HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Modern Educational Mayhem and the Way Out

If there is one common critical challenge for most parents in this world, which worries them constantly and goads them into making life-altering changes in their lives, it concerns their children's education. Ridiculous though it may seem, it is a fact that even before the child has opened his/her eyes to the world, many parents have already lost enough sleep pondering over the best possible schooling options for their child. Recently, Canada's national daily, Globe and Mail carried an article on the state of panic regarding kindergarten education among educated urban parents in the Indian capital New Delhi. The headline said it all – "Fierce competition for top spots in India's peewee Ivy League". The article went on to say "As New Delhi's population explodes, parents are doing anything to get their children into one of the city's elite nursery schools – a task that's tougher than getting into Harvard." It also points out that "Private-school fees can be hefty (100,000 rupees, or $2,500 a year), but parents from every income group are willing to take on huge loans if they can secure a precious seat."

Why is it that good and free education which according to the UN Declaration of Human Rights is the fundamental right of every citizen of the world, has today become a casualty? Is this truly not at the root of many evils that torment our current society repeatedly? Why is it that knowledge which was always considered sacred by ancient civilizations such as India, the teacher being venerated as a form of God, is today just another commodity which has to be bought and not reverentially received? Hasn't something seriously gone wrong in the last few decades? Definitely yes! And the answer probably is the pernicious paradigm shift in the philosophy and procedure of the modern system of learning. Education today is no longer a noble and altruistic experience that has to be conscientiously proffered and courteously absorbed; sadly, it has become an enterprise.

India Inc. and other major economies of the world today hail the advent of a new breed of business leaders - the 'edupreneurs'. The mission of these edupreneurs is straightforward and simple - to *maximize* their monetary returns by making the most of this 'huge market' of desperate buyers of much-needed education. In fact, many businessmen whose area of operation for decades was totally unrelated to any aspect of education, learning or human resource growth *et al* have now jumped into this 'promising emerging business opportunity' and are soon poised to join the other 'education czars' (some of whom in India own assets worth 600, 500 or 800 crores!).

US $42 billions is the size of this new market in India alone and this is expected to climb to US $64 billion (some say $80 billion) in another four years, according to a study conducted by a leading Indian Business Magazine. And half of this pie consists of K-12 (Kindergarten to class 12) education which comes to Rs. 2,01,600 crore, and this too is growing fast to double in a decade. Enrollments in K-12 are expected to touch 351 million by

2018; at an average charge of Rs. 1.15 lakh per seat this translates into an alluring Rs. 3,91,000 crore! No wonder, it is not just entrepreneurs but also private equity and venture capitalists who are zealously eyeing 'education companies'; US $300 million has already been sunk by them into this sector and this number probably could have been several times more but for government regulatory hurdles which does not legally permit 'profit' in this sector. These *edupreneurs* too do not even inadvertently utter this 'P' word but have a convenient substitute - 'surplus'(!). Slice or dice any which way, the edupreneurs have come of age as the product they sell is a huge money spinner.

What happens when a student who is reduced to a mere 'customer' goes through such a mercenary system of learning? He hits back at the earliest opportunity to recover the huge investments made to acquire the degree. No surprise then that we find professionals demanding high salaries, entrepreneurs seeking to make a fast buck through the shortest possible route - no matter what - and young doctors almost fleecing their patients, without a second thought. Society, they feel, was heartless to them earlier and now it their turn to get back. Their ruthlessness is well justified, they reason.

And so, this vicious cycle continues with the result that presently we have reached a point where most of these educational establishments have only 'growth and prosperity' as their aim and have no qualms of being a commercial organization; and in the process the original purpose of imparting quality and sacred learning that most institutions originally had is completely lost. If we analyze carefully, this is in fact the reason why a plethora of pathetic ills plague our society today, be it terrorism to teenage suicides, gang-fights to drug abuse, youth depression to poverty. Exorbitant education has to be avenged for by hook or crook.

Many may say, "Well, this could be true to some extent, but that is the way the world is now. Changing this entire set up in society is next to impossible. Altruism is good for platform speeches but the reality is starkly the opposite." Basically, many sections of society do realize that we are living with a cancer but feel helpless, while the worst part is that there are others who are either not aware or do not even acknowledge that we do have a truly deadly cancer.

Long ago, a British visionary named Malcolm Muggeridge, who used to be a teacher of English in Kuchi, before the partition of India and Pakistan, returned to England only to find himself utterly disgusted with the prevailing educational system there. He noted, "A society like ours, dedicated to the pursuit of happiness, which means in practice, the pursuit of pleasure, money, eroticism, success etc., with violence for kicks, is to me very repellent! It is my considered view that the way of life of the Western man today, is the most horrible and degraded that ever existed on earth. Education, the great mumbo-jumbo and fraud of the age, purports to equip us to live and is prescribed as a Universal remedy for everything – from juvenile delinquency to premature senility. For the most part, it only serves to enlarge stupidity, inflate conceit, enhanced credulity, and put those subjected to it at the mercy of brain washers in printing presses, radio and television at their disposal."

Things don't seem that much different today even in India. So much for the problem, but is there a solution? If there is, will it be practical and effective, and more importantly, enduring?

And the answer is there is no problem in this world that does not have a way out. However, if the solution has to be permanent, it also has to be based on something that is unchanging and eternal. In other words, **the source of the solution lies not in the fickle and intelligent mind but in the heart that is steady and sacred. A shining practical illustration of this is the Sri Sathya Sai University, established by Bhagavan Baba more than a quarter century ago in a remote corner of the state of Andhra Pradesh in India.** The students of this institution never 'buy' their education; they are instead gifted this sacred knowledge with great love and care, and the pupils too receive it humbly. The motto of this holy seat of learning is 'Speak the Truth – Follow Righteousness' and this is exactly what each alumnus or alumna of this university strives to do once he or she is back in society. But does it really work? You can find out for yourself from our collection of real-life accounts in the section "Harnessing the Heart" from H2H archives. And to get a glimpse of how these students imbibe this lofty education not only from their teachers and professors, but also directly from their Divine Chancellor Himself, please read our article "Scintillating Moments with Sweet Sai, Part-2" in the Swami and Me section of this issue.

Well, the Sri Sathya Sai University may have three campuses, but this is just one of the thousands of educational establishments in this country; what difference can it really make? This is no doubt a valid argument but what one fails to observe is that this University does not proclaim to be the answer to all the evils of the world, instead **it demonstrates to the entire human society what is truly possible if one were determined enough to chart a new dimension in modern education, where character development of the students is more important than their career prospects, and the only currency exchanged during this entire learning tenure is selfless love.** What is more heartening is how, drawing inspiration from this enlightened educational philosophy, a plethora of Sai schools and colleges have sprouted up in India and all corners of the globe. And their number as well as their impact is only increasing every passing day. There is the British Institute of Sathya Sai Education in UK which has done tremendous work in sensitizing young minds about the timeless values of Love, Truth and Non-violence. You will find a peek of this in our Feature article "My Invaluable Experience with Sai EHV" which is a conversation with the director of this aforementioned institute, Mrs. Carol Alderman.

The big story in this issue, however, is about the Institute of Sathya Sai Educare located in Chromepet, Chennai in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Offering completely free education of international standard for nearly three decades now, this school has achieved something which even the most prestigious institutes do not even dare to contemplate upon. Ms. Sai Meera, the Principal of this school who is actually an alumna of the school, says, "This school believes in offering real education that involves the student, and

does not merely thrust information. Real education flows from the heart and is termed as 'Educare'".

This institute like all other Sai inspired institutions relies not on money, men or material, but in the immeasurable power of pure Love that is encased in every individual's heart, for that alone can provide permanent peace to society. Only when selfless Love rules the hearts of the majority of our civilization, can we appreciate and live by the 'indefinable moral law that governs this universe' as Mahatma Gandhi put it. And when this happens, we will definitely find ourselves in a society that offers us more good and inspiring news than the current headlines that highlight gaudy and debilitating stories.

Let us make morality the mark of our lives, individually and collectively, and live lives worthy of our education – one that is for life, not merely for earning a living.

Loving regards,
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

True Education Emerges From the Heart

In this world, there are millions of educated people. Right from a child to a learned old man, everyone is interested in reading books and acquiring knowledge. But in what way are they benefited by the acquisition of bookish knowledge? Such education can only help you to eke out a livelihood.

One may study a number of books and master various branches of knowledge, but does he/she enjoy peace and tranquility? All the knowledge that we acquire from books can only take care of our physical needs. The fact is, true knowledge is latent in everyone. Women do not lag behind men in academic excellence. People think that education confers on them respect and esteem. But, people lack true wisdom in spite of their high academic achievements.

Education Should Turn the Students Inward

In the present times parents want their children to pursue solely job-oriented education. But, what is the use of such education which does not bring about transformation among children? Neither are the children benefited nor are they able to render any help to their parents. Modern man develops ego on account of his educational achievements. Humility is the hallmark of true education. If a man lacks *viveka* (discrimination) and *vinaya* (humility), all his education is of no value. You should understand that your education is meant for the welfare and progress of society. But, in what way is society benefited by educated people?

Students should strive to earn a good name in society. Today's education is making the students materialistic. It does not prepare the students to turn inward to listen to their inner voice. One should acquire *Atma Prabodha* (Atmic knowledge). That is true education. Without awareness of the Self, all other knowledge is useless. Why should one pursue such education?

People are interested in exercising their influence and power; they are not making efforts to cleanse their mind and heart. This is the result of modern education. People have learnt to talk sweetly, but they do not translate their words into action.

True Education Should Purify the Heart

Mere learning by rote the contents of books is not important. You should imbibe the *gandha* (essence) of all *granthas* (texts). That is true education. People read a number of books, but what is the use? They merely quote what

others have said. Is this what you one is supposed to learn? You should listen to the prompting or utterance of your inner voice and share it with others. But, scarcely anybody thinks on these lines today.

There are three important principles in every human being – *Manas* (Mind), *Buddhi* (Intellect) and *Atma* (Self). What is the nature of Self? It is all-pervasive. True education is that which originates from the heart. The reference in this context is to the spiritual heart and not the physical heart. There are many noble souls who are setting ideals to society by translating their knowledge into action. If you do not act in a principled manner, all your education becomes useless. It is what you practise that matters, not what you speak. Wherever you may go, your behaviour should be exemplary. That is what pleases Me.

True education is that which originates from the heart. Heart is very important for human existence. When a child is born, the first thing that people observe is the heart beat. You should rely more on your spiritual heart than on the physical heart. Conscience is another name for spiritual heart. Keep your heart pure. That should be your main endeavour. Whatever is done with love and purity of heart will confer bliss on you.

First of all one should understand the principle of unity. Unity leads to purity and purity leads to divinity. A true human being is one who strives for unity, purity and divinity. Otherwise, he is no better than birds and animals. First, purify your senses and develop unity. Consider all as your brothers and sisters and live in harmony.

Love in Practice is Real Education

You can certainly acquire secular knowledge. But you should not rest contented with that. You should turn inward and acquire spiritual knowledge as well. Only then can you attain peace.

So many have assembled here (in Prasanthi Nilayam). Everyone's attention is focused on Swami. In the same manner, let your mind be focused on divinity always. Contemplate on God. Serve your fellowmen. If a person who has been starving for ten days is served a sumptuous feast, you can well imagine the joy he experiences. When all the tanks and lakes are dried to a trickle, you can imagine the joy that a continuous downpour brings with it. Similarly, serve those who are in desperate need of your help. Give them happiness. You can attain divinity only through service. Human life is most precious. But, man is behaving like an animal and thus wasting his life.

First of all, develop love. When you have love in you, everyone will become your friend. If your heart is not suffused with love, your life will become artificial. Life is meaningless without love. If everyone shares his love with his neighbour, there will be no room for hatred at all. Share your love with everyone and live like brothers and sisters. Today we find conflicts and differences even among brothers and sisters, because they lack proper understanding.

People do not understand the true meaning of love. Their love is tainted with physical and worldly feelings. When you understand the principle of love and develop love to love relationship, all will become one. The Veda says, "Sahasra Seersha Purushah ..." It means that all heads, all eyes, all feet are His. Once you understand the principle of oneness that is present in all, you can live in tune with the true spirit of brotherhood.

- Divine Discourse at the International Conference of Eminent Educationists

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - part 18:
Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear Reader,

In response to your positive feedback to this section where we have a conversation with the Divine, we continue with Prof. Anil Kumar's 'Satyopanishad' following Dr. John Hislop's series 'Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba' that ended in January 2008.

This series is also 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, and aspects of God – embodied and formless, to price hikes, women's liberation, vegetarianism, and the generation gap among people 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 sixth chapter, 'Parallels and Polarities'.

Chapter 6: Parallels and Polarities

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We hear two terms very often used by *pandits*: *prakruti* and *purusha*. Please explain these two terms?

Bhagavan: *Prakruti* and *purusha* are matter and energy. You can also take them as the positive and the negative. Even if there is bulb, you don't get light unless there is power supply. Likewise, the power supply remains useless, if there is no bulb either. Therefore, both power and light bulb are required. Similarly, this entire creation is a combination of *prakruti* and *purusha*. These two are interdependent and interrelated.

Prakruti is viewed as feminine. God is the only male.

In a College for Women, girls play all the different roles in a drama. So also, at the level of the body, there are differences. But, the indweller, *atma*, is one and the same. The body is a bundle of bones. It is like a water bubble, it is ephemeral. It is afflicted by many diseases. After all, it is full of urine, blood, muscles, bones and faecal matter. It emits only bad odour and not the fragrance of flowers and perfumes. The body is *prakruti* and undergoes change periodically. But, the eternal, changeless, immortal truth is *purusha* or

God. It is only the *purusa* that is valued. *Prakruti* is accepted and cherished so long as *purusa* is there.

Sugar mixed with cream of wheat makes a sweet by name *ravva laddu*. Sugar in combination with dal makes a *laddu*. The same sugar can be mixed with any type of flour. Similarly, *purusa* functions through *prakruti* assuming different forms and names. But, *purusha* remains a witness, who is transcendental, beyond time and space; non-dual, eternal, blissful and is a personification of wisdom. It is *purusha*, who created *prakruti*, the universe. *Purusha* is the object while *prakruti* is his reflection. Therefore, these twin terms are used by Sanskrit scholars to indicate *purusha* and *prakruti*: *Loka-lokeswara*, *viswa-visweswara*, *jagat-jagadiswara*, *sarvam-sarveswara*, *prapancha-parameswara*, etc. Let's suppose there are containers made of gold, silver, copper and clay and they are filled with water. Although the containers differ in metal and value, the reflection of the Sun in all these containers is one and the same. So, the Sun is *purusha* while the containers represent *prakruti*. Matter + Energy = God.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Some worship Vishnu, while some others worship Siva. They don't see eye to eye with one another. There seems to be constant rivalry between these two groups, the Vaishnavites and the Saivites. Kindly tell us how these two groups of devotees of God can be united.

Bhagavan: This is utter ignorance and foolishness. The scripture says, *ekamevadvitiyam Brahma* which means "God is one without a second'. It also says, *advaitadarshanam jnanam* that is, true wisdom is non-dual. Every seeker of truth or a spiritual aspirant, should know the essential unity in diversity. You should experience unity in divinity. The worshippers of Lord Vishnu address the Lord of the seven hills of Tirupati as Venkataramana while the worshippers of Shiva call him Venkateswara. But, you know both are the same.

Once a king convened a conference of scholars of both these groups to deliberate, discuss and finally decide as to who was the greater of the two, Vishnu or Siva. Both the contending groups presented their viewpoints convincingly. The king, therefore, wanted his Chief Minister to consider all the points of the scholars and then give his verdict on the issue. The latter got up and said, "Oh King! I do not think if either of these two groups has ever experienced reality. Those who argued in favour of Vaishnavism saying that Vishnu is greater than Siva knew little of Vishnu. Had they been genuinely devoted to Him, they would have seen Siva in Vishnu also. Similarly, those who held that Siva was superior to Vishnu would see Vishnu in Siva also".

There is another episode to illustrate this fact. One day Lord Sri Rama was passing by and on the way He saw a stone. Hanuman observed it and wanted to pick it up and throw it away. He used all his strength, but could not lift it. That very stone was the Sivalinga installed by Sri Rama in Ramesvaram, a pilgrim centre in Tamilnadu. Rama, being Vishnu Himself, proved that He and Siva are basically one and the same by installing a Sivalinga. Isn't it so? Know

that all names are His and all forms are His. He is the only one who responds to our prayers.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! You repeatedly mention 'love' in Your discourses. Why? Don't we have *prema*, love, within us? If not, how are we to develop it? What is the difference between *prema*, love and *moha*, attachment?

Bhagavan: You think you have *prema*, love. It is a mistake. You only have *abhimana*, or attachment. There is a lot of difference between the two. You have misdirected love and allowed it to flow in different ways and ultimately got it steeped in attachment. You have forgotten real *prema*.

The love you have towards your children is *vatsalya*, affection. Your love towards your wife is *anuraga*, attachment and your love towards worldly objects is *mamakara*, possessiveness. Your love towards your equals is *maitri*, friendship. Like this, love flows in many different directions. All this is not love in the true sense of the term. This is all physical, worldly, ever changing and temporary. This may give you *prapanchika ananda*, worldly pleasure, *bhautik ananda*, mundane pleasure, *indriyananda*, sensual pleasure, and *manasika ananda,* desire-oriented love. They give you only pleasure.

Today you may be happy with one thing and tomorrow you may not be with the same thing. In winter, you are happy wearing a woolen coat but in summer, you will be unhappy if you wear the same woolen coat. Therefore, time, position, space and states of mind bind happiness. This is the type of happiness you get out of *abhimana,* attachment. Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya in the Ramayana, died of his attachment to Rama as he couldn't bear separation from him. It is again, the attachment of Kaikeyi that led to the attempt to crown Bharata and the exile of Rama.

You observe the contrast between Rama and Dasaratha. The father, Dasaratha, due to his attachment to Kaikeyi, had to be separated from Rama by granting her the boon she had promised. But, his son, Rama, left his consort Sita to her fate in a forest, when a washerman spoke ill of her as she had spent eight long months in Lanka under the control of Ravana. What supreme detachment! He had no attachment to the kingdom either. So, he simply obeyed his father's command and left for the forest.

In the Mahabharata, you know how king Dhritarashtra remained silent due to attachment when his sons were committing atrocities against their cousins, the Pandavas, which ultimately led to the death of all his progeny. Isn't it so?

Don't you know that Yasoda couldn't fully comprehend the divinity of Krishna because she considered him always only her son and never as God, due to her *vatsalya*, attachment? Had Buddha been attached to his wife, Yasodhara and his son, Rahul, would it have been possible for him to leave them? Krishna, once he left Repalle, a place where he had spent his boyhood, never stepped in there again. He was not attached to the place. But, His connection with the Gopis continued, as it was only love to love relationship, which was

divine. The love of the Pandavas suffered no decrease or loss in spite of the terrible sufferings they had gone through.

Love is changeless. Love is steady and unshakeable. Love is non-dual. Love is not carried away by praise nor does it vanish with blame. Love is selfless and unconditional. Love is spiritual and essentially divine: it was the love of Jesus for humanity that made him pray for those who had persecuted him while he was on the cross. Isn't that the pinnacle of love?

Attachment is confined to getting and forgetting, while love always gives and forgives. Love is God. God is love. Live in love. Attachment is bondage leading to misery. Attachment is narrow and utterly selfish.

A child is full of love and bliss. As he grows up, he starts loving toys; thereafter he loves to play and slowly starts loving friends. On becoming a youth, he loves a life partner, then his family, and gradually he develops love for possessions, position and properties. Thus, love is allowed to flow in different directions, and as such, it becomes diluted and finally reduced to attachment.

Your love for God is devotion, and helps you to cultivate virtues like humility and obedience and makes your life blissful. It helps you to attain *mukti*, liberation. What you need today is the expansion of love.

First of all, you start with loving your family, extend your love to your relations and slowly to your community and your country as a whole, and ultimately to the entire universe. You can realise and experience God only by and through Love, as God is the embodiment of Love. You may find people in want of one thing or other. But, you find none lacking in love. You have to channelise it. Love is the natural quality which is God's gift to man.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! What are *Brahma* and *bhrama*?

Bhagavan: To realise and experience unity in diversity is *'Brahma'*, divinity. But, viewing one as many is *'bhrama'*, illusion. That which is bound by name and form is *bhrama*. Brahma transcends time and space, and is eternal and unsullied. You know many sweets such as *gulabjamun*, *laddu*, *jelebi*, *basundi*, etc. These sweets have their names and forms. This is *bhrama*. But, they are made of sugar, which is one and the same. This is *Brahma*.

Another example: You see cloth which is made of yarn closely interwoven. This is *bhrama*. Though the yarn is apparently different from the cloth, it is after all made of the same cotton only. This approach is *Brahma*. So *bhrama* illusion, is multiplicity, plurality, diversity and has different names and forms, while *Brahma* (divinity is unity), is the fundamental primordial principle.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Some say that God has no form. But, we see devotees praying to idols in temples. The concept of Avatar, the incarnation of God, is of special significance in our land of Sanatana Dharma. But followers of other paths argue that God has no form. We pray to you to clarify this point.

Bhagavan: When you see a doctor, you will be reminded of your physical complaints. When you meet a lawyer, you think of litigation and court cases, don't you? Likewise, when you see a *gopuram*, temple tower, you will be reminded of God. As I often say: love may not have a form, but a loving mother has. Water may not have form, but the tumbler with water has a form; air may not have a form, but the balloon into which it is pumped has a form. In the same manner, the formless divine has its form or forms. The formless expresses itself through a form.

A simple example: You know the screen in a theatre. You find pictures projected on the screen. In every picture, there is the screen. Without the screen, you can't see the picture. Pictures come and pass. Not even one remains permanent. This screen may be described in spiritual parlance as *'sat'* and '*asat'* or '*satasat*'. *'Sat'* is existence, '*asat'* is non-existence. Like this, these two coexist, *sakara,* one with form, and *nirakara,* the formless.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We hear of cellular phones and remote controls everywhere. All the necessities of our worldly existence seem to be from electronics and computers, drawing the attention of everyone. How does the subject of spirituality come into the picture here? Where is the time for it? As if this is not enough, we hear of nuclear tests also. How are we to coordinate and integrate these diverse aspects? Kindly show us the way.

Bhagavan: Men are more valuable than all the wealth of the world. Having been born as human beings, you should strive to attain liberation, *moksha*. Science and technology can provide you many comforts and conveniences. They can't confer on you peace and bliss. What is Science? What is Spirituality? What is the difference between the two? Science is below the senses. Spirituality is above the senses. Spirituality speaks of *tat*, that, and Science speaks of *tvam*, you, so as to make you learn *tattvamasi*, 'That thou art'. This is nature, world, or *prakruti*. That is *purusha* or God.

Spirituality is like the letter 'O' which is full and complete, whereas Science is like the letter 'C' which is incomplete with a hollow space within, starting at one point and ending elsewhere. Spirituality begins where Science ends and it takes you from the world to God. Spirituality makes you feel and experience divinity in this world. This is the way to integrate Science and Spirituality. Spirituality is the unseen principle behind the apparent electronic or scientific gadgets and equipment.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Are Science and Spirituality contradictory to each other? We are eager to know Swami's views on this subject.

Bhagavan: Science operates below the senses, while Spirituality functions above the senses. Science speaks of 'this', *'tvam'*, world, while Spirituality thinks of 'that', *'tat'*, divine. Science refers to *tvamidam*, 'near' while Spirituality concentrates on 'far', *param*, beyond. Science is meant for the *padartha*, 'material' and Spirituality is for the ultimate *paramartha*. Science deals with the *jada*, inert, and spirituality, with *chaitanya*, awareness. Spirituality aims at the *adhara*, base and Science experiments on the *adheya*, superstructure.

Science is the 'split of love' while Spirituality is the 'spirit of love'. Science deals in *pravritti marga*, the external world, and Spirituality in the intuitive *nivrutti marga*. Science can visualise the *vyakta*, apparent, while Spirituality dives into the *avyakta*, hidden. You can learn Science with your *karma chaks us,* physical eye, but the understanding of Spirituality needs the *gyana chaks us,* 'eye of wisdom'. Science is the collection of facts, which are stuffed in your 'head'. Spirituality is metaphysical, and touches your 'heart'. Science is incomplete like the letter 'C' which begins at one point and ends somewhere else. Spirituality is *purnam*, full like the letter 'O'.

Science supplies implements. Spirituality tells you how to use them. For example, a knife with which you can cut vegetables, fruits and so on can be used to cut throats. Science shows what you see, like your photo or picture. But, Spirituality is an x-ray film. Science is 'negative' while Spirituality is 'positive'.

Creation is 'negative' while the creator is 'positive'. Fill your heart with positive spirituality as you fill the tank with water. Senses are the taps through which you draw the water of love. Science states facts, but Spirituality symbolises unchangeable truth, *ritam*.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We experience love in our worldly life. How is it different from spiritual love?

Bhagavan: Split of love is worldly, but the spirit of love is spiritual. Love shared with one's own kith and kin is the split of love. This is worldly love. The primordial principle governing the entire universe is spiritual love. This is the spirit of love. Spiritual love is universal.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Today everyone speaks of Free Will. Do we really have Free Will?

Bhagavan: Man has no Free Will. It is only God who has Free Will. Being a slave to the senses, how can you claim to have free will? Where from do you get Free Will? God alone is free and hence He alone has Free Will and that is why this Free Will is an absolutely divine attribute. How? Here is a small example. When a man suffers from a paralytic stroke, he is not able to lift or move the paralysed part of his body. Come on! Let him now try in the name of Free Will! So, there is no Free Will as such, and it is ridiculous to think so. There is no meaning in the claim.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! In modern society, much knowledge is only half knowledge and partial understanding. We don't have a clear picture of anything. We want to know the difference between Free Will and Divine Will?

Bhagavan: It is ego and ignorance that prompt doubts of this kind. On account of body identification, you are not able to know reality. In fact, you are a slave to your senses. So, you are not free. How can you have Free Will then? God is the Master of all. He is above everything. He is not bound or

limited by anybody or anything. He is absolutely free. Hence, it is only God who has Free Will or Divine Will.

Today everyone thinks that he has Free Will enabling him to do anything of his choice and that he can decide anything in the name of his Free Will. This may be one thing today and quite a different thing tomorrow, but Divine Will never changes. While exercising your Free Will, you may succeed or fail, win or lose. If you succeed, you become proud and egoistic. If you fail, you become frustrated and disappointed. But, Divine Will is a transcendental phenomenon. What you should do is simply surrender to Divine Will. It means readiness or preparedness to receive and accept happily whatever happens in your life, good or bad, with the feeling that it is only for your ultimate good. You must accept it as God's gift to you. This is true *gyana* and *bhakti*. In fact, you do not know what is good for you. God knows the when, the why, the what, and the how, of everything, of everyone. Everything happens according to God's will or Divine Will. If you know and sincerely believe this, you will never be elated, egoistic, proud, frustrated, depressed and disappointed once you have surrendered truly to the Divine Will.

Divine Will is present in the guise of conscience, reminding you of your responsibility. It is the *antarvani*, Inner Voice. But, you neglect it and don't pay heed to its appeal and message, and so you suffer. With your mind turned inward, your intellect tuned to the fundamental principle and your senses kept under strict control, you can hear clearly your Inner Voice, which is none other than the Voice of God. Divine Will is the master plan of God.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Kindly let us know the difference between devotion and surrender.

Bhagavan: Devotion is dual. Here is one who is devoted to God. Therefore, devotion is the path of dualism. A devotee has no meaning if there is no God. So also, God is associated with a devotee. It is devotion that links them. But, surrender is non-dual. In the path of non-dualism, we find this surrender. Once you surrender to God, you do not exist for yourself any longer. You do not have anything of your own.

For example, you have water and sugar. As it is, these two are separate and different from each other in their names, forms and tastes. This is the principle of dualism, since sugar and water exist apart from each other. Now, mix both, what happens? It is neither Sugar nor is it water. It becomes syrup. So also, the devotee who totally surrenders himself to God does not consider himself as a separate entity apart from God. This is true surrender and the spirit of non-dualism.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

'Drawing' God…

This happened in the time of Lord Krishna. There once lived an artist who had traveled far and wide and had built for himself an extensive reputation. But even as he climbed the edifice of fame and renown, achieving success and impressing one and all with his art, he still hadn't achieved access to Lord Krishna! As much as he was anxious to seek approbation from Lord Krishna Himself, who not only ruled everyone's heart but was also the greatest connoisseur of art, success in this endeavour kept eluding him. But one day, after relentlessly trying to meet Krishna, he got an appointment. The artist met Krishna and requested Him to stay still, so that he could paint His picture.

On getting Krishna's consent, the artist first prepared the outline and told Krishna that he would ready the final painting in a week's time. The all-knowing Krishna also knew about the ego of the painter, but did not say anything then. After a week, the painter brought a finished portrait, covered with a white cloth. And when he uncovered the painting in Krishna's presence the painter himself was shocked at the lack of similarity between the real Krishna and Krishna he had painted! Completely taken aback by this, the painter asked for another week's time to get the job done. This went for many such weeks, but each time he failed to capture Krishna in his paintings.

In complete frustration and total dejection, he decided to leave the city and go away. But the Lord had other plans. When he was going away, Sage Narada met him. Well aware of the painter's plight, Narada confided to him that it was silly to attempt to paint the picture of Lord Krishna, for the Lord has no fixed form and can change His face every second!

Narada then advised, "If you really want to paint Him, I will tell you a method which will enable you to do so." Saying so, Narada whispered something into the ear of the artist. Following the advice given by Narada, the painter returned yet again to Krishna with a white cloth covering something. But this time, enriched by the wisdom Narada had imparted, the painter told Krishna that even as He was welcome to change the painting in any manner whatsoever, the painting would look exactly like him. Saying so, the artist removed the cloth, laying bare the mirror the cloth had till then hidden. The mirror reproduced an exact replica of Krishna.

If therefore, you are imaging that God would be like this or that, it is not correct. You cannot describe God and your attempts will fail. But when you make your mind clear and clean; fill it with love and devotion; the very same love and devotion will enable you to have the true vision of God.

- **Baba**

Illustrations: Mrs. Vidya, Kuwait

COVER STORY

CRADLING A CHARACTER-RICH GENERATION…

The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare, Chromepet, Chennai

Current School Education in India – Far Cry from Her Enlightened Past

The anomalies of India's social structure are clearly evident in the uneven access to school education for millions of families. According to the report 'Global Education Digest 2007', released by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), "Households pay for more than one-quarter, 28 per cent, of the costs to send their children to primary and secondary school, [as opposed to only 14 per cent towards university education]. These fees pose a very real barrier for the children of poor families."

Mapping the latest education statistics from primary to tertiary levels, the report focuses on the financing of education and provides a series of indicators to compare spending patterns across countries and levels of education. Explaining the Indian situation, it stresses, "…systems that are overly reliant on private contributions, especially at the primary level of education, raise the risk of excluding students from poorer families" thereby making the fundamental right to basic education for the poor Indians a distant dream.

The UNESCO report clearly points out that the distribution of funds was "extremely uneven" among the school-age populations. "Equity issues are clearly at play given this uneven distribution of resources" it adds.

Once the bedrock of timeless wisdom and inimitable teacher to the world, modern India is witnessing a mushrooming of a bevy of "international" schools across large and mid-sized metros, providing education based on the Western models, either American or British. Without exception, these private schools cater to the elitist of Indians and come with a hefty price tag. Based on a survey of 4 leading private schools in the south Indian city of Chennai for instance, the annual cost of sending a child to a private school from Grade 1 through Grade 12 adds up to about Rs. 80,000 to Rs. 2,00,000 (US $1800 – 4200). What is worse is the value system and culture promoted by these schools is a far cry from the harmonious and balanced way of life exemplified and recommended by enlightened sons of Mother India.

It is this context that the Sri Sathya Sai System of Integral Education, gifted by Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba to the entire world, becomes extremely significant. And the best example of this philosophy of education is the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School located in Prasanthi Nilayam. The "End

of Education is Character" is the central focus of this educational system which nurtures the students' body, mind and soul, and recognizes the spiritual component of the human experience, existence and aspiration. This holistic approach to integral education trades purely in the currency of selfless love, and has remained untainted by any monetary burden to the families of the students. Based on universal human values, Sai education is also universally accessible and involves no barriers of race, wealth, religion or social status.

Over the decades, this unique system, through Sai Schools worldwide, has churned thousands of graduates, committed to the practice of values in their personal, professional and social life. One such outstanding Sai school flourishes near Chennai, quietly providing the highest quality holistic education, at absolutely no charge.

The Noble School at Nemilichery – Its Sublimity and Beauty

In Nemilichery, a suburb of the south Indian metro of Chennai, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare is a Sai school with a rare distinction. It has been awarded an A+ accreditation from the Mumbai based national regulatory and supervisory agency, the Institute of Sathya Sai Education. A product of the direct grace of Bhagavan Baba, the Sai School at Nemilichery takes its social responsibility seriously by bringing the gift of balanced education to grateful families without any economic burden to them. And it has been doing this silently for the past 31 years! This is just one of the reasons why this institution is special; more will unravel to you as you proceed with this story.

A short ride from Chromepet Railway Station is a densely populated community on the outskirts of Chennai. Past the bridge and along dusty roads, one comes across lush green fields. Soon the signature Sai architecture comes within view - the pink lotus crown atop a light blue building. As unique as its vision is the compound standing a world apart from the rest.

Am I at Prasanthi Nilayam?

"Am I at Prasanthi Nilayam?" This is the typical thought that would strike any visitor to this breathtakingly scenic campus. The ambience and architecture lend a divine serenity to the atmosphere.

The majestic prayer hall, the Ram Sai Hall, has been designed after the Poorna Chandra auditorium at Prashanti Nilayam. The hall is furnished with idols of Lord Vishnu's *Dasavatharas* (ten incarnations) and Sri Krishna's *Gitopadesh* on the interior. The outer walls are decorated with carvings of religious symbols of all religions.

As you proceed further towards the main building, you see a beautiful temple for Sri Vidya Ganesh. The temple was inspired from the Ganesh temple situated in the campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University. Adjacent to it is an idol of Lord Hanuman standing on a raised platform in a majestic posture. The

children's playground, aptly called 'Brindavanam', is graced by a sweet statue of Lord Sai Krishna.

The school, with all these sacred icons and a beautiful garden, constitutes a serene learning atmosphere, a product of three decades of a collective effort by those wedded to the Sai Education ideals.

The School's Conception, Expansion and Current Exemplary Status

The Birth of the Sri Sathya Sai Bala Gurukulam

The school came into being as the Sri Sathya Sai Bala Gurukulam on the auspicious day of Vijayadasami in the year 1978. Initially it was managed by the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samithi, Chromepet (Chennai) and run from a rented tiled house with just 40 students. Women members of the Sai Samithi (the local Sai centre) volunteered to work as teachers. The following year (1979), saw the strength of the student body increase to 90 students. The school was then shifted to the Samithi Bhajan center, a rented building with a light roof. However, within five years the strength of the Gurukulam reduced to a mere 17 students! An office bearers' meeting was organized to discuss the closure of the non-performing school. However, Bhagavan had other plans!

At that time, a school associate visited Puttaparthi and was blessed with a personal interview by Bhagavan. **During the audience, she expressed her concern that the small school at Chromepet was not functioning properly. Swami told her, 'You run the school as it is. I will take care of it.'** This assurance from Bhagavan renewed the enthusiasm of the office bearers of the Samithi, and they took an active interest in the affairs of the school. In a year, the strength of the school rose to a 100!

For more than ten years, the school offered education up to Grade 5 in the rented Samithi center without any government recognition. Then, the Samithi members decided to purchase half an acre of land at Nemilichery, a village adopted by the Chromepet Samithi. They went to Puttaparthi to seek Bhagavan's blessings. Baba materialized *vibhuthi*, the sacred ash, as a blessing for the project. At about the same time, a lady from Madurai donated an amount that was given as advance for the land, and in a year the sale agreement was signed. Well wishers of the project contributed, but the school was still short of Rs. 30,000. All Samithi members came together and prayed fervently to Bhagavan. And the answer came in the form of a voluntary contribution!

From Sri Sathya Sai Matriculation School to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare

The school later acquired even more land. By then it was evident to everyone involved that the divine hand was behind the mysterious but synchronized series of events. A higher power was directing the project that was to fulfill a higher purpose in the divine mission.

Since the Sri Sathya Sai Trust, Tamil Nadu is a registered body, all financial transactions were done through the trust and the land was registered in the trust's name. Two thatched sheds of dimensions 20' x 80' were erected and the school was shifted to Nemilichery from the Samithi centre and was named the Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Mandir.

The following year, Bhagavan's will manifested in a rather unexpected manner. The area was hit by a heavy cyclone which blew away both the thatched roofs of the school. Suddenly, there was no room to run the school. But what seemed like a curse then, later turned into a blessing in disguise.

This seemingly untoward incident led to two interesting developments. Firstly, at this moment of grave need, a Good Samaritan stepped forward with a proposal. He said that he was moving into his just allocated railway quarters, and requested the committee to conduct the school in the house that would fall vacant due to his move to his official residence. The school ran in those premises for three years.

Next, all the Samithi members went to Puttaparthi to seek Bhagavan's blessings for constructing their own building for the school. **Bhagavan blessed all by sprinkling *akshata*, the holy rice, on them. When He was invited for the *Bhoomi Puja* (ground breaking ceremony), Bhagavan said, 'Osthanu, Osthanu' (I will come, I will come)."**

Having bagged the divine assurance, the team spirit was soaring. Upon return, the Ganesh temple, the Shirdi Sai shrine, a three-storied school building, and a big prayer hall were constructed. Initially, government recognition was granted in the name of Sri Sathya Sai Matriculation School by the Sri Sathya Sai Trust, Tamil Nadu. After four years, the school committee switched over to the national academic curriculum, known as the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) syllabus to give its students the advantage of being on par with the best in India. When it did this, it also changed its name to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare as Bhagavan Baba always emphasizes on 'Educare' than education.

The Holistic Hostel and School Routine

Arise and Stay Awake to Your Life's Goal

A school thus born out of the sweet will of the universal teacher Bhagavan Baba follows a befitting schedule where the day begins with salutations to the Lord of the Universe.

In response to the obvious question as to why the school is residential when it is located in a city and can run the program successfully for day scholars, the warden of the school hostel, Mr. A.N. Janardhana Kurup explains, "In the residential system, an institution has sufficient time to mould students and work upon each aspect of their personalities, individual traits and social behaviors through various programs integrated within the hostel life. It helps

mould children as a whole. That is why we offer residential education from classes 6-10. However, the school also has day scholars."

To further augment the benefits of the hostel life, the hostel routine is based clearly on the foundation of discipline and devotion. Students rise early and spend their day through a rigorous schedule, learning time management early in life.

4.30 – 5.30 A.M.	Wake up and get ready
5.30 – 6.00 A.M.	Omkar, Suprabhatham, Nagarasankirthan
6.00 – 6.30 A.M.	Yoga, Sun Salutation
6.30 – 7.00 A.M.	Milk
7.00 – 8.00 A.M.	Study Hours
8.00 – 8.30 A.M.	Breakfast
8.30 – 12.20 P.M.	School Hours
12.20 – 12.50 P.M.	Lunch
12.50 – 3.45 P.M.	School Hours
3.45 – 4.00 P.M.	Evening assembly
4.00 – 4.15 P.M.	Milk & Snacks
4.15 – 5.15 P.M.	Games & Vocational Course
5.30 – 6.00 P.M.	Bhajans
6.00 – 8.00 P.M.	Study Hours
8.00 – 8.30 P.M.	Dinner
8.30 – 9.00 P.M.	Night Prayer Session
9.00 P.M.	Bedtime

The Elevating Assembly Session

Once the students head to school from the hostel, they start off with an assembly session of a different kind. They file into the hall in silence and sit in neat rows. Soon the school day begins with a powerful chanting of the primordial sound "Aum" thrice. As the sacred vibrations reverberate in the air around, the perfect silence that follows it is intensely felt for the next few minutes. *Slokas* and Veda chanting form the next part of the schedule.

The assembly programs which include daily reading of the thought for the day, news headlines, quizzes and talks about inspired individuals, scientific facts, etc., are hosted by various grades on a rotational basis. This allows the students the opportunity to take up leadership roles and responsibilities. The assembly sessions also have group singing relevant to the occasion, announcements, talks by the Principal or Correspondent, chanting of the Gayathri Mantra and prayer for universal peace.

At the end of the session a collective call to the Lord is offered: "Dear Lord, we pray that Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare be bestowed with spacious accommodation, well-founded infrastructure facilities, dedicated staff and students to grow into an excellent and full-fledged University."

As the students disperse in discipline and return to their respective classrooms, the school's motto ("Towards the height of human excellence"),

seen clearly at the entrance, is reflected throughout the morning assembly and in the school's overall ambience.

The Central Focus of the School – 'Educare through Experiential Learning'

"We provide *educare* along with education"- Ms. Sai Meera, the Principal

Leading this institution is the Principal, Ms. Sai Meera, who holds many distinctions. She has received her diploma in Sathya Sai Education from the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, Mumbai. More importantly, she was the first student of this school, who has worked her way through the ranks of the system, having served the school as a teacher and then Vice Principal.

Exuding the confidence of a school committed to character education, she says, "The school has 300 students and 17 teachers, a 1:20 teacher-student ratio. The total student strength of each class is not more than 30. This facilitates teachers to pay individual attention on every individual student in the class. The school offers co-education till the fifth standard; from the sixth standard the classes are populated by boys alone."

She adds, "Adhering to the Central Board of Secondary Education, New Delhi, the school believes in offering real education that involves the student, and does not merely thrust information. Real education flows from the heart and is termed as 'Educare'. There is a lot of difference between 'education' and 'educare'! Educare is the basis and foundation for all types of education. Educare is the *adhara* (support) and education is the *adheya* (supported). All the texts we read teach only education to us. But, this is totally inadequate. We must pursue educare along with education."

Instilling Integral Values-Based Education

While a stand-alone Moral Science class once a week is not uncommon in many schools in this country, what sets the Sai model apart is that here value-based education is the essence of all learning, be it secular or spiritual. As the school's Correspondent Mr. Kumarasamy says, "Value-based integral education is the core. In other words, values are integrated in each and every aspect of learning. This is the difference. **Value education (VE) classes are conducted to mould character of children and infuse values. Children of all classes take active interest in VE competitions.** In fact, the dedicated faculty themselves feel that today's education is incomplete and needs to be wholesome. As Bhagavan says, 'Education is for life and not for living'. It is in this connection, that as a part of their everyday schedule, silent sitting and (twice a day) *Jyothi* or light meditation are practiced by students and teachers. Doing this, not only helps them improve their power of concentration, it also brings about total transformation.'

To further boost the student's self-awareness, the primary division children maintain a spiritual diary, monitored by parents and teachers, while the students in higher grades maintain a self-analysis record.

SSE Edge Built Into the System

Sathya Sai Education, also known as Bal Vikas classes, are also included as a part of the school's regular curriculum. The nine years Bal Vikas residential syllabus is followed. At the end of the ninth year all students take Group III examination, upon which they are awarded a diploma in Sathya Sai Education.

Experiential Teaching Practices Make Learning Fun

Another very interesting aspect of this school is that it is committed to making learning a hands-on experience, full of fun and creativity. Role-playing, prayers, quotations, silent sitting, poems, PowerPoint presentations, songs accompanied by music instruments, quizzes and models relevant to the topic are often used as effective techniques in engaging student interest. Even slow and kinesthetic learners find opportunities to exhibit their talents and play a part in the presentation. In essence, learning here is a joyful experience, with the school improving and innovating various learning styles continually.

Explaining this further, the Principal says, "It is learning through experience than just memorization of facts and figures. When students learn by doing everything on their own, it not only bestows on them practical experience but also provides them opportunities for creative work. Once learning becomes fun, the experience remains with them for a long time."

Cutting Edge Technology for Hands-On Learning

The school's novel approach to learning has prompted positive collaborations from a community partner, enriching its learning tools and techniques further.

As a part of experiential learning for children, HCL, a global leading hardware and IT solutions provider launched *Digischool*, their e-learning solution for school children here on Bhagavan Baba's birthday in 2008. Mr. T.R. Vasudevan, the Senior Vice President of HCL Infrastructure inaugurated the application here before releasing it in the market! He wanted every student of this school to augment his or her total learning experience.

Laudable Laboratories and Library

Aiding in this endeavour of practical learning is the subject of Computer Science, which is a hot favourite among the students here. Most excel in the subject and show greater interest in learning more than what is recommended in their syllabus. With its well-equipped Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Math, and Computer Science laboratories, the school has kept itself abreast of the current syllabus that is being followed nationwide. The management believes in offering quality education, and emphasizes it by the use of modern teaching aids such as PCs, OHPs, LCD projectors, and so on.

The school also has a well-equipped library which has more than 3,000 books on various subjects, apart from subscribing to various periodicals, magazines,

and newspapers to provide up-to-date knowledge on current affairs. In addition, it promotes learning through visual aids such as educational CDs and video cassettes.

In essence, the school through all these teachings techniques and facilities encourages students to come up with creative ideas at all stages of their academic pursuit. During presentations, they are encouraged to coordinate amongst themselves with minimal assistance from teachers. In fact, this creative license has raised the bar for the standard of presentations put together by the children, starting right at the start, in Grade 1 itself.

Sharing Its Success through the Professional Development of Educators

One of the salient reasons for the school being able to offer such quality education is its band of dedicated teachers. Most of them are qualified in this mode of unique education having obtained a diploma from the Institute of Sathya Sai Education. Moreover, each one of them has also undergone a three-day Educare training course offered again by the Institute of Sathya Sai Education or ISSE, Mumbai.

In an effort to strengthen the practice of this invaluable philosophy of education in the state of Tamil Nadu, the school had recently organized a 21-day certificate course for 17 teachers from Sathya Sai schools across the state. The program was inaugurated by Mr. V. Srinivasan, the All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organization. The first presentation was given by Dr. B. G. Pitre, the Director of the Institute of Sathya Sai Education, Mumbai.

Post School Learning Schedule

Once the students return after school, light refreshment welcomes them back at the hostel. The next little while is playtime at the outdoor playground. This time is also used to teach many vocational courses as well as train them on various other talents like Karate, *silambam* (a south Indian martial art), keyboard, *mridangam* (an Indian percussion instrument), dance, *bhajan* singing and so on. The school band too practices in this evening hour.

In fact, the school has weekly competitions in all these creative talents between the four houses – Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi and Prema, which enables the blossoming of these extra-curricular skills phenomenally.

At 5.30 p.m. everyday, the hostel students assemble in the prayer hall for a half-an-hour session of *bhajan* and prayer. Following this is a two-hour study time till 8.00 in the night. Dinner follows after this and then the day closes with the night prayer. Lights are switched off by 9.00 p.m. to allow for a good night's rest for their growing bodies and minds, after a packed day.

Student Records Track Individual Progress

Progressive in its administrative practices, the school also goes to lengths in creating and maintaining case study registers for every child wherein overall personality traits are studied and recorded in detail. Effort is taken at all levels to help the child come out of difficulties.

The Fee Free Approach to Education

The notable aspect of this comprehensive, well-planned education is that it is offered at no cost to the students' parents. In fact, this is true not only of Sai students at Nemilichery but also of thousands of such students studying in various Sai schools and colleges all around the globe who enjoy the generosity and loving hospitality of their divine benefactor, Bhagavan Baba.

The school's correspondent Mr. Kumarasamy explains, "The Sri Sathya Institute of Educare follows the Sai system of education, which emphasizes free, residential, and value-based integral education…As our school's Founder, Bhagavan Baba says, 'Education is not a commodity to be sold in the bazaar. Society has the responsibility to make education available to all individuals'. Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare provides free education from LKG to class 10 with voluntary contribution from well-wishers of our school."

In its initial years, the school collected a nominal fee from its students. "However, after hearing about an incident, my view on this changed. A Prime Minister from another country was on a visit to Puttaparthi and he asked Bhagavan, 'How do You manage Your hospital, which is run absolutely free of cost? How is it possible?' Bhagavan said, 'If one is broad minded, compassionate and full of consideration, with that you can do anything in this world.'

"Once, someone told Bhagavan, 'Swami, You don't need to charge poor people. At least, You can accept money from rich people.' **Bhagavan immediately said, "The rich man and the poor man have the same heart. There is nothing like rich heart and poor heart. A heart is a heart. It is heartless to say that rich have to pay and poor need not." But this man did not keep quiet. He asked again, 'How to run this hospital then?' Bhagavan said, 'For good work, for selfless work, for work born out of love, all people will join hands. All will join. All will co-operate.'**

"Subsequently, we decided to provide free education to all students in a phased manner. Initially, we provided free education for students from the 9th and 10th standard. Then, we included the 8th standard. Now with Bhagavan's blessings we are able to provide free education to all through voluntary contributions from supporters."

"Since we provide free education, we are strict about two aspects: the number of students we enroll and Swami's guidelines on raising funds through voluntary contributions.

"This is what Swami says, 'Under no circumstances are we to solicit funds from private persons or firms or make public announcements. We may announce our plans and programs, and those interested may assist in cash or kind without demanding any publicity. I must tell you that for such good causes as this, you should not collect any money in devious ways. Help should come from pious hearts, from well-earned money: from persons who know and appreciate the purpose for which they give. That is why I oppose all benefit shows, where you tempt people with a dance or a drama or a film and collect money for your pet plan. I am also against lotteries where one does not do anything; a prize collected out of other people's earning is used for the collection of funds.

'Let each one give out of the fullness of your heart, on your own initiative, whatever you can give gladly, after studying well the present work and the future possibilities of the institution. Your duty is only to inform, do not try even to persuade: begging for the sake of work which is inherently good is an insult to human nature; the man who asks and the man who is asked are both demeaned."

This is the divine direction of Bhagavan Baba about the financial management of the school which the school's administrators follow diligently. However, for the lodging, food, and other expenses of only the residential students, the school charges a very minimal amount.

The Edifying Aspects of Enduring Values Education

The Triangular Approach for Effective Impartation

If the school is successfully able to mould the students' character, it is because of its triangular approach to establish pupil excellence, wherein the teacher and the parents monitor the child while the teachers train the parents. In this manner, a teacher-parent-student relationship is maintained which is critical for the students' growth. Community partners including experienced people from various institutions and walks of life are also invited to guide students in their academic performance. The teachers offer advice and tips to students on the effective learning techniques, question paper pattern, and so on. Students are also counseled regularly to identify their personal problems and solutions are provided based on Bhagavan's teachings. Resourceful and knowledgeable parents are also welcomed whenever needed to guide in various areas including personality development, exam preparation, etc.

As the Correspondent explains, "We believe that the school is not an isolated institution. It is a part of the society. As such, it has a responsibility towards the society that stretches beyond mere education and development of children. It should be a role model and should lead the society by its very own example. In this school, Bhagavan Himself is the role model. Every aspect of His life is an example of how to live in peaceful co-existence. This is especially true in our society, which has people from multiple faiths, living in peaceful co-existence.

"The parents and the community at large have a high regard and respect for teachers. Also, former students of this school are invited for important functions. An alumni club for the ex-students was inaugurated on October 2, 2008, and periodic meetings are planned to help build the school society.

"All school parents now subscribe to the Tamil edition of the magazine Sanathana Sarathi through which they come to know about Bhagavan and His message."

True Education Includes Social Responsibility, Charity and Community Service

Service and Sacrifice of hundreds is what makes the school what it is today. To inculcate these two sterling virtues in each student, the school has a well-laid out policy. Through acts of charity and 'ceiling on desires' programmes, Bhagavan's message of simple living and high thinking is instilled in them. In fact, the students of the middle and higher sections of the school are encouraged to participate in social service. 'Grama Seva' (serving the poor in rural areas) is conducted in the neighbouring villages every year on Bhagavan's birthday.

The strategy behind the Grama Seva program is two pronged. It helps create awareness on many issues such as cleanliness and discipline, and about Bhagavan and His message. On the other hand, it creates a sense of discipline, servitude, and humility in the hearts and minds of the young students. All the students practice 'Ceiling on Desires' during Deepawali festival and save money for the Grama Seva. This also instills in them the true value of money and the many constructive uses to which it can be put.

During the Grama Seva program students carry a picture of Bhagavan on a caparisoned chariot in a procession across the locality. The procession ends at a government middle school in Nanmangalam, which is two kilometers away from the school. Various sports events are conducted for the government school children and prizes are distributed in addition to offering food packets and sweets to all. Service is also offered to the aged members of an old age home at Nanmangalam.

Learning Good Citizenship through Lights, Colors, and Love

Good citizenship and patriotism for the motherland is encouraged through the grand celebration of all national festivals and important days of India's secular and multi-faith calendar. Cultural programs, processions, competitions, house-wise display boards, veda chanting, bhajans, and *homams* related to the function are organized by the students under the guidance of their teachers.

Last but not the least; to identify with the Source of their inspiration, a spiritual visit is conducted every year for all students and staff to Puttaparthi to have Bhagavan Baba's *darshan* and blessings. Every year all students and staff write about their transformation and submit it at the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan Baba during the festival of Guru Poornima.

Also, on many occasions when Baba visited the Chennai city, the school children had the blessed opportunity of presenting dramas and skits in His Divine physical presence.

The Enriching Relationship between the School and the Sai University

The Unstinted Support by Alumni of Sai University

Since its inception in 1982, the Sri Sathya Sai University, formerly known as the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, has produced thousands of grateful graduates. Settled all over the world, they are striving to do their bit to repay their personal debts of gratitude to their divine Chancellor by living up to their social responsibility in their local communities.

One such dedicated group forms a strong base in the Chromepet area. They help the students in various capacities, from teaching vedic hymns to even automating the school! The Correspondent Mr. Kumarasamy says, "Mr. T. Ramakrishna comes every weekend to teach Vedic hymns to our students. Mr. Hariharan, an alumnus of Bhagavan's Music College teaches Mrudangam. Mrs. Priya, an alumnus of Anantapur campus, teaches keyboard.

"Shyam prepares scripts and records for various cultural programs including the Annual Sports and Cultural meet. S. Shankar and S. Sriram recently offered computer training to all our teachers. Gunaranjan, Shyam and Sankar are currently automating our school activities.

"K. Rangarajan, M. B. Srinivasa Rao, R. Srivatsan, S. Sriram, Gunaranajan and Harikesh with their office colleagues recently updated the school computer lab and also arranged a LCD projector two years ago. Last year they arranged purified Municipality Palar river water for the school hostel by constructing a sump and water tank. They also installed a motor. This year they plan to install a 30 KVA engine alternator to avoid frequent power failure and also construct a sick room for hostel students.

"The Sai alumni also help in the education effort. Raghavendra recently procured educational CDs for the school. Most of these former students contribute financially too and have the ultimate desire of developing a corpus fund for the school. Apart from all these, these ex-students also participate either directly or indirectly in many other initiatives. In November 2007, a program Samarpan 2007 was arranged purely by the former students of Bhagavan's university."

From Chennai to Prashanti Nilayam

The tight link between the Sai school in Chromepet and the Sai University in Prashanthi Nilayam has resulted in a healthy osmosis between the two institutes. Today they share more than the sacred name of the world's

greatest teacher. Some of the alumni of Sri Sathya Sai University are also alumni of this school!

Ms. N. Bhuvaneshwari was an alumna of this school who later went to study at the Anantapur campus of Sri Sathya Sai University. And this is what she has to say of her days in this school:

A child feels very secure when she is in her mother's womb. She is the happiest little one in the world for being provided with all that she needs at that stage in life. But one fine day, when she realises she is going to miss all the care forever, she cries out loudly. That is how I felt when I left the Sri Sathya Sai Matriculation School of Mother Sai. I was been nurtured in the womb with the values that is necessary for my growth. Besides, I was given scholarship till I completed my schooling. I cried when I had to leave the secured place that has built a strong foundation of values in me. But Mother Sai consoled me by putting me again in a value based school.

It is impossible for a child to enter the womb again in its life time. But I was given a chance to be in a more secure place when I got admission in Sri Sathya Sai University, Anantapur campus. As the foundation was very strong, I loved it when I was in this campus; I graduated from the Sai University, confident and with joy. Now, holding Mother Sai's hand, I have entered professional life.

Mrs. G. S. Thulasi was another student of this school who joined Bhagavan's University at Anantapur:

My school taught me values which I still abide by: patience, perseverance, respect to elders, the art of simple living and high thinking; I learnt about all this right from the age of five and these have formed the strong foundation for my life. The values and discipline I learnt here have given me a unique background I fall back on even now in the corporate world.

Mr. Guru Prasad was yet another who achieved his life's desire – of being a part of Bhagavan's university:

I studied in Sri Sathya Sai Matriculation School from grade 6 till grade 10. I bow to the teachers of this school who helped me to come up not only in my worldly life but also in spiritual life. This has helped me to secure the grace of Bhagavan, the Sadguru, and become a student of His University. Even today, those teachers stand as my guiding light. As a Sai student, now I always pray that I may live up to His expectations.

Such inspired Alumni from this school are many, but here is just one more instance. *Dhandapani S.,* currently a research scholar in the US, says:

I am proud to write a few lines as an alumnus of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare. What started as a small school named Sri Sathya Sai Bala Gurukulam in '78 with three teachers and a couple of students has grown step

by step to Sri Sathya Sai Matriculation School and now to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare with very good infrastructure and lab facilities.

I was fortunate to study at Bhagavan's lotus feet for couple of years for my Bachelors and Masters degree in Brindavan and Prashanthi Nilayam respectively. It was a lifetime opportunity to study and enjoy the love in action of Bhagavan Baba. The lessons I learnt there were innumerable. Some important things that I carry with me are: to love and respect parents, teachers and elders, and to ever speak obligingly, even though we may not always oblige. Both the institutions, S. S. S. Educare and S. S. S. University have provided me a very conducive environment for learning. I am currently a post doctoral research associate at Lehigh University, Pennsylvania. Whatever I am today is purely because of Swami.

Heartening Glimpses of Sai Educare

What Current Students Say

Bhagavan says that the end of education is character. This is the end of all the pursuits at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Educare too. Their goal is to transform a student into a promising young citizen of tomorrow, filled with the ideals of Bhagavan. To get a glimpse of what difference this school is making on the young minds, here are a few impressions from current students.

T. Bhuvanesh Ram of the eighth standard has an interesting story:

My father is a Sai devotee and he admitted me in this school as he wished me to become a good Sai student. I have been studying here the last 4 years and am a top rank holder. I learn various other skills such as karate and yoga, and while receiving this value based education I have transformed a great deal. I used to get up late and throw my belongings everywhere, but after coming here I keep my things in order and rise early.

I am gaining self-confidence and learning how to adjust to others as I live in the hostel. I participated in last year's competitions and won the state level prize in the quiz, group singing and the skit. I feel very proud to be a Sai student; I would never have got such chances had I been living at home. I pray to Swami to make me a doctor which is my life's goal. I wish to serve the poor and the sick. I will work hard to achieve my goal and help my parents with the grace of Sathya Sai Baba.

Listening to Bhuvanesh, *M. Akshay Kumar* too came forward to share his story.

I have been studying for the past four years here. After coming to this school, I have noticed many changes in myself; I have transformed a great deal. Earlier, I did not respect my parents or elders. But now I respect them all and also help many of my friends. The practice of meditation and silent sitting helps me to concentrate more on my studies. Moreover, our school provides

free education and also a devotional environment. I intend to spread the message of Sai and the value based education which I learned in this school, all over the globe, wherever I go.

Samin Kandoth, the son of an aerodrome officer, says that he has studied in many schools, but this one is different. How? Watch what he has to say:

I am in the 10th standard and have been studying here for the last two years. I have been to many schools but I found that while they imparted me education they did not mould my character. But here we learn spiritual values, and thus the students become symbols of humility and meekness. Our hidden talents are brought out through the extra-curricular activities. My friends in this school are sweet and selfless, and with the help of the bhajans and peaceful atmosphere I am calmer and my previous angry nature has been controlled. I am very grateful to this school as it has helped me to become a better person and cut down the distance between me and my Lord.

Teachers Speak their Heart Out

However, it is not just students who get transformed here, but also teachers themselves! Bhagavan's infinite love and grace transforms everybody. This is what *Ms. Lavanya Prabha* says:

After coming here, all the prayers, meditation, omkaram had a very great effect on me. I found that my severe knee pain, of two years duration, just disappeared so that I can sit on the floor in the temple. I also lost all wish to engage in quarrels with my relatives and came to understand the importance of Love, how to spread love, that love must prevail and that any person can be changed through love. The kindness that people have shown me here has moved my heart and I have become a true Sai devotee, whereas before coming here I was not one.

Here is another teacher, *Ms. K. S. Latha* with her reflections.

I joined here last year, and previous to that I was a housewife. One day Swami came in my dream and scolded me for wasting my knowledge, saying that after studying so much I should not sit at home. However I was reluctant, as I did not want to work. But my daughter had a dream where Swami said he was very disappointed with me, so I changed my mind, and joined this school where my son is currently studying, as an English teacher. This school is full of divinity and is like a temple. After coming here I have learned to be meticulous and conscientious in my work. My only prayer to Swami is that wherever I am, I should have the opportunity to work in such a divine atmosphere.

The School's Kasturi Mark

The school has had many distinguished visitors over the years, but the one that is cherished a lot is the trip of Prof. N. Kasturi, the biographer of

Bhagavan Baba in 1981. The visitors' book has Prof. Kasturi's handwriting which says:

"I had the immense pleasure of listening to the *bhajans* and the *stotrams* of the children and telling them a story of Bhagavan's early days which was listened to with rapt attention, and the children were ready with intelligent responses. I very much appreciate the spirit of service of the gurus and others who run this institution. May Bhagavan lead them aright."

Sai – The Spirit that Sustains, Strengthens and Safeguards the School

Having seen the beauty of the campus filled with happy children and teachers, and even happier parents who rest assured comforted by the fact that their wards are in good hands, it is but natural for one to wonder if this miracle can be anything but divine will.

Not new to such thoughts, given the awe that every other visitor to the school experiences, the Correspondent smiles and explains, "What you see is the manifestation of His will. What the future holds in store is also His will. The Lord will look after all our needs. He has been running this school all along, I am but His tool. From the conclusion of the recent World Education conference held at Prashanti Nilayam (2007), I can say one thing for sure – the Sri Sathya Sai system of education is going to be the basis of future education. A lot of things are happening."

The school community is unanimous in acknowledging the presence of a divine energy pervading through their corridors, like an invisible force that actually runs the school. As the Correspondent says, "Every second we realize the presence of Swami in this school. It is He who runs this school. We are but simple instruments in His divine hands. We only pray to Him to bless us, guide us, and guard us to run the school following the Sai path to produce His students."

Each passing day reverberates with the melodious strain of the daily *bhajan* session in the prayer hall and ends with the peaceful chants of the night prayer. The sun goes down, but not without witnessing another beautiful miracle that the Lord silently performs. In a silent corner of a busy world, the Lord silently works to provide His children with a better tomorrow. The economic burden of this service to the students' families is none: it simply leaves them with a feeling of relief just as priceless!

We are grateful to Mr. Ramakrishnan Ramani, Mr. Shyam Sai Sundar and the school's Correspondent Mr. Kumarasamy for their invaluable assistance in providing information for this feature.

To know more about this school, please visit www.sssieducare.org

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 28

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. I hope you are surviving, just as I am! More than merely surviving, I do hope you are keeping track of this rather wild and dizzy tour I have been taking you through. Maybe, I should pause for a moment and review where all we have been.

The Legacy of Forgotten Stars

To start with, we started on a grand tour of the sky, that took us all over, past stars, galaxies and what not. We then tried to learn something about what makes a star shine, that is to say where its energy comes from. Having learnt something about that, we then asked: "What happens to a star when it runs out of the fuel it is burning in order to shine?" Well, it dies; but interestingly, the story does not quite end there, and that took to us to the story of the rebirth of a dead star, and its going through many cycles of birth and death.

OK, but why do stars have to do it? What is their Karma? The answer is: "Stars have no Karma but they go through repeated cycles of birth and death so that they can cook various elements in the periodic table, all the way to iron." What for? That is a question we really ought not to ask for if there was no iron cooked in stars billions of years ago, we would not have any iron on earth. Just think of how life would be if there was no iron. Do you realise that body of your car is largely made of steel? Do you realise that the huge ships that carry oil and cargo and ply across the oceans in hundreds of thousands are all built of steel? That every railway engine also is built of steel? That without steel, we would have a big problem cutting vegetables?

So, a kind God, made stars work for us, so that we, coming late in the life of the Universe, can have not only iron but also silver, gold, uranium and such other precious metals. But wait a minute; these heavy elements like gold cannot come out of the cooking going on inside stars for stars cannot produce anything heavier than iron by the cooking process. That precisely is where the final collapse of the star comes into the picture. Remember I told you that there comes a stage when the star gets tired of the cooking business and quits? What happens then?

Well, when the fire inside goes out, the star begins to cool. And with no radiation pressure driving the outer skin outwards, the star yields to gravity and begins to massively collapse. Here, depending on the mass of the dead star, we saw that there could be three scenarios. First was that the corpse shrinks and shrinks and ends up as what is called a White Dwarf. This happens if the mass of the dead star is less than 1.4 times the mass of our

Sun. What if the mass of the star happens to be greater than 1.4 times the solar mass? That said young but brilliant Chandrasekhar way back in the thirties, was a mystery.

Subsequently, that mystery was solved. For dead stars with masses greater than 1.4 times the solar mass, one option is to undergo a supernova explosion followed by a collapse of the core into a neutron star. While the latter usually shows itself up as a pulsar, the stupendous explosion that we call supernova is what produces silver, gold, mercury, uranium etc.

All of which implies that our solar system was born out of some star that exploded way back, donating to our solar system some of its treasures in the form of iron, silver, gold etc. You know, just so that we can have ships, jewels, and nuclear power plants, God made the stars do so much for us for so many billions of years! Have you ever thought of that? Just to complete the story of the final collapse, we also saw that very heavy corpses end up as Black Holes, some of which then become indescribably powerful gravitational engines driving quasars and such astronomical objects. Lots of incredible things going on out there, all due to the Infinite God in quest of Whom we are.

So, where exactly is this Infinity? Once in a while, I have asked this question, only to dodge it and take you on a side tour. One of the important side tours I took you on in this manner was into the world of the atom and the nucleus. That was because in a rather amazing way, inside the nucleus is buried the entire gene of the whole Universe! This then led us right up to the Big Bang and what is supposed to have happened immediately thereafter. I even briefly discussed what might have existed before the Big Bang, from a physics point of view that is.

All this kept us very busy with what might be called inanimate entities. OK, but where do we human beings, with life, consciousness, awareness and all the rest of it, fit in? That is what I have been trying to deal with during the last two or three issues and we came up to the point where I said: "Listen, before Creation, there was Pure Consciousness. That is the real Mother of our Universe. If we choose to refer to that Mother as God, then obviously Pure Consciousness must be God; *Vedanta* emphatically proclaims that it is indeed so (*Pragyanaam Brahma*!); which means, that our Quest for Infinity has brought us right up to the doorstep of *Vedanta*.

Looking for God

So what do we do next? Go and buy a copy of *Bhagavad Gita* and pore over it? Will that bring us face to face with Infinity? Not necessarily. In fact, we do not have to do all that I just suggested! Instead, all we have to do is pay serious attention to one key sentence used by Swami from time to time. What is that key sentence? Let me introduce that to you by recalling what happened one afternoon here in Prashanti, many years ago. That day, Swami was to give a Discourse, and as always, He asked someone to speak ahead of Him. The person who was chosen began with such questions as: "Who is God?

Where is this God?", and so on. Good rhetoric and it sure caught the attention of the huge audience present.

When Swami began His Discourse, He literally dropped a bomb! He said, "The person who spoke earlier asked various questions. All these are meaningless questions." We were all stunned; at least I was and I began to wonder, "What does Swami mean?" I did not have to wait long, for almost the very next moment Swami said – and this is the key sentence I mentioned earlier – **Swami said, "There is only God and nothing else, everywhere, in everything, and at all times!"** That sentence got permanently etched in my memory and that is what I am going to elaborate on next.

If we reflect carefully then what Swami said can be restated as follows:

1. In the beginning, there was only God.
2. Then, this God decided to create a Universe.
3. And so, God Created a Universe.
4. This means we now have God plus a Universe.
5. **Swami says no! There was God before and there is God now. There is only God and nothing but God!**

That of course makes our head spin wildly and we have got to figure this out. But before we do that, let me recall another Discourse one rather hot afternoon, many years ago. I remember it very clearly. Swami was speaking about Universal or Pure Consciousness and repeatedly hammering into our thick skulls that everything is nothing but Consciousness. And then, suddenly He waved His hand and created a lemon, a nice, fresh, bright yellow lemon. There were of course the usual oohs and aahs, as Swami held up the lemon and everyone craned his or her neck to catch a glimpse of it. **Swami then said slowly and emphatically, "All of you think this is a lemon. Indeed it is so from a worldly point of view. However, in terms of Vedantic Reality, this is nothing but Consciousness appearing as a lemon!"** That was His way of reinforcing at that moment that the diversity that we think we see is really God and that indeed the Universe is only God and nothing else.

That said, the empirical reality of the diversity that we see, touch and experience all the time is extra-ordinarily powerful. So powerful it is that it makes us forget the True Reality behind it, just as all of us saw only the lemon that afternoon and not the Consciousness that lay behind it. *Vedanta* no doubt says [as Swami reminds us often] that behind the "seen" lies the Unseen which is the basis of everything animate and inanimate, and is the True Reality. We of course find it very, very difficult to accept that, which is not at all surprising. Even the great Vivekananda found it difficult to swallow, at the time when as young college student named Narendra, he was frequently going to have the *darshan* of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. This is what he said later, recalling an incredible experience he had at that time:

One day, in the temple garden at Dakshineshwar, Sri Ramakrishna [Vivekananda's master as many readers might know] touched me over the heart, and first of all I began to see the houses – rooms, doors, windows,

verandas, the trees, the sun, the moon all were flying off, shattering to pieces as it were, reduced to atoms and molecules and ultimately became merged in the Akasha [sky/ether]. Gradually the Akasha too vanished, and after that my consciousness of these ....what happened next, I do not recollect. I was at first frightened. Coming back from that state, I began to see the houses, doors, windows, verandas, and the other things. On another occasion, I had exactly the same vision by the side of a lake in America.

If you read Vivekananda's writing, there is in fact a graphic description of what happened before this extra-ordinary experience. Young Narendra describes how while walking towards Dakshineshwar, he was talking to himself expressing deep doubts about his master's teachings that everything was the Self or the *Atma*. I remember reading his touching a fence and saying mockingly, "This is supposed to be *Atma*!" He then kicks an iron gate or something and as it hurt his foot, he said once more in disbelief, "How can this gate which just hurt me, be the *Atma*!" Swamiji adds that perhaps his master suddenly gave him that incredible experience merely for his prospective disciple to know that the *Atma* was for real; and that is the Infinity we are after. We looked for it everywhere, thought we missed it, while Swami is telling us, "Listen you fool, there is only Infinity and it is everywhere, in you, above you, below you etc."

More about this soon but meanwhile let me mention that the lake where Swamiji had this incredible experience for a second time is, I believe, in upstate New York. I recall visiting that region way back in the summer of 1958 when I made a brief visit from Canada. I saw Lake Placid, and that region is indeed one where a highly spiritual person can go into a trance. I am told that near this particular lake that Swami refers to (I believe it is not Lake Placid but some other lake near it), there is in fact a small plaque referring to this visit of Swamiji.

Why We Are Fooled

Let us get back to the fundamental question, which is: "If everything is indeed Infinity, that there is nothing but Infinity, and we who believe we are particular individuals [as stated in the business card if we have one – I do not, by the way!] then how come we do not know we are Infinity and that it was in fact foolish to set out on a Quest for Infinity? Have I, in collusion with H2H, taken you for a ride? Have I, like the proverbial trickster, sold you a lemon [which, by the way, is also Infinity!]? What is going on? Some serious explanation and discussion are called for.

If I get back to what we were discussing, it all boils down to: "How do we see Unity in the diversity that surrounds and overwhelms us?" The answer is simple. We see diversity in Divine and Cosmic Unity because we are using our senses and the Mind. As Swami has reminded us many times, both these are **below** Creation. If we have to see Unity in diversity, then we have to go **above** the senses and the Mind to the Heart. In practical terms, what does that mean? Before dealing with that issue, a simple discussion about how the senses can mislead.

It is a common fact that no matter how spiritual we may claim to be, we are in fact, strongly attached to the body, and that is because we think, as Swami tells us, that we ARE the Body. But do we realise that contrary to our belief, in a sense there is really no sharp boundary between our body and the rest of this planet? You think I have gone bonkers? Well, consider what follows in that case.

Atomic Connections

We start with the question: "What is my body made up of?" This is an enquiry about ourselves at the gross level, and that is why we are bringing the body here. The simple answer is of course that our body is made up of atoms, mostly hydrogen, quite a bit of oxygen and carbon no doubt. Then there are vital necessities like phosphorous, calcium, sodium and potassium [widely prevalent in the heart], iron [playing a central role in haemoglobin, a crucial constituent of the blood] and so on. There are also what are called trace elements, that are present in very tiny quantities, so small that till the advent of high-resolution spectroscopy, their presence in the body was not even suspected.

OK, we can make a distribution plot and say how much of each of the elements of the periodic table is present in our body. By the way, some rather interesting studies have been done in this area. There is a man in the US who regularly gives blood and tissue samples to a research lab and has been doing so for years. After carefully analysing these samples and comparing them with samples available from say around 1900 or so, scientists find the following:

1. These days, many elements are found in the human body that were not found before, i.e., in samples going back to 1900 or earlier.
2. The quantity of these new elements found is found to be increasing in some cases.

After many further studies, scientists have concluded that some of these new elements have begun entering our body on account of our extensive use of new products and change in life style. I mean in this space age, we are using all kinds of products for all sorts of things. Suppose we drink plenty of soft drinks. Then all kinds of stuff enter our body from the paper cup or straw may be. They could even originate in the water, which these days has all sorts of elements, thanks to ground water pollution. Anyway, that is a different matter altogether, and the point I presently want to make is that our body is simply made up of all kinds of atoms, making their entry from all over the place.

Next, consider a new born baby. Its weight is small, as is to be expected. Ten years later, this baby boy is now an ugly fatty! So much weight! Weight means mass and mass means lots and lots of atoms. So, where did all these atoms come from, and how did they get into the body? That is an easy one. Most of the atoms in our body come from what we eat and drink. And some of it comes from what we breathe. There could be the occasional other sources

also, like organ transplant or even a simple blood transfusion. Good, this we understand, namely how atoms come in.

What about atoms going out? There are many ways for atoms to exit, all the way from the excreta to a hair cut and the air we breathe out. There are many other ways we hardly ever think of. When we cut nails, we are losing atoms. When we rub our hands, we lose a lot of cells and loss of cells means loss of atoms. If we get injured and we lose blood, once again there is a loss of atoms, a serious loss it might turn out to be. Surgery also takes out atoms, sometimes in a rather drastic manner of course.

Now the reason I am mentioning all this is simply to stress the following points.

- **Although we imagine there is a skin that forms the formal boundary of our body, that boundary does not diminish the strong linkage between our body and the rest of the planet.**
- **In fact, thanks to recycling and all that, a particular carbon atom in my body might have resided a long time ago in the body of a dinosaur!**
- Not only that. **Since every atom on planet earth came from a long extinct star, we are not only connected in a sense to all the planets of the solar system and indeed the sun itself, but our galaxy as a whole.**
- **In fact, going back in this manner we can trace our linkage right to the Big Bang.**
- **What is even more amazing is that all the forces that govern the entire Universe are deep within us, in the nucleus of every atom of our body.**

What it all means is that if for a moment we stop being wrapped up in our utterly trivial egos, we can see that all of us are not only connected to each other, but to everything in this Universe. It is indeed a staggering thought, but do we ever bother to think of it?

Hardly ever. The point is that if we fail to see how we are all connected not only to each other but to the entire Universe at the material level, how would we ever be able to see our immanent Unity at the Cosmic and Divine level?

The Evil within our Minds

So, it all boils down to this. **We allow our senses to dominate, and egged by the agents of evil who hide in the crevices of the Mind, we allow the Mind to be a slave of the senses. The evil agents then use this slave to implement their agenda in the wide world.** How do we know all this happens? Well, look at conflicts and wars, for example. Wars may be fought between countries but as someone said, every war is born in the Mind, the Mind of one evil person who spreads poison all round, or a group of like-minded evil persons, all of whom suffer from the same deadly mental infection.

Let me give a graphic example. The First World War [1914-1918], often called the last gory trench war, was really horrible. Millions, yes millions died in the

trenches of France, but mercifully civilians were not killed in millions. Germany lost, surrendered, and later a Peace Treaty was signed. Was it really a Peace Treaty? No; it was a document that was so full of insult and humiliation [to the loser, namely, Germany] that right away it sowed the seeds for the next war, World War II which broke out, though in a limited way, as early as September 1939. And when it ended in 1945, the death toll exceeded fifty million I believe, a substantial number of those killed being civilians. For the first time, war meant death not only to soldiers but to civilians as well, in fact in greater proportion.

Once more the leaders scratched their heads and created an international institution to prevent further wars. Never again war, they all said, and thus the UN was born amidst great hope. What happened? There was tension once more very soon, and this time it was a Cold War instead of a hot war. But that did not prevent wars. There were many, but fought on the sidelines, like the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and so on. What prevented a massive nuclear catastrophe was MAD, the fear of Mutual Assured Destruction, as used to be said by political commentators.

Luckily, sense prevailed and in 1989 I believe, Ronald Regan and Gorbachev signed several treaties to scale down the inventory of deadly nuclear weapons and missiles. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union itself collapsed and over night as it were, communism disappeared in Eastern Europe. There was cheering everywhere, and it seemed that at last, confrontation had disappeared in substantial measure from the face of the earth. But can it, if Ego continues to rule?

Experiencing Infinity

You might, at this point, wonder: But what has all this to do with our Quest for Infinity? The answer is simple:

Our objective was flawed to start with; there is really no need to go in search of Infinity when it is everywhere and within us. Our objective must have been to EXPERIENCE the Infinity that is already everywhere, including within us.

In fact, we were really wasting our time! I deliberately made all of us waste some time just to drive home the point that what we do is mostly to waste our time, even though we may think we are sending an urgent tweet or whatever.

OK, we were after a wrong goal; we should have spent time to experience Infinity rather search for it. But why is this also not a waste of time? Why is this being rated as so very important? The answer is simple.

If at least a critical number of us experience this Infinity that is within us and all around us in the real sense of the word, then such people getting together can really do something to solve the seemingly insurmountable problems that humanity now faces. That is the reason Swami wants all of us to experience Infinity.

I realise all this might seem very fuzzy, vague and not convincing at all. I fully appreciate that. But don't worry; next time, I shall address all that fuzziness and vagueness. Meanwhile, I think I have given you enough to think about!

Take care, and will be with you again next month. All the best till then, and Jai Sai Ram.

MY INVALUABLE EXPERIENCES WITH SAI EHV

- A conversation with Mrs. Carole Alderman, Part-2

Mrs. Carole Alderman is the Director of the British Institute of Sathya Sai Education in Human Values in the UK. For the past 3 decades, Carole has devoted her time and energy to promoting the Education in Human Values Program among schools and teachers in Britain and other countries. In an interview with Heart2Heart in December 2008, Carole spoke about her work and life as inspired by her divine teacher, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Reproduced below are excerpts from the second part of this conversation.

H2H: Tell us a little bit about the nature of your current work that you're so deeply involved with. You've done a lot of workshops, you've a very busy schedule year-round, and you're a registered organization – The British Institute of Sathya Sai Education. As its Director, what can you tell us about it?

CA: Yes, it is a company limited by guarantee, and it has all the necessary paperwork that is required in the UK. It's a registered charity, which is good because although it requires a lot of administrative work, it gives respectability.

H2H: And, I believe its mandate is to publish training materials for teachers and to carry out research into the effects of SSEHV. What has been the response so far?

CA: Right now we've actually got a management board, with the responsibility for different aspects. Up to a few years ago, I was responsible for everything and I really had a work overload. I think that for the first 10 years I worked 6 ½ days a week, almost 15 hours a day. But Swami always gave the energy. Even when I'd have to do a workshop and I'd been ill, as soon as I started the workshop I would not be ill again until I'd finished the workshop. So there was nothing to worry about. But we developed very good training material in the UK over the years.

H2H: And you trained teachers? Educators?

CA: We trained some educators, we did a group of educators in Wales, but we have general groups and often have mixed groups, because the training is partly self-development and people come for that aspect as well. We have reflective exercises and an awareness exercise, which I picked up at the Philosophy School.

H2H: So when you approach a public school system to carry out this education for their teachers, parents or school community, how exactly do you present it to them?

CA: Well, it usually comes about the other way around. One of the things we do is run holiday schools or weekend classes or schools. For example, a couple of years ago we started a Sathya Sai Weekend School in Wembley (north-west London). And it's been so successful in changing the behaviour of children. There are more children coming now because the premises of the school in which we run this programme has asked us to start the SSEHV classes for their school children as well.

We have a full-time school in Leicester, a Sathya Sai School, with about 50 or 60 children. But we've also got a State school in Leicester, which has about 450 children, whose headmaster is absolutely, very keen on SSEHV. All of those children have an SSEHV lesson every week, and one of our teachers who has been doing SSEHV for many years, shows the teachers how to integrate the values into the curriculum. So he helps to execute the schemes of work with them.

H2H: So you educate the educators to take it into their classrooms.

CA: So the teachers know how to bring values out in the classroom, as well as having a dedicated lesson every week. I think we couldn't have done that if we hadn't had the books. We currently have 6 books sold in the bookshop in Prasanthi Nilayam and 3 more are in progress – 2 are being reviewed by schools and one more is being written. If we didn't have a set of books, one for every year, we wouldn't be able to do it in that way. The ready-to-use resources make it pretty foolproof for the teachers to teach EHV.

H2H: Yes, it's wonderful to have such well-researched materials handy, because then it becomes very easy for the teacher to adapt them. My next question to you, Carole, would be – what is it about this programme, the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values, that appeals so deeply to educators who care about their students, that the public school system in the UK is embracing it with such warmth and enthusiasm?

CA: Tim Foster, the headmaster of Abbey Primary Community School, is very keen on Sathya Sai Education in Human Values. He recently said to me that if we could get it into 10% of the schools in England, it would just change the country. We would have no problems with all the social ills that we have at the moment.

Of course, it would unite the people of different religions, because the 5 values are inherent in a human being. They're the unifying factor between all the religions. All the faiths have these values in them - they all talk about righteousness, love, truth and peace. And non-violence will come automatically if they have those other 4 values.

And indeed the feedback from the various schools who are actually using the programme has been very impressive.

The public school system in the UK has accepted that they've got to teach values. So there are quite a few values programmes in the UK.

This particular programme in my opinion, has a spiritual aspect to it. It raises children's self-esteem, it improves their behaviour, it makes them feel worthwhile, and it makes them happy. And that was one of our aims – to make the children happy. Because children are extremely unhappy if they don't have a value system.

H2H: And it's hard to believe for someone in, for instance a developing country, that children in a country like the UK would be unhappy, where they have access to all the basic amenities, comforts and luxuries in life. That's quite revealing.

CA: And one third of all suicides in the UK are among students who have recently left university.

H2H: It's the moral breakdown that's happening in Western societies.

CA: It's absolutely dreadful! Of course, it's not like that everywhere. There are a lot of good, well-balanced kids too…

H2H: Absolutely.

CA: But values education certainly improves the children tremendously. It changes the ethos of the whole school.

H2H: What's the feedback from the parents?

CA: The feedback is very positive. It's always positive when it's done properly, with a teacher who endeavors in some way to practise the values. Because it's all about practice, it's not so much about teaching.

H2H: And role modeling, because if the teacher's an example of the values he or she is teaching, students are more likely to follow.

CA: It's absolutely imperative! You can't teach a child to do something if you're not doing it yourself.

H2H: And in that respect, Bhagavan is the greatest teacher because He is a perfect role model. Tell us a little bit more about the Good Values Club that you run.

CA: The Good Values Club is in Leicester. It is run by Dipak Fakey Kumar who made the values board games. The various classes have an EHV lesson often using the SSEHV books as well as games and sports. They also get involved in community service work and run events. A recent one was an anti-drug day called 'Wot U On?' The club is for children of all ages. There are about 160 children now. It's held at Abbey Primary Community School – the school that I told you about, the public school. And as I already said, the head teacher there said to me in October, that if we could only get Sathya Sai EHV into 10% of the schools in England, it would change the country so much. And

he doesn't know Sathya Sai Baba; he's not a follower. There are other similar SSEHV clubs throughout the UK.

H2H: I see. The head teacher appreciates His values, the philosophy so deeply.

CA: Absolutely. He really does.

H2H: That speaks volumes about the organic nature of what Bhagavan is trying to tell us. Anybody with half a brain and common sense will appreciate the impact it's bearing on children everywhere. Tell me a little bit about the partnership schools.

CA: Abbey Primary Community School is a partnership school. There are also others nearly ready too. We have about 20 schools in Wales, who have been doing EHV for quite a long time. There are quite a lot of schools using SSEHV in London and elsewhere. I don't even know how many because I'm always coming across people who say, "Oh yes, I'm using your books in my school", and they don't always – or very rarely – ever have the time to contact us and let us know. But that's an area that we need to go into more. But really, we spend a lot of time setting up holiday schools and monitoring things.

Now, in this new busy setup, my personal responsibility is developing the resources, developing the books and writing them.

H2H: Teacher resources?

CA: Yes, because Swami said to me two things. He said to me – well, He's always said to me – "Teacher", even though I've not got a teaching certificate. He's always been teaching me about being a teacher, and about being accurate. I've been very fortunate in the interactions He's allowed. For 6 years I was Head of Protocol backstage at the children's Christmas Play. **H2H:** Tell us something about that. What has He taught you, specifically?

CA: One of the things He taught me was accuracy – I must always be 100% accurate, down to the last person. I remember in the first play I was involved in, there were about 1200 people participating in it. He expected me to know how many people were in each team, all the time, and not to be out at all.

H2H: To be a very hands-on leader!

CA: And whenever I would get lists of things that I thought I knew the answers to, He would always ask me a question I didn't know the answer to. Always! So it was quite amazing but it was delightful too; He always came and spoke to me.

But one interesting thing I thought… when I was given that job, or asked if I would do it, they said I didn't have to worry very much because Swami would come out of His door, from His house (then in the Poorna Chandra

Auditorium), and He would always go past the men's side, where the boys were sitting. He wouldn't come past the girls' side. At that particular time I think we had about 50 boys and 80 girls. It was a big group for the Christmas play. We would take all of the Western children who wanted to participate.

And I thought, "Well, that's strange… An Avatar, always going past the boys' side. That's gender biased. It can't be the case. Swami is beyond gender, there's no gender for Him." So I thought that if I make the discipline very strict, and the girls behave very well, we'll see what happens. So I moved the children back so they weren't crowding the front of His door at all, and I got the girls all sitting cross-legged… And I gradually moved them up, really squashing them into their square to give more room for Swami if He came. So I had at least 18 inches between the children and the curtain backstage. And I said to them, "If Swami comes out, you must put your hands together, and don't speak unless He speaks to you. But if He speaks, you must answer. And there must be silence, all the time."

So we did this, and when Swami came out – I squashed myself back into the curtain as much as I could, into the corner – He came over, straight past me and straight past the girls… And He did it virtually, almost every time for the Christmas week for 6 years, when I was there. Provided nobody came and sat in the way or did anything wrong. So much so that I started to feel sorry for the boys' side, and decided to tell the boys what they must do if they wanted Him to pass on their side.

H2H: Swami was looking for discipline and yearning.

CA: Yes, and He's very keen on discipline.

H2H: Absolutely. And it's very apparent here, in the way the students conduct themselves, and in the way the *ashram* is run - discipline is the key to Swami's philosophy.

CA: Yes, without the *sevadals*, none of us would have *darshan*!

H2H: Absolutely. It would be total chaos.

CA: Yes, it would be impossible.

H2H: Finally, I just want ask you… What are your thoughts on being a Sai devotee in the current times, and the relevance of His teachings to the challenges that we face as a society today?

CA: Well, His teachings are telling us how to live happy lives, actually. Because if we follow the teachings, we will live happy lives that won't be chaotic and troublesome. I mean, my life now is totally different from how it was before. It is totally different.

H2H: And what are the differences?

CA: I'm happy! Almost all of the time. And if I have any problems, I can just turn to Him and He'll sort them out for me.

H2H: It's a great reassurance to know that there's always somebody you can turn to.

CA: Yes! And that life goes on, that we make our own lives… As we sow, so we reap. And that we're here to serve others. Once you start to serve others and stop thinking about your own problems, you don't have any worries.

H2H: That's very true… Because the worries just generate from the mind.

CA: And the joy, from doing the workshops and the training with the adults! The work is joyful! And we have such good fun.

H2H: Tell me about some of the most memorable workshops you've ever conducted.

CA: Well, they all are. They've all been wonderful. I mean, I've been so happy, met such delightful people around the world. I've done workshops now in Israel, Egypt, Morocco, Canada…

We did a couple of hours last year I think, just as a sample, for the Europeans – the mainland Europeans, I should say; geographically the UK's part of Europe, of course. It's just happy work. I mean, I'm so lucky. Being immersed in the training, and writing EHV books – I'm just immersed in happiness, really. I enjoy it so much. My husband helps me enormously, and looks after me in everything. He does all the difficult stuff, the administrative work. His work is in documentation, and that's what he does. I find it very difficult to do anything without him. I hate going to big meetings without him. Because it's like having half my brain missing.

H2H: Because you work so well as a team. It's been wonderful talking to you. Any last reflections for RadioSai listeners, about the SSEHV message and its value?

CA: Study Swami's teachings, and whatever He asks you to do, do it. Because if you don't do it, He's only going to ask you again. So you might as well get on with it. And know that you can do it. With Swami there, we can do anything. Because I told you, I'm not a public person – I hate speaking. Except now, for the training… Anything to do with our EHV is fine. But Swami even had me speaking on Ladies' Day one year. And so, you can do it! Just leave it to Swami.

H2H: Clearly, you are pointing to a strong sense of urgency to follow His teachings and to trust them.

CA: We don't really have time to waste. Although we have all the time, we have eternity, we have no time to waste. Let's get His message out while He's still in His body.

H2H: Very important, very priceless. Thank you Carole, for being with us. It's been a pleasure talking to you. Sairam.

CA: Thank you. Sairam.

A UNIQUE AND FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON UNITY OF FAITHS

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

This is an article prepared in connection with the Conference on Unity of Faiths, organised by the Sri Sathya Sai International Centre, New Delhi, held in July 2009.

We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

- Swami Vivekananda

The subject of Unity of Faiths is traditionally discussed mainly by religious scholars on the one hand, and academics [especially sociologists] on the other. While the focus of the former community is largely on theological issues with emphasis on the common aspects, academics concern themselves with how religions either promote values in society leading thereby to social benefits, or polarise it sharply, resulting, in extreme cases, not only to riots but even armed conflicts, war, and lately terrorism.

In this article, I wish to consider the topic at a somewhat higher and trans-religious level, drawing special attention to the **fundamental** nature of the human Spirit which, in some sense or the other, is the starting point for all religions [whether that fact is explicitly acknowledged or not]. And the reason for this unconventional approach is that based on the teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, I am convinced this is the best way of finding solutions to very complex problems that face society/humanity today. In brief, the stress would be on **core** or fundamental values that **truly** define the nature of a **good** human being; indeed, these values are not only common to all religions, but are embraced [to some extent at least] even by those who claim to be atheists.

The Overriding Moral Law and its Absolute Nature

I shall begin by recalling a remark that Gandhi made in 1932 in England, while he was visiting that country for participating in the Second Round Table Conference. The remark being recalled is part of a special Spiritual Message to humanity, recorded by the Columbia Gramophone Company. In the course of that Message, Gandhi said, "There is a Moral Law governing the Universe." These days when relativism is often the core ideology driving many [especially the young], the existence of an Eternal and overriding Moral Law is often superciliously and even contemptuously dismissed by most

intellectuals, a phenomenon referred to by Pope Benedict as the 'tyranny of relativism'. On the other hand, not only have people all over the world and belonging to diverse societies and cultures maintained balance for thousands of years by leaning on this Moral Law, but even Courts have acknowledged its existence.

For example, in a famous case against a leading politician who was accused of engaging in illegal land deals while in power, the Supreme Court of India said in its judgement that **while the Court could not find the defendant guilty under any provision of the law, she was not exempt from answering her own Conscience.** That, in a sense, explains what the Moral Law is all about, and who administers it. **In simple terms, the so-called Moral Law is an immutable and eternal guiding principle, based on core values [mentioned earlier], that is unchanging, applicable to all, and under all circumstances – there are no exemptions for anyone, anywhere and at any time, period.** Clarifications regarding this Moral Law [which clearly is a transcendental principle] are provided by the Conscience. In practical terms, this means that whatever one does, one must always be guided by one's Conscience. That this is a universally acknowledged dictum is evident from Shakespeare's famous remark, "Above all, to thine own self be true!"

The Universality of the Moral Law

It is important to appreciate that the Moral Law is the same for all human beings, no matter what their race, religion, colour, social status, or whatever. The question may be asked:

> *It is said that one must seek guidance from one's Conscience while trying to navigate through life with the help of the Moral Law. But the Conscience of different people could speak with different voices. In which case, how can one speak of the Universality and the unchanging nature of the Moral Law? Given the fact that people are so different from each other and that Time produces its own change in social perspective, it appears that after all it is relativism that is meaningful and not any kind of absolutism.*

This precisely is where Baba's teachings assume importance. His Message can be paraphrased as follows.

- All religions are unanimous in declaring that God created the Universe and everything in it, including humans.
- Therefore, all humans are the children of the **same** God. In other words, there is **only one single Universal Father** for all.
- Just as humans inherit a biological gene from their parents and ancestors, **all children of God inherit from their Universal Father, an aspect of Divinity,** which, for convenience, could be called the Divine Gene; Baba often refers to this as the latent Spark of Divinity.
- How do we know we have latent within us such a Spark of the Divine? **Because everyone without exception is capable of resonating**

with the beauties of Nature which reflect the Glory of God, everyone can love other beings in some manner or the other [even a hard core terrorist might love his dog dearly!], and everyone can and does show compassion in some form or the other at some time or the other, and so on.

- In other words, there is no person on earth who is **totally** devoid of the Divine Spark. At the same time, it is an empirical fact that some people end up almost like the devil, the classic example of course being Hitler. How come there arose a Hitler when even he was supposed to have the Spark of the Divine within him?
- That is due to contamination of the Mind, caused by ego operating in various devious and dangerous ways. In other words ego, which is largely the result of excessive body-consciousness, leads in turn to undue preoccupation with the pursuit of sensual pleasures and worldly attractions of diverse nature. The cumulative effect of all this is to generate a huge chatter by the Mind [in the form of undesirable thoughts] that masks and drowns the Voice of Conscience speaking from within. In turn this implies that purity of thought, word and deed has to be constantly maintained, if one wishes uninterrupted contact with the Conscience.
- Since the Voice of Conscience is nothing but the Voice of God speaking from within, and further, since there is only one God, **Conscience, by definition, has to speak with the same voice for all people,** no matter to what religion the person belongs, indeed even if the person does not formally believe in a God.
- If people think they hear several voices from within, it is merely a trick played by the ego, which if unchecked, can, as just pointed out, drown the Voice of Conscience.

It is for this reason that Baba often says:

1. Follow the Master; your Conscience is your Master.
2. Face the devil [meaning, confront squarely the evil tendencies within you].
3. Fight to the end, and
4. Finish the game!

Rising From the Individual to the Collective Level

At this stage, it is necessary to raise the discussion from the individual to the collective level, on account of the heavy connectivity of modern society. Whereas in the very early days humans roamed and lived largely as primitive individuals, preoccupied mainly with their own particular survival problems, in later times, the stratification of society compelled the emergence of such institutions as communities, tribes and even small kingdoms. Thus, mutual co-operation and collaboration became a part of social existence, although the level of such positive interactions was not always steady. For example, people did come together at the time of birth and death, marriage and various other festivals and when facing danger either from other communities or due to natural calamities. At the same time, mutual rivalries also arose frequently,

leading to clashes between tribes, and even countries, sometimes for as long as a hundred years [the protracted conflict between France and England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries being one famous example].

Two brutal wars fought in the 20th century made humanity come to its senses and create the UN, besides solemnly resolving that no more such wars would be fought. Yet the record shows that since the end of World War II, the number of people who have died as a result of various wars, genocides, protracted armed conflicts, terrorism, etc., has almost reached the number of deaths during the two World Wars. In fact, it is estimated that during the late sixties and early seventies, more bombs were dropped on one single country [Cambodia] than was done during the Second World War, an "achievement" that was entirely the result of vastly superior military technology.

This raises the question:

> *In earlier times, spiritual and religious teachings largely focussed on transforming individuals and elevating them to be good children of God. Is that enough in this day and age, or is something more needed?*

In my opinion, this critical issue is not receiving the attention it merits, except from Bhagavan Baba. The reason why Baba lays heavy emphasis on this matter has been explained by Him. He says that there is a powerful and profound parallel between the human body and human society. At the level of the micro, the individual cell and the individual human being form analogues, while at the macro level, the body and human society as a whole form the counter parts. Baba adds that just as there is a [complex] synergy between the cell and the body, so also, there is a comparable synergy between the individual and society.

Going one step further, Baba tells His students that just as the body cannot be healthy while the individual cells are rather sick, so also, **unless there is individual character, there cannot be any character in the Nation as a whole.** In other words, the Moral improvement and advancement of the individual and society as a whole are inextricably tied together; it is thus not possible to have just one and not the other.

The above statement, while appearing trivially obvious, is nevertheless universally ignored, almost to the point of courting disaster. It is pertinent in this context to mention that the National Motto ***Satyameva Jayathe!*** [Truth alone triumphs] is hardly ever referred to in our schools; as a result, millions and millions of our students go through not only school but also the university, without hearing the word *Sathya* even once! If Truth which is the foundation of honesty, integrity and good character is hardly mentioned in schools, and education is regarded as mere training for the workplace with no responsibility whatsoever for the development of character, it simply means we are in free fall!

These days, polls show that people have come to believe that corruption is something one has to live with and that nothing can be done about it. Can a society ever survive if corruption becomes endemic? It is like saying one can live with cancer and simply ignore it! Corruption is not merely the taking of bribes by officials for doing a job that is actually a part of their duty [like issuing a birth certificate, for example]. Rather, it is largely about cheating. Once one grants the license to cheat, the virus of deception would automatically spread like wild fire to other areas like the manufacture of fake drugs [which, by the way, is not something where the Government alone can be blamed] or the massive adulteration of milk with melamine, as happened in China. Can one really be in equilibrium with such criminal and widespread malpractices? Clearly not, which is why Baba has not only made character development the core agenda of His educational institutions, but also constantly advises His students to get **actively** get involved in serving Society, in all manners possible.

In passing, it is pertinent to mention that while in ancient societies the duties and responsibilities of the individual always came before claims to rights of any sort, in modern times the concept has been literally turned on its head, with everyone clamouring for his or her rights, totally unconcerned about who then would "carry the buck". This "triumph" of extreme individualism has become possible thanks to a vast and powerful coalition of diverse vested interests, that have, by harnessing the Media, managed to dull people's capacity of discriminatory listening, discriminatory viewing and arriving at conclusions based on deep personal enquiry.

Karl Marx famously declared that religion was the opium of the masses; he was of course wrong. However, today, the "Market Place" has come up with a **real and most potent opium** in the shape of 24 hour media-blast, drugging people with instant and ready-made advice, opinions and choices! As **Bhagavan Baba tells His students, people these days are made to see through the eyes of others [read TV], hear through the ears of others [read radio] and think through the minds of others [expert opinions dished out non-stop via every conceivable arm of the Media, including the internet].**

It is time to break these shackles, and **the starting point has to be a return from a culture of rights to the age-old tradition of duty and responsibility.** This is not an easy task and is literally like moving a mountain. A mountain might seem impossible to move but immediately after discovering the principle of the lever, the great Archimedes declared, "Show me where to anchor my lever and I shall move the moon itself!" Translated to our situation, what this means is that if individuals first commit themselves to a path of purity and responsibility, and thereafter cohere together, especially in large enough numbers, they can not only move mountains but also bore though it, just as a laser which is the epitome of the principle of coherence, can cut through as much as ten to twelve centimetres of steel!

Seeing Cosmic Unity and Purpose in Diversity Rather Than Diversity in Unity

The following points emerge from the above discussion:

- Although humans tend to differentiate themselves in terms of sects, tribes, communities, nationalities, race, religion, etc., the fact is that even from a scientific point of view, they belong to **one** species called human, with distinctive genetic characteristics [no doubt somewhat different from that of the lower species].
- Nevertheless, if one thinks in terms of genes, there is in fact a continuity across the species, going back all the way to the very first appearance of life on earth.
- If one takes one more step backwards and regards humans as made up not of bio-molecules but of atoms of carbon, oxygen, calcium, etc., then human existence can be taken all the way to the Big Bang itself. All the above clearly tells us that not only do humans have a lot more in common with each other, but in fact they share much with other species as well [including those that came earlier]. Indeed, **in terms of atoms, humans have a connectivity with the whole of the Cosmos.**
- It is significant that Krishna draws specific attention to the Cosmic aspect of man, though briefly.
- Going even beyond, what really links everything in the Universe is the basic fact that **everything came from God, the Creator.**

In short, **the amazing thing is the incredible Cosmic and Spiritual Unity that underlies the whole of the Cosmos**, rather than the diversity that meets our eye and tends to make an excessive impression in our Minds, thanks to our polarized and restricted way of thinking [of course, aided and abetted by the Media].

I strongly submit that one must, not merely for lofty Spiritual reasons but even for down-to-earth considerations, really look for *Unity in Diversity* rather than unnecessarily stressing diversity, based especially on rather divisive considerations. To put it differently and succinctly, I could, paraphrasing Baba, say there are Four C's that every individual should be conscious or aware of. They are:

1. Humans must be conscious of their **Cosmic Origin.**
2. Next, they must be conscious of their **Cosmic Connections**.
3. They must be ever sensitive to their **Cosmic Responsibilities**.
4. And finally, they must never forget their **Cosmic Destiny**.

It is not possible to expand on this theme on this occasion [those interested can find further details in my recent book ***Conversation between God and Man***, ISBN-978-81-908439-0-4]. For the present, it suffices to say that once we understand and feel our linkage across species, and across Space and

Time, to the One God from whom all of us have come, there is no question we would experience a wonderful Cosmic Oneness that would enable us to draw upon the immense power of Pure Love within us.
As a footnote to the above, I might state that by using the Unity of Faiths as a stepping stone, one can to rise to a much higher plane of realisation and experience that not only fills one with Bliss, but also helps one to tap the literally unlimited Divine Power latent within, for solving the toughest man-made problems.

The Practical Advantages of Cultivating a Feeling of Universality

Roughly two years ago, Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University delivered a series of thought-provoking lectures over the BBC, in which he identified three critical problems that face humanity at the present time. They are 1) the threat of terrorism with possibility of triggering a much wider conflict, 2) the severe dangers posed by impending climate change, and finally 3) the dangers lurking in the rapid spread of mass poverty.

Prof. Sachs no doubt gives a masterly analysis of how these problems arose, but when it comes to solving them his arguments seem somewhat weak and doubtful. That is because his analysis is confined [as is perhaps inevitable amongst academics] to levels that exclude Spirituality, and the fundamental as well as the core nature of the human Spirit.

In my view, all the massive problems identified by Jeffrey Sachs arise due to what Mother Teresa famously referred to as the Poverty of Love. **The only antidote to that serious and dangerous deficiency is Pure Love in abundance.** That this antidote can be provided, and that Pure Love when tapped properly can lead to stunning results, has been demonstrated by courageous souls in many lands and cultures, throughout history.

Heart – the Seat of all Solutions

Abandoning ancient wisdom and forsaking the valuable lessons of history, we have today resorted instead to problem-solving [the latest problem being the greed-driven economic meltdown] via Think Tanks, national and international committees of various kinds and complexion, and even global meets of leaders. Given the fact that **this type of solution-seeker do not ever address the root cause of the huge problems we have created for ourselves, one doubts if solutions can ever be found via bureaucratic methods.** An out-of-the-box approach is needed, and what I have attempted is to sketch one possibility.

My suggestion is not based on wild day-dreaming or naive speculation; rather, they merely paraphrase the lifetime teachings of Bhagavan Baba, who has also proved that these ideas are eminently workable. Since His numerous missions of Compassion have been well documented in many places [for example, in this website www.h2hsai.org] I shall skip describing them here.

Instead, I would like to conclude by drawing attention to two important remarks, the first of which is due to late Prof. Victor Weisskopf and the second of which is due to Bhagavan Baba Himself.

Weisskopf, an émigré from Austria who escaped to America during Hitler's witch hunt for Jews, was not only a distinguished Physicist but also a highly cultured person. After working on the atom bomb project during its early days he quit weapon design, turned a pacifist, and became a teacher in MIT where he acquired a lasting reputation. Addressing once the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Weisskopf said:

[Scientific] Knowledge without compassion is inhuman, while compassion without knowledge is ineffective.

In simple terms, what the learned Professor means is that humanity is engaged in a dangerous pursuit, namely seeking so-called scientific and technological progress, most of the time without any trace of compassion whatsoever.

In a similar vein, Baba tells His students that while "secular" education might impart tons of worldly knowledge and hone the worldly skills of students to an exceptional degree, it does not teach them how **to be balanced, and use their knowledge for purposes that are beneficial to society as a whole, without disturbing Nature in any manner. That missing balance comes only when one soars to Cosmic levels, a noble goal that one can and really must seek, since after all, humans represent the highest aspect of Creation.**

Viewed from those exhilarating heights, much of what we currently do and spend money on would appear utterly trivial and pitiably meaningless. This is not the place to dwell on this topic but if one merely considers the astronomical amount countries of the world spend on their military budgets and arms development and arms bazaar, one **would be forced** to agree that this is not only a massive and unwanted expenditure but a most sinful misuse of knowledge as well, arising entirely on account of a massive Poverty of Love and Compassion.

It is perhaps meaningful to add, before concluding, a few personal remarks so that the reason for my espousing rather unorthodox views might be better understood. When I was young, I was irresistibly drawn to Physics even as an iron piece is attracted to a magnet; fortunately, I got my chance, and was able to spend an entire lifetime working on various frontiers of pure science as well as technology. In those days, I often used to think, as Nehru emphatically declared, and repeatedly I might add, that Science and Technology alone could solve the problems of India. Forty years later, I realised that Gandhi

understood India and its problems much better. And when after retirement I came to the Sri Sathya Sai University to teach, I realised, after listening to numerous discourses of Bhagavan Baba, that the problems of the world are largely created by the Head. However, where solutions are concerned, the Head is pathetically powerless and utterly ineffective. **Solutions to complex problems such as those earlier referred to can be found only via the Heart.** And by way of stressing that, let me end with a wonderful quote from Baba who says:

There is only one caste,
The caste of Humanity.
There is only one religion,
The religion of Love.
There is only one language,
The language of the Heart,
There is only one God,
And He is Omnipresent!

SERIAL ARTICLES

SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PART 9

(Continued from the previous issue)

by Prof. G. Venkataraman

Since Heart2Heart started in 2003, readers have very often written to us seeking answers to many spiritual questions. We have answered them at times through appropriate articles in H2H. However, there are still many that have to be explained carefully and in detail. And in the recent past, a lot more queries have arrived on varied topics concerning spirituality and personal growth.

We have now meticulously compiled and categorised these questions, and Prof. G. Venkataraman has offered to answer all these queries in a structured and systematic way as a series on Radio Sai as well as in H2H. In this way, these answers now remain always on our website as a ready reckoner on spiritual doubts. This is a suitably adapted transcript of our radio series bearing the same name.

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. It is nice to be with you once more, responding to your questions. I have two questions before me today, and as earlier, these two questions also relate, in a manner of speaking, to the subject: purpose of life; if you recall, that is the topic we are currently dealing with.

The questions I shall be dealing with today are as follows:

Question 1: ***Does being selfish prevent one from being Self-realised?***

Question 2: ***Is it possible to obtain liberation in spite of being an atheist, but good at heart?***

Without appearing to hurt the questioner, I would say the first question is like asking: "Can we have the cake and eat it too?" I am afraid not. The question arises because of a basic ignorance about what Self-realisation is really all about. Once one gets some understanding of that, many such questions would automatically fade away. So, let me spend some time going over this Self-realisation process. I have of course gone over this already in earlier articles, but then, in a series like this, a certain amount of repetition is inevitable. Rather than complain about it, I look upon it not only as a chance to do some revision, but also as an opportunity for injecting a few new angles. So, those of you who might tend to feel it is all the "same old stuff", please bear with me! We have many readers for this series and we have to take

everyone along with us as we journey forward. With that caveat, let me address the first question.

I shall try to deal with the question by focussing first on three key words, namely, the Self, Self-realisation, and selfishness. Once I explain what these three words mean, the answer to the question would be almost self-evident.

Although this might appear to be like a diversion, let me start with the familiar question: *"Who am I?"* Most of the time, this question is asked in a purely worldly sense, and it needs therefore to be answered also in that very same sense. Thus, almost everyone responds by saying, "I am so and so," and at times offers further information by identifying one's family, hometown, job title, etc. These days, all this is done most efficiently by simply offering a business card that includes many details that would be needed by most questioners.

All this refers to usual worldly business, but when the same question is asked in Spirituality, it has an entirely different connotation. There, when one asks 'who am I?' one is really asking: "What exactly is the core of my personality? What precisely is my True Nature?" One might be puzzled as to why at all does such a question arise in the first place. The reason for that is that every human being is actually a composite of three distinct entities: 1) the gross body, 2) the Subtle Mind, and 3) the Cause of everything in the Creation, namely the *Atma*, that goes beyond Space and Time itself. From this perspective, the question *Who am I?* can be rephrased as: "Am I the body, or am I the Mind, or am I the *Atma*? Which of these three am I?"

Who Are We Really

Commenting on these three questions, Swami says: "You think you are the body, but **you are not the body**." OK, does that mean we are the Mind? Swami's answer to that is: "Others judge you by your behaviour and attitude and since these are shaped largely by the Mind, it essentially means that **others think you are the Mind. But that also is not true**!"

So two out of the three possibilities have been knocked out, and by the process of elimination, it follows that the answer to the question '*Who am I?'* obviously has to be, **"I am the *Atma*."** Indeed that is exactly right, and Swami also confirms it emphatically. So, **we are not the body, we are not the Mind but the *Atma*** – that is settled.

Now you may say: "Listen, the question you are supposed to answer is entirely different. It is: "Does being selfish prevent one from achieving Self realisation?" What has all that you have just now said got to do with that question?" Everything, as I shall now explain. The first step consists in understanding that the *Atma* is incapable of selfishness. To put it differently, the *Atma* can never suggest an action that has even a trace of selfishness in it. Hence, if a person tends to feel selfish, it means some agency within, other than the *Atma* is prompting him or her to be selfish; and it turns out that this other agency is nothing but the Mind.

You might now say: "OK, the Mind prompts selfish ideas; so what? What has that got to do with Self-realisation?" Well, in order to figure that one out, let us first ask what does the word Self-realisation mean? It means knowing and believing that **one is actually the *Atma* and not the Mind**. In addition, **one must feel as well as act in the true Spirit of the *Atma* – that is what Self-realisation is all about.** Now tell me, how can a person be selfish and yet claim he is acting in the Spirit of the *Atma*? Are not the two things contradictory? I hope you get the point.

I might take the opportunity to add a few clarifying remarks that are related to the advice we seek within. You see there are two agencies within us, both of which are capable of giving a reply when you post a question inside. Let us say a person wants to do something and wants some advice. So, he asks himself: "Should I do this or should I not?" This is a question that is asked of one self and one expects a reply. This assumes or implies that there is an agency within that could be called the "self" that is supposed to give the answer. What is that agency within that could be called the "self"?

The Tale of the Two Selves

Let us try to deal with this question. *Vedanta* says that there are two agencies within that could claim to be the "self"; one is the *Atma* and the other is the Mind. Of these two**, the *Atma* is the Real or the True Self;** as for the Mind, being extra-ordinarily clever and powerful, it all the time keeps on making the claim, "I am the Self!" though it is not; in fact it is the bogus or the false self. Thus, every time humans look inside for clarity and guidance, they hear two voices, both giving advice. If the person is spiritually ignorant, then the person would not know which voice one must pay attention to and which voice one must ignore; in other words, the person is unable to distinguish the true from the false – that is the problem.

These two voices present different points of view and both argue their cases strongly; and the poor individual who is facing a difficulty and wants guidance from within, is totally lost. He or she does not know which of the two voices is giving the right answer, and how exactly to make sure one is getting the right answer and is not being taken for a ride. Interestingly, this precisely is what the *Bhagavad Gita* is all about.

Remember what happens right in the beginning of the *Gita*? Arjuna asks Krishna, his Charioteer, to take the chariot to the middle-ground from where he could survey both armies. Krishna does that because He knows fully well what is going to come. When they reach the middle ground and Arjuna is able to see both armies in full, both in battle-readiness and fully prepared to slaughter each other when the word "go' is given, Arjuna is suddenly seized with all kinds of doubts. He then reflects and seeks answers from inside, which he then conveys to Krishna.

Krishna smiles and then tells Arjuna, "Look mister, you have been conned! The personality within you that is giving this advice, that seems so reasonable is actually a fake, a fraud; it is nothing but your Ego, posing as your Real Self.

You had better acquire some Spiritual Discrimination or *Buddhi* immediately; otherwise, this very clever salesman inside would be constantly selling you lemons. Wake up and grow up; don't remain a sitting duck for ever!" And that is when God, speaking from outside, gives a powerful lesson on how God advises constantly from inside as the Indweller and how one must learn to tune into Him.

What we learn from all this is the following: When we tune inside for advice on how to act when faced with a sticky situation – and that is what Arjuna faced, to fight or not to fight – we would encounter two voices; one of them would be Real and the other would be an utter fake, which, however, would try to appear very genuine. **The Real Voice is that of the *Atma*, while the other one comes from the Mind; one is true and the other is false.**

Recognising the Real from the False

The question now becomes how to distinguish between the two. This is rather like the old story where two women appear before a judge, both claiming that the baby before them is theirs. You might have heard of that one before. Well what happens is that the judge creates a situation and sees how the two women react, and from their different reactions, he is able to find out which one is the real mother and which one is the fake.

All that is fine but what do we do in the present case, which has to do with spirituality? Luckily, Swami has given us the complete procedure, and all I have to do is to repeat it for you. Basically, there are two kinds of situations one could face. In one, there are two very different options, one of which is patently immoral and adharmic while the other is good and absolutely the right thing to do; in this case, it is no big deal to choose the right option. It is a different matter when it comes to actually following the right option.

A very simple example relates to giving bribes. Where spirituality is concerned, giving bribes is simply not the done thing. In other words, if it comes to a question of whether one must give a bribe to get a thing done, or avoid giving the bribe no matter what the problem, the correct option is very clear – no ambiguity at all, and the answer is ***no bribes***! However, these days, people don't like to hear that. In fact, sometime ago when in one of my broadcasts I raised this issue, one listener, a devotee of course, wrote that in his company they regularly give bribes; otherwise, he says, they cannot survive. Since one is not supposed to give bribes, they say we call it speed-money, that is, money paid as an appreciation for the speedy rendering of service.

That is the whole point. People **insist** on doing things that are wrong, sinful, immoral, because of so-called practical advantages, all of which is just another name for selfishness. Just as a rose is a rose no matter by what name it is called, *adharma* is *adharma*, no matter how much it is white-washed. This is the easy case and in such cases, the test of discrimination one administers is to ask the following questions of oneself and answer them honestly: **As Swami says, one must ask, "Is it right, or is it wrong? Is it**

good or is it bad? Is it selfish or is it unselfish? Will it harm anyone in any way or will it not?" and so on. This checklist is easy to go through. If one goes through the check list honestly, the correct answer is easy to identify.

Simplifying Moral Dilemmas

There are however situations where two options present themselves and both of which appear to be one's duty. Both have their pros and cons. Which one to choose? This is a harder exam, and when one faces such a situation, one is said to be caught in a *Dharma Sankatam*. Arjuna was caught up in precisely such a dilemma, called a moral dilemma. As he saw it, it was a crime to kill one's *Guru* and one's dear Grandfather, all in the name of gaining back one's kingdom that had been illegally grabbed. So Arjuna says, "I prefer not to have this kingdom; I would rather beg than kill my near and dear for the sake of this wretched kingdom." On the face of it, it is a very powerful, forceful argument, and it is not easy to find any fault with it.

That is where Krishna steps in and teaches him not to apply kindergarten type of analysis to such complex situations but a Ph. D level analysis, if I might say so! It is in these situations that the application of *Atma Dharma* becomes very essential and I have made some references to it in my earlier talks. Obviously, I cannot go into the entire business of *Atma Dharma* here, but refer you for further details to Swami's many Discourses as also the Krishna-Arjuna Dialogue serial in ***Heart2Heart***. But, coming back to the question I started with, I can now say the following:

1. Whenever we seek answers from within, we would hear at least two voices. In all cases where multiple voices are heard, we must realise that only one of these is genuine. **This genuine voice is the Voice of the *Atma* or Conscience if you prefer.** All the other voices are that of impostors, posing as the Real Self.

2. The Real Self is the *Atma*. The impostor is the Mind, posing as the Real Self. This means, **we must learn to distinguish the Voice of the *Atma* or Conscience from the voice of the Mind or the Ego.**

3. **Conscience always speaks with one voice, meaning it would not give multiple options. It would always give only one option that is fully consistent with *Atma Dharma*.** The Ego, False Self, the Mind, call it what you will, would offer multiple choices. It would say, "Hey, try this; it is a good option. If you don't quite like that, how about this? This also is very good for you, you know! Grab it before it slips out of your hand!" and so on. **The Ego is a very clever salesman! Recognising the source that gives the multiple options is important; if one is able to recognise it, one can also avoid it.**

4. How to dump this Ego? This has to be done by cultivating one's *Buddhi,* or true Discrimination. The more the development of the *Buddhi,* the better is one's Spiritual Discrimination. Thus improvement of *Buddhi* should be high on one's agenda for self-improvement.

5. Swami says, Ego is very clever and would claim it offers discrimination; yes, it does help you to discriminate with wonderful cost-benefit analysis and all that. However, at the end of the day, it is all **individual** discrimination, that is to say, discrimination soaked in **selfishness**. ***Buddhi*, on the other hand, would help in applying what Swami calls *Fundamental* Discrimination.**

6. Swami further cites any number of examples of the application of Fundamental Discrimination. Rama was asked by the Emperor to go into the forest. Many told Rama that there was no need to do so, citing all kinds of legal arguments in support. Rama brushed them all saying that Fundamental Discrimination called for Him to stand by *Dharma* and not the so-called right to the kingdom. Krishna told the same to Arjuna, "If you apply Fundamental Discrimination, you would realise that as a Kshatriya, you have no choice but to fight on the side of *Dharma*. Your side is the side of *Dharma* and that is why I am with you! That being the case, how can you refuse to fight?" Next consider Prahalada; the *Vedas* declare that one must worship father as God. However, there is fine print, which Hiranyakashyapu, the father forgot, but the five-year old Prahalada did not. That is why he told Hiranyakahyapu, "Yes, you are my bodily father for which I give you due respect. However, how can I accept you as the Supreme Lord when I know for sure that it is Narayana who is really the Supreme One?"

And thus we arrive at the following important conclusion: "Sorry, being selfish is quite contrary to the objective of Self-realisation." That is the short answer to the question we started with. I hope with all the elaborate explanation I have given, the answer is clear.

When one realises one's True Self or Real Nature or Real Self – call it what you will – it means one recognises in one's Heart that one is not the body nor the Mind, but really the *Atma*.

By its very nature, the *Atma* cannot be selfish. If one is selfish, then how can one achieve the goal of union with the *Atma* or God? Can oil ever mix with water? In other words, selfishness and Self-realisation simply cannot go together! Hope that is clear!

Let me now move on to the second question which is:

Is it possible to obtain liberation in spite of being an atheist, but good at heart?

This is an interesting as well as an important question. Basically, it all depends on what exactly the questioner means by the word "atheist". Traditionally, an atheist is a person who denies the existence of God. That might appear to be a very clear-cut definition, but then what does the atheist precisely mean by the word 'God'? Further, what, for that matter, do we mean by the word 'God'? So you see, there are lots of subtleties hiding behind this apparently simple question.

In responding to it, I shall take the Vedantic point of view and by the way, all Swami says is nothing but pure *Vedanta*! So, I guess I am on safe ground there!

Who is an Atheist?

Let me start with what we normally mean when we say that so and so is an atheist; it means that the person concerned denies the existence of God. Yes, an atheist indeed firmly denies God and describes God as an invention of weak people, etc. Many eminent people say that. Yet, you know something? Most of these people are often men of very high integrity, who swear by Truth. Of course, their understanding of the nuances of Truth or *Sathya* as we call it, might not be as broad or sweeping as *Vedanta* teaches and explains. These people might deny the existence of God; however, they do deserve our respect. Why do I say that? For the following reasons: Firstly, because Swami tells that Truth is God. **Hence, if an atheist swears by Truth, at least substantially though not in its entirety as *Vedanta* mandates, then that person is on the right track and is in fact not denying God totally,** though the person himself might not be aware of that! Thus, an atheist who swears by Truth should not be rubbished, as is often done by people who feel strongly about their faith in God.

By the way, it is interesting to hear what Gandhi says about Truth. He says:

"The seeker after Truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after Truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of Truth.

"Truth is like a vast tree, which yields more and more fruit the more you nurture it. The deeper the search in the mine of truth the richer the discovery of the gems buried there, in the shape of openings for an even greater variety of service.

"The quest for that Truth is the summum bonum of life. In the march towards Truth, anger, selfishness, hatred, etc., naturally give way, for

otherwise Truth would be impossible to attain. A man who is swayed by passions may have good enough intentions, maybe truthful in word, but he will never find the Truth. A successful search for Truth means complete deliverance from the dual throng, such as of love and hate, happiness and misery."

That is good advice and worth remembering. Let us get back to the issue of the atheist and liberation. So, what does all the above add up to? Will the atheist achieve liberation or not? Yes or no? I guess that is what our questioner would like to know.

The Non-negotiable Path for a Non-believer

Clearly, no one can answer this question in that sense. My own view, based on the *Gita* is as follows. When Arjuna asks what happens to the imperfect person, who tries to *follow* Dharma and all that but does not score a hundred out of a hundred, Krishna replies that all is not lost. It is like slowly moving up in school, from one standard to another. If one does well in one academic year and passes the exam, then the student is promoted to the next higher class – and for this, the person, the student does not have to score 100%; that hardly ever happens; yet, year after year, large numbers of students do get promoted, and in this manner, in due course, they reach the end of the road, which means they graduate from school. The same thing happens in University, in professional colleges and so on.

Essentially this also happens with respect to the spiritual evolution of an individual. Krishna says that based on the merits earned during one's life, by doing good acts, sticking to *Sathya*, *Dharma* and so forth, one is born in the next life in such a situation, where there are good opportunities for further spiritual advancement. Of course, just because one has good opportunities in the next birth, it does not automatically mean that in the next birth too the person would improve; on the contrary, the person may slide down; in this sense, life is rather like a snakes and ladders game!

The long and short of it is that a good atheist, if I may call him that, who believes in Truth, is likely to be born next time and placed in a situation where he realises that Truth has a reality beyond Space and Time. This is a fundamental difference between *Vedanta* and the perception atheists have of Truth. For them, Truth is a concept or value that has meaning within Creation, that is, within Space and Time. *Vedanta* says, "No, Truth goes all the way to the Creator, who is **beyond** Space and Time." Swami describes all this succinctly as follows.

The Salient Hierarchy of Truth

He says: There are three strata associated with what we loosely describe as Truth. At Level 1, we really have facts; this is Truth with validity over a limited period of time. I mean, suppose I am wearing a white shirt right now, a person seeing me would say, "So and so is wearing a white shirt." Fine; but suppose he says exactly the same thing tomorrow when I am wearing a blue shirt, then

he clearly would be wrong. In Sanskrit, facts which have validity over a limited period of time are described by the word *Nijam*. History is all about the narration of facts, without distortion and bias of course!

Level 2 is about things that remain true throughout Creation, that is, from the beginning to the end of the Universe. In *Vedanta*, this is referred to as *Sathyam*. Swami says that there is a still higher level, where Truth has meaning beyond Creation. At the exalted level, Truth is referred to as *Ritham* – this is Level 3.

So the hierarchy is: *Ritham* first, *Sathyam* next and finally, at the bottom of the totem pole, is *Nijam*.

A fully evolved soul would understand all this and order his life to be in tune with *Ritham*, in which case, he is OK all the way. An atheist would know nothing about *Ritham*; in fact he might deny its existence, because to do so would mean accepting *Vedanta* and that in turn means he would have to accept God, which of course he would not do.

OK, what does it all add up to in terms of this atheist ever being liberated? Putting together all that I have said thus far, I would say the following: In his present birth, and with his disbelief in God, **NO**! However, his belief in Truth would give him plenty of opportunities in later births to recognise that Truth is not just an abstract concept but represents something Supreme, namely *Paramatma*, who can incarnate, and who teaches us that Truth is just another name for many things such as Selfless Love, Compassion, Forbearance, and so on.

A true devotee of God would fully understand all that while an atheist would not be able to recognise that Truth or *Sathya* and Love or *Prema* are all facets of God; that represents a higher level of evolution. **The atheist may be on that road, but is not yet at the destination. With luck, he might reach that destination in later births.** I trust that throws some light.

I think it has been a heavy dose and I better stop here! Thanks for being with me and hope you join again for the next session too. God bless, Jai Sai Ram.

THE DRAMAS OF LIFE DIVINE

Part-7

Dear readers, till the December 2008 issue, in this section we serialized for you "Shirdi Sai Parthi Sai", the glorious saga of Shirdi Sai and the divine life of Sathya Sai till His early childhood. This series continued for 48 episodes, and we received very positive responses to this serial. In fact, now that the script is available, this television serial has been re-enacted as a play in many Sai centres.

Encouraged with this, we decided to continue this section and offer something in a similar format. And now, after the Divine Life story of Bhagavan Baba, it is the innumerable dramas presented in the Divine Presence by the students of Bhagavan's Schools and University, as well as by the Bal Vikas students and Sai devotees from all corners of the world. We hope the current series, which is accompanied with lots of pictures and video stills/clips, will not only make an enriching and edifying reading experience, but also will help devotees everywhere to redo these inspiring plays in their own settings with little effort. So, enjoy these divine dramas where the Divine was a keen spectator and the hidden director!

The current drama, which was staged by the students from the Prasanthi Nilayam campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University on January 12, 2008, highlighted the supreme virtues of Hanuman, one of the greatest devotees of the Lord, and exhorted one and all to emulate the example of this matchless servant of the Lord.

"RAMAYANA RATNAHARA VEERANJANEYA"

THE MIGHTY HANUMAN, THE DIADEM OF RAMAYANA

Part-1

Sportsmeet Drama, 2008

The relationship between Rama and Hanuman is the best example of intimacy between the Lord and His devotee. Hanuman understood the Lord completely, for he never tried to understand the Lord, he just followed Him implicitly. At the bodily level, he was the servant of the lord. From the perspective of the mind, he was the spark of the divine. At the level of the Atma, he and the Lord were One. Let us explore the journey of Hanuman through another true devotee, the composer of 'Hanuman Chalisa' and 'Ramacharitamanas', Saint Tulasidas.

Scene 1: Conversation Between Tulasidas and Narada

Tulasidas enters the stage singing, "Bhajo mana Rama charan sukhadaayi"... in the middle of the song Narada enters and joins in...

Tulasidas: Narad *munivar* (noble sage), *pranams* (salutations). The *darshan* of a saint like you has elevated the holiness of this hermitage.

Narada: Narayana...Narayan...*Pranams* Tulasidas... The divine name of Rama captured in your mellifluous melody has sanctified the surroundings. I look upon you as the Valmiki of this age. You have come a long way to become a peerless saint.

Tulasidas: But *munivar* every saint has a past, and my past has been chequered with the sin of attachment to the world. It has been my *tapas* (penance) to formulate a path that would ensure that my fellow beings do not commit the same mistakes that I did and lead them to divinity.

Narada: A very noble intention, Tulasidas. How do you propose to do that?

Tulasidas: I wish to show and highlight to the world a personality who exemplifies the path, and for that I seek the gemstones stored in the treasure trove of Ramayana.

Narada: Tulasi, who do you think can be that harbinger of hope to humanity moving the mountains of obstacles?

Tulasidas: Moving mountains…. *munivarya*, it can only be the one who moved the mountains literally to serve the Lord, His *padadasa* (servant of His feet), Hanuman.

Narada: Yes Tulasi. The first step in Hanuman's journey was to seek the Lord and surrender to him. Our self effort must be guided to choose the Master.

Tulasidas: But in the end it is the Master who actually chooses us. Ah! The beautiful scene of the first meeting between God and His devotee comes alive in front of my eyes.

Scene 2: Hanuman Meets Rama

[Hanuman is in meditation as Sugriva, and Jambavan approach him]

Jambavan: Hanuman, please come out of thy meditative trance. A crisis looms ominously over Maharaja Sugriva's future, from which only you can rescue him.

Hanuman: Crisis for Maharaj! No external force can be a life threatening source for Maharaja Sugriva until the breath flows incessantly in the body of Anjaneya. Pray, tell me what is the problem?

Sugriva: Your reassurance has rejuvenated the dried streams of hope within me, Hanuman. Nala has reported the presence of two strangers in the vicinity of Rishyamookha. A feeling of anxiety and fear has gripped all our hearts. We

have a strong suspicion that they are spies sent by Vali to eliminate the resistance. Let the spies be captured and brought to our presence.

Hanuman: Pardon me, *Maharaja*. But let us not draw conclusions without due investigation. Permit me to approach them in the form of a Brahmin. I shall find out their intentions and do the needful. But, I have a queer intuition that something good is about to happen.

[Lakshmana and Rama enter]

Lakshmana: *Agraja* (elder brother), we have been wandering along these wooded shores of the Pamba. Now, the Sun shines in the western horizon and darkness deepens. We still haven't found our friends of Rishyamukha.

Rama: [gives a benign smile in the direction of Hanuman] See, a scholarly Brahmin is approaching us. Maybe he can help us.

Hanuman: (Enters chanting something. Stops. Offers *pranams* to both. Amused, he utters a phrase of surprise and wonder) *Namaskaram! Namaskaram! Kim Tvama Agamanam?* [in Sanskrit]

In this primitive wilderness, I behold the enigma in you, oh strangers! You shine with the brilliance of a thousand suns, yet emanate the serene coolness of *chandra* (moon). Who are you, oh resolute ascetics with matted locks? What purpose has brought you to this sylvan kingdom?

Lakshmana: O Revered One, we are searching for the Rishyamookha *Parvata* (mountain). Can you please guide us there?

Hanuman: *Kim prayojanam? Kim karanam?* [in Sanskrit] May I know the reason as to why you noble souls seek the Rishyamookha peak? And you haven't revealed your identity yet.

Lakshmana: We have come to meet Maharaja Sugriva. But our identity will remain veiled since you haven't revealed yours. Strange indeed is finding a Brahmana in this forest!

Hanuman: But stranger indeed is finding renunciates adorned with mighty bows. Your visit to this forest filled with wild animals and *rakshasas* (demons) must have a purpose; great but hidden. Can you reveal your true purpose?

Lakshmana: (annoyed) You seem to have not even an iota of intention to help us. Brother, come, we are not in such deep desperation that we have to rely on this wayward Brahmin

Hanuman: *Rosham karoti dosham* [in Sanskrit]. My intensions are honest and pure, sprinkled with a natural curiosity to explore your 'true identity'. I seem to have woken up the *Adishesha* (the divine serpent associated with Lord Vishnu) within you that your eyes spew forth darts of anger. But your companion...Your companion is *sumanohara santha swaroopam* - He

emanates the equanimity of the Manasa Sarovar, stilling the stirrings of 'Manas' (mind).

Rama: [Smiles] Lakshmana! The Brahmin carries an aura of wisdom around him. O Brahmana, your sweet and immaculate voice pouring forth words of profundity and meaning has mesmerized me. An unsung song of intimacy which remained inert all these years has sprung forth.

Hanuman: O *Neelavarna* (the blue-complexioned one), your deep gaze from the lotus eyes brings forth a feeling of belonging. I too feel a sense of acquaintance with you, but I cannot define it.

Rama: The feeling of belonging lies cloaked under the mutual ignorance of identities. Won't you spell the truth about yourself?

Hanuman: It looks as if both of us eager to know each other. But you see, you have come here as strangers and I have received you as guests. Thus, you have to reveal yourself first.

Lakshmana: *(On receiving the indication from Rama)* We are the sons of Dasaratha, king of Ayodhya and the crest jewel of the Suryavansha. He is Sri Ramachandra and I am his brother Lakshmana.

Hanuman: Rama… Rama… *(falls at his feet)*

Prabhu Pahichani Pareu Gahi Charana, So Sukh Uma Jai Nadi Varna,
Pulakit Tan Mukh AAvan Bachna, Dekhat RuchirVesh Kai Sharana.

You have come at last. My Lord, My Master! Forgive me, Lord, this foolish *vanara* (monkey) could not recognise its master? But O Omniscient One! Could you not recognise your servant?

Rama: Hanuman, in the incessant flow of your learning and sweetness of your communication, your identity was clouded, Hanuman.

Lakshmana: Hanuman! Is this *brahmana* Hanuman?

Hanuman: Yes, brother Lakshmana. Lost in the extravagant display of learning, my eyes failed to recognize my master. Lord! You must have been thinking, "Let this fellow reach me through *jnana* (wisdom), which he very joyously radiates". Pardon me, Lord.

Rama: Hanuman! No one can know me until I reveal myself to them. I am lost in this forest and I need your help.

Hanuman: Swami! Do not say that. We lesser mortals look up to you when we are helpless. You have willed that I should serve you in your divine mission. I owe eternal servitude to you O lord! I owe eternal servitude to you. Come lord, let us proceed to Maharaja Sugreeva.

Scene 3: Hanuman Leaves for Lanka

Beautiful indeed is the tryst of the Lord and His devotee. Hanuman's surrender to Rama was total and complete. Rama too placed utmost confidence in Hanuman and gave him His ring to be delivered to Mother Sita. Placing the image of Lord in his heart, Hanuman got ready to face the approaching devils, including the devils of despair.

[Angada, Nala, Nila, Jambavan, Hanuman are at the seashore. Hanuman sits a little away from the group silently. Jambavan gets up to address the gathering]

Jambavan: Brothers! We have searched every nook and corner and left no stone unturned in the mission of the Lord. The end of land is reached and the turbulent ocean stares at us as an insurmountable obstacle. Beyond the ocean, at a distance of 100 *yojanas* is the kingdom of Lanka where Mother Sita is imprisoned. The future course of action shall be decided by our leader, Crown Prince Angada.

Angada: There seems to be only one feasible solution to this problem. One of us has to cover the 100 *yojanas* in a single jump, confront the wicked Rakshasas and bring tidings of Sita for the Lord. Venerable Jambavan, you are the eldest among us. You have circumambulated the glorious form of the Lord in the Trivikrama form. 100 *yojanas* is a mere footstep for you.

Jambavan: The invisible tides of time have sapped away the huge reserves of energy that I have harboured in my earlier days. With a supreme effort, I can cover only 90 *yojanas* nothing more.

Angada: O *vanara veeras (mighty monkeys)*, come forth with the assessment of your strength so that we can pick the right person for the enterprise.

Nila: Prince! I can jump at the most forty *yojanas*, not a finger-breadth more.

Nala: With all the strength that I can summon and the winds in my favour, I can definitely do a sixty.

Angada: Then, I, Angada, son of Mahabali Vali shall cross this ocean and carry out the task. Though I have a doubt as to whether I will have enough strength to come back, I am ready to take the risk.

Jambavan: No, Angada. You are the Crown Prince and you cannot go into the domain of demons. That's against the canons of royalty. You have to delegate the task to any of your servants who are eager to do your bidding.

Angada: Fate is playing a cruel game with us giving a ray of hope in the beginning and suddenly plunging us in the darkness of despair.

Jambavan: Do not be disheartened, Angada. The ever merciful Lord who lays down the mission will even give us the strength to fulfill it. I know the one

person who can undertake the task set by the Lord. [Moves towards Hanuman] Anjaneya! You will have to cross the ocean and finish the assignment given by Rama.

[Hanuman gives a puzzled look and remains silent]

Angada: Yes, Hanuman. You are the right person for the job. With your intelligence and diplomacy, you established the friendship between Rama and Sugriva. Now, use the same skills to deliver Rama's message across the ocean.

Jambavan: Shed the cloak of meekness and rediscover your might. Remember! A single leap was all it took for you to reach the Sun, and a single leap is all it will take to reach Lanka. Recollect the various boons and powers bestowed by the *Devas* (gods). It is time they be put to use for the Rama *Karya* (mission). Arise, Awake! The garland of victory is waiting on yonder side to adorn your neck.

Hanuman: O *Vanaras* (monkeys)! By the power of His name, I shall carry out His command. The glory of His form enshrined in my heart will give me the means to carry out the Lord's wish. Sing His praise as you await my return. Jai Sri Ram!

All: Jai Sri Ram!

Scene 4: Hanuman in Ravana's Court

Narration: Hanuman leaped towards Lanka facing the various barriers with confidence and aplomb. Driven by the Lord's grace, he overcame the various hindrances, and finally succeeded in the search for Mother Sita. Hanuman fought till the very end confronting even Ravana in the process.

[Ravana is seated on the throne and hanuman is dragged by Indrajith to the court]

Meghnad: *Pranams Pitashree* (salutations o father), I have captured the impudent, insolent monkey that dared to enter Lanka and destroy the Asokavana.

Hanuman: Captured [gives a slight laugh] I have come by my own will to your court. [Breaks the bonds and continues]. It is my reverence for Brahmaastra and not your son's valour that had allowed this little meeting to take place.

Meghnad: For the vanquisher of Indra, a monkey is child's play. I was only trying to capture you alive as per the word of my father. Or else…

Ravana: Meghnad. Alright, *vanara*. Give us your introduction. Why have you come? Why have you wrecked our garden and killed our soldiers?

Hanuman: *Dasoham Kosalendrasya…* I am Hanuman, the servant of Lord Rama. I have come as His envoy to deliver His message. After a long and tiresome journey I was hungry. I shook the trees to relieve them of their fruit and some of them got uprooted. Then, your soldiers attacked me, and I had to slay them for self-defense.

Ravana: You can deliver the message from the grave, for that is where you shall go for killing my son. Guards, execute him immediately.

Prahasta: Tarry a while, Lord. Let us first hear the message that the mortal sends to the monarch through this monkey. That may help in the future course of action.

Ravana: So be it! Monkey, come forth with your plea.

Hanuman: Pleas and requests are for my master. For you it is just sermon. Born in the noble line of Pulastya, do not tarnish it with this single sin. Return Mother Sita and crave forgiveness at the feet of Rama. The ocean of compassion will definitely pardon you.
On the other hand, if you remain a slave of desire and decline to return Mother Sita…

[Poem which describes the doom that is likely to befall on Ravana]

Remember Ravana! The march of the monkeys shall shake the foundations of your empire. The twang of Rama's bow will fill your hearts with fear.

Ravana: You ignoramus! You dare to threaten me in my court!

[Poem that describes the valour of Ravana]

The utterance of my name and vision of my form causes the three worlds to tremble. The head that lifted Mount Kailasa touching the feet of a mere mortal! Impossible.

Hanuman: If you remain obstinate, Ravana, that very head shall roll by the power of Rama's arrow. Why do you want to turn Golden Lanka into a graveyard? Why do you want to convert glory into infamy?

Ravana: Your articulation amuses me a lot. So you mean to suggest that an army of monkeys led by a mortal will defeat the conquerer of *devas*. [laughs] *Mukkoti cheyanidi Koti chesthundata…*

Hanuman: You want to know what a monkey can do?

[Poem]

Understand Ravana, the secret behind the success and the mystery behind the might of the monkey. It is all due to the grace of Rama. Surrender at His lotus feet and seek the umbrella of His divine protection.

Ravana: If Rama, in the remotest possibility, does plan to attack Lanka, it is my protection that he will need.

Hanuman: Your arrogance degrades your achievements, be happy that your death is written on Rama's arrow that shall tear your bowels and free you from the cycle of birth and death.

Ravana: Your tongue seems to be longer than your tail, Hanuman. Every utterance of yours is taking you closer to doom. Remember that you are now living on borrowed breaths. You are strong at heart for you are able to bear the roar of Ravana and yet remain alive. A gesture is all it takes to send you to *Yamaloka*.

Hanuman: I request you to take a trip of the Ashokavana. You will be able to see that I had facilitated Yama's meeting with many of your minions.

Meghnad: You are wasting your valuable time on this monkey, my lord. Give the execution order immediately and finish him.

Ravana: Rightly said. Meghnad, Kill this *vanara* and avenge the death of your brother.

Vibhishana: Brother, I beg to differ. An ambassador must not be killed according to the code of conduct laid by kings.

Prahasta: You mean to say that an ambassador comes to our kingdom, destroys his majesty's favourite garden, kills the dear son of our emperor, and we have to treat him like an honourable guest.

Vibhishana: It may be a mistake. But that does not authorize us to commit the same mistake. An ambassador is a guest to our kingdom and must not be harmed.

Malayavan: I agree with you, Vibhishana. A messenger cannot be held responsible for the intention of the message he delivers. Besides, when Hanuman goes back to Rama, he will describe the glory of Lanka and the might of its army. That may dissuade Rama from leading the army.

Prahasta: Agreed, that he cannot be killed but definitely he can be punished. Let them see the maimed monkey entering their camp and they shall think twice before trying to come for war.

Ravana: Mmm… The pride of a monkey lies in its tail. Let the tail of the creature be put to fire. The shrieks and jumps of the monkey will provide a good entertainment to the citizens.

Hanuman: Ravana, you are putting fire not to my tail, but to Lanka itself. It is said, *Vinasha Kaale Viprita Buddhi* (When the end approaches, the mind looses its moorings). Brace yourself Ravana, for the beginning of the end.

(To be continued…)

PRASHANTI DIARY

August 5, 2009 – Musical Presentation by Himachal Pradesh Sai Youth

The trend of the *darshans* and *bhajans* in the first week of August was more or less the same in terms of timings. The Veda chanting begins at 4:00 p.m. and continues till 5:00 p.m. The *bhajans* then begin and Swami arrives at about 5:30 p.m. He sits for about 4-5 *bhajans* after the *darshan* rounds and then receiving *aarthi*, retires into Yajur Mandir. On August 5, the youth from Himachal Pradesh were blessed to put up a musical programme. In their bright costumes, they sat in the marbled blocks and everyone awaited Swami's arrival. The Veda chanting halted at 5:00 p.m.

Swami arrived at about 5:20 p.m. and took a complete *darshan* round. As always, He spoke to some people, collected letters from some more and blessed everyone. Taking a round in the portico, He arrived on the stage. The Veda chanting had restarted with Swami's arrival. Swami too was chanting the Vedic hymns in the *darshan* rounds! From what can be observed, it seems as if the *Shivopasana* mantram is a favourite; He invariably begins to chant in unison when that is on and never halts the chanting when it is going on! After this *mantram*, the Sri Suktam began and soon Swami commanded the chanting to a halt and asked for the programme to begin.

The presentation was in three parts and the first part was a performance by the men. It was entitled, "Sai Naam Tarakam". It was a collection of verses and songs sung by great devotees of Lord Rama. The youth had compiled them into one medley and two members came forward to offer the programme at His lotus feet. Then the programme began at around 6:00 p.m. There was a costumed "Hanuman" who sat amidst the singing youth and it was apt that all songs were on Rama. Swami sat listening to the programme, almost still and non-moving. He seemed to be observing the many people - some filing into the hall, some others leaving. It was such a profound scene. People were coming in, they were going out. Here and there maybe some were sleeping while some others were weeping (for whatever reason it may be). And the Lord sat, expressionless and not exhibiting any emotion, like the eternal witness that He is. Some people in the front rows also began to leave. A whole group of visiting small school children got up to leave. Maybe they had a bus to catch or a train to board. Wherever the space was freed up, someone or the other inevitably came forward to occupy the vacant seats. One could not help but think, "For God, all are valuable but no one is indispensable. It is an opportunity to be with Him or serve Him for if we are not ready to do so, there are hundred nay thousands to take our places."

After about half an hour, Swami moved into the interview room and soon the men's programme concluded. The women started singing as theirs was the second part of the programme. Swami arrived from the interview room and told them they could sing some other time. He smiled at them as if to assure them that it was not their fault in any way but He desired their programme on

some other occasion. Then He received *aarthi* and blessing everyone, moved to Yajur Mandir.

August 9, 2009 – Music Programme by UK Devotees

It was a day that brought some hope and cheer and with very good reason too! The marbled blocks were occupied by devotees and youth from the United Kingdom - Sai Kingdom as they also call it and why not. Where there is Unity, there is Purity and then there is Divinity Swami says. So a truly "United" kingdom is indeed a Sai Kingdom! It brought hope in the sense that for the past 3-4 days, Swami had been arriving for *darshan* at around 5:30 p.m. or so. He generally sat for a few *bhajans* and left by 6:15p.m. To top that, morning *darshans* have become a rare privilege. When we wake up to a reality that we had been avoiding due to familiarity, it stirs up so many things within. People throng every evening and wait to see that Lovable Form draped in orange. On that day everyone hoped that they would be blessed with a *darshan* session in which they would be able to drink longingly for long, His beautiful form!

The Veda chanting was done, as usual from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. It was around 6 p.m. that there were signs of activity at Yajur Mandir and soon Swami arrived for *darshan*. The crowd was huge and the hall was full. The passage in front of East Prashanti building was also full of people waiting to glimpse at Him. It was like the sunrise at twilight as Swami moved into the Sai Kulwant Hall in all beauty and grace. Near the students were seated paramedical students from the SSSIHMS Bangalore. They had made a card and had also come to have His *darshan*. Swami spent a few minutes looking at the card as one of the seniors from the hospital's student-staff explained to Him about the paramedics. Swami gave a patient ear and blessing the paramedical students, moved on. Soon, He completed the *darshan* round and arrived on stage. The co-ordinator for the programme showed Swami the details of the presentation and Swami blessed the programme to begin.

A few members of the group moved up to the stage and offered the programme and a few other items to Swami. One among them was a little plump and Swami immediately indicated that he must pull down! There were smiles and laughter everywhere. That showed another beautiful aspect of Swami, and in turn, of pure Love. When anyone makes fun of us, we feel emotions that range in a spectrum from indifference to violent rage! But when Swami jokes about us, we are so happy! We celebrate it and even share it with pride to others! And that is the power of Love. Love may be disguised in any form - praise or blame, seriousness or fun - it always elicits a positive response.

Sai Vandana seemed to be the theme of the programme that day. As it is always with this group, they began with the offering, "*Brahmaanadam Parama Sukhadam*", which tells about the inexplicable joy and bliss that is brought by association with the Lord. The thrill of Unity was instantaneously felt as the group began to sing vigorously with synchronized clapping! That became a

common feature for all the songs that followed. There was an instrumental piece in Raag Bhairav on the sitar by a woman from the group. Heart strings were pulled as her fingers danced on the metal strings of the Sitar. Songs in Hindi and English followed in quick succession. A qawwali was also sung for which the women involved donned the traditional caps. When it was nearing 7 p.m., Swami asked the devotees to sing *bhajans*. He also blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed.

Many times during the programme, Swami seemed lost to the mundane world. He smiled to Himself and the audience just watched. For some parts of the songs, Swami kept rhythm and that spurred the group into greater intensity. Many members of the group were in tears and many others were beaming smiles. The responses were so varied but all were due to their intense Love for Swami. The clock had ticked past 7 p.m. when Swami asked for the *aarthi*. As the *aarthi* completed, Swami clarified something with the Secretary of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust, Mr. Chakravarthy. And then, raising both His hands in *abhayahastha* He blessed everyone and retired for the day.

August 10, 2009 – Drama by Gujarat Sai Youth

Swami always stresses, "Love My uncertainty". We always take that statement with a pinch of salt though He did not intend it that way! When His uncertainty brings unexpected gifts, we rejoice. But when that same nature seems to take away something from us, we do not like it! Maybe it is time to evolve to "accepting" His uncertainty and then to "loving" it, always that is! It turned out to be a different kind of session in the Mandir on August 10 - a session like which has happened very rarely before. It began at around 2:00 p.m. when the youth from Gujarat were told to be prepared with their programme in case Swami permits it at the "last" minute. Again, with the Lord, there is nothing like the "last" minute. It is always at the "right" minute irrespective of the position of that minute in time!

At about 5:40 p.m., when *bhajans* were in full swing, came the message that the Gujarat youth must be ready to put up their presentation. Quickly, the marble blocks were evacuated and a backdrop was brought into position. Soon, Swami arrived for *darshan*. Of late, the *darshan* timings had been moving more and more towards late evening rather than the afternoon. Swami completed the *darshan* rounds and moved to the portico where the lecturers and teachers from the department of Chemistry of the Sathya Sai University were seated to seek His blessings for a conference that was to commence the next day. Swami blessed them and soon arrived on the stage. He sat listening to the *bhajans* which went on, one after another and Swami too seemed happy listening to them. After a while, He began to search for the priest who always sat with the *aarthi* plate. Mistaking that as a signal, the State President for Gujarat came ahead and requested Swami for permission to start their programme. In fact, the youth on the ladies side began to sing too.

Swami however asked for *aarthi* to begin! And so it was that the songs were ended even before they began! *Aarthi* was done and Swami blessed laddoo *prasadam* to be distributed to all. He even threw a *laddoo* to one of the students in the front. There was a strange glow on Swami's face. He was so happy. All of a sudden, He called a little boy who had come with a tray of goodies on the occasion of his birthday. As the boy moved up the stage, Swami spoke to him. Then, patting him on his cheeks, Bhagavan materialized a gold chain. Swami was so very happy and joyous as He put the chain around the neck of the little boy. The boy bent down, kissed His feet and returned to his place with all joy. Now that was a piece of "uncertainty" that all enjoyed.

Swami then sat watching all those assembled as the *prasadam* distribution went on. All the members from Gujarat had mixed feelings, it seemed. Swami was so happy and it was such a joy to see Him. But the programme had been cancelled! Swami watched the faces all around. Calling the State president He said, "Start your drama." Immediately a row of youth made a beeline to make offerings. It was already past 6:30 p.m. and thankfully it was realized that it was unfair to keep Swami waiting by delaying the drama any further. The presentation entitled, "Sai Apadbandavay Namah" began immediately. The skit was based on the actual experiences of Sai Missionaries, the Youth who were engaged in Sri Sathya Sai Village Integration Programme, popularly known as SSSVIP at a village, Paikhed, 65 kms from Valsad.

An emergency situation arises in Paikhed when an epidemic strikes amidst heavy rains. Despite all that, the youth organise relief. Other instances shown were when a youth member risks his life to save the life of a village child and the tale when more than 2500 bricks were found in perfectly good condition when a need for them arises to complete a construction in the same village. 15 minutes into the drama, Swami said, "Drama over." He gave a gentle smile and slowly moved towards the car. He then retired to Yajur Mandir and the time was past 7 p.m. The foolish wept that Swami left midway but the wise celebrated yet another instance of god's infinite Love where He condescended to watch at least a part of a programme which maybe never existed! Mysterious and uncertain indeed are the ways of God, but His ways and methods are always Perfect.

August 11, 2009 – Parthi Pilgrimage of Srikakulam District

Three thousand five hundred devotees from the coastal district of Andhra Pradesh, Srikakulam, joined in a pilgrimage to Prasanthi Nilayam spanning for three days, from 11th to 13th August 2009. Swami came to Sai Kulwant Hall at 5:15 p.m. to the chants of the Vedas. At the outset, the District President presented the programme for the evening and also gave a brief speech expressing his gratitude to Bhagavan for the opportunity to present a dance drama in His presence. He said that they were doing Seva in many villages of the district which included *Deenajana Seva* (service of the destitute). It was due to His grace that they could come to Prasanthi Nilayam for the past eight

years, opined the speaker. After his speech, there was a mini procession of the cast who came to the stage to offer their obeisance.

The programme begins with a conversation between Max Muller, the famous philosopher from the West, Sri Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the great freedom fighter of India, and Sri Rabindranath Tagore, the poet who penned the Indian National Anthem, and a freedom fighter residing in Prasanthi Nilayam. The dance drama was an imaginative portrayal bringing alive these three great characters of the past. They are happy to be in the abode of peace. The three great men give their opinions on this sacred land of Bharat extolling her sanctity. Bal Gangadhar Tilak says that Bharat is the land of sacrifice and spirituality and is based on the foundation of Indian culture. It will shine forth as a beacon for everyone. A tiny tot Swati, brilliant in studies is encountered by Rabindranath Tagore who hears the child reel off the nursery rhyme "Ba Ba Black Sheep …" The poet is pained to know that children are being taught such rhymes in school which have no meaning. The teachers hesitate to teach the greatness of the epic Ramayana and Mahabharata to children.

Max Muller is thrilled with the realization that Rama and Lakshmana set foot on this land of Bharat. He says that some people have a wrong notion that the Ramayana and Mahabharata belong to the Hindu religion. Bharatiya culture is based on Sanathana Dharma and not on any particular religion, explains the great German philosopher. Bharat is fortunate to have great souls like Emperor Sibi, Harischandra and Prahlada who demonstrated great ideals to the world. The word Bharat means 'Bha' (Bhagawan-God) 'Rat' (Rathi – attachment, love). So, the Bharatiya is one who has love for God. Axioms like *Isavasyam Idam Sarvam* (the entire universe is permeated by God), *Tattwamasi* (That Thou Art) have originated in Bharat, says Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Modern inventions like aeroplanes, and modern systems of medicine have their roots in Bharat. They were visualised by our ancient seers.

Thus the drama highlighted the glory and grandeur of Bharath and also attempted to define what a Bharatiya is according to Swami's teachings. The whole drama was liberally spiced with Swami's quotations and poems on Bharath and that had Him fully involved in the drama. Swami was almost in tears at many points of time in the drama. Definitely none can ever be more patriotic than God! But even the words of the Lord when put through a good "medium" or "instrument" has a tremendous impact. And the power with which His poems were sung that day proved just that. It appeared as though the great Ghantasala, the legendary singer from Andhra Pradesh, himself was singing.

The drama also brought home a subtle lesson about role plays in the divine presence. For once the saying, "Imitation is human" could be seen in the positive light. There is no need for us to delve on subjects of "great" spiritual significance or "newer" teachings. If we study and understand His teachings and imitate all that He has said, it is more than sufficient. Nothing is more powerful and more Universal than His teachings and the best we can do is (follow them of course!) depict them for all to see and get inspired. And this

drama did just that with many songs and colourful dances interspersed with the dialogues.

As Max Muller was mulling and later thundering about the glory of Bharat, Swami beckoned him to the stage. In a flash, He materialized a gold chain and put it around his neck. The boy just broke down and tears coursed down profusely. Swami smiled and lovingly patted him. The drama went on as the prerecorded disc played but all eyes were riveted to the emotional drama that was unfolding on the stage. Swami then sent back Max to resume his "role" in the drama. The final song and dance was performed and the children came together in the final formation. Swami seemed extremely happy and He moved into the interview room and fetched safari pieces and sarees. He moved down and posed for photos with the children and had the clothes distributed.

When Swami moved up the stage, tens and tens of people began to come to Him. Some gave letters, some others sought advice while still some others had items that they wanted blessed. Swami also cut a cake that they brought up. He then lit a Jyoti that would go around the district. As the lamp was lit, the glass cover on top fell to the ground and shattered to pieces. Swami smiled! Everyone pines to take refuge at His lotus feet and the glass cover was no exception. But it was also a reminder of the care that has to be taken when in the presence of the Lord. Even a slight "slip" may have "shattering" consequences! At 6:45 p.m., He received *aarthi* and retired, blessing everyone with His hand and smiles.

August 14, 2009 – Krishnastami Celebrations in the Divine Presence

Lord Sri Krishna is the favourite deity of millions all around the globe and it is no surprise that His day of birth, Janmashtami, is celebrated with great vigour, joy and mirth everywhere. At Puttaparthi, thousands thronged the Sai Kulwant Hall to have a *darshan* of their beloved Sai Krishna – a sight that would redeem them and fill them with joy. When the Lord took birth as Sri Krishna, the "chains" that held His father in jail, fell away. The prison doors opened and Vasudeva was "freed". Adding significance to Janmashtami being on the 14th was the fact that "Independence" day was the next to come! This metaphoric significance was not lost on the thousands that gathered and they waited for an unlikely morning *darshan*!

"Unlikely"? Why? Swami had not arrived for morning *darshan* for almost the past two weeks and it was no secret that Swami was not exactly in the pink of health. Every action of the Avatar is with a purpose. "God" alone knows what are the different ways in which Swami is protecting humanity and taking upon Himself the pains and burdens of this earth. Christ bore the Cross once and Swami seems to have made a habit of it. And yet, He comes unfailingly everyday, consoling and comforting people as if we are the ones suffering! But He does not suffer as He said once to Prof. Anil Kumar, "There may be pain, but there is no suffering!" Day in and day out His thoughts, words and deeds are based on His devotees and He has no time for Himself. He has no

time to think about His pains and difficulties! He goes on like a candle, burning Himself to give light to everyone! It is such a powerful message and reminder on how one should face life. He is such a living example. It reminds one of the ABCDEFG of life - *Always Be Cheerful* & *Don't Ever Forget God*!

The usual cow procession and Krishnashtami celebrations had been postponed for the evening. And so, when at 9:20 a.m., Swami arrived in the resplendent *pitambara* (yellow robe), there were gasps of joy and delight. By sheer force of habit, the sweet Lord had sacrificed yet again, and it was only to fill the devotees with the thrill of the morning *darshan* that He had come. Students from all three campuses of the University were present along with a contingent from the institutions at Muddenahalli and Alike and a group of devotees from Maharashtra. Sai Krishna moved through the lines and rows of waiting devotees to complete a full *darshan* round. Blessing all the various cards made by the students of the University students as well as by the children of the Higher Secondary School and Primary School, Swami moved into the interview room. He granted interviews to some lucky souls and it was quarter past ten when He arrived onstage and received *aarthi* before retiring for the morning.

In the evening, the procession of cows from the Gokulam led by Swami's baby elephant arrived in Sai Kulwant hall at five o'clock as the *bhajans* began. Fifteen minutes later, Swami arrived! And again He was in the yellow robe and for those who had missed out in the morning, it was a special thrill! It was a special moment for even those who were present in the morning for how much ever one sees the sweet Lord, one is not satisfied! And there is no need for a ceiling on this desire for this desire is such a lofty one that no ceiling could ever contain it! In the centre of the hall were the cows, calves and other animals. The "not-so-little" Krishna Gita got so excited when Swami arrived that she rushed ahead in the hall. It turned out to be a "moving" experience for all the students seated in the marbled blocks as they got up and retreated to avoid the excited pachyderm! Soon, she was brought under control and Swami arrived near her. Swami fed milk to the calves and blessed the fawn, pigeons and rabbits that had arrived.

Bhajans gave way to songs on Lord Krishna as Swami moved to the front. There was a huge "Get well soon" card made by the students. Swami read through the card and was full of smiles. The card said, "Swami, you frown when we are ill. You are full of concern when we are in pain. The same is true for us." A beautiful smile flashed across His face as He straightened and sat more erect. He seemed fully fine in an instant! He gave all assembled the rare opportunity to see how He actually was acting out the "drama"! As He moved across the rows of Primary School tots, He had a detailed look at the various cards they had made. He blessed each and every card and slowly moved to the stage. The songs were on and Swami got involved in them. After a couple of *stotrams*, two songs detailing His glory in the Dwapara age were sung. Swami sat placing beats with His hands and feet too! Wow! A beautiful sight indeed!

As per the tradition in Puttaparthi, a "Bala Krishna" and "Bala Balarama" moved to the stage with an earthen pot that was filled modern goodies - chocolates. Swami blessed them and put His hand into the pot shuffling through the chocolates. Swami enquired as to which class those students were in and both of them happened to be from 8th standard. Swami blessed them and told them to return to their seats. After the songs, a plea was made for a programme by budding flautists from the School and University who had been learning the musical reed for months now. Swami said that it could be staged some other time. Then *bhajans* began and a couple of *bhajans* later, Swami asked for the *aarthi*.

August 16, 2009 – "Bharatha Bhagya Vidhata" Drama by Sai Students

The Independence Day every year is reserved for a programme by the students of the final year post graduation class. In 2009 however, since there was a symposium of Tyagajeevis (people who have decided to serve Swami's Mission with all their energies without entering into family life) at the Yajur Mandir, the Independence Day programme was shifted to the 16th. The Indian National Anthem is unique in the sense that, more than an anthem, it is a prayer to God as the Bharatha Bhagya Vidhata (The Divine who has designed India's destiny). The drama that evening was also entitled "Bharatha Bhagya Vidhata" and was based on the life and experiences of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh.

Swami arrived into the packed Sai Kulwant Hall, full of energy and vitality. He moved through the ladies side accepting many letters and asking the boys behind Him to take many more. As He reached the centre, Swami looked at the huge India map that had been coloured with the tri-colours. He spoke to some of the boys who were seated there and slowly passed by the backdrop. He completed His rounds through the gents' side and then arrived to the portico. Then, He moved into the Bhajan Hall where all the actors in their costumes sat awaiting His blessings to begin the drama. Swami entered from the front door and right away began to enquire into the different characters present. One enterprising actor came forward and "introduced" to Swami some of the characters - Gangadhar Tilak, Alexander the great, Aurobindo, Lord Rama. When 'Lord Rama' arrived in the front, Swami asked, "Where is Lakshmana?" It was like Rama and Lakshmana were inseparable and sure enough, Lakshmana arrived. Swami called one of the teachers and asked, "What (role) are you doing?" He said that he was coordinating! Swami then blessed the troupe and told them to move out and begin the presentation.

Swami arrived on the dais and a long line of students moved from the Bhajan Hall to the backstage area. When Swami asked for the programme to begin, Sri Aurobindo, Tilak and Alexander arrived on stage and offered the programme and a rose at His lotus feet. The drama began in the period when Bengal was being partitioned based on religious differences and mobs of Hindus and Muslims gathered to fight out their respective cases. As the fight got hotter, Swami looked and said, "They are fighting among themselves!" Soon, wisdom prevails when Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo and Tagore

infuse peace, calm and unity among all. But Aurobindo is worried about this "greatest attack" on Bharatiya culture. He recalls the story of Alexander and Porus wherein the great conqueror realized the Truth of life that how much ever a man conquers, he will one day leave empty handed. "Seek not a place in the bowels of earth but in the hearts of men and God" seemed to be the message if we are allowed the liberty to play with Gibran's quote.

The student acting as Alexander had a huge frame and so Swami asked, "Will the chair be able to bear him? Will it not break?" A smile blossomed on His sweet face and it spread to all nearby who heard and understood Him. The drama meanwhile moved on to the jail where Aurobindo was held prisoner for masterminding the Alipore bomb blast case. That is where he receives the ultimate spiritual experience of getting lost in Krishna consciousness. He begins to see everything as Krishna and is convinced that his duty lies in planning for India after Independence. A moving song filled the air and the hearts of everyone gathered too. When Krishna arrived thus on the stage, Swami was moved. He must have got nostalgic, for age after age that is what He has been doing - uplifting His devotees. The next scene shifts to the court where a young advocate, Chittaranjan Das (who later came to be called "Deshabandhu" or "friend of the country") is divinely inspired to fight out the case for Aurobindo and finally wins it for him too. At that point Swami asked, "What is that protruding from his ear?" "Mike Swami!" was the answer! It was such a cute question and the answer brought another smile on the Divine face. It must be mentioned here that the dialogues were all delivered live and so was the background music and singing! It was a magnificent effort and the spirit was marvellous.

The powerful message of Lord Rama that the mother and Motherland are greater than the highest heavens was impressed upon all. The lesson that a true Bharatiya is one who has Love (Rathi) for God was also communicated emphatically. The drama concluded with the episode wherein Sri Aurobindo came out of his vow of silence on the 24th of November, 1926, to declare that Krishna had descended on earth! The drama on the whole was powerful but its force was reduced with the unusually long gaps between the scenes. Swami's presence on the stage however was the big plus factor and as the saying goes, "All's well that ends well!" Swami blessed the actors of the drama as they came into the final formation. He asked for *aarthi* and accepted the rose from the designated elder as well the student. As He was about to leave, "Aurobindo" stepped up and requested Swami for a group photograph for which Swami graciously consented. Posing with His students, Swami gave separate photos for the actors, the background maintenance boys and the singers too. Moving up the stage, Swami blessed everyone again and retired for the day.

August 20, 2009 – Parthi Yatra of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh Devotees

The final day of the Puttaparthi Pilgrimage for the devotees from the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh in India was on August 20. The term "Parthi

Pilgrimage" is a bit confusing. Why specify it as a pilgrimage? Well, why else would anyone want to come to Parthi? A detailed look at the development of the Puttaparthi village into a township (with its very own Urban Development Authority too!) with such rapid rate would suffice to realize that there are indeed segments of people who come to Parthi for other reasons too - be it tourism, curious visits or shopping at attractive rates! All sorts of businesses are spawning in the town and they are thriving too. Everything is, of course, centred on Swami or atleast involves His name and photographs, and Puttaparthi today is another huge pilgrimage centre like Tirupati or Varanasi. Of course, the vast majority come to Parthi on a pilgrimage. The term "Parthi Pilgrimage" is used to refer to the two year old phenomenon where a huge group of devotees from a particular region arrive to Puttaparthi in a fashion that is coordinated to ensure that there is uniform distribution of the crowds!

Swami arrived for *darshan* a little before 5:30 p.m. and as He neared the centre, He enquired from some of the youth members about the details of the programme to be staged that day. Then, moving around, He completed the *darshan* rounds and went into the interview room. On the way, He spoke to some of the tiny tots from the primary school and blessed a cut "Ganesha" card that they had made. Please allow for a small but very relevant digression here. It is said that coincidences are miracles where God chooses to remain anonymous. Even as this report was being compiled on 21st August, another programme got underway in the Mandir. It was as if Swami wanted to make some clarification in this report when the programme began with a speech in which the speaker defined what a "Parthi pilgrimage" meant! And a smile danced on His face as the definition thundered in the loudspeakers of the hall - "A pilgrimage to Parthi is an opportunity to witness Sathya, the Truth. Apart from being an opportunity, it is also a physical commitment to the path of Truth or Sathya that Sai stands for." And so, with Gratitude to Swami for having provided in His own "Heart to Heart" fashion, the meaning of a Parthi Pilgrimage, we move ahead with the report.

It was 6:30 p.m. when Swami arrived on the stage from the interview room and asked for the programme to begin. The State President and the main coordinators offered roses and soon the programme got underway. It was called, "Manasa Bhajore Guru Charanam" and there are no prizes for guessing what episode it derived its inspiration from. Since that Golden day in 1940, this bhajan has been the inspiration for thousands on The Path. The drama revolved around different aspects pertaining to the mind. More than a drama, it was like a dramatic anthology of skits. There was a skit on how the sea God tells the great guru Dakshinamurthy that he needs to keep throwing out waste and dirt from himself because dirt too aggregates over time just like "tiny drops make an ocean"! The story of king Janaka achieving the Ultimate by surrendering his mind totally to the young sage Ashtavakra was also depicted.

The presentation concluded with the bhajan, "Narayan bhaja Narayan" in Swami's own voice and the whole hall joined enthusiastically in following it. One of the members also came up to Swami to give Him a pair of cymbals. Swami blessed them.

This was followed by a brief music programme by Ms. Geetika Manjrekar, an alumnus of the Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar, Indore. Starting her career at the age of four, she learnt Hindustani classical from Mrs. Malti Joshi of Jaipur Atrolia Gharana, and is currently undergoing training at the Music Gurukul of Mr. Suresh Wadkar at Mumbai. She sang a song which was followed by a group song that had been composed by Swami Himself years ago, "Aaj ki Shubh Din". After that song, Swami moved down the stage and posed for group photos with the youth. Moving back on the stage, Swami told them, "The drama was very good." He also rolled His fingers into the "superb" gesture! Then, receiving *aarthi* and blessing *prasadam* for distribution, Swami moved to Yajur Mandir at 7:20 p.m.

August 22, 2009 – Bhagavan Gifts Ganesha Idols

The festival of Ganesha Chaturthi had arrived and so had the Ganesha idols. Every year, Swami presents these idols to His various institutions for worship and immersion. The idols had been lined up in a semi circular array in front of the Yajur Mandir entrance. Shortly after the *bhajans* began, Swami came out of His residence. Seeing the idols lined up, He seemed pleasantly surprised! He moved around the arc and closely looked at each of the statues. He allotted them to be sent to various institutions and He took His time to make the selections. When He was satisfied that all was well, He blessed the research scholars who had come and sprinkled on them holy *akshatha* grains. Then He moved into Sai Kulwant Hall for the *darshan* rounds.

He completed the *darshan* rounds and that also included a round of the Mandir portico. Near the bhajan group area, the students showed a card to Swami seeking permission to put up a programme the next day, that is, the day of Ganesh Chaturthi. He arrived on stage and the *bhajans* were on. He called a couple of students to the stage and spoke to them. He enquired from the students once again as to whether the next day they would be singing in triplets. After a while, He called one of the staff members working in the Administrative block. Pointing to the chain on his neck, He asked whether it was a silver one. He replied that it had been gifted by Swami many years ago. Swami then said, "Take gold now!" and waving His palm, materialized a beautiful gold chain with a rectangular pendant. He put it around his neck and patting him, sent him back to his seat. After some more *bhajans*, He received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

August 23, 2009 – Ganesh Chaturthi in the Divine Presence

The day of Ganesha Chaturthi brought a pleasant surprise when a message arrived from Yajur Mandir at 4.30 p.m. asking whether the students were ready with their programme! There were two reasons for this happiness, one was that Swami was keen about the programme, secondly it was only half past four (Swami came only after 5 p.m. on most days since July 2009).

It made everyone feel that there is something really special about that day and why not? Lord Ganesha is a popular deity all over India and, in this age of globalization, the world too. Celebrated as Ganesha's birthday, Ganesh Chaturthi apart from its profound spiritual and ritual impact, gained prominence as a political strategy too during the pre-Independence days when Bal Gangadhar Tilak used it as a medium to unify the masses. From then on, the celebrations have only grown and become more popular. Puttaparthi too has a long and fulfilling history of celebrating Ganesha Chaturthi and Swami takes active interest in the celebrations. Having been blessed with the statues the previous day, the students assembled in the Mandir for the evening programme. They had completed the idol installation and worship in the morning.

Shortly after 5 p.m., Swami arrived in the elegant white chair which He seems to reserve for special occasions. He had a beautiful smile playing on His face and seemed so exuberant right from the start. Considering the fact that He is the Shiva-Shakti Swaroopa, it was the "joyful parents" arriving for the "birthday party" of their son - Ganesha! Swami moved for a complete round and as He neared the students, there were many cards that they had made for the occasion. Swami went through the offerings and when the students from the music group requested permission to sing songs, He agreed whole heartedly. The Primary school section of the hall was a pandora's box of cards! And Swami seemed delighted at seeing so many cards. He carefully went through each and every one of them and spoke to many of the tiny tots. Many of the children seemed too awed to speak but the moment He would break into a smile and ask something, words came flowing out. The most common question was, "Which class are you in?" and that too seemed like an expression of admiration of their 'class' rather than a question to determine their academic level!

Completing the round, Swami moved into the Bhajan Hall where a clay idol of Lord Ganesha had been installed for the period of three days. He looked at the altar and the priest explained something to Him. Swami then had a look at the other idols too - Shirdi Baba, the Shiva Lingas and the golden Krishna. He moved out and took a round through the portico too. A long standing devotee, Mr. Ramana Rao, requested Swami for prasadam for some people who were in need of Divine help. Swami nodded to him. As soon as He came to the centre of the dais, Swami told the student next to Him, "Go inside and get some packets of prasadam." When the vibhuti packets were brought, Swami sent for Mr. Rao and gave the vibhuti packets to him. Swami then looked at the students and said, "Sing your songs!" The programme began.

Starting with the Ganaashtakam which was sung with a lot of vigour by all the students (and many devotees too for it is a popular stotram), the singing moved on to the Sankata Nashana stotram. The Primary School children added vociferously to the volume and Swami seemed to be in such a jolly mood. An interesting fact was that Swami was hiccupping! The student by His side offered water, but Swami did not want it! He continued to hiccup slightly! It is said that if someone is thinking of you, you begin to hiccup. If that were really true, Swami would be in eternal bouts of hiccups! But being Ganesh

Chaturthi, it seemed to "make sense" that a lot of people were thinking of Him that day! The songs went on and now there were trios singing special songs. Swami kept complimenting or commenting about the songs and was actively involved in the presentation. There was another small episode where a fly alighted on His face. He gently brushed it but it kept coming back over and over again. One of the students moved to the front and raised the fan upwards in an attempt to blow the fly away. Swami seemed amused and said, "Move away the fan." The student said, "That fly keeps hovering at Your face." Swami smiled and let it be (The conversation between Swami and the student took place in sign language).

After a few songs, Swami moved to the interview room for a brief interval. The Carnatic classical "Maha Ganapatim" was on and when Swami returned, the song was moving towards its climax. The two boys singing it did a lot of vocal gymnastics with the *swaras* (notes) of the songs and Swami was visibly impressed. As the song concluded He called one of them and asked, "One more?" Another song followed soon and the icing on the cake came with the "Tillana" song. Only one of the singers knew this song and Swami asked the other, "Don't you know this?" The boy nodded "no" with a kind of apologetic face. Swami immediately smiled at him as if to say, "It is okay!" The Carnatic songs were the highlight of the evening as the boys scaled great heights of pitch and rendering excellence. The audience was clapping and seemed thrilled. Swami's face glowed with pride! After that, He asked for *aarthi*. He said (by signs) "Too many songs will strain the throats!" After the *aarthi*, Swami spoke to the lead singers. One of them said, "Swami, were the songs good? If they were not, please forgive us." Swami patted him and said that all songs were good. He called another singer and told him to get ready for a Burrakatha on the Ramayana. Then Swami moved towards Yajur Mandir.

August 24, 2009 – Burrakatha on Ramayana by Sai Students

Bhagavan promised the students on August 23 that He would witness the Burrakatha the next day, so on August 24 they came prepared and ready in costumes to the Mandir. The trio seated themselves in the Bhajan Hall awaiting Swami's arrival. Bhagavan emerged for the *darshan* rounds at 4:40 p.m. itself and after one complete round, moved into the Bhajan Hall. He interacted with the three artists for about 15-20 minutes and it was a memorable one (it is always memorable when Swami interacts except when He takes the role of "disciplining father" rather than "loving mother"! And that too becomes memorable in retrospect!). Swami asked them about the various songs that they would sing as part of their Burrakatha. They sang out a song that had been composed by Swami (which was about the strong reply that Hanuman gives to the demon king Ravana). As the boys sang out, Swami joined them in the singing and converted the human trio singing the song into the divine quartet! Swami also spoke to their teacher Mr. Krishna Bhaskar, who has been blessed with opportunities to perform the Burrakatha in His presence in his heydays. Blessing them and inspiring them thus, Swami moved out to the stage.

It will be appropriate to say that the stage was "divinely set", for as soon as Swami arrived, He began to direct the positions of the mikes and His position on stage. The mikes were placed at an angle beside Him and Swami moved more towards the gents' side to provide for a bigger presentation area. Once all was set, the students were called and the Vedam chanting halted. The main narrator offered the card with the programme details and the "Rajakeeyam" (analyst) and the "Hasyam" (jester) offered roses along with their salutations to Swami. Bhagavan had His chair turned towards them and His ears tuned to them! The presentation began with the Ganesha Vandana - an ode to lord Ganesha. This was followed by garlanding of the performers by three designated students as per tradition, before the trio went elucidating the glory of Ramayana.

Starting from Rama's birth the story evolved towards various events narrated by Swami Himself in the book, Rama Katha Rasa Vahini. Rama's implicit obedience towards His father's words, the marriage with Sita, His life in exile, protecting Dharma by annihilating the demons and uplifting the holy ones, the devotion and dedication of Lakshmana, Hanuman, Sabari, Guha and Jatayu, etc. The story ended with the message to mankind that when man becomes closer to God, he does not require or desire anything materialistic. If he departs from Lord's heart, he would be facing lots of obstacles, the apt example being that of Mother Sita's agony, when she was deluded by Mareecha who turned golden deer. If you have *kama* (desire), you are separated from Rama (God). The narrative also depicted the great devotion and surrender of hanuman before wrapping up the story with the coronation of Lord Rama.

Swami was apparently moved during many portions of the narrative. One thing is for sure - He was completely engrossed in the presentation. Every edifice has a strong foundation on which it rests. The performers on stage were very well supported with the harmonium, keyboard, violin, tabla and mridangam below. The impact of these instruments cannot be overemphasized. The story being completed, the trio went on to say how privileged we all were to be in the presence of Sai Rama. In joy they burst forth with the song, "Anandame Sai Bhajana, Brahmanamdame Sai Bhajana…." As they concluded, Swami called them to Him and began to interact with them again.

He asked one of them, "When will you take out your braces?" "In a month or two Swami." "Get rid of them soon!" Another member of the trio was due to join the vaidehi medical college in Bangalore and Swami enquired about that from Him. Swami then asked, "Who is Vaidehi?" (Vaidehi also happens to be a name of Sita). The *bhajans* had begun and the one in progress was, "Kausalyatmaja Ramacharan." Swami began to narrate another episode from the Ramayana to them. At this point even their teacher joined the interacting group. When they said to Swami that the musicians had also put in a lot of effort, Swami said that He knew that they toiled hard last night and that the trio did not leave them till they picked up everything! The musicians also moved up the stage and joined the privileged group flocking at His feet. Swami posed for photos with them all and also blessed *prasadam* for

distribution. *Aarthi* was taken and as Swami was leaving, He asked one of the photographers sitting below, "How was the programme?" He nodded that it was excellent. With a satisfied smile, Swami retired to Yajur Mandir at 6:30 p.m.

August 25, 2009 – The Festival of Ganesha Immersion

The Ganesha Chaturthi festival has profound inner significance in every aspect. And the immersion ceremony is no exception. The clay idol of Lord Ganesha that had become another member in the household is worshipped and immersed in a water resource. That is indicative of the reality of the human body that is composed of the five elements. "From the elements it has come and to the elements will it return." But the spirit lives on forever just as Vinayaka Chaturthi is celebrated year after year! And August 25 was the day designated for the immersion ceremony after Ganesha Chaturthi. The Ganesha idols worshipped over the last three days in the various institutions at Prasanthi Nilayam were brought in richly decorated and imaginatively designed "chariots" to the Sai Kulwant Hall in a procession at 4.15 p.m. The beauty and grandeur of the various chariots in procession to the hall and their final parking in waiting for the Lord's arrival are best captured in the following images.

There was a heavy downpour from the heavens and the intermittent drizzle was on. But that did not deter the "chariot pullers" and "palanquin bearers" as they brought their Lord Ganesha to the Mandir. Shortly before 5 p.m., Swami arrived. He was received at Yajur Mandir by a procession of little Ganeshas from the Primary school and the Vedam group with the *Poornakumbham*. Swami entered the Sai Kulwant Hall and moved past the magnificent array of chariots. He blessed them and the 'makers' too with His benediction and smiles. Many brought forward plates with *prasadam* and fruits which Swami blessed.

It took about 20 minutes for Swami to move past all the chariots and arrive on stage. He seemed intent on the proceedings to begin. One could also catch a hint that maybe He wanted to speak to all His children too! He asked for the proceedings to begin immediately. The warden asked Swami whether a small programme that had been planned could be put up and Swami agreed. The first presentation for the evening was an entertaining dance by the University students. Starting off in a purely Carnatic style, "Maha Ganapathim Manasa Smarami", the song moved through the beats of rock, reggae and roll with a beautiful blend of chords and *ragas*. The dance was well choreographed and Swami seemed a little amused at it. The next was another dance, a little more sober and done by the children from the Higher Secondary School. A cute kid from the 8th class was at the lead and Swami smiled so sweetly at his performance. Watch a part of this dance in the video below.

Then, began the procession of the chariots. There was a continuous commentary that introduced the different chariots. As the decorated vehicles were all coming to the front, Swami blessed them. Swami was very

appreciative of the efforts that had been put in making the chariots. He however seemed to have a complaint too. As the commentary went on, He said, "There is no *Vadyam* or *bhajans* going on. All are silently walking." It was 'explained' to Him that since the commentary was on, the boys would start singing once they went out of the gates. But Swami was the least satisfied. He wanted that *bhajans* should have been done in the Mandir itself and everyone agreed that a mistake had been made. Swami was the most loving and forgiving as usual! He saw that all the chariots had already left the Mandir premises and so He also recalled a student who was rushing to convey Swami's apparent 'displeasure' to everyone. He said, "Do *bhajans* here." And so it was that *bhajans* began and needless to say everyone participated vociferously in it. Meanwhile two students dressed as Lord Shiva and Lord Ganesha came to Swami and offered their salutations to Him. Swami blessed them and then they moved back to their seats.

Swami sat for more than 45 minutes. Like a mother, He was waiting for His children to return. He kept asking as to where the children were and when they would return. Swami was "assured" that the students would all be returning soon. And five minutes later, the students started streaming in. Swami kept seeing them and as the hall began to fill up, He seemed to rejoice. When He felt that the hall was fairly full and the children had all returned, He said, "Now distribute the *prasadam*." It was a beautiful and touching scene as Swami ensured that all had returned and had *prasadam*. When finally the *aarthi* was performed, Swami's joy became apparent as He raised both His hands in blessings to the congregation. It was 7 p.m. when He returned to His residence.

August 26, 2009 – Special Discourse on Lord Ganesha

The day after the immersion of Lord Ganesha idols turned out to be a very special one. As the *bhajans* began, Swami came out as usual for *darshan*. The crowds were surprisingly present even though it was the middle of the week. The youth from Orissa too had arrived for their "Parthi Yatra" and they had occupied a large portion of the Mandir. Swami completed the *darshan* round and made a brief visit to the Bhajan Hall. Then He arrived on stage and something seemed to be running through "His mind". He looked to the left and right and asked a professor nearby as to what he was holding. He was shown the map of the villages where the Grama Seva this year would be conducted. Swami blessed him and sent him back. Then He asked for the mikes and podium to be brought! He said that He would speak and instantaneously everyone in the audience was positively thrilled. Swami began with the first few lines of a poem describing the glory of Bharat. The exhaustive summary of the discourse is given below.

Vinayaka Chaturthi celebrated yesterday was one of andha (beauty) and ananda (bliss). Vinayaka is the one who is the Master of the whole Universe and has none above Him. It is a misfortune if one forgets Him. He eats only those foods that are oil-free and made only from steam. They are called Udumu and Undraalu in the local languages. They are made by powdering

nine types of grains which are available everywhere, mixing them in water and steaming them. Vinayaka accepts only these. There are two wives (of Karthikeya) - Valli and Devayani who also partake the same food like Him. He has two children - Vidya and Siddhi. They stay with Him and learn from him. Vinayaka never commands orally and communicates through Mounam (silence). His gait is soft. He manifests before whomsoever prays to Him wherever he may be. He is Universal and not restricted to the Bharatiyas alone. He is the master of the Universe and He destroys all your sins if you think of Him.

Vinayaka has a trunk - not the one you use to carry your clothes when you roam! The trunk does everything - breathing, drinking and eating. It is foolishness to think of Him as an idol, for He is present as the breath in all. He has been there from the beginning of creation. So Vinayaka is in you, around you, below you and above you. Yesterday all of you brought Him in a chariot procession and immersed the idol in the Chitravati. The significance of that act is that just like sugar dissolves in water to become omnipresent, Lord Vinayaka is also omnipresent. (The form which arose of mud returns to mud, symbolic that in our spiritual journey we identify the formless God with a form and then realize His omnipresence!) Even there His children are with Him. They are His only property. Consider your children as your own property. And never forget your mother and father who are most important. Vidya (Buddhi) and Siddhi come from parents.

When you begin any task or eat any food pray to Him. It is essential for Bharatiyas to worship Him first always. When a temple is built He is worshipped first. It is the same when singers sing and even when our boys sing too. Without Vinayaka, there is no Nayaka (master). Do not restrict Him to the idol alone or to the period of Chavithi alone.

It is important that you worship Him on Chavithi but the 3, 5 or 10 day ritual is based on convenience because people cannot eat that type of food that Ganesha likes for a long time. Vinayaka's food is special but simple. He has nothing that has to do with fire or oil - only steam. So Vinayaka never falls sick. People sing about Him as the one with a big stomach. But the stomach is full of air and nothing else. He never accepts anything from anyone though He moves about everywhere. God is also like that. Whoever may offer, He will bless but not receive.

Life is under His control otherwise everything will get destroyed. It is only because of Vinayaka that vinasha (destruction) is prevented. Whether you know it or not and see it or not, He is with you always. Man cannot stay without breath and breath is Vinayaka. Air is life. Without our inhalation and exhalation, there is no life. Breathing is Soham. It has three parts - pooraka (inhalation), Kumbhaka (retention) and Rechaka (exhalation). These three happen as per the will of God. These were also taught by Vinayaka and propagated by his daughters - Vidya and Siddhi. So He is called Siddhivinayaka. There is none to explain this secret.

The elephant is the most powerful and its footprints wipe out those of the lions and tigers too. It also clears thick forests making them habitable. After the elephant has moved, buses, cars and trains too can move in that path! Even the procession of King Dasharatha which had horses and chariots was headed by elephants. They are path makers. That's why every temple too has an elephant. Even the trumpet of the elephant is special. It shuts up all the dogs on the street.

While considering divinity, remember that only the form has birth and death. Who is Brahma? Who are you? Aham Brahmasmi. Brahma is the breath and has no form. He has no birth and so no death. So too it is for Aum. Pain and pleasure are only for the one that is born and has death. Who is God? God is the underlying Unity in the apparent diversity. That is Brahman. Do not keep dolls and call them as Ganesha, Krishna or Rama. These forms are all derived from Ravi Verma paintings which he too imagined. He has not seen divinity. None have seen God in reality.

At the same time, the physical aspect has a meaning and the form should not be neglected. The form will take you towards morality. But do not forget the spirit. Seeing the display yesterday, I was so enthused. I was pleased about the spirit. Without the spirit, you cannot understand divinity. Know the significance that Vinayaka stands for the absolute Master. Understand the festival and understand the significance.

Swami concluded the discourse with the *bhajan Vinayaka Vinayaka Vighna Vinashaka Vinayaka…*. After singing two lines, Swami again stressed the fact that Vinayaka refers to one who has none above Him. Then He said, "My throat is not proper. You boys sing." The same *bhajan*, "Vinayaka Vinayaka" began and needless to say, it had a very enthusiastic following. Swami sat for three *bhajans* swaying rhythmically and keeping beat. After that, Swami received *aarthi* and joined everyone in the chants of Samastha Lokaha Sukhino Bhavanthu. Then He retired to Yajur Mandir.

August 27, 2009 – Drama by Sai Youth of Orissa

As mentioned in the Prasanthi Diary article of August 26, the Orissa Sai Youth was on a pilgrimage to Prasanthi Nilayam on August 26-27. And like all other visiting youth, they too had come prepared with a drama. A word here about one special genre of dramas that are enacted in the divine presence: these are dramas that are based on incidents in real life, and where the names of the characters are not changed in order to enforce the authenticity! They are plays where the drama behind the drama is so much more thrilling than the actual presentation itself. No wonder they say that Truth is stranger than fiction! And on August 27, the youth from Orissa had brought such a drama to present before Him. It would have been more of a "highlights" show for Him, for wasn't it He who directed the whole version?

It was at about 5:20 p.m. that Swami arrived for *darshan* rounds. There were very important dignitaries including the Governor of the Reserve bank of India

who had arrived to attend a conference on "Ethics and the World of Finance" to begin the next day under the auspices of the Sri Sathya Sai University. CEOs, MDs, Chairpersons and Country Heads of various banks and financial institutions (JP Morgan, HDFC, Kotak Mahindra, IRDA, Birla Sun Insurance to name a few) were expected to be present in the conference. Swami moved through the ladies side and in the centre, had a look at the backdrop that had been placed. He completed the *darshan* rounds and arrived at the veranda where the chairman of HDFC Bank Mr. Jagdish Kapoor was waiting to greet Him and offer his salutations. The members of the university staff showed the programme details for the conference. Swami blessed it and assured that He would be there for the inauguration.

The day's drama had an interesting flashback that dated back to the 81st Birthday celebrations in the state of Orissa. During the birthday celebrations, the Youth from Ambadola Samithi (Southern Orissa) had presented a drama - the story of a group of young men who were inspired by Swami to take up the project of a home for the destitute children and to finally dedicate the same to Bhagavan. After this was done, a Divine direction came to the youth in a most unexpected manner giving them a real jolt. Swami appeared in the dream of one of the youth, Trinath, and asked if they were only acting or going to do something really, that is, are they going to make the "drama" a reality? Then, came the Divine command, "Make it a Reality". And so, that day's drama was about the drama that ensued after that dream.

Swami arrived on the stage and seemed very keen to have the programme. The main characters came up the stage and offered the cards to Swami. One of the cards had a mirror embedded in it and it reflected the sweet face of dear Swami. Swami blessed them and soon the drama began. It showed in a quick scene the above mentioned story in the flashback. The Divine drama began once the protagonist begins pondering as to how he must go about the 'dream'. A senior, 'Mohan Bhaiya' arrives and tries to drive 'sense' into these 'foolishly' inspired youth who seem bent upon 'ruining' a prosperous life for a life of service. The debate ends with Mohan stating, "I will give you four acres of land at a concessional price if you can show me at least Rs. 50,000 by the end of a week." As he says this, a blind beggar arrives with his singing son. The song, "Aadmi ko aadmi kya deta hain" made a powerful impact not only the members in the drama but everyone in the audience too. Swami was very moved and happy at the same time. He blessed the sweet kid who was proclaiming such an important message about 'finance'. And that is the unfolding of the divine drama. It was so apt that this drama was being presented when the top echelons of the financial world were also witnessing the programme at Prasanthi Nilayam.

The drama moves on wherein the protagonist gets a cheque for exactly Rs. 50,000 for some project that he executed sometime ago for the company Bajaj Allianz Insurance! On top of it another person comes with a donation of 2.5 lakhs. All the required machinery gets rolling and soon Mohan's jaw drops in awe! He is so moved and inspired that he decides to give away the land free, instead of building an explosives factory which he had originally planned. Very soon "Sai Karunalayam" is up and functioning with the first beneficiary

being the boy who had sung the song in the opening scene. Swami was so happy when He saw the boy "comfortably placed" and He expressed that through a smile that broke into an emotional gasp. Towards the end, the home for the destitutes was dedicated to Swami and the members of the drama danced to the tunes of a song that proclaimed Swami as the "Captain" guiding His soldiers, which is them. They declared, "Baba does not have a bank account of His own but millionaires consider it their great privilege if they get a chance to serve Him." As the audience clapped madly, there were many heads on stage that perked up and those were the heads of the Heads of major financial institutions and they were to soon realize the Truth of that statement!

The drama concluded and Swami permitted the youth to sing two songs. As this went on, a few prominent members of the drama went up the stage. Among them was the Convenor of the Ambadola Samithi, the one who had actually started the Sai Samithi in that under-developed region. Along with him on the stage was Mr. Raja, the District Youth Coordinator. Swami started asking them about the details of "Sai Karunalayam". "How many children are currently there?" "Ten, Swami," was the reply. "Where are these children studying?" The Lord asked again. "Swami, they are studying a nearby school." Immediately Swami asked again, "You do not have a school?" "No, Swami." "I will build one for you. I will do everything. Whenever you need anything, I will make the arrangements. I will look after everything." Needless to say, the youth were on cloud nine; they were overwhelmed with these divine assurances that flowed from the Lord so spontaneously and lovingly. They blurted out, "Swami, when You are with us, we can achieve anything, we can take up any project, however mighty it might be." Now, Swami was overwhelmed, and instantly clasped the hands of the youth. You can imagine the exchange of Pure Love that was transpiring at this point between Swami and His dearest instruments; everyone who was watching this was truly in ecstasy.

Swami continued further and asked, "How many more children do you want to add?" "We want to have 40-50, Swami," they responded enthusiastically. But Swami said, "No, have 20." Then, He Himself said that He would guide them about the plan and in fact, would do everything. This statement "I will do everything" of Swami has now become their talisman, which will enable them to any miracle of Love; it is their source of eternal strength and inspiration.

As Swami was interacting with the two senior Youth, Swami Himself beckoned the protagonist, Mr. Trinath to the stage. He was the one whom Swami had inspired to build the home for destitutes. And now, he seemed to find His life's fulfillment as he lay prostrate at the divine feet. He broke down in sheer joy and was in no position to stem the immense joy that seemed to exude through his tears.

In fact, it must be mentioned here that before coming to Prasanthi Nilayam, Trinath, though only in his early thirties, had given up his lucrative job of a Manager in SBI Life Insurance so that he could devote his entire time and energy to Swami's work. The plan of the Ambadola Samithi is to build a small

Sai ashram in their region which not only provides spacious accommodation to the orphans but also has a school, a hostel, a community centre, a horticulture unit, an old age home, and also a vocational training centre along with space for more initiatives. [H2H team had the privilege of interviewing many of these Sai Youth and shortly, will present a comprehensive story based on their moving service initiatives and more importantly, their rock-like faith.]

After blessing Trinath, Swami moved down the stage to pose for a photograph with all the participants. Conferring joy on them by granting them *padanamaskar* and talking to a few of them, Swami returned the stage. He blessed *prasadam* for distribution and then retired to Yajur Mandir. Thus ended another scintillating day with dear Sai.

August 28, 2009 – "Ethics and the World of Finance" Conference in Prasanthi Nilayam

It was to be a wonderful chapter in the book of world finance that has been torn and battered ever since the housing bubble burst and various economies grappled to find a firm foothold, and the situation continues till this day. In this scenario, to give it the firm foundation of morality, a conference entitled "Ethics and the World of Finance" began in the holy hamlet of Puttaparthi under the 'August' auspices of the Sri Sathya Sai University. The Conference was scheduled to be inaugurated at the divine hands at 10 a.m. in the institute auditorium. Live video streaming of the event to the three campuses of the University was also organized so that everyone could participate, and more importantly, also have the divine *darshan*.

On the dot at 10 a.m., Swami arrived at the auditorium. He was welcomed by a Veda group with *Poornakumbham* and by the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the Prashanti Nilayam Campus. Swami entered the green room where Mr. D. Subba Rao, governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the former governor of RBI, Mr. Y. V. Reddy greeted Him. Swami blessed them and then moved on to the stage where He was received by the gathering as they rose upto their feet. Swami lit the lamp to mark the inauguration of the Conference. Before we proceed, it would be very instructive to just glance at the Delegate Sheet for the conference. It consists of the who's who of the Indian financial edifice.

SL No:	NAME	DESIGNATION
6	Ms. Usha Ramanan	Managing Director SEBI
7	Mr. Sridharan	Managing Director SBI
8	Mr. D. Subba Rao	Governor, RBI
9	Mr. Vijay Srinivasan	Chief Executive A V Birla Financial Services
10	Mr. Ravi Duvvuru	Chandiance, Kotak Mahindra
11	Mr. Uday Kotak	Executive VC & Managing Director Kotak Bank
12	Ms. Kalpana Morparia	Chief Executive Officer, JP Morgan India
1	Mr. Amitabh Chaturvedi	Managing Director Dhanalakshmi Bank
2	Mr. Y. V. Reddy	Former Governor, RBI
3	Mr. Ravi Kannath	Chairman ICICI Group
4	Mr. S. S. Das	Executive Director RBI
5	Mr. A. Prabhakar	Executive Director IRDA

13	Mr. Aditya Puri	Managing Director HDFC Bank
14	Mr. K.R. Kamath	Chairman & Managing Director Allahabad Bank
16	Mr. V. Vaidyanathan	MD & CEO ,ICICI Prudential Life Insurance
17	Mr. R.S. Reddy	Chairman & Managing Director Andhra Bank
18	Ms.Meera Sanyal	Country Head, Royal Bank of Scotland (ABN Amro) India
19	Mr. Alok Mishra	Chairman & Managing Director Bank of India
20	Mr. Jagdish kapoor	Chairman HDFC Bank
21	Mr. M.V.Nair	Chairman & Managing Director Union Bank of India
22	Ms. Anuradha Sarin	Vice President, Yes Bank
23	Mr. S.Narayanan	MD & CEO IFFCO Tokio General Insurance Co
24	Mr. Gunit Chadha	Chief Executive Officer Deutsche Bank India
25	Mr. A.C Mahajan	Chairman & Managing Director Canara Bank
26	Mr. K.R. Ramamoothy	Chairman ING vysya Bank
27	Mr. Mani Subharamanian	Chief Executive Officer Baraclays Bank India
28	Mr. A.Balasubramanian	Chief Executive Officer Birla Sun Life Insurance
29	Mr. Sreeram Iyer	Chief Operating Officer, Standard Chartered Bank India
30	Dr. N. Krishna Mohan	Regional Director RBI, Hyderabad
31	Mr. K. Raghavalu	Chief General Manger, NABARD Hyderabad
32	Prof. G. Venkatraman	Former Vice Chancellor,Sri Sathya Sai University
33	Prof. A.V.Gokak	IAS,Former vice Chancellor,Sri Sathya Sai University
34	Mr. S.V. Giri	IAS Former Vice Chanellor,Sri Sathya Sai University

Swami seated in the centre with the past and present governors of RBI on either sides was an inspiring sight in itself and surely the world of finance would have heaved a sigh of relief and experienced a surge of joy that the Lord had taken up its case. Chairpersons for the inaugural function, Dr. Duvvuni Subba Rao and the former Governor, Mr. Y. Venugopal Reddy were garlanded by Dr. Naren Ramji, and Mr. Srirangarajan, Registrar and Controller of Examinations of the University respectively, before the commencement of the day's proceedings. Delivering the welcome address, Prof. Vishwanath Pandit, the Vice Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai University, highlighted the direct relevance the conference has with the current world affairs. Prof. Pandit was categorical in emphasizing that value-based education has to be practised in life, rather than confining the same to bookish knowledge. He also made a mention about the University's contribution to the society by sending out students with ethical values and academic perfection. Interestingly, he mentioned about the remark of the NAAC committee that the

Sathya Sai University was the "crest jewel" in Education institutions of India. The UGC delegation visited the University in September 2008 and made a similar remark, unofficial though that "what we see here is exceptional and must be replicated. This place does not need our support; we need the support of the University".

The Vice Chancellor said, the conference would deal with panel discussions on (1) Quintessence of Ethics, (2) Behaviour and Structure of Financial Institutions, (3) Role of the Government and Regulatory Authorities and (4) Role of Education.

In his key-note address, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Duvvuri Subba Rao today said there was no evidence to show that people in the financial sector were inherently less ethical than people in other professions. However, given the larger temptation and more opportunities, the power of context to be short, there could be greater incidence of unethical behaviour in the financial sector, he remarked. Economics, as an academic discipline, is losing its value base, and conjectured, if that could be at the root of the malaise in the financial sector. In his in-depth analysis of the present economic recession and the role of ethics, the RBI Governor outlined how a sense of responsibility to larger societal good underpins on the mandate of the RBI. ``All of us as individuals, families, social communities and faith communities confront ethical dilemmas everyday, and we resolve them in our own ways. We take the value of ethical behaviour to be axiomatic,'' he observed. Dr. Subba Rao referred to financial scams that shocked the world and led to the collapse of markets, from Nick Leeson, Bernie Madoff, Dennis Levine to Satyam Ramalinga Raju. On the RBI role, Dr. Subba Rao said the bank had a broad mandate. Concluding his speech the Governor listed out the ethical dimensions of Reserve Bank of India, listing the bank's roles and responsibilities being the guardians of nation's financial security.

The next speaker, the Ex-Governor of RBI, Mr. Y. Venugopal Reddy, sent out a barrage of questions with reference to the recent global financial crisis. Referring to some of the "Questionable Practices" that could have caused the crisis, Mr. Reddy drew everyone's attention to the previous crisis in the early nineties. Listing out the consequences thereon, Mr. Reddy sounded interrogative as to whether the present crisis would bring similar consequences. Speaking about values, morals and ethics versus the market and government, he said that the world of finance is a different ball game and is entirely based on Trust. He ended his speech quoting Mahatma Gandhi, *there is enough in this world to meet the needs of everybody but there is not enough to meet the greed of even a single person.*

The last speaker for the session was Mr. S.V. Giri, formerly Chief Vigilance Commissioner of India and the 6th Vice Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai University. His speech was mainly on the topic as to how the foundations of character building were laid through activities like Grama Seva and the like. Summing up the morning session he highlighted the five cardinal human values describing them as pillars of Sanathana Dharma and so "cannot be compromised, whatever be the situation or condition".

All the while, Swami was on the stage listening to every talk. In the end, He presented the two governors, past and present, of the RBI with momentoes which were made as replicas of the Sarva Dharma Aikya Stupa at Puttaparthi. Swami asked for *prasadam* to be brought and distributed to all. He did not want the *aarthi* to be performed and blessing everyone, He moved to the green room. There, when a prayer was made to Him that the governor of RBI would like an interaction with Him, Swami said that He would meet him in the interview room in the Mandir. Swami did as He said and the interview took place at the Sai Kulwant Hall. Then Swami came out at 12:15 and the *bhajans* that had begun at 9:00 a.m. were still on! Swami said, "You are all still singing!?" He asked them to move into the shade as the sun was blazing hard upon them through the transluscent roof at the centre.

The evening session turned out to be even more memorable. The stage had been grandly arranged and all the delegates were initially seated in the bhajan hall. Swami arrived at 5:00 p.m. and after finishing the *darshan* round, He arrived on stage. During the *darshan*, as Swami moved in the ladies side, He blessed the delegates and their spouses and relatives who too had come to Puttaparthi. He was particularly playful with one baby that stretched out of its mother's arms as if trying to go to Swami! Twenty six chairs had been arranged on the stage, 13 on either side of Swami. The number 26 seemed symbolic for it was as if the "A-Z" of the financial world had arrived at the Source, the primeval principle that Swami embodies. As Swami sat in the centre stage, the names of each of the delegates were called out. They arrived one by one and offered flowers to Swami. In return they were blessed with their special moment with Him as He granted them *padanamaskar*. In this way, soon all the chairs were occupied and Swami asked for the session to begin. The Registrar introduced the two speakers for the evening.

The first speaker for the session was Mr. K. V. Kamath, the Non-Executive Chairman of ICICI Bank. Calling it Bhagavan's foresight that made such a unique event a possibility, Mr. Kamath hailed the University's initiative. The whole crisis should be seen from the point of view that the two strong pillars, Truth and Righteousness are under challenge, he said. Roots of the crisis were from the west, symptoms of which were seen two years ago, and a deeper analysis raised a lot of ethical issues that were under threat. Compromises on ethical grounds, especially on Truth and Righteousness, at various rungs and between various players have magnified the crisis. "My belief is that the core we have in terms of the teachings we have imbibed for ages that are continued to be taught to us by Bhagavan are the reasons why we have been able to withstand the challenges that have swept the whole world. There could have been no better place to deliberate, understand and find solutions for the future than this place. Going back to morality, going back to ethical values, going back to fairness would be the solutions to prevent such happenings in future," said Mr. Kamath.

Mr. Kamath was followed by Mr. Gunit Chaddha, CEO-India, Deutsch Bank. Starting with prayerful salutations to Bhagavan, Mr. Chaddha told, "It is truly an honour and privilege to submit myself before the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. I have visited Prasanthi Nilayam and Sai University

many times over the last decade, and each time I have returned with even greater passion. But, today, standing here and having an opportunity to speak with the permission of Bhagavan is truly the most humbling experience of my life for the last forty-eight years." He expressed the view that bankers should try to emulate what the Sathya Sai students do. Mr. Chaddha exhorted that the values Sai students stand for are much needed in the financial services sector and he invited them to be with the members in the financial world and strengthen its basis.

Swami was then requested for His divine discourse but He knew of the flood of emotions and feelings that had been welling in the hearts of many of the finance captains on stage. He asked Mr. K. R. Ramamoorthy, the Chairman of ING Vysya Bank whether he would like to say a few words and he was positively delighted. Almost hopping to the podium in joy after prostrating at His lotus feet, Mr. Ramamoorthy, began his extempore talk. Talking about his miraculous escape from the terrorists at the Taj Heritage Hotel in Mumbai on the fateful day of 26th November 2008 he said that it was sheerly the grace and benevolence of Bhagavan that saved his life, virtually granting him a new birth. His visit was aimed at dedicating his second life at His Lotus Feet. Talking about the scarcity of true institution builders, Mr. Ramamoorthy opined that Institution and individual reciprocity is slowly giving away and everyone looks into individual gains forgetting about the concept of building up an institution. "The efficacy of a leader is felt in his absence, when others recall his presence in the buildup of the institution. You cannot find a better institution than Sai Institution and a better leader than Bhagavan who leads an exemplary life," said Mr. Ramamoorthy. He concluded with the hope that Bhagavan's students would outshine in building institutions of durable nature.

Swami again sent the registrar around to a few people whom He 'knew' desired to speak. And as they were approached, they agreed. Thus it was that the day saw three more speakers. The fourth speaker for the session was Mr. V. S. Das, Executive Director, RBI. Claiming the day to be the best day in his life, Mr. Das appreciated the wonderful conduct of the ongoing conference. Recounting Bhagavan's adage 'My Life is My Message' he said that one could get greater lessons by attending such conferences, wherein practical demonstration of hospitality, system supported management, and organizational ability were demonstrated for one and all to see and imbibe.

He said that values and ethics flow from a heart which has affection for fellow beings. "Why talk of morality and ethics only when we reach a stage when we are operating banks? These values should start at the grass root level, at the individual level which should help building a society wherein these values could be instilled. Business is run on the *terra forma* of society. If the individual is sound, society would be sound and business also would automatically become sound, said Mr. Das reflecting Bhagavan's teachings.

The fifth speaker for the session, Mr. Jagdish Kapoor, Chairman, HDFC Bank Ltd., in his short speech highlighted that financial affairs were in no way separate from the moral values that we carry and there could have been no better place for holding the conference than the Sri Sathya Sai University,

where each student would carry with him impeccable discipline and high moral values as taught by Bhagavan and followed by everyone in Prasanthi Nilayam.

Prof. Venkataraman, the 5th Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University spoke in detail about various service projects taken up by Bhagavan, that included the medicare, water project, housing project scheme in Orissa and so on. Reiterating what Mr. Kamath outlined in his speech, solutions to human problems could be found by going back to the two strong pillars of Sathya and Dharma with love as the essential tool, said Prof. Venkataraman. He used Swami as the shining example and it was very clear that if we can follow Him even to a miniscule amount, the world would be a much happier place.

Swami now asked the students to sing a bhajan with *aalaap*. "Sri Raghavam" began. For reasons best known to Him, Swami stopped that *bhajan* midway and asked for *aarthi* which was performed and then *prasadam* was distributed as Swami retired for the day.

August 29, 2009 – Divine Discourse on the Occasion of 'Ethics and the World of Finance' Conference

In our Prasanthi Diary article of August 28, we had for you the proceedings of the first day of the unique conference on "Ethics and The World of Finance". The second day of this grand event had in store something even more fantastic.

Swami arrived for *darshan* as the *bhajans* were on. Arriving on stage, He asked for His mikes to be brought! There was excitement and minutes later, everyone was absorbed in listening to the nectar divine as Swami spoke with vitality and force.

Embodiments of Love,

God is one. Scholars call God by different names - Allah, Jesus, Rama, etc. Depending on one's faith, God assumes a form. Take the Christian 'I'. Cross the 'I', the ego and you get the Holy Cross. That is God. God has no name or form. People have had desires from ages. People have many desires. But Dharmaraja, the eldest of the Pandavas, had only 1 desire. Dharmaraja loved gambling. The Kauravas knew this and the cunning Shakuni further inspired them to utilise this as a weakness of Dharmaraja. Dharamaraja felt happy when invited for a game of dice. Duryodhana and Dushaasana were on one side and the Pandavas on the other. The dice used for the game were biased in favour of the Kauravas who were deceitful. Dharmaraja thus sacrificed the kingdom (he had actually desired to takeover the Kauravas kingdom). He finally even placed Draupadi as the wager. When she too had been lost, she came to hall and asked a question, "Whom did he lose first? Having lost himself, he has no right to wager me." None could answer. She was Panchali - the wife of all the five Pandavas. He had no sole authority over her! That was the understanding of Draupadi.

Another thing has to be mentioned. The Pandavas had to decide about Dharma on many occasions. Drona had stayed at King Drupada's place. Drona prayed to Drupada for milk for his son. The king told him to take as much milk as he wanted. Then Dronacharya asked for a cow saying that it would solve all problems once for all! The king advised him that it was difficult to maintain a cow as he would have to take care of her shelter, fodder, etc. Hearing this, Drona got angry, "You can't give me even a cow?! What sort of a friend are you?" And so he left the kingdom along with his wife and son. There was no train or bus or car in those days. They walked to where Pandavas were. The Pandavas and Kauravas were children, playing at that time. They were all sad because their ball had fallen into a well and they did not know how to get it out. Drona took out arrows from his bundle and retrieved the ball by shooting arrows in a series, end to end. It needs expert skill to shoot an arrow into another in a series. It appeared as though a rope of arrows was made, connected end to end. Seeing this, the children were happy and they sung his glories at home. Drona, his wife along with son, were accommodated and the people started talking highly of his skill. The Pandavas began to learn from him. Later he said, "Give me one student so that I can teach him everything completely." Dharmaraja summoned Arjuna. Drona taught all arts to Arjuna. Thus Drona's skill was noted and he became popular. Even Aswathamma came to forefront because of this.

The differences in opinion between the Pandavas and Kauravas alienated Aswathamma from the Pandavas. Jealousy and anger sprouted in Aswathamma. The Pandavas had 6 children - the Upapandavas. Aswathamma beheaded them at night when they were all asleep. Draupadi came to know of this but she didn't shed a tear. She said to Ashwathama, "My husbands are your Father's students. Is it justified to kill the children of your father's students? They were not in war, they were unarmed and that too it was night - how could you kill them? This is injustice." Bheema was so enraged and out of anger he shouted, "I will not spare this Brahmin. I'll behead him in retaliation." But then, in a pacifying manner, Draupadi said, "Just as we feel at the loss of our children even his mother will feel in same manner. But still, it is not right to kill one who is afraid, sleeping, intoxicated, or resting without security, and who is a child or a woman. Shave his head. That is enough as a punishment for a kshatriya." Uphold Truth. Sathyam bruyath Priyam bruyath - Speak the Truth but also speak in a pleasing manner. The teaching of women in the epic Mahabharatha is of very high standards. Arjuna was pacified by Draupadi else he would have killed himself. "What's the use of brooding over past? Past is past. It is gone. The children are gone but we should not hurt anyone else." That is what she said. Arjuna's temper subsided due to Draupadi. Everything is there in the Mahabharatha.

A Conference on Ethics in Finance is being held here. It was Ethics that gave protection always. Do not feel bad for the financial loss. Life is the wealth that has to be protected. Life is so valuable and human beings are the greatest wealth. That is the wealth. And such ethics are set in Mahabharata. Women of Bharath have had the noblest character and have always been broad-hearted. They know noble ideals. That's why Bharath has progressed. Thus it was that Draupadi advised Arjuna, "Oh Phalguna - the one with many virtues, you are

noble, you should not kill Ashwathamma. Don't be childish." These noble people are forgotten today by the Bharatiyas. Who are the people of noble ideas and lofty individuals? They are the ones who have tolerance as their beauty. Its not body beauty.

Aping others is a sign of weakness. Uphold and safeguard the tradition and culture of Bharat. Without neethi (morality) there is no jaathi (humanity). Money comes and goes but Morality comes and grows. Protect morality. What are the qualities of a Bharatiya? They maintain their character. The character is of utmost importance. But today, Bharatiyas are like the elephant - not aware of their own strength. The mahout says sit and get up and the elephant does as told. The training and education it receives makes the elephant like that (Obvious reference to the importance of an Educare system over an Education system). The mahout can be thrown if elephant just wills to brush its tail. So to, Bharathiyas are very powerful.

The Vedas, Ithihasas, Puranas and Upanishads - these are great repositories of knowledge. But people become weak because they are not following these sacred texts. They wear suits because the foreigners are wearing them. Understand our culture. Today no one follows one's conscience. This is a country which played football with intruders and invaders but today they are in a state of innocence (The statement was translated as a "state of ignorance" and Swami corrected it by saying, "not ignorance, innocence").

Because of imitation you lose energy. So don't imitate. Be in your limits. The lion is very powerful but it kills only when it's really hungry. It never misuses its power. Excess ego, anger and desire leads to one crossing the limits. Don't give way to misdirection. Do not hurt or injure anyone and yourself. Don't use your power as you wish. Keep everything in limits. Students want to be free. That is good, but under certain limits. Then alone does freedom have value. Simply getting more money and more intelligence is dangerous. There is a lot of wastage of wealth in the US. Lot of money is wasted on Afghanistan and Iraq. And because they do that, today they have lost money. See, God is all powerful but He does not use it recklessly. So don't use this power as you like. Don't waste even thoughts. Thoughts make the mind. See the cloth here. It is a bundle of threads which are actually cotton. So too, the mind is a fabric of thoughts.

Don't make excessive use of materials. The same applies to food too. Help others. Never hurt anyone. Help ever, hurt never. This is what we have to learn. Don't hurt others or yourself. Everything is not in the texts. It lies in tests that you face in life. Think inside, "Is it good/bad?" If bad, don't even touch it. If good for all, meaning family, society, and you, then proceed.

Remember that you are not doing any favour to the bank by working properly. You are doing service to yourself. Taking good care of the bank will ensure your betterment. The more you preserve, the more it will help you. Don't be egoistic of the amount you have in bank. It will come to you today and disappear tomorrow. Whatever you do is for your own betterment. Daiva preethi… paapa bheethi… (Love for God and fear of sin) are most essential.

Get a good name in society. For that develop intense love. A sin once committed will come back to you. But when you have character, the whole society will love you. Love and God is everywhere. Love all. Then your love will increase. It also increases your name and fame. When you perform a bad act, others too follow you. So 'do good', 'be good' and 'see good'. This is the way to God. You will be held in high respect and position. It is not in any text. It is in the sacredness of the heart. Maintain this sacredness.

But nowadays, everything sacred has gone and only a cigarette is seen! If you start smoking, all want to smoke with you. Tell me your company, I shall tell you what you are. If you are bad, your company will be bad. If you are good, your company will be good. Today many companies have shut down. That is because many are tempted to follow bad company. Don't be in that eagerness to follow bad company. Haste makes waste, waste makes worry. So don't be in a hurry. Haste is the root cause of worry. Never be in a hurry.

Dear children, you are young. Do good deeds. Undertake good tasks. Service to society is one of the noblest deeds. The society maintains us. Even amongst the society, the mother, the father, the preceptor and then God must be the order in which you give priority! Mother is very very very important. If you make your mother suffer you will suffer for the rest of your life. So always make your mother happy. If your mother is happy, then you will be happy throughout your life. Happiness of your mother is your happiness. The Mother will always protect you. Sometimes she scolds you or hits you, but that is out of her concern and love, not out of her anger. This is only temporary. Everything is temporary. Anger, jealousy, temper, lust and even hunger are temporary. Only the atma is permanent.

Love all serve all. This is your permanent property. "Service is my god. It is my life". Enter service with this feeling. Service should not be for money. Money is a jumping and fluctuating factor. It comes and goes. Don't rejoice or feel depressed when it comes or goes. See to that your morality comes and grows.

Students, today is a very happy day. Pray or desire that such days come along always. Recollect everything that has been told. Wherever you are, be it in space or the deep forest or a poor village or a city, God will always be by your side. GOD is in you, around you, beside you, above you. God will never desert you. God is not temporary!

You students are very good. Be good always!

Swami concluded the discourse with two bhajans - *Hari Bhajan Bina* and *Subramanyam Subramanyam.*

Swami then asked for *prasadam* to be brought. In a hurry, that was arranged and Swami blessed it for distribution. All the bankers and financial captains were on their knees as Swami passed by them into the car. He blessed all of them and they all seemed to be in a different level altogether! It was nearing 7 p.m. when He retired to His residence.

August 31, 2009 – Onam Celebrations: "Shankara Digvijayam" Drama

The devotees from Kerala were in large numbers to celebrate Onam with their beloved Swami on the last day of August. A three day programme schedule has been blessed by Swami and August 31 was the opening day. The Onam legend has it that the emperor Bali visits His people in Kerala and gets thrilled. But in the present scenario, there is a slight reversal! The people of Kerala come to "God's Own Country", Puttaparthi, to visit their emperor, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai! Surely when Bali visits His kingdom, he would find many empty homes and would be inspired to make the pilgrimage to Puttaparthi! And Swami too seemed very eager to meet His people for He arrived at 4:30 p.m., quite early by current trends.

The big backdrop for the *drama* had been placed in the marbled block and as Swami came for the *darshan* rounds, all the children were seated in front of it and it was a beautiful sight. He completed the *darshan* rounds and arrived straight on the stage. He called the State President and enquired into the details of the drama. In the meanwhile three kids in costumes came up to Swami. He was very happy and asked them about the drama. Each of them replied separately to Him, "Shankara Digvijayam." Swami's eyes seemed to light up. He called the State President again and told him to make an announcement about the drama. As he announced the name of the drama as Sri Shankara digvijayam, Swami corrected him saying, "It's only Shankara Digvijayam. Announce once more!" The appropriate correction was made and then the drama began.

The drama begins with a little child wanting to be a *sanyasi* (renunciant). A guru commends him on such a noble ambition and inspires him with the story of Shankaracharya. Shankara was born in Kaladi in Kerala after Lord Shiva promised his parents that He would himself come to them as a son. The astrological signs show that Shankara is destined to be a Sanyasi and when his mother tries to prevent him from becoming one, he is caught in the jaws of a crocodile while bathing. The croc does not release him till the mother says, "Oh Lord! Let him live for the sake of being a *sanyasi* at least!" The croc immediately leaves him and thus he fulfills his divine destiny. Swami was entirely gripped as Shankara was in the grips of the reptile's jaws! The whole episode moved Swami so much and He seemed to admire the creative manner in which it was portrayed. In fact, when the "river" was created by innovative waving of plastic sheets held at two ends, Swami explained, "These are the waves of water!" In between the drama, Swami made a brief visit to the interview room and on His way back, blessed the wedding card of one of the student's brother.

The drama also depicted the famous episode where an "untouchable" enlightens Shankara by asking, "Are you asking this body to move out of your way? It is made the same way of yours. If you are asking the soul to move out, it is immovable." The *acharya* fulfills the word given to his mother when he arrives in time to complete her last rites. Swami was very moved with this too and it was a perfect example to show that detachment does not mean indifference and Love does not imply attachment! The drama had narrators

coming up in between in formations, providing valuable connections to the various episodes. A few dances sprinkled here and there added to the flavour of the drama. A mention must be made about the excellent music and songs that pervaded the drama. They were so inspiring in the fact that even though one did not understand Sanskrit, one could almost 'feel' the meaning as the song progressed.

The drama concluded with the *mahasamadhi* of Shankaracharya at the age of 32 and his guidance to his disciples to carry the message of Advaitha to all the four corners of the country. As the drama concluded and all the children came together in the final formation, Swami told them to group closer together. *Bhajans* began as per His command and amidst the singing, Swami had clothes distributed to all the children. He also blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all. Then, He called for the boy who had acted as Shankaracharya. Waving His hand, He created a beautiful golden chain for him. The grandeur of the costumes was seen by Swami when as He was trying to put the chain around, the saffron cloth covering the head dropped down. The make up and costume under the hood was also perfect and no compromise had been made in spite of the fact that this part was not to be visible to anyone at all! Swami too on His part did something very sweet. He put the chain around the boy's neck and then lifted the hood and put the cloth back on the head. Everyone rejoiced and clapped.

Swami then sent back the boy and sat enjoying the *bhajans*. After sometime, He received *aarthi*. The photo of Swami gifting the chain to Shankara was given to Swami and He presented it joyously to the boy. As the *aarthi* was complete, Swami stated emphatically, "The drama was very good and nice. Swami is very very happy." He raised His hands half a dozen times to bless everyone assembled. With that smile still adorning His face, He retired to Yajur Mandir at about 6:00 p.m.

SWAMI AND ME

DRAWN BY THE MAGIC WAND OF DIVINE LOVE

How the Eternal Entertainer enraptured the hearts of 'The Dharmic Clowns' from Italy who have taken upon themselves the mission of spreading His Love and Message through smiles, music, joy and laughter.

In the Healing Touch section of this August 2009 issue, we have the fascinating story of how 'The Dharmic Clowns' from Italy invaded the Super Specialty Hospitals in Puttaparthi and Whitefield in January and March 2009 and created a magic that mesmerised every soul in these Divine Abodes of Healing. Read this story 'Love, Laughter And Happiness At The Temple Of Healing'.

In the present article, these charismatic Dharmic Clowns share how their souls were magically pulled by the mysterious call of the Master Charmer, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Mr. Riccardo Romagnoli – clown "Magic Richard": Just looking at the cover of the book "The Holy Man and the Psychiatrist" by Dr. Samuel Sandweiss, instinctively I felt that Sai Baba was my Divine Mother and Father. I was sixteen years old then. After reading that book, I met several devotees of Baba, studied other books and began to see Him in my dreams. One night He told me that soon I would be departing for India along with my mother. And that is what happened.

I arrived at Whitefield and during *Darshan*, Swami blessed my *japamala* (rosary) and looking Him in the eyes I said, "Swami, I love You", and He responded, "Yes, so do I, just as I had dreamt. After that trip, everyone in my family became devotees of Swami.

I've also had the blessing of going to India with Sara, first my fiancée and then wife. And with great joy also taking Matilde, my five-year-old daughter. Swami is always present in my life as Teacher, Friend and Eternal Witness. Any action in my life is infused with my love for Him.

An interesting fact about me is that since I was a child, I have been fascinated by the art of sleight-of-hand and at the age of 17 I became a professional conjurer. I've always believed that all the acts of Bhagavan are Divine actions, but at the same time I had a great curiosity constantly to see first-hand the materializations of Swami. The first manifestation of *Vibhuti* that I saw happened right in front of my eyes. Swami looked at me, then lifted the sleeve of His robe (to show me that His hand was 'empty') and finally moved His hand in circles to give *Vibhuti* to a devotee who was sitting next to me. I was bewildered, like the time that I saw Him materialize a golden ring with a green emerald in the interview room for an Indian doctor. **But what**

continues to surprise me, however, is the greatest magic of His Love - Love that transforms, inspires, and bares fruit.

Mr. Claudio Giannini – clown "Piuma": I read about Sai Baba in a weekly magazine in 1979, but I wasn't particularly interested. Following that, some of our neighbours, who had already been to Puttaparthi, gave my wife and I the book "The Holy Man and the Psychiatrist" by Dr. Samuel Sandweiss. The book made me curious and in August 1988, we decided to experience Baba's Ashram.

I have to confess that, personally, at the beginning of our stay I felt a strong sense of rejection due to the uncomfortable lodging, the smells and tastes so different from those I was used to. Then, some days later, I tried to open my heart to Baba and during *Darshan*, He called me for an interview and entered my heart like a ram, capturing me completely - He has never left me since.

Subsequently, my life has been transformed and even though in our society it's not always easy, I try, as much as possible, to put His Divine Teachings into practice.

Mr. Franco Borghetti – clown "Pepita": In the house of a couple of devotees, I saw a large picture of Sai Baba dressed in a white robe and a rose in His Hands. Those friends began to talk about Him with such sweetness that it left me very inquisitive. It was the beginning of a grand adventure!

In January 1990, I arrived at Puttaparthi. During the first *Darshan*, I wasn't really aware of what was happening around me until the buzzing of the people waiting calmed down and everyone pointed out that Baba was about to come out. Just then I felt a strong impulse to recite the most beautiful prayers that I knew: "The Magnificant" and the "Our Father".

Mr. Marino Marchi – clown "Squeaker": One day, it so happened that I overheard some people talking about Sai Baba. I didn't know of Him, but I was even more curious. So I got some books on Him and on Christmas Eve of 1991, I arrived at Prasanthi Nilayam. It was my first *Darshan* right on Christmas Eve. Upon seeing Him, the emotions were such that I wept for joy.

Since then, Baba has always been present in my heart and at least once a year, I feel it necessary to be physically close to Him.

Mr. Claude Macquet – clown "Bianchino": I became familiar with Baba through a friend who gave me the book by Dr. Samuel Sandweiss "The Holy Man and the Psychiatrist". I went to Puttaparthi for the first time in January 1995. During the first *Darshan*, upon seeing Baba, my curiosity was substituted by an overwhelming serenity of spirit and a strong sensation to have finally returned home!

Ms. Tiziana Mitrano – clown "Biancospina": Whenever I visited the home of a friend, I often saw pictures of Baba, books that talked about Him and

even some Vibhuti, but I didn't understand what it was. I was, however, very attracted by everything about India, but I didn't understand yet.

Then, in December 2003, I went with a group. Upon entering the Ashram, I began feeling moved, but I didn't comprehend anything yet. The next day, at 4 a.m., together with my group of women, I started towards Sai Kulwant Hall. We entered with the first row and I remember looking at the red carpet in front of me that was continuously being swept clean. Then, they began the *mantras* and Baba came out of His residence and walked towards us. I was in the first line and finally, for the first time, He looked directly into my eyes, my heart, and my soul, with an infinite and strong sweetness. His Hand has never abandoned me since then, and finally, I began to understand.

Ms. Emma Marcolin – clown "Ugolina": My first approach towards Baba was mainly through the practice of devotional chanting, and later I gained a deeper knowledge through His Divine Teachings. And finally I found answers to all my existential doubts. I went to Puttaparthi for the first time in July 2004 for the celebration of Guru Poornima, volunteering in the Western canteen. During my first *Darshan* I was very emotional and my heart was beating very hard. Upon seeing Him, tears began to pour. I observed Him as He got closer, and standing in front of me, He looked directly into my eyes with His sweet and powerful gaze as if to say: "Welcome!" It was an extraordinary experience that changed my life.

Mr. Pino Madera – clown "Pipino": I was at the studio of a fashion designer doing business where I saw a life-size picture of Baba. Curious, I asked who was that "Man" and the reply I got was that He was God. My first reaction to such a reply was a scoff; however, when I left that studio something inside me began to move. I felt the constant presence of Baba and I began to intuit that my life was about to change.

After about a year, in July 1986, I felt a strong pull to Puttaparthi. I remember that, still groggy from the long trip, I found myself at the Ashram not knowing what to do in order to meet Swami. I was confused and tired, I felt like crying, asking myself what was I doing there! I got myself to *Darshan* but I was so tired I could hardly keep my eyes open. Shortly, Baba arrived and I had with me letters given to me by Italian devotees. I was still trying to acclimatize myself when, looking up, I saw Baba in front of me Who, with an infinite sweetness, asked me to give Him the letters. I couldn't comprehend what was happening to me, but I felt like a child seeing his mother after a very long time.

Mr. Mauro Contini – clown "Tritolo": I heard about Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in 1990, when I saw short films that featured Him. Following that, I read some books that talked about Him, and one night I dreamt of Him. I understood that He was calling me. When I saw Him for the first time during *Darshan*, I felt such an emotion of love and peace as I had never felt until then. After that experience I have returned periodically to His Ashram and my faith has evolved.

One day I had the fortune of being able to hand Him a letter in which I expressed three wishes for my life: two have already been realized and the third has a long-term expiration date… above all it is in His hands. When I returned from that first trip, I cried at the thought of leaving that Abode of Supreme Peace, but in my heart I knew that He would always be with me.

SCINTILLATING MOMENTS WITH SWEET SAI - Part 2

By Mr. Mayur Pandya

An alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, Mayur joined the erstwhile Sri Sathya Sai Arts, Science and Commerce College in Brindavan, Bangalore in 1978 for his Bachelors in Commerce. Later, he pursued his Masters in Commerce in the Bangalore University. After Bhagavan unfurled the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1981, Mayur served as a lecturer in the Brindavan campus for a year.

Later, he moved to the Prasanthi Nilayam campus and completed his Ph. D in the area of Banking in 1989. After this, he served for a year and half in the Prasanthi Nilayam campus as a lecturer, and later, moved to the corporate sector, and since then has held managerial positions in various companies in Mumbai, Los Angeles and Vancouver. Currently, he works as a Technical Writer in the HSBC Bank of Canada. Additionally, he is also the President of the Vancouver Sai Centre.

This is the second part of Mayur's reflections, the first was published in the June 2008 issue.

Every room in the Mandir holds different memories for me, but more so, the interview room. In fact, within the interview room, there is another room which serves as the inner chamber for private interviews. Many a time, this inner room has also doubled as the place where Swami gives interviews to very eminent guests like the President of India, governors of states and the like. Memories of this private room are especially close to my heart, for Swami would often call me too along with another guest, and I would have the wonderful fortune of doing *padaseva* (serving His feet) to the Lord even as Swami sat talking to that devotee.

It so happened one day that a certain devotee was taking *pada namaskar*. As he got up, however, his back hit the coffee table behind and the glass broke. The devotee was profusely apologetic. But the all-merciful Bhagavan reassured him saying, "Don't worry. I will get it fixed." And Swami asked another devotee, instead, to get the coffee table fixed.

Treasured Tales from the Safe Room

The story now moved on to the safe room, reminiscent again of the many private sessions we had with Bhagavan. (The safe room was so called because there was a huge safe in there, apparently placed there even before the building was constructed.) In that room, there was a beautiful couch for Swami, around which we few senior students would often huddle in a sort of a horse shoe arrangement, even as Bhagavan would speak to us for long.

That morning, when Swami sat there on the sofa, just after He returned from the Sairam Shed (the erstwhile *darshan* area in Brindavan), Swami had about two hundred letters in His hand. Typically, what Swami would do is to simply keep the letters in a tray next to Him. That day too Swami put the bunch of letters down and looked at this devotee who had just got the coffee table repaired. Swami asked him, "How much did you spend on this furniture?" The devotee said, "No Swami, I don't want any money from Swami." But Swami insisted, "*Cheppu*" (Say.) So the devotee replied, "Swami, one thousand rupees." Swami looked at the devotee, then took the whole tray of 200 letters, and put it on His lap. The next few seconds, He flipped through them with His two fingers, picked one letter out from the middle and opened it. There were exactly ten notes of 100 rupees each! Swami then said, "You think I don't read the letters. The moment you think about something to write to Me, I already know it. Just for your satisfaction, I take the letters." What a brilliant way to proclaim His **massive omnipresence through a tiny missive**!

Almonds and His All-Mindful Concern

The safe room, indeed, holds secure for me a treasure trove of wonderful memories. Another beautiful incident that happened in the safe room was when somebody offered a whole box of almonds to Swami. The Lord looked into the box and said, "*Aba, aba*, too fattening! I cannot have this." Then He looked at me and said, "*Ye Gujarati ko dedo* (Give it to this Gujarati)." I was taken aback, elated yet wondering why Swami was singling me out. So I didn't say anything. Swami then picked up one almond from the box, broke it into two, ate one half and offered me the other half saying, "*Eh* Mayur, take." I was even more dazed, thinking what a fantastic thing Swami was giving me. That too, *prasadam* that He had directly partaken! As I was slow to respond, Swami asked, "Oh, because I put it in my mouth, you don't want to have it?"

I quickly reacted, saying, "No, no Swami," grabbed the almond, and put it in my mouth! That was, indeed, a very beautiful gesture from Bhagavan, and I took the almond even as He said, "You are part of Me now."

The almond connection continued, however. For, I had been having persistent headache for over two weeks. So I wrote a letter to Bhagavan saying, "Swami, I have this headache." Taking the letter, Swami asked, "Ah, how long?" I replied, "Two weeks, Swami" and the Lord said, "Oh, I see." After *darshan* when everybody had gone, Bhagavan took me up to His dining room, holding my hand all the way through the long corridor that opened to that room. He then asked the cook for a big packet of almonds. Handing the cover to me, Bhagavan said, "Soak four every night and then have them in the morning. Your low BP problem will go." Again, Swami escorted me back all the way to the steps to go down!

Words fail me each time I think of the incident. Swami could have simply given me the almonds and asked me to go. But He chose to walk me down the corridor, so concerned and full of feeling, holding my hands all the way as if to reassure and rejuvenate me. One could not but simply feel overwhelmed.

Restoring a Faint Heart Fabulously

I recollect another wonderful incident, one that occurred again in the safe room. As ever, we were all standing in a semi-circle and Swami was giving a beautiful discourse that went on for about an hour and a half. Suddenly, one of the students, a pretty frail boy, fainted, collapsing right there in front of Swami. Bhagavan, who was sitting on the diwan, got up mid-way through His discourse, went straight to the boy, and held his hand. In a manner very similar to restoring a patient's heartbeat by applying electric shock through defibrillators, Swami just touched the boy's hand and the boy was back again to consciousness, as if some energy had passed through him! And Swami said, "See, divine power!"

All of us were shocked because we saw that boy completely knocked out! The very next moment, Swami covered us with His *maya* (Illusion) again. For He said, "So, what was the last sentence I said in the discourse?" And all of us instantly started thinking about what Swami had said last. It was simply so amazing. That was one experience that has been to me a constant reminder of His Divine Powers, which we all tend to forget, lost in the charisma of His Cosmic Playfulness; that beneath those endless games of hide and seek that Swami envelops us in with the able assistance of *maya*, there lies, in essence, Divinity!

The Copious Reward of Selfless Concern

In those days, I would sleep just outside the safe room. That was my favorite spot, and each night when I lay down, I would think of the ceiling and Swami's bed, which I knew was just above that. That was my way of connecting with Swami. In the next room lay Mr. Ramabrahmam, the caretaker of the Mandir, who would sleep just next to the safe room. At that time, he was very ill with a certain malady and was moaning at night with pain. As I was about to sleep, I could not help feel sorry for him. And the thought came to my mind, "Swami, You are saving devotees far away and here is this person right under Your very roof. And You are not doing anything for him."

A few days later, a boy came up to me saying, "Swami is calling you upstairs, come running." When I went to His Presence, Swami, who was waiting there, said, "*Eh* Mayur, come here." As I knelt down next to Him, Swami said, "I am sending Ramabrahmam to Bangalore to get himself examined because he is suffering with so much pain. I want you to go with him."

I was wondering as there were so many senior students whom Swami could have sent, perhaps even the warden. But He picked me instead, although it did not strike me then. Nevertheless, I was thrilled to be sent on an errand. I went with Mr. Ramabrahmam for the examination, and when I returned, Swami asked for a detailed explanation. Swami usually retires by 7:00 – 7:30 p.m. But that day, by the time we returned from Bangalore, it was about 8:00 p.m., and Swami was still waiting up there. The staircase boy on duty bid me to hasten to Swami, who was calling me. When I went up to Swami, He

debriefed me like no one could. He asked me to explain exactly what the doctors had said, and when I was finally done, Swami said, "Take *namaskar*." As I bent down to touch His feet, Swami raised His feet in a very deft movement such that my hands landed up on the cushion instead of His feet. Swami then put His feet on my hands! With Swami's robe automatically covering His feet, nobody could really see where my hands were as I was taking the *namaskar*. It was, in fact, not a *namaskar* because Swami was pressing His feet on my hands. It was unusually long, about four to five minutes. Even as I lost track of time, Swami said, "*Eh*, get up, get up," telling the warden that I had gone to sleep!

Each time I think of this beautiful incident, I am only convinced that it was Swami's way of saying that He really appreciated the empathy that I felt for another human being; that Swami waits all the time for us to show that empathy and love for others. And when it comes spontaneously, He also blesses and rewards us in the same vein.

Herculean Care for a Humble Devotee

But there was a forgotten aspect to this incident which Swami took the pains to clarify to me in His unique way. For, a few weeks later, from this incident, Swami went to Ooty. Mr. Ramabrahmam, who was sleeping in that room, had woken up in the night to go to the wash room that was adjacent to his room. And he had fallen down, unknown to any of us. When we got up in the morning and went up to the washroom ourselves, Mr. Ramabrahmam said to us, "*Babu*, I fell down in the bathroom and Swami came and picked me up. He put me in the bed and sat with me all night. He has only just gone!" So I imagined myself sleeping, blissfully unaware of what was transpiring in the adjoining room, whereas Swami was there all night, despite the fact that He was physically present in Ooty! That is the kind of concern and love that Swami has for His devotee. I had, in my empathy, entertained a momentary misconception that Swami did not care about Mr. Ramabrahmam. But Swami proved me all wrong in a momentous revelation.

To Be Totally Lost in Love

I still remember another incident by the mandir window. In fact, our *darshans* of Swami by the window are some of our most cherished memories as students. Swami would come down the stairs, and as He came down in the afternoon or in the morning, each of us would place our face near the window, which was a nice curved window. It was 'prime real estate' because when Swami passed by the other side of the window, Swami's face was very close to us. There were three such windows which were open, barred only by a metal grill. So if Swami were to put His hands through, we could touch Swami too. It was very intimate because it was the only place where Swami would be face to face, looking into our eyes, as if Him searching our souls!

Occasionally, Swami would even stop by the window! This one time, Swami stopped there, and He looked into my face and said, "*Eh* Mayur, do you love Me?" I was taken aback by that question. I said, "Yes, Swami, I love you." And

Swami said, "No, all lies. If you really love Me, then you are lost in loving. You are not aware of that. The moment you are aware that you are (in the act of) loving Swami, that is not love." And He walked away.

It sort of put me into a dizzy to think, "Oh my god! What a high expectation of love!" We think we love Swami just by that emotion and by all that running after Him. But truly, Swami's concept of love is something that we will have to spend a life time understanding.

A Weighty Lesson in Witnessing

On another occasion, I had the privilege of going with Swami in the car. I was standing in the portico when Swami's car came up. Our then warden Mr. C. Sreenivas was sitting next to Swami. Just as the car was about to leave, Swami looked at me and asked me to take my seat in the car. So I sat down in the car, a Fiat car, as it went through the *darshan* lines and went out to Belathur village. Even as the vehicle headed through the village, I realized that nobody was talking in the car. So I looked behind, only to see Swami staring at me with His head tilted. Swami continued to stare without a blink. I turned back and again looked at Swami, and Swami was still staring at me but not saying anything.

So just to make some small talk to break my nervousness, I said, "Swami, at night when I sleep, I don't get sleep. I think about You, I yearn for You." But Swami said, "All lies. You sleep well and you snore too." Caught red-handed in a futile attempt to start a conversation, I immediately changed the topic and said, "Swami, how to control this mad mind?" Swami said, "The easiest thing in the whole world is to control the mind. The most difficult thing in the world is not to control the mind." So I was even more confused. Then Swami said, "*Choodu ra* (see)," and He took His handkerchief. He held the cloth and said, "All my fingers have to make so much effort to hold the handkerchief. So easy to let it go. When the mind is running, if you try to catch it and control it, that is when the problem comes. That is the difficult thing to do. Let it run, watch it as a witness and then it is easy to let it go." Swami continued saying, "What is this? Is this a handkerchief? This is not a handkerchief. It has got threads, so each thread is a thought. The moment the threads are gone, there is no handkerchief. The moment the thoughts are gone, there is no mind. That is how you have to do it." Thus, He gave a beautiful explanation that day to drive home a profound lesson.

Every moment spent with Swami has been a revelation. They are memories so precious and powerful and at the same time so sweet that it enriches every second of your life and ennobles your every act.

THE PRESENCE OF THE GREATEST POWER

By late Mr. Charles Penn

Born in Australia, Mr. Charles Penn traveled to the USA as a young boy and had a distinguished professional career as a writer, editor and publisher in America, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. He is an honoured biographee in "Who's Who in California". In 1964 he was drawn to Bhagavan Baba quite amazingly and had the rare opportunity of proximity with His Divine Master, both physically and metaphysically. Later, he along with his wife, Faith Penn, traveled throughout the USA and other countries disseminating the Love and Message of Bhagavan Baba and also authored many sterling Sai literature such as "Sai Ram", "My Beloved" and "Finding God".

This article appeared in the 'Homage Volume' offered to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba by the Sri Sathya Sai University on the auspicious occasion of His 65th birthday celebration on November 23, 1990 at Prasanthi Nilayam.

Ethereal Contact with the Eternal One

Many years ago when I had seldom experienced deep feelings that I could relate to the divine, it was far less likely for me to conceive my ability to see or understand God. Furthermore, for a student seeking divine understanding, as myself, I found it improbable to believe that I might find and have the exceptional privilege to be taught by a supreme power such as the Sai Avatar, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Once the initial relationship began there was no hesitation in proclaiming to myself the evident and truthful statement, "I believe!"

The knowledge that a world teacher, Supreme Being, was in a land on the opposite side of the world and who spoke Telugu, a language I did not understand, was never considered an unrealistic obstacle to my becoming His student. However, to be given lessons in English for my spiritual upliftment, at times on a moment to moment basis, and often including long question and answer sessions, became an unexpected and extraordinary practice. To have time and space cast aside and to have given to me the first four of twenty-five years' tuition on a divine scholarship basis without actually coming into personal contact has been a remarkable and priceless experience for me from Baba, my divine teacher, the "chancellor of a celestial university of higher learning".

What is, is! I discovered that the higher elements are used by Sai Baba. For example, to me His teachings incorporate full colour scenes played out to the end in heavenly vision form. Such "vision teachings" remain inscribed in my mind for years and years. An entire play or moving scene may be recalled at a moment's notice and expressed in minute detail so that His teachings can be

drawn upon for the upliftment of myself and others. At times, etherealized methods of communication are used, and viewed as a procedure within the higher realm.

A Beautiful Beginning

All this came about as a result of my life's turn-around culminating unexpectedly. It was June 1965, I reached for a small book on a table in the sitting room of my wife to be, Faith, and her mother Althea, at their home in Westwood, California.

Touching that book which was "Sathyam Sivam Sundaram," written by Prof. N. Kasturi, was for me like touching the fingers of God's outstretched hand. That momentary action changed my entire future. A glance at the photographs of Sai Baba as a boy, and looking at pictures of His mother and father, started to weave a web about me, a web I found shortly afterwards so beautifully powerful.

A simple action such as the one I took can vastly change a life. Something to marvel at indeed! If I were to predict the future and were asked what I envisioned for a seeker taking a similar singular action, I feel I would say that from that moment on his or her life could become most wondrous in a way never before contemplated.

As Prof. Kasturi's book unfolded in my mind, I had a desire to prepare a similar book omitting the Sanskrit but incorporating his translations of the Sanskrit. This would provide an American edition of the life of Sai Baba through His fortieth year which could be more easily understood and enjoyed in the West and by all English speaking people.

I wrote to Sai Baba. Can you imagine my writing to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in India and receiving a letter from Him granting permission to produce the book, with His blessings, and in addition conveying in the letter a wealth of great knowledge?

He endeared Himself with each word: "I am as near you as you are near Me." And, "When the name is remembered, the Form is evoked; when the Form is recollected, the Name is evoked. The name and the Form are inseparable. That is the meaning of Presence…."

Heavenly Wisdom Descends

I lengthened the periods of my meditation to hours and hours a week, and my meditations deepened. I grasped every chance to draw to me the Presence. From around the whole world I was near Him. Geographically, He wrote, there was no barrier. After a while I actually started to feel I was coming nearer and nearer to Him. Whenever I had the courage I would tell Him I was listening. First, ever so silently, I heard words about things I had never thought of in my life.

On a subsequent occasion, in order to remedy a foot problem I had, Sai Baba conveyed to me the instruction to grasp my foot firmly with my hands and, while doing so, to count to a hundred. I was to say His name with each number (one-Sai Baba, two-Sai Baba), I counted. I called it my "Sai Baba Count." In this way I was evoking the name. His Name was on my lips.

His teachings flowed and flowed. So entrenched He became in me, and I in Him. The time arrived when I felt I was "One with Him."

Turning my thoughts back to those glorious spiritual "young" days, I recall a lesson Sai Baba gave me with the inspiring words, "Every time the hand is lifted, lift it for Him." That teaching so infused me that I again wrote to Him and asked for further deeper guidance. He responded in a letter in August 1965: "If you lift the hand to serve, to help, to console, to encourage another man, you are lifting it for God, because in every man is God."

The wisdom of the heavens was surely ascending upon me. "Every man is God!" That was a great revelation to me. "Every man," yes, "every man." Then I knew, for the first time - God has to be everywhere in everything and in everyone.

Now a few months had gone by and I was continuing to be saturated with the Love of Sai Baba. Discourses were undiminishing from wherever He was. I asked Him many questions about many things that might help my spiritual progress.

I asked Him how one should be dressed and prepared for Brahmamarga, the path or way of life adopted by aspiring seekers who set their sights high to realize the Self in their quest for God. Eventually the gaze has to be turned inward to the true Self and the aspirants ascend the pathway to the state of lasting consciousness of God, the Infinite (Brahman).

Sai Baba explained to me that "Before starting on Brahmamarga and commencing your sadhana (spiritual practice), undress, disrobe. But not in the usual manner. The 'clothes' you cast off may vary in number. Some people may be more heavily garmented. Some may have already discarded unwanted 'apparel.' In whatever order you choose, cast off the 'clothing' of jealousy, hate, anger, pride, greed, desire... You know all the others. But you shall not be cold, for there is one 'garment' you leave on. That is the raiment of love. This one piece has many thicknesses to keep you warm and protect you on the coldest of nights. It will survive the greatest of storms, for what is this clothing of love? It is the love of joy, the love of giving, the love of survival, the love of living. Yes, My bhaktha (devotee), this one raiment is all you need when you come to Me in the quietude and stillness of your meditation, although you do not have to wait until then to come to Me, for I am always near."

Speaking from the Heart

A divine high point was reached when an official invitation was received by mail to attend the First World Conference of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Seva Organizations, to be held in Mumbai in May 1968. On the midnight of May 9, 1968, I had the great joy to meet my Lord in Human Form, in India. The incredible realization filled me - in four years the Sai Avatar and I had become ever so close. Our love was the same love, and God within God was the same God.

The knowledge that two people could inwardly communicate from one side of the world to the other was now less overwhelming - God unto God without physically traversing the world. Many other devotees know that this is possible and are able to rest in the knowledge that they can become One with the Lord. When the Sai Avatar makes it known that the divine contact is intact, devotees have the capability to rise to this higher realization. Achieving this goal overcomes many doubts and misgivings previously generated in the mind.

In appreciation for being given this boon, I have thanked Sai Baba for it on numerous occasions, including those when speaking from time to time to devotees attending Sai centers, conferences, retreats, and special occasions here and abroad. He has shown me the folly of reading from notes or from a prepared script. In my experience, everything spoken which one wishes to be efficacious must first be fully entrenched in the heart. How better can it be said than when it emanates from one's heart? Sai Baba has taught me to speak in this manner. When invited by Sai Baba to speak, and after basking in the joy of performing padanamaskar, I look up to Him and whisper, "I'll need your help, Swami." By this time inner joy has taken hold of the glorious moment as I hear Him say, "Yes, yes!"

There was the occasion of His fifty-seventh Birthday when, after the honor of garlanding Him, He whispered, "Char less (as he calls me), you would like to say a few words?" "Yes, yes, Swami," I replied. Rather slowly I approached the microphone at the podium. This brought me to a moment of great exhilaration. I faced the crowded Poornachandra Auditorium overwhelmed by His faith in me and my own inner feeling of His assurance. Simultaneously I was also fully aware that I had no preplanned speech, no great salient point I wanted to stress. The freedom from all this made the joy of the moment ever so precious. I looked at the vast audience, glanced lovingly at Swami, and His smile filled the moment. It is at times such as these that I know the seemingly long and precious moments serve their full purpose. I received a flashed inner direction from Him. "Seek the 'thread'." Just a small starting thread is needed to begin.

Baba - The Most Enigmatic Teacher

One requires deep insight to believe that our divine teacher, actually and ethereally, has thousands of students. I am astounded when I attempt to

comprehend that the Avatar is simultaneously teaching students in all languages the world over.

In this regard, during one of our visits to Prasanthi Nilayam, Sai Baba was granting interviews to a number of devotees in the Mandir, as is His practice almost every day. From our floor vantage point, just feet away and behind a curtain Sai Baba was talking to a young man from Spain. Sai Baba's stream of words flowed at an extremely fast pace. Later, outside, I met the man and mentioned to him, "How amazing it is that Swami can talk to devotees in any language. His talk to you, in Spanish, flowed incessantly, and you undoubtedly clung intently to each word." (We speak some Spanish and can recognize it.) The man looked at me in amazement and said, "He spoke to me in English!"

Reflecting, I say, "How Great Thou Art!" Here is a teacher who astounds and uplifts His students worldwide, assisting and blessing them in multitudinous ways. I look momentarily at myself, and with deep gratitude I see myself being transformed by Him, writing about the world's greatest power - the Sai Avatar.

GET INSPIRED

PRECIOUS TREASURES THAT WERE LOST…

There was a man who dreamt of buying five precious things spoken of in the entire world. He toiled day and night for a long time until his dream finally came true.

He put all the things he had bought into a big bag, and carried them along with him. There was an inwrought blanket of the finest wool, balm tea of the best quality ever, a book in delicate golden cover full of assorted wisdom, fine silver scales, and a golden key that could open any door.

Every morning, on his way to work, the man took his bag with him; every evening, he put the bag next to his bed when he went to sleep. The man woke up many a nights to check if the bag was still there. There were days when he even got up in the middle of the night and took all the things out of the bag to make sure they were all still there. He did not use any of these things as they were far too precious for him; he was afraid of damaging them. The bag was the dearest thing to this man.

One day, on his way back from work, the man walked into a park. He sat down on the bench where the warm rays of the Sun caressed him until he fell asleep. Upon waking up, the man discovered that the bag was gone! It was stolen. He was deeply sorrow-stricken; he had lost his precious belongings. The labour of many years disappeared without a trace. The thought of not having his prized possessions for the rest of his life made him massively depressed.

The man had a friend, who started to worry about him. He came to the man in apparent distress and asked, "What was in that bag?" The man explained that the bag contained an exquisite blanket of the finest wool. The friend then asked him: "Was the blanket soft? Did it caress your skin gently? Did it really give you warmth even in the coldest nights, just as everyone described it?" The man had no answer because he had never used the blanket himself. All he knew was that it was made of the finest wool, daintily embroidered and very expensive.

"What else was in your bag?" asked the friend. "The bag contained balm tea of the best quality in the world." His dear friend then asked, "Was the tea tasty? Did it really calm your mind as it was acclaimed to? Did it soothe away your worries and heal your body?" The man was without an answer yet again, as he had never drunk even a sip of it. All he knew about the tea was that it was balm tea of the choicest quality, and was really expensive.

"Was there any other thing in the bag?" the friend continued. The man told him that the bag also had a book of assorted wisdom in delicate golden cover. Was the book interesting? Is there a new lesson in that you would like to share? Did it help you progress in life?" This question remained unanswered

as well, because the man had never opened the book. All he knew was that it was a book of wise sayings in an elegant covering of gold, and was classy.

"Was there more in your bag?" the friend persisted. The man continued with his story that the bag held a pair of fine silver scales. "Did these scales really weigh things more accurately than the ordinary ones? Did they help you do your job much quicker and better? Was the silver warm or, perhaps, cold?" the friend asked again. The man seemed to be clueless because all he remembered about the scales was that they were made of diaphanous silver, and looked very elegant.

"What else had you put in the bag, my friend?" The man remembered the golden key that could open any door. "How many new doors did you open? What new discoveries did await you behind these doors? Were you overwhelmed when the key opened new worlds for you?" Sadly all the man knew was that the key was made of gold; that it could open any door, and it was a privilege to have that object.

When the man failed to answer the last question, the friend put his hand on man's shoulder and comforting him he said, "Don't grieve, my dear man, even less, worry, because those things in your bag are of no value to you if you have not used them. If you haven't used them, how can you know what joy and satisfaction they bring? If you haven't experienced the joy by using those things, you haven't lost anything. Even if you had ever used those precious things and let in the joy, you would have stayed rich even when you lost the bag; because no thief can steal your experience, feelings and joy from your heart. You've lost nothing, simply because you had nothing."

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba gives us Love (*prema*) – the inwrought blanket of the finest wool, calmness (*shanthi*) – the best quality balm tea, peacefulness (*ahimsa*) – the book in delicate golden cover full of wisdom, justness (*dharma*) – fine silver scales, and the truth (*sathya*) – the golden key that opens any door. We are rich and happy only if we have used these precious gifts. For when we have benefited from them, they remain in our hearts forever. They become our indelible property which no thief can ever steal. We become rich and richer. But if we never discover their true potential through real practice and experience, we are poor and poorer every day.

We have the greatest of wealth within us, let us harness it and lead a life of undisturbed love and bliss.

- By Ms. Rita Ivanova, Latvia

Illustrations: Ms. Lyn, New Zealand

CHARISMATIC KINDNESS

These words of Bhagavan Baba touched me when I first came across them: **"Do not judge others to decide whether they deserve your service. Find out whether they are distressed – that is sufficient credential. Do not examine how they behave towards others either, for they can certainly be transformed by love. Service should be for you a sacred vow, a *Sadhana*, a spiritual path. It is the very breath; it can only end when breath takes leave of you."** When I thought about these beautiful words long and hard, it occurred to me that there was someone I knew who lived them.

My grandmother still visits me in my dreams every once in a while. There certainly has to be a reason for this. Why does she still remember me when she's happily spending time in God's delightful company? She was my "Living Angel" till she died a few years ago, and now it's just "My Angel".

When my beautiful grandmother was in her mid-90s, (her unquestionable intelligence in tact and her sense of humour that just got better with age) she invited her sons to tea and asked them what they wished to keep as memories that she had lovingly preserved to feel her late husband's presence around her. That my grandfather was near-perfect as a human being is another story.

Whilst my uncles took their pick, my father had just one request. That happened to be all the diaries that my grandmother had filled rather religiously over the years. Diaries of a mother in her mid-90s do sound like a treasure now, but who would have thought of it at the right minute! Like any mother who can read her child's mind, my grandmother knew what my father meant when he requested her for nothing more than her "very long" journal. She knew that her son could get comfort from no other material gift.

After my grandmother's demise and the final rites done, my father returned with his mother's last gifts - the numerous diaries. My sister and I were moved at what my father held most dear to his heart. It was evident to us where my father's goodness came from. My father began to read to us from those pages. An account of a certain day in her life just months before she passed away was a revelation. My sister and I found it hard to fight back tears as my misty-eyed father read this chapter to us.

One page pretty much summed up what my grandmother 'was about': the rarest form of goodness that I probably will never get to see again - ever. Among her list of 'visitors' were people who needed help with money or jobs or counsel or who popped by for her sheer lovely company. One woman in particular was a regular who liked to think my granny's house an extension of hers. This obviously wasn't terribly pleasant for the rest of the family and there was a reason for it! This face that became a little too familiar came across as a bit annoying; she was rude and insensitive, always spoke ill of people when she opened her mouth to speak, was discourteous and never hesitated when offered a meal or a cup of tea. Now everyone around my grandmother

wondered for years why she never had a bad word about 'this guest'. Funnier still was the fact that my grandmother served her a meal each time she turned up and chatted to her with the same smile that she had when we were around.

"It's thankless to be good to people! I can be kind and generous occasionally but to put up with someone's not-so-brilliant company everyday is no great joy." Haven't we all thought to ourselves this way on some days if not everyday?

My father came to the point in the diary that had these golden words: "For years people have asked me why I am nice to this human being. I do know for a fact that she is quite an unpleasant person and has given reasons to people to shun her. She even confessed to me that she thought of herself to be a deplorable character. Instead of judging her, I have thought of how sad and lonely she must be. **If I show her the door, which is perhaps the easiest thing to do to someone like her, who would ever befriend her, give her a meal, or even spend five minutes with her?"**

My sister and I looked at each other; trying not to show tears. My father noted that we couldn't believe our ears. He paused for a minute, took a long breath and continued. **"I wanted her to know she had my place to come over to whenever she needed anything at all."**

I now realize why I see my grandmother in my dreams. She's always telling me never to forget to be good. Like my father tells us: "It's good to be great, but it's great to be good." My grandmother really got one thing right and practised it to perfection: **"Love all, serve all; help ever, hurt never."**

She lived all her 99 years on this planet doing the same old good deeds without any hint of boredom or complaints. How did she manage to remember to feed birds and animals, random strangers who showed up at her doorstep, or friends or family, actually anyone and everyone, before her meals and other times of the day – and this, every single day of her long life? It baffles me, it humbles me; my heart swells with pride when I tell myself that she was my granny. Even a candy from her had a special sweetness to it. Her beautiful smile with which she constantly shared made her generosity even more striking.

Bhagavan's loving words come to mind. **"Give joy to all. Practicing Selfless Love is the way to achieve this ideal. When Love can bring even God near you, how can it fail where human beings are involved? God dwells in a pure heart; shining in His innate splendour of Wisdom, Power and Love. Start the day with Love. Spend the day with Love. Fill the day with Love. End the day with Love. That is the way to God."**

By Mrs. Anisha Bordoloi

THE MUD AND THE MIND

Buddha, for all of us, symbolizes wisdom, compassion and absolute reality. Equanimity of mind is best understood when we observe Buddha's reactions to events and non-events in his life. His sense of compassion moves you with its sheer purity and simplicity.

Let us share with you a day from the life of Buddha.

Buddha, in one of his travels, was going from one town to another along with his disciples. The Holy One's company, His observations, suggestions, and advice were gems of wisdom that His disciples were blessed to receive. As this team traversed some distance, they came upon a lake. Buddha voiced His need for some water as He was thirsty. "Do get me some water from the lake as I am thirsty."

The disciple walked toward the lake to a point where he could fetch some water when he saw a bullock cart cross the lake resulting in the lake turning to a murky brown. "Oh no," he thought, rather disappointed about the ill-timed passing by of the bullock cart. "How do I take this muddy water to Buddha? What will He say to this?"

He walked back to Buddha not looking too happy and said to him, "Buddha, this water isn't good to drink. It is dreadfully muddy." Buddha waited for about a half hour and sent him back to the same lake to get Him a bit of the same water!

The disciple visibly puzzled walked back quite sure the lake wouldn't change. A closer look showed that the lake was indeed still addled. He was right; the lake didn't change colour in that time at all. There was no way he was going to take this water back to Buddha!

He marched back to his master. He was received with the same calm and waited for a while. Buddha told him to go to the lake yet again. The disciple knew not what Buddha had in mind as he found the whole exercise a bit odd.

The lake that was mucky and filthy all the while since the bullock cart left seemed to be a totally different one this time – a clean, clear lake with not a hint of brown! The mud nicely settled into a bed of sediment; it required no skill to fill his pot of crystal clear water for Buddha. Feeling triumphant after more than a single attempt, he walked back pleased to have gone back on a successful note.

Buddha in his quintessential serene look, accepted the water, and turned to this disciple and said, "Did you see what it took to get me some clean water? Nothing! You just let it be. You gave it time and what happened? The mud raced to the bottom of the lake leaving you with clean water!"

"The same holds true for your mind as well. Just let it be. All it needs is a little

bit of your time. It will quieten down on its own. It requires no effort from you to still it. It eventually happens with the help of a little time. It is effortless."

Just how supremely powerful is this simple message? The disciple was obviously stupefied. The peace of mind that seems to elude most of us on this planet actually is right here for all of us to experience. "It is **actually** effortless." It isn't a wearisome exercise that we think only few can get results for. It is **actually** that simple for all of us!"

Bhagavan Baba says, **"Be like the tortoise that can live in water or on land. That is to say, cultivate the inner calm that helps you remain with the thought of God, whether you are alone or in a crowd. The true inner solitude (e*kantha*) is when you are not aware of the crowd around you. When you are able to remain undisturbed by others, then you have perfect inner solitude."**

Illustrations: Mrs. Vidya, Kuwait

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ ON SAINTS AND HOLY MEN - I

*In general, the term **Saint** refers to someone who is exceptionally virtuous and holy. It can be applied to both the living and the dead and is an acceptable term in most of the world's popular religions. The Saint is held up by the community as an example of how we all should act, and his or her life story is usually recorded for the edification of future generations.*

Swami says: "Learn from the saints and sages who have realized the Truth about the path you shall tread and the goal you have to attain." In the current quiz we take you through the lives of many such ideal men and women who have become lighthouses of inspiration and direction for generations to come.

1. In Islam, a **Sufi** is one who is a lover of Truth, who by means of love and devotion moves towards the Truth, towards the Perfection which all are truly seeking, and who dedicates himself to the quest after mystical union (or, better said, reunion) with his Creator from whom he has been cut off and become aloof – and his longing and desire to restore it.

Jalalud'din Rumi is one of the world's most revered mystical Sufi poets, whose outpourings capture the hearts of spiritual seekers because of their depth and beauty.

For Rumi, religion was mostly a personal experience and not limited to logical arguments or perceptions of the senses. "The religion of love is separate from all forms of religions. Lovers are of one nation and one religion – love. And that is God."

In essence, what was the nature of Rumi's teachings through his poetry?

A. Universal
B. Ethnic
C. Diverse
D. Secular

2. A **Tulku** is an enlightened Tibetan Buddhist Lama who is believed to be the manifestation of the '*Bodhisattva*' - of Compassion, who is consciously determined to take birth, often re-incarnate many times, to serve the people.

Dalai Lama means Ocean of Wisdom. The current Dalai Lama, is often called "His Holiness" (HH) by Westerners. **His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso**, is the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people.

Born to a peasant family, His Holiness was recognized at the age of two, in accordance with Tibetan tradition, as the reincarnation of his predecessor the 13th Dalai Lama.

How do the Tibetans normally refer to His Holiness, the current XIVth Dalai Lama as?

A. The Saint of all Saints
B. The Greatest Philosopher
C. The Wish-Fulfilling Gem
D. The Most Needed One

3. In Jainism, when a person renounces the worldly life and all the attachments, and is initiated into monk hood or nun hood, the man is called *Sadhu, Shraman* or *Muni* and the woman is called *Sadhvi, Shramani*, or *Arya*. However, the chief among saints, the topmost in Jain hierarchy of saints is called **Acharya**.

Acharya Bhikshu was one of the great revolutionary saints of Jainism. He was a staunch disciple of Lord Mahavir and completely immersed his life on the path given by Him. In pursuit of finding Truth, he sacrificed material goals, honor and luxuries and studied and analyzed the various disciplines of the Jain religion thoroughly and on this basis, compiled his own ideologies and principles of the Jain way of life.

In the initial phase of his spiritual revolution, he had 13 saints,13 followers and 13 basic rules. This coincidence resulted in *"Terapanth"* – "*tera*" represented the number 13, *panth* meaning religious order.

What was the most important principle observed and stressed upon in this religious order of *Terapanth* that Acharya Bikshu propagated?

A. Devotion
B. Dedication
C. Self-Discipline
D. Compassion

4. Living a hidden, simple life of prayer, **St. Therese** was gifted with great intimacy with God. Through sickness and dark nights of doubt and fear, she remained faithful to God, rooted in His merciful love. Christians around the world came to know Therese through her autobiography, "**Story of a Soul**". She described her life as a "little way of spiritual childhood." She lived each day with an unshakable confidence in God's love. "What matters in life," she wrote, "is not great deeds, but great love."

Therese lived and taught a spirituality of attending to everyone and everything well and with love. She believed that just as a child becomes enamored with

what is before her, we should also have a childlike focus and totally attentive love. Therese's spirituality is of doing the ordinary, with extraordinary love.

What was St. Therese also popularly known as?

A. God's Beloved Child
B. Little Flower of Jesus
C. Messenger of Love
D. Heavenly Star

5. Saint Kabir is one of the major inspirations behind Sikhism. His name, 'Kabir', is often interpreted as Guru's Grace. A substantial amount of Kabir's verses (*dohas*) are pious songs sung in deep meditation and are present - about 500 of them - in the Sikh scripture, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, that is considered the living Guru by the followers of Sikhism.

What method of attaining salvation did Kabir advocate the most in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib?

A. He insisted on forming a special group amongst Sikhs.
B. He created a special mantra for all his followers.
C. He advocated meditation and isolated worship.
D. He recommended everyone to find a true Perfect Spiritual Master.

6. For Hindus, it is extremely difficult to find a parallel to the wonderful **Mirabai**, a saint, philosopher, poet and sage. She was a princess, but she abandoned the pleasures and luxuries incident to her high station, and chose instead, a life of poverty, austerity, renunciation and solitude. She was a magnanimous soul whose life had a singular charm of extraordinary beauty.

Mira's poured her devotion to her beloved God, Lord Krishna, through compositions of powerful songs of intense faith, courage and love. Bhagavan Baba often remembers one of her popular prayers:

"*I went deep into the ocean of Samsara and caught hold of the pearl of Your divine name. How can I allow it to slip away from my hand? I will safeguard this 'pearl' even at the cost of my life."*

Towards the end of her life, when Maharana, her husband, asked her to leave the Krishna Temple located in the palace, Mira in all agony and anxiety went to Dwaraka. And upon reaching there she found the temple doors of the city closed. What happened next?

A. Mira banged her head on the doors of the temple and lo and behold! Lord Krishna appeared before her.

B. Mira slumped at the door of the temple and spent the whole night beseeching her Lord to have mercy on her.
C. Mira heard a heavenly assurance from Lord Krishna that all will be well and returned to her palace the next morning.
D. Seeing Mira at the door of the temple, the temple priest opened the door immediately and served her food and comforted her.

7. A group of devoted young seekers, led by **Mullá Husayn**, set out from the holy city of Karbilá (near Baghdad) in search of the Promised One, a Bahá'í Messianic figure, whose coming had been prophesized for more than a thousand years.

On reaching Shiraz, Mullá Husayn was approached by a young man wearing a green turban, an indication that the wearer was a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. The stranger invited Mullá Husayn to his home. After being asked by him as to what he was doing in Shiraz, Mullá Husayn replied that he was searching for the Promised One.

The young man then asked how would the Promised One be recognized, to which Mullá Husayn replied, "He is of a pure lineage, is of illustrious descent, is endowed with innate knowledge and is free from bodily deficiency."

To the shock of Mullá Husayn, when the young man declared, "Behold, all these signs are manifest in Me." How did Mullá Husayn react?

A. He was angry and hurt.
B. He grilled Him with questions.
C. He felt possessed of courage and power.
D. He fell unconscious.

8. Zarathushtra used fire as the central symbol of his teachings, and the 'fire guardians' became Zoroastrian priests. ***Dastur*** are high priests and in addition to being learned in the entire *Avesta* (Holy Scripture) and proficient in conducting all the ceremonies, *Dasturs* are leaders, administrators, spiritual guides and teachers.

Revered Priest of Priests, Dr. Dastur Maneckji N. Dhalla, whose 'way of life' was an object-lesson to humanity, and whose day-to-day life-style shaped a living, loving volume of ethical import was the orator and speaker eagerly sought for speaking engagements all over India, UK, and the US. When he rose to speak, his countenance radiated light. He spoke with flaming enthusiasm and animation, stirring up religious enthusiasm among his hearers. He held his audience spellbound and his listeners felt that their souls had awakened to a new life.

How many major books did the genius Dastur M.N. Dhalla write on the Zarathushti religion?

A. 9
B. 18
C. 27
D. 36

9. According to Jewish tradition, God gave both the Written Law (Torah) and the Oral Law (additional laws and customs meant to be passed down from teacher to student). "The Law" in Judaism refers primarily to Biblical Law, given to the Israelites by God through Moses, as well as interpretations of the meaning and application of those rules.

The ***Tannaim*** were the Rabbinic sages, and as teachers of the Oral Law, were direct transmitters of passing it from teacher to student. According to tradition, the *Tannaim* were the last generation in a long sequence of oral teachers that began with Moses.

Since for centuries, only the Torah appeared as a written text, fearing that the oral traditions might be forgotten, Rabbi **Yehudah HaNasi** undertook the mission of compiling them in what became known as the *Mishnah*.

What does the title "Nasi" mean in his name Rabbi **Yehudah HaNasi?**

A. Chosen One
B. A Prince
C. Wealthiest One
D. Enlightened One

10. Narendra, reverently later known as **Swami Vivekananda** (Vivekananda means 'joy of discrimination'), always remembered to mention the name of his pious mother Bhuvaneshawari Devi, as the one who in his childhood, played a very important role in his spiritual development. One of the sayings of his mother he quoted often in his later years was, "Remain pure all your life; guard your own honor and never transgress the honor of others. Be very tranquil, but when necessary, harden your heart."

When young Vivekananda showed great inclination towards spirituality and God realization, he searched for a man who could directly demonstrate the reality of God. He finally came to Ramakrishna Paramahansa and became his disciple. As a Guru, Ramakrishna taught him that all religions are true, and service to man was the most effective worship of God.

Living by such divine principles, he came to America and spoke as an unknown monk at the World Parliament of Religions. Instead of addressing the audience as "Ladies and Gentlemen", which words did Swami Vivekananda use to address the audience which gained a standing ovation?

A. "Embodiments of Love"
B. "Sincere Seekers of God"

C. "Brothers and Sisters"
D. "Divine Souls of this Congregation"

ANSWERS:

1A. Universal.

The teachings of Rumi are Universal in nature. Rumi's visions, words, and life teach us how to reach inner peace and happiness so we can finally stop the continual stream of hostility and hatred, and achieve true, global peace and harmony.

What can I do, Submitters to God? I do not know myself.
I am neither Christian nor Jew, neither Zoroastrian nor Muslim,
I am not from east or west, not from land or sea,
not from the shafts of nature nor from the spheres of the firmament,
not of the earth, not of water, not of air, not of fire.
I am not from the highest heaven, not from this world,
not from existence, not from being…..
He is the first, he is the last, he is the outer, he is the inner.
Beyond "He" and "He is" I know no other.
I am drunk from the cup of love, the two worlds have escaped me.
I have no concern but carouse and rapture.
If one day in my life I spend a moment without you
from that hour and that time I would repent my life.
If one day I am given a moment in solitude with you
I will trample the two worlds underfoot and dance forever.

2C. The Wish-Fulfilling Gem.

Tibetans normally refer to His Holiness as the Wish-Fulfilling Gem, or simply, *Kundun*, meaning The Presence.

During his travels abroad, His Holiness has spoken strongly for better understanding and respect among the different faiths of the world. Towards this end, His Holiness made numerous appearances in interfaith services, imparting the message of universal responsibility, love, compassion and kindness.

"*The need for simple human-to-human relationships is becoming increasingly urgent . . . Today the world is smaller and more interdependent. One nation's problems can no longer be solved by itself completely. Thus, without a sense of universal responsibility, our very survival becomes threatened. Basically,*

universal responsibility is feeling for other people's suffering just as we feel our own. It is the realization that even our enemy is entirely motivated by the quest for happiness. We must recognize that all beings want the same thing that we want. This is the way to achieve a true understanding, unfettered by artificial consideration."

"This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness."

3C. Self-Discipline.

Acharya Bikhsu revolutionized the various principles which had become meaningless with the passing of time. To organize and stabilize this religious order, *Terapanth*, he propagated the ideology of one guru and brought to an end the concept of self-discipleship. In this way, his ideology of one Acharya, one principle, one thought and similar thinking became the ideal for other religious sects. He showed the importance of discipline, purity and self-control.

It was this way of life that was demonstrated by Acharya Bhikshu that self-discipline became the foundation principle of *Terapanth*.

Acharya Bhikshu showed the way from desire to desirelessness. He said the common man should understand and practise true religion which would take him to the path of salvation. His followers piously referred this great visionary monk as 'Swamiji'.

4B. Little Flower of Jesus.

Therese saw the seasons as reflecting the seasons of God's love affair with us. She loved flowers and saw herself as the "little flower of Jesus," who gave glory to God by just being her beautiful little self among all the other flowers in God's garden. Because of this beautiful analogy, the title "little flower" remained with St. Therese.

"Yes, my Beloved, it is thus that my life's brief day shall be spent before Thee. No other means have I of proving my love than to strew flowers; that is, to let no little sacrifice escape me, not a look, not a word, to avail of the very least actions and do them for Love. I wish to suffer for Love's sake and for Love's sake even to rejoice; thus shall I strew flowers. Not one shall I find without shedding its petals for Thee...and then I will sing, I will always sing, even if I must gather my roses in the very midst of thorns - and the longer and sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song." *Story of A Soul, Chapter XI*

5D. He recommended everyone to find a true Perfect Spiritual Master.

Sant Kabir believed that being one with God is the ultimate aim of every individual. **He showed that the path of permanent salvation could only be attained with the blessings of a "Satguru" (true Perfect Spiritual Master).**

One of Saint Kabir's most popular quotes is:

"When you came into this world, everyone laughed while you cried. Do such work, that they cry while you laugh when you are gone."

During a Divine Discourse in 1976, Swami spoke on this holy saint thus: "Kabir, the great mystic-poet, sang, 'Here are my prostrations to the bad. Here are my prostrations to the good.' When asked why he offered prostrations to the bad along with the good, he replied, 'I prostrate before the bad so that they might leave me alone; I do the same before the good, so that they might remain near me always."

6A. Mira banged her head on the doors of the temple and lo and behold! Lord Krishna appeared before her.

During a Divine Discourse in 2006, Swami spoke on her intense devotion to Lord Krishna: "When Mirabai was asked to leave the Krishna temple in the palace by the Maharana, she was full of anxiety, thinking, "How can I leave my dear Lord Krishna and go away!" But her unflinching faith in Krishna developed the firm conviction in her, "Krishna Himself would come along with me."

She prayed to Lord Krishna, "Oh, Lord! I obtained the precious pearl of Divine Name after a great effort. Please bless me that I do not lose this invaluable pearl." Chanting the name of Krishna incessantly, she reached Dwaraka. However, she found the doors of the temple closed. **Unable to bear the agony of separation from her dear Lord Krishna any more, she banged her head against the doors of the temple. Lo! And behold! The doors of the temple opened and Lord Krishna appeared before her.** After having *Darshan* of her dear Lord, Mirabai merged in Him."

7C. He felt possessed of courage and power.

Mullá Husayn expressed: "This Revelation, so suddenly and impetuously thrust upon me, came as a thunderbolt…the knowledge of His Revelation had galvanized my being! **I felt possessed of such courage and power that were the world, all its peoples and its potentates, to rise against me, I would, alone and undaunted, withstand their onslaught.**

"The universe seemed but a handful of dust in my grasp. I seemed to be the Voice of Gabriel personified, calling unto all mankind: "Awake, for lo! The morning Light has broken. Arise, for His Cause is made manifest. The portal of His grace is open wide; enter therein, O peoples of the world! For He who is your promised One is come!"

Mullá Husayn became the Báb's first disciple. Within five months, seventeen other disciples had independently recognized the Báb as a Manifestation of God. The "**Letters of the Living"** was a title provided by the Báb to the first eighteen believers in his mission who became disciples of the Bábí Religion and were given the task of spreading the new faith.

8A. 9 major books.

Dastur M.N. Dhalla taught that religion is a thing of the heart, not of the head. **He was the genius that flowered in his nine major books and countless papers on Zarathushti religious literature, history and theology.** He served, not only as a ceremonial *dastur*, but also a scholar and teacher, for over 45 years until his death.

"No thinking man's own idea of God and religion, at all times and in all conditions of life, is ever the same. For everybody's views on religion, then, it is not possible ever to be alike. Monotonous would our world become, if all thought equally and in the same way without ever differing in religious beliefs and practices from one another. Nature shines in her luxuriant glory because of the wide variety of her form and colour and beauty. So do there bloom and blossom in the garden of the spirit pervading mankind, foliage and flowers of all shades and grades of devotion and religious emotions."

9B. A Prince.

In Judaism, the title "*Nasi*" is often translated, in accordance with its historic meaning, as "Prince". As Nasi, he became very wealthy, comparable to Roman rulers. But he gave much of his wealth to the support of the poor. He is also referred to as "Rebbi," Teacher par excellence, and as "Rabbeinu HaKadosh," or, Our Holy Rabbi.

Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi was best known as the chief redactor and editor of the Mishnah in its final form. In addition to redacting the Mishnah, Rebbi and his court also ruled on which opinions should be followed, though the rulings do not always appear in the text.

It was said of him, "From the days of Mosheh Rabbeinu till Rabbeinu HaKadosh, there was never found great Torah knowledge combined with great wealth."

10C. "Brothers and Sisters."

Swami Vivekananda chose, in obedience to a higher call, service to man as his mission on earth. **He is best known for his inspiring speech beginning with "Brothers and Sisters of America", through which he introduced Hinduism at the Parliament of the World's Religions at Chicago in 1893**.

During the 1972 Summer Showers, Swami applauded Swami Vivekananda: "When Swami Vivekananda introduced a new form of address at the Congress of Religions in Chicago, **instead of addressing them as "Ladies and Gentlemen", he addressed them as "Brothers and Sisters"**. It was quite new to the foreigners, and they were so much touched and moved by this gesture that they applauded him incessantly for fifteen minutes. Of course, nowadays too, we are addressing the audience as sisters and brothers, but that feeling is not there in our hearts even for the time we are on the platform. What we do not feel in our hearts should not be expressed outwardly. We must give place to true feelings in our hearts and we must try to practice good things in our life."

QUIZ ON DIVINE DISCOURSES ON EDUCARE

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word 'educate' has its origin from the Latin word 'educare' which is related to 'educere' or 'educe', meaning: to bring out or develop from latent or potential existence.

Bhagavan tells us that true education is far more than just filling our head. It must: "Promote good and truthful feelings, good conduct, righteous action, and justice." The process of education must bring out the human values latent in every individual and furthermore and most importantly lead us to realise our true spiritual nature.

Over the last few decades, through His Divine Discourses, Bhagavan has inspired humanity to foster a system of education that focuses more on the heart than the head. The present quiz is based on these divine teachings, which Baba has mercifully bestowed on a far erring world.

1. In a Divine Discourse delivered in 2005, Swami gave us a simple explanation on **Educare**: "What is **educare**? **Educare** is that which brings out the latent divinity in a human being. Divinity is also known as consciousness. It is only because of the consciousness present in him that every individual is able to know the nature of the world around him. But, unfortunately, no one is able to recognize this all-pervading consciousness. In fact, it is only this consciousness that is protecting every human being. In spite of one's education and scholarship, one is not able to realize this truth.

Education is negative and artificial, whereas **educare** is positive. People are going to foreign countries to acquire such artificial education. What is the use of acquiring such education? Instead, everyone should strive to acquire **educare**. One need not go to foreign countries for acquiring **educare**. It wells up from within and protects the person constantly."

According to Swami, what is the gift of **Educare**?

A. It enables us to be motivated.
B. It promotes harmony in our relationships.
C. It leads to realization of our true nature.
D. It instills courage to achieve all our goals.

2. In a Divine Discourse from 1999, Swami enlightens us concerning more aspects of educare: "What is *vidya*? It is derived from the root word *vid*, meaning, 'to know'. *Vidya* is termed as education in English. The term education has its origin in the Latin word ***educare***, which means 'to elicit'. ***Educare*** has two aspects, the worldly and the spiritual. Worldly education imparts knowledge pertaining to the physical world. Spiritual education is essential, without which human life has little value."

Elaborating on the differences of the two types of education what does Swami advise?

A. To aspire for excellence in one, this will eventually lead to gaining excellence in both.
B. To strive to be good, not great.
C. Never compromise on academic degrees.
D. To focus exclusively on spiritual knowledge.

3. In a Divine Discourse delivered on Jan 14, 2006, Swami expands on each individual value of **Educare**: "**Educare** is bringing out or manifesting the human values of *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti, Prema* and *Ahimsa* by spiritual practice. The first among the five human values is *Sathya* (truth). Who is the author or who spoke and taught about this *Sathya*? It is said *Manasyekam vachasyekam karmanyekam mahatmanam* (those whose thoughts, words and deeds are in perfect harmony are noble ones). Such noble souls have preached this truth since time immemorial. *Sathya* (truth) manifests from one's own heart. The second value is *Dharma* (righteousness)."

According to Swami, while *Sathya* originates from the heart, where does *dharma* originate from?

A. From obeying one's parents.
B. From serving a Guru.
C. From reading spiritual teachings.
D. From adhering to truth.

4. In a Summer Shower Discourse delivered in 2000, Swami proclaims the need for appreciating True Education: "To begin with, students must appreciate the greatness and the grandeur of True Education. Such education alone is real beauty, a hidden treasure of mankind, and an unfailing companion when one travels overseas. It is also the Teacher of all teachers. In the Court of Kings, it is knowledge and not wealth that commands respect. He is a pitiable fool, who does not aspire for such Eternal Knowledge.

"Students of today are not making any efforts to understand the sanctity of education. What precisely is the type of education that students must acquire? What is it that contributes to true progress and the real prosperity of mankind? What is it that one expects from educational establishments? It is the foremost duty of students to enquire into all such questions and share their findings with others."

Besides bookish learning, for the students to be able to appreciate the value of true education, what other requirement does Bhagavan propound?

A. Team work.

B. A deep desire to attain Grace from God.
C. Knowledge of specialised skills and talents.
D. Cultural refinement

5. In a Divine Discourse from 2000, Swami asks: "If a question is put, what is education? People say, it is the acquisition of knowledge. But it is not merely the acquisition of knowledge; it must be in action. What is the end of education? Character is the end of education. What is the essence of education? Concentration is the essence of education. What is the aim of education? The aim of education is not only cultivating human qualities, but attaining divinity."

According to Swami, how important a part does character play in our life?

A. Character is three-fourths of our life.
B. Character leads to creativity.
C. Character leads to discrimination.
D. Character makes people famous.

6. In a Divine Discourse from 2004, Swami helps teachers: "**Educare** brings out our latent sacred values. Values are not to be taught but manifested. Mere accumulation of information from various books is not **educare**; it is education. **Educare** is the blossoming of the Divine Lotus in our heart. **Educare** enables us to be not just receptors but vibrators and radiators of values to all creation. Values are to be translated into action. That means, both precept and practice are equally important."

According to Swami, while teaching **educare**, what should be the goal of every teacher?

A. To make each student able to study by themselves.
B. To bring out the latent powers in each student.
C. Students should be able to teach **educare** to others.
D. They must succeed in all their endeavours in life.

7. In a Divine Discourse from 2001, Swami clarifies certain topics related to **educare**: "What is the relation between religion, spirituality and **educare**? It is surprising to Me to note that you have been unable to recognize the relation between religion, spirituality and **educare**. First and foremost understand what religion is - 'Religion is realization'. Only when you realize the truth about yourself, will you understand what religion is.

Spirituality is not merely singing *bhajans*, performing worship, going to temples or on pilgrimages or undertaking any other good activity. Spirituality is recognizing the oneness of all beings. To recognize unity in diversity is spirituality. The basic truth to be recognized is that there is only one *Atma* in all beings. The questions and doubts arise when you see multiplicity in unity."

After explaining more on religion, spirituality and **educare**, what was Swami's conclusion?

A. All three are one and the same.
B. We should never mix them up.
C. We must respect all differences and treat them alike.
D. We must give importance to spirituality the most.

8. In a Divine Discourse from 1998, Swami elevates our consciousness higher: "Resolve to make the best use of the education that you have received. Respect and revere elders and set an ideal to humanity. Let your conduct befit the degrees you have acquired. There is nothing great in obtaining good marks - see that you do not invite bad remarks.

"In the modern system of education, a student is declared 'pass' if he secures just 35% of marks. What about the balance 65%? If a person completes only 35 out of 100 tasks assigned to him, can you call him successful? One should secure 100% marks. That is true education. Attaining high marks is not the aim of education. Education is meant to broaden the mind. Education and discrimination should go hand in hand. The prosperity of the nation depends on the progress you make in the field of education.

"Knowledge can be classified into five categories: bookish knowledge, superficial knowledge, general knowledge, discrimination knowledge, and _____knowledge."

A. Spiritual knowledge
B. Self-knowledge
C. Practical knowledge
D. Worldly knowledge

9. In a Divine Discourse from 1999, Swami awakens us further: "Persons with numerous degrees are thought to be highly educated. Such proliferation of degrees is mere quantitative attainment. But what we need is quality. One teaspoonful of cow's milk is better than barrels of donkey's milk. Good behavior, good intellect, commitment to truth, devotion, discipline, sense of duty — these are the six aims of education. Who is teaching all these today? We find that students are heroes in bookish knowledge and zeroes in practice. This is not true education. You have to become heroes in practice as well."

According to Swami, besides helping man earning a living, ultimately, what should one experience from education?

A. Equanimity
B. Sense of loyalty towards society.
C. A Charitable disposition.
D. Bliss

10. In a Divine Discourse from 2000, Swami helps us further understand the sanctity of **educare**: "The word '**Educare**' has a sacred inner meaning. That which is manifested by '**Educare**' cannot be seen by the eyes, cannot be heard by the ears and cannot be felt by the mind. But all that education confers can be seen, heard and felt. Education fosters desires and leads to rebirth, whereas '**Educare**' confers immortality. There will be no rebirth. The innate divine qualities like truth, righteousness peace, patience, forbearance and love cannot be seen by the naked eye and they lead to no birth. Modern education is giving rise to desires, which form the basis for rebirth. You need to develop detachment to control desires."

According to Swami, what can lead us to detachment?

A. Focusing on our goals.
B. An optimistic outlook on life.
C. Listening to our Inner Voice.
D. Performing sacred deeds.

ANSWERS:

1C. It leads to realization of our true nature.

Swami says: "Realizing one's innate divinity is **educare**. That innate divinity in man has been referred to by several people as *atma*. Without realizing the nature of the *atma* one cannot understand the nature of the body. **Educare** consists of realizing the nature of the *atma*.

One may acquire a lot of wealth and become a millionaire with the help of bookish knowledge and high academic degrees. But, ultimately people will give value to a realized soul and not to the one who has accumulated enormous wealth."

2B. Strive to be good, not great.

Swami guides us further: "**Worldly education makes man great, whereas the spiritual education makes man good.** Spiritual education relates to the

heart, which is the origin of sacred qualities like compassion, truth, forbearance and love.

Today parents expect their children to go in for higher studies, amass wealth, and become great, but very few want their children to be good. **Goodness is long lasting, whereas greatness is temporary.** Goodness forms the basis for spiritual life. There are crores and crores of people who have become great by amassing wealth, but what is their contribution to the welfare of society? Absolutely nil. Therefore, **strive to be good, not great."**

3D. From adhering to truth.

Swami simplifies each value thus: "What is *Dharma* and what is *Adharma?* If you go on enquiring, it becomes clear that *Dharma* is not something that is created by someone. ***Sathyannasthi paro dharmah* (there is no *Dharma* greater than adherence to truth). *Dharma* originated from *Sathya*.**

The third value is *Shanti* (peace). You enquire from any millionaire, "Sir! You have everything in this world for a happy life. Are you happy?" Pat comes the reply, "I have everything, but I have no peace." Peace is not something that a person passes on or gives in charity to another person. It has to come from one's own heart. Today, wherever you go you see, 'only pieces, no peace'.

The fourth value is *Prema* (love). Where did this love come from? Did it come from mother or father or some friend? Did anyone gift it? No! Love is your very life-breath. Devoid of love, the world cannot exist.

The fifth human value is *Ahimsa* (non-violence). Gautam Buddha taught *Ahimsa paramo dharmah* (non-violence is the supreme *dharma*). But, today wherever you look, there is only violence. Like the other human values, the heart is the seat of non-violence.

The five human values *Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema* and *Ahimsa* are not independent of each other. They closely follow one another. These five qualities are the gift of God to a human being. We as human beings have to manifest these five human values by putting them into practice. That is '**Educare**'.

4D. Cultural refinement.

Swami continues: "Mere bookish learning and the acquisition of information cannot by themselves earn for you respect and esteem in society. For that, **culture and the associated refinement are also needed.**

Routine scholarship is negative, whereas culture is positive; both are required. **Whereas bookish knowledge equips you with facts, culture refines and transforms your inner being** (for the better).

Education bereft of culture is like a field without water, a wire without current, a house without a lamp, and a temple without a deity. Pursuit of such education makes youth totally rudderless."

5A. Character is three-fourths of our life.

Swami brings more clarity: "The modern education system lays emphasis on wealth, strength and friendship. Then what about character? **Character is three-fourths of life.** So, you have to develop character. Without character what is wealth, strength and friendship for? They come and go like passing clouds."

6B. To bring out the latent powers in each student.

Swami prods the teachers thus: "Many modern boys and girls have no knowledge about these principles. It is absolutely necessary that every student should know all about **educare** and its importance. **The latent powers in each student have to be brought out.** These powers must play their part in all his activities as reflection, reaction and resound. Thus, the process of education has to work in such a way as to transform the students into reflections of their latent powers. They are to be moulded properly and shaped beautifully. Our institutions bring out ideal students and present them to the world."

7A. All three are one and the same.

Dwelling deeper into this subject, Swami says: "The entire creation has emerged from love. Therefore, there is no difference between religion, spirituality and **educare**. Religion is realization of your Self. Spirituality also is discovering who you really are. The next aspect is **educare**. How can you call yourselves educated if you do not understand what **educare** is? Education is for a living while **educare** is for life. Education is for *'Jeevana Upadihi'* (livelihood). **Educare** is for *'Jeevitha Paramavadhi'* (the ultimate goal of life).

It is easy for us to recognize things outside us and difficult to look within. There are many things inside us, which are not manifest. When you join the three letters G, O, D, we get the word GOD. When you look at the letters individually they have no meaning of their own. Our effort lies in putting together these letters to get the meaning. This is **educare**. **Educare** means to bring out from within. The *Atma* is our innermost reality. That is what **educare**

should bring out. **Therefore, there is actually no difference between the three – religion, spirituality and educare.**

Do not worry about religion. There is only one religion, the religion of love. **Educare** means to bring out the divine love latent in man. That is why it is said, *Love is God, live in Love.* Then there would be no conflict in the world and all would live together happily. Only when there are differences, there is conflict. Push aside these differences and live with the feeling of oneness. Basically, you have to get rid of the sense of differences and develop the sense of oneness. Then you will know that **religion, educare and spirituality are one and the same."**

8C. Practical knowledge.

Swami elaborates further: "Knowledge can be classified into five categories: bookish knowledge, superficial knowledge, general knowledge, discrimination knowledge, and practical knowledge.

General knowledge and common sense are very much essential. **You should set an ideal by exercising practical knowledge and following the four Fs.** The first F is *Follow the Master*. Who is your master? Conscience is your master. So, follow your conscience. The second F is *Face the devil*. The third F is *Fight to the end*. The fourth F is *Finish the game*. Play the game of life in the true spirit of sportsmanship."

9D. Bliss.

Swami explains more: "Modern education does not fulfill the aim of life. You gather graduate and postgraduate degrees, but these are mere burdens on your minds. What comfort do you derive from these degrees? Nothing whatsoever! Penniless, illiterate persons go to sleep without a care in the world. But educated persons with many degrees to their credit, acquired at great cost, wander about hunting for a job, almost facing starvation.

Education is not solely for the purpose of earning a living. It must lead you to experience bliss. Of what use are the job and the wealth if there is no happiness? Man is in constant search for wealth. Just as the earth revolves round the sun, man is going round money. Even a beggar can get money. Is that sort of income worth acquiring? Virtue is the wealth that you should go after. In the absence of virtue, wealth merely makes you bloat with pride and ostentation, destroys your humanness, and eclipses your human values. Studying to get a degree, getting a job, running a family - all these are worldly activities, emanating from the head. What should a learned person bring out? He should manifest the qualities of compassion, love, forbearance, peace, kindness, etc., which come from the heart. But, today, there is no compassion, there is only fashion. It is very important to have compassion. You should respect and love all your fellowmen and serve your parents."

10C. Listening to our Inner Voice

Swami helps us understand this point: "Attachment leads to bondage and restlessness. The innate values alone can control the desires. Listening to our **Inner voice leads to detachment**. You have to enquire into the difference between attachment and detachment. To attain detachment, you must obtain release from worldly bondage."

H2H QUIZ ON EDUCARE

The importance of raising children with good character who can mould themselves into model citizens and serve their parents and their country has been one of the principal thrusts of Bhagavan Baba's sacred teachings to mankind. Here is a quiz, culled from the pages of Heart2Heart, on Bhagavan's unique educational programme of Educare, which seeks to bring out and let blossom the inherent human values in every child.

1. In 'Getting Spiritually Better: Educare and Education from the December 1st 2003 issue, we shared in a rough paraphrase how Swami helps us distinguish Education from Educare:

Swami describes Education and Educare as follows. He says:

'Education leads to a mind shaped by **external forces.**
Educare leads to a mind shaped by the **divine source** within.'

Swami then says:

'Educare is a Divine Philosophy, Education is a _____ Philosophy.'

A. Ego-filled Philosophy
B. Survival Philosophy
C. Selfish Philosophy
D. Dead-end Philosophy

2. In 'Reflections: On Educare' from the May 1st 2004 issue, we described how Swami explained Educare to His MBA students:

'Swami wants man to look into his Heart and start from there – that really is what Educare is all about. Some years ago, while speaking to students of the Business School in His University, Swami related the processes associated with Educare to Import-Export. He said we must first import '***love*** from the Heart' into the Head and then, after processing it, 'export it' to the world outside through '***loving words*** and ***loving actions'*** [via the Body of course]. This is typical of Swami, translating a seemingly complex concept into not only simple language but also a practical recipe.'

How should we further the process of educare in our own transformation?

A. Read the educare text books.
B. Attend study circles.
C. Practise constant introspection.
D. Attend bhajans.

3. In 'Getting Spiritually Better: Educare and Education' from the December 1st 2003 issue, we dwelt on the fact that Educare is not a new concept:

'The question arises: "Why suddenly **educare**? Why was it not there before?" The answer is the following: Earlier, the forces related to educare were working silently, implicitly and unobtrusively. There was morality in the home, morality in the school, morality in the work-pace, and finally, morality in the community also. Today, the situation has changed completely. God has been put on the back burner so to speak. Therefore, an entirely different strategy and set of priorities are called for. We have to first invoke God strongly and then only move on to other matters and business.'

In our article, how did we describe the lifestyle of a highly-educated person, devoid of educare?

A. Of mediocre achievement.
B. Full of attachments.
C. Like a ship without a rudder.
D. Guided by selfishness and self-interest.

4. In 'Reflections: On Educare' from the May 1st 2004 issue, we shared the short-cut method that Swami recommends for applying Educare in life:

'Human actions must generally reflect Divine attributes. What are the attributes that one expects? The most important of these is the harmony of feeling, thought, word and deed, a harmony that Swami often refers to via the word *Trikarana suddhi***.** [Triple Purity]

In practical terms, it means the harmonious functioning of the Heart [the seat of feelings], the Head [the seat of thought] and the Body [the source for words and action]. When these three components, namely the Heart, the Head and the Body function coherently and in unison, it automatically implies that the feeling that underlies the word/action is Divine, so is the thought that formulates the word/action and so is final word spoken or the action performed. In other words, if *Trikarana suddhi* or Purity of Thought, Word and Deed is achieved, then it automatically implies that Educare has been given practical expression to.

According to Swami, how exactly does practicing Triple Purity help in real life?

A. All the five human values get manifested.
B. We achieve success in all our undertakings.
C. The world treats us with awe and respect.
D. We achieve everything we aspire for, materially and spiritually.

5. In our: 'Getting Spiritually Better: Educare and Education - Dec 1st 2003' issue, we made a comparison chart between Education and Educare.

EDUCATION		EDUCARE
SOURCE	World	Heart
PHILOSOPHY	Survival & upmanship	Harmony with Creation
ATTITUDE	Greed & aggression	Love & compassion
APPROACH	Competition	Co-operation
MANIFESTATION	Selfish grabbing	

Please fill in the MANIFESTATION expression under the EDUCARE category.

A. Selfless Service
B. Always Truthful
C. Very Conscientious
D. Charitable acts

ANSWERS:

1B. Survival Philosophy.

We shared Swami's view-point further: 'Education is a survival philosophy [destroy opposition, beat the competition, etc.] Educare is a divine philosophy [love all, serve all]. Finally, education is for the head, and educare is for the heart!'

2C. Practise constant introspection.

Our article continued to state that:

'Swami has always stressed individual transformation and Educare is a word that focuses explicit attention on that. We shall now examine in some depth the implications of the word transformation. Transformation implies change and in our context it means a change for the better. In turn this means giving up the bad and embracing the good. But there is more to transformation than just this.

Now when relating to Swami, we must clearly understand that Swami's focus is **always** on Spirituality and that He wants us also to have the same focus.

This means that **transformation must be seen as a process originating Inside**. **Unless we seriously look Inwards, we would never be able to relate even feebly to the Atma or the Universal and Eternal Spirit/Soul. Any transformation that a Sai devotee seeks, must involve such introspection, if the seeker is serious.'**

3D. Guided by selfishness and self-interest.

'Let us go back to education versus educare and see how the two together can lead to balance in daily life. Swami says that a human being is a combination of the body, the Mind and the Atma - he is thus an MBA complex! Here, we shall use the words Atma, Heart, and Soul interchangeably.

A person who ignores the Atma/Soul would be guided entirely by his body and his Mind. The senses would feed information about the external world to the person concerned, and the person would react to situations based entirely on the dictates of his senses and the impressions coded into his mind/brain. **This would be true of even a highly-educated person who is totally Heartless. His actions and decisions would never show even the slightest trace of any compassion. He would always be guided by selfishness and self-interest.**

In short, the external world applies a **force** on man, compelling him to conform, keep up with the Joneses, etc. The Heart, on the other hand, directs man's attention to the **Source** as Swami puts it, and arouses feeling of compassion, etc.

In a good man, the Source overwhelms the Force [due to the external world]!'

4A. All the five human values get manifested.

'It is pertinent to note that Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa that are normally referred to as **the Human Values manifest only when there is *Trikarana suddhi*; no Triple Purity, no Human Values** – Swami has made this abundantly clear on more than one occasion. The last mentioned point is important, especially in the context of the various efforts being mounted to spread Human Values.

As Swami has pointed out – take care of *Trikarana suddhi* and the Human Values take care of themselves automatically.'

5A. Selfless service.

	EDUCATION	**EDUCARE**
SOURCE	World	Heart
PHILOSOPHY	Survival & upmanship	Harmony with Creation
ATTITUDE	Greed & aggression	Love & compassion
APPROACH	Competition	Co-operation
MANIFESTATION	Selfish grabbing	Selfless service

HEALING TOUCH

LOVE, LAUGHTER AND HAPPINESS AT THE TEMPLE OF HEALING

The captivating story of how the 'Dharmic Clowns' from Italy inundated the Sri Sathya Sai Institutes of Higher Medical Sciences, at Puttaparthi and Whitefield, with fun and frolic, magic and music, happiness and healing in January and March 2009.

Laughter the Best Medicine: Hospital Turned into a Hall of Fun and Love

It was all magic. One drowsy and cold winter evening in January 2009, five spirited Sai devotees walked into Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram with huge bags, gobs of makeup and cartloads of fun and joy. In the course of the next few days, the otherwise silent wards of Urology, Orthopaedics and Cardiology were ringing with giggles and smiles, joyful shrieks and uncontrollable laughter. The Hospital had been transformed into a hall of overwhelming fun and love… there were no more patients, nurses, doctors or volunteers; everyone had turned into a 'laughing angel'… the charismatic clowns had invaded the Hospital.

And this happened not once, but twice; first time in January 2009 and again in March. From where did these welcome invaders arrive? They had come all the way from Italy, with their most potent weapons – love and joy. As the infiltration began, all that the patients and doctors of the hospital could do was to let go and laugh to their hearts' content even as these vivacious volunteers put up an awesome and mesmerising performance.

They called themselves **Dharmic Clowns**. But how did they land up in the Sai Hospital? That is a delightful story, and let us get it directly from them. Here is what the Dharmic Clown Group has to say about their birth, blossoming and beatific mission.

The Dharmic Clowns Uncover their Soulful Saga…

Marino Started It All

It all began when our dear friend Marino, a member of the Dharmic Clowns group, told us of an overwhelming impulse he felt, three years ago, to rent a Santa Claus costume, buy some candies and go around distributing them to all the children he came across. It was the Christmas season, and the very air smelt of cheer and conviviality.

While he was doing this, one day when he was in the town of Forlì, Italy, Marino found himself at the Pierantoni Hospital. In the pervading hush and quietness, he went from ward to ward until he came to a small door.

He rang the bell. A voice on the other side asked, "Who's there?" "Santa Claus," he answered. "Whooooo?" enquired the voice again, sounding slightly incredulous. "Santa Claus!" he repeated.

Marino entered the room to the amazement of the staff and the head doctor who greeted him with the question slightly rephrased, "Excuse me, who are you?"

Marino lost his patience a little, considering that his attire was self-evident. Nevertheless, he went on to respond that he was, in fact, Santa Claus who was out there to bring smiles and good wishes.

From that moment, the head doctor accompanied him through all the rooms till the very last one; where a patient, an elderly woman, sat up in the bed upon seeing them enter, and exclaimed, "Ohhh, Santa Claus! I've always longed to meet you ever since I was a little girl!"

In that moment, everyone, literally everyone, had a lump in their throats, and their eyes moistened. Only upon leaving the ward did Marino realize that he had entered the Oncology ward. He later found out that the elderly lady died the next day. Marino shared with us this experience and we were immensely inspired.

The Dharmic Clowns are Born

In the beginning, we gave ourselves the name "The Company of Nine", in deference to the Eastern spiritual tradition that identifies the number nine as a symbol of Divinity. Within a short time, other friends, among whom were professionals from the animation and entertainment industry, joined the initial crew of volunteers.

With the growth of the group, our roles became more defined. We then changed our name to "Dharmic Clowns", taking inspiration from the Sanskrit word "Dharma", which, in essence, means "duty".

Driven by the will to put into practice Human Values, the essence of which was exemplified in Bhagavan Baba's aphorism "Love All, Serve All", we donned "red noses" and clown costumes in an attempt to bring love and happiness to children, the elderly, the sick and the needy.

Clown Therapy: A Joyous Movement in the Making

The idea of implementing the clown therapy was not a new one though. There are dozens of studies that show that laughter is beneficial to one's health, and that it is much easier to heal a happy person. Given all these evidence and our own conviction, soon we started formulating the clown therapy.

Games and humour help hospitalised children, their parents, and patients in general, to rediscover their smiles, and the joy of living, at large. Amongst the first to put this therapy into practice was the American Dr. Patch Adams.

Today in Italy, the clown therapy has spread rapidly. There are many groups, which practice this mode of healing at various levels in hospitals.

We have been offering our service as clowns since 2006. Currently, we perform two days a week in the paediatric ward of the "SaintAnna" Hospital of Ferrara bringing comfort and smiles in the life of children. We also regularly perform in various Assisted Living Facilities for the elderly and in orphanages.

Additionally, the group offers its services within the context of the Italian Sathya Sai Organization volunteer services, and performs at the national seat of the "Mother Sai" House in Varallo Pombia (Novara), during national and international meetings.

Infusing Professional Finesse and Divine Message in the Clowning Business

Performance is enhanced by regular brainstorming sessions. In order to refine the techniques and the ability to express in the best possible way, we meet once a month for workshops and *satsangs* (study circles) with professional clowns, magicians and entertainers.

Currently, we are preparing a new show aimed principally for children in which they will be the protagonists in the stories that emphasize Bhagavan's Teachings. For all of this, we are enormously grateful to Bhagavan Baba, our Swami.

Laughter Transcends Linguistic Barriers as Dharmic Clowns Delight Inmates of Sai's Ashram

At the end of February 2008, we had the opportunity to perform at the orphanage situated close to the Sri Sathya Sai Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi, where over 80 little hearts lit up with smiles and happiness. Though we knew little English and no Telugu, laughter helped us transcend all linguistic differences to experience a joy that weaved magic and united us in an everlasting bond of love.

Our next big moment of collective joy was at the Western Canteen in Prasanthi Nilayam, where children and devotees alike were all agape at the entertaining tricks performed by our group member, aptly named Magic Richard.

Most importantly, there was Swami, our Cosmic Wire-Puller and Beholder. We felt His ever vigilant, ever-abiding Presence, through the vivid life-size picture in the shrine before which the show had been staged.

Thereafter, we went along the small paths of the Puttaparthi ashram, amongst many of our brothers and sisters from India and from all over the world, many of whom expected anything but to see clowns in perfect costumes in Puttaparthi! We also shared introspective moments during *Satsangs* in the ashram, that focused on the meaning of "Dharmic Clown", on bringing out our

'inner' clown, and on reaching out and entertaining 'from heart to heart' without having to don the attire.

When Clowns Stepped Into the Super Specialty Hospital…

During the Mahashivaratri Festival in 2008, a delegation from our group had been blessed to present Bhagavan Baba with a report of the service activities carried out in Italy in schools and hospitals. In the report, we also expressed a prayer to Bhagavan: to be able to perform at the Super Speciality Hospital, to form the Dharmic Clown Association, and also to create an interactive performance inspired by the Teachings of Swami.

The All-merciful Bhagavan answered our prayers, for within a year, in February 2009, we had the good fortune of delivering in the hands of Swami, the Dharmic Clown Association Statute. Swami also gave us the permission to perform at the Super Speciality Hospitals in Puttaparthi and Whitefield.

On the afternoon of January 28, 2009, for the first time we crossed the entrance gates of the Super Speciality Hospital, Puttaparthi with our bags full of balloons, clown clothes, make-up, juggling items and magic tricks. We felt a combination of fear and a huge, very huge, sense of gratitude for the opportunity that was granted to us so generously. Until then, we had only read about that sacred place, of that 'Temple of Healing', where everyone and everything spoke of Bhagavan's immense Love and Compassion.

Joy Blows Fears Away

We were first met by the Sevadals who looked at us with curiosity. Their faces were writ large with question marks. But in a matter of moments, greeted by hearty 'Sairams' and smiles, we felt welcomed in one great embrace: similar in size to that of the architectural form of that massive building. Then we entered the vast shrine, the central dome with its lofty ceiling, and the majestic Murano-glass chandelier, immersed in SAI-lence.

We sat on the floor a few minutes to recite the *Gayatri Mantra* and *Samastha Loka*… (the Universal Prayer for Peace). Once we were done, we put on our make-up and costumes, ready for the show. We were taken to the Hospital wards. We were met with wide-eyed amazement, even amusement. It was the first time the Hospital had had such unusual visitors!

There, at the patients' bedsides, with the doctors and nurses on duty, we started our performance of magic tricks, balloon manipulation and other assorted gags.

Funny Magic the Clowns Created

Well, what exactly did these spiritual clowns do? Here is what a staff of the hospital narrates:

The first performance of these Baba's buffoons was in the Urology ward. Word spread fast and furious. Patients, both young and old, sat up on their beds eagerly anticipating the performance. When they could no longer hold back their excitement, they burst forth with questions.

"What is happening, doctor?"

"Sister, where are they from? From Italy?"

"Doctor, where in India is that? Oh, not in India, it is across the seas? Then they wouldn't know our language, would they?"

"But what are they going to do? Tell us something, please."

The staff was at a loss to explain anything as they were themselves completely new to the novel phenomenon.

"Just wait, and you will soon find out for yourself," they said, in a futile bid to calm down their wards.

Finally, the door opened, and in walked a bunch of people with funny make-up, jazzy costumes, bright red noses, oversized hats and undersized trousers, goggles, bows, et al. The very sight of them sent laughter spreading like wildfire.

The clowns went from patient to patient. One of them asked a patient in utterly broken English, "Problem? What?" The patient sat smiling all the time, unable to comprehend a word. "Here," the clown pointed to himself, "I clown doctor. I cure. Now, no problem."

The clown doctor called for his assistant, who came in huffing and puffing. "Write medicine," the doctor directed. The assistant was all ears, as the doctor dictated the prescription.

"One smile in the morning, one smile in the afternoon, and one smile in the evening. That is all!" the clown doctor prescribed with joy. The patient understood the message and burst out laughing, while the rest of them too broke into guffaws.

Winding their way through the corridors, the clowns finally reached the paediatric section of the ward. The sheer spectacle of the clowns capering and prancing in colourful outfits and piebald faces sent peals of amusement tinkling across the ward. The leading clown Richard gestured to his assistant to blow a balloon. Once the balloon was blown, he twisted and turned it to resemble a dog. With the next balloon, came a hat, then a pair of goggles, a flower, and there was no stopping this clown.

There were grown ups too in the ward. Some of them were around 50 years of age. In fact, they were giggling and chuckling, clutching their stomachs in

vain. The laughter simply flowed as did the love from these laughing messengers of the Lord.

It was then time for some card tricks. A card in hand disappeared the next moment, throwing everyone into a tizzy. Then it appeared in the pocket of one unsuspecting patient, to his utter dismay. Everybody went up with mirth, while the patient kept scratching his head, unable to comprehend how the card ended up in his pocket in the first place.

The most enchanting part of the presentation was the clowns making the kids in the ward perform the magic tricks. "What we do, no magic…you also magicians," they said, inviting the all-too-eager youngsters. And the clowns performed the magic tricks with the children in the front. The young ones were in raptures. As for the clowns, they performed the tricks with such élan that nobody had the slightest suspicion that it was the kids and not them who were pulling off the tricks.

"How did you do it?" a startled mother was heard asking her child. The kid hadn't realised that he had actually performed some magic tricks (with some help)!

After a roller coaster of a laugh riot, it was time for the clowns to wind up. But the patients refused to let the clowns go. "One more trick, please. No, not for me, for that kid over there," an elderly patient was heard saying. Needless to say, it was the older child who enjoyed the fun, though he asked it on behalf of the younger one.

Eventually it was time to bid goodbye. The patients let go their angels of happiness most unwillingly, even as they reassured them most warmly with hundredfold promises of return.

Moving Memories…

The Clowns continue their narration:

In the evening we sat pondering over the events of the day – we remembered the three-year old who shrieked in joy and amusement when we touched his nose, and the 16-year old who could not hear and speak but burst into a broad smile when we said 'Nothing is impossible', and the tiny tot in the Neuro Surgery department who lay depressed in a bed full of tubes but when he saw us, he smiled in joy and said 'Sairam', and also how our tray of seven different bells, each given to a different person, created a special musical game which everyone in the ward enjoyed, and so on.

As we sat ruminating over the wonderful events of the day, we realized what a great blessing Bhagavan had showered on us by allowing us to alleviate the suffering of His patients', at least by a little.

In the following days, January 29 and 30, there was great rejoicing in the Hospital. Groups of patients, along with relatives, appeared on the balconies

of the wards and greeted our merry company, waving their hands. We were deeply moved and our hearts were aflame with gratitude to our beloved Lord. It was a very intense and magical feeling, a magic that we would have transmitted from heart to heart when we larked among the beds in the wards.

It's easy then to imagine what our feelings were when we found out we were to return on March 20 and 21 to try to bring some more joy to the patients of the Hospital and then on the afternoon of March 24, to continue to transmit the healing magic of the clown therapy at the SSSIHMS, Whitefield.

And they did wonderfully once again, lighting up the faces of every patient and doctor with happiness and joy. When we asked the Dharmic Clowns, what else would they like to say to the world, this was their heartfelt message:

How Can We Forget You

Finally we would like to remember all: the patients, nurses, doctors, boys and girls that we met, and especially that little boy who shouted repeatedly when he said goodbye to us: "Don't forget me!" We shall not forget him because that voice is the voice of the little child inside us.

What this experience did to the Dharmic Clowns themselves is possibly far greater than what it did to the patients and doctors. Even after returning to their homes, these messengers of magic and love relived every moment they spent in these sacred homes of healing and could never express to their complete satisfaction the gratitude that welled up in their beings towards Bhagavan Baba for the blessed opportunity that had been rewarded with. Even now, they pray and hope to be back yet again to bask in that environment of pure love and pure service that is the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences.

Article written in association with SSSIHMS

YOUR SAY

Feedback from our readers on the July issue

Feedback on *Prashanti Diary*

Living thousands of miles away from Puttaparthi, you may have no idea how overwhelmed we feel with the blessing that Swami is granting us by providing this platform from which we can get up to date information of all that is happening at the ashram. We feel that we get a chance to visit Parthi again and again refreshing us with Swami's darshan, love & grace.

Never in any avatar has this been possible, that we are so far and yet so near to Swami's continuous inspiration. Our days ordinary are turned into joyous ones. I cannot thank you enough.

Hope you have a blissful day.

Sarita Maharaj, Sydney, Australia

This is not the first email we have sent you to thank you for your moving and informative reports and pictures. Please do not stop! You are bringing such important and detailed information about the day to day activities at Prasanthi Nilayam to the whole world. Our lives would now seem empty without our daily website visits to Puttaparthi. Without leaving home, we are able to be so realistically close to our beloved Swami. You have the privilege of being so physically close and knowing exactly what is happening around Swami and you are sharing that with such sincerity and professionalism. Our heartfelt thanks.

John & Joy Beales, Australia

I found your new section extremely inspiring. Not only was I absorbed reading and looking at the pictures, I was transported mentally to Prashanthi Nilayam. I felt as though I was sitting in Sai Kulwant Hall sharing in the festivities basking in the Glories of Our Lord.

Tej Kamo Persaud, Ontario, Canada

Prasanthi diary inspires me a lot. I was a student of SSSPS and SSSHSS and now as I'm away from the physical presence of Bhagavan I'm so happy to know everything that is happening there. I feel as though I'm there in Prasanthi Nilayam itself! I thank "Radio Sai" for the good job that they are doing!

B. Sai Srikar, Hyderabad

Feedback on *A Million Mother's Love*

This article was moving to say the least. How does God, our Mother, make each of us feel so utterly special? Beautifully expressed by Mr. Rakesh.

You don't realize what Radio Sai does to people across the globe, do you? Impeccable timing and hidden messages in random experiences. Swami speaks to us through these beautiful chapters from people's lives.

Abir and Anisha

I just read this story and I've received so many messages to myself from Swami! It still amazes me how He continually guides me here in Trinidad in the West Indies. I am suffering from dry skin and I have the Ponds cold Cream which I have not used as I should. I will now!

Devika Rambalack, Trinidad

Feedback on *The Key to Permanent Happiness*

It is a wonderful article. I am delighted to know the details of happiness. I have already started practicing the art of "Divine Love". I could see the difference in myself and in my surroundings. It is difficult in the beginning, but sometimes I am able to realize immediately after making a mistake. I am trying to realize before committing the mistake. Maybe over a period of time, I will attain purity.

Jagannath Vidyala, Chicago, USA

Feedback on *In Quest of Infinity Part 27*

I like to congratulate Prof. Venkataraman on the "Quest for Infinity Series". I noticed a few years ago how many scientific conclusions are in accordance with some of the spiritual facts, for example *Karma,* which is cause and effect, is kind of related to Newton's third law.

Recently things have started to make more sense to me in regards to the relationship between science and spirituality, the definition of consciousness and its relation to the material world and the fact that divine consciousness manifests through us human beings - something which science has failed to do: explain consciousness.

The important thing is to understand that God transcends the mind, and since Science is a mind exercise, there will never be a scientific approach to God, He transcends it. If you want to understand God you have to experience Him, through love.

Thank you for sharing all of these insights and God bless you,

Luis Duran, Guatemala

I'm very grateful for the new article by Prof. Venkataraman. I find it inspiring as always. Spiritual Q&A is also my favourite. Please keep up this great work.

Severin, Slovenia

I have just downloaded the latest "In Quest of Infinity" by Prof G. Venkataraman. I am so excited and cannot wait to get started on my study.....Words cannot express my thanks and appreciation to you and the Professor for all the effort he has put into sharing all this knowledge with others and me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Sierra-Sue Mitchell, Queensland, Australia.

General Feedback

The whole of the remarkable Heart2Heart Journal is an *Encyclopedia of Love and Service*. I suspect it is unique in covering all aspects of life, from cosmology and particle physics, to individual human stories - which must bring people together, give courage and strength when in doubt - to wonderfully produced audio and other material, often about matters (such as 'the tribals') which are neglected elsewhere and world news and events!

Photographs, Prashanti Diary, seva and so much more. I like it all and congratulate all concerned in such wonderful work! It helps me when I am not physically in Prasanthi Nilayam to be aware of the wonderful atmosphere created by Swami. The H2H journal restores the Heart!

Douglas Johns, Cambridge, UK

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who are working behind H2H; guys you are doing an amazing job. I guess there is no better way to spread the divine love of Swami worldwide than this. The pages are amazing and the content writing is top class. You have inspired many of us here to follow the steps of the divine with your content. I wish with Swami's blessing you continue doing this great service to humanity to make changes in lives of many across the globe.

Jayakrishnan Komath

I am not sure who is going to read this email! Trust me, the content matter in H2H is awesome! We are not sure how many people dedicate their time and services, but all of you keep our parched souls in touch with Swami more than ever! Though by destiny, or by choice, we are across the world from Prasanthi, but your H2H writings literally touch our hearts profoundly! Please accept our sincere regards and tons and tons of gratitude.

Ravi K