

HEART 2 HEART

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Page No.</u>	<u>Section</u>
03	BETWEEN YOU AND US
	SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS
05	SATHYA SAI SPEAKS – The Essence of Devotion
07	CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI BABA - Part 24
13	<i>CHINNA KATHA</i> – Guru the Last Resort
	COVER STORY
14	PART ONE - THE ATHI RUDRA MAHA YAGNAM - A POWERFUL PRAYER FOR UNIVERSAL PEACE
30	PART TWO- THE PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE BEHIND THE POWERFUL SACRIFICE OF THE ATI RUDRA MAHA YAJNA
	FEATURE ARTICLES
41	UNDERSTANDING AND ATTAINING THE SUPREME BEING THE VEDIC WAY
51	THE SAI MOVEMENT IN VENEZUELA
61	THE MANTRAS OF MANTRAPUSHPAM – MULTI-FAITH AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL
68	MOVING FROM ILLUSION TO ENLIGHTENMENT
	SERIAL ARTICLES
72	THE DIVINE STORY OF SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI - Part 21
75	GITA FOR CHILDREN - Part 22
	WINDOW TO SAI SEVA
77	IMMEASURABLE SERVICE IN A MENTAL HOSPITAL IN VISHAKAPATNAM
83	PRASHANTI DIARY
	SWAMI AND ME
106	LIFE IS A CELEBRATION
117	BE THE LOVE THAT YOU ARE

122 YOUR MOTHER WILL NEVER, EVER FORGET YOU

H2H SPECIAL

127 WITH THE LORD IN THE MOUNTAINS – Part 3
136 UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS WITH SAI – Part 7

SAI WORLD NEWS

142 HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN HONOURS THE SAI YOUTH OF
THE UK
147 FIRST SSEHV TEACHER TRAINING IN CASABLANCA,
MOROCCO

GET INSPIRED

150 THE TEST
155 THE ZEN OF JOY
156 THE DEFINITION OF FAMILY
157 FILL ME, LORD

159 **TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT**

THE HEALING TOUCH

163 FAITH FORTITUDE AND THE DIVINE TOUCH
168 FROM HEARTBREAK TO HAPPINESS

171 **HOSPITAL STATISTICS**

172 **YOUR SAY**

BETWEEN YOU AND US

It was one of the best times to be in Prasanthi Nilayam. The supreme abode of peace was so suffused with powerful spiritual vibrations – the mornings were filled with elevating echoes of vedic chants, the afternoons with illuminating talks of distinguished scholars and in the evenings the chock-a-block Sai Kulwant Hall feasted on soulful devotional music. And this was not all. The compassionate Lord wanted to confer more and made the occasion most memorable when He rose to speak on almost every evening. There was nothing more you could ask for! When the devotees heard “*Premaswarupalara!*” from His divine lips on the very first day of the *Yagnam*, they burst into a resounding applause. You could see tears streaming down many cheeks. Swami was speaking for the first time in public since His return to Prasanthi Nilayam in the month of June.

The 11-day *Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam*, just like its name suggests, was an occasion of superlative importance. Significant in every which way you look at it - be it from an individual, societal, universal or historic perspective. From an individual point of view, it was perhaps the most potent “self-purifying” spiritual exercise, as a neurologist from USA said, “It was an unforgettable experience which stunned and exhilarated my soul.” “When I contemplate back on the *Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam*, words like priceless, heavenly, revitalizing and auspicious come to mind,” said a youth from Canada. Yes, it touched something very deep in every soul who had the privilege to witness the grand spectacle. How did it transform them? How lasting was the experience? How were they benefited? You will find people from different corners of the globe sharing their profound experiences with you in the cover story of this issue.

“The *Yagnam*”, Swami said on the very first day, “is great, most sacred and highly efficacious... It is for the benefit of whole humanity.” One can understand how the invention of a life saving drug or discovery of a rare fuel which is abundant and absolutely non-polluting can benefit humanity. But can a sacrifice performed in one corner of the world confer elusive world peace? Is it logical? Is it not all imagination? Can this be proved? These questions trouble the modern rational mind. When you read our cover story and the supplementary article “The Profound Significance Of The Powerful Sacrifice”, it is surely going to make you think like you never did before.

The *Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam* was not only about Vedic chants. There were also many rituals and ceremonies associated with it. It was indeed very elaborate. There was the *abhisekham* of the Shiva *lingam* (worship through pouring various sacred items), the performance of the Rudra *Homam* (offering oblations at the fire altar), the *Rudra parayana*, *Aruna Parayana*, etc. - all done strictly according to Vedic injunctions. It was indeed, a great spiritual symphony of prayer and peace. For all those who were present it was an opportunity of a lifetime, as the chief priest himself remarked on the very first day, “Even the gods in the heavens would feel jealous of us.” For those who could not be here in Prasanthi Nilayam, we bring detailed accounts of every ritual and every ceremony amply illustrated with lots of pictures in the Prasanthi Diary of this issue.

Though all these rites and rituals are moving and beautiful, times have changed dramatically, someone would say. Is it not a regressive step revisiting ancient rituals and traditions in the modern era? How relevant is it? And moreover, are the Vedas not associated only with the Hindus? One would ask. The answer is an emphatic no. When you read our feature “The Sacred Mantrapushpam – Mutli-faith and Multi-dimensional” you will know how the teachings of the Vedas so tellingly relate to every modern religion. “The *Vedas* are the gift of God for the welfare of the entire humanity,” Swami said during the *Yagnam*. “The secret of the entire creation is contained in the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* make no distinction whatsoever on the basis of religion, caste, nationality, etc.” You will see how the Vedic concepts defy time, space and words - let alone modern religion, beliefs, philosophy, etc. when you read our illuminating feature on the significance of the Vedas in the same section.

One of the unique aspects of the *Yagnam* in Prasanthi Nilayam which impressed Swami immensely was the initiative taken by the Sai Youth of Karnataka to organize the whole event. “It was a superb example of organization management of highest perfection” to quote Prof. Ramaswamy, a founder director of the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. The Sai Youth, with His divine blessings, are making a difference all over the world. You will be glad to know that Her Majesty the Queen of England and the Duke of Edinburgh very recently invited the Sai Youth Leader of UK to Buckingham Palace and conferred a special recognition certificate for their dedicated service. Back in India, the story of how the Sai Youth have literally transformed the Hospital For Mental Care in the city of Vishakapatnam into a “House of Love and Care” is extremely heart-warming. It is a testimony to the power of selfless love.

“Love! Love! Cultivate love! That would be enough,” Swami said on the fifth day of *Yagnam*, “It should be steadily fixed on God.” In fact, that was essence of all the Vedic chants during the 11 days. After the chant of every *Rudram*, the priests would pray “*Achanchala bhakthi praptirastu*” meaning, “Oh Lord! Bestow us with unruffled love for God”. So that is the bottom-line of every spiritual exercise, however mighty or minuscule it may be. If we have developed unconditional love for Him and for all His creation, we have reached our goal. World peace would no longer be a utopia.

Let all beings everywhere be happy!

In His Service,
H2H Team.

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

THE ESSENCE OF DEVOTION

Among all forms of *Sadhana*, *Bhakti* (devotion to the Lord) is the easiest and holiest. *Bhakti* is derived from the root "*Bhaj*", with the suffix "*thi*." It means *Seva* (Service). It denotes a feeling of friendship coupled with awe. For one who is a creature of the *gunas* (*Satwa*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*), to understand what transcends the *gunas*, an attitude of humility and reverence is required. "*Bhaja Sevaayaam*" (worship the Divine through *Seva*). *Bhakti* calls for utilising the mind, speech and body to worship the Lord. It represents total love. Devotion and love are inseparable and interdependent. *Bhakti* is the means to salvation. Love is the expression of *Bhakti*. Sage Narada declared that worshipping the Lord with boundless love is *Bhakti*. Sage Vyasa held that performing worship with love and adoration is *Bhakti*. Sage Garga declared that serving the Lord with purity of mind, speech and body is *Bhakti*. Sage Yajnavalkya held that true *Bhakti* consists in controlling the mind, turning it inwards and enjoying the bliss of communion with the Divine. Another view of *Bhakti* is concentration of the mind on God and experiencing oneness with the Divine.

Win Love through Love

Although many sages have expressed different views about the nature of *Bhakti*, the basic characteristic of devotion is Love. Love is present in every human being in however small a measure. The *jiva* (individual) is an aspect of the Divine, who is the supreme embodiment of Love. Man also is an embodiment of Love, but because his love is directed towards worldly objects, it gets tainted and he is unable to get a vision of God in all His beauty. Ordinarily people regard offering worship to God, reciting His name and meditating on Him as constituting *Bhakti*. True devotion really means installing the Divine in the heart and enjoying the bliss of that experience. It is the mystic union of the individual soul and the Universal. When the devotee prays ardently from the depths of the heart and his love gushes forth, *Bhakti* is manifested. Winning love through love is the vital aspect of devotion. Prayer does not mean merely appealing to God for favours. It is a means of conveying to God one's troubles, desires and aspirations and offering all one's merits and the fruits of one's actions to God. The basic quality of devotion is the yearning for realising oneness with the Divine.

Two Kinds of Devotion

Devotion is of two kinds. One is acquiring knowledge about God and transforming oneself thereby. This is a natural process by which one starts with the physical, proceeds to the mental and ultimately attains the spiritual goal of merger in the Divine. But in taking to this path of knowledge, only the individual concerned can benefit. In the second type of devotion, the devotee not only benefits himself, but shares his experience with others and benefits them also. Such a devotee not only saves himself but helps others to save themselves.

Love is flowing in an endless stream through humanity all the time. By turning this love towards worldly objects and fleeting pleasures man is missing the opportunity to make life purposeful and to secure enduring bliss. Man should direct this love towards God to attain the true goal of life. Love of the Divine is not developed by secular education or scriptural studies. It springs from the heart. One who is filled with love of the Divine will not be attracted by anything else in the world. Nor will he submit to anything demeaning or unworthy. Love is selflessness.

The devotee filled with love of the Lord welcomes what may appear as punishing, as something for his good. Even when the Lord appears to be angry, His compassion is evident. Even in punishment, God's kindness will be seen. Hence, no one should cherish a grievance that he is being singled out for punishment. Even punishment is a means of leading one to God. The display of anger is for safeguarding the devotee. The true devotee is one who recognises this truth and welcomes whatever happens to him as intended for his good. Eschewing interest in worldly concerns, he should concentrate on the means to realise the Divine...

The Essence of Devotion

The essence of *Bhakti* is Love and not formal exercises in *japa* or worship of various kinds. Worship should be offered to the Divine who resides in all beings. Love is God: live in love. Love is the means of realising the bliss of the Self, which is centered in ourselves. It need not be sought elsewhere. It can be found within one's self when all thoughts are controlled and the mind is turned inwards. Dedicate all actions to the Lord. This is the highest knowledge. It is the summum bonum of existence. Love should become a way of life. That alone is true devotion.

-BABA

Discourse at the Poornachandra Auditorium on 8-10-1986.

-Heart2Heart Team

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI – Part 24

Creation by Divine Will

A Visitor: These miracles that Swami does by moving His hand and out come very costly things from nowhere. Is there some explanation?

SAI: Some objects Swami creates in just the same way that He created the material universe. Other objects, such as watches, are brought from existing supplies. There are no invisible beings helping Swami to bring things. His sankalpa, His divine will brings the object in a moment. Swami is everywhere. His creations belong to the natural unlimited power of God and are in no sense the product of yogic powers as with yogis or of magic as with magicians. The creative power is in no way contrived or developed, but is natural only.

H (Hislop): Is it true that wild animals will not harm a saintly person?

SAI: There was once a guru who told his disciple that God was in everything. The disciple believed the statement. That very day there was a royal parade. The king was the centre of attraction riding on an enormous elephant. Ignoring the rules of safety for such parades the disciple planted himself firmly in the path of the royal elephant, and he paid no attention to the cries of warning that he would be trampled to death. Upon reaching him, the elephant lifted him and put him safely to one side.

The disciple went to the guru and complained that although God was in both the elephant and himself, he had been unable to remove the elephant from his path. That on the contrary, the elephant had removed him. The guru explained that it was merely a matter of the elephant having greater physical strength. He told the disciple that had he not been looking at God in the elephant the beast would have killed him just as a matter of ordinary work. However, since the disciple was looking at God in the elephant, God had safely lifted him out of harm's way. No animal, not even a cobra, will harm the person who sees God as the essential reality of the animal or the snake. The same is usually true as regards dangerous men, but there are some exceptions here because of karmic implications.

Saints and Scholars

H: I bought this book *The Saints of India*.

SAI: (*Opening the book and looking at the names*) They are not saints. They were scholars and heads of religious sects. (*Sai read through the lists making a comment in Telugu about each name. Translator was silent.*)

H: Swami, it would be good to know the names of some real saints so that I could read about them.

SAI: What is meant by 'saint'?

H: I guess I mean a messenger from God. From the list of ten names, the world thinks of Sankara, Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi as being such.

SAI: Ramakrishna started as a devotee of God. There was Mother Kali and himself. They were separate. A duality existed. At one point he engaged in a certain action, and Mother Kali never appeared to him again. Towards the end he merged in God and was God-realized.

H: Sankara and Ramana Maharshi were similar cases?

SAI: Yes.

H: Perhaps Buddha was a messenger of God?

SAI: Buddha never mentioned God. The story is known that he was a prince with wife and child, that when he saw misery and death he determined to find their cause. For years he engaged in severe austerities. He made three announcements: All is suffering. All is transient. All is void.

H: Then Buddha did not realize God but realised nirvana?

The Greatness of Madhura Bhakthi

SAI: Yes. *(On a previous occasion Sai had said that one found that for which he sought, and the Buddha had searched for the cause of sorrow).* **There is only one yoga, and that is bhakthi yoga. All the others, Kriya yoga, hatha yoga, the so-called Sai yoga, pranayama, all the methods and techniques known as yogas belong to the body. They are like drill exercises. Right! Left! Up! Down! Where is the result? They are worthless and a waste of time; Bhakthi yoga is the direct path to God. It is the easy way. All others are useless. There are six types of Bhakthi. Madhura means sweet; this is the highest type.**

H: What makes madhura the highest?

SAI: In this the devotee sees everything as God. When Jayadeva would lift his clothes to put on, he would see Krishna in the garments and would not treat them as clothes. He would go about the streets unclothed and people would put a garment around him. He would talk with Krishna, sing to Krishna, dance with Krishna, merge with Krishna, and fall senseless. He was the guru of Chaitanya.

H: Swami, the description sounds somewhat like Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

SAI: Jayadeva, Chaitanya, and Ramakrishna are in this madhura stream of bhakthi. Jayadeva saw himself as the bride of Krishna, and because of this his songs are taken by the public with a worldly meaning as being lustful. Whereas, the true meanings, the meanings they had for Jayadeva are quite different. To himself, the heart was the bride. He was the Atma.

Chaitanya's Madura Bhakthi

H: What kind of person was Chaitanya?

SAI: Chaitanya also would sing to Krishna and dance in ecstasy with Krishna. Once he visited an admirer. He was lodged in a room next to the prayer hall. Whenever food was offered to the 5-metal idol of Krishna, Chaitanya was observed to be eating that same food in his room. The host decided to make a test. He locked Chaitanya in his room and there was some opening through which he could see Chaitanya. Food was offered to the Krishna idol, and Chaitanya was seen to be eating the food. The host entered the room and slapped Chaitanya on both cheeks. Upon this, the metal idol of Krishna disappeared. This caused great worry, and prayers were made to Krishna. Krishna appeared to the devotees and said, 'You offered food to me and then slapped me when I ate. So I went away'.

H: His devotion had...

SAI: Chaitanya had Sachananda as a guru at one time. The guru wanted to test the devotion of Chaitanya. He placed a cube of sugar on Chaitanya's tongue and said to him to keep it there until he returned from the river. At the river, Sachananda bathed, washed clothes, did his singing and was away some two hours. On returning, he found Chaitanya with his mouth still open and the cube of sugar vibrating somewhat, but intact on the tongue without any melting. Realising Chaitanya's greatness, and that his control of the senses was so complete, he prostrated and declared that Chaitanya was his guru.

Devotion in Modern Times

H: Swami, are there such complete devotees living today, such as Jayadeva and Chaitanya?

SAI: Oh yes, there are. But mostly they contain the devotion within themselves. Sometime it shows and the world judges the person to be of unsound mind. Swami has encountered such devotees, but He does not grant interviews. But the people live filled with joy. There was one such, a rani, a queen, who was encountered a few years ago. It was not appropriate to the situation to grant interview.

H: Is it possible for a Western person to be such a great bhaktha?

SAI: Oh yes, quite possible.

H: But Swami, for an office-holder who has Swami's work to do in the world, which is the best bhakthi?

SAI: The same.

H: But how could one do work if he were like that?

SAI: It is quite possible to do work and at the same time be the highest bhaktha. It is the feeling that is important, for the work. Even in the case of Jayadeva and Chaitanya, their influence was widespread.

H: Swami, it seems to be the case that from the time of Krishna to Sathya Sai there has been no opportunity...

SAI: *(interrupting)* **Time? I am Krishna! Where is time?**

H: Swami, I mean between the time of the Krishna body and the Sathya Sai body there has been no opportunity to have God Himself as one's guru.

SAI: Until the Shirdi body.

H: Then, Swami, this has to be the best time for persons to be born?

SAI: Yes the very best time - even better than during the lifetime of the Krishna body.

Curing Cancer

SAI: Cancer. It develops often from a small pustule. There is inflammation, some gas, and from this cancer develops.

H: Swami can cure even terminal cases of cancer?

SAI: Oh yes, a certain person whom you know is a good example of that. She was filled with cancer. The doctors gave up, removed tubes, sewed up incisions, and left her only a few days to live. Now she is strong and healthy and works all day.

H: Swami does that only when the karma is appropriate?

SAI: If Swami is pleased with the person, He heals that person at once. Karma can have no effect on that.

H: This is extremely important information. Because when people fail to get cured by Swami, they put it down to the fact that their karma is not ready.

SAI: If the person has a pure heart, and is living Swami's teachings, Swami's grace is automatic. No karma can prevent that.

Sai Teaches on Healing

H: There is a situation in California where a healer wishes to join a Sri Sathya Sai Centre and use his healing powers for the benefit of Baba's devotees. The leader of that particular Center has had relief from illness by means of the power flowing from the hands of the healer, and has the idea that the healer has been sent by Baba and that Baba is doing the healing through the person of the healer. I was requested to ask Swami for His viewpoint.

SAI: The power flowing from the healer is not Swami's power, it is evil power. The healer is himself in need of healing. Divine power is in every place; it arises from within. Both these bodies (*pointing to Hislop and the driver of the car*) are strong and healthy (*implying that the health was due to divine power without the agency of an outside healer.*)

H: The healer also has a question. He asks if what he is doing is all right.

SAI: No. It is not all right. It is not divine power flowing through the person of the healer.

H: How then should one be healed.

SAI: By ordinary medical means and by prayer.

H: But Swami, there are thousands of cases around the world of sick people being healed by healers. What about them?

SAI: Any benefit is only a temporary feeling of relief and is not real. If a healing occurs, it is because the person has had a feeling or thought of God.

H: Then power from God does not flow into a person?

SAI: Where is God? He is within you. From within He heals.

Test and Punishment

A Visitor: Baba, since time is simply Your will and has no reality outside of that, and duration of time also being Your will, why not shorten time a bit? People have so much suffering, why do they have to suffer for so long a time?

SAI: They are being tested, but it should not be called so. It is grace. Those who suffer have My grace. Only through suffering will they be persuaded to turn inward and make the inquiry. And without turning inward and making inquiry, they can never escape misery.

H: People have said they are being punished by Swami. Is this a fact?

SAI: Of course. In punishing a person for misdemeanour, Swami punishes in order to correct the defaulter. But, though harsh in appearance and voice, Baba is all love inside. Sometimes Swami corrects a person in private, at other times in public. It depends on the individual. If the correction is in public, then all who hear may learn what pleases Swami and what displeases Him. Butter may be cut with a finger, but a rock needs an iron hammer. It all depends on the material, the person. **Swami is very strict in His rules and principles. An Avatar does not compromise. To the devotee, strictness is ultimately the best kindness. Depending on the situation, Swami can be soft, kind, or He can be as hard as a diamond. He does not give only one chance, He forgives a thousand times. But if persons still pay no attention, He clips them.**

H: Yes, Swami. People, devotees near Swami have to do their best to be perfect in their behaviour.

SAI: People, those outwardly 'distant' from Swami, He tells, but not so severely as those 'near'. People judge Swami by His 'near' devotees and so these individuals must follow very strict standards of behaviour. 'Punishment' also depends on the nature and magnitude of the error.

God Forgives With Sincere Repentance

H: Can it be correct that God forgives sin?

SAI: With sincere repentance all sin can be washed away. God's grace responds. If it is His wish to forgive, nothing can stand in the way. All karma is cancelled out. At the root of all spiritual action – which is without reaction – is the seed of love. If the seed be nourished, it will grow as the tree grows, and all things of value automatically come from that tree of love. Regardless of the sins of the past, if there is deep repentance and love of God, the sins are washed out and the nature purified. To fear otherwise is weakness. God has infinite compassion. Seek His love, and forgiveness follows.

H: Does God forgive even present karma?

SAI: There are three types of karma: past, present and future. Present karma must continue. It is like the carriage behind which is a trail of dust. If the carriage stops, the dust will settle on it. A doubt might be that the carriage cannot forever continue so as to be ahead of its dust. But the carriage need not always travel on a dusty road. It can get on the surfaced highway where there is no dust. The highway is equivalent to the grace of God.

There is a difference between the benefit of grace and the benefit of bhakthi, of devotion. A patient with a pain is given a sedative which dulls the pain. But grace is an operation that does entirely away with pain. Make no mistake; grace does entirely away with karma. Like a medicine which was labelled, 'good until 1968'. If used in 1973, the medicine is entirely ineffective. The body is the bottle, the karma in the body is the medicine. God puts a date on the 'medicine' so it is not effective.

H: But Swami, grace is a rare prescription!

SAI: It might be thought that grace is difficult to secure. Such is not the case. Grace is the easiest thing to secure if the method is known and used. In the Gita, the method is given. As in driving a car, so confusing at first, but with practice so easy to do all the necessary tasks all at the same time and also carry on a conversation without strain. There is nothing that cannot be accomplished with practice. Even ants in a single file crossing a stone will leave a mark.

The Name it is that will guard you and guide you throughout life. It is such a small thing! But to cross the ocean, an immense steamship is not needed. Even a small raft will do. The Name of God is the smallest of the small, and the largest of the large. The mouth is the principle gateway of the body, and the tongue must always carry the Name. Like a small lantern, the Name must go when and where you go, and then you can travel easily through the whole forest of life.

(To be continued)

-Heart2Heart Team

CHINNA KATHA

GURU—THE LAST RESORT

An aspirant after spiritual realisation went off into a jungle and was plodding across the infested region, through the thick undergrowth, when he heard the angry roar of a lion. He climbed a tree to escape from the beast, but the lion saw him among the branches and roamed round and round the trunk in terrific rage.

On the tree, he was attacked by a bear and so, he slid down the roots that descended from one of the branches of that banyan tree. Luckily, there were two roots hanging from the branch, so that he could hang on in midair clinging to them, one in each hand. Just then, he saw two rats, one white and the other black, which were gnawing at the base of the roots, endangering his life with every bite.

While in this perilous state, a honeycomb which was full of sweet nectar situated on one of the top branches leaked a few drops which fell his way. So, the unfortunate man put out his tongue to catch a drop so that he may taste the delicious honey. But no drop reached his tongue. In despair and terror, he called on his Guru, "O Guruji, come and save me."

The Guru who was passing by heard his appeal. He sped to the rescue. He brought a bow and arrows and slew the lion and bear, frightened off the rats and saved the disciple from the fear of death. Then, he led the man to his own Ashram and taught him the path of liberation.

This is the story of every one of you. This world is the jungle in which you roam. Fear is the lion, which drives you up the tree of *Samsara*, worldly activities. Anxiety is the bear that terrifies you and dogs your steps in *Samsara*. So, you slide down into attachments and binding deeds, through the twin roots of hope and despair. The two rats are day and night which eat away the span of life. Meanwhile, you try to snatch a little joy from sweet drops of egoism and mine-feeling. Finding at last that the drops are trivial and out of reach, you shout in the agony of renunciation, calling on the Guru. The Guru appears, whether from within or without, and saves you from fear and anxiety.

-BABA

-Heart2Heart Team

COVER STORY
PART ONE

**THE ATHI RUDRA MAHA YAGNAM - A POWERFUL PRAYER FOR
UNIVERSAL PEACE**

“The land of Bharat is like a teacher to all the countries in the world. Where else would Lord Shiva incarnate, except in such a sacred land as Bharat?... This Yagna is being conducted for the welfare of the world. There is a very important aspect of this Yagna. The Athi Rudra Maha Yagna protects and fosters the divine nature in the human beings, while rejecting and diminishing the demonic qualities. Thus, it works for the welfare of humanity.”

“It is the Highest Form of Worship” – Head Priest Sri B.S. Nanjunda Dixit

This is what Swami emphatically declared to the large concourse of devotees who had assembled for what was to be an unprecedented and supremely exalting spiritual experience – the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam (the Supreme Sacrifice to Lord Shiva) on the 9th of August 2006.

Time and again in the history of human evolution, there come watersheds that redirect humanity towards the ultimate goal. Akin to the loving hands of the mother that support and steady the faltering steps of her toddler, God grants us a glimpse of His Grandeur and what He holds in store for us...with just a small inkling being given in such instances as this. In the words of the Head priest of the Yagnam, Veda Brahma Sri B.S. Nanjunda Dixit,

“The Athi Rudra Maha Yagna is the highest form of worship of Lord Shiva. At present the same Athi Rudra is being performed in the presence of Rudra Himself...it is a unique opportunity for everyone to enjoy the blessings of Bhagawan, as this yagna is for the spiritual progress of humanity as a whole. At the same time it is the duty of each one of us to express our gratitude for our existence and also to spread the message of love and peace, highlighted by Bhagawan so that His dream of establishing a Nation of Humanity is realized.”

“It Was Priceless, Heavenly, Revitalising...” – A Youth from Canada

The yagnam stood for “Universal Love and Peace”. Thousands who had filled literally every inch of the richly decorated Sai Kulwant Hall felt themselves bathed in these two emotions as they watched the seven-tongued flames, leap and dance, accepting the oblations offered into the eleven homa kundas [fire-altars], delivering the prayers from thousands of yearning souls to the divine. As the sanctified plumes from the altars entered the being of everyone present...an overwhelming sense of purity pervaded the mind, heart, frame of one and all. It is not self-effort that brings one to such a momentous occasion, it is something far beyond...as one youth, from Canada expressed blissfully,

“When I contemplate back on the Athi Rudra Maha Yagna, words like priceless, heavenly, revitalizing and auspicious come to mind. The hours spent in lines to sit in the Sai Kulwant hall and the early mornings were all

worth it. As I sat amongst devotees from all nooks and corners of the world, I was overcome by a unique sensation. I felt at peace during the chanting of the Vedas. The Vedas seem to have an exceptional cleansing and energizing property contained within them. Although, in all honesty, I had little idea of what was being chanted, the hairs on my arms seem to stand and chills ran down my spine at times. Perhaps it was the ancient hymns (whose origin is that of mysticism); or perhaps it was the fact that the Maha Yagna, in praise of Lord Rudra, was being performed in the midst of Rudra himself? The series of Bhagawan's divine discourses only made the experience sweeter. It was the cherry on the cake. Swami reminded us that we are verily God - that we are sparks of divinity. All we have to do is realize it."

"My Every Hair and Folicle Was Charged" – Ms. Sharmila, UK

You would have found the similar sentiments on the lips of everyone present for the glorious occasion. Take for instance, Ms. Sharmila Parikh from UK,

"The atmosphere was charged with spiritual vibrations that I felt through each hair and follicle of my frame. (One was reminded of Hanuman – Hanuman's every hair resounded Rama's name). The magnitude of the Yagna is a memory to be cherished forever and more. Experiencing Bhagawan's Love and basking in the bliss and His glory for the duration was an incredible treat; I felt like a child of God receiving sweet prasadam twice daily."

In the presence of God even the greatest, oldest and wisest of all feels like a child. It is with awe and admiration that we look upon His handiwork as the Master works on the masterpiece.

"I Have Come To Foster The Vedas and Devotees" – Bhagawan Baba

The Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam is yet another milestone in the unfolding grand mission of Bhagawan and as significant and far-reaching in its influence as any other; be it the Health mission, or the Educare mission, or the Sociocare mission.

In a landmark discourse in the year 1963 at Prasanthi Nilayam, Swami declared,

"The Lord comes as an Avathar when He is anxiously awaited by saints and sages. The pious prayed - and I have come...My tasks are...Veda Rakshana and Bhaktha Rakshana - fostering of the Vedas and fostering of devotees."

"An Unforgettable Experience That Stunned My Soul" – Dr. Venkat Sadanand, USA

To limit Vedas to any particular religion, philosophy, sect or culture is like limiting the ocean to a bowl! Vedas are Universal in nature. They are for the good of all mankind. It is for the whole humanity to benefit from this great treasure of energy. A Yagna incorporates various aspects of the 'fostering of the vedas'. It is akin to an ultra-wide spectrum antibiotic. Through the

tremendous positive energy that it generates the Yagna elevates consciousness to a higher level.

“Spiritual energy is not discernible by our five senses. But it renders an unforgettable experience that stuns and exhilarates the soul. The spiritual energy present during the Yagna was high and each individual present at the time was truly blessed when, out of pure love, Bhagawan infused the lingam with Prana [consecrated the lingam personally].” These are the words not of a philosopher, but of Dr. Sadanand, a neuro-surgeon working in USA who experienced the Yagna for just one day.

A Great Spiritual Symphony

The Yagnam was a great spiritual symphony in perfect harmony which merged the whole congregation into one entity reaching out to the divine. Recalling his unforgettable experience, Matthew, a youth from England , says,

“While watching the 132 priests offering oblations into the fire and moving in perfect synchronicity; and hearing their chanting, all uttered in unison, creating a symphony of divine mantras, I felt transported beyond my ordinary self. The flames aglow from the eleven altars, the beautiful robes of the priests, and their wonderful voices, the entire scene was so electrifying, I was lost in bliss. Above all, when the Lord Himself was presiding, I was overcome with divine vibrations, so much so that I felt filled to overflowing – surely this was a taste of heaven.

Other highlights were the times when the head priest would offer the holy fire to the Lord and then all would move their hands back and forth taking in the vibrations coming from this sanctified act - this again was a tangible feeling of joy, another gift of grace. Sometimes, there would be one priest reciting the prayers alone; invariably his voice would be most beautiful to hear and on one occasion I was spellbound at the speed of recitation which still maintained a great sense of sanctity and holiness.

Then at the end of the day, at least half those present would form well-ordered lines sitting on the floor. They were all waiting patiently for the holy abhishekam water and after quite some time they were rewarded with this by designated seva dals. Surely everyone left the Kulwant Hall in an exalted state, maybe experiencing feelings they had never felt before. I am so grateful to Swami for allowing me to be present at the yagna and I am already praying to Swami to organize the next one!”

It may be asked that though the Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna has been performed right from 1961 during Dasara celebrations, what was the necessity for Swami to perform another Yagnam on such a grand scale at this point in time? Swami clarified this on the final day of Yagnam when He said, **“The Yagnam done during Dasara is Gyana Yagnam, while this is an Adhyatma Yagnam”**, meaning, this Yagnam is for the spiritual health of the whole world and much wider in scope and purpose than the Yagnam performed during Dasara which is related only to the “mental principle”.

'See What I Will Make Out Of It'

Every effect has a cause and every purpose, an instrument. The chosen instruments for this grand spectacle were the Sai Youth of Karnataka. Sri Vinay Kumar who led this dynamic team of youth exceptionally well, recalled the very initial days of this sacred project saying,

“On the 13th of June, when I submitted this humble prayer at the Lotus Feet to allow us to perform this Yagna, on the same day, Swami said, **“You watch what I will do. You are bringing it as this small proposal, and now you see what I will make out of it.”**

True to His word, God made things happen. With clockwork precision, every single piece of the massive jigsaw puzzle fell into place perfectly. It was absolutely amazing to see how such a mammoth project was executed to perfection. More than a thousand fresh lotuses every morning, tons of toned sandalwood and neem wood, seamless coordination and communication in every level from the transport of massive quantities of milk, tender coconut water, curds, honey, ghee, sugar, nine types of grains and above all, waters from the nine rivers from their very sources dispersed across the country – everything was carried out as smoothly as a gentle breeze.

In the words of Prof. Ramaswamy, a founder director of the prestigious Indian Institute of Management- Bangalore, “...This organization, this Athi Rudra Maha Yagna is a superb example of organization management of the highest perfection. As a teacher for the last 50 years I have not seen anywhere such decorum, discipline, demeanor - perfection. Why? This is based on spirituality, ethics, morals, meditation, law of order, law of karma, etc....my tribute and my admiration...to Mr. Vinay Kumar and his group of volunteers, the ritwicks and all those who were behind him who have sacrificed everything they want with Ananda (bliss), with a spiritual provocation, strength which you cannot find even in professors working under me who get twenty thousand rupees per hour.”

Swami Arranged the Entire Yagna

So, it was the Divine manager who was at work. Recalling the level of involvement of Swami, Sri Vinay Kumar, said,

“... The dates for the Yagna were fixed by Swami, very meticulously, the location of this Shivalingam, right here in the centre of this hall was His direction...Out of His mercy, He said, ‘Every person in this Hall, every individual, the last person sitting in the hall should also be able to witness the Abhishekam being performed to the Lingam.’... Every Homakunda [fire-altar] which is put up here, the layout of this Yagashala [sacrificial enclosure], was personally decided by Bhagawan. The colouring of the homakundas, the selection of the lingam, the methodology for setting up this mantapam, it was all personally advised, instructed, directed and put into action by Him. We of course have been fortunate to be used as His worthy instruments... For the first time, probably in the history of this Avatar, He released an invitation in the

Sanathana Sarathi, inviting people for this Yagna. He commanded and ensured advertisements went through newspapers, all over the country, inviting them for the Yagna....”

“Each time I took some aspect of planning related to the Yagna to Swami, He would say, ‘You don’t take any tension on your head. You remove all the worries from your head and transfer it to me. I will take care of everything. I will ensure that everything goes through smoothly. You don’t worry about anything.’ And Swami took care of everything.

Sri Nanjunda Dikshit, in an interview granted by Bhagawan mentioned that the Athi Rudra Maha Yajna would give a lot of Trupti (satisfaction) to Lord Shiva. Bhagawan then immediately said, “But I have a lot of Trupti, My Trupti is in your Trupti.” And continued, “If you listen to what I say, then I will have a lot of Trupti.”

Bhagawan casually gave us a glimpse of who He is and how fortunate we are!

Sri Rudram – A Potent Prayer

This brings us to a question. What is this good fortune? How is this Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam significant? What is it in the Rudram that makes it so powerful? Let us turn to the ancient scriptures to understand the beauty and majesty of this timeless hymn, Rudram.

Sri Rudram, also known as Rudraprasna, is a hymn devoted to Lord Shiva. It is part of the Krishna Yajur Veda and one of the greatest of the Vedic hymns for all round benefits and to remove all maladies and obstacles. Sri Rudram is in two parts. The first part, is known as Namakam because of the repeated use of the word "Namo" in it. In this sacred hymn the devotee repeatedly salutes the Lord who pervades the animate and the inanimate, tangible and intangible, visible and invisible aspects of creation. The devotee prays to Lord Shiva thus:

“O Lord of Mount Kailash of the Vedas! We pray to attain you by our auspicious words. We ask that for all our days, this entire world will be free from ills and discord, and that we may live in amity and concord.”

“Salutations to Him who was before all things and who is foremost. Salutations to Him who pervades all and moves swiftly.”

“Salutations to Him who is the source of happiness here and hereafter. Salutations to Him who is inherently of the nature of conferring happiness directly in this world and the world hereafter. Salutations to Him the auspicious one, who is more auspicious than all others.”

These are just a few of the myriad expressions of the Namakam through which the Lord is propitiated. The Namakam concludes with the most potent Mrutyunjaya stotram.

Tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushhtivardhanam

Urvarukamiva bandhananmrityormukshiya maamritath

“He who has divine fragrance, He who makes men powerful and full of plenty, Him even we worship, the three-eyed Rudra. Like a ripe berry from its stalk, release me from death, and let me not turn away from immortality and enlightenment.”

The second part of the Rudram, is known as Chamakam because of the repeated use of the words "Cha me". The devotee prays to the Lord for blessings and benefits both in this world and beyond. For instance -

“Let Lord Shiva grant us happiness in both worlds on (earth and heaven). All the materials dearer and attractive and worthy of possession in heaven and endearing relations.”

“Grant me, Lord, the capacity to discriminate what to hear and what not to hear. May my mind be lit up with clarity to understand things properly.”

“May I be blessed with the capacity to protect and retain what I have already earned. May I be granted courage and determination to face tough situations in life. May I win goodwill, respect and honour in this world.”

The “Shanti patha” (invocation for peace) in the concluding part of Chamakam begins with, “Idaa devahurmanu...” meaning:

“Let my pleasant thoughts bring forth pleasant actions and the resultant enjoyable fruits. Let my joyous offerings bear fine and worthy speech and my words please the divine. May men lend their ears to gladden me and may the Gods enlighten me and make my words powerful. May my forefathers feel joyful over this and bless me to perpetuate it.”

The Divine Blessings of Chanting Sri Rudra

It is said that Sri Rudra is a great purifier which when repeatedly chanted with devotion can expiate the worst of the sins and in the words of the head Priest, “One can attain Bhukthi or all material benefits for enjoyment of life on earth and Mukthi, which is freedom from the ills of the world.” But an important aspect to note is what Dr. Kashyap, Director of the Sri Aurobindo Kapalishastri Institute of Vedic Culture, conveyed when he said, “The mantras we chant are potent and full of power. But it manifests only if we chant it with full of faith.”

If one Rudra [that is, eleven times the eleven stanzas of Namakam chanted along with one stanza of Chamakam every time by a single person] is chanted, it can free one from all childhood diseases.

Similarly:

3 Rudras can destroy imminent difficulties which with one is faced,

5 Rudras can free one from the evil effects of certain planets occupying unfavourable positions.

7 Rudras can dissolve one's greatest fear.

9 Rudras can confer the fruit of one Vajapeya sacrifice (which is believed to bring in bountiful crops and plentiful water) and also attainment of peace of mind.

11 Rudras can bestow one with great wealth and the favour of the high and mighty.

33 Rudras can fulfill all material desires and bless one to be free of enemies.

Now just imagine the benefits that this hymn can confer when chanted over a thousand times! During the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam the Rudram was chanted the prescribed 14,641 times accompanied by the Vedic fire ritual or Homam.

One of the unique aspects of the Yagnam in Prasanthi Nilayam was mentioned by Sri Veda Narayan, who generally leads the Vedic chants in Prasanthi Nilayam,

"If This Can Happen Anywhere It Can Be Only In Prasanthi Nilayam" - Sri Veda Narayan,

"One thing, which touched me most, is that it is not the mandatory 132 Ritwicks alone who chanted the Vedas, but from the tiny tots of primary school onwards to the illiterate devotees who joined in the chanting of Namakas and Chamakas irrespective of the caste, creed or gender! (So the number was actually much more than 14,641). In any Yagna performed before, there never was a chance for people of other beliefs to see such an occasion let alone chant the Vedas. In other words the spirit of Namakam "Namo Mahadbhyah Kshullakebhyaschavo Nama" - Salutation to the Lord in the mighty as well as in the lowly - was practically demonstrated in the presence of Bhagawan, and if this can happen anywhere it can be only in Prasanthi Nilayam."

And what was most significant is that in Prasanthi Nilayam the Lord in flesh and blood presided over the Yagna. "Never in the history of mankind," continues Sri Veda Narayan, "was such a Yagna performed in the immediate presence of the Avatar, who was the Yagna Kartha (performer of the sacrifice) and the Yagna Bhokta (receiver of the oblations) for the welfare of the whole world."

"We Need To Ignite Fire Only In The Engine" – Bhagawan Baba

Now, many might wonder how could a sacrifice done in a small corner of India impact the whole world! This is exactly what a devotee posed to Swami many years ago,

“Swami, you say all yagnas are conducted for loka kalyana (welfare of the world), but all yagnas are conducted in India alone?”

Swami gave a beautiful reply to this saying, “All the nations in the world are like the coaches and India is the engine. We need to ignite fire only in the engine.”

What is the eligibility of India to be the guide for the whole world? Someone might ask. Prof. N. S. Ramaswamy, a Founder Director of Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, (one of the premier Management Institutes of India) and a recipient of Padma Bhushan (one of India’s highest civilian awards) who spoke during the Yagna’s proceedings,

“Out of the 49 civilisations existing in the world prior to the Christian era, our’s is the only one which is living and vibrant. Why? Everything is conceptualized as a mother - Mathrutva Bhava. In every century, in every part of India, great saints and evolved souls and Avatars were born. Loka samastha sukhino Bhavantu (Let all beings everywhere be happy) – no other country says it. We are the only people to say that all religions lead to the same God... Akashat patitam thoyam, yatha gachati sagaram... We are the only civilisation in the whole world to give highest praise, highest pedestal to women... our civilisation has continued for 5000 years because of the sacrifice, suffering, modesty, chastity, sympathy, empathy and service of the women of India. The world is divided into two - the haves and have nots. But India has a third category - those who have but don’t want. Buddha, Mahaveera and Janaka belong to this exalted category.”

“The Indian Way Is The Sai Way ” – Sri B N Narsimha Murthy

Arnold Toynbee, a British historian said, “...at this supremely dangerous moment of human history, there is only one way of salvation for mankind and that is the Indian way.”

And what is the Indian way? Sri B N Narasimha Murthy emphatically stated “It is the Sai way, the way of the Vedas, the way of Daiva Prema [Divine Love] and Jeeva Karunya [Compassion for all].”

The Youth Lead The Way

The 11-day glorious ritual of the Yagnam was one potent facet of this Indian way. And by whom did the Lord choose to demonstrate this significant aspect? The youth. And there are good reasons for this. Sri S V Giri, former Vice-Chancellor of Swami’s University, explains, “Rudram by itself is a very dynamic, highly energy-infusing mantra. It is in a class by itself. To chant the hymn means to charge oneself internally with dynamism and elevate one self to higher levels. So it is only appropriate that youth have come together to organize this elaborate event. For, just as this mantra, youth represent energy and vigour.”

In fact, it would be interesting to note that even among the priests there were many who were in their 20s. Swami Himself expressed great satisfaction about this in His final discourse of the celebration on the 19 th of Aug and said, “I am extremely delighted looking at the young ritwiks. I will give the ritwiks whatever they want.”

“The Youth Will Build The Kingdom of Sai ” – Sri V Srinivasan

“It is the Youth of India which will bring out her spiritual regeneration. This is what Bhagawan has said on many occasions,” affirmed Sri V Srinivasan, the All India President of Sai Organisations, on one evening during the celebrations. “The people of India look to the youth of India to make India again not only a Ram Rajya but a Sai Rajya (kingdom of Sai).” He continued, “In the Sai organization today, much has been done, but much more is yet to be done. You the youth have to take the reins and give it a new energy and enthusiasm.”

“Today we have begun to use technology in the Seva organization. We can proudly say that our Sai brothers in Uttaranchal have commissioned successfully a mini hydro-electric project that is giving electricity to a village to run their ‘chhakkis’ (small grinding units). Where the governments are unable to provide electricity, our Sai brothers have made it possible. Our brothers in Andhra are installing in the villages new types of water purification plants using reverse osmosis technology and membrane technology. Brothers in Madhya Pradesh have commissioned thousands of new types of toilets in villages. So we are looking to you to take the Sai Organization further in playing your role in Sai’s divine mission. Remember, you are the Amritha Puthras – sons of immortality who are full of confidence and without doubts. With Bhagawan we are heroes, without Him we are zeroes.”

If the world today is a pathetic picture of restlessness, terror and insensitivity towards fellow beings of a different community, region or religion, misguided Youth are surely a major part of the problem. As Krishnan Bhagawat, a youth from Karnataka put it, “At the core of all the hotspots of violence the common thing is disaffected and disoriented youth. What is the solution for this problem? It is the transformation of hearts that can bring about a change in the youth.”

And this transformation can come about only when the youth take up tasks which will cleanse their senses, energize their inner self and connect them to their roots – their glorious ancient heritage. It is in this respect that the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam stands as a perfect example.

Shashank, a senior student of the Institute said,

“We saw Bhagavan achieving multiple objectives through one event – the upholding of the Vedic wisdom, the upkeep of the Vedic scholars, the encouragement of the youth in the positive direction and the purification of the environment through the positive vibrations.”

It was really a very heartening sight to see hundreds of youth from Karnataka working so systematically with so much unity and more importantly with passion to see that the yagnam proceeds without even a slightest hiccup. “It really was a great lesson for us in project management as well as dedicated service,” many students from the Institute said. More than 300 youth – most of them employed in multinational companies in Bangalore - working tirelessly for two weeks for an event like a Yagna has done more than just setting an example. And this is something which is going to have awesome cascading effects in the days to come. Swami already mentioned in the final day of the Yagna that He wants the Youth of Tamil Nadu to come together and conduct the Yagna in Chennai in the month of January. That this is going to be replicated in multiple locations all over India and all around the world spearheaded by Sai Youth is anybody’s guess.

Exhilarating Experiences

A young adult, Arvind, from Hyderabad, India, who attended the Yagnam said,

“Every time I heard the opening lines of the Rudram “Om namo bhagavate rudraya...” I was filled with some inexplicable sense of awe and reverence. When I first saw the lingam of sparkling white marble that glowed in ethereal hue and heard it being christened “Saieaswara” [ritual demands that the lingam being worshipped be given a special name] my mind filled with the multitudinous names of Lord Shiva and His lingas all over the sacred land of Bharath, from the Amarnath in the Himalayas to Rameswara at the southern tip. And most of all, I was filled with a deep sense of satisfaction when I reflected on the set of circumstances that had culminated in me being in Prasanthinilayam, in the presence of Lord Rudra Himself, as He presided over the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam. It is an opportunity of several thousand lifetimes that all of us are blessed to be here at this time – with the living loving God.”

Such was the blissful experience that every youth felt. That it was a purifier of massive proportions, something which propelled every individual present to journey towards one’s soul with greater vigour is what every participant testifies. “I am very grateful to have been part of such an extraordinary event,” said S. Mass from USA, “I experienced a strong purifying energy. Also, there were moments which transported me to a brighter, more intense, yet subtle place of harmony within.”

And Pedro Montero from Spain said after attending the ninth day of the Yagnam, “I went to the Yagna very early (sleeping only 4 hours in the previous night) and spent the entire morning and evening in Kulwant Hall. Later, I experienced strong physical energy as well as a heightened sense of alertness, something akin to Swami’s Constant Integrated Awareness. Even now I feel that not only my body, but mind, intellect, senses, intuition and even my soul have made a quantum leap in all their functions. It is truly amazing! I don’t know myself.”

So, that was a small glimpse of the mystifying and soul-enriching experience that thousands had all through the eleven days of the Yagna. But all this exalting spiritual experience is subjective and very personal - how did the Yagna actually contribute to world peace, one might ask? The answer is – in different ways at different levels, gross and subtle, individual and cosmic. Let us deal with the cosmic level first.

How the Yagnam Furthered World Peace

The chaos theory of physics states that the flap of a butterfly's wing in Brazil could set off a tornado in Texas . Such is the way the whole cosmos is connected. The power of positive thought is something which every discipline of modern knowledge acknowledges. New research suggests that once Alzheimer's disease robs someone of the ability to expect that a proven painkiller will help them, it doesn't work nearly as well. Scientists from the University of Michigan injected the jaws of healthy young men with salt water to cause painful pressure, while PET scans measured the impact in their brains. During one scan, when the men were told they were getting a pain reliever which was actually a placebo, their brains immediately released more endorphins - chemicals that act as natural painkillers by blocking the transmission of pain signals between nerve cells - and the men felt better.

Positive thought generates positive energy and in a similar fashion positive energy creates positive thoughts. Just think how peaceful you feel when you are in the sanctum sanctorum of a venerated shrine. If the Yagnam was anything it was a 'colossus of positive energy' which could alter the collective consciousness of the world.

Leni Matlin from USA says, "I find it more than curious that Baba called for this powerful Yagna just when the world was on the brink of violent madness, which always leads to more of the same. As the Yagna began, the terrorist plot to blow up 10 transatlantic aircraft was thwarted, and during the Yagna, the UN approved to the ceasefire resolution which both Israel and Lebanon agreed. I am not a pundit and cannot understand or explain the Yagna in esoteric terms, but it is clear to me that the flood of divine light it brought to the planet has saved humankind from further disasters, either manmade (war and terrorism) or natural. Swami says He does not interfere in karma, but we know He sometimes mitigates it. I shudder to think what might have occurred without His divine presence and the conducting of this Yagna."

In how many diverse and subtle ways will this critical mass of positive energy affect the world is something unfathomable for our limited minds. But that it's favourable impact is inevitable is beyond doubt. Katharina from Austria says, "I could feel that this Athi Rudra Maha Yajna was not only meant for the welfare of the participating individuals in Prashanti Nilayam. Something much, much bigger was going on. It was for the welfare and peace of the entire Humanity."

Is the Yagnam a Waste of Resources?

A good act can only result in good results just like a mango seed can grow only into a mango tree as Swami often says. There are some who question the various oblations made to the fire during the Yagna – the grains, the ghee, etc. Is it not ludicrous to submit all these edible articles to fire when thousands do not have food to eat? To this Bhagawan gave a beautiful reply in His discourse on the 16 th of August. He said,

“Today a farmer sows five bags of paddy in a field. When they sprout, he transplants them in the entire field and waters them. Can anyone say that he is throwing valuable paddy into mud and water? Ultimately, he reaps a harvest of fifty bags. Similarly, the rituals being performed by the Ritwiks (priests) confer great benefit on humanity; they are never a waste. Whatever is offered to God today is like this paddy and ghee; they all confer great benefit to humanity at a later date. Just as a bag of paddy sown in a field multiplies itself into fifty bags, similarly all the materials that are offered to Agnihothra (the fire-god) multiply themselves several times.... Whatever is offered to God, comes back to us a thousand fold.”

“A Grand, Self-Purifying Event” – Prof. William Miller

Now coming to the individual level, what the Yagna has done to every participant and through them to society in general is something most profound. William Miller from USA says,

“At the beginning of this Yagna, someone suggested to me that it could become quite repetitious and even boring with the Vedic chants and rituals being done day after day. I had just the opposite experience -- it became more engaging and more enriching as a cumulative effect, for me and others. Before this Yagna started, I read many of Swami's quotes from Sathya Sai Speaks about the purpose of Yagnas in general, and a focus on Rudra and Siva in particular. I realized that this grand, self-purifying event incorporates two metaphors that prepared me for how to participate: that I could use the sacrificial ceremonies to ‘wash myself clean of my errors in life’ and to ‘offer into God's 'refining fire’. Thus, Swami helped me get ready for how to actively take part in the ceremony, even though I don't chant Vedic mantras.”

“Also, I kept in mind the Sanskrit verse we chant every day – ‘Loka Samastha, Sukhino Bhavantu’ – ‘May all beings in all the worlds be happy’. Since that is the purpose of this Yagna, I felt attuned to whatever has been happening, even without mentally understanding everything. In this regard, I met a friend coming out of the darshan hall who was ecstatic that an ‘impure set of thoughts’ (vasanas) had arisen in him during the ceremony, which he could then enthusiastically ‘put into the fire’ to finish off. I realized that I could do the same, and in that way contribute in some small way to greater peace -- if not in the whole world, at least in the world around me. And as one of the speakers said, this Yagna doesn't really end on 20 August, 2006. It will remain an ongoing process in my heart. I will simply continue to focus on asking God to make me pure so I can be an instrument of peace.”

Instruments of Peace

An instrument of peace – that is what the Yagnam made out of individuals. It infused tremendous inspiration more importantly into the minds of Youth. One of the Youth leaders from Karnataka, Sri Gunaranjan, an IIT and IIM alumni, said,

“Any student of science will know that in any equation of nature L.H.S or Left Hand Side is equal to R.H.S or Right Hand Side. For us, L.H.S. is Love, Humility and Service. And R.H.S is Royal Highway to Swami. Let us cultivate these three aspects. Let us build the royal highway to our Mother Sai.”

And many were really on the path. Having mended their senses with the sacred chants, they wanted to bend their bodies and end their mind. Just consider this startling case.

It was one blissful evening during the Yagna celebrations. The programme was in its concluding lap and Prasadam distribution was going on. Carrying the carton of sweets, Bhanu, a senior student of the Institute, went to the far corners of Sai Kulwant Hall trying to reach everyone present. He distributed as many as he could. The carton was now empty and Bhanu was returning. But suddenly there was tug. The box is empty, why is someone holding on to the carton? Agitated, Bhanu looked around. It was a 60 year old man pleading through his eyes for the carton box. It is empty, Bhanu explained, but the old man in silence persisted. Bhanu let it go. He had no time. There were hundreds yet to receive Prasadam. He picked up another box from the store and forgot all about the old man, until he saw him again after half an hour. Now from a distance. Most of the crowd having received the sweet was now dispersing. But the old man with his back bent was busy on the road just beside the hall. There was the carton in his hand, Bhanu noticed and he was picking something. Intrigued, Bhanu went near the man. The old man's carton box was full with the sweet wrappers. Bhanu was moved. The old man must have walked up and down the road at least 20 times to fill the carton box with empty papers, he thought to himself. With shock and reverence, he asked, “Why are you doing this, Sir? Can I offer you one more sweet?” The man very reluctantly said, “I always wanted to be part of this great Yagna, but I could not be part of the organizing group. The only way I thought I could do some service and be part of this glorious Yagna is by collecting the left-over wrappers of devotees. Thank you for the carton box.”

“This Is The Way We Serve Devotees In Gurudwara”

And this is no incident in isolation. The Yagna worked on each individual in a magnificent way and how the transformation found expression in each individual is something very special and actually stirring.

Just outside the Sai Kulwant Hall on the Southern side is a small shoe-stand where generally the students and the staff leave their slippers before entering the Hall. One evening as the Yagnam was going on, a senior student noticed that beside the shoe-stand was the rear of a red turban. What's a red turban

doing here, he thought and moved closer. As he went nearer, he found there was a head below the turban and actually it was a person, a red-turbaned Sikh, who was sitting facing his back to the road. The man intently looking down was busy. With a neat napkin in his hand, he was assiduously cleaning a pair of slippers. The amount of care and undivided attention that the man put into what he was doing, it looked as if the man was cleaning a piece of gold. Shocked beyond measure, the student bowed down to the middle aged man. "Why are you doing this, Sir", he asked, with all humility and reverence. What the man replied sent a chill down the boy's spine.

The devoted Sikh said, "Yesterday in His discourse, Baba praised His boys very much, he said, 'All our children are like gold, not impure gold, but pure and unalloyed gold!' I am new to Sai Baba and the Sai Organisation. I do not know anybody here. But I love Baba and want to serve Baba. And the best way I can serve I thought is wiping their slippers clean. This is one way we serve the devotees who come to the Gurudwara in Punjab." The student stood transfixed to the spot.

And these two examples are not alone as this gentleman's experience shows. Mr Gopal from South Africa, told Heart2Heart that he and his wife had been drawn to do seva in the North Indian canteen for the entire duration of the Yagnam. They missed most of the ceremonies, but had been able to take part in the massive prasaadam preparation work. Their job was to wrap up the prasaadam ready to be distributed later in the day. Sometimes there was prasaadam both morning and evening, so he and his fellow sevaks often found themselves working until 10.30 at night, completing batches of up to 40,000 per day. He mentioned that the spirit of camaraderie and love amongst those preparing the prasaadam was unprecedented and a clear reflection of the presence of Sai amidst them.

Just imagine what the world would be like if every heart shines resplendently with purity and love just like the Sikh gentleman, or the old man from Karnataka, or those workers in the North canteen. Has anybody any doubts about the efficacy of Yagna? Just like one cannot quantify the power of mother's love or the bliss of Mother Nature, the impact of the Yagna can only be felt. And just as every second is vital in an hour and every drop important for the ocean, every person in peace is a concrete step towards world peace.

The True Yagna

But one does not necessarily need to organize elaborate Yagnams for world peace. In His divine discourse on the second day of the Yagnam, Swami said,

"We do not find the performance of sacred rituals like yajnas and yagas anywhere else in the world. People think that only offering oblations in fire is Yagna, but the true Yagna is offering oneself to God, to please God and to become worthy of His love."

In fact, what the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam really did is it light this fire of inner Yagna in the hearts of thousands who witnessed the grand spectacle. “Even more enthralling than simultaneous Vedic chanting,” Dr. Sadanand from USA says, “were the words delivered by the One from whom the Vedas, and indeed, the universe itself originated. It reminded me that it is more imperative now than ever before for all individuals to heed the words of Bhagawan and cherish the loving touch of the Divine Avatar in our lives.”

Speaking to a group of students on one occasion, Bhagawan Himself asked, “What is the meaning of Yagna?” And then went Himself went on to explain, “Any action that you perform, if you offer the fruit thereof to the Lord, it becomes a Yagna. In other words, a true Yagna involves unity of mind, action and words.”

“We Need To Rededicate Our Lives” – Sri Vinay Kumar

It is to remind one and all of this inner Yagnam is what the real purpose of Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam is. “It is time to be ready at Bhagawan’s call, and to me it is not only a question of being an example but also to be ready to sacrifice and use all my strength to meet challenges of a transformation in my life,” said Cecilia Parisi Frascati from Italy. Sri Vinay Kumar, the youth leader emphasized this very significant aspect of the Yagna on the final day of the celebrations when he said,

“Efforts towards world peace are happening whether this Yagna happens or not. This was done only to put us on the right path. Only to give us the thought process that we need to dedicate our lives towards this end. And this surely is only a beginning. The real work starts when every single soul sitting over here and the rest of humanity sits up and thinks what one needs to do to take all the aims that Swami has set out for us and convert them into reality.”

Captain Ong from Singapore who was there for the penultimate and last day of the Yagna says,

“Just last month, on the 9th of July, one of the main intentions of the chanting by the group Tibetan monks in Prasanthi Nilayam in His divine presence was for the peace of the world and today, our Most Loving Bhagawan had upped the scale and grandeur of His Divine Will with this Maha Yagna and the forth coming one in Chennai. He so very much wants to confer upon us the peace and bliss that is our very nature. Let’s us all open our hearts so that God may do His work so that there will be peace in the world.”

“Develop Devotion, Golden One!” – Bhagawan Baba

Whether we understand world peace or not, whether we understand Swami’s grand mission or not, one thing we can do which will take care of our personal welfare as well as the welfare of the world and which Swami emphasized over and over again during His discourses all the eleven days is - love for God. Swami said on the very first discourse itself, “Develop devotion, bangaru

(golden ones)! You must be immersed in devotion, not deep ocean. It is only such devotion that will take you to the Divine.”

“This yagna, for me, was a manifestation of love” said Harry Geurts, Visiting Faculty from the Netherlands . All we have to do is to light this fire of God’s love in our hearts. This is our true Yagna. Once guarded and protected with enthusiasm and concentration, this is what will purify us, energise us, enlighten us and one day help us merge into that pure ocean of consciousness that divinity is all about.

– Heart2Heart Team

COVER STORY
PART TWO

**THE PROFOUND SIGNIFICANCE BEHIND THE POWERFUL SACRIFICE
OF THE ATI RUDRA MAHA YAJNA**

We reproduce below, the text of a special Musings talk by Prof G. Venkataraman on the subject of *Ati Rudra Maha Yajna*, broadcast earlier over Radio Sai.

Loving Sai Ram, and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. The *Ati Rudra Maha Yajna* is now in full swing here, and it is only appropriate that I devote this special talk to that subject. Before I say anything on the *Yajna* proper, I must first offer the disclaimer that I am no Vedic scholar. Whatever I say on the technical aspects is based on material I have gathered from various sources, including scholars behind the event here. It is likely that there could be errors due to the incompleteness of my understanding, for which I make my apologies in advance.

The *Ati Rudra Maha Yajna* is addressed specifically to Lord Siva; as such, my remarks would be structured as follows:

- I shall begin by saying something about this particular *Yajna*, the chanting aspects that is.
- Next, considering that this *Yajna* is addressed to Lord Siva, I shall say something about Siva, how He is represented, and what that representation means.
- This would then lead me on to some more comments about the chants that characterise this particular *Yajna*.
- After this, I shall say something about what really lies behind ritualistic worship, etc.
- I shall then wind up with a few general remarks on the broader significance of this *Yajna* and why it is important.

The Chants of the Rudram

With this preamble, let me get down to business and start with *Rudram*. The word *Rudram* usually refers to a special chant, a celebrated one actually, that occurs in the *Yajur Veda*. The *Rudram* is heard almost everyday here in Prashanti. I should point out that what is commonly referred to as the *Rudram*, has two parts; the first of these is called *Namakam* while the second one is called *Chamakam*. Most of the hymns of *Namakam* end with the words *namo* or *namaha*. Similarly, the ending of many of the hymns of *Chamakam* is *cha me*. The hymns are organised into portions called *Anuvakams*.

Normally, one chant of the *Namakam* followed by one chant of the *Chamakam* constitutes one *Rudram*. There is a long-standing traditional belief that chanting the *Rudram* confers benefits of various kinds. For example, chanting it a few times grants freedom from disease, worldly difficulties, etc.

As the number of the repetition increases, one is supposed to get progressively more and more benefits but at some stage, the benefits switch from being worldly to spiritual, the culmination being becoming one with God.

In functions like the one going on here, the word *Rudram* representing the basic unit of chant is defined slightly differently. Glossing slightly over the details, the basic unit consists of the chanting of the *Namakam* 11 times followed by one chant of the *Chamakam*. If eleven persons do this simultaneously, we have essentially 11² or 121 collective chants, which is called *Ekadasa Rudram*. When the basic module is chanted 11³ or 1331 times, we have a *Maha Rudram*, and when it is chanted 11⁴ or 14641 times, we have an *Ati Rudram*. In the present *Yajna*, this total score of 14641 repetitive chants of the *Rudram* would be achieved by 121 priests doing the chants over 11 days. That roughly is the bookkeeping as far as the chants are concerned. For the record I should mention that this total score of 14641 could be achieved by one individual, of course, spreading the chant over many, many days; on the other hand, with a large enough team, it could all be done in one day itself. I should also mention that while this is the first time the *Ati Rudra Maha Yajna* is being performed for the first time in Prashanti Nilayam, the *Maha Rudram* version has been performed once, way back in 1955.

Ritualistic worship does not consist merely of Vedic chants, though chants form the backbone. Often they are accompanied by procedures of various kinds, the most important of which in this case are 1) *Abhishekam* and 2) offerings made to the sacred fire, or *Homam* as it is called. In the current *Yajna*, the *Abhishekam* would be offered to a special Lingam, everyday. The *Yajna* also features eleven sacred fires, to which offerings are made, once again to the accompaniment of chants based on the *Rudram*. May be you have not understood all that I have said but let that not bother you. Soon we shall be bringing out a video documentary that would enable you to actually see all that I am now describing with words.

Worshipping the Form of God

Let me now turn to Lord Siva, to whom this *Yajna* is specifically addressed. Who exactly is this Siva? Folklore is of course full of details about who Siva is, but I would like to view the matter in a slightly larger perspective than usual. In the ultimate analysis, Siva is one of the many names by which the Supreme Creator is known. Now all who believe in God agree without exception that the Universe exists because a Creator willed it into existence. Whether this Universe came into existence via the Big Bang, as scientists including myself believe or as described in various theologies, is a different matter; despite these differences, all theists believe that God created the Universe of which we are a part.

Most religions not only agree about the existence of a Supreme Creator but also declare that God is abstract, formless, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. However, different religions choose to call this God by different names but that detail need not bother us. Now the human Mind, as

Krishna declares in the *Gita*, is infinitely capable; yet, ordinary people do not experience the infinity that the Mind represents. Thus, for ordinary people, the concept of an abstract, formless and infinite God is not easy to grasp. Different religions try to deal with this problem in other own different ways, via the intermediary of convenient symbolism.

In this respect, Hinduism is perhaps the most liberal, leaving it entirely to the individual to adopt whatever form the individual wants, and thus conceptualise God with Form in many different ways. At the same time, while encouraging the worship of God with Form in order to develop Love for God, ancient Indian scriptures always viewed rituals etc., as a stepping stone to the ultimate realisation that individual is not the body but the Real Self or God. In other words, worship of God was a graded process, which took one from regarding God as a great provider to something indescribable, beyond attributes, eternal, and beyond Space and Time itself, and who was the Self within.

As Swami has pointed out, *Bhakti* is first developed via rituals because they help one to relate personally to God. However, rituals are like floatation aids that people learning to swim first use; once they know how to swim, they throw away the aids. In the same way once the spirit of devotion is established firmly in the Heart of the devotee, he or she should move to the higher realm of relating to God directly on a Heart to Heart basis.

Lord Shiva - the Deity of the Yagnam

Let us now look at all this in some detail, with specific reference to Lord Siva and the procedures that are being followed in the *Ati Rudra Maha Yajna* now in progress here. As I mentioned earlier, the human Mind ascribes to the Formless God a specific Form so as to be able to easily relate to the Almighty. Where Siva is concerned, the traditional description, together with the significance of the attributes is as follows:

- Siva has three eyes. Many meanings have been given to the significance of the three eyes of which the one due to Swami is the most fitting. Bhagavan Baba says that one eye tells us that God knows the past; the second eye means that God knows the present. Humans have two eyes and therefore they too can claim they know the past and the present, though of course they cannot know the past relating to earlier births. As for the third eye, it signifies that God alone knows the future.
- Siva has matted hair, and apparently matted hair represents God as the Lord of breath, which is present in all living beings.
- A crescent moon adorns the head of Siva. This crescent moon has many interpretations, the most important of which is that the moon represents the progression of time. In that sense, the message that Siva's moon sends to us is that God is beyond Time and the absolute master of it as well.
- The drum in the hand of Siva is a symbol of sound, the basis for language.
- Siva wears the skins of the tiger, the elephant and the deer. The tiger represents power that pervades the universe; thus, the tiger skin

symbolises mastery over every force. The elephant represents pride and wearing the elephant skin, Siva sends the message that to become one with God, one must first conquer pride. Similarly the deer, which makes big leaps, represents a fickle Mind; and wearing the deerskin, the message sent is that Mind must first be stilled, if one wants liberation.

And so on the list goes. I am not saying that my description is the only way of understanding the symbolism. The point is somewhat different. Once one gives a Form to God, one also starts assigning attributes. However, the assignment of attributes is done in such a manner as to remind the devotee that God is **beyond** the attributes associated with the phenomenal world.

Getting back to the specific form of Siva in which devotees visualise Him, is this form of God unique? By no means - God has endless Forms. Then in what Form does He grant a clear vision to the devotee? The answer is that He manifests in the Form the devotee yearns for, the Form that would grant the devotee the highest satisfaction. Speaking humorously, Swami once said that if a buffalo were to become very devout, it would quite likely think of God as a Super Buffalo and when God grants it a Vision it would in fact be as a Super Buffalo. The famous Indian novelist R. K. Narayan wrote a humorous story about the efforts of a tiger to become spiritual, by seeking enlightenment from a Guru. One day, the Guru asks the tiger to describe God, and the tiger replies:

God must be an enormous tiger, spanning the earth and sky, with a tail capable of encircling the globe, claws that could hook the clouds, and teeth that could grind mountains, and possessing of course, immeasurable strength to match.

Hearing this, the *Guru* bursts into laughter and replies, "You may be perfectly right in thinking of your God as a super tiger. Also, it may be true. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, God reveals Himself in a mighty terrifying form, which pervades the whole universe in every form of life and action. Remember also that He is within every one of us and we derive strength from Him."

So we arrive at the conclusion that while the name Siva and the specific form attributed to Him are useful in their own way, we must really look beyond the form to the Formless aspect of God. I shall return to that shortly. But for the moment, I would now like to turn to the rituals.

Rituals Bring Us Closer to God

A ritual is basically a form of worship in which chants are accompanied by certain procedures. This is best illustrated by the simple worship of Lord Ganesha that precedes practically every ritual here. In this there is a small idol of Lord Ganesha, and after the preliminaries are over, the devotee first welcomes Ganesha. And how does he do it? By seating Ganesha on a plank and making the gesture of washing the feet. This symbolism has a specific meaning. In the olden days, whenever an elder or a revered guest came to a house, the first thing that the host did was to seat the guest and wash the feet

of the guest. Next, Ganesha is given a bath, after that He is given clothes, followed by the offering of the sacred thread, sandalwood paste, etc. etc. Full hospitality is extended. Ganesha is then worshipped with flowers, after which He is offered food, fruits etc., topping it all off with *Aarathi*, as a gesture of reverence and worship.

These days, hardly anyone goes through this routine in the spirit implied in the procedure but that does not take away the spirit. The devotee relates very intensely on a one to one basis with the Lord, even as he would with say his *Guru*, dropping in for a visit. There is love and respect in every word and every gesture associated with the welcome. Sometime ago, we did a feature in H2H on Saint Tyagaraja, a life-long devotee of Lord Rama. Tyagaraja had a set of idols representing Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. For him, however, they were not idols but God personified. Tyagaraja related to them in an intensely personal way, and when, for example, the idols were seized by his brother in an act of jealousy and thrown into the river, Tyagaraja became extremely distraught. And when he discovered the idols, by Divine Grace of course, how happy he became and how joyously he welcomed the Lord back into his home!

Bhakti or the intense worship of the personal God, even if it were via rituals, enables the devotee to have an intense, personal and mystical relationship with God and offer Love to God easily. That is why in the *Gita*, Krishna recommends the worship of the personal God, that is, God with Form, as compared to the worship of the Formless God.

Let me at this stage briefly recap what I have said thus far. I started off with some bookkeeping details about how many times the *Rudram* is chanted during the *Ati Rudram Maha Yajna*. I then talked about visualising God in the form of Siva, with all the attributes that are ascribed to Him. That was followed by some remarks about how worship of God with Form is very helpful in the spiritual path, and how Krishna Himself recommends it over the worship of the Abstract, Formless God, which can easily derail the ordinary person. I also described, especially via a brief reference to the *Puja* done to Lord Ganesha routinely, how ritualistic worship enables one to relate in a personal way to God. This sets the stage for me to make now a few remarks about some of the procedures followed in the *Ati Rudra Maha Yajna*.

The Rituals of the *Ati Rudra Maha Yajna*

Leaving aside the many satellite rituals, the three basic rituals are 1) chants accompanied by *Abhishekam* done to a Lingam, 2) the stand-alone chants of the *Rudram* and 3) chants accompanied by offerings to the sacred fire, that is, *Homam*. Let me start with the *Abhishekam* done to the Lingam. What really is a Lingam? As Swami has pointed out in many of His Sivarathri Discourses, Lingam is basically a representation of Creation. When the Lingam is worshipped, one is symbolically thanking God for all the bounties Creation is filled with, like air, water, land etc., the Sun that gives us energy, and so on. For example, one of the hymns in the *Namakam* goes in part like this:

Prostrations to the Lord of all bodies, the destroyer who protects with His stringed bow. Prostrations to the charioteer, the indestructible one, the Lord of the Forests, Prostrations to the crimson one, the Lord of trees who, existing in all, protects.

Clearly, a person immersed in the world has desires. Swami says if you have to beg, better to beg from God than humans. In that spirit, some of the hymns unabashedly seek favours like this one that I quote in part:

May I be provided material comforts in abundance in my life's journey and the capacity to put them to the best use.

Here is another sample:

May I be granted movable and immovable property and plentiful gold and silver.

But there are also hymns that seek higher knowledge, the ability to sacrifice, the realisation of the ultimate purpose of life and so on.

If we take all this together, we see an interesting progression. First, the devotee adores the Lord as the Supreme Creator and seeks from the Lord the blessings of material prosperity etc., all of which are related to Creation. But slowly the devotee's focus shifts to things more spiritual, that is, to things that go beyond the mere material.

Life as a Pilgrimage

Let me now try and put all this in a larger perspective. Basically, one can visualise the rituals as a symbolic representation of life as a pilgrimage. Initially, one does not understand that God is the Indweller who resides within us. Thanks to this ignorance, one seeks God outside, in manmade temples, in so-called holy places, etc. One also tries to do one's duty but the Mind is agitated by the consequences of the past, one's *karma* that is. As a result, one prays to God for protection, freedom from troubles and so on. If this part of life is handled properly, the Mind slowly develops some maturity and helps the individual to focus more on fulfilling his or her *Dharma*. As the focus on *Dharma* increases, the individual seeks to become united with God because that grants true Peace and Bliss. And this process is facilitated by the individual seeking God within rather than outside.

In passing, I should perhaps mention the following. These days when one has a bath, one takes a shower, at least in the advanced countries. In India in the olden days, people used to bathe in the river or when they took a bath at home, they would pour water over themselves using a metallic mug. And while bathing, many would chant the *Rudram*. The idea was that bathing of the physical body, was symbolic of performing *Abhishekam* to the Lord inside.

To put it all differently, worship symbolises a three-step process as it were. In the first step, we come to grips with our *karma*, that is, the consequences of

our past lives, often painful. That pain compels us to seek God and pray to Him for favours. As we work out our *karmas* and acquire some spiritual refinement, we slowly become focussed on *Dharma*. This propels us forward on the spiritual path, helping us to discriminate the false from the true. In particular, we progressively move away from material objects and sensual pleasures to things more eternal and permanent, that is, values that transcend Creation. That takes us on a beautiful inward journey that culminates with coming face to face with Supreme Consciousness and finally becoming one with it.

Thus far, I have talked about the spiritual progress of an individual. Indeed, most *Gurus* have in the past, been mainly preoccupied with helping individuals to go from the finite to the Infinite, from the transient to the Eternal, from untruth to Truth etc., etc. In this sense, the spiritual journey was essentially seen as a lonely trek by an individual. In a radical departure from this traditional approach, Aurobindo in his rather difficult to read *Integral Yoga*, ventured to suggest that mankind has reached a stage where a **whole** body of people could and must **collectively** evolve. Even more interesting is the fact that our beloved Swami has been quietly translating Aurobindo's rather fuzzy theoretical concepts into practical reality, with what I would call a truly revolutionary approach.

Sai's Mission to Uplift Humanity

Take, for example, Swami's Institute. On the face of it, it is a University that like its counterparts elsewhere, offers courses in mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc., besides other courses on Business Administration, Financial Management, Computer Science and so on. That is what one sees on the surface; but look below and you would find that Bhagavan Baba's University is a spiritual cauldron of a unique kind that produces every year in a coherent and structured manner, hundreds and hundreds of young men and women who are ready to serve humanity and uplift it in many different ways.

Look next at the Seva Organisation founded by Swami. As Bhagavan once remarked, the basic aim of the Organisation is to spirituality elevate the individual engaged in Seva, but when thousands and thousands do selfless seva round the world throughout the year, it has its own collective impact in uplifting a large number of people.

The same is true of Swami's Hospitals. On the face of it, the Hospitals help the poor by offering them free medical service, including at the advanced level. But look deeper and what do you find? These Hospitals provide a wonderful chance to so many doctors and nurses to do **real** service. Then there are the large number of Swami's students who are serving as Technical Officers for a modest salary, even though they can command much bigger pay outside, given their highly specialised skills. And let us not forget the many others who are serving in the Hospitals in various capacities, purely on a voluntary basis. Finally, there are the huge Seva Dal brigades that come week after week, from all over the country, to engage in a variety of support

services that range from security duty to laundry work, carrying food to the patients, pushing wheel chairs, and so on.

In every one of the institutions created by Swami, groups of people working coherently together and for a common noble cause, get collectively elevated, spiritually that is. And the beauty is that people involved get uplifted without being conscious of it. Superficially it seems to sort of just happen; not really, because Swami is there behind, silently orchestrating it all. That is what is unique about this Avatar; He has come not merely to give a helping hand to individuals here and there but to large sections of humanity.

In physics, we have a phenomenon called self-organisation where a collective system, under some special conditions, exhibits extra-ordinary properties. Superconductivity is a classic example. A wire made of lead can conduct electricity, but when the electrons flow in the wire to carry current, they normally experience resistance. If the resistance is high, the wire in fact gets hot. But take a wire made of lead and cool it to a temperature close to absolute zero; and you know what happens? Miraculously, the electrical resistance vanishes **completely** and the electrons can flow without facing the slightest impedance. This is an example of self-organisation; when the conditions are right, the entire system goes over to a very different state and the behaviour of the system changes dramatically.

The laser is another great example. A laser is basically a system the atoms of which emit light. A fluorescent tube also emits light; so what is the difference between the light emitted by fluorescent tube and that emitted by a laser? The atoms in a discharge tube emit light in all directions and with a range of frequencies. The atoms in a laser behave differently. Firstly, the light emitted comes out in one direction; secondly the frequency range is very narrow and thirdly, the atoms all emit light in step as it were. That is what makes the laser light very powerful, so powerful that in suitable cases it can even drill through thick steel plates. Here too, once the conditions are right, the system just fires and starts lasing, as scientists say; this also is a case of self-organisation.

Swami is telling us that when individuals in Society all are in perfect step with *Dharma*, then automatically that Society would become self-organised and transform into Utopia. This is how the so-called Golden Age would dawn, when mankind becomes self-organised by resonating to *Dharma*, and not through the wave of a magic wand as many seem to imagine.

In passing, I might add that unknown to us, Swami is nudging us forward with some incredible but hardly noticed steps. I shall mention just two. I don't know how many of you were born at the time of the famous Cuban missile crisis in the early sixties, when Kennedy was the President of America and Khrushchev was the boss of the erstwhile Soviet Union. I remember those days vividly. There was an eye-ball-to-eye-ball confrontation between the two great super powers and it seemed for a few days that the whole world might go up in a nuclear holocaust. Tough messages were being exchanged between the two world leaders, and at a crucial moment Kennedy had the option to send almost an ultimatum or to send a slightly conciliatory message

that would enable Khrushchev to back off without losing face. Kennedy chose the latter option and dramatically the crisis eased off.

Historians might praise the statesman-like approach taken by Kennedy but we must realise that ultimately our actions are determined by inner promptings. If the promptings are good then so are the resulting actions. Narrating the story of Dhruva, Swami once said that when young Dhruva, a mere five-year old, was on his way to the forest to do *tapas*, Sage Narada asked the young lad where he was headed. Dhruva replied that he was going to the forest to do *tapas*. Narada then asked, “And how exactly do you plan to do the *tapas*?” Dhruva calmly replied, “He who put the idea in my head about going to the forest would also guide me how to perform the *tapas*!”

Yes, God often works that way, without making Himself very evident. As Swami once declared, “Coincidence is a miracle where I hide Myself!” This reminds me of another great historical event, the meeting between Ronald Regan and Gorbachev that resulted in a remarkable *détente* and led to the drastic reduction of the nuclear arsenals held by America and Russia. Subsequently there was a dramatic change in Russia to the point where we now actually have so many Russians coming to Prashanti Nilayam, something we simply could not have dreamt of, say even as late as 1985.

Perhaps I have been rambling somewhat in this talk but I just could not help it because this is a subject of such vast proportions. To help you, let me briefly recap the main points I have made thus far.

- I started off with a few remarks about what exactly is meant by the *Ati Rudra Maha Yajnam*.
- I then said something about Lord Siva, the attributes He is supposed to have and what they mean.
- After this I moved on to the utility of worshipping God with Form.
- This took me then to some of the specifics of the procedures followed in the current *Yajnam*.
- I then described briefly how, starting with the ritualistic worship of the God with Form, one slowly evolves to the adoration of the Formless Abstract God who is nothing but Pure Consciousness.
- I also took the opportunity to point out how Swami is helping us not only at the individual level to become better spiritually but is in fact lifting us all together at the same time, so that humanity as whole would see better days.

The Yagnam is a Call to Wake Up!

I guess it is now time to wind up. I believe that this *Yajnam* is a wakeup call for all of us to pause and reflect on who we really are. Resonating with the sacred vibrations generated by the Vedic chants here, we must see ourselves in a larger and Cosmic setting and what our real purpose of existence as humans is. According to me, human destiny is determined by two critical factors – where we came from and where we are headed. As far as the first is

concerned, there is no question that humans have evolved from lower species. In turn, this means that inevitably humans would have traces, sometimes strong, of the basic instincts and tendencies common to animals. However, this does not mean humans have to yield to these instincts and not rise to higher levels.

The question now is to what level they must rise. This is where the question of the final destiny of humans comes in. If the individual believes that he must revel in the primitive instincts but in a sophisticated way that technology enables him to, then he would be nothing more than a clever animal or even a clever devil perhaps. But is that what human birth is gifted for? If we believe that there is a higher and nobler destiny that beckons us, then we must seek it and reach that goal. That goal is to realise our latent Divinity and become one with God.

The *Yajnam* that I have talked about is a powerful reminder of that truth. While people in India can instinctively recognise this truth thanks to an ancient and rich tradition, I must not omit to mention that great scientists in the West have also independently come to the same conclusion. Einstein, for example, declared that he pursued Science because it enabled him to have, at least fleetingly, the mystical experience of Cosmic Infinity. Young Werner Heisenberg too experienced this Cosmic feeling of religiosity when, at the age of twenty two or so, he discovered a key principle of quantum mechanics. As he later wrote to his sister, he felt at the moment of his great discovery as if he was looking over the shoulders of God while the Creator wrote the symphony of Creation. Erwin Schrodinger, another of the founders of quantum mechanics declared that at the end of the day, he had no choice but to recognise the profundity of the Vedic declaration *Aham Brahmasmi* – I am Brahman. By the way, both Heisenberg and Schrodinger won the Nobel Prize.

Max Planck who in a sense ushered in the era of quantum physics declared that Consciousness is primary and that matter is secondary, being a material manifestation of Consciousness. For the record, I must mention that Planck too was a Nobelist. Eugene Wigner, another Nobel Prize winner declared that information is complete only when it is registered in Consciousness. Then there is the Harvard biologist George Wald, needless to say another Nobelist, who said that though as a scientist he did not like accepting the idea of Consciousness, he had no choice but to accept that Consciousness existed first and from it came all Creation, the human being the finest flower of this Supreme Consciousness. Is it any wonder then that more and more scientists are being drawn to the idea of Primary Consciousness from which everything came and that Siva who represents Consciousness, symbolises the Cosmic rhythm of the Universe through His *thandavam* or dance?

Yes, Siva is the root and support of this universe, and the rhythm of His Cosmic dance is reflected in the atoms and in the galaxies of the universe. As physicist Fritjof Capra says, “Modern physics has shown that the rhythm of creation and destruction is not only manifest in the turn of the season and in the birth and death of all living creatures, but is also the very essence of

inorganic matter. For modern physics then, Siva's dance is the dance of subatomic matter."

Capra concludes, "Hundreds of years ago, Indian artists created visual images of dancing Sivas in a beautiful series of bronzes. In our time, physicists have used the most advanced technology to portray the patterns of that cosmic dance. The metaphor of the cosmic dance thus unifies ancient mythology, religious art and modern physics."

In appreciation of the feelings of modern physicists for Siva's dance, the Government of India presented in June 2004 to the world's leading laboratory in particle physics, a two metre tall statue of Nataraja, representing Siva engaged in His Cosmic Dance. This statute stands in the premises of CERN, an international laboratory located in Geneva, where many outstanding discoveries relating to the microcosm and its relationship to the macrocosm have been made.

As this great *Yajna* in Prashanti winds its way to conclusion, we devotees, wherever we are, must, taking help from the rituals and the chants, try to look far beyond so that we see ourselves not in the limited setting of daily life as father, mother, teacher, CEO or whatever, but with respect to where we came from and where we ought to go. As Swami reminds us, from Consciousness we all came and in Consciousness we must finally merge. And Siva is one of the representations of that Supreme Consciousness. The worship of the Lingam, *Abhishekams* done to it, and the offerings made to the fire while chanting the name of Siva must all help us to focus on our true destiny and not the false destiny that the ephemeral world tempts us with.

I hope you agree with my conclusions. Thank you and Jai Sai Ram.

- Heart2Heart Team

FEATURE ARTICLES

PRASHANTI MUSINGS -

UNDERSTANDING AND ATTAINING THE SUPREME BEING - THE VEDIC WAY

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam.

This is my eighth talk in the Veda Walkthrough series. Last time, I dealt with some aspects relating to the end of life, quoting some *Mantras*, in English translation of course, from Ramundo Panickkar's monumental book. I shall now move away from Panickkar's book, and, by way of slowly winding down on this series, I shall now mention a few related points.

The Vedas Point the Way to God

The first thing I would like to point out is that though individual Vedic rituals might be directed at deities, the grander aspect of Creation and the Creator are not lost sight of. We must understand that the *Vedas* were meant to cater to a wide spectrum. As the custodian of the *Vedas*, the Brahmins were expected to preside over various rituals performed by ordinary folk and guide these people by drawing their attention to the practical aspects of *Dharma*. I shall point out some examples of this shortly. For the moment, however, I wish to highlight the fact that where the Brahmins themselves were concerned, they were expected to focus on the **highest** aspects of Vedic philosophy. Thus it is that we find in the *Vedas* many hymns directly in praise of the Supreme One. Here, for example, are some verses from the *Rig Veda*, where the hymn is based on the rhetorical question: Who is it that we should worship?

*He who bestows life-force and hardy vigour,
Whose ordinances even the gods obey,
Whose shadow is Immortal Life,
What God shall we adore with our oblation?*

*Who by His grandeur has emerged sole sovereign
Of every living thing that breathes and slumbers,
He who is the Lord of man and four-legged creatures,
What God shall we adore with our oblation?*

*To Him of right belong, by His own power,
The snow-clad mountains, the world-stream, and the sea,
His arms are the four quarters of the sky,
What God shall we adore with our oblation?*

O Father of the Earth, by fixed laws ruling,

*O Father of Heavens, pray protect us,
O Father of the great and shining waters,
What God shall we adore with our oblation?*

That is very poetic, is it not?

This idea of an Absolute God who is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent is present as an undercurrent throughout the *Vedas*, though it shows up explicitly only in the more philosophical passages.

Hailed as *Sarveswara* the Supreme Lord, He is extolled in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* thus:

*On all sides eye, on all sides face,
On all sides arms, on all sides feet,
He, God, the ONE, creates heaven and earth,
Forging them together with arms and wings.*

*He who is the source and origin of the deities,
The Lord of all, Rudra, the mighty sage,
Who produced in olden days the golden germ,
May He endow us with purity of Mind!*

*Without beginning and end is He;
In the midst of chaos He is and brings forth all things.
Creator is He, and sole provider of manifold forms.
When a man knows God, he is freed from all fetters.*

In the *Mahanarayana Upanishad*, which, incidentally, we hear chanted often in Swami's presence, it is said:

*The sound that is uttered in the beginning of the Veda,
The sound that is established also in the end,*

*That which is beyond its absorption in Nature,
That is the Supreme Lord.*

*Narayana, Universal God,
Supreme word, Imperishable.*

*On every side Supreme, eternal,
Narayana, Universal Lord.*

*We adore the Master of All,
The Lord of the soul,
Eternal, Benevolent, and Immobile!*

*Narayana, the mighty One to be known,
The Self of all, the Supreme Goal.*

*Narayana the Light Supreme, the Self,
Narayana the Supreme,
Narayana supreme essence of Brahman,
Narayana the Supreme!*

And so on it goes. The *Mandukya Upanishad* puts it all very crisply thus:

*This is the Lord of all, the Knower of all,
The Inner Controller.
This is the Source of all,
The beginning and the end of all beings.*

In the *Prasna Upanishad*, the Supreme Lord is described thus:

*He is the fire that burns,
He is the Sun.
He is the plenteous rain,
He is the Wind,
He is the Earth, matter and God,
Being and Non-being – He the Immortal.*

And in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* which we have already reviewed, He is described in the same tone:

*That from which beings are born,
That by which, when born, they live,
That into which, when dying, they enter,
That you should desire to know:
That is Brahman!*

The Path of the *Bhagavad Gita*

One cannot talk about the *Vedas* without some reference at least, to the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Gita* can understandably be described in many different ways but for the present, I would choose to describe it as the direct authentication of Vedic Wisdom by God Himself. God in human form not only corroborates all that is said in the *Vedas* in various places but also goes far beyond, by opening up a simple path by following which anyone can, if he or she so chooses, attain God by observing just a few very simple rules.

Basically, the *Gita* reveals to man how by loving God, man can attain God, without any jeopardy to his normal call of duty. And that the God man so attains, is nothing but the Brahman whom the *Vedas* extol.

There is a very important point here that needs to be underscored. The Vedas essentially told man, “Follow *Dharma* and you will reach God.” Very true indeed. But then, for many, *Dharma* may appear like an inconvenient set of rules. Krishna instead tells man, “Just love Me, and be devoted to Me. I shall take care of everything.”

Does that mean that man can forget *Dharma*? Not at all. However, man now thinks of the Loving God and tries to please Him. God is so wonderful, loving, compassionate, and all that, that it is a joy to please God. Thus, driven by his love for God, man starts following *Dharma* almost unconsciously. *Dharma* is no longer a burden but something that is merely incidental.

Creation, Swami says, is a Divine Play involving the Lord and the devotee. Krishna was the first to make that plain, besides instructing man how to please the Lord. I remember very distinctly what Swami said when inaugurating the *Sanskrita Sadhanam* in Bangalore in January, 2001. This is what Swami said effectively:

“God has everything. Being the Creator of everything, there is no need for God to desire this or that. God does not incarnate to ask man for service or favours. God incarnates so that man may have God in his radar screen. When God is physically present directly in front of his eyes, man feels an urge to serve God. That is the opportunity that the Avatar presents to man. Some people are not quick on the uptake, and so God asks people sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, ‘Will you do this for me’.”

We hardly realise how much Swami is doing so that we might improve ourselves. Many years ago, late Dr. Fanibanda asked Swami a question. By the way, for those of you who are not aware, I should mention that late Dr. Fanibanda was a renowned dentist in Bombay, he was a good amateur magician and on top of it all, he was a good photographer and film cameraman. It is thanks to him that we in the Prashanti Digital Studio have reels and reels of archival film that have wonderful scenes that we shall never again see.

Getting back to Dr. Fanibanda and his question, he asked Swami, “Swami, what is the purpose of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation?” Swami replied, “Nothing.” That of course knocked the good doctor out flat. When he recovered, he gently asked, “Swami, nothing? How can that be?” Swami then smiled and replied, “I founded it so that people could improve themselves!”

A very profound reply, and when we think about it, so many of the activities that revolve round Swami and the Ashram are really

opportunities for various people to improve themselves. I personally find this absolutely remarkable. I mean otherwise, how would so many people with expertise in finance, administration etc., get an opportunity to serve in the Divine presence?

In His earlier incarnation as Lord Krishna, our Swami said this, and this is very important:

On me fix thy Mind. To Me give thy devotion. To Me offer thy sacrifice. To Me make thy obeisance. Thus having attached thyself to Me and made Me thy end, to Me indeed thou shalt come!

Even the vilest of sinners shall be counted as righteous, if he turns to me with undivided devotion; for he has chosen the right path.

These are incredible pronouncements that **only** the Lord can make. And just listen to this guarantee.

As for those who exclusively worship Me, who meditate on Me with no other thought and who are ever steadfast – I bear entirely the burden of their welfare.

By the way, these remarkable *slokas* or hymns are all from the ninth chapter.

It is no surprise then that in the post-Krishna period there was a great following for the Lord in the form of Krishna. Indeed, many saints did exactly what was prescribed and attained precisely the destiny promised. In short, I would say, using a modern idiom that the *Bhagavad Gita* is nothing short of *Vedanta* for dummies!

I am sure with all these remarks, you would be able to recall innumerable statements from Swami where all these assurances have not only been reiterated but even exceeded; in other words, Swami is giving bargains far exceeding Krishna's offers! That really is what the Lord's compassion is all about.

Sacrifice – a Vedic Value

Changing the gear somewhat, one theme that occurs right across the *Vedas* is SACRIFICE. The Sanskrit word for sacrifice is *Tyaga*, and there is a Vedic passage extolling sacrifice that Swami often quotes. In the *Vedas*, the theme of sacrifice may be seen in two distinct perspectives. One of these is what I would like to call Cosmic External, and the other Sublime Internal. As is to be expected, the two concepts are in fact related.

The Outer Sacrifice

Let me start with what I refer to as the Cosmic External aspect. The basic idea here is that the human is but one cog in a massive engine called the Cosmos. The Cosmos has innumerable entities ranging from stars and galaxies at one end to insects, plants, animals and so on at the other end. Everything in God's Creation has a purpose for its existence, and plays a role in the Cosmic Scheme of things, though we might not be aware of it. **In this sense, not only the Universe but every single entity in it, big or small, has a definite purpose for its existence. This, of course, goes against the belief common amongst many modern scientists, that the Universe simply happens to exist and has no purpose.**

The important point here is the interconnectivity of existence. The point needs to be underscored especially in today's world, when many hold that man is supreme, that everything exists for his benefit, and he can even do what he wants. Take, for example, the question of bio-diversity. Bio-scientists have recognised that bio-diversity in Nature is good for ecosystems and for mankind too, and must not be disturbed. However, genetic engineering promoted by many companies, it is feared, would greatly harm bio-diversity by making just a few species of plants dominate. This would be clearly going against the structure of Nature but the protagonists of genetically modified seeds could not care less about such considerations.

Another example: there are many coral reefs round the world, some of them truly famous. However, their very fame has spelt their doom. Heavily promoted as tourist destinations, many of these reefs are in danger of being wiped out. It was not realised, until recently, that coral reefs play a vital role in preserving balance in marine ecosystems. They are the breeding ground for many marine species, which in turn support many types of fishes. Damage to coral systems has caused, in many places, heavy destruction of many species of fishes. I can cite many examples but shall not at the moment. Maybe in a talk later, I shall deal extensively with ecosystems. Currently, the point I want to make is that man's superior abilities does **not** give him any special license to disturb eco-balance in anyway. God has given man superior abilities **not** for damaging the environment but to become conscious of God and move towards Him. Misuse of Divine capabilities endowed by God to man for a special purpose is a great sin.

Indeed, this is where sacrifice comes into the picture. In the *Gita*, the Lord tells Arjuna:

At the time of Creation, the Creator told mankind: ‘Through sacrifice thou shall prosper and propagate. This shall be the milch-cow [Kamadhenu] of thy desires.

This is verse 10 in Chapter 4. Here, sacrifice is described at a level that most people would grasp. It is a payment for favours one wants. Continuing, Krishna adds:

Worship is a form of sacrifice. Worship the powers of Nature [the Devas], and they in turn will nourish thee. Through this synergy, thou canst attain the highest good.

Here, sacrifice is commended in order to achieve a balanced co-existence with Nature. The word sacrifice normally makes people say: “I am being asked to simply give up something that I have earned with hard work. Is this not unfair?” Krishna dispels such notions. Maybe the person might think he or she has worked hard, but there can be no gains unless there is the Grace of God. **Thus, what people think they are sacrificing is really something that has been given to them by God. They are not giving away some material thing of theirs, but something given to them by God. To make sure that this idea is not forgotten, Krishna says:**

Fostered by sacrifice, the deities of Nature will, unasked, bestow on thee all the enjoyment thou couldst possibly desire. But he who enjoys the gifts of the gods without offering sacrifice in return, is verily a thief.

Food is one of the great gifts of Nature. We do not realise it but all food comes really from Nature and not the supermarket. Reminding man of this, Krishna says:

The virtuous who partake of food that remains after the sacrifice is offered are free from sin; but the selfish who eat alone without sharing their food with others are in fact feeding on sin.

These *slokas* are from the fourth chapter of the *Gita*, where Krishna really goes to town on the subject of sacrifice. Here are some more *slokas* from that same chapter:

Know that all action originates from the Supreme One who is imperishable and all-pervading. And in sacrificial action, this Supreme Spirit is consciously present.

O Partha! One who does not revolve with the wheel of sacrifice but seeks instead mundane pleasures through the gratification of the senses lives in vain.

I am sure you would have noticed that all that I have said so far about sacrifice is actually connected with the so-called external aspect. We receive, and so we must also give; better it is give more than what we receive. One important thing to remember is that what we give or sacrifice is something that would bring material advantage in some form to us if we did not give that away. Thus, the term sacrifice is used in the traditional sense.

Now in the *Vedas*, the word sacrifice is intimately tied up with *Yajna* and *Yaga*. And *Yajna* and *Yaga* call to our minds the spectacle of a huge sacred fire, the sacrificial fire as it is sometimes called. I am sure many of you must have seen *Yajnas* being performed at Prashanti Nilayam at the time of Dasara. We see priests pouring not only ghee but cooked rice and many material objects into the fire. **What does all this symbolism really mean? How does making offerings to the fire amount to sacrifice? Let us first hear Swami on the subject.**

The sages used to perform Yajnas for gaining mastery over the senses. The real nature and meaning of Yajna is the overcoming of all our bad tendencies, throwing them into the fire of sacrifice.

What is sacrifice? What is that one must give up? Is it the transient wealth that one has?

Sacrifice means giving up one's desires, greed and extreme miserliness. Unless you sacrifice desire, anger, greed and so on, you cannot attain Divinity.

The Inner Sacrifice

That is the real point - *Yajnas* are performed for achieving Inner Purity through sacrifice, and this is where what I earlier referred to as the Sublime Internal, comes into the picture. However, it must be added that in Vedic times, people did perform *Yajnas* for propitiating deities and getting boons from them. For example, Emperor Dasaratha performed the famous *Putrakameshti Yaga* so that he might be blessed with children. This is the external aspect of the Vedic ritual. But the beauty is, as Swami sometimes points out, all these rituals have a sublime internal aspect too.

This brings me to my next point which is about fire. In the scriptures, the term fire is sometimes used in a generic sense. Let us get back to the *Gita* for a moment, and listen some more to Krishna: the few *slokas* I am now going to quote are from the fifth chapter.

Some offer sacrifice to the Devas alone while others more evolved offer the ego as a sacrifice in the fire of Knowledge.

Some offer the senses such as hearing, in the fire of sense control; while others offer sound and other objects of perception to the fire of the senses.

Others again, kindled by Wisdom, sacrifice all the activities of the senses and of the vital energy [Praana] in the fire of self-restraint.

Some perform sacrifice using material objects, some through austerity, others via Yoga, and some again make the study of the scriptures, and the acquisition of knowledge [of the scriptures] their sacrifice – all born of piety.

Yet others, abstemious in food, practice sacrifice by spiritualising their vital energy. All these know what sacrifice is and use it to purge themselves completely of sin.

Thus, many and various are the sacrifices enunciated by the Vedas. Know them all to spring from the action of the mind, the senses and the body. Once thou knowest this, thou canst win release.

All the *slokas* I have just quoted relate to what I would call the internal aspect. **Remember my earlier quote of Swami who says that sacrifice really means giving up one's undesirable habits and traits? When one gives up a bad habit like getting angry say, one can say one is sacrificing anger in the Sacred Fire of Spiritual Knowledge.** That is the spirit in which many of these *slokas* are to be understood.

A Sacrifice of Meat and Alcohol

This gives me an opportunity to narrate a small incident and bring this talk to a close. This happened way back in 1995, around October I think, when I paid a three-week visit to New Zealand, on an invitation from the Sai Organisation. The high point was the National Conference, which, it so happened, coincided with the Deepavali festival.

The Spiritual Convenor of the New Zealand Sai Organisation had a nice idea. It was to have a fire, and everyone was supposed to write on a piece of paper one or more undesirable habits that the person wanted to get rid of. Everyone was made to stand in a queue, and one by one, people went to the fire, said a small prayer to Swami, and then threw the paper into the fire. The idea was to sacrifice bad habits, with fire as the witness. I thought that this was an excellent way of performing a *Yajna* in modern times, sticking closely to the basic principle stated by Swami.

Announcements were made about the fire and all that at lunchtime, and devotees went around with pencil and paper, wondering what they would give up. It was very much like people going to Benares

in the old days, taking a dip in the Ganges and then giving up some favourite vegetable. What used to happen was that people would sacrifice a vegetable that they did not like anyway! I was remembering all this when I fell into conversation with a devotee. He is a very good person, and he had worked a lot for the National Convention. He also took good care of me. He had a long conversation with me about what he should give up. Hearing him out, I suggested that he should give up eating meat and drinking alcohol. He did not like what I told him and argued with me a lot. For my part, I tried to explain why Swami had asked devotees to shun these. He went away saying he would think about it.

Came the evening, and the fire was lit. One by one, people were walking up to the fire and throwing the piece of paper they had with them. **This man came up to me and showed the paper he had with him. On it was a promise to give up totally meat and alcohol. He walked up to the fire tossed the paper into the fire, came back to me with huge grin and gave me a huge bear hug. He was a big fellow and literally crushed me but it was worth it! He was so happy and I too was happy for him.**

So you see, *Yajnas* are relevant in this day and age too, especially in their Sublime Internal aspect. I hope you will agree with me.

Thank you and Jai Sai Ram.

-Heart2Heart Team

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN VENEZUELA

The “Little Venice” of South America

When Christopher Columbus sighted its coast way back in 1498, he was so enthralled by its landscape that he called it as **Tierra de Gracia** (or the *Land of Grace*), which has today become Venezuela’s nickname. The name “Venezuela” which means “Little Venice” in Spanish was actually given by European explorers who on their arrival observed local Indian houses on stilts along the shores of Lake Maracaibo which reminded them of the city of Venice. Lake Maracaibo, incidentally, is the largest natural lake in South America with an area of more than 13000 sq. km. Before we go more into Venezuela’s splendid natural beauty and later into Venezuela’s Sai story, lets first get familiar with the early history of this Spanish speaking nation situated at the top of the South American continent which shares its borders with Brazil, Columbia and Guyana.

The first settlers in Venezuela were Indian tribes related to the Mayas from the North and Incas from the south. These peoples were governed by chiefs, and were people who were childlike in their ways, friendly, brave in the face of difficulty, and basically a society which lived by farming, fishing, and killing game.

Colonisation by the Spanish

In 1492, three ships landed on the Carribbean island of Guanani. These were “La Pinta”, “La Nina” and “La Santa Maria”. These ships brought Europeans, principally Spaniards, commanded by Cristobal Colon. They had been commissioned by the Catholic Royalty of Spain, Fernando and Isabelo. The Spanish with their superior weapons were able to subdue the natives and killed the chiefs. The Indians became domestic slaves. Also negros were brought from Africa to work the land but as bonded slaves, and with time both the Indians and the Africans were absorbed into a mixture known as mestizos, which can still be observed today.

After colonization took place, because of the injustices committed by the Spanish, a group of patriots or rebels sprang up in protest. They were led by Simon Bolivar, an idealist who was educated in Europe and was able to inspire his followers. He was from a wealthy family and utilized his wealth and connections in Europe to get arms. They fought many battles, and finally triumphed at the battle of Carabobo on the 24th of June 1821. This battle was coordinated by Bolivar with other battles in Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and Peru.

The Spanish were overextended so that not only Venezuela, but also the countries of Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia were freed from Spanish yoke. One of the new government’s first acts was to free all slaves. The government also allowed freedom of worship which allowed the Catholic religion to continue, with the priests supporting the new government.

Tierra De Gracia - The Land of Grace

Venezuela is a country with much natural beauty typified by the mountain, El Avila, which has a huge cross built on its top and serves as a park and green zone for the city of Caracas, the largest city and the capital of Venezuela. Los Roques is a splendid coral reef in the Caribbean Sea where divers can find diverse fish species. Mochima and Morrocoy are beaches which would tempt any swimmer. In Canaima, Venezuela hosts the Angel Falls – the highest free-leaping waterfall in the world at 3212 feet with an uninterrupted drop of 2646 feet. There is a famous cave called Guacharo, in Monagas state.

The city of Coro was named by UNESCO as a world cultural and historic site because of the colonial architecture preserved there; also the beautiful Bolivar Mountain is always covered with snow, being a peak in the Andean chain which starts in Venezuela, but runs all the way to the tip of Chile in the South. This is where we have the longest ski lift in the world.

In the south of Venezuela, there is the world famous Amazon jungle and a natural cave called Jaspe. It is one of those regions of the world with large areas of flora and fauna where animals are able to live in their natural surroundings without being disturbed by man. The country is also blessed with large rivers such as the Orinoco, Cuyuni and Caroni which has facilitated hydro-electricity for its numerous industries and homes.

The Land of Riches Too!

Venezuela is naturally very rich with mines of gold, silver, diamonds, copper, zinc, lead and other metals. The country has a large steel and aluminium industry which uses the alloys from the mines. In the town of El Callao, the mother of one devotee tells of how, when she was a child, she and other children would find small pieces of gold after it rained in the mud that would run in the streets, and they would exchange these pieces of gold for candies from the shop keepers. In 1939, petroleum was discovered, and this brought a great deal of wealth to the country accounting for roughly one-third of GDP, around 80% of export earnings, and over half of government operating revenues. Agriculture produces very good cocoa for chocolates, and coffee, corn, rice, peanuts, potatoes, yucca and diverse tropical fruits.

Appearance of Virgin Mary

About 200 years ago the Virgin Mary appeared to an Indian named Coromoto, and since then the Virgin of Coromoto has become the patron saint of Venezuela. More recently, about 20 years ago, the Virgin Mary again appeared at a farm called Betania, and this place has become a tourist place for the faithful. Pope Juan Pablo (John Paul) II visited Venezuela twice, and declared the beatification of Mother Maria of San Jose during one of his visits. With a predominant Christian population, processions with Jesus on the Cross and Mother Mary winding their way down the streets in many towns and cities is a common sight during Easter in this country.

Venezuelans – Always Smiling And Spontaneous

The Venezuela of today has a population of over 26 million people blessed with many renowned universities and hospitals. There is a symphony orchestra, and also a youth symphony orchestra which has gained much fame even in Europe. Its director, Gustavo Dudamel, has received the international award - “the ring of Beethoven”. Venezuelans are characterized for their good humor, big smiles, superstitiousness, and spontaneity. Populated with peace loving people, Venezuela has never been in a war with its neighbours.

The Sai Saga in Venezuela

So how did Swami come to be known in this beautiful nation? Arlette Meyer and Mrs. Elizabeth Palmer and her family visited Sathya Sai Baba in 1972. Mrs. Palmer learned of Sai Baba from Indra Devi and visited Him in 1968 and 1970, when she had the fortunate experience of riding in the car with Swami. She also knew what to take, such as foodstuffs, sleeping mats, kitchen utensils, etc. as living conditions those days were still quite primitive for foreign travellers. Because of her prior visits, Mrs. Palmer was given a flat in the ashram in which everyone somehow managed to fit in. There was no western toilet, but such inconveniences were part of the game of adapting to a culture far different from the West.

Arlette had only read one issue of *Sanathana Sarathi* and still did not know much about Sai Baba, but when she saw Him giving darshan from the balcony after the evening *arathi* in the temple, she felt a wave of energy pass through her and began to cry.

The following day, December 24, 1972, Swami gave His famous discourse in which He declared that He was the one of whom Jesus said, “The one who sent me will come again.” The very next evening a foreigner came to the flat and asked if the translator was there. Arlette said she was a translator by profession. The person said, “Good, then you can translate Swami’s books.” He suggested *Sai Baba, Man of Miracles*. The idea began to take form, but she thought she should ask Swami’s permission first. During an interview, Swami asked her, “What is your name?” When she answered, “Arlette,” Swami joked, “Arlette, not omelet,” which made everyone laugh. **She asked Baba if she could translate the book into Spanish, and He said, “Yes, do it, it is your duty.”**

Ten months later Arlette was back in Prashanti Nilayam with *Man of Miracles* translated into Spanish, but without knowing how to publish it. As fate, or Swami’s will, would have it, she ran into Gail and Luis Muniz from Mexico who were there to ask permission to translate and publish some of Baba’s books into Spanish. She handed Luis a photocopy of her translation and told him, “Here’s the first one.” In 1974, during an interview, Swami blessed the first published Spanish translation about Him and told Arlette to continue translating the *Sathya Sai Speaks* series. On this same trip, Swami also instructed her to open a Sai Center and offered her a big package of vibhuti and *prasad*.

'Quality Not Quantity'

After consulting with Dr. Hislop, a very senior member of Sai Organisation, Arlette opened the first Sai Center in Venezuela in Caracas on August 22, 1974. The seven members met in her apartment and sang bhajans to cassettes recorded by Janet Bock and studied the *Sathya Sai Speaks*. **In a later interview, Swami asked how the Sai Center was doing and was informed that very few people were coming. He replied, "We don't want quantity, but quality." When He asked who was singing in the Center, He was told, "You, Swami." He then encouraged the group to sing the bhajans on their own instead of using the tapes, and that is when the group began learning bhajans in earnest.**

Few people attended the little Sai Center, but when the first shipments of *Sai Baba, Man of Miracles* arrived from Mexico and were distributed, little by little, the number started growing. Arlette continued the translation work and soon the Spanish collection of Sai Literature grew: *Sathya Sai Speaks Volume I* (1977), *Gita Vahini* (1978), *Summer Roses on the Blue Mountains* (1976), *Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba* (1980), *Sathya Sai Speaks Volume II* (1980) and in the subsequent years other *Sathya Sai Speaks* till *SSS Vol. VII* on 1990, etc. Since the address and telephone number of the Sai Center were noted in the books, gradually more attendees showed up. Initially, all this was done on a typewriter, since until 1985 Arlette did not have a computer.

Arlette attended the Second World Conference of Sai Organizations as the delegate for Venezuela in 1975. At that time, the front of the Mandir had been completely redecorated, additional rooms had been added, the Poorna Chandra auditorium was being decorated and the 50 feet *Sarva Dharma Stupa* was under construction, which Baba inaugurated on November 23rd. For that occasion, Swami flew in a helicopter which landed in front of the Mandir. She had been put up in the flat of a lady from Zimbabwe, in the South-I building, directly in front of the Poorna Chandra, so Arlette was able to film the arrival of Swami and His darshan at the Stupa and Poorna Chandra. The crowd was so huge that He could hardly move as many people were camping out there. Later, during the inauguration of the World Conference, she had the honour and joy of garlanding Swami in the name of Venezuela.

The Organisation Begins to Blossom

Back home, on the last Saturday of each month, a public meeting was held for viewing the movie which Arlette filmed on her first trip. Also during Thursday meetings there were short readings of Swami's messages; a bhajan manual with 271 bhajans in Sanskrit and a few in Spanish were prepared to facilitate the bhajan learning process.

All this had its own impact and new people started coming until the numbers became so great that people could not get into the apartment. Of course,

people started coming to the centres not just out of curiosity or because they like bhajans, but it was because Swami was in His own mysterious way was personally touching their lives. Just take the case of this lady devotee, for instance.

Sai Comes To The Rescue of The Forlorn

One single mother with two small children came to the Sai Center at Sabana Grande because she was at the end of her rope. She had cancer, and was dying, she had these two small children, and she did not have any place to live. Her home was a cardboard shack. She started attending bhajans and the study circle. The devotees loaned her a book to read. She had her head wrapped in a towel because all her hair had fallen out from cobalt treatments. One day someone told her that the government had offered to give free apartments to the poor. She went to the building which had 24 apartments, and there was a crowd of thousands waiting to get an apartment. She had gone there with her two children and was holding the book which had Sai Baba's picture on the cover.

The government officials told the people waiting outside that there were too many people and no more could come inside. There was a big push, and she was shoved inside with the kids. **One of the government people saw her with Swami's book and asked her if she believed in miracles and that she will receive an apartment! It is a nice two bedroom flat and the devotees furnished it with a refrigerator, beds and other necessities. She thanks Swami for everything because now her cancer is gone too!**

Whenever the prayer is sincere, there is response from the divine. The Lord knows what is best for His devotee and waits for the right time to do the right thing for His the devotee. By Grace and with His love the Lord attracts those who need Him and so by 1983, attendance was up 80 persons on Thursdays. Shortly thereafter space was rented in Edificio Acapulco, First Floor, Apartment 1, in Sabana Grande boulevard in Caracas. In August 1985, the Sai Centre moved there, where it is still functioning.

Activities at the Sabana Grande Center included Study circles and bhajan practice sessions on particular days of week and one and half hour of Bhajans and meditation on Sundays. Public meetings were held on the last Saturday of the month. Also on Sundays devotees did selfless service on Sunday mornings in an area near town and once a month they visited the senior citizen's home. During the late 1980's the number of centres proliferated and it became necessary to appoint a Coordinating Committee for the country.

'Education In Human Values' Enters and Expands

In 1983, Arlette, went to the international Symposium in Rome on "Unity Is Divinity – Purity Is Enlightenment" organized in October by Dr. Antonio Craxi, President of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization of Italy. She learned there that a Workshop for the Training Teachers of Education in Human Values was to be held in Los Angeles, U.S.A. shortly. The Center decided to send Ms. Pili Garcia for this workshop. Ms. Pili returned with a copy of the *Teacher's Handbook for Education in Human Values* and thus Education In Human Values in Venezuela started taking shape.

Arlette translated the material prepared by U.S. devotees and a program of 30 classes was prepared to work with EHV in schools (*Lesson Plans for Education in Human Values International Edition*). 5 more classes were added, one for each human value, using Venezuelan songs and stories in order to adapt them to the country's culture.

Bal Vikas classes were also initiated. For this the program that had been prepared by Rebeca and Monique Muñiz from Mexico was used, as well as the Human Values Education series published by the Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas Education Trust. At one point there were up to 56 children attending at different levels.

"In September 1987, we organized the First Workshop of EHV for School Teachers. Prof. Angel Bracho, Supervisor, Direction of Primary Education of the Ministry of Education, and more than 50 persons took part," say the enthusiastic Sai devotees.

After this Workshop, there was another held in Maracay, organized by Gustavo González and María de Los Angeles Ramoni in November of that year at the Instituto Pedagógico Universitario El Libertador, UPEL, with the assistance of 38 teachers. Later various workshops were held in different cities like Margarita, Barquisimeto, San Cristobal, etc. including in Caracas, the capital.

In the year 1992 a national meeting of devotees was organized in Caracas, which was held at El Laurel Center by the National Team of Education. Bro. Daniel Coifman of Argentina, coordinator of Education of the Latin American Council was the special guest at this meeting. There, some devotees made an exposition on the Origin and the Unity of Religions; the other members of the team worked in the workshops on each of the Human Values. Another workshop was held in Maturin in the East with administrators and directors of the Ministry of Education.

In 2005, Nicolas Maduro, the minister of foreign affairs of Venezuela and his wife Cilia Flores who is the president of the legislature visited Swami and were blessed with a private audience with Swami. Mr. Oskar Dorta, the president of the Sathya Sai Foundation of Venezuela was also present in that precious interview with Swami. It would be interesting to note that the minister of education and his wife are also devotees of Swami and visit Prasanthi Nilayam frequently. The Education In Human values programmes, by His grace, is taking giant strides in this South American nation.

Communicating His Work

In addition, the Sai Organisation in Venezuela has organized Public Meetings to inform the public about Swami and His work in several cities such as Caracas, Maracay, Maracaibo, Barquismeto, Cumana, Ciudad, Bolivar, Puerto Ordaz, Merida and Margarita Island among others which have been attended by more than 3,000 people.

Sai School In Venezuela – Training Young Minds

So that was how some of the groundwork was laid. Now let's fast forward to 2006. Presently there is a Sai School in Abejales, in the state of Tachira which is run by a Sai Foundation and was started by Ukrania Ramirez and her husband Pedro. The school has 4 grades at this time and 144 students. It is a shining example for the Ministry of Education. "A high school is planned and some more buildings will be constructed to make way for the expansion. There is so much love here which flows both ways from teachers to the children and vice versa. Even the gardener has been transformed. His behaviour was not satisfactory, but he was given a second chance to practice human values in his life. Now, his wife works in the kitchen where wonderful vegetarian meals are prepared, and his two sons are students at the school and his life has become changed for the better," say the Sai devotees with satisfaction writ large on their faces.

Speaking of practising human values and love, one girl in 2nd grade went home to find her mother killing a chicken for dinner. She told her mother that she was not going to eat the chicken and that this was violence to the poor animals. Her mother and the whole family have now become vegetarians.

The Institute of Human Values – An Example For Emulation

There is an Institute of Human Values dedicated to the training of teachers. And now the minister of education (and his wife), who is in charge of the national curricula, have become Swami's devotees. They have given the Sai Institute of Human Values the job of training teachers in pilot schools whose students will have their behavior compared to other public schools that are not in the program.

There is a strong team of teacher trainers in various parts of the country carrying out the training. And the Institute also continues to train the college students who are preparing for a teaching career. Mr. Victor Kanu, the founder of Sathya Sai School of Zambia, visited Venezuela recently, and the "Miracle School of Zambia" has become an example for the Venezuelan Education Ministry. The Minister and his wife will visit Zambia in October 2006. [To read more about the Zambia Sai School click here].

Service Activities Gain Momentum

Service activities started first in Caracas after the centre moved to Sabana Grande. In the early 1990's it was decided to start a service where all the devotees from different centres could participate together. It was decided to visit a large public hospital with 5 floors. Different groups of devotees would go to different floors and pray with the patients and some groups sang songs, others passed out refreshments and helped cheer up all patients.

This service eventually lead to medical camps which were carried out by Sai doctors (including non-devotees who believe in service to society) in different sections of the city and also in the interior. Then some of the doctors who are eye specialists decided to start offering free cataract operations.

Patients were selected from the poorest areas, people who could never afford such an operation. One eye clinic of prestige decided to help and allow the Sai doctors to operate on Sundays when the clinic was closed. There have been over 120 cataract operations now with lens implants given completely without cost to the patients. And these people are so grateful because finally they can see again, and be useful.

Cataract Operations in Caracas

The Organisation undertakes various other service activities all round the year in true spirit of Love All Serve All. The devotees visit Children's homes, serve the homeless and orphaned with food, do special medical camps for geriatric people, donate blood to hospitals and regularly do *Narayana seva* – serving food to the needy.

And on numerous occasions Swami has demonstrated His omnipresence in different ways and enthused them to continue the noble work with unceasing zeal. Take the following episode, for instance

'I Want Her to Serve Me'

Once service activities were being held in a rural area, and food was prepared for more than 100 people. **One of the lady devotees had a dream on Swami the night prior to the service, in which He said He would come for dinner the next day. The following day when she was cooking, an old man with a grey beard showed up at the backdoor to the kitchen at about 4:00 p.m. and asked for food.**

One of the volunteers relayed this to the devotee who was cooking and she said to ask the old man to come back in an hour as the food was not yet ready. An hour later he returned and the lady who was cooking sent him a plate of food with the volunteer. However, the old man said "No, I want her to serve me", indicating the devotee who had the dream and was cooking. She was very busy but stopped to take the plate to the old man who said "Thank you" and turned and walked into the tall grass behind the backdoor. When the devotee turned to go back to work, she suddenly recalled her dream, and cried out, "It's Swami. He came as Shirdi Baba!" She opened the door and ran into the tall grass calling for Swami, but He had already disappeared.

Sai Miracles are a worldwide phenomenon and Venezuela is no exception. How Swami rescued a devotee from an imminent danger narrated below is very revealing.

Saving Grace

One devotee was trying to sell her house for two years. She finally complained to Swami asking why He didn't send her a buyer. That same afternoon, when she was driving home from the University where she worked, about two blocks from her home while she was waiting for a traffic light, a man in the next car rolled down his window and asked her if she knew of any houses for sale in the neighborhood. She said "Just follow me".

You guessed it, he bought her house. She and her husband then moved to an apartment which was close to the beach but outside of town. After living

there for a couple of years, this same devotee thought “How selfish of me, staying here without any problems while my husband has to drive up to the city everyday in all the traffic”. She told her husband that night that they should move back to the city for his work. He agreed and so she got busy packing and after two weeks contracted a big truck to take all their things up to the city. When the truck was just finished loading, it started to rain. **It was a rain which lasted 5 days and caused an enormous landslide which destroyed thousands of lives and homes. Their building was covered up to the 5th floor by the mud slide. But Swami had saved their lives.**

Sai Guards, Guides and Gives Solace

Every Sai devotee in Venezuela, just like in any other country, has his or her own story to narrate. The way God reaches to different people is so mysterious and magnificent. This is what an office bearer of Venezuelan Sai Organisation narrated to Heart2Heart recently -

“In 1997 I became conscious of Swami’s existence. But, at that time, I still used to go to bars and have some beers with my friends. On one occasion, a friend of mine and I went to a bar in my hometown. He told me, “You must be careful with the car”. I answered, “Don’t worry. A friend of mine is going to take care of it (referring to Swami)”. We had drunk some beers when suddenly I remembered the car. I decided to go and see if everything was alright. When I opened the door of the bar, a security guard with an afro haircut, looking at me with deep eyes, was standing in front of me.

I said, ‘Good evening’. He didn’t answer. He was like a statue. The problem seemed to be that he was very alike Swami and this was acting as a wake-up call to my conscience. I came in and I told my friend very nervously, “The party is over”. We went, and I told him what had happened. When we got to the street, the security guard had disappeared. I tried to look for him but I couldn’t find him. By the way, have you ever seen a security guard with an afro?

On another occasion I had a very serious inflammation in my throat. I could hardly eat or drink anything. I called my doctor and she told me to have nine injections. They were antibiotics. Nothing happened and the pain was only growing. I went to the altar and prayed to Swami to heal me. I talked to Him for a long time, asking for His assistance. That same night I dreamt of Swami. I was at darshan and He was walking as usual. Suddenly, He came close to me and told me, “Take an anti-allergic”. He told me this in my ear as if it were a secret. I woke up immediately, but I waited till morning to call the doctor. I asked her, “Don’t you think it’s a good idea to try an anti-allergic?” I didn’t mention the dream. She agreed and so they gave me the new injection at 7:30 am. At 11:00 am, I could swallow and the pain had almost gone. I am so grateful to Swami.”

It is really fascinating how people from countries located thousands of miles away from Puttaparthi feel His presence and love. The Lord resides in

Puttaparthi, only physically but His cosmic form is there everywhere and the way He operates is awe-inspiring.

To know more about Venezuela's Sri Sathya Sai Organization, please contact: www.saivenezuela.org.

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- Heart2Heart Team

THE MANTRAS OF MANTRAPUSHPAM – MULTIFAITH AND PROFOUND

Om Ganeshaya Namaha | Saraswatyai Namaha| Sri Gurubhyo Namaha |
Harihi Om |

Swami continues to emphasize the need for all the people across the world to learn the Vedas and apply their principles to life. He has reiterated that the Vedas are meant for everyone irrespective of whatever caste, creed, religion and community they may belong to. These statements trigger questions in the rational mind such as;

- **why does the Lord reincarnate to propagate the awareness and practical implementation of the Vedas?**

- **how do the Vedic Hymns transcend the commonly perceived notion of their association to Hinduism and also be applicable to all other religions?**

This article is a humble attempt to contemplate on these questions and the insightful revelations that were conceived with Bhagawan's Divine inspiration and grace.

A general belief exists that Vedas are pertinent to the Hindu Religion since they were conceived in the language Sanskrit or *Samskritam* (in correct pronunciation). "When I expressed my inability to understand and chant Vedas as I do not know this language, Bhagawan chided me (in a dream) and mentioned that Samskritam is not a language and the meaning of the hymns is understood only by the depth of one's own contemplation and practice," says Sekhar Boddupalli, a Sai devotee from San Hose, USA and then goes on to explain how Bhagawan beautifully unraveled the universal message of the Vedas. He continues,

"He unfolded a deeper and significant meaning for Samskritam: *Kritam* means 'to do' and *Samyak* meaning 'in unity'. *Samskritam* is hence not a language; it is an awareness of the self revealed by practice with the unity of thought, word, and deed. *Sruthi* (intent and active listening) and *Smruthi* (active practice) thus became the basis of Veda Dharma (a way of life) and its propagation for time eternal.

VEDA contains four letters that signify the most important aspects of practical spiritual life: **V**alues, **E**ducare, **D**evotion, and **A**wareness. These four represent the quintessential Vedic message. Unvarying practice of the Human Values with a constant quest to Know the Self (Educare), and endless adoration of the all pervading Supreme Lord (Devotion or *Bhakti*) leads to constant integrated Awareness (*Prajnanam*). Interestingly, switching the letter V and D in VEDA makes it DEVA (meaning God in Sanskrit). Hence, VEDA and DEVA are the reflections of each other; DEVA the primary focus in a religious context and VEDA, a primary focus in a spiritual context, both leading to the same target of Self-Realization.

Veda Mantras are beyond the perceptual plane of imagination. Abundant with symbolic and cryptic messages they unravel the interconnection of various aspects of creation to the supreme consciousness. The *Mantrapushpam* is a popular Vedic Hymn that declares the truth of creation. The chant repeatedly uses the words; *Apaha*, *Pushpam*, and *Veda*, as follows:

Yopam Push pam Veda | Pushpavan Prajavan Pasuman Bhavati |
Chandramaava Apam Pushpam |
Puspavan Prajavan Pasuman Bhavati | Ya Evam Veda | Yopamayatanam
Veda | Ayatanavan Bhavati |

The above hymn, from a literal standpoint, would mean that the one who understands the flowers (*Pushpa*) of waters (*Apaha*) and its relationship to the moon (*Chandra*) will reach the highest abode. According to Bhagawan Baba, *Apaha* (the waters of Life) is Love. Contemplating on the *Mantrapushpam* with Love substituted for *Apaha* unfolds a deeper and significant meaning: **the one who understands the inner significance (Pushpa) of Love (Apaha) and its relationship to the mind (Chandra) will reach the highest abode.** This mantra points the way beyond the confines of religion to universal human experience which the remainder of this article will expand upon.

Mantrapushpam's Relationship to World Religions

The *Mantrapushpam* elucidates several aspects of creation which are the basis for several religious faiths. **In fact, this article will show you how *Mantrapushpam* relates to all the religions represented in the Sarvadharm Symbol, which depicts the essence of Bhagavan's Universal Love.** We first look at the religion founded by Zoroastra.

Zoroastrianism

The second stanza of *Mantrapushpam* says -

Agnirva Apamaayatanam | Ayatanavaan Bhavati |
Yo Agner Ayatanam Veda | Ayatanavaan Bhavati |
Apova Agner Ayatanam | Ayatanavaan Bhavati |

This verse means the one who understands the significance of the sacrificial fire reaches the highest abode. 'Agni' means the fire. The fundamental basis of Zoroastrianism is the sacrificial fire.

Bhagavan tells us that the spiritual meaning of the sacred fire of Zoroastrianism is: **'Offer all bitterness in the sacred fire and emerge grand, great, and godly'.** Here is a sacred chant from the Zoroastrian scriptures -

mazdâ at môye vahishtâ
sravâoschâ shodhanâchâ vavochâ
tâ-tû vohû manandahâ

ashâchâ ishuudem ratûtô

*xshmâkâ xshathrâ ahurâ fershêm
vasnâ haishyêm dâo aham.*

And in response to my request in praises,
Wise One, tell me now the best words and deeds through good mind.
Make life truly renovated with Your sovereignty as You wish.

Next, we have three lines following the second stanza of Mantrapushpam which get repeated many times in the hymn –

Ya Evam Veda | Yopamayatanam Veda | Ayatanavan Bhavati |

Which means: “This is all that needs to be known. The one who is illumined by the Love attains the highest abode.”

Christianity

Now we present the fourth stanza of Mantrapushpam, which can be taken to relate to Christianity in the following way:

The fourth stanza of Mantrapushpam says –

Asouvaitapann Apamaayatanam | Ayatanavaan Bhavati | Yo(a)mushyatapata
Ayatanam Veda | Ayatanavaan Bhavati | Apovaa Amushayatapata Ayatanam
| Ayatanavaan Bhavati |

“Asouvaitapannaha” means the scorching sun. The Cross is symbolic of the pain and suffering of the scorching sun. Annihilation of the ego and the body consciousness on the cross is the essence of Christianity. The Love of Jesus for his fellow beings aids us in conquering body consciousness. This verse means the one who understands the interconnection between Love and the ‘Annihilation of the Ego’ reaches the supreme abode.

Bhagavan tells us that the spiritual meaning of the cross is: **‘Cut the “I” feeling clean across and let your ego die on the cross to endow on you eternity.’**

Here are two sublime hymns from the Christian tradition -

*Kyrie Eleison Kyrie Eleison |
Lord! Please have mercy on us.
Christe Eleison Christe Eleisonm |
Christ! Please have mercy on us.
Kyrie Eleison Kyrie Eleison |
Lord! Please have mercy on us.*

*Sing Hallelujah to Our Lord
Sing Hallelujah to Our Lord*

*Sing Hallelujah, Sing Hallelujah
Sing Hallelujah to Our Lord*

Again, the common refrain of Mantrapushpam -

Ya Evam Veda | Yopamayatanam Veda | Ayatanavan Bhavati |

This is all that needs to be known. The one who is illumined by the Love attains the highest abode.

Islam

The next stanza in Mantrapushpam, can be interpreted to relate to the religion of Islam. It states the following-

Chandramava Apamaayatanam | Ayatanavaan Bhavati | YasChandramasa
Ayatanam Veda | Ayatanavaan Bhavati | Apovai Chandramasa Ayatanam |
Ayatanavaan Bhavati |

“Chandra” means the moon. The changes of the moon are interconnected to vagaries of the mind. Fixing the mind that is filled with Love on the supreme Lord captures the spirit of Islam. Thus this verse means the one who understands the connection between the mind of fixed faith and Love reaches the highest abode.

Bhagavan has given us the meaning of the crescent and moon symbol of Islam as: **‘Be like the star which never wavers from the crescent but is steady in fixed faith.’**

And here are very elevating chants from the Koran -

*BismiAllahi rrahmani rraheem |
Qulahuwa Allahu ahad | Allahu ssamad |
Lam yallid | balam yullad |
Lam yaku llahu | kufuwan ahad*

Which means: “In the Name of Allah, the Caring and Kind. Tell everyone: 'He is One God; Allah, Who is forever. He doesn't have children and He was never born, and there is nothing the same as Him.’”

Another beautiful song is:

*Let My Heart Reflect Thy Light Lord
As the Moon Reflects the Light of the Sun In Love Always In Love
Hu Allah Allah Hu Allah Hu Allah Allah Hu*

And again the common refrain of Mantrapushpam -

Ya Evam Veda | Yopamayatanam Veda | Ayatanavan Bhavati |

“This is all that needs to be known. The one who is illumined by the Love attains the highest abode.”

Judaism

The subsequent stanza in Mantrapushpam can be understood to relate to the Jewish faith. It says –

Nakshatraniva Apamaayatanam | Ayatanavaan Bhavati | Yo Nakshatranam
Ayatanam Veda | Ayatanavaan Bhavati | Apovai Nakshatranaam Ayatanam |
Ayatanavaan Bhavati

“Nakshatram” means star. The Star is symbolic of the all pervading consciousness and the soul of Judaism. Thus this verse means the one who recognizes the grandeur of the omniscient omnipresent and omnipotent Loving Lord reaches the highest abode.

Bhagavan tells us that the meaning of the Jewish star is: **‘Trust in God who rules over all six directions (east, west, north, south, up & down) symbolized by the six points of the star.’**

Here is a chant extolling the Lord in Hebrew -

*Sh'ma Yis-ra-eil, A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu,
A-do-nai E-chad.
Ba-ruch sheim k'vod
mal-chu-to l'o-lam va-ed*

*Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God,
the Lord is One.
Blessed be the Name of
His glorious kingdom for ever and ever
I'v du Hashem B'simcha (4x)
Come and serve the Holy One with joy (4x)
Yi dy da dy dy Yi dy da dy dy dy | Yi dy da dy dy Yi dy dy
Yi dy da dy dy Yi dy da dy dy dy | Yi da dy dy dy dy dy*

The eternal message of Mantrapushpam again -

Ya Evam Veda | Yopamayatanam Veda | Ayatanavan Bhavati |

“This is all that needs to be known. The one who is illumined by the Love attains the highest abode.”

Now we look at the last stanza of Mantrapushpam, which can be taken to concern the Buddhist religion. It is as follows

Buddhism

Samvatsarova Apamaayatanam | Ayatanavaan Bhavati | Yah Samvatsarasya
Ayatanam Veda | Ayatanavaan Bhavati | Apovai Samvatsarasyaya Ayatanam
| Ayatanavaan Bhavati |

“Samvatara” (Year) represents time. The Buddhist wheel is symbolic of the Dharma which is related to the time of cause and consequence. Love in action is Dharma which is beyond time. So this verse means the one who understands the interrelationship between Love and Time (Action) attains the highest abode.

Bhagavan has given us the spiritual meaning of the Buddhist wheel as follows: **‘Remember the wheel of cause and consequence and the wheel of dharma that rights them all.**

And here is the prayer of Three Refuges which all Buddhists chant regularly -

*Buddham Saranam Gacchâmi.
Dhammam Saranam Gacchâmi.
Sangham Saranam Gacchâmi*

*I go to the Buddha as my refuge.
I go to the Dhamma - His Doctrine, as my refuge.
I go to the Sangha - His Holy Order, as my Refuge.*

And now, one of the most sacred chants of Buddhism -

Om Manne Padme Hum

Which means, “Behold the Jewel in the Lotus.”

Hinduism

The last three lines of Mantrapushpam can be related to Hinduism which say–

Ya Evam Veda | Yoapsunavam Pratishithitam Veda | Pratyevatishtathi

“This is all there is to know. The one who knows this is stable like a boat on the ocean of Love. He will be able to know the self that is all there is to know.”

The sound of creation and beginning of knowledge is ‘Om’. And Bhagawan says,

“Listen to the primeval Pranava resounding in your heart as well as in the heart of the Universe.”

It is said in the Vedas *Ekam Sath Vipra Bahudha Vadanthi* which means “The Truth is One and the Wise Call it by Many Names”.

What we can understand in this thought-provoking article, which spans the centuries and synthesizes centuries of religious ideas, is that the various faiths express the same immortal message of the 'love and righteousness' of the Lord in diverse ways through culturally specific traditions. The message of the more recent religions is in no way different to the most ancient of scriptures, the Vedas. **And Swami, the great synthesizer of the ancient and modern spiritual paths is showing us that truly "There is only one religion and that is the religion of love."**

"Om Shanthi Shanthi Shanthihi!"
Let there be Peace, Peace, Peace.

-Heart2Heart Team

VISION OF THE NON-DUAL-7

MOVING FROM ILLUSION TO ENLIGHTENMENT

The Fish and The Bird

Like a fish living in an ocean covered on all sides with water, so also is man enveloped on all sides by the veiling power of the supreme spirit called Maya or illusion. This maya therefore is often termed as “The Divine Enchantress”. The fish lives, grows and has its being in water and dies in water. It knows of nothing else. So also, is man drowned in this Maya. How then can a fish understand the sky, and the bird which flies? How can a fish even understand the concept of freedom? How can a fish even yearn to be like a bird in the sky? The fish here is the *jivi*, or the individual, and the bird refers to the spirit.

Man craves for freedom consciously or unconsciously. He struggles, suffers and toils not knowing what will free him from the shackles that bind and weigh him down. He seeks freedom from this *Bhava Sagara* or the ocean of life. We see this ***pinning for the oversoul***, the Atman, in his poetry, the arts, his emotional outpourings, plays, music, mental imagery, etc. Like a fish in water which can only imagine and ruminate about the sky, Man seeks economic freedom, political freedom, freedom of expression, etc. but rarely seeks freedom from the thralldom of the senses, from the coils of body consciousness, from desires, from the 6 inner enemies, which alone can free him from the ***clutches of Maya***.

At long last, man develops dispassion for things of this evanescent world, including the noble infirmities of name and fame; he finds that it is spiritual freedom or *mukti* alone that can liberate him from all bonds, and then his life gains a new vision, a new momentum, a holistic attitude and a new direction. The child which had been playing with toys all along, finally throws them away and calls out for its mother, and the ***mother*** comes to him. The Truth or Brahman is finally realized through His Grace, as it is man’s true nature and his birthright.

Attaining Beatitude

How does Swami help take us away from the ***negative aspect*** of life or Maya? Swami says Maya is neither the truth nor untruth. He calls it a ***half-truth*** at best. It is a fact that life after life one has been fed (and brainwashed) on half-truths. Rather than more learning about the Truth, we must do some proper ***“unlearning”*** and cleansing, to get rid of the mountain high “crystallized superstitions” (as Swami Vivekananda puts it) of half-truths that weigh us down and block our vision. This is our priority.

“Bend the body, mend the senses first” says Swami. “End the mind” comes last. The negative thought processes in man, are what constitutes the warp and woof of the mind and Maya. ***All self-centred worldly thoughts, sense enjoyments and attachments constitute negativity. This is counteracted***

by positive thought vibrations, by dwelling upon the selfless nature of the spirit. Constant dwelling and contemplating on these lofty positive aspects of Brahman and developing a wealth of spiritual thought and feelings for the divine, followed by corresponding selfless actions and a holistic attitude towards life, helps the individual shed its selfishness and attain to its final true state of beatitude.

Swami often says to his devotees, **“I am ready - are you? Be ready!”** The photographer always asks you to be ready before clicking your photograph, but God may click at any time and one has to be ready all the time. Therefore choiceless awareness needs to be developed at all times by the spiritual aspirant through practicing *namasmarana* or chanting of God’s name, selfless service, etc.

How Can The Fish Fly?

Coming back to the fish and bird story, there is one way for the fish to turn into a bird and fly, and that is through the process of evolution. The fish evolves to be an amphibian like a frog, later a land reptile, gradually evolves wings and turns into a bird and flies in the sky. From being surrounded by water, the evolved being is now free from water, and surrounded by the sky.

Similarly, in the case of the *jiva* or the individual, who is surrounded by Maya, evolution is not so much at the physical level as the human body is a perfectly developed instrument. It is touching the domains of the vital, emotional, psychic, and spiritual levels of man, that the inner man (subtle body) can develop and undergo transformation.

Eluding Illusion

Swami has beautifully explained how one can conquer this maya with an analogy. Swami says, “Maya is like the **ferocious watchdog** guarding the gate to your master’s mansion. To get across, you have to do one of the two things. Either you fearlessly grapple with the dog and overcome it to reach the master; or else, you call out loudly and pleadingly to the master in the house. The master hearing your cries, may come to the gate and take you in. The dog will be totally subdued that way also.”

So one must be strong and steady enough spiritually not to be affected by the all-pervasive illusion and see through it every time; or a much easier option is to call for the Master, the divine Lord. With His grace, the illusion will disappear and will not raise its hood as long as we are under His care.

The Two Techniques for Overpowering Illusion

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the great Saint of India, explaining the same issue used to say “Maya is like the **big net** that the fisherman throws into the water to catch the fish. All fish fall into the trap of the net except two types. The very small fish escape through the holes in the net while the very large ones, due to their sheer size and strength, tear the net asunder and escape.”

Dasoham – The First

Swami explains the idea through two types of devotion that a devotee can practice - Dasoham and Soham. In the 'Dasoham' form of devotion, the devotee prays, "Lord, I am only your servant" and surrenders unconditionally to the Lord. The devotee's ego diminishes day by day and is finally subdued. This is one way of escaping through the net of illusion – when you become smaller than the holes in the net of illusion. Hanuman from the epic Ramayana, Swami says, is the ideal example for this. In the court of Lanka, when the demon king Ravana asked him who he was, Hanuman, though one of the mightiest warriors of earth, said, "I am a servant of Lord Rama." Always at the service of Rama, never did Hanuman think twice when Lord Rama entrusted him with any task in the whole story of Ramayana.

The Second Way - Soham

The other way of extricating oneself from the clutches of illusion is the Soham or Shivoam form of devotion. Here the devotee through spiritual enquiry and acquisition of right knowledge recognizes and realizes the *Brahman* or the supreme spirit. The devotee starts identifying himself with the Universal Spirit and feels "I am That". Jesus Christ, towards the end of his earthly sojourn, declared "I and my father are one." There are many enlightened saints who could visualize the unity of creator and creation. For them everything in the world around was God and they too were no different from the creator. When this happens, he breaks the net of illusion - just like the big fish - and merges with the universal consciousness. Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Adi Sankaracharya of the modern era are exemplars of this form of devotion.

Therefore the solution lies in opening one's heart and training the mind either way. What is outside, Swami says, is actually a reflection of the inner being. And there is a beautiful story Swami narrates to illustrate this.

It's All in the Mind

Once Krishna wished to bring to King Dhritarashtra's notice, the difference between his two cousin princes, Yudhishthira and Duryodhana. Krishna called Duryodhana and told him that he wanted to do something important and that he was on the lookout for a good man with good qualities. He asked Duryodhana to look for such a man. Duryodhana searched the world over for a few days and said that there was no person with really good attributes and if there was anyone with good qualities, the best was himself and that *he* came nearest to the ideal.

Then Krishna sent Duryodhana away and asked Yudhishthira to come. He told him to look for a man who is very bad and whose qualities are such that there can be no one else worse than him. Yudhishthira searched the world over and came back and told Krishna that he could not find anyone, it was himself. He said that *he* fits the description which Krishna gave. For Duryodhana to say that he was the best man and for Dharmaraja to say that he was the worst man, the world is not responsible. The qualities in them and the way they look

at themselves and at others are responsible. Krishna thereby proves to Dhritarashtra that good and bad in the world are projections of one's own quality of the mind. What is within oneself, is seen without.

The realization and practice of this truth is one of the significant milestones for a spiritual aspirant. Literally it is the "light" at the end of the tunnel. Purifying one's own inner self will purify the world around us. Just like a person wearing red glasses will see the whole world red. Mother Teresa saw only God and love everywhere, be it a toddler, or a dying man. Forbearance, humility, cheerfulness – all reflect in one's personality when there is inner purity.

Purity – A Must For Enlightenment

No purity of the heart - no enlightenment! It is as simple as that. No amount of verbal pyrotechniques or intellectual gymnastics can liberate the seeker, if the heart is filled with ego, pride, anger, etc. Swami says "**The magnet is very powerful, but it attracts the iron filings only if the filings are free from rust. There may be diamonds and pearls, etc. but the magnet will not attract them.**"

The task of the seeker is therefore to free himself from the rust and dust of the life of worldly illusion, the thralldom of the senses and body consciousness. Immortality is the goal - love, perfection and freedom follow in its wake.

As Swami says;

"Morality is the only way to immortality," and
"The end of Knowledge is Love.
The end of wisdom is freedom
The end of culture is Perfection."

-Heart2Heart Team

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI – PART 21

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT 4 SCENE 4

Elementary school in Puttaparthi. Boys are lined up in front of the school building. The school master is inspecting the line. He is hoping the boys have brought some gifts for him, but no student has. He is irritated and annoyed.

TEACHER: Slate and pencil, slate and pencil, slate and pencil! All of you have brought only a slate and pencil. Do you think you will receive education if you come to school with just a slate and a pencil? How about bringing some vegetables like brinjals, drumsticks, etc., as fees for me? Don't you fellows want to pass and later enter High School?

BOYS: Yes Sir, we do!

TEACHER: Now listen! If you come to school tomorrow with just slate and pencil and no vegetables, I will beat you. By the way, did I not ask you to report well before the bell rings?

BOYS: Yes Sir, you told us so.

TEACHER: Then why did you not? You don't care; you don't bother; you don't listen to your teacher! You have no respect for my words!!

BOY: No sir, it's not that. My mother is very sick, and that's why I was delayed.

BOY 2: Sir, my house is very far and I am late because I had to walk all that distance.

BOY 3: Actually sir, we have come fifteen minutes earlier!

TEACHER: Are you questioning me? Are you saying, "We are on time and so why are you punishing us?"

BOY: No sir, I didn't mean that!

TEACHER: Then what exactly did you mean?

BOY: I am merely saying that we did not come late.

TEACHER: You dwarf, you dare to argue with me?*[beats the boy]* Just because you scream, do you think I will stop beating you?

At this juncture, the Head Master of the school comes there. The class teacher is scared that he might find out about his effort in extracting bribes.

TEACHER: *[alarmed, to himself]* The Head Master is coming! If I do not start the class immediately, he will take me to task!..... *[to the boys]* Go inside the classroom! Hurry!!

SCENE 5

Kondama Raju's house. Sathya and His grandfather are talking about the story of Lord Krishna.

K.RAJU: Do you know who is the brother of Krishna?

SATHYA: I do.

K.RAJU: Who is the brother?

SATHYA: Balarama!

K.RAJU: Really!

E.AMMA: Sathya, how do you know all this about who Krishna is and who is Balarama?

SATHYA: When grandpa narrated earlier the story of Krishna, he mentioned that Balarama was the brother of Krishna. Grandpa has forgotten telling me all that but I have not – that's all!

K.RAJU: Your grandfather is an old man, is he not? That's why he forgot all those things. You on the other hand are young and sharp!

SATHYA: Grandfather, you say you are old but you remember very well all the Puranic [spiritual] stories.

K.RAJU: Sathya, can one forget the stories of the Lord? Do you know what Balarama once did?

SATHYA: Yes I know. He complained to Mother Yasoda that Krishna ate mud. Yasoda then called Krishna and asked, "Did You eat mud?"

K.RAJU: And what did Krishna say to that?

SATHYA: Krishna asked: "Mother, am I a kid to eat mud?" Krishna insisted that He did not eat mud but Yasoda did not believe Him.

K.RAJU: Then what did Yasoda do?

SATHYA: Yasoda slapped Krishna and ordered Him to open His mouth! When Krishna opened, Yasoda saw all the fourteen worlds. She said: "Is this real or an illusion created by the Lord? Are You Krishna, and am I Yasoda, Your mother? How strange!" Later, Yasoda told herself that what she saw was entirely her imagination and promptly forgot it all. In this way, God threw the screen of *Maya* or illusion and concealed His Divinity. Do you know why?

E.AMMA: I don't know.

K.RAJU: I too don't know!

SATHYA: Grandfather, you don't know?! Then listen. If everyone knew right then that Krishna was God, then it would have interfered with His Mission later. Did you not tell Me that Krishna came to punish the wicked and protect the good? If the word got around that Krishna was God, the extermination of

the evil ones and the re-establishment of *Dharma* or Righteousness would have become a more tedious process.

K.RAJU: Sathya! From today, I am not Your grandfather but You are mine! From now on, You must tell me all the scriptural stories!

END OF ACT 4 SCENE 5

(To be continued...)

-Heart2Heart Team

GITA FOR CHILDREN - PART 23

(Continued from the last issue)

CHAPTER 9

21. 'Let Me now get back to what I was telling you earlier. People miss Me as the Immanent God, immanent in all the things in this Universe, and they also miss Me as the Incarnation. Needless to say that the latter is a greater failure.'

22. 'Arjuna, whether people understand it or not, take it from Me that I am the One who has ordained this Universe; I am also its Father, Mother, and Grandfather.'

23. 'I give heat. I send forth rain and also withhold it at times. I am death as well as Immortality.'

24. 'I am the Goal, the Sustainer, the Great Lord, the Eternal Witness, the Eternal Abode, the only True Friend, the Fountainhead, the Origin, the End, the Treasure House and the Seed Imperishable.'

25. 'Great Souls know all this. Always proclaiming My Glory, they constantly worship Me.'

26. 'And now Arjuna, I make a solemn promise not only to you but to the whole of mankind: **Those who think of Me all the time with no other thought and who are steadfast in their devotion to Me, to such ones I declare – “Be assured that I shall bear entirely the burden of Your welfare”**. Arjuna, that is not merely a promise but a Divine vow!'

27. 'People often wonder how to please Me. No problem at all because I am very easy to please. I don't ask for expensive gifts. I am quite happy even if you offer just a fruit, or a flower, or a leaf or even a bit of water. All I want is that you should do so with Love in your Heart. I expect nothing but Love.'

28. 'Actually, you do not have to even bother about getting for Me a fruit or a flower. Just offer Me your bad qualities; that is more than ample! In fact, I would be overjoyed if people were to offer their bad traits like anger, jealousy, hatred, etc.'

29. Completely mystified, Arjuna asks, 'Krishna, what is the connection between Divine Love and Your extraordinarily generous offer to accept absolute trash from us, in the shape of our bad qualities?'

30. Krishna replies, 'The answer is very simple. When a person gives up bad qualities, that person gets purified to some extent and thereby comes closer to Me. Should I not rejoice on that score? It is My intense Love for man that makes Me feel that way!'

31. 'People have all kinds of wrong and funny notions about Me. They think that I have favourites, and that I positively detest some people. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is all people's imagination.'

32. 'I am the same to all beings, and with Me none is favoured or distant. In fact, even if the vilest sinner were to come to Me and say, "Lord, please forgive me. I am sorry about my evil past and promise to be good from now on," I would readily welcome him. If the sinner truly repents, I shall, without any hesitation, rescue him forthwith. His past would be no hindrance. This is a solemn assurance.'

33. 'Arjuna, it is very strange. Here I am ever ready to help, ever ready to carry man's burden, anxious to rescue him, and all that. But what does he do? He ignores Me or forgets Me, unless of course he gets into deep trouble.'

34. 'Arjuna, don't be like these fools who lose themselves in the attractions of the world and forget Me. The world is transient and also so full of misery. How can something that is transient ever give permanent happiness? Yet, man is not able to understand this obvious fact.'

35. 'Arjuna, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation to the sacred fire, whatever you do by way of penance, in short whatever good act you perform, offer it whole heartedly to Me and think of Me while engaged in that action.'

36. 'The Wise know what permanent joy or Bliss is. They know that Bliss can be found only in Me. I am Eternal, and therefore the joy that I confer is also Eternal. Realise this truth, O Arjuna. Now get ready to fight in conformity with the duty to which you have been born. While fighting think of Me, and offer your actions to Me. Then, even as the Wise do, you too shall come to Me in due course. Of this, there can be no doubt.'

(To be continued)

-Heart2Heart Team

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

IMMESURABLE SERVICE IN MENTAL HOSPITAL, VISHAKAPATNAM

Sai Youth befriends the miserable and the forsaken

In Oct 2005 issue of Heart2Heart, we had featured an article on the “Shanthi School” of Kuwait where Sai volunteers are serving the needs of mentally-challenged children with great love and bringing about amazing transformation in these special children. [Go here to read that again]. That article inspired so much interest, even to the point of a man from Dubai expressing great desire to replicate the same work. And now we have another article dealing with such moving service, this time it is not for children born with mental deficiencies, but for adults who have become mentally ill because of circumstances in their life. Depression, anxiety and delusions are some of their typical symptoms. The Sai Youth of Vishakapatnam has been rendering yeoman service to these special adults in a mental hospital for years now and by the time you finish reading this story, we are sure, your heart would have turned as soft as butter.

Have you ever entered the doors of a mental hospital? Probably not and would not like to either. The very mention of a mental hospital conjures before us a pathetic and even scary scene of people to have ‘gone mad’ or have had a ‘nervous breakdown’. These two terms are about the sum of the average person’s knowledge of mental illness, yet there is a whole world of different ways such problems can show themselves - all as unique and distinct as the sufferer themselves. And in many cases the cause of the mentally unwell person is not served well, either by overstretched mental health care services, or by the lack of care and understanding shown by relatives or the society around them.

It was into this situation that the Sai Youth of Visakhapatnam decided to make a positive difference and go where most people would be reluctant to tread. They are now celebrating the tenth anniversary of the time when 27 of them went to the Hospital for Mental Care in Visakhapatnam. After gaining permission of the hospital superintendent, they began to look after the patients with a lot of love.

They found that many of the patients had been rejected by their families and communities. The Sai youth realized that the inmates of the hospital had so many needs to be met and were in such a pitiable plight that the situation called for a multitude of service activities. Thus, you can imagine how overjoyed the patients felt when the young men and women came every Sunday to clothe them, feed them, clean their rooms and plates, sing bhajans to them and most importantly of all, befriend them.

“My Heart Becomes Light And Peaceful when Sai Youth Talk To Me” - Mr. Aluri Nagendra Raju

One of the patients, Mr. Aluri Nagendra Raju, who is 25 years old, was recently interviewed for Heart2Heart:

Q: How did you meet the Sathya Sai youth?

Mr. Raju: We meet them every Sunday. They bathe us, give us good and tasty food and even wash our clothes. They sing Bhajans also along with us. I feel very happy to sing Bhajans. I feel that we should sing Bhajans every day at least for one hour. Because when Sathya Sai Youth conduct Bhajans and talk to us with love and affection I feel that my heart becomes light and peaceful, and I can sleep well.

Q: What do you feel about the Sai Youth?

Mr. Raju: When I join them in Bhajans or when I talk to them I feel that they are my loving and affectionate brothers. Then I feel very happy and ecstatic, and I believe I can completely recover from my ailment.

Q: What do you plan to do when you go out from here?

Mr. Raju: I will complete my MBA. I will do Bhajans not only at home but I would like to organize Bhajan sessions whenever there is encouragement and opportunity for that. I will go to Puttaparthi to see Sai Baba who has given me all this happiness. I will also ask my parents to go with me.

You can sense Aluri Nagendra Raju's joy that there are people who care for him and are prepared to give up their Sunday to be with him and share his pain - and his profound gratitude to Bhagavan who is the inspirer for all this work.

Back in the days when the youth first began the seva, the hospital had to run on meager funds. The food that was served was of low quality and the wards were as unclean as they can be. The Sai youth concentrated first on the care of the patients: bathing them, combing their hair, and in the case of women patients the ladies Seva Dal would remove any lice, and dress them properly and so on.

Since that time the youth have been working tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of the patients. They distribute food in the form of *pulihora* (tamarind-rice), curd rice, *payasam* (pudding) and vegetable *pulav*. Every Sunday 50 kgs of curd rice is served to all the patients and on the 19th of every month i.e. 'Saktiswaroopini day' [day dedicated to the mother] women Seva Dal members distribute sweets to all the patients.

Every week the Sai youth give all the patients a head-bath, with a coconut oil massage; they cut the patients' nails and apply soothing lotions for those who

are suffering from skin allergies. The seva dals also clean plates and vessels and wash any dirty clothes. They teach the patients to sing Bhajans and as a result *Nama Sankeertan* [chanting gods name] has become very popular. The Sai youth have also worked alongside the patients in a garden project, planting saplings in the rainy season to beautify the hospital environment.

In a situation where visits to the hospital by the patients' relatives are almost non-existent, the Sai Youth visit the patients and treat them with great love and care. This taboo of relatives neglecting their kith and kin (born out of fear and ignorance) only serves to make the patients' condition worse. Such is the situation of Smt. Ramanamma, for example, who is 45 years old and who shared her feelings with Heart2Heart.

Q. Why did you join this hospital?

A. My husband is a drunkard. He does not look after me at all and I became mentally unwell. He has put me here.

Q. Does he come to visit you?

A. Not at all – not even my parents come here. They have all left me alone! (cries).

Q. *Amma* (Mother), have faith in God and pray. Don't lose heart.

A. You are right. Your Sathya Sai devotees have become my kith and kin. They enquire about my health and well-being every week. That is how I am getting by. Kindly carry on with this help and ask my family to look after me.

Q. We will definitely help you. Our boys shall visit your home and convince them to come and see you.

A. Thank you, sir. Sai Baba is great. I will chant His name – He alone can help me.

This middle-aged lady is in a pitiable state; but imagine the plight of young people who find themselves ostracized by their own families. Some parents had even left their children in the hospital without giving their correct address. In these situations the Sai Youth helped the hospital authorities take back the young patients when they had recovered to their homes and restore them to their parents. It was shocking that in most of cases the parents were not happy to receive their children back home.

For these patients who are neglected by their families, the Sai Youth have become their only hope and the only time that friendly faces appear from outside the hospital. By sharing their love the Sai youth give the patients a sense of self-worth that helps them build bridges back to mental health.

“When The Sai Youth Leave, They Keep Asking When They Will Come Again” – Nurse Teresa

Apart from benefiting the patients immensely, another dimension in which the work of Sai Youth has yielded great dividends is the encouraging impact of their work on the hospital staff. This is evident from what nurse Theresa, a trained nurse of 6 years service, tells Heart2Heart.

Q. What do you know of the services being rendered by the Sathya Sai youth wing.

Nurse Theresa: I know it very well and ever since I joined I have noticed the service of the Sathya Sai youth wing with great interest. They come every Sunday and bring such things as soap, biscuits, food, vessels, plates, coconut oil, nail cutters and combs. They first bathe the patients, clean any eczema and other skin diseases and apply ointments. They cut the patients’ nails whenever necessary. They apply coconut oil to their hair and provide them with sumptuous food such as tamarind rice, *pulav*, and curd rice. They also sing bhajans with the patients joining in, distribute Baba’s photos and vibuthi. They also help us in cleaning the toilets and wards if it is necessary.

Q. What do you think of the seva offered by them and the affect on the patients?

Nurse Theresa: They feel very happy when the Sai youth come and sing with them. They relish the food served by them and enjoy the services. I can say from my heart that that the services rendered by the Sai Youth are of superior quality. The patients are very happy and active and join the Sai youth in bhajans. When the Sai youth leave they keep on asking whether they will come again tomorrow.

There are a lot of benefits - in some cases the patients get cured early. Some patients get cured and wait for their relatives to come and take them back to their houses. But in some cases, their relatives do not turn up and so the patients become sad waiting for them. In such cases the Sai youth get them discharged from the hospital and give them personal assistance to get back to their native place. They safely hand them to their relatives bearing all the expenditure - that is very much moving. One more thing: some service organizations distribute fruits in the hospital, but what the Sathya Sai devotees do is real service.

“The Love And Affection Shown By The Sai Youth Is Immeasurable” – Dr. G. Bhagya Rao

These plaudits from an experienced member of trained staff at the hospital stand alongside the ringing testimonials from the patients. The person who is very happy about the Youth’s initiative and extremely grateful to their dedicated work is the superintendent of the hospital, Dr. G. Bhagya Rao, who

has served in this capacity for 7 years. We now bring you a small excerpt of what he shared with Heart2Heart recently:

Q. Doctor, what is your opinion about the service rendered here by the Sai youth for the last 10 years?

Dr Rao: It is very good. Once I happened to participate in their service activity and saw that the Sai Youth are rendering very good service here. The then health Minister, Smt. Aruna, once visited the hospital. She saw your youth serving the patients and felt very happy.

Q. What is the response of the patients to the services of the Sai Youth?

Dr Rao: Each patient will be with us for about a month and their response depends upon the stage in which they are. The patients are happy and the impact is very good. The Sai Youth render service with very good feelings. They wash their clothes, give them baths, talk to them, conduct bhajans, give them good food and prasad. All this has a very good effect on the patients. More than the patients, there is a very good impact on our staff. I like this impact on our staff. I fully appreciate the services rendered by Sai Youth. The patients are extremely happy with the way they are treated.

Q. Doctor, as the head of the Institution, what is your advice to the Sai Youth?

Dr Rao: No doubt the Sai Youth are doing very good service. I feel that the Sai Youth should work in the direction of starting a rehabilitation center. This is a very big project. There are so many unwanted and unclaimed patients in the city. Such long term projects can be taken up by the Sai youth. The mentally challenged people can be involved in projects like Phenyle making, candle making - a number of patients are wandering in society homeless. A project should be taken up for them. These patients can come here and participate in this work. It is a kind of self employment for them.

The Sai Youth are a source of inspiration to us. I sincerely wish that the Sai Youth should extend their services and think in terms of long term projects, particularly rehabilitation projects. I may tell you here that some families want to get rid of their patients. They give wrong addresses and they don't come (to visit). Some patients are stuck up here for months and years. The Sai youth have taken upon themselves the responsibility of taking home these patients who have recovered, by meeting their to and fro charges. The love and affection shown by the Sai youth is immeasurable.

Q. Sir, have you observed any change in the patients?

Dr Rao: More than the patients, I see the change in my staff. The patients too become changed. When young people like the Sai Youth, who are in no way connected with the hospital are rendering very good service

here, what about us who are getting salaries and meant for service. Really it is an appreciable change. I thank and congratulate the youth for this change. This is also a part of treatment. Earlier the patients felt that they were unwanted. But now that feeling of 'unwantedness' has disappeared from the faces of the patients. They are happy that there is somebody to look after them.

This article celebrates 10 years of service to the mentally ill by the Sai youth. Swami tells us “Be Happy” and we are blessed with His love in so many ways so that our happiness is easy to grasp. Yet there are so many who are lacking in an inner sense of peace and who need the touch of Sai in their lives. We hope you, dear reader, can feel a sense of joy at this very necessary seva. Please do not let it stop there: Feel inspired to go out there and find those in need and make a difference. On our part, we will try our best to bring to you as often as possible such heart-warming stories of selfless love.

-Heart2Heart Team

PRASHANTI DIARY

Chronicles of Heaven on Earth

As probably most of you know by now, the biggest happening last month in Prashanti Nilayam was the *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam*, a 12 day long celebration on a scale rarely witnessed in history, a celebration that was unprecedented as for the first time a *yagnam* or “sacrifice” to Lord Shiva was offered in the presence of the Living God Himself.

The tone for this momentous event was set quite a few days earlier, on July 30, 2006, when the students of the Sai Mirpuri College of Music celebrated in song the role of Lord Shiva in the birth of Music. This was followed a few days later by the Varalakshmi Puja, a *puja* (prayer) which history states was revealed by Lord Shiva to Mother Parvathi when She asked Him to give a boon to all married women for the well being and prosperity of their husbands. These two events, memorable and important in their own right, set everyone’s thoughts this month to the munificence of Lord Shiva and all that He has done and continues to do for the benefit of humanity.

This was fittingly followed by the *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam*, a unique form of worship of Lord Shiva performed to establish an environment supremely conducive for spiritual growth and for the washing away of one’s sins. This holy ritual was also a prayer for the prosperity and protection of mankind (*loka kalyanam* and *loka kshemam*) and also satisfies worldly desires which if used virtuously can confer a lot of spiritual merit.

JULY 30, 2006: “SANGEETHA NAIVEDYAM” A VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL FUSION PROGRAMME

This program, a vocal and instrumental fusion program that was lovingly offered by the Music College students, started with a Ganesh *stuthi* entitled “Naada Pushpanjali”. This song (*Shravana Sunadara Naama Ganapathy*) in *raag* Hamsadvani symbolises Lord Ganesha who Himself is a musician. Lord Ganesha’s instrument is the *Pakhavaj* (a barrel shaped percussion instrument) and this song that they selected contained *pakhavaj bols* which emerged from Lord Ganesha’s *Pakhavaj*, thus highlighting the passion that Lord Ganesha had for rhythm. The instruments used to accompany the vocals were the *sitar*, the *tabla*, the *mridangam*, the harmonium and the key-board.

Music was born from Lord Shiva, the Cosmic Dancer. Sri Thyagaraja enlightens this in his famous song “Naada Thanumanisham Shankaram Namami Mey Manasa” in *raag* Kharaharapriya. *Saptha swaras* (seven notes) emerged from the five faces of Shiva namely Sadyojaatam, Vaamadevam, Aghoram, Ishanam and Tatpurusham. Therefore Lord Shiva is also called Panchanana (the one with five faces). From the scales of the Sama Veda innumerable *ragas* emerged and then from the divine *damaru* (small two-headed drum) of Lord Shiva emerged 5 rhythmic patterns – Thisra, Chaturasram, Khandam, Misram and Sankeernam. “Rudra Tandava”, presented next by the boys, depicted the birth of these ‘swaras’ and ‘talas’.

This was a fusion of the popular song on Shiva – *Bho shambho Shiva Shambo Svayambo* in *raag* Revathy, and the bhajan *Bhasmabooshi thaangaa Sai* with rhythmic varieties. The instruments used in this piece were the *veena*, the *mridangam*, the *tavil*, the harmonium, the *kanchira*, the keyboard and the octopad.

The third item they presented was a *thillana* (*Naa diri diri dheem than a na*) in *raag* Kadanakuthuhalam, a *raga* that gives joy. And their last song for the evening was a famous Western composition called “Heartbeat” by Sri Muthiyah Bhagavather in *raag* Sankara Bharanam. ‘Heartbeat’ was sung with the accompaniments of the *veena* and the *mridangam*. All in all it was an enjoyable evening, a fitting precursor to the magnificent *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam* to follow in a few days.

AUG 4th: VARALAKSHMI PUJA IN SAI KULWANT HALL

In August 2000, Swami explained about the origins of the Varalakshmi Puja. Swami said, "*Legend has it that Parvati once asked Easwara (i.e. Lord Shiva) if there was any way to ensure the auspiciousness, prosperity and well-being of women. She desired that every woman should lead a long, happy and healthy life with her husband, children, grandchildren, friends and relatives. Easwara was pleased with Parvati's prayer and told her about the Varalakshmi Vrata, which would confer all a woman may ask for. This particular Vrata is a boon for all women.*"

“Easwara revealed the sacred Varalakshmi Vrata to Parvati, so that future generations might perform this Vrata and derive the benefits there from. The Purohit (chief priest) has enumerated the benefits which this Vrata confers. When a woman performs the Varalakshmi Vrata, she gets the blessings that she may live long with plenty and prosperity as a sumangali (a woman whose husband is alive) with her children and grandchildren. Varalakshmi protects seven past generations and seven future generations. Noble women like Savitri and Anasuya enjoyed peace and prosperity by performing this sacred Vrata. The purpose of Varalakshmi Vrata is to atone your sins, develop sacredness and ultimately lead you to Divinity.”

On August 4th, 2006, another grand Varalakshmi Puja was performed in the divine presence for the second year in a row. This year nearly 1500 women from all over India as well as from abroad participated in this function held in the divine presence to pray for the well being of their husbands and their families.

Sai Kulwant Hall was beautifully decorated this day with pieces of lawn and with small Lakshmi Statues adorning the steps of the veranda. The centre of the veranda dais, right in front of Ganesha was done up as a floral *pandal* (protective structure) resting on 4 columns wherein a beautiful silver statue of Goddess Lakshmi was installed. On either side of the veranda a floral portrait

of Mother Lakshmi, done by using flower petals of different hues, was also placed to lend the right ambience to this holy day.

All the women were seated in rows in front of the dais with a plate in front with all the necessary ingredients for the *puja*. The ladies were all dressed alike in a silk sari and the entire hall had a festive and august ambience that provided the right setting for the conduct of this sacred ritual.

After Swami arrived at the Hall to the sounds of *veda* chanting, He lit the lamp to signify the start of the proceedings. Then the priest after obtaining Swami's blessings led all the women in the conduct of this ritualistic worship that lasted for approximately 45 minutes. At the conclusion of the ritual the priest also briefly related the story of the origin of this *puja* for the benefit of the participants. All the participants were later served a sumptuous lunch in the South Indian canteen.

AUG 9th TO 20th, 2006: THE ATI RUDRA MAHA YAGNA

Then finally dawned the day that devotees from all over the world and deities in Heaven, were waiting for with bated breath – the *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam*. A lot of the background material on this *yagnam* has already been reported in numerous forums earlier and this event also forms this month's cover story on Heart2Heart, but for the sake of continuity as well as completeness of this article we will digress a bit to give a brief back-ground (even at the risk of repetition) in order to link all the aspects of the story we want to tell you about this momentous event. We seek the readers' understanding of our indulgence.

WHAT IS THE ATI RUDRA MAHA YAGNA?

The *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam* is very sacred and has been performed since antiquity to drive out the calamities and difficulties of mankind. Let us first understand what these strange words mean.

Yagnam? A lot of confusion prevails about the terms *yaga* (or *yagya*) and *yagna*, which are commonly used as synonyms in informal conversations and normal understanding. However there is a difference. 'Yaga' means the offering (or sacrifice) of certain traditionally sacred and valuable items like cow's *ghee* (clarified butter), fruits, flowers, sesame seeds, rice, and other such sacred offerings to the fire in a *havan* or *homa kundam* (a fire pit constructed according to certain norms), as the fire is the vehicle to transfer the essence of these items to celestial deities like Indra, Rudra, Varuna etc.

Why do we need to propitiate these deities? The Vedic literature indicates at many places that the *jiva* (or the individual) and the *deva* (or the Gods) exist in a cooperative manner; one supporting and feeding the other. As an example, Verses 10 through 13 of Chapter three in the Bhagavad-Gita contain a clear reference to this:

"Having created men along with *yagya*, the Lord of Creation (Prajapati) said: 'By *yagya* you will prosper and its performance will bring forth the fulfilment of your desires. Through *yagya* you nourish and sustain the gods and those gods will, in turn, sustain you. By sustaining one another, you will attain the highest good. Nourished by the sacrifice, the gods will bestow on you the enjoyments you desire. But he who enjoys their gifts without offering to them is merely a thief.'"

Why is fire used? There are also two reasons for the use of fire as the preferred means of conveyance of the essence of the *yaga* or (*yagya*) to these deities. Firstly, fire is the only element that does not get polluted by contact with any other material, and secondly the smoke emitted from the *homa kundam* during the *yaga* purifies the entire atmosphere. These types of *yagas* will grant happiness to mankind, good health to all humanity and also earn the Grace of God.

The term *Yagna* on the other hand has a more inclusive meaning – it not only includes *yagas* (or the fire sacrifice portion) but also *Adwaram*. *Adwaram* means the journey towards God through good deeds.

It is moot to note that the term used here for this momentous event was the *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam* (i.e. *yagnam* in its fuller sense). So while over these 12 days we witnessed the *Yaga* portion of the *Yagnam*, clearly the journey to God has only just begun. It is up to us individually to further sanctify our lives and earn His grace through good deeds as a continuation of the spiritual momentum generated by this *Ati Rudra Maha* (great) *Yagnam* that was just concluded in Sai Kulwant Hall.

Rudram is another name for Lord Shiva. One who removes difficulties, one who teaches 'Atmavidya', one who uplifts *dharma*, one who grants emancipation, one who grants wisdom and even one who on doomsday punishes evil-doers is called Rudra. The term Rudra is commonly (and mistakenly) associated **only** with the angry aspect of Lord Shiva, the aspect with which He destroys evil, though Lord Rudra is expressly concerned with the total well being, protection and emancipation of humankind.

The Sri Rudram chant (called the Namakam) is an ancient Vedic hymn, and is the oldest example of a listing of various names of Lord Siva. Through the chanting of the Namakam, Lord Siva's various attributes and aspects are invoked and worshipped. Describing the several facets of Lord Shiva by reciting the Namakam is also called 'Rudra Prasna'.

The *Rudra prasna* can be done with or without the accompaniment of a Vedic *yagna* ritual. When accompanied with the Vedic fire ritual, it is called the Rudra Homam or the Rudra Yagnam.

In the Taithareeya Samhita, 4th *skanda* (chapter) – the 7th sub-stanza is known as 'Chamaka'. In this section, the letters 'cha' and 'mey' appear repeatedly and it is hence known as *Chamaka*. Those who are interested in

worldly gains and riches, pray to God to grant them all types of 'boons' and hence this prayer is known as the 'Chamakam'.

So what is the **Ati Rudram**? To understand this, we have to do some basic mathematics.

Eleven recitations of the Sri Rudram (*Namakam*) followed by one recitation of the *Chamakam* is called the *Ekadasa Rudram*. This also constitutes one unit of the *Rudra Homam*.

Eleven *Ekadasa Rudram* recitations make one Laghu Rudram. ($11 \times 11 = 121$ times of *Namakam* and 11 times recitation of *Chamakam*). This is achieved if 11 priests chant 11 times the *Namakam* and 1/11 of the *Chamakam* for every single recitation of the *Namakam*. [Editor's Note: The *Namakam* and *Chamakam* are each divided into 11 *anuvakyas* or sections. Hence for each recitation of the *Namakam* they chant one *anuvakya* or 1/11 portion of the *Chamakam*].

Eleven Laghu Rudram recitations make a Maharudram ($11 \times 11 \times 11 = 1331$ *Namakams* and 121 *Chamakams*). This is achieved if everyday 11 priests chant 11 times for 11 days.

And eleven Maharudram recitations make an Ati Rudram! Thus, in an Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam, the *Namakam* will be recited 14,641 times and the *Chamakam* 1331 times, with the performance of 1331 Rudra Homams by 121 *Ritvik* priests. (121 priests x 11 times per day over 11 days).

So one can ask the question - if this *yagnam* is being performed since time immemorial for conferring spiritual benefit and for *loka kalyanam* and *loka kshema*, what is the necessity of reciting the *Chamakam*, which confers mere material benefits. The *Chamakam* (in this context) is now a prayer to the Lord to provide all the articles required for the *homam*. The list is exhaustive and comprehensive, from lentils of several varieties, to fuel, *ghee* and fruits. The usage of material things in the service of the Lord is after all one of the highest form of devotional service.

The 121 priests are spread over 11 *homa kundams* (fire pits), with each *kundam* associated with 11 priests. Apart from these 121 priests there will be 14 other priests who will do *pujas* to various deities, thus totalling to 135 *ritviks* who will take part in this *yagnam*. A detailed explanation of the importance of the number 11 is given in the box below.

This really begs the question – why the fascination with the number 11? The answer is quite simple as there are 11 primary names of Lord Shiva. Hence the *Yagya mantapa* or the *Yagya shala* (the sanctified place where the *yagya* will take place) had 11 *homa kundams*, specially set up for the occasion in Sai Kulwant Hall. Each *homa kunda* was in the shape of a square of length 5 feet. It attained a height of 3ft over three tiers. The *homa kundams* were constructed of bricks and cement and then painted over. The base of the *homa kundam* had a refractory material that could withstand high heat. The *homa kundams* were filled with sand on the inside up to a height of a foot or a

foot and a half and in this pit the wood was burnt to generate the fire to convey the offerings. The layout of the *yagya shala* is represented in the figure above.

Each of the *homa kundam* is associated with a name of Lord Shiva. The Central or main pit (No 1) is associated with the name Mahadeva. The names associated with the other *homa kundams* numbered 2 through 11 in the figure are: (2) Devadeva, (3) Ishwara, (4) Vijaya, (5) Adityatmaka Rudra or Sri Rudra, (6) Bheema, (7) Shiva, (8) Rudra, (9) Neelalohita, (10) Bhavodbhava and (11) Shankara.

In addition to these 11 *homa kundams*, *kalasams* (sacred pots) totalling 160 were placed near the *Homa Kundams*: 132 *kalasams* for Lord Shiva and 28 *kalasams* for the other *Vasthu devatas* (or the subordinate Gods).

A curved pot full of water on which a coconut is placed surrounded by mango leaves or the equivalent is called a *kalasam*. This *kalasa* can be quite simple or elaborate depending on the event or preferences. The curved pot called *kalasam* contains water from one of the holy rivers of India.

The water from some of the holiest rivers of India were also placed in a separate stand and labelled with the name of the river from which the water was collected. A *Kalasa puja* was performed in honour of the seven rivers of India and to invoke the god Varuna to bless and purify the water.

The whole *Yagya Shala* was constructed with permitted materials in front of the veranda dais. The pillars supporting the constructing were made from the wood of the Araca Nut tree as was the top side railing. Decorations of tender coconut and araca nuts lined the pillars and the top of the railing. The base of the pillars was held in place by huge boxes filled with sand and topped up with painted tender coconuts. Metal strings were also used to tie the structure to the columns in Sai Kulwant Hall for further stability. Ferns and coconut leaves were woven together to form a sheltering fabric for the *Yagya shala*. The top portion of the *Yagya Shala* was entirely open so as to provide an exit for the smoke that was generated from the offerings to the 11 *homa kundams*! And on some mornings Swami even had the rolling roof of Sai Kulwant Hall opened to let the smoke out.

Additionally the veranda was also exquisitely decorated. A floral arch was constructed around the Lord Ganesha statue and some oversized decorative lingams were also placed on the veranda to provide the right ambience. Amber coloured focus lights also lent a homely warmth to the veranda.

An ornately decorated table with a marble top was placed immediately in front of the veranda and on this the *abhisekham* (bathing ceremony) of the marble Shiva *linga* was carried out during the entire *yagnam*. This Shiva *linga* was installed on a silver base called 'Pannupattam'.

As per the 'Kurma Purana' this *Athi Rudra Maha Yagna* was performed in Dwapara Yuga by Lord Krishna. In the Treta Yuga, Lord Sri Rama also

performed the same as per Hindu Vedic scriptures. This is the first time in the history of Kali Yuga that this *yagna* is being performed when Lord Sathya Sai is in the “Siva Sakthi” *avatar* amidst us as Lord Rudra.

This *yagnam* was started on August 9th, when ‘Sravana’ star was in sway (which is the birth star of Lord Vishnu) and ended on August 20th in ‘Aarudra Star’ (which is the birth star of Lord Sathya Sai).

The programme began on the morning of the 9th itself when Swami, the Rudra Avatar Himself, presented the 135 *rithviks* (priests performing the *Yaaga*) with sets of ceremonial clothing to be worn during the *Yaaga*. This distribution ceremony called *Acharyadi Ritvik Varana* was done in the holy precincts of the *bhajan mandir* of Sai Kulwant Hall where the priests had assembled early in the morning. After the distribution, the priests chanted some mantras in the Divine presence before the conclusion of the morning’s ceremony.

Then for the next 12 days we had an unimaginable gourmet spiritual treat in store. The *yagnam* rituals performed over these days can be broadly classified into 4 different categories:

1. The ceremony of the 9th evening when the lingam was purified for installation.
2. The Installation ceremony on the morning of the 10th, which included the *rudra parayana*, *linga abhisekham* and *rudra homam*.
3. The morning and evening ceremonies from the third day to the 11th day which were identical and repeated every day.
4. The *Poorna Ahuti* or the concluding ceremony on the morning of the 12th day.

Every evening after the conclusion of the afternoon (and the day’s) ceremony all the priests took their places in front of the veranda and it was the turn of one or two eminent speakers to educate everyone on one aspect of Shiva or to elucidate some aspects of the *yagnam* that was being conducted. All these speakers were either accomplished Vedic scholars or eminent men known for their deep spiritual knowledge and all of them held everyone spellbound with their oratory and the sheer wealth of the spiritual experience that they shared with the audience every day. And on almost all evenings, Swami also pleasantly surprised everyone with His divine discourse. And after the speeches there would be devotional songs either by budding artistes from Karnataka or on Swami’s command the SSSIHL boys would perform.

In order to present this material in a readable and understandable manner, we depart a bit from our normal format of reporting the events in a chronological manner. We will first talk about the *yagnam per se* following the 4 grouping that we listed above. Normally we also report on all the speakers, but as some

extracts from their speeches has already been reported in the cover story we will not repeat it here again.

The full text of the divine discourses is also already available on-line , so we will again not follow our normal practise and bring you summaries that contain the essence of what Swami said that day. We will, of course, bring you these speeches and divine discourses on Radio Sai so we hope you are able to listen to them either through the Radio Sai Global Harmony or through our audio streaming service. To download the chants of the Vedic priests,

We will however, report in full on the musical events that took place almost every day and we sincerely hope that you like this changed format of the report for this month only.

The Function On The 9th Evening (The First Day)

The evening of the 9th was the start of the *yagnam*. All the *rithviks*, chanting vedic hymns and accompanied by auspicious *Nadaswaram* music, entered Sai Kulwant Hall in a procession and received Swami with the *Purna Kumbha*. Swami lit the lamp to inaugurate the *Yaaga*.

After lighting the lamp, Swami took His seat on the veranda. The *yagnam* started with the invocation song, sung by the *bhajan* group from Brindavan, entitled "Athi Rudra Maha Yagna Purusha Sai".

Swami asked Sri Vinay Kumar and Sri Lakshmi Narayan to speak to the audience. Sri Vinay Kumar recounted how when he had asked Swami's permission to perform the Ati Rudra Yagnam on June 13th for Rudra's joy and satisfaction, Swami had replied, "But I am always joyous and satisfied". He went on to explain how the *yagnam* would be performed. Sri Lakshmi Narayan, also a co-organiser speaking next also related Swami's involvement in all aspects of planning for the *yagnam*.

After these two speakers, Sri Nanjunda Dikshitar, the chief *rithvik*, gave a very illuminating talk on the significance of the Athi Rudra Mahaa Yaaga. After these talks, Swami unexpectedly gave a Divine Discourse. He said, "*Athi Rudra Maha Yajnam is noble and sacred. Those who perform it are blessed. The key is to do it with unity. This will lead to purity and then to divinity. The 6 vices are your enemies. Keep them away. You are all embodiments of the ATMA. Be happy, healthy, peaceful and spiritual. But one cannot be happy without devotion. Immerse yourself in devotion and not the deep ocean (of Samsara)*".

After Swami sat down, the Head priest obtained Swami's blessing for the implements with which the *puja* would be done. The *Yaaga* then began with the *Maha Ganapathi Puja*, after specification of the place and time of the *Yaaga* in the traditional way:

"In this spacious Universe, on Earth, on the continent of Jambhoo-dvipa, in the land of Bharat (India), in the State of Andhra, in the holy pilgrimage site of

Puttaparthi on the banks of the holy Chitravathi River, in the year Vyaya, during Dakshinaayana, on the first day of the month of Sraavana, on Budhavaar (corresponding to Wednesday, August 9, 2006), until the 12th day of the month of Sraavana, Aadivaar.” (Sunday, August 20).

Afterwards *Svasthi Vaachanam, Svasthi Punyaaha Vaachanam* (prayers for auspiciousness and blessings for the *Yaaga* and the people) took place. This is for the negation and purification of any inadvertent errors in conducting the *Yaaga*, or any impurities in the materials used. This is traditionally done before any auspicious religious ceremony is conducted.

Next was the *Raksha Bandhan* Ceremony to the newly made Sivalinga, for auspiciousness and protection. Swami also created a beautiful golden bracelet and personally put it on Sri Vinay Kumar, the Sri Sathya Sai Karnataka Youth leader, who along with the youth of Karnataka conducted the *Athi Rudra Mahaa Yaga*, under the guidance and blessings of Bhagavan.

The milk white marble Shiva *Linga* was ceremoniously bathed in water in ‘Jala Proshana’. Then *Purvaanga Godaana* was performed. A well-decorated cow and her calf were welcomed with auspicious music and vedic hymns, worshipped with *mantras* according to the *Shastras*, and then given away to a Brahmin. Among all auspicious good deeds, the gifting of a cow is traditionally considered the highest and holiest act of charity.

In the Yagna Hall, the Lord in His many Forms was invited with prayers to install Himself in the forms of many *kalashas* in a ceremony called as *kalasha sthapana*. [The *kalasha* is a pot filled with water, and topped with mango leaves and a coconut. The *kalasha* has many symbolic meanings- it represents the Primordial Waters, the Super Soul filled with love and compassion, abundance, and hospitality. The mango leaves are for auspiciousness. The coconut is a symbol of the Godhead, the eyes of the coconut symbolic of the three eyes of the Lord.]

For the correction of any errors in *Vaasthu* (location and construction), deviating from Scriptural guidelines, *Vaasthu Puja* to all the eight deities like Yama, Varuna, Agni, Vayu, Kubera etc. was performed.

Pancha Gavya Aaraadhana was also performed (*Panchagavyas* are cow’s milk, cow ghee, cow dung, cow urine, and yoghurt made of cow’s milk) These five items were used in this *yagna* and hence the process of sanctifying them is called “Pancha Gavya Aradhana”.

Subsequently, various *pujas* were conducted in accordance with the *shastras*. The Shiva *Linga* was bathed or anointed for some time successively with water, milk, rice, flowers, fruits, honey and sugar. This *seva* is traditionally performed during installation and consecration of deities, as directed by the *shastras*.

Then around 4:30 PM “Bimba Suddhi” *puja* was performed to the newly brought *lingam*. (This means removing all the mistakes committed while carving the lingam by the sculptor).

Then rituals (done to a newly born baby) known as ‘Pumsavana’ (3rd month ritual); ‘Seemantham’ (6th month ritual), Dasama Maasa Jananaartham (removal of *doshams* in the tenth month) etc. were also performed.

The installation and consecration of the Lord in this particular image or form of the Shiva *Linga*, is considered equivalent to the Lord being born in this world in this form, so all of the *Shastric* rites conducted during birth were also performed for the Shiva *Linga*.

[The *lingam* is traditionally used to represent Lord Shiva and has a deep meaning and significance. It is considered the “amorphous” form of Lord Shiva. The Lord is in the 3 forms i.e. the formless state of God, the lovely ash-smeared form of Lord Shiva with the blue throat and the snakes around His waist that we are all familiar with, and in the *lingam* – the amorphous state of formlessness and yet also with form, as the *lingam* has no defined beginning and end. The *lingam* is thus indicative of the beginningless and endless Brahman. *Lingam* is a combination of two words namely Leeyathe (mergence) and Gamyathe (emergence) suggestive of the creation and dissolution of the Universe].

The *Shayyadheevasa* ('sleeping' of the Lord) was next performed. The *lingam* was literally placed in a cozy bed with fruits, flowers and incense. Lullaby was sung and music played in 5 *ragas* as the two *chamargrahas* (fan bearers) gently fanned the Lord. Sentries - Indra on the East, Agni (S.E), Yama (S), Nirariti (SW), Varuna (W), Vayu (NW), Kubera (N), Shiva (NE), Brahma (above) and Ananta(below)- were posted to ensure a peaceful rest to the Lord!

With these *Agama Shastra* Rites, the *Ashtavadhana* Seva, the day's ceremonies concluded with the Maha Mangala Aarathi. As the Lord retired, *arthi* was sung and the eventful evening came to a close at 6:45 PM.

The Function On Aug 10th (The Second Day)

On the morning of the 10th, the entire ‘packed to overflowing’ hall was abuzz with excitement. At the centre of the hall was an ornate table in wood with a marble topping on which was placed the pedestal with the *lingam*. The priests had begun the day by getting the *lingam* ready for Swami to do the *prana prathista* (installing life in the *lingam*).

The first ceremony was *Aruna Parayana*, followed by *Kalaa Homa* and *Anga Homa*. *Kalaa* and *Aavaahana* were performed for the Shiva *Linga*. *Aavaahana* was performed to all the *kalashas* with Veda Mantras. Before *Praana Prathishtapana* (invocation and consecration of the Life Force) was conducted for each *kalasha*, all of the necessary ceremonies required by the scriptures were performed, including “Netronmeelana” to the Siva *lingam*.

Netronmeelana means opening of the eyes of a new born baby (in this case the Siva *linga*).

The white-stone *lingam* sat on its silver pedestal. On it was smeared a “third eye” of sandal paste and vermillion. It was decorated with a garland of *bilva* leaves. It had above it a silver-golden bowl, hanging from a support, with intricate carvings and studded with precious gems. This silver bowl was called the “Dhara patram”, and it had a small hole at the bottom. When this vessel was filled with a fluid – either water or milk etc., it flowed out through the hole in a continuous stream on to the *lingam* below, giving it an *abhisekham* (a ritual bath).

Swami came out of the Yajur Mandir around 6:15 AM and got down from the car in front of the *lingam* itself where He was welcomed by the head priest with holy water to be offered to the Lingam. He was helped on to a pedestal and He sprinkled water on the *lingam* with the aid of a long brush braided from holy grass, while the ritual prayer was being recited by the priests.

Then to everyone’s astonished gasps, with the merest wave of His hand, Swami materialized a “third eye” for the Lingam. It was a “namam” [*namam* refers to the three parallel *vibhuti* lines that followers of Lord Shiva apply to their foreheads] of three lines made of gold plate with a red gem at its centre. Swami Himself placed the “eye” on the *lingam* and stuck it there and completed the picture.

The priest then performed *arathi* to the *lingam* and Swami together. Swami then went walking around the table, up the steps and took His place on the veranda. Thus after the installation of the Shiva Linga with Vedic rites, Swami Himself had performed the *Praana Prathishtapana* for the Shiva Linga and the Siva *lingam* was now born and considered to be imbued with life. The *yagnam* began with a song in Tamil by a 13 year old boy Karthick calling out to Lord Sankara as the mother and the father of all mankind. It set a tone of devotion to the entire proceedings.

After the Birth Ceremony, the Naming Ceremony was performed. Swami Himself gave the Shiva Linga the name “Sai Easwara”. The Head priest (Sri B.S. Nanjunda Dixit) made this announcement to the congregation to the utter delight of everyone assembled there.

Around 7 AM after Swami had sat on the dais, two priests took the wooden sticks (the *Arani* or the churning equipment for the creation of fire) and had it blessed by Swami in order to generate the fire. The fire caught in just two minutes. Then the pundits showed the fire to Swami and placed it in the main *homa kundam* and “Agni Pratishta” (installation of fire) was done that way.

GENERATING THE SACRIFICIAL FIRE

It is a practise at all *yagnas* that the fire is only lit naturally through friction and this is called *Arani*. Generally two sticks are churned on another log and the

heat generated by the friction lights up the dry grass with which it is in contact. Once the dry grass catches and wisps of smoke are seen, it is carefully kindled into a fire and transferred to the main pit.

Once the 'Agni' (fire) was established in the main *homa* altar, it was distributed to the other 10 *homa* altars, which were successively lit. This is called 'Agni Vibhajana' or separating the fire, by taking a burning stick from the main *homa kunda* and placing it in the other 10 *homa kundams*.

Simultaneously, *Panchaamritha Abhishekam* was performed to the Sai Easwara Lingam (bathing with five sanctified substances: milk, yoghurt, *ghee* (clarified butter), honey, and sugar), and in addition with coconut water, flower essence water, turmeric water, *kumkum* water, sandalwood water, *vibhuti* water, etc. accompanied with the chanting of vedic hymns.

After the *panchamruta abhisekham* ended, *Rudra Abhishekam* was performed with *Rudra Paaraayana* (recitation of the Rudra). The priest poured the milk into the silver cup above the Lingam from which there was a steady trickle of milk onto the *lingam*, while the Namakam was continuously recited for the requisite number of times as recounted above.

After the completion of the *Rudra Paarayana*, *Rudra Homa* was done. In the *Rudra Homa*, Rudra mantras are chanted, each ending with "Svaaha" while offering *ghee* and other items to Lord Agni in the *homa kundam*. The main priest pours the *ghee* with a wooden spoon, and the other priests sitting around the *homa kundam* throw articles like rice, flowers, etc together.

After the Rudra Homa, Sai Gayathree Homa was performed, and the Sai Gayathri was recited 108 times.

Later, *pujas* were performed to the Shiva Linga, with *Ashtaavadhaana Seva: Ekaarthi, Thriyaarthi, Kumbhaarthi, Panchaarthi, Radhaarthi*, followed by *Maha Mangala Aarathi*. *Prasad* was then distributed to the devotees.

In the afternoon, the *pujas* began at 2:00 PM. Auspicious Nadaswaram music, *Rudra Paaraayana, Panchaamruta Abhishekam, Rudra Abhishekam, Vibhuthi Archana, Nivedana - Shodashopa pujas* were conducted.

In Swami's presence, after the talks by learned scholars and then Swami's Divine discourse the programme ended with *Maha Mangala Aarathi*.

The Function On The Next 9 Days

From the third day to the eleventh day, the *homams* and *pujas* were conducted in a similar way and the same sequence was repeated on all days.

The programme used to start early at 5:00 AM. The morning programme had 3 distinct components:

1. Auspicious music early in the morning, followed by *Aruna Paaraayanam*, *Mahanyaasa Paaraayanam*, *Panchaamruta Abhishekam*
2. Shiva Linga *Abhishekam* (of continuous stream of milk and later by water) accompanied by Rudra Paaraayanam by all the assembled priests and
3. *Rudra Homam*, *Sai Gayathree Homam*, *Maha Mangala Aarathi* and *Ashtaavadhaana Seva*.

Before the priests started in the morning, in a ritual called as *sankalpam* they would seek the blessings of the Gods to perform the day's rituals in an error free and perfect manner as laid down in the *shastras*. Thus with purified minds and firm resolve after obtaining the blessings of the presiding deities, all the priests would commence the day's rituals.

After the *Panchaamrutha Abhisekham*, the entire table was cleaned and all the *abhisekham* materials (fruits etc) were collected from a spout on the edge of the table into a vessel below. These holy ingredients were later (after the morning's *yagnam*) distributed to all the devotees as *theertham* or the sanctified liquid *prasadam* from the proceeds of the *yagnam*. The *lingam* is also bathed again with water and then wiped clean with a new towel. Then the *lingam* is "dressed up" with a shawl and a variety of flower garlands and thus made ready to oversee the *homam* that commenced next.

It must be noted that for the *Rudra Paaraayanam* while the number of priests reciting were supposed to be 121, in actual fact it was a lot more, perhaps in the thousands. Swami asked all the *vedam* chanting boys also to come dressed in *dhotis* for the recitation. The *vedam* boys wore a red *dhoti* and a white *angavastram* (upper cloth) and sat in front of Swami for the Rudra recitation during all the days. Additionally, the entire student body from all the 3 campuses as well as the Primary and the High School students also chanted the *Namakam* along with the priests. Additionally, quite a few of the devotees who either knew the mantra or had brought the mantra book with them also chanted along over the approximately 2.5 hours it took to recite the Rudram 11 times and the Chamakam once.

And after the completion of the *paaraayanam*, the head priest went to seek Swami's blessings to do the *homam* or the fire sacrifice portion of the morning's rituals. Following the ancient *Bharatiya* culture the priest very respectfully covered his mouth with his fingers as he talked with Him (so that the spittle from the mouth is guarded by his palm). After obtaining Swami's blessings, the priests all went and took their places by their respective *kundams* and at the end of each *mantra* a handful of offerings were put into the fire.

And after the completion of the Gayathri Homam along with recitation of the Sai Gayathri the morning programme was almost over. Once the *homam* was over, one of the priests would take a pinch of the ash from the main altar and making a paste apply a 'tilak' of the ash to the Sai Easwara *lingam*.

But before the *mangal arathi* was taken every day in the morning, Sri Karthick used to sing a brief song praising either Lord Shiva or Lord Sai. These were very melodious and most appreciated by all. Deep was their meaning too - as for example on one day he sang, "*Enda Idam Chendralum, enda mugam partalum, inda mugam thereyudai, Sayee Mugame Sathya Sai mugame*". "Wherever we go, wherever we see a face, we see only this face, the face of Sathya Sai". What profound sentiments! No wonder this young boy Karthick became a firm favourite of the Lord, with the Lord many times enquiring about his welfare during the twelve days of the *yagna*.

And after Sri Karthick had finished, there used to be a melodious *nadaswaram* tune to round off the morning's prayer, before taking the arathi to conclude the morning's session.

In the days of yore, Sage Vishwamitra had the young Lord Rama and brother Lakshmana protect the *yagya shala* from the attacks of the *rakshasas*. According to tradition and as part of the ritual, a few *kalasams* were spread around the *yagya shala* according to the prescribed norms. *Puja* was done at prescribed times to the deities associated with these *kalasams* to invoke the respective deities to protect the *yagnam* from adverse forces. And not to forget! It was only because of Lord Sai Rama's benign protective gaze from His seat on the veranda and his copious blessings that this *yagnam* was so well protected and was performed so flawlessly.

The afternoon program used to start daily at 2:00 PM. After the auspicious music, *Nithya Homam* was performed. *Panchaamruta Abhishekam*, and *Sri Sai Gayathri Homam* would also be done in the afternoon followed by *Rudra Krama Archana Puja*. And after the completion of the afternoon's *puja*, all the priests would take their place in front for a vantage view of Lord Rudra and listen to the afternoon's speeches and music programme.

The credit for the success of this stupendous *yagna* is not only due to the organising prowess of the youth of Karnataka, but also due to the 135 priests who conducted the programme. Swami Himself acknowledged this explicitly in His discourses and also said that the bonds between Him and the priests were unbreakable. And as a visible measure of His immense pleasure, He rewarded the Headpriest (as being the representative of all the priests) in many tangible ways. On the morning of the 18th also, He also manifested a gold chain with a crystal lingam as the pendant and personally put it around the priest's neck.

And perhaps as a measure to indicate that all the Gods in the Heavens were also pleased with this *yagna*, on the evening of the 19th, the penultimate day of the performance of this *yagna*, a very beautiful rainbow light up the Eastern skyline of Puttaparthi.

The Poorna Ahuti Function On The 12th And Concluding Day

It was the concluding day of the *Yagna* culminating with “Poorna Ahuti”, and by prior intimation the *yaga* had started very early at dawn at 4:00 AM with 'Aruna Parayanam'.

The massive crowd had collected even earlier with some standing in line from 12 AM to get entry and a good vantage position. The *yagya shala* had been spruced up for this important concluding ceremony with fresh flowers and decoration adorning this sacred space. Noteworthy was a beautiful statue of Lord Shiva that was brought just for this concluding morning's session and occupied the pride of place at the front of the *yagya shala*.

Following the pattern of the last 10 days, the 'Aruna Parayanam' was followed by *Mahanyasam* and *Panchamrutha Abhishekam*, and the Siva Linga *Abhisekham* accompanied by the last 1331 chants of Rudram (to bring the total chants done during the *yagna* to 14641), the *Rudra Homam* and the *Sai Gayathri Homam*. The *ritviks* were very energetic and enthusiastic, eager to continue and bring the *yagnam* to a successful conclusion.

Similar to the first day, on this concluding day also “Uttaranga Godanam” – a cow and a calf were donated to a Brahmin.

It was close to 8:15 in the morning, when the *Rudra Homam* was also completed after the completion of the *Rudra Parayana*.

Then “Maha Poorna Ahuti” was started by and performed in the presence of Swami. A beaming Swami sat Himself between the Sai Easwara lingam and the main *homa kundam* and watched the proceedings keenly. The Head priest then did “Vasodhara” Homa duly uttering the requisite Vedic mantras. In this ritual cow *ghee* is poured in a continuous stream into the main *homa kundam* through a special silver spoon, and all the while the priests utter the Vedic mantras. The “spoon” was quite big and had to be supported with a log wooden peg.

More offerings followed. The head priest offered a bowl that had in it the *Navadhanyas* (9 types of grains) and also the *Navaratnas* (9 types of precious stones). Swami took fistfuls of them and cast them into the fire pit. Then He took a hemispherical *Copra* (dried coconut) that had been filled with turmeric and then another one filled with *kumkum* and cast both of them into the fire. Swami then asked for the offering that He had personally prepared! A big bundle tied in an ornate green silk sari was brought on a platter. Swami blessed it and the head priest offered it to the fire.

Then the 160 *kalasas* that had been worshipped all these days were opened and the water available in all the *kalasas*, that had attained “Amruthatwa” (nectarine properties) due to the vedic chants, were poured on the Sai Easwara *linga* after the water was blessed by Swami Himself. Then this holy water after the *abhisekham* was collected in a large silver vessel and Swami took a “Dharbha kunchu” (a bundle of *kusa* grass) and went around for the 'proksana' or the sprinkling of the holy water on the devotees.

He took a large round, going from the primary school children in front of the veranda up to the entrance to Sai Kulwant Hall from the ladies side, crossed the entire Sai Kulwant Hall and then went all the way to the East Prashanti entrance before coming back to the veranda. He was continuously sprinkling and such is His love that when His right hand got tired, He switched to the left hand as He did not want to disappoint anyone.

And thus the *yagnam* concluded. Swami asked the priests to chant the Rudram one last time and as the priests were chanting slowly everyone offered their own *abhisekham* – their eyes brimming with tears and washing away the accumulated dirt of *samsara* from their soul.

With the sprinkling of this *amrita*, the divine blessing for the welfare of the world is attained. With this *Kumbha Abhishekam* and *Maha Poornahuti*, Swami confers His divine blessings for the welfare of the worlds.

By chanting *Shanti, Shanti, Shanti* three times, the three worlds, *Svarga, Marthya, Paataala*, and total of 14 worlds obtain the blessings of peace and prosperity. Universal peace and prosperity result from the completion of the *Athi Rudra Yaaga*.

With the chanting of the Vedas, in accordance with the Shastras, and accompanied by auspicious music, *Mahaa Mangala Aarathi* was performed to Bhagavan Sri Sri Sri Sathya Sai Baba, a great blessing conferred by Bhagavan on the devotees.

So gaining merit by this act of participation in this great *yagnam*, let us all reach the haven of the feet of Lord , “the Lord S who wears on His flower-decked matted locks the Adambu and Thumbai flowers, a freshly waxing moon and the Kondrai flowers and who bears aloft a victorious flag bearing the emblem of a bull”.

The Daily Functions After The Completion Of The Day’s Prayers

Every day, after the afternoon’s rituals were over, the entire Sai Kulwant Hall would be filled with the silence of the sacred sounds heard throughout the day. The priests would also finish up their rituals and put more wood in the fire *kundams* and then come and sit in front of the veranda to have the glorious *darshan* of Lord Rudra.

Next Sri Vinay Kumar would approach Swami and appraise him of the eminent person who would speak that day. Swami would bless the speaker or speakers and after they finished, He would stand and then give His divine discourse. On some days, after the scheduled speakers had finished, Swami sometimes called an elder or a student to speak extemporaneously and they did such a magnificent job that most people did not realize that they were speaking without prior intimation.

And then it was spiritual entertainment at its very best with devotional concerts that had the crowd in raptures. Everyone who attended the *yagna* then went home, as if transported on a cloud, slept the sleep of the pure and the innocent and came back again early in the morning with eager anticipation for the next day's *yagnam* ceremonies.

On the evening of the 10th the young boy named Karthick (from Chennai) sang devotional songs in a melodious voice that had the crowd listening in pin drop silence at his precocious talent. Swami after the end of his brief concert called the young man and materialised a chain for him. After this, it was the turn of another talented 8 year old youngster from Bangalore who enthralled everyone with the tunes from his flute.

On the evening of the 11th, a renowned singer Sri O. S. Arun Kumar gave a vocal concert. A highly acclaimed singer, he has been the recipient of several awards - "Sangeetha Kalaimani" and "Brahma Gana Samrat". Sri Arun started with a Ganesha prayer and the song - *Gayiye Ganapathi Jaga Vandana*. He then sang the Shiva Panchakshari Mantram – *Om Namah Sivayya*. With wonderful variations of this 5 syllabled *mantra* that richly reflected the wide range and timbre of his mellifluous voice, he held the audience in rapture. Sri Arun then sang some Sai *bhajans* and concluded with *Jagata Udharana Parthiviharana*, to which the entire audience sang along with the chorus line "Jai Sai Ram, Jai Sai Ram". Sri Arun was accompanied by Sri Ambika Prasad on the violin, Sri Ganapathy and Sri Kiran on the *tabla*, Sri Freddy on the percussion.

While Sri Arun was singing, Swami called for a singer from the students' *bhajan* group. He spoke to him and sent word for a couple of other singers and instructed them to get ready with some songs. After Sri Arun had finished, the students took centre stage and Sri Aswath Narayan held the hall spellbound with his impressive "Shivasankari Shivanandalahari". Guru Prasad then sang the song, "Om Namah Sivaya", followed by the Telugu song "Deva Namu Devaa" sung by Sri Om Prasad. Three more songs were sung that day – "Aanandam tava darshanam", "Challa gaalilo" and "Yeaho vittale" to the absolute delight of the audience, before *arathi* was taken, quite late at around 7:00 PM, to signal the end of the day.

On the evening of the 13th after speeches by Sri Dr. Gururaj Karjagi, an eminent educationist and Sri V.Srinivasan, the All-India president of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organizations, Swami gave His Divine Discourse. Swami then called all the music college students to the stage and talked to them briefly. And as per His command, next there was a music programme by the students of the Institute and the Music College.

Sri Omprasad started with "Ye poorva Janma phalamo" and also "Neelkandara devaa"; Sri Aswath Narayan sang "Dinakara Subhakara" followed by Guru Prasad with "Saamagaana lolane". The Hindustani Music Boys of the Music College Sri Abhinav Sitoke and Sri Rahul Sharma then sang the songs "Mere to Giridhar Gopal" and "Payoji Maine Ram Rathan Dhan". Kaustubh Pare then sang the last song of the evening "Pyaaare

darshan dijo aaj”. These vocalists were accompanied on the flute by Sri Ravi Teja, on the harmonium by Sri Sanket Modi, with Sri Sailesh Srivastava on the keyboard and Ratnakar, Shivakumar and Abhisekh Acharya on the *tabla*. At the end of the concert, Swami talked with all the students and gave them valuable advice on how each of them could improve. The Lord who gave the world the Bhagavad Gita on the battle field was now correcting these students individually in the full gaze of the spill-over holiday crowd that had come from all over the world to witness the holy and historic *maha yagnam*!

After the usual speeches on the 14th evening, (this time by Prof. M. S. Ramaswamy, the Founder-Director of Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore followed by Swami’s divine discourse), Swami graciously allowed Sri Vaidhyathan of Coimbatore, to render devotional songs in traditional Tamil folk style. Singing in a simple but very sweet and appealing manner that tugged at the heart-strings of all the devotees, Sri Vaidyanathan sang a number of songs that included “Raja Ganapathi”, “Damaru Damaru Dwani”, “Tha Thai Endraduvar”, “Omkaranath Kedaranath”, “Aavinankudi Orathisai”, “Velai Vananguvade” and “Charanamule Namidai”.

On the occasion of Independence Day, on Aug 15th evening, we had a concert by the Khan brothers on the *sitar*. They were the sons of Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, and the grandsons of the legendary Ustad Rehmat Khan. The concert was a mixture of instrumental and vocal music. The 4 Khan brothers – Hamid Khan, Rafique Khan, Shafique Khan, and Mohsin Khan along with Ankush Nayak formed the quintet on the *sitar*. They were accompanied by Sri Rajendra Nakod on the *tabla* with vocal support being provided by Sri Narendra L. Nayak. On the *sitar* they first started with *raag* Kirwane. They next played the Meera *bhajan* “Payoji Maine Ram Rathan Dhan Payo” in *raag* Yaman. In honour of the Indian Independence Day, they next played the patriotic song “Sara Jahan Se Acha”. Next was a vocal and instrumental combo on the *panchakshari mantra* “Om Namoh Shivaya”. They ended their concert with the Meera *bhajan* “Rama Nama Rasa Pijiye”. At the end of their concert, Swami got up and going over to where the artistes were sitting personally gave clothes to each one of them. After distributing His gifts of Love, Swami graciously posed for group photos with all of the artistes.

Last month the SSSIHL boys had expressed their feeling in dance form set to melodious music. Swami wanted them to do an offering again on the occasion of the *yagnam* and so the boys too performed beautifully again during the *yagna*. The tears of their soul, the prayers of their heart, and the droplets of their brow all these were offered in the effulgence of His smile. They offered a dance programme to His supreme Love, a programme entitled “Natraj Natya Vallari”. Swami had earlier given instructions on how he would like the costumes to look and even inspected them on Aug 13th while they were being prepared. Again on the morning of August 15th, he called the leader of the “dance boys” and blessed that they perform the dance in the afternoon. After the concert by the *sitar* quintet, the stage was set for the dance programme.

The boys presented these dance forms not only as an offering to their beloved Lord but also as a outward expression of their innermost feelings and

reverence towards Him and their gratitude for all that He has taught them. So each dance was preceded by a small commentary in Telugu and in English, followed by the dance set to a song specially chosen for the lyrics and the *bhava* it conveys. A total of 8 dances were performed by the boys that day. The first dance, by 8 boys, glorified His name as a providing a path to their feet, a light for their eyes and that which tenders the wounds of their heart, in their dance form set to the song “Rama Rama Kodanda Rama (x3), Ento Ruchira”. Continuing with the same theme in the next dance, again by 8 boys, and set to the song, “Chandana Chanchita, Nila Kalevasa, Pita Vasan Vana Mauli”, to express their feeling that when we mortals lie worn at Your feet, lift us Lord and reclaim this flute of Yours, forever Yours, to play again. The third dance to the song “Adivo Adladio, Sri Hari Vasamu, Padivela Seshula, Padagala Mayamu” expressed that though language might recreate the existence, it cannot confer the experience. The next dance (set to the song “Appulevi Sansara Maina Maaku Chaalu, Tappuleni Jetmokkaaina Chalu”) extolled the virtues of truth. They said, “Sweat and toil may bring few morsels, but they fortify the endurance of the mind and the strength of the soul. Steal and plunder and raise a mansion but you will lay your dead soul as its foundation”.

The 5th dance done by two boys celebrated the *Yakshagana* (a folkdance) set to the song “Sri Raghunanada Janaki Jeevana, Rama Rama Rama Sai”. Just as the *Yakshagana* magnificently captures the folklore in skilful steps, and as the dancer dissolves his identity in the dance, the grace of *Yakshagana* emerges to embrace and adorn the Lord, was the feeling that these 2 boys conveyed. The sixth dance (by 13 boys) choreographed to an instrumental number (with no voice) celebrated the rhythm, harmony, unity, and the joy of the Voice of Silence. The seventh dance set to the popular bhajan “Bho Shambho Shiva Shambho Svayambho” expressed this world as a perfect mirror where Lord Shiva dances in divine ecstasy. And the last and final song for the day was the much expected *Shiva tandava* dance performed by the leader of the dance group to an instrumental song.

On August 16, after speeches by Sri Nityanand Saraswathi from the Ramakrishna Mission in Bangalore and Sri Krishnan Bhagwat, a student pursuing his medical studies, Swami gave His divine discourse. Suddenly in the middle of His divine discourse, Swami materialised a crystal Siva *lingam* and calling the head priest presented it to him. Clearly the Lord was very pleased at the dedication and devotion with which Sri B.S. Nanjunda Dixit and his team of *ritviks* (priests) had conducted the entire *yagnam* proceedings so far.

But clearly the Lord was not pleased with merely making a presentation only to the leader. The very next day, on August 17th, we experienced in full the limitless love of the munificent Lord. While Sri Vinay Kumar called the names of the 135 *ritviks*, He distributed to each and every one of them beautiful wristwatches as a small token of His immeasurable love and appreciation of their efforts. He blessed all of them in His own unique way – a nod here, a smile there, or His hand raised in blessing and everyone of the priests wore a smile that was worth a million dollars. All of them came, first prostrated at His

lotus feet to obtain His blessings and then graciously accepted the gift that He lovingly proffered to them. Their eyes locked His and in that brief moment they all knew that they had obtained the fruit of their *yagna*! And the Lord knows all. He then enquired from the Head priest if all the priests had obtained their watches and after coming to know that a couple of priests were not there, he handed their watches to the Head-priest to be given to them.

But the giving was still not over. Calling all the dance boys who had performed so well on August 15th, he personally gave all of them watches and then finally, He also gave watches to all the vedam boys of the High School and College who had chanted along with the priests all these days.

And this was still not all. On the morning of the 18th, Swami asked the Head-Priest how many of them had families. When he replied, "Thirteen, Swami", immediately Swami had 13 gorgeous silk sarees brought and personally distributed them to all the married priests.

After all this distribution, there was an entertaining musical concert by the singer sisters from Chennai, Ms Ranjani and Ms Gayathri. Starting with *Gan Ganapathe*, they then sang the Meera *bhajan Payoji Maine*, followed by the songs *Eppo varuvaro* and *Shankara Shree*. The sisters were accompanied on the violin by Kum Charumathi Raghuraman and on the *mridangam* by Sri Neyveli Skanda Subramaniam. Swami blessed the artistes with sarees.

On August 19th, we had a fitting finale to the music programme for the entire *yagnam* - again a blend of instrumental and vocal music. On the flute (and vocal) was Sri K.L. Sreeram, on the *tabla* (and the mouth organ) was Sri N. Sundar, on the violin was Sri Embar Kannan, on the *ghatam* and providing vocal also was Sri Karthick, on the *kanjira* was Sri Sethuraman and on the *mridangam* was Sri Poongilam Subramaniam. They sang many heart rending songs including "Ratipatipriya", "Sambasadasiva", "Sallabham", "Payoji Maine", "Strotasmii", and "Patanjali".

The *yagnam* proceedings made for a long day, starting at 5 AM and going on until 11 AM and everyone would reassemble for the *yagnam* when it started again at 2 PM and went on till 6:00 or 6:30 PM. In spite of these major physical inconveniences, everyone was in awe at being present for this magnificent and holy ceremony and not one single complaint was heard!

The *yagnam* also had a mesmerising effect on people. We would like to end this report on the *yagnam* by quoting the personal account of Mr. John Behner, a devotee from El Salvador, who told Heart2Heart, "*This experience has two levels of importance for me. The first is the opportunity to be focussed on God almost constantly for 24 hours a day with the help of the darshans of Swami, the mantras which are just imbibed with joy though without understanding the words (being a Westerner) and the holy atmosphere in Sai Kulwant Hall. I have not missed even a minute of the yagna. The second level for me is praying for world peace. In this regard, I have observed a water and fruit juice fast during the 12 days praying that the poor people uprooted from their homes in Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan will have enough food*".

And finally it was over. And on the last day, right after the *Purna Ahuti* ceremony, in the closing ceremony a profound announcement was made. Sri V.Srinivasan, the All-India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations announced that the next *Ati Rudra Maha Yagnam* would be held in Chennai after Pongal (January 14th, 2007). Sri Raman, speaking next, announced that this time it would be the turn of the youth of Tamil Nadu to organize this magnificent and beneficial event. He also invited the Head Priest to officiate again at this *Yagnam* also. We at Heart2Heart congratulate the youth of Tamil Nadu for providing the devotees another opportunity to participate in such a beneficial event and wish them all success for their small part in Swami's glorious mission.

[Heart to Heart would like to thank Vidvaan Sri Nidumamidi Srikantha Rao of Tirupathi for providing us the details of the rituals used in the *yagnam*, that contributed immensely in the writing of this report]

AUG 16th: KRISHNA JANMASTAMI CELEBRATIONS IN SAI KULWANT HALL

August 16th, the 7th day of the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam also happened to coincide with Sri Krishna Janmashtami celebrations, or the celebrations to mark the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna. It was a blessing to see two ceremonies – one marking the glory of Lord Shiva through the recitation of the *Namakam* and the other celebrating the anniversary of another Poorna Avatar - Lord Krishna – being celebrated at the same time in Sai Kulwant Hall.

Traditionally on this day, Swami's students lead a procession of His cows from the Gokulam and other animals like deer and of course, Swami's pet elephant in a procession to Sai Kulwant hall and Swami feeds all of them with bananas and apples.

The *yagnam* that day had commenced early, at 5 AM and was in full swing with the chanting of the Rudram after the initial chanting of the *Arunaparayanam*, *Mahanyasam*, *Panchamrutha Abhishekam*, when this procession arrived at the gates of Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami Himself went through the *Yagya Shala*, the only time He crossed the entire *mantap* for the duration of the Yagnam, to the enclosure right at the entrance, where the animals were waiting to be blessed by Him. He first fed His pet elephant Sai Geetha with apples and she pushed them down one by one. Next an assortment of calves and cows were brought to be blessed by Him and He watched as they were fed bananas and apples by the students and seva dal in attendance. He personally fed a 5 day old calf with a bottle of milk and a very skittish fawn also briefly received His attention, but it was too scared by the crush of people to eat the apple slice. The students sang Krishna *bhajans* while Swami was thus occupied and the whole scene was a feast for the eyes and the ears when the Rudram and the Krishna bhajans blended with the scene of the chanting *ritviks* and the expectant crowd of devotees (with the smoke emanating from the *homa kundam* rending a surreal atmosphere), as

the Poorna Avatar of this age fed the animals that were a favourite of the Lord in His previous *avatara* as a cowherd boy!

After this brief function, done without detracting attention from the *yagnam*, Swami crossed the *Yagna Shala* again and settled down in His chair on the dais. Then two High School boys came dressed as the child Krishna and His elder brother Balarama, bringing with them a pot full of butter packets to be blessed by the Lord. Swami spent quite a few minutes talking to both of them. Then two boys came holding white doves to be released by the Lord to mark the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna. On the way back home Swami very graciously cut a cake with a solitary candle (to mark the ageless age of the *Avatar*) before returning to Yajur Mandiram.

AUG 26th: SWAMI VISITS THE INSTITUTE

On August 26th, Swami paid a visit to the Institute, early in the morning at 7:45 AM, where boys had arranged a couple of ceremonies for Him. First He inaugurated the Multi-Media centre of the Institute. This is a state of the art facility with three cameras and seven projectors providing a video link between the Puttaparthi and Brindavan campuses. Thus expert faculty can simultaneously address students in both campuses (without any echo as in older equipment). This provides a lot of advantages as guest faculty can be shared and external speakers can get wide coverage with minimal cost. As Sri Gopal Srinivasan (of TVS Electronics) whose team installed these facilities for the Institute said in his speech, "*People come from all over to teach in this University, now everyone in other parts of the world can listen to what they have to say*". Swami was given a demonstration of how the system works and links up both the campuses.

After inaugurating the multi media centre, Swami then went to inaugurate the new building that will house the Economics Department. This building was ready a few months ago, but was waiting to be inaugurated by the Chancellor Himself. And on this day, the last day of an All India Conference (on "Economic Growth with Equity and Stability") that was being hosted by the Economics Department, Swami came to their building and in the midst of the boys of the department and all its well wishers; He cut the red ribbon to open the building. He was also taken for a tour of the ground floor of the building before He went back to Sai Kulwant Hall in time for the start of the *bhajans* there.

AUG 27th: GANESHA CHATURTHI CELEBRATIONS

This day marks the birth anniversary of Lord Ganesha. After Swami arrived in Sai Kulwant Hall, He first went around to the side of the primary school children and blessed the Ganeshas and other handicrafts that they had made. Then after a few minutes, He came and took His place on the dais. The Institute boys, dressed in a red dhoti and white *angavastram* (upper cloth), went up to Him respectfully and had their brightly painted clay Ganesha idols blessed. These idols will be worshipped for a few days, and then brought in a ceremonial procession to Sai Kulwant Hall, and later immersed in a pool of

water. These small sized Ganesha are made of clay specifically for the short duration of this festival, and are made so that they would disintegrate on immersion in water on the conclusion of the requisite period of worship.

After the birthday boys were also blessed, Swami gave His permission for the boys to sing Ganesha *stotrams*. And they sang eight group songs, songs of love and longing, paeans of praise for Lord Ganesha. Starting with “Ek Dant Mahakaya”, “Vataapi Ganapathim”, “Premamya Shirsa Devam” and “Prabhu Ganapathe”, they went on to “Shri Ganesha Shivum Kumara”, “Vinayagane Vinayie”, “Gaieye Ganapathim Jaga Vandana”, and the last one was “Jai Ganapati Vandana Gananayak”.

And with these sounds of praise to Lord Ganesha we also close this month’s chronicles. What an unforgettable and sacred month. Not only was a grand *yagnam* conducted for the blue-throated one, but we also celebrated the birth anniversaries of the blue-hued one and the elephant-faced one. Truly a rare occurrence when these three Lords of the spiritual hierarchy are all honoured in the short space of 18 days. We are sure that you will all agree with these sentiments.

So till next month, Sai Ram!

-Heart2Heart Team

SWAMI AND ME

LIFE IS A CELEBRATION

By Professor Anil Kumar

This is the transcription of the talk given by Prof. Anil Kumar in the USA.

With Pranaams at the Lotus Feet of our most Beloved Bhagavan. Revered Elders, Brothers and Sisters.

A Dream Realized

I thank all of you for having given me this opportunity to be in your midst this afternoon. To be very honest enough, I am not able to believe that I am here. Is this a dream or a reality? Perhaps this very much certifies what Bhagavan says: "Life is a dream; realize it!" This is the dream, realized!

Because I was not quite sure that I would get His permission to come over here. There have been repeated calls and demands from my children asking me to be here some way or another. **With great reluctance and postponements repeatedly, somehow I ventured to broach the matter with Bhagavan: "Swami, may I go to U.S as my children want me there?" You will be surprised to hear His first question: "When are you going to return?" I said: "Swami, I must make my travel arrangements; I don't know when I would be back."**

Somehow that day passed; and the next day He asked: "When are you going?" I said: "I must get my reservations Swami; I am waiting for a call from my travel agent." He asked: "When are you coming back?" Therefore you can imagine the situation - I am not able to believe that I am here this afternoon with you! But anyway, I thank Bhagavan for making this trip possible and to have the privilege of your company for some time.

Distance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

Because, I for one, would believe that distance lends enchantment. We feel Bhagavan, we experience Bhagavan, far from the physical proximity. Perhaps the very idea of the Avatar Incarnation as per the scripture is this: to take every seeker from the Form to the Formless state; from the state of attributes, to an attribute-less state; from the finite to the Infinite.

In that context, we can certainly understand that we feel more. Because someone asked me there in San Antonio: "Anil Kumar, how do you feel now being away from Swami?" I said: "As it is with the case of any family; we miss our children when they are far from us and they miss us when we are far away."

So also God; it is also true with Swami. We feel His presence more and more away from Him. But near Him, there's every chance of being deluded by the Form of being carried away that He is just a human Form with all the attributes; but to experience His Divinity, one has to be away from Him.

Exile from Shirdi

I happily recall at this moment an incident from the biography: "Shirdi Bhagavan". Shirdi Bhagavan all of a sudden asked one of His devotees to go away from Shirdi and not to return for one year to come. What a punishment it is! What penal code, what law He applied no one knows.

So this grand old man was asked to go away from Shirdi - not to come back for a year. He cried and cried, and ultimately left the place in obedience to the commandment of the Lord. And towards the end of one year of exile, with a day left more to return, he was sitting in a garden and he was crying: "Oh Lord! What a punishment you have given me? This is not the way you should treat your devotees! Is this the reward I get Bhagavan? How do you expect me to be separated from You?"

Suddenly he finds a hand on his shoulder. He feels that gentle touch. He turns behind and to his utter surprise he finds a gigantic personality, 6 feet tall, wearing white dress, with a beautiful, soft expression and gentle and tender in His touch.

Well he couldn't identify that God - Bhagavan has come to that garden far away from Shirdi! **Then Bhagavan started talking to him like this: "Look here My son; you know why I asked you to get out from here? You fool! You have been thinking that this physical Form is the Divinity! You just think that Bhagavan is present in Shirdi only! But I want you to experience Me everywhere! I want you to feel Me everywhere. That I am not limited to this place alone. That Baba is not limited to this physical frame."** That was the message of Shirdi Bhagavan in those days.

Experience the Closeness

Those of you who are familiar with this episode will surely be convinced of the fact that whether we are near or far does not matter; because God is beyond time and space. God is not a person to be near. If anyone claims that he is near and close to Swami, please keep him away from you. The best service you can do to him is to admit him in a mental hospital. Because no one can be close to God - all are close to God. It is not any exclusive right of anybody; no, all are close to Him.

God is not a person to be near. God is not an object to be possessed. God is not a claim. The experience of God is not an achievement. Because some people say that: "I think I advanced spiritually." He advanced in age - not spiritually. Geriatric problem.

Spiritual Progress

So nobody can say that: "I advanced". What is spiritual advancement? To be very frank with you; spiritual advancement cannot be measured in terms of degrees or in terms of number of years that one spends in close proximity with God. **Spiritual advancement is the realization of the Supreme Self - which is uniform in everyone; from microcosm to macrocosm. The Self is very much the same in every one - that cosmic principle is very much the same in everyone. That is spiritual realization. Bhagavan says: "Do not try to analyze, it is time to Realize."**

We cannot go on experimenting, we cannot go on expressing. That which is given to expression by word is a limitation. Because 'mind cannot comprehend, words cannot express' says the Upanishad. So, spirituality is not an expression but it is an experience.

The Greatest Challenge

Life with Bhagavan is really challenging. If you credit me anything for having stayed there so long, I can only tell you; it is not an easy joke! So nice to hear about Him, so nice to experience His miracles. But to stay with Him and to work with close proximity is quite challenging!

Life is a challenge, meet it! Because it is quite challenging it does not mean that we should run away from the responsibility. Because it is challenging, it does not mean that we should find some excuse or other to avoid any assignments given to us from time to time. No! Life is a challenge; so we have to meet it!

I recall at this moment the year 1989 during our trip to Kodaikanal, when Bhagavan said, all of a sudden, "I appoint you as the principal of Brindavan campus of Shri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning at Bangalore." I was not physically or psychologically prepared. I was upset on hearing this news, because I had many responsibilities at home.

But Swami's remarks and commands are like a mathematics question paper - no choice. Choicelessness is Divinity. Choice and preference are different. **When there are two, you can prefer either of the two. When it is choiceless, not to question why, not to reason why, but to do and live; not die.**

So when He said: "I am appointing you as the principal there", I was so much upset. Thank god I was quite young at that time; nothing happened to my blood pressure. It was afternoon and I was having a nap and tossing on the bed. I thought 'I cannot run away from Kodaikanal at that moment though I really want to. I cannot jump at the opportunity because I know its implications, ramifications and the threats and the Divine risks and the spiritual danger involved over there.' So I had no choice; I just kept quiet.

That evening Bhagavan gave a beautiful message. He wanted me to translate. In the course of the talk, He made a reference to a particular situation from the epic Ramayana. Lord Rama started asking everybody: "Is anyone here prepared to go over to Lanka crossing this vast ocean in search of Sita?"

Nobody had the guts to raise their hands. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Somehow Rama started asking one after another: "Are you ready to go?" One Nala said: "Swami, I am quite young. I am not sure that I will be able to do that." Next: Neela. "Are you prepared to do it?" "I am not sure of my strength but anyway, I will be able to fulfill one fourth of the task assigned to me." "Jambhavan, are you ready?" "Yes Swami, but I am a retired man working on super annuation. I am physically indisposed. I am not sure that I will be able to cross this?" Finally the good Lord came to Hanuman. And Lord Rama said: "Hanuman, are you ready to jump over this ocean and go over there in search of Mother Sita?" Hanuman said: "Yes my Lord, I'll do that."

Then Rama started putting some questions. First question: "Did you have previous experience?" "No Swami." Two: "Did you see Sita before – because you have to identify Sita there" "No Swami." "So you don't know the route! You don't know her! You have never seen her before! And you are prepared to undertake to travel all the way and find out if they are there. Why did you do that? Why do you speak like that?"

Hanuman replied like this: "Oh Lord! when You have assigned me some duty; when You want me to do one thing, I am more than sure that You will give me the needed skills, ability, talents, energy, courage and all that is required to be successful in the Divine task assigned to me."

Saying this, when I completed my translation, Bhagavan in His usual style, looked at me and gave a mischievous smile. The whole episode had to be said only in support of my appointment there; because I was in a fix at that moment of time.

So my friends, life is a challenge; meet it. Life there or elsewhere anywhere all over the world is a challenge. People are not prepared to accept that challenge. That's the reason why we find people being upset at times. I know one elderly gentleman to whom Swami asked "You be the district president of the Sathya Sai Seva Organization." He said: "Swami I am incompetent." Swami said: "I know your competence, keep quiet! I know your competence." So one has to be prepared.

Life is a challenge; meet it! This challenge, the climax in this pursuit of meeting the life as a challenge, goes to the point of realizing Divinity within - that is the challenge, a spiritual challenge. Bhagavan said so long as you think God is outside you, you have not understood Him; you have not experienced Him. The real challenge is really met with when once you experience Him within. The realization of Divinity within - that is the spiritual challenge. Be that any religion, be that any sect, be that any spiritual path given to anybody, any Guru for that matter will

certainly want you to realize the Divinity within - that is the biggest challenge!

Swami's Challenge to His Students

I can also give you one illustration. All students usually sit there in front of the mandir there; and Swami, after completing His usual interviews to selected groups of devotees, walked out and slowly came to the students and said to one boy **"You move from one room to another room like a cat and a rat; you are not supposed to move like that! How do you study like that?"** That boy never knew how Swami could know that he was moving from room to room!

He went to another boy and said: "You are weak in mathematics; you're not doing well in mathematics - you should study properly!" He pointed to another boy and said: **"You always sleep; you don't read properly - you sleep in classes too, I know!"**

Then He said: "I know boys. Know that I know; because where am I? I am in you!" That is what Bhagavan said: **"I am in you!"** That is the challenge! Life is a challenge! The spiritual challenge; to know that God is in you, with you, above you, below you, around you! That has to come into our experience. That is really fantastic.

Late for a Letter

I can also give you one more example. Of course this being a small family, I don't think anyone would have any reservations or secrecy here. Again I take you back to Kodai Kanal days. I was asked to follow students to be taken to the lake every morning, and bring them back to Sai Shruti. It so happened I was late; all the boys had arrived already. And Swami started joking and the boys were laughing. By the time I reached there, I heard loud laughter! Then I thought: "Entertainment must be waiting at my cost!"

Then I went slowly; and Swami said: "Why are you late?" I said: "Swami: I am late!" "I know you are late, I am asking you why are you late? Do you understand my question?" The answer was too personal; I couldn't respond immediately. I thought: "Silence is golden." Then immediately Bhagavan said: "I know you had been to the post office!" Everybody laughed. He looked at the boys and said: "Hey boys! Did I not tell you that your teacher went to the post office?" "Yes, Swami."

Then the cat is out of the bag! I had to say: "Yes Swami, I had been to the post office." "What did you do there?" What do you do in post office? You will not have a breakfast or a dinner? What do you do there? Either you write a letter or post a letter. "Swami, I wrote a letter." "Hmmm...to whom did you write?" That's the next question - searching questions! And He looked at boys: "Boys didn't I tell you that he was writing some letter in the post office?"

“Yes Swami, I wrote a letter”. To whom did you write I say?” “Swami, I wrote a letter to my wife.” “Aha! To your wife? Where is she? Is she in your pocket? What did you write?” “Swami what’s there to write after all? All the miracles that we experience - the Divine conversations.” “Then you would have asked one of your boys to post that letter. Why should you stay there?” “Swami, it’s too delicate a matter, so I wanted to post it.” **“No ! You thought that our students will censor your letter or would go through the letter? No. My boys do not read others letters, understand. So you don’t need to suspect them.”** That is what Bhagavan said.

Be that as it may, it is a revealing experience that Bhagavan knows pretty well what I did there; I was actually very shocked! This is the challenge to feel. Because the silent conversations, the softest whispers go to His notice; and suddenly He starts telling you everything.

The Embodiment of Generosity

I recall another incident. It so happened that I was traveling with Swami in His car from Puttaparthi to Brindavan. Swami stopped His car at several places and started picking out something from His wallet, giving some currency notes to everybody. I didn’t understand this. But I didn’t have the guts to ask why this is happening. But later softly, finding out the mood of Bhagavan, and the ambience around, I picked up a little courage and said: “Swami, what is it that You are doing?”

He said: “They are all poor people. They don’t even have food to eat, they have to go begging everywhere. The whole family depends on them. So I gave Rs. 500 notes to everybody.” Rs. 500 notes! Costly begging indeed! I said: “Rs. 500 notes Swami!” He said: “It doesn’t matter – I just give it to them!”

And those people were illiterate, rural, and far from the frontiers of any sophistication or civilization - ill dressed. And they didn’t even thank Swami - they simply took the money and left! They didn’t know who He was either.

Then I said: “Swami, they don’t seem to know You.” What I meant was ‘they didn’t thank You’. He said: “They don’t know Me, but I know everyone! I know all!” Then He looked straight into my eye and said: “I don’t expect any thanks from anybody.”

Because love is unconditional - no stipulation, no regulation. Love to love, heart to heart is the hallmark of the present Incarnation - Bhagavan Shri Sathya Sai Baba.

When water was supplied to almost around 700 villages in that Ananthapur District of Andhra Pradesh in India; village heads from these 700 villages came to Prashanti Nilayam to thank Swami. They all came there – heads of villages. They all sat there and Bhagavan was granting them Darshan that morning. When Swami came close to them, they all said in one voice: “Swami, thank you for all your help. You gave us drinking water. We were

denied of this for several years in the past. Thank you for your concern and love.”

Do you know Bhagavan’s answer? Please mark this. He said: “I should thank you for giving Me this opportunity to serve you.” - whereas we expect thanks for every silly thing!

There are also some people who donate some ceiling fans. The ceiling fan has three wings. They will have some name written on the three wings of the ceiling fan. And the fan rotates at high speed - nobody can read their name. So they pray for an electricity breakdown so that anyone can read their names!

Publicity is not spirituality. Vanity is not spirituality. Propaganda, aggrandizement, self praise, self-esteem have no place in the realms of spirituality! Self-effacement, humility, obedience, reverence, prayerfulness - they are the qualities of a true devotee. Life is Love, share it! Because Bhagavan is the very Personification, the very Embodiment, the very Metaphor of Love. He shares that Love with everybody.

The Game to Play

Life is a game, play it. Game and play, from the point of English may be akin to each other; they may sound synonyms. I am not a student of English literature, yet I am more than sure that a game and play are not synonymous; certainly not!

A game has certain restrictions and regulations. At the end of the game, one may win or lose. The game is limited to a time. Game may give you a sort of feeling of pride, achievement, accomplishment or may frustrate you if you lose it. But play is fun and frolic. Play is full of fun and enjoyment and laughter. Life is a game, play it. Life is ecstasy. Life is a dance. Life is a celebration.

Life is laughter. Swami smiles and smiles but His smile is of a different nature. Of course I can even dramatize it; but I don’t venture to do it. Suppose there are two devotees here. He’s very serious with this devotee; He wants to teach him a lesson. Well, He goes on reprimanding him: “You are a fool; you are not doing your duty properly!” This devotee, immediately He smiles: “Hello, how are you? How’s your wife? When did you come?” Simultaneous, parallel talk at the same time; impossible for anyone to do it! He is serious with this man, on one hand; full of fun with this man on the other at the same time!

Because life is just a play - God’s play! The whole creation is God’s play. Only humans are involved in a game. That of humans is a game; that of the Divine is a play! A child’s play. A child while playing along the seashore, will gather all the sand, make a small hut, smiles and jumps; and immediately kicks it off; and smiles and jumps. Why then? Why now? No one knows. That’s it. Life is a game; play it! That game being dual, make it non-dual - like a play.

Thus speaks Bhagavan; thus advises Bhagavan everyone to view life in the true perspective. In fact, He made the whole definition of spirituality into a single sentence: "Spirituality is a travel from I to We."

There are three challenging terms. The first term is dependence. All children depend on their parents. Child expects to be lifted by mother; child expects to be escorted by father - dependence. The next stage is that of adolescence. 'I don't depend on you' - independence. So, from dependence to independence. But the greatest is interdependence. Interdependence is the highest state; which is the path of spirituality – interdependence.

The Inner Experience

I can also tell you, the true spiritual experience one will have when one starts listening to the inner voice. Many people start questioning, 'What is inner voice?' We don't have time to listen to the inner voice because of outer noise. Unless outer noise is silenced, the inner voice cannot be heard. **"It is only in the depths of silence; the voice of God can be heard"** declared Bhagavan.

When once we observe silence, when once we turn inward, when once the mind goes to a state of total withdrawal of thought - the thoughtless state of the mind - then one will have the chance to listen to the inner voice. That inner voice is His Master's voice. That inner voice is of the conscience one has to adhere and follow.

That is the reason why Bhagavan says: "You are not the body; don't follow the body. You are not the mind; don't follow the mind. Follow your conscience. The conscience is the inner voice that could be experienced only in a state of silence."

What is silence? Silence is not refraining from talk. Silence means silencing our thoughts. The stillness of the human mind. Stillness. One goes into the fathomless depths into the interior within - that is silence. Then one can experience God within.

Loneliness and Aloneless

Spiritual life is one of aloneness. Aloneness is different from loneliness. Loneliness is imposed. If I have a bitter tongue; if I cannot talk to you politely, if my talk is not sweet and soft, nobody would like to be near me. So I should lead my life in loneliness. If I am not helpful to anybody; if everybody suspects something harm or hurt from my side, nobody would dare to be near me - naturally I will be forced to get into that state of loneliness.

But aloneness is spiritual. Leave me alone! Let me reflect upon Him for sometime. Let me meditate. Let me pray for some time. Let me think of His Form, let me chant His name, let me sing His glory. Leave me alone! That is aloneness. It is for that reason most of the spiritual people would like to be left by themselves. Spirituality is the life of aloneness; not of loneliness.

I should also bring to your attention it is not one of friendship. We cannot make a kind of social contact in the name of a spiritual organization; no! If it is for social contacts and for personal development, for business prospects, it is a sacrilege to the very word religion. Because this spirituality, has nothing to do with friendship. But true spirituality is friendliness.

Friendliness is different form friendship. You can be a friend to one or two; you can be a friend to a group of people but you can be friendly with everybody. You can be friendly with humans, you can be friendly with animals; you can be friendly with flowers, birds and bees, nature, mountains and rocks. Friendliness is Divine; friendship is human and physical. So, if you are to be truly spiritual, let us cultivate this friendliness to be friendly with everybody; rather than crave for friendship. It is not merely being a lover; Bhagavan always says you can love one or two. But you can transform yourselves to Love itself.

The Real Meditation

There was one gentleman who was sitting in a corner. He was feeling so sad “How is it that Bhagavan is not talking to me in the recent years?” Because Swami used to talk to him every morning; but somehow for the last couple of years He was not talking to him. He was feeling so sad; he was about 90.

One fine morning, Swami came and stood in front of him and said: “You should not feel like that. These are the times to think of the moments when I spoke to you! These are the times to remind yourself to bring back to your memory, to recall those happy moments of our togetherness, of what all I said in those days, you have to think and recall.” That is meditation.

Mediation it is not sitting straight; because people say: “I meditate.” Some people say: “My husband meditates morning five to six.” What is that he meditates on? Nothing but awaiting the first cup of coffee; it is coffee meditation. You cannot say I mediate between five and six. Certainly not! How do you know it is six o’ clock, if you are in a state of meditation? How do you know that? Have you kept an alarm, or special instructions to your wife to wake you up?

Bhagavan says: “Life is meditation.” While at work or at home, while in dialogue or in conversation, or in prayer - one can think of God. As one thinks, he offers in dedication his whole work to please God: “Let it please You, oh Swami! All these things that are offered to You, let them be acceptable to You Bhagavan.” That is meditation.

Bhagavan gives a number of examples. As you start driving, as you sit in front of your steering wheel, if you close your eyes and think of God, that is meditation. Meditation is not a time bound program. Meditation is not a physical exercise because we find most interestingly some of the news papers coming up with advertisements: “Meditation in thirty days; fifty dollars.

Meditation in fifteen days; hundred dollars!” Fifteen days is costlier, you know! Instant meditation! Like instant coffee! Ridiculous! Think of the sages and saints that spent years and years in meditation; are they fools? Don't they know this instant method of fulfillment of meditation? Meditation is not like that. According to Bhagavan Shri Sathya Sai Baba, Life is meditation. Life is prayer. There is no prayer time; whenever you are reverential or surrender the fruits of your action to God; that is prayer.

What is Surrender

“Oh Swami, I shall not take credit for the success. Bhagavan, I am not going to be frustrated by my failure. If it is a success, you are to be credited. If it were to be a failure, perhaps you want to teach me a lesson. In both the ways, I am benefited; I am profited.” That is surrender. The moments of surrender, meaning - the readiness to accept whatever that comes in our way of life; that is surrender.

Many people ask: “What is surrender?” This surrender is not any particular process: “Oh Swami, I am ready; whatever happens, that is your gift, that is Your prasada; that is Your Will, I accept it.” That is surrender. Surrender is devotion, surrender is spirituality.

How to Celebrate Easwaramma Day

I also know full well that two days ahead of us we have the celebration of Easwaramma day, May 6th. From other point of view, it is Mother's day as well; that falls on May 11th. Bhagavan's concept of the mother, is quite unique. He says “The very Mother Earth we call this Motherland; no one would ever say Fatherland.” No; this is Motherland! One has to be grateful to this Motherland. Why? You live on earth; you are benefited by the crops, you're benefited by the metals and the grain available on this Planet Earth. So one has to be grateful to Bhū Mata – Mother Earth.

Second comes the Mother who gave us this physical body. She passes through all the trouble, pain and turmoil, bearing the child for nine long months. She takes care of the child; without any expectation - ready to even sacrifice her life for the future born child. That is Deha Mata; the physical Mother.

So, Bhū Mata, the Earth; Deha Mata, the physical Mother. If we don't have this body, there is no chance of doing good or bad; there is no scope to enjoy this creation. In fact, the scripture says all the angels in the ethereal form wait to be born as humans on earth. Human life is rarest of all; it's the noblest of all. It's the climax in the course of evolution. Naturally, having been given this physical body, one has to be grateful to the physical mother – Deha Mata.

And third, one has to be grateful to the cow; Go Mata. The cow is the Mother. In what sense? Some may say: “Sir, I am a beef eater; how can I consider it as mother? Why do you say that?” It is not that! The four legs of the cow stand for the four Vedas - the scripture. Cow represents the very principle of

sacrifice. Giving you the milk; nurturing your body. So one has to treat the cow as one's own mother.

Bhu Mata, Deha Mata, Go Mata. Then comes the next; the Veda Mata. The Holy Scriptures of any religion - it does not matter. It is the Scripture that tells you what you are; the purpose of life; the value, the gift of life. So one has to be grateful to the Veda Mata; the Scripture.

It is in this sense we observe and celebrate May 6th - Eashwaramma day, in one sense, Mothers' day; in other sense; it is also Children's day - where children will have to realize their duties and responsibilities towards their parents. Bhagavan always says about the college students whenever they say: "Swami, we want to serve You. Swami, we don't want to leave You. Swami, we want to be with You permanently. We don't want to leave this place."

Bhagavan being the Divine director knows our actions pretty well - how nicely we are acting; how dramatic we are. Suddenly He will say: "You fellow, you do not know how to serve your mother, how am I to believe that you are going to serve Me? You know your mother well, you know what your mother requires; you know how to make your mother happy. But you do not know what I need. You do not know how to make Me happy; but you want to serve Me; it is ridiculous!" That's what Bhagavan said. So the children should learn to serve the parents first and foremost. And secondly is reverence to one's own teacher.

My friends, life is not the process of becoming. Life is the realization of Being. Becoming and Being are different. I get my doctorate, I become a doctor. I get my Master's degree, I become a Master. Religion is not like that - it is one of Being. So this message of Bhagavan should help to take us to the true essence of our very Being, the very core of our life. Not struggling for becoming. I am extremely happy for having your rapt attention to my talk.

Aum Jai Sai Ram

-Heart2Heart Team

BE THE LOVE THAT YOU ARE

These questions followed the talks which Arthur and Poppy delivered at a meeting of Sathya Sai devotees in Ebell Club, Los Angeles, California on the 7th of Sep, 2003. Arthur and Poppy are from New Brisbane, Australia. They have been serving Swami for many years, since 1979. They have been to Israel, Russia and many other countries, spreading the Love and the message of Bhagavan. Arthur was a management consultant and served as chairman for the Sathya Sai Council of Australia. Swami also nominated him as a regional central coordinator. He was in charge of the Christmas program for many years and has given many talks at Christmas time in front of Swami.

Questions And Answers

How do I get close to Sai physically, like you?

That's one question I can't answer; because only Sai knows and only Sai knows why. But I will say this to you; don't separate yourself from God by seeing Him away from you. Know that which is the important aspect; the Formless God is within you already. Coming to understand that will bring great peace and great love.

Know who you are. Maybe one day, because of the role that you are playing, you might find yourself close to Sai, but I can't say that; but I would wish it for you that that's the place. But even greater, I would wish for you, that you realize that that which you are searching for, is you're very Self; and that is with you all the time - and that is the true nature of the Avatar; it is not different.

Shouldn't God intervene and stop the wars and the killing?

You see, while we focus only on this life, we can't understand the big play. I'll give you an example in a small way. Once a man was robbed outside a village somewhere in Puttaparthi. And the robbers blinded him so he couldn't identify them. And in the interview room, someone said: "Oh Swami! How terrible! The poor victim! Then Swami looked at him - because He knows everything - and He said: "The poor victim? The poor victim blinded many people in the past life!"

We must understand firstly, that the ledgers must be balanced. Every thing that we have done before must be balanced whether it is plus or minus. And it has to happen and all this must happen prior to the Golden Age coming into being. It must be that.

So we need to understand that all this is only happening on the sea of consciousness; that's all. At the truest level, when you know the truth, when you see yourself for who you are; you will understand that this is not happening; it is only this dream that we talk about. When someone asked an old saint about this, he said this is all happening in consciousness. "Why does

consciousness do this?" the man again asked, and the saint simply said: "Because, it is its nature to do so within the scheme of this big play."

That which is God, is total awareness, but totally unaware of itself; and so that it may experience and know itself, it has bought itself into movement. And all these forms, and the trees; even the trees themselves are Formless God within; because nothing can exist without that! The hardest thing is to get away from the programming that we have had.

In my early life, I was told that I wasn't worthy of God that I was a miserable sinner; and God was up here on a cloud somewhere, with a big stick waiting to punish me if I did something wrong. What a terrible thing to give to people! What a terrible program to sell! But of course the ones who were teaching this didn't know any different. They were only speaking on man's interpretation; that's all.

But Swami tells us something different. Yes of course, when I say this, please understand that even if we see it as a dream, please have love and compassion for those in the dream! If ever one gets to the point and says: "Well, it's only karma!" - Then we have just lost a lot of ground. While we are born into this play, we must have love and compassion for every role that's in the play and love everybody; it's like that.

Krishna said: "He is dear to Me who asks nothing of Me." Should we ask Swami for help with material things like job, wife, financial needs etc.?

There was a man that I knew some years back. He rang me up and was talking to me and telling me how bad it was in the world; as a matter of fact, he had even got Swami's picture on the wall and he was so down in despair. He said: "I am sick of it! I have been trying to get a job all this time and it's not happening!" It wasn't a time to tell him that that's the way it was in his life until a job would come up. And he said: "But you said everything will be alright in life; and I'm not happy with this!" Well, I said: "I will come down and talk to you."

And I went down and I said: "Look! You have really done everything you can; you can't do anymore now, can you?" And he said: "No! I have done everything; I have put ads in the newspaper; I have been to employment places, I cannot get an hour's work!" Well I said: Don't you think its time that you handed it over to God?" He said: "But I've got to get it to work!" I said: "I know! But when you know when you have done everything else that you can, then just hand it to God! Don't ask Him for anything; just say: 'Lord, I haven't got work. I have done all I can to get a job and it's not happening. So I must leave it to you and I will accept whatever comes.'" Eventually he said: "I don't do that!"

A week later, I got a phone call from him – just as stirred up as ever you see! I said: "I thought that you were going to hand it over to God?" He said: "I did! But He hasn't done anything yet!" I said: "No Joe! You didn't hand it over to

Him at all! You handed it after Him but you held on to the corner - just in case! And you haven't let go of it!"

So you see, what we need to do is to first put our problem in front of the Lord. Now, He might say He might fix it up quickly; or He might say: "This is not best for you at this time!" God knows best in every aspect of our lives. And if we let that go and leave it to Him, then you will be amazed what can happen in one's life. But while we are blocking that flow, we'll be frustrated.

So, if you are going to ask Swami, ask Him once. And then say: "Lord, let thy Will be done. I will accept Your Will." It's hard to say to someone - like the chap I was talking about - he was so frustrated in trying to pay off the house, and the money is down! It takes a lot of courage to say: "Lord! I'll leave it in Your hands." That is what we need to do. Ask God once for something; but don't nag after that.

Swami says: "All is reflection, reaction, resound. Isn't there a way to reflect only love and not see anything else - not see disease, or evil, etc?"

It's a very good question! As we look within and come to understand more and more, we understand firstly that everything is a planned consciousness. But these bodies have been born into this play. And therefore, we can't help but see the disease or that which is called evil; however, but not to dwell on it. See it for what it is as all a part of the Divine play; and it all relates to karma but as I said before, don't get to the point where you say it's all karma; so that we don't have to be compassionate! But understand that disease - all these things exist - within this play and that they are going to be there.

But the more you become loving of others and of all things, it is beautiful. So you see God in everything. God is within everything. Nothing exists that is not God or within God.

So what we try to do is not focus on the disease; not focus on what we see as evil in the world; see the Divine play for what it is; know that yes, one has to go through these things - into each life a little rain will fall - and sometimes we think it is the thunderstorm. But if we understand that it is there we accept that, we don't get upset by it. If we focus on disease, if we focus on evil all the time, that's the way our world will be!

But the beauty of it is, when we change and see every being as it is; and that every being is playing out their role in the world, and it's perfect. There is nothing that comes to us in life that is not perfection - especially for us to learn and to grow and to be God like and to be able to love all people everywhere - even those we might call evil roles because they have to be played out also. As I said; see the behavior as not good, but love the person.

And don't forget Krishna here as we mentioned a moment ago, Krishna asked a couple of people: "What is it you want to do? Do you want to have five easy lives before enlightenment or do you want two very savage lives - two years

only - for enlightenment? They said they would take the two savage lives and go through much suffering and everything just to be with God. Try not to see things as evil; try to see things within this great picture that's projected on the screen of consciousness by consciousness itself; and love everybody.

When you say to stay away from the behavior which is bad, and love the person, do you mean that we have to be friends with the person but ignore this behaviour?

No. Swami made it very plain - don't mix with bad people; you stay away from them! You might love the tiger too. I love wild life you know. I really love those elephants - they are beautiful! But you know I wouldn't run up to another member of the family - another lion and put my arms around them! Because it's in their life to bite and chew. You stay away from the behaviour but understand and love the person who they are; the indweller is God itself but the behaviour is bad; and don't mix with the cobras either!

Swami has never mentioned to me anything about dreams. Sometimes we can get something through dreams; sometimes it seems they are garbled - we don't understand what it means. Sometimes when Swami comes in a dream, you might not still understand what it was. And for those you might simply call it they got Darshan!

But there can be some dreams that give you an insight into your life, you know! Years ago, I had a dream. I was floating down the water way in the Himalayas in a flat bottomed boat. And in the bottom, in the water I could see bodies of soldiers and sailors. And what I said at that time to myself was: "Gee, I better be careful here. I don't want to get mixed up in all this!" And the moment I said that, I was in a cabin in the mountains. And there was no oriental speaking with me mind to mind.

So I went out for some time, and it was time to leave. I got up and I turned around and I said: "How do I get out of here?" And he said: "After all you have been told, you don't know what to do?" So from that I took a little courage and I walked to the side of the cave and opened the door. There I stood out in the middle of a big city with people everywhere. I just took that little tune to me: Not to get caught up in conflict of any type. Soldiers and so forth represent conflict. And once I realized that, I decided I mustn't get caught up in all of this; then I was up in the mountains.

But you see, for me it was that my role in life was to be carried out. I did have thoughts of sitting on a mountain top and gazing up my navel - so to speak, you know. But I realized that the role I had to play was within society - with people. So some things can give you a point. But don't look for a dream every night; you got to make decisions sometimes too.

How many years have you been with Sai personally?

If you simply mean just when you visit there; then at the beginning it was once a year for a couple of months; now it's twice a year - about three months of

the year. But the time that I have been with Him in total has been since I first went there in '79. But you must understand that that's one way of being with Sai; the other way is realizing Him within yourself.

What is the biggest obstacle in practicing love for all?

So easy to feel love for your son or daughter, the same deep love to feel for others. Of course this is the trouble in the world; that is limited to that little family unit. I can show love for these but sometimes you are frightened to show love for anyone else in case it is misinterpreted and so you approach it steadily. When you are with Sai devotees you can be loving and kind fairly easily. But let it expand slowly; that will expand as you start to understand more and more.

Let me say this just to finish. Make the effort to be what you are, the effort is only to understand that. The only thing to realize is that you are already realized! But programming in the world has got in the way of that and we have to see through those programs. Understand that you are Divine Love. Don't miss this opportunity to be the Love you are. I love you!

-Heart2Heart Team

‘YOUR MOTHER WILL NEVER EVER FORGET YOU.’

This is the transcription of the talk delivered by Shashank Shah in His divine presence during the Dasara Celebrations on the 19th of Oct 2004.

I offer my most Humble, Loving, and Reverential Pranaams at the Divine Lotus Feet of my Most Beloved Mother Sai.

Respected Elders, Dear Brothers and Sisters. Sai Ram to all of you! And hearty greetings on this Auspicious and Holy occasion of the Devi Navaratri Festival. We are indeed blessed to be here, during the Navaratri, for we are in the midst of Goddess Adi Shakti Herself!

Sai - the Incarnation of the Divine Mother

In the *Ashtotra Shata Naamavali* (108 Names of Bhagawan); the 57th name describes Bhagawan as: ***Aum Shri Sai Adi Shakthaye Namaha.***

And yes, Bhagawan is indeed Goddess Adi Shakti, Goddess Durga, Laxmi and Saraswati Herself! For, He presides over this *Prashanti Vidhwaan Maha Sabha* (the special assembly during Dasara Celebrations) as Goddess Saraswati; the Goddess of Wisdom, Knowledge, and Learning. He Presides over the *Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna* (Sacrifice during Dasara) as Goddess Durga; the Goddess of Spiritual Success. And He distributes food and clothing to all His devotees as Goddess Laxmi, and Goddess Annapurna. He is indeed Goddess Adi Shakti.

The *Devi Bhagavatam*, describes how the Mother Goddess had annihilated for the protection of the *Devas* (gods), from the days of the yore - the *Asuras* (demons) - Chanda, Munda, Shumbha, Nishumbha, Raktabheej, Dhumralochana, and of course, Mahishasura.

And the same Goddess has now come again for destroying those very Asuras; for they are once again present but with a difference; they are present within each and every one of us as our inner vices; the shadowy foes of Kaama, Krodha, Moha, Lobha, Mada, Mathsarya. As Goddess Mahakaali, the Goddess of Power and Inner Purification, He destroys these inner vices, transforms our minds and hearts and renders us Pure, Righteous, and Virtuous. We are blessed to witness the *Veda Purusha Saptaha Jnana Yagna*.

Caught Out in the Rain

And here I remember the very remarkable incident which happened during one of the very first *Yagnas* which was to commence on 1st of October 1961. Great Vedic scholars from all over the country were here. (Shri Kamaudhani Garu, Shri Varanasi Subramanyam Sastry Garu, Shri Kuppa Bairagi Sastry Garu); these were the foremost Sanskrit scholars of their times!

And for the commencement of the program, they had fixed the auspicious time based on the various astrological calculations as 7:30 in the morning. When they approached Bhagavan, and asked His permission, Bhagavan said: "According to me, 9:30 would be more appropriate." But somehow, they insisted that 7:30 should be the time for the commencement of the Yagna. And somehow, Swami agreed; but with a mischievous smile on His face which I don't think they noticed.

The day of 1st October 1961 dawned, and all of them went to the banks of the River Chitravathi, for their ceremonial bath and performed their *Sandhya Vandanam* (morning prayers) by 6:30 a.m. And at 7 o'clock as they were ready to come to the *Yagna Shaala*, dressed in the silken robes given by Bhagavan, the skies opened up and there were torrential rains accompanied by thunder and lightning. And from 7 to 9 a.m, they were stuck up at the banks of the Chitravathi. It was only after that they could come here to commence the *Yagna*, which in reality began at 9:30 as per what Bhagavan had said initially. **He knows everything for He is the Veda Purusha accepting all the offerings which were put there in the Yagnakundam (sacrificial fire).**

The *Devi Mahatmyam*, or *Durga Saptashati* which describes the various facets of the Devi, the most important sentence to notice, which was chanted right here a few minutes back by the students from the Institute is,

*Ya Devi Sarva Bhuteshu, Matro Rupena Sansthita
Namastasyai, Namastasyai, Namastasyai Namaha.*

I offer my obeisance to that Devi, who is present in all beings in the form of the Mother. For She is indeed the Source of the Existence and Sustenance of All this Creation! And it is to that Devi we offer our Pranaams.

It is beautifully described in the Telegu poem:

Tanna Jaaji Kanna, Champangi Lata Kanna, Chunnu Gadda Kanna, Venna Kanna, Nemali Kanno Kanna, Nindu Venella Kanna, Sai Talli Prema, Tunni Tama.

(More fragrant than the jasmine flower, more tender than the champak creeper, more beautiful than the eye of the peacock, softer than the creamy layer of cheese and butter; more soothing than the moonlight on the beautiful full-moon night, is the love of Mother Sai.)

And Her Love is that of not one single Mother; but as Bhagavan describes so very often: **"You can never understand my Love, for My Love is that of one thousand mothers rolled into one! You are not able to understand the Love of your own physical Mother, how will you understand the Love of this Divine Mother?"**

His Love – Overflowing and Immense

I would like to share a few incidences which describe this very facet of Bhagavan as the Divine Mother. We are privileged to receive Prasadam here in the Sai Kulwant Hall in the Divine Presence so very often. But what we do not know, is that Bhagavan is so very carefully observing Prasaadam distribution that is going on.

Just recently, two weeks back, on a Sunday morning, during Darshan time, after the prasaadam was distributed, Bhagavan called one of the staff members, and told him: “See, at that gate there...there is a seva dal, go and ask him whether he has got prasaadam.” And the seva dal had not got prasaadam. It was Bhagavan alone who had noticed it. **So it was on one such occasion, Swami called one of the students and asked him “Have you got the *prasadam* which your brothers distributed?”** The boy was hesitant to tell the truth, but he nodded. For Bhagavan knew that he had not received any. Bhagavan called for the *prasadam* and gave it to the boy. And then He told him: **“See my child, your brothers may forget you but your Mother will never, ever forget you!”** For, She is the Listener of all our silent prayers, She is the Witness of all our acts, She is the Motivator behind all our actions!

There was a beautiful incident which occurred there at Dharmakshetra many years ago, when Bhagavan had visited Mumbai. The Bal-Vikas children had the opportunity to offer rose flowers to Bhagavan. There was one small boy who also wanted this opportunity but he was refused because he had not yet joined the Bal-Vikas class. But he was allowed to sit with the other students. But this boy was very determined to offer a flower to Bhagavan; and somehow, he got hold of a grass flower. Bhagavan was coming towards the students and blessing all the roses that were offered to Him. And this boy sneaked ahead and got a place in the front line with the other students.

As Bhagavan came near Him, he offered that unique flower to Bhagavan...that of a grass flower! Bhagavan smiled and while He blessed all the other roses, He took this flower in His hand. Thereafter, meetings went on with the office bearers and trust members for over three hours.

When Bhagavan came out of the inner complex that flower was still in His hand! Bhagavan sees the purity of intention and the intensity of devotion behind every act of ours. He is not pleased with external show but He sees the quality. As Bhagavan says: “Quantity does not matter! I am *Bhava Priya*, I am not *Bhaya Priya*.” [that is ‘I am interested in the inner feeling, not the outer expression.’]

We have the unique opportunity as students of the Shri Sathya Sai Educational Institutions to participate in the *Gramma Seva Maha Yagna* during these days. There is a very wonderful incident, which combines the Motherly aspect of Bhagavan and the importance of doing seva correctly.

Over three and a half decades back, during this very season of Dussehra, Bhagavan personally used to perform *Narayan seva* in the grounds there. **He used to serve each and every devotee who would come with His own hands, bending and stretching for hours on end.**

On one such occasion, there was a small child in the lap of his mother. He was too small to partake of the prasaadam which Bhagavan was giving. **So Bhagavan called the boys standing there and said: “Get milk from the kitchen. This boy is too small to partake of this prasadam.”**

The boys ran to make use of this opportunity to serve the Lord, and they came back with a glass of milk. By that time, Bhagavan had moved ahead towards the end of that row. Just as the glass of milk was given to this small child, right from the end of that row where Bhagavan was serving, Bhagavan said: “Wait!” And He walked back that entire long row and came to this place where this small child was about to be given that glass of milk. **Bhagavan told the boys standing there. “See, this milk that you have brought is so hot! If the child drinks it, it will burn its tongue! How can you give such hot milk to this small child?”**

And then Bhagavan asked for one more glass and He poured the milk from cup to cup checking the temperature till the milk was of the right temperature, and then gave the milk to the small boy. **Who knows the needs of that small child, except the Divine Mother?**

But there is an important lesson in seva that Bhagavan brought home through this incident. For whomever you offer, it is the God in them that receives. The one that is being served; the one who serves; and the one who receives the service; is all Sai Himself!

A Buffalo Rewarded

The Love of the Mother is not restricted to the devotees and human beings. It is for all the beings of this creation. Once Bhagavan visited a forest resort on consecutive days and as there was an acute shortage of water, there was this buffalo that had the unique privilege to fill water for Bhagavan and take it up the hill to provide the needs of water for the devotees staying with Bhagavan. At the end of the stay there as Bhagavan was about to leave He got down from the car and immediately started walking towards the bungalow. Not towards the entrance, but towards the rear side of the bungalow.

Prof. Kasturi was very much surprised by this. He was inquisitive to know where Swami is going. And as he peeped, he saw Bhagavan going to that buffalo who used to fill water for the needs of Bhagavan and the devotees' entourage who had accompanied Him. Bhagavan went to the buffalo, patted his back and said: *“Dhunapota, chaala manchi seva cheshta!”* ... (Oh buffalo, you have done very good service!) So saying Bhagavan lovingly patted that buffalo, for Bhagavan is the Mother to every being in this Creation of His. There is no restriction; there is no limitation to His boundless Love.

To end, I would like to quote Shri Ramakrishna Parmahansa the foremost devotee of Mother Kaali, who said that initially when the small child cries, Mother gives the child toys to play with; but how long will the child be satisfied with the toys which the Mother gives? It starts crying again, and at that time the Mother lovingly takes the child in her arms and gives herself to him.

Similarly, Bhagavan says: "I too fulfill your petty desires and wishes and all that you ask for so that ultimately you will ask for what I have come to give; Liberation itself!"

On the 23rd of November, 1968, during the 43rd Birthday Celebrations Bhagavan said: "The various problems with which you come to Me; the desires for promotion and status; are mere baits which bring you to me. **For there is a Higher Purpose for which you come to me; and that is to realize the secret of a higher life; to realize the importance of the human birth. And above all, to realize the Oneness with the Supreme Divine!**

As Bhagavan mentioned in the discourse day before yesterday:

*Tvameva Mata Cha Pita Tvameva; Tvameva Bandhu Cha Sakha Tvameva
Tvameva Vidya Dravinam Tvameva; Tvameva Sarvam Mamma Deva Deva.*

Shri Sai Deva,

Oh Lord: You are our Mother, You are our Father;
You are our Closest Friend; and You are our Dearest Lord.
The Ever Loving, The Ever Giving, and Ever Forgiving Lord!

Bless us with Your supreme, all encompassing, pure, divine and eternal Love.
Bless us, that we may be recipient of that Love always!

Jai Sai Ram.

-Heart2Heart Team

H2H SPECIAL

WITH THE LORD IN THE MOUNTAINS PART 3

I think I have said enough by way of preamble and let me now come to this year's Kodai trip. I should perhaps mention that this was my second Kodai trip, the first one being in 2003. That time we were in Brindavan and Swami's party flew out of Bangalore. This time, Swami left from Puttaparthi and flew direct to Madurai, as He did last year also, that is in 2005. In 2004, Swami spent the entire summer in Bangalore and did not go to Kodai.

A couple of days before Swami left, He went past me in the veranda during Darshan. At that time He briefly asked me, "What are you doing these days?" I replied that I was busy engaged in doing Swami's work. He dismissed me by saying there was no work of His that required any attention from me. Normally one ought to be devastated by such a reply, but I was not; I knew enough not to pay serious attention to casual remarks. And it turned out to be right. Next day afternoon, **Swami called me briefly inside and said, "I am taking you to Kodaikanal." Frankly, I did not in the least expect this; in fact, there was so much work pending, I was planning on what all I ought to do after Swami's departure – of course I knew Swami was going.**

Last year, that is in 2005, after Swami left, there was a lot of catching up I could do, and this year too I was planning to do something similar – and believe me there really was plenty to do in connection with the documentary on Swami some of us are very busy with. Thus, when Swami told me He was taking me along, I was totally unprepared, and also a bit worried about the pending work.

However, soon sense dawned on me, and as it turned out, I not only had a welcome break, and had a chance to do exercise which I had neglected for long, but also managed to collect material for a nice video documentary on Swami's Kodai visit. All that would come later. Having been given notice, I did some hurried packing, and thanks to the 2003 experience I knew something about the do's and don'ts.

A Detailed Departure

D day was set for 9th April 2006. A chartered Airbus 320 aircraft would carry Swami's party direct from Puttaparthi to Madurai, as was done last year. If there is anyone who is a stickler for details, it is Swami. It is amazing how He concerns Himself with every little bit, and taking a cue from Him, the people working closely with Him on tour details make sure that nothing is left to chance. Of course this drill is nothing new; it has always been that way; only, in the old days it used to be journey by road while now it is journey by air. Mode of travel different but attention to details remains the same; if anything, it is better and more professional.

Let me explain. The first detail is about luggage and departure details from the Ashram. All the people in Swami's party were asked to bring their luggage by

6.30 A.M. to the open area adjacent to the Poornachandra Hall, facing west. Prior to this we had been given specially prepared baggage tags with numbers and names. Everyone was allowed two bags and therefore given two tags only! When people came and deposited their baggage, Seva Dals with notebooks recorded the details. When all the baggage had been collected, it was loaded on to a tractor trailer and taken to the Sri Sathya Sai Air Port, where after unloading, weighing and adding the airline baggage tags, it was bulk cleared through Security and kept ready for loading on to the aircraft.

As for us the passengers, there was a bus waiting right next to the baggage collection area near Poornachandra Hall. We just piled into the bus and at 7.15 the bus left for the Airport. Normally, one goes to the Airport in Puttaparthi via the road that goes past the new petrol bunk and the Hospital; this is the usual road by which we travel when we go to Bangalore from Puttaparthi. But for some reason, we took the old road past Brahmanapalli and then went to the Airport. Old time devotees may remember that before the Hospital and the Airport, this was in fact the road by which one came to Puttaparthi from Bangalore.

As I travelled along the Brahmanapalli Road towards the Airport, I could not help recalling a recording we had made of an old-time devotee's recollection, who first came to Swami in 1960. Those days, the road was not only bad by itself but was made worse by the locals who were quite hostile to Swami and did not like people coming from outside and having His Darshan. I will not repeat all that here since you can find it all in H2H – just click [here](#) go to Mrs. Geeta Mohan Ram's talk which we published in the July 2006 issue and you will find all the details.

All that was in 1960. But today in 2006, it was an entirely different story. That god-forsaken village Puttaparthi, if one can be forgiven for use of that colloquial expression, has now become a global spiritual hub, with its own Airport; imagine that! Would anyone have believed this if it was predicted say in 1960? Why even in 1968, Arthur Schulman of Hollywood who came here described Puttaparthi as 160 km from Bangalore and ten minutes past the stone age! But now? What a miracle and yet, how quietly it has happened! What Shirdi Baba did to Shirdi, Swami has done to Puttaparthi, and in a much shorter time!

Well anyway, to get back to the main story, the bus arrives at the Sri Sathya Sai Airport, and we all get down. No hassle with the luggage – all that is taken care of by the Seva Dals. All we have to do is to walk into the waiting area, sit there, go through Security Check when called and then board the aircraft.

By the time we arrived, many had already arrived; the boys and some of the teachers who were part of the Divine party. Somebody guided me to what I later learnt was the VIP waiting lounge. Many people were already seated there, including the present Vice Chancellor Anil Gokak, whose father, incidentally, was the first Vice Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. To my knowledge, the last time Swami took a working Vice

Chancellor to Kodai was when Prof Sampath held that office. After more than ten years, Swami was once again taking a Vice Chancellor in service to Kodai with Him; and this time, the wife of the Vice Chancellor also.

The Indian Airlines Airbus 320 aircraft that was to carry us was supposed to come from Madras. It arrived in the Sri Sathya Sai Air Port exactly on schedule, at 8.20 A.M that is. After a while, the flight was called and we went through security to get out of the terminal building and walk towards the aircraft, parked some distance away. On the tarmac I saw the boys who were in the party quite excited, with many of them clicking away taking pictures. We arrive near the aircraft, and Narasimha Murthy waves us in.

We make our entry through the rear door, since special arrangements had been made for Swami to board from the front. The VC goes in first and I follow him. We walk all the way to the front, and I find that the seat allotted to me is 2F, the same seat that I occupied during my 2003 trip. Swami's seat was of course 1A, and from my seat, I could see Swami diagonally across the aisle. The VC was right behind Swami.

The flight crew welcome us with tasty musambi (orange) juice, most delicious of course! I learn that the two stewardesses on the flight are graduates of the Anantapur Campus. I also notice Prakash Bharatkar of the Prashanti Digital Studio inside the aircraft, merrily clicking away precious photos for archival purposes. Normally, this kind of thing is simply not possible in any airport anywhere in the world - but this is Puttaparthi and a different world! Thus, with the support of Capt Sharma, now in charge of the Airport, I was able to get all the permission required for full photo and video coverage.

9.20am and all the passengers are seated; about 70 in all, including 23 students. There is a flurry of activity and I can see Swami's car driving up on the tarmac towards the aircraft. A special elevator that looks like a van on wheels has been brought from Bangalore, and it is parked near the front entrance. I can see it is well decorated both on the outside and the inside.

Swami gets down from the car and gets into the elevator which then is lifted up to the level of the front door. Swami then enters the aircraft, beaming of course. **And guess what! The very first thing He does is to go up and down the aisle giving Darshan! In 2003, the Darshan started after the aircraft took off, but it seems that this time, He just cannot wait!**

The Darshan is just about over and Swami is finally in His seat, when the Captain asks the ground staff to deplane, in preparation for take off. The cabin crew, as per the normal drill then arm all doors and start making the usual announcements. I am surprised that the Sai Ram greeting, common on Swami's chartered flights, is missing this time. We are told that the flight to Madurai would take one hour exact. Meanwhile, people inside are still clicking left and right, both members of our party and some airline staff too!

9.40, the engines are revved up and the aircraft slowly starts moving out of the parking bay. It makes a turn and slowly moves along the runway toward

the Yelumalapalli end. This process takes a few minutes and as we slowly go there, I see from the window that there are lots of people gathered all along the road waiting to see Swami's aircraft take off. I notice not only many vehicles parked on the road but also lots of Seva Dals all along the runway on both sides.

At the Yelumalapalli end, the aircraft makes a 180 degree turn and starts taxiing. In less than a minute it is airborne. As it flies West, I look out of the window and below me I see we are flying over the air traffic control building and on the balcony outside, **I am thrilled to see our boys capturing shots of the take off in video and still camera! I was so proud that they had planned and organised it all so well.**

The aircraft then takes a gentle but huge turn to head south while my mind wanders off to 2003, when I was on a similar flight to Kodai, that time from Bangalore. I maintained then a diary and let me now offer extracts from that so that you can get an idea of what happened then as compared to now.

A Peep Into The Past – Kodai 2003

Sunday, May 11th, 2003. This is the big day, and we are all supposed to leave for Kodai sometime early afternoon.

Swami comes out and Bhajans start as usual. Swami goes round, gives Darshan, sits for a while and then rises, signalling for the Aarathi. He receives Aarathi and goes back to the Trayee Mandir – end of Bhajan for the day. Also, no Interview calls – that of course is to be expected.

As always, everyone in the party has received instructions about what to do – guests, students, teachers, and all the rest. We are told that two big air-conditioned buses would come to the area of the Ashram adjacent to the Canara Bank, where residential quarters are located. Everyone is to assemble in that area, hand over all the check-in luggage to Seva Dal volunteers deputed for the purpose, and board the bus. We are told the bus would leave the premises for the airport at 11.30 A.M. There is a lot excitement, especially amongst those chosen to go with Swami; no surprise in that.

I arrive in the bus departure area at about 10 A.M. because I had been told, "Go early. There would be a lot of luggage, and the volunteers would need sufficient time to receive the luggage of all the people." Good planning.

When I arrive, I see two big blue-coloured air-conditioned buses with the name Sri Sathya Sai Tourists written in bold on the sides. I have seen such vehicles many times in Puttaparthi, bringing devotees from Bangalore. I go to the area where Seva Dals are receiving luggage. Quite a crowd. There are people handing over luggage and volunteers receiving them. I am pleased to see that everything has been organised with meticulous care – not common, I am sorry to say in our country.

A truck has been hired for the sole purpose of carrying the luggage to the airport. Since ours is a chartered flight, the luggage is being taken ahead of the passengers and checked-in at one go, so that security examination etc., can be done without involving the passengers. I have just two pieces of luggage, a modest suitcase, and a handbag; of course, besides this, I have the digital camera from our studio - Prashanti Digital Studio that is.

There is a Seva Dal standing with a clipboard that has the list of passengers. Everyone is handing over the luggage to him. He is having a tough time, since he has to deal with so many people simultaneously – students, teachers, ladies, and some elderly people too. However, there are many other Seva Dals to help him and this volunteer knows precisely what to do. When a person goes to him, he asks the name of the passenger and how many pieces of luggage the passenger has. He then asks another volunteer to receive the baggage pieces and attach identification tags. He tells the passenger the serial number of his luggage, makes a tick on his clipboard against the name of the passenger, and that is it. No more worry for the passenger about the luggage. The luggage tag has been specially made for the flight with the words OM SRI SAI RAM. The date, the name of the passenger and the serial number are duly recorded on the special label. After the tag is attached, there are other volunteers who load the luggage into the truck.

As I move away after handing over my modest suitcase, I stand back, click a couple of pictures and then take in the whole scene. I am amazed to see some huge suitcases. “My God,” I tell myself, “whatever happened to Swami’s teaching about less luggage and all that?” I am sure if these people had to fly by buying their own ticket, they would have to shell out a lot of money for excess luggage; in which case, would they be travelling with such big suitcases? I wonder!

There are two buses, but which one am I supposed to get into? I make enquiries and find that one bus is for students while the other is for family parties. Swami had graciously included many husband and wife pairs in the tour party, and this other bus was for such people. I decide to keep the company of students and board their bus. It is almost full. Fortunately, there are a few seats vacant in the front. I see Warden Narasimhamurthy already seated and ask him whether I could occupy one of the vacant seats. He smiles and replies, “Why not? Please do.” I park myself.

I look around and see that though the bus is nearly full, there is hardly any chatter. I am impressed and very proud of our students. Can one see this sort of discipline anywhere else? Indeed, later I would be surprised repeatedly, how wonderfully our boys conduct themselves in various situations.

The bus looks real luxurious. There are nice and fresh seat covers with the *Sarva Dharma* symbol. I look in the front near the driver’s seat. Above it is a row of pictures of all the deities one can think of. Strangely, there is no picture of Swami. I am totally puzzled, because the bus service is named after

Swami. I look around and see a sticker, with a picture of Swami's picture – saving grace, I say to myself.

I have come wearing my *chappals* (slippers) but I am not sure whether this was the proper thing to do. I remember the funny incident that occurred when I went with Swami to Delhi and Bombay in March 1999. I went wearing *chappals* as did all of us, including Anil Kumar, and we had a problem while boarding the aircraft with *chappals* on since Swami was already seated, and right at the entrance. The problem was: how to go past Swami? We could not carry it in our hands right before His eyes, nor could we walk in wearing them! I leave you to guess how we wriggled out of that tight corner!

'Please Wear Chappals!'

I turn and look around and find that Narasimhamurthy is wearing nice *chappals*. I am relieved and say, "So, I am not the only one. You also are wearing *chappals*." The Warden's reply stunned me. He said, "Sir, we actually got instructions from Swami that we should all wear *chappals*. Swami said, 'When the plane reaches Madurai and you step on the tarmac, it would be very hot – it is mid-summer and the tarmac is all concrete. So all of you must wear *chappals*.'"

Imagine that! Swami thinks even of such small details! How considerate and how compassionate! He is always like that. But what about Swami Himself? Well, like always, He moves barefoot. So I guess it would be so in this trip too, all the way to Kodai and back.

It is pretty warm outside and though the bus is air-conditioned, the effect is hardly noticeable since the door has been kept open. I wonder when we would leave. The Warden tells me that the first the luggage truck would leave and twenty minutes later the buses would follow.

The plane that would carry us is supposed to come from Delhi to Bangalore as a regular commercial flight. It is supposed to return to Delhi in the evening, and in between is sandwiched the charter flight to Madurai. According to what I was told earlier, the take off would be at 2 P.M. That means we would be boarded not later than 1.30. Possibly, Swami would get in at 1.45, and that would mean He would leave here by about 1 or 1.15.

I get into a small conversation with Narasimhamurthy who has accompanied Swami to Kodai a few times during earlier trips. In 1999, which was when Swami went last, He went via Madurai, just as we would be doing. I was checking when we would touch Madurai, what would happen after that, etc. It seemed to me that Swami would reach Kodai ahead of us.

The Warden confirmed that indeed that would be the case and added, "Swami is always there to welcome us when the bus arrives. He would very kindly say, 'Boys, today our cooks have just arrived. You will therefore have only a modest dinner with just a few items. From tomorrow onwards, you can expect a sumptuous fare. Have your meals

and rest.” The Warden then added, “In 1986, Swami took the boys to Ooty and I was in the party. Swami reached Ooty way ahead of us, and I remember He was leaning against a tree and waiting for us!”

Amazing, isn't it? I mean the Lord of the Universe waiting like you and I perhaps would? Frankly, I am not amazed when Swami performs miracles that make people say ooh and aah. It is when He acts utterly human that I am truly stunned.

One good thing. Almost everyone is in the bus. This means not many will come to the airport by cars. 10.35. The luggage van finally leaves and I guess we would move in about fifteen minutes or so. 10.50 A.M., and the signal is given for our buses to leave. There is a lot of excitement, naturally. Flanking the Ashram premises is the Canara Bank. One employee there seated next to a window is looking at what is going on in the Ashram compound, forgetting his work completely! Obviously, this bank employee does not seem to have heard of *Karma Yoga*!

The buses are big and the exit gate is small. Quite a bit of manoeuvring is required and finally, with a big sigh, the buses manage to get into the road outside. A big crowd there. The ladies who sang Bhajans in the morning are also there, in their uniform sarees. Obviously, these people are gathered to catch a glimpse of Swami and not to bid us goodbye! Meanwhile, just as the bus starts moving, one of the boys says loudly: “Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Satya Sai Baba Ki” and everyone shouts “Jai!” This is done three times. For the boys, this is a normal routine.

A forty-minute ride and we are in the airport. It is a lean period for air traffic, and ours is the only flight for next two hours or so. As I get down, I see plenty of Seva Dals everywhere. There is a lady, obviously a member of the staff of Indian Airlines, and she greets us with the words “Sai Ram”. Well, this is the first time I have been greeted that way by the Indian Airlines!

Mr. Dwarakanath who does gate duty at the Trayee Mandir is there to greet us on arrival. He has a whole bunch of boarding passes in his hand. The seating plan has apparently been arranged in advance, and the boarding passes printed accordingly. Mr. Dwarkanath calls out names and hands out the passes one by one. While so doing, he adds, “Please go upstairs to the restaurant. You will be served refreshments there.” The lady who greeted us on arrival escorts us all there.

We go into the terminal building and head for the first floor, following the lady staff member of the Indian Airlines. The restaurant is empty when we troop in but soon it is full with passengers on the special chartered flight. I take a seat at a table and look at my boarding pass. The flight number is given as IC 999. That sure is a Sai touch! I then check on my seat number. It is 2C. Wow, I tell myself. Swami I am sure is in seat 1A and 2C means that I am right behind Him. Good chance for snapping pictures. I say a silent prayer of thanks to Baba while a couple of others join me at my table.

We are told special snacks have been arranged and that we could have a bite if we wished to. So I walk to the counter along with others in my table. There is a queue, which we all join. Lots of nice items piled up there at the service counter, and I see the students are not at all shy. Seeing the goodies makes me wish I was younger but thanks to a stern warning from my stomach, I settle for just a packet of juice. One of my tablemates does the same while another one says, "My policy is always to tuck in good before a flight."

And while I return to my seat with a packet of juice in hand, I see the ladies trooping in. Obviously, the second bus or the family bus has also reached the airport. Most of the ladies are wearing the same type of saree, given by Swami of course. This coming in a uniform is quite common, and I guess there is really no reason for me to be surprised.

Slowly people are leaving the restaurant and going for security check. As I join the queue, one of the members of our group throws a scare into me about the camera battery. He says, "They are very strict these days. They may ask you to put the battery in the check-in luggage." That worries me because all our luggage has been taken away already. So many people in our group are carrying cameras, and they all are taking them personally with them; after all, who would dare to check in a camera as a piece of luggage? These people walked around without a care about the security. I thought maybe they were ignorant of what lay ahead, and that is why they were so carefree. Luckily, it turned out that there was really no problem. I cleared security with my camera and all, as did everyone else carrying a camera.

We are all now in the departure lounge for the wait before boarding. Once again, there is silence where our boys are concerned. The elders, on the other hand, especially the ladies, see no reason for silence. **I sink into a solitary seat but after a while a student joins me. Hesitantly he asks, "Sir, I have some doubts; can I ask?" I ask him to go ahead, and I find myself educated by the wonderful questions he fires at me, all spiritual of course.** Meanwhile we hear that our flight has been slightly delayed. Finally, the flight is called and we all troop out to board the buses that would take us to the aircraft.

As I get into the Indian Airlines bus, I am making all kinds of plans. I tell myself, "I must be ready to snap some real good pictures when Swami enters the aircraft." I thought, and so did all of us, that Swami would board only after all of us were seated. But I am in for a surprise.

The bus takes us to the aircraft, which is parked in the VIP area near the HAL hanger. This is where we took off from in 1999, when Swami went to Delhi. As our bus approaches our aircraft, I strain to see the car by which Swami is supposed to have come to the airport. Earlier we were told that Swami had arrived in the airport and was in the VIP lounge. I am not able to spot the car. Meanwhile, as our bus is approaching our aircraft, I notice that there is a lot of excitement there. I am not able to figure out what is going on. It is only when I hand my boarding pass and climb up the stairs for entering the plane, that I

realise what has happened. Swami has already got in; and there He is now greeting each and everyone of us as we enter!

Actually, it was a hassle to get in because the airline staff were ahead of us, all of them crowding around Swami, offering flowers and whatnot. While this was happening, I could hear Mrs. Ratanlal behind me asking the staff to make way so that passengers could board!

The Captain finally asks the ground staff to clear out and the doors are shut. The engines are revved up and the aircraft starts moving. 1.50, the plane is airborne. As usual, there is an announcement from the cabin staff on the PA system, but this time the announcement is special not merely because it is a Sathya Sai Chartered Flight, but because there is a special welcome for Swami. On behalf of the airlines the airhostess said, "We are very much honoured that Bhagavan Baba is flying with us."

Just before lift off, all of us put on the seatbelts as per the regulations. I see some activity near Swami's seat. I am not able to see what is going on. I wonder: "Is Swami putting on the seat belt or is it like when we went to Delhi when He did not?" Meanwhile, the aircraft is gaining altitude. We are told that the flight to Madurai would take about 45 minutes.

Well, all that was from the notes I had taken in 2003. More next time! Jai Sai Ram.

-Heart2Heart Team

UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS WITH SAI - Part 7

This is the seventh instalment 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 [06], we took you up to the point where Mr. Krishnan dramatically becomes united with his estranged son. In this the seventh instalment, we now have Mr. Krishnan telling us about an incident in the earlier part of his life when he was about to be murdered while visiting Ceylon [now Sri Lanka], and how Swami transforms the assassins at the very last moment. Read on.

Swami once told me, “I will provide you the ultimate protection no matter what; and I will also give you detailed instructions about what to do and when.” In the beginning, I did not appreciate Swami’s Divinity and used to critically analyse every one of His statements and remarks, instead of accepting them with full faith. Eventually, it dawned on me that I had no right whatsoever to indulge in any such analysis. Instead, I had to surrender totally, in the full sense of the word, leaving everything to Swami, *Karma* or no *Karma*. He knows everything and He would always do what was best for me – slowly, this realisation sank into me. I realised that I had no choice but to accept whatever Swami decided for me, having the faith that He would always do what was good for me.

Thus it is that I have given up completely all that useless analysis. If He says stand, I stand; if He says sit, I sit; my job is to simply obey His command. I have now learnt to see Sai in all because that is the only truth. No doubt Swami tells us again and again that He is in all but we quickly forget that because we are so used to focussing on external diversity. So we have to constantly drill ourselves to see the Inner Divinity rather than the external form.

How to Avoid the Consequences of Karma

Here I am reminded of a story. It seems that a certain gentleman who was once travelling with Swami in a car asked, “Swami, you say one should not hunt and kill animals. Suppose a cobra comes to bite. Can one kill it?” **Swami replied, “If you think it is coming to bite you, you could kill it, but if you believe that Swami resides in that cobra also, you should not kill it.”** “But, Swami,” said the other person, “the cobra would bite!” “No,” replied Swami, “If you really believe that Swami is present also in that cobra, it will not bite.” I can say with authority, that this is really true. I have had many such experiences when danger that was imminent miraculously passed away because of this belief. That belief brings Swami’s protection.

Swami once told me: “A man is coming to attack you and to stab you. He is trying to do that because of your *Karma*. Maybe you can escape the attack but you can never evade the consequences of *Karma* forever; because there is, under normal circumstances, no escape. However, if

you see Swami in the person who is coming to attack and stab you and do *Namaskar* to that person, then the danger would pass and indeed the *Karma* itself would get cancelled, just like that!”

It is all a drama. Swami is the one who is coming to stab and Swami is also the one who is getting stabbed. Swami is both. We see these two individuals as distinct because of ignorance. But once we realise the Truth, the drama is over and *Karma* vanishes!” So the safest way to wipe out all past *Karma* and to avoid accumulating fresh *Karma* is to see Swami in all. This comes through total surrender, and that is the best option.

The Intriguing Ceylon Adventure

I shall now narrate an incident that happened in 1961 that highlights how Swami protects once He gives the word. At that time, our company had a lot of business in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. Our product had a trademark, and the rule in Ceylon was that the trademark must be renewed before the expiry date. In India, the rule is not so strict and there is a grace period, but in Ceylon they were very strict; renew before the expiry date or else lose claim to the trademark. If the ownership of the trademark was allowed to lapse, then someone else could use it; that was the law in Ceylon.

As I told you, our company trademark had to be renewed, and my brother had to go to Ceylon for that. We had a rule: never do anything without taking Swami’s permission first. So my eldest brother went to Puttaparthi to get Swami’s blessings for going to Ceylon for this purpose. The company was registered in his name, and legally he was the owner; so it was he who had to go and sign the papers needed for trademark renewal. My brother thus came to Puttaparthi, and sought Swami’s blessings, which He lovingly gave. Swami then asked my brother to do a few small things while in Ceylon. Swami also gave some *Prasaadam* and permitted my brother to attend the wedding of the High Commissioner’s daughter, while in Ceylon.

My brother then left Puttaparthi and returned to our place Mukkudal via Trichy. In Trichy, he booked a seat on a flight to Colombo. It was about 7.30 in the evening when he came home. On arrival, he told me that he had received Swami’s blessings, had booked a ticket on the Trichy – Colombo flight and would leave the next morning. He added, “I would be gone for a few days; while I am away, take care of the business.”

At 4.30 A.M., my brother woke me up and said, “Swami told me repeatedly a short while ago that I should not go to Ceylon.” I was taken aback and said, “Brother, I think you must have had a dream. You have personally gone to Swami and He granted you permission to go to Ceylon. Not only that, he wanted you to do a few small things there. How could He now suddenly change all that?” **My brother said, “No, it was not a dream. Swami stood physically in front of me and He repeatedly warned me not to go. I then bent down to touch His feet, when He suddenly vanished. This is the truth.”**

I was not prepared to accept all this and said to my brother, "Listen, you have personally gone to Puttaparthi and Swami told you to go to Ceylon. He not only gave you permission but also His blessings. And now you are suddenly saying you will not go. I find this unacceptable. I suggest that you must go as earlier planned." My brother was in no mood to listen to me and replied, "Look, I tell you that Swami personally stood in front of me and asked me again and again not to go." However, all that did not convince me and I simply dismissed his so-called vision as a hallucination. My brother then told me that Swami had advised against going because of a sudden danger. I was disturbed to hear all this and said, "Brother, just think of what would happen if you did not go. What would happen to the renewal of our Trademark?" My brother responded, "I understand but when there is imminent danger, what do you expect me to do?"

I decided that there was only one way out, for me to rush to Swami and seek His personal guidance once more. I called my driver and left almost immediately. It was about 7.30 P.M. when I reached Puttaparthi, and Swami immediately sent for me. I went up and found that Swami was waiting for me. I asked, "Swami, what's all this?"

Swami replied, "If your brother went now, he would not return alive." I was puzzled and said, "But Swami, You were the one who gave my brother the permission to go to Ceylon in the first place." Swami said, "Yes that is true but the situation was different then." I could not understand and asked, "Swami, what changed the situation so suddenly and so dramatically?" Swami patiently replied, "Soon after your brother left here, your company manager in Ceylon dismissed the company driver there. The driver became very angry and tried to attack the manager. To save himself, the manager told the driver that it was your brother who gave the dismissal order. This is not true but the driver believed it and vowed to kill your brother if he came to Ceylon. It was because of that circumstance that I appeared before him and stopped him."

I understood what had happened but still had a doubt. I asked, "Swami, all that is fine but what happens to the renewal of our Company Trademark? Without my brother going to Ceylon and signing the papers in person, the Trademark would lapse." Swami replied, "Don't worry about that. I shall take care of it." I was still not fully aware of Swami's Divinity and naively asked, "Swami, how can You take care of it from here? My brother has to personally go; that is required by law." Swami brushed aside my immature remarks said, "Did I not say I would take care of everything? Now keep quiet."

Swami then asked, "Was there any other work your brother wanted to do while in Ceylon?" I replied, "Yes Swami, he wanted to attend the marriage of the daughter of the Indian High Commissioner." Swami said, "Your brother need not go but you can go in his place." I became scared and blurted out, "But Swami, that evil driver would come after me!" Swami smiled and said, **"They cannot do anything to you. I shall take care of you." Baba then materialised some *vibhuti* and asked me to open my mouth. I did and He**

put all of the *vibhuti* into my mouth and said, “Eat it.” After that, Swami said, “You just go and trust in Me; nothing bad would happen to you.”

I came back to my hometown and narrated everything that happened in Puttaparthi to my brother. He was relieved and said, “Thank God I did not go. If I had, that mad driver Ali would have killed me.” I then told my brother that Swami had given the assurance that He would take care of the matter of the renewal of our Company Trademark. My brother did not seem too sure how Swami was going to do that but he did not raise any further queries. He then asked, “What about the marriage of the daughter of the High Commissioner?” I said, “Swami has asked me to go.” My brother now became alarmed and said, “But you cannot go! That mad driver would try to kill you!!” I assured my brother, “Have no fear; Swami has told me that nothing would happen to me and that He would protect me.” My brother was not convinced and tried to dissuade me from going but I was firm – Swami had asked me to go and had assured me of protection; nothing would stop me and I WAS going!

Life Hangs by a Thread in Ceylon

And so I left for Ceylon and landed in Jaffna, on my way to Colombo, to attend the wedding. Our company manager received me on arrival, and the very first thing he told me was not to go to Colombo. He added, “If you went to Colombo, that Ali would try to kill you. I replied with bravado, “I am going and nothing would happen to me.” My manager and his associates did their best to stop me but they understood I was firm. So they said, “OK, we will drive you to Colombo and drop you in your residence there. After that we would all disappear because if Ali finds us there along with you, he would kill us also, besides finishing you off!”

As I mentioned earlier, it was actually this local manager who had got rid of the driver. However, to escape blame, he told the driver that the dismissal order actually came from the owners of the Company, that is, my brother. The manager feared that if my brother or I came to Ceylon, the truth would come out and that he would be in deep trouble. I was now in Colombo and trouble could erupt any moment. I was so tired that soon after I was dropped off in our Colombo flat, I fell asleep.

Early in the morning, I heard someone knocking on the door. Half asleep, I dragged myself to the door and opened it. And there, standing before me was Ali, hopping mad, along with three others. They pushed themselves in and shut the door after them. Ali then spoke, “So tough guy, what do you think of yourself? Your big brother is hiding back in India and you thought you could come here and get away with it? You feel secure because of that Sai Baba?” I must here mention that Ali had earlier come to India and had in fact driven me from my hometown to Puttaparthi to see Baba. Indeed, he too had seen Baba.

I was completely rattled and tried my best to pacify the gang that had come to finish me off. I said to Ali, “Listen, don’t get excited. Let us discuss calmly and resolve this problem.” Ali was in no mood to listen to me and shouted,

“What’s there to talk about? You have come here to flaunt your authority. You are an Indian and this is Ceylon, not India. You have no authority to dismiss me from service. You are cocky and think you can get away with it. We will teach you that you cannot. You have to pay and pay you will.”

I changed my tactics and said, “You forget that I too have a gun but I am not touching it. Presently, I am alone whereas you are four big fellows there. This is an unfair contest. It is better therefore that we talk sensibly and if there is a problem, let us find a solution. Why should we unnecessarily resort to violence? First, listen to me. In case you are not convinced with what I say, you can then go ahead and kill me.”

I must confess that despite this external bravado, internally I was very scared. At this stage, one of the accomplices of Ali said, “I say, why are we wasting time? We came here to do something; let’s do that and get out quickly.” Ali seemed to agree and it appeared that the moment had come. They all gripped their weapons and positioned themselves to strike me. Absolutely terrified, I feverishly prayed to Swami silently, “Oh Swami! What’s happening here? It looks that the end of the story is going to be different from what I had hoped for. Baba, what sin did I commit to merit such a fate? I came here because You permitted me to and now see what is happening!”

I then said to Ali, “You can go ahead but first give me two minutes to myself.” Jaffer Ali sneered and replied, “Oh, you want to pray to your Sai Baba, do you? Go ahead and pray for the last time.” I closed my eyes and silently cried, “Swami, must it really end like this?” My eyes were drenched with tears. I felt some drops falling on me feet. **I opened my eyes to see those tear drops falling on my feet. Instead, what was it I saw? It was an incredible sight. Lying at my feet was Ali, and tears were flowing from his eyes on to my feet! It was simply unbelievable. It was incredible. I rubbed my eyes and saw that Ali was actually there, sobbing at my feet!!**

Murderer Becomes Meek

It all happened in a flash, as if in a dream. Yet it was not a dream but reality, Sai Reality! Swami had kept His word and saved me in the very last minute, after testing me for quite a while. Earlier, Swami transformed my eldest brother in one second and made my marriage possible. Now once more, in just one second, Swami had transformed a man who had come to murder me.

I heard some words being spoken and realised that Ali was saying something. I started to listen. Ali said, “All these years, you have treated me not only fairly but also very well and now, here I was trying to kill you! Honestly, I simply do not know what evil feeling came over me. Please beat me, kick me and punish me any way you want. I deserve all that you can give and much more. Go ahead! What are you waiting for? I deserve every punishment you can give.”

My head was spinning. Earlier, this very same Ali was refusing my offer to reinstate him, my offer of higher pay, bonus etc., and now here was

the same man, just two minutes later, asking me to beat him and to punish him! Slowly I bent down and lifted Ali up. I said, “Ali, you really did not mean any harm to me. I know that; what happened was the result of circumstances. Let us forget this nightmare.” Meanwhile Ali continued to sob uncontrollably. The other members of the gang were just stunned to see all this and were wondering what was going on. Suddenly, they too became respectful to me!

Ali said, “You know something? It is Baba who has brought about this change in me! That local manager of your company is a coward. He should have stayed with you to protect you. Instead, he simply abandoned you and ran away! He deserves to be flogged! Is this how one shows loyalty to one’s master? **Anyway, do not worry sir. From this moment, I shall be with you every single moment until you leave for India! I shall be your bodyguard!**”

Mr. Krishnan’s life seems to be full amazing experiences, does it not? Want to know more? Look out for the next instalment of H2H! Share these stories with those you know so that they too become aware of how Swami is everywhere, helping devotees in innumerable and unimaginable ways.

-Heart2Heart Team

SAI WORLD NEWS

HER MAJESTY, THE QUEEN HONOURS THE SAI YOUTH OF UK THE QUEEN'S ROYAL GARDEN PARTY

2006 is a very special year in Great Britain, it marks the 80th Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the 50th Anniversary of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme for young people. To celebrate both events a special Royal Garden Party was organised at Buckingham Palace on Thursday 13th July 2006.

Royal Garden Parties have been held at Buckingham Palace since the 1860's by Queen Victoria. In fact, Queen Elizabeth II has always worked hard to recognise the efforts of those people who best embody the spirit of Great Britain. This year was no exception: approximately 8,000 invitations were sent out to various dignitaries, diplomats, ministers, famous celebrities, and ordinary people who had made a unique contribution to society.

But the most heartening fact was this: The National Youth Wing of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisation United Kingdom, had been chosen by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to attend and receive a special certificate of gratitude and recognition for the outstanding contribution made by its Youth towards nation-building and promoting happiness and harmony within the community. This indeed was a great honour and further demonstrates the respect and gratitude that the country has for the humanitarian work being undertaken by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

The National U.K Youth Co-ordinator, Shitu Chudasama, had been asked to speak at Buckingham Palace during the presentation ceremony on the work of the Sai Youth and the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisation. This was extremely well received and all marvelled at the wonderful work being done by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. A miracle of Swami's omnipresence occurred during the ceremony. **When the certificate was presented, instead of bearing the name of the Sai Organisation, the certificate instead bore the name of Divinity – 'Sri Sathya Sai'.** This was a thrilling example of Swami's Omnipresence and guiding hand.

"It was a blessing, a shower of Grace." – Mr. Shitu Chudasama

Recounting his memorable experience to Heart2Heart, Mr. Shitu Chudasama, says,

"As soon as Rita, my wife and I arrived at Buckingham Palace, we were escorted to a special enclosure where we were introduced to some famous Hollywood actors, actresses, and people who had received honours for doing outstanding and heroic deeds. We were extremely nervous and at this point wondering what we were doing here. However the celebrities were most kind and extremely humble. A famous Hollywood director who directed famous movies such as 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory', 'Planet of the Apes', and

'Batman' , Tim Burton came up to us and started asking questions about what we did. We started talking to him about Swami and Swami's Youth and the wonderful work that is being done in United Kingdom. He straightaway said that America needs an Organisation like this - we told him that America already had one. He mentioned how some of the youth that he had come across in the movie world were so badly behaved and lacked manners. He further went on to marvel at Bhagawan's youth and how impressed he was by them.

When the time for the speeches and award ceremony came, my heart started beating very fast. What was I to say? How can one describe in a few minutes the marvellous and miraculous humanitarian projects that are undertaken by Bhagawan. I started calling Bhagawan for assistance. I stood quietly, closed my eyes, and imagined our beautiful Bhagawan standing there at the Palace beside me. I surrendered to Swami's will.

I was the last speaker called up, and suddenly a confidence, and a joy engulfed my being. I spoke about the wonderful work being done by our Sai Organisation Youth in United Kingdom. I attributed everything to our founder Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. As I spoke I watched the sea of faces, they were hanging onto my every word and there was a look of excitement on their faces as if to say 'why have we not heard of this Organisation before?'

Suddenly the certificate was presented to me. Instead of having the name of the Sai Organisation, the certificate bore the name of divinity itself "Sri Sathya Sai" - I looked again, and was dumbfounded. For that split second as everyone cheered and clapped loudly, I felt the omnipresence of our beloved Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba at Buckingham Palace. Then I knew that this was a gift from Bhagawan Himself. A blessing, a shower of Grace for all the Sai Youth in UK that work so hard contributing to Bhagawan's Mission of *Dharmasthanthapana* – establishing righteousness in the world.

After the award ceremony, we were then escorted to a special section, which was lined with the Queen's guards. We were asked to wait here so that we could meet the Queen. At 4.00pm, as the National Anthem was played by the Royal Band, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, together with other members of the Royal Family emerged from the Palace and started to greet their guests.

We could not believe this remarkable Grace, Swami had bestowed upon the Sai Organisation. As the Queen walked gracefully by, one noticed that there was a very special aura and energy around the Queen, something quite beautiful, enigmatic, and spiritual. The Queen had dedicated her whole life to serving her country and people. As she walked passed, looking at all and smiling, you could not help but notice that her smile never once left her face.

She was extremely patient with everyone and spent two hours greeting and welcoming everyone. All in all it was a truly memorable and uplifting event.”

The award reads, as you can see from the picture,

*“This certificate is presented to **Sri Sathya Sai** on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Duke of Edinburgh’s award with grateful thanks from the patron ... for Your invaluable contribution as a partner of the award in helping to provide an enjoyable, challenging and rewarding personal development programme for young people.”*

Now what is Duke of Edinburgh’s award? And how and when did the Sai Organisation of UK become associated with it?

THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH’S AWARD

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is an international leadership in action programme established in 1956 by its Founder and Patron, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh (the husband of the Queen of England). The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is a voluntary, non-competitive programme of practical cultural and adventurous activities. It is designed to support the personal and social development of young people aged 14-25, regardless of gender, background, or ability. Being voluntary, flexible, non-competitive, balanced, progressive, challenging and most of all enjoyable, it provides an opportunity for young people to achieve personal excellence and build self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance, self-motivation and respect for others via their involvement in service, skill, physical recreation and expedition activities.

THE GENESIS – THE UK NATIONAL YOUTH PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA 2004

The partnership of the Sai Organisation of UK with the Duke of Edinburgh award and the tremendous positive international contribution of the UK Sai Youth is what lead to the recent recognition award from the Queen. But the whole episode has its genesis in November 2004. 180 youth from United Kingdom embarked upon the National UK Youth Pilgrimage to Prashanti Nilayam for Bhagawan’s blessings that year. The trip was both unique and multi-faceted. It was a message of love for Bhagawan that His youth in UK were ready and waiting to take up the baton of His mission. The Pilgrimage consisted of a Youth Service Camp, the UK Youth Choir, Youth Speakers and a Mini-Prashanti UK Youth Conference which were all held in Prashanti Nilayam leading up to Swami’s Birthday.

The Youth Service Camp was entitled “Helping Hands and Healing Hearts” and a phenomenal amount of planning, energy, goodwill and sacrifice went into the work. For over 5 days, the Youth visited 4 villages near Puttaparthi that were not easily accessible by bus or car. The Youth Service Camp was unlike anything ever attempted before by UK youth. **5 tonnes of equipment was taken from the United Kingdom consisting of medical supplies, the latest health scanners, thousands of saris, baby clothes, and toys.**

The camp consisted of a plethora of service activities for the needy villagers: *Narayan Seva*, workshops on hygiene in the villages, the installation of toilets, the providing of water pumps and water pipelines. There was also seva directed specifically to the women of the villages: talks, medical check-ups, and counselling to improve their quality of life. For the children there was distribution of clothes, music, games and special dramas. The youth also engaged in village cleaning and maintenance, the reconstruction of a dilapidated village temple and installation of its village deities. And finally, a large scale Medical Camp which provided general medical care, eye care, paediatrics, dentistry, physiotherapy, massage, diabetes screening and cancer screening.

The entire cost and expenses of the Youth Service Camp totalling around \$45,000 was solely funded by the youth, which was inspired and enabled by Swami's Ceiling on Desires Programme. During the Medical Camp Vibhuti started materialising on the badges worn by a number of our Youth. The Pilgrimage proved to be a very powerful magnet in not only empowering the youth to become leaders but also bringing out other qualities in them such as self-confidence, discipline, and compassion.

THE MOMENTUM GAINS MASS – THE SAI YOUTH WING BECOMES A PARTNER WITH THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S AWARD SCHEME

On returning to the UK, the National Youth Wing was contacted by His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh's Office, and informed that they wanted to award each of our Sai Youth the prestigious Duke of Edinburgh's Award. They had heard about the wonderful work that was done in Puttaparthi by our Sai Youth in UK.

On 9th August 2005, the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisation (UK) formalised its partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme by signing the much-coveted Operating Licence Agreement. This gives the Organisation the mandate and authority to run this famous Award scheme and to award the certificates within the structure of the UK Organisation for all youth aged between 14-25 years.

At the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Ceremony, held on Saturday 3rd September 2005 in London, all 180 youth from the National UK Youth Pilgrimage received their Duke of Edinburgh's Award certificates in front of an audience of 450 people.

Presiding over the ceremony was the Chief Executive (CEO) of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, Peter Westgarth. Peter was extremely impressed with the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation and in particular the calibre of its youth. **In his address, he stated that they had a lot to learn from the Sai Organisation, especially from its Founder Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.** This was truly a historic event in the history of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organisation in UK and a befitting tribute to our Lord during His 80th year of Love in Action.

“The invitation to the Organisation to attend the Queen’s Royal Garden Party and receive the award is a valuable testimony of recognition for the Sai youth in the UK. The youth of the United Kingdom are indeed grateful to Bhagawan for the wonderful Grace that He has bestowed upon them with the presentation of the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Certificate,” say the Sai Youth of UK.

Swami says that young people are the future leaders of tomorrow - for youth to be the leaders of tomorrow they must be the participants of today. And the Sai Youth of UK have amply demonstrated how selfless work with love can take us to great heights and make us beautiful instruments In His hands.

Heart2Heart is very pleased to carry this article, which portrays not only the tremendous benefits of dedicated service on those taking part, but also the need for society to value and recognise what is healthy and beneficial to its citizens. We pray and wish them all the best in their future endeavours in continuing His work and also express our gratitude to them for sharing with us this wonderful account, which has had such a tremendous impact on those whom they served and also drew laurels from a prestigious award body and the country’s esteemed Head of State.

- Heart2Heart Team

FIRST SSEHV TEACHER TRAINING IN CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

The first Sathya Sai Education in Human Values training in Morocco was held at the American School, Casablanca, on 1st & 2nd July 2006, organised by the SSEHV group of the Casablanca Sathya Sai Centre.

Morocco – The ‘Land of God’

Before we go into the details of the wonderful happenings at this unique training camp, a little about this country, Morocco, first which sits right at the top of the African continent.

The full Arabic name of the country (*Al-Mamlaka al-Maghribiya*) translates to *The Western Kingdom*. The Arabic influence originated in the 7th century when invasions established Islamic culture in the country. The name ‘Morocco’ many believe, originates from the name of the former capital Marrakech, which means ‘Land of God’.

Morocco now is a constitutional monarchy, which recovered its political independence from France in 1956. The Atlas Mountains run down the backbone of the country, from the south west to the north east and most of the population live to the north of these mountains, while the Sahara desert is to the south. This phosphate-rich nation is the fourth most populous Arab country comprising mostly of Sunni Muslims of Arab, Berber (an ethnic group indigenous to Northwest Africa,) or mixed Arab-Berber stock.

So it was really a miracle of sorts when a Human Values training camp was held in this part of the world and more than one hundred and twenty teachers attended from fourteen schools. At the invitation of The African Institute of Sathya Sai Education (TAISSE) Carole Alderman, Director, and Christina Wilson, a French speaking trainer, of the British Institute of Sathya Sai Education (BISSE) facilitated the training. The whole training took place in French.

During the two days of the course the teachers were introduced to the five values and five teaching techniques through lectures, brainstorming, pair-shares and interactive activities – in which everyone participated enthusiastically. **A lively, friendly and very positive atmosphere developed. During the first lunch break one participant remarked, “Look teachers from different schools all talking to each other. That has never happened before. This in itself would have been enough.”**

The first day had ‘Love’ as the main value and a reflective exercise on ‘Prema’ gave an insight into this value. The participants later had the opportunity to practise delivering an SSEHV direct method lesson in small groups, and then presented the lesson plan to other participants, in larger groups.

On the second day, a presentation on the Elicitation of Values in curricular subjects was given which the teachers found interesting and very inspiring.

Day 2 was given the theme of ‘Non-violence and Not Wasting’ and ways of doing this were brainstormed. The effect of this exercise was evident at the end of the second lunch break, as much less food was left uneaten on the plates. One participant commented, ‘You see, we are already putting the values into practice!’

Later, the different schools discussed together and reported back on how they would take SSEHV further. Their feedback was extremely positive. **Each school said that they would start implementing the programme in their schools the very next day, and they all requested that the UK SSEHV Books 1 & 2 be made available in French and Arabic.**

The participants were overjoyed by the programme and created poems and songs themselves and recited and sang them to all. They were very expressive in their appreciation of the course.

One teacher remarked, **“It is the end of the school year and I was very tired when I came to attend the course yesterday morning, but now I feel refreshed and full of energy. It’s amazing. Tomorrow we start planning the next school year and we will be planning the SSEHV programme into our curriculum straight away.”**

Another teacher commented, “Because of the way that society is going, it is really important for our children that they learn this.” Another said, “I have never enjoyed myself so much at work!”

The organisers, Tony and Chitra Mirpuri, and the BISSE trainers were invited to one of the schools the next day. It was a small private school with children from 2 to 11 years. The head teacher’s father had started the school to bring good education at a low cost to children whose parents would not otherwise be able to afford it. **“We were delighted to see the values symbol already painted on the school wall near the entrance,” the organisers commented with great jubilation.**

After being shown over the school, a meeting was held with the head teacher who said she wanted the school to become a model values school for Morocco. Mrs. Mirpuri agreed to do whatever she could to support them in this endeavour and BISSE agreed to provide educational resources in French.

It is very heartening to know how the Sai Education In Human Values is spreading to countries which many would not have even heard of. The ways of God are mysterious. We at Heart2Heart pray that this seed of Sai Values grows into a gigantic tree conferring peace and solace to this Islamic nation.

Responses from the Participant Schools

Jardin d’enfants Condorcet

“In relation to the needs of the pupils, we will put the values into practice in our teaching work, in our relationships with our colleagues, in our relationship with the children and with our relationship with the parents.”

Ecole Al ilm Wal Imane Rabat

“We will ask our teaching assistants to practice values with the children for between 2 to 5 minutes in between each lesson and when the children arrive for school we will put on soft music and do relaxation exercises.”

Ets. Assabil Sale

“One lesson a week on human values to be included into the timetable for 30 or 45 minutes.”

Ecole La Palmeraie, Kenitra

“We will introduce it in our programme and it will be among the subjects proposed for the end of the year celebration: For example, songs , dramas, dances.”

SFB, Maarif

“We will integrate silent sitting into classroom practice and commit to Direct practice once a week.”

Mohammed Ben Abdellah

“We are going to implement these values throughout the whole school year in classes of oral expression and poetry.”

The Orphanage Lalla Hasna

“We are going to assign 3 or 4 children to each teacher, and every morning that teacher will get those children up, help them to get dressed and give them their breakfast and show them love, just like a mother would.”

Institution Al Mansour, Rabat

“We shall implement the Direct method once a week and put up a table of the five values in all the classrooms.”

Ecole El Ittihad Privee

“We are going to reproduce the symbol of the five values on the entrance of the wall of the school and inscribe the following words of Sathya Sai: **‘The end of wisdom is freedom. The end of culture is perfection. The end of knowledge is love. The end of education is character.’** We will talk about the founder of the program and discuss why we should be good citizens and have a good character. We will inform and make the children realise the benefit of practicing each Value and apply values in each situation in everyday school life. We will make projects with these values involving the children with their parents and use one or two values as a theme for the end of the year program.”

We are very grateful to Mrs. Chitra Mirpuri, Chairperson of Sathya Sai Centere of Morocco for sharing with us this story.

- Heart2Heart Team

GET INSPIRED

THE TEST

The King trudged through the mud and filth littering the streets of the poorest quarter of the city. His tattered shoes were old and worn and the rain seeped through his hood. He was a long way from the palace's secret door but was enjoying his evening habitual freedom from court ceremony and the burdens of outrageous wealth. That night he was looking for someone to teach, someone who needed to understand the value of happiness.

Leaning over a windowsill, the King saw a bare room, partially lit by a candle on a table. Before it was a meager meal, consisting of a chipped mug of water and a small hunk of bread. Seated, his face golden in the candle's light, was a man praising God and thanking Him for this great meal.

"Hello, my friend!" shouted the King, thrusting his head further into the window. "How are you?"

Smiling, the man looked up and replied, "Oh, I am so fortunate! A visitor, a guest has come! Please come in and share my meal with me."

The King entered the tiny room, pulled up a rickety chair and seated himself opposite his host. Confident in his disguise, the King said, "You seem to be in a very joyful mood today."

"Yes, I had a great day."

"You've had a great day?" teased the King. "How can you say this, when you're living in such disgusting surroundings with just a little piece of hard bread to eat? This is a great day for you?"

"Yes, I am a cobbler and today earned just enough money to pay the rent, all my expenses, and the remainder bought this little piece of bread. It is a great day. You see, my philosophy is, 'Day by day, by God's blessings, my life keeps improving.'"

"Is that so?" sneered the King.

"Yes, yes! It has always worked for me," cried the cobbler. "It's the source of my happiness. This is why I am praising God."

"Thank you very much my friend," said the King. He shared the pathetic meal with his host in silence. Later, as he trudged back to his palace, he thought that this cobbler was the perfect person to train about the value of happiness.

The next morning the King issued a new edict. The messengers and town criers scurried through the city, shouting from every corner that it was now illegal for anyone to have their shoes repaired by another person. The King was satisfied and wondered if the man would be so happy that evening.

In the seedy street he heard the man chanting even louder. The praises of God were echoing, filling the street with joyful sound. The King poked his head through the open window and saw the same scene: the man sitting there with tears in his eyes praising the grace of God, in the same bare room, with the same rough-hewn table, the same but shrinking candle, the chipped mug of water, the small piece of bread...and a wedge of cheese.

The man saw the astonished King and motioned him inside. "Oh please come in, my friend. Please share my meal with me."

"So," asked the King, "how are you doing?"

"Oh, I have had a wonderful day today."

The man said, "I heard the edict of the King as I was standing in front of my shop and I wondered what to do. As you may remember, I believe that day by day, by God's blessings, surely everything gets better. Anyway, I saw an old woman carrying a bucket of water and I offered to help her. She showed me where to take the water, thanked me and blessed me and gave me a little copper coin. I thought, "This is wonderful! I'll just help people to carry water today." I made more money than when I was mending shoes. This is why I am praising God, because my philosophy is true. Day by day, when one has faith in God, everything improves."

"Oh is that so? I am very happy for you" said the King as he shared the little bread and cheese. As before, the King trudged back to the secret gate in the palace walls and the poor man went to sleep without guessing the identity of his visitor.

The following morning the King issued a new edict. The messengers and town criers scurried through the city, shouting from every corner that everybody must carry their own water.

The royal day passed with the King impatient to see how his friend was faring. That night, he slipped out, incognito, into the street. He was still a block away from the poor man's house when he heard the praises resounding more loudly and joyfully than before. Once again the King was invited to share the meal and as he swigged a cup of wine, said, "So I see you have had a very good day today."

"Oh yes, praise God," the poor man replied.

"Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought I heard that it was forbidden to carry water. Didn't the King issue a new edict?"

"Yes, I heard it too. I was standing outside wondering what to do, when I saw some men carrying a big bundle of wood on their backs. I said, "Hello brothers! Where are you going?" And they replied that they were woodcutters on their way to the forest to chop wood, and then bring it back to the city. So I

said, "Can I help you?" The woodcutters agreed, saying they could use someone to help carry the wood. I spent a wonderful day taking exercise and filling my lungs with fresh air in the forest, which is such a beautiful clean place to work. I came back with a stronger physical body, ruddy cheeks, and even more money than when I was carrying water and more than when I was repairing shoes. So this is why I have this splendid meal today, which I am going to share with you. You see, my friend, as I told you, day by day, everything gets better and better by God's grace."

The King finished the last bite of his meal, pushed aside his empty plate, and said, "Is that so? Thank you very much."

He stomped back home to his palace and spent a sleepless night thinking how to make the poor man have a real taste of misery. He felt certain there was a way to get this man. Soon he constructed a wily plot. The following morning he issued a new edict stating that all woodcutters must become guards of the royal palace. There would be no exceptions. The cunning King thought that he had trapped the man now. Palace guards, unlike all the other professions the poor man had tried, were only paid at the end of the month. The day of the edict was the 15th, so the man would not have any money for two weeks. "We'll see how he survives with his 'day by day everything gets better' philosophical nonsense," mused the King.

The following morning was cold and the fog clung to the damp streets and wound itself around the town criers and the messengers as they spread the King's newest edict. The poor man had reached the gates of the city and was looking forward to spending another day in the forest when he heard that he had a new job. Nevertheless, he willingly went and enrolled as one of the guards.

A new uniform, a beautiful shiny new sword and a solid pair of boots were thrust into his arms, and before long he was happily standing guard at the palace door. At the end of the evening he went to his captain and said, "I have had a wonderful day today. Thank you very much. May I now have my salary?"

"Salary? What salary?" the captain laughed. "Don't you know we only pay at the end of the month?"

Crestfallen, the poor man managed to stammer, "Oh no, I didn't know that." He left the palace, walking home with his shiny sword by his side. As he walked he contemplated what he could eat while waiting for two weeks without any money. Finally, he pawned his sword to a blacksmith. The blacksmith gave him enough money to live comfortably on for two weeks.

"It would never do to be a guard without a weapon," he muttered to himself as he formulated a plan. "I know! I'll fashion a wooden sword that fits exactly into the sheath and if I paint the handle black, it will look like a metal sword." The fake wooden sword looked perfect. No one would ever guess it was not the genuine article.

He hung up his uniform, and with a deep sigh of satisfaction sat down to his evening meal. Suddenly, he saw a huge pair of eyes bulging at him from the darkness of the street. His friend, the anonymous King, was looking at him. He was astonished to see the poor man's table groaning under a fine carafe of wine, a jug of water, a huge crusty loaf of bread and a hunk of cheese. Incredulous, he stammered, "H-h-hello my friend, you have had an excellent day, I see."

"Yes, please come and share my meal with me. Today, by God's grace, everything is getting and better, as you can plainly see."

The man started relating his adventures of the day and how he had become a palace guard. "Yes, yes, look my uniform is over there." Then he went on to innocently confess the entire story of the counterfeit sword to the King.

The King devised a plot to trap the man in the palace. The captain of the guard, obeying the King's orders, marched in front of the palace driving a prisoner before him. "You there!" he barked at the poor man. "This criminal has been condemned to death by the King. The King orders you to execute him immediately. Chop off his head with your sword."

The King smiled to himself as he saw the trap sprung. The poor man swallowed and put his hand on the handle of his useless sword, trying to avoid the eyes of the terrified convict and felt the whole palace glaring at him, waiting for his decisive stroke. Nevertheless, he took a moment to calmly assess his situation. Obviously, the wooden sword was useless to cut off a man's head. The seconds stretched elastically as he contemplated his ghastly order. The other guards shifted nervously; the captain raised an eyebrow; the King leaned forward in his seat and a small bead of perspiration rolled down the criminal's cheek and splashed on to the ground.

Inspiration came to the poor man. He firmly gripped the handle of the sword and shouted so that everyone could hear: "As God is my witness, if this man is guilty, let my sword cut off his head; but if this man is innocent, let my sword turn to wood!"

A gasp rippled through the crowd. The sword held high above the poor man's head had become a plain piece of wood! Everyone fell to their knees shouting, "It's a miracle!"

The King bowed to him from his window and mentally congratulated his unknowing disciple, "My friend, today you have completed the course."

If you want choices in your life, train yourself to remain calm and confident and trust that God will help you and provide a solution. Every time our poor man was tested by being placed in a difficult situation, he thought calmly about it, prayed to God...and a solution always came to him that eventually improved his welfare.

Further, it is the role of God and spiritual mentors to give some trouble to their children, in order that they may grow in faith and confidence in themselves and in God. As Paramahansa Yogananda once said, "Problems are a necessary ingredient in life and make it worthwhile. Meet everybody and every circumstance in the battlefield of life with the courage of a hero and the smile of a conqueror. Misery is really your best friend because it awakens your search for God."

Adapted from SSS Bal Vikas Monthly Magazine, June 2006

-Heart2Heart Team

THE ZEN OF JOY

Once upon a time, there was a well-known and beloved Zen Master who was famous for being happy and full of the joy of life every single day. Absolutely nothing could make him lose his contentment. When the time came for him to depart this world, he seemed as cheerful as ever, for not even the specter of death, which even rich and powerful men fear, could disturb him in the slightest. In his own inimitable way, with the same natural smile he always lovingly greeted his students, he announced that they should assemble in his bedroom and say their farewells.

As he lay on his deathbed, his devoted disciples gathered around him. One asked him the question that was on all of their minds.

“Master, before you go, can you please tell us, what has been the secret of your constant happiness?”

The Master replied to one and all, “It is very easy, really. Every morning, the moment my eyes open and I awake, I ask myself the same simple question: ‘Do you want to be happy or sad today?’ And every day, I answer, ‘I want to be happy today!’ And once I have made the choice, I simply stick to my word.”

And with that, he left this life with the same smile on his lips that he lived it with.

And not a single tear was shed in that chamber, for on the face of each of his devotees was an inheritance greater than the wealthiest Kings of old had ever bequeathed their kin: the smile of someone who has decided to be happy.

Adapted from East and West Series, July 2006

-Heart2Heart Team

FILL ME LORD

Fill me with the fruits of Your Spirit, Lord.

Fill me with love, so that I seek to understand and appreciate the rich variety and diversity of life that surrounds me.

Fill me with joy, so that I celebrate Your presence in each and every moment I am on this earth.

Fill me with peace, so that I know how to ease those angry and sometimes violent urges that well up inside of me.

Fill me with patience, so that I stop rushing long enough to witness Your miraculous work taking place all around me (and within me!)

Fill me with kindness, so that I take the extra time to help the one in need, even when it isn't convenient for me.

Fill me with faithfulness, so that I place my mind, heart and all that I do in the service of Your Will.

Fill me with gentleness, so that others know that I believe in a God who loves and cares for all people.

Fill me with self-control, so that I act not on my impulses and urges, but rather on my beliefs and values, which are rooted in You.

Fill me with these fruits of Your spirit, Lord!

Adapted from Moolyasudha Oct 2005

- Heart2Heart Team

THE DEFINITION OF FAMILY.....

I ran into a stranger as he passed by,
"Oh excuse me please" was my reply.

He said, "Please excuse me too;
I wasn't watching for you."

We were very polite, this stranger and I.
We went on our way and we said good-bye.

But at home a different story is told,
How we treat our loved ones, young and old.

Later that day, cooking the evening meal,
My son stood beside me very still.

When I turned, I nearly knocked him down.
"Move out of the way," I said with a frown.

He walked away, his little heart broken.
I didn't realize how harshly I'd spoken.

While I lay awake in bed,
God's still small voice came to me and said,

"While dealing with a stranger,
common courtesy you use,
but the family you love, you seem to abuse.

Go and look on the kitchen floor,
You'll find some flowers there by the door.

Those are the flowers he brought for you.
He picked them himself: pink, yellow and blue.

He stood very quietly not to spoil the surprise,
you never saw the tears that filled his little eyes."

By this time, I felt very small,
And now my tears began to fall.

I quietly went and knelt by his bed;
"Wake up, little one, wake up," I said.

"Are these the flowers you picked for me?"
He smiled, "I found 'em, out by the tree.

I picked 'em because they're pretty like you.
I knew you'd like 'em, especially the blue."

I said, "Son, I'm very sorry for the way I acted today;
I shouldn't have yelled at you that way."
He said, "Oh, Mom, that's okay.
I love you anyway."

I said, "Son, I love you too,
and I do like the flowers, especially the blue."

Are you aware that if we died tomorrow, the
company
that we are working for could easily replace us in a matter of days.
But the family we left behind will feel the loss
for the rest of their lives.

And come to think of it, we pour ourselves more
into work than into our own family,
an unwise investment indeed, don't you think?

Do you know what the word FAMILY means?
FAMILY = (F)ATHER (A)ND (M)OTHER (I) (L)OVE (Y)OU

-Heart2Heart Team

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

1. One of the beliefs in Hinduism is the descent of 10 avatars. What was the name and form of the 5th Avatar?

- a. Kurmaavatar as a tortoise.
- b. Narasimhavatar as a half man and half lion.
- c. Lord Rama as a divine man.

2. What is the spiritual significance of number 9 as enunciated by Swami?

- a. Because there are 9 planets.
- b. Because there are 9 paths of devotion.
- c. Because there are 9 universal dimensions in toto.

3. Who began the practice of congregational singing in India?

- a. Mahavir
- c. Lord Rama
- d. Adi Shankaracharya

4. In the Mahabharatha, after the battle of Kurukshetra, Lord Krishna narrated the Kama Geetha to King Yudhisthira who wished to give up his kingdom from sorrow and retire to the forest. What was the subject of this divine discourse?

- a. That Yudhisthira should develop desires in accordance with the sastras.
- b. That all desires come from God.
- c. That Yudhisthira should rule his kingdom without desires.
- d. That Yudhisthira should give up desires and retire to the forest.

5. How is a person initiated to the Islamic faith?

- a. With a baptismal bath.
- b. With a special ceremony presided over by a mullah.
- c. By worshipping at a mosque.

6. As recorded in the Bible, why did Mother Mary give her baby the name Jesus?

- b. It was foretold in the Jewish scriptures.
- c. He was named after a family relative.
- d. The name was revealed to her in a dream.

7. What was the title of the first play that Swami produced at the age of 12?

- a. 'Love Is The Goal.'
- b. 'Follow the Master.'

d. 'Values Are The Essence Of Life.'

8. The Athi Rudra Maha Yajnam was held from 10th to 20th Aug in Prasanthi Nilayam. How many times is the Rudram to be recited according to the scriptures for the successful completion of this great sacrifice?

- a. 16,431
- b. 11,461
- c. 14,146

9. In which religion is the Navjot initiation ceremony found?

- a. Judaism
- b. Christianity
- c. Sikhism

10. One of the characters in the Ramayana was Kabandha – who was he?

- a. One of Hanuman's trusted soldiers.
- b. Lord Rama's charioteer.
- c. One of Ravana's assistants.

ANSWERS

1B

Swami explains the significance of the Vamana avatar as follows:

"The Lord, who knew the greatness of Bali, his noble qualities and his devotion to God, formally acceded to the Devas' prayers but decided to confer the highest blessings on Bali. For this purpose He incarnated in Siddhasrama as Vamana and went to Bali's *yajnasala* to ask for a gift. Pure-hearted as he was, Bali could instantly recognise the radiance on the face of the young Vamana. He asked Vamana: "Swami, what is it you seek at this *Yajna*? I have decided to renounce everything I possess to redeem my life." Vamanamurthi was short in stature, but the whole universe was immanent in Him. He asked for an apparently small gift from Bali - nothing more than three lengths of ground measured by his feet. Bali felt that for a ruler of the vast earth, this was too small a gift and he agreed. That very moment, Vamana assumed the immeasurable form of Trivikrama, the Supreme Lord of the three worlds. With one step, He covered the entire earth. With the second step, He covered the whole of space and asked Bali where He should place his foot for the third step. Bali knelt before the Lord and said: "Oh Lord! What can I offer you except the body and heart which you have given to me? I pray to you to place your foot on my head." Bali was thus the supreme embodiment of self-sacrifice, who did not hesitate to offer everything he had to the Lord."

Discourse on Onam day, 15-9-1986.

2C

"9 is the screen upon which the pictures appear, the basis, the rope that deludes you as the snake in the dusk, Brahman the nameless, formless eternal absolute. 9 is the Brahman number, for it is always 9 however many times you multiply it! It is immutable, for 9 into any number adds up to 9 only."
Sathya Sai Speaks VII p,34

3B

Bhagavan tells us that

"Guru Nanak was the initiator of the practice of community singing of devotional songs. He believed that through such community singing the common man can ennoble his life and experience the presence of the Divine in everyone. Through that experience, one can become a knower of the *Brahman*."

Divine Discourse 8-11-1986

4C

Lord Krishna explained to King Yudhisthira that his sorrow was not dharmic. His foes fell by their own deeds. Real victory involves overcoming the 6 inner enemies. His wish to retire to the forest was itself a desire and thus, Lord Krishna's advice was to sublimate this desire and rule the kingdom without any wish for the fruits.

5D

One becomes a Muslim by reciting the special testimony of faith of the Islamic religion which is called the 'Shahada'. The Shahada is as follows:

"Ash-Hadu Anla Elaha Illa-Allah Wa Ash-Hadu Anna Mohammadan Rasul-Allah".

The English translation is: "I bear witness that there is no deity (none truly to be worshipped) but Allah, and I bear witness that Mohammad is the messenger of Allah."

6A

We can find the account of this event in the Bible as follows:

'In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.'" *The Bible, Luke 1 v26-33*

7B

The young Sathya was asked to produce a play in Telugu. He plunged into the work very enthusiastically. The drama was a great success, not only because the hero of the play was a little boy acted by Sathya himself, but, chiefly because its theme was a common human failing – hypocrisy. The title of the play in Telugu was "Cheppinattu Chesthara?" meaning "Do You Do What You Say?"

8D

Athi Rudram involves 14,641 Rudrams (Rudram is a combination of Namakam and Chamakam given in Rudradhyayam in the 5th Prapathakam of the 4th Kanda of Krishna Yajur Veda Samhita). Namaka recited once along with recital of Chamaka once constitutes one Rudram. The recital of 11 Namakas along with one Anuvaka of Chamaka at the end of each Namaka, thus completing one Chamaka constitutes Ekadasa Rudram. The recital of 11 Ekadasa Rudrams is Laghu Rudram or Rudraikadasini. The recital of 11 Laghu Rudrams is one Maha Rudram. The recital of 11 Maha Rudrams is one Athi Rudram. Therefore, in Athi Rudram 14,641 Rudrams include 14,641 Namakams and 1,331 Chamakams. For more information, read the Prasanthi Diary.

9C

The *Navjot* (literally, 'the New Birth') ceremony marks the second birth of the child, i.e., into the Zoroastrian fold. On this auspicious day, the child wears the sacred 'Sudreh' and 'Kushti' for the first time – a white muslin undershirt around which is tied a consecrated hand-woven thread made from lamb's wool, whose wearing serves as a daily affirmation of the doctrines of Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Light and Wisdom. The Priests and relatives also witness the candidate's recitation of the 'creed'; an announcement that the new initiate accepts the religion as revealed to Zoroaster by God.

10A

Swami elucidates how this event took place as follows:

'While the brothers were trekking across (the forest), a demon called Kabanda, a mass of distortion and disfiguration, appeared before them. He opposed their advance and shook the forest with his unearthly guffaw. He attempted to snatch Rama and Lakshmana, but Rama slew him before he could succeed. He was a monster, with no head. His arms were inordinately long. He had his mouth in the centre of his stomach! He was a terror in that forest, devouring whatever he could get in the sweep of his arms. By killing him, Rama saved the forest-dwellers from a dreaded foe. On the point of death Kabandha realised who his enemy was. He recognised Rama. He said, "Master! You have this day liberated me from the shackles of a curse that had reduced me to this ludicrous and cruel role. My sins have been exonerated by the vision I have of you." While falling at the feet of Rama, Kabandha said, "Your mission will succeed, without delay or obstacles. You will certainly triumph over the forces of wickedness.'"

Ramakatha Rasavahini – II p,69

-Heart2Heart Team

THE HEALING TOUCH

FAITH, FORTITUDE...AND THE DIVINE TOUCH!

“The TV will look great in the corner sir”, said the officer pointing to the darkest corner of the *cul de sac* in the huge Cardio Thoracic Vascular Surgery Post operative ward.

“Well actually it’s better off flush against the wall.” said Dr. Anil Mulpur. “All the UPS plug points are on this wall together.”

“Yes, but won’t the viewing area be limited?”

“Actually the flat position permits more people because it faces the length of the corridor.”

The officer thoughtfully nodded conceding that the doctor was right. On the opposite side of the corridor they had decided to have a Library with books in various languages.

“Amar Chitra Katha will be a good start. We can also subscribe to Tinkle. They are available in almost all Indian languages. The subscription is not very expensive and there are lots of people who will only be too happy to help”.

“Let us get what we can! God will send the other things at the appropriate time.”

They then had a discussion about the various DVD titles that would be good for general viewing.

“Make a list, and so will I. Some from your collection and some more from mine will be a good start.

“Right sir! Shall we call the dealer today?”

Continuing their discussion the two walked back to the nurse’s station. Some patients and their attenders were seated near the entrance to the ward. Dr. Anil turned to the Ward Sister In-charge and was giving some final instructions when he heard a soft voice

“Doctor *Saab* (sir). Please!”

He turned to find a tall lanky father carrying his baby boy on his shoulder. His wife was just behind him and she was holding a polythene cover which obviously contained the medical records of the patient. It did not take a stretch of imagination to deduce that the child was the one in need.

“Oh! This child has been admitted and discharged four times.” Said Dr. Anil, to no one in particular; then he looked at the sister and the officer and said, “We are unable to perform surgery on him because he has persistent and continual chest congestion, cold and cough.” Three pairs of eyes swiveled to the little baby boy.

“*Saab*...” began the father hesitantly. Dr. Anil Mulpur nodded.

Pleading Desperate Parents

Encouraged, the father continued, "Doctor we have sold everything we have and have come here four months ago. All our money ran out and we had no place to stay or food to eat. I am working near the ashram as a construction labourer and am paid Rs.100/- a day. **My family and I are finding it very difficult to manage with this amount! Please help us sir! Please operate on my little boy.**" The grayish brown eyes of the father were desperate; the orbs swimming in unshed tears.

Dr. Mulpur and the officer traded looks with the same thought in their minds. It was obvious from the expression in the doctor's eyes that he was torn as a professional and as a human being. **The child was already sick and to operate on a sick child was an invitation to disaster. And the predicament of the family was so poignant that his heart went out to them. He took a deep breath and turned to the photo of Swami on the wall and said, "In the name of Swami..." He held out his hand, "Where is the file?"**

In a haste that betrayed their pent up emotion, the parents offered the file to the doctor. In the file appeared the magic words that they had been waiting for months "...Admit for surgery..."

The expressions of the parents were a mixture of relief and disbelief. The mother could not but vent her feelings in tears but the father fought back the deluge with the stoicism born of years of suffering.

Dr. Mulpur turned to the other patients leaving the file in the officer's hand. The dog-eared, pink cardboard folder held the details of the 16 months of little Pinku Das's existence. Born to Sanyasi Das and Sarojini Das in the village of Pottamundai, in the Kendrapada District of the state of Orissa, Pinku was their first born and their only child.

The officer turned to the clinical details and read that the boy had a Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD - a hole in the heart). It was not such a rarity and it intrigued him that the surgeons were so hesitant to operate.

As Dr. Mulpur approached the desk, his rounds complete he said, "Make sure that the file reaches the OPD."

"Sir, going back to department?" asked the officer.

"Yes?" said the doctor.

"Could we talk?" said the officer tapping the file significantly.

"Sure, come on."

They exited the ward and were walking along the huge balcony that hung over the massive dome area and the central hall that hosted the weekly bhajans.

"Sir, why are we thinking so much about working on the boy? I mean, after all it is a VSD and you have handled so many?"

The Medical Problems To Overcome

"The problem is with his lungs" replied the doctor. "In babies as small as these it is not advised to take up septal repairs with damaged lungs. **The chances of respiratory failure are high.** The lungs already have a fluid imbalance

because of the cough and cold and during surgery we have to artificially ventilate the child. If the lungs are unable to recover after the extended duration of artificial ventilation we are done for. This is just one of the problems. If he contacts any other infection Post Operatively, in the ICU the body will have to fight multiple fronts. **The already existing infection, elimination of excess fluid, the added assault of surgery and there is always a possibility of acquired infections, and undiagnosed allergies.**”

“Sir, that is quite a bad list,” said the officer opening the doors to the Operation theater complex. They left their foot wear near the slipper rack outside the complex and were standing outside the entrance to the changing rooms. “That’s why I did not admit him all this while” continued Dr. Mulpur, **“I wanted to do it when he recovers but I am doing it in Swami’s name. He will definitely support anybody doing anything with a good intention. And my intention is to help the family get back on its feet. Why don’t you go and have a talk with them?”**

The officer nodded and the day ended on that note.

The little boy Pinku was duly admitted for surgery on the 13th of July 2006, a Thursday. Dr. Anil ably assisted by Dr. Manoj performed the surgery and it concluded uneventfully. But the team took no chances. All the medical technology required at that level was used to good result. No expense was spared. Pinku recovered fast and was out of the ICU in three days.

In the post operative ward, one afternoon when the little boy was resting after his lunch, one of the hospital staff who was from Orissa helped translate the story of Pinku and his family.

The Parents Tell Their Story

Twenty-two year old Sarojini Das, the mother, was the spokesperson since her husband was away on some construction site working - earning so that he may hold their skin and soul together. Her husband Sanyasi Das was twenty-eight years old and worked as a daily wage worker in agricultural fields. He earned about 60/- a day and a little more during the harvesting season. He had studied only till the fourth standard since he had to start working to earn a livelihood. He had married her seven years ago and they had waited long to have their first child. And when she finally delivered it was a happy moment.

“I was so happy when my son was born and everyone blessed us that good times would come” said Sarojini. Her voice grew husky and eyes brimmed with tears when she continued, “When Pinku was 5 months old, he had bouts of vomiting and loss of appetite. It came as a shock to us. We immediately went to a doctor in our village, Pottamundai.”

Dr. Nakul Sahu, the medical practitioner in the village diagnosed a heart problem and since the village had hardly any facilities to deal with such complications, he referred them to Sisu Bhavan at Cuttack. At Sisu Bhavan, after all the tests were done and the diagnosis confirmed as VSD (Ventricular Septal Defect) it was estimated they would need Rs.1 lakh for the surgery.

“Where could we go and what could we do?” Said Sarojini, her mahogany cheeks streaked with freely flowing tears, as she relived the past agony. “Then we met another doctor. Dr. Anil Kumar also working in the Sisu

Bhavan. He referred us to the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences Whitefield.” Encouraged they enquired further and the Sai Samithi of Kendrapada gave them the details of Swami’s Super Hospital at Whitefield.

Now a new issue arose. How to get to Bangalore, and reach the Hospital? It involved the most important thing of all! Money. And they had a negligible amount of it on hand.

All they had was a hut that had a cow dung floor and a thatched roof about five kilometers away from Pottamundai. Sanyasi Das also owned 5 (*guntas*) about a fifth of an acre of uncultivable land. It was used as pastoral land where cattle grazed. He made a hard decision and sold his land for a paltry Rs.6000/- . He needed the money for travel, lodging, food and other expenses.

They reached Bangalore – a foreign land to simple people who had never left the village and town they lived in. They first came to the Hospital on the 17th of April 2006. The child was admitted but had bouts of cough and cold. Concerned that the infection may spread to the other preoperative patients in the ward Pinku was discharged and was referred to St. John’s hospital for treatment. They approached St. John’s hospital and seeing their pitiable condition the couple was not charged anything for the treatment.

“In fact we met a Good Samaritan who gave us some money to see us through the crisis. My husband refused but that man insisted and gave us the money. I guess, the world still has good people,” said Sarojini with conviction in her voice.

But the undernourished child continued to have recurrent bouts of cold and cough and every time they approached the SSSIHMS they received the same reply, “It is not good to operate on such a small baby when he is already having cold cough and other infections.” Antibiotics were prescribed to stop the infection but the child did not improve sufficiently enough for surgery.

“Meanwhile all our money ran out and we had nothing to eat. My husband then found some work on the construction sites near the ashram. They pay him 100 rupees a day and with that we have been living. It has been about a week since he has started working like this.”

“Then one evening we came and we met Dr. Anil. He admitted Pinku and he also did the surgery. This was the fourth time we came to the hospital...I really don’t know what to say...our gratitude...to Swami and to this hospital...” She choked on the rest of the words. After she recovered she continued “We had darshan of Swami when He was here. And now we want to go to Puttaparthi to thank Him, but we have no money to undertake the travel. We only pray and hope that the God who has helped us so much will also allow us to have His darshan again.”

Her story was so moving that the conversation was ended by the ones listening to her. They left her with her son who was now fast asleep oblivious to the attention he was receiving.

Simple Faith and Stirring Fortitude

A couple of days later Pinku was discharged and in the discharge summary a long list of antibiotics had been prescribed to ward off any infection that he

may probably contact. This threw up a new problem for the parents. How were they to spend so much money on the medicines when they could hardly make ends meet? Moreover, they had to come back to the hospital after three months for the review. They did not have any money for the journey to their village and back.

This issue came to light when they approached the counseling department. One of the Sai Workers who performed voluntary service in the Hospital offered Sanyasi Das money for the medicines and also some more for their personal use. But he gallantly refused the charity.

“I have received enough from Sai Baba, I must repay whatever I can...don't offer me money...give me some work so that I can earn the money and take care of my child. I will clear my debt to God as long as I live...I still have energy to work. Please give me work. I may be poor but I still have my dignity.”

Impressed by the self-respect of the father, the Sai worker immediately contacted others and told them of his request. **In almost less than an hour, another Sai worker called back with the good news that the agricultural skills that Sanyasi Das had could be put to good use...they needed a gardener and he fitted the bill.** He could work as long as he wanted and they would pay him Rs 100/- a day. The same amount he was earning as a construction labourer but with a fraction of the risk.

Time has passed but nothing can dim the gratitude the family has to Swami and what He has done for them. The family continues to stay in Bangalore and will remain there till Pinku is reviewed.

On being asked what they would do after that the reply was surprising.

“Whatever has happened so far has happened with the Will of God. And what will happen, will also be His Will. We will make our efforts to get back to our normal life in our place but now we are sure that there will always be someone somewhere who will help us. Without that our child would not be with us today. Over the last one year, our child could never sleep well. He used to wake up during the nights and cry piteously. Only after the surgery did Pinku and his mother, have a restful sleep...If God can bring us this far, he will definitely show us a way.”

These words emerged from a tormented soul to whom neither destiny nor the world had a kind word. But when God decides that the time has come...well the story of Pinku says it all. In the face of all adversity Sanyasi Das did not lose faith. He had his self esteem and never subrogated himself to circumstance. The silent fortitude of Sarojini as she stood by her husband and child through all the adversity...a source of support and inspiration...never giving up... there is something to learn from both of them. **They vindicate what Swami says, “What you meet in life is destiny. How you meet it is self effort.” Let us pray that not just this family but all those in pain and need of help receive it through the various images of God...we...His reflections...children of immortality.**

FROM HEARTBREAK TO HAPPINESS

A moving story of how two tiny-tots rediscovered light, joy, strength....

“Patients were pouring in and the place was getting crowded. I suddenly heard a little boy’s voice from the back calling ‘Aunty, aunty’. When I turned around I saw Kotishwar, with bright shining eyes and a wide smile on his chubby face. ‘I can see, Aunty’ he said as he came running and held my hand. ‘Take me to the doctor. I want to tell him also that I can see,’”. This is what Mrs. Poornima Shirale, who has been serving the Neurology outpatient department of the Swami’s Hospital since the days of its inception, narrates recollecting one of the typical days at the hospital. “Every day in the hospital is a revelation,” she says.

In this article, we bring you the experiences of just two of the hundreds who walk into this Hospital everyday and return with full of hope, happiness and gratitude to God.

So to continue with the story of Kotiswar, over to Mrs. Poornima Shirale for the events that unfolded as she saw them.

“Tears welled in my eyes seeing the jubilant face and sparkling eyes of Kotiswar, as my heart silently thanked Swami. I looked up at his mother, her eyes were full. They could no longer hold the tears. It was too good to be true. Her face was a assortment of disbelief, utter joy and gratitude.

I took little Koti, as he is fondly called, and his mother inside the doctor’s chamber. The kid was very excited and kept talking to the doctor non-stop. “What is this?” asked the doctor holding a pen in his hand. “Pen,” came the answer. “Who is this?” asked the doctor pointing to Swami’s beautiful photograph on the wall. “Baba *garu*,” replied Koti. The sense of fulfillment on the doctor’s face said it all. It was not mere ‘joy’ or ‘happiness’...it was something more, an inner elation beyond expression.

Kotishwar Rao is a 3-year old boy hailing from a remote village in West Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh. He is the eldest among two siblings. His father works as a daily wage labourer in the fields. He was born as a normal and healthy baby. When he was 2 ½ years old, Koti’s mother had a second child, a baby girl and the couple palpably was delighted. But it was not to last too long...within a couple of months, they noticed that Koti’s vision was not what it should be. In fact, it was decreasing. He was groping for objects and to their utter shock, within 25 days he became totally blind. The worried parents approached a local eye doctor. Lack of advanced medical investigation facilities in their village meant no proper diagnosis for Koti. The local doctor referred them to the ophthalmic department in the Sri Sathya Sai Super-Speciality Hospital at Puttaparthi.

It did not take them long to reach Puttaparthi. After the preliminary investigations and a CT scan, it was confirmed that Koti had a brain tumour. The doctors in Parthi hospital immediately sent all his medical records to our hospital at Whitefield with a letter addressed to the neurosurgeon.

The next week was a hectic one for Kotishwar. His family arrived in Bangalore on 3rd May 2006, and approached the reception hall in our hospital, nervously

clutching the letter the doctor at Puttaparthi doctor had given them. Kotiswar's mother says, "We came to a new city with two babies and no money. We were surprised by the understanding and care that the people here have shown us."

Considering Koti's young age, he was admitted immediately. MRI and blood tests were carried out. The MRI revealed a well-defined lesion in the suprasellar region. The tumour was very close to the optic nerve. The surgery had to be done immediately because once the optic nerve gets damaged then there is probably no hope of getting one's eyesight back.

On 17th May little Koti underwent surgery. Left Pterional Craniotomy and Decompression was done. Post surgery, the pressure on the optic nerve was released. His vision started improving. Kotishwar was discharged on the eighth day.

When he was in the hospital, the chubby and cheerful Koti won the hearts of all. Doctors and volunteers included. His lively smile and sweet talk became the talk of the ward.

One month later, he came to the neuro OPD for a review with his mother. By then his vision had improved and he could see everything clearly. This is what his mother had to say. "My family members warned me that the child would not survive or might lose his speech or limbs after the surgery. Still placing faith in Swami we agreed for the surgery. Now it is the turn of the family members to be surprised. How can we ever forget the love and care shown to us by the Hospital staff? We have no words to express our gratitude to our beloved Baba *garu* and consider ourselves very fortunate to be the recipients of His boundless love."

Now Kotishwar can go to school like all other children and do everything that children of his age can do. It is as if he never had any illness at all.

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The second story is also another moving account. But this baby is only 2 months old and this what Mrs. Poornima narrates –

"Look at baby Omkar, two months old, lying peacefully in his mother's arms. His mother smiles with gratitude and happiness. Just a week ago, she had come from Karwar (in North Karnataka) to the Neuro out-patients department, hugging her child, who was having breathing difficulties.

The mother was overjoyed when she delivered a male baby, after ten years of marriage. But her joy soon turned into a nightmare, as she noticed her baby was finding it difficult to breathe, when he was sleeping. The doctors could see a swelling descending from his left nostril. The doctors in their town did not want to do the operation. "It is too risky," they said and advised the parents to take the child to Bangalore to a bigger hospital.

The desperate parents took the child to some private hospitals, but the doctors refused to admit the child too. This time the issue was with the deposit. Without a hefty sum of advance payment they would have nothing to do with the baby. The father being a salesman in a shop, could in no way

afford the medical expenses of such a complicated surgery. They were helpless! The surgery had to be done early. There was a chance of the lesion getting infected and the infection spreading to the brain if delayed any longer. It was as if they were no light at the end of the tunnel.

It was at this time that they came to know from a distant relative about Sai Baba's Super-Specialty Hospital in Whitefield. They also learnt to their great delight that the hospital specialized in such cases and what was more, the treatment was totally free of cost! They immediately came to our Hospital with hope in their hearts.

After the initial checkup and medical investigations the baby was diagnosed as having 'Fronto-nasal encephalocele', or in other words, the brain tissue was prolapsing into the nose.

Baby Omkar was admitted immediately and he underwent an exploration after a craniotomy. The brain tissue which was prolapsing through the roof of the nose was put back inside the brain. The roof of the nose was reformed with bone to prevent further chance of prolapse. This prevents any chance of brain infection in case the lining of nasal mucosa is lost.

The child responded well to the treatment. And Omkar today is hale and hearty. The parents say that, they are touched by the loving care, the doctors and nurses have shown to their child. When they return home, they want to share this love and faith with others. They are grateful to Mother Sai for this divine gift of health to their child."

If one were to document the story of every patient that came to Swami's Hospitals, both in Puttaparthi and Whitefield, it would be another epic – an epic of selfless love, an epic of loving kindness. And these stories are just two tiny grains of sand in the ocean of His infinite compassion for the forlorn and often-forgotten.

- Heart2Heart Team

HOSPITAL STATISTICS

BANGALORE SUPER SPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 19th Jan 2001 to 21st Aug 2006.

Cardiac Surgeries: 6,675

Cardiac Catheterisation: 14, 144

Neuro Surgeries: 6,108

CT Scans: 19,430

MRI Exams:22,894

PUTTAPARTHI SUPER SPECIALITY HOSPITAL

Cumulative Statistics from 22nd Nov 1991 to 21st Aug 2006.

Cardiac Surgeries: 15, 771

Cath Procedures: 17,109

Urology Surgeries: 31,091

Ophthalmology Surgeries: 35, 429

YOUR SAY

Responses to the August issue of H2H

Dear Heart2Heart staff,

I wanted to write to tell you how many hours of happiness I have immersed in reading the amazingly wonderful journal each month. The sheer size and volume means I have to force myself to read in many sittings (tonight was an hour and a half on just part of the August issue).

I look forward with joy every month...and a little caution because I know if I start reading it will take me a long time to pull myself out. The writing and the depth of the reporting are all wonderful, and the scope of topics covered is also astounding.

I am an interfaith minister and have appreciated this year's series on the great religions. I am excited to be coming to Prashanti soon (at the end of August) for my third pilgrimage. This year I am bringing two of my sister ministers, both first-time to India and Sai Baba. What an adventure I'm sure it will be. One of them is a registered nurse - an emergency room care specialist as well as an acupuncturist and talented administrator who has run large integrated health care /alternative health care centers in Chicago. Your story on Swami's Hospitals have inspired her and she is looking forward to seeing them in person.

I also had the opportunity recently to show the articles on the Water projects to a friend (another minister) who works as an assistant for a woman who has done much with the UN, lived in India for some time, and has worked tirelessly on behalf of women in distress around the world. She had recently attended a "futurist" conference and came back so discouraged on the state of the world. I had my friend show her your articles on the water projects, (especially the article on the presentation to the WWF) and her first remarks were that these must be proposals for projects; they couldn't be completed...I think she is still digesting the reality!

I was in Prashanti last summer as the female guitarist who sang with the American Sai children's chorus on August 1st, our English songs from the CD "Love Eternally."

Thank you again, so much for your work. I wanted you to know what a difference it makes, these many miles away from Sai's physical form...it brings me to His Feet over and over, and when I am tired and sometimes discouraged it is like a panacea for the heart! Truly Heart2Heart!

Sai Ram,
Nettie Spiwack,
Old Greenwich, CT, USA.

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Please accept my most sincere and heartiest congratulations on bringing out an excellent magazine everytime. Consistently good ,always inspiring and very elevating.You are bringing a lot of happiness to our lives. Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart.

Sairam,
Mohan.

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Responses to the cover Story “Zoroastrianism – A Shimmering Flame of Eternal Wisodm”

Dearest H2H Team,

Sai Ram, the time and effort put on researching and gathering information on the article on Zoroastrianism was definitely well spent as the article covered all parts of the religion and was wonderful to read.

I was amazed to learn that most of the temples were in India and how wonderful and confident the Zoroastrians are even when the population is slow growth. It is a beautiful religion and a lot can be learnt from this wonderful religion. The section which really stood out is how the dead bodies are disposed and how nature/animals are important in all parts of the degradation process. Keep up the wonderful work and may Swami shower his blessings on the H2H team. I look forward to your next article.

With Sai Love,
Sarika,
London.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

This was a **fantastic** article. Thank you for doing your homework and putting together such a comprehensive, complete and concise document. Your efforts are highly appreciated.
Best wishes and blessings,
Rayo.

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Sai Ram, thank you for our very interesting, comprehensive and above all, very lively informative story on Zoroastrianism! You provide so much: maps, audio prayers, pictures and history. I sincerely hope that you will continue to provide information on the great religions in this way. Thank you again with all my heart for all the regular information you send out to all of us in the world about the work and the experiences Swami inspires in us all.
With love and blessings,

Constance Eykman,
Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Dear H2H Brothers and Sisters,

I just finished your beautiful cover story on Zoroastrianism. It was as wonderful as the one on Buddhism. *Sathwic* and *Premic* information such as this promotes harmony and peace. Please consider an article on Taoism. Thank You.

Your Sai Sister,
Felicia Girona,
Brooklyn NY, USA.

Sairam, the cover story of the latest issue is very informative and interesting. Of course many of them are not known to many people. The history of religions with maps is very useful and made it easy to understand. It is happy to note many similarities with Swamy's sayings e.g. "good deeds, good thoughts, good words". Giving old names like Persia and new names like Iran is also useful. Anyway the presentation is a very good with lots of research work in it. I appreciate the efforts you put in bringing this informative research article. I liked the clubbing with Baba and Balavikas childrens' presentations photos. We wait for more and more articles of this type from you.

God bless you all, Jai Sairam,
Dr.Lavanya Saraswathi.

Hello, my name is Mona Antia and I volunteer (at least 2 Sundays per month - Sept to June) to teach Zoroastrianism to little kids in Toronto, Canada. This is a very impressive article and cannot tell you how much it is appreciated! You have made a tremendous effort in covering it from the beginning to the present day!!! I am very impressed and thank you!
Ushta Te, Mona Antia.

Sai Ram Brothers and Sisters, I just wanted to write to tell you what a wonderful job you did with this article. It is very thorough, informative and enlightening. Thank you very much for sharing such beauty. Also I have saved all the prayers on my hard drive. I think this is a very special treat that I can have forever.

With Love, Michele.

Responses to the article “Sai Movement in Brazil”

Dear Heart2Heart,

I was cleaning out my email account and happened to click on this article, which I had not read. It was so beautiful! Tears sprung to my eyes to read about the excitement and joy that the Brazilian Sai family has in such abundance. Reading about the Sai Movement in other parts of the world is so inspiring because it gives me hope for my own country. Each country seems to have its own particular strengths and weaknesses in implementing the Sai Message, so we can all learn from each other. Articles like this also tend to minimize cultural and religious differences as we can all recognize the Love for Swami that we all have in common. One day I hope to be able to visit all these countries and meet my worldwide Sai family. Thank you for sharing!

Ellesha Wanigasekera,
Toronto, Canada.

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Om Sai Baba,

I'm enjoying very much this article of The Sai Movement in Brazil! My name is Paulo and I'm Brazilian. In this edition I learned about the origin of the movement, and it put me in contact with the Sai organization in my country. Thank you all for that joy and for opening some doors for the future. May Baba bless us all.

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Response to the Sai Seva articles In Laos and Hyderabad

Dear H2H Team,

Sai Ram, the article on Sainet Project in Laos is wonderful. To read it is a humbling experience, to serve in such way, how much humbling it would be. One has to experience it oneself to feel it, no words can describe it. The article on Hyderabad Sai youth service was wonderful, the service being wonderful and timely. Being yards away from Shivam but knowing the service activities only through the Internet speaks volumes of the silent service done by the Sai Sevadal /Sai youth service.

Kudos to H2HTeam, With Love,
Manjula.

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Response to the article “Unforgettable Moments With Sai”

SaiRam!!

We are truly blessed to read such narrations as 'Unforgettable Moments With Sai', where Mr. Chidambaram has taken us back to the bygone era of our

beloved Lord. As I read, I stop and imagine how it would have been to be so close to Baba. Strangely as it may seem, I am relatively a newcomer to Sai or should I say a late bloomer. I was born and brought up in India and like a lot of our countrymen I too heard of Swami, but never made that attempt to get close. And now staying half way around the globe, how I wish Baba had given me the opportunity. So my million thanks to Mr. Chidambaram and other close devotees of Baba for giving myself and others this opportunity to read these beautiful stories and relive the moments.

Thank you - Heart to Heart.

Jai Sai Ram,

Jay Venkatraman.

Responses to the article “Amitha’s Amazing Journey – From Doubt and Despair to Light And Delight”

Sai Ram, the story is another example of Baba's grace. I am a retired internist in a small town in Bluefield, West Virginia, USA. I am a lonely Baba devotee. Internet is my pathway to Baba’s messages and blessings. Please continue to publish similar stories.

G.S.Gupta, M.D.

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Dear Sai Family,

Sai Ram, I am always of the opinion that whatever Baba wants to do, He does. *Tu Chhahe Tu Sab Kuch Kar De, Vish ko Bhi Amrit Kar De.* So I feel very good reading of such wonderful miracles that our sweet Lord Sai - God Incarnate - can do all the time for us. I feel very happy for Little Amitha who has a long life before her and now she can go about her life normally.

Hokumchand Rewah, New York.

Response to the article “Spreading the light of Human values in Oman”

Dear H2H Team, I am very glad that I took the time to read the whole article. The Sai group in Oman is to be commended on their innovative method of spreading human values which is the essence of our beloved Swami's message. The Sai (Service And Inspire) group in Oman is an example for other countries to follow.

Sai Ram, Venugopal, Canada.

Responses to SAI INSPIRES

Thank you Heart2Heart Team so much for all the emails you are sending!
You are doing a great service, I have no words to express my gratitude. May
that Divine Light guide you always!

Sai Ram!
Respectfully,
Shantha.

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Thank you for such an informative and spiritually inspiring newsletter. I
eagerly look forward to reading the Sai Inspires piece every morning and it
gives me such a warm, pleasant and peaceful feeling throughout the day. I
also enjoy all the articles which I find very enlightening and the advice
contained therein is pure words of wisdom. I know that in my daily life I try to
help people in which ever way possible and all my efforts is due to Sai Baba's
motivation which gives me the strength to go forth each day and try to practice
what he preaches.

To the Heart2Heart Team keep up the good work and thank you for giving us
the daily inspiration messages and spreading the light. May your efforts be
successful in enlightening the people and those who are fortunate enough to
come into contact with you.

Kind Regards,
Amrtiha Bagwandeem,
Germiston, South Africa.

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Sai Ram. Each day, the Sai Inspires message acts like a fatherly finger that
guides me to walk on the correct path. I am back from Prasanthi not long ago.
The visit to Prasanthi gave me a rebirth. A new birth where I am lucky enough
to continue to hear the teachings of Swami through Radio Sai and to sing the
daily prayers at home to develop my devotion to Swami. I just want to thank
the team working in the Radio Sai organization for the relentless great work
and a Love for Swami's great teaching to mankind.

Tang Wek Soon,
Singapore.

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Dear Heart2Heart Team,
I have only just started receiving the daily Sai Inspires messages and am
writing to let you know how much I am appreciating them. It's lovely to turn
on the computer and to find every day a message from Sai - they truly are
inspiring and arrive with such a feeling of love.
Thank you so much.

All love,
Ann.

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Hi,
Congratulations on your excellent work. The articles are interesting and inspiring. My family gets to know and understand Swami's messages in depth through your daily emails. It's like a beacon light, showing the right path we have to travel in our daily life.
Thanks and Best wishes,
Usha.

.....

Jai Sai Ram, I have been receiving Sai Inspires mails on a daily basis on my mail id. On reading and going through it, I have found out that a major positive shift/change has happened in my mindset, which, firstly has come into a calm and logical thinking mode. This has definitely helped me a lot because, with this as a base, I am able to channelise my physical and mental energy onto a positive developmental path, which will ultimately benefit me a lot in the first place and also people surrounding me, in the long run.
Jai Sai Ram,
T P Ananthanarayanan.

SUNDAY SPECIALS

Response to the Sunday article "Freedom, Liberty And Happiness"

Sairam, this is in response to your article 'Freedom, Liberty And Happiness' in the Sunday Special of 5th August 2006. You have not gone wrong at all. To any person who is spiritually inclined, your explanation of the meaning of 'self rule' suits very much. It is the Truth. Therefore, there can be no counter argument to this.

I just want to move a step ahead. Even in the ordinary sense ie. in the political situation of pre-independent India or America, people came to realize the need for self rule only when they underwent suffering due to the evil tendencies of the ruler. Then they gave call for 'Swarajya' (self rule). By doing so they were confident that once the ruler with evil tendencies is removed and substituted by one who is free from such bad tendencies, then life will become happy and peaceful. This is applicable not only to the foreign rulers but also to the local rulers who do not have virtues and moral values. On the whole, man prefers that he should be ruled by GOOD only and not by BAD at all.

There is no difference between the political world and the spirituality. The only difference is - in politics it is the society (collection of individuals) that is being ruled and in spirituality it is the individual.

With Pranams,
B. Chandraiah.

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Sairam Dear H2H team,

I always look forward to the Sunday special article. This week I got to read the article on "Freedom" from other sources. Your team has analyzed the concept of freedom, self-rule and happiness quite beautifully. It is absolutely true that we have managed to interpret freedom and happiness in relation to the material world. That is why we remain slaves to our senses and sensuous desires in spite of enjoying the so-called freedom we have won from our rulers.

Please keep up the yeoman service you are rendering to the whole world by writing such inspiring articles.

Santosh

.....

Om Sri Sairam,

A very nice article which brings out the close relation between spiritual aspects of life with the happenings in the world around us: how the social, economic and political issues that face the world today will find an answer if mankind embraces a dharmic way of life.

One of main issues with many of us today is that we tend to think in closed brackets, politics and social issues for discussions, spirituality for peace of mind but with a pursuit of material desires for oneself and one's near family. To appreciate, understand, absorb and lead a life based on the eternal truths requires a transformation in each one of us, which can come about and is coming

only about by our dear LORD's grace. Look forward to read more articles which will make us think a little more and indicate the right directions in this journey called life.

Warm Regards,
Anand.

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Response to the Sunday Special "A Powerful Prayer For Peace"

I agree that we must listen to Swami's instructions to each of us individually and do as He asks. Who knows exactly how He will create the tipping point to shift the current seeming balance of violence, hate and misunderstanding to love, compassion and mutual support. I hope we do not need more tsunamis, hurricanes, and earthquakes to teach us that we can actually all work

together. I do hope the works that address the real wars of our time, hunger, disease and illiteracy, find their way into everyone's knowledge and they are used as examples to be replicated time and time again until we no longer have those problems. These programs are with us in Sai Baba's Hospital, Schools and Service Projects all over the world.

I am reminded of the fall of the Berlin Wall. How in the world did He ever get that to occur? I have no idea but I do know, in bringing down that wall a whole new era began for Germany. Families that had been separated for many years were finally reunited and rebuilding has begun. Europe appears to be coming together as never before...in fact we should be celebrating this new cooperative venture.

Thank you for your thought provoking article.
Sai Ram,
Gayle.



Dear Heart to Heart team,

I just want to thank you again, for your inspirations and guidance. I do believe love is the way that can unite the world and put aside all the other trivial differences. Most of us should be content with having a shelter over our heads, and food to eat and drink, having a father, mother providing. But even then people are not happy, and make unnecessary quarrels. I liked the Sunday issue very much! I hope your words of wisdom are heard all over the world. Just know you have touched my heart and I will do my level best to hold on to your kind words and share them with others. Thanks to all of you to bring me these nice thoughts. All of you are working very hard. I enjoy reading all the Sai Inspires and the Sunday specials!! Actually makes my day.

Thanks!
Sai Ram,
Ami.



Sairam,

The message given today and the 'Powerful Prayer for Peace' was wonderful. It is very true people don't have inner peace and are running all over the place in search of peace. Swami has put forth many ideas in simple terms but we fail to understand the significance and suffer untold miseries in our life. Every word Baba utters is so true and meaningful, if only we all could spend some time pondering over those beautiful words.

I pray to Swami that He blesses the people with Sadbuddhi and people start caring for others' lives and maintain peace and stop all violence. I am sure the Yajna will be a grand success and with Swami's blessings peace will soon reign the world. Sairam to the team making this noble contribution to the world through the Sai Inspires mails. Please continue this noble work to enlighten people.

Sairam,
Shanti.

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Response to the Sunday Article “A Crash Course in Higher Learning”

Dear Heart to Heart Team,

I want to thank you for your very interesting article about higher learning. In particular I liked the way you described the meaning of the Yagna conducted in Sai Baba’s Divine Presence these past twelve days.

I hadn’t thought of it exactly the way you described it, leading us from the unreal to the real and to transcend our ordinary consciousness. Coming from a Catholic background I am used to some rituals but not to such a grand and elaborate extent. However tuning into Radio Sai and the updated reports, pictures and sounds from the chanting daily did indeed focus my thoughts and energies towards the Divine. It was extremely uplifting for myself and my family to read and listen to the Divine inspirations.

I like thinking about the Vedas and the Yagna as reminding us to think of God as Supreme Consciousness. In our Sai Center this past week we spoke about how Krishna showed His cosmic form to Arjuna, and how God is difficult to comprehend, because of His vastness, and yet He is present in all objects and matter. We discussed how all objects are expressions of the Cosmic Consciousness of the Divine One. So relating this to the Yagna is the same thing, seeing the absolute in the finite and drawing us into this Divine understanding. We also spoke about how Krishna told Arjuna that no one can behold Me, but through unswerving love humans can know My essence and enter my Being. This again relates to the Yagna because as you mentioned in your article that through the Yagna we ultimately are helped to love God in a very personal way. And I guess that is why God incarnates in human form, just as Sathya Sai Baba has done, to help us develop a love of God in an intimate way and then transcend our mundane consciousness into a Supreme consciousness. Aren’t we blessed to be born at this auspicious time?
Jai Sai Ram!

Fran Kesselman.

-Heart2Heart Team

