

HEART 2 HEART

VOL 4 ISSUE 1, JANUARY 2006

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield – Baba's Super Specialty Hospital in Bangalore - will celebrate the fifth year of its birth on the 19th of Jan this New Year. During the First Anniversary Celebrations of the same hospital in 2002, Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, the current President of India, at the end of his memorable talk said, "I was telling some friends of mine today that an antiballistic missile has been launched by Bhagawan Baba against poverty. How does this missile work against poverty? Through water, education and healthcare."

In the last issue, we had our cover story on the Godavari Drinking Water Project. We have also several cover stories on Baba's "Temples of Learning" and other Water Projects (go to Previous Issues). The focus in this issue is Baba's Hospitals. In the last 15 years, Baba's Super-Specialty Hospital at Prashanthi Nilayam has done more than seventy-five thousand cardiac, ophthalmology and urology surgeries, all free of cost to the patients apart from a host of other non-surgical and diagnostic procedures. The Hospital in Bangalore which is also following suit is the focus in this issue.

Three and a half lakh patients, six thousand cardiac surgeries, more than five thousand neuro surgeries, eleven thousand cardiac cath procedures, fifty thousand diagnostic procedures (all of which were done free of cost) and five years later, - the Hospital is as dedicated and committed as ever to reach out to the poor and forgotten. It is not as if the quality is in anyway compromised. In fact, eight British MPs of the Conservative Party who visited the Institute on the 28th of Sep 2004, said, "This Hospital is as good as any facility in the UK, it is a beacon of hope for the economically weaker sections." Indeed, that is what it has been and is truly meant to be!

When you read our cover story you will know how Abdul, who had lost all hope for her baby is smiling now; how Thankamani fasted for days just to save enough to bring her baby to the hospital; how Raju Das could never have regained his eyesight but for this hospital and wants to do a Ph.D now!; And how Dilip refused to go back to his profession as a butcher after his little Sharira Bhanu was operated here. The two wings of the Hospital – cardiac and neuro - just like its two outstretched arms have embraced all of them and hundreds more. No wonder, the former Prime Minister of India, A B Vajpayee called it a "Palace-cum-Temple."

Everybody acknowledges the quantum and quality of the work that is being done by Swami's institutions - be it free hospitals, free educational institutions or free water projects – but there are still a few ill-informed so called "intellectuals" who refuse to see what is evident and make unpleasant comments on this grand mission, and more importantly, on the glorious Personality behind it. That they have not done their homework well is palpable. It is to open the eyes of such "thinkers" and also to help devotees in understanding the mystery of the Sai Avathar, at least a good glimpse of it, that we have the feature article called "God, Avathar and the Intellectual". Do not miss this!

Jan 19th is special not only because it is the fifth anniversary of Baba's Hospital in Bangalore, but also it is the Silver Jubilee of *Sundaram*, Baba's Mandir in Chennai. In addition, it is also the 158th death anniversary of the famous poet-saint of yesteryears, Sri Tyagaraja. Baba has on innumerable occasions lauded the devotion and the musical genius of this great devotee of the Lord who, as it is said, was a confluence and symphony of three streams – spirituality, saintliness and *sangita* (music). The harmony of these three facets found spontaneous self-expression in every syllable of his creations, each of which is a jeweled beauty suffused with intense intimate devotion to Sri Rama. It is to pay our tribute to such a great masterly spirit that we have a comprehensive feature on him. When you **listen** to the Tyagaraja *kritis* rendered by the legendary carnatic vocalist, Ms. M S Subbalakshmi, you are going to be thrilled!

Any soulful composition has always touched Swami's heart, the divine master musician. Just a few days ago, when devotees from nearly 40 countries had gathered here in Prashanthi Nilayam to celebrate Christmas, the Lord looked so pleased listening to their beautiful carols. "*Sathya Sai, Lord of light fill us with your golden light....Light so pure, love so deep, fill us with your love so sweet,*" they sang and Swami, literally filled the hearts of each one present with love and delight. "Are you happy?" He kept asking the singers and musicians after He had sat through their presentations, lovingly spoke to them and blessed them with gifts. As one participant put it, "*I shall take away many wonderful memories but most of all I shall remember the joy of living...Swami's message is very clear – Be Happy.*" You will find a very detailed account, this (lots of pictures included), in the Prashanthi Diary of this issue.

Thousands had gathered for Christmas and many are here still celebrating New Year with Swami. But there are millions who, in the altar of their homes and in the inner recesses of their hearts, experience Swami. The Sai Phenomenon is expanding as ever and touching thousands of hearts crossing all barriers of region and race. Recently, the Mayor of the City of Little Rock, USA, hailed the mission of Swami with a beautiful proclamation, declaring Nov 23rd as Sathya Sai Baba Day. In the same section, you also have the story of a Professor from Swami's Institute, Prof. V Pandit, who has won an UGC award for his outstanding scholarly work and important contributions to human knowledge. Read about all this in the Sai World News section.

The New Year has arrived, so quickly! We are busy again making preparations for celebrating the event and racking our brains to make resolutions that will stick and stay, through the thick and thin of the coming year. Perhaps, this is the most opportune moment to recall Swami's New Year message that He gave a decade ago in 1996. "Stand up for your belief in God, even as you stand up for your father or mother. Render service to society, without which you cannot exist. Your welfare is bound with that of society. Develop the feeling of oneness with all, loving all as members of one Divine family."

The emphasis, clearly, is on the feeling of oneness and Unity, so vital to realise Divinity. In this New Year, let us resolve to make our love a little more selfless, extend our hand a little more to the needy and see Sai in all, as well as Sai inside. For, SAI truly means **See Always Inside**.

Have a blessed New Year!

Lots of Love,
Heart2Heart Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

I FIRMLY BELIEVE

A New Year Poem By Swami

This is a Prayer written by Bhagawan Baba Himself more than four decades ago and given to Prof. Kasturi, His biographer, on New Year's Day, 1960

I FIRMLY BELIEVE...

**I firmly believe there is none kinder than You,
to shower Grace on me.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I am at Your Lotus Feet?**

**I firmly believe You will respond quick
when I do pray and plead.
Tell me, is this the reason why
I am crying aloud for You?**

**I firmly believe You are ever beside me
to guide my steps aright.
Tell me, is this not the reason why
I am Yours thro' day and night.**

**I firmly believe You can never say 'No'
Whatever I ask from You.
Tell me, is this the reason why
I long for a glance from You?**

**What have You designed for me this time?
Why this dire delay to offer boons?**

**However long You make me wait and wail
I will not leave, I'll be standing still
Until Your loving eyes do turn on me.**

-BABA

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Yield Place to New, Sacred and Sublime Thoughts

This is the first month of the New Year, 2006. Let's listen to what Swami said on New Year's Day exactly a decade ago, in 1996.

The Three Active Agencies In Man

Turn the love that arises in you towards God. Dedicate your body to the Divine. This is the true mark of devotion. There are three constituents in man: the mind, the power of speech and the body. These three are called *Thrikaranas* - the three active agencies in man. It is when all three are used for sacred purposes, that man becomes sanctified.

Every human being needs to cultivate the spirit, irrespective of his beliefs. All need devotion. It is only spirituality that can purify the heart and mind of man. The second requirement is morality. Morality helps to purify *Vaak* (speech). The third is *Dharmikam* (Righteousness). All righteous deeds done by the body or hands sanctify a man.

It is through spirituality, morality and righteousness that the three instruments get purified. Only the one who has achieved this triple purity can realise the Divine, if any of these instruments are impure, he cannot realise the Divine.

To comprehend the Divine, man has to understand the subtle atomic principle that pervades the entire cosmos. The difficulty in comprehending the Divine was recognized by the Gopikas (ardent devotees of Lord Krishna) who declared: "How can we know you, oh Krishna! You are the subtlest among the subtle and vaster than the vastest among the 84 lakhs of species in the cosmos."

The Three Ornaments To Cherish

With faith in the omnipresence of the Divine, man should engage himself in good deeds, cherish good thoughts and dedicate his life to good practices. His words should be words of truth. The ornaments he should cherish are truthfulness in speech, charity for the hands and listening to sacred lore for the ears. Develop faith in your divinity. Then you will redeem your life. Follow your conscience. Make your heart pure. You cannot realise the Divine by immersing yourself in worldly concerns....

Embodiments of Love! The **New Year comes regularly year after year. But do you have any new thoughts? You do not shed your old, mistaken ideas. They should be given up, yielding place to new, sacred and sublime thoughts.** Of what use is it to celebrate New Year days if you do not change your old ways of thinking and behaving? Make proper use of time which is both precious and sacred. Do not indulge in useless gossip. **Develop good qualities like compassion, love and sympathy. Act as your own monitor and correct yourself by self-punishment. By a simple method**

you can control your wandering mind or your anger. Moreover, place your reliance on God.

With the power of the Divine to sustain you there is nothing you cannot accomplish. Karna and Ravana (evil persons from Indian epics) are examples of powerful men who were destroyed because they did not have the power of the Divine behind them. The Pandavas (from the Mahabharata) were saved because of their faith in the Divine and their unity. Happenings in the world show how some families have prospered because of unity and how others have suffered because of divisions within the family.

Today the nation needs unity above everything else. It is through faith in God that unity can be promoted. Look at the diversity of people in this hall, the different creeds they profess, the different nationalities to which they belong. All are united in their common allegiance to Swami. By this single feeling of faith in the Divine, unity can be achieved. It is the absence of this faith that is the cause of division.

Stand Up For Your Belief

All of you are embodiments of the Divine. All of you are embodiments of love and peace. You are the Divine in human form. Develop that conviction. Immerse yourselves in Divine love. Offer that love to the Divine. Thereby you will have love for all. It is only when you develop this love principle that you will be realising the meaning of festivals like these.

Stand up for your belief in God, even as you stand up for your father or mother. Render service to society, without which you cannot exist. Your welfare is bound with that of society. Develop the feeling of oneness with all, loving all as members of one Divine family.

- Divine Discourse in Prashanthi Nilayam, on 1-1-1996

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

PART 16

(Continued from the previous issue)

Slowing the Mind For Meditation

H: (HISLOP): The Buddha's way of slowing down the mind is given much attention in Burma. Swami must have a better way?

SAI: The Buddha's way of watching the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils is just a beginning, just for a few minutes before the meditation begins. There is no 'better' way to quiet the mind. There is only one way. Sitting in meditation, the question often comes up, 'How long to sit?' There is no answer. There is no particular time. **Meditation is really an all-day-long process.** The sun shines and the sunlight falls here and there. What is the difference between the sun and the sunlight?

H: There is no difference, Swami.

SAI: In the same way, all is God - thoughts, desires, all are God. All thoughts should be regarded as God.

H: But Swami, there is still the puzzle of how to slow down the activity of the mind

SAI: Really, there is no mind; it is a question of what is desired. With God as the only desire, all will be well.

H: But in meditation there is this fast rush of thoughts and ideas through the mind. Does not this need to be slowed down so that there may be quiet in meditation?

SAI: Yes. The mind must slow down. At a certain stage it will come to a stop. **If desire in meditation is turned towards union with God, the mind will naturally slow down. No method should be used; no force used.** Desire should not be too fast, too strong. Even desire for God can be too hurried, too feverish. Start early, drive slowly, reach safely. It is possible to be too lazy. Fast, then slow is also bad. The process should be steady.

The Origin of Thoughts

H: These thoughts that stream through the mind, are they material?

SAI: Yes, they are matter. All matter is impermanent.

H: Where do thoughts come from?

SAI: They come from food and environment. If you have *sathwic* food and have only desire for good, only good thoughts will come.

H: Where do thoughts go?

SAI: They go no place. Because thoughts do not flow through the mind. The mind goes out and grasps and gets engaged in thoughts. If desire is for God, the mind does not go out. But the best way is not to have the problem of getting rid of thoughts. **The best way is to see all thoughts as God.** Then only God-thoughts will come.

The Power of The Mind

H: Swami says that it is the *Atma* that is unlimited power, yet in one's daily life, the mind gives the experience of being a sort of relentless power.

SAI: The mind is passive, yet it seems to be active. It is active only because the *Atma* (Self) reflects into it. It sometimes seems to be stronger than *Atma*. Iron, in its nature, is not hot; it is cool and passive.

The iron is heated in fire. Is it the iron that burns, thus creating the heat? No, it is the heat that is put into the iron by the burning coals. The heat is added to the iron. Yet, when hot, the iron seems even hotter than the burning coals.

H: The mind has the tendency to plan ahead. No doubt this is a wrong activity?

SAI: In ordinary life, one makes plans and carries them out. This has to continue, with purity, and without harm to others. At length, a spontaneous divine thought will arise without planning. Such divine impulses will continue.

Discerning Right Thought

A Visitor: How can I tell what is right thought?

SAI: Here, in the Ashram, you can ask Swami. In America, **pray for the answer, then make inquiry in an impersonal way, and in half an hour you will have the answer. If you know what is right, don't ask. Do it. That is confidence, God power. Put aside all relationships. Is the work right, regardless of who is involved?**

H: Swami says to keep a distance from the mind. What does that mean?

SAI: **That means do not be led by the mind.**

H: What are the acceptable mental functions?

SAI: First, find out what is right and what is wrong. If right, do that which satisfies you. If unsure, do nothing until sure.

Vedantha

H: Swami mentions Vedanta. What is the correct use of that word?

SAI: Vedanta is metaphysical inquiry of the divine, the world, and the valid experience of each. Metaphysics begins where physics ends. Vedanta proves by experience that which has been formulated. Philosophy is the fruit which has all the parts, whereas Vedanta is the sweet juice. Philosophy takes you to the edge of truth, gives you a vision of truth. Vedanta takes you into the heart of truth. Philosophy is a way of intellectual inquiry.

Swami, the World and the Individual

H: Swami speaks of the divine, the world and the individual. What is the relationship of Swami to the individual?

SAI: Swami is the activator of the individual. He is the I, the Self in you and in everyone else. The Sun is reflected in the water, and the water becomes warm. Yet, warmth is not in water's nature.

H: What is the difference between God and the World?

SAI: Only in words, in the mind, is there a difference. When one is fully devoted to God, desiring Him only, the verbal and conceptual differentiation will cease, and the world also will be seen as God. The sequence should be experienced and seen as God, life, world. But most people see the world, life - and God is far distant.

The Reason For Creation

A Visitor: Why is creation? What is the reason for it?

SAI: First ask, 'Why food?' No reason. 'Why marriage?' No reason. Then children. 'Why children?' No reason. It is your wish. **Creation is God's wish, His Sankalpa.** There is a seed of a tree. It sprouts and there are many twigs and branches - and more and more. Thousands of leaves grow, and hundreds of fruits. Diversity - all from a single seed.

Visitor: But what is behind creation? What is the reason?

SAI: First ask, 'Who are you?'

Visitor: I am a nobody.

SAI: No. No. Who are you? **First find that and then you will find the answer to your question.**

Visitor: Is there life on other planets?

SAI: Creation is endless.

H: Is it that man creates his world by projecting concepts? For example: 'table' is not real. It is the wood that forms the table that is real, yet we accept the concept 'table' as being real, and we act according to that concept.

SAI: Table is wood, and 'table' is a projection of the human mind, and 'table' is only temporary. But the image in the mind is in the nature of an archetype. Likewise castles in clouds are passing phenomena, but God is their base. Just as waves, spray, and bubbles arising from the ocean fall away and disappear, but the ocean does not disappear.

H: Swami once said that the world emerges outward from man, just as human beings emerge outward from the body of a mother. Does this mean the entire world of which we are aware, everything?

The Ego: Its Formation and Dissolution

SAI: There is one exception. There is one thing that comes into man from the outside. That thing is the ego which is formed by attachment to outside objects. **With desire for the world cut, ego automatically vanishes.** Impressions that are taken into man from outside, if taken as the reality, are harmful. Because man looks at something outside and then creates, he thinks he is reproducing the outside. Whereas, in fact, the outside thing seen merely recalls to memory that which is already within.

When the eyes are open, one sees creation. All beings are created by the help of the eyes. The source of all that you see is the eyes. All so seen is impermanent. The three letters in 'eye' represent the three *gunas*. **But with 'I', the Self, one can see something quite beyond the transient.**

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

THE DISCIPLE FINALLY GETS IT!

Once a disciple went to a preceptor and requested him to impart to him the Supreme Knowledge of the Self (*Brahma-thathvam*). The Guru gave him a *manthra* (a sacred utterance) and asked him to recite it continually without any selfish desire. The Guru told him that after he has done this wholeheartedly for a year he could come and receive the *Brahma-Jnaana* (knowledge of the Self).

The disciple came back after a year duly carrying out with devotion the instructions of the preceptor. Filled with the hope that the preceptor would impart the Supreme Knowledge, the disciple had a sacred bath and was on his way to the preceptor. Unaware of the presence of the disciple, a maid was sweeping the ashram (hermitage) premises and the dust from the ground fell on the young man.

Immediately, he lost his temper, as he felt that his purity after a sacred bath had been sullied by the dust that fell on him. He was angry with the maid for allowing the dust to fall on him. He looked at her angrily and she became frightened.

The disciple went in and offered his salutations to the Guru and said, "Guruji! I have been waiting for a year to secure your grace. The time is now ripe for realising it. I am eager to receive the Supreme Knowledge from you."

The preceptor said, "You are not yet competent to receive that knowledge. You have the qualities of a snake. You got angry with a girl who unwittingly caused some dust to fall on you. How can the supreme knowledge of the self be imparted to one who has not even this amount of forbearance? Go back and practise the *sadhana* (spiritual practice) for one more year."

At the end of the second year, when the disciple was about to come to the ashram, the preceptor instructed the maid to see that as she swept all the dust should fall on the disciple. The maid told the guru that on the previous occasion the disciple had been angry with her, and this time if she repeated the offence, he might beat her. The guru told her to do as directed by him.

In accordance with the directive of the Guru, she swept the dust on the disciple in full measure. Enraged at her conduct, the disciple went to beat her but refrained from doing so. He then went into the ashram and paid his respects to Guru. The Guru told him,

"You have not yet acquired the competence to receive the knowledge. You are exhibiting the qualities of a dog. Come back after ridding yourself of these animal qualities."

At the end of the third year, the disciple was coming to the ashram after a sacred bath. Carrying out the instructions of the Guru, the maid of the ashram

poured some dirty water on the disciple. The latter calmly offered his *pranams* (obeisance) to the maid and said,

"Mother! My salutations to you. You have helped to strengthen my forbearance so that I can be worthy of the preceptor's grace." Without getting angry with her, he told her that he would be always grateful to her for what she had done to him. When he went in, the Guru welcomed him and said: "Son! Today you have become eligible to receive the Supreme Spiritual Knowledge."

The lesson of this story is that every spiritual seeker has to get rid of attachment to the body. But, that is not enough. The egoistic feeling should be totally eliminated. The sense of possessiveness should be expelled. Only then can one realise Divinity. The preceptor drew the disciple close to him and imparted to him the *Brahma-Jnaana* (Supreme Spiritual Wisdom) and filled him with bliss.

- From Baba's discourse on 14th Oct 1995.

COVER STORY

SRI SATHYA SAI INSTITUTE OF HIGHER MEDICAL SCIENCES, WHITEFIELD

FIVE YEARS OF HEALING WITH LOVE

The Very Beginning... Nagaratna Rediscovered Life

The beaming smile on the face of Nagaratna said it all...a smile that conveyed an explicable joy, immense gratitude and wonder – all at the same time. “Can all this be really true... am I dreaming?” Nagaratna, the first surgery patient of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, kept wondering after she was discharged from the Hospital with the hole in her heart fixed.

18-year old Nagaratna never had imagined that somebody would be interested in improving her condition looking at her father’s purse, or the lack of it. Her father, a typical poor Indian farmer, battered by erratic seasons and beaten by poverty from Sipili village of Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh, never ever contemplated taking his daughter to a super specialty Hospital, forget getting her treated. When someone told him of Baba’s Hospital, he too, like many, never believed about the free treatment part, until... when he came face to face with the huge mansion that was the Hospital, stepped inside and experienced that the hearts of the people serving inside were equally large.

He immediately felt at ease when he and his daughter were greeted with smiles by everybody from the registration clerk to the doctor. On the day of her surgery, the nurses, the technical officers, the doctors...all seemed so interested in her, “It was a like a family affair, I never felt I was alone... everybody was with me, concerned about me,” says Nagaratna now recalling her days in the Hospital. Her father lost all anxieties when he saw his daughter going to the operation theatre smiling and later the Hospital staff reassuring him, “Do not worry...She is going to be alright...it’s only a matter of few hours...Baba will take care.”

Looking at her cheery face nobody would have said that she had undergone a heart operation just a few hours ago, the nurses attending on her say. Her joy was doubled when Bhagawan Baba Himself visited the ICU just the next day of her surgery and as He gently moved, cast a kind loving glance on her and then raised His hands in blessing! Nagaratna was never the same again.

You could see an all new Nagaratna on the day of her discharge - the spring in her step, the smile on her lips and the confidence on her face to now face life boldly and bravely – it was as if she got a great blessing unexpected! She was now going to study with renewed vigour.

The Magnificent Mansion of Hope

A casual look at the corridors and corners of the Hospital on any typical day will show you so many such Nagaratnas, whose existence society barely acknowledges, let alone comes to their aid, who have stepped into this magnificent mansion of hope and received help, health and more importantly, confidence.

Raju Das, the son of a factory worker from the state of West Bengal and currently an under graduate student, who had lost vision in both his eyes because of a brain tumour, having regained his vision, now says he will continue his graduation and will someday do a Ph.D! When 20 days old Afsath was diagnosed with a hole in her heart, her father, a street hawker, and mother, a servant maid, did not know where to turn to for support. They were simply devastated! It was as if someone had slapped a capital punishment on them for eternity...they knew they could never garner the astronomical amount their kid's surgery demands. Years rolled by and they had accepted their fate until one day... when they met one of Baba's devotees. He told them about Baba's Hospital in Whitefield. They did not have enough money even to travel to Whitefield! They bought the tickets with borrowed money! Today, Afsath in the pink of her health and with a benign smile on her face, says, "I want to become a doctor!" Isn't it stirring?

"It's a Magnificent Palace-Cum-Temple" – Sri A B Vajpayee, Former Prime Minister of India.

There is no dearth of such heart-touching stories in this 'heaven of health' for the poor...so many such Nagaratnas, Rajus and Afsaths have come in hundreds and thousands since this Hospital came into existence on the 19th of Jan, 2001. All these beautiful people have left behind tales for all of humanity, each one more soul-stirring than the other. On the inauguration day, five years ago, the then Prime Minister of India, Sri A B Vajpayee had said, "It is no Hospital or hi-tech Hospital, it is a magnificent palace-cum-temple."

Yes, it is a palace...a 'palace for the poor' and a 'temple of healing' for all. What makes this Hospital so special? For this, let's go down the memory lane of time to the very first day of this Hospital and listen to the words of Bhagawan Baba, the divine initiator and the sole inspiration of this wonderful edifice.

Bhagawan Baba had said on the day of the Inauguration,

"This (Hospital) is not operating for financial gains. All medicines here will be free. Doctors should understand that it is not medicines alone but God's grace that cures patients. **While this building is imposing from the outside, it will also confer inner bliss. This Hospital has a divine quality that will draw the whole world to it. We should see to it that there are no heart diseases (at least) in Karnataka.**

Doctors should win over the minds of the patients by talking to them with compassion and concern, the diseases are half cured when the doctors win over the minds of patients by talking to them with love and consideration. The doctors should administer the injection of courage and encouragement.

Compassion is more important than money. Some doctors wonder how we can treat patients free of charge. You can work wonders with purity of heart. Any work which is started with purity of heart is bound to succeed. Money flows if your work is suffused with love and Sacrifice. People will volunteer with adequate funds to support any noble endeavour.”

The Divine Declaration Unfolding...

And true to Baba’s words, since its inception the Hospital has operated on more than 11,000 patients with various heart, brain and spinal disorders, all absolutely free! In the words of Michael Nobel, Chairman of the Board of the Nobel Family Society and great grandnephew of Alfred Nobel, who visited the Hospital on 19th Jan, 2002,

“A truly remarkable achievement! A one of a kind combination of hi-tech, state of the art medical facility offering the top-of-the-line treatment for free to the masses of the people who would never normally have such a chance in life. An awe-inspiring achievement! Thank you (Baba) on behalf of mankind.”

- Michael Nobel

A little more than a year ago, Dr. Fazilah Allahdin, Deputy Director, Ministry of Health, Malaysia, visited the Hospital, and before taking leave she wrote this in the visitors’ book,

“It has been a privilege to visit this Hospital where there is so much devotion, passion and love. It makes me realise that money is not everything after all. Keep up the good work and continue to serve the people! God bless all of you.”

- Dr. Fazilah Allahdin

Devotion, passion and love. Yes, this is the bedrock on which patient care in this Hospital stands!! The treatment of a patient has essentially no relationship with the economic soundness or social background of the patient. His/her religion, country or culture too does not matter.

Sukriti Sharma, an eight-month-old baby girl from Kathmandu, Nepal, underwent a surgery to correct a congenital cardiac defect – totally free in

2003. P N Mishra, a 56-year old man from Nimapara, a village in the state of Orissa, India, had a heart valve replaced without paying a single penny, a few months ago. Jim from Trinidad chose to fly down to the South Indian City of Bangalore for a by-pass surgery instead of heading for the US or London.

COSTS AND PATIENT CARE

What's Special in Baba's Hospital?

Why are people from different regions and countries converging in this Hospital? Is it only because it is totally free? Partly, yes. The poor come here because they just cannot afford to go anywhere else. We know how expensive specialized healthcare is! A simple heart procedure anywhere in India will cost between Rs. 50,000 to 1,50,000. Same with closing a hole in the heart, or correcting a valve and many other such operations, while a heart valve replacement will be close to Rs. 2,00,000. If you take the case of Neuro-Surgery which demands very high skills from surgeons dealing with the nerves and tissues inside the brain, surgeries range from Rs. 1,00,000 to 3,00,000. But, Baba's Hospitals, both in Bangalore and Puttaparthi, are perhaps, the only Hospitals in the world which run without a billing system!

Many wonder, how is it possible? The same question was asked by Felix Wust (Mr. FW), editor of SWISS MED - The Swiss Review for Medicine and Medical Technique - to Dr. A N Safaya (Dr. ANS), Director of the Hospital, in an interview few months ago. Here are Dr. Safaya's words.

Mr. FW: When you spoke about the medical disciplines in your hospitals you said you provide the treatment completely free. This is rather astonishing. I may say almost unbelievable – and not everybody's cup of tea in our Western countries!

Dr. ANS: I expected this question. The free treatment is mainly possible due to donations – small and large donations – made by the devotees of Sathya Sai Baba from all over the world. These donations go into a Trust which is called the Sri Sathya Sai Medical Trust. This Sri Sathya Sai Medical Trust has a certain amount of money placed in the banks as its corpus fund that supports the day-to-day activities of both our hospitals. The two hospitals require about 2 crores of Rupees every month. Of course, a rigid cost control, cost engineering and continuous innovation help us cut the costs. In addition to these donations, some people make contributions (in kind) for a particular purpose.

MR. FW: And you do not take any direct action in acquiring such donations?

Dr. ANS: No, we don't, they just come. You need a Sathya Sai Baba to be in the centre of this picture. Without him, all this would probably not have been possible."

But the completely free treatment aspect is only, as previously mentioned, part of the story. The most important other half is the quality of care – technologically and otherwise offered at the Hospital.

INSPIRED STAFF AND PATIENT CARE

It's Not Just Free, It's of High Quality!

Mr. Lalitbhai Vadilal Parekh, from Pune, India who underwent a heart operation in the Hospital a few months ago, says,

“After seeing all the facilities available there, I felt as if I was in a 5 star hotel and not a Hospital. What a beautiful and imposing building it is! It is equally clean, well ventilated and comfortable. The volunteers, doctors and nurses greet you with an “Om Sri Sai Ram” in a polite manner and are always ready at your service. It feels like one has come into a temple.”

Two years ago, when Lalitbhai developed chest pain, he underwent angiography (a diagnostic test) in a local Hospital paying Rs. 20,000 and he was told he would need a bypass surgery. His condition worsened with time and he would become breathless while walking. When he did another test in 2003, he drowned in distress because the local doctors told him to get the surgery done in a matter of 8 days! Approximate cost of surgery – Rs. 2,00,000!! Knowing fully well he could never afford the treatment, Lalitbhai tried other alternative medicine such as homeopathy, but all in vain. It was at this time that he learnt about Baba's Hospital. Successfully operated upon and now immensely glad and grateful, Lalitbhai, wrote in “Jain Jagruthi” (July 2004 Issue), a Marathi magazine from Pune,

“In this Hospital patients are looked after just like guests. There is a spirit of service to mankind in each one of the staff members. They do their service in a most selfless and devoted manner. Honestly, I felt and saw God in each one of them in this ‘Kaliyug’....All treatments are absolutely free! Each patient who goes there is given friendly and polite service by the staff that is always so courteous.”

Recalling the kind attention given by doctors, he further adds, “After a 45 minute angioplasty...I was discharged within a day. **The doctors advised me about the course of action to be taken in future, the care, diet and exercise and also about keeping a philosophical attitude in life as that leads to one's progress. It was as if, I had been reborn again.**”

Tremendous Commitment – Be it Doctors or Nurses

Truly, it is the dedication and passion with which the doctors and nurses work, that distinguishes this Hospital. For example, when Joseph (name changed) was operated upon for a complex Neuro Surgical procedure called "Aneurysm clipping", the Neuro Surgeon was in the Operation Theatre for – hold your breath - 20 hours! He did not come out for a sip of coffee or even water! And the amazing part is that when the surgery was finally over, the surgeon chose to go to the wards and do his regular rounds seeing the progress of the post operative patients and giving instructions to the nurses. Only after he had done this to his satisfaction, did he go to have some food and catch some sleep! Any Hospital with doctors like this would do wonders, wouldn't it?

It is not only the doctors; the nurses and all the other support staff are equally enthused lot. The mission and inspiration of Baba rubs on all of them. There are so many instances when the nurses have given money from their own purse for the

patient to return home because they are so poor! There are patients who come to the Hospital selling their land and property just to pay for the travel expense and all the staff in the Hospital are very sensitive to their problems. When the barber who was meant to shave the head of a patient meant for neuro surgery could not make it in time, one nurse did not hesitate to don the barber's role! Nothing is inferior or mean when it comes to patient's welfare.

Nobody asks the nurses to get comics for kids or walkmans for youngsters in the ward. They just do it. In fact, when one patient wanted petroleum jelly for her skin, a nurse did not hesitate giving her own cold cream! There are hundreds of daily incidents like this...all small but the impact on the patient is never small. They feel the Hospital is another home. In fact, there are many patients - Abduls and Anands – who have shed tears during their discharge. For, dieticians in which other Hospital will come three times a day and ask you if the food is ok, if you wanted any change in your menu and explain to you why you have to take a particular diet - and that too, all free! Where else will you find volunteers eager to help in every activity inside the Hospital including taking you to the bathroom, even if it is in the middle of night! No wonder, for poor patients, it is nothing less than a paradise.

“It's Alladin's Magic Lamp for the Poor” – Lalitbhai, a Former Patient

Lalitbhai, the former patient, continues to say, **“For receiving all the care, I did not have to shell out a single penny. Along with this, I also got a ‘Rate Concession Form for Heart Patient’ as a result of which my railway fare was only one-fourth. Thus, I was benefited greatly by this form, I doubt if there is any other organization that does so much.”**

Before he ended his article, Mr. Lalitbhai clearly spelt out why he had written those words saying, “The organization and management of such an institute is truly an example for the world to follow. This is truly a god sent boon for the needy ... it is a magic lamp – Alladin's magic map - for people suffering from heart and brain diseases in this age and I myself have experienced this, an experience that changed my life. I feel that everyone should benefit from such selfless work. This is the reason behind writing this article.”

It is this familial care which has changed so many lives and which continuously draws people from far and beyond to this Hospital. The Hospital makes no publicity on its own. The good word spreads. In fact, a Nepal Newspaper “The Rising” carried an article “Sathya Sai Institute – In the Service of Mankind” mentioning how so many Nepalese have been touched by the loving care delivered in the Hospital. Similarly, a South African paper, “The Citizen” reported six months after the inauguration of the Hospital in 2001, “While South Africa struggles with a public health service which is turning into a nightmare – cruelly selfish nurses, thieving doctors and hospitals which breed infection....a medical miracle is taking place in India which should serve as an inspiration and an example to us....They demonstrate that simultaneous compassion and efficiency in healthcare is not a pipedream.”

“Patient is a Full Human Being, Not a Disease’ – Dr. Sreedhar

This Hospital is truly a dream turned into reality. It is what men of great character

and concern for people like Gandhiji and Swami Vivekananda had envisaged for India. A structure which not only heals the body, but also quietens the mind and energizes the soul.

“The unique aspect of this Hospital is that, in all departments, patients are treated as a full human being rather than as a disease. The philosophy of ‘love all serve all’ rubs on all who work in the Hospital and every member of the staff tries to help the patients in their own way starting from guiding them to the right place in the Hospital till helping them to find an accommodation for their over night stay, giving priority to out-station poor patients. Nothing but Swami’s blessings enable us in doing this pious task with such contagious zeal,” says Dr. Sreedhar, the Chief Radiologist of the Hospital.

Bhagirath from New Delhi who had her only daughter’s valve replaced here a few months back says, “The treatment here is not only for the body but also for the mind.” This happens because of a number of salient features of the Hospital starting with technologically high quality patient care to the dedicated team of doctors and volunteers to the sublime spiritual ambience of the Hospital.

SOPHISTICATED TECHNOLOGY AND PATIENT CARE

Often ill-informed people jump to conclusions that as the treatment given is totally free (the patient is not asked money for anything even for food), the treatment in this Hospital must be substandard. The fact is though that the Hospital is counted among the best in Bangalore, the “Silicon Valley” of India and it has many firsts to its credit as far as patient care and medical infrastructure is concerned. Baba often says, “Since it is free, it should be the best.” And best it is, no doubt, equipped with the most modern medical equipment available in the field of Cardiology and Neuro Sciences. Just to give a few instances -

- The Stealth Neuro Navigation System (for image guided surgery), the latest technology in precision neuro surgery which borrows its concept from the Global Positioning System technology used to map geographical dimensions using satellites, arrived at the Hospital just a few months after its inauguration and is being used by the Neuro Surgery team of the Hospital.

Many would not know that the Hospital is the first in Asia and second in the world to have such a sophisticated facility. This facility makes the surgery safe, especially in cases where the tumour is close to the speech or other critical areas of the brain. “This makes the procedure less invasive and the skull won’t be cut beyond what is required,” says, Dr. A S Hegde, the Head of Neuro Surgery Department of the Hospital.

- Similarly, the Neuro-interventional catheterization lab (or in short Neuro Cath Lab), with its biplane feature, allows for imaging in two planes simultaneously and ensures that the contrast dose to the patient is kept to a minimum. Only a few select Hospitals in India have this.
- Coming to Radiology, the 1.5 Tesla GE Signa Horizon Lxi MRI system used for MRI scans is at the forefront of medical imaging technology and is one of the few available in India. This helps in efficient diagnosis and faster cure as it

is a crucial aid in diagnostic radiology and allows high resolution images with a shorter exam time.

- Again, the CT scanner which is a Volume Zoom Multidetector Multislice CAT scanner represents a new generation in Computerized Tomography (CT) technology and is the first such installation in South India. Its amazing speed and resolution allow for highly accurate imaging, particularly of vascular structures, and the cardiology department has performed some very high quality CT angiograms (visualization of blood vessels). Likewise, the dual-headed SPECT Gamma camera present in the Hospital is the latest technology in the field of Nuclear Medicine, which is equipped to detect functional abnormalities in heart and in the brain non-invasively.
- Moving on to the Laboratory, the Biochemistry department has a Beckman Coulter cx9 ALX clinical system which can perform the tasks of 7 to 8 testing machines and can analyze 900 bio-chemical tests per hour! This speed enables doctors can diagnose the patients better and quicker.
- Similarly, the blood bank of the Hospital operates a Blood Componenting system which separates the various components of blood like plasma, platelets and red cells under sterile conditions and then stores them at specific temperatures for use during operations - a practice performed only in premier Hospitals.
- Only those components that are of therapeutic value to the patient are transfused. As a result of this the blood bank makes optimum utilization of the blood donated. For example, in the period of 10 months (Jan-Oct 2003) the blood bank collected 3,141 units of blood but they were able to prepare many more components, namely 4,714. One will be surprised to know that this blood bank receives 98% of its stock through donations which perhaps happens in no other hospital in Bangalore, or maybe even in India.
- Again, the Column Agglutination Technology used in the blood bank for cross matching blood components is the among the latest technology in the field and is used by less than 1% of hospitals - those considered the best in the country.
- Aply assisting all this sophisticated equipments is a robust IT (Information Technology) system and network. With a 1 Gbps fiber optic cable which networks the entire Hospital and the ancillary buildings, the network has the potential to enable doctors to access the vital signs of the patients even from the their home. There are close to 10 servers and 80 client computers connected to the network.
- The Hospital Management Information System, MEDICOM, comprising of over 60 modules, not only enables easy patient tracking, fast access of the patient information, from anywhere in the Hospital, but also enables some of the medical equipment to 'talk' with the computers thereby allowing the doctors to order tests, see results, etc. online.

In fact, comparing the IT deployment in the Hospital with other hospitals in Bangalore, the *Times of India*, India's largest English daily, said,

"According to an independent healthcare consultant firm, 75% of the tech deployment in the city's healthcare sector is focused on administrative activities, including billing and patient management. There is no emphasis on customer relationship and systems integration...**the study found the highest tech deployment in Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences.**" There are good reasons for this assessment by the consulting firm and here are a few highlights of how the Hospital has effectively embraced IT in delivering better patient care.

- Unlike conventional procedure where CT and MRI images are printed on films, in this Hospital all the scanned images are electronically transmitted to the doctor's desktop PC immediately upon completion of the scan by the Radiology department. Not only does this help in speedy and effective diagnosis, it also reduces consumption of films by 90%, which is a huge saving!
- On the same lines, all the blood samples are bar-coded and fed directly into the electronic analysers in the lab. On successful completion of the ordered tests, the analysers feed the results directly into the patient management software which displays the results directly to the requesting doctor/nurse without any human intervention, and more importantly, without any loss of time which is so important.

Similarly, a lot can be said about the indigenously developed sophisticated stores management system which enables all the sub-stores to maintain a very lean inventory and also place their indents to the main store electronically; or, the intuitive software interface designed specially for the doctors which mimic the usual pre-printed forms which doctors are accustomed to; or, the speedy electronic collation of all the information relevant for the discharge summary of the patient and hence a quick discharge report; or even the reliable and effective patient wait-list management (uniquely this Hospital has a waiting list for surgeries because of the enormous number of people it receives everyday).

- Dr. Nandita Ghosal, In-Charge of Blood Bank, says, "The laboratory has become "paperless" as the results of patient blood profiles and a host of other

Hospital who are very poor have come forward to offer blood saying, *“We are very poor...this is the only way we can give something back to this Hospital.”* Of course, the blood bank never accepts blood from former patients, but those scenes remain ever fresh in the memory of the staff, inspiring them and giving them a sense of fulfillment.

PATIENT TRANSFORMATION ALONG WITH PATIENT TREATMENT

What the Visiting British MPs Said

A little more than a year ago, when eight British Ministers of Parliament (MPs) from

the Hospital in 2001 for check ups and treatment. All these three children were operated upon for PDA and now they are all healthy and happy and of course, very grateful to the Hospital.

"I had never even dreamt of leading a normal life," is all Savitha, aged 40, would say with a choked voice. Savitha could not get married because of her heart ailment and lives with her younger brother's family while her elder brother is mentally retarded. The successful operation on her rheumatic heart disease has now opened up for her a host of opportunities and now she is planning her future and looking for a job which will to some extent, at least, better their tragic condition.

"An Overwhelming Experience!" – Tina Ambani

Tina Ambani, former actress and wife of corporate czar, Anil Ambani, wrote in the visitor's book on 31st July 2004:

"It has been an overwhelming experience! I am speechless, expressionless. Your devotion to humanity is unreal - till you see it, experience it. May god give this vision to more people."

Dr Lalit Chauhan, Cardiology Consultant from St Louis, Missouri in the USA says,

"My five days here was my first visit to this unique institution. This place combines in the most comprehensive way professional tertiary care, arranging healthcare delivery system and a set of uniquely dedicated individuals working selflessly," says Dr. Lalit Chauhan, "the quality of care here is so good and up to the best institutions that I will not hesitate for even my family members to get help if they happen to be here and need it. May the reality of this place be a role model for the rest of the world."

Everyday hundreds of such people find new meaning in their lives, sport a smile which they haven't for years and thank God that this Hospital exists. This Hospital indubitably changes them for ever, for the better. Some begin to live a fuller life while some begin to rethink about the actual purpose of life.

Ask Ahmed the bus driver who after his operation expressed his desire to help transport patients to the Hospital. Ask Dilip, who refused to go back to his profession as a butcher after his little Sharira Bhanu was operated here. Ask the student who returned again and again to physically assist other patients as they recuperated after surgery. "I know how it feels" was his simple reply.

It is the blend of aesthetic appeal, functional effectiveness, practical efficiency and spiritual sublimity, as the Hospital brochure states, which consciously and subconsciously touches and leaves a mark in the inner recesses of every one who steps into this hallowed Temple of Healing. Before the British MPs left, they penned down in the visitors' book: "Thank you for giving us such a fascinating tour of a truly extraordinary Hospital."

“An Impressive Healthcare Facility” – Ferid Murad, Nobel Laureate

Ferid Murad, Nobel Laureate in Medicine, 1998 from the University of Texas Medical School at Houston, USA also had similar feelings to express. After he took a tour of the Hospital and its work, he said on Nov 18th, 2003, “Thank you for the tour of your Hospital and clinics. This is a very beautiful and impressive healthcare facility that promises free medical care. I congratulate the Hospital and Swami for such an important mission.”

- Ferid Murad, Nobel Laureate, 1998

SUBLIME AMBIENCE AND PATIENT CARE

“Healthcare in God’s Service” – Dr. Mitchell Krucoff

Dr. Mitchell W Krucoff, Professor of Medicine/Cardiology, Interventional Cardiology, Duke University Medical Centre and Director, Cardiovascular Laboratories, Durham VA Medical Centre, (both in the US) visited Baba’s Hospital along with his team of professionals and this is what he records,

“We literally were bathed in the healing space created through Baba’s loving vision, embedded in every detail from the concrete to the gleaming marble floors, in every person from the staff to the patients and their families. What we saw was the highest level of technology, with some equipment even newer than the equipment we use at Duke Medical centre. But the technology was dwarfed by the context into which everything in the Hospital dwelled – healthcare in God’s service.

Among the staff, whether cleaning or cooking or doing open heart surgery, all work was done in God’s service. Among the patients and families, many of whom had never seen a plumbing fixture, much less a digital cardiac catheterization laboratory, there was no fear, no anxiety, no depression as we commonly see on rounds in the USA. As we rounded in...every patient and family member, children and adults, literally beamed at us. They clearly knew that, physically and spiritually, they were in God’s Hospital.”

This extract truly sums up the ambience of the Hospital. It is this ambience which is responsible for the Hospital’s success and which has been ratified by almost everyone who has seen and been in this ‘Temple of Healing’ including visiting doctors and experts.

Conversation Between Dr. Nadana Chandran and Dr. Choudhury V

It is interesting to learn what Dr. Nadana Chandran (Dr. NC), Director of the Neurosurgical Unit, Canberra Hospital, Australia, who spent 2 1/2 weeks in 2005 serving in the Neurosciences Department, said in an interview with Dr. Choudhury V (Dr. VC), another distinguished Cardiac surgeon, from USA.

Dr. NC: I walked into the ward the other day after we did some major cases and I was amazed at the state of recovery of the patients; it was far ahead of what I would normally see. This is no exaggeration. This is purely something very striking in this

place. People recover that well. I am sure it is all the Grace of Swami. Of course there is the human skill of the people who are working here, and dedicating themselves to the work here, but there's something beyond that, of course.

Dr. VC: The other thing (apart from 'divine grace') which impressed me when I used to actively work here, was the fact that the patient does not have to pay any money, everything comes free to him, and when he came in he looked at himself and everybody else in a different way. How do you view that?

Who Says There is "No Free Lunch" – Dr. Choudhury

Dr. NC: I come from an environment where medicine is largely driven by money. And, here you see for the first time somebody who can walk in and have the most highly advanced, technologically sophisticated service available with no worry about any money and I am amazed to see people coming all the way after 3 days' travel, from Calcutta and other places to get the treatment done.

Dr. VC: Till 2001, I used to practise cardiac surgery in Los Angeles and I used to work for 3 months in Swami's Hospital. Now the thing that amazed me was technologically, over here, even simple things like blood cardioplegia which is a technological advancement, we would do exactly the same thing in Swami's Hospital. Our tendency is to normally associate something free to be cheap. That was my impression. When I came here I found that the "No free lunch" concept in totally untrue in this environment.

Dr. NC: In fact, I must confess that we don't have some of the equipment in the Theatres here, in many of the Hospitals in Australia. So, it is really amazing to see this degree of technology available for our patients, who have to pay nothing at all. It is really very, very rewarding.

Dr. VC: Ten years ago, I heard from Swami, we should not treat the patient as a disease, but we should treat the mind, body and the soul. And, that to me, is the biggest message I got from Swami from here.

Dr. NC: Yes, and you can feel that when you hear the bhajans and the soothing music that is piped right through. Sometimes Swami's discourses are heard when you're operating, which is quite different to the environment where I normally work. Certainly, it is a very spiritually healing place.

Talking about the ambience and experience of working in the Hospital, the common refrain of every doctor who has served or is currently serving is - "This is a totally different place to work. It is very humbling". Dr. Hegde, a very distinguished Neuro Surgeon of India who heads the Department of Neuro Sciences in the Hospital, says,

"We do what is best for the patient. The economic factors do not influence the patient management decision....there is none of the all-too-common feeling of helplessness that poor patients have when they are unable to afford treatment.

"Toddlers Only" Zone in the Out Patient Department

In the recent times, the Hospital has “reengineered” its processes in the Cardiac Out Patient department – Indubitably, the most crowded place in the Hospital everyday mid-morning where on an average at least 220 patients and their attenders, await for various tests, reports or consultation. For the toddlers, there is a “Toddlers Only” zone where their mothers can nurse them and they can ‘relax’ and play with interactive soft toys (which, incidentally have been sent by Bhagawan Baba Himself recently). This room has been done up with colourful wall paper, cartoons and stickers, entirely by the staff of the department. It is now a hot-favourite amongst the tiny-tots! Apart from this, there are audio-visual systems set up in patient waiting areas and various films of Bhagawan, His discourses and proceedings during various festivals in Puttaparthi are being shown. This medium is also used to screen videos on patient-education, counseling, preventive medicine, and so on in regional languages.

COUNSELING AND PATIENT CARE

Counseling Department: One-of-a-Kind

Once the patients step inside the Hospital, they are reassured and relaxed. They know the Hospital wants nothing from them in return. Providing comfort and confidence and lending a patient ear to all their worries and anxieties is another very unique service wing of the Hospital - the Counseling Department. This department, if not unique in its concept, is surely intuitively exceptional and one-of-a-kind in its approach and impact. Their fundamental tenets - “Help Ever, Hurt Never” and “Love All Serve All” inspired by Baba. The counselors of the Hospital provide the non-medical but equally vital emotional support to the patients. Describing their work, a counselor says,

“On admission the patients have different apprehensions as to their stay in the Hospital – at this point we appraise them of the good care available, assuring them of the doctor’s expertise and competence along with free care provided by Bhagawan Baba and they relax instantly.”

Prithvi Pani, who underwent neuro surgery for removal of a tumour, says, **“My nine days stay at the SSSIHMS was a divine holiday. In fact I never had the feeling that I was a patient. In a surgery it is fear that haunts you more than the diseases. But here I must admit that from the time of admission the fear had gone and a subtle peace of mind transcended on me. The state of mind has to be experienced to be believed.**

Although I have profound faith in God, the moment I entered this divine medical centre, I began to admire Baba for his selfless service to mankind, through his philosophy of “Love All Serve All”. Every person admitted to this Institute, however poor or rich, is taken care of without any discrimination. The medical service is supreme. A missionary zeal can be seen in every individual serving this Institute and this clearly shows the heartiness of this Divine soul, Sri Sathya Sai Baba who infuses such dynamism into every person serving here.”

*****IN BOX

A Letter From A Patient To The Counseling Department

Sairam,

Loving letter from Menaka. I am a 1st Year M.Sc. (Microbiology) student from Kanchipuram. On 4th June 2005, I was admitted to Sathya Sai Hospital at Bangalore. Next day morning I was operated successfully. I am healthy now. Recently I had revisited the Hospital for a follow-up checkup. Doctors informed that there is no problem. I am able to lead a normal life.

Regarding the Hospital: **I was well-taken care in the Hospital during my week long stay. The courtesy, love and words that I enjoyed there will not be possible even with money elsewhere. Sevadals conducted themselves gracefully. I did not know any of the people working in the Hospital as I was completely new, still they took care of us nicely. So much of care and love is not possible elsewhere!**

Pages would not be enough if I were to write about the doctors. If not for them, will I be writing this letter? I see these doctors as a form of GOD to save the lives of the sick...**Doctors were very humble and believed that all of us are equal in the eyes of Baba. Baba has given me a rebirth. It is because of Baba I am alive now!!**

This operation would have cost lakhs of rupees elsewhere, but was done completely free at this Hospital. I really doubt if I would have recovered this well even if I were to shell out money.... I would be grateful for the rest of my life, for my very existence is their benevolence. I am serving my locality and also meditating as per your advice. All these make me feel healthy and strong.

Many a thanks for your service! I will be in touch regularly through letters.

Yours

V.

25 November, 2005

loving,
Maneka

*****BOX ENDS

Counseling and Spiritual Healing

The counselors meet all the in-patients individually, either in the counseling room or at their bedsides in the wards. They quickly establish a rapport not only with the patient but also with the immediate family members by informal interaction and by speaking to them in their own language or one familiar to them.... Counseling compliments the modern medicine and surgery process through spiritual healing.

Mind is the seat of all emotions and feelings and Baba says, in fact, it is the mind which is the root cause of 98% of all ailments. By generating positive thoughts in the patients, the counselors help in maintaining good health of the patients in the post-operative recovery period.

“On the bedside rounds we see some patients going through great pain and suffering with all the care given. They are looking for solace and comfort. A small prayer to the divine here, together with the patient, releases all pain and tensions – result, the patient falls off to sleep. This is a divine painkiller and we have experienced this several times,” say the counselors who work voluntarily in the Hospital in a spirit of selfless service because of their love for Baba.

In fact, this pure love for Baba expressing itself as selfless service and the satisfaction derived there from is the biggest motivating factor for everyone associated with the Hospital. It is this ennobling feeling which makes many suppliers of various items needed by the Hospital offer their products free.

The dockyard worker in Bangalore may be used to tobacco, hard work and harder words but when it comes to unloading equipments meant for the Hospital, he takes only half the payment saying, “This is my small contribution to what Baba is doing for humanity!” There are many who choose to remain anonymous and silently contribute their might to the Hospital in whatever way they can, as for them it is only an offering to their lord.

SERVICE BY VOLUNTEERS AND PATIENT CARE

Sai Volunteers – The Spinal Cord of the Hospital

One of the most committed and caring among these group of selfless workers are the Sevadals – dedicated teams of volunteers belonging to various Sathya Sai centres all over from the state of Karnataka, who come for short periods of one week and lend their eager and earnest support in the running and upkeep of the Bangalore Hospital.

If the corridors in the Hospital shine and the walls of the wards and offices look bright, it is because of the Sevadals. If the gates of the Hospital are well-guarded

Expressing how the Sevadals change the quality of patient care, Dr. Geeta Rangan, who worked previously in many government and other private hospitals before joining as the head of the Neurology Department of Baba's Hospital, says,

"Our Bhagawan's Hospital does away with all the weakness in our different systems of health care. I was pleasantly surprised to see how the Seva Dal take care of the mundane aspects such as reception, guidance of the patients, and even paramedical aspects, without the usual shouting, screaming and exchange of unpleasanties. Instead, there is a quiet atmosphere in which to function, where a troublesome patient can be handed over to a psychological advice group while one concentrates on the next needy individual."

Testimony of a Sevalal

Quite happily and with enthusiasm, every Seva Dal accepts his position with a smile and works anywhere. Mr. Prakash Chittaranjan, a longtime volunteer, recollecting his first days of service and says,

"The whole Hospital seemed a crystal maze for me at the beginning, not knowing where each lab and other departments were within such a gigantic Hospital complex. But Swami kept telling me from within that He was there to guide me as ever, through his loving Hospital staff (Sisters, Doctors and administrators). I was able to feel the Unity, Purity and Divinity principle that Swami often talks about, which led me to interact well and share my love with the patients and the staff.

Patients from all classes and religions were being treated in this Hospital lovingly and for free. There were smiles all around from the patients and their relatives at the time of discharge, for they were fully charged with Swami's ocean of love.

This was a wonderful gift from Bhagawan to me, whose experience I will ever cherish in my life. As I entered into the last day of Seva, I was beginning to feel heavy hearted for I was about to be rudely woken up from the short and sweet dream. A dream that I wished should never end, deep within my heart. All I wanted to do then was to thank SAI for providing such a wonderful and spiritually enlightening experience and for making me be close to him as part of the overall experience."

This is the sublime feeling with which the Sevadals give their energy and time to the Hospital. They see Baba in everyone. No Seva Dal member gets tired or complains of hard work. He never aspires for any fruits for his service. He is a silent worker and never projects himself. You can not only see but feel the saying 'Service to Man is Service to God' when you see the Sevadals at work.

"Every Doctor, Nurse and Volunteer Behaved as if They Were My Family" – Dr. Pai,

Former Patient.

Dr. Y V Pai, a retired IAS officer recalling his hospitalization says,

“The most striking difference between SSSIHMS and other hospitals is the quality of people – doctors, paramedics and volunteers. They are not only skilful practitioners

Rehabilitation Programme, “Presentations about the programme content, in depth, were made by the Hospital staff followed by an interactive session. A detailed briefing followed on how the body-mind checkup needs to be done including completing the patient status feedback form as formatted by the Hospital. The take-home workshop material included guidelines, medical protocols following discharge, and counseling guidelines for providing emotional support and fostering spirituality.”

Explaining in detail the Programme implementation, Mr. Umesh Rao who also works in the Counseling Department of the Hospital, says,

“The Sai Organisation provides the Hospital with a list of the district doctors and seva representatives, who work in tandem as care providers to implement the programme. The Hospital at the time of discharge directs the patient to report, thirty days hence, to the appropriate local doctor for the first check up. Thereafter the local doctor and the district Seva representative take over the programme implementation.

The patient is asked to return for two more bi-monthly checks to complete the six-month recuperative rehabilitation. After every check up, a patient status feedback is routinely sent to keep the Hospital posted about the patient's recuperation.

These periodical checks of the patients are done in the respective doctor's clinics during their regular consulting hours. The volunteer doctors also perceive this as a God given opportunity for rendering Seva in their own clinics!”

BABA'S STUDENTS AND PATIENT CARE

Technical Officers - The Unsung Heroes

Yes, it is the loving care of doctors, nurses, ward boys and volunteers which makes the Hospital what it is - but it is not only them. There is another group which remains in the backstage just like the inconspicuous yet crucial group in a great musical extravaganza working on the sets, on the logistics, the costumes, the lights, the cameras, etc...whose services are vital and basic for the performance to click. This hallowed group is the band of Technical Officers, all former students of Baba's Institute, who were sent by Baba to premier healthcare institutions and trained on different operations of the Hospital before the Hospital actually started.

It is they who handle all the support services of the Hospital, be it maintaining the

stores, pharmacy and accounts; or, monitoring and constantly upgrading the IT deployment in the Hospital; or, refining and simplifying the procedures of the Hospital with optimum patient welfare as the sole objective; or, assisting the surgeons in the theatre working as perfusionists; or, managing the crowded outpatient departments of the Hospital which handle more than 300 patients every morning; or maintaining all the expensive medical equipment in the Radiology department and other Laboratories as well as other infrastructure like generators, etc.; or even doubling up as Public Relation Managers, Administrative Officers, etc. All of them keep themselves abreast of the latest happenings in their areas of work and one of them has even contributed a chapter to a text book on Radiology, a field which he was first acquainted with five years ago, when he joined the Hospital after his post-graduation. They are Baba's Messengers, the chosen Instruments of His grand Mission. In fact, they are like so many wheels working in clockwork precision, safeguarding the running of the great Hospital.

What motivates these post-graduates to forsake good careers and work in the Hospital? You ask them and they will say, "It is our love for Swami and the satisfaction of being a part of His glorious mission." They will join the counselors and hundreds of other volunteers and add, "Love is our tool, sincerity our drug and with empathy we see the unseen hand of the divine working in the process." Their essential love, sincerity and empathy is what makes them stand out and they experience, as they say, the "unseen hand of the Divine".

THE "UNSEEN DIVINE HAND" AND PATIENT CARE

In fact, this "unseen Divine hand" is an experience which every department of the Hospital can vouch for. Ask the surgeons and they will tell you there were so many cases where they thought the patient will not be able to cope, actually survived. And it happened so magnificently! Take the case of Juhi (name changed). When the Neuro specialists saw Juhi, a middle aged woman, brought on a stretcher to outpatient department, they had little clue as to what was the source of her chronic back pain which only increased when she tried to walk. Juhi had experienced hell. She was turned away from all hospitals she had visited. "Your case is too complex with very low chances of survival, we are sorry," is all they would say. Then somebody told her about Baba's Hospital in Bangalore.

When the doctors examined her thoroughly they learnt she had a very peculiar problem. Her abdominal aorta (blood vessel) had widened sac-like and was eating into the spinal cord. Doctors from both the disciplines - Cardiac and Neuro - teamed up to save this poor lady as the operation was going to be a very complicated affair.

Her surgery was done under hypothermia (temperature of blood brought to levels lower with ice) so that her heart can temporarily be suspended (transferred to the heart-lung machine) by Cardiac surgeons while the Neuro surgeons corrected her abdominal aorta and placed spinal implants to support her spine. Her post-operative period was not easy, but when Juhi did leave the hospital, she went out walking!! When Juhi returned to the hospital after three months for a follow up, doctors were amazed with the improvement in her condition. She was totally pain-free! "We are grateful to Bhagawan for His healing grace," is all the surgeons say.

In fact, the construction of the huge gem of architecture that is the Hospital building which spread over half a million square feet of area in just sixteen months is in itself a miracle! Few thought it was possible. Mr. Satish Nayak, who was the Project Director during its construction stage says,

“Nearly 500 contractors and sub-contractors gladly bent over backward to fulfill their obligations so that the project schedule could strictly be maintained....such commitment, one could clearly see, was possible only because the Divine Hand was guiding them. It was a case of: ‘Without God on our side, we are nothing; with God on our side, we are everything.’

Dr. Shailaja, MD, in charge of the Bio-chemistry lab says, “When unexpected things happen once, we call it coincidence; when they happen twice it may be just things falling in place due to our good luck; when they happen all through the year, you call them miracles. That is what we in the lab have been experiencing.” She substantiates this saying how on one occasion when they felt that a quality-control workshop must be conducted for the lab technicians in Bangalore, just a few hours later, a doctor from USA landed there with a CD with exactly the contents on quality-control they were looking for! Similarly, when they were not able to programme their sophisticated equipment for a particular test needed for a patient and even the service engineers of the company had given up, suddenly it occurred to them that if they could configure the machine in a particular way they could get the right result they needed and it worked! The doctors could put the patient on the right treatment in time and then thanked Swami.

Acclamation and Recognition from WHO

Thanks to the committed staff and their devotion to Baba, the quality of the care being offered at the Hospital has attracted the attention of many national and international agencies and personalities.

“According to a World Health Organisation’s (WHO) Medical Information Accreditation report, the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences at Whitefield in the outskirts of Bangalore, which specializes in cardiology and neurology surgeries and treatment, has **one among the lowest rates of mortality, morbidity environment and hospital acquired infection. The Hospital has also been recognized by the National Board of Examination (NBE) to admit PG students in cardiology and neurology for practical training,**” reported the Bangalore bureau of Pharmabiz.com on the 21st of Jan, 2002, that is, after one year of its operation.”

Since 2002, the Hospital has been recognised by the NBE for other disciplines too like Cardiac Surgery, Neuro Surgery, Neurology and even Radiology.

INFUSION OF NEW TECHNOLOGY AND PATIENT CARE

The Knowledge Transfer from Distinguished Visiting Doctors

Apart from the sophisticated equipment and the doctors’ commitment, another aspect which has contributed amply in maintaining the premium quality of patient

care is the visit of distinguished doctors from different parts of the world and the subsequent transfer of knowledge and technologies that are in vogue in top-of-the line hospitals around the world.

These experts most willingly join the team of Hospital doctors for short periods and “bring us the latest technology from abroad, from their respective countries and institutions. They teach, they help... from their point of view they are performing Seva, free service. This they do without any reimbursement,” says Dr. Safaya, director of the Hospital. One representative illustration of the many is the case of Dr. Sanjay Kumar Prasad. Dr. Sanjay Kumar Prasad is Consultant Cardiologist at the Royal Brompton Hospital in London, which is well known for the pioneering work done in the field of Cardiac Magnetic Resonance Imaging (Cardiac MR).

Cardiac Magnetic Resonance is a revolutionary technology with the potential to change the way cardiac patients are treated. With Cardiac MR, screening patients to find out whether they might need an intervention does not need to be an invasive procedure anymore.

Dr. Sanjay spent a week with the Hospital doctors in the summer of 2004 and imparted knowledge of this exciting new field to the Radiologists and Cardiologists of the Hospital. “The benefit to the patient is that,” says Dr. Sanjay, “it is much less uncomfortable, there is less risk from the procedure and it is much safer and at the same time provides more information than many of the standard procedures and so greatly helps the doctors manage cardiac patients. In time, Cardiac MR can become an out-patient procedure leading to improved throughput, increased cost savings and reduced morbidity in patients as compared to an invasive procedure.”

*****IN BOX

TALENTED DOCTORS AND PATIENT CARE

The infusion of latest techniques and expertise from regular visiting doctors along with their missionary zeal and enthusiasm greatly improves the skill and knowledge of the Hospital doctors. Many have received celebrated awards and fellowships and some regularly publish papers in reputed medical journals. Dr. A S Hegde, who heads the Neuro Sciences Department of the Hospital, is a very distinguished Neuro surgeon and a recipient of Karnataka Rajyotsava Award in 2003 for “outstanding contributions to the state and country.”

Dr. Hegde on invitation is part of cutting-edge projects in healthcare, the recent one being the invitation by CSIR (Council For Scientific and Industrial Research, India) to be part of the New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative (NMITLI), the largest public-private partnership scheme on behalf of Govt. of India, to develop high quality Medical Implants and Development of Gene Chip for molecular diagnosis of Malignant Brain Tumor. He is also part of the six-member committee appointed by the Government of Karanataka to suggest views on improving the quality of healthcare services offered in the 16 government hospitals in and around Bangalore.

Dr. Smruti Ranjan Mohanty of the Cardiac Surgery Department, for instance,

was awarded the Evarts A. Graham Traveling Fellowship for 2004-05, granted by the American Association of Thoracic Surgery. It entitles him to work in the specialized field of pediatric heart care in the prestigious Charles Stewart Mott's Children's Hospital in Michigan, USA which is rated "the Best" in the state of Michigan for child healthcare and fifth in the USA by 'Child' magazine. Dr. Mohanty is the third Indian to be conferred this Fellowship in the last 40 years. A very rare achievement, indeed!

Dr. Anil Kumar Mulpur, Consultant, Cardiac Surgery Department, has contributed to two chapters in a text book on "Techniques in Extracorporeal Circulation- 4th Edition" published by Arnold Publishers, U.K. in 2004. He has co-authored the first chapter of the textbook with Christopher M Munsch, Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon, Leeds General Infirmary, Leeds, UK and also the sixteenth chapter with a few consultants working at the Leeds Hospital, U.K.

*****BOX ENDS

GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT AND PATIENT CARE

The state government of Karnataka, the state in which the Hospital is located, acknowledging the noble mission of the Hospital not only provided land measuring 52.26 acres in the prime Export Promotion Industrial Park **free** to the Trust for the construction of the Hospital and waived many taxes during its construction stage, but also even now offers huge subsidies with respect to electricity charges. Similarly, the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, exempts customs duties for imports of equipments and infrastructure for the Hospital.

The infrastructure, the equipment, the expertise of the doctors along with the government's support has made the Hospital exceptional. Add to this, its soothing ambience and the noble mission of Bhagawan, and the Hospital becomes a 'role model' for the healthcare profession.

"It is Not Only a Medical But a Spiritual Contribution" – Dr. Krishna Kant, Former Vice-President of India.

Dr. Krishna Kant, former Vice-President of India, after visiting the Hospital way back in 2001, had said, "SSSIHMS is a wonderful contribution of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. To have a free and modern Hospital for the poor people of India was a dream and pledge of our leaders in the freedom struggle. This is a realisation of (the) dreams (of) Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. It reproduces our spiritual heritage. One feels proud after going round it. This can be (a) model for all the developing countries as well as the developed world. The developed world has these facilities but not free for the poor. May this example be followed by others. It is not only medical but a spiritual contribution."

Yes, since its inception every patient and every visitor has looked at this Hospital with wonder. After 6,000 cardiac operations, more than 5,500 neuro surgeries, 3.5 lakh outpatient consultations and after five golden years of service, the Hospital is as dedicated and as committed as ever to serve the poor and the forlorn.

THE MILESTONES IN PATIENT CARE

In these five years that have gone by, the Hospital has also seen many changes, crossed many milestones, overcome many challenges and been a witness to many eye-opening revelations and stirring transformations.

“Making a Difference to People Who Had Given Up Hope.” – Dr. Safaya

When in the first six months of its existence, the Hospital crossed 1,500 surgeries, leading newspapers carried stories about it. Dr. A N Safaya, the Director, said at that time, “The Institute has also treated 18,012 cardiac outpatients and 10,722 neuro outpatients. Another 2,000 plus cardiac and over 1,000 patients in the neuro-sciences were treated as in-patients in the Hospital.” Speaking to the press on the social impact of the Hospital on that occasion, Dr. Safaya had said, it is “making a difference to people who had given up hope.”

In April 2004, The Times of India under the title, “Holistic Healthcare: Hospital Treats 2.5 Lakh Patients” congratulated the Hospital for the feat and continued to add, “Most of them belong to the lower income group, and many come in from Nepal, Sri Lanka, South Africa and even some from European countries.”

“Since inception in January 2001,” the newspaper article in April 2004 continues, “doctors here have performed complicated procedures in cardiac and neuro branches, with state-of-the-art technology. In commercial terms, the cost of treatment meted out free is around Rs. 150 crore. Lakhs of patients depend entirely on the Hospital.” Beautifully, the article describes the Hospital as the ‘Hospital With a Heart.’

Bhagawan Baba in His discourse during the inauguration of the Hospital had said, “We do not have any discrimination for caste, creed, religion, and nationality. We offer free treatment to everybody. We are determined to offer free treatment, come what may. Safeguarding the lives of patients is our main objective. Eschew greed for money; develop love and a spirit of sacrifice.”

MEDICAL CHALLENGES AND PATIENT CARE

It is this powerful inspiration coming directly from Bhagawan which has propelled the doctors and the staff of the Hospital to go any length to make someone’s life better.

Some Complex Operations...To Save a Labourer, a Small Shop Owner

Mrs. Mohan Das, a labourer, was shattered when her new born 18-day-old baby’s lips turned blue. When the doctor in a private hospital told her she will need over Rs. 300,000 to correct her baby’s heart and even that came with a 50% risk to her life, she just lost all hope and accepted her fate. It was at this time that she heard of Baba’s Hospital.

The doctors performed on her baby Arterial Switch Operation considered as one of the most complicated types in the practice of neonatal cardiac surgery involving

correcting the interchanging between the aorta and pulmonary artery. Seeing the smile on her baby's pink lips, Mrs. Das had no words to express her gratitude on her way back home. For her, her little one has received a second life by the grace of Bhagawan Baba.

Abdul Vahid who owns an electrical shop in Kotma town of Madhya Pradesh was a worried man when he learnt that his child, Saniya, has a very complex congenital defect of the heart—Dextro Transposition of the Great Arteries, due to which impure blood is pumped to all parts of the body and the pure blood is sent to the lungs. Abdul could never have afforded the complex surgery, costing around Rs. 3 lakhs. When he heard of Baba's Hospital through the local Sai Samithi, it was like a boon from heaven. In March, 2003, Abdul brought Saniya to the Hospital. Balloon Atrial Septostomy was performed as an intermediate step and 6 months later Saniya was operated for Senning's. In the surgery lasting over 8 hours, the defect was corrected, and Baby Saniya having recovered completely is now in the pink of health. For this free gift of health to his child, Abdul is ever grateful to the Hospital.

Cardiac and Neuro Surgeons Come Together to Restore Eyesight to a Farmer

Similar was the experience of a poor farmer from Coimbatore in August of 2004 when in a rare display of skills Cardiac and Neurosurgeons of the Hospital got together to perform yet another rare and complex procedure, this time to reverse the sudden onset of blindness in one of the eyes of the farmer.

The blindness, the doctors found out was because of a giant aneurysm (a balloon-like enlargement of the arteries) in his brain. The aneurysms can sometimes grow to enormous sizes and cause significant difficulty in treating them. In this case too, the aneurysm was so large that it was compressing the optic nerves and other vital structures in the brain.

Any excessive manipulation of the normal brain would cause serious complications, which could sometimes be fatal. Therefore direct aneurysm clipping, the normal way out for dealing with these bulges, was ruled out. It was here that the specialty of cardiology also came in. The cross functional team of surgeons and perfusionists operated on him using a technique called 'hypothermia with low flow state' or 'cardiac arrest' which would help the neurosurgeon open the aneurysm directly, reduce its size and then clip it. The cardiac surgeons opened up the heart and diverted the blood to pass through the heart-lung machine. Simultaneously, the body was cooled to a very low temperature of 18°C, at which the brain would survive without oxygen for about 20-30 minutes. The aneurysm was opened, reduced in size and then clipped successfully in a marathon surgery lasting over 9 hours.

The farmer, needless to say, was very grateful to get back his eye sight. So far five such complex surgeries have been performed in the Hospital for complex aneurysms. That success in such cases requires very high degrees of skill, coordination, and endurance from the surgeons and other staff is implicit.

The New On-Campus Accommodation For Patient Attendants

Recently, in a move to better the facilities for the patients, an “on-campus accommodation facility” for the patient attendants has been constructed. This was a long-felt need as most of the patients being very poor, go through untold suffering to get accommodation.

The Salarpuria Group of Companies graciously came forward to build the “Sai G.D. Salarpuria Foundation Block” and offer it to Swami. The new building located just beside the Hospital once fully operational will be a great boon for the patients and their attendants.

Who Are the People Most Benefited by the Hospital?

Truly, going by the Hospital statistics, **more than 60% of the patients operated upon in this Hospital earn less than Rs. 1500 (US\$ 33) per month and 25% out of this do not even have a monthly income of Rs. 500 (US\$ 11).** It is the same statistics with the 3,50,000 patients seen in the outpatient department of the Hospital - about 2,50,000 out of these earn less than Rs. 1,500 a month.

On similar occasions, the Hospital, as the *Times of India* article in 2004 suggests, has indeed done challenging operations and complicated procedures whenever required to save a breadwinner of a family, a young mother, a teenager or a tiny baby.

“He is Sai’s Gift to Our Family” – Thankamani, Mother of an Infant Patient

The sadness in the eyes of Thankamani holding her 18 days old baby in her arms said it all...Her baby was born with a complex heart ailment referred to as – Transposition of the Great Arteries (TGA) which involved malfunctioning of the two major vessels that arise from the heart. Hailing from a family of labourers, Thankamani could barely provide for her family, so the surgery for her little one was just an elusive dream. The child’s condition deteriorated and she was in a state of panic. It was at this time that she heard about Baba’s Hospital. Free surgery? It seemed too good to be true. She rushed to Bangalore, nevertheless.

“An Arterial Switch Operation (ASO) which belongs to the higher strata in the risk spectrum in neonatal surgery was done and two months later,” says Ashwin V, the technical officer at the outpatient department, “a bubbly little boy walked into the outpatient department for a review.”

The smile on his lips and sparkle in his eyes betrayed the painful-looking scar over his once-defected heart. The mother speaks excitedly about his first words and his first steps towards her. Her little bundle of joy is blue no more she says. She can send him to school, watch him study, play and grow as a normal child. And then with a simple love and gratitude known only to the very poor, she adds, “We have given him a name now. We have decided to call him 'Sai Prasad'. He is Sai's Prasad, or Sai’s gift, to our family”.

the great saga of divine love continues....drenching the hearts of millions with pure selfless love. A love that loves for love's sake alone.

H2H Connects Two Hearts...

If the readers of Heart2Heart remember, in the November issue of H2H, we carried the moving story of a poor student, Pradeep, from Orissa who was operated on in this Hospital. Pradeep's father, a farmer, could hardly afford his education and it was Pradeep's perseverance alone that won him a seat for studying MBBS. But his heart ailment troubled him and made his plans of becoming a doctor an elusive dream. Since then....Pradeep came to the Hospital, was operated upon and was so touched that after the operation he said,

"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. "

But the story does not end there! Reading this article one Sai devotee from Australia wrote to us saying that he would like to help Pradeep. During Baba's Birthday celebrations, this gentleman came to our studio and even took the address of the boy and said, "I will find out all details about him and see to it that he becomes a doctor." We gave the gentlemen all the information and advice he needed. It was a great feeling for us witnessing two hearts coming together through Heart2Heart!

THE IDEAL PATIENT CARE – WORTHY OF EMULATION

A Shining Star....A Guiding Light – Dr. Krucoff

Dr. Mitchell W Krucoff from the Duke University Medical Centre, says, "Like shining stars in the darkest of nights, Baba's Hospitals in Puttaparthi and Bangalore not only live the answer to that question in the free care they deliver every day, but also as examples of how much God is ready to teach us about the alleviation of human suffering through optimal medical care. He has built these programmes – all we have to do is to open our eyes and see....to the western world of modern medicine, what blessing it is to have such a guiding light."

Speaking to the Hospital staff on one occasion, Baba said,

"The service you are performing is a very exalted and highly beneficial act. Service to the downtrodden, sick and miserable people who are in pain and afflicted with disease is the most precious and valuable deed. The work being done here is very sacred work, and words cannot adequately describe it. So work happily and spread happiness to more and more patients. Be happy and make everyone happy."

Making others happy – that is the key.

Is it Possible Elsewhere?

Many say it is great that such wonderful Hospitals set up by Baba exist, but it cannot be replicated elsewhere. It is just not possible. To this, Dr. Safaya, the Director of the Hospital, in an interview with Felix Wust, editor of SWISS MED, said, "Why not? The Western countries should be able to do it. I don't think Westerners are devoid of sympathy for the people. I don't think the West is lacking in the type of people who think that serving man is serving God."

With Selfless Love...Nothing is Impossible

So that is the crux of the story. If any personality or group can love as selflessly as Baba, then it is surely possible! For, there is the desire to do good in every human heart. It has only to be strengthened, fortified and practised; and that is the great miracle of transformation which silently but surely is happening in the quiet corners of every heart that has seen Him and experienced His love. Whether any more such grand "Temples of Healing" stand steady and strong as beacons of hope for the poor and the forgotten, each one of us can surely become a guiding light, a little shining star helping many others to make their journey from discord to harmony, from hopelessness to hope and from depression to delight! And this, we know, is possible only with love, genuine selfless love!

- Heart2Heart Team

FEATURE ARTICLES

GOD, THE AVATHAR AND THE INTELLECTUAL

By Prof. G.Venkataraman

INTRODUCTION

This article is triggered by one of the many that appeared in a special 80th Birthday feature published by a prominent Indian Weekly named ***THE WEEK***. This weekly magazine is published from Kerala, and is a part of the famous **MALAYALAM MANORAMA** group of publications. For years, the **MALAYALAM MANORAMA** has been writing many articles on Swami, all reverential, I must add. The companion magazine ***THE WEEK*** apparently decided that Sathya Sai Baba also was news and featured Swami in its issue dated 27 November, 2005 as the Cover Story. For the record I must mention that the **MALAYALAM MANORAMA** brought out a special souvenir of its own on the occasion of the 80th Birthday, very well done it must be said.

In the feature published by ***THE WEEK***, there are several small pieces by many guests, besides some stuff written by staff writers from Bangalore. In typical modern journalistic fashion, the magazine presents “both points of view”, that is to say, material that is complimentary and also material that is critical. I will not go into all of that but would like to stick mainly to an article by a well-known award winning writer and social activist from Bangalore named U. R. Ananthamurthy.

Mr. Anantamurthy - A Typical Intellectual

Ananthamurthy hails from a traditional background and acknowledges that his parents paid their respects to Swami. But he himself is cast in a different mould, and, pained by the deep inequities that existed [and in some measure continue to exist] in Indian Society, Ananatamurthy has been continually registering his disapproval and protest through his various writings, novels and speeches. In the special issue of ***WEEK*** that I mentioned earlier, Ananathamurhty has a piece – actually, it is not an article by him as such but an “as told” piece, that is to say what Ananathamurthy said to a staffer.

Ananthamurthy, I must admit, does not cast aspersions nor sling mud. But he does not hesitate to question, disapprove and dismiss without any semblance, I regret to say, of deep analysis. This of course is quite typical of many intellectuals when it comes to Spiritual matters. Before I come to intellectuals and the problems many of them have in accepting God, I should mention that Ananthamurthy, while dismissing Swami, does not appear to reject Spirituality. On the contrary, he accepts and admires a host of evolved souls like Kabir, Basava, Tukaram, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Ramana Maharishi. However, he is not sure where to fit in Swami in all this. He is aware that people flock to Swami in hundreds of thousands but dismisses all that with the remark, “But that magnetism is not spiritual”. He adds,

“Spiritualism requires a kind of mind like Jiddu Krishnamurthy. I could argue with him. With Sai Baba, either you believe him or you don’t.”

WHY INTELLECTUALS FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT GOD

So much for an introduction. Let me now leave this eminent intellectual aside and turn to the main topic of intellectuals and *Avatars*. I shall come back to the remarks of Ananthamurthy later. These days, most intellectuals tend to be agnostic at best and atheist at worst; often it is the latter. Dazzled by the achievements of man in so many dimensions, they are unable to accept God because they are confronted with so many questions for which they do not have answers.

Einstein And Abdus Salam - Scientists With A Difference

Having said this, I must point out that there have been and there still are many intellectuals [possibly a minority] who **do** believe in God, scientists included. Einstein was a famous example. He freely acknowledged that he believed in a Superior Being although his God was not One who sat in judgment, inflicted punishment and all that.

Talking of scientists, I must not forget to mention late Abdus Salam of Pakistan, who won the Nobel Prize for his incisive work on electro-weak unification. I had the privilege of meeting Salam once when he came to address a conference on high-energy physics that was held in the lab where I was working at that time. It was my job to receive Salam at the airport and take him to our Centre. Later in the evening, when he was returning to the airport, Salam who was then riding in the car said his evening prayers as all Muslims are expected to. A Westerner once asked Salam, “How come you, a scientist, believe in God?” Salam gave a terse reply, “Science is all about the outer world. God is all about the Inner world. Where is the contradiction?”

In what follows, I shall focus heavily on scientists for two important reasons. One, I know something about scientists; two, in many respects scientists set the fashion in questioning God, a fashion that other intellectuals are eager to adopt.

THE TRAP OF LOGIC – WHY INTELLECTUALS REJECT AVATARS

I would now like to deal briefly with the topic of *Avatars* and how people react to them. Here, I have found a very strange phenomenon. I know of many who are ready to accept Rama and Krishna as *Avatars* without batting an eyelid, but when it comes to Swami, they dismiss Him summarily. I am sure these people all have their own reasons but I always wonder: “How come they accept as *Avatar* both Rama and Krishna whom they have never seen, but are unwilling to accept Swami who can be seen?” Perhaps these persons accept that Rama is God and that Krishna is God, because they have heard that frequently from their parents, right from childhood. Maybe that is all there is to it.

Gandhiji On God

This raises a fundamental question: “Who is God?” Many answers have been given over thousands of years by sages and philosophers in all lands, but I like best the definition given by Gandhi. I have quoted this often and I hope the reader would not mind if I quote the same one more time, because it is so pertinent to what I am discussing.

Gandhi said, “He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect. God to be God must rule the Heart and transforms the senses. He is **LOVE**.” Now I ask you. Does not this definition fit Swami like a glove?

Many decades ago – around 1950, Swami paid His first visit to Venkatagiri, in response to continuous prayers by the then Rajah of Venkatagiri. [In the November 2005 issue, H2H carried a conversation with the Rajah's Son, to read that now, go [here](#)]. On that occasion, the Rajah took the initiative to bring many Vedic scholars to the Divine presence so that there was a discussion of spiritual matters.

Swami was hardly known at that time, and the proud Vedic scholars took a dim view of the Rajah inviting a “young and unknown upstart”. As happened on such occasions with Swami, the Vedic scholars were soon put in their place when they realized that Swami knew far more about the *Vedas* than all of them put together.

Ramana, Ramakrishna And Sai - The Difference

That filled them with wonder: “How does He know all this when He has not spent even a single day in a Vedic school?” They then asked Swami, ‘What exactly is the difference if any between You and great souls and saints like Ramana, Ramakrishna etc?’

Swami responded with a gesture rather than with words. Swami held the left hand at the level of the chest with the palm facing upwards and the right hand at the level of the face with the palm facing downwards. The Vedic scholars were nonplussed. They wanted to know what exactly this gesture meant.

Swami explained: “The saints and sages you are referring to are humans who were in the process of evolving towards God. I, on the other hand, am God come down in human form – that is the difference.”

There you have it – Swami was making abundantly clear that He is an *Avatar*.

Why Modern Scientists Find It Difficult To Accept God?

Notwithstanding all this, intellectuals have a big problem in accepting *Avatars* – I mean when they cannot accept God Almighty, how can they accept a human manifestation of the same Supreme Lord? This gives me an opening to discuss briefly the reservations most modern scientists and indeed intellectuals have in accepting God. Barely fifty years ago, we knew very little

about the Universe. In fact, around 1920 or so, most scientists believed that the Universe consisted of just the galaxy Milky Way, of which our solar system is a part. Almost all astronomers believed then that there was no galaxy in the Universe apart from the Milky Way. And then suddenly things changed, thanks to a few major scientific discoveries, as a result of which we now know that there are billions of galaxies!

In this way, our knowledge of the Cosmos and the stuff it is made of has increased enormously. True there is a lot more we still do not know but what we presently know is already mind-boggling.

The Current Dogma of Science

Thanks to this tremendous leap forward in scientific knowledge, all of which has occurred in about fifty short years – and this includes not only physics and astronomy but every scientific discipline all the way to molecular biology - scientists have become very cocky and arrogant. The current dogma of Science is that a theory of Science might be accepted based on currently known facts but must not be regarded as the eternal truth; there could well be new discoveries that disprove existing theories or limit their scope. Everything is subservient to logic and must be applicable within the boundaries as stipulated by Science. In particular, the prevailing belief is that Science progresses best by a systematic effort to prove wrong currently accepted hypotheses. Any proposition that refuses to accept these terms and look beyond does not deserve the attention of scientists.

Modern Science - Experiments Hold The Key

That is the way scientists of today operate. Logical analysis is supreme and hypothesis becomes a fact only when tested thoroughly by experiments. Just to make my point clear, I might mention that the famous scientist Stephen Hawking has written many epoch-making papers on exotic astrophysical objects called Black Holes.

There is hardly anyone who disputes the theories of Hawking. And yet, though the results obtained by Hawking are of profound significance, and though he has been hailed widely as a genius, he is yet to receive the Nobel Prize because his theories have not yet been tested experimentally. I mention all this just to make the point how experiments hold an important place in the scheme of Science.

Having said all this, I must hasten to add that one should not find fault with the above methodology of Science, for such rigour is very much needed in Science. The problem arises when some of this discipline is applied in domains where it is neither relevant nor applicable. And that problem lies not in Science but with scientists. What exactly is the problem? That is what I shall discuss next.

THE BOUNDARIES OF SCIENCE

The most important thing about Science is that it is bound by the limitations of both Space and of Time or, Space-time as pundits would like to put it. There is nothing wrong with it. Science seeks answers about the **material** Universe as it evolved and as it exists today, and since the Universe is bound by Space and Time, Science too has to observe the same limits.

Can Science 'Experience' Life?

So far so good. Where then does the problem lie? The problem surfaces when one starts asking questions that lie **beyond** the purview of Science as is currently accepted. Are there such things at all that lie beyond Science? Of course there are, like **LIFE**, for example. Ask a scientist to define life, and you would find he is in trouble straightaway. Yes he would give all kinds of shady and cagey answers but he cannot really answer the question. Some would honestly say, "Listen, I cannot answer that question; it is beyond Science as we currently know it." Others more arrogant would say, "Well, I cannot answer it now but be assured that one day Science would be able to answer that question. You do not need to invoke God and all that to explain life."

How far is this defence valid? We can get a better appreciation of it by considering an everyday example. Let's say there are two people watching a glorious sunset. As you know, the Sun turns deep red as it goes down the horizon. This is due to what is known as the Tyndall effect, and students of Physics know all about it. No dispute there. But just consider this. I say the Sun appears red, because I experience a sensation thanks to the eye-brain combination, and I describe this sensation by saying that the appearance of the Sun is red. The red colour I see is a sensation within me. Another person watching the sunset would also say the Sun appears red. He says so because of the sensation within him. But then, how do we know for sure that the sensation that I experience is exactly the same as the sensation he experiences?

Science Can Measure a Sunset, But Can Science Feel It?

This is not a silly question; on the other hand it is an important and non-trivial question. To make clear what I mean, let us go back to the sunset. If a spectrometer were to be directed towards the Sun, it would show a spectrum with a strong peak at a frequency that we would describe as red. The spectrometer would just generate an electrical signal and a graph – that is all. On the other hand, the sensation of seeing a red colour is a property of the senses. It is connected with an **EXPERIENCE** that a living entity has. **Experience and life are thus intimately connected, and Science, as presently structured can never address these aspects of Creation.** In turn this means scientists can never get answers about God when all doors are shut; that is to say, it is not meaningful to either "deduce" or reject God via Science. It is like trying to talk about the third dimension, living in a two-dimensional world.

With our sense organs we can feel, touch, smell, taste and see. These **FEELINGS** or **SENSATIONS** are **unique** to the living being, and as far as I know, they are not and can never be accessible to any scientific instrument. There is a simple reason for this. All scientific instruments, including the very best in the world are **inanimate** – **they can never have any experience, which is possible only for an entity with a life force within it.** It is no doubt possible to have an instrument that detects the molecules that produce the fragrance of fresh jasmine, but no instrument can feel that fragrance the way you and I do.

I can, using MRI [Magnetic Resonance Imaging], print out the waveforms produced in the brain of a Yogi who is experiencing Bliss, but a waveform is mere data while Bliss is the **EXPERIENCE** of a living person. The two belong to different domains, with the waveform representing a mere projection of **EXPERIENCE** into the lower domain of inanimate instruments.

Experience of a Living Entity - Not Accessible to Science

Basically, the point is simply this: The experience which a living entity has belongs to a dimension **beyond** the inanimate, and is **NOT** accessible to Science as structured at present. Yet, through the instruments of Science we can even study living systems and their parameters such as blood pressure, sugar level in the blood and so on. But no instrument can taste the sweetness of sugar although there are instruments that can tell you all you want to know about its molecular structure etc.

In short, Science, which is bound by Space and Time, is related to the gross inanimate world. It does not, as it stands, extend to the subtle world to which we have access through our senses. This is particularly evident when one considers Consciousness. Even scientists admit that there is a thing called Consciousness but ask them to define it, and they would throw up their hands. This being the case, scientists, if they have any sense of humility, would recognise their boundaries and limitations and not comment on things they do not know about. When they lose their humility, they become arrogant and arrogance blinds one to basics. That is what happens almost invariably.

Double Standards Of Science

Consider a biologist. Most biologists would not know much about the theory of relativity although almost everyone would know that it was Einstein who gave that theory. Ask a biologist, “Do you believe in the theory of relativity?” He would promptly say yes, even though he has not studied it and in fact knows practically nothing about it. How come? Because he has faith in Einstein.

Now if in the same way I were to say that I believe God exists because Adi Shankara says so, my fellow scientists would say I have become senile.

I am dismissed for having faith in God based on what Adi Shankara has taught and experienced, but it is OK for a biologist to have total faith in

relativity without understanding a word of it, just because he has faith in Einstein. I would call this double standards.

Proving God's Existence Through Science!

Another argument that scientists often give is that in Science one can prove laws through experiments. Newton's laws can be proved by experiments and indeed first year students do this all over the world. More complex laws like that of electro-weak unification require billions of dollars for setting up the equipment, and at the end of it, the law can be proven, as did Carlo Rubbia. Citing all this, scientists often say that you cannot prove the existence of God in this manner. This is where I disagree.

Let us take a material like lead. Suppose one took a wire made of lead and cooled it to say a temperature of 5 degrees absolute. This is a very low temperature - such temperatures are not encountered even in Antarctica in winter - and one needs very special apparatus to reach such a low temperature. Let us say this has been done. It would then be found that the lead wire can carry electric current without any losses whatsoever; that is to say, it would lose all its electrical resistance. This is the phenomenon of superconductivity. A lead wire at room temperature will not show superconductivity. Unless one takes the trouble of cooling the wire to a very low temperature, one cannot make lead into a superconductor. In the same way, anyone in principle can have the Darshan of the Divine, like Ramakrishna Paramahansa did; however, if someone wants God to appear before him, then that calls for special effort on the part of that person. It is very much like in experimental science.

Divine Experience Through Scientific Instruments - A Flawed Approach

The effort made to see God directly involves achieving a state of high internal purity through strict sense and mind control. Those are the conditions under which God will manifest. Many sages and saints have had the Darshan of the Good Lord in this manner, but tell this to any scientist and he would scoff at you. He would assert that in Science you can observe a phenomenon only when the experimental conditions are right. Yet, most scientists are unwilling to accept a similar stipulation in the case of God and Spirituality. In Science one uses inanimate instruments to detect the phenomenon one is interested in, no matter how complex the phenomenon. In Spirituality, the instrument is the human being itself. Experiences related to the Divine cannot be had through inanimate instruments alone, even if one spends trillions of dollars. This is the basic truth that scientists of today simply do not understand or refuse to.

Most intellectuals, scientists being prominent among them, try to explain all that we see through the "Head" alone but when it comes to God, the "Heart" HAS to come into the picture. The Heart being BEYOND the Mind, the tools of Science will not work; instead, we need the tools of meta-science or meta-physics, if you will. It is at this point that the modern physicist loses patience,

makes his sarcastic comments and withdraws with the feeling that those who believe in God need to be pitied rather than censured.

In passing I might mention that most of the problems faced by humanity today are caused by the Head, and if we are serious about finding solutions to them, we HAVE to go beyond the Head to the realm of the Heart. This, incidentally, is the core of most of Swami's Discourses, and this is where Spirituality becomes most essential. Intellectuals, I am afraid, hardly appreciate this.

SOME QUESTIONS RAISED BY MR. ANANTHAMURTHY

Now if a [modern] scientist has so much difficulty in accepting God, how is he going to accept an *Avatar*, that is, God come in human form? This is reflected in the following quote from Ananthamurthy. He says, "What puzzles me is that he [Swami] claims he is God and I laugh at him. People also laughed at Lord Krishna when he claimed he was God. I used to wonder if Sai Baba also is God, and if we are refusing to acknowledge it?"

Ananthamurthy goes on: "I like certain things about Sai Baba. When BJP leader L.K.Advani went on a *Rath Yatra*, Sai Baba is believed to have said, why build Ram temple at Ayodhya when he is present everywhere. *[This is a reference to Advani, a politician, who made a political issue out of the construction of a temple for Lord Rama at Ayodhya, the birth place of Rama.]* I appreciate his drinking water and healthcare initiatives. One more thing I like about him [Sai Baba] is that he is not an English-speaking person." Ananthamurthy is of the opinion that English has done much harm to the various Indian languages, relegating almost all of them to a second-class status.

His parting line is: "The land that gave birth to great people like Gandhi and Ramana deserves better." In my view, this casual remark makes it abundantly clear that Ananthamurthy's thinking is highly flawed and superficial. He says that he finds it laughable when Swami says He is God. But he seems to conveniently forget what Swami adds, namely that we also are God. Ananthamurthy praises Ramana Maharishi. That is the way it should be; but does he remember Ramana's perpetual question? Does he not recall that Ramana invariably asked every one to examine the issue: "Who am I?" As we know very well, Swami too has discussed this topic in so many of His Discourses.

Swami and Ramana

Let us focus on this question: "Who am I?" What does Ramana say about this? He says that every human being is really Divine. Swami says the same. So, if you and I are God why cannot Sai Baba be God? Or is it that Ananthamurthy is not prepared to accept this fundamental teaching of Ramana whom he holds in such high regard?

At this stage, I wish to make one thing very clear: I am not speaking against Ramana; on the contrary I hold him in the highest regard. Swami too has high

praise for Ramana, as should be evident from the remarks He has made at various times. By the way, we have on video tape the recollections of an old devotee who, along with her family, used to be in the *Paatha Mandiram* or Old Mandir where Swami stayed from 1940 to 1950. She recalls in that tape how Ramana sent two of his disciples to Puttaparthi over sixty years ago to have the *Darshan* of God! So you know what Ramana thought of Swami as far back as the forties, when Swami was little known in the outside world.

THE HEAD VERSUS THE HEART

Changing gears let me now make a few spiritual arguments, starting with Swami's observation that a human being is a combination of the gross body, the subtle Mind and the immortal *Atma*. Combining the three letters M [for Mind], B [for body] and A [for the *Atma*], Swami sometimes jocularly says that everyone is a MBA! For convenience, let me use the word Head for the Mind and Heart for the *Atma*.

Now what is the hierarchy amongst these three? Swami says it should be the Heart first, the Head next and Body and Senses last. In the world of today, the priorities are different, with the Heart more or less left out most of the time. Intellectuals in particular, are dominated by the Head. When that happens, logic takes precedence and the feelings of the Heart take a back seat, especially faith.

For one on the spiritual path, faith is perhaps **the** most important requirement. Maybe for some, when the journey begins, faith takes root through enquiry and questioning but there comes a stage when logic simply has to be thrown away, and this is something few intellectuals would be prepared to do. Which brings me to the subtle way in which the *Avatar* moves about amongst us. One saw this earlier in the Shirdi *Avatar* and one sees it now in the Sri Sathya Sai *Avatar* also.

THE AVATAR HAS A HUMAN FORM BUT HE IS VERY DIFFERENT

There are innumerable things that an *Avatar* does, some of which we can perceive and understand, while others are far beyond our comprehension; this is a fact we must be prepared to accept. From what I have seen, I would like to say that there are at least four aspects of the *Avatar* on constant display. Firstly, He showers Love on all. Next, He responds to our distress calls. Thirdly, He gives advice. Fourthly, He tests. The last point needs some elaboration.

There are two key *Slokas* in the *Gita* that offer a clue to the point that I just made. The first of these is *Sloka* [9.22] which, by the way, Swami refers to as the fulcrum of the *Gita* since it occurs right in the middle of the eighteen chapters of this sacred text.

In this *Sloka* the Blessed Lord essentially says: "Repose steadfast faith in Me and think of Me always. I shall then carry your burden entirely." The second *Sloka* that I hold to be relevant is [18.66], wherein Krishna declares that he

who totally surrenders to the Lord would be fully redeemed. If we keep these two key declarations of the Krishna *Avatar* in mind, then we would realise that often times Swami is really testing us about the quality of our surrender.

Total Surrender - Not Easy For Devotees, Hard for Intellectuals

Devotees, especially while in the euphoric state inside the Interview Room, declare ecstatically, "Swami, I have surrendered to You." However, seldom is this a serious statement. As Swami often tells students, "People say they have surrendered their Mind to Me. Yes, they give their Minds to Me but only for a few seconds. They take it back when they go out of the Interview Room!" Though said in a light-hearted manner, there is profound truth in this statement. All of us are highly prone to deposit our Minds with the proverbial monkey rather than entrust it to God for safe custody. Now if we so-called devotees have so much problem with the Mind, how much more difficult it would be for the intellectuals?

Yes, as Swami often reminds us, the Mind is the key to our future; it can take us to God or to the Devil, which ever we please. We have to make the choice, not God. God will only help by giving advice and setting examples to follow; but the buck really stops with us. However, if we surrender totally, then God would get into the driving seat and take us safely to our destination.

THE TESTS THE AVATAR GIVES US

People ask: "Why does God have to test us? Does He not know where we stand? Why can't He help us? Why all this test business? It is so unfair." I would like to respond with a direct personal experience of mine.

Once many years ago when I was the Vice Chancellor, exams were in progress. I went round the various rooms where the boys were taking the exams and later I reported about the exams to Swami, who, you must remember, is the Chancellor of our Institute. Swami asked me how many students were absent – it always happens a few students are absent due to sickness. I thought I was very smart and said, "Swami, You know everything!" Swami looked at me sternly and replied, "I know how many were absent but do you know?" I hung my head down for I actually did not know how many were absent. Swami was sending me a signal that as the VC, I had better know more about what was expected of me.

I am citing this incident merely to state that God always knows everything about us but He tests us nevertheless so that we may know where exactly we stand. These tests are really tests of our faith. It is up to us recognise the tests – Swami will never say, "Here is a test for you"; we have to figure out when He is testing and when He is not. Having spotted the test, we must measure up to it. We must constantly keep in mind Swami's statement: "Test is taste for Me!"

SURRENDER AND FAITH

Surrender involves going beyond the domain of the Mind and that is something intellectuals cannot easily do, trapped as they are in the illusion that they are free, when in fact they are prisoners of logic and the Mind. Actually, we should not blame intellectuals when devotees also are given to questioning the actions of the *Avatar*. Take, for example, the Rama *Avatar*. People have been asking from time immemorial, questions like, “Why did Rama banish Sita to the forest, especially after having made her go through fire earlier? Is this not gross injustice?” My response to this is the following: If you and I who have come thousands of years after Rama and Sita know her to be pure and chaste, would not Rama, who was supposed to be God incarnate have known that? We must have the faith that God never does anything without a purpose. I maintain that Rama was actually establishing certain norms for people in high places, for all times, especially during this Kali Age.

To stress my point I would like to point out that there was some years ago, a well-known politician, hailed by all as an upright man; he even rose to become briefly, the Prime Minister of India. He had a son, who throughout the political career of his father exploited his father's high position to make all kinds of shady deeds. The whole world knew about it, but the father consistently turned a blind eye, notwithstanding the frequent discourses he gave on the Ramayana! If this politician had read his Ramayana right, he would have learnt that Rama banished innocent Sita to stress that even if a relative is blameless, one must have nothing to do with that person, in order to establish high standards of probity. In short, here was the *Avatar*, who, as a part of His drama was teaching a lesson and instead of learning it, humans are passing judgement on Him as if the *Avatar* was just another human being.

Many alleged scholars of the epics often indulge in judging *Avatars* by applying norms that apply only to humans, which is a fatal mistake. **Surrender demands faith, and total surrender demands total faith;** this is not possible for intellectuals but is possible for those who believe in God. Let us never forget that in the processing of drawing the devotee closer, the Lord will test for sure, sometimes sorely!

This digression into the business of testing is needed because this is something unique to the *Avatar*. With due respect to them, saints like Ramana and Ramakrishna do not do this. God alone tests because it is to God alone to whom we must totally surrender; and when we do, He will take full charge of us as He has assured in the *Gita*. Thus, this testing game goes on constantly to pick out the winners and separating them from those who have to try more. Intellectuals will never understand this and people like Ananthamurthy would be totally perplexed by many of the things that Swami does. Indeed, all who “see” with their Heads would have this difficulty and end up dismissing Sai Baba. God, as Swami often reminds us, can never be understood but only experienced.

JUDGEMENT WITHOUT KNOWING THE FACTS

Ananathamurthy has correctly identified three key phenomena of the twentieth century: “hunger for social justice, hunger for spirituality and hunger for modernity.” According to him, all these three go together. Ananthamurthy then goes on to describe how these three hungers have manifested and who has done what about them. I have no argument with any of these. But he makes all these remarks as if Swami has done nothing about them. On the contrary, Swami has shown how starting from Spirituality, one can indeed solve most of humanity’s problems, including social injustice, besides blending the best of today with the best of olden times as He has done in His Institute for example. But Ananthamurthy, it seems, knows hardly anything about it.

Let us start with social justice. Many fight for social justice through agitations. Swami rejects that approach. He concentrates instead on transforming individuals and sensitising them. In the long run this is the only workable approach. Take caste discrimination or race discrimination. One can pass all the laws one wants to prevent these but in the ultimate analysis it is people who have to change and give up prejudice. That can happen only when there is a change of Heart, and change of Heart, I maintain, can never be brought about through agitations, or legislation or the cudgel. Ananthamurthy talks of the hunger for Spirituality. Yes there is such a hunger, and when that is taken care of, problems of poverty, problems of hunger, etc., can all be mitigated in substantial measure. That is what this *Avatar* is all about. It is great pity that Ananthamurthy does not have one single word to say about Swami’s infinite Love and how Pure Love can solve all man-made problems.

Swami Teaches Love In Action

In general, intellectuals like Ananathamurthy are utterly ignorant about the incredible service of Love being rendered by the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation throughout the world. Here, I would like to make a personal appeal to the readers of this article. Please do make time to read our regular reports on Sai Seva in **Heart2Heart** and tell as many as you can about these inspiring stories. In a nutshell, by helping every individual to spiritualise himself or herself, Swami is in fact leading a silent revolution. Take His Institute, for example.

Does Ananathamurthy, or for that matter any so-called intellectual in India, know how much Seva the old boys are doing silently in many places in India throughout the year? Do they know that every time the old boys gather here, they not only run medical camps in the neighbouring villages but also go out at night and cover street-sleepers with blankets? Do they know how our old boys (past students of the Sathya Sai University) went to Jammu and Kashmir to help quake victims there, against great odds? I would like to know of one University or College in the country [other than Swami’s] whose alumni reached out in such a fashion. Maybe they wrote cheques but did they actually go there and serve the victims?

INTELLECTUALS AND SWAMI'S MATERIALISATIONS

One thing that intellectuals seize upon to denigrate Swami is the materialisation that Bhagavan often performs, like creating *vibhuti*, or a ring or a chain etc. Science phoooh-phooohs miracles and intellectuals invariably seize upon it to cry fraud. I don't have to convince you about the genuineness of these demonstrations of para-normal phenomena but I do think it is important that you hear Swami's own observations on the subject. Here is what He says:

You must have heard people say that mine is all magic. But the manifestation of Divine Power must not be interpreted in terms of magic. Magicians play their tricks for earning their maintenance, worldly fame and wealth. They are based on falsehood and they thrive on deceit. However, this body can never stoop to such low levels. This body has come through the Lord's resolve to manifest in human form. That resolve is intended to uphold Sathya or Truth. Divine resolve is always true resolve. Remember, there is nothing that Divine power cannot accomplish. It can transmute earth into sky and sky into earth. To doubt this is to prove that you are too weak to grasp great things, and the grandeur of the Universe.

I guess I have said enough about intellectuals and how they are not equipped to comprehend phenomena like *Avatars*. I took time off to write about intellectuals because many people hear what they say, read what they write and get disturbed by it. I hope I have succeeded in convincing you that there is nothing to be disturbed about.

Putting The Facts Straight

There is one other matter that many devotees have been quite agitated about, and maybe I should add a few remarks about that also, and that concerns the notorious so-called documentary on Swami produced by BBC. We received many, many letters and mails asking us to do something about it. However, we did not react in the way most people expected us to, but respond we did, in our own way though. I don't wish to go further into that. But I thought you might be interested to know what was said by one of the writers who contributed an article to the special issue of **THE WEEK** that I alluded to in the beginning.

The writer in question is Bill Aitkin, an Englishman who for decades has made India his home. For many years he has been coming to Puttaparthi, but so quietly that hardly anyone here knew about him. He came to some prominence with his recent book **Sri Sathya Sai Baba, A Life**. Aitkin has given a stirring defence of Swami, not that Swami needs any defence from mortals. But records do need to be set straight and Bill Aitkin does that with pungent fervour! Here are some quotes:

The critics are so intemperate in their dislike that their vituperation now comes across as almost near comical in its

predictability. Nothing that Baba can say or do meets with their approval. If he provides drinking water to thirsty villagers, they scent a scam but if doesn't provide drinking water, he is anti-poor. Probably because of the intensity of their hate, when it comes to a serious, forensic examination of their allegations, they resort to bluster and evasion instead of hard facts. Smearing sexual innuendo is a traditional ploy but on failing to substantiate their charges, the critics switch to another unrelated subject.

They will claim that all of Sathya Sai Baba's materialisations are phoney. However, this cannot stick, because millions have witnessed the outpouring of vibhuti at Shivarathri. So then, financial irregularities are imputed to the saint, and when these are likewise found to be unproductive of scandal, mafia happenings are evoked. The strategy of the critics seems to be that if sufficient mud is thrown, some might stick.

Here is what Aitkin has to say about the BBC, and he gives on behalf of all of us a stinging reply to slander with all the required passion! Aitkin says,

The latest in these so-called exposes is the BBC documentary whose agenda was so predetermined to denigrate Baba that it stooped to the unethical use of a spy camera. In a last farcical gesture, the producer hired some roadside entertainers to attempt to simulate Baba's chamatkar [materialisations]. The result is so ludicrous that it leaves the viewer wondering as to who is funding this bizarre display of hostile reporting. The BBC is ultimately governed by the Anglican establishment, and churches in the west are losing out financially to the appeal of the Sai Baba movement.

As a commercial broadcaster, the BBC's opting for sleaze would have the dual advantage of discrediting a rival as well as getting a good audience rating. The Church of England can have no objection to programmes that weaken perceived threats – like the Papacy or Hindu holy men – to its declining influence in the world. Posing as a lion in Asia, the BBC is a mouse in Britain. It dare not criticise public icons like the Queen, who happens to be the supreme of the Anglican Church.

Well, there it is - all the rebuttal of the BBC that you have always wanted, that too from an Englishman! To the above, I would like to add a few comments of my own. When Hardy the BBC producer came to Prashanti Nilayam at the time of Shivarathri to shoot some scenes, I met him briefly. It was apparent even then that Hardy was out to smear tar. When the so-called documentary was released, my worst fears were confirmed. Do you know that in this much touted video there is a character who goes about shouting that Sai Baba

wants to kill him? As though Swami has no better business! Hardy was able to get away with pure nonsense because in those countries where this film was shown, most people had absolutely no idea of who Swami is.

I ask you: suppose some TV channel in India had produced a similar, poorly-researched documentary on a person in the West held in high public esteem; would the people and the media there have kept quiet? On the other hand when this rubbish that carried a brand name was telecast, so many papers in England hailed it as a great expose. No surprise in that because sometime earlier, the famous London *Times*, carried a similar shabby, ill-researched article on Swami that made waves. I then wrote a letter to the Editor, as did many prominent devotees from America. None of these were published, quite contrary to the usual practice of giving some space to counter opinion. So much for the much taunted objectivity of the Media of those countries.

I do not wish to make a blanket condemnation of all that comes from the West. A few days ago, a devotee here shared with me his copy of an article entitled **GOOD GURU GUIDE**, that appeared in 1994 in the famous journal **ECONOMIST**, published from London. I don't know who the author is but this is a penetrating article on various successful people and intellectuals like George Soros, a financial wizard, Tom Peters, Peter Drucker and Michael Porter, all celebrated Management Gurus, Noam Chomsky, a renowned professor of linguistics in MIT. What stunned me was that Swami has been mentioned in this article and in a reasonably complimentary manner too! Here is what the article has to say about Swami. After commenting on Indian Gurus who globetrot, it observes:

Sai Baba stayed home and succeeded splendidly. His message of peace and love, like his beatific smile, has not changed since he was a child prodigy. Now he is more popular than ever – so much so his hometown of Puttaparthi a couple of hours drive from Hyderabad boasts a new airstrip.

Over the years, dozens of implacable rationalists and other mischief-makers have tried to discredit him, but never successfully. Sai Baba has ignored, outlived or outpaced them all.

These days, miracle-wise, he concentrates on holy ash. But he is also a popular philanthropist running schools and colleges and an enormous hospital for the poor. Judges, politicians, bureaucrats and film stars cringe and crave an audience. Tom Peters, eat your heart out!

How do you like that?

MY OWN CROSSOVER AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Some of you might say, "Listen, you are supposed to be a scientist, are you not? What about you? Were you ever on the other side of the fence, and if so, how did you come over to this side?" I have, I believe, described all this in one of my radio talks; even so, the present occasion warrants a brief statement. Yes, a long time ago, I was on the other side of the fence. However, I did not

deny God nor did I denigrate Swami. I just remained indifferent to Swami; He was, so to say, not in my radar screen. And then when the time came, Bhagavan Baba pulled and strongly too, with a few telling traumatic experiences.

As Swami says in the *Gitavahini*, misery is indeed a great friend, because it draws one to God; in this case, it brought me to the Living and Loving God. I must mention that when I was first drawn to Swami I thought He was just a saint or something of that sort. I did not know then that He was actually an *Avatar*. That realisation came later. In the precursor period, shall I say, I did not also believe in materialisations. I dismissed them as impossible because they defy all laws of Science – the usual, ignorant prejudice. And one fine day when Swami actually materialised *vibhuti* for me, it hit me like a ton of bricks. I had actually seen a materialisation, beyond the so-called laws of Science and I had to accept it.

A Cold Fig On A Hot Afternoon by Swami!

Since then I have seen so many of these materialisations, some of them quite exotic. Once, a few years ago, we were all seated in the afternoon on the lower porch in the Sai Kulwant Hall. It was a hot afternoon. A few of us were around Swami, and seated in the Hall were thousands. Suddenly in the middle of causal conversations, Swami materialised a fig fruit in full view of the huge gathering. He then passed the fig around to us and when I received it I found it was cold, as if it had just been taken out of a deep freeze! Imagine getting a cold fig on a hot summer afternoon. Later Swami made it into pieces and distributed the fruit, and I got a piece too! Hmmm, it was delicious!!

I shall conclude with the story of another such materialisation, which was remarkable in its own way. This happened during the period when I was the Vice-Chancellor. Those days, after *Darshan* was over, Swami would invariably call me and a few others connected with the Institute into the Interview room to spend some time with Him. That day, the Warden of our Hostel here was also present. As a small but intensely loving gesture, the Warden had brought with him in a silver vessel, some shelled groundnuts or peanuts as they say in America.

Amazing Billet From A Peanut!

The Warden offered it to Swami who first refused but later popped one nut into His mouth. He then started giving us one nut at a time. He did one round, then another and then started on the third. Everyone put out his hand to receive the *Prasadam* from Swami and when my turn came I did the same. But what fell into my hand was not a piece of groundnut but an enamel billet with some art work on it. I gave Swami a puzzled look and He said, “See what it is.”

I took it near the window of the Interview room and tried to see what was on the billet but could not see clearly since I did not have my glasses on. Swami then made some teasing remarks and said, “This billet shows the Cosmic

Form of the Lord. Embedded in it are the forms of Shirdi Baba and Swami. I have left some space for Prema Sai also. Shall I include Prema Sai also?" We remained silent, stunned by the experience. He then smiled and said, "No I shall not include Prema Sai because you faithless fellows would desert Me and go after Him!" We all laughed.

Swami then took the billet, held it near His mouth and started blowing on it. I thought He was going to make it disappear; instead, it became a full-fledged ring, shining brilliantly! Swami held it high showing the ring to all of us, even as we were dumbstruck. He said, "A goldsmith would take fifteen days to make a ring, but I have done it in less than fifteen seconds!" He then asked me to stretch my right hand. I simply could not believe myself.

In this world where there were so many wonderful devotees, Swami was giving this extra-ordinary ring to me of all persons. But then that is God. As Ramakrishna Paramahansa once said, "Nobody can say who will receive God's Grace. There may be very eligible people, but the Lord, for reasons best known to Him, may choose someone far less deserving." Very true indeed, as I can say from personal experience.

Well, what do you think? Do you agree with the many things I have said? Whether you agree or disagree, I would be happy to know your reactions. I can be easily reached via our **Heart2Heart** e-journal.

Jai Sai Ram!

TYAGARAJA – THE EXEMPLARY POET-SAINT

And the Most Celebrated Carnatic Music Maestro

This year, 19th January happens to be very special. This day is not only the fourth anniversary of Swami's Super Speciality Hospital in Bangalore but also the Silver Jubilee of *Sundaram*, Swami's Mandir in Madras/Chennai. In addition, this year, 19th January also happens to be the 158th death anniversary of the famous saint Tyagaraja. Every year, on the day of the death anniversary according to the Tamil Calendar, there is a reverential musical homage paid to Tyagaraja in Tiruvaiyaru where Tyagaraja lived and finally gave up his body.

Tyagaraja is of course well known in South India, but elsewhere in the world he probably is not. If there is anyone who literally sang his way into the Heart of God, it was Tyagaraja. Last year, **Heart2Heart** paid homage to Saint Tyagaraja in a modest way; this year, we want to do a better job, both in **Heart2Heart** and on our radio service. In this special feature, we present many pieces about and related to Tyagaraja. We start with a biographical sketch, which follows.

SAINT TYAGARAJA – A PROFILE

In India, there are two dominant styles of classical music – Hindustani Music whose domain is the North and Carnatic Music, largely confined to the South. By all accounts, Saint Purandaradasa is acknowledged as the Father of Carnatic Music. Purandara Dasa whose story has been enacted a few times before Swami, started off as a pawnbroker, and a pretty miserly one at that. But there came a turning point, when he realised with a start that there is a Lord who really pulls the strings.

Thereafter, Purandaradasa became transformed into a musical saint. Although, Purandara Dasa gave Carnatic Music a start, it was the musical trinity of Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshatar, and Syama Sastry, all contemporaries and all belonging to what is now Tanjavoor District of the State of Tamil Nadu. These really helped to bring structure to Carnatic Music, besides raising it to truly exalted levels. In what follows, we concentrate on Tyagaraja, his life and his exemplary devotion to Lord Rama, via the path of soulful music.

Birth and Family of Tyagaraja

Tyagaraja was born in a small town called Tiruvarur on 4th May, 1747 in a Telugu Brahmin family, descended from immigrants from Andhra who went South towards the end of the 16th century. Till that time, the Vijayanagaram Empire dominated Andhra, besides controlling the feudal kings of the South. In 1565, the Muslims destroyed the Vijayanagaram Empire, following which many Telugu speaking people, especially Brahmins, migrated to the South, seeking patronage of kings there.

Thus it was that Tyagaraja's ancestors who lived in Karkala village in what is now Kurnool District of the State of Andhra Pradesh, moved to Tanjore [now Tanjavoor] seeking the patronage of a Maratha ruler there.

Tyagaraja was the third son of Ramabrahmam and Sitamma. Ramabrahmam was patronized by the then King of Tanjavoor, and engaged himself in spiritual activities in the royal court. When Tyagaraja was born, Ramabrahmam was living in the temple town Tiruvaroor where Siva is the presiding deity and is known as Tyagrajaswami, the King of Sacrifice. The little baby was named after the local deity. Soon after Tyagaraja was born, Ramabrahmam shifted to Tiruvaiyaru village on the banks of the sacred Kaveri river where the King gave him a house to live in and also some land.

At the age of eighteen, Tyagaraja was married to a girl named Parvati who died issueless. Thereupon Tyagaraja remarried, taking as his second wife, Kanakamba the younger sister of Parvathi. They had a daughter Sitamma, who was given in marriage to one Kuppaswami. To this couple was born a boy but this boy, Tyagaraja's grandson, died without any children. Thus the lineage of Tyagaraja came to an end.

If one goes through the story of Tyagaraja's life, one cannot escape the impression that he was born for music; not just to create music that enthralls but to show without a trace of doubt that music is unquestionably one of the best ways of attaining God, if not the best. As Swami often tells us, God is *Ganapriyudu*, a Lover of Music; not merely that; Swami also reminds us that one of the names of God is *NADABRAHMAM* – that is to say, [good devotional] music IS God. It is said that as a small baby, Tyagaraja would stop drinking milk, when he heard music.

Tyagaraja Under The Tutelage of Sonti Venkataramaniah

The story is also told that as a boy, every day on his way to the temple, Tyagaraja would pass by the house of one Sonti Venkataramaniah, Principal Musician in the court of Sarabhoji Maharaja, then ruler of Tanjavoor. Every time he passed the house, young Tyagraja would stop to listen to the music lessons being imparted by Sonti Vemkataramaniah to his students. One day, when Tyagaraja was listening from outside, the teacher asked his students a tough question in music. None of them could answer but young Tyagaraja who was standing outside, shouted the answer. The teacher was amazed to hear someone other than his students give the correct answer. He opened the door, came out and saw the young boy who had answered his question. One look and he knew that there stood before him the dream student. Almost immediately, Tyagaraja became a disciple of Sonti Venkataramaniah and started taking musical lessons from him.

Tyagaraja's Steadfast Devotion To Lord Rama

This brings us to the musical genius of Tyagaraja. It appears that although Tyagaraja took musical lessons, he did not follow the classical path of a student making a debut as a singer, then becoming a concert artist, etc. For

him, music was a vehicle for communing directly with God.

However, that path opened up in a very special way. Tyagaraja's father Ramabrahmam had been initiated into the chant of the powerful Rama Mantra. Unfortunately for Ramabrahmam, his first two sons were not up to the mark spiritually. Tyagaraja the third son seemed to be different. So the father promptly taught his son to worship of Rama daily.

Like his father, Tyagaraja too was initiated into the chant of the name of Rama, and this, it appears, was done by one Ramakrishnananda Swami. Tyagaraja kept chanting the name almost non-stop, and when he crossed the ten million mark [one crore], it seems that Rama appeared momentarily and gave *Darshan*. An ecstatic Tyagaraja burst into song, and from then on there was no looking back.

There is another tale describing how Tyagaraja was specially chosen by the Lord to spread Bhakti through the medium of music. According to this, Tyagaraja quietly started worshipping Sage Narada in order to learn the deeper secrets of music. As those familiar with Indian scriptures and tradition know, Sage Narada is a wandering saint, singing the glory of the Lord wherever he goes. He also described the nine ways by which humans can attain God, the famous *Nava Rasa Bhakti Marga*, to which Swami makes a reference ever so often. Apparently, Narada was pleased with Tyagaraja's dedication and devotion, appeared before the devotee and gave him a Divine musical treatise containing the secret and mystery of musical notes. Thus Tyagaraja was doubly blessed; he received the treasure of musical knowledge directly from Sage Narada and he had also been blessed by Lord Rama Himself.

Whether one believes in these folklores or not, two things cannot be questioned. Tyagaraja's genius is literally unparalleled – he holds a position of almost unattainable eminence like Shakespeare in literature and Beethoven in Western Music. And, what is more important, Tyagaraja dedicated his music entirely to Lord Rama. Swami says that we must start the day with God, spend the day with God, and end the day with God. If we want to know how to do it, then we would do well to study the life of Saint Tyagaraja.

In the morning he would wake up Lord Rama! He would, in the course of the day, chat with Rama through his many songs. Sometime, he would praise Rama; sometimes he would make prayerful requests to Rama; sometimes he would wail to Rama about his personal difficulties and sometimes he would even complain to Rama! In fact, if one carefully examines his life and compositions, one can, without doubt, find shades of the nine paths of devotion prescribed by Sage Narada.

Tyagaraja Stuns His Teacher!

Tyagaraja kept to himself and spent most of his time communing with Lord Rama – he simply did not have time for promoting himself in the community through his musical talents. Nevertheless, he soon became known for his

singing.

One day, his Guru Sonti Venkataramaniah sent for Tyagaraja and asked him to sing some of his own compositions in the presence of leading court musicians of the day. Normally, Tyagaraja avoided singing before others, but this was different; his Guru was asking him to do so, and so he obeyed the command and sang.

The teacher was so stunned by Tyagaraja's remarkable talent that he openly praised his disciple as being far better than him, a praise few teachers would be prepared to give. Not only that; Sonti Venkataramaniah presented Tyagaraja with a gold medal that he had once received as an award at a royal court. Tyagaraja was averse to receiving such tokens but made a one-time exception for the sake of his Guru. Later, Tyagaraja presented the medal and the chain at the wedding of his teacher's daughter; thus he managed to dispense with what was perhaps the only worldly reward he had ever received

For Tyagaraja, Nobody was More Important than Lord Rama, Not Even The King

Whenever there is exceptional talent, there appear people who try to take charge of such people and "manage" them, a practice so very common these days. Interestingly, Tyagaraja's elder brother Japesan decided that he should "manage and market" his foolish younger brother who did not know how to make a fast buck. Since Tyagaraja was already well known despite his scrupulously avoiding public concerts, Japesan managed to convince the King of Tanjore that Tyagaraja must be invited to the court to sing in the royal presence. In keeping with the tradition of the times, the King sent a messenger with lots of gifts, and asked the messenger to invite Tyagaraja to sing for the King in the royal court.

Japesan thought that Tyagaraja would jump at the offer and that would be the beginning of great things to come. But that was not the way things worked out. Tyagaraja was pained and gave expression to his anguish by singing a wonderful song that begins with the words, *"Tell me O Mind! Which is better? Money and fame or the chance to be in the presence of Lord Rama?"*

It is interesting that there was actually a strong tradition amongst the highly evolved persons of those times to flatly reject the patronage offered by the rich and the wealthy, including Kings. There are any number of stories similar to the one just narrated. Rejection of worldly offers and dedicating oneself solely to the Lord was the hallmark of saints of those days.

The "Loss of Rama"

The story does not end here. Japesan became furious at what he regarded as Tyagaraja's downright stupidity and, in a fit of anger, threw into the Kaveri river, the idols that Tyagaraja lovingly worshipped every day. This happened when Tyagaraja was not at home and unfortunately for Tyagaraja, there was also a flood in the river. Thus came a testing time for the devotee – a period of

unbearable separation from the Lord. Swami says, “Do not make God into a picture but elevate the picture to God.” This certainly applied to Tyagaraja. For him the idols he worshipped were not merely idols but Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in person.

The songs that Tyagaraja composed during this period of “separation” reflect, understandably, intense grief, sorry and agony. When the flood receded and the water level came down, Tyagaraja went into the river to look for His Lord, and by His Grace, found the lost idols. He burst into a song, this time full of joy and ecstasy, marking the end of the separation period. After that, Tyagaraja welcomed Rama back into the house with yet another memorable and sweet song.

Tyagaraja In Tirupathi

Devotees of the Lord often go on pilgrimages to various holy places, but Tyagaraja was not cast in that mould. There are, however, accounts of his visits to a few places, almost entirely in the South. The northernmost part he visited was Tirupathi, where Lord Venkateswara is the presiding deity. There is a story behind Tyagaraja’s visit to Tirupathi. Tyagaraja was actually invited to Madras by a rich patron of music but he refused, naturally. This rich man then went to a noble *sannyasi* and a great devotee of Rama named Upanishad Brahman, who lived in Kancheepuram near Madras.

This Upanishad Brahman was a friend of Tyagaraja’s father and having heard of the talents of the son of his friend, wanted to see him. So he sent an invitation to Tyagaraja, inviting him to Kancheepuram. This formal invitation, known as *srimukham*, exists to this day along with some of Tyagaraja’s own writings on palm leaf of his compositions, in the Saurashtra Sabha in the temple city Madurai in Tamil Nadu. Tyagaraja then decided that he would go to Tirupathi and stop in Kancheepuram while returning, to see Upanishad Brahman.

In Tirupathi, Tyagaraja entered the sanctum sanctorum of the temple where the idol is installed but it so happened that at that time the curtain was drawn, hiding the idol. It is a tradition in Hindu temples in South India that when the idol is being washed or decorated, the curtain is drawn. And when Tyagaraja saw the curtain, he sang memorable song, asking: *“When will this curtain come down? O Lord, I have come all the way to have Your Darshan and You are behind a curtain! Will You not please make the curtain fall so that I can see You?”* It seems that the curtain immediately fell down, allowing Tyagaraja to have the Darshan of Lord Venkateswara.

This is the folk lore. However, scholars say that what Tyagaraja was really praying for was for the curtain of *Maya* or delusion to come down, so that he could have the vision of the Lord without any Mind-made distortions. Given Tyagaraja’s depth of devotion, this probably is the real significance of this wonderful song.

“Praise God, Not Man” – Tyagaraja in Chennai

From Tirupathi, Tyagaraja turned back and on his way stopped in Madras (now Chennai). We are here talking of a period around the year 1800 when Madras was far from the huge metropolis it now is. There was of course the main town, scattered around which were many villages, all of which have now been swallowed by the megapolis the city has since become. Though Madras had not yet become a big city then, there were in the vicinity of the city many patrons of Carnatic Music. One of them was Kovur Sundaresa Mudaliar, who warmly extended his hospitality to the Saint.

Patrons in those days, wanted poets and musicians to sing their praise in return for the patronage conferred. It is said that Sundaresa Mudaliar dropped hints that he would like Tyagaraja to sing a few songs in his praise. Obviously Tyagaraja could not and would not do that. So how did he handle this delicate situation?

Literally by following Swami's dictum: "If you cannot oblige, speak obligingly!" What Tyagaraja did was to go to the local temple where the deity was Sundaresa [this is one of the names by which Siva is known]. And there before Lord Sundaresa, Tyagaraja sang five glorious songs in praise of Sundaresa [the Lord and not the host!]. This set of five songs are known as Kovur *Pancharatnams* [the five gems of Kovur].

Lord Rama To The Rescue of Tyagaraja

Sundaresa's consort in Kovur is Tripurasundari [a name of Parvathi], and moved his love for Mother, Tyagaraja also sang many songs in praise of the Goddess. When finally Tyagaraja took leave of Kovur Sundaresa Mudaliar, the host gave a palanquin for the Saint to travel in. While the party was proceeding south, a gang of robbers attacked them. Tyagaraaj was surprised; why was a robber gang attacking them? They had no money or valuables; why then? When he posed this question to one of his disciples, he was told that unknown to him, Sundaresa Mudaliar had given the disciples a lot of money, saying it was all for Rama's work.

Hearing this, Tyagaraja is reported to have said, "*In that case, it is Rama's problem. He has to protect what belongs to Him,*" and sang a song invoking the protection of the Lord. At that time, there appeared, seemingly from nowhere, some hunters who attacked the brigands and drove them away. And after vanquishing the robbers, the hunters vanished but not before giving *Darshan* to them as Rama and Lakshmana.

All this was reported to the Saint in great detail, whereupon he saw how lucky were the robbers to get the *Darshan* of the Lord whereas he, a life-long devotee was aching for the same all the time. That is how the Lord plays sometimes with his devotees; for Tyagaraja, it was one more occasion for a memorable song.

Tyagaraja Sings To Mother Kamakshi in Kancheepuram

Tyagaraja then went to Kancheepuram to meet Upanishad Brahman, and sang songs on Lord Vishnu who appears as Varadaraja. He also composed some songs on Devi Kamakshi, which is the name by which Parvathi the Universal Mother is known there. The late Paramacharya of Kanchi once gave a graphic description of this song. He said that on the way to the place where the idol of Kamakshi is installed in the temple, Tyagaraja had to pass by many idols of Vinayaka the first son of Parvathi. He then sang a song asking Mother Kamakshi to protect him also the way She protected Her son Vinayaka.

We see from this and many other such songs that though Tyagaraja was a devotee of Lord Rama, he saw Rama as the Supreme Lord who took many forms; thus he saw no contradiction in his worship of many forms for in his mind they all belonged to only ONE GOD who, for him, was Rama.

The Last Austere Moments...Before The Final Call

Years passed; Tyagaraja's wife passed away and he was now in the eighties. Ten days before he gave up his body, Tyagaraja had a vision of Lord Rama on the top of a hill as if in Lanka, getting ready for the battle with Ravana. Tyagaraja composed a song recalling this vision. Apparently, at the time Rama appeared – and this was on 27th December, 1846 – Rama gave the assurance that he, Tyagaraja, would merge with Him ten days later.

On 5th January, 1847, one day before he was suppose to receive the final call, Tyagaraja formally took *sanyas*, that is to say, he became a renunciate, in accordance with the Hindu tradition. Next day he passed into eternity, merging forever with Lord Rama. Whereas householders are cremated when they die, sannyasis are buried. Tyagaraja was interred at a spot on the left bank of the Kaveri river with all the rites due to a Sannyasi. A tulsi plant was planted near the spot. In the years to come, that spot got built up progressively and that is where the saint is worshipped today; and that is also where musicians have been paying homage to him for nearly a century.

The Three Schools of Tyagaraja

During his life, Tyagaraja attracted many students and to each he imparted a “corpus of his compositions according to the student's voice-quality and musical equipment”. It is to these students and in particular to three branches that we owe the legacy we now have. The three branches, or schools that emerged are those associated with the places Umayalpuram, Tillaistanam, and Walajapet.

Some disciples also took the trouble of documenting Tyagaraja's life. The first two biographies were written by the father and son duo, Venkataramana Bhagavathar, and Krishnaswami Bhagavathar of Walajapet. Venkataramana Bhagavathar was born in 1781 and spent many years with Tyagaraja. He died in 1874. His son Krishnaswami was born in 1824, and he too spent some years with Tyagaraja. Both the father and the son wrote their biographical

texts in Telugu, and all other accounts that were published subsequently have naturally relied a lot on these basic texts.

Professor William J Jackson on Tyagaraja

Material for this article has been gathered from many sources, an important one being the wonderful book entitled ***Tyagaraja – Life and Lyrics*** by Professor William J Jackson, Professor of Religious Studies in Indiana University. Jackson's book is a typical professional treatise, and it is amazing how detailed a study he has made of Tyagaraja, his music and his times. It is interesting to know that Jackson met Swami in 1970, learnt Telugu, was inspired by Swami's Bhajans and from then on went to discover Tyagaraja. This is how he puts it:

Listening in 1971 to Sri Sathya Sai Baba, a great speaker of Telugu, inspired me to study this mellisonant tongue. Just as Italian has been favoured for librettos and is used for musical terminology by composers, Telugu, of all the South Indian languages, has been chosen by lyricists and musicologists of the South.

My spiritual guide, Sir Sathya Sai Baba, a great singer who has a unique far-reaching voice and who is the real Raja of Tyaga, - exemplar of renunciation – helped me find the confidence to reach for new possibilities and the patience to work until reaching completion. When I first encountered him in 1970, I knew nothing of India; he taught my wife and me many bhajans, and showed us the way to silence.

Remarks on Tyagaraja's musical heritage, the famous *Pancharatna Kritis*, and the *Aradhana* festival are made separately.

MUSICAL HERITAGE OF TYAGARAJA

Although the **Heart2Heart** Team does not claim professional expertise in Carnatic Music, it ventures to make some remarks by way of placing the musical heritage of Tyagaraja in a proper context.

To understand better the heritage of Tyagaraja, one must start with the musicians of the period before the advent of the Saint. In that period, the focus was on musical excellence and virtuosity based on what is called *ManoDharma*, that is to say the unrestrained creativity of the Mind. The music of those days was by and large centred around a scheme called *Ragam*, *Tanam*, and *Pallavi*. More about this shortly but first we must say something about how Tyagaraja made extensive use of a scientific *Raga* classification scheme called *Melakarthas*, introduced by a 16th century saint named Venkatamakhi.

The Basic Scale In Carnatic Music

In brief, the scheme may be described as follows: Seven notes form the basic scale – *sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni*; in western music, they are familiar as *do, re,*

mi etc. After *ni* comes *sa* again, as an octave of the starting *sa*. These seven notes are referred to as *saptha swaram*. The scale is now made richer by introducing additional variations of some of the notes; for example, *ri* comes in more than one variety. However, *sa*, and *pa* do not have companion notes or *swaras*.

The Ragam (or the Tune)

Now from this expanded set of *swaras* where *ri*, *ga* etc., have companions or siblings, one can make a variety of complete ascending scales having 7+1 notes and corresponding descending scales. When one ascends, one has only *sa*, *ri*, *ga*, *ma*, *pa*, *da*, *ni* and *sa*, although *ri* etc may be one of the many choices available. A *Ragam* is a tune with a complete set of scales which remain the same both for going up and down; such a *Ragam* is referred to as a *Melakarta*.

Venkatamakhi analysed all this and established 72 *Melakarthas*. This is the starting point. One can create more Ragas by taking a *Melakarta Ragam* and selectively dropping a few notes while going up and dropping the same notes while going down. One could as well drop some notes while going up and drop others while coming down, and so on. Obviously, there are innumerable possibilities, as any mathematician would point out.

However, not all scales so constructed are musically appealing; only some are, and it is left to the genius of the musician to discover the musically appealing *Ragams* and use them for his or her songs.

All this is being mentioned just to highlight how Tyagaraja made brilliant and extensive use of this scheme to compose a very large number of songs, choosing *Ragams* to convey the mood of the song as contained in the lyrics. Sometimes the song might convey joy; at other times it may be soaked with anguish, and so on.

The Revolution in Music Brought About By Tyagaraja

We may at the juncture point out how Tyagaraja brought about a complete revolution in the way music was used and presented to the public. The *Ragam*, *Tanam*, *Pallavi* style adopted by earlier musicians centred almost entirely around displaying virtuoso skills. True, the *Pallavi* that came at the end proclaimed devotion to God; however, that devotion came somewhat like an add-on. By and large, a musical concert was an occasion for the display of tonal gymnastics.

This stress on sheer musical skills turned away many who found that this style was not suited for promoting their sense of devotion or *Bhakti*. Tyagaraja changed all that but turning the focus entirely on the song, which, invariably was soaked with devotion or *Bhakti* without sacrificing musical excellence.

With Tyagaraja, many things converged. First there was *Bhakti*, which pervaded every word of the song. The song itself had a definite structure.

There was the opening called *Pallavi* that gave the headlines so to speak of the contents of the song, after which came the *Anupallavi* which was like the sub-headlines. Following these two came the *Charanam* which gave the details of the message. Tyagaraja took the song and mixed it with good music, that is he set it to one of the wonderful ragas available from the *Melkartha* scheme.

As a scholar put it: Tyagaraja started with a good song in that beautiful language Telugu. He then packed it with Divine feelings and sweetened it further by adding Rama's name. He topped it all off by setting the song to the most appropriate *Ragam* available, thereby bringing out the depth of the spiritual message and the musical richness of the composition. In short, he had the winning combination – depth of devotion and the best of music.

Tyagaraja concentrated mostly on songs, though he has also composed a couple of musical dramas. Telugu was invariably the language of choice although here and there one can find a few compositions in Sanskrit. His songs with the *Pallavi*, *Anupallavi* and *Charanam* structure is usually called a *Kriti*. Tyagaraja has himself described the *Kriti* as follows [quoted from **The Spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja** by C.Ramanujachari and V.Raghavan]

Kritis which expound the true words of the exalted Upanishads, which are marked by the correct placement of the swaras and rhythmic turns and pauses, which reflect true devotion and vairagya, which are dripping inside and out with juice like grapes and are rich in the nine rasas.

Mention must also be made of congregational songs composed by Tyagaraja. Now Tyagaraja had an ancestral house to live in, but since he did not have a job, he had no income as such. In those days, many pious people went around giving musical discourses known as *Harikatha*. Basically, it was the story of Hari or God, rendered in a musical fashion.

During the Shirdi Avatar, devotee Das Ganu was famous for this. He started with *Harikatha* based on Rama and Krishna but soon switched to narrating the story of Shirdi Baba.

Tyagaraja, Humble As a Man of God - Seeking Alms

Tyagaraja followed instead a slightly different tradition adopted by some pious people. He followed the path of *Unchavritti*; he would go out and seek alms, singing as he walked the streets. He did not sing *Kritis* but instead special songs, most amenable for group singing. As he went round the village, people would join him and follow him in the singing. Thus came into existence a special category of songs, that we would compare to Bhajans; however, they have their own musical richness.

The beauty about this category of songs was that people without musical training could easily follow him. Tyagaraja did not consider seeking alms as *infra dig*. On the contrary, he felt it would help him to be humble. He collected only as much food as was needed. Such was the spirit of those times that

people gave respect to Tyagaraja and considered it a blessing to give him alms; all that was on account of his extreme piety and his total surrender to Lord Rama.

In the years after Tyagaraja gave up his body, his music pervaded all over South India and literally began to dominate Carnatic music. Indeed, towards the end of the nineteenth century and till the middle of the twentieth century, almost all girls in Brahmin families had to learn music and inevitably a good part of it was what Tyagaraja composed. This helped music appreciation to grow in big measure and many took to Carnatic music as a vocation. It was not merely vocalists but also instrumentalists who took to Tyagaraja's music like a fish takes to water. Indeed, to this day, one can hear the saint's music played here in Prashanti Nilayam on the *Nadaswaram* on every festival morning.

Music Should Lead To The Divine

Savants everywhere have intuitively recognised the place of sublime music in human society. Coleridge wrote, "The best sort of music is what it should be – sacred." A French music scholar went one step further and wrote [in 1739], "It is the true purpose of music to be above all else, a moral lesson." And Bach wrote in his copy of the Bible: "Where there is music, there is God."

Tyagaraja did not preach, but by giving poignant musical expression to his devotion for Rama, provided [unconsciously, we are sure] tons of moral lessons! As a lover of music wrote in the *Hindu* in October 1941,

His music is a synthesis of South Indian culture and is as great as any form of Indian culture. Its Telugu is as simple almost as any Telugu of the girl that goes home in the evening, singing, with her bundle of grass. But from such slim footing Tyagaraja's music rises as tall as the world.

Its tradition is Tamil. The tradition of Alvars and Nayanmars. Its grammar is Carnatic, that is to say, South Indian. Its culture is Indian in vision. Its spirit is human, the spirit of man, the top of creation, communing with his creator. Everyone in South India can understand it, can feel its rhythm, can follow its spirit and feel at home in it.

Tyagaraja, more perhaps than any other single musician, has preserved for us our one great live art with an appeal both wide and deep.

It is no surprise then that musicians of South India gather every year on Tyagaraja's death anniversary to honour the saint. This festival called *Aradhana* is described below.

THE ARADHANA FESTIVAL

Celebrating The Death Anniversary Of Tyagaraja

Every year, at the time of the death anniversary of Tyagaraja, there is a week long festival in Tiruvaiyaru during which a musical homage is paid to the saint, mostly by giving short concerts in the immediate proximity of the Samadhi where the Saint is interred. On the anniversary of the day when the Saint merged with his Lord Rama, there is a special routine, during which the musicians of the day, led by the senior ones go round the streets singing, in the same spirit in which Tyagaraja went on *Unchavritti*. They then assemble in the area set apart for the concerts, and there, after following a set pattern during which certain specific songs of Tyagaraja are sung, they commence singing in chorus the famous *Pancharatna Kritis*. All this did not start right away, and the practices one now sees have evolved over a period of time.

Immediately after Tyagaraja was buried, the disciples of the Tillaistanam school, took upon themselves the daily performance of *puja* and other rituals at the Samadhi. However, a dispute arose between the two brothers who were direct disciples of Tyagaraja. The elder brother, Panchu Bhagavathar was a very orthodox man and insisted that only Brahmins must be associated with all the activities, particularly the religious ones. His younger brother Narasimha Bhagavathar, on the other hand, was more liberal in outlook and demanded that even as God belongs to all, so do his exalted devotees; there must thus be no discrimination. This disagreement became a big dispute leading, unfortunately, even to litigation. In fact, the practices now followed are what have been stipulated by the Court! How sad!! But that is what human folly is all about.

In the beginning, there was no structure at the burial spot; the structure was put up later thanks to the exemplary initiative of Bangalore Nagarathnammal, whose story and the way she was led to our Beloved Swami by Tyagaraja himself, is narrated elsewhere. Till 1908, it was all entirely a religious activity. The practice of holding music concerts in honour of the Saint started that year. Group singing of the *Pancharathna Kritis* commenced in 1948, and has been going on ever since.

As per the order of the Court, *Abhishekam* is performed to the idol of the Saint three times on *Aradhana* Day, between 4.00 AM and 6.00 AM by Mr. Chellam Iyer's group [Mr. Chellam Iyer was a stalwart of the so-called *Chinna Katchi* or Small Group associated with Narasimha Bhagavathar mentioned above], between 6.00 AM and 8.00 AM by the Bangalore Nagararathnamma Trust and after 8 AM by the Musical Body [*Sabha*] that organises the main *Aradhana* festival.

The practice of celebrating the *Aradhana* Day by singing the *Pancharathna Kritis* has since spread to many places in India and even overseas.

*****in box

BANGALORE NAGARATHNAMMAL

The pious and blessed disciple of Thyagaraja.

These days, everyone takes the Tyagaraja Aradhana festival for granted. Few realise the key role played by Bangalore Nagarathnammal in all this and her contribution to the continuance of the tradition.

Bangalore Nagarathnammal as she is known, was born on November 2, 1878 in Mysore as the daughter of Vakil Subba Rao and Puttulakshmi. She learnt Sanskrit and music from one Giripatta and violin from her uncle Venkitasami Appa of Bangalore. Later she continued her violin training under Munuswamy Appa who had studied under Wallajapet Krishnaswami of the Tyagaraja disciple lineage. Nagarathnammal also learnt Bharathanatyam [classical dance] but her heart was really in music.

The Early Life of Nagarathnamma

Her early life was full of difficulties because her mother was abandoned by her husband. But Nagarathnammal bore this all stoically and in her fifteenth year, she gave a veena concert at the house of the famous Veena Seshanna. From then on, there was no looking back. She had a wonderful and strong voice, and it is reported that between 1905 and 1935, she gave over a thousand concerts. Tyagaraja and the Kannada Saint Purandaradasa [often regarded as the father of Carnatic music] became her heroes, and she did all in her power to preserve their heritage. Tyagaraja became a special favourite because he too had suffered much life, like she had.

Once, Tyagaraja appeared in her dream and directed her to go to Tiruvaiyaru to his burial place. This she did and resolved then to build a formal *Samadhi* [tomb]. With single-minded devotion and dedication, she sold her properties, pooled all her collections, and, enlisting the support of music lovers and devotees of Tyagaraja, she started on October 27, 1921, the construction of the *Samadhi* on the banks of the Kaveri river in Tiruvaiyaru. The land for the *Samadhi* was donated by Maneppa Saheb Rajaram Mannaji Surve. The construction was completed and the *Samadhi* was consecrated on January 7, 1925. This is the venue of the famous Tyagaraja *Aradhana* festival that takes place every year, marking the death anniversary of the Saint.

Nagarathnammal was very pious. She performed Guru Pooja every year and also celebrated Hanuman Jayanthi unfailingly. As the years rolled by, she became increasingly involved with activities at Tiruvaiyaru. She built, from her earnings, the Mysore Choultry at Tiruvaiyaru, where pilgrims going there could lodge free. She established, with much help from the cine actor Nagaiah, the Tyaga Brahma Nilayam, a music school, where she herself gave lessons.

In 1949, she executed a will, leaving everything she had for the propagation of Tyagaraja's musical and spiritual legacy. That same year, she was specially honoured by the Governor General of India. She passed away on May 19, 1952 and is buried in a *Samadhi*, right next to the one she built for Tyagaraja.

*****box ends

SWAMI MAKING A REFERENCE TO TYAGARAJA

Often Swami has made reference to Tyagaraja in His discourses, on one occasion, He said,

"Tyagaraja, in his song *Evarani nirnayanchedira*, has explained the significance of the two letters in the word Rama. He says, "In the Narayana Mantra 'Om Namo Narayanaya', 'Ra' is the fundamental letter (*Jiva Akshara*), and in the Siva Mantra 'Om Namah Sivaya', 'Ma' plays a similar role.

Without these letters, the two *Mantras* would be lifeless and meaningless. 'Ra' and 'Ma' combine to form Rama. One who knows this Truth, is worthy of respect and I prostrate before him. There is hardly anyone who does not utter the name of God in one form or the other. At least they name their children after God, so that consciously or otherwise, they utter the name of the Lord while calling their children."

Well, if we compile what Swami has said on Tyagaraja, it would be in volumes, too less to cover in a feature article. In the coming issues, we will try to give more glimpses into the life and works of this great spiritual saint of India and an exemplary devotee of the Lord!

- Heart2Heart Team

SERIAL ARTICLES
SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI - PART 13

continued from the last issue

In our last issue the epic story of the life of Shirdi Baba came to an end with the shedding of His mortal coil to the sorrow and consternation of His devotees. Yet He had promised to incarnate again and this happened eight years later, exactly as He had told His devotees. Earlier, it was in the village of Pathri. This time, it was in the village of Parthi, or Puttaparthi, to give the full name.

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba took birth on 23rd November, 1926 in the Ratnakara family. This family was highly respected in the village for its devotion to the Lord, and for its staunch adherence to righteousness. Baba's parents this time were Pedda Venkama Raju [father] and Easwaramma [mother]. Pedda Venkama Raju was the eldest son of Kondama Raju, a highly esteemed village elder. At birth, Baba was named Satyanarayana Raju. Prior to Him were born, Seshama Raju [elder brother], Venkamma [elder sister], and Parvathamma [another elder sister]. Sathyanarayana Raju was called Sathyam at home and Raju by His friends, till He declared His Avatarhood on 20th October, 1940. After that He came to be known to the world as Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba and also Swami.

What is presented in the following issues of Heart to Heart covers Swami's early years, starting with the Holy birth in the Ratnakara family. Right from the beginning, there were ample signs of His Divinity. However, not all noticed this. As a result, young Sathyanarayana Raju was often subjected to much teasing and at times harsh treatment. At the same time, drawn inexplicably by His Divine attractive power, there were many that showered love on Him and were deeply loyal to Him. All this was of course a part of His Divine Drama.

The appearance of God on Earth in human form is no ordinary event. Whereas we cannot choose our parents, God can. He decides when and where He would be born and takes birth only in a deserving family. The Raju family was rather poor, yet the members of the family commanded much respect in the village. Kondama Raju had a *Guru* named Venkavadhoota. Sometime before Swami's birth Venkavadhoota had told Kondama that one day, as reward for the devotion of the family, the Lord Himself would take birth there. It always happens that prior to the advent of the Lord, there is some turmoil. It was so in Puttaparthi before Swami took birth. There was tyranny from the administrators and also the rich landlords...

ACT I - SCENE 1

The story begins sometime before the incarnation of the Lord. There is a raid by the Government tax collectors. The people are suffering due to drought and consequent crop failure. There is no income. Yet, the Government wanted the people to pay taxes. There was much harassment. A jeep carrying Revenue Officials comes tearing across the narrow village roads.

TWO VILLAGERS (*running in front of the jeep*): Make way, make way!

A MAN: The Munsif [village headman] has come personally to collect taxes.

ANOTHER MAN: The revenue inspector also has come.

REVENUE INSPECTOR (RI): Hey, confiscate those things! Grab whatever you can lay your hands on – cattle, goats,you too.

People lament and cry as the underlings grab and confiscate everything they can see and lay their hands on. The heartless revenue inspector laughs and gloats over the suffering of the poor villagers.

PEON: [*tells the villagers*] How many times should I tell you to pay taxes on time?

RI: [*laughs and shouts*] Confiscate the bulls.....Hey you, confiscate the hens and load them in the bullock cart.

The Government cart, loaded with all the confiscated material, drives off.

VILLAGER: [*to the revenue inspector*] Sir, the rains have failed and the crops have withered. We have had to borrow money and cannot even pay the interest. How then can we pay the taxes?

RI: [*ignoring the villager*] Let this be a lesson! From next time, pay your taxes promptly!

VILLAGER: How can we pay sir? We borrowed money, ploughed the land and looked up to the sky for rains; but the rains did not come!

RI: How am I responsible for that?

VILLAGER: Unless it rains, how can crops grow?

RI: I don't care whether there is a flood or a drought. You have to pay taxes according to rules. I don't have the patience to listen to all your stories.Hey you! Start the vehicle!

The revenue inspector and his party drive away, leaving the villagers lamenting and weeping. A man comes there and sees the scene. He starts making enquiries.

MAN: What's the matter? What happened?

VILLAGER: Sir, do you see our plight?

VILLAGER 2: Sir, we have lost everything! We have become orphans, with no one to seek support from.

MAN: Mr. Kondamma Raju (*who becomes Swami's grandfather*) is there as a beacon light for all of us. Let us report to him the injustice that is being inflicted. He will show us a way.

VILLAGERS: Yes, we shall do that.

SCENE 2

Kondama Raju is in his house, offering worship. He is just about to conclude by offering Aarathi, when several villagers come to his house.

MAN: Mr. Kondamma Raju! Mr. Kondamma Raju!!

K. RAJU: Who is that?

MAN: Greetings and salutations.

K. RAJU: Who is that? Oh you, Subbaraidu! Why have all of you have come at the same time?

MAN: Respected Sir, you are an elder and the preceptor for all of us. You are the jewel of the of the Ratnakara family. The mention of your very name makes even mountains bow in humility! Your words soothe wounded hearts, and your touch can melt even stones!

MAN 2: In this village that is your home, oppression is growing.

MAN: Lawlessness, injustice, and unrighteousness, also are on the increase!

K. RAJU: Don't get excited! Tell me what exactly happened.

MAN: Since taxes were not paid, everything from pots and pans to domestic animals have been confiscated. When there is no harvest, how can people pay taxes? Please sir, you tell me! We fell at the feet of the authorities and prayed, but they refused to understand our plight. Instead, they simply kicked us and went away. Is this to be our fate? Please sir, you tell us for you are our *Guru*!

K. RAJU: In every age, God comes down in human form to remove the difficulties of mankind, and to make people happy. Very soon that time is coming.....I shall arrange to see that the confiscated goods are restored. Don't worry. Please go now.

MAN: Now we feel more secure! Mr. Raju sir!! Your words fill our heart with confidence and the assurance that our difficulties will disappear.

K. RAJU: Hardship is like fire; it burns when you touch it. But does not the fire always die down eventually? It is the same with difficulties; they will pass off. Better days will come soon. Please go now.

END OF SCENE 2

(To be continued)

GITA FOR CHILDREN

PART-15

Continued from the previous issue...

A Beautiful Exposition On Concentration, Contemplation and Meditation

46. 'I would now like to tell you something about Meditation, especially because *Yogis* are supposed to be lost in Meditation for long spells of time. The word Meditation is greatly misunderstood, besides being interpreted in a narrow sense.'

47. 'To begin with, I should mention that the text-book *Sannyasi* or *Yogi*, call him what you will, is one who has lived with himself and for God for years and years. He has not only practised austerities but has gone through a long and elaborate routine of self-discipline, involving many and progressive stages. It is like going up a ladder. Yogic Meditation is the top of the ladder.'

48. 'I won't go into all those details now, but I should call your attention to three stages involved. They are: Concentration, Contemplation, and Meditation.'

49. 'Concentration is something very common. Anybody who is serious about what he is doing necessarily concentrates a lot. You, for example, would totally concentrate on the target before shooting an arrow. Well, that is concentration.'

50. 'Concentration is an activity of the brain or the lower Mind. With some practice, anyone can easily learn to concentrate. In fact, concentration is a must for all students.'

51. 'After concentration comes contemplation. This is a higher activity of the Mind. Let us say a teacher has taught a lesson about plants. Later when the student is revising the lesson, he could contemplate and wonder:

"How can the plant grow up without a father and mother? Or, are there an invisible father and an invisible mother? When I feel hungry I ask my mother for food. Which mother gives food and water to the plant? Why has God made the plant so different? Incidentally, why has God created plants?" That is contemplation.'

52. 'Coming now to Meditation, in simple terms it means filling the Mind with God. When you contemplate, you start thinking of higher things. Going back to the case of the plant, Meditation means thinking, "God, how beautiful are the plants and the trees! Oh Krishna, when You were young, You used to rest under trees. How I wish I was one of those! I could have had Your *Darshan* for long periods of time!! Krishna, why don't You become a tree and make me a creeper twining round You?"'

53. 'Another example. You go to your garden to pluck a rose for God. When you pluck the flower, you must concentrate; otherwise you would get hurt by the thorns. Once you have plucked the flower, you hold it in your hands and admire its beauty and freshness. That is contemplation. You then say, "God, this flower I am offering to You." That is Meditation.'

54. 'In simple terms, Meditation is nothing but remembrance of the Lord. You can go about your normal household work, chanting My Name all the time – that also is Meditation. People do not realise this and imagine that Meditation perforce involves sitting in a Yogic pose, closing your eyes and all that. That is only ONE way of meditating!

There are actually many ways to meditate and the bottom line in all cases is remembrance of the Lord. That really is the important point.'

55. 'Arjuna, people are made differently and have a differing attitudes and aptitudes. Take running for example. Some can run very fast but only over a short distance. Others have stamina and can run not very fast but over long distances. The long distance runner cannot do what the sprinter does and vice versa.'

56. 'You can see this in your own family. Your brother Bhima is hefty and therefore the mace is the ideal weapon for him; but for you, it is the bow and the arrow. In the same way, where Meditation is concerned, people can adopt different techniques best suited to them. It is not the procedure but the SPIRIT in which Meditation is done that is important.'

To be continued....

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

AMAZING TRANSFORMATION AND DIVINE MIRACLE -

Through Unity, Purity and Divinity in Melakavatti, Tamil Nadu

Ten kilometers away from Ooty, in Tamil Nadu, India, is the village of Melakavatti, which lies on the road between Ooty and Nanjanadu. Surrounding this valley are cloud-capped, mist-laden hills that offer a panoramic view of Nature's emerald greenery at its best. The slopes of the hills are thickly wooded and the shifting mist seems to play hide and seek upon them. 300 families live in this verdant village.

The Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations of Nilgiris selected this village for their three-year Seva activities prior to Bhagavan's 80th Birthday. They could not have realised that it was the Divine Hand that had pointed out this village, since a *Leela* was to be played out there.

A Paralysed Lady Blighted and Uncared For...

It was in January 2003, at the inauguration of the Seva activities in the village, that the members of the Ooty Samithi conducted a *Nagarsangeerthan* one early morning. After the *Nagarsangeerthan* they visited each and every house and gave out Swami's picture, a laddu and vibhuthi as prasad. At the end of a lane they entered an ancient, dilapidated house for handing out prasad. What they saw shook them to the very core of their being. **On the damp floor was lying a lady well past her prime on a sacking cloth. Wherever they turned, their eyes met only signs of abject poverty and neglect.** Some villagers who had come along with them explained the pitiful condition of that lady.

She was extremely poor and had been orphaned at a very early age. The little plot of land that she inherited was the source of a meager income that kept her body and soul together. Having no near and dear relatives to arrange her marriage, she remained a spinster. When she was 30, suddenly, she lost the use of both arms and legs.

The Divine Sai Seva Begins....

The District President and other members of the Organisation, who heard these pathetic details, were deeply touched. That second itself they resolved to adopt her and take care of her. Immediately, a cot, a mattress and blankets were bought and she was transferred from the cold sacking cloth on the floor. **They planned that every day one member would bring food and stay with her the entire day and take care of her.** That was how the Divine Seva began.

The Villagers' Hearts Awaken...

As months rolled by, the collective conscience of the village woke up. They felt ashamed that in the name of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, volunteers were coming from distant Ooty to take care of the elderly, paralysed lady who had always lived in their midst, totally neglected by them.

They felt that it was their bounden duty to take care of the lady. Slowly, their minds and hearts changed and kindness and compassion crept into their hearts. As a result, the village panchayat (head committee) was convened. Each one commented appreciating the continuous Seva that had been going on, rain or shine. The Ooty Samithi members had never failed in the Sai Seva they had taken up even though they had to travel 20 kms to and fro from Ooty. The villagers resolved that henceforth they would take over the care of their neighbour whom they had forsaken till then.

Thirty people came forward to care for her. All the days of the month were thus covered and **the specific date for each family was written on a paper and kept near Bhagavan's picture in their Pooja room as an offering at the Feet of the Lord Sai.** The service continued and the Samithi members continued to associate themselves and assist when need arose. The eagerness to serve spread and soon everyone in the village wanted to do something!

The Seva Ideal Spreads...

They began to renovate her house, cementing the floor, painting the walls and repairing the roof. It gained a new look and shone because of the love and service gushing from generous hearts. They began cooking her food in the renovated kitchen and thus she was able to eat hot food, a very welcome change for her in Ooty's cold climate.

A healthy competition began between the villagers so that each month lots had to be drawn to assign 30 families for performing Seva to the paralysed lady. All the important activities of the village began to be held in her house only. It had become a symbol of their unity and purity of hearts and the readiness to serve that sprang from that purity. **The dark, dismal house had become transformed into a shining center for all activities in Melakavatti.** The village that was earlier divided by selfishness, clashes of ego and disinterestedness, came together bound by love of service to the long-neglected lady. Thus, started the link that bound them together into Unity, which spread Purity among them. Can Divinity be far behind?

The Lady's House...the Centre of the Village

In September 2004, the Samithis in the Nilgiris District planned to hold bhajans in 80 villages. The turn of Melakavatti came along and all the people in one voice opined that the bhajan should take place in that lady's house, which had become the focal point of all their activities. Accordingly, a well decorated *shamiana* (temporary shed) was erected in front of the house and *bhajans* started in the evening. All the villagers participated with great enthusiasm and devotional fervour. The bhajan singers from Ooty were totally

immersed in singing the praise of the Lord who had brought the village together.

The Unexpected Divine Miracle!

At that golden moment something momentous, something miraculous, something totally unexpected, began to happen. **That 50 year old lady who had no sensation in her hands and legs and had been confined to her bed for the past 20 years, suddenly, without the help of anybody or without anyone being conscious of it, raised herself up to sit on the bed. Slowly, she put her feet down and stood up!** She moved her hands as well. She moved towards the place where bhajans were being sung in front of Bhagavan's picture.

The whole village was immersed in the bhajans and did not know of the miracle that was taking place inside the house. **All at once, they saw her coming to the front of the house unaided and raising her hands in homage to the visible Lord and beginning to dance in ecstasy.** The bhajan singers, Samithi members and the villagers were all struck with wonder seeing that lady dancing before their eyes and this must have flashed on their minds *"Sai Bhagavan! How is it possible for this lady who had remained paralysed for 20 years to dance to the rhythm of the bhajans except by Your Grace? You are indeed present here and have taken over the entire village and working miracles. The total transformation of this village has been due to Your boundless Grace, mercy and compassion."*

The lady explained to the amazed gathering that Swami had appeared in her dream the previous night and had massaged her hands and legs thus removing her paralysis.

The Amazing Transformation in the Village

Today, the 300 families are closely knit into one Sai family. Unity led to Purity that has expanded into Divinity. **The village chief who was shocked by what he saw resolved then and there that he would never touch another bottle of liquor in that pure village where God was present. He had been a confirmed alcoholic throughout his entire life!**

Lo and behold! The paralysed walks! The addict renounces liquor at a moment's notice! Unity prevails in a divided village and their pure hearts are temples where Bhagavan is enthroned! What other proof does one need to recognize the presence of the All Compassionate Lord?

A little footnote to the above is that the name of the lady is Subbi short for Subbamma! A look at that shining lady's face and visit to her is enough for her neighbours to come back lit with joy and peace. Where the Lord has taken residence is surely a place filled with Ananda and peace everlasting.

Courtesy: Sai Samarpan - **Heart2Heart Team**

SAI SEVA IN CHENNAI AND JAMMU

Here we bring you news of Seva carried out in two parts of India, literally at opposite ends of the country, from the States of Jammu and Kashmir and Tamil Nadu. Though separated by thousands of miles the Seva Dals are motivated by the same love and inspiration - that of helping the suffering and pleasing their Lord.

FLOOD RELIEF SEVA IN TAMIL NADU

Heart2Heart readers will be aware of the immediate response of Swami's devotees whenever there are disasters affecting humanity. The Seva carried out by the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation embraces those affected with the touch of Swami's love, poured through His willing instruments. There can only be physical limits to the help that is rendered – His Love is everlasting and ever present.

You may remember that there were torrential rains in Tamil Nadu in the months of November and December. Thousands of people were suffering due to the flood waters. Into this situation entered the Sevalal teams, propelled to aid wherever, whenever and whoever they could. We would like to tell you of the Seva that was carried out mainly in the Chennai area, for your inspiration and interest.

On 12th November 2005 over **600kg of rice was handed out** in Vedachalam Nagar, Koyambedu, providing food security to 125 families. Two weeks later after flooding from the Cauvery and Coleroon rivers, **2200 people were served with food packets** by 95 sevadals in 7 villages of Tanjore district.

In an amazing rescue mission 15 youth members put their own lives at risk to save 20 people marooned in the swirling waters. They constructed a raft using bamboo sticks and barrels, which was then able to cross the swollen surge and ferry the stranded back to land. This occurred in the Madipakkam area of Chennai Metro on 2nd December 2005. Another 50 people were cared for and given food at the Koyambedu bus station.

In the next two days further seva was undertaken as follows. **1,200 people received food packets** in the Choolaimedu area of Chennai Metro area, as the sevadals waded through knee deep water in dangerous circumstances to find the needy people in their very homes.

300 people received food and 100 sarees and 150 children's clothes were given out at Bharani Nagar, Alapakkam. **100 people were given food** at IDPL grounds, Nandampakkam and Bharathi slum, Nesapakkam.

In the Adyar area of Chennai the Adyar River had burst its banks and created havoc for the surrounding residents. **40 youth sevadal distributed hot milk and biscuits to 300 homes** in Mallikaipoo Nagar. Unmindful of danger they were forced to walk through knee deep water and use emergency lighting.

Those who go to the aid of others are often neglected themselves. In such circumstances the Army was engaged in rescue operations in Kotturpuram and so our **sevadai gave out hot milk and biscuits to their personnel. 1000 people who were sheltering in a school** in the same area were attended to with hot milk, biscuits, Vibhuti and Swami's picture.

Sai Seva During Tamil Nadu Floods

PEOPLE SERVED FOOD	7,500 approx
PLACES VISITED	16
PEOPLE RESCUED	20
RICE HANDED OUT	600kg
CLOTHES DISTRIBUTED	100 sarees 150 children's clothes

These details are only a summary in words of what transpired in desperate situations. Please bear the limiting factor of words in mind and take some time to contemplate on the real life feelings of the seva dai and those whom they went to help. Of all the devotion and dedication, the sacrifice and joy, the sympathy and compassion that guided the seva dai. And the pain and anguish of those suffering who found their lives lit up in their hours of need by service inspired by Sai.

Disaster Management Training

Some of the Seva dai involved in the above report have been trained in disaster management. These instructions become vital in life and death situations. You can see some of the training in these pictures. It was imparted at a 3 day intensive course near Tanjore. The topics include water rescue, rescue using ropes, first-aid training, cardio pulmonary resuscitation techniques and fire-fighting training. So far 500 seva dai have received disaster management training in Tamil Nadu. And some have gone on to become trainers themselves, even instructing people outside SSSSO!

This article is based on our latest information from the state president of the Tamil Nadu Seva Organisation. Next issue we will be updating you with more such reports.

- Heart2Heart Team

SAI ACTIVITIES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

The seva carried out in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has hitherto been somewhat subdued due to the risk to life from terrorist activities. The mountainous and rocky terrain also makes the Seva undertaken a little more difficult than other parts of India. Yet this year was to be different as it is the glorious 80th advent year and so the Sai Organisation of Jammu and Kashmir was determined to ignore any personal risks.

Narayan Seva in Kashmir Valley for the First Time!

It was a significant moment for the Organisation when the Seva Dal members, undeterred by the spate of militancy related activities in Kashmir Valley, organized the first ever Narayan Seva on the eve of Bhagavan's birthday when food packets were served to hundreds of people.

Grama Seva And Clothes Distribution In Progress in Jammu and Kashmir

Apart from the regular Narayan Seva that is carried out by the Organization every second Sunday of the month, Sai youth organized a special Narayan Seva on the eve of Bhagavan's 80th Birthday. Food packets were served to the poor and physically challenged living in the outskirts of Jammu City, in *Jhuggies* (temporary houses). In addition to this, several Sai Youth visited a lepers' home in the Bhagwati Nagar area of Jammu City, where delicious food was served to nearly 80 lepers. As a part of the Narayan Seva, Sevadals also distributed clothes to 530 people, including families with members suffering from leprosy and physical disabilities.

"Shanti Rath Yatra" – Peace March During November

Peace is such a rare commodity in the way. To promote brotherliness and harmony, the devotees and Sai workers had a "Shanti Rath Yatra" (A Peace March on The Chariot) in Jammu City during November 2005 to commemorate Bhagavan's 80th Birthday.

The "Rath Yatra" helped in creating awareness about Swami and His message of love and Service among the people. The Chariot was decorated with banners and was accompanied by cars decked with pictures of Swami and lead by six Sai youth on motorcycles. *Akhanda* Bhajan was also held for 24 hours attended by 600 people in three locations.

Many would be aware of the recent earthquake that hit the state of Jammu and Kashmir and even some areas in Pakistan. **Many alumni from the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning rushed to the spot to help and aid the victims. There are really moving stories of service...of love...We will bring you all these stories in the next issue of Heart2Heart. Watch out for the Cover Story of Feb 2006!**

- Heart2Heart Team

PRASHANTI DIARY

The Christmas Story

After the hectic events leading to the celebration of the 80th Birthday, it was just His Grace that events in Prashanti Nilayam slowed down in its wake. This gave the myriad staff, *seva dal*, devotees and students time to catch their breath and complete the more mundane chores of life (like paying the bills), chores which had been brushed aside and put on the back-burner in anticipation and preparation for the Big B-Day.

But life in the Ashram cannot remain still too long. Soon it came abuzz with a lot of devotees coming from overseas to celebrate Christmas and wind down the year-long 80th Birthday celebrations. The Vidya Giri stadium also rang with the excited shouts of students who were participating in their intra mural games which lead up to the celebrations of the Sports Day on January 11 every year.

In this issue we bring a detailed report of the Christmas festival, one of the most joyful in the Prashanti calendar, as people from all over the world gather here for many days, living and practising together, in true brotherly love and harmony, so that they can present their best programmes in front of the Lord.

This year too devotees from overseas, estimated at 3,000 to 3,500 people, gathered here to celebrate the birth of Christ and ring out the old year and usher in the new. Traditionally in the Western world, the nuclear families that live apart the whole year come home for a full family reunion at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

So Christmas is a cherished time of the year that everyone looks forward to, in order to see and be with their loved ones. But these devotees had come to their real home - to be with their divine Father and Mother and their brothers and sisters from all over the world. They all come quite early and some bring their musical instruments with them. Christmas organising committees are then formed - with a decoration committee, an adult choir and a children's choir committee and so on and they even have their own *seva dal* to help wherever needed.

ORGANISING THE ADULT CHOIR

What motivates the hundreds of devotees that form part of the adult choir to come here year after year? What drives them to put up with great personal difficulties and inconvenience? What inspires them that they spend long arduous hours in practise? Let us hear a first hand account from one devotee:

"Christmas in the Divine Presence is an incredibly thrilling, learning and loving experience. Swami brings us from all parts of the world, with different languages, cultures and past experiences, and shows us how to be as one. Many come with expectations of just how Christmas must be celebrated.

Others, having arrived for the first time, come with no experience of being in the Divine physical Presence of our Beloved Swami. The love energy that emanates from Him fills us all with awe and the yearning to do that which will please Him. Emotions and devotion are both very much in evidence. For many, the feeling can be one of remembering past Christmases with fondness and for others there is healing of memories that had caused pain.

With so many from differing areas of the world coming together to sing as one, one must be ready for the very real experience of practising the Human Values, as taught by dear Swami. There are challenges enough to allow all to practise patience, perseverance and, by His Grace, purity. Perhaps one of the most difficult for many from the West, is sitting for hours on the floor. Western knees and backs are not used to the floor.

Further, by necessity, the seating has to be close. Both of these challenges give the opportunity to overcome the noisy complaining of the body. Many of us are used to much space and the need to pull oneself together, as it were, is new to many. Much patience is needed. Language becomes an opportunity to overcome shyness. We learn to talk with hands, smiles, nods and singing.

The Staff at the Ashram are ready and willing to give us all the help and cooperation that one could wish for. By Swami's Grace, we are always given a venue in which to practise. These practices comprise about 4 hours a day (2 in the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon) for the singers. The musicians add three more hours to this time. Beyond the time spent in actual practice, are the times spent learning the texts and melodies. It is indeed a full schedule. There are occasions when either darshan and/or bhajans must be missed due to the duty of attending practice. The attempt is made to make these times as infrequent as possible. For the musicians, however, the many hours spent rehearsing means Swami must be experienced on the inside. Fortunately, Swami makes His loving Presence felt with unmistakable clarity. These are the times when tears of joy and gratitude flow freely. His love is what makes all of this possible. For some, the combination of music and text that extol our love for Swami, bring tears of relief and healing.

Does everything move easily and without any bumps and jumps? Of course not! How could we learn to adjust and humble ourselves if all went smoothly? By Swami's Grace, we are provided with plenty of opportunities to learn and grow spiritually. There are the times when people are very tired and communication breaks down. We have the chance to use our words with loving care and if we fail, there will be another time when, by His Grace, we will listen carefully and speak lovingly. Often the program for Christmas Eve, which contains Praise and Worship songs for Swami, is worked on all year. Many people keep their ears and hearts open to the words and melodies that express their love for our Beloved Bhagavan. However, when we arrive at Prashanti Nilayam, the time line is shortened.

Many projects need to be completed in a very short period of time. It has been my experience that Swami will send the perfect person at the perfect time. For example, the choir may be working on music that cries for a flute. With no

effort on our part, someone will show up and ask if we could use a flute player. The quality of the musical talent is incredible. Professional musicians from throughout the world come bringing their instruments so that they can have the blessing of playing before Swami.

It is when these challenges arise that the Human Values really come into play. Someone may come with a song that they have composed out of their love for Swami. This person will want to have their love sung for Swami. However, the music may not be appropriate, the words may not fit the theme, or, frankly, it may be beautiful to the composer, but not to others. Here is where truth, spoken with love and compassion, must be uttered. When this happens it is amazing to see how speaking with love and from a place of dharma, people are able to accept that this song might be better used as a devotional song in their Sai Centre. Anger is rarely seen or heard. The occasional grumble is voiced, heard and dealt with. So many come wanting only to sing for Swami on this Holy occasion, that the challenges are dealt with in a spirit of cooperation.

My personal experience of the Christmas Choir for these past years, is one of great joy and humility. To be allowed to participate with hundreds of brothers and sisters in singing our love for Swami is the highlight of my year. The feeling of oneness is palpable. Are there little glitches along the way? Certainly, but the Love and Grace of Swami so completely permeates the environment that they become little nothings compared to the joy of serving Him.

Also on a personal level, but one that has been expressed to me by several choir members, is that the rehearsals become the focal point of Christmas. One becomes totally involved in giving and the feeling is one of focusing completely on Swami and pleasing Him. When focused upon singing His praises, we are raised above the petty level of everyday challenges. The experience then truly becomes a Holy Christmas to remember."

This year around 564 ladies and 230 gents hailing from nearly 38 countries were part of the adult choir. Co-ordinating this choir was Ms. Silvia Olden an energetic, exuberant lady with deep devotion who was able to hold this motley crowd together and mould them into one team, one voice. As Vijay Vengetas, an Australian devotee said,

"With nearly a 1000 voices raised in 'Unity', melodious notes pouring out in absolute 'Purity', how could we not feel the Divine Presence ('Divinity') around us. Christmas 2005, is truly a fantastic experience being in the choir. I have been in the Christmas choirs previously but this time seems different. The group is not only much larger but also very enthusiastic. I think, NO - I KNOW that much of our enthusiasm comes from our Director, Sylvia, who puts so much energy and love into everything she does. The stories she tells touches our hearts and teaches so many lessons. On the day of the narration the message comes out loud and clear as though it was meant specifically for you. Attending the practice sessions have brought great joy to many of us and

it is no wonder that we convey that joy in our singing. I shall take away many wonderful memories but most of all I shall remember the joy of living each day as though it were my last. Swami's message is very clear - Be Happy".

THE DECORATION COMMITTEE AT WORK

What most people do not realize is the sheer amount of work that goes in to deck up and decorate the Ashram for every festival, and Christmas 2005 was no exception. The core decoration committee members, about 30 in number, arrived in Prashanti Nilayam about 3-4 weeks prior to Christmas to do the preliminary preparation work. Devotees come from all over the world to work in harmony, unity and love. So much love! The barriers of culture and language dissolve in Shed 36 where most of the decoration prep work is done.

The first thing that the core team does is get all the stored boxes of Christmases past from the storage warehouse near the Ashram Post-Office, which requires the tractor trailer to make 5 trips to get all the boxes. Additional material (the delicate items) are in the basement of North 5 and have to be carefully moved to shed 36. All these boxes are unloaded and unpacked.

Shed 36 is divided into seven designated decoration prep areas (the Mandir, buildings in the Poornachandra complex, pillars and fences of Sai Kulwant Hall, SKH gates, the canteens and deities like Ganesha, Gayathri, Buddha, and Jesus in the Ashram). Wires are then strung for all these designated areas in a uniform manner so that bunting preparation work can be carried out unhampered and in an unobtrusive manner and later hung from these wires, till they are ready to be installed.

The front part of the shed has 3 main work areas. On one side is the Glitter Work, where devotees put glue over cardboard and wooden stars and then dip and sprinkle gold and silver glitter over them, then hanging them up to dry.

The second area is a work bench for Hot Glue Guns. These 4 hot glue guns are operated for sticking mirrors, sequins, and other items onto cardboard, timber and cloth. The third area is for the fabrication of longer items where operations like drilling and sawing are required. Materials are brought from overseas, whatever devotees can fit into their luggage. But a lot of items including consumables like glue, paints, timber, foam boards etc. are purchased locally.

95% of the items are made from scratch and are re-used or recycled the next year. A good example of this is the number of earth globes left over from the youth conference conducted earlier. They were covered with gold glitter and had red ribbons tied to them with small mirrors, and they became the Christmas ornaments hanging from the Poornachandra balcony.

Every year the Christmas festival has a different theme. Unity of Faith being the theme for this year, the banner that was prepared and put up on the Mandir balcony stated "There is only one Religion - The Religion of Love".

Across the Poornachandra gate another banner was put up that read "King of Kings".

Devotees work 3 shifts in a day (morn/afternoon/evening) completing 6-8 hours in a day, apart from attending *darshan*. This goes on till the decoration preparation work is complete and it is time to put it up. Teams are formed to cover all the different areas where the decorations have to be put up. When Swami gives His blessing at the most auspicious time, the devotees work through the night, till the wee hours of the morning putting up the decorations (for that is when the Hall is vacant). Ashram seva *dals* also assist, especially in tasks like the hanging of large items from the ceiling of Sai Kulwant Hall.

The cynosure of all, the centre-piece of the decoration, is the manger on the gents' side with statues of Mother Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus in a crib. On the ladies' side we have a statue of the three wise men who came to visit the Baby Jesus in the manger. These beautiful mock-ups were made and donated by devotees from Italy. (We give an explanation of the importance of these statues for Christians in the box below.)

A total of 70 devotees took part in the decoration team this year from different parts of the world. But the work is not over after the programme is done. When Swami gives the command, all the decorations have to be taken down, packed and put away in storage for the next year.

*******IN BOX THE NATIVITY SCENE**

The diorama of the Nativity scene is a very traditional part of the Christmas decoration, though it is now caught up in controversy in the West. However in the Ashram, where all the festivals of the world are freely celebrated, this realistic mock-up of Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus is very much appreciated by the people of all religions who come here to celebrate Christmas and all the other festivals in the Parthi calendar. Mrs. Milena Kunz-Bijno from Italy contributed the following explanation for the origin of the importance of the Nativity scene:

It was a chilly night in the year 1203 A.D. St. Francis had invited the citizens and the peasants of Greppio, a small hamlet near Assisi, to come for the midnight mass. It was Christmas Eve and the "poor monk" as the people called him, wanted to make a real reconstruction of the event that had brought the son of God down on earth. So, Francis decided to dress a boy and a girl as Joseph and Mary, the parents of Jesus, and put them along with a cow and a donkey in a cave in the hills. The people of the village came through the fields bearing candles and bringing lambs and sheep, singing carols.

They reached the cave with Joseph and Mary and St. Francis started offering the mass. And then the miracle happened: an effulgent light enveloped the cave and everybody could see the newborn Jesus in the manger. The air was full of softness and everybody felt the emotion of witnessing the birth of Christ. The devotion of St. Francis was so great that Jesus had appeared!

Since then the habit of preparing a crèche is a dear tradition for the Christians. Several items, sometimes the full scene of the birth of Christ, are arranged ahead of Christmas and on the 24th of December at midnight the figure of Jesus will be put in the manger by the smallest child of the family.

THE THREE WISE MEN

The 3 Wise men, or magi as they are called, also occupy a treasured place in Christian lore as they are intimately linked with the birth of Christ.

The traditional view of the three wise men is that they came from Persia to pay homage to the baby Jesus, guided by a star. Their names were Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar and were also reputed to be kings. They brought costly gifts of frankincense, gold and myrrh.

The frankincense, an incense used in temple worship, speaks of Jesus' priesthood. The gold speaks of Jesus' kingship. The myrrh, a spice or balm used in preparing bodies for burial, speaks of Jesus' atoning death.

Swami has often asked the primary school boys (while pointing to the statues of the three wise men) if they know who these figures are and He has also spoken about them on a few occasions, such as during Christmas 1998.

When Jesus was born, three Arabian kings came to see Him. They were overjoyed on seeing the new-born babe. While returning, the first king said to Mother Mary, "Mother, you have given birth to a child who loves God."

The second king said, "Mother, you have given birth to a child who will be loved by God." The third king said, "Mother Mary, your child is not different from God; both are one and the same."

Once we understand the inner meaning of these three statements, we will know the truth. The one who loves God is the Messenger of God. The one whom God loves is the Son of God. The one who understands the principle of unity becomes one with God.

- Divine Discourse Christmas 1998.

*******END OF BOX**

ORGANISING FOR THE CHILDREN'S CHOIR

This year the Children's Choir consisted of 90 children, restricted to the ages 6-14 years from 20 countries. Eighteen adults in the roles of organizing, childcare, and musicians brought the number to 108. By giving the opportunity to prepare their songs over a number of days, Swami allowed the children to experience the depth of His boundless love, mixed with the clear discipline and structure as maintained in the ashram. This created an enormous building of character in a very short period of time. In this way, Swami planted the seeds of understanding

how Swami's children can live as an example of His teachings.

All the children showed their love for Swami by giving 100% of their effort in learning the songs and practising steadfastly. They also meditated and put on a little piece of paper a gift they wanted to offer to Swami in the form of replacing a negative habit with a positive one. These little papers were put on the Christmas tree, which was posted in front of the Poornachandra Hall (Swami's residence).

The children's choir was guided by Ms. Alma Badings, a long-time Swami devotee from the Netherlands. Great was her patience at playing Mother Hen to all these young and eager children for 4 hours of practice every day (9:00 to 11:00 AM in the morning and 4:00 to 6:00 PM in the evening), gently coaxing and cajoling, praising and giving tough love in turn, till all the children moulded into one unit, till they all sang in unison in one voice. And as the days rolled by, the hard work seems to have paid off, for those of us who could listen as we passed by their practice, in the ground floor of the "double-decker" building. And as Christmas day came closer and closer they were all ready, willing, able and eager to go!

The Christmas Committee had a problem to place the children who could not sing in the choir because they were either too small or came too late to learn the songs. Then they had the idea to make them Swami's greeters. About 12 girls and 20 boys were given small flower bouquets and waited close to the car path to welcome Him as Swami passed by. When Swami looked at each greeter as He went by, one little girl was so overcome with emotion that she stayed in her room the entire next day crying with happiness! We are immensely grateful to Swami for giving this profound experience of coming close to Divinity for all the children. The memory of it will give them strength and guidance throughout their life.

THE CHRISTMAS EVE DINNER

There are three canteens in the Ashram catering to different tastes - a North Indian (NIC), a South Indian Canteen (SIC) and a Western or Foreigner's Canteen (FC). While the Indian canteens play a major role during the Birthday celebrations by catering to the hundreds of thousands of people coming in streams to partake of Swami's *prasadam*, the Western canteen now plays the major role during the Christmas Holiday season, with the traditional Christmas Eve dinner being served to the devotees.

The canteen wears a festive look decorated with holly and twinkling stars and other Christmas decorations. A huge picture of Swami adorns the back of the Hall. A Christmas tree with all ornaments and a sleigh with a cushion seat for Swami completed the decoration. All the tables are also well laid out and ready for the candle-lit dinner.

The gents and the ladies side both have a big queue right after the evening *bhajan*. The myriad volunteers and the canteen staff have been toiling the entire day to get the meal ready in time for the 7 PM service.

The eclectic menu this year consisted of asparagus soup, lasagne, mashed potatoes with cheese, spinach with corn and potato, Russian salad, white rice, dhal, chocolate and walnut ice-cream for dessert and herbal tea. And all this for just 30 rupees (or 67 cents)! The doors open at 7 PM. The crowd comes enters in an orderly fashion. The *Brahmarpanam* Thanksgiving prayer is first recited in front of Swami's picture and the dinner is then served. The good food and the festive ambience on Christmas Eve set the tone for the grand Christmas celebrations in the morrow.

THE CHRISTMAS MORNING PROGRAMME BY THE SATHYA SAI STUDENTS

Christmas morning dawns with a little nip in the air and more than a little excitement. All the devotees are dressed in their best and eagerly waiting for the Father who had sent Jesus to Earth, to now come and bless them also.

After Swami got down from the car, in a departure from the norm, He cut the Christmas cakes first. There were cakes by the Overseas Devotees, the Hospital Staff, the Institute and Easwaramma School students. After cutting the cakes, Swami sat down in His customary position on the veranda after profusely blessing all the devotees with His *abhaya hasta* (hand raised in blessing).

Christmas morning belonged to the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Institutions, as Swami had blessed music programmes by the Primary School violin boys and the Institute Brass Band. After Swami had taken His seat, the Primary School boys take their place for the first item of the day. They are neatly dressed in white pants and a full-arm white shirt and a red vest that lends a neat festive touch.

The Primary School Violin Boys' Orchestra is made up of 17 violin boys, one cello, and 13 recorder boys. The programme consisted of the energetic *Vigoro*, *Dong Dong Merrily on High*, *Canon in D*, and a jazzy version of *Jingle Bells* that is very well received by the crowd and warms them up for the next item. Swami then gave permission for the Institute Band to begin its programme. The 36 musicians joyfully raised their music stands and stood in position as its conductor returned after speaking with Swami on the portico.

The instruments in the band include 2 flutes, 1 Piccolo, 6 Clarinets, 6 Trumpets, 3 Alto Sax, 1 Tenor Sax, 1 Baritone Sax, 4 Trombones, 3 baritones, 1 Band Leader, 6 Percussion instruments, 1 Tuba and 1 Sousaphone. The varied programme opened with the Christmas Carol *Ring Christmas Bells*, which the band played as a rendition of the *Asatoma* prayer. Other works included *The First Noel*, *Christmas Candle*, *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*, *Hark the Herald Angels*, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, *Rocking Around the Christmas Tree*, and *Jingle Bells*.

The Institute choir accompanied by the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School next presented a bouquet of 10 carols before Swami as a grand finale to the morning's programme.

Two students, one as Uncle Sam and the other as Little Jack gave an introductory commentary before the start of each carol. The instruments accompanying the singers were 4 keyboards, 2 guitars (base and rhythm) and a saxophone. The percussion instruments consisted of the jazz drums, the digital drums and other special effects instruments. While there were some core singers to lead everyone through the microphone, the entire student body joined in the singing accompanied by the devotees to make it a full participatory and a memorable experience for everyone.

Extolling the charm, grace and joy Christmas brings, the students started with the carol *Oh the joy of Christmas Day* which talks of how people the world over have gathered in Parthi to offer their love and prayers. The birth of Christ was heralded next in *Ding Dong merrily on high, In Heavens the bells are ringing...* A beautiful piece on the guitar lead the crowd into *All Night Long I shall burn my Christmas candle*, leading next to a *Deck the Halls* Medley consisting of 4 songs (*Deck the halls with boughs of Holly Fa la la*, *Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer*, *You better watch out* and the crowd favourite *Jingle Bells*).

While the strains of *Jingle Bells* filled the air, a student dressed as Santa Claus comes bounding in and seeks Bhagavan's blessings, and then goes around throwing chocolates into the crowd. A beautiful piece on the saxophone was the lead to the song *Let Your Glory Fall*, an inspired song filled with yearning for the Lord's touch. The students then got everyone rocking with *Aye ye ye Christmas Day*, followed by *Hallelujah Hallelujah.....*

The next carol talks of the prophecy that Jesus made of His father's coming ("...a crown of hair upon His frame, a blood red robe just like a flame...") with the carol *One day before He left His frame He showed His future name*. Accompanied with a beautiful violin solo, a prayer to the Lord (Who is all goodness) to take control of our lives and pardon us our misgivings was next with the carol *God is Good All The Time*. The boys ended the morning programme on a very cheery note with *With Love and Joy we wish you all a Very Very Merry and Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year*. Distribution of *prasadam* followed by *arathi* brought to a close a warm and cheery Christmas morning programme.

THE AFTERNOON CHRISTMAS PROGRAMME BY THE OVERSEAS DEVOTEES

The afternoon was exclusively reserved for the overseas devotees and brought to a fulfilling climax the arduous preparation and the hard work of the past few weeks.

A Short Christmas Skit

A small skit both at the beginning and at the very end of the programme (after the children's and the adult choir) brought to light the commercialization rampant in the celebration of Christmas today. The small kids also brought out

the true spirit and message behind the birth of Jesus. While a full length skit had been originally planned and prepared, it was scaled down at the last minute due to the exigencies of time. The young children took it very well and it was an abject lesson for everyone else in faith and love. Listen to what a 12 year old devotee, Master Dhruvan Dellibabu from Raleigh, North Carolina, USA had to say: *"One important incident that happened during my play was that I had somehow damaged my arm. I wasn't able to lift my arm at all and that was the week-end of the recording so I prayed to Swami and I managed to do my part well with my hurt arm. The next day we went to the doctor to check my arm. The doctor said that it wasn't broken so I didn't need an X-Ray, but a voice in me told me to have an X-Ray and it turned out that I had a broken arm. It was one month before the final performance so I prayed to Swami with all my heart and soul and when I got to Parthi my arm was better."*

The Children's Choir

Two boys and two girls from the children's choir first welcomed Swami with a rose and sought His blessings. Then Ms. Alma Badings, the children's choir conductor, sought His blessings also before the kids went into their routine. They sang a total of 13 songs before our dear Lord. Starting first with a prayer *Ganesha Ganesha* to Lord Ganesha to guide their way, the children next sang a Telugu song called *Antaa Okkate manamantaa okkate*. The gist of the song is - 'All are one, we are all one. Living under different flags we are all one. There is only one land, one language. If you are a Hindu or Christian, all are children of Mother Sai. If you are rich or poor, you are all eligible for Sai's love. We are all citizens of universal peace, all one.'

The children then sang *Jesus Christ Tender Child*, followed by *All my little children do come unto me*. Then they sang a joyous song called *Bells are ringing Christmas morn; Tidings bringing, Christ is born*. This was followed by *Have a Holy Christmas and Noel Noel*. Then they sang the quintessential Christmas song called *Joy to the world, the Lord has come!* Launching next to *The Little Drummer Boy* which had the crowd humming along. This was followed by 2 songs singing a paean of praise to Swami called - *Ev'ryone loves Sathya Sai Baba, He is God incarnate*, followed by *Sai Baba Sai Baba Sathya Sai Baba jai*. The children then sang *All night all day angels watching over us my Lord* and then the perennial favourite *Jingle Bells* brought their thoroughly enjoyable programme to a close.

The Adult Choir

The Adult Choir was next and like the children's choir, they also sang 13 songs. Lead by Choir conductor Sylvia, the huge choir sang a Sanskrit prayer first *Om Ekadhanthaya Vidmahe, Vakrathundaya Dhimahi, Thanno Dantih Prachodayath*. (An Invocation to Lord Ganesha praying: Oh Lord Ganesha! The one-tusked elephant-headed Lord! Bless us with auspiciousness)

Then they launched with gusto into their Christmas routine for which they had been practising for so long. They began first with *Turn Your Eyes Upon*

Swami, *Look Full In His Glorious Face*, and next they sang two songs of praise to Swami - *Dark Clouds can't O'er Take Me, Fear Dare Not Invade...* and *Light is Your Form, Light Is Your Being*. A Spanish song *Un Solo Dios Eres Tu Eres Tu Mi Senor* was next. This was followed by *Deep Within My Heart and Soul I find the Being Without Form* and *Sri Sathya Sai Baba, He Is The Light Of The World*. The melancholy *My Lord And My God, Take Away From Me All That Parts Me from Thee* was followed by an equally wrenching *Where Are You My Krishna, Whither Have You Gone?*

Turning more joyful with *What's Love? It's The Voice Of A Dear One* was followed by a Sanskrit song *Tvam Adidevah Purusha Purana, Tvam Asya Visvasya Param Nidhanam*. The rousing *Feliz Navidad* was next and *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee* was the last group song for the evening. Swami then instructed Sylvia that the choir could sing *bhajans*. The choir sang *bhajans* with aplomb and lead everyone to great heights of devotional ecstasy. While the *bhajan* singing was going on, *prasadam* was brought to be blessed by Swami and then distributed.

Swami held a peppermint candy cane and after some time called Mr. Rafael Ferrero, a saxophone player from Argentina sitting in the front row, and lovingly gave it to him. Rafael beamed at this unexpected blessing and took his seat.

After a few minutes, Swami again called Rafael and started talking to him. A personal interview in full view of the Christmas crowd! After discussing some personal matters and giving Rafael the most valuable divine guidance, Swami waved His hand and made the most beautiful pendant for him. It was a circular gold framed pendant inlaid with precious stones. More discussion and instructions followed while the crowd sat up agog with excitement. Finally after fulfilling all his wishes completely the Lord blessed Rafael again and permitted him to resume his seat.

But a visibly happy Lord had to express His happiness some more. He called Michael, a guitar and drum player from the United States sitting next to Rafael and made for him an exquisite golden chain. He lovingly undid the clasp and personally tied the chain around Michael's neck. Michael buried his face deep in Mother Sai's lap suffused with His love that flowed not only to him but also engulfed all of us sitting in the crowd. Swami then asked Michael "Are you happy?"- perhaps because Michael had been quite anxious all evening worrying if their music would please the Lord. What glorious words of assurance from the Lord - soothing and allaying fears and pouring bliss, unending bliss in everyone's heart.

But the "fireworks" were not over yet. Roger Dietrich, a flute player sitting next to these two who had already been honoured, was the next one to be called. Swami made a ring for him which He personally slipped onto a finger of

Roger's right hand. Roger was overcome with emotion and speechless. Swami graciously permitted him to take the much sought *padanamaskar* before returning to his seat.

After that Swami signalled for the *bhajan* to stop and wanted that the *arathi* be taken. Three of the people who had toiled hard for the past three weeks to bring Christmas 2005 to a successful conclusion were honoured by being selected to do the *mangalarathi* to Swami. After the *arathi* was taken, Swami turned to the choir again and asked everyone in the front row "Are you happy?" and then blessed them profusely.

While there was no formal divine discourse this Christmas, by His repeated emphasis on being happy, the Christmas message was quite explicit and clear - Don't Worry, Be Happy - for on the road to happiness, happiness itself is the road!

DOUBLE HEADER: TWO MUSICAL PROGRAMMES BY THE SHALOM GROUP FROM AUSTRALIA AND THE SATHYA SAI SINGERS OF S. CALIFORNIA AND HAWAII ON DEC 26th

On December 26th, two musical programmes were on offer: first was a group of Jewish singers from Australia called the Shalom Group who sang spiritual songs for Swami in Hebrew and the next programme was by a group of musicians from Southern California and Hawaii who also presented a musical programme for our beloved Swami entitled *Life is a Song Sing it!*

The Shalom Group

The Shalom Group is a group of Sai Jewish devotees who have come to the Lotus feet of Swami about 20 years ago, and are now living in Perth, Australia. The Shalom Group consists of a total of 21 people and 11 of them had come to Prashanti Nilayam as part of an Australian youth group to attend the Christmas celebrations. The Shalom group have been singing Jewish spiritual songs for the last 8 years. These spiritual songs praise the glory and love of God and pray for peace and love in the entire world and for all humanity.

The Shalom Group had been trying to come and sing in His divine presence for over 5 years and they were given the lifetime opportunity on Dec 26th, 2005. Auspiciously, it was also the Jewish festival of *Chanukah* ("The festival of Lights"), which this year coincided with Christmas and the New Year since it is celebrated over 8 days. *Chanukah* is celebrated to symbolise one of the great miracles of God wherein he kept filling a jar of oil that should have lasted only 1 day to light the *menorah* (Candlelabra) in the great Jewish temple in Jerusalem for a full 8 days!

The songs that they sang in the Hebrew language for Swami were *Shalom* and *Adonolam*. *Shalom* is a song to call the angels to participate in our prayers and goes on to praise the righteous man that follows in the path of

God with right action. *Adonolam* calls on the Master of the Universe, Who is and always will be; Who ruled before any creature existed and Who with His will created everything.

The Sathya Sai Singers Group

In 2005 the devotees of Southern California were given the opportunity to travel together as a group on a pilgrimage to see Bhagavan for Christmas in December. The devotees were given the opportunity to choose one of four special *sadhanas*: a choir group, a *bhajan* group, a play group or a service group. Each of these groups met separately one or more times a week to practise their offering to Bhagavan.

The choir group, called the Sathya Sai Singers, met twice a week for six months in order to rehearse and make the final song selections that they wanted to perform for the Lord during the Christmas celebrations in Prashanti Nilayam. They performed at several of the monthly group meetings near Los Angeles as well as at the December Southern California public meeting and at a church near San Diego in order to perfect their presentation for Swami. The *bhajan* group and the play group also met weekly to organize and rehearse their offering for Bhagavan. Everyone prayed that Swami would allow the groups to perform in His divine presence.

On December 26th, the prayers of the Southern California devotees were answered as Bhagavan graciously consented to have the choir sing in Sai Kulwant Hall. Ms. Maryalice Jessup, the choir director, came forward to give Swami a special handcrafted programme and a red rose on a silver tray. **Bhagavan (who was seated) stood up to greet her and smiled lovingly at her, saying "Very happy, very happy!"**

This group of singers from Southern California and Hawaii presented a bouquet of 7 beautiful songs to bring to a finish one of the most exciting and beautiful Christmas celebrations in Prashanti Nilayam in recent times. They started with a beautiful song "*For The Children*" which pleaded with everyone to save the trees, the rocks, hills and valleys, the seas and the planet for the children. Moving on to a prayerful song called "*Lord Of Love*", they prayed to Swami that *O Lord of Love, I come to You and give You my life. I Surrender all, and I make You one with my life.*

The next song - "*You Raise Me Up*" - talked about how Swami's support helps all to get over weary and troubled times. This was followed by a song from Walt Disney's "*Pocahontas*" called "*Colours Of The Wind*", and is a song depicting the era in United States' history when England was sending people to explore this "new" land. In this song, Pocahontas, a Native American woman, is chiding John Smith, an Englishman, for his narrow views about nature.

"*In This Very Room*" - the next song expresses hope that in this very room there is love, joy for all of us; for Baba, Sai Baba, is in this very room. The words of the song, "*How Beautiful Your Songs Of Praise*" - *How true and*

steadfast your ways. Let all that is within me rise and sing. How beautiful Your Holy name. How marvellous Your saving grace, that You would call me as Your own...how beautiful...beautiful, left everyone moved to silent tears overcome by the surging emotions of love for Swami. The last song called "*Here I Am Lord*" sang of the glory of God and His promise to tend to the poor and the lame.

Swami was immensely pleased with the heart touching lyrics and the soulful music. He called the conductor, Ms. Maryalice Jessup, and manifested a beautiful gold chain with a gold cross encrusted with blue sapphires and asked her to slip it around her head.

It was a little tight and would not easily go over and the conductor turned to the audience and humorously remarked, "I have a big head". Swami was touched at this innocent and pure humour flowing spontaneously as love from the heart. Swami also blessed Maryalice with a personal audience the next day. Swami then asked the group to sing *bhajans* and the group obliged magnificently singing both English and Sanskrit *bhajans*. Swami sat for nearly an hour enjoying the music, before *arathi* was offered - by one gent each from both the groups (the Shalom Singers and the group from Southern California) and likewise by two ladies together - one from each group.

An entire year has gone speedily by. We are now in the New Year - 2006, a year of new challenges and new opportunities. While we mistakenly tend to view time as discrete independent intervals, we do not always consciously realize that time is a continuum and thoughts and actions from the past (*samskaras*) continue to influence and shape our present circumstances and thoughts (*prarabdha karma*). And these *samskaras* are not just limited to our present lifetime but go back to many prior lifetimes also.

The Vedas also tell us that there are 8.4 million different species on earth. Though we have since time immemorial been travelling and taking birth with different bodies in all these 84 lakh species, this time around we have been blessed with a human body. Thus obtaining a human body itself is a very rare occurrence, but to obtain a human body at the same time the Avatar is also present on earth is the rarest and most fortunate of circumstances. And of the billions of people on earth, we are the most blessed to come in the divine presence of the Avatar and have His *Darshan*, *Sparshan* and *Sambhashan*.

This opportunity must not be missed for who knows how many millions of lives will have to go by before such a rare opportunity comes our way again. So let us resolve in this New Year to grasp this opportunity and realize the aim of our life; let us resolve to love Him, pray to Him and listen to whatever He says. And His message for 2006 seems to be "Always Be Happy!"

Jai Sai Ram.

- Heart2Heart Team

SWAMI AND ME

OUR JOURNEY... TO LOVE, WITH LOVE

By Jagdish Chandra
a current M. Phil Student in Swami's Institute

This is the text of the talk delivered by Jagdish Chandra in the Divine Presence of Bhagawan Baba on 18th Aug 2005, the second day of the conference on "EDUCATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY- EDUCATION TO EDUCARE".

With humility, and love, I offer myself at the Lotus Feet of my Beloved Swami; my Lord, my Master. Honorable Chief Guest, Distinguished Dignitaries, Revered Elders, dear Sisters and Brothers. Sai Ram to One and All.

A few days back, as I was going back to the hostel, from the mandir, I saw a person wearing a T-shirt which sported a peculiar saying, it said, "I was born Intelligent, but Education spoiled me." As I walked into the Mandir today, and stood right in front of the banner that portrays the theme of the conference, I read "Education to Educare." **What is this journey? How does one go about it?**

Let me start with a small anecdote. A man once dreamt that he went into a beautiful shopping complex and after making a tour and buying some items he finally went to the billing counter. To his utter astonishment, he finds God standing there! He plucks up courage and asks the Lord,

God Points the Way...

"God! What are you selling here?" God replied: "Whatever is good for you!" The man started thinking. After a while he said, "God, then give me something that can take away my pain." God said: "No, I will not do that, for **trials, tribulations and pain draw you away from the world and closer to me.**" Then the man said: "God, give me happiness!" God answered, "No. **I can bless you, but happiness is up to you.**" The man pondered a little and said, "God give me all the things so that I can enjoy life." "No. **I have given you life so that you can enjoy all things,**" replied the Lord.

At the end the man was exhausted. He thought frantically and came up with a wonderful solution. He said: "God, now I understand the most essential, the most valuable thing for a human being. And they are the Human Values! Give me *Sathya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema.*" This time God chuckled, "Son, you have got me wrong! We don't sell fruits here. We sell only seeds. It is up to you to inculcate them. **I can only point, but you have to follow.**" That is what we have to do.

And what is the necessity of these Human Values? They show man the highest of goals. The path to tread - where to begin and where to reach. The Ultimate Reality that each and every human being is essentially Divine. And

the basic purpose of his life, his existence, is to merge back into the Source from where he originated.

THE FOUR BEAUTIFUL PILLARS THAT SHOW THE WAY

TRUTH

There are four Beautiful Pillars that take us to the goal. The first is **truth, Sathya**. Bhagavan beautifully teaches us that Sathya is beyond our ordinary understanding of the word truth. It denotes the Ultimate Truth - **the Truth that reveals to man that he is essentially Divine.**

Divine Arithmetics...Divine Lessons

It once happened that a group of devotees came from Madras. And as Bhagavan glided by in *Darshan*, He went and stood in front of them. Bhagavan asked the group leader, "How many members are there?" The group leader said: "Bhagavan, 20." Swami said: "No, 21." The man counted once more. He thought there might an error. But his counting was perfect. He said: "Bhagavan, we are 20!" Swami replied, **"You forgot to count Me! I am always there in that group! How could you forget this?"** Overjoyed, the man had to agree!

The next day Swami approached the group again. This time the leader was ready to face another question. But he did not know that a different answer was asked of him. Bhagavan again asked: "How many members?" The man said, "Swami, 21." Swami answered, "No, 40."

There could be a slight difference when one considers 21, 23, and 22. But 40 is altogether a very huge number. He could not have made that mistake. And then Swami said: **"You think I am alone with the group? I am with each and every one of you! Then if I am with each and every one of these 20, then in fact, we make 40!"**

The final lesson was still waiting. The next day Bhagavan came to the group. The group leader too was ready but this time not to give an answer but to learn from Bhagavan. Bhagavan asked: "How many members?" The man stood up. He did not know which to say - 21 or 40. But he said: "Bhagavan, 40."

Swami said: **"No, one. All are One."**

Who can teach this most important lesson in just three apposite and powerful statements? To teach the Reality which the Vedas, Upanishads and great Scholars have struggled to expound! Only the Avatar can come to our level and teach us everything in just three axioms. The only Truth which God comes to teach is: "All are One! Everyone is essentially Divine."

Bhagavan once said:

“I am not a *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* or a *Shudra*.
Neither do I relate myself to any of those four *Varnas*.
I am *Sathya Bodhaka*...The teacher of Truth.
I am Sathyam, Shivam, Sundaram.”

When one follows this Truth, what he actually follows is *Dharma*. The Scriptures declare: *Sathyam Nasti Paro Dharma*. There is no greater *Dharma* than following Truth.

DHARMA – What Exactly Is It?

There may be differences of opinions over the definition of Truth, what exactly is *Dharma* (right conduct) and how to follow it. As I entered the portals of this Institute on my first day in the hostel at Brindavan I remember a board which had the following inscription: “A hostel is a place where each one lives for the other; and all live for God.” This is *Dharma* simplified so that it can be easily put into practice. Just do whatever you want keeping in mind the Indweller in your heart and offer everything to Him - that automatically becomes *Dharma*.

“My Krishna is Suffering!”

When Krishna was suffering from a headache He asked for dust from the feet of His devotees to cure it. There were intellectuals and scholars who recoiled at the possible blasphemy - but the Gopikas did not listen to this. They said, “My Krishna is suffering! All that I want is just to carry this dust and to place it lovingly on His head!” The scholars argued with them saying, “How dare you do this? It is sinful? You will end up in hell for all the remainder of your lives for having done such a thing!” But the Gopikas replied “We don’t mind spending the rest of our lives in hell! But if it gives a moment of joy to our beloved Krishna, that is enough!” **What can be greater *Dharma* than pleasing God?**

Top Marks From God!

Once it so happened that the examinations in the Institute were going on. A boy who was on his way to the examinations hall found an old woman who had met with an accident lying in a pool of blood! Not knowing what to do, He prayed to the Lord within His heart; He prayed to His Dearest Swami. He then took the lady to the General Hospital and made sure that she received treatment. He then ran to the examination centre. By then, most of the time which was allotted for writing the paper had elapsed. He wrote whatever he could for the paper and then went to the Mandir. That day Bhagavan called him and said: “**Good boy! You will get top marks!**” Needless to say, that boy got top marks!

One’s Own Heart...The Simplest Guide

Thus, to the question “What is *Dharma*?” there arises the simplest of answers. **Follow whatever pleases the Lord most.** If one ponders what is the means

by which the most complicated dilemma of *Dharma* can be understood, **it can be realised that the devotee's own heart is the simplest of guides.**

PEACE

When one practises *Dharma* it leads to the next level of the Human Values...Peace. When one practises *Dharma* to the extent that he surrenders himself totally at the Lotus Feet of his Lord...

Sarva Dharman Parityajna Mam Ekam Saranam Vraja
Aham Tvan Sarva Papebhyo Moksha Yisyami Ma Suchah.

(One who surrenders to Me forsaking all, I will take care of Him and even grant Him liberation).

That *Moksha*, the Peace that he feels, is the Peace which is mentioned as one of the Four Pillars of Human Values.

The Temple of a Thousand Bells!

A traveler once heard that under the ocean lay buried a temple of a thousand bells. He was gripped by a wish to find this temple and so he went to the ocean. Day after day, he put his ear to the sands to listen for the faintest tinkle of a bell. But he never came across any sign of this. After searching for many days he finally decided to give up. And on the last day he was standing on the seashore one final time, just looking at the magnificent ocean as the waves came crashing onto the shore; and he gently lost himself in the symphony produced by the waves. He slowly went deeper and deeper inside that experience.

And in that depth, he heard a small bell ring. And then he heard two...and then three...and then thousands of bells ringing! So much so that he did not hear the voice of the ocean - he only heard thousands of bells ringing all around him.

LOVE - The Ultimate Purpose!

Similarly, when man loses himself totally in what God is telling him...what he hears, and what he feels is Peace - the Voice of the Lord. And that Peace leads him to the Ultimate Love.

I used to wonder, God is such a poor businessman! He does not know how to barter! How could He barter a few handfuls of puffed rice and shower boundless wealth on Sudamma? How could He take a piece of cloth from Draupadi's sari and shower an infinite number of saris when she needed help? How could the Lord eat the berries eaten by Shabari? How could the Lord eat banana peels which had been already partaken by Vidura? I could see the material actions but there was a hidden aspect behind - the aspect of Beautiful Love!

Once a T.V mechanic went to a particular devotee's house. And as he was repairing the T.V., he saw the Bhagavan's photograph there. He asked the owner, "Do you believe in this person?" The devotee humbly said, "He is my Master...my Guide, my Everything." The mechanic said, "Mine too!" "How can you say that?" said the devotee. The repair man gave a very simple answer, saying, "If I have ten rupees in my pocket, I would see it to it that come what may this ten becomes a hundred, the hundred into a thousand, and the thousand into ten thousand."

But here is God Who is giving away whatever He has! Sometimes in the form of a Super Specialty Hospital, sometimes in the form of a Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, sometimes in the form of a Water Supply Project...and His projects never end! One after another, even before a project can come to an end another project starts! It is impossible for an ordinary human being to do all this - He can only be God, our Bhagavan! In what way can one measure Thy Love!?

Saint Francis of Assisi once said, "Oh Lord! All through the day I searcheth for You! And all through the night, as I dream, You searcheth for me! When, when shall this dream come to an end and I shall meet You?"

There was once a boy who had newly joined the hostel and had been brought up in luxury at his home. He had never learnt the art of sweeping and one day he found that it was his turn to sweep the room. With great effort, and with whatever courage and talent he could muster, he swept the room. At the end of it and with the broom in one hand, and the dust-pan in the other, he went in front of Bhagavan's photo and said, "Swami, I have accomplished such a great task! Now give me my reward!"

But then, at the following *Darshan*, Swami came right in front of him, materialized Vibhuti and gave it into his hands saying, "This is the reward for the great task that you accomplished this morning." Sweeping the room is such a small thing; does it require any merit or any talent? But what transpired was just Love!

Anything that can make us become better human beings and a little more evolved, maybe sweeping, maybe mopping, helping in some way - that is dear to the Lord! And when He sees that, He does not mind to come down to our level and reward us even for sweeping! That is the Love of God!

After Love, What Next?

Finally, what does this lead to? What does Love lead to? Once, there was a disciple who was always at his prayers. His Master took him to task "How long will you keep praying like this?" The disciple replied, "Master, it is you who taught me to pray like this! It is you who taught me that I should lean on God as He will solve our problems." The Master retorted,

"When will you learn that God is not a person to lean on? He is the one who rids us of our tendency to lean. He makes us realize that we are no

ordinary human beings. We too are Divine! The day you learn that lesson, you will no longer lean.”

Lord, I would like to close with a prayer inspired by a story which Shri Ramakrishna Parmahansa beautifully narrated. It is about a small salt doll that tried to measure the depth of the ocean. It went into the ocean and it found that it could measure nothing. It just dissolved.

Let each one of us, who are simply puppets, merge into the Fathomless Infinity, into the Fathomless depths of Love that You are!

Jai Sai Ram!

- Heart2Heart Team

THIS LIFE AND YOU....

This a moving poem written by a former student of Baba's Institute.

All other moments of life may go beyond the reach of my memory,
but never the ones spent in Your presence.

All other sounds of the world may fade into the depths of time,
but never the sweetness of Your voice.

All other sights of the world may dissolve into the mists of the past,
but never the sparkle in Your eyes as you looked into mine!

All other smells of the world may diminish as my hair turns grey,
but never the fragrance of Your robe as you walked by me.

All other foot prints on the sands of my life may be washed away,
but never the ones made by You...as you walked towards me.

All other lives of mine may never count... in the infiniteness of Eternity,
but never this one, for in this....I have seen You!

- Heart2Heart Team

EXPRESSION OF LOVE - I

The New Year Card to Swami

A new addition to 'SwaMi and Me' section from this year onwards is 'Expressions of Love'. Each issue will bring you one such 'Expression of Love' - the story of an art-work or a card which was lovingly crafted by His students for presentation to Him on various occasions.

Whenever boys take these cards to Swami, He would sometimes play with it, sometimes ask amusing questions about it, sometimes point out something which had missed every student's eye, sometimes smile mischievously and then put His signature, sometimes reward the young artists profusely with gifts and blessings.

The cards commemorated special occasions and each are articulations of the sincere and innocent feelings of the young boys. They convey their prayers and spiritual ideas in an expression of feelings from the heart, transformed into beauty to their Love, their beloved Bhagavan.

To chime in the New Year we have a New Year card which was offered to Bhagavan on the 1st of January, 1995 (70 th birthday year) on the following theme: "Sai Era – Ushering In World Peace".

The idea behind the card you see on the left is this – The Sai Era has produced an evolution of love from the level of molecule to the Universal. Bhagavan's 70th birthday is envisaged as an enormous comet streaking through the Milky Way. Without doubt this comet of love will usher on the 'evolution of love'. All 'pray to Swami for World Peace'.

Now coming to the actual part...what transpired between the boys and Swami when they presented this card? Well, Swami to the immense delight of the young artists, looked overjoyed on seeing the card! There was a twinkle in His eyes as He saw the stars, the Milky Way and the 'Sai comet' on the card.

The boys basked in His love as He cast a benign smile and spent quite a few moments looking at the card. And then the great moment arrived! He asked for the pen and yes, put his signature "With Love, Baba" with a sweet smile and so full of love. For the boys, that was the ultimate reward! They could not have asked for more.

Dear reader, please look forward to this section for many more such cards, accompanied by their short sweet stories that have been presented to Swami over the years.

- Heart2Heart Team

SAI WORLD NEWS

LITTLE ROCK MAYOR PROCLAIMS

SRI SATHYA SAI BABA DAY

In the October edition of **Heart2Heart** we informed you that the city of St. Louis, Missouri in the United States is celebrating September 11th as Sri Sathya Sai Baba Day, as proclaimed by its mayor. (To read that again, go here). Now a second US city has joined this trend! This is the city of Little Rock, in the central state of Arkansas, where the mayor Mr. Jim Dailey, has proclaimed November 23rd, Swami's Birthday, as Sri Sathya Sai Baba Day.

Little Rock is the capital and largest city in the U.S. state of Arkansas with a population of more than 183,000. The city derives its name from a small rock formation on the south bank of the Arkansas River *La Pétite Roche* (the "little rock") and is famous for being former US president Bill Clinton's seat of governorship.

In his Proclamation Mr. Jim Dailey, the Mayor, has given some august comments on Swami, His life and mission. As an official declaration it is a joy to read and we are sure that you will agree with the mayor's opinion

PROCLAMATION

Know Ye All People By These Presents Greetings

WHEREAS, *Sathya Sai Baba is one of the most revered spiritual teachers in the world today whose life and message are inspiring millions of people throughout the world to lead a more purposeful and moral life; and*

WHEREAS, *Sathya Sai Baba was born as Sathya Narayana Raju in Puttaparthi, a remote village in the state of Andhra Pradesh in Southern India; and*

WHEREAS, *at the age of fourteen, he proclaimed his mission to bring about the spiritual regeneration of humanity by demonstrating and teaching the highest principles of truth, right conduct, peace, love and non-violence; and*

WHEREAS, *Sathya Sai Baba has established an educational system including primary and secondary schools, colleges and an accredited university that provides free education, room and board to all students, from kindergarten to high school, and to all students enrolled in undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs of the highest quality; and*

WHEREAS, *Sathya Sai Baba has also established four hospitals, which provide advanced tertiary care and general hospital care completely free of*

cost to all patients, regardless of creed, country or social class; and

WHEREAS , *with his personal example, inspiration and teachings, Sathya Sai Baba has transformed millions of people to perform dedicated community service, silently and without publicity, through centers of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization located in 190 countries of the world; and*

WHEREAS , *Sathya Sai Baba has allowed the dissemination of his message of universal love, via around-the-clock programs on Radio Sai Global Harmony, which promote the equality of all religions and cultures, the concept of the world as one vast family, with all beings as kith and kin; and*

WHEREAS , *the City Little Rock is pleased and honored to recognize Sri Sathya Sai Baba for all of his humanitarian work and extends best wishes to him for good health, peace and happiness as he continues his journey along life's path; and*

NOW, THEREFORE, *I, Jim Dailey, Mayor of the City of Little Rock, Arkansas, do hereby proclaim November 23, 2005, as:*

"SRI SATHYA SAI BABA DAY"

in the City of Little Rock .

IN WITNESS THEREOF , *I have hereunto set my hand and caused to seal of the City of Little Rock to be affixed on this 23rd day of November, in the year of our Lord, 2005.*

Jim Dailey
Mayor.

It is interesting that the proclamation has nine paragraphs and it mentions the positive impact of RadioSai Global Harmony. We hope more people get inspired and take to the path of selfless love and service as taught and demonstrated by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

- Heart2Heart Team

SAI INSTITUTE PROFESSOR WINS UGC AWARD

Dr. Vishwanath Pandit is Awarded

the Swami Pranavananda Saraswati National Award.

“The news has come as a pleasant surprise as I see it as indicating the Grace that Swami has been showering on me”.

This was the humble reaction of Dr. Vishwanath Pandit, Professor of Economics and Dean, Faculty of Arts at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, on learning that he had been chosen for the Swami Pravananda Saraswati National Award, for 2004, by the University Grants Commission for outstanding scholarly work which has made important contributions to human knowledge.

Dr. Pandit, regarded as the pioneer of ‘Macroeconomics Policy Modelling in India’ received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, USA, under the Nobel Laureate Lawrence Klein. Dr. Pandit, who has published a large number of papers in National and International Journals and written nine books on economics, has also been President of The Indian Econometric Society.

For Dr. Pandit the most gratifying moment has been his joining the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in Prasanthi Nilayam. That is his real blessing, he says as he goes on to add, “The fact that he let me be close to Him and be His instrument for starting the Department of Economics at the Institute five years back has itself been a source of fulfillment”.

Before he joined Swami’s Institute, Dr. Pandit was Head of the Economics Department and Director, Centre for Development Economics in the prestigious Delhi School of Economics, New Delhi. He was also advisor to the Government of Sri Lanka and the World Bank on economic policy issues.

For several years Dr. Pandit served as visiting Professor at University of Manchester, U.K., University of Pennsylvania, U.S. and has been a faculty member at the University of North Carolina, U.S. In addition, Dr. Pandit has been very active in the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations in Delhi. Before joining SSSIHL he was “Activities In-charge”, at the Sri Sathya Sai International Centre, New Delhi.

Dr. Pandit, who now guides M.Phil. and Ph.D. students in Swami’s Institute has guided two dozen Ph.D. / M.Phil students and himself been on selection committees for two prestigious awards, the Mahalanobis Memorial Medal (National and International) and the VKRV Rao Awards in Social Sciences.

“At a mundane level”, he says, “one would not be quite overwhelmed by the award! Yet the Award is of considerable gratification when seen as an aspect of His Divine Grace”, the Professor signs off with these final remarks.

His devotion to Swami and the rare humility to see everything as His doing is something which the boys try to learn from him, apart from his socio-economic wisdom.

In this light, on behalf of Dr. Pandit's fortunate students, his colleagues, and you, our readers we, from Heart2Heart congratulate and wish all success to Dr. Pandit, a worthy instrument in His hands.

- Heart2Heart Team

GET INSPIRED

GOD, MAN, FROGS AND THE WORD

God created beauty and He created the Word to communicate the beauty. The word is the eloquence of expression, the soul of understanding and the essence of an unseen thought. As the word marched through the alleys of time, it instilled fear, it bestowed knowledge, it created unity, it bred evil. It inspired and conspired. It created and destroyed. It praised and insulted. It blessed and cursed. The Word thus reigned over the human race.

The words that emanated from the son of God raised Lazarus - bringing back the dead to life. The quiet words of a half-clad old Indian rallied the masses to wrench their country non-violently from the fists of slavery (read Gandhiji). The profound words of God in the battlefield lighted the corridors of centuries showing man the way to God (read Mahabharata). The Word thus reigned over the human race.

There was once an inspector who was on his regular visits to a school. Hearing the teacher discourse on morality and values, he mockingly asked her, "Do you think that mere words will have any impact on these children?"

The teacher nonchalantly asked her students, "Who will help me in throwing out this arrogant fellow?" The enraged inspector bellowed, "Do you know whom you are dealing with? Your misdeeds can land you in severe trouble." The teacher politely apologized and then calmly asked him,

"Sir, did anyone come close to harming you?" "No", was the puzzled reply. "Then it was merely my words that elicited the angry response from you. Just as negative words elicit negative reactions, positive ones spread peace and harmony." The inspector understood her meaning.

The above incident is one of the many "*Chinna Kathas*" 'Little Stories' that Baba lovingly narrates in His discourses. Every word, truly, is a missile for good or bad - and can be more powerful and devastating depending on how it is used. Words in their simplicity carry the profundity of eternity, in subtlety they represent the human longing to be understood, to be loved.

Each word is a droplet concealing an ocean. As the human mind dwells deeper into the meaning of each word it witnesses the beauty of God. The word in gross understanding is a pebble cast in the pool of societal thought. The pebble, if coated with evil creates and sends the ripples of evil like unto the fringes of a placid lake, thus making it into a cursed habitat. Read the following for an illustration of this.

A group of frogs once decided that they wanted to find out who was the fastest and strongest of them and they organized a race from 100 competitors to the top of a tower. All the other frogs gathered to witness the event as they

set off with a bang! As time went on the weaker frogs began to tire. And unfortunately, the frogs that had gathered to cheer began to mock and jeer. "None of you will ever make it to the top...." "It is an impossibility...a dream!"

More frogs gave up amid the jeers and comments which only made the detractors shout louder, "You can't do it" "Give up weaklings!" And true to their 'words' they limped back. None ever made it to the top - none but one little frog who was declared the undisputed winner!

The frogs all gathered to find out how he did it. But it was found that our little hero was unresponsive to all questions as he was DEAF! He had never heard the disparaging words of failure and had succeeded as he listened to the words that emanated from the depths of his own heart.

Choose to hear the words of your conscience and believe in their power, because they carry the power of God. For in the beginning there was the Word; the word was with God; the word was God...

- Heart2Heart Team

THE CLAY BALLS

A man was exploring caves by the seashore. In one of the caves he found a canvas bag with a bunch of hardened clay balls. It was like someone had rolled up clay and left them out in the sun to bake. They did not look like much, but they intrigued the man so he took the bag out of the cave with him.

As he strolled along the beach, to pass the time, he would throw the clay balls one at a time out into the ocean as far as he could throw. He thought little about it until he dropped one of the balls on a rock and it cracked open.

Inside was a beautiful, precious stone. Excitedly.... the man started breaking open the remaining clay balls. Wow.....each of them contained a similar treasure! He found thousands of dollars worth of jewels in the 20 or so clay balls he had left.....and then it struck him!

He had thrown maybe 50 or 60 of the clay balls with their hidden treasure into the ocean waves. Instead of thousands of dollars in treasure, he could have taken home tens of thousands.....but he had just thrown it away.

It is like that with people. When we look at someone.... maybe even ourselves....all we see is the external 'clay' vessel. It may not look like much from the outside....it may not be beautiful or sparkling, so we decide to ignore it.

We see that person as less important than someone more beautiful or stylish..... or well known or wealthy. But we have not taken the time to find the treasure hidden inside that person by God.

If we take the time to get to know that person, and if we ask God to show us that person the way He sees them, then the clay begins to peel away and the brilliant gem begins to shine forth.

There is a treasure in each and every one of us.....each of us is special!

Please Baba.....May we not come to the end of our lives and find out that we have thrown away a fortune in friendships because the gems were hidden in bits of clay.

May we see the people in world as YOU see them!

- Author Anonymous; Illustrations: Tupdhen, SSSHSS.

GOD'S EMBROIDERY

When I was a little boy, my mother used to embroider a great deal. I would sit at her knee and look up from the floor and ask what she was doing. She informed me that she was embroidering. I told her that it looked like a mess from where I was, the underside. I watched her work within the boundaries of the little round hoop that she held in her hand.

She would smile at me, look down and gently say, "My son, you go about your playing for a while, and when I am finished with my embroidering, I will put you on my knee and let you see it from my side."

I would wonder why she was using some dark threads along with the bright ones and why they seemed so jumbled from my view.

A few minutes would pass and then I would hear Mother's voice say, "Son, come and sit on my knee."

This I did, only to be surprised and thrilled to see a beautiful flower or a sunset. I could not believe it, because from underneath it looked so messy.

Then Mother would say to me, "My son, from underneath it did look messy and jumbled, but you did not realize that there was a pre-drawn plan on the top. It was a design. I was only following it. Now look at it from my side and you will see what I was doing."

Many times through the years I have looked up to my Heavenly Father and said, "Father, what are You doing?"

He has answered, "I am embroidering your life."

I say, "But it looks like a mess to me. It seems so jumbled. The threads seem so dark. Why can't they all be bright?"

The Father seems to tell me, "My child, you go about your business of doing My business, and one day I will bring you to Heaven and put you on My knee and you will see the plan from My side."

Illustrations: Rohit, Shakthi, SSSHSS.

- Heart2Heart Team

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

QUIZ ON MULTI-FAITH FESTIVALS

These festivals were really intended to be used for the exclusive worship of the Divine, to enjoy the bliss of that devotion, and to overcome pain and sorrow. These holy days were instituted for the purpose of getting rid of ignorance and cultivating right knowledge, the higher wisdom and cosmic consciousness.

- Sathya Sai Baba, Sanathana Sarathi, May 1989

For the delight and education of devotees, Bhagavan has encouraged the celebration of festivals from all the major world religions in Prashanti Nilayam. In this light, we have questions for you on festivals from Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and ancient Chinese culture. The source material is from Bhagavan's Divine Discourses and the relevant passages are shown as answers when you finish each question. The order of the festivals follows the calendar and the relevant dates for 2006 are shown.

1. SANKRANTI – Jan 14th

What is the inner meaning of the *Sankranti* (Pongal) festival which usually falls in the month of January?

- A That we should celebrate with dancing and feasting.
- B That we should transform ourselves.
- C That we should give thanks to the moon.
- D That we should stay in the home and read the scriptures.

2. CHINESE NEW YEAR – Jan 29th

Swami mentions a well known and apposite saying from China in one Chinese New Year discourse. Can you complete it?

"The most delicious food is that which is..."

- A Good for health and the mind
- B From ones' parents
- C Hot and nutritious
- D Acquired by hard work

3. SIVARATHRI – Feb 26th

Why is Sivarathri considered so auspicious?

- A Because Lord Siva does not sleep this night.
- B Because the moon is waning and the mind's power is weak.
- C Because Lord Shiva vanquished the demon, Naraka.
- D Because Lord Shiva saved the Himalayas from destruction on this night.

4. EASWARAMMA DAY – May 6th

What miraculous event happened to Easwaramma during her pregnancy?

- A A cobra danced before her.
- B A holy man gave her some pudding as Prasad.
- C She was visited by a dazzling light.
- D She and her husband had a very revealing dream.

5. BUDDHA POORNIMA – May 13th

According to Swami what did the Buddha conquer?

- A Desire.
- B A group of pundits who were criticizing him.
- C His father's kingdom.
- D The need for sleep and food.

6. GURU POORNIMA – July 11th

Guru Poornima has many significances. One of them is to commemorate Sage Vyasa finishing a well-known scripture. Which one is this?

- A The Ramayana
- B The Brahma Sutra
- C The Bhagavad Gita
- D The Vedas

7. GANESH CHATURTHI – Aug 27th

Once Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati staged a race between their children, the brothers Lord Ganesha and Lord Subramanya, to find out who could go round the world first. What happened in the race?

- A It was a tie.
- B Lord Ganesha and Lord Subramanya decided not to race against each other.
- C Ganesha, having the rat as his vehicle, could not finish the race and hence lost.
- D Ganesha won by going around his parents.

8. DASARA – Oct 2nd - 11th

On the penultimate day of Dasara "worship of weapons" *aayudha puja* is observed. What is the inner significance of this act?

- A To give thanks to the army.
- B To commemorate Krishna's victory over the demons.
- C To worship the divine powers in man.

D To contemplate on *ahimsa*.

9. DEEPAVALI – Oct 21st

The festival of Deepavali commemorates which event in the life of Sri Rama?

- A The day when He entered the forest for 14 years of exile.
- B The day when He was coronated in Ayodhya after returning from exile.
- C The day when He lifted the bow of Lord Shiva.
- D The day when He helped sage Viswamitra to complete a Yagna, protecting him from the demons.

10. RAMADAN – Oct 24th

Ramadan is the holy month of fasting in Islam. How does Swami define the meaning of 'Islam'? Is it:

- A Knowledge of the scriptures
- B Love all
- C Surrender to God
- D Joyfulness

11. BIRTHDAY – Nov 23rd

What day does Swami consider as His real birthday?

- A The day Prashanthi Nilayam was inaugurated.
- B The day when India gained freedom from foreign rule.
- C He does not consider that He has a birthday.
- D The day when God comes into our life.

12. CHRISTMAS – Dec 25th

Jesus' life was one of exemplary service to the poor and suffering. Who inspired this spirit of service in him?

- A His mother.
- B The priests.
- C A mystical brotherhood called the Essenes.
- D The Jewish scriptures.

ANSWERS

1.B

"Kranti means transformation. Therefore, Sankranti is supposed to bring about a transformation in our lives. But, how are we reacting to this? Are we able to achieve transformation in our life? No. The purpose of our education is to remove the bad qualities and cultivate good qualities and good behaviour. This is what the festivals in India are meant for. But nobody realises the inner meanings of these festivals."

Divine Discourse, Sankranthi, 2004

2.D:

"There is a proverb current in China, 'The most delicious food is that which is acquired by hard labour.' What is obtained by arduous effort is relished with joy. One who enjoys his food without having laboured for it, is an idler. In China everyone works hard to earn his living. This cult of work should activate every human being. Unfortunately this is forgotten today."

Divine Discourse, Chinese New Year Day 13/2/97

3. B

"Why is Sivarathri considered auspicious? The reason is this. The moon has 16 *kalas* (aspects) and so too the mind. On the day of Sivarathri, 15 are merged and only one remains. If the 16th aspect is also merged, one attains Divinity. This total merger will take place only when one chants the divine name continuously and wholeheartedly."

Divine Discourse, Sivarathri 22nd February 2001

4. C

"A unique incident happened before Easwaramma delivered a baby...There used to be a well in the midst of four houses...One day Easwaramma was fetching water from that well. Suddenly, there was a flash of brilliant light in the sky. The wind blew and the cluster of divine light entered the womb of Easwaramma."

His Story, p 3-4

5. A

"Buddha conquered desire, which is not possible for everyone. One need not do any great *Sadhana* to conquer desire. You will not be troubled by desire once you understand the inner meaning of life."

Divine Discourse, 5/7/01

6 B

"On this day, the day when the moon (the presiding deity of the mind) is full circle and the moonlight cool, pleasant and clear, Sage Vyasa completed the composition of the immortal scripture, the *Brahma Sutra*. *Sutra* means string. He revealed that the Brahma (the Ultimate) principle interpenetrates and holds together the many in the ONE. That principle does not wax or wane, it is *Poorna* and it projects *Poorna*, in spite of that projection. The passing cloud cannot act on that fullness. This was what Vyasa, the *Guru* taught mankind."

Divine Discourse, Gurupoornima 1985

7 D

"Once Mother Parvati and Easwara (Shiva) called Vinayaka (Ganesha) and His younger brother Subrahmanya and advised them to go round the world... The younger brother Subrahmanya immediately plunged into action. He mounted His vehicle, the peacock, to fly round the world. But, Vinayaka did not move and sat in His own place. Easwara enquired, "My dear son! Why did You not start on Your journey round the world?" Vinayaka laughed at this question and replied, "Oh! Father! I need not go anywhere. The fruit of all My journey round the world is right in front of me." So saying, Vinayaka made a pradakshina (circumambulation) round His father and mother and sat down calmly. He claimed victory in the race."

Divine Discourse, Ganesh Chaturthi 2004

8. C

"The Navarathri festival is observed by contemplating on God for ten days, cleansing one's self of all impurities, in order to experience the divinity within. The penultimate day of the festival is dedicated to what is termed "worship of weapons" (*aayudha puja*). The weapons to be worshipped are the divine powers in man. When the divine is worshipped in this way, one is bound to progress spiritually."

Divine Discourse, Dasara 14/10/94

9. B

"It was on Deepavali day that Sri Rama's coronation took place after his victorious return to Ayodhya from Lanka vanquishing Ravana and his Rakshasa brood. For a long period Ayodhya had been plunged in darkness when Rama was in exile in the forest. In the absence of the effulgent Rama, Ayodhya was a city of darkness. The forests were filled with light. The return of Rama was hailed by the people of Ayodhya as the return of divine effulgence and hence they celebrated the event by the lighting of lamps everywhere."

Divine Discourse, Deepavali 1991

10.C

"Those who consider charity as a high duty and elevate their consciousness through prayers and continuous meditation on God are Muslims. Islam is a word which denotes not a particular religion but a state of mind, the state of total surrender to the Will of God. Islam means dedication, surrender, peace, tranquillity. Islam denotes the social community whose members have achieved supreme peace through surrender to the All-Merciful, All-Powerful God and who have vowed to live in peace with their fellowmen."

Divine Discourse, 12/7/83

11 D

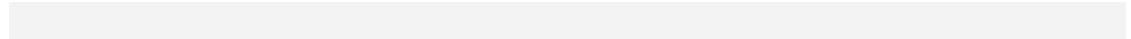
"I do not think of one particular date in the calendar as My birthday, for I consider the day when Divinity blossoms in your heart as My birthday in you. Therefore, each of you should individually celebrate such a day as My birthday. The day when you resolve to practice My advice, to follow My directives, to translate My message into acts of service, and to engage in spiritual discipline - that day is My birthday for you."

Swami's Divine Birthday Discourse, 1975

12 A

“Jesus exemplified the spirit of social service. The inspiration for this came from His mother, Mary. From His childhood, Mary taught Him such good qualities as truth, kindness, compassion, and justice. Jesus had learned His lessons from His mother and developed His spiritual faith. After they returned from Jerusalem, Jesus felt that service to His parents was His foremost duty, because He owed everything to them.”

Divine Discourse, Christmas 1994



INTER-FAITH CROSSWORD

CLUES

Across

- 1 Perform this act to have a safe and comfortable journey (5,5)
- 5 He leads the Tibetan faith. (4)
- 6 This spring cures. (7)
- 8 Moral (8)
- 11 The all-pervading sound (2)
- 12 Prophet (4)
- 14 The 1st World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Organisation was held in this city (6)
- 16 Any place of worship (6)
- 17 Everything (4)
- 18 Egyptian Sun god (2)
- 19 A sect devoted to worship of stars (7)
- 23 This lowly puny creature is the vehicle of a mighty hefty God. (3)
- 25 A note from the West. (2)
- 26 A purification process signifying new birth. (7)
- 28 A title of honor for a successful pilgrim (5)
- 29 A religious symbol (8)
- 32 In the lamp of Love, devotion is compared to ____ (3)
- 33 Quiet, dear, different priest ! (5)
- 34 The innermost area of a place of worship (7)
- 35 A sub-division of a religious group (4)
- 36 A festival of fasting and purification (4)

Down

- 1 In the spiritual mansion of life, this constitutes the roof (4, 9)
- 2 *Let Uma* wear this to ward off evil (6)
- 3 This does not wait for anyone (4)
- 4 Not to be told (3)
- 7 Not to be sold for any amount ! (4)
- 9 Chinese religion (6)
- 10 Pure, noble being (5)
- 13 Among all living beings on earth, man alone has this faculty (6)
- 15 A gift from God (4)
- 20 The story of God , told by four men (5)
- 21 ____ bath, a bath in which the hip region alone is immersed, as for a medical treatment (4)
- 22 A cure-all (3)
- 24 Three-pronged weapon of a God (7)
- 27 Roman earth goddess (4)
- 30 O SUN, the intellect ! (4)
- 31 This flies! (4)
- 33 Eastern note for a Western father. (2)

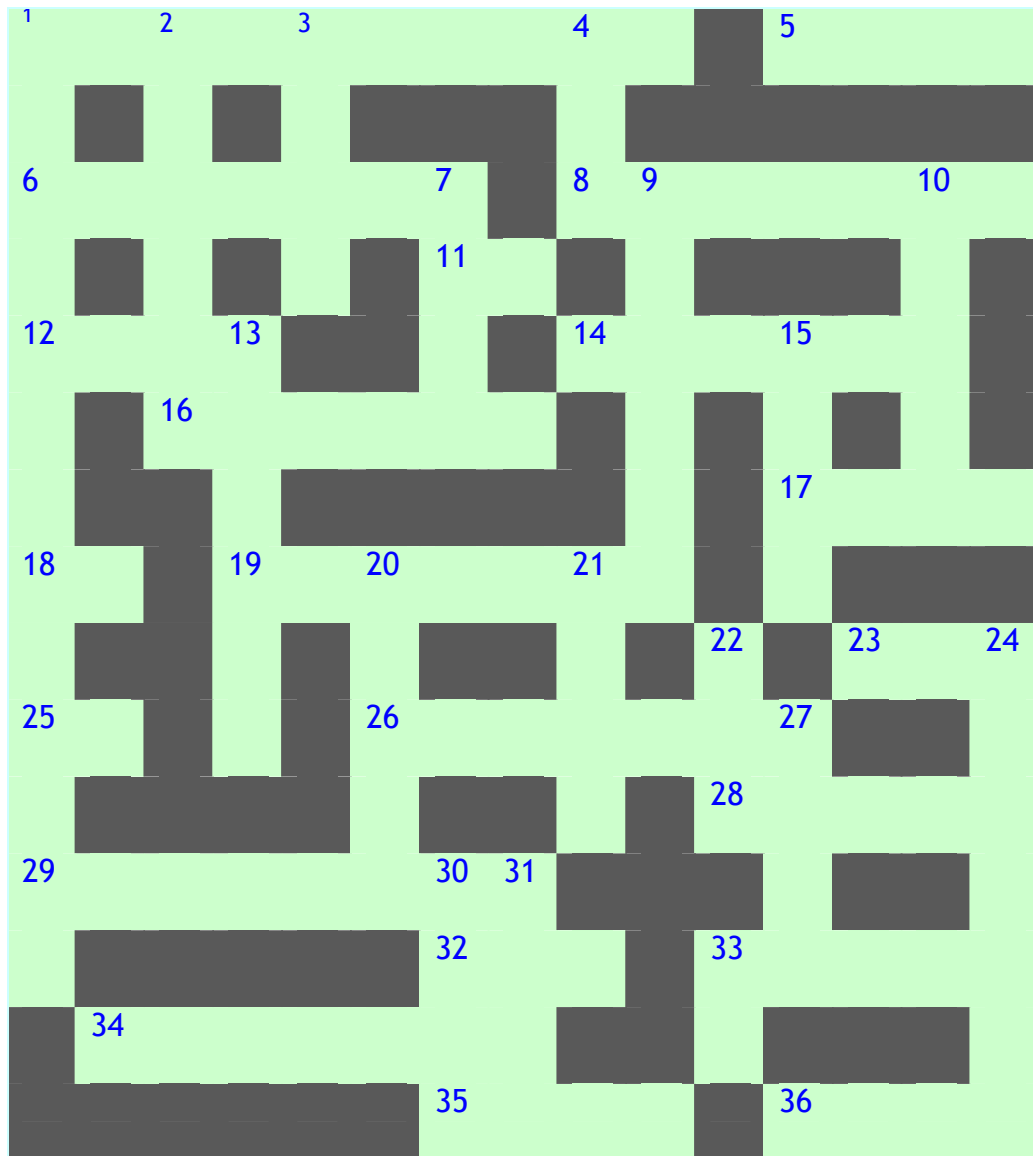
FURTHER CLUES

- 1 _____ , reach safely, says Baba.
- 5 His title name is made of musical notes from West and East, in that order
- 6 Anagram of THE RED SOUL
- 11 The All-pervading sound (2)
- 12 The former name of this renamed city.
- 17 Begins with “the Pranava”
- 19 In Hebrew, worship of host of heaven
- 26 Involves sprinkling of water
- 28 One who has visited Mecca is called thus.
- 29 Part moon
- 33 Anagram of *P* (for *Quiet*, in crossword terminology) and *DEAR*
- 34 _____ sanctorum
- 36 The period of 40 weekdays before Easter.

Down

- 1 Self confidence,
- 2 Anagram of LET UMA
- 3 Time and _____
- 4 Falsehood
- 7 What is “inside” a body
- 8 The religion of Lao –tse
- 9 Member of a race
- 13 Anagram of A SNORE
- 14 A 4-in-1 scripture
- 22 _____ Wednesday
- 24 Weapon of Shiva
- 27 The month of MAY is named in her honor
- 30 Anagram of O SUN meaning intellect
- 31 Don’t waste this
- 33 Affectionate address for a father

INTER-FAITH CROSSWORD



ANSWERS

1	S	T	A	R	T	E	A	R	L	Y		5	L	A	M	A
	E		M		I											
6	L	O	U	R	D	E	S		7		8	9			10	
	F		L		E		11		O	M		A				R
12	S	E	E	R					14	B	O	M	B	A	Y	
	A		16	T	E	M	P	L	E		I		O		A	
	C			A							S		17	O	M	N
18	R	A														
	I			O		I				I		22	A		23	R
25	F	A														
	I															
29	C	R	E	S	C	E		30	N	T				I		D
	E							32	O	I	L		33	P	A	D
		34	S	A	N	C	T	U	M			A				N
								35	S	E	C	T		36	L	E

THE HEALING TOUCH

SAI SHAKTHI SPEAKS AND SMILES AGAIN!

This is an amazing story of how a teenager from Orissa was able to speak and eat after eight long years, due to Baba's Grace and the expertise of doctors in His Super Specialty Hospital, Prashanthi Gram.

Sai Shakti, an eleven year old boy from the state of Orissa, India, had been unable to open his mouth for almost eight years due to alkalosis of the Temporo-Mandibular joint (TM Joint), that is, fusing of the joint where the jaws are hinged inside the mouth. This happens due to calcification and bone formation. The operation was successfully performed on 8th September 2005 at the Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi. His faith in Bhagavan brought about the cure, something even an established teaching hospital in Delhi could not do.

All through these years the poor boy had to push mashed up food through the sides of the mouth with his finger, between the teeth and the cheek, until the food went past the small gap behind the last tooth before slipping into his throat. He attended school like any other child of his age. His sight and hearing were normal, but he was handicapped by his inability to speak and answer questions verbally on account of this disability.

In the beginning they sought help from a teaching hospital nearby and got admitted for treatment. He was an inpatient for three months. While the doctors were prepared to perform the operation needed to get the mouth opened, they could not proceed with surgery because the family refused to allow a mandatory tracheotomy for a safe anaesthetic administration, which involves making a surgical opening in the throat for placement of a breathing tube into the trachea or windpipe prior to commencement of anaesthesia for the operation.

Later, the boy's father, who was doing some minor jobs in Delhi and earning a small amount of money, took his son to a well established teaching hospital there. They too maintained that the boy needed a tracheotomy for a safe anaesthetic, which was common practice to secure a safe airway in such cases. The family, once again backed away from getting this operation done, thus allowing the boy's misery to continue.

Sai Shakti along with his family and relatives were attending bhajans at a Sai centre near his home. Some devotees attending this centre also happened to do sevadal duties at the Super Speciality hospital and had known about this hospital doing a variety of plastic surgical procedures, including locked jaws. With faith in Swami, Sai Shakti came immediately with his uncle to consult with the plastic surgeon at the Super Speciality Hospital in Puttaparthi. They were told that the problem was not surgical but anaesthetic. With a positive note the plastic surgeon referred the boy to the anaesthetist to evaluate the risk factors. The senior anaesthetist was on leave at the time. In the mean time preliminary investigations including X-rays and CT scans were done to

avoid unnecessary delay. The X-rays and scans give a good image of the deflections and diameter of the air passage from the nostrils to the trachea for a proper assessment.

Within a few days the anaesthetist concerned reassured the patient and relatives that no tracheotomy would be done. However, the patient was alerted that in the unlikely event of a failed nasal intubation (insertion of a cannula or tube into the nose), the operation would be abandoned. They also reassured the patient and his attendants that with Swami's Grace there should be no failure. The Super Speciality hospital is well equipped, even with fibro-optic intubating bronchoscope that is quite costly and not generally available in most government hospitals, and teaching hospitals in India, let alone charity hospitals. Bhagavan has spared nothing to make such facilities available for the poor, not to mention even expertise of talented doctors.

Sai Shakti had his left TM joint ankalosed (fused due to bone formation). The only way was to perform an operation of the joint, an arthroplasty of the TM joint (surgical remodelling of the joint with prosthesis) and get his jaws opened. The plastic surgeon in Swami's hospital had done this procedure several times in his long career and was only awaiting an affirmative from the anaesthetist. The anaesthetist too has wide experience in procedures such as this and with Swami's Grace all staff involved with this operation looked forward to the day.

Prior to admission the boy had spent a week in Puttaparthi and attended *darshan* of Bhagavan in Sai Kulwant Hall. He had seen Bhagavan going around devotees seated in His special silver-metallic car. Sai Shakti was confident that Swami would help him. He got admitted to the ward and the night before the operation the boy had a dream. In his own words Sai Shakti described to the operating theatre staff his overnight dream:

"Swami entered the Kulwant hall from the ladies side in His car. When the care reached the middle of Kulwant hall it suddenly turned to the left heading towards the Gopuram. I got up and ran towards Swami and He lowered the window. I stretched my hand out to Him and Swami gave me a laddu and said, "*Teesko*" (take), as I hesitated, remembering my inability to open my mouth. I was surprised that I could immediately open my mouth and eat the laddu that Swami had created. This experience in my dream gave me confidence that my operation would be successful. So I am not frightened of the operation."

The boy was very happy and cooperative in the operating theatre and the anaesthetist was able to perform a nasal intubation with the help of the flexible paediatric fibro-optic bronchoscope guiding him (placing the breathing tube through the nose into the wind-pipe) in the first attempt itself without any difficulty. Normally a blind nasal intubation without seeing the larynx is very difficult, although very occasionally it is still possible. On this occasion it was Bhagavan's mercy that made everything synchronize to make it a success.

The entire operation that lasted an hour and a half went off smoothly. At the end of the operation the mouth was kept open with a rubber wedge. The boy recovered from anaesthesia smoothly. **As he woke up the first thing he saw was Swami's picture on the wall and he said "Sai Ram! Sai Ram!!" Those were his first words. He felt no pain and needed no pin-killer.**

He was able to speak to the doctors and nurses in the recovery area of the operating suite. He could hardly hold back his experience under anaesthesia. We narrate the same, once again, in Sai Shakti's own words:

"I saw a ball of fire burst through the wall and Swami emerged from it. He reached out to me and lovingly stroked my cheek and jaw on the side of the operation. Then He blessed me with His abhayahasta and merged into the ball of fire, which disappeared into the wall. That was sufficient for me to know that the operation would cure me."

The remaining few days in hospital went uneventful. He started eating normally and kept narrating his wonderful experiences of Swami's grace and the cure of his misery. He left the hospital full of gratitude to Bhagavan and praise for the kindness of doctors and nurses who showed such love and encouragement. Sai Shakti, as his name suggests, had truly got his *Shakthi* or power from Sai. Sai had energized him!

- Heart2Heart Team

HOSPITAL STATISTICS

BANGALORE SUPER SPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 19th Jan 2001 to 31st Nov 2005.

Cardiac Surgeries: 5,959

Cardiac Catheterisation: 11,864

Neuro Surgeries: 5,302

CT Scans: 17,065

MRI Exams: 19,537

PUTTAPARTHI SUPER SPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 22nd Nov 1991 to 31st Nov 2005.

Cardiac Surgeries: 15,214

Cath Procedures: 16,947

Urology Surgeries: 27,838

Ophthalmology Surgeries: 27,252

Echo Cardiography: 391,900