!

SATHYA: In all of you, there is a third eye that you cannot see. That is the Eye of Wisdom! Open that eye and you will see that God is not just here or there but everywhere! Develop Love in your hearts. Always adhere to Truth [*Sathya*] and Righteousness [*Dharma*]. Those who have attained the Knowledge of the *Atma*, will not specially go in search of God because they can see God wherever they are. May all good be unto you!

SUBBAMMA: Easwaramma, your house is not big enough to accommodate the devotees who throng to see Sathyam. Many devotees are standing outside, unable to get in. My house is more spacious; it can not only accommodate more devotees but is also very convenient for having *bhajans* and various other ceremonies. What do you think?

EASWARAMMA: As you say, Subbamma.

SUBBAMMA: Very good; shall I now take leave of you?

But after a few days, even Subbamma’s spacious house was not enough to accommodate the ever increasing number of Sathyam’s followers.

SUBBAMMA: Saying that your house is not spacious enough, we shifted the venue of the Thursday *bhajans* to my place. Now, even this house is not big enough! Day by day, the crowd of devotees is increasing!

EASWARAMMA: True Subbamma. When I see devotees worshipping Sathyam, I feel it is all due to the merit acquired by Him in earlier births. At the same time, I am scared by the jealousy of others. I don’t want any harm to

come to Him. Personally, I think it would be safer for Him to remain just my son, rather than the One who is Universally adored!

SUBBAMMA: Easwaramma, you need not have such fears. Sathyam is no ordinary boy as you seem to imagine. He is the gift of Lord Sathya Narayana, and cannot be harmed by any evil force whatsoever. I will make available some land I have near the Chitravathi River. Devotees can stay there and sing *bhajans*, while I take care of all the arrangements. Sathyam also can reside there. That will make it possible for Him to spend all His time with devotees.

EASWARAMMA: Subbamma, why are you so generous?

SUBBAMMA: Easwaramma, don't say that! Rather, it is my good fortune to know at least now that Sathyam who was born right before my eyes is verily God Himself! When you serve God, it is not called generosity! Easwaramma, it is my supreme good fortune to perform service to Sathyam!

EASWARAMMA: Subbamma, I am lost! I don't understand anything. All I want is that my child should not be separated from me!

SUBBAMMA: Don't we all feel pain? As the mother of One born for a special Mission and who is also the Master of the Aeon, you must be prepared to make some sacrifices. Worldly bonds are for the ordinary but not for One who has come with a Mission. Your Son is drawing the whole world to Him. Just as the waves of the entire ocean come to the shores, devotees from all over the world will throng to Sathyam. We must all be happy about it and not feel disturbed. Easwaramma, don't be afraid.

SATHYA:

*Evil thoughts bring misery,
While good thoughts bring joy.
But one who is free from thoughts
Enjoys total peace!
This is the Truth that Sai wishes to convey!*

A cloth is a combination of threads but if the threads are all removed, there is no cloth. In the same manner, if all thoughts are removed, there will be no mind! Human values latent in man will blossom only when there is a ceiling on desires. A person lacking in human values is not fit to be called a human being.

*If Sathya is abandoned,
It is equal to losing one's head;
If Dharma is given up,
It is equal to losing one's shoulders;
And lack of Shanti,
Is equal to having no stomach!
Prema is the basis for all the three!*

Love in thought is *Sathya*, and love in action is *Dharma*. If there is Love in us, there will also be peace.

Om Shanthi Shanti Shanthi Hi.

[To be continued]

MUSINGS ON AVATARS

Part 7

(Continued from the previous issue)

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Dear Readers, for 40 previous issues – from October 2004 to February 2008 - we brought you a spiritual feast in the form of the "Gita for Children" in a serialized form. Prior to that, we had started our first series entitled "Shirdi Sai – Parthi Sai" which is continuing till date. The "Gita for Children" series was taken from the book "Krishna - Arjuna Dialogue" authored by Prof. Venkataraman. As we concluded the final segment of this book in February 2008 issue, from March 2008, we started a new series on "Avatars" or Divine Incarnations. The articles in this series are actually adaptations of talks delivered recently on Radio Sai by Prof. G. Venkataraman, and are based on the book "Message of the Lord" authored by him a few years earlier. We hope H2H readers will relish the spiritual insights this series offers.

The last episode concluded with a description of a dice game in which the Pandavas lost everything and Draupadi was about to be humiliated publicly when Krishna's grace saved her. Following that, on Gandhari's advice, King Dhritarashtra gave back to the Pandavas the kingdom they had lost through gambling. But that did not mean that the Pandavas troubles were over. On the contrary, the dice game that ended disastrously was just the beginning. What happened next? Read on.

This scene in the Mahabharatha (the epic story of the Pandavas and the Kauravas), is deep with significance. It shows how even the clever and the righteous can, at critical times, lose their discrimination (as did Yudhishtira). It shows that even the learned and the wise sometimes turn a blind eye to grave misdeeds in society, shirking their duty to protest and give expression to their conscience (as did Bhishma, Drona and Kripa during the dice game that was described last time). Above all, it shows how when everything else seems lost, there is still the Lord, the last resort; and He never fails a loyal devotee.

God Immediately Answers a Heartfelt Prayer

Swami often describes the rescue of Draupadi by Krishna and then refers to a later personal meeting between the two of them when Draupadi asks, "O Krishna, what took You so long to come to my rescue?" To that Krishna replies, "Draupadi, you hailed me as *Dwarakavasi* [the One who lives in Dwaraka] and so I had to first rush to Dwaraka to make your words true. Then you addressed Me as *Mathuravasi* [the One who lives in Mathura] which made me rush to Mathura. With all this running around, I couldn't come quickly to your aid. Finally, you hailed Me as *Hridayavasi* [the One who dwells in the *Hridaya* or the heart]. At that point, I could rush immediately because no long distance travel was involved!" The point being made is simply that God is not here or there; He is present right in our hearts 24/7, and that really is where we must look for Him.

Barely had the Pandavas departed after that turbulent drama, than Duryodhana pounced upon his father for glibly gifting away what had been won with deep stratagem. Duryodhana said to his father: "The Pandavas were like wounded serpents and they would now be waiting to attack; and before that happens, they must be totally neutralised. The only way is to win the kingdom back from them with yet another game of dice and then banish them to the forest."

"Dice game again? Which fool would agree to that?" Dhritarashtra asked, to which Duryodhana replied, "Father you seem to forget that no matter what the circumstances, a person of royal blood can never refuse an invitation to a game of dice. That is his code of conduct and you know Yudhishtira is a stickler for observing the code." The weakling and the doting father that he was, Dhritarashtra yielded to his son's perverted arguments and Vidura was once again sent to invite the Pandavas.

Playing Dice with Fate

"Once bitten, twice shy", says the proverb. No matter what the code of etiquette, the Pandavas could, with justification, have refused the invitation for a second round but strangely, each one reconciled to it for a different reason. Bhima, for example, felt that this time by winning they could wipe out the ignominy of the former occasion.

And so it was that the second round of the dice game commenced, hardly before the wounds inflicted in the first had healed. This time, Sakuni changed the bets; the losing party would go away in exile to the forest for a period of twelve years, followed by one year of incognito existence. If during that one year period their identity is discovered, the whole penalty would have to be gone through again i.e., another twelve years in the forest followed by one year of incognito life. The deal was agreed to and the game commenced. Once again Sakuni cheated and in no time at all, Yudhishtira won for the Pandavas the thirteen-year hardship.

Soon after the Pandavas left for the forest, Vidura remonstrated with Dhritarashtra for being nose-led by his vile sons. In his heart Dhritarashtra knew that what Vidura said was correct but unable to stomach the truth, he ordered Vidura out, and Vidura departed gladly. But soon better sense prevailed on the blind king, for without Vidura, he was doubly blind. A messenger was sent to fetch Vidura, who, by this time, had joined the Pandavas; thus within a jiffy, Vidura was back to his thankless job of advising a king who was not only blind but deaf as well (to his sane advice, that is).

Krishna Joins His Beloved Pandavas

Meanwhile Krishna, who was busy in Dwaraka grappling with His own problems heard about the double debacle suffered by the Pandavas and rushed to the forest to commiserate with them. While many advocated immediate war, Yudhishtira was cool, firmly committed to the assurance given

earlier that the loser would serve a thirteen-year hardship. Draupadi who was still smarting under the humiliation she had suffered, asked Krishna with anguish: "O Krishna, my tormentors have gone scot-free while the great Pandava heroes are here in the forest. Is their might and prowess doomed to hibernation in this jungle? Why don't You speak out?" Visibly moved, Krishna replied, "My dear sister, listen to Me. Those who tormented you cannot go scot-free; on the contrary, they are doomed to miserable death in a bloody battle field. I can see it coming but you cannot. All I ask for from you is patience - that is all."

And so with much patience and fortitude, the Pandavas went through the twelve long years of hardship and difficulties, and of course, with it numerous experiences as well. Indraprastha, the kingdom they once ruled, now came under the control of the Kauravas and it was not clear if the Kauravas would return it at the end of the exile period. Therefore, in preparation for a possible war, Arjuna, on the advice of elders, withdrew for a while to the Himalayas to meditate on Siva, offer intense penance and seek the boon of divine weapons. Pleased with Arjuna's devotion, Siva in due course blessed him with an immensely powerful missile known as Pasupata.

One day during the exile period, Duryodhana and Karna got the idea of going to the forest Dvaitavana where the Pandavas were spending time so that they could personally see the suffering of the exiled ones, and gloat over it. But when the Kauravas went to Dvaitavana with their army and royal retinue, they faced obstruction from a Gandharva prince and a fight ensued. Curiously, in spite of their great strength, the Kauravas were worsted in the fight and were taken captive. Instead of seeing the Pandavas in trouble, Duryodhana was himself in difficulties, having been bound hand and foot! Some of the Kauravas who escaped capture ran to Yudhishtira to give him the news. And what did Yudhishtira do? He ordered Bhima and Arjuna to attack the Gandharvas and secure the release of Duryodhana! Bhima was aghast, and at first, flatly refused but Yudhishtira told him in compelling terms, "Bhima, I know how you feel but Kauravas are our cousins. One should not rejoice at the suffering of even one's worst enemy; that being the case, how can you exult on the suffering of your own cousin? That is not in conformity with *Dharma*." Though not fully convinced, Bhima and Arjuna yielded to their elder brother because when it came to adherence to *Dharma* there was no greater stickler! In no time at all, the Gandharvas were vanquished and the release of Duryodhana was secured. Ashamed and thoroughly humiliated, the Kauravas returned to Hastinapura, their mission having completely backfired.

Yudhishtira Wins the Lives of His Brothers

Yudhishtira's extraordinary commitment to *Dharma* is exemplified by an incident which took place during the exile. One day, while wandering in the forest, Yudhishtira became very thirsty and asked Nakula to fetch some water. Nakula searched and soon found a pool. Feeling thirsty himself, he thought he would first take a sip before taking water for his elder brother. Just then he heard a voice which said: "I am the Yaksha who is the Lord of this pool. Before you drink my water, you must first answer my questions; if you violate my

stipulation, you would fall dead." Nakula was so thirsty that he did not pay attention to the warning; he drank some water and promptly fell dead.

As Nakula did not return for quite a while, Yudhishtira sent Sahadeva to investigate and also get some water. It was the same story again; Sahadeva too violated the warning and fell dead. After this it was the turn of Bhima and Arjuna, and finally, thoroughly perplexed, Yudhishtira set out to investigate. He too reached the fatal pool and saw the corpses of his four brothers. Even as he was wondering as to what had happened, the voice sounded again with the usual caveat. Yudhishtira realised that all his brothers must have ignored the warning and learning from that experience, decided to answer the questions posed.

The questions from the so-called Lord of the pool followed in rapid fire.

"What makes the Sun to shine every day?"

Yudhishtira replied, "The power of *Brahman*."

"What rescues man in danger?"

"Courage."

"By what study does a man become wise?"

"Wisdom does not come from study but by association with the wise and the great."

And so on it went. Finally,

"What is happiness?"

"Character is happiness."

"What is that by abandoning which man becomes the beloved of all?"

"Pride."

"What is that which when lost leads to joy?"

"Anger."

"And, what is the greatest wonder in the world?"

"People believing they would live for ever, even though they see people dying everyday!"

Pleased, the voice said, "O Wise One, you may have one of your brothers back alive; I leave the choice to you. Which among the four do you want alive?" Without a moment's hesitation, Yudhishtira replied, "I want Nakula;

please restore him to life." The voice said, "This I shall gladly do but would you first tell me why you chose Nakula and not say Bhima or Arjuna?" To that Yudhishtira answered, "O Lord of the pool, my father had two wives - Kunti and Madri. I am the eldest son of Kunti, and Nakula is the eldest son of Madri. It was in the interest of natural justice that I asked for the restoration of Nakula, for in that manner both my mothers would have one surviving son each."

At this stage, the voice assumed a form and revealed itself; it was none other than Yama or Dharmaraja, the father of Yudhishtira. He said, "Son, I am mighty pleased with you and as a token of my happiness, I shall restore all your brothers to life. Only a few days remain for the completion of your twelve year exile. It will pass off smoothly and the thirteenth year also will pass by. You are a shining beacon of *Dharma* and one day you will reign as king supreme."

Finally came the thirteenth year which had to be spent incognito. For this purpose, assuming appropriate disguises, the Pandavas accompanied by Draupadi went to the court of King Virata and found suitable employment there.

One day towards the end of the incognito period Draupadi who was being continually harassed by a man called Kichaka complained to Bhima about her problem. Suitably enticing Kichaka to a secluded spot Bhima killed him after a fierce fight. This was no ordinary feat since Kichaka was a huge ruffian.

Word about this reached the Kauravas and they strongly suspected that Kichaka's death must have occurred at the hands of Bhima. Wanting to expose the disguise of the Pandavas and thus exile them for another thirteen years, they rushed to the kingdom of Virata and attacked it. A battle ensued in which Arjuna, though in disguise as a female, participated and the Kauravas were defeated. Duryodhana protested that he had seen through the disguise of the Pandavas, and that therefore they had to repeat their exile as per the original conditions. The Pandavas refused, insisting that by the time Duryodhana woke up, the exile period was actually over, a fact confirmed by Bhishma. Duryodhana refused to accept the contention, and there was tension in the air.

The big question in everyone's mind was: What would happen now? Though the Pandavas knew well the psychology of their Kaurava cousins, still the ever-peaceful Yudhishtira decided to try the olive branch by sending an emissary to the court of Dhritarashtra, seeking a peaceful return of Indraprastha which had been annexed by the Kauravas during the exile period. As was widely forecast, the emissary returned with empty hands.

Making the Right Choice

The war clouds now began to gather, and both camps began to line up allies in the event of an armed conflict. As a part of this exercise, both Duryodhana and Arjuna went to Dwaraka to seek Krishna's help. Fully aware that the two were coming, Krishna staged a little drama. Even as the two were arriving, He lay in His bed, pretending to be fast asleep. By the side of His head, there was placed a chair. Both Duryodhana and Arjuna being well known to Krishna had the right of free entry into Krishna's palace, right up to the bedroom.

Duryodhana arrived first, saw Krishna sleeping, parked himself in the empty chair, and waited for Krishna to wake up. Arjuna entered shortly thereafter, and he too saw that Krishna was sleeping. He was annoyed that Duryodhana had come ahead of him but there was nothing he could do about it. He decided that he too would wait for Krishna to wake up, and he stood standing near Krishna's feet, his hands joined in reverence.

Feeling that it was time to get on with the play, Krishna now pretended to wake up and since Arjuna was near His feet, chose to see him first and asked, "Hello Arjuna, nice to see you. When did you come?" Annoyed that Arjuna received the first attention, Duryodhana said, "Krishna, I too am here; in fact, I came first." With a smile on His face, Krishna said, "That may be true, but since I saw Arjuna first I am obliged to attend to him first. By the way, I know why both of you have come here. You are both preparing for war. As for Me, I am a man of peace. If you want Me, let Me make it clear that I would not lift any weapon nor fight. But if you wish, you can have My army and I don't mind if they fight. Now Arjuna, what will be your choice?" Without a moment's hesitation, Arjuna said, "Krishna, I want You, You and You alone; it does not matter if You will not take up arms." This was sweet music to the ears of Duryodhana who wanted Krishna's army rather than Krishna himself. In this manner, Krishna pleased both his visitors and each got what he deserved! And that, incidentally, was how Krishna ended up as Arjuna's charioteer in the great Kurukshetra war.

This scene too is full of inner significance for it portrays the two choices man has -to seek either worldly gifts from the Lord Almighty or to seek His Divine Grace i.e., *Preyas* or *Sreyas*. Almost invariably, the preference of man is for *Preyas*, rather than *Sreyas* even though it is well established that *Preyas* leads only to misery. Right from the time of Duryodhana, that lesson has still to be learnt!

Lord Krishna's Peace Offer goes Unheeded

As the war clouds got stronger, Dhritarashtra began to get scared. He therefore sent his close associate Sanjaya as his envoy to plead with the Pandavas to let bygones be bygones, live in peace bearing no animosity to the Kauravas and, incidentally also forget their claims to Indraprastha! Naturally, there were no takers in the Pandava camp for such an atrocious offer. As a counter measure, the Pandavas sent Krishna as their emissary to the court of Dhritarashtra. Presenting Himself before the blind king, Krishna said, "O King, the Pandavas are peace-loving people. They have fully completed their obligations following their defeat in the game of dice thirteen years ago. All they now ask for is their old kingdom. Please be wise enough to return their territory." Dhritarashtra was inclined to agree to Krishna's request but the ever-angry Duryodhana intervened and shouted, "No Indraprastha, no town, no village; not even five pinheads of land shall we give the Pandavas." Krishna returned empty handed (as He knew He would!); and the die was firmly cast - it now would be war.

Events moved swiftly, both sides now striving their best to line up as many supporters as possible. In accordance with the injunctions of war, the rules of combat, the place of fighting, the hours of fighting, etc., were all meticulously laid down and both sides swore total commitment to the observance of the rules. Thus it was that Kurukshetra was selected as the venue for the battle, and each day the fighting was to conclude at sunset.

Last Parlays Before the Battle Commences

On the opening day, just before the fighting actually commenced, Yudhishtira got down from his chariot and with folded hands walked towards the Kaurava ranks. Everyone was flabbergasted. Was Yudhishtira throwing in the towel and surrendering? No such thing! All that was happening was that Yudhishtira was going to pay his respects to elders like Bhishma, Kripa and Drona whom he shortly would have to face as adversaries. Was this all a big put on? No, on the contrary Yudhishtira took his duties to elders quite seriously. Thus when he approached Bhishma he reverentially bowed to him and said, "Grandsire, I offer my humble salutations to you and seek your pardon for daring to fight against you. As you well know, all this is ordained by fate and neither of us have any control over it. I seek your blessings and also the permission to begin the fight. And, please also advise us how we may conquer you!" That then is the sample of the etiquette of those times.

A few remarks about how Bhishma and a few others found themselves fighting on the side of the Kauravas. Bhishma, for example, never approved of the actions of either Dhritarashtra or Duryodhana, but having all along enjoyed in some sense their patronage, was committed to fight on the side of the Kauravas. Karna was another example. He had many wonderful qualities, apart from his martial skills. As a generous donor who gave freely to charities, Karna was unequalled, and many are the stories of extreme sacrifices made by him. In his heart of hearts, he knew that Duryodhana was pure evil and that all his actions were wrong. Yet, that same Duryodhana had, when others sneered at him as the lowly son of a lowly charioteer, conferred status by making him without as much as a second thought, the King of Anga. So loyalty compelled him to serve the cause of Duryodhana.

On the eve of the battle, Kunti made a secret visit to Karna and revealed to him that he was, in fact, her son and not that of Radheya. She pleaded with him to join the Pandava camp and promised that when victory was won, he and not Yudhishtira would be crowned the monarch. Karna was overjoyed to hear that he too was of royal lineage but declined his mother's offer. He said, "For me, loyalty overrides all other considerations. I am in no position to pass judgements over Duryodhana. He gave me shelter and support when none did and my duty is by his side, irrespective of his intrinsic qualities." Kunti then said, "In that case, please spare the lives of the Pandavas; others you may kill as per the rules of warfare." To that Karna replied, "Mother, I promise that I will cause no harm to four of the Pandavas but Arjuna is not in that list. Right from the beginning he has established himself as my sworn enemy and him I cannot spare even if he be my own brother. So it has to be either him or me. But mother, look at it this way; whether I die or Arjuna does, you will still have five

sons." "No Karna," Kunti replied, "your calculation is wrong for either way I lose."

Karna is a character who is not mentioned much and if he is, he is generally maligned. However, Swami rates him very highly and has spoken about him on many occasions. All that is reserved for the next episode!

Till then, all the best and may God be with you.

Lokaa Samasthaa Sukhino Bhavantu. Jai Sai Ram.

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

THE SWEET FLOW OF BHAGAVAN’S LOVE IN BOGODOHOVO

While a neighbouring superpower invades another former republic of the erstwhile USSR, waging a brutal war and destroying precious lives, the story in nearby Ukraine is of an invasion of a different kind. Here also, a little town called Bogodohovo recently came under siege but by an army of angels, who swept the region with the purest form of unadulterated love, compassion and kindness extraordinaire.

Motivated by Bhagavan Baba, the personification of selfless concern for humanity, a group of dedicated Sai doctors and volunteers travelled half way across the globe in mid 2008 from places such as the US and the UK to revive the Ukrainians’ faith in God, goodness and selflessness by providing them with the much needed medical help. But along the way, this band of Sai angels has also brightened thousands of depressed lives with their whole hearted and spontaneous love. So, when man was busy making war, God incarnate was spreading peace and love in the region. Here is how He did it.

“Bogodohovo” sounds similar to the Sanskrit word “Bhagavan”, isn’t it? Interestingly, “Bogo-Du-hovo” in the Ukrainian language too has an intrinsic divine connotation; it means “City belonging to the spirit of God”. And the present story of Sai Seva is all about how divine love and compassion overwhelmed this remote ‘God’s city’ tucked away in a rural corner of Ukraine.

Bogodohovo, which is seven hours from Kiev, the capital city of Ukraine, is actually an antithesis of Kiev. Kiev is home to many high-tech industries, higher education institutions, extensive infrastructure and a sophisticated system of public transport, including the Kiev Metro; Bogodohovo, on the other hand, is a sad picture of poverty, poor nutrition, pathetic infrastructure and very basic medical facilities. The 18,000 people of this city are ages behind the affluence and prosperity that Kiev stands for. The situation, in fact, is worse if one visited the outlying villages of this city where innocent and ignorant people suffer from a variety of ailments, major and minor, and have no clue about either the disease or the treatment.

Some had become blind and have been sightless for years; others suffered with serious cardiac complications, a third group consisted of children who were mentally and psychologically challenged at a very young age, and so on. While some of these pitiable conditions were irreversible, most of them could be corrected and cured with proper medical attention and guidance. Moved by the plight of these unfortunate rural folk, a group of Sai Volunteers flew from the USA and the UK to restore health, hope and happiness into their hitherto depressing lives.

Love Knows No Distance

The inspired group, led by Dr. Upadhyay, comprised of a broad skill mix of doctors with various specialities and a bunch of youth volunteers. Let us start this stirring tale from the very beginning – the story of how these doctors and volunteers arrived at Bogodohovo, which is really fascinating.

On June 28, 2008, three groups of doctors from the US and the UK were due to arrive from different places of the globe at Kiev Airport. This meant three different travel arrangements to get to the site of the medical camp which was 7 hours away! Or so it seemed...

What actually happened was that first the US team was delayed as their flight was cancelled. Next, the UK flight to Amsterdam too was running late because of which the group lost their connecting flight to Kiev, and as a result, landed at Kiev much later than scheduled. Lastly, the team arriving from Paris by another airline also landed 5 hours after its scheduled time.

Signs of Divine Help

The last minute hotchpotch in plan would have caused much chaos but for the hidden divine plan of the Lord. The cancellations and delays actually turned out to be to everyone's benefit as all three teams arrived at the Kiev Airport within 10-30 minutes of each other! This not only facilitated the transport arrangements for the hosts greatly, but also allowed the entire group to travel together as one closely-knit unit right from the start. "It was Swami's way of reinforcing unity among us right from day one! What a beautiful orchestration of events!" said a doctor from UK, jubilantly.

In fact, the members of this blessed team experienced many such coincidences, nay 'Saincidences', even before they started their journey to Bogodohovo. "The numbers in the amount paid as donation by the Sai Organisation to the medical camp added up to 9, the divine number. For us, this was an auspicious sign," said one of the Sai doctors, a paediatrician from UK. She had another interesting tale too. "I was trying to borrow a portable ultrasound machine so that we could offer screening facility to patients at the medical camp. I had made several attempts to get this machine, but without any luck. It was now the penultimate day of our departure and I was nowhere near getting this machine. I had only 20 minutes with me that day after which I had to attend a clinic.

Absolutely clueless, I finally made a fervent plea to the Lord: 'Swami, if You want us to take the ultrasound machine, please make the arrangements in 20 minutes.' Immediately after this, I walked up to try for the last time to borrow the ultrasound machine. And to my surprise, this time all things were in place and the concerned people willingly lent the USG machine! In just about 20 minutes, I had the machine in my hand from the hospital on loan! And I must add here that during our medical camp in Bogodohovo, we performed more than 300 ultrasounds on this special machine. On the basis of ultrasound tests, when we assured patients that their organs were normal or that they did

not have gall stones, it gave them so much relief. They returned feeling happy and healthy.”

The group, comprising of 19 doctors and 5 youth volunteers, felt the presence of the Lord every step of the way as they embarked on their noble endeavour. They were overwhelmed at the warm welcome they received first at Kiev and later at the medical camp site. But nothing could have prepared them for the overdose of love and affection that they were to receive next. More than two hundred volunteers (217 to be precise) had gathered at the site from Russia, Ukraine, Moldavia and Belarus much before their arrival. They had travelled long distances to offer their time and energy, and show solidarity with the noble aims of the camp. In reality, it seemed like it was their camp into which the team from UK and US had joined.

Heavenly Inspired Neurosurgeon

In fact, one of these volunteers was a qualified neurosurgeon. He had actually journeyed more than 1500 miles to participate in the medical camp. However, when he realised that there was little need for his discipline at the camp, he simply accepted it as God's will and was ready to assist in any other way. Therefore, he spent the next 7 days helping with transportation and lending his hand for doing building renovation work! His humility and sense of dedication inspired everyone in the camp.

Local People are Stunned

Sai Love pervaded the whole atmosphere and the group was overjoyed when the Mayor of Bogodohovo welcomed the group at a special civic ceremony and said, “I cannot believe that medical service is being offered absolutely free of charge.”

In fact, the recurring question from many patients was: “Is it really free?” Being new to Sai and His philosophy, it was difficult for them to accept that an international team of doctors would travel half way across the globe to care for their problems and treat them free of charge! Nothing like this had happened before. And the icing on the cake for them was the way the service was offered. They were overwhelmed with the love and genuine concern of the Sai volunteers.

One old lady who received free reading glasses was delighted. She said, “I always believed in angels but now I can see them!” There were two ophthalmologists and three optometrists who were exceptionally busy treating refraction and glaucoma. Another old lady had tears of joy when she was informed she did not have a cataract. Thinking that she needed an operation, the poor lady had in fact cut down on the food for her family to save enough for the procedure. When she was told not to worry about her eyes for another ten years at least, she was jubilant. “Now I can feed my family properly,” she exclaimed, with tears of gratitude.

There were countless such experiences of supreme joy for over 780 pairs of spectacles were dispensed in total and 750 pairs were donated to the local ophthalmologist for free dispensing in future.

Many Hands Make 'Sai Light' Work

The camp days for the doctors were nothing short of hectic. Their morning began with transport arriving at 6:30 a.m. to take them to the dining hall for a good breakfast of porridge and fruit. Then there was a group meeting with the Ukrainian and Russian coordinators who assisted in working out who would go in each team and to which village. The doctors were actually divided into 3 groups every morning with each group going to a different village.

Consultations began once they reached the specified areas. On the first day, more than 700 patients were examined and the numbers kept growing each day for the remaining four days. Over 6000 patients were attended to in the short span of five days!

There were two cardiologists and while they gave valuable advice on maintaining a healthy heart and explained techniques for weight reduction, there was one occupational therapist who demonstrated healthy exercises to patients suffering from diabetes and hypertension. The ENT surgeon, screened the patients and distributed free hearing aids to the needy. The recipients were overjoyed at being able to hear again!

The group also had two paediatricians and a gynaecologist who were immensely useful to the people. Together, they spent quality time advising young mothers and reassuring the ones who were distressed. For instance, one day, a young mother of three with severe gynaecological problems stepped into the clinic. Earlier, she had been told to have surgery, but being a farm worker, she knew she would never be able to pay for the procedure. However, the camp's gynaecologist offered her another safer option. This was still an expensive alternative, but the cost of this was borne entirely by the Sai Organisation. The lady was so overwhelmed with the love and care she received that tears started streaming down her cheeks. She said, "I know all of you believe in God. When I prayed to God today I felt confident that angels had come to save me. I knew I would be fine." Then, she misread the Dr. Sri Bala's name in the badge and gleefully said, "Thank you, Dr. Baba!" She was, of course, right! The way Swami was working through His instruments and making His presence felt was wonderful. Evidently, He alone was the sole doer.

When this lady's son had come to the camp the previous day for an eye check-up, he returned home and told his mother that he felt he was in a temple of healing and not in a medical clinic.

The team had doctors with many other specialities too. There were three general physicians, two psychiatrists and an equal number of physiotherapists who were extremely busy diagnosing and counselling the young and the old.

The physiotherapists on the team were invaluable in their advice regarding a little infant with paralysed R Erb's palsy (paralysis of Right arm) to ensure a swift recovery. They also advised patients with chronic pain various simple exercises to strengthen their muscles. The occupational therapist was very busy giving out valuable rehabilitation advice to stroke patients and exercises for weight reduction for patients who suffered from diabetes and hypertension. Health promotion and awareness was the key to their problems.

Dr. Pabani, the pain specialist, used many of his own devices and acupuncture to alleviate patients with chronic pain in their backs and joints. His special machine ***Thermo scan*** was actually able to pick up the actual site of pain on a computerised programme. The patients finally were very relieved because they felt finally someone believed their pain! For the first time in years these poor folk were pain free. Obviously, their joy knew no bounds.

On the second day of their camp, the group made a heart-rending visit to an orphanage of 140 disturbed children, who had been traumatised by abuse suffered earlier in their lives. While the psychiatrists offered them valuable advice and boosted their morale, the paediatricians screened them for medical illnesses and imparted important health education. The little orphans touched the volunteers' hearts deeply, and so, they went out of their way to do everything possible to add more life and colour to their lives. Saddened by the plight of a disabled child in the orphanage, the volunteers gifted him a wheelchair.

Meeting a Kindred Soul

There was another person too, who moved the volunteers beyond words. He was a local Ukrainian doctor who for the last 25 years had covered four villages on a bicycle to help the patients in his own way, with limited resources at his disposal. Now he was 61, and still cycled for hours to do whatever he could for the rural folk. Beyond the effort he put in physically and professionally, everyday he prayed sincerely for his needy patients. But when he met the Sai group, he felt his prayers were being answered. One of the volunteers spontaneously offered to gift him a motorcycle; the joy of the good old Samaritan knew no bounds. The group also equipped him with a portable instrument to measure blood pressure. For him, it was unexpected blessings from the Almighty; he was thrilled, one could see it in his tear-filled eyes.

In this manner every day was a celebration of His love and grace for every member of the group. They would return to their guest house by 7 p.m. and had their dinner together at 7.30 p.m. After this, they settled down for group meetings in which they shared their experiences of the day and began to plan for the next day. By the time the discussions concluded, it was always 11 p.m.

It was not only valuable medical service that the group carried out in Bogodohovo; in fact, treating the sick was only one part of the story. While the group of international doctors got busy in treating their patients, there was a silent undercurrent of love spreading in other ways too. The rest of the

volunteers in the group engaged in a variety of other activities to make the lives of these rural folks better. The Sai workers distributed clothes, footwear and even nutrition packets to several households, pensioners and disabled members of the town. Besides toys and games for the children, the volunteers also lent sporting equipment to the local boarding school and even helped set up a computer class.

The Volunteers' Impeccable Spirit

In fact, there was much more happening. There was a '**Cleaning Brigade**' for whom no job was mean or inferior. They cleaned the bathrooms of the schools and the city with their bare hands while their throats were incessantly singing His glories. One lady, indeed, had an incense stick burning in the toilet, while they worked because "If Swami were to visit us now it should smell nice!" she said sweetly. And the people who did this work were all qualified and dignified, but their humility and dedication was to be seen to be believed. One of them was actually the famous soprano singer Elena Petruchenko.

Besides this, a group of volunteers also had formed a '**Building Brigade**' who worked tirelessly to repair and replace plumbing in a local school. They painted walls, renovated bathrooms, did the electrical fittings, corrected the sewage system, and repaired and replaced wash basins, taps, pipes, fences, etc. They even redid an old lady's door and broken bed. She had tears of joy in her eyes when she saw her house being redone, and said, "I knew that angels existed but I am seeing them nowour dear Sai angels." These acts of genuine selfless service not only touched the villagers but also stupefied the village authorities as they had never witnessed anything like this before. And as if these were not enough, the group also made anew the library and gymnasium of schools there.

This group of volunteers also visited an old people's home. Moved at the dismal facilities existing there, they provided them with a microwave and refrigerator. The senior citizens were so overcome with gratitude that they exclaimed: "No one has ever come to see us - let alone do anything for us with so much love!" In a matter of 4 days, the hairdresser in this group lovingly provided haircuts to 335 people!

Mention must also be made of the most important '**Kitchen Brigade**' who did stalwart service for the entire week bringing a smile to everyone's face at every meal. The youngest helper was 16 years while the oldest 60! They cooked fresh and tasty meals for 260 people everyday and they were the first people to get to work every day; their day started as early as 3 a.m.! So passionate they were about their work that they even painted a mural on a wall depicting Divine Mother Earth - 'Annapoorna'.

While all these voluntary service was going on, there was one family who actually stole everybody's heart. The father, Ruslan, who is the Sathya Sai Coordinator in the Ukraine Sathya Sai Organisation, gave his all helping the doctors, while his wife worked as the chief cook sleeping hardly a few hours

every night. And their two wonderful daughters, Nancy and Macha, served tirelessly as **interpreters** who offered the camp vital cross-cultural communication. In fact, they have been part of every medical camp held in Russia and neighbouring countries in the last few years.

This family, truly, overtook all with their dedication and selfless service. As without them and the other interpreters the medical camp would never have been a success. They were the group’s ears and voice, giving out essential health information which could save a life or a limb. They endured long hours of translation without taking a break, and at the same time, the arduous job of a three-way conversation did not ever stop or affect their charming smiles.

The youngest interpreter in the group was only 11 years! Even she would stay up until midnight translating often without a meal, as she felt so overjoyed just doing Swami’s work! In short, it was the love, patience and understanding shown by every translator that was pivotal to the successful execution of the camp, and each of them did a splendid job.

There were more volunteers groups. One was the ‘**Transport Brigade**’ who used their own vehicles, some having travelled more than 1000 miles. They ensured that doctors moved the long distances from one village to another without any difficulty and the camps functioned on time. “But the most heartening aspect about them was their eternal cheerfulness,” said the paediatrician from UK.

Vivek Sharma, a high school student from USA, who was one of the volunteers at the camp, said, "I received firsthand experience to serve another country's people. This is the first trip I had with the Sai organisation to serve. I was really amazed by the commitment of the Sai brothers and sisters when it comes to helping the less fortunate ones. I worked in a variety of places, including in the orphanage where I befriended many of the children living there. What I learned through this experience is to see God in everyone, and help them in whatever way I can because I realised that I was actually helping myself too in the process."

More than the difference that they brought in the lives of people in Bogodohovo, the satisfaction and sense of fulfilment that filled their hearts during the days of the camp was something which every member cherishes in their heart forever. And it is for this reason that every time there is such an opportunity to offer selfless service, they grab it with both their hands.

Bringing Joy to All Through a Variety Show

Apart from the thrill of the service, there were other joys too during this trip. On the final day of the camp, all the 200 plus volunteers and doctors had a variety entertainment show open to all to celebrate the glory of their Lord. Beautiful sounds of music from various faiths merged into one beautiful melody. They sang and danced as an offering to Him and shared His love gladly.

Ms. Elena Petruchenko, the soprano singer who was actually cleaning toilets for six days prior to the concert, charmed the entire audience with her soulful rendering. The pure love for Swami that exuded that evening was something extraordinary. The oldest volunteer in the group, Olga, played the accordion, and she has been a regular member for the last ten such camps. During her first camp, she had her eyes checked and it was found that she had a cataract which required surgery. But there was no way she could afford the operation, so she asked Dr. Upadhyay for medicine instead. The doctor told her that surgery was inevitable, but she could have vibhuti in the meantime and pray to Swami. In an amazing act of divine grace, a year later she was back to serve and was completely cataract free!

It is such instances of Divine love and compassion that every individual's heart was so filled with which made the incredible happen in a remote corner of Ukraine. It was a week that every volunteer, doctor and patient remembers with delight and love. It was Swami working, loving and serving through them, and as if to confirm this, on the final day of their visit, as the team was leaving at 5.30 a.m., the morning sky in Bogodohovo was covered with a beautiful round rainbow. For the Sai workers from different parts of the globe, it was an unforgettable symbol of unity, purity and selfless love that had come a full circle during the camp, and an endorsement from the source of supreme bliss their Lord, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, of their efforts to emulate a tiny speck of His infinite Love.

PRASHANTI DIARY

July 28, 2008 – Programme by USA Devotees

On July 28, 2008, the devotees from USA, Region 10, had the permission to put up their programme in front of Swami. They were all seated in the marble block by 3:00 p.m. itself. A sea of blue scarves occupied the most coveted spots of the Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami arrived for *darshan* in the chair and took the round along the ladies side. In between the marble block, He turned and moved towards the stage. He took mini rounds of the portico and the Bhajan Hall and came out onto the stage at 5:25 p.m. There were many offerings to Him - flowers, cards and booklets. Swami, sweetly and smilingly blessed everything.

The programme was based on the concept of the Lord's descent in the world for man's ascent. Like always, the traditional "opener's" slot was allotted to Lord Ganesha. The episode wherein the monkeys led by Lord Rama build a bridge to Sri Lanka was depicted by children as songs went on in the background. Moving into another age, the next episode depicted the pranks of Lord Krishna and His *leelas* (Divine Sport) among the cowherd boys and girls. A traditional Sufi dance set to the lively rhythms of a *qawwali* was next and it focused on the grandeur of Allah. The next Avatar to make the appearance was Lord Buddha and the vanquishing of the negative emotions that he embodied. The fifth theme was on Jesus Christ and his all encompassing Love. And finally, just like how all roads led to Rome in the past, all paths lead to Sai today. The final few songs were on the glory of Swami and His projects for the welfare of mankind.

Towards the end of their programme, all the children who had acted in the various tableaux came forward and sat down. Swami called a photographer and told him to take a snap of all the children seated down. He then moved down the stage and sat amidst them too. All the children surrounded Him and the picture was complete. He moved back on stage as the children kept touching His feet and seeking blessings, and then they began *bhajans*. After the *bhajans* went on for a while, Swami received *aarthi* and retired to Yajur Mandir at 6:40 p.m.

July 31, 2008 – Music Programme by Devotees from UK

Thursdays, in the recent past, had become days of great joy at Puttaparthi, especially among the gents. With Swami frequently choosing to take a shortcut to the interview room immediately after the ladies' side, the gents' devotees were generally starved for close *darshan*. For them, Thursdays became very important - not only because of the fact that Swami has since childhood assigned special importance to it, but also because the primary school children come for *darshan* on these days. As when the children come the gap between the ladies and gents blocks is filled up by them, thus increasing the likelihood of Swami taking a full round. On July 31, when Swami came out at 4:15 p.m., He did exactly that as He took a complete round of the ladies and gents side on the chair, leaving everyone happy.

Very often, it is said, "God is everywhere. All we need is a pure heart and a clean mind to feel Him." Be it just a statement or the Truth, ask anyone who has just had the privilege of seeing Swami from up close, and you will get the answer. The thrill that shoots through one's being at being so close to His Being is something out of the world! His *darshan* seems to fill the entire body-mind-soul apparatus with sublime joy and pure bliss. That effect seems more divine and profound especially when one has been starved of it for many days! It is not simply that the sages and saints, who were ever immersed in the divine, became dumbstruck into ecstatic silence at the mere sight of that same Divine. When the Lord descends as an Avatar, His *darshan* is something that one must experience.

On July 31, Swami was all "randomness" if we can give another name for His famed "uncertainty"! He moved towards the interview room, but then moved along the upper portico and interacted with the devotees there. He also materialised a gold chain for one of them. Moving down, He went towards the primary school block. He blessed chocolates to be distributed to all the children and this raised the excitement levels slightly in the whole Mandir, and to extreme levels in the children's portion of it. As the chocolates were distributed, another treat too was readied and choco-cream biscuits soon followed suit, only that this time the beneficiaries were everyone and not the children alone. Swami slowly traveled down the slope along the primary school students. He collected letters and blessed the kids as their Veda chanting reached "sonic boom" levels. He retraced the same path and granted the children a bonus *darshan*.

Through the veranda, He moved out to the gent's side and this time gave the privileged 'double' to the Higher Secondary School and Institute students. As He neared the area where the birthday boys were seated, He told them in a joking and admonishing tone, "Aye! I already blessed you all!" He moved to the interview room and then blessed the group from the United Kingdom to put up the musical programme they had prepared.

Quickly, the marble block was cleared and the group to perform was seated. Hurriedly, a lamp to be lit by Swami was prepared. However, when Swami came, He straightaway sat facing the devotees and asked for the programme to begin. The group leader went up to Swami and offered a rose to mark the beginning of the programme. Starting with "Brahmaanandam Parama Sukhadam", the group sang five songs in different styles and moods. The final song was a powerful one that had the catch phrase, "onward, forward, Godward". As they completed their five songs, Swami told them to sing *bhajans*. The youth from the United Kingdom had come on this visit to Puttaparthi as part of their Sadhana Camp. They began *bhajans* and after a while, Swami asked for *aarthi* and then retired to Yajur Mandir.

Aug 3rd, 2008 – Drama by Devotees from Kuwait

The central area in the Sai Kulwant Hall on August 3, 2008 was occupied by devotees from Kuwait and they had been granted permission by Swami the

previous day to stage a programme that evening. For the devotees from Kuwait, it was a very significant pilgrimage. They had come prepared with a programme called, "Prayer" with a prayer for an opportunity to put it up in His divine presence. Days had passed and nothing seemed to happen. Swami too had avoided the gents' side for some time. And on August 2, when Swami Himself went to them, enquired about the programme and granted permission, they experienced the joy of praying and the thrill of it being answered at the right time by the Lord!

At about 4:40 p.m. Swami came out for *darshan* rounds. As He moved in the chair and neared the Kuwait devotees, He asked, "Drama?" They were all very happy as they nodded in agreement. Swami, with a lot of interest, watched the huge screen they had put up as the backdrop and moved over to the gents' side. Waves of devotees rose to catch a glimpse of the smiling, orange-robed, lovable and adorable form that was gliding through them. The balconies of the East Prashanti block were also bursting at the seams with old ladies looking at their Sai Krishna. Smiling and granting *Abhayahasta*, Swami moved on. With His scented curls of jet black hair dancing to some ethereal melody, red lips sporting a divine all-knowing smile and twinkling eyes with the unique ability to thrill and fill every person with joy on whom they fall upon - seeing Swami is a joy sublime!

Completing the rounds, Swami came onstage and as soon as He arrived, He called one of the ladies seated in the front and asked her whether the drama was first or was there a music programme prior to that. She said that both were together but things would go as Swami wanted. One of the most common answers that people give Swami is, "Swami as you will/wish." On deeper introspection, we realize the absolute needlessness of that statement. Anything that happens is 100% in tune with what He has willed and no amount of effort from us can change that. Only complete surrender to Him can change things, and that too because **He** will do anything for the one who surrenders completely to Him. But still, that statement is made very frequently and Swami too seems pleased when it is stated thus. More than informing Swami, that statement serves to remind each one of us that everything is going on beautifully well and nothing can ever go wrong because whatever is happening is in accordance to His Will and His Will alone!

As Swami sat on the stage, a few devotees from Kuwait came up to Him with flowers, cards and booklets as offerings. Swami received of all them and blessed the devotees. After that, Swami sat for a while listening to the Veda chanting. Then, He went into the interview room for a brief interval, and returned to the stage. And then, He asked them to start their programme. The presentation was a skit cum music programme that was many shades different from the standard presentations made in Swami's presence.

The storyline was very simple. There is a devout Muslim searching a good match for his daughter. In his daily interactions with the shopkeeper of the local grocery store, he discovers the power of prayer. The episode narrated here is of a very pious but poor lady who begs for food at the store. When the shopkeeper mockingly tells her that he would give her provisions equivalent to

the weight of her shopping list, she takes the name of Allah and places the list on the scales. The scales get "tipped" so heavily in favour of the one taking the Lord's name that no amount of provisions seems to move the weighing balance! With the Lord's name, nothing is impossible. And so with the Lord's name on his lips, the devout Muslim is able to find a good match for his daughter. That lad is also devout and hardworking, and helps a music teacher, Rammohan, to run his music classes. Finally, there were simple dances and songs in praise of Swami.

The striking aspects of the presentation were twofold - firstly, it was a very simple story which everyone could relate to; the problem portrayed, the questions asked and the line of thinking employed were so similar to the slice of life of any common man. Secondly, there were quite a few songs embedded in the play which were sung live and were very lively too! The coordination and synchronization between the ladies and gents on either side of the "play" were very harmonious and the counters sung were also very effective.

As the programme concluded, Swami called a little girl in a Muslim dress to come on the stage. He materialized a gold chain for her and put it lovingly around her neck. He also agreed to move down and pose for group photos. As He posed for pictures, He spoke to the children asking them where they had come from and what their names were. Some answered and many did not even open their mouths. But well, can they be blamed? Swami's presence is so overawing that one is muted into a mind-free moment! As Swami was moving back on the stage in the chair, one of the wheels seemed to trip and slip out of the ramp. There was a collective gasp but Swami seemed to just shrug it off. He just said, "Ay" to the person moving the chair more because of the 'gasp' he had caused among the devotees rather than because of the actual act. Swami never bothers about Himself at all. And His thoughts and feelings are always on the devotees. Even a slightest discomfort to them, makes Him very uncomfortable. If we really want Swami to be comfortable always, let us vow to remain comfortable and fine always! His joy lies in our joy and comfort.

Swami then permitted them to sing *bhajans*. Very creatively and nicely, they sang what we call as the "chain bhajans" - one *bhajan* threaded into the other! After the singing went on for about 15 minutes, Swami blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed and then left after receiving *aarthi*.

August 4, 2008 – Speeches by Devotees from UK

August 4, 2008 at Puttaparthi was quite cloudy as a moisture laden breeze swept through refreshing the otherwise sweltering afternoon. Slowly, more and more clouds gathered and the day grew cooler and cooler. Early evening, the message was that Swami had permitted the youth from United Kingdom to sit in front and have a short programme. The thick clouds soon gave way and a torrential downpour began. As the rain lashed on the Sai Kulwant Hall roof, the movements near Yajur Mandir indicated that Swami was about to arrive.

Swami came in the car and after a short *darshan* round, came on stage. He enquired about the speakers for the afternoon. After listening to the Veda chanting for a short while, He went into the interview room.

Swami came out after a while and asked for the speeches to begin. The first speaker was an elderly lady devotee by name Ms. Josephine. She was helped to the stage and as she slowly walked, Swami was all compassion and love for her. He asked for the mike and podium to be immediately placed and then blessed her to begin. She seemed to be completely drenched in His love and overwhelmed at the wonderful opportunity. She spoke only for four minutes wherein she stated that all she wanted to convey was that everyone must have full faith in Swami and that was enough! As she concluded with "Sai Ram", Swami seemed surprised. He asked her smilingly and jokingly as to why her speech was so short. Blessing her, Swami asked for a chair to be placed for her to sit.

The next speaker was Mr. Ajit Popat. In his usual inimitable style he began with a *shloka* saluting the Lord. Centering his talk on the theme of "onward, forward, Godward", he spoke on a plethora of subjects ranging from faith and devotion to realizing the Self as the Swami within. He concluded after a little above 35 minutes, and then Swami patted him lovingly for the effort. Then, He asked for *bhajans* to begin. As per His command, the first *bhajan* was "Sri Raghunandana" with the *aalaap*. The next one began with the *aalaap*, "Allahu Akbar". As the singer traveled through the highs and extra highs of the opening tune, Swami was visibly moved. He even told Mr. Popat sitting beside him that the boy was singing at a high pitch. Seeing Swami so moved, the youth sitting in front of Him too began shedding tears.

The Love that devotees have for Swami is so unique and complete, just like His Love for them. A smile on His face lights every other face similarly. When a tear wells up in His eye, there is a free flow of tears in all the thousands of eyes watching Him. He reflects the emotions and feelings of the devotees, and they in their turn, reflect His emotions and feelings. Indeed, beautiful is this unique relationship. As the *bhajan* reached its crescendo and the zenith of its rhythm, Swami asked for *aarathi* and retired to Yajur Mandir.

August 5, 2008 – Music Programme by Youth from Himachal Pradesh

The marbled blocks in the Mandir on August 5 wore a festive look. It had been occupied by the youth from Himachal Pradesh, clad in cream-coloured *sherwanis* with a maroon *dupatta*. They were seated neatly in four rows and behind them was another group of men who were also in red scarves and from the same state. The ladies side also had devotees from Himachal Pradesh sitting in a separate area. They were to present a musical entitled "Hrudaya Tarang" - a collection of Himachali folk songs and *qawwalis*.

Swami arrived in the chair and as He neared the devotees in the centre of the hall, He asked, "Himachal Pradesh?" As they nodded and answered in all eagerness, Swami's face too seemed to light up. In fact, twice He asked the devotees whether they were from Himachal Pradesh. He went into the

interview room for a short while and then came outside. He sat listening for the Veda chanting for a while and soon asked for the youth to begin their programme. After the customary offering of flower to Swami, the programme began.

The third row of youth went up on their knees while the fourth row stood up. The first song was in praise of Lord Shiva, the emperor of the snow covered kingdoms of Kailash! The second song was a song of dedication by the youth of Himachal Pradesh which is also called *Dev Bhoomi* (Land of the Lord). Both the songs had a wonderful and soulful *aalaap* which was sung so beautifully by the lead singer playing the harmonium. Just as the *aalaap* filled the soul with sweetness and sublimity, once the actual song began, it enveloped the mind with melody and the body with energy, bold and beautiful! The thirst for God was almost visible on the faces of the youth as they moved in perfect rhythm. Their harmonious movements made the entire area look like a colourful and gently fluttering brocade. Their body language was such that it looked like with His name on their lips and the deep contemplation of His form in their hearts, they were promising to spread His message with their sterling character and exemplary conduct.

The third song was a *qawwali* full of heartfelt prayers to the Lord for spiritual upliftment in the sojourn of life through the path leading to Puttaparthi, the abode of the avatar of the age. "Lord, we are not in search of worldly companions or fellow travelers in this journey, but only you, who are our only solace and refuge", was the repeated refrain of the song. As they let their feelings flow in a free torrent towards Him, Swami reciprocated with sweet smiles. The Lord throughout was clapping gently on His lap and had a rhythmic sway. The fourth song was a *qawwali* of total surrender to Swami. The final song was on the glory of Sai as He marches ahead inspiring millions to strive for the welfare and emancipation of the world. As they completed, Swami asked them to sing one more song. They immediately began another song, not in the original "schedule".

As they were singing, Swami asked the student sitting beside Him, "What is the meaning of that line?" The answer came, "Swami, they want to be at your Lotus feet always!" Swami smiled and nodded. At many points during the programme, Swami kept speaking a few words here and there. One was not able to make out the exact lines He spoke about, but anyone could easily see that He seemed to be enjoying Himself and was very happy with the songs (and with the "dances" too). As the programme concluded, Swami called the lead singer who was playing the harmonium and created a gold chain with a pendant for him. The youth playing the *tabla* came up to Swami and offered gratitude to Swami on behalf of all the youth. Swami asked for special sweets to be brought and distributed to all the participants. Then, He called Mr. S. V. Giri, the former Vice Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai University, and told him to distribute white safari pieces to all of the participants. He also ensured that all of them had received the sweets and the cloth pieces. The concern was very evident, as He told a student to distribute in the far corners too and asked another student to find out personally whether everyone had received the gifts of Grace.

Then, turning around, Swami said, "Get *prasadam*." Vibhuti packets were brought from the interview room and distributed to the participants. They sought permission to sing *bhajans* and they were granted that. After a few *bhajans*, Swami asked for the students to sing a *bhajan*. They began with the *aalaap*, "Allahu Akbar", a multi-faith *bhajan*. Swami was drawn into it and He too began to lip the words of the song. What a supreme joy it is to see Swami singing to your "tunes"! It is an overwhelming and humbling feeling at the same time! As that *bhajan* concluded, Swami asked for *aarthi*. A few youth from Himachal Pradesh moved up to Swami and spoke to Him. Swami patted each one of them lovingly on their cheeks. One of them seemed to be following Christ's dictum. When Swami patted him on one cheek, he had showed his other cheek too! Swami obliged him by lovingly patting his other cheek also. Blessing everyone Swami left for Yajur Mandir. Meanwhile, it was announced that a special farewell ceremony for the Vice Chancellor of the Institute had been arranged by Swami in the Poorna Chandra Auditorium at 10 a.m. the next day.

August 6, 2008 – Vice Chancellor Changeover Ceremony

August 6, 2008 was the scheduled farewell for the Vice Chancellor (VC) of the Sri Sathya Sai University and also the welcome ceremony for the 8th VC. The Poornachandra Auditorium was the hub of activity as it was being readied for the big day after a lull lasting months. This was the first programme being held in the auditorium after the Convocation drama the previous year on November 22! The dais had been set up grandly and there were four chairs in the centre. But all these lay hidden from the public eye as the whole stage had been curtained.

At about 9:50 a.m., the huge curtains began to part. It gave the feeling of the huge doors of some grand temple opening to reveal the deity. The 'veil' lifted and the Lord was seen. Two huge banners stating, "Saa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye", adorned the stage. Swami took His place in the centre and then Mr. Anil Gokak and his wife came on stage and took their places beside Him. Finally, Prof. Vishwanath Pandit, the Vice chancellor to be, also took his place. The programme began with Mr. Gokak and his wife being garlanded by the principals of the Prashanti Nilayam and Anantapur campuses respectively. Then, Mr. Rangarajan, a lecturer from the Business School, made the opening remarks and expressed gratitude to Mr. Gokak. Recounting the instances where he had shown a lot of care and concern for students just as Swami wants all His administrators to be, the speaker spoke of the glowing qualities of Mr. Gokak. Then, he invited former VC, Mr. S. V. Giri to address the assembly, after which he requested Mr. Anil Gokak to say a few words.

Mr. Giri spoke of the glory of the story of the Institute. He too spoke of the sterling qualities of Mr. Anil Gokak as well as his illustrious father, Mr. V. K. Gokak, the first Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University. Then, he praised the noble virtues of Prof. Vishwanath Pandit. There was applause as he concluded and Mr. Gokak rose to speak. He was overwhelmed by the nature of the ceremony being accorded to him. He recounted how his father had

experienced Swami's divinity and had come to Him. He was almost in tears as he gratefully narrated Swami's love that had and has been bountiful on his family. He said that wherever he may be, he was sure that Swami would be with him always and that he would work for Him forever. He concluded his talk and Swami asked for the "Suvarna kankanam" (golden bracelets). First, Swami put the bracelets on Mrs. Gokak, and then calling Mr. Gokak, Swami placed bracelets onto both his wrists and blessed him profusely. After that, Swami rose to speak. There was a joyous applause and Swami began with a poem on the glory of Bharat (India). Here is a detailed summary of His discourse:

Bharatiyas are like the elephant. They do not have a measure of their own strength. An elephant is very powerful, but on man's command, it moves and sits. That is because it is not aware of its might. So too, the Bharatiyas do not realize the might they contain.

There is a lot of affluence today. But does anyone have peace of mind? Money gives worldly comforts but not spiritual bliss. Where does happiness come from? Bhajana Bina Sukh Shanti Nahi... (Swami sings the first line). Sing the Lord's name. Today, people study a lot and gain knowledge to a great extent. Of what use is it if you remain the same mean person and do not realize who you truly are? What you need today is the inculcation of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa. The six vices of desire, anger, greed, attachment, pride and jealousy are not human at all. You are all experiencing animal qualities today. That is why in spite of all the wealth, there is so much of
restlessness.

Move, therefore, from the realms of education to that of educare. It means to bring out what is latent within. It is different from education which is external and worldly. There are so many colleges and professors in the world. Why is it that there is no peace and happiness? Peace is missing in the world because education is being used only for a living. Educare is related to the soul. The soul or Atma is everywhere, in the hearts of all beings. Remember, man is nothing but the Divine in human form. Do not get deluded by the body which is just a case. The body is a case for holding the five values.

Sathya has no form and it is invisible. So too is the case with Dharma, Shanti and Prema. But though one cannot see Prema, one can feel the Love. And once one feels this love, there is no scope for hatred, anger or violence. Then automatically Ahimsa comes. Forgetting these five values, you keep running behind so many things. Keep telling yourself always, "I am a man, not an animal." You might have won great titles, amassed wealth and might even be a scholar, but only the five values will safeguard and protect you. Alexander the great, conquering most of the world, landed in India. Crossing the Indus, he had a massive heart attack. The doctors said that He would not live long. So he expressed his desire, "When I am taken in the funeral, let my hands be outstretched. Let the world see that the great Alexander, who conquered everything, is taking back nothing with him." Keep this Truth firmly in mind. Whoever you may be, you will return empty handed. You cannot take away even a grain of sand with you.

The inner feelings are most important. The Gayathri mantra prays for illumination of the intellect. (Swami chanted the Gayathri mantra here). Even chanting the Aumkara is enough. That is educare. Acquire that and do not crave only for the secular education.

I knew Gokak even before he came here. He has spent so much time and learnt so much from me. Whenever I visited their home, they would take me to the Puja room. V. K. Gokak was the first VC. Students today are doing very well and are happy because of the good deeds of Gokak. He would follow Swami's instructions fully. Anil Gokak is the worthy son of a worthy father. He has completed three years and he retires in a worldly sense. But, both he and his wife, are always with me. Wherever they may go, in their hearts they have Swami and the interests of the Institute. All their feelings are for me. He is always there for me and I am always there for him. I and Gokak are one and the same. And that is the Truth. Everything in the creation is nothing but the Creator. All are one, be alike to everyone. All acts, big and small, happen in accordance to God's will.

The sun is always present. Even in the night, the sun exists, only that it is on the other side. Days and nights pass but the sun remains. So too is the case with God. He is above you, below you, in you and around you. Keep chanting His name. Never ever feel that you are away from God. If you are so, how is it that you are living? You and God are one. Lord Shiva is Ardhanarishwara - having both the male and female aspects. So man and woman too are Shiva. Do not have the God-devotee feeling. You are also God and God is you.

Do not feel that Gokak is leaving us. He is living with us! If we remove 'I' and 'mine', then you will realize there is nothing like accepting or relinquishing a post. When you say that, "This is my body," you are different from the body. The sun is reflected in the thousand pots filled with water. But the sun is one. So too, when you empty the water of feelings that lead to duality, only One remains. God is One. Today, Gokak gives the post to Vishwanath Pandit who will be the new Vice Chancellor from tomorrow. Different people come and go, but it is only their bodies. They are always with Swami. You are all always with Swami and there is no coming or going. Do your duty well. This duty establishes a relationship with God, so duty is God. Gokak has discharged his duty extremely well.

All the eminent personalities who come and those who have come in the past too belong to Swami. I bring such noble and good people here for our students. Our students are very good. There is no comparison between them and the other students. They have no hatred or anger. The alumni have all come up in life in the spirit of Love. Always keep spirituality at the head of everything. If the head remains fine, everything else is fine. Gather knowledge from all the lectures you hear. Do not distinguish and compare between lectures. Receive everything with Love. Whatever is thought, said or done must be in harmony. The heart, word and deed must be one. That is Educare. Your heart is your textbook. Follow it and you will be good students and good people. Good people become God's people.

Swami then concluded the discourse. He asked Prof. Vishwanath Pandit to speak a few words and the distinguished professor did exactly that. Stating that being a man of few words, he had fewer words on such an overwhelming occasion, the professor thanked his predecessor for all the wonderful works done and prayed to Swami to use him as an instrument. He emphasized repeatedly that he is only an instrument in the Divine hands. As he concluded, Swami very lovingly blessed him and then *arti* began. At the same time, Swami blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all. He sat for the complete *arthi* on stage and personally gave the *prasadam* to both the ex-VC and the next-VC! As He moved backstage, the new VC took *padanamaskar*. It was 12:15 p.m. as Swami left.

In the evening, Swami had agreed for a music programme by Ms. Sunanda Sharma. It was being placed at the lotus feet as part of the Puttaparthi Pilgrimage by the youth of Himachal Pradesh. They were all seated in the centre of Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami arrived close to 5 p.m. and taking a detour between the youth from Himachal Pradesh, He moved into the interview room. After a brief stay there, He came out. He sighted one of the youth sitting in the first row and asked him, "You were playing the *dholak* last time, right?" The boy was really touched and thrilled; he nodded in affirmative. Swami also said, "That small boy was sitting in that corner last time. Now he is in the third line there." After a while of Veda chanting, Swami asked for the programme to begin.

Ms. Sunanda Sharma, an MA in Indian classical music from the Punjab University, went onstage and offered a rose to Swami. Taking *namaskar*, she returned and began the presentation with three *Aumkaras*. The first song, a *Chota Khayal* actually, was in raag Madhuvanti entitled, "Sai Gun Gao". She showed what nine years of rigorous training under an able guru in the Gurushishya tradition can do to groom one's talent. Her performance was scintillating to say the least. She continued in the same vein as she sang "Bhool Jaave Sab Dukhve" (I forget all my sorrows). Then she shifted over to singing Meera *bhajans*. She enchanted the audience with "Jogiya Tu Kabhahu Miloge" in raag Sindhubhairavi and then with another Meera *bhajan* in raag Kaapi. As she concluded, Swami called the 'Dholak player' and told him to find out how many songs she had still.

When He was told that she had sung her quota, He asked, "One more song?" She was overjoyed and she responded with a song that seeks refuge at His lotus feet to cross the ocean of life. As she completed her rendition, Swami called her to the stage and materialised a gold chain for her. She was so happy and excited that she ran to the stage with the *tambura* still in her hand. It brought to one's mind the images of saint Mirabai running to her beloved Krishna. Swami was all smiles as He quickly placed the chain around her neck. Another lady came walking to the front and Swami told her to sit down. The singer told Swami, "My mother Swami." Swami said, "I know. And that is father..." He pointed to the person playing the harmonium and the parents were so very happy.

Swami then asked the students to start *bhajans*. As it went on, Swami asked the youth girls whether they were ready to sing as a group. So one *bhajan* later, they were asked to sing. Swami, meanwhile, called the artists who accompanied the singer and gifted them clothes and *paadanamaskar*. He called the singer too and gave her a wonderful saree. The youth girls from Himachal Pradesh sang two songs, one on Lord Ganesha and the other on the mother goddess. Next, Swami, the divine orchestrator that He is, asked the students to continue. As *bhajans* went on in fast speed, Swami asked for *prasadam* to be distributed. Chocolates went around sweetening the mouths after the ears had been sweetened by the musical feast. On the ladies side, the people distributing the chocolates to the youth, got back the box half full stating that everyone had received *prasadam*. Swami said, "Take it back and finish it. It's yours!" And through that simple act, all understood what it is to give wholly, the way God always does - no restrictions. In Hindi it is said, "Jab Bhagawan Deta hai to chappar faad kar deta hai" which somewhat translates into the famous English quote, "When it rains, it showers!" After two more *bhajans*, Swami received *aarthi* and retired to Yajur Mandir at about 6:30 p.m.

August 10, 2008 – Video Show with Swami and Drama by Vizianagaram Devotees

Swami had decided to gift His dear students with a wonderful opportunity on August 10, the Sunday! He had invited all to the Poornachandra Auditorium to view a film entitled, "Living with God is True Education" which had been prepared by the students working at the Prashanti Digital Studios. The Auditorium began filling at 3:00 p.m. and by 3:30, it was occupied by all the students of the University as well as the Higher Secondary School. At about 3:50 p.m., a hush fell over the entire gathering as Swami entered the hall from the stage. The students had lined the paths as usual and Swami slowly moved to His place in the centre. As Swami entered the hall, the musical CD entitled, "Bhaavanjali" which Swami had graciously blessed for release, was being played. Swami and the guests who had come with Him sat in their respective places. Swami was surrounded by boys and how apt it was! Living and sitting with God, the students were watching, "Living with God is true education"!

The new Vice Chancellor, Prof. Vishwanath Pandit, welcomed everyone and spoke a few words expressing his gratitude to Swami as he also introduced the film to all the boys. He said that it was indeed wonderful to see a film made by the students, of the students and for the students with Swami, on Swami and around Swami! The show then began and all the lights went out. Swami was attention personified as the storyline moved on along Swami's philosophy of education. It showed how Swami's University combined the best of modern education with the glorious culture of the *Gurukula* system of education. The documentary traced the history of how Swami literally put together bricks and bonded them with Love to raise the massive edifices of Educare in Puttaparthi, Anantapur and Brindavan at Bangalore. Swami was quite nostalgic as the events that led Him to build the hostel in Brindavan right next to His bungalow were recounted. He became emotional as former students, now well settled in various professions, related how Swami would

personally take care of every aspect of their lives, and how they would manage everything in the hostel and college as in self-rule, for in Swami's institutions The Self really ruled!

When a former student, now a teacher in the University, recalled an incident where Swami miraculously made the sweet filling enter into the hollows of the wheat dough fried in oil, Swami pointed and said, "That is Ravikumar!" The videos of the Sports meet where Swami was almost tumbling in laughter and joy made everyone clap as they were thrilled reliving those lovely moments. Memories of Kodaikanal and Trayee sessions captured on film also left indelible imprints in the hearts of all watching. Swami was at many times recollecting the people involved, the incidents and events, and narrating them to the Vice Chancellor. It was an experience that thrilled everyone present. As one viewer put it, "As you see Swami toiling, as You watch Him laughing and thinking for your welfare, as You see Him excited and grim on your cause, something deep inside your heart sprouts back to life....your tears would water it and the strength of relationship endows it a will to sustain it."

At the point when, Mr. Indreshwar, the grandson of the Rajmata, narrated how none of the students were even in the billionth worthy of what Swami was showering on all, Swami said, "Stop! We will go now!" It was a very profound moment. Swami said that the devotees from Vijaynagar with the drama were waiting. But it was a perfect and beautiful spot to leave everyone in the hall lost in deep introspection. As the film was stopped, the students who had prepared a card for putting up a drama on August 15th went to Swami. The Lord interacted with the students for quite some time, and then, began to move towards the stage. All the students moved to Him like bees surrounding a lotus. The kind Lord smiled and blessed everyone on the way and then moved from the auditorium towards Sai Kulwant Hall where all the devotees from Vizainagaram were waiting for Him eagerly.

Swami took a turn in the central marble block after 'inspecting' all the children involved in the drama as they sat in front of the backdrop. He came on the stage and asked for the program to begin. The children accompanied by an adult from both the ladies and gents side went up to Him with cards and roses. As Swami blessed them, a group of people advanced to the stage with a big silver lamp and a Shivalingam. Swami lit the lamp and blessed the Shivalingam. Like a sweet child, He picked the silver snake that lay coiled around the lingam and then placed it back. As the devotees returned to their place, the drama to be staged was introduced.

The drama featured the story of Mallamamba, a great devotee of Lord Rama, from the Rayalaseema district. Her father writes a *shatakam* (hundred stanzas) but is refused entry into the temple to offer to the Lord as he belongs to a lower caste. Mallamma speaks strongly to the guards and stuns them to silence. But as always, might becomes right and both father and daughter are thrown out of the temple. With her intense devotion and prayers to Lord Rama, Mallamma forces the Lord to appear before her, and Rama Himself blesses her to write the Ramayana in her native tongue. She thus composes the Ramayana in Telugu. She goes back to the temple and the guards feel

that she must be punished for her audacity. But she is rescued by none other than Tenali Ramakrishna, the minister and jester for the king Krishnadevaraya. Being a great poet himself, Ramakrishna is floored by Mallamamba's work. He personally informs the king, and soon, the king too appreciates and gets her work published; her effort is finally recognised. Mallamamba eventually, lost with Rama's name on her lips and His beautiful form in her heart, gives up the ghost. The drama was interspersed with lovely songs and dances by the Bala Vikas children.

As the drama concluded, Swami moved down from the stage. He created a golden chain for the devotee Mallamamba! He also got a wonderful blue saree and gifted it to her. He presented all the other girls with beautiful sarees. As they crowded and almost mobbed around Him, sweetly He kept telling them, "I will give all of you. I will give all." He, then, personally distributed white cloth pieces to all the boys. At the same time, accepted letters from many, blessed all of them, and finally, returned to the stage. Next, He asked for *bhajans* to be sung and blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed to all. After 4-5 *bhajans*, Swami received *aarathi* and retired to Yajur Mandir.

August 13, 2008

Every day spent in the presence of the Lord is something special to be remembered. Every day and in fact every moment, the Lord touches hearts, cleanses minds and uplifts spirits. On occasions when we get 'lucky' we see, hear or atleast get to know how the dear Lord did these things. This Wednesday, turned out to be special not because Swami did anything that He does not always do, but because anyone with a little alertness could observe and admire what He did!

Swami came for darshan at about 4:05 pm. The students' blocks appeared a little barren, what with the boys taking time off to practice for a drama to be put up in His presence the next day. Swami moved slowly through the ladies section of the hall and then as He neared the central area, thousands of fingers on the gents side were crossed as all watched in anticipation whether Swami would proceed straight or take the now famous "square cut" detour. The sigh of joy and relief was almost audible as Swami moved through the central area into the gents side. He collected letters and blessed the ones assembled. He spoke to the youth members from West Bengal who had assembled. HE blessed the programme that they had come ready with. Moving through the students, He blessed some of the boys holding trays and also collected letters from the boys. Then, Swami moved into the interview room after blessing Sri Rasagothra who was seated on a chair in the portico.

After a few minutes, Swami came out and to the stage. He sat there as the Veda chanting went on. He called the boys who were holding trays. He blessed them by showering the sacred akshatha grains on their heads. To one student who went up, He said, "I blessed you in the lines right?" Another boy was so engrossed in Him and lost in the joy of receiving the 'rice shower' that he forgot that he had a letter for Him in the tray. Swami Himself reminded him to give the letter! He blessed about 14 students thus. Then He saw two

boys seated with a tray full of "sacred threads". He called them and blessed them too. After a few more minutes, He went via the interview room to the ladies side. He moved slowly through them, speaking to many of them, giving padanamaskar and taking letters. He came once again towards the central blocks. But then, He asked to go back to where the youth from Bengal were seated. He spoke to them for some time and then even created a gold chain for one of the ladies. Then moving slowly along all the ladies seated on the mandir side also, Swami went into the interview room. Bhajans began at 5:10 pm and Aarthi was taken at 6:00pm.

August 14, 2008 – Independence Day Programme by Students

India and Pakistan, countries which were Siamese twins at birth, were separated by a political cesarean operation. And so, it happens that while India celebrates its rebirth as a free nation on the 15th of August every year, its separated twin, Pakistan, does so on the 14th of the same month. Whatever be the date, it is indeed in "august" company that the celebrations occur! August 15, 2008 in Prasanthi Nilayam had both celebrations, of the National Independence and the Varalakshmi Vratam. Swami never allows anyone to go disappointed. And so, Swami had instructed His students to put up their traditional 1-day *drama* on the 14th evening itself so that the very elaborate preparations that had gone into the Vratam could continue into fruition the next day.

The stage was set and all the boys in their costumes were seated in the Bhajan Hall. Swami moved along the lines as He came out for *darshan*, and then as He reached the central block, He looked admiringly at the simple yet elegant backdrop that had been constructed with the Indian tricolour on it. He cut through the central area and moved straight into the Bhajan Hall. That is where all the actors were waiting. Swami seemed to be fascinated by their good and colourful costumes. And like a child, He was so happy seeing the 'various colours' of the boys! He was 'introduced' to Gandhiji, Subash Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh. He looked at a bearded person sitting nearby and asked him what he was doing. He turned out to be Harishchandra; his wife, Chandramati, too was nearby in a blue saree! Swami was also very happy to see Krishna and Arjuna figure in the scheme of things. He enquired into the duration of the programme. "One hour, Swami," was the answer. Similarly, Vasishtha and Vishwamitra were introduced to Him. Swami blessed all the actors and told them that He would soon be out to witness their programme.

As per His word, He soon came out and asked for the Veda chanting to give way to the programme. Krishna and Arjuna came up to Him and offered roses. Swami appeared very touched seeing Krishna in all splendour. The programme started with the *Sootradhaari* or compere introducing the *drama*. Then all of a sudden, he asked, "Why are you proud to be an Indian?" Everyone was taken by surprise. A few tense moments passed when it seemed that no one wanted to voice an answer! Then a hand went up and a student rose and said, "There are many reasons why I am proud to be an Indian. But the greatest and the most heartfelt is because God has taken birth here over and over again through the ages!" The crowd burst into a joyful

applause and Swami was very touched. He called the student and told him to announce that the programme was being done by the 2nd year post graduate boys and he did as asked. The programme continued with another student, a boy from the 8th standard getting up and stating that he too was proud to be with the avatar and for the reason that Bharat has such a glorious culture. Swami was deeply touched to see the fire in the belly of that child.

The *drama* was weaved into a fine brocade of a story by the threads of little known individual patriots who gave their all for the sake of *Poorna Swaraj* (complete freedom) alongside the lives of two young men who dedicate their lives for the freedom struggle under the leadership of the Mahatma Gandhi. They rise against the British non-violently, trusting the power of their immortal spirit rather than relying on the strength of the mortal body. They receive the blows rained by the British joyfully knowing that each blow that seemed to crush their body actually developed their resolve to be free into an indomitable and unbreakable one. They go to jail and there too experience the joy of unity and oneness as people of all religions and strata in society rub shoulders, united in the common cause of freeing Mother India from the fetters of foreign rule. Gandhiji motivates them by his mere words which are laced with Truth.

The episode of Sathya Harishchandra was depicted very aptly at this point. Being a king, Harishchandra is reduced to a poor undertaker at the cemetery. His legendary adherence to Truth is seen as he refuses to be bound by bodily attachments and bury his own son for free. His wife pleads and the king's heart bleeds. But he remains firm in his resolve to be on the path of Truth. As Swami saw the episode of Harishchandra, He became very emotional. It seemed as if His heart too bled and tears were shed at the memory of a person who always adhered to the path of truth and righteousness. Especially when Chandramati, the wife, pleaded for the son, the divine mother that He is, Swami felt the pangs of another mother's heart.

When the protagonist of the play loses his son to police brutality, he is a broken man. With tears he goes to his Guru, Sri Aurobindo. His brother who is also a comrade is there and he is just unable to understand why people meekly receive blows and think that it is bravery to be non-violent. Did not Lord Krishna in the Bhagwad Gita urge Arjuna to rise in arms? The Guru clears all the doubts by taking both the disciples through the Bhagavad Gita. The Krishna Arjuna dialogue ensues and message becomes very clear. Krishna, though apparently urged Arjuna to wage war, wanted him to actually give up body attachment. And war was the means of doing it then, for Arjuna did not want to fight because he thought he was killing his own people. Non-violence was the means used now for the revolutionaries wanted to fight because they thought they were killing enemies! Whatever be the means, the end must be to annihilate body consciousness and then alone can one be truly free.

Towards the end, the heroes, Gandhiji, Bhagat Singh and Subash Chandra Bose made their brief but very inspiring appearances. Patriotic songs were liberally sprinkled all over the *drama* and all the singing was being done live. Rather than using recorded tracks, the boys wanted to get immersed in the

feelings of the day and occasion, and sing the songs live. It had the desired effect as each song touched the people in some deep recess of the heart. There were no spectators or audience on the day as all felt one with the feelings of patriotism and true love being depicted at the centre. The *drama* concluded with all the students coming forward in the crescent formation. Then, in military style, one by one, they all stepped out of line, stated loudly and proudly what the *Bharata Bhagya Vidhata*, Swami, had done for them and then stepped back in line. As this concluded, it was so clear for all in the hall that if at all there is a true patriot, then He sat right before them robed in the saffron of sacrifice! This final portion elicited a lot of applause from everyone.

Swami called all the actors to Him. He was very happy and congratulated everyone. A 'Muslim' from the *drama* was called onstage and Swami spoke a few words with him. He however commented that the Bhagavad Gita was the greatest treasure from India and more time should have been spent on dilating on its teachings. He, then, moved down to the performance area to grant the students the privilege of group photos with Him. He materialised a beautiful and thick gold chain for the student who played the role of Krishna.

A point to be noted here is that Swami always seems to gift those actors who do positive roles, however small their actual roles may be. It is not that He is not rewarding talent and making a bias or anything of that sort. The Lord believes that the only way to spread goodness and 'Godness' in the world is by embodying those qualities. Whenever the students put up a *drama* in front of Him, they involve themselves deeply in their roles so that they can do their best. It is but natural that the ones who get so involved in the roles that are divine, Krishna in this case, really embody that divine spirit, even if it is for a short duration. Swami rewards that noble effort and feeling.

Swami accepted all the letters the boys had to offer. He moved back on stage slowly and then very patiently and lovingly posed for group photos with all the boys. He Himself called on the groups. "Krishna and Arjuna", "Bose and Gandhi", "Harishchandra and Chandramati", "the sepoys", "the red clothes sepoys" (British soldiers), and so on. He would call like this and they would go on stage to pose for photographs with Him. Then, He blessed the lush red apples to be distributed to one and all. As if that were not enough, He personally distributed watches to each and every member of the 130 strong team that had made the presentation. As this distribution went on, each student interacted with Swami in his own way and Swami responded to every one of them and made them feel special. One of the students gave a golden ring to Swami and requested Him to put it on his finger. Swami smiled and obliged. All the students prayed that Swami visit the hostel and Swami said, "I will come". Then Swami asked for *bhajans* to be sung as He continued to distribute watches ensuring that He missed no one. The *bhajans* began and after 5-10 minutes of vociferous and enthused singing, Swami received *aarathi*. It was past 7:00 p.m. when He retired to Yajur Mandir.

August 15, 2008 – Vara Lakshmi Vratam Celebrations

The completion of sixty years is a very spiritual event in the life of a person as per ancient Indian traditions. It is celebrated as the "Shashti Poorthi." It signifies the fact that a person has completed all his/her earthly duties and from now on, the focus would be God and God alone. It is an event that marks the watershed in the life of any person. And India on August 15, 2008, turned 60 as a free and independent nation! What greater fortune could have befallen this nation, for while everyone turns Godward only as they turn 60, God had turned towards her ever since her birth and also when She turned 60! As if symbolizing this Godward turn for Mother India, as everyone awoke to "life and freedom", in the words of Pandit Nehru, Puttaparthi awoke to the celebration and worship of the Mother in the form of the Varalakshmi Vratam! It is very significant that this Vratam (vow) is one that is done only by the ladies and it has very spiritual connotations. The fact that this vow was performed in the divine presence on the occasion of independence day as Mother India completed her 60th birthday was in itself thrilling and goose bumps erupted on the being of anyone who realized the supreme significance.

The whole Sai Kulwant Hall resembled a bedecked bride awaiting her Lord! The stage had been set and a small *pandal* had been erected to house the presiding deity, Lakshmi. All the ladies participating in the *pooja* were seated neatly in rows on both the ladies and gents side of the Kulwant Hall. Swami came out after 9:30 a.m. He moved along the lines of the ladies, all dressed up in pink, granting *darshan*. There was the gap in the centre but that day Swami said that He wanted to go on and complete a full *darshan* round. The students were in one corner of the hall and Swami moved there too. After completing the round fully, Swami moved onto the stage. There, He lit the lamp to mark the auspicious beginning of the worship. The Veda chanting was told to subside and the *pooja* began. Swami sat for a while as the worship went on, and then moved into the interview room. Five minutes later, He was out again and began a second round of "rounds" starting with the ladies side. He slowly moved along the lines of the worshipping ladies and blessed a few of them too by sprinkling the holy *akshatha* grains. He moved around the entire gathering and surely there wasn't even a single woman who could complain of not being able to see Swami from close quarters.

As Swami went on these rounds, the *pooja* continued. The various aspects of Lakshmi were worshipped and mantras chanted - some by everyone and others only by the priests. Swami slowly returned to the stage and sat there witnessing the rituals. The story behind the worship and the inner significance also was explained by the chief priest. The event concluded with the women exchanging gifts with the feeling that they were welcoming and presenting to the Goddess Herself. As holy threads were tied on the wrists, Swami blessed the conclusion of the worship. He then spoke to and blessed the priests. *Prasadam* was blessed to be distributed to everyone and as the distribution went on, Swami asked the priest to chant a few special Sama Veda mantras. He chanted, or rather sang, them slowly and well. Swami swayed to those

tunes! After that was completed, He blessed the priests once more and then left after receiving *aarathi*.

In the evening, there was a scheduled programme by Mrs. Sunitha. She is a renowned playback singer, anchor and dubbing artist who has won many awards at various levels. The stage was set by way of a wonderful blue carpet in the central marble block. The artists were ready and Swami came for *darshan* rounds. He took a complete round and then moved into the interview room. He soon came out and asked for the concert to begin. She sang many light devotional songs and most of them were in Telugu. She was lost in the joy and feelings that aroused in her as she sang and Swami too was very happy listening to her rendering. She was accompanied by a keyboard, *tabla*, *veena*, tambourine and *mridangam*. After she completed her planned quota of 6-7 songs, Swami, asked her to sing a few more. She sang one more and when Swami asked her to sing another, she seemed so very thrilled and happy. She told Swami that the song she was about to sing was one that matched exactly to what she was feeling right then. She also sang a Meera *bhajan*. She, finally, concluded with Swami's bhajan, "Giridhara Naagara Kunja Vihaari" which everyone followed.

Swami called her to the stage and created a gold chain for her. He also gifted silk sarees to her and safari pieces to her accompanying artists. He also blessed her husband who came up the side stage. He had many words of encouragement for the singer, and He, very lovingly, blessed her. He seemed to be advising the husband; He blessed him too and then each of the accompanying artists also had their share of interaction with Him. As they returned to their places, Swami asked for the boys to sing *bhajans*. Two *bhajans* with *aalaap* were sung and everyone including the artists followed with great fervour. As the *bhajans* concluded, Swami called one of the students and asked him to sing a song. He sang the Carnatic song, "Dinakara Shubhakara" with all its intricacies. The singer artist of the evening, Mrs. Sunitha, herself was lost in appreciation of the boy's singing. After he completed, Swami told her that from a young age itself the boy had been practising and that he was a student in the University. She seemed very happy and pleased for she too had begun her music training at a young age of three.

Prasadam was blessed to be distributed to all and Swami received *aarathi*. Swami sat through the whole *aarathi* and at the end raised both His hands in blessings and benediction. It was 7:00 p.m. as He retired into Yajur Mandir.

August 16, 2008 – Programme by West Bengal Sai Youth

The youth from West Bengal had come prepared with a drama to present in front of Bhagavan. The Lord had graciously permitted them to stage it on August 16, 2008. The 'privileged' marble blocks were all empty and there was a backdrop that had been erected. The 'youthful' prayer had been on for a few days now and Swami had showered special love on them. In fact, on August 13, it seemed, He had made special *darshan* rounds only for their sake.

Swami arrived in the chair and moved into the interview room after the rounds. He came out briefly and sat listening to the Vedas. However, He went in again and the chanting continued. It was about 5 p.m. when He finally decided that the programme must begin. As presented in the introductory brochure, the drama about to be staged was a "depiction of how the divine energy of Love, when translated into action at an individual level in the form of selfless service to humanity can bring about the transformation in society." Swami called the main coordinator and asked for the performance to begin. The chanting came to a halt and the pre-recorded audio filled the air.

The story was of a Sai Youth, Vinay, who is strongly committed to values and adheres to them in all situations. He sacrifices personal gains and benefits to safeguard them. He refuses to be a part of bribery and corruption, and even quits jobs though it means severe financial stress for him and his family. The company he finally works for plans to relocate a village and build a factory in that particular area. That village happens to be the one in which Vinay does Grama Seva undertaken by the Sathya Sai Seva Organisations. Not wanting to be a part of that relocation, Vinay quits again. But when the heads of the company see the wonderful work being done in the villages, they are inspired. They are overwhelmed by the power inherent in Love. They understand that what they thought would be good for the villagers, was not actually something that they wanted. And it was here that one felt the true meaning of Love.

If Love has to be defined in one word, that word would be "freedom". It is not a great binding force, but the greatest liberating force. And Love expresses itself by giving the power of choice to the loved one, even if that choice is apparently used for something that may not be so good for that being. Towards the end of the drama, as is the case in any drama - on the auditorium stage or in the stage of life - Vinay's associates are transformed seeing his selflessness and dedication. Vinay humbly attributes all of it to his Master, Sathya Sai Baba. He also explains the great gift - the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, which Bhagavan has gifted mankind for redeeming itself.

The lead role was played by an alumnus of the University. As soon as he came on stage, Swami recognised him as a student. He also said, "That boy sings very well. He has a very good voice", during the course of the drama when the protagonist sang. There was also a scene of the traditional "white" and "red" robed selves which are a part of every human that pull him towards them whenever he is caught between the horns of a dilemma. But this scene was done so realistically and powerfully, that everyone, including Swami, seemed to feel the pangs of dilemma and doubt, as the "angel" and "devil" argued forcefully and in rapid succession. In the final scene, the hero shared the stage with more than 20 characters, some dancing, others speaking and a few others miming. But all the attention and glory seemed focused entirely on Vinay as he simply stole the show with a burst of superlative acting topping his sterling performance till then.

As the *drama* concluded, Swami called "Vinay" to the main stage and materialised a golden bracelet for him. He also asked him about his stay in Puttaparthi and the date of his departure. Swami, then, personally distributed

Safari cloth pieces to all the participants. Then, moving down the stage, He posed with them for group photos. Accepting letters from whomsoever had one and granting *padanamaskar* to anyone who wanted, Swami slowly returned to the stage. Still, He, somehow, did not seem satisfied! He went into the interview room and came out with many boxes. Opening one of them, He displayed a photo frame with an embedded digital clock, the screen of which would light up green at the press of a button. Swami, in His sweet childlike manner, showed all the boys how to "enlighten" their "time" in the simplest manner by pressing a button. He, again, personally distributed these to all the members of the *drama*, including the sets boys and the helping youth members. He also spoke to some of them as He gave them the gifts. To one youth, He asked out of the blue, "Where do you work?" He answered. The Swami said, "Not much pay...how much?" He said, "Swami, 800." Swami blessed him and sent him back. That boy was really thrilled.

Next, Swami asked for *bhajans* to begin. As the singing went on, one of the photographers showed Swami copies of the group pictures that had just been taken. Swami was very happy and held up the pictures for all to see saying, "Your picture is here!" He called the hero and presented the photos to him. After that, blessing the *prasadam* to be distributed to everyone, Swami received *aarthi* and retired.

August 22, 2008 – Drama by Vishakapatnam devotees

Last two years devotees seem to be coming in huge numbers to Puttaparthi. It is not that devotees were less in numbers anytime before, it is just that now they come as groups. The concept of unity seems to be getting stronger with each passing day. On August 22, for instance, a 2500 strong contingent had arrived from Vishakapatnam, and had also been permitted to put up their programme that evening. From His side, Swami too encourages group *sadhana*. Even physically, He seems to give more attention when the devotees are in groups. He speaks to the group, gives them opportunities to present their programmes and distributes gifts of grace. Very subtly but surely the message sent across is - "Unity is strength; Unity is divinity."

Swami arrived at about 4:10 p.m. and took a straight path to the interview room. The stage was all set for the *drama* to begin. The actual *drama* began, however, at only 5:15 p.m. But in the hour that passed by, any absorbed observer could not have helped but notice the two other dramas going on - one of *bhakti* and the other of *Karma*. The hall was packed and all the devotees with yellow scarves sat in prayer and devotion waiting for the Lord to come. It was a hot evening. As the popular fact about Puttaparthi goes, "There are three seasons in Puttaparthi - hot, hotter and hottest!" So though the wrath of the summer had passed by, it is still hot, at times, in Puttaparthi, with the humidity too being high, it being a monsoon season. Giving relief to the *bhakti* of the devotees was the *Karma* of the selfless sevadal volunteers as they went about relentlessly supplying ambrosial and cool drinking water to them. This silent *Yajna* went on continuously as many a parched throat was slaked with nectarine water. It was symbolic of all that Swami has achieved

through His mammoth projects - injecting into His people the enthusiasm for energetic service; the softness of heart to be touched by suffering of any kind.

Swami came out at about 5:05 p.m. and after listening to the Vedic chants for a while, asked them to stop and beckoned the Vishakapatnam group to begin the programme. The office bearers first symbolically offered the programme unto His feet. A silver lamp made its way up the stage and soon it was lit by the Lord. This is another practise that has gained ground especially among the different districts of Andhra Pradesh. A lamp is lit by Swami at Puttaparthi and its "light" is taken back to the respective places signifying Swami's entry into their homelands. And so, it was only after the lamp was lit and *Padukas* blessed that the actual participants moved up to Swami and offered flowers. Soon the *drama* began.

It opened with Karnam Subamma calling out to Krishna and little Sathya responding to her asking her why she had called. He reminds her of the wonderful Brindavan days that He has come to recreate - those days of *leelas* when He as Krishna had danced with the gopikas. Then too, like now, He was the favourite of everyone. All wanted to spend time with Him and no one felt their day complete without Him being a part of it. As a tiny tot, Krishna showed Mother Yasoda that the entire Universe is in Him - the same boon that the little Sathya bestowed on Subbamma. The episode of Krishna merrily dancing on the hoods of the vicious serpent Kaliya as He subdued him was wonderfully depicted and the episode of Swami swallowing the poisoned vadas, and in turn consuming the hatred and anger of people who tried to poison Him was brought up as a comparison. Krishna also performs the miracle of lifting the mountain Govardhana to spare the people of Gokulam, who had placed all their faith in Him, from the ire of Lord Indra. When Subbamma asks little Sathya whether He would do a similar thing even now, He replies, "Then I lifted only one mountain - symbolic of achieving the impossible. This time, I shall do many more." He then allows her a sneak peek into the future where He accomplishes "lifting the Govardhanas" of health care, educare and socio-care.

Throughout the drama, Swami was very moved and it appeared as if He was reminded of the Love that exists between Him and Subamma, and that which exists between Him and Yashoda, if there is any difference between them, that is! He seemed overwhelmed on many occasions, and here and there kept nostalgically remembering the episodes and even told some of them to the people by His side. The crowning moment for the *drama* came towards the end. Both Subamma and Yashoda express their desires to see their dear little ones gently swinging in a *jhoola*. At this point both Krishna and Sathya came to Swami and pleaded with Him to fulfill that desire! Swami agreed and as the final dance was on itself, Swami moved down from the stage and went near the big swing that had been placed in the centre of the performance area. The dancers went about merrily dancing till Swami told them to stop and pose with Him by His side.

And so, all the children came crowding around. Slowly all the people associated with the drama also came to Swami. They surrounded Him from all

sides as the flashes were fired and tapes rolled. Most of the children began to break down into uncontrollable tears. There were expressions of Love and uncontrollable joy. The urge to fall full at His feet was also uncontrollable. In short, everything about the final formation and photo session was uncontrollable! And that is how it is with the Lord - everything beyond limits and boundaries! Swami created two gold chains simultaneously and gifted one to Krishna and the other to Subbamma. He was surrounded on all sides by the children and the young ones seemed to be everywhere. And everyone seemed to have only one objective - to fall at His feet. Soon, Swami waded out of the surging waves of children, and as He moved towards the stage, He asked for sarees and white safari pieces. He gifted two beautiful sarees to Yashoda and Subbamma. He also asked for sarees to be distributed to all the other children. For the boys' side, He gave T-shirts to all the kids and to the elder boys, He gifted Safari pieces. In the meanwhile, He also sent word for Krishna and Sathya. He told Krishna, "Call your mother also." The innocent 'Krishna' instead of calling 'Yasoda', called her mother from the audience. And the mother of Sathya also came to Swami in the same fashion. Swami posed for a picture with them. The mothers broke down and almost lay at His feet. Swami told them to rise and blessed them.

Swami continued the giving with pens that were also brought out. To many of the children, He Himself distributed. After that was done, Swami returned to the stage. Everyone was so happy and Swami was the only reason for that. Swami said that the *drama* was very well scripted and presented. After a short visit to the interview room, Swami received *aarthi* and retired for the evening.

August 23, 2008 – Programme by Alike Sai Students

The students from the Sri Sathya Sai Loka Seva Institutions, Alike (located in the state of Karnataka) had been permitted by Bhagavan to stage a programme in His presence in the afternoon of August 23, 2008. Yakshagana, the traditional dance form of Karnataka, was to be performed. This art form is a combination of musical narration, dance and drama and the novelty lies in the fact that the characters do not speak much vocally, but any viewer would unequivocally subscribe to the statement that they give wonderful expression to the thoughts and feelings through dance, actions and facial movements.

Swami arrived a little after 4 p.m. but He went straight to the interview room, cutting through the ladies side. Then, there was a gap of about 40 minutes. This time period was used by the participants to pray so that their efforts please Him. It is a period when the sweat and toil, and the feelings and emotions of all the training time are creamed up with the fervent devotional prayers. Soon enough, Swami came. The first thing He wanted to do was to go backstage where all the wonderfully costumed actors were seated. He moved down the stage and slowly glided amidst the actors. He asked some of them about the roles they were playing. He checked whether they were all appropriately dressed. The perfectionist that He is, He pointed out to hairpins that were sticking out of the heads of some of the characters, and said that they must be put in properly. On the whole, He was pleased with the

costumes. Taking a full round, He moved back to the stage slowly. Then, He asked for the presentation to begin.

Two children came with the cards and offerings, dancing all the way to the stage and presented them to Swami. The drama entitled, "Choodamani Pradanam" was the story of Hanuman's successful triumph at Lanka in the search of Mother Sita. After the kidnap of Sita by Ravana, Sri Rama enquires from Lakshmana about the promise of the king of monkeys, Sugriva, to search for Sita. Then, Sugriva gets his army ready for the search. Leaders are selected among them but Sri Rama has the ultimate trust in Hanuman. Rama informs Hanuman of the identity of Sita and gives the signet ring as a mark of identification. All the monkeys now plunge into action with Rama's name on their lips. The mere chanting of the name gifts wings back to the de-winged Sampathi, the brother of Jatayu. Very inspiringly, it went on to show that once anyone begins to work for the Lord, all obstacles simply seem to fade and disappear. Sampathi, thereafter, himself guides the troops towards Lanka where Sita had been kept under strict vigil. When faced by the sea, Jambavan, Sugriva's minister, reminds Hanuman of his immense powers. With Rama's name, Hanuman jumps across the sea and encounters the demoness Lankini at the entrance.

There was a funny sequence when Hanuman teases and troubles Lankini! Finally, vanquishing her and releasing her from the curse she had been under all this while, Hanuman comes to know the whereabouts of Sita from Vibhishana, the pious brother of Ravana. Sita is with Sarama, Vibheeshana's wife. Ravana enters the orchard with material gifts and tries to persuade Sita to marry him. But Sita reprimands and curses him. Hanuman, then, makes his appearance and tells mother Sita all about Rama. The description of Rama touches the inner recesses of Sita's heart. It also seemed to touch some chords deep within Swami. He was touched by the loyalty and love of Sita to Rama and Hanuman's devotion to both Rama and Sita.

All the singing was being done by the 'Bhagavathars' as they are called, standing backstage. There was the main singer and accompanists for him. A *mrindangam*, a drum, a set of cymbals and a music box provided the rich music. Most of the speaking was being done by that singer. The actors would once in a while speak English dialogues so that the non-Kannada people could also catch the action going on. But all that was rendered superfluous by the superlative acting of the boys, who brought to life all the characters from the bygone era.

Sita is overjoyed and she hands over the "Choodamani" as her mark of identification for Rama. Then, when she seems to despair, Hanuman, meek and sweet till now, stands to his magnificent height and reassures her. Hanuman then destroys the Ashokavana and gets captured willingly when Indrajit, Ravana's son, uses the Brahmastra against him. In anger, Ravana commands that Hanuman's tail be set on fire. Jumping across the city of Lanka, Hanuman sets it on fire. Finally, Hanuman returns to Sri Rama and informs the joyous tidings. When he gives the Choodamani to Rama, Rama embraces him.

Marching against the demonic forces, Rama vanquishes Ravana and rescues Sita. The drama closes with the scene of the coronation of Lord Rama. It displayed the glory of the humble Hanuman who achieved so much that even the Lord was speechless in gratitude to him.

The Ramayana is such a wonderful epic that even today when we listen to it, it arouses noble feelings and emotions within. The story never seems to get boring and every time it is narrated or depicted, it inspires one to rise above the pettiness and narrow mindedness, and get lost in Love for God. And so, it is no surprise that Swami gives so much importance to this epic. It is not just a story, but the story of every person in the journey called life.

As the drama concluded, Swami came down from the stage and was so very happy with all of them. He stated so many times that each and every actor had done a wonderful role. He posed for group photos with all of them, and then He also materialised two gold chains simultaneously and gifted them to Rama and Sita respectively. Many tried giving letters to Him. He told them to wait and hold on. He seemed to say, "When I am here available for you to tell me whatever you want, why the impediment of the paper? When the rich feelings of the heart are on song, why use the grossly insufficient medium of the words?" He called for Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and took a picture. He then slowly moved on to the stage. All the boys in a disciplined manner moved backstage when they were all told to come front and sit.

Discipline is something that pleases Swami a lot. Not one person, child or adult, rushed to Swami. As a result, Swami Himself kept calling people to Him, and spoke and interacted with them. He sat for more than 20 minutes after the *drama* and interacted with them all. He distributed t-shirts to all the students. He gifted the elders with Safari pieces. For some of the elders who always dress in traditional clothes, He gifted silk *dhotis*. He also asked about the people who had been involved in the make up and gifted clothes to them. He spoke at length with the heads of the institution at Alike. Then, blessing them profusely, He asked for the *aarathi* to be taken. He sat for the whole *aarathi* and blessed the children specially after it concluded. Before leaving, He once again said, "Very nice *drama*. All acted very well. Am very happy!" Blessed indeed are these children for they delighted the Lord so much!

August 24, 2008 – Krishna Janmastami Celebrations

August 24, 2008 day dawned to usher in the birthday of the most fascinating Avatar of the Lord - Krishna. The Sai Kulwant Hall was brimming with people. Many devotees who were supposed to leave had decided to stay on to witness the splendour of the Krishna avatar with their dear Sai Krishna. So full was Prasanthi Nilayam that the main gate carried a notice, "Sairam! No accommodation available inside." Well, there was dearth of accommodation in the ashram, but no dearth of accommodative people! People had settled in the corridors of the Southern blocks and had spread sheets and mats wherever there was a little sheltered space.

The red rays of the early morning Sun turned golden and began to filter and flow into the Sai Kulwant Hall lighting up especially the central area. Krishna Gita, Swami's baby elephant, the Gokulam cows, deer, peacocks, doves and rabbits accompanied by the student care-takers too had arrived to the Mandir in procession. They too had been bedecked and some of them appeared to be in bridal finery. It was at this moment that the sweet Lord too arrived covered in the golden yellow robe! There was an applause of thrill as He entered the Sai Kulwant Hall. We have only heard about the beauty of Lord Krishna in the *pitambara* (yellow dress) but everyone present was indeed blessed to see Him in the splendid yellow robe! He moved slowly down the aisle and a sweet smile adorned His beaming face. He blessed all as He arrived. As He neared Krishna Gita, she stretched out her little trunk to touch Him. Smiling to Himself, Swami slowly waded into the confluence from the animal world.

He fed the cows with bananas. There was a suckling calf. That day it was blessed to receive milk from two mothers as Swami too fed it with milk from a feeding bottle. Gently moving amidst the animals, He ensured that everyone was fed at least something in His divine presence. Two white pigeons had the special privilege of being released into the free skies from His divine hands. As the pigeons soared skywards, the decibel levels in the hall also soared as people joyously clapped at the happy sight. Moving ahead, Swami lovingly fondled a baby deer that was brought near Him. He fed the mother of that deer with a biscuit which she quickly gobbled. He not only blessed the animals but their caretakers too. Many of the members of the Sathya Sai Gokulam offered roses to Swami. It was as if a bouquet of roses had been presented to Him. He patiently and lovingly accepted all of them, and then moving through the students, went up the stage. It was then that two children decked as Krishna and Balarama went on stage. Swami blessed them and also the sweets they offered to Him.

Swami sat listening to the chants that were on ceaselessly. He sat that way for about 20-25 minutes. In between, He told the caretakers to take all the animals back to their lovely homes that He so lovingly has gifted them. It is really wonderful how much concern Swami has for the animals. Normally any of us feel that though the animals do not know, it is their privilege to be in Swami's presence. However, on the smooth marbled floors of Sai Kulwant Hall, the animals find it a little tough to get a grip. It was not so before when the Hall had concrete floors, and before that when there was sand. Probably therefore, Swami sends back the animals as soon as possible.

Once the animals left, Swami asked the students to start their programme. The card was shown to Him and the programme started with a group song, the *Pandurangashtakam*. Since it is a popular one, even the children from the Primary school too joined in the singing. After that, two students sang the song, "Govardhana Giridhara" in all its majesty and grandeur. This was followed by a novel programme. A group of students from the Institute and the School have been working hard at learning to play the flute. All these students, along with their teacher, put up a 15 minute recital in His presence. Swami kept tapping in beat as they played on the flute. And therein lay the

beauty of being a student! Any talent that one has or any skill that one acquires, one gets the wonderful opportunity to present before the supreme Lord Himself! After they finished their presentation, it was back to songs. A Telugu song recounting the *leelas* of Lord Krishna as a child was sung and Swami was very involved in the song. He seemed to be drinking in every word that was sung and appeared very touched at times. As that song was completed, Swami probably decided that it was best all leave in that frame of mind. He asked for the *aarthi*.

As the *aarthi* was nearing conclusion, Swami called the students who had arrived with a cake. He cut the cake and naturally so, for, was it not His birthday? Many Krishnashtami cards had been made by students from the Institute, school and primary school too. Swami called them all and began to slowly and patiently go through the works of art that His children had designed. Some were huge; others were three dimensional structures; while a few others were fine carvings. There were others which were simple sketches and paintings depicting the episodes in the life of Lord Krishna. But all of them were prayers addressed to Swami. As Swami went through these cards, the "Krishna" and "Balarama" moved up on stage again, and offered chocolates to Swami. Swami lovingly gifted these to the Primary school children who had made the cards. He, in fact, gave a chocolate to every child who came to Him. In this manner, Swami spent more than 20 minutes seeing and blessing the cards with their creators. Then, raising both His hands in benediction, He retired for the morning. It was a blissful day for everyone blessed to be present.

August 25, 2008 – Music Programme by Tamil Nadu Sai Youth

More than 3000 members of the youth brigade from Tamil Nadu had arrived at Prasanthi Nilayam on August 25, 2008. It has become part and parcel of the activities of each and every state in India to have at least one pilgrimage to Puttaparthi wherein all can recharge their fatigued spiritual batteries, and continue all the other activities thereafter with renewed vigour and energy. Swami had very graciously consented for a music programme by them. And so, by 3:30 p.m., all of them were seated in neat rows and columns in Sai Kulwant Hall. The rest of the Hall resembled an ocean as all these devotees were in deep blue scarves.

Swami arrived for *darshan* and took a complete round of the ladies side. He cut through between the seated rows of singers and moved towards the interview room. Coming on the stage, He sat listening to the chants. Then, He took a round around the stage area and moved to the portico. Via the portico, He again went over to the ladies side. Now, this was a bonus round that none had dreamt about. This turned out to be the *darshan* round that had been cut short initially. As He moved through the students into the gents' side, the sea of humanity from Chennai experienced high tides as people bobbed up and down to glimpse the Orange Form. Taking letters and raising His hands in blessings many times, Swami moved back into the portico, and then finally returned to stage. Then, He called all the card boys and birthday boys and blessed them. The cards were actually made for the occasion of

Janmashtami, and Swami seemed to make fun of the fact that He was being shown cards whose "expiry date" was gone!

He then told the Vedic chants to stop and asked for the programme to begin. The programme schedule was shown to Swami by a member of the youth - a former student of the University. Swami recognised him instantly! No wonder it is said that once you become His student, you never cease to be one. The programme consisted of devotional songs that the youth had prepared. The original plan was that the girls would sing their share of songs, and then the boys would present what they had prepared. But with Swami, one has to be ready for everything. As soon as the girls finished the first song in praise of Lord Ganesha, He called one of the boys and told him that they should sing in an alternating fashion. This needed some quick adjustments as all the songs had part of the music pre-recorded on CD and the tracks had to be shuffled all over so that the boys and girls could alternate. But as with the Lord always, when He asks for something, He also gives the strength and intelligence needed to achieve it. And so, the necessary changes were quickly made and the song programme continued as He willed it!

There were two little kids playing the *mridangam* and violin respectively, and they did it like professionals. Swami seemed very impressed by them. Most of the songs were in Tamil and one or two were in Malayalam, a sister language for Tamil, too. The girls especially were wonderful in their singing as they reeled counters and chords in their rendering. As they concluded about 8 songs, Swami asked the students to sing a few *bhajans*. The students then sang Swami's favourite bhajan-couple: "Ram Hare Hare Ram Bolo..." and "Sri Raghunandana..." After those two *bhajans*, Swami sent word for the All India President of Sri Sathya Sai Organisation and had it announced that there would be a drama by the Tamil Nadu youth the next day! Then, receiving *aarthi*, Swami retired for the day.

August 26, 2008 – Drama by Sai Youth from Tamil Nadu

As announced the previous day, the Sai Youth from Tamil Nadu were all set to stage a drama, Sathya Sai Kavacham, in the divine presence. Swami came out in the chair after 4.15 p.m. Bhagavan has not used the car during *darshan* for quite a few days now. There were times when Swami's arrival in the chair sent shivers of pleasant surprise through everyone assembled. Now, it has become part of the routine and people are shocked if He uses the car! Many times, we miss the grand and glorious things happening in our presence merely by getting used to it! The secret to happiness and peace lies in living the present moment fully and looking forward to every moment as if it is a new one, for, indeed it is a new one!

Moving through the ladies side, Swami reached the centre of the hall where He took a detour towards the interview room. The Primary school children were arriving in great hurry, and Swami seemed to enjoy them rushing in. In any case, rushing for God is a noble quality worth of emulation by anyone! Swami granted interviews to various devotees till 5:15 p.m. He, then, came out and wanted the *drama* to begin. The initial offerings of the card and

flowers were made. Once the Veda chanting stopped, flexible and foldable props erupted on the stage and created appropriate settings for the scenes to begin.

The storyline was very similar to many dramas put before, but the presentation style was different and nice. The *drama* begins with a dialogue between Narada and Kali (the demigod in charge of the present age). Kali exults over his power and influence. Narada laughs at him and challenges him to influence a simple person. Kali uses all his powers to tempt that person into taking money - by ensuring that he loses his job, pressures from the family growing and finally with his mother falling very sick. But the person never yields and Kali surrenders as the hero's mother is allotted a bed in a Super Speciality hospital under the Sai Trust's Free Bed Scheme done in collaboration with many hospitals. Wondering from where on earth does the young man get his sustenance and determination from, Kali discovers the power of Sathya Sai Kavacham (Sathya Sai Shield). He too desires to come to Puttaparthi to see Swami and gives up his crown of ego.

Swami seemed very involved in the *drama*. He was very touched when the hero held on to his principles in the face of very stiff challenges. Swami was moved seeing the hero torn between options, and was pleased to see him select the correct one over the easy one. As the *drama* concluded, Swami called one of the participants and told Him that He would move down for group photographs. He moved down and the boys clustered around Him. He materialised a gold chain for 'Narada' of the *drama*. He kept saying, "*Romba Santosham* (Very happy)" and His smile and beaming face conveyed the same to those who did not understand Tamil or could not catch those words. He moved up the stage and then brought Safari cloth pieces from inside. As *aarathi* was performed and *prasadam* was distributed, He personally distributed white cloth pieces to each and every member of the performing troupe. The boys were all joy at this shower of Grace.

Icing up this cake of Grace, Swami asked the boys to sing some *bhajans*. The mikes were quickly transported to the youth from Tamil Nadu and they began singing. Swami kept rhythm as two *bhajans* were sung and everyone joyfully clapped and followed. After this singing, *aarathi* was performed for a second time. Everyone seemed so happy because very rare are the days when Swami receives *aarathi* twice. Swami raised both His hands in benediction and Love, and told all the participants that He was very happy. Then, He retired to Yajur Mandir.

SWAMI AND ME

“THIS LIFE IS FOR HIM”

An interview with Mr. Y. Siva Rama Krishnaiah, Principal, Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School – Part 2

He was totally new to the Sri Sathya Sai Organization till 1971, and before that he was a shy graduate who thought he failed in the first year examination of his Masters; well, that is what his results said. But assured earlier by Bhagavan that he would pass the exam, he waited, only to hear that he indeed had passed in first class. And the very next year he went on to top the university in the final examinations. After that, he waited again for two years for another shower of Grace, which came as his first job, a chemistry lecturer in the erstwhile Sri Sathya Sai Junior College.

Embraced and assimilated into the Sai mission, slowly but surely, Mr. Siva Rama Krishnaiah was to become the Principal of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam. In 2003, he was conferred with the “Best Teacher” award by the Central Board of Secondary Education of the Government of India. Fortunate to be an instrument in the divine hands in shaping the school for the last 25 years, his journey to Sai is as wonderful and exciting as the story of the school itself! In the July 2008 H2H issue, we offered you the sublime story of the School, and now here is the tale of the school’s principal, a story suffused with same love, care and protection of the Supreme Teacher and Divine Mother, Lord Sai.

In July 2008, H2H met this 59 year old principal, who never reduced the number of his lectures, in spite of umpteen administrative responsibilities as a principal. “I am a teacher first, and only then a principal,” he said. “I never dreamt that I would become the principal of this school. And tomorrow, if Swami gives me some other assignment, I’ll do it gladly. This life is for Him. For what He has done for me, I cannot ever repay Him for any number of lives to come.”

H2H: It is almost 25 years since the school started. What do you think are the achievements of the school?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: The excellence of the students has increased steadily. In the infant stage of the school, Swami was expecting that hundred percent of the students should pass. Later He started asking us whether all students have obtained first class marks! We struggled for the first few years but slowly reached the target of all students passing with first class marks.

H2H: Which year was it?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: In 1997, all the students had passed in first class. That year, before the summer course, Swami went up the stage and announced the results Himself!

H2H: So, that was the day of fulfillment!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes. Bhagavan Himself acknowledged our efforts.

Earlier, one day when I received the examination results, Swami called me. He asked me about each and every boy, and I told Him the marks each one had got. Swami then, quite casually, said, "**In My view, 75% is the pass mark**".

That is how Swami groomed us! When you go to Swami with the result, He would not see what the result is. He would tell you what He wants for the future and we have to aim for it the next time.

This is the way we are being carried by Swami. It is like a child in his mother's hands. He brought us to this level, step-by-step.

Now that we are in the 'adolescent' period; there are more eyes on us! Swami is protecting and inspiring us. Even now, in spite of so many commitments and constraints, He is spending so much time with us. He gives us chances to perform so many *dramas* and skits in His Divine presence.

H2H: Some may say that Swami's physical interaction has reduced. But actually He gives His time to students more than anyone else!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes!

H2H: Given the number of dramas that Swami watched in the last one or two years, the opportunities that the students are getting are tremendous.

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Absolutely! And there have been occasions when the students, who have their CBSE examination the next day are performing a play the previous day! And then these boys secure distinction in their final examinations! Is it possible anywhere else? That shows the presence of the Divine Hand in everything.

H2H: And it shows how Swami wants all-round development and human excellence!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes. If you observe, for all the strong foundation that we give in the school to the students, the fruit is enjoyed by our institutions which impart further education to them. The 'fruit' is, in fact, for the whole world. In the GATE (Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering) examination, our boys bag more than 60% of the ranks. A lot of the research scholars who receive gold medals in the Sri Sathya Sai University every year are from our school. These boys are the 'fruits' who were 'seeds' when they were in our school. Two of us from the staff even got national awards and Bhagavan blessed us.

H2H: How was that experience? Can you narrate that event?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes. In fact, that too is a lesson for me. The director of the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) used to come to Swami. When he came here for the second time, he told us that he would send us an application form for a national award, and asked us to propose one among our staff for the award. We did not know what the award actually was.

H2H: Yes, for the staff in the school, the greatest award is the appreciation of Swami.

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes! And the CBSE director sent us the application form and I took it to Bhagavan. Swami said, “**Emi award? Emi chesthaarata veellu?**” (Which award is it? What is the purpose?)

I told Swami what it is all about and that they want us to propose one among us for the award. Swami then said, “**Manakoddhule**” (Leave it; we need not apply for it). I asked Him, “What do I reply to them, Swami?” “**You tell them that all our teachers are the best. So, we cannot propose any single person for the award.**” He replied thus! There I saw how loving Swami is! He never hurts anybody.

Two years passed in the same way. Every year they were sending us the application form, and when I would take it to Swami, He would give me the same reply. But in the third year, they sent the application form directly on my name! This time, since they pre-selected my name, Swami said, “**Fill the application form and send it to them.**”

I did as He directed. With Bhagavan’s Grace, I got selected for the award and the award-giving ceremony was supposed to be on September 5, that is, on Teachers’ Day. But those were the days when Swami’s *darshans* were very uncertain; He used to come in the Golf cart.

I tried my best to obtain a chance to speak to Him, but with little success. I did not want to go the ceremony without obtaining Swami’s permission. Finally, one day, I went to the Poornachandra auditorium, which was His residence then. He did bless me and immediately permitted to go.

I went to New Delhi, received the award and returned by flight. When Swami came to grant *darshan* the next day evening, He saw me and exclaimed, “**Oh! When did you come?**” I went up to Him and showed Him the award. “**Inthenaa? Inkemee ivvaledhaa?** (Is this all? Didn’t they give you anything else?),” He said.

I told Him that by His Grace, I also received Rs. 25,000 and showed Him the D.D (Demand Draft). I added that the money too belonged to the school and that I was just an instrument in His Hands. He said, “**Mancidhi, manchidhi. Unchuko, dhaggara unchuko**” (Good, good. Keep it with you.)

Only after three months, did He agree to my proposal of giving the prize money to the Central Trust. Evidently, it was entirely His plan. Since the school had reached the 'adolescent' period, it had to receive the recognition due to it, and that is probably why He willed this event. In 2005, one more staff member, Mr. Veda Narayan, received the award.

H2H: Though you receive these awards, the recognition that you look for ultimately is of course from Swami. What are Swami's expectations?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Now, that most of the students are securing distinction, Swami has raised our target; He is now expecting the students to score above 90 percent. We will definitely achieve it.

H2H: Yes, when He sets the target; He gives us the strength to achieve it too.

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Right. How much time are the students and the teachers here really left with after the multifarious extra-curricular activities they do? Within that limited time, we are able to achieve great results academically! That itself is clearly a miracle.

H2H: Academics are one thing. Can you tell us about the other facets of the school?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Well, we do not generally participate in any competitions with other schools. The sports event that takes place on 11th of January every year is the only such event. We perform dramas before Swami and we have always received appreciation from the public as well as from Bhagavan for them.

H2H: What is the mission of the school?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: The mission of the school is a part of Bhagavan's mission. It is under His shade that this school grows. We want to spread His message of Love. Swami wants us to create a dynamic yet balanced personality out of every student.

H2H: Can you explain that, Sir?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes. As Swami says, a human being is composed of three parts – Head, Heart and Hands. Head stands for intellect. Hands represent service. Heart stands for the spirituality within. To achieve excellence in these three aspects is the goal of the school. Thereby all the three *yogas* – Karma (Work), Bhakti (Worship) and Jnana (Wisdom) are taken care of.

But if these three principles are simply studied and left aside, then the individual remains static. But when he puts them into practice, he becomes a dynamic personality.

Our routine, in fact, is planned to reflect these principles. Our boys are always kept busy without giving room for any diversion of mind. For them, change of work itself is rest, just as Swami says. The daily schedule which is being followed in the school by the students has been given by Swami Himself. Whenever He gives us an instruction, we implement it immediately. For instance, it is Swami Himself who introduced the morning jogging into the curriculum in 1983-84. Swami also asked us to perform the sacred exercise *Suryanamaskaram* along with *mantra*! The students do *yoga asanas*, breathing exercises, etc.

In the human values course, we have a 30 percent component for the practice of the values. The teachers constantly observe and evaluate the students. They keep an eye on each boy’s punctuality, participation in various programs, the company he keeps, his manners and behaviour, relationship with teachers, etc. Out of 25, we have allotted 7 marks to these aspects. The remaining 18 marks are for testing their theoretical knowledge, which includes the discourses of Swami.

Though the students feel this disciplined curriculum a little difficult while they are in the school, they appreciate it fully once they have passed out of the school. After settling down in their lives, when they happen to come and meet us, they tell us how the school life had benefited them greatly.

H2H: You said that the mission of the school is to create dynamic and balanced individuals. Can you tell us instances where you saw the school living up to its mission? Any old boys of the school who made you feel so?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Striving for perfection is a continuous process. Coming to specific instances, you might be familiar with the incident that took place when the Super Specialty Hospital was under construction. One of our boys sent hundred rupees to Swami along with a letter. In the small note, He wrote thus: “Swami! I saved this money by washing clothes myself, thereby cutting down my laundry charges. And if these hundred rupees could be used for the construction of the Hospital, at least to buy one brick, my life would be sanctified.”

Swami came out very thrilled and showed those hundred rupees to all of us! If Swami is satisfied with us for one such moment, our lives would truly be sanctified. All our lives, we strive for one such glance of approval from Bhagavan. Isn’t it?

About 5-6 years ago, there was a big cyclone in India, and the school boys and teachers together pooled up to Rs. 40,000 within 40 minutes! They contributed this money from their own bank accounts and savings! Along with that, a large collection of clothes was also sent to the victims.

It is exactly this kind of compassionate hearts that Swami wants. That is why Swami stresses on ‘Educare’ rather than mere ‘Education’.

Also the boys help each other greatly. Irrespective of their tight study schedules and examinations, the boys themselves take care of the sick ones among them. We don't ask them to help each other, but they do it on their own.

H2H: How do you feel when you talk to the old students?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: We feel happy and satisfied when we see them settled in their lives. For a teacher, that's the greatest satisfaction he can ask for in his life.

When a boy, for instance, comes and tells me how the organic chemistry that I taught him had greatly helped him further in his life, I feel grateful to Bhagavan for rendering my efforts fruitful.

That's why I have always loved the job of teaching, right from the beginning. I would never give it up. I never reduce the number of my lectures, even though I have many administrative responsibilities. I am a teacher first, and only then a principal.

I make myself available to the students and the staff till 8 pm everyday. Sometimes, even if there is no specific work, I stay in the school premises till that time. If the parents of any of any student come, I talk to them. Sometimes, if the boys have any questions related to the subject of chemistry, I clarify them at that time.

H2H: The school has crossed so many milestones in the past 25 years and come a long way, academically and even otherwise. Students have really made a mark in their careers. Can you recall some of the old boys?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: There are thousands of them! There are at least forty to fifty doctors whom I remember clearly. Similarly many more engineers, software professionals, etc.; it is difficult to specifically name a few.

H2H: Where do you see the school 25 years from now, in terms of its mission?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: We have to keep putting in the effort in the direction Swami expects us to. This school has inspired so many other Sai schools all around the world. Those schools seek guidance from us. And we are always improving ourselves; the school is getting better every year in one sphere or the other.

We need to be perfect; we are on the path to match up to Swami's expectations. Though we have not reached our goal yet, we are on the path. More importantly, we are on the 'right' path since it is laid by Swami Himself. So, we can simply go straight even by closing our eyes. That's the special advantage of being with Bhagavan.

The school will run without any impediments under all circumstances since it is under His Grace. We are only His instruments. He will take the school ahead whichever way He wants. One of the good features of the school is that we ensure that there is hundred-percent participation from the students in every activity that we take up.

H2H: Can you explain this?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Take chanting of Vedic hymns, for instance. In other schools where this is done, only students from certain sects are allowed to learn. But in our school, even Muslim and Christian students learn and chant Vedic *mantras*. They also take a test in this. There is a student from America, Jeffrey, who chants these hymns very well, and he has received a lot of encouragement from Swami Himself.

H2H: It is amazing for the devotees to watch an American student chanting Veda with correct intonations!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes. Even in sports, we ensure that there is full participation from students. Teachers divide the responsibilities of various programs equally among themselves.

When the students of a particular grade stage a *drama*, every student of that class gets involved in it one way or the other. Those who do not act, work backstage.

H2H: You will agree Swami is the sole inspiration and motivation behind the school. But in what forms does this inspiration sustain the school?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: The teachers are highly dedicated and focused. Since every teacher joins here only because of His inspiration, they are absolutely committed. And with that dedication, comes unity. Harmony comes in easily among us because we are all likeminded. We do discuss different opinions but when we arrive at a decision, everybody follows it. This unity is very evident in our staff.

We, the teachers, voluntarily assign to ourselves various responsibilities and do our part meticulously. Even those teachers among us, who do not reside with the boys in the hostel, visit the hostel and help the students in the evenings. And this happens voluntarily! It is not out of pressure; it is not a duty assigned to us by anybody. We want to serve more, for we believe we are here only because of Him. We get satisfaction out of everything we do here.

H2H: I think every teacher here will have a wonderful story of how he came to Bhagavan.

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes, each and every one of them has. And that is why they are able to stick to their job, even though many of them are over-qualified for the job of a school teacher. They never think of leaving the place. They are satisfied with whatever Bhagavan has given them. They are

steadfast in their job and are concerned only about the wholesome welfare of the boys.

H2H: One last question, Sir. How did the association with the school help you personally?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Well, till I came here, I never knew what Vedic hymns really are. I thought only the priests in the temple chant these hymns while performing worship, but I never knew it can be learnt and chanted by any one.

Till I came here, I never faced an audience; I never spoke in a microphone. Even in my college days, I used to skip classes whenever I had to present a seminar. In the beginning, when I came here, I told Swami that I cannot speak in public. When the new hostel was opened, Swami Himself excused me from speaking since He knew that I was hesitant to take the stage.

But on August 15 (India’s Independence Day), in 1993, Swami asked me about the programme in the school that morning. I replied that we only hoisted the Indian flag, sang a *bhajan* or two and then assembled in the Mandir. Swami immediately said, **“No, you should speak at least for two minutes!”**

We must follow whatever Swami says. So, I opened up and spoke on the 15th of August the next year. From that day onwards, I make it a point to speak during such occasions.

So, it was a learning process all through. He motivates and inspires me always.

He has helped me even in my personal life. After my marriage, we did not have children for fourteen years. When we came here, Swami called us for an interview and said that we would have a child. But for the next two years, our condition remained the same. Yet, we never were dispirited. In general, both of us, spent our time only in service activities, nothing else.

Finally in 1984, she conceived but within five months, she had to undergo abortion. Swami then called us and said, **“Don’t worry. She will conceive again within the next three months.”**

And it happened just as He had said. Initially Swami told us that it would be a male child. But after she conceived, He casually came to me one day and said, **“Boys these days are leaving their parents. On the other hand, girls are good, they do not leave you.”** I immediately got the hint that He was going to give us a female child. And that’s what had happened.

My whole life is what He has given me. I came here with an open mind; I never dreamt that I would become the principal of this school. If tomorrow He gives me any other responsibility, I will do it. This life is for Him. For what He has done to me, I cannot repay Him in any number of lives to come.

Being part of this school is a great chance that He has given me. Though there are eminent and distinguished people who need His attention, He calls me and talks to me. That itself is His mercy and a blessing. I am absolutely grateful to Him.

H2H: Can you recall any other personal experiences of His Love?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Even though He might not be available physically, His unseen Hand is always there behind everything. Two years ago, I met with an accident. It was during the Dasara celebrations. I had gone to do service near Kothacheruvu (a small town near Puttaparthi). The car, which I was driving, hit a tree. The vehicle was damaged completely but nothing happened to me except for a slight fracture! I opened the door of the car slowly and walked out! And there I saw our doctors coming along the same road for performing service activities! They immediately took me in their jeep to the hospital and gave me necessary treatment.

I was told later that physically Swami appeared very much tensed that day! Every ten minutes, He was sending someone to the hospital or asking another to call the hospital to enquire about me and also to give instructions to the doctors.

When I was discharged, I went straight to Swami and said, "I am very grateful to You, Swami!"

"Ah! You were going up. I caught your collar and brought you down," He replied.

H2H: Wonderful.

Thank you so much for your time, Sir! Talking to you was very enlightening. Swami has brought so many people to work here so mysteriously.

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: And remains silent as if He does not know anything!

***H2H: Yes, only on hindsight one knows how much Swami has done!
Thank you once again.***

SWAMI – MY MOTHER UNPARALLELED

By Mrs. Sangeeta Bhadriraju

Though born and raised in Cuttack, in the Indian state of Orissa, Sangeeta Bhadriraju spent a good part of her life in the Brindavan campus of Sri Sathya Sai University when her father was appointed as the Principal of the campus in 1996. She did her intermediate in Bhagavan's Anantapur College during 1981-83. Later on, after marriage, Sangeeta moved to the USA. She currently lives in Atlanta, along with her husband and two children.

I am very fortunate, for I came into Swami's fold early in my childhood. I recall waking up to the melodious resonance of the *Suprabhatam* rendered by my father while my mother hummed *bhajan* tunes. Our family conversations were always centered on Swami. While my parents were all the time actively involved in Swami's work, one day my father decided that he wanted to work for Swami. He responded to a job posting for a lecturer in the Sri Sathya Sai University in the monthly newsletter *Sanathana Sarathi*. By Swami's grace, he was selected and asked to join immediately. But even before my father could join the Puttaparthi campus, Swami asked him to work in the Whitefield campus. My father was very happy to take up the position as the Head of the Department of English at the Sri Sathya Sai University, Brindavan campus in 1987.

Growing Up On Divine Campus

Soon, our family moved to Brindavan ashram, in the outskirts of Bangalore city. We lived there happily, basking in Swami's warmth and love. The residents of Brindavan await Swami's arrival every summer with the eagerness of the proverbial *chataka* bird waiting for the first drop of rain. And what wonderful days were those! Every evening Swami would call us into His residence at Trayee for an evening session. I was very fortunate to sit and watch Swami conversing with us in His inimitable ways, and sometimes playing the cymbals during *bhajans*. I was always the last one to enter the heavenly abode as I had to wheel my mother into the main hall of Trayee. On many occasions Swami held the door open for me as I gently wheeled in my mother's chair for the Trayee sessions. And on days when I was sad, Swami would come and instruct me to distribute sweets to the guests. This would not only be a pleasant diversion for me, but would also buoy my spirits up greatly.

My mother suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, which is a chronic inflammatory arthritis of the joints. Despite various treatments with different systems of medicines, her condition continued to deteriorate gradually. She suffered excruciating pain, but always bore it with a smile; nothing ever wavered her faith in Swami even for a moment. She was very alert mentally and continued to provide loving guidance to all of us.

Sai, Our Refuge in Times of Woe

In the summer of 1992 my mother became very sick. Every day, Swami would talk to her, sometimes in Telugu and at other times in Kannada or Hindi. Just before leaving for Kodai Kanal that year, Swami came to my mother and asked for me. My mother also suffered from spondilitis and hence couldn't turn her head to look for me. Swami knew exactly where I was seated and gestured me to come up. As I rushed forward, He waved His Divine hand and showered *vibhuti* on my mother and gave the remaining *vibhuti* to me to apply on her later. In a few days, Swami, as expected, left for Kodai Kanal, but my mother's health continued to deteriorate. My father was busy with the preparation for the summer course that used to be held in early June every year. When Swami returned from Kodai Kanal, my father wrote to Swami informing Him of my mother's poor condition.

Finally, she had to be admitted in the hospital as her kidneys began to malfunction. At this point, we were very worried. On May 24 my mother passed away in her sleep at about 2.30 in the afternoon. When Swami was informed, He immediately responded saying He knew about it. Swami, then, enquired from my father about our religious rituals which had to be performed for my mother's last rites. The next day, as my father was waiting for Him at the college auditorium Swami came straight to him and showered His love profusely. He advised him to be courageous, assuring that He would completely take care of the children, and also promised to talk to us soon.

For the next thirteen days, like a Mother, Swami sent us food daily. We were verily receiving holy *prasadam* from God Himself! Every single day, He showed concern and enquired from my father what rites had been observed that day. He also said He would organize a Narayan Seva (poor feeding) in her memory on the thirteenth day, which He did. Before the session started in the canteen that day, He came to all of us, took *aarathi* and spoke consolingly with much love.

Swami Becomes Her Divine Mother

A few months later, Swami promoted my father to the position of Principal of the Brindavan campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University. Soon after, my father had to attend a meeting at Puttaparthi and on that occasion Swami asked my father if I had come along with him. When my father answered in the affirmative, Swami told him that He would talk to us the next day in the morning. It was the auspicious day of Vara Lakshmi Vratam, a very important day in the South Indian calendar.

The next day Swami called us to the interview room as promised. Once inside, Swami lovingly introduced my father and me to the others present in the room. I was overwhelmed when He asked me to sit next to Him; I was speechless. Next, as He was talking, He waved His hand and asked the devotees, "What is the time?" Swami then Himself answered, "It is 7.14". And the next moment there was a gold watch in His hand which He presented to my father. He then asked me, "What do you want?" But words failed me. I

kept looking at Him with awe writ large on my face. My hands were full pressing His Lotus Feet gently. Swami then materialized a diamond ring! "I want to give you a *Vajram* (diamond)," He said, and asked "Do you know what is today?" I said, "Swami, it is *Vara Lakshmi Vratam* day." Swami said, "No, *Maha Vara Lakshmi Vratam*". He then placed the ring on my ring finger. I thought to myself Swami gave such a beautiful ring but it is so loose. The next moment Swami looked at me and said, "Do not worry; the ring will fit you in course of time." And just as He had said, subsequently I did put on weight. Today, the ring is a perfect fit!

On that day auspicious day Swami also promised me that from then on He would be my Divine mother. He also told us that He would look for an eligible groom and get me married. He promised to be at our side all the time and blessed us profusely. Even today, fifteen years later, every word that Swami uttered echoes in my ears. Such was the profundity of His assurance!

Years have passed by. But Swami has not forgotten me. He asked me to go to the United States of America to further my studies. I kept going to the American Consulate with my I-20 forms and returned disappointed to Puttaparthi to tell Swami that I didn't get a visa. When I told Swami the same in 1993, He said, "You will get in January." But, it did not happen. During the same period Swami would often banter me saying my husband was sitting in the men's side. Once, in Brindavan Swami was distributing sarees to the sevadals and I was doing security duty. Swami came up to me and said, "Your husband is sitting on the other side!" And my to-be husband was indeed sitting in the *darshan* lines waiting for blessings from Swami as he was planning to go to the USA for Residency training. At that time we were not yet married and did not even know each other. No detail however escapes the divine gaze. And only later I realised how every word of Swami, even though spoken in jest, is actually filled with meaning.

The Divine Match-Maker

In 1996, with Swami's blessings and guidance my wedding was fixed. Swami seemed so excited. He announced in the Trayee session that "the Principal's daughter is getting married. I am very busy..." He told my father that He was looking for a good day to talk to all of us. On March 22, He called all of us for an interview. All my Sai sisters doing security duty were more excited than I was. On that day, Swami called us in along with the Venkatagiri family, who were His very old devotees. Swami once again introduced us to the royal family and told them that I worked very hard doing security duty. He then said, "This girl does not have a mother...that is why I have told her, 'Hereafter I am your mother'."

He then briskly walked into one of the inner rooms and returned with a beautiful *pattu* or silk wedding sari. He put it on me to see how I looked, just like a mother would do, to her daughter. He complimented me and then walked towards my father and materialized the sacred *mangalasutra* (holy pendant) tied to the wet yellow thread as if dipped in thick turmeric water. He carefully put it in an envelope and then slipped it into my father's pocket. And

then, He once again looked at me, lovingly. He was not done yet with materialisations. Next, He waved His divine fingers, and lo and behold there was the most beautiful necklace with a very unique design; I had never seen that anywhere. Then, He took us inside and advised me like a loving mother as to how I should behave in my new home and what He expected from me; He wanted me to live by His message. Just as we were leaving the interview room, Swami suggested to me that I should come back with a son and a daughter, and that is exactly what happened. In a span of two years, I went back to see Swami with a son and daughter. Swami, of course, made fun of me in the *darshan* lines asking me how many children I had.

Till this date, Swami, my dear mother, has not left my side. I feel His presence all around me. We are so fortunate to be His students and His loving daughters. Recently, in the Southeast Sai retreat He made us feel His presence through all of the sisters who were present in my home. Most of them were people whom I had never seen before, still we could share so much love with each other, and that was all possible only because of Swami. He has bound us with His overflowing Love. He has given us so much!

Prayers to Sai Result in Healing

My brother and his family (wife and two daughters) live in Florida. His older daughter suffers from atopic dermatitis, a skin condition caused by allergies where there is severe itching, leading to skin breakdown and infections. She has been miserable for over two years and had not been to school for over a year. As a result, she was very frustrated; my brother tried both homeopathic and allopathic medications, but nothing seemed to work. When my father visited Puttaparthi recently (July 2008), my husband sent a letter to Swami through him making a fervent appeal to the Lord to intervene and help the innocent child.

My husband often quotes a poem from Gajendra Moksham. This is an episode in the epic Maha Bhagavatam where an elephant is trapped by the crocodile and fights for his life for over one thousand years. Finally, after exhausting all of his own strength, he makes a final appeal to the Lord acknowledging Him as the only omniscient and omnipotent God, and surrenders his own ego completely. The merciful Lord then immediately intervenes and saves the animal from the eternal suffering. This is what was going on in my husband's mind when he made the emotional appeal to Bhagavan in the letter. My father has since then returned from Puttaparthi and I am told that my niece's skin is fast returning to normal! She has stopped itching and is sleeping comfortably. In fact, she is getting ready to go school this year. It is only the merciful divine mother, the omnipotent "doctor" that can do this.

Swami goes to any length to save us and be with us; His love knows no bounds. And all He expects from us is to be noble human beings. Let us all make a fervent prayer that He may grant us the faith and strength to live up to His expectations, and gives us more opportunities to be the instruments of His message.

HOW SAI CAPTURED THE PHOTOGRAPHER

The story of Mr. Kumaran Ganesan as told to Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam

Kumaran Ganesan is a leading advertisement photographer based in Bangalore. While his professional life has taken him abroad to many countries, the best of his experiences came from his interactions with the Lord within. Currently living in Bangalore, with his wife and two sons, Kumaran’s life is a testimonial of how Swami’s love transforms lives.

Seeing without Looking

It was in 1989 that Kumaran saw Swami for the first time. That was the beginning of his photography career when he had been to Abbotsbury, Chennai, to take photographs of Swami, during His Chennai visit. Though Kumaran had the opportunity to take photographs of Swami from very close quarters for two days, he confesses that at that time he did not feel any attachment to Swami. “I just took the photographs as part of my job and left the place,” says Kumaran.

The optical sense cannot visualize the truth. It gives only false and fogged information

- Baba

But when God proposes, opportunities are galore. Such was the case with Kumaran, who was blessed with yet another chance to photograph our dear Lord Sai.

“The same year, I got another opportunity. I was working for Sudhir Ramachandran, a very renowned photographer and also a devotee of Swami. Sudhir was also my mentor.” Kumaran recollects with obvious pride.

Kumaran accompanied Sudhir and his family to Kodai Kanal, where Swami was residing at that time. On reaching Kodai, Sudhir offered to take him for *darshan*, but Kumaran thought it is better to stay back in the room, choosing to take care of Sudhir’s children instead.

On the last day of their stay in Kodai, for reasons he finds difficult to explain, Kumaran felt an urge to have *darshan*. Unable to contain this desire, he expressed it to Sudhir. But since it was very crowded and also quiet late, Sudhir suggested Kumaran to go to a particular spot near the lake, from where he could see Swami, as His car would normally pass by that way.

Sometimes I do get to places just when God’s ready to have somebody click the shutter.

~Ansel Adams.

The Divine Shot – At the Right Time

Kumaran promptly went and waited at the spot. When Swami’s car passed by him very slowly, he bowed down reverently and offered his salutations, hands

folded. “Swami looked at me eye to eye and showed His *abhayahastha* (hands raised in blessing) and I instantly fell in Love with Him,” says Kumaran.

He came, He saw, He was conquered. And when the heart is conquered, it is conquered for ever! From that instant, Swami became the guiding force in anything and everything that he engaged in. A few years later, when he got married, he spoke about Swami to his wife. She came to Puttaparthi with him and she too instantly came into Swami’s loving fold. This was so natural and instantaneous for both of them that they can only understand this as due to the infinite love of Swami which has permeated their lives since then.

The Lesson of Patience

In the earlier years, the professional opportunities that Kumaran got were few and far between. But with his new-found pillar of support in Bhagavan, nothing seemed too difficult to handle. Once, when he prayed to Swami for guidance, concerned by the thin volumes of his business, Bhagavan came in his dream and said, “Have patience. You will get your chances.”

“Swami taught and blessed me with this quality of patience, when I most needed it. Patience is one virtue that is required for professionals, be it entrepreneurs or corporate executives,” says Kumaran. “I was patient and did not lose heart, which paved the way for my current successful and rewarding career in photography, which is my passion.”

“Every single time I take a photograph, I say ‘*Om Sri Sai Ram*’, says Kumaran. “And sometimes when things falter during the shoot, I just take a short break and go to my room, touch Swami’s photo and pray. When I come back, things automatically fall in place.”

The Lord of the Land

Years ago, his studio was situated in Millers Road, Bangalore. There were thefts in all apartments in that building, except his! For security reasons, he wanted to shift the studio, but hesitated since he thought he might lose the good luck that the location had brought him. A rather illusive thought, for God is everywhere and place is hardly any constraint for Him when He chooses to bestow His blessings on his devotees. But, His ways are mysterious. So, at the time when Kumaran was contemplating moving out of his office to a new place, there was a new office in Bangalore’s Infantry Road that was readily available. The owner of this place gave Kumaran one month to decide and finalise the place. But, Kumaran was confused and could not take a decision. Both, he and his wife, prayed to Swami for guidance. Bhagavan came in his wife’s dream and said, “Shift to the new premise. You will get all good results.”

Kumaran was very happy and relieved to hear that. But soon *maya* came in. After a while, fear and confusion prevailed over him again. His wife suggested, “Why don’t you pray to Him again. He will clear your doubts.” He prayed and again that night, Swami came in the dream – this time around, in

Kumaran’s dream and said, “I am with you. Why do you worry? You are going to work with clients like IBM. Shift your studio to the new place.”

On receiving this assurance from the Lord, he went to the landlord to give the advance and finalise the Infantry Road Office. Given the mysterious way the whole event had unfolded, Kumaran could not help but look around the owner’s house for Swami’s photos. There were none. But later, when the owner Mr. V. Krishnamurthy said, “Pay the advance to my son, Sai” Kumaran was thrilled. And once he interacted with his son, he came to know that the landlord and his family were long time devotees of Swami.

There will be times when you will be in the field without a camera. And, you will see the most glorious sunset or the most beautiful scene that you have ever witnessed. Don't be bitter because you can't record it. Sit down, drink it in, and enjoy it for what it is!

~
DeGriff

“Then Mr. Krishnamurthy took me inside and also shared another very interesting story. In the 1960’s, there was a bungalow on this same piece of land, where Swami had stayed during his visits to Bangalore.”

Needless to say, Kumaran relocated his studio to the new place to re-launch his career and from then onwards professional life has only been on the rise. “I got lot of new clients, of course, including IBM!” Kumaran exults. “Revenues also increased multifold.”

Do Not Compare, If You Want Peace

“Sometimes, I used to compare myself with fellow professionals, to find that some of them were doing better than me,” says Kumaran. “I used to particularly compare myself to one photographer whom I knew, who got more business and revenue than me.”

“But Swami, through my inner voice used to correct me, by asking me not to indulge in such comparisons. And once He clarified in a dream ‘The person you are comparing with, is better than you work wise. And moreover, he has the need to work harder since he has the need for that extra money.’”

Ask One – Get Two!

Four years into the marriage, the Kumarans did not have an issue. Hence, they kept praying to Swami: “Please bless us with a child, Swami” had been their prayer for long, but not too long. One night, the Lord came in Kumaran’s dream and said, “Your time has not yet come. I will give - not one, but two children.”

They have two beautiful sons and every time they see the cheerful duo, they see Swami’s infinite Love.

Undiluted Peace

“Coming to Swami’s loving fold has blessed me with, amongst other things, the most valuable thing – undiluted peace.” Kumaran says gratefully.

“At times, when an existing client of mine substitutes another photographer for certain reasons and conveys the same to me, I just think of Swami and I am calm,” says Kumaran. “Before Swami entered into my life, these kinds of adverse events would instantly unnerve me. But now, I find myself very composed and peaceful. “

“When my son, Karan, fell ill a couple of times, my wife was very perturbed, but I reminded her that he was Swami’s gift to us, and hence the Lord would surely take care of His child. Thus, in all matters, and at all times, while awake and in dreams, I feel a deep sense of peace, which is purely because of His infinite Love and blessings.

“Even when the family shares a happy moment I just say ‘Om Sri Sai Ram’. I know it is all because of His Grace. Hence, it is a kind of thankful remembrance of Him during such moments.

“Today, in all matters relating to my professional and person life, Swami’s teachings guide me and my family. For anything and everything, we seek Swami’s guidance and blessings and only then proceed.”

Kumaran has come a long way from 1989 when he was just an uninterested photographer of Swami to one who has now captured the Lord in his heart forever.

*When words become unclear, I shall focus with
photographs. When images become inadequate, I shall
be content with silence. ~Ansel Adams.*

H2H SPECIAL

MESMERIZING MOMENTS WITH THE DIVINE MASTER

Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 6

A devout and dedicated devotee for nearly sixty years, Mrs. Rani Subramanian, who originally hails from Tamil Nadu, came to Bhagavan Baba as early as 1950. Now eighty five years old and fondly called 'Rani Maa' by Bhagavan, her life is a treasure-chest of scintillating experiences from yester years. A sincere spiritual seeker, she currently resides in Puttaparthi and shares her elevating memories with eager devotees with deep conviction, insight and faith. This is the fifth part of her wonderful reminiscences, continued from the previous issue.

Learning Pranava from the Primordial One Himself

A few years after Swami started residing in Prasanthi Nilayam (moving from the Old Mandir that was located in the Puttaparthi village), He introduced the practice of chanting “Om” at the ashram. He announced that all the devotees should assemble in the Bhajan Hall and they would be taught the correct method of chanting. Thus, began these “*Omkara* sessions”, every morning, at 3.30 a.m., the *brahma mahurtha* (divinely auspicious) hours. (Apparently later, Swami changed the time of these sessions).

A few days after the practice began, He came to our room. My younger sister had been allotted a cottage, but Swami refused to allot one to me! In any case, He entered the room and asked both of us to sit on the floor. He squatted on the floor as well, facing the two of us. Then, He asked, “Do you know the purpose of chanting *omkara*? I shall tell you the meaning of *omkara* and also teach you the proper way to chant it. It must be done correctly!” He went on to explain the power of the *omkara* and said that it purifies the *antahkarana* – *manas, buddhi, chitta* and *ahamkara* (mind, intellect, awareness and ego). He further said that it purifies all the *koshas* or sheaths that the *jeevaatma* (individual) is encased in (*annamaya, pranamaya, manomaya, vijnanamaya* and *aanandamaya* – that is, food, life-force, mind, wisdom and bliss). “Through such purification”, He said, “*Omkara* takes one closer to one’s own divinity”.

And then He would chant it for us and that we used to repeat after Him in precisely the same way. There were no chairs those days for Swami! He just sat on the bare floor and chanted. We followed after Him and made an earnest attempt to learn. After a few days, He visited us again and said, “I have come to see how well you have learned! Let me see - chant *omkara*!” He listened to our chanting and said it was satisfactory. And then instructed us to chant it everyday.

Mantropadesha

A few days later, when we happened to be in the presence of Swami, we asked Him a question: “Swami, we don’t have a *mantra*. We hear that chanting a mantra is very important in the spiritual path. Will you give us *upadesha* and initiate us to a *mantra*?” He said, “No! I don’t give *mantras*.”

In hindsight, Swami made it clear at the time that He is pure *advaita* (non-dualistic) and that is what *Omkara* represents, although we didn’t comprehend the true purport of His statements. *Omkara* verily means the *Parabrahma*, the

One beyond name and form, as explained in the Bhagavad Gita. At that time, neither had we read this sacred scripture, nor did we have any concept of what it stood for. Swami knew we were not yet ready for an in-depth explanation. Therefore, He merely told us to chant *omkara* and said it was good for us.

At that time, we asked him with dismay: “Swami, how will we get our *mantra* then?” He told us to pray to God for a *mantra* and assured us that we shall receive it. “But you should persevere”, He said, “It will come to you at the right time. Until then, keep praying.”

But we persisted with our requests. “Until we get the *mantra* what should we chant?” He said, “Each of you would have an *ishtadevata* - a specific form that you like. I will not prescribe to you what form to choose, but you select one. If you like Rama, then chant ‘Om Sri Rama’; if you like Krishna, chant ‘Om Sri Krishna’. Remember that you have two Gurus – one is your *ishtadevata* (God) and the other is the Guru who gives *Upadesha* (spiritual instruction).” Then, He continued in a seemingly lighter vein, “If you like My name, you may chant that as well.”

Next, He asked me which form did I like. I confessed that I liked Krishna as I relate more easily to Krishna than to Rama; the way He moved among His people, His love, and so on appealed to me. Rama was too austere, too strict about everything! Swami said that it was alright since the choice was up to me and it made no difference. This instruction was given by Swami to all four of us, my sisters and me. Several months after this incident, each one of us received a *mantra* in our dreams according to our *prarabda* (merit) or liking.

I did not receive the *mantropadesha* in Puttaparthi; I got it instead in Nagpur, the place where I lived at that time. Upon receiving the *mantra*, I arrived at Puttaparthi and Swami came to our room very shortly after that. I told Him that I received the *mantra*. He said, “That is very good. Tell me, what *mantra* did you receive?” When I revealed to Him, He warned me that one is not supposed to tell this to all and sundry. He, however, said that He is my Guru and so it was alright. He reminded me that when I visited Him the very first time, He had asked me to perform *Paada pooja* (worshipping His feet), and explained to me that this was the reason why He had asked me to perform the *pooja* then. We had not even realised that He was our Guru!

Still, there was something that bothered me. I blurted out: “Swami, I received Rama *mantra*, however, my *ishtadevata* (chosen deity) is Krishna! Do you think this is appropriate?” He said, “Your question indicates that you have not understood the fact that Rama and Krishna are the same. Why do you see a difference? All forms are one. For some reason, you have received the Rama *mantra*. Accept it with reverence. If you continue to perceive a difference in forms, the efficacy of the *mantra* will diminish. Let Rama be your *mantra*, Krishna be your *ishtadevata*, but chant it without being conscious of a difference. Then, you will surely reach that state of consciousness. You are fortunate to have received such a good *mantra*.” I have been chanting the *mantra* I received since that day.

Divine Invitation to Kodai Kanal

During those days, Swami would ask us to visit Him mostly during the summer; He would say that since the crowd would be small, the place would be quieter and He would be able to spend a lot of time with us. So, one summer after the above incident, I arrived at Puttaparthi with my younger sister who is a *brahmacharini* (celibate), my 9 year old daughter and my 4 year old niece. When we arrived, Swami was at Puttaparthi. However, after a few days, unexpectedly He left Puttaparthi by car, without informing us. We went to uncle Kasturi and asked him about Swami’s destination and expected return date. He told us that Swami had gone to Kodai Kanal. Disappointed, we asked uncle Kasturi, “What is happening? We have come all the way to Puttaparthi with the sole purpose of spending time with Swami. But He has left us high and dry, not permitting us to leave or letting us know when He would return. What shall we do?” Uncle Kasturi asked us to write a letter to Him. “Tell Him that you cannot leave Puttaparthi without His permission. He will give the date when you should return - that is the etiquette you must follow,” he said.

Thus, we wrote a letter to Swami at the address provided by uncle Kasturi. The content of the letter was: “Swami, we came here for Your sake. But you have left us here stranded. What are we supposed to do? Without Your presence here, there is no purpose in our staying at Puttaparthi. Shall we go back? What would you like us to do?” Then, we received a telegram from Swami. It simply read: “Proceed to Kodai Kanal and stay with me.”

We were happy! We went to Chennai and contacted a lady at Kodai Kanal who was a dear friend of ours for accommodation. She was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and owned two bungalows there. So, Kamala Sarathi’s (my sister) daughter and two more friends joined us. We were now a team of five adults and children and we had managed to organise a bungalow through my friend for a couple of months. The only problem was that this place was very far from Swami’s residence. But then it was the only bungalow available at that time.

On the very first day of our arrival in Kodai Kanal, the five of us, with two children, took the long walk up the hill to Swami’s living quarters, which was the beautiful bungalow of Mr. Venkatamuni. As we neared Susheelamma’s

(Mrs. Venkatamuni) house, to our utter dismay, we saw Swami driving away in a car! He had two or three people with Him; Mr. Raja Reddy was driving and Swami sat next to him, while a couple of gentlemen were in the back seat of the car. Swami saw us coming, stopped the car and called out: “Rani amma, come here. Don’t get worried. I am not leaving Kodai Kanal and going away somewhere else. Stay here. I will return after a couple of days. A very dear devotee of mine is seriously ill. He wants My *darshan*”. So, He asked to stay in Kodai Kanal until He returned and go to Susheelamma’s house for lunch everyday. So, after He returned, we used to have breakfast and dinner outside but spend almost the entire day with Swami at Susheelamma’s place. Lunch and tea were provided to us.

Lessons on *Moksha*

One of these days, He called us into the room and said, “There are three stages on the spiritual path. You have crossed two stages. The third one is very difficult to cross. The first two stages are like walking; they are easy. The third stage however calls for a leap – very few can do that and that’s where people hesitate.”

Now, after reading Bhagavad Gita, I have understood that the third stage Swami meant was *moksha* (liberation). *Moksha* is very difficult to achieve, one must be completely rid of ego, exist at all times in divine awareness and no trace of worldly desires must cloud the mind such as *artha* (wish for wealth) and *kama* (or desires). This is the last stage which is the state of liberation from the mind. Mind is the one that makes you think you are the body. It tells you that you are someone’s son, the other person’s brother and so on.

Swami continued, “The last stage is very difficult to reach. But you must reach it. The tests that will come your way will be difficult. You must go inward and seek the answer. Swami will tell you how to handle any situation. Eschew your ego.”

This entire *upadesha* (instruction) was about how we must root out feelings of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ completely. That is why He didn’t give me living quarters at Puttaparthi; He said you are working for ‘thou’ and ‘thine’. Why should I give you a room? It will bring you down to the level of ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ if I do. You are all scared to make the last leap and balk; don’t do that. Stagnant water begins to emit foul odour. You must flow like the river, which is pure. Face the trials and tribulations because they are tests that must be passed – Baba is putting you through an examination and depending on your performance, you’ll pass or fail. Don’t be scared, I am with you. Take one step at a time. Give up more and more – if someone hurts you, keep your composure. Do not react. If someone is pompous, keep calm and composed. You react because of your limited ego. Take the leap and I will help you. Do not stop!”

Husband’s Career – Taken Care by the Lord

Before this visit, during an earlier conversation with Swami about my husband, I had told him, “Swami, my husband is passing through a bad

phase. He is very depressed because he has been overlooked for a promotion he deserved." My husband should have been promoted to the post of the director of health services, but the chief minister did not want the promotion to happen for political reasons. The chief minister installed his nephew in the position in spite of him being junior to my husband professionally. Now, my husband had to report to him which drove him very close to the decision of even resigning the post. All this transpired when I was in Delhi to help my sister with her delivery. He was alone, was very agitated, and had a strong urge to go to Puttaparthi and see Swami. He thought nobody could give him solace and guide him, except Swami. But he did not inform me that he was going to Puttaparthi. He quietly arrived at the *ashram* from Indore and went to uncle Kasturi. He introduced himself as my husband and requested him for an opportunity to see Baba. Mr. Kasturi said, "Baba is not here! You cannot see Him; you will have to go back".

My husband was very disappointed and decided to return to Indore. In a little while, Baba arrived in the car! He went straight to his room, sent for Mr. Kasturi and said "Rani Maa's husband, Subramanya, is here, is he not? Send him upstairs immediately!" My husband went to Swami and poured his heart out. He also told Swami that he had kept this matter as well as his visit to Puttaparthi a secret from me. Swami told him, "Don't worry about Rani Maa! She is mine. I will take care of her." My husband said he would like to resign after this experience at work. Swami said, "No. You cannot do that. Stay back and I will help you. It will take time, but leave everything to me." After that my husband spent some time with uncle Kasturi and returned very consoled.

So, this had happened sometime back, and now in Kodai Kanal Swami called me alone into the room one day and spoke about this issue. He said, "I have written a letter to Subramanyam." He had dictated it to Mr. Raja Reddy. It was written in English in nice handwriting. He handed me the letter and asked me to read it. It was about how one should constantly observe *dharma* (righteousness) and leave the rest to Swami. It was 3-4 pages long with a lot of spiritual advice. Oftentimes, people engage in *dharma* partly and indulge partly in *adharma* (unrighteousness). In the letter, Swami said, "Everything will happen at the right time. You must adhere to *dharma* and leave everything else to Me." After I read the letter, He asked me, "Rani Maa, is the letter alright?" I said, "Swami, why this question? Who am I to comment on a letter written by You?" He said, "No, you must know what I have said to your husband, and you must feel happy that I have provided the right advice." I said, "Swami, since you have written it, it must be so. Who am I to remark anything on it?"

Swami then mailed that letter. After a few years, my husband appealed to the health secretary of the government that injustice had been done to him. The IAS officer, Mr. Varadan, who was the secretary to the Madhya Pradesh state government, was a dear friend of ours. He took up the case and fought for the cause of justice with the government. Mr. Varadan's initiative prompted the chief minister and the health minister to create the post of an additional director of health services, unheard of in the history of state, to correct the

wrong that had been done and promote my husband to this post. Notice Baba's miracle!

A few months after this incident, a state level meeting for health services was organised at Indore to be chaired by the Director, who was the chief minister's nephew. All the doctors and the directors representing various districts of Madhya Pradesh were to attend. When the meeting began, after having spoken a few sentences, the Director collapsed on the stage. My husband, who sat next to him, caught him as he fell. He was rushed to the hospital but did not survive. Subsequently, my husband was designated as the Director and the temporary post of the Additional Director was abolished. This illustrates what Swami said, "Do *dharma* and the results will come at the right time. Leave that to Me."

GET INSPIRED

LIFE EXPLAINED

A large pleasure cruiser docked in a tiny Mexican village. An American tourist got off, and walked along the harbour, ambling up to a middle-aged local fisherman, wizened by many hours sitting under the sun. After a few moments, he complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took him to catch them.

"Not very long," answered the Mexican in a relaxed and pleasant voice.

"But then, why didn't you stay out longer and catch more?" asked the straight forward American. The Mexican explained that his small catch was sufficient to meet his needs and those of his family.

The American, who seemed like he was coming around to making a point, asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?"

"I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, and help my wife around the house. In the evenings, I go into the village to see my friends, play the guitar, and sing a few songs. I have a full life."

The American interrupted, "I have an MBA from Harvard and I can help you! You should start by fishing longer every day. You can then sell the extra fish you catch. With the extra revenue, you can buy a bigger boat."

"And after that?" asked the Mexican, laconically.

"With the extra money the larger boat will bring, you can buy a second one, and a third one, and so on, until you have an entire fleet of trawlers. Instead of selling your fish to a middle man, you can then negotiate directly with the processing plants, and maybe even open your own plant. You can then leave this little village and move to Mexico City, Los Angeles, or even New York City! From there you can direct your huge new enterprise," he said, filled with enthusiasm.

"How long would that take?" asked the Mexican.

"Twenty, perhaps twenty-five years," replied the American.

"And after that?"

"Afterwards? Well, my friend, that's when it gets really interesting," answered the American, laughing. "When your business gets really big, you can start buying and selling stocks and make millions!"

"Millions? Really? And after that?" asked the Mexican, looking out to sea.

"After that you'll be able to retire, live in a tiny village near the coast, sleep late, play with your children, catch a few fish, and spend your evenings enjoying your friends' company." The American had a self-satisfied grin on his face, as he was rather smug that he had been able to explain his way of thinking so convincingly to this simple man – and yes he seemed to understand!

The Mexican chuckled and looking him straight in the eye said slowly but emphatically, "Well, that's what I'm doing now, my friend!"

The visitor stopped for a second. He realised he had met his match in this simple man who was actually quite a few steps ahead of him. But, of course, he did not want to show this and simply forced a smile and backed away mumbling some need to get back to his boat.

And the wry Mexican fisherman – well, he just kept on chuckling – wouldn't you!

Bhagavan Baba has been telling us the same message. He exhorts us to aspire for one thing alone – and that is the Supreme Inner Peace that only God can give us. A life based around the pursuit of money, possessions and physical comforts will never grant us any contentment. That, Bhagavan explains, only leads to 'pieces'.

It is in contentment that peace and happiness are present. Who is the richest man? The man with contentment. And who is the poorest man? He who has many desires, says Bhagavan Baba. Let us have a limit on our desires and make our joy limitless.

PICTURE IN A WALLET

A ticket collector on a train found an old worn out wallet in a compartment full of many people. He looked inside to find the name of its owner. There was no clue. It had some money and a small picture of Lord Krishna. He held it up and asked, 'Who is the owner of this wallet?'

In response, an old man approached and said, "That is my wallet, please give it to me." The ticket collector then told him: "You'll have to prove that it is yours. Only then I can hand it over to you." The old man, who had no teeth, smiled, and said, "It has a picture of Krishna in it."

"That is no proof; anyone can have a picture of Krishna in his wallet. What is so special about that? Why is your picture not in there?" Obviously, the ticket collector was not an easy person to deal with.

The old man took a deep breath and said, "Let me tell you why my picture is not there. My father gave this wallet to me when I was in school. He used to give me a small sum of pocket money. I loved my parents and I kept their picture in it.

Later on, I replaced their picture with mine as it was an excellent color picture of a handsome looking teenager.

Some years later, I got married. My wife was very beautiful and I loved her a lot. I replaced my picture in the wallet with that of hers. I spent hours gazing at her pretty face.

When my first child was born, my life started a new chapter. I shortened my working hours to play with my baby. I went late to work and returned home early too. Obviously, my son's picture occupied the prized position in my wallet."

The old man's eyes brimmed with tears as he continued, "My parents passed away many years ago. Last year my wife too left her mortal coil. My son is very busy with his beautiful family. He has no time for me. All that I had close to my heart is out of my reach now.

So, after all the disappointments, I have put this picture of Lord Krishna, my favorite form of God, in my wallet. It is only now that I have realized that He is the eternal companion. He will never leave me. Alas! If only I had realized this before. If only I had loved the Lord all those years, with the same intensity as I had loved my family, I would not have been so lonely today!"

The ticket collector quietly gave the wallet to the old man. When the train stopped at the next station, he directly went to the book stall at the platform and frantically started looking for a picture of his favorite form of God for his wallet!

Innumerable are the occasions when Bhagavan Baba has told us that our one and only true friend is God – He will never forsake us. He will always be with us no matter what. He alone is permanent and will never lift His compassionate gaze from us.

In a Guru Poornima discourse a few years ago, Baba said,

“Try to reduce your attachment to the world to the minimum extent possible. Be happy and make others happy. Do not hurt anybody. Consider difficulties as passing clouds. You have developed family relationships and there are bound to be some worries. But do not be perturbed by them. When you look at the vast sky, you find many clouds. Likewise, in the sky of your heart there are clouds of attachment. They just come and go. Do not worry about them...Develop equanimity and strive to attain Divinity”.

We are grateful to Heart2Heart reader, Mr. Rajen Ghayal, from USA, who shared this story with us.

THE BARBER SHOP

A man went to a barbershop to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. As the barber began to work, they began to have a good conversation and talked about many subjects. When they eventually touched on the subject of God, the barber said, "I don't believe that God exists."

"Why do you say that?" asked the customer.

"Well, you just have to go out in the street to realize that God doesn't exist. Tell me, if God exists, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children? If God existed, there would be neither suffering nor pain. I can't imagine a loving God who would allow all of these things."

The customer thought for a moment, but didn't respond because he didn't want to start an argument. The barber finished his job and the customer left the shop.

Just after he left the barbershop, he saw a man in the street with long, stringy hair and an untrimmed beard; he was looking dirty and unkempt.

The customer turned back and entered the barber shop again and said to the barber, "You know what? Barbers do not exist."

"How can you say that?" asked the surprised barber. "I am here, and I am a barber. And I just worked on you!"

"No!" the customer exclaimed. "Barbers don't exist because if they did, there would be no people with dirty long hair and untrimmed beards, like that man outside."

"Ah, but barbers do exist! That's what happens when people do not come to me."

"Exactly!" affirmed the customer. "That's the point! God, too, does exist! Because people do not look to God for help is why there's so much pain and suffering in the world."

Bhagavan Baba explains this whole problem as a simple lack of awareness of who we truly are. He says,

"When anyone asks you, 'Can you show me God?' You should reply 'You are God; that is why you are able to talk and act.' To know divinity, you should know the sacredness within you. Keeping salt in your mouth, you can not taste anything sweet. Only by rinsing your mouth and getting rid of the salt can you taste sweetness. Worldly desires are like salt. Discard them; then you can realise divinity."

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

On Sacred Religious Scriptures

Every religion is blessed with many holy texts which guide the faithful. If it is the Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana and Mahabharata for the Hindus, it is the holy Qu'ran for Muslims, the sacred Bible for Christians and so on. Every such scripture not only contains deep spiritual truths but also practical guidelines to help man lead a righteous life. The ultimate objective of these powerful texts is to help man identify himself with God and thereby, make his life on earth meaningful for both himself and others.

In the current quiz, we wish to dwell on these sacred volumes which have guided man for centuries and will continue to do so with their superlative wisdom and light.

1. Extolling the importance of scriptures, in His Divine Sutra Vahini, Swami wrote: "The scriptures are expressions of the Truth acquired by sages while delving into the Reality. The words emanated from the inhalations and exhalations of the Divine Breath. They were heard from no embodied entity; they did not arise out of anyone's imagination. Hence, they are described as impersonal (*a-pourusheya*) and eternal (*saswatha*).

Only the scriptures can liberate people, through that illumination named knowledge. They regulate one's life and foster it, guarding it from grief."

According to Swami, what is one of the most important lesson one derives from the scriptures?

- A. Discrimination of good from bad.
- B. How to control our senses.
- C. Reverence for all gurus.
- D. Constant thought of God.

2. Written by Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í Faith, the '*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*' is sometimes also referred to as "the Aqdas", "the Most Holy Book", or "the Book of Laws". The book outlines the essential laws and principles to be observed by His followers, lays the groundwork for Bahá'í institutions, and articulates His vision for the development of human civilization.

What is the first duty extolled in the first verse of this Holy Book?

- A. Regular study of the scriptures.
- B. To take utmost care of physical health.
- C. Recognition of the supreme power of God.
- D. Purity of thoughts.

3. The ***Dhammapada*** sometimes translated into English as 'Path of the *Dhamma*', is a versified Buddhist scripture traditionally ascribed to the Buddha himself. According to tradition, the Dhammapada's verses were spoken by the Buddha on various occasions. Most verses deal with ethics.

The Buddha taught that human beings desire one thing: pleasure (*sukha*). They find instead suffering (*duhkha*). The cause of that suffering is selfishness or self-centeredness (*trishna*). If this selfishness and self-centeredness is totally extinguished (*nirvana*), then all suffering and pain cease.

Which of these is the first saying of the Dhammapada?

- A. 'We are what we think.'
- B. 'Wakefulness is the way to life.'
- C. 'Live in joy, in love, even among those who hate us.'
- D. 'There is pleasure and there is bliss; forgo the first to possess the second.'

4. The '***Koran***' literally "the recitation"; is the central religious text of Islam. Muslims regard the Koran as the culmination of a series of divine messages and view the Koran as God's final revelation to humanity. It is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects which concern human beings: wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law, but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures.

The Koran has one overriding theme, endlessly repeated and elaborated throughout the text. What is that?

- A. Utter humility
- B. Complete Submission
- C. Total Sacrifice
- D. Unwavering faith

5. '***Agama***' means "a traditional doctrine, or system which commands faith". The collective term given by the Jains to their Sacred literature is called Agamas. The Jain Agamas contain the sermons of their founders. They were later codified by their trusted disciples into the languages of the people for the larger benefit of the masses. The Jains generally agree that the Agamas constitute the inspired wisdom of Lord Mahavir, when he attained perfection and Omniscience.

Which of the following is one of the most profound teachings of the Jain scriptures?

- A. Strict vigilance of sleeping habits.
- B. Disciplined reading hours for spiritual growth.
- C. Practice of service oriented actions.
- D. Reverence for all life.

6. **"Tanakh"** is the compendium of the teachings of God to human beings in document form. The name "Tanakh" is a Hebrew acronym formed from the initial Hebrew letters of the Tanakh's three traditional subdivisions: The Torah ("Teaching," also known as the Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im ("Prophets") and Ketuvim ("Writings") forming the covenant between God and the Jewish people are the foundation and Bible of Judaism. It is also called the Hebrew Bible.

The word 'Adonai' is repeated often in the Tanakh. What does it signify?

- A. God alone has true ownership of man.
- B. Man should always serve his brethren.
- C. Everything in this world is the will of God.
- D. One should love all beings as much as he loves God.

7. For Christians, the Bible not only contains the word of God; it is the word of God. The New Testament portion of the Bible, contains the life and teachings of Jesus in the four Gospels, the letters of the Apostle Paul and other disciples to the early church and the Book of Revelation. Jesus is its central figure throughout.

Once, when Jesus was asked: "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" What was Jesus' reply?

- A. Love God with all your heart and soul.
- B. Love your neighbor as yourself.
- C. Do not lie.
- D. Do not steal.

8. The role of Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book, as a source or guide of prayer, is pivotal in worship in Sikhism. It is more than just a scripture for the Sikhs. The Sikhs treat this Granth (holy book) as a living Guru, an eternal Guru, a sacred conduit for wisdom and guidance.

The religion depicted in Guru Granth Sahib is based on experience and belief which requires that religion be reflected in daily life. Harmony of the mind, utterances and deeds is the main sign of spiritualism.

The text in which the Granth is written is a script called Gurmukhi. What does 'Gurmukhi' mean?

- A. The last Guru
- B. From the Guru's mouth
- C. The Eternal Truth
- D. Total Reverence to God

9. Zoroastrianism is a religion founded in ancient times by the prophet Zarathushtra, also known as Zoroaster. The holy book of Zoroastrianism is the ‘Avesta’, which includes the teachings of Zarathushtra written in a series of hymns called the ‘*Gathas*’.

The *Gathas* are highly abstract sacred poetry, worshiping Ahura Mazda. They promote a comprehension of righteousness and cosmic order, concepts of social justice, and stress the need for individual choice between good and evil.

What are these ‘*Gathas*’ also considered as?

- A. Laws for a just society.
- B. Solace for lost souls.
- C. Akin to *Manthras*.
- D. A description of God’s Infinite powers.

10. In Hinduism, the most succinct and powerful abbreviation of the overwhelmingly diverse realm of Hindu thought is to be found in the Bhagavad Gita, also known simply as "The Gita". The Gita speaks of cultivating the intellect, properly using the body, and always remaining equipoised in relation to the greater Self.

The Bhagavad Gita truly presents itself as a liberation scripture, universal in its message. It discusses selflessness, duty, devotion, and meditation, integrating many different threads of Hindu philosophy.

According to Bhagavan Baba, what is one of the greatest teachings in the Bhagavad Gita?

- A. Offer your food to the Lord before partaking it.
- B. If you need to fight, do so in a detached manner.
- C. Never give up on your appointed task.
- D. That Thou Art.

ANSWERS:

1D: Constant thought of God

Swami tells us: “The scriptural directives or counselors (*sastras*) direct and counsel everyone. People yield to delusion and become one with the darkness caused by false values and attachment to the unreal, the ‘me’ and ‘mine’. But scripture is the mother; she does not give up. She persists and pursues; she reminds people of their goal in order to ensure that they will be saved.

The scriptures are numberless, and a lifetime is too short. Aspirants are plenty; doubts and hesitations are numerous; steadfastness is meager. As a result, no one can claim full mastery. Of course, one need not drink the entire ocean to know its taste; one drop on the tongue is enough. Similarly, it is impossible to understand all the contents of the scriptures. But it is enough to grasp the important lesson that is elaborated and put it into practice. **This lesson is: constant thought of God.**

2C. Recognition of the supreme power of God.

The inspiring opening verse of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is as follows:

“The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine Inspiration?”

In the Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh stated: "They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples." "To build anew the whole world" is the claim and challenge of His Message, and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is the Charter of the future world civilization that Bahá'u'lláh wishes to raise up. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas reiterates those eternal truths enunciated by all the Divine Messengers: the unity of God, love of one's neighbour, and the moral purpose of earthly life.

3A. 'We are what we think.'

The first saying is: "**We are what we think.** If one speaks or acts with a cruel mind, misery follows, as the cart follows the horse... If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows, as a shadow follows its source."

The title "Dhammapada" which the ancient compilers of the Buddhist scriptures attached to this anthology means portions, aspects, or sections of Dhamma. The work has been given this title because, it spans the multiple aspects of the Buddha's teaching, offering a variety of standpoints from which to gain a glimpse into its heart. Buddhists believe that one should reflect on the meaning of each verse deeply and thoroughly, investigate its relevance to his life, and apply it as a guide to conduct. If this is done repeatedly, with patience and perseverance, it is certain that the 'Dhammapada' will confer upon his life a new meaning and sense of purpose. Infusing him with hope and inspiration, gradually it will lead him to discover a freedom and happiness far greater than anything the world can offer.

4B. Complete Submission.

The overriding theme that is endlessly repeated and elaborated throughout the text of the Koran, is one of complete submission (in Arabic: Islam; Muslim means "one who submits") to the word and the will of God, who is one God and the only God. The God of Islam is both a stern judge and endlessly forgiving; obedience to God wipes away all transgression. This submission, however, must be fully and rationally given; faith (*iman*) is a rational consent to the truth of the word of God.

Muslims believe the Koran to be the book of divine guidance and direction for mankind, and consider the original Arabic text to be the final revelation of God. Islam holds that the Koran was revealed to Muhammad by the angel (Gabriel) over a period of 23 years.

When the Koran is recited, a holy atmosphere is created, an atmosphere involving God, the world, the truth and peace. During the moment of reciting, the compound becomes sacred, and the moment powerful. The reading of the Koran is a meditative moment for a Muslim and it is a ritual that can be performed anywhere anytime.

5D. Reverence for all life.

The Jain Agamas teach reverence for all life, vegetarianism and strict renunciation for ascetics. According to the Jain dharma, the goal of life is to attain liberation. The Jain scripture, Jain Agamas Siddhantas, preaches the doctrine of Ahimsa or non-violence. According to this doctrine, all objects have a soul, and should not be hurt or killed. The main teaching is that it is the greatest sin to cause injury to creatures, and that it is the greatest virtue to renounce worldly possessions and practice strict asceticism. Orthodox Jains could not even take to farming, because it involved tilling which killed earthworms. Jain dharma's message of nonviolence (*Ahimsa*), truth (*Satya*), non-stealing (*Acharya*), celibacy (*Brahma-charya*), and non-possession (*Aparigraha*) is full of universal compassion.

6A. God alone has true ownership of man.

The name Adonai is translated Lord in the Hebrew Bible. It signifies ownership or mastership and indicates the truth that God is the owner of each member of the human family, and that He consequently claims the unrestricted obedience of all.

This name refers to the true ownership God alone has of man. Jews believe that we are not our own. God alone has the right to tell us what to do. At the same time He provides us with the ability to accomplish that task.

Answer: A. Love God with all your heart and soul.

7A. Love God with all your heart and soul.

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**

The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

8B. From the Guru's mouth.

Gurmukhi literally means "**From the Guru's mouth**".

Guru Granth Sahib is compiled in the form of hymns written in praise of God, which describe what God is like and the right way to live. Sikhs consider the Guru Granth Sahib to be the highest authority within the community, and it plays a central role in Sikh devotional and ritual life. The hymns from Guru Granth Sahib contain the philosophy of Sikhism and it is the central part the Sikh Culture. The Guru Granth Sahib teaches many things. These include:

- 1) Love of God and as well as mankind
- 2) Service to God and the community
- 3) Equality of man and woman
- 4) Respect and tolerance for other religions

9C. Akin to *Manthras*.

The importance of the Gathas to Zoroastrianism cannot be emphasized enough. They are the centerpiece of scripture and inspiration. For Zoroastrians, **the Gathas are basically like "manthras," literally "thought-provokers"**. They believe that they are prayers to God and guidance for humanity. Every line, every stanza, and every song is communion with God; and at the same time, they impart an eternally modern message. They lead humanity, with all its modern science, to Ahura Mazda, God of Subtle Wisdom. With the Gathas as the guide in thought, word, and deed, one may devote one's life in practicing, teaching and preaching the divine doctrine.

Some of the verses of the Gathas are directly addressed to the Omniscient Creator, Ahura Mazda. These verses, devotional in character, expound on the divine essences of truth (*Asha*), the good-mind (*Vohu Manah*), and the spirit of righteousness.

10D. That Thou Art.

In His 1972 Summer Shower Discourse, Swami says: 'The *Bhagavad Gita* means "The Song of God"; words that have come to us as His flowers, as His *Prasad*, as *bhakthi* or devotion, *jnana* or knowledge and *yoga* or meditation,

and so on and so forth. But **the *Bhagavad Gita*, in addition to these, has really also given us the great saying, “THATH THWAM ASI” meaning “That Thou Art”**. This is the essence or the keynote of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The first six chapters teach us about the *jiva* or soul that resides in this body and, through that, the nature of *jiva*. The next six chapters, while teaching us the path of *bhakthi*, also show us the nature and content of what we call *Thath* or “THAT”. The last six chapters, while giving us the content and the meaning of the third word *Asi* also tell us about how to realize the identity of the self, the *Jivatma*, with “THAT” the *Paramatma* and also teach us to give up things, how to sacrifice and reach *Moksha* or liberation. If we study the *Bhagavad Gita* in the proper way and enquire into its contents, we will understand the true nature of the saying “*THATH THWAM ASI*.”

QUIZ ON DIVINE GANESH CHATURTHI DISCOURSES

Lord Ganesha is universally worshipped by the followers of Sanathana Dharma. He bestows joy, wisdom and protection. Lord Ganesha is invoked at the beginning of every puja and His sacred name is chanted before starting any new venture.

In one Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, Bhagavan Sai Ganesha assured us: “The purpose of festivals like Ganesha Chaturthi is to remind men of their inherent divinity and awaken in them the sense of oneness of all mankind. When you make proper use of your inherent intelligence and wisdom, you will be successful in life. Ganesha will never put you to suffering in anyway. He blesses all your endeavours, efforts and confers success. He will never allow anything evil to reside in you.”

Here is a quiz to remind ourselves of all these beautiful divine snippets gifted by Bhagavan Baba to everyone of us over the years.

1. In His Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse in 1971, Swami said: “To get rid of delusion and enable man to comprehend his inherent divine nature, the ancient sages taught a prayer. This prayer is the one that is addressed to Lord Ganesha.

Shuklam-Baradharam Vishnum Shashivarnam Chaturbhujam Prasanna Vadhanam Dhyayeth Sarva Vighnopa-Shantaye

Suklaambaradharam means one who is clad in white. This is the symbol of purity...universal love and compassion. ***Vishnum*** is the second attribute ascribed to Him. Vishnu means that He is present everywhere, at all times...***Sasivarnam*** means His complexion is grey like that of ash. ***Chaturbhujam*** (Four-handed) is the next denotation. This means that apart from two visible hands, He has two invisible hands that are available for the two divine uses of (1) Blessing the devotee, and (2) Guarding him from danger.”

What does ***Prasanna Vadhanam*** mean?

- A. Always Forgiving.
- B. Of Resplendent Beauty.
- C. Of Graceful Countenance.
- D. Of Pious Nature.

2. In His 1994 Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, explaining the true meaning of the name Ganapathi, Swami reveals: “The essential purpose of the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival is to teach a person to avoid the company of bad people and cultivate the company of the good. What does the term Ganapathi signify? ‘Ga’ means *Buddhi* (intelligence). ‘Na’ means *Vijnaana* (wisdom). ‘Pathi’ means master. So, Ganapathi is the master of all knowledge,

intelligence and wisdom. There is also another significant meaning for the word, that He is the Leader of all the *Ganas* who are celestial. *Ganas* also symbolize _____.”

- A. Words
- B. Actions
- C. Universe
- D. Senses

3. In His 2002 Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, elaborating on the name Vinayaka, Swami states: “He is also called Vinaayaka, which term means that He is one who has no master above Him. He is the Supreme master. He is beyond the mindless state. One who has stilled the mind cannot have any master.”

According to Swami, how can man possess the knowledge of self-mastery?

- A. By means of a Guru.
- B. By having a pure and sacred mind.
- C. By detachment from material objects.
- D. By gaining knowledge from Holy Scriptures.

4. Explaining the meaning of the name Vighneshwara, in His 1989 Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, Swami elaborates: “Man is confronted with many *Vighnas* (obstacles) in the journey of life. Prayers are offered to Ganapathi - who is better known as Vighneshwara - for removing such obstacles and minimizing impediments. Ganapathi is an important deity for people of all sects. He is the deity to whom worship is offered first in any ritual.”

According to Swami, by what means can Vighneshwara remove any obstacles and impediments in our way?

- A. According to Him His place of honour.
- B. Offering Him His favourite food.
- C. Invoking His presence by penance.
- D. Praying to His Mother Parvathi.

5. In His 1997 Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, Swami expounds: “In what form does Vinaayaka - the one who has no master - exist within a human being?

- A. Appetite
- B. Digestion
- C. Soul
- D. Heart

6. In His 1991 Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, Swami narrates a story that reveals the mystery behind why Lord Ganesha is worshipped first: “How did Vinayaka acquire *siddhi* (supreme powers)? His parents held a contest for their two sons - Ganesha and Subrahmanya. They said they will offer their grace in the form of a fruit to whoever came first in circumambulating the universe. The younger son Subrahmanya set out immediately on his peacock to go round the universe. On seeing Subrahmanya approaching his parents, almost at the end of his trip, Vinayaka, who had been quietly sitting all the while, got up and went round the parents and sat down.”

Why did Lord Ganesha not go around the Universe?

- A. He wasn’t interested in the fruit after all.
- B. He felt His parents were His true Universe.
- C. He doubted whether it was possible.
- D. He did not want to leave His parents.

7. Swami has said: “Association with Gods, as vehicles, ornaments, accessories or servants of Gods, endows objects, animals and men with specially sacred status. Elephants, Lions, Eagles, Snakes, Primates - all these and many more have been divinized thus. Divinity is not limited to mankind alone. We find divinity present in birds and beasts too.”

In His 1992 Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, Swami further explains as to how Lord Ganesha’s family is an ideal one, maintaining harmony and peace in spite of the antagonistic elements present amongst them: “Easwara’s family consists of Shiva, Parvathi, Ganapathi and Subrahmanya. When you consider the vehicles of the four, you find that by nature they are antagonistic to each other.”

While Shiva’s vehicle is the bull, and Parvathi’s is the lion; of their two sons, Ganapathi’s vehicle is the mouse - what is Subrahmanya’s vehicle?

- A. The Peacock
- B. The Eagle
- C. The Horse
- D. The Cat

8. In His 1988 Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, Swami explains: “What is the inner significance of worshipping the elephant-faced deity? The symbolic significance of Ganesha’s elephant head has to be properly understood. The elephant has profound intelligence. Moreover, the elephant has large ears and it can hear even minute sounds...The elephant takes the praise and blame equally. When it hears something bad, it moves its body this way and that way and shakes off the unwanted things while it retains good things quietly. Only Vinayaka teaches the lessons that are essential for mankind.”

Besides intelligence, according to Swami, which other quality stands out the most in an elephant that man should learn from?

- A. Compassion
- B. Reverence
- C. Strength
- D. Gratitude

9. In His Divine, 1997 Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, Swami reveals the symbolic meaning of the relation between Paarvathi and Ganesha: “When Ganapathi is described as *Paarvathi thanaya*, who is this Paarvathi? Paarvathi signifies *Prithvi* (Mother Earth). Everyone is a child of Mother Earth. The meaning of *Paarvathi thanaya* (son of Paarvathi) is that Ganapathi, who is the Lord of the *Ganas*, is the son of Paarvathi, who symbolizes *Shakthi* (the Divine Energy).”

Swami then asks: “Where are Paarvathi and Ganapathi to be located?”

- A. In Celestial regions.
- B. In Spiritual Oneness.
- C. Wherever they are worshipped together.
- D. Only in sacred lores.

10. In His 1997, Divine Ganesha Chaturthi Discourse, Swami teaches us the significance of Ganesha’s vehicle – the mouse: “Man is bound by three tendencies. The first is *Kama* (the longing to possess). When that longing fails, *Krodha* (anger) raises its hood. When the desire is fulfilled and the thing is gained the third tendency, *Lobha* (greed) overtakes him. If one's desire is beneficial, the Divine will shower Grace. Ganesha has no desire, no anger, no greed. His Grace is available for all who seek good and godly goals. Look at the vehicle which He has chosen, the mouse! The mouse is a creature that is led, even to destruction, by *Vasana* (the smell of things). Men are all victims of *Vasana* (preferences and predilections stamped on our minds during the past lives). Ganesha smothers and suppresses the *Vasanas* which misdirect man and create misfortune.”

According to Swami, what is the significance of Ganesha using the mouse as His vehicle?

- A. To teach humility.
- B. As this expresses contentment.
- C. As symbolizing the controlling of the darkness of ignorance.
- D. As symbolizing control over anger.

ANSWERS:

1C. Of Graceful Countenance

Swami further describes: The last description is: **Prasannavadhanam** (of graceful countenance). The countenance depicts the inner calm, happiness and balance, inner grace and mercy, the consciousness of strength and sovereignty. **Sarvavighnopasanthaye** means for the removal of all obstacles. **Dhyaayeth**, meditate (on Him) who removes all bad qualities, instills good qualities and confers peace on the devotee.”

2D. Senses.

Swami asks: “Where are the *Ganas*? What is their form? When you investigate this, you find that *the Jnaanedhriyas* and *Karmendhriyas* (five organs of perception and the five organs of action) are the *Ganas*. The mind is the master over these ten organs. *Buddhi* (intellect) is the discriminating faculty above the mind. Thus, **Ganas also symbolize the senses**. The ten senses, the mind and the intellect together constitute the *Ganas*. Ganapathi is thus the Lord of the senses.”

3B. By having a pure and sacred mind.

Swami teaches: "Vinayaka" means that He is totally a master of Himself. He has no master above Him; He does not depend on anyone. This term also means that He is the master of the intellect and discriminating power in man. He possesses great intelligence and knowledge. Such knowledge issues from a pure and sacred mind. This knowledge leads to *Vijnana* (wisdom). Because He is the master of *Buddhi* (intelligence) and *Siddhi* (wisdom or realization), He is described as the Lord of *Buddhi and Siddhi*. *Buddhi and Siddhi* are referred to as the consorts of Vinayaka. You should not stop with installing the idol and doing *puja* for a few days. You should make efforts to become a *Naayaka* or Master over yourself.”

4A. According Him His place of honour.

Swami explains further: “There is special significance in placing Vigneshwara in the forefront before embarking on any undertaking. In a forest, when an elephant moves through the jungle, it clears the way for others to follow. Likewise, by invoking Ganesha, the path is cleared for our undertakings. The elephant's foot is so large that when it moves it can stamp out the footprints of any other animal. Here, again, **the symbolic meaning is that all obstacles in the way will be removed when Ganesha is accorded the place of honour**. The journey of life is made smoother and happier by the grace of Ganesha.

5C. Soul.

Swami answers: “It is in the form of the *Aathma* (Soul). *The Aathma* has no master. The mind is the master of the *Indhriyas* (senses) and Indhra is the master of the *Indhriyas*. People conceive of Indhra as presiding over his own

celestial realm. But as the Lord of the *Manas* (mind), he resides in everyone. The *Buddhi* (intellect) which is the master of the mind is the very embodiment of *Jnaana* (Wisdom or Awareness). What kind of awareness is this *Jnaana*? It is Constant Integrated Awareness. It remains unchanged, neither growing nor diminishing. It is called *Vijnaana*. Unfortunately, nowadays *Vijnaana* is equated with science. Science is not *Vijnaana*. Science is phenomenal knowledge. It is based on demonstrability.”

6B. He felt His parents were His true Universe.

Swami continued: “Parvathi observed that Subrahmanya, who had taken so much trouble to go round the universe, should be declared the winner. Parameswara asked Ganesha what was the inner significance of his going round the parents. Ganesha replied: ‘The entire universe is permeated by both of you. The entire creation is a manifestation of the Siva-Sakti form. It is an act of delusion to attempt to go round this phenomenal universe. **To go round both of you is the true circumambulation of cosmos.**’ Then Parvathi exclaimed: ‘Yours is the fruit.’ Ganesha became the Lord of *ganas* (the Divine hosts). Easwara was so much impressed with the supreme intelligence of Vinayaka that he told him: **‘All those who wish to worship Me, will offer their worship first to you.’**”

7A. The Peacock.

Swami enlightens us further, in detail: “Shiva's vehicle is Nandi (the Bull). Parvathi's vehicle is the lion. By nature the bull and the lion are inimical towards each other. On Easwara's head there is Ganga. In His forehead He has fire. There is natural antagonism between water (in the Ganga) and fire in the Lord's forehead. Ganapathi has the elephant's face and His vehicle is a mouse. There is a natural antagonism between Parvathi's lion and Ganapathi's elephant-head. Likewise there is natural enmity between the serpent around Easwara's neck and Ganapathi's vehicle, the mouse. There is also enmity between Shiva's serpent and **Subrahmanya's peacock**. In spite of the natural enmity of these different vehicles of Easwara's family, there is no discord at all among them. Perfect harmony prevails among the members of the family and their different vehicles.

Harmony in the Divine family shows that where there is Divinity there is peace and amity. Hatred and jealousy arise when the Omnipresence of the Divine is forgotten or ignored. This harmony and unity is an example to the world.”

8D. Gratitude.

Swami teaches that “The elephant is also known for its fidelity and gratitude. In any circumstance it will not forget its master. Even in its last moments, if it hears the voice of its master it will open its eyes and look for him. It is prepared to sacrifice its life, but it can never tolerate its master’s suffering. These are the lessons man should learn from the elephant. Intelligence without gratitude is valueless. Gratitude is a very sacred quality. **Every man should be grateful to those who have helped him.**”

When there is no path for us to tread in the jungle, it is the elephant that walks through and creates a path for us. Similarly, in this jungle of life, it is the elephant-headed Vinayaka who shows the ideal path for all of us to tread."

9B. In Spiritual Oneness.

Swami explains in depth: "What is the relationship *between* Paarvathi and Ganapathi? People do not normally enquire into these matters. Usually Paarvathi is considered as the mother of Ganapathi and no one recognizes the underlying unity between the two. Where are Paarvathi and Ganapathi to be located? Are they in the external world or are they immanent in *every* human being? **The truth is both of them are all-pervading and convey the message of *Ekaathmabhaavam* (spiritual oneness).**"

10C: As symbolizing the controlling of the darkness of ignorance.

Swami tells us: "The mouse is Ganesa's vehicle. The mouse is a clever and lively creature. As a symbol it means that we should be clever and diligent in our actions. It also represents darkness, which is the symbol of ignorance. **The mouse moves about in the dark. Ganapathi is regarded as controlling the darkness of ignorance.** The inner significance of *Vaasana* in relation to humanity is the heritage of *Vaasanas* which they bring from their previous lives. These *Vaasanas* (inherited tendencies) account for the actions of human beings in their present lives. They also signify desires. Without recognizing this underlying significance and desires, people merely wonder how a large being like Vinaayaka could ride on a tiny creature like a mouse. **Vinaayaka signifies the triumph of wisdom over ignorance and of egolessness over desires.**"

QUIZ ON HEART2HEART

On the third day of this month falls the exciting festival of Ganesh Chaturthi when people all over India and in many countries elsewhere celebrate the advent of the beautiful Lord Ganesh with great joy. We, in H2H, have always offered you special articles to mark this occasion and to help you dwell on this fascinating form of the Lord which is a favourite of many.

The below quiz is based on these articles to help you refresh your mind with the profound significance of this unique form and name of the Lord.

1. In ‘The Source of All Prosperity’ an enlightening article in praise of Lord Ganesh from the September 2005 issue, we find an inspiring excerpt from Swami’s 1997 Ganesh Chaturthi day’s discourse, where Baba recited the Ganapathi Gayatri:

***Ekdantaya Vidmahe
Vakratundaya Dhimahi
Tanno Dantih Prachodayat***

[I meditate on the single tusked Lord, the Lord with His curved trunk. May He grant knowledge and inspire me.]

Swami then said: “If you want to lead a life of happiness, free from troubles and difficulties, you have to pray to Ganapathi, the remover of all _____.”

- A. Ignorance
- B. Hatred
- C. Illnesses
- D. Obstacles

2. In ‘Primordial Deity - Powerful Inspiration’ from the August 2006 issue, we clarified: ‘There is a grand mythology surrounding Lord Ganesh. The very image of Lord Ganesh invokes awe and surprise. He has a huge body matched by a huge head. His vehicle is a small mouse, a large trunk and two tusks; one half broken. He holds in his hands a noose, a goad, a plate of sweets and in the fourth hand holds forth the promise of *abhaya*. All these have messages for us.’

What is the message of His holding a plate of sweets?

- A. We must have a sweet personality.
- B. Life is meant to be enjoyed; it’s God’s gift to us.
- C. We must control our intake of sweets.
- D. He loves His devotees dearly.

3. Looking again at ‘The Source of All Prosperity’ article, we also described the significance of Lord Ganesha’s different names. ‘Fascinatingly, Lord Ganesha, the God of auspicious beginnings, has a number of appellations and each one chooses a name of their liking to invoke Him. He is described as –

Ganapathi - The Leader of all celestial beings,
Vighneshvara - The Lord of every form of *Aiswarya* i.e. wealth,
Vighanharta - The Annihilator of all obstacles,
Vinayaka - The Supreme Master with none above Him,
Gajanana - The God with an elephant face,
Lambodar - The God who is pot bellied,
Mooshika Vahana - The Lord with the rat as His vehicle,
Ekdanta - The God who is one tusked,
Gajadhipati - The Lord of elephants, etc.

According to Swami, in what form does Lord Ganesha live in every human being?

- A. Courage and Valour.
- B. Health and Wealth.
- C. Intellect and Wisdom.
- D. Humility and Compassion.

4. What unique activity do the students from Swami’s educational institutions carry out every Ganesh Chaturthi day, much to the joy of Bhagavan and assembled devotees?

- A. An inter campus general knowledge quiz on Lord Ganesha.
- B. A procession of caparisoned elephants with students riding on top.
- C. Creation and subsequent immersion in water of decorative floats of Lord Ganesha.
- D. A beautiful drama showcasing the life and ideals of Lord Ganesha.

5. Delving again into the article ‘Primordial Deity - Powerful Inspiration’, we also shared the mythological story relating to Lord Ganesha’s birth: ‘The advent of Ganesha is lost in the mists of time but He is mentioned even in Vedic literature. The mythological story relating to His birth is well known. Goddess Parvathi wanted a reliable person to ensure that her privacy is not intruded and so created a baby from her own body and breathed life into it. And the baby boy was very handsome and brave. She armed him and asked him to stand guard. Lord Shiva returned from His meditation and wanted to enter the house. The boy challenged Him and no amount of persuasion worked. Lord Shiva ordered His *ganas* to wage war. But the boy was too hot to handle even for the *ganas* and their leaders who beat a hasty retreat.... ’

According to the story, what did Lord Shiva have to do to enter the house?

- A. He had to reduce Ganesha to the size of a mouse.
- B. He had to disguise Himself into a woman.
- C. He had to behead Ganesha.
- D. Goddess Parvathi had to finally come out and reveal the truth.

ANSWERS:

1D. Obstacles.

Wherever His glories are sung, the Lord in His elephantine form is worshipped as the remover of all obstacles. In the article, we explained the significance of the worship of Lord Ganesha first: ‘It is a time-honoured tradition to offer worship first to Ganesha before embarking on any undertaking or learning music, the fine arts or any branch of knowledge.

The popular belief is that **Lord Ganesha instills purity in body and fearlessness in mind and removes all the obstacles coming in the way of any endeavour.** It is for this reason that the first *bhajan* is always dedicated to Ganesha in all Sai *Bhajan* sessions. Worship of Lord Ganesha confers success at two levels, *Pravritti* (outward) and *Nivritti* (inward), spiritual as well as worldly.

2B. Life is meant to be enjoyed; it’s God’s gift to us.

The noose in his hands reminds us that our attachments must be under our control. We should not get too attached to fleeting objects of the world. The goad is the device a mahout uses to discipline the elephant. By holding the goad in His hands, Ganesha teaches us that self discipline is the best discipline. The *abhaya hasta* reminds us that we are all safe and under His protection. Lastly, **the plate of sweets reminds us that life is meant to be enjoyed.** It is God’s gift to us and like all of His gifts it is extremely valuable. Irrespective of the incongruities of the form He has a large following. All denizens of the three worlds worship Him and no activity is started without His consent.

3C. Intellect and Wisdom.

In October, 1997, elaborating on the principle of Lord Ganesha on *Ganesha Chaturthi* Day, Swami said, “*Ganesha is Aprameya, meaning He is transcendent and all-encompassing. Hence, He can be worshipped in any manner. Your prayers will certainly reach Him if you affix the stamp of ‘faith’ and the address it with ‘love’ to Him. In fact, Ganapathi dwells in every human being in the form of intellect and wisdom. There is no need to seek for Him in the outside world. Realize and act on the basis that the living Divinity is ever-present within you.*”

4C. Creation and subsequent immersion in water of decorative floats of Ganesha.

Prashanti Diary from October 2007 beautifully describes this special event and eloquently comments on the spiritual message behind it:

'One by one in a disciplined manner, each chariot was brought front and displayed before Swami. Swami would bless the chariot and then they would be taken away... The labour of Love seemed to be paid back in full with the look of Love. The head priests of each chariot went up to Swami with an idol of Ganesha and Swami blessed them.

The whole exercise of making these chariots is so spiritual. The central theme of the Bhagavad Gita is *Karma Phala Tyaaga* (renouncing the fruit of action - action without expectation.) This chariot making seems to embody that philosophy. Everybody sweats and toils - days and nights - to get beautiful chariots ready for Ganesha...

The glory and grandeur of the chariots lasts only a few hours during the procession. Once the immersion ceremony is over, the chariots are just forgotten. Nobody seems to cringe or cry that such a mammoth effort is not being preserved. It is often missed but a real powerful example of detachment and renunciation. And all the effort is just to make Swami happy. It would indeed be an uplifting experience if we make our lives into one big chariot making ceremony.

5C. He had to behead Ganesha.

It required almighty Shiva Himself to behead him. Parvathi entered at that very moment and saw her creation destroyed and was distraught. The Lord offered to restore the life of the kid with the head of any being lying down with his head pointing south and thus Ganesha received an elephant's head. This story is just symbolic. It shows we are created for God's own pleasure and have a role to play in this world. Utter loyalty to the mother ensures Her blessings and invincibility.

HEALING TOUCH

THE REVIVIFIED RAVINDER

- *A Story of Despair turned into Delight*

In a medical breakthrough, a team of highly specialized Cardiovascular surgeons at the SSSIHMS, Puttaparthi recently performed a rare procedure, using state-of-the-art equipment to restore the functioning of a man's arm that had lost its blood supply because of an accident. The grateful patient, Ravinder, a young man of modest means from Ludhiana in the northern state of Punjab, is finally ready to return with both his arms healthy enough to pursue his dream of driving a private taxi to make an honest living. The only currency that was traded in the entire saga of selflessness combined with the highest possible professionalism was that of Pure Love. Driven by the Avatar's personal example, Sai medical professionals continue to make medical history every day, while raising their dedication to the highest levels of spirituality.

August 11, 2008 was the fateful day; it could make or mar his life forever. Understandably, Ravinder was slightly nervous. Yes, the 23-year-old had gone through it earlier; but going through it all over again for the third time was making him edgy.

First, it is the chill of the large room, with all the machines and tubes, which get to you. Soon after, a mask is put on and everything before the eyes turns liquid and floats around as in a psychedelic dream. Then it is all quiet.

Ravinder's mother was not with him; she was in his hometown Ludhiana, a city in the Indian state of Punjab in North India. Though she was physically not with her son, in all other ways – emotionally and psychologically – her heart was with him. She was observing a complete fast on August 11, praying fervently for Ravinder's well being and the success of the operation. Though her sister was there to comfort her son, it was but natural for the mother to worry about her youngest child. Ravinder had five older siblings.

"After the surgery, when I phoned Ravinder's mother and told her that the operation had been successful, she wept in relief. She told me that none in the family felt like eating anything on the day of the operation," Ravinder's maternal aunt, Mrs. Sundari Devi said. "It is our good fortune that we came to Baba's Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi. Ravinder's family had already spent a fortune on two earlier surgeries performed on him elsewhere, and his family was in no position to pay anymore for his treatment. But here the operation was done absolutely free of cost. We did not even spend a rupee for the treatment," she said joyfully.

Sitting on his bed in the Cardiovascular Thoracic ward of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS), Puttaparthi, Ravinder, who had undergone an axillary to axillary bypass, reminiscences how a small

bruise under his left collar bone, later incapacitated his left arm and how he was even on the verge of losing this vital limb.

Temple of Healing that Feels Just Like Home: Ravinder

A rare surgery performed by the surgeons of the SSSIHMS has now given him new hope. "I have not seen a Hospital like this. Everybody speaks so lovingly here. It is like home," he said. "*Just* like home," he added. Ravinder is now to be discharged in a few days. He is young, has a broad unshaven face, a welcoming smile and sports a T-shirt with red horizontal stripes. His dark eyes look at you with a lot of enthusiasm, and have a serenity, which seems to say, "Ah, finally it is over".

With his short, sturdy body, one would seldom associate any illness with him. "Look how thin my left arm has become," he said comparing both his arms. "Doctors said not enough blood was reaching it; but after the operation I could feel the blood flowing into my left arm," he added.

Serious Consequence of Minor Accident

In 2001, on a visit to Sirsa in the neighbouring state of Haryana, Ravinder unfortunately met with a road accident and sustained just a bruise under the left collar bone. "I was accompanying my uncle, who was on a visit to Sirsa to meet his guru. He wanted me to accompany him, so I went along," Ravinder explained recalling that ill-fated day.

Though on surface there was a small mark and little pain, internally, the injury had obstructed the main blood vessel that supplies blood from the heart to the left arm. Owing to the lack of blood supply, Ravinder's left arm had started withering. The obstruction had also actually resulted in an aneurysm (blood-filled bulge of a blood vessel) under his left collar bone. In simple terms, the accident had caused a permanent injury to the nerves of his left arm and Ravinder was completely unaware of this.

Two years after he met with the accident, Ravinder felt a swelling forming under his collar bone. "Not only did a lump form, but my left arm also started getting constricted in winters. I could not use it the way I could use my right hand; it was growing thin as days passed."

Mercenary Hospitals Misdiagnose, Charge Exorbitantly

Ravinder panicked and visited a private hospital in New Delhi (India's Capital city), where a doctor looked at the bump and told him that he was suffering from tuberculosis. Ravinder was now shattered; nevertheless he picked up courage and started the prescribed medication. But after a while, he, however, grew suspicious of the diagnosis as the medicines produced no positive effect.

"I don't belong to a rich family. My father and mother work in the hosiery industry in Ludhiana. I have two elder brothers, who also work in the same

industry; they make woollens. As the demand for woollens diminishes during summers, our family income takes a hit. I wanted to contribute to the family income by driving a private taxi, but with such a pitiable condition, I could do nothing. In fact, I ended up adding to my family's misery." Ravinder recalled those hoary days with a deep sense of sadness, and continued, "However, my family wanted me cured, whatever be the cost."

Once he was back in Ludhiana, after his brief stay in Delhi, Ravinder now visited a local hospital. The doctors of the hospital out rightly rejected the diagnosis of the private hospital in Delhi. "These doctors confirmed that it was an internal injury and removed the lump," Ravinder recalled, but his problems did not come to an end. "However, soon after I was operated, the lump returned," he added.

Family's Finances Run Dry

With no relief in sight, Ravinder's family now arranged for the money and sent him to New Delhi once again. This time he went to another hospital and the doctors, after diagnosis, performed on him an angioplasty (the technique of mechanically widening an obstructed blood vessel) at a cost of Rs. 1,50,000, (US \$ 3,750). The doctors, in this procedure, used a stent to close the rent in the artery. However, for some reason, after a while the stent became blocked. Ravinder's family was now told to pay up another Rs. 10,000 for the operation.

"At this point, I lost hope," Ravinder said. "I refused to undergo the operation. My family had already spent all that they had, and now the doctors were demanding another Rs. 10,000!"

God Intervenes Through Caring Aunt

Ravinder's maternal aunt, Mrs. Sundari Devi has been a devotee of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba for more than a decade. She used to visit Prasanthi Nilayam every year to render selfless service. It was through her, that Ravinder was first introduced to Swami.

Sitting in a chair beside his bed at SSSIHMS, Sundari Devi was a personification of joy. "Ravinder used to watch programmes on the television about Baba and His mission. He used to ask me about Him, and told me that he wanted to visit Prasanthi Nilayam himself," she recalled with delight.

"I was planning to visit Prasanthi for my annual seva, so I told him to come along, because I wanted him to see the doctors in the Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi," Sundari Devi said. "Ravinder was initially against the idea, not because he did not want to see Baba but because he thought his family would incur a heavy expenditure in the process," she explained and continued, "Ravinder and his family could not believe their ears when I told them that in Baba's Hospital even complex surgeries are done absolutely free of cost!".

Complex Operation Restores His Arm

The financial situation in Ravinder's home was truly very discouraging. The family actually took a loan to pay for Ravinder's train tickets and food to enable him to visit Puttaparthi. Once Ravinder and his aunt arrived at the Hospital, the doctors examined his case carefully and after taking into consideration the severity of the ailment and the age of Ravinder, they advised him to get admitted immediately. And soon, the surgery was performed. This happened on August 11, 2008. In the surgery, the doctors inserted a graft and connected the blood vessel, which supplies blood to the right arm to a portion of the blood vessel on the left side, beyond the obstructed portion, thereby ensuring that the required quantity of blood flowed to his left arm.

According to Dr. Chaudhury Voleti, Chairman, Cardiac Sciences, SSSIHMS, who was a part of the operating team, the pulse on Ravinder's left hand, which was too feeble to be read before the operation, jumped to 95 soon after the surgery. Elaborating more on the procedure, Dr. Voleti said that during the meeting of surgeons before the operation various options were discussed. "One of the alternatives was to connect carotid artery (that takes blood to the left side of the brain) to the axillary artery on the left side (the vessel carrying blood to the left arm). But taking into consideration the effect it may have on the brain; it was later decided to connect the axillary blood vessel on the right side to the one on the left side of the body."

Before the operation, Ravinder was counselled about the surgery and its possible outcomes. "We told him, that functional capability would return to his left arm, but the damage caused to the nerves in the accident could not be reversed. Then, Ravinder said 'If I can use my hand after the operation, I have no problems going ahead with the procedure,'" explained Dr. Tushar Gajjar, one of the surgeons who took part in the surgery.

At 7:45 a.m. on August 11, Ravinder was wheeled into the operation theatre on the first floor of the Hospital. After anaesthesia took effect, the specific area of Ravinder's body, which was required for surgery, was cleaned with an antiseptic. The muscle under the right collar bone was split open and the axillary artery was found. Then, a 3-4 cm of the artery was cleaned of the adjoining tissue. This process took the surgeons about 20 minutes.

The same process was repeated on the left side. Later, a tunnel was made under the skin, which would accommodate the tube that would carry blood from the artery on the right side to the left side. This tube is called a graft. Next, the right length of ringed Gortex graft was measured and cut.

Best Equipment, Seasoned Doctors, Highest Service, Loving Care Define Sai Healthcare

"Though several times more expensive than the cheaper variety of graft, we use the ringed Gortex in Bhagavan's hospitals, as He insists on only the best

quality of service and facilities be provided to the patients, and as always, absolutely free of cost," Dr. Voleti emphasised.

After making incisions on the axillary artery on the right side and the left side, both arteries were connected using the graft to ensure supply of blood to the right arm. The entire procedure took a good two-and-a-half hour.

Ravinder's discharge papers had been lying on a table next to him. He looked at them, and asked the nurse, "Sister, where do I need to sign?"

"Here," the sister replied. Ravinder put down his signature in neat Devanagiri script.

Joy and Relief Fill the Family After So Long

"I will now go and have Baba's darshan. In a week I will return to Ludhiana. I have been told by the doctors to take specific precautions for a few months. Afterwards, I want to drive a private taxi, and earn money for the family," he said jubilantly and continued, "My aunt called up home after the operation was successful. My mother shed tears of happiness...after a while, regaining composure my mother said she will now break her fast. She had not eaten all day."

Anyone who looked at Ravinder and sensed his emotions at this moment would have found it impossible to stop their eyes getting wet. It was as if he had not only regained all that he had lost...his health, his mother's joy, his family's peace and harmony, his future... but also had found in his life a new hope, a novel beginning, a grand opportunity to celebrate life knowing that there is Someone who will always stand by him, even if the whole world turns a blind eye towards him in his times of travail. The God, that His mother turned to while observing a strict fast for his sake, was indeed his only true friend. The sense of relief and a hope of a bright future are hard to miss in Ravinder's smile.

When Ravinder returns home healthy and whole, an entire family and community rejoices in the generosity of the Sai healthcare system in distant Prasanthi Nilayam that provided him with treatment of the highest international standards, steeped in spiritual love ... a love so sacred that money has no place in it, proving once again that Bhagavan Baba's Love truly has no boundaries.

- *Authors: The PR Dept., SSSIHMS, PG*

and the Heart2Heart Team

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our Readers on the August 2008 issue

Feedback on the cover story: *'Beacons to Bolster the Soul of Business'*

Sai Ram,

My name is Ramachandra from the 2005-07 MBA batch. It just was extremely refreshing and rejuvenating to read this edition's cover story on MBA alumni. As I have very little corporate experience, I cannot comment much on the long term impact that an MBA in Puttaparthi would deliver. But I would like to say that it is important to pay attention to *discipline* during the stay in Hostel, as I believe this inculcates the many different qualities mentioned in the cover story. Remaining calm and not being driven by impulses is something that is paying off very well in my career.

Regards,

Ramachandra

Dear Radio Sai,

The coverage on SBMAF was very interesting. It is also interesting to see the transformation these graduates are bringing in the corporate world by each day undergoing spiritual transformation as they solve business problems - and at the end of the day placing the wins and losses at Swami's Lotus Feet. These MBA graduates are truly living to the axiom '**Mind on Baba Always**' while uplifting the Morality factor in the corporate world, challenged by increasing competition.

I hope these drops in the water will one day transform the corporate and non-corporate worlds worldwide.

Sairam,

Syam Rajasekharuni, Sydney, Australia

Sai Ram H2H Team,

I cannot agree more to all that you have said. As a treatise it was very well articulated and you have analyzed the problem very precisely - "when the goals are wrong, it does not matter whether you succeed or not."

True, the goals of business have metamorphosed drastically. The true goal of any business is not to get the maximum profits possible. Surprisingly, the thoughts that intrigue me now-a-days are on H2H lines! Your analysis strengthens my conclusions and makes me feel happy to see people, who take the initiative to propagate powerful thoughts and help others think!

Transformation should start at the individual level. It's only when each of us resolves to become better human beings, there can be a visible change in society. It is only when the thoughts of the general public are stimulated in the right direction, when they give deep thought to all the issues we face today, that they will resolve to do something about it.

Regards,

Purnima

Sairam,

My name is Bharadwaj, an alumnus of the Institute and based currently out of New York City. I thank Radio Sai and the Heart2Heart Team for this excellent and timely article.

At such a perilous time in the world, with little publicity, the School has achieved tremendous importance and relevance. I was at the Stern School of Business, a premier Ivy League School, in the US and I realised nobody can give us the quality of education that we received from Swami. If we talk of placements, salaries, alumni, etc. maybe we are not comparable; but the one greatest gift that mankind will envy us for is Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Himself.

Sairam,

Bharadwaj

Sairam,

I read the article and of course it inspired me a lot, being very informative – it felt like attending a refresher course at the Business School of the Sathya Sai University.

It was a great opportunity to read and know about the inspired alumni who are the gems created by Bhagavan.

Sarath Kumar

Sairam H2H,

It was an absolute joy to read the two Cover Stories, from the July and August issues, about the Students and the Institute. They were both fantastic. They were highly inspiring and just what I have been waiting for.

After reading this, I am convinced without a doubt that things in the corporate world can only work the Sai way.

I am currently pursuing a Law degree, and long to study my MBA at the Feet of Sai.

Loving Regards,

Nimish Ubhayakar

Feedback on *Destiny's Child*

It is with a lot of joy and humble pride that I read the article in Heart2Heart. To know that Swami's Super-Specialty Hospitals in Bangalore and Puttaparthi are transforming thousands of peoples' lives each day is truly beautiful. My humble *pranams* to Swami, who inspires every living being in this universe, and guides us to become better human beings. My best wishes and warm regards and *pranams* to all the staff at the Hospitals.

Being in the UK for five years, and working part time as a care-assistant in the local hospital for that period, has made me realise what a brilliant gift selfless love is! It benefits the receiver and also the giver, possibly more so to the latter!

Even with multi-million pound budgets for the NHS (National Health Service, which is free, too) and many plans and guidelines for a smooth-running NHS Trust, I am yet to see dedication and efficiency, love and commitment on a scale that Swami's Hospitals and their staff exemplify. I can only say that when I go in to work again this weekend, the memory of this family's experience will guide me to be even more receptive to the needs of my patients.

Om Sri Sai Ram,

Ruchita Sarvaiya, Luton, UK

Feedback on *This life is for Him*

Dear H2H,

The article is inspiring because it affirms for me that Swami has a plan for us. I am a teacher and recently a new career opportunity has been presented to me. There was uncertainty in my mind as to what the outcome will be, but

reading the article about Mr Y. Siva Rama Krishnaiah's professional journey affirmed that things happen according to Divine timing.

Many years ago when I had doubts whether I should continue in my teaching career Swami appeared in my dream and with a word dissolved all my doubts. The question was 'what shall I do Swami?' and the response was 'Teaching'.

Sai Ram,

Ivo Tadic, Mount Gambier, South Australia

Feedback on *Prashanti Diary*

I would like to thank you for providing people with the amazing spiritual Prashanti Diary with Sai Baba's discourses. His discourses are so wonderful that it brings tears to my eyes and makes me feel as if I am climbing a spiritual ladder, slowly yet willingly. Thank you so much!

Jai Sai Ram!

Shama Bhatia

Feedback on *Love And Liberation*

The article from the loving Australian was beautiful and inspiring. It spoke in an expansive yet concise manner and captivated me throughout.

Sai Ram,

Gregory Matsumoto

Thank you so much for bringing back to memory these very insightful words from Howard Murphet, which I had read before, but had not completely registered in my mind and which had receded back in memory!

Shashikant Ambegaokar, Vista, California, USA

Sai Ram,

Thank you for publishing the great article on Love and Liberation. Swami has worked through Murphet to explain love, forgiveness, and liberation in simple terms.

Sai Love,

Rama, Milwaukee, WI, USA

Feedback on *My Sai - the Incredible God, Within and Without*

Sai Ram,

Yes, this article did inspire me. I cried as I was reading it. What wonderful magic Swami performs. Swami gives us so much love. I now feel I must learn to share this love with all the people around me.

Lots of love,

Jayanti.

Sai Ram,

This article is a very inspiring narration of experiences with the divine Lord and His grace showered on her by Swami. It certainly inspired me to a great extent to do more than what I am doing to be part of the divine mission: Love All Serve All and Help Ever and Hurt Never.

Regards,

Balaji Suresh

Feedback on *My Dear Sai, Always infallible*

Sairam,

This article is just wonderful. It gives an insight into the mysterious ways of our Sai; He gives what we deserve and not what we desire. He always gives the right thing at the right time. I would like to read other such articles where a devotee is disappointed that the Lord has not granted his wish, but finally has their desires fulfilled at a later stage.

V.S. Venkataraman Iyer, Mumbai, India

Feedback on *The Overlooked Truth about Ourselves*

Sai Ram,

This is a brilliant yet easy-to-understand story that explains to us that our good fortune is not just from individual effort, but is also derived from others; those whom we may know and also whom we do not. It also provides a beautiful reason for chanting *Loka Samasta*. Thanks for this!

Sandthiren Mudaly

Feedback on *Lunch With God*

Sairam,

Many thanks for this article. Truly, God is always with us, we only need to open our minds and see, and accept Him in whatever form He comes to us.

Raahul Seshadri, General Manager, Pune, India

Feedback on *Bhajan Classroom*

Dear Staff of H2H,

This is a great website and amazingly helpful! I just wanted to say my big 'Thank You' for all of your work to upload the script of the bhajans and the meaning in English.

This is very easy to use because of separated files for pronunciation, tune and full version. The text on the website was also useful. Now I can enjoy it more as I sing and learn bhajans - and will be more prepared for my next visit to Ashram.

Thank you so much again,

Kazuhiro Numasawa, Japan

General Feedback

I've been reading your email for a few months and I want you to know that the stories and quizzes you provide are well worth the read. Thank you for bringing Sai Baba into my life; I am a Roman Catholic who enjoys Indian spirituality; it's very enlightening.

My favorite Sai Baba saying is "Love others as God loves you." Keep spreading the Good News. Have a peaceful week.

Love to all,

Walt Henry, USA

Sai Ram Brothers and Sisters in Sai,

Today I heard a talk by Dr. Venkataraman about the beginnings of Radio Sai and future of the 24 hour broadcasts. I would like to send my profound thanks to all that help and run this wonderful service to all in the listening universe.

In the beginning of hearing about this marvel, I had no interest in technology of any kind and had a prejudice initially about the satellite and internet broadcasts. That slowly melted away as I was pleasantly surprised at the talks

by Baba, interviews with various international devotees and their experiences and, of course, the bhajans sung by Baba and other programs.

To date, it has been two years that every work day at my office, I am able to keep the station on for the 8 hours that I am there! My boss is not asking me to shut the station off, so I know Baba has His hand in the matter. The clients that I see in my office and the social workers are all getting a blast when they enter my office which is set up in a spiritual way with a picture of Baba and other photos of Buddha, Gandhi and a picture of the *Lingam* Swami produced that has healing energy. I work in an HIV/AIDs program in Queens, New York City and my level of stress is kept to a minimum, thanks to all your efforts and the blessings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

I have been a devotee for the past 34 years and could have never guessed that all the wonder I have been privileged to experience while under the direct guidance of the Avatar would have manifested; of course, everything He said has always come true. I feel that all the discourses are like going to Spiritual School in the Direct Divine Guidance of Baba with the help of you all. May Baba bless all in all. Thank you and Sai Ram.

Rosalie Loew, USA.