

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Unique University, Awesome Chancellor

“I thought people who live up to their principles had drastically reduced in this organization. But you have proved me wrong. I am really happy that those who stick to their values and do the right thing are still around. I am truly delighted.” The Administrative Manager of a reputed company in Mumbai said this to his subordinate who was an alumnus of the Sri Sathya Sai University. Another superior, this time a CEO of a software firm in Bangalore, called one of his employees, who had the courage to bring to the notice of the management serious lapses in behaviour of a few colleagues, and said, “As a student of Sri Sathya Sai University, you are truly the moral gatekeepers of this company.” These are just two samples to highlight a very significant concern of modern times.

Today, universities and educational enterprises of eminence and repute are not few. The premium brands like Harvard and MIT in the USA or the IIMs and IISs in India of course may be a minority, but even these are expanding. For instance, the Government of India has sanctioned the establishment of seven new IIMs in 2009. Besides these extremely elite institutions, there is a plethora of other business schools, engineering institutions and other knowledge centres, and their number in India and the world over is only spiraling. According to India’s National Knowledge Commission, the country still needs at least 1500 more universities. Many of these institutions are celebrated for one facet or the other. If one is hailed for the brilliant IQ in IT of its graduates, the other is acclaimed for churning out engineers of high caliber, while the third is looked at awe for the signing bonuses and pay packets that its students command or demand and receive!

But how many institutions do we know which are exalted for offering society a band of intelligent men and women whose strength is their indomitable moral fibre as much as their technical and professional expertise? How many are such colleges at the graduation, post graduation and even at the postdoctoral level which passionately and genuinely instill into the hearts and minds of their students the dicta “Truth alone Triumphs” or “Righteousness protects the Right”?

In fact, the topic of Ethics and issues related to morality and spirituality, are given the same treatment that most obese youngsters give to their dietary habits. Those enlightened rules of life are considered ancient and impractical, though in the real sense, these tenets are what will confer prosperity and peace not only to them, but also on everyone else associated, directly and indirectly with them – indeed the society at large.

It is in this context that the first paragraph of this editorial needs to be underlined. Imparting an education that instills in the young minds a conviction that ‘Character is Power’ and the belief that in life ‘empathy and caring is more important than an enviable career’, has been the principal goal of the Sri Sathya Sai University right from its inception in 1981. Though this is the most

salient aspect of this holy seat of learning, it is not the only one. From the time a student steps into this university till he/she is awarded the degree in their hands, no one hears the term 'fees' or any of its synonyms. The pupil has the blessed opportunity to focus, without any hindrances or distractions whatsoever, solely on their subjects and on lofty ideals. Again, in its more than a quarter century of history, this University, which places discipline on a high pedestal, has always worked from the June 1 of every year till the March 31 of the next year, without the delay of a single day come what may.

Another remarkable aspect is the fact that selfless service in this university is a virtue (and not a forced punishment for one's wrongdoings), and the students voluntarily engage in acts of social service, self-service, hostel-service, room-service and such initiatives which form the basis of its self-induced (by the students in response to the campus environment of altruism) self-reliance and social responsibility programs.

While all these are truly unique and awe-inspiring, what is even more amazing is the intense personal interest in the welfare of every student not only by the faculty members, the Principals and the Wardens, the administrative officials, the visiting Professors, or even the Vice Chancellor or the Registrar, but by the Chancellor Himself! In fact, **this is exactly what makes this institution so lofty and an ideal to emulate.** Can you think of a university where the Chancellor interacts with the students on a daily basis? Is there any Head of an educational institution who is concerned about not only the physical and mental health but also the spiritual well-being of its every pupil and offers support and solace, love and blessings to his or her wards? To get a glimpse of how this actually happens and the impact it has on the young minds, please read our story "A Million Mothers' Love" in the Swami and Me section of this issue.

But this unique Chancellor does not stop with nurturing all His students' physical, emotional and spiritual needs, He goes even further. Almost every year, during the summer vacations, He takes a few of them to the hill station in Kodai Kanal and offers His entire day, dawn to dusk, to them for sometimes a whole month or at least a couple of weeks. He lives with them, eats and sings with them, jokes and entertains them – but all the while instilling in them invaluable lessons of life, sometimes covertly, other times overtly. The students not only enjoy all this, but are also consciously or unconsciously enlightened.

What exactly happens in this trip? What are these sessions like? How does Baba so subtly mould the minds of these youngsters towards a life of nobility and integrity? And what is the most entertaining part in this special odyssey? Actually, it is difficult to document everything that happens in this exceptional excursion because it is not a one hour or one day voyage but a 24-hour experience for days and weeks together. However, it is our endeavour to share with you as much as possible and in a manner that is engaging and entertaining. Please read the first episode of this amazing story in this issue's cover story "Kodai Festival 2009". We plan to follow this up with another

eleven episodes in subsequent issues of H2H. You can also very soon hear this program on Radio Sai and download it for your convenient listening.

Once you immerse yourself in this Kodai Festival 2009, you will know that the secret of this one-of-its-kind university is actually the secret of this universe. We all know it, we all feel it, but maybe don’t do enough to share it with others sincerely. But this Chancellor does it day in and day out. That’s why He addresses all His students as “Embodiments of Divine Love!”

Truly, life without Love has no purpose. If the world is still a beautiful place, it is because they are a few out there who understand and harness, revel in and radiate this principle of Pure Love.

Let us make Love the summum bonum of our lives.

Loving regards,
Heart2Heart Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The Key to Permanent Happiness

Who is the hero? God is the hero, while the world is a zero. So, you should make friendship with that hero. It is only the eternal nature of Divine Love, which is blemishless, selfless and pure, which can stand the test of true friendship. When you enjoy the proximity of such a friend, you will be free from fear even in the face of insurmountable difficulties. Lack of faith is the cause of fear in man. So, cultivating faith in the Divine is the foremost task of man. Endowed with such faith, one can achieve success in every kind of task. What is the root cause of disturbance and restlessness in the world?

*Due to their ignorance, people have lost
Fear of sin and love for God,
Resulting in the depravity of human nature.
What a blow to the cause of peace in the world!*

[Telugu Poem]

Man today has made giant strides in all fields. But the progress he has registered can be compared to an electric wire without current, since he does not possess human values. Love of God has infinite power. Here is an example: People are coming here (to Swami’s physical presence) from far off places in India and from different countries, spending a lot of money and time. Why do they gather here? What is the reason? They find something here that they do not find in their family members, in friends, relatives, in the society they live in, and also in their countries. What do they find here? You find Love here. For the sake of experiencing Divine Love, all of you embark on long and arduous journeys. But, if you make a thorough observation and investigation into the matter, you will be able to know that love is present within you only. In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna declared: *Mamaivamso Jeevaloke Jeevabhutha Sanathana* (the eternal *Atma* in every human being is a part of My Being). Hence, Divine Love is present in every individual. But the human being, unable to realize the truth that Love is present within himself, thinks that it is something separate or different from him and undertakes long journeys searching for Love. Know that the Divine is not different from you. *Sarvata panipadam Tat sarvathokshi siromukham* (That omnipresent *Brahman* has His hands, feet, eyes, and mouth everywhere).

Our Foremost Task is to Cultivate *Sadgunas*

To have a vision of God, who is omnipresent, you have to make certain enquiries. The *Vedas* proclaim that *Brahman* is all-pervasive. *Easwara sarva bhutanam* (the Divine is immanent in every being). Man should cultivate good

qualities if he wants to realize the truth of these statements. Without such qualities, man cannot realize even a fraction of the truth of the statement *saryam khalvidam Brahma* (verily all this is *Brahman*). Only by means of good qualities can one recognize the Divine, who is omnipresent. Cultivating good qualities is the basic tenet of devotion. Inculcation of virtues, right attitude, adherence to truth, discipline, and sense of duty are the signs of devotion. Only those who develop these qualities can be called devotees.

Our foremost task is to cultivate *sadgunas* (good qualities). The Sanskrit word, *sath* stands for eternity, which is called *Being*. We should acquire the qualities of *Being*. What are these qualities? They are attributelessness, purity, steadfastness and enlightenment. It is not an easy task to acquire all these qualities. However, there is one way out. Since all the virtues are embedded in pure, selfless, and divine love, if you develop love, all the virtues will manifest in you. The true nature of love should be cultivated to experience the Divinity latent in you.

God is the Resident of Your Heart

God is not different from you. He is not confined to places like temples, mosques, and churches. He is omnipresent. He is the resident of your heart. The body is the temple of God. So, you should strengthen the feelings of love within you. You do develop love, but it is based on bodily relations. You love your son, father, and mother. You identify yourself with the body, so you direct your love towards those with whom you have a relationship at the physical level. You are not able to manifest the kind of love that is beyond name and form. Love has no form. It does not differentiate between young and old or man and woman. Love is love. It cannot be compared to anything else. Love is the very form of the Divine. Love is God. Live in love. How to do that?

*Start the day with Love
Spend the day with Love
Fill the day with Love
End the day with Love
This is the way to God.*

You can cultivate love in several ways. But, do not limit it to the bodily needs and relations. However, as long as you live in the world, you do need the warmth of relationship. You can wish for the welfare and progress of someone else. You can also share his/her happiness. But all these feelings are limited to the physical relationship, which is transient.

Man yearns for happiness in every act, in every kind of experience. Whether he does business or work in an office, his aim is to derive happiness. But does he find it? No. It is only a temporary phase as it is worldly happiness. He may be happy for a while, but permanent happiness is attained only by contemplation on God. So, contemplate on the Divine. You try to experience many things. Instead, experience the divine bliss, which is within you. That is the supreme bliss.

*It is the very form of supreme wisdom.
It is one without a second.
It is expansive and pervasive like the sky.
It is eternal, pure and changeless.
It stands as a witness of everything.*

[Sanskrit Verse]

Cultivate Divine Love

Divinity, like light, is the witness of everything. Its effulgence illuminates everything else. Where does it exist? We find *santhi* (peace) within *asanthi* (unrest). In the depth of the *santhi* (peace), there exists *prakanthi* (supreme splendor). In this *prakanthi*, one can experience *Param Jyothi* (Divine Effulgence). *Param Jyothi*, in the form of *Atma Jyothi* (the light of the *Atma*) is within you. That is the light of non-duality and eternity, of immortality; that is the light of the Self.

Since you possess that light within yourselves, why should you be afraid of anything else? Why should you worry? Be happy. Where is happiness? How to experience it? Union with God is happiness. You should realize that Love is the form of God. As long as Divinity, in the form of love, exists within you, unrest cannot reach you. But, these days, people are subjecting themselves to unrest and unhappiness by misinterpreting the nature of Love and by attributing to it certain impure feelings. It is a blunder. Know that Divine Love is unsullied, selfless, and pure. Without any hesitation you should try to acquire that Love. Strive to possess it.

Embodiments of Love! Strengthen love, saturate your lives with love and live in that Divine Love.

- Divine Discourse delivered on April 26, 1999 at "Sai Sruthi", Kodai Kanal

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - part 17: 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 continue the fifth chapter: 'Concepts'

Chapter 5: Concepts **(Continued from the previous issue)**

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! One cannot escape from the effects of fate or destiny. Things are preordained, and accordingly events happen in our life. This being inevitable, we suffer and face difficulties. Would you please tell us the way out of this?

Bhagavan: Everything in life is nothing but a reflection of your own thought and deed of your earlier life or lives. You pretend happily to think that none can notice you. But God within you knows fully well all your thoughts, feelings and deeds. God is everywhere. You cannot hide anything from Him. One day or other you must face the consequences of your actions. This is the supreme truth.

You think and blame someone else, holding him responsible for your troubles. You are thoroughly mistaken here. **Your actions are responsible for both the good and the bad you experience in this life. God is an eternal witness of all human activities. He created this world and gave it to man for his enjoyment, but on one condition that he must face the consequences of his own actions.**

God is like a postman. He is least bothered about the contents of the letters that He hands over to people. It is all a matter of the relationship that exists between you and the one who writes you a letter. God is not concerned in any other way about the matter. Well, you receive a wedding card, you don't pay compliments to the postman, do you? If you receive a threatening letter from someone, you don't blame the postman either. The postman is merely an instrument in the process of delivering letters.

But prayer does help you to withstand tensions and problems with courage. Intense prayer, deep devotion, strong faith, sincere repentance, constant yearning and supreme love for God can alter the sequence of events in life. They can make even God reverse His own will. Take for example, the life of Markandeya. Fate granted him only sixteen years of life. But his devotion to Lord Siva was so intense that He made him immortal. God had to review and revise His own master plan in response to the prayers of Markandeya.

Take another example. There is a prisoner punished according to the laws of the penal code. During the period of imprisonment, if the character and conduct of the prisoner are found to be good and if he follows all the rules, regulations, and code of discipline imposed by the jail authorities, there is scope for the reduction of his jail term. There is another point you should note. Suppose the appeal of a person in a criminal case is lost in all the courts from the district level to the High Court and even the Supreme Court, and when punishment like a death sentence or life imprisonment becomes imminent and inevitable, the President of India can still order his release from jail on grounds of mercy and for special reasons. **Similarly, though you are bound to suffer and destined to face difficulties as a result of your past actions, God in response to your sincere prayer and repentance will change the course of your life and save you from your suffering. God confers special grace on you being pleased with your single-minded devotion to Him.**

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! The Bhagavad Gita wants us to give up the fruits of our actions, *karmaphalaparityaga*, both good and bad. Since we do good rarely, there is very little or none to offer you as the fruits of our good actions. We feel that it is not proper to offer evil or bad to You. What is to be done?

Bhagavan: You have to surrender both good and bad to God. Never get yourself attached to the results of your actions, be they good or bad. God is beyond these two opposites as He is non-dual. Any water, pure or impure, when mixed with Ganga, you will notice, does not affect the sanctity of Ganga. The sanctity never diminishes. Similarly, whatever you put into the fire gets burnt. The fire is in no way affected or polluted by those things that are put into it. Hence, if you offer both good and bad to God, ultimately you will be benefited.

A small example: Suppose you have a five hundred rupee currency note in your pocket, and you need to go out on some business and return later. You will be very careful to see that you do not lose it. You keep your hand on the

pocket if you go to a cafeteria for a cup of coffee so that no one will pick your pocket. Even in a theatre, you will be vigilant. But on the other hand, if you deposit that money in the bank, it will be credited to your account and it will be safe. Then, you don't need to bother about it further. **So also, if you surrender all the good you have done to God without attaching any value to the results, what happens is that you will be humble and simple. Here you do not take the credit. You thank God.** You are full of thankfulness and gratitude to God. But if you own and claim the results of all your good and meritorious deeds, you will feel that you are the doer, so much so, you will become proud and egoistic. Hence, you should surrender the reward of your good actions to God.

Then, how about the evil or bad to be offered to God? You may feel that it is not proper to do so. Yet, you will notice that it will help you finally. Here's a small example for you in this matter. Suppose you have with you a spoiled, dirty and half torn five hundred rupee note. You don't throw it away as it is a valuable currency note. But you have not been able to use it; no one will accept that note. You are not in a position to buy anything. So, you can neither throw it away nor use it. But, if you deposit the very same currency note in the Reserve Bank, they accept it and give you a brand new note. One thing is very necessary. The number on the currency note should be very clear for them to accept and give you a good note. **Similarly, the currency note of your deeds and consequences of your bad action, if offered to God, He will see the 'number' of 'devotion' on the note and give you in turn the good note or transform you. God is the Reserve Bank. Only God can receive your evil tendencies and misdeeds and transform them into good ones and give them back to you.** Hence, both good and bad must be offered to God for your own ultimate benefit.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! All the experiences, which are dual, are obtained due to our mind. Swami says 'Mind is a mad monkey.' Pleasure and pain are both due to our mind. How are we to annihilate the mind (*manonasanam*)?

Bhagavan: The mind never makes you suffer; it all depends upon the way you use it. It is everywhere. It takes the form of that into which it gets. It is deathless. So, it is said that the mind is the world, *manomulamidam jagat*. **Therefore, annihilation of the mind, *manonasanam* is not correct. What you should desire is the merger of the mind with the divine, *manolaya*.**

Just as the river merges in the mighty ocean, the mind should also merge in the Self. The mind surrendered to God becomes Ramadas, servant of Rama. But the mind full of desires is a slave to the organs, *kamadas*.

The mind should not be allowed to be lured by what we call in Telugu *balimi*, strength, *kalimi*, wealth and *chelimi*, friendship. It should be filled with divine thoughts so that it may become one with God.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Are there any who attained *tadatmya* (union) with God? We hear that total identification with God is the highest step in spirituality.

Bhagavan: Yes. There are many who experienced that state of total identification with God. In fact, a devotee should aim at it. There was a Westerner by name, Hen, who was very intelligent. The famous scientist, Darwin, was his guru. He started seeing his guru by contemplating on him continuously. Darwin concentrated his vision on a star and experienced certain vibrations. His student also reached that state.

You also must have heard of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. At one time, while worshipping Lord Sri Rama, he considered himself Hanuman. It is reported that he developed a short tail during that time.

You also find another illustration in the great epic Ramayana. Bharata wanted Rama to come back to Ayodhya and rule the kingdom. He pleaded with him repeatedly. But, Rama refused to return, since he had decided and vowed to follow the command of his father and follow *dharma* in totality. Bharata left the palace, after Rama promised that he would return immediately after the period of exile. The period was almost over and Bharata was expecting Rama to return at the appointed hour. Unable to bear the anguish at seeing no sign of Rama's arrival, Bharata got ready a funeral pyre and was prepared to jump into it, ready for self-immolation. In the meantime, Rama had sent Hanuman in advance with a message to Bharata in order to avert this situation and to inform Bharata of his arrival as he had promised before. Hanuman immediately dashed off to Nandigrama where Bharata was staying. As Hanuman was just landing, he noticed the scene there. Bharata was circumambulating the pyre into which he was about to jump and burn himself. Hanuman thought, "How is it that Rama is here? Why is Rama circumambulating the pyre?" Evidently, it means that Bharata looked exactly like Rama due to his constant meditation on him. This left even Hanuman confused. This is the meaning of what the Veda says, *Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati* - 'Constant awareness of Brahman makes you Brahman'.

Towards the end of the Ramayana, after he had killed Ravana, Rama was returning to Ayodhya along with his consort Sita and Lakshmana in a chariot. Bharata himself was driving the chariot. As the chariot was approaching the outskirts of Ayodhya, the inhabitants were eager to receive Rama, Sita and Lakshmana with garlands. Here again, the people were confused since Bharata, holding the reins of the chariot, looked exactly like Rama. When the people were about to garland Bharata mistaking him for Lord Rama, Bharata had to silently and softly point out to Rama with his folded hands as to who should be garlanded. This is again an instance of total identification, *tadatmya*.

Here is another example. You must have heard of Swami Samartha Ramadas, the preceptor of emperor Sivaji. Like Bharata, Swami Samartha Ramadas also looked for some time exactly like Lord Rama in his form as well as in his manner of walking with the bow and arrow on his shoulders. People, watching this, were amazed, and one of them asked him, "Swami! If you are really Lord Rama, can you shoot the bird sitting over there on a branch located on the top of that distant tree?" Ramadas killed the bird with an arrow. It fell on the ground. Someone said then, "Swami! You have killed the bird for

no reason. It did no harm to you. Rama, known for compassion, never kills anyone without a valid reason. Can you revive it now?" Then, the Swami collected the dead bird with both his hands and lifted it. He prayed for its life. Lo and behold! The wings started to flutter. The bird moved slowly and finally flew away. All present there joined in a chorus shouting in praise of the Swami, "Jai! Samartha Ramadas Ki Jai," (Our praises to Swami Samartha Ramadas!) This is an instance of total identification with God.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! You are referring to *anubhava gyanam*, practical knowledge. We think we know many things. Is this not wisdom?

Bhagavan: Certainly not! The pity is that you do not realise that you do not know. You know very little and what you know is at best negligible. But you think you know everything. What you study is very little and it is a big mistake if you think that you know everything. It is foolish too. There is a lot to be known. What you know is but a fragment, and it is not total knowledge.

Now, look! What is this? This, as you see, is a handkerchief. (At this point, Swami kept the handkerchief in his grip and held it in such a way that only a bit could be seen outside his fist.) Now, what is this? This is only a piece of cloth. It is not the whole kerchief. (Then Swami spread the kerchief and held it in His hands). Now, what is this? You will say, 'It is a kerchief'. Seeing only a bit, you cannot call it a handkerchief. So also, acquiring a little knowledge, you can hardly claim to have attained total knowledge. This is a mistake the educated commit in this modern age. They know a little and claim to know everything. **Complete or total knowledge is awareness, and not knowledge of a bit or a fragment. This you should remember. Go for the whole. Be aware!**

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! When does a devotee get total experience?

Bhagavan: *Bhakti* finds its fulfilment in *mukti*. Till then, we can't say that a devotee has got total experience. Total experience is *purna anubhavam*, *advaitanandam*, a state of nondual bliss, *brahmanandam*, supreme bliss, and *nityanandam*, eternal bliss. A simple example: A river flows incessantly. There may be a number of obstacles in its way. Yet, the river flows on taking different turns. It overcomes the obstacles and proceeds forward. How long and how far? It must reach the ocean and merge in it. The ocean does not permit the merger so easily. It drives away the river or pushes it out. Still the river does not give up its attempt. Finally, as the ocean tides rise, the river merges. When *layam*, *sayujyam*, merger of the two takes place, there the river finds *vis'ranti* and *pras'anti*, rest and peace.

Similar is the relationship between a devotee and God. The flow of devotion leading to merging in God is *sadhana*. The river merging in the ocean is the merger of the individual *jiva* with *brahman*, which is known as *jiva brahmaikyata*; a state of perfect merging or unison of *jivatma* and *paramatma* or the individual and the Ultimate Lord.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! What is wisdom?

Bhagavan: Wisdom is not textual information. Wisdom is not scholarship. Wisdom is not preaching. Wisdom is not verbal or vocal. Wisdom is not an academic Master's degree or Doctorate. Wisdom is practical experience. Wisdom cannot be stuffed into the head. **Wisdom is what enables you to identify your own mistakes, faults, and defects, and correct them and finally lead you towards not repeating any errors of the past.**

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! In the big human body, where is the source of life located?

Bhagavan: You think it is the heart. No. Don't you know that today surgeons can do heart transplantations too? Even while it is done, the patient doesn't die. Then, where is the life principle that keeps you living? In the spinal column between the 9th and 12th vertebrae, there is the life principle that acts as the main switch.

In the *mantrapuspam* (vedic hymn) it is clearly indicated: *vidyullekheva bhasvara*, a lightning or electric current acts as the life centre.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! What are the main principles of life?

Bhagavan: A newborn baby cries, but a grownup man should part from this world smiling. **Do you know why the baby cries? It cries because of the misfortune that lies ahead of it - a long, troublesome and problematic life.**

In the words of Adi Sankara, *punarapi jananam punarapi maranam, punarapi janani jathare s'ayanam*. Everyone is born again and again, life after life. So, the infant cries. But at its birth, its parents, its relatives and elders celebrate, smile and distribute sweets, don't they? Life begins with a question, '*Koham*', (who am I?) But, it should find an answer '*Soham*', (I am He, I am God), before it ends. We get the answer, through *sadhana*, spiritual practice or exercise. There is no point in going through the question paper again and again without finding the answer.

We can in one way divide life into three phases: morning, midday and night. Morning is the stage of an infant, the four-legged one crawling on the ground on both hands and both legs. Midday is the stage of a youth, the two-legged, walking with two legs. Night is the stage of an old man, the three legged with a walking stick as an aid to the two weakened legs.

Brahmacarya, celibacy is the foundation over which a three storied building, with the first floor, the stage of a householder; the second floor that of a recluse; and the top floor that of a renunciant is built. Thus, for the mansion, celibacy is the foundation.

By the time a person becomes fifty years old, he should have full control over his five organs of action, *karmendriyas*.

By the time he is sixty he should have conquered all the six weaknesses, *kama*, desire, *krodha*, anger, *lobha*, greed, *moha*, infatuation *mada*, pride, and *matsarya*, jealousy.

At the age of seventy, after overcoming the weaknesses, he is revered as one of the seven sages, *saptaris*; like the seven notes of music, *saptasvaras*; and the seven seas, *saptasamudra*.

At the age of eighty, having followed the eight paths of *astanga yoga*, he shines like the eight lords of the directions as *tadikpalakas*.

At the age of ninety, life shines like nine precious gems, *navaratnas* having followed the nine paths of devotion.

At the age of hundred, he is master of the five organs of perception, and the five organs of action, and is divine having experienced divinity in depth, *brahma vid brahmaiva bhavati*.

You should also know another point. Whatever you do, it is for your own satisfaction and not for other people. You put on new clothes; for whom do you wear them? It is for your satisfaction that you wear a new dress. You construct a new house; for whom? It is for you only, isn't it? You eat an apple not for the benefit of the apple; it is for your own satisfaction.

Understand that Self is God. You have to play well your role in the drama of your life. Swami is *Sutradhari*, the director, while you are the actor, *patradhari*. Consider this an opportunity. Lead your life in an ideal way and get a good name in society. God should say that you are good. This is what is said in the Gita, *manman a bhava madbhakto madyaji mam namaskuru* - “Don't pray for the fulfillment of desires. Pray to be with Him and Him alone.” Then, everything else will be added unto you. Be always humble and respectful.

In South India, food is served on plantain leaves. When all the items are served, the leaf on account of its weight, remains without being blown off by the wind; when it is empty, it is blown off because of its lightness. In other words, empty vessels make much noise. A tree loaded with fruits is always bent because of the weight of the fruits. Similarly, a true scholar is humble and modest. A cloudlike mass of air goes up higher and higher, while a cloud of vapour comes down. A person with ego ruins himself.

There are four main principles you should know and follow in life. **The first principle is *tyaja durjana samsargam*** - run away from bad company. **The second principle is *bhaja sadhu samagamam*** - be always in good company. If necessary, you better lose or pay money if you must in order to avoid bad company. You should never be separated from good, pious and noble people.

The third principle is *smara nityamanityatam* - bear in mind always what is impermanent or transitory. In other words, distinguish that which is divine from the one that is temporal. You are gifted with intellect for discrimination and

judgment. Discriminate between what is transient, perishable and dual and what is eternal, immortal and non-dual.

The fourth principle is *kuru punya mahoratram* - do meritorious deeds day and night. The body is meant for serving others. *Paropakararthamidamsariram.*

END OF CHAPTER 5

(To be continued...)

CHINNA KATHA

The Mark of a True Devotee

There will always be worry and grief of some type or the other. There is no escaping it, be it in the past or future; while walking, dreaming or even while sleeping. But by placing faith in the Lord and dedicating everyday chores and tasks to Him, the effect of these constant worries can fizzle out completely. Here's how.

One day Narada boasted before Lord Vishnu about how there wasn't any devotee better than him. But in doing so he went against the very first qualification of a devotee - freedom from egoism. So, in order to teach Narada a lesson or two in devotion, Vishnu spoke of a farmer, who was tilling his little plot of land, as a greater devotee. He even recommended that Narada should visit and learn the art of devotion from him!

A little humiliated but at the same time curious, Narada proceeded to the farmer's village. But what he saw amazed him. The farmer was all the time engrossed in either doing his work on the field, in the cattle shed or was busy at home. And in spite of the most vigilant watch, Narada did not hear him utter the Lord's name more than thrice a day; once when he woke up from bed, another time when he took his midday meal and the last when he retired for the night. Narada was naturally incensed that he was deemed inferior to this very poor specimen of a devotee. While Narada was always singing melodiously the divine stories of the Lord and spreading everywhere the message of chanting the name of the Lord, here was a horny-handed son of the soil who remembered the Lord just three times a day, whom Lord Vishnu judged as being superior to him!

He hurried to heaven, his face flushed with anger and ignominy, but Vishnu only laughed at his plight. In answer to his anxiety, the Lord gave him a pot full to the brim with water and asked him to carry it on his head and go round a certain course without spilling even a drop. Narada did so, but when asked how often he had remembered the Name of the Lord while doing so, he admitted that in his anxiety to walk without spilling the water, he had forgotten the Name completely. Vishnu then explained to him that the farmer, who was carrying on his head more precious and more spoilable burdens than a pot of water and who had to be careful not bring harm to any of them, must therefore be more admired for remembering the Lord at least three times a day!

So, even if you remember the Lord with thankfulness at least thrice or even just twice a day, it is rewarding enough and confers with you with great peace. Do not give up your worldly duties, but do them with the Name of God on your lips, thus inviting the Grace of God upon you.

- Baba

COVER STORY

KODAI FESTIVAL 2009

Come the summer months of April and May every year, and the rumour-mill about the Lord's visit to Kodai Kanal is at full swing whether Swami is in Puttaparthi or in Whitefield. For everyone, be it the devotees or the students, to see Swami in Kodai Kanal - the Divine Creator in the midst of His pristine creation - is an ethereal experience. And every visit of the Lord to this sylvan hill station has been absolutely unique and special in ways more than one.

In an earlier cover story [The Divine Playground - July 2005] we had offered you a glimpse of the Lord's glory in Kodai Kanal that unfolded in the year 2005. And what transpired in 2006 came to you as a series of articles [With the Lord in the Mountains by Prof. G. Venkataraman] in various issues of H2H in 2006 and 2007. And now we are back again offering you a detailed narration of His Divine trip in 2009. However, this story is presented much differently than what you might have read earlier on this topic as this is the script of an audio programme that we originally made for Radio Sai. The advantage is now you have not only pictures, but also audio and video clips, making it richer and riveting. Moreover, what we have presented below is just the first of twelve episodes that we have planned for you. So, be on the look out for the rest of story to come in the subsequent issues of H2H. May the tale of this divine odyssey fill you with delight and joy!

DAY 1 – April 23, 2009

Welcome to the first episode of this special series, **KODAI FESTIVAL 2009**, during which we shall take all of you to the cool heights of the mountains, along with the Lord of course, and help you to get a taste of the unique Kodai experience. At the end of it all, we are sure you would find that this is an incomparable experience, not available for all the wealth in the world! In short, you are about to go with Swami to Kodai!

How Kodai became a Part of His-Story

Let us start with what the much-talked about Kodai visits are all about, and how they started. Kodai Kanal is a small town located on the Palani Hills in South India. It is a beautiful hill station, and is about 125 km to the north-west of the famous Temple city, Madurai. Though discovered by the British, in the early days Kodai was patronised more by American missionaries in South India. Till 1916, there was no proper road to Kodai; but after the road was built, Kodai quickly became a popular tourist resort.

Swami first visited Kodai in 1957, along with Mr. Venkatamuni of Madras, and thereafter continued to do so till about 1966. Then came a long break. In the early eighties, Swami resumed His Kodai visits, taking very small groups with him. By the mid eighties, Swami decided to take student groups as a part of His Kodai sojourn, and for this purpose He established a third Ashram there called Sai Sruthi, which is now known the world over.

The Divine Proximity of Kodai

Since then, Swami has been going to Kodai regularly, always taking with Him a small band of students and teachers, for giving them direct, personal attention. Let us learn more about this from Mr. Narasimha Murthy, the Warden of the Hostel of the Brindavan Campus of Swami’s University, who describes what it is like to go with Swami to Kodai.

“It is an unforgettable experience to be with Swami in Kodai Kanal. I know that millions of His devotees all over the world would like to live with Swami at least for a day. Kodai Kanal is the only place where His chosen students, teachers and devotees live with Swami; especially the students. They live in the hall next door to Swami’s room, on the first floor of Sai Shruithi. That is why it is a very unique opportunity and a great experience to be with Swami in Kodai Kanal.”

Our Journey of Kodai 2009 Begins

With that background, let us return to the main narrative.

In this decade or this century, if we might put it that way, Swami first went to Kodai in 2003. He skipped this visit in 2004 but went again in 2005, 2006, and 2007. Kodai was skipped again in 2008 and when summer came in 2009, there was a lot of speculation:

“Would He, or would He not?” For weeks, Swami kept every one guessing, thoroughly enjoying perhaps the acute suspense He was creating! There were all kinds of wild rumours, but finally it became known that Swami would go to Kodai on the morning of 23rd April.

Students Travel on Ahead of Swami

Yes, Swami went to Kodai once more, but there was an important difference. What was that? To learn that, we turn again to Mr. Narasimha Murthy:

“This trip particularly, was slightly different, for the reason that it was the first time that on His journey to Kodai Kanal, the students did not accompany Swami. Generally, earlier when Swami would go to Kodai Kanal via Brindavan (Bangalore), there would be a bus or some vans following Him and they would reach Kodai Kanal by 6 in the evening. In 1999, for the first time, Swami flew from Bangalore airport to Madurai and then traveled by road to Kodai Kanal. Even then, boys would accompany Swami in the plane from Bangalore to

Madurai and then they also followed Swami from Madurai to Kodai Kanal. But this was the first time that the boys went ahead of Swami.”

So the students and the Warden went ahead. What about Swami? For that part of the story, we turn to Prof. Venkataraman, who was blessed and privileged to travel with Swami. And let us get that part of the story, straight from the horse’s mouth, shall we say.

Prof. Venkataraman Describes the Kodai Build-Up

“My going to Kodai this year (2009) is an interesting story. Right from the beginning of April, the rumour mill became very active. There were some who said Swami was going to Bangalore, there were others who said He was going to Kodai, and yet others who maintained Swami would go to Kodai via Bangalore.

As for me, having gone to Kodai three times and with a lot of work ahead of me, I was wondering if I could find some way of staying back. My work involves deadlines and if I am absent for an extended period, then the work has to be telescoped into a very short period, which becomes very difficult – this happened in 2007, when we had to get the Prema Jyothi exhibition ready in barely six weeks, and that was back-breaking I can tell you. And as I am rapidly getting on years, that kind of work compression is getting tough to handle.

So one day, I summoned courage and said privately to Swami, ‘Bhagavan, I am not certain what Your plans are, but in case Swami decides to go to some other place, please may I stay back? This humble prayer is being made since there is a lot of work pending.’ Swami smiled and very emphatically replied, in Telugu of course, ‘Most certainly, most certainly.’

I took that as a good sign, although I knew from experience that with Swami, there can always be last minute changes. And sure enough there was. About four days before departure, Swami suddenly called me inside the interview room during the evening *Darshan*. Very casually He asked me as if He did not know, ‘Are you very busy with the classes?’ I replied, ‘Swami, the University is closed for the summer and there are no classes right now.’ ‘In that case,’ replied Swami, “you are coming with Me to Kodai. We leave on the morning of 23rd, at 8 a.m. Be ready!”

Last Minute Divine Invitation

Actually, I had a hunch that things would work out this way, and so, I had sort of got my act together, so to say. What I mean is that I had planned my work schedule in such a manner that I carved out that portion of the work I could do in Kodai without computer, phone, etc., scheduling all the rest for a later period. This way, I could be ready in a moment’s notice, and that was the kind of notice I finally got!

Whenever Swami takes anyone with Him, He does thorough planning. Next, He makes sure that all instructions are duly issued to all concerned, well in time. I have gone through this routine on many occasions, and knew I had to tune in even the day before.

On 21st, I received the first round of instructions. The plane by which Swami would be travelling would be a private executive jet with a capacity of just eight. So, if I had a suitcase or something like that, I would have to send it along with Mr. Narasimha Murthy earlier. At best, I could take one hand baggage with me. This made my life simpler.

That night, I was told to be ready by 6 a.m. next morning and report at Yajur Mandir, where I would be given further instructions. Next morning I was informed that I would go to the airport in a car that would pick up on the way, Dr. Dash of the Super Speciality Hospital, Bangalore, and Mrs. Ratan Lal. All three of us were then to proceed to the airport and wait there. We should be there not later than 7.30 a.m. Swami was expected around 8 a.m., and board the aircraft immediately for takeoff.

That's the way the morning routine unfolded. When we arrived at the airport, we were first shown into the lounge. Next, our hand bags were taken away for loading. A few minutes later, we were asked to proceed towards the aircraft which was already there, having arrived the previous evening. Thus, by 7.40 or so, all three of us were aboard the beautiful special jet.

Inside Details of the Special Jet Plane

It was a Challenger 604, with two powerful jet engines at the back, Pratt Whitney or GE, I am not sure. There were four large and comfortable sofas in the front, two on one side of the aisle facing each other, and two on the other side, once again facing each other. Towards the back, on the left side as one faces the cockpit, there was a three-seater sofa. The steward on duty during this flight gave me many interesting details about this aircraft; he said, for example, that this could fly non-stop from London to Bombay in about eight hours! For what seemed a small jet, that sure was impressive.

When we boarded, Mrs. Ratan Lal, Dr. Dash and myself occupied the sofa seat, leaving the four seats in the front vacant. Three people were expected to occupy them. One of them would of course be Swami. One seat would be taken by Satyajit, and the third one would be for Mr. V. Srinivasan, who this time was personally accompanying Swami all the way to Kodai, having done much to make the trip possible. The fourth seat would be vacant.

Having taken my seat, I looked out and I could see the tarmac with all kinds of people, airport staff, security people, and sevadals assigned various duties.

In the midst of this crowd, I could also spot our studio boys, whom we must all thank, because without their help you would not be hearing this program. I could also see a portion of the road, which was lined with big crowds, awaiting Swami.”

That was the first instalment from Prof GV. Let us now turn to Swami’s movements.

How Swami Left Prashanti Nilayam on His Way to Kodai

In the morning of 23rd April, a big crowd had gathered in Sai Kulwant Hall, waiting for Swami. As He always does when He goes on a trip, Swami got into the Porte car at Yajur Mandir. The clock showed 7. 45. Satyajit was in the driver’s seat and Mr. V. Srinivasan who took the main initiative for Swami’s visit [as he has been doing for many years], was also in Swami’s car.

Slowly the car entered Sai Kulwant Hall. There Swami took *arathi*, and drove out of the Temple gate towards the airport. As Swami drove past the school, college and hostel, there were cheering crowds everywhere, with many who lined up along the roads throwing flowers at the car.

Shortly thereafter, Swami reached the airport, where a special lift had been arranged for Him to board the plane. After Swami boarded the plane, as usual many people crowded round Him, mainly the ground staff, trying to get photos, *pada namaskar* and what not. By the way, we too got some photos of Swami seated in the aircraft.

Finally, the Captain asked everyone to get off the plane and ordered the doors to be closed. To know what happened thereafter, let us turn once more to Prof. G. Venkataraman.

Swami Boards the Plane and Brings Joy to All

“I shall begin from when we spotted Swami’s car, sitting inside the plane. We were all looking out eagerly through the windows, when suddenly there was excitement and buzz all-round; and sure enough Swami’s car quickly appeared on the tarmac.

Swami got out of the car and moved onto a mobile chair that was then taken to the special elevator. Slowly, the elevator then took Swami and His chair from the ground level to that of aircraft door. A few moments later, Swami was in the aircraft, and what a feeling it was to be with Swami in such exclusive company in an executive jet! I am sure there are millions out there absolutely jealous of me!

It was a special blessing and privilege, and right there I resolved that I would express my thanks by doing my best to capture this entire trip in a wonderful radio documentary, and a companion stirring article in H2H.

The moment Swami got in, a whole lot of people tried not only to get *padanamaskar*, but also their photos along with Swami. Naturally, everyone who was around did his best to seize the opportunity, but then Capt. Sharma who manages the airport and the Captain of the aircraft had their own responsibilities. When a flight plan is filed, and this has to be done in advance, then the aircraft **has** to leave as scheduled. So, at some point, all people not flying were asked to leave so that the door of the aircraft could be shut!

This was done and I thought all picture taking was over; no it was not, for now the steward on the flight came to Swami, took *namaskar*, and had his picture taken, with his cell phone of course!

We were now all told to wear the seat belts. In earlier flights, Swami never did so and no one dared to suggest that to Him either. This time, the steward mentioned this to Swami. Swami smiled and I think Satyajit did the needful.

The engines were revved up and the Captain made the usual announcements. Like all modern aircrafts do these days, this one too had LCD panels connected to a GPS system that showed maps, current location, etc. I noticed that the clock showed 8.10 a.m., that the distance to Madurai was 333 miles, and that the estimated flight time was 47 minutes.

It was all set, and slowly, the aircraft started moving even as everyone outside waved. Swami looked through the window and smiled. The taxiing was quickly over and in no time at all we were airborne and gaining height.”

All of us who had gone to the airport to see Swami off, soon lost sight of the aircraft. But what happened within, as the plane sped to Madurai? Let’s find out from Prof G. Venkataraman.

Flight of the Divine to Kodai

“I have travelled with Swami a few times before, by air specifically, but it was a long time since I went with Swami in a small private jet like this. The last time I had this opportunity was in March 1999, and I believe that entire trip has been broadcast over Radio Sai as a talking book.

Unlike last time, on this occasion, there was much less talk, and whatever was said, was mostly driven by the GPS information appearing on the two LCD screens in the plane, one of it located right before Swami’s seat.

Shortly after the takeoff, the Captain showed up and offered his *pranams*, which was of course customary. About twenty minutes or so after we took off, Mr. Srinivasan signalled to me to move over to the vacant seat in front of Swami since that would help in answering Swami’s occasional questions, which, by the way, were mostly about the flight in progress. Swami’s voice, by nature soft, has lately become even softer and it was sometime difficult to catch what He was saying over the steady roar of the powerful engines, though they were only in the back.

And so, I moved over and sat right in front of Swami. Luckily for me, millions the world over did not know about it, for otherwise, they would not only have cursed me, but got me thrown out offering themselves as a much-superior candidate! Anyway, as a born-in-Madurai-fellow, a qualification that no one else on the flight could claim, I could sort of act as a running commentator as we approached closer and closer to the temple city.

On the whole, the flight was uneventful, and we touched down on the dot. It was about 9 in the morning, and the Sun was well up in the sky, beating down harshly I suppose, though we did not know about it till the aircraft door was opened.

Looking through the window, I could see the helicopter, which, apparently had actually done a dummy run to Kodai the previous day, and kept in waiting so that Swami could transfer easily. Actually there were two helicopters on the tarmac, but it was easy to figure out which was the one Swami would use. There were the characteristic signs, including Sevadals, standing in attendance.

As our plane taxied and came to a stop, Mr. Ramani, State President of Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Tamil Nadu was there to greet and welcome Swami, complete with the crew to help Bhagavan in coming down, for which purpose a special elevator had been arranged. The helicopter was about fifty feet or so away from where the aircraft had parked, and Swami was taken in a moving chair right from the plane, via the elevator, onto the tarmac, to the small ramp near the helicopter. Unfortunately, none of us had cameras and airport security being what it is, hardly anyone of the receiving party had a camera either. In any case, all were on duty with specific jobs to do, and photography was not one of them. What I am trying to say is that sadly, H2H cannot present any photos relating to this part of the Divine journey.

After Swami got down, the entire elevator was moved away and we stepped down using a built in ladder in the aircraft. And having got down, we slowly walked away to the terminal building since everyone was asked to clear out of the tarmac and be near the arrival building while the helicopter took off.

Swami Transfers to His Exclusive Helicopter

Thus it was that I saw Swami take off from the side. The helicopter was a relatively small one with only four passenger seats located behind the two seats in the front, one for the pilot and the other one for his assistant. The four seats were arranged as two pairs, facing each other. There was plenty of plexi-glass all round so that every passenger could have a very good view of the outside. From where all three of us stood, namely, Mrs. Ratan Lal, Dr. Dash and myself, apart of course from Mr. Ramani, Swami could be seen very clearly.

Soon the engines were revved up, and it took about three or four minutes before the Captain slowly raised the helicopter above the tarmac. Thereafter, he just followed the runway from about five metres or so above the ground, and when he reached the far end, he just rose sharply and flew away; within a minute, Swami was out of our sight!

Having seen Swami off, the question now was: How were we to go to Kodai? Mr. Ramani said, 'Listen, all arrangements have been made, but first please come with me inside to the airport officer's room where we shall serve breakfast. Breakfast first, and all talk afterwards.' We just obeyed and silently

followed him to the airport officer’s room, where three packed breakfasts were waiting for us.

None of us were keen on eating and we nibbled just a little bit, while Mr. Ramani, who had left Kodai at 2.30 that morning, had some breakfast himself. He was really carrying a crushing load. In the morning, soon after arriving in the city, he first made sure that the student party led by Mr. Narsimha Murthy was being taken proper care of, and more important, they left by 5 a.m., so that they could be in Kodai by the time Swami arrived there! After attending to all those arrangements, he came to the airport to take care of an entirely different set of duties.

A Surprise Heli-Ride!

As we were finishing breakfast, Mr. Ramani said, ‘Originally, all three of you were supposed to come with me by car to Kodai. But today, there is a bandh called for by a political party.’ I should mention here that the election season was in full swing, and in fact that day was polling day in Puttaparthi. Tamil Nadu, however, was having its polling much later in May, and the election fever was at its highest. This meant a lot of tension, etc., and this bandh meant complete stoppage of transport in the big city. That was one reason why the student party got out of town very early. It was not clear whether we would be obstructed, and so it was decided that the three of us would get a helicopter ride! When I heard that, I said ‘wow’, since I had never before had a chopper ride, although I have flown by air many times and in many parts of the world.

That meant we just sat there and waited, carrying on small talk. I asked Mr. Ramani, ‘OK, we take off, but what about you?’ He gave a Mona Lisa smile and replied, ‘Look, I have many things to tie up. I cannot come right away. In any case, all your hand baggage cannot go in the helicopter. I have to take it with me and deliver it to you in Kodai.’ We then asked, ‘How long do you think we have to wait here?’ He said, ‘Swami would reach Kodai in about 25 minutes. The helicopter has to cool off for a while before it can take off again. The pilot has to then come back. After that he has to refuel and so there is plenty of time ahead! Just take it easy!’”

While Mrs. Ratan Lal, Dr. Dash and Prof. G. Venkataraman were waiting in Madurai Airport, Swami sped to Kodai. And believe it or not, He was there in less than half an hour! From the helipad, Swami drove straight to Sai Sruthi, and needless to say, there were big crowds lined up all along the route. Some say that the drive from the helipad to Sai Sruthi took more time than the ride from Madurai to Kodai. No wonder. If devotees had wings, they would have choked the airways too!

We hope you appreciate how different this trip was for Swami. At 8 a.m. He was in Puttaparthi airport. By 10.30 a.m. He was being greeted by His students in Sai Sruthi! Incredible! More about that, but first let us read Mr. Narasimha Murthy’s account about their trip to Kodai, and getting there before Swami.

The Lord is Warmly Welcomed by His Students

“The students, 36 in number, plus myself, left Prashanti Nilayam by bus around 2 p.m. the previous day, and went to Bangalore International airport, and from there flew to Madurai. We stayed at Madurai that night, and on the next day, the 23rd, we left early in the morning, at 4:30, and reached Kodai Kanal one hour before Swami reached there. So we were there to welcome Swami when He arrived at Sai Shruthi.

Swami arrived at 10 a.m. on the 23rd and He came to Sai Shruthi and the boys were all waiting to go inside. But we didn’t take our luggage inside because we wanted to go inside only after Swami came!

Everybody was sitting with their luggage and waiting under the shade on a side, and as soon as Swami came, we all stood up! Only after Swami went inside, and after He gave word for the boys to come inside, did they go in. When Swami asked the boys to get the luggage, they were very, very happy. And since they had traveled separately, they actually had a little doubt if Swami would allow them to live in the room next to the hall this time. But once Swami permitted they rushed and occupied the little space in the hall. So that is how the day started for the students in Kodai.”

Let’s catch up now with Prof. G. Venkataraman and others. We can’t leave them behind, can we?

Helicopter Rides Can Be Fun!

“As I mentioned earlier, while we were cooling our heels in Madurai airport, we got a minute to minute commentary about Swami’s movements, thanks to Mr. Ramani and his cell phone. Boy, what a difference this gadget has made to communications!

Suddenly someone burst into the room where we all were and asked Mr. Ramani, ‘What are these people doing here? The helicopter pilot is waiting! He wants to take off immediately, because after dropping these people, he has other duties!’ We obviously did not know that the helicopter had returned, refuelled and all that! Anyway, we rushed away and soon we were in the copter.

We just went in and climbed into the chopper – no ladder, no steps, etc. – just climbed in! And it so happened I got the seat earlier occupied by Swami! Honest, I did not scheme or manoeuvre!

The helicopter was quite small but comfortable nevertheless. The windows were real big and one could get a very good view of the outside. When Swami went, there were only three passengers, but this time one more joined us; he was an official connected with the charter company. As we all fastened the belt, this was a must in the chopper, I heard the pilot telling his colleague, ‘I have to drop these people in Kodai, get back to Madurai, do a trip to Madras,

and from there go to Bangalore by night!' When I heard this, I said to myself, 'My goodness, this guy is sounding like a taxi driver!'

The rotor blades were set in motion, and we could see those huge things going all round us and a bit above us. The pilot waited quite a while till the blades were up to the right rpm (revolutions per minute), and then he lifted; the chopper just went up, and it was like floating! He took the chopper to about four meters and then started moving. He went exactly as he did when he flew Swami, that is to say, he strictly followed the runway, and once he reached the end, he quickly went up.

This being my first ride, I was of course excited. But what increased my excitement was I was very familiar with this neighbourhood, and was busy trying to identify familiar landmarks. I could of course clearly see the Tiruparankunram hill at the base of which is a famous Subramanya temple, the railway line leading to Trivandrum, and the hill range by the side of which is the Madurai University campus. But other landmarks that I wanted to spot, I completely missed.

The chopper was gathering speed and also height, and soon I just settled down to enjoying the glorious view from about 5000 or 6000 feet.

Down below were green paddy fields, looking like a chess board. Meanwhile, I kept looking at my watch all the time. I was given to understand the ride would take about 25 minutes; 20 minutes had gone by and there was no sight of the mountains. I was asking myself, 'What's going on?' And then, all of a sudden, the mountains appeared straight ahead, and we were almost at the level of the mountain top. And the Captain was saying he would touch down in a few minutes.

I braced myself for identifying the Kodai landmarks that I knew, and soon we were flying above and past the TV tower, which, by the way can be seen from Sai Sruthi. And before I knew it, I saw down below, to my right, some distance away of course, the lake, and right by its side, Sai Sruthi. I was excited and pointed it out to Mrs. Ratan Lal and Dr. Dash. Within half a minute after that, we were descending in no time at all, we had touched down on the helipad.

We had taken just about 30 minutes to reach Kodai after leaving Madurai airport. It was simply unbelievable! I think the time was about 12 O'clock. At 8 we were in Puttaparthi, and by noon, here I was on top of the mountain, after spending nearly two hours at the Madurai airport! It was like a dream!

While I sat wondering, the rotor blades started slowing down. We were of course severely warned not to try getting down, but I guess there must have been a door lock that would anyway have prevented any attempt to open the door until the release switch was operated by the Captain. I was waiting for the rotor to stop completely; but no, we were asked to get out even while it was still moving, though quite slowly.

I should here mention a few important facts. The first is that this helipad had been specially prepared just a week or so earlier at the private estate of the late Raja of Sivaganga, whose grandson now owned the estate. This gentleman is not only a Sai devotee but also a Sevadal volunteer. The estate is about a dozen or so acres, right at the top of the hill, and the helipad was made specially for Swami. I was told that in case there were clouds [which sometimes happens] the helicopter carrying Swami was to land at a special alternate helipad constructed just for Swami at the foothill, from where Swami was to be taken up the hills by road. Fortunately, the weather was fine, and also free from turbulence and Swami flew straight to Kodai.

We had a good ride, as Swami also had, as I learnt from the Captain. By the way, I should mention that the inside of the cabin was not only pressurised, but also relatively noise free – in all the old models, there used to be heavy chopper noise inside. Earlier Swami had gone once to Alike from Bangalore by chopper and had mentioned a lot about the deafening chopper noise. This time, it was a noise-free ride, relatively speaking that is.

Outside, there were a few cars waiting and we were asked to rush and take our seats. And guess what? By the time we had got into the car, the chopper had already taken off and was on its way back to Madurai! In about fifteen minutes or so we were in Sai Sruthi. As I got down from the car, I was told Swami was with the students, which meant I must immediately go in and report my arrival.

Sai Amidst His Chosen Ones

As I entered the hall, the sight that greeted me really filled me with surprise. Not only was Swami looking fresh as a rose, but in fact, He was fully engaged in a lively conversation with the students, who were crowding round Him, grabbing the chance of a lifetime. He was smiling and joking and what not; it was amazing because I had not seen such a scene for nearly a dozen years now. In olden times, Swami used to spend hours and hours in close company with students, but in recent time, the traffic of VIPs plus the heavy schedule of various events staged before Him, in addition to a few other factors, made such close encounters, shall I say, an almost impossible thing, except momentarily perhaps, at the end of a music or drama performance say. But this was different, and I was so happy to see Swami so happy.

The All Compassionate Mother

As we entered, Swami turned to us and greeted us. His first question was: 'Did you have anything to eat?' I was touched; who would remember to ask such a question, but for Swami those things are very important. We replied, 'Swami we were taken good care of by Mr. Ramani at Madurai airport.' For Swami, that was not enough. 'What were you given for breakfast?' We dutifully mentioned all the items we were fed. Next question, 'But what about tea, coffee?' This was just too much! We replied, 'Swami, we were offered all that and a choice of fruit juices too, but we declined and only drank some water!'

Swami’s eyes then wandered to the wall clock. Noticing the time, Swami said to the boys, ‘Get up, it is time for lunch.’”

So that was Prof. G. Venkataraman, taking us to Swami announcing the lunch break on Day One. For a moment, let us go back to Mr. Narasimha Murthy again, and a few words from him comparing this arrival in Kodai with earlier ones.

Golden Memories of Earlier Years

“In the earlier days, when Swami would travel to Kodai by road from Madurai, His car would reach early. And the boys would be traveling in a mini-bus or a big bus. Generally, they would be slightly late, and Swami would be waiting for their arrival! He would keep all the snacks/tiffin ready for them, and wait for them!

On one particular trip, I can’t remember the year, it was a Sunday and there was heavy downhill traffic in the evening, and the boys’ buses got stuck in the traffic. Swami had reached at 6:30 or so and the boys’ bus reached at 11 in the night and Swami was still waiting for us! He gave us dinner in the dining hall and told the boys: ‘Since you arrived late and are sleeping late, you can get up late – by 8 o’ clock!’ That is His love for His students and anyone who is associated with His students!”

In recent years, day one generally tends to have a light schedule, which of course is understandable. It was so this year (in 2009) too, with a few minutes of evening *bhajans*.

For the record we might mention that when Sai Sruthi was first built in the mid eighties, it lacked many of the facilities we all take so much for granted. In fact, the story of the birth of Sai Sruthi is itself an interesting story, and maybe we shall make it a part of our narrative some other day. For the moment, we would just like to say that the Bhajan Hall was built much later, as a part of the gradual expansion of the Sai Sruthi complex. Once the Bhajan Hall came into existence, Swami held *bhajan* sessions there, with of course, His boys leading the *bhajans*.

Dear reader, as mentioned in the article, this episode gave you a glimpse of the proceedings of Day One of Bhagavan’s Divine Visit to Kodai Kanal in April 2009. We will be following this first episode with another 11 articles to cover all the 12 days of Swami’s stay in Kodai in the coming issues of H2H. So there are plenty of interesting stories and pictures in the pipeline. Do not miss this treasure in h2hsai.org

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 27

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

The Heady Journey to Infinity

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. I am sure many of you would be wondering where is this Infinity to which I am supposed to be leading you? More than two years have passed, during which time we have wandered all over the Cosmos, peering into stars and even inside the atom, the nucleus and what not. We have also had a brief tutorial on Quantum Mechanics, and that mysterious thing called quantum entanglement; but no sight of any Infinity yet!

All this must be making you wonder whether I know what I am doing, or am I merely misleading you and taking you for one mighty big ride on an absolutely random trail!? Let me assure that I am not doing anything of that kind. If, however, you are getting some kind of a worry like that, it only means that this mysterious Infinity that we are in quest of is really at the end of a very subtle road; and soon I expect to bring you face to face with it; thereafter, I shall leave you all alone - to ponder over it!

On that note of assurance, let me pick up from where we broke off last time. If you recall, I ended with a reference to Prof. Robert Jahn’s experiments, consciousness, and all that. That discussion came after some earlier references to Einstein, the EPR paradox, and the strange experiments that confirmed that there definitely appeared to be some mysterious and intangible connectivity underlying the “seen” as well as the “experienced” physical universe. What I was trying to do in the process was to connect quantum entanglement with consciousness in some manner or the other. To be strictly correct, I was not primarily trying to do that; I was merely bringing to your notice what many others have already done or said. In other words, I was just recalling a bit of little-known scientific history.

At the end of it all, we have the following questions:

- Are the foundations of Quantum Mechanics really telling us something about the existence of Consciousness?
- Is quantum entanglement the same as Consciousness?
- By the way, does the word Consciousness mean the same thing to physicists [that is to say, those who believe in Consciousness] and to scholars of *Vedanta*?
- In *Vedanta*, the words *Atma* and [Pure] Consciousness are used synonymously. Is Physics indirectly telling us that the *Atma* is for real?

- But then, Physics can tell us only about what is in Creation, whereas the *Atma transcends* Creation. So what is the connection, if any, between what physicists are talking about, and what Vedantins lecture on?

Nobel Laureate Declares a ‘Universe of Consciousness’

These are some of the issues we shall now take a close look at. Let me start with a couple of quotes from very eminent scientists. Here is what Prof. George Wald of Harvard, who won the Nobel Prize, says:

It came to me quite lately, as a new and extraordinary idea, both tempting and repellent, since it shocked my scientific sensibilities. Then I realised with some embarrassment that many others had been there before – not only mystics, over past millennia, but also a few most thoughtful physicists quite recently.

*It is the view that, just the contrary of consciousness appearing as a late outgrowth of evolution of life on this and other planets, **that this universe breeds life and consciousness because Consciousness is its source, because the stuff of this Universe is ultimately mind-stuff. What we recognise as the material of the Universe, the Universe of space-time and elementary particles and energies is actually an Avatar, the materialisation of Primal Consciousness. In that case, there is no waiting for Consciousness to arise. It is always there, at the beginning and at the end. What we wait for in the evolution of life is only the culminating Avatar, the emergence of self-conscious bodies that can articulate Consciousness, that can give it a voice, a culture, literature and art, and science.***

I hope you read that quote carefully. In this, the hard-core, no-nonsense Harvard Nobelist essentially says, “I don’t like to say it, but it appears that the Universe really came out of [Pure] Consciousness. In other words, Consciousness is the Mother of the Universe, and the Big Bang is nothing but the Cosmic birth pang!” That is essentially what his words boil down to. Please store that away for we shall come back to that later.

Next, I would like to point out, that more than fifty years ago, **Erwin Schrodinger one of the founders of Quantum Mechanics [remember him?], studied Vedanta thoroughly and concluded that the Atma was the Ultimate Reality.** I mean, that is absolutely stunning.

There are many more who could be cited for lending support to the Vedantic idea of Consciousness being the Primordial Entity, but that is really not required. What is important is to recognise that **many giants of Science, despite their natural tendency to dismiss anything beyond**

Science [which Consciousness undoubtedly is], have, reluctantly though, conceded that 1) Consciousness exists, and 2) it is Primordial. Let us store this away for the moment, and get back to our discussion.

Materialism and the Growth of Consciousness

I shall now run through the Creation scenario as different people might view it. I start with what the strictly factual type of person would view it as. His view is captured in Fig 1.

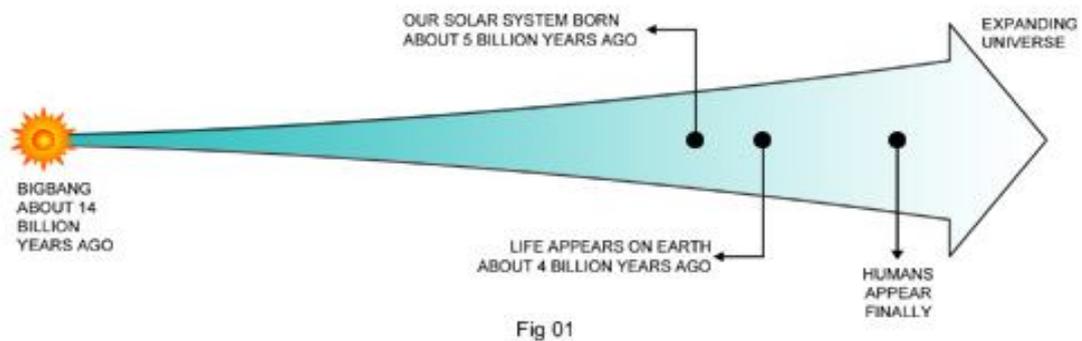


Figure 1: This figure shows a schematic of the timeline according to a person who merely “reports” known, observed and verified facts. For him time would start with the Big Bang, whereupon the Baby Universe would come into existence. Slowly, over billions of years, matter would aggregate into stars, and after that there would be many generations of stars, clustering into galaxies and so forth. During this process that takes place all over the Cosmos, in one corner, what we call our Solar system in due course is born. This solar system would have planets, one of which would of course be the Earth. On this Earth, about four or so billion years ago, life in its most primitive form would appear. How and why? No one knows but life does appear. It then evolves through a whole series of species of increasing complexity. What drives this evolution? Maybe, that happened as described by Charles Darwin. Finally, almost as the end point of the evolution of species, humans appear. Like lower species they too have this amazing capacity for “awareness” but in humans, this “awareness” is very special. This episode of “In Quest of Infinity” is in a sense all about that!

The scenario described in Fig. 1 is but the start of the story, giving as it does just the headlines. From our present point of view, the centre of interest is this “awareness”, the capacity for being Conscious. The question arises: “What exactly is this Consciousness? What does being conscious mean?” This is a non-trivial question, and understandably, different people deal with it quite differently.

Let us start with hard-core scientists [read non-believers!]. They, typified by Francis Crick who along with James Watson discovered the double-helix structure of the DNA and created history, would say: “There is nothing very special about this consciousness business. It is just a rather spectacular capability of the brain, which though wonderful and all that, is nothing but a meat-machine!” Notice that – the brain is nothing but a meat machine! Technically they might be right, but according to me it borders on sheer irreverence to summarily dismiss this great gift of God in such a casual manner. Anyway, that is **View-Point # 1**, which is the one most scientists and “intellectuals” swear by these days. You ask them, “But listen, there are all these complex emotions, feelings etc. They cannot come out of a meat machine, can they?” They would reply without a trace of any emotion, “Over thousands of years, the brain gets increasingly hardwired due to experiences accumulated. So if you see someone hurt and rush to help, it is all the result of ancestral experience passed on to you via the genes which then hardwire your brain to do certain things automatically. That’s all; what’s so great about it? Just a bit of embedded programming!” One thing that must be mentioned in this context is that according to this school of thinking, there is no such thing as a Subtle Mind, independent of the brain. The Mind that philosophers and spiritualists talk of is pure nonsense, invented by these unscientific thinkers to suit their fancy and their crazy and unsubstantiated theories! This rough schema in Fig. 2 captures this viewpoint.

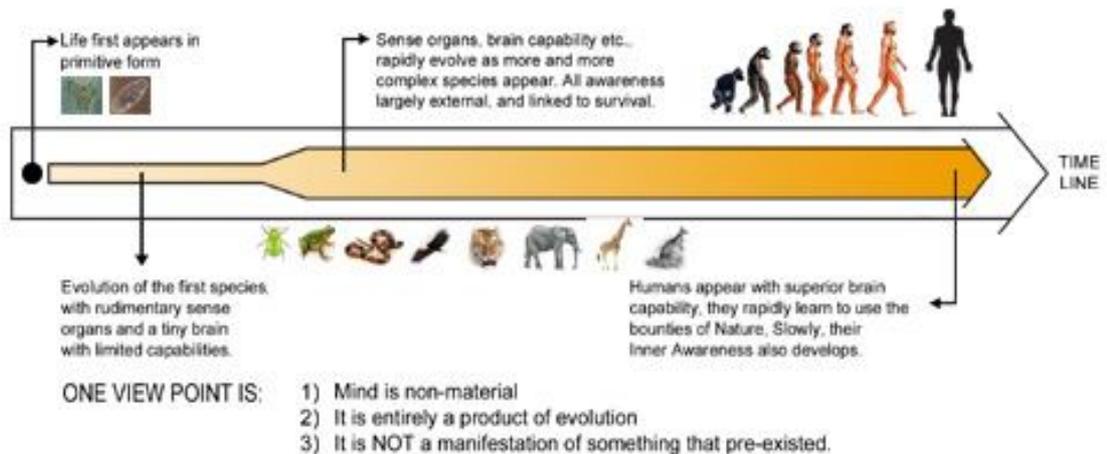


Fig 02

Figure 2: This schematic is meant to show **View-Point #1** regarding how “awareness’ or the capacity for being conscious evolved amongst the living species.

The Psychological Approach to Human Consciousness

From physicists, chemists, biologists and the like, we now move on to psychiatrists and philosophers. This group is not at all uncomfortable about discussing the Mind, especially the human mind. In fact, if I may say so, if psychiatrists deny the Mind, they would be out of business! They are quite comfortable not only with the idea of the Mind, but also of Consciousness; indeed, they use this word quite often, especially the psychiatrists. I should stress here that when these people use the word Mind, a good percentage of them accept the Mind as an entity distinct from the brain and which stands apart. That is an important point.

OK, in that case, where did this Mind suddenly pop up from, during the evolution of species? That question is not often asked. However, I have seen one much-acclaimed book entitled *The Conscious Mind* by David J Chalmers, in which the author definitely says that Mind emerged as humans evolved.

Summarising the two view-points discussed above, hard-core scientists are firm in their belief that there is no such thing as the Mind, *separate* from the brain, while psychologists and some philosophers are prepared to agree that there is such a thing as a Mind that is distinct from the brain; however, this Mind did not exist when life first appeared and it is **entirely a product of evolution**. They totally side step the intriguing question as to how a very subtle entity called the Mind emerged out of something entirely material, namely the brain.

Experiencing the Indefinable Atma

I hope what I have said thus far is clear enough. Let us turn now to the Vedantic point of view where Consciousness not only plays a key role but is at the very heart of the entire discussion. Here, we have to deal with the following issues:

1. *What is the connection, if any, between Consciousness and the Big Bang?*
2. *Did the Mind exist before the Big Bang or did it emerge only after Creation was ordained?*
3. *What is the connection/relationship, if any, between the Mind and Consciousness?*

There could of course be many other supplementary questions, but to begin, the above set is quite adequate. The best way of getting started is by noting that in Vedanta, Pure Consciousness and *Atma* are just two names for the same Supreme Entity. This entity can and does exist all by itself, and is timeless, which is another way of saying it is Eternal.

We all think with our Minds, and using the Mind alone, it is absolutely impossible to have even the faintest idea of what this *Atma* or Pure

Consciousness means. Indeed, that is why the *Vedas* described the *Atma* as beyond words and even thought. At this point, it is useful to note that operationally, Time has meaning only when there is any change. When nothing changes, which is true of the *Atma*, and when it is an indefinable oneness, it is clearly beyond all description. But there is one way of cognising this *Atma*, and that is through experience. That experience is not through the senses or even the Mind, but via the “Heart”.

We all know the physical heart since it is so vital for life to survive. One can have a person who is brain dead, but if the physical heart stops functioning, then that is it! OK, but what about this thing called “Heart” which is supposed to allow us to cognise the existence of the *Atma*? And by the way, how on earth do we know we have actually experienced this *Atma*? I am sure most readers of H2H would know that the word Heart in Spirituality connotes something **very different** from the physical heart, which, as a cynic once described it, is nothing but an amazing pump! Thus, this cynic never used the phrase “heart attack”, preferring instead the description “pump failure”! That is because for this person, Heart did not mean the seat of Compassion and Pure Love; in other words, as Swami often tells us, the Spiritual Heart is ‘the seat of God within’.

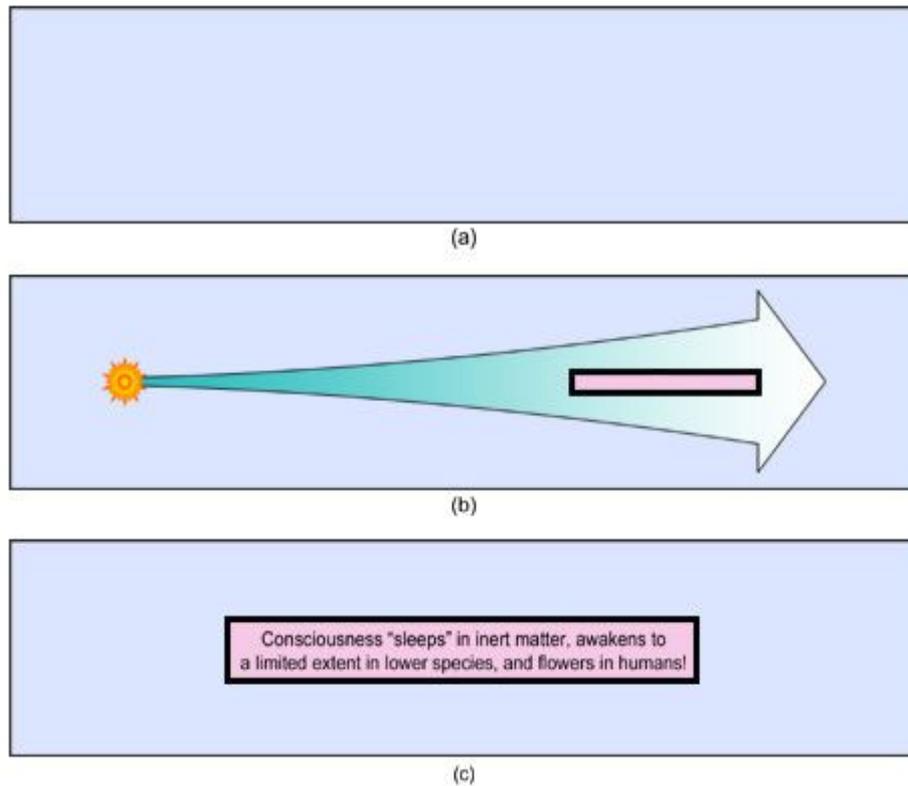
Enough of this minor digression and let us get back to Consciousness, the Big Bang, and the possible connection between these two. Earlier, we discussed two viewpoints into which Spirituality did not enter. Let us now enlarge our view and consider how a Vedantin would describe it all. This is roughly how he would put it:

The Vedantin Explains Consciousness et al

“Listen you guys! Let us start with what Krishna declares in the *Gita*. He says right in the beginning that He is the *Atma* and so is every human being. Further, everything came from the *Atma*, which includes Creation, Physical Universe, call it what you will.”

Question: “Krishna says we are all the *Atma*. He also says that the Universe was born out of the *Atma*. That means, I am born out of myself! Something is wonky in all this! What’s going on?”

To answer this question, let us first take a look at Fig. 3.



VEDANTIC VIEW

- 1) Pure Consciousness is God, and therefore pre-exists creation.
- 2) The Universe is born and evolves against an ever-present and ever constant background of Consciousness.
- 3) As the Universe evolves, Consciousness premeates everything, flowering and manifesting at its best in humans via a) amazing creativity and b) Supreme virtues.

Fig 03

Figure 3: *The background screen in (a) is a symbolic representation of the Infinite and Eternal Atma/Pure Consciousness. As far as this part of the figure is concerned, there is no Time; that is because the Atma is Eternal and beyond Time. Now take a look at (b). We see here the background once more, but superposed on it is a timeline that shows the Big Bang, the emergence of inanimate matter, etc. At one point, we have the solar system taking birth, the earth being formed, and so on. In (c), we see this portion enlarged, and in this magnified representation, we see the emergence of life, the subsequent evolution of the various species, and finally the emergence of human beings. Don't forget that in this figure, the Timeline "floats" on a "background". That "background" is all important, because it imperceptibly influences and indeed directs evolution! More discussion about all this can be found in the main text.*

OK, have you absorbed what is in Fig 3? If so, let us discuss some details relating to it. The basic point we have to understand is that **everything that happens after the Big Bang takes place against a background of Pure Consciousness, which hangs around all the time, though unseen and imperceptible.** That is the important and crucial point of our entire story.

Please note that after the Universe is born, the *Atma* which is the “Mother” does not cut off or walk away! Rather, it is present all the time everywhere, meaning in every corner of the Universe and in even the tiniest atom, nurturing everything in a manner appropriate.

Question: “How exactly does Pure Consciousness or the *Atma* nurse its baby, namely, everything in the Universe?”

That is an interesting question. Truly speaking, that calls for a long answer, which clearly is not possible here. If you are interested, and we hope you are, then you should read the book ***Conversation between God and Man*** where you can find some of the answers you are looking for. We offer you alongside, a picture of the cover. Where to get the book? Well, visit the Radiosai or H2H website (h2hsai.org), it will soon be there!

After that plug for one of our *Sai Blossom* products [!], let us try to understand in brief the question we started with in this issue, namely, wherefrom do humans acquire a Conscience, and what has it to do with “awareness”, as psychologists, etc., understand it? The following conclusions may be drawn:

The Atmic ‘Background’

1. Everything, evolution of inanimate matter, the first emergence of life, the evolution of living species into more and more complex entities, and the growth of brain power as species evolve further and further, all these take place against an all-pervading, constant, and invisible “background” called the *Atma* or Pure Consciousness.
2. The development of the brain can itself be seen as the **increased and forceful manifestation** of the power of the *Atma*, even as the species evolved.
3. In other words, it is this “background force or field” call it what you will, that drives this evolution of “brain power”.
4. When humans emerged, the “background field” became **particularly** active. Why? Because, it was through humans that God intended the *Atma* to give full expression to its various potentialities, on the stage called the world. When it is all by itself, that is to say before Creation, the diverse powers and attributes of the *Atma* are all latent. However, it is only when there is a “platform” – and that platform is the world – that the *Atma* can express itself in a tangible fashion.
5. One of the attributes of the *Atma* is compassion. Can say a lion, show compassion? Perhaps in a rare instance, as in the famous case of Androcles, it could; otherwise, generally not; lions are not “designed” for that! However, humans have been specially tailored for this purpose by God Himself to live and act so that the *Atma* finds full expression through their actions, words etc. [Incidentally, that is why Swami often says: *Jantuunam*

narajanmam durlabham, meaning roughly: Human birth is rare and precious!]

6. In other words, the *Atma* endows humans with special abilities where Consciousness and awareness are concerned. In particular, not only are humans able to be aware of what is going on around them [this sense of awareness is shared with lower beings and might be called **external** awareness], but, in addition, **humans can “look” inside and become aware of an “Inner Force” which is often spoken of as the Conscience or the Indweller.**
7. In short, while the “background” permeates every entity in Creation and remains immanent in it, humans have the special ability to cognise this unique presence of the *Atma* everywhere, including within themselves. This is the role the “background” was actually “waiting to play”, if one might put it that way! And it took off, once humans appeared.

Understanding Our Conscious Universe

So, that is roughly what the expert in *Vedanta* would tell us. Are you able to appreciate the significance of this message from the expert? Perhaps not, since it is really quite heavy! So, as a wrap up of this issue, let me lay it out for you.

1. The *Atma*/Pure Consciousness is the starting point of it all.
2. Basically it can and does exist all by itself. This is a state of incredible ONENESS, that we can never comprehend with our Minds. However, we can experience it, if we prepare ourselves adequately for that.
3. This aspect of the *Atma* is Eternal, beyond Time and Space, and “featureless”. By the way, the *Atma* is also called God; in *Vedanta*, this aspect of God is referred to as *Niraakara Brahman* [God without Form].
4. Featureless it might appear, but the *Atma* is latent with incredible and immense potentialities. This is rather like the “vacuum” of modern Quantum Mechanics; it is not “emptiness”; rather it is a state in which though nothing materially exists, there is infinite potentiality for throwing up a lot of things.
5. Creation is something that emerges from the *Atma*.
6. When Creation takes place, it is not as if the *Atma* in the sense described earlier ceases to exist, transforming into the Universe. Not at all; rather, it is like a mother giving birth to a baby. Before birth, there was only the mother [with the baby in the womb of course]. After birth, the mother is there plus the baby. It is the same here.
7. Is there any purpose behind Creation, or, as Stephen Weinberg put it, the Universe is without a purpose? Well, Steve may think so but in *Vedanta*, the Universe came into existence so that the

potentialities latent in the *Atma* could play out in a manifest form in many different ways.

8. For example, the beauty of the *Atma* [the *Sundaram* aspect for the technically minded] can be seen all over Nature.
9. The noblest qualities like Pure Love and Compassion are best exhibited by the human form, which is why there was a long and complex evolution process, slowly preparing the way for humans to take the stage.
10. It may be humans act out their part in a tiny planet that goes round a B-grade star called the Sun, which is but one of the billion or so stars in a galaxy called the Milky Way, which is one of the billion or so galaxies scattered across the sky!
11. Seen that way, our solar system, our planet and ourselves may seem utterly trivial! [It is good to feel that way since that can check our egos from running away!]
12. Nevertheless, in this wide and huge cosmos, it is humans alone that can comprehend many things. They can understand that it is God who created the Universe [the monkey, for example, cannot do that, obviously!]; they can appreciate that the Universe exists with a purpose, i.e., as a platform where humans can show Pure Love, Selfless Sacrifice etc.
13. And above all, it is on this “tiny and insignificant planet” that God incarnates as an Avatar, enabling us to experience Bliss!

OK, all this is fine, but where is the much-promised Infinity? If that is your question, why don’t you try an answer yourself and write to us with your guesses? Perhaps we can begin the next issue, starting from there? What do you say?

See you again next month; till then, take care! God bless, Jai Sai Ram.

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 19

Living Up to the Challenge of Conscience in Daily Life

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

In our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories from around the globe. These included the experiences of Mrs. Priya K-Aldis, Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani, Mr. Karthik Ramesh, Mr. Amar Vivek, Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam, Mr. Hiten Morarji, Mr. N. Prabhakar, Mr. Sathya Jambunathan, Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi, A courageous woman executive (Part 11), Mr. Shalabh Mittal, Mr. P. S. Kannan, Mr. Sai Mudigonda, an anonymous charity board member (Part 15), Mr. Vivekananda Sahoo, Mrs. Annapurna Shankar and Mr. Venkataraman Krishnamoorthy [Go to Harnessing the Heart Archives].

There are many in this world who face morally-sickening circumstances in their professional or personal life, they are tremendously disturbed and disillusioned as they see no way out. Can one single person be conscientious and stand up for what he or she thinks is right, especially when there is hardly anybody listening or if it means jeopardizing one’s life and career? Can one steadfastly execute a new vision when everybody around is ridiculing the idea? What does it take to live up to one’s ideals? Read this riveting life-story of Ms. Preeti Sahoo, and maybe it will give us a clue or two about how we can make a difference if we really decide to.

THE ‘C’ FACTOR OF MY CHARACTER

***How when you stand up courageously for what you believe in,
you can turn the world around your life unbelievably.***

By Ms. Preeti Sahoo

Ms. Preeti Sahoo is an alumna of the Anantapur campus of Sri Sathya Sai University, where she received her Bachelor’s degree in Economics in 2006. Later, she worked as a Testing Engineer at a Bangalore based software company for 3 years, and is a certified internal auditor for ISO 9001:2000. A spirited individual, she founded a music group at her workplace and also led the company’s social outreach program into the community. Currently she is pursuing her Masters in Business Administration.

I joined the Anantapur Campus of Sri Sathya Sai University in 2003, but truly I was a Sai student right from my early childhood. As a little girl, I was part of the Bal Vikas or Sathya Sai Education in Human Values programme conducted by the Sai Organisation. And today even after I have graduated from the portals of this hallowed University, I cherish the values that this institution instilled in me and continue to strive to stay true to the lessons Baba has taught me.

Bhagavan Baba urges His students to be courageous like the lion. He tells us that the king of the jungle is fearless and majestic, and He expects nothing less from us.

What I learnt from His example and teachings is to never compromise on one's integrity...and a vital part of my training as a Sai student was to be courageous enough to stand for the right.

Courage Never Compromises on One's Integrity

After I completed my Bachelor's in Economics from the Sri Sathya Sai University, I joined a software company as a Testing/Quality Analyst based in Bangalore. It was time for the tyre to meet the road. Who would have imagined how much I would be drawing from my three years' stay in Bhagavan's University for the strength and clarity to meet life's challenges, and take decisions in consensus with my conscience's call.

***With Sathya, Dharma, Santhi and Prema
Carry on your life's journey, oh man;
Karma Yoga is your bounden duty;
Remembering the Lord is the great secret
And Sadhana is the devotee's hallmark,
Proceed, oh man, on your life's pilgrimage
With Sathya, Dharma, Santhi and Prema***

This beautiful and poignant song composed and sung by Bhagavan Baba (originally in Telugu) has always been the lighthouse to me in guiding my ship in the waters of this life.

As I stepped into the world, I realized with great joy that while others outside were busy making ships, my Master had prepared us to be the lighthouses that would guide these ships.

When I joined this software unit, I resolved to practice certain ideals I cherished deeply from my alma mater, integrity being foremost among them. I was determined to earn, by my sincere and hard work, every rupee that I am compensated for in my job. I would work diligently for each of the forty hours in a week to deserve the 40 hours of pay. While filling my timesheet at the end of each week, I experienced my personal moment of integrity, especially since it is a common industry practice to manipulate one's timesheets.

Courage is Challenging an Injustice

During my stay in this company I accidentally witnessed some uncalled for behavior by senior colleagues which violated all sense of propriety. After having stayed in an atmosphere where conduct and discipline is given paramount importance, it was appalling to witness acts of misdemeanor towards ladies and transgression of professional integrity. My inner voice clearly told me that I should not allow the situation to worsen as it would bring a bad image to the organization. I felt I had to bring it to the attention of the leaders. After a strong inner affirmation to follow my conscience, I opened up this sensitive issue with few of my close colleagues, who to my dismay, also shared similar accounts of situations that they had either faced or witnessed. At that moment I strongly felt it was my moral responsibility to raise my concern about this issue with the leadership team and walked into my CEO's cabin to expose all I had witnessed, and my concerns about the same. Initially the CEO was shocked and unable to take it as they could not believe that a senior employee of an organization could misbehave in the most unexpected manner. But later when they heard all the stories and incidents, they took up the matter seriously and interrogated the concerned employee.

After having done what I thought was right, even if risky, I was even ready to put in my papers and leave the organization, as I prized my integrity more than monetary security. But I was stopped by others on the Board of Directors as they were very proud and appreciative of my courageous step. Unfortunately my other colleagues could not talk about the same as they feared losing their jobs, and hence my director was all the more happy with the fact that I took the bold initiative for the sake of the company's larger good even at the risk to my own job security. He insisted I don't leave the company and mentioned that "As a student of the Sathya Sai University, you are the door keepers of this company". So happy was he for I had been brave and candid. He further assured me that I should not fear or hesitate to share any other such disturbing situations in future. Shortly, strong action was initiated against the irresponsible employees.

But for the training on strong value system I have received from Baba's Institute, I would have perhaps not had the courage to fight against the unethical practices and would have chosen to remain a quiet spectator to the injustice.

There are always a million reasons that tempt us to compromise our integrity and not take a courageous stand for righteousness. Our minds can come up with justifications that seemingly make good sense and let us sleep better at night. But at the end of the day, when we place our rationalizations on a scale next to integrity, we might realize that we sold out something priceless for a measly pittance. There's nothing more valuable than our good name and the ability to look at ourselves in the mirror each day with a clear conscience.

At the same time, to practice the value of courage requires enormous inner strength. It means to have the inner reserves to initiate and execute noble

ideas, and remain unruffled in the face of opposition and ridicule from peers and superiors.

Actually, my journey towards a life of courage began nice and early, right under His care.

Courage to Initiate and Execute Ennobling Ideas

My formative school years were spent at a Catholic school in my hometown. Outside of school, during the same period, we were learning Vedic hymns from our Bal Vikas teacher. In one discourse, Baba said that Vedas purify the heart of not just the one who chants but also the listeners.

I was wondering how do I start this noble initiative in my school, a Catholic convent, when, as always, He came to my aid. A state government circular was passed that every school must have prayers from the *Sanathana Dharma* (India's ancient spiritual culture) that promote universal brotherhood.

The next day our Vice-Principal auditioned the students who knew such prayers. Many students chanted the Gayatri mantra as that was all they knew. But when it was my turn I chanted the Vedas. And as I ended the chanting by repeating the word 'shanti' thrice, there was absolute silence for the next two minutes. Finally, the Vice-Principal said: "I have not heard anything like this before. Please start the prayers from tomorrow with these Vedic chants." I was happy that my prayer had been answered but at the same time it pained me that among 2000 odd students there were none who knew these ancient prayers which are a part of our rich cultural heritage.

The Vedic tradition emphasizes unity in diversity at the universal level, keeping in mind man's needs and aspirations, his quest for peace and the link that ought to be established between God and an individual soul.

The mine of Vedic wisdom has unearthed several secrets which Science discovered at a later stage. It has been proven that even when one chants Vedic mantras without understanding their meaning, positive effects are produced on the body. This is the power of the acoustic vibrations generated by the rendering of these hymns. How proud I am of our culture and heritage!

The next day as I stood alone facing the entire school gathered for the morning prayer assembly I strongly felt Baba's presence around me. As I started 'Gananam thva...' and then followed with Durga suktam (another hymns adoring the Divine Mother) I was imagining myself standing in Sai Kulwant Hall in His presence and chanting the same.

The students looked at me in awe and from that moment on, a lot of my peers and teachers saw me in a different light. Many of my teachers came and expressed their joy on this new development in the school. I still remember my history teacher who said: "when you say the Vedas, the entire atmosphere reverberates with the vibrations of the chants, it feels as though the entire environment has been purified."

Courage to be Oneself with Full Confidence in His Support

My debut into Veda chanting for an entire school assembly evoked a lot of respect and admiration, but there was another side to the experience as well. Many senior students came and confronted me and also started teasing me. They encircled me and started imitating the chants. One of them said, "Stop all this braying. All this is good for nothing. We would be happy if you can sing some rock albums."

I was taken aback at this reaction but then realized that this is the way God tests us. I never reacted to what they said thereafter and would always smile at them when they threw these barbs. This continued for many days and every time I would react the same way, for in my heart of hearts I believed in the power of the Vedas and knew that it would protect not only the one who chants them but would also transform the listeners.

I also noticed some reservations from teachers who were from different religious background. They felt how can such prayers be sung in a Catholic school! Though they never said anything harsh but it was clearly apparent from the way they talked to me.

Come Christmas and it was time to prepare for Christmas carols. And thanks to Bhagavan Baba, His teachings and my visits to Puttaparthi, I knew almost all the carols even better than the regular Christian students. I was now teaching the students Christmas carols too!

The same teachers who were behaving with me indifferently earlier were now taken by surprise and their antagonism transformed into admiration. The winds of change were now blowing through the corridors of the school. Many of the senior students who teased and bullied me earlier approached me later and after apologizing, asked if I could teach them the Vedic chants! They wanted to learn Vedas!

Our Principal, who was a missionary priest, one day called me and enquired how I knew both the Vedas as well as Christmas carols. I then narrated to him about Baba and His message of love and service to the humanity. He was touched and said he prays that he is able to visit Puttaparthi and meet Baba.

I passed out from my school more than a decade ago, but the tradition of chanting Vedic hymns still continues there. Even when I visit my school sometimes, my teachers remember me as the girl who introduced the Vedic tradition of universality in a Catholic school.

This is but one of the many occasions when I followed my heart with courage and was instrumental in initiating a change movement. I remember another such endeavour when I was at home during a college vacation.

Courage to Love and Care Selflessly

My mother and I had an opportunity to visit to a Juvenile Detention Centre at Rourkela, Orissa. There we saw children convicted of every possible crime. Interacting with them and observing them, it was not hard to sense that they had committed these crimes in complete ignorance because they did not grow up with a value system that many like me had benefited from. Another strong reason which motivated them to perform these crimes was the destructive influence of cinema on their gullible minds. I recollected how Bhagavan has been always insisting that young minds should never be exposed to too much television which He says is actually 'TeleVisham' or 'the scorpion's poison'. The more I heard their stories the clearer it became that all their misdeeds were imitations of scenes from cinemas.

There was such a feeling of guilt amongst the kids that they bowed their head down and sat with deep remorse, wailing in the crushing jaws of reality instead of enjoying life as young children should.

On seeing their pathetic condition, I realized that I needed to do something to allow the narrow confines of their consciousness to expand, and embrace hope and faith in themselves. I started sharing with them the abundant love that God has showered on all of us. Incidents and experiences of Baba's selfless and unconditional love were slowly bringing about in them a transformation that can be only termed as miraculous. I also told them, the same friends who misled them into committing mistakes didn't even bother to come and meet them when they were in jail. They began to understand that the current phase of difficulty they were undergoing was a period to realize their mistakes and realize that it is only God who would be their true friend, and such situations in their lives were just an excuse for God's entry in their lives.

Listening to the redeeming power of Divine love, slowly these children came out of a depression which surprised even the psychiatrist who used to visit them every week. The doctor acknowledged how wonderful it was that slowly the children were opening to counseling and future rehabilitation. I thanked my Lord – who has shown us the way to a life which courageously depends only on Him and where love can work miracles.

I remembered fondly an often recited song from my Anantapur days, which is very close to my heart:

"We have a great big wonderful Lord, We have a great big wonderful Lord.
A Lord who loves every one of us, does so much for all of us, a great big wonderful Lord. He would never, ever leave us, He is always standing by, He will pick us up when we stumble, we are the apple of His eye. We have a great big wonderful Lord"

Courage to Attach to Work and Detach from Rewards, Success and Setbacks

As Sai students we realized the need to complement each other's efforts instead of competing as rivals, to truly create the team spirit needed to evoke the much-wished for "chala santhosham (very happy)" response from our beloved Chancellor.

We never sought taking individual credit for our collective achievements. This was one stark difference I noticed the moment I stepped into the corporate world. At first it was disturbing to notice this 'shark eat shark' nature that persists, where values are trodden each day over performances. Means have no significance over ends. However, cutting through this screen of perplexing behavior I saw the reason for it and it was – Insecurity, and this occurs at various levels – emotional, physical and so on.

A small incident made me realize that I am all that I could be. I can't be more than what I am. I am complete. I am not waiting for something or someone to make me complete and whole.

This instance happened once again during my employment tenure with an IT company. I was working on three different projects simultaneously and was completely focused on the work assigned to me. There was a need for me to travel home for a week and by the time I returned, I was told by my manager that there would be yet another girl who would be supporting me in these projects as I was overloaded with work. Since she was new to these projects, I had to spend long hours in explaining various aspects of our work despite my own looming deadlines. I ended up working later hours many times. I was later told by my manager that I would have to do the knowledge transfer as she would also be working as a second team member in the projects. In about 15-20 days I could help her in understanding the complete process and flow of the project.

Since it was also a recession time, our CEO called for periodic status meetings to update himself on the progress of each team's respective projects. When it came to the testing team that I worked on, my colleague was asked if I had done the necessary knowledge transfer to her but she was absolutely silent and non-reactive! This came as a surprising shock. It gave an impression to people that I had done nothing in this connection and that everything was done by my other colleague. I tried telling the CEO that I had done complete knowledge transfer but there was no supportive communication from either the girl or my manager. My manager, who knew everything about my work, appeared to be favouring the other colleague, and hence did everything to underplay my performance and highlight her efficiency. Eventually within a span of a month, I was told by my manager that there was a need for only one testing team member and that I could look for better opportunities outside.

After having put in all efforts and been a proven performer for the last 3 years on this project, due to my manager's bias in favour of the new colleague, she

bagged all the credit for my work and also the job. I was told by my other office colleagues and friends, to take this up strongly with the manager and higher authorities to retort back and gain my position back in the company.

I tried once to talk to the CEO directly, but his answers to the situation was not convincing enough for me to continue any further or fight for my position and survive in a very uncongenial work environment. The organization had lost its scruples. Hence, I decided to move out of the organization.

I was naturally disappointed; despite working so hard right as a founding team member in that company I was being treated so unfairly. But that did not devastate me. Thanks to my grounding in values and our powerful culture, I took courage from the eternal dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna in the song celestial, the Bhagavad Gita:

"When a man dwells in his mind on the object of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment springs desire and from desire comes anger."(2.62)[51]

"From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory; and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes".

Remembering these timelessly relevant lines I never gave way to anger, hurt or disappointment. When something you have built for years is snatched away from you in a most inappropriate manner, it requires you to summon strength from the deep reservoir of detachment and equanimity within, and walk away from the experience without losing the lesson.

"With the body, with the mind, with the intellect, even merely with the senses, the Yogis perform action toward self-purification, having abandoned attachment. He who is disciplined in Yoga, having abandoned the fruit of action, attains steady peace." – Lord Krishna

It looked that I had suffered a setback in my career but such a view was short termed. The people and events that anger and hurt us are the ideal educators to help us learn the lessons that will help us shine - at work, at home and in life. Besides, God is always there!

Over time I realised that, moving away from a full-time job actually gave me a valuable opportunity to fulfill my long overdue aspiration to study further. I finally enrolled in the MBA program. And surprisingly, a few days after I moved out, I learnt that the company had lost the client due to the incapability of both the manager and the other testing member, both of whom were eventually asked to leave the organization.

And for people like me, who have tasted the nectarine sweetness of His Love, certainly there are higher goals to be achieved in life than a more lucrative pay package.

“Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, offer service to Me, bow down to Me, and you shall certainly reach Me. I promise you because you are My very dear friend.” – Lord Krishna

And my journey with the Loving and Living Lord never found a dead end. It found a new beginning where He chose me as an instrument in His mission of love and service. After having returned to my home town I had the opportunity to play an active role in organizing an inter-state Sri Sathya Sai Medicare conference for doctors.

Truly, when God closes a door, He always opens another one, that is bigger, brighter and better.

Being Courageous the Right Way

And as I carry on my life, my character anchored on this powerful virtue of courage (which I call the 'C' Factor of my life because it makes my life feel complete), setbacks are only stepping stones. I cannot but recollect a beautiful poem attributed to the late Mother Teresa which resonates with my life's experiences:

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.
Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.
Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.
Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.
Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.
Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the
smallest men and women with the smallest minds.
Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.
Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.
Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.
Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you have anyway.

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.
Love them anyway.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - PART 8

(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 Prasanthi Nilayam. We are now into our eighth Q & A session and as usual, I would like to begin by expressing the hope that you are getting something out of this series.

This month’s question bag has only two questions instead of the usual three. I presume that is because the producers thought these two questions alone would require all the time allotted for this program. Let us see. The questions that I have to deal with in this session are as follows:

QUESTION 1: What is *Mama Dharma*?

QUESTION 2: How can we realise the God within us?

The word “*Mama Dharma*” is not all that common and the fact it features in a question to me means that the one who submitted this question has obviously heard Swami use that phrase. Actually the question is a very important one and I think I should first explain why that is so, before proceeding to answer it.

Swami often asks His students what is the last word of the last *sloka* in the Bhagavat *Gita*. For students, that question is easy because many of them have read the *Gita*; that word is *Mama*. Swami next asks what is the first word of the first *sloka* of the *Gita*. This is even easier for students of the *Gita*, for that word is *Dhamakshetre*.

Swami now says: “Combine the last word with the first part of the first word; what do you get?” The word that we get by this process is nothing but *Mama Dharma*. Swami then slowly says, “That word *Mama Dharma*, is the essence of the *Gita*.” So, what the questioner wants to know is: “What really is the essence of the *Gita*, and why is it so important?”

I trust with that brief background, you will be able to appreciate why this particular question is most important. Before I get on to the actual answering, I should point out that Swami sometimes uses another phrase in place of *Mama Dharma*, and that is *Atma Dharma*. Does Krishna say anything at all about this in the *Gita*? Sure He does; but the phrase He uses is *Swadharma*. So the first thing we have to learn is the equation:

$$Mama Dharma = Atma dharma = Swadharma$$

That is to say, all these three words are **completely equivalent and interchangeable**. The last remark is very important; why? We must first understand that before we get on to the question proper.

Now in the context in which we are using it, the word *Dharma* essentially means duty. The phrase *Swadharma* used by Krishna in the *Gita* is often translated in English as ‘duty of the self’. Technically this may be correct but trouble comes when one mis-interprets the word “self”.

The Two ‘Selves’

Vedanta talks in terms of two **SELFS** associated with our personality. The first is the **Real Self**, also sometimes called the **Higher Self**, while the second is the **False Self** or **Ego**, also called the **Lower Self**. I do hope all that terminology does not confuse you. Even if it does not, you might still say, “OK, all this is fine but where is the problem?” The problem arises when one asks: “What is this “**Self**” that Krishna is talking about, and how is that connected with the two types of Self that you just mentioned?”

The problem arises in the following manner. Now unfortunately, most people take *Swadharma* to mean ‘the duty of the Lower Self’ and thereafter interpret the word ‘duty’ in the sense we usually do. This might appear to make eminent sense but it is **not** correct; in fact to do so is quite misleading, and as far as I know, Swami alone has most emphatically drawn attention to the true meaning of *Swadharma*. Once you accept Swami’s way of interpreting *Swadharma*, the entire ballgame changes and the *Gita* acquires a vastly profound meaning and depth; that is why this question is so very important. What follows would largely be an expansion and amplification of this comment.

Let me get back to the word I started with, namely, *Mama Dharma*. Suppose one were asked to translate that into English, one would automatically say, *Mama Dharma* means ‘my duty’. Seen in this light, when scholars usually say that *Swadharma* means ‘duty of the self’, it would appear that they are indeed

correct. Yes, they would be so, provided they associate the word **SELF** with the Higher Self rather than the Lower Self, as is usually the case.

Which ‘Self’ Am I?

I am sure you are thoroughly confused, and so, by way of explaining it all, let me take you back to a question that Swami often asks in His Discourses, and that question is: “Who am I?” As we shall see, the answer to this question is intimately tied to the question we are considering and trying to answer.

Ask anyone, “Who are you?” and the person would invariably reply, “I am so and so,” and proceed to give his name. If the person is businessman or a techie, he would immediately flash his visiting card, which would not only tell you the name of the person, but also his job title, the organisation he is working for, his phone number, his email ID and so forth. So, all’s perfectly okay.

In that case, where exactly is the problem? Given the way I am building this up would, it may seem to suggest there is! Well, yes there **is** a problem because the response we are seeking is **not** in relation to day-to-day matters but in relation to Spirituality. Where worldly matters are concerned, it is indeed correct and proper to identify oneself by the name given by one’s parents, via one’s profession, and so forth. However, when it comes to answering Swami’s basic question “Who am I?”, responses of the type I am mentioning fall flat! Why?

The answer to that was given a long time ago by Krishna; in fact that is almost the very first thing He teaches Arjuna when He says, “Arjuna, **you are not the body!** You think you are the body, but in reality **you are the Eternal Atma;** that is your True Nature and **not** the transient body you are wearing right now. You may go through many lives wearing many bodies; does that mean that your nature is changing every time you are born? Not at all! Humans change their dress every day; the dress may change but the person wearing the dress remains the same, is it not? In the same way, many bodies might be worn but that which wears the bodies remains the same. Now who is that which is wearing the different bodies? That is the one who says ‘I’ while responding ‘I am so and so’. That response actually means, ‘I am in fact the Eternal *Atma*, presently donning a body that answers to the name of so and so, that is shown on my business card!’”

Of course no one gives a long and technically correct answer like that, and that is because hardly anyone is aware that he or she is the *Atma*! This lack of awareness is very dangerous, because it severely affects the way one performs one’s duty. One might be under the impression that one is very meticulous and is performing one’s duty the way one is supposed to and all that, but if the person does not know such things like what is meant by the word *Atma*, why Swami says we are the *Atma*, what is the difference between the so-called Higher Self and the Lower Self, etc., then one is in danger of doing things that actually **go against** one’s real duty. In other words, if one is **really** serious about performing one’s duty as Krishna ordered us to, and as

Swami is reminding us we should, then we had better take a few minutes to understand what this *Mama Dharma/Atma Dharma/Swadharma* is all about! I hope with that “sales talk” I have persuaded you to pay close attention to what follows.

Atma Dharma and its Vital Importance in Our Lives

Before I proceed further, for the benefit of those who are rather frightened by the word *Atma*, think of it as the Soul within us. Seen this way, *Mama Dharma* simply becomes: ***My duty in accordance with the dictates of the Soul.*** Hope that makes it easier to follow! For the moment, instead of using the phrase *Mama Dharma*, let me stick to the more common one, namely *Atma Dharma* and proceed further and see what exactly *Atma Dharma* implies. I would like to add that I am making this special choice because this way, the critical word *Atma* would always remain on the radar screen. Keeping in view what I just said, *Atma Dharma* simply means performing actions that are in full accord with the Nature of the *Atma*. Now you might feel frustrated and think that I am merely juggling with confusing statements! Not really; give me a few minutes and I shall explain it all.

The first thing we have to understand is that when Krishna told Arjuna that he was the *Atma*, He was in fact saying, “Arjuna, do you realise you are actually God wearing a human dress?” One wonders whether Arjuna did, but it is to remind us of that very same fact that often when we hail Swami as God, He tells us, “You also are God!” At other times, He addresses us as ***Divyatma Swarooplara***, meaning “Embodiments of the Divine *Atma*”. And have we not heard Him begin most of His Discourses these days with the word ***Prema Swarooplara***, meaning “Embodiments of Divine Love”? Why does He do all this? He does this in order to remind us **that we all are Sparks of the Divine.**

Now this is a very important point. Many people imagine humans are born sinners. *Vedanta* says **“No, on the contrary, your intrinsic nature is Divine;** maybe you have accumulated a lot of dirt just as children become dirty when they go out and play in the mud. But **that does not mean your basic nature is that of a sinner.”** Keeping all this in mind, *Atma Dharma* simply means,

“God we all are in truth, and God-like all our actions must be!”

That makes sense, does it not? So the question now becomes: “How to make sure that our actions are God-like?” Many might laugh and say, “Listen, stop being stupid! Do you mean to say when I wave my hand in a circular fashion, rings, watches and chains would drop out?” No, dear reader, being God-like does **not** mean that at all. In the *Gita*, Krishna says at one point that where virtues like *Sathya* or Truth, *Dharma* or Righteousness, *Prema* or Pure Unselfish Love, *Daya* or Compassion, *Kshama* or Forbearance, *Ahimsa* or Non-violence shine, there one finds the radiance of Divinity. Thus, being God-like means our actions should have the stamp of Divinity, the fragrance of Divinity and the radiance of Divinity.

Hearing this, people would shake their heads and mutter, "Nonsense," or "Impossible," and so on. But let me give you a very simple example to prove that the radiance of Divinity is not so rare as we might imagine it to be.

Have you ever seen a tiny baby, just a few days old, smile? I am sure many of you have. How wonderful that smile always is! Have you ever wondered why on earth that baby smiles? Has it won a lottery? Has it got admission to Harvard? Have the stocks it owns suddenly shot up in value on account of a very bullish market? None of these things; on the contrary, the baby hardly even knows who its mother is. It is just a couple of days old; and yet, such babies **do** smile. What exactly are they so happy about?

As Swami sometimes reminds us, little babies are close to God, and God being always in a state of Bliss, babies too are happy – that is their natural state. It is only when they begin learning about the world, start getting attracted to sweets, attached to toys and so on that trouble begins! Anyway, my point was something different, which is that the radiance that one sees along with the beautiful smile that little children flash is actually the radiance of Divinity.

So after all this, what is the point am I making? Basically, I have thus far tried to convince you that deep within, we are in fact Divine. If that is the case, is it not obvious that our actions too must reflect the Divine within? *Atma Dharma* simply says that since we are intrinsically Divine, there is an obligation on everyone to make sure that **his or her actions always reflect the nature of the Atma**. Many might say, "that is a tall order"; before I deal with that issue, there is another question I should answer. People might say: "To ask people to follow the *Atma Dharma*, is pretty vague. What exactly are we supposed to do?"

Now this is an important, practical point and needs some discussion. Basically, *Atma Dharma* is a general principle, which, by the way, applies to everyone and at all times; no one is exempt, be it the king or the pauper. That said, the practical application **does** differ from person to person. Clearly, the way a teacher applies it would differ from the way a government official does and so on. But this much is common, no matter who it is, the person must **make sure that whatever is done is in full conformity with Sathya and Dharma** – that really is the bottom line. Also, there must be no trace of selfishness whatsoever; moreover, the action must, without fail, reflect Divine Love!

Atma Dharma Comes Before Worldly Duties

I shall not discuss here the question whether following *Atma Dharma* is practical or not in the modern world, but I shall illustrate what it means with a simple example. Let us say a person is walking along a road and is in a hurry to reach his office because an important task is awaiting him. As he is speeding towards his office, he sees a pedestrian being knocked down by a speeding car that runs away without stopping to help. The person knocked down is injured and needs help badly; however, no one is coming forward to help. What should our man in the example do? From a worldly point of view,

he might have an excuse for not stopping. However, his *Atma Dharma* requires him to come forward to help. Would that not risk this man losing his job? What would happen to his family then? Those considerations simply do **not** enter where *Atma Dharma* is concerned. **Remember, one must act the same way God would!**

One might persist and say, “Be practical man! It is all nice to talk about acting like God and all that, but what would happen if, after all, this man is fired from his job for not showing up when he was required to?” I agree that is an argumentative point, but if while rushing to help, one also has full faith in God, then that same **God would definitely do something to protect the person’s future; one must have that faith.**

Faith is an important component in Spirituality. Many do not have it but those who do, would be well aware of the old saying that he who protects *Dharma* would be rescued by that very same *Dharma*; no surprise in that because *Dharma* is God. Thus, when one says that *Dharma* would take care, it really means that God would take care. So, if we are serious about following Swami, who strongly endorses *Atma Dharma* [after all, it was He who taught it first, to Arjuna, that is], then we should have the faith that He would not only be very pleased but also give us full support. Let us not forget His assurance that if we take one step, he would take a hundred towards us; we must have full faith in that. Then, following *Atma Dharma* would never be a risky proposition, as many believe it might be.

I shall now move on to the next question, which is:

How can we Realise the God within Us?

I have already discussed this question in an earlier session; at that time, the question was posed as: “How can we realise our innate Divinity?” In view of that, I shall not go over all that ground again; however, since the question has been formally posed in this talk, maybe I could just say a few words by way of response. Basically, though God is our Indweller, we fail to realise that because of spiritual ignorance. This automatically implies that if we are to recognise the Divinity latent within us, we must scrub away all the crust of ignorance that masks the Divinity. That scrubbing is achieved largely through *Sadhana* or appropriate spiritual practices.

People often have a rather mistaken notion about what *Sadhana* is, and imagine that it means performing all sorts of rituals and so forth. Swami makes it very clear that *Sadhana* simply means removing the spiritual contamination that all of us so easily acquire; in short we must improve our mental purity, if we are keen on realising that **God is actually resident within us**. Swami has talked umpteen times about how to improve mental purity, and I shall refer you to Sai literature for that. Here, let me say that one very useful tip is: See no evil, hear no evil and do no evil, all of which adds up to one simple instruction, which is: **Avoid Bad Company!**

I would also like to draw your attention to the following quote from Swami, which also is about *Sadhana*:

Man has to undertake various types of Sadhana to purge his Heart of impurities. Exercises such as meditation, chanting, etc., can only provide mental satisfaction. It is only when the Heart is melted in the heat of Divine Love that one can succeed in getting rid of bad qualities and make the Heart shine in its pristine effulgence. Just as the Sun's rays can burn a heap of cotton if the rays are concentrated through a lens, the rays of the intellect would destroy one's bad qualities only when they are passed through the lens of Divine Love.

Well, that is all for now and I do hope, as always, that you found it useful. Goodbye for now and God bless. Jai Sai Ram.

THE DRAMAS OF LIFE DIVINE

- Part 6

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 14, 2009, drives into one the profound messages enshrined in the Bhagavad Gita through many scenes from the grand epic Mahabharata.

Full Cast

- (1) Lord Krishna
- (2) Vidura, the noble minister in the court of Hastinapura;
- (3) Gopalas, the devoted cowherds of Brindavan;
- (4) Uddhava, childhood friend of Lord Krishna;
- (5) Maitreya, a noble sage;
- (6) Dharmaraja (Yudhistira), the eldest of the Pandava brothers;
- (7) Bheema, the strongest among the Pandava brothers;
- (8) Nakula, one of the younger Pandava brothers;
- (9) Sahadeva, the youngest of the Pandava brothers;

- (10) Draupadi, the noble wife of the Pandavas;
- (11) Disciple, the disciple of Sage Durvasa;
- (12) Durvasa, a noble sage;
- (13) Suyodhana, the eldest of the Kaurava brothers;
- (14) Bheeshma, the great, uncle of both Pandavas and Kauravas who was one of the greatest warriors;
- (15) Drona, the teacher of Pandavas and the Kauravas;
- (16) Sakuni, the brother of Gandhari, the mother of the Kauravas;
- (17) Karna, a great archer and a friend of Suyodhana, who was actually the sixth brother of the Pandavas;
- (18) Arjuna: the master archer among the Pandava brothers.

SRI KRISHNA TATTWA DARSHANAM

- Part 2

Sportsmeet Drama 2009

Scene 3a: Bheeshma’s Oath

Bheeshma is in his camp sitting in a contemplative mood along with Drona. Duryodhana, Karna, Sakuni with Dushasana enter.

Duryodhana: *Pranams Pitamaha (salutations grandsire)! Pranams Gurudev (salutations preceptor)!*

Bheeshma: *Yasaswi Bhava(May you be blessed with good fame)!*

Drona: *Ayushman Bhava, Vatsa (May you live long, Son)! Pitamaha and I were having a discussion about tomorrow’s battle formation.*

Bheeshma: Duryodhana, I fail to conceive any reason for your nocturnal venture. Is there any crisis we failed to foresee?

Duryodhana: We are amidst the greatest battle of our times, and what a greater crisis we can hope for oh grandsire! Every day becomes a lost trail of my victory, and the arrogance of the Pandavas doesn’t seem to abate.

Bheeshma: In your fragile impatient temperament, you refuse to see the dwindling numbers of your enemy. Regiments of their soldiers are being dispatched to Yamaloka.

Sakuni: But, *pitamaha*, what is the use of slaughtering herds of sheep leaving the roaring lions to prowl. The sons of Pandu are making merry under your watchful eyes, O supreme commander.

Bheeshma: The *Kaunteyas* (Pandavas) are an invincible force, shielded further by the presence of Vaasudeva. I have already told you, I shall not kill the sons of Pandu, in fact, they cannot be killed by anyone.

Duryodhana: *Pitamaha*, I wonder on whose side you are fighting, theirs or ours.

Bheeshma: I am not fighting on any side Duryodhana, I am fighting on the side of Hastinapura.

Duryodhana: Then, will you allow Hastinapura to go down on its knees in submission to the enemy? I can sense a treacherous surprise willing to surface any moment.

Drona: Control your violent impulses Duryodhana ! Your immature emotions must not tarnish the blemishless persona of *pitamaha*. The world knows about his terrible vows and his unparalleled loyalty to Hastinapura.

Sakuni: Forgive him, *Gurudeva*. He has already lost 24 brothers to the malicious mace of Bhima. He harboured false dreams of victory under *Pitamaha*'s banner, only to wake up in a terrible nightmare.

Bheeshma: Do not try to test my composure with your wit and sarcasm, *Gandhar Naresh* (king of Gandhar). Wagging tongues do not win wars, blazing arrows do.

Karna: But none of your arrows could harm the Pandavas, *Pitamaha*. Lay down your arms and take rest. Allow me to test the Pandava's invincibility.

Bheeshma: So, finally, an *ardharathi* (semi-skilled general) wishes to discourse me on the vagaries of victory. You take rest, Radheya (karna). Remember your cowardly flight in the war at Dwaitavana and the shameful defeat in the Virata war.

Duryodhana: Enough is enough, *Pitamaha*. [**Padyam**] As the representative of the King, this is my order. Leave the battlefield, and let Karna take your place.

Bheeshma: [*Padyam*] After I put my life on stake for you, this is the honour you wish to bestow on me. Alright, let my soul shatter and my vow be falsified. I shall blot the Sun with my arrows, and bring the wrath of Rudra to shame. I will be the prophet of doom for Pandavas, if that's what destiny demands of me.

Scene 3b: Krishna meets the Pandavas

Arjuna is completely lost in a contemplative mood, as Krishna enters

Krishna: Arjuna, you seem to be in some deep thought. I hope I am not intruding.

Arjuna: Where does the question of intrusion arise for the omnipresent, omniscient one, O Vaasudeva? Your arrival is the only happy moment I can relish at this moment. Every other thing is bitter about this war.

Krishna: Pour out your anguish to me, Dhananjaya, and relieve yourself of the distress that disturbs you. Maybe, I can be of some help.

Arjuna: If, not from You, from whom else can we seek help, Krishna. The fury of *Pitamaha* has caused cracks in the fragile morale of our army. The goal of victory seems to become more elusive than ever.

Krishna: Hmm... I think you should have opted for the Narayani Sena, Partha, instead you took this unarmed charioteer who is becoming a burden to you all.

Arjuna: Hey, *Sanatana Sarathi!* I shall never regret the choice I had made. If it is our destiny to lose, we would be more than happy to lose by Your side. The glory of victory pales to insignificance in front of Your divine company.

Krishna: Then, what about your terrible vows? Is it not your *dharma* to keep up your vows. Are you ready to forsake them?

Arjuna: We know no *dharma* greater than your word, Keshava. Let Your will shape our destiny.

Krishna: My mission is to secure the victory of *dharma*. *Dharma* is on your side and so am I. But the garland of victory shall continue to elude you as long as Gangaputra Bheeshma holds his bow.

The world is My stage, and every drama occurs by My will. It is time for the enactment of a play that shall secure victory for an army and emancipation of a devotee.

[Sloka: Sarvadharmā Parityajya ...]

**Scene 3c:
Krishna’s Leela**

Krishna: Listen, to me carefully, sister. The fate of your husband as well as the war lies in your hands. Be very careful in dealing with *Pitamaha*.

Draupadi moves towards the throne of Pitamaha

Panchali, your sandals may make noise and alert *Pitamaha*. Leave them with Me, and I shall take care of them.

Draupadi: Krishna, You carrying my sandals...

Krishna: *Panchali*, just do as I say. Go now...

Draupadi removes the sandals and gives them to Krishna who wraps them in the cloth and keeps them under His arm. Krishna withdraws as Bheeshma enters.

Draupadi: *Pranams*, O Revered one!

Bheeshma: *Deergha Sumangali bhava* (May you have a long wedded life)! Who are you and what do you want, O *sadhvi* (holy woman)?

Draupadi: What else can a poor daughter-in-law ask for...except blessings, *Pitamaha*?

Bheeshma: Draupadi, you? What brings you daughter here at this dark hour.

Draupadi: Dark times provoke desperate attempts, *Pitamaha*. You blessed me as a *sumangali*, I pray that you uphold the blessing.

Bheeshma: So, hearing of my declaration to kill your husbands, you have extracted a blessing very cleverly from me. Hmm... [*Laughs*] This act definitely bears the signature of a divine endeavor with perfect execution. Hey, *Jagannataka Sutradhari* (the Divine Director of this Universe)! Madhusudana! Where are You? Please come out of Your hiding and present Yourself.

Krishna: *Pranams, Pitamaha!*

Bheeshma: Hey Yashodanandan, you have not yet lost your mischievous touch. See what a precarious predicament You have forced me into.

Krishna: Is protecting your grandsons who are fighting for *Dharma* a predicament, *Pitamaha*? In fact, I am also helping you in fulfilling the blessing of victory you conferred on Yudhishtira in the first day of war.

Bheeshma: [*slightly laughs*] Alright Vaasudeva. Let it happen as You will. My dear daughter, shed all worry. Who can harm your husbands, while the protector of the Universe has taken it upon himself to protect them. In fact, the very thought to harm them is enough, He will devise some ingenious plan to bail them out of trouble.

Krishna: Draupadi, now you may leave. Here, wear your sandals and go. *Pitamaha* and I have some unfinished business left.

Draupadi wears the sandals and leaves as Bheeshma watches in choked admiration.

Bheeshma: Hey *Bhakta Paradheena* (*One who is bound by His devotee*)! When the entire Universe moves according to Your will, You submit yourself to Your devotee's will. You are ready to carry even the dusty sandals of a *Bhaktha*. If only, I were the dust on Panchali's sandals, I would have been liberated by Your touch. Vaasudeva, can you hear a plea from this old man?

Krishna: *Pitamaha*, a devotee need not plead with Me - he can command Me.

Bheeshma: Relieve me from the shackles of earthly bondage, Vaasudeva. The war ceases to be a war to me anymore. It is a *dharma sankata* (dilemma of righteousness) that is tearing me apart from within. End this suffering once and for all, Krishna. Have mercy on me.

[*Padyam*]

Krishna: Bheeshma, you are the very personification of *Shanta Bhakti* (peaceful devotion). My very *Kartavya* (duty) is to protect the virtuous and punish the wicked. You perform your duty, and I shall perform Mine.

Scene 4: Pareekshit Episode

Dharmaraja: The greatest testing time for the *Kuruvamsha* (Kuru dynasty) has arrived. The war has created such deep wounds that they may never be healed for eternity. A slight glimmer of hope lies in the arrival of an heir.

Arjuna: *Agraja* (eldest brother), a deep and unknown fear stalks me. That evil Aswattama has guided the cruel missile against all our progeny.

Bhima: Do not harbor such unreasonable fears, brothers. Our protector Krishna, has promised to save the unborn child. He will never go back on His word. There comes Draupadi. Surely she is bringing pleasant tidings about the arrival of an heir.

Draupadi: Hey *Kaunteyas!* The light of our clan has set even before it could rise. Uttara has delivered a still-born child.

Arjuna: *Panchali!* This is not true. This cannot be true. What wrong have we done to deserve this? What has this so called victory given us except pain, guilt and tears?

Nakula: Crisis has always been an eternal companion in our sojourn. We were robbed of our father’s love, denied the rightful share of kingdom, and made to live in exile by a conspiracy. Endurance has lost its meaning in the ceaseless flow of sorrow.

Sahadeva: And now, the last ray of hope too has gone leading us to a dark and uncertain future.

Dharmaraja: No Sahadeva, there is still one ray of hope left. The light which lit up our dark lives in exile and guided us through the troubled times, will surely dispel the impending doom.

Krishna: Arjuna, why is Hastinapura so silent? Make arrangements for celebrations - get the streets decorated, give charity...why are you staring so? Has the arrival of a grandson suddenly reminded of your age?

Bhima: The curse of Aswattama has taken effect. The world of Pandavas has collapsed with the death of Abhimanyu’s son.

Krishna: Ha! Ha! Your sense of humour has remained very intact, Bheemasena. But don’t utter such inauspicious words. See, how peacefully he sleeps in his mother-in-law’s arms. *Arey!* He is the very image of

Abhimanyu. His eyes are like Abhimanyu, nose is like Abhimanyu, lips are like Abhimanyu...

Arjuna: His breath is also like Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu is dead, so is his son. Mockery has its limits, Vaasudeva. Don't add any more fuel to fire of anguish raging within us.

Krishna: You are all mistaking a sleeping child for dead. Sister *Panchali*, give Me the child.

Krishna takes the child into his arms and with the touch of Krishna, the baby springs to life and laughs.

Arjuna: Hey Keshava! In what words do we express our gratitude to You? [*Padyam*] Hey *Vamsoddharaka* (One who redeems clans)!

In the midst of the padyam, Krishna's mood suddenly became pensive. Arjuna notices this and asks.

Madhusudana, what are You contemplating now? When we were in sorrow, You were smiling, and now when we all are so happy, You seem to be withdrawn. What is the matter, Vaasudeva?

Krishna: *Partha*, do you remember the day Abhimanyu fell? And what did you say...[*Padyam*]...You then termed me as *Vamsanashi* (one who dooms clans). Then I was the destroyer of your clan, and now suddenly I am an emancipator.

Arjuna: Forgive me, Vaasudeva. Being in Your company for all these years, forgetting that You are divine, I have poured scorn on thee and hurt You.

Krishna: When you accused Me as *Vamsanaashi*, or extolled me as *Vamsoddharaka*, I remained unaffected. Then and now, I am the same Krishna. [*Padyam*]

Arjuna: Fie on me, Madhusudana! Fie on me! Even after receiving the nectarine message of the Gita and having a glimpse of Your true form, the veil of delusion has not yet left me.

Krishna: Dhananjaya! It is not just you. This problem is faced by everyone. When the infinite enters the realm of the finite, the principle of Maya

accompanies Him and deludes everyone. I act every moment of My life but every act of Mine carries a message. Take the message behind the act but do not take the action as My reality.

Arjuna: Then Lord, who is the one who is truly liberated?

Krishna: [*Sloka, Janma Karma Cha...*] Whosoever in My birth and action recognizes in true light that I am divine, he is liberated. That is the true *jnana* and the essence of Gita.

Every breath we take, every moment we spend in the Avatar’s presence is His blessing. Know that He is Divine, He is God. That is enough to secure His grace and our liberation.

Yudhistira: Following the Lord is the only true *dharma* - *Mama Dharma*.

Bheema: Let His message live through us, so that Our Life becomes His Message.

Nakula: Let us take the first step saying “I am Yours” and surrender to Him.

Sahadeva: Let us take the second step claiming Him, “You are mine” and offer ourselves to Him.

Arjuna: And finally let us achieve the ultimate merger with the grand experience of unity, “You and I are One”.

THE END

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

SAI CARE TO THE HURRICANE-HIT CARIBBEAN

...The story of how the Sai devotees in Puerto Rico and Venezuela planned and executed a moving service initiative, all by His Grace, for the devastated people of Haiti and Cuba in September 2008.

The Caribbean region consists of nearly 7000 islands. Commonly known as the West Indies, some of the notable islands in this region are Puerto Rico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Haiti and the Dominican Republic actually share one common island, the eastern two-thirds of this is occupied by the latter while the western part belongs to Haiti. And to the east of Dominican Republic is Puerto Rico. And in all these regions, the Sai consciousness is growing amazingly and sanctifying thousands of lives. In an earlier issue of H2H, we had the story of the Sai Movement in Puerto Rico which has a history of nearly three decades even though the formal Sathya Sai Organisation of Puerto Rico came into being in 1987. And since then, this committed group of devotees has engaged in a variety of social welfare and spiritual activities, often reaching out to people outside of their borders. And in all of these sacred endeavours they have experienced the Unseen Hand of Sai. The current story is one such amazing tale.

Hurricane Alert for the Poor of Haiti

Every year, from August through October-November, there are very strong hurricanes in the Caribbean Sea. This made the Service Coordinator of the Sai Organization in Puerto Rico think that perhaps 2008 too would be a difficult one for the islands. He was particularly concerned about the poor people, especially those living in Haiti, who are usually the hardest hit by these hurricanes.

Puerto Rican Sai Devotees Send Emergency Aid

Among all the Latin American countries, Haiti has the lowest standard of living, hence the heightened concern. So the devotees from Puerto Rico started collecting clothes, and food items with the idea to take them directly to Haiti. They had never done this service before, but they contacted the devotees at the Sai Center in Puerto-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, and asked them if they would receive the articles and help to distribute them to the needy. The answer came back affirmative, but also explaining that a detailed list of everything arriving would have to be given to customs with a letter showing that it was a donation. The items were collected from all the centers in Puerto Rico, and packed in boxes. An inventory was prepared and the idea was to take a ferry across from Mayaguez, Puerto Rico to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. And from there to travel overland to Haiti and deliver the aid to the Sai Center in Puerto-au-Prince.

Everything was packed into a van belonging to one of the devotees, and passage was booked on the ferry, which makes the crossing in 8 hours. There was no storm and seas were calm. So on the last week of August 2008, the devotees from Puerto Rico arrived at Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. But to their surprise, they were informed that the government officials in Haiti would not let them proceed because some paperwork still needed official seals of the government and this could take weeks.

Official Snags Delay the Gifts

Also the government officials at the customs in San Domingo were not in agreement to let them even unload the shipment in the Dominican Republic while waiting for the permission from Haiti. It almost seemed like they would have to board the ferry and return with all their humanitarian aid. Just when the obstacles seemed insurmountable, one of the customs officials allowed them to deposit the goods at the local Sai Center while waiting for the permissions from Haiti. The devotees knew it was Sai who had come to their rescue.

Even though the two nations of Haiti and Dominican Republic share the same island, they have not enjoyed good relations for more than 200 years.

No surprise then that the Sai Organization has emerged as the only diplomatic light in this bleak situation, for they have held joint Sai Spiritual retreats in Santo Domingo, where the pervading spirit of Sai love erases all geographical or political differences.

Since the government officials were dragging their feet, the devotees from Puerto Rico had to return home, having brought the service offering only half way. Then the devotees from Dominican Republic took over. They decided to add to the provisions and kept collecting more items until there were 48 large cartons. Everything was put in the inventory, but still there was no permission from Haiti to proceed.

Hurricane Gustav Makes the Aid Indispensable

Then, in the second week of September, hurricane Gustav roared through the Caribbean, hitting many islands but the worse damage was done in Haiti and Cuba. Winds were gusting at 150 miles per hour and torrents of rain flooded everything. When the government of Haiti saw the need to help their people, the paperwork that had taken so long to seal was ready in a day! But now there was another problem. The road leading to the border had been washed out and no transportation was moving.

The devotees in Santo Domingo were frantically looking for a truck to take the load of aid to Puerto au Prince, but all the transport companies wanted a fortune. Finally through friends, a bus company was contacted. They offered to transport the goods, but for \$2,500. The devotees then explained that this was humanitarian aid and no one was making any money so could they give a discount. A call was made to the owners of the company and they asked who

was shipping the goods. When they heard it was the Sathya Sai Service Organization, they said we will only charge for gasoline which would cost a mere \$185.00! Swami again showed His glorious Grace and by the next day the floods had receded enough to let the bus, loaded with supplies get through.

Hundred Joyful Families Receive the Emergency Gift Packs

Finally, when the 48 cartons reached Puerto au Prince, the devotees at the local Sai Center in Haiti were ready. They didn’t just put everything in plastic bags and hand it out to the needy people. Instead, they gift wrapped all items making a total of 110 beautiful gift packs with essential food items and clothes for families who had lost everything. When these were distributed, the recipients had tears in their eyes because someone cared enough to have come to their rescue in the darkest moments.

Who else but the compassionate Sai could have made this delivery so timely, in less than a week after the hurricane had struck!

Hard Hit Cubans Celebrate after Sai Intervention

The same storm, hurricane Gustav also hit Cuba. The damage to life and property there too was as serious as in Haiti. The Sai Organisation Coordinator from Cuba informed that the government had to use all of the available food to help residents in the flood ravaged area, especially Alquizar province, leaving very little food for the people in the capital city of La Habana. Because this disaster hit shortly before Swami’s Birthday, the Sai Organization in La Habana decided it would be impossible to celebrate His Birthday that year. However, a very generous devotee from Venezuela immediately sent 15,000 cases of food items to the government of Cuba for distribution. In Cuba, the Sai devotees are not allowed to participate in distribution of this nature as the government does everything. He also sent \$2000 for the Sai Center for helping those devotees who were in difficulties, and for celebrating Swami’s Birthday.

The money was just in time for helping many who did not have enough food in their homes, and a grand celebration was held with over 300 devotees. The sevadal volunteers were trying to keep things in order for the *bhajans* and cake distribution in a house which can normally accommodate only 50 persons. Sai videos were also shown and also present was a most honoured guest - Her Excellency, The Indian Ambassador to Cuba.

Where ever there is a pure intention and sincere desire to engage in selfless service, Sai is always there. And this story which unfolded thousands of miles away from Prasanthi Nilayam, only reinforces this fact. With Sai everywhere, Sai devotees have no fear. It is only loving and sharing, selflessly.

We are grateful to Jaime Marizan, of the Dominican Republic for sharing this story with us.

PRASHANTI DIARY

June 27, 2009 – Parthi Yatra of East and West Godavari Beneficiaries

The people from the Tribal Agency areas of the East and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh arrived at Prashanti Nilayam on their first ever Parthi Yatra (pilgrimage to Puttaparthi) on June 27, 2009. More than 900 of them had gathered to express their deep love and gratitude to Swami for gifting them life and livelihood. The work that has been done by the volunteers of the Sathya Sai Organisation in the hilly tribal areas of Godavari where inhabitants still live by hunting and collecting forest fruits and flowers in the dense and dark jungles is so phenomenal that it has to be attributed to sheer human perseverance backed by Divine Love. Please read our cover story "The Copious Stream of Pure Love" to know more about this incredible work.

The Mandir had been decorated by the people from Godavari with festoons and banners. The opening banner read, "Salutations from the residents of the hills" in Telugu. Swami arrived for *darshan* at 3:50 p.m. During the *darshan* rounds, He looked up quite a few times, presumably at the decorations that hung in the Sai Kulwant Hall. The students had not yet arrived and so there was a vast empty space in the centre. This turned out to be a blessing of sorts for the devotees as Swami's gaze was always on them. Swami took a complete round and then moved to the stage. Sitting on the stage, swaying to the Vedic chants and looking so beautiful, Swami granted to these simple devotees from the hills what they had pined for – His sublime *darshan*. At about 4:30 p.m., He asked for the programme to begin. As has become the 'norm' now, tens of people from the ladies' and gents' side came forward to offer bouquets, lamp-lighting candles, roses, cards et al. Of late, this in itself takes up about 10-15 minutes. So Swami gently told many of them to be seated and granted *abhayahastha* to assuage their expectant hearts. He accepted the offerings from a few people and the message seemed clear - "Begin the programme! I am very eager to see it!" And thus it was that Dr. Bhaskar Rao, a medical doctor by profession and a veteran devotee cum active functionary of the Organisation dilated at length on the Sri Sathya Sai Village Integrated Programme (SSSVIP) programmes being implemented by the Organisation in these districts.

As he spoke, it became increasingly clear that the name SSSVIP was no coincidence. Swami has literally outlined every detail for the uplift and welfare of the village people. God taking so much interest and showering immense love on anyone definitely makes them VIPs! The Sai Organisation in these hilly areas have taken up 44 out of more than 400 villages in the first phase and have literally transformed them into ideal villages envisaged by Swami. You can read more about this in Part-1 and Part-2 of the June 2009 H2H cover story. After the 25 minute speech, which was both enlightening and moving, Dr. Bhaskar Rao concluded with a prayer that Swami visit the Godavari districts. Swami immediately said, "I will." The profundity of this little statement was discovered over the next two days also as incidents where Swami had been seen in the hills were narrated!

To begin the procession, a tribal, decked in all traditional finery and holding a decorated insignia, came forward and spoke aloud expressing his gratitude to Swami. The Lord smiled and in the meanwhile, a little boy went up to Him with a plate containing a scroll. Swami looked at it keenly and rolling it back, He blessed him and lovingly pulled his cheeks, much to the joy of everyone assembled. Then, like in the kingly days of yore, people came forward offering Swami the plants and produce of their fertile hills. The forest products were all placed on the steps in front of Swami. After that the traditional dances unfurled gracefully in the Divine Presence. To start with, a group of youth beating drums performed the 'Konda Reddla Dappu Vinyasam', an art featuring synchronization of their drum beats. The next was 'Koyadorala Kommu Nrithyam' by the Koya tribals who were dressed with bull horns. They locked horns with each other in mock combat. The Garga dance, performed by the villagers to appease the goddess of the village, was constituted by people balancing small containers on their heads. Stilt walking by children and the traditional Kolattam dance (dancing with sticks) was performed with élan by these villagers.

Next was the peacock dance performed extremely well by a little girl. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the viewers felt that there was a peacock that looked like a girl and not the other way! The theme of that was simple like all others. Hunters try to kill the peacock which rushes to take refuge at Swami's feet. This act has a transforming influence on the hunters. It went down very well with the audience and Swami seemed so happy. The final dance was so touching as it depicted the river, Mother Godavari, requesting Swami to bless her with the touch of His Lotus Feet and relieve her from the burden of sins of all the devotees bathing in her!(It is believed that a holy dip in the Godavari washes away ones sins.)

Swami made a brief visit to the interview room and when He came out, white cloth pieces and sarees also were brought and stacked behind Him. The dances were done wholly by the tribals and featured both boys and girls performing separately. The whole programme was backed by beautiful and apt music and soul stirring commentary. There came a point when Swami seemed thrilled with joy. This happened when the narrator explained as to how the police inspector of the area had said, "Your Baba is really God. He has eradicated naxalism from our area. And He has done it not with any of the weapons that we use, but with sheer Love." Naxalism is a result of the growing divide between the haves and have nots where the latter desperately take to radical measures for survival. Swami once again demonstrated for all to experience and imbibe the power and transforming ability of love and selfless service.

Swami saw that all the children had been seated at the back. He asked them to move front near the stage. The children came and sat in supreme discipline and Swami so lovingly moved down the stage. He went up and down the path in between the children asking many of them their names and age. It was such a lovely scene. As the youth and children reached out to His feet, Swami also reached out to bless them by placing His hands on their heads. His arms were all the while extended, blessing the tribals. Swami then sat for group

photos with them. He told the photographers that He would bless the girls also with the photo opportunity. The simple-minded tribals just sat in reverence and awe as Swami advised them to make a place for Him in the middle. After that, Bhagavan moved to the stage. White cloth pieces for the boys and sarees for the girls were blessed for distribution. *Prasadam* distribution also began simultaneously. Swami enquired about the next day's programme as *bhajans* by devotees continued to fill the air. At 6:15 p.m., Swami received *aarathi* and as the mantra for Universal Peace was being chanted, He raised both His hands in blessings. With a loving smile and words expressing His happiness, Swami retired for the day.

June 28, 2009 – Parthi Yatra of East and West Godavari Beneficiaries – Day Two

The grateful inhabitants of the hills of East Godavari district continued their "Parthi Yatra" (pilgrimage to Puttaparthi) with another evening filled with Love and devotion. Ladies who were to be recipients of sewing machines were seated in the centre of Sai Kulwant Hall alongside one volunteer. Swami arrived at 4:35 p.m. and moved into the ladies side. As Swami passed through the centre, He asked one of the ladies as to what the drama was about. She did not have an idea about it and Swami moved on. After completing the gents' side, He moved towards the interview room via the eastern entrance to the Mandir portico and all the former students of Swami's University who sit there had a wonderful opportunity of *darshan*, *sparshan* and *sambashan*. Swami arrived on the stage at 5:15 p.m. and immediately asked a student seated nearby as to where the drama for the day was! When the student told Him that a distribution was scheduled first, Swami asked for that event to begin. The coordinators offered their obeisances to Swami and began to read out the names of the beneficiaries and the villages they hailed from. As this was done, each recipient beneficiary rose and offered salutations to Swami from his/her place and sat in the allocated positions. Volunteers presented them with their sewing machines. The whole event was complete in a matter of minutes and Swami was visibly impressed with the efficiency and professionalism with which it was conducted. He also told the coordinator, "The distribution was very good and done well." It is a well known saying about self-reliance, "Instead of giving a man a fish, teach him how to fish." Here the sevadals members had gone a step ahead and also gifted the people with a "fishing rod" as many of the tribals had begun to earn their livelihood by stitching, which seemed "tailor made" for them!

The next part of the programme was a musical drama entitled, "Uppongi Poyindi Godavari." The kids performing the drama moved upto Swami and made the initial offerings. Swami blessed them and after a couple of sevadals offered flowers to Swami, the drama began. The opening was with a lilting song which transported one to the waters of the river Godavari and literally made one feel the fresh and cool breeze against one's face. The drama was about the meeting between two tribals and a Sai volunteer in Prashanthi Nilayam. The tribals recount the innumerable blessings that Swami has so lovingly bestowed upon them and state that they have arrived at Prashanthi to

express their gratitude, for what else could they do? Swami was engrossed in the drama throughout and one could see the different emotions move across His face during the course of the drama. It also depicted two incidents where Swami moved amidst the tribals of Godavari. The first one was in Kodada where Swami arrived and promised the tribals pure water to drink. Today, at exactly the spot depicted by Him, there stand the taps of the Sathya Sai Drinking Water Project. The other incident occurred at Rampachodavaram in a village called Sripuram where Swami appeared and provided materials to an old woman for reconstructing her home! Before that, He had blessed the same woman and cured her fever. He even had tea at that village!

We see our Lord seated on the chair, giving *darshans* and enjoying *bhajans*. Our Swami, in the meanwhile, is traversing the globe and providing support and succour to the needy millions. Hasn't He declared, "If you need Me, you deserve Me?" Listening to these experiences, a thrill ran through one's being and Swami also seemed so moved as the tribals poured forth their love and gratitude to Him. The entire drama was populated with melodious and devotion filled song. When the song stated, "Touching the holy soil of Prashanthi, our lives have been sanctified...", Swami appeared very moved and He smiled at the students sitting nearby. A Burrakatha was also presented by tiny tots. Swami was appreciative of it and as it concluded, He looked at the three University students who had done the previous few Burrakathas and seemed to say, "Did you see how well they did it?" The drama soon concluded and Swami asked for *bhajans*. The students were about to begin singing when Swami indicated that He wanted the tribal people to sing. Swami moved into the interview room as the girls from Godavari district began to sing *bhajans* and songs.

When He came out, there were white cloth pieces and sarees that were brought out. Swami asked for the person who was heading all the work being done. When the person moved to Swami, He materialized a gold ring for him. The ring appeared a little tight and when he told that to Swami, the Lord smiled and immediately materialized another ring on the spot for him! He also told him to keep the first ring with him. The director of the drama, Mr. Prakash Rao requested, "Swami, so much has been done in these areas. If by your Grace, coffee plantations are cultivated, there will be good livelihood for the tribals." Swami assured him that coffee plantations would definitely arrive in those hilly areas.

Swami then moved down the ramp and granted the privilege of group photos to all the participants of the drama. He materialized a ring to another active worker of the organization on His rounds! Then, moving into the children, Swami interacted with a few of them. He also blessed the sarees and white cloth pieces to be distributed to all of them. He sat witnessing the distribution in front of tribals below the stage for quite some time. Moving up the stage, He blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed. One of the photographers handed Him a picture of the "dual-ringed" Sevadal worker being blessed by Him! Swami called him and handed over the photo to him even as he exulted in joy. Swami then asked for the *aarthi* but He continued to sit even after the *aarthi* was complete. He told the coordinator that He was very happy. Watching the

scene before His eyes, He felt great joy He said. Sitting like that for about five minutes, it appeared as though Swami was leaving very reluctantly.

Blessed indeed are these innocent tribals that they have so completely won over the Lord's heart. Swami retired at about 7:10 p.m! After that, Mr. Balaraju, the Minister for Tribal Welfare, who had witnessed the evening's programme, rose from his seat; he was a thrilled man. He said that he wanted to know more about the project which had made such an unbelievable impact on the tribal people. He seemed annoyed that the people in his ministry had not updated him about such wonderful work. To top it all, he promised that he would work to get coffee plantations in the hilly regions, and do his little bit for the magnificent project. Indeed wonderful are the ways of the Lord. Coincidences are indeed miracles where God chooses to be anonymous!

June 29, 2009 – Parthi Yatra of East and West Godavari Districts – Day Three

June 29, 2009 happened to be the final day of the Parthi pilgrimage of the devotees and tribal people from East and West Godavari district. In the evening as Swami arrived for *darshan*, a gentle smile danced on His face. Swami, of late, has a new surprise in His treasury of uncertainty. He arrives from Yajur Mandir with little Vibhuti packets. As He is moving through the devotees, He throws a packet or two to those whom He knows need it and there is such a joyous surprise. And Swami, for the past few days, has been giving these packets to little kids who seem to carry the burden of their whole families in the letters they hold in their tiny palms! When Swami smiles at them and lovingly throws the Vibhuti packets, they rush to Him, give the letters and taking a quick *padanamaskar*, return to their place. It's a very sweet scene and must be witnessed to experience it completely. On that day too, three kids were recipients of this 'Vibhuti Grace'.

Moving through the ladies side, Swami reached the marbled area of the Mandir. This had been completely occupied by the tribal folk. Swami collected letters from many devotees on the gents' side and completing the rounds, reached the stage. As He arrived on the stage, He was chanting the Vedas along with all the students! As soon as He was seated in the centre of the stage, He asked a student nearby as to what the programme for the day was. He told that there was "temple-key distribution" followed by speeches. Swami asked immediately for the speeches to begin. Swami knew, of course, that the speakers were the tribals who were not used to facing a huge gathering, definitely not a crowd of this proportion. So He did something so sweet and lovely. The mike was placed before the speaker and he began to speak looking at Swami. He expressed his gratitude at all that Swami was doing, and the Lord on His part kept nodding and reciprocating to the person. In this manner, what was to be a speech transformed into a heart to heart conversation between Lord and devotee! Swami said that He would take care of all the unfulfilled aspirations and granted His *abhayahastha*.

The next 'speaker' was a tribal woman, Nagamani. The word speech has been put in between apostrophes for she spoke in the language of music! She sang a song that she had specially composed on the bountiful Grace Swami had showered on the Godavari villages. It was moving and the students began to play the harmonium and tabla too as accompaniments. As she concluded her 'speech' of five minutes, Swami beckoned her to the stage and materialized a gold chain for her. He also presented a saree to her as a token of His Grace. Swami then asked for the other part of the programme to commence.

Mr. P. Vardhana Rao, Education Wing co-ordinator for SSSVIP, East Godavari District listed out the achievements of the Organisation under the Project, making a mention of the eight fold service scheme. He prayed to Swami to hand over the keys for the four Integrated Village Service Centres, five Rama temples, one Shiva temple and a mini rice mill that had been constructed for the villagers. At this time, another beautiful scene took place. The devotees who had sponsored and initiated the construction activities were all staunch devotees of Swami and Bhagavan became nostalgic as He heard their names being announced. Mr. Dandamudi Venkata Rama Rao who had constructed the temple at village Mareedumilli was a dedicated devotee about whom Swami had once written in a letter, "Ramarao is a blessed soul who has taken birth only due to some karmic balance. He has a pure mind, heart and intellect. His relationship with Swami is at the Atmic level." Mr. Ramarao's son came up to receive the keys along with the tribals' chief when Swami 'recognised' him and said that He had named him when he was small! The family of Mr. Seetharamaiah, the first superintendent at the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital at Puttaparthi, had initiated temple building at the village G. M. Valasa. Similarly Mr. Sai Ravi Sekhar from village Madicherla, and Thuraga Rama Murthy from the village Gunjigudem were the blessed names to be read out.

As the announcements were on, people came up to Swami and collected the keys. Swami immensely blessed every one of them and gifted them with lovely smiles. At the end of the distribution, Swami asked the students to sing *bhajans*. There was something so special in the *bhajans* rendered that day. And that was due to the communion of the flavours of simple devotion that seemed laden heavily in the air and that of Divine grace. Swami seemed lost in a trance as some of the *bhajans* were sung and the devotees were in a clapping and singing frenzy. In between the *bhajans*, Swami was given a photograph of Him gifting the golden chain to the tribal woman Nagamani. Swami called the lady and gave her the picture. She was so happy and fell at Swami's feet before returning to her place. The wonderful *bhajan* session went on for about 35-40 minutes as *prasadam* was blessed and distributed to all assembled. Swami assured all the *girijans* (mountain dwellers) that He would complete any of the remaining works. Then, blessing everyone, Swami received *aarthi* and retired to Yajur Mandir.

July 1, 2009 – Vedam by Mumbai Bal Vikas and Concert by Ms. Kalapini Komkali

The devotees from the states of Maharashtra and Goa had arrived to celebrate the festival of Ashadi Ekadasi with their Lord. The eleventh day (bright half of the month) of Ashadh (Indian lunar month) is known as the great ekadasi or Maha- ekadasi. It is a day of fasting and also the day of the huge "Yatra" or pilgrimages to the god Vithoba (Vitthala) of Pandharpur, a town in south Maharashtra, situated on the banks of the Bhima River, a tributary of the Krishna River. Now that their Vitthala is at Puttaparthi on the banks of Chitravati, these devotees arrive here every year. Though the ekadasi falls on July 3, the celebrations started from July 1st onwards.

A contingent of Veda chanting boys in red and pink *dhotis* waited at the Yajur Mandir awaiting the Lord's arrival. Swami arrived for *darshan* at 9:00 a.m. and the whole hall resounded with the chanting of the Vedic hymns as devotees from both the gents' and ladies' side joined in the chanting. As the procession moved into the hall in front of Swami, He moved through the ladies' side accepting letters and throwing vibhuti packets to a few fortunate ones. It is a glorious site to see Swami as He comes under the glass domed area in the Sai Kulwant Hall when the sunbeams kiss His tender face. The curls of His hair gently move like black clouds in the welcome monsoon season. As He moved to the gents' side, a new development could be observed. The letters being offered to Swami nowadays are so many in number that often Swami would instruct those behind His chair to collect them on His behalf. From that day onwards, that great chance had been given to two sevadal volunteers appointed for doing that! So as Swami moved through granting *darshan*, whenever He indicated, these volunteers collected letters on His behalf.

The Veda procession seated itself in the marbled block and Swami moved to the stage via the portico. Arriving on the stage, He lit the lamp and sat on the stage. The Veda chanting continued for the next 35 minutes or so wherein the Purushasuktam, Narayanasuktam, Durgasuktam, Narayanopanishad, Ganapathiatharvasheersham and the Mantrapushpam were chanted. Swami sat listening and many times joined the chanting. It was a wonderfully vibrant atmosphere. It was evident that all the children and youth had picked up these hymns with a lot of efforts. The ladies' chants however, seemed to drown that of the gents' in volume! As one cycle of all the chants learnt was complete, the chanting restarted and Swami noticed that! He said that they could stop and they concluded with the chanting of the Sai Gayathri. Swami enquired into what the evening programme was and He was told that it was mainly a concert. Swami then received *aarathi* and blessed everyone present with *abhayahastha* before moving into Yajur Mandir.

In the evening, a music concert by Ms. Kalapini Komkali was scheduled. Ms. Kalapini is the daughter and disciple of Pandit Kumar Gandharva and Vidushi Smt. Vasundhara Komkali. Kalapini has performed widely across the country in many prestigious music festivals. After her post graduation in Library Science, Kalapini learnt music from her father and is now an active trustee of the Kumar Gandharva Sangeet Academy. Swami arrived for *darshan* and as

He was going round, enquired into what the huge structure at the centre of the hall was about. He was told that it was the stage for the next day's programme. Arriving on the stage, Swami sat listening to the Veda chanting for about 10-15 minutes. Then, after a brief visit to the interview room, Swami returned and the programme started.

The artist offered her salutations to Swami and began her performance. After about three songs, Swami asked her whether she knew any Telugu songs to which she answered in a sheepish smile. Swami told her to sing some Meera *bhajans* which she did. However, her selection of Meera *bhajans* was unique and all of them seemed to be new to the ears of the audience and seemingly to Swami too! Swami materialised a gold chain for her at the end of her performance and also presented a golden brown saree after her concert. He presented the other accompanying artists with safari cloth pieces. He then signalled the students to sing and told Ms. Kalapini, "Now my children will sing!" The two *alaap bhajans* were sung. As a third *bhajan* was on, Swami called one of the students and asked him whether he knew any Marathi songs. (Ms. Kalapini sings a lot in Marathi). Returning to his place the student sang, "Ye O Vitthale", a famous Marathi song and the whole audience was clapping in rhythm. At the end of it, Swami received *aarthi* and retired to His residence.

July 2, 2009 – Music Concert by Pandit Suresh Talwalkar

The second day of celebrations leading up to Ashadi Ekadasi dawned on July 2, 2009. It was a wonderful morning and at the centre of the Sai Kulwant Hall stood a huge stage. The stage covered the entire stretch of the central part of the Hall horizontally. Eight big focus lights and many huge speakers were part of the stage set up that Swami had enquired about the previous day. One subtle lesson was to be noted here. Swami had expressed His uneasiness about the huge scaffolding and the stage, and also pointed out how the big set up was touching the lights on the top of the Hall. But it was submitted to Him that the stage looked grand. There are times when Swami hints at something. We must always pray that we have the alertness to recognise it and the wisdom to execute it as He wants. Someone once said that God gives direct advice and commands only to those who He is sure will obey Him to the word, for the sin of disobeying the Divine is too big for anyone to bear. Out of His mercy, He gives us subtle signals so that in case we do not obey, we do not bear the burden of the sin of direct disobedience! Swami did not seem too happy about the structure that still stood in the centre.

The scheduled programme in the evening was by Taalyogi Pandit Suresh Talwalkar - one of the greatest Tabla exponents of the present times, synonymous for his untiring efforts, devotion, and endless passion in pursuit of promoting Indian classical music. Pandit Sureshji belongs to the illustrious "Keertankar" family of Sri Dholebuva. Swami took an entire *darshan* round. It was a beautiful sight to watch as Swami moved into the gents' side. The traditional Maharashtrian attire demands a typical *topee* or cap for completion. Hundreds of white caps seemed to rise from the crowds as the people rose in

salutation to their sweet Lord. Swami completed the *darshan* round by going through the portico and then arrived on stage after 5:15 p.m. Listening to the Veda chants for a while, Swami asked for the programme to begin. Pandit Sureshji made a floral offering to Swami and "introduced" to Him, his son Satyajit and daughter Savani. Swami blessed them and all the other accompanying artists as they wended their way to the erected big stage.

The Pandit began by saying that it was more than three decades ago, in 1973, that he was blessed to perform in the Divine Presence. Since then, so many things have changed but as always, the love and connection between Swami and His devotees remain! On that day he was happy to be playing again for Him. For him, it was a 'seva', a service. The stage had five tablists, one person each on the mridangam, harmonium, keyboard, cymbals and the sarangi. There was also a vocalist who would accompany the Pandit at many junctures during their performance. It was a musical feast for the next forty minutes or so as the troupe weaved sheer percussion magic. The songs "Ananda Lahari Bhajave ..." and "Dheem, Dheem Dama Damaru Baaje ..." by the two vocalists and the *taals* (vocal beats) by the Panditji kept the appreciative audience riveted to their places with intermittent applause. There were also interludes in the form of performances by the flautist, one each on the tabla, Sarangi, harmonium and the keyboard that added variety to the performance. The whole concept was designed in an innovative way as the Panditji was well known for it, to make it an apt offering to the *Ganapriya*, the lover of music, that Swami is.

Swami that day seemed to be in the *Gambhirya Bhaavam*, He seemed so Divine as He sat totally unaffected by anything that was going around. Not an emotion arrived on His serene face. He neither looked serious nor jovial. His eyes were fixed on the stage for most part of the programme and at other times He was lost to the world as He closed His eyes. It seemed like a demonstration of perfect *Sthithaprajna*. The crowd burst into applause many times, but nothing seemed to stir in Him. Seeing Him itself inspired one to attain that state of unaffectedness - the state of tranquility. That was how He was throughout the programme.

At the end of the performance, Swami asked the State President, Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, Maharashtra and Goa to honour the artists with shawls and white safari suit pieces. The maestro's daughter was presented with a saree. The artists got up to come forward but Swami told them to be seated on the stage itself. As they were honoured there, the crowd burst into appreciative applause. Swami asked for the *aarthi* to be performed and blessed sweets to be distributed as *prasadam*. When one of the members of the youth came forward and presented a rose to Him, He told him, "You were thin but have become fat now! Reduce a bit!" The person accepted Swami's advice with a smile. The State President confided into Swami that the artists desired a photograph with Him. A smile came over the Divine face and He asked them to come down. He personally arranged them saying to the Panditji, "You be in the centre!" Swami then moved down and posed with them for pictures which the artists would surely treasure for a lifetime. All of

them fell at His feet and sought blessings. It was nearly 7:00 p.m. when Swami moved into His residence.

July 3, 2009 – Ashadi Celebration in the Divine Presence

The month of Ashada (according to the Indian lunar calendar) is synonymous with strong breeze and light winds! Puttaparthi is being rocked and swayed by the wind God and it is such a pleasurable experience at the end of a torrid summer. The kind Lord seems to be blowing the rain bearing clouds too towards the hamlet of peace and the sweet earthy scent pervades the atmosphere. A wonderful statue of Panduranga Vitthala adorned the main stage and cutouts of a group of saints and holy men from the state of Maharashtra through the ages were also placed beside the Lord’s idol. In Maharashtra, a fast is observed on this day which is broken in the evening. As if, in accordance to it, Swami decided to extend this concept to the programmes as well! Swami sent word that the programme scheduled for the morning be held in the evening and the drama to be held in the evening be held the next day! He knows best and whatever He wants to be done is the best possible for everyone. And so, the morning saw *bhajans* and *aarthis* being sung by everyone in Sai Kulwant Hall.

In the evening, it was 5:15 p.m. when Swami arrived for *darshan* - the breeze blowing His fluffy hair and Swami sweetly adjusting it! As He moved through the ladies side, a mother carried her baby to Him and Swami lovingly blessed both of them. He seemed to massage the head of the baby and the mother was ecstatic! Swami was welcomed to the centre by devotees in traditional Maharashtrian attire blowing conches. He moved to the gents’ side and thrilled all the devotees gathered there with His *darshan*. Arriving at the stage, Swami accepted roses from many of the devotees in the portico and side stage and blessed them. Swami then lit the lamp to mark the Ashadi Ekadasi. It was past 5:30 p.m., when Swami asked for the programme to begin. As has become the practice in the last several months, there was a line of offerings before the presentation could begin. Interestingly, in this line was also a wonderful portrait of Swami that had been painted with great skill and Love. Swami looked at the painting closely and it appeared as though He was looking into a mirror! Also, the musical artists who would be providing the background score and singing all the songs, were 'introduced' to Swami one by one. Swami blessed them all and they took *namaskar*. A tiny ‘Shirdi Baba’ also offered a rose. Mr. Shivaraj Patil offered the *Tulasimala* (garland of tulsi leaves) to Swami and the sweet Lord plucked one leaf from it and put it in His mouth!

After the artists and organisers offered their obeisance to Bhagavan, the programme started with the collective chanting of Pandurangashtakam. As the song “Jai Jai Vitthala Jai Hari Vitthala ...” (Victory to Vitthala) was sung to the accompaniment of sweet music, two youth blew bugles to signal the formal commencement of the programme. At the outset, Dindi procession group members or Varkaris offered their humble salutations to Bhagavan through the song, “Maze Mahe Pandhari ...” (my native place is Pandhari).

The Varkaris are pilgrims who walk all the way to Pandharpur in Maharashtra to be there on the day of Ashadi Ekadasi and offer their salutations to Lord Vitthala. Following that tradition, many Sai devotees walk from Dharmavaram to Puttaparthi. The members of that dindi procession came forward and offered their *pranaams* to Swami. A garland of Tulsi leaves was offered at His feet.

The programme was entitled, "Maharashtra Bhakti Gaatha" and it consisted mainly of songs and dances. It depicted through the songs of various saints of Maharashtra, the power of the Lord's name and the ephemeral nature of all material possessions. It attempted to convey that the only way to peace and happiness is simplicity in life. A procession of saints with dances followed during which the three people involved in a conversation in the presentation said that Maharashtra was blessed with the touch of Swami's divine feet as well. A little boy asked Swami, "Swami, would you like to have a look of the photographs of your visit then?" Swami nodded a sweet yes and the boy moved on the stage and showed the black and white photographs to Swami. Then, the depiction of famous Chavadi Procession of Shirdi Baba with the accompaniment of the Bhajan "Dam Dam Dam Damaru Bhaje" evoked nostalgic memories of those glorious days of the previous incarnation. All the songs were being sung live from the huge stage that had been erected in the background. Again, the same child who had shown the photos asked Swami, "Swami, is it true that Swami would again visit Dharmakshetra?" In reply, Swami called the child to the stage and in an instant materialised a gold chain for him. Patting him on his cheeks, Swami asked for the *aarathi* to begin. And so, at 6:50 p.m., eighty percent through the programme, *prasadam* was distributed and *aarathi* was performed. For those who had kept the fast, it was a wonderful to end it with the *darshan* of the Lord and the *prasadam* He blessed!

July 4, 2009 – Ashadi Celebrations in the Divine Presence

The Ashaadi drama that had been scheduled for the evening of July 3 had been shifted to the next day. And so it was that Swami who arrived a few minutes before 4 p.m. was welcomed into the hall by conch-blowing devotees. He completed the *darshan* rounds and by 4:15 p.m. He moved through the portico collecting letters and the roses that were offered. He then moved to the dais. He was on the stage and asked for the programme to begin. Before that, as the chanting was on, Swami gazed up at the various slogans that adorned the stage. "Recite the Name and the Named will be before you", caught His eye and He looked it at for quite a while.

The children also moved up front and made their offerings before the drama began. It started with an introductory dance that stated the fact that Maharashtra had been blessed by saints and godmen galore. The presentation would examine the inspiring life of one such man of God - Sri Gajanan Maharaj. The place is Shegaon. Shri Gajanan Maharaj first appeared at Shegaon on the 23 February, 1878, as a young lad. Bankatlal spots the saint eating leftovers abandoned on the road side and growing inquisitive,

questions the saint about his identity. Gajanan Maharaj asks him to find the answer to the question, "Who am I" first. Interesting anecdotes from his illustrious life were shown depicting the transformation he brought about in individuals bringing in societal transformation. When an enraged villager showers abuse on him at his laziness to fetch water in times of drought, the saint fills a dry well nearby to the brim with water.

In two incidents, the Maharaj shows his spiritual powers to bestow the boon of liberation on his chosen disciples, Bhaskar and Peetambhar. Bhaskar is bitten by a rabid dog and he sees no other doctor but his master. Gajanan Maharaj burns away all his *karmas* in a matter of two months and grants ultimate freedom to him. Peetambar, on the other hand, is told by the master to go away from Him for he had to spread His message. Peetambar realizes that he is a mere instrument and when asked to prove that he is not a thief but a genuine seeker, he brings to life a dead tree through the sheer power of prayer.

A self styled *Brahmajnani*, challenges the master into a debate in the Gita. Maharaj creates a fire surrounding Him and tells the arrogant man, "Come in, for the Gita says that fire can't burn me, nor water wet me." The man immediately falls on His feet and begs pardon. Visiting an evolved soul in neighboring village, Gajanan Maharaj would often get into spiritual discussions and even advised the householder devotee, who was very much evolved, that, despite following *grihastha dharma* (the life of a householder) one could still reach the exalted state of spiritual ecstasy. The master attained merger with his Lord Vitthala chanting His favourite mantra, "Gani Gana Ganath Bothey".

The drama was touching in so many aspects. The foremost was the fact that seeing the drama, one could easily identify the incidents depicted with one's own life with Swami! The chant "Gani Gana Ganath Bothey" was so catchy and elevating that whenever it came up (and it came up regularly) one found oneself chanting along! The inspired words spoken by the saint on many occasions left no doubt in every heart as to who was the inspiration behind those words and one could not help but gaze at beloved Swami with tear-filled eyes. Hats off to the organizers who made painstaking visits to the village Shegaon to collect matter and feel the pulse of the saint before presenting it before Swami. Bhagavan too seemed quite absorbed in the play and as it concluded, agreed to move down the stage to grant group photographs.

The boy acting the role of the saint moved up the stage and offered the text of the holy life of Gajanan Maharaj to Swami. Bhagavan flipped through the pages of the book, paying particular attention to the picture of the saint. Then, He blessed the child and sent him down. As He was moving down, He looked at a student on stage and said, "The drama was very nice." He appeared so moved at the effort of the children. He not only granted them group photographs, but also moved amidst them collecting letters and talking to them. He asked one little girl what her name was. She replied, "Mirabai", which was her role in the drama. Swami smiled, for it appeared as if He had asked for her name in the drama of life! Many of the children were in tears

and Swami seemed to be telling them not to weep! He then moved through the boys actors' area and granted them blessings too.

Finally Swami moved up the stage and blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed. As Swami returned to the car, the Youth team members from the state had an opportunity to show a presentation on the various Youth Awareness programmes conducted across the state. They also detailed Swami as to what entailed in the service activities for the 114 adopted villages in the state. In a village where drinking water facility was scarce, getting potable water once in seven days, Sai Organisational units initiated sending drinking water; taking a cue from this noble deed, some other organizations also joined the activity making it a full week drinking water scheme, much to the joy of the villagers. Sathya Sai Seva Organisation's (Maharashtra) upcoming website was also shown to Bhagavan seeking His Divine Blessings. It also happened to be the last day of service for Swami's security guards of the month. Swami blessed them too with a group picture at Yajur Mandir before retiring for the day.

July 6, 2009 – Guru Poornima Celebration in the Divine Presence

As Prashanti Nilayam prepared itself for Guru Poornima, the stage in Sai Kulwant Hall was set for a drama by the youth from the state of Tamil Nadu. It was past 5 p.m. when Swami came for *darshan*. He arrived at the centre and having a look at the youth in costumes, took a detour and moved towards the stage. Arriving on the dais, He asked a student seated there, "Where is the chair?" The student was perplexed. "God" alone knows of the various dimensions Swami meant with that question, but on a physical plane, Swami was asking about the chairs that were now in the bhajan hall for a special event on the next day. Swami then asked for the translator's podium and His mikes to be brought. There was a great rejoicing and people sat alert and straight as Swami began His Divine Discourse:

***Gurur Brahma, Gurur Vishnu, Gurur devo maheshwaraha
Gurur Sakshaath Para Brahma Tasmai Shree Gurave Namaha***

Though names and forms of the Lord are different, the essence is the same. All are one. So be alike to everyone. The creator, sustainer and destroyer are all one. Brahma becomes Vishnu who in turn becomes Shiva. But God is one. To be free of doubts, have only one name - that is the Atma. The Atma (Soul/Consciousness) is the same in all. Religions are many, the path is one. Yarn is different but the cloth is one. Life forms are many but life is one. So the three prayers that one must offer are that "I am God", "I am the Jeeva (individual)" and "I am the society".

Daiva Preethi (Love for god), Papa Bheethi (fear of sin) and Sangha Neeti (morality in society) are needed. If there is love, morality comes automatically. Without morality, one cannot be man and so it is very important. Love for God expresses itself as morality. Today man has lost fear of sin. He feels he can get away with his sins. Never can you

escape your sinful deeds and so, fear sin. If this fear is absent, morality can never come in society. You will just behave as you want with ego.

Reflect always on your actions. Avoid bad vision, bad talk, bad thoughts, bad hearing and bad actions since you will have to face the results of these without fail. At times you may face the consequences all at a time too. So telling lies and indulging in wicked actions does not benefit human beings. Carry on your life keeping these three principles in mind. One without Neethi (morality) is worse than a Kothi (monkey). Such a person is looked down upon, he/she is worse than a dog.

There are three paths - Bhakti (devotion), Jnana (wisdom) and Karma (Action). The body is for karma. If the body is used properly, the mind is set right. In the mind, you will see the reflection of God. You may have Bhakthi but Karma may go wrong. A fan has three blades and out of the three even if one is out of order, it is of no use.

People question, "Why should I love God?" If you desire morality in society, how else will you get it then? Have discrimination of what is good and what is bad. Be good, see good and do good. This is the way to God. No use of doing Japam and penance. In the nine fold path of devotion, the first is Shravanam. Whatever you hear, discriminate if it is good or bad. When you feel that it is bad, then how can you continue? Today you get away speaking lies, doing bad deeds and unrighteous acts. But they will get at you soon. They can come anytime, anywhere. Make your minds pure and sacred. Purity of the heart is most important.

The Atma has no qualities or attributes. It is eternal, changeless, pure, unsullied, steady and liberating. Understand the principle of the Atma. There are many pots of water and all of them reflect the moon. But the pot is bound to break one day. What happens to the moon then? There is no more water and so you are unable to see it. So too, the Atma is in all as the witness. You are the witness to your mind and character is the witness to the body. No character means no morality and that implies that one is not a human.

We have to earn respect in society. But today no one aspires for it. They view only the rich and poor. Wealth comes and goes. It is not proper to have attachment to money, position and family. You never know when you have to leave this world and so even the money under one's pillow is not secure. The Atma never comes or goes. It exists. Have faith in the Atma. Then you will have no injustice, failure or loss. But in spite of listening to devotional ideas, they just seem to go in from one ear and out of the other. Never rely upon momentary things. When you say 'my mind, 'my body', 'my intellect', realize that you are not that. This book in my hand is mine. (Giving it to the boy seated beside Him) Now it is not mine. I have given it.

To help society in any way, man must have character. There are many people wanting to reform society but they are unable to do so because

they want money. You must be pure at heart to transform society. Have love for God in the first place and that will improve society. Society is nothing but a combination of individuals and so individual purity is paramount. Academics studies, chantings or other techniques are of no use.

First you say that you are meditating. You sit with closed eyes. But what about the mind? All that you do is a practice of concentration. You have to pass through it and then through contemplation to get into a meditative state. I cannot believe when you say that you sat and went into meditation. In meditation, you have to forget yourself. You have to transcend the senses. Today if a father has 4 sons, each chooses a different profession. Though the paths are different, each wants to make money.

(At this point, it began to pour from the heavens and rain struck the roof in fury. After 2-3 minutes, Swami resumed)

Do not be afraid of the rains. Floods come and wash out homes. Many die. That happened in Orissa and Swami sent a message, "Do not worry. Be happy. I'll feed you and take care of your families." The people from Orissa had come in a special train and all those who came said, "No one cared for us or even gave us a naya paisa." I sent them crores! Why do I need money? All I want is your love. Be happy. Develop your morality. Love is God. If you love God, you distance yourself from all cruelty.

When there was the war in Lanka, Hanuman arrived in front of Ravana who asked him as to who had sent him there. Hanuman replied, "You fellow, the kings who chopped away your demoness sister's nose and ears, sent me here." Ravana was shocked as none had dared call him "fellow". He had Hanuman's tail set on fire. But Hanuman used that as a spark to set fire to the whole of Lanka. When Mandodari, Ravana's wife, asked Hanuman what should be done, he said, "Take care of your husband; everything else will be taken care of."

God gives what you deserve. Earn morality. Anything good done cannot be erased or removed. Who can decide what is to happen? Be ready always. The food in storage is bound to get spoilt. You cannot protect it. You cannot hide anything from God's notice however you store or keep it.

If you can, do good. Else shut up and sit. Either in word, singing or at play, do not do bad. You will face the consequences even if it takes time. The Bhagavad Gita has nothing in it. The Upanishads hold all the secrets. Learn who you are and everything is learnt. Make attempts to answer the question, "Who am I?" This is my wife, my child, my father etc. All that is an illusion. All are but gifts and property of god.

Never fight. Fighting is a waste of time. Time waste is life waste. Never waste time. Become worthy of god's love. You think you understand

Brahman, but Brahman has no form. Now the children are putting up a drama. See the drama. I will tell the rest tomorrow.

As Swami concluded the discourse, He asked for the drama to begin. It was entitled, "Sai Yugam, Swarna Yugam." The costumed actors as Krishna, Ved Vyas and two little Krishnas walked to Swami with offerings. Then, the drama began. The storyline was thus. Sage Ved Vyas is worried as to how the golden age would ever arrive in the troubled Kali Age. His preceptor Narada guides him to Krishna who then unveils a timeline of the Kali Age. It unfolds the arrival and message of the great masters - Zoroaster, Lao Tse, Buddha, Jesus, Prophet Mohammed, Adi Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhwacharya followed by the times and teachings of the great devotees of the Lord, namely, Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, Mira Bhai, Purandara Dasa and Kanakadasa conveying their eternal messages. The various predictions from the Islamic scriptures, the Christian scriptures and others were also mentioned to give one the verbal description of the Avatar seated in front of everyone! Krishna then reveals His form as that of sweet Swami. The drama thus made a powerful impact on the unity of religions too. It was as always, interspersed with dances.

Swami called the actors Krishna and Ved Vyas to the stage as the drama went on. He held their hands and asked the photographers to snap pictures. As the drama concluded with another dance, Swami said that He would move down for granting group photos. He spoke to many of the members as the pictures were taken. There He also blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed. It would be interesting to know that Guru Poornima is also called Vyasa Poornima for the sage Vyasa completed writing the eighteen *puranas* on this day! So it was indeed significant that Vyasa was the protagonist of the drama. Receiving *aarthi*, Swami went to the portico where He blessed the model for the construction of the new Institute building at Muddenahalli. He also went into the Bhajan Hall to ensure that the arrangements for the next day were in order. Swami then retired to Yajur Mandir.

July 7, 2009 – Guru Poornima Day in Prasanthi Nilayam

Guru Poornima is a day of great solemnity and reverence for it celebrates the unique relationship that exists between the *shishya* (disciple) and the Guru, the seeker and the sought. The Guru is regarded as the boat to help an individual cross the ocean of life. And when the Lord arrives as the Guru, what more need to be said? In His own words, when on some occasion the famous nursery rhyme 'Baa Baa black sheep', was being discussed, Swami said, "This Baba is a white ship! Not black sheep!" It is indeed reason to celebrate for when in need of a 'boat' we have been taken aboard the 'divine ship'! It was on such a significant occasion that Swami chose to honour the services of some of His long standing devotees. The dais in Sai Kulwant Hall was arranged with chairs. The hall was bedecked like a bride and everyone had been waiting from almost 5:30 a.m. longing to see their Guru.

At about 10 a.m., when the Sun had moved from its cooling orange to a slightly flaming yellow, Swami appeared. The Sun seemed to have taken the cue from Him for He had put on the golden yellow vesture giving up the usual saffron, and a halo of brightness seemed to emanate from Him. Spontaneously people clapped and it was such sheer joy to behold Him in all celestial majesty. The devotees craned and strained to see Him seated on a special white chair and the overall scene was just breathtaking. Swami blessed all the thronging thousands. It has been more than 69 years since Swami sang the ever-new *bhajan*, "Manasa Bhajore Guru Charanam" and humanity seems to have taken this seriously! Swami completed the *darshan* round and moved to the portico where two cakes awaited His arrival. Swami lit the candles and cut the cakes. One of them - the vibronics cake - a special one based on a system of healing was also blessed. Then, Swami arrived on the dais and calling Prof. Anil Kumar, asked to begin the proceedings. The stage was set for a felicitation programme.

Prof. Anil Kumar began with Mr. A.V. Appa Rao, Financial Controller, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram. He was formerly Deputy Accountant General in the States of Kerala, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. Though he held positions of eminence, he was happy to be called a Sevadal in which he served from 1978 to 1992. He narrated an experience wherein Swami diagnosed from the X ray of Mrs. Apparao what had escaped the keen eyes of the doctors! Mr. and Mrs. Appa Rao prayerfully occupied their seats on the dais.

Another senior functionary, Prof. Nanjundaiah, Controller of Examinations, Sri Sathya Sai University, who had the privilege to be with Bhagavan from 1973 was introduced. Formerly, he was the head of the Department of Commerce, NES College affiliated to Bangalore University. He stood first in his university in 1962. He had felt teaching would be a hindrance in his spiritual life but Swami cleared his misconception by saying that it was his mind that was interfering in his spiritual life. He asked Swami, "How am I to understand You?" Swami told him, "Don't understand Me, experience Me." He was the translator of many of His Discourses. Starting his career as a lecturer in the Department of Commerce, he rose to the position of Controller of Examinations. After offering their obeisance to Bhagavan, Mrs. and Prof. Nanjundaiah took their seats on the dais.

Mr. A.V. Sathyanarayana Murthy, Senior Engineer in Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences was the next senior functionary to be introduced. Mr. Murthy used to say that *one should be a servant of God and not to mortals. If you have devotion Swami will confer everything.* Before coming over to Prasanthi Nilayam, Mr. Sathyanarayana Murthy served as Engineer in Bilaspur, Kenya and in New Delhi. He had a miraculous healing after a major heart surgery due to Swami's grace. Mr. Sathyanarayana Murthy then sought Bhagavan's blessings before occupying his seat on the dais.

The next to be honoured that morning was Prof. A.V. Lakshminarasimham, who served as Registrar of Sri Sathya Sai University. Prof. Anil Kumar said that his devotion to Swami could be compared to that of the devotion of

Gopikas for Lord Krishna. His eyes radiated kindness, always had a smile on his face and spoke very softly. He was again from a Sevadal background. He did his Ph.D. from Osmania University. Joining the Brindavan Campus as a lecturer, he was elevated to the echelons of Reader, Professor, Principal of Prasanthi Nilayam Campus and finally as Registrar of the University. He too humbly took his seat on the dais.

As each of the functionaries arrived on stage, they rushed straight to the Lotus Feet, their object of desire and service for all these years, and offered roses to Swami. Once the functionaries were seated, they were garlanded in the Divine Presence by their worthy successors in some cases and in other cases, by other eminent people in His mission. There were two scheduled speeches. The first was by Dr. A.N. Safaya, Director, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences. He began his speech by saying that he had lots of experiences and to narrate them would need another Bhagavatham. Narrating how Swami has been guiding him always, he lavished praise on Mr. Apparao for his precision work and accepted the fact that he would sorely miss him. He also paid glowing tributes to the work of Mr. Sathyanarayana Murthy. After Dr. Safaya’s speech, it was revealed to the audience that Mr. Appa Rao and Mr. Sathyanarayana Murthy were brothers and Prof. A.V. Lakshminarasimham was also the chip of the same block, being the youngest among them! There was an applause for the dedication of this family to Swami. Prof. Vishwanath Pandit, Vice Chancellor, Sri Sathya Sai University, then paid tributes to the efficient and rich work done by Prof. Nanjundiah and Prof. Lakshminarasimham.

The speeches having been completed, there was absolute silence in the huge hall. The *prasadam* bowls were taken to Swami. Bhagavan sat playing with the sweet packets for a short while. Then He called out for four boys in the front and personally gave them the *prasadam*! Blessed indeed were they to get *prasadam* from the Guru on Guru Poornima! Then Swami distributed the *prasadam* to all those who had been felicitated and they accepted it with gratitude. Swami also blessed chocolates to be distributed. Then, Swami presented the felicitated functionaries with silver plates and tumblers. He finally posed with all of them for a group picture and what a memorable picture that would be for them! Just before leaving, Swami asked for the universal peace prayer to be chanted once again. *Samastha Lokaha Sukhino Bhavanthu* was chanted followed by a high pitched “Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Ki...” which was met with a resounding *jaika!* It was nearing 12:00 p.m. when Swami retired for the morning.

The evening session began with *bhajans* at 5 p.m. Swami arrived at 6:00 p.m. Completing the *darshan* round, as Swami came on the stage, He asked where the other chairs were. Quickly the morning arrangement was being made when Swami called out the two felicitated couples, Mr. and Mrs. Nanjundiah and Apparao. He materialized gold coins and presented one each to them. He had them seated and Himself sat in the centre. Bringing the *bhajans* to a halt, Swami asked for His mike and began His divine discourse.

Starting off on a lighter note that in the morning He was not allowed speak about those who were honoured, Bhagavan had all the good words about the seniors who were felicitated in the morning. Mr. Appa Rao who has been serving as auditor right from the inception of the hospital has taken care of everything in minute details putting an all-round show. He has been rendering service without any expectation and without remuneration. Referring to the service rendered by the other two brothers of Mr. Appa Rao, Mr. Sathya Narayana Murthy, Sr. Engineer in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram and Dr. Lakshmi Narasimham, outgoing Registrar of Sri Sathya Sai University, Bhagavan said that all the three brothers were serving Bhagavan with utmost dedication. Hailing Mr. Appa Rao's yeomen service to the hospital, he said it would be difficult to leave and lose such a person. He has taken care of everything most meticulously, taking everything as his own responsibility and put in all his hard work for the development of the hospital. Mentioning that the special session was convened in honour of Mr. Appa Rao, Bhagavan said, He was immensely pleased, touched and moved by his dedicated hard work.

Dr. Lakshmi Narasimham has done a lot to the best of his satisfaction without any complaints. It is absolutely necessary to thank him profusely for his hard work. Being a bachelor he has dedicated his life for the welfare of the university; he had no other responsibilities and this was his lone concern. Starting his career as a Seval, with an intention to serve the university, he completed his Ph.D. to join the Brindavan Campus as a lecturer. Hailing Prof. Nanjundiah, the outgoing Controller of Examinations, for his systematic approach towards the examination system, Bhagavan made a mention of the exalted status of the Institute which has become a reputed institution of national and international reckoning.

In an apparent reference to the prevailing corrupt practice in the educational and medical system, Bhagavan said that in Sathya Sai Institutions no such collections and no corruptions could be found. Neither students nor patients need to worry, said Bhagavan assuring that he would take care of them.

Making a mention of the girls attending to work, Bhagavan asked: *If you go to school to teach other children who will take care of your children?* A woman who goes to work will never be happy; it is their responsibility to take care of their children and parents. Parents should be well taken care of. They should not be kept at 'home for the aged'; keep them with you; feed them and take care of them. It is an absolute must to take care of your home and responsibilities. Students should take note of it. This is right education, said Bhagavan. Discoursing on the greater importance of emulating the ideal lives of elders, Bhagavan exhorted the students to follow the path shown by the elders to come up in life.

Completing the discourse which lasted almost 75 minutes, Swami looked a bit tired but very satisfied and happy. He asked for *bhajans* to be sung. Two *bhajans* were sung and Swami was so happy and lost in the *bhajans*. *Aarthi* was performed and *prasadam* sent for distribution. Swami called one student from the front lines and accepting his letter, advised him for quite a while.

Then He called all the tiny tots from Primary school and blessed the various Guru Poornima cards that they had made. Having done that, He smiled so broadly for all. He was really so very satisfied. In fact, He bestowed nearly 6-7 *abhayahasthas* towards various directions. Then, at 7:45 p.m, Swami returned to Yajur Mandir in the car.

July 8, 2009 – Performance by Brazilian and Indonesian Devotees

There was heavy expectation in the air for the devotees from Brazil and Indonesia on the evening of July 8 as they had been informed to be ready with their presentations and programmes. But they had not yet been officially permitted and the permission was likely to be sought as Swami arrived for *darshan*. At 5:00 p.m., the *bhajans* began as is the usual practice. At about 5:10 p.m., there were signs that Swami was arriving for *darshan*. The above mentioned groups seemed to be sitting with their muscles tensed, like the athletes from an Olympic 100 metres dash! Swami arrived and permitted the programme.

Quickly students evacuated the front block of the Sai Kuwant Hall and in no time men and women in green "Brasilia" scarves filled up more than half of the central area. Swami took a detour at the ladies side and arrived straight onto the stage. He called Mr. Sergio, the orchestrator of the Brazilian choir and spoke to him asking his name. Swami then halted the Veda chanting and asked them to start their programme. The presentation consisted of *bhajans* in Portuguese! It began with Veda chanting and it was thrilling to know that these holy chants resonated in the Latin American nations too! The singing was wonderful and the beauty of a hundred throats singing in unison was easily seen. Swami sat keenly observing the ladies and the gents, and each time He looked in a direction, a wave of smiles seemed to flow through.

The programme began with a 'bang', if we may term it so. Sergio spoke of their fervent gratitude to Swami and concluded with a thumping "We Love You". Everyone chorused it and "raised their hearts" to Swami as they held up three dimensional hearts which they had placed on their hands. The *bhajans* then followed and flowed. It was definitely a foreign tongue for most of the people assembled in the hall, but their Love for Swami and their joy at seeing Him were so evident. They sang one song after another for about 40 minutes. Swami sat keeping rhythm at times, smiling at other times or simply closing His eyes and drinking deep into their devotion. It was a beautiful experience and when they sang *Manasa Bhajore Guru Charanam*, Swami (and the conductor) encouraged all the students to follow too. This stream of devotional singing found its fulfillment at the sea of Grace that Swami bestowed so profusely by repeated *abhayahasthas* to them. Once they concluded, the overseas organisers requested Swami to give opportunity to the devotees from Indonesia to make their presentation and Swami wholeheartedly agreed.

It was 6:00 p.m. and the small Indonesian group from Bandung, West Java, filled into the places of the Brazilians. Swami sat watching the entire process.

One of the male members of the group took to Swami the instrument that they were about to perform with - the Angklung. This is a musical instrument made out of two bamboo tubes attached to a bamboo frame. The tubes are carved so that they have a resonant pitch when struck. The two tubes are tuned to octaves. The base of the frame is held with one hand while the other hand shakes the instrument rapidly from side to side. This causes a rapidly repeating sound. Thus each of three or more Angklung performers in an ensemble will play just one note and together the complete melodies are produced. *Angklung* is popular throughout Southeast Asia, but originated from Indonesia (used and played by the Sundanese since the ancient times). Now a lady devotee of the group presented Swami with a traditional idol from Indonesia. Swami held and examined the idol so cutely, like a child examining his new toy! Then He blessed her with a smile.

As for the actual programme, leave behind all the definitions, the experience of hearing the music being played with perfect synchronization was tremendous. It has to be seen to be believed.

The group had a mix of traditional tones of Angklung into *bhajans*, namely, “Gopala Sai Gopala” and “Jai Ho Sai Ram” and a Sudanese traditional song, *Es Lilin*. The group of 27 played for 15 minutes with the help of the Angklung, Guitar, Drum, Tambourine and the “kentongan”, all of them were essentially Sudanese bamboo percussion instruments.

The session brought so many rich feelings to the heart. Never in the history of mankind has an Avatar been sung about in as many tongues as Swami has been extolled! People from all parts of the world flock to His Lotus feet. The power of selfless Love is such that it magnetically attracts. Even the criticism that is leveled against selfless Love promotes its glory and grandeur. It is so overwhelming yet sublime. Let us just ponder for a moment. Is it not a miracle that a gentle smile from Swami brings joy and solace to the thousand hearts gathered in the hall? And a description of Swami's smile does the same to millions of readers worldwide? The power of Swami's love (or its synonym, Selfless Love) is such that it is infinite and never reduces even if shared with everyone; on the contrary, it seems to multiply as it is shared. Blessed indeed are we for He has chosen us to experience His Love in our lives.

As the Indonesians concluded, Swami blessed them with His right palm. He blessed *prasadam* to be distributed and that day it was *laddoos* and Brazilian nuts! Swami then received *aarthi* and it was 6:20 p.m. when He returned to His residence.

July 9, 2009 – First African Choir in the Divine Presence

Thank you Latin America. Thank you Asia. Welcome Africa! That was July 9 at Prashanthi Nilayam. After a moving performance by the Brazilians and the Indonesians on the previous day, a group from Nigeria occupied the centre stage waiting for the arrival of the Lord. There was something else in the eastern end of Sai Kulwant Hall that awaited the Lord - a model of the

Trimbakeshwar temple which is located at Nasik. In fact, at about 12:30 p.m., Swami had made a brief visit to the Sai Kulwant Hall and had seen the model from far. The model is part of the series of models to be made for the programmes leading up to the 85th birthday celebrations with the view of discovering the route to Bharatiya roots!

Shortly after 5:00 p.m., Swami arrived for *darshan*. Moving through the ladies side, He halted briefly in the centre of the hall. Seeing the 45 members of the Sai Africans Adults Choir, which consisted of the natives of Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon and Ivory Coast, Swami moved to the gents' side. He moved towards the 'model' temple and sat seeing it for a while. It looked magnificent with the lighting and Swami asked about it from the Maharashtra state co-ordinators. Coming via the students' area to the centre, Swami seemed to be taking the guard of honour as He moved along the lines of the Africans. One woman held a letter and Swami, seeing it, seemed to be "moved" towards her as He accepted it! Just seeing them, Swami seemed so very happy. The Africans are a blessed people as theirs is the only place that Swami has visited out of India. And now, they had come to their Lord. The Primary school children seemed to be beneficiaries of Swami's joy as He had a look at all their cards and accepted their letters! And then coming onto the stage, Swami asked for the programme to begin at 5:30 p.m.

The stalwart from the African continent, Mr. Victor Krishna Kanu arrived on the wheel chair. He rose and moving to Swami offered a rose. Swami's face blossomed into a smile and He blessed the great yet humble soul, His Instrument in Africa, so lovingly with many a pat. Mr. Victor Krishna Kanu gave an introductory speech, mentioning the African history of struggle and the ever growing Sai Mission in Africa. He thanked many a hand that helped in making the choir a reality. Before the conclusion, he introduced, Bro. Okwudiri Nduka Imo, Chairman National Coordinating Committee, SSSSO, Nigeria and Sir Jude Nnam, the Conductor for the show, to Bhagawan (in the formal sense of course!) and to the capacity audience.

The group of forty five members was led by Sir Jude Nnam, the first young man to be knighted from the Roman Catholic Church. He was trained at the Trinity College of Music, London and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He had the rare distinction of directing the "Papal Choir" during the visit of Pope John Paul II to Nigeria in 1998 and was also the recipient of second prize, for the Choir from Nigeria, in the Music World Catholic Festival held in Rome. He has over 1000 musical master pieces to his credit. Starting off their presentations with the Omkara, the troupe sang nine songs- three thanks giving songs from north, west and east Nigeria, in Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages respectively, two love offering songs from Congo and Ghana, primarily on Lord Jesus, a communion song from South Africa and a song on the Holy Spirit from Zaire. A variety of African instruments too were on musical display - the Bass Pot (udu), Wooden Gong (ekwr), Small Wooden Gong (okpokovo), Tambourine (Shaker), Talking Drum-Small (gangan) and the Big Drum (Igba). The beauty of the performance was the involvement - both of the performers and of Swami! They swayed and moved their bodies to the rhythm and there were smiles galore on the Divine face! Interspersed

were also two popular Sai bhajans, "Ananda Ram Ananda Shyam" and "Guru Baba Guru Baba".

Towards the end, Swami asked to be seated on the ladies side of the stage! This was done, much to the thrill of the African ladies who were singing the songs! After a short while, Swami moved to the interview room to probably personally select gifts of Love for these devotees who had pleased Him so much! As He came out of the interview room, the doctors from the Super Speciality Hospital surrounded Him and invited Him to the two-day international conference in Orthopaedics. Swami seemed to agree to their wishes and moved to the stage. Sitting on the stage, Swami asked for the two colours of sarees -pink and white with green - that He had picked. It appeared as if He felt that both were good and was unable to choose as to which one to present! What did He do next? Something that was so cute and lovely! He held out both the sarees and asked Mrs. Kanu, "Which one is better?.....this one?...or....this one?" Amidst the joy that was enveloping all, she moved to the stage and selected the white and green saree! Swami then gave the sarees to her to gift them to the women. For the men, Swami had white Safari pieces distributed by the students.

Swami then moved down the stage to Sir Jude and asked him whether he would accept a gift. He materialized a beautiful golden ring. Sir Jude held out his hands to receive the ring but Swami told him that He would put it on his finger. The ring slid in and was a perfect fit! He then told him, "One more song". Rare indeed are the times when the Lord asks for something. And whenever He asks also, we can be assured that it is for Love alone in one of its various forms. When Swami asked so, the song that began was in English – "Great Navigator Oh! Sai Baba! Navigate us through this path of life." In answer to this, Swami navigated up and down the rows of the singing devotees! It was such a beautiful sight. As they completed it, He asked for one more! Wow! Everyone was thrilled and happy. Swami again moved through the lines of the singers.

Swami now asked for the photo frames with the digital clocks inbuilt to be brought. He showed how it works to Sir Jude and gifted it to him as he bent down with "thank you" on his lips. Swami told him, "Your mind keeps wandering here and there. Keep it in check." He seemed surprised and he again nodded, "Thank you." Then Swami began to distribute the frames to each and every one of them. He told some of them that batteries had to be put and then they would start working. He spoke a few sentences to many of them. Some He advised not to fight and to some others he gave guidance without even being told the problem! It was indeed a divine revelatory session. Finishing the distribution on the gents' side, Swami did the same on the ladies' side too! Many of the ladies broke down in sheer joy! It is really strange with the Lord! When He neglects you, you cry. When He gives attention to you, you cry too! An old lady on the wheel chair was brought up to Him and He presented her too with a frame. She too was in tears. Completing the distribution, Swami posed with them for a wonderful group photo.

Everyone stretched out their hands to hold Swami. Swami called Sir Jude to be seated right in the front. Meanwhile, the photo of Swami presenting the ring to Sir Jude was given to Him and He gave it to Sir Jude with a smile! Swami then moved to the stage and blessed *prasadam* to be distributed. Receiving *aarti* and profusely blessing the troupe, Swami retired for the day.

July 11, 2009 – Blessings for Orthopaedic Doctors

The central block in Sai Kulwant Hall was filled with chairs and all the delegates of the second Sri Sathya Sai International Orthopaedic Conference were seated there for Swami's *darshan*. The Conference being held at SSSIHMS was to conclude the next day and that evening session could be called the highlight of the conference for either with their knowledge or without, this opportunity was what each soul had been pining for. Many of the doctors were coming to Puttaparthi for the first time and just being in the hall was an experience in itself for many of them as people filled in for *darshan*. Swami arrived for *darshan*, His sweet and smiling self.

As He moved to the centre, it was a sight to see! The doctors seemed to feel the joy and excitement 'in their bones!' Knee-replacement specialists were down on their knees! Swami raised His hand in blessing towards them and accepted letters from some of them. Completing the *darshan* rounds, Swami moved into the interview room. The cricket legend, Mr. Sunil Gavaskar, was granted the coveted interview. *Bhajans* began in the meantime and it was after some twenty minutes or so that Swami arrived. He arrived on the dais and sat for the *bhajans*. Within the next *bhajan*, He indicated for the *aalaap bhajan*, "Sri Raghavam..." to be sung. The resonant notes of that *bhajan* soon filled the air. As that was completed, Swami called one of the lead singers and asked him, "Do you know any English *bhajans*?" The answer was a sheepish "No". Swami asked for the *bhajans* to continue.

And then, the way Swami was looking at the doctors seated in front of Him, everyone could feel in their hearts that something special was to materialise. Swami, with a swift gesture of His right hand, indicated that He would move down. As He descended, He spoke with the doctors in the first row. All of them began to move down from their chairs and offered themselves at His feet. He slowly moved around the block and also blessed the lady delegates too. Within minutes, discipline had taken the backseat having been pushed there by devotion as people just madly rushed to His feet. Swami so patiently and lovingly collected letters and interacted with many of them. Those doctors, for whom this was the first visit and *darshan*, did not seem to know how to respond. Some of them pleaded with the photographers to snap when Swami was near them saying, "We don't know if we will ever get this opportunity." Even the first timers seemed to very well realise the magnitude of the opportunity being bestowed on them. "He is so small, but so...so...powerful", one first timer doctor said later on. Swami moved through the centre aisle and then moved back to the stage.

Now as the *bhajans* continued, the settings in the block in front had changed. Many of the doctors were 'floored', sitting cross-legged and clapping to the

beat of the *bhajans* having given up their chairs! Swami blessed *prasadam* to be distributed. He received *aarthi* and as He was leaving, blessed all the doctors.

July 16, 2009 – A Downpour of Gifts from the Divine

The dawn of another Thursday - *Guruvaram*, as it is called in the Indian calendar - at Puttaparthi saw the students becoming beneficiaries of the Lord's bounty yet again. The first hour at the college on a Thursday is called 'Moral Class' and it is a period when various subjects related to the nourishment of the soul are dealt with. And the Thursday on July 16 was indeed solely soulful, for Swami had asked for all the students to assemble in the Mandir in the morning. *Bhajans* began at 9:00 a.m. and it was at about 9:30 that Swami arrived for *darshan*. The hall was packed to capacity and Swami finished a complete round before moving into the Bhajan Hall. Just like a loving parent, Swami had decided to gift His children with clothes on that Thursday.

In the Bhajan Hall, Swami segregated the various bundles of Safari cloth pieces and gave elaborate instructions as to which ones had to be given to school boys, which to the post graduates and which for the teachers and professors. He asked for the students who were awaiting His command to begin the distribution. Once He was satisfied that the directions were clear, He moved out of the Bhajan Hall to the dais where He sat for the *bhajans*. Even as the distribution went on, nothing escaped His keen eye. He pointed out to some teachers who had not yet received the cloth pieces or had received the wrong ones and ensured that everything was set right! He later blessed the students working in various Institutions at Puttaparthi also to be recipients of the clothes. Swami sat outside seeing the progress of the distribution. After it was complete, He asked for something else too to be brought. To the surprised joy of all the students, Swami also gifted all with 2gb capacity pen drives! Then, He received *aarthi* and retired for the morning.

The evening too turned out to be one of distribution. Swami took a detour after the ladies side and moved straight into the Bhajan Hall where ladies from Swami's 'physical' family had assembled. It is indeed the good fortune of merits over previous births that one gets a chance to be in the same family as the Avatar and be physically related to the Avatar. One must pray to Him that such an opportunity is bestowed, and once it is gifted to realize the great significance and make best use of the opportunity.

Swami arrived into the Bhajan Hall and asked for the *sarees* that He had set aside after careful selection. They were brought to Him and Swami began to distribute the *sarees* one by one to all who had gathered. He spoke to many of them and cleared doubts of a few of them. Blessing all of them, Swami ensured that all had received His gifts of Love. Then, Swami also blessed two elderly lecturers seated in the Bhajan Hall with *sarees*! He gifted another *saree* to the headmistress of the Primary school.

Also was present another teacher from the Boys' Section of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School about whose parents Swami had been of late enquiring a lot. He told Him that they had arrived to Puttaparthi and were seated outside. If Swami wishes, he would call them to Him. Swami graciously agreed and the family of the teacher was soon in the Bhajan Hall. Swami blessed the ladies with *sarees* and the family with a group photograph. He then moved outside for *bhajans*. Towards the end, He called one of the teachers from the Music College and after talking to him for a while, materialized a gold bracelet for him. The young man was thrilled and with this, Swami received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

July 17, 2009 – Parthi Yatra of Devotees from Medak District

The Puttaparthi pilgrimage for the devotees from Medak district of Andhra Pradesh began on July 17. Of late at any time of the year there are a group of devotees from a particular region who are in Puttaparthi as part of a formal "Parthi Yatra" (pilgrimage to Puttaparthi), even though there are thousands of pilgrims everyday to this sacred shrine where God walks and talks, smiles and shines.

At quarter past five, Swami arrived for *darshan*. He moved through the completely packed ladies side granting *darshan*. These 'pilgrimages' are wonderful as they give people who have the desire to be at the Lotus Feet an opportunity to get there and arouses in everyone else a curiosity, which later translates into an intense desire to see the Lord.

As Swami moved through the ladies side, one could see many of them breaking down with the sheer joy of seeing Him. If we ponder for a moment, this spontaneous outburst of joy through these 'sweet' tears in itself is a miracle of God. His mere form confers supreme joy, for isn't it true that Love is His form! Swami moved through the central area that had been packed with materials for distribution. He enquired about them as He moved into the gents' area. The thousands rose and craned their necks to see their beloved form in Orange. When Swami completed the *darshan* rounds and arrived on the stage, He asked for the Veda chanting to come to a halt and the programme to begin. Children dressed to represent the various faiths came up to Swami for blessings. Swami was very pleased as these children came to Him in all their innocence. He asked one or two of them their names and pulled cheeks of the really little ones.

Being trained to be highly reverential, the kids moved backwards so as to not show their backs to Swami. The smallest among them, looking so cutely at Swami, tripped. He fell softly but still did not use his hands, which were folded in prayer to Swami, to get up! Swami was so amused by the scene and the little one too seemed more amused than hurt. He rose and returned to his place. Then many people from the gents' side seemed to rush to Swami to offer their obeisance. A cake was offered which Swami cut. Bhagavan also blessed two marble idols of Lord Ganesha. But soon a mob gathered around Swami with everyone keen at falling at the lotus feet. A comic scene of sorts

ensued as the district president called for discipline and restraint over the PA system! Swami also lovingly told the people to return to their places. After that, a disciplined bevy of women moved up the stage for Divine blessings. Then the distribution began.

Imbibing the message of reforming the society through selfless service to humanity, the Medak district Sathya Sai Seva Organisation organized distribution of handy implements for selected beneficiaries from the districts. The implements included Iron Boxes, Coin Boxes, Water Purifiers, Tea Drums, Drums, Tea Stalls, Kirana Shops, Vegetable Shops, Sprayers, Foot Sprayers, Cycle Repair Kits, Gold Polish Material, Cloth Merchant Material, Drilling Machines, Vegetable Trolleys, Welding Machines, Wet Grinders, Cycles, Tri Cycles, Sewing Machines along with a sponsorship of college study for one student. Thanking Swami profusely for the "Elixir Divine", Drinking Water supplied in the entire district, Mr. Jagannadham, the district president of the Organisation, made a mention of the various service and spiritual activities taken up by the Sathya Sai Seva Organisation. As the names were called out, 85 beneficiaries, both men and women, some handicapped, came one by one to receive the implements in His Divine Presence, after paying prayerful obeisance to Bhagavan. People from both the gents' and ladies' side came to Swami as He blessed many of them with *abhayahasta*.

The distribution was complete and permission was sought from Swami for a music programme. Swami blessed the singers and the programme began. This musical offering titled, "Hrudaya Kusumanjali", or the garland of flowers from the heart, began with a song expressing gratitude for the nectar divine - water - that Swami has so graciously provided for the people of Medak. The offering whose music was arranged by former students from Sathya Sai University was sung by both men and women. It had a bouquet of over nine songs covering various themes, namely, His Glory, Service Activities, The nine fold path of devotion, Glory of Sai's Name, Shodasopachara Pooja, Mother Easwamma and her glory. Swami seemed particularly impressed with the powerful singing of the women. As many solo pieces were being sung, Swami watched the singer keenly. Towards the end, Swami asked as to how many women were there in the group. He went into the interview room and selected *sarees* to be given to them as gifts of His Love and Grace. The women received the *sarees* while the men got safari pieces.

Swami called the little boy who had "fallen for Him" in the beginning to come up the stage! Speaking to him, Swami materialized a gold chain and put it around his neck. There was a loud applause. Meanwhile the lady who distributed the *sarees* at Swami's behest arrived to Swami with one *saree* that was extra. Swami gifted that *saree* to her herself and she was mightily pleased. Swami presented another *saree* to State Minister for Information and Tourism, Mrs. J. Geeta Reddy who had played a role in organising the Yatra. Conferring joy and *laddoo prasadam* to everyone assembled, Swami received *arthi* and retired for the day.

July 20, 2009 – Special Divine Discourse on Atma

It turned out to be a wonderful evening at Prasanthi Nilayam - an evening that began like any other day, progressed and ended in a very special manner. As it happens everyday, the *bhajans* began at 5:00 p.m. and were on when Swami arrived for *darshan* on a special white chair. It was a wonderful sight and Swami looked so different and beautiful. The saffron of His robe stood out against the white of the chair. Even His hair was seen in all its glory as it stood out against the white backdrop! Swami moved through the ladies side and into the gents' side via the central students' area.

Swami arrived on the stage and sat for the *bhajans*. At about 5:30 p.m., *prasadam* was brought to seek His blessings before the distribution. Swami blessed it but as the distribution was about to begin, He told them to stop. He then moved around the portico for a bonus *darshan* and blessings round for all those seated there. And now, arriving on stage, He asked for the podium and mikes! He told Prof. Anil Kumar to speak. For about 20 minutes, the professor spoke on the Upanishads and the principles of *Tat Twam Asi* and *Aham Brahmasmi*. He also dilated on the various Vedic declarations on Swami that highlighted His reality and nature. As he concluded, Swami blessed him and asked Mr. S. V. Giri to address the gathering. He too spoke on the Upanishads and other holy texts. When he was explaining the meaning of Upanishad as, "To sit near the Guru", Swami corrected as, "Down", meaning not only near the Guru but also below the Guru! That correction was however low in volume and was understood only by those whose eyes were riveted on Swami. After his speech, Swami decided to deliver His discourse. Needless to say, there was thunderous applause. Here is the exhaustive summary:

All ask Swami about *Atma* and none ever understand it. All that has been spoken about the Upanishads are only words. It is said that the Vedas gave rise to the Upanishads but in reality, the Upanishads gave rise to the Vedas. Without the Upanishads, there is no Ramayana, Mahabharata or the Gita; those are mere books.

The ancient sages studied and investigated thoroughly and found that the *Atma* was the basis for all. *Atma* is the changeless primordial principle. It has a birth and death when it takes up the body. Shivaratri is not the birthday of Shiva. *Shivam* means auspiciousness. It is everywhere as declared in the Vedas - "*Sarvatah panipadam tat Sarvatokshi Shiromukham. Sarvatah Shrutimalloke Sarvam Aavrutya tishtathi.*" Whatever the eyes see, the ears hear or all that is said are all Brahman. Sound, light, speech, movement, etc. - all of these are Brahman. There is nothing apart from that principle. This kerchief, for instance, is Brahman. It arose out of threads which in turn were made of cotton. This is not a cloth in reality but just interwoven threads. It can become either a gown or a *dhoti* or even a saree.

A powerful mind is that which can convey the *Atmic* prompting. Without mind, there is no movement at all. So investigate into the mind. The mind keeps changing and that is why it is called the monkey mind. What the mind conveys

is not the Truth if it is not prompted by the *Atma*. Without *Atma*, there is no *Chitta* (awareness) and without that, there is no *Viveka* (discrimination).

The infant grows into a boy, lad, man and becomes a householder. All are same and one cannot exist without the other. The fundamental is the *Atma*. People give different forms to the *Atma*. Some give it the form of the primordial sound - *Aumkara*. Others call it *Tat Twam Asi*. It is the same in all. One became many. Just like a mother become a mother and a baby after delivery. The *pranava*, *Aumkara*, arises out of the navel as we chant it; it is divine. But all cannot chant *Aum*. So, they take up other names like Rama, Krishna, Allah, Jesus and the like.

God has no form in reality. The form is used only as an indicator. The form is chosen out of liking. Whether you like Venkateswara, Rama or Krishna, all the forms you have are from Ravi Verma (an artist) paintings! You may shift between forms but all are one. *Ekameva Adviteeyam Brahma*. The Brahman is only One and without the second. People imagine and get delusional and that leads to confusion. In a drama, a boy dons the vesture of Krishna. The next scene, he comes as Rama. Though the names you call him are different, the same person arrives. The variations are only due to our delusion.

If you think someone is bad, he appears thus. It is so, also when you think someone is good. It is all based on your feelings towards that person. All these are based on thoughts. Thoughts change due to change in mind. You think that you are meditating on a form. But it keeps changing from time to time. That is only contemplation. It is steady for some time but it changes. It is meditation when it is absolutely steady. None have meditated so far but they say so. It is all artificial. It is not good but it is necessary in the beginning. It should be made steady. Concentration leads to contemplation which leads to meditation. That is acquired by constant practise. Nobody becomes elder at the minute of birth. It is a process of limited growth. It is wrong to think that everything happens as you will. If that is true, then you will not desire anything. You yourself will not exist then. Know yourself first.

"I am *Atma*". Then why do you considerate it separate from you? All you do today is full of confusion and depression. That leads to disappointment. The wayward nature is responsible for depression. When examinations are held, you either fail or pass. Change is everywhere. There is change in the environment, water, air, sound, weather – everything changes. How can you remain changeless? Food also changes. What you eat today, you cannot eat tomorrow. It is only the Constant Integrated Awareness that is changeless. To achieve that, develop the feeling of oneness. The *Atma* is the same in all. Bodies are like pots and the mind is the water in the pots. The moon is reflected in every pot. Nothing is true without reflection, reaction and resound.

Children! You do not understand the *Atma*. It is not the letters 'A', 'T' or 'M'. Have the feeling of oneness. All are one. You do different jobs but the spirit of work is the same. It is from the Truth the whole creation has come and it will dissolve into it. That Truth is the *Atma*. It is changeless. *Satya + Satya + Satya = Satya!*

Always speak the truth and speak it pleasingly. Truth gives birth to righteousness and together they give rise to Peace. Then there is no anger, pomp, jealousy and ego. There is only Love.

Hanuman went around the whole of Lanka searching for Sita. Though he searched in the palaces, he realised that Sita would never go to Ravana's palace. When he met Ravana in the court, he addressed him in the singular. Ravana was enraged and said that none had the impunity to address him so. Hanuman then said that he was the servant of Lord Rama and so he would call him in the singular alone. Ravana ordered Hanuman's tail to be set on fire. Do the demons need any provocation for such deeds? They brought all their clothes and rags and wound it around Hanuman's tail and set it on fire. Hanuman leapt and went to every home in Lanka and set it on fire. Everyone was rushing helter-skelter wondering which house to enter and be safe. Only Vibhishana's house was saved from the carnage. It is all *karma*. You decorate yourself with jewels and brilliant necklaces of gold. It is only the garland of your *karmas* that accompanies you always and adorns your neck. All good and bad are recorded. Nothing else matters.

As you sow, so shall you reap. When you eat *pakodas* (a south Indian savory), your belch will have that flavour. Nothing more, nothing less. Keep your actions right. If you have Love for God, you will automatically fear sin and refrain from it. You will love society. *Daiva Preeti, Paapa Bheeti and Sangha Neeti*. Earn these three. Do *namasmarana*. Singing the praises of the Lord leads to liberation. *Aham Brahmasmi. Ayam Atma Brahma*. Focus on the Consciousness alone. Follow your conscience. Do not spend time in idle gossip. Have pure looks, thoughts and words. Then you will be perfect and good. The Ramayana, Mahabharatha and Bhagawatham - all teach good ideas. Develop love for god more and more. All else will follow. Then you can experience consciousness. Then you become God. Practise is needed for that experience.

So begin to practise. Even for small things, you have to practise. Then you become perfect. Otherwise, you make mistakes. The first step is to say, I am not animal, I am not demon - I am human. Become men first. Avatars have come to make humanity realise the divinity. Be perfect as humans first. Accept and follow whatever God has said. Then the experience will come easily. If you follow bad, you become bad. Tell me your company and I shall tell you what you are. Now, do *bhajans*.

As *bhajans* began, Swami asked for the *prasadam* to be distributed. After the *aarthi* was performed, the traditional, "Samastha Lokaha Sukhino Bhavanthu" was chanted. Swami instructed that, "Samastha Jeevaa Sukhino Bhavanthu", meaning "Let all the beings in all worlds be happy" should be chanted. That was done as He instructed and Swami blessed the assembly. On His way to the car, Swami spoke briefly with the Maharashtra Chief Minister, Mr. Ashok Chavan. It was past 7:15 p.m. when He retired into Yajur Mandir.

July 25, 2009 – Programme by Devotees from Glendale & Arcadia, USA

It became a historical day as Swami stayed in the Sai Kulwant Hall for a record number of hours. How many? Read on to find out. Also, this special day turned out to be a day of changes. One, chanting of the Vedas with emphasis on the Rudram from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. got regularized. Apart from that, Swami also instructed that the Universal Peace prayer be reverted to "Samastha Lokaha Sukhino Bhavanthu" from its recently modified form, "Samastha Jeeva Sukhino Bhavanthu." There was also another new practise that began that day and you will know about it as you read along.

Now, going through the day chronologically, at 4 p.m. sharp began the sonorous chants of the RudraPrasnah. The devotees from the Glendale & Arcadia Sadhana Group, Southern California, USA were seated in the marbled blocks as they had been permitted to put up their song cum skit programme.

At 5 p.m., the Veda chanting ceased and the whole Mandir became silent. It was a marvellous feeling and has to be experienced. More than 8,000 people congregating and not the least bit of noise! A miracle indeed for it reflects the inner stillness that comes about so naturally in the proximity of God. At about 5:20 p.m., the chanting resumed to signal the arrival of Swami. Bhagavan moved through the ladies side and as He arrived in the center, asked one of them, "Where do you come from?" Swami speaks so softly and soothingly that often times it is easier to lip read Him rather than hear Him! The lady chose the latter and could not make out! Swami repeated His question and seeing the same response, seemed to smile to Himself. He later got that answer from a little boy who was seated on the gents' side! Swami moved through the packed gents' side and soon was in the front. Taking a round in the portico, Swami arrived on stage.

The co-ordinators for the programme offered their presentation to Swami and Bhagavan seemed to say, "Things have been mixed up." Sitting for hardly a minute, Swami asked to be taken to the interview room. Then began what can be termed as the great wait for the Lord! It is often said that God's delays are not His denials. There were two ways in which the above sentence got aptly demonstrated. On one hand there were those devotees whom Swami had assured that He would grant an interview and they had been waiting. It didn't seem that even today they would get their promised interviews, for a programme was in waiting. But Swami began to call them in, one by one. On the other hand were these devotees from USA. As the interviews got underway it did not seem plausible that they will get their chance to present their programme before Him. The chances of the programme seemed to move from low to bleak as the clock showed 7:30 p.m. Rarely does Swami stay out so long and even when He does so, it is for occasions like Shivarathri. But any day Lord Shiva decides to grant His Grace that day becomes Shivarathri. This got proved with a thumping authority as Swami arrived on stage at 7:35 p.m. and asked for the programme to begin!

The group comprising of 84 members, including children had a small skit entitled “Mother’s Blessings” based on the inspirational life story of the 16th President of USA, Abraham Lincoln. Swami often narrates the story of Lincoln to exemplify the spirit of Self-Confidence and the power of the mother's blessings. The programme started with a few kids and elders offering the programme and roses to Swami. Chanting shlokas from the immortal Bhagawad Geeta, the group depicted through the skit how Lincoln followed those very principles as stated in the shlokas. The skit lasted about 15 minutes and the kids participating in it offered their *pranams* to Swami. The devotees then requested Swami for permission to sing *bhajans* and Swami permitted them to do so. In accordance with the theme of the day, all *bhajans* sung were on the glory of Mother Divine. Swami sat listening to and enjoying the *bhajans* till almost 8:30 p.m.!

Then came the cherry on top of the icing on the cake for the US devotees. Swami said that He would move down the stage and grant them Divine proximity and group photographs. Oh the thrill of that move! They became exuberant! All the tiredness of being seated for nearly five and half hours evaporated into thin air. They welcomed Him in their midst and Swami blessed them. He spoke to a few of them and accepted one or two letters. Moving back on the stage, Swami asked for the *aarthi* to begin. Now, coming to the change that was mentioned in the beginning: Swami had blessed all the elders working in the Ashram, some of them for more than 30 years now, with the opportunity to offer a rose to Him, one elder per day! And so that day, Mr. Ram Mohan Rao, Head of Finance and Accounts Section of Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust offered a rose to Swami. Swami was all smiles as the octogenarian moved to Him and bowed at His lotus feet. Swami then retired for the day, moving to Yajur Mandir in the car.

July 26, 2009 – Radha Krishna Drama by Rangareddy District

The three-day Puttaparthi Yatra of the Rangareddy district of Andhra Pradesh started on July 25 and more than 3000 devotees from that region converged at Prasanthi Nilayam. The play they were about to present in the divine presence on that day, was really divine in the sense that it had been scripted and directed by Swami Himself for His 60th birthday! Having laid their hands on the script, these devotees had planned to present the immortal devotion of Radha towards her Lord and dearest one, Krishna. Swami arrived for *darshan* at about 5:15 p.m. and having completed a full *darshan* round, arrived on the stage via the portico. He immediately asked for the Vedam to halt and the programme to begin.

The "programme before the programme", if we can call it so, of late is the offerings to Swami! Bhagavan arrives, very eager to watch the programme and sometimes the long lines of people offering Him roses and other items seem to go on for 5, 10 or even 15 minutes! The Lord very patiently accepts everybody’s prayer and blesses, but when it becomes an unreasonably long session, like it was on that day, He gently signals to start the programme without any further delay.

Soon, the actors came on stage and Swami blessed them. Bhagavan called one of the organisers who had been a student of Sathya Sai University and told him to make the initial announcements. The boy began and Telugu seemed to flow out from him with the purity and torrential volume of the mighty Ganges. Swami was so moved with his introduction and that in itself drew handsome applause from the audience.

The drama began with tiny tots dancing to a song saluting the compassionate Divine Mother. The *gopis* and *gopalas* make elaborate and excited plans on hearing the news that their Krishna is coming to Repalle the next day. Radha too is very happy about Krishna's visit. The two consorts of Lord Krishna, Rukmini and Sathyabhama converse with each other of Krishna's visit to Repalle, as to whether Radha would be present then. Satyabhama feels that Krishna has a special corner for Radha alone and she cannot bear that. When Krishna does not cajole and plead with her to accompany Him to Repalle and leaves it "to her choice", she is devastated! She sings out her heartbroken song asking Him why He does not shower His special attention on her. It became very evident as to who the composer of the song was as Swami sang along the lines of the song that He had written more than two decades ago!

At this point of time, Narada enters the scene. He talks high of the devotion of Radha for Krishna. There is no Krishna without Radha and no Radha without Krishna, he says, adding a liberal sprinkle of the divine testing salt over Satyabhama's jealous wounds! Meanwhile, even in Repalle, people are jealous of Radha. Someone hits and breaks the earthen pot carried by Radha with a stick. Even as he does it, he suffers a paralytic stroke in his hand. Narada immediately asks the affected person to ask forgiveness from Radha. When the person does so, he is relieved of the ailment. The D-day arrives and Krishna enters Repalle. He enquires about the whereabouts of Radha. The people accompanying Krishna lie to Him that she has left Repalle. Krishna then tells Rukmini, "See dear! This is the effect of the Kali age. People lie effortlessly to the Lord and think that He is dumb to fall for lies. That is how they are blinded!" Rukmini then eulogises the devotion of Radha for Krishna. When Radha enters the scene and entreats Krishna to have mercy on her, Krishna says, "I am giving Myself to you, what else could I give you?" The drama closes with her merger into Krishna.

Throughout, Swami was fully immersed in the drama. He even seemed to remember and deliver some of the dialogues too! The script was flawless, for that is how the Divine Director writes any drama - whether it's the one done on a stage or the one that Life is! Again, like all His dramas, the faults come only if the actors do not play their roles well. But the Loving Director, Swami, was always there prompting the dialogues and songs too, for that is His Duty to help anyone who whole-heartedly acts their part in His drama! The drama concluded with a prayer that all develop love and devotion for Him like Radha did. Swami seemed very pleased and as the final formation came into place, He saw that it was indeed a very huge assemblage. He called the photographer and told him to take pictures of the group from different points on the stage! Then He asked the whole group to move ahead and come closer to Him. What a call it was! The eternal calling of the Lord to man

depicted in that simple act of Swami! The group responded by surging closer to Him.

Swami, next moved to the interview room, and returned with safari pieces and sarees. Descending from the stage, Swami began to personally distribute the clothes. All the main actors were male, including the *gopikas* and Radha. Swami so sweetly asked whether they would accept *sarees*! They said that if Swami gave, they would gladly accept. Swami distributed *sarees* to them! Later, He also gifted them with safari pieces! That was a wonderful sight to watch. Swami spent nearly 20-25 minutes distributing the clothes and interacting with the children. If we can be audacious enough to measure Swami's joy by the amount of time He spent with the children downstage, then we can confidently say that Swami was immensely pleased. After ensuring that all had received clothes, Swami blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all. Arriving back onstage, Swami asked for the person responsible for coordinating the whole effort. All heads turned in the same direction towards one elder. He got up and went to Swami. Bhagavan materialised a gold bracelet for him and put it on his wrist. Then, receiving *aarthi*, Swami returned to His residence, the Yajur Mandir, as the devotees longed to have one last glance and preserve that image in the safest corners of their hearts.

July 27, 2009 – Essential Items Distribution and Music Programme by Rangareddy District

The way the Lord works is similar to the principle of the process of nuclear fission. In nuclear fission, one atom that is bombarded with a particle gives rise to many more such particles with the potential to bombard many more atoms. This builds up at a rapid rate till a point when a whole city can be provided power to run! In the similar manner, Swami invests time, energy and, most importantly, Love into a particular service idea. That grows exponentially till the idea becomes a plan and the plan becomes a glorious reality! All the health and education projects taken up by His devotees the world over and the recent growth in village service activities - all owe their origins to the seeds planted by Swami.

The distribution of food, clothing and essential livelihood items was seeded by Swami over the years and today it has grown into an elaborate service exercise. Every region, as part of its Puttaparthi Yatra, seems to do its bit in distributing essential items to the needy. On July 27, the devotees from Rangareddy district had planned a similar endeavour. The marbled areas of the Mandir had been filled with these items to be distributed to 85 beneficiaries, 32 gents and 53 ladies, chosen from the districts. The implements included sewing machines, embroidery machines, iron boxes, barber's kit, telephone coin boxes, agricultural sprayers, wet grinder, carpenter kit, scooter mechanic kit, electrician kit, plumber kit, amplifier sound system unit, etc.

Swami arrived shortly before 5 p.m. for *darshan*. On the ladies' side, it was the birthday of a kid. She seemed so happy and excited to see Swami and the

Lord reflected and radiated back the same. He blessed her by sprinkling the holy grains and granting her and her mother *paadanamaskar*. He had a look at the items in the centre before moving over to the gents' side. Blessing the birthday boys seated in the front, Swami moved to the stage and arriving there, asked for the programme to begin. Once again, there was a long line of offerings to be made. It took some time and even Swami said, "That is enough. Otherwise it will become late." Soon, the coordinator began to call out names of the beneficiaries. These beneficiaries, both men and women, some handicapped, came one by one to receive the implements in His Divine Presence, paying prayerful obeisance to Bhagavan.

It is said that chanting the Divine Name is a sure way to salvation. It is really a special privilege for the beneficiaries that their names are read out in the Divine Presence! A plate had been placed in the centre into which they offered roses of gratitude. Soon enough, the plate was full and overflowing too - symbolic of the feelings in their heart! The entire distribution was complete in a matter of fifteen minutes. Then, Swami permitted the presentation of "Sangeeta Vibhavari" - a bouquet of songs at His lotus feet. The songs were beautiful in their meaning and Swami seemed so happy with the effort. Then an interesting anecdote occurred that kept all the viewers occupied and happy.

Swami had a trifoliate stem of the Tulsi plant, maybe offered to Him by one of the devotees. Every now and then, during the programme, Swami would raise it and study it deeply. Then, as if suddenly becoming aware of the staring audience, He would drop the stem back on His lap, looking up with a sheepish but very sweet smile! This happened a couple of times. Then slowly, Swami raised it to His lips. Smiling at those who were watching, He put it in His mouth and nibbled it! The sight was so sweet and it was so childlike of Swami to do that. Throughout the period of the songs, Swami kept rhythm and kept smiling. Towards the end, He moved into the interview room and brought safari pieces and sarees to be distributed to all the participants. He specially called out for the harmonium player and the violinist and created golden rings with emerald for them! Both of them were naturally thrilled. The violinist offered his violin to Swami and the Lord so sweetly strummed a string. That act seemed to tug at the heartstrings of the artist as his face was overcome with joyous emotion.

Swami asked for the *aarthi* after blessing *prasadam* to be distributed. Continuing the trend of offering a flower by the senior honorary staff, that evening it was the turn of Prof. Ram Murthy, a distinguished professor from the School of Business Management Accounting and Finance of Sri Sathya Sai University. Swami then accepted a letter from the harmonium player and read it for almost 3-4 minutes! Blessing the congregation, Swami retired for the day at about 6:30 p.m.

July 31, 2009 – Varalakshmi Vratam in the Divine Presence

Goddess Lakshmi is the bestower of prosperity and wealth. While in a narrow sense, people consider this to be the material riches, she also confers

spiritual wealth. In fact, she is depicted as seated at the lotus feet of Lord Narayana, eternally engaged in His service. The message is very clear - all prosperity and riches are at the Lord's feet. His feet are the panacea for everything! Swami has stamped this message in the minds and hearts of devotees ever since He sang His first song in 1940 - *Manasa Bhajare guru Charanam; Dusthara Bhava Saagara Tharanam*.

And so, very aptly, on the day of Varalakshmi Vratam dedicated for the worship of Goddess Lakshmi, more than 1500 married women gathered in Prashanti Nilayam to worship at the feet of the Divine Mother Sai. It was a colourful spectacle as the women began filing in from the early hours of the morning. The hall was a kaleidoscope of colours as the Veda chanting began at 8:00 a.m. The stage had been tastefully decorated and images and figurines of the mothers - Lakshmi and Saraswati adorned various parts of the stage and the hall. The chanting concluded at 9:00 a.m. and it was about 9:45 a.m. when Swami arrived for the *darshan*. He was received with the *Poornakumbham* and *Naadaswaram* accompaniment. A literal "red carpet" welcome was accorded to Him. He moved through the prayerful rows of the *Sumangalis* (literally meaning "the greatly auspicious"- a term which all the married women leading happy lives with their husbands are known by) and cut through at the centre to move to the stage.

Arriving on the dais, Swami lit the lamp to mark the beginning of the auspicious day. The Veda chanting went on for another 10 minutes or so when the priest asked Swami if they could begin. Swami blessed them to start the worship. The story behind the Varalakshmi Vratam goes as follows. Mother Parvati prayed to Lord Shiva on behalf of all the *Sumangalis*. Lord Shiva suggested that by performing the Varalakshmi Vratam on the first Friday of the Hindu month of Shraavana, a woman could attain all her desires. The Mother now appeared in a dream of a pious lady, Charumathi and instructed her to perform the worship. It has been tradition ever since for *Sumangalis* to perform this Vratam. The priest guided all the assembled ladies through the *Kalasha Pooja*, Ganesha worship and finally the worship of the Divine mother.

The Divine Mother Sai was on the dais all the while watching Her children in all Love and Patience. The wonderful thing was that Europeans, Japanese, Americans were all part of the worshipping brigade! At the end of the *pooja*, as the ladies did the ceremonial exchange of gifts, Swami moved down the stage. Ah! What a sight it was then. A thousand moons seemed to rise in Sai Kulwant Hall as all the ladies beamed happily in celebration. Swami slowly moved through the long lines of women, blessing them and accepting letters from many of them. Some of the ladies were unable to quell the urge to rush to Him. He gently smiled at them and taking the holy *akshatha* grains, sprinkled them with it. It was another complete *darshan* round in Sai Kulwant Hall and a complete thrill for the assembled *Sumangalis*. After conferring joy thus, Swami returned to the stage and the final formalities of the worship were completed. The story of the origin of the Vratam was narrated. Swami blessed both the priests and asked for *aarthi*. The *aarthi* was special in the sense that all the ladies too waved tiny flames of their silver lamps at Swami.

Prasadam was blessed for distribution and once the *aarathi* was completed, Swami retired for the morning at about 11:00 a.m. It was announced that there would be a concert by Mrs. Anuradha Sriram in the evening.

In the evening, Swami arrived for *darshan* at 4:30 p.m. The hall was packed and Swami took a complete round. He saw that the artist for the evening had been seated on carpets in the marbled area. He said that the performance must be on the mainstage! So, quickly, the readjustments had to be made! The artists were seated soon on the stage and the mikes were kept ready. Soon Swami arrived on the stage and asked Mrs. Anuradha to begin. Starting with "Vatapi Ganapathim" in Hamsadhwani, she moved on to the Thyagaraja Kirtan, "Marugelara O Raghava". Aptly for the occasion, she sang the Kannada song, "Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma". Swami was so moved with her renderings and often she merged the name of Sai into the songs to give it a special meaning in Swami's presence. Some more popular devotional song were sung, notably, "Kurai Ondrum Illai" in Tamil and "Mere Sai Teri Murat Rahe Man Mein" in Hindi. In between Swami moved to the interview room for about ten minutes as the artist continued with her performance.

When Swami returned, He asked her if she had completed. He seemed to be beaming smiles as Mrs. Anuradha requested, "Swami, one more?" Swami nodded in agreement and she began singing the Meera bhajan, "Payoji Maine Ram Ratan Dhan Payo." As she rendered this song beautifully, Swami raised the sleeves of His robe. He was rubbing His palms and it appeared as if He was eager to shower His love and Grace on the talented artist. And sure enough! No sooner had she completed her song, Swami waved His hand and materialized a beautiful golden chain for her. Mrs. Anuradha was so overwhelmed that she rushed to His feet and lay down there! She was there for almost half a minute and all the while Swami so sweetly waited for her to rise. Then, putting the chain around her neck, Swami presented her with two *sarees*! She asked with her eyes, "Both for me?" and a sweet smile was His reply! Swami presented the accompanying artists too with *sarees* and safari pieces. Having done that, He called the photographer and told him to take a group photo from two different angles, adjusting His chair and posing perfectly!

Swami then told the students to sing *bhajans*. Two *alaap bhajans* were sung among the other *bhajans* and Swami was so happy. He called the tablist and harmonium player from among the artists and told them, "Music college boys!" He also asked them as to when they were leaving and blessed them. In the meanwhile, a picture of the artist receiving the chain from Him was presented to Swami and Swami gave it to the delighted artist. Another senior member of the ashram presented Swami with a rose. Swami accepted it and when he spoke about his heart, Swami gently placed His right hand on his chest. He lovingly rubbed it and assured him that He was there for him always. Blessing everyone with *prasadam* and Grace, Swami retired for the day at about 6:30 p.m.

SWAMI AND ME

HOW MY LIFE GOT ITS VALUE

- A conversation with Mrs. Carole Alderman

Mrs. Carol Alderman is the Director of the British Institute of Sathya Sai Education in Human Values in the UK. For the past 3 decades, Carol 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, Carole spoke about her work and life as inspired by her divine teacher, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Reproduced below are excerpts from the conversation.

H2H: Sairam and welcome to this special episode of a conversation with Mrs. Carol Alderman. Carol Alderman is the Director of the British Institute of Sathya Sai Education in Human Values based in the UK, and today she is going to talk to us about the theme of taking Bhagavan’s five human values into the British public school system.

Welcome Carol.

Carole Alderman (CA): Thank you.

H2H: Before we get down to business, would you like to briefly tell our readers, what was your life like, before Bhagavan entered it.

CA: It was totally different actually, because I had a very difficult teenage time and twenties. I had an early marriage and children. I became independent when I was very young and left home; I had a very, very difficult time... in an abusive situation. Later, when I was in my 30’s, I came across the School of Economic Science in London, where I went to study Philosophy. My eldest daughter, a very beautiful girl, who was 16 at that time had a motoring accident. She was almost dead. This had a deep impact on me; it made me completely rethink my value system. I joined the School of Economic Science and studied Philosophy where we studied Vedanta, the Upanishads and related subjects. It was the first time I’d ever heard the truth spoken... What I considered to be the truth. As a young child of 6 years, I used to take myself to the various churches in my hometown Ramsgate, a coastal town in Kent, England. It was nice, I had a happy childhood. I used to love playing on the beach and had lots of relatives to visit. But, as I said, I’d left home early – I’d wanted to start my adventure in life. And, funnily enough, I wanted to learn Philosophy. But I’d got into this situation, marrying my first husband, and so eventually I did go to Philosophy.

H2H: Around what period of time was this? In the 1970’s maybe?

CA: Yes, this would have been in the late 70’s. And it was 5 years into that period of going to this Philosophy school that I heard about Sathya Sai Baba. By this time I had married again, to a wonderful husband. I’ve always said my 2 husbands were like Ravana and Rama. So I had this wonderful husband and we were both studying at the Philosophy school... And we’d come to the part where we were studying Adi Shankara’s commentary on Brahmasutras and I didn’t understand what he was talking about. Then my husband and I went on a holiday and... strange things started to happen; Unusual things.

H2H: Like what?

CA: Well, before we went, my husband went to the library and found a book sticking out at him. He picked it up and it was called *Sai Baba: Man of Miracles* by Mr. Howard Murphet. He brought it home and said, “This will be a nice book for you to take on holiday.” That’s the first book he had ever got from a library for me, and he’s rarely got a book since. That was the first thing that was strange – he got me this book from the library.

We always have wonderful, sunny holidays and it was a beautiful summer in England that year. But we went to France and it poured when we were there. So we had to stay in a cottage. This was in August 1983.

H2H: So you were housebound.

CA: Yes! And I was taken up with the book. I read it from cover to cover, which is extremely unusual – I usually pick up bits and pieces. But I really loved this book and I loved the teachings; they were so simple and straightforward, and not hidden and complicated. So I was excited and wanted immediately to write and find out where this sage had lived, and what teachings he’d left behind him.

H2H: You said “had lived”... Why?

CA: Because I assumed he was dead.

Then I realized that I couldn’t really find out much in France. If I waited till I got back to England, I had contacts and I could find out. On the way back to England, I started to notice little coincidences happening. We had gone by car and we got to the port. But the port was closed because of the weather, so we drove along the coast to the next port. Although we were the last, we were put onto the boat that was actually going back to England to cross the channel. We got back and as we were approaching our home in London, we were on a motorway. And this motorway at a particular point has an adverse U-bend which we know very well. And as we came up to this U-bend, I was about to say to my husband, “Slow down,” because I always slow down on this bend. But it came into my head – don’t tell him to slow down, he’s been driving you for the last 2000 miles safely. So I didn’t; I continued to talk to him, and I saw the car going into a skid. I saw him lose control of the steering wheel; the car started to zigzag and we were just about to hit a concrete wall at 60 miles an hour. We were within a few metres of it. Then, into my head came the words

from the book, uttered by Sai Baba, “By whatever name you call on Me, I will be with you.” So I said, “Sai Baba, I’m a Christian, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me.” I got into a crash position and I thought, “I’m going to die now.” And then I thought that’s going to be really interesting, because then I’ll find out about reincarnation! And I was quite interested in that.

H2H: A very unusual reaction for someone going through an accident!

CA: I was seeing everything very clearly, and we hit the wall. The car was thrown across the motorway, hit the wall on the other side, got thrown back and was turning... But the road had cleared so we didn’t hit anything. The car stopped, facing the wrong way on the hard shoulder, out of the way of the main road. My husband said to me, “Are you alright, darling?” I said yes, and he told me to get out of the car. So I got out of the car. And the car, apart from the seats and the windows and the windscreen, was a total wreck. It was completely crushed up.

H2H: And you were unscathed.

CA: We were completely unhurt, in fact I felt very happy. I felt really quite elated, and happy... As if I’d been held in God’s hand. I mean, this was quite an unusual experience.

The boot of the car wouldn’t open, it was completely crushed. When we eventually got the boot to open, there was a screwed up can of petrol in it – not a drop had leaked out.

H2H: My God... That is so unusual.

CA: Nothing had been hurt! And just at that moment, a police car came along. The police said, “We don’t normally travel on this road. But 10 minutes ago, the thought came into our minds to travel on this road on the route back to the station.” So they called the Automobile Association or AA and got us taken home, got the car towed home... It was very easy. I felt very happy. My husband had one scratch on his ankle, about a quarter of an inch long, and that was the total extent of our injuries... We didn’t have any whiplash or anything wrong with us.

H2H: It was like you were held when you called out Jesus’ name.

CA: Yes, and to Sai Baba. Because it felt as if we’d been on the bumper cars.

H2H: So after that, how did you go about searching for Him?

CA: When I got home, I told my daughter, who was there with a friend, about the accident. Within about 10 minutes, I’d totally forgotten about it and I was reading to them out of this book, *Sai Baba: Man of Miracles*. Two days later, the girl who was there (my daughter’s friend), said that there was a picture of that man in her driving instructor’s car. I told her to go find out who He was,

and she rang me back and said that I could find out more about Him in a shop in Swiss Cottage.

H2H: And that was a distant neighbourhood for you.

CA: Well, that was part of London, but it was on the other side of London from where I lived. It was a part of London that I never went to. And on the Thursday, my daughter rang me up and said, “Mummy, come and meet me before you go to Philosophy class, and have a coffee with me.” So I said, “Yes, where are you?” to which she said, “I’m at Swiss Cottage!”

H2H: What a coincidence!

CA: It was a total coincidence because, as I say, it was completely out of my path. We went there, we went to the shop and the man who was standing in the doorway asked whom we were looking for. I had to say, “Sai Baba,” though I hadn’t intended to tell him... Because I was a bit cautious. But he told me all about it and gave me a picture, and told me to contact Mr. Victor Kanu.

And from the time I’d heard that Sai Baba was a living person, I had a tremendously strong feeling – that I must go now, I’ve got to get there now, this afternoon... I’ve got to get my suitcase, got to get to the airport, got to get to see this person now.

Anyway we went to Kanus’ and had a very nice interview with him. I arranged with him in 3 weeks to see Sai Baba on Easter, with my husband and daughter – the one who had had the accident. She came too. It was in April 1984 that I first saw Sai Baba. And the moment I saw Him...

H2H: What was your first reaction?

CA: Wow... Wow, I’d never realized God was like this. So powerful. So beautiful. Because I knew I was going to see God, and I’d never realized Jesus must have been like this. Much greater than anything I could have imagined. Great power. And my husband knew that he’d come to an Avatar, too. He realized that on sight. My husband never came again for 12 years, but I came practically every year after that.

H2H: Tell me something... Your faith in His Avatarhood was based on the literature you had read, and the series of coincidences that had occurred in your life. And when you saw Him for the first time, you were convinced. Didn’t you need any other personal experience?

CA: No, because there was this great power in His Being. It wasn’t the Being or the frame, it wasn’t the body – it was what was emanating from it. What it was. It was... something else. Something that I’d never experienced in this life before. I can’t say more than that. It was an intuitive knowing.

H2H: I understand what you mean. Now, considering the fact that you came here for the first time in 1984, today, by the year 2008, you’ve been such an

effective instrument of taking His message of the Education in Human Values programme to so many schools across Europe, North America, and especially in the UK. How did that come about? How did you make the transition from just coming face-to-face with God to becoming such an effective instrument?

CA: About 2 years before I heard of Sathya Sai, I had been very disillusioned with the education system from my children’s education. I’d seen that they weren’t being taught anything to do with law, not even grammar, in school. Or, morality. I knew that within about 20 years, society was going to be plunged into quite a bad social environment. It was just going downhill. I was very concerned about children’s education, and I prayed about this issue.

When I returned from having seen Sathya Sai... I think, even before that, after I’d seen Victor Kanu, he’d had a conference on Education in Human Values in Monstead, and I’d attended. I started to work in a voluntary capacity for Victor Kanu as his assistant. I was practising meditation at the time, through the school of Philosophy, and his wife seemed to think that I had a peaceful influence on him. I worked as a sort of secretary to Victor and gave whatever help I could. When I returned, I continued helping him and I helped him for 5 years with EHV in the UK, and all the conferences – including going to Accra, the capital of Ghana, for the first African conference on EHV.

And then when Victor left – I think it was in 1989 - we didn’t have any EHV in the UK for I think 4 years. Then a new chairperson came up and I suggested to his wife that we start EHV again. They did, and a couple of years after that I was asked to be the National Convenor. Which I didn’t want to do – I did not want to do it at all, because I’m not a schoolteacher, I’m not a public person and I didn’t really feel I knew anything or was capable of doing or organizing anything. But I accepted the post because there was nobody else available then to do it – everybody else had left and gone off in different directions.

So what happened was that we had a meeting, and we called different people from around the country. It was February at that time. We decided that we would take EHV as a gift for Sathya Sai’s birthday in November, 15 lesson plans – one lesson plan on each of the 5 values in each of the 3 age groups. I’d asked different people to send me some material – stories, songs, and so on. When I received the material, I found that nothing matched, and nothing was suitable for Western schools. It was all material from Eastern origins, and was religious material... And I knew that we couldn’t present it in a religious way.

H2H: And EHV is not about any religion... It’s about the values, which are beyond and above religion.

CA: It was all that was available at that time. So I turned to Swami’s picture and I was absolutely desperate then. “I cannot do this. I’m not a teacher... I can’t make lesson plans; I can’t make one lesson plan... Please help me, I can’t do it!”

The following November, I attended His birthday, and we’d put a book together and it had 50 lesson plans in it. It was later divided into the first 3 books.

H2H: How did that miracle happen?

CA: It happened because having asked for help, people who had the necessary skills started to ring me up and I started to find material which was suitable. I had to borrow my husband’s laptop and I worked in the corner of the dining room, putting all this material together. Whenever I came to a difficulty, and I needed, maybe, a particular activity for a particular lesson plan, within 24 hours I’d have a phone call from an expert in some particular skill. For instance, maybe a drama teacher who could get me something or somebody else willing to help with that activity. It came about like that.

H2H: So it appeared like the universe was cooperating to make this huge grand purpose happen, because you had prayed to Swami and surrendered to Him... Tell me more about how Swami personally intervened in the process. You were talking about His involvement in the books that you wrote, and the blessings He gave you in the form of a *japamala*.

CA: Well, in November, I went for the birthday celebration and I had this book divided into 3 sections, with 50 lesson plans in it. At that time, we were allowed to take books into *darshan*. It was quite a big, heavy book. So I used to take it with me everyday into *darshan*, and wait for Him to give me an interview so that I could present it to Him and ask His opinion of it. He didn’t call me. Day after day, I was sitting there with this book, and I eventually thought, “Well, You don’t want it... it’s no good.” I didn’t know whether it was any good or not, because I’m not a teacher; not in public schools, anyway. So I was sitting there and I said, “Well, Swami, this book obviously has taken quite a lot of months, quite a lot of work to do. But if it’s no good, You don’t want it, and I don’t want it... So I’m going to burn it.”

H2H: (Chuckles) Rather drastic, huh?

CA: Well... I was devoted to Swami. If He didn’t want it, then it was no good. It was rubbish. So, get rid of it.

Anyway I waited another couple of days, I didn’t act hastily. After 2 days He called me for an interview, and He went through the book and blessed it. He asked me if I would promote Sathya Sai Education in Human Values in the UK, and I – rather boldly – said, “That is my intention, Swami.” And then I thought, “Oh! But this is going to be very difficult.” Before the words “I need Your help, this is going to be difficult” had even gone through my mind, He waved His hand and produced this particular necklace, which has 101 beads. He put it over my head and around my neck and said, “Never take it off.” I said, “Huh?” And He said, “**NEVER take it off.**” So I don’t take it off. Not for any reason, ever. And one of the effects of it – I know this because once it got taken off accidentally – is that it has a complete link with Him. If I think of doing anything wrong, I immediately know I mustn’t do it. And as I say, I knew

because a few years ago I'd accidentally taken it off with another necklace and I didn't have it for 2 days... I told somebody to do something which was wrong. I mean, in the circumstances it seemed very justifiable but actually it was wrong; it wasn't truthful. So, since I found the necklace I put it back on and found that person quickly and told him, "Don't do what I told you to do; it's not right."

H2H: So when you're wearing it, you feel connected with Swami and in case you're thinking a thought that's not appropriate what happens?

CA: I get a sort of knocking in the head.

(To be continued)

A MILLION MOTHERS’ LOVE

By Mr. Rakesh Menon

An alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, Mr. Rakesh Menon joined the Brindavan campus in the 1994 for his Bachelors in Commerce. After this he pursued his Masters in Business Administration in the Bharatiya University in the state of Tamil Nadu. He began his professional career in 2000 and since then has served in the banking industry in India as well as in other countries in various positions. Until recently, he was in the UK working as the Global Product Risk Manager in JP Morgan, Europe. Currently, he is the Vice President, Risk Management, in JP Morgan, India and is based in Bangalore.

This is the adapted version of a conversation with him in the studios of Radio Sai for the radio series “Fleeting Moments...Lasting Memories” in July 2008. To listen to this audio file please visit radiosai.org/saistudents.

“God could not be everywhere, therefore He made mothers.” But I had the unique fortune of having the Lord Himself as my mother.

Enraptured by the Sublime Sai Ambience

I was blessed to be at Swami’s feet between the years 1994 to 1997. I was not a devotee before I joined Swami’s University, neither was anybody in my family. But we had heard of Baba’s college as a unique institution which imparted human values. One of my uncles got me the application form and brought me to Puttaparthi, where I wrote the entrance examination. Swami, at that time, was in Kodai Kanal. Nevertheless, the general ambience of the ashram kindled in me the urge to learn more about Swami. I was fascinated by the discipline in the ashram; how things happened in clockwork precision, right from the stroke of the bell at five o’ clock at dawn. It felt wonderful to be a part of the *Omkaram*, *Suprabhatam* and the *Nagar Sankirtan*, and feel those positive vibrations. Furthermore, everybody maintained silence irrespective of whether Swami was physically in Prashanthi Nilayam or not. That made a deep impact on me.

Thus, in the summer of 1994, when I stepped into the portals of the University at the Brindavan campus in Bangalore, I was yet to physically see Swami. Now I was not a devotee but already a Sai student. And I was very eagerly looking forward to the ‘Big Change’ that was to manifest in my life. I hailed from a village in Kerala and now a higher education in a different sort of institution in the city of Bangalore really appealed to me. It seemed exciting, but I was not aware of what I was actually in for.

The first step to the change lay in my acceptance of Swami as God. But how could I accept someone as my guru and God, when I had not even seen Him? Wasn’t it foolhardy to invest my faith on a person, of whom I had only learnt from hearsay? So I decided to test Bhagavan!

Testing Divinity and What an Answer!

We were a group of three boys from the same place who wrote the entrance examination together. And all three of us had got through the test! There was one amongst us who had the habit of smoking. And as the hostel and ashram rules strictly forbade this habit, this boy would go out on the sly, unknown to anybody else, to take the vital puff! I was aware of his furtive habits and so was the other boy. And we both advised him against persisting with his covert ways, knowing fully well that it might result in his expulsion from the institution altogether. But he remained adamant. Instead, he pointed a finger at a photograph of Swami in the Sai Ramesh Hall and said, “Let Him say and I will stop.”

I looked at the hall; there were at least 5000 devotees seated there, waiting for Swami. It seemed Swami now had two more tasks to accomplish in such a massive crowd before two Doubting Thomases could accept His divinity. First, to censor the cigar boy and second, to trigger a Big Change in me.

Two days later, this boy got the chance to wave the *arathi* to Swami. I was sitting close to him. When the *bhajans* ended, Swami picked up the match box, lit the *arathi*, and told him in Tamil, “**You said that if I ask you to stop smoking, you would do that.**” He put the match box back into the boy’s shirt pocket and then continued as if nothing had ever happened. I was flabbergasted! Nobody else knew about that conversation except the three of us. And I can never forget the expression on this boy’s face – of utter disbelief, shock and fear. Swami’s words were also heard by the third boy. And we all looked at each other, astounded beyond words. In a crisp one-liner, the Omnipresent Lord had neatly packaged the lesson of a lifetime; it was powerful and unforgettable. This was my first direct experience of Swami’s omnipresence.

‘I will give him a thousand mothers’ love’ - Baba

More was to come. Nine days later, I received a letter from home. It was from my sister and the contents went thus, “We were very strict with you because we wanted you to grow up in the right way and become a respected individual. Now that you are far away, we do miss you.” My sister and I were very close to each other ever since my mother died when we were very young. The letter made me homesick. And when, in the evening, there was a soul-stirring *bhajan* extolling Swami as Sai Ma (Mother Sai), I was reminded of my mother and was actually in tears. Soon, I was convulsing hard, with my head bent down I was trying to stem the cascade of sorrow that streamed down my face.

A few boys nudged me during the *bhajans* saying that Swami was looking at me. But I did not believe them. The Trayee Session followed soon after the *bhajans*. These sessions are close interactive sessions wherein Swami would give discourses and move closely among us, interacting and sharing valuable insights peppered with humor. It was a great opportunity for us to listen and learn both from Swami and as well as from the elders. That evening, I was

sitting quite far away from the *jhoola* (the swing on which Swami generally sat). When Swami came, He looked around, searched among the boys, spotted me and then He asked me to come towards Him. Had I committed a grievous mistake I wondered, as I went up to Him? But when I came closer, Swami pulled me towards Him, held me in a warm, loving embrace, and said, **“This boy lost his mother. This boy lost his one mother but I will give him a thousand mothers’ love.” And then, He created a ring for me.**

I was too overwhelmed, lost in His love, lost for words. And I was wondering how Swami knew my story; He was mentioning so many facts of my life to people nearby. This was the first time He spoke to me. That day, He touched my heart with His love. And I accepted Him as my Mother.

Sai’s Simply Amazing Care

His love was as tender as a mother yet strict like a father. And since I had no exposure to Swami and His teachings prior to my Brindavan years, He took upon Himself the task of ensuring that I was moulded into a Sai student. There were times when a Father’s guidance surged along with a Mother’s concern. One such day in Brindavan, I was sitting for *darshan*. It was a cold winter morning. Swami walked by me, stared queerly at my face, and then went on His usual round of *darshan* among devotees, accepting letters and blessing them. I was perplexed, praying and hoping all the while that I had not upset Swami in any way, in thought, word or deed.

As I sat on after *darshan*, I was a troubled bundle of anxiety. And then I saw my commerce professor running towards me, holding something in his hand. **As he came to me, he said, “Swami has sent this for you,” and handed me a Ponds cold cream! Apparently, Swami had noticed that I had dry skin because of the weather, so He sent the cream for me in His boundless concern.** Even as I stood there choked for words, I learnt from Swami that day something which I consciously try to apply in my daily life – attention to detail! Swami attended to thousands of devotees that day – collecting letters, conferring blessings, bestowing guidance – and yet He had borne in mind my dry skin and sent the cream! What was a parched epidermis in front of a million other pressing concerns for Swami? But that was the affection of the Divine Mother.

Surprise Gifts of Grace for Sisters

Another of my memorable experiences happened when I was in Kodai Kanal with Swami. Kodai Kanal is a place where one can witness the parental aspect of Swami like nowhere else. I am reminded of an evening when Swami actually gave money to all of us, students, and asked us to go and buy something for ourselves. I went along with Prof. Anil Kumar to the shop. On the way I thought to myself that here I was with the Lord, pampered with His love, and absolutely taken care of, while my family back in my hometown was still facing life in its coldest. So I thought I should buy something for them; that was the least I could do with the money Swami gave me. Therefore, as the professor shopped for something for his wife, I bought two pairs of earrings,

one each for my two sisters. These were not very expensive, but I thought this was the minimum I could do.

So I had these earrings packed and put them in my shirt pocket. When I returned, Swami instantly started looking about as if He was searching for something. **He then came to me and asked, “What did you buy?” and before I could reply, He put His hand in my shirt pocket and took out the earrings.** There was a look of dismay on His face when He saw those jewels, as if to say that they were not really of a good quality. And I was very disappointed, that I had not bought the right gifts for my sisters; that Swami had not approved of them. If Swami did not approve, then surely these are not really good, I thought to myself. That evening went by. That night even after everyone had retired, I was still ruminating over what had happened, and praying for my family.

At breakfast next morning, Swami went around looking to everyone’s needs like He did everyday. And when He came to me, He started waving His hand. Out came two identical sets of earrings from the Divine Palm! **Swami said, “Those were not good. Give these to your sisters,” and humorously added, “I gave you two identical ones because they might fight.”** That was one unforgettable instance of pure maternal affection that stands evergreen in my memories!

Success in the Corporate Space – The Sai Way

Time went on and I was not fortunate to secure an MBA admission in Swami’s University and I was not sure about my future, because I was going to leave the protected shelter where I was so comfortable. This indeed was a huge transition and the following year I returned five times to Swami for support and strength which I desperately needed. And only Swami could have made that possible.

When I completed my MBA in another institution, I started my career with HSBC Bank. The corporate environment was cold, emotionless and unforgiving. Although the stress levels were critical, it was to percolate, at least through team work. But the fact remained that it is mostly every man to himself, so completely different from the brotherhood I enjoyed in Swami’s hostel. And in this new scenario, one didn’t have any choice but to dive within and look for inner reservoirs of courage and strength. That is when I realized that whatever Swami has been teaching works in the corporate environment, that *values gives one the growth*. And practising Swami’s teachings did wonders for me – His directions on the right attitude towards work, dignity of labor, the right man management through leading by example, and practising what one preached. These simple messages of Swami actually helped me move ahead in my career right from HSBC in India, to the Middle East with Standard Chartered Bank and Citibank where I was handling quality assurance and operation risk audit, to the UK where I am currently managing quality assurance for risk, globally, for JP Morgan.

A common thread runs through all these career positions. And it had to do with my values. Initially people didn't understand why I behaved in a way which was totally different from the entire team of people around me. Nevertheless I clung on to the values I had imbibed as a student, especially the qualities of patience and perseverance. That helped me win the trust and credibility of the people I reported to, of my peers and my subordinates. I lead by example such that my subordinates were always willing to go an extra mile for me.

I remember an audit wherein my team worked round the clock to turn around a weak control situation into a strong order success. Even though there was no overtime, they worked day and night because they did not want to let me down at any cost. The highlight was this: one of my subordinates came on the morning of his marriage to finish off a task! That was what I consider as success in a corporate environment. The challenge to manage the people and all the functions become more or less achievable. Tackling different individuals, impressing them by being a silent worker and leading by example – that is something which I really learnt in Swami's college and I still hold on to it. And when people ask me about my personality and the secret of my professional growth, I only talk about my University, the *ashram* in Puttaparthi and my Guru and my Mother, Sai. What I am today is only because of Swami.

What words of gratitude can I have for my Swami, who, time and again, showered His love on me, treating me more like a son than a student? He has given me the love of a mother and the guidance of a father – a love that keeps me joyful and brings me back to Him, a love that gives me strength in my career and helps me face life and all its challenges. And I know that I never need to worry, for my Mother's watchful eyes are always on me – caring, protecting, guiding, comforting and loving.

H2H SPECIAL

**THE INSCRUTABLE WILL OF THE COSMIC BEING
- Part 2**

A conversation with Mr. V. Srinivasan

Mr. V. Srinivasan is an electrical engineer and an eminent industrialist. He is a former National President of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and also a Senior Member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (USA). Currently, he is the All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, as well as a Member of the Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust and Sri Sathya Sai Medical Trust.

The following is the second part of an excerpt of a conversation between Mr. V. Srinivasan and Prof. G. Venkataraman, former Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University, held in the Radio Sai studio in 2002.

Prof. G. Venkataraman (GV): Please could you relate to us some more of your unique experiences with Swami. I am sure you have had so many and we would like to benefit from your sumptuous storehouse.

V. Srinivasan (VS): I have been graced with magnificent instances of the boundless mercy of Bhagavan; experiences which I was fortunate not just to witness, but even play a role in. One such incident comes to my mind, an incident which was very unique and indicative of how Bhagavan looks after every single devotee of His.

This happened a few years ago, about a week in advance of Bhagavan’s proposed visit to Chennai. I suddenly found that I had to make a very urgent business trip to Chicago for a meeting, and it could not be put off; there was no way I could postpone this appointment. Literally I was going to fly in and fly out.

But I could do so only if Bhagavan gave me a go-ahead. Swami was then staying in the old bungalow at Brindavan, Bangalore. So I went there to seek His consent. It was evening by the time I reached Brindavan and I was to leave that night from Chennai.

When I sought Bhagavan’s permission, very graciously He said, “Yes, you can go and come back. Anyway I’m going to come only after a few days.” Bhagavan knew I was worried about my absence when He came to Chennai. He knew of my reluctance on taking this demanding trip. With His reassuring words, He made it possible for me to go on my trip, without the additional baggage of anxiety. Or so I thought...

A Mysterious and Arduous Journey

Just as He was about to retire, while I was waiting there with folded hands, Bhagavan said, "On your way back, stop in a certain place and meet this particular person." I said, "Yes Swami, I'll do that". And I sat waiting for Him to give me further instructions on the assigned appointment. But Bhagavan simply went inside His chambers and the meeting was over.

I was stunned! Here was I going to travel thousands of miles to meet an individual without the slightest clue as to why I was going there and what I was supposed to tell him.

GV: Swami really gave you a tantalising and mysterious task. How did you cope with it initially?

VS: I thought to myself, "Well, Bhagavan will sort everything out." And I flew that night to Chicago. I finished my meeting and then, called this individual to inform him that I was coming to meet him. He lived in a city, a long way off from Chicago, 14 hours by flight!

When I telephoned him, I was, however, met with a curt "Why are you coming?" I replied, "I'm coming there, I'll tell you when I get there." If I told him that I didn't know why I was going, I was sure that he would have immediately put an end to the meeting. Again he sounded a bit curt, but I didn't allow the dialogue to persist. Instead, I simply said, "Sai Ram. I'll see you and I'm arriving in this particular flight."

I left Chicago that evening and flew 14 hours with a refuelling stop over in between, in the Pacific. I was quite worn out by the time I reached my destination. As I came out of the customs area, I found this particular gentleman waiting for me. He appeared to me a highly well-to-do individual, with an aristocratic demeanour.

When he saw me, he said, "Sai Ram".

GV: So he was a devotee.

VS: Yes, he was a devotee. We didn't have any further talk there. Instead we went over to the curb side where his Rolls Royce was parked and got into it.

There was dead silence throughout the journey. When we reached his palatial home, it was about 2:30 in the morning!

GV: You must have been exhausted.

VS: Yes, very much so and when we reached there, this gentleman did not even offer that I retire to a room and have some rest. Instead, he took me right away to his drawing room, shut the doors, sat opposite me and demanded, "Now, why have you come?"

GV: You two were alone?

VS: Yes, totally alone. One can well imagine my plight after a 14-hour flight and a long drive to residence, in the wee hours of the morning, all alone with an enigmatic gentleman.

I replied to his question saying, “I have come here because Swami asked me to come and see you.”

To which, he burst out impatiently, “Yes, yes, yes. What did He ask you to tell me? What is the message you bring?”

I said, “I bring no message.”

He grew wary. “What? Are you a fool? You have come such a long distance without any message, without knowing why you are supposed to come and see me? Are you sure or are you hiding something?”

I said, “No, I’m not hiding. I’m implicitly carrying out Swami’s instructions. I was asked to come and see you.”

He repeatedly quizzed and grilled me, and I stuck to what I was supposed to say and that was the truth.

Then he relapsed into dead silence and got into a very sombre mood. He looked removed to a different world altogether. Fifteen minutes elapsed this way. Even as I was thinking of the wretchedness of my circumstances, stranded with an inscrutable gentleman, lost in thought and with no talk whatsoever, I suddenly saw this gentleman bending forward and reaching for his right shoe. And I was wondering whether he was going to shoe me.

Then a Revolver Appears...

Suddenly, I saw the man drawing something from his sock. It was a pocket revolver in glinting blue steel!

Showing it to me, he asked, “Do you know what this is?”

I said, “I know exactly what it is. Please don’t point it at me.”

Certain that my last moment has arrived, I started chanting ‘Sairam, Sairam, Sairam’ in my heart, wondering what I had gotten into.

Then, the gentleman said, “This is a fully loaded revolver. And I want to tell you that just tonight I was going to shoot myself.”

GV: That must have been a heart stopping experience for you!

VS: Most definitely so, and for the gentleman a heart saving one! The dam finally broke. Unable to control the flood of emotions, he began reciting his

story of how he had got himself into enormous debts in his business which he was finding very difficult to repay, and how he had decided to take away his life as the easy and only way out.

He then himself said, “Bhagavan knew what I was going to do. That’s why He has asked you to come and see me.”

We conversed for a while. I had a return flight to Chennai in the early afternoon. I just had time to have a quick wash, eat a very light breakfast in the gentleman’s house and rush to the airport. Before leaving, I told him that Swami would be coming to Chennai within the next few days. He said that he would be there.

So here I could understand how Bhagavan knows the past, the present and the future, and how every devotee is under His care... You asked me a question, whether he was a devotee and I said, “Yes, he was a devotee.” I was very careful in my choice of words.

GV: I didn’t realize that.

VS: Because he seemed to have strayed from the fold a bit. But still Bhagavan did not forget him.

Swami’s Mercy is Infinite

GV: Was there any follow up experience for this man?

VS: To take this incident a little further, the gentleman came down to Chennai a couple of days later to see Bhagavan. But He who saved him pretended that he didn’t exist at all! Swami did not, so to say, speak or even cast a glance in this gentleman’s direction. Several days passed this way.

One fine morning however, Swami called the gentleman into the interview room and asked me also to come in. Once inside, Bhagavan started to really castigate him. Swami’s words were so strong that I was feeling very delicate to translate some of them. As I tried to pass them over, Swami got very angry with me. He said, “No, you are just a loud speaker. Your only role is to say exactly what I’m telling you to say.”

I had no choice but to follow Bhagavan’s instructions implicitly. The gentleman burst into tears and wept like a baby. Finally Bhagavan, in His ever flowing mercy, said, “Now forget the past. Past is past. Everything will be alright for you.”

True to Bhagavan’s words, the story had a happy ending. This gentleman owned a lot of property which could not be sold due to crash in the prices which took place at that time. But lo and behold, buyers seemed to come mysteriously from somewhere seeking him. Finally the gentleman could raise enough funds to meet all his obligations.

This was a very unique experience for me. I learnt that day Bhagavan’s ways are mysterious. We may never know how, when and where He will come to protect us. But what we should always be sure is that protect, He surely will. But He will protect us at the time when we need protection. That is what we have to understand.

GV: There are two salient points to note here. One is the way you implicitly obeyed Swami’s command. This is something that Swami asks us to do very often. But we almost invariably fail. And I was deeply impressed how in a delicate mission like this about which you had no clue, you literally followed His instructions. And that I think is a great lesson. The other even more striking thing is you said that this man had strayed away and here is Swami ready to come and save him. It’s just absolutely extraordinary.

How about another scintillating experience to follow this one?

Sweet are the Ways of the Lord

VS: Well, a really beautiful aspect of Swami’s love is that with Him, even the tiniest of entreaties do not go unheeded. I remember an experience of a devotee who was to go to Moscow. Before he left, he came to Brindavan to take leave of Swami. As he got into his car to drive home, a sevadal came running to him and said, “Stop sir, stop sir”. The sevadal was carrying a huge box and he said, “Swami has asked this to be given to you.”

So the devotee opened the rear of the car, put the box in there and drove back. On reaching home, he wondered what to do with the big box. No instructions had been given and he was to leave for Moscow in a couple of hours. So the devotee opened the box to check its contents. He found it packed with sweets. Deciding to take the sweets to Moscow, he transferred them onto another suitcase and took it along with him.

In Moscow, this person went to the Sai Center. The first question he was greeted with was, “Has Baba sent the sweets?” The devotee did not know that he was supposed to carry the sweets with him. But he was instinctively led to bring them along. Still, he asked them, “What do you mean by ‘Did Baba sent sweets’? Why should Baba send you sweets?” They said, “Sir, we are arranging sweet distribution to an orphanage here and we prayed to Swami saying, ‘Swami, we are planning to distribute sweets. But it would very nice if You can send some sweets.’” And Swami had sent it, using the devotee as His instrument!

GV: How He used him as an instrument was similar to your revolver incident; the man didn’t know what was going to transpire – but He did!

VS: The Moscow gift of sweets was to me a powerful reiteration of Swami’s mercy and love. Bhagavan melted at a manifestly insignificant supplication and hastened to fulfil it. I learnt that day that not even the smallest prayer escapes Bhagavan’s personal attention.

I learnt another important lesson in the process. Many a times, we think that we are the doers. But we have to understand that we are just instruments in the hands of a Greater Power. Once we realize that we lose our ego and our rigidity, and become flexible instruments in the hands of Bhagavan, to be used and utilized as He thinks appropriate. And that, I have learnt, is the way to happiness.

An Elevating Experience

Not only that, when we immerse ourselves in Bhagavan’s work, He ensures that ‘our’ work is taken care of. I learnt this through a first-hand experience, some years ago.

GV: Please tell us about this.

VS: This happened in New York when I was visiting my sister who lived in Manhattan. I was spending a night with her, scheduled to return the next morning. My plan was to go up to the west side air terminal to catch the American Airlines flight which was going from New York to Chicago. I had planned to leave my sister’s flat at about 7.30 in the morning.

Exactly at 7 a.m., a Sai devotee who was very well connected with the Sai activities in New York called me, and we started talking. So engrossed were we in talking of Swami that when we had finished conversing, it was 8 o’clock. Time had just flown by. Certain that I was going to miss the flight, I rushed out of the apartment, got into the elevator, and pressed ‘L’ for lobby. Lo and behold! I found the elevator, which was signalling ‘Down’, going up, defying their sound logic control system. I thought to myself, “Today seems to be a day of troubles for me. Now I’m going to be stuck in the elevator.”

Suddenly, after the lift went up about 5 floors, the door opened. Two men in airline uniforms stepped into the elevator. One of them, who saw my suitcase, said, “Look, buddy, you seem to be travelling somewhere”. I said, “Well, I wanted to travel and I’m not sure whether I’ll be able to do so. I think I’m going to miss the flight”. He asked me, “Which flight is that?” I replied, “The American Airlines flight to Chicago”, and gave him the flight number. He said, “You don’t have to worry. We are the pilots of that flight!”

GV: So literally you went with the *Sarathi* (charioteer)...

VS: Need I relate what happened after that? They took me in their car and we went straight to the aircraft. The captain of the flight had me checked in right through. I was treated royally, without a bother in my mind. This was a very small instance, but it showed me that when one is engaged in Swami’s work, even simply recounting or recollecting Swami’s *leelas* (play) and *mahima* (glory), one does not have to worry about the world. That is because Swami takes over and takes care.

GV: This incident reminds me of Swami’s profound statement in the Bhagavad Gita, “He who talks about Me and spreads My word is dear to Me.”

VS: That day, Swami validated the veracity of the same to me, ensuring that not only the *sarathi* (driver) of the flight had driven and flown me home well in time, but that He, the *Sanatana Sarathi* - The Eternal Charioteer - had driven home a lesson too.

GV: This incident may be dismissed as coincidence by sceptics. But, as Swami says, “Coincidence is a miracle where I hide Myself.” If we have the faith, God will materialize Himself more often in our lives, through innumerable ways and channels.

Faith, in Swami’s words, should be unconditional. If something doesn’t happen quite the way we want, we must regard that also as an act of God and not lose faith. We must stick with God through thick and thin, powered by the firm belief that whatever happens is always for our good. Because, as Swami says, “I’m in you, with you, above you, below you, around you.”

It is important that we reflect the inner significance of that message, conveyed to us, assuring us of His guarding and loving Omnipresence. It means that we are never alone. Bhagavan is always with us.

VS: Indeed so, and I hope these accounts have affirmed this beyond doubt. Thank you, Professor Venkataraman for having me.

GV: Thank you. Sai Ram.

VS: Sairam.

ENTHRALLING REMINISCENCES OF THE DAYS OF YORE

From the mental diary of Mrs. Karunamba Ramamurthy - Part 6

Extremely fortunate to come to His lotus feet when she was just a tiny girl in the 1940s, Mrs. Karunamba Ramamurthy, lovingly addressed as Kannamma, has a priceless treasure trove of incredible memories of the yester years. She is also the author of the famous book "Sri Sathya Sai Anandadayi - Journey with Sai". This is the sixth part of her wonderful reminiscences.

It was at Whitefield that Swami once materialized a silver vessel and showed it around to everyone. It was empty. Then Baba created a silver spoon and keeping the vessel in the left hand He drew the nectar from it using the silver spoon and distributed it to everyone. Once it was over, Swami tapped the vessel with his right hand finger and as He stirred it, the nectar came up. The vessel was filled and overflowing!

“You are all My children” - Swami

Once when Swami was in the Old Mandir, my sister and I came together to see Him. Swami asked us where we had come from. We replied “from Mysore.” Swami again asked, “From where?” We repeated the same answer. Then Swami told us “don’t say from Mysore. Say Puttaparthi. You are all My children. You are people of Puttaparthi.” Our joy knew no bounds, having Swami tell us that we were His people.

The Merit of Spiritual Practices

Swami has declared that He is an Avatar. Those days, visitors used to find it rather odd that the *ashram* did not have a formal routine of spiritual practices and discipline like recitation of the divine name, meditation, etc. The daily schedule was quite informal with some *bhajan* singing. The morning Omkaram chanting followed by suprabhatam program had not begun then.

When we drew Swami’s attention to this concern from visitors, He asked where is the need for *sadhana* when He is Himself here? Swami then told us one important thing. If the parents brought just the bride and her groom to perform their marriage, it can’t be completed without witnesses... in this case, Swami wanted some *bhajans* or *pujas* to be conducted because Swami explained that after our death, a court enquiry will be held in heaven. In the court of God, God questions all the sages and seers if the soul being judged has performed good deeds and recited God’s name. When the sages and saints bear witness and vouch for your conduct before God, He confers suitable boons upon the soul. In a similar manner, witnesses from the celestial beings are required for the marriage as well. To achieve this endorsement from the divine beings inhabiting celestial planes, we have to participate in *bhajans*, read Holy Scriptures and earn good merit.

Shraadham* Should be Done with *Shraddha

Swami reminded us that our parents are God for us in this life. Hence on their death anniversary, we have to invite and feed at least one person in our home to mark the event. “Because we have to offer that meal with *Sraddha* (or with faith, paying special attention), in due course of time, this custom came to be known as *shraadham*. That’s all. There is no rule to spend more money for pomp and show. All that extra expenditure you have created yourself. What shall I do for that?” Swami asked.

Then I questioned Swami if it is alright for us to go and eat *shraadham* meals in others’ homes. Swami was clearly against the idea. He said, “No, you should not take meals in others’ houses during their *shraadham* ceremonies. If they are very close blood relations then there is no harm otherwise if a new person goes and take meals on a *shraadham* day in other’s houses, some part of the fruits of the bad deeds done by that dead person should be borne by this guest. Whether meals or sweet, whatever you may eat, you have to share his/her bad deeds, otherwise you have to do extensive penance and get rid of that sin. Instead of that penance it is better not to partake of the meal at all.”

Why One Should Never End Ones’ Life

During old mandir days, once when we were all sitting around Swami, someone came from Tamil Nadu. He asked Swami about ending one’s life if one faced great difficulties.

Swami said no one should die by ending their life. There is a purpose to human birth. In this world even if we lose anyone, including our mother or father, somehow we can recover from the loss but if the human body is once lost, it cannot be retrieved under any circumstances. So, every one of us must take care of our body very carefully. This human body is a vehicle for realizing God. Just because there are worldly difficulties, you cannot throw away this precious gift. One has to keep the body healthy and well as all our *karma*, pleasant or otherwise, must be borne by the human body. Any attempt to untimely end one’s life is fraught with greater danger.

To explain this, Swami gave the example of a rented house. The house owners may ask us to vacate it. Can we vacate the present house without securing a new vacant house? If we get angry with our landlord and vacate it in a fit of anger, without securing another one to move into, what are we going to do? Live in the open space outside? Do you think that this open space outside is all vacant for us? Once you leave the body without completing your life cycle by taking your life, your soul will be left to wander in the open space. Swami said there are a lot of devils, demons and evil souls occupying the air in the space around us. Just because we have a body now, when we are living in that body, we don’t know the details of how the other planes of existence work. If our soul is let out of the body by unnatural means, then we will be letting it loose into outer space where ghosts will catch it. The details of

such a situation are very difficult to hear and we cannot even imagine that hell.

What Should be Our Daily Prayer

Swami advised us to pray immediately upon waking up and before stepping out of the house. We should ask God to grant us good behaviour and intellect so that we may serve society with discrimination of what is right and wrong. Similarly, before we go to bed at night, we have to pray God, "Swami, I offer everything I did today at your lotus feet. Please save me from the sins of my errors."

If we involve God in our day from morning till night, then God will think that this person is fully dependant on Him and He will look after us in every way. Hence, prayer must be offered compulsorily. God will thus work through us as we will surrender to Him and involve Him in all our efforts.

How to Fulfill Our Purpose in Life

Once when Swami arrived at my house, I used the opportunity to seek His guidance on a few issues. I asked Him that what we have to do to fulfill our purpose in life?

Swami replied, "If you don't want any more human birth and are keen on attaining emancipation, then all of your karma/actions/desires must be completed fully. If any portion is left over, then you have to be born again in order to complete them. Suppose you take birth again as a great person to fulfill that balance karma, but in that life you may do some good deeds or bad deeds. As a result, to receive the fruits of that karma one more birth will have to be taken. Hence you need not do any *karma*. Always focus on My *darshan* (the act of beholding a divine being), *sparshan* (blessing by means of a divine touch) and *sambhashanam* (hearing the divine benediction) and saying so, Swami showed His lotus feet. Then we took *padanamaskar*. Swami said He had now introduced the routine of daily Omkar, Suprabhatam and *bhajan* or congregational singing for our emancipation from the grip of our karmic residue.

How to do Japam?

Once we asked, "Swami, how to do *japam*?"

Swami said, "Sit cross-legged in *padmasan* or lotus posture. Bend and fold the left leg at bottom, and place the right leg on top. It should be a comfortable pose. Think of Swami's face and repeat the divine name or *japa* silently in your mind.

Spread a cloth on the ground and sit over to it to avoid earth's gravitational force. Always be alert that your spinal cord is straight without any bend. If it is bent the blood flow will get disturbed. If you sit straight the blood will flow sufficiently to the brain and head.

Japa and meditation performed early in the morning at dawn will be more fruitful than at any other time of the day.

Which Name Should be Chanted during *Japam*

We again asked, “What name is to be chanted during *japa* (penance?)”

Swami said, “If the *japa* is performed with a longer *mantra* then it will be hard for your mind to concentrate on it. Hence instead of chanting something like “Om Sri Sathya Sayeeswaraya namaha” or so on, it is better to chant “Om Sri Sai Ram” This is a shorter one and better. All the power is contained in the *mantra*. *Om Nama Sivaya* is contained in *Om Sri Sai Ram*.

How to Know Our Spiritual Progress

One more day, we said. “Swami we all feel that we are stagnating in our spiritual growth, without any progress as we are unable to notice our spiritual progress.”

Swami, then said, “You need not know, but you are transforming. If I openly tell you of your progress you will get ego and that will lead to your downfall. Here there are others like you. I will not reveal any thing about them too. Some of you are chanting the mantras of Siva, Rama, Krishna, and so on. When will you learn about Sri Sathya Sai Maha Mantra? *Brahmanda* (entire universe) (Bra + Ha+ Man+da) consists of only 4 letters. That connotes all lokas or worlds put together. Sathya Sai Maha Mantra is also in four letters (in telugu, Sa+thya+Sa+ I). This mantra of Sathya Sai alone is enough to grant everything. Never change the *mantra*. Fix it firmly in your mind for constant remembrance and focus on the form of the deity in your inner vision.

Creation and Divine Incarnations

“Please explain about creation of universe or *Brahmanda*?” we asked on one occasion.

Swami said, “The entire *Brahmanda* or the Universe was created from a big sound Aum. That Omkara is I, Sai, (Swami pointed to Himself). The world you see outside and all else is of lesser value. Even Rama and Krishna are also like rays of light. When these avatars lived in this world, no one worshipped them and followed them. In those *yugas* or ages no one recognized them as God. But now all of you have recognized me as God. This is your good fortune.”

One day Swami asked us whether we have seen Rama and Krishna. We replied in the negative. He then asked us how we knew what the forms of Rama or Krishna looked like. We admitted we did not and just went with the description of our elders. He then explained thus: In olden days there was a painter who could draw picture well. His name was Ravi Verma. He saw some photos and imagined the shapes and forms of Rama and Krishna and then drew the imaginary pictures. “For generations, people have come to believe

that those are forms of Rama and Krishna. But when I am personally telling you as I am God and descended on earth, why do you not believe Me?

Actually there was no form of God. It is only *tejas* or bright light aura. When devotees or *sadhakas* do *dhyana* (meditation) they keep a photo or an idol in front. As the devotee likes that form, God also grants vision in that form. However there is no form and shape for God.

Sai – The Safe Boat to Cross the Ocean of Worldly Life

Getting a human birth is very difficult and a rare blessing. Moreover, having spiritual bent of mind is even rarer. Even if one has it, finding the guru to initiate one on the path is not easy. Where as in this life, for people like you God's incarnation as Sathya Sai is available with you and is giving you daily *darshan*. You meditate upon Me. Try to merge in God and get emancipation.

Swami further said: suppose you have to cross the ocean of worldly life, you need to take a life boat. This vessel can only accommodate so many people. I am like that boat in this life. All of you can board this boat to cross the ocean of worldly life. Daughter, I am waiting for you like a boat in order to take you all to the other coast of emancipation. Let it be any number of human beings. I can grant you emancipation in this Avatar. You need not request Me to remove any difficulties. Without even your asking, I will surely get rid of all your difficulties for which you have to simply have My *darshan* and meditate upon Me. That's all.

GET INSPIRED

THE BREAD FROM THE FLOUR OF LOVE

There once lived a man, who had seven sons, but not a single daughter. Even though his wife was exhausted from frequent child-bearing, the man continued to dream of the day when his wife would give birth to a girl.

With her endless chores and responsibilities as a mother of seven boys, the wife was overwhelmed with despair and drained of all energy. Finally, in utter desperation, she prayed to God to have mercy on her by guiding her husband to give up his obsession to have a daughter.

God was moved to see how her once beautiful face had crippled under her burdens. He almost didn't recognize her, even though He had crafted her as His divine gift to her husband for being a patient servant to Him.

In response to her prayers, God instructed the woman to send her husband to Him at sunrise.

The man was thrilled to learn that God had summoned him. He prepared for the blessed meeting by grooming himself well and wearing his finest clothes. He asked his wife to bake the most delicious bread for offering to God.

Upon daybreak the man took to the road. He was ecstatic at the thought of God inviting him for a meeting. He felt honoured and special for this privilege. In his euphoria, he became so self-absorbed that he didn't even notice the morning dewdrops that sang to him like little tinklers among the green lush blades of grass, nor did he notice flower buds about to blossom upon the rise of the Sun, or birds that flapped their wings to create the flow of wind for a fresher, cooler journey, or the soft sand on the road that supported his feet for an easier walk. All he could think of was his impending meeting with God.

When the man finally arrived, he found a big lock on the door to God's house. The house was totally quite and deserted.

The man thought God was probably engaged in His morning chores and was running a bit late. He sat on God's porch determined to wait for Him. He sat there day and night without noticing how time passed by. All he saw was God honouring him when they would finally meet.

Time passed unnoticed, but God did not return. Then he started to feel hungry. The smell of the bread baked by his wife spread everywhere. His hunger was unbearable. The man took the bread out of the towel woven and embroidered by his wife; he broke off small pieces and put

them on his tongue. The bread melted like honey in his mouth and suddenly the man saw a green sunny valley, a river of clearest water and a fine woman who drew water into her pitcher from it. That was the vision of the day when he had seen his wife for the very first time.

He saw his wedding day; that gentle look of his wife, that touch of her hand that soothed his soul. He saw his wife sitting day and night by his bed when he was sick and holding her cool, pale hand to his forehead to ease the fever heat.

He remembered the taste of food that his wife gave him each day with such love and tenderness, and best of wishes. He remembered the birth of each of his children when despite the great pain his wife preserved her calm and loving demeanour. He remembered all the moments when he was happy, because this woman given to him by God was simply beside him.

Tears ran down his cheeks. He saw how blind he had been trying to find God where He wasn't. God was by his wife all this time. The man rose and ran home.

Upon entering his house, he saw God sitting next to his wife, sipping tea and enjoying cakes baked by her. At once, the man fell at his wife's feet, bathing them in his tears, and sought her forgiveness for his blindness and insensitivity towards her. The wife put her cool, pale hand on the man's head and he felt calm at once. He felt love and peace filling up his heart. It was the blessing that his wife always guarded in her heart to share with people around her.

God rose from the table, thanked the lady for the sweet breads and headed for the door. The man stayed kneeling in front of his wife.

When God was going through the door the man said quietly: "Thank You God for opening my eyes."

God smiled fondly and before walking away said: "It wasn't I who opened your eyes, but your wife's baked bread that is made from the flour of peace and love. Your wife has returned in your life, because she is My gift to you, that you had once deserved. Let peace and love follow you and your family, because God is there where love is."

In almost every discourse, Bhagavan Baba emphasises this principle of selfless and unconditional love which is equal to the Divine. Love is selflessness, Baba says and adds, "Love is God, Live in Love." One must always be grateful for all the 'loves' that fill our lives everyday in the form of mother, father, sister, brother, wife, grandmother and so on. They are all gifts of God and only when we treasure these gifts and love them sincerely, will God love us increasingly.

- *By Ms. Rita Ivanova, Latvia*

LET HIM DECIDE

Once a little boy went to a grocery store with his mother. The old shopkeeper looked at the small cute boy and lovingly took a bottle of his tastiest sweets and offered them to him saying in a jovial tone, "Dear child, you can take all the sweets you can hold in your tiny hands."

But the child didn't take any; he just looked up with a wistful expression on his face. The shopkeeper was a little surprised. He wondered why the little one did not take any sweets. So he tried to persuade him again, "Take the sweets, dear son."

His mother also joined in and coaxed him to accept a handful, "Come on, uncle is giving you some sweets – take a few." Yet the boy still did not pick any.

The shopkeeper thought maybe the boy is too shy. He himself took two handfuls of sweets and gave it to the child. The boy's face lit up; he was only too happy to accept them and exclaimed, "Oh thank you, Sir!"

When they returned home, his mother asked him, "Why didn't you take the sweets when the shopkeeper offered you? There's no need to be so shy."

Can you guess what the boy said?

"Mum! I was not being shy. You see, my hands are very small and if I take the sweets from the bottle, I can only take a few. But see what happened. When the kind uncle gave them to me with his big hands...how many more sweets I got!"

When we choose and acquire from the world, we are limited by our mind's desires and expectations. But when we pray to God to supply our wants the way He wishes and knows is best for us, He gives to us everything we could require - way beyond our needs. Let us depend always on Him. When we rely on Him totally, we will never be short of anything, for He is the True Source of all that exists in this Universe. And His Love is unimaginable.

Bhagavan Baba says,

"The Lord's grace is conferred on each devotee according to the level of that person's spiritual consciousness. The ocean is vast and boundless, but the amount of water you can carry from it is determined by the size of the vessel you take. If the vessel you carry is small, you cannot fill it beyond its capacity. Likewise, if your heart is constricted, divine grace will be equally limited. Broaden your heart and receive the plenitude of God's grace."

(From the Divine Discourse on 23 February, 1990)

- Story adapted from 'East And West Series June 2009'.

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ ON SACRED PILGRIMAGES

For every sincere pilgrim, to be able to go on a pilgrimage is undoubtedly an outpouring of Divine Grace. Thousands throng to Prasanthi Nilayam everyday, which is now the spiritual epicenter of this Universe to ‘recharge’ so to say the ‘batteries’ of their spiritual lives. Just like it is with the current Sathya Sai Avatar, every time God incarnated as man or sent His divine messenger, there have been few places on this earth which have been blessed to be associated with the Divine’s earthly sojourn. This multi-faith quiz takes you on a journey of such holy sites which have inspired and purified lives for generations.

1. **The Golden Temple** in Amritsar, a city in the North Indian State of Punjab, is the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion and a place of pilgrimage for Sikhs worldwide, which was established by Guru Ram Das Ji, the fourth guru of the Sikhs. Known among the Sikhs as the Durbar Sahib, this holy shrine, its architecture, symbolism and religious significance, is deeply rooted in the history and traditions of Sikhism.

The temple is surrounded by a large *Sarovar* (manmade lake), known as the Amritsar (*Lake of Holy Water or Immortal Nectar*). A pilgrimage to this holy site is a journey that Sikhs as well as many followers of other religions make, because the sanctity and peace of the holy shrine brings peace to every pilgrim that enters its portals.

The temple building has four entrances instead of the usual single entry. What is the significance of having four entrances?

- A. To remind every Sikh of their four values: Truth, contentment, contemplation and chanting the Name of God.
- B. It indicates that followers of all faiths are allowed inside.
- C. To allow entry of men, women, children and old people respectively.
- D. To be used at different hours – dawn, noon, evening and night.

2. Pilgrimage serves an important function in the Bahá’í community. **The Bahá’í World Centre**, the spiritual and administrative heart of the Bahá’í community, is located in the twin cities of ‘Akká and Haifa in northern Israel. It comprises the Shrines of Bahá’u’lláh (prophet/founder of the Bahá’í faith), the Báb (his forerunner), and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (his son), and other holy sites where Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lived. Every year thousands of Bahá’ís visit these sites as pilgrims in the company of fellow believers from all parts of the world.

Which of these spots is considered the holiest site for the Bahá’í’s?

- A. The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.
- B. The Shrine of the Báb.
- C. The Shrine of Abdu'l-Bahá.
- D. The other holy sites where Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived.

3. **Jerusalem** becomes the focus of pilgrimages each year for thousands of Jews celebrating the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. These pilgrimages are in keeping with the command in the Torah to visit and worship "...in the place that God will choose, for the Lord God blesses you with produce and blesses the work of your hands and you shall rejoice" (Deuteronomy 16:16).

Synagogues around the world are traditionally built with the Holy Ark facing Jerusalem.

In association with holy Jerusalem, many Jews have "*Mizrach*" (plaques) hung on a wall of their homes. What does the plaque indicate?

- A. A reminder of making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
- B. It contains a special morning prayer.
- C. To indicate the direction of prayer.
- D. A reminder to observe the traditional *shabbat* (day of rest) every weekend.

4. For the Hindus, a pilgrimage to **Badrinath** is considered heavenly! During a Divine Discourse delivered in 1961, Bhagavan Baba revealed to us the details of the pilgrimage He made to Badrinath with about 150 fortunate devotees: "Shankaracharya brought five lingams from Kailash and installed one each at Dwaraka, Sringeri, Badri and Puri and the fifth he placed at Chidambaram. Of these, the one at Badri has the Narayana *amsam* (orientation) and that had to be consecrated afresh. That was My task..."

The *Nethra Lingam*, laid by Shankaracharya underneath the idol there, was "taken" out by Me and *abhisheka* (consecration by pouring holy water) was done with Gangothri water which I fetched by a wave of the hand. It was worshipped with golden *Bilva* leaves and *Thumme* flowers, both created by Me on the spot, and sent back to its original place. The *Lingam* was placed on a Golden Lotus, with three layers of petals, each having two smaller layers of 16 smaller petals - the entire *Kamala* (lotus) representing the *Hridhaya* (heart) where the *Lingam* has to be installed for worship."

According to Swami, what is one of the biggest benefits one can derive from going on a pilgrimage to a holy place?

- A. Brings revenue to the country.
- B. Helps us develop a lot of patience.
- C. A good practice for Silence.
- D. Helps develop our devotion and faith.

5. Pilgrimage is an important part of spiritual life for many Christians. They see life itself as a journey, coming from God and returning to God. The pilgrim seeks to separate himself from the everyday concerns of the world, and to spend time in the presence of God as he travels to a place of special meaning.

The "little town" of **Bethlehem**, mentioned in any number of Christmas carols, attracts pilgrims worldwide on account of its description in the New Testament (and particularly the Gospels) as the birthplace of Jesus.

During a Divine Discourse in 2002, Swami talked about the three royal, wise men who came to see baby Jesus in Bethlehem. According to Swami, what did the third one say?

- A. "This child will love God."
- B. "He will be loved by God."
- C. "He will love one and all."
- D. "Everybody will love him."

6. The most important places of pilgrimage in Buddhism are located where Gautama Buddha lived and taught, and the main sites connected to his life are now important places of pilgrimage. **Bodhgaya** is the place where Siddhartha attained enlightenment to become the Buddha.

Born into royalty, Siddhartha had renounced his royal heritage, and since then had faced many hardships in his search for Truth. He came to Bodhgaya looking for a quiet retreat where he could meditate upon the causes for human suffering.

In Bodhgaya, where did Siddhartha choose to sit for meditation and became the Enlightened Buddha?

- A. Under a tree.
- B. In a cave.
- C. On a mountain-top.
- D. By a serene lake.

7. The Hajj (annual pilgrimage) is one of the "five pillars" of the Islamic faith. (The other "pillars" include the declaration of faith, daily prayers, offering regular charity, and fasting during the month of Ramadan.)

Medina ranks as the second holiest city of Islam, after **Mecca**. Both cities' numerous mosques are the destination points for large numbers of Muslims on their Hajj. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims come to Medina annually to visit the Tomb of the Prophet and to worship at mosques in a unified celebration. Muslims believe that praying once in the Mosque of the Prophet is equal to praying at least 1000 times in any other mosque.

During the days of the Hajj, how do the Muslim pilgrims say their prayers?

- A. Each pilgrim recites their own self-written prayer.
- B. They gather in groups and recite a chosen common prayer.
- C. They say the same prayers at the same time in the same manner.
- D. They pray very silently and privately in their own heart.

8. Going on a Zoroastrian pilgrimage is about learning how to balance the more serious aspects of life with the lighter moments.

Most of the ancient Zoroastrian places of pilgrimage are in the province of **Yezd** in Iran, all of which carry a long history of faith, resistance, love, hope and survival.

The village of **Chak Chak**, also known as *Pir-e Sabz*, consists of a shrine perched beneath a towering cliff face in the desert of central Iran. It is the most sacred of the Zoroastrian mountain shrines as it serves as a pilgrimage point for pious Zoroastrians. Each year many thousands of Zoroastrians from Iran, India and other countries flock to the fire temple of Pir-e Sabz. Tradition has it that pilgrims are to stop the moment they see the sight of the temple and continue their journey on foot the rest of the way.

According to Zoroastrians, how can an individual pilgrim benefit the most while undertaking this pilgrimage?

- A. By visiting during all four seasons of the year.
- B. Going all alone.
- C. Participating in a communal yearly pilgrimage.
- D. Going with every member of the family.

9. Of the great number of places of Jain *teerths* (pilgrimages), one which is of unequalled sanctity is Mount Parshwanath, or **Sammet Shikhar**, in Bihar, for it is believed that here no fewer than twenty of the twenty-four Tirthankars (enlightened beings) left their last earthly bodies and achieved *moksha*. For each of them there is a shrine on the hill. In addition, numerous ascetic saints also attained salvation here by practicing deep penance and meditation.

Jains believe that when just one auspicious event of one Tirthankar, can convert a place into a pilgrimage, it will be quite impossible for human intelligence to assess the holiness and power of that pilgrimage where as many as twenty Tirthankars have lit up the inextinguishable light of '*nirvana*' and attained the supreme status of '*moksha*'. So this is called *Teerthraj* (King of *Teerths*).

This is the only reason that when a devotee starts pilgrimage for Sammet Shikhar, his heart and mind gets filled with great enthusiasm, joy and devotion towards the Tirthankars.

At the starting point, what is the most enchanting part of this pilgrimage?

- A. All the animals of the forest come to greet the pilgrims.
- B. The special gift given to every pilgrim.
- C. The thrill of reaching the top.
- D. The surrounding honey-forest.

10. Bhagavan Baba often says: “Do not restrict God to temples and pilgrimage centers. He is *Hridayavasi* (indweller of the heart). He is in you, with you, above you, around you. You do not need to visit various pilgrimage centers. Your heart is the real pilgrimage center.”

During a Divine Discourse in 1970, Baba guides us how to undertake the real, internal pilgrimage: “The nine steps in the pilgrimage of man towards God along the path of dedication and surrender are: (1) Developing a desire to listen to the glory and grandeur of the handiwork of God and of the various awe-inspiring manifestations of Divinity. This is the starting point. It is by hearing about the Lord again and again, that we can transform ourselves into divinity. (2) Singing to oneself about the Lord, in praise of His magnificence and manifold exploits. (3) Dwelling on the Lord in the mind, reveling in the contemplation of His Beauty Majesty and Compassion. (4) Entering upon the worship of the Lord, by concentrating on honouring the feet or footprints. (5) This develops into a total propitiation of the Lord, and systematic ritualistic worship, in which the aspirant gets inner satisfaction and inspiration. (6) The aspirant begins to see the favourite Form of God, which he likes to worship, in all beings and all objects, wherever he turns, and so, he develops an attitude of *Vandhana* (reverence) towards nature and all life.”

On this spiritual pilgrimage, according to Swami, after succeeding in these 6 steps towards God, what is 7th stage that one should reach?

- A. He becomes fit to be a Guru.
- B. He becomes the devoted servant of all.
- C. He becomes utterly desireless.
- D. He already attains salvation.

ANSWERS:

1B. It indicates that followers of all faiths are allowed inside.

The temple building has four entrances instead of the usual single entry. This is symbolic of the openness of Sikhism and indicates that followers of all faiths are allowed inside. The poor, the low, the meek, the oppressed and the humble can feel the presence of God face to face.

The temple is a symbol of the magnificence and strength of the Sikh people all over the world. In its architecture are included symbols associated with

other places of worship. This is an example of the spirit of tolerance and acceptance that the Sikh philosophy propounds.

Most Sikh people visit Amritsar and the Darbar Sahib at least once during their lifetime, particularly during special occasions such as birthdays, marriage, birth of children, etc.

2A. The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

To the Bahá'í, the holiest spot on earth is the resting place of Bahá'u'lláh's mortal remains: the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí, north of `Akká. **Bahá'ís, when reciting their prayers, turn towards the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in the same way that Muslims turn to the Kaaba in Mecca.**

Before His passing, Bahá'u'lláh indicated that the world headquarters for the Faith He had founded would be in the Haifa/Akka area in the north of what is now Israel. Each year, thousands of pilgrims come from around the world to pray and meditate in the shrines, and to visit the other Bahá'í holy places in the Haifa/Akka area. These pilgrimages, which bring together Bahá'ís from all over the world, serve further to give social cohesion and integration to the Faith.

3C. To indicate the direction of prayer.

Many Jews have "*Mizrach*" plaques hung on a wall of their homes to indicate the direction of prayer.

In Judaism, *mizrach* ("east") is the direction to be faced during prayer. Thus, if a man is east of the Temple, he should turn westward; if in the west, eastward; in the south, northward; and if in the north, southward.

It is customary in traditional Jewish homes to mark the wall in the direction of *mizrach* to facilitate proper prayer. For this purpose, people use artistic wall plaques inscribed with the word *mizrach* and scriptural passages like "From the rising (*mi-mizrach*) of the Sun unto the going down thereof, the Lord's name is to be praised."

Expressing their yearning to make that pilgrimage to Jerusalem, at the end of Passover *seder* and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, many Jews exclaim "*L'shanah haba'ah b'Yerushalayim* - Next Year in Jerusalem."

4D. Helps develop our devotion and faith.

Swami enlightens us further about pilgrimages: "There are many things which you can learn from a pilgrim's steady march towards the goal; that is the

advantage in going on pilgrimage. **You can develop your *bhakthi* (devotion), your *shraddha* (faith) and your *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) when you are surrounded by kindred aspirants.**

Pilgrimage is for softening the heart, widening the outlook, expanding the circle of sympathy; not for collecting curios, or pictures, or *prasadam* packets, or idols and images...Pilgrimages should be as silent as the eyelids dropping on the eye. Why should people wag their tongues and shout and wrangle when they are God-ward bound?

Truly, all *Kshethras* (places of pilgrimage) and all *Yaathras* (pilgrimages) are in yourself. You are ever on a pilgrimage, though you might not have taken a step forward towards Badri or Kaashi.

People may say that pilgrimages are a waste of time and money; but let Me tell you that it is the best way of spending time and money, provided one has real devotion. ***Bhakthi* is no sign of weakness; it is a sign of courage, of wisdom, of discrimination; it alone can give *soukhyam* and *shaanthy* (happiness and peace).** Every one has one day or other to fall in line with you, for every one is terribly anxious to get these two. They try, in their ignorance or excitement, various other remedies, but this remedy alone can cure them.”

5C. “He will love one and all”.

Swami revealed: “Jesus was a noble soul. He declared that he was the Son of God, but he never said that he was God. When Jesus was born, three royal wise men from the east were guided by a star to a cowshed in Bethlehem where the baby Jesus lay in a manger. He was radiating divine effulgence. The first of them said, “This child will love God.” The second said, “He will be loved by God.” **The third said, “He will love one and all. He is not different from God.”**

The one who loves God is the messenger of God; the one whom God loves is the son of God; the one who understands the principle of unity becomes one with God. This is the inner meaning of the statements given in the Bible. *The one you think you are, the one others think you are and the one you really are.* You should understand the import of these statements.”

6A. Under a tree.

Siddhartha spread Kusha grass beneath the Bodhi or Bo tree, and sat cross-legged facing the east with a vow to get up only if he attained supreme knowledge. Even though he was assaulted with a tempter’s weapons of flood, fire, thunder and lightning, Siddhartha entered deeper states of contemplation.

His quest finally ended at dawn on *Vaisakha Poornima*, the full moon day in April-May, when the kind daughter of the village chief of Senani, Sujata, brought him a bowl of *kheer* (sweet thickened milk). Siddhartha attained the Enlightenment that he had been seeking for so long and thus became the Buddha.

As the place of the Buddha's Enlightenment, Bodhgaya is the spiritual home of Buddhists. People pray, meditate and prostrate before the Bodhi tree, making a wish or in thanksgiving.

Under the Bodhi tree is the Vajrasana (diamond throne), a rectangular slab of polished red sandstone, covered with a gold canopy. This is kept at the exact spot where Buddha is believed to have been sitting when he attained enlightenment.

7C. They say the same prayers at the same time in the same manner.

The Hajj symbolizes the lessons taught by the final prophet, Muhammad, who stood on the plain of Arafat, proclaimed the completion of his mission and announced the proclamation of God: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam, or submission to God, as your religion" (Quran 5:3).

During the days of the Hajj, Muslims dress in the same simple way, observe the same regulations and say the same prayers at the same time in the same manner, for the same end. There is no royalty and aristocracy, but humility and devotion. This holy occasion confirms the commitment of all Muslims to God.

8C. Participate in a communal yearly pilgrimage.

The annual pilgrimages to Pir-e Sabz and the other five mountain shrines are considered the most important religious periods of the year.

Pilgrims may visit any of the shrines throughout the year but the religious benefit is considered greatest when an individual participates in the communal yearly pilgrimages.

Pilgrimage is simultaneously an undertaking of spiritual significance as well as an opportunity for feasting, music and dancing. Today, pilgrims make their way up the towering rocks, following hundreds of steps to a cave where they pray and drink clear water from a spring.

Indeed, for every Zoroastrian a pilgrimage to Iran and particularly to Yezd, is an exciting rediscovery of one's historical, cultural and spiritual roots.

9D. The surrounding honey-forest.

The foot of the Sammet Shikhar Mountain, from where all devout pilgrims start their journey, is called Madhuvan. All around it there are large clusters of trees sprinkling with drops and crystals of 'madhu' (honey). That is why it is called Madhuvan (Honey-forest).

Sammet Shikhar is an astonishing and unique holy pilgrimage. The attractive feature of this pilgrimage is that no other Jain temple in the world is situated as high as Sammet Shikhar. The shrine of Lord Parshwanath is the highest and the final destination in the *teerth* journey. It is considered to be the holy destination, not only of Lord Parshwanath but also of the entire Jainism.

The Natural beauty of the mountain is such that it is as good as worshipping the universe. This mountain's own special feature is that it always remains redolent with the fragrant trees of a large Sandal forest situated over it. Several rare herbal medicines are found on this mountain. The melodious sound of the cool waterfalls flowing on this mountain gladdens any pilgrim's heart. The journey to this holy pilgrimage rids misery, confers piety and destroys sin.

10B. He becomes the devoted servant of all.

Swami continues: “(7) **Established in this bent of mind, he becomes the devoted servant of all, with no sense of superiority or inferiority. This is a vital step, which presages great spiritual success.** (8) This takes the seeker so near the Lord that he feels himself to be the confidant and comrade, the companion and friend, the sharer of God's power and mercy of God's triumphs and achievement, His *sakha*, in fact, as Arjuna had become. (9) As can be inferred, this is the prelude to the final step of total surrender, or *Aatma nivedanam*, yielding fully to the Will of the Lord, which the seeker knows through his own purified intuition.

You will note that the seventh step is *daasyam* (the servant stage). That is the stage of service, which every person calling himself a social worker, or volunteer, or *sevak* has to reach. It is more fruitful than reciting the Name or counting beads, or spending hours in meditation, though one's service will be richer and more satisfying if done on the basis of spiritual discipline. You must look upon all as limbs of your own body, and just as you try to heal any bruise or wound on any limb as quickly and as efficiently as possible, you must heal the woes and pains of others to the best of your ability and as far as your means allow.”

QUIZ ON A DIVINE DISCOURSE DELIVERED IN KODAI KANAL

Bhagavan Baba tends to visit Kodai Kanal every year around April-May, leaving the heat of Prashanti Nilayam and Bangalore for the cooler climes of the green sylvan hills so that the devotees are much inconvenienced because of the warm climate. During such trips, Bhagavan always takes a few students and elders with Him, and uses this time to teach them, often in a playful way. But he also gives extended series of Discourses to the devotees who have made the pilgrimage to Kodai from all over the world. We now present a quiz taken from one such discourse, delivered in “Sai Shruthi”, Swami’s residence in Kodai Kanal, on 26 April 1999.

1. During His Divine 1999 Discourse in Kodai, Swami, very poetically, revealed the different aspects of Speech.

“Speech is the cause of prosperity,
Speech is the cause of friendship,
Speech is the cause of bondage, and
Speech may even cause death.” [Sanskrit Verse]

While elaborating more on this topic, Swami said: “When the speech is good, man becomes _____.”

- A. Confident
- B. A Hero
- C. Trustworthy
- D. Egotistical

2. While imparting knowledge concerning the “I” principle, Swami expanded: “Several ways were enunciated in *Vedanta* to clarify one question: ‘Who am I?’ What is its inner significance? Question yourself, ‘Who am I?’ A doubt may also arise as to why you should try to know ‘Who am I’, when there are so many other things of interest in this age of information.”

According to Swami, how does understanding the word “I” help us?

- A. We can feel comfortable with ourselves.
- B. Others can judge us less.
- C. Keeps us humble.
- D. It helps us to understand the real nature of others.

3. During the Discourse, Swami used a very pertinent example to teach the Truth of how the ‘One’ becomes many in the Vedantic language. “There is only One without a second. That is Divinity. If you recognize Divinity, you will

be able to understand the nature of the Self, immanent in all individual beings. Everything has emanated from the Divine.

“Here is an example. First you were alone. Later you got married. Before marriage you had only two legs and you enjoyed greater freedom. You could go wherever you wanted to go. After marriage, you acquired two more legs and your movements were restricted, since you did not feel like leaving your wife alone at home. This is _____.”

- A. Selfishness
- B. Fatal
- C. Unspiritual
- D. Bondage

4. While explaining the phenomenon of the changeless *Atma*, Swami uses the example of the screen in a theatre: “The world is like a cinema, and the *Atma* is the screen. The different projections that appear on the screen are transient, whereas the screen remains as it is. That is why *Vedanta* proclaims *Brahma sathyam jaganmithya* (*Brahman* is truth, the world is an illusion). The pictures in the form of projections on the screen come and go, but the screen does not change. Let us analyze this from the standpoint of the *Vedantic* statement *sarvain khalvidam Brahma* (the entire universe is *Brahman*). When the pictures appear on the screen, it become invisible. Where does it go? It is there within the picture, but it is invisible. But without the screen you cannot see the pictures.”

After elaborating more on the function of the screen in a theatre as merely a witness, to what does Swami compare the permanent screen of our heart to?

- A. Blank paper
- B. The spiritual heart
- C. Conscience
- D. Pure Bliss

5. In an attempt to guide us towards attaining liberation, Swami reveals the formula: “The conscious perception of what is going around and the people we come across through bodily senses and mental powers are transient. Conscience is within. It vibrates throughout the body, whereas conscious perception is associated with the senses. Where do these two, conscience and conscious perception, come from? Both have their origin in the all-pervading universal consciousness. Where do you find consciousness? It is not confined to one place. It is infinite, immutable, invisible, and all-pervasive. First, you should understand this consciousness. You can then attempt to merge it with Divine Consciousness. This merger leads to bliss and liberation.”

Swami then asks us: “What should we do to attain this liberation?”

- A. Cultivate more purity and divinity.
- B. Work harder and more dutifully.
- C. Read texts on advaita.
- D. Have few and fewer friends.

6. While teaching us how to love with purity, Swami prods us: “God is not different from you. He is not confined to places like temples, mosques, and churches. He is Omnipresent. He is the resident of your heart. The body is the temple of God. So, you should strengthen the feelings of love within you.

“You do develop love, but it is based on bodily relations. You love your son, father, and mother. You identify yourself with the body, so you direct your love toward those with whom you have got a relationship at physical level. You are not able to manifest the kind of love that is beyond name and form.”

How does Swami teach us to love everyone without directing it on the physical level?

- A. By focusing on our duties only.
- B. By not limiting love to bodily needs and relations.
- C. By serving our family with sincerity.
- D. By reading Swami’s teachings.

7. While imparting a very profound message, Swami guides us: “As long as you are awake, you aspire for many things and indulge in many activities. You are also subject to manifold experiences. But you forget everything while sleeping. The state of sleep can be compared to a short death, and death can be compared to a long sleep. It is not easy to understand the true meaning of birth and death. You forget in sleep state what you experienced during the day. So, sleep state can be considered as a short death. Similarly, the waking state can be considered as long life. However, the waking state and the sleep state are temporary. But in both the states, witness consciousness exists, which experiences everything.”

What is the powerful message Swami ingrains in us while using the example of the three states of our being - waking, dream, and deep sleep?

- A. We have no control over birth and death.
- B. Everything is illusion.
- C. We are the very form of Truth.
- D. Bliss can actually be attained easily.

8. While teaching us how important it is to live in the present, Swami stresses: “Do not brood over the past. Past is past; forget it. Future is not certain. It is beyond your perception. So, live in the present, since it is permanent. It is not ordinary present; it is omnipresent. How? Past is in the present, since the

present is the result of past actions. Future is also in the present, since it depends on the present actions.”

How does Swami want us to live in these three time periods?

- A. By thinking over our past mistakes.
- B. By planning a successful future.
- C. By using our time wisely.
- D. By being happy in the present.

9. Expressing His loving concern, Swami makes us realize: “Man yearns for happiness in every act, in every kind of experience. He pines for happiness. All his actions are aimed at deriving happiness. Whether he does business or work in an office, his aim is to derive happiness. But does he find it? No. It is a temporary phase only as it is worldly happiness. He may be happy for a while, but permanent happiness is attained only by contemplation on God. So, contemplate on the Divine.”

According to Swami, before we pass away, what is the task expected of human beings?

- A. To secure a financial future for our children.
- B. To read all the world’s holy scriptures.
- C. To visit the holy shrines of one’s country.
- D. To experience divine bliss.

10. Towards the end of the Discourse, Swami helps us further to attain our spiritual goal: “The world today is full of misery. There is no place without fear and grief. People are afraid to travel by air, by trains or by cars, because they are wary of evil elements. Even walking has become unsafe. People are not happy at home also, since they are haunted by numerous fears. They are terribly fear-stricken. What is the reason? They are unable to bear difficulties and ordeals.”

What solution does Swami provide to get rid of our fears that result in misery?

- A. Do bhajans at home.
- B. Attend more study-circles to gain more spiritual strength.
- C. Reduce attachment to our body.
- D. Always travel in groups.

ANSWERS:

1B. A Hero.

During this discourse, Swami explained in more detail the effects of speech: "In this world, speech carries also more value than the currency note. In ancient times, people used to give immense value to speech. With the help of speech they were able to become rich and prosperous; they could even win kingdoms. Man becomes virtuous only when his speech is good; he becomes evil when his speech is bad. Speech promotes friendship. It also brings about differences between friends. Speech promotes affinity among relatives. It also creates discord. Effects of speech are not confined to ephemeral and worldly matters only; speech affects our spiritual progress also. Speech may even cause death. Speech can save one's life, too. Sweet speech brings you name and fame. Since man today has lost his pleasant speech and sweet temper, he is subjected to innumerable ordeals and sufferings. That is why I tell the students now and then, 'you cannot always oblige but you can speak always obligingly'.

"When the speech is good, man becomes a hero. But man will become a zero if the speech is not good. Who is hero? God is hero and the world is zero. So, you should make friendship with that hero."

2D. It helps us to understand the real nature of others.

Swami makes it easy for us by explaining that: "If you find an answer to this question, you will be able to realize not only your true nature, your true identity, but also the true identity of the millions of people in the world. You will be able to recognize the true nature of every individual.

"Whenever you come across a stranger you ask him, 'Who are you?' and waste your time. Instead, question yourself, 'Who am I?' By finding out the answer to this question you will be able to very easily find out who he is, since the true nature of every human being is one and the same.

"Every human being refers to himself as 'I'. The word 'I' is applicable to every individual. **If you understand this one word 'I', you can understand the real nature of every being in the world.**"

3D. Bondage.

Swami guides us further: "**This is bondage.** Your wish to have a son might be fulfilled after two years. With the arrival of the son, you added two more legs. Your movements were further impeded. With the passage of time, you might feel bad for not having a baby girl, though you had a son who could uplift your family and bring name and fame. Two more legs were added with the birth of a daughter. The greater the number of legs, the lesser the freedom would be. You would give away your daughter in marriage. Members of the bridegroom's family would become your relatives. With the arrival of the

daughter in-law, the members of her family too would become your relatives. In this manner one becomes many. Here oneness is the cause of multitudinous.

“If you realize this truth, the *Vedantic* axiom *Ekoham Bahusyam* (one *Brahman* multiplies itself into many) can be understood easily. To realize this oneness as the unifying force of the multitudinous is the *summum bonum* of the Indian culture. But, man today is not thinking on these lines. He is dividing oneness into many. He is carried away by attachments at the physical level and is fully immersed in worldly relations like son-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandson, and the like. **This attachment leads to bondage, if he realizes the truth that the nature of the Self is one and the same in every being, there will be no suffering.**”

4C. Conscience.

Swami makes the analogy and explains the function of the movie screen further: “Observation reveals the fact that the screen is not at all affected either by the innumerable visuals or by the sound effects. The fire that appears on the screen does not burn it. A tempest appears, it may even uproot the trees. The screen depicts the scenes, but it is not affected by them. Sometimes, we see floods on the screen. Rivers like the Ganga, Yamuna, and Godavari may overflow, but the screen is not drenched. What is the reason? Floods, earthquakes, and tempest that appear on the screen are not real, so the screen is not affected by them. It remains as a witness.

“Your heart is a big screen, which is changeless. On the screen of the heart, you see sufferings, happiness and ordeals. All these are transient scenes, like passing clouds. None of the scenes is permanent. **Only the screen of your heart is permanent. That is Divine. It is also called conscience, which is the eternal truth.**”

5A. Cultivate more purity and divinity.

To explain further, Swami uses the example of a balloon: “Air is everywhere. It is invisible and we cannot catch it. But nobody has got any right to deny its existence. It is our life force. So, it does exist and it is all-pervasive. In your body, this air is in a limited quantity.

“If you inflate a balloon, the air, which is all-pervasive, enters the balloon. But its quantity is limited. If you tie the balloon securely with a string, the air in it cannot merge with the air outside. What is the reason? It has a limitation, since it is encased in a balloon. What should be done to overcome the limitation? The encasement should be destroyed. How? Pump more and more air into the balloon till it bursts. Then the limited air in the balloon will get merged with the infinite air outside.

“Likewise, the body, which is only a vesture of the divine, is the cause of bondage. In the body too there is the air of divinity. But it is limited and bound. **If you cultivate purity and divinity more and more, attachment to the body gets destroyed, which will lead to liberation.**”

6B. By not limiting love to bodily needs and relations.

Swami reiterates: “Love has no form. It does not differentiate between young and old, or man and woman. Love is love. It cannot be compared to anything else. Love is the very form of the Divine. Love is God. Live in love. How to do that?

Start the day with Love
Spend the day with Love
Fill the day with Love
End the day with Love
This is the way to God.

“You can cultivate love in several ways. But, do not limit it to the bodily needs and relations. However, as long as you live in the world, you do need the warmth of relationship. You can wish for the welfare and progress of someone else. You can also share his happiness. But all these feelings are limited to the physical relationship, which is transient.”

7C. We are the very form of Truth.

Step by step, Swami carefully explains: “Here is an example. During the waking state, you move around with the help of the body, listen to many things, and experience happiness. When questioned, you claim that it is you who is experiencing all this. But, in the dream state, who is experiencing the dream? It is you only. In the deep sleep state, you forget everything and enjoy bliss. Here, who is experiencing bliss? Again, it is you only. So, in all these three states - waking, dream, and deep sleep - you do exist, and it is you who experiences everything.

“*Trikala badhyam sathyam* (Truth is changeless in all three periods of time). You remain the same in all the three states. So, you are the very form of Truth.”

8D. By being happy in the present.

Giving us the key to leading a happy life, Swami reveals the foolproof method: “You simply brood over the past and worry about the future. In this way, you ignore the present. As a result, you are subjected to suffering. Why should you not derive happiness from the present state of affairs? Brooding over the past and worrying about the future is the main cause of man’s suffering. Why

do you think about the past? You treaded that path consciously. Then why do you look back? **Be happy in the present. That is all you should aspire for. You may face many ordeals. But do not pay too much attention to them. Lead your life happily till the end.**”

9D. To experience divine bliss.

Swami guides us: “You must understand that the final product depends upon the original material. From clay you can make a doll of clay. Is it possible to make a doll of gold from clay? Your bodies are composed of the five elements. They survive on food. You may prepare a several course meal. But, you should eat it before it gets stale. If you waste time, the food may decay and become unfit for consumption.

“Likewise, you should experience the eternal divine bliss at the right time before the body decays and becomes decrepit. This is the task of the human beings today. You try to experience many things. Instead, experience the divine bliss, which is within you. That is the supreme bliss.

It is the very form of supreme wisdom.
It is one without a second.
It is expansive and pervasive like the sky.
It is eternal, pure and changeless.
It stands as a witness of everything. [*Sanskrit Verse*]”

10C. Reduce attachment to our body.

Swami explains: “People are unable to bear difficulties and ordeals. But think who is facing ordeals? Who is undergoing suffering? It is the body only, which is the composition of the five elements. **Reduce attachment to the body. Then you will experience eternal bliss.**”

“Reducing body attachment and increasing attachment to the Self is the true meaning of devotion. Attachment to body leads to *pravritti* (outward path), while attachment to the Self leads to *nivritti* (inward path). The combination of these is human life.”

H2H QUIZ ON DIVINE KODAI TRIPS

Sai students and devotees often say that Prashanti Nilayam is Swami's Office, Brindavan (Bangalore) is His home, and Kodai Kanal is His playground. In a manner of speaking this is so, particularly regarding Kodai Kanal, for it is here that one gets a glimpse of that aspect of Sai which is so full of divine sport and manifestations. Here is a quiz based on many stories about such fascinating Kodai Trips that we have had over the years in H2H.

1. In *The Kodai Kanal Experience* from the February 15, 2004 issue of H2H, during an interview, Professor Anil Kumar shared a moving incident he witnessed regarding a boy who was receiving special attention from Swami during one Kodai stay.

“About six to eight years ago. Swami was showing special concern for this boy. We were wondering why? In fact, I was even jealous! Swami materialised a ring for him, then a chain, a watch and so on, and it seemed as if the whole trip was meant just for this boy! After a few days Swami materialised a pair of ear rings for that boy. We just couldn’t understand. The next day, Swami materialised another set of ear rings for the same boy. I thought to myself, ‘Swami I have three daughters, you can give me also one (laughter), why only to that boy, an unmarried fellow?’”

What was Swami’s explanation for the special favours He was bestowing on this boy, that He revealed during a discourse in the sylvan hills?

- A. The boy was new to the Sai fold.
- B. The boy was feeling nervous.
- C. The boy had prayed for jewellery from God during a past life.
- D. The boy had lost his mother and needed Swami’s Love and care.

2. In a recollection of his trip to Kodai in 2003, from *With the Lord in the Mountains, Part 7*, Prof. Venkataraman said: “Kodai also gives Swami’s boys an opportunity to see how to play the role of a perfect host. Basically it is all about attending to minute details. Swami makes it a point to take many people with Him. Having undertaken that responsibility, He then bends backwards to see that all the needs of His flock are fully taken care of; He insists on playing the perfect host.

“I saw this aspect at its best in 2003. That year, the new Guest House Complex and the attached Canteen had not yet come up, and almost all elders in Swami’s party were put up outside in various houses.”

Demonstrating a lesson on how to be a perfect host, besides arranging for accommodation and food, doctors and transportation, how else did Swami go out of His way?

- A. Yoga was taught daily
- B. Music lessons were given to anyone interested.
- C. Shopping money was given to all.
- D. Laundry arrangements were taken care of.

3. In *With the Lord in the Mountains, Part 7*, Prof. Venkataraman recounted an incident that shows Swami’s unprecedented Love and Compassion: “This particular picnic story was narrated to me by some students who were eyewitnesses to it. It happened some years ago, and was a picnic not organized by Swami but suggested by some Police Officers posted to Sai Shruthi for security duty by the local administration. Overwhelmed by the Love and compassionate attention that Swami showered on them, these Officers began praying to Swami that He must permit them to take the boys out to a nice spot where they could have a great picnic. After a while, Swami agreed to their plea and a day was fixed for the outing. The vehicles were arranged, the wagons stuffed with eats, and for their part, the boys were ready with all their party games to play out there in the picnic area.”

What did Swami say when He saw that the picnic spot was not so great after all?

- A. “It’s ok boys...we can go to the hill on the next street up.”
- B. “Hey boys! This is a beautiful spot, is it not?”
- C. “Oh boys! All views are the same, anyway!”
- D. “Boys! It’s the company that matters; not the place!”

4. In *The Divine Playground: Swami in Kodai Kanal*, the cover story from the July 2005 issue, we told you about a very touching incident depicting the Lord’s everlasting love:

“On the 21st afternoon Swami took all the boys to the Hill Top building, the highest point in Kodai Kanal. There was an elderly devotee whom Swami had spotted during *Darshan* time and had brought him along. The devotee, overwhelmed by Swami’s love and kindness, said, ‘Swami, I am beholden to you! So graciously you recognized me in the big crowd!’

What was Swami’s most loving reply:

- A. “How could I ever forget you.”
- B. “You are my very own.”
- C. “I remember all my cherished ones.”
- D. “When I come as Prema Sai, even then I will recognize you.”

5. In *With the Lord in the Mountains, Part 7*, Prof. Venkataraman recalls another sylvan hills episode that took place: ‘Another Kodai incident; this happened one year when Swami was in Kodai on Easwaramma day.

Occasionally this happens and whenever it does, there is a special Narayana Seva, plus distribution of clothes and blankets for the poor at Sai Shruthi. After the distribution was over, Swami came back inside, but seemed lost in thought. Normally, after such Seva, Swami is usually in an expansive mood and often talks to students about service, etc. This day, He did not and something seemed to be bothering Him, but no one could figure out what exactly it was. Suddenly, Swami called for the car, gave some instructions, took a few people with Him and simply drove out.”

What was the reason for Swami’s sudden outing?

- A. He went to buy sundries from the poor hawkers outside the Ashram.
- B. He remembered He had to fulfill the promise of Darshan to other sick devotees.
- C. He went to distribute blankets to the old and sick who could not come.
- D. He was too overwhelmed with memories of His Beloved Mother.

ANSWERS:

1D. The boy had lost his mother and needed Swami’s Love and care.

Prof. Anil Kumar tells us that:

“Then after a week, while delivering a Discourse, Swami said, “Many are wondering why Swami showed special concern to one particular boy. Some are specially curious to know why I gave ear rings to that boy. That boy lost his mother long back. I have been watching the boy crying and sitting in a corner. I called him close to Me and asked him about the reason. He then told Me about the death of his mother and how his mother wanted to present ear rings to her two daughters, that is, the two sisters of this boy. Before his mother could do that, she died.

“Now, I am his Mother and also of those girls. Who else is there to care for them? That is why I materialised many things for that boy. You will seldom understand what I do. Whatever I do and say has got a deeper significance and inner meaning. Out of frustration, the boy’s father wanted to commit suicide. I made the boy’s father to come here, took a promise from him that he would not make any attempt to take his life. I am now taking care of the family. From that day onwards, the boy has started smiling.”

2D. Laundry arrangements were taken care of.

Prof. Venkataraman shared this important detail: “Swami went to great lengths to ensure that everyone had proper accommodation, that adequate

breakfast arrangements had been made for all, that they had the transport to come to and go from Sai Shruthi as needed, and that there was also a doctor to attend to emergencies, should they arise. Even laundry arrangements were taken care of.

And on the day of departure, Swami personally went into the details of who would go in which vehicle or car, worried about distribution of snacks to the people traveling by the different buses and cars, collection of luggage earlier and taking it direct to the airport, etc. It was an amazing exercise in thoroughness that I hope our boys absorbed in detail.”

3B. “Hey boys! This is a beautiful spot, is it not?”

Prof. Venkataraman continued with his narration: “Intentions might be good, but sometimes things might not work the way one wants. On this occasion, the roads were bad and the going really tough. The trip to the scenic spot dragged on and on, making all the boys very frustrated. Finally, after a lot of struggle and a really rough ride, that spot was reached. And when they looked around, the boys could hardly hide their disappointment; the spot selected did not command a grand view as had been promised; the view was anything but fantastic and ill-suited for a nice picnic.

Swami knew very well the thoughts racing through the minds of the boys, but beautifully averted a flop ready to occur. He looked around and said, “Hey boys! This is a beautiful spot, is it not?” The boys quickly caught on, and soon the mood was such that the Police Officers who were feeling a bit sheepish for having troubled Swami to travel to a spot less than scenic began to feel better. Swami made them even happier by not only praising their devotion, but also creating rings and so on.

Later in the privacy of Sai Shruthi, Swami told the boys, “See, these Officers meant well. They really wanted to please Swami. Maybe they made a wrong choice of place for the picnic, but Swami cares only about the intentions. If they are pure and loving, Swami overlooks physical shortcomings.”

4D. “When I come as Prema Sai, even then I will recognize you.”

“To this, Swami, casting a very benign look on him, said, **‘Dear one, when I come as Prema Sai, even then I will recognize you.’** That is the bond between the devotee and the Lord!”

5C. He went to distribute blankets to the old and sick who could not come.

Prof. Venkataraman shares further: “Swami is known to go out occasionally for a drive while in Kodai, but this clearly was not one of them.

“Swami was away for a while, and even as the rest were waiting for His return, there was a lot of speculation as to why He went. After a while, Swami returned, and this time His face was glowing and wearing a big smile. As the boys crowded around Him He said, 'Boys, do you know where I have been? I went out to distribute blankets to the old and infirm that could not come here for the Narayana Seva. **As I saw the poor people who came here, My thoughts went out to the many old and sick people out there who could not come here. I just could not bear to think of them suffering in the cold. So I had to go, seek them out, and give them the blankets.** They were so happy!”

How much joy there was in His voice and eyes, even as He spoke those words! For God, service is not a duty or an obligation. It is an act of Pure Love that gives Him as much joy as it does for the one who receives, if not more.

HEALING TOUCH

DELIGHT, DEPRESSION AND DIVINE DELIVERANCE

This is a story of shock, fear, disbelief and ultimate relief – the heart-rending tale of a family’s rollercoaster ride when their infant’s scalp exposed her skull.

Venkat and Deepa’s joy knew no bounds as they awaited the birth of their first child at the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prashanthi Nilayam. Residents of the town of Addanki in Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh, they had been married for a year, with Venkat being the breadwinner, and Deepa the homemaker. Agriculture is the couple’s main source of subsistence with Venkat driving a truck during the lean season to provide for his family. Their excitement of parenthood turned sour when, to their utter shock and horror, within days of taking the infant home, they found her scalp tissue degenerating, exposing her little skull.

Luckily for them, they were aware of a healthcare system that provides super specialized medical treatment completely free of cost to every single patient that seeks refuge in its generosity. Founded by the greatest philanthropist with the largest, most compassionate heart on planet earth, it performed a medical marvel and today the gaping hole in Venkat and Deepa’s child’s head is healing and their family is finally whole. Baby Sai Teja is one of the millions who are hale and hearty, due solely to the presence of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba at this moment in history.

Having been discharged from the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prashanthi Nilayam, in May, 2009, Mrs. Deepa Rani was ecstatic to hold her perfect little bundle of joy in her arms. Shortly after the smooth delivery, when Deepa Rani and her baby returned home to a warm welcome from the extended family at her mother’s house, never could she have imagined that she would be rushing back with her baby in a state of frantic panic just 20 days later. Things spiraled out of control so fast that the baby hadn’t even been named yet.

New Born Baby’s Terrifying Skin Loss

Just after the mother and baby had gotten back home, Deepa noticed the scalp at the back of her child’s head had turned soft. Even as she was concerned, she hoped it would stabilize but the softness persisted stubbornly. About five days later, the parents noticed that the portion of the baby’s scalp which had turned supple was starting to peel off! Now, the new born’s skull was visible. The young parents were horrified!

With her fragile little baby in arms, the desperate Deepa rushed back to her refuge, the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, where her daughter had been born. Doctors there were quick to realize that the exposed skull was infected and the contagion had entered the baby’s blood stream. In medical terms, septicemia had set in. Immediately, the doctors started a prolonged treatment

to clean and clear the wound of the infection. They first dressed the wound and gave the baby medicines to fight the foreign bodies. Once the lesion started healing, they referred the little baby, whom the parents later named Sai Teja, to the Department of Plastic Surgery at the nearby Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram, a sister medical facility which provides tertiary care free of cost to all patients, a feature common to all Sathya Sai Medical Facilities and Services worldwide.

Plastic Surgery at Swami’s Hospital was their Only Recourse

At the Sri Sathya Sai Super Speciality Hospital, Dr. D.V. Reddy, Head of the Department of Plastic Surgery knew right away that he had a challenging job ahead. The case was not only critical but also urgent. Any delay in bringing the child to the doctor would have proven fatal for the infant.

The case was uniquely challenging because, as Dr. Reddy explained in an exclusive interview to the H2H team, “When I saw this child, I found a non-healing ulcer over the back, with a bare skull bone exposed at the floor of the ulcer, which would not have healed unless we provided a stable skin flap.

“In my 37 year career as a plastic surgeon, I have not performed this type of operation on a 35-day old child. I have been doing plastic surgery since 1972, but this is the smallest child that I have operated upon and that too on the head!

“On the bare skull bone, ordinary skin grafts will not take, so it will not provide coverage. The ulcer will not heal unless we provide skin with its own blood supply, which we call a flap. So when we used a flap for this child, we had to use a thin skin graft from another area of the skull as a pre-graft for the bed of the flap that we rotate, to cover this bare skull bone.

“But I was not apprehensive because to me, to rotate flaps, and provide a skin graft are basic procedures. However, **I will say that in this case with a child at one month, with a bare skull bone, who has just recovered almost from the jaws of death from septicemia — we had to be very cautious. But since Swami is the one who was blessing the surgery, we went ahead. We are never afraid of any procedures because there is always Swami's help to safeguard all our work.**”

The Baby’s Family are Wracked by Fears over Surgery

The medical team’s mightier challenge was to convince the family to consent to this complicated and elaborate surgery on the head of a month old baby. The young parents were terribly afraid and the concerned grandparents didn’t want this tiny baby to undergo such a serious operation. This is when the staff at the Sri Sathya Sai Super Speciality Hospital swung into team action and counseled, educated and guided the family to have full confidence in Swami’s divine grace and the efforts of the surgical team and give their precious baby a chance to live a full and normal life.

“I was scared, terribly afraid at the thought that my little one would have to undergo a surgery. She was just a few days old. None of us in our family or village had ever heard about anybody undergoing an operation. And my baby was being put through this,” Deepa said, recalling those scary moments. “I can understand anybody a few years older going through this, he/she will be able to bear it, but I felt my baby was too small for all this,” she said. “The thought of my days-old baby undergoing the surgery made me cry,” she added. For the infant’s father Mr. Venkata Rao, it was the question why it had happened that seemed to be hounding him.

It took a great deal of convincing from the staff of the Plastic Surgery department including Dr. Reddy himself to convince the family that immediate surgical action was required to give his little girl a chance to live. “We had to convince the parents and told them there was nothing to worry about and that the baby’s life depended upon the surgery. After a lot of persuading the family finally consented to the surgery,” the surgeon said.

Dr. Reddy Performs the Life Saving Surgery

On the morning of June 10, 2009 the surgery began. The baby’s maternal grandmother Eshwamma recalls how nervous and anxious her daughter, the young mother Deepa, was letting go of her baby for such a complicated surgical procedure. “She even refused to accompany Sai Teja till outside the operation theatre,” she says.

After the elaborate operation, the baby returned to the ward at around 3:30 p.m. to the great relief of the fretful mother. The little one remained in the ward for about a week and then she was discharged, with routine follow-up appointments to check on the healing process and ensure there was no recurrent infection. All fears had by that time vaporized. The parents and the doctors were amply convinced that Sai Teja was a healthy and active baby.

Looking back, both the mother and grandmother of Sai Teja realize how fortunate they had been. They see their family’s emotional rollercoaster and final victory as a divine design. Had Deepa not come back to her parents’ home during her second trimester of pregnancy in Rasampalli (a village very close to Puttaparthi), and continued her family tradition of turning to the Sai Hospital for her pre-natal care, her child would not have received a new lease of life. As the baby’s grandmother Eswamma explains, “We always come to Swami’s General Hospital because of the care and attention they give to the patients. During pregnancy, my daughter was under the medical care of the doctors at the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital from the fifth month onwards. The baby did not cry at the time of birth and was kept in the ICU for 10 days. Back home, when the child was given a bath and dried, we were terrified to see that a portion of the skin behind the right ear peeled off almost exposing the skull. We rushed to the General Hospital and they referred the case to the plastic surgeon in the Super Speciality hospital, Dr. Raghav Reddy. Her mother was afraid of surgery as the child is very tender and even thought of returning home. But I have great faith in Swami and decided to go for the surgery. Now we are happy as the surgery was successful.

“Not a single penny is charged here. If Swami’s Hospital is not there we do not know where we would have gone for treatment. Going for plastic surgery would have been out of question. At home, we always remember Swami’s kindness in providing health facilities to poor people like us totally free of cost.”

The Sai Model of Free, World Class Medical Care

The fear of the financial burden was a paramount concern to the dejected parents. When the child’s father Venkat was told about the surgery, he had to be assured that he was not required to spend any money. It actually took him sometime to come to terms with the truth that both the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital, Prasanthi Nilayam, where his daughter was born and the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram, where plastic surgeon Dr. Reddy operated upon her skull, provide such loving and high class treatment to all patients totally free of cost.

So unbelievable and unthinkable is the extreme altruism and generosity of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, that like millions of skeptics everywhere, Venkat found the deal almost too good to be true! Little did Venkat know, that while the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital has been serving the rural and backward communities of the Rayalseema area of Andhra Pradesh as well as from people of other states of India since 1954, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prasanthigram came up in 1991. Since then they have been providing free treatment to all.

For as far as his mother-in-law Eshwaramma can remember, for any ailment in her family, they have availed the excellent and loving medical care at the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital. But it was her little grand-daughter’s shocking illness that brought them to the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, for the very first time.

“We had seen the Super Speciality Hospital many times from outside and it looked just like a temple. Today after having stayed here, I truly believe this is not a Hospital but a Temple,” Deepa said. Grandma Eshwaramma added, even in the hospitals where they charge money from the patients, they will not provide such a good service to the patients.

Today, both Deepa and Eshwaramma believe that it was due to the grace of Bhagawan Baba that the baby has a new shot at life. It was but natural that the baby was therefore named Sai Teja. Grandma Eshwaramma explains **“It was because of Sai Baba’s grace that my grand daughter has got a new life. It was as if Sai Baba had poured a radiant new life into her, so we named her Sai Teja or Divine Radiance of Sai.”**

As Deepa and Venkat’s healthy little doll radiates the light of Sai, the saga of Love that is Bhagavan Baba continues to provide hope and relief to thousands that come to His hospitals for the finest possible medical care, leaving all worries about payments outside the gates of His holy temples that heal like no other facility in the whole wide world.

YOUR SAY

Feedback from our readers on the June 2009 issue

Feedback on the cover story *The Copious Stream of Pure Love*

I read and also listened to the audio of parts 1 and 2 of ***The Copious Stream of Pure Love***. It was very informative and interesting. You must have put lots of effort and time to compile them. Thank you all. I hope that this mission will spread all over the villages in India and all over the world and the prayer *Samastha Loka Sukhinobavanthu* will become a reality.

Venugopal, Canada

General Feedback

Thank you very much for all the wonderful and inspiring articles. They are so pleasing to the heart that most of the time I burst into tears. I feel very at peace and very close to Prasanthi. They are also very informative.

Avinash Meetoah

I feel am really blessed that Swami is always with us what ever the situation. I am an alumni of Sri Sathya Sai University. Life got busy and I was dragged away into the mundane world. Luckily at the right time I learnt from my friend about Heart2Heart; it’s really inspiring and energizing to see and read about Swami however far we are from Him. I thank everyone who has made this possible.

Shanthi Challa

My name is Blanca and I’m from Mexico. I have no words to express how grateful I am. Your articles have been such a great inspiration for me. To read Swami’s leelas and devotees’ experiences helps me to increase my faith. Today I am especially happy because Swami came into my dreams last night. Please continue doing what you are doing cause your work is excellent.

Blanca

Your stories are very inspiring. I thank you very much for your ceaseless efforts to give us many spiritual insights, inform us about our Swami’s teachings and devotees’ experiences. Please continue with His grace.

Manos Karakostas, Greece

Feedback on the series *Spiritual Questions and Answers*

I enjoy learning from your responses to spiritual questions. It quenches my thirst. Not only do I check my knowledge but I also share this with my medical students who are doing rotations with me. They are learning the values of Swami thru this interaction.

Indra B. Sriram, M.D., Indiana, USA

Feedback on *The Might To Follow The Right*

I would like to express my gratitude to your entire team for presenting many inspiring articles of those who are implementing the values taught by our beloved Swami. I am working for one corporate IT company and these articles are really amazing as they inform us how different people survive in their careers without losing their determination to follow the good values.

Shekhar

Feedback on *The New Light in the Eyes of Little Sai*

Thank you for sharing this beautiful story to me which made me so grateful - for we take our eye-sight for granted. Most important is the compassion and love of our dear Bhagavan for making such operations available to anyone who is in urgent need! He doesn't just take care of the disabled he provides for their maximum comfort!

Vani Naidoo, South Africa

Feedback on *Prashanti Diary*

Prasanthi Diary is our 'connection' to Baba's daily presence on earth. Relating our Lord's daily movements amongst His children, on the internet, is such a blessing to us who cannot be with Him physically at this time.

Baba continuously reminds us that our lives are His message and that we should recognize that God is everywhere, in all. Yet, the strong 'pull' we feel to His Divine form is inevitable. How can we not yearn to experience a gaze, a smile, His divine feet....? The ability to 'tune-in' to Him at Prasanthi is truly a blessing. I sincerely thank you for bringing the Lord's daily leelas and discourses to us, wherever we may be.

Mrs. Urmilla Mahabirsingh-Khan, Ontario, Canada

Thank you for the wonderful write-up with pictures on the June 13th *Burrakhatha* performance by students. It brought tears to my eyes as I felt the love of the students and Swami. Even though physically I could not be there, just reading it and looking at the pictures made me feel connected emotionally, mentally and spiritually recharged. I really appreciate it. Please keep writing and sharing.

Doreen Ong, Malaysia

Thank you for bringing to all devotees around the world beautiful reports of darshan and activities in Prasanthi Nilayam. Your account of the *Bhurakatha* narration was very beautiful, giving me the feeling of being present in Sai Kulwant Hall. Thank you, again!

Parimala, Chicago, USA

I read the wonderful commentary on Prashanthi News about the *Burrakatha* on Mother Eashwaramma. You make millions of people like us feel as if we were watching it live. Thanks for this service that you're doing. Please keep up your good work. May God bless you all.

Mukund

This is Geoffrey and Judith Last in Pahoehoe, Hawaii. We look forward to your darshan updates and derive great joy from them. Mahalo nui loa (thank you very much) for this service. These reports keep us bonded to the Lord and the happenings at P.N.

Hello from Germany, I am very happy with this information - it helps me not to get not homesick for Puttaparthi. Please carry on with this wonderful work and thanks again.

Heidi

Every section of H2H inspires me a lot. I utilize my leisure time by reading it and today, I've gone through the full story of the AP Sai Youth Programme – I find the snaps in the story heart touching. What also inspired me is the Barclays Chairman's award and how these 'tiny squirrels' rushed to the Lotus feet to dedicate it to Him. I am very thankful to the entire team of Radio Sai for publishing all the happenings of Prasanthi Nilayam.

Saiprabha Pattnaik

Feedback on *Scintillating Moments with Sweet Sai*

Mayur's story of his time at the campus was very well-written and funny too. These benefit all of us who have not had the good fortune of studying in front of Swami. The most lovable part of this story was that educare, values, spirituality happened with so much understanding, love and tolerance. I really loved it! I look forward to the next part of his story.

I request other stories about how values and basic foundations are operationalised; the starting phase when students go out and meet the world again. How do they put the learning into practice?

I have been feeling that educare and searching for the God within and outside are a very serious "occupation"! Please carry more such stories because otherwise it is difficult for me to understand, I can't digest the learning easily!

Saimonisha

Feedback on *"Three Seconds Flat!"*

I wanted to thank you and thank Mrs. Devika Gunasena for sharing her amazing experience with Swami. This story has really touched my heart and moved me deeply. I feel it is so important to share experiences of Swami's infinite Love with all devotees, because they give us strength and help us in many ways.

Berit, Italy