

HEART 2 HEART

VOL 3 ISSUE 11, NOVEMBER 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Section</u>
03	BETWEEN YOU AND US
	SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS
05	SATHYA SAI SPEAKS – Do Not Allow Your Mind to Waver
07	CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI BABA - Part 14
12	<i>CHINNA KATHA</i> – The Gash on the Back
	COVER STORY
13	GLORIOUS SAI – A TRIBUTE TO BHAGAWAN ON HIS 80 TH BIRTHDAY
	FEATURE ARTICLES
35	THE SAI AVATAR ON HIMSELF
42	MY MESSAGE IS LOVE
	SERIAL ARTICLES
46	THE DIVINE STORY OF SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI – Part 11
48	GITA FOR CHILDREN – Part 13
	WINDOW TO SAI SEVA
50	GLIMPSES OF WORLDWIDE SAI SEVA
56	SAI SEVA IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE KATRINA
	PRASHANTI DIARY
58	PRASHANTI DIARY
	SWAMI AND ME
72	SCINTILLATING MOMENTS WITH SAI – Prof. Anil Kumar
76	UNTO THEE
	HEART2HEART SPECIAL
80	GOLDEN MEMORIES OF A BYGONE ERA - CONVERSATION WITH THE VENKATAGIRI RAJAH'S SON

GET INSPIRED

88 THE BAMBOO AND THE FERN
89 WITH 'A LITTLE HELP' FROM GOD
90 SET THE WORLD INFECTED

91 TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

THE HEALING TOUCH

93 PRADEEP'S PERSEVERANCE AND SAI'S GRACE
96 HOSPITAL STATISTICS

BETWEEN YOU AND US

Isn't it incredible! What was a small obscure village tucked away in an interior corner in the dry dreary lands of Rayalseema region in Andhra Pradesh just a few decades ago is now a happening place in the eyes of the world! Thousands flock to Prashanthi Nilayam, the "Abode of Supreme Peace" everyday religion, nation, creed, culture notwithstanding. The village which was described as "*a stone's throw from stone age*" some years ago is actually the epicenter of a spiritual revolution heralding a new age and a new world order of peace and harmony.

In these times when aggressive materialism is the way of life and religion is either confined to temples and churches or grossly misinterpreted; while spirituality is for the mystics or for the retired and unsuccessful, what is it that draws people belonging to various cultures and professionals to the Lotus Feet of Bhagawan? What is the secret (if any) behind citizens from more than 170 nations which includes the man on the street to presidents and Prime Ministers coming to Prashanthi Nilayam? The influence of Sai sitting in a small corner in the southern hemisphere of the world is astounding!

There are His devotees all over the world, some who have never even seen Him, even in a photograph, but know Him! When the Sai devotees in New Zealand visited the men's area of the Mt. Eden prison to serve the inmates, before they left they gave a picture of Swami to every inmate, and do you know when one heavily tattooed gang member saw the photo, he came up to them and said: "*Hey bro, the fella in that picture you have there is not just for you guys. Two weeks ago He came into my cell raised His hands as if He was blessing me and then disappeared. I have not told any of my prison mates this as they would think I am going soft but it is the truth!*" That is His Glory, His Grace! Time and space are limitations for the mortals.

When an Avathar comes He is the embodiment of all Power, all Wisdom, all Grace and all Glory but what is more important is that He is the embodiment of all Love – Love that is genuine, pure and knows no selfishness. In fact, this is the basis of everything that Sai Baba is. It is these magnificent facets of the Avathar that we have elaborated in the cover story of this issue as a humble tribute to Him on His glorious 80th Birthday.

How many thousands all over the world have been guided towards a life where truth, righteousness and character are more important than power, pomp and position. Never before in the history of mankind has an Avathar revealed Himself so much in His earthly sojourn as Bhagawan Baba has done but still He remains an enigma wrapped in mystery inside a puzzle! As He Himself said on one occasion, "*Only another Sai Baba can know what this Sai Baba is!*"

But if we go through all the revelations He has made on Himself over the years in His infinite compassion, sometimes directly, sometimes covertly, some publicly, some to chosen ones, we can catch a glimpse of the Phenomenon that is the Sai Avathar. We have gathered few such precious

pearls and strung them into a garland called “The Sai Avatar On Himself” for you in our feature article section.

In the Window to Sai Seva section in this special issue we have glimpses of Sai Seva done in different countries of the world as well as a report on the relief activities that were undertaken by Young Adults of USA for the hurricane Katrina victims. Do not miss the moving story of Pradeep, a heart patient from the less developed state of Orissa, India who was treated in our Hospital in Bangalore, in the Healing Touch section.

Earlier years during Birthday celebrations, Swami used to sit on beautifully decorated *Jhulas* (swings) and would swing gently as devoted artists rendered melodious songs and the devotees would be lost enraptured by His Grace and Beauty. To relive those moments we have gathered for you pictures of Swami on *jhulas* of varied types and styles - enjoy that in our photo gallery.

In a recent discourse during the Dasara Celebrations (you have a detailed account of this in Prashanthi Diary), Swami said, *“Cultivate pure love; for, purity is unity and unity is divinity. Let your individual love be transformed into pure love for God.”* This should be our goal – to love God genuinely and earnestly. For, when every individual ignites that spark of divine love in his heart, the golden age would have arrived.

Let the whole world unite in singing His Glory.

Loving Regards,

Heart2Heart Team
In Sai Service.

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

This is the month of Bhagawan's 80th Birthday. Let's recollect what Swami said almost half a century ago on the auspicious occasion of His 35th Birthday on the 23rd of Nov, 1960 in Prashanthi Nilayam.

Do Not Allow Your Mind to Waver Due to Doubts

The (Lord's) Name is like the seed, implanted in your heart; when the shower of His Grace falls upon it, it sprouts into a lovely tree. All trees that sprout from the Names of the Lord are equally lovely and shady. If you have Krishna-*naama* (Lord Krishna's name), the vision that you win and the form that you evoke is that of Lord Krishna; if you have Rama-*naama* (Lord Rama's name), it is Lord Rama's form that sprouts.

Leelaashukha (a devotee of Lord Krishna) had the Name of Krishna embedded in the well ploughed field of his heart and so, the Lord appeared before him with a peacock feather, a flute and a charming mischievous smile! He fulfils your innermost aspiration in a flash, if it is compelling enough. Only you should not allow your mind to waver due to doubt or disappointment. Leave all to Him and be at ease; it is the man with no faith that is tossed about on the sea, like a ship caught in a storm with neither rudder nor anchor. The *Bhaktha* (devotee) bears the ups and downs of life, keeping the balance of his mind even.

You sometimes talk as if the devotee leads a life beset with hardships and sorrows and that the man who does not bend before a Higher Power is carefree and prosperous; but this is a totally wrong idea. The devotee sails on an even keel; he has inner peace, a spring of joy which sustains him and keeps him together.

Bairaagi Shaastri (the previous speaker) said that this is an auspicious day for you because this is My Birthday; but let Me tell you, I have many Birthdays like this. The Auspicious Day for you is the day on which your mind is cleansed and not the day on which I took this human form. I am ever new and ever ancient, ever *noothana* (modern) and ever *sanaathana* (ancient). I come always for the sake of reviving Dharma, for tending the virtuous and ensuring them conditions congenial for progress. Some doubters might ask, "Can *Paramaathma* (The Supreme Lord) assume human form?" Well, man can derive *aanandha* (bliss) only through the human form; we can receive instruction, inspiration, illumination only through human language and human communication.

God Bows To Your Will and Carries Your Burden

I will never force you to take up a particular Name or Form of the Lord as your *ishtam* (chosen deity). The Lord has a million Names and a million Forms, and

He wants that faith and attachment should be evoked in you by any one of them, as you recite the Names or contemplate the Forms. That is why they have a string of 1008 Names for use to worship; the devotee might be drawn closer to the Lord while any one Name is being repeated, however distracted or inattentive he might be during the rest of the list.

Like the coldness of the atmosphere which freezes the water, the compelling agony of the devotee's heart solidifies the *Niraakaar* (Formless Absolute) into the shape and the attitude that are yearned for. "*Yadh bhaavare, thath bhavathi*" ---"as felt, so fashioned." He bows to your will, He carries your burden, provided you trust Him with it.

Therefore, so act and feel and speak that you get "*iha soukhyam, para soukhyam and kaivalya soukhyam*" ("joy here, joy hereafter, joy everlasting" all three). I bless you all that you get more success in the struggle.

- *Prashanthi Nilayam, Birthday Festival, 23-11-1960*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI PART 14

(Continued from the previous issue)

SAI : There is One, not two. If one sees a second, then *Maya* is in operation.

H (HISLOP): Life appears to be somewhat a jungle of unexpected dangers!

SAI: *Maya* is harmless to the devotee of God. That same *Maya* , so dangerous to the person who does not believe in God, protects the devotee from all harm. The cat carries the kitten in the mouth from here to there, and the kitten is unharmed. But a rat is killed by a cat. It is the same mouth in both cases. *Maya* brings trouble, yet it is the same *Maya* that tenderly protects the devotee of God.

H: Then, the devotee of God may just do his work and not worry about penetrating the illusions of *Maya*?

SAI: Yes. The devotee may do work for God and pay no attention to the powers of *Maya*. God protects His devotees. His devotee is near and dear to God, and He carries the devotee safely through life. In Indian kitchens tongs are used to pick up and move the cooking utensil. The instrument can seize everything except the user. *Maya* are the tongs held and used by God.

H: Then God holds *Maya* in one hand and the devotee in the other?

SAI: Two hands are not needed: one hand is enough. If God held the devotee with one hand, the tongs might still seize him! So God holds both in the same hand.

H: What does Swami say about the three states of consciousness?

SAI: There is waking, sleep and dream, and deep sleep. In deep sleep there is no mind. All are changing states. Past is gone, future is coming, present is leaving. None of these changing states is truth; for all agree that truth is real and the same whether in the past, present or future. You are always that truth, changeless, constant, unaffected by change, always the same.

H: Swami says that 'I' refers to the body. But when one thinks of himself he sees not just the body, but also his mind, his conditioning, and his tendencies.

SAI: 'Body' means all the five senses and all that is implied by any extension of these.

H: In deep sleep, body is gone and mind is gone. But there is a strong happiness. However, that happiness is only known afterwards as memory, and memory is just a thought; it has no reality.

SAI: The difference between deep sleep and *Samadhi* is that in *Samadhi* the happiness is known at the time it occurs.

H: Swami says that in *Samadhi*, happiness is known at the time that it occurs. But how could the person, the subject, be aware of himself as happy? Surely that implies a subject-object relationship. Subject-object is unreal, so what is experience in those terms must also be unreal, is it not?

SAI: If one looks in the mirror and sees dust on the brow, he will at once remove it, even though he was unaware before looking in the mirror. Guru is the mirror.

H: Once he has tasted sugar, one never mistakes salt for sugar. If that bliss of which Swami speaks is our real nature how is it that we confuse the unreal for the real?

SAI: You have not tasted either the salt or the sugar, but are just looking at them and imagining about them.

H: When one is merged in the divine bliss, is one aware of it?

SAI: He is the witness of his bliss. The person loses his limited awareness for God's total awareness. Deep sleep is *Samadhi*, where there is no world and no mind but only the experience of 'I'. Freedom is that same experience in full awareness.

H: At various times, Swami mentions happiness, joy, bliss. Is there a difference?

SAI: Happiness is temporary; it is given to us by others. Next comes joy; one is joyful while filling the stomach - it comes and goes. But bliss is one's rightful nature; it does not come and go. Bliss is not something that comes to one; it is one's real nature and is permanent.

H: If one is wholly absorbed in God, who will take care of the body?

SAI: In waking and dreams, the mind is there, but who takes care in sleep? God takes care. Who takes care of the body at any time? One side may be paralysed - can you make it move? The genuine saints and yogis in the Himalayas have no way to take care of their bodies. It is God who takes care.

H: Baba says that in *Sadhana*, at a certain stage the exterior nature ceases. How is that?

SAI: There are ten stages in *Sadhana*, each cognized by sounds of various types ranging from just sound, through vibrations, bell, flute, conch, Om, thunder, and explosion. The 10th is pure form. Then senses are transcended. Until then everything is in the sense realm. Above the senses, there is the state of bliss as the universal body of God, which is light.

H: Is that state of bliss there only for a time? What happens then in the daily round of living?

SAI: That state, when fully realised as natural, always remains, Then the world is bliss, always bliss. Think God, eat God, drink God, breathe God, live God.

H: Does everyone pass through these *Sadhana* stages?

SAI: No. One may go directly to the transcendental state, or to the state number 6 or 7 or anyway at all. It is not uniform.

H: What should be one's attitude to these *Sadhana* stages as one encounters them?

SAI: The states change, but the attitude should be unchanging.

H: But what value should one give to the various stages?

SAI: The *sadhaka* will not be satisfied with any of the states. Because it is complete union that is desired. Desire remains strong and constant until the transcendental bliss is realized, and then desire ceases. Who is the poorest man in the world?

H: The man without God?

SAI: No the man with the most desires is the most poor. Until we realize the desireless state of pure bliss, we are in poverty.

A Visitor: One gains a measure of spiritual understanding, but in the next life is it all swept away and lost?

SAI: We say, 'I am not the body, mind or intelligence, because they are impermanent'. These are of the same matter. They are not of different material. Just as butter, curds, buttermilk, ghee cannot again be joined to the others to once again constitute milk, in the same way the quality of spiritual being, once separated by churning the milk of the world, does not go back again into the world. The spiritual beingness is never lost once it is manifested.

H: This car in which we are driving has certain natural factors that are neither good nor bad. If moving, it has speed and momentum. In like fashion, what are the natural powers of the mind?

SAI: The mind does not have any powers. The only power is *Atma Shakti*, the power of the *Atma*. Actually, the mind does not exist. There is no mind. The moon is lit by the sun. What we see is the reflected light of the sun. What we take to be the mind is the reflected light of the *Atma* shining on the heart. Really there is only the heart. The reflected light is taken to be the mind, but

that is just a way of looking at it, a concept. There is just the sun and the moon. (The reflected light is not a third object).

In another way, mind cannot be compared to a car. A car has form. Mind has no form, for mind has no existence of its own. Mind can be said to be woven of desires. The *Atma* shines on the heart, whether the heart be pure or impure. If the heart is purified and if the strongest desire is for God, that is best.

H: My mind and intelligence are in operation at this very moment, regardless of the subtlety or coarseness of quality. Baba says that the only power is the *Atma* power. So why do I not see as *Atma*, that *Atma* that is in operation through the mind-intelligence complex at this very moment?

SAI: The *Atma* in its purity will be seen when the hindrances to clear vision are removed by spiritual practice, by *Sadhana*. Real *Sadhana* is not just sitting in meditation. Meditation is constant inner inquiry as to who am 'I', what is loving, and what is harsh? Meditation is thinking on spiritual principles, searching out the application to oneself of what Baba says, and so on.

H: I have the conviction so strong that it is into the marrow of my bones that life is one, and that other beings and myself are one. The *Atma* is that One and it is fully here at this moment, and I am constantly engaged in *Sadhana*. So the question remains, 'Why do I not actually experience that unity as no other than myself?'

SAI: Your conviction of unity is an idea, a thought. It is not experience. For instance, your wife has a chest pain. Do you have the chest pain? If not, where is the unity? The unity of life must be experienced - not idea or thought without experience.

H: Now! Swami has to say about experience! If *Sadhana* and conviction do not bring that unity as real experience, then how is one to get it?

SAI: With steady *Sadhana*, no special effort is needed to try and get the experience of One. Just as with ourselves in this car. We need only concern ourselves with the careful driving of the car, and in due course we will arrive at Ananthapur. With correct and steady *Sadhana*, in due course, the actual experience of One will naturally come about.

H: Swami, it is not possible to tell death to wait for a convenient time. In respect to death, in what state should the mind be?

SAI: That we feel that only oneself will not die is the greatest wonder. Flowers bloom and give perfume before dropping, whereas man, when his end is approaching, has only a long face. He should be like the flower, and do something good and bright when dying.

There are two things to remember: death and God.

And there are two things to forget: any harm done to us by others, and any good we may have done to others.

For to hold onto these two would be to reach for future results, and there will be future consequences if these are held in the mind. Whatever we think, or put in mind, we experience the reaction. Of course, death should be held in the mind always, for then much good action will result, and much harmful action will be avoided.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

THE GASH ON THE BACK

There lived on the banks of the sacred Ganga a poor Brahmin, who was an ardent student of the Bhagavad Gita. He read it every day. He worshipped the Book and he tried to live according to its teachings. But his faith was sorely tried, for he was immersed in distressing poverty. His bowl was seldom filled. He and his wife were on half ration all the time.

One day, while overcome by grief at his misery, his eye fell on the 22nd sloka of the 9th chapter, where the Lord assures that He will bear the burden of all who take refuge in Him. He felt that in his case, the assurance was a hoax. And so, he took his pen and dipping it in red ink, he struck out the exasperating line! Somewhat relieved of anger, he rose and went out with his bowl.

Before long, two boys, brothers by appearance came to his door. The younger of the two had a bluish darker hue. He had a bag of rice and the other one had a bag of sundry other provisions. The wife was surprised, because they insisted all of it was for her and her husband! She could not believe it!

The woman found a bleeding gash on the back of the younger boy. She asked him, "Who had inflicted the cruel wound?" The boy replied with a mischeavous smile, "Your husband!" How could he lose his temper so much as to stab such a charming child, she wondered. But the brothers disappeared in a flash.

When the husband returned home the woman questioned him about the gash on the back of the younger boy. The husband said he knew nothing about the bleeding boy. He pleaded innocence. He wondered who could have sent them help. His head was in a whirl. Then he turned to the Gita for consolation. The Book opened on the 9th chapter, sloka 22. Ah! His eye fell on the angry gash he had drawn on that page, across that line! That pen had in fact cut Sri Krishna's back! His want of faith had "wounded" Him. Realising this he ran about like mad, to discover the Boy and fall at His feet, crying for mercy. But He could not be found.

- Baba

So, have faith in the Assurance of the Lord. When He says, "Why fear, I am here." He means it. When He says, "I look to you, when you look to Me," He really looks after you and takes care of your needs.

COVER STORY

GLORIOUS SAI

- A TRIBUTE TO SWAMI ON HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY

Let's go back in time ... imagine our beloved Swami as a small boy of eight... playing with His friends on the sands of Chitravathi... going up the hillock in a jiffy and beckoning His playmates, His eyes twinkling and His looks enchanting... plucking out all kinds of fruits from the big tamarind tree, apples to avocados, grapes to gooseberries, and giving them to everybody and anybody, smilingly and selflessly, asked or unasked, ...

Or, the young Sathya going to the school scout programme... a small little leader with His you-can-count-on-our-fingers classmate-followersor the little One teaching His tiny troupe dancing and singing, regaling and rekindling the innocent hearts of the village folk... and again in the garden of Sri Anjaneyulu...Sai is 14 now...sitting delightfully on a boulder and singing into the hearts of every soul present there "*Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam...*" ...only a handful of people around Him... all elated and ecstatic ...the scene.. so special, so serene, soul-stirring...

Cut to 2005, when the Lord sings "*Sai Bhajan Bina...*", the scene is not only equally serene and stirring but also electrifying. For, it is no more a handful now...it's no more a small obscure stream in an unknown land, **it is now a mighty river, nay, an avalanche unstoppable and enormous.** What is visible is, in fact, only a fraction...there is so much that is not apparent and hence unseen just like an Antarctic iceberg.

The heartfelt following and thunderous clapping of a thousand hands during Swami's *bhajan* will now elevate you effortlessly. You cannot but be touched by that compelling divine vibration so suffused with positive energy.

The little Sathya, the darling of His mother and heartthrob of His few friends years ago, is now the centre of life for millions spread all over the globe, religion, culture, colour and creed notwithstanding, some who have never even seen Him physically, some who have only seen Him in photographs and some who have only felt His love and power miles away - they do not know who He is, what He is and where He residesthat is His Love and Glory...so mystifying!

Sathya then and Sai Baba now, has never sent an invitation to anybody to come to Him. Does the flower need to send an invitation to the honeybee? Much water has flowed under the bridge of time since Sathya declared, "*I am Sai Baba*" on 20th Oct, 1940 and **the innumerable lives that have been transformed since then, the hearts that have been changed, the minds that have been transmuted, the families that have been reunited, the grown-ups that have been timely guided, the children that have been**

adroitly redirected on the right path....all stand as a testimony to His all-powerful Love and Grace!

In His discourses, Baba generally addresses the vast assemblies as, *"Divyathma-swarupulaaraa!"* meaning, *"Ye, Divine Atmic Realities!"* He sees all as Himself; He calls upon all to see themselves as Him. This identity is the Truth. Baba is all Love, all Wisdom, all Power, all Grace as Prof. Kasturi, His biographer, describes Him in *Sathyam Shivam Sundaram*. How else, do you think He can declare,

"The world is My mansion; even those who deny Me are Mine; call Me by any name I shall respond; picture Me in any Form, I shall present Myself before you....I am in the least for you, as much as the best; do not slander or injure anyone, for, you are slandering and injuring Me who is in him". Such is the universality of His majesty and His Love!

Beethoven has written in his own hand on a piece of paper preserved in the Royal College of Music, London, some of his seminal ideas. One of them is about God - *"From what we are able to perceive in His works, we conclude that He is Eternal, Almighty, Omniscient, and Omnipresent."* How singularly appropriate are these lines when we think about our Baba!

We intend to deal with this magnificent and all-conquering Love and Grace, this all-knowing Wisdom and Power and this splendid all-encompassing Glory in this cover story. This is our prayerful offering at His Lotus Feet celebrating His eighty glorious years on this mother earth.

HIS LOVE

His Methodology

Once, many years ago, when Baba was asked about His 'methodology', He said, *"I have no methodology or machinery or strategy in the accepted organisational sense. My methodology is a simple one, based on conversion by love, and the machinery is one of human co-operation and brotherhood. Love is My instrument and My merchandise."*

It is this love that prompts Him to speak to each seeker in a language that he can understand - Swahili in East Africa, Spanish to devotees from Argentina and Adi to tribals from Along (Northeast India). It is this love that persuades Him to heal our physical and mental wounds and then inspire us to grow spiritually. It is this love again that illumines the darkness of our hearts and corrects the crookedness of our habits and attitudes. Again it is this love that performs miraculous cures of terminal diseases, and saves countless of us from accidents and disasters. It is this irresistible love that breathes new life into our being through just one look, one glance or one word and we are never the same again!

Ask any devotee who has been touched by His love and he will say, *"It is an experience that I cannot ever convey through spoken words...it is such an*

emotional and uniting experience...it is like a child uniting with his mother... after years of toil and turmoil." It can be expressed only through the universal language of tears....tears of joy, tears of a never-before-felt happiness, tears teeming with emotion and deep love!

His Love...Spontaneous and Selfless

Swami's love always has been universal and spontaneous with no barriers. The spontaneity with which He goes out to serve the downtrodden, the eagerness with which He reaches out to speak to someone in need, the joy with which He smiles with a person with physical disabilities, arm in arm (the blind cannot see, but they can surely feel His love, isn't it?), the undiluted bliss with which He talks to the orphans and distributes clothes and sweets besides constructing a school and a home for them (they have now become God's own children), the sweet innocence coupled with a bewitching smile with which He talks to a tiny-tot....all these are just a few, very few, instances of what His love is made up of.

His Love...So Pristine and Pure, Childlike

It is said that in the innocent and innocuous face of a child you can see the face of God. And how true it is! Even the reverse of this is so true. If you look at the face of God, you can see the clean and crystalline countenance of a small child. And why will it not be? For, there is so much likeness between the two.

Let's just think, why are kids so lovable? Hmm ...Because they are so innocent. Because they are so pure. Because they have no grudge against anybody. Because they are so simple. Because they know no manipulation. Because they do not know what is ego. Because they love everybody. Because they play and frolic with anybody, showing no distinction. Because they know no hatred or greed. Because they only know to receive love and return love. Their mind is guileless and their heart, stainless. They can only spread happiness and joy all around. And if you ponder for a while, you will agree that it is the same with God too.

One day many years ago, Swami distributed ice-cream to the boys. The brand name was JOY ice-cream, and it was gifted by a devotee who owned the company. While boys were enjoying the ice-cream, Baba went round as usual, asking the boys how they liked the ice-cream. And then suddenly He asked a boy,

"Boy what do you think God is like?" The boy was taken aback. He was fully immersed in enjoying ice-cream, and God was, at least at that moment, far from his mind! Swami asked another boy the same question, and he too blinked. After drawing a blank response a few more times, Swami smiled and slowly said, "God is SWEET like ice-cream!"

The boys became attentive. Swami continued, "God is SOFT like ice-cream!"

By now, the boys had stopped eating, while Swami went on, "God is COOL like ice-cream!" And then the punch line: "He gives JOY like ice-cream!"

What a delightful play on words! Truly, His love is as universal as the child's. His heart is as pristine, His looks as serene, His nature as gentle, His words as simple and His smile, as exciting and as thrilling! [We have dealt with this childlike aspect of our Beloved Lord Sai in great detail in the cover story of our issue on Aug 1st 2004. You can go [here](#) to read that again.]

The Testimony of an Aura Expert

If we ask ourselves what is so special about Swami's love? And then look deep within ourselves....we will know it is essentially His selflessness, His love is as selfless as it can be. While each one of us has experienced it in our hearts and minds this love... so pure and so arresting, Frank Baranowski has proved it scientifically for the whole world.

Professor Frank Baranowski, a psychologist and regression therapist from the University of Arizona, specializes in research on auras (the energy pattern surrounding the human body) and this is what he recounts on seeing Swami many years ago in Brindavan, Baba's Ashram in Bangalore.

He says, "I have always been able to see the human aura, that is, the energy pattern which surrounds a person. The auras around average people extend as much as three to five feet. Auras are composed of every imaginable colour and these colours change as a person's emotional, physical and mental states change. In general, whenever the colour blue is evident in a person's aura, it is an indication of deep spirituality; green is a healing color; yellow indicates high intelligence; and red means anger or frustration.

The colour pink, which is rarely seen, typifies a person capable of selfless love, this was the colour that Sathya Sai Baba had around Him. The aura around Sathya Sai Baba went beyond the building against which He stood; this energy field reached thirty or forty feet in all directions. Never having seen any aura like this before, my first reaction was to look for fluorescent lights, which may have been shining on Him. But as I watched, the beautiful pink energy pattern moved as He moved, there was no doubt, this was His aura....

*...As He walked among them, the beautiful pink colour in His aura permeated the violent red colours in the crowd. His selfless love transcended their fears and worries....you have to meet this man to understand His gifts. **He gives of himself to thousands of people from all around the world who await his blessings.***

*I was not brought up in any belief, though I am a Christian by birth and a Roman Catholic. The scientific community in my country finds it difficult to accept God. 'It is not scientific,' they assert. The aura that Swami projects is not that of a man.... **Two days ago, right outside this hall, I looked into His eyes. They had a glow in them. It was clear to me that I had looked into***

the face of Divinity. If ever I can use the phrase, 'I have seen Love walking on two feet', it is here."

The living embodiment of all love and grace, our beloved Sai is giving away so much positive energy every time He comes out for *Darshan*, whether we ask for it or not, whether we deserve it or not. In His infinite compassion, He overlooks our deficiencies, our shortcomings. What does He ask in return for all this grace?

Ask the devotees who had had the opportunity to speak to Him and they will tell you how so many times they have asked Swami if they can do anything for Him and He would invariably say - *"You just be good, be happy. I do not want anything else."* This is love for love's sake, isn't it? It is a Love that is truly genuine and utterly selfless, selflessness forms the nadir and the zenith of this love.

His Grand Service Projects

It is this penchant for serving mankind selflessly that prompted Baba to open Super Specialty Hospitals in Puttaparthi and Bangalore which offer free medical care to the poorest of the poor. **What you offer to the needy should be what you would offer to your own son or daughter, Swami has always insisted.** And true to His message Swami's hospitals offer the best treatment possible with the latest technology, equipments, et al for no charge whatsoever. Aiding the treatment, of course, is His Divine Grace.

When Swami decided to offer pure drinking water to all dry and arid areas of Anantapur in March 1995, one million people in more than 700 villages who used to travel miles for a pot of water everyday, now had water at their doorstep! And that in just nine months! It was at a cost of US\$ 70 million. The Prime Minister of India, who inaugurated the project, said, *"Anantapur has now become 'Anandpur'"* (meaning, the city of joy!).

What is more heart warming is that without a second thought Swami extended this project to another 300 villages in Medak and Mahabubnagar district when villagers from those areas expressed their wish. And more recently in 2002 the people of the city of Chennai were blessed when Swami, quite unexpectedly, announced the drinking water project for the city of Chennai, a city in South India well-known for its water-nightmares. More than US\$60 million was spent to reconstruct the Kondaleru-Poondi canal and once and for all after more than fifty years the water-starved city was free from water-stress.

The saga of selfless service of the Lord is never ending. Now there is again a free drinking water supply project on for the upland and water-starved remote areas of East and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh commemorating His 80th Birthday.

Divine Love and Compassion are not abstract qualities, we know now. They are as real as the Sun and the moon and reveal themselves magnificently as Selfless Service. Swami often tells us: *"You are not just human. You are in fact Divine."* And it is to help us discover this latent Divinity in us that He constantly exhorts: *"Help ever, hurt never; Love all, serve all."*

The Highest Expression of Selfless Love - Service

Service is the highest expression of selfless love. It is for ourselves more than for others, Swami has explained to us many times. Many years ago, when late Dr. Fanibanda asked Bhagavan: "Swami, what is the purpose of the Seva Organisation?" Swami replied, "Nothing."

The good doctor was knocked out by this most unexpected reply! Recovering from the shock, Dr. Fanibanda then hesitantly asked, "Nothing Swami? How could that be? There must be some reason." Swami, then smiled and said, "Yes, there is a reason. I founded this Organisation so that you might improve yourself!"

Indeed, and that is why it is often said: "Do not talk about the service you have done. Instead, reflect on what service has done to you!" How significant are these words! A whole new perspective to love and service!

"Students Are My Life" - Baba

If there is a community which is singularly fortunate in the present times, it is the students of Swami's school and the college, undoubtedly. For, as Swami has told many times and even very recently during Dasara celebrations, 2005, *"Students are My Life"*. Yes, there is nobody more dear to Him than His students. Just like all great masters of yore, a lion's share of His time is always for the young minds and understandably so as they are the torchbearers of His mission.

There will be harmony in the family and peace in the nation, Swami says, only when the students' higher nature is fostered and encouraged to blossom by means of study, prayer and spiritual practice along with quality secular education. To instill self-confidence in them and drive them towards self-realisation has been Swami's tireless effort right from His childhood. Then it was only a few classmates for the young Sathya, now it is thousands of students from His schools and colleges. His enthusiasm remains the same, His perseverance remains the same, His mission remains the same.

Finest Moments of Love....

This incident happened a few years ago. A student had just joined the Brindavan campus of the Institute and one morning he is told that Swami has sent something for him. Surprised, he opens the pack and then completely breaks down. Nobody quite understood what was happening. The boy had not disclosed to anyone that his mother had just passed away and everyday the

thought of his mother would devastate him. When he opened the pack and saw a ponds cream there, he was overwhelmed with Swami's omniscience and love because it was his mother who would put cold cream on his lips everyday when he was at home and his Sai Mother was now there to take care of him and knew everything about him.

Another interesting incident concerns a student from Prashanthi Nilayam campus who was suffering from asthma. His illness did not allow him to go to the Mandir for *darshan* and one evening, feeling very frustrated with himself, he went to the dining hall of the hostel where there was a big picture of Swami and cried his heart out to Him. Immediately, there is a call for him from the Mandir and as soon as he reaches there, **Swami calls him to the interview room. Swami tells him that he should give Him his asthma. What the boy needs to suffer for the whole year, Swami says, He could suffer it for one minute.** The boy pleads against it because he did not want Swami to suffer even for a moment. But Swami out of His love absorbs the boy's asthma into Himself and the student is cured for ever.

Such are the finest moments of love that weave the special relationship that exists between Swami and students...it is this purely selfless love of Swami that strikes a chord in their heart, every student will tell you. His pure love is like the philosopher's stone. Once touched by His love, every student is transformed...they are unmade and remade the way they ought to be. For every student it is these moments of love - a small interaction, a beautiful smile, a motherly care and concern, a friendly quip, a divine revelation – all these and more, which are his life's precious treasure...his eternal source of strength and inspiration, physical distance from Swami being no barrier.

In the modern world, we have institutions who try to mould the character of the student at the school level but there is hardly anyone except Swami who is everyday counseling and correcting the students at the graduation and post-graduation level, and with tremendous success. So, what is the key to this success? Undoubtedly it is His pure selflessness.

All the education in Sai's educational institutions – be it kindergarten courses to masters degrees and doctoral works – all education is provided absolutely free. *"Be Good. Get a good name for your parents. Get a good name for your country,"* is all Baba would ask from every student leaving the comfort of His Lotus Feet into the wide world after his education. It is these loving words which become a constant spring of joy and an eternal mission for every student.

One can go on and on talking about Swami's love because everything that Swami does always has love as the inner basis. It is for this reason that Swami says, *"To grasp My Meaning, you have to tear into tatters the doubts and diversions that you now indulge in and develop divine love. For, the embodiment of love can be known only through wisdom and pure love...."*

HIS WISDOM

Profound Philosophies in Parables

In one beautiful discourse in June 1989, Swami said, “You use a mosquito net to avoid being bitten. As long as you have the net, no matter how many mosquitoes there are outside, you don’t have to worry. However, if mosquitoes are inside the net, nobody can save you from them. (Similarly) if you put up a net to protect yourself, but foolishly allow mosquitoes in, it is like visiting holy places, keeping holy company, doing holy deeds, but not clearing out the defects within.”

The evil tendencies within man are just like the mosquitoes inside the net which can ruin man irrespective of the ‘mosquito net’ of good company and holy deeds, Swami tells us. What a beautiful example to convey a valuable idea!

On another occasion, Swami said, “A landowner may own all the fields up to the horizon on all sides, but he will deign only to sit on a patch that is clean! In the same way, when the Lord chooses the heart of a devotee, He will select a clean one. It doesn’t mean all the other hearts are not His, it’s just that they are not clean, that is all.”

Therefore, one must cleanse one’s heart by the towel of spiritual practice and the tears of repentance and so that the Lord might install Himself therein, Swami explains.

Such similes and stories from Swami that convey important ideas are infinite. In innumerable interactions over the years, Baba has conveyed the most complex of philosophical truths in such a simple and lucid manner through parables and anecdotes, analogies and imageries that the message has always gone straight into the hearts of devotees. In fact, this is an attribute, you will agree, which is common to all great masters who have walked on this earth over centuries, be it Jesus or the Buddha, Guru Nanak or Adi Shankara.

Divine Pun...Deep Wisdom

The way Swami sometimes plays with the words to convey great ideas are something fantastic. For example, to a very affluent devotee, Swami once said *“‘Properties’ are not ‘Proper Ties’ which only bind you to this world. True property which will always be there with you at all times is God’s Grace - make efforts to accumulate that property.* “

Similarly on a very humorous note, Baba once asked another devotee, *“How do you spell wife?”* *“W-I-F-E”*, the devotee responded. Then making an acronym of the word ‘wife’, Baba mischievously teased the devotee saying,

*"It means **Worries Invited For Ever**". The devotee put on a downcast expression. To cheer up the devotee, Baba changed it instantaneously saying, "No – it's **Wisdom Invited For Ever**". Such instances are galore. Every individual who has had the opportunity to interact with Swami will have a story to tell.*

"Baba's Scholarship is Overwhelming" – Dr. V K Gokak

Every word spoken by Swami is significant, every interaction with Swami is a revelation. Sribhashyam Appalacharya from South India, a very distinguished scholar and a repository of ancient scriptural wisdom, writes after staying for a few days at Prashanti Nilayam,

"Bhagavan is a Veda (Authority on Knowledge) - what He says, happens; Bhagavan is a Sastra (Spiritual Guidebook) - what He does, is exemplary. He elaborates the truth with many a metaphor, simile and story as a Purana (mythology) does; His words are the highest poetry, for they confer bliss and liquidate the littleness in man."

In fact, in countless discourses delivered for several decades now, Baba has covered the whole spectrum of human thought. There is no realm of human activity that Baba has not talked about sometime or the other (you will realize this when you listen to all His discourses right from early years of His Avatharhood) and all this, mind you, from a personality who 'dropped out of school' when He was just 14!

Late Sri V K Gokak, a great literateur and a scholar which was also the vice-chancellor of Bangalore University and later the first vice-chancellor of Swami's University, writes, *"Baba's scholarship is overwhelming. With hardly any formal education, He has on the tip of His tongue, atomic formulae, Vedic hymns, medical recipes, and Tantric mantras."*

Ask the Vedic scholars who conduct the *Yagnam* during Dasara every year and they will tell you how time and again they have been baffled by His intricate knowledge of Vedic rituals and scriptures. Let's take just one instance here narrated by late Sri G V Subbarao, a UN official for decades and also a great Vedic scholar –

"I was once present when some of the most learned Vedic scholars gathered at Prashanti Nilayam. Two adepts had differences over the complex procedure of the performance of the Vedic 'Soma Yaga' sacrifice as to the exact configuration or arrangement of the sanctified bricks in the construction of the main altar. They confronted Swami with their respective standpoints and doubts backed up by citations of authoritative 'Shroutha' texts.

Apparently even the great ascetic heads of the Math's (monasteries) are themselves not familiar with purely field practices of the elaborate yagnas. They are more familiar with Vedantic and philosophical subjects than with the details of complex ritual sacrifices. Perhaps these pundits came to test Swami

*in a remote area of Vedic ritual knowledge. This is an area of Vedic knowledge which has been the preserve of only a handful of traditionally trained specialized scholars. **But to their astonishment Swami specified and demonstrated the correct configuration of the sanctified and ritual place. Swami's procedure did not coincide with the expert view of either of the two pundits. They later checked up their palm-leaf Shroutha texts to confirm that what Swami had elaborated was exactly the same for that particular sacrifice!** The assembled scholars were greatly amazed and some of them returned humbled as well as greatly impressed by Swami's knowledge in the field of Vedic knowledge."* It is the same experience with professionals from every discipline of modern world.

Embodiment of All Knowledge

Engineer Par Excellence

The engineers who were to construct the 65 feet high Hanuman Statue in the Hill View Stadium in Prashanti Nilayam for the 65th Birthday were at a loss regarding the design of the huge structure taking into account the huge weight, the load distribution on all sides, stability, etc.

When they approached Bhagavan, Swami told them that a certain pose of Hanuman would give them the required structural stability, and to illustrate what pose He had in mind, He materialized on the spot a golden idol of Hanuman, the way He wanted! Later, the engineers did a complete structural analysis through computer simulation and discovered that indeed this particular structure was far more stable than anything they had come up with earlier!

Advocate Supreme

Amar Vivek, a former student of Swami's Institute and a distinguished lawyer serving in the High Court of Punjab and Haryana, recently shared over an interview with the Radio Sai team how Swami came to his rescue in a very critical case.

This happened in May 2001. Amar decided to fight the case of a retired school teacher whose house was being illegally grabbed by a police officer by forging the documents. The notorious officer, in retaliation, framed 30 false allegations against Amar but that did not deter Amar in going ahead with the case. On 15th May, 2001, Amar returned home tired, exhausted and nervous after presenting his case in the court. Very apprehensive of the verdict, Amar went to his bedroom and started praying and crying in front of Swami's photo. Just as he was doing this, he heard Swami's soothing voice from the photo!

Swami told him that it was actually He who was handling the case for him and even mentioned three specific instances as evidence. The first – a few days ago, a person by name Rishi, a government employee, had dropped by Amar's house and given him some very crucial documents for the case. Swami told Amar 'Who do you think arranged for that?'

The second and the most important – in the court when Amar was cross examining the police officer, to his utter bewilderment, the police officer answered all the questions against himself! It was a grueling 4 hours session and all the time the police officer said what Amar had never expected! Swami said to Amar 'Who do you think sat on his tongue and changed his words?'

The third – Swami mentioned to Amar the exact date of the verdict, 17th May 2001 and even told him that it is the holy day of Thursday and that Judge Sant Prakash (his name meaning, The Sage's Light) will read out the verdict in his favour. Needless to say, Amar won the case, thanks to Swami's grace.

Doctor Divine

Instances where Swami has guided doctors are innumerable. Doctors in Swami's Hospitals, both in Puttaparthi and Whitefield, know it better than anybody else. Here we give just one incident narrated by Dr. Shantamma of Swami's General Hospital.

This happened in 1985 concerning the baby of the present principal of the Higher Secondary School, Sri Shivramakrishnaiah. This baby, Sujaya, was actually Swami's gift to the couple as the couple did not have any child for 14 years and she was conceived after Swami gave *prasadam* to the principal's wife. When Sujaya was brought to *darshan*, Swami blessed the child and told the mother to take the child to the hospital immediately. Dr. Shantamma who was attending on the patient says,

"When the baby was brought to the hospital, she was in a collapsed condition. It was 18th July 1985 . The baby was dehydrated.... we started Oxygen inhalation. We were not able to get the veins as all had collapsed. I wanted to make a small cut on the skin under local anesthesia so that a cannula or a needle can be put into a deeper vein, but the parents cried and refused. I came to Swami, told Him about it, and He said, "Don't do the cut as they are very much scared. Go and see the baby again." The anesthetist and myself went and saw that there was a prominent vein on the hand itself, which was not there earlier! We started I.V (Intra Venous) drip. The baby had severe peritonitis – inflammation of the abdominal membrane. Copious greenish fluid was coming through the naso gastric tube.

With all necessary antibiotics and other medicines, the baby's condition did not improve. It was already one week, the I.V (Intra Venous) Line was changed 2-3 times. We were tired of pricking the baby repeatedly. I went and told Swami. Swami said, "Don't worry, the baby will become all right". He materialised vibhuti and told me to apply it all over baby's body. It was done.

Distension of abdomen-lessened, bowel sounds appeared, and the baby passed motion, the naso gastric tube aspiration became lessened. We were a bit relieved of our tension. After 2 days, the baby developed high fever, and the temperature went up to 104-106 F. In spite of all medicines, and good nursing care, the baby became delirious, and restless. Once again I went and told Swami, "Swami please take over the management of the baby, I cannot*

handle the case any more in this condition of the baby. The parents are very anxious and worried. They have given up all hope". Swami looked at me deeply and said, "Yes, it is my responsibility, you do as I say" I agreed, Swami materialized vibhuti, and told me to apply it all over the body.

When I came back to the hospital, we applied vibhuti, removed all the tubes and stopped all medicines as the baby was in this condition for nearly two weeks. We allowed her to sleep peacefully. We told the parents that was all we could do and started praying to Bhagavan. The baby slept through the night and her heart beat, pulse, respiratory rate, and motion became normal! The next morning, Swami asked me, "How is the baby?" I said, "It is a miracle. The baby has improved." Then Swami said, "You say improved? It is all right now, fully normal." Swami made her well without physically

Manager Divine

Question the Dean of the MBA programme, Prof. U S Rao, about Swami's inputs on Management and he will tell you, "*Bhagavan explained the concepts of 'Reengineering' and TQM (Total Quality Management) to the management students and asked us to incorporate them into the core courses of the MBA programme more than ten years back when no other management Institute had thought of introducing these into their core syllabus.*"

Ask a few management students and they will tell you how Swami chose the project and research topics for them and how He actually guided them in their work. Shirish Patil, a management student of Swami's Institute belonging to the 1996-98 batch, recollects a revealing incident -

During my second year of MBA), all my classmates had decided to offer our project work at the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan Baba. During the evening darshan, we kept all the projects piled up for Bhagavan Baba's blessings. My project work (Analysis of the Indian Petrochemicals Industry) happened to be the bulkiest and when Bhagavan Baba asked "Whose work is this?" I raised my hand; Bhagavan Baba asked me to hand over the project work to Him. As Bhagavan Baba went through the project, I knelt by His side.

He then said "You have made a mention of Rakesh Mohan Committee in your analysis," and before I could react, He turned the pages (about 150 pages) and straight went to that particular page and said, "See I told you". Then He asked "Why should I have interest in what is written in your project work? I wanted to show you that I know everything!" I took Bhagavan Baba's Padanamaskar (salutations at His Feet) and He then created Vibhuti for me.

Thus, Bhagawan is the invisible guide for their project work for every student in the Institute.

Sai is at the Heart of Science

The students of the Physics department of the Institute will gladly recollect how on so many occasions Swami had elaborated on Energy, Laser, Optics,

etc. And the faculty of Chemistry Department will tell you how Swami once explained in detail the composition of petroleum and all its products and by-products, their uses, their composition and their demerits.

And what to say of biology, zoology or the environment! Swami has dealt in so much detail about all these topics on so many occasions. Of course, Swami's favorite is Spirituality and like a great master He beautifully provides a spiritual dimension to all disciplines of human knowledge. Yes, He has talked about the mysteries of the Universe, creation, the distance between galaxies, the planets and the constellations....everything on the earth and in the sky!

"Mine are not Lectures, they are Mixtures" - Baba

Swami often says His discourses are not lectures but 'mixtures'. A wholesome mix of the spiritual and the standard, which makes it practical, interesting and illuminating. He is the greatest of teachers and a Teacher by example and advice. A philosopher can learn from Baba the art of laying bare enigmatic thought processes in a simple and straightforward manner. A painter of genius meets his challenge in the ever-varying expressiveness of His face and eyes. An actor learns from Him those subtle inflections and intonations of the voice that best express the soul. A trained teacher finds a master of profoundly new methods in Baba. As the Geeta says, *"The Divine is the best, the mightiest, the most charming, the wisest, the highest and the most intricate Being; an incarnation of the Divine bears this stamp on its personality."*

Not only is He Himself an inspiring theme; His charm and every conversation releases springs of inspiration hidden away for a long time in the minds and hearts of people. And how they are transformed for good! Prof. Kasturi beautifully narrates this process in *Sathyam Shivam Sundaram* saying, *"...His speech with even casual visitors becomes a pat on the back, often a prick to the bubble, a stab to the ego, a candle in the darkness, a stick to the lame, a path in the wilderness, a rose amidst the thorns, a beacon that beckons to nobility and divinity."*

HIS POWER

'Miracles'

What you call 'miracles', are only manifestations of My Love, Swami has often said. *"Every miracle of Baba is a gift of Grace,"* Prof. Kasturi records in *Sathyam Shivam Sundaram*, *"It may be a pinch of sacred ash, a piece of candy, a picture created before us; it may be a shower of ash, or the emergence of Kumkum (vermillion) or fragrant sandal or nectarine honey, on a picture, an 'Om' in ash on the floor, a continuous flow of scented oil or Amrith (nectar) from a Linga or locket.*

It may also be a series of paper slips on which counsel or warnings are written in the language you understand, that come from His hands in the portraits you worship. It may be given to you while you are awake, asleep or dreaming - or

come to you as a book or as a parcel through the post, in reply for an order that you may not have placed. It may be a vision of Himself, subtle, substantial, momentary or more lasting, but, always, it is a sign of His Love and Majesty."

Power Over Nature

This year has been full of natural disasters of various kinds. First there was the tsunami, after which there were the hurricanes that hit America, followed by floods in China and India, especially in Mumbai. As if this were not enough, Taiwan and Vietnam were slammed by typhoons; a little later, hundreds of people lost their lives in Guatemala in the mudslides and to cap them all, there was recently, the massive earthquake in Kashmir, killing tens of thousands and leaving millions homeless, even as winter was setting in the Himalayas.

In earlier issues we have covered some of these disasters. Again and again people ask: *"Why does God punish mankind with such natural disasters?"* Somehow, people forget that God does not punish but sends help. At times, He personally comes to the rescue. He did this as Krishna, when He saved the villagers of Gokul from a torrential deluge by lifting a hill on His little finger.

In the October issue, we carried the story of how, in the form of Lord Rama, Swami came to the rescue of the people of Madurantakam in South India, following an earnest prayer by Col. Lionel Price of the East India Company. Now we have for you a story of how Swami controlled the elements, to rescue the people of Puttaparthi, even as He did in His earlier incarnations.

This happened way back in the year 1971, and the incident was narrated to us by Mr. Chiranjeevi Rao, who had a ringside view of the whole incident, and who was caretaker for the ashram for some years. That year, there was a deluge and Chithravathi River was in full spate. The water entered the village and drove away hundreds of villagers from their huts. The Ashram being the highest point of the village, the villagers all flocked there. Swami in His mercy and compassion not only allowed them all inside giving refuge, but also arranged food distribution for the refugees.

Meanwhile, the water level was rising menacingly and threatened to enter even the premises of the Ashram. That is to say, water was almost at the Ganesha Gate. In those days, there was almost nothing between the river and the Ashram. Swami now decided on Divine intervention. He summoned Mr. Chiranjeevi Rao and along with him, walked up the flight of stairs in East Prashanti. Together they went to the terrace, and moved close to the parapet wall. Looking down from there, they saw water on the street below, the level of which was rising.

Swami then said something softly. Mr. Rao says he could not exactly hear what Swami said but it seemed as if He was speaking something. Bhagavan then raised both His hands in benediction and said: *"Shanti, Shanti, Shanti"* (Peace, Peace, Peace). The moment He finished, most miraculously, the

water started withdrawing! It all happened very quickly. Mr. Rao has with him a photo taken during that period which he has kindly made available to us. That photo is what you see on the right. You can see Swami amidst the villagers who had taken shelter in the Ashram. Behind is Mr. Rao.

Instances of such nature that are recorded are many, which is only a fraction of what is happening all the time all over the world. When terrible forest fires broke out in the Chunchuma Ranch, Tecate (Mexico) where Indra Devi has her Yoga Institute, Swami in India said, "No more fires!" and the flaming conflagration retreated in a trice! Sri Indulal Shah will tell you how Swami with a gentle wave of His hand dispatched the clouds that were threatening to disrupt a public meeting in Malleswaram, Bangalore in the summer of 1965 and again in Dharmakshetra, Mumbai in 1967. Mrs. Ratanlal once narrated how Swami showed a miniature moon – same brightness and coolness as the real moon - in His palm while talking about the moon and the spots on the moon's surface to the devotees.

Master of Matter

Anybody who has been in Swami's vicinity would have been a witness to innumerable materializations that Swami does from the thin air everyday to confer small gifts of love and grace in the form of a ring, a chain, a watch, etc. Why does He do it? Is it to draw people? Swami once said, *"No. it is just a spontaneous expression of My love. When you wish to show affection to your son, or if you want to make someone happy, you make him a sports shirt or buy him a present, do you not? (In the same manner) Swami also wants to give you happiness with these small gifts."*

On another occasion, in an interview that He gave to a newspaper editor, many years back, He said, *"It is never for 'pradarshan' (or show), it is always for 'nidarshan' (or evidence), it is just like a play, sport - My natural behaviour. It is a sign which helps to turn into faith, devotion, inquiry and realization of their own Atma (spirit). As the intention or the will arises in the mind, the thing is made! It is ready when I want it. The moment it is willed, the thing comes to hand or happens where I will it to happen."*

He is the Master of matter and energy! When He created that exquisite cross for Dr. Hislop made out of the same wood on which Jesus was crucified, it was to remove the veil on some very important facets of Christ's personality; or when He transformed a small rock into a sugar candy for the hard-nosed scientist-geologist Dr. Rao, it was to drill deep into him that there is God beyond protons and electrons in the rock; when He multiplied food just by a mere tap on the lid of the vessels on so many occasions whether on the sands of Chitravathi or at the residence of a host in Bangalore, it was to feed so many people and/or to protect the host from embarrassment. His actions or miracles are always for a purpose just like His gifts which are a sign of eternal protection and love.

Miracle Cures

More than the material objects which serve as a constant reminder of His presence, Baba has gifted the most precious possession – good health - to so many devotees, sometimes physically, sometimes telepathically, sometimes through *vibhuti*, sometimes through a mere glance, sometimes appearing at the bedside of an ailing man, sometimes through a dream... His means are as varied as the ailments.

The medical miracles of Bhagawan - be it giving eye-sight to Dr. Ravi Kumar, a lecturer in Swami's college in Bangalore, not once, but twice; or canceling the cancer of Captain Oberoi, the first aerodrome officer of Sathya Sai Airport; or curing the torn muscle of Sunil Gavaskar, the legendary cricketer, in the West Indies; or making the handicapped little Ketu, daughter of a Parsi gentlemen, Mr. Russi Patel, from Mumbai, walk and talk; or curing an old man from Nellore with chronic diabetes and sinuses in the arms in a day by materializing *vibhuti* for him; or... this list is endless – but each is an amazing expression of His supreme power and infinite compassion.

Resurrections

But most remarkable is the Gift of Life that Swami has bestowed on not one or two but so many devotees over so many years of His Avatharhood. In fact, we ran a cover story on this theme in the June issue of Heart2Heart. There you will find detailed accounts how Swami brought back Mrs. Vijayakumari's father from death (Smt. Vijayakumari is a long standing devotee who came to Swami in the early 1940s); gave a new lease of life to Sri Seshagiri Rao, the temple priest of Prashanthi Nilayam; resurrected Mrs. Subbamma, Swami's foster mother; and similarly breathed new life into so many other devotees, old and new.

The Real Divine Sign

To narrate comprehensively Swami's power and miracles is like trying to measure the ocean and the sky. There is nothing that He cannot do for He is omnipotent and omniscience,

"I can, by My Sankalpa (will), change the earth into sky and the sky into earth, but that is not the only sign of Divine Might. It is the Love, the compassion, the supreme patience to deal with all this frailty and fanaticism, it is the Resolve to cure them all - that is the Unique Sign," Baba explained on one occasion.

The divine consciousness sees the past, present and the future, wholly and truly. *"If He is all-powerful, why did He not answer my prayer?"* one may ask. Perhaps it was because, in His all-seeing wisdom, He knows what you want will not be good for your spiritual welfare. He is like a mother who will not give to her child what will be harmful to him, no matter how hard he cries and begs for it. Clouded by our limited understanding, we might often lead ourselves to believe that Swami can do only this and this and not this. But the truth is that we try to measure with our limited human minds the immeasurable and the

infinite. Elaborating on the same lines, on Christmas Day in 1970, Swami declared,

"There are many who cannot bear to tolerate the splendour that emanates from Me, the Divinity expressed in and through every act of Mine. These people label them as acts of mesmerism, miracles or feats of magic! Their vocabulary is small. Their experience is limited. They hope, by these words, to cast a slur. Let Me tell you this:

'Mine is no mesmerism, miracle or magic! Mine is genuine Divine Power. Small minds and limited intellects cannot comprehend them. They have no strength or stamina to grasp the magnificence and the majesty. God can do anything. He has all Power in the palm of His Hand. My Body, like all other bodies, is a temporary habitation but My Power is eternal, all-pervasive, ever-dominant.' "

The Everyday Miracle We Miss

Prof. Kasturi in *Sathyam Shivam Sundaram – III*, narrates a beautiful incident substantiating this very aspect of the Sai Avathar,

"Nearly twenty years ago, arriving one morning at the Prashanthi Nilayam I found a group of young men from a Bangalore college praying to Baba to take them to the top of the hill on the left bank of the Chitravathi river. They hoped that once there, Baba would take from the famous tamarind tree, fruits of different species. I too joined in the appeal, but Baba was determinedly silent for a while, then said sharply, "Do I require that particular tree? Any tree can do."

We were filled with hope. He would give us fruit from another tree and make that immortal! But He said, "Why do you think I want a tree? Sand is good enough." That meant He would give us something from the river bed! We were soon disillusioned! "Do I need the sands of a riverbed? Is not any sand equally good?"

Since the building work was in progress at Prashanthi mandir, truck loads of sand had been heaped to one side. "We shall sit on this heap itself, Swami!" I said. "Do you think that the creation of something out of sand is the only miracle? Is sand so essential?" We did not know what to say - we had to be satisfied by the miracle, creation of Vibhuti by the mere wave of a hand.

"Should I create something so that you can see a miracle? Is not your existence itself a miracle of Mine?" He asked. Then He rose and walked away leaving us aghast at the revelation of His being the Trinity, of His being the Incarnation of the One Universal God."

Yes, He is truly the one universal consciousness which responds to a Muslim who prays to Allah, provides strength and solace to a Christian who cries before Christ and confers blessings to a Hindu who worships Lord Shiva. He is all-powerful and all-pervasive and His grace is there in abundance for

everybody like the refreshing drops of rain, only our hands and pots should be ready to collect and preserve them.

HIS GRACE

Darshan – The Gift Supreme

Eighty years have gone by since Swami chose to descend and at least six decades since He made *Darshan* – the divine act of going to the masses and conferring them peace, joy and untold blessings - a part of His daily routine. It is a routine which He has followed actively and assiduously day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade.

Darshan is the single divine routine through which the bond between the devotee and the Lord is established. Every devotee yearns for that moment each and everyday He spends in His physical presence in His Ashram, be it in Prashanthi Nilayam, Brindavan, Kodai Kanal, Chennai or Mumbai. *Darshan* is overwhelming! You would have seen Him just this morning but you want to see Him again in the afternoon, you would have enjoyed His presence yesterday but you want it today also and wish you could get it everyday.

His Love and Grace – Universal and Irresistible!

Never in the annals of history has a sea of humanity waited with bated breath for the glimpse of a single person for hours in silence and prayer. Never before has it been recorded that one person, with His presence could initiate miracles galore, make the sorrow of the populace vanish in a trice and force a gathering to willingly forget itself and transport each one of them to the highest realms of ecstasy. Never before has any person commanded such love and adoration from an assembly of people with myriad professions and varied age groups, of assorted backgrounds and mixed cultures. How very powerful is the wand of the love that the Lord waves! How irresistible is His grace! Yes, it is compulsive, enticing and more importantly spiritually reinvigorating – the divine attraction is simply overpowering!

They come from every corner of the globe and from every strata of Society. One may be rich and another poor, one may be a king and another may be a pauper but all distinctions vanish before God. Everyone is His child. In a temple or a church, one must go to the sanctum to have His *Darshan* but here in His Home, He comes down to us, where we are seated, with a smile that transports everyone to the very heavens. *Darshan* is not just Swami coming to us...So many incredible things happen, things that become treasured memories for a lifetime!

The Yesteryears...Golden Moments

The old-time devotees go into divine raptures when they recollect the nostalgic memories of those wonderful days when there was an Arch in Prashanti Nilayam, where the Sai Kulwant Hall now stands. Yes, it was somewhat uncomfortable, especially when sitting on sizzling sand under a

blazing Sun, vulnerable to the rain and the wind, but who bothered? Did not time stand still as He gently walked by, smiling, blessing and waving?

His one look, one glance is sufficient to change the course of our lives for the better, for good. People clamour for the chance to touch His Feet, to have their children named, or initiated into spiritual disciplines according to scriptural rules by Him, to receive some token of His Grace, and to lay before Him, their mental and physical illness so that He may render them whole. His Grace grants 'colour to the painter, notes to the composer, voice to the singer, strength to the athlete, endurance to the climber, and bliss to the Yogis'.

The old-timers who have seen the Lord sitting blissfully under the blessed banyan tree in the Brindavan of the 80's and early 90's - the "Sai Ram" shed as they used to call it – will not miss a single opportunity to narrate how the setting and the scene was so wonderful and captivating...a bewitching Lord at the front, an enchanting Krishna idol behind Him, birds chirping and joining in during bhajan sessions, the banyan tree so lively and full of glee being Baba's tree spreading its copious branches and leaves to make a natural roof over every devotee. God, man and nature had become one!

An Open Invitation to One and All

Baba has an open invitation for everybody to seize the chance of His Grace and save themselves with alacrity.

"By seizing this chance, you can elevate yourself step by step, steadily. A stomach ache or a fever, some loss or grief brings you to Prashanti Nilayam. You start liking this place and its atmosphere, the Omkara, the Bhajan, the calm quiet that prevails. You see Me and observe My movements, words and actions; you leave with hope and courage, confidence and strength with a Bhajan book and a picture, perhaps.

Before long you forget the ache or fever, for it has either disappeared or lost its acerbity; you have developed a new ache - for Prashanti, (Unshaken Peace) for Darshan, Sparsan, Sambhashan, for Japam, Dhyanam (spiritual practices) and Sakshatkaram (Realisation). Follow My instructions and become soldiers in My Army; I shall lead you on to victory," Baba said on one occasion years ago.

The Golden Books of Our Lives...

Each one who moves to His presence with hope and confidence, has a story to tell, each one more fascinating and reassuring than the other. Each one has in his heart a book of experience with letters written in gold. Baba, even when physically present at Prashanti Nilayam or Brindavan, arouses ardour and yearning, awakens curiosity and interest, stimulates thirst and restlessness, assures comfort and cure and alerts and admonishes in dreams and through visions.

Distance is no barrier, time is no hindrance, power, position or wealth are no criterion when it comes to His Grace. However disintegrated the personalities of individuals may be, when they come to His Lotus Feet they assemble in unison. He is like a divine goldsmith who melts the small metal pieces of our individual egos into one beautiful resplendent ornament and in His company we shine brilliantly.

“Each one of you has to be saved....”- Baba

In puncturing our egos, breaking the barriers of our hearts and removing the narrowness of our minds, He is ever relentless and as determined as ever. He said on one occasion, *“Each one of you has to be saved, and will be saved. I shall not give you up, even if you keep afar. I shall not forsake even those who deny Me, I have come for all. Those who stray away will also be drawn near and saved; do not doubt this, I shall beckon them and bless them.”* Do we need any clearer intimation than this about His Grace and His Divinity?

To the students of a medical college, Swami once said, *“For a four-lettered degree, you spend the best part of your life; for attaining the Degree of Degrees, namely God’s Grace, can you not spend at least five minutes a day, contemplating silently on the mystery and majesty of God, which is evident in the construction, the functioning, and the disintegration of every atom and cell?”*

It is up to us to seize this opportunity. Swami says, “Make Me your Charioteer!” All we have to do is to surrender the reins of our lives to Him and He, the divine charioteer, will smoothly and safely take us to our goal. There should not any worry, any doubt. He is our Divine Insurance. His Grace is our only true property which will be with us at all times and at all places, here and hereafter.

HIS GLORY

Glorious Sai – Unprecedented and Unique

Is it not it unprecedented in the history of mankind? So much being said, so much being written, so much being sung in so many languages and in so many tunes by so many people from every corner of the globe about a diminutive personality from an obscure village who had little or no formal schooling! Devotees worldwide want Him photographed in as many ways as possible, whilst in flesh and blood, walking, talking, singing, laughing, joking and guiding one and all. Swami Himself said at a meeting in Prashanti Nilayam in 1965,

“No Avatar (incarnation) has acted like this before - going among the masses... seeking out the distressed, waking up the sleeping, quickening the dull, showering Grace on millions and counselling, consoling, guiding, uplifting them along the path of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema. I am neither Guru nor God. I am you! You are me! That is the Truth and you will realise it when you reach the goal. You are the waves and I am the Ocean.”

He has come to repair the ancient highway of man to God and you can see that happening everyday. The divine bridge to God in the heart of every man that comes to Him gets resurrected, renovated or repaired. His charisma is inscrutable. The Sai Phenomenon is enigmatic and His mission is mind-boggling, as is evident from what He has done for humanity in the last few decades.

The Global Sai

If we look around, in almost every village and city of India, Baba is adored and worshipped. With His mission and message of love spread through Sai Organisations present in nearly 180 countries of the world, Baba has achieved a far-reaching revolution in the world today, all very silently but surely. No advertisements, no invitations, hardly any publicity and now there is a human chain that can tip the balance towards achieving a world characterized with peace and harmony.

He has never called anyone, but the who's who from every discipline – scientists, administrators, politicians, musicians, artists, doctors, lawyers, presidents and prime ministers – all have flocked to His Lotus Feet and if Puttaparthi, a remote obscure village hidden in the barren lands of Andhra Pradesh is today the epicenter of a spiritual revolution enveloping the whole global community, it is a testimony to His indomitable Will and infinite Power. Power that does not defy, but transcends, all science, logic and human reasoning.

Millions continue to get drawn to His Lotus Feet, every hour devotees multiply. And why not? If there is one person in this world who has only loved people unconditionally right from day one and spent every second of His earthly existence trying to bring a smile on the distressed and deprived and never known what is to be selfish, it is our beloved Bhagawan.

The Essential Sai

Take away the divine power and the glory...the essential Sai is a simple and straightforward person who just practises what He preaches. He is a loving teacher, a firm father, a compassionate mother, all rolled into one. Intensely concerned with the moral upliftment of mortal beings, He is the embodiment of humanity, love, goodness, self-abnegation and soul power.

Millions may come to Him, poets may compose soul-stirring poetry on Him, authors may fill page after page glorifying Him, photographers may try to capture His physical form in all its moods, film and stage producers may use His life story, musicians may sing praises of Him, researchers may analyse the various aspects of His personality and His works, scientists may be startled at the ceaseless flow of miracles, but Sai is essentially the same simple, humble and full of sweetness.

In fact, you cannot miss the childlike innocence on His face and His activities. He touches the very inner core of your heart with His matchless purity and unexpected and unsophisticated pure love.

Missionary Sai – With a Grand Mission

No ordinary man can remain so calm, so composed and unimpressed with so much glory. He is an example for Humanity and unequivocally declares, "My life is My message." He shows us how spirituality can be a way of life and how every man is inherently divine.

We find in Baba the integral manifestation that combines three significant roles. He is the great teacher, far-famed for His simple and sweet exposition of the highest philosophies in the world today. He is the great dispenser of love – love that is selfless and unconditional. Finally, He is the great restorer of the essence of spirituality to mankind. We may say of Baba what Prof. P. Shankaranarayanan says in his book '*Sri Ramachandra*': "*For man to receive God's stimulus and to make the responses, God must become a person in flesh and blood, Human in His Divinity, and yet Divine in His Humanity. To infinitise man, God has to finitise Himself.*"

Universal Sai – The Emancipator

And that is what has exactly happened! He is the single unifying force in the world today come for the emancipation of mankind. People from all religions and nationalities gather at His Lotus Feet and feel homely. He has not come to create a new cult or a new religion but to create a new world full of peace and harmony. A world where each one lives for the other and all live for God. And nothing can stop Him from His mission as He declared many years ago in Anantapur,

"Even if the fourteen worlds in the upper and nether regions of the universe unite in order to delay or disrupt the work for which I have come in this Body, it will not suffer or falter."

Parting Words...

He will go on and accomplish His mission and but have we missed the chance of a life time? Certainly not, if, as Swami says, we do not remain in the shallow waters of doubt, half-heartedness and hesitation and dive deep into the sea to get the pearl of realization. We have to realise the full fruit of this Avathar, dive deep and get immersed in Sai.

For, He is all the power, all the wisdom, all the love, all the miracle that ever was, is and will be. Let us lose ourselves in the universal divine consciousness that He is and that which pervades the whole cosmos of which we are verily a part. Let us become Pure! Let us become Divine! Let us become Sai! Only then there will be ever-lasting peace, rest and fulfillment in our being, and then in the whole of the creation - the becoming.

FEATURE ARTICLES

THE SAI AVATAR ON HIMSELF

*Sai is the one who preaches the principle of Love.
Sai is the one who fosters harmony and equality.
Sai is the one who teaches the value of humanity.
That Sai is the embodiment of Love.*

-Baba

Bhagavan Baba has unequivocally declared that He is the Lord come again in human form, as a *Poorna Avatar*. Like Krishna, He has displayed His Divine powers by performing numerous *Leelas* (wonderfully described in the various volumes of *Sathyam*, *Sivam*, *Sundaram*). His miracles have attracted people from all over the world, and numerous are the books and articles written on them. And yet, Bhagavan Baba brushes them all aside, laying greater stress on His activities as a human being. Occasionally He does make a reference to His *Avatarhood*, but almost invariably it is only a passing reference. Nevertheless we have collected many of His utterances regarding this fascinating subject in this article. Such as in 1974 when He devoted a whole Discourse to this theme, the opening remarks of this historic Discourse are very arresting. Swami says

"Giving the appearance of a shabby person, having a basket-like hair on his head, showing no symptoms which indicate any particular religion or sect, with no specific mark on his face indicative of any particular caste.

He appears quickly in a moment and vanishes equally quickly; then comes suddenly into your presence, wearing a robe that comes right down to his feet and sometimes covers the feet and sometimes does not cover the feet.

Inherent beauty and attractiveness are obvious in his playing and in his singing. These are the aspects of Sivasakti that is contained in him. Neither his hair nor any particular mark on his body, nor the kind of robes that he wears give any indication of his birth."

All these things describe the young Sathya Sai as he appears in external form. How is it possible for anyone to understand Sathya Sai, whose form answers this description?

"All these statements [about God] by different people depend on their ideas, their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes, and, depending on these vagaries, they have been giving various descriptions of the Lord ...In the same manner, with regard to Sai as well, some people draw conclusions based only on the external appearances, and they thus try to understand the nature of Sai. They are not making any effort to recognize the basic truth, the unchanging permanent qualities of Truth that are in Sathya Sai. All powers are in the control of Sai. Unfortunately, many educated people who call themselves Yogis, Mahayogis, Pandits and people who have all kinds of qualifications talk only of the miracles I perform. They do not make an attempt to

recognize the strength and the true nature of the Sai that they apparently see."

Quite apart from *Avatars*, people are generally confused about God and tend to have their own views and impressions, conditioned by their intrinsic nature, outlook and experiences. The same happens with respect to God in human form also, i.e., the *Avatars*. As Swami puts it,

For example, although people talk about Sai's Omnipresence, Omnipotence etc., few really take it seriously or even comprehend in a small measure what they are saying. About His Divine powers, Swami says:

"There is no limitation to My power. There is no reason to limit or confine My power and My Grace to any one place. Infinite powers and Infinite Grace are present in My hands. To state these things with regard to Myself becomes necessary sometimes." When He does so declare, people listen keenly, some with awe, but soon it is all forgotten! Commenting on this, Swami says,

"There is no use telling people who refuse to know. For people who know, there is no need to tell. But for people who know and yet do not know, it becomes necessary to present what I call My visiting card. Therefore, if today I have undertaken to tell you about Myself, it is with a view to present you with My visiting card.... In the whole of our spiritual history, we find that only Krishna had proclaimed His own Divinity in this manner.

Even in the Avatar of Krishna, there was some superficial setback and there were some difficulties at certain times. But this is nothing unusual. It is only a put-up appearance and it is part and parcel of the Divine aspect... Depending upon the nature of the country, upon the people and upon the environment, it becomes necessary for God to enact such situations and pretend to do certain things.

In this Avatar of Sai, there is no room for such pretensions and there is no place for such setbacks at all. What I have taken as a Sankalpa will surely be fructified, but I need not take on a Sankalpa if I don't wish to.

Because I am like an ordinary individual when I am talking with you and playing with you, many people do not understand My true nature. In this context, even people with great strength of mind cannot recognize the true nature of this Sai and the difference between the external appearance and the internal aspect."

In another striking example of the power with which the Avatar is invested Swami clearly states the magnitude of His mission in global terms – literally the saving of our planet! This is excerpted from 'God Lives in India' where Sri Karanjia, a reputed Bombay journalist, interviewed Swami in 1976

Karanjia: *The existing situation driven by evil forces to destruction as you have correctly analyzed it, appears to suggest the inevitability of another*

Mahabharata-type war. Does this mean that the salvation for which you are working can be consummated only after a destructive war?

Baba: *The evil must and shall be removed before such a catastrophe takes place. There will be minor wars and skirmishes, of course: these cannot be helped in the existing state of affairs. The Mahabharata war was a different issue altogether. Lord Krishna decreed it and, in fact, led Arjuna to the battlefield in order to rid the world of evil men and ungodly forces.*

"Today, as I told you, the evil is so widespread that humanity itself would be destroyed in a nuclear holocaust in the event of a world war. It is to prevent such a catastrophe that this Avathar has come to raise human consciousness above the existing syndrome of anger, hate, violence and war and save the world from disaster.

This can be achieved only by the reestablishment of the brotherhood of mankind though the Vedas, Shastras (ancient Indian scriptural texts) and all religions with their evangel of dharma to liberate the human race from the chains of karma."

"I always say: let the different faiths exist, let them flourish, let the glory of God be sung in all the languages in a variety of tunes. They should be the ideal. Respect the differences between the faiths and recognize them as valid so far as they do not extinguish the flame of unity."

What are the special objectives of the present Avatar? Swami has clarified this as follows:

"My objective is to establish unity in mankind and to reveal to them the aspect of Divinity which is Brahman (universal consciousness), the only goal one should look for. It is also My duty to make you realize the kind of relationship that should exist between man and man, and to establish that the aspect of Divinity is present and latent in all human beings."

Krishna says that when the Lord descends, He shrouds Himself in the cloak of Maya. It is this Maya which makes people oscillate in their views and sometimes wonder: "Is He God or not?" This applied to Krishna and it applies also to Sai. Concerning this wavering mentality, Swami remarks:

"Sai knows everything. That people are in doubt is due to the Maya of the Avatar."

As mortals, we are understandably captivated by the miracles Swami performs, but from His point of view it almost amounts to trivializing Divinity if Swami is portrayed merely as a magician. Criticizing such an attitude, Swami observes:

"To talk always of the Vibhuti which I give or to talk of the things that I materialize and of the miracles I perform is not correct."

Reference was made earlier to Krishna 's warnings about how fools mistake Him (Slokas 7. 24 and 9 .11). Swami has emphasised the same point with the following words:

"Since you see Me in close proximity, you are not able to assess Me properly. Familiarity has deceived you to the point of delusion. Swami's Form is BIG, VAST ... INFINITE."

"Sometimes, I feel like laughing at the ignorance of people when they attach importance to My miracles. People talk only of such things and forget the more important aspect in Me. The most sacred quality in Me is Prema. This Prema is immeasurable."

Since Swami has declared that He is an *Avatar*, everyone, parrot-like, repeats the same. But how many really understand what they are saying? This point came up once in the conversation between Hislop and Bhagavan, when Hislop said that it was strange that only a few people recognized the *Avatar*. Swami then asked Hislop how he would identify or recognize the *Avatar*, to which Hislop replied, "By faith." Swami then observed,

"Faith is one thing and knowing is another. The Avatar may be known at one time, but doubt and recognition wavers."

This is the most magnificent aspect of Sai - *Prema* or Divine Love. Since He is Love personified, is it any wonder that all the time He talks about Love? He says: *"I am Love, always Love..... God is Love and wherever there is pure Love and Love only that is God. Love is everything, but people do not understand Love."*

Dilating further on the universal nature of his Love He told the many thousands gathered in Kenya in 1968,

"I have come to light the lamp of love in your hearts, to see that it shines day by day with added lustre. I have not come to speak on behalf of any particular dharma (righteousness), like the Hindu Dharma. I have not come on any mission of publicity for any sect or creed or cause; nor have I come to collect followers for any doctrine. I have no plan to attract disciples or devotees into My fold or any fold. I have come to tell you of this Universal unitary faith, this Athmic principle, this path of love, this Dharma of Prema, this duty of love, this obligation to love. "

Nairobi , Kenya 4 July 1968

And further...

"You will learn then that I am Prema itself; that I give only one thing, Aanandha, through the Prema. My task is to distribute solace, courage and Shanthi. That is to say, My characteristics are the ancient authentic ones; only the Manifested Form is new. My desire---if I can put it in so many words---is

this: more and more should yearn for Me. The desire could be realised only if I assume this Form and come among you." 4-3-1962

And yet, though He stresses Love *ad nauseam*, little attention is paid to it. How tragic, for if there is one weapon which can destroy wickedness, it is *Prema* or (selfless) Love. Everyone wants the world to be set right but no one is prepared to invest even a little in *Prema*. Anyone in Sai's place would have become frustrated and quit. God alone is capable of infinite patience and tolerance to put up with this supreme indifference to the Supreme Message. Maybe this has something to do with Swami's divine dispassion, which Swami explains as follows:

"There is no desire in Sai..... Where is there space for desire in Sai? Everything is already Mine. Sai does not think. My will is immediately realized. Whatever it may be, it immediately appears."

At the First World Conference Swami gave us some further details about Himself:

"This is a human form in which every Divine entity, every Divine Principle, that is to say, all the Names and Forms ascribed by man to God, are manifest. Do not allow doubt to distract you; if you only install, in the altar of your heart, steady faith in My Divinity, you can win a Vision of My Reality. Instead, if you swing like the pendulum of a clock, one moment, devotion, another moment, disbelief, you can never succeed in comprehending the Truth and win that Bliss. You are very fortunate that you have a chance to experience the bliss of the vision of the form, which is all forms of all Gods now, in this life itself."

God is often worshipped as Father and Mother. Arjuna too, declared to Krishna that He was Mother, Father, etc. Sai says that He too is Mother and Father rolled into one. Speaking once to students, Swami said:

"This form is the form of Sathya Sai or the embodiment of Truth. In the name Sai Baba, Sa stands for the Divine and Ayi for mother, and so Sai stands for Divine Mother. Baba means father. The name Sai Baba thus means Divine Mother and Father. Like mother, I will be tender and soft and give you happiness, and like father I will punish you, criticize you when needed, and through these methods I take you to a high level..... If an individual who has good qualities comes close to Me, I am sweet to him. On the other hand, I am harsh to one who has bad qualities, and I do not let him come close to Me. It is not that I like one more than the other but I give medicine to cure the bad qualities when they are present."

Krishna has declared that He comes again and again, when circumstances demand. Here is Sathya Sai in our midst who says that He is the *Avatar*. We murmur; but are we convinced that He is Krishna come again? In this context, the following extract from the conversations of Hislop with Baba is most revealing.

Hislop: Swami, it seems to be the case that from the time of Krishna to Sathya Sai.

Sai: Time? I AM KRISHNA ! Where is time?

Hislop: Then, Swami, this has to be the best time of the world for persons to be born?

Sai: Yes. The very best time. Even better than during the lifetime of the Krishna body.

Swami also added:

"Rama was looked upon as a King. He acted so. Krishna also was a King. As God, would He have been put to work as a charioteer?Even in their status as kings, only the residents of their respective cities gave Rama and Krishna homage and worship. The Sai Avatar is the only one where His Divinity is known to all peoples of all religions. This has never occurred before. With Krishna , only the Gopis were aware of Him as God - but they were Rishis [reborn]."

So, we had better count ourselves as being extraordinarily lucky to be the contemporaries of the present *Poona Avatar*, even luckier than those who lived at the time of the *Krishna Avatar*.

One remarkable aspect of the *Avatar*, which hardly ever gets noticed by people, is that the *Avatar* is totally unattached to whatever He is doing. Rama couldn't care one bit whether He was being crowned or whether He was going to the forest. It was so with Krishna , and it is so with Sai too. And just in case we fail to notice, Swami repeatedly stresses that He is (a) totally unattached and (b) equally selfless. These are Divine qualities demonstrated in human form so that ordinary mortals will snap out of their excessive worldly attachments, and rise to nobler heights.

And so, once in a while, the Formless assumes a Form, undergoes a lot of difficulties and even suffering (how much suffering have the Lords of Shirdi and Parthi undergone!), and sets a priceless example of what humans should really be like. In other words, the Lord comes down mainly to give a Message, a Message which is given not merely with words but in fact with His entire life (recall Swami's frequent declaration: "My Life is My Message"). The Message translates as a life-long Mission of which we are all partners. Spelling out our role, Sai says

"There is considerable change in human outlook that I have to bring about. No one can stop Me or deter Me from fulfilling these tasks for which I have come, namely the establishment of the one unchanging Truth. In this task, you have a part to play.....You must take a path by which you can see deep in my heart, and experience the various Divine aspects of Mine. You must understand the all-knowing power in Me. Do not be led away by people who always talk of having got a locket or a watch or a ring from Me. These things have no deep meaning."

Another important point, which everyone is aware of but fails to appreciate, is that *Avatars* subject themselves to the ultimate limitation of a human body.

They are not only born like ordinary humans, they also depart like ordinary humans. It is this union of the divine with the human that creates the wonder ...and the mystery.

On 4th March 1962 Swami declared,

"Even to the best of you only a fraction of the mystery is revealed. You are like a Telugu audience sitting through a Tamil picture, or vice versa. The nuances, the subtler significances, the deeper meanings are all beyond the grasp. My language, My role, My career, My purpose can be understood in a general way only by sitting through the entire film, watching earnestly and vigilantly and trying to get at the meaning of every word and act with patient attention."

It is now over 40 years since Swami spoke those words and 80 years into His life. Can anyone say that they 'know' Him or that they 'understand' His ways and personality. Only a few are physically near the Lord. The rest must watch from 'afar'. We can glimpse, we can feel His touch and presence and yet we can not comprehend this enigma of Sai. Thankfully we do not have to fathom Him. It is enough to rest assured that we are under the protection of this most powerful of Avatars.

*The one who pervades the entire universe,
The one who comes to the rescue of His devotees,
The one of power who endows you with devotion and protects you,
Will not such a Lord of Parthi uplift you?*

- Baba.

MY MESSAGE IS LOVE

EXCERPTS FROM BIRTHDAY DISCOURSES

For those blessed enough to be present during Swami's Birthday festivities the preceding days provide a feast of culture in the form of dramas and musical performances by renowned artists. The whole world is represented in the crowds that flock to join the celebration of the birth of the God of Selfless Love. As the 23rd arrives everyone's hearts expand in great bliss and excitement. During the Divine Discourse the devotees imbibe the theme-note from the Lord - guidance to treasure, ruminate upon and practise throughout the year. The discourses are supercharged with Bhagavan's ardour to guide His devotees away from the pitfalls of human life.

He has often repeated that it is not necessary to drink the whole ocean to know its taste, that it is not necessary to read all scriptures to live a life of joy, peace, and love. It is enough to put into practice one aspect of spiritual teaching. In that light and to celebrate Bhagavan's 80th Birthday, Heart2Heart brings you selections from previous Birthday Discourses for your spiritual delight and inner edification.

Your virtue, your self-control, your detachment, your faith, your steadfastness: these are the signs by which people read my glory. You can lay claim to be a devotee only when you have placed yourself in my hands fully and completely with no trace of ego. You can enjoy the bliss through the experience the *Avatar* confers. Realizing the Lord within you as the motivator is the task for which He comes in human form.

You may benefit from God, but you cannot explain Him. Bring something into your daily practice as evidence of your having known the secret of higher life from me. Show that you have greater brotherliness. Speak with more sweetness and self control. Bear defeat as well as victory with calm resignation, I am always aware of the future and the past as well as the present of every one of you, so I am not so moved by mercy. Since I know the past, the background, the reaction is different. It is your consequence of evil deliberately done in the previous birth, and so I allow your suffering to continue, often modified by some little compensation. I do not cause either joy or grief. You are the designer of both these chains that bind you.

Many of you come to me with problems of health and mental worry of one sort or another. They are mere baits by which you have been brought here. But the main purpose is that you may have grace and strengthen your faith in the divine. But I call you to me and even grant worldly boons so that you may turn Godward. No *Avatar* has done like this before, going among the masses, counseling them, guiding them, consoling them, uplifting them and directing them along the path of *satya, dharma, shanti and prema*.

Cultivate nearness with me in the heart and it will be rewarded. Then you too will acquire a fraction of that supreme love. This is a great chance. Be confident that you will be liberated. Know that you are saved. Many hesitate to believe that things will improve, that life will be happy for all and full of joy, and that the golden age will recur. Let me assure you that this *dharmaswarupa*, that this divine body, has not come in vain. It will succeed in averting the crisis that has come upon humanity.

-1968

The 23rd day of November, which you now honor as the day on which I was born, is only like any other day if you celebrate it in a routine, ritual fashion. Adore man; the adoration reaches Me. Neglect man; you neglect Me. Of what avail is it to worship the Lord and to suppress man, His counterpart? Love for God must be manifested as love for man, and love must express itself as service.

Through love alone -- love acquired through spiritual discipline and shared with all as spiritual discipline -- can peace be attained, by the individual as well as by the nation. My Life is My Message and My Message is Love. That explains why you have gathered hither in hundreds of thousands.

-1975

Why is it that so many lakhs of people have gathered here today? Here there is Divine Love. It is this powerful magnet of Divine Love which has been attracting all the iron filings in the form of human beings. Not a single invitation was sent to anyone. No one was asked to come. What has drawn all people here is the power of Divine Love, the bonds uniting hearts.

The advent (of this *avatar*) took place 64 years ago. All these years, this hand has not been stretched at any time to seek anything from anyone. I have not asked anyone. I will never ask anyone and there will never be an occasion for it. How then are these things happening? Embodiments of Divine Love! I do not expect anything from you. Only, develop love within you. Regard all mankind with fraternal feelings. Recognize all as the children of God. Bear no ill-will or hatred towards anyone. Do not hurt anyone's feelings. Only such a large-hearted attitude will confer on you limitless bliss. If you are celebrating Swami's birthday, this is all that I desire from you. Have unity among yourselves. Strive to revive and promote the glory of *Bharat*.

-1990

You celebrate the birthday of Bhagavaan. But do you follow the teachings? You will experience the fruits of celebrating the birthday only when you follow the teachings. Jesus said: "Love everyone." Christmas is celebrated, but how far does one practice love? None at all. There is love in everyone's heart. Share it at least with ten persons every day. This is seldom done. People are

more keen on receiving than on giving. They are willing to give away only things, which they do not relish. There is no sacrifice in this.

You should not be concerned with how many have come for Swami's birthday but how many are following Swami's teachings. If every devotee is able to influence two persons, soon the whole world will be reformed. Embodiments of love! There is only one thing you have to offer to Me today. Pray that people in all countries, may the entire humanity, should be happy and at peace. "*Lokaas samasthaas-sukhino bhavanthu*" (Let all the worlds be happy). Then alone there will be real unity. Do not wish me rely for the peace and prosperity of India alone. Pray for the welfare of all countries. All are our brothers, whether they are in Pakistan or America or elsewhere. -1993

Today as an offering to Swami, give up meat eating, consuming liquor and smoking. By renouncing these three, you will benefit yourselves as well as society and the nation. If you wish to carry out Swami's aim, renounce from this moment itself these three bad practices. Do not put it off to tomorrow. Take the resolve from this moment. Expecting that you will carry out Swami's wish and thereby promote the well being of your family and the nation, I bless all of you. -1994

It is the 70th birthday of this body. You have to know one important thing. Swami does not need anything. He does not expect any dress. Swami belongs to you. Swami is not separate from you. You are not separate from Swami. That is the intimate relation between Swami and you.

Right from this day our organization should expand and spread all over the world. We should forget individual differences; keep in view the welfare of the society. The welfare of the society is our welfare. Let it be in any village, region or country, we should participate in all activities in all areas, regions and countries. -1995

Today this body enters on its seventy-first year. This body is made up of the five elements and is essentially impermanent. Do not attach much importance to the body. Take to heart the Love principle that is being conveyed to you. My entire life is filled with love (cheers). I have never put anyone at any time to any kind of suffering. I have never done any harm to anyone. I have hated no one. I have no aversion to anybody. What is the reason? It is my love that is transforming others. I am now seventy one. But no one can know what accounts for my condition.

Some may ask why they are not attracted to Swami if that magnet is so powerful. The reason is that these persons are like rusted iron which no magnet can attract. Let them remove the rust and dust and they will be drawn

to the magnet. Their hatred and desires, their envy and greed are the rust and dust covering them. If you cleanse yourselves of these, wherever you are, you will be mine and I will be yours. The hapless and the forlorn, wherever they may be, are the concern of Sai. Promote sacred love in your hearts. That love will not only redeem your lives but will promote the well-being of all around you.

-1996

Keep your association with anyone to the barest minimum. Genuine spiritual aspirants should be particularly careful in eschewing bad company. They should create an environment conducive to their spiritual progress and mental peace. That is the only thing Swami wants. Having come to Prasanthi Nilayam, all of you must become exemplary devotees. Outsiders must feel spontaneously how exemplary is the behavior of Sai students and Sai devotees. That reaction will do you more good than satisfying me.

-1997

What does the word 'Bhagavan' mean? '*Bha*' represents effulgence. '*Ga*' signifies the one who radiates effulgence and '*Va*' symbolises the power to propagate effulgence. Therefore, 'Bhagavan' is one who spreads the shine of effulgence everywhere. He has no form of any kind. 'He is subtler than space and the atom.' How can you attribute any form to such a One? He fills the entire universe, but is not attached to anything. 'Brahma' - God is in you and you are in 'Brahma.' Since we see duality in such non-dualistic principle, we suffer many sorrows. Though He has no particular form, all forms are His.

You need not undertake any difficult spiritual practices to attain Divinity. You need not fast or do any chanting or meditation. Love Him from the depths of your heart. Devotees want to offer many types of service to God. These are the characteristics of faith. When you have such faith, you should not sully your sacred body by partaking wrong food. Gradually, you should intensify your love for God, fear of sin and morality in society. Morality rules the society only when people have love for God since fear of sin follows it.

-2001

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI PART-11 ***(Continued from the previous issue)***

ACT – V: SCENE - II

LAKSHMI BAI: Baba!Baba!.....Baba!Baba!

Baba now calls out to His other devotees.

BABA: Shyama.....Malsa.....are they here?

MALSA: Baba, all of us devotees are near youWe are all here, Baba!.....Ramachandra Patil, Bala Shinde, Lakshmi Bai, Bhadoji, Nimodkar, Appa Kote Patil.....all are here Baba!

With quite an effort, Baba gets up, sits, and begins to talk to them.

BABA: So you are all here.....Only four more days left for Vijaya Dasami *[the last day of the Navarathri Festival that typically comes in September or October; Sirdi Baba gave up His body on Vijaya Dasami day]*..... I am not able to go to Lendi *[the garden created by Baba]* or to seek food.....I think Buti Wada is better for Me than this place. I'll go there. Take Me to the Krishna Temple in Buti Wada.Malsa, take Me to the Krishna Temple. *Baba has a violent coughing fit.*

A DEVOTEE: Baba, Your health is not good. You look very weak. Please Baba, take rest here itself.

ANOTHER DEVOTEE: Baba, after You get better, I shall myself take you there.

BABA: I feel like going there right now. It will be good for me if I go.

MAN: Baba, we cannot go against Your will. But please! If you rest here for three or four days, You can go to Buti Wada by Yourself.

BABA: Does that mean all of you will not come with me now?

MAN: Baba! What are You saying!! Can we live even for a second without You? Surely, we will go wherever You go!

ANOTHER MAN: We are just anxious about Your health Baba, that's all.

BABA: Shyama.....Appa Kote Patil.....Malsa.....Ramachandra Patil.... Why are you all so full of anxiety? Whatever has to happen will happen. You should not worry. Understand?

LAKSHMI BAI: Baba, we are frightened by Your words.

BABA: Lakshmi, why are you afraid? It is an illusion to think we have come to this world. It is another illusion to think we exist here. To believe that we leave this world is yet another illusion! This business of so-called coming and going from this world is all a part of the Lord's Play! It is a part of the secret of Creation! When we came into this world, were we afraid? In the same way, why should be afraid to leave it? We should not be afraid because it is all a part of secret of Creation! That's all. ... It is time for *Bhajan*. All of you go without any worry.GoGo peacefully.....Go please!

MALSA: How can we go, leaving You in Your present state?

BABA: Malsa! You cannot understand My situation but I understand yours! Nothing is permanent in this Creation, because impermanence is the very characteristic of Creation! However, I am Eternal! ... Anyway, you will not understand these things! Go please.....Don't worry about Me. ...I am alright... I really am! *Baba gets up*

BABA: I I say I am alright.....Go away all of you! *Devotees take Pada Namaskar and leave one by one.*

Baba is now alone and all by Himself. He reflects.

BABA: How innocent are these people! They all are thinking about Me but do they know that I am all the time thinking about them?... How can they know!!

GITA FOR CHILDREN - PART 13

Continued from the previous issue....

14. 'No one asks a person, "Why are you happy?". On the other hand, if a person is very sad, every one would try to find out why. The reason for this is simply that happiness is in fact the natural state of a human being. To be technically correct, I should say that Bliss is the natural state of a human being.'

15. 'As a result of this, everyone everywhere is continually trying to secure happiness in one manner or the other. But the trouble is that almost always, almost everyone is using the wrong method!'

16. Arjuna asks, "Krishna, what do you mean by the wrong method?"

17. Krishna replies, 'Patience! I am coming precisely to that. You see Arjuna, people are trying to find happiness in this world, and that is what is wrong.'

18. A puzzled Arjuna asks, 'Wrong? Why is it wrong? Where else except in the world would one seek happiness?'

19. Krishna smiles and replies, 'You are puzzled because you think that the world is all that exists, and that the world is the only place where happiness can be found; that is not correct. This world that you see around you is the **external** world, but there is a much larger and a better world within you; that is the **INNER** world. Real happiness exists in the Inner world and **NOT** in the outer world as people imagine.'

20. 'Arjuna, the external world is a part of Creation and therefore not permanent. As a result, the happiness that the external world can offer is also short-lived; it is transient, it is ephemeral. You may be happy for a while but after that pain would visit you for sure.'

21. 'This external world is what the Wise refer to as a dual world; it is full of "pairs of opposite" such as pleasure and pain, profit and loss, joy and misery, success and failure, and so on. These two members of a pair are like the two sides of a coin. They can never be separated. Can you ever have a coin with just one side?'

22. Arjuna asks, 'So? What exactly are You trying to convey?'

23. Krishna replies, 'Simple! You cannot have joy alone. If there is joy today, be sure you will experience sorrow tomorrow. As I often say, pleasure is an interval between two pains! Pleasure and pain form a package deal; if you pray for pleasure, it would be granted, but then, you must be ready for the pain that would come along with it as a part of the inseparable package! Now do you understand what I am trying to tell you?'

24. Arjuna says slowly, 'Am I right in saying that the happiness that a transient world can offer is also short-lived?'

25. Krishna joyously replies, 'Great! You got it!! The point Arjuna is that man is right in seeking happiness. In fact he must, since Bliss is his true nature. But he must go about it in the proper way. Bliss means **eternal** happiness, and eternal happiness can be found only in the Inner world and **NOT** in the outer world. The outer world is temporary and therefore, the happiness it can offer would also be temporary. How can the temporary offer something that is permanent? Man is not able to understand this simple fact!'

'Arjuna, true happiness is union with God. Now where do you find Me? What is My permanent address? Your Heart is My permanent residence. Look for Me in your Heart, and there you will find Me for sure. Become one with Me there and you can enjoy Bliss forever! Got it?'

27. 'In the external world, happiness comes bundled with sorrow because it is a dual world. A dual world **MUST** have the pairs of opposites. But My world is not a dual world. It is a single world; there are no opposites. Bliss is thus all by itself and has no opposites.'

28. 'Let Me explain the point. Suppose you eat a delicious mango. That would certainly give you great joy. Fine. Now suppose five years after that event you recall your eating this mango. You would probably tell yourself, "Well, that was a very nice mango," that is all. You will not experience the sweet taste once again and feel equally joyous as you first did. With Bliss, it is very different.'

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

GLIMPSES OF WORLDWIDE SAI SEVA

To commemorate Swami's 80th Birthday, we at Heart2Heart thought it would be interesting and inspiring to give you a glimpse of Sai Seva that is happening all round the world! The Sai Organisation, you would know, is active in more than 175 countries spreading the Light of His Love and sharing His love. When a Sai worker puts his/her hand to the field of service it is an expression of His love; it is the guarantee that God is working to salvage our world and that His instruments are ready and willing to play their part.

The Sai Global Mission of Service is helping to bring about the Golden Age and we can all be a part of this renaissance. We bring you below accounts of Sai Seva from a representative 15 different countries here; space is too small to bring you all their details but we are sure your hearts will be warmed from reading them. None of the reports reach the newspapers - but they should reach you. You will be enthused when you read the kind of service being done even in the poorest of African nations like Zambia, Malawi, etc. You will notice that we have not covered India and similarly many other countries, lest the article becomes too long. We plan to feature them in subsequent issues.

(Note to PDF readers: on the web version each country's information was accompanied by the relevant picture)

ARGENTINA

Did you know that a wonderful Community Centre has been built by the Sai organisation at Noccan Kani, Argentina?! The 200 squatter homes there comprise an Indian settlement which does not attract many outside visitors. But the people that society ignores due to fear and ignorance, are just those whom Swami has taught us to render service to. The Sai Organisation there has been helping in incredible ways. They hold periodic Medical Camps where activities include haircuts and even removing lice from the children's hair! The latter practice really shows the dedication of the volunteers. The ladies from the community have been taught to sew from donated material, and now they make all the clothes for their children and families, and thus they are helping to help themselves. This service has really led to transformations in the people's lives.

BRAZIL

Water is a problem in most parts of the world, we know. But, did you know that some Brazilian volunteers have come together and constructed a water pipe to deliver clean water to a very poor community?! Their inspiration, undoubtedly, was Swami's massive drinking water projects. This pipe line required clearing two kilometres of roadway grass (among other tasks). It was accomplished by devotees and members of the community.

Just imagine all the planning that went into this project and the commitment that the Sai workers had to have to see it through. In the beginning the villagers just watched, but enthused by the sight of this Sai Seva, the villagers later joined in the pipe laying work. How wonderful for the volunteers to reflect on, that a whole community can have running water thanks to them willing to be Swami's instruments.

COLOMBIA

Did you know that some Sai Youth from Colombia have been lovingly visiting an old people's home regularly, singing for them and bringing cheer to their lives?! We know there are so many lonely and forsaken elderly people waiting to receive care and love. Instead of wasting their time, the splendid Sai Youth from Bogot , the capital of Columbia, regularly visit a home for the aged that bears the interesting name "Fingerprint of the Grandparents".

What has endeared the youth to the senior citizens is the fact that they not only serve but also sing for the old people, bringing joy and cheer into their otherwise dreary lives. For their part, the elders narrate interesting experiences from the past to the enthralled youth. Altogether, it is a sweet two-way traffic. Giving love costs nothing and the benefits ripple out to others in so many ways.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Did you know that Swami's followers in the Dominican Republic have been developing a refugee camp and serve breakfast everyday of the week to the school children?!

What you see beside is a scene from the refugee camp set up to assist those who fled from Haiti some years ago. The devotees have accomplished some noteworthy improvements to the facilities of the camp. They have built bathrooms and carried out refurbishments to the primary school. That is a lot of time and energy commitment but then serving itself gives the needed inspiration. If only more people knew this and put it into practice!

EL SALVADOR

Did you know that the Sai Organisation in El Salvador, the smallest Central American country (roughly the size of the U.S. state of Massachusetts), has helped to rebuild a Catholic church, after an earthquake!

El Salvador , you might not know, is in an area which is very much prone to earthquakes. In fact, in 2001 when Gujarat (in India) was hit with a massive quake, El Salvador had to face the brunt of two. Inevitably, Sai volunteers rushed to help, and among other things conducted six Medical Camps with the help of several doctors and volunteers. In the months that followed, they also made arrangements for water supply to three communities where the existing system had been destroyed. Just think of all the man-power hours that accomplished all that work - incredible!

GREECE

Did you know that Sai devotees in Greece have helped to stave off many an empty stomach? God is Love and since God is Omnipresent, so is Love. And since Swami's message is Universal, it is not surprising to see the words LOVE ALL SERVE ALL, all over the world on banners, on scarves and of course on T-shirts. We see here devotees in Greece preparing for a *Narayana Seva* (feeding the poor). You can see the care with which the food is prepared in the ladies' expressions.

Such scenes have become quite routine and standard in all continents, and thus many can receive at least one good meal that day. This is the power of Swami's Message and example. Yet consider this small point - how many people would have gone hungry but for Swami's example? One can extrapolate this in so many ways in the other fields of His mission, such as those who would have gone

JAPAN

Did you know that Japanese devotees have answered some of their own less fortunate countrymen's need for food? There is a popular belief that hunger is a problem found only in poor and developing countries.

Not true. Japan is the world's second largest economy, but due to disparity in wealth distribution and income there are people living on the streets here as well and people often go hungry. But how happy they become when served hot meals. They are bringing some cheer to at least a few people, warming other's hearts with the love from the Lord.

KENYA

Did you know that devotees from Kenya are taking the message of Educare to their younger brothers and sisters?

Many imagine that rendering service consists of distributing food, running Medical Camps and so on. Not entirely so; yes, food and clothes do have to be distributed to the needy but grooming young minds is an equally valuable service. Swami has stressed that the 'End of Education is Character' and that character gets developed only when students adhere to the Basic Human Values.

Students and teachers in Kenya are taking Human Values seriously and with great joy too, thanks to dedicated service by Sai devotees. Consider that these children are probably learning about human values for the first time in their lives.

MALAWI

Did you know that thousands in Malawi (one of the poorest nations on Earth) have received medical care from Sai devotees?

It is Swami's Love that directed the medical team to go there to serve the most needy. A 5-day intensive Medical Camp was run by a group of UK doctors and paramedical staff, consisting of about a dozen people - this being just one of the group's regular service activities. The Camp was run in two local hospitals with wonderful co-operation from the local medical staff.

Those who benefited must have wondered at the unique care and love they were shown, which was simply Swami's Love expressed through His instruments.

MEXICO

Did you know that Sai Youth in Mexico spend their valuable time picking up rubbish!

God gave us a wonderful and beautiful planet to live on but, through carelessness and thoughtless actions we are polluting the planet in innumerable ways - throwing garbage is one of them. People crowd to the beaches because they are beautiful and inviting but having gone there, they carelessly leave rubbish. Thanks to technology, most of the polluting material is non-biodegradable, which makes matters even worse.

But instead of viewing the beach solely as a place of fun, the Sai Youth in Mexico have ideas more of their civic responsibilities and collect the garbage littered on the beach. A group of twenty or so collect about 40 bags of rubbish during the weekends and leave them at a designated area for garbage trucks to pick them up on Monday mornings. If more people had such feelings the world would be a blessed place.

NEW ZEALAND

Did you know that elderly people need so much care - care that Sai devotees are keen to offer.

In olden times, elders, especially parents, were looked after in old age by their sons and daughters. But such is the nature of so-called progress that today, even the elderly have been forgotten. In rich countries, those who can afford to move into special senior citizens centres but those who are not so lucky face a hard time.

However, they are not entirely forgotten, for the loving God sends His devotees to serve such people and bring at least some cheer in their dreary lives. Such Sai Seva goes on silently in all parts of the world all the time. Sharing one's time and energy with elderly people is possibly the most easy and rewarding seva to practice - have you found this to be true?

NIGERIA

Did you know that the Nigerian Sai Organisation have been regularly running leprosy camps for over TWENTY years now?

Leprosy is a curable disease but courageous people are needed to overcome prejudice and serve the sufferers. Sai volunteers in Nigeria are doing precisely that. Thanks to this many lepers have been cured and even rehabilitated.

Incidentally, when patients come to the clinic, not only are they bandaged and given medicines that are a part of Multi-Drug Therapy, but are also given fruits and snacks as a token of Swami's Love.

RUSSIA

Did you know that UK Sai devotees have conducted medical camps in Russia?

What is now Russia was the centerpiece of the erstwhile USSR. The Soviet Republic was officially wedded to atheism, and the practice of religion in any form was frowned upon, as well as discouraged. The sudden collapse of Communism changed all that, and literally overnight, Sai awareness expanded dramatically all across Russia. This is indeed a miracle, especially considering that no one like Hislop or Murphet specifically took Baba's Message to Russia. The deep yearning was there in Russian hearts and Swami responded in His own way.

One major benefit has been the Medical Camps now being conducted by UK doctors in Russia. Once, it was the State that provided health care but now the sick are left to fend for themselves as best as they can. Luckily, many have been able to experience His Love via compassionate service rendered by Sai devotees.

SOUTH AFRICA

Did you know that South African devotees regularly visit slums and serve the indwellers?

For decades, Swami has directed the attention of His students to rural service. There was a time when He physically used to take students and teachers to villages to join Him in doing such service. Since the year 2000, rural service has assumed a new format via the famous *Gramma Seva*. As Swami says *Gramma Seva* is Rama Seva, meaning that service to man is really service to God. Inspired by the wonderful *Gramma Seva* now being done every year by Swami's students, many devotees overseas have started doing the same.

Here we see an example where devotees in South Africa are bringing groceries, vegetables and blankets to the residents of a slum near Johannesburg, this being a regular feature of their service activities. This again needs time, energy and money commitment - all inspired by the Lord.

ZAMBIA

Did you know that the Zambian Sai Organisation has a big programme to help street kids? Street kids are a problem even in affluent countries. It is no surprise then that Africa has its share, in fact more than its share, thanks to AIDS which has made thousands of children orphans. In Zambia, Sai devotees are caring for street kids in many ways, one of them being periodic distribution of not only food but such necessities as soap and toothpaste, quite scarce in Zambia, indeed in Africa in general. Of course when winter comes, the kids all receive blankets, whereupon they break into a loud cheer.

There are many thousands of people who have been inspired by Swami's Love and are working for the good of the world. What we have collected are only *snapshots in time*. They were not performed for the publicity camera or done as a one-off. A multitude of service activities are continuing *right now* as you read this, all over the world, fulfilling a variety of needs. So let us not forget that when we are serving, thousands are serving with us!

If you know of such inspiring happenings in your town or country, please do share it with us at h2h@radiosai.org.

Jai Sai Ram!

SAI SEVA IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE KATRINA

In the last issue we carried a feature article on hurricane Katrina – “Hurricane Katrina – Are There Any Lessons To Be Learnt?” There we talked in brief about the disaster's effects and how hurricanes are formed, and then elaborated on what Swami has to say on such Natural disasters and also through an example of the Madhurantakam temple we brought out how God's Grace can mitigate an enraged Nature.

We could not bring you any accounts of Sai Seva in the Katrina affected regions then. So we are very happy to present you now an account of the service that was carried out by the Young Adults (YAs) from the North Central Region of USA.

Katrina hurricane necessitated a mammoth relief response from the US government and international aid agencies. What could Sai Youth do in this situation? To have a greater impact, they decided to concentrate their activities on a particular town - Tylertown in Mississippi - where the needs were considerable

Quickly, the core group of YAs – 21 of them from 10 cities of USA - networked and a coordinating team was formed a week after the catastrophe. The next two weeks they assessed likely needs, planned transportation and organised the aid from various Sai Centres to be dropped-off at a central point. Sai Devotees from 7 cities came forward to contribute their bit to the work of YAs. The main areas of concern were supplies of food to about 50 families; trees needed clearing and roofs needed repairing.

We must mention that the YAs spent as much time or more in planning as in execution. And that's precisely the reason why it was so very nicely organised and the recipients of the Seva were immensely pleased.

They all came together at a church in Tylertown on September 30th 2005 with a shipment of supplies. It then took 24 hours to unload and sort the items into packages for personal use. The items were distributed at the church and also to people's homes for the housebound and elderly (above and to the left). Tree clearance was also undertaken. And roof repair work. (Each sentence in the above paragraph accompanied by the relevant picture on the web)

Faced with such an appalling scale of disaster these young people were inspired by Swami to simply do what they could. They are only a small representation of the outpouring of Seva that was undertaken by different Sai Groups, Sai Centres and Sai devotees individually in the aftermath of the Katrina and Rita. Indeed having made the necessary visits and assessments the same team is returning to three other rural areas at the time of Swami's Birthday to continue this 'American Grama Seva'. A medical team visit is being organised as well.

The response has been touching, as can be seen in this example from the Pastor of Lee's church where the distribution was actually carried out, who

said with tears in his eyes, *'I cannot believe so many of you have traveled 800 miles to bring along 6,000 lbs. of food supplies, I feel that you have brought Jesus with you, even if you came with empty hands we would have been thrilled with your Love and Compassion'.*

There is a lot of inspiring Seva happening, we will bring you more in the next issue of H2H.

Jai Sai Ram!

PRASHANTI DIARY

Chronicles of Heaven on Earth

The months of September and October are festive months in the Parthi Calendar. While the *Krishnajanmastami* and the Ganesh Chaturthi festivals were covered in the last issue, in this issue we bring a report on the Dasara festival and the '*Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna*' that is conducted every year during this festival. While the *yagnam* (or the ritual fire sacrifice) is performed in the morning during the entire week, the evening too provides a rich fare for the sincere seeker - the *Prashanti Vidwan Maha Sabha*. The Prashanti Vidwan Mahasabha was started in 1972 wherein learned pundits were invited to give discourses on various aspects of spirituality to the congregation. In recent years however, the speakers are drawn mostly from the staff and students of the Institute and elder devotees.

Along with Dasara festival also occurs the Grama Seva activities by the students of the SSSIHL, where the students actually go and distribute food packets and clothes to every individual household in villages in the 3 *mandals* (sub-districts) of Puttaparthi, Bukkapatnam, and Kottacheruvu.

In this report we cover all these functions. While these functions overlap and are intimately intertwined as they happen almost simultaneously, for the sake of clarity and comprehension we report them separately. In a departure from our normal chronological reporting of events, we bring alive for you first (through photographs and a descriptive accompanying text) the major cultural programs performed by the students during this past month, before we go on to report on the Dassera and the Grama Seva activities.

CULTURAL PROGRAMMES

SEPTEMBER 25, 2005: A BHANGRA DANCE BY THE PRASHANTI NILAYAM CAMPUS

In the evening of Sept. 25th, the students of the Prashanti Nilayam campus provided a visual treat to the audience when they performed a vibrant and pulsating dance form from the fertile valleys of the Punjab known as the *bhangra*.

The *bhangra* dance is noted for its energetic almost martial movements and pounds with abundant energy. The dance steps included a display of rigorous acrobatics and gymnastics that had the audience enthralled. The 'farmers' looked elegant in their rural outfits and I heard that it took 12 minutes to tie the *turban* (the head-dress) for each 'farmer'.

The dance focussed on the life of a farmer, his routine, worries and the blessed moments of his life. The dance told the story of how a typical Punjabi farmer thanks God on waking for the fitful sleep and also seeks His grace for all activities to be performed during the day. He then goes to till the fields and begins work only after expressing a prayer to the tilling instruments. The

dance leads the audience through the various stages of cultivation - tilling, sowing, weeding and so on. After months of work, when the crops are almost grown, the monsoon plays hide and seek and the poor farmer is in danger of losing his entire crop.

When the farmers are bemoaning the forthcoming loss, there enters a sage who tells them to pray to God for showers. All of them then sing together and along expected lines the rains pour profusely resulting in a bumper harvest. The ecstatic farmers harvest the fields and remove the wheat from the chaff in a joyous spirit of celebration and thanksgiving. The wheat is then packed in large sacks and trundled off to the market; with the farmers dancing and singing all the way there and back and continually expressing their love to God and thanking Him for providing everything for them.

The dance was choreographed by 2 devotees from Chandigarh - Mr. Desraj Singh and Mr. Bhupinder Singh; they not only taught the students the dance steps but Mr Desraj also played the *dhol* (the native Punjabi percussion instrument) and sang the Punjabi song that provided the backdrop for this unusual and unique cultural event.

SEPTEMBER 28, 2005 : 'SATHYAM VADA, DHARMAM CHARA' - A DRAMA BY THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

This standout drama entitled - '*Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara*' meaning "Speak the Truth and Perform Righteous Actions" was conducted by the high school students in the classical language of Sanskrit to the astonishment and wonderment of all present in Sai Kulwant Hall. Incidentally '*Sathyam Vada Dharmam Chara*' is also the Institute motto.

The play (which started with an introductory dance) was conducted in two parts.

The first part '*Sathyam Vada*' details the story about a thief Mahendra who promises a sage that he will speak the truth under all circumstances. Mahendra on one of his stealing missions makes the acquaintance of the king who occasionally went around his kingdom in disguise to feel the pulse of the people. They decide to rob the king's treasury. Mahendra finds 3 huge diamonds in a chest in the king's treasury and steals one and gives one to his "friend" - the king in disguise. He leaves the 3rd one behind in spite of the king's entreaties to steal it also. The next morning the king, now out of his disguise, asks his minister to check the treasury. The minister reports that all the 3 diamonds are missing. The king summons Mahendra to his court who confesses (truthfully in accordance with his vow) that he stole only 2 diamonds from the treasury. The king then finds the treasurer had kept the 3rd diamond and hence sends him to jail and installs the truthful Mahendra in his place.

The second part of the play '*Dharmam Chara*' tells the story of a sage Mahatapa, who has accumulated great powers as a result of severe austerities. Once angered at a bird he turns it to ashes with a glance since it

left its droppings on him. This sage then goes to the house of a chaste woman to ask for alms. She angers him by asking him to wait till she finishes serving her husband. When the sage shows his anger, the woman mocks him by asking if she is a mere bird that he could reduce to ashes. This astonishes the sage and the woman explains that she got all her knowledge merely by the *dharma* of serving her husband and not through *sadhana* or spiritual practice. She asks him to go to Mithilapura and meet a butcher by name Dharmavyadha.

When the sage reaches the butcher's shop, he is asked by the butcher whether the chaste woman has sent him to Mithilapura to meet him. Again being shocked at his knowledge the sage wonders if the butcher has done *tapas* (severe austerities) or *sadhana* to gain such powers. The butcher explains that he is simply a devotee of his parents and offers all he does to God. The sage tries to argue with the butcher about his vocation and is in turn questioned whether what he did to the bird was non-violence. The sage gets transformed and the boys bring the drama to a close by singing a touching finale song for Swami.

OCT 12: A DRAMA BY THE STUDENTS OF THE BRINDAVAN CAMPUS ON THE LIFE OF THE POET-SAINT SURDAS

On the evening of October 12, after the completion of the *Poorna Ahuti* or the concluding session of the week-long *yagna* and also after the completion of the *grama seva* activities, the Brindavan students touched everyone's heart through a poignant portrayal of episodes from the life of the blind saint Surdas. Surdas is very popular as an exemplar of the tradition of Bhakthi Yoga as he willingly chose to live a life of darkness for he felt there was no sight worth seeing other than the magnificent form of Lord Krishna.

In the opening scene the sage is wandering through a village singing *bhajans* when his gaze is attracted by a lissom lass in front of a hut. Surdas feels miserable that worldly pleasures still bind him and so he plucks his eyes out with thorns from a nearby bush, as these eyes had distracted him away from God. He is then shown facing the ridicule of the villagers for being a hypocrite and a show-off.

Surdas' life takes a turn for the better when he gets a guiding light in the form of Guru Vallabhacharya, who shows Surdas the right path of devotion to Krishna. Surdas now intensifies his quest for the vision of Lord Krishna, and this intensity is reflected in his pining songs. The boys sing "*Maili chadar....*" very feelingly to the intense delight of the crowd. Surdas settles in Braj and propagates the glorious *leelas* of Krishna through his songs, which instilled in the common man a sense of devotion for God. His immense popularity makes some jealous people try to kill him by leading the blind Surdas to a deep well.

But Surdas is rescued by a cowherd boy and Surdas soon realizes that it is the divine shepherd Himself - his beloved Lord Krishna. So he begs Krishna for His *Darshan* which Krishna grants him by restoring his sight. After the divine darshan, in a moving scene, Surdas asks Krishna to take his eyes back

as he felt that there was nothing else worth seeing. The men who tried to kill him were also witness to this scene, immediately repent and sincerely seek Surdas' forgiveness.

The closing scene shows Surdas who after many long years of contemplation and service to Lord Krishna has grown old physically but his passion for the Lord is still as intense as ever. He now begins to see God in everyone and addresses them as Krishna. He feels a sudden urge to leave his body and merge with the Lord. The Lord then appears and in a touching scene He tries to convince Surdas to remain for some more time in the world. The sage pleads piteously to be allowed to reach His Lotus Feet and the Lord finally relents.....

The boys brought the entire story to life with their attractive costumes, soul lifting melodious songs and realistic portrayal. The scene in which Surdas plucks his eyes out was especially touching. Swami profusely blessed all the actors and also spoke lovingly a few words with the boy who portrayed the role of Surdas.

GRAMA SEVA - SERVING IN THE VILLAGES

OCT 4 TO 12 - A REPORT ON THE 2005 GRAMA SEVA ACTIVITIES

Ever since it's inception in the year 2000, the *grama seva* or village service has been a quintessential student activity. All the Institute and the High School students during their Dassera Holidays distribute food-packets, *laddus*, and clothes at the door-step of every household in the 3 sub-districts of Puttaparthi, Bukkapatnam and Kottacheruvu as messengers of Sai. This year the *grama seva* activities lasted for 9 days (from Oct 4th to 12th), so the students could then prepare for their exams beginning from the 19th of October. It was quite late - only on Oct 2 that Sri S.V. Giri, the former Vice-Chancellor of the Institute, made a public announcement about the *grama seva* at Swami's behest. Sri Giri further announced that T-shirts and caps were going to be distributed that day to all the students. Though the public announcement was made late, a lot of planning and preparation had already taken place.

All the ingredients for the food preparation and the clothes that had to be distributed to each household (apart from the T-shirts and caps for students) had already been procured. The infrastructure to support this activity like vehicles for transportation, communication systems so each vehicle can keep in touch with the home base, police security to accompany each truck, additional requirements of *seva dal* etc. was already in place. God always works silently but most efficiently.

After the announcement was made things moved at a breakneck speed! A group of boys were sent to Poornachandra to bring the bundles of T-shirts and caps which were stacked in the Bhajan Hall. The T-shirts were then distributed to each student by Sri S.V. Giri in the divine presence, as the warden called out the name of each student.

The Anantapur (ATP) girls were not forgotten. Swami also had saris distributed to them, and even gave an audience to all the girl students and their teachers on October 4 inside the Bhajan Hall. In this private discourse, He told them that character is the end (goal) of education. He asked them to remove bad thoughts from their mind and avoid needless and unnecessary talk. He emphasized that *Namasmarana* is the panacea for all ills.

Following the public announcement about the *Grama Seva*, the organization infrastructure was quickly put in place. Committees were formed and group leaders identified. An initial distribution schedule was drawn up and survey parties sent to the villages to evaluate the condition of the roads as well as update the population count of the villages. All the boys were divided into 6 groups with A and B batches, so that the distribution schedule could be alternated between the 2 groups, providing some needed rest in between (however quite a few boys distributed on all the days without any break). To support the Dassera activities going on simultaneously the *Vedam* and *Bhajan* boys were identified and exempted from the *grama seva*. And all this was done within a mere 24 hours.

Meanwhile on the cooking front, hectic and frenetic activity was taking place. Laddu making in Parthi still remains a labour intensive activity (not being mechanised in spite of the availability of laddu making machines) as it provides a glorious *seva* opportunity for hundreds of ashram ladies. The "laddu labour force" was mobilised and deployed so that 30,000 laddus were ready for distribution by the wee hours of the morning of the 4th and every day thereafter.

Food Preparation During Grama Seva

(The preparation and packing of the food-packets is so well organised that it perhaps merits its own tale.) A shed has been allotted for this purpose behind the North blocks. In the back of this shed, are huge cooking vessels where hundreds of kilos of rice are cooked beginning at around 6 PM for the next day's distribution. After a batch of rice is cooked, it is spread out to allow it to cool fast.

After cooling the cooked white rice is collected into a "white mountain". A *pulihora* paste (spicy tamarind paste) is prepared separately by the cooks. Now some ashram ladies and the ATP students and teachers mix portions of the white rice scooped out from the mountain with the spicy paste in big vessels. Once the rice and paste is mixed into *pulihora*, the packing activity begins.

The packing usually starts around 10 PM when the ATP students and teachers come in, and goes on till 2 or 3 AM. A group of 5 girls take one big vessel of the mixed rice. They sit in a circle and about 400 grams of rice is ladled into a 'packing leaf'. This leaf is folded neatly and then wrapped in a newspaper and held in place by 2 rubber bands. Viola - a food packet is now ready! On a given day an average of about 27,000 food-packets are made daily for distribution involving about 500 students and 250 *seva dal* making up the support staff. The prepared food-packets made ready by the ATP students (see box) during the night are stacked into crates (about 90 per) and these

crates are in turn loaded into the distribution trucks in the wee hours of the morning, according to a loading schedule that depends on the population and the number of households to be visited by that truck that day.

The distribution trucks are numbered from 1 through 38 and designated to one of the 6 groups. In addition there are 6 tractor trailers (one for each group) that are used to transport additional food-packets, *laddus* and clothes. Another additional 6 sport utility vehicles (SUMO trucks) are used to provide field supervisory support as well as facilitate quick inter and intra group transfer to deliver excess stock from one area to another village that is experiencing a shortage.

On the morning of October 4th, the anticipation in Sai Kulwant Hall (SKH) was high. The boys had all dressed in their *grama seva* T-shirts and caps. Swami too arrived with the contagious enthusiasm of a school-boy going on a picnic. After all serving the poor is a cause closest to the Lord's heart. The day's distribution activity follows a set pattern. After Swami's arrival to the Mandir, either the Vice-Chancellor or the Brindavan Warden approach Swami for His benediction to start the day's distribution. Swami beams and immediately gives His blessings. Then 2 boys bring buckets of tamarind rice and laddus so that the Lord can consecrate them into *prasadam* by blessing them.

The boys then disperse quickly, put on their shoes and get into their respective trucks. All the 38 trucks are lined in order on the main road of the Ashram. A head-count is taken, the food-packets, *laddus* and clothing are counted to ensure the loading is correct as per plan and the okay signal is given to the "home base" controller on the wireless communication system. When all the trucks are ready the convoy rolls out and the boys shout "Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Babaji Ki Jai" when each truck passes the SKH. In the past the *grama seva* had always started with Puttaparthi on the first day and then moved out from this centre. In a marked departure this time around, the distribution started from the distant villages - the more difficult to reach villages on the periphery (so that they are tackled first when the boys are fresh) and then work their way towards the centre of the distribution circle.

Here is the personal account of the chronicler of Prashanthi Diary who went on all days with the students to give us a first person account of the whole service activity: On the 8th of October I decided to accompany the Grama Seva group. I joined Group 5 which was going to distribute in the village of Brahmanapalli. Though relatively close to Parthi if the distance is measured as the crow flies, yet it was extremely remote, nestled as it was in the deepest recesses of the hills lining the Valley of Peace. Though the path less travelled to this remote outpost was just an apology for even a dirt track, strewn with pebbles, stones and even boulders, the scenery was stunning and mind-blowing. Intricate granite formations regularly punctuated the undulating greenery. Multi-hued granite rocks lined the top of the hills like the ramparts of a fort all ready to repel foreign invasion. Boulders of innumerable sizes were strewn all along the road's edge like a herd of buffaloes that had just come to slake their thirst at a mountain stream.

After nearly 90 minutes of travel, first along perhaps 20 kms of paved road and then about 8-10 kms on a uneven, bouncy track that a mountain goat would have envied, we finally neared our destination. It was just 10:15 AM on Saturday morning and *Rahu Kalam*, that inauspicious segment of time lasted till 10:30 AM. So we stopped just a kilometre from the village and decided to have our snacks and enter the village after *Rahu Kalam* had made its exit.

The boys gingerly stepped out mesmerised by the scenery. After the initial oohs and aahs, they got down to the more serious business of feeding their hunger pangs. The snack was a small but tasty 'veggie burger' washed down with a glass of *majjiga* - spicy buttermilk. Then after posing for a few pictures we triumphantly entered the village, perhaps their first motorised vehicle in many weeks. Immediately we were surrounded by the village children. The first item on the agenda, per Swami's instruction, was *nagarsankirtan* - or singing the Lord's name through the streets to elevate and spiritualise the atmosphere. We asked the village children to join the group and they did so eagerly clapping their hands in glee.

The village was laid out like a capital 'T', so we went up till we reached the fork, went down one end, returned and went all the way back to the other end, in just a matter of minutes. Usually the *nagarsankirtan* is terminated at the village temple if there is one. This relatively small village did not have a temple and we suspect no school either. This village had around 150 to 200 houses - surprisingly well constructed perhaps as a protection against the extreme winter chill in this elevated area. Due to the layout and the smallness of the village, it was decided to distribute as 1 group rather than break-up into smaller groups.

The distribution routine is always the same. Generally the teacher in charge walks up to the home and greets them with a cheery "Sai Ram" and informs them that we have been sent by "Puttaparthi Sai Baba" to give them *prasadam*. Then we ask how many inhabitants there are in the house and we give enough food packets and laddus so that there is one for each resident. Then the teacher or any other elder gives one sari and one dhoti for each household along with a small picture of Swami for them to cherish and worship. Then we take leave with a *namaste* and a chorus of "Sai Rams" from all the boys and move on to the next house. The distribution moves fast since the houses are fairly close to each other. Occasionally the boys cuddle a small goat or scratch a calf behind the ears. City slickers getting their rural education! All the village folk and their animals seem to live in a harmony and rhythm that seem very natural far away from the trappings of "civilisation".

Soon we are done and are ready to leave. One of the villagers offers me a "peacock egg", perhaps one of his most prized possessions. I do not know if he meant it to be gourmet breakfast fare or he hoped that I would incubate and rear the pea-chick as a pet. I think wistfully of the reactions of the neighbours in my 6th floor flat and politely decline his magnanimous offer and pat him gently on the back to express my appreciation for his gesture.

And then we are off. On the way we stop, perhaps a few hundred meters away, to distribute to 3 houses lying in the outskirts. We learn that there is a *thanda* - a tribal hamlet - a clutch of about 50 houses just a kilometre away. It is a place so small that it is not marked on any map but we have already exhausted all our stocks. We return the way we had come on the bouncy roads till we link up with the other buses close to the main road. They have some excess stock, so a confab takes place and the excess stock is transferred to our truck. We decide to go back all the way to serve the people of the *thanda*. The cartographers may have forgotten them but God does not!

We reach the village to a warm welcome even though the villagers did not expect us. The village dogs, normally a friendly lot, growl menacingly at us since they are so unused to strangers. We quickly befriend them by giving them the broken bits and pieces of *laddus*. We pray that Swami's *prasadam* will bless them with human bodies in their next lives. The boys are bone tired but go about spiritedly to do Swami's work. We cheerfully do the *nagarsankirtan* and then finish the distribution. It is a few minutes past 1 o'clock when we wend our way back home.

On the way back we stop at a huge granite boulder where another truck distributing in the vicinity has also stopped. We exchange notes, make a little small talk and have our lunch of the same *pulihora* and *laddus* that we have distributed. But it is the water that is most refreshing after the physical work on this hot, sultry day. And we hurry back so that we may have time to grab a quick shower and reach SKH before 4 PM and listen to Swami's discourse that evening as part of the Prashanti Vidwan Mahasabha celebration.

In the 9 days of the *grama seva* the students visited 145 villages in the 3 mandals and touched 50,000 households. Almost 2,70,000 food-packets and 3,00,000 *laddus* had been distributed by the boys. Though the statistics are impressive, above all the *grama seva* is a love story. It is a story of the love between the Lord and the most destitute of His devotees.

So though in this report we have tried to convey to you the blessing that is the *grama seva*, still words are so inadequate to express the deep-felt feelings. How do we convey the glow that lights up in the villagers' eyes when they see the yellow *Grama Seva* bannered truck enter their village? How do we express the hope that kindles in their breast and the tears of gratitude that roll down their cheeks when they see that God has not forgotten them but has sent us as His messengers? How do we describe the sheer joy in the small children when we give them a tasty *laddu*? And how to verbalize the deep feeling of satisfaction when we distribute a food-packet because for some this small food packet is perhaps their only meal of their day?

For as Sri S.V. Giri said when he announced the *grama seva* on Oct 2, 2005, that the *grama seva* has to be done in the spirit that there are no givers and there are no takers, for it is only God who gives, it is God who receives and it is eventually God as the inner fire Who digests the food! And my lingering memory of the 2005 *grama seva* is the sight of this elderly gentleman in Obuladevarapalli village who was singing praises of Swami beside our truck

after we had finished our distribution and continued singing even as our trucks pulled away enveloping him in the dust. And all of us who had participated also felt blessed. For all we did was distribute the food that God had prepared. We distributed the clothes that He had bought. We were transported in trucks that He had paid for. And we were the beneficiaries of the praise and blessings that the villagers heaped on us. Only God's love is so selfless, so encompassing, and so universal!!

DASARA CELEBRATIONS IN PRASHANTHI NILAYAM

Oct 6 to 12: REPORT ON THE VEDA PURUSHA SAPTHAHA GNANA YAGNA

On October 6 was celebrated one of the most popular festivals in the Prashanti Calendar - the Dassera celebrations. The Dassera festival marks a period of intense and sustained devotion for an entire week, a period that is most conducive for a devotees' spiritual progress. The morning programme during the week long celebration is known as the Veda Purusha Saptaha Gnana Yagna. The first days celebrations begin in Sai Kulwant Hall where Swami gives the learned priests the clothes they will wear to perform the ceremonies for the entire week.

The procession of priests led by a richly caparisoned Sai Geeta, Swami's pet elephant, then start for Poornachandra Auditorium after they have been blessed by Swami. The procession is also followed by the Veda chanting Institute students in their bright red dhotis and cream coloured *angavastram* (upper cloth). After reaching Sai Kulwant Hall the *Yagna* ceremony starts which will be repeated for the next 6 days.

An additional item on the first day is the traditional lighting of the fire by rubbing two sticks to spark a fire which is then kept burning over the next 7 days.

A number of activities take place simultaneously during the *Yagna*. The pride of place at the centre of the dais is a sacrificial pit made of bricks where the *Rudra Homam* is conducted by 3 or 4 priests reciting the Vedic hymns as they pour offerings of clarified butter into the flames that has now been kindled. A number of priests sit at the side and recite the Vedam while the Institute students also contribute in the background.

On the left of the central 'sacrificial pit' a young priest performs the *Suryanamaskar* or Sun Worship, circumambulating the offerings while chanting hymns and then prostrating to it. When Swami is present He first offers Him a rose and the circumambulates Him, for after all He is the very Source of the Vedas. Behind this priest doing the *suryanamaskar*, there are 3 learned elderly priests who continually read (*parayana*) from the sacred epics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, and the Bhagavatham during the entire week. This is to heighten the spiritual atmosphere as well as to emphasize the central role of reading the epics in a devotee's spiritual

sadhana. At the extreme a priest performs the worship of the Sri Chakra, a mystic symbol representing the Goddess Mother.

Ceremonial Lighting of the Sacred Fire

The *Yagna* traditionally begins with the ceremonial lighting of the Sacred Fire, while the chanting of the *Vedas* is carried on in the back-ground. A spark is kindled by friction, when two priests rotate a piece of wood to and fro against a stationary block of wood exerting the necessary pressure so that the generated heat ignites into a small spark and lights up the dry bundle of hay. The small spark is nursed with expert care till the fire catches on and very soon the sacrificial pit is transformed into a merrily blazing fire which cannot be extinguished easily even by a strong gust of wind.

Our spiritual *sadhana* is similar. We have to use the name of the Lord - *Namasmara* to initially kindle the spark of devotion in our dry hearts. The kindled spark has to then be nursed with care and protected against the wind of *maya* only by recourse again to His name. Once our *bhakti* has been kindled to a merry blaze the billowing winds of *maya* cannot extinguish it but only serve to make it burn brighter. On the right of the stage which the audience cannot see clearly, the worship of the Mother Goddess is performed by the priest who normally performs the ceremonies in Sai Kulwant Hall. This place is also reserved for performing the daily *Arati*, which is taken whenever directed by Swami.

This routine is the same on all the days of the week-long *Yagna*. The last day is called Vijayadasami and that is when the *Poornahuti*, or the Valedictory offering, is made to the sacrificial fire. An expectant and spiritual fervour pervades Poornachandra Hall as everyone is expectantly waiting to see Baba, as the *Veda Purusha*, accept the final offerings of the *Yagna*. Amidst the sonoric chanting of the *Vedic* hymns, Swami seats Himself behind the sacrificial fire and witnesses and blesses all the numerous sacrifices offered to the fire by the priests, including fruits and precious stones. After the conclusion of the *yagna*, the priests circumambulate Swami, and one by one prostrate at His Feet in gratitude for the chance to officiate in a *Yagna* conducted by God Himself!

And then comes the event that everyone has been waiting for. Swami comes down the stage with a priest holding the sanctified water in a large silver bowl. With a large brush, which Swami often dips in the bowl, He whisks this sanctified water at the faces of everyone in the aisle as a measure of blessing. Bhagavan goes around the hall sprinkling holy water and blessing the students and the staff, the men and the women, seated in the front rows of Poornachandra with this holy shower of Divine Grace! On receiving this great blessing, the crowd becomes almost delirious and prays fervently to be included in the blessing.

And soon it is over. The *Veda Purusha Saptaha Gnana Yagna* that had been conducted for an entire week comes to a close. The crowd lingers on,

reluctant to leave. An announcement is then made that the students will be coming to each room in the Ashram to distribute the *prasadam* as part of the Grama Seva, for traditionally on this last day of Vijayadasami the *prasadam* is distributed inside the Ashram to bring the *Grama Seva* also to a close. And the crowd slowly disperses, but the pleasant memories linger and the ears still ring with the Vedic chants.

Oct 06 - 12 EVENINGS: PRASHANTI VIDWAN MAHASABHA

The Prashanti Vidwan Mahasabha is conducted during the weeklong *yagna* celebrations. While the ritualistic ceremonies are conducted in the mornings by the learned priests, the evenings are devoted to speeches on Indian culture and spirituality usually by the teachers and the students of the Institute or perhaps elders blessed by Swami. Following this of course, is the Divine Discourse on every day of the week. The whole exercise has a 3 fold mission: *Veda poshana*, *Vidwa rakshana* and *bhaktha rakshana* (nurturing of the Vedas, propagation of spiritual knowledge and guidance of devotees in their spiritual pursuit).

These priceless divine discourses are collected together and have been published as a book by the Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust over the years for the benefit of devotees and mankind. This year too was no different. There were speeches galore, perhaps 3 or 4 speakers before Swami rose slowly to give His mesmerising message to humanity. This year too there were a total of 18 speakers, each of whom gave a gem of a speech before the nectarine divine discourse. Carrying all the 18 talks here will make this report very lengthy, you will agree, so, off and on we will give the transcription of the talks in H2H articles.

Maybe, you have already heard the talks on Radiosai as we have aired all the talks during the Dasara week. We will be re-airing them again in a few days along with the Divine Discourses of Bhagavan. Those of you who do not have Radio Sets can listen on the internet, please go to our site www.radiosai.org and click on "web stream" button on the home page.

We will bring here a gist of some of Swami's discourses to give you a flavour of the range and profundity of the topics discussed during this year's Prashanti Vidwan Mahasabha. On the 7th of October Swami chose to speak on the ephemeral nature of life and the goal of Man. Swami said,

"Man spends his life time deeply enmeshed in pursuing ephemeral things. He is carried away by unproductive thoughts depending upon the particular stage of growth he is passing through. Ultimately he realises that, he has, in fact, wasted his precious human birth in vain pursuits. Is this the real nature of a human being? Is this what he has to learn in life? These activities are momentary like water bubbles. They cannot provide lasting happiness to man. It is mere foolishness to spend one's time in such futile pursuits".

Swami related the story of the Pandavas to illustrate this point. He talked about the demise of Krishna and how Arjuna lost all his power after the

passing away of the Lord and was unable to protect the queens and Gopikas. He then went on to describe the scenes in the court of Hastinapura when the news of Lord Krishna's passing reached them. Queen Kunti immediately shed her mortal coil in despair.

The Pandavas also decided to start on their Northward journey after crowning King Parikshit. Swami related how the Pandavas do all these 3 things simultaneously with the same equipoise and strength of mind without any attachment to the body - cremating their mother, crowning Parikshit as the emperor and making preparations for their continuous Northward journey to the Himalayas and the end of their sojourn on earth. Then addressing the students, Swami said,

"You are young and have a long life ahead of you. Pariskhit was much younger to you when he ascended the throne. However, he took up the challenge with admirable courage and faith in God. He stood as an ideal to the young generation. You too should develop such courage and fortitude and strive for the welfare of society. That is the true ideal. Pray to God to bestow on you the necessary strength to hold on to this ideal. The Pandavas left the world long ago but their ideal is eternal and ever fresh. You should cherish their ideal in your heart and try to follow the same in letter and spirit".

On the 9th of October, Swami chose to speak on developing purity of heart as being the true sadhana. Swami said,

"Divinity is manifest in every living being. The same Atma Tattwa is present not only in human beings, but in every living being in the universe. But, one has to have a pure and selfless heart to realise this truth. In order to realise this truth, every human being has to constantly contemplate on God. By doing so, your heart will become pure and peaceful. The moment you attain that stage, God will surely perceptibly manifest in you. This must be your Sadhana. Everyone of you are embodiments of divinity in reality. When you develop such a firm conviction, you can visualise God in every human being. It is only in keeping with this concept that the expression Yad bhavam tad bhavati (as is the feeling, so is the result) is asserted in the scriptures.

Lord Krishna declared once while revealing His omnipresent divinity that there was none other than Him in the entire universe. The same truth is contained in the declaration Ekam Sath viprah bahudha vadanti (truth is one, but the wise refer to it by various names). If you wish to have the darshan of God, you must develop purity of the heart. All kinds of sadhana are meant only to attain purity. The moment you attain purity of the heart, the omnipresent God will manifest right in front of you".

On October 10, Swami talked about educate. He said,

"Good education is not merely reading several books, gathering bookish knowledge and teaching it to others. There is no use acquiring mere bookish knowledge. By acquiring bookish knowledge, you may perhaps become a book yourself. Real education is that which promotes unity, equality and

peaceful co-existence with fellow human beings. Merely reading books and periodicals and acquiring bookish knowledge is the so-called secular education. Real education flows from the heart and is termed as 'Educare'.

Educare is the basis and foundation for all types of education. Educare is the adhara (support) and education is the adheya (supported). All the texts we read teach only education to us. But, this is totally inadequate. We must pursue educare along with education". He also related many interesting and absorbing stories from the Ramayana to illustrate the practise of dharma."

During the conclusion of His Discourse Swami made a very uplifting statement for these deeply troubled times. He said,

"God loves every human being. He does not hate anyone. The avataric mission is meant to bring about a transformation in the hearts of human beings.

The global transformation of human beings has already begun. Within a short period, you will notice that the entire human community will come together and live in peace and unity in keeping with the ideal cherished in the Vedic prayer:

*Let us live together, let us grow together
Let us grow in intelligence together
Let us live in harmony with each other*

I assure you that the golden era is very near. The personal rivalries, differences and hatred against fellowmen will become a thing of the past in Bharat and the world at large".

On the 11th of October, Swami brought the Prashanti Vidwan Mahasabha's divine discourses to a close. In this discourse on the 11th, Swami talked about the mind and made some very emphatic statements. He said,

"It is only when man develops faith in God that God will come to the rescue of man. The same Atmatattwa that is residing in this body as the indweller is present in every human being as well. Considering the prapthi (deservedness) of the concerned individuals, God interferes to bring about transformation in them. While doing so, God will stick to His own discipline.

Transformation of the human mind can not be brought about by a human being or by chanting some manthra. It is only when God wills so, it is possible. In keeping with the declaration "EkamevaadvitheeyamBrahma" (Brahma is only one, without a second). God does not change. God is truth, eternal and unblemished. None can change such a Paramathma (supreme self). It is very difficult to comprehend the nature of divinity".

It was a supremely elevating week, and perhaps a very tiring one for the Lord for He stayed till well past 7PM every day during this week, to give His Divine Discourse after the 3 or 4 speakers for the day had concluded. And after the

Divine Discourse had finished, He stayed on till *prasadam* was distributed to all before He finally retired to Poornachandra Hall. Truly the Lord's love knows no limits!

On October 12 - Vijaya Dasami day, the Surdas drama was staged by the Brindavan students (as reported earlier in the chronicles) to formally bring the Prashanti Vidwan Mahasabha to a close. On the 19th of October around 11:00 AM in the morning, Swami ("*Love My uncertainty!*", Swami says) went to Brindavan, perhaps in response to the ardent prayers of the devotees. After spending time in Brindavan giving immense pleasure to all devotees and moving in between them during *darshan*, He returned back to Puttaparthi on the 20th around 5:45 PM, in time for the evening *arathi*.

About 4000 *balavikas* children are now gathered here in Parthi as we ready this chronicle for the current issue. This week promises to be a fun-packed week and we will report all these events, along with exclusive pictures, in our next issue.

So this brings to an end the chronicles of a very interesting month here at Prashanti Nilayam. Next month of course, is the big one - the 80th Birthday Celebrations. Be sure to catch our reports and pictures of this historic event in our issue dated the 1st of December, 2005. Till then, we wish you all the very best and pray for Swami's blessings for all.

Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu.

SWAMI AND ME

SCINTILLATING MOMENTS WITH SAI – PROF. ANIL KUMAR

Here are a few excerpts of Prof. Anil Kumar's talk delivered in the Divine Presence on the 13th July 2004.

“You Should Know That I Know”

These were the days when I was there in Brindavan quite fresh to the Sai system of education and the campus as well. *(Prof. Anil Kumar had newly joined the Brindavan campus as the Principal of the college)*. One Sunday Bhagavan drove straight to the campus about 8 am. Luckily I was there, even though usually we would take rest on Sundays but I congratulated my stars that they had driven me to be present on that day most unexpectedly. At that time there was a gentleman named Col. Sood from Punjab who, along with 18 associates, was working in the garden. Well I did not know who they were but someone told me that they do the work regularly.

Bhagavan got down from the car and asked me who are those men. I replied that I did not know. Bhagavan immediately said *'Can anybody step into the college like that and do work without your permission?'* (Prof. Anil Kumar being the Principal).

What am I to do? But then I wanted to be smart and said *'Bhagavan shall I ask them to get out?'* Bhagavan replied, *'Since you did not ask them to come in, how can you ask them to go?'* I was stuck in between 'to be or not to be that is the question'. Swami smiled and left. Then I thought it is my duty to keep myself abreast of the situation. I slowly approached Col. Sood and did some homework: who he was and his associates. I became familiar with all the data: so and so from Kerala, another from Tamil Nadu, etc.

Bhagavan again came to the college campus at 4 pm. Without being called to come close I ran up to Bhagavan and started to exhibit my knowledge. So and so is Col Sood, so and so from Kerala, so and so from Tamil Nadu. Swami heard this and I thought that He appreciated my knowledge. Swami walked to Col. Sood and materialised a big ring for him. He then enquired about his son and daughter saying that she must be in her final year of medicine and that his son is in Patilia... He went on talking like this. I was really non-plussed at that moment. I went up to Bhagavan and said *'Swami, when You know him and everybody very well, why did You ask me about them? Why did You listen to all this information from me?'*

Swami's reply is the message that we should take note of. He said, ***"I know everything but you should know that I know - therefore I ask you."***

Bobattoo and Birthday

It happened to be my birthday, October 25th and I came from Bangalore to Prashanti Nilayam campus on official duty. My family was away at that time

and I received a box of sweets - a special preparation called in Telugu *bobattoo* (a sweet chapatti). *Bobattoo* is the favourite dish of every Andhrite - circular, brown in colour and bathed in ghee, so sweet it goes straight into the gullet and you will feel the sweetness till the evening.

That is the height of its taste and I received six of them from Guntur (his hometown) to be specially consumed by me alone. But what happened was that my room was overflowing with devotees asking me about the latest miracle from Swami. Well I was talking, but my concentration was, only on *bobattoo*. What was I to do...?

Somehow using all my intelligence I chose *Darshan* time when no one would disturb me. I bolted the door from the inside switched off the light, it was still dim, and started eating them, all six of them in quick succession, as an NCC parade salute - as quick as that. But I did not want anyone to notice this, so I took some cloves so that nobody could smell it.

I sat there for *Darshan* and usually Bhagavan comes and walks in a curve but that day He comes straight to me - then I thought something is waiting for me. Then Swami came close by and said, '*Ah, safe, safe now; all the six are safe now. Why did you eat all six of them? Can you not distribute them to friends? Are six enough or do you want 60?*' Then Bhagavan smiled and said, '*I know today is your birthday*' and He gave me *Padanamaskar*. This action that I did secretly, in the dark without anyone's knowledge, stomach being the only witness, but Bhagavan starts to tell everybody there so that I felt very much embarrassed!

Anything Can Happen At Anytime

Another experience that I wish to share with you happened in Kodai Kanal. We were all seated at the breakfast table and by my side was one gentleman by name Mohan Das. A very good gentleman of my age group and both of us usually sit together. Swami walked slowly up to us and said '*What is the breakfast?*' Then I replied, '*Swami, poori and idli.*' '*Oh I see*' said Swami, '*good, good*' and looked at the plate.

Then Swami came close to Mohan Das and picked up one *poori* saying, '*It is well done*' and tore it at the centre. A diamond ring appeared there! Swami put it on Mohan Das' finger! Watching all this I started to eat slowly. Bhagavan asked me why I was eating slowly? I replied,

'Swami who knows there may be a diamond ring in my poori also. I want to be extra careful so that it does not get stuck in my gullet by accident!' Baba reposted, '*I am not going to give - ask your mother-in-law.*' So I saw the materialisation out of a *poori* ! Anything can happen at anytime

He Can Never Forget You

I remember Bhagavan attending a music concert in Choudaiah Memorial Hall in Bangalore . A very good music programme attended by the Chief Minister

of Karnataka, the Chief Commissioner, the Railways Minister and Bhagavan presided over the whole programme. At the end of the programme while Bhagavan was leaving the auditorium I saw an old couple who must have been in their 90's at the back of the hall. Swami went all the way there, took the old man's hand and asked him how he was. Swami blessed the couple and then left. I was very much surprised at this but later I came to know that he had been the Electricity Board chairman and also an ardent devotee of Bhagavan for a long time.

This only goes to prove that Bhagavan will never forget us. We may find it difficult to walk because of age, we may find it difficult to hear but Bhagavan always remembers everybody.

Long back in the 1980's a *yagna* was taking place in the Poornachandra auditorium. Next to me sat a man called Rajagopal, a revenue inspector from Venkatagiri. He told me that he had visited Prashanti Nilayam many years ago but he is returning now after 20 years. He related that Swami would visit Venkatagiri every year and sang some of the songs that Swami used to sing. Around 9 am Swami started walking in the midst of the devotees, came straight to Rajagopal and said, '*Rajagopal, how are you?*' This man was shocked! Swami remembered him after 20 years! And then Swami looked deep into his eyes and said, '*You might have forgotten Swami but Swami has not forgotten you.*' Swami remembers every one of you.

'Now this is My car'

Once a man brought a brand new car and asked Swami to accept it. Swami said that He did not want it. The man started crying but Swami replied, '*If I accept all the cars offered and they are all piled one on top of the other there will be no space to walk. So I do not want it.*'

Then Swami gave him an interview but still the man was crying in the interview for Swami to accept the car. Bhagavan said, '*Alright, where are the keys?*' Swami took the keys saying,

Now this is my car. You run the car in My name; the car belongs to Me. You use it, you understand.' He gave him back the keys.

"I Belong to the Whole Universe"

This is the hand that never receives only gives and gives. I recall the speech made by Smt. M S Subbulakshmi before her concert at Guntur attended by 10,000 people. She told us,

I am a devotee of Bhagavan. I have visited so many universities and educational centres and charitable institutions. Wherever I go the trustees ask me to give a musical concert to raise funds; and in this way so many institutions have been built.

But I went to Prashanti Nilayam where instead of asking me to perform, Bhagavan Sathya Sai Baba gave me a diamond necklace and it is my experience that He never accepts anything.'

Once I said to Swami concerning some matter, *'In our area things will not happen like that.'* ***'Why do you say our? I belong to everybody; do not say our placel belong to the whole world. I belong to the whole universe.'***

We are in front of the Cosmic Personality, the Divine Personality and we are an international fraternity.

Jai Sai Ram!

UNTO THEE.

By Sri Madhusudhan Rao Naidu Former student of Baba's Institute.

Not very long ago, a tiny grain of sand waded its way through the waves of the mighty ocean, blissfully ignorant of what was in store for it in the heart of the sea...but only too anxious to have lost its trampled past! As if swept by the invisible waft of a tender touch, it soon found its reluctant self at the mouth of the Mother of Pearls. Even as it stepped into that haven of happiness, it only irritated and annoyed the architect of its destiny!

Will a mother ever avenge its child in her womb for all the kicks that she receives? All the deeds of the erring grain of sand were forgiven once it was engulfed in the encompassing love of the patient oyster ...only to emerge as a sparkling pearl that would adorn the neck of the one whose own feet had trampled it... not very long ago! My voyage from the shores of humanity to the shrine of the divine is the most treasured part of my life. I was then a 'student' and now a 'Sai Student'. I am sure that my tale of transformation would not be very different from that of the others at His feet.

It was one of those pleasant afternoons when Bhagavan was seated in the portico in front of the parched millions who thirst for a mere glance, a mere word, a mere smile or just a mere sight of His countenance, but it made a difference to my life and the lives of many who were close enough to follow and gather with eager hands the pearls of wisdom that were showered by Bhagavan.

"Will you do anything that I will ask of you?", demanded the Lord.

"Yes, I will." Pat came the reply.

"Anything, you mean?"

"Yes, anything that You command."

"Well... Then eat two fishes tomorrow and come," ordered the Lord

I was speechless....

"Will you do that? Tell me now." Bhagavan insisted on an answer while that familiar mischievous smile played on His lips.

I was thinking while all the eyes, human and divine, were riveted to my face, waiting for a reply.

I thought...if I say "Yes, I will do", with the courage (if not the faith) of a Kakasaheb Dixit (an ardent devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba), the Lord might scold me for not having followed His teachings .

On the other hand, if I say "I won't", I might be reprimanded for lack of faith in the Lord's command. I was in a fix!!

A few moments passed...My heart skipped a few beats even as I was evaluating the pros and cons of the decision I was going to make. There was pin-drop silence... to be broken only by the divine reproach "*Chee!! Neeku nammakame ledu. Swami atlantivi yepaadaina chepputhada? Swami atlanti di yeppudu cheppudu ani gettiga jawab cheppali.*" (meaning, You do not have any faith. Will Swami ever ask you to do such things? You must reply with firm faith that Swami will never ask such things of anyone.)

Those were the words that struck me like a thunder-bolt only to make an indelible impression on my heart. Yes, Swami asks us to do what is good for us. The pill might be bitter, the decoction might be sour, and the treatment might be agonizing... Yet that would be the only thing good that can happen to us when He commands.

Academic education was over at the divine feet. It was time to pray for further guidance. My heart searched for every opportunity to present its plight and beseech His grace. Finally, I succeeded when He chose to stop by me while gliding during the *Darshan*. I poured out. *"You have done so much for me ... Tell me now what shall I do for You?"*

"Be Good. Be Happy."

He summed up the entire essence of all the scriptures in four simple words. I am yet to comprehend...was it a command or a blessing! Does it not surprise when all He asks of us in return for all that He does for us is to be good and happy. Well if that is not God, then what else is! However, when He asks us to do something, do we ever pause for a moment and think for a while as to who actually is doing it! Let me explain.

Have you ever seen a father driving a vehicle with an excited tiny tot on his lap? Well, if you have done so then it makes my task much easier. The child, who has its little hands on the steering wheel, in all its innocence, assumes and gets excited that it is able to steer the car, little aware of the greater truth that the father is holding its puny palms. The father, who is all-aware, pretends that the child is actually able to steer the car and even mentions a word or two of appreciation to the onlookers.

Many a time we are blissfully ignorant of the greater force that works through us without which we will be reduced to a mere bag of bones and flesh. In such moments of ignorance, the words of the Lord become the guiding star and show us the way.

"What grade did you get in the exams?" enquired the Chancellor (Baba). With a twinkle in my eyes I raised myself to reach Him and reply, *"Swami! 'O' Grade (Outstanding)' 'I know ...I know, Sir!"* said the Lord with a smile. *"Swami! It is Your Grace."* I submitted. *"Yes! Grace tho ney grade vacchindi* (Yes! You have got the grade due to grace) revealed the Lord. ...and He walked away leaving me behind, wondering at the simplicity of His magnificent truths.

How often do we actually realise (in the true sense of the term) that we are all puppets with our destinies tied to the fingers of the great *sutradhari* (divine puppeteer) that Bhagavan is? The applause that we gather greedily after every performance is because of His grace and not our greatness.

Ultimately, whatever He asks us to do or rather does through us, whatever happens to us or rather whatever He chooses should happen, is good for us.

"What ever happens is for your good." This was the fifth time I heard Him say during the interview that He granted to our family. After He left our hearts overflowing with His loving words and souls spellbound by His silken smiles, He beckoned us yet again for a family photograph...rather a complete family photograph!

I rushed with my little camera to capture that timeless moment, when to my ill fate I realised that the flash had failed. Well...I tried again and again but all in vain. The Lord willingly waited with the other family members to be captured on that thin film of silver. However, the heartless camera that had worked perfectly well till then, refused to oblige. My younger brother who was sitting at the Feet of the Lord posing for the photo chose to try his luck too, but the callous camera would not work. The fear of losing this opportunity gripped my being and it did not go unnoticed by the Lord.

Swami, who was a silent witness to this wreck, took pity on my plight, *"Aiyyo, paapam."* (So sorry). He commanded me to beckon the boy with the camera sitting outside the interview room. I carried out the command and there we were having a group photo that now included me too. After this brief photo session, Swami said *"See! Your camera did not work. Even that was for your own good. Now all of you could be together in the photograph. So you see whatever happens is for your good."*

Needless to say, the point was driven straight home.

"Swami! Bless us that whatever might happen we should always have faith in You," prayed my younger brother.

The Almighty replied, *"Yes! You must have firm faith; however, clouds of doubts will come, which is but natural. Still, you must persist, wait for the winds to blow them away and you shall see the sun again. The sun is always there. It is only that the clouds hamper your vision. Doubts are but passing clouds and they bring the testing times along. Only if you pass the test will they promote you to the higher standard. Is it not so?"*

Test is His taste. He never promises us faith or devotion or love or peace ...all He promises are tests and, of course, the grace which can promote us to the next standard, provided we put in sincere efforts. There is no end to this saga of Sai's love...for the story began at the commencement of creation and is destined to go on till the end of eternity...All I feel when I walk down memory lane is that there is so much being given unasked, let us rush to our homes and get back with the biggest container lest we should miss the downpour.

In all these years that have gone by, many times I have wondered as to what can one possibly give back to the Sun as a token of gratitude for all the light that He brings to our dark homes even as He burns Himself out...perhaps nothing at all! However, the least we could do is to keep our doors wide open and do not let His efforts go in vain. What can I possibly gift on the birthday of the one beyond time? As someone has appositely said,

What you are is God's gift to you and what you become is your gift to God."

So, I am here to offer myself and pray
That I remain moist as clay
For Him to mould and play

And when I grow hard and dry
Wouldn't bend how much you try
Let me have the heart to cry

With the tears of joy or pain
That He shall ordain
And I be wet again ...

For Him to play and cheer
Not just on this day but the whole year!!

- Courtesy: Hridaya Brindavan, 2005

HEART2HEART SPECIAL

GOLDEN MEMORIES OF A BYGONE ERA-

CONVERSATION WITH THE VENKATAGIRI RAJAH'S SON

Venkatagiri has been, for centuries, the seat of a Royal family dedicated to the support, protection, and the promotion of Dharma. Consider how many temples have been built or renovated and maintained by its munificence! Take count of the Vedic Pandits [scholars] the family has patronised so far, and the number of religious books its donations have helped to reach the masses. See the interest the family takes even now, for the uplift of temples and mutts [religious establishments], although their State and status have been overwhelmed by the storm of political change.

Bhagavan Baba, 18th Feb 1964

A small Introduction about Venkatagiri for those who are unfamiliar -

Till about fifty years ago, Venkatagiri used to be a Princely state. It is located about a hundred kilometres north of Chennai. After Independence, all the Princely states in British India merged either with India or with Pakistan, depending upon their location and demographic composition.

The Rajah of Venkatagiri was one of the early devotees of Baba. He was an interesting mixture of the oriental and the occident. He was educated in England, mingled with international socialites, hunted big game, and played polo. He was a towering personality, princely in demeanour, and spoke English like an English gentleman. Yet, in religious matters, he was an orthodox Hindu. A deeply religious man, he was an ardent worshipper of Lord Rama. He first saw Swami when Bhagavan was just emerging from His teens. One look and the Rajah became instantly convinced that this was his dear Lord Rama come again. From that day, Rama became 'Sairama' for the Rajah.

Swami often went to Venkatagiri and spent long spells there. The company was most congenial, being full of learned Vedic scholars, and music lovers. In fact, Baba even used to give private music concerts! When it was time for Swami to go back, the Rajah would lie down on the road as Swami's car passed by. The roads were not paved, and the car would kick up a lot of dust. The devout Rajah wanted the sacred dust to literally bathe him – so intense was his adoration of Baba! To ensure that the dust was raised solely by Baba's vehicle, the Rajah forbade other vehicles to pass on the road; Swami's vehicle was the only one allowed to travel on the road.

The Rajah it was who used to organise festivals in Puttaparthi in those days, and provide all the necessary arrangements. Swami often speaks nostalgically of the Rajah, describing him as a loyal devotee next only to Hanuman – that is extra-ordinarily high praise, coming from Bhagavan.

We present below, excerpts from a long conversation with the younger son of the Rajah, VGK Rachandra (VGK) recorded by Radio Sai for archival purposes. The person in conversation with the Rajah's son is Prof. G. Venkataraman (GV).

GV: Sai Ram and welcome to our studio. I request you to say a few things about your life.

VGK: My father was the last Rajah in Venkatagiri. After the abolition of the Princely states no one else was coronated. But my elder brother still has the title.

GV: What is your brother's name?

VGK: It is a big name, but I will tell you the initials: VVVRK Rachandra. Rachandra is a common name for all of us. My name is VGK Rachandra - Gopala Krishna Rachandra.

My father first came to know about Swami in 1948. We had a very big bungalow then in Bangalore with 21 acres behind the Mysore Maharajah's palace, and Swami used to stay in that house.

The Venkatagiri King's First Meeting with Swami

GV: How did your father come to hear about Swami in 1948?

VGK: A relation told him that there is a great Mahatma staying in Puttaparthi. At that time Swami happened to be in Bangalore in Sakkama's house. My father was a great Rama *Bhakta*.

My grandmother died in 1947 and Swami made His first visit to Venkatagiri in 1950. My father asked Swami to show my grandmother. Her name was Ratnamma. He said "Ratnamma come." From the wall she came in flesh and blood - not as an apparition, a dream-like thing or hazy. She appeared actually as she was. We touched her feet. She told my father that *"He is the Sri Rama that you are worshipping but in His characteristics He is like Sri Krishna. He will try to dupe you to see that you go away from His fold. So be careful; do not leave Him."* After a few minutes she slowly went back to where she came from. This was in August 1950. That was the first time Swami came to Venkatagiri.

GV: You all met Him two years earlier in Sakamma's house. Tell us about that.

VGK: We were there along with 50-100 people waiting outside. Somebody went inside and said the Rajah of Venkatagiri has come. Swami said *"What has he got any horns on his head? Let him wait, I will see him later"*. So He did not see us at all for five days, though we were waiting from morning till evening. Our servant maids were given interview before us! Clearly it was all

Swami's test for us. My father was a very religious man and had faith. So we waited and on the fifth day the entire family was called.

The first miracle that our family witnessed, concerns me. I was having eczema, and a liquid with a foul smell used to ooze out. The first thing that Swami did was to touch me all over the place - and miracle of miracles till today there is no eczema. And He did it without anybody even asking Him to cure me.

In 1950 my father came to Puttaparthi and during that trip opened the Bukkapatnam High School . That was the first time anyone in my family came to Puttaparthi.

GV: How come your father opened the Bukkapatnam High School ?

VGK: Swami asked him to when we met Him in Bangalore. In 1949 we stayed in our Bangalore house for the summer. We played cricket and my father was a great polo player.

Swami and Cricket

GV: Talking of cricket Mr. G.V. Subba Rao was recalling the time when your father commanded you to attend on Swami. But the Ranjit trophy cricket match was being played then in Madras and you were very keen to hear the running commentary on the radio.

VGK: Not the Ranjit trophy; it was a test match between India and the West Indies.

GV: What Mr. Subba Rao said was that Swami gave the running commentary while you were with Him.

VGK: The entire thing, as if He was seeing it! How Hazare felt that he had hurt his ankle when he took a catch and fell down.

GV: I saw that match - Everton Weekes was run out on 90. Let us get back to your father's first visit to Puttaparthi.

Swami Journeys to Venkatagiri

VGK: During that visit, my father requested Swami to visit Venkatagiri. Swami agreed and said *"You send somebody and I will come."* At that time Swami did not have a car. So father agreed and a date was fixed just after Krishnastami. At that time I was an atheist.

GV: My God, with such a father! You remained atheist even after seeing the miracle cure done to you?

VGK: Yes, I took it all with a pinch of salt. I was not impressed then. My father said *"Go and bring Swami."* I replied *"Father, I will not go. You send someone*

else." So one of my relations who happened to be the Headmaster of my old school in Venkatagiri was asked to go and bring Swami. That car was scheduled to leave Venkatagiri at 5.30 A.M.

However, at midnight Swami appeared in my dream and gave me mangoes. After eating those mangoes I had a terrible urge to start immediately for Puttaparthi. So I went and woke father and told him that I was going immediately; he was very happy that I was going. One thing that my father told me was that whenever I passed an important town such as Madanapalli or Kadari, I was to send a telegram. My father explained, "Based on your information, I will be ready with *poornakumba* and elephants to take Swami in a procession." I agreed to do as he asked me to.

When I came to Puttaparthi it was Krishnastami and Swami was staying in the old Mandir. I went there. Suddenly Swami assumed a blue appearance. Not just to myself but to so many others as well. Swami was blue with *namam* and with peacock feathers in His hair. We then sang Bhajans, after which we went to bed. Early morning we started.

At every town we passed through I told Swami that I had to send a telegram. Swami said *"It is not necessary: why are you bothered? I am here."* So we drove on without sending a telegram. At one place we stopped for lunch. We had some empty vessels. Swami touched them and they were full of sweets and so on. We ate them to our hearts' content and then we started off again. By the time we reached Tirupathi I was in great jitters, because arrangements were supposed to be made to receive Swami ceremoniously. But when we entered Venkatagiri all the *poornakumba*, elephants and paraphernalia with servants in turbans were fully there!

Swami got down from the car and we took Him in a procession to the palace, where Swami retired to His room. Nobody uses that room till today - it is for Swami. Before Swami came down I confessed to my father that I had not sent any telegrams. He said *"You bloody fool; you say that you did not send any telegrams but here they are."* He then showed me a bunch of telegrams *"Passing through Madanapalli"* *"Going through Kadari"* and so on - telegrams from all the towns we had passed through!

My father then asked the Postmaster to come and asked him if any telegram had been received. The man said *"No sir, we have not received any telegram from any place."* *"Then what are these telegrams?"* my father demanded. *"Sir, these are on official telegram paper no doubt, but there is no stamp of the Post Office"* said the Postmaster. There were no stamps on the telegrams because they came direct from Swami!

Swami's Stay in Venkatagiri

GV: When Swami came to Venkatagiri for the first time, how long did He stay?

VGK: Fifteen days and we have kept records of all that He did in diary form.

GV: What did Swami do in Venkatagiri?

VGK: There were not many public functions. Mainly, He would be talking with the family; not much philosophy; now and then some remarks on the Ramayana. Mostly, He would be joking - suddenly He would ask "What colour dress am I wearing?" In those days He used to wear dresses of all colours. "Swami you are wearing blue." "*Dunnapota*(buffalo) you must get your eyes checked; you say I am wearing blue but I am wearing red." And I would look and it would be red.

Often, He was very playful. "*What do you want?*" He would ask. He used to give whatever we wanted. One day we were all sitting together, my cousins my brother and so on and He said "*What do you want?*" I said "*I want a mango*" - it was December and not the mango season. Somebody said "*pear*" another person said "*apricot*" which are not available in Venkatagiri.

Swami replied "*You want all of them? There is a small tree in the palace. Go and pick them from that tree.*" And we saw that all the different fruits that we wanted were hanging there - and it was not even a fruit-bearing tree! Swami did not even go anywhere near it. I do not think that I have ever tasted a mango like that in my life.

One night He was lying down on the bed and I was massaging His Feet. I was lucky to have this privilege. I do not know what good I had done in previous lives but not in this life. I asked "Swami, what is the difference between You and other saints such as Ramana Maharishi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu?" He replied "By their own effort they have risen to the level of Godhead, but with the infinite powers I possess, I have come from the level of Godhead to redeem mankind." This is the exact wording that He said in Telugu.

Swami would suddenly get up in the night and would laugh and make gesticulations. I asked Him what He was doing. "I am talking with angels" He replied, "Can't you see?" "How can I see Swami? Give me special eyes so that I can see." "That stage has not come. If you see them now you will lose your eyesight."

GV: You said that Swami visited you many times. Did the nature of the visits change in any way?

VGK: Very much; every year there was a change. He used to tell us that "This is the 'playful' *Leela* stage; next comes 'teaching' and afterwards 'service'. What you are experiencing is the playful stage, the *Leelas*, in the first few years."

A Public Meeting With Ascetics In Venkatagiri

GV: How long did the *Leelas* last?

VGK: About 4-5 years until the middle of the 50's. Later the first Divine Life Conference (*of Swami Shivananda*) was held in Venkatagiri, in 1956 I think. All the people came from the Shivananda Ashram. Swami was considered to be a small boy, illiterate, and 90% of people used to think that He was a magician.

Father arranged for a big palanquin and wanted Swami to be carried by the family members. Swami said, "*No I do not want to get into the palanquin. I will walk with these sanyasis.*" So Swami walked from the palace to the town hall where the meeting was held, a distance of about one furlong from the palace. That was the first blow that shattered them - almost.

Next, there was a big golden throne that Swami was supposed to sit on but He sat along with all the other people. They thought that He was not well versed in Vedic philosophy and so they all started talking to each other ignoring Swami. They never addressed Him as Bhagavan or even as Sai Baba. Swami was laughing, but I was furious. Swami's turn came, and He started speaking. They all stood up and said "*We came here to defy him - but we are defied*" and prostrated before Swami. This was the first public meeting with these sanyasis.

How the Rajah Organised Festivals In Puttaparthi

GV: Once I heard Swami say that in the olden days the Raja of Venkatagiri would organise all the festivals in Puttaparthi as there was no one to do it here and that he would bring all the people from Venkatagiri and arrange the celebrations. Can you tell us about this?

VGK: We used to bring *Purohits* and people who would cook. During Dasara, Swami would feed poor people. Our family members would carry Swami from the Mandir on a palanquin. By the time we came back it used to be between 4 and 5 P.M. In those days many in the village were hostile. They used to sit on the thatched roofs and smoke. Swami would give a look and everyone would disappear. *Vibhuti*, *kum kum* turmeric and all sorts of things would come and He would look really ferocious. One of our servants, who was a very weak fellow, managed to throw off a buffalo which had been sent to disrupt the procession - it was one of the greatest miracles that I have seen as none of us together could push the buffalo; but Swami gave him the strength. That was the animosity in those days, in Puttaparthi.

GV: Do you have any idea why these people were so hostile?

VGK: They used to think that Swami is like them, born here. Why then are so many Rajas, Maharajas, intellectuals and scientists coming to Him? I used to ask Swami what is this? "*Dhoshana Bhushanalu samana teesko*" – treat praise and blame equally; be indifferent to both - He would laugh and tell us.

GV: You said local people were hostile then but they are not so now. How did that change?

VGK: Because of the water projects, the hospitals and the colleges. Swami also used to feed people during famines.

GV: When was Swami's last visit to Venkatagiri?

VGK: February 1970.

GV: Was there any reason why He stopped His visits subsequently?

VGK: My father died on 1st June 1970. After that Swami did not come.

Swami Sings

In 1951 Swami said that He would come so we were all making arrangements. Father received a telegram from one of the greatest musicians at that time - Bangalore Nagaratnamma. She came and we asked her how did she come to know of Sai Baba? She said that Thyagaraja the musical saint and a great devotee of Rama appeared in her dream and told her to have the *Darshan* of Swami. That is how she came to Venkatagiri, in search of Swami. She was about 80 at that time.

The minute she saw Swami she sang *Kannugontini Sri Rama* - Thyagaraja sang the same song after he discovered his lost idol of Rama in the river. And after that *Ra Ra Ma Intiki Daka* in *ragAshaveri*. Then *Nanu Palimpa Nadachi Ochitivo* in *rag mohanam*. Afterwards, I think to test Swami, she asked for very rare *kritis* (songs) which are not in vogue generally, such as *Raghuvara Aprameya* in *rag kamboji*.

They then both sang for nearly two and a half hours - she would ask Swami to sing and then join in and then He would ask her to sing one and He would join with her. Then Swami stopped the singing and asked her what she wanted. She said that she only has two desires; one is that she should not suffer when she dies and the second that she should utter 'Sai Ram' at the time. Swami told her that she would die on a particular day about six months later and that she would die peacefully uttering 'Sai Ram'. Exactly the same thing happened. The attendant who was looking after her came and told us that she passed away peacefully chanting Sai Ram.

Swami used to come for Bhajans in my house in Madras, near Thousand Lights, located on a 10 acre ground. We would cook food there and sing Bhajans and Swami would give interviews. He used to come to Madras the day following His Birthday and stay till Pongal festival (in mid-January) for one and a half months, all by Himself. I still have a letter where He says "*Bangaroo, I am alone here. There are only a couple of ladies who do the cooking besides the watchman. It is boring; so you come and take Me to Venkatagiri.*" So I took a car and brought Him to Venkatagiri.

Dear Reader, it is actually a very long interview filled with fascinating tales and we hope to publish other excerpts from this conversation later on a suitable occasion.

Thank you

BOX ITEM

Howard Murphet, author of *"Man of Miracles"* describes a wonderful incident that occurred during a visit by Swami to Venkatagiri. At that time, Baba was twenty four. This is what Murphet says:

"A party of between twenty and thirty people left the Rajah's Palace in a fleet of cars for a drive in the country. Baba who had never been in the area before, asked the Rajah to stop by any patch of sand they might happen to see. A few miles further on they came to a dry sandy river-bed. Here they stopped, and all sat on the sand around the young Swami.

After talking for a while, Baba rolled His sleeve up to the elbow and thrust His hand deep into the sand before Him. Swami then withdrew His arm from the sand, there was a great flash of blue light that spread to a circle some ten feet in radius. Then they all saw that Baba was holding in His hand something about eight inches in height. It proved to be a statue of Lord Rama and His consort Sita."

GET INSPIRED

THE BAMBOO AND THE FERN

One day I decided to quit...I quit my job, my relationship, my spirituality...I wanted to quit my life. I went to the woods to have one last talk with God."God", I said. "Can you give me one good reason not to quit?" His answer surprised me...

"Look around", He said. "Do you see the fern and the bamboo?" "Yes", I replied. "When I planted the fern and the bamboo seeds, I took very good care of them. I gave them light. I gave them water. The fern quickly grew from the earth. Its brilliant green covered the floor. Yet nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo. In the second year the fern grew more vibrant and plentiful. And again, nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo." He said.

"In year three there was still nothing from the bamboo seed. But I would not quit. In year four, again, there was nothing from the bamboo seed. I would not quit." He continued. "Then in the fifth year a tiny sprout emerged from the earth. Compared to the fern it was seemingly small and insignificant...But just 6 months later the bamboo rose to over 100 feet tall. It had spent the five years growing roots. Those roots made it strong and gave it what it needed to survive. I would not give any of My creations a challenge it could not handle."

He said to me. "Did you know, my child, that all this time you have been struggling, you have actually been growing roots. I would not quit on the bamboo. I will never quit on you. Don't compare yourself to others." He advised. "The bamboo had a different purpose than the fern. Yet they both make the forest beautiful. Your time will come", God said to me. "You will rise high"

"How high should I rise" I asked. "How high will the bamboo rise" He asked in return. "As high as it can?" I questioned. "Yes." He said, "Give Me glory by rising as high as you can." I left the forest and brought back this story. I hope these words can help you to see that God will never give up on you. Never give up.

- Source Unknown

WITH 'A LITTLE HELP' FROM GOD

I was sitting in a train, waiting for it to start. Across from me sat a small boy, asking questions as children do. He asked his mother, "When will the train start?" I saw my chance and volunteered to answer. I said, "The train will start when we start pushing."

The child opened his big eyes in surprise, "Really?"

"Of course," I said.

"Unless we push, it doesn't start."

"Then let's push," he exclaimed. "Just a minute," I said.

"The passengers are not all on. I'll tell you when to push."

I watched for the signal light at the station and heard the station master's shrill whistle.

Then I shouted to the boy, "Now! Push for all you're worth."

He and I started to push in the direction of the engine.

We pushed and pushed against the back of the seat.... and soon a contented smile lit up the boy's face!

The train was moving ... very slowly at first, but then gaining speed little by little.

I congratulated the lad on his success. "We DID it! We DID it!"

"Wasn't that great?" he exclaimed.

He looked immensely pleased with himself. He was traveling in a train he had helped to start.

I did not have the heart to tell him about the monstrous engine chugging up in front. Eventually he would find out for himself...

This story concerns our own mistaken notion that 'we are the doer'. We usually attribute great success to our little actions, forgetting that behind them all is that almighty unseen power called God, who often makes us look powerful! Yet everything is created by Him; everything belongs to Him and everything is done by Him.

- Source Unknown

SET THE WORLD INFECTED!

Smiling is infectious.
You catch it like the flu.
When someone smiled at me today,
I started smiling too.

I passed around the corner
and someone saw my grin.
When he smiled, I realised
I'd passed it on to him.

I thought about the smile
and understood its worth.
A single smile like mine
Could travel round the Earth.

If you feel a smile begin
Don't leave it undetected.
Let's start an epidemic
And get the World infected!

- Source Unknown

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

The Blessings of Divinity...in November - *A Quiz on Swami's Life and Mission*

Here are ten questions for you on milestones in the divine life which took place in the current month, November. We have divided the quiz into two sections - before 1990 and after that date.

Part One – Before 1990

1. During which year did Swami rush to the deathbed of His loyal devotee Subbamma and bring her back from the dead so that He could fulfil His promise to be with her at that time? 1945 1950 1941 1952.
2. When did Bhagavan inaugurate the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Prashanti Nilayam? 1988 1981 1986 1979
3. When was the inauguration of Prashanti Nilayam? 1950 1960 1956 1948
4. When did Bhagavan lay the foundation stone for Dharmakshetra at Bombay? 1972 1963 1967 1959
5. When did the inauguration of the Sri Sathya Sai Space Theatre (the Planetarium) take place? 1989 1990 1977 1985

Part Two - After 1990

6. In what year did Swami open the Sri Sathya Sai Airport? 1990 1993 1991 1995
7. In what year was the Sri Sathya Sai Drinking Water Project for Anantapur inaugurated? 1997 1991 1992 1995
8. In what year was the opening ceremony of the Chaitanya Jyoti Museum? 1994 2000 1993 1999
9. In what year was the inauguration of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Prashanti Nilayam? 1993 1996 1990 1991
10. When was the launch of Radio Sai Global Harmony? 1999 2003 2000 2001

ANSWERS

1. 1945
2. 1981
3. 1950
4. 1967
5. 1985
6. 1991
7. 1995
8. 2000
9. 1991
10. 2001

THE HEALING TOUCH

PRADEEP'S PERSEVERANCE AND SAI'S GRACE

This is a moving story of a teenager from the state of Orissa, India who recently was operated for a heart ailment in Swami's Super Specialty Hospital in Whitefield, Bangalore.

The twinkle in his eye and the gentle smile playing on his face, both belie the fact that he underwent a major open-heart surgery very recently. Only the suture marks across his sternum will reveal to you the real story. Sri Pradeep Kumar Sahu is a bright young boy from rural Orissa. Youngest in a family of 5 brothers and 3 sisters, he was a pampered kid. No wonder everyone was concerned when, at the age of 8, he started showing worrying symptoms: he used to fall down unconscious while playing and used to have frequent coughing fits. His father, a poor farmer, took him to the local doctors, who prescribed some medicines to counter the symptoms. Things seemed fine with Pradeep for a while.

Though from a farming community, Pradeep seemed to be born with an innate desire to become a doctor. A very hard working boy, Pradeep used to study in the light of a candle, as the modern day comforts of even simple electric lighting hadn't reached his home yet. His hard work bore fruit when it happened that, in a family where none of the other children passed even the 8th standard, Pradeep went on to top his class in high school and later in the pre-university course.

His health problems persisted amidst his success in school and college. He used to participate in the college games, but used to feel very exhausted afterwards. It was during a Zoology class in the pre-university course that Pradeep had a premonition that his heart was not normal. Soon after Pradeep ran a high fever and when taken to the doctor, he was diagnosed as having a heart problem. He was then referred to a cardiologist.

In a country where farmers' lives are closely intertwined with the vagaries of nature, the life of Pradeep's father was not very different. He was not well to do, and imagine his consternation when the cardiologist diagnosed Pradeep to have a congenital heart problem, involving his aortic valve, where instead of the regular three cusps (a cusp is a thin triangular flap of a heart valve), Pradeep's valve had only two, causing various complications. Pradeep needed an immediate aortic valve replacement, the cardiologist said. He was further dismayed when he heard that the operation was to be performed within seven days and that the surgery would cost him around Rs.1-1.5 lakhs! This shook the entire family very badly, needless to say.

During this difficult time, if there was one person who remained calm throughout, it was Pradeep himself. He had a deep-rooted faith in God and treated Him as his best friend. He regularly contributed poems and short stories on God and Nature in Oriya (his mother tongue), which have been

published in various spiritual magazines. He had the faith that God would come to his rescue. He met his teachers in the college, who agreed to pool up as much as Rs. 40,000 rupees for his treatment, but this was way below what was needed to save his life.

His desire to become a doctor still burnt brightly within him. As his family and teachers couldn't bear to see him exert himself, they wanted him to discontinue his studies. But Pradeep had set his mind on becoming a doctor and used to secretly prepare for the medical entrance examination. He took the exam in 2001 but he couldn't clear it. A born fighter, he took the exam again in 2002, but he still couldn't clear it. His family and the doctors coaxed him to give up, but in the face of adversity, his desire to become a doctor seemed only to grow stronger.

It was at this time that Providence led him to a person who had benefited from a pacemaker implantation at Swami's Hospital at Puttaparthi. This person introduced Pradeep to Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and narrated about the existence of His beautiful edifices of love and caring, the Sri Sathya Sai Institutes of Higher Medical Sciences, which stood out as beacons of hope to the poor and needy, who could not afford expensive medical treatment. Pradeep and his family were thrilled on hearing this and their hearts were filled with hope. Pradeep, accompanied by his brother, came to Prashanti Nilayam in 2002 for a checkup at Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Puttaparthi. The doctors confirmed he did need an aortic valve replacement and that he would be sent a letter calling him for the surgery.

Pradeep had his first *Darshan* of Baba during this visit. He felt a surge of love attracting him to Baba and felt as if he was in the presence of his life-time friend, about whom he used to write. Baba's saying, "Why fear when I am here" gave Pradeep a lot of courage and mental peace with which he went back home.

Mentally at peace, Pradeep took the medical entrance examination another time in 2003 and this time, he came out a ranker, ranking 205 amidst fierce competition from thousands of other applicants. Soon afterwards, he secured admission in a good medical college in Orissa, with the help of a bank loan and a scholarship, both awarded due to his merit performance.

The admission process wasn't without its share of hardships, though. As he was suffering from a heart problem, he was declared "medically unfit" to join college until he got his surgery done. His heartfelt prayers to God and sincere appeals to the authorities met with success. On mentioning that he would soon be operated on by the Hospital at Puttaparthi, the authorities agreed for his admission.

Pradeep was now on his way to become a doctor, but his heart didn't allow him an easy time. He had to live in a hostel, 600 kms away from home and had to go through the rigours of attending classes for eight hours a day. He was completely exhausted by the end of the day. He used to draw strength by going to the wards and seeing the suffering patients. This used to enthuse

him and he came back to his room, recharged in his enthusiasm to become a doctor and serve his suffering brethren. During the course of his studies, he was periodically examined by the medical college cardiologists and they urged him to get the valve replacement done immediately. In 2004, when his condition seemed to worsen, he came to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, Bangalore, where a balloon dilatation was done as a temporary step to ease his discomfort and postpone the valve replacement. He went back to college, studied hard and passed the 1st year MBBS with flying colours.

In Sep 2005, he came once more to the Whitefield hospital. This time he was admitted and the valve-replacement surgery was performed. Recuperating in the post-operative ward, Pradeep is now a relieved young man. He is all praise for the Hospital and the staff.

“This place cannot be called a hospital. It is a Temple ...a Temple of Health . I’ve never received so much of love before. The doctors, the nurses and all staff are so loving. The doctors, knowing I am doing my MBBS used to give me text-books to read so I do not get bored. I shall forever remember their loving and caring treatment,” he says with great emotion.

More than his words Pradeep’s eyes speak eloquently of the joy, peace and love he has received directly from the Institute and from Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who is the driving force behind these “Temples of Healing”.

Pradeep will now be able to concentrate on his MBBS studies with full vigour and go on to achieve his desire of becoming a doctor. He desires to become a neuro-surgeon, which he knows demands a lot of finesse, sharp reflexes and sensitive hands.

We wish Pradeep all the very best in all his endeavours.

SSSIHMS STATISTICS

PUTTAPARTHI SUPERSPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 22nd Nov 1991 to 30th^t September 2005.

Heart Surgeries: 15,012

Cath Procedures: 15,808

Urology Surgeries: 27,478

Ophthalmology Surgeries: 26,918

CT Scans: 43,376

BANGALORE SUPERSPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 19th Jan 2001 to 30th September 2005.

Cardiac Surgeries: 5,783

Cardiac Catheterisation: 11, 365

Neuro Surgeries: 5, 132

CT Scans: 16,630

MRI Exams: 19,045