

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Dear Reader,

Fascinating Buddha. What a powerful personality 'the enlightened one' was! Even after two thousand and five hundred years the warrior prince-turned-ascetic remains a tremendous source of inspiration not only for the 350 million Buddhists spread across the globe but also for scores of other individuals seeking lasting peace and joy in life.

Why is he so charismatic? Because he once and for all solved the eternal riddle of man – "How can I be Happy?" And how did he do it? Through self-effort, inner strength and strong conviction. His life is an amazing saga of the triumph of the spirit over the senses and he was so human (living a married princely life) just before he left his wife and little son Rahul. It is this ordinary-to-super-human facet of His life which makes every man think, "Yes, it could be possible for me too." The Buddha practised what he learnt and taught what he practised. In perfect harmony with his innerself as well as with society, he became just the right conduit for divine love and wisdom.

Desires, the Buddha said and as Swami reiterates so often, are the root cause of all suffering. "As he gave up all desires, Buddha became an epitome of total renunciation. There was nothing in him except love. He considered love as his very life-breath," Swami said in the just concluded Buddha Poonima celebrations in Brindavan, Bangalore on May 13th.

Such was his love for mankind that even after attaining *Parinirvana* (complete *Nirvana* or Salvation) under the bodhi tree, the Buddha chose to live in the mortal frame for another four and half decades just to share the 'greatest wealth' he had discovered and aid fellow human beings to come out of pain and suffering and like him be in everlasting bliss and peace. The compassionate spiritual doctor prescribed very down-to-earth rules of living which when strictly adhered to would slowly but surely lead man to that state where there would be no sorrow - namely enlightenment. It was a 'you-can-do-it-yourself' mandate for every man.

The Buddha lived till the ripe age of eighty, traveling in the Gangetic plain of Northeastern India touching the hearts of thousands. From Kings and nobles to street outcast sweepers and servants, all found comfort and solace in his soothing words and loving message and the transformation in them was instantaneous. When pure unsullied divine love assumes a human frame, it opens the long forgotten and hidden spiritual vaults present inside the heart of every man so effortlessly and effectively that the evolution of man happens at the pace of a space jet. And this is what we see happening everyday.

While the Buddha then and now Sai say the same thing – Non-violence is the greatest Virtue, Help Ever, Hurt Never, etc. – what the Buddhists and all other spiritual seekers have now is a Being who can by His mere physical presence elevate man's consciousness to the level of the divine. And this is precisely the reason why thousands of Buddhists gather at Swami's Lotus Feet every

year on Buddha Poornima Day. How do the Buddhists celebrate Buddha Poornima in His divine presence? How do they understand Buddha's teachings better listening to Sai's divine messages? And how have the different revelations from Swami from time to time about the Buddha and His life broadened their levels of understanding and made their spiritual journey easier? All this and more, you will know when you read our cover story. In the Prasanthi Diary, you will find a detailed account of how Buddha Poornima celebrations went on in Brindavan this year with lots of pictures and stories.

If people from California to Canberra flock at Swami's Lotus Feet, it is not because He creates rings or watches or gives Vibhuti. It is because He touches the inner core of every being in such a remarkable way that the experience pulls the devotee to Him. There is nothing more fascinating in this world than Divine love and it is this love that creates all wonders, whether we realise it or not. When you read the riveting tale of how Sai entered the small Central American country of Guatemala in our feature article, you will find one more telling example of how His mysterious and mind-altering love works.

Many times we ask: how do I get close to Swami? How do I feel His love? And the wise men say actually we do not have to do anything except allow His love to flow deep into us. When you read our articles Precious Closeness To Bhagawan and First Come The Tears in the Swami and Me section, we are sure you will know not only how to connect with the Lord and but also remain in that state of intimacy and feel His love every moment of your life. Do not miss these real life stories of a Sai student and a Jewish lady from Israel – they have felt His love and found never-before bliss and you can experience the same too!

Ask anybody who had been to Kodai Kanal this April and they would say, "It was so beautiful! So... indescribable." To see the Lord in the Mountains every morning and evening is heavenly. While a very few who were physically present there enjoyed it, many missed it. It is for this reason that we are working on a very special article, nay a series of articles, starting from the next issue so that you can relish this divine ambrosia drop by drop, ultimately becoming as blissful as He is. But for now, we have heart-filling pictures of Swami in Kodai in our Photo Album. Before you get on with this issue, here is a surprise! This issue's Photo Album is special. It is not just a static nine pictures for the whole month, you are going to see a fresh set of pictures everyday from the 3rd of June. You are going to travel with Swami to Kodai Kanal and loose yourself.

Let's let Him take over our life.

**In Sai Service,
Heart2Heart Team.**

YOUR SAY

- FEEDBACK FROM OUR READERS

RESPONSE TO THE MAY ISSUE OF H2H

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

This journal is like my best friend. Articles here increase my faith in Swamiji and also make me feel confident. I like the Serial "Gita for Children". Even though I'm not so young (27), I somehow felt it is the right book for many as a stepping stone to spiritual knowledge. I like the short stories in the Get Inspired section also. I like the experiences of long time associates with Swamiji who share some interesting stories which are not documented elsewhere. Hearty Congratulations to the team that is behind it.

Gopala Krishna,
Hyderabad.

Dear Team,

This journal helps me greatly in improving my spiritual knowledge and understanding how to live in the modern world without losing my inner spirituality. The articles are highly thought-provoking and insightful. They give me practical ways to apply Swami's teachings. Spiritual Blossoms, Features, Swami and Me and Get Inspired are the sections that I like the most although I do not miss reading the entire journal.

I would like to see more experiences of students in Swami's presence and also students who have been instrumental in spreading love and compassion in their chosen careers, which have made an impact on lives of other people.

Kandaswamy Bharathan,
Chennai.

[Dear Mr. Khandaswamy, in every issue we have a talk by a student in the divine presence and moving stories of cards, decorations, etc. done by the boys for Swami and His interaction with them. We will try to have more inputs from the students as per your suggestion.]

RESPONSES TO SAI INSPIRES AND SUNDAY SPECIAL ARTICLES

[Sai Inspires is a free daily inspirational email service sent to all subscribers. Every Sunday the subscribers also receive a spiritual discussion on a topic of current relevance called Sunday Special Articles.]

Dear Team,

The Sunday special articles are really deep and holistic, it's beautiful to read a text which deals with science, economy, politics, ecology and religion with the values that Swami teaches. I want to express my congratulations to the people behind it.

With Love,

Fausto,
Argentina.

RESPONSES TO THE SUNDAY SPECIAL "TRUTH ALWAYS TRIUMPHS" SENT ON 17TH MAY 2006.

Dear H2H fraternity,

It was a great relief to read the message entitled "Truth Always Triumphs" appended to the Sai Inspires on the 17th. If it was any other secular or even religious organization person, a big pecuniary compensation would have been claimed for the damages to the name and fame of the person unfairly sued against, besides an order for public tendering of an apology. Sai does not need any wealth from any one, much less from the mean persons casting slur on the pure souls.

But the damages by means of the extreme mental agony caused to the millions of devotees of Sai ought to have been compensated by securing an order for a public broadcast as well as publication of apology by the person who filed the reckless suit, against the greatest personality of our times, who is believed to possess extraordinary qualities and powers of compassion, wisdom and charity, by millions of His loved ones across the globe, with good and substantial reason and evidence. It is not clear why the defense did not press for this.

Further, apart from the skeptics who do not wish to believe in people with superhuman powers, or those who consider them as exercising satanic powers etc, there are others who hold a neutral view and would like to know the truth of the possession of divine powers by Sai. These people would have been confused by the media spreading the motivated evil action of the petitioner, knowingly or unwittingly, thus depriving these people of their right to know the truth of the news.

In all fairness, the media that spread the news documentaries supplied by the miscreant in their news have to suo motu report the dismissal of the suite by

the California court in all prominence - perhaps at peak hours when maximum viewers /listeners are expected to view /hear the news. Since such good manners are unlikely to prevail in this world of evil influences, a court verdict in this regard would have made them to comply with justice.

Your appeal asking the subscribers to inform the friends in Sai fold appeared inadequate considering the gravity of the episode. Hence this letter to you.

Please advise in the next message if other (more effective and swift) measures to dispel the mischievous propaganda are being considered by the organization.

Jai Sai Ram.

Sangi family, India.

[Dear Sangi Family, we really appreciate your concerns. On our part, as already stated, we are preparing a comprehensive article on this so that it can be circulated to the maximum people possible. We will also use other media at our disposal like Radio Sai and Sanskar TV to spread the good news.]

RESPONSES TO THE SUNDAY SPECIAL "BUILT IN TERMINATOR" SENT ON 7TH MAY 2006

Dear Heart2Heart Team.

Thanks again for this wonderful article, Built in Terminator. Through the whole article there is a lovely feeling of love for Swami and the whole divine creation. Strangely I felt myself surrounded by the finest gold dust full of love when I read it. I was part of those tiny nano particles and what a fantastic feeling. The writer must have spoken from a divine point within from a part of Swami. Thank you for uniting us all in this divine feeling.

Sonja Engman Wilson,
Denmark.

RESPONSES TO THE SUNDAY SPECIAL "THE SILENT MAJORITY" SENT ON 30TH APRIL 2006.

Om Sai Ram!

While reading this, I frequently considered replying to you to say how excellent this article was. I very much agree with the following thought written in the text:

"We devotees who form a sizeable section of the 'silent majority' have a profound obligation to enhance the quality of our devotion through a more firm commitment to Dharma."

What is written in the text about what Dharma really is, is also very important; because if we understand that, then everything becomes easy. Easy because as you said, our Sai is eager to help us in our path of Dharma. He is here to support us in that direction. And He always does help, no matter what. And when out of devotion we become eager to change for the better and to live righteously, our devotion grows and grows. So, it means that the one who has tremendous devotion for Sai should be righteous at the same time.

I also liked the idea that the Sai golden era can not come if our negative attitudes and petty habits (*adharmic*) do not change. To follow Swami's command/teachings should be our uppermost concern and as you mentioned, if we would be so interested in that as we are when we see Swami's car approaching and run after Him, the Sai golden era would already be here.

Thinking over about what I read in your article, broadens my understanding of Swami's words: "If you take one step towards me, I will take hundred steps towards you." I finally realized that these words mean, that He will always support our steps towards dharma, no matter how small and weak they are. We just have to pray that He endows us with Self-confidence and the rest will follow - even the Sai golden era. So, yes of course I agree that the silent majority can become the "effective" majority and overpower the forces of *adharma* prevailing today, if we become ardent in practicing Swami's teachings.

Thank you for this article and I am looking forward for next Sunday, and of course every day for Swami's message. May Sai bless your efforts with success!

Tina,
Slovenia.

Dear Team,

Yes, yes, yes, we the 'silent majority' must and will continue to do our good works, even as they go unnoticed. Our change is effective, maybe not always immediate, but we are making a great difference.

As I read the part about Swami wanting nothing from us but our bad habits, it just dawned on me that He indeed takes our bad habits away. All we have to do is ask Him, and pray fervently, and He does remove our inequities.

Yes, it is interesting how people act at the coffee kiosk, as well as in the Mandir. I think I witnessed some of the worst behavior and was quite surprised. I even tried to rationalize it as 'culture clash' but there is no excuse for rude, physical, inappropriate behavior.

It is so great that you write these open ended commentaries, they really make me think and also make me realize how fortunate we are to have God on earth and know He is here.

It is so important to teach the young children, whenever they bring up a bad, scary thing that has happened, that for one bad thing so many good and wonderful things are happening that we cannot even count them all. And that when we do hear of something bad, we should do at least two goods act to counter balance the bad.

Jai Sai Ram,

Michele Hammerton.

– Heart2Heart Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

WHAT IS TRUE LOVE?

True Love Does Not Seek Any Return

Man's purity is manifest when human relations are based on heart to heart and love to love. Love has a form of a triangle with three arms. *Prema* (divine love) does not seek any return.

Where an individual offers love in expectation of a return, fear overtakes him. The one who loves with no expectation of any return is totally free from fear. Love knows only to give, not to receive. Such a love is free from fear. For true love, love is its own reward. Thus, love seeks no return, is free from fear and is its own reward. These are the basic features of true love.

Love today is based on desire for a return benefit. It is filled with fear and anxiety. Thus love is motivated. When love is based on a desire for transient and perishable objects, life will be futile. Love must be its own reward.

You Have To Show Your Gratitude To God

Love is eternal. You are the embodiment of Love. You are the embodiment of Peace. You are the embodiment of Truth. You are the embodiment of God. It is only when this supreme truth is realised, and our life is based on it, that our love can make our life meaningful and enable us to comprehend the world. Your studies, your conduct, your actions, all that you see, hear and think - all these should be regarded as offerings to the Divine. This is the true meaning of *Saranagathi* (taking refuge in the Divine). All that is seen, heard or experienced should be considered as intimations of the Divine.

Have firm faith in the reality of God's existence. You have to show your gratitude to God for the benefits showered on you. Consider, for instance, how the Divine has filled the atmosphere with life-giving oxygen to enable you to live.

The biggest fan made by man can provide breeze only for a small area. But the winds caused by Nature can blow over the whole world. Who is the cause of this wind? There are three kinds of lamps in this Mandir. They illumine a small space. But the Sun created by God illumines the whole world. We pump water with the help of pump sets. Can all the water pumped by these sets equal a fraction of the water got from a heavy downpour of rain which can inundate the Ganga? Who is it that is providing this air, this water and this illumination?

We are enjoying all these, but we show no gratitude to the provider of these benefits. We render thanks to those who render trifling acts of service. But what thanks are we expressing to God who is providing such essential life-

sustaining amenities for meaningful human existence? Can this be a virtue in a human being? Is it a sign of a right education? Is it the mark of a scholar? No. You must show your gratitude with humility and sincerity to whoever has done you any good.

You Must Shed Your Narrow Outlook

Education that does not promote gratitude is worthless. It is the parents who give you education. The *guru* is the educator. The Divine has given you the capacity to get educated. Hence, the mother, father and the *guru* are to be revered as God, as enjoined in the *Vedas*. You must show your gratitude to your parents, offer due respect to the teacher, and base your life on faith in God. You may feel proud that you are getting on in life by your own abilities and intelligence. This is utterly foolish. You must cultivate a wide appreciation of Nature. You must shed your narrow outlook.

Realise for instance, how small is the eye. But it is able to see the whole universe. Even your eye is teaching you a lesson. "What a fool are you? In spite of my minuscule smallness, I am able to see the whole universe with my wide vision. But your mind has a very narrow outlook. " You must try to broaden your heart and enlarge your mind. You must dedicate your chittha (will) to the Divine.

- Divine Discourse at the Prashanthi Mandir, 12th July 1988.

- Heart2Heart Team.

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI
PART 21

(Continued from the previous issue)

SAI: What is your work in America?

H (Hislop): I am retired and do no work.

SAI: Then how do you pass the days?

H: Mostly the day is spent with Swami. It starts with Swami in the morning and goes through the day. I work at my desk trying to make sense out of my financial affairs and then there are many tasks in relation to the house. But really, Bhagavan is our life. Our discrimination, added to by our direct experience, tells us that Baba is God Himself – so what else is there, what else can there be?

SAI: It is a good opportunity for you to study Sai's teachings.

H: Swami must tell me what he wants the Chairman of the Central Committee of America to do. That will be my work now. *(This conversation took place in the early 1970s.)*

SAI: You will need to do quite a bit of touring, visiting the Sathya Sai Baba Centers. For this, since you are now retired, you should not pay out of your own pocket.

SWAMI'S GUIDANCE TO THE CENTRES

H: I don't worry much about the money. I am a financial idiot and it can only be by Sai's grace that I am not flat broke by now! When I visit Centers, Swami, they will expect discourses. About what shall I talk?**SAI:** Speak on the principles of spiritual life. On those things that Swami says are essential to reach God. The spiritual life, such as discipline, devotion, *sadhana*. Be clear, do your duty calmly, and the goal will be reached in due course.

H: Swami's teaching is clear enough, and that can be said.

SAI: What is needed most now is that the devotees must have tolerance of each other. And they do not have any seasoned discrimination in respect to the many 'gurus' and their various spiritual paths. They have not had the face to face confrontation with Swami that you have had. And you have considerable background in spiritual life and they have not. You must carry them along with you.

H: The new rules for Centers that will be in the guidelines will shake many Centers.

SAI: That will be the case. **Sai Centers must reflect the distinctive character of our organization.** There cannot be a mixing of a Sathya Sai Baba Center with the many gurus and the many spiritual paths. We have our goal. Swami has shown the path to follow, and we must quietly and sincerely devote ourselves to that path. The leaders must provide the example in their conduct.

H: Not all present Centers devote themselves entirely to the Sai teachings.

SAI: At present, some people form their own organisations and use the Sai Center name as a tool to promote their own interests and ends. Some leaders have a yoga business and use the Sai name as a way to add to the business.

H: What to do about such? Is the prominent leader an exception to the rule? The rule that a leader of a Sai Center cannot carry on yoga classes, or any classes related to spiritual sadhana, and charge the students money?

SAI: Swami is not aware of having exceptions.

H: I understand. The same principle applies to all. Probably such a leader will at once say that entirely apart from their yoga business they will continue to be an Officer of a Sai Center.

SAI: How would that be practical? There would still be the same mixture. Such individuals will have to decide to go one way or the other. Two ways at once will not do. And that will be the case for everyone. Those devotees who wish to determine a separate path for their organizations are quite free to do so.

H: One leader I know has a dual personality. In some cases, the individual is extremely kind-hearted, and in others if a devotee crosses the leader in any way it is 'off with his head' and he is gone from the scene.

HOW SWAMI CORRECTS PEOPLE

SAI: That is the way of the world. Kindness is used with people. **But when people do wrong, they must be corrected sternly. Swami does the same. To those who act according to His command and obey Him He gives everything to fill their wants and needs. But if after a long treatment of love and patience they still disobey, Swami gives severe punishment. He gives it because of His love for the person and because He knows that if He does not punish the person is spoiled.**

H: But there is a considerable difference. With Swami it is God Almighty who punishes. Whereas in the other case it is the leader of a Center, a personality who does the punishing.

SAI: Yes, it is as you say. Sai rewards and punishes without self. When humans reward and punish, there is self-interest.

H: Yes, self-interest is there. When the individual of whom I spoke helped some people in trouble with remarkable generosity, the individual put in a stipulation that on the surface was also generous but which resulted in the people repaying the generosity with much service.

SAI: That was all right. The individual helped the people and they should show gratitude. Unless a person can show gratitude to another being at his own level, how can he expect to show gratitude to the divine?

H: To my mind, ingratitude to God is a great sin.

THE FOUR CLASSES OF PEOPLE

SAI: To fail to show gratitude is wrong. To show ingratitude is a sin. **There are four classes of people in the world. First, those who call everything they see as good. Second, those who call wrong as wrong and good as good. Third, those who do not make a judgment. In each of these three some reason can be seen. The fourth class is those to whom everyone and everything is evil; they do not see any good.**

H: There must be just a few people in this fourth class. Perhaps from the lower socio-economic group?

SAI: On the contrary, it is the largest class of all and it is not a special characteristic of poor people. **The poorest peasants often rely on our Indian traditions of thousands of years past and they behave very cautiously. They fear to commit a sin. Poor people who have moved near the cities lose contact with their hereditary background and live in a world which they see as wholly bad.** Likewise, the so-called educated middleclass, who are half educated and half ignorant, do not fear sin nor do they believe there is a God and they become sinful, corrupt, immoral, greedy, hateful and so on, and that is their world.

H: As Swami says it, I recollect that in the West those who are corrupt are from the educated middle class who gain positions of wealth, authority, and power. But many workers are also corrupt in their lives and relationships. But in America I do not think the same behaviour and attitude is typical of the upper class.

THE REAL MEANING OF UPPER CLASS

SAI: If by upper class you mean those who have a tradition and who are correctly trained by their parents, then the same would be true even of a large number of farmers living in Indian villages.

A Visitor: Swami, Mr. X wishes to make a film about the so-called 'lost years of Jesus'. He has much experience in making films and he is a Sai devotee.

SAI: **Jesus realized that he was Christ in his 25th year. For eight years following his 16th birthday he travelled in India, Tibet, Iran, and Russia.**

He was variously regarded as a beggar or as a sannyasi. Jesus had no money. His parents were very poor and practically abandoned him at an early age.

HOW TO SEE GOD IN ALL

H: What is the art of looking whereby one may see the Lord even in unpleasant and disagreeable persons?

SAI: **Even in persons of an unpleasant nature, be aware that the Lord is in the heart even of that person. Have that aspect in mind and treat the person from that viewpoint to the best of your ability. In time that person will respond, and his nature will change.** One sees people as good or bad because he does not see the person in full but only one side.

Suppose a mother were six feet tall and her young child could not as yet walk but could only sit on the floor. Will that mother say, 'I am six feet tall when I stand erect. I will not bend myself for the sake of the child'? Or, does she bend down to the child because of her love for the child? As another example, there may be a person with many big degrees who teaches small children; will he refuse to help the children because he knows so much? The children must start to learn by being drilled in the A B C's. They must learn at their level.

HOW TO SEE THE DIVINE

H: Eyes see body. How does one see God Himself?

SAI: In order to see the moon does one need a torch? It is by the light of the moon that one sees the moon. **In like fashion, if one wishes to see God, it is by love, which is the light of God, that one may see Him.**

H: Swami says that like the blind man who has no eyes to see, we are likewise blind and unable to see our own divinity. With what vision does one see his own divinity?

LOOKING WITHIN TO FIND THE HEART

SAI: A blind man cannot see his body. You can because you have eyes. But you have no eyes to see your spiritual body. You have a spiritual body that is omnipresent. That body can be seen with the spiritual eye.

H: Would Swami describe the spiritual eye?

SAI: Oh, yes. **The spiritual eye is God. Attain Him and the spiritual eye will open.**

H: What does Swami mean when He says 'To look within oneself'? What is meant by 'look'?

SAI: 'Looking within does not mean looking into the body of flesh and bones. It means transcending the senses, as in deep meditation.

H: As one turns inward he encounters feeling. Women talk of the heart. Swami puts emphasis on the heart. What is meant by the word, 'heart'?

SAI: 'Heart' is the inside. 'Art' is outside. Heart is inside.

H: Swami says that 'the heart is the reflection of the Atma.' And also that 'the heart is the best mirror for reflecting truth.' What is that 'heart'? What does Swami refer to?

SAI: Heart is the consciousness.

H: Is the 'heart' that women talk about the same as what Swami means?

SAI: No. That is the subconscious mind mixed up with their desire.

FIND BABA INSIDE

H: Just under my skin, about an inch, there seems to be a mirror. When I see Baba outside, I also see Him in that 'mirror'. The 'mirror' reflects Baba's every move. Of these two, the Baba I see with my two eyes and the Baba of the inside reflection, which is the most real?

SAI: Consciousness is a reflection. If pure it is a clear reflection. It is by the *sankalpa* of Baba that the reflection is seen.

H: Is it to the inside Baba that prayers and devotion should be addressed?

SAI: When Baba is found within, He will be seen everywhere outside.

H: When one inquires within, I is found to be I. That 'I' is thought to be oneself. But then it seems to me that 'I' is not me at all, but is Baba.

SAI: That is correct, 'I' is Baba. Have no doubt. You and Baba are one. Not the tendencies and so on, but the essential 'you' and Baba are one and the same. 'I' is Baba.

(To be continued.

– Heart2Heart Team.

CHINNA KATHA

- A little story from Bhagavan

GIVE UP AT LEAST ONE BAD HABIT

A wicked man once went to a Guru for initiation into spiritual life. The Guru asked him to give up at least one of his bad habits. He gave up uttering falsehood.

That night, when he went to the Royal Palace to commit a robbery. He found on the terrace another person who said he too was a thief. They broke into the treasury and divided between themselves the diamonds found there.

The other person, however, was none other than the King. He pretended to be a thief and he knew where the keys of the treasury were.

While the diamonds were shared, the honest thief felt pity for the King of the realm who was losing his entire stock. He asked his companion to leave one diamond behind in the safe. It was done.

Next morning, it was discovered that the treasury had been looted. The Minister was sent by the King (who had acted as a thief the previous night) to assess the loss. The Minister found a diamond that had missed the eyes of the thieves. He quietly transferred it to his own pocket and reported at court that all the diamonds were gone.

The previous night the King had obtained the address of the honest thief as they were parting company with their separate bags. So he sent for him and when he stood in court before the King he confessed that all but one of the diamonds had been stolen by him and his unknown associate.

The missing diamond was discovered in the pocket of the Minister and the King dismissed him for the lie. The honest thief was appointed Minister instead. He gave up his other evil habits too and pleased his Guru by his fame as a virtuous administrator.

- Baba

Through this small story Swami tells us how sincerity pays. Even if we follow one message of Swami, let us be sincere in observing it in our daily life. Sincerity and our steadfast devotion to Him will surely take us to great heights.

Illustrations: Ms. Vidya, Kuwait

- Heart2Heart Team

COVER STORY

FASCINATING BUDDHA

THE LIFE OF BUDDHA

Buddha has fascinated people around the globe for almost 2500 years. Born as a prince in northern India, the Buddha had an incredible destiny ahead of him.

His desire for truth was so powerful that he broke free even from family ties at a young age and abdicated the throne to the Shakya kingdom. Initially his father named him Siddhartha. Later he was called Gautamo Buddha (after his stepmother) or Shakyamuni Buddha (chief of the Shakya family). Buddha means "The Enlightened One".

Born To a Royal Lineage

Buddha was born 2600 years ago in Lumbini in the Shakya state, on the Nepal-India border. Legend says that his family lived in opulence and luxurious palaces. Some days after Buddha's birth, his mother passed away. Thereafter he was lovingly raised by his stepmother Gautami. Legend also claims that a seer predicted the newborn prince would become either a great king or a revered holy man.

Buddha's father, King Suddhodana, had an ardent desire for his son to take over the reins of the kingdom. However, he feared the likelihood of Siddhartha renouncing worldly life, so he shielded Buddha from all unpleasant experiences, ensuring that he would be perfectly content with his life. He placed Siddhartha in a palace with servants at his beck and call providing everything he wanted, completely sheltering him from mundane reality. Buddha married and had a son. Nevertheless, despite a luxurious and contented life, at 28 he decided to venture out and see what lay beyond the palace walls.

The Path To Enlightenment

Siddhartha witnessed the harsh realities of daily life for the first time. He encountered four people – known as the "four passing sights" in Buddhist scriptures – which turned the young prince's life inside out, eventually prompting him to seek the path of enlightenment.

First he saw a crippled old man, a sick man, and a dead body, and finally a wandering holy man who had transcended the ups and downs of mortal life and was serene.

Prince Siddhartha returned to the palace and contemplated what he had observed. He had been unaware that the King had prohibited anyone old or sick to come into his son's purview, fearing that such images might awaken his latent tendencies towards a renunciate's life. Indeed, these four sights led

Siddhartha to the realization that birth, old age, sickness and death come to everyone, not only once, but in a cycle repeated life after life since time immemorial.

Buddha began to consider his entire past. **He saw that nothing lasted permanently and nothing bestowed deep and satisfying pleasure.**

At this point let's read what Swami comments on this topic:

“Parents were subjecting their children to various kinds of bonds and making their lives miserable. As soon as the children come of age the parents are keen to get them married. They do not know what kind of happiness he can get from married life. What happiness have they derived from their own married life physically, mentally or otherwise? No person, however intelligent, thinks about this matter. Even eminent scholars do not care to examine whether it is worthwhile pursuing sensuous pleasures instead of seeking what is beyond the senses. Buddha felt intensely unhappy that his parents and others combined to commit him to the bondage of married life. One day at midnight, Buddha left the palace, giving up his wife and young son, Rahul. At the age of 28, he gave up everything and turned a renunciate.” (Divine Discourse - 15th May 1997)

Buddha Sacrifices His Luxurious Life to Pursue Self-Enquiry

After reviewing his own life and life in general through self-enquiry, Siddhartha renounced his lavish worldly life, his wife and child, his status and all his privileges. **He made this immense sacrifice in order to seek the solutions to the problems of birth, old age, sickness and death and embarked on the quest for escaping the cycle of life and death.**

Baba's comments are pertinent here:

“Buddha...could not bear to see anyone suffering. He was deeply grieved at the sight of persons afflicted with old age. He was intrigued at the sight of a dead body. None of these natural happenings gave him peace of mind. Buddha considered the movements of the planets and the sun and the stars as natural phenomena. He undertook many spiritual exercises to find out what transcended these natural phenomena. Failing to find the answers by these exercises, he approached many great elders to find the answers. None could give him satisfactory answers. Ultimately he reached Gaya [in Northern India] and sat under a banyan tree to meditate on the problems that worried him.” (Divine Discourse - 15th May 1997)

Buddha Practises Asceticism

Siddhartha sat under the banyan tree in search of answers to life's mysteries. Holy men often engaged in a variety of ascetic practices designed to mortify the flesh as it was believed that through enduring pain and suffering, the *ātman* or 'soul' became free from the cycle of rebirth.

The young seeker proved adept at these techniques and even surpassed his teachers, but after six years of practising asceticism and solitary meditation he was still no closer to his objective of finding a permanent solution to eradicate suffering. So, leaving his teachers behind, he and a small group of companions set out on their own to intensify their austerities.

After a long period of asceticism and almost starving himself to death, Siddhartha began to re-evaluate his path and practice. He determined that the goal was unattainable by either extreme, the austere life or the lavish life. When he abandoned their path and parted from his companions, they warned him that he would fail. Undeterred, he proceeded forward in pursuit of his goal.

The Finding of the Truth – Nirvana

Buddha recollected a childhood memory when he had a profound insight. As he watched his father inaugurate the season's ploughing, he drifted into a natural state of concentration which was refreshingly blissful, in which time seemed to stand still.

Buddha realised that truth is not outside or something accessible through spiritual teachers or special rituals. *Truth is inherent in oneself.*

“Although all Avathars (divine advents) have been preaching only good things, men today are content to observe their birthdays without following their precepts. Buddha did not attach any importance to yajnas and yaagas and other religious rituals. The reason is he felt that it was more important to ensure that the five sense organs were pure to begin with. Buddha sought to find out why the mind gets disturbed.” (Divine Discourse - 15th May 1997)

Regarding this inherent truth, which Buddha called Nirvana, or freedom from illusion, Baba has commented:

“But none of these practices could show him the path to Nirvana. Ultimately, he realised that Nirvana lay in making use of the five senses of speech, touch, vision, taste and smell in a sacred manner. He understood that japa, dhyana, yoga, yajna, etc., were mere physical activities. These spiritual practices are needed for those who are attached to the body.” (Divine Discourse - 14th Jan 1973)

When Buddha became enlightened, he had the option of leaving this world behind and entering Parinirvana. He reflected upon his awareness: “The truth and the reality of dharma are not easy to understand – only the wise man will understand.” Yet his infinite compassion won out and compelled him to remain on earth in a mortal form so as to help others transcend the cycle of birth and death.

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING – THE MIDDLE PATH

Having known both luxury and austerity, he rejected these extremes and called his teaching, "The Middle Path". He imparted his wisdom to one and all in a serene and compassionate manner, disregarding all social and hierarchical distinctions.

The following three headings highlight the essence of Buddha's teachings.

1. The Four Noble Truths
2. The Three Jewels
3. The Noble Eightfold Path

The first three Noble Truths present a diagnosis of why we suffer. The Fourth Noble Truth is the remedy to this suffering. The Three Jewels describe the relationship between the enlightened One (*Buddha*), the right way of living (*Dharma*), and the community around us (*Sangha*).

Through the Noble Eightfold Path Buddha explains why an ethical life is crucial in the practice of his teachings. Comprehending and following the Noble Eightfold Path is the therapy for life's misery.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Four Noble Truths present an analytical view of our daily life. Shakyamuni Buddha explains in a scientific way how to find true bliss and why our worldly life is not Life's ultimate purpose.

The Buddha taught that life was unsatisfactory because of constant craving and desiring but that this condition was curable by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. *Dukkha*: All worldly life is unsatisfactory, disjointed and entails suffering.
2. *Samudaya*: There is a cause for suffering, which is attachment or desire rooted in ignorance.
3. *Nirodha*: There is an end to suffering, which is Nirvana.
4. *Magga*: There is a path that leads out of suffering, known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

Buddhism teaches that suffering is caused by desire and wants. The central theory of Buddhist philosophy explains that the cause of suffering is Pratīyasamutpāda, which means "the chain of causation", and further more that everything in the world, including the soul, is only relative and

momentary. Action is not independent from its cause but depends upon it – hence the fundamental theory of Karma.

When we analyze our own life in this way, we will discover the desires underlying the decisions we made at various junctures on our journey. As long as we deny the eternal truth permeating everything, life will continue to appear as suffering. However, once we grasp that the underlying cause of all our suffering is ignorance, we then have the choice in any given moment to awaken from our slumber and rise above our ignorance. The Buddhist prescription for alleviating and removing suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path. We have to make a permanent decision to orientate ourselves towards the eternal truth.

This decision is known as the “change in the consciousness” (*asraya paravrtti*) in Buddhism. As long as we are unable or unwilling to observe our own ignorance and recognize it for what it is – a misperception of true reality – we will foolishly hold onto it.

However the moment we perceive this state of ignorance as the basis of our suffering and make a commitment to free ourselves from it, a transformation occurs in our consciousness.

In Buddhist philosophy, hatred, jealousy and greed are the three poisons in our consciousness. Whenever we overcome our ignorance and rise above hatred, jealousy and greed, we are orientating ourselves in a *Dharmic* direction.

Concerning the role of faith in assuming this right decision, Baba stated:

“Buddha was born in this sacred land of Bharat. He declared to the world '*Ahimsa paramo dharma*' (non-violence is the greatest dharma). He undertook penance for several years, met many noble souls, listened to spiritual discourses, and studied various scriptures. But he was not satisfied. Man aspires for bliss, but how can he attain it? Where there is faith, there is love. Where there is love, there is peace. Where there is peace, there is truth. Where there is truth, there is God. Where there is God, there is bliss. The path of spirituality starts with faith and ends with bliss. Bliss cannot be attained from materialistic pleasures or people of the world. It can be experienced only when the five senses are put to proper use.” (Divine Discourse, 30th May 1999)

THE THREE JEWELS OF BUDDHISM

Traditionally, when a person has made this decision and wishes to follow the way of the Buddha he then takes sanctuary in the teachings of Buddha in an act known as “Taking Refuge” in the Three Jewels.

Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels is the foundation of Buddhist religious practice. The Jewels are the *Buddha*, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*. For someone who is seeking to become enlightened, Taking Refuge entails a continuing commitment to pursue illumination by having faith and confidence in the path trod by those dedicated souls who have preceded them.

Many Buddhists take the refuges every day, often more than once, to renew and strengthen their resolve towards liberation. The inward act of taking refuge is always more significant than the external ritual. In Buddhism, the term "refuge" should not be taken in the sense of "hiding" or "fleeing"; rather, it is conceived of as a homecoming, or place of healing.

A misunderstanding of this has led some Western scholars to erroneously conclude that Buddhism is "a religion for sticking one's head in the sand", whereas practicing Buddhists would assert, to the contrary, the main goal of Buddhism is release from the suffering of cyclic existence not by denial or running away from life but through the elimination of ignorance and the dispelling of illusion in all forms. Some translators also translate it as "taking safe direction".

Understanding the 'Middle Path' correctly, we should not indulge in actions without right motives and we should not go the ascetic way and avoid the world as something evil. The meaning of the 'Middle Path' is expressed in Baba's aphorism, "Head in the forest, hands in the society". This is the balanced path, when we act for the benefit of the world but keep our focus on God. Only then can we "come home" and heal ourselves and others.

In a Buddha Pournima speech, Baba beautifully explained the true meaning of the prayer used in the Three Jewels:

"Buddham sharanam gachchaami, Dharmam sharanam gachchaami, Sangham sharanam gachchaami. The real meaning of the prayer is: you must divert your Buddhi (mind) towards Dharma (right conduct). And right conduct should aim at serving society. When this is done, society gets purified." (Divine Discourse, 15th May 1997)

The Buddha presented Himself as a model and appealed to His followers to have faith in His example, as one who was human and successfully transcended the chains of mundane existence. Buddhists believe that there is no otherworldly salvation from one's karma. The suffering caused by the karmic effects of previous thoughts, words and deeds can only be avoided by following the Noble Eightfold Path. The *Dharma* offers a refuge by providing guidelines for the cessation of suffering and the attainment of enlightenment. The *Sangha* offers a refuge by preserving the authentic wisdom of the Buddha and by providing further examples of the validity of his teachings.

Jewel One: Buddha

Shakyamuni Buddha did not claim any superiority over mankind or any gods. He also did not proclaim any divine status for himself. He was himself *Dharma* (Ultimate Truth) made manifest.

A Buddha is anyone who has fully awakened to the true nature of existence, liberated himself from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, and has eradicated all negative qualities and developed all positive qualities, including omniscience.

Shakyamuni Buddha as a human being was unique, yet His existence reminds us of our own inner qualities. The German Zen Master Rei Ho Hatlapa Roshi taught that ritualistic prostrations are not performed to another person but are an expression of the reverence to our own inner Buddha qualities as well as to the omnipresent Buddha.

Jewel Two: Dharma

In general, *Dharma* is the ethical guidelines for the right conduct of a Buddhist. It is not an external frame work but something that comes from within, from the heart. *Dharma* also relates to the inner connection between everything on an ethical and spiritual level.

Baba points out that a true human being is someone who pursues the path of truth – the *Dharmic* path, which is comprised of:

“*Samyak drishti* (right vision), *samyak bhavam* (right feeling), *samyak sravanam* (right listening), *samyak vak* (right speech), and *samyak karma* (right action)...Truth, righteousness and sacrifice should be the way of life...It means: *buddhi* (intellect) should follow the path of *dharma*, and *dharma* should be fostered in society. Only then will the country prosper. This is also the inner meaning of the word SAI. **S** denotes spiritual change, **A** denotes association (social) change, and **I** denotes individual change. Man's mind will become pure and sacred only when these three changes take place.” (Divine Discourse, 30th May 1999)

The Love in all living beings is the countenance of the *Dharma*, which appears between people when they interact in a *Dharmic* way. Love is attainable by *Ahimsa* (non-violence), the highest value in Buddha's teachings as Baba has declared:

“Buddha said non-violence is the greatest dharma. Love will be fostered only when non-violence is practiced. When love is fostered, there will be peace in the world. When there is peace in the world, man will naturally take to the path of dharma. When man follows the path of dharma, he will attain Truth. It is, therefore, the primary duty of every man to foster these life principles.” (Divine Discourse, 30th May 1999)

Baba has declared that the individual and society are interconnected. We can only reach the goal when we are aware of this connection (*Dharma*). This bond cannot be taught like an academic subject. We can reach the Right Vision only by practice and deepening our understanding. But what is this knowledge that we must acquire?

Baba tells us:

“What is the meaning of knowledge (*Jnana*)? It is not mere acquaintance with numerous books. Even the acquisition of information about all the objects in the animate and inanimate is not knowledge. True knowledge is awareness of the relationship between the individual and collective (*Samashti*) and their oneness.” (Divine Discourse, 5th February, 1998)

Knowledge is a tool, like the use of our hands, which aids in the development of our abilities. We must value *Jnana* or spiritual wisdom, but true knowledge awakens when we utilize our abilities to contribute to the oneness of humankind in every situation that confronts us.

Baba points out the true meaning of *Dharma*:

“To achieve happiness, man embarks on acquiring various kinds of knowledge and pursues various occupations. He seeks happiness through marriage and having children and building a mansion for his residence. But is he happy thereby? No! What is *dharma*? Is it celibacy or the duties of a householder or a renunciate (*sanyasin*)? These are transient obligations which have to be observed as incidental duties in the journey of life. The supreme duty is refraining from causing harm to anyone. This truth is proclaimed in the scriptures in the exhortation: ‘Speak the truth. Speak what is pleasing’ (*Sathyam bruyaath; priyam bruyaath*). Thus, pleasing speech is declared as a supreme duty.” (Divine Discourse, 5th February, 1998)

Jewel Three: Sangha

In ancient times, *Sangha* was comprised of the community of monks and nuns. This was traditionally accepted then because it was the monks who primarily promoted the teachings of the Buddha throughout the centuries.

Underlying the visible social order, there is always deeper spiritual symbolism. The true *Sangha* is not a community of specific people in a special society.

The true *Sangha* embraces everyone and everything. The true *Sangha* is a universal heart to heart relationship with every living being. It embraces everything, from the tiny cells to the flowers and trees to the distant stars.

When we break through to this understanding, then we realize the true *Sangha* – the true community of all beings – and understand that the positions or labels we might give ourselves are barriers to our

understanding of oneness and are obstacles which must be cleansed from the mind.

Baba repeatedly tells us that the individual, society, creation and the creator are One. Therefore, the goal of education is not simply to earn money for ourselves and our immediate family but to help society. In speaking to His students, Swami once said:

“You are struggling hard to acquire worldly education. You are spending hours together concentrating on it. What is the benefit that accrues from it? You acquire this education merely to fill your belly. Even this education can be used for the welfare of the society. Leave selfishness and aspire for the happiness of all. *Loka samastha sukhino bhavantu*. (May all the people of the world be happy!) This should be our prayer and aspiration. That is the true spiritual practice. *Vyashti* means individual, *samashti* means society. So, you should progress from *vyashti* to *samashti*, from *samashti* to *srushti* (creation), and ultimately merge in *Parameshti* (God). You should attain the unity of individual, society, creation, and the creator. Only spiritual transformation can bring about social welfare. The first letter **S** in the name Sai stands for service (work), **A** for adoration (worship), and **I** for illumination (wisdom). So, the very name of Sai symbolizes the unity of work, worship, and wisdom.” (Divine Discourse, 30th May, 1999)

The Vietnamese Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh taught a similar concept. He says meditation, wisdom and action should be integrated with each other. Meditation is worship in which we delve deeper into our mind and understanding and reach greater wisdom which then in turn enhances our work and action.

The interconnection between the individual and the collective and how Buddha always spoke from a sense of righteousness and justice is highlighted in a story Baba related during *Buddha Poornima* in 1999.

“Once, Buddha entered a village along with his disciples. A lady approached him and requested him to have food in her house. Buddha blessed her and accepted her invitation. Seeing this, many villagers, including the village headman, warned Buddha, saying, ‘O Buddha, you are one of wisdom and have renounced everything. She is not a woman of good character. It is not proper for you to have food in her house.’

Buddha smiled and asked the village headman to come forward. Buddha, holding the right hand of the headman, asked him to clap. The headman said it was not possible for him to clap since one of his hands was in Buddha’s hold. Buddha said, ‘True, it is possible to clap only when two hands come together. Likewise, this lady cannot turn bad by herself unless there are men of bad character in the village. The men of this village are the root cause of her bad character.’

The villagers realized their folly, fell at Buddha’s feet and sought His forgiveness. Through His teachings Buddha instilled sacredness and wisdom

in people. Buddha's teachings are highly sacred, with profound inner meaning." (Divine Discourse, 30th May, 1999)

We all know similar stories or have had comparable experiences, perhaps in school or in the workplace, where gossip happens behind people's backs. Not knowing the unity of mankind, the ignorant act this way out of fear, hatred and envy. But to reach our personal goal and serve society, we must overcome this sense of divisiveness. Baba remarked in 2003 in Whitefield, "When you have an enemy, go to him and ask him: How are you? Maybe he is not your enemy." Most enemies exist in our mind and a warm-hearted dialogue can help resolve many conflicts.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Buddha's view on life was like that of a doctor. To attain wisdom and liberation, first he offered a diagnosis through the Four Noble Truths and then prescribed the Noble Eightfold Path as the cure. In order for us to fully understand the Four Noble Truths and investigate whether they are valid, Buddha recommended a certain lifestyle be followed, i.e. the Noble Eightfold Path, consisting of:

1. Right Vision
2. Right Thought and Feelings
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

There are various interpretations of the Eightfold Path but the essence is still the same. Baba emphasised that the first three steps are the most crucial ones as they are fundamental to everyone's development. Without proper practice of the first three steps there will not be development of the others. Whenever we achieve something at one step, we are also elevated at the other levels too. In some interpretations the Noble Eightfold Path is described as being a progressive series of stages through which the practitioner moves, the culmination of one leading to the beginning of another. However it is more customary to view the stages of the Path as requiring simultaneous development.

1. Right Vision

Baba explains that Right Vision is the first and foremost step. Without Right Vision nothing can be achieved. Right Vision (in some interpretations it is called Right Understanding) is to look on every situation with a *Dharmic* view.

The essential teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path is that we control our senses. When we control our senses, then we will see good in the world. Swami says:

“Hence, Buddha declared that the first requisite is *Samyak darsanam* (Having the right vision). The implication of this statement is that, having been bestowed with the great gift of eyes, man should use them for seeing sacred objects and holy beings. But, on the contrary, by using his eyes to look at unsacred objects and evil persons, man fills himself with bad thoughts and becomes prey to evil tendencies.

What one sees influences the feelings in the heart. The state of the heart determines the nature of one's thoughts. The thoughts influence one's life. Hence to lead a good life the first prerequisite is pure vision. Man has to cultivate a sacred outlook. As a result of looking at cruel, ugly, and wicked scenes man leads an animal existence.

The very first inquiry one should make is to ascertain what is pure, edifying, and godly that he should see. Whatever he sees leaves its imprint on man. Few realize the effects of this.” (Divine Discourse, 5th Feb 1998)

“This was the first lesson Buddha taught. Buddha wandered all over the country in search of spiritual peace and liberation. After many years of inquiry he came to the conclusion that the secret of spiritual wisdom was not to be derived from scholars or by study. He realized that spiritual understanding could only come from mastery of the senses.” (Divine Discourse, 5th Feb 1998)

2. Right Thoughts and Feelings

Feelings and thoughts arise like a chain reaction triggered from what comes in through the senses. When we watch violent movies or a bloody political encounter on the news, if our mind is not well trained we tend to support one side or the other and perhaps would like to punish the "bad guys" – even when we know both sides are equally abhorrent. When an undisciplined mind is stimulated by scenes of violence, it predictably reacts with feelings and thoughts of further violence.

However, if we have made the effort to train the mind to remain peaceful, then we can be unaffected and remain centred in calm thoughts and feelings. Whenever anger, hatred or jealousy commandeer the mind and spawn negative feelings and thoughts, a sincere spiritual seeker can instead concentrate his vision on the good.

Despite surface appearances, somewhere within every situation there is always something good happening. When we recognise this, we become more steady and balanced and our reactions can bring harmony and peace rather than further agitation. From Right Vision and Right Thoughts, Right Speech will arise.

The purification of our vision and the cultivation of sacred feelings are conducive to purity in speech, which in turn promotes harmony and an atmosphere of love and cooperation. Whenever an individual is thus transformed, society benefits from it as well. Only through the righteousness of every individual can a *Dharmic* community be built and sustained. A pure mind is essential for pure thoughts, pure vision and pure speech.

3. Right Speech

Speech is the most important aspect to every human contact. Sai says:

“From developing sacred vision, man should proceed to *samyak vachanam* (sacred speech). Buddha declared that only sacred thoughts could lead to sacred speech. Buddha declared that the tongue should not be used recklessly to utter whatever one thinks. The tongue has been given to speak the truth, to amplify on what is sacred and pure.

The tongue has not been given to man to pamper the palate with delicious sweets. It is not given for talking as one likes. It is not to be used for causing displeasure to others. Nor is it to be used for indulging in falsehood. The tongue has been given to man to speak the truth, to be sweet to others, to praise the Divine and enjoy the bliss derived from such sacred speech.” (Divine Discourse, 5th February, 1998)

Buddha placed Right Speech before Right Action.

We should not only avoid lying, gossiping, harsh words and so on, but we should strive to maintain harmony in the community by being truthful, reliable and credible in our words. Through our speech we can build a society based on truth, trust and unity, or conversely, one of mistrust and isolation.

Our speech should always be based on human values like fairness and integrity. Right Speech requires something more, however, as speech is often a reaction to someone else's words. Before we voice an opinion, we must listen carefully to the other person's feelings and needs. When we answer, we should include these in our response as well. This is the way of Right Listening. Only when we answer respectfully to the needs of the other are we able to foster peace in the society and dispel ignorance.

In order to listen attentively, comprehend another's viewpoint, and respond with compassion, we must first learn how to communicate in an appropriate manner. The following incident illustrates this point: An American, who bases his peace work about non-violent communication in a spiritual context, states: “Certain ways of communicating alienate us from our natural state of

compassion". As an example, he relates an encounter which occurred when he visited the Deheisha Refugee Camp in Palestine. When he was recognized as an American, a few Muslims shouted slogans at him, like, "Murderer, child killer!" Being trained in the way of Right Speech, however, he reacted calmly and carefully.

First he verbalized their feelings and acknowledged their anger. He also accepted their expressed frustration that his government could utilize its resources for more humane objectives. They then mentioned their personal needs for housing and other basic amenities. The American questioned one individual whether he would like his living conditions to be improved? The man started to complain about the poor circumstances in which he and his family continually struggled. They felt ignored and neglected.

The American verbalized aloud the man's feelings of despair and enquired if he needs to be better understood. Next the man began to grumble about the stark disparity between his children and American children. The American man reflected back the father's anguish for his children (i.e., no secure place to study or play, no schoolbooks, etc.) He voiced his understanding for the man's desire for an overall improved environment. The dialogue continued on in this manner, the Muslim man vocalizing his pain and frustration and the visitor listening compassionately for the underlying feelings behind each statement. He neither agreed nor disagreed and perceived his words not as an attack but as a gift from a fellow human being prepared to share his life with him. Once he felt understood, the self-same man, who called him a murderer at the outset, invited him for a Ramadan dinner.

When Right Speech is correctly practiced it builds bridges. As in the above example, to pacify a problematic situation we must extend awareness and compassion to all, no matter their feelings or opinions. Even when someone is rude, we should look deeper and handle the conflict in a sensitive and loving manner. Most often people just want to be heard and acknowledged. When we grasp this basic principle of communication and respond in an appropriate way, we can alter and pacify even stormy circumstances.

4. Right Action

"True spirituality consists in the unity of thought, word and deed in all their purity and sacredness. Buddha declared that when spiritual striving of this nature has been completed, there is *samyak-jivanam* (leading a pure life)." (Divine Discourse, 5th February, 1998)

5. – 8. From Right Livelihood to Right Concentration

The next four steps of the Noble Eight fold Path are Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

When we practice Right Livelihood in our profession, we avoid everything which can potentially harm other beings, whether selling weapons (or violent movies), meat, alcohol, drugs, polluted foods, unsafe products, etc. Further,

we would naturally choose to stabilize our life, serve others, and contribute to justice and purity in society by practicing good business ethics, avoiding profiteering, and treating everyone fairly.

All this leads to Right Effort. Becoming increasingly aware of our selfish tendencies, we can then dissolve the three mental toxins of hatred, jealousy and greed and replace them with love.

Right Mindfulness will occur when we practice all these steps. Our mind becomes more steady and conscious of the divine presence. Right Concentration naturally follows as the final step.

As explained by Baba, Right Action leads to spiritual progress (*samyak-sadhana*) and steadies the mind. This results in a pure life.

Right Action and a pure life thereby become integrated. The typical spiral effect of the Noble Eightfold Path becomes evident here. The progress which is made in our spiritual development bestows a steadier mind and equips us for Right Action founded on Right Vision, Thoughts and Speech.

"When You Fill Your Heart With Love..." – Baba

In this discourse, Swami tells us that the Noble Eight fold path can be easily followed when we fill our hearts with love.

“(Buddha) stressed the need for *Samyak Vak* (sacred speech). *Anudvegakaram Vakyam Sathyam Priya-hitham Cha Yat* (one should speak only those words, which cause no annoyance to others and which are truthful, agreeable and wholesome). Whatever you speak should not cause any disturbance to others. It should be truthful as well as pleasing. You cannot always oblige but you can speak always obligingly. Sacred speech is the manifestation of divinity. God exists in the form of Sabda Brahman (sound principle).

...Under any circumstances, do not let your speech be tainted by harshness. Never become agitated. When you understand that all are one, there will be no chance to get agitated. All bodies are like mirrors, showing you your own reflection in them. How can you be angry with your own reflection? You should speak with love. There is no divinity greater than love. When you fill your heart with love, your thoughts, vision, words and deeds will be suffused with love.” (Divine Discourse, 5th February, 1998)

The Goal Of The Noble Eightfold Path Is Nirvana

Nirvana is not an abstract place or a secret formula. In the Buddhist *Heart Sutra*, it is said, that ‘**Form is Void and Void is Form**’. This means that it is both with and without attributes and therefore beyond our logical understanding. **We can perhaps understand this better by the example of the Bodhisattva vow. When someone takes this vow, they promise to stay in the world and help others until every living being attains**

enlightenment. In this context it requires one to eradicate any distinction between nirvana and the world. This distinction is an obstacle in our mind, a dualism created by the desire for enlightenment.

Baba speaks about *Nirvana* in this way:

“Today man aspires to attain mukti (liberation). What is mukti? It is not the attainment of a heavenly abode. Mukti means freedom from suffering. You need to have mukti at three levels – body, mind and soul. For example, you are hungry. When you eat food, your hunger is satiated. This is also a kind of mukti. You are suffering from a disease. You take a medicine and get cured. This is also mukti. All this is related to the body.

At the mental level, mukti means controlling the vagaries of the mind. But true liberation lies in understanding the principle of the Atma, which neither comes nor goes. This is termed as Nirvana.” (Divine Discourse, 7th May, 2001)

In 1997 Swami also said:

“Buddha's emphasis was entirely on purity in every aspect of daily life. Purity in vision, purity in thought, purity in speech and purity in action. He considered the spirit of sacrifice as true yajna. Sacrifice is the means for attaining Nirvaana (freedom from the bondage of mundane existence.)” (Divine Discourse, 15th May, 1997)

Nirvana is that which is permanent –we will neither find it in the future nor in the past. It is not owned by Buddhists, by Hindus, nor by any other sect or religion. It is the very essence of every living being. When our mind is steady and directed towards oneness, we will be able to reach liberation here and now. **In Buddhism it is said that the way itself is the goal. Control of the senses itself is nirvana.**

THE SILAS – GUIDELINES ON THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

The *Silas* (training rules) are an aid for Buddhists following the Noble Eightfold Path. Normally people undertake five rules, although some who are keen will undertake all ten.

1. To refrain from harming living creatures (killing).
2. To refrain from taking that which is not freely given (stealing).
3. To refrain from manipulative oppression of basic human rights due to social inequalities.
4. To refrain from improper speech (lying, harsh language, slander, idle chitchat).
5. To refrain from intoxicants (such as alcohol or drugs) which lead to loss of mind control.
6. To refrain from exposing others' mistakes and short comings.
7. To refrain from elevating oneself at the expense of denigrating others.
8. To refrain from withholding the free flow of Dharmic Abundance.
9. To refrain from being subjugated by anger.

10. To refrain from malicious remarks about the Three Jewels

BUDDHA'S DISCIPLES

Buddha brought his teaching to the entire cross section of the populace, whether royalty, worker, or outcaste, whether rich or poor. He empathized with each and every person who opened up to him. Some followed him everywhere, yearning to develop their understanding of his teachings.

The disciples, through their example, manifested Buddha's teachings. Their transformation bore witness to Shakyamuni Buddha's greatness. The accounts of these disciples have been told over the centuries and convey many lessons. Two of the disciples were Ananda, the step brother of Buddha, and Sariputra. The following two stories illustrate the qualities of these disciples.

Ananda - The Compassionate Disciple

Ananda was very dear to Buddha since their childhood days. It is said, that he never attained enlightenment during the lifetime of the Buddha. However, very shortly after the Buddha's Parinirvana, he did realise the ultimate truth. In the Buddhist tradition, he represents compassion. He also had the most retentive memory and it is due to him that Buddha's teachings have been recorded so thoroughly. Ananda joined the *Sangha* as a child, and like his brother he refused to become heir apparent of the Shakya kingdom.

Once Ananda approached the Buddha and remarked that "half of the dispensation is based on friendship, companionship and association with the good." To which the Buddha replied, "Dear Ananda, do not say so. Not half, but man's entire life is established on friendship, companionship and association with the good."

The Buddha repeated his vision in the Metta Sutra, one of the core texts in Buddhism. This is what should be followed by one who is kindhearted and who knows the paths of peace:

Let them be able and upright,
straightforward and gentle in speech.
Humble and not conceited.
May they be content and easily satisfied,
unburdened with duties and frugal on their ways.
Peaceful and calm, and wise and skillful.
Not proud and demanding in nature.
May they be wise, with their senses calmed,
not arrogant and without desire.
May they do nothing that the wise would later reprove.
May all beings be happy.
May they live in safety and joy.
All living beings, whether weak or strong, the great or the mighty,
medium, short or small, seen or unseen, near or distant,

born or to be born, may they all be happy.
Let no one deceive another or despise any being in any state,
let none by anger or hatred wish harm to another.
As a mother watches over her child,
willing to risk her own life to protect her only child,
so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings,
radiating kindness over the entire world.
Standing or walking, sitting or lying down,
during all one's waking hours may one remain mindful of this heart
and this way of living that is said to be the sublime abiding.
Unattached to speculations, views and sense desires,
the pure hearted one, with clear vision,
being freed from all sense desires,
will never be reborn in the cycles of suffering.

Sariputra, the Wise and Humble Disciple

The handsome young Sariputra was a renowned scholar in the academic field. However, he considered his wisdom to be peerless and that none could qualify to teach him until he met the Buddha.

Sariputra was Buddha's chief disciple, and despite his own deep wisdom, he always followed and obeyed the Buddha's instructions. Among all His disciples, Buddha trusted Sariputra the most. When His son, Rahula, joined the *Sangha*, Buddha asked Sariputra to be his mentor.

Once, Rahula accompanied Sariputra to beg for food. He returned to the monastery with a sullen look. When Buddha enquired why he was unhappy, the young Rahula replied resentfully, "Buddha, when we beg for food the devotees always give good food to the elder monks but they usually offer food with no nutritious value to the younger monks. Everyone needs good food to maintain their health. Our elders neglect to take care of us when they receive the good food."

The Buddha knew very well that nutritious food was necessary to maintain health and a healthy body was very important for monks because if they were weak they would not be able to concentrate on their meditation practice. However, the Buddha lectured Rahula for being too preoccupied about food when he should be focused on his meditation practice.

After Rahula left, Sariputra was summoned to see the Buddha. "Sariputra, do you know that you have eaten unclean food today?" Sariputra quickly threw up the food taken on that day and said, "Lord Buddha, ever since I became your disciple I have always been following the rules of begging prescribed by you and would never dare to accept any unclean food."

Buddha then clarified, "Sariputra, I know you have been observing the rules of conduct, but one cannot be self-centered in the Sangha. Rules should be fair to everyone and the benefits should be equally shared. It is the responsibility

of the elders to take good care of the younger monks, even where begging for food is concerned."

Sariputra was not angry and gratefully accepted the teachings of the Buddha.

Buddha's Path Requires Individual Responsibility

In the time of the Buddha, many people believed that rituals could grant them liberation. Buddha, however, discovered that this was untrue. He repeatedly emphasized that liberation is attained only by adhering to the path of Dharma. He shifted the responsibility back to the individual. The individual was responsible for his development, his Right Vision and Right Action. Nobody else can undertake this responsibility. Like Buddha, Baba also points out that none can assure liberation for us. Only self-effort will lead us to it.

Buddha went on to declare that good action is conducive to good spiritual progress (*samyak-sadhana*). Good deeds constitute genuine spirituality. Mere formal worship or ritualistic practices do not constitute spiritual striving. These religious practices are good in a way. But they do not constitute spiritual sadhana. True spirituality consists in the unity of thought, word and deed in all their purity and sacredness. (Divine Discourse, 5th February, 1998)

Baba also explains that love is the way to God and that love and life are the best teachers.

"There is no need for you to follow this person or that person in the search for a Guru. The heart full of compassion is the altar of God. Nature is the best preacher. Life is the best teacher. Fill yourselves with awe and reverence at the handiwork of God, the manifestation of His Power and Glory that is called the World. This is enough instruction and enough inspiration for you." (Divine Discourse, 14th January, 1973)

Our speech is more authentic when we adhere to our own experiences and avoid unsubstantiated references. Buddha once reprimanded a disciple, who lavished praise on him. Buddha often said that there are other Buddhas, too, and that he was not the only teacher who was leading disciples to the goal of liberation. Swami related a story about this.

"Once, Buddha was travelling from village to village giving spiritual discourses. One day, he felt tired and asked one of his disciples to address the gathering. He went inside to meditate and take rest. During the course of his speech the disciple said, 'In this world, there has never been a spiritual master greater than our master Buddha and there will not be another like him in future.

The audience gave a thunderous applause. On hearing this, Buddha came out. One of the disciples told him the reason for the people's joyous applause. Buddha smiled and called the disciple who delivered the lecture. 'What is your age?' he asked. The disciple said he was thirty-five-years-old. 'How many kingdoms have you visited so far?' Buddha asked him. The disciple said he

had visited only two kingdoms. Buddha said, 'You are thirty-five-years-old and have seen only two kingdoms. You have not understood the present completely. Then how can you say anything about the past and the future? It is meaningless to say that a master like Buddha was never born before and will never be born again. Many Avatars and sages have taken birth in this sacred land of Bharat. Many more Avatars and noble souls will be born here in future also. There are many noble souls in this world; I offer my respects to all of them...'

This was the teaching of Buddha. Character is important, not money. Bliss can be attained only through control of senses, not through penance, japa, or meditation. Neither by penance nor by going through scriptures nor by having a dip in holy rivers can one attain liberation. Only by serving noble souls can one cross the ocean of Samsara. There is no easier path to peace and bliss other than controlling one's own senses." (Divine Discourse, 30th May, 1999)

THE JATAKA STORIES

The Jataka stories are an inherent part of Buddhist culture. They are a collection of stories enjoyed both by children and adults. They are easy to remember and their insights and wisdom are easily grasped. Some are based on historical events and some are fictional accounts. Over millennia the purpose of the Jataka stories has been to cultivate moral conduct and good behaviour. The Buddha himself used Jataka stories to explain concepts like *karma* and *reincarnation* and to emphasise the importance of certain moral values, just as Baba conveys spiritual teachings through *Chinna Katha*.

These stories are even more relevant in the fragmented societies of today. This applies especially for children for whom guidance is much needed in contemporary times. All Jataka stories are parables for correcting our behaviour. Such stories play an enormous role in the cultivation of peace and generosity in all societies. In India, these and other similar stories were a principal instrument in the socialisation of children, discouraging them from selfishness and laying foundations for family and community solidarity. Jataka stories speak eloquently of those human values which contribute to harmony, happiness and progress.

Jataka and other similar stories travelled far and wide by word of mouth along caravan routes and contributed to the literature of Arabia (*Arabian Nights*), Italy (Boccaccio's tales), Greece (*Aesop's Fables*), Britain (Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*) Japan (Zen stories), Persia and China. Here is a typical Jataka story.

God Is Where Love Is!

"Once, three aged monks lived in a monastery, amidst cedar trees, on a remote hill surrounded by mountains. They dutifully worshipped the Buddha, and all the Patriarchs. Daily they practiced their rituals, chanted the Sutras and meditated. However as they progressively aged, they harboured a gnawing concern.

They acutely desired to impart to the next generation the tradition and teachings of Lord Buddha and also their own knowledge. However, they were painfully aware that it was very long since anyone had visited the monastery in pursuit of the spiritual path. They increasingly feared that their advancing age and impending deaths would thwart the continuity of their spiritual legacy.

Eventually they set out to consult a wise man. A day and a half later, they reached his hermitage in the mountains. After his warm welcome and exchanging pleasantries they submitted their concerns to him.

Responding with a knowing smile and loving eyes, he said, "Please give me some time. It is not an easy question and requires reflection. I need to meditate upon it."

So he began meditating and the monks sat and waited. Nearly two hours later he startled them by suddenly opening his eyes, and exclaiming "I saw...I saw...oh, Buddha!"

The monks clamoured unanimously to know, what he had seen. The wise man, silent and smiling, just gazed at them. Then, with a wave, he silenced them. Quieted, the monks waited with bated breath.

Pausing a while, the wise man revealed, "I had a profound vision. I saw Buddha Amitabha, the compassionate Buddha."

The monks were awestruck, deeply moved by such a blessing. The wise man continued, "There is something more. I saw, that one of you three is the Buddha Amitabha". The monks cried out in astonishment, "Who is it?"

The wise man replied, "I am sorry, but I only saw that one of you is the Buddha. I could not specifically identify who."

The monks were overjoyed that one amongst them was the Buddha Amitabha, the compassionate Buddha. Profusely thanking the wise man, they departed.

Throughout their return journey, silently they all pondered deeply upon who amidst them could be the Buddha Amitabha?

The first monk was thinking, "Is it the monk behind me? He knows so much about Buddha's teachings, he is a walking dictionary. But on the other hand, he is so much older than I am, his skull is already visible. No he cannot be the Buddha Amitabha. And the other monk cannot even cook properly. No, actually, the only one is myself – **yes, I must be the one**, who the wise man could not identify."

The second monk was busy asking himself the same question. He thought "The monk in front of me can recite all the sutras very well but he does not seem to understand them well. And he has a broken nose from a fight in his teenage years. No, he cannot be Amitabha Buddha. And the other one,

behind him? He shuffles along with us, probably busier with the mosquitoes than with meditation. **Only I can be the one. It must be myself.**"

The third monk was asking himself whether the first one could be the Buddha. He reflected, "But his breathing is so loud during meditation and the other one can not even sit silently for an hour. **No, I must be the Amitabha Buddha.**"

So their reflections resulted in each monk concluding, that he himself was the Amitabha Buddha. They each felt an elevated sense of self and a deeper commitment and responsibility towards their own spiritual endeavours and excellence. Each one assumed the role of Amitabha Buddha. No one openly claimed that he was the Buddha, believing that time itself would reveal their reality.

They all resumed their monastic life, daily rituals and duties. But as time passed by a profound change took place. When they meditated and the first monk started to sniff or cough, the other two smiled silently. When the third monk brought the food to the table, the others ate it with so much loving acceptance. Nobody complained anymore.

Mutual tolerance was increasing daily between them. Signs of peaceful change accumulated slowly but surely. The atmosphere of the monastery began to transform, and gradually filled with love.

One year later, a young man visited the monastery and rested a while there. Gradually from then on people began to visit and stay for a while. Some months later the first disciple arrived. The monastery was once again vibrant and joyful.

When we perceive everything in us as divine, we can then attain liberation. Love is the way to attain liberation – this is the fundamental truth.

Baba expounds the essence of Buddha's teachings as follows:

Man can get limitless powers through love of God...Man's love is like an atom when compared to divine love, which is infinite, eternal, and nectarine. It is foolishness and ignorance on the part of man to think that he knows everything without understanding the principle of Love. He should see through the eyes of love, hear through the ears of love and cultivate the feelings of love. (Divine Discourse, 30th May, 1999)

THE LAST WORDS OF THE BUDDHA

There are various versions of the last moments and words of the Buddha. Throughout the centuries these accounts have been continually revised. The following is one such version.

Forty-five years after he attained enlightenment, Lord Buddha entered Parinirvana at Kushinagara, laying between two shala trees. Like the radiance

of the enchanting evening sun, the Buddha radiated an unusual brilliance. The Buddha lay on a bed made by Ananda.

As darkness fell, the shala trees burst into bloom, showering a rain of flowers on Buddha's body.

The moon quietly shone on the shala grove while the quiet and lofty mind of the Buddha shone on all the people in the grove. It was a touching yet solemn scene. Everybody wept, including the enlightened sages. Ananda was especially sad and cried tearfully.

However, crying would not help mankind! The most important task was to consult the Buddha for retaining Dharma forever. They deliberated and elected Ananda to represent them to pose their last queries to Buddha.

First, when Lord Buddha enters Nirvana, who shall be the master?
Second, when Lord Buddha enters Nirvana, how shall we live?
Third, when Lord Buddha enters Nirvana, how should we treat evil people?
Fourth when Lord Buddha enters Nirvana, how do we propagate the Teaching?

In his usual compassionate tone, the Buddha replied,

"All of you must remember to take the precepts as your master and take the Dharma (Truth) as your refuge; in this way you will ensure the continuance of the Dharma."

After hearing Buddha's words, everyone was moved.

Baba also narrated Buddha's last words:

"In his last moments, Buddha summoned His stepbrother Ananda to impart to him His final message...Placing His palm on the head of His younger brother, Buddha said: "My dear child! I came to the world to teach (the Truth). If anyone asks, 'Where is God?' the answer is: 'He is everywhere'. Truth is God. Speak the Truth. Do not harm anyone. Recognize that the highest *dharma* is non-violence, *ahimsa*." (Divine Discourse, 5th February, 1998)

BUDDHA POORNIMA

Buddha Poornima or *Vesakh* is an auspicious Buddhist festival. It is the first full moon night of May. Significantly Buddha was born, attained enlightenment and entered into Parinirvana on the first full moon night of May, symbolically demonstrating that we are born and die each moment and in the same moment we are carried by eternity.

Baba has commented on *Buddha Poornima* in this way:

"Embodiments of Love! We are celebrating today Buddha Poornima, or Buddha Jayanthi. What does Poornima (full moon) signify? It signifies

wholeness. When the mind is filled with love, it achieves fullness. As long as the mind is filled with darkness (evil thoughts) there is no meaning in celebrating Buddha Poornima. Get rid of this darkness. Without the light of love in the heart, what use is there in having illuminations outside? Light the lamp of the Divine in your minds. Banish hatred and envy from your hearts. Man is the victim of two evil planets: attachment and hatred. To escape from their grip, the only way is to cultivate love.” (Divine Discourse, 15th May, 1997)

Buddha Poornima 2006 In The Divine Presence

Devotees have been blessed by Bhagavan to celebrate Buddha Poornima in His presence every year. Buddhists from 14 countries converged at Brindavan, Whitefield on May 13th, this year (2006) too and had a very memorable two days of celebrations in the presence of the Living Sai Buddha. 8 monks were present from Sri Lanka and Indonesia, as well as many dignitaries, in particular from Sri Lanka. The day began with Bhagavan being escorted to the dais by 12 children from Indonesia.

Then followed some beautiful bhajans sung by overseas devotees which pleased Swami. Dr. Jumsai then gave a speech commenting that the Sri Sathya Sai School in Thailand had been hailed as the best Buddhist school in the country. After lunch was served to the 1100 delegates, the evening began with bhajans followed by a speech by Dr. Reddy who commented on the universality of the Buddha’s teachings. Sri Krishnaputra spoke next and related how, with Swami’s grace, he had been able to open a Sai centre and a school in Indonesia . Then followed the Discourse by Bhagavan in which He said,

“During the course of his (Buddha’s) journey, he once reached a town and met a holy man. The holy man told him that the cause of his anguish was actually within him, and it was his anguish that was coming the way of his self-realisation. So saying, he gave a talisman for protection and asked him to wear around his neck. At this point of time, (Bhagavan materialised that talisman and showed it to the congregation amidst a thunderous applause).

This was the talisman given by the sage to Siddhartha. When Siddhartha put the talisman around his neck, all his anguish disappeared instantaneously. Then he started doing intense penance which went on for a long time. He kept questioning himself, “Who am I?” “Am I the body? Am I the mind? Am I the Buddhi (intellect)? Am I the Chittha (mind-stuff)?” He came to the conclusion the he was neither of these. Ultimately, he experienced the truth, “I am I”. Till the last moment of his earthly sojourn, Buddha had the talisman around his neck. When he shed his mortal coil, the talisman disappeared.

Siddhartha advocated the practice of meditation. What is that you have to meditate upon? What is meant by meditation? Does it mean concentrating upon a particular object? No, no. That is not meditation at all. To meditate upon the principle of “I am I” is true meditation. No other Sadhana (spiritual practice) can match this... Buddha recognised the principle of unity and based

his life on this truth. Under the direction of many yogis, he had performed various kinds of meditation and penance, but ultimately found them to be a mere waste of time as none of these could lead him to the ultimate experience of oneness.

He regretted having wasted his time in such a manner. One should find fulfillment in life by making proper use of the time. This is the primary duty of man.

Buddha could attain the experience the unity of all creation. There was total transformation in him once he attained the vision of Ekatma (oneness of the Atma). He realised that all worldly relations like mother, father, wife, children were false. He transcended body consciousness. That is why he earned the appellation Buddha (enlightened one).

Truly speaking, Buddha is not just one individual. All of you are Buddhas. You will see unity everywhere once you understand this truth. There is unity in the apparent multiplicity. When you are surrounded by many mirrors, you see a number of your reflections. Reflections are many, but the person is one.”

After Bhagavan’s discourse there was a dance performance from Indonesia and another drama by the Sai Youth of Singapore, thus concluding the day’s programme. On the second day a choir from Malaysia sung some beautiful Chinese songs and then Swami blessed the food to be given out as Narayan Seva. Then followed some amazing drumming from Sri Lanka and lastly a dance from Indonesia. So it was celebrations at it best in the divine presence.

You could see there was an inexplicable joy in the hearts of everyone present. They had experienced something which they had never experienced before, something which they cannot get anywhere else on earth. The living presence of Divine Love on Mother earth, then as Buddha and now as Sai, are acts of supreme Divine Compassion. Let’s wake up to it. Rejoice and redeem our lives.

APPENDIX

Buddha’s Heritage

Buddha’s heritage is as vibrant as it was 2600 years ago. More than 350 Million people (other statistics account for 700 million) either practice Buddhism or adhere to its precepts. Buddhism underwent a long transition of change and transformation to now take its place as a contemporary ‘global’ religion. In the east, it gives the cultural foundation for every aspect of life, from childhood to death. In the west, it is commonly perceived as a peaceful and meditative religion.

Common features in all Buddhist lineages -

- Shakayamuni Buddha is the original founder of Buddhism.
- The Three Universal Seals, Four Noble Truths, Eight Fold Path are the basic precepts to all schools of Buddhism
- Threefold training of Precepts, Meditation and Wisdom are universal to all schools.
- The concept of mind over matter. The focus on taming the Mind is fundamental to all schools.

Types of Buddhism

Though the above are the common features in all Buddhist lineages, there are also distinctive differences in the paths that are followed. Theravada Buddhism is mainly practiced in Southern Asia, Mahayana Buddhism, in Northern Asia. Theravada Buddhism (small vehicle) emphasises the personal individual goal for self liberation.

Mahayana Buddhism (big vehicle), on the contrary, focuses on universal self liberation. It is very important for them to help other sentient beings to attain self liberation. Theravada scriptures are imparted in Pali, and Mahayana, in Sanskrit, or languages like Chinese, Japanese or Tibetan. The Mahayana mythology is much more extensive than the Theravada mythology.

History of Buddhism

Buddhism spread across India due to Buddha's teachings until the 12th century. Then it almost vanished. However during the last century it has begun to spread again. The Theravada Buddhism spread across to Sri Lanka and all over South Asia and remains there till today.

Mahayana Buddhism emerged in 100 BCE and spread across most parts of China, Japan and Korea. Zen Buddhism is a part of Mahayana Buddhism. Bodhidharma was prominent in bringing Zen Buddhism to North Asia. For him the experiential dimension was the most important aspect in Buddhist Practice. In Zen Buddhism scriptural studies are rejected in favour of the more direct methods of gaining insight. Tibetan Buddhism evolved in 600 CE, as a special aspect of Mahayana Buddhism, and spread nearly across the entire Himalaya region.

The European continent encountered Buddhism several times during its 2600 years of existence. This was primarily due to the conquests of the Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, who conquered most of Central Asia. The Indo-Greek kingdoms, which emerged as a result, gave rise to the exchange of the Greek-Hellenistic and Indo-Buddhist culture. The Greco-Buddhist art is a fine example of this. Some of the Buddhist monks travelled on the trading routes from India even up to Greece. They were instrumental in spreading Buddha's teachings. References to the earliest traces of Buddhism in Europe were made by the Greek Philosopher Plutach and also by the Milinda Panha (Buddhist Canon). Both described the earliest conversions,

that of the Indo-Greek King Menander to Buddhism. Saint John of Damascus translated the biography of Buddha into Greek in the 9th century, naming it "Balaam" and "Josaphat", and distributed it to the Christian population.

During the last two centuries, interest in Buddhism in the west increased amongst the intellectual, scientific and cultural communities. Thereby Buddhism spread in various ways through the different aspects of society. Hence, the scientist, Max Mueller made accurate German translations of the Sanskrit texts. Also, the famous German Author Herman Hesse, who wrote the novel "Siddhartha", was inspired by Buddha's life. The German philosopher Schopenhauer was also influenced by Buddhism.

The Jesuit Pater Lassalle is one more example. He was a missionary in Japan and survived the a-bomb attack on Hiroshima. He learnt Zen-Meditation whilst in Japan and returned as a Christian Zen teacher to Europe. Nowadays in some catholic monasteries, Zen-Meditation is offered in seminars and workshops.

During the Vietnam war refugees came to Central Europe and America, rescued by charity organizations as "Boat People". These people brought along with them, their Buddhist culture. For example, 120,000 of them, are now living in Germany. 60,000 of them belong to the Temple "Pagoda Vien Giac" in Hannover. Reverend Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Zen Master, who escaped the war. He founded a Buddhist order for Vietnamese and Western disciples in France. He became a well known name for Buddhism and Inter-religious dialogue in the west, through his numerous publications.

Buddhism is not confined only to inter-religious dialogues. It also extend to dialogues between science and Buddhism. In contemporary times the gap between science and Buddhism is increasingly narrowing. Both have similar concepts of the cosmos.

Albert Einstein said "*Buddhism [...] avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and the spiritual. ... it is based on a religious sense aspiring for a meaningful unity from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual*".

Many Buddhist centres exist in Europe, North and South America, Australia, New Zealand. In contemporary times virtually all the major Buddhist traditions are represented, and continue to attract the interest of Westerners in all walks of life.

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- Heart2Heart Team.

FEATURE ARTICLES

MUSINGS FROM PRASANTHI NILAYAM CONCERNING THE VEDAS - 05

MANTRAS - MAN'S LINK TO GOD

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

Today, I shall finally start on what I have been promising all along, namely to take you on a Veda Walkthrough. The idea for such a walkthrough has been bugging me ever since I came across a most fascinating book entitled: THE VEDIC EXPERIENCE, *Mantramanjari*, in the library of our Institute here. This book is by one Raimundo Panikkar, and it is an amazing book. The author too is amazing in his own way.

Raimundo Panikkar – Scholar Par Excellence

Raimundo Panikkar was born in Spain to a Catholic mother and a Hindu father – that is why his name is half Spanish and half Malayalee. Panikkar grew up as a Catholic and entered priesthood. Later he came to India and discovered the *Vedas*. Of this trip, Raimundo Panikkar says, “I left as a Christian, I found myself a Hindu, and I returned as a Buddhist, without ever ceasing to be a Christian.”

Panikkar has three doctorate degrees, one in science, one in philosophy, and one in theology. He is a scholar par excellence, and was, until recently when he retired, a Professor in the Department of Religious Studies in the University of California, Santa Barbara Campus. He is widely acclaimed as a great theologian. Panikkar is well known for his attempts to initiate a dialogue between Christianity and the major Asian religions. Panikkar believes that though Christians must remain devoted to Christianity, it is not necessary to believe that all truth is exhausted by Christ, much less by the historical person Jesus of Nazareth. He has argued that though Jesus is referred to as the Son of God in the New Testament, this does not mean that the Son of God is always and only Jesus.

The Vedic Experience – A Treasure House of Vedic Mantras

So much for the author of the book, *The Vedic Experience*. Now a few words about the book itself. It has had many printings, and is published by Motilal Banarasidass of Delhi, a well-known publisher of books on Indology and Indian scriptures. The book has 936 pages, and is what Panikkar calls a Vedic Anthology. It is a collection of Vedic *Mantras* from right across the *Vedas*. As Panikkar himself explains,

A Vedic Anthology seems appropriate in our age, when the world is so much in need of serene and balanced wisdom, and when the Indian tradition has so powerful an appeal, especially for the younger generation.

I am not sure if the younger generation of today has any idea at all of the *Vedas*; I personally doubt it; in fact, few of the elders of today know anything! Such being the case, I thought I would pick up some ideas from this treasure of a book and share it with Radio Sai listeners, in the hope that at least you would take greater interest in what Swami has to say about the *Vedas*, ancient Indian Culture and tradition, etc.

Mantras - The Main Link To God

You might wonder how I am going to deal with a book that is over 900 pages. Here is my road map. Panikkar has collected *Mantras* from *Aitareya Aryanaka* through *KausikaSutra* and *NyayaSutra*, right up to *Yajur Veda*, with *Bhagavad Gita* thrown in for good measure. Altogether, it is a mighty scholarly effort. Now what criteria did Panikkar adopt for making his selection? This is what Panikkar himself says:

This anthology claims to represent the whole of the Sruthi or Indian revelation. It purports to contain the central message of the Vedas, to embody their essence, their Rasa. Just as a bouquet contains all the seven colours of the rainbow and all the fragrance of the fields, this anthology seeks to encompass the whole range of Vedic experience and to convey the main body of the Vedic revelation.

When I first glanced through this monumental book what struck me was how various *Mantras* are chanted at different stages in a person's life, and how they all, at the global level, establish the link between Man, Nature or Creation and God the Creator.

Right then the idea grew within me that somehow, I should share this fragrance with our listeners, and this series is the result. In a sense, this talk and the one to follow are the centrepiece of this series.

A Vedic Walkthrough of A Person's Life

This is what I plan to do in the present talk and the next one. I shall, starting from the moment a person is born, keep track of that person through life, till death. During the life of that person, *Mantras* are chanted on many occasions. Leaning on Panikkar, I shall offer brief extracts so that we get an idea of what is the content of the *Mantras* chanted. When we do this right across a person's life, we would get a broad overview of what Panikkar rightly calls the Vedic experience. I use instead the more catchy term Walkthrough, but it means the same thing.

Ideally, I should offer both the Sanskrit original and the English translation of the *Mantras*, but since I do not right now have access to an erudite Vedic Pandit who can pull out what I want from the Sanskrit originals, I have to be content with the English translations found in Panikkar's book. It is my hope that one day Radio Sai would be able to produce a program complete with the Sanskrit chants. I am in fact trying to rope in an eminent scholar, and if my

efforts succeed, we might even offer that program soon. For the moment, you have to be content with what I can offer in these talks.

A Son Is Born....

Let me start off with the birth of a son to a couple. According to tradition, the child's father should feed with a golden spoon a little butter and honey and say:

*I feed you with ghee, the gift of God the beautiful,
I feed you with the golden wisdom of honey,
May you have long life, protected by the Devas,
May you live in this world a hundred circling years.*

Next, putting his lips close to the child's ears, the father says:

*May God grant you intelligence,
May His power grant you intelligence,
May his two Divine messengers, Lotus-wreathed,
Grant you intelligence.*

The father then touches the shoulder of the child and prays for strength thus:

*Be a stone, be an axe, be unsurpassed gold,
You in truth are the Veda, called my son,
Live, therefore, a hundred years.
Powerful God, give us the best of treasures,
Grant us Your gifts, O bountiful One!*

The mother is also remembered, and the father prays for her thus:

*You are Ida, the daughter of Mitra and Varuna,
You a courageous woman, have borne a vigorous son,
May you be blessed with vigorous children,
You who have blessed us with a vigorous son.*

I have not included all the *Mantras* chanted on this occasion, but selected just a representative few. In Vedic times, birth was not regarded as merely a family affair but an event of cosmic significance. Human birth was a part of the cosmic drama, and the birth of a son was important for the continuity of the Vedic tradition, which revolved mainly around men in those days. By the way, the child is fed butter and honey because these were considered symbols of wisdom.

The Young Boy Goes To A Guru...

I now skip the years and come to the time, in the Vedic era that is, when the young boy is accepted as a disciple by a *Guru*. This ceremony that brought the disciple close to the *Guru* was called *Upanayanam*. Swami says that the mother shows father to the child. The father then shows the *Guru* to the boy, and the *Guru* guides the boy to God. So really speaking, though in a worldly sense *Upanayanam* brings the boy closer to the *Guru*, the inner meaning is that *Upanayanam* is a step in going closer to God. The *Upanayanam* ceremony that we see these days is an adaptation of that ancient ritual.

In Vedic times, life was seen as a whole. Man, it was felt, is born not to enjoy and fritter away life but to serve a cosmic purpose as ordained by God. Man's primary duty is to adhere to, to sustain and to preserve *Dharma*. *Dharma* was given the utmost importance because without *Dharma*, Society would degenerate, and when Society degenerates, humanity itself could be in peril.

Following the path of *Dharma* calls for discipline in life and this is the discipline to which the young boy is initiated when admitted to the fold of a *Guru*. In a sense, the period that the boy spent at an *Ashram* with a *Guru* was a period of apprenticeship. If a modern analogy is required, this apprenticeship could be likened to the life of a cadet in a military school.

The *Guru* is also known as *Acharya*, meaning one who teaches by example; in this sense, the *Guru* is rather like an instructor in a military school who teaches by example how to march, how to hold the rifle and fire, etc.

The tradition followed in the initiation, and which has been adapted in the present-day *Upanayanam* ceremony also, is supposed to be based on the initiation undergone by the Lord when He came down as Vamana. On that occasion, it is said, that the gods and the goddesses themselves presented the various articles needed by the young Brahmin.

In that same spirit, the *Acharya* gives to the new entrant, a new garment, then a girdle, then the sacred thread, followed by a deerskin, and finally a staff to complete the proceedings. That is when the student is formally admitted to the fold and the *Acharya* accepts the boys as a disciple.

Some of you might wonder, as I did, whether the parents did not perform then the *Upanayanam* as is common these days. It seems that in those distant and prehistoric times, the father simply brought the young lad and left him in charge of the *Acharya*. The initiation was done by the *Acharya*, after he agreed to take the boy as a disciple in his *Ashram*.

How Does The Guru Initiate the Young Disciple?

Now to some of the *Mantras* chanted. We start with the presentation of the new garment by the *Acharya*. This garment symbolises the entrance of the boy to a new phase in life, and since the garment is supposed to be specially woven by the goddess, a prayer is offered to her by the teacher:

*May the goddess who spun,
Who wove and measured this garment,
Clothe you with long life!*

*Put on this garment endowed with life and strength.
As Brihaspathi clothed Indra in the garment of Immortality,
Even so I clothe you, with a prayer for long life
A good old age, strength, and splendour.*

*For your own well-being you have put on this garment.
You have become a protector of your friends,
Against the curses of men.
Live a hundred long years.
May you be noble, blessed with fullness of life,
Sharing generously your wealth.*

After this, a few more rituals, and then comes the sacred thread part. The *Acharya* places the thread around the boy and says:

*You are the sacred thread,
With the thread of sacrifice,
I initiate you.*

Next, some oblations in which water held in the palm of joined hands is poured. Now follows a question and answer session during which the *Acharya* formally ascertains the disciple's parentage and lineage and willingness to be a disciple. It starts off with the *Acharya* asking,

What is your name?

The disciple replies,

I am so and so.

This goes on and in the end, the *Acharya* says,

Declare yourself as a student

And the reply comes,

I am a student sir.

The *Acharaya* now declares,

*By the vivifying power of God Savitr,
With the strength of the two Asvins,
And with Pusan's aid,
I initiate you.*

After this the *Acharya* hands a piece of deer skin as a symbol of longevity and says,

*Put on this skin, so and so,
May the firm eye of Mitra,
Be a token of swiftness and self control.*

*May Aditi gird your loins
That you may know the Vedas,
That you may acquire insight and faith,
And retain what you have learnt,
That you may be endowed with goodness and shining purity.*

The *Acharya* now hands a staff to the disciple that is a symbol of the ascetic life the *Sishya* is embarking on. The disciple accepts it saying,

*This staff which is falling from the sky upon the earth,
I now take up with prayer for life,
With prayer for fullness of spirit,
And the splendour of Brahman.*

The teacher then says,

*Agni, I entrust this student to you,
Indra, I entrust this student to you,
Aditya, I entrust this student to you,
All Gods, I entrust this student to you,
So that he may have a long life,
So that he may acquire authority in all the Vedas,
So that he may achieve renown and happiness.*

After this, the *Acharya* says,

*Under my direction,
Your mind will follow my mind,
In my word you will rejoice with all spirit,
May Brihaspathi unite you with me.*

The Final Hymn – Gayatri Mantra

It is only after all this that the *Acharya* teaches the *Gayathri Mantra* to the disciple. The ritual ends with the spiritually rejuvenated disciple offering solemn prayer and promise to the sacred fire. He says:

*O Lord, the glorious One,
Make me glorious too.
Lord, you who are the custodian of sacrifice for the gods,
Even so may I be the custodian of Sacred Knowledge for men.*

*You, Lord, are the protector of bodies.
Protect my body.*

*You, Lord, are the giver of life.
Impart vigour to me.*

*Lord, what is imperfect in my body.
That Lord, restore to fullness.*

*May the God Savitr give me wisdom,
May the goddess Saraswati, give me wisdom,*

*May the two Divine Aswins, wreathed with lotus,
Give me wisdom.*

That is a very brief account of the elaborate and extended ritual associated with the initiation ceremony that launches the young disciple into apprenticeship with his *Acharya*. I apologize I am not able to provide right now, the Sanskrit rendering of the *Mantras* I have presented in English, drawing of course upon Panikkar's monumental volume.

Significance Of The Initiation Ritual

Now to some comments on the above. The first thing we have to note is that during the apprenticeship, the disciple or *Sishya* gets a thorough grounding in the *Vedas* from his *Acharya*. Learning the hymns and committing them to memory besides knowing how to chant them properly etc., is only part of the training. More important, the *Sishya* was expected to live like an ascetic, and in practical terms, that meant strict sense and mind control. Indeed, the various symbols like the girdle, the staff etc., are all associated with such regulation.

Why the sense and mind control? The answer is simple. By its very nature, the mind tends to wander and does so very easily. It takes some effort to focus the mind on something and retain that focus for an extended period of time. Concentration is not unusual; indeed, it is often necessary, especially when one is engaged in a complex task. A painter has to concentrate, a musician has to concentrate, a surgeon has to concentrate, and so on.

Concentration on a task associated with a profession is not all that difficult, but when it comes to concentrating and meditating on God, it is a different matter; the fickle mind is ever ready to wander. Yet, with effort, one-pointed attention on *Brahman* is possible.

Now why on earth was the poor boy made to do all this? For a very good reason. In Vedic society, it was the duty of the Brahmin to help people follow *Dharma*, develop love for God and so on. How could he do all that if he himself lacked discipline?

Discipline, the ancients realised, comes more easily when inculcated at a young age. In those days, attractions and distractions as we now know did not exist. So one would think that those boys should have had no problem with sense and mind control. In a sense that is true. But, as Ramakrishna Paramahansa points out, there are two attractions that can cause the downfall of any person in any age. As he puts it, they are *Kamini* and *Kanchan*, meaning woman and gold.

The attractions of sensual pleasures and wealth are present in every age, and the Vedic age was no exception. The Brahmin, for example, could easily start making money using his scriptural knowledge. Indeed the story of Adi Shankara and the grammarian that Swami often narrates is an example.

Just to remind you, when Shankara was going along with his disciples to the river Ganges for a morning bath, he saw a man furiously cramming the rules of Sanskrit grammar. When Shankara asked why the man was spending so much energy on learning grammar, the man replied he was doing so to become a scholar in King's court and earn, money acquire wealth and fame.

Vedic Society did not permit such misuse of knowledge. Knowledge was to be used solely for the benefit of Society and a Brahmin's main duty was to help people in following and abiding by *Dharma*.

The Vedic seers laid down norms of life and behaviour that to us might seem very demanding and even stifling. That is because in this day and age we are all tuned to personal achievement, sense gratification, acquisition and so on. Consumerism being the order of the day, what is undesirable is heavily marketed as the most desirable thing to have. However, when individual greed dominates, collective good has to perforce decline. Common good gets enhanced only when individuals sacrifice. Indeed, sacrifice is a constant undercurrent through the *Vedas*. As Krishna says, it is only through sacrifice that the individual can prosper. Society prospers only when individuals prosper. And it is only when Society prospers that the individual can enjoy real security, peace and happiness. So there is a kind of inter-linkage between man and Society, with sacrifice at the core.

I hate to use the word but something like Moral Socialism was advocated, so that everyone was guaranteed well being. Where the Brahmin was concerned, he not only had to rise above desires but also had to feel one with Creation and its Creator through adoration. The *Vedas* being full of such adoration, the Brahmin was expected to spend a lot of his time chanting the *Vedas*.

So how long does the disciple stay with his *Acharya*, and what happens after he has acquired a solid grounding in the *Vedas*? Well, he takes leave of his *Acharya*, and that is when the *Acharya* gives the farewell sermon, with *Matru Devo Bhava* etc., that I referred to in one of my earlier talks.

The Guru Fosters Righteousness and Righteousness Protects The Guru

One might wonder how on earth did the *Acharaya* provide for himself? This is a valid point, because here on earth, even a monk or a *Sannyasi* needs essentials like food, clothes etc., for sustaining himself. In ancient times, the disciple, obviously drawing from his parents, would make an offering to the *Guru* while leaving. This was called *Guru Dakshina*. The *Guru* was not expected to ask, but at the same time, the graduate disciple if I might use that term, was expected to make an offering. How much? No quantum was prescribed; rather, it was each according to his capacity.

Today we might wonder how at all can such a system work. Might not people cheat? Should not one prescribe the amount the student was supposed to give? Well, such concepts are the so-called blessings of modern Society. In Vedic Society, the *Acharya* did not make stipulations; instead, he had full faith that the Lord would take care of him and the good Lord always did because the *Acharya* was helping people to follow *Dharma*. As the saying goes, he who helps the cause of *Dharma* would be protected by that very same *Dharma*.

I think I had better wrap up this talk. Next time, I shall tell you what the disciple did after leaving the *Ashram*. But for now, let me recall an encounter I had with an unusual gentleman about seventeen years ago. This man was born and brought up in Bombay, and worked for sometime as an officer in bank. Later he came to Madras as Chennai used to be known in those days, and spent some time working for a well-known Finance company. One fine day, he just chucked his job. Why? Because he felt an overpowering urge to go around delivering spiritual discourses and narrate stories from the *Puraanas*.

God Takes Care...

I asked him why he felt like that, especially since he was all set to climb the corporate ladder. He replied that two things motivated him to change. First was that being a wandering minstrel spreading the good word was the family tradition. In his family, since no one in his generation followed that tradition having gone for well paying jobs, he felt that he must do something to preserve the family tradition.

Next, he said, spreading the spiritual message gave him a lot of joy. I then asked him the obvious question.

I said, "But you must eat! What about money?" And you know what he said in reply? He said, "Amazingly, I do not starve. Wherever I go, I do not ask for any money. I fulfil my speaking engagement as a call of duty but later, people spontaneously come forward and give me envelopes with small amounts of cash. It is not much, but enough for me to survive. Anyway, my wants are now very simple and I do not need much cash to sustain myself. The Lord is taking good care of me and I have no wants!"

Yes, this is exactly what I heard in this Kali age, not too long ago, to be precise in 1988. As long as the Sun shines, there would still be good and noble people walking on this earth, at least in this land, the birth place of the *Vedas*.

Thank you and Jai Sai Ram.

– Heart2Heart Team

SAI BABA AVATAR - A PERCEPTION

By Sri Anil V Gokak

My wife and I saw Baba for the first time in August 1969; we had accompanied our parents: Baba materialized a beautiful necklace for my wife and asked her to wear it; He said that He had performed our marriage afresh and gave the necklace as a present to mark the occasion! Then He materialized a big apple and asked my wife to eat it! My wife had a most thrilling experience.

Is Baba God?

Two important events brought about a qualitative change in my perception of Baba as God and Avatar. Very often I would wonder whether miracles were the only hallmark of divinity and whether the importance being given to them was disproportionate. One day, when my father had come to Mumbai, he told me how Baba compared His miracles to visiting cards, and that the miracles are only an introduction to Him. Then, around the year 1973, there was a fierce controversy on whether Baba was God or not. When some of the rationalists asked Baba whether He was God, He said, **“I am God, you are also God. The only difference between you and Me is, I am aware of My Divinity, whereas you are not.”** This struck a deep chord within me.

However, it was the subsequent events which proved to be the turning points. Baba blessed my wife in the mid-seventies that she would conceive and give birth to a son. These words proved to be benedictory and my wife gave birth to a son in September 1975.

Another incident which also took place in the mid-seventies further consolidated my belief. My mother was extremely unwell and my wife and I came down from New Delhi to Bangalore to look after her. She was suffering from severe pleurisy and the doctors had, on the basis of X-ray reports, opined that she would survive only for three months.

When the subject was broached with Baba, He gave her vibhuti and said that everything would be all right, and that no operation would be necessary. When the X-ray was taken again, the doctors said that the danger was no longer there. My mother lived for 18 long years thereafter!

These events were the landmarks of the first stage of my understanding of Baba. The miracles that He performed and the benefits that accrued to us because of them thus played an important role in convincing me about His divinity and avatarhood, at this stage.

‘I Give You What You Want’

The second stage of my understanding of Baba is related to the statement that Baba makes very often. He says that He gives us what we want; so that

we may want what He has come to I give us. I started pondering over the significance of the pronouncement. I began to feel that I should at least try to understand closely the working of the Sathya Sai organisations without necessarily being a full time or active participant in their programmes. Activities connected with Bal Vikas and Seva Dal now fascinated me. I could see the impact that these activities were having on the masses.

I realised, in particular, Baba's abilities to explain to the masses the most profound truths in the simplest of words. In simple language He explains the importance of inner faith as opposed to external rituals; the values of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa, as against the irrelevance of caste and creed. He is quite contemporaneous in His vocabulary as well as content. While emphasising the importance of inner faith and character, He gives the example of the car: the car moves only when the driver is able to move the inner wheel. The inner character and strength are to the human being what the inner wheel is to the car.

'I am Lokanath'

Baba has said, "I am *Lokanath* (Lord of the World) and not *Vyakthinath* (Lord of Individuals)" I started feeling that His role as *Lokanath* was like that of the saints and prophets in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who mingled and communicated with the masses to awaken their interest in spirituality. My perception of Baba as *Lokanath* was particularly strong between the mid-seventies and the eighties. The establishment in the early eighties of Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, a deemed university, added a new dimension to my perception of Baba as *Lokanath*.

The weightage given to human values in the syllabus and the emphasis on transforming the personality of the students, not just imparting information and knowledge to them, sent an unequivocal message. He is truly Lokanath!

From the year 1990 onwards, a new dimension appeared in my perception and understanding of Baba as *Lokanath* when Bhagavan Baba undertook massive projects such as the Sri Sathya Sai Super-specialty Hospital to cater to the medical needs of the people in rural areas, and the Drinking Water Supply Project for the drought prone region of Anantapur District. Baba extended the scope of the water supply project and has covered Mahaboobnagar and Medak Districts and also Chennai City under similar schemes. East Godavari and West Godavari Districts are also being covered under similar schemes now. Such schemes have not been taken up on such a large scale by any Non-Governmental Organisations in the country. **The compassion shown by Baba to the poor is unparalleled. This made me feel that Baba had come to serve *Daridranarayana*, the poorest of the poor.**

Between the years 1996 and 2000 another remarkable change occurred in my understanding of Baba's role as an avatar. I was posted as Secretary to the Department of Telecommunications, Government of India, in November 1996

and held that post till August 1998. I could experience first-hand the sweeping changes which were taking place all over the world due to the advance in telecommunications, and information technology which enabled people from different parts of the world to communicate much better with one another: however, the mindset of the human beings had not changed.

Though the temple and the mosque had indeed become an integral part of the landscape in many of the Western countries, there were the invisible walls that separated the people on the basis of race and colour in multi-racial societies that had emerged over the last few decades; there were no effective channels of communications among people belonging to different faiths. Apart from the individual and racial barriers, there were political barriers too, as the concept of the Nation-State was still fiercely active in all parts of the world. It was at this stage that Baba's message of world unity attracted me. I understood much better the significance of His message:

There is only one caste, the caste of humanity; there is only one religion, the religion of love; there is only one language, the language of the heart; and there is only one God, He is omnipresent. I would regard this as the third stage of my understanding of Baba, in which Baba's global approach to the question of spirituality unfolded itself vividly and intensely to me.

On my retirement in August 2000, I continued reading the Sai literature. The attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001 and the events that followed thereafter shook the whole world. Like many other friends of mine, I too brooded on the problems of terrorism and fundamentalism that show signs of ascendancy today and wondered what the solution to the problem could be.

I read Professor Huntington's book, *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order*, in order to get a better perspective of the global menace. On a thorough analysis of the global scenario, Prof. Huntington comes to the following conclusion:

In addition, as many have pointed out, whatever the degree to which they have divided humankind, the world's major religions - Western Christianity, Orthodoxy, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, and Judaism - all share key values in common. If humans are ever to develop a universal civilization, it will emerge gradually through the exploration and expansion of these commonalities.

This approach is conducive to world unity as it recognizes the underlying unity among all religions while respecting their diversities at the same time. The philosophy based on the pluralism is superior to the other philosophies based on exclusivism and inclusivism. Exclusivism, the idea that one's own way is the only true way may not be trivial as deep belief is central to any religious faith; however, if this logic is extended it means that all other religions are false and cannot be tolerated - the implications of this for humanity are dangerous. Inclusivism, the idea that there should be a single world religion or that one's own religion is sufficiently comprehensive to accommodate all others is also not workable as it does not respect diversities among the world

religions. All religions are deeply rooted in the respective geographies. A Muslim can never dissociate himself from Mecca nor can a Hindu from the Ganges.

Baba's Philosophy of Pluralism

At this stage, I realised that Baba, unlike the professors and intellectuals, does not merely theorize; **He translates His ideas into action by setting an example. Like a magnet He attracts people belonging to different faiths from different parts of the World. His is the philosophy of pluralism based on equal respect for all religions as exemplified in the Sarva Dharma emblem.** He wants all to follow their own religions and makes them better Hindus, better Christians, better Muslims, better Jews, better Buddhists, and better Jains.

What is stated above is best described in a book entitled, *A Catholic Priest Meets Sai Baba*, by Don Mario Mazzoleni, a Catholic priest from Italy, who narrates how he was excommunicated for writing a book, which, though it begins with the praiseworthy intent of seeking the action of the Spirit of God in every man and in every religious experience, ends up disavowing the truths of the Catholic faith; for, according to the Church, "the assertions moreover that accept Sai Baba's claim to be a divine incarnation, that defends His works, miracles, sayings and doctrines are grave affirmations against the faith." Don Mario Mazzoleni, on the other hand, said,

As the author of the book in question, I reaffirm that I have not lost my Catholic faith. On the contrary, after my encounter with the great "Indian Master" Sri Sathya Sai Baba, I feel that I live it with greater intensity in a spirit of real communion with all other religions. These all share the one goal of reaching the same and the only God, who transcends all changing names and forms.

The experience of the Catholic priest from Italy is indeed a moving one. It shows how he accepted the essence of Baba's teachings despite the heavy price he had to pay for such acceptance. It convinced me that Baba alone can save the world from a major catastrophe like the one that occurred in September 2001. This, I would say, marks the fourth stage of my understanding of Baba.

I have tried to delineate the four stages of my developing perception of the Sai Avatar. The more I see of Him, the more I feel and experience His inexplicability, and His 'Holy Dread'. I pray to Baba to give me greater insight and strength to understand Him and the complex cosmic phenomenon that He is.

Sri Anil V Gokak, a retired Officer of the Indian Administrative Service (Maharashtra cadre), is the Vice Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. He had held important positions in the Government of Maharashtra and later in the Government of India in various capacities such

as Secretary, Department of Telecommunications; Secretary, Department of Fertilizers.

Courtesy: Sai Sparshan

– Heart2Heart Team

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN GUATEMALA

By John Behner

The Republic Of Guatemala

Guatemala has a rich history and culture related to the Mayan Indians who have maintained their autonomous communities and have not intermarried with Spanish settlers.

There are over 4 million Mayan descendants using traditional methods of cultivation and managing their own legal system who live in this small Central American country located in the south of the continent of North America and flanked by the Pacific Ocean to its west and the Caribbean sea to its east.

The agricultural products of the Mayans are sold in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and southern Mexico, and are mostly vegetables. There are many rivers and lakes which the Mayans used to transport their produce to other villages.

The Mayans built large cities with pyramids up until about 600 AD when their culture was decimated due to infertility. The most famous Mayan centre is Tical where there are several impressive pyramids. Now Guatemala has a population of 12.7 million with 3 million in Guatemala City. Of this population, one-third are descendants of the Mayan Indians, living in rural communities.

Modern day Guatemala enjoys an economy which is mostly agricultural, with sugar cane, coffee, and meat products making up the major part of exports. There are several tourist attractions such as Antigua, where there were over 30 churches and convents when the colonial capital was located there in the early 1700s. Chichicastanango, a Mayan town is also on every tourists' list of places to see.

The Sai Movement In Guatemala

When did Swami arrive? Well He was always there, but people started to discover Him about 1975.

Nassin Michaan, a business man, traveled to India in the year 1974, and saw Sai Baba for the first time. He became a frequent visitor, quite possibly the most frequent visitor from the west. His friend, Augusto Ansueto, and his wife Balbina opened the first Sai Center in their home in 1979. Augusto had a business of making rubber stamps, and he also gave his customers free handouts and told many of them about Sai Baba. His store was like a public relations point for people interested in knowing more about Sai. After a visit by Indra Devi, the famous yoga teacher, to Guatemala, many other centers were opened in four zones of the city.

Amazing Transformation Of A Drunk

About this time a very strange incident occurred. There was a very dignified university professor who later became the rector of the national university who would take a stroll everyday, and during his walk, he would come across a drunk who was lying by the sidewalk. He would carefully detour this drunken fellow so as not to have any unpleasant encounter. This went on for a few years until one day he found to his surprise that the drunken fellow, was standing up, dressed and shaved, wearing white clothes. He couldn't believe his eyes! So he asked the fellow what had happened. He was told that God was alive on earth in the form of Sathya Sai Baba, and that his life had been transformed into the life of this now aspiring devotee. The professor, now had his curiosity pricked, and decided to find out more about Sai Baba. He too became a devotee, as well as all of his family, and one granddaughter has started a Sai School as we will read about as we go on.

Returning to the visit of Indra Devi, the devotees had rented a diplomatic residence for her visit and talks. Devotees were singing bhajans and the room was packed. A fellow from Nicaragua was walking by on the street and heard the bhajans and stuck his head in the door. Sai Baba stepped out of His photograph in the front of the room and motioned to the man, called Norman Cuadra, to enter and come to Him. Norman walked up the path in the centre of the room which was the only space open, and then Sai Baba moved His hand and made vibuthi for Norman.

Norman did not have anything to put the vibuthi in except the celofane wrapper from his cigarette package. So he put the vibuthi there, although he did not know what it was, and retired from the gathering. No one saw this except Norman.

However, Norman was very much overcome by the experience, and the next day he found a book, *The Man of Miracles*, in a book shop and bought it. He spent the next 5 hours in a park reading the book.

He was sitting in the sun, and someone came up to him and asked why he was sitting in the sun when there were plenty of shady trees nearby. At this he was stirred from his reading and decided to return to the house where he had seen Sai Baba the day before.

When he got there and asked for Sai Baba, he was told that this was a diplomatic residence which the Sai Baba Organization had rented for the day, but they had no more information. Norman returned to Nicaragua without finding anyone else who knew about Sai Baba.

Returning to the reformed alcoholic, he decided to put a Sai Centre in his house although there was not much space. However, over the years, he has been able to build a beautiful centre on a second floor over his home. All of his family have become Sai devotees, and all of his children were in Bal Vikas at one time. Many are now grown and hold leadership positions in the Sai Organization.

In a village in the north of Guatemala, a Sai School was started by the Calderon family in Huehuetanango. The school had six grades and was free for the students, many were children of Indians and farmers from the area. Other schools in the town asked Maria Calderon, the director, to train their teachers, as the students at the Sai School were so much better disciplined and more polite than other students. The school has the colours of Prashanti Nilayam.

Champaign Reflection

General Carlos Arana Osorio was the president of Guatemala from 1972 to 1978, and in 1990, he became the president of the coordinating committee of the Sai Organization of Guatemala. On a visit to Prashanti, just prior to celebrating his 50th wedding anniversary, Swami called Carlos and his wife for an interview. During the interview, Carlos invited Swami to attend his wedding anniversary in Guatemala. Swami said, oh yes, He would be there. They waited expectantly during the anniversary celebration, but were disappointed when Swami did not turn up.

But then when the photos of the anniversary were developed, to their surprise and joy, Swami's image appeared lying down inside a Champaign glass in Carlos' hand. This photo was later exhibited in the old EHV building where Radio Sai Global Harmony is now located. Swami came to see the exhibit and pointed out His image in the glass, and told the story to those who were with Him at that moment including Sri Indulah Shah and the author.

Swami Guides The Sai School

In 1998, the parents of Lucilla Rodriguez, granddaughter of the professor spoken of earlier, gave her the money for a trip to India. Instead of spending the money for a trip to India, she spent the money to furnish a small school, which was to become the School of Sathya Sai Human Values of Guatemala. She has been adding a grade every year and now has 110 students including 7th graders. But one problem exists. The house where the school started is now too small. The playground is on the roof. Before starting 7th grade she wanted word from Swami if she should continue adding grades. In a dream, Swami told her to continue adding grades, so now she has 7th grade too. But where will Swami put all these children? That is the question which is waiting for an answer. The parents are very much interested that their children should continue, not only because it is a free school, but because the children have changed so much for the better.

On the 28th of October, 2004 the Institute of Sathya Sai Education was set up in Guatemala to carry the Sai Education Mission to the next higher level. On the same day, a Sathya Sai Baba centre also was inaugurated in Zone 9 of Guatemala City. There are 6 centers and groups in Guatemala City with service activities almost every day of the week. There are 4 Sai medical clinics with medicine and the consultation free of charge. There have been several public meetings, one was attended by over 800 people. As many as 40% of the population have heard about Sai Baba.

Many have the mistaken belief that only the wealthy people from overseas are able to visit Sai Baba in India because the airfare is so expensive. However, this is not true. One devotee of very nominal income, has won in the national lottery, not once, but twice, and this has permitted him to visit Swami on both occasions.

Wake Up!

Another person, who is a male army nurse, from a rural town, who did not even have a bank account, was assigned to look after General Carlos Arana, after he had suffered a broken hip. His first day of duty at the General's home, was not difficult, but that night when he went to bed, he was awakened by Swami personally. Jose, the nurse, was afraid, and pulled the covers over his head, but Swami pulled them off again, and just stood looking at him, then disappeared.

In the morning, Jose did not say anything to Carlos, but he was not very happy at his new post. The next night the same thing happened. Swami pulled off his cover in the middle of the night. Rather frightened, Jose again tried to pull the cover over his head only to have it pulled off again. In the morning Jose told Carlos that he was leaving. He said that the person in the pictures all over the house was bothering him in the night and would not let him sleep. Carlos asked what had happened, and then told Jose that there were millions of people around the world who would love to have such an experience.

He convinced Jose to stay and to read a book about Sai Baba. Then after a couple of months, Carlos asked Jose to accompany him to India to help with the wheelchair. Jose was able to get all the visas, and traveled with Carlos and his son to India. One day Swami called Carlos for an interview. Jose pushed his wheelchair up to Swami's door, and was going to leave when Swami invited him inside. Jose had a private interview with Swami in which Swami spoke only Spanish, and the next day they had another interview, and again Jose had another private interview with Swami and all in Spanish. He received a medal from Swami. Now Jose says he wants to be a devotee, but he is not sure if he is worthy of being called one. So no matter what a person's economic status or position in the society is, nobody knows when the divine wire-puller will pull the strings and string you to Him for ever.

The Sai Movement in Guatemala is interesting and inspiring. Sai works in mysterious ways and thanks to His grace and love, there is lot of Sai inspired work being done in this Central American country. Though small in size, the inspiration this country gives to others is huge.

– Heart2Heart Team

H2H is grateful to Gene Massey who has been painstakingly taking pictures of the Sai Mission in different countries and selflessly sharing them with us.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

PART-18

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT THREE - SCENE 1

It is 23rd November, 1926; Monday in the holy month of Kartik. It is an auspicious day when Lord Siva is worshipped and at Kondama Raju's house worship of Lord Siva is in progress.

Meanwhile, Easwamma is in a room inside closeted with ladies. She is having labor pains. Everyone is anxiously awaiting the birth of the baby. This includes Kondama Raju and Venkama Raju.

V.RAJU: It is half an hour since Kamamma told us that Easwamma's labor pains have started.

K.RAJU: Venkamma, today is Monday in the month of *Kartik*. It is an auspicious day on which people worship Lord Siva in the temple.

Subbamma comes to the Raju house, to be of assistance at the time of the birth of the baby.

V.RAJU: Subbamma, you have come at the right time! Please go inside.

SUBBAMMA: I will, thank you.

Subbamma goes into the room where Easwamma is.

SUBBAMMA: Easwamma, here is sacred *Prasaadam*, take it.

A little later the cry of a baby is heard. Everyone is very happy.

V.RAJU: Listen! That is the cry of the baby!
A lady comes out of the bedroom.

LADY: *[to Kondama]* Sir, a grandson has been born.

K.RAJU: Venkama, did I not tell you that you will get a son and I will get a grandson? This grandson is no ordinary one but the very embodiment of God. Venkamma, Parvathi, Seshama Raju! Won't you get some sweets for Grandfather?

VENKAMMA: As you say, Grandpa. We want to see our brother.

K.RAJU: Certainly.

V.RAJU: Father, is there anything sweeter than your words?

K.RAJU: The year is *Akshaya*, the month is *Kartik*, the day is Monday, and the star is *Arudra*. A jewel has been born in the Ratnakara family. The Lord of the Universe has Himself taken birth here! The world is going to prosper and be happy!

SCENE 2

A few days pass. The child is given a ceremonial bath and made ready for the naming ceremony. The baby boy is brought to Kondama Raju.

K.RAJU: *[holding the baby in his hand]* Treating Him as a gift of Lord Sathya Narayana, we shall name Him Sathanarayana Raju.

Sometime later. The baby is in the cradle. Easwamma comes there and looks admiringly at the baby. Suddenly she sees a wonderful and remarkable Divine glow around the infant. She is amazed and dazed. Meanwhile, Subbamma comes to her house and calls from outside, but Easwamma fails to hear her calls.

SUBBAMMA: Easwamma, Easwamma. *[She waits; no response; calls out again]*, Easwamma!

E.AMMA: *[finally responds]* Coming Subbamma!

SUBBAMMA: I had to call for you three times! You are looking only at the child but not in my direction. Did you not hear me? Are you so much enchanted by the child?

E.AMMA: I saw a Divine Aura around the head of the baby. While I was gazing at it, it disappeared. I was engrossed and perhaps that's the reason why I did not hear you.

SUBBAMMA: Easwamma, Sathya is no ordinary child. Born on a Monday in the month of *Kartik*, this child is another form of Shiva.

E.AMMA: Subbamma, don't tell anyone about this aura. People may start feeling jealous, and also cast evil eyes on the child. Isn't it a fact that all tongues and all eyes are not alike?

SUBBAMMA: Yes, yes, that is true. Oh, I forgot the purpose for which I came here. See, I have made this silk dress for Sathya.

E.AMMA: It is very nice, Subbamma. You love Sathya so much.

SUBBAMMA: There is no one who does not love Sathya.

END OF ACT 3 SCENE 2

(To be continued)

GITA FOR CHILDREN

Part 20

Chapter – 8

(continued from the last issue)

19. 'I now wish to tell you something about Creation and the Dissolution of the Universe, and the cycle of birth and death that takes place within it.'

20. 'As a part of My never-ending Cosmic Drama, I create the Universe, let it run for a while, and then dissolve it. I then recreate it and later dissolve it once more. This goes on and on. This is all a part of My *Leela* or Divine Sport.'

21. 'At the time of Creation, everything issues forth from Me, and at the time of dissolution everything comes back into Me.'

22. 'The birth of the Universe occurs at what might be called the Cosmic Dawn and the dissolution occurs when Cosmic Night sets in.'

23. 'Don't imagine that the duration between dawn and nightfall is twelve hours. Where the Universe is concerned, this time span is billions of years.'

24. 'Between Dissolution and the next Creation all the withdrawn beings are kept in a state of suspended animation as it were. They emerge once more when the next cycle of Creation occurs.'

25. 'You will of course appreciate that though Universes might come and go, I go on forever. Once again I repeat that there is nothing beyond Me and I am what philosophers refer to as the Ultimate Ultimate.'

26. 'Turning now to the living beings, there are, as you know, millions of species. These have emerged as the result of a complex evolutionary process. It all might seem to have happened "quite naturally." So it appears to those who do not enquire in depth. The wise know that every single aspect of evolution is a part of My Master Plan. There is nothing random about it, though it might seem so.'

27. 'There are actually three strands of evolution in the Universe. The first is the strand that relates to the evolution of inanimate matter. It is as a result of this evolution that you have planets, stars, mountains, etc.'

28. 'The second strand is connected with the origin of life and the evolution of species. Among the living species there is a distinct hierarchy. The plants are at the bottom. They cannot move about, have to feed themselves from the word go, and have no nervous system.'

29. 'After the plants come the animals. They have a nervous system and also a brain, but with limited capacity. At the top of the to the pole is man. He is superior in every conceivable way.'

30. 'Man is superior not merely in terms of brain capacity and creativity but because he alone can reach high levels of Consciousness. He alone can recognise God within, and it is on account of that he can exhibit Divine qualities and virtues.'

31. 'In fact, there is something very interesting here. Though time is short, I cannot skip a reference to this. Arjuna, I wish to call attention to three important and inter-related things: Conscious, Conscience, and Consciousness. Presently I shall explain what these are, and you had better pay careful attention.'

32. 'Being Conscious means being aware of the external world. Not only man but even animals have this capability. After Conscious comes Conscience. This, one might say, is the Voice of God within. It is through the Conscience that the Indweller speaks.'

33. 'Obviously, animals do not have a Conscience. For them there is no such thing as right or wrong. But for humans there is, and that is why God in His Mercy speaks from within. That Voice of God is the Conscience. In other words, man can listen to God speaking to him from within.'

34. 'This Conscience is one aspect of the Universal Consciousness that is another name for the Omnipresent God. This Truth is not evident to ordinary mortals who may be good in their own way and listening to their Conscience. But when Wisdom dawns, they become aware that Conscience or Individual Consciousness as one might call it, is the same as the Universal Consciousness.'

35. 'This Truth is described in the *Vedas* through the statement: *Prajnanum Brahma*, meaning that the Individual and Universal Consciousness are one and the same. There is another Vedic declaration that also asserts that the Self within is the same as the Universal Self, meaning the same God resides in all. This says: *Ayam Atma Brahma*, which essentially means that the God within and without are one and the same.'

36. 'This Universal Consciousness is Supreme. It is that which is also called the *Atma*, God, etc. This I have told you before but since the point is important, I stress it again.'

37. 'The *Atma* or the Universal Consciousness is the source of Creation. In the entities in Creation, aspects of this Universal Consciousness show up in a limited manner in the lower species. In animals, for example, it shows up merely as the ability to be conscious of the world outside.'

38. 'In humans it manifests additionally as the Conscience within that acts as the guide to life. But if the human is evolved, he attains the state of what may

be called Constant Integrated Awareness. That is the person sees God everywhere, in everything, and all the time. In other words, he becomes one with the Universal Consciousness.'

39. Arjuna asks, ' Krishna, could I put it this way? In life one must first be Conscious of one's Conscience and from there rise to the level of Universal Consciousness?'

40. Expressing delight, Krishna exclaims, 'Arjuna, that's great! You are now beginning to get the hang of things. Good show indeed and keep it up!'

(To be continued)

– Heart2Heart Team

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

CREATING NEW LIVES....THROUGH SERVICE

THE SRI SATHYA SAI VOCATIONAL CENTRE FOR WOMEN IN CHENNAI

When we come across someone who needs our help it warms our heart to do so. Normally such help is of a temporary nature. But imagine if the help rendered would give the receiver skills which would change their lives for the better for ever, help that will last their entire lifetime. Now that is divinely inspired help. The seva carried out at the Sri Sathya Sai Vocational Centre for Women in Chennai is such an example.

If I would have not reached this centre I would have lost a golden opportunity. I feel very confident, which I was terribly lacking in before. All the members here are so affectionate to me that I forget about my house after coming here.

The Philosophy of The Vocational Centre

This is what an old student, Ms. Bhuvanewari, movingly conveys while talking about the centre. Opened in March, 2001, in the Chennai Metro, west district, this unique Vocational Training Centre's aims have been to lift ladies out of economic hardship, to make them money earners, to give them vocational job skills and to grant them the gift of self confidence along the way. The project has been receiving exclusive and continuous help from the Sai Organisation and the Tamil Nadu state president, N Ramani, explaining to H2H a little about the philosophy saying,

The value based training they receive not only makes them better mothers and good housewives but also better citizens. The centre is a great boon given by our Lord to the mahilas (ladies) to serve economically weaker women and to guide them to lead a happy, healthy, economically and morally clean and comfortable life.

"They Treated Me as Their Daughter" - Subeena

It is indeed a divinely inspired temple of learning, offering life saving assistance as we learn from Ms. Subeena, another happy alumni, who says,

"My family has 7 members, and father is reluctant to go for any job. My sisters and brothers are all younger than me. After completing my higher secondary I was in a confused state and didn't know what to do. At that time somebody informed me about the Vocational centre run by the Sathya Sai Seva Organization for the economically weaker sections.

I immediately joined in their secretarial course. **I was very happy to be a student there. The teaching staff and all the other members treated me as their daughter. They were very kind to me and taught me lots of moral values about our life."**

All the students have their lives transformed for the better by a multitude of vocational training courses, and everything here is imparted at absolutely no cost. So far, 80 ladies have received instruction giving them self-reliance and vital help out of poverty. One old student of the centre tells H2H, **“I feel very useful now. The amount of self confidence I got after coming here is beyond description.”**

A Variety Of Vocational Courses

So what exactly are the courses that are imparted in this centre? The most popular course at the centre is tailoring. The students stitched over 6,000 tricolour bags which were distributed, on Swami's instruction, to the Bal Vikas students on His 80th birthday at Prashanti Nilayam. The students also stitched more than 2000 *jubl*as (shirts) which were given out by the various samithies on Easwaramma day.

The ladies are paid to do this work and also receive regular orders from Sai devotees to stitch clothes. The students take examinations, and if they successfully pass, acquire a certificate. Thus, when they leave they are able to find enough work to receive a good wage. To further assist them, the centre has donated sewing machines to 35 ladies so that they can get started in their tailoring work. Bhuvaneswari, an old student of the tailoring course, tells us how the centre has transformed her life,

“I am living in a house constructed by the slum clearance board. My father is a watchman. I tried to study hard but I was not successful in completing my 10th. Somebody informed me about this centre and I joined the tailoring section, successfully completing my tailoring course. The centre presented me with a tailoring machine and with the help of this machine I am able to stitch garments for my neighbours on payment. I feel very useful now.”

The second most popular course is secretarial training. This covers typewriting, accountancy, spoken English MS office automation in computer science and the PABX telecom telephone operation course. There are 10 typewriters and 2 state-of-the-art computers in the service of the centre's students. The shorthand classes in English use Swami's quotations and teachings and follow Swami's Educare principles. Around 20 students have undergone the training and have passed out successfully according to the DOTE exam standard. All students passed out 1st class in typing and in MS Automation and by Swami's Grace every one of the centre's students are now placed in good jobs, such as Ms. Subeena,

“I completed the secretarial course successfully with the grace of Bhagawan. Today I am working in the ICICI bank; this job was also due to the recommendation of a member of the organization. At present I am doing well. I am the only breadwinner in my family. Whatever changes which have taken place in my life are due to the blessings of Bhagawan, and the hard selfless efforts of the teaching staff of the centre. This is a great experience in my life and it is a boon for my family.”

Ms. Vasumathi is part of the same success story.

“I am a daughter of a vegetable vendor living in a small hut in T. Nagar area. After completing my plus II examination I was blank about my future. At that time I came to know about the centre and I joined in the secretarial course. After coming here I was surprised to find that this institute teaches everything free of cost and the people around here are so kind and understanding. I felt at home. I informed my parents about this and they were also very happy. I came to know about the teachings of Bhagawan, and the amount of mercy He has for less privileged people. **My self confidence developed. I completed the course successfully and at present I am working as an accounts clerk to an auditor receiving a good salary. I will never forget this experience in my life. I am ever indebted to Bhagawan for giving me this opportunity.**”

Candle making is another course on offer. Eight varieties of colourful candles are made with different moulds. The students who have undergone this training are making candles at home and selling them to nearby shops and neighbours. Ms. Bhuvanewari tells H2H,

“I learnt candle making for which they presented me with the candle preparing mould, and with the help of this I am able to supply candles for the shops. This has added to my earnings.”

The students also make agarbathi (incense) sticks. The total output is 800 boxes per month. This is all done by the seva dals and active workers and the finished product is exclusively supplied to Sundaram Sai Centre, Chennai.

The yoga and beauty course is very popular among the students. The duration of this course is for six months and there are presently six students proficient in yoga who can demonstrate the asanas to the new pupils.

The screen printing course teaches the students the art of creating beautiful colourful letterheads, envelopes, visiting cards, hand outs etc. The equipment and training has been imparted by experts in the subject.

Some of the ladies take instruction in printing. With the addition of the “Baby offset” multicolour printer the production work has increased manifold. Sundaram Sai Centre has requested thousands of booklets and the ladies are very happy to be part of the work disseminating Swami’s teachings. They also print cardboard boxes for packing the agarbathis.

Practical Skills Coupled With Spiritual Activities

Of course, as well as the practical skills that are imparted, the centre also holds regular Bhajan singing, Veda chanting classes and spiritual instruction. In fact, it is a wonderful conduit for the Sai Mahila Seva Dals to be instruments in Swami’s hands and to pass on His love and wisdom.

Every day the centre's activities start with Bhajans and end with Mangalaharathi. A facet of Swami's teachings is explained to the students, who are very enthusiastic and wish to learn something new every day!

The aim of the class is to instill Swami's principles to the students so that they can be good citizens and compassionate human beings. Every Thursday they attend a study circle where, among other topics, they learn Suprabhatham, and Ashtothram. The Bhajan mandali has 25 participants. Bhajans are conducted every Tuesday from 11 to 12. Ms. Subeena, an old student, says that

"I used to attend the Bhajans and Spiritual lectures held at the centre and came to know about Swami. This was a sea change for me from the distressful atmosphere which I was experiencing at home. "

The ladies also help in cleaning Sundaram Sai Centre and participate in Gramaseva. They attend weekly Veda classes and are able to chant the sacred Sanskrit verses to a very good standard. One participant, Ms. Bhuvaneshwari, comments:

"Above all this, I am able to sing Bhajans, and I have witnessed in my life the mercy Bhagawan has shown on people like us."

These Students Also Serve...

Eight students rendered service in Parthi during the October period. The mandali also runs a Bal Vikas class which 15 boys and girls attend.

It is heart warming to see the mothers who are students at the centre bringing their children to the class every Saturday, confident that at least here their little ones will learn meaningful subjects in a loving atmosphere.

Mrs. Savitha, a former student who now has a tailoring shop of her own, tells H2H with so much satisfaction and joy how her life has now changed beyond all recognition.

"I am married and my husband who was stitching posters and doing some odd jobs was not satisfied with the income. So I wanted to help him. At this juncture I was informed about this centre. I learnt Tailoring, completed the course and they presented me with a tailoring machine.

For some days I was taking orders from the neighbours and slowly my confidence developed. Now at present with the blessings of Bhagawan I have opened a tailor shop named Sai's Needle Art, at Nungumbakkam. The thing which cannot be believed has taken place in my life. Thanks a lot to this centre which I treat this as my mother's house. I can never forget this experience in my life."

Thus, the centre, inspired by Sai, stands as a grand beacon of hope to ladies suffering from poverty and hardship. It lifts them from their disadvantaged

state and helps them attain a foothold where they can gain self respect and self confidence. And once they acquire confidence, opportunities beckon and they shine resplendently reflecting His love, His Grace and Compassion. How fulfilling a journey it is both for the served and the one who serves!

*The address of the Sri Sathya Sai Vocational Centre for Women is:
No. 1, Paul Appasamy Street , 7 Nagar, Chennai 17, Ph: Chennai 8257705.*

– Heart2Heart Team

PRASHANTI DIARY

CHRONICLES OF HEAVEN ON EARTH

A SPECIAL REPORT FROM SWAMI'S ABODE IN BRINDAVAN

It was a pleasing time, it was a heavenly time, but all good things had to come to an end. After a very special and enchanting 15-day stay in Kodaikanal, Swami left this place of enchanting beauty on April 23rd and flew for His summer residence of Brindavan, in the suburbs of Whitefield, Bangalore. There is so much to share with you about the wonderful happenings in Kodai Kanal that we have decided to have a series of articles on Kodai Kanal entitled "With The Lord In The Mountains" starting from the next issue. In every issue from July, you will get a drop of the Divine Nectar that was Swami's visit to Kodai. Also if you have not seen the photo Album of this issue, we have some enchanting snaps of Bhagawan in Kodai Kanal and this time the Photo Album is really unique because it is dynamic. We will be changing the Photo Album with a fresh set of nine pictures everyday almost till the end of June. So you are going to get immersed with Sai in the sylvan surroundings of Kodai Hills. For now, we continue to report on His activities during His stay in Brindavan after He returned from Kodai Kanal.

No sooner did He settle in, and then it was time for a celebration. "Trayee Brindavan", Swami's Divine Abode in Brindavan had been inaugurated on April 26th, 1984; so it was time for a special remembrance - the celebration of its 22nd anniversary.

APRIL 26TH: "TRAYEE DAY" CELEBRATIONS IN BRINDAVAN, BANGALORE

The Morning Programme

Every year, this anniversary is traditionally celebrated with great fervour with *bhajans* and *Narayan Seva* on April 26th if Swami is resident in Brindavan.

The morning started as usual, with the Divine *darshan*. The entire dais had been well decorated with floral garlands and wreaths even at such short notice as Swami had only returned a couple of days earlier from Kodaikanal. The early morning celebrations started on an auspicious note with *Mangala Vadhyam* (*Nadaswaram* music) by a bunch of dedicated musicians in front of Trayee Brindavan. The public were treated to a delightful mix of *bhajans* sung by the Institute students who had sacrificed their holidays and elected to spend it with the Lord. After about an hour of *bhajans*, *mangala arathi* was taken and *prasadam* was distributed to one and all.

ut the morning's festivities did not end there. More was on the agenda, which however most of the public did not get to see. As Swami was returning to His residence, the Bangalore *Seva Dal* obtained His blessings to do *Narayana Seva* (distribution of *prasadam* - a sumptuous plate of *sambar* rice and *sakarra pongal* - sweet rice - to the underprivileged) and *vastra dhanam*

(giving of clothes to the needy) to benefit about 400 persons from the neighbourhood.

Another tradition that is not normally visible to the public is that on this day the students and some of the staff resident in Brindavan decorate a portion of the garden in front of the Divine Abode. Swami usually spends some time viewing these decorations when He returns after the morning *darshan*, and also poses for photographs with the boys who had laboured through the previous night to win His approval.

Every year the theme varies. This year the theme was “Garden of Love” – a specially decorated chair was laid for Swami in the centre and a circular “garden” was laid around it with a decorated entrance and a back-drop.

Swami entered this circular garden, cut a cake that the boys had prepared for Him and posed for the coveted photographs. Thus the morning celebrations came to a close.

The Afternoon Programme

In the afternoon, a programme of devotional songs was presented by the *mahilas* (ladies) of the Brindavan Bhajan Group.

This *bhajan* group has a hoary history and was started in December 1968, soon after Swami’s return from East Africa, and they started singing *bhajans* under the mango tree inside Swami’s residence at that time. Later on Ugadi day – March 19, 1969, the official Brindavan Bhajan Group, started *bhajan* singing – on Thursdays and Sundays when Swami is resident in Brindavan. When Swami is not physically in Brindavan, the *bhajans* are sung on Sundays. Presently the Brindavan Group consists of 100 singers and accompanists, out of which 57 are ladies and the other 43 are gents.

The ladies’ programme, containing songs of praise to Swami in many Indian languages, started with an obeisance to Mother Easwamma with the Hindi song *Janam Diya*. This song offers salutations to Mother Easwamma for conferring on us the boon of the Sai *Avathar*.

This was followed by a Kannada song called *Prema Swaroopa Hey Jagannatha*. This song goes thus – “Oh! Embodiment of Love; salutations to You. You are the Lord of the temple of our hearts; we are like the dust of Your Holy Feet. Relieve us Sai Krishna from the bondage of birth and death”.

Kantrinile Varum Geetam, a Tamil song expressed the sentiment - What in this world has the power to melt a stone, to breathe life into a dying tree and to mesmerize all the birds and beasts. Only the divine music from Sai Krishna’s flute can inspire such wonders.

Saans Saans Mein a Hindi song exhorted the Lord to help us remember Him with every breath; the Sanskrit *Dheera Sameera Yamuna Theere* expressed a prayer to keep us away from all that keeps us away from You; singing the

glory of Sai with the Malayalam *Brindavanathille Sai* which says that Your enchanting *darshan* as Brindavana Sai Krishna makes us forget ourselves.

Sundarathe Dhyana in Marathi asks dear Swami to let Your beautiful form be ever affixed in our hearts and Your sacred name for ever be on our lips.

Adivo Alladivo Srihari Vaasamu (in Telugu) said that Trayee Brindavan is the sacred abode of Sai Srihari, chanting Your divine Name is incomparable to any worldly wealth.

The ladies finally expressed gratitude to Swami in Hindi with *Kaise Bataayein* – Bhagavan, how can we express our good fortune for we are here with You dear Lord. Innumerable are our follies, but Your mercy exceeds them all. None so high or low, we are all one in the Kingdom of Sai. We express our gratitude Swami, for accepting us at Your Lotus Feet.

After this *arathi* was taken and the formal programme in Sai Ramesh Hall concluded with the distribution of *prasadam*.

But the evening's programme was not yet over! Two years ago, on April 26th, 2004, Swami graciously acceding to the prayers of the devotees had permitted *Deepalankara* of Trayee Brindavan, i.e. nearly a lakh (100,000) candles were lit all over the *ashram* campus – in front of Trayee, Sai Ramesh Hall, the Kalyana Mantap, the space in front of the two Hostels, the Guest Houses as well as the pathways along the Residential Blocks.

On that occasion hundreds of devotees participated in the lighting of the candles with great love and reverence, and Swami also responded by driving around Trayee, showering His Grace on one and all.

In continuing with that tradition, this year too, later in the evening after the Sun had gone down, "*Sai Akhanda Jyothi*" was alight with thousands of candles – in and around Trayee and all around the *Ashram* complex. All the devotees – both men and women – participated in lighting the candles. The entire *Ashram* campus was aglow with the light from the thousands of candles and also the multi-coloured electric light bulbs. All who had the fortune to be present and witness the grand spectacle of the illuminated Brindavan felt that this was indeed the "Bhooloka Vaikuntham" or Heaven on Earth!

Swami came out in the balcony late during the evening and sat for a few minutes witnessing the lights from all sides and giving a special *darshan* to all those who were waiting for Him after lighting the *jyothis*.

April 27TH 2006: A STUDENT SPEAKS TO THE CROWD

It was the first Thursday after Swami had returned from Kodaikanal. An expectant crowd had collected to sing *bhajans* and spend this holy day in the divine presence. After listening to the *bhajan* singing for a few minutes Swami blessed Sri Sanjay Mahalingam, a student pursuing his Ph.D. in Management

in the Prashanti Nilayam campus of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (SSSIHL) to address the crowd.

Sri Sanjay opined that only God can give us true, absolute and unsullied love. The love that knows only to say “Yes, Yes, Yes”. He said that to seek God is the only purpose of life and to attain God is the culmination of life. A wise man has only one desire to become one with God. Raising the question “Who is God?” - he answered that the only God that ever exists is our own, true self. We should hence pursue who we are till we attain the realization that we are the subject and not the object. Quoting extensively from the *shastras*, Sri Sanjay showed that all problems stem from false identification with the body.

After this brief but well received speech, Swami blessed some of the students of the Sai Mirpuri College of Music to sing some Meera *bhajans*. The boys sang three haunting *bhajans* for the crowd: *Mere to Giridhar Gopal*, *Payoji maine Ram rathan dhan payo*, and *Krishna, Krishna darshan dijo aaj pyaare*. They ended this concert with the popular group song *Hum ko tumse pyar hai*.

MAY 2ND: A DIVINE DISCOURSE

Unexpected and inexplicable are the ways of the Lord. Seeing the devotion with which the people of Bangalore had received Him on his return to the city, the Lord felt moved to address them. So an announcement was made a day prior that Swami would be addressing everyone on the evening of May 2nd at 4 PM. A very big crowd had collected to listen to this unexpected but very welcome benedictory message from our dear Lord.

Swami first blessed Sri Sanjay Sahni, Principal of the Brindavan campus of the SSSIHL, to address the crowd prior to His Divine Discourse.

Sri Sanjay Sahni said that coming to Bhagavan is like a homecoming. The greatest adventure in life is to seek God, and the greatest fulfilment in life is to attain Him. Just as we mark our progress in a journey by the milestones we pass, in the spiritual journey of life too we have several milestones, milestones that Bhagavan has beautifully elaborated as *Salokyam*, *Sameepyam*, *Saroopyam* and *Sayujyam*.

Sa means divine. Hence *Salokyam* refers to the divine *loka* (planet). Sri Sahni said that once the late Dr. Hislop asked Swami what the 14 lokas are. Swami replied that the 14 *lokas* are the 14 levels of thought – 7 levels of thought towards the divine and 7 levels of thought away from the divine.

Sri Sahni further added, “*If we think of Bhagavan, we are in His presence. How much of our thoughts we give to Him? In the beginning even 10 minutes may take a lot of effort, but with persistent practise soon our thoughts flow naturally towards Him*”. He then said that the next stage is *Sameepyam* or proximity of the Lord. If you want to have *sannidhi* (nearness) of the Lord, you must participate in His mission. The third stage is *Saroopyam*, the stage of dearness to the Lord when you acquire His characteristics. This was the stage reached by Bharatha, who contemplated so deeply on the Lord when Sri

Rama was in exile for 14 years, that He looked just like Him and the people of Ayodhya could not differentiate between them. In conclusion, Sri Sanjay said that even *Saropyam* is duality. The last stage is *Sayujyam* or merger with the Lord. This final stage is attained only with the Lord's Grace.

Swami in His Divine Discourse chose to speak on a topic dear to His Heart – the 4 Human Values of *Sathya*, *Dharma*, *Shanti* and *Prema*. He said that the result of attaining high levels of education, the value of noble and charitable acts and the reward for all kinds of good deeds all come to naught if man is bereft of these 4 human values of Truth, Right Conduct, Peace and Love. These 4 values are the pillars which support the mansion of *Sanathana Dharma* (the Perennial Philosophy), He asserted.

He next touched upon the meaning of the descent of the *Avatar*. The descent of God is the act of coming down to the world with love for man, and He becomes one with him. God comes down to earth in order to set ideals for mankind and to lead them on the righteous path. And to achieve oneness with man He chooses to come down in a human form. For any achievement in the world, wealth and property is required as nothing can be accomplished without worldly instruments and implements. God however, is beyond the desires of the body and the mind and free of qualities like anger. Everything He does and says is only for the redemption of man.

Swami next emphasized that all of us are divine. He said, “*If somebody asks – Who are you? – then you have to answer, “I am I” and not with the name given to the body*”. He further said that except for the entity ‘I’ in everyone, everything else is imaginary. God resides in all and He is the one that has become the many. The ‘I’ exists in everyone; society itself is a conglomeration of individuals; the individual is God and God alone and hence society itself has emerged from God. He said that God is in our own heart and by practising the 4 human values, we can recognize God. First and foremost we have to understand that we are God. Till we attain this divine experience, we will be unable to give up body identification.

On a cautionary note, Swami said that God Himself has prescribed limits for every man. In this world everything is limited and it is only when we cross these limits that we undergo difficulties. It is because of a lack of control that we have no limits for our desires. He exhorted all to reduce sensual desires and to cultivate patience and courage. “*Whatever may change, Truth will never change*”, He said. He further added that Truth and Love are both within you. So by developing Love we will always be peaceful. Swami ended His discourse by singing the *bhajan* - “*Prema mudhitha manasa kaho....*”

MAY 6th: EASWARAMMA DAY CELEBRATIONS

The Morning Programme – Bhajans By The Bala Vikas Children and Narayan Seva

Traditionally, Easwaramma Day celebrations in Brindavan are essentially a children's activity. Leading up to the special day, the Bala Vikas children

belonging to the Education Wing of the Sri Sathya Sai Organizations of the Bangalore Urban District enjoyed a variety of activities in their centres like a Sports Meet and other cultural functions. On May 6th, however, about 60 children (both boys and girls) were blessed with the coveted opportunity of singing *bhajans* in the divine presence of Swami on the morning of May 6th, 2006.

Apart from the singers, about 500 children from the different Bala Vikas units of Bangalore had also assembled in Sai Ramesh Hall to sing along with main singers and celebrate this special day commemorating Mother Easwaramma. 200 Bala Vikas Gurus from Bangalore and other districts of the state of Karnataka also attended the programme. Needless to say the parents and other family members of all these children and about 5000 devotees were also present and this expectant crowd sat waiting patiently to have the special *darshan* of the Lord on this holy day. The dais was specially decorated with floral garlands and pictures of Swami's Parents were also placed on the dais and decorated with garlands.

The children sang about 28 *bhajans* in the morning. The *bhajans* were very well selected and rehearsed and the young children sang with aplomb and enthusiasm. The girls lead the morning program with the *bhajan* *Gowri Nandana Gajanana* and the boys followed with *Sri Sai Natha Guru Govinda*.

Then as Swami entered Sai Ramesh Hall, both the boys and the girls sang *Dhanya Ho Easwaramba* in unison. *Bhajans* followed in quick succession with the boys and the girls alternating - *Jai Jai Janani Sai Janani, Jai Hari Bol Jai Sita Ram, Govinda Krishna Jai, Bhola Bhandari Baba, and Namah Parvati Patale Hara Hara* quickly reverberated through the Hall without anyone realizing the passage of time. Other *bhajans* like *Rasavilola Nanadala, Sathyam Gnanam Anantam Brahma, Sundara Vadani, Sai Humara Hum Sai Ke* quickly followed and soon about 16 *bhajans* had been sung.

At this time, Swami asked the leaders how many *bhajans* were left as His eyes were drawn by the preparation activity along the side of the Hall where the morning's *Narayan Seva* was going to take place after the conclusion of the *bhajan* singing. After all, the activity most dear to His Heart is to bring succour to the poor and the suffering. So clearly He wanted to be there among the poor bringing joy and happiness to them.

The children continued singing. *Bhajans* like *Ayodhya ke Sita Ram, Radhe Shyam GopalaRadhika Jivana, Om Namoh Bhagavathe Vasudevaya, Dhim Dhim Dhimi Dhimi, Shivaya Namah Shiva* and *Dum Dum Dum Dum Dhamaru Bhaje* were sung with élan and enthusiasm by all the kids. Finally the kids completed their 28th *bhajan* – *Chitta Chora Yashoda Ke Bal* and Swami rose gracefully from His seat. He profusely blessed the boys and girls on both the sides of the aisle and slowly got down from the stage and proceeded towards the *Kalyana Mantap* entrance where the poor had assembled to be blessed by Him.

They had gathered early in the morning and were waiting patiently, for it was also their day. The unfortunate, the destitute, those living on the fringes of society with nothing much to call their own except perhaps the clothes on their backs, their homes on the pavement with the sky as the roof on their heads, had as their sole friend only the Lord Himself.

And they waited patiently, alongside Sai Ramesh Hall while the Bala Vikas children were singing *bhajans*, waiting patiently for the Lord to become free for they knew that He would then bestow His grace on them, bearing uncomplainingly the Sun beating down mercilessly on their backs - for on this day they were going to be blessed by the Lord Himself.

And then suddenly without much fanfare the Lord was amidst them. Quickly He blessed the food that was going to be served to them - consecrating it as *prasadam* – a wholesome South Indian fare of *sambar* (thick lentil soup) rice cooked with vegetables; and also *curd* (yogurt) rice. He waited and continuously cast His beneficent gaze on all while the *seva dal* lovingly served these Narayanas, seated in rows with the ladies on one side and the gents on the other.

After the food service was well underway, Swami enquired about the clothes that were going to be distributed – *dhotis* for the gents and saris for the ladies. He personally inspected and approved the clothes and blessed that they also be distributed to all.

While the clothes were being distributed He also went around them and blessed everyone. He made a chain for a baby that was lying on its mother's lap and instructed that the chain be placed around its neck, a talisman that would afford lifelong protection to the young one.

This distribution of food and clothing is a tradition in Bangalore on Easwamma day and the word of this event is spread far and wide. But as always happens, there are a lot of people who hear about this late, so do not come in time to be accommodated in the premises before Swami's arrival. While Swami was blessing everyone assembled in the Ashram premises, a good crowd had also collected outside at the gate and were milling around eager to go in – for a glimpse of the Lord, and also to have His *prasadam* of food and clothing. And the ever so-patient *seva dal* volunteers let them in also later and served all of them till everyone was satisfied. Mother Easwamma surely would have been very pleased at their selfless service! All the Bala Vikas children assembled there also partook of the *prasadam* later.

The Evening Programme – The Divine Discourse And A Bala Vikas Drama

Swami arrived in the evening to the melodious sounds of the bhajans by the Institute boys. Starting with *Sundara Sundara Vinayaka*, the boys sang a bhajan next in honour of the Divine Mother – *Easwaraamba Priya Tanayaa*. These were followed by *Raghuk ula bhooshanaa*, *Giridhaari laal Shyama Gopal*, *Raama Raama Jaya Raghu kula* and *Allah Ho Tum*. After the end of

this bhajan, Swami signalled for Sri Sanjay Mahalingam, who had addressed the crowd a few days earlier to speak again this evening.

Sri Sanjay Mahalingam chose to talk this evening about divine love and its manifestation. He said that beauty, fame, wealth, knowledge of the Vedas, proficiency in poetry and prose, all are of no avail if your mind does not dwell on the Lotus Feet of the Lord! He said, *"Pure love for God is immortal, transcendental and eternal. Once divine love is realized, the heart seeks nothing else; it seeks only love, love, love!"*

He also recounted a story of how once Swami asked him about his future plans after his completion of his MBA. Sri Sanjay replied, *"Swami, Your wish is my command"*. To this Swami replied that He was his servant. Naturally Sanjay replied, *"No Swami, I am Your servant"*. Swami then explained, *"I always think about you all. My only wish is your joy. And I am always thinking how I can make all of you happier. Are you also always thinking of me and ask what does Swami want? Hence I am your servant"*. Sri Sanjay ended his speech by exhorting everyone to love God with all our heart, mind and soul so we can be claimants of our own heritage.

After Sri Mahalingam's talk Swami gave His divine discourse. He said that man comes out of his mother's womb not with a garland of pearls, rubies or precious stones but with one heavy garland that Brahma gives and that is the garland of the consequences of our good and bad actions (*karma*) done in previous lives. Hence in our lives we have to discriminate between the good and bad.

We can find fulfilment in human life if we utilize the 5 elements in the right way. This world is called *prapancha* (a conglomerate of the 5 elements) of *sabda* (word), *sparsa* (touch), *rupa* (form), *rasa* (taste), and *gandha* (smell) and these should not be used in an unholy way. We should only perform good deeds with the 5 senses.

Swami said that human life is given to conquer illusion (*Ma – Maya, Na – not, and Va – to conduct*). At birth, one is free from impurity, but with growth desires also increase. There should be a limit on desires, but man today is crossing all limits without regard of humanness.

Indian principles are noble, but today we are trying to emulate the Westerners. In India, a woman is placed on a pedestal. There is no love higher than a mother's love. When we love our mothers we achieve great power. Mothers should be well cared for in their old age. Today the children are sending their mothers to old age homes; remember tomorrow you will also be sent there by your own children.

Humanity can blossom only when there is truth and love. Today everyone thinks in a mean way, not a cultured way. We must always think what is good for the society and the country. Culture emerges from the heart. Many great souls have made sacrifices to foster Bharatiya culture like Savitri, Draupadi,

Sitadevi and Damayanthi. They looked like ordinary ladies but had great divine power.

Truth and divine love are changeless. Love with desire is like a passing cloud, whereas divine love is eternal. Hence keep love as foremost in your life. Truth should be your ideal. You attain sacredness and your life will become fulfilled.

Swami also recounted in detail the story of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Born in poor circumstances, through hard work he obtained a good education and later got a very good paying job. He then wanted to buy his mother new clothes to wear. She agreed to wear the sari only after two of her desires are fulfilled. She asked Vidyasagar to build a small school for the children of the village and then to dig a well so the women did not have to walk long distances to fetch water. Vidyasagar fulfilled his mother's wishes. Later Vidyasagar became very famous and thousands flocked to hear him speak.

Once he was travelling to another place to give a speech. In his coach was a Government officer. After reaching the destination, the officer started looking for a porter to carry his luggage but did not find any. Vidyasagar volunteered to carry the same and even refused to accept the money for carrying the luggage telling the officer that he did it as an act of service. The same officer felt contrite when he later found out that the same person on the stage and the person who carried his luggage was Vidyasagar himself. Swami again reiterated that we should always do service to others, and not receive service from others.

Accordingly, said Swami, Sathya Sai also fulfilled Mother Easwaramma's 3 desires and had a school, a hospital and a well built in Puttaparthi. These have now become a University, a Super Speciality Hospital and a Water project.

In conclusion, He said that making mothers happy is the duty of all children. Hence on this Easwaramma Day, cultivate the principle of helping others and find joy and fulfilment in your lives.

A little while later, everyone assembled in Sai Krishan Kalyana Mantap for a drama entitled *Bhaktha Sudama* presented by the Bala Vikas children of Bangalore. This is a well known story from the Bhagavatham recounting an incident from Krishna's childhood. The story begins with Sudama (one of Lord Krishna's playmates at the ashram of their guru) eating Sri Krishna's share of beaten rice when they were in the forest tending cows. Years later, Sudama (also known as Kuchela) remains a poor man, barely making ends meet. His wife asks him to go to Krishna who is rich and a king and ask him for help. She also gives Kuchela a handful of coarse beaten rice to give as an offering to Krishna.

Krishna receives His childhood friend with great honour and seats him and washes his feet. Though a king, He eats with great relish the poor fare sent by Sudama's wife. Krishna takes good care of Sudama and the friends spend a lot of time recounting the old days. Soon it is time for Sudama to leave and in

his happiness he forgets to ask Krishna for help. Sadly he walks back home wondering what he would tell his wife. When he reaches the place where his humble hut stood, he now finds in its place a big mansion and his wife and children are living in abundant prosperity. Krishna had eaten the beaten rice and showered His grace. Unknowing to Sudama, He had made him prosperous. Such is the way of the Lord.

The whole play was well enacted in Kannada, the local language in Bangalore and contained a lot of meaningful and soul stirring songs. Not knowing Kannada, your correspondent requested the Co-ordinator for a detailed English synopsis of the drama so we could fully bring the pleasure shared by the audience for the benefit of the thousands of readers worldwide also. Unfortunately, she was unable to comply with our request in time.

[Heart2Heart requests all people who put up programs in regional languages to please provide us a detailed English language synopsis of the programme. We all try to please Swami but His joy is only in the joy that the audience feels when they witness the glory of God that is portrayed in the drama. Help us share the same joy, enjoyed by the audience witnessing the drama in Swami's divine presence, with our readers and devotees world-wide also by this thoughtful gesture of providing us with a decent translation.]

MAY 9TH AND 11TH: PRAVEEN SULTANA SINGS IN SAI RAMESH HALL

On May 9th, seeing Ms. Praveen Sultana, the doyenne of Hindustani Music seated amidst the crowd, Swami asked her if she would like to sing to the crowd. Naturally being very delighted at this unexpected blessing, Ms. Sultana sang Meera *bhajans*. But Ms. Sultana being one of the topmost performing artistes in the country was used to singing with the best accompaniments. Swami asked the students of the Sai Mirpuri College of Music to accompany her. The students (Sri Sanket Modi on the harmonium, Sri Shivakumar on the *tabla* and Sri Niranjan on the *mridangam*) were absolutely thrilled to be playing for a singer with such a world-wide reputation. Ms. Sultana then sang 4 Meera *bhajans* in her own inimitable style for the benefit of the audience – *Sakhi ri main to Govind ke guna gaoo* (O friend let me sing of the qualities of my Govind); *Main to lino Govind mole* (I have bought my beloved Govind); *Payoji maine Ram rathan dhan* (I have attained the incomparable wealth of Rama) and finally *Mere to Giridhar Gopal* (Beloved Krishna is mine).

On the 11th, Swami again blessed Ms. Praveen Sultana to sing to the devotees gathered in Sai Ramesh Hall. Choosing to sing the classical Hindustani *ragas* – she first sang the *raga* Hamsadvani followed by the *raga* Bhairavi which included a *bhajan* to the Goddess Mahisasuramardini. She then concluded her short concert with the Meera bhajan *Bhaja Mana, Nanda Nandana Giridhari*.

After the concert Swami asked her if the accompaniments especially the harmonium were good. She replied that it was very good (a good harmonium accompaniment is very necessary for her to keep time). Swami beamed like a proud mother on hearing this signal praise of his students performing well in

such a setting. He immediately called Sri Sanket Modi, a Music College Diploma student, and manifested a *navarathna* (nine-gem) ring for him. Truly if you sing solely for the Lord, worldly recognition will follow of its own accord without any seeking.

MAY 13 & 14th VESAK 2006 - BUDDHA POORNIMA CELEBRATIONS IN BRINDAVAN

The First Day

Vesak Day, 2006, the 2550th anniversary of the triple-event of the Birth, the Enlightenment and the Death of Siddhartha - also known as Gautama Buddha, was celebrated in millions of homes in all the lands where Buddhism is practised with the lighting of lamps and elaborately sculpted decorative lanterns, both in homes and in the public streets, the erection of colourful depictions of events from the life of the Holy One and the offering of *dana* - charity – and of course going to the temples to offer obeisance and seek the Buddha's Blessing on this the most auspicious of days for the practising Buddhist.

This important Buddhist festival has also been celebrated in Whitefield for more than 10 years for Swami is usually resident in Brindavan when the *Buddha Poornima* or the full moon night in the month of May rolls around.

Every year one of the Buddhist countries acts as the chief host for this event of great significance to Buddhists. Last year Sri Lanka was the host and this year it was the turn of Region 41 South East Asia comprising the countries of Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei.

Planning for this mega event started right after the Maha-Sivarathri festival when Bhagavan approved and blessed the proposed *Buddha Poornima* Programme. A total of 14 countries responded and came to Brindavan – Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Taiwan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and many Buddhists also came from the countries of UK, USA and South Africa (in addition to the devotees from the 4 host countries) – as early as the 8th of May. In addition 8 Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka and Indonesia also participated in this memorable event.

By the 11th, the devotees started to put up the decorations inside the Ashram premises, including Sai Ramesh Hall, the *Kalyana Mantapam* and of course – Trayee Brindavan, Bhagavan's residence. Some speciality decorative items – like the red Chinese lanterns from Taiwan which added a touch of grandeur when hung from the ceiling - were brought from their own countries by the devotees, but in most cases items were bought locally. When the lights were fully lit it was a sight for the Gods to see. The wonderful decorations and the entire campus looked like it had been transformed into a Buddhist country with its many banners displaying the teachings of the Buddha and Swami, the different flags, and the Chinese lanterns. In a corner of the dais an elaborate and intricately decorated altar was set up along with pictures of Shirdi Baba and Sathya Baba.

On the morning of the 13th, Bhagavan was led by 12 children from the Nanyang School of Medan, Indonesia in their beautiful red attire and playing beautiful music for the Lord, from His residence to the dais of Sai Ramesh Hall. A lot of dignitaries attended the day's festivities. Seated on the dais along with Swami were the Sri Lankan Opposition leader Sri Kuru Jayasuriya, the Governor of the State of Karnataka Sri T. N. Chaturvedi and the Governor of the State of Maharashtra Sri S.M Krishna. Also gracing the occasion by their presence were – Sri Rohitha Bogollagama, Sri Lankan Minister for Enterprise Development and Investment Promotion, the Sri Lankan Ambassador to India, the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of Sri Lanka, heads of several industrial groups and prominent citizens of Bangalore who are long time devotees of Swami.

Swami was welcomed with bouquets by the leaders of all the countries hosting the program. Swami then inaugurated this great event by pressing a switch which lit up the entire podium and the Buddhist altars to clapping from the assembled crowd. The celebrations were set on its way by a beautiful rendering of a few *bhajans* by singers from the host countries. Both the ladies and the gents sang very well and Bhagavan kept beat with the songs. After the *bhajans* had uplifted the entire congregation, there were a couple of speeches by well-known Buddhist devotees to round off the morning program.

First was an inspiring address by Dr. Art Ong Jumsai, an eminent educationist, a former Member of Parliament and an eminent scientist having worked for the space Agency NASA during the heady days of the moon landing. Dr Jumsai stressed on the loving kindness, the *ahimsa* and the compassion of Lord Buddha. To the delight of the crowd he also related the story of the Sathya Sai School in Thailand, where 95% of the students are Buddhists and which was recently acknowledged as the “best Buddhist school” in Thailand. Dr Jumsai said that the reason for this achievement was that the students did a lot of *seva* at the Buddhist temple next door –serving food during festivals, washing plates, cleaning the temple and also arranging discussions on the various aspects of human values. They also had a water project to supply clean water to the community around the school and provided free medical treatment for the nearby villagers at the school's clinic. Terming 'educare' as the discovery of the Buddha within; he outlined 3 steps in Buddhism to achieve this. The first step is *Sila* or control of the senses. The second step is Meditation and the students wake up at 4:30 AM to do the *Jyothi* meditation as laid down by Bhagavan. And the third step in Buddhism is *Panya* - inner wisdom or understanding of the truth of the true nature of man being the Atma, using the human values of Love and Non-Violence.

Next to speak was Sir Bradman Weerakom from Sri Lanka who was the Secretary to the Government and served 7 Prime ministers in Sri Lanka. Sri Weerakom chose to speak on the contribution of Buddhism towards Global Peace.

He said, “*The road to peace as expressed in Buddhism needs to have two pathways. The first is the cultivation of the right mental attitudes. The second is the resolution through right effort of the underlying material conditions which*

give rise to conflict; whether of poverty, or under-development or alienation or exclusion. Improving the human condition so that the poor and the deprived in our societies are provided with the basic necessities of life – like food, drinking water, health facilities and education for the children, which Bhagavan has engaged in so resolutely, is in total fulfilment of this second pathway, so complementary and so essential to building, sustaining and strengthening global peace."

After the *arathi*, all the delegates were directed to the *Kalyana Mantap* where a sumptuous lunch was arranged for all the 1100 Buddhist delegates by Bhagavan.

All the delegates were seated (ladies on one side and the gents on the other) for the luncheon which was served in the traditional manner on banana leaves. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the lunch which was lovingly served by the *seva dals* and some of Swami's students. This concluded the morning programme.

The evening programme started around 4 PM. Welcoming Swami everyday to Sai Ramesh hall were the *bhajan* singers drawn from the host countries who sang a number of Sanskrit *bhajans* singing the praise of the Lord. We need to commend these *bhajan* singers. They had practised a wide repertoire of Indian *bhajans* just for Swami's sake. Both the ladies and the gents sang very well and at times Swami sat for as much as a half-hour listening attentively to the *bhajans* before He would bless the day's programme to start. And a listener would not have been able to tell the difference from the usual *bhajan* rendition, such was their level of practise and a reflection of their level of dedication.

After a short while of *bhajan* singing, Swami blessed the programme to start. The first to speak in the evening was Dr. Narendra Reddy from Los Angeles, California. Dr. Reddy serves as a member of the Prashanti Council and coordinates its medical programmes (like medical camps in different countries or the sending of medical teams and supplies to areas affected by natural disasters like the recent tsunami in the region).

Dr Reddy touched upon and amplified the views expressed by the two speakers in the morning and especially addressed the devotees on the significance of this joyous day. He also mentioned the catholicity of the teachings of the Buddha and its relevance to all of us.

Speaking next was Brother Phoa Krishnaputra, of Medan, Indonesia, who chose to talk about how with His Grace we can achieve anything. Fortunate in having a loving wife and healthy successful children, he followed a prosperous career with plantation companies and reached the highest level of management. Still there was something niggling deep inside his mind, and he was searching for a cure for his aching heart. He next recounted the story of his life and how he happened to come to India on a pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy places and was lead to Swami; he also recounted Swami's help and guidance in helping him establish a Sai Centre and a school in Indonesia.

After these two speeches, Swami graciously blessed a book entitled "Personal Interactions with Baba My Father" by Dr (Mrs) Vasantha Jayasuriya, wife of Sri Jayasuriya, a former Minister of Sri Lanka. Swami was also kind enough to release a copy of the Buddha Poonima issue of the Sai Marga magazine. Sri Jayasuriya also extended an invitation to Swami to visit Sri Lanka. After this Swami got up slowly to give His Divine Discourse, while the students scurried hurriedly to set up the discourse table and mike for Him.

Swami started His divine discourse by delineating in detail on the life of the Buddha. He mentioned how the Buddha's parents – Shudhodhana and Mayadevi – performed penance for many years to have an heir to rule the kingdom.

As soon as the son Siddhartha was born, the mother Mayadevi gave up the body and the boy was brought up by the King's second wife Goutami. At the time of birth, the King's astrologers predicted that the boy would not rule the kingdom. To prevent this untoward happening, the king shielded the boy by keeping him in the palace itself and isolating him from outside influences. At the age of 20, Siddhartha was married to Yashodhara and they in turn had a son.

One night there was a sudden transformation in the mind of Siddhartha and he left the palace after caressing his son, Rahul. Siddhartha went to the forest to contemplate and had to undergo a lot of hardship and difficulties. His parents were also suffering from a sense of separation. Swami also added that Siddhartha's anguish came in the way of his self-realization.

In one town a person gave him a talisman for protection, telling Siddhartha that the anguish actually is from within. (Swami waved His hand and materialised the talisman to the astonished gasps of the audience). The person put the talisman on Siddhartha's neck and all the anguish vanishes (Swami later in His Discourse also added that the talisman disappeared when the Buddha died).

Siddhartha started doing penance, very long penance. He started questioning – Who am I? Am I the body? Am I the mind? Finally he reached the conclusion that "I am I". This is also the principle of *Aham Brahmasmi* – I AM God; and *Tat Twam Asi* – Thou Art That. Thus, said Swami, Buddha went on enquiring into the truth and reached the true realization that **I AM I**.

Swami further said that today's meditation, penance, *japa*, or *yoga* gives only momentary satisfaction and is a waste of time. The primary duty of man is to find fulfilment in life. "*Without wasting time in meditation, do social work*", said Swami, "*and recognise the divinity in everyone. That is true meditation*". He further said, "*Every man therefore has to recognise the Truth that I am God, I am God. Every man identifies himself with the Atma. Buddha was the person who had recognised the unity in multiplicity and there was a total transformation in his life when he recognised the unity*".

“*What did the Buddha teach?*” asked Swami. Answering the question He said that he went on teaching that there is only one principle in everyone. The truth is one, though it may be called by different names. Similarly Krishna also declared - Everybody is part and parcel of Myself. You are My Own reflection. You are not different from Me, said Swami. He further added that every reaction, reflection and resound is one and the same. The Buddha also taught that we should not get angry with anyone. We should not harm others. We should not find fault with others. There is only one principle – eternal, pure and wise. And all of you are Buddhas. And when you understand this truth you see unity everywhere. And so we have to unite our hearts and recognise the spirit of unity. When mind finds and experiences this unity, then man’s life finds fulfilment.

After this *arathi* was taken; and the devotees were asked to assemble in the Ramesh Krishan Kalyana Mantap for the cultural programme to follow. First the 12 children from the Nanyang School of Medan, Indonesia presented a unique dance called “The Thousand Hand Kwan Yin” dance. The Nanyang Modern Indonesian School of Medan, Indonesia, is one of the educational institutions where the ‘Sri Sathya Sai Education in Human Values’ is being implemented in the teaching curricula.

Kwan Yin is the Goddess of Mercy and is revered in Indonesia. The small children dressed in their gold suits gave a very well co-ordinated dance that won loud applause from the crowd. When they stood in a line and moved their heads and hands it looked like they had moulded into one single body. The message conveyed by these synchronised dance movements was that as human beings we are obliged to spread the loving kindness (*metta*) and helping hands in order to attain global peace and harmony. Following this short dance programme was a drama by the youth of Singapore.

The drama was based on the life and teachings of the Lord Shakyamuni Buddha whose teachings emphasized the need for all of us to realize the divinity within and to follow the path of Truth and Righteousness by mastering our five senses. The opening scene was set in the Supreme Court where all had gathered to hear the case of the Government against the Inter-Faith council on the charge that God does not exist. If the Government proves its case without a doubt all references to God in schools and Government policies have to be removed. In an action packed sequence sparking with hard-hitting and well rendered dialogues, the defence attorney wins the case when he proves that the mere presence of evil in the world does not imply that God does not exist.

He made the argument that just as darkness is the absence of light, so too evil reflects the absence of goodness and is a human foible. God is something that can only be experienced and cannot be perceived by the five senses; just as the fact that though we cannot see and feel Oxygen we still continue to breathe. The drama also depicted a scene from the life of the Buddha (wherein He accepted a pomegranate from a poor woman but did not accept gold and precious stones from a king - looking just to the motivation behind the gift rather than its worldly value) to emphasize that we need to purify our

minds and hearts if we are to attain *Nirvana* - the final goal of life according to Buddhism. Swami talked with all the youth who had put up the play before He retired for the night.

The Second Day

On the second day Swami came out of Trayee at 9:10 AM and gave *darshan* to the assembled devotees at Sai Ramesh Hall. After a few *bhajans*, the Bala Vikas children of Indonesia presented a traditional Indonesian dance, called the "Welcome dance", a custom in the area of North Sumatra, Indonesia – in welcoming distinguished guests during festive occasions by the young Sumatran ladies.

The Bala Vikas students aged between 9 to 14 years performed the dance to the delight of the crowd. Following this was a repeat of the Kwan Yin dance from the previous day but now before the larger Sai Ramesh Hall audience. Again the young ladies won the applause of the crowd with their synchronised movements.

This was followed by an entertaining and absorbing Chinese choir presented by Malaysia. All the songs were in Chinese - joyful songs sung in praise of God; songs that expressed that we should experience the joy, love and grace of Bhagavan Baba. The songs were vibrant, expressive, and full of love. Though the tunes were unfamiliar and the words incomprehensible - everyone found empathy and unity with the sentiments that were joyfully expressed by the energetic choir.

At the close of the presentation, Swami called Bro. Stanley Cherry, a vocal teacher in Malaysia and the choir conductor and motivator, up to the dais and materialised a golden chain much to the joy of all the members of the choir and the devotees present.

Following this Swami blessed the food and the clothes that would be distributed by the Buddhist devotees as part of Narayan Seva and *vastra danam*. The poor people were all seated in orderly rows and the overseas devotees enthusiastically distributed food to all. In all about 800 people were given food and clothing to conclude the morning programme.

In the evening the darshan started at 4:20 PM and Swami was again greeted by an inspiring rendition of *bhajans* by the singers from the overseas devotees. After a few *bhajans*, Swami gave His blessings for the evening programme to start. The first item was a short rendition by 2 gents on what was termed as 'Sri Lankan Drums'. These 2 percussionists gave a short but resounding and controlled display that picked up pace very fast so that at times it seemed that their fingers were just a blur playing fast staccato music on the rawhide skin.

The finale item of the two day celebration was a dance put up by the Bal Vikas of Indonesia to the tune of the *bhajan* "Sai Bhajan Bina Sukh Shanti Nahi". This traditional Indonesian dance form is called "Mainang Kuala Deli". It

is an entertainment dance performed by the youth in North Sumatra, to share their joy and happiness. Certainly their joy was contagious and everyone went home uplifted and happy at the conclusion of this two day festival of Buddha Poonima.

MAY 16TH: A SITAR CONCERT

When we all came to Sai Ramesh Hall in the afternoon, we noticed that a plush carpet had been laid out in the first block right in front of the dais. All of us immediately suspected that a musical concert was in the offing and we were not disappointed. Slated to play this day was Sri Prabeer Bhattacharya, a noted sitar exponent from Kolkata.

Sri Prabeer Bhattacharya is a disciple of the great Pandit Deepak Choudhary (Pt. Deepak Choudhary himself is a disciple of Pt. Ravi Shankar). Sri Prabeer had about 17 years of training under his teacher and his playing style is notable for its range of emotions and speed. A rigorous daily practise regimen of 12 hours had made him a maestro of the sitar. Accompanying him this evening were accomplished artists Sri Rajendra Nakoe on the *tabla* and Sri Srinivas on the *mridangam*.

Sri Prabeer started his concert with *Raag Megh* or a *raga* celebrating the rainy season. (A *raag* is a combination of certain *swaras* or notes. In Hindustani music we have seven *swaras* – *Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni* analogous to the Western *Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti*). Thus *Raag Megh* has the *swaras* *Sa Re Ma Pa Ni Sa* on the ascending and the *swaras* *Sa Ni Pa Ma Re Sa* on the descending.

He followed the *Raag Megh* with *Raag Hamsadhwani Malika* (or the *raga* that creates a happy mood) that had the *raga Bahar* admixed with it. This *Raag* has on the ascending the *swaras* *Sa Re Ga Pa Ni Sa* and on the descending it has the *swaras* *Sa Ni Pa Ga Re Sa*.

The last item was the *raag Bhairavi* that had a *jugalbandhi* (i.e. The *tabla* and the *mridangam* played in turn). This *raag* has on the ascending: *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dh Ni Sa*; and on the descending: *Sa Ni Dh Pa Ma Ga Re Sa*.

Our readers might also be pleased to know that this young artiste Sri Prabeer Bhattacharya is also a Visiting Professor at the Sai Mirpuri College of Music and spends a couple of months every year sharing his immense talent and skill with the young and eager students.

MAY 19TH - 21ST: A 3-DAY KERALA YOUTH SADHANA CAMP

A *sadhana* camp was held for the Sai youth, students, teachers, doctors and paramedical professionals of Kerala on the 19th, 20th and 21st of May, 2006. About 1800 participants (which includes 300 doctors and paramedics) attended the camp from all the 14 districts of Kerala.

This was the fourth Youth Camp in as many years, riding high on the crest of the phenomenal success of the earlier meetings. Youth of the state of Kerala drawn by the all- attractive love of Swami, came in phenomenal numbers to spend three exclusive days at the Lotus Feet, three days of love speaking its universal language, making use of their summer vacations from schools and colleges or else leave from their employers.

They put up lightly with physical hardship and inconvenience suffused with devotional fervour and the contagious enthusiasm and response to the love that Bhagawan showered on them; for in this Avatar the Lord has chosen the youth of the world to be the instruments through which He will accomplish His Mission of transforming society.

It was a very tightly packed three-day programme. They would come early and take their allotted seats in Sai Ramesh Hall, both for the morning and the evening *darshan*. Speeches and Music Programmes were planned in Sai Kulwant Hall in the Divine Presence on all the three days. Additionally, after about an hour's break for breakfast after the morning *darshan*, the numerous participants would meet in the Sai Ramesh Krishan Kalyana Mantap for "classes" where the staff and some chosen graduate students of the SSSIHL, or a few elderly devotees would speak to them. They would then break for lunch at around 1:00 PM and again re-assemble at 2:00 PM in the Kalyana Mantap for one more "session" before re-assembling again in Sai Ramesh Hall for the afternoon's *darshan* and activities. We bring you a report on all the numerous speeches and talks, so you too can also get a flavour of the blessings received by the Kerala Youth during these three days. This has made our report a little long but we hope you will understand our indulgence and appreciate the motivation behind it.

The First Day

Amidst *bhajans* led by the Kerala *Bhajan* group, Bhagavan came to the stage at 8.50 AM. Bhagavan was welcomed to the richly decorated auditorium with the accompaniment of *Nadaswaram*. Apart from the floral decoration to the dais, there hung on both sides the traditional Kerala *Villakku* - the oil lamp, but with a modern touch of having small electric bulbs in place of wicks fed by oil.

The Kerala Bhajan Group had 10 gents (5 lead and 5 followers) and 10 women (again 5 for the lead and 5 followers) drawn from across the State. The vocals were ably accompanied by the Harmonium, the *tabla*, the Violin and a Timer Instrument. The *Bhajan* group had the signal honour of welcoming Swami to the Hall for every *darshan*, and they responded magnificently to the occasion.

Starting with *Vigna Vinasaka*, they moved into *Sathya Sai Rama* and *Prema Swaroopini*. *Jaya Krishna Kunja Bihari* and *Shiva Shiva Shiva Shiva* quickly followed. The *sarva dharma bhajan Rahiman Rahiman* was next, followed by *Gangadhara Hara* and *Gana Gana Neela*, at which point Bhagavan gave the signal for the morning programme to start.

Prof. E. Mukundan, State President of the Sathya Sai Seva Organisations of Kerala, in his introductory remarks thanked Bhagavan for the glorious opportunity of holding the *Sadhana* Camp in the Divine Presence for the fourth consecutive year.

The first programme was the release of a book entitled “Helpline on the Sathya Sai Path” – a book of questions and answers by Sri B. N. Narasimha Murthy, Warden of SSSIHL hostel at Brindavan, compiled by Dr. Koushik Narayan - a member of the Kerala Youth Wing. The book is based on the questions and doubts raised by the Sai Youth of Kerala in the previous three youth camps. Bhagavan graciously accepted the book and blessed it with His Divine Signature.

Then the State President, Sri Mukundan, introduced the two speakers of the morning – two Hon. Judges of the High Court of Kerala – Justice Thottathil B. Radhakrishnan and Justice Padmanabhan Nair.

Justice Thottathil Radhakrishnan said that his desire as a student to participate in the Summer Course on Spirituality and Indian Culture held at Brindavan came alive that day with the youth of Kerala. With Swami’s permission, he narrated how he was saved from the disaster of the recent *tsunami*, without even knowledge of the disaster.

His family had been to the Andamans; the giant waves of the *tsunami* had hit the shore a few minutes after they had disembarked from the ship, and the ship was washed away. They did not even know of this unfortunate turn of events, and came to know of the disaster only on returning home.

He advised the youth to remain committed to the motherland, as mother and motherland are greater than even the Heavens. He added that India’s wish to be a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic would be fulfilled in full only if the five human values of the Sai Philosophy are put into practice.

Justice Padmanabhan Nair expressed his fortune at having been able to come to Swami for the first time and speak in the Divine Presence. He also added that the educational, medical and water projects of Bhagavan are one of their kinds in the world and are pristine examples for humanity.

It is for us to emulate those ideals and practise it in our own small way. The youth are fortunate to be at the Lotus Feet of the greatest Master and Mentor. He added that we have to put this opportunity to the best use for individual and social transformation. Bhagavan materialized *vibhuti* for both the judges.

A musical offering by Sri Madhu Balakrishnan, the renowned Malayalam playback singer, was the next item. He chose to sing popular Malayalam devotional songs; there were also a couple of songs on Swami.

Starting with *Maha Ganapathim*, he launched into the Malayalam *Oru Yugam* followed by *Mahadeva Shiva Shambho* and *Radha Than Premam*. This was followed by the *keertanam - Dasa Dasa* and the Malayalam *Karuna Chei Van*.

After a couple more devotional songs, he ended with a composition on Swami entitled *Ellam Ennikende*. Sri T.S. Radhakrishnan accompanied the vocalist on the harmonium, Sri Rajesh on the flute, Sri Selvam on the *tabla* and Sri Shankar on the *mridangam*. The session concluded with *Mangala Arathi* at 10 AM.

Then the participants proceeded to the “*Sadhana* session” at the Sai Krishan *Kalyana Mandapam*, where the teachers of the SSSIHL and other elders addressed them. The first speaker was Sri B. N. Narasimha Murthy, Warden of the Brindavan campus. The revealing message was the recent declaration by Bhagavan, “*The one who loves this beautiful form of Sai is My Jeeva-prajna; the one who works relentlessly for me in My Jeeva-prajna.*” He narrated many experiences to illustrate the Infinite Love of Bhagavan. If the youth hold on to Swami’s Feet, all their desires will be fulfilled and they will attain inner peace.

The next speaker was Dr. Narendranath Reddy, the Chairman of the International Medical Committee of the Prashanti Council. Once Swami told him in response to a doubt, “*If you have intense longing for me in your heart, it means that you love me.*”

The next speaker, Dr. T. Ravikumar, a faculty member of the Dept. of Chemistry, SSSIHL, narrated many experiences to demonstrate the various ways of Bhagavan in reforming His devotee. He also narrated how Swami cancelled his father’s cancer. The post-lunch session at the Kalyana Mandapam had a lecture by, Sri Vijay Menon, a consultant and trainer of Human Resource Development and a member of the Sai Youth Wing of Kerala. Speaking in Malayalam, he said that only a self-ignited value system orientation can lead us to Swami. Swami gives us both material and spiritual gains. It is for us to decide what we want.

In the evening session at Sai Ramesh Hall, the Bhajan Group welcomed Bhagavan again. This time the group could sing about 10 *bhajans* (which included *Jay Ganaraya, Radhey Govinda Hare, Rama Hare Sai Krishna Hare, Shivaya Nama Shivaya* and a few others) in the divine presence before He asked the afternoon programme to start.

Bhagavan blessed four members of the Kerala Youth wing to speak. The programme commenced with Veda chanting by the numerous Sai Youth of Kerala.

The first speaker of the afternoon, Sri Vijay Menon highlighted Indian culture to be so deep that even mighty kings sought refuge in its saintly wisdom for protection. Along with the growth of science, ignorance has also increased thus the effect gets balanced out so that no real effect is felt. We must be personifications of a value and virtue system as taught by Gandhiji. It is ultimately the *dharmic* consciousness that finally matters.

The second speaker was Kum. Nadiya, the Mahila Youth In-charge of Chalappam Samithi, Kozhikode. She described the benefits that she derived

out of active participation in the Sai Organisation. She thanked Bhagavan for the unique chance that the youth have obtained, to be the instruments of individual and social transformation.

The third speaker was Dr. Koushik Narayan, State Gents' Coordinator of Education, Kerala. He elaborated upon the impact of the previous three *Sadhana* camps on the Sai youth of Kerala. Today's youth are attracted only to the petty and transient pleasures of life; they do not bother about matters of greater significance. It is in this context that the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation, Kerala gives them the ultimate experience of Divinity Itself. He also narrated a touching incident as to how Swami came to a group of young *Sevadals* in the guise of a young boy.

The fourth speaker, Kum. Anjali Ajay, explained how Swami helped her throughout her academic and personal life. She also shared the Sai activities that she participated in and the benefits she derived out of them.

This was followed by a speech by Dr. Anand Mohan, State In-charge of the Medical Cell. He said that Swami is the *Apoorvavidya* who cures the malady of desire, delusion and attachment.

The principles of health care as elucidated by Bhagavan – globalisation of health care, decommercialisation of medicine, human values in medical practice - have demonstrated to the world that health is primarily a spiritual concept.

The materialization of these concepts through the Super Speciality Hospitals, General Hospitals and the medical centres and camps held all over the world is unparalleled and unprecedented in human history; and perhaps may be unrepeatable in future. Swami has shown to the world that when Universal Love manifests, miracles occur. This was followed by a musical presentation by Sri Madhu Balakrishnan again, at the end of which Swami materialized a golden ring for the singer.

The Second Day

On the second day morning, amidst *bhajans* led by the Kerala Bhajan group, Bhagavan came to Sai Ramesh Hall at 8.20 AM. The Bhajan Group welcomed Him with three bhajans – *Vinayaka Vinayaka, Keshava Madhava,* and *O Baba Sai Baba,* before He signalled for the morning programme to start. The State President introduced the speaker of the morning session Dr. Ramachandran Nair, the revered Vice Chancellor of the University of Kerala.

He exhorted the youth to make the best use of knowledge by integrating the resources of man, material and money in a very positive manner. This leads to the prosperity of the nation. Sincerity, commitment, devotion, love and affection are very important in this regard.

The present generation is missing the inheritance of wisdom and the blessings of the previous generation. The youth have to develop the qualities

of leadership, communication skills – verbal, written and body language, ability to motivate oneself and others and above all, creativity. At the end of the speech, Swami materialized a golden chain for Dr Nair.

A Carnatic musical offering by Sri Harihara Subramanyam followed. The young promising artist was previously a *Bal Vikas* student. Most of the *krithis* were preceded by a soul-stirring *viruthams*. Starting with *Vattapi Ganapathim*, he next sang *Karunai Daivame*, and then *Eppovaruvaro*. He concluded with a special composition on Swami called *Sai Sai Sairama*. The programme concluded with *Mangala Arathi* at 9.10 AM.

Dr. Deepak Anand, a faculty member of SSSIHL, addressed the first morning session at the Kalyanamandapam. He advised to dedicate all the impurities of our heart at the Lotus Feet of Swami and remain ever focused on Him. He will accept them and transform them into Divine Love. Then only can we merge in the Supreme Divine Love.

The second session was by Sri G. Srirangarajan, a faculty member of SSSIHL. The human body along with its talents and potentials is Swami's *prasadam* to us; our duty is to return it as *naivedyam* to the Swami in all in the form of service. This constitutes the "Prasadam-Naivedyam cycle."

The next speaker was Prof. Sanjay Sahni, Principal of the Brindavan campus of the SSSIHL. He stressed on the importance of sense-control and mind-control. The two golden injunctions on this path are – talk less, have minimum connections.

In the post-lunch session at the Kalyana Mandapam, Dr. Ramachandran Nair, revered Vice Chancellor of the University of Kerala addressed the camp participants. He said that evil qualities easily conquer us; on the other hand, it is difficult to cultivate virtues. Just because the path of evil is easy, one cannot afford to accept it; one must take the effort to cultivate virtues. In today's world, only Sai's glory can bring about transformation; all the mega Seva Projects of Bhagavan are role models for humanity to follow.

In the evening at Sai Ramesh Hall, Swami came as the Youth of Kerala rendered mellifluous *bhajans*. The bhajans included *Hari Sri Ganapathi Om*, *Jaya Jaya Rama Janaki Rama*, *Sarva Dharma Priya Deva* and a couple more.

The programme commenced with Veda chanting by the Sai Youth of Kerala. The State President introduced the two youth speakers of the afternoon and the dignitary, Sri Radhakrishnan, Hon. Vice Chancellor, Sri Sankaracharya Sanskrit University, Kalady, Kerala, who also addressed the gathering.

The first speaker Sri Manoj shared the lessons that he learnt at the previous Sadhana camps. He said that knowledge must be attained not by learning the *pusthaka* (the book) by rote, but by exercising the faculty of *masthaka* (the head) that the Lord has bestowed upon us. He added that the youth must possess the head of Sankaracharya, the heart of the Buddha and the hands of Janaka Maharaja. He elaborated upon the benefits that he derived upon

participating in the *Grama Seva* and concluded by saying, “Living with God is education. Living for God is devotion. Living in God is true *bhakti*.”

The second speaker Kum. Divya appealed to the youths to become like a flute in the hands of the Lord. The flute is straight and hollow; if we are also like that, the Lord will take us into His Hands, fill His Breath into us and will play His melodious music through us that will delight the world. She also elaborated upon the benefits of selfless *seva*. She also thanked Swami for the unique opportunity bestowed upon the Sai Youth of Kerala.

Sri Radhakrishnan, the revered Vice Chancellor, began by saying that Bhagavan’s very presence infused confidence in the devotees. He commented that the decadence of human values in all walks of life that we see today might be compared to the battle of Kurukshetra.

Bhagavan Baba is doing to the world what Krishna did for Arjuna. He exhorted all to go beyond the religious level, and rise to spirituality. Being religious alone, one sometimes gets entangled in rituals, on the other hand, spirituality infuses in us the greatest confidence.

Baba’s projects have established education and health to be service activities and not commercial activities. Life is not a problem to be solved, but a harmony to be enjoyed; this is possible by adhering to Swami’s teachings of Love and Compassion.

Carnatic musical offering by Sri Harihara Subramanyam, the same artiste who had sung in the morning also, followed this speech. In the afternoon, he sang the Thyagaraja *KirthiManavyalakinchara*, followed by *Muralimanohara* and *NeerajaDalanayana*. He concluded with *Swagatam Krishna*. At the end, Bhagavan materialized a golden ring for the musician. The programme ended with *mangala arathi*.

Thereafter, Sri Radhakrishnan, Hon. Vice Chancellor, Sri Sankaracharya Sanskrit University, Kalady, Kerala, addressed the participants at the Kalyana Mandapam. The purpose of all *sadhana* is to ensure optimum use of all resources, by putting a ceiling on desires. One has to go by the way of *Shreyas*, not *Preyas*.

The Third Day

On the third day morning, Bhagavan came to Sai Ramesh Hall amidst *bhajans* by the Sai Youth. Starting with *Pashupati Thanaya*, they sang two more bhajans – *Hey Madhava hey* and *Devi Sai Ma*, before Swami blessed the programme to start.

The speaker for the morning session in Sai Ramesh Hall was Sri Jyothilal IAS, Executive Director, Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project, Govt. of Kerala. He narrated his transformation from **IAS** to **SAI**. In today’s world he said, **IAS** implies – **I** first, **A**ny other person next, **S**ervice last. However, **SAI** implies - **S**ervice first, **A**ny other person next, **I** last. He narrated how, as a boy

of eight years, he escaped from the face of death due to an attack of meningitis.

He was not Swami's devotee then, but his father had prayed to his family deity Shiva and his mother had prayed to her family deity *Shakthi*. Bhagavan, the *Shivashakthi Swaroopa* came to his help, even without his knowledge. Meningitis is notorious to produce residual intellectual defects, but in his case, the opposite occurred. He developed a particular determination, began to study harder and studied in the IIT and completed his IAS – the dream aspirations of intelligent students.

He narrated many instances to show how Swami helped him to solve various problems related to his profession and saved him from many dangers. He concluded by advising the youth to utilize fully the excellent opportunity at the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan. Bhagavan materialized *vibuthi* for the speaker.

What followed next was a devotional musical offering by Sri Kavalam Sreekumar and Sri T. S. Radhakrishnan. In addition to compositions of Bhadrachalam Ramdas and Meerabai, there were songs on Bhagavan composed in Malayalam. Kavalam started with the song *Vinayaka Vinayaka* and followed it with the Malayalam *Vaanii Swari Sai*.

Sri T. S. Radhakrishnan then sang the song *Anda kat a ham*. Sri Kavalam Sreekumar then sang a Bhadrachalam composition entitled *Rama Jogi Mandu* and a Meera bhajan *Man Re Parsi*. Sri T.S. Radhakrishnan then sang the last song of the morning called *Aavinam Kudi*. They were ably accompanied on the flute by Sri Rajesh and by Sri Selvam on the *tabla*.

The morning programme in Sai Ramesh Hall then concluded with *Mangala Arathi*. The first speaker of the *sadhana* class in the Kalyana mandapam was Sri N. Dhakappa, State President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization of Karnataka. He narrated a few personal experiences revealing the Omnipresence, Omnipotence and Omniscience of Swami. He added that the best *sadhana* for the Kali Age is to involve ourselves actively in the activities of the Sai Organisation.

The second session was by Sri B. N. Narasimha Murthy, Warden of the Brindavan Campus. He gave the four golden guidelines in the path of spiritual evolution –

*“Look back and thank God
Look ahead and trust God
Look around and serve God
Look inside and see God.”*

He also narrated many experiences from his personal life to demonstrate these statements.

The third session was by Sri Sanjay Mahalingam, a research scholar at the SSSIHL. He said that the only way of liberation is to experience the pure love

within. The most important step in this regard is to conquer the three kinds of attachment – worldly, intellectual and spiritual. In the last session of the morning, Sri B. N. Narasimha Murthy clarified many of the doubts raised by the participants of the Sadhana Camp.

In the afternoon, Sri Ruchir Desai, faculty member of the Dept. of Commerce, addressed the participants. He stressed that the key element of transformation is a change in attitude. He also narrated an experience to show Swami answers to even a flash of thought in the devotee's mind. He also answered many of the questions of the participants.

In the evening in Sai Ramesh Hall, Swami came to the stage, as the Kerala Bhajan Group was singing *bhajans*. He walked among the Sai Youth, graciously accepted their letters and materialized *vibuthi* for some of them.

All the while, the *bhajan* singers continued singing their bhajans. In all they sang 11 *bhajans* which included *Gajanana Gajanana*, *Radha Ke Natavarlal*, *Sai Baba Tera Naam*, *Bolo Jai Jai Kar*, *Mrityunjayaya Nama Om*, *Hara Shiva Shankara*, and *Rasa Vilola Nandalala*.

Bhagavan is all His Mercy and Compassion then delivered the Divine Valedictory Discourse for the Youth Camp. Starting with a small *padhyam* (a poem), He said,

“He is present in all beings as peace; All names are His; He is Sat Chit Ananda Swarupa; He is Truth, Auspiciousness and Beauty (Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram)”. Swami also said, *“I am extremely pleased at the happiness you have experienced in the last 3 days. These 3 days passed off beautifully as 3 minutes. Your hearts are sacred filled with devotion, joy and steadfastness. Such meetings should be held for the welfare of society.”*

Touching next on the importance of good company, Swami said that only the Self is present in all beings. Plain paper has no smell but takes the smell of whatever is wrapped in it like vegetables, fruits or dry fish. Likewise, the heart is pure, selfless and steady. However, due to the company it gets polluted. So avoid bad company, be in the company of people with sacred thoughts, get a good name, and lead a good life. He said that the Buddha also exhorted *“Buddham Charanam Gacchami, Sathyam Charanam Gacchami”* – take refuge in *Dharma*, take refuge in *Sathya*.

Swami also said that there is only one God, and He resides in everyone. Just as there are many kinds of sweets, but sugar is one, so too the *Atma* is one though there are many names and forms. When you think that whatever happens to you is for the good then all good things happen to you.

Addressing the Kerala youth, Swami said – Be courageous. Acquire truth and love. Your activities and songs of these past 3 days are very good and beautiful. Whatever you do with love always bears fruit. If you close your eyes and call upon Rama, filling your heart with joy – then you can see Rama yourself. God has no desires. God always loves. Being in society, have the

attitude that you are serving God through society. Everything is God. There is nothing in the world that is not God.

He further said that always be with the feeling of oneness that I AM I. After the body goes, what remains ultimately is the I. Only the I is eternal. He concluded the discourse by stating there is only one bondage between Swami and you and that is love. He also added that your Love is reflected in Me and I (am reflected) in your love. "*I accept your love and shower my love on you. Live with joy and happiness*". He concluded with the *bhajan* "*Prema Mudita...*"

A devotional song by Sri Kavalam Sreekumar followed the divine discourse to conclude the valedictory function of a memorable 3-day sadhana camp. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for all the participants for Swami's love was manifest throughout. Though they had to put up with many physical inconveniences, it was all unforgotten as they were completely drenched by His divine love. Swami even provided free food for all the participants during their stay in Brindavan. Truly, love is the only bondage between God and His devotees!

[Heart2Heart would like to gratefully acknowledge that the State President of the Kerala Sathya Sai Seva Organisations, provided us the brief summaries of the speeches given by the youth, staff, students and elders to the participants of the *Sadhana* Camp.]

A NOTE ON THE TRAYEE SESSIONS

Any report on Swami's stay in Brindavan will be incomplete without mention of the "famous" Trayee Sessions. Right after the evening programme the students who have elected to spend their holidays with the Divine, the University staff still on the *Ashram* and a few chosen elders are invited into Swami's home - Trayee Brindavan.

It is a unique privilege and an honour that everyone cherishes. The wait is full of anxiety – Will He invite us in today? - and when the signal is given, the boys scramble to get a vantage position next to the Lord Himself, and the Lord is seated majestically on His swing at one end of the room waiting for the boys.

No two sessions are alike except to say that Swami is always at His informal best. Some sessions are serious with usually an elder or a staff member or a chosen student giving a speech and Swami sometimes adding a few comments of His own. Sometimes Swami chooses to speak Himself (with the Brindavan Warden translating) - either amplifying or reiterating His comments that He may perhaps have made in a public discourse earlier or else making points that He feels need to be told to the boys. Some sessions are just hilarious wherein He asks those who do not normally lead the *bhajans* to sing and as you can imagine it gives ample scope for merriment.

Most times He just converses with the boys or the elders asking and enquiring, cracking a few jokes but always delivering a message of spiritual

import even in the most light-hearted banter. And in an understated fashion His divinity manifests at times, as for example, when He gently corrects a fact in a story that a boy is relating thus revealing His omnipresence.

And of course, no summer's 'Trayee Session' story is complete without a mention of the eye-popping manifestations that He so casually accomplishes – bringing forth Lord Rama's ring, Mother Sita's *chudamani* and so on just to motivate the boys along the spiritual path. And sometimes He just talks to the boys like the Father that He is telling them that He loves them and that He is preparing them for the roles that they have to play in the future to bring about a transformation in society. And the sessions usually begin and end with the taking of letters – the fervent appeal to the Lord that is a unique privilege available to all of us.

And of course, the most generous Lord always sends us all off from His abode with His *prasadam* - either a sweet or a mango, yet another small way to show how much He loves all of us. And it is this very love for all of us for that has brought Him down to earth to redeem humanity.

IN CONCLUSION

There is a unique 'race' that happens at the end of every programme in Brindavan. As the *arathi* song is getting over, and the strains of "Om Shanti Shanti Shanti" are fading, a few Seva Dals hurry to roll some barricades from one end of the Hall and put them in place before the deity of Lord Ganesha in the front of the Hall under the dais. And simultaneously a few enterprising ladies also hurry in a similar fashion. They have a narrow window of opportunity - just the time that it takes the Seva Dal to roll the barricades down - to go up to Lord Ganesha and take His *padanamaskar* before He becomes "unavailable". And soon it is a scramble. And the *seva dal* does have a problem on his hands. He tries to shoo the ladies away so he could put the barricades in place. While the ladies in front try to obey him (as they have already taken Lord Ganesha's blessings) the ladies from behind are unwilling to give ground in their attempts to reach His feet. I wonder what Lord Ganesha, sitting serenely in His place, thinks about all this confusion that happens right at His Lotus Feet.

While this story has its bit of humour; it is also a powerful commentary at the same time. The *Avatar* has been with us for 80 years and the 'window of opportunity' is fast narrowing. Are we also hustling to reach His Lotus Feet and hold on to Them before the barricades are in place and He becomes unavailable? Do we have the same urgency to intensify our *sadhana* so that we attain Him and realize the purpose of our life? Or are we taking a *laissez-faire* attitude thinking there is always tomorrow and wasting yet another day, yet another year, and yet another lifetime!

Think about it. Swami's airplane is getting ready to take off. Have we 'earned' our boarding passes yet! So till next time; Jai Sai Ram.

- Heart2Heart Team.

SWAMI AND ME

PRECIOUS CLOSENESS TO BHAGAWAN

By Sri B Arvind
A Current Student of Swami's Institute

This is the transcription of the talk delivered by Sri B Arvind in the divine presence of Bhagawan Baba on the 29th of July 2005.

Offering my Humble Pranaams at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet. Beloved Bhagavan, esteemed elders, dear brothers and sisters.

The Message of the Messiah

Once upon a time there was a Messiah who had come to Earth. After spending a long period on Earth, he decided that he would quit. So he went on top of the mountain and told everyone present, "Listen, today I am going to quit. I am no longer a Messiah." Hearing this, the people were shocked. They said, "You can't quit! If you leave us, how will we communicate with God? How can we keep in touch with Him? So you can't do this!" He said, "Listen, you're a fisherman; when you get tired, you don't go fishing. You are a manager; when you get tired, you don't go to work. I am a Messiah, and I don't want to do it anymore so I am quitting."

The people could not convince him. And so, they said, "Before you quit, please give us one message from God. A message following which our lives will be fulfilled – the greatest and the most wonderful lesson that God has to give us."

The world always looks for compactness, shortcuts. They asked this from the Messiah. They said, "Before leaving, do this much for us." He said, "So you want to know what God wants you to do?" They all chorused, "Yes!"

"Okay, I will tell you. But are you ready to follow it?"

They said, "Yes! We are ready to follow it, even if it means giving up our lives, even if it means giving up our wives, our children, our husbands, our relations, everyone. We are ready!"

He said: "Think again. Are you ready?" They said, "Yes, even if it means going through the fires of hell. Even if it means getting crucified upside down. We are ready to undergo any torture, any amount of sadness for God."

The Messiah smiled and said, "Listen...God wants you all to be happy!"

And there was a stunned silence.

Brothers and sisters, we are all ready to suffer for God. We are all ready to undergo pain for God. But are we ready to be cheerful for God? To be happy

for God every moment of our lives? What is it that we want in our lives? We want to be happy every moment. And what is it that God wants from us? He wants us to be happy every moment. Then where is the problem? Why are we not happy every moment of our lives?

This has been answered in various ways, in various scriptures, by various religions. And I feel that being in the Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, this is the greatest gift we receive: the gift of this higher learning; learning how to be always happy.

We are unhappy because of what people term *Maya* – ignorance; and we have the *Jagad Guru*, the Lord of Lords amongst us to help us overcome this. Talking about ignorance, or *Maya*, I am reminded of an interesting anecdote.

Once upon a time there was a fisherman who used to go to the beach and throw out his fishing net. He would catch his fish and return. In the ocean there were so many fish but there was one particular fish that was never caught in the net. All of its friends and relatives used to get caught but not this fish. So one day, all the other fish went to this fish and asked, “How is it that you never get caught in the net?” The fish explained, “When the fisherman comes, he throws his net. At that time I swim close to his feet so I don’t get caught in the net.”

To escape from this net of *Maya* the only way is to take refuge at the feet of the fisherman – our Lord! That is what Jesus meant when he went to the fishermen and said: “I am a fisher among men.” That is what Bhagavan also said in His very first discourse as a tiny lad: “*Manasa Bhajare Guru Charanam, Dushtara Bhava Saagara Taranam.*”

At the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Swami is our Mother, our Father, our Guru, our Friend, our Everything:

*Tvameva Mata Cha Pita Tvameva,
Tvameva Bandhus Cha Sakha Tvameva;
Tvameva Vidya Dravinam Tvameva,
Tvameva Saravam Mama Deva Deva.
Mama Sai Deva.*

As You Think, So It Is

I used to wonder how should I establish my rapport with my Master, my Guru, my Friend, my Everything? And then what I did was this: (I am being very honest and frank in laying before everybody what I did and how wonderfully it worked.)

Though I could not see my Bhagavan with me always, I imagined that my Bhagavan is with me whether I eat my food, whether I sleep, whether I talk, whether I am in the classroom. I imagined that Bhagavan is with me and I would talk to Him. Anything I found uninteresting I would tell him, “Swami, this is not interesting for me.” Anything I found interesting, I would also tell Him.

In fact, it became so much so that when walking on the road I would say, "Bhagavan, You walk on this side because vehicles are coming on that side." At the same time I would say, "Swami, now so many people are coming; please don't go and start talking with them. Be only with me." (I meant only in my imagination.) This was because in the beginning I used to pray, "Bhagavan, please don't leave my hand, always hold on to me."

One night He came in my dream. He called me and said, "You are praying in the wrong manner. Remember, I will never leave your hand. You don't leave My hand, okay?"

And so, this is how it went on. I imagined that my Bhagavan is always walking with me. Because this is what the Truth is: though we cannot see Him, though we cannot hear Him, He is always there. And so this went on everyday and I was happy.

All A Hallucination?

But then one day a small problem came up. I told Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, see this is the problem; it is not getting solved." And I wrote it down in a letter to Him and I came to the Mandir. And I was so sure that when Bhagavan came, He would take the letter from me. So I was sitting there, and as Bhagavan passed by I held out the letter. He merely passed by without even looking at me. At that moment I felt crushed. I felt that all that I was doing was nothing but hallucination!

Is it really true that Bhagavan is with me or am I merely imagining Him? Are these all my hallucinations? I was shaken. I said, "Then whom do I tell this?" It was something which I didn't want to tell anybody and I said, "I cannot even tell it to Bhagavan. Is it that I am alone in this world? Do I really have nobody?" And the next week was torture because I felt so lonely. I felt helpless.

And then that night I had another dream. In that dream it looked like the whole world was out to strangle me. And when I was running, Bhagavan came out and said, "Come with me." Even in the dream I was still very angry with Bhagavan so I just walked with Him. Then Bhagavan said, "Shall we go to the park?" I told Him, "Why are you asking me? You do what you want!"

Then Bhagavan said, "No, no, no before you do anything you tell me. How can I do anything without telling you? So shall we go to the park?" I was surprised.

As we were walking towards the park, Bhagavan said, "Arvind, I am scared to walk on this side of the road. Can I walk on that side?" When we reached the park, Bhagavan said, "You sit here and block me, because you see those people there? If they see me they will come and talk to me. Then whom will you talk with?" And at this moment I was shocked.

In the dream I said, "Bhagavan, how do you know all this?" At that time Bhagavan put on His angry face. He said, "Until four days ago you used to tell me everything. You used to share and we used to be so happy. For four days now you have been so silent, I don't know why." And the dream ended there.

Bhagavan is always with us but we may not be able to feel Him. If the radio set is out of order, can you blame the transmitting tower? No. The radio waves are always in the air. The tuning system is broken, so we were not able to tune in and we blame the tower! This is what happens.

It once happened that Bhagavan came and mentioned to a senior teacher here, "So many people are writing letters." Then the teacher said, "Bhagavan, maybe they have some emergency – that's why." Bhagavan then looked at Him and said: **"What? Once they come under Me do they have any emergencies? The very moment they come to Me there is no emergency in their lives!"** And this is the greatest benefit we have. We have all come under Sai.

Let me narrate one incident. We always think that we have come to Puttaparthi. We have come via rail, road, or airplane to Swami. Let me mention an incident that will make us all realize how fortunate we are.

"Your Time Has Not Yet Come"

There was a convener in Indore named Mr. Mandalay. Every Thursday he would hold bhajans at his house. He noticed that the number of devotees coming for bhajans was increasing and many faces were unfamiliar. So he went to those people and asked them, "Are you new devotees for Bhagavan?" They said, "No. On the railway station there is a Sanyasi who says, 'If you want peace of mind, go to this house on Thursday and you will get it.' Listening to this Mr. Mandalay was surprised. He decided he would go to the railway station and find out for himself. He went there and as he approached the Sanyasi, the Sanyasi told him, "Stop! Don't come near me. If you want to come near me there are two conditions. Condition one: you should not fall at my feet. Condition two: I will fall at your feet."

Listening to this Mr. Mandalay was stunned. Next the Sanyasi said when Bhagavan visited North India He went to the ashram of Swami Shivananda. He said, "I was a disciple of Swami Shivananda. **Swami Shivananda was my Mentor, my Guide, my Guru, my Teacher. When Bhagavan came, he ran and prostrated to him and spent one day with Bhagavan. "The next day, we all asked our Guru, 'Who was this lad?' [Swami was very young at that time.] Swami Shivananda proclaimed: "He is the Jagad Guru!"**

After that the Sanyasi said, "Whenever I meditated in my third eye region I could always see Swami." But he never made any effort to come to Puttaparthi.

One day, while traveling to Madras, He saw a photo of Bhagavan and he enquired about Him. Some people told him that Swami is there at Puttaparthi

in Andhra Pradesh. He was overjoyed listening to this. He asked them, "How can I get to Puttaparthi?" They said, "Very simple. Catch a train to Dharmavaram. From there, take a bus to Puttaparthi."

He said, **"I took a train to Dharmavaram. By the time I reached Dharmavaram it was late at night so I decided to sleep and catch the bus to Puttaparthi the next morning." But he said the next morning "I woke up in a distant cave in the Himalayas." And then I heard a Voice which told me "Bangaru, your time has not yet come. You will have to wait."**

He said, "Sir, I have not been able to step on to the hallowed land of Puttaparthi, while you visit every now and then. You have had the chance to have Darshan, *Sparshan* and *Sambhashan* with Bhagavan Baba. Tell me, should you fall at my feet or should I fall at your feet?"

Brothers and sisters, let us never forget what a great opportunity it is just to sit and look at Bhagavan. Sages and saints of yore have prayed for ages and they just get a glimpse. We get Darshan for hours together. It's time that we realize our opportunity.

Let Our Lives Be Bhagavan's Pride

I would like to conclude with one thing an elder brother told me. I asked him, "Brother, what do you think we should do so that our lives will not be a waste?" He told me something which seemed very radical. But I would love to share it with everyone because it is the truth.

He said, "Arvind, after Bhagavan completes His Avatarhood, suppose Lord Indra comes to Him and asks, "Bhagavan, you have returned! How was Your mission?" And before Bhagavan can answer Indra looks at Him and says, "Bhagavan, see that Arvind there, he stayed with you for thirty years but there is no change in him! What happened, Bhagavan?"

And that brother told me that should never happen. What should happen is that if Indra comes and asks, "Bhagavan, how was the Mission ?" Bhagavan should look and say, "You see that Arvind there? He was a piece of junk when he came to me. And when you see what he is today you will understand My Mission."

Each of our lives should enable Bhagavan to point out and say, "If you are to see the quality of My Mission, look at the life of this devotee. Look at the life of that student." And our life must stand as testimony to Bhagavan's Mission. Bhagavan, I have only one prayer: "Give us that Love and let our Love for You grow every moment. Let it grow stronger and stronger."

Because in this life there is nothing, I stress nothing more important or of any greater value than loving Bhagavan, loving God, with all one's heart. Jai Sai Ram!

– Heart2Heart Team

FIRST COME THE TEARS...

**By Ms. Ira Strum
from Israel**

H2H received this very personal and heartfelt account from a Jewish lady, Ms. Ira Strum, about her intense inner journey. She describes in a very beautiful and honest manner how at a time of great pain in her life Swami guided her in His own unique way to greater peace and filled her with confidence and love. She lives in Israel where she works as a senior lecturer of design in Shenkar College, Tel-Aviv, a city in Israel.

Tears...Of All Kinds

When I see You, Baba, even from a long distance, my eyes fill with tears. They are unexplainable and uncontrollable, yet I trust them: they tell me that something is true! I have been around You the last five months and during these five months my strongest experiences have been through tears.

“You need them” it seemed You whispered in my ears just a few days ago. “They soften you and open the door for me to enter. They are cleaning your mind. There are all kinds of tears,” You continued, “Tears of sadness, tears of joy, of depression, of hope, excitement, laughter, tears of longing . . . tears of love.”

Writing these lines I see a picture from my childhood: it is *Yom Kipur** after the meal, before the fast.

[Yom Kipur is the day on which, Jews believe, God is consigning the people to life or to death, according to their deeds. In this day we have an opportunity to ask for forgiveness for the sins of the last year and start clean anew.]

My grandmother is standing at the door, looking at us leaving, her eyes full of tears. “Why are you crying, grandma?” I once dared to ask? “I don’t know she answered, we separate, we must say good-bye.”

She didn’t continue. The subtext was clear, also the fear. The next evening, gathering together for the meal after the fast, she was again filled with tears. “Why are you crying now?” I asked. “Oh, I am so happy to see you” she replied.

Saved By An Inner Voice

I came to see Sai Baba after three years of crisis. Three years with very little sleep, and with breathing problems. Three years of not being able to be with my cats. Three years of nightmares and fear; of running from one therapist to another, from one place to another trying to escape from myself. I was feeling trapped in a cage within my body and my soul was screaming for help. But no one could help. Everything had lost meaning and door after door seemed

closed. There was no solution on the horizon. In July, 2005, I was so desperate that I wanted to put an end to my life.

“It is not you who will decide when to die” I heard a voice from within saying, “Leave it to God! And besides you haven’t completed your duties. You still have work to do!” I am not a religious person and I do not relate to the usual picture of God but at such moments I listen – even without understanding why.

A Divine Call

Among the people I met to consult with, there was one man whom I appreciated a great deal. We had been meeting for some time till one day he said: “I think you have had a breakdown. There is nothing you need to do; just rest. But you can’t do it here, so I think you should go somewhere else.”

“Where should I go?” I asked. He was silent for some moments and then said, “There is one – His name is Sai Baba. I don’t know Him personally but they say that He is full of pure love. Pure love is what you need! Go there and stay as long as you can.”

So after some time of reflection I decided to go to India. I had never dared to go to India before as I was afraid of what I would see there. Since early childhood I couldn’t bear to see suffering. I couldn’t see people in pain – the pain of others immediately became my pain.

I went to meet a woman who is a longtime follower of Sai Baba. The moment she saw me she said, “You must go! But tell me first what you want.”

“I want to leave this world with a smile,” I heard myself saying without thinking. Then it seemed as if Baba Himself was calling me to come saying: “You are waiting for a personal invitation. Come after your feasts; it can be after the Birthday.” So I did.

The Inner Process Begins In Puttaparthi

I came full of fear but with some hope. Fear of the culture shock in India and hope because I had already been told that Baba is ‘a man of miracles’. The minute I arrived in the ashram, people started telling me all kinds of stories. ‘This is a place of miracles they whispered’ - so I was expecting a miracle!

Childishly enough I was expecting a fairy tale miracle: to go to sleep at night and wake up the next morning relieved from all pains. Of course, what happened was just the opposite – more and more pain.

The tears of my first three months in Puttaparthi had only one colour: sadness. I was crying from morning till night. I was crying from what I was seeing outside and from what I was seeing inside. It felt like I had all the sorrow in the world, from many generations. The nights were a nightmare with very little sleep and I fell sick quite often.

On top of all this, there was a battle going on inside me, rejecting the rituals. My God is abstract; how can I follow these people who worship a human shape or a sculpture? It is forbidden for me! Am I betraying my God? I went through all these fears and doubts.

Confused and full of pain I was trying to understand what was going on within me. Why everything just gets worse when other people are getting miracles? 'He is working with you; you just have to surrender' people said. But I couldn't surrender. Even in the moments I really wanted to – I just didn't know how.

At the same time there was another process going on. Baba was appearing in my dreams and in visions and guiding me. I was also trying to discern His voice, but there was a lot of inner conflict.

Conflicts take energy and my physical body was already weak, so I became more unwell. Things became desperate till one night it was so bad that I said

“OK Baba, God, whoever You are, I surrender. Please guide me back to life.”

“*Naase Venishma*”

There is a saying in Judaism which is called “*Naase Venishma*”. Actually it is an instruction in the Tora (Bible) meaning: 'First we do (what God says); only then we will understand (or will be given the reason).'

I accepted this precept and in practising it I felt some relief. When there were only two weeks left for my stay in India, I left Puttaparthi and went to be in nature. I needed to be alone and more silent. I chose Kodai Kanal because Baba would be visiting soon and I found a farm surrounded by nature.

Kodai Kanal – The Turning Point

Unfortunately, the day Baba was supposed to arrive was exactly the day of my departure. I was expected to be home for an important Jewish festival, the *Pesach* feast. Yet as that time drew closer, I felt that I could not go. I was forced from within to stay on. I extended my stay for two more weeks just to see Him again.

During the evening before *Pesach*, which we call *Leil Haseder*, Darshan became a Bhajan celebration.

[Leil haseder, the evening of the Pesach feast is when all the family gathers together to sing praises to God. The songs are based on bible stories which describe how God liberated His people, Israel, from slavery in Egypt.]

The singing went on and on as if it was a special festival. The wonderful voices were lifting everyone up as I sat outside, looking up at the sky, feeling the music expanding my heart.

“Finding My Way....After Years”

The next day was *Pesach* itself. It was the first time I was hearing a discourse, and the first time Baba, I heard Your physical voice. As Your discourse continued, I realized that You answered all my questions - even the ones I didn't know I had. You were encouraging me to be who I am.

There was one special counsel which You gave as parting inspiration, which opened the spring of my tears anew. **“Help ever, hurt never”** You said and continued: **“To help someone who is kind to you is easy. But to help someone who hurt you is great.”**

This was my way; yet for so many years I was misunderstood. People took it as weakness, and I, knowing that I couldn't behave differently, felt so alone and hurt. Immediately you gave the answer: ‘Do your work for God!’ This was not new for me, as I was living like this; yet somewhere along the way I had become tired and lost confidence in myself. I started to believe other people, who seemed surer of themselves. I was listening outside, instead of inside.

In Your words, in Your special way of reopening my heart, you brought me back to myself - the one I abandoned. When I really needed help You sent me help; when I wanted to lean You pushed me back to my center. In strange and mysterious ways You have given me lessons. In strange and mysterious ways You brought back my trust. Reminding me things that I have forgotten, helping me find things I have lost.

You were my inspiration, my mirror and my guide. At some point You, my voice from within, God - all became one. It was then that I felt only love. It was a feeling, not just a thought – for this I thank God.

I know the work is not finished...maybe it is just the start. I pray that You will always be my guide and my guard. I wish that my tears will keep me open enough for You to find entrance. Needless to say I fell in love with India and with the wonderful hearts You sent on my way.

- Heart2Heart Team

EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE - V

DECORATING TRAYEE FOR SAI **- Trayee Anniversary Day, 2001**

Dear Reader, in this series of "Expressions of Love" which we started in this January, till now we have offered you stories of different cards – New Year Card, Shivarathri Card, Gratitude Card, etc. – all made so lovingly by the students for Swami and how Swami, the indweller of their hearts, responded to their sweet 'expressions of love' - sometimes churning their hearts, sometimes drowning them in His ever-purifying love, sometimes smiling with them just like a longtime companion, sometimes taking them to heights of ecstasy with a rewarding remark or a gentle gesture.

But the boys' 'expressions of love' are not limited to cards alone. There are hundreds of other ways (and every year new ideas come up) by which boys strive to please their Lord. Just like an infant who never loses an opportunity to be with his mother, the students always look for opportunities to be with their Divine Mother, to express their heartfelt feelings for Her and bask in Her love.

The Trayee Anniversary Day, the day celebrating the inauguration of 'Trayee Brindavan' (Swami's abode in Bangalore) in the month of April is one such day when every year the boys make not just cards, but decorate the whole Trayee garden turning the serene and green lawns into a paradise of divine delight. Sri O S K S Sastry, a former student, who has been involved with the Trayee decorations for many years now as a teacher, goes down memory lane and tells us:

Come April and lots of wonderful memories of Trayee Anniversary flood in. Generally, Swami would be in Kodaikanal in the month of April, but you never know when the unpredictable Bhagawan would play His sport (and return) - so everybody is kept guessing. In fact, it is these pranks of His that give us the opportunity to express our feelings of joy and the happiness of spending our holidays with Him, transforming them, in the process, into very holy days.

Way back in 1998, with the Lord in our midst we were very jubilant and upbeat enjoying His beatific Darshan. As we were wondering what to do to make Him happy as we celebrate the Trayee day on April 26th, it occurred to us – 'why not decorate the lawns of Trayee Brindavan?' Two Sai brothers, Sanjay Singh and Sai Prakash suggested this unique idea and we were really excited. Overnight we made a big candle whose flame was in the form of 16, indicating the 16th anniversary of Trayee.

With very little time at our disposal all we could then do was something colourful with a few satin silks and Mexican hats, which were all arranged resembling small boys assembled around the lawns to celebrate the joyous occasion.

And on the Anniversary day, Swami was visibly very happy with our efforts and seemed to enjoy the little children playing in His lawns. He even said to an elderly devotee that the decoration was pleasing to the eye. We were filled with happiness, joy, bliss and encouragement. We wanted nothing more.

As luck would have it, we had many more opportunities from that time onwards and now I would like to recall the decorations we created for the 19th anniversary of Trayee which pleased Swami immensely.

The theme for that year's decoration was "Swami and His students". We started preparations for it by the 10th of April. We made a computer drawing of it by scanning a photo of Bhagawan that we felt suits the setting. The whole painting was a collage in which Bhagawan is giving Darshan and the students are surrounding Him and putting forward their prayers to Him. The entire piece was about 18 – 20 feet long and Madhusudhan, Raghuram and I started painting the various parts of the picture.

Lots of other boys, excited by the idea, joined the efforts and as the day was approaching we procured lots of rocks and painted them in bright colors. A cake was also added. This was to make opportunity for more boys to become involved in the celebrations and to make Swami happy too.

On the penultimate night of the 25th, we painted a lot of plastic tubs and put water and lotuses into them and arranged the colourful rocks all around. It looked wonderful.

Swami on His part was actually looking forward to the event, as we heard that He commented to the Rajamata's daughter of Navanagar, "Tomorrow will be My Students day."

The long awaited morning arrived and the all knowing Lord came out with a mischievous smile and an all endearing look towards the decorations. You could see it in His face that He was so pleased. The all blissful Lord looked more blissful than ever.

He asked the Hostel warden, "Who painted the picture of Swami?" Madhu ran to Him and Swami praised the painting and even created vibhuthi for him. Madhu of course was in ecstasy and we were all excited. Swami went for Darshan then and we waited with anticipation in our minds and prayers in our hearts to show the Lord around the garden more when He returns after Darshan.

After Darshan the compassionate Lord came back into Trayee and immediately entered the lawns to have a closer look at the various decorations just as we had prayed. First, we led Him to the cake which He appreciated and gently cut. We were so grateful to Him. Then He went near the painting and made close scrutiny of the entire painting. He was so joyful with smiles beaming from His beatific being. And then looking at the students painted in the picture, He said, "The boys need a haircut, the hair is too long". We burst into laughter!

Bhagawan then lovingly went and stood next to the painting of Himself and posed for priceless photographs. We all then prayed for a photo with Him and He readily obliged. Unfortunately, we became so excited so as to not miss this once-in-a-lifetime chance that it created a bit of confusion and in the process we missed a precious photo with Him.

He took a different path on the way back towards the interview room and saw the lotuses placed inside the tubs. Swami with great interest watched the 'little ponds' and wondered aloud, "Where do these boys get such brilliant ideas?" But after that came the golden message for the day. He looked at all of us and said, **"Boys, you should all have sublime and pure feelings for the Lord springing forth from your hearts just like the lotuses that are coming out of the water."** What a beautiful message! All the effort had been rewarded.

As the Lord slowly gilded past and returned to His divine abode we were very happy. But a little sad too that we could not get a nice photo with Him. Yes, there were many things to feel happy and we just relived all the beautiful moments just passed by and returned to the hostel. We needed to catch up on our sleep too.

Half an hour into my slumber and somebody woke me up – "The warden is calling you", he said. I went to his chamber wondering why he wanted me now as everything is over. But imagine my joy as he announced to me that Swami is hosting a high tea for all the students who worked for the decorations!

Needless to say, all 25 of us were overwhelmed and excited with youthful exuberance. Sleep just went out of the window. We were all ready to go in at around 1 pm, as many watched us with admiration as they also wished us good luck.

Our sweet Lord received us and watched each intently from the balcony as we entered the Trayee Central Hall, and asked us to be seated in a semicircle.

He asked me, "Where is the warden" and I said, "Swami, he is in the hostel". So He asked us to call the warden and he came immediately. Swami, in the meanwhile, came down and asked the boys who stay inside with Him to start serving the snacks. He ensured that all of us took all the items and personally supervised the serving. He watched with great joy all of us eating to our hearts' content. Finally when He was satisfied that we had enough, He summoned us to the verandah room where He sat in His *joola* (swing) and we all crowded around Him and sat close to Him.

What followed next was a one and hour long interview in which Bhagawan asked each student his name, what he is doing currently and what he wants to do in future. To many He indicated what discipline to take up after his current degree and blessed some of them when they were in consonance with what He wanted them to do.

Some of the students expressed their concerns and difficulties that they had and like a loving mother He blessed all of them saying, "Everything shall be alright."

So many boons and lots of benevolence we received in those precious moments that day when time stood still for all of us and we only hoped that the interview never ends.

There is thrill passing through my spine even today as I recollect that wonderful day which was so full of love. It was a union of hearts like no other. It was an abundant exchange of Divine Love. We were drenched in His bountiful Love as the cups of our hearts were full and overflowing. And the all-graceful Lord blessed us what we desired most too! We got an amazing group photo which we missed in the morning. He watched over each one of us as a concerned and loving mother as we walked out of His heavenly abode that blissful afternoon.

These loving memories are not just beautiful moments of the past, but are eternal reservoirs of love, of energy and grace which provide instant access to our Lord and connect us to Him whenever wherever we want Him by our side.

- Heart2Heart Team

H2H SPECIAL

UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS WITH SAI

RECOLLECTIONS OF MR. CHIDAMBARAM KRISHAN, PART 4

We continue with our 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 the last instalment, we broke off at the point where Mr. Krishnan digressed to tell us a remarkable story about how in the middle of nowhere, Swami filled the empty petrol tank of His car just by tapping it, even as He had earlier produced snacks and coffee in Quilon beach with Divine taps. In this the fourth instalment, Mr. Krishnan describes how he came to Puttaparthi to discuss with Swami the arrangements for his marriage and what happened subsequently. Read on.

As I was telling you earlier, in Trivandrum, Swami had assured me that He would protect me from death, and I had lost all fear on that account. He then began to talk about my marriage. He asked me, "Who all would form the marriage party and how many would attend?" I replied, "Swami, first the date has to be fixed and it only after that one can consider and discuss all these details." To this Swami said, "Alright, you go home now and then come straight to Puttaparthi; we can discuss all the details there." I agreed and left for my hometown. The date was 14th March, 1960, and I was still alive! Swami spent two more days in Kerala and then left for Puttaparthi via Cochin and Bangalore.

Puttaparthi, Those Days...

On 2nd April, I went to Puttaparthi for the first time with my relative Kailasam. I am surprised – there is not even a proper road to this place! From Bangalore we drove along the Hyderabad road via Chickballapur. There was hardly any traffic; there was much fear of dacoity and many people avoided this road. But we enjoyed the ride and travelled fast till we reached Penukonda. There we got a jolt – there was really no road to go to Puttaparthi! Somehow, with a lot of difficulty, we finally managed to reach Puttaparthi. The very first question Swami asked us was: "Did you have a lot of problems reaching here? Were the roads very bad?"

One problem we faced on the way was that there was a lot of hostility to Swami in the villages surrounding Puttaparthi. In those days, we did not have the by-pass road that goes past the airport.

One had then to go via the road that passes through Brahmanapalli village. The residents of that village had placed a huge stone in the middle of the country road, claiming it was their deity. Actually, their real intention was to block traffic to Puttaparthi. They would not even heed to the appeals of Swami to remove that stone. If anyone tried to have that boulder removed, the person would be attacked. It was nightmare to negotiate past that boulder in the car.

When Swami asked us, “Was it very difficult coming here?” – remember, I was coming to Puttaparthi for the first time - we replied, “Swami why fear when You are there?” Having said that, I must repeat that my experience with Swami at that time was very limited. I had seen Him in Surandai, and spent a few days with Him in Kerala – that was all.

Swami then changed the topic to my marriage. He asked, “Are all plans ready? How many of you will be coming?” I replied, “Swami, about three hundred to three hundred and fifty people.” Swami said very happy to hear that and then asked whether the *Mangal Sutram* (Sacred Necklace) had been made. I replied yes. Swami then said, “You can have your *Mangal Sutram* but I shall create one for the bride Myself. She can wear two instead of one.” With a smile, Swami then added, “That would be extra protection!” He then ended the meeting saying, “I shall speak about other things tomorrow.” Next morning, Swami summoned Suraiya, who in those days used to be in charge of cooking arrangements for visitors. Puttaparthi being very backward, practically nothing was available here and all major shopping for groceries had to be done in Hindupur.

Enigmatic Sai

You would not believe how different things were then. Swami would grant interviews around Bhajan time. There would be very few people around, may be about five or six only! Of these, about two would be called in for the Interview and the others would be left out. Inside the Interview room, He would talk to each person for about forty five minutes or so.

He would not wait for your question and would plunge into a narration of the entire life history of the person He is talking to! And He would answer all the questions one has, without waiting for the person to ask! In those days, there was no need to ask any questions; He would anticipate them all and have the answers ready! Those were indeed wonderful days!

So there He was talking to me about the arrangements for my marriage, and He told Suraiya, “This man says that about 350 people would be coming from his side for the marriage. That means you actually have to cook for 1500 people!”

When we came out, Suraiya told me, “Swami always talks like this as if a lot of locals would be attending the marriage. Nothing like that is going to happen. Most of the locals simply do not believe in the Divinity of Swami. They say, ‘This boy grew up here along with us. And now He says He is God! How can that be?’ There is thus a lot of hostility in the neighbourhood. I am thus going to plan food for only about 350.”

I was totally confused by what I was hearing. Here was Swami giving specific instructions that food must be planned for 1500 whereas this man who is supposed to arrange all this is saying he would plan only for 350 or so! I just left it at that.

That Rama is This Sai Rama

In those days, Swami used to come down from His room upstairs in the Mandir around 4.30 in the evening. There used to be a Brahmin scholar named Brahman. He was the only priest in the Mandir in those days. This Brahman would be seated in the front in the Bhajan Hall with a small desk in front of him, like the one clerks used in those days for writing accounts while squatting on the floor. When Swami came down, He would not sit on the chair placed there for Him. Instead, he would sit on the raised platform below the chair, on which was spread the tiger skin. In all, there would be about 7 or 8 people only. There were of course about twenty and odd ladies in the Ashram but they would not attend this evening session with Swami.

The proceedings started with Brahman reading out some passages from the Ramayana. He then started explaining what he had read out. After that, Brahman asked us who were gathered there, whether we had any doubts. None of us understood what he had said in the first place; where then was the question of asking doubts! At this point, Swami intervened and said, "You will not understand what this man is saying. I shall explain it all." So saying, Swami started giving a Discourse. During His Discourse, Swami narrated many incidents that are not recorded in the published versions of the Ramayana. Brahman therefore asked, "But Swami, one does not find these incidents reported in the Ramayana." Swami simply said in reply, "I am Rama, I was there and I know what exactly happened!" Mr. Brahman was stunned and feebly asked, "Are You really Rama?"

You see, in those days, very few people really knew that Swami was God in human form. They felt that He was a holy man with some special powers – that is all. Many came to see Him but worship of Him was still taboo.

For example, in those days, Swami used to stay in the West Wing of the Mandir and would walk along the veranda in the first floor towards a room in the East Wing for His meals. People would gather below and watch Him walk across. But if anybody joined his palms as a gesture of worship, that person would be ridiculed. And Swami also contributed to the process by throwing the veil of *Maya*. He moved with people like a friend.

Nobody had heard of God moving around like a friend and that often made people to overlook His Divinity. He just did not disclose His Divinity to all. He would casually call someone, take that person to the Interview room and spend time chatting with that person!

To get back, Mr. Brahman asked, "Are You really Rama?" Swami coolly replied, "Yes, I am indeed Rama." My head began to reel. I began to tell myself, "Rama is God and this Swami is man. How can man become God? How can I accept this claim? Looks like I am going to have a real problem here! Am I supposed to give up one God for another? If I did that, it would be a great mistake."

Turning to my relative who had come with me I said, "Look, I am not happy with what's happening here. Firstly, it is a grave mistake for a man to declare that He is God. Secondly, He asserts that He is Rama, whereas you and I worship Lord Muruga. I think this is not the place for us. Let's go back!" He did not agree and I fell silent.

"I Am Krishna And I Know It All"

After that there were Bhajans and Swami went upstairs, taking me along with Him. Once again He started talking about my marriage, and told me that He would give more instructions on the following morning.

Next day, Swami reviewed all the preliminary arrangements and then said, "Go to your family astrologer and ask him to pick an auspicious day for the wedding."

In the evening, there was one more session that started off with Mr. Brahmam reading out some passages from the Mahabharatha and trying to explain the meaning. Swami intervened like on the previous day, and said many things not found in the usual texts.

Once again Brahmam said, "Swami, these things are not found in the books. They are completely new." Swami brushed aside the objections with the comment, "I am Krishna and I know it all." Brahmam was floored and muttered, "Swami, yesterday You said You were Rama and today You are saying You are Krishna!" To that, Swami simply said, "I am everything!" Brahmam weakly responded by saying, "Is that so?"

At this point, I gently tapped my companion and whispered, "Listen, I am not at all happy with what's going on. First He says He is Rama and then He says He is Krishna. Whatever it is, He certainly is not my Lord Murugan. I think I had better get back home." My companion replied, "Hold on! Just be patient and wait for a while. We can discuss all this calmly later." After this there were Bhajans and Swami then retired upstairs.

Lord Muruga 'Madness'

I had had enough of all this. I just got into my car and drove off, straight to my hometown. You see, I was passionately and deeply devoted to Lord Murugan who had saved me once from death when I was very sick, and also from many other crises. When I reached home, my second brother asked me, "What happened there in Puttaparthi? Have all matters relating to the marriage been sorted out? Have the details been finalised?" I replied, "No, nothing of that sort has happened. You see, this Sai Baba is a human being but He is declaring that He is God. I am simply not able to accept that. And so I just came away before completing the discussions."

My brother was not at all happy with what had happened and said to me, "Listen, you should not bother about those things. For us, the marriage is important and it must be celebrated. Sai Baba told you that He would perform

the marriage. Instead of sorting out the practical issues relating to your marriage, you have unnecessarily become involved with issues like whether He is God or not. What has that got to do with your marriage?"

I responded, "I have always been ardently worshipping Lord Murugan, and I therefore simply cannot accept these declarations. For me, there is no God other than Murugan. That is why I came away." On hearing this, my brother became frustrated and dismissed me by saying, "You are a mad fellow and would not understand even if told. You do as you want."

I then left home and went straight to Tiruchendur to worship Lord Murugan there. Standing in front of the idol I said, "O Lord! I was disloyal to You and went after a man who says He is God. Please forgive my temporary betrayal." I then had elaborate rituals performed in grand style, by way of atoning for what I believed was the sin I had committed. After all those rituals had been performed, I felt somewhat calmer inside and then returned to my home.

I must interrupt to tell you that till then, I had not really experienced in depth and in full measure, the Love and Compassion of Swami. True, He had lifted my spirits, and true He had enabled me to live beyond 14 th March 1960. But my eyes were yet to be opened. And that happened almost immediately after I returned from Tiruchendur.

The Dream That Cured The 'Madness'

That night, I was fast asleep. Around 4.30 A.M., I had a strange dream. In that dream, I saw myself standing before the idol of Lord Murugan in Tiruchendur, with His consorts Valli and Deivayanai on either side of Him. I had in my hands, flowers and fruits for offering to Him. Suddenly, all the three idols came alive, and I could see all of them laughing loud. Valli and Deivayanai then began to say to Murugan, "This is a madcap. Why are You giving him Darshan?"

On hearing this I became angry and retorted, "No, I am not mad." The two consorts now turned to me and said, "You ARE mad, and nothing but mad. That's why you do not understand anything!" Meanwhile, Lord Muruga disappeared, and His place there now appeared an old man whom I could then not recognise; I now know that old person to be none other than Shirdi Baba. Deivayanai tells this old man, "This is a mad fellow; he does not understand anything. Why then are You giving Darshan to this fellow?" Once again I protest, asserting loudly that I was not mad by any means. While this was going on, the old man fades away and in His place I see Swami.

So first there was Lord Murugan with Valli and Deivayanai, then Shirdi Sai in place of Lord Murugan, and now our Swami with the two consorts of Murugan on either side; and they all were laughing. Once again I was described as mad and once again I registered my protest.

Even as I was arguing furiously an elephant appeared looking rather menacing and I was frightened. Suddenly something happens and I blurt out,

"I now understand; they all the same." Valli then demands of me, "At least from now on, would you behave yourself?" Feebly, I reply, "Yes."

Just then I woke up with a jolt and I realised it was all a dream. I then began to reflect asking myself, "What does all this mean? Did I have the dream because I was thinking intensely about all these matters or was it that Swami deliberately made me have this dream?" I was wondering how to sort this out. I then came to a decision: "This very minute, I shall leave for Puttaparthi. If on His own Swami makes a reference to this dream, then it means it was no accident but set up by Swami Himself; and it also means that Swami IS God. On the other hand, if Swami does not refer to this dream but instead scolds me for leaving without informing Him, then it means that He is only a man.

The U Turn

Promptly I went to my brother and told him of my decision to drive back immediately to Puttaparthi. He was displeased with my wavering mind and said, "You are truly a mad fellow. You have got the proof you want in the dream itself. What more do you want? One moment you come and the very next moment you want to go! How strange! OK, you want to go? Then go by all means, but for heaven's sake do so after a few days. There are many pressing business matters that need to be taken care of. Attend to them, dispose of those matters, and then go after two or three days." I dismissed all that advice and said, "Listen, I HAVE to go, go right NOW! Understand? Otherwise, I just cannot sleep!" My brother was simply fed up and said in disgust, "You are just plain mad. Do what you want!"

So what happened after that? Did Mr. Krishnan go to Parthi or did he not? To find that out, watch out for the next instalment!

(To Be Continued)

– Heart2Heart Team

SAI WORLD NEWS

THE FOURTH WORLD WATER FORUM LEARNS MUCH

FROM THE SRI SATHYA SAI DRINKING WATER PROJECTS

Introduction

The Fourth World Water Forum (4WWF) was held recently in Mexico City from 16th - 22nd March 2006 on the theme of "Local Actions for a Global Challenge". The World Water Forum is the flagship summit of the World Water Council which was established in 1996 on the initiative of renowned water specialists and international organizations. Its mission is "to promote awareness, build political commitment and trigger action on critical water issues at all levels, including the highest decision-making level, to facilitate the efficient conservation, protection, development, planning, management and use of water in all its dimensions on an environmentally sustainable basis for the benefit of all life on earth."

By providing a debating platform the Council aims to reach a common strategic vision on water resources and water services management amongst all stakeholders in the worldwide water community. In the process, the Council also catalyses initiatives and activities, whose results converge every three years at the World Water Forum.

Nearly 20,000 people converged in Mexico City from 140 countries to take part in the two hundred working sessions, during which 1,500 local actions were presented. The participants included official representatives, 78 ministers, 120 mayors, 150 legislators, 1,395 journalist experts, apart from many NGOs, and civil society representatives, etc.

But why are we interested in the World Water Forum? Simply because the Forum is very interested and excited about Swami's Water Mission.

The Sri Sathya Sai Anantapur Drinking Water Project is a telling example of how with inspired leadership and proper public-private partnership stupendous objectives can be achieved. In the case study prepared by the World Water Council on Swami's Anantapur Project available on their website (www.worldwatercouncil.org), the last paragraph states,

"The uniqueness of the (Anantapur) project lies in every aspect of the Project Management right from its Design, Planning, Engineering, Implementation, Cost effectiveness, Service delivery, Operation & Maintenance, Time & cost management, its replicability and finally achieving the end goal of supplying fluoride free safe drinking water to a million inhabitants of the district and thereby improving their health conditions and ensure better quality of life. A non-governmental organization, led the way in showing that the success of the entire endeavor depends on Unity, Purity and Divinity."

To give you more details of what exactly went on in the forum, we have below an interview with Prof. Anantharaman who actually presented the case study of Swami's Drinking Water Projects to the forum in Mexico City recently. Prof. Anantharaman has worked as Managing Director of several multinational companies in Africa, Asia, Europe, USA and also as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of a Transnational Business conglomerate based in Switzerland. He has served as an adjunct professor in several business schools including the Harvard Business School and is currently an honorary faculty member in the School of Business Management at Puttaparthi. In conversation with Prof. Anantharaman (AN) is Prof. G Venkataraman (GV), a former Vice Chancellor of Swami's University. Over to the interview:

Prof. G Venkataraman In Conversation With Prof. Anantharaman

GV: Sai Ram! We have with us in our studios Professor Anantharaman possibly known to you because we had invited him earlier to our studios. That time, we chatted about his coming to Swami and his experiences. Today he is here for a very specific and a somewhat different kind of reason. Professor Anantharaman is just back from Mexico City where he attended the fourth WWF.

Prior to that, he attended the third WWF in Kyoto, three years ago. So what has WWF got to do with Swami you might be wondering? I am going to now ask Professor to tell us something about the connection with WWF and Swami.

So Professor, welcome to our studios. I think you must begin by educating us a little about the WWF and what it stands for? Who organizes it? And how frequently does it meet, where does it meet and why does it meet?

AN: The WWF meets every three years. The third WWF was in Kyoto three years ago and during the time they met in Kyoto, and in the earlier water forum also, they developed certain Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for availability of water to people all over the world.

GV: Is the WWF by any chance a part of the United Nations, officially or unofficially?

AN: It is an unofficial body of the United Nations. And UN – HABITAT had sponsored a special programme in both, the third WWF and in the fourth WWF, to concentrate on Millennium Development Goals.

(The UN–HABITAT is the United Nations agency for Human Settlements Programme; it was established in 1978 and its headquarters is at the UN Office at Nairobi, Kenya.)

One of the millennium development goals of the WWF is to reduce in the next ten to twenty years the number of people going without water by 50%. Towards this they wanted to examine several local actions that have taken place over the world to supplement governmental work to ensure that we

reach the millennium development goal. They were interested to learn about the Sri Sathya Sai Drinking Water Project in Anantapur in the third WWF, and subsequently in the fourth WWF.

GV: How did they come to hear about the Anantapur Project at all? Because even here some people don't know about it.

AN: I think UN-HABITAT, which was one of the co-sponsors of this WWF, have heard about our Anantapur project. In fact they had come and visited us here. UN-HABITAT had even asked the Housing and Urban Development Corporation of Delhi (HUDCO) to do an impact evaluation study a few years ago. And the Asian Development Bank which funded the evaluation study is also aware of our project. So the UN-HABITAT is aware of us successfully carrying out this local action programme and we presented this project at the third WWF.

GV: How did you happen to be invited to the third WWF?

AN: Basically, the representative from UN-HABITAT was at Prashanti Nilayam at some point in time. At that time, I also happened to be here. We got talking to each other - in fact, it was in your office when we all had the meeting, Mr. Chakravarti (Secretary, Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust) was there and you were also there.

GV: Oh yes! It was a long time ago!

AN: So we were discussing this, I from an academic interest and also from a management point of view. The UN-HABITAT representative felt that a case study must be written about the Anantapur Water Project. So when the third WWF was convened in Kyoto, there was an invitation to me to present this case study which I was supposed to write on the Anantapur Water Project. That's how the whole connection started.

GV: So what exactly did you tell the august audience in Kyoto?

Prof. Anantharaman's Address To The Third WWF

AN: In Kyoto, my talk was scheduled to be about the financial model of the local action programmes of the water project. So there were several other talks about pay back period, cost of the project, recovery etc. The focus was basically upon that and when I went in there I said that at that point in time, I was not going to say anything about the financial aspects of the project which was not very relevant.

What is more relevant about the project was how the whole product was conceived and carried out - so I did not talk about the financial aspects at all. **I said that I did not want to tell them about a project case study, or about finance, but I wanted to tell them a story - a story about love. And I said this is a love story. The whole project started as a love story.**

GV: They must have all being shocked!

AN: That received attention I suppose, because previously people were talking about pay back periods, financial charges, and replicability. That somebody should then talk about a love story in connection with a public activity programme certainly caught people's attention!

GV: So how did the love story go? Did you get an Oscar?

AN: No, I didn't get an Oscar!

GV: But how was it received?

AN: It was received well. Being the first attempt to introduce this programme, there were a lot of interested parties at that time. The local press wanted to know all about the water project, and a little about Swami, so it had a good beginning.

GV: Okay, before we get on to that, I think you must tell us and repeat for our benefit as to what this love story is about; how did you relate this love story; and what was the love that you were talking about?

Swami's Love Story - The Anantapur Water Project

AN: Basically what I told them was that I am here to present a case study of a water project in Anantapur District in Andhra Pradesh in India. I don't know much about water nor do I wish to talk to you about the financing angle. I don't even want to talk to you about a case study. What I really want to talk to you about is the fact that it is a story and not only a mere story but a love story. **How one Man's Love and Compassion for a large number of people who were suffering without water, was responsible for ensuring that water was permanently available for them through this project.** And then I brought in Swami and I carried on.

GV: What kind of questions were you asked? Obviously your presentation must have been very different from all the others, and it must have taken them quite by surprise.

AN: Within the session I didn't face very many questions because of time constraints. But immediately outside, as soon as the programme was over, there was a lot of interest. People asked me 'what is this love story that you're talking about?' So I repeated the whole love story.

GV: What kind of people came to you?

Interest From The Conference Delegates

AN: Public service people, secretaries of government, ministers from several different countries, people connected with water and water projects from

Universities who were also activists pro and against water being a basic right of people.

GV: People are against water being available?

AN: No, basically they are activists who feel that water resources must become the property of everybody.

GV: Oh! You mean it should be socialized.

AN: Exactly, it should be socialized. They are against pharmaceutical companies taking away the water.

GV: They were against the privatization of water!

AN: Exactly! There were also university people, people engaged in public policy making and people who implement policies on behalf of several companies.

GV: What kind of questions did they ask you at the outset?

AN: At the outset, they wanted straightaway to go to the question of who is this person who has taken this as a complete local action programme? **What is His interest? Why did He get involved in a government area? What was there in it for Him? Why did He have to do it? Who is He? Where is He and how is He?** It quickly shifted away from water to Swami Himself.

I think there were more questions on Swami and the reason why He did that, rather than how He did it, which was supposed to be the focus of the programme.

GV: So, what kind of impression do you think they were left with after listening to all this?

AN: I think that they were definitely left with the impression that if there is good work needing to be done for society, if sufficient leadership is provided for taking care of this work, there are enough people in the world who can come forward and do that. As long as inspired leadership is available we can raise the common good of all, even if government is not able to provide inspired leadership. Everybody wants to contribute something towards the common goal. There is a basic desire on the part of everybody to do good.

GV: Did they understand that Swami did the project for free and gave away the assets free?

AN: In fact, the question where did the funds come from was the first thing that they wanted to know. And when I said that these funds came from contributions from civil societies all over the world, they were surprised that a civil society in another country should contribute to a water project here. Secondly, when they found out that the whole project was completed from

these contributions and was finally handed over as a gift to the government they were very surprised - why would someone do this without any obvious motive or advantage for them? They just couldn't believe that such a thing was possible in the 20th century! (*The Anantapur Water Project was formally handed over to the Indian government in October 1997.*)

GV: I am not surprised. Okay, so what happened after Kyoto ? Was there any follow up or any kind of attempt to learn from this example?

The Anantapur Water Project Is Selected As Exemplary

AN: What happened in between Kyoto and Mexico City where this fourth WWF took place? I am not privy to what exactly happened but UN-HABITAT informed me that during this process they short-listed several projects in the world, where local action can provide a good support and substitute for government action and how these could be successful. The Anantapur Water Project was one of the 10 that was short-listed. And the case study of this Anantapur Water Project, and the 9 others which were short-listed were circulated to public policy bodies all over the world thereby creating a greater awareness of what local action can achieve.

GV: Are you aware of the other projects?

AN: One of the ten is from Pakistan; somebody had devised some water distribution metering system and there was another project from El Salvador. They all seemed to be more on design of new kinds of equipment for water distribution or preservation, etc.

GV: Facilitation of water rather than supply of water.

AN: This was probably the only project of its kind where there was cooperation between the non-government organization, government, the contractor and the beneficiary.

GV: Also here, the objective is to bring relief to people having suffering from distress.

AN: Exactly. The fact that it was in the Anantapur District, one of the most arid districts, where there were eleven famines out of the fourteen in the whole state. I think that was all emphasized. I think that it was appreciated that a lot of relief of people's suffering was achieved.

Prof. Anantharaman At The Mexican World Water Forum

GV: And one million people were getting it! Okay, so let's come to Mexico City in the year 2006. Tell us what you saw there and how was it different if at all from Kyoto ?

AN: The UN-HABITAT again invited me to come to the Mexico City to present the Anantapur Water Project to a group of people since we were one of the 10 who were selected among the 10 best projects in the world.

GV: Was the audience the same or different?

AN: In fact, the audience was much bigger in the sense that the total number of people who attended the WWF in Mexico was 17,000 people!

GV: 17,000!!

AN: But of course all the 17,000 didn't attend this session. There were several sessions, about twenty of them.

GV: Parallel sessions?

AN: Yes, parallel sessions and this was one of the sessions. But the number of people who attended in Mexico was at least 2 to 3 times that of Kyoto, so a much bigger affair.

GV: Before I come to your presentation, just for satisfying our curiosity, what kind of people attended the Mexican conference? In other words, were they more from the third world or was it equally distributed between the first world and the third world?

AN: I would say there were a greater number of people from the third world than the first world. There were also some people from the first world, but the participants seemed to be predominantly from the third world. While if I talk about the people who made presentations, I think there were more from the first world than the third world.

GV: The problems are more in the third world - at least larger numbers of people from the third world participated. Now let's get back to your own presentation. Was it in any way different from what you said in Kyoto ?

AN: Well, what they thought was that I must provide continuity from Kyoto and carry it one step further. So, I briefly commented and remarked by saying that when this was presented three years ago in Kyoto, I talked about this being a love story but I want to carry it one step further and say this is not merely a story of love, but also a story of compassion.

Because love by itself is meaningless unless it results in some kind of an action. You need compassion for that action. I laid emphasis here on the fact that the founder of this trust had this compassion for this very large number of people who were going without water. And this compassion carried them forward in order to establish the project and in as much as in the earlier session, there were questions about sustainability, replicability of all these other projects. I did not spend much time in describing the engineering of this project but I basically talked about the kind of impact that this project has made subsequently.

I think Radio Sai had produced a poster which was exhibited in Kyoto on the uniqueness of the project, its impact and benefits. There were several reports such as a story of a girl who said that from tomorrow onwards, she can go to school. **There was a mother who went back to work because she didn't have to spend so much time drawing water. There was a story of another girl who said till yesterday she was spending so much time drawing water but from tomorrow she can go to school. There was a story of another girl who said she was walking 4 ½ miles to fetch water everyday but now she can get water from outside the house.** After talking about compassion, I focused more upon what is the impact to the society in that area.

Swami's Example To The World

GV: You mentioned one word - replicability. So, tell us what you said to them about replicability. How did you define that word?

AN: With respect to replicability, what they want to evaluate is whether it is possible to replicate the same concept, with the same method of financing. I said that the proof of replicability is in fact that the project has replicated itself. Because, using the same kind of management cooperation, after Anantapur, we've had Medhak, Mehboobnagar, Chennai, and Godavari.

If you combine all these, there are a total of 10 million people who did not have water now provided with access to water. One of the Millennium Development Goals is to help the 10 billion people in the world without water. So 10 million is 1% of 10 billion. Therefore one local action programme has solved the problem for 1% of the total people in the world who were without water.

It has replicated itself in 4 or 5 different areas. The engineering is different, the projects are different, but the concept is exactly the same.

GV: Here I would like to quote something which Dr. Safaya says. You know, Dr. Safaya is the director of our Super Specialty Hospitals. Many visitors who see him ask whether this can be replicated elsewhere. And the standard answer is that yes if you have a Sai Baba there you can replicate it! I would just try to ask you whether you are asked that kind of question.

AN: Not exactly that kind of a question but that question is implied.

Can The World Follow?

GV: Okay, I will play the devil's advocate and I will ask you what a pressman would have asked you. He would have said: "Well, there was a driving force here in the shape of Sri Sathya Sai Baba; whose love motivated and created these projects. How can you say it is replicable because it is confined to one person?"

AN: The leadership was provided by Sathya Sai Baba through His Love and Compassion. But, basically what Swami did was to tap human beings' desire to do good to others, to cooperate, and to work together etc. And towards this He created a cooperative endeavour between 4 or 5 different bodies who work together for a common cause. It is possible to create that cooperation elsewhere using this model; all it requires is somebody else to replicate this model and do it somewhere else.

GV: Can I put it this way? We all have within us the latent goodness. If the doors can be opened, and the leadership can be found, to harness this goodness, then the model becomes replicable.

AN: Absolutely! In fact, 2000 years ago, man wanted to do nothing more than to do good for others. There is this basic desire to do good; there is this basic desire to be part of a community. The basic desire to work together is always there.

GV: So, can I put it this way that if one follows the example of Swami and provides inspired leadership in the same way, these projects can be done elsewhere, maybe not in the same scale?

AN: It should definitely be possible.

GV: Very good. Okay, now how many days did this Mexico City meeting last?

AN: The Mexico City meeting was almost a week, six sessions a day. It was on a much larger scale because here they talked not only about water but also about sanitation.

GV: Are both problems connected?

AN: Yes, both are connected problems. I would say that since there are a larger number of people, there was a much greater awareness created about the water project at the Mexico presentation. In fact, at the end of the session when I was talking about the Godavari Project I mentioned the stories Swami related about how when our engineers went there, they were confronted by Naxalites. And when they were told that Swami has sent people to lay the water pipe line, the Naxalites were totally surprised that somebody should bother about them who are outside the pail of the law and they started supporting our people.

“I Like Your Boss”

When it was mentioned, I think it had a very sympathetic reaction from the people. In fact one of the gentlemen at the end of this presentation came to me and said: “I like what your boss is doing.” I said: “Well I will certainly convey it to Him that you like what He is doing.” He said: “Look, we are a bunch of people who have a lot of money. We are from the west coast.”

GV: This man was an American?

AN: Yes, he was an American. "I and my friends want to do something about it. What is it that we can do? Can we come and meet your boss?" I said: "You certainly can come and meet my boss as you call it." He said: "Do you have His business card?" I said: I don't have His business card but here's His photograph; you can have His photograph." "Is there no email id?" I said: "He normally doesn't attend to email but this is a photograph, this is where He lives and you can come and see Him and He will talk to you." And there were several requests for they wanted copies of the power point presentations to be sent to them.

There were requests from several universities for this to be sent. There were 2 or 3 US based organizations which had been formed for establishing public utility projects in the third world. They wanted to know in more detail about this project, in fact subsequent to the presentation, I spent a lot of time talking to these individual people, and it created a much greater awareness.

GV: Were there any world leaders who attended this Forum?

AN: There were ministers from several countries, I particularly noted visitors from several West African, East African, and South African countries. There was a very large contingent from China, and a group of people from Cambodia and Japan, and I could notice that there were a lot of ministries connected with Public Utility and Water, etc.

GV: Was the U.N Secretary General there?

AN: The UN Secretary General was not there, but the head of UN-HABITAT, who is an assistant to the UN Secretary General and has a direct reporting relationship to the UN Secretary General was present there.

Media Interviews

GV: Did the media show any interest in your presentation of Swami's project?

AN: Yes, there were local Mexican television people who were present during the session who wanted to talk to me and there was another television agency called teleSUR which basically broadcasts to the entire South America. It's a very popular Spanish language TV channel. They were interested in interviewing me and I had a session with them 2 or 3 days later where they interviewed me for almost about one hour.

GV: What did they ask you and what did you tell them?

AN: The teleSUR interviewer wanted to focus more on this water activism than anything else so she asked me questions about what is my belief about water being a basic right of people? I tried to deflect it completely away and say: look, I don't want to talk about rights here.

Basically, we are concerned with responsibilities. As a person connected with this project, we believe we have a responsibility to ensure that water is made

available to people so that people can drink it. So I would shift to responsibility, and she would shift back to rights, so this battle went on for a while almost throughout, but somewhere after about half way they were all completely interested in knowing all about the water project.

GV: And were they interested in knowing about Swami?

AN: In fact, I didn't know how quite to bring Swami in because every time I used to go towards the trust and the founder of this trust, the interviewer would deflect me away to water rights and then I would go back to the trust and she would deflect me to the water rights. So this battle went on for a while. I was feeling pretty uncomfortable that I have not brought in Swami anywhere here. And I would satisfy myself if Swami doesn't want to be brought in here; He only wants the world to know what is being done.

But right in the end, the cameraman of all the people, suddenly turned around and asked me: "Look here, do you have a photograph of the founder of the trust?" Fortunately, I found I had a photograph of Swami in my coat pocket. So I took that out and while he took the photograph of Swami's picture, I had an opportunity to talk a little about Swami. I am sure the devotees in South America would all be very happy to see this, because there is extensive coverage in South America.

GV: If you don't mind, I would like to do a little commercial for H2H. The issue of April 2006, carries a feature of Sai activities in South America starting with Mexico. So we have an article telling the world about South America because many people don't know much about Latin America, they only know about North America. There is an article on Sai activities in Mexico and how it started and so on. [To read the first article on Latin America and about Mexico, click [here](#).] Now getting back to your visit to Mexico, apart from this television interview, did you happen to see any Sai activities there or did you at least meet any Sai devotees there?

Visit To A Vibrant Mexico City Sai Centre

AN: In fact, there were about three or four of us Sai devotees in that conference; I was there; Mr. Ramakrishnan of Larsen and Toubro was also there, and Kalyan Ray was also there from UN-HABITAT. They had called all of us to come and attend the Sai Center meeting. They had asked Kalyan Ray to make a presentation about the Sai Net project in Africa and also on Education in Human Value Systems. They asked Ramakrishnan and me also to speak and share our experiences. **I have attended Sai centers in several parts of the world but I must say that the intensity and the close devotion that I was able to see at the Mexican Sai center was something which was extremely touching.** The people were very happy to see us. They asked all sorts of close questions on what is happening at Prashanti Nilayam, what Swami is doing, etc. It was a very intensely emotional experience being with them.

GV: How many people were there in the Mexico City Center ?

AN: I would say there were about 50 to 60 people.

GV: Of course the city is big, there must be many centers.

AN :It was only one of the four centers and the meeting in the center went off so well that they asked us to come over the next day and talk to them. There were a larger number of people who came on that day, they were all very happy to see us. The amount of love and devotion they had for Swami is outstanding. In fact they gave me a photograph of all of them and said: "Please go and give it to Swami and tell Him that Mexico loves you." I said I will try as much as possible.

The Next WWF?

GV: Very interesting, that's very nice. Before I thank you, I would like to know when the next WWF is.

AN:Three years hence.

GV: Where will it be?

AN: In South or West Asia, maybe in Istanbul, Turkey .

GV: So are you going to there?

AN: I don't know, let's see.

GV: Okay, if you go to Turkey, you should take water from the Ganges - not our rivers. Maybe you won't find any water in the rivers. I was just reading the other day, that out of 117 rivers in the world, which have a length of more than 1000 kms, nearly half of them are dry. Water does not flow from the source to the place where the river enters the sea. That is the kind of situation that we are now in. Water is a very vital subject. In fact, as some people would say, water has become more important than oil. Not everybody needs oil - unless you have a car, you don't need oil. But everybody needs water and you can't live without water for more than a few hours. So water is going to become a very big issue!

AN: In fact, in H2H in one of the issues, you had presented some very interesting statistics on water which I had used in my presentation also, where you have said that 97 percent of the water in the world is in the oceans. And among the remaining 3%, 95% of the 3% is in the form of the icebergs.

GV: That is all that is left available for our use. **Fresh water is very limited and we are going to be in deep trouble with water sooner than we realize. So I think we have to pay serious attention to Swami's teachings on this subject; and maybe we will explore that some other time.** But I would like to thank you, maybe but I would like to mention one point related to Love and Compassion if I may.

Swami says Love without Compassion is meaningless. You can't profess Love if there is no Compassion in your heart. On the other hand, Compassion without Love is impossible. And Swami is the Embodiment of both. And when both run together, then great miracles happen. And they have happened as you must have told in Mexico, in the case of Swami's Hospitals and in the case of Swami's education facilities?

AN: In fact, I concluded by saying that Love with Compassion gives rise to these actions. As an example this trust is not only involved in water projects alone.

There are super specialty hospitals where there are open heart surgeries; there is a university where education from kindergarten to doctorate programmes is available, all at no cost - all using the same model of sustained leadership, based on the same values of love and compassion. So it extends to all areas of human activity, not necessarily just water.

GV: Well, thank you for sparing some time for us and Sai Ram to you again.

AN: Thank you. Sai Ram.

– Heart2Heart Team

SSSIHMS HOSPITALS – A REVELATION AT THE INDIAN

INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AHMEDABAD HEALTH CONFERENCE

The Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, one of the premier business schools of India, held its first ever comprehensive health care consultation covering a wide range of issues concerning health care in India between 20 and 24th March 2006.

The objective of the exercise was to increase the interaction between academics, practitioners, administrators and members of industries associated and involved with health care.

The current Indian health care scenario is at best complex. Recent trends have witnessed the persistence of age old infectious and communicable diseases with a concomitant increase in lifestyle diseases such as Diabetes Mellitus and Ischemic Heart Disease. The health care delivery mechanisms in India have not grown with time. Government hospitals have neither infrastructure nor funds to cope with the changing trends of disease while Corporate hospitals (which have had a phenomenal growth in the last decade) though having the best of technology and facilities essentially function with a business outlook. In addition to this, issues like the exodus of quality doctors from government hospitals to private healthcare sector, and of medical personnel to greener pastures outside India, low penetration of health insurance, reservations in healthcare education for specific castes, etc. have only made high quality health care increasingly inaccessible and grim for the common man.

It is commendable that the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad has come up with the idea of holding management consultations every year and bringing out a publication based on the proceedings of this consultation. In order to provide the necessary focus and thrust to the consultation, a National Advisory Committee was formed. A variety of health care facilities management and service delivery mechanisms was taken up as one of the themes for this consultation.

The Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences (SSSIHMS), being a recognized provider of high quality health care totally free of cost, which is difficult to imagine and sustain in the present day world, was invited to share its unique and successful experiment in health care delivery along with many other providers of health care from different backgrounds. The presentation for SSSIHMS was made by Dr. Anil Kumar Mulpur, FRCS (Edinburgh), FRCS(Glasgow), FRCS C/Th(Edinburgh), FIACS, FETCS and Head of the Department of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery at the Baba's Super Specialty Hospital, Bangalore.

Reflecting on the Conference, Dr. Anil says,

“It was a great honor to represent the hospital in a large national platform, to a learned audience drawn from various walks of life. Misconceptions about waiting lists, free treatment, and volume of work done were at once removed from the minds of the audience. They all agreed that the divine force of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba was singularly responsible for this success. Concerns were expressed about the practical possibility of replicating such a model.”

Dr. Anil stressed that it is not impossible for others to take up this success story as a role model to replicate similar services in other parts of the country. “The presentation was very well received,” says Dr. Anil and continues, “It has been a learning experience for us on the employee retention policies which were being adopted by corporate hospitals using modern human resource management techniques. There is no doubt that we will need a good number of highly motivated and skilled doctors and paramedical staff to increase the volume of the work. Such frequent interactions with people who specialize in management do help in revisiting our own thinking.”

So much for brief summary of what went on in IIM-A. But to give a complete picture of how the presentation was received by healthcare professionals and policy makers from different disciplines and important wings of society, what questions were raised, etc. we had invited Dr. Anil to our Radio Sai studio for a chat immediately after the conference. Below are excerpts from the conversation.

**Prof. Venkataraman (GV) in Conversation
with Dr. Anil Kumar Mulpur (AKM).**

GV: Sai Ram Listeners and Greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. We are very happy to have in our studios today Dr Anilkumar Mulpur, who is a cardiac surgeon in Swami’s Hospital, in Bangalore.

The reason why we have invited Dr Mulpur to our studio is that he has just come back from Ahmedabad where he has attended a rather unique meeting. This meeting was convened by the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad.

I think it would be better for Dr Mulpur himself to describe as to why Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad convened this meeting, what it was all about, who all were present there and what they discussed.

So doctor, please tell us about the meeting and what was the duration.

AKM: Sai Ram everyone. The meeting was a 5 day program. It commenced on Monday and went on until Friday. Unfortunately, I could not be present for all the 5 days, I was there only for 2 days.

GV: Roughly how many people participated?

AKM: There were about 110 participants.

The Purpose Of The IIM-A Conference

GV: Who called for the meeting and what is the purpose?

AKM: The meeting was called for the first time by Indian Institute of Management. This meeting, in their words is the unique first ever Management Consultation to get the Health Care Providers and Health Care Policy Makers together to sort out certain burning issues.

GV: Why is IIM Ahmedabad interested in this? What is there in it for them, if I may ask so, as it is a business school?

AKM: My own feeling is that these schools has now started to look at the potential which the health care sector has to offer, as over a period of 5 to 10 years, this sector is really going to open up. Therefore I think they are looking at the business point as well.

GV: What are the primary motives of this conference?

AKM: India is a signatory for what you called as “Almata Declaration.” The Indian Government is committed to give health status that is acceptable to the community. The deadline for the goals is the year 2015. The Indian Institute of Management thought they will try to help the Government by trying to get all the information from the health care providers.

GV: Can you describe what the goals are?

AKM: These goals are related to health care in a multifactor manner. They include maternal and child health, literacy, provision of safe drinking water, rural employment, rural electrification and sanitation, and such things which will have repercussions on the health status at the community level.

GV: The State is supposed to provide these things.

AKM: The Indian Government has an obligation. The expectation anywhere in the world is that the Government or rulers have to provide this. Now we talk of health as a fundamental right. So people now have started to demand that this is their right and they are after the Government to demand that this right is attended to.

Who Attended The Conference

GV: What kind of people participated in the conference?

AKM: This was a conglomeration of different people from all walks of life. We had Health Ministers, Health Secretaries, Politicians, Bureaucrats, and Government Civil Servants who are running large civil hospitals, Non Governmental Organizations, the Corporate Sector plus the industry. Industry also has a certain role to play.

GV: What about Doctors?

AKM: Doctors were there but this is not a purely medical conference. They would have formed about 1/5th to 1/4th of the attendees.

GV: What was the role you were expected to play and why were you invited?

AKM: They had a certain general knowledge about the scenario of healthcare status delivery and healthcare delivery systems in India and they knew that the Sri Sathya Sai organizations are doing phenomenal and unique work in this field.

GV: You mean medical camps?

AKM: Yes, Medical Camps and the related activities in terms of “*Gram Seva*” (*Village Service Outreach Programme*) and so on. Our beloved Director Dr. Safaya was invited. For personal reasons he could not go and he deputed me to go. He gave me his ideas. We all know what Sathya Sai Seva Organizations do.

GV: The Hospital is not really connected to the Sathya Sai Organization. It is an institution of its own right and a world famous one too. Was the role played by the Hospital in the Indian Medical Scenario any consideration when the invitation was extended?

AKM: Yes, because they have actually looked at the tertiary care which we are providing. In fact that was the main theme. Tertiary care provision, that is extremely costly, they wondered “How come your Organization is able to give it totally free of cost? What is the secret?”

How Did The Conference Proceed

GV: Now that you have given us the background to the meeting, the participants and the purpose, how about telling us what you saw and what you heard?

AKM: What I have seen is a genuine interest for the first time from the healthcare policy makers to find out what exactly is going wrong with making policies. Why despite policy making, a good 60 years after independence, we are no way near provision of safe drinking water to State Capitals, leave alone district headquarters and villages. How should we be going about the so called private and public enterprise partnerships, to involve more of non-Governmental organizations and how exactly Government should be taking up these projects to give them a new turn, so that at least now they can come on to the right path and try to deliver health care system to all the sectors of the society?

GV: You mentioned drinking water; this was discussed in the context of ensuring health and avoiding water borne disease?

AKM: That's correct.

GV: When they were talking about water, was there any opportunity for them to know about Swami's massive drinking water projects?

AKM: I have told them about the project even before they could ask me. <<laughter>>

I have given them the phenomenal statistics that you have generated. So far Sathya Sai Central Trust has spent about 180 million US Dollars. Those figures were mind boggling. They couldn't believe that in a record time we are able to cater to 10 million people, without ever approaching any Governmental Organization.

SSSIHMS – Questions Raised And Doubts Dispelled

GV: What were the questions about Swami's healthcare system?

AKM: The only question they had was "What is the source of your funding?" And I told them that the preamble of the Hospital is that we are going to provide healthcare free without reference to caste, color, creed, Nationality, religion, economic status and most importantly, there are no leaflets, no donation boxes. There is no solicitation for fund donation at any stage whether it is in *Ashram* or any of the institute. And obviously, people voluntarily donate, every penny is accounted for and that goes into human service.

GV: What kind of questions was asked about Swami's hospital health care system? For them it must have come as a great revelation and also possibly a shock!

AKM: Yes. The key question is how on earth is it possible to give free medical care totally, absolutely free, to anybody who walks in the hospital? This is an experiment and our hospitals have been doing this for a good decade and a half. The message has not percolated. One thing I have seen is people still have lots of misconceptions. Even when they were announcing that I will be speaking, they thought this is sort of a private hospital, managed by a trust and we are collecting funds. There are similar hospitals of that background. In the opening remarks when I said that it is 100% free they all sat upright on the chairs and listened.

GV: Did they ask you about the kind of treatment?

AKM: Yes. What I have told them is the whole spectrum of the disease which we are addressing to. I actually combined the statistics of Prashanthi Nilayam and Whitefield. We have done over 24,000 cardiac operations, over 5,500 neuro surgical operations; I have given them a good breakup, as of today. More importantly what I did with the help of our technical officers, I arrived at the monetary value of the work which has been done in these tertiary care

hospitals so far. Just monetary value, as in the market value of each procedure, and it came to a huge figure something like 660 crores, 150 Million US Dollars. There are organizations which have no-profit no loss basis, where they will still take some money from the patients. In our case whether it is a valve or coronary artery by pass surgery, we do it total free of cost.

GV: Did people appreciate the fact that most of the beneficiaries were absolutely poor people?

AKM: Yes. I also tried to emphasize that we have absolutely no selection. A patient may be millionaire, and he will get the same treatment. A homeless patient may be coming and he will still get the same treatment. There is no discrimination at all; this is something unique. We don't have any special rooms in the hospital, everybody is treated equally.

GV: Did you show any pictures? I am sure you would have done it.

AKM: I have not only shown the pictures of the hospitals, interiors of the hospitals, operation theatres, intensive care unit complexes. I also took the opportunity to project what we have been doing in social care and Educare in terms of our university's recognition by the National Accreditation Assessment Council, our having achieved a double plus grade, what the Institutions look like and a few very impressive photos of the Water Projects.

GV: You seem to have been an ambassador for all the institutions of Swami. I think I should kidnap you and keep you here so that you become a spokesman for all those Institutions for and on behalf of Radio Sai. <<laughter>> What kind of other issues were discussed? You mentioned general problems like sanitation, healthcare etc.

Other Important Issues Discussed

AKM: The important issues were "What is the cross-sectional status of health care delivery, especially in the corporate sector?"

GV: What do you mean by that?

AKM: As you speak in 2006, "How are certain hospitals which have no-profit, no-loss functioning? And what is their modus operandi?" "How are the problems faced by civil hospitals and so called Government hospitals unique and how are they being tackled, with lots of political pressures, etc. and interferences which are characteristic of our health care delivery system even at tertiary level in Government set up?"

And then they discussed about Tele medicine and what technology can do so that remote people can be accessible as far as health care is concerned. They showed certain shots where we had the Chief of ISRO coming up and speaking to us, Mr Sathya Murthy. Other things discussed were about the experiments which have been done by Non-Governmental Organizations.

The next topic discussed was to look at the disease burden and projections. For example “What is the Psychiatry disease burden like? What is the Neurology burden? What is the cardiology disease burden like in the next few years?” so that they can frame policies and change existing policies such that these individual problems can be looked at.

The Unique Counseling Department At SSSIHMS

GV: I want to ask you a question, which I think you would appreciate, since you deal with patients, many often poor and illiterate. When an educated person comes to you as a patient, you can ask questions and he will understand what you are trying to ask and will give you fairly precise answers. When a person comes, who does not know how to describe his address, you may not be able to find out by asking questions what exactly the patient is suffering from. His descriptors are vague; he is not used to this kind of dialogue. You have of course your instruments, which will tell their own story, but in the ultimate analysis, you would I am sure, like to talk to the patients – were these kind of problems, addressed at all? I think it is one thing to treat educated patients and quite another thing to treat someone who absolutely has no idea of what modern medicine is.

AKM: This was not particularly addressed in the meeting. In our hospital scenario, luckily we have a group of Doctors who speak a good variety of languages. And the other thing is we have the counseling department who try and get in touch with somebody who can exactly translate.

By the time they have come to tertiary hospital, they have all the objective data with them and it is easy for us to go through the data and have an idea of what exactly is the problem. More importantly, when it comes to counseling them about what exactly they should do after we do the operation; we are doing a pretty good job.

I am sure you are aware of the Pilot project we have taken up in Karnataka state where we have involved District level Doctors who are going to follow these patients with Sathya Sai Seva organizations. And every single patient is actually followed up! This probably doesn't happen in any part of the world, including developed countries like America, as this will cost a lot of money.

GV: And this is absolutely fascinating, I didn't know about it. Why don't you enlighten and educate me and our listeners a little bit more about our follow up program, where you are going to use the services of Doctor devotees, to follow-up post operative or post treatment scenario of Patients who are treated in Swami's hospital? Tell us something more.

AKM: Whenever we see a patient, we have always been trained to see him as a whole in the background of his family, in the background of his occupation and never to do piece-meal work. So a tertiary care specialist will come to do only a piecemeal work, but he should not lose the sight of the overall background of the patient.

GV: In what way is that important?

AKM: In what we call as a tertiary level of health delivery, we have something known as “Disability limitation and rehabilitation.”

GV: Can you explain what Primary, Secondary and Tertiary care is?

AKM: Primary care is where the patient for the first time comes into contact with any health care provider. In India it could be a primary health care center or a rural center or a sub center or it could be in our context, the Sri Sathya Sai Organization doing a “*Grama Seva*” Activity. (Village Outreach Programme) That is the first time a patient is in contact with somebody who has a medical background. Certain of the diseases, a good 80% of them can be treated at that level, such as infectious diseases.

You pick up certain problems which cannot be solved at village level, in the Government setup District Hospitals that provide secondary care. In the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations, the equivalent will be Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital and also similar hospitals and nursing home which have been identified by our groups of workers in various parts of India.

GV: In a General Hospital, what kind of attention and treatment do patients get?

AKM: In General Hospitals, you have specialties like General Medicine, General Surgery, Pediatrics, Ophthalmology, ENT, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Gastroenterology, Orthopedics, these are some of the specialties where patients can be diagnosed what his ailments is and treatment can be given to satisfaction of the patient.

GV: What is Tertiary Care?

AKM: Tertiary Care is where you have advanced specialties like Cardiology, Cardio thoracic surgery, Neurology, Nephrology, Neuro surgery, Plastic surgery and certain advanced aspects such as Gastro Entrology and Pediatric surgery. They are all tertiary care, where second level of referral will come to them. They are very specialized in certain aspects and they cater to that and the patient is transferred back to the Primary care physicians so that they are followed up.

In our situation (in India), what is happening is we have the Primary and Secondary and after that, they go to the tertiary, and when they go back, there is no proper follow-up. In our hospitals, they come to tertiary, from the length and breadth of the country.

Nowhere in the world, are we able to produce solid data, to say, for example what happened to valve replacement patients after 5 or 10 years, describing how good are they, how does their symptom status improve? Are they able to go back to professional life? Can they lead normal family life? Are they productive from a social and economic perspective?

In Karnataka what we thought is instead of taking the whole India in one go, we would involve District Level Devotee Doctors and Non-Devotee Doctors who have a bent to do certain social activities.

We called for a conference. We gave them what exactly cardiac and neuron surgical care means. We started identifying persons in individual districts and even taluks where the patients can go to them for help. And we just follow them up.

GV: How many doctors are empanelled in the follow-up service?

AKM: More than 100 doctors covering all the 27 districts of Karnataka, roughly 4 doctors per district.

GV: Now the doctors are there, how do the patients know where they have to go to see the Doctors?

AKM: When we discharge, we tell them who the nearest contact person is. We also tell them where a good quality laboratory is. Again there is no uniform standard in labs. And certain of the life saving medicines, such as *Warferin*, we need to alter, which is an anti coagulant, in the light of their investigations. If he goes to a lab where the investigations are done and I cannot depend on the quality of the investigations, we are doing more harm than good. So we try to identify good quality labs, good quality doctors and direct the patients to them, so that we can take sensible decisions.

GV: When was this programme started?

AKM: This is a good one and a half years ago.

GV: What are the results so far? What are the trends that you can see? First of all, is this working out well? Do patients go?

AKM: Patients do go there. And we also identified some teething problems. Some of the doctors are at a loss to explain as they themselves have no full information. They do not understand what abbreviations mean? What exactly the final diagnosis printed on the discharge summary mean? We have tried to clarify this to them. We will probably call them for second round conference shortly and clarify their doubts/questions.

GV: And later, what is the method through which the Doctors communicate to you?

AKM: Manual, for the time being also by electronic media. Electronic Media is not present everywhere, but we try to encourage them to use electronic media (internet), as it is quite fast and they can answer them.

We also hopefully will install a hot line and any patient can ring that number 24x7 and have some clarifications. That would mean you will have a million calls a day. <<Laughter>>

Initially you will have some physicians who will screen them 24x7 and if that physician cannot answer, they will have access to the Hotline, so that the patient will have access to a Primary caring Doctor 24x7 in a tertiary set up.

Preventive Care And Health Education

GV: Let me fan out and ask some general questions.

You have seen hundreds and hundreds of patients, poor people coming with all kinds of ailments. Do you believe that many of these problems can be avoided by some care earlier in the life of the patient?

AKM: Absolutely correct, it is very unfortunate thing that even today, in 2006, up to 30% of hospital cardiac admissions are because of rheumatic heart disease.

GV: Tell us a little bit about that.

AKM: Rheumatic Heart Disease starts off with streptococcal infection of the throat. And if this particular infection of the throat is diagnosed properly and treated with adequate antibiotics like penicillin in the community and general community health status and environment is improved, in terms of housing and prevention of overcrowding we will never have this magnitude of problem.

GV: When you are talking about Healthcare for all, we are not able to provide even access to something like buying a tablet, what do you do?

AKM: On paper, all these areas which you have mentioned Government will say, "They also fall under such and such sub-center, which belongs to a Primary Health center." It is open secret that we don't have adequate doctors in rural background or paramedical personnel and therefore someone who probably has half knowledge gives out dangerous medicines.

The villagers are totally away from civilization. On one hand you have got such advancement in Information Technology. On the other hand we have 70% of rural India where only 25% of doctors are practicing. This issue needs to be addressed by Government.

GV: Apart from this you talked about education. You can use the medium of Television, which is commercialized, even in the Government sector. So who is going to talk about Primary Health Care and matters relating to being clean, taking precautions, taking Vitamin A to avoid problems to the eye at an early age – how are we to do this?

AKM: We know that Government is unable to do this; there is no doubt about it - because of sheer population, numbers, etc. So what I feel is the so called

non-Governmental and voluntary organizations have to do a large part. The projects of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations are a role model.

We have started this; we have shown how it can be done. **My take home message in the Indian Institute of Management was “Comprehensive health care can be provided at primary, secondary and tertiary level, absolutely free of cost with a good quality.”**

And I said, “We are not here to wipe the disease burden from the face of the humanity. People should look at us and take our role model and grow in greater numbers and replicate this.”

Go to villages and speak to them about health education, sanitation and safe drinking water. Actively take part, involve the community, adopt villages, even industry should do this.

Only then we will be able to make any progress and tackle this. This is a phenomenal problem. 70% of doctors who are concentrated in cities are not willing to go to rural areas where you have actual occurrence of these many problems.

GV: Can I ask you a provocative question and make a suggestion? There is a reason why I am going to do that. Some years ago I was having a chat with Dr Ramanathan Iyer of the hospital. He is also very passionately committed to helping poor people. So I told him, Dr Iyer, we have this big Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization. Why don't we some how or the other, make some charts using which when the volunteers go to the villages for any work, they explain in simple language, “This is how you should take care of your teeth. This will give you benefits.” This is what you can eat; so that you can avoid these problems. This is what you do with the water? And stuff like that.

The goal is there is a preventive approach. And some of these cardiac problems also can be covered. Now that you have started this follow-up do you think it is worthwhile to initiate by bringing together these two great institutions created by Swami, the Hospital and the Organization to spread health care education?

AKM: You are absolutely right, and I fully agree with you, that is how we should go about. Hyderabad Youth also have done quite a bit on this. They have actually issued certain guidelines for somebody who wants to go and do *gram seva*, what are things that should be done. You are absolutely correct, we should create a common collection of reproducible charts.

The Last Word – Let's See Sai In All

GV: This is the challenge that Swami is giving us. With all these multi media it can be made very attractive and it is not at all difficult. So Doctor, I would like to thank you for sparing us some time and telling us about the meeting.

Have the last word – what do you think must be done on the National Scale as a next step? There was one meeting in Ahmedabad, some kind of followup is needed. On a national scale, what should be done next?

AKM: If you see what Swami's 80th birthday speech, in the first very few sentences, He said "Who is bothered about wiping the tears of the common poor man?" That is absolutely true, he has said this several times in the presence of distinguished senior politicians. I strongly believe in *Yatha Raja Thatha Praja* {"As is the King So are the People".} Unless we have value based politicians, sitting in high positions, value based Policy Makers who are sitting in high positions, who are able to earmark a large chunk of funds. The current state is that only 8 paise out of 100 is reaching the common man. This is not enough.

You need to have clean politicians, value based politics, corrupt free bureaucrats then comes high quality medical education and only then we will be able to have a proper health care delivery system. This I think, holds good for any country.

GV: Doctor, you are asking for the moon! <<Laughter>> How about some practical suggestions?

AKM: For practical things, unless we have the grassroots change, we are not going to get anywhere. If you don't want me to ask for the moon, I think social organizations like ours should straight away get on with it and do a great more deal than what we do today.

Swami has been giving us directives. He is right there to supervise; **"You don't have to come to Prashanthi Nilayam. Wherever you are and are doing selfless service, I am there with you. I am there in every person, in every person you are talking to."** I think that should get into our people.

GV: What is the message you would like to give our listeners as a parting gesture?

AKM: I can't better say than what Swami said "Love All, Serve all".

GV: Thank you very much Doctor, it was so nice having you here and I hope I will be talking to you about the hospital and your patients again.

AKM: It is an honor and a great privilege talking to you and allow me to share my thoughts. I am part of Sathya Sai Organization, wherever I am. You have my full commitment.

GV: Thank you. God Bless You. Jai Sai Ram.

-Heart2Heart Team

GET INSPIRED

THE GIFTS

There once was a Sadhu who regularly used to give discourses. One day at the end of his talk he was expounding on being grateful to existence. "Operate from a space of gratitude, '*Kritajna*'. This will allow us to expand," he said.

A beggar was sitting in a corner and listening to this discourse. Afterwards, went up to the Sadhu to speak with him.

"Maharaj, your talk was really great. But one thing I am not able to do. You said to be grateful to existence because it has always showered benediction on you. Sorry, but existence has not given me anything. I am struggling even for one *roti* to eat!"

The Sadhu said, "I agree with you, so I will give you two lakhs, right here, right now. Will you be grateful then?"

The beggar was thrilled and said yes.

"But...I want something in return from you," the Sadhu explained.

The beggar became confused. "But I do not have anything at all. What can I possibly give you in return?"

The Sadhu smiled and reassured him. "I promise I won't ask you for anything that you do not have."

"Well then," the beggar said, "if I have something then I shall definitely give it to you."

And so the agreement was made. The Sadhu went on. "I shall make arrangements for the two lakhs to be delivered to you. Now, you please give me both your eyes."

The beggar was taken aback. "What will I do with two lakhs without my eyes? I do not agree to this ideal!" he protested. "I prefer my two eyes right where they are in my head to the two lakhs."

The Sadhu asked, "But you were cursing existence because you said you don't have *anything*."

This is a revealing story, isn't it? The beggar who claimed he had nothing in fact possessed two eyes, two hands, two legs, a brain, a stomach, his intelligence, and so much more, but he was unable to see these gifts. For him, only what he didn't have - money - was important to him, until the Sadhu pointed out to him what he *did* have.

Being able to see is a great gift of existence. Not only that, but we can hear, walk; talk, smile and laugh: all these are great gifts as well. To say that you have nothing and become unhappy is ridiculous. In fact, we should dance and celebrate that existence has showered upon us so many wonderful abilities. We too often tend to focus on what is missing in our lives. When we start operating from what we *don't* have, all that we do possess gets dismissed and forgotten. However, counting your blessings, and they are always there as the beggar found out, reminds us of the wonderful gifts that are ours.

Swami tell us, "There is no wealth more satisfying than contentment. Eat your fill, not more. There is a limit which you cannot overstep without injury to yourself. Find out your measure, your limits, your bounds, then act. Do not develop jealousy towards others whose measures are greater, who have less limitations, less narrow bounds. Hold firm to the steps that you have reached on your spiritual path, then transfer attention to the next. Have a clear vision of the goal and march on. (Divine Discourse, 3rd April, 1967)

*Illustrations: Ms Vidya, Kuwait
Courtesy: Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas, February 2006*

- Heart2Heart Team

THE BOON OF BOONS

It was a dark rainy night. The King was riding through a narrow lane. He was in disguise for he was in the habit of dressing as a common man so as to see how his subjects lived. Though thoroughly drenched by the rain, the King did not mind, for he was strong and healthy enough to withstand the cold. The darkness did not bother him either for he was not afraid to face danger. And so he rode on through the stormy night.

Coming up stealthily behind him was gang of a dozen bandits. They had noticed that this stranger was riding a very fine horse and intended to steal it from him. All of a sudden, the robbers surrounded the King, who was taken by surprise. The King did not panic, but just as he was about to dash off and make his escape, his horse's hoof got lodged in a crack in the road. The bandits were about to pounce upon him when six young men suddenly appeared from the rear and surprised the bandits and rescued the King.

Now whenever the King traveled incognito, some of his ablest bodyguards followed at a discreet distance. The royal guards arrived on the spot and cornered the gang of thieves, who tried to escape but were all captured.

Naturally, the King was pleased with the brave young men who had come forward to save him, even though they had no idea that they were protecting their King. After thanking them, the King insisted they accompany him to his palace. The young men had come from distant villages. They had become friends because they were all staying at the same inn.

By morning, the news of the incident had spread. Everyone was delighted that the bandits had failed to harm their noble King. The members of the royal family, the ministers and courtiers and the public all praised the young men's courage. When the King appeared in the durbar, the six young men were brought before him. The King got down from his throne and embraced them. He expressed his wish to reward them for the help they had rendered him.

"Let each one ask me for the thing that would please him most. I promise to grant it instantly, unless it is beyond my power or capacity to do so," the King announced.

The oldest of the six friends was asked to state his desire. He thought for a moment and then said, "O King, I have only a hut for a house. For a long time I have wished to live in a comfortable house. Will you please fulfill my wish?" The King summoned the court architect and engineer and instructed them to build a grand mansion for him.

The next young man wanted to be promoted to the rank of a nobleman. The King bestowed some titles upon him and made him one of his peers. The third young man said, "My Lord, the poor people from my village come to the town every week to sell vegetables. Because there is no good road between my village and the town, the villagers suffer, particularly during the rainy season. My prayer is, let a good road link my village with the town."

The King made a gesture of approval and the minister in charge of roads and bridges made a hurried note of it. When the fourth young man was asked to state his wish, he blushed and replied, "O, great King, you are like my father; find me a beautiful bride, if you please." The King's jester had a beautiful daughter. The King asked the jester to give his daughter's hand in marriage to the young man and the jester happily agreed. The fifth young man expressed a desire for money. A bag full of gold *mohurs* was immediately handed to him.

Now came the turn of the sixth young man. He said, "My King, I want you to be my guest once a year until one of us dies." Everyone was surprised at this strange request. Some thought him a fool. Even to the King thought it rather odd. But as he had promised to fulfil any request unless it was beyond his capacity, he agreed to spend one day and night every year at the young man's house.

Now it was left to the various departments of the King's government to make adequate arrangements for the King's yearly visits to the young man's abode. First of all, it was necessary to build a good road - a royal road - to his village, so that the King's chariot could run there smoothly. Then the question was raised: How can the King live and sleep in the young man's home which was hardly more than a cowshed? In no time a luxurious castle, worthy of hosting the King, was built for him.

But how would a young man with a meager income maintain the castle and play host to the King and his entourage? To solve this problem, arrangements were made for him to draw a handsome monthly allowance from the royal treasury.

According to a long established convention, the King could only be a nobleman's guest. So the young man was promoted to the rank of a nobleman with very special titles of honor bestowed upon him. He was now as dignified as any prince of royal blood. There was yet one more factor to be considered. The lady who would be the King's hostess should be familiar with the King's habits and refined tastes. To whom could they be more familiar than the King's daughter? Soon, arrangements were afoot to wed the princess to the young man, for the young man was now rich, lordly and master of a castle.

Thus, by asking for but one boon, this wise young man had all the many boons his five companions had obtained individually, and in actuality much more. In like fashion, when we pray to the Divine directly, we receive devotion and purity and everything else we may need. As Jesus said, "Seek the Kingdom of God first and everything else shall be added unto you." And as the young man found out, one need not wait for these virtues to flourish first to make one eligible for hosting the Divine!

*Illustrations: Ms Jyothi and Timothy, Seattle
Courtesy: Nava Sarathi*

- Heart2Heart Team

FREE AT LAST

One windy spring day, I observed young people having fun using the wind to fly their kites. Multicolored creations of varying shapes and sizes filled the skies like beautiful birds darting and dancing in the heady atmosphere above the earth. As the strong winds gusted against the kites, a string kept them in check.

Instead of blowing away with the wind, they arose against it to achieve great heights. They shook and pulled, but the restraining string and the cumbersome tail kept them in tow, facing upward and against the wind.

As the kites struggled and trembled against the string, they seemed to say, "Let me go! Let me go! I want to be free!" They soared beautifully even as they fought the imposed restriction of the string.

Finally, one of the kites succeeded in breaking loose. "Free at last" it seemed to say. "Free to fly with the wind."

Yet freedom from restraint simply put it at the mercy of an unsympathetic breeze. It fluttered ungracefully to the ground and landed in a tangled mass of weeds and string against a dead bush.

"Free at last" became free to lie powerless in the dirt, to be blown helplessly along the ground, and to lodge lifeless against the first obstruction.

How much like kites we sometimes are. The Lord gives us adversity and restrictions, rules to follow from which we can grow and gain strength. Restraint is a necessary counterpart to the winds of opposition. Some of us tug at the rules so hard that we never soar to reach the heights we might have obtained.

Let us each rise to the great heights our Sai has in store for us, recognizing that some of the restraints that we may chafe under are actually the steadying force that helps us ascend and achieve.

As Swami says,

"Discipline is essential for the success of every endeavour of man in whatever field, whether it be economic, social, educational, or merely material and worldly. It is even more essential for success in spiritual effort."

Source: Moolyasudha, October 2005

- Heart2Heart Team

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

1.

Can you complete this saying from Swami?

“The End of Knowledge is _____.”

- a. Love
- b. Wisdom.
- c. Perfection
- d. Freedom.

2.

Reverence to the Ten Commandments is found in both the Jewish and Christian faiths. In which book of the Bible can you find the account of God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses?

- a. Genesis
- b. Proverbs
- c. Judges
- d. Exodus

3.

In the *Ramayana*, what did Hanuman first do to attract Mother Sita's attention when he found her sitting in captivity in the Ravana's Ashoka garden?

- a. Hanuman transformed himself into a squirrel and reached Sita's feet.
- b. Hanuman flew through the air and landed before her.
- c. Hanuman recounted to Sita the exploits and prowess of Lord Rama.
- d. Hanuman dropped a ring belonging to Rama at Sita's feet.

4.

What was the boon granted to Bheeshma, the great warrior from the epic Mahabharata, by his father?

- a. That Bheeshma could die whenever he pleased to.
- b. That Bheeshma could call upon a sacred eagle to carry him anywhere.
- c. That Bheeshma would be able to conquer all foes in battle.
- d. That Bheeshma could call on his father at any time for help.

5.

What is Swami's teaching on 'Destiny'?

- a. We should resign ourselves to Destiny's will.
- b. We should pray to make our desired Destiny happen.
- c. We should act to fulfill our destiny.
- d. We should consult astrologers to find out our future.

6.

Can you complete this sentence from Swami?

“Your basic nature, believe Me, abhors this dull, dreary routine of eating, drinking and sleeping. It seeks something which it knows it has lost - _____.”

- a. Money
- b. Heaven
- c. Shanti
- d. Respect

7.

In Islam what does the term *Haj* refer to?

- a. A Sufi saint.
- b. The annual pilgrimage to Mecca.
- c. The call to prayer.
- d. Songs of devotion to Allah.

8.

The Buddha encouraged his followers to develop *metta* - what does this term refer to?

- a. Frugality
- b. Cleverness
- c. Loving kindness
- d. Renunciation

9. In which year did Swami visit Rishikesh and bestow incredible blessings on Swami Purushotamananda, who had been in a cave for thirty years.

- a. 1959
- b. 1980
- c. 1957
- d. 1963

10.

Can you complete this prayer from Zoroastra?

“You who wish to hold fast to the path of good thought through righteousness should keep the demon of _____ suppressed.”

- a. wrath
- b. speech
- c. thoughts
- d. laughter

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1A

The complete message of Swami is:

The end of education is Character.
The end of knowledge is Love.
The end of culture is perfection.
The end of wisdom is freedom.

2D

In the book of Exodus, we find the account of God calling Moses to Mount Sinai and giving him the Ten Commandments as follows,

“And God spoke all these words:
‘You shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven
above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.
You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
Honor your father and your mother.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.
You shall not desire your neighbour's house or anything that belongs to your
neighbour.”
(Exodus ch 20 v 1-17)

Further to this Swami tells us,

“Moses was always meditating on God and dedicated his entire life to God. Because of this, Moses acquired the effulgence of the Divine.” (*Divine Discourse 18th August 1995*)

3D

Swami delightfully recounts this episode in *Ramakatha Rasavahini*,

“He dropped right before Sita the ring that was given by Rama. It fell shining like a flame of purest ray. And he kept on repeating “Rama! Rama!” in ecstatic bliss. When her eyes fell upon the ring, Sita was astonished at what she saw. “Is this true, or am I dreaming? Can it be true? How can this golden ring worn on the golden finger of my Lord be found in Lanka? Is this Rakshasa magic or mere hallucination? No, I should not hesitate any longer, after recognising it as my Lord's, to take it in my hand. It will be a sin if I refrain from handling it.” So saying, she took it and placed it on her eyes in reverence. Tears of

gratitude flowed from her eyes. "Rama! Are you granting me your Darshan, the joy of your presence through this ring?" she said and raised her head."
(*Ramakatha Rasavahini II p132-3*)

4A

Swami comments on the greatness of Bheeshma in these two passages:

"After he fell in the battle he lay on a bed of arrows for 56 days for the auspicious moment of the northward motion of the sun to give up his life. He had such will power that he could bear any amount of personal suffering. He spent his last days imparting the highest wisdom to the Paandavas.

(*Divine
Discourse 7.10.97*)

"One morning, Dharmaraaja went to Krishna, in order to pay homage. He found Krishna seated in the *padmaasana* pose, meditating deeply, with teardrops rolling over His cheeks. Dharmaraaja wondered whom He was meditating upon. At last, when Krishna opened His eyes he dared ask Him the question and Krishna replied that He was exulting over the devotion of a great soul towards Him. He said that it was no other than Bheeshma, whose mind was intently fixed on Him even while he was on the bed of arrows. It is not enough if you claim to be a bhaktha; the Lord must acknowledge it and exult over it, as Krishna did, when He was lost in admiration over the steadfastness of Bheeshma.

(*Divine Discourse
24.7.64*)

5C

"If you sit quiet with the fruit in your hand, hoping that its juice will reach the mouth, how can you take it? It is sheer stupidity to complain that destiny denied you the juice, without squeezing and swallowing the fruit. Destiny gave the fruit into your hand; Karma alone can make you enjoy it. Karma is the duty; Destiny the result. Result cannot emerge without action...You should never underestimate your powers; engage yourselves in action commensurate with that power. For the rest, talk of Destiny to your heart's content. It is wrong to desist from the appropriate Karma, placing reliance on Destiny. If you do so, even Destiny will slip out of your hands. Whoever he may be, he must engage himself in Karma."

(*Sandeha Nivarini p,72*)

6C

The full passage is as follows,

“Your basic nature, believe Me, abhors this dull, dreary routine of eating, drinking and sleeping. It seeks something which it knows it has lost - Shanti: inward contentment. It seeks liberation from bondage to the trivial and the temporary. And it is available only in one shop: contemplation of the highest Self.”

(The Inward Path Lit Up by Swami)

7B

The Haj is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca – only undertaken by those who are physically and financially able to perform it. Nevertheless, about two million Muslims go to Mecca each year. The Haj begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic year and pilgrims wear simple, unstitched garments, which convey the idea that all stand equal before God. The rites of the Haj include circling the Ka'bah seven times and walking seven times between two hills. Pilgrims also stand together on the wide plain of Arafah joining in prayers for God's forgiveness.

8C

In these beautiful and inspiring words, taken from the *Metta Sutta*, we find an example of Buddha's teaching on love,

*“Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born,
May all beings be happy!*

*Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings:
Radiating kindness over the entire world
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths.”*

9C

In 1957, Swami Purushotamananda welcomed Baba as if expecting Him. He was more than seventy years old. On the second visit to the cave, Baba placed His Head on the lap of Swami Purushotamananda and laid Himself down. Suddenly His entire Body was bathed in divine brilliance. His Head and Face appeared to have increased very much in size. Rays of splendor emanated from His Face. When later asked to divulge the nature of the Vision, Baba said that it was a Vision of the glory of the Lord.

10A

The complete prayer is from *Gatha* 48.7 and reads as follows,

“You who wish to hold fast to the path of good thought through righteousness should keep the demon of wrath suppressed and should cut out hatred. To which path of good thought the beneficent man is dedicated.”

-Heart2Heart Team

THE HEALING TOUCH

JAGADISH DISCOVERS HEAVEN

AND FINDS FULFILLMENT IN SSSIHMS, WF

This is a story of an amazing transformation of a patient from West Bengal, India for whom God was a nonentity before he stepped into Baba's Hospital in Whitefield and now he says "I had heard of heaven.....(but I) did not think it would be in Whitefield."

It is not uncommon for patients who have been recipients of Bhagavan's unconditional love through the superior medical care, coupled with the love and affection of the staff, to write to Swami's Hospitals expressing their gratitude to Baba and the hospital personnel.

Once in a while, though, there comes along a patient for whom the Hospital and the treatment made available here are nothing short of a miracle. They strike a deep and deadly blow at one's narrow ways of thinking, fuelled by ego, self-centeredness and materialism.

Mr. Jagdish Chandra Ghosh is one such individual who underwent a bypass surgery in January 2006. He came to the Hospital referred by his son, a doctor, who told him that, "If you cannot find a cure for your illness at this hospital there is no other place in the world where you can be cured."

During his pre-discharge counseling session, Jagdish opened up and revealed that during his stay at the hospital he underwent a sea change in his perceptions and went from being an atheist to feeling deep gratitude to Him for having opened his eyes to reality. This change, he candidly admits, is due to Divine grace. For the first time, he has become aware of something beyond the body and mind and has now embarked on a journey of self-exploration and understanding.

The following is an English translation of the letter written by Jagdish, containing the outpourings of a sincere heart profoundly touched by the love of a Divine Being.

"I had heard of Heaven, but not in my wildest dreams did I think that it would be in Whitefield, a place in Bangalore in the state of Karnataka.

As a member of the CPI (M) party, I was an atheist. I used to think of everything as deception, magic. But standing in front of the hospital, nay a temple, I was shaken to the core of my beliefs.

I saw people irrespective of caste and religion being received with the hope of better treatment, the hope to live.

In a country where even government hospitals do not provide free medicine for mere fever, in that very country there is a service organization providing the best quality treatment for heart and nervous system disorders absolutely free of cost. Is it possible?

I felt disgusted at my own distorted beliefs that I had harbored all these years. **Here I saw the fulfillment of those golden words of Swami Vivekananda,**

“Who serves others, serves God.”

It is true that service to mankind is service to God, but where such service is rendered by God Himself, it becomes impeccable – perfect. Divinity pervades every activity here.

SSSIHMS – I am thankful not just because of my free treatment (CAB) but more so since my long held wrong beliefs were given the correct direction. I know now that God exists. I realized the value of service, duties and responsibilities.

In life, if I get any opportunity to come and serve at Baba’s lotus feet, doing service of any kind, I will find fulfillment in my life. This alone is my prayer.”

Jagadish Chandra Ghosh

West Bengal, India.

