

# **HEART 2 HEART**

## **VOL 4, ISSUE 4, APRIL 2006**

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## BETWEEN YOU AND US

**Dear Reader,**

“If Christ had not been raised from the dead, our preaching is useless and so is your faith...” (*1 Corinthians 15:15, 17, 20*). This is what St. Paul, the diehard critic of Jesus who turned into an indefatigable Apostle of Christianity, wrote in a letter to the early Christian community a few years after Jesus had returned to His heavenly abode. Truly, the Resurrection of Jesus is the greatest turning point in history (and in His Divine Story) which shocked the followers of Jesus out of their stubborn slumber and disbanded the doubts and suspicions about Him once and for all. It is the single most mind-shattering event which instantaneously instilled faith in the confused and closed hearts and minds of thousands, more than two millennia ago and continues to do so even now.

This is the sacred month, the holy month of Easter, when more than two billion Christians, distributed literally in every country and region of the present day world, congregate and rejoice because “He rose”. Be it Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, Lutherans, followers of orthodox churches or any another type of Christians, every believer in Christ at this time relives the events that happened in the life of Jesus more than two thousand ago and draws comfort from the fact that “He reigns and brings Peace!” (*John 14:27*). He/she feels secure because He is “the Power of the powerful”, (*Psalms 62:11, Rev 5:13*) and adores Him with all devotion because “He is Holy, Righteous, Mighty, and Pure.” (*Leviticus 11:45*). But is adoring Him enough? Is believing Him sufficient to make Him happy? Is one a true Christian if he/she just accepts Christ as God? What does it mean to be a good Christian? And what is the real significance of Easter? What should Easter mean to us?

The cover story of this issue will help you to find answers to all these questions and more. If you are not a Christian and are already feeling out of place, wait a minute! It is not meant only for Christians or Christian Sai devotees. Easter is not just a joyous festival, it is, in fact, a fascinating spiritual journey as you will realize when you read the cover story. It is a journey which will release us from our own inner conflicts and frigid fixations of mind and lead us to light, love and pure eternal joy and this is, in essence, the goal of every religion - to awaken the inherent divinity in man.

What is special about the cover story is that for all the questions mentioned above, we have answers not from the bible or any other holy text, but from the direct lips of the “Father” Himself! Swami in His innumerable discourses on Christmas and other occasions has given profound insights into Christianity and the life of Jesus which have guided many a troubled Christian souls from despondency to divine bliss, from confusion to spiritual vision, essentially, from darkness to light. You will find any number of such examples in our cover story and we hope this will be of immense use to you in your spiritual journey.

Just like the divine miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus which stirred the hearts of men centuries ago, a very significant divine mystery in the life of Sai which kindles faith in newcomers and confirms faith in the minds of the old devotees, is the spectacle of *Lingodbhavam* which happened a few weeks ago in Prashanti Nilayam. In the "Prasanthi Diary" of last issue, we had a very detailed account of what factually happened during this major event. In this issue we have a very insightful feature article which will tell you what is the real significance of this divine manifestation and what should be the 'take homes' for all of us from this divine display of power, love and sacrifice.

The way the word of Sai spreads around the world is most mysterious. Recently the Vice President of Fiji visited the Sai School in Fiji and hailed Bhagavan and the good work done at the school; the education minister of UAE, Shaikh Nahayan recalled the private audience he had had with Swami a few months ago and said to the Sai volunteers in Abu Dhabi in February this year that it was "his great good fortune" (you can read about this in the Sai Seva section). There is also another very inspiring article in the Sai Seva section about a innovative service project undertaken for the first time by the Sai Youth of Hyderabad, do not miss it!

Three decades ago in Latin America, nobody knew about Sai Baba but today there are more than 250 Sai Centres - Mexico alone has about 30 Centres. In fact, the history of the Sai Movement in Latin America is very fascinating. It is to bring to light what is so silently and so beautifully happening in this part of the world that we have decided to carry the story of one Latin American country in every issue starting from this issue. The first country chosen for this issue is Mexico – not because it is sitting at the top of all Latin American countries but because the Lord chose this country to pioneer the Sai movement in that region. You can read all about this in our special feature article.

In the H2H Special section of this issue, apart from continuing the remarkable experiences of Mr. Chidambaram Krishnan, we have a special article for all the listeners of Radio Sai. It is actually the transcription of a Radio talk delivered by Prof. G Venkataraman in response to the enormous feedback we received on invitation from listeners all over the world. If you are a listener of Radio Sai, please do read this and let us know what you feel about it.

One of the highlights of the recent celebrations in Puttaparthi was the celebration of Holi in the divine presence of Bhagavan. What a joyous occasion it was! Swami literally gave Himself away to the hundreds of people who had come all the way from Bihar to be in His presence. They sang beautifully, danced in ecstasy, staged a scintillating drama and basked in His bountiful love. They left with memories to last a lifetime. You will enjoy this account in Prashanti Diary .

Before we leave you to explore the rest of the journal (this time the journal is huge with more than 150 pages of material), just one word of gratitude. The 'Sai Inspires' subscription list, dear reader, is more than 10,000 now and we are happy that many enjoy this service and we are grateful to you for your

continued support and encouragement. If you have any comments/suggestions, please feel free to write to us. We are here to serve the "Sai" in you.

Let our every thought be Sai, every breath be Sai.

In Sai Service,  
Heart2Heart Team.

## YOUR SAY-

### FEEDBACK FROM OUR READERS

Dear Reader,

*We at Heart2Heart feel ourselves very fortunate that we are able to serve you in whatever way we can. We are doubly blessed when we receive feedback from you as not only are we encouraged by your response, but we can make also changes to our format and content according to your suggestions. It is therefore with a feeling of great gratitude that we publish these letters from you, both to say 'thank you' and to confirm to you that we read them all and take note of the contents! Please keep them coming!*

**- Heart2Heart Team**

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#### **Response to the Cover Story "Sundaram - A Prashanti in Chennai":**

Sir,

Sundaram has a variety of volunteers from various parts of Chennai and from different levels of society carrying out service in Sundaram. On entering the place, we realize its peace and serenity. It has some kind of aura which radiates a feeling for each devotee who steps into this temple of bliss. Once a person, (devotee or non-devotee) enters, he is relieved of all ego, jealousy, evil and all bad thoughts... It just creates a serene mind with pleasant and peaceful thoughts and brings a lot of patience.

I have been visiting this temple regularly twice a week for the past five years and this has brought about lots of drastic changes in me and my behaviour and has made me a more conscious and dedicated worker. No other place that I have ever visited before in Madras has created such a change in me. I strongly feel that this temple is solely run by the unity among the people and it is self discipline that has lead to the making of this wonderful place.

I wish there were many more Sundarams around Chennai so that it facilitates the enhancement of the mind leading to a more dedicated, contented and happy society.

Thanking You,

L.Kanchana

## **Response to the Feb issue cover story “Behind the Glorious 80th Birthday”:**

Dear hands behind H2H,

Many congratulations and laurels to the special bulletin. I was just waiting to read the update like millions of followers all over the world. For us this is a very great opportunity to get to know the activities of the Nilayam and Swami. All sections of H2H are really good, simple and highly inspirational.

Surely the report of the effort put in by the people during the birthday celebrations was a great lesson - in the sense that what each of us does is very little and yet we strive to take the credit, while this mammoth function was done with so much of ease due to Swami's grace. The photographs were good. The report was so lively that at so many places I had to sit and introspect. Please continue this updating, for all of us who are away and long to be near Swami, it is a great relief and instant inspiration to do better service.

BrindaRamanathan,  
Trivandrum, India.

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## **Responses to Sai Inspires:**

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

Sai Ram,

At the outset I must say that it is wonderful that you have been blessed with this unique Seva opportunity of spreading Swami's message. The inspirational messages of Swami are a daily tonic for us. Reading Sai inspires is like having a map before going to any destination; with a map in hand the chances of getting lost are reduced to minimum. In fact "Sai Inspires" along with the H2H journal are like having a navigator service in your car in the journey of life. I have forwarded Sai Inspires to many of my friends - even to those who do not know much about Swami.

All the articles in the journal are very informative and the pictures and details are very good. I have no clue as to how my friends will find it. The quiz part of the journal is my children's favorite. It's nice that you are drawing attention to different articles and related discourses. I am planning to start using the Bhajan tutor - only then I can tell others how to use it. One suggestion along with Bhajans is that it could be nice to include Mantras or Veda chanting.

You are doing great work!!!

May Bhagawan Bless Us All,  
Suman Rana

*(Dear Suman Rana, The Books and Publications Trust, Prashanti Nilayam already has an interactive CD for learning selected Vedic hymns "Veda Pushpanjali - 01 and 02". Please consider using them to learn Vedic hymns - H2H Team).*

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Hi:

I just wanted to say that every time I have some confusion in my mind I only have to open my mail and look up for the answer in Swami's words - it does help me a lot. It is so difficult to stop desiring, but after knowing Swami's words I have some peace.

Thank you for serving humanity in this way.  
Nadia Chávez Sumarriva,  
Lima, Perú.

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### **Responses to the Sunday Special "Irrational Rationalists" sent on 19th March 2006**

Dear H2H Team,

Thank you for the response to a social activist. Your information helps us, the humble with simple faith, to know more - juxtaposed with the negative criticisms of the less informed.

Sadly few of these critics realize that here we have a Swami who asks for nothing in return. He will not even think negatively of these vicious hounds. They (the critics) are to be pitied for they are a sad bunch that would love to pick on the good and harmless. They do not have the courage to comment on proselytizing groups that look for money at every turn when doing any work for the poor or the needy to further their own agendas. Some will even kill in the name of God. Would these critics comment on them? No. They have to spend their energies where they can get glamour without fear of being held accountable.

Sadly, in this information age, sensationalism is what most media look for, and rationalists make good copy. So why not trample the Good Work and nit-pick to find and highlight the miniscule?

Thank you for the response. We must have some rebuttal periodically, even if it is on a small scale, to inform and alert our members.

Sai Ram,  
Perry Naidoo.

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Dear Sir,

What an excellent article 'Irrational Rationalists' is! Let's have more of that kind of article.

It is very informative from time to time to write articles like that, as there probably are some people, who become confused over all the negative writing about godlike qualities like Swami's. Those who write negatively about Swami are indeed odd and strange, because if they cannot see all what He is doing for man on 3 levels – body, mind and spirit - they must somehow have a defect, when they cannot see the good other people are doing to humanity.

A small story from my homeland Denmark. We have a very dignified and noble man called Maersk Mc Moeller. He has created a world wide consortium in the shipping industry. As he has gifted a lot to the Danish people and to people in other land; he also lately gifted the Danes a big Opera House.

Immediately, there were some powerful people in the press writing in the newspaper, that Maersk Moeller is very "egoistic and a dictator". There was no 'thank you' for the gift. No musing over the good quality in a man gifting a lovely opera building to the people. These are the "mind people" who have no or very little experience of divine matters. So how can they really understand what it is all about? If they just knew what it means to come to Swami's Lotus Feet, they would be very ashamed of their earlier thinking.

I often think that it should be a "must" in all the newspapers to have a spiritual writer. Most parts of the world need input from spiritual writers, who really can explain about the spiritual life. The feeling of peace and love and trying to do good to other people every day is such a great feeling of richness.

The fact is, there are many people, who are tired of all the uncaring, unkind, jealous, aggressive people who only see bad where there is good. They misuse their position as journalists, editors and newspaper owners to spread their wrong judgment.

So thank you again for the lovely, logical article.

Sincerely Yours,  
Sonja Engman Wilson,  
Denmark.

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Sir,

I am so glad to go through this week's Sunday special. I come from Kolkata, but now live in California, US. I came here only last year as a PhD pursuant in Statistics in University of California, Riverside. My family has been in Swami's fold since 1973. Since my birth I have seen the abounding grace of Swami.

I am glad you mentioned the Ganga Sagar project. I have been an active member in the youth wing in Kolkata, and have personally seen the high level of motivation and devotion of the youths for Swami and Seva. This is absolutely mind-boggling when you compare this with the general anti-spiritual atmosphere that exists. What is this if not Swami's wonderful miracle?

You have correctly said that we should pity the "rationalists"...they do not understand the joy and peace that a spiritual life confers...and the joy and bliss that the Avatar brings in the lives of the people who even make half an attempt to Love Him! And in this they end up being the greatest irrationalists.

My friends, who either know very little of Swami, or know all the wrong things have now started respecting Swami. They had no idea about the tremendous humanitarian projects Swami is carrying out. You are right...people have no idea about the tremendous Seva Swami's devotees are carrying out all over the world...silently!

I just shared my story. I am attaching 3 pictures of my altar and how my friends participated in the Saraswati and Kali puja that I performed at my apartment. They really enjoyed the spiritual atmosphere that was created by Swami's grace!

Sairam,  
Debarshi Dey,  
Teaching Assistant,  
University of California, Riverside, USA.

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- Heart2Heart Team

## SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

### SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

#### **The Power of the Name 'Rama'**

*April 6th is Rama Navami Day, that is, the day celebrating the advent of Lord Rama. Let's recapitulate what Baba said on this occasion more than a decade and half ago in Kodai Kanal.*

Every *Avatar* (Incarnation of the Divine) has six types of powers: all-encompassing Prosperity, Righteousness, Fame, Wealth, Wisdom and Renunciation (or non-attachment). God is the possessor of these six attributes. Sri Rama had all these six attributes in equal measure. Every *Avatar* of God in every age and every place has these six attributes.

#### **Importance of Truth and Righteousness**

In the *Ramayana*, *Sathya* (Truth) and *Dharma* (Righteousness) are the most important concepts. The *Vedas*, which are regarded as their very life-breath by *Bharatiyas* (Indians), have proclaimed: "*Sathyam Vada; Dharmam Chara*" ("Speak the Truth; Act Righteously"). In order to honour the plighted word of his father, Sri Rama elected to go to the forest leaving Ayodhya. Truth is the foundation for all righteousness. There is no greater religion than truth. Lord Rama stood out as an upholder of Truth to fulfill the promise of his father, to maintain the traditions of his *Ikshvaku* dynasty, to protect his country and for the sake of the welfare of the world. Everyone who calls himself a human being should stand up for truth in the same manner. It is said of *Mahatmas* (enlightened men) that what they speak, what they think and what they do are in perfect accord. In the case of the wicked, their thoughts, words and deeds are at a variance with each other. By these definitions Sri Rama was a *Mahatma* (a great soul) and Ravana was a *Duratma* (an evil being)....

#### **Triple Power of the Name 'Rama'**

What are the inner meanings of the name Rama? The three syllables 'R', 'A' and 'Ma' indicate the three causes for human birth, namely *Papamu* (the sins one has committed), *Thapamu* (the troubles one experiences) and *Ajnanamu* (one's ignorance). "Ra" represents the root letter for *Agni* (fire). "A a" represents the letter for the moon. "Ma" represents the root letter for the sun. What does *Agni* signify? It destroys everything and reduces it to ashes. The letter "R" has the power to destroy all the sins committed by man. The letter "Aa" (symbolising the moon) has the powers of cooling the fevers man suffers from and conferring peace on him. "Ma" represents the sun who dispels the darkness of ignorance and confers illumination of wisdom. Hence, the word Rama has the right triple power of destroying sins, conferring peace and dispelling ignorance....

We must learn to chant the sweet name of Rama with a pure, unsullied heart, in a spirit of selfless devotion. In the mind of man dwell the deities representing the moon and the sun...

### **Face Troubles With Faith In God**

Today everybody utters "Ram,Ram." But very few follow the example set by Rama. They are not true devotees of Lord Rama. At best they may be described as "part-time devotees." True devotion means perpetual remembrance of the Name of the Lord and constant meditation on that Name, cherishing the figure of Sri Rama in the heart.

You should be prepared to face the vicissitudes of life with firm faith in God. It is during times of difficulties that God is remembered. To confront difficulties with faith is itself a spiritual discipline.

Although Sri Rama was the son of the Emperor Dasaratha and son-in-law of King Janaka, he had to face many ordeals in life for the sake of upholding *Dharma*. The Pandavas went through many difficulties for the sake of adhering to righteousness and hence their name and fame remain forever. You should pray to the Lord to give you the strength to bear all troubles and face all difficulties.

If you have even an atom of Grace of the Lord, a mountain of troubles can be overcome. Sri Chaitanya declared: "If a fraction of the time that is spent in worrying about wealth, provisions, wife, children, friends and business is devoted to contemplation on the feet of the Divine, one can face the messengers of death without fear and cross the Ocean of *Samsara!* (Worldly life)."

It is not necessary to devote many hours to prayer. It is enough if one thinks of God with all his heart and offers himself even for a few moments. A single match stick when it is struck can dispel the darkness in a room that has remained closed for years. Mountains of cotton can be burnt down by a single spark.

Likewise, wholehearted chanting of the name of Lord Rama even once can destroy mountains of sins. But the chanting should not be done mechanically like playing a gramophone record. It should emanate from the depths of the heart....Remember the Name of Lord Rama with love. God can be realised only through love and by no other means.

*Discourse at "Sai Sruti", Kodaikanal, on Sri Rama Navami Day, 14-4-1989.*

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

### Part 19

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

#### **COMMUNICATION WITH SAI**

**Visitor:** I look at Swami's photograph on my desk at home in my country. And I receive Swami's instructions. He ordered me to come to India for this Conference.

**SAI:** You think of Sai and get some feeling.

**Visitor:** I look at Swami's photograph and send Him questions and problems from other people, and I receive His orders and instructions for those people. Is that all right?

**SAI:** No. It is not all right. For yourself you may ask. But you should not think of placing yourself between a devotee and Sai. That is a wrong idea.

#### **THE 16 FACTORS OF THE AVATAR**

**A Visitor:** What are the 16 points of the Avathar? I have asked and nobody knows.

**SAI:** The difference between man and Avathar? Man experiences the 15 factors, but he is not their master. They go their own ways. As control starts to be gained, man comes closer to the 16th, the all-knowing *Paramatma* (supreme self). The five working organs have to do with talking, taking, walking, rejecting (excretion), and eating. The five sense organs: hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell. The five elements: earth, water, fire, air, space. The 16th factor is the all-knowing *Paramatma*.

#### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BREAKING COCONUTS**

**H:** One sees people breaking coconuts in front of Swami's car as He is departing from Prasanthi Nilayam or Brindavan. What is the significance of this?

**SAI:** As long as there is water, meaning worldly desire, in the nut, and as long as the meat clings to the shell, the nut will grow if planted. As the unplanted nut ages, the water disappears, the meat leaves the shell, and the nut will not grow. The nut is chosen as a symbol because of the three eyes - the two physical eyes and the eye of wisdom (unopened). **When the nut is broken, it symbolizes breaking the closed heart and asking the Lord to take the contents. This is 'surrender'.** Nothing inside can be concealed and, once the nut is broken, it will never grow again.

## DISCOVERING THE MOST VALUABLE PRIZE

**SAI:** Mr. 'X' is a great scholar with various degrees and a lifetime of *sadhana* in the Himalayas and elsewhere.

**H:** I suppose degrees are O.K., but the only scholarship of interest to this individual is scholarship in Swami's teachings. It is like locating the greatest deposit of gold in the world. Why work at anything else?

**SAI:** The mention of gold is important. Deposits of gold are not limited to one place in the world, but gold is found only by certain individuals. **God is not limited to one place only. He is everywhere and He may be found at any place by those who are pure of heart. And by that I mean where there is love in the heart.**

**H:** No doubt gold is in every place, but great treasures of gold are seldom found. It is the same with great springs of water. In Baba, one finds the spring of divine sweetness.

**SAI:** Waters from springs are often impure. Pure water may be found by digging for it. One person may dig 100 feet and another person may find pure water at 40 feet or at 10 feet. It is the same in the spiritual life. The amount of work needed to find the divine sweetness depends on purity of heart.

**H:** Is it only by the strength of one's love for God that he comes to union with God, or are there other essential factors?

**SAI:** **The most beneficial thing that can happen to a person is that he should draw God's love to himself. His love for God is of less importance, because it is an imperfect mixture of divine and worldly love. The most important action to gain God's love is righteousness, dharma.** Spread out on a flat surface there may be gold, silver, copper, iron filings, diamonds, rubies, silks and other things of value, but a magnet pays no attention to all the riches; it selects only the iron filings. It is the same with devotees. God does not select on the basis of wealth. He looks to the purity of heart.

## FACING GOD AND SADHANA

**H:** Swami; speaks of 'facing' God. Please explain.

**SAI:** When two people face each other, each enters the eye of the other, and they are different only in name and form. Otherwise, they are the same. **So, it is important to face God directly and be one with Him. That is why one naturally closes the eyes in a temple, so as to use the eye of wisdom instead of the physical eyes.**

**A Visitor:** The word, '*sadhana*' is used in so many different places.

**SAI:** *Sadhana* is just replacement of the bad tendencies of the mind by the divine attributes of the Atma. Mind has two principal bad characteristics: its tendency not to go straight, but to move obliquely; and its tendency to desire and grasp all objects that it sees. It is compared to the snake, which moves by twisting and bites all it sees. The mind must go straight to God by facing Him directly.

## **WE ARE TRULY FEARLESS**

**H:** Baba says, 'Why fear when I am here'. That must have a wide and deep meaning. Will Baba speak of it?

**SAI:** 'I am,' refers to the Atma, who is always everywhere. The Atma is like the lion, without fear. 'Fear', refers to the body, which is subject to worry, depression, trembling and fear. Body is like a sheep, wavering this way and that way. Body is always looking for information, gathering information, questioning. Whereas Atma, like the lion, is full of courage and without fear. 'Atma' is God. You are God. God is omnipresent. This 'I' is you. That 'I' is you. You are all.

**A Visitor:** What is '*Jnana*'?

**SAI:** *Jnana* is ordinary knowledge, knowledge about living in the world. Special knowledge is wisdom. **Love is giving and forgiving. Selfishness is getting and forgetting. Love is expansion, and selfishness is contraction.**

## **OUR ATTITUDE TO THE OPPOSITES - 'GOOD' AND 'BAD'**

**A Visitor:** I see evil on all sides and am puzzled.

**SAI:** Here is this banana. The skin is useless to us, so it is regarded as bad. But, if there were no skin, the inside would not be protected. Do not regard anything as bad. **If a person has done evil to you and you take it as evil and retaliate, then you also have become bad. But, by remaining good and not regarding others as evil, you gain the right to reform them. If there is a bad smell in the room, and if incense is lighted, the fragrance changes the smell of the room. Bad actions should be met with good deeds and a good viewpoint, and the evil will be changed.** The difference between good and bad is a function of time. Food when eaten is good. In time that same food undergoes a change, is excreted, and is called bad. Whereas, truth remains the same and does not change with the passage of time. Therefore, the time sequence is just imagination.

**H:** The thought arises that some persons are wholly bad, their crimes are so vicious.

**SAI:** **No person is wholly bad, for God is in every person's heart.** A mother and son may fight in court over property, but the relationship of mother and son remains. Two people who have come to hate each other live in two

houses. Each has a picture of Baba over the door. The house represents the body, and Baba's picture represents the God resident in the soul. The body may have to be corrected in its behaviour, and the best way is to attract the person with love. There is absolute good, but there is no absolute bad. Bad changes, bad is a distorted aspect of good. But it is not possible when one has the ordinary physical vision to see good and bad as one. Only when one knows the divine spark in oneself and in others, only then one sees good and bad as the same.

If one can adopt as an attitude the truth that good only is real, and that all one sees is essentially good, even though distorted, one acquires a great strength if he can see the world this way. **The learned might argue about the world and say that all this is illusion and despair, but they can never hope to live without loving the world. Love is not to be disregarded. The world might seem to be untruth from the material viewpoint, but the world is truth if looked at from the transcendental viewpoint.**

## **THE PRINCIPLE OF KARMA**

**H:** We are asking Swami about the 'bad' people. How about the poor victim of vicious action?

**SAI:** **Everyone is good, but there are bad actions. Action and reaction. In terms of the victims of bad action, everything was exactly right. We see only the present.** Baba sees the past also. A four-year-old boy was attacked by robbers for the gold chain around his neck. The robbers blinded the boy so he could not identify them. The boy was crying bitterly that he could not see. The parents also were crying. They came to Baba. In the past life, the boy had been a cruel man who had blinded several people. The boy will continue blind but, as a man, if he starts to consider, understanding that he is blind because of past dark deeds, and then sincerely repents his bad tendencies and makes a genuine effort to change himself, praying to God to forgive him, Baba may forgive the karma and restore the eyesight.

**H:** How should we relate to so-called 'bad' people?

**SAI:** **Keep the body separate from people who give bad food to the senses, even though all are brothers. Let souls be in God, bodies apart.**

**H:** Often it is very difficult to choose the right action. How may one acquire the ability to make this discrimination?

**SAI:** **Every man has the discrimination to know what is right action and what is wrong action. Wrong action develops guilt feelings. Whereas right action is free and without such fear.**

*(To be continued)*

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## **CHINNA KATHA**

### **- A Little Story from Bhagavan**

#### **PURITY- PATIENCE – PERSEVERANCE**

A certain spiritual aspirant went to a sage and asked him to give him a mantra. The sage said that he would impart the message only if the disciple agreed to serve him for twelve years, carrying out all his injunctions. The disciple agreed and carried out his services to the preceptor with devotion for twelve years.

At the end of the period, when the sage felt that his own end was approaching, he asked the disciple to bring a palmyra leaf on which he would inscribe the mantra before his death. The disciple went in search of a palmyra leaf, but before he could return, the preceptor died.

On enquiry from a boy who was there, the disciple learnt that before dying, the sage had written something on a bed of sand, which a woman had copied but then had wiped off the inscription.

The disciple went in search of the woman, who had some donkeys. He learnt from her that she had inscribed on the palm leaf roll that she wore in her earlobe what she found on the sand. When she learnt from the young man that the writing on the sand was a mantra intended for him and for which he had served the sage faithfully for twelve years, the woman said that she would give him the palm leaf only if he served her dutifully for twelve years. The disciple, who was determined to get the mantra at any cost, agreed to serve her.

The young man looked after the donkeys and served the woman for many years, living upon the food given by her. One day, he could not get the food from her and went about in search of food. At that time, he learnt that the king of the region had been feeding the poor for a long time and that he might be able to get food if he went to the feeding place. On going there he learnt that from that day, the king had stopped feeding the poor because it had not yielded the result he had expected from it.

The king had started feeding the poor on the advice of his preceptor who had told him that he would have a son if a truly godly man ate the food that he would serve to the poor. A bell was kept in the palace and when it rang by itself, that would be the sign that a godly man had partaken of the king's food. As the feeding had gone on for a long time without the bell ringing, the king decided to stop the feeding.

That was the very day when the young disciple went to the feeding place. On learning that all the vessels used for cooking the food had been sent to the river for cleaning, the young man hastened to the river bank to find out whether some food scraped from the vessels would be available for him. He found some crumbs at the spot and started eating them. At that very moment the bell in the palace started ringing.

The king was startled to hear the bell and immediately sent out messengers to find out who was the person who had eaten the food that day which made the bell ring. After enquiries, the messengers traced the young man at the river and brought him to the king.

The king was overjoyed on seeing the young man because he felt that he would soon have a son. He offered the young man half his kingdom and invited him to stay with him. The young man told the king his whole story and said that he was not interested in the kingdom or anything else, but only in the mantra from his guru, which was now in the keeping of the woman with the donkeys. The young man insisted that the palm leaf earring worn by the woman should be obtained without any compulsion.

The king sent out men to trace the woman, who was brought before him. Learning that she was an acrobat, who could perform feats on a rope, the king asked her to demonstrate her skill before the queen who was now enceinte. As she was dancing on the rope, he asked her whether she could catch two diamond earrings he would throw at her and wear them while dancing on the rope.

She readily agreed. The king threw the shining diamond earrings at her. Catching them in her hands, she took out the palm leaf rings from her earlobes, cast them down and wore the diamond earrings in their place.

As the palmleaf earrings dropped down, the young man rushed towards them and eagerly read the message inscribed therein. **Immediately after reading the mantra the young man secured instant illumination and liberation thereafter.**

**A spiritual aspirant should have such determination and preparedness for any kind of sacrifice to achieve his goal.**

- Baba

- Heart2Heart Team

## COVER STORY – Part one

### BE A GOOD CHRISTIAN... A TRUE CHRISTIAN... A BETTER CHRISTIAN

This is the season in which Christians celebrate Easter – Jesus’ resurrection from the dead after his crucifixion. What is the significance of this celebration, not only for Christians but for all people everywhere? How have the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba illuminated the meaning of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection in the lives of Christians who have come to know him? These two questions have prompted this cover story.

To fully appreciate the story of Easter, we must start with the fact that Jesus was born into the culture and religion of the Jews over 2,000 years ago. According to the first book in the Jewish Holy Scriptures, humanity was originally created by God in a state of purity and blissful intimacy with God:

**Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...” So God created man in his own image... male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number... I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food...” God saw all that he had made, and it was very good . (Genesis 1:26-30)**

This state was known as “the Garden of Eden.” But man developed ego and self-will, and “fell” from grace and purity and was sent out of the Garden. God promised to send the Jewish people an “Anointed One” (“Christ” in Greek or “Messiah” in Hebrew, the language of the Jews) to save humanity from this plight. Christians believe that Jesus was this “Anointed One”, the “Christ” sent by God.

Since the name “Jesus” is Greek for the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “the Lord saves,” he became known as Jesus Christ – “the anointed one who saves,” who would restore humanity to its original state of purity and intimacy with God. Jesus was born of a virgin, Mary, in very humble surroundings near their capital city of Jerusalem. He had a distinct mission, which Sathya Sai Baba describes this way:

**Jesus was to shatter the darkness that had enveloped the world... to spread the light of love in the heart of man and councils of humanity. (24 December 1972)**

In order to carry out his redemptive mission, Jesus had to correct mistaken ways of thinking, which he did through teachings such as:

**You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist an evil person. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:38-39, 43-44)**

Jesus gave spiritual teachings and performed many miraculous healings for the people of his time, as Sathya Sai Baba relates:

**Jesus taught simple, practical lessons in spiritual advancement for the good of mankind. He manifested Divine powers to instil faith in the validity of his teachings. He marked out the path that can confer on man the sweet nectar of Divine bliss (ananda). He exhorted people by precept and example to cultivate the virtues of charity, compassion, forbearance, love and faith. These are not separate and distinct qualities; they are only the many facets of the Divine in man, which he has to recognise and develop. (24 December 1972)**

In the course of his ministry and miracles, even raising people from the dead, certain religious and political leaders felt challenged and threatened by Jesus' popularity. Sai Baba tells us:

**Jesus was the epitome of compassion and the refuge of the poor, needy and forlorn. But, many people tried to create troubles for Jesus, since they did not like his sacred teachings and activities. Their hatred for Jesus increased day by day. Even the priests turned against Jesus as they became jealous of his growing popularity. Many people out of jealousy laid obstacles in his path and even tried to kill him. (25 December 2000)**

Jesus foretold what was to happen to him – that he would be crucified and then rise from the dead on the third day. After three years of ministry, Jesus was going to Jerusalem for an upcoming Jewish holy festival, the Passover Feast, and a great crowd heard that he was coming:

**They took palm branches and went out to meet him shouting, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”(John 12:13)**

On the Thursday evening before the Passover Feast, Jesus met with his disciples for the Last Supper, knowing that the time had come for him to undergo suffering on behalf of humanity's estrangement from God (going all the way back to the time of the Garden of Eden).

That night, while praying in a garden, he was taken into custody to appear before a Jewish tribunal and eventually before the Roman ruling authorities of the region. Sathya Sai Baba reports what happened:

Jesus' critics complained to the head priest against him. They tempted one of his disciples with 30 silver pieces, to betray him into their hands. The disciple who was most loved, Judas by name, decided to work against the Master, yielding to the low temptation of a few pieces of silver. Greed for money is a demon that gets hold of the weak.

Jesus' critics told the Roman ruler that Jesus was attempting to assert himself as king and so he should be punished for treason. The priest knew that Jesus was speaking the truth, but he did not support him in order to safeguard his

own position. Their insistences made the Governor order his crucifixion. (25 December 1978, 23 November 1979, 25 December 2001)

On the next afternoon, which was a Friday, Jesus was put to death by hanging on a cross. (In the centuries to follow, Christians called this day Good Friday.) Yet, he forgave all, even those who were nailing him to the cross. As Sathya Sai Baba elaborates:

**Jesus wished well for those who insulted and injured him. He knew that God wills all. So, even on the cross he bore no ill-will towards any one and he exhorted those with him to treat all as instruments of God's Will.** (25 December 1982)

On the following Sunday morning, his closest women disciples came to his tomb, whose entrance had been sealed by a large, round stone.

When they arrived, the stone had been rolled away and they were met by an angel dressed in a white robe, who told them:

**Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.** (Matthew 28:5-6)

Jesus had risen from the dead, on what later became known as Easter morning. The name "Easter" comes from the name of a pagan goddess of Spring who had been celebrated around the same time of year as the Jewish Passover and the anniversary of Jesus' resurrection.

Eventually, the early Christians borrowed that name to help turn the pagan celebration into a Christian holiday.

## **WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION FOR CHRISTIANS AND FOR THOSE OF OTHER FAITHS?**

For a Christian, the resurrection of Jesus is essential to knowing that Jesus was Divine and that his teachings were Divine. St. Paul – whom Sai Baba said "was originally an inveterate critic of Jesus, (but) was transformed by Christ's love into the greatest apostle of Jesus and the first propagator of the Christian faith" – stated the importance of Jesus' resurrection to Christians in a letter to an early Christian community:

**If Christ had not been raised from the dead, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... (and) you are still in your sins. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.** (1 Corinthians 15:15, 17, 20)

Sathya Sai Baba gives a poignant understanding of the significance of this "resurrection" and the lessons we can all learn from it, no matter what our religion:

What is the resurrection, really? It is the revelation of the divinity inherent in man. That is the result of contact with the Godhead; that can come only after

years of contrition. Man is led into the wrong belief that the accumulation of material possessions will endow him with joy and calm. But Divine Love (Prema) alone can give that everlasting joy. Divine Love alone will remove anger and envy and hatred. ( 28 February 1964 )

Jesus' physical resurrection points back to the early days of Jesus' ministry when he spoke of *our* need to be resurrected and reborn in a different way – in the knowledge and direct experience of God:

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (Jesus – John 3: 3, 6)

It is this same “rebirth of spirit” that many Christians have experienced as a result of coming to know Sathya Sai Baba. In fact, this rebirth of spirit has been experienced by followers of all faiths as they have responded to Sathya Sai Baba's consistent urging that each of us should deepen our faith and sincerely practise our chosen religion or spiritual path:

**Each should practise his own religion sincerely. A Christian should be a good Christian. A Hindu should be a good Hindu. A Muslim should be a good Muslim. Let each one be a true practitioner of his religion.** (14 April 1996)

**A Muslim should become a true Muslim. A Christian should become a true Christian. A Hindu should become a true Hindu. You should have full faith in your religion and lead an ideal life.** (4 September 1998)

A Hindu should become a better Hindu, a Christian a better Christian, a Muslim a better Muslim. (19 November 1999)

“Be a good Christian. Be a true Christian. Be a better Christian.” What does that really mean in light of celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead after his crucifixion? Many people who were brought up in the Christian religion have experienced a time when their beliefs faded in importance in their lives, or they doubted and questioned what they were taught in childhood. Many have felt a need to search for a deeper understanding of what Jesus taught and how it applies to their lives today.

We have collected stories of eight men and women from Christian backgrounds throughout the world, showing us how their knowledge and love of Jesus Christ has been *resurrected*, *reborn*, or *renewed* through their association with Sathya Sai Baba. They share with us how they have discovered a closer relationship with Jesus, a more profound appreciation of who Jesus was, and a deeper practice of what Jesus taught. Each story brings to life teachings of Jesus that can apply to us all, no matter what our faith might be.

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## **PASSAGES FROM SWAMI RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

*Try to be like Jesus. Jesus was a person whose only joy was in spreading Divine love, offering Divine love, receiving Divine love and living on Divine love. Jesus was a supremely pure and sacred person.*

*(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 December 1979)*

*Christ sacrificed his life for the sake of those who put their faith in him. He propagated the truth that service is God, that sacrifice is God. Even if you falter in the adoration of God, do not falter in the service of the living God. Be ready to sacrifice even your life for the sake of God.*

*The spirit of sacrifice is essential. To speak about devotion without a spirit of sacrifice is meaningless. If the name of Jesus is glorified all over the world today, it is because of his boundless love. He served the lowly and the lost, and in the end, he offered his life itself as a sacrifice .*

*(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 December: 1970, 1998, 1993)*

*Jesus teaches infinite love and compassion. To resurrect love and compassion, you must kill jealousy and selfishness, and purify your hearts. Speak sweetly; shed comfort with every glance of yours. Do not be slaves to your sensual desires. Dedicate your hand to the service of mankind. Earn the true mercy of Jesus. Follow the path shown by him.*

*(25 December 1979)*

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Our first story is from Harry Geurts, guest faculty member of Western music in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning since 1996, and previously Vice President of the Sathya Sai Organisation in the Netherlands. Growing up immersed in an atmosphere of Christian service, the personal pain he experienced while contemplating Christ's suffering on the cross often overshadowed his celebration of Christ's resurrection, until he gained a profound insight from Sathya Sai Baba.

### **IN GOD THERE IS NO SUFFERING - Harry Geurts – the Netherlands**

I grew up in a Roman Catholic family. People in my grandfather's generation had bought a building in Rotterdam for the St. Vincentius Union (also known around the world as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul), which gives many services to the poor. I was born and grew up in that house and my grandfather and father took care of the house.

I never knew anything else. We had a big statue of St. Vincentius there, and all I knew were people who were always talking about Jesus. I went to church

and learned to play the piano there. All of my schooling was at Catholic schools with only boys. So I have never gone to a school with girls. I have also only been in choirs with boys and men, no girls or women. Even now I am teaching here at the Sathya Sai Institute with only boys.

I have always had a love for Jesus. Because I was active in the choir and I was appointed to sing in the front, we always sang the Christmas songs and all of the Jesus songs. The director of the choir looked after us because we were the leading voices. You cannot sing without love and there was always a loving atmosphere – love was always in our singing. So the spiritual foundation was laid. When I was 13, I started my own band. And when my voice broke, I left the choir and that is when I came to the world. I had an idea of becoming a priest before then, but then I saw so many nice girls that I decided not to become a priest.

When I was in my 20's I became very depressed and disappointed by the world, and I thought that Jesus must be in the world, but I couldn't see him. I was just beginning to peep into the world at that time. I saw so many things and I thought, "Oh my God, is this it?" So I was frightened, although my music profession became my therapy. During the road of life, I got into my job and career and wanted to make it, which I did both as a musician and an educator. I had a nice house, nice car, and nice family.

In 1989, I went to a healer and while I was sitting in the waiting room I saw a photo of Swami. The lady pointed out to me that this was Sathya Sai Baba, but I didn't know anything. In 1992, I came to know Sai Baba more as I began to read John Hislop's book, "My Baba and I." Then, in 1994, I attended a session on Sathya Sai education. I was very curious to meet devotees and wanted to know what they were like. After coming to know many of them a new world opened for me.

Even though I had accomplished everything, I was not content and I knew this was not the last thing I was to do in life. Then, one thing after another happened, and one day in 1995 it all collapsed, including my marriage. I had gotten so involved with my profession that I had no relationship with Jesus and I forgot to be a human being. I wasn't a human being; I was a musician. So all of this was necessary to get me back.

One year after the big collapse in my life, I received an invitation to go to India to play in the symphony orchestra at the ashram during Gurupoornima in 1996. This was the beginning of everything for me. Swami was like mother and father for me. First like mother and then later like father. He called me for interviews and spoke to me and healed my leg. I prayed to Swami to see Jesus as he was. One day he asked me to give a talk, and after the talk he made a chain for me with a cross. This signified to me a new start in my relationship with Jesus.

Last year, the students asked me to participate in a Good Friday programme, to talk about my experience with Jesus. At that programme, I told about how I was always in tears as a young boy during the week leading up to Jesus'

crucifixion. On Good Friday, I was always in agony looking at my watch, thinking about the time that Jesus died. I always died somehow myself; it was terrible for me. Even though Palm Sunday celebrations started joyously and we were very happy as we gave fruit to all the elderly houses, it would end in this very agonizing time on Good Friday.

Then I told how in 1992, I had read in John Hislop's book where Swami said that Jesus did not suffer at the crucifixion – and Swami said the same thing at Christmas in 1998. I grew up with such agony around seeing Jesus on the cross. I had no other view. And then Swami said that Jesus did not suffer. It turned everything around for me and it took time for me to really realise it, because it had been so impressed on my mind.

I cannot describe my feeling; it is such an emotional thing for me when I realised that Jesus did not suffer. Yes, Jesus did take on the world karma in those days and he died, but this is the same thing that Swami is doing now. Swami knows what he is doing, just like Jesus knew when he sent Judas away to betray him. I concluded my short speech with a question to Swami, "Please Swami tell us more about the life of Jesus." I wasn't expecting that he would stand up and give a discourse, but I wanted to know more.

Months later when I returned to the Netherlands I went to the Sai Center and Luc Courtois let me know that the book he had written about Swami's teachings about Jesus had come out on Good Friday. I took this book with me the next time I came to the ashram and read it twice. I then presented it to Swami for His blessings and he said, "Very, very happy."

One thing I have learned by being with Swami is how to calm myself down when someone is against me. I can now take time to see them with love, this is very important to me. I have a tendency of wanting to overreact and argue back. I now see that there is really no enemy; the only enemy is myself. Every person is just a mirror for us. To understand the love that Swami and Jesus talk about takes time. So I am trying to understand this love.

To see Swami as the father of Jesus is to me the most logical thread between Jesus and Swami. For me, Jesus has always been like a friend. This is the same for me with Swami. Last year I felt that Swami had become my friend. The moment I met Swami I realised that His voice has always been there and has always guided me in my life.

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## **PASSAGES RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

*Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic organisation, leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to those who are needy and suffering in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.*

(Society of St. Vincent de Paul)

*All religions and scriptures agree that going to the aid of fellow-beings in times of need and saving them from distressing situations is the greatest virtue of a person. What Jesus preached was in accord with these basic teachings of all religions. Seeing his acts of love and kindness, people declared that he was a "messenger of God." Give happiness to those who are suffering and consider every activity as God's work.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 Dec 1982, 1996, 1998)

*Wherever you may be, go into the society and render social service in all possible ways, with faith in God and in a selfless spirit. The fulfilment of human life consists in the service that man renders, without any thought of return, in an attitude of selflessness. Service rendered in this spirit sheds light in the dark interior of man; it widens the heart and purifies the impulses and confers lasting bliss (ananda).*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 Dec 1970, 1989)

*When Jesus reached the stage of unity with God, he had no suffering at all. He was blissful and was prepared for anything. Even at the time of crucifixion, Jesus was smiling, because he realised that he was not the body. Body is bound to perish, but the in-dweller has no birth and death. Truly speaking, the in-dweller is God Himself. Jesus understood that his body was merely a vesture, and that God was the in-dweller.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 December 1998)

*God takes upon Himself the pain and sorrow of the world in order to prepare the hearts of men for love! But, when you look at the truth squarely in the face, you will know that in God there is no "suffering" and that you too have no reason to suffer! The entire world is the play of love! You suffer on account of love. It is love, love, right through – there is no reason for sorrow or pain or suffering!*

( Sathya Sai Baba – 25 December 1970)

*But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

(Jesus – Luke 6:27-28, 31)

*I have called you friends, for everything I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

(Jesus – John 15:15)

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Sharing Harry Geurt's love for Jesus is Father Charles Ogada, a Roman Catholic priest. For him, such love brings us all alive in our oneness with God and with our neighbours. During an interview with Radio Sai's host Dr. Venkataraman, Father Ogada shared how his experiences with Sathya Sai Baba helped him take his priestly vows more deeply, and to live a life of intimacy with God.

## **LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART**

### **Father Charles Ogada – Nigeria**

I was first introduced to Sathya Sai Baba by a priest who was a lecturer at the seminary I was attending. He gave me the book "Sai Baba: the Man of Miracles" by Howard Murphet to read. I wasn't so struck by the miracles themselves, but realised that they were signals to a higher reality. To me that higher reality is the One that pervades all things, God Himself, the unseen that is behind the seen. The miracles are different, they are things in the hand, but there is a hand holding it. This really pushed me into an inner inquiry about that reality.

As a Catholic priest I had thought about this before, but not in this context. Before this it was an intellectual thinking; now it became a passion. This was an eye-opening in my life – the fruit was ripe to fall. I was really drawn into a search of inner inquiry about these realities.

In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12 verse 29, a young scribe who was a teacher of the Jewish law came to Jesus and asked him a question, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus looked at him and replied from the Old Testament, "Listen Israel, the Lord your God is one, there is no other. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. There is no other commandment greater than this."

When I came to Baba's teachings, I discovered what this meant. For example, the first call Jesus made was, "Listen Israel." It was a call to silence, to the sound of OM. The other one is that the Lord is one; there is no other reality. All of the other things are illusions; they are non-existent.

And to love this One with all your heart, that is bhakti yoga, with all your mind that is jnana yoga, and with all your strength is karma yoga. And to love your neighbour as yourself is to realise that the same Self in others is the same Self (Atma) in you.

In one of Baba's Telegu poems from Sai Gems, he said,

"I am telling you once and for all in one sentence: the one quintessential teaching of all scriptures is that you should firmly feel your identity with the One and the same Self (Atma) that is present in all beings."

This is the same sermon that Jesus Christ gave to that young man who asked him for a summary of all the scriptures.

I have never had any doubts about the Divinity of Baba. It is because I feel that my connection with Baba is not just this incarnation; that I have come across him before. For me Baba is love; that is how I know his Divinity. Love is unity; love arises from the realization of oneness. The greatest oneness is to realise the oneness with God. That is the greatest love.

One experience with Baba that has really influenced me was during my first interview. I am a Catholic priest and I belong to a congregation where we take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. I was sitting in the general interview room and Baba called me aside and whispered to me, "How are your wives?" I was taken aback and thought, "Oh my God." I said, "Baba I don't have any wives." I then remained silent and he began talking to other people.

After a while he again asked me the same question. I kept quiet because I knew he was up to something. Later on in a subsequent interview he said to me, "Sometimes you want to marry, sometimes you don't want to marry. You are mine."

My experiences with Baba have made me live the life of intimacy and to take the vows more deeply. For example, there is a lot of talk about celibacy now. The problem is not with the priests; the problem is that they are expected to live a life without being taught how to live that life. So life is like a suppression for them. Baba teaches us how to transform the lower energy into a higher energy so it becomes a flow and you can begin to live life in full without thinking that celibacy is a punishment. This experience has helped me gradually step-by-step to move into a whole new view of life.

From my own experiences with Baba, I have also learned that the meaning of the vow of poverty we take is to act without ego. Poverty is being above praise and blame, above success and failure, establishing yourself in the equanimity of spirit. Because of Baba I can now live this kind of life in full awareness.

There is no contradiction for me between the teachings of Jesus Christ and Baba. When I began to read the Bible in light of Swami's teachings, I found a lot of new meaning, a lot of things that I never expected like these insights. I believe that there are so many problems in the world because of ignorance, because of the lack of spiritual inquiry. We are inquiring about the objective world, but not spirituality.

What Africa needs now is Baba. The problems in Africa are not poverty or wars; the problem in Africa is spirituality. When we know God and we know that we are God and everyone else is God, then all these wars and poverty will go. When I know that the same spirit is in others that I have within myself, when I realise that oneness, then there is no room for me to harm you.

Baba has given us many practical steps to begin solving these problems in Africa, like education. This is the greatest - taking the young people and starting when they are small to train them in the path of human values and spirituality. Another part is that although the African man is a very religious man, he still needs spiritual nourishment to satisfy his hunger. Self-less service without any ego does this.

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## **PASSAGES RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

(Moses – Deuteronomy 6:5)

*Love your neighbour as yourself.*

(Moses – Leviticus 19:18)

*One of the Pharisees, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

(Jesus – Matthew 22:37-40)

*The heart of Jesus was pure and calm. Hence it is honoured as sacred. We must make our hearts sacred so that either we merge in Jesus or Jesus merges in us. When we merge, it is called devotion (bhakti); to say Jesus awakened in us is the path of wisdom (jnana).*

( Sathya Sai Baba – 25 December 1984)

*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."*

(Jesus – Luke 22:19-20)

*Jesus said that the bread taken in the "last supper" was his flesh, and the wine, his blood. He meant that all beings alive with flesh and blood are to be treated as he himself and that no distinction should be made of friend or foe, we or they. Every body is his body, sustained by the bread; every drop of blood flowing in the veins of every living being is his, animated by the activity that the wine imparted to it. That is to say, every man is Divine and has to be revered as such.*

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Just as Divine love brings about the experience of oneness with God, it also awakens the awareness of the Divinity in one and all. This was the discovery not only of Father Ogada, but also Bernice Mead, National Coordinator of the “Education in Human Values” programme in the USA. During her interview with Dr. Venkataraman of Radio Sai, she tells us how, through Sathya Sai Baba’s presence in her life, she transformed her fundamentalist Christian background into a broad understanding that we are all Divine.

## **YOU ARE GOD, ALL ARE GOD**

### **Bernice Mead – USA**

I found out about Swami in 1977 and made my first pilgrimage in 1978. I am a very atypical devotee because I come from a large farm family in mid-America with 11 children and was raised as a fundamentalist Christian. When I met my husband he wasn’t interested in organised religion and so we began to search for truth. We first went to more liberated Christian churches but could not find what we were looking for there. So we started taking meditation classes.

I had been taught all my life that Jesus was the only way. And not only was Jesus the only way, but the church that I attended was the only church. I questioned this from the time I was a teenager. It seemed unreal to me that everyone who loved God could not have a chance to be with God. So I wanted to know the truth and what this was all about. Could it possibly be that the little fundamentalist church I was going to was the truth, the only truth?

I had just had my first child and I was going through post-partum depression, so I was really searching for something besides what I had. Eventually, I heard about a meeting to be held by a man who had been to Sai Baba and who was going to tell about his experiences.

I went because my husband wanted to go, but I didn’t think that I would hear anything of relevance. We were both captivated by his stories, which were only telling about his experiences. We spent the whole evening there. We smelled a sweet jasmine right away; we thought it must have been incense, but it wasn’t. When we left that evening around 11pm, we felt excited and took three books with us. One of them was the “Holy Man and the Psychiatrist” by Samuel Sandweiss.

I read the book and right away I wanted to come to India. I felt so drawn and so much in love with Sai Baba. I wanted to know who he was and whether he was for real. Even though I am still mystified by him, I love him dearly.

Back in 1978, coming to the ashram was very difficult. The weather was hot and humid, the food was bothering me, and there were 14 of us in the flat that

I stayed in. I still had a lot of doubts and there was a time when I wasn't sure if I was in the right place.

Swami called all of the Westerners into the mandir and gave us a discourse. Then he came around and gave each of us little packets of vibhuti. I said to him, "Thank you." That afternoon I wrote him a letter and went early to darshan so I could get the first row. He came and took my letter and said, "Thank you" to me. So my first words to him were thank you and his first words to me were thank you in return. This made me very happy.

During my second trip in 1979, I had to go alone after all of my friends had come home. One morning while sitting under his window where he lived in the mandir at the time, I had this thought, "What if he isn't who he says he is? What if he is the anti-Christ?" I didn't know where these thoughts were coming from because I had been so happy and so thrilled at being there.

I got up and went back to my room where I wept and wept. While I was there I prayed very hard, I prayed to this God that I had prayed to all my life, somewhere out there in space. I decided that I should also pray to Jesus and so I brought Jesus into the prayer also. When I went to darshan, Swami called me for an interview, which was a fulfilment of my dream. He talked to me about all of the doubts I had had in my mind that morning.

There was a part of me that knew that he knew all that I was experiencing – but to experience that was another thing. He said to me, "I hear all of the prayers, I even hear the prayers to Jesus." So I knew that he was telling me that he had been with me that morning and knew that I had prayed to Jesus. Then he made me candy. My earthly father owned a grocery store and used to bring me candy when I was a child. This was like my earthly father giving me something so I would feel better. I had been crying all morning, and I was like a child at his feet, so captivated and so much in love.

The one lesson of Swami's that I find most important is that we are God, we are all God. Elsie Cowan was a very good friend of mine and she used to say all the time, "You are God. You are God. You are no different than God." And God is love, so love and God are synonymous. To me this is the richest and the best teaching.

I have had wonderful experiences with children where I have learned the lesson that we are all God. When I taught kindergarten with six-year-old children we would have a few minutes each day of quiet time. One day a sweet little boy wanted to share what he had experienced that day during the quiet time. He said, "I saw God." I asked him if he could tell us what God looked like and he said, "Yes, yes" and he put his hands over his head and said, "He had a lot of black hair and a blue business suit."

One day while I was walking in a park, a little five-year-old came up to me on his bicycle and said, "Please go home with me I want you to meet my parents." He kept asking me to go home with him so I could meet his parents.

I didn't know this boy, he just came out of the blue while I was on my afternoon walk. I told him, "I can't go home with you today, but I'll come this way tomorrow and I promise I'll go home with you tomorrow."

But he kept begging me, "Please, oh please." He was such a cute little mischievous kid, so I said to him, "Say, do you know Baba?" I don't even know why I said this; it was out of the blue. He jumped off of his bicycle and said, "Yes, I do! He's Jesus Christ and all his angels!" He got back on his bicycle and rode off and I never saw him again.

I am the national coordinator of the EHV programme in the USA , and I travel through the states giving teacher training classes. In 1979 I started one of the first Bal Vikas children's classes in southern California. We would sing a lot of songs and began to learn bhajans.

We all learned and grew together. One time I had a little boy who was quite precocious and he gave his school teachers difficulty in the classroom. After he had attended Bal Vikas for a year, his school teacher told me, "I don't know what you're doing, but whatever you are doing, keep it up. I have seen such a wonderful change in this child this year." These are the kinds of experiences I have had with children where for some moment in time they knew. God has had wonderful fun with me through children.

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## **PASSAGES RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

*I and the Father are one. I am in My Father and you are in Me and I am in you.*

(Jesus – John 10:30 ; 14:20 )

*You are in God and God is in you. Understand this truth and act accordingly. You should be able to say with conviction that you are the spark of the Divine. You should say with courage and conviction that God is everywhere. You must fill yourself with the feeling that God is in you, beside you, around you, and with you wherever you go.*

( Sathya Sai Baba – 15 Jan 2000, 25 Dec 1985)

*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*

(Jesus – Matthew 19:14)

*Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

(Jesus – Matthew 18:3-4)

*You must take shelter in the Divine principle to escape from the storms of life. You will be welcomed by the Divine only when, as Jesus said, you become like a child. They have the sense of wonder, fresh and free; they have the simple, sincere eagerness to know; they have reverence towards knowledge and power. Christ treated the children with tenderness, and advised all the grownups to become like children, so that they may be saved.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 23 May 1967, 22 Nov 1969, 23 April 1967)

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Through children, God revealed to Bernice many new insights about the nature of God. But William Miller – guest faculty member in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning’s MBA programme since 1999, and co-author of *Human Values at Work* – had to transcend some deeply in-grained childhood beliefs in order to “see the Light” and “be the Light.”

## **I AM IN THE LIGHT, THE LIGHT IS IN ME, I AND THE LIGHT ARE ONE**

### **William Miller – USA**

As I look back on my upbringing, I was “very Roman Catholic” – even co-president of my parish’s teen youth organisation when I was 17. I was disciplined and respectful in my relations with girls and elders – wanting to be known as a good person, and to me the ten commandments were the perfect “measuring stick” to determine if I was being good. I particularly strived to be a peaceful person, not ever wanting to hurt anyone.

But this determination did not come from a positive love for God and others; rather it was based in a self-dislike and self-criticism which I wanted to overcome. My experience of life and being a Christian was coloured by a strong belief that my nature, particularly as a male, was “selfish, hedonistic, and environmentally destructive” – and that my job as a Christian was to *overcome* my nature. God was “out there” or “up there” – distant, judging, punishing, loving you only if you were good.

After going to college in the mid 1960’s, I found myself becoming “agnostic”, neither believing nor disbelieving in God. I just didn’t know. While I enjoyed being with friends and the priest at my university’s Catholic centre, I fell away from the Catholic religion. I felt attracted to Zen Buddhism as a practical “substitute” to nurture my inner growth, particularly as author Alan Watts introduced it to the West. In fact, it was his book “Myth and Ritual in Christianity” that first renewed my appreciation for the spirit of Jesus’ teachings. In 1982, a deeper level of spirituality began to stir within me.

I found myself saying the word “Divine” without consciously thinking about it ahead of time. A new joy began to well up inside of me and I would make up little songs such as “Divine love, expressing through me, always draws to me all that I need.”

The night just before Easter Sunday that year, I “accidentally” (are there any coincidences or accidents?) came across a film on TV called “The Lost Years of Jesus”, produced by Richard Bock.

I watched the entire film, but when near the end it showed this Indian guru named Sathya Sai Baba, I paid little attention. Only later did I realise that Easter weekend was my first semi-aware contact with Baba. Later that year, a good friend was reading “Man of Miracles” by Howard Murphet, chronicling many early experiences with Sai Baba. I had never ever sought an India spiritual teacher, but I asked to borrow the book.

Halfway through reading it, I thought, “This is *very, very* difficult to believe, that such a person is walking the earth – *but if it’s true*, I don’t want to look back in 40 years and say that I missed my chance!” I knew inside that I should go see for myself, and I travelled to India seven weeks later.

My first day at Prasanthi Nilayam was the last day of a ten-day festival called Dasara. At one point during the morning function, Sai Baba went around and sprinkled everyone with blessed, holy water. I thought, “As a Catholic, this is very familiar” and I felt more at home. Then he gave a discourse. I could understand very little of the translation into English, given the interpreter’s different accent, but a few words rang crystal clear – they were the words I most needed to hear: “When you realise that God is inside you, then the more you go into yourself, the closer to God you become... and the distance between your will and God’s will likewise begins to diminish.”

When the discourse was over, I walked out of the auditorium stunned and dizzy – I actually had to lean against a tree. While I had been slowly rooting out of my psyche the childhood belief that God was distant and my very nature was sinful, Sai Baba’s words were like the hammer blow that finally split the rock. I had been opened up, healed, and reborn onto a spiritual path that ultimately led me back to a new relationship with Jesus and Christianity.

Ever since I was a 13-year-old attending the Catholic Jesuit High School, I participated once a year in some kind of spiritual retreat. In college and afterwards, these retreats took the form of “human potential” seminars. Now, I made India my annual retreat. I could tell right away that being around Sathya Sai Baba would be the most nourishing way I could find to grow spiritually.

Each year when I would come for 10 to 14 days, on my annual work vacation, I would select a book to bring as my core spiritual reading. In the mid-1980’s, I read the books of two 16th century Spanish Christian mystics: St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Both spoke about the “marriage” of the soul with God, and that the fundamental message of Jesus was the path of Divine love.

The hours waiting for Sai Baba to emerge from his residence to give *Darshan* were often exquisite times for me to ponder and pursue a new understanding of who Jesus was – through the experience of these two saints who devoted their entire lives to love and know Jesus, and to follow the path he laid down

for us. Sai Baba often spoke of three stages of spiritual growth: “I am in the Light,” “The Light is in Me,” and “I and the Light are One.” St. John of the Cross spoke of spiritual growth in terms of putting a log on a fire: at first, the fire has to heat up the log; then the log begins to emit flames, but only with the helpful heat of the coals; finally, the log is fully ablaze so that there is no distinguishing the “log” from the rest of the fire. I saw that Sai Baba and St. John of the Cross were describing the same three stages. And when Sai Baba explained how Jesus’ life showed us these same stages – as “Messenger of God,” “Son of God,” and “I and the Father are One” – my faith grew that Jesus really could be a model to inspire and guide my spiritual growth.

Later, when I read, as if for the first time, Jesus saying, “I am in the Father and you are in Me and I am in You,” I directly experienced that I could travel the pathway with Jesus through these stages, ultimately ending with knowing our union with God. Thus, for me, Jesus’ life and teachings, and the life and teachings of Sai Baba, became mirror reflections of each other. And when I read Jesus’ words about a baptism by fire – “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and how greatly and sorely I am urged on until it is accomplished!”— I could rejoice, rather than be afraid, that this baptism of fire would ultimately turn this William-log into a heart ablaze with Divine love.

However, the idea that this journey could end with the experience that “God and I are one” – was quite difficult for me to “warm up to.” My upbringing said that this was blasphemy, the statement of an ego-out-of-control. But then, Sai Baba led me back to my Christian tradition where “union with God” was the ultimate aim of every mystic. I also began to see how other teachings of Sai Baba were alive and well in the Christian tradition. For example, he has often said that the most effective means of spiritual growth is repetition or singing of the names of God, thus promoting a continuous awareness of God’s presence.

When I read the book, “Way of a Pilgrim” – written in the late 1800’s by a Russian who constantly recited the “Jesus Prayer” (“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”) – I could only smile in recognition of what Sai Baba’s advice could mean for a Christian. Yet all of this has been just the beginning. My journey with Sai Baba and Jesus, which started (at least in my own awareness) one Easter weekend in 1982, continues forward – my own version of what it means to experience “heaven on earth.”

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## **PASSAGES RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

*There was a huge halo of splendour illuminating the sky over the village when Christ was born. This meant that he who was to overcome the darkness of evil and ignorance, had taken birth and that he will spread the light of love in the heart of man and councils of humanity.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 24 December 1972)

*When we read the Bible, we look at Christ as an ideal figure who proclaimed truth to the world. The moment the story of Christ's birth to the Virgin Mary is revealed, all those who follow Christianity rightly feel very proud, and feel that this mysterious birth is the result of some Divine power and that Mary was a very sacred woman.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – Summer Showers 1974)

*Like the fragrance in the bud of a flower, Jesus' Divinity was evident from his boyhood. ...Jesus displayed such sacred qualities as compassion, love and sacrifice. The inspiration for this came from his mother Mary, who taught him such good qualities as truth, kindness, compassion and justice.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 December: 1991, 1994)

*When Jesus proclaimed that he was the messenger of God, he also wanted to emphasise that everyone is a messenger of God and has to speak, act and think like one. This is the true spiritual discipline of selfless work, prayer, service to humanity and meditation.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 December 1978)

*When spiritual progress is furthered Jesus asserted that each one can recognise all as sons of God, children of God, brothers and sisters of oneself. When you lead a life of purity and morality, you are entitled to regard yourselves as "sons of God." God is the embodiment of love and you should not do anything that is contrary to the love that God represents.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 December 1978, 1984)

*Finally, when knowledge ripens into wisdom and the goal of spiritual wisdom is reached, each one realises, "I and my Father are one," just as Jesus ultimately declared. Jesus and his Father were one. You and God are also one and you can be aware of it. You must take note of this oneness. You must proclaim your oneness and not your diversity.*

(Baba – 25 December: 1978, 1997, 1984)

*Jesus: ...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I have given the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.*  
(John 17:21, 23)

*St. Paul : He who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*

(1 Corinthians 6:17)

*St. John : God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.*

(1 John 4:16)

*St. Teresa of Avila : The Lord appears in the centre of the soul, not in an imaginative vision... One can say no more than that the soul, I mean the spirit, is made one with God.*

*Maximus the Confessor: When a human being gives himself entirely to God's love and is united with him by grace, he penetrates entirely into God and becomes God, without losing his identity.*

*Angelius of Silesius: Fire melts and makes One; if you rejoin Origin, your spirit with God's will be melted in One.*

*St. Catherine of Genoa: I am so... submerged in His immense love... my being is God, not by simple participation, but by a true transformation of my being! My Me is God, nor do I recognise any other Me except my God Himself.*

*Meister Eckhart: God gives birth to the Son as you, as me, as each one of us. As many beings – as many gods in God. In my soul, God not only gives birth to me as his son, he gives birth to me as himself, and himself in me. I find this divine birth that God and I are the same... Here, in my own soul, the greatest of all miracles has taken place – God has returned to God!*

*The prayer of the heart provided me with such delights that I doubted if there were anyone happier than I on earth. ...all that was around me appeared to me in a delightful form, and all prompted me to love God and to thank him – people, trees, plants, animals, everything was akin to me. On all, I found the impress of the name of Jesus Christ.*

(The Way of a Pilgrim)

*There can be no better panacea for our suffering than chanting the Lord's name ("namasmarana"). No greater or more potent weapon can even be there to help man surmount his obstacles. When the mind is engaged in the recital of God's Glory and the names of God, there can be no temptation to stray into the rake's highway of insane desire. It will be of considerable help to establish the feeling of the constant presence of God, within you and without. Let each and every cell of your body be filled with His Divine Name. Nothing else can give you the bliss, courage, and strength that you derive from namasmarana.*

.....(Sathya Sai Baba – 16 May 2002, 19 Oct 1969, 14 April 2002).....

Just as William had to overcome early childhood beliefs, in order to love Jesus and himself, Sylvia Alden – choir director for the Prasanthi Christmas adult choir – struggled with beliefs about Jesus that she was taught as a child. She had a healing experience of Divine love in the presence of Sathya Sai Baba that helped her understand how she could live a Christ-like life.

## **GOD IS PURE LOVE**

### **Sylvia Alden – USA**

I was brought up on a farm in the mid-western part of the United States during the time after the Great Depression and that which preceded the Second World War. Many were struggling to recover from the depression and the fear of the war was strong in our rural community. My maternal grandparents became born-again Christians and my paternal grandfather was a Congregational minister. Their concept of Jesus, and by extension of God, was of Divine beings one could never expect to please. One could only fear and obey. Love was not emphasised.

As a child, these grandparents and their religious beliefs had a marked and indelible impression on me. My parents also followed these teachings and I wanted very much to please them all. Somehow, I always fell short of the mark. Jesus became someone who knew everything I did and was marking it down so that come the Day of Judgment, he could tell God all the bad things I had done. As I was not the most perfectly behaved child, Jesus had a lot on his list. He became someone to fear and dislike. I wondered how Jesus could be so wonderful if he would tell on a little kid.

As part of the religious training that was given to me by my parents and grandparents, I was taught that unless one became a born-again Christian one would be condemned to hell's fire and damnation for all of eternity. There was no other choice. It was extremely confusing to me that the same Jesus who was held up to love people so much that he was willing to be crucified would also condemn those who had never even heard his name. As I reached my teenage years, I struggled to put these teachings into some semblance of logic that I could fully accept. I went to church, sang in the choir, read my Bible, and acted "as if" I truly believed the sermons I heard. The one positive was the music.

I loved the hymns that spoke of the love and glory of God. I drew comfort from the music. I convinced others that I was a good Christian. I felt like a hypocrite because my actions were lip service only. My actions were just for show. I still could not accept the idea that a person who loved Buddha or some other form of God would be headed for hell.

When I married and had children, I was firm in the conviction that my children would not grow up in fear of God. I wanted them to be free of the judgment of the beliefs of others. I doubted that if God/Jesus existed, they really cared what we did. Why else would babies die, people fight in wars, and good people suffer? As much as I attempted to push God to the back of the closet, He refused to stay there. He showed Himself to me in music and nature.

I loved nature in all its many forms and music was my healing place. The yearning for the Supreme Being that created this beautiful universe and populated it with people of such diversity and beauty grew. I was searching for what would ring as truth within my heart, a truth that I could share with my

children which would allow them to love others irrespective of their religious convictions.

I began to study Eastern religions, starting with the teachings of Aurobindo. His teachings touched a place within that caused the door of my heart to crack open a bit. I first heard of Sri Sathya Sai Baba in 1972. "Nice," I thought. "There is another saint like Aurobindo." I continued to read and study the wisdom of many Indian saints. Peace was growing in my heart. I studied meditation and even had the temerity to teach meditation classes.

In 1978, I made my first journey to the Beloved Divine Feet of Swami. He looked at me and I knew that He knew everything I had ever said or done, would ever say or do. And miracle of all miracles, He loved me. He was all that I had ever thought God should or could be – love, pure love. There would never be condemnation or exclusion from Him. My heart was full to overflowing. God was here on this earth and I had seen Him, talked with Him, felt His touch and I was free from fear and doubt. Joy is too small of a word or concept to express my feelings. I was truly home.

Swami's teachings are universal. They allowed me to look more objectively at the teachings of the Christian religion. His discourses on the life of Jesus brought the real Jesus to life for me. I could now read the Bible with an openness that was lacking before. The actual sayings of Jesus reflected Swami's words. I sang the hymns and drew great joy and comfort, especially when I knew that those words were describing my Dearest Lord.

I no longer closed my mind to the tenets of Christianity. Rather, my understanding of Christianity was enlarged to be defined as living a Christ-like life. Jesus lived a life of love, forgiveness and complete surrender to God. I now realise that those who condemn others' beliefs don't really reflect the teachings of Jesus. The love that Swami embodies and showers on us all allowed me to revisit my early upbringing. I came to realise that the God/Jesus that I had feared and denied was nothing but the extension of my family's fear and their need to make sense of a world that was lacking love.

Further, their love for me took the form of needing me to be like them, to believe like them and to ensure my going to heaven with them. They didn't want me to burn in hell for eternity. When I could look at their beliefs from this perspective, I was able to understand them and their actions. My fear and distrust of Jesus receded. My family continued in their beliefs and saw my love for Swami as an indication that I was certainly on my way to hell. I felt sorry that they were not able to see what I saw in Him. I had felt pure selfless love the likes of which I could not have imagined. It saddened me that they were not able to join me in this glorious journey.

I don't just believe any more – I know that our Beloved Bhagawan is indeed the Father of Jesus as He is the father and mother of all. I also know that since the passing of my parents and grandparents, they will have had the opportunity to see and know Swami as I see and know Him as the embodiment of total love and compassion, the supreme one who created and

sustains all. This brings me great comfort and allows me to let go of the sadness that was a large part of my younger life.

What relationship do I have with Jesus now? I see him as an older brother who exemplified complete surrender to God. I look at his dedication to God and am humbled. I no longer think he will give God a list of my misdeeds. I am grateful that Jesus taught and lived the way of love. I am comfortable with the understanding that for some people Jesus is the only way, just as I am comfortable with the understanding that there is a religion that is suitable for all at whatever stage of spiritual life they may be. My perception of Jesus and what he exemplified has freed me – by his example of unconditional love and obedience – to completely open my heart to his father.

I offer my complete gratitude and overwhelming love to Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, my dearest and most beloved Swami. He has given me a life sweeter than I could have ever dreamed of. By His Grace, He is truly my very best friend.

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#### **PASSAGES RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

Sai Baba says that Divine love has three qualities – changeless, selfless, and fearless:

*Love knows only to give, not to receive. Love does not seek anything in return. Such Love is free from fear. These are the basic features of true Love.*

*( Sathya Sai Baba – 12 July 1988)*

*Jesus exemplified these three qualities of Divine love throughout his life...*

*Changeless:*

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

*(Jesus – Matthew 5:44)*

*Selfless:*

*I am among you as one who serves. Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.*

*(Jesus – Luke 22:27 and Matthew 20:26 -27)*

*Fearless:*

*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*

(Jesus – John 15:13)

*You should sing God's name with love. You will see the manifestation of Divinity with your physical eyes when you sing His glory with all love. Many noble souls merged in God through love.*

*It is the tongue that tastes the delicacy and it is the heart that tastes love. The taste of love is peerless. It is sweeter than even nectar. Love alone can match love. God is love, love is God. Live in love. Whatever you sing, sing with love. God sees your feelings, not the rhythm or tune. If your feelings are pure, God will take care of everything.*

*Scatter the seeds of Love in dreary, desert hearts. Then, sprouts of Love will make wastes green with joy, blossoms of Love will make the air fragrant, rivers of Love will murmur along the valleys, and every bird, beast, and child will sing the song of Love.*

*Emerge from devotional singing with a greater measure of Love!*

*(Sathya Sai Baba – 14 Mar 1999, 14 April 1999, 4 October 1970, 23 July 1971)*

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Sylvia experienced a breakthrough in her life, but it was one she had been seeking since her teenage years. For Victor Kanu, co-founder of The African Institute of Sathya Sai Education, the breakthrough came much more as a surprise. During his interview with Radio Sai, hosted by Dr. Venkataraman, Victor tells how Sathya Sai Baba transformed his life into one of selfless service, just as Jesus taught his disciples.

## **HANDS THAT HELP ARE HOLIER THAN LIPS THAN PRAY**

### **Victor Kanu – Zambia**

I started my career as a schoolteacher and headmaster of a large Roman Catholic Primary school in Lunsá, Sierra Leone, before proceeding to Oxford University in England for further studies in philosophy, politics and economics. After that I became my country's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. It was after that that I came in contact with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in a miraculous way. This was in 1975.

I was living a very high life, being a High Commissioner; the booze was a regular thing. In a dream two angels took me to an unknown place which I later discovered to be Prasanthi Nilayam itself. They left me at the main gate of the ashram, where I met all of the religions of the world including my African ancestors. When I woke up, of course it brought about a tremendous change in me that I could not explain how or why it happened. The things I used to do, like going to the parlour and smoking, gradually faded away. This is how Baba first called me. This was an extraordinary turning point in my life and also a transformation point.

I began to take spiritual matters rather seriously. Even though I had been brought up as a Christian I had stopped going to church. But after this experience I began going to church and reading the Bible. And I became interested in Western philosophy. I have never seen a contradiction in going to my Christian church and following Sathya Sai Baba. In fact, the more I came to know Baba, the better I became as a Christian. I gradually loved Jesus Christ more so than ever before and I understood the Bible more so as a result of my contact with Baba. Although Baba has immense power and immense influence, he tells people to stay where they are, be a good Christian, be a good Muslim. This is in agreement with his teachings that there is only one religion, the religion of love. He says he has come to water the roots of all religions, not to uproot them, but to freshen them up.

When I finished my job as High Commissioner, Mrs. Kanu and I engaged ourselves in teaching with the Inner London Education Authority. This is what brought about our active contact with Sathya Sai Baba. In 1980 we came to Puttaparthi to attend the first overseas Bal Vikas teachers training course; we were among the first to be trained on Swami's "Education in Human Values" (EHV) programme. It was an eye-opener after that course. We liked the programme so much that we felt this was the answer for Africa. So we started implementing it in the London schools and gradually our interest in returning back to Africa grew. We saw that this was the programme that could transform, unite and also integrate Africa.

We had visited Zambia very briefly to conduct a workshop; that was all. We knew no one there except a few devotees. When we came to Baba in 1987, he placed his hands on our heads and said, "Go to Zambia and spread my message of love. Build a school. Spread my message through education and help the people." So it was Baba who chose Zambia for us. I remember during that interview that my wife was brave enough to ask Baba, "How about funding?" Swami said sell your house; if that is not enough borrow from the banks. We were delighted when he said this to us.

Being brought up as Christians, we remembered the story in the Bible where a rich man went to Jesus and said, "Oh Lord I've done this and I've done that, what else can I do to enter into the kingdom of God?" And Jesus said, "Sell all that you have and give it to the poor and follow me." After Jesus said that, the man ran away. We didn't want to run away. We were so thrilled that Sathya Sai Baba, whom we believed to be God incarnate, gave us this test and we did exactly what he told us to do.

We were not afraid at all. The country was new to us. But we remembered the stories of other disciples who had gone to distant lands, the Lord was with them and that was all we needed. We knew that Baba was with us throughout. When he told us to go to Zambia, he did not tell us we would not face difficulties. Difficulties are a part of life and when you are doing God's work you face even more difficulties and more tests. We enjoyed every bit of them; we knew this was the Lord testing us.

Our school in Zambia is called a “Miracle School”, first because of its location. The school is in a disadvantaged area of Ndola with very poor infrastructure, very poor roads. We could have built it in the middle of the city, but I sent Mrs. Kanu to ask Baba where to build it and he said to go to a poor area and start with a boy’s school. We started the primary school and collected the dropouts as our first students.

This was all part of the Divine plan. When these students took their first national tests, they had top scores. The nation was stunned. How can a school that is located in a village among poor children do so well? This was the first time in the education of Zambia that they had ever experienced this. So their results were outstanding, their character improved, they became good boys in a short period of time.

This also made a tremendous impact on their families. In one instance, a boy insisted that his father take him to school early in the morning. After dropping the boy to school, the father would report to work. Within six months the father got a promotion because he was now the first person to show up for work. There was another man who was a managing director who also dropped off his boy and started going to the office early. The late attendance of his employees reduced.

There are so many testimonies from the parents and from the children. There are boys who never used to study who now began to tell the others to study; they would give others’ advice. When we opened the school in 1992, there was only one family who could afford to bring their son in a car, but after this our school started attracting good students. Today we have 30-40 vehicles, including Land-Cruisers, coming from town to bring their children. Five years ago we started a separate school for girls. Many of our students have gone to universities and are now involved in teaching. Many are engaged in the police forces.

When we first came to Ndola, we worked on Saturday and opened the school on Saturday. Today, all of the schools are open on Saturday. From this the people came to know that part of our success was due to hard work. Work is worship, commitment. Now all of the boys and girls in Ndola take their studies much more seriously than ever before. We are also very much involved in community work.

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## **PASSAGES RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

*Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” If you want to enter life, obey the commandments. “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

(Jesus – Matthew 19: 16-17, 20-22)

*“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” I will tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*

(Jesus – Matthew 25:37, 39-40)

*“We all long for heaven where God is, but we have it in our power to be in heaven with Him at this very moment. But being happy with Him now means: loving as He loves, helping as He helps, giving as He gives, serving as He serves, rescuing as He rescues, being with Him 24 hours, touching Him in his distressing disguise. ”*

(Mother Teresa)

*In the Bible, it is recorded that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. When they asked him why he was doing so, Jesus answered: “I am washing your feet as your servant, so that you may learn to serve the world.” Love must be manifested as service to others and that service must take the form of food for the hungry, solace for the forlorn, and consolation for the sick and the suffering. Jesus wore himself out in such service to humanity.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 25 Dec 1984, 1981)

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In surrendering to Jesus’ message to “sell all you have and come follow me,” Victor has dedicated his life in selfless service to the education of poor children. Debra Miller, co-author of *Human Values at Work* and co-compiler of the *Be Like Jesus* book, likewise experienced a time of surrender, one that led her to a deeper knowledge of the universal purity of Jesus’ teachings.

## **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS WITHIN**

### **Debra Miller – USA**

I grew up in mid-America where my mother was a devoted Christian and made sure that my four siblings and I were active in all of the church activities. I loved going to our Southern Baptist church and wanted all of my friends to go to church. I played the piano at the church, and my mother taught the children’s classes and sang in the choir.

Because I had always talked to God personally even from a young age, I had never felt comfortable with the idea that God was a punishing Father and that I had to live a strict life for fear of his wrath. In my early 20’s I wanted to explore the world and became disillusioned with the attitudes of the people in our church. I decided to leave the church and focus on my college and career.

I was doing very well in my career and had a lot of worldly success to my credit when, in my early 30’s, I had a deep spiritual awakening of the heart

while at my brother's marriage. In what seemed like the twinkling of an eye, I had an experience of God's Divine love that changed the course of my life. It was like I experienced what Jesus meant when he said the kingdom of God is within us, in our hearts.

Still apprehensive about getting re-involved with the Christian religion, I began to seek the meaning of spirituality and how to comprehend and live God's will in my daily life. I first pursued metaphysical, new age teachings; and while they opened my mind and heart to new levels of awareness, I felt I needed more. I then spent many years practising the Buddhist Vipassana meditation where I would go into silence for 10 days at a time. It was in practising this meditation that I discovered how much I loved spiritual teachings that were universal, rather than the more narrow teachings that I had grown up with.

In 1999, I met my husband. After we married, he brought me to India to have Sathya Sai Baba's *Darshan*. The moment I saw Swami enter the portal of the Sai Kulwant hall, I had the same experience of God's Divine love that I had had 12 years earlier at my brother's marriage. I knew in that moment, from direct experience, that Swami was God incarnate, here to establish the kingdom of divine love within every heart and all of society.

In the year 2000, my husband and I sold or gave away our personal belongings, left our home in the USA and moved to live in the ashram. We initially immersed ourselves in Swami's teachings and the *Bhagavad Gita*. We began to devote ourselves to Swami's work, first by writing a programme with another couple from Denmark on Swami's human values for working people.

After moving to India, my sister-in-law, who is a strong Christian with an open mind, began to ask me questions about how Sai Baba's teachings correlated with Jesus' teachings. I honestly did not know how to answer her questions – once I had left my Christian upbringing, I had no wish to return to the *Bible*.

My husband, however, was very excited about her questions, as he had found his Christian upbringing had come alive for him after he began following Swami's teachings in 1982. So we began to read and study the Bible in the evenings and began reading a book we had on the teachings of Christian saints and mystics over the last 2,000 years.

In those early days, I lamented that I would much rather be studying the *Bhagavad Gita* or *Dhammapada* than the Bible, but I could intuitively feel Swami prompting us to continue our study and our talks together. One evening when we were looking at a particularly confusing statement Jesus had made, my husband related it to Swami's teachings and was able to explain it in a simple way. I was amazed. I said to him, "I could get really excited about studying the Bible if we could rewrite it from this universal perspective based on Swami's teachings."

That night when I laid down to go to sleep, I asked Swami if he would give to humanity a book that would explain the life and teachings of Jesus, just like he had done with Krishna in the *Gita Vahini*, a book he wrote through a series

of articles for the *Sanatana Sarathi* magazine many years ago. I had a longing to know the truth about Jesus and I had so many questions. I felt that Swami was the only one who could really explain that truth to me and answer my questions.

The next morning I wrote a letter to Swami and then explained to my husband what I was feeling. He felt the same longing as I. We both signed the letter and he took it to *Darshan* where Swami came to him and readily accepted the letter with a smile. We had no idea what would unfold after Swami took the letter, but we had the full faith that he would somehow answer our prayer.

Months passed, and my husband began writing a series of scripture-based essays about Jesus' teachings that would begin the process of answering the questions that my sister-in-law had asked. I was still not very interested in spending that much focus on the Bible and so I hoped that I could simply edit his essays and not have to get too involved.

One day when Swami was giving a discourse I felt that he was guiding me to stay home from *Darshan*, although at the time I didn't know why or how long it would last. The next morning I said good-bye to my husband as he left for *Darshan* and then settled in a chair and asked Swami what he wanted. His guidance was to focus on the Jesus essays my husband had begun. Over the next week, I began to delve deeply into Jesus' teachings. Using Swami's teachings to guide us, my husband and I began to discover new ways of understanding what Jesus meant.

One morning while I was alone and quietly working on an essay, I heard Swami's voice speak to me, which was very rare, as I usually only received impressions in my mind and had to use my heart and conscience to figure out how to interpret them. But the voice was clear and indisputable: "I've already said everything I need to say about Jesus, and I will show you how to put it together." I was stunned, and yet the clarity of the words and the impression that was left on my heart and mind was undeniable. I knew that Swami was giving my husband and me the assignment to be his instruments to compile his words about Jesus' life and teachings into the book I had prayed for.

I had no idea where to begin, but Swami guided me every step of the way. He chose every word and every expression exactly as he wanted it to be. In many ways the experience, which lasted five months, was like being in another time and reality. It was as if my husband and I were living, breathing and experiencing what it was like to sit at Jesus' feet and have him tell us first hand who he was and the truth of his teachings.

On a practical level, Swami first guided me to compile all of the Christmas discourses into one Word file that I could go through and select text from. As I went through each Christmas discourse, word by word, he showed me by a distinct inner impression which text to extract and how to begin putting the text together in specific groupings. As I was going through this process, Swami also identified key words that I would later use in order to find teachings he had given about Jesus or Christianity in other discourses. These were words

such as: Jesus, Christ, Messiah, Saviour, cross, crucify, Mary, etc. It was also clear to me that he only wanted his words from published discourses to be used; we were not to use any other sources where devotees were reporting what Swami had told them about Jesus.

Once all of his discourse passages were extracted, Swami began to show me how he wanted them to flow in sequence throughout the book and how to integrate them in those instances where he had told the same story with different nuances in different discourses. Throughout this time period, I was having many intimate experiences with Swami as I asked him question after question and he responded with answers to each one.

I had often heard the young men from Swami's university speak about how Swami attends to every detail of their lives and projects. I experienced this same level of Swami attending to every detail of this book, even making sure the grammar was consistent between the translations of the 60's and 70's and those of the 80's and 90's. Furthermore, instead of simply giving us a book to read about Jesus, he gave us the direct experience.

One experience I had was when I was reviewing a full draft of the book and noticed that in the English translation of Swami's discourses they had used the word "treason" instead of "blasphemy" to describe the accusation the Jews made against Jesus. I talked this over with my husband and asked for Swami's guidance to which I felt he approved of us changing the translated word from "treason" to "blasphemy."

After we had completed the transcript, received Swami's blessing of it on Christmas morning 2003, and turned it over to the Sri Sathya Sai Book Trust, we were documenting all of the discourse references when I found another place in the book where the word treason was used. At first my mind reacted and I felt frustrated that I had not done a full search of the book and replaced it everywhere. But I immediately felt Swami's prompting inside and sat down quietly to ask him if it was okay for us to change the word. I clearly received a "no". I was totally confused. It seemed incorrect to me, and I even argued in my mind to Swami that it should be changed.

Several days later we were speaking to a gentleman from the Book Trust, and my husband was explaining some Christian history about Jesus that I had never learned when I was growing up. He explained that when the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy against God, it was not a crime that he could be crucified for. So they took him to the Roman officials and told them that Jesus was asserting himself as the King of the Jews and therefore he should be crucified for treason against the Roman Empire.

I had never known this distinction before. I couldn't wait to run home and see if this is why Swami told me not to change the word. Upon checking the book, I found that when Swami had approved of the word blasphemy, it was in reference to the Jews; when he had disapproved of changing the word treason, it was in reference to the Romans.

Swami answered my every question about Jesus in a simple, clear way. He affirmed that Jesus was a Divine incarnation, a master born with a purpose to awaken humanity spiritually. He affirmed that Jesus' life showed us the path to liberation, and that the path he taught, through both his example and teachings, could lead us to full enlightenment. He clarified how Jesus always pointed the people to God and not to himself, and that he taught that we are all Divine, children of God, and that God is one. From this experience and with the presence of Swami, I have been able to continue to embrace and delve deeply into Jesus' teachings to understand the underlying purity that is universal to all of humanity.

I can now honestly embrace my Christian upbringing and understand its purpose and meaning in this "Kali-yuga" age of materialism, disillusionment, and violence – something I never dreamed would happen.

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### **PASSAGES RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

*The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, "Here it is", or "There it is", because the kingdom of God is within you.*

(Jesus – Luke 17:20-21)

*God is love dwelling in your hearts. So the kingdom of heaven is within you. Only then the sense of spiritual oneness of all mankind can be experienced. Out of that sense of unity will be born the love of God. This love will generate pure bliss in the heart that is boundless, indescribable and everlasting.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 17 July 1997, 25 December 1987, 25 December 1994)

*Two thousand years ago, when narrow pride and thick ignorance defiled mankind, Jesus came as the embodiment of love and compassion and lived among men, holding forth the highest ideals of life. He was a master born with a purpose, the mission of restoring love, charity and compassion in the hearts of man. He had no attachment to the self, nor paid any heed to joy or sorrow, loss or gain. He had a heart that responded to the call of anguish, and he went about the land preaching the lessons of love. His life was a libation for the upliftment of humanity. Jesus transformed many sinners into saints.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 24 December 1980, 25 December 1978, 25 December 1998)

*Christ sacrificed his life for the sake of those who put their faith in him. The birthday of Jesus must be celebrated by all mankind, for such Divine personalities who are born with a purpose (karana-janmas) belong to the whole human race. They should not be confined to a single country or community.*

(Sathya Sai Baba 25 December 1978)

*It is therefore appropriate that the birthday of Jesus, who felt the need to save mankind and who strove to achieve it, is celebrated. But, the celebration must take the form of adhering to the teachings, being loyal to the principles, practising the disciplines, and experiencing the awareness of the Divine that he sought to arouse. The day must be dedicated to the purification of one's passions and emotions through meditation on the virtues and values that Jesus held forth.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 24 December 1972, 25 December 1982)

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

(Jesus – Luke 9:23)

*The Christian cross is a symbol for the elimination of the ego. Let us pay attention to the sacrifice that Jesus made while free, out of his own volition: he sacrificed his happiness, prosperity, comfort, safety and position; he braved the enmity of the powerful; he renounced the "ego," which is the toughest thing to get rid of. You too have undertaken this birth for this very mission: the mission of crucifying the ego on the cross of compassion. Crucify it and be free.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 22 November 2000, 24 December 1972, 07 January 1971, November 1970)

*The ego has to sacrifice itself so that man's divine nature can manifest itself. "Mine" is death; "not mine" is immortality. The golden key of non-attachment opens the lock which keeps the door to heaven shut. "Give up; I shall fill the gap" says Jesus.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 24 November 1967)

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Debra came to appreciate how Jesus' life and teachings could enlighten us all and give meaning to our lives. Peter Phipps, author of *Sathya Sai Baba and Jesus Christ: A Gospel for the Golden Age*, had a dramatic experience of the power and love of Jesus in transforming even the most tragic of circumstances. From this experience, and his devotion to Sathya Sai Baba, he has embraced his mission of preparing Christians for the Second Coming of Christ.

## **FATHERHOOD OF GOD AND BROTHERHOOD OF MAN**

### **Peter Phipps – New Zealand**

(Excerpts from Chapter 1: My Personal Transformation – *Sathya Sai Baba and Jesus Christ: A Gospel for the Golden Age*)

My origins are within a fairly traditional Christian setting, having been raised as an Anglican, confirmed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, and having struggled with my faith for years. At one stage I had applied for admission to Holy Orders (Anglican terminology for ordination as a priest), and came within six weeks of admission to theological college before a letter from my vicar to the bishop led to an abandonment of these plans.

However, I maintained my interest, and continued to study theology and comparative religions. My faith waxed and waned over the years. I felt compelled to believe in God as a logical probability, but had little sense of a personal relationship with the Deity. I believed in a Creator, but not the Personal Guide, Friend and Heavenly Father whom I have now come to know.

I qualified as a psychologist in the early 1960's and worked in the prison system, the New Zealand Army and private practice before I joined The Salvation Army as a salaried employee. I still believed in a Creator, but could find little evidence that He (or She) took a personal interest in what we do, any more than the force of gravity distinguishes between one person and another.

Then my life and belief system changed, literally between one day and the next. In 1990, a man gunned down 13 people. I was one of a team of three on a Crisis Intervention Team sent into the area to counsel the victims. We were part of a Victim's Task Force established for that purpose. Thus began the most harrowing and spiritual two and a half days of my life. We counselled over 100 people between us, as victims told us their story and received affirmation for their feelings. We saw victory over tragedy again and again.

We have accepted such violence in Beirut or Northern Ireland and have become immunised to it. I now know that such horror affects real people who also weep. The world does not have to be so unloving and hateful. The team learned that with love all things seem possible. I have the sense that this Earth could be Paradise if only we loved one another. The gospel seems so practical, so "here and now", so non-mystical. Heaven does not have to be in another plane or in another place; we already have it, if we only knew it.

All of us on the team felt that we were operating with a power beyond our own. The energy available to us was phenomenal! We knew that others were praying for us and thinking about us, and this helped. The power seemed mightier than that available at most times. I felt that the power of Christ was available to use directly, and it contained wisdom, power, love and caring.

On the second morning, I woke up with the thought that the easy way of working, using (or being used by) a Higher Power, was the way that Jesus must have worked. The whole Christian story made sense at a higher level than before. We saw people turn around from a state of confusion and shock to positive action. Some people have told us we were wonderful – but we do not feel at all wonderful, rather that we have access to a wonderful power which we may rightly call the Holy Spirit. What we feel is the great privilege to have been of use to others and to the Lord.

On the way home after the events described above, I thanked God in my heart for the help He provided, and I got a very clear reply: "I am greater than you know; seek Me out and find Me." This message implied that there was the possibility of finding the source of the message, and so I determined to explore and find the Source.

I had had the sense for a long time that Jesus was not fully revealed in the teachings of the churches or in the Gospels of the New Testament. Somehow the essence of the Man and the Revelation of the God seemed a bit misty. In search of the deeper truths I started in a bookshop dealing in esoteric texts. My intention was to sift through everything I could find no matter what the origin and use my discrimination to sort out the truth from the bizarre. I had had such a taste of Jesus that I was confident of knowing the difference. In the bookshop, one text nearly leaped into my hand.

I saw it on the shelf, a book called "The Jesus Mystery" by Richard and Janet Bock. My hand grew very warm when I reached for it, and I was confident it would help me. The book stated that Jesus is written as "Issa" in Tibet and "Isa" in Indian languages, and means "Divine Mother". The same term can also be written as "Sai". The book then suggested that Sathya Sai Baba, a modern spiritual teacher in India, is the prophesied returned Lord come to save mankind from the present crisis.

The name "Baba" is said to be the same as "Abba", which Jesus used when addressing the Father. It seemed important for me to meet this Sathya Sai Baba if possible and so I joined a trip to India to spend some time at His ashram. If He really is the Lord returned to earth, I wanted to check first-hand for myself.

My experience in India was right out of Biblical times. To see subsistence farming as Jesus would have seen it, herds of goats foraging for food on poor soil, primitive irrigation techniques as used thousands of years ago, and real desert communities was somehow exciting in its novelty. Assembled for Christmas celebration were 20,000 people from all countries in the world and most of the world's faiths. The trip was essentially a spiritual pilgrimage, and we learned a lot about Sai Baba's teachings through study of His books, lectures for foreign visitors, discussion with others and hearing His discourses.

At the ashram one heard constantly about miracles performed, people healed and extraordinary phenomena. I saw Sai Baba manifesting vibhuthi (sacred ash with healing and spiritual properties) with a wave of His hand several times. I came away convinced that Sathya Sai Baba is the Lord as prophesied in Chapter 19 of the Book of Revelation. Sai Baba says that he has not come to create a new religion, but to revive the old ones, "to make a Christian a better Christian, a Moslem a better Moslem, and a Hindu a better Hindu".

He will not disturb anyone in their faith, but confirm them in what they already have. He returns again and again to the theme that developing love for God and our neighbours is our fundamental task as humans. He uses many of the

terms and phrases Jesus did, and is closer to the teachings of Jesus than to any other spiritual teacher I have encountered.

I have found Christ to be indeed greater than I know. I am closely involved with my own church and am working to be a lay reader. I believe I have a great understanding of Christ, and that I have actually been in His physical presence. The mission that I feel I am being called to undertake is to help Christians prepare for the acceptance of the Second Coming. I preach Christ in the form which Christians know Him, but from the perspective of His teachings in the current age. The message is essentially as Jesus gave us in the Sermon on the Mount and stresses the Unity of all Creation, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.

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### **PASSAGES RELATING TO THE ABOVE TEXT**

*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.*

*(Jesus – John 5:24)*

*Bring to mind the words Jesus uttered, the advice he offered, the warnings he gave, and decide to direct your daily lives along the path he laid down. Have sacred vision. Speak good words. Hear only what is good. Entertain noble thoughts. There is no greater spiritual practice than this. This was the teaching of Jesus.*

*(Sathya Sai Baba – 24 December 1980, 25 December 2001)*

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*(Jesus – Matthew 6:33, 7:7)*

*Jesus Christ said, “Ask, it shall be given; call, it will be answered; knock, it shall be opened.” But, are we asking, calling and knocking? Yes. We are asking, we are calling, we are knocking at the door. But, whom are we asking? Whom are we calling? At whose door are we knocking?*

*(Sathya Sai Baba – 21 October 1982)*

*You are not asking for everlasting bliss; you ask only for short-lived material pleasures. So, you do not get all that you ask for. You do not ask for the indispensable! You do not pray for the peace that knows no break. If you did, the boon would be granted. Knock at the door of your own heart. God, the resident, will come into view. Believe that He resides in you and turn your eyes inward.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 21 October 1982)

*God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.*

(Exodus 3:14, 15)

*For this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the Truth.*

(Jesus – John 18:37)

*That which remains changeless is referred to as Sat (Being). Sat is Truth. This Sat is within you. Truth is God. God is Truth. God is the very form of Truth.*

(Sathya Sai Baba – 15 February 1999 , 01 January 1991 , 04 September 1994 )

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## IN CLOSING...

As we reflect upon the significance of Easter – not just for Christians but for people of every faith – we are again reminded of Sathya Sai Baba's words from the opening of this story:

**What is the resurrection, really? It is the revelation of the divinity inherent in man.** (28 February 1964)

What was the key that Jesus gave the world to realise our inherent divinity? His message is contained in one word: Love.

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.** (Matthew 22:37, 40)

While the message of love, this commandment of love, may seem difficult to live up to in our daily lives, from it springs the promise of resurrecting humanity from the trials and perils it faces today – replacing selfishness with selflessness, animosity with unity, religious tension with spiritual respect, and personal estrangement with a renewed experience of the presence of God. As Sathya Sai Baba reminds us:

**The followers of Jesus have broken into schisms on various counts; but the life of Christ is a lesson of unity. He taught people that there was only one God and all were His children. Recognise in each being, in each man, a brother, the child of God, and ignore all limiting thoughts**

**and prejudices based on status, colour, class, nativity and caste. (24 December 1972, 25 December 2001, 01 March 1974)**

**Jesus showed the path to unity and never gave scope for multiplicity. He always said that all were Divine. In terms of physical form, human beings appear different; in terms of the Spirit they are all one. This is the truth propagated by Christianity. (25 December: 2001, 1991)**

**The foremost need today is for everyone to realise that God is One. This is what Jesus proclaimed. God is and can be only One, not more! There is only one God and He is omnipresent! There is only one religion, the religion of love. There is only one language, the language of the heart. The followers of every religion, in their own way and style, call upon the One God who is omnipresent. It is the same God who confers upon all mankind, health, prosperity, peace and happiness. (25 December: 1994, 1970, 1978)**

Each person we have met in this cover story has experienced an awakening of this “*oneness of God*” and our collective “*oneness in God*.” This is not surprising, since the lives of both Jesus and Sathya Sai Baba have embodied this fundamental message of life – thus turning the hearts and minds of people everywhere towards knowing the changeless nature of God, the loving presence of God in their lives, and the truth of their own inherent Divinity as children of God.

The influence of Sathya Sai Baba in the lives of countless Christians has led to a resurrection of their relationship with Jesus, a rebirth of appreciating who Jesus was, and a renewal of their sincere practice of what Jesus taught. The result has been, time and again, lives fulfilled as good Christians, true Christians, better Christians.

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## COVER STORY – Part Two

### THE STORY OF EASTER – JESUS IS RISEN!

**By Rev. Father Charles Ogada**

*In this compelling and powerful essay, written specially for **Heart2Heart**, Reverend Father Charles Ogada C.S.Sp presents a dramatic portrayal of the events at Easter 2,000 years ago and thought provokingly relates the meaning of Easter to our own Sadhana.*

Easter is a festival of Enlightenment. It is the day that Jesus rose from death. It was on a Sunday morning, the day of the Sun God. Mary Magdalene and other women had gone to look at the tomb where Jesus was buried. But to their horror and bewilderment they met an empty tomb. Beside the tomb stood two angels who said to them; **“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, He has risen!”** (Luke: 24:5) This was the great turning point that transformed the story of Jesus which seemed to have ended with His tragic death on the Cross on Friday evening.

So the story of Easter is not just the story of Jesus’ resurrection from death but also the story of how He was unjustly arrested by the Jews, tried, condemned and crucified on the cross on account of His stand for Truth and Righteousness. **From a spiritual perspective, Easter is the story of humanity’s ascent to Divinity.** It is the dramatic spiritual journey that everyone must undertake to emancipate oneself from the bondage of death and ignorance and enter into the glorious light of Immortality and Self Knowledge. In this way, Easter is not just a past event but the day we are born again into Enlightenment.

#### **The Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem**

Jesus went with His disciples to the Jewish religious center of Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. It was an important feast celebrated annually in commemoration of the Jews’ deliverance from slavery in Egypt. All males older than twelve went to Jerusalem for the holidays. As Jesus entered the city riding on a donkey, pilgrims spread cloths and branches on the road for Him. They shouted in gallant jubilation, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord, Hosanna in the Highest!” (Matt 21:9). This praise stands in sharp contrast to their latter cry, “Crucify Him!” and their option for a thief to be released in place of the Righteous One. **Jesus remained the same in both praise and blame.**

When Jesus entered the temple of Jerusalem He saw people sacrificing doves and other living things to God in order to please Him. (Matt 21:12 ) The temple priests had become very corrupt and money-centered. The house of God had been turned into a bazaar and religion had been commercialized. Jesus sought to put an end to these cruel and harmful practices. So Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling and

overturned the tables of the money changers. This angered the priests and temple authorities and from then on they looked for a way to kill Him.

### **The Last Supper**

The Jewish feast of Passover has its focal point on a special meal. Jesus had this meal, which was His last supper, with His close disciples before His death. Jesus alone knew the significance of this last evening. So He sat closely with His disciples round a table and showered upon them the very essence of His Love. In a very dramatic and direct manner He gave them the essence of all He had been teaching them.

*“While they were at the table He took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them saying, ‘This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’”* (Luke 22:19). He also took a cup with some wine and did the same saying, “This Is My Blood”. When Jesus said, “This is My Body” He was teaching the disciples the truth of the Bible and of all the Scriptures: **‘I am not this Body - I do not identify Myself with the body. (Deham Naham - I am not the body. Koham? Soham – Who am I? I am that.) Because I am not the body, I break it and give it up for you. In the same way, you should do the same in My memory. You should give up body consciousness. This is a Divine Command.’**

### **Beyond Body Consciousness**

When we say, “this is my cloth” it means I am not the cloth. When I am not the cloth then I can sacrifice it for the good of others. If the body is my ‘thing’ just as the cloth is my ‘thing’, then I cannot say I am the body just as I cannot say I am the cloth. This is the lesson that Swami often exhorts us now and what Jesus taught then. **As long as one thinks I am the body, sacrifice is not possible. Without sacrifice it is impossible to attain the Absolute Divinity.** We should see ourselves not as the body but as the indwelling Divinity residing in the temple of the body. Again, we should recognize and treat all bodies as embodiments of Divinity.

In the words of beloved Sathya Sai Baba, **“When Jesus said that the bread was His flesh and the wine, His blood, he meant that all beings alive with flesh and blood are to be treated as He Himself.”** (*Divine Discourse of 25th December 1978*)

### **The Oneness of Life**

Earlier in His teachings Jesus had told His disciples that “whatsoever you do to any of these, you do it to me” (Matthew 25:40). Seeing the same God in all beings is the true spirit of non-dualism. **This advaitic truth is contained in two verses of the Bible: “I AM THAT I AM” (EXODUS 3: 14) and “Be still and know that I AM ” (PSALM 46:10).** It is in stillness that we know THAT which is our true nature - the eternal, infinite, immortal and absolute pure existence, dwelling in all beings. This stillness is the silence of the grave. It is

the death, not of the physical body, but of the mind. It is the total annihilation of the ego on the cross of self sacrifice.

### **Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet**

After they had finished eating, Jesus dramatized to His disciples how to sacrifice the body by giving up body identification. To sacrifice the body does not mean to hang one's throat with a rope as Judas did after he betrayed Jesus. **To sacrifice the body means to burn out the body at the altar of selfless service!** To prove this, Jesus took a bowl of water and a towel round His waist and started washing the feet of His disciples and wiping them with the towel. When they asked Him why he was doing so, Jesus answered: "I am washing your feet as your servant so that you may learn to serve the world." (John 13:14) In selfless service we sacrifice our desires, our prosperity, our comforts, our safety and positions and the demands of the flesh for alleviating human misery and serving the helpless and the poor. **In essence, Jesus was teaching that selfless service is the easiest and most effective way of going beyond body consciousness and arriving at the Absolute Divinity.**

From the upper room where He had His "last supper" with His disciples, Jesus went straight to the garden of Gethsemane with His disciples (Matthew 26:36). In this place He prayed to His Father with intense agony. "His sweat was like drops of blood" (Luke 22:44, Mark 14:32) He prayed to the Father, "Abba Father, everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me." (Mark 14:36, Matthew 26:39). At the same time He submitted to the Will of His Father.

Usually we pass through this stage of rejection in our spiritual journey. This corresponds to Arjuna's despondency before the battle field of Kurukshetra. At this level we ask the same questions: why me? What have I done to merit this situation? Take this suffering away from me! etc. Many people never go beyond this level. Normally what is rejected comes back. It is like suppressed anger or emotion. It usually manifests in a different and sometimes more dangerous form. **Jesus is teaching us here that we should go beyond rejection and accept as God's Will everything that happens to us on our path to Truth.**

### **Jesus Demonstrates Acceptance of God's Will**

Acceptance ushers in a process of transformation and purification. This is the level where we accept with joy everything that happens to us as the Will of God and therefore ultimately bound to work out for our highest good. Jesus went through this stage when He prayed: "I want your Will to be done, not mine" (Mark 14:36). **When we accept our lives as an expression of God's Will, sufferings begin to have a refining effect on our souls. The external push and buffeting of Karma now pulls us inwards and draws us closer to the warmth and love of our inner Christ -Consciousness.**

While Jesus was praying He invited his disciples to keep watch and pray with Him. But the fatigue and weariness of the body did not allow them to fulfill this. They were heavy with sleep. Jesus chided them for this behaviour (Matthew 26:40).

Meanwhile, the leading priests and leaders were meeting at the residence of Caiphas the high priest to discuss how to capture Jesus and secretly put Him to death. They tempted Judas, one of Jesus' loved disciples with 30 silver pieces to betray Him into their hands. Judas succumbed to this temptation and betrayed His Master. Greed for money is a monster that gets hold of man and makes him lose all sense of discrimination and accept without compunction wrongful ways of satisfying it. Whenever we opt for falsehood in place of Truth, we betray Jesus again and again.

### **The Arrest and Trial**

As Jesus was leaving the Garden, Judas appeared with the crowd armed with swords and clubs sent by the chief priests and elders to arrest Jesus. Jesus addressed His betrayer as 'friend' and offered no resistance when He was arrested. When this happened all His Disciples deserted Him and fled (Matthew 26:56). How many times we desert God when the road gets tough! True worship lies in standing with God in both pain and pleasure and accepting both with equal mindedness.

Following His arrest in Gethsemane, Jesus was first brought before the former high Priest Annas who conducted a preliminary examination by questioning Jesus about His disciples and teaching (John 18:12 -14). He was then taken to the Palace of Caiphas the president of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish tribunal during the Greek and Roman periods.

Because of the contradicting testimonies brought against Jesus, Caiphas brushed these aside and put Jesus under oath to tell the court if He was "the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26: 63). Jesus' positive affirmation to this question made Caiphas tear his robe and charge Jesus with blasphemy. When this happened the storm was let loose. The guards began to spit in His face and strike Him with their fists. After blindfolding Him, they slapped Him and said, "Prophecy to us Christ, who hit you?" (Luke 22:63-65). **In all this, Jesus remained calm and silent.**

Since the Romans had removed from the Sanhedrin the power of capital punishment, it became necessary to secure a death sentence from the Governor. They stirred up the common people to call for Jesus' death. They told Pilate, the fifth Roman Governor of Judea (AD: 26-36) that Jesus was attempting to make Himself king and so He should be punished for treason. When Jesus explained to Pilate the nature of His Kingdom saying, "My kingdom is not of this world", Pilate announced a verdict of acquittal (John 18:33-38). This verdict could have ended the trial but it only evoked storms of bitter charges against Jesus by the instigations of the priests. They wanted Jesus dead by all means.

Pilate reviewed the case before the people wanting to prove the innocence of Jesus. He offered them a compromise in an effort to appease their rage and thirst for blood. He sent Jesus to be scourged before releasing Him. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head. They clothed Him in a purple robe and ridiculed Him saying, "Hail King of the Jews!" and they struck Him in the face (John 19:1). After this torture Jesus was in a pathetic situation. Then Pilate brought Him out to the Jews gathered outside to be released as he thought enough punishment had been meted out. But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him, crucify Him" (John 19:6). Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus to death. He offered the Jews another compromise. It is customary for Pilate to release one prisoner for the Jews on the occasion of this festival. When the Jews demanded for this customary right, Pilate offered them the choice between Barabbas, a notorious murderer and Jesus the Christ. They people shouted for Barabbas, demanding that Jesus be crucified (Luke 21:18). They opted for a murderer of life, in place of the Giver and sustainer of life.

When Pilate further tried to save the life of Jesus, the Jews threatened him that he was no friend of Caesar the Roman Emperor if he set Jesus free "since anyone who claims to be King opposes Caesar" (John 19:12). This made Pilate really afraid. He finally yielded to the people's wish and sought to absolve himself of the guilt of Christ's death by publicly washing his hands. The people accepted the responsibility of Jesus' death saying "let His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). Meanwhile, Peter the head of the disciples had denied Jesus three times as Jesus predicted he would (Mark 14:34). How many times we deny God when our selfish interests are at stake! One should be prepared to sacrifice anything for the sake of God and His message.

### **The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus**

The Governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorian, inside the palace, and gathered a mob of soldiers around Him. There they subjected Jesus to some inhuman torture one of which was His scourging at a pillar. Scourging by lashing was a common punishment in ancient times. Roman scourges had pieces of metal or bones attached to the lashes. Jesus was stripped to the waist and bound to a pillar in a stooping position. The body of Jesus was horribly lacerated so that He was bleeding heavily. After this, they led Him away to crucify Him. Jesus had to drag a heavy cross-beam made from a tree on His shoulders to the place of crucifixion.

At this place called the Skull (or Golgotha ) which stands on a hill outside the city, Jesus was stripped of His garments and nailed on His own cross along with two criminals - one on His right and the other on His left. On the way to Golgotha, Jesus failed three times under the heavy weight of the cross. Once the soldiers compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, to carry His cross when they suspected that Jesus might die on the way. At the foot of the cross stood Mary, the Mother of Jesus and other women who sympathized with Him (John 19:25). One could only imagine the agony of the Mother of Jesus at the sight of her son so cruelly treated.

Jesus hung on the cross for close to three long hours. While hanging on the cross Jesus expressed concern for His mother (John 19:25). He prayed for forgiveness for those responsible for the crucifixion because they do not know what they did (Luke 23:24). He promised Paradise to the criminal that was crucified with Him (Luke 23:39-43). The soldiers cast lots for who will take His garment and scornfully challenged Him to escape from the cross if His claims to be the Son of God were true.

It was customary to break the bones of the crucified men to speed up their dying so as to remove the bodies before the Holy day that followed. When the soldiers came to Jesus they found out that He was already dead so they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and "blood and water" flowed out of the side of Jesus (John 19:33 -35). This fulfilled Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah's bones would not be broken and that His side would be pierced with a spear (Exodus, 12:46; Psalm 34:20; Zechariah 12:10).

At mid-afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Father into your hands I surrender my Spirit" and merged in the principle of Divinity (Luke 23:46). This is the final step in the ladder of Self Realization. It is described as the art of **self surrender**; that passive effortless state of no-will. It cannot be called darkness and it cannot be called light. It is neither nothingness nor can it be described as something. It is not being and it is not non-being. Beyond thought and beyond reason, beyond imagination and transcending understanding, the Sages call it THAT for lack of expression.

To remain in THAT disposition where;  
There is no effort to be  
Since you are already that;  
There is no need to want  
Since you are the fullness;  
There is no necessity to surrender  
Since there is no other than you;  
There is no will to attain  
That which you have always been.  
There is no urge to move  
Since there is no place you are not...  
Simply by dropping this effort to be;  
This need to want,  
This urge to move,  
This will to attain,  
This necessity to surrender,  
The SELF remains in the contentment of ITSELF -  
Full, Absolute, Eternal and Infinite.

Immediately Jesus surrendered Himself to the Father, we are told that the Sun stopped shining (Luke 23:45 ) and the curtain of the Jewish Temple that separated the Holy of Holies was torn in two. Thus - self surrender tears the curtain (illusion) that separates us from God. When this happens, the

illumination of the Self–Effulgent–Sun of the Atma extinguishes all other lights that are derived from it.

### **The Resurrection**

Jesus' body was placed in a tomb that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin. **No one was more surprised than the disciples of Jesus when they heard that the man they had seen die on Friday was walking around on Sunday!** (Matthew 28:2-15; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24 1-12; John 20:1-18) At first, it seemed to them like hysterical nonsense.

But when Jesus appeared to them again and again, they could not deny it any longer. Thomas only believed after he had put his hands in the nail marks on the body of Jesus (John 20:24 -24). The resurrection had in fact transformed the tragedy of the crucifixion into a triumph for all humanity.

### **The Spiritual Glory of Easter**

Easter is more than a festival of Enlightenment. Easter is also a prayer of Light. We pray to the risen Christ to lead us from the unreal to the real, from darkness to the Light and from death to Immortality. On this spiritual journey Jesus makes an invitation to all of us.

“If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23, Matthew 16:24, Luke 14:27) **On the path of spiritual emancipation, everyone has his cross to carry. It is the cross of karmic debt and worldly tendencies that lie deep at different levels of our conscious, subconscious and unconscious states.** This debt has to be balanced and the tendencies cleared. Jesus tells us the best way to do this: “Take up your cross and follow the Master”. Then and only then can you be sure of winning the battle of life. Beloved Sathya Sai Baba gives us the same recipe: “Follow the Master, Face the devil, Fight to the end, Finish the game!”

The devil here is body identification. It is the root of all sorrows and sufferings. It is the Original sin of Christian theology! We have to face this devil and make the first giant step in our spiritual ascendance. We have to declare the truth with courage: ‘I am not the body, I am not the mind. Therefore I remain unaffected by the dualities of the body - mind complex. In this state of equanimity, I must follow the Master.’

The master is the inner conscience, the Sound of Silence or the inner voice of Krishna (= Krist–na) seated on the Chariot of Arjuna (= the heart of the devotee) on the battle field of Dharmakshetra (= the way of the cross). When we listen and follow the Divine instructions (= the Gita) of the Master (= Krist or Krishna ) then victory is sure. That victory is the Resurrection of the Immortal Self in the incarnated life.

When the ego disappears then God resurrects. This is the meaning of the Cross: the cutting of the “I” right across. It is the essence of Christianity. The

Christian cross is a symbol for the elimination of the ego. **Without the Cross, this dissolution of the ego, there is no resurrection. When we choose to follow Jesus on the way of the cross, the spiritual path of the death of the ego, we must be ready to crucify the old little self that lives on anger, jealousy, greed, hate and body attachment and rise to our glorious immortal Self of Truth, Love, Peace and Right Conduct.**

**Our celebration of Christ's Victory at Easter is an act of faith that one early morning we shall rise with Him to the Glory and Light of the Immortal Absolute Divine Consciousness.**

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## FEATURE ARTICLES

### WHAT SHOULD WE LEARN FROM LINGODHBHAVAM?

#### Musings From Prashanthi Nilayam

By Prof.G.Venkataraman

This is the text of the Radio talk by Prof. G. Venkataraman, broadcast after the Sivarathri festival 2006, which has some very significant reflections on what *Lingodbhavam* means.

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. Normally, you would have heard in this time slot, a talk by me on the life of Shirdi Baba. Today I interrupt that serial to share some of my thoughts with you, concerning some memorable moments we witnessed during *Sivarathri* celebrations last week. As you are aware, this year, *Sivarathri*, or *Maha Sivarathri* to be more precise, fell on Sunday, February 26.

#### **The Divine Sivarathri Schedule**

As per Prashanti Nilayam traditions, typically, this is how *Sivarathri* is observed. On the morning of *Sivarathri*, Swami's boys sing songs; after that, there is Bhajan and Swami retires. In the afternoon, everyone assembles in the Divine presence for a Discourse, which would then be followed by all-night Bhajan singing.

This all-night Bhajan singing is a phenomenon in itself and merits a talk on its own but I shall skip that. On the following morning, some time after dawn, Swami comes back to the Hall, listens to Bhajans for a while and then gives one more Discourse to bring the observance of *Sivarathri* austerities to an end. After that, there is *Prasadam* distribution, which too is an event in itself. This, so to say, is the standard script for a non-*Lingodhbhavam* year, and this was the way it was for many years until Swami revived the *Lingodhbhavam* a few years ago.

#### **Last Year, No Lingodbhavam**

Last year, it was announced well in advance that there would be no *Lingodhbhavam*, and, as was to be expected, this resulted in a sharp decline in the crowds attending the function. By the way, although it was announced last year that there would be no *Lingodhbhavam*, what actually happened was that after Swami finished the Discourse in the evening and sat down to listen to the Bhajans, suddenly there were strong symptoms that a *Lingam* might emerge. However, Swami summoned His car and went away; ultimately, there was no *Lingodhbhavam*, at least in public.

This year too, the crowds were much smaller; probably because everyone expected that there would be no *Lingodhbhavam*, and Sunday evening passed off without any *Lingam* emerging from Swami. In a sense, many were

glad because you know Swami has to undergo enormous physical stress and strain, while making the *Lingam* come from within Him. Devotees told one another, "Ah, this year, Swami has mercifully spared Himself the torture He has to undergo while bringing the *Lingam* out."

### **The Morning Heralds A Great Event**

Came Monday morning and Swami came out at around 6.45 and sat in His chair. Bhajans were going on as usual. Meanwhile, a big group of Swami's boys got busy bringing in fresh hot *Prasadam* from the Canteen in huge vessels and placing them in the Sai Kulwant Hall for distribution after the conclusion of the proceedings. I noticed though that they were doing things somewhat differently to the routine they usually followed. I knew, however, that this must be on the explicit instructions from Swami; in all such things, it is Swami who is truly the Manager; He decides even minute details, and nothing can ever happen unless He personally orders it.

OK, all this is fine but this is not what I wish to talk about. There we were, all of us waiting for Swami to start on His morning Discourse, when I saw a few boys rushing into Swami's Interview room. In itself, this is nothing unusual. Swami often gives instructions and Swami's boys are so agile and alert, that they dash to implement the instructions. A minute later, I saw these boys go back to where Swami was seated, with flasks, towels and tumblers in their hands. The moment I saw this, my antenna went up; I said to myself, "Looks like Swami is going to bring out a *Lingam*." And it was not just me; the whole of Sai Kulwant Hall suddenly woke up from its drowsiness, coming at the tail end of an all-night vigil, singing Bhajans. Something that not normally does not happen in the morning session, was about to happen.

After last year, everyone assumed that for the second time in the history of this Avatar, *Lingodbhavam* would come to a stop. What I mean is that way back, Swami used to bring out *Lingams* regularly but then put a stop to it for years and years. And then most unexpectedly, it became a star attraction so to speak. While everyone was thrilled to see this spectacular phenomenon, devotees also realised that Swami went through much physical pain and suffering before the *Lingam* emerged. Thus, many even prayed that Swami should spare Himself this agony and stop the *Lingodbhavam*. That's exactly what happened last year and this year too, till Monday morning, that seemed to be the case.

When it became clear that there would be a *Lingodbhavam*, the huge audience snapped to attention, while the singing of Bhajans picked up in vigour and tempo. Everyone waited with bated breath, while Swami started drinking glasses and glasses of water, as He normally does just before the *Lingam* emerges.

### **The Agony of the Birth of the Lingam**

A big group of boys was seated behind Swami, pouring out water from flasks into silver tumblers. Two boys kneeling on either side of Swami, were tensely

focussing on Swami, ready to support Him by holding Him. One of them would place the tumblers in front of Swami and offer the water to Swami whenever He signalled, which was every fifteen or twenty seconds.

Swami would take the silver tumbler from this boy, and drink the water. He would then hand the empty tumbler, which this boy would pick up and hand over to the crew behind and position the next tumbler in readiness for offering to Swami. Swami was evidently feeling very hot, and coolers were placed on either side to blow cold air. After drinking water, Swami would wipe His face. And so, kerchief after kerchief was offered. Frequently, Swami would use a small hand towel to wipe His face and mouth. Any number of towels were passed on. Meanwhile, some of the boys sitting behind would run to Swami's Interview room to fill the flasks, bring more kerchiefs and more hand towels.

In a sense, all this was not new; we had seen this for many years now, except last year of course. **But what was unusual this time was the very long time it took for the *Lingam* to come out.**

**Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, half an hour, forty-five minutes, and still the *Lingam* would not emerge. By now, almost everyone was absolutely shattered and silently prayed, "Oh Swami! Please, let this agony end this very minute." But Swami's suffering continued.**

### **Impassioned Bhajan Singing**

Meanwhile, the Bhajan singing went almost haywire. Normally, when the *Lingam* is expected, the team of singers, boys from Swami's Colleges in Brindavan and Puttaparthi and girls from the Anantapur College for Women, would take turns and sing fast, powerful, and inspiring Bhajans on Lord Siva. This time too it started off like that; but when Swami's suffering became prolonged, the singers could no longer maintain the traditional drill and rhythm; instead, they cried out in their own way, perhaps coaxing the *Lingam* to emerge and bring Swami's suffering to an end. Here is a sample of those extra-ordinary moments.

### **Creation Manifest**

I hope that gave you an idea of how things were. Meanwhile, Swami's body continued to suffer so much, that everyone seated everywhere could see it plainly. It seemed like an epic story in which a frail human body embodying the Incarnation of God was struggling to rise to the enormous demands of a mighty Divine Power within, to bring forth the ultimate symbol of Creation. Finally, about one hour after Swami started showing the symptoms of yet another *Lingodbhavam*, the much-awaited *Lingam* appeared ever so suddenly. It was about 8.15 A.M. Listen now to the sounds of that historical moment.

## ***Lingodhbhavam* Demonstrates Divine Creation**

I would now like to digress and reflect for some moments on the significance of *Lingodhbhavam* itself. People come from far and wide to witness the extraordinarily Divine event and feel thrilled by it, but what exactly does that event signify? That is what I would now like to dwell upon.

**Briefly, when Swami brings out a *Lingam* from within, He is reminding us, among many other things, that behind Creation, there is a Creator.** If there is a painting, then there must have been a painter who painted the picture. If there is a child, then there must have been a mother who gave birth to that child. Everyone accepts these facts without any dispute whatsoever, including the so-called rationalists and atheists. But when it comes to the Universe itself, say God created it and see how many feathers you ruffle.

It is not just that some people feel offended by the reference to God; the more important point is that their vehement denial of God has done much harm to Society. What we call good thoughts, good acts etc., spring basically from God. Goodness is the representation of Divinity at the human level. Swami as Krishna, Shirdi Baba and in His present Incarnation has made very clear, that goodness springs from Godliness. Where there is Love there is God. Without God, there simply cannot be any Love and without Pure Love, there just cannot be any sacrifice, and without sacrifice, there cannot be any goodness.

A very large number of people are good by nature, and silently they do a lot of good to Society. Without the sacrifice of these people, without the compassion shown by these people, without the selfless service done by this people, without the sense of duty exhibited by these people, Society would come to a stop. All these virtues are the manifestation of Divinity within.

**So, the first point about the *Lingodhbhavam* is that it is a powerful reminder to us of the basic fact that behind Creation there is a Creator, and that Creator is God.** These days, there is a lot of talk about the DNA test. Where heredity is concerned, everyone knows that the child must have the genes of the mother and the father. In the same way, if every atom in the Universe has come from God, should not every atom and all things built from atoms have “Divine genes” if I may say so?

**This exactly is what Swami tells us often. He says: “Everything in the Universe is Divine, and there is nothing other than God.”** Swami has said this to us not once, not twice, but any number of times. And yet, why do we fail to take notice of it? Because we are so obsessed with the outer form of everything in the Universe. This is all the result of a terrible disease called body-consciousness. In its most virulent form, this disease makes everyone see just the outside, but not what is hidden within.

### **The Disease of Body-Consciousness**

Let me give a few examples, starting with the Sun. Today, thanks to our knowledge of Science we say, “The Sun is but a gas cloud that is burning.

Deep inside, it burns elements like hydrogen via thermonuclear reactions. And the energy produced in these reactions is what comes out to us as solar radiation.” Yes, all this is true of course. But how come all this is happening? The modern scientist would just shrug and say, “Oh that? It is all Nature.” This kind of reaction may not be harmful but then one thing leads to another, and it is really dangerous to ignore the Omnipresence of God.

Let us take violence; if people saw God in others, would anyone raise a sword to strike another person? Remember those famous stories about animals and Shirdi Baba? How Baba taught one woman that He came as a dog and she rained blows on Him? And how He told another woman that He came as a pig and she fed Him most kindly? Yes, as the *Vedas* proclaim, God is in everything, from the atom to the galaxies. And, as Swami often reminds us by quoting a powerful line from one of Saint Tyagaraja’s song, which says that God is in the ant and in the Cosmos as well.

What I am driving at is that *Lingodhbhavam* is NOT a spectacle. But most unfortunately, that is what most of us tend to reduce it to, by clamouring more for the photos and videos of that event, rather than pondering about the deeper implications and the message that Swami is sending to us.

### **Let Us Contemplate...**

Let us take a minute off to reflect on why Swami undergoes so much suffering to bring out the *Lingam*. Is it merely to thrill us? Is it merely for showing the *Lingam* to everybody by going round? Indeed, why does He, after going through so much physical pain, take extra trouble to go round, holding up the newly-created, brilliantly shining *Lingam* for all of us to see?

The suffering of the Divine body that we saw this year was something quite unusual and exceptional. **In fact, Swami mentioned to a few devotees even on the previous day that He was beginning to experience pain inside.** So it was not just the painful struggle we witnessed on Monday morning. Unknown to the world, the birth pangs of Creation, if I might call it that, had commenced 24 hours earlier.

### **he Golden Splendoured Lingam**

We all say that Swami brought out a Golden *Lingam*. Yes that is true but for a moment just reflect on this fact. Can anyone have so much gold inside? The answer is no. Then wherefrom does the gold needed to form the *Lingam* inside Swami come? It comes from the five elements that form Swami’s body as well as ours. In our bodies, those five elements cannot specially combine to form gold. However, they do inside Swami’s body, as the result of Divine *Leela*.

Next, the gold that forms inside thus must aggregate, become liquid, acquire the shape of a *Lingam*, solidify, and then only emerge. It is all very much like a baby growing in the womb, starting from a single cell. I am sure you are aware that gold is a solid at room temperature. If it has to exist as a liquid, and

that is what happens at start during the *Lingodhbhavam*, then it must be a very high temperature, something like 600 degrees. **Now at that temperature, the stomach of ordinary mortals would simply burn away and turn into ashes. But such is the control exercised by the Divine that the inner organs of the Avatar, do not get destroyed, though they experience excruciating pain.** By the way, it is to counter the enormous burning sensation within that Swami drank so much water. Frankly, I have never seen any one consume so much water. But then, there was a reason for it in this case.

### **The Sacred Message of *Lingodhbhavam***

In short, I personally believe that through the *Lingodhbhavam*, Swami is sending us many subtle signals. The first of these is that we must see God everywhere so that we do not disturb Society and harm Nature, both of which, each in its own way, are an aspect of God. When an individual fails to see God in Society, it then becomes very easy for that individual to slide into actions that harm, injure and even have the capacity to destroy Society.

People do not realise that corruption harms Society; promoting permissive behaviour harms Society; unfair competition harms Society; creating unwanted desires in the name of expanding the market harms Society; promoting junk food harms Society; treating education as a business harms Society; marketing weapons harms Society; peddling pornography harms Society – the list is almost endless. Why do people do all this? Because they are dominated by greed, by the quest for power, by the urge to dominate, etc. If, as Swami says, people see God in Society, would they dare to do such things?

In earlier years, I have many times seen big groups of Sai devotees from various States in India come to Prashanti Nilayam to invite Swami to their town or city. Swami would call the group for an Interview and the devotees would walk in with big smiles, hoping to persuade Swami to accept their invitation. **After about half an hour or so, the door of the Interview room would open and out would come these people, everyone of them with a long face. Why? Because Swami had ticked them off. What for? For not having unity.**

This has happened many times. The point is that why should there be such a marked absence of unity among Sai devotees, when Swami keeps hammering the message of unity all the time? If we saw Swami in each other, could there be such disunity as to make Swami refuse the prayer to visit? Mind you, I am not trying to preach or pontificate. I am just trying to say that we must take seriously Swami's advice that we must see God in every entity in Creation, as we go through life.

### **Important Lessons to Practise**

One might ask what exactly does this mean? Many years ago, when I was giving a talk to a group of devotees, I said something similar; I said we must

see Swami in all. A devotee who was a businessman objected to my remark and said, "Listen, you obviously have no idea what business is. I do *padanamaskar* to Swami. I offer whatever I can to Swami free. Surely, you do not expect me to fall at the feet of everyone I am trying to make a business deal with, do you? And do you expect me to give away free, various things to my customer, things that I am trying to sell?" There was a lot of laughter and everybody was wondering how I was going to respond.

I simply said, "You know what Swami's name is? Sathya. All I ask is that a businessman must deal with his customer in a truthful manner, with integrity and not try to take the customer for a ride, that is all. I am not asking you to do *padanamaskar* or give away things free. I am just asking for honesty. Is that asking for too much?"

**The point about all this is that seeing God in others does not mean we abandon normal worldly code of conduct. What it means is that no one should hate others; if one hates others, it is tantamount to hating God. No one should hurt others wantonly, especially with malicious intent.** We would not hurt God, would we? In the same way, we should not hurt others because God resides in all. The long and short of it is that seeing God in every entity means recognising that God is the core all entities, animate and inanimate.

From Society, let me for a moment, turn my attention to Nature. If man saw God in Nature, he would not recklessly cut down trees. If man saw God in Nature, he would not mercilessly hunt whales. If man saw God in Nature, he would not shamelessly pollute air and water. If man saw God in Nature, he would not so thoughtlessly harm the ecosystem created by God for the good of all living beings. The list goes on.

What I am trying to get at is that the *Lingodhbhavam* is really a profound lesson, teaching us the following:

- The Universe exists because the Creator has specifically willed it to be so.
- Everything in the Universe is Divine at the core, though we might see bewildering diversity on the outside.
- Man must live in harmony with Society and Nature, and this he must do by God everywhere.
- This does not mean we go around saying, "Oh snake! You are God," or "Oh tiger! You are God," and things like that. That would be entirely artificial. Rather, we must love all living beings on earth, both humans and of other species, and must not deliberately cause harm to anyone or anything. On the contrary, if we can help, we should.
- We must also remember that since we have come from God, we must get back to God, the sooner the better.
- And getting back to God would be possible, only if we try to purify ourselves.

You would remember that this year, the theme of the World Conference held at the time of the 80 th Birthday was: UNITY, PURITY and DIVINITY. In simple terms this means: first we must feel one with all beings not only on earth but in the entire Cosmos. Next, we must strive to be internally pure, meaning we must keep a long distance from our eternal enemies, you know the usual fellows, *Kama*, *Krodha* etc. And when we achieve this sense of oneness with everything and are also pure, then we can become united with God and enjoy bliss forever. I do not know whether you would agree with me, but according to me, these are the lessons, subtle lessons I should perhaps say, that Swami is teaching us through the Divine and extra-ordinary phenomenon of *Lingodbhavam*.

Mankind has not seen this before and I am not sure mankind would see it subsequent to the Sri Sathya Sai Avatar. We who are privileged to witness it, must seek a higher meaning in it, rather than see it simply as a rare and spectacular event. Just think of the one hour of long agony that Swami went through.

**Being Divine Swami could easily have made the *Lingam* come out in jiffy; but He did not. Why? Because He wants us to know that anything good and beautiful cannot be created without pain and sacrifice.** All babies are beautiful. But just recall how much pain the mother has to go through for giving birth to the baby. It is those lessons that Swami is recalling and reiterating.

I wonder how many of us realise that sacrifice and purity go together. Some of you may recall the famous story of Siva swallowing poison. The essence of that story is that when people get together for doing anything collectively, there are bound to be a lot of bad vibrations generated in the beginning by the evil lurking within humans. If any good is to be achieved, then those bad vibrations must be quelled, and that can be done only with sacrifice. Since in the story concerning Siva, He makes a big sacrifice, He is also known as Tyagaraja or the King of Sacrifice.

### **Back to Sivarathri Morning**

Let me now get on with the rest of the story of that unforgettable Monday morning. **The moment the *Lingam* emerged, Swami's face instantly brightened. He then put the *Lingam* on a silver plate and called for the moving chair that is actually a seat in His small Toyota car.**

**Swami sat on that chair and went round Sai Kulwant Hall holding up the Golden *Lingam* in His right hand, to let devotees see the *Lingam* from close quarters. In fact, He went round many times giving *Ananda* to all.**

### **Swami Blesses the Orphans and Their Carers**

We thought that after this Swami would signal for *Aarathi* and *Prasaadam* distribution. But that was not the case. He went to the place near where the boys of the Primary School sit and whispered something. Soon, a red Hyundai

car [kept in readiness] was brought there, and Swami graciously blessed Mr. Paramahansa, by presenting him the car. It must be added that Mr. and Mrs. Paramahansa live in the Ashram and have been serving Swami for many, many years, particularly by taking care of destitute children and mothers who have been given protection by Swami for nearly a decade. In fact, Swami has built an entire village to accommodate the destitute mothers and their children. Swami spoke highly of this devoted couple.

After Mr. and Mrs. Paramahansa were honoured, they signalled to the children they are taking care of to come near Swami. What followed then was truly memorable. **Swami became overwhelmed with Love as He distributed sweets to these erstwhile village kids.** Swami spoke to them softly. We could not hear what He said since there was no mike but we could make out from the reactions of those standing near Swami that He was very happy the way these children had shaped after coming under His protection. Mr. Anil Kumar then very kindly gave the huge gathering some background to the whole episode. Just listen to what Anil Kumar said.

After that, the former destitute children expressed their gratitude to Swami in many ways, including by singing a song or two. This song was set in folk song style, making it abundantly clear that these boys are really from the villages. A couple of boys also made speeches in which they not only expressed their deepest gratitude to Swami, but also promised to spend their lives with Swami, serving Him in every possible way.

### **Concluding Points**

**Looking at it all, I felt that through this impromptu function honouring Mr. Paramahansa, Swami gave an opportunity to the vast gathering in Sai Kulwant Hall, how one must reach out to the forlorn, shower love and compassion on them, and bring cheer into their lives. This is one very effective way of being in resonance with Society and therefore also with our Creator.**

Swami's entire life is a saga of Love and Compassion. But this *Sivarathri*, He gave a new meaning to both these words, by first undergoing tremendous physical suffering to highlight the crucial role of sacrifice. The result of that personal suffering of His was the emergence of the *Lingam*, which taught us that without Creator, there cannot be any Creation.

Next, having come into this world with the human form, itself a great blessing of the Lord, we must use the opportunity to serve Society with Love and Compassion. Here again, Swami gave us an example by reminding us of the children He had taken under His wing, bringing hope to their lives.

Altogether, it was a memorable Monday morning, with a wide shade of experiences from the utterly sublime to the very practical. I was deeply touched by it, and I felt absolutely electrified by the extra-ordinary message that Swami sent through His suffering, of which we saw just one hour. I then resolved that I must share my feelings so that you can get at least some idea

of the great Divine drama that we witnessed. That is why I am interrupting the normal schedule of the talks on Shirdi Baba to tell you something about what I saw. In conclusion, I would like to quote a comment I overheard while returning to my room at the end of the proceedings. Two young ladies were walking by, talking to each other. **They spoke in Tamil, which is my mother tongue. One girl said to the other, "Did we really have to witness all this horrendous suffering?"** Indeed, and so, let us all pray that Bhagavan will not tax His physical body from now on, and give us the *Buddhi* (intelligence) to absorb and practice the profound lesson He has taught us this year, after much physical suffering.

Thank you and Jai Sai Ram.

- Heart2Heart Team

## **THE SAI MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA**

Starting this issue, **Heart2Heart** is pleased to present a series of articles on Sai in Latin America. There is hardly anyone who does not know about America but when it comes to Latin America, amazingly there are many who hardly know about its existence. And yet, in this part of the world that many do know about, there is a very strong Sai presence. Way back in 1992, late Dr. John Hislop noted that the spirit of Sai was sweeping Latin America like wild fire. He explained that this was because Latin America was almost 100 % Catholic and that Catholics accept saints and mysticism quite easily.

In the years that have followed, the Sai movement in Latin America has grown enormously, and it is quite moving to see large numbers of people coming to Prashanti Nilayam all the way from countries like Guatemala, Ecuador, Columbia and so on, countries that many here have not even heard of. A devotee from Madras (now Chennai) who recently went to Brazil to transact some business, went to a city in the middle of the country and checked into a hotel. As he did so, he was stunned to see a huge picture of Swami in the lobby! He was simply knocked out. Who would imagine seeing a picture of Swami in a hotel in Brazil, and that too in a humdrum city in the interior? That is the Glory of the Avatar that has its own magical way of spreading - unknown to most people.

**H2H** takes great pleasure in presenting this series, in the hope that the spirit of the people of Latin America in spreading the Message of Baba would be a source of inspiration for all of us. Particular thanks are due to John Behner of El Salvador and Leonardo Gutter of Argentina, both of whom have been of invaluable help to us in producing this series. In passing, we might also mention, that with the help of devotees from Latin America, Radio Sai has been able to broadcast regularly, services in Spanish and Portuguese. Imagine that! Swami's Discourses, Bhajans etc., in these languages filling the airwaves. Who would have thought that such things would be possible even as late as 2000? But miracles keep happening all the time. Welcome to the Sai world in Latin America!

We begin with a lead article by Leonardo Gutter on Latin America in general. This is followed by an article by John Behner on Sai's presence in Mexico.

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO LATIN AMERICA - By Leonardo Gutter**

Loosely speaking, Latin America is that part of the continent of America, that lies to the south of the United States. In a more strict sense, the term Latin America is supposed to stand for all the countries that were once colonies of Spain, Portugal and France. Since Spanish, Portuguese and French were all derived from Latin, the term Latin America generally designates nations that were once the colonies in the New World of these European powers.

In geographical terms, the American continent may be considered to be made up of three parts: North America, South America and Central America. North and South America are linked by Central America, which at one point becomes very narrow.

Latin America as presently understood, comprises of 23 countries. They are: Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, and the Guianas. We begin with a description of the region known as Central America.

### **CENTRAL AMERICA**

#### **GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS**

This region comprises of Mexico, the countries that lie below Mexico right down to Panama, and the Caribbean islands. Many volcanoes crisscross the region from the West to the East. The climate of Central America is generally warm, though in the hilly regions it tends to be mild and pleasant.

Barring Cuba and Puerto Rico where the population is predominantly white, in all other countries the population is mixed, with some being white, some black, some of Indian origin [not from India!] and the rest racially mixed. The official language in most countries is Spanish - Brazil of course being a major exception, where the official language is Portuguese. However, many other languages and dialects are also spoken, especially where the indigenous population is predominant. There is also considerable diversity in the economic levels of the different segments of the population, with many of them being quite poor.

#### **Mexico:**

Mexico lies just south of the United States, and has the shape of a horn. It is washed by the Pacific on the western side and the Atlantic on the eastern side. The land slopes sharply on the Pacific coast while the slope is gentler on the Atlantic side. The capital city is Mexico City, which is at quite a height above sea level. It is also densely populated. The other big cities are: Guadalajara, and Monterrey. The official language is Spanish. There is no official religion; however, Catholics form the majority. Thanks to the fertile soil, agriculture is widespread, the crops raised ranging from corn, wheat and rice,

all the way to sugarcane, coffee and cocoa. There are also many industries. Mexico also produces oil, fifty percent of which is exported to the United States.

### **Guatemala:**

Guatemala is a very mountainous country, with land elevation varying quite substantially across the country. As a result, there is a considerable variation in the climate, the upper regions being cold and the lower regions being warm. The population is quite mixed racially, with people of indigenous origin being in majority. Most of the people are Catholics. The official language is Spanish, and the Capital is Guatemala City. The country is predominantly agricultural, and not very rich. Sugar cane and bananas form the main export items.

### **Belize:**

This is a small country located on the south east of the Yucatan Peninsula, having Mexico, and Guatemala as neighbours. There are rich tropical forests near the coast and pine forests in the interior. Thanks to the moderating influence of the sea, the climate is not as warm as it otherwise might have been. The population is mostly indigenous and of African origin. The country is poor and the economy depends mainly on forest products. The capital is Belmopan.

### **El Salvador:**

El Salvador is flanked by the Pacific, Guatemala and Honduras. The country is mountainous and there are many volcanoes. It is also prone to earthquakes. The rivers are not very long and of torrential character with many cascades as they flow to the ocean. The Capital city is San Salvador and the other big cities include San Vicente, Holy Ann and Sansonate. Spanish is the official language and the people are predominantly Roman Catholics. The bulk of the population is mostly racially mixed and also poor. Coffee, corn, cotton and sugar constitute some of the major agricultural products; besides that, there is also some mining of gold, silver, copper and iron. Almost all the minerals are exported.

### **Honduras:**

Honduras is a small country tucked between the Caribbean Sea in the north and the Pacific in the south, besides flanked by Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. The country is quite mountainous and receives a lot of rain. The capital is Tegucigalpa, and the population is mostly made up of people of mixed racial origin. A large part of the country is covered by forests with cedar, mahogany, and oak. Agriculture is the main occupation.

### **Nicaragua:**

Nicaragua too is like most of the central American republics, mountainous with many volcanoes, sandwiched between the Pacific and the Atlantic, generally poor, and is ethnically diverse. There are some valuable mineral deposits also. The capital is Managua , and the official language is Spanish.

### **Costa Rica:**

Another small country, very similar to many others in the region but with a more humid and tropical climate compared to the countries to the north of it. Like most central American countries, banana is an important agricultural product. The Capital is San Jose and the official language is Spanish.

### **Panama:**

Though a tiny country, Panama is probably better known than most of its northern neighbours on account of the famous Panama canal. Here, the huge and expansive American continent shrinks to a mere 65 km or so. No wonder, the man-made canal linking the Atlantic and the Pacific is located here. On account of being an important maritime highway, Panama naturally has a very cosmopolitan population. Spanish naturally is the official language but English is quite well understood. There is of course agriculture, mining etc., but the Panama Canal is unquestionably the country's greatest "industry".

### **Haiti:**

Haiti is truly an interesting country. It forms the western part of a Caribbean island close to Cuba. Historically, it used to be a French colony but the black slaves rose in rebellion and drove the French out over two hundred years ago. Thus Haiti not only became independent a long time ago, but also a French-speaking "black" republic! As is to be expected, the official language is French, another factor that makes Haiti unique. The capital is Port au Prince and the dominant religion is Catholicism.

### **Dominican Republic:**

This country occupies the eastern part of the island of which Haiti forms the other part. Historically, the Spanish ruled this part of the island, hence Dominican Republic. Though similar to Haiti in terms of topography, landscape, climate etc., it has a rather different cultural tradition and of course language, which is Spanish. The population is made up largely of people of mixed racial origin.

## **SOUTH AMERICA**

### **GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS**

The land mass normally described as South America is not only huge but also quite distinctive in many ways. First, there are the tall mountains that run right

through, almost close to the Pacific coast. To the east of the Andes mountains, the land slopes towards the Atlantic, providing a nice route for the many rivers rising in the Andes, the famous Amazon being of course the biggest of them all – indeed, the Amazon can rightfully claim to be the biggest river in the whole world. The climate is predominantly tropical, and the principal racial groups are the native Indians, the blacks, the whites and people of mixed racial origin.

The countries that make up South America include: Venezuela, Columbia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Chile, Uruguay, and of course the big ones, namely, Brazil and Argentina. Spanish is the official language everywhere, except in Brazil, where it is Portuguese, for well-known historical reasons. We now offer a thumb-nail picture of the countries in the region.

### **Venezuela:**

Venezuela is to the north east of the South American landmass, and flanks the Atlantic Ocean. It is partly mountainous, and has many lakes. The population is substantially of mixed racial origin, with a small minority of whites and black people. The capital is Caracas, the language is Spanish, and most of the people are Roman Catholics. Oil is the important produce and there is some agriculture as well.

### **Colombia:**

The Republic of Colombia is placed between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, bordering Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador. The soil of Colombia is characterized by its immense variety. The Andes dominate the western region, and the Amazon has its origin there. The capital is Bogota. As elsewhere, Spanish is the official language and the population is mostly of mixed racial origin. Coffee is the most important product. The country is also rich in many minerals.

### **Ecuador:**

Ecuador is a small country with the Pacific to the west, Columbia to the north and Peru to the south. The equator crosses through Ecuador. There are many volcanoes. The capital city is Quito. Guayaquil is another important city. The population is quite mixed, being composed of native Indians, white, black and people of mixed races. Spanish is the official language. The country is, like many in the region, quite poor. Perhaps, Ecuador is most famous for the Galapagos islands that belong to it. These islands lie in the Pacific more than a 1000 km away from the mainland, and this is where Charles Darwin made many crucial observations that later led him to formulate his famous Theory of Evolution. The country has some oil and a lot of mineral resources. However, they are yet to be exploited vigorously.

**Peru:**

Peru is one of the important countries in the southern hemisphere, with a substantial land mass. It shares with Bolivia its neighbour on the south east, the famous Titicaca lake. Its western region is very mountainous with snow-capped peaks but to the east there are rich forests. The capital is Lima , and the official language is Spanish. Roughly 46 % of the population is made up of native Indians, besides which there are, as elsewhere in the continent, the usual quota of whites, blacks and people of mixed racial origin. In addition, there are also many Chinese and Japanese immigrants.

**Bolivia:**

This country named after the famous freedom fighter Simon Bolivar, is landlocked, being surrounded by Peru, Chile, Brazil , Argentina, and Paraguay. There are some mountains. Part of the country is a plateau, and part of it a plain.

More than half the population is made up of native Indians, while the rest is made up of the usual mix, including whites and blacks. The constitutional capital is Sucre while the government works from the city of La Paz . The official language is Spanish but the use of native Indian languages is widespread. Mining is the main industry.

**Chile:**

Chile is a country with a unique shape, a long narrow strip enveloping the Andes, bordering the Pacific Ocean, and stretching right down to a point facing the Antarctic continent. The capital is Santiago and the population is almost exclusively white. The official language is Spanish.

**Paraguay:**

Paraguay is yet another landlocked country, tucked between, Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina. It is relatively flat and semi-arid, with two big rivers running across. The climate is warm and dry. The Tropic of Capricorn runs through this country. Paraguayans are primarily native Indians, especially of the Guarani tribe. The Capital is Asuncion. The country has two languages, Spanish and Guarani. The economy is essentially agricultural.

**Brazil:**

Brazil is truly huge, with most of the South American rivers that drain into the Atlantic, passing through it, the Amazon being of course the biggest of them all. There are numerous lakes in the country. The climate is varied, being equatorial in some regions, tropical in some places and subtropical in others. The population is predominantly white, but there is a sizeable population of blacks and people of mixed racial origin. In marked contrast to the other countries in the region, Portuguese is the official language. Brasilia is the capital, though Rio de Janeiro is probably better known. Agriculture no doubt

forms an important segment of the economy, but Brazil is industrially quite advanced in many sectors. In this respect, it stands out compared to many other Latin American countries.

### **Uruguay:**

Uruguay flanks the Atlantic coast, with Brazil and Argentina as its neighbours. The river Uruguay separates the country from Argentina. The terrain is marked by gentle hills making the landscape slightly wavy. The population is made up mostly of immigrants from Spain and Italy. The official language is Spanish, and dominant religion is Catholicism.

### **Argentina:**

Argentina is also a big country, the western part being mountainous, the eastern part being flat and the region in between being a plateau. The population is predominantly white. The official language is Spanish although in the interior where native Indians live, Indian dialects are also spoken. The capital is Buenos Aires, and the people are substantially Catholic. Agriculture is an important occupation. The country also produces some oil. It has big reserves of iron ore and natural gas.

The above is meant to be a general introduction to Latin America. As can be seen, this part of the world was opened up mainly by the Spanish and the Portuguese, and to a smaller extent by the French. Culturally, ethnically and economically and in many other ways, Latin America is very different from USA and Canada. In terms of the Sai movement, there are two important factors worth noting. Firstly, unlike Hislop who played a key role in the Sai movement taking roots in USA , one cannot identify one central figure associated where Latin America is concerned. Secondly, unlike in USA and Canada , there is hardly any Asian Indian population in Latin America . Thus the character and the growth of the Sai movement in Latin America has a unique character of its own, and one can clearly see Swami guiding the growth in His own special way.

In this the first article on Sai activities in Latin America, we have John Behner telling us about what is happening in Mexico. He is starting with Mexico not for geographical reasons, but because the Sai movement in Latin America took hold there first.

## **MEXICO, THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE SAI ORGANIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA**

**By John Behner**

### **A Brief Overview of Mexico**

Mexico has contributed to the culture and spiritual development of man from ancient times. Several thousand years ago, pyramids to the sun and the moon were built at Teotihuacan, which means the City of the Gods. These pyramids were built by the Toltecs and are comparable in size to the pyramids in Egypt. Teotihuacan is a spiritual center, which includes many other pyramids and ceremonial buildings.

At about the same time, the Mayan Indians were developing a very advanced culture further south. They knew the sun's magnetic cycles and the secrets of life and the universe. Their science was of a very high order and they were able to explain how the sun affects life on earth such as the earth's weather, seasons, and even ages which can be correlated to the *yugas* described in the Upanishads.

They knew the purpose of life and death, the journey of the soul which can return to the creator purified or diminished, returning to earth later for another try at purification through suffering. After the Spanish invaded Mexico and destroyed the Aztec Empire in 1519 AD, the Mayan and Toltec cultures declined.

Mexicans became a mixed race, part Indian and part Spanish. The people are generally easy going and love music and dance. Unlike their neighbours to the north (the Americans), Mexicans are not so time conscious. They open their shops late, and also stay open late.

Lunch is the big meal of the day, followed by a siesta. Corn, beans and rice are the staples of their diet, and yes the Mexicans like spicy food, just as the people in India do. Another parallel in the diet is tortillas, similar to the chapattis, but made with corn. Modern Mexico is known for its modern architectural designs, and there are many beautiful buildings.

Mexicans have great devotion for Virgin Mary. Way back in the late 1500s, Virgin Mary appeared to a poor Indian peasant named Juan Diego, in a region that is now Mexico City. At the hill where she appeared, a famous shrine has been built as she requested, and she is worshipped as the Lady of Guadalupe. People from all over the world frequent the shrine as many miraculous cures are taking place there.

The population of Mexico is about a hundred million, and 25 % of that lives in Mexico City the capital. With this overview we would like to describe how the Sai movement became established in Mexico.

### **How the Sai Organisation Took Root in Mexico**

In 1973, Dr. Luis Muniz and his wife, Gail traveled to India from Mexico with the idea of visiting some spiritual masters for whom they had references. Their program included visits to six ashrams. The last site scheduled, and one that looked less interesting to them, was the Ashram of Sathya Sai Baba. For various reasons, visits to the other five ashrams had to be dropped; in some cases the Guru was not available, or he was away. So they arrived at the Ashram of Sai Baba. Their plan was to stay for there for only seven days as they were to continue visiting the other Ashrams. Instead of seven days, they stayed on for seven weeks! Amazed by the miraculous Sai Baba and His wisdom, their doubts instantly vanished. Sai Baba talked to them about their lives in such a detailed manner, that they were very moved.

One night Gail had an unusual dream and at 3:00 AM woke her husband to tell him about it. Three days later, Baba called them for an interview, and with a smile said to her: "Three nights ago you had a dream didn't you?" Then addressing Dr. Muniz, He said "and she woke you up at three o'clock in the morning to tell it to you, isn't that so?" In the interview they asked Swami if they could open a Sai Center, though they didn't have the faintest idea how to do it. Baba gave them very simple guidelines, "Women should sit on one side and men on the other. There should be a good aroma."

### **The Growth of the Sai Organization**

Back in Mexico City, at first it was a family affair. Later, other devotees joined. They followed Swami's instructions and transmitted it to others. Then other people started singing bhajans in their homes, not only in Mexico City but in other cities as well. In such a simple way, the seed of the Sai Organization was planted in Latin America. There are now 29 Sai centers in Mexico and over 250 centers in Latin America.

From the very beginning, Swami allowed Dr Muniz to publish Sai literature in Spanish. Arlette Meyer from Venezuela translated Howard Murphet's book, "Man of Miracles" into Spanish, and gave it to Dr. Muniz. This was the first book to be published in Spanish. Later Swami authorized Dr. Muniz to publish *Sanathana Sarathi* in Spanish. Now there are over 200 books about Swami, and by Swami in Spanish.

As the Sai Centers grew, so also did the activities of the three wings of the Organisation. They are now making a positive contribution to the communities and uplifting the members in their spiritual growth. Three Sai mothers from Ciudad Cuauhtemoc in the state of Chihuahua, went to the school that their children were attending and asked to be allowed to give Sathya Sai Human Values Classes. Their proposal was accepted and that small start resulted in

128 schools in the state of Chihuahua both public and private, asking for the program over the next ten years.

### **The Institute of Human Values Comes Into Being**

An Institute of Human Values was formed and over 1500 teachers have been trained. One teacher commented that before becoming involved with the Sathya Sai Human Values program, she felt exploited by the State, that her profession as a teacher was the worst profession in the world, and she always wanted to go on strike. Now she says her pay is when a little girl comes up and embraces her, and says, "I wish you were my mother".

As the program in teaching and spreading human values grew, it became apparent that an ideal school was needed to demonstrate what this program can really do for the children. With this objective, two Sai Schools have been opened, one in Chihuahua and the other in Cuernavaca. There are about 100 children in each school.

Here is an example of how the values are impacting these children occurred at the Chihuahua school. One day during recess; the 2nd grade children were strangely quiet. The teacher went to the window to see what was happening and saw all the children sitting in a circle meditating. After a minute or two, one of the children got up and moved to another spot in the circle and sat down and continued to meditate. A minute later another child changed places. After about 20 minutes the children came in from their recess. The teacher asked what they had been doing. The answer was: "meditating". Then she asked why they were moving to different places in the circle. The answer: "to hear God better".

Another incident shows how the children teach the teachers, and also their parents. One little boy was crying and so the teacher took him outside to talk to him and try to cheer him up. There was a mandarin tree in the neighbor's yard which had a branch which came over into the school yard. The teacher asked the boy if he would like a mandarin. Between his tears, he said, "I thought you said it was wrong to take things that do not belong to us".

The Sathya Sai Institute of Human Values is training public and private school teachers in diploma courses that last 90 hours. One teacher said that, "this program must really work", because since taking it and practising the values, she has started to enjoy teaching and can feel the love of the children. Up in the sierra, the training course was taken to a village where there had been several teens who had committed suicide. The application of the program in the village school has helped to overcome this terrible situation.

### **The Government's Encouraging Support for the Noble Work**

In both Chihuahua and Tijuana, the education authorities have recognized this program of Sathya Sai Human Values as extremely valuable. In Chihuahua the Ministry of Education paid for the printing of teacher's manuals containing the Sathya Sai EHV program, and in Tijuana, the municipal education

authorities have put a Sai devotee in charge of the Sai EHV program at all the public schools.

In the city of Monterrey, where a large public school has requested the program, after 3 years, a neighbor wrote a note to the principal telling him that she used to be afraid of walking in front of the school, but now she is happy that the school is her neighbor. In the beginning, one classroom at the school was painted black, and had graffiti on the walls. Now the school is clean and painted in pastel colors. The children are proud of their school thanks to Sathya Sai EHV.

### **Amazing Transformation In Teens**

Service programs have been numerous and varied. In Monterrey, at a correctional Institution for youth, devotees are giving human values classes to the youth and to their parents. On Mondays, ladies from the Sai center give classes to the girls section and on Tuesday, the men give classes to the boys. These youth are from ages 12 to 17. This has brought about a big change in their behavior.

On Fridays, the devotees meet with the parents. This is an interactive meeting and once the parents start to tell of their problems with drugs, liquor, theft etc. all of them start to open up and they find support and love in the group, especially from the devotees. Their attitude toward their children has changed radically and they are starting to develop a loving relationship with their siblings. This has changed the parent's behavior and many of them have a history of being in and out of jails for one thing or another. These people are changing for the better, getting jobs, and keeping them. Some have stopped drinking and using drugs. The Governor of the State has given a certificate of recognition to the Sai Organization for the wonderful work they are doing at this detention center.

### **Reaching Out to the Underprivileged...**

In Mexico City in a slum area, devotees are showing the residents how to prepare soy protein, which is given to them by the government. In another shanty town, a medical clinic has been established and is open 6 days a week.

One man who was an alcoholic received so much love from the devotees working at the clinic that he stopped drinking, found a job, and is now supporting his mother. Another man came to the clinic after his wife told him about the loving attention she received in pre-natal care run by Sai devotees. He was a drug addict, but has been able to kick the habit and maintain a job to support his wife and their new-born son. After a major earthquake in Mexico City, Sai Seva Dals rushed to establish 2 soup kitchens which served hot meals to rescue workers and people who had been left homeless for many days.

## **Moving Hearts with Devotional Singing**

In the devotional wing, there are bhajans that are sung in Spanish at most centers. Some are outstanding. The Tijuana centers have recorded a CD with their songs and at the Tuxtla Gutierrez center, the devotees were asked to sing at a municipal program which lasted for two days. The first day they gave the Sai Organization 15 minutes of program time. After they heard them sing, the next day they gave them 4 hours. Thousands of people heard their devotional singing.

## **Mysterious Blessing During a Public Meeting in Mexico City**

We have also held many public meetings in Mexico, the most outstanding was a meeting in Mexico City. The meeting was to start at 11 AM on a Sunday morning in a well known auditorium. There were about 1200 people present when one of the volunteers who was helping outside in front of the theater came in and advised the people at the back of the theater to go outside and see the sun. People started to walk outside, and look up at the sun. Inside, the people who were on stage did not know what was happening. But then they too were advised to go outside. Over a thousand people were looking up at the sun. A few were taking pictures. It was a beautiful day with a clear blue sky, and a bright orange ring had formed around the sun. This was Swami's Darshan, because it was a very unusual phenomenon. The next day the major newspapers of Mexico carried photos and scientific explanations, which were pretty far out. It was apparent the scientists didn't know what was happening, but the devotees did.

## **Sarvadharm**

These public meetings are bringing new people to the centers; most are interested and buy a book and learn more about Sai Baba. The Sai Centers are making their ceremonies and altars look more ecumenical and using study circles to help introduce Swami's message to newcomers and old timers alike by incorporating them into the regular bhajan meetings.

## **Furthering His Mission in a Myraid Ways....**

The youth of Mexico are very active in forming groups and looking for difficult service activities. In Veracruz, a group of youth have been doing a beach cleaning service which no one wanted to do, not even the authorities. Other youth have dedicated themselves to establish electronic web information such as Sai Bhajans, and discourses, and a site for Sathya Sai EHV. Mexico will continue to lead the way for many to find the Avatar in this historic moment of time.

We, at **Heart2Heart**, wish all the Sai devotees of Mexico the very best and pray for Sai's choicest blessings on them to carry on the wonderful work that they are continuously engaged in.

**- Heart2Heart Team.**

## THE UPANISHADS – THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN GENERAL AND TAITTRIYA UPANISHAD IN PARTICULAR

### **Musings From Prasanthi Nilayam Concerning The Vedas - Part 3**

**By Prof. G Venkataraman**

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

This is my third talk on the Veda Walkthrough Series, if I might call it that. In the two earlier talks, I sort of gave a general introduction to the *Vedas*. In the present one, I shall draw pointed attention to one particular *Upanishad*, the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, for the simple reason that it not only offers a good sample of what the *Vedas* are all about at the highest level, but also because we often hear this chanted when Swami comes out for *Darshan*. Radio Sai has of course presented earlier a detailed series on this particular *Upanishad* and I hope at least some of you have heard that presentation. Many of my remarks are in fact based on that presentation but they would be quite brief compared to what was offered earlier.

I have already pointed out that the *Upanishads* form a part of *Vedanta*, *Vedanta* meaning that which comes towards the end of the *Vedas*. As such, the *Upanishads* are highly philosophical in content, which ought not to be surprising because, as I mentioned in one of my earlier talks, Vedic thought evolved with time. There are many *Upanishads*, but scholars consider ten of them to be the most important ones; the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, which I am now considering, is one of this top ten.

#### **The Meaning of ‘Upanishad’**

Let me start with the precise meaning of the word *Upanishad*. Swami says that literally it means to sit down near. Who sits near to whom? The disciple sits near the *Guru*. And then what? The disciple absorbs Wisdom from the *Guru* and becomes enlightened. This is the traditional and outward meaning. The deeper meaning is that the individual must move nearer and nearer to the True Inner Self, for God is Ultimate *Guru*; that is the real way to Wisdom.

The individual, as Swami often reminds us, is an Embodiment of the Eternal *Atma*, that is to say, *Atma* cloaked in a Mind and a body. This combination is also referred to as the *Jivatma*. The *Upanishads* help the *Jivatma* to embark on a voyage of discovery. Discovery of what? Discovery of the *Jivatma*'s True Nature. And what is that True Nature? The Pure, Unadorned, Unembodied and Infinite *Atma*. As Professor Radhakrishnan says, “The *Atma* is what remains when everything that is not the True Self is discarded.” *Sadhana* is the process by which the *Jivatma* discards all the unnecessary trappings that cloud the *Atma*.

## Upanishadic Thought Echoed by Plotinus

In passing, it is well to remember that the *Upanishads* represent the highest Truth, which has attracted seekers the world over. Professor Radhakrishnan quotes the Greek scholar Plotinus who long ago independently observed:

***One that seeks to penetrate the nature of the Divine Mind must see deep into the nature of his own Soul, into the Divinest point of himself. He must first make abstraction of the body, then of the lower soul which built up that body, then of all the faculties of the sense, of all desires and emotions and every such triviality, of all that which leans towards the mortal. What is left after this abstraction is the part we describe as the Image of the Divine Mind, an emanation preserving some of that Divine Light.***

## Max Mueller on the Upanishads

No one can deny that this is a remarkable and independent perception of the essence of *Upanishadic* Truth. But the fact remains that the *Upanishads* outweigh in sheer quantity as well as depth, the insight gained by seekers elsewhere. This is not to comment adversely on other philosophical traditions. Rather, it is a fact of history that in ancient India, seeking the Inner Self literally became a way of life for a very large number of people. Thus it is that Max Mueller, to whom Swami often makes references, says:

***It is surely astounding that such a system as Vedanta should have slowly been elaborated by the indefatigable and intrepid thinkers of India thousands of years ago, a system that even now makes us feel giddy as in mounting the last steps of the swaying spire of a Gothic cathedral. None of our philosophers, including Heraclitus, Plato, Kant, or Hegel has ventured to erect such a spire. In the beginning there was but One, and in the end also, there will but One, whether we call it Atman or Brahman.***

This is what Swami Himself has to say about the *Upanishads* in general.

*The Upanishads are not the products of human intelligence. They are whisperings of God to man. The Upanishads are authentic and authoritative, as they share the glory of the Vedas. They are 1180 in number, but, through the centuries, many of them have disappeared from human memory and only 108 have now survived. Of these, 13 have attained great popularity, as a result of the depth and value of their contents. Adi Sankaracharya raised the status of ten among all the available Upanishads by selecting them for writing his commentaries and that is how, they became important. Humanity stands to fall or gain by these ten.*

## The Taittiriya Upanishad

Let me now come to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the focus of the present talk. It consists of three parts, each referred to as a *Valli*; the three parts are:

**Sikshavalli, Anandavalli, and Bhriguvalli.** The first part is essentially connected with a theoretical knowledge of the scriptures. Here a *Guru* instructs his disciples on some basics.

Mere theory is of no use, and God has to be experienced; then alone would one know what *Ananda* or Bliss is. But Bliss cannot be experienced by one who is in the grip of ignorance. Thus, the first task in moving towards Bliss is to get rid of ignorance. The *Anandavalli* part of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* deals with this aspect. Finally, there is the *Bhriguvalli* which is in the form of a dialogue between Sage Varuna and his son Bhrigu, and deals with the Knowledge of the Supreme of *Brahman*. In a sense, it is a recap of *Anandavalli* but in dialogue form. So much for a brief introduction as to what three Vallis are all about.

### **What Swami Says About the *Taittiriya Upanishad***

Let me now tell you what Swami says about the *Taittiriya Upanishad*:

*Brahmavidya [Knowledge of Brahman] is the specific theme of this Upanishad. It has three sections: Sikshavalli, Anandavalli or Brahmavalli, and Bhriguvalli. The latter two sections are very important for those seeking Brahmajnana [Knowledge of the Supreme]. In the Sikshavalli, certain methods to acquire one-pointedness are detailed. But bondage cannot be destroyed and delusions overcome by this alone. The flux and the turbulence of life are due to Ajnana or ignorance. And bondage is the result. It is only when Ajnana is destroyed that the bonds get loosened and Liberation is attained. It is just like saying your train is moving when the fact is that your train is stationary while it is the train in the adjacent track that is really moving. Watch your train and you know the truth; watch the other train and you are deceived. There is no use to seeking the cause of delusion; instead, seek to escape from it!*

In trying to appreciate the deeper implication of *Sikshavalli*, one must have the following mental picture in mind. We must go back thousands of years to Vedic India when young students, between the ages of five and eighteen gathered in small groups, and lived with their *Guru* in an *Ashram*. The *Ashram* was called *Gurukulam*, and the young seekers were called *Brahmacharis*, or the seekers of the Supreme God, known in Sanskrit as *Brahman*. The *Guru* instructed, guided, and counselled the disciples, *Sishyas* as they were called. *Siksha* means instruction, and thus, *Sikshavalli* is all about the instruction that the *Guru* gives to the disciples.

What exactly is the meaning of seeking *Brahman*? Why were these young men in quest of God Almighty? If indeed the young disciples were in quest of the Supreme One, then how come most of them later ended up getting married and thereby immersed in the turbulent sea called family life? Some clarifications concerning these questions are necessary so that we can appreciate better the teachings and the purpose of the *Upanishads*.

What is truly remarkable about the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* is that they do not dismiss anything in Creation; everything has a place and a purpose, and

evolution must take place against this background. Thus it is that Swami Nikhilananda says:

***In spiritual evolution, one cannot skip any of the stages. Hence, for those who, prompted by their natural impulses, seek physical pleasures on earth, the Upanishads lay down the injunctions to discharge various duties and obligations. For those who seek pleasures in heavens the Upanishads prescribe rituals and meditations by which one can commune with the gods, or higher powers. Gods, men and subhuman beings, in the tradition of the Upanishads, depend on each other for their welfare. The key to enduring happiness lies in co-operation with all created beings and not in ruthless competition.***

The last remark is perhaps relevant in the context of what is happening today, when man is not only dominating, but even wiping out many living species. Getting back to the uniqueness of the *Upanishads*, they not only instruct in rituals but, besides giving hints of their inner meanings, indicate how man, bound as he presently is, can elevate himself to experience the Divine, or the Ultimate-Ultimate as Prof. Radhakrishnan refers to *Brahman*. As far as we are concerned, we shall focus primarily on the Universal aspects of the teachings of the *Upanishads*.

We end this brief introduction by quoting what Swami says about *Sikshavalli*. He says:

*In the Sikshavalli, certain methods to overcome the obstacles placed in men's way by the Devas, and also methods to acquire one-pointedness in mental exertions are detailed.*

Swami adds that merely by routinely discharging one's duties as a good householder, one cannot cross the Ocean of Life. That calls for something more, and that is presented in the later *Vallis*.

### **The Guru's Teaching in the *Sikshavalli* Portion**

Let me now quickly present some of the highlights of *Sikshavalli*. As I told you a short while ago, the word *Siksha* means instruction. Thus, the *Sikshavalli* consists essentially of teachings by the *Guru* to the *sishtyas* or disciples. The disciples being young, there are a number of practical matters that are given attention. For example, the *Guru* stresses to the student that correct pronunciation and intonation are important since they determine the meaning. There must be no slackness in these.

There is an idea behind this particular advice of the *Guru*. In later life, many disciples may be engaged in assisting with the performance of Vedic rituals. If rituals are performed, they must be done so in the proper manner, which means that *Mantras* must be chanted properly. I have already called attention in an earlier talk to the importance attached by the Kanchi Paramacharya to the sound aspect.

This particular instruction of the *Guru* has a special relevance to this day and age. The performance of Vedic rituals has declined sharply in the last fifty years or so, and not many of the few priests available for performing rituals are bothered about proper pronunciation. This is not only unfortunate but also a betrayal on the part of the priests concerned.

**By the way, one should not imagine that *Upanishads* are pure philosophy. Often they offer a mix of the practical with the philosophical.** However, even behind the so-called practical, that is the ritual, there is deep philosophy. For example, while performing *Yajnas*, priests offer cooked rice to the sacred fire and chant a chant a *Mantra*. People may think it is all a ritual but in the *Gita*, Krishna explains the deeper significance of it all. This *Mantra* in the *Gita* that I am referring to is the *Brahmaarpanam Sloka* that we all chant before eating. In effect, everything is by God and for God. This perspective must always be kept in mind.

Correct chanting is no doubt very important but that does not mean that the student reduces himself to a tape recorder. It is quite likely that through long and disciplined chanting, the student might end up focussing entirely on just the words. To prevent this from happening and to uplift the student, the *Guru* also has a hymn through which the attention of the student is directed to the inner significance of the hymns.

The student is advised that he must contemplate upon the hymns and their meanings. According to the *Upanishads*, meditation can be done in two different ways. One is with an eye on the benefits that would accrue and the other is without any concern for worldly gains. Thinking about God for realising worldly gains is all right up to a point but should not be the ultimate goal. **The *Taittiriya Upanishad*, though it leans heavily on high philosophy, does not entirely frown upon having worldly desires; instead, it recommends that desires must be kept in check and blended with acts that benefit Society.** Thus it is that the householders are asked to give charity in abundance, even while they are praying for wealth.

**In passing, we may note what Swami has to say about mental processes. He distinguishes three categories: concentration, contemplation and finally meditation.** While the former two belong to the worldly mind, the latter is associated with the higher mind or in simple language, the Heart. When one meditates in the Heart, there is are no desires, and this is what Swami really wants.

**Among other things, the *Guru* instructs the disciple on the sacred word OM, which, Swami once referred to as God's phone number! As is well known, the word OM is chanted before the commencement of any auspicious activity.** It is also symbolic of the Creator, and His act of Creation. The Bible says that the word is God; that statement is, in a sense, an echo of Vedic sentiments too.

In this connection, we must remember that among the living species, humans alone have the ability to speak. The capacity to speak and the capacity to

create languages is an extra-ordinary gift of God. However, all of us tend to take this incredible gift for granted, treating it most casually. Vedic seers asked their students to meditate on the word, its deeper significance, the capacity to speak, and see therein the power of God. For us, all this is a reminder that the power of speech must be used only for good and never for bad.

### **A Practical Teaching**

The *Guru's* teachings cover not only aspects of the highest Spiritual Knowledge but also a lot of practical advice. As Swami reminds us often, mere bookish knowledge is of no use; what is equally if not more important is practical knowledge, namely, how to apply the principles of Spirituality in daily life. Thus, the *Guru* says that when the disciple leaves the *Ashram* and enters life after getting married, he has the duty to give generously, with love, without the expectation of anything whatsoever in return, and never unwillingly. **In other words, sharing is the best way of showing that one really cares. Indeed, one must not merely share food, and wealth, but, most important of all, God's Love.** That is what the *Gita* also declares, and Swami repeatedly emphasises. So much for the highlights of the *Sikshavalli*.

Now the *Upanishads* cater to the entire spectrum of aspirants. In a modern school, we have many classes like the first standard, the second standard and so on, all the way to high-school level classes. Naturally, the level of instruction varies with the class. In the *Gurukulas* of ancient times, there were no classes because the number of disciples was usually a handful. Keeping this in mind, the hymns catered to students with all levels of spiritual evolution. There was no such thing as the same formula for all; instead, it was a case of "each according to his capacity".

### **The Conclusion of the *Sikshavalli***

The *Sikshavalli* ends with a remarkable exhortation by the teacher to the student. Swami quotes this often, besides which this exhortation invariably forms a part of the invocation at the commencement of the Institute Convocation. The *Guru* tells the disciple: *Sathyam Vada, Dharmam Chara, Matrudevo Bhava, Pitu Devo Bhava, Acharya Devo Bhava, Athithi Devo Bhava* etc. I am sure everyone knows what these stand for. Basically, they exhort the disciple to always abide by Truth, to be righteous, to revere mother, father, *Guru* and guest, verily as God personified. These are incredible pieces of advice. And how relevant these are today!

### **The *Anandavalli* Portion**

I now turn to the *Anandavalli* portion of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Swami says, "The purpose of life is to prepare you to return to your natural habitat. From God you have come and to God you must return." What does this mean and how does one go about it? That is the issue dealt with in *Anandavalli*.

We recall first Swami's remark that God is the Embodiment of Pure Bliss. That is why He once sang: "Bliss is My Form," a song familiar to all of us. The Sanskrit word for Bliss is *Ananda*. The word *Ananda* is not easy to translate. Often, *Ananda* is translated as joy or happiness; both these words are totally inadequate; by comparison, Bliss does a better job.

Joy and happiness relate to experiences we have in this world. Joyful experiences are no doubt nice but they also have an opposite, which is pain or misery. By contrast, Bliss or *Ananda* has no opposite. How come? Because, Bliss belongs to the non-dual world, that is the world of God.

In as much as man is a child of God, his true nature also is Bliss. But once man gets immersed in the world, he gets easily duped and starts readily accepting fakes like worldly and sensual pleasure as being Bliss. The senses con him, and he gets caught in a trap; again and again he goes for sensory pleasures even though they bring misery in the end.

The question might be asked. "There is a man who diligently follows all that the *Vedas* prescribe. He is good, he is honest, gives charity and all that. Should this not lead him to Bliss?" Well, it is nice to be a good person, perform all duties and rituals diligently and so forth. But all that would not and cannot ever lead to ultimate union with God. Why? Because of attachment. Even a good man has desires, though they may seem harmless. For example, many good people want to go to heaven after death. This may seem alright superficially but heaven is the wrong destination! **That is why Swami says that even *Sattva* binds; it is like a golden rope! Then what does one do? One must become UNBOUND, which means one must shed all body-consciousness.**

### **The Goal of Life**

In the *Anandavalli*, the Teacher gently draws the attention of the young disciple to what exactly the goal of life ought to be. One ought not to get sucked in and become overwhelmed by the turbulence of life. One must look far beyond, never losing sight of the final destination. Why must one do that? Because, that is where Eternal Joy and Bliss lie.

**The student must realise that there is a God beyond description by words and beyond the understanding of the Mind, notwithstanding its enormous power.** The *Guru* urges the disciple to be bold and seek this Supreme Being who is beyond the physical world and the Mind too. The *Guru* stresses that it is only the one who seeks *Brahman* who can enjoy Eternal Bliss.

I must also call attention to the fact that in *Anandavalli*, the Supreme God or *Brahman* is described as *Sathyam*, *Jnanam* and *Anatham*, i.e., as Truth, Knowledge and the Infinite. In fact, Swami often sings a Bhajan starting with these very words; these words are from the *Anandavalli*. In summary, ***Anandavalli* is a road map to Eternal Bliss.**

## The *Bhriguvalli* Portion

The *Bhriguvalli* which is the last of the three *vallis* that form a part of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, is essentially a repeat of the *Anandavalli* but in a different format. In this, Bhrigu, the son of Rishi Varuna asks a question of his father about *Brahman*. The father, who in this case is also the *Guru*, asks the son who is also the disciple, to think, meditate, and come back with the answer. **In other words, the answer is to be found by self-enquiry and not via tuition.**

The disciple does as told and come back with what he thinks is the answer. The father says go back and meditate some more. Why? Because the answer is not complete and represents only a part of the Truth. The disciple goes and comes back a few times, and every time he is sent back to enquire more. However, it is not an infructuous exercise altogether because in every attempt, the disciple manages to refine the answer he found earlier.

**And finally there comes a stage when the disciple does not come back to report. Why? Because, having found that *Brahman* is nothing but Absolute Bliss or *Ananda*, he becomes one with It!** There is nothing more to find out or discover!! That in essence is the gist of *Bhriguvalli*. In other words, it gives hints about how exactly one must enquire while seeking the Ultimate Truth.

## Swami's Words on *Anandavalli* and *Bhriguvalli*

Before I wrap up, let us hear what Swami has to say about *Anandavalli* and *Bhriguvalli*. Swami says,

*The Anandavalli and Bhriguvalli are very important for those seeking Brahmajnana or Knowledge of Brahman. It is in the nature of things that Avidya or ignorance prompts men to crave for plentiful fruits through the performance of actions. This craving produces despondency when there is failure. And such attachment binds further, making it even more difficult to become free. Even though the turmoil called life involving birth, decay and death is frightening, man finds that the clutches of attachment are difficult to shake off.*

*Change is the sign of untruth while Constancy or Changelessness is the sign of Truth. Brahman is Truth, that is to say, It is Changeless. All that is that not Brahman that is, the Universe that is projected out of Brahman, is subject to change. All objects subject to change come within the purview of the intellect. Here, the Knower, that which is to be known and the process of knowing, appear separate. But beyond, there is Oneness that is Brahman.*

*The Taittiriya Upanishad exhorts you not to swerve from the path of duty and learning. Listening, rumination, and meditation are the three steps in Realization. Listening refers to the Vedas, which have to be revered in faith and learnt by heart from a Guru. Rumination of what is learnt, fixes the notion of Brahman in the Mind. Meditation helps in the single-minded attention on the*

*Principle so installed in the Mind. The Brahmavalli teaches while the Bhriguvalli proves by experience.*

I hope I have succeeded in giving a broad-brush overview of one of the important *Upanishads*.

Jai Sai Ram.

**-Heart2Heart Team**

**EQUANIMITY - THE TRUE WISDOM,**  
**THROUGH THE VEDAS AND THE BIBLE**

**The Vision Of Non-Duality - V**

*Continuing our series on the lofty thoughts of unity and divinity, this article delves into Swami's teachings, the Upanishads and the Bible for some illuminating lessons. First we want to tell you about...*

**Rishi Yajnavalkya – His Decision to Take Sanyasa**

The great Upanishadic Seer and Sage Yajnavalkya, of Vedic times, was one among the great rishis, during the time of King Janaka of Mithila. He authored the *Krishna Yajur Veda*. His teachers were Uddalaka and Vaisampayana. In later life, Yajnavalkya decides to take up the fourth stage of Ashram life, namely *Sanyasa* (life of a renunciate). He tells his two wives, Maitreyi and Katyayani, about his plans for austerities in the Himalayas and asks them to divide all his property among themselves and live happily in the ashram.

Katyayani, of common intelligence, is agreeable and accedes, but Maitreyi, who possesses great discrimination, questions her husband on the value of worldly properties and their suitability for earning her true happiness. To this, Yajnavalkya agrees saying, "These can grant you worldly comforts in life, but not knowledge of the Self." Maitreyi, who is a sincere seeker, then questions her husband on the source of true happiness, and how the knowledge of the Self can be acquired.

**Enlightening Dialogue Between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi**

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, we come across this fascinating dialogue between these two. The sage explains to Maitreyi, the nature of the Self and worldly relations,

"Oh Maitreyi, you were dear to me earlier also, but by seeking thus, you have become dearer. Listen to what I have to say:

One loves the husband, not for the sake of the husband, but for the Self present in the husband;  
One loves the wife not for the sake of the wife, but for the Self present in the wife;  
One loves the friend not for the sake of the friend, but for the Self present in the friend;  
One loves the Gods, not for the sake of the Gods, but for the Self present in the Gods;  
One loves a thing, not for the sake of the thing, but for the Self present in the thing;  
This Self alone exists everywhere. It cannot be known, for it is itself the Knower."

Such was the profound teaching of Sage Yagnavalkya! As a result these teachings, Maitreyi quickly becomes an enlightened scholar in the vedic times, along with Gargi, another woman scholar of those times, in the court of King Janaka of Mithila. Another valuable story from the Upanishads, which Swami has also reiterated, describes two birds sitting on the boughs of a tree.

### **The Story of the Two Birds on a Tree**

One bird, at the top of the tree, is large and bright, of brilliant plumage but sits silently, peacefully and in deep bliss. Another bird, somewhat plain, is sitting lower down, busily eating the berries of the tree, some of which are sweet, some of which turn out to be bitter. And every time it eats a bitter one, it is repelled and looks upwards towards the silent bird, fascinated by the composure of the silent bird at the top of the tree.

The bird continues to eat the berries. Gradually, with such alternate experiences of sweet and bitter berries, it develops dispassion and is slowly drawn and moves upwards towards the silent bird. Arriving at close proximity to it, the plain bird is surprised to see that what it had observed all along, was its own reflection and that the two are One in reality. There is total mergence.

**The analogy to our own lives is that we, by nature, seek and experience the duality of life in terms of good and bad, (the berries) happiness and misery, etc, until we finally mature, accept both with equanimity, and learn to rise above them, thus attaining to the Transcendental One or Atman.** This is the Vision of the Non-dual.

### **How to Overcome the Pleasure-Pain Cycle**

The normal human tendency is to readily accept pleasure, but reject pain and suffering. The greater the suffering, the greater the effort and the intensity in trying to overthrow and overcome the same. **But when we learn to accept pain, (which happens after a lot of inner struggle and inner preparation), as we do pleasure, we evolve to a higher level of awareness and equanimity through surrender. Suffering bring us to our proper senses when we take it in the right spirit and attitude. This become our spiritual practice for the higher life of the spirit.**

Kunti, the mother of Pandavas, had this attitude that she may always face sufferings, which is a very rapid form of *Sadhana* - when the attitude is right. It may look as if suffering is being glorified in God's scheme of things. But there is a great purpose and requirement behind sufferings. Thomas A. Kempis, the 15th century Roman Catholic monk has much to advise on the role of suffering in his classic book, *The Imitation of Christ*.

"It is good for us to have trials and troubles at times, for they often remind us that we are on probation and ought not to hope in any worldly thing. It is good for us sometimes to suffer contradiction, to be misjudged by men even though we do well and mean well.

These things help us to be humble and shield us from vainglory. When to all outward appearances men give us no credit, when they do not think well of us, then we are more inclined to seek God Who sees our hearts. Therefore, a man ought to root himself so firmly in God that he will not need the consolations of men.”

We will see as we go along, what lessons Swami teaches us on this subject. “Suffering must be looked upon as ‘adjustment’ *sadhana*”. Swami tells us that “Test is My Taste!” and that we should “Give up Ahamkara and Mamakara (I and Mine).”

Through many births we have undergone several forms of body attachment and conditioning. The ego develops and strengthens its hold through ignorance, selfish *samskaras* (in born tendencies) and negative thinking. Sufferings therefore come upon us. These help loosen the bonds of attachment, and releases the jiva gradually from the “I and Mine” syndrome. This has been explained by Swami on many occasions for example: ‘Fish is better than selfish’ ‘Cut the I clean across and let it die on the Cross’.

### **The World for Us and Not 'We for the World!'**

Swami Vivekananda tells us how this world can be useful for our enlightenment. He says: “This world is a gigantic gymnasium, wherein we come to develop our spiritual biceps and muscles!” But very few follow this outlook. **We tend to move into the world’s by-lanes, fascinated by the world of sense-enjoyments and worldly attachments and thus miss the true goal of life.**

Our Lord Sai puts it beautifully when He teaches us how to ‘take on’ the world:

“Life is a challenge, meet it.  
Life is a game, play it.  
Life is a dream, realize it.  
Life is Love, enjoy it.”

If we follow these precepts then we shall surely succeed – and realize the true nature of Love. The *jiva* (individual) has now learned fully what it has to from the world - that we must grow and grow in God’s Love!

Let us see how facing challenges, meeting them squarely head on in the world, helps the *jiva* develop spiritual biceps. Again, it is Swami’s nectarine words which will help facilitate our understanding.

### **Challenges and Adversities - Our Teacher and Redeemer**

In The Old Testament, The Book of Job, tells us about a man called Job, his struggle, the challenges he faced and the sufferings he underwent, at the hands of Satan, before the Good Lord blessed him and made him whole. The story of Job from the Old Testament is worth relating here in brief and the important lessons we learn from it, in the light of what Swami teaches us.

## The Story of Job

Job lived in the land of Uz . He flourished during the biblical times. He was blameless, upright, honest, one who feared God and turned away from evil (he was of a *sathwic* nature). He was very prosperous. He had 7 children, 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 oxen, 500 she-asses and many servants. The Lord praises Job for his good and noble qualities, but Satan wants to challenge his integrity and test him - which he is permitted to do. Satan undertakes the task with full vigour.

### Job's Test

As a result Job suffers terribly. In one day he loses all his possessions, camels, sheep, oxen, etc. Then, all his 7 children die in a whirlwind hurricane, due to house collapse. Overnight he is a deprived and a devastated man. In the face of a catastrophe of such magnitude, Job's response is truly heroic. It shows his exemplary faith, devotion and his surrender to the Lord's Almighty will. **Having lost all, he has the courage of his conviction, not to blame God or ask "Why me?" He utters powerful words in defence of God, whereas many a good man in his place would have crumbled and quailed.** Instead he says,

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord." He says. But that is not all. Job has won the first challenge round, but wily Satan has more in store for him:

### The Second Round

Job is next smitten by a rare and painful disease. He is covered all over his entire body with pus-filled, painful boils and sores. He sits all day, among a heap of ashes for relief. Finally, even his wife gives him up – "Curse your God and die!" she utters and weeps. Swami tells us that 'The body is a bubble, don't follow the body.' '*Deha* (body) means that which is burnt.' and '*Sharira* (body) means that which declines'.

### With Friends as These, Who Needs Enemies?

To top it all, 3 of his friends visit him in the hour of his trial. They criticize and blame him fully for his past evil deeds leading to his present pitiable condition. Job searches his own soul and finds he is innocent of any crime or sin, that his friends blame him for. He finds his friends' talks shallow and without compassion and substance. To him, it appears as empty rhetoric and he rejects their explanations.

In this light Swami has taught us that "**Friends are like frogs in a pond, they vanish as soon as the pond is dry**" and that "**God is the only true friend.**"

Moreover, the friends have a 'dual mind' - which Swami says 'is half blind'. The friends speak from the head and not the heart. The friends are unable to

place themselves in his shoes. They neither empathise, nor pray for his well-being. No one is able to help him. Job is undergoing, what is called in Christian parlance, “the dark night of the soul.” He is left all to himself, to grapple with his problems in silence. In prayer and deep contemplation, he seeks the source of solace and refuge. “*Vichara* (enquiry) is seventy percent of true *sadhana*” – Baba.

### **Job’s Transformation**

It is difficult to have a true and proper perspective of Job’s inner life and his search but we can be sure that through introversion and self analysis, he is gravitating rapidly towards the core of his inner being, the spirit. The Lord alone is his shepherd. He develops complete dispassion for the body, the world, what it stands for and what it has to offer.

When one door closes, the Lord opens another. There is a Divine Interlude. **In the deep silence he hears the voice of God. He hearkens to the voice of God within, which says “The two ferocious animals responsible for your bondage have been destroyed!” The Lord’s Grace has descended upon him. In silence he is totally transformed.**

**“Do you think I would confront you with pain and sufferings, if there was not a need for it? - Baba**

### **The Two Animals In Man**

What are these two animals the Lord mentions to Job? The Lord calls them: “*Behemoth*” - the enemy within, i.e. self-centredness, (ego -centricity) containing animal and carnal elements. In this regard Swami tells us “Destroy the six inner enemies, the *shadripus*. Give up the ego.”

And the second “*Levathan*”- the enemy outside, comprising of “the world, the flesh and the devil.” Swami is continually exhorting us to “Give up worldly desires.”

### **The Inner and Outer Foes in Man**

Conquering these means inner and outer purification. The “inner” and the “outer” finally merge and there is the One. Every spiritual aspirant has to undergo this purification (purgatory), lose his body attachment and break away from the bondage of “I and mine” before final mergence, or atonement (at–One-ment).

His physical, vital, emotional, psychic, intellectual and spiritual parts undergo transformation. There is no doubt that Job had undergone this thorough inner cleansing. Job attains the state of equanimity,

“He who is not downcast in sorrow, nor elated in joy, and is free from anger, fear, attachment, etc. such a person is called the wise one, established in equanimity.” - *The Bhagavad Gita Chap II*

## Lessons Learnt from Job's Tale

Some of us may be going through pain, suffering, disappointment and anguish, and are crying out, as Job did, "Why? Why me? What have I done? Where does it all fit together? What purpose?"

Job's answer to us (as of all Scriptures of the world, likewise) is, "God knows what He is about. One of these days all the answers will come in. In the meantime, rest in confidence that He knows what He is doing with you."

## A Dialogue Between Swami and a Close Devotee

Devotee: "Swami! From the lives of saints like Tukaram and Narsimha Mehta, we see that they underwent great sufferings in their personal and family life."

Swami: "Not so! Why do you say they suffered? The Lord took care of them and their faith and devotion gave them peace and bliss! To the outsider it may appear as though they underwent great hardships! They had developed equanimity."

## More Lessons Learnt

Suffering like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder, as Shakespeare would have put it. **The power of faith and devotion leading to discrimination and dispassion, in a devotee, makes him immune to worldly sufferings.**

**"For bitter medicines, there is a date marking its use 'Effective until this date', thereafter, it becomes ineffective. God's Grace, likewise can put a date for the sufferings and its effectiveness" — Swami.**

"Instead of saying, 'Oh God, I have a big problem', take the positive step to say -"Oh problem, I have a big God!" - anon.

## The Lessons Learnt in a Beautiful Poem

These words by a poet, wrap up in a beautiful fashion, the lessons learnt from facing challenges and its concomitant sufferings:

### A Beautiful Poem

When God wants to drill a man,  
And thrill a man,  
And skill a man;  
When God wants to mould a man  
To play the noblest part,  
When He yearns with all his heart  
To create so great and bold a man  
That all the world shall be amazed;  
Watch His methods, watch His ways -

How He ruthlessly perfects  
Whom He royally selects.  
How He hammers him and hurts him,  
And with mighty blows, converts him  
Into trial shapes of clay  
Which only God understands,

While man's tortured heart is crying,  
And he lifts beseeching hands.  
How He bends but never breaks  
When his good He undertakes.  
How He uses whom He chooses,  
And with every purpose, fuses him,  
By every act, induces him  
To try his splendour out.  
God knows what He's about.

- Anon.

Finally, Swami's parting words on how He transforms Man:

"I am Nataraja, the dance master! The prince among dancers! I alone, know the agony of teaching you each and every step of the dance!"

**- Sri S Suresh Rao and the Heart2Heart Team**

## SERIAL ARTICLES

### SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI - Part 16

(Continued from the previous issue)

#### **ACT 2 - SCENE 3**

*The scene is the house of Subbamma, where Sathya Narayana Puja or the ritual worship of Lord Sathya Narayana is in progress.*

PRIEST 1: Lady, please offer your reverential salutations to the Lord, saying: 'O God, I worship You with pure devotion in order to seek Your Grace.'

PRIEST 2: In this Kali Age, worship of Lord Sathya Narayana confers the greatest strength. People refer to Him by various names such as Sathyeswara, Sathya Naryana, Sathya Deva and Sarweshwara. The worship of Sathya Narayana has now been completed. All may now offer salutations to the Lord.

*On conclusion of the Puja, the guests prepare to leave. At this time, the women who have come make their offerings to the deity that is worshipped. In return, the hostess gives them Prasaadam.*

LADY: Madam, please accept this floral offering. Since the *Puja* is over, we would like to leave.

SUBBAMMA: Please receive *Prasaadam* before you go.

LADY: We now take your leave.

SUBBAMMA: Thank you.

*The worship is being brought to an end, and the priest chants 'Om Shanti' three times. After this the holy water used for the worship is to be distributed to all present including Easwamma. The priest tells Subbamma to do the distribution.*

PRIEST: [*to Subbamma*] Lady, please distribute the holy water to all.

SUBBAMMA: [*gives holy water*] Easwamma, you receive this *Prasaadam* first before anyone else.

ESWARAMMA: Subbamma! By the Grace of Lord Sathya Narayana, the *Puja* has been performed in a grand manner. Allow me now to take your leave.

SUBBAMMA: Easwamma, take this *Prasaadam* home. Let the children stay back and have food here.

ESWARAMMA: As you say ..... *[to children]* Stay back and have your food here.

CHILDREN: Yes mother, we will.

#### SCENE 4

*Easwamma is back home doing some household work. Her husband Venkama Raju walks in.*

V.RAJU: Easwamma, ...Easwamma..

ESWARAMMA: Yes?

V.RAJU: Did the worship of Lord Sathya Naryana go off well?

ESWARAMMA: It was glorious, and a feast to the eyes!

V.RAJU: Where are the children?

ESWARAMMA: Subbamma asked the children to eat in her place.

V.RAJU: Oh, I see. .... If I had not been busy with this groundnut business, I too would have attended the function. Here... keep this money carefully. By the Grace of Lord Sathya Narayana, we all are well.

ESWARAMMA: *[receiving the money]* I shall go inside and keep it safely. Meanwhile, please go and wash your feet. After that, I shall give you *Prasaadam*.

V.RAJU: I will do as you say.

*Venkama Raju has a wash and comes to Easwamma to receive the Prasaadam.*

ESWARAMMA: Please have the *Prasaadam* of Lord Sathya Narayana.

V.RAJU: It is our good fortune to be able to receive the *Prasaadam* of Lord Sathya Narayana. Wherever the Lord casts His glance, there is prosperity. His will decides whether the family flourishes or not.

#### END OF SCENE 4

*(To be continued)*

- Heart2Heart Team

## **GITA FOR CHILDREN – Part 18**

(Continued from the previous issue)

### **Chapter – 7**

20. 'And now, a word of caution! Sometimes you would find excellence no doubt but along with it also some unwanted contamination! The excellence is Mine but the contamination does not come from Me! Take, for example, the case of Hiranyakashipu, the father of Prahalada. Hiranyakashipu was a brilliant scientist and that brilliance essentially came from Me. But he misused that gift of excellence and thereby became a demon.'

21. 'In this world, excellence often appears with contamination. When you encounter such contaminated brilliance, do not ever associate the adulteration with Me! Let us say you go to the stream that I mentioned a minute ago. You have with you two bottles and you fill both with water. One bottle is red while the other is clear. The water in the red bottle would appear red while the water in the other bottle would appear clear. The same water is present in both bottles but they appear different. Why? On account of the colour of the bottle.'

22. 'In the same manner, while Divine Power everywhere is pure, humans contaminate it with their innate tendencies or *Gun*as. More about *Gun*as later but I hope that you will remember to identify clearly the different origins of excellence on the one hand and contamination on the other.'

23. 'Divine Love also gets adulterated in the same way. Love is My Form and since I am in all, I am present as Pure Love in every Heart. But when it flows out into the world through the Mind, the senses and the body, it almost invariably gets adulterated. This adulterated stuff appears as attachment between mother and son, as infatuation between husband and wife, as desire between man and worldly attractions, and so on.'

24. 'All this adulteration takes place on account of the *Gun*as. These latent tendencies of the human superimpose themselves on Pure Love, and thus it is that the world is full of only contaminated stuff. It is very difficult to come across Pure Love, and incidentally, that is one reason why God comes down as *Avatar*, to remind man at least from time to time, what Pure Love really means!'

25. 'The *Avatar*'s Love is Pure and Unsullied because He is always totally above the *Gun*as. Like a powerful magnet, His Love draws people from everywhere and of all kinds. Yes Arjuna, that is the nature of My Love!'

26. 'Arjuna, all sorts of devotees come to Me, each with his or her own agenda! Broadly speaking, one can identify four categories amongst the devotees. All devotees love Me no doubt but except the devotees in category four, all want something or the other from Me. People in category one want wealth, people in category two want their problems solved and fixed, and

people in category three hunger for Knowledge, which, by the way, is a very good thing.'

27. 'No matter to which category people belong, I love them all, and equally too. All are the same to Me, and I give to each what he wants. Do you know why? Because I hope that one day he would ask for what I really like to give. Do you want to know what that is? Why, this very Knowledge of the Self or *Atmajnana* that I am imparting right now to you!'

28. 'Arjuna, it is funny people ask Me for all kinds of trivial things and trinkets, when I can confer the greatest possible boon.'

29. Arjuna asks, 'Krishna, why don't people do as you say? What blinds them?'

30. Krishna smiles and replies, '*Maya* of course. People accuse Me of trapping them in *Maya*. People behave foolishly and then blame Me for it, as if I have no better business than casting the veil of *Maya*. If people choose to bury their heads in sand, the fault is theirs' and not Mine!'

31. 'Arjuna, *Maya* or illusion arises from spiritual ignorance. For example, I am present everywhere and yet people ask, "Where is God? I can't see Him." If they cannot see Me despite My being everywhere, whose fault is it? Mine or theirs?'

32. 'If only people would make the effort to get rid of their ignorance, they can immediately see that I am in them, above them, below them, in front of them, behind them and so on.'

33. Arjuna then asks, 'Krishna, I understand what You say. How does one get rid of this ignorance?'

34. Krishna smiles and replies, 'Ignorance can be banished practising internal purity and seeking with humility, guidance from a *Guru*, as you are doing right now!'

35. 'Let Me give an example of how Knowledge destroys ignorance. There is a dark room and in a corner there is a coiled rope. A man enters the room, sees the rope, shouts "Snake, snake," and rushes out. A crowd gathers, and people then enter the room armed with sticks and carrying a lantern. And what do they see? A rope and not a snake. There was no snake; only a rope, and always. The person who saw it first was deluded on account of darkness, and when the darkness was removed he along with all others saw that there was no snake and only a rope.'

36. 'This example teaches the relationship between Knowledge and Reality on the one hand, and ignorance and delusion on the other. It is only the ignorant that get deluded; the Wise do not.'

37. '*Jnana* or Wisdom shines when ignorance is expelled or scrubbed away. This *Jnana* does not have to be obtained from anywhere outside; it is already latent within. All that needs to be done is to remove the shroud covering it.'

38. 'Once you acquire *Jnana*, the world would appear very different. It does not mean that you would stop seeing the Sun or the Moon and so forth. Rather you will see Me in them, in all My Glory. You will see in the Sun not the bright light of a fireball but My Divine Brilliance. You will see in the Moon not the reflected light of the Sun but My Coolness. And so on.'

39. 'Most people don't see My Omnipresence simply on account of ignorance. Indeed, even when I come down as an *Avatar*, as at present, people are not able to know who exactly I am. Once again this is on account of spiritual ignorance. Just because I eat, sleep and move about like ordinary mortals, people develop all kinds of wrong notions and fail to see Me as God in human form. In the process, they miss the priceless opportunity to spiritually elevate themselves in many ways. I am right here ever ready to help, but few seem to want spiritual help.'

40. 'All this is due to self-generated delusion. Take it from Me Arjuna, I know everything about everything and everybody. I know all about those who lived in the past, those who are living now, and those who would come in the future. That is God!'

41. 'Arjuna, it is important that you must know Me in your Heart and Not in your head. It is no use simply telling me, "Krishna, You are God!" You must FEEL that way in your Heart. Those who so know Me in their Hearts, will come to me fast. Others would have to go through many births before they get purified enough to merge in Me.'

## **END OF CHAPTER SEVEN**

(To be continued)

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

### UNIQUE SOFT SKILLS SERVICE BY HYDERABAD SAI YOUTH

The story of how the Sai Youth in Hyderabad organized a unique IT (Information Technology) and Soft Skills (computer programming) workshop for teenagers and through that brought moving transformation in their lives.

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*“Hello brothers,*

*I do not know how to express my gratitude. You have inspired us so much. My classmates and I have started to go to an orphanage next to our colony in Secunderabad to teach children in the evenings instead of going to the disco. Really, our country needs us and you have made us realize this by showing us the way. The IT workshop was so well conducted. We gained lots of insights. Also, we shared with our other classmates. Thank you for inspiring us to be part of nation building. This is what we need. No politics - only service. Hats off to your Baba. Thanks. K. Raghuram, Aurora Engineering College.”*

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This is what one participant wrote back after going through the unique Seva initiative undertaken by Sai Youth in Hyderabad. What is this new kind of service which had such a profound impact on the teenager-participants? Read on to find out.

#### **What in the Relation of Information Technology with Spirituality?**

In the second week of February, 2006, the Twin Cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad (Hyderabad is the Capital of the State of Andhra Pradesh, India) were witness to what was undoubtedly a one-of-a-kind Seminar organized by Sri Sathya Sai Organizations, Hyderabad - an IT and Soft Skills workshop for fresh graduates. It was delivered by leaders from the Industry and was christened as “Voices from the Field”.

What has IT and Soft skills got to do with Sai organization and spirituality, you might think. Well, IT may not have anything to do with spirituality but spirituality surely has a lot to do in every field and IT is no exception. You will know more about this as you read along. First let's start with how the idea took root, in the first instance.

#### **The First Step - The 7 Day Management Workshop**

Actually, the concept of workshops/seminars for the student community started back in September 2005 under the name of “Management *Saptaham*” (that is, a Week of Management) where for 7 days working professionals

spoke to the students of Sri Sathya Sai Free Tutorials on topics like Communication Skills, How to Face Interviews, Time Management, Personality Development etc. Speakers were primarily members from the Sri Sathya Sai Organizations itself. The students of the tutorial received this very well and even later expressed their desire to be a part of more such seminars.

### **Next - The 3 Day 'Success Planning' Workshop**

Further pondering upon the subject led the Youth to think that in today's context it is essential that "we bring forth the values imbibed in the teachings of Bhagavan and build a sense of National Pride among the students for our culture and history." And this was the genesis of "Success Planning" - A soft-skills workshop for today's youth.

It took about 1 month to plan and execute this 3-day workshop (6pm – 9pm on Fri and Sat; 10am – 2pm on Sun). Posters and banners were put in Degree colleges; our Sai brothers approached college managements to nominate deserving candidates; a Community Hall was booked for the same; scrolling advertisements were put in local TV channels; and leaders from the corporate world were invited to lecture and share their knowledge with the students. The project was scaled-up to accommodate nearly 400 students (as compared to 100 in Management Saptaham).

The response was overwhelming! Students queued up an hour before the scheduled start time, and used the opportunity thoroughly by interacting with the guest lecturers well after the seminar was over. On the final day, a skit on Nation Building was presented and as an immediate service opportunity, a blood-grouping camp was arranged for volunteers.

"There were many lessons for us in terms of organizing such events", says a youth coordinator and continues, "We realized that the invited students formed a very heterogeneous group making it difficult for us to cater to their very specific needs; renting an auditorium resulted in huge expenses as did the advertising campaign used to invite the students."

### **Finally - The 5 Day Workshop - 'Voices From the Field'**

Wiser from the experience of the previous two conferences and able to be more effective in their presentation, the Sai Youth conducted a workshop from Feb 8 through Feb 12, 2006 entitled "Voices From The Field". This was focused in catering to the needs of 300 odd students who wanted to pursue their careers in the IT industry. Spread over 5 days and for more than 3 hours a day, this workshop brought the best people from the Industry - Project and Programme Managers, Functional Leaders and CEOs on to one platform.

#### **The Agenda for the 5 days was:**

- Wed, Feb 8 (6:30 pm – 9:30pm) → Overview of the IT Industry
- Thu, Feb 9 (6:30 pm – 9:30pm) → Software Eng., Quality Assurance
- Fri, Feb 10 (6:30 pm – 9:30pm) → IT Enables Services, video conference with a Consultant in the USA.

- Sat, Feb 11(6:30 pm – 9:30pm) → Personality Development / Communication Skills
- Sun, Feb 12 (9:30am – 5:00pm) → How to face interviews, Insight into Success Planning, Question/Answer session with panel of experts.

Topics on Day 2 and 3 helped the students derive an insight into each of the above-mentioned areas, as they are in the practical world and helped them understand what it takes to get into their area of interest.

In order to help them understand what should or should not be done in interviews, some of the participants were invited a week before the start of the seminar, where a mock interview was conducted and the whole scenario video taped (of course faces were masked!). These videos were then played on Day 5 with industry experts commenting on the different scenarios.

The session on Insight into Success Planning focused beyond the Philosophy of Expressions, Behaviors and Attitudes to more Indian Values and Beliefs and the one common Spirit which binds each one of us, and how all these contribute to the “Success” of an individual.

### **Shivam and Its Impact**

The programme was conducted in Sivam (Swami’s ashram in Hyderabad) and was very well received by the audience. A presentation on service activities conducted by the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations was also given to the students who responded very positively and more importantly came forward to take part in such activities in the future. In fact one of the students was so inspired that he wanted to start right away and offered to arrange the chairs in the Sivam Meeting Hall from the very next day. “It was very inspiring for all of us to watch this...it was worth the effort!” says a Sai youth coordinator.

And as you can read from the below feedback from a participant, the workshop was a resounding success!

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*Let me congratulate you for conducting a brilliant workshop. Frankly, I used to think that Sivam temple was a religious center. And that nothing except bhajans and poojas happens there. But, it was only after I attended this workshop that I came to know of the many service activities you are all doing so silently. Really, it is mind blowing. **We, in our college have decided to participate in nation building as suggested by you. We have decided that we will visit hospitals on every Saturday as it is half day for us. And we will take fruits for the patients. Thank you all.***

*R. S. Subbarao and friends, Deccan College of Engineering*

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Some of the speakers actually offered to look at some of the students for potential employment, which was a “total surprise to everyone and also a big boost to morale” says another Sai Youth.

The expenses for an auditorium were eliminated by using the Sivam Premises, which also lent an inspiring atmosphere to the proceedings. Advertising costs were cut down by enrolling students ahead of time by visiting their colleges.

### **How the Workshop Came About**

Sai brothers toiled day and night for 2 weeks to put the programme together. After 8-10 hours at their jobs, they met in Sivam in the evenings to plan the event. Some of them missed lunches at work just to be able to visit the colleges and interact with the students. Many of them were there in Sivam on working days also to take care of the seating, audio-video arrangements, to ensure that all the guests were comfortable and that the programme would run without any interruptions.

### **The Most Important Point....**

**What was interesting to note however was that the leaders from the various corporates who came over to address the students spoke of Values and Integrity as essentials they look at.** Obviously students who have impressionable minds absorbed these facts as they heard it directly from the horse’s mouth. **When the corporate highfliers - people students emulate - speak about values and ethics, the impact is certainly noticeable.**

The examples given from real life corporate scenarios, where values play a major part, were impressive and ensured that the message was driven home. In fact one of them even said that “If you have Integrity and Values, nothing else matters.” Impressed with the workshop, one participant said,

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*This has been a great and rare opportunity to find such a wonderful platform of IT Market update - and that too from such experienced personalities in the industry. I am fortunate to get such blessings from Baba.*

*This has really built a lot of confidence within me. And further helped me in understanding how to go on in the IT industry at various levels. Thank you very much once again for conducting such a valuable workshops. - Sridhar Kannuri.*

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**“We certainly look forward to conducting many more such workshops to benefit the student community and at the same time help in building a**

**better India - a value based India ,” say the Sai Youth of Hyderabad in one unified voice.**

The student participants seemed not only to benefit by learning new skills, but also were enriched in their hearts as Kalyan of Shadan Engineering College says,

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*Your workshop was best quality. I had paid 2500 rupees and attended a soft skill workshop conducted in the city. Neither were the presenters so good nor was the whole workshop. Your idea of having video conferencing with a software professional from US was really unique. **And it is still unbelievable that you did all this for free. Amazing! We did not know that good people are still around. Now we know why Sathya Sai Baba is worshipped - it is because He inspires you.***

*Wish u all the best, Kalyan, Shadan Engineering College.*

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For the Sai Youth, their inspiration and strength is Sai. They tell us how Swami made His presence felt by the occasional drop of the flower. They felt His presence throughout.

We pray that they have more such opportunities of service in the future - helping themselves, others, society, the nation and more importantly, being effective instruments in His hands. Heart2Heart wishes them all the best.

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## SERVE AND INSPIRE (SAI) SEVA IN ABU DHABI, UAE.

### Sri Sathya Sai Medical Awareness Camps.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a constitutional federation of seven emirates, namely Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah, was formally established on 2nd December 1971. With an area of 83,000 sq km along the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, the country is four-fifths desert. Yet it is a country of contrasting landscapes, from awe-inspiring dunes to rich oases, precipitous rocky mountains to fertile plains – all of which have helped to make it one of the world's fastest growing tourist destinations. Qatar lies to its west, Saudi Arabia to the south and west, and Oman to the north and east. The largest city of the federation is Abu Dhabi which is also its capital.

In this oil-rich country, one of the things that is a cause for concern is care for the elderly. The elderly persons comprise an increasingly greater percentage of the UAE population who need care and attention especially because of the on-set of age-related diseases such as diabetes mellitus and cardio-vascular diseases, psycho somatic disorders, chronic low back pains and the like.

And if they are from weaker sections of the society their problems are really compounded. It is not only the elderly but also the middle-aged from the working population who are often victims of various killer diseases and many of them are not even aware of it. It is this state of affairs which prompted the Sai devotees of Abu Dhabi to reach out to this segment of the UAE population under the banner SAI (Serve And Inspire group).

**As part of the 80th birthday celebrations of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the medical wing of the Abu Dhabi Sai center continued to conduct medical awareness camps, once a month, for these economically weaker section of workers in and around Mussafah, the industrial town of Abu Dhabi. For the devotees and their families, a weekly SAI clinic is also run on every Sunday in Abu Dhabi town.**

### **H.E. The Indian Ambassador Helps in the Sai Seva**

His Excellency (H.E.) C.M. Bhandari, the Ambassador of India in Abu Dhabi came forward and offered the embassy premises once a month to conduct the awareness camp for the benefit of the patients who have no access to quality health care.

“It is a wonderful opportunity for me to associate with the service activities of the Sai Center and I involve myself for my own spiritual upliftment,” said the Indian Ambassador in his speech. “Thus Swami blessed us with legal and consular protection to perform the medical Seva, as per His assurance - **Why Fear When I Am There**,” say the joyful Sai volunteers in Abu Dhabi.

Diabetes and hypertension are the major problems among the economically weaker working communities in and around Mussafah and Abu Dhabi.

**Heart2Heart** is pleased to inform you that patients from Pakistan and Bangladesh were thrilled to receive such loving and valuable health care - a rare experience in today's society, where we know consumerism is the order.

"Most people are not aware of the dangers of these diseases and the way in which they manifest. The medical camps are aimed at providing on-the-spot detection through blood tests, as well as to create awareness regarding the dangers of these silent killer diseases," says a Sai Volunteer.

Health education in terms of hygiene, balanced nutrition, practical tips on controlling hypertension, diabetes and avoidance of vices like smoking and alcoholism were explained through power point presentations by devotee doctors of the Abu Dhabi SAI centre.

Going down memory lane, a senior volunteer says, **"When we began the camps, we had the services of one doctor and a pharmacist. And we conducted the service in a garage. But now, by the divine grace of Swami, there are seven lady General physicians and two male doctors with the back up services of an Ophthalmologist, a Gynecologist, Pediatrician, Dentist, Neuro Surgeon and Plastic Surgeon."**

The dedicated Sai volunteers carry out Sai activities reflecting Swami's message that service to humanity is service to Divinity. In fact, the volunteers eagerly wait for the fourth Friday of every month to participate in this noble Seva.

### **How the Camps are Organised**

**It is important to note how systematically they go about organising these medical camps, paying attention to every detail so that the people being served are not put to inconvenience. Their service consists of:**

- Arrangement of transport to pick up the patients from the labour camps located at Mussafah industrial area, approximately 30 kms away from Abu Dhabi city.
- Then on the arrival of the patients at the medical camp they are received cordially by the Sai volunteers and their names and details registered.
- Blood pressure and blood sugar check ups follow, to screen them from the silent killer diseases like Diabetes, Hypertension, etc.
- SAI doctors then carry out the examinations and prescribe the treatment plans. Future follow-ups, diet regulation, hygiene and exercise, etc. are advised. For the relevant patients some special lab tests, X-rays, physiotherapy, etc. are arranged in the city hospitals.
- The pharmacist dispenses the medicines as per prescription and explains to them with love how to take these prescribed medicines. Patients requiring other consultations, like eye and dental check ups and treatments are also directed to the respective specialists.

- For some patients who need admission to referral hospitals, the Sai center provides a Health card if needed, and devotee doctors have overseen their operations carried out for Hernia, Abdominal complaints, Knee joint problems, and Gynecology problems. Patients requiring heart complaint evaluations and management are also catered to.

“I am eternally grateful to Baba. It is because of His divine kindness that we benefit from free treatment, medicines, food and transportation” commented one patient - and as a result of the exemplary care shown at the camps this sentiment was echoed by many other beneficiaries at the camps. You could see they were so happy with the attention and love being showered on them so unconditionally.

### **Patients Calmed by Films on Swami**

While the patients waited in the waiting area, they could also see the inspiration behind the camp while watching two Sai Videos - *His Works* and *Pure Love*. Many patients and embassy staff were thrilled to know about Baba and His global mission. The loving care provided by the doctors and SAI volunteers brought joy to their faces. When acts are performed to make Swami happy, Love becomes the basis and these acts become selfless, touching the core of a person’s heart. The Doctors and volunteers experienced exactly the same feeling at the camps as they lived Swami’s unique message - ‘**Hands that help are holier than lips that pray**’.

### **Swami’s Care for the Patients**

In each and every camp or clinic Swami’s care was in evidence. When medicines were in need, they would be given the next day through the SAI members.

It was also routine to find some patients with high B.P. (>200/120mm), blood sugars more than 400 mg (in some patients the reading was more than the capacity of the machine i.e.> 600 mg) and chronic cough and chest problems. Surprisingly these patients with complicated diseases are turning healthy in a record period of a few days without hospitalization! Such is the effect of Sai’s love and grace. It is no wonder that many patients eagerly look forward to the next medical camp the following month.

<u>Medical Camp in UAE</u>	
<u>Camp date</u>	<u>Patients Treated</u>
28th October 2005.	90
25 <sup>th</sup> November 2005	122
23rd December 2005	105
20th January 2006	132
<b>24<sup>th</sup> February 06</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>438</b>

“We have spent a lot of money in other clinics without relief. But in SAI clinic from the first day onwards we feel normal” say the above two patients. Both were suffering from a major chest disease and now with Sai’s care they are absolutely healthy. The medical care provided included the areas of cardiology, urology, dental care, eye care, homeopathy, blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, ear nose and throat, etc.

### **Blood Donation Seva:**

**Apart from medical camps, another service activity which goes on throughout the year is Blood Donation.** As part of Bhagavan’s 80th Birthday, the Center planned a blood donation drive. To begin with **63** blood donations were given and some more donation events are on-going.

Devotees are encouraged to participate in this noble seva of ‘liquid love’ by spelling out the potential benefits for the donor from the spiritual as well as medical point of view. They are informed that apart from helping a fellow human being one will be actually helping oneself as it results in improvement of circulation in bone marrow, dilution of blood and less strain on the heart, etc. They are also informed how the multiple components of the blood like RBC, platelets, etc. can be used separately.

### **Sheikh Nahayan Hails Sai Baba**

Recently the Sai devotees in Abu Dhabi also conducted a different kind of Seva – organising a Hindi language propagation conference in the auditorium of the Indian embassy. The main aim was to promote Vedic literature through proficiency in Hindi so that profound Vedic knowledge and literature is within reach of everyone. There were 200 members, with no earlier exposure to Baba, invited by the Indian ambassador. Honorable education minister H.H Sheikh Nahayan was the chief guest for the function. In his inaugural address the Ambassador recollected how Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba beautifully blessed Sheikh Nahayan Bin Mubarak Al Nahayan with a personal interview in August 2005. It came as a surprising reminder to the august assembly of the Indian community.

In his speech, Sheikh Nahayan hailed the holiness of Baba and his great fortune to have a personal interview with Him. Later, the Indian Ambassador introduced Abu Dhabi centre’s chairman Dr. Kolli Chalam, who presented Sheikh Nahayan with a memento. The Indian ambassador also gave a brief account of the monthly medical camps taking place in the embassy premises, highlighting the true spirit and the selfless nature underlying SAI activities.

It was a great occasion where Sai’s love and Divine presence flowed through everyone present.

**Heart2Heart** wishes the Sai devotees of Abu Dhabi and UAE all success and joy in their continuous efforts to bring smiles of joy on all those they serve.

**- Heart2Heart**

## PRASHANTI DIARY

### CHRONICLES OF HEAVEN ON EARTH

After the hectic month of February there was just a short lull, before the busy afternoon schedule was resumed. Kicking off the programs in the month of March was a *Burra Katha*, an active and vibrant rural art form endemic to the region of Rayalaseema, where Puttaparthi is situated.

The land Rayalaseema was ruled by a great king called Sri Krishna Devarayulu whose Vijayanagar kingdom included the current states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Krishnadevaraya was a wise and just king who transformed this region of *rayulu* (stones) into *ratnaaluu* (diamonds).

It was his minister, Thimmarasu, who took the concept of *Yakshagana*, a stylized drama form from the Kannada speaking region of Karnataka, with elaborate costumes and music into a simpler art form adapted to the Telugu speaking region wherein three men went around the nook and corner of the kingdom trying to spread the word of the king, his plans and upcoming projects. These three men had fixed roles - that of a bard (*kathakudu*), a narrator (*rajakeeyam*) and a *hasyam* - a comic providing relief through caustic humour using contemporary issues. This was a fusion of information and entertainment at its very best that resonated well with the target rural audience.

Traditional art forms (*Janapadha Kala*) that prevail over time are those which penetrate easily and deeply into the minds and the hearts of the people (*Jana*). These traditional art forms mirror the lifestyles of the people in the villages where the majority of India's population lives. A number of such traditional art forms are extant in Andhra Pradesh; a few being: *Burra Kathalu* (an art form with a trio telling a story with songs, narration and humour); *Hari Kathalu* (a singer - *haridasu* - who narrates the story of the Lord through melodious songs and simultaneously taps his feet to the rhythm); *Uggu Kathalu* (a form of folk art where mythological stories are narrated to the audience); *Jamukula Kathalu* (consists of a trio narrating a story through songs); *Jangama Kathalu* (a traditional folk art of telling a story, where the group moves from place to place); *Thappidi Gulu* (a dance accompanied with songs; the singers wear a drum called *thappidi* around the neck); *Veedhi Bhogavathamulu* (a small group moving from street to street narrating stories); *Veedhi Natakamulu* (street plays on social issues interspersed with music); *Chekka Bhajanalu* (singing songs using *thalam* or cymbals), *Thollu Bhoomalakatlu* (a puppet show). These art forms thus run the entire gamut from puppets on a string to different dance and song art forms as well as the hoary art of story telling in different milieu.

Those of our readers who have read Swami's wonderful biography *Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram* by Sri Kasturi would perhaps recollect that right from an early age Swami took a keen interest in these traditional art forms. Swami wrote, enacted and directed many plays during His childhood days.

He also started a *pandhari bhajan* group that used to go from village to village singing the glories of the Lord. And of course, the famous story where He danced and surpassed the skill of the most famous professional dancer of the day (Rishyendramani) and earned the accolade of one and all is still evergreen in our memory.

While the kings of yesteryears patronized the arts, the plight of the present day artists in the villages is deplorable. Even though the spark of enthusiasm and the love of their art glow in their eyes, their empty stomachs force them to look for alternate employment as their art alone does not prove sufficient. And for all in dire situations, God is the only refuge.

Swami in His own unobtrusive and silent way has been trying to revive these ancient art forms. These art forms have always been performed in Swami's divine presence over the years; usually the artists were professionals drawn by Swami's love to perform in His divine presence from places in Andhra Pradesh like Guntur, Hyderabad, and Warangal and so on. In later years, Swami has been encouraging the students to learn these arts and perform them in His divine Presence.

In 1988 a troupe from Guntur performed a style of *bhajan* singing and dancing called *chekka bhajan*. Swami was so impressed, that this started a close and intricate relationship between the *chekka bhajan* group and Swami's students over the next few years.

After the students of all campuses were trained, they presented a number of professional quality performances before Swami and the devotees on different occasions. For a full account of this absorbing love tale please read the story entitled "*Chekka bhajan* and Sai Students" in the box below.

A decade later, perhaps in late 1997 or early 1998, quite unexpectedly and with little notice, Swami called a few traditional artists from the villages around Puttaparthi and had them perform a street play before the students in the Institute Auditorium. This was very well received and for most of the 'next generation students', this was perhaps their first exposure to these traditional rural art forms.

The boys ever quick to do what pleases the Lord, quickly started taking an interest in these art forms. Swami engaged experts in the various fields to come and teach the students of the School and the Institute and they have (in addition to *chekka bhajan*) learnt the nuances of *Burra Katha*, *Hari Katha*, *Pancha Vadyam* (an art form from Kerala), and *Nadaswaram* that is prevalent throughout South India. Very soon, on Nov 22nd, 1999, as part of the convocation drama, the boys Sujith, S. Prashant and Karthik performed the first *burra katha* by the students called *Pandavulu*.

Sri Krishna Bhaskar, a *burra katha* artist, lyric writer and music composer is a long time devotee of Swami and has performed more than 20 *burra kathas* in the divine presence during the years 1961-1982. He has been training the boys since 1999, and they have creditably performed quite a number of *Burra Kathas* that he has written, over these past 7 years. They have not only

performed during the convocation dramas and in Sai Kulwant hall but have regaled the Lord with a *burra katha* whenever He visited their hostel. On March 9th, 2006, they performed yet one more *katha* to please the Lord!

Quite recently, on Feb 10, 2005, when Swami conducted the spiritual marriage ceremony for octogenarian couples, aged 70 years and over, called as *Bheema Ratha Shanti*, the featured item was not a big name artist to sing for all. No, the entertainment was provided by the *Lambadi* (gypsy) dancers, hailing from Warangal, who looked very colourful in their red outfits and really won the hearts of one and all with their elegant dance steps. Thus slowly but surely, Swami is exposing all of us to the vibrant art that is alive in the villages and the small towns of the country and generating in us a deep and abiding love for the culture that is Bharat! The mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceedingly small.

### **CHEKKA BHAJAN AND SAI STUDENTS**

It was during the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations in 1988 that a folk festival was organised in the Divine presence by the Andhra Pradesh State Organisation. From every district of Andhra Pradesh, a native folk dance group was selected and a rally was performed before Swami in Prashanti Nilayam. The rally lasted for more than 3 hours with every folk dance group performing for just 5 minutes in front of Swami. Folk dances like *Thappeta gullu*, *Garagalu*, *Dhimsa*, *Guravayyalu*, *Dappu Vadyam*, *Puli Vesham*, *Veera Natyam*, *Chekka Bhajan*, *Kolatam* and many such came up in procession and performed before Swami. Swami was immensely pleased and His joy was boundless.

As the *Chekka Bhajan* (from Guntur District) came up before Swami, His interest was aroused by the *Chekka Bhajan's* rhythm, beat, formations, songs, synchrony and the captivity. Swami blessed the group with another full pledged hour-long performance the very next day on 22 nd November, 1988. The spectators were spellbound with the magical performance of the group. What followed next was Swami's overwhelming Grace in abundance. Every member of the group was presented personally by Swami with a pair of clothes, photos and *vibhuti prasadam* and the *Chekka* Master Sri Koti Reddy of Munnangi Village of Guntur District was presented with, in addition to the clothes, a gold chain created by Swami.

'*Chekka*' means a wooden piece; but, in the context of the folk dance, it is a pair of wooden pieces, specially prepared to be used as the main percussion instrument to the rhythm of which the dancers dance. In *Chekka Bhajana* both the *Chekkas* are held in the right hand and the other hand is used for occasional, generalised gestures. The *chekkas* not only provide the basic rhythm, but with the jingling bells tied at the ends and the metal pieces fitted into the *chekkas* give a more pleasing variety of sounds. By opening and closing the palm, the *chekkas* can be struck at each other, which produces metallic and jingling sounds at the same time.

*Chekka Bhajana*, more than any other folk art, has remained a temple art form for many centuries. It is popular especially in the Sri Rama temples, which abound in Andhra. No village in Andhra, however small, exists without a Rama temple and wherever there is a Rama temple; *Chekka Bhajana* is bound to be performed. It has been a happy and absorbing folk dance, learnt during the lean months of summer when villagers are relatively free from their agricultural work and presented to the villagers in the following festivals.

A *Chekka Bhajana* group consists of 16 to 20 artists sometimes even more up to 40, but is always an even number. The costume of the artists is simple, but colourful: a *dhoti* tied in the fashion of a cyclist, a colourful shirt on it, a garland around the neck, garlands tied to the hands, and a coloured kerchief around the neck and ankle-bells. They will also tie a wide, coloured ribbon around their forehead, tied in an artistic way on the right side. Each dancer prepares his '*chekkas*' with utmost adoration. On the outer side of each piece, the images of Rama, Sita and Laxmana are engraved. Otherwise, they may have beautiful creepers painted.

The songs are usually taken from the popular texts on Rama - written by Bhadrachala Ramadas, Tyagaraja, Tumu Narasimha Das and other saint-composers. Some of the local writers wrote songs on other gods and goddesses. There are also episodes from Krishna 's life, from Harischandra, etc., but the songs and narratives on Sri Rama are more in number and more popular.

In the first week of December 1988, the District president of Guntur Sri. K. Narayana Rao received a message to get 40 pairs of '*Chekkas*' and to send Sri Koti Reddy to Prashanti Nilayam to teach *Chekka Bhajan* to the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. He rushed to Prashanti Nilayam along with the master Sri Koti Reddy and the *Chekkas*. Swami in an interview blessed Sri. Koti Reddy to teach *Chekka Bhajan* to His students. Swami Himself selected the students and directed the *Chekka Bhajan* Master as to what had to be taught. Swami also selected the *bhajan keerthans* to be used. Swami used to visit the campus to periodically assess the progress of students and to guide them personally. On Jan 1 st, 1989, Swami called all the students learning the *Chekka Bhajan* to Prashanti Nilayam and personally saw the rehearsal and blessed every student and the Master.

In 30 days time the students learnt the folk dance form of *Chekka Bhajan* and they were asked to perform in public and before Swami during the Sports Day Celebrations. The students performed in perfection, just like a professional group, to the delight of all the spectators and Swami on 11 th of January, 1989. Swami was so pleased that he summoned every student to the Shanti Vedika and blessed them. He summoned the Master Sri Koti Reddy and felicitated him in presence of all the dignitaries.

During the *Avatar Prakatana Swarnothsavams* (Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Declaration of Avatar hood) in 1990, an opportunity was again presented to the *Chekka Bhajan* group of Guntur District. The performance was excellent and this time Swami again summoned the Master Koti Reddy and the Junior

Master Brahmananda Reddy to teach the *Chekka Bhajan* to the boys of Institute. During the Birthday Celebrations in the same year the boys of the Institute performed *Chekka Bhajan* in Sai Kulwant Hall.

In 1995, during Gurupoornima, ***Paduka Mahothsavam*** was organised by Sri. K. Narayana Rao of Guntur District with participation from every district and once again with special blessings from Bhagavan, the *Chekka Bhajan* groups led by Sri Koti Reddy and Sri Brahmananda Reddy performed before Swami and the Primary School boys were trained by the Senior Master Sri Koti Reddy. The boys of the Primary School performed during the Sports Day in 1996 for a brief time in the procession and in the last week of January they performed in Sai Kulwant Hall for half an hour in a full group performance. It was an amazing performance by the small kids of the Primary School.

In 1996, during the '***Ekadasa Sahasra Kalasabhisheka Mahothsavam***', organized by the District President of Guntur District during October in Sai Kulwant Hall, again the *Chekka Bhajan* groups of Guntur District of Seniors and another group of Bala Vikas students were given an opportunity by Bhagavan to participate in the four days of celebrations.

Impressed by the performance of the *Bala Vikas* children in *Chekka Bhajan* Swami again summoned the *bhajan* master to teach *Chekka Bhajan* to the new batch of students of the Institute, the Higher Secondary School and the Primary School. In less than a month's time a "near professional" 3 teams of *Chekka Bhajan* were trained in the campus. Every team performed before Swami during the Birthday celebrations in 1996 and later in the same year the Masters were summoned to train the Girls of the Primary School. The Junior Master Sri Brahmananda Reddy and Assistant Master Sri Prasada Reddy trained the girls of Primary School and on the Ladies Day of 1998 - on the 19th of November, the girls of Primary School performed *Chekka Bhajan* with a professional perfection in the Divine Presence and they were blessed by Bhagavan.

Heart2Heart would like to thank Sri Koteswar Rao of Guntur for providing the material and photos for this story on *chekkabhajan*.

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### **MARCH 9TH: A BURRA KATHA BY THE INSTITUTE STUDENTS**

The three boys who had prepared for the different roles in the *Burra Katha*, had a card ready to seek the divine blessings to put up the programme the next day. The Lord perhaps reflecting His enthusiasm for this genre said, "Put it now itself".

Readers can perhaps best imagine the hectic activity that ensued. A quick run had to be made to the Hostel to get the costumes and the musical instruments. The costumes were quickly donned, the instruments fine-tuned and make-up applied almost in "real-time" so that in a matter of about 20 minutes the boys were ready to offer their presentation! In order to alleviate

the confusion among the devotees who were all wondering about this frenetic activity, Swami asked Prof Anil Kumar to introduce the programme that was going to be presented that afternoon.

The boys started their programme with a salutation to Lord Ganesha – *Jaya Jaya Gananathaam* followed by a song that offered salutations to our beloved Mother Sai – *Maata Neekide Vandanam*. A few years ago when the boys first performed a *burra katha* in front of Swami He had asked that after the first invocation song the boys should be garlanded in keeping with the tradition. Thus the 3 *burra katha* artists were next garlanded to the merriment of the crowd.

The story proper began with the third song *Katha Chebuta Vinarayyah* ... “Let me tell you the nectarine story of Shirdi Sai, O noble men who have assembled in Sai Kulwant Hall”.

The next song announces that they were going to hear the unique story of the avatar hood of Shirdi Sai as revealed by Swami Himself - *Shirdi Sai janamu telipunu Sathya Sai manaku*. (In answer to the intense prayers of a couple called Gangabhavadya and Devagiriamma in the remote village of Pathri in the former Nizam’s dominions, a son was born on September 28 th, 1835 – who would later be known as Shirdi Sai Baba).

The fifth song, *Kadilenu Shivudu*...., tells about Lord Shiva coming down to earth to test Devagiriamma in the disguise of a decrepit old man, at a time when her husband was away looking after his boats on a rainy night.

This “old man” requested first shelter, then food and finally asked the married woman Devagiriamma to massage his legs as he was tired. Not knowing what to do, Devagiriamma went around the village looking for someone who would do the task. Despondent at being unable to find anyone to help her she prayed to Lord Shiva to help her.

Parvathi (Lord Shiva’s consort) then knocked on the door and offered to help Devagiriamma. Devagiriamma, having no clue about the divine nature of the lady, was elated that Goddess Parvati had sent the woman to help in response to her prayers. She sent the newcomer to the veranda for serving the old man and closed the front door. However, the “old man” and the “newcomer” were none other than Parameshwara and Parvathi, the divine couple!

They wanted to bless Devagiriamma and knocked on the door and revealed themselves in their divine form to her. Unable to contain her joy, Devagiriamma fell at their feet. The divine couple blessed her and said that she would have a son to maintain the lineage and a daughter for *kanyadaana* (to be offered in marriage). Lord Easwara said, “I am immensely pleased with you and shall Myself take birth as your third child”.

When the husband returned in the morning, the eager wife related to him all that had happened the previous night. But Gangabhavadhya dismissed the entire episode as incredible and fanciful.

The sixth song *Hara Hara Shankara* .... tells about Gangabhavadhya praying to Lord Shiva to bless him with the Divine Darshan. The seventh song, "*Bhaavateeta kaalateeta*" tells about Devagiramma praying to Lord Shiva to grant her a child.

The story continues. After a year had passed, Devagiramma became enceinte and a son was born to her, followed a year later by a daughter. Gangabhavadhya was now convinced that the birth of the two children was the result of the blessing conferred by Parvathi and Parameshwara. He told his wife, "You had the good fortune to be blessed by the divine couple. I did not have the luck". When Devagiramma conceived again Gangabhavadhya began to feel an urge to give up hearth and home and go in search of the divine couple. He announced to his wife that he was leaving for the forest to do penance. The devoted wife Devagiramma decided to follow him, though she was in the ninth month of pregnancy. After proceeding some distance, she developed labour pains and delivered a boy in the forest. Wrapping the baby in a piece of cloth she left the child in the forest and went in search of her husband. It was because of this circumstance that no-one knew who the parents of the child were.

The eighth song *Paramahivamu tallidandrulu evaru cheppagalaru* ... wistfully asks who can decide the mother and father of the cosmic dancer? The fakir who found the child in the forest brought him home and brought him up as his own as he was childless. The boy stayed in the fakir's house for four years (1835 - 1839). However, the fakir then passed away. The fakir's wife who lavished great love on the little child was grief-stricken. To add to her worries the boy was behaving in a "strange" way. In those days, Hindu-Muslim differences were prevalent in the region and considerable bitterness prevailed between the two communities. The boy used to visit a Hindu temple and sing the praise of Allah, "Allah malik hai" – Allah is the Supreme Lord. Similarly, He would visit the mosque and declare, "Rama is God; Shiva is Allah". Thus the aggrieved members of both communities went to the fakir's wife and complained about the boy's behaviour. Unable to deal with the situation, the fakir's widow handed the boy, for upbringing, to a pious scholar called Venkusa who was living near her house. The boy stayed in Venkusa's Ashram for 12 years from 1839 to 1851.

One night in 1851, the boy left the Ashram and reached Shirdi, which was a small village at that time. He stayed there barely two months and was then wandering from place to place. After many years, he reached a place called Dhoopkheda. The ninth song *Baba Vacchadu Shirdi Baba Vachcadu* .... tells about how the residents of Dhoopkheda village used to invite Him to their homes.

When He was residing in Dhoopkheda, the marriage of Chandu Patel's brother's son was celebrated. Baba joined the marriage party and reached

Shirdi again. From that day till 1918, He did not move out of Shirdi and remained there for 60 years. Baba's complete life span was for 83 years from 1835 to 1918.

In Shirdi, Baba was invited to each and every home. Similarly in Puttaparthi, devotees and students await the return of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba from Brindavan. This sentiment was memorialized in the next song "*Dosita Hulabi Poovulato Nee Vaakita Nilabadi Unnamaya*" meaning - 'With a handful of beautiful rose flowers, standing near Your door-step; we await Your return from Brindavan to Parthi'.

The eleventh song *Shiva Tarudu Shirdi Sai Gaa* glorifies Lord Shiva for coming down to earth as Shirdi Sai and restoring peace in the world. Baba in the year 1918 told a devotee called Lakshmibai that He would take His next *avatar* after 8 years in a hamlet known as Puttaparthi, in Andhra Pradesh. And that *avatar* is none other than our beloved Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

The twelfth song (*Sakshat Daivam sai yera...*) tells that only the loving and living God i.e. Swami is real and eternal and everything else in this mundane world is transient. The thirteenth song (*Mugimpulenidi Baba Charitramu*) further adds that Baba's story is infinite.

The last song was a prayer for every one of us to open our eyes and realize His true value. *Ayya baboyi Ikkadunnavah; nee Kosam Etiki Etiki Tirugutunnam Sai deva* – "Oh my dear Swami! Not aware of You being here, we people go everywhere in this world in search of external material objects. Let us all surrender ourselves at Your Lotus Feet".

B. Sai Prabhakar, a second year B.Sc student, was the bard, S Aravind of II B.A. played the role of the comic and Sai Raghu Ram another second year B.Sc. student did the narration. The melodious voices of these boys were well supported with soothing, mellifluous accompaniments with Sanket Modi on the key-board, Niranjana on the *tabla* and Raghavan on the *dholak*.

It was an enjoyable time for all, even for those of us who do not know Telugu, but were able to appreciate the sentiments expressed in the song. Swami also expressed His pleasure by posing for a group photograph with all of the boys (who brought this excellent programme to Sai Kulwant Hall) and their teacher.

### **MARCH 12TH: SPEECHES BY LONGTIME DEVOTEES**

On Sunday, March 12th, after Swami entered Sai Kulwant hall, He seated Himself on the dais in the verandah and listened to the *Vedam* chanting for a few minutes. Soon, unexpectedly He asked that mikes be set up and chose 2 longtime elderly devotees, who are associated with Him over many decades to address the gathering.

After a brief introduction by the Vice-Chancellor, Sri A. Gokak, Dr S.V. Chittibabu rose to speak at the divine command. Dr Chittibabu retired as the Director of School and Collegiate Education in Tamilnadu.

In a distinguished career, he also served as the Vice-chancellor for Madurai, Andhra and Annamalai Universities. He also has been a member of a number of committees connected with the activities of education and education reform. He has been associated with the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning since its inception and has a very special relationship with the Institute. He has been a member of the Governing body since 1986 and has been an ardent devotee of Baba for over 40 years.

Speaking in a soft voice, Dr. Chittibabu first narrated how Swami came into his life in 1962. He said that he used to suffer from severe headaches which frightened him. He was desperate about how he was going to overcome this ailment. It was his sister-in-law who suggested to him to seek refuge in the love of the Lord of Puttaparthi and that He would take care of everything. With that firm faith, he came to Parthi all the way from Chennai and was given an interview. In the interview, Swami immediately asked him – “Are you having problems in the head?” He was just stunned. Swami then materialized the sacred *vibhuti prasad* and applied a little on his forehead. Even before he left Parthi to return to Madras (Chennai), his headaches were gone! Sri Chittibabu said that we are most fortunate to have in our midst a living and loving God, who has chosen to incarnate and rescue humanity from the prevalent chaotic situation.

Quoting Swami, Dr. Chittibabu exhorted the audience to be courageous and be bold and have full faith in divinity. He said that we have innate wisdom inherent in all of us but that wisdom must flower. He also said that we should not be sleeping but be a dynamo of action. We must nurture noble thoughts and mould those thoughts along the right lines. Right thoughts must then be followed by right action. Dr Chittibabu also remarked about how Swami loves humanity by mentioning His myriad selfless projects to benefit humanity. Quoting Swami, he then asked everyone not to be selfish as the world is not for you alone.

In closing, Dr Chittibabu said that we can return His love by demonstrating that we are all loving brothers and sisters. He said that the world must become a better, brighter and happier place. He ended with a prayer to the Lord to give us the strength to bear our sorrows and keep our mind above the petty trifles of day to day; and to give us the strength to make our love fruitful in service to humanity. He finally prayed that everybody can live in peace, harmony and *shanti* in this great land of ours.

### **Speech by Prof. (Mrs.) Jayalakshmi Gopinath on Swami’s Early Life**

Speaking next was Prof. (Mrs.) Jayalakshmi Gopinath, Warden, Anantapur Campus, of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. Speaking in an a very unassuming manner, Jayamaa (as she is popularly known) electrified the audience with her touching stories of the Lord’s love and glory drawn from her

57 years of association with Him. Though it makes the excerpt long, we bring the highlights of her speech to you so you can fully appreciate the mesmerizing effect of the spell that she wove on the audience that day. She said,

*"I have been blessed to know dear Baba's grandfather, the doyen of the Ratnakaram family. Many a time the great doyen, the grandfather of Bhagavan Baba would come to see his Divine grandson. What a sight for the Gods to see! Blessed I am indeed, that I have seen it! He was a perfect village chieftain – tall, gaunt, upright, dignified; definitely befitting to be the grandfather of Divinity...and he knew his grandson was God Himself. I have seen the interaction between the grandfather and the little grandson. Those early years, Swami used to be beautiful. He would walk about so sprightly, so vivaciously, at the same time, one could never take advantage of Him. So the great grandfather, he would come, he would not take any support. He would just have a stick in his hand, straight, upright. When I saw him he was about 110 years old. And, as soon as he came people around there would put a chair for him and word would go for his little Divine grandson. But, of course, Swami knew that he had come.*

*Swami would come so lovingly as if He was waiting for His grandfather. Our beloved Bhagavan would come to the grandfather as if it mattered so much to Him. I have seen the interaction between the grandfather and the grandson. Baba would sit beside him drawing a chair. And we would just watch what brightness there would be on the grandfather's face. He was all happiness, all bliss. Baba would be very, very endearing to him. After some time, he would get up without support. He had the sparks of Divinity in him because Bhagavan had Willed it that to him should be born the grandson, who is going to be The Teacher, The Great Teacher, The Divine Teacher, The Loving Teacher, The Profound Teacher of the whole world. He knew his grandson was that. That is why his heart flowed out to him, but at the same time as we would watch he would never take advantage of Bhagavan. And the interaction is still, as if I have seen it yesterday. I always tell myself how blessed...how blessed I am! Indeed so blessed am I that I have seen this great doyen of the Ratnakaram family. Then he would go back straight, very confident, with the feeling that I have met my Divine grandson, the great satisfaction would be there upon his face.*

*I have seen the benevolent father, Venkama Raju Garu. What a wonderful person! The father was also tall and thin, he was also a prominent person in the village. How simple! How genuine! How loving! Not a bit of ostentation in any of them, and yet, Venkama Raju Garu was the father of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Puttaparthi was a very small hamlet and in those days there were no shops to cater to the devotees who would come and they had to cook their own food. Venkama Raju Garu was so kind to the devotees, he knew the difficulties. So, he would get a large quantity of provisions from Bukkapatnam. He had a small little stall nearby. Let us learn from him. Any devotee who comes to him, he would lovingly ask, "Eem Kavali Meeku" (What do you want)? He would speak with such gentleness and respect.*

One day my father asked him, Venkama Raju Garu, “Me Koduke Devudu Aaypoyadu Kada, Mari Meeku Elaganipisthundi” (Your son has become God, is it not? How do you feel about it?). The same serene face, this was his answer, “Vitthal Rao Garu, Vadu Devudu Aayipoyadandi, Nake Kadu Andariki Devudu” (Yes, He has become God. He is God not just for me, but for everyone). What a beautiful answer! How he had reconciled to the situation that his beloved son was not only for him, but He was for the whole world and for the whole humanity.

I knew the Divine Mother Easwaramma so well. It was mutual love between us. I loved her because, on her face there was such brilliance that you could not find anywhere in the whole world, on any sophisticated face. Whatever one would put on the face, it could not match the glow on her face. I have seen it myself. She was as simple as a child. She came to our house and of course, all of us would touch her feet. I am so glad that I had that opportunity. She came to my father and said, “Vitthal Rao, Swami, Pedda Pedda Bhashanalu Istharu Kada. Vadu Chaduvukoledu Kada. Sarigane Cheputada?” (Swami gives many discourses, does He speak properly? I am asking because He has not studied books). What would we say to that innocent mother! She was so concerned about her son. She knew He was Divine, but such concern!”

After entralling us with these wonderful stories of Swami’s grandfather and His parents, Jayamaa then talked about His first public discourse in 1951.

“One incident comes to my mind. Way back in 1951; till then Baba had not given discourses in public. That day He called the men devotees and said, Put a table for Me; I am going to speak”. We were all enthralled. That day Swami asked the table to be brought. The microphone was put on the table. Baba was young then. Let us remember what He said, at that young age. The wisdom and the love that overflowed, they were joined together.

He came down; of course, none of us had the doubt that Baba could not speak well. We were all waiting anxiously, breathlessly. All fellow devotees, youngsters and elders, if I tell you what He said that day; it will make your hair stand on end. **He just thumped at the table hard and then said: “Remember, I am God.”** Take it in. So many of us cannot take it in because we do not know God, we do not love God and if God were to come and tell “I am God”, we would be blind to the reality. That was the first announcement (declaration).

**The second announcement, He thumped, “I am the Upanishads”; the third announcement, “I am the Vedas”; the fourth announcement, “I am the scriptures”. “I have come down for the sake of humanity.” And then He says, “Remember, why are you vacillating? I have nothing that is personal in what I tell. It is for your benefit. Cast off all your doubts, all your vacillations.**

*Come here and try to take in arms-full. The wonderful teachings, the wonderful things that you see is not just confined to only, as we may think, religious rituals, but a combination of what humanity in toto is – the heart, the head, the intellect, everything.”*

*He said, “Let us remember this, it is the same people who come to Me, adoring Me and offering Me gifts; the very same people after some time malign Me. It does not affect Me. Whether you give anything to Me or you do not offer anything to Me; it makes no difference”. Beautiful things... He told us that day, young Baba. Even today, I remember the Mandir of 1951. Some of the things are etched in our memory that it makes an indelible impression. These are the scriptures that we should treasure, Sai’s scriptures”.*

Many were the stories she told. One or two particularly stand out.

*She said, “One very casual incident when He came to our hostel... We were all there in the staff room. Baba would come to us very often, very casually and as Meera sang in her bhajan “Andanalum Vandidado Brindavanatil, Kannan Valarthan” (Would those days come again when Kannan (child Krishna) grew up in Brindavan.) Those days, when He would come to Anantapur, so casually without previous announcement, sit with us in the staff room; talk to us; not as one of great Divinity, but on equal terms. I was wondering - Baba has placed me here; how can I fulfil His trust in me. Some children can be very naughty. They all have innocent hearts. Sometimes they are unmanageable. So, when Baba was sitting there, He asked me, “Jayamma, Andaru Bagane Unnara Pillalu? Bagane Anni Chesukuntunura? (Are all the children alright? Are they doing well?) And ignorant as I was, I said, “Swami, Andaru Bagane Unnaru, Kani Kondaru Koncham Vinatamledu (everyone is alright, but some are not listening to me). Immediate answer, “Evaru Cheddavaru Undaru, Mana Drishti, Andaru Manchivalu” (nobody is bad, good and bad lies in our vision. Everyone is good). That is a message for all of us. Be good, do good, see good. That is Bhagavan’s message. All the Vedanta, all the scriptures, all that the Bible has to say or the Quran or the Zoroastra religion comes to this essence, “Be good, do good, see good”.*

*He would take all of us, men, women, young and old to the sands of Chitravathi. It was almost an everyday affair. How can I describe how Puttaparthi was? There was no obstruction of all these buildings. It was just greenery all around, tall trees, which had grown from the silt of the sacred Chitravathi; so green, so cool, so beautiful, so comforting to the eye. We would go; we were not so many. Baba would walk ahead and we of course ladies would keep to one side and men to the other side. There He would sit, He would select a place, all of us would sit and again according to the discipline.*

***We read about the ten Avatars and we wonder why God had taken all these forms? It was one such day, when it was evening, almost dusk coming in, it was getting a little dark. We were all there, and suddenly***

***Baba disappeared. Where is Swami? Because in those days those hills were thickly forested, and we were told there would be cheetahs and tigers around. Baba was small and delicate. Where is Swami? We could not find Him. But we heard His voice right on that hill. It is there even now. "Look here", He said, a stentorian voice, the voice of Divinity which can reach out to the periphery of eternity itself. And dumbfounded, aghast, we were just tantalised. We were just looking upon the hill, a brilliant dazzling light. The panorama of all the ten Avatars one by one went across, as if, I would say it was the silver screen. Each one of them perfect, we were just standing there aghast, not petrified, but looking at the whole thing with such wonder. Ultimately, it was Bhagavan's image in a bright halo of light. Oh! Then we knew the director behind all this. We knew that it was His Will. 'Oh ye devotees! Oh ye human beings! Remember, I am the Creator; I am The One who has presented before you all the various aspects of My creation.'***

*Then hardly had we got out of this wonderful experience, we were almost glued to the spot, Baba was amidst us. How could He come from that hill? ...as if like lightning, He was amidst us! And He spoke to us almost casually as if He was not the One who did all these things. He was just the little Sai Baba of the Old Mandir. That is our Swami.*

*In Kodaikanal, I got the opportunity, I mustered courage...looked at Him and said. He had just got up from the chair. He was so concerned whether everything was ready for the dinner for all of us. He hardly eats anything, I know it. As He was coming, I said, "Swami, it is not difficult for Swami to cure Himself; Swami just do this, everything will be alright".*

*And you know the answer, fellow devotees. It went like a shaft into my heart. I will tell in Telugu, it will be sweeter. **Nenu Mee Andariki Mee Jabbalu Nayam Chesthana? Mari Nenu Naku Endaku Chesukuntanu? (Do I cure the diseases of everybody? So why should I cure Myself?)***

*What an idea! We have our Prarabdha (results of past lives). We cannot ask God to cure our diseases which we have brought with us from life to life. He will mitigate it.*

*But the answer He gave was, "When I am not curing your diseases, how can I cure Myself?" This is perfection! But let us remember, we have also to eke out our Prarabdha. ...And with His grace, chanting Bhagavan Baba's Name, miracles will become common when Divinity inherits the earth. Jai Sai Ram".*

What a glorious evening listening to such enchanting stories of the Lord!

## **MARCH 13th: MEERA BHAJANS BY THE STUDENTS OF THE MUSIC COLLEGE**

Ever since the Sai Mirpuri College of Music has been established, it has become a tradition that towards the end of the academic year, the students put up a concert for Swami, as it provides them a forum to show-case what

they have learned during the academic year. his year was no different. The students of the Hindustani style of vocal music had been preparing their routine for some days now and requested permission for their performance, so they could sing some *ragas* for the Lord. But the Lord had other plans for them.

He asked them instead to prepare and sing “Meera *bhajans*”. And the boys ever keen to comply prepared a list of His favourite Meera *bhajans* and practised and practised till they felt they were ready to sing in the Divine Presence. But one of the Lord’s favourite tricks is to play hard to get. No sooner were they ready then He started ignoring them. So one day of waiting became two and so on and it soon became a full week of waiting and intense prayer for the Music College boys.

But our Lord knows when the time is right. And on Monday, March 13th, Swami comes and sits on the dais and asks the warden – in all innocence and pretending full ignorance – “Is any program ready?” The warden being fully attuned to the ways of the Lord quickly replied, “Yes Swami. The Music College boys have a program ready for You”. And so the stage was set! Swami gave His blessings and the Music College boys found themselves at centre-stage in Sai Kulwant Hall with their instruments.

But who is Meera and why is Meera *bhajan* such a perennial favourite of the Lord? Meera or Meera Bai as she is known was born in 1547 A.D. and left this world in 1614 A.D. She was an intense devotee of Lord Krishna. Her songs are composed in the agony and ecstasy of devotion. Hence her songs of *bhakti* are one of India’s richest heritage and a legacy of all seekers on the royal road to God through the path of devotion.

Meera Bai was born as a princess and so she was married to the prince of one of the major Rajput kingdoms of those times. Soon after marriage she faced widowhood and her intense devotion towards Lord Krishna, which she had since her infancy, grew even more now and soon became so dense that Meera remained blissful all the time totally immersed in her love for her Lord.

Intoxicated with intense devotion for her beloved, unable to bear the separation from Him, she poured out her heart in her songs. Lost in bliss she used to dance in ecstasy. Her family could neither understand nor condone her “strange” behaviour and would hence torture her in many ways. At last she left the confines of the palace and went on a pilgrimage. While having *darshan* of Ranachodji in Dwarka, she merged in Him her Beloved!

Why is her bhajans so appealing to the Lord? Because each word of each song drips with the *bhava* (feeling) of intense devotion. After all the Lord does not look at the devotee, He only looks at his or her devotion. And Meera’s songs are so overpowering, so intoxicating, coming straight as they do from the deepest and innermost recesses of her heart, that it is no wonder that she has also fully won her Lord’s heart for eternity!

The concert began with a prayer to Lord Ganapathi “*Jai Ganapati Vandan Ganayaka*” wherein the singer describes His various forms. Following this was the Meera *bhajan* “*Maine lino Govind mo*”, where Meera declares that she had purchased Lord Krishna by paying in love. The next Meera *bhajan* “*Paga ghungru bandh meera nache re*”, she displays her state of bliss and joy which she felt after experiencing oneness with Lord Krishna. In the fourth song that was presented – “*Payo ji maine rama ratan dhan payo*” – she described Lord Krishna as a unique treasure which she had attained. Again in the fifth composition (*Aisi laagi lagan Meera ho gayi magan*), Meera Bai described her bliss, full bliss. The sixth composition (*Jaga mein sundar hein do naam*) tells about the beauty of the Lord’s name. In the seventh song – “*Mere to Giridhar Gopal*” – she expresses that Lord Krishna is her only property. The last Meera *bhajan* that they sang that day was “*Vighana harana Gouri ke nandan*”, a prayer of ‘Oh Lord! Soon take me out of this cycle of birth and death.’

The last two songs that they presented that day were a *taraana* type of singing – *Raag Todi* and *Raag Bageshri*. *Tarana* (called *Thillana* in Carnatic music) is sung at a fast tempo and make use of words like Ta Na Na, De Re Na etc. These words have no meaning per se, but *Swara Gamaka* (modulation of the voice) is the main essence of this type of singing.

After the concert, Swami requested the boys to sing the Meera *bhajan* “*Pyare darshan dijo aaj*”, but the young boys had not practised this song and were hesitant to sing it before the Lord. The following day during the afternoon *darshan*, Swami again called the boys up to Him and expressed that he liked the bhajans “*Paga ghungru bandh meera nache re*” and “*Mere to Giridhar Gopal*”. The eager boys immediately said that they had practised the *bhajan* that He requested yesterday and were now ready to sing it. Swami said “Yes, yes” and also expressed that they need to practice more.

But that was not all. From the following day for the next few days, Swami took them under His care and taught them personally how to sing Meera bhajans. A dream come true for any music student – to learn how to sing from the Lord Himself! How many lifetimes of good deeds must have resulted in the fruit of this golden opportunity for these blessed souls? And we also wondered – is Swami preparing them so they could play again on the bigger stage of a festival day in Sai Kulwant Hall? Only time will tell.

The vocalists were Koustubh Pare, Rahul Sharma, Sanket Modi and Abhinav Siteke. Accompanying music was provided by Abhishek Narayan Acharya on the *tabla*, Sanket Modi on the harmonium and V.S. Raghavan and Niranjana Kanedia on the percussion instrument *Naal*.

## **MARCH 15TH: HOLI CELEBRATIONS BY THE DEVOTEES FROM BIHAR AND JHARKHAND STATES**

States around the country pick one of the many festivals that dot the Indian calendar that they would like to celebrate in the Divine Presence. Devotees from Maharashtra, for example, like to celebrate Ashadha Ekdashi; Gujaratis

their New Year Day that coincides with Diwali; devotees from Kerala come to celebrate Onam and Vishu; Tamilnadu's devotees come to celebrate Pongal and the Tamil New Year; but the celebration of the festival of Holi in Sai Kulwant Hall is specially associated with the devotees from the states of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Holi is a festival of fun and gaiety but also has a serious underpinning. Legend has it that the name came from Holika the sister of Hiranyakasipu, who had a boon that fire could not consume her. She took Prahlada into the fire with her to kill him at the instigation of Hiranyakasipu who wanted to kill his own son, as Prahlada worshipped the Lord rather than Hiranyakasipu himself. Needless to say the Lord always runs to protect his devotees and it was Holika herself who perished in spite of her boon and Prahlada came out unscathed from the fire due to the Lord's grace. Holi is thus a celebration of the triumph of good over evil and even today bonfires are lit and unwanted things are consigned to it.

But the quintessential image of Holi is as a festival of colour and uninhibited fun. People put on old clothes and the old and the young are rejuvenated when they go out into the streets and "play Holi" i.e. sprinkle or apply colours on each other. In recent times however, due to the pernicious influence of Kali Yuga the good clean fun has become an opportunity for the baser elements of society to indulge in rather unsavoury and puerile behaviour especially towards the fairer sex that brings the festival a lot of disrepute.

But the festival of Holi was celebrated in a very holy manner on March 15th in the divine presence by a good crowd of about 300 devotees from the North Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, who had braved the rigours of travel (the border of Bihar is at least 2300 miles from Puttaparthi) at the onset of summer to be present in Sai Kulwant Hall on this momentous day.

Sai Kulwant Hall was gloriously decorated that day with streamers that stretched all the way across the roof. The façade of Sai Kulwant Hall was bedecked with floral garlands and on the pillars were hung small signs wishing all devotees on this holy Holi day.

### **The Morning Program**

The celebration of *pavitra* Holi or Holy Holi begins in the morning after Bhagavan's arrival into Sai Kulwant Hall with a dance expressing gratitude to Him through the *Navagraha Stuti* (a song of praise to the personification of the nine aspects of divinity). Everyone's hearts are eager for His *darshan*, as they feel they have no existence without God. And having obtained His *darshan*, they express their feelings in the accompanying song – "Wherever our minds revel, we see your form; wherever our heads bow, we see thy feet installed".

This was followed by a salutation song to our Lord – *Hey Saeshwar, Hey Jagdhguru, Hey aadi-anadi Avinashi...* which means "Hey Saieshawara, our Lord, the whole of Bihar offer their salutations during this *pavitra* festival of Holi. You have always been showering Your Grace on us in abundance.

Please give us the power to discriminate. May we all be of some service at thy lotus Feet. Do forgive our shortcomings”.

This was followed by a *Qawali* song, a song and dance mode, influenced by the Islamic culture that is popular in the Northern areas of the country that saw long periods under the foreign Mughal occupation. The *Qawali* song was “*Tere darbar ka Sai ajab taseer dekha hai....* We have seen something wonderful in your *darbar*; everyone makes a fortune here. O! Lord of Puttaparthi, You are the saviour of all. You love and respect the poor and reside in their hearts. You lead us to truth and kindle the light of wisdom. Oh Lord! Carry us across the Ocean of life. The *qawali* dance girls were authentically made up in period costumes and gave a very good rendition to the appreciation of the entire crowd.

This *qawali* program was followed by a song entitled *Param Brahm Sathya Sainath ki, Abdhut Leela nyari...* This song draws our attention to the fact that Sri Sathya Sai, the Para Brahma, has incarnated in this *Kali Yuga* for the sake of humanity. He brings about transformation in the lives of people and shows them the path of righteous living.

This was followed by yet another song this time sung in Bhojpuri, the dialect spoken in most parts of Bihar. Labelled as a *Lok Geet* or a song of the people it runs thus, *Aaara! Holi rang rangol, mausam basant bahar va.....* “The Glory of Parthi is unimaginable. Men and women from all over the world come to have Sai’s darshan. The festival of Holi is being celebrated in Baba’s *darbar* during the spring season. He looks after all those who rely on Him fully. Come let us sing together – *Sa ra ra....*”

Next was a song and dance routine called as the *Holi geet* or the song of Holi. Happy girls came dancing onto the centre of Sai Kulwant Hall singing the quintessential Holi song and the whole crowd got involved and kept the beat along with the singers. *Rang gayee rang gayee hai Parthi ki dagri...* Parthi is looking very colourful with everybody dancing in joy. Sri Krishna is playing with the cowherd boys and Radha too is with Her friends. Oh Bhakthas! Fill your pockets with colours; we shall play holi with Sri Krishna.

Two more songs brought the morning programme to a close. The first one was a song entitled *Galan gal galeen gavatan gopin gwal gulal lagave...* a song trying to picture holi being celebrated in Parthi. The cowherd boys apply colours on the Gopikas. Radha dances with her friends. Kunj Bihari (Sri Krishna) plays His pranks and showers coloured water from the Jamuna. The sky showers *Amrit* (or nectar). Holi has brought festivity in Parthi. The beauty of Parthi is indescribable with the *leelas* of Sai Murari.

The finale song was *Tera ham par hai lakhaon upkar....* Bless us O Lord! You have helped us innumerable times. The whole world is dancing at the onset of Holi. Puttaparthi’s divine beauty is out of this world, and it purifies the hearts of all. The *bhagya vidhata* of the world reside here. Even if the whole world turns away from me let me not leave Your door-step.

May I always have Your name on my lips. Liberate me from the shackles of fear and take me under Your protection. Oh Sai! You are the same Rama and Krishna in the Kaliyuga. No-one has been able to comprehend Your glory; how can we mortals recognize You. Teach us the lessons of Love and *shanti* and show us the path of truth. Hey *antaryamin*, please accept our prayer.

Swami was so happy that He patiently posed group by group with all for the all-important photograph, talked with everyone, consoling some, giving a word of advice here, blessing someone there and even making *vibhuti* for someone who requested it.

### **The Evening Programme**

In the evening it was the turn of the *Bala Vikas* boys. After the excellent morning programme by the girls, we were wondering how they could top it. And they did succeed! They elected to stage a drama of the life story of a great devotee of the Lord – Vidyapati - born in Mithilanchal in Bihar state. Mithila has been the centre of Sanskrit *Vedicdharma* from time immemorial. King Janak and Mother Sita were from Mithila.

Vidyapati hailed from a Brahmin family and had tremendous inner confidence on his poetic and intellectual abilities. Vidyapati served Raja Shiv Singh as a *darbar* (court) poet, whose compositions equally voiced the inner-most thoughts of the king and the aspirations of the poorest of the poor. He penned the highest devotion in his poems. Vidyapati's love for Radha and Lord Krishna depicts the pleasure and pain; as also the union and parting of any ordinary person. His poems gained immense popularity during the time of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Vidyapati is a great devotee of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva appears in the life of the poet Vidyapati to serve his *param bhaktha*. This real life story of Vidyapati and his tenure with Lord Shiva as his domestic help was depicted in the play. The story ended with the Divine message that the Lord can go to any extent for the sake of His true devotees – even alter His own laws of nature to answer the prayers originating from the hearts of a *Param Bhaktha* (a top-most devotee).

The play was depicted in nine scenes. Scenes 1 and 2 laid the ground work with the participants first offering their *pranams* and then showing the appearance of Vidyapati appearing in the land of Mithila. They also depicted how Vidyapati was a great devotee of Lord Shiva even from his childhood.

Scene 3 develops the theme of his devotion further. They show how devotees in the Shiva temple are amazed at Vidyapati's *bhakti*. They are inquisitive to know the secret of his deep devotion. Vidyapati explains to them that 'sincere intense prayer' is the best way.

The next scene portrays Vidyapati as a householder who did not leave home (and become a *sannyasi*) so that he could develop his spirituality. This offers hope that we too can aspire to develop devotion like him. Lord Shiva moved

by Vidyapati's devotion decided to serve him in his house as a domestic help - Uгна. In scene 5 we see Vidyapati being summoned by Raja Shiv Singh. Vidyapati sets on the journey with his *sevak* (servant) Uгна.

In an emotional 6th scene they show how Vidyapati discovers that Uгна is in reality Lord Shiva Himself. In the middle of the journey Vidyapati feels very thirsty, and asks Uгна to fetch him some water. Uгна is unable to find any water, but takes out water from His matted hair (legend has it that the river Ganges resides in Lord Shiva's hair). Vidyapati then immediately recognizes Uгна as being the Lord Himself. Uгна takes a promise from Vidyapati that he will not reveal His identity to anyone, else the Lord will disappear in that very moment. They then return home.

In Scene 7, they enact how Vidyapati's wife is taken aback at their early return. She is a shrew and takes a dislike to Uгна and accuses him of loitering and wasting time instead of doing work and tries to keep him engaged in doing household work. Vidyapati, on the other hand, always tries to keep Uгна beside him.

Scene 8 depicted how one day, Vidyapati's wife gets upset when Uгна does not return from the woods (where he had gone to collect fire-wood) for a long time. In a fit of rage, she tries to hit Uгна. Vidyapati runs to his Lord's rescue and the Lord promptly disappears.

After this episode, in the final scene, Vidyapati prepares himself for *Ganga Sevan* (leaving his body while immersed in the Ganges). He gives parting advice to his children and hires labourers to carry him in a palanquin to the Ganges. However, the labourers get exhausted and abandon Vidyapati midway. Vidyapati then prays to Mother Ganges to come to him. The Holy Ganga changes Her course and takes Vidyapati in Her arms.

The play thus ends with the assurance that when a *bhaktha* approaches Him with a pure heart, He will go to any extent to help him. Needless to say the excellent theme, rendered in a simple but very effective way immediately stole the Lord's heart. He expressed the desire and then came down and spent some time amidst all the participants in the drama.

**Even while the drama was going on, He could not contain Himself and called Vidyapati to Him in the midst of the scene and made a ring for him.** After the end of the play, He specially called for the drama director – Mr. Mishra and made a ring for him also. He also satisfied everyone's desire and posed for photographs with all. He then asked the participants to sing *bhajans* for Him and stayed for a long time listening to the *bhajans* sung by the actors and the *bhajan* troupe that had come down from Bihar.

Truly it was a tremendous way to celebrate Holi, one celebration that will remain evergreen in everyone's memory - not only for the scintillating fare but also for the enthusiasm shown by the Lord and His childlike response to what His devotees from Bihar lovingly offered at His Lotus Feet.

## MARCH 27TH: TWELFTH CLASS PRESENTATION ENTITLED 'THE INWARD PATH'

On the 27th of March, the class XII students of the Higher Secondary School, put up a presentation entitled, 'The Inward Path'. The presentation was an expression of gratitude to Bhagavan and also a recollection of some of His teachings that they had imbibed during this important phase of school life. It was interspersed with stories from Bhagavan's *Chinna Kathas* and songs.

At the very beginning, two students discuss about the innumerable virtues imbibed by staying with Bhagavan. But then, they feel that all efforts would bear fruit only if they did not perform their activities mechanically. To illustrate this, a short story was enacted.

It is a story of two woodcutters, Gopi and Hari, who have joined a logging firm together. While Gopi works intelligently and takes care of every detail, Hari toils harder than everyone, works overtime and sacrifices his break time too. When they go to receive their wages at the end of the week, Hari is shocked to learn that while Gopi has received a bonus, he has been dismissed. On taking up this matter with his employer, he learns that his efficiency has been dropping, despite his hard work. He is unable to understand this. His employer then asks him if he has been sharpening his axe regularly. Hari then realizes where he has gone wrong!

Thus 'sharpening the axe' has a great significance in our lives. The students then compared it to the inner transformation that must accompany outward actions and that just as 'sharpening the axe' was a continuous process; we too must from time to time check our inner progress in order to derive the maximum benefits. But then from where should one begin? One must put in efforts from one's side - that is self effort. A well known story from Bhagavan's *Chinna Kathas* was enacted to illustrate this.

A farmer was once proceeding to town in his bullock cart. All of a sudden the roads become inhospitable and a wheel of his cart gets stuck in the muddy track. The farmer however, does not put any effort to remove the wheel. However, being a devotee of Lord Rama, he sits down to chant the Lord's Name, expecting a miracle to occur. It is then he hears a voice from above reminding him that God had given him a strong body and that he is not putting in the slightest effort to pull the cart from the mud. Thus, **God helps only those who help themselves.**

At this point, a third person who has been listening to the anchors says that at times he sees people getting what they do not deserve. This makes him feel that God is partial. One of the presenters says that it is a common doubt and recollects an incident from the life of king Janaka (another '*Chinna Katha*') which was enacted.

King Janaka used to visit the *ashram* of sage Yajnavalkya often. One day the king is unusually late. The sage thus does not start the classes. King Janaka enters and apologizes for being late. The other disciples then feel that the

sage waited for Janaka just because he is the king and that he never waited for anyone of them. The sage reads their thoughts by his powers and creates an illusion of fire burning the entire city of Mithila. All the other students run for their lives except Janaka, who sat unmoved in meditation. Pleased, the sage withdrew his illusionary fire. The disciples then return and find Janaka in meditation. They realize their folly. In their ignorance, little did they know that the king was far ahead of them on the inward path.

Thus what we see is only the tip of the iceberg but God sees the totality. He takes into account the past, present and future. Thus what he does is for our own good. At this point another relevant topic of discussion comes up - 'the wavering mind'. The boys say that the mind can be controlled if thoughts are channeled in the right direction. Swami says, "Dust You Think, Dust You Are. God You Think, God You Are"- a saying well illustrated by the following *Chinna Katha*.

*[The scene begins with Hiralal walking --- tired and thirsty]*

Hira: Oh the scorching heat! The sun is merciless. My throat is completely dry. I can't walk anymore. My legs are failing me. Here is a shady tree. Let me relieve these aching legs of mine.

*[Sits down]*

Oh how I wish there was some water around, to quench my thirst.

*[Water appears]*

What?...A glass of water on a branch.

Where did it come from?...Who cares?

*[Drinks]*

This hunger is killing me. I wish I had some food to eat.

*[Food appears]*

Huh? Now...from where did this come?

Anyway I can't wait!

*[Eats]*

I feel extremely sleepy. How nice it would be if I could relax a bit.

*[A chair appears]*

My chair?!?!? How come it is here? This is no ordinary place. Never mind. Let me have a nap.

*[Lies down]* I wish my servant was here to press my legs.

*[The servant appears]*

Ramu?!? Where did you come from? You were in the house when I left.

Is all this really happening or am I hallucinating.

What if ...what if he's a ghost? A DEMON???

*[He turns into one]* aaah...he is going to finish me!!!!

Demon : So I am

The anchors then felt that the world was like a wish-fulfilling tree. As we think so we become. Swami often tells that even if we cannot control the mind, we must direct our thoughts towards Him and He would take care. They also said that this inward journey is the beginning of the four F's namely: Follow the master, Face the devil, Fight till the end and Finish the game. It is Follow the master and then Face the devil. We would anyway have to face the devil, but it is very important to fight till the end, which was illustrated by the next story.

A boy named Ravi was going to attend the last paper of his board exam. On the way, he finds his classmate, Ramesh bleeding and seriously injured. Ramesh had ill-treated Ravi many a time. Thus Ravi is in a dilemma, the good and bad in Ravi separate out from him.

The bad reminds him of all the improper things Ramesh had done to him while the good tells him about the importance of human life and that one shouldn't have hard feelings for anyone as God guides everyone in his own way.

Good says that maybe God guided Ramesh to put obstacles in his path so that Ravi becomes more determined and works even harder. Then bad brings in the point that Ravi may miss his exam if he helps Ramesh. But good reminds Ravi of his promise to be good to God. Ravi gives up the idea of taking his exam.

He takes Ramesh to the hospital where he receives treatment and is discharged after four hours. As Ravi comes out of hospital, he meets Ajay and asks him about his performance in the exam. He surprises him by saying that the exam is postponed as there was a paper leak and that it would be held 15 days later. Ravi is filled with joy and is also happy that he and Ramesh could write the exam. He is grateful to God for showering his grace.

After the presentation, the anchors discuss about difficulties which arise whenever one chooses to tread the right path. They further add that if one surmounts these obstacles then God shall reward one in much greater ways than what one aspires for. As they discuss another point comes up that in spite of one's effort one always remains attached to the physical, the outward

which drags one away from one's goal, the inward path. This is illustrated by yet another story.

When Ashtavakra entered the assembly, the scholars and pundits started laughing at his appearance. Then he laughs at them and addresses them as shoemakers and cobblers for assessing him by his physical appearance. He says that true pundits are those who see unity in all creation and '*charmakaras*'.

Then the anchors relate that what begins with simple effort ultimately must lead to vision of the underlying unity of all creation. Controlling the senses and the mind, conquering the six inner enemies, these are various processes which constitute sharpening of the axe. When one fights to the end, the compassionate Lord showers His grace. Only His grace can lead one to the ultimate destination, the journey from 'I' to 'we' and finally to 'HIM'.

The anchors tell how Swami was gracious enough to point the shortcomings in them during their previous class programme and that all the boys have been putting in efforts to be worthy of His love. At the end they pray to Swami to help them to forever march forward, inward and ultimately **Godward**. In the end Bhagavan was pleased with the presentation and graciously blessed the students with group photographs. He also told all the boys to be good and happy always.

### **MARCH 29THh: 11th CLASS PROGRAMME ON CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU**

29th March, 2006 was indeed a memorable day for the students of the 11th Class of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School. With Bhagavan's blessings, the students performed a drama entitled "Sri Krishna Chaitanya". It had a blend of good melodious music, scintillating sets and above all a sincere straight-from-the-heart effort from all the students. It was all the more creditable as they put up the play just 3 hours after they had completed their final exam.

The play started with a *Gurukul* ashram scene with a guruji singing a song in praise of the Lord accompanied by his disciples. After that, the guruji taught his disciples the importance of the sweet name of the Lord. As the guruji was talking, a young Gauranga of Navadweep enters seeking spiritual advice; the guruji realizing his thirst for spiritual knowledge and initiated him with the *Gopalaya* mantra. In hindsight, perhaps the guruji was very much aware that this young Gauranga would one day stir the masses and lead them to God.

Many years passed and young Gauranga grew up to be the great scholar Vishvambhar and an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna. He had his disciples whom he taught Panini's grammar. One day while he was preaching to his disciples, the topic about another great scholar named Digvijay pundit propped up. The guruji was told by his disciples that this pundit, who though blessed with immense knowledge by goddess Saraswati, was still a proud

and very arrogant man. He was also told that this pundit was visiting Nawadweep.

The next scene opens with Digvijay Pandit glorifying and boasting about himself and he boasts about his triumphant march across the Eastern part of the country. He is informed by his disciples about Vishwambar and his popularity. The scene ends with Digvijay Pandit promising his disciples of an assured victory when they have a clash to see who is superior.

The following scene shows the encounter when both the scholars came face to face. Digvijay Pandit boasts of his poetic experience which Vishwambar humbly accepts. When Vishwambar requests him for his sweet rendering, he acknowledges with a song. After the song, Vishwambar praises Digvijay Pandit and says that he had not seen any scholar comparable to him. Digvijay however speaks sarcastically and asks Vishwambar to render a poem on the mother as his part of the challenge, which Vishwambar accepts. While he was singing, Digvijay mocks him initially, but very soon seeing the evolved stature of Vishwambar, he realizes that he underestimated the prowess of this divine being. He accepts Vishwambar's supremacy and falls at his feet.

In the next scene, Chaitanya (Vishwambar) searches for Krishna through a song full of longing. He enquires from people whether they know the whereabouts of Krishna and when the people tell him that they have not seen Krishna of that description, he hallucinates and falls into a trance and then visualizes Krishna dancing with the *gopis*. The Guruji then enters the scene and arouses Chaitanya from his trance. Chaitanya is filled with remorse for coming late into Krishna's fold. The Guruji consoles Chaitanya and tells him that he will surely feast his eyes on the form of Krishna some day and ultimately merge with Him.

After this incident, whenever Chaitanya took classes, he would lose himself in Krishna consciousness. This affected the learning of his students. One day when the students expressed their feelings to their master, Chaitanya told them that henceforth he would teach only the glory of Krishna. If they wanted to learn Panini's grammar, they would have to seek another teacher.

The next scene opens into a town named Navadweep, where there lived two drunkards, Jagai and Madai. They live only to taste the sensual pleasures of the world and are total atheists. A devotee of Krishna was singing the Lord's Name and disturbed by the *bhajan*, Jagai and Madai hit the devotee. At that time Chaitanya Mahaprabhu comes and transforms the two drunkards and takes upon himself their sins thus granting them salvation.

The last scene is in a Krishna temple. The temple *pujari* and one of Chaitanya's disciples discuss the greatness of their master. As they discuss, their master comes to the temple. When he sees the idol of Krishna, he shouts 'Krishna Krishna' and collapses into a trance on the steps leading to the *sanctum sanctorum*. The person in charge of the temple declares Chaitanya to be dead and asks that his dead body be removed from the temple. As he chides the disciple of Chaitanya, a troop of dancing bards come

and sing a song that asks where the soul goes when the body collapses. When the song reaches the climax with “Govinda Gopala”, Chaitanya awakens from his trance. The temple in charge seeks his pardon and Chaitanya transforms him too.

While this was going on, a leper enters the temple without being noticed by anyone. Once the people around him realize this, they shout at him and try to drag him away from the temple. But, Chaitanya who was watching all this stops them and approaches the leper even against strong protests from the leper himself who requests Chaitanya not to approach him. Undeterred, he touches the leper and instantaneously the leper gets healed by his pure love and divine consciousness.

Thus Sri Krishna Chaitanya stirs the hearts of the masses and leads them to God. Today Sri Krishna Chaitanya lives in the hearts of the people as a symbol of deep and intense devotion to God. His profound love for God lives on inspiring thousands and thousands of people to tread the path of love which will ultimately lead them to communion with the divine. Swami too, has always wanted us to love God through intense devotion and unflinching faith in Him. The wonderful drama pleased Bhagavan and everyone present very much. Swami accepted their humble request and blessed all of them with the coveted group photographs.

A little prior, Swami called the student who acted as Sri Krishna Chaitanya and expressed His happiness over their brilliant acting. He also blessed him and materialized a gold chain with a Lord Ganesha pendant and He Himself put it around his neck. He also told all the students that the following day, He would provide lunch to all. This was certainly one of the most memorable days for the students of Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School. And what a glorious way to end the school year, by having lunch at the Lord’s residence!

### **MARCH 30TH: UGADI CELEBRATIONS IN SAI KULWANT HALL**

*Ugadi* marks the beginning of the New Year in the Southern States of Andhra and Karnataka. It also brings happiness with the onset of *Vasanth* or the Spring season. Varahamihira, a saint who lived in the sixth century, started this new method of marking the passage of a year basing his calculations with the onset of spring.

The name *Ugadi* is derived from *Yuga Aadi* (*Yuga + Aadi* means beginning of New Age). Thus *Ugadi* heralds not only the beginning of the New Year but also signals the beginning of a new regeneration with plants acquiring new life, shoots and leaves; animals and birds bestir themselves and the sweet fragrance of budding flowers is in the air.

Preparations for the festival begin many days prior with houses being cleaned thoroughly. People go shopping and buy themselves new clothes to wear on this special day. People also splash fresh cow dung water on the ground in front of their house and draw intricate floral designs, using multi-coloured powder, called *rangoli*.

And on the dawn of the New Year, people wake up early and take a traditional “oil bath” before putting on new clothes. The entrance to their houses is decorated with mango buntings as it is an omen of good luck and prosperity.

The Lord takes care of all as we are all His family. Some weeks prior, Swami had distributed clothes to all the students and staff. Everyone had the clothes stitched and all assembled in the Hall were looking resplendent and grand in their new clothes not only on the Ladies’ side but even on the gents!

March 30, 2006 dawned bright and early to a richly decorated Sai Kulwant Hall. The entire façade was done up with flowers and even the steps were laid out as a flower garden. An oversized arch richly adorned the entrance on the Poornachandra auditorium side of the hall through which the Lord enters Sai Kulwant Hall.

An oversized *poorna khumbam* (an ornate vessel used in prayer rituals) was erected at the back of the hall with an idol of Lord Ganesh inside and this lent an air of grandeur to the entire Hall. The pathway through which the Lord was to pass was also decorated with *villaku* (lamps) and either a coconut or a raw mango in a bed of leaves.

On this auspicious day, people go to the nearest temple early in the morning or else offer *pooja* (prayer) to God in their own home, invoking His blessings for the New Year. The day itself is considered auspicious, so people start new ventures on this day. And this Ugadi day not only fell on a Thursday, the most auspicious day of the week, but was rendered even more so by the fact that the Lord was moving into His new residence on this day.

Swami entered Sai Kulwant Hall looking radiantly beautiful in His yellow robe and even more so, with His enthusiasm reflecting the mood and feelings of the crowd assembled that day to usher in this special day with the precious *darshan* of the Lord and a prayer to Him to bless them in all their undertakings in the New Year. After giving His New Year *darshan* to the assembled multitudes, Swami took His throne and then asked the Institute Marching band to play. They played a couple of renditions like *La Bamba* and *O when the saints go marching in...*

Swami then took *arathi* and got onto His specially modified open one-seater vehicle to give the unrestricted bliss of His *darshan* to all as He returned back to His residence to proceed with the rituals connected with moving in into His new house. After all, when the divine takes human form, He abides by the customary social customs and norms, and thus sets an ideal for humanity to emulate.

Swami was escorted back into His residence complex by the marching bands of all His educational institutions. After He entered into His new house, the ceremonies got underway. Only a select few guests were allowed into the house for this part of the prayer ceremony and other rituals connected with *graha pravesham* or the ceremonial entry into a new abode.

We now a poem which beautifully conveys the emotion of one humble soul regarding Swami's new home.

### **THE LORDS NEW HOME**

If one truck cleared the way,  
The next would just arrive.  
Also, so many people,  
Carrying flowers,  
Carrying chairs, cloth and incense.  
It was around 5.30 in the morning.

This new year - Ugadi was special,  
The Lord was to move to His new Home

There were spectacular lights,  
Colourful and soothing,  
Also focusing and dancing,  
Elaborate floral decoration,  
And the festive mango leaves.

So many people,  
All working in their own capacities.  
Each one doing his or her best,  
All, very happy to be of some use,  
To feel a part of the group,  
To do something for the Lord.

About a furlong away,  
Sitting all by herself,  
In the shadows of the trucks and people,  
On a step with her legs stretched out,  
Was an old lady.  
I was just wondering how she got there,  
Could she even walk without support?

And when the sun would rise,  
And the Lord would come out,  
She would have by then gone back home,  
Not being able to crane her neck,  
To push her way,  
Or to sit on the floor.

She was ecstatic,  
She was beaming,  
She was crying,  
She was enjoying the moment.

As I went past her,  
She took courage,  
And called me.

“My Swami is getting a new home,  
And a big nice one too!  
He is going to be very comfortable there,  
I am so happy, I am so happy.”

She was trying to jump in joy,  
Her heart was soaring in the skies,  
Her spirit was dynamic as youth,  
Her eyes were bright, filled with light,  
And she continued to sit there.

One can never build a home,  
For the Lord,  
With bricks, with concrete,  
One can never attract the Lord,  
With lights and pomp,  
It is the heart,  
It is the love,  
It is the innocence.

At that moment I felt,  
The Lord's home was now complete.

After the rituals were over, Swami came out of the abode and was looking radiant as ever, for He was going to do what is closest to His heart – taking care of all the guests, as He had promised the day prior at the end of the High School drama.

While the prayer ceremony was going on, the students of all the 3 campuses as well as the staff were seated in Poornachandra Auditorium. About 300 tables were laid out for the purpose and special food service tents were set up on either side of the central aisle way for quick service to both the Gents as well as the Ladies side. Professors, Heads of the departments as well as doctors and other special guests were seated inside the annex building to the new house, where on the ground floor there is a huge open hall.

Swami first entered this annex and blessed everyone and supervised the serving of the food there before He proceeded to the Poornachandra auditorium. The boys had prepared a cake for Him which He cut and made all of them happy. Inside Poornachandra auditorium, He went up and down the aisle raising His hands many times to bless one and all, before He retired to His abode.

Some rituals are intricately intertwined with Ugadi. One is the eating of a "*pacchadi*" or a pudding made of *Bevu* (*neem*) and *Bella* (jaggery). The *neem*, though it tastes bitter in taste is good for health. It is also used in cosmetics, toothpaste, soaps, cow fodder, manure, oil and others products due to its high medicinal content. It is also useful for patients having diabetes and skin diseases. Jaggery increases the hemoglobin in the blood and provides additional energy for the body. But the inner significance of eating this bitter-sweet mixture is to indicate that life itself is a mixture of good and bad, joy and sorrow, success and disappointment, and all of them have to be treated alike. All experiences have to be treated with equanimity. Everyone should resolve to face calmly whatever happens in this New Year, accepting it with good grace.

The celebration of *Ugadi* is thus marked not only by religious zeal but also with social merriment as people make use of the holiday to visit friends and relatives. Special "must make" dishes for this occasion in Andhra Pradesh are eatables such as "*pulihora*", "*bobbatlu*" and preparations made with raw mango. In Karnataka too, similar preparations are made but are called "*puliogure*" and "*holige*".

In keeping with this tradition, the luncheon menu included not only the Ugadi *pacchadi* and *pulihora* but also a variety of sweets that are popular with the Andhras. Rice forms the staple diet in South India and the menu also included vegetables prepared in the traditional style. Everyone partook of this *prasadam* from the Lord with reverence and awe for their unexpected good fortune of ushering in the New Year in this most auspicious fashion.

In the evening, after Swami came into Sai Kulwant Hall, He blessed the boys of the Institute to put up their small skit which they had specially prepared to explain to everyone the tradition and rituals connected with the Ugadi festival. They thus explained that this day was celebrated as the day on which Brahma created the cosmos. It is thus special not only to the people of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra but also to the Sindhis. They explained the significance of the Ugadi *pacchadi* and also brought out the inner significance of another intricate ritual called the *Panchanga Shravanam*.

People listen to *Panchanga* (or *Panchanga Shravana* - the traditional recital of the almanac highlighting the important effects and assurances of the New Year) on Ugadi. The economy of the Southern states are mostly agrarian and hence these *panchanga* meetings are usually held in the village square and experts forecast rain, crop, storms, crop prices and other relevant things of interest to the rural farmer in the year to come; but with the onset of modern technology, one can get to hear the priest-scholar on cable television sitting in comfort in one's own living room! The boys in their skit explained that *panchanga* (the 5 limbs) actually refers to the five senses and *shravanam* is the first step on the nine fold path of bhakthi towards the Lord. Hence they said that after controlling the senses, one must take the first step towards the Lord to achieve the purpose of life.

The boys then did an authentic reading of the almanac, in keeping with the Ugadi tradition, to the wonderment of the whole crowd. They said that Guru (the planet Jupiter) is the king of this year. Guru is the Lord of rains and commerce. Hence a general prosperity in all these areas can be expected. However, Shukra (the planet Venus) as the minister of the year can exhibit adverse effects on the Indian political scene. The programme also highlighted the proportion of expenses to income and the proportion of insults to praises that various zodiac signs can expect this year. Thus people belonging to the *Vrishaba* (Taurus) Zodiac can expect Rs. 14 in expenses for Rs. 5 in income and also in this New Year they would be praised 5 times for every 4 insults they had to bear. In conclusion, they reminded everyone that no planet, however powerful, can ever exert its influence on all those who seek refuge in the love of Sai; for His love is the mightiest and most benevolent of all. In the last act the boys used an example of a man who had troubles with the boss at work to show that the world is tinted depending on the colour of the glasses that you wear. Thus they said that we should always see good and do good for that is the way to God.

At the conclusion of this well written, topical and thoroughly enjoyable skit, Swami signaled that His table be brought for He wanted to give His Divine discourse to the immense pleasure of the crowd. In His discourse, Swami talked about the Pandavas and the lessons to be learnt from their lives. Bhagavan related how Arjuna shot a fish with his arrow and so fulfilled the test put forward by the King to win the hand of Draupadi. Then He said,

*"They (the Pandavas) were staying at the house of a poor Brahmin. They saw Kunti inside with the door bolted and said, "Mother we have brought a valuable fruit with us". She replied "Such a valuable fruit should be shared by all of you."*

*Children should follow strictly the command of the Mother. They went inside, prostrated at her feet and promised to follow her wish. Thus since that time Draupadi was known as Panchali – the wife of five people.*

*But how can worldly minds accept this? It is the duty of children to follow their mother irrespective of others' opinions. Thus people understood the significance and reconciled themselves to this course".*

Swami also talked about anger, a disease that all of us suffer from. He said that

*"Anger is necessary for man but you should not express anger on an unnecessary matter but only when it is needed. For anger can be very destructive causing one to lose wealth, the affection of one's near and dear ones and it can even ruin one's entire life. One should always love children and never be angry with them."*

Along the same lines, the Lord also lovingly gave guidelines for a Dharmic life. He said,

*"Whom should we hate? Should we hate the one we dislike, the one who harms us, or our enemy – No! We should hate those who interfere with us on the path of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema. We should like those who encourage us on this path.*

*Has God given good and bad? No, He has not given these. Each one conducts himself in his life and God is the Witness. He does not give grief and pleasure - these are the results of our actions. If we speak sweetly we will have a sweet reply. If we speak harshly so will be the reply. As is the action so is the reaction. Reaction, reflection and resound are the result of our own actions, like a mirror. Whatever we speak comes back to us. Reflection means that our inner thoughts will express themselves outwardly. Therefore it is necessary to find out the good and bad in all actions. If one finds an action is bad it should be given up immediately. If we are determined to follow this we will be successful in life. Good and bad are based on inner feelings and they are mixed. It is not possible to separate them. The moment good comes the bad disappears. Therefore you do not have to remove the bad separately.*

*Students you have completed one academic year and are now going on vacation. Tomorrow you will be going through the newspapers reading the numbers to find your name there.*

*You will never find your number if you want to find it. Instead you should enquire within: 'Have I written well? If so, I am bound to pass.' If you have not written well, then the number is not important. The number does not matter – you should be 'number one man in this world'!*

*You should always remain peaceful. Let people accuse you but remain at peace. You should think, 'Only the tongue is scolding me; I am separate you are separate.' If you go on taking insults you will lose your balance."*

Thus ended a historic memorable month in Prashanti Nilayam. We hope you have enjoyed reading this rather long account of the chronicles of this month's events. And as summer is upon us, and schools close and everyone heads for a vacation, do take time everyday to think of God.

So till next time, we wish you the very best.

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## SWAMI AND ME

### MOTHER DIVINE – MOTHER THE GREATEST

By Kartick Ramesh,  
a current MBA student of Swami's Institute

*This is the transcription of the talk delivered in the Divine Presence by Kartick Ramesh, a current MBA student of the Institute, during Dasara celebrations on the 8th of October 2005.*

Aum Sri Sai Ram! I offer my most Humble and Loving Pranams at the dearest, Divine Lotus Feet of Sai Ma. Before I begin, I would like to make a dedication to the Principle of Motherhood without which, I would not be standing in front of all of you.

#### **In Honour of the Universal Mother**

I dedicate this speech to the Universal Mother Sai Ma who is Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient and with all of us at all times. And, I also dedicate this speech to my physical mother who though physically is not present with me at this point of time is with me in every thought, word, deed and action.

All of us share a very special relationship with our mothers. In our family we had a strange problem. In my generation, there were no male children. In total desperation, my mother sought the refuge of the Divine Lotus Feet of Sai Ma in the form of Santoshi Mata.

And 25 years ago till this date, and for the rest of her life, my mother took a vow that she would observe a fast which would grant her the privilege of having a son. When I heard the story from my mother and when I saw her fasting I felt pained. I told her: "Mother! If it has taken a *Santoshi Ma Vratam* for me to come to your lotus feet, I will also take a *Santoshi Ma Vratam* to go back to the Lotus Feet of Sai Ma."

And for 3 years, I undertook the *Santoshi Ma Vratam* to become a student of Shri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. In these 3 years, I did not see any result. And the horoscope suggested that I would never become a student. But it was just the pure Grace and Love of Sai Ma that I am standing today in front of you as a student of Sai.

Today is the most auspicious day of Navaratri Celebrations, the Festival of Nine Nights. What does this signify? According to ancient Indian Mythology and our culture the scriptures reveal that it was during these nine days and nights that the Devi Ma, Sai Ma, in the form of Durga Mata destroyed evil from the face of the earth, evil which was present in the form of the demon Mahishasura. It is also during these days that Bhagavan in His previous Incarnation of Shri Rama prayed to the Devi Ma before beginning His battle

with the evil Ravana. It was this day when Arjuna acquired the Divine weapons for fighting in the Kurukshetra.

**And it is on this day that I will venture to describe the qualities of Motherhood, the Godhood of Mother and the Motherhood of God.**

### **The First Touch of His Love**

A little child was clinging to the gate of his kindergarten class and refusing to attend classes. At this juncture, a group of teachers tried to pull the boy but the boy stretched out to his mother who was standing on the other side of the gate. And it was not until the mother assured the boy that she would come back to him in the evening to pick him up that the boy agreed to go to the class.

This vivid description of this incident in my childhood flashed across my memory on the very first day I joined the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. 54 fortunate boys were chosen by Bhagavan this year to be part of the M.B.A Programme. But unusually instead of joining Prashanti Nilayam directly, Bhagavan commanded those students to come to Brindavan and seek His Blessings.

This incident was flashing in my mind as I held Sai Ma's hand on the Gardens of Trayee Brindavan. And in the same innocence I prayed to Mother Sai because we were leaving from Brindavan that day.

"Swami, please come to Puttaparthi! Please don't stay at Brindavan." At this juncture Swami looked lovingly at all of us. All the 54 boys who had sacrificed great careers, boys who had left great academic opportunities, to be with the Greatest Divine Form. Bhagavan looked at us and said: "I will come day after tomorrow." When Swami Wills, it is "*Vajra Sankalpa*" (firm determination) - nothing can go against it! And just in two days, as promised, Swami made a trip all the way from Brindavan to Puttaparthi to see His 54 students!

### **Glimpses of Divine Motherhood**

And during our stay in Brindavan at that time, we received some glimpses of Motherhood. We saw the amount of care, the amount of Love which Swami showers on His students. How many questions Swami was asking the warden! Whether the boys were accommodated well, whether we were being fed well and about the trip that we had to make to Puttaparthi.

### **No Need to Run**

But is this Motherly Nature of Swami only exhibited towards students? The answer is no! Divinity does not distinguish between people to shower its Grace! I am reminded of an incident when as a devotee of Swami and I had made a trip to Brindavan. It is customary for all devotees and students alike to run after Swami's car when Swami goes out.

In my enthusiasm I also chased Swami's car and I was very fit at that time. I raced ahead of others and we reached a particular point of time when there was only Swami's car and myself. I kept running and running and after sometime I lost my breath. I went down on my knees and gave up. I told Swami 'I give up.' **Swami looked at me, rolled down the glass and said in Tamil: "Porum, Porum! (Enough) Don't run!"** What compassion this is! For a devotee who is running behind His car, we think that Swami sometimes ignores us, Swami has forgotten us!

### **Can God Forget?**

Talking about forgetting, how can Swami forget! During one festival, Bhagavan was concluding His discourse with the Bhajan *Hari Bhajan Bina Sukh Shanti Nahin*, and Bhagavan forgot, or apparently seemed to forget, a particular line. Then a student enthusiastically looked at Bhagavan and Bhagavan asked him "What is the next line?" and the student immediately sang the next line to Bhagavan.

And Bhagavan said: "Good!" The same incident was repeated for several festivals! And on one particular festival Bhagavan approached the student and asked him, "Did you really think I forgot? If I forget, the sun will not rise and the sun will not set!" Who else can make such a statement other than the Divine Mother! It is left to us to understand that this Divine Energy is present with us at all times and at all places!

### **The Greatness of Gayatri**

In our Puranas, it is stated that '*Gayatri Chandasaam Mata*', that is, before Creation, Gayatri Mata, the Mother of Vedas, that Primordial Force *Adi Shakti* gave birth to the Trinity, as Three Babies. And She blessed each of the Babies with the Gunas of Rajas, Sathwaa and Thamas. Mother Gayatri left the scene and the Babies started crying and Mother Gayatri came to that particular scene assuming the form of a five-headed God. And that is how we picture Mother Gayatri today.

*Om Bhur Bhuva Swaha Tat Savitur Vareniyam  
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi Dhiyo Yo Na Prochadayat*

The Gayatri Mantra is the single most potent and powerful mantra which even Bhagavan has confirmed. Bhagavan says, "**This is the Mantra which will guarantee protection to the chanter, if chanted correctly, at all places and at all times.**"

### **The Sacred Upanayanam**

When I read this, I found a deep desire within me that I should also have my *Upanayanam* (Hindu Sacred Thread ceremony) done and I should also have the chance of chanting the Gayatri Mantra. But my age was 21 years and my father did not believe in rituals. So he refused to perform the *Upanayanam* for me. At this juncture every Darshan I used to give Him a letter asking Him for

two things “Swami I want to be your student and please perform my *Upanayanam*.”

It took a year but at the end of one year, Bhagavan organized an *Upanayanam* ceremony in ‘Sundaram’ at Chennai, the place where I reside. 108 boys were selected. But unfortunately, an age limit was set of 18 years. And I was 21 years.

**In total anxiety and depression, I wrote a letter to Bhagavan quickly saying “You have to perform my *Upanayanam*!” and I placed it in my aunt’s house in front of the photo. The next day, *kumkum* (vermillion) materialized on the letter! And I was sure that this was a sign from Bhagavan that He would perform my *Upanayanam*.**

The primary motive of having my *Upanayanam* done by Swami was not only to chant the Gayatri Mantra, but to get the opportunity to chant it once in front of Swami - and to get the blessings of the Divine Mother, Sai Gayatri. So Bhagavan had said: “Bring those 108 *Vatus* (participants) to me after the function.” But at the beginning of the function, Bhagavan sent another message “If those boys come to Brindavan, they will have a lot of problems in terms of accommodation.” What kind of Motherly Love is this again!

**Swami was concerned about the strain which the 108 boys who were coming to seek His Blessings would undergo! So Swami sent word “Tell those boys that I am with them all the times at all places! Wherever the Gayatri is chanted, I am there!”**

As soon as I heard this, I almost felt as if I didn’t want my *Upanayanam* to be done. Even though I knew that Swami would be with me but, I would lose a chance of coming to the proximity of Sai Gayatri. At the end of the function, I told my mother “Mother, why don’t we make a trip to Brindavan despite Swami having told us not to come?” My mother looked at me a little bit surprised and told me “Tomorrow is your final University examination! This is a matter of life importance!”

I told my mother: “This is a matter of life’s importance mother! It is a result of the penance of several lives that I have this opportunity to get my *Upanayanam* performed by Swami Himself!” And my mother consented and we went to Brindavan.

As soon as we went to Brindavan, we found a couple of other boys who were equally enthusiastic to seek Swami’s Blessings. And we arrived just in time before the music began. As we sat for Darshan, Bhagavan sort of glided towards us and looked at us so lovingly. And I had no hesitation, no doubt in my mind that I was looking at the *Gayatri Roopam* (form of Gayatri) of our beloved Swami! Swami then gave us *Padanamaskar* and materialized Vibhuti. And that was really an amazing incident in my life which showed me that with Faith and Devotion, you can definitely win the Love of Sai Ma!

## **Mothers are the Gift of God to Man**

As an English saying goes: "God could not be at all times with all people; so to ensure that they were getting the same amount of Love, God created Mothers!" What a great gift God has given to us! Bhagavan says: "A true *Bharatiya*, a true son, is one who can strive to earn the Grace and Love of his mother."

Take the example of Ravana, who was a great Shiva devotee and who had intense love for his mother. When he saw his mother worshipping an earthen lingam, he asked her "Mother why are you worshipping an earthen lingam?" She said: "Son, I want a place in Kailasa." Ravana said: "For you, I shall bring Kailasa here." And he proceeded to the Himalayas and started lifting Kailasa! This was the amount of devotion that Ravana had towards his mother! But the same Ravana forgot the Mother Principle when he abducted Sita! And so, he had to pay for the consequences of his action.

## **Sai Gives a Beautiful Voice**

I am reminded of a personal incident of mine. I for one was never used to public speaking, be it an audience of one or ten people. At the end of one unsuccessful talk, I went home and literally burnt the pages of my speech! And my mother was silently observing me from the back. She called me and said: "Son, what are you trying to do?" I told my mother that I never want to speak again in my life! My mother said: "Don't lose courage! You will speak one day; not in front of one, two or ten but in front of thousands of people!" And it is that very grace, the very words of my mother, which I feel has come true today!

When I came into the Sai fold, I was really attracted towards Bhajan singing. But fate had blessed me with a hoarse voice! When I used to sing, people used to close their ears! But I did not lose hope; for I knew My Mother would again come to my rescue! Both the physical and the Divine Mother. My mother, a trained classical singer, tried her best to teach me the basics of Karnataka music. But, I did not relent - or my voice did not relent. So my mother commanded me "Go and seek the Blessings of Swami. He will definitely shower grace upon you!"

That particular trip I made coincided with Shivaratri festival in 2000. And as a devotee, I came and sat in the lines at 12 o'clock in the night because of the crowds. As Bhagavan willed, I got the first row and I got a chance to take the Padanamaskar of Swami. But then I had a desire in my mind: "**Swami, if you can give me some *Prasadam*; something which will make me sing well in front of you.**" Suddenly, Swami started distributing chocolates to the students. Bhagavan looked at me, aimed a chocolate and threw it at my head! And ever since I took that chocolate I have sung in almost every bhajan group in every state which I have visited. And today, it is only by the grace of Bhagavan that I had the opportunity to sing in front of Him also! All that we need to do is to offer our Love to such a Mother!

## The Godhood of the Mother and the Motherhood of God

The Vedas declare *Matrodevo Bhava*. In our culture we are elevating the Mother to the level of God; in other words, we declare the Godhood of the Mother. We also talk about the Motherhood of God - but which is greater? The answer can be seen by considering a ticket. This ticket represents the physical Mother. Without the seal of authenticity of the Divine Mother that ticket is useless! And with such an attested ticket, you can take a journey to any destination, be it a worldly or a Spiritual destination. So both the Godhood of Mother and the Motherhood of God go hand in hand.

## Becoming Swami's Gold

I would now like to narrate very quickly a small incident. It happened in the final year of my Engineering course. I had made another prayer to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan whenever I come to you as a student I should have first class with honors and distinction; I should be a gold medalist." In Engineering, 80 percent is considered as a benchmark. So every letter I wrote to Bhagavan, I begged "Bhagavan at least give me 80 percent!" Bhagavan used to be so kind - He used to give me 5% extra! I used to get around 85% and once even 90% in my Engineering!

In the final semester, I fell very sick. And Swami knows what happened at that particular point of time. He probably wanted to increase my faith and devotion. My mother made me take mock exams but I could not even sit to write the exam. So my mother started her usual prayer routines for me day and night and she accompanied me to each and every exam! We had around 10 papers. Every time I sat in the examination hall I visualized that I was not writing, but Bhagavan was writing. Because even the doctor told that "I have no hope for you! Please depend on Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba."

At the end of the examinations, I knew that I would barely have passed. **But when the results came the total average came exactly to 80 percent. And I got the gold medal which I had desired - not for myself - but to offer at the Lotus Feet of both my Mothers. An interesting statement which Swami made to us on the first day "It is not enough to just earn an academic gold medal! You should really be the Gold of Swami!"** And we got an opportunity that time to express our love to Swami. **We told Swami "We are Your strength" and Swami said "Yes! Students are My strength!"** And this particular interaction showed us how much Motherly Love Lord Sai showers on all of us!

Now I will come to the closing part of my speech where I would just like to say that we need to just surrender ourselves not only to the Feet of the Lord but also to the Lotus Feet of our physical Mothers. Bhagavan has said: **"Mother and Motherland are greater than Heaven!"**

In one of the trips I made to Malaysia, I looked back and saw I was leaving this great country and my physical Mother and I almost cried! But I

remembered the words of my mother “Don’t worry! By the time you reach Malaysia, Swami would have already come there!”

And believe it or not the accommodation which I was given in Malaysia, was right opposite to the largest Sai Centre in Malaysia. And the devotees there were so full of devotion! So many people who had never come to see the Physical Form of Swami were so devoted in whatever activities they were undertaking! Whether it was chanting Vedas, whether it was singing bhajans, or whether it was participating in Service activities! This is the kind of Universal Love which Swami is spreading!

### **The Three Mothers**

All that Swami is saying is **“Let us remember to honour not only the two Mothers but also the third Mother - that is Mother Nature. Let us never be ungrateful to all these three Mothers.”**

### **We are Children of Mother Sai**

I would now like to conclude by just saying that whatever we do let us just behave like an innocent child at the Feet of our Divine Mother. An innocent child is a beautiful sight! It is the sight of God Himself! All that we have to do is just surrender ourselves, give our love and believe in the fact that Mother Sai - the single Principle which runs through all these Mothers - will take care of us at all times!

With these few words, I would just like to conclude with a small prayer:

“O Lord, take my Love and let it flow in devotion to Thee.  
Take my every thing and let me be an instrument to work for Thee.”  
Jai Sai Ram!

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## **AN AMAZING PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION...**

### **FROM ME TO 'MYSELF'**

A Moving Story of Personal Transformation  
of a Shy Young Girl to a Dynamic Police Officer.

by Charu Sinha (IPS), UNMIK CIVPOL, Pristina, Kosovo.

#### **A Sensitive Girl Yearns for Her Personal God**

When I was a child, I loved the story of Dhruva and like him, I wanted to sit in the lap of God. I always thought if I pray to Rama, Krishna, Shivji, or Vishnu, the other Gods would get angry. So I was always confused whom to pray to. I wanted a God I could see in front of me, talk to, confide in and laugh with, who would love me unconditionally however I was, and one who would be my best friend and guide. I wanted my own personal God. The idea of a God somewhere up there in the sky, beyond my reach, was not what I could relate to.

As a child I had a disturbed childhood and never knew how it was to be carefree. I was very shy, sensitive, and had the right values but was quiet, scared of everybody and everything and always felt unloved. I wanted to be loved unconditionally and be absolutely independent - emotionally, mentally and financially. I thought when I find my God, I won't need anyone in this world and no one could hurt me. It was the heartfelt desire of a sensitive child who was badly hurt by the insensitivity and constant comparisons by the people around.

In 1989, my father's German friend Frank introduced me to "The Autobiography of a Yogi" and my spiritual quest began. I had never doubted the existence of God, but I wanted to feel and experience it and find my personal God. My yearning increased. We would visit Shirdi every year. I had some amount of faith in Shirdi Baba but, since I could not see Him or talk to Him, I still wanted something more.

#### **In the Time of Despair Baba Becomes Her True Friend**

In August 1989, Papa took the whole family to Puttaparthi. Something in that trip had affected me. On returning home I found myself turning to Baba whenever I would pray in the Pooja room. In the meantime, all the people I had faith in, started letting me down. I could not understand why I was suddenly without a friend in the world, for no fault of mine. I was plunged into the nadir of despair, hopelessness and diffidence. I did not know whom to turn to. In those young and foolish days, I wanted a soulmate, as I thought that that would be the solution to all my problems and my insecurities, little realizing that my quest would bring me unbearable pain. Baba made me experience and realise that He was the only soulmate I ought to look for, trust and have faith in. Betrayed trust, humiliation, broken friendships and relationships, left me badly mauled, with a mutilated heart and soul, absolutely

alone, with no emotional support, and no job to sustain myself – I was heading nowhere, had no one to turn to and there seemed to be no way out. I cried for help from the depths of my being. **I did not want to live anymore. Only God could have saved me - and He did.**

### **Selected for the Indian Police Service**

In January 1996 when I went to Puttaparthi, I had a number of dreams and was selected for the Indian Police Service the same year. I realized that it was He who got me selected. He had told me in a dream that He was selecting me to protect something. As usual I did not understand what the dream was all about. That was the turning point in my life as I turned to Him completely. Had it not been for Him, I could never have done my National Police Academy training. It was He who made me do the rock climbing, push ups, sit ups, rope climbing, back roll, front roll, cross country running, drill, marching, swimming, horse riding - every step of the way, in spite of severe breathing problems, fractures and bruises.

In December 1997 after 8 years He gave me padnamaskar and took away all the pain. He also taught me that forgiveness was important and I am not my past. I learnt to put my past behind me and understand the role of different people at different stages in my life for my learning and progress, however hard the lessons were.

### **Success Comes By Swami's Grace**

Then came the field training – the initial shock of policing – I saw for the first time the different social values of different people and sections of society. The deceit, lies, crimes, insensitivity, and different interpretations of truth as per convenience. I saw what motivated people to commit crimes, where the subtle line of distinction between right and wrong, good and bad was so thin that people justified every act they committed, on various grounds, morality being brushed aside completely. I was also exposed to various methods of policing and control, and I learnt to differentiate between what was right for me and what clearly wasn't, what I should or should not do and at the same time while doing my duty, how not to judge other people and the situations they are in and how to be tough with criminals (a complete turnover from the soft me).

I had to evolve my style of functioning – mature, strict, sensitive yet tough – for the people and my own subordinates. I survived a grueling and exacting first 3 years in my job thanks to Him. Slowly but surely He helped me gain command over my work and people. Though several times I thought I was a complete misfit, now I know I was destined only for this. I could never have been anything but a police officer.

Then came my experiences in policing. **Once when I was posted in an extremist affected area, the extremists were out on a rampage, blasting and destroying property, and everyone was tense. As Addl. SP Operations I had to take care of the situation. The extremists we were searching for day and night, simply came to the Police station and**

**surrendered!** In another complicated case which I was dealing with for the first time, I was wondering what to do. And I felt His direction that I must take one step at a time and what do I mean what should I do? Didn't I know that He is always with me? I also felt His guidance that my decision making was poor, so He would ensure that I was always in situations where I was forced to make decisions on the spot and soon became very good at it.

**In one case when I was Superintendent of Police of a district, the extremists kidnapped four of my policemen, held them captive in a forest and threatened to kill them if the demands they laid forth were not fulfilled. I only prayed, and I taught the families of the kidnapped men to pray. After 10 days, in spite of no demand being fulfilled, my men were released by the extremists (why, even they could not understand!) and they came back home walking from the forest!** It was unprecedented in the history of extremism to have policemen kidnapped and released like this without any demand being fulfilled, without any reason whatsoever. But I knew the reason was Baba!!!

### **Hard Lessons are Learnt**

In one of my postings where I had worked very hard, after my transfer all the work I had done was destroyed by another officer who thought differently. **Swami taught me how to accept someone else destroying a system I had built up carefully, how to detach myself from the result of my work, how to work without expecting appreciation and move ahead.**

**Swami also taught me that I must not look at only one quality in a person and judge them according to that - I must look beyond that quality and see the whole person. He taught me how to do my work, my duty and forget about the result. Justice or no justice, things were happening just as He willed it. Everybody was playing the role assigned to them. Acceptance on my part of His will was important on the road to total surrender to Him.**

### **Inner Acceptance and Love**

I always found it very difficult to love myself. I had no tolerance for myself, least of all for the mistakes I would commit. Swami taught me to love myself and be more patient, kind and tolerant with myself. Since He was in me how could I hate myself? Was that not tantamount to hating Him? He also taught me how to leave behind the emotional baggage I was always carrying on my back. I learnt to travel light, though I still have the tendency to make the same mistake.

Not being a very good judge of people initially, I would always trust the wrong people and would regret it later as they would always betray this trust. Swami always let me go through the experience, but each time helped me learn how to judge for myself to what extent to trust people. It was learning the hard way but, it never made me forget my lessons. He is a hard taskmaster. He puts us through different tests, and with each new step up the spiritual ladder comes

another more difficult test. Each time one has to remember that it is a test and tell Him that you are going to be strong, will put up a good fight and pass the test and make Him proud of you.

At each step Swami taught me how to introspect and evaluate myself and what I was doing and be absolutely disciplined, truthful and a person of total integrity. I am not the perfect daughter He would like me to be, but I am trying. He taught me how to take one step at a time when in doubt and how things would then automatically work out. He also taught me how to care for my subordinates, and how to stand up for right things and values, come what may. He taught me how to be a leader and lead from the front.

### **Learning to See Each Experience as a Lesson**

What Swami taught me in a few years in my job about assessing people and situations, I probably could never have learnt all my life. He would give me experiences putting me in the place of other people and help me understand people and situations better and then take fair decisions. **I learnt that all the people we meet, we do so for a reason. Either they have a role in our lives or vice versa and once the lesson is learnt, everyone moves on. But if the lesson is not learnt then we keep attracting the same experiences to ourselves.**

In one case He warned me that there are people around me I should be careful of. I had sensed it but this message helped me confirm what I felt vaguely. Once when I was SP of a difficult district, a person from the USA travelled all the way to my area of posting and told me to be careful of a senior who would backstab me. It happened exactly as foretold, 7 months later. I could not prevent it but, I was prepared for it and could face it courageously.

When I once had to take a very important professional decision involving life and death and was very disturbed, He told me that like Arjuna I must do my duty. He would never let me do anything wrong. If I take a decision that is wrong He would not allow it to happen and if right then there was nothing to worry about. That was the most fantastic assurance I had received in my life. My God was taking care of me every step of the way in my life.

**Once while travelling when I was perturbed about something and asked Him for help, a water tanker overtook my vehicle and loomed large in front of me, with Baba's photo behind it with the message "24hrs at your service!".** Swami's responses were always tremendous and spontaneous. At each step He taught me to have faith that He is there for me.

### **God Knocks to Wake Us Up**

From the year 1992 to 2000, for about 8 years, I had been hearing someone knock on my door every night and sometimes this person would call out my name. I couldn't understand and never slept properly. Once while travelling in a train I read that Baba stated that God knocks on the door of people to wake

them up to the reality of who they really are. He also said that if we do not open our hearts to Him, He will break it and enter! I prayed to Baba and thanked Him for telling me that. Since that day the knocking stopped. I guess I was a poor learner, He kept knocking at my door patiently for 8 years and I never understood!!!

Swami has come in about 130 dreams to me – each one signifying something – either care or precaution to be taken or something which is about to happen, or expressing His happiness or otherwise at something. He is a hard taskmaster too, who knows how much to push you and to what extent. Whatever He gives in one's life, whether sorrow or happiness, it will not be anything more than what one can bear.

### **The Joy of Working at Prashanti Nilayam**

I always wanted to do seva at the ashram but my job would not permit me to take a long time off and do seva. So when called on official police duty for His Birthday celebrations, I was thrilled. I wanted Him to see me in uniform and when He passed by me I saluted Him and He did look at me.

After one week of very demanding duty when I was completely tired and my seniors were happy with the way I had controlled things at the ashram, I thought to myself what is the use of these praises, if the lord of the universe appreciates my work then that would be something. **The next day when I was sitting for darshan, He came to me and when I said, “Baba thank you for giving me this opportunity of coming here”, He said, “Chala santosham” and gave me Padnamaskar. The Lord of the universe knew how hard I had worked. Oh what wouldn't I do for that smile and padnamaskar!**

### **Granting of the Precious Interview**

In 1999, on 17th July, Mummy's birthday, Baba called the whole family for an interview. Those 15 minutes with Him were like ages. That time we spent with Him, the assurance He gave to each one of us that He is there for us and His comments about each one of us revealing His omniscience were wonderful. I was sitting near His feet, in the same place where I would sit in my dreams, and He put His hand on my head twice, while talking. I was thrilled. Baba gave us strength to face the bad times ahead.

Each visit to Parthi would be for learning a lesson. Either we would meet someone who would clear our doubts about something, or share someone's experiences and grow richer, or Baba would help us find the answers to our questions and give us food for thought and practice. Love, truth, patience, ahimsa in thought word and deed, understanding, seva was His message, continuously reiterated in different ways. **The way He loves all unconditionally, the capacity He has to forgive, the patience with which He deals with everyone, the transformation He brings in oneself, the love, devotion, the desire to give up everything and follow only Him that He incites, can't be compared even remotely to anything that exists in**

**this world.** He is the most wonderful teacher, who taught me patiently what I needed to learn, though I went on making mistakes all the way.

Had Baba not given me wonderful parents and sisters, who supported me always in whatever I did, it would have been very difficult to survive. I was inspired by my mother and sisters to learn vedic chanting and to meditate and move ahead in life spiritually. My younger sister was blessed with several visions and visitations from Baba. Papa's relationship with Baba was very interesting. Papa fought with Baba for some reason and refused to acknowledge or talk to Him. But the more he resisted, the more Baba ensured that all the spiritual activities were carried out from our house and slowly he started participating enthusiastically in all activities like Laksharchana, study circle, nagar sankirtans, bhajans etc. That was Baba's way of bringing an unwilling sparrow into His fold!

### **Reward Comes as Service for the UN**

In September 2005, I was selected for the UN Mission in Kosovo for a period of one year. The entire process of selection which takes just a month and involves tests for police personnel from the whole country, took one year. It was something I wanted for a long time.

When I wanted to know why the delay was taking place the message that came said it was because I was not well! This was true. I was suffering from severe backache for sometime. My Baba delayed the entire process of selection and gave me time to recover so that I could join the mission!

### **Heartfelt Prayers**

I can only pray -

O lord, where would I be without you? What can I do to thank you? Nothing I can do will express my gratitude to you. I can only offer you myself - a tiny speck in your universe, confused and tainted – with all my heart and soul. I am where you want me to be, doing what you want me to do. **Make me your instrument to do what you want me to. Make me the daughter you would like me to be. Show me how to fill my heart with love for everyone, just like you. Make me a part of you where I lose consciousness of myself. I would like to see you in everything. If I look left I should see you. If I look right I should see you. If I look at someone I should see you. If I am asleep I should dream of you. If I am awake I should see you. If I listen to anything it should be only your voice. If I talk it should be only to discuss your glory. I want to be God Drunk - I love you Baba.**

- Heart2Heart Team

## **EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE - IV**

### **A Gratitude Card for Swami “Heart with us... Feeling with You”**

In this section in the last issue of Heart2Heart, we had for you the touching story of a Valentine’s Day card and many readers wrote to us saying they were quite moved with the story and it filled their hearts with love for their Lord. Encouraged with this response, we have another beautiful card-story for you, this time a Gratitude Card created by Post Graduate students in 1993.

Before we proceed with the story, a little background about Gratitude Cards for those who are unfamiliar with the practice. Every year in the last months of the academic year (generally Feb-March) boys of all classes present a small programme in front of Bhagavan to express their gratitude to Him for His love and care and all the umpteen golden chances showered on them all round the year. So it was way back in 1993 too. But the scene that year for the final year post graduate boys was a little different. They were not in a pleasant situation. So what was the issue? And how did the boys finally come out of it?

Let’s hear it directly from one of those present, Sri O S K S Sastri, who was then a student and is currently a faculty member in Swami’s Institute, as he recalls those days -

It was during our final year post graduation in 1993. Swami, for some reason not very apparent to us, chided all of us for being ungrateful. He said we were not following His commands. We, the final year post graduate boys, were really crestfallen. And this happened at a time when in a matter of few weeks we were to leave the portals of Institute and consequentially the cool comfort of the physical proximity of our dear Lord. It was the time when we wanted to make the most of our last few days with Bhagawan and here was Bhagawan avoiding us every single evening in the Mandir. We wanted to somehow please Him, somehow win His love back.

Many in our class felt perhaps the feelings and intensity in our prayers were not strong enough to move the Lord. Perhaps we simply were not able to churn our hearts the way He wanted. Maybe we were not able to bring forth the purest of divine feelings. We knew we had to work more on ourselves, introspect a little more, cry for Him a little harder and then ultimately surrender to Him completely. Someone amongst us said that perhaps our feelings are not pure enough and instead of praying for His love, why not pray to Him for pure feelings as well. Many felt it was Swami prompting through that boy. And all of us agreed that we are going to pray to Him to bestow on us sublime and pure feelings for Him.

And so, we all wrote to Him.

“Oh! Lord, The Heart is with us but the Feeling is with you. Kindly bless us with the feeling to be able to win Your Grace.”

The result of this prayer was a beautiful card. A very simple yet poignant card that we made for Him. We made small fledglings on a tiny branch seated in their humble nest but no sign of peace on their beautiful faces.

With searching eyes and tiny probing necks, they were eagerly waiting for succour from their mother. It was if the tiny little birds were saying “Oh mother! When will you come and end this weariness! Won't you come?” The tiny fledglings depicted our sorry state of affairs most aptly. All of us poured out our feelings and out came a beautiful little poem with three little stanzas, one stanza in Hindi, another in English and finally in Telugu that we wrote in the card just next to the bird picture. The poem was then set to a sweet yet moving tune. And all of us gave our heart and soul to this small musical creation.

We practised the song again and again till our hearts ached and our throats dried. We soaked every line of the song with the best feelings we could express. The song went like this –

#### The Hindi Stanza

Dear Lord Sai! You are our very life!  
Without You, oh Lord, our hearts are barren,  
We are lifeless! We are fallen!  
These thirsty hearts of ours  
Long for Your love, Your grace.  
Without Your love, dear Lord,  
This rainy season has become  
Dry and dreary like another autumn.

#### In English

Oh how I love thee Lord, Living God,  
With deepest purest feelings  
And worshipping thee with rising hopes,  
Take us; guide us; love us...

#### Finally, In Telugu

Oh! Mother, do we not deserve Your Love!  
Are we not Your very own children!  
Why are You staying away from us?  
Why are You delaying to grant Your Compassion?  
The light in our eyes is missing,  
Our minds are devoid of any peace,  
We have lost all our talents.  
Without You, we can never be at ease.  
In spite of all our praying and pleading,  
dear Mother,

Your warmth and love has eluded us.  
Please bless us, dear Mother, with the right feeling  
And the true spirit to set Your heart melting.  
And if You deny us, dear Lord,  
We just can not survive.

So, this was the meaning of the song and we practised it till it became a part of our life. That evening, when Bhagavan came for Darshan, as usual He avoided all of us. This only increased the intensity of our prayers. We prayed like never before holding the card in our hands. A few tense moments passed. And then we saw Bhagavan come out of the interview room. We just could no longer hold ourselves.

We all burst forth singing! *Sai...Tum Hamare Pran Ho....*We sang as loud as we can. We sang with all our hearts, minds and souls. The compassionate Mother then could not but embrace His loved ones. It was like the waiting of the tiny fledglings in the card was over. Their mother had come and with lots of food and gifts too!

Perhaps this was the last lesson that He wanted to teach us before the academic year was over. And He did it so beautifully. Swami so lovingly then went around all of us, speaking to someone here, lovingly patting someone there, cracking a joke at the third, blessing with *padanamaskar* the fourth, ...this went on. It was as if He was compensating for all the chances we had missed for weeks.

He asked, "Who wrote the song?", "Who composed the tune?" As always, everybody said that it was a collective effort. But Swami, the all knowing one, went and spoke one by one to all the three boys who had written the English, Hindi and Telugu portions of the song. There is nothing you can ever hide from Him. Each one of us was there before Him like an open book and on that day He wrote a golden chapter in each of our lives, a chapter which continues to inspire us to love Him with all our heart, whenever we feel life is becoming tough and we are missing His Love.

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## H2H SPECIAL

### UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS WITH SAI

#### - RECOLLECTIONS OF MR. CHIDAMBARAM KRISHNAN - Part 2

In the last issue, we commenced a presentation of the wonderful recollections of Mr. Chidambaram Krishnan, a long-time devotee of Bhagavan Baba who came to the Lord under somewhat unusual circumstances. In Part 1, we broke off at a point where Swami had glanced at Mr Krishnan for the first time and left for a small town named Surandai in Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu, leaving Mr. Krishnan wondering who was Swami and how Swami could prevent his death that seemed to be imminent. Read on and find out what happened next!

After Swami left for Surandai, Mr. Mudaliar told me, "Tomorrow morning, you go straight to Surandai without fail. Swami will definitely talk to you. I have some work, and will join you there in the evening. You have worshipped Lord Murugan in Tiruchendur. Swami is Lord Murugan; therefore, have no worries. Go positively to Surandai tomorrow morning."

Surandai is about 30 km from Tirunelveli. I left Tirunelveli in the morning and was in Surandai by 7.30 A.M. In those days, there was not much of a crowd to see Swami because He was not so well known. I saw about fifteen to twenty people gathered in front of the house where Swami was staying. That small crowd included, however, many important people from the TVS family and enterprise. A few among those gathered there knew me and greeted me. They told me that Swami was still inside and had not yet come out.

Even as we were talking, the door opened and Swami emerged. I had never seen Swami before and knew nothing about Him. It is true Swami often tells us, "You may not know Me but I know everything about you." However, at that point, I had never physically seen Swami before and likewise, Swami had never physically seen me before.

#### **"This Head Knows Everything!"**

I folded my hands and looked at Him; He too saw me. Then suddenly, He asked those near Him to move aside and came rushing to Me. He then caught hold of my hand and literally dragged me inside the house! Patting me on the back, the very first thing He said to me was, "**You are not going to die! I have come to save you!**" I was stunned and asked, "**Swami, how do You know about all that?**" He replied, "**This head knows everything!**" In a voice that was choked, I said that I was very happy. Swami then materialised a talisman and asked me to wear it all the time. He also gave me a precious stone and asked me to keep it with me all the time. He added, "If ever you lose it, rush at once to Puttaparthi or Whitefield, wherever I happen to be."

That was an important warning, and there is story related to that which I shall narrate later.

Swami then asked, "What happened to your marriage?" Once again I was taken aback. Not many knew about the problems associated with my marriage, and Swami was in no way connected with it. Yet here He was asking me about the marriage! I had seen many Swamjis before. If we tell them something about our problems, they would give some vibhuti. No doubt some of these Swamjis had some Divine powers. However, they only responded when questions were put to them or problems were placed before them. But here was Swami asking me about something few knew about and I had not told Him anything about it! I realised that for the first time, I was in the presence of someone who knew all about me without my mentioning anything. Anyway, I asked Swami, "**Swami, how do you about the problems concerning my marriage?**" He smiled and said, "**I told you, this head knows everything!**"

I then described my marriage problem and said, "Swami, my brother has obtained a Court injunction and the marriage cannot be performed." To that Swami replied, "Who said so?" I reminded Swami, "There is a Court order, Swami!" Swami brushed that aside and simply said, "Forget it; go and get married!" "But Swami, the Court? If I got married, I could get into all kinds of problems. My brother is a Congress MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) and is very powerful because he has high political connections. He knows the Chief Minister very well and could easily have me thrown into jail!" Swami just smiled and said, "**In that case come to Puttaparthi and get married there! I will personally perform your marriage.**" I replied, "Swami, you simply do not know about my brother. He will even chase me all the way to America to stop my marriage!"

You must remember that in those days, I did know anything about Swami, much less about His Divinity. I was rich, haughty and arrogant. Kamaraj Nadar, the famous politician, was my uncle. We had a big company and we owned about forty vehicles including many trucks and cars. We had a huge establishment, and so arrogance was second nature to me then. That was why I was talking so casually to Swami, almost on equal terms.

Swami then shut me up, and patting my head affectionately said, "**All the grim things you are fearing will simply not happen. You do not know anything about Me. Forget your worries and just leave everything to Me.**" I then said, "In that case Swami, I shall, as you say, get married in Puttaparthi." The conversation about my marriage was over for the time being. Swami then suddenly asked, "Will you come with Me to Trivandrum tomorrow?" I replied yes. Swami then asked me to go home, pack my bags, and join Him in His tour to Trivandrum on the following day and stay with Him for a few days.

## **With Swami in Trivandrum**

So on the following day, I went to Trivandrum along with Swami. We reached there around 3 P.M. and were received by Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao, who was the Governor of Kerala State then. Swami was given a grand reception, and stayed with the Governor. We also stayed in the Governor's mansion. The accommodation was fabulous – no surprise in that because this building was earlier a palace.

Soon after arrival, there was a Bhajan session. In those days, I was an ardent devotee of Lord Muruga, and for me no God other than Muruga existed; I never worshipped any other God. Thus, Swami for me was then just a human being, though with some Divine powers perhaps. I definitely did not see Him as God then – that came later. During the Bhajans, many songs were sung in praise of all sorts of Gods, but there was not a single song in praise of my God Murugan. I was very unhappy. I told Mr. Krishnaswami Mudaliar who had originally asked me see Sai Baba, "These people are singing about all sorts of Gods but they did not sing a single song on Muruga. I don't think this kind of worship is going to suit me."

Mr. Mudaliar was alarmed and replied, "No, no! You should not talk like that. Baba is truly a great one. Just be patient, and they might even sing a song like you want." I shook my head and said, "I am not at all hopeful."

This sort of things happened two days in a row. Bhajans in the evenings, and songs about all Gods but none on Muruga. My patience was being sorely tried. I felt really pained because Lord Muruga had come to my help at so many critical junctures. In our party, there was one Chittoor Ramanathan Reddy. An irrigation engineer by profession, he was in charge of five Districts in Rayalaseema (a region in Andhra Pradesh). Suddenly during the Bhajans, this Ramanathan Reddy started singing a song on Lord Muruga, and he did a superb job. After that, I felt somewhat relieved.

## **Mind-Boggling Moments With Sai in Kanyakumari**

Next morning, we went to Kanyakumari, the southernmost point in the Indian peninsula. Because the Governor was travelling with Swami, the road was cleared of all traffic and our party simply sped along. In Kanyakumari, we were accommodated in the Kerala Government Guest House, and treated to a fabulous lunch.

In the evening, Swami said, "Let's go to the beach." In Kanyakumari, there is a bathing ghat where it is safe to enter the water. Swami did not go there but instead headed for a rocky spot some distance away. The sea slopes very rapidly there and is very deep. Huge waves often form there, and visitors therefore avoid that area; but that exactly is where Swami went. Many have drowned there and so there was some concern in our party about Swami going there. Kasturi and a few others pleaded with Swami not to go there, but He brushed everyone aside and went straight for those rocks. I too tried to stop Swami saying, "Swami, not there please." But He pushed me aside.

It was 6.45 P.M and rather dark. I had a camera with me, and Kasturi asked me to click a picture. I replied that taking a picture would be of no use since it was quite dark and I did not have a flash attachment for my camera. Swami who heard this said, "You do not seem to know about Me. I tell you, do what Kasturi says." Rather brashly I replied, "You may be Swami but it is too dark to take a picture now." Swami was not put off by this impertinence; instead He said, "Just try." And so I clicked, telling myself one film wasted. But guess what? When the film was developed, there was a beautiful picture; the camera had captured a remarkable scene and it seemed as if it was daylight when the picture had been taken!

Soon after I took this picture, a huge wave came rushing towards Swami. I tell you, this wave was real huge! And it engulfed almost half of Swami!! We were all mighty scared, and feared that the wave would carry Swami away. The wave withdrew and we then went near Swami. He smiled and said, "Looks like all of you valued your lives so much that you abandoned Swami and took to your heels!" I said, "Swami, that wave was really a monster; it was so big!" **Swami then gently lifted his robe about an inch and said, "Look below!" And what we saw there around His Feet was a necklace with huge diamonds, 108 of them as we found later. Swami said, "The Lord of the Sea had come to pay homage to Me and make this offering to Me. How could I ignore Him and walk away from the shore? You thought instead that you would be swallowed and ran away!"** We then begged for forgiveness. Swami gave that necklace to the Governor.

### **Sai at the Beach....Some More Blissful Moments**

We then adjourned to a nearby spot where there was a nice sand hill. That small sand hill was a favourite spot for visitors, especially because one could see sunrise and sunset from there nicely. That sand pile no longer exists; an observation tower has been now built there. Swami took us to that spot. We all sat down in a circle.

The first thing Swami said was, "I will bring the sea here." He dug a small pit in the sand by scooping out a few handful of sand, and water appeared in the small pit. He asked us to taste that water, and it tasted just like sea water. Mind you, we were on a small sand pile, a small hill really, and the sea was much below. But Swami made sea water appear on the top there for us.

Swami then pulled various objects from the sand, like a locket and a Naga Sai, which He gave away. Swami then asked, "What is the importance of this place Kanyakumari? Can any of you narrate an important incident that took place here?"

We said, "Swami, the Goddess installed here in Kanyakumari is known as Kanyakumari Bhagavathi Amman. The jewel on the nose of the idol used to have a big diamond that shined brightly at night. That light could be seen from far through an opening in the temple, and that light acted as a lighthouse for ships on the sea. Once a ship came straight towards that light; the captain thought that there was a lighthouse there. On the way, the ship crashed into

the rocks and sank. After that, the opening in the temple through which the light could be seen was closed. Soon after that, the gem was missing.”

**Swami heard all that and said, “Oh I see. Do you want to see that missing gem?” He then put His hand in the sand and pulled the hand out. And as He did so, in His hand was a huge gem. He passed the gem around for all of us to see. I had a torch and flashed the light of the torch on the diamond. Believe me, the diamond was shining like a thousand watt bulb!** In our group was a bearded man from Kerala. He was one of the members of the

Governor’s party. That man said, “Swami, please give that gem to me!” Swami replied, “This gem was stolen by a king. After he died, the gem was lost and lay buried underground. You all wanted to see it and so I brought it from there. Now it has to go back where it came from – that is the natural law.” In an instant He sent the diamond back! Altogether, we spent a memorable evening there on the beach. We then returned to the Guest House, had dinner and returned to Trivandrum.

Next morning, we had Bhajans and this time there was a couple of songs on Muruga which left me satisfied. That evening, we left for Quilon, now called Kollam. The Governor’s establishment had made all the arrangements but missed out on crucial item – I shall tell you about that presently. We went to the beach, which was fabulous and time simply flew by. Swami loves beaches and does not like to leave from there. And so it happened, that we stayed much longer than the Governor’s staff had expected us to. They thought we would make a lighting visit and be back in Trivandrum for evening snacks. But you know, with Swami, schedules are always changed.

After we had spent a long and wonderful time there, Swami asked, “Any tiffin?” There was none and everyone was looking at the other. The beach was about five km from the town and if we wanted anything to eat or drink, it meant a trip of five km to procure and then another five km trip to come back to the beach where we all were then. So it looked like there would be no tiffin. It seemed however, that Swami had other plans!

**(To be continued)**

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## **RESPONSE TO RADIOSAI LISTENERS' FEEDBACK**

**By Prof. G Venkataraman**

**Recently, Radio Sai solicited listener feedback, for the purpose of revamping and rescheduling its programmes. There was a good response to the appeal, and subsequently, after an analysis of the replies received, Prof. G Venkataraman broadcast a special talk responding to the listeners' comments, suggestions and queries. Since many might have missed that talk when broadcast, H2H reprints the text of the talk for the benefit of our readers who listen to our radio services.**

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

As you know, in recent weeks, we have been soliciting from you feedback about our programmes. I am happy to say that there has been a very good response to our appeal and we have received hundreds of letters, all the way from New Zealand to Canada and everywhere in between. This is a special talk in which I would like to respond to the reactions of our listeners.

### **An Overwhelming Response**

The first thing I must say is that we are overwhelmed by the response to our request. We have received both bouquets and brickbats, fortunately more of the former than the latter! We have spent quite some time in carefully analysing the comments and questions. I must at this point give you some idea of the diversity of the response, which seems to span many dimensions.

What I mean is that our listeners belong to different time zones; they speak many different languages; they are from different cultures; they have different tastes; and they belong to different religions. You will appreciate that it is not easy to run a radio service that satisfies such diversity in equal measure, at least with our kind of resources. Nevertheless, we have thus far tried to do our best. Feeling, however, that we could do better, we did the survey; now that we have received your responses, the ball is in our court. Towards the end of this talk, I shall give you some idea of what we plan and hope to do in the immediate future.

### **In Reply to Your Points**

But first, I must reply to some of the points made by the listeners who have kindly written to us. There are some who say that everything is fine as it is. We are grateful for this flattering compliment but we know in our hearts that we can, should and certainly ought to do much better. And that is what we are determined to try.

Some of the suggestions made are already in the process of being implemented, and we are already broadcasting the kind of programmes requested. For example, one listener wants us to broadcast songs sung by Swami's boys during festivals. I believe we do this regularly. Another listener

wants news reports of events in the Ashram. I am not quite able to understand what this particular listener means, but for your information, we do regularly broadcast a programme entitled Prashanti Bulletin, which summarises all recent happenings. Yet another listener wants songs from old Convocation Dramas. We have, I believe broadcast these; in fact, we have even broadcast the entire soundtrack of the dramas. But we must admit that we do not have the soundtracks of all the dramas staged during the various years and so we can do only so much. Incidentally, this highlights one general difficulty we have and which you must appreciate.

You see, we came into the picture only at the beginning of this century. Much has happened before Radio Sai went on the air, and despite our best efforts, we have not been able to get recordings of many precious events of the past; more about this later.

Many have made suggestions that we ourselves have been thinking about and are actually about to be implemented. Examples include: Bhajan tutorials; narration of Chinna Kathas, or stories for children written by Swami a long time ago; interviews in Telugu, and so on. So, no problem there.

### **The New Telugu Service**

Incidentally, this is a good place to refer to our new Telugu service and also respond to requests for programmes in many languages. Let me start with the Telugu Service. For quite some time, there has been a great demand for special broadcasts in Telugu. In the past, we have occasionally broadcast special programmes in Telugu on special occasions like Ugadi or the Telugu New Year Day. However, we held off a regular service because of many practical difficulties. Nevertheless, adopting a come-what-may attitude, we commenced a Telugu service on the holy day of Sankaranthi [14th Jan] this year. This is a one-hour programme that is aired twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. By Swami's Grace, it is going well and we hope to improve both the frequency as well as the depth of this service.

### **Broadcasts in Different Languages**

This brings me to the request for broadcasts in various other languages, both Indian and non-Indian. In all such cases, we have a basic difficulty – lack of familiarity with the language concerned. There are just a handful of us here in the Prashanti Digital Studio, and we simply are not equipped to produce programmes in all sorts of language. Strange as it may sound, Telugu is not the mother tongue of the few of us who work here.

So, running the Telugu programme is quite a difficult job for us. Fortunately, this is Telugu country, and we are able to manage because of the generous help given by volunteers who know Telugu. When it comes to other languages, it is an altogether a different story. Speaking for ourselves, we DO want to have programmes in as many languages as possible – from Japanese and Mandarin Chinese to French and Italian. But for this, we need the co-operation of devotees from the regions concerned. Let me explain. From time

to time, devotees from Japan would come to us and say, "Here is a Bhajan programme we have recorded; it is in Japanese. Please can you broadcast it?" We say yes, and air the programme at a time previously agreed. Similarly, there is the occasional programme in Chinese that we have aired, because devotees from Singapore gave us a packaged programme.

Maybe, I should mention here the special arrangement we have managed to enter into with devotees from Latin America. This has been possible on account of the personal initiative of many devotees from that region, besides the strong support given to us by the leaders of the Sai Organisation in that part of the world. These people have gone to enormous trouble to prepare regularly, programmes in Spanish and Portuguese that we air on Radio Sai.

### **Programmes Produced by the Linguistic Regions**

I shall repeat that all over again in slightly different words so that you appreciate what needs to be done if we are to air programmes in various languages, other than English. First of all, devotees must realise that such programmes cannot be produced by us; if programmes are produced for us, then we can broadcast them, as we do regularly for the Spanish and Portuguese speaking people. If a particular linguistic group say Russian or Bengali for that matter, want Radio Sai to broadcast programmes in these languages, then a special radio group must be formed in that region which would, as a Seva, do all that is necessary to produce programmes in that language.

This includes generating ideas for the programmes, producing and recording the programmes and making the appropriate arrangements for sending the recorded programmes to us for broadcast. Of course, any group wanting to produce programmes, must do so with the blessings of the Sai Organisation in the region. This in turn means that the Sai Organisation must ensure both quality and suitability of content; in other words, it must oversee the whole process and must take responsibility for making sure that something that is not suitable for broadcasting does not get on the air.

All this is not as difficult as it might sound. And thanks to technology, recording etc., is not such a hassle either. However, it requires dedication, firm commitment, and perseverance. You see, it is not easy to generate programmes, unless there is a strong passion for it. One must be charged with the feeling that the programmes would bring so much joy to the listeners. Once there is this fire in the belly as it is called, then the whole process ceases to be a burden.

### **If You Are Ready, Then So Are We!**

Let me wrap all this up by saying the following: *yes, we would be very happy to broadcast programmes in French, German, Italian, Russian etc. but people in those linguistic regions must take the initiative, just as devotees in Latin America have pioneered programmes in Spanish and Portuguese. If Latin America can do it, the rest of the world also can. If you are ready, then so are*

we! If you want to know more about to go about all this, please do write us and we shall fill you in with all the required details.

### **Study Circles**

OK, let me move on to another topic. Many listeners have asked for Study Circle sessions. This is something that has been exercising our minds also for quite some time. Using our **Heart2Heart** service, we have actually run an entire series of articles, that can serve as reference material for running study circle.

This material has been packaged under the title: *Getting Spiritually Better*. If you go to Radio Sai web site and click on **Heart2Heart**, and look up previous issues, you can see and also download all the reference material that might help you to run your own circles in your own areas.

### **Radio Satsangh Programme**

Over and above this, we are planning a series called Radio Satsangh, which would involve an active dialogue between two young people, dealing with various practical aspects of leading a spiritual life. This format may not be quite the same as a Study Circle with say ten persons; on the other hand it can be regarded as, if you like, a Study Circle with two people! Wait for it, and then judge if it is at least partially useful. We think it would be quite interesting and also useful.

### **Talking Books**

Many people have been asking for Talking Books. We have actually broadcast a few of these, but obviously there is a lot more we can do in this area. Believe me, we are currently making all the efforts we can to have as many talking books as possible recorded. Here, I must draw your attention to one important practical problem we have.

You know, producing a talking book is not all that easy. The main problem here is finding a good reader. The reader must first of all have a good voice, added to which, he or she as the case may be, must have good diction and pronunciation. I repeat once again that it is not at all easy to find readers in the numbers we need! Secondly, to make a talking book out of a book of say 150 pages or so, takes many sessions of recordings. Even if we are able to find a reader, that person is often not available for an extended period. In short, we have all kinds of practical problems, most of them connected with an acute shortage of competent human resources. However, we have made a few talking books in the past and even broadcast them. We now intend to take a Hollywood or bust approach and not let any further difficulties in our way. In short, do not be surprised if we do convert some of the Vahini series, for example, into talking books.

## **Talks by Devotees**

Some listeners want talks by Hislop, Kasturi etc. Alas, all these people are no more with us, and Radio Sai was not around when they gave talks. So, this is a double difficulty. However, we have been able to track a few precious tapes with talks by these great devotees, and soon you would hear their voices floating into your homes via Radio Sai. But please remember there is only so much we can do about this matter.

This takes me on to talks by Geetha Mohan Ram, who is obviously very popular with our listeners, and with good reason too. Listeners want lots of talks by her. We too would like that but there are ground realities that cannot be brushed aside. This good lady lives in America whereas we operate from Prashanti Nilayam. On two occasions when she was here, we managed to record talks by her. Apart from this we managed to get some tapes containing her talks through the efforts of a well-wisher of Radio Sai. In short, talks of these kind are not easy to come by and with the limited resources we have, we are unable to do better than what we already have. For your information, we made a direct appeal to some of the devotees in America to help in this matter, but then when oceans and continents separate us, follow up becomes very difficult.

I might in general say that we have made a conscious effort to get recordings of talks given in various places, both India and overseas; but the results are very poor. I am afraid they will remain poor unless people out there make a special effort to come to our aid and help.

## **Meeting the Required Balance**

I would now like to deal with a slightly different aspect of the requests communicated to us in the survey that we made. Many would like a lot of Vedic Mantras, Suprabhatham in the morning, etc. On the other hand, there are many, obviously non-Hindu, who want something more suited to their needs and familiarity. All are our listeners, all are Swami's devotees, and we have to please all. But what is to be done when the demands are so diverse? This is one of the many difficulties we face – wide diversity in preferences.

One thing is clear: we simply cannot have a Hindu channel. Quite apart from the *Sarva Dharma* nature of Swami's Mission which mandates a balance in presentation of aspects of various faiths, the broadcast arrangement we have requires transmission from Melbourne and Johannesburg and we cannot strictly speaking run a religious channel. The authorities in those countries do not permit that. I hope that people who want exclusive broadcasts of Hindu programmes shall I say, would have to bear with us.

## **Volume Fluctuations**

Some listeners have complained about volume fluctuations. This is an important problem, and I am personally looking into this along with our staff to find out what exactly the problem is and why it is originating. There are many

links in the broadcast chain, and we must analyse in detail. We hope to track down the root cause and once we do so, we shall of course fix the problem.

### **Safeguarding the Precious Past**

One listener wants to hear Discourses of Swami given prior to 1976. Actually, nothing would give us greater pleasure than to broadcast those Discourses. With enormous difficulty, we have managed to collect many recordings containing those precious Discourses, but unfortunately, thanks to lack of care, many of those recordings have deteriorated in quality, some seemingly beyond any repair. This is most tragic. I would like at this point, to make a few general remarks on the indifference of many devotees to the preservation of historical records, photos, etc.

In the old days, photography was not all that restricted, and during every event, there were many still photographers and also videographers. But unfortunately, hardly anyone has bothered to keep systematic records and preserve pictures, audio tapes, films and videotapes carefully, with two notable exceptions; they are late Richard Bock of America and late Dr. Fanibanda of Bombay. I humbly bow in respect and reverence to these two departed souls, but for whom, we would have almost zero video archive. The Prashanti Digital Studio owes an immense debt of gratitude to Janet Bocker in San Fransisco and to Mrs. Fanibanda in Mumbai for the generous gift they have made of films of priceless value, after holding them for years in impeccable condition.

Getting back to audio recordings going back to the seventies, we have salvaged some and are trying to salvage as many of the rest as possible. Some, I regret to say, are beyond restoration; but mercifully, many can be recovered. However, it is going to cost us a lot of time and money to get that job done. Till the restoration is complete, listeners would have to wait. I am sorry but that is the way it now is. Meanwhile, please believe me – we are doing our very best.

### **About Live Broadcasts**

Some people want live broadcasts. I appreciate the desire of people to listen to events even as they happen, but we cannot do live broadcasts because we do not have a transmitter. And one cannot get a transmitter just like that. Not only is it very expensive but also, one must have a license for that and so many other things besides. Now one way to beat this requirement is to have access to someone else's transmitter, live. We do have access to the transmitters of Worldspace in Melbourne and Johannesburg, but if we are to have 24/7 live link to these two cities, believe me it would cost a fortune. Only the big boys can afford that kind of money; we simply cannot. We have of course done one live broadcast three years ago, but it was a one time affair, and a very difficult one too. With our limited resources both in terms of staff and finance, I am afraid we cannot do live broadcasting at present. Later, when we switch to 100 % internet streaming, maybe we could think of almost live broadcasts; but we shall cross that bridge when we come to it.

Meanwhile, please note that on the Asiastar service, we bring many festival programmes within a day or two. We are in the process of establishing similar highband connectivity with Johannesburg, and when that is done, listeners to Afristar service would also hear programmes 'hot', shall I say. By the way, this special highspeed connectivity to Melbourne and Jo'berg does not come free! There are substantial charges, but we bear them and this is transparent to the listener.

### **SAICAST - Video Service**

One listener has written to us about SAICAST, the video streaming service that we run in collaboration with the Sri Sathya Sai Society of America. This devotee wants us to place high quality videos instead of what is offered now. I appreciate the writer's point of view but do you know about the cost of running this service?

Let us say a particular video programme content is M bytes. Every time a person logs on and sees the video, M bytes are exported from the server. There is a charge for this that comes to us. If 100 people see the video, then the server exports 100 M bytes. This in turn means that we have to pay for 100 M bytes outflow. I hope you get the point. Now if we place high quality videos for viewing by this process then the content would not be M but much higher, like 30 M or so. Which means that if 100 viewers click on this service to see this particular video, the outflow would be 3,000 M instead of 100 M bytes. In turn, that means we have to foot a much larger bill.

You see, SAICAST was started mainly to give viewers a sample of what is going on etc., so that if they want to view these programmes again and again with high resolution, they could purchase the DVDs from the book store here. I hope you will understand our argument and realise that we simply cannot afford the expense of placing high resolution videos for viewing on SAICAST.

### **Regular Programme Slots**

Some of you have said why on earth could we not have a particular kind of programme aired at a specific time every week, so that the listener knows well in advance what to expect when? Certainly this is a feature of all reputed broadcasters, and it is no big deal to implement this. I agree with all this and let me inform you that very soon when we implement our new look, or should I say our new audio programme model, this feature would be very much present.

### **Advance Publication of Programmes**

Another related question is why can't we publish in advance the programmes for say one month? We wish we could but we are not quite in a position to do so. Here is a typical situation. One day, the boys decide to present a programme before Swami. We record it, and would like to broadcast it soon. Right now, we can broadcast it within a day over Asiastar and the Internet. However, presently, we cannot do that over Afristar, but we have already

made the required payment for the highband internet connections required and when the installation is complete, we can broadcast the programme next day over Afristar also. This clearly is a situation where we cannot anticipate in advance. Hence, under present circumstances, having a one-month pre-planned programme would not be helpful since there might have to be many mid-course corrections.

There is also another factor, which is even more important. If we were broadcasting live like the big stations do, then all we have to do is to say such and such programme would be broadcast at such and such time, and simply broadcast it live. Our service is not like that. We have patiently to make what is called a playlist. This playlist tells the computer what it has to broadcast for 24 hours, every second of it. Making a playlist is a tedious affair since the computer has to be told what music to play when, what announcement to make when and so on. Right now, the playlist is made about two days or so on in advance. Now if you want us to have the playlists for the entire month ready on the first of the month, then I am afraid we simply cannot do it; we have just half the time resources of someone to do playlists at the moment, and so we cannot offer one month playlists in advance. However, having said all this, there IS something we can do which is to give you some idea of the highlights of the coming week. This feature we shall implement soon, when we revamp our service.

### **Downloading Programmes Already Broadcast**

A related matter, and a valid one too. Some people write, "Often, we miss an important broadcast because we are not at home at that time. Why don't you do something so that we can download that programme later for hearing at our convenience?" Valid point and it is under serious consideration. I assure you that soon we will start doing something about it.

### **Region Specific Services**

I might also add that we are also considering three separate internet streaming services so that Asia, Europe and America can have their own streaming services, suited to their respective time zones. So as you can see, we are trying to serve you better!

### **Heart2Heart, The On-Line Magazine**

At this stage, I would like to say a few words about Heart2Heart, our on-line magazine. We launched this magazine about three years ago. When we started it, this magazine was visualised as a distinct activity for spreading the message but as we went along, it seemed desirable to slowly link our radio service to H2H. Right now the linking process has commenced; true it is a bit nebulous at present, but soon we expect the link to be fairly tight. How exactly, you might ask. Let me explain.

## **Linking Heart2Heart and Radio Sai**

Firstly, many things that appear in H2H would be aired on the radio. For example, for quite sometime, we have been offering on H2H something called Bhajan Tutorial. This programme would now be aired on Radio Sai.

We have at least 9000 subscribers now, for a service called Sai Inspires. Everyday, we e-mail to each and every one of these 9000 and odd subscribers, a nice picture post card with a sweet photo of Swami and a beautiful saying of Swami. We are now making arrangements to read out these sayings over Radio Sai.

Next, many talks and interviews are aired on Radio Sai. Transcripts of these would be published in H2H. In this way, even people who do not listen to us can get the benefit of our radio programmes. In every possible way, we are making a conscious effort to improve the content and quality. Please send us your critical comments and do not give us any rest! If you drive us hard, then we would deliver better, we have to!!

## **The Path to Professionalism**

I would now like to touch upon one comment made by a listener who obviously knows a lot about broadcasting. He quotes an Englishman to say that our broadcasts are not professional. I entirely agree! Are you surprised? You shouldn't be. You see, when I was in service I worked in some of the best laboratories in the world. Besides, I have been in charge of groups that have designed and built chips, set up a silicon foundry, built control electronics for nuclear power plants, and set up big computer centres. So I know what professionalism is all about. I also know how BBC, NPR in America etc., run their broadcast services, since I hear them all the time.

Having said that, I must add that when it comes to Swami, things are very different. Let us start with His healthcare programme which now is world famous. Do you know it all started way back in 1954 with a small general hospital with six beds, two for men and four for women, with one doctor and one female nurse? And then, Swami established three colleges, a college for women in 1968 in Anantapur, a college for men in Brindavan in 1972 and yet another college for men in Puttaparthi in 1980. In all cases, the classes were started in temporary and even improvised locations; the buildings came later. In short, the start has mostly been on a low key, the build-up coming later when the time is ripe.

So you see, with Swami, there is a different timeline and a different evolution philosophy. Since He is the Master of the show, always, things have to happen His way and not ours. To somebody living in the West, used to Germanic precision and Swiss discipline, this style may not appeal very much. That is understandable; at the same time, we as devotees have to see behind what meets the eye superficially.

Swami starts something not merely as a facility that would serve the public but one that would serve as a test bed for the staff working there. You take the Sri Sathya Sai Institute for Higher Learning, about which I can speak with some familiarity, both for the reason I have been a faculty member for 14 years and also the Vice Chancellor for one term. Now in many respects, our Institute faces constraints not encountered elsewhere. When I first came, I was taken aback; then I became unhappy and frustrated; I then began even to grumble.

This went on until I did some deep introspection. When I did that, I realised that the so-called problems and obstacles had a purpose of their own. They were meant to teach me that life is not perfect, that in life we must often improvise, that obstacles and impediments are meant not only to toughen ourselves spiritually but also to teach equanimity, and so on.

The bottom line is this: yes, if we have all the worldly resources, we sure can run a professional service. The BBC, for example, gets a huge budget from the British Government, and it has about 2000 people on its staff. No wonder it can run many radio and TV channels and produce all kinds of quality programmes. With are just four people doing everything and with the load we carry, we obviously cannot match professional broadcasters.

### **The Stimulus to Improve is You**

I hope some of you heard my earlier broadcast giving a brief history of Radio Sai and how constrained we are in terms of human resources and all that. OK, so what do we do? Throw in the towel and walk out or do the best we can? We have chosen the latter option. And what is the outcome? That is really interesting!

People do note that we have shortcomings but most wonderfully, over 90% of our listeners are prepared to be quite forgiving and fault tolerant. Because, even with all our imperfections, they can hear the voice of Swami, the Prashanti Bhajans and so on right in their homes, be it in Kobe or Vancouver. You know something? Unknowingly, it gives so many of our listeners an opportunity to forgive our lapses, and thus practice *Kshama* or forbearance - the greatest of virtues! Mind you, I am not, repeat not, making excuses for many of our technical lapses, but when listeners unconsciously forgive us, it actually elevates them.

What about us? We too are spiritually elevated in our own way. If we compare ourselves with the big daddies of broadcasting, we sure become downcast. But if instead we turn to Swami and say, "O Bhagavan, we know we are not doing a great job but please help us to bring every minute of every day, some Ananda into someone's life somewhere.

If we achieve that, then that would fill us with Bliss, knowing that we have in our own little way helped to spread Your Infinite Love." Believe me, that is the spirit in which we work. We try to do the best with what we have, and bring Ananda to our listeners in every possible way.

## **Are We Pleasing Sai?**

We are sure that Swami has deliberately put a cap on our resources, so that we learn to do things the hard way so called, because for God that is the best way. Smooth efficiency is OK in the ordinary world, but in the world of Swami, He tells us loud and clear, "You are NOT the doer but Me. So, don't bother about worldly parameters like market share, listener ratings etc. Don't look at others and compare yourself with them. Ask instead: are you pleasing Me? And know that I am pleased when you see Me in your listeners and bring them Ananda."

Well dear listeners, I can honestly tell you that all of us here do feel that in some little measure, we do bring Ananda to our listeners, at least a good many of them. How do we know? From the innumerable letters that we constantly receive. Here is a sample, a letter written by a lady in Connecticut, America. She writes:

*Firstly, I strongly appreciate your service especially to people far away from Prashanthi Nilayam. My family enjoys all the programmes on Radio Sai and I would like to share one experience. My 1 yr old son is fascinated by the Sai Students's bhajans. He stands near the laptop all thru arathi until shanthi. He listens very keenly and wherever he is in the house, he comes fast to the laptop the moment he hears the arathi. It looks like that he is captivated by their voice, maybe Swami's love is spreading more thru His students. May Swami bless you all with strength to continue with the good service.*

This letter is typical; there are hundreds like this.

So, to put it all briefly, we do know what professionalism is, but working within constraints that we cheerfully accept as the will of the Lord, there is only so much we can do at present. While we cannot get high marks in the department of professionalism, we can certainly claim that when it comes to *Ananda* and not worldly joy, our programmes, with all their limitations, do help people experience the Bliss of welcoming Swami to their living rooms.

Please do not imagine that by saying all this, we are absolving ourselves of the responsibility of trying to constantly improve the quality, the diversity and the depth of our programmes. In fact, right now, all of us are engaged, not only in studying carefully your responses, but also in figuring out many improvements both in content and in execution. Possibly in a later broadcast, I shall spell out some of the details. For the present please be assured that stimulated by the responses we have received and we are doing everything we can to revamp our present services to a much higher level.

## **Volunteers at Radio Sai**

I would now like to turn to the question of volunteers who can help us. Many people write to us asking whether they can in any way help us. I would first of all like to thank all such well-wishers. We really feel very grateful for this wonderful response. Over the years we have come to appreciate that the real

world is quite different from the ideal world we tend to lose ourselves in. This we have learnt by hard experience.

In the beginning, we tried our best to accommodate all who volunteered to help but soon we discovered that this was not working out. In the case of people who showed up at our studio, the first problem was that they did not quite have the specialised skills we needed. I mean a radio and video studio is not like a canteen. In a canteen, volunteers mainly serve, man the cash counter or do dishwashing. All these are relatively simple jobs and do not require specialised pre-training. The volunteer shows up and in five minutes he is working.

In our case, it is not so. Even if it is a simple task, it takes time for us to train the volunteer. After that, we have to do a lot of babysitting because the volunteer would often run into some problem or the other. Still, we decided to bear it all, hoping that the volunteer would be happy and we too would benefit. However, after a while, it became very evident to us that this thing was simply not going to work. Basically when a person comes from say Germany or America for that matter and says he would help for the ten days here, it takes us two or three days to orient that person. Then we discover that the person would be away for the two darshans and also has to stand in long lines in the canteen. After that, there is shopping, taking care of a friend who has fallen sick, and so on. Mind you, I am not, repeat not, complaining. These are things that do happen; we have to expect them. But at the end of the day, short spells of volunteering simply does not work out. Fortunately, we have a couple of volunteers who are with us for long spells, and they know exactly what to do – they have been trained and so we can do our work while they do theirs. It is not easy to get such people, and that is why we are restricted in what we do.

## **Outsourcing**

Some people say, “Come on, every body outsources; why can’t you?” Believe me we have tried and most of the time, it simply does not work out. When people show up here and have long discussions with us, they promise many things but when they go back, they get so much sucked up in their work, they are unable to help us even if they want to. Obviously, we cannot go on e-mailing them and bugging them. We accept this a fact of life, and generally stay away from outsourcing. In short, we manage from here to the extent we can.

However, having said all this, I cannot omit to mention that there are a few wonderful people who have done jobs for us on a regular basis even though they live far away from here. We have for example a lady in America, an angel I must say, who regularly does transcription work for us, quite a lot of it in fact. She is simply amazing, and I do not know what we would do without her. There is similarly a lady in Kuwait who helps us with a lot of art work, and another in Singapore who helps us with voice work. So it is not as if we do not have volunteers helping us. There are some; however, since our work is quite demanding, it is not possible for all to actively help, and this we fully

understand. That is why we do not complain and at the same time feel immensely grateful to those who are able to spare so much valuable time for us. The point simply is that volunteer work here is not easy and we cannot go on bothering anyone and everyone to help us. We feel happy that some are able to, even though the work is demanding, and are happy to rest content with that. On the whole, we have found that when faced with a real pinch, Swami sends someone! And we feel quite happy about that.

### **Positive and Negative Criticism about the Radio Interviews**

I now would like to comment upon a programme I am personally involved with, and that is the so-called Interviews. I wish this programme had not been billed as Interviews but as Conversations. Anyway, that is what this programme has been called and right from the beginning, this particular programme has attracted a lot of interest, and we have received many, many letters concerning it. Most of it has been quite complimentary but to be absolutely truthful, I must mention that a small minority has been quite critical of some aspects of this particular programme that relates to me personally. Before I come to that, I must say a few things about the genesis of this programme and how it evolved.

It all started with our desire to fill air time really. In those early days, we needed programmes other than Divine Discourses and Bhajans, because we simply did not have enough Discourses and Bhajans to broadcast 24 hours without too much repetition. So we strained ourselves to come up with other kinds of programmes, and conversations with devotees turned out to be one of them.

When I first went out looking for possible people with whom I could have a chat in front of the microphone, I found that most people I contacted were quite nervous. They wanted me to submit a list of questions in advance and things like that. Obviously, I could not operate that way. If I did, that would look like obtaining a formal statement. This is what happens with some political leaders who are very allergic to meeting the media. I wanted something very different – I wanted a free atmosphere where the guest would feel comfortable and just have a conversation like anywhere else, forgetting the mike.

So, I would take the guest to the studio, converse for a while putting him at ease, and then gently signal for the recording. This invariably succeeded and what happened then was, I really plunged into the chat like I normally would. Of course, in all this, I kept two things always in mind. One was to watch the clock, and the other was to draw out the guest on a variety of topics relating to his personality, status in life, etc.

All this may seem fine, and it did so to me. But many found that there was the fatal flaw that I interrupted often and cut short the guest. Over the years, we have received many mails, a majority of them strongly approving of this programme, and a small minority expressing equally caustic disapproval. I

would like to respond to these comments, both appreciative and highly critical, but before I do that, let me give you an explicit example.

### **The Narasimha Murthy Interview – A Case in Point**

Sometime ago, I had a chat with Narasimha Murthy, Warden of the Brindavan Hostel, about Swami's trip to Kodaikanal in 2005. This was broadcast, and our web site received many mails appreciative of the programme. But one day, there was a letter addressed to me that came by post, and I quote from that letter in part:

*Many times I thought somebody should inform you of what you are doing in the interviews you are in charge of. And after the recent interview with Brindavan Warden, which we all looked forward to, I realised that it is a must that I must inform you. To say it as mild as possible, you are actually spoiling the interviews with so many interruptions, comments and stories which we have heard many times before. We want to hear the person interviewed and not you.*

*It is only an excuse to be on the whole time. People are deeply frustrated about it and disappointed. It sounds as a huge ego who want to hear his own voice all the time. I am sorry to be direct but it seems to be necessary.*

There were many other critical remarks the writer has made, but they do not add to what I have quoted above. Basically, the writer is hopping mad and thinks there is a fatal flaw in what I presented.

I was sort of taken aback by this because normally when I finish a conversation – note I keep on saying a conversation and not an interview; this was one of the mistakes made in programme presentation - I invariably ask the person about how it went off and almost invariably people have come out of the recording quite happy, so happy that almost all of them wanted a copy of the recording.

It so happened that Narasimha Murthy was here in Prashanti soon after this letter came, and I showed it to him and he was totally surprised. I then said, "Narasimha Murthy, I shall give you a recording of this chat described as an interview. You please hear it in leisure and give me your comments." He agreed, and went away to Bangalore. He came back a few days later for some work, and when he met me he said, "I played the recording and listened to it carefully. I do not feel the criticism that you were frequently interrupting me is correct."

Now one might argue that this is not a correct perception and that the listener is a better judge and all that. I agree. At least I made sure that Narasimha Murthy was not offended. Anyway, soon after this letter came, I received another letter, it so happened from the same town. I don't know this person even as I do not know the person who thinks I am on an ego trip, and the contents of this letter also stunned me. The writer, a retired air force officer, said:

*I thought it fit to share a few words with you about the Radio Sai Programmes that I and my wife are very attached to. In particular, I am writing to inform you about the thrilling interviews that are broadcast day after day, for the benefit of devotees around the globe. In particular the interview about the Kodaikanal visit of Swami with Sri B N Narasimha Murthy was fantastic, and I have heard it 3 to 4 times already. It is invigorating and rejuvenating.*

The writer goes on to say many things that are pertinent, but I shall refrain from quoting them lest I be accused again of ego, giving publicity to myself and all that. But there is one point the writer makes that is relevant and so allow me to quote those words. He says,

*I have been a teacher at the Flying Institutions in the Indian Air Force, and I always thought it necessary to understand the minds of the audience, while trying to steer the class in the right direction. In this regard, your appropriate input, word, gesture, a little encouragement, a query, and exclamation etc., have always been noticed to bring out the right word from the devotee being interviewed, and we have always admired your natural talent in this regard.*

### **Praise and Blame**

I would now like to comment on the entire issue, from three perspectives. The first is from a contextual point of view, the second from a technical point of view and the third from a strictly personal point of view. Before I start, I would like to make it very clear that I have no personal grudge or animosity to those who have made critical remarks. Long ago when as a scientist I started writing books, I found from the book reviews, that while many praised, some were also critical. In one case, a long scientific biography of Prof. C.V.Raman, the only Indian physicist to win the Nobel Prize for Physics working in India, there were some who attacked certain portions of the book. Many asked me to respond and rebut those comments but I refused to. I just took the stand that professional reviewers were entitled to their views, and authors should not get into a debate with them. This was the general Dharma of the publishing world, and that I too would follow it. In that sense, I have learnt to take the bouquets and brickbats with some balance. After coming here, I learnt that this equanimity is actually mandated by the Lord and that I had better improve my performance in this department. One might then ask, "In that case, why are bringing up this issue at all?" There is a reason. You see, it is not so much a case of the critical remarks as the perception people have about the so-called Interview programmes. I would now like to clarify what I mean.

### **A Conversation – Not a Media Interview**

Let me get back to the contextual aspect. Basically, I was trying to get people with whom I could converse on matters of mutual interest, relating of course to Spirituality. Although this programme was unfortunately billed as an Interview, my own perception was that it was a dialogue.

I certainly did not see the point of playing the role of a press or media correspondent who interviews a celebrity. Instead, I tried to put people at ease

and conversed with them as I would do normally, and since many knew me personally and were used to my style, they certainly did not feel that I was doing anything inappropriate. You may or may not agree with this statement, but I am merely stating how I approached the task.

Next, sometimes people tend to talk at length and even go off at a tangent. If this is permitted, then the programme would become pretty boring if broadcast as recorded. We would have to do a lot of editing. In fact, I might mention that in some cases, the recording could not be aired because even with the best of effort from our side, the person speaking to us tended to be rather incoherent. In such cases, we transcribe, distil and then try to use the material. The point is that we do not want to, if we can avoid it, be burdened with a lot of post-recording editing work. I hope you understand.

Many of the people whom we have invited are quite busy. They show up here only during the big festivals and they are so busy; it is difficult to catch them. And when they come to our studio, we have just about an hour at the most when we have to get as much as possible out of them while they are with us. With respect to this task, perceptions might vary. For some, only certain aspects are important but for us, all aspects are. And clarity is also important. In one case, a listener wrote that a certain person was not answering some crucial questions with clarity despite repeated efforts on our part. This particular listener appreciated our effort and commented on how difficult it is sometimes to gently steer the person speaking with us.

### **Media Interview Styles**

I would now like to move away from our own programme and discuss briefly the scenario elsewhere. Programmes involving discussion, conversation, dialogue, etc., fall into many categories that include: 1) interview of a celebrity, 2) panel discussion, 3) talk with an ordinary person in connection with an important event, 4) opinion sampling, 5) talk show where listeners phone in, etc. I have heard and continue to hear, almost daily, programmes of these different kinds, and I find, that interruptions of various kinds are quite common in most of them, though the reason for them vary widely.

Before I amplify, I must mention that broadcasters do not always butt in, especially when the person speaking to them speaks crisply and in short paragraphs. The high profile celebrities are masters of the art of conversation and make sure they do not make speeches. This enables the broadcaster enough room to walk the celebrity through wide territory.

Having said that, next let me consider the interruptions. At one extreme, we have the studio person say, "I am sorry that is all the time we have and I must stop here." This happens often and I have heard this many times. Then there are the interviews with people supposed to be difficult. Say a western media person interviews a top politician who is not exactly popular in the West. On many occasions I have heard the media person interrupt rather rudely, just to ask yet another provocative question.

Then there are shows designed to stir up trouble where the excitement runs so high that everybody starts not merely talking but shouting at the top of their voices, leaving the moderator one hell of a time to restore peace. Here one finds the moderator pleading helplessly almost, 'quiet please, one at a time'.

The point I am trying to make is that interruptions often do occur, and I am mentioning this specially because many write to me to say, "You do not know how to run programmes. Listen to what is broadcast by the others." Well, I have listened to others, and there too there are occasions when there are no interruptions and there are also occasions when interruptions do occur. So it is a mixed bag really. Notwithstanding all this, listeners can well say, "How is all of that relevant to us? Is not this channel different?" Of course it is, but since some people mentioned other channels I thought I would make a brief reference to them also.

At this point, let me make the following very clear:

1. I am personally very sorry if inadvertently I have caused some pain to some of our listeners. This was not intended.
2. We have noted the point and will try and make sure this does not happen in the future.
3. The remarks made earlier in the talk are not in anyway intended to criticise or attack those who have genuinely felt that there were flaws in what we are doing.
4. There never was and there never will be any deliberate effort to eclipse our guest.
5. Indeed, never have our guests, not even once, ever felt that we were slighting them. On the contrary, all of them have felt happy while leaving the studio and have asked for a copy of the recording. So, I can say that at least our guests never felt offended.

### **The Technical Side**

I would next like to make a brief reference to the technical angle. We record digitally, and later do some technical processing known as equalisation, noise reduction etc. In addition, unwanted sounds like breath pop, coughing, pauses when someone drinks water, etc., are eliminated.

It might happen that in the course of pause removal, the interval between the end of one person speaking and the other person starting might be tightly clipped. As a result, this electronic editing might give the impression that the second person is rudely interrupting, while he is not. I am not saying this is actually the case but listening to one so-called Interview broadcast recently, I did get the feeling that this might be happening.

### **On a Personal Note...**

I now wish to mention what I referred to earlier as a personal note. Many listeners, including one whom I quoted earlier have accused me of ego. They are of course entitled to their perceptions, but speaking for myself, this charge

pained me a lot. Ego is a manifestation of body consciousness, which grips all of us. No one is exempt from ego. Having said that I would like to say that I have made a conscious effort to limit body consciousness - if I am that much in the grip of ego then I would not be here at all. When I retired more than a dozen years ago, my immediate boss was Dr. Kalam, now the President of India. Dr. Kalam tried hard to make me continue for at least two more years, but I declined. If I had continued, I would no doubt have enjoyed many things that came with a top job. There were many incidents in the earlier part of my career that I could cite in continuation of this argument, but I shall mention just one.

For a scientist, publishing a paper means a lot. In the middle part of my career when I was doing more management than pure research, there were times when my juniors who had benefited from my guidance and were writing papers, would add my name as an author, even though my personal involvement was not deep enough to qualify me. Many bosses in fact demand the inclusion of their name, the world over. However, I have always rejected such unmerited authorship. If ego had played a part, certainly I would not have missed these opportunities to inflate my publication score. Indeed, after coming here, there are many books I have prepared on Swami and His Teachings and Mission but none of these carry my name.

I am not trying to prove that I am a saint or something like that; all I am trying to say is that it is painful for me that an unintentional act on my part should have prompted some to attribute to me something I have consciously endeavoured to avoid.

One thing I do know. Broadcasting does have its occupational hazards. Since even the regulars and the greats like the BBC often attract the ire of listeners, I do not have to feel anything special. If there are shortcomings, we do have to be ready to hear about it. In that spirit, I apologize once again and express the hope that we will try to commit less mistakes!

### **Fewer Interviews, Why?**

By the way, I wonder how many of you have noticed that of late there are not many so-called new interviews. This is partly because I have become deeply involved with many administrative and management matters. For example, we are trying hard to enhance our radio reach. We are also trying to make a concerted effort to produce programmes in Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam, besides enhancing our effort in Telugu. Then there is a lot of work connected with archiving and so on, each of which requires a lot of time for chasing, and correspondence. This is work that I simply cannot dodge; I have to do it myself.

I am hoping some of our younger staff members can take up the work I have to lay off from - but then, they too are overworked. Right now, the most important task that takes a good deal of my time is the long video documentary on Swami's Avatarhood, that I am deeply involved in.

Circumstances have changed, and with it my work pattern has also changed. All the regular staff we have are overloaded with running the Studio, and they too are not in a position to handle the Interviews. We are on the lookout for someone who can take charge of the programme, and we hope Swami would send us soon a suitable person.

### **Highlights of the Forthcoming Changes**

Let me now fulfil the promise I made in the beginning and give the highlights of some of the changes we are currently planning:

1. There would be greater structure and discipline in our programme schedules.
2. We will make a serious effort to avoid repetition, and straightaway pull out programmes you have heard many times already.
3. We will try and add new programmes, besides injecting more variety.
4. We hope to introduce three separate internet services to suit the needs of different regions of the globe.
5. We will introduce Bhajan tutorials.
6. We will try and give exposure to the teachings common to all faiths.
7. We will increase the cross links between Radio Sai and Heart to Heart.
8. We will add more and more talking books.
9. We will try and introduce a download service so that you can download and hear a programme you have missed when broadcast live.

There are many other improvements planned and you will hear about them in the future. I am sorry this has turned out to be rather long but then there were so many things to respond to.

### **Keep on Writing...Your Comments Are Precious.**

Finally, I would like you to continue writing to us all the time, even if it is critical because we learn from them and also because your criticism helps us to improve our service. However, please do not write to us about organisational matters, especially the difficulties you face there.

I hope you appreciate that we cannot be involved in organisational matters. Concerning these, you had better get in touch with the office bearers of the Organisation itself. I hope you would understand. I hope you will bear with us and forgive us for our many lapses, most of which are unintentional while some are due to infrastructure inadequacies. If, however, at the end of the day we have made you even a little bit happy by bringing Swami's Love into your homes, then I hope we can be forgiven all our other shortcomings, even though they might be many.

Thanks again. Jai Sai Ram.

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## SAI WORLD NEWS

### THE VICE PRESIDENT OF FIJI INAUGURATES FOUR NEW CLASSROOMS AT THE SAI SCHOOL

In the December 2005 issue of **Heart2Heart** we carried a story on the exemplary Sai School in Fiji “Fiji Government Minister Hails the Sathya Sai School in Fiji” which informed you of the government’s support, the school’s facilities and the press interest.

The school serves the need of the poor surrounding communities and more importantly inculcates Swami’s educare teachings. In a further development **Heart2Heart** can now tell you the wonderful news that in an event presided over by the Vice President of Fiji, the school opened four new classrooms. This occurred on February 8th 2006 and included a traditional welcome to the V-P, Mr. Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, from the local villagers and parents of the children.

The inauguration was covered by three Fijian national newspapers: The Fiji Times, The Fiji Sun and the Daily Post and television news. The Fiji Times said,

“The new classroom block will enable the school, which has a roll of 160 students, to provide children of neighbouring communities with their first nine years of formal education – from kindergarten to class 8.”

*- The Fiji Times, February 9th 2006.*

It was a well attended function and all the school authorities and parents were happy with the excellent quality of the new classrooms called the Sai Hema Tappoo Wing.

In his address the Vice President stated that -

“The school serves the surrounding community and provides hope for a better life for all the students who enter its gates to learn...I know many here come from poor and underprivileged background. That is nothing to be ashamed about. What is important is that one has the determination to do something about it. Working hard at one’s studies is a good place to start.”

And in a passage which seems to echo Swami’s teachings he said,

“A school is more than bricks and mortar of its physical structure. So it is with the Sathya Sai School at Drasa. A vital part of its mission is the inculcation of moral values that helps its students to recognize right from wrong. We live increasingly in an age of relativism where many say that judgment depends on your own perspective. It is a dangerous argument because it becomes difficult to agree on what are universal values. As long as we live in society, we have duties and responsibilities to each other and to the common good. We cannot do as we please because we have to be mindful of the needs and

rights of others. The values the Sathya Sai School teaches remind all of us about interdependence and what that entails.”

In his speech, Mr Kanti Tappoo, a long time devotee and one of the founding trustees of the Sathya Sai Service Organisation of Fiji, who was instrumental in the building of the new block said,

“This is a school dedicated to building character into its students. It teaches human values alongside the Ministry of Education curriculum. It is a model school for harmony and living together. The school’s goal is to change young people’s experiences in education so that they will enter adulthood as constructive citizens. From what we see, this may be the most successful effort of this kind ever undertaken in our country.”

We can all pray that Swami continues to lavish His Grace on this wonderful school - so worthy of the name of Sathya Sai!

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## SAI LECTURER WINS NATIONAL AWARD IN PHYSICS

### 'TALENT IS GOD' - BABA

The year 2005 was declared the World Year of Physics by the UN to commemorate 100 years after Einstein's most productive year. During 1905 Einstein published three of his most important contributions to physics, "The Photo Electric Effect" for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize, "Brownian Motion" and "The Special Theory of Relativity" for which he became most famous. As part of the celebrations of world year of physics, the Indian Physics Association conducted a 'Physics Talent Search For Teachers' applicable for teachers below 40 years of age. The teachers had to submit articles in seven different categories:

Physics Project, Physics Theory, Physics Education and Management, Physics Research, Physics Power Point Presentation, Physics Writing and Physics Communication. Each article was graded out of ten and the best five participants were asked to present their work at the Nehru Science Center, Mumbai. The winner was awarded the Sir C.V. Raman award for the most talented teacher.

Sri O. S. K. S. Sastri, a physics lecturer at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Brindavan Campus, was awarded the **SIR C.V. RAMAN SECOND BEST TALENT** award amongst teachers in the event. In acknowledging his award Sri Sastri, who is a Gold Medallist in M. Sc. (physics) and a student of the first batch of M. Tech (Applied Optics) of the Institute, told **Heart2Heart**,

*"God bestows different talents to each of us. Some of us are gifted with a wonderful voice or with the power to articulate our feelings through speech, art, dance etc., and each of us find fulfillment when we offer this talent at His Lotus Feet. I had taken up this endeavour to offer my little talent that Bhagawan has blessed me with back to His Lotus Feet on the occasion of His 80th birthday. By His divine plan, I was selected in the top five and as if to bless my humble effort the presentation was to be made on 23rd November, 2005. I made a request to the organizers and it was postponed to Nov 24th when I could make my presentation, by His grace."*

Further blessings came to Sri Sastri when he presented the certificate to Bhagavan. Taking ample time, Swami carefully read out every line of the citation on the award and even told the elders around Him, "*Baaga chesaadu kadha!*" (He has done well, isn't it?). Bhagavan then gave him *padanamaskar* and blessed him very lovingly saying in Kannada "*Chennaga maaditivi, innu mele hogibeku*" (you have done well and have to go still higher).

Recalling that blissful morning in the sylvan precincts of Trayee Brindavan, Sri Sastri says, "*When Bhagawan read out the citation and looked around at all the elders with pride I felt true fulfillment of my effort.*"

The 34-year old lecturer also won First Prize in this year's National Competition for Innovative Experiments in Physics, along with his students Deepak and Shankar Jha, at the National Convention of the Indian Association of Physics Teachers held at Bhubhaneswar from 21st – 23rd of October 2005.

And in a further development which will greatly enhance students' work in the area of physics, Sri Sastri and his student M. R. Ganesh Kumar designed and developed a **Scientific Analysis Interface** (or SAI 80, as they call it), which they offered at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet on the 80th Birthday.

This interface basically transforms the computer into a Data Acquisition System and can be used by students from +2 to P.G.level to perform more than 20 computerisation experiments in physics. This product was presented, along with demonstrations, at the National Workshop on New Trends in Teaching Physics held at Bangalore on November 6th, 2005.

*"The software SAI developed in Visual Basic and the designed PCBs with all the required details for making SAI80 shall be given free to all the colleges, in tune with the ideals of our institute as set by Bhagawan,"* says Sri Sastri with a big benign smile on his face.

With this article **Heart2Heart** wishes to pass on to you, dear reader, how the Lord's Grace can work through His instruments in every field of life to make a better world. We should not confine ourselves to the narrow field of religion, but recognize that God's world is a myriad splendour and that all areas of human life can become sacred and in this endeavour the teachers in His Institute are so wonderfully setting a role model.

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## GET INSPIRED

### A BROTHER LIKE THAT

A friend of mine named Paul received an automobile from his brother as a Christmas present. On Christmas Eve when Paul came out of his office, a street urchin was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it. "Is this your car, mister?" he asked.

Paul nodded. "My brother gave it to me for Christmas." The boy was astounded. "You mean your brother gave it to you and it didn't cost you anything? Boy, I wish..." he hesitated. Of course Paul knew what he was going to wish for. He was going to wish he had a brother like that. But what the lad said jarred Paul all the way down to his bones.

**"I wish," the boy went on, "that I could be a brother like that."** Paul looked at the boy in astonishment, then impulsively he added, "Would you like to take a ride in my automobile?" "Oh yes, I'd love that."

After a short ride, the boy turned and with his eyes aglow, said, "Mister, would you mind driving in front of my house?" Paul smiled a little. He thought he knew what the lad wanted. He wanted to show his neighbours that he could ride home in a big automobile. But Paul was wrong again. "Will you stop where those two steps are?" the boy asked.

He ran up the steps. Then in a little while Paul heard him coming back, but he was not coming fast. He was carrying his little crippled brother. He sat him down on the bottom step, then sort of squeezed up against him and pointed to the car. "There he is Buddy, just like I told you upstairs. His brother gave it to him for Christmas and it didn't cost him a cent. And some day I'm gonna give you one just like it...then you can see for yourself all the pretty things in the Christmas windows that I've been trying to tell you about."

Paul got out and lifted the lad to the front seat of his car. The shining-eyed older brother climbed in beside him and the three of them began a memorable holiday ride.

**That Christmas Eve, Paul learned what Jesus meant when he had said: "It is more blessed to give..."**

*Courtesy: East And West December 2005*

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## A LESSON ON LIFE

There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn not to judge things too quickly. So he sent them each on a quest in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away.

The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in summer, and the youngest son in the fall.

When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen.

The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted.

The second son countered that actually it was covered with green buds and full of promise.

The third son disagreed; he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful - it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfillment.

The father then explained to his sons that they were all right, because they had each seen but only one season in the tree's life.

**He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season, and that the essence of who they are and the pleasure, joy, and love that come from that life can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons are up.**

If you give up when it's winter, you will miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer, fulfillment of your fall.

**Moral:**

**Don't let the pain of one season destroy the joy of all the rest. Don't judge life by one difficult season. Persevere through the difficult patches and better times are sure to come some time or later.**

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## WHO IS WEALTHY?

A saint was living happily in beautiful countryside, unmindful of the world and its cares. He used to sit and pray to God, and contemplate on the joy of his inner Atma. Nearby birds were chirping sweetly and a stream was softly gurgling. He was lost in his own inner joy.

One day, a wealthy merchant happened to pass by the saint's home and observed the saint's devotion and sincerity. He felt deeply moved to see such a person divorced from all concerns and of such peaceful demeanour. He plucked up courage and approached the saint and offered his respect. The saint smiled at him and asked after his welfare. After exchanging pleasantries the merchant wished to take leave, but before doing so he offered the saint a bag of gold. "I know that you will use the money for the good of others. Please take it."

The saint realized that this was an opportunity to teach this man a lesson. "Just a moment." The saint replied. "I am not sure it is right for me to take your money. Are you a wealthy man? Do you have more money at home?"

"Oh yes. I have at least one thousand more gold pieces at home," the merchant said proudly. Feigning interest, the saint asked "Do you want a thousand gold pieces more?"

"Why not, of course! Every day I work hard to earn more money." the merchant said. "And do you wish for yet another thousand gold pieces more after that?" the saint continued. "Yes. Everyday I pray that I may earn more and more money" the merchant replied.

The saint's expression became grave and he pushed the bag of gold back to the merchant. "In that case, I am sorry, but I cannot take your gold. A wealthy man cannot take money from a beggar."

"How can you call yourself a wealthy man and me a beggar?" the puzzled merchant exclaimed, looking at the simple hut in which the saint was living. The saint replied, "I am a wealthy man because I am content with whatever God sends me. You are a beggar, because no matter how much you possess, you are always dissatisfied, and always begging God for more." Thereafter, the saint closed all further conversation and kept quiet.

The merchant left, feeling somewhat rebuffed and hurt. But as he pondered on the saint's words for sometime he realized the wisdom behind them. He found himself contemplating on his obsession with money and how the saint was obviously basing his happiness beyond worldly means. Humbled, he realized that God must be the bestower of real joy and not money.

Let us remember what Bhagavan says, **"He who is filled with desires is the poorest man in the world."**

**- Heart2Heart Team**

## TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

### MULTI-FAITH SPIRITUAL QUIZ

1. What did Jesus say was the most important commandment?
  - a. To love all, serve all.
  - b. To practise patience.
  - c. To love God with all your strength.
  - d. To never lie.
  
2. What was the origin of the *Pranava*? It originated from -
  - a. God's breath.
  - b. An atom.
  - c. Lord Vishnu's navel.
  - d. A thunderbolt.
  
3. What does the Native American belief system centre around?
  - a. A holy book
  - b. Making pilgrimages.
  - c. Fasting.
  - d. Nature.
  
4. Part of the Buddha's teaching is contained in the Four Noble Truths. What is the First Noble Truth?
  - a. That life is full of suffering.
  - b. That man is intrinsically good.
  - c. That all are one.
  - d. That all must worship the sun.
  
5. Jains follow three jewels (*ratna-traya*) in their faith. The first two are right faith or perception, and right knowledge. What is the third?
  - a. Right thinking.
  - b. Right conduct.
  - c. Right conversation.
  - d. Right business dealings.

6. Adi Shankara traversed India and spread the doctrine of Advaita over the entire country. He became a monk (*sanyaasi*) at a young age, overcoming his mother's objections. How did he persuade her?

- a. By pretending that a crocodile was about to eat him.
- b. By running away.
- c. By refusing to eat.
- d. By pretending to be dead.

7. In the *Mahabharata*, how was Draupadi's honour saved in the court hall of Dhritarashtra, when Dushshana wanted to disrobe her?

- a. The Pandavas fought and saved her.
- b. An eagle flew down and took her away.
- c. Her robes became unending.
- d. She turned herself into a bee and flew away.

8. What is Swami's definition of *Mounam* or keeping silence?

- a. Not to speak to others.
- b. To avoid company.
- c. To sit in a silent place.
- d. To go beyond the senses.

9. The *Japji* prayer is the creation of which religious founder?

- a. Guru Nanak.
- b. Mahavir.
- c. Zoroastra.
- d. Jesus.

10. How does Swami define *Moksha* – liberation?

- a. Ending all ties with people.
- b. Ending all desires.
- c. Permanent meditation.
- d. Going to the heavenly worlds after death.

## ANSWERS

### **1c**

The answer is taken from *The Bible, Matthew, chapter 22 verses 33-38*:

“When the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching. But the Pharisees (strict observers of law), when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees (priests), gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him. ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.”

### **2b**

Swami informs us that “Earlier, nothing existed in the universe. In the beginning, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the sky, etc., did not exist. There was only pitch darkness all around. The combination of atoms resulted in the formation of hard matter of a very high density. As a result, a lot of heat was generated. Then all of a sudden, the hard matter exploded with a big bang into pieces and spread all over. This was the cause of creation. This was also the experience of Kaanaada. The sound that emanated when the big bang took place is *Pranava*. That is *Omkara*, the primordial sound. This sound of *Pranava* is all-pervasive. It originated from *paramaanu* (minutest atom). There is nothing other than atoms in this creation.”

*(Guru Purnima discourse, 24-7-2002)*

### **3d**

“The natural world is our bible. We don’t have chapters and verses; we have trees and fish and animals. The creation is the manifestation of energy through matter. Because the universe is made up of manifestations of energy, the options for that manifestation are infinite. But we have to admit that the way it has manifested itself is organised. In fact, it is the most intricate organisation. We can’t know how we impact on its law; we can talk only about how its law impacts upon us. We can make no judgement about nature. The Native American sense of natural law is that nature informs us and it is our obligation to read nature as you would a book, to feel nature as you would a poem, to touch nature as you would yourself, to be a part of that and step into its cycles as much as you can.”

*(John Mohawk, Resurgence, Issue 178)*

### **4a**

Swami tells us that Buddha “abandoned everything out of the conviction: ‘There is no mother or father, no kinsman or friend, no home or wealth. Awaken yourself!’ He resolved to find out something which transcends all worldly relationships and pleasures. Buddha asked himself: ‘What is this life? Birth is misery. Old age is misery. Wife is a cause of sorrow. There is misery at the end of life. Therefore, be alert and awake.’ Happiness is not to be found in any of the things of the world. Everything is fleeting. Man is wasting his life in the pursuit of petty ephemeral pleasures. *Nirvaana* is the only truth. It is the

sense of oneness with all life. To turn the mind towards that which is permanent is *Nirvaana*.”

(*Divine Discourse, Buddha Poornima, 15/5/1997*)

### 5b

Jainism teaches that in order to acquire the above three jewels, one must observe the five great vows:

Non-violence - *Ahimsa*

Truth - *Sathya*

Non-stealing - *Achaurya*

Celibacy/Chastity - *Brahmacharya*

Non-attachment/Non-possession - *Aparigraha*

### 6a

Swami relates the story “The mother was in deep distress over the son's resolve. One day she was going to the river to fetch water. The young Shankara followed her earnestly pleading: ‘Mother! Permit me to take to *sanyaasa*.’ She did not agree. When she got into the river for her bath, Shankara jumped into the river and going down the river for a while, he raised one hand and shouted: ‘Mother, a crocodile has caught hold of me. At least now permit me to become a *sanyaasi*.’ The mother said: ‘If you can be saved from the crocodile by taking to *sanyaasa*, you better do so, so that you may live.’ Shankara then came out of the river and told his mother: ‘In the ocean of *samsaara* I was about to be drowned by a crocodile in the form of a wife. When you let me become a *sanyaasi* I was free from the hold of the crocodile. No one could marry a *sanyaasi*.’”

(*Divine Discourse 7/9/1996*)

### 7c

Draupadi prayed to Lord Krishna and He blessed her with unending drapery which covered her body when she was being disrobed.

### 8d

“What is *Mounam*? Not the keeping of the mouth shut. It means, getting beyond the influence of all the senses and becoming established always in the consciousness of one's own Reality. Perpetual *ananda* is also perpetual *shanti*. When the mind withdraws from the external world, the tongue too becomes silent. All senses follow suit - that is the genuine *Mounam*.”

(*Prashanti Vahini p,67*)

### 9a

The *Japji* was written by Guru Nanak. The lines below, taken from the beginning of the *Japji*, are called the *Mulmantra*, which can be envisaged as the essence of Sikh thought.

The *Mulmantra* –

“*There is but one God. True is His Name, creative His personality and immortal His form. He is without fear, without enmity, unborn and self-illuminated. By the Guru's grace He is obtained.*”

**10b**

“Liberation cannot be attained by the study of texts. It cannot be attained by listening to the teachings of others. *Moha Kshaya* is *Moksha* (annihilation of desire is liberation).”

*(Divine Discourse 21/5/2000)*

**-Heart2Heart Team**

## UNRAVEL THE SWEET SAI SAYINGS

Swami is a master at word-play, particularly in English. Here's a game based on this word-play! How quickly, or with how little help can you recognize some of Swami's well known sayings from the letter clues given in the question will determine how well-versed are you with some of Swami's famous quotes.

Answers	Points
Correct answer without help of clues	3 points
With the help on One word clue	2 points
With the help of Two words clue	1 point

So have a go at it and see for yourself your spiritual quotient at the end of the game.

1. *Question :* L \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ F \_ \_ \_ \_  
*One Word Clue :* LOVE \_ \_ \_ \_ F \_ \_ \_  
*Two Words Clue :* LOVE \_ \_ \_ \_ FORM
  
2. *Question:* F \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ M \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
*One Word Clue :* F \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ MASTER  
*Two Words Clue :* F \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ THE MASTER
  
3. *Question:* L \_ \_ \_ \_ G \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
*One Word Clue :* L \_ \_ \_ \_ G IVES \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
*Two Words clue :* L \_ \_ \_ \_ G IVES AND \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_
  
4. *Question:* S \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ L \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
*One Word Clue :* SELF \_ \_ \_ \_ L \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
*Two Words Clue :* SELF \_ \_ \_ \_ LOVE \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

5. Question: T \_ \_ \_ \_ M \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 One Word Clue : T \_ \_ \_ \_ M Y \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 Two Words Clue : TRUTH \_ \_ M Y \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

6. Question: \_ \_ \_ E \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ C \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 \_  
 One Word Clue : \_ \_ \_ E N D \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ C \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 \_ \_  
 Two Words Clue : \_ \_ \_ E N D \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 CHARACTER

7. Question: \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ C \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ , M \_ \_ \_ \_  
 One Word Clue : \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ C \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ , M E E T \_ \_ !  
 Two Words Clue : \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ C H A L L E N G E , M E E T \_ \_ !

8. Question: H \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ U \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 One Word Clue : H \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ U N I O N \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 \_ \_  
 Two Words Clue : H \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ U N I O N \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
 GOD

9. Question: B \_ \_ \_ \_ F \_ \_  
 One Word Clue : B \_ \_ \_ \_ M \_ F O O D  
 Two Words Clue : B \_ \_ \_ \_ M Y F O O D

10. Question: S \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ D \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
\_ \_ \_ \_ \_

One Word Clue : START \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ D \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
\_ \_ \_ \_ \_

Two Words Clue : START \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ DRIVE \_ \_ \_ \_ \_  
\_ \_ \_ \_ \_

### ANSWERS

1. LOVE IS MY FORM
2. FOLLOW THE MASTER
3. LOVE GIVES AND FORGIVES
4. SELF IS LOVELESSNESS
5. TRUTH IS MY BREATH
6. THE END OF EDUCATION IS CHARACTER
7. LIFE IS A CHALLENGE, MEET IT!
8. HAPPINESS IS UNION WITH GOD
9. BLISS IS MY FOOD
10. START EARLY DRIVE SLOWLY REACH SAFELY

### YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT SCORE

If your total points are above 25, then we can tell you that your knowledge of Swami's sayings is impressive!

If your points range is 20-25, then you seem to have good knowledge of Swami's sayings.

If you scored 10-20, then it was a good attempt. Thank you very much for trying this game.

If the points are less than 10, it was a good try. Thank you very much for trying this game.

**-Heart2Heart Team**

## THE HEALING TOUCH

### THE SPIRITED LITTLE TEACHER IN THE HOSPITAL

*Swami's Hospital wards are suffused with compassion flowing from the hard working staff and sweet examples of how the needy patients are helped in so many ways. Yet, often times, this flow reverses and the givers find themselves receiving from these springs of ever-streaming love. Here is one such tale about an innocent, pure hearted 'embodiment of love' which a staff member at the hospital has beautifully recorded in his diary.*

Dear Diary,

Today I met a Teacher who taught me unquestioning faith in God. This did not happen in a classroom, there was no bespectacled professor, nor were there any clever arguments being exchanged. I was taught Faith in the Hospital ward through the little index finger of a 5-year old child.

I went to the Cardiac post-operative ward this evening to look up the 'little VIPs', recovering from surgery. There were children of different natures. Here was one blissfully asleep, there was one playfully snuggling in its mother's lap, and there one more who was doling out toothless grins to whoever caught its eye. And then there was my Teacher, who was very busy with a pen and paper. I gently walked up to her bed and peered over to see what she was doing. She was doodling away - coconut trees, birds, cows, rivers and all other 'childish' stuff. But I might as well admit now, rather than later, that Umul Bushra was no ordinary child. She looked up, smiled and continued her drawing.

From the time of her birth when she had been having spells of unconsciousness till the time she came to Swami's Hospital, Umul had been through a long period of pain and desperation. Her father, Abdul Rehman, runs a public telephone booth in a remote village in interior Karnataka.

A little prodding, and he and his mother, whom Umul is very attached to, reel out the story of how Umul was diagnosed as suffering from a heart disorder and how through a devotee doctor they came to Swami's Hospital and how after a 4 year wait, Umul underwent a successful operation and is now recovering in the ward.

"We used to treat Umul like a delicate flower. Because of her heart condition we never used to let her walk. We used to carry her to the school and let her stay there only for two hours lest she strain herself or hurt herself in the games. We were so concerned about her future and are now so grateful to Swami's Hospital. Never have we seen or experienced anything like this before," they said.

While we conversed, Umul continued her doodling, stopping once in a while, only to look at her creation from a distance. One thing which I wanted to know was how children, at such a tender age, undergo and handle the trauma of a surgery. If she was feeling pain, Umul was successful in hiding it. I was curious to know from little Umul how she handled it all and so posed her a question in Hindi: "*Tumhe Operation ke waqt dar nahi laga?*" (Were you not afraid during the operation?)

She stopped doodling and lifted her hand along with her IV line and pointed her index finger at something on the wall. I must be one of those slow learners for I gazed in that direction, but I did not register what she was pointing at. My Teacher realized this. If a child could give a compassionate look to a slow learner she gave me one such look and uttered two syllables in her sweet voice, "BA BA".

They came straight from her heart spontaneously, with no ambiguity, no second thoughts and no hesitation. It was only then it dawned on me that she was pointing to Swami's picture on the wall!

Neither Umul nor her parents have even seen Swami, but it was so touching to see how effortlessly they have accepted Him in their lives and live with such simple faith that He is there to take care.

I was so moved by the reply from my young teacher. Feeling too shy to thank her, I smiled at her, said 'Sai Ram' (which she reciprocated in her sweet voice) and took her leave. And here I am, back home to tell you what I learnt in the 'school of our hospital ward' today...

**- Heart2Heart Team**