

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

Imagine if Jesus Christ Himself had taken the quill and systematically tabled in black and white His Gospel with all its annotations and enunciations – would there be so many versions of the Bible and consequently, unending debate on instances related to His Life and Message?; what if Lord Rama had left “The Story of My Life” before ending the drama of His holy descent; envision Lord Krishna documenting the entire Bhagavad Gita that He sang for all mankind (Arjuna being only a conduit); or for that matter, if only Shirdi Sai had left a diary of His daily divine discussions in His darbar (what we have now in the Shirdi Sai Satcharita is only incidents related to the last ten years of His life) – how profound, precious and invigorating these would have been!

The Almighty Lord in His every incarnation came down to the level of man, lived with him, ate with him, played with him, and at the same time preached to him, purified him and awakened in him the power of his own inner strength. The Lord always spoke and gave sermons, be it in the Sathya Yuga (Vedic times), Treta Yuga (Rama’s reign), Dwapara Yuga (the age of Krishna) or even in the early Kali Yuga (Jesus, Mohammad, Nanak, Buddha, Mahavir etc.). But in His latest incarnation, out of His immense compassion for mankind, Sathya Sai decided to do something He had never done before – He took the pen Himself! The mind-uplifting message of the Master came now in an enthralling flow directly from its source, its purity preserved and content unscathed. And what did He choose as His vehicle to carry this message to the masses all over the world? The sacred Sanathana Sarathi.

Yes, it is this holy ‘mouthpiece of the Lord’ emerging from Prasanthi Nilayam that has carried the priceless streams of ‘Vahinis’ that Bhagavan wrote for an astonishing three hundred and eighteen months spread over more than two and half decades. Starting from February 1958 when He inaugurated this holy magazine, Swami continuously penned, however tight be His schedule, an article every month which was either an exposition of divine love, an explanation of deep philosophical thought, an enlightening dialogue between the seeker and the master, or narration of entertaining yet elevating divine sport relating to His earlier manifestations, which revealed instances of His earlier actions and their inner divine intentions like never before. All these ‘Streams of Divine Grace and Illumination’ that Swami wrote till October 1984 for the magazine were compiled into volumes and that is how you have the “Prema Vahini”, “Dharma Vahini”, “Bhagavatha Vahini”, etc. in the Book Stall in Prasanthi Nilayam and elsewhere today.

Swami in His first discourse in 1953 had declared that after sixteen years each of *leelas* and *mahimas*, (divine sport and miracles, in that order) in His life will start the third phase, that of Upadesha or spiritual instruction. And precisely after thirty two years, Swami launched the “Sanathana Sarathi” to spearhead the spiritual revolution that the current generation desperately needs to save itself from impending peril. But why the name “Sanathana Sarathi”? Did Swami Himself christen it? How did it all begin? Who were the hand-picked instruments for this mission? How did He nurture and foster this ‘creation’ of His so that it has now become literally the ‘lifeline’ of thousands of

devotees from California and Cameroon to Canberra and Takahama? For media houses today, what is the 'take home' from this spiritual magazine which is translated into thirteen Indian languages and as many overseas tongues, and being shipped every month for an annual charge to lakhs of subscribers for a cost cheaper than a small size french fries? You will know all this and more when you read our informing and elevating cover story this month.

Sanathana Sarathi celebrates its golden jubilee this month. The splendid history of its fifty glorious years under divine guidance and grace is difficult to encapsulate in a limited twenty six page narration. What we have tried is to present before you only its greatest moments, heartening highlights as well as its trying times and consequent triumphs. In an effort to dedicate this issue to this enduring and hallowed 'messenger of Sai's mission', we have three other articles from its archives. As you celebrate Shivarathi this month, you can read accounts of how thrilling the occasion was three and half decades ago in our feature article taken from 1970 issue of Sanathana Sarathi. Similarly, there are astounding experiences of Dr. John Hislop and Ms. Indra Devi in the SwaMi and Me section brought to life from the Sarathi's 1971 issue.

Sai is as mysterious a phenomenon as He ever was and always will be. The same incredible instances of healing, love and grace continue to confer support and solace to any being whichever corner of the earth needs Him and longs for His protection. When you read the feature 'Sai Movement in Bolivia' you will be in awe at the implausible working of the Divine Will. Yet another scintillating account of this ever-loving phenomenon is by Dr. Ravi Kumar, a former student and current lecturer in Swami's University, who shares the beautiful relationship that He has had with Bhagavan like every student of His University, and how Swami never ceases to overwhelm him with His ever-caring concern. More of such sweet instances of this one-of-its-kind relationship you will find in the stories of Swami's stay in Kodaikanal with His students in 2006 and earlier years comprehensively compiled and documented by Prof. Venkataraman which we have in the H2H Special section.

The month of January saw Swami making a much-awaited visit to Chennai after a decade. We will be having a complete coverage of this landmark event in the next issue of Heart2Heart. For now, we want to take you down the memory lane to those prized visits of Swami to Chennai He made in the seventies and eighties; and so, we have the enrapturing Photo Album in this issue entitled "Sathyam in Sundaram". Enjoy it!

The compassionate Lord is ever busy granting *ananda* to all without any discrimination whatsoever. His love flows in the same measure to the saint as well as to the sinner. And this is, perhaps, the only valuable lesson we have to learn to make our lives His message. If we can love for love's sake, without any conditions, expectations or reservations, there is nothing more to accomplish in this world.

Let our lives becomes silent roses which exude the sweet fragrance of His love, everywhere at all times.

Loving Reagrds,
H2H Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

Shivarathri – Holiest Night of Goodness and Godliness

Ananda (sheer bliss), is man's real nature. But, alas, man in his ignorance and perversity, devotes all his skills, resources and time to acquisition of *Ananda* through his outward bound senses, rather than discover it by using the inward probing intellect and intuition. What he attains by his struggle and search is, at best, a pseudo-*Ananda*, a fleeting modicum of pleasure, an indistinct image visible in a murky mirror. It is not the everlasting bliss of *Atma* (eternal self), indiminishable by the blows of fortune, ecstasy beyond imagination. The delight one gathers from the objective world has to be continuously renewed and replenished, for it fades away soon. Therefore, man becomes a bondsman of desire, which presents before him an unending series of targets.

Man is, in truth, the *Atma*, which is beyond the bounds of his mind. The *Atma* has neither

beginning nor end. The mind, the senses and the body undergo decline, or development every moment and finally disintegrate and die. Man places faith in the instruments of exploration and experience that are superficial and so, he deprives himself of the supreme *Ananda*, inherent in the *Atma*. Like the sun hidden by the clouds, embers covered by ash, the retina overlaid by cataract, the sheet of water veiled by moss, the consciousness of man is coated thick with likes and dislikes; how then can the splendour of *Atma* shine through?

The Well-Guarded Treasure

The body of man is a receptacle designed to keep safe a precious treasure. Legends announce that cobras guard hidden treasures. The name of the cobra that prevents access to the priceless treasure hidden in man is *Aham*, 'the fascination for oneself and for one's belongings'. In order to reach and recover the *Ananda* Treasure, man has first to destroy the snake of *Aham* (egotism). The river is a part, a portion of the sea; it earns fulfillment when it returns to the sea and merges in its source. Fishes are of water. They live in water and die when deprived of water. The baby is a part of the mother. It cannot survive apart from the mother. The branch is a part of the tree. Cut it off the tree it gets dry and dies. Man is an *amsa* (a part) of God. He too cannot survive without God. He lives because of the urge to know God, his source. In the Bhagavad Gita the Lord declares (15-7), "all living beings are My *Amsa* (part). I am in them as the Eternal *Atma*," He indicates.

Man lives for a high purpose, not for submitting as the beast does to every demand of instinct and impulse. He has to install himself as the master, not crawl as a slave. He has the right to proclaim *Shivoham* ("I am Shiva"), "I am *Achyutha*" (I am the indiminishable Fullness), "I am *Ananda*" (I am the everlasting bliss). As soon as one becomes aware of his reality, the chains that bind him, iron as well as gold, fall off and he attains *Moksha* (liberation).

Ananda Is Within Us

Ananda (Divine Bliss) is all around us and within us. It is *Ananda* that sustains and supports us, but this Truth is hidden by petty selfishness which prods us across the sea of storms in order to gather on the outer shore, the things which apparently give *Ananda* inherent in them. Man envelops them with a layer of the *Ananda* within him but, while imbibing it, imagines that the thing itself can confer *Ananda* on him! Really speaking, it is his own *Ananda* that he is receiving back. After a term of deep sleep, man declares that he had unbroken *Ananda*. The mind and the senses, even the faculty of reason, had no contact then with any object, nor did they have any impact from objects. So, the *Ananda* was derived, during sleep, from within his own reality.

There are only two entities' - The Seen, and The See-er. The See-er is *Atma*, the Seen is the Creation. The See-er is Conscious; The Seen is inert. So long as man is immersed in the inert and The See-er, the Witness or the *Atma* is neglected or negated, he cannot escape from distress and despair. The meat on the hook hanging at the end of the rod, draws the attention of the fish and tantalises it, but the fish is hooked and has to give up its life. The man who yields to the desire for sensual pleasures has to suffer the same fate. The sages knew that the 'seen' cannot last or provide lasting joy. They renounced the lower cravings and the transitory comforts. *Thyaga* (renunciation) was, for them, the genuine Yoga (path to merge with the Divine)...

The Night of Goodness And Godliness

Today is Shivarathri, the *Rathri* (night) of *Shivam* (Goodness, Godliness, Good Fortune). It is an auspicious Night because the mind can be made to lose its hold on man by devoting the night to prayer. The Moon is the presiding deity of the mind, according to the scriptures. The mind is kindred to the Moon as the Eyes are to the Sun. Shivarathri is prescribed for the fourteenth night of the dark half of the month, the night previous to the New Moon when the Moon suffers from total blackout. The Moon and the mind which it rules over are drastically reduced every month on the fourteenth night. When that night is devoted to vigilant adoration of God, the remnant of the wayward mind is overcome and victory ensured. This month's Shivarathri is holier than the rest and so, it is called Mahashivarathri.

With firm faith and a cleansed heart, the night should be spent in glorifying God. No moment should be wasted in other thoughts. Time flees fast. Like a block of ice, it melts soon and flows away; like water held in a leaky pot, it disappears drop by drop. The time allotted for one's life ticks off quite soon, and the span ends sometime somehow. So, be vigilant. Be warned. Be alert and aware. Seek the shelter of the Lord and transform every moment into a sacred celebration.

- *Divine Discourse on Shivarathri, 26-2-1987.*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI - Part 29

(Continued from the last issue)

THE ATMA IS EVERYWHERE

H (HISLOP): Does the Atma (spirit) have a location in the body where the attention may be fixed in meditation? Is the Atma considered to have a 'seat'?

SAI: The Atma is everywhere, but for the purpose of sitting in meditation, the life principle can be considered as being ten inches above the navel and at the centre of the chest. An inch in this measurement is the width of the thumb at the first joint.

H: I have read that the seat of the Atma is found to be at the right side of chest centre, that is where one points at himself.

SAI: That the seat of the Self is at the right is just a viewpoint. Left handed people point differently.

H: Devotees often ask what happens after death. All that I am able to reply is that I understand from Swami that the after-death experience is not uniform, that, it is not the same for every person.

SAI: That is the correct answer. In each case there is a corpse. That is similar. But beyond that, it is not similar.

H: Well, Swami, one has to die. Is there some skill in dying? That is, is there a correct road through death which one can hold to and not get lost in the process?

SAI: That is not up to you at the time. You are influenced at that time by the net effect of your life.

H: Swami says that God acts to save the devotee from perdition. What is meant by perdition?

SAI: What do you understand from the word?

H: It seems to me that it means Hell.

SAI: That is just mental.

H: But the Buddha speaks of Hell as a place.

SAI: It is a place. A place of the mind. A mental state in which there is much worry and suffering. It is an after-death state. Sai is here to guide His devotees so they do not fall into that state.

CONCENTRATION AND MEDITATION

H: Swami points out that we already have and use a very high order of concentration in our daily lives. Then why is concentration not automatic in spiritual practice?

SAI: Without concentration nothing can be done. And we use that concentration throughout the day. Why is that same concentration so difficult to come by in

spiritual matters? Because the mind is outward turned, and by desire the mind clings to objects. But the mind can be trained to concentrate inwardly, and the heart can be cultured to grow with love for God. How? By Sadhana. The best sadhana is that every act through the day be done as worship of God.

God is like the electric power. Heart is the light bulb. The wiring is the discipline. The switch is the intelligence. The act of turning the switch is morning, noon or evening meditation. Once the electric switch, the wiring and bulb are in, nothing more need be done. Just turn the switch and there is light.

A fence is placed around a young tree to protect it. The same precautions must be observed in meditation. People think it is all right to meditate in any place. There are currents, there is will power. There is a strong current passing into the earth. Because of this, the earth exerts a very strong attraction. In meditation it is advisable to insulate oneself from such currents. For this reason, meditators sit on a plank and cover their shoulders with a woolen shawl. Once the person has grown strong in his meditation, he may sit anywhere and not suffer for it.

H: There must be a second or a fraction between one thought and another, and also between sleep and waking. No doubt that state in between must be something special?

SAI: Find out. Continue practice to catch the interval between sleep and waking. Do it with love.

H: Swami, seeing a corpse one can understand that the body has no life of its own. But how can the mind be associated with a body that is inert?

SAI: There is the inert body. There is the supreme consciousness. And in between the two there is the mind which is inert but which appears to be alive because it is infused with consciousness. Just as with iron which when heated burns and does so because it has been penetrated by fire; thus it is not the iron that burns, but it is the fire that burns. The whole mirage, the whole thing arises from thought. From the identification of 'I' with the body, all troubles and complications arise. Since it is the mind that has woven this web of identification with body, it is the mind that must now turn and seek one's true nature through discrimination, renunciation and inquiry. Both ego and intelligence may be included in the word 'mind'.

JYOTHI MEDITATION

H: Swami, in meditation some of the westerners are taking light alone, not the quite definite form of the Jyothi, but just a formless light and they are concentrating on that and projecting that. Is it correct to make formless light as the object of concentration?

SAI: It is not practical to attempt to concentrate on that which has no form. To concentrate on the Jyothi, is an illustration. The object of concentration can be sound form, the Jyothi, etc. It needs to be something concrete. It is not easy to fix the mind on the abstract.

H: Is there a particular pathway along which the flame, the Jyothi, should be moved in the body?

SAI: The light is first moved into the heart which is conceived as a lotus, the petals of which will open. The Jyothi is then moved to other body parts. There is no particular sequence. But important is the final body station, which is the head. There the light becomes a crown enshrining and covering the head. The light is then moved outside, from the particular to the universal. Move the light into relatives, friends, enemies, trees, animals, birds until the entire world and all its forms are seen to have the same light at their centre as has been found to be within oneself.

The idea of moving the light into the universal phase, the idea of universality is that the same divine light is present in everyone and everywhere. To impress this universality on the mind, we do the spreading of the light outside one's own body. One should understand that what comes about in meditation as one moves deeply into it, is not the thinking of the light, but the forgetting of the body and thereby the direct experience that the body is not oneself.

This is the stage of contemplation when the body is totally forgotten. It cannot be forced. It comes about by itself and is the stage that naturally follows correct concentration. Vivekananda said that in meditation he was unable to find his body; where was this body? He could not find it.

Seeing the light and moving the light here and there is to give work to the mind, to keep the mind occupied in the right direction so that the mind will not be thinking of this and that and thus interfering with the process of becoming more and more quiet. Spreading the light into its universal phase, sending the light into every other body, and when one is so concentrated in it that he is no longer conscious of his body, is the stage of contemplation. As contemplation deepens, the stage of meditation comes about of its own volition. It cannot be forced. If the meditator remains conscious of himself that he is engaged in meditation, then he is not meditating but is still in the preliminary stage, at the beginning of concentration.

There are the three stages: concentration, contemplation and meditation. When contemplation deepens it moves naturally into meditation. Meditation is entirely above the senses. In the state of meditation, the meditator, the object of his meditation and the process of meditation have fallen away, and there is only one, and that One is God. All that may change has fallen away and *Tat Twam Asi*, That Thou Art, is the state that exists. As one gradually returns to his customary and habitual state of consciousness, the Jyothi is again placed in the heart and kept lighted there throughout the day.

H: In meditation on the form of God, Swami says that transition into the states of contemplation and meditation occurs naturally without the volition of the person who is meditating. But how does this tie into the meditation on light where the meditator deliberately and with volition moves the Jyothi here and there?

SAI: The three stages, concentration which is below the senses, meditation which is entirely above the senses and contemplation which lies between and is partially within the senses and partially above the senses, which is on the border of each, this is the experience in genuine meditation whether the object taken be form or light. There is no essential difference. If the devotee has a form of God to which he is particularly

devoted, he may merge that form into the Jyothi, and that form is most attractive to him and is the object of his concentration and is seen to be within the light wherever it is seen. Or, the concentration may be just on the form of God, for God is universal in every form.

Again, the object chosen is just a device to allow one to sink deeply into quietness and to allow the body, which is non-self, to fall away out of consciousness. Anything concrete, such as light, form or sound may be chosen as the object of concentration. It is not possible just to move directly into the stage of meditation.

THE KUNDALINI

H: In speaking of yogas, Swami said that *bhakthi yoga*, devotion to God, was the only yoga worth the bother, that the others were useless. But the westerners complain that Ramakrishna Paramahansa describes how he saw the kundalini factor rise and open each chakra. What is the correct reply to this doubt?

SAI: Ramakrishna used the chakras as symbols for locations of greater sensitivity along the spinal column. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about this so called kundalini meditation. The chakra is a wheel. There are no wheels on the spinal column. The wheel is taken as a symbol because the circulation of the blood is circular. The discs of the spinal column are also circular. By placing the 'wheel' at various points along the spinal column and giving these points particular names, one is able to fix his mind on those stipulated areas and move the mind from one to the other.

H: But Swami, how about the idea that the snake of Kundalini awakens at the base of the spine and activates each chakra as it rises up?

SAI: That energy is prana. It is imagined as rising up the spine by the practice of Pranayama. The practice of Pranayama is dangerous unless all circumstances are exactly correct. It is not necessary, and Swami advises against it. The area between the 9th and 12th vertebrae is especially sensitive. An injury there can result in paralysis. Meditation as described by Swami is the royal road, the easy path. Why bother with other practices? For meditation to be effective there must be steady practice with no hurry and no worry. With steady practice, the person will become quiet and the state of meditation will naturally come about. To think otherwise is weakness.

Success is assured. Call upon God, He will help you. He will respond and He Himself will be your guru. He will guide you. He will always be at your side. Think God, see God, hear God, eat God, drink God, love God. That is the easy path, the royal road to your goal of breaking ignorance and the realization of your true nature, which is one with God.

H: Swami, the westerners are extremely interested in everything that Swami says and they think and talk about it. The fact that the breath is saying 'Sohum' 21,600 times a day has some of the people puzzled, because they say they do not experience breathing at that rate?

SAI: The 21,600 breaths per day is the typical experience. It is the average of one's life. At times of exertion or stress the breathing will be very fast; at times of peace

and quiet it will be slow. Some people may have an average of more than 21,600 breaths per day. A practiced yogi may average not 15 breaths per minute, but as low as 6 or 7 per minute. The slower the breathing, the longer the life span. The short-life donkey will breathe some 40 times per minute. The long-life snake will breathe 3 or 4 times per minute.

H: For us westerners, is there something of the essence, some test that could be applied to action that would point out the correct *dharma* for any role in life?

SAI: There is not one dharma for Indians and another for Westerners. Dharma is universal. Yes, there is a test that may be applied to any action and you may thereby determine if it is according to dharma. Let not that which you do, harm or injure another. This flows from the recognition that the light, which is God, is the same in every form and if you injure another you are injuring that same light that is yourself. Dharma enables you to come to the recognition that anything that is bad for another form is also bad for you. The test for dharmic action is stated very clearly in the Christian religion. That is: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

H: People have their previous meditations prior to coming to a Sathya Sai Baba Centre. How should they now evaluate their present meditation procedure?

Interpreter: This question is answered by Swami's description of genuine meditation. If the meditation engaged in by the new member of the Centre falls short of that, then he may consider following Swami's guidance in the matter.

(To be continued)

CHINNA KATHA

The Fruit Of Fortitude

Arjuna was lost in meditation on Siva, during his life as an ascetic in the Himalayan valley. Suddenly, a huge wild boar ran across the place where he was and evidently standing at bay, was grunting ferociously and snorting in terrible anger. Though during the penance, he should not hurt any living being, he hastily took up his bow and shot an arrow at the monster. Just at that moment, a Bhil of the forest, also armed with bow and arrow, appeared on the scene and claimed the boar as his kill. "Who are you, intruder, daring to shoot at my prey?" he shouted and he was in a defiant mood. Arjuna felt deeply insulted by the forest-dwelling tribesman. "The forest and its wild life are the property of all", he claimed. "Why did you kill the boar I was stalking?" asked the Bhil.

From words they soon came to arrows. Arjuna noticed that his arrows fell off the Bhil, like blades of grass. He stood helpless and full of rage. He dealt a fierce blow with his bow on the head of the Bhil, but the bow it was that broke. He engaged the Bhil with his fists. They struggled long, dealing hammer blows on each other, but, it was Arjuna who flopped on the ground. The Bhil was not exhausted in the least, though Arjuna was gasping for breath, and bleeding.

Then Arjuna realised that the Bhil was no ordinary mortal. He moulded a Linga of the Siva he was adoring and offered some flowers on it. And, he saw those flowers on the head of the Bhil and of his wife, who had joined him meanwhile. He was overcome with delight, for, he now knew they were Siva and His Consort, Parvati, come to test his fortitude and bless him.

...He ran towards them, exclaiming, 'Oh Sankara, Mother Gowri!' and fell at their Feet. He prayed that They should pardon him for his rashness and ignorance. Gowri and Sankara, who are the embodiments of Grace, lifted him by the shoulders lovingly and stroked his head affectionately. 'Son,' they said, 'You have attained the fruition of your life. You did your duty as you were bound to do. That is not wrong, at all. Now, take this; here is the sign of Our Grace'—and he got from the Hand of Siva Himself the Divine Pasupatha Asthra.

- Baba

COVER STORY

SANATHANA SARATHI -

...Recreating a 'Prasanthi' in Every Home

Bringing Joy...Bestowing Bliss

"The monthly gift from Prasanthi Nilayam has arrived again! What a joyful and comforting feeling it is! The Sanathana Sarathi sitting in our mail box brings along with it, something indescribable, an inexhaustible stream of inexplicable happiness...it brings to our home Bhagavan Himself! Not yet having laid our eyes on one word within its sanctified pages, we hear His soft voice, see His warm smile and feel His caring gaze...We feel His presence...our eternal guide and closest friend, our Sai, is with us, very near and very real."

This is the experience not only of the Shiva Gopie family living thousands of miles away from Prasanthi Nilayam in the North American city of Toronto, Canada, but of hundreds and thousands of devotees and spiritual aspirants spread from California to Cameroon, Suriname to Slovenia, and Tanzania to Tokyo who are the blessed recipients of this 'Prasadam from Prasanthi' – the Sanathana Sarathi.

The Lord's will is indomitable, impassable. "The sky may fall and break into pieces but Sai's will must prevail," thundered Bhagavan in front of thousands just a decade ago. In 1962, on that auspicious evening of the holy 'Festival of Austerity' – the celebration of Shivarathri, while enunciating the virtues and vital mission of this hallowed magazine on its fifth anniversary, Swami declared, "The 'Sanathana Sarathi' is the result of My *Sankalpa* (resolve), My *Uthsaaha* (venture), My *Aanandha* (bliss). Nothing can stand in the way once I have decided on any step." And for five decades by then, this unique instrument of the Lord has incessantly and indefatigably taken the immutable message of universal love and perpetual peace to the hearts and homes of every sincere spiritual seeker and searcher of divine love.

"The moment I see the publication in my mail box, it instantly takes me away from worldly interactions and puts me right back in Prashanti Nilayam with the feelings of what I am and who I am....it is a direct link to beloved Swami and the Ashram. Without this publication or the transliterations of it and His unique and special message of inherent divinity, I cannot imagine what my life would be. Each issue emphasizes the principal ingredients of life - absolute love, wisdom, and knowledge, and enlivens every cell of my being," says a devotee from New York who has been subscribed to this magazine for nearly two decades now. For Mrs. Kirsten Pruzan from Denmark, the Sanathana Sarathi is "like an umbilical cord to Prasanthi Nilayam – the abode of Supreme Peace."

“The articles and pictures of Sanathana Sarathi show that life is a combination of spiritual and material energies. It demonstrates how we can make our life a work of beauty, love, enjoyment and clean fun if we have the yearning,” the joyful Perampalan Murugasu from Remuera, New Zealand says.

Bhagavan Launches a Spiritual Missile of Love

Yes, beauty, love, joy, bliss.....this is what this gem of a journal has bestowed to every reader, exactly as Bhagavan had wished and prophesied in His very first message to this magazine. In the inaugural issue on the sacred Shivarathri in 1958, Swami had said,

“From this day, our Sanathana Sarathi is on the march, at the head of the spiritual cohorts – the Vedas, the Upanishads and scriptures – to subdue the evil ego brood – injustice, anarchy, falsehood and license.

“May this ‘Charioteer’ fight for world prosperity and, by making the drum of victory sound and resound, spread joy among all mankind.”

Everything about this hallowed magazine is so significant, be it the date of its inception, the year of its birth, the place of its origin, the immense implication of its name, or the Lord’s instruments chosen for this divine endeavour.

In His first public discourse on the occasion of Vijaya Dasami (last day of Dasara) in 1953, when Bhagavan was only 27, He revealed, “The first sixteen years of this Life have been, as I have often told you, the period when *Bala leela* (divine child sport) predominated, and the next sixteen is being spent mostly in *Mahimas* (miracles) in order to give *santhosha* (joy) to this generation. Joy and contentment are short-lived sensations; you have to catch that mood and make it a permanent possession: *Aanandha* (bliss). After the thirty-second year, you will see Me active more and more in the task of *Upadhesa* (spiritual instruction) - teaching erring humanity and in directing the World along the path of Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi and Prema (Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love)....Not that I am determined to exclude *leela* and *mahima* from My activity after that; I only mean that re-establishing Dharma, correcting the crookedness of the human mind and guiding humanity back to *Sanathana Dharma* (eternal universal religion) will be My task thereafter.”

And significantly enough, in His thirty second year Bhagavan unfurled this unique conduit of His mission and message on a no less significant day than the occasion of Maha Shivarathri. It was February 16, 1958 when Bhagavan blessed the first few copies of this newest ‘manifestation of His will’ to be distributed freely to all present. [Interestingly, after five decades while Sanathana Sarathi celebrates its golden jubilee, the Sun and the Moon are so aligned that Shivarathri falls on February 16 this year too!]

The Naming Ceremony

But why the name ‘Sanathana Sarathi’? Could it not have been ‘Divine Love’, ‘Sai Speaks’, “Unity to Divinity” or anything similar? And who christened it so? Prof. Kasturi, the Lord’s hand-picked mission-man and the first editor of this magazine, narrates a beautiful incident to put to rest all such often queried queue of questions.

“I got the good news pretty quick; Baba had come to Bangalore. He was staying in Sri Vittal Rao’s house on the 9th Cross Road, Wilson Gardens, only 5 minutes away from my residence, ‘Ashoka’ on the 12th Cross,” writes Prof. Kasturi in his biography, *Loving God*. “Knowing that there was a possibility of His coming to his place, I had tipped the dry cleaner, who attended to the washing and ironing of his door and window curtains, to inform me as soon as he delivered the wash to Vittal Rao. I had noticed that he had the curtains washed and ironed as part of house-cleaning, preliminary to Baba’s visit. When the news leaked at last, I posted the little daughter of my domestic help on a slab of stone facing his house, with directions to keep watch for a big car and an orange robe. So within ten minutes of Baba’s stepping into his house, Vittal Rao was amazed to find me on his verandah! “Wait! Wait!” he pleaded. But Baba spotted me and came towards me with His palm ready to fall on my shoulder. “Now, you have to work at Puttaparthi”, he said. “A monthly magazine will start soon. Guess! How is it named?” He asked. I confessed I could not delve into His Will. Yet He drew out from my reluctance a few names. “The Godward Path”, “Karma Dharma ...”, “Premayoga.” He waved aside the titles I suggested and announced that he had decided to designate it as “Sanathana Sarathi!”

A Part and Projection of His love

Who else but the parents name the child, isn’t it? The “Sanathana Sarathi” is a product of His divine love, to share love and transform every being into a beacon of love, just as He is. And so, from its very beginning, Swami took great care of it. Apart from appointing a man of supernormal caliber and competence like Prof. Narayana Kasturi, who had a plethora of popular Kannada and English literature to his credit and also had served as Assistant Director of the All India Radio (in fact, he was one who named the all-India radio broadcasting service ‘Akashvani’ which has stuck on permanently since India’s pre-independence days); personally visiting Bangalore to ‘Vichara Darpan Press’ in Avenue Road and buying a foot-operated treadle printing machine along with a case of Telugu and English types; setting up the ‘Sri Sathya Sai Press’ in Prasanthi itself right next to His residence in late 1950s; appointing people and selecting volunteers to serve in the press as well as aid Prof. Kasturi; visiting the press every other day to correct, direct, instruct and inspire; laying down clear and austere guidelines with respect to its content and format; even Himself editing articles on many occasions – Swami was concerned about every single detail.

And just like a mother would sacrifice everything and go to any extent to take care of her just born infant, Swami too, embarked on an exercise

that was hitherto unprecedented by any standards in any age – The Lord decided to take the pen Himself. And this was perhaps, the greatest demonstration of Swami's immeasurable love and immense concern for Sanathana Sarathi (and through it to all mankind). It was epoch-making. Imagine God himself writing week after week! Imagine if we had the Bhagavad Gita written by Lord Krishna Himself and not by a third party! Imagine having Lord Rama's life story in His own hand-writing! For the first time, the Avatar acceded to document His message Himself. Perhaps, this is the best way the purity of His preaching could be preserved, and the destiny of mankind could be rewritten to save it from impending peril in the present Kali age.

'Sanathana' means 'Eternal, the timeless one'; and 'Sarathi' implies 'Charioteer'. "Recognise God as the *Sarathi* (the charioteer of our life), yield wholeheartedly to His direction, reach your Destination in good shape", is the message that Bhagavan is conveying through the name," Prof. Kasturi explains in 'Loving God'. In reality, it is not a name; it is an announcement, a divine proclamation and reaffirmation that Bhagavan is the Omniwill, which is moulding and manipulating, since Time began, the wills of living beings from the amoeba to the astronaut. It is a clarion call to cleanse our hearts and souls, and create an ambience for Him to install Himself in us and lead us to truth, goodness, joy and bliss.

Innumerable are the instances when God has converted a 'stormy tornado' of someone's life into a 'serene sea' when they allowed Him to take over the reins of their lives. Dr. Y S Thathachari, a dedicated biophysicist who had worked for some years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and after that at Stanford University and the University of California, suffered in 1960 'aggressively malignant and metastasising tumours in the skull, the neck, the ribs and the hips, the cancer having the features of both Ewings and Retiaulum Cell Sarcoma.' It was a death sentence enveloped in medical abracadabra! Prof. Kasturi reports in Sathyam Shivam Sundaram. The surgeon finally told him, 'Sir, miracles do happen. We hope such a miracle would happen to you.' This was in 1962.

The couple returned to Madras (now Chennai) and the doctors in Madras pronounced that even the liver is now affected with cancer. "In 1965," Thathachari says, "I felt like seeking the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, following a chance reference by a friend. Baba blessed me and my wife and directed us to go back to Stanford, continuing the Endoxan, if I wished to do so. In 1970, when I approached Him again, He asked me to discontinue all drugs and dietary supplements. He gave me an assurance of cure and dispelled that ever-present dread of recurrence." Thathachari later pursued his teaching assignment and research projects in America with undiminished zeal. The 'miracle' had indeed happened.

The reason we quote this particular incident, though there are innumerable of such 'divine graces' happening anytime all over the world, is to bring to attention a few powerful and profound words that Bhagavan wrote to him many years later. "Busy yourselves with the duties which are entrusted to you,

in good spirit and fine health,” Swami’s initial lines in the letter to Thathachari read. But what came later is most significant. **“Sai is ever by your side. He is the charioteer of the vehicle of your life.** The ship of life, however heavily loaded with the cargo of joys and sorrows, can certainly arrive at the harbour of self-realisation, if it is propelled by holy mental energy. Repetition of the Name is the ‘dug-dug-dug’ of the pistons; the steering wheel is love; the anchor is faith. Continue the journey in confidence. Sai is always guarding you from harm and pain...Swami is constantly showering His compassion on you. He counsels you from within and corrects you. On your part, be immersed in the duties entrusted to you; remember, that is Swami’s work. When you discharge your duties, convinced that the work is Mine, health and happiness will be added unto you.”

Bhagavan, in so many comforting sentences, conveyed how glorious one’s life can be if He is made the Charioteer. It is these sweet and soothing words of the Lord, dripped in divine selfless love, which are His most potent weapon to induce man to pause, reflect, reform and then reestablish himself in peace. “Whenever I or my family members felt dejected and hopeless in challenging situations, the postman’s knock on the door and delivery of Sanathana Sarathi would bring renewed hope and succour in the form of a word of encouragement, or a solution to the problem. It is a harbinger of good hope,” says Dilip Trasi from Mumbai.

The Beginning Stream of Love

The very first article in the inaugural issue of Sanathana Sarathi was Bhagavan’s ‘Prema Vahini’, or the ‘Stream of Divine Love’. What else could it be, when Bhagavan has declared that if you ever want to give Me any appellation, call me “Premaswarupa or the Embodiment of love”, for “Love is my form; Love is my instrument.” And each devotee’s life is a testimony to this unconditional all-encompassing love of Bhagavan.

For twenty-five months till February 1960, Swami assiduously penned for mankind the challenges and characteristics, norms and nuances of Divine love. Once and for all, Bhagavan settled the age-old controversy on the relative status of the three paths - Bhakti, Karma and Jnana (Devotion, Action and Knowledge) - that lead to God. He explained,

"I do not agree that Bhakti, Karma and Jnana are separate. I do not place any one before the other, nor will I accept a mixture of the three. Karma is Bhakti; Bhakti is Jnana. A piece of candy has taste, weight and shape; the three cannot be separated. Each bit has all the three; we do not find shape in one bit, weight in another and sweetness in the third. When the candy is placed on the tongue, the taste, the weight and the shape are simultaneously experienced. Similarly, Jnana, Karma and Bhakti may be truly experienced only as one whole."

Karma is love in action, Jnana is love experienced and Bhakti is love universally shared. Thus, Baba dismissed in one stroke all disputations about the superiority of any one of these disciplines over the other.

The Clearing of The Inner Path

Just after three months of Prema Vahini, the compassionate Lord in May 1958 started another divine series “Sandeha Nivarini” (or the Clearance of Divine Doubts). Swami, interestingly, played a dual-role in these articles, that of the ‘inquisitive devotee’ as well as the ‘enlightening guru’, so that, perhaps, devotees can relate to it better and grasp its essence faster. A typical conversation in this series goes like this –

Devotee: What is the use of confidence and hope when one is not destined? Hope will only cause greater disappointment.

Swami: Has destiny a shape and a personality so that you can recognise it even before it shows itself? You should not hang on its favour, talking all the time of destiny, destiny... How can that destiny itself fructify without your will and wish, taking practical form, as action? Whatever be the destiny, it is essential to continue acting. Karma (Action) has to be done, even to attain one's destiny.

Devotee: If one is destined, everything will come of itself, isn't it?

Swami: That is a big mistake. If you sit quiet with the fruit in your hand, hoping that its juice will reach the mouth, how can you take it? It is sheer stupidity to complain that destiny denied you the juice, without squeezing and swallowing the fruit. Destiny gave the fruit into your hand; Karma alone can make you enjoy it. Karma is the duty; destiny, the result. Results cannot emerge without action.

Devotee: So, Swami, we should not sit with folded hands, placing all burdens on destiny, isn't it?

Swami: Listen. You should never underestimate your powers; engage yourselves in action commensurate with that power. For the rest, talk of destiny to your heart's content. It is wrong to desist from the appropriate Karma, placing reliance on destiny. If you do so, even destiny will slip out of your hands. Whoever he may be, he must engage himself in Karma (spirited action).

This is how illuminating every paragraph in Sandeha Nivarini is! **Till the Birthday issue in November 1959, both these treatises of spiritual wisdom – one fertilizing the devotees' hearts with pure love and other weeding out any unruly twig or shoot of any hesitation or fear – was proffered to the devotees concurrently by Swami. Sanathana Sarathi, literally became every sincere spiritual aspirant's lifeline.**

While all this took the magazine to great heights and it lived up to its mission of “Moral and Spiritual uplift of Humanity through Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Non-violence”, in the days of old when Puttaparthi did not even have a good road, let alone electricity, transport, a decent post-office, etc. and with the old manual typesetting letter press machine (which would take a skilled person a minimum of two days to compose one page), for Prof. Kasturi posting the magazine by the 16th of every month with the help of just one assistant in the first two years was an ordeal of gargantuan proportions

for which he prayed for the Almighty's blessings every minute. How complex was the process? And how did it actually get done every month in time? Over to Prof. Kasturi for the interesting first-hand account from his biography:

The Enterprising Editor's Labour of Love

"For about a year, Narasimhachari, the sole helper at the treadle, put together the types, prepared the pages and pedalled away, to get two pages printed at a time. I offered to help him in the composing and in the footwork when I found him delaying or dozing. I was shocked when he accepted the offer whenever I made it! The job was really hard, though he lightened and brightened it singing Bhajans to himself.

"I was kept busy most of the day and even a few hours of the night, since the number of subscribers increased fast. Money was sent by post or paid direct by devotees and pilgrims, who realised that the Sarathi was the link between the Chariot and the Charioteer. The Register of subscribers became more voluminous with every festival at Prasanthi Nilayam; thousands who came to the holy Presence mired to ensure that the voice of the Lord should enter their doors at least once every month.

"For over two years, I and Narasimhachari bore the yoke. We were anxious to post the numbers at the newly opened Prasanthi Nilayam Post Office, on the 16th of every month, as announced in the very first copy. Devotees, we knew, would welcome it even more reverentially when they find, on the wrapper, on the right hand corner, the circular frank-mark of the Post Office with the euphoria-filled name "Prasanthi Nilayam" (Prof. Kasturi was himself the post master for eight months!). But a cutting machine which could trim the edges of the magazine was acquired only much later, long after a cylinder press was installed to cope with the 3000 copies we had to print. They had to be trimmed at Bangalore City, 100 miles away.

The Amazing Journey Borne by the Chariot

"Every month, therefore, after the printing was over, I stuffed the quantity of English and Telugu magazines into two gigantic boxes, took them to Bukkapatnam on a bullock-cart, had them lifted to the roof of the bus proceeding to Penukonda, and ordered the bus to stop near the level-crossing about 300 yards away from the Penukonda Railway Station. The boxes were brought down from the bus and a Tarzanian porter, Narasappa, carried them as head load to the platform. There, I awaited the arrival of the passenger train to Bangalore, 85 miles away to book the boxes as freight. Reaching Bangalore, porters loaded them into horse-drawn vehicles, which I directed to a Press that had a cutting machine. The boxes filled with trimmed copies were then taken to the house of a devotee in the heart of the City. I spent the night there with a dozen young men who volunteered to put the magazines into wrappers (with the addresses on) which I had brought from the Nilayam. The copies were thus ready to be posted and we could sleep through the short hours of the night. The next day, I repeated the schedule while returning – horse, vehicle, porters, railway journey, Penukonda station, Narasappa,

level-crossing, bus until Bukkapatnam, bullock cart, and finally the Prasanthi Nilayam Post Office to receive the Holy Name affixed and allow the precious Prasadam to travel to more than 3000 homes! The devotees received it with reverence, thanked the postman who brought the magazine and put it in their altar before reading it.”

Creating the Ideal Editor out of Kasturi

So that was the ‘behind the scenes’ story of perfecting and posting the beautiful Sanathana Sarathi. But it was not drudgery all the time, with the divine beside lightening and brightening the burden at every available opportunity. Prof. Kasturi narrates a very entertaining yet enlightening incident that happened in the second year of the magazine in his ‘Loving God’ which goes like this:

“I remember one evening in 1959 when He sent some one to bring me to His room at the mandir. Baba told me that the Editor of a daily published from Hyderabad had asked for my photograph, for he was announcing me in his paper, alongside a nice write-up as the Editor of the ‘Sanathana Sarathi’. Baba had promised to send him my photograph and He asked me to prepare myself for being shot within minutes by Baba Himself, with a brand new camera He had specially selected for the purpose. O! My joy knew no bounds! I rose to the eighth heaven. I rushed down the eighteen steps to reach home for a quick face lift.

“I returned to the Presence, within minutes, shaved and starched, with a big broad smile on the frontispiece. Baba held me by the shoulders and positioned me at an appropriate distance. He peered through the lens and congratulated me on my ‘photogenic face’. I was elated that my picture will catch the eye of at least 30,000 readers all over Andhra Pradesh. My smile swelled into a toothless grin! Baba gestured and I swallowed the grin in one gulp. He cautioned me with a ‘steady’, followed immediately by a ‘ready’. He clicked.... A black hairy blotch with a flashing tail bounced on my neck from inside the camera! With a shrill screech, I hopped into the corner of the room casting away the horrid, hirsute....was it a rat? Was it dead? No. It was a cotton mouse....that was cunningly tucked inside the dummy camera, to be released when clicked. Baba had a hearty laugh at my panic. I too laughed to relieve the tension.

“He reprimanded me mildly for swallowing the story He had invented to deflate my ego. He reminded me that my being the Editor was not the kind of ‘news’, which the world was interested in. Lasting fame is to be sought not through newspapers, which turn into the very next morning, but through dedicated service to God and the godly. I left His room, a leaner and wiser man.

“Baba mercifully helps us, slowly and subtly, to shed the burden of the ego....He advises that we should be just ourselves and not wear masks behind which we hide. ‘What greater status can you attain than being the medium for packaging and posting My message to thousands of devotees

every month?' He asked me. Baba is too bright a Sun for human eyes; we can bask and bathe in sunlight but we cannot gaze at Him."

This was how Swami was 'chiseling and creating' the ideal editor out of Prof. Kasturi after bringing into existence the magazine a year ago. The Sarathi then was half the current size and bilingual with articles in English first and then in Telugu. The cover picture, a telling sketch of Krishna holding the reins of the galloping horses and directing Arjuna's chariot, was in direct consonance with its name and mission. After the first anniversary, the cover pages portrayed beautiful sculptures of the earthly manifestations of the Lord through different ages, thus, covertly conveying the divine declaration of Lord Krishna - 'Whenever there is a decline in Dharma and rise of wrong conduct, the Lord incarnates to save the pious, destroy the evil and restore righteousness.' And the inside pages overtly had a beautiful and benign image of the current and happening incarnation – the Sathya Sai Avatar.

Defining Dharma

In Dharma Vahini, which Swami started on the Sarathi's fifth Anniversary in February 1962, Swami unequivocally gave precise guidelines and yardsticks by which any devotee could decide and decipher for their self if they were in the path of dharma. "Whoever subdues egotism, conquers selfish desires, destroys bestial feelings and impulses, and gives up the natural tendency to regard the body as the self that person is surely on the path of dharma," Swami explained, and continued, "Such a person knows that the goal of dharma is the merging of the wave in the sea, the merging of the self in the Over-self. In all worldly activities, you should be careful not to offend propriety or the canons of good nature; you should not play false to the promptings of the inner voice; you should be prepared at all times to respect the appropriate dictates of conscience; you should watch your steps to see whether you are in someone else's way; you must be ever vigilant to discover the truth behind all this scintillating variety. This is your entire duty, your *dharma*. The blazing fire of wisdom (*jnana*), which convinces you that all this is Brahman (God), will consume into ashes all traces of your egotism and worldly attachment. You must become intoxicated with the nectar of union with Brahman; that is the ultimate goal of *dharma* and of action (karma) inspired by dharma."

That is probably as comprehensive and complete, the meaning of dharma can get. And this is just one paragraph. Bhagavan wrote, in all, thirteen timeless pieces on this subject which ended in February 1963.

Exponential Expositions on the Upanishads

But immediately Swami started another Vahini – the 'Upanishad Vahini' and the highest and most esoteric of philosophical thought flowed from Bhagavan's pen in a language that a farmer and a fisherman, a potter and a carpenter could understand. Prof. Kasturi, though aware of Swami's divinity, still used to be stunned seeing the scholastic wisdom and succinct expression of Swami who had not studied beyond sixth class in school. In Sathyam Shivam Sundaram, he narrates a revealing incident:

“As editor of the magazine which published serially the chapters of this book, I had an amazing experience every month for a whole year. After dispatching the magazine on the 16th of the month, I would go to Him for the next part of the series. Announcing the name of the Upanishad Himself, He would ask me to wait for a while in His room and proceed along the veranda with a notebook and pen, towards the room where there stood a table with a chair by its side and nothing else besides.

Once, it was the turn of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad to be summarised and simplified. It is the biggest and the profoundest of the ten. I am certain that Baba had never read it or consulted others who could talk on it. And there was no copy available anywhere within miles. But forty minutes after, He moved out with the pen and the notebook as His sole possessions, I could descend the eighteen steps from His room with a ten-page dissertation on the truths this Upanishad enshrined! I peeped into the script as I walked towards the press and my eyes fell on the Telugu words which said, ‘The grandeur of the intellect of the Sage Yajnavalkya is impressively evident in this Upanishad.’ I told myself, ‘The grandeur of the omniscient teacher that Baba is, is now impressively evident to me.’

Narrating his monthly mission of receiving a manuscript or two from Bhagavan, Prof. Kasturi in his biography says, “Proceeding to His presence every month to offer Him the Telugu and English editions of Sanathana Sarathi, I climb the steps in trepidation. I come down the steps with a thrill in the heart and an exclamation in the head, when I am given His contribution in Telugu for the issue of the next month. The length of the article would be exactly the same, month after month. The diction – sweet and satisfying, simple and sustaining – avoids pedantry and prolixity. The calligraphy is charming to the eye. The most complicated metaphysical conundrum is resolved by a parable or a proverb.”

Miraculous Manifestation

By virtue of his auspicious assignment and also his amazing adjacency to the Lord, Prof. Kasturi was witness to many eye-opening events concerned with the Avatar and His literary mission. One incident recorded by Mr. G V Subba Rao which cannot be missed narrated here, though it happened in such a nonchalant way, is this.

“Once just on the eve of my departure from Puttaparthi in a hurry to catch a plane that very morning in Bangalore, I was called by Swami to His modest living-cum resting room in the upstairs of Prasanthi Mandir,” writes late Sri G V Subba Rao who served in the UN Energy division for many years.

“Without being told that I was studying *Thaithireeya* Upanishad (a sacred Vedic text) during my weekend spare time in Delhi (where I was then a resident representative of a UN agency) Baba, in His infinite Grace expounded for nearly one full hour the essence of this famous Upanishad.

“When I began to write it all down, Baba remarked that there was no need to take notes; He assured me that whenever the need arose, I would automatically recall His teachings!

“While Baba's instruction was thus proceeding, Sri Kasturi, the editor of the Ashram magazine, came up to request Baba for Swami's article for the monthly ‘Sanathana Sarathi’ issue which was just then going to the printer. Swami, then, with a wave of His hand, produced the article and gave it to Sri Kasturi in my direct presence!”

The Sanathana Sarathi, is therefore, a creation, an extension, a ‘manifested missionary’ of Sai. Just like the name and the form, the Lord and the message are inseparable. ‘Sanathana Sarathi’, verily, for all its readers, is Sai in black and white. And Swami personally took great care of its purity, sanctity, authenticity and affordability right from its inception.

Contributions from the Wise and Worthy

In fact, in the very first issue of the magazine itself it was declared, “Contribution of articles, especially from those of those who endeavour to put into practice what they speak and write out on spirituality, are welcome. And anything that smacks of ‘public news or comments on public news’ or personal attacks, rude phraseology or even non-devotional sentiments can find no place in here.” For many years Sanathana Sarathi had articles and experiences from devotees but every literary piece had to pass these strict stipulations. In the September 1960 issue, for example, there was a revealing story by Mr. P S Menon titled “Significant Words” which said:

“Last Dasara (1959), on the day when the poor were fed, I and few others were holding back the thousands, beyond the gate of Prasanthi Nilayam for over two hours, when suddenly, in obedience to someone’s orders, they broke all barriers and rushed pell-mell to the *pandal* (stage), to the left of the Nilayam! I was very much annoyed that all our labour had gone waste; but, Baba called me towards the *pandal* saying ‘Menon! Go and see that all are seated in rows. I am coming.’ I went to the *pandal* and was surprised to see all that motley mass arranged in perfect rows. Baba came there in a few minutes. He walked along the rows, and turning towards me, said, ‘Menon! Look at the wonderful variety of Creation!’ That was a revealing remark. Those words opened my eyes. Yes, there must have been present in that *pandal*, at that time many pious souls, *sadhakas*, saints, seekers, pretenders, penitents, idlers, idealists, castaways, misfits, and many other types besides, making up this vast multicoloured panorama of humanity. The scene was not something to be viewed with disgust, as I was prone to; it was something to be watched, and studied with sympathy and discrimination.

“A few hours later when the Feeding had started and Baba had served with His Hand the sweets to the poor, Himself to each and everyone, I was in the kitchen near the pile of the rice, straightening my back to relieve the strain. Suddenly, Baba appeared before us. He asked me, ‘Grand, isn’t it?’ I replied, ‘Yes, Swami. There must be at least three thousands.’ But Baba smiled and

said, 'Not that! The *Shanti* (peace) and the *Ananda* (bliss) here now... How is that?' Significant words those two! Yes, they revealed to me my error, in getting disgusted with the noise and confusion all around me. I must have concentrated, instead on the *Ananda* that the poor got and the consequent *Shanti* that prevailed in their minds. These were more real, than the noise and confusion, certainly. Thus does Baba, by a casual remark, a word or two, reveal to the ignorant the significance of things and events. He is the Sadguru, the Great Teacher."

Such experiences were more frequent in the initial decade of the magazine. But as devotees' stories started pouring in profusely and it was difficult to establish which was authentic and which was 'augmented imagination', articles from readers became occasional and rare in the magazine. But one salient feature remained, however, – bringing alive breathtaking happenings in Swami's presence, whether He was in Puttaparthi or on tour to any other fortunate destination. For instance, the January 1959 issue described Swami's visit to the holy state of Kerala of which a small excerpt goes like this:

Recounting 'His Story'

"...In the evening (of December 21, 1958), Baba arrived at Kovalam Beach, seven miles away from the City, accompanied by the members of His entourage, as well as many devotees from Trivandrum. At a quiet spot on the seashore, far away from the noise and bustle of the Capital, Baba gave those around Him, the unique pleasure of hearing Him sing a number of songs. Everyone joined in the Bhajan that followed; during the Bhajan, Baba 'took' (created) from the sands a beautiful image of Murali Krishna and a Gold ring with the Radha-Krishna motif embossed charmingly on it. Being Vaikuntha Ekadasi Day, Baba also 'took' *Amrita* (nectar), this time from His Hands! The Bhaktas (devotees) who sat around Him could sense the captivating fragrance, long before the actual materialisation, and even as Baba was singing a song, He pointed His joint palms at a silver vessel and the ambrosial *Amrita* gurgled into it from His fingers! Baba then distributed the Nectar, Himself, to everyone present, including a few fortunate fisher folk from the hamlet nearby."

Apart from these scintillating stories, there was also a special section called "Healing Touch" which carried medical miracles that are so common in Swami's hospitals. Dr. V Brahman serving in the Sri Sathya Sai General Hospital (the only hospital then) in the October 1960 issue writes,

"Sai Prabha (age 8 years) had typhoid fever which ran through full three weeks; after touching normal for a week, she had a relapse. The temperature was 104 steady for four days and thereafter it wavered from 101 to 103. So, she was admitted to the Sathya Sai Hospital.

On September 24, her condition caused anxiety; she was talking deliriously from 10 PM. But, at 3 PM she called out, in her usual voice, 'Grandma, grandma! See, Baba has come! Get up Baba is giving me Vibhuti He has

applied to my brow.’ We rose and went to the bedside. Yes! There was a big patch of white Vibhuti on her brow! Baba had come in His subtle form and blessed the child. The thermometer showed that the temperature had come down to normal!

When I went to Him, Baba made fun of me, saying, ‘Well! What shall I say of your *bandobust* (security arrangements)? You do not know who comes and goes!’

It was the fifth day of the Dasara Festival; so, hundreds of devotees came to the ward and saw the mark of Baba’s Grace on the face of the sick child.”

The magazine, therefore, has been a treat for devotees and spiritual seekers alike right from day one. One very important characteristic which distinguishes it from other similar publications, apart from its crystalline message in candid words, is its complete absence of any commercial intent whatsoever. ‘No sort of commercial advertisements is allowed to be published in this magazine’ - the announcement was emphatic and loud in the very first issue; and it has been this way for five decades now. In fact, the magazine was mailed and distributed to all the subscribers free in the first five months. Only from July 1958, did subscribers pay a very nominal amount. The message from the editor then read: **‘We had at first no intention to fix a price for our Sanathana Sarathi. But, on account of postal regulations and other circumstances, we have now to decide that it’s annual, nominal subscription shall be three rupees.’**

“Baba did not favour campaigns to enlist subscribers, donors, patrons, etc. or even acceptance of subscription fees for more years than one,” Prof. Kasturi writes in his biography about the initial years of the magazine. “He wanted readers to decide for themselves whether they wished to continue the diet which was placed before them. Baba negated a proposal to post letters to subscribers cautioning them that if they do not pay for another year, the Sarathi would not be sent to their address. ‘Leave it to them. The hunger that hurts is caution enough,’ He said. ‘The Sarathi should be awaited, accepted, treasured and studied with avidity. Missing it must be as saddening as missing a companion on the journey through a strange land,’ He said.”

And that was exactly how it was felt especially in those days when, leave aside the internet revolution, even telecom penetration was poor in India. “The Sanathana Sarathi was a lifeline, reaching all the way back to Prasanthi Nilayam, which helped build a sturdy foundation of faith,” recalls Chris Parnell from Australia. “In the days of being a new devotee, it was anxiously awaited in the mails and every issue was studied from cover to cover – the pictures of Swami, the divine discourses. Sometimes I would wake up in the morning and some words, a paragraph, would come to mind and form the focus of the day’s meditation and reflection. It was our life raft, our assurance, that monthly beacon of love.”

The Ceaseless Stream – Endless and Enlightening

And this perennial source of strength, support and spiritual light was sustained by the Sai Sadguru Himself because the cleansing cascade of divine wisdom from Swami's heart flowed, uninterrupted. It was Dhyana Vahini (the stream of Meditation) and Prasanthi Vahini (the Stream of Supreme Peace) from Jan 1959 to February 1961. Later, followed Jnana Vahini, Dharma Vahini and Upanishad Vahini – Streams of Knowledge, Righteousness and Supreme Philosophy, offering wisdom, and widening minds for thirty four consecutive months.

In 1964-65, amidst touring the length and breadth of Andhra Pradesh and establishing the ashram in Brindavan, Bangalore, Bhagavan continued to take the pen and out came the glorious Stream of Divine Gospel – the Geetha Vahini.

“The Geetha is as a boat, which takes man across from the self-imposed state of bondage to the freedom which is his nature. He is taken from darkness to light, from lustrelessness to splendour,” Swami said and explained, “The way it begins and the way it ends, that gives the clue to the subject which it expounds. The very first verse (of Gita) starts with the words, *Dharmakshethre, Kurukshethre...*, the word Dharma being the leading word. The last verse of the final eighteenth chapter speaks of *Yatha Yogeswarah Krishna* and this word, ‘Yogeswarah’ sums up the Dharma that is taught. Thus, it is clear that the objective of the teaching in the Geetha is just this: ‘Remember Dharma; practise Dharma.’

Simultaneously with Geetha Vahini in February 1964, Bhagavan also started Prasnotara Vahini which was a stream of answers to questions on duties of man in various stages of life (who is superior – renunciant or a householder?), clarifications on procedures and principles of social and spiritual practices (Is caste system relevant today? Is the man of action wiser or is the man of devotion? Can women aspire for the highest? etc.) – all in the form of short and crisp dialogues.

It was now mid way through the sixties and Prasanthi Nilayam Ashram was separated from Puttaparthi to form a separate township which Swami inaugurated on August 1966. In April next year was held the First All India Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations. In November 1967, Swami laid the foundation for Dharmakshetra in Mumbai and after six months returned to inaugurate the building. Four days after this, in May 16, 1968 was held the First World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations. Hardly eight weeks and Swami was on the plane on His first and only trip overseas. He returned from East Africa in the same month and inaugurated the Sri Sathya Sai Arts and Science College for Women in Anantapur. It was now July 1968. Palpably, Swami's schedule was busy, but, in spite of so many engagements and emergence of new projects, Swami never deprived the readers of Sanathana Sarathi their monthly share of ambrosia. As the Avatar's mission in the present era was unfolding at break-neck pace, in the

Sarathi Bhagavan was thrilling the hearts of the devotees with the sweet and syrupy story of His previous Incarnations, especially the Krishnavatar.

The Bhagavatha Vahini, replete with the scintillating divine sport of Lord Krishna, was as liberating as it was enthralling. And even though the Sri Sathya Sai Arts and Science College for Men was opened in Brindavan, Bangalore in June 1969 and thousands gathered for the third All India Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations in the November of the same year, Swami's 'Stream of the Lord's Story' continued ceaselessly. The complete series which was later compiled into a book of 338 pages, says, Prof. Kasturi, "is not just a book; it is a tonic, a balm, a pilgrimage, a hallelujah, a clarion call, a beacon light."

The Language of Love in Many Tongues

What started as a tiny brook had now become a roaring river, with many tributaries too! Many states in India started their own vernacular versions of the magazine – Hindi, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, Malayalam, Sindhi, Assamese, etc.

On the cover page, the 32-page magazine always had a simple drawing of spiritual significance. But this was until 1970 when during the Shivarathi festival of that year, Swami drew with a pen of the back of a used envelope, a figure with the holy symbols of the five-major religions of the world, with the Lotus Pillar in the centre, indicating the spiritual aspirant climbing through any one of these paths and achieving success. Since then, this became the 'poster symbol' illustrating the universality of Swami's message and disseminating the mantra - "There is only one religion – the religion of love" from the front covers of Sanathana Sarathi.

The Sarathi grew at a gigantic pace in early 70s with new wings added to it from every state of India. This was heartening, but at the same time there was a hidden danger too. Because of its sudden expansion with editions in different dialects located in distant destinations, there was a certain element of disharmony creeping in between various vernacular versions. Bhagavan nipped this incongruity in the bud in His benedictory message to all members of the organization assembled for the Fourth All India Conference of Sai Organizations in November 1971, when He said,

"In almost all the languages of India and in English, we have a number of periodicals, under different names - Shanthi, Prashanthi, Sudha, Sanathana Saarathi, etc. - causing confusion and complications. So, we shall have only a single monthly magazine in each language called everywhere, Sanathana Sarathi. From now on, it will not be possible for these periodicals to be published according to the will and pleasure of people. If they are left as they are, there is likelihood of lowering of standards and even financial loss for the parties, and consequent distress. So, it has been decided to place the Sanathana Sarathi of each linguistic area, on sound footing, both financially and in the range and authority of content."

Just a few years back, Bhagavan had then formed the Sri Sathya Sai Education Trust to aid the publishing of books written by experienced devotees, and the Sanathana Sarathi too came under this banner. Until 1973, the Sri Sathya Sai Press, which was located on the Eastern Side of the Prasanthi Mandir (which is now called the Pathshala block) had only a foot-operated treadle machine which was later upgraded into a cylinder machine. Both these machines were manual intensive to the maximum. Each page of the magazine received by every single reader had to be hand-fed into these inept equipments to print. (Imagine printing tens and thousands like this every month with uncompromising deadlines!)

With only a couple of workers and the rest volunteers, it was indeed a miracle of sorts every four weeks how copious copies used to roll out of this primitive press. Of course, there was the divine intervention. Swami used to often frequent the press, sometimes many times in a week, and goad and guide, encourage and enliven the spirits of the dedicated workers. The boys' college in Puttaparthi still was in the womb of time, what existed then was a 'Veda Pathasala' or a 'School of Vedic Learning', and all these students in their spare time would contribute their mite to this holy mission. "We used to do typesetting, composing, cutting, covering them in envelopes and every other sundry job," recalls Sri Ramesh Kasturi, grandson of Prof. Kasturi and one of the first students to join Swami's Veda Pathasala. "But the amount of work was never a burden...in fact, it was our ticket to bliss," continues Ramesh with a satisfied smile, "because Bhagavan used to visit often while we were working and spend lot of time joking, rewarding, instructing and inspiring."

But as the subscription numbers grew to stratospheric heights and the need for a more efficient infrastructure was strongly felt than ever, Swami shifted the whole printing and posting operation to Bangalore. Thus, was born the Vrij Brindavan Press, Bangalore in 1973, thanks to the enthusiasm and spirited initiative of an ardent devotee couple, Mr and Mrs Ratan Lal. Interestingly, this was the fifteenth year of the magazine and commemorating this, in March 1973 issue Swami gave a special message to all the readers which said:

A New Form for the Vehicle of the Formless

"Readers are aware that Sanathana Sarathi has been assiduously propagating, during the last fifteen years, unconcerned with decorative display, or the calculation of benefit; that the Integration of the Human Race cannot be achieved by the provision of facilities for mere outward contacts for, it can be realised only by the inner conviction of essential Unity; that Man must need transcend his mental, vital and physical levels of experience and attain the spiritual depths, where the Atma, the Divine is; and that the strength surging from this awareness nourishes the physical, vital and mental levels and raises man to a status above and beyond mere human-ness, into the Divine itself. **Sanathana Sarathi is happily entering the sixteenth year, offering to all who yearn for mental, moral and spiritual riches. Sanathana Sarathi celebrates the day as a Festival, with both Form and Feature, endowed with a new splendour.**"

Yes, the magazine had a novel 'form, feature... and splendour', a new Avatar, so to say, on its fifteenth birthday. It had now become double the size; in printing terminology, its dimension was now crown quarto (7 ½" x 10") from the earlier crown octavo (5" x 7 ½"). It had the Stupa adorning the full length of the cover page and after a lot of persuasion, Swami had very reluctantly agreed to increase its annual subscription from rupees four to five.

In His special message on this occasion, Swami also reminded all the mission of this one-of-its-kind magazine and stated:

"Man can liberate himself, only by knowing himself. He may master the Universe; but, what can he claim to have known, when he has not mastered himself? When he has no awareness of himself, he has no knowledge of the Knower. Sanathana Sarathi has, as its Mission, the assertion of this Truth, its installation in the heart and its establishment in actual practice...."

May Sanathana Sarathi flow on, as the Santhosha-Dai (Grantor of Joy); may it swell and surge as Prema-Sai (Bringer of the Love that Sai embodies); may Sanathana Sarathi reside in and find fulfillment in the Sarva-Jiva-Samaikya-Varidhi (All-Beings-'Equality-Unity'-Ocean)! May Happiness, Peace, and Prosperity be attained all."

Telling the Tale of the Lord, Anew

It was a downpour of blessings from the divine. Meanwhile, Swami's Bhagavatha Vahini series had ended and yet another serene stream of the Lord's story had begun to flow from His fountain tip – The Ramakatha Rasavahini. This series, which Swami continued to write for an overwhelming 91 continuous months spread over eight years, was the most lucid narration of Rama story's ever.

And why not? The same Rama was narrating His own story, and not surprisingly, it was decorated with dialogues and diversions not contemplated by Valmiki (the first author of Ramayana) or any subsequent author. Filled with intricate details and hitherto unknown events regarding Rama's and Hanuman's birth, the insightful circumstances related to Rama's marriage, the never-heard virtues of Sumitra, Urmila or Sruthakeerthi, and many other such additional events and encounters, the Rama story retold by Swami explained many lacunae and missing links that have long disturbed admirers of this great epic.

Swami, indeed, revived the epic to its pinnacle of perfect idealism that it exemplified for mankind. By the time Swami concluded the series in August 1977, readers' who were avidly lapping up every word of this series had their hearts saturated and minds sublimated with the glory and profound purpose of the Lord's earlier earthly sojourn. In fact, they could now understand and appreciate the Sai Avatar better.

Even after this marathon tale, Swami did not stop or take a break even for a month. After the great epic from India, it was now the turn of India, her precious values and sacred spirituality. In September 1977, Bhagavan penned for all humanity the Bharatiya Paramartha Vahini or the "Stream of Indian Spiritual Values" - a topic very close to His heart. In the first article in this series which had the title 'The Supreme Reality', Swami revealed, "The supreme secret is that man must live in the world where he is born like the lotus leaf, which though born in water, floats upon it without being affected or wetted by it. Of course, it is good to love and adore God with a view to gain some valuable fruit either here or hereafter; but, since there is no fruit or object more valuable than God or more worthwhile than God, the Vedas advise us to love God, with no touch of desire in our minds. Love, since you must love for love's sake; love God, since whatever He can give is less than He Himself; love Him alone, with no other wish or demand. This is the Supreme Teaching of the Bharathiyas (ancient Indians)."

His Stream Of Grace Continues...

For sixteen contiguous months Swami explained, through enlightening essays, the basic truths that foster and feed Indian Culture since ages before history began. Given the immense importance of these precious eternal truths for the muddled mind of man living in the modern world, Bhagavan, in January 1979, decided to continue the flow of illumination and instruction under a more comprehensive and meaningful name, "Sathya Sai Vahini" - the Ganga from the Lotus Feet of the Lord - "The Flow of Divine Sai Grace". Inside these pages lay strewn pearls of perennial wisdom resurrected by Sai. Sample this. Swami wrote, "Three types of activity reach God and earn His Grace. First, activity not prompted by personal desire; Second, activity emanating from unselfish Love; and finally, prayer arising from pure hearts."

"The medium between you and me" – Swami

The January 1979 issue, venerating the 21st year of Sanathana Sarathi, was indeed a landmark one because of the exceptional message that Swami passed on to the devotees while inaugurating the rechristened series of Sathya Sai Vahini. He wrote, nay embraced all, stating, **"Moved by the urge to cool the heat of conflict and to quench the agonising thirst for 'knowledge about yourself' that you are afflicted with, see, here it comes, the Sathya Sai Vahini, wave behind wave, with the Sanathana Sarathi as the medium between you and me."**

Truly, Sanathana Sarathi, with its series of invaluable Vahinis, had become every devotee's soul support. When the Sarathi arrived, they missed Sai less, because it was as if He was sitting next to them, showering His love and shaking off their earthly burden, as Sridevi from Kuwait says, "It transformed our day to day outlook towards life and started making us feel the presence of Our beloved Baba all the time. Apart from leading us into the right path, the Divine messages from Sanathana Sarathi used to console us at the right moments of depression, correct us when we were wrong, motivate us when

we were lethargic and shower words of love. We knew, we felt that He is always with us, around us, above us, below us, in us.”

In February 1981, Bhagavan concluded the Sathya Sai Vahini with the last article on sociological basis of ancient Indian culture and society. “The four *varnas* (occupational divisions in society) are the limbs of the Divine body, of the one and only Lord. Caste is the Cosmic Person Himself manifesting as Human Society,” He explained and emphasized, “There is only one caste, the caste of Humanity.”

Elevating Education to Ethereal Heights

By 1981, it was two decades and three years since Bhagavan had started writing for this holy magazine. But the Divine Hand continued to exert to exorcise the evil tendencies embedded in man for centuries. And so, in March 1981, Sai, the Eternal Educator, started yet another series “Vidya Vahini” – or, the “Stream of Thought Which Illumines”. In the nineteen essays that Swami penned, He candidly enumerated: what is true learning? What is the purpose of learning? And which is the best procedure to learn? The duties and responsibilities of both – the teacher and the taught too were clearly elucidated. Interestingly, this was the year when Swami inaugurated the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School along with its Primary Wing. Not only that, November 1981, also marked the opening of the grand ‘Temple of Learning’ – the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning. Many of the articles in this series were partly due to appeals to Swami by educators and academicians for the elucidation of the principles which must guide one while rehabilitating education as an effective instrument for establishing peace and freedom within oneself and in society.

“Bhagavan Baba’s Vidya Vahini is the most authentic version of His interpretation of Education for Life and total Education,” says Prof. S Saraf, the second Vice-Chancellor of Swami’s University, in his book ‘Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba – the Eternal Educator’. He further states, “It (Vidya Vahini) presents the basic philosophy and concept in its multi-dimensional form covering the entire gamut of life-long education in its various facets from childhood to adulthood; containing beautiful elucidation of methods for reaching the goal.”

The Sagacious Sutra Vahini

With the opening of the deemed university in Puttaparthi, Swami, the Chancellor, was well-occupied with shaping this edifice, still His role as the ‘Chancellor of the Universe’ and His compassion for mankind propelled Him to continue to communicate the essence of spiritual wisdom, and that is how, in October 1982, Swami put to paper the “Sutra Vahini”. “Sutra” means “that which, through a few words only, reveals vast meanings”. “Brahma Sutras” of ancient India are the multicolored flowers gathered from all Upanishads, and in each syllable it contained a volume of profound philosophical thought. Swami, in His sixteen serial essays, unrivalled these precious spiritual wisdom

and placed it in a manner a layman to a litterateur could appreciate and apply them in their daily life.

After twenty five years, fifteen series of spiritual volumes and three hundred twelve months of continuous writing, Swami was still not done. As His divine mission was unfolding with the Inauguration of 'Trayee Brindavan'- the new Temple at Brindavan, Bangalore and launching the Seva Dal conference in 'Shivam' – His temple in Hyderabad in April and May 1984, respectively, Swami, to the devotees' delight, dished out another divine gem – "Leela Kaivalya Vahini", the name itself was so ethereal to the ear. True to its name, which meant the "Cosmic Sport of God and Eternal Universal Being", this series of Swami was meant to purify man's consciousness in all its facets and fill it with bliss. In March 1984 issue, Swami Himself stated, "From the coming Yugadi (New Year) Festival Day, this series under the name Leela Kaivalya Vahini, will dissolve all such obstacles and fill you with Ananda (bliss). It will lead you to the path of spiritual progress."

That is what precisely, not only this Vahini but every single page in Sanathana Sarathi, has done to thousands world over. "I eagerly await the monthly arrival of Sanathana Sarathi, and read every word of Avatar Vani, and everytime it gives me a new meaning, a new understanding. I must have read most of the Vahinis time and again, in English and in Gujarati, alone and in group. I read the Bhagavad Gita repeatedly but after I had the nectar of His discourses, every time Gita lends me new meaning and deeper understanding," says Sri Chandrahas Shah from Mumbai.

Dr. Joseph Phaneuf, a MD from USA, says, "The Sanathana Sarathi is my living Bible. Reading the words of the Lord who is walking on earth at this time is the greatest opportunity of many life times...Swami's nectarous words are so simple, straightforward and practical, they go straight to my heart. I try to take at least one point and put it into practice. I have so many opportunities to put His teaching into practice in my daily work as a physician. When I am successful at putting His teachings into practice everything just goes smoother and taking care of my patients is much more enjoyable. Swami reminds us time and time again that service to our fellow man is the same as service to God. This awareness brings reverence, humility, love and great joy to my work with my patients."

Even though Swami stopped writing comprehensive articles for the magazine after October 1984, His involvement and interest in the magazine was as spirited as ever. Be it the front cover, the inside photos, His discourses or devotees' articles, every detail was Swami's concern and under His directions, the Sarathi improved and evolved to even sublime heights. For example, after the mid-eighties, Swami wanted a makeover of the front cover of the magazine. It transformed from various shades of blue, green, maroon, etc. in various previous issues to the sublime and sacred orange. "Swami liked the orange very much and directed that this should be maintained for all future issues without any change," recalls Sri C M Prakash, a former student of Swami's college, whom Swami had appointed to serve in the press as early

as 1979. "Even a slight deviation in the shade of orange would not be acceptable to Swami," he adds going down memory lane.

It was because of His grace and guidance that the glory of this 'mouthpiece of the Lord' only became grandeur every passing day. With the volume of work for the magazine increasing alarmingly, by early 1980s Prof. Kasturi also had help from Sri V K Narsimhan, an esteemed journalist who was the former Editor-in-Chief of Indian Express and winner of the Goenka Award, India's highest accolade in journalism. Swami appointed him as the Associate Editor of the magazine. The mid-eighties saw sweeping changes in Sarathi's printing, production and distribution. Swami decided it was time for the magazine to be printed in Puttaparthi itself and so, in a few weeks all the press infrastructure was shifted to the spacious Eswaramma High School where Swami has allotted few rooms to be used for the revived 'Sri Sathya Sai Press'. This was in June 1986. (For a few months while the machinery was being shifted and installed, the printing job of Sarathi was outsourced to a printer in Chennai).

Sai Students Manage the Magazine's Mission

But this time, Swami wanted the press to be run and managed by His students alone. "Is anybody willing to join the press?" Swami asked the selected group of boys He had picked to take with Him to Ooty in 1985. Before anybody could answer, Swami looked deeply at Mahesh Reddy and queried, "Are you ready to go for training?" Swami wanted to send two boys to Cochin to get acquainted with the working and maintenance of the printing machine. Mahesh Reddy was silent and hesitant, not because he was uninterested to work in the press or disinclined to stay back and serve in His mission, he was sad because he will be missing Swami. "It is only for 18 days, after that you will again be with me," Swami explained with motherly love, and consoled him further saying, "When I go to Brindavan, you manage, isn't it? It is because you know I will come back. It is the same here. After a few weeks you will come back to me." But Mahesh was still not convinced. "After Ooty, Swami wants to send me to Cochin, while He will proceed with all the other boys to Kodaikanal," this thought was too depressing for him to deal with. But the all-knowing Swami assured him, "I am not going to Kodaikanal. I will return to Brindavan after the Ooty trip." To get him more interested, Swami said, "Kerala (the state in which Cochin is located) is a beautiful land. You can go for sight-seeing there. I will make all arrangements for your trip. Now be prepared."

That is how Mahesh and another student Swami had picked went to the HMT factory in Kalamaseri (Ernakulam district of Kerala) to learn the methods and maintenance of printing machines. After their training, before they started on their return journey, they sent a telegram to Swami informing Him of their arrival to Brindavan. And receiving their message, the sweet Lord, who was about to return to Puttaparthi that day, stayed on for one more day in Brindavan to lovingly receive them and fill their hearts with His tender love.

The next morning as soon as Swami saw them, He beckoned them and enquired about their welfare. After the morning darshan, Swami called these two boys inside along with other elder devotees for a long private session during which Swami asked literally about every little detail of their stay and training. "Where were you having breakfast?" "Was the food inside the factory good?" "Did the factory canteen provide dinner too?" "How was your health?" "How did you find the training?" "Were the people there cooperative?"...Swami, like a concerned care-taker, wanted to know everything.

Later, when Mahesh and his student-brother offered to Swami the balance amount that was unspent from what He had given prior to their journey, Swami like a proud mother looked at the senior devotees there and said, "See, my boys, they use money judiciously and return the remainder amount, had it been outside boys they would have loaned and spent more." After a couple of days of their arrival to Puttaparthi along with Swami, He blessed the two on an auspicious day saying, "Join the printing press today." Swami even visited the press on that day and inspected the equipment and their working environment. Their joy then knew no bounds.

After a few months into work, when Mahesh was not completely happy in his heart, Swami sensed this and during one interview He gave to the working staff of the ashram, told him, "I know, you are not happy." It was not the work that bothered Mahesh but its time-consuming nature. He missed darshans and bhajans on many occasions and this always saddened him. The loving Swami knew the devotee's pain as well as its panacea. He called him near and said, **"See, you are doing such a sacred job, printing the ashram magazine. This goes to so many people all over the country and the world. It is no menial job, its significance is immense. What you are doing is actually 'Virat Eshwara Seva', or 'Serving the All-pervading Cosmic Lord'. So never be unhappy."**

That is how Swami took care of each selected staff of the press. His interest and involvement with the magazine in its every operation, right from its inception, never diminished. Even now, Swami approves and at times Himself selects pictures to be placed on the first page of the magazine. From its very first issue, the first copy of the Sarathi from the printing press is always presented to Swami. The Sarathi has always been Sai's shining light guiding mankind and at no moment did Swami take His caring eyes away from it.

In 1987, when Prof. Kasturi shed his mortal coil, Swami appointed Sri V K Narsimhan as the editor. A widely-travelled journalist who had served in three national newspapers of India for half a century, Sri Narsimhan was the right man for the job at a time when the Sarathi was becoming increasingly international. By the early nineties, there were editions of Sanathana Sarathi in various foreign languages like Japanese, Nepalese, Spanish, Greek, etc. Sri C M Prakash recalls that Sri Narsimhan used to call the magazine a 'monthly miracle'. It was amazing how with seemingly inadequate infrastructure and limited staff, the thousands of copies could be printed and

shipped to various corners of the world. There were subscribers of the magazine from even countries like Curacao, Estonia and Rodrigues Islands.

Sanathana Sarathi Finds Its Readers

The way the magazine has sometimes 'found' its subscribers, is also very amazing. "In the summer of 1994, I was visiting India from America," says Dr. Raghu Nathan, a radiologist. "At that time, Swami was residing at Brindavan, Bangalore. I had a desire to start subscribing to the Sanathana Sarathi, however, I did not know whom to contact to initiate the subscription. While waiting for Swami's Darshan, I expressed this wish to an elderly and pious gentleman who was standing in line just behind me. And imagine, this person turned out to be the co-ordinator of overseas subscriptions for Sanathana Sarathi! He, then and there, took my address and finished whatever formalities required, and when I returned to America, the current issue of Sanathana Sarathi was waiting for me in my home! This may just be a coincidence; but, for me, it was a Sai-incidence! Living far away in California, the Sanathana Sarathi is the monthly *prasadam* from Prasanthi Nilayam I eagerly look forward to".

Vincent Green, another devotee from Scotland, says, "I had a good dream before I got my first issue of Sanathana magazine. I dreamt I was in a library and Sai gave me sweet oranges to eat - lots of them. I now believe it is the small and sweet pieces of wisdom that I was to receive that Baba was referring to".

The ways of the divine are beyond the kin of human understanding. In fact, it was He in His inscrutable way, who was writing the articles, enlisting subscribers and running the whole show. Yet at the mundane level, Swami has been ever guiding and directing all who were concerned with the magazine. When the need for a greater space and new infrastructure was felt, Swami directed the press to be moved for the final time to a new location, now inside the ashram compound itself. It is in this spacious location that the Sri Sathya Sai Press operates today with the latest offset machine and a string of volunteers to help. And just like the previous occasion, Swami again sent two of his students to learn the mechanics and maintenance of this new machine to Kolhapur, in the state of Maharashtra. When they returned after two weeks of training, they became invaluable assets to the press, and in extension to the Sai mission. "It has been a great opportunity and privilege to be part of this holy endeavour and I am ever grateful to Swami for the role he has gifted me with, however small it may be, to be part of this glorious mission," says Saravanan, one of the students who joined the press in 1995.

Sai Saga and Sarathi Saga – So Intertwined

The saga of the Sanathana Sarathi is no different from any other mega service project of Swami; in fact, it is much grandeur with a glorious fifty year history. It was the one which carried thrilling accounts when Bhagavan announced the setting up of the Super Specialty Hospital in Prasanthi Nilayam, the mega water project for Anantapur, the setting up of the second

medical marvel in Bangalore, the opening of the Chaitanya Jyothi Museum, or even the recent water projects in Chennai and the two Godavari districts (East and West) of Andhra Pradesh. And it is these 'mass miracles' of Swami that the magazine had as its cover pages in the last five years (departing from the more-than-a-decade-long Orange) under Swami's guidance. With the passing away of Sri V K Narsimhan, in May 2000, the magazine had a new editor appointed by Swami, Sri G L Anand, an experienced educationist who has served in the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) for many decades, and an ardent devotee of the Lord.

Over the years, editors have changed, the content composition has undergone many alterations, the aesthetics have greatly improved, the subscription has grown exponentially, and the magazine has reached virtually every corner of the globe, but the Master and His mission for this magazine has remained the same. As Prof. Venkataraman says, "Sanathana Sarathi has been the Lighthouse of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti and Prema, in a world that is otherwise spiritually dark."

Sarathi – Setting the Ideal for World Media

In the modern times when the media has become a 'play of money' with even reputed media groups willing to pass on anything 'that can sell' as news, not giving a penny's worth of thought about its impact on society or its younger generation, and willing to compromise and commercialize anything and everything with the logic that 'otherwise it is not going to sustain', the Sanathana Sarathi stands as a role model, just like all other Swami's service projects. It is the pristine purity character of the Sarathi which has endeared it to lakhs of devotees and spiritual aspirants world over today.

Touching Hearts...Transforming lives

If Arturo Salazar from Venezuela says, "It is the perfect food for my soul," or if Ravi Rudra from New Zealand joyfully shares, "As I read the articles, I feel the Lord directly communicating with me to inspire and transform me so that I may be like Him," or for that matter, if Perampalam from Auckland testifies, "I have now greater awareness of my innate divinity and purpose in life, and the need to express this in acts of love, fellow feeling, sacrifice, selfless service, helping ever and hurting never", it is because the magazine has touched their lives like no other. Truly, what the Sanathana Sarathi has achieved is perhaps incomparable to any other mega service plan of Swami, purely because its mission, *modus operandi* and immeasurable impact have been so mind-altering. It has worked on a totally different dimension than other massive projects of Swami in subtly, slowly but surely bringing out the best in each human being, and raising his consciousness to a new realm of peace and bliss. What transformation it has inspired in the minds of its readers, perhaps can be best expressed in a poem that Bhagavan Himself penned for the 59th Birthday issue of this 'Divine Carrier' of His timeless message. Let's ruminate on this enlightening message and elevate our lives.

This one is mine.

*I do not need any riches; for, why should I?
A carefree mind is enough, O Father,
That is a Million for me!*

*I shall not yearn for Fortune; for, why should I?
A smile-lit face is enough, O Father,
That is a Million for me!*

*I shall not pine and want: for, why should I?
A glance from Thy Eye is enough, O Father,
That is a Million for me!*

*I shall not crave for Wealth; for, why should I?
The joy of being Thine is enough, O Father,
That is a Million for me!*

*Enough for me these things I have,
Whatever Thou hast gifted now;*

*Why think of getting more?
I'll have them when Thou wishest;*

*Enough for me Thy un-diminishing Grace
Which falls on all whom Thou hast blessed,*

With the words: "This one is Mine."

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 2

How It All Began

By Prof. G.Venkataraman

Sai Ram and warm greetings again. I am happy to resume with you our joint quest for Infinity! Last time, I gave you a brief glimpse of the Universe we live in and how man, without moving out too much, mostly by gazing, wondering and thinking, combined with a lot of ingenuity of course, has assembled so much information about the Universe. In this issue, I would like to tell you something about what we know about the birth of the Universe.

From ‘Steady State’ to ‘Big Bang’

You may not believe, but even as late as the twenties of the 20th Century, people including astronomers thought that the Milky Way in which we are placed, was the only galaxy in the Cosmos, that the Universe always existed, and that the Universe would always be in a steady state, that is, without any change of size. The first half of the twentieth century saw all those concepts give place to something totally different. Most importantly, we now believe that the Physical Universe we live in had a definite birth, an event that is popularly referred to as the Big Bang.

The idea of the Big Bang is in some measure due to George Gamow. It must be said that Gamow did not actually ask questions about the birth of our Universe. He was more interested in the question: “How did the very first elements form in the cosmic cauldron that came into existence after the birth of the Universe?” Although people had considered models relating to the Universe earlier, the question of the actual birth of the Universe did not acquire importance till Gamow got into the act. However, the earlier story is interesting in its own way, and maybe I should give a glimpse of it, before I get back to Gamow and the trigger he provided.

The Gravity of Einstein’s Theory

Cut to the year 1915, when Einstein, already famous and soon to become almost a rock star, developed his Theory of General Relativity and Gravitation. This is a very important development and maybe I should say a few words about it. We all know that it was Newton who first told us that matter attracts matter due to a force called the gravitational force; that a stone falls to the earth when thrown up because of the force of gravity, and that the Earth goes round the Sun and the Moon goes round the Earth because of gravity. But what exactly is this gravity? That was the question that Einstein answered, though not in full, at least in great measure.

Einstein’s Theory of General Relativity [GR] is quite complicated; in fact at the time it was developed, very few scientists understood it, let alone ordinary

people. However, we are not concerned with the technical details but an interesting story related to GR. The core of GR is a set of equations and fooling around with them, Einstein applied them to the whole of the Universe. And what did he find? Something unbelievable: the Universe had a birth and thereafter expanded.

Einstein was shocked and could not believe what his own equations told him. He said to himself, "There is something wrong with my equations. How can the Universe be born? It has always been there; and this expansion business, it is utter nonsense. So, to get the facts right, let me fix my equations so that they tell the truth." And Einstein "fixed" his equations by adding what he called the ***Cosmological Constant***, and presto, the equations behaved "well", meaning they did not predict a birth for the Universe nor any expansion. Einstein felt satisfied and relaxed.

Today, even schoolboys know that the Universe had a beginning and is expanding all the time, but around 1920, people had a very different idea about the Universe. Some scholars say it was all due to the subtle influence of religion; I do not know about that, but the fact is that in those days, people, including astronomers [!], thought the Milky Way represented the whole of the Universe!

Friedman Theory Sheds New Light

The story now develops two parts, one revolving round Alexander Friedman and the other revolving round Edwin Hubble. We shall take them one by one, starting with Friedman in Russia. Friedman was a young man at that time [1922] and became fascinated by Einstein's Theory of General Relativity. Like Einstein, he too began playing with Einstein's equations and found that depending upon the circumstance, the Universe could have different histories. These are described separately. But common to all of them was a birth, and expansion [in one model, in the first stages only].

Einstein being the Grand Master, Friedman sent a letter to big man, submitting his results and requesting Einstein to have the paper published in Germany in a leading Physics journal. As I told you earlier, Einstein had already encountered this business of the Universe being born and had dismissed it. So he wrote a short note to Friedman saying that he was all wrong. Young Friedman was disappointed but did not give up. He checked his work all over again and found he had made no mistake whatsoever and that his findings were true. He wrote a second letter to Einstein, pleading that since there was no mistake, his results deserved publication.

Einstein was travelling at that time, and in fact, on account of his travels, he missed going to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize in December 1922 [those days, they had to travel by ship and the journey took weeks]. So it is but natural that Einstein missed seeing Friedman's second letter. However, when Einstein returned to Berlin [where he was those days], a Russian scientist named Krukov managed to meet Einstein personally and argue on behalf of Friedman. Thereupon, Einstein studied Friedman's work, found that

there was no mistake in the Russian's work, and admitted that Friedman's work shed new light.

Edwin Hubble

We now come to the second part of the story, which takes us to America and deals with Hubble. Edwin P. Hubble was born in Missouri, USA in 1889. After earning a B.S degree from the University of Chicago in 1910, Hubble trained to become a lawyer. However, through the influence of friends, he also developed a strong interest in astronomy. After getting his B.S degree, Hubble went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. At Oxford, Hubble showed the world that he was a good athlete too, by becoming an Oxford Blue in athletics. In addition, he also trained as a heavy weight boxer and even defeated champion George Carpentier in an exhibition fight!

On return to America in 1913, Hubble was admitted to the Bar in Kentucky. For a while, he practiced as a lawyer. However, his interest in astronomy prevailed, and Hubble got ready to return to Chicago for graduate studies in astronomy. Meanwhile, the First World War intervened, and Hubble enlisted in the U.S Army. He saw action in France, and rose to the rank of a Major.

After the war was over, he returned to pursue his interest in astronomy; and thus began a most fruitful career. Hubble was a very keen observer and made many important discoveries.

Discovering the Expansion of the Universe

By this time, astronomers had shown that the Universe contained billions of galaxies, and in 1924, Hubble developed an important way of measuring the distances of galaxies, especially the distant ones. His greatest discovery came some years later when he found that galaxies were all moving away from each other, showing that the Universe was actually expanding. Commenting on this, Hubble wrote:

“[all this] should furnish a clue as to the exact nature of the Universe. It may then be possible to say if the Universe and space itself is expanding at a rapid rate and in a remarkable manner. And finally, it may be possible to describe the nature of the expansion and to determine the time at which the expansion began – that is to say, the age of the Universe.”

The idea of the Universe expanding was now clearly established by observation, confirming what Einstein's equations had predicted earlier. When Einstein learnt of Hubble's discovery, he regretted trying to fix his equations earlier by introducing the Cosmological Constant, and described that move as his greatest blunder. But you know what? God has ordained that the Cosmological Constant **has** a place in His Creation, and it is now back in a new Avatar, without disturbing the expanding Universe!

Georges Lemaitre Rediscovered Friedman Theory

It often happened in Science in those days, partly I presume because of lack of communications, that many facts were re-discovered independently by many people.

Earlier I told you how Friedman in Russia had discovered what Einstein had found earlier, namely that the Universe might have had a beginning. Same story once more, this time the person involved being a Belgian priest named Georges Lemaitre. Born in 1894, Lemaitre attended a Jesuit College and entered in 1911, the University of Louvain to study engineering. When the First World War broke out in 1914, Lemaitre joined the Belgian Army and was decorated for bravery. In 1918, after the war was over, he resumed his university studies but switched from engineering to mathematics and physics. Simultaneously, he also enrolled in courses in philosophy. His ambition was to specialise in physics and metaphysics!

In 1923, Lemaitre wrote a thesis on relativity and gravitation and this won for him a scholarship from the Belgian Government, enabling him to travel to Cambridge. There he came into contact with a famous astronomer named Eddington and this spurred his interest in Cosmology. From England, Lemaitre went to America, made the acquaintance of many astronomers there, and spent some time in the famous MIT in Boston. In October 1925 Lemaitre returned to the University of Louvain, where he remained for the rest of his life.

By 1920, Lemaitre had become strongly interested in Einstein's Theory of General Relativity, which he mastered entirely by self-effort. By the mid-twenties, Lemaitre, unaware of the work done in Russia by Friedman, examined critically some earlier work of de Sitter on Cosmology, and derived some new results. He published these in an obscure journal, and not surprisingly, the results went unnoticed. In 1927, there was a big conference on physics held in Brussels [the capital of Belgium] attended by all the bigwigs, including Einstein. Naturally, as a Belgian, Lemaitre was present, and he took the opportunity to catch the attention of Einstein and tell him about his results. The Master's reaction was cold. He simply said [in French], "Your calculations are correct but your physical insight is abominable."

In January 1930, there was a meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society in London, during which there was a lot of discussion about Hubble's new discovery about the expanding Universe. All this was duly reported in the February issue of the journal *The Observatory*, which Lemaitre read in full. Immediately he dashed off a letter to Eddington reminding him that as early as 1927, he had sent him [Eddington] a paper that predicted an expanding Universe. Eddington then remembered that indeed he had received a copy of a paper but had completely forgotten about it. He now made amends by writing a letter to the journal *Nature* drawing attention to Lemaitre's brilliant work three years before. Suddenly, Lemaitre became a celebrity.

In May 1931, Lemaitre published in *Nature*, a paper that ventured to suggest that the Universe was born from an infinitesimal supreme state of matter condensation, the Primeval Atom as Lemaitre called it. The explosion of this Primeval Atom was what later started off the expansion of the Universe. Rather colourfully, Lemaitre referred to this explosion as a “day without yesterday”. Lemaitre’s theory has also been referred to as a “fireworks theory of the beginning”. In some respects, Lemaitre rediscovered what had already been found earlier by Friedman, though perhaps with a bit more physics than just bare Cosmology. No wonder Russians are annoyed with the credit given to Lemaitre, overlooking the claims of their scientist.

George Gamow

All this happened before World War II. During the war years, basic science naturally took a back seat but when the war was over, scientists went back to their passion with renewed vigour. It is time to bring George Gamow back into the picture. Gamow, by the way, was a student of Friedman, and he achieved early fame with some brilliant work in radioactivity. In those days, Russia was a tightly-controlled dictatorship. Gamow found the atmosphere too stifling. He and his wife then planned an escape. They purchased a small canoe and hoarded food for months. They then managed to wangle permission for having a holiday on a Black sea port. And one day, they tried to row out of Russia – they had to paddle nearly 250 km and they thought they would be able to do it. But it did not work that way; the canoe was caught in a storm and blown back to the shore, forty eight hours later! The chance to leave Russia came two years later when the Government sent him to Brussels to attend a conference. From there Gamow went to America in 1934, where he stayed for the rest of his life. During the Second World War, Gamow worked on the atom bomb project. After the war, he turned to Physics and began to wonder about the origin of elements in the early Universe.

An Infant Universe

It was while trying to answer this question, Gamow reasoned that first there must have been an infant Universe. Next, he said that this baby Universe must have been very, very hot. After this he argued that this was the ideal setting for the cosmic cooking of elements; that was Gamow’s line of reasoning. All this happened around 1948 or so.

It was only after Gamow’s seminal work that physicists began to accept the notion that the Universe did have a definite birth. Later, thanks to a casual remark by the British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle, the term Big Bang gained currency and came to be associated with the primordial event that signified the birth of the Physical Universe. By the way, Hoyle never believed in the Big Bang himself, and he, in fact, introduced the term somewhat in a sarcastic vein in a popular talk on Science over the BBC; but the name has stuck, and the belief in the concept too!

One important fall-out of Gamow’s conjecture is the following: “OK, the Universe was born in a hot Big Bang. Then a lot of heat must also have been

radiated at that time. If so, is there any remnant of that heat still left now?" The basic argument in favour of such a remnant goes as follows: The Baby Universe must have been extremely hot with a temperature in the range of trillions, yes trillions, of degrees! So the radiation emitted at that time must also have had an astronomically high temperature. But since then the Universe has expanded enormously and since expansion always produces cooling, the original radiation too must have cooled down considerably.

Gamow's student estimated that at the present time the radiation surviving from then must have an absolute temperature of about 5 degrees absolute, or -268°C ! For comparison, the lowest temperature recorded on the face of the Earth is about -60°C . The predictions we are mentioning were made way back in 1948 or so. In 1960, two scientists in America named Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson accidentally discovered this Cosmic Background Radiation that had been predicted on the basis of Gamow's theory. One may say that Penzias and Wilson actually heard the OM of Creation! And for their [chance] discovery, they later received the Nobel Prize! The discovery of this Cosmic Background radiation was a landmark event in Cosmology for it provided clear evidence that the Universe did originate in a Big Bang.

Three Alternative Scenarios Discovered by Alexander Friedman

When Friedman worked with Einstein's equations of General Relativity and applied them to the Universe [tough mathematics one must say!] he found that there were three possible scenarios. They are as sketched below:

In scenario 1, the Universe has a beginning and thereafter expands endlessly. In scenario 2, the Universe is born, expands for some time, and then begins to shrink. Eventually, it disappears in a Big Crunch, even as it was born in Big Bang. In scenario 3, the Universe is born, and then expands. However, with the passage of time, the expansion slows down and after literally infinite time, the Universe has a fixed size.

Two questions arise: a) Why three scenarios, and b) which of these actually applies to our Universe? Let us take the first question first. Three scenarios exist depending upon the amount of "matter" contained in the Universe. The issue is a bit complicated and so I shall avoid the technicalities. Let us turn now to question (b). After years of speculation, it would now appear that 95 % or even more, the Universe is headed for scenario 3 described above. Maybe in a subsequent article, I shall add some more comments on this very important issue.

I have lots more to tell you but that would have to wait till the next time. By the way, please note that though I am presently dealing with the physical Universe, later we shall go beyond Physics to Meta-Physics and then on to Vedanta and so on. Waiting for us at the end of it all would be the Cosmic Infinity! It's a long way to go and there are plenty of exciting journeys ahead of us! Till we meet again, all the best!

Jai Sai Ram.

THE SAI MOVEMENT IN BOLIVIA

Beautiful Bolivia

Nestled in the heart of the highest and longest mountain range in Latin America, the amazing Andes; protected by beautiful 6,500 meter peaks on one side, and humid Amazon jungles coupled with dry planes on the other; blessed with the second largest lake in South America, the sacred puma-shaped Lake Titicaca, which is impossibly deep and covers 8,030 square kilometers; host to world's largest salt flat, the Salar de Uyuni, which has an area of 10,582 kms containing a staggering 10 billion tons of salt; home to the largest indigenous population in South America comprising nearly five million of the country's total eight million – Bolivia is a breathtakingly beautiful country conferring an authentic South American experience of Indian cultures and dramatic superlative landscapes in the Southern hemisphere.

Spiritually Rich and Serene Heritage

The Bolivian way of life, consists of their unique Andean culture, fashionable fusion music which is a blend of traditional and modern, and their serene and in-built inclination to spiritual principles, is a one of its kind in the modern world. Timeless forts, temples and amazing ruins (startlingly preserved and many still in use today) are testimonies to the glorious history of this land which was once an important part of the ancient Incan Empire. One of the most spectacular displays of ancient ritual is during the Bolivian holiday of Yintip Raymi, or the Solemn Feast of the Sun. This is a large and elaborate sun ritual which dates back thousands of years. "Once you visit Bolivia," it is said, "you will feel the power of the sun and the awe-inspiring landscape, and also understand how this culture came to worship the sun." That is how fascinating and distinct Bolivia is!

Quechas and Aymaras, the native Americans of this land, constitute nearly fifty-five percent of the population. They have existed for two thousand years. It is from the Aymaras that Bolivians have inherited the Ayni or system of community sharing. Each member of the community helps the other in a society of giving and receiving. The Aymaras also started and left a legacy of polarities based on man and woman, and their language was considered to be one of the most advanced and well structured in the world. While the Quechas, the other ethnic group, were renowned for their excellent farmers with advanced systems of irrigation, terraces, and soil conservation schemes; roads paved with smooth stones and good communication systems.

The Incredible Incan Civilisation

In fact, the concept of truth, no stealing, no lying, and no laziness came to the Bolivians from Quechas. And not many will know that it was actually a Quecha leader who started the Incan Empire (the largest empire in pre-Columbian America which formed 13 states which occupied what is now Bolivia, Peru, northern Chile, Ecuador and the north of Argentina) which

lasted for five centuries till the Spanish conquest of South America in the 16th century.

The Incas greatly influenced the ethnic communities of this region. In Inca mythology, nature played an important role, and therefore, the concept of spirit of unity, worship of Panchmama (Mother Earth) and reverence for the Sun – all of these came from the Incas to the Bolivians. The Incas also had a strong belief in reincarnation which was symbolized in their symbol, the 'Andean Cross', based on the Southern Cross constellation and which represents the current life and different stages of the after life.

Bolivia Today – Changing At A Fast Pace

The Spanish conquest of Bolivia in the 1500's changed greatly changed the demographic and cultural landscape of this land-locked country. With 80% speaking Spanish as their first language, Spanish today is the official language along with Quecha and Aymara. A great majority of Bolivians in the present day are also Roman Catholic and many native communities interweave pre-Columbian and Christian symbols in their worship.

Bolivia was, in fact, the last Spanish possession to achieve independence. Thanks to Simon Bolivar (who is the inspiration for the country's current name) Bolivia became a republic in 1825. La Paz was made the country's capital, which is the highest administrative capital city in the world. Rich in natural resources like silver, natural gas, iron and magnesium, Bolivia has always been a "gold mine" which unfortunately was often exploited and not used optimally for the country's advantage, partly due to years of unstable political rule even after becoming a republic. But in the recent times, Bolivia has begun to blossom into a culturally, spiritually and politically rich nation and recently elected a descendent of Indian origin as President in 2005. And with Sai's grace and guidance reaching the country through mysterious channels, the whole process is only getting expedited. But when and how did Baba enter Bolivia? And how has it changed the Bolivian mindscape? This is a fascinating story and you will read all about it as we go along.

Sathya Sai Baba Comes To Bolivia

The first Bolivian to visit Sathya Sai Baba was Ramiro Sotelo Murillo in 1974. His visit, did not immediately lead to the formation of the Sai Organisation of Bolivia, but sowed the seeds for it in the form of contacts he had made among friends while in Prasanthi Nilayam.

In 1978, Gustavo Mendez brought books on Sai Baba from Mexico and also information about this 'marvelous being on the Earth'. Gustavo's sister, Emma Mendez, says, "From the moment I started reading this material, I was convinced that it was authentic and that these were messages from an exceptional being. I eagerly shared all this material with family and friends. We started to study His books in a small group and began practicing His teachings in our lives." This was the beginning of Sai Organization in Bolivia.

“During 1979, while visiting Mexico,” Emma continues, “I had the opportunity to meet devotees who were returning from India. They had received a gift - a medal with the image of Swami on one side and an ‘Om’ on the other. It was really a beautiful gift.” Swami’s inspiring messages and fascinating stories started flowing to Bolivia slowly but steadily, and the Mendez family’s faith deepened everyday. In 1981, they received material which helped them to organize a Sai ceremony with devotional songs and Arathi, and soon small Sai groups were born which blossomed into Sai Centres in the cities of La Paz and Santa Cruz, the capital city and the largest city of Bolivia respectively.

Eye Will See

Gustavo Mendez and his wife, the fortunate instruments of the Lord, continued to visit other cities, carrying with them books and photos of Swami. They visited Potosí, Tarija, Trinidad and Sucre. And everywhere they went, miracles happened. Looking back more than a decade and half, Mrs. Maria Teresa Doria says,

“It was the year 1989. My daughter Karina was going to lose her sight permanently. Many ophthalmologists had examined her, and explained how the pigmentation in the retina was not normal, and how there was a progressive deterioration of the optic nerve. Even though one of her eyes was no longer responding and the other was deteriorating fast, I somehow was not willing to accept the stark prognosis. One of the doctors even recommended that 17-year old Karina be inscribed in the Institute for the Blind, so that she could learn Braille. To me, it was totally unacceptable. I wanted to leave no stone unturned and in a desperate effort to find a cure, I took her to Christian prayer sessions, to spiritual healers, to doctors of alternate medicine – all of which was of no avail.

Then, one day on the TV, I heard a discussion on spiritual gurus where there was a mention of Sai Baba. They showed a picture of Sai Baba too, and He looked so brilliant and beautiful. When they started talking about His miracles, I was even more enthralled. During this time, I was attending a conference on health, and happened to meet a person who directed me to the home of Mrs. Mendez. Once there, I bought three or four books about Sai Baba and also got some Vibuthi. Every night I started applying this Vibhuti over Karina’s eyelids and to my amazement and joy, she started getting better every passing day. One night Karina even had a dream where she saw Swami. Our house at this time was pervaded with the smell of jasmine. Swami’s grace was mysteriously percolating our lives. Later, when I took her for medical check-up, the ophthalmologist was amazed at the regeneration of the optic nerves. ‘She is normal,’ said not one, but all the three doctors who examined her. I knew Swami had completely cured Karina. I needed no more confirmation of His divinity. From then on, my faith has been concrete and complete.”

Stream of Endless Vibhuti

Hundreds of miracles like this instilled devotion and installed Sai in the heart of Bolivians. Narrating an interesting account, related again to vibhuti and Mendez, Sr. Javier, a long-standing devotee, says,

“In the year 1990, we were invited to visit a group of people who were studying metaphysics. Mr. Gustavo Mendez spoke to them about the miracle of vibhuti which could cure just about anything. He had also brought many books about Sai to the meeting, but what the people wanted was a sample of vibhuti, and no one seemed to have any. I remembered that I had a small amount in a plastic bag in my pocket, but it was not enough for more than four or five people to receive a little sample. I did not want to help distribute this, purely to save myself from incurring the displeasure of many who will not be able to receive. I, therefore, turned the little bag over to a lady devotee, Ms. Anita Ardaya, and over 80 people lined up to receive a sample! Each one took a small piece of paper to keep the vibhuti safe, and the lady started giving out a spoonful to each one. When I saw the size of the first spoonful, I wanted to protest but instead I decided to step away from the scene (as if not connected with it) and let her do the distribution. And she kept giving spoonfuls not to three, four, thirty or fifty; all the eighty received their generous samples and when Anita returned the bag to me I was completely dumbfounded. The bag had the same amount of Vibhuti as was there previous to the distribution! The hair on my arms literally stood on ends.”

Miraculous Medicine Man

The story of every Baba devotee from Bolivia is a beautiful revelation of His omnipresence and omnipotence. Sr. Javier has many more to share but we will move on with one more scintillating tale from this veteran devotee.

“In the year 1989,” Javier says, “I was with my friend, Mendoza, who was returning to Chile and offered to take any gifts for my friends there, as I had lived with my family there previously. I thanked him and while I was wishing him well before bidding goodbye, I told him to remember about our discussions about Sai Baba. He had always listened intently when we had spoken about Swami, but never joined the Sai Organization or participated in Sai activities. Before he left, he said he would surely keep an eye out for Swami in Chile.

When Mendoza returned, his first declaration over the phone was, ‘I have news of Sai Baba in Chile.’ When we met later, he narrated a strange story. It was about a TV program he had seen in Santiago (capital of Chile) where an uneducated ‘shaman or curandero’ (Indian medicine man) spoke of miracle cures. The interviewer on the TV asked this person what he cured. The poorly dressed mystical physician said, ‘Everything.’ He was asked again, ‘How do you cure?’ And the reticent ‘medicine man’ couldn’t really explain, and finally said, ‘In reality, it is not me who cures.’ Obviously, the next question was, ‘If it is not you, who is it?’ The man modestly just shook his head and the program ended.

The next week, on the same program the 'medicine man' was back. Now, he had brought a friend who had just returned from India. His friend explained how he had gone to India and found himself in the ashram of Sai Baba. He had gone for darshan, and sat in the lines like everyone else, without knowing anything about Baba. All of a sudden, he said, a sevadal was asking for him by name. He thought it was for someone else with the same name and didn't bother to respond. But the sevadal came again, so he got up. The sevadal said, 'Swami wants to talk to you.' When he went into the interview room, Swami smiled at him and asked him if he knew the 'medicine man', giving his complete name. 'Oh yes,' said the friend, and then Baba asked him if he would help Him. Swami then gave him a small envelope with the name of N. N. written on it to be given to the 'medicine man'. When this person returned to Chile, and told the 'medicine man' about the present for him from India, the 'medicine man' said, 'I do not know anyone in India.' But when he opened the envelope and saw Swami's photo, he cried out, 'Oh! He is the one who cures my patients. What is His name?' Swami had sent the photo just in time to help the medicine man with his TV interview."

Mind-boggling are the ways of the divine. He reaches out to His devotees in a million ways, each one more astounding than the other. It is because of such experiences of His love and power that the Sai Movement grew in Bolivia and Sai centres sprouted in many cities apart from the administrative capital city of La Paz.

Ask and You Shall Receive

In February 1993, for example, the Organisation formally opened in Sucre, which is the constitutional capital of Bolivia as well as the seat of her supreme court. The previous year, Armando Salvietti had seen a photo of Sai Baba in a newspaper which he had cut out and put away in a box. In his mind, he said, "If You are really God, and know everything I am thinking, please help me to find out about your teachings, and I will take Your photo out of the box." Not three days went by and someone knocked on the door and offered books on the life and message of Sai Baba! Armando bought all the books and started studying them intently. One thing he read which fascinated him was that Sai Baba materialized objects for His devotees. He went to the box and took out the newspaper clipping, and said, "Please send me a medal with Your photo on it." And within ten days, Armando's sister-in-law returned from Argentina, and brought a medal with Swami's image on it saying this is the picture of a Saint from India.

There was more to come. A group of friends from Santa Cruz had visited Swami and had brought back some vibhuti. They gave some to Susana, Armando's wife, attesting, "It cured anything". Susana was then suffering from chronic ulcers and the doctors had recommended an operation. But she was not for the idea, instead she decided to travel to India with her husband.

They came to Prasanthi Nilayam and were fortunate to be called for an interview. Swami asked her, "Why are you so worried about your health?" And

before she could answer, He said, "I know, I know," and explained in detail the causes of her ulcers. The couple was waiting for Swami to say that He would cure the ulcers, but He only said, "Everything will be fine, I am always with you." Then He put His hand on her head and said, "I bless you and all your family." But Susana was still feeling that nothing had changed. But one amazing fact of the whole episode was that she had heard Baba speaking everything to her in Spanish, because she does not know English, but her husband, and another devotee from UK, had heard Baba speaking in English and not a word of Spanish! It was all an unsolved puzzle.

On their return journey to Bolivia, the couple landed in Miami (Florida, USA), where Susana went for a check up of her ulcers. The doctors said, "There are no signs of any ulcers, she is in excellent health". Susana was ecstatic with happiness and no one could shake her faith in Swami now. Soon after they reached home, she decided to open a Sai Center in Sucre to spread the good news of Swami and His message. Soon the centre grew and the Salviettes helped form the Sai Foundation of Bolivia in 1995 to aid the service and other spiritual activities of the Bolivian Sai Organization. Armando became the first president and recently in 2006, Susana took over. There is another devotee who helped Armando with the setting up of the Sai Foundation, Ms. Sonia Rojas Salvatierra, and her experiences too are equally remarkable.

The Divine Doctor Cures All

"It was in the early nineties," says Rojas Salvatierra, "I was returning from a trip to Paris, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires, not having slept for about 72 hours. When I arrived at the airport in Bolivia, I was advised that my mother was being operated upon. I quickly went to the hospital, notwithstanding the severe headache mainly because of my lack of sleep. But after I got a few hours of sleep and returned to the hospital to see my mother, the headache was worse. I became too weak and had to be hospitalized. It was such a bad time that I thought it was better to die than continue in the situation. The diagnosis was out - I was having an incurable disease which if operated had only 50% chance of recovery. There were some new treatments, but these too were in an experimental stage and did not guarantee recovery. Cisticercosis is a disease of worms in the brain and I had sixteen of them in the reproductive stage. I, however, opted for the experimental treatment which required that I remain hospitalized for one month for the administration of the medicines.

I remember the doctor who always woke me up at night to tell me that everything would be alright and to take my medicine. He was always smiling. After my recovery, I went to Mexico for a check up at the Institute of Neurology as they had more experience with this type of disease. A friend asked me to take an envelope for some of her family members in Mexico. While I was waiting for the envelope, I saw on her table a book with a photo of the doctor who attended on me in the hospital at night during my sickness. I asked her, "Who is the doctor?" She said, "Take the book and read it." I was hurrying to the airport, so I just put it in my bag. In the plane, I opened the book and the first thing I saw was this message, "It is not important that you

do not know me, the only thing which is important is that I know that you need me.”

Later I tried to find these words in the book, but could never locate. I continued to read, and was surprised that the doctor who had attended on me in the hospital was a man in India named Sai Baba, who said He was God. You can imagine my frustration when I returned to Bolivia and went to the hospital to inquire from my doctor about this Sai Baba. The hospital administration presented me with the doctor on the night shift, but he was not the one who had attended to me, but everyone said there had been no change of doctors. It was probably a confusion caused by my medication, I thought.

I was almost ready to accept that explanation when I decided to call the woman who had loaned the strange book to me. She said that I could call someone in Argentina named Leonardo Gutter and gave me his number. Leonardo was very pleased to receive my call and said that he was planning a trip to Bolivia. When he came, he had brought a film about Sai Baba. When I saw the film, I could confirm that the doctor who took care of me for one month in the hospital was the same Sai Baba, and not a doctor.

It was incredulous that this ‘gentleman’ in India had come all the way to Bolivia to help me cure in the hospital. I had a hundred questions to ask Him. When I arrived in India after a few weeks, the first thing I noticed about Sai Baba was that His hair was exactly the same as the doctor who had looked after me in the hospital. His eyes were the same, his smile was the same! For reasons that I still don’t understand, I know it was Swami who chose me for this divine drama.”

The Lord’s pure love flows to where it is needed, one need not even ask. He has come to convert our troubles and tribulations into happiness and bliss, and every single moment, He is engaged in this divine endeavour whether we realize it or not. This one experience changed Sonia’s life for ever and she dedicated all her energies in His work serving as Coordinator for the Sai Organization of Bolivia for four years till 1996 and later working with the Sai Foundation.

The Mendez family, Sonia, Susana, etc. are not even the tip of the iceberg of the Bolivian Sai Movement. For every mind-altering incident we hear, they are hundreds which are locked in the deep recesses of the every devotee’s heart forever infusing them with faith, confidence and spiritual energy just like the Alicia Arispe’s.

All Round Protection

“It was in 1995 that I started to know about Sathya Sai Baba,” says Alicia. “I decided to join a group of devotees that were traveling to India for His 70th birthday. For me, it was a moving experience. I am a retired teacher and founder of a private school where I was the director for ten years. When I went to India, it caused a serious problem with the supervision. The

supervisor, a Catholic Priest, while I was gone, tried to remove me and put a Catholic nun in my position. It was the last year for me before retirement, and very important to qualify for my pension. I cried in front of Swami's photo after I returned, resigned myself to whatever He decides for me and went to school. When I returned from School and was passing by the open door of my meditation room, I heard a voice say, "Don't worry, everything will be alright." By this time, the memorandum naming the catholic nun to my position had already been sent to the district supervisor. I had given up all hopes. But strangely the district supervisor raised some objections and renamed me as director of the school! I was joyous and was able to complete my career in peace. In fact, Swami has protected me in many situations since then and my life has seen wonderful changes after I made Him an indelible part of my life."

Mother Healed By The Divine Mother

If that was how Swami has transformed the life the Alicia, let us now read the story of another Sonia, Sonia Bascope, the youngest daughter of Delfina Mendizábal, who shares how having Swami in our lives is like having access to an infinite reserve of support, strength, grace and peace. "In the year 1994," says Sonia, "it was determined that my mother had cancer. I started asking questions about life and why this was happening to our family. I got no satisfactory answers. In 1995, she was submitted to an operation. The cancer was in the nose and during the operation the doctor had to cut out a part of her palate. I was told after the operation she would only live for only six months and also suffer much pain.

I was desperately looking for answers to my questions at this time and someone told me about Sai Baba. I arrived at the home of the Mendez family where I found books and vibhuti. I started going to the Sai center in the home of the Petersens. My mother at this time was receiving all the treatments indicated for her condition. But when she felt pain, I would put vibhuti on her face and then give her it to eat. I also showed her how to do the Light Meditation. Slowly, her pain began to disappear and she lived for an unbelievable nine more years! Even her palate closed up little by little. My mother accepted Swami completely to the extent that she would tell visitors, "Swami is God". In spite of everything, my life has become much richer spiritually because of Swami. I also got the answer to my questions after knowing Swami. I know now that we are eternal and life is continuous. This has helped me to lead a happy life."

Life, without Swami, they say is a hopeless end but with Swami, it is endless hope. For thousands of Bolivian Sai devotees, life with Swami is, in fact, endless hope, health and happiness. And the universal message of love and peace of Baba has been percolating to every strata of the Bolivian society.

Sai Public Meetings

Inspired devotees have been organizing Sai Public Meetings every year in different cities. As recent as 2006, a Public Meeting was organized in Santa Cruz which was attended by hundreds of devotees and newcomers. Gustavo

Mendez and his sister were the first devotees named in charge of the organisation in 1993 and national retreats of the Sai Organisation are held every year to share organizational and spiritual experience. With representatives from other countries like Argentina, Brazil, etc. coming for the Public meetings including senior devotees like Nassin Michael, Leonardo Gutter, Carlos Rivas, Marcelo Berenstein and the like, the Sai Movement in Bolivia is touching more lives than ever.

‘You must speak for me’

Narrating an elevating episode of how mysteriously Sai’s name and message enlightened souls in a catholic church, Senor Javier says, “One morning in 1999, I received a call from a friend, Father Hugo, who is also a Catholic Priest. He invited the devotees of the Sai Centre of La Paz to give an exposition about Sai Baba in the Iglesia Monticulo Church, La Paz, but needed an immediate answer. When I saw the interesting possibilities for sharing Swami’s message, I accepted the invitation for the same evening. But very soon I saw how imprudent this was. I called the Centre president and asked her to speak at the church but she asked me to do it. Only then did I realize the problem that I had created. I tried to call my friend, the priest and cancel the engagement. But I was unable to get him on line in the morning or afternoon. Other center members offered to go and give me moral support, but no one wanted to talk on the spur of the moment.

Finally, thinking that the presentation would probably be to a small group in an adjoining room, I reconciled myself to present something. But I was still completely unprepared. I remembered another friend and asked him to speak and he politely refused. The only other possibility was to turn to Swami Himself, and say, ‘Swami, please, You must speak for me.’ I started looking for messages in Sathya Sai Speaks volumes, and found three sheets of printed messages of Swami in my desk that I had read and copied for future reference. It wasn’t much and I could hardly concentrate on my work. When I went to the church at 7 PM and met the priest, I asked him about the venue. He pointed to the main church, and also said this was to be part of the mass ceremony. I was to speak first about Sai Baba and His message, and then the father would give the mass, I gathered. Some devotees who had come had brought vibhuti. I tried to be calm.

The church was full. It was the evening mass. I stepped up to the microphone, and to my surprise my voice came through in a pleasant tone, and ideas flowed seamlessly. To me, it was clear Swami was speaking through me. There was a question and answer period, and several questions were asked about Sai Baba and Jesús. When vibhuti was distributed, a couple was sitting next to a devotee. The lady got up to get vibhuti, but the husband remained seated. When she came back to her seat, she said to her husband, ‘Here, put some of this on your knee’. He rolled up his trouser and applied it, and then suddenly ran to the front to get some more! All this drama was over that evening at 9.30 and the father finished the mass making several references to the teachings of Sai Baba. Everyone sang hymns to the Lord and there was peace and love everywhere in the air.”

Peace and love and more of it every moment – that is that Bolivia is inching to every passing day and Sai devotees in Bolivia are doing all that they can. In 2006, a workshop to stimulate education in Human Values was organized by Mrs. Isabel Toyos, the Education coordinator for the Southern Council, while the youth wing of Cochabamba (a city in Central Bolivia) are engaged in some outstanding service activities with the Maria Auxiliadora community.

‘Another Claudia is Born’

Claudia, a youth member from Cochabamba says, “I want to share with you what I have experienced with the youth and which has caused me to see life with a different perspective. I became a member of this group about a year ago. As part of the activities of this group we wanted to do serve in needy communities. One of the first communities we selected was Maria Auxiliadora, where we started taking used clothing for the residents. However, we saw that there was a greater need for sharing Human Values with the children, and so, we started going once a week and telling stories, singing songs, staging dramas and playing games – essentially, just giving love. At this time my life was filled with a big hole, there was no love in my heart. After I started working with these children, I started discovering that the love that was always there in my heart. I had plenty left over to share with everyone after I had spent time with these children. All this has filled me with so much happiness which I cannot imagine. It is as if another Claudia is born in this moment. Now there is so much to do, and so much to give. I have transformed. I have learned that to love is to serve.”

Bolivia...Marching to Bliss

Service always gives more to the giver than the receiver. “You are all caskets of Divine Love; share it, spread it, express that love in acts of service, words of sympathy and acts of compassion,” Swami says and the Sai devotees in Bolivia are doing exactly that by reaching out to the needy and underprivileged. Very poor families living in the shores of Rocha river who use contaminated water for cooking, washing, and even drinking, have lit candles for ages and do not know what is electricity, and live in tiny and flimsy houses made of straw and pasteboards are being taken care of by devotees from Cochabamba. They visit this community regularly, donate clothes, food, water, cans and attend to their problems. “It is only when one engages in selfless service that love can be purified,” Swami says and the Bolivian devotees know that the only way to love Swami is to serve the disadvantaged. With every Bolivian devotee becoming a shining candle of selfless service done in gratitude and reverence to the divine, the day is not far when Bolivia, though land-locked will be love-filled and will not only be beautiful but will also be Baba-filled and Baba-blessed in every inch.

Dear Reader, we are sure there are many more devotee stories and there is much more seva happening in Bolivia, which we could not present to you in our time constraints for this article. We will collect and collate these and bring you more accounts in future issues. Thank you for your time.

SCINTILLATING SHIVARATHRI OF 1970

We bring this article from the archives of Sanathana Sarathi, the Ashram's hallowed magazine, as it celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

Seva at Sivarathri

Sivarathri attracts mammoth gatherings to Prasanthi Nilayam, to witness the emergence of the Linga from the Divine Body of Baba, and so, to serve the devotees, contingents of Seva Dal members trained for the purpose by the Sathya Sai Seva Samithis of different linguistic regions from Hyderabad, Eluru, Guntur, Vijayawada, Bombay, Mangalore, Bangalore, Kerala, Delhi also arrived in time, to be blessed and directed by Bhagavan, who inspired them with His Divine Discourse on the evening of 4th March, 1970. Dr. S. Bhagavantam spoke to the men and women volunteers on the attitude of surrender that the member of the Seva Dal has to cultivate, for, Seva at the Prasanthi Nilayam as well as everywhere is a Sadhana. Baba exhorted the volunteers to feel that their Seva is a form of worship, (dedicated to the God resident in every one. Seva destroys the ego and confers *Ananda*, on the giver as well as the receiver, He said. It is a transformation of the mind, the compassion one gets automatically, at the sight of distress, pain or grief).

"Wherever you are, whatever the time, when you meet situations that require help, render it, to the best of your capacity," advised Baba. "You yearn to do some Seva to Me, isn't it? Well! I have a thousand hands and feet, a thousand eyes and hands. *Sahasra-seershaa purushah Sahasraakshah-sahasrapaad*, says the Vedas. The thousands who come here, the children, the sick the aged, the diseased, the sad, the depressed—they are all Me; serve them and you serve Me", Baba declared. "The badge given to you now must not be cast away, after the three or seven days are over; it must be imprinted on your heart and be a permanent call and reminder of the mission, into which you are initiated now", Baba said.

Sivarathri Morning

More than 50,000 persons arrived at the Nilayam, by the morning of the 6th; a long unbroken train of hundreds of omnibuses, and cars, scooters and motor cycles, brought thousands in; there were thousands who came by rail, and trekked the distance from Bukkapatnam or even boarded trucks to reach the place in time. When the Sivarathri Day dawned, the gathering shone in grateful joy, and cheered Baba, when He gave darshan, prior to the hoisting of the Prasanthi Flag on the Nilayam.

Dr. Divakarla Venkatavadhanulu, Professor of Telugu, Osmania University, addressed the gathering on the significance of Sivarathri. Bhagavan discoursed on the basic faults that corrode into individual and social life. He said, greed or lobha is the root of all the banal competitions in the current world – greed for riches, for power, for authority over fellowmen. He said that

this can be overcome by the cultivation of detachment, of tolerance, of the spirit of service and the deepening of faith in an ever present immanent God. He referred to the condemnation of the love for one's language, community, province or religion, and the exaggerated emphasis on the love for the nation. "The loyalty to the nation is built on the loyalty to the village, the family, the language spoken at home, the religion learned at the mother's lap, etc. You cannot separate the limbs and name the trunk as the source of all strength!" Baba said.

Baba also emphasised the inherent excellences of the customs, conventions, rituals and ceremonies laid down by the sages, for limiting the vagaries of the human mind and regulating and educating his emotions and impulses. He said that the Prasanthi Flag has on it the symbol of the *Sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant), struggling to attain self-realisation.

Baba Creates a Locket for Shirdi Baba's Silver Idol

At 11 A.M. Baba proceeded to the Auditorium, for the Abhishekam. Bhajan from fifty thousand throats filled the air with a Divine fragrance; the path was a lovely carpet of flowers. The richly caparisoned Sai Gita (elephant) walked majestically in front. To the right and left, ancient of the ancient Vedas moved with Baba, chanting the mantras. During the Bhajan, Baba gave the gathering the unique chance of witnessing the creation of a nine-jewelled locket for Sai Baba's silver idol, and when He placed it on the forehead, between the eyebrows, it stuck! Then He poured from a wooden pot an unbroken stream of sacred ash on the idol, precious stones too falling from the pot, when His palm drew the sacred substance created by His touch.

In the evening, devotees gathered before the Santhi Vedika, and the vast expanse of open space was tight packed with men and women, eagerly awaiting the discourses, the emergence of the Linga, and the night long vigil and Bhajans. Dr. V. K. Gokak, and Sri. Nakul Sen. I. C. S., Lt. Governor of Goa, spoke in English on Bhagavan and His Universal Message of Love. Dr. Pivakarla Venkatavadhanlu spoke in Telugu.

The Divine Discourse

Then, Baba delivered His Divine Discourse. In the Sanskrit Verse which was the prologue to His speech, Baba disclosed His identity; *Naham manushyo* (I am neither a human being) *na cha deva yakshah* (nor a god or superman), *na Brahmana kshatriya vaisya sudra* (nor am I a member of any one of the four castes) *na bramhachari, na grhee, vanashthah* (nor can you label Me as belonging to any of the four stages or Ashramas laid down by Sanathana Dharma), *aham sathyabodhaka* (I am the Teacher of Truth,) *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram!* My Reality is Truth Goodness Beauty!

He said, "Sai Bhaktas (devotees) have to be pioneers in a new revolution, a transformation of character and endeavour; so, they have to fill themselves with Love so that the shower of unselfish universal Love can scotch the flames of anger, hatred, fear and anxiety that are consuming the world today.

Sometimes, despair clouds the vision and people get panicky about the future of this country. But, I assure you that the country will not come to harm, either through internal or, external danger for, it is Bharath, (*Bha* meaning Bhagavan, God and *Rathi* meaning Attachment), the Land where the people are attached to God, and whom God loves."

Manifestation of the Linga

After the Discourse which lasted for one hour, Bhagavan sang a few *Namavalis* (bhajans) and enthralled the huge gathering into ecstasy. Meanwhile, the first indications of the emergence of the Lingam (symbol of the Formless-All Formful God, Siva) from His Abdomen became apparent, and Baba sat in the silver chair. The gathering sang in chorus, in anxious expectation of the Miracle, the uplifting song, "Om Sivaya, Om Sivaya." About fifteen minutes later, a heavy oval *Linga*, glowing with divine effulgence, composed of a substance very much akin to opal came up and manifested its splendour to the vast multitude, uplifting them in a wave of adoration and bliss.

The Festival Continues

On the morning of the 7th, when the Bhajan sessions which began at 8 P. M. ended, Bhagavan gave Darshan at the Santhi Vedika and blessed the mass of devotees with a short discourse. He said that the 'Kirtan' (singing the Lord's Name) should not end but, must persist as long as there is breath in the body. *Sam-apthi* is the word for Finish; but, it does not mean here, the end of progress. It means the *apthi* attainment of *Sama* or Brahman (God). So, until the Universal Absolute is attained, this adoration of the Lord has to be continued. The *Sastras* (ancient scriptures) of this country will help you to understand Divinity. India is unique in this field - it is one composite culture, composed of a variety of languages, spiritual disciplines, valuable teachings, goals and paths, to suit the various types of people and various stages of development. Each is wholesome and useful, in its place, at the proper time." After the Discourse, Baba blessed the devotees and had Divine Prasadam distributed to every one of the 50,000 persons, so that they may break the ritual fast they had vowed the previous day.

On the evening of the 7th, the Meeting held in the Auditorium was addressed by Brahmasri Kuppa Bairagi Sastry and by Swamy Karunyanandaji of the Jeeva Karunyasangha, Rajahmundry. Bhagavan spoke about the Guru and his responsibilities. Instead of elevating the Guru, who is all only a sign-post to God, as God, it is much better to accept the God resident in you, as the Guru and pray to Him to guide you and take you nearer to Him. You cannot cross a river sitting in a boat of stone! You must surrender completely to His Will and dedicate thought, word and deed to Him.

Master the Mind – Not the Moon

"I was asked by some scholars this morning about the adventure of putting man on the moon; I answered that, even on the moon, man has no peace of

mind, he is anxious that the vehicle that will take him back to earth might not miss him. And, on earth below, he has not yet ensured peace! Journeying into the mind and controlling it by knowing its vagaries is far more profitable than journeying to the outer moon, the moon that has no illumining power of its own. The mind is the inner moon; one must discover it and master it. Love brings hearts together; Love for the sake of Love, that is to say, the greatest expression of Love, namely God. My teaching, My message, My practice, My mission is 'Love'," Swami said.

"Love for God builds up the path of *Bhakthi* (devotion); it is so powerful that it compels God to assume the Form which it desires to visualise! Cleanse your heart, and invite Him to install Himself in it, in any Form you crave for; God is so compassionate that He moulds Himself in that Form and with that Name! But, *chittha suddhi* or cleansing of the heart is essential. All religions have this fundamental requisite in view. If the postage stamp is affixed, even a worthless notepaper on which is scribbled some trash, put into a dirty envelope will reach the addressee! But, not even the gaudiest envelope containing most sacred texts written in golden letters on the costliest of notepapers can reach the addressee, if it is unstamped! So, too, without a pure heart, the most pompous of pundits cannot visualise Him; with it, even the most illiterate, can!"

"The Gita teaches the highest truth by stages. First, it prescribes Karma; then, it advises you to give up the desire for the fruits of Karma, while engaged in Karma; later, Dharmamarga (path of righteousness and duty) is prescribed, and after reaching a certain stage, you are exhorted to give up even Dharma and strive for *Moksha* (liberation); lastly, even that is explained away as a 'desire' and the *Sanyasa* of *Moksha* (renunciation of liberation) is recommended as the Goal."

Baba Gives His Personal Touch To Thousands

On the 8th, Baba blessed the thousands of eager visitors from all the States of India, and from all the continents, giving to each one of them the coveted Vibhuti and the chance of *Namaskara* (touching His feet). On the 9th, 10th and 11th March (1970), Bhagavan selected from among the thousands the old, the sick, the maimed and the afflicted, for being blessed with special interview, with Him and He gave them the consolation, courage, and cure they longed for. On the 12th, He left for Anantapur, where the building for the Women's College is fast coming up. He will be at Whitefield for a few days, before proceeding on tour.

GANDHI ON CIVILIZATION

H2H reproduces below, an extract from a booklet published almost a century ago. The author of that booklet is Gandhi. The booklet is a compilation of articles written by Gandhi in the journal *Indian Opinion*. The original articles were in Gujarati, and the book was written while Gandhi was travelling from London to South Africa in 1908.

Later, the book was translated into English and reprinted many times under the title *HIND SWARAJ*. H2H hopes to offer from time to time, extracts from this booklet, which later became quite famous. There is a specific reason why we are offering these extracts. In a preface entitled *A WORD OF EXPLANATION* written in 1921, Gandhi says, "In my opinion, it is a book which can be put into the hands of a child. It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. If India adopted the doctrine of love as an active part of her religion and introduced it in her politics, *Swaraj* [Independence] would descend upon India from Heaven."

Swami teaches the lesson of Love all the time but most of us laugh it off or politely ignore it. Gandhi taught it and it was because of that South Africa escaped a blood bath when finally Apartheid ended in the early nineties.

One may be able to contradict a few details here and there but about the value of the overall message of Love, there cannot be any doubt.

Gandhi never saw Swami or knew about Him. Yet he responded to the call of Swami speaking from within his heart. We, on the other hand, are able to see Swami in physical form and enjoy His Grace and blessings in so many different ways. Do we not have the obligation then to take His Message of Love far more seriously that we are doing at present? Is not the world in a far more turbulent state now than it was a hundred years ago, especially with so much violence all round and so many thousand atom bombs floating around?

Think about it.

GANDHI ON CIVILIZATION – Part 1

Reader: What do you mean by civilization?

Editor: It is not a question of what I mean. Several English writers refuse to call that as civilisation, which passes under that name. Many books have been written on that subject. Societies have been formed to cure the nation of the evils of civilisation. A great English writer has written a work called *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*. Therein, he has called it a disease.

Reader: Why don't we know about such matters?

Editor: The answer is simple. We rarely find people arguing against themselves. Those who are intoxicated by modern civilisation are not likely to write against it. Their care would be to find out facts and arguments in support

of it, and this they do unconsciously, believing it to be true. A man while he is dreaming, believes in his dream; he is undeceived only when he is awakened from his sleep. A man labouring under the bane of civilisation is like a dreaming man. What we usually read are works of defenders of modern civilisation, which undoubtedly claims among its votaries very brilliant and even some very good men. Their writings hypnotize us. And so one by one, we are drawn into this vortex.

Reader: This seems very plausible. Now will you tell me something of what you have read and thought of this civilisation?

Editor: Let us first consider what state of things is described by the word "civilisation". Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of their life. We will take some examples. The people of Europe today live in better-built houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilisation, and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness. Formerly, they wore skins and used spears as their weapons.

Now they wear long trousers, and, for embellishing their bodies, they wear a variety of clothing, and instead of spears, they carry with them revolvers containing five or more chambers. If people of a certain country, who have hitherto not been in the habit of wearing much clothing, boots, etc., adopt European clothing, they are supposed to have become civilised out of savagery. Formerly in Europe, people ploughed their lands mainly by manual labour. Now, one man can plough a vast tract by means of steam engine and can thus amass a great wealth. This is called a sign of civilisation. Formerly, only a few men wrote valuable books. Now, anybody writes and prints anything he likes and poisons people's minds. Formerly, men travelled in wagons. Now they fly through the air in trains at the rate of four hundred and more miles per day.

This is considered the height of civilisation. It has been stated that as men progress, they shall be able to travel in airship and reach any part of the world in a few hours. Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button and they will have their clothing by their side. They will press another button and they will have their newspaper. A third and a motor car will be waiting for them. They will have a variety of delicately dished up food. Everything will be done by machinery. Formerly, when people wanted to fight with one another, they measured between them their bodily strength; now it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working behind a gun from a hill. This is civilisation. Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now, thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance, work in factories or mines. Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires.

Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptations of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now diseases that men never dreamt before, and an army of

doctors engaged in finding out their cures, and so hospitals have increased. This is a test of civilisation. Formerly, special messengers were required and much expense was incurred in order to send letters; today, anyone can abuse his fellow by means of letter for one penny. True, at the same cost, one can send one's thanks also. Formerly, people had two or three meals consisting of home-made bread and vegetables; now, they require something to eat every two hours so that they have hardly any leisure for anything else.

What more need say? All this you can ascertain from several authoritative books. These are all true tests of civilisation. And if anyone speaks to the contrary, know that he is ignorant. This civilisation takes note of neither morality nor of religion. Its votaries calmly state that their business is not to teach religion. Some even consider it to be a superstitious growth. Others put on the cloak of religion and prate about morality. But, after twenty years of experience, I have come to the conclusions that immorality is often taught in the name of morality. Even a child can understand that in all that I have described above, there can be no inducement to morality. Civilisation seeks to increase bodily comforts, and it fails miserably even in doing so.

This civilisation is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people of Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad. They lack real strength or courage. They keep their energy by intoxication. They can be hardly happy in solitude.

This civilisation is eating into the vitals of the English nation.They [the English] are a shrewd nation and I therefore believe they will cast off the evil. They are enterprising and industrious, and their mode of thought is not inherently immoral. Neither are they bad at heart. I therefore respect them. Civilisation is not an incurable disease, but it should not be forgotten that the English people are affected by it.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI - Part 26 (Continued from the previous issue)

ACT VI - SCENE 3

Sathya's house. People are engaged in doing various things. At that time, a beggar comes to the house, begging for food. As beggars normally do, he cried out to the lady of the house, though he could not see her. Seshama who is there near the door, asks the beggar to go away.

BEGGAR: Mother, please give me some food. I'm hungry!

SESHAMA RAJU: We are busy! Go elsewhere.

BEGGAR: Mother, please give me some food.

Sathya who is watching all this, quietly goes into the kitchen to fetch some food for the beggar. This matter is promptly reported to the mother by Sathya's sister.

PARVATHAMMA: Sathya has gone to the kitchen.

VENKAMMA: Yes, He has gone to get some food for the beggar.

PARVATHAMMA: Mother is there; maybe He will ask her.

BEGGAR: Mother! Please give me some food.

Sathya brings food and gives it to the beggar.

BEGGAR: May you be happy, dear boy!

SESHAMA RAJU: *[becoming angry]* Sathya, come here. Is not mother there? What do you mean by giving food like this on your own? At this rate, nothing will be left us.

SATHYA: That does not matter. The important thing is that we must give food to the hungry.

SESHAMA RAJU: If you keep on doling out food like this, you will have to fast.

SATHYA: I am ready to. Mother too fasts from time to time.

SESHAMA RAJU: That she does for securing God's Grace.

SATHYA: They say that man is an embodiment of God. And God also comes in human form. The beggar to whom I gave food is My God. If he eats, it is as good as My having eaten.

SESHAMA RAJU: Does that mean You don't want lunch?

E.AMMA: Come children, it's time to have food!

PARVATHAMMA: Coming mother! Come, Venkamma.

VENKAMMA: Yes, sister.

All the children respond to their mother's call and assemble for lunch. Sathya does not join. He is watching the beggar eat.

E.AMMA: Sathya, you also come and join for food.

SATHYA: Mother, have I not already given My share to the beggar?

E.AMMA: Yes, You have given Your share to the beggar and his hunger is appeased. But does that fill Your stomach? Come now, and have food along with the others.

SATHYA: No, mother, My hunger has already been appeased.

SESHAMA RAJU: Come on Sathya, have You become averse to food?

PARVATHAMMA: Come brother, join us please.

E.AMMA: Come child and have food.

At this stage, Kondama Raju and Venkama Raju enter the house. Kondama has been hearing what was being said.

K.RAJU: For my grandson, the satisfaction that others experience is as good as His own! Sathyam is beyond hunger and thirst.

V.RAJU: Father, in your perception your grandson is beyond everything! But what about Sathyam's father and mother? If Sathyam starves, will they not be unhappy? Please tell me, how can we eat when Sathyam does not?

E.AMMA: Come Sathyam, come and have food.

V.RAJU: Come Sathyam, come.

K.RAJU: Sathyam's word is Truth! You go and have your meals.

(To be continued)

GITA FOR CHILDREN - Part 27

(Continued from the previous issue)

Chapter 14

26. Arjuna now has a new doubt and asks, 'OK, the same God is seated in all. The same God does the digesting in all people, the same God does the blood circulation in all people and so on. In that case, why so much difference between people? Why are some people good and others bad?'

27. Pleased with question asked, Krishna says, 'Arjuna, have you ever seen the bed of a Himalayan river? If you had observed, you would have noticed that on the river bed there is not only water but also sand and nice smooth pebbles too.'

28. Slightly impatient, Arjuna interrupts, 'But what has all that got to do with good and bad guys?'

29. Unperturbed by the interruption, Krishna replies, 'Arjuna, you must learn to be patient! I am coming precisely to that point. Patience is one of the virtues I like. Remember the three Ps? Patience, Perseverance, and Purity? Patience is the first step in the long road to Purity.'

30. 'Now, where was I? Oh yes, I was talking about sand and pebbles. When the pebble is pulverised, it becomes sand. Now let us say you take two tumblers. You fill one with sand and the other with pebbles. Next, pour some water into both tumblers. In the tumbler containing sand, the water would get completely mixed up with sand while in the other tumbler, the pebble and the water would remain separate; no water would enter the pebble.'

31. 'Now this is the real point. The good guy is like sand and the bad guy is like the pebble. The former, through his discipline and *Sadhana*, has shattered his ego and body-consciousness. Hence Consciousness seeps freely into him, raising his awareness of the Divine to a high level. The opposite is true of the bad guy. His ego is intact, and so he is like the pebble; no seepage! In other words, he has not evolved on the ladder of Consciousness.'

32. 'God is present without fail in all. Some take advantage of the Divine presence within while others do not. Those who do are like the pebble pulverised into sand. Those who do not, are like the pebble that is yet to be shattered.'

33. 'In the case of people who can be compared to sand, Consciousness saturates every cell of their body and Mind. Consequently, their feelings are full of Love, their thoughts are full of Love, their words convey nothing but Love, and their actions radiate only Love. Obviously, I do not have to describe

the situation with respect to the person who has refused to allow God to permeate all over his senses, body and Mind.'

34. Krishna continues and says, 'Arjuna, I now wish to introduce two important words, *Kshetra* and *Kshetrajna*. You know what *Kshetra* means, don't you? It means a sacred place. Here is some news for you; the body is a *Kshetra*!'

35. Puzzled, Arjuna asks, 'The body is a *Kshetra*, a sacred place, like Badrinath or Benares?'

36. Krishna replies, 'Yes indeed.'

37. Arjuna is not able to understand and asks, 'How come?'

38. Krishna counters with a question of his own. He asks, 'Tell me Arjuna, why do people call Badrinath and Benares a sacred place? Why do they flock there?'

39. Arjuna replies, 'That is easy. Devotees throng to those places and go on pilgrimage there because God resides there. That is all.'

40. With a laugh Krishna says, 'Yes, of course. It is for the same reason that the body is also a *Kshetra*. Arjuna, imprint this firmly in your Mind. The body is not an ordinary body. It is not just a hunk of meat or flesh and bones. It is the very Temple of God! That is why the body too is a *Kshetra*.'

41. Continuing, Krishna adds, 'This Temple is no ordinary temple. It is a live temple, it is a moving temple and built personally by God Himself for Him to occupy. The Wise refer to this resident of *Kshetra* as *Kshetrajna*!'

42. 'I find it very funny that when there are so many temples all over the place built by God, man insists on spending a lot of money, time and energy to build temples of his own. Having done so, he goes there, struggles against crowds, pushes and jostles to have My *Darshan*. And what happens when he gets to the sanctum of the man-made temple? Does he seriously meditate on Me? Hardly ever. What a tremendous waste, when I am exclusively available and easily too, to each and every person all the time.'

43. Arjuna is stunned by this revelation. Slowly he says, 'Krishna, I never knew all this! No one ever told me that the body is Your Temple, built entirely by You! What a fool I have been to ignore this temple and think of man-built temples far away! Lord, why are people misguided in this fashion?'

44. Krishna smiles and replies, 'Very simple. People are all the time so immersed in worldly affairs that they have no time either to listen to or to follow simple truths. Instead, all their time is spent in promoting their ambitions, desires and what have you. They have hardly any time for Me! And even if they think of Me, it is mostly in relation to their problems or their desires.'

45. 'Arjuna, today you find many people who would parrot-like say, "God is within you," and all that. But can any one of them honestly declare that they have actually experienced God within? There is an ocean of difference between bookish knowledge and practical knowledge. Since people do not hear and are not bothered about all this, I have to come down again and again, to repeat the very same lesson, not just once, but so many times!'

46. Arjuna says, 'Krishna, please give me some time to digest all this.'

(To be continued)

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

SHARING LIQUID LOVE DOWN UNDER

Inspiring blood donation service by the Sathya Sai Service Organisation of New Zealand, Auckland Region.

Every year for a number of years, the Sathya Sai Service Organisation in the Auckland Region has organized blood donations from its members as part of Swami's Birthday Celebrations service week, and during Guru Poornima in the month of June-July.

Until the year 2000, the number of members attending the days that were planned was fairly erratic, in fact early records show only 27 members gave blood in 1997. Then, a concerted effort was made by the Service Wing members to promote the programme more efficiently by the way of coloured brochures issued by the New Zealand Blood Service, and also by talks at Sai centre devotional singing nights on the importance of giving blood, the many benefits from giving and also how Swami Himself describes giving blood as sharing "Liquid Love".

In 2001 the New Zealand Blood Service in Auckland offered to open their facilities especially for the Sathya Sai Service Organisation of New Zealand, on the proviso that they could provide enough donors to make it worth their while. They had never done this before for any other organization as Saturday is normally a holiday, so this was a major breakthrough that needed to be taken advantage of, so, the Sai Organisation in Auckland swung into action and plans were formulated to have at least two major organized blood drives per year to coincide with Guru Poornima and Swami's Birthday.

The first to be held on a Saturday at New Zealand Blood Service's rooms was in 2001 during Guru Poornima which was a major success – approximately 145 members of the Sai Organisation from the Auckland area gave blood on that day. This made the New Zealand Blood Service extremely happy, as it vindicated their decision to open their facilities on a Saturday for the Sai Organisation.

During the years since 2001 the number of donors from the Sai Organisation have steadily increased at each session culminating in 170 giving blood in July 2006 which helped the Blood Service tremendously, as at this time, New Zealand was beginning to experience a very severe winter which was playing havoc with people's health.

By this time the Youth Wing had become involved and it was through their efforts - working together with the Regional Service Wing – that everything went so smoothly. One of the Youth members said on behalf of the rest:

"By getting involved in this project has made us very happy and we have realized just how some service programmes may seem small but actually have enormous benefits for many people that we don't realize at the time until

we become part of it. We are so happy that we have been asked to participate in this and will now make it a permanent part of our Youth activities.”

The following is an extract from a letter sent to the Sai Organisation in New Zealand by Martin Francis, of the New Zealand Blood Services.

“Now is the winter of our discontent’ this quotation from William Shakespeare’s play Richard III was very much the theme for New Zealand Blood Service this winter of 2006 here in Auckland, as this year was considered the most severe winter experienced in New Zealand for many years, and Auckland was no exception. These adverse weather conditions played havoc with peoples’ health with large numbers falling ill with colds or the ‘flu. This had a serious impact on our blood donors in the Auckland region as a high portion of them were either sick or recovering. This means that a sick donor is not allowed to donate until they have recovered completely which includes the course of antibiotics as well as any symptoms. This could be over a six to eight week period. Almost two months! Our stocks of blood were running low. What were we to do?

Our Sathya Sai Organisation of New Zealand came to the rescue. On Saturday the 16th of July, 161 wonderful members came to our rooms in Epsom and lovingly donated, in the words of Sai Baba Himself, ‘Liquid Love’. This large donation was just the boost we needed. Each unit of blood, 370ml has the potential of saving the lives of three people.

Mention must be made about the highly organized manner in which these drives are conducted. Due to the large number of donors expected, the New Zealand Blood Service in Auckland opens the Blood Bank rooms in Epsom on a Saturday especially for the Sathya Sai group. The kitchen area is efficiently run by a group of Sai devotee ladies who serve the donors with hot drinks, juices and snacks with a smile. They are caring, happy and always have nice word to say to all.

There is a saying that imitation is the best form of flattery. Since the Sathya Sai Organisation of New Zealand has been involved in donating blood as a large group, other cultural and community organizations have heard about it and now they too wish to contribute and are in the final stages of planning to do so. So, the Sathya Sai Organisation of New Zealand continues to lead by example through an attitude of enthusiasm, caring, and most of all, love for humanity”.

We have found that this service activity, even though only done twice a year at this stage, has proved to be an excellent introduction to service for new devotees, and also for families who attend as a family unit and who feel extremely happy that they can contribute in some way. Also run at the same time in rooms given to them to use, are free medical clinics with Doctors from the Sai Organisation involved.

Thanks to Swami’s Grace and Love, this service programme in Auckland has become an example to other community groups to follow and can only add to

the good name that Sai's name and the Sathya Sai Organisation in New Zealand already has. Blood donations are also done by the New Zealand Sai Organisation in other areas as well, notably Hamilton and the Wellington regions.

We are grateful to Doug Saunders for providing the material for this article.

PRASHANTI DIARY

Gratitude Day - New Year Celebrations: January 1st and 2nd 2007

The first day of every year is a day looked forward by every student of Bhagavan. Students who have received the gift of education from Bhagavan's hands come every year on this day to offer their gratitude and love at the lotus Feet. What a grand way to begin the New Year!

Like every year, this year too the former students gathered in Prashanti Nilayam on December 30 for a huge medical camp to be carried out on December 31. On the morning of December 31 when the boys had gone to the camp site for the medical seva, Bhagavan called the Warden of the Sri Sathya Sai Hostel for Senior Boys and enquired about the January 1 programme. When the Warden mentioned about the New Year morning programme to be staged by the current students of the Institute, Swami wanted to know more and asked, "What else?"

The Warden then mentioned to Bhagavan that as per His permission the Alumni are prepared to present their programme in the afternoon.

Bhagavan: "Where are they?"

Warden: "They have gone to the village for medical camp."

Bhagavan: "Manchidi (very happy). What is the programme?"

Warden: "They have prepared the Band for a music programme..."

Bhagavan, "Where are they doing it?"

Warden: "Swami, here itself, in Sai Kulwant hall in front of You."

Bhagavan: "Mandchidi (very happy)"

"This was a sweet indication that Bhagavan was also waiting for us. By 2.30 pm we all were seated in the Sai Kulwant Hall getting ready to welcome our Lord," says an alumnus. Forty eight Veda boys, attired in traditional dress – saffron dhoti and angavastram, stood at the entrance of Yajur Mandir to welcome Bhagavan with Vedic hymns. As Bhagavan emerged He was welcomed by three former students, the first carrying the Poorna-kumba, the second offering a bouquet and the third placing a flower at His Feet. The joy on Bhagavan's face was apparent on seeing His children after years of their passing out of the Institute.

The procession then moved towards the Sai Kulwant Hall. After a complete round of daily darshan, as Bhagavan alighted from the car and walked towards the main dias He mentioned to one guest sitting there, "My boys have come to celebrate their day with Me." One could see the proud mother in Swami.

He later beckoned the Vice-chancellor and asked him to give his opening remarks. The Vice chancellor in his speech referred to the various service activities the Alumni is busy with around the world and how they stand as role

models for the current generation. After his short speech, Bhagavan indicated for the programme to begin.

Brother Dr. M.V. V. Bhadra Rao, an alumnus from UK who was the M.C started with offering gratitude to Bhagavan for allowing His students to gather at His lotus Feet and offer their gratitude in person. At the same time another alumni went up to Bhagavan and offered a bouquet which He smilingly accepted.

Next was the cake-cutting ceremony. Though the Alumni had prepared three big cakes, they had planned to request Him to cut only one and light a candle to save Him from physical strain. But to their utter joy, after Swami cut the first cake He wanted more. So the Alumni turned the table and presented the second cake. **But Swami was satisfied only after He had cut the third cake too. He then instructed, "Distribute it to all the boys". So sweet was His concern for His children.**

The presentation for the afternoon was a Brass Band performance by the Alumni. In fact, it was the first time the former students belonging to the Institute Brass Band had come together to re-live their glorious days. Though many boys had touched the instruments after many years, it was a performance par excellence which moved Bhagavan's heart.

What came next was the highlight of the New Year afternoon - an enthralling music programme, comprising of nine songs, all of them especially composed by His students.

After every two songs, an alumnus would speak and the theme of that two minute talk acknowledged the impact Bhagavan made on His students by interacting with them and how He has been shaping their character. While this went on, Bhagavan was presented with the summary of the service activity reports from different regions like India, Europe, Middle East, Africa, America, etc. The scintillating programme ended with the Telugu song 'Rama Katha Veenu Raaiya...' being sung by expert student singers of yesteryears. **"Very Very Very Happy" – this was Bhagavan's response as the final song ended.**

Then the students prayed that Swami should bless them with His message, which He consented to do the following morning.

If January 1 was a shower of Divine Love, well, January 2 was a torrential downpour of His compassion and concern.

As promised, Bhagavan called of them on the morning of Jan 2, and by 8.15 am He was inside the Bhajan Hall. Before all the boys could walk in and settle, Swami started beckoning to Him a few boys and enquiring about their welfare. Swami was all smiles. Students are His property, He says, and seeing so many of them gathered touched His heart.

After speaking generally for a few minutes, Bhagavan started moving between the rows of students. He was recalling their names, enquiring about their lives and conferring special blessings. "It was like the good olden days" one former student remarks. "We surrounded Him, spoke to Him and received so much love."

After He was done with all the boys, Swami sat in the middle of the Hall, near the Hanuman statue. Sitting so close to Him after so many years, the boys were absolutely thrilled.

One student prayed to Bhagavan, "Swami please speak to us, can we arrange for a microphone?" Bhagavan consented and then spoke, softly and lovingly.

The excerpts of Swami's message are as follows:

Mind is responsible for either bondage or liberation. One needs to exercise control. Mind is like a mad monkey and body is like a water bubble. All the worldly pleasures are fleeting ones and momentary. Know that it is the same Atmic-Self present in all. "Ekam Sat Vipraha Bhuhudavadanti". Body is given various names like Sai Baba, etc, but God is one. He shines equally in every body.

Develop and always have self confidence. It is the foundation on which self-sacrifice; self-satisfaction and self-realization rests. Self-confidence is the base on which others are like floor, walls and the roof. Self is common in all. Never ever doubt your capabilities. Do not think whether you can do a particular job or not? Whether something will occur or not? Be confident. Positive thinking is important. With self-confidence you can achieve even the impossible. (Stressing on this topic, Bhagavan said, "Have faith that Swami is with you all the time.")

Educare means developing Human values in us. Human values are Sathya, Dharma, Shanthi, Prema and Ahimsa. Put them into practice. What is the use of amassing wealth and degrees if one does not have good qualities? Good qualities give peace of mind. You can not get peace of mind by any other means. Alexander the Great understood this principle on his death bed. He conquered huge vast lands and kingdoms and amassed huge wealth. But while crossing Sindu River when he fell sick and knew he was dying, he realized he cannot take with him any of his conquests. So, he asked his generals to keep his empty hands outside his coffin on his death-bed to show to the world that even he, a great King, went empty handed on his death. The only thing which comes with you is your goodness and good qualities.

Develop Love. Peace of mind does not come with wealth but only from the good qualities one has. Develop truth and righteousness. Develop and practice human qualities and you will get everything. Help ever, Hurt Never. All are elements of God. We cannot take anything from this world. The same God is there in all. Serve people in need. Distribute blankets to

those who are suffering from rains and cold. Serve the society and serve your parents.

Bhagavan then blessed the boys by saying that they could come every year on January 1 and 2 and spend the time with Him. It was a downpour of benediction that afternoon.

After His discourse, Bhagavan out of His immense concern again started conversing with the boys, answering their questions and clarifying their doubts. It was an opportunity of a lifetime, indeed.

Here is a sample of this session:

Student: Swami, how to control the growing hatred in the world?

Bhagavan: Develop brotherly love towards one and all. Know that same divinity exists in every body irrespective of caste, creed, color, and language. Develop unity and chant Swami's Name.

Student: How do we constantly remember Swami?

Bhagavan: By practice. You can achieve anything by practice. For worldly things you practice to achieve perfection. It is the same thing.

Student: Swami, if you are happy we all will be happy.

Bhagavan: I am always happy.

Bhagavan then took this boy's letter and said, "I am looking at you always."

It was more than ninety minutes since Swami had come to the Bhajan Hall. Sensing that Swami would leave at any moment, the boys prayed that they be allowed to sing bhajans and Swami acquiesced to their request. For many yesteryear student-singers it was an opportunity after years; for some after decades. As Swami was listening to their soulful bhajans, He asked for prasadam to be distributed. Not only that, He gifted all students with vibhuti packets along with *ladoos*. The students had no words to express their heartfelt gratitude to Bhagavan. Before He left, He raised both His hands in 'abhaya-hasta' (blessing) benignly looking at all the students. This was not all. As He got into the car, He again looked keenly at the boys and raised His hand in blessing.

"Bhagavan's expression of love has no boundaries. Many of us saw Him so close after a decade or more. After years, we got a chance to have a word or two with Him. Some of us had almost given up hope of another *padanamaskar* in our lives. All our dreams were realized today. Truly, when the Lord gives there is no limit, and we do not know how to thank Him," say a group of alumni.

That was the glorious "Gratitude Day" on the New Year. Can there be a better beginning to the year?

Celebration of Saint Thyagaraja, January 8, 2007

Saint Thyagaraja (1767-1847) along with his contemporaries Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri forms the trinity of Carnatic Music popular in the Southern parts of India. Thyagaraja, out of his unwavering devotion towards Lord Rama was inspired to compose nearly 600 *krithis* or songs in Telugu and Sanskrit and through this penance win the darshan of Lord Rama. These songs have today become the mainstay of any Carnatic musician's repertoire. Bhagavan has in the past, often praised the musical quality of these compositions and has on many occasions even sung many of these compositions in His golden voice to the delight of His devotees. Saint Thyagaraja attained *mahasamadhi* (left his mortal coil) on the Pushya Bahula Panchami day. In his sacred memory, the Thyagaraja Aradhana festival, a week long music festival is conducted every year in the birth place of Thyagaraja at Thiruvvaiyuru in the state of Tamil Nadu, with thousands of singers and hundreds of musicians singing his most famous compositions, the *Pancharatna Kritis* in unison, with the accompaniment of a large orchestra of violins, flutes, nadhaswarams, *mridangams* and *ghatams* on the Bahula Panchami day.

At Prasanthi Nilayam, it is the good fortune of the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Mirpuri College of Music to celebrate this festival in presence of Lord Sai Rama, the very God who was adored by Saint Thyagaraja.

This year the Bahula Panchami Aradhana was observed on January 8 at Sai Kulwant Hall. After obtaining Bhagavan's blessings, the students commenced the programme with a song in adoration of Lord Ganesha, *Sri Ganapatini Nee* in ragam Sourashtram set in Aditalam followed by three of the pancharatnas, the first one being, *Jagadananda Karaka* in Nata ragam followed by *Sadinchane* in Arabhi Ragam and the next being *Endaro Mahanu Bhavulu* in sri ragam, all of them being set to Aditalam. The programme ended with a veena duet where in the song was *Enta Vedukondu* in Saraswati Manohari ragam set to Adi talam. Swami was very pleased with the performance and indeed was seen singing a few stanzas along with the students. At the end of the programmeme, Bhagavan blessed the participants and presented them with clothes.

Annual Sports and Cultural Meet, January 12th

One of the most important, electrifying and entertaining days in the Prashanti Nilayam calendar, the inaugural function of the Annual Sports and Cultural Meet this year too did not fail to enthrall and delight one and all. The entire Sports Meet can be easily compared to one of the most delicious dishes that can be ever served. Central to its recipe are the 'spices' of precision, imagination, elegance, passion and most importantly Love for our Beloved Lord. The event is totally in keeping with the most quoted adage of all times- "Life is a Game, Play it". All the tremendous skill that lies dormant in the students culminates in a performance that makes the spectator anxious not to

even as much as bat an eyelid and risk missing the action. The display caters to a variety of tastes - be it thrilling daredevilry, or edge-of-the-seat acrobatics, or elegant dance and music presentations.

The proceedings began in the morning with Bhagavan coming out at around 7:00 a.m. to the grounds of Sri Sathya Sai Hill View Stadium. The first event was the march past of the various campuses. Students from the first standard to final year post graduate, all march in front of the Lord. Dressed in regal and colourful dresses, all the students marched forth offering their salute to the Lord as they passed the dais. It was as if every soldier of the entire Sai Army saluted the Chief of this strong Sai Army. With a twinkle in the eye and a graceful movement of His head, He acknowledged every contingent as they passed by, as if to tell them that everything had come out right just as He had seen it in the various practice sessions (Swami had graced the grounds various times during practice sessions of the meet).

The oath ceremony and the torch lighting ceremony were the next to line up in the sequence of events. That done, the stage was all set for the day's events. "Watching all this, the feeling welled up in my heart," says a student, "that here lies a journey where the means always stand taller than the ends. The weary weeks of conceptualization, the intense days of practice, the tense hours of final preparation, all coming together in flawless precision as our offering to the Lord!"

The opening performance was by the Brindavan campus of the Institute who began their show with paragliding. The skill and acumen for this challenging fete is most difficult to master. Watching those fliers in the sky, who had a "bird's eye view" of everything around, was delight mixed with tense moments for the spectators. Then in all elegance they swooped down for a comfortable landing. The boys who performed the stunts were called over by Bhagavan and given trophies and a well-earned pat on their cheeks.

Then the students on motorbikes were soon to follow with some breathtaking stunts, speedy crisscrosses and some high flying ramp jumps. Then followed a cricket drill with students dressed in the attires of the various cricket playing nations showing how games and sports brings together people of various beliefs and cultures and fosters unity in diversity.

The Prasanthi Nilayam campus was the next to follow. The presentation began with a dance in praise of Lord Ganesha. At the back was a dazzling effigy of Ganesha in a dancing posture set on a globe. Indeed, so masterfully was it made that it even seemed to join the dancers in their performance. Following this, there was a fantastic display of Chinese and Indian Martial arts and some creative basketball mingled with gymnastics. A daring display of stunts and showmanship on jeeps was the next item. They demonstrated the truth of the maxim "Nothing dared, nothing done".

One of the most exhilarating spectacles of the day was carabining down the rope from the hill onto the ground over the heads of spectators. The students went a step further to include the slicing of targets placed in their path as they

roared down into the ground. It was such a tremendous feat of concentration and courage with their minds fixed on their goal, the performers transcended all bounds of fear as they descended from several feet up in the sky placing their faith on a slender rope.

Nay! The faith rested in Him, who was always there to brush aside adversity and ward off the winds of fear. Faith born out of experiencing His Presence in every aspect of their lives and more particularly in every endeavour of the Sports Meet guiding the students visibly and invisibly. It is at times like this that we become aware of how every moment of our lives he is expressing His perfection and beauty.

The afternoon session saw Bhagavan being welcomed by the students of the Sri Sathya Sai Primary School by an innovative caterpillar formation by students trained in acrobatics. This team of acrobats later put up a fantastic display of their skills performing gymnastics not only on the ground but also on poles. The girl students exhibited a number of dance formations. Their colourful costumes and the imaginatively arranged sequences made for a pleasing sight, which were greatly appreciated by the audience.

Some of the formations were so breathtakingly beautiful that at times the response from the audience was an audible gasp as they took in the elegance of the display. The students also treated the audience to a daring feat of eye-catching formations on a grid 40 ft high. All this made for a highly entertaining programme, as always from the children of the Sri Sathya Sai Primary School. They concluded their presentation by serenading to their Lord with the song “Madhura Mohana Ghanashyama”.

After this colourful presentation by Sri Sathya Sai Primary School, the students of the Anantapur Campus of the Institute, commemorating the completion of 25 years of the formation of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, presented a programme on the theme: “The Sri Sathya Sai System of Integral Education.”

The inaugural item highlighted the auspicious beginnings of the Institute in the establishment of a College for women at Anantapur in 1968. The Sri Sathya Sai System of Integral Education aims at the development of every aspect of human life – the physical, the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual – which when integrated leads to the total blossoming of the individual personality. This idea was well brought out in the programme presented by the Anantapur Campus.

A day in the life of a Sathya Sai student was depicted, beginning with the first activity that every student engages in after chanting Omkar and Suprabhatam; namely, Yogasanas. Yoga helps the students to calm the agitations of their minds to achieve the equanimity which is the aim of Yoga. Different asanas were performed with perfect co-ordination and balance. The Sahasrara or Thousand Petalled Lotus – the abode of the highest consciousness in man – was beautifully shown, with the Bindu – where God resides – being symbolized in the mudra of an enlightened person. The girls also

demonstrated a few difficult asanas that only an adept practitioner can perform.

Two academic sessions of the Institute were depicted very smartly with a chair drill. The unique relationship of mutual love and respect between the teacher and the taught in the Institute was brought out, followed by a representation of the values of discrimination, equanimity and self-confidence that are required in the pursuit of secular knowledge.

A sound body leads to a sound mind. At Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, the curriculum is not confined only to the academic subjects but also to the physical and spiritual domains. Hence, the daily schedule has time set apart for sports and games too. This was shown through skating, a badminton drill, and a variation of rope and pole malkam.

The skaters performed some acrobatic and gymnastic stunts on a board that was just 12 feet by 40 feet in size. The badminton drill was a demonstration of the different strokes used in the game of badminton, ending with an imaginary match between the Blue Strikers and Red Smashers. This was followed by an exciting and breathtaking display on the poles and ropes that had a height of nearly 27 feet from the ground. It was an amazing display of various asanas on moving vehicles!

Social service is an important facet of the curriculum of the Institute. Bhagavan says that the essence of education is service. The truly educated must share their knowledge and skill through selfless service, and thus repay their debt to society. To depict Social Service, the students performed a drill with baskets and shovels. One part of this drill very innovatively showed a house under construction recalling how a few years ago, as part of a Service Project, the girls had built 50 houses at Raptadu, a few miles from Anantapur. The Annual Grama Seva programme of the Institute, wherein all the students go from village to village distributing food and clothes, was also represented.

Since extracurricular activities like music, dramatics and dance, etc., are equally necessary to create in the students a comprehensive understanding of the culture and traditions of the country, the concluding part of the programme had the Dancing Dolls from Anantapur singing in praise of the Lord of the Universe who has started a University to establish peace in the world.

The fully equipped products of the Sri Sathya Sai System of Integral Education were then presented before the Revered Chancellor, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The grand finale song was played extolling Bhagavan and the students and teachers paid a grateful tribute to Beloved Bhagavan for the wonderful gift of Educare that He has given them. The students reflecting the thought of all present there, stood in sincere prayer at the end thanking Him for helping all beat all the challenges that had to be overcome to make such a majestic presentation possible. Man gains so much from challenges and learns lessons that could be taught in no other form. Challenges brings the

best out of man as one poet said so beautifully “The brook would lose its song if God removed the rocks.”

Around fifteen hundred students, two hundred teachers, and a host of administrators across the three campuses working in unison – caring not whether it is night or day – whether the limbs ache or the belly growls. ‘Challenging’ is not good enough for them - they have set their sight only on the ‘impossible’; they are out to testify the veracity of the power of faith – the adroitness that concentration can elicit and the will that knows not how to bend in defeat. And all this for just one moment of that one day - for the smile on that one face whom we all know simply as Swami. One can only stand and admire that Divine Force and pay our salutations to that Supreme Power of devotion to Bhagavan that inspires these Sai soldiers to march on triumphantly and display their mettle in a daring and dazzling display of prowess in spite of all odds.

Bhakta Prahlada – Drama presented by Brindavan campus students on 14th January 2007

The mind is the key for the lock to the Heart. If a key is inserted in a lock and turned left, the lock is closed; when turned right, the lock is opened. Similarly, when the mind is turned outward towards the world, man is lost in bondage; when he turns the mind inward and has the vision of God in his Heart, he becomes free and is redeemed. The story of Bhakta Prahlada illustrates both the pitfalls of turning the mind away from God, and the kingdom of heaven that awaits us when our life is dedicated to the love of God. This story was depicted in a drama titled “Bhakta Prahlada” put up by the students of the Brindavan campus of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning on the evening of January 14 at Sai Kulwant Hall.

Hiranyakashipu, the powerful demon king wins a boon of invincibility from Lord Brahma and comes to believe that he is more powerful than Lord Vishnu and ordains that henceforth all worship is to be offered only to him and none else. This is so symbolic of our present day society where we have supplanted adoration of the Divine with a hedonistic self-centered existence. Developing this analogy further, the play portrayed through a dance sequence how Hiranyakashipu won mastery over the five elements.

By understanding the first element, the expansive and mysterious Space, he became free from fear of failure. By comprehending the second element, the fast and furious Wind, he stilled fickleness. By knowing the third element, the blazing Fire, he succeeded in controlling anger and the pangs of hunger. By realising the fourth element, the flowing Water, he quenched the thirst of passion. And by experiencing the fifth element, the inert and heavy Earth, he overcame inertia and sloth.

Hiranyakashipu’s son, Prahlada, on the other hand, was the faithful devotee of the Lord Narayana, initiated into His worship at birth by none other than Sage Narada himself. Prahlada mirrors his father’s achievements, but by complete surrender to the Lord.

He is fearless because he is assured of the Lord's protection. He is steady in his faith in the Lord's might. Fire cannot burn him, water cannot drown him, a fall to the Earth cannot hurt him! All the five elements become benevolent to him because of his devotion and love for the Lord. Ultimately, it is devotion and love that overpowers arrogance and might.

As Prahlada comes of age, his father decides that it is time to place him under the tutelage of able teachers and for this, he chooses Chanda and Amarka, the sons of Shukracharya, the Guru of the demonic clan. The teachers train him in the scriptures, but at the back of their mind is the instruction from Hiranyakashipu that his son should recognize that there is no God greater than his own father.

When he returns to the palace, the king is eager to see the progress Prahlada has made. To his consternation and to the dismay of his teachers, Prahlada instead reaffirms the primacy of Lord Vishnu above all else. Blinded by anger, Hiranyakashipu orders that his son be destroyed. The royal soldiers try all means – the tender child is thrown down a mountain, when that failed, he was thrown into the ocean and when he emerges safe and sound, he is thrown into the fire. At this, the God of Fire himself carries him out of the flames and places him on safe ground.

But, when ego has taken root in man, it drives out all reason and feeling. Hiranyakashipu confronts his son and asks him to prove the existence of God. Prahlada calmly tells him that God is everywhere - it cannot be said that He is present someplace and does not exist elsewhere. This enrages Hiranyakashipu and he advances towards a pillar challenging Prahlada to show that God exists in that pillar too.

The time had now come for the ignorance in Hiranyakashipu's heart to be removed once and for all. There is a thunder clap and the pillar splits open and out emerges a terrible man-lion form. This form of Lord Vishnu is worshipped as Lord Narasimha (Nara-Man; Simha-Lion). This terrifying being proceeds to take Hiranyakashipu into its lap and begins to tear out his entrails. However, it is not Hiranyakashipu who is annihilated. It is his ego and ignorance that is destroyed. In his dying moments, Hiranyakashipu realizes that there can be none greater than God and nothing greater than devotion towards Him, and he offers his salutations to Him as he breathes his last.

The reason for this unique manifestation of the divine is very fascinating and has to do with the boon awarded to Hiranyakashipu by Lord Brahma whom he had pleased with his arduous penance. He had sought from him the boon of immortality and Lord Brahma in His wisdom granted him that he could not be killed by any animal, man, god or demon either at day or night, whether indoor or outdoors. That is why the Lord assumed a form that could not be said to be any known being, He attacks him at the twilight hour which is neither day nor night, and slays him on the porch of the palace which is neither indoor nor outdoors.

There is yet another fascinating aspect to this manifestation. In the last scene of the play, after the little Prahlada witnesses his own father's death, he falls at the feet of the being and hails Him as Lord Narayana. That unflinching faith in the Lord to be able to recognize him in any form under the most trying

circumstances – this was the ultimate test from God and young Prahlada passed with flying colours to be immortalized as one of the foremost devotees of the Lord to inspire mankind for all time to come.

After the drama, Bhagavan lovingly gathered the boys near him for photographs. All the students involved, the actors, those who gave background music, the costumes department and the sets boys all were given the same pat on their backs for their grand effort. And as if to show, that the Lord had no resentment in His Heart towards Hiranyakashipu, Bhagavan called the boy who played the part of Hiranyakashipu and said to him, “You are a good boy”! Anuj Sharma, who played Prahlada was blessed with a chain materialized from the Lord’s Hands.

The students and teachers of the Brindavan campus were indeed fortunate to be blessed to present this story of devotion and faith in Bhagavan’s presence. Fortunate not just to win His beaming appreciation after the drama and words of praise the following day in His Discourse, but also to go through the sweat and toil that goes into making such a wonderful event possible. For, this was an effort for the highest purpose, to please the Lord Himself.

The drama had been conceived six months earlier to allow the actors to ‘get in to the character’ of their role. Work on the massive and elaborate sets too began at that time. The story had to be presented in such a way as to make it memorable and at the same time drive the sacred message home. A lot of thought went into the various aspects of the dance that portrayed Hiranyakashipu’s conquest of the elements like the manner in which the concept had to be brought out, the form of dance, the nature of instruments to be used for each of the five elements, the kind of music to be used and so on.

For example, in the case of the element Akasha or Space, the attributes of the element were first listed out: expansive, mysterious and characterized by deafening sound. This helped in choosing the right form of dance, the appropriate colour for the costumes and the right combination of instruments for the music. How to conquer this noise? Through inner silence. And Space was linked to the quality of Fear. This was the basis for the lyrics and the expression for the dance. Similarly, the element Fire was linked to Jataragni, the fire inside our body, which is used for digestion; and hence came out the idea that Fire can be conquered by controlling hunger. To bring in the element of realism, in the scene where Prahlada is thrown down the mountain, a substitute actor actually jumped down fifteen feet into a crash pad to create the effect. The thunderous applause when Prahlada emerges unscathed after this scene was testimony to the grip they had on the audience. All in all, kudos must go out to the students and teachers of the Brindavan campus for presenting such a wonderful drama that would have kindled in all present an aspiration to be like Prahlada and achieve that ultimate state of total surrender to the Lord.

Sri Krishna Rayabaram – A Drama presented by Prasanthi Nilayam campus students on January 15, 2007

The Mahabharata is an epic revered in millions of hearts even today in India because it is a timeless representation of the eternal conflict between the

forces of the good and righteous on one hand and the dark forces of the evil vices on the other. Like the blind king Dhritarashtra who ruled from Hastinapur, the mind is blinded by ego, greed, hatred, desire and limitless ambition. Representative of these vices are Suyodhana, the eldest son of Dhritarashtra, (the name Duryodhana by which he is more commonly known was given later to represent his evil nature), Suyodhana's ally Karna, his cunning uncle Shakuni, and his brother Dushyasana.

So utterly blinded he is by these vices that he no longer pays heed to the advice of buddhi (intellect) and viveka (discrimination) represented by the wise minister Vidura and grandsire Bheeshma. These are the mind's eternal companions who help him discriminate through the various crossroads of life. They receive their strength and inspiration from the supreme fountainhead of awareness which is the conscience. The conscience prods and guides the mind, but more often than not, the confused mind is assailed by so many desires, that it is unable to distinguish the good from the bad. To such a mind, even the sight of the cosmic form of the Lord is a blinding, scorching light. He prefers to keep his blindfolds on and not confront reality. That is the attitude of Dhritarashtra. This is the immortal story told in the Mahabharata, one of the most revered scriptures in India.

The Post Graduate students of the Prasanthi Nilayam campus of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning depicted an important episode from this sacred epic titled "Sri Krishna Rayabaram" on the evening of January 15 at Sai Kulwant Hall on the occasion of Makara Sankranti. In this episode, Lord Krishna undertakes a peace mission on behalf of the Pandava camp as a last attempt to dispel the war clouds that had been gathering. The drama starts off at that point in the story after the Pandavas, the much persecuted cousins of the Kauravas, the sons of Dhritarashtra, finish their thirteen years of exile. The Pandavas dutifully send an envoy to Hastinapur with the message to return Indraprastha that rightfully belongs to them but the messenger is humiliated in the court. Suyodhana sends a strong message in return to fight and get back their kingdom. War is now imminent and both the camps have started preparing.

The opening scene is set in Dwaraka, at Krishna's palace. Krishna is taking rest when Suyodhana comes and proudly occupies the seat at the head of Krishna. Arjuna arrives a little while later and humbly waits with folded palms for Krishna to awake. Both are in the palace for similar reasons – seeking Krishna's help in the impending war. As Krishna gets up, he notices Arjuna first and enquires as to the reason of his arrival. Suyodhana makes his presence felt and asserts his right to petition Krishna first as he had arrived there first. Krishna offers them a choice between Himself and His army. Arjuna chooses the Lord while Suyodhana is delighted to see Arjuna make this apparently foolish choice and gladly takes Krishna's army.

The next scene has the all knowing Krishna preparing the Pandavas for war. Virata and Drupada enter the scene and put forth the argument for the necessity of the war. Krishna then explains that peace can still be the best solution. Having convinced the Pandavas and Drupada, after a vehement

argument, Krishna decides to go to Hastinapur as the peace messenger of the Pandavas as a final attempt to stave off a disastrous war. The Pandavas are apprehensive that their beloved Krishna may be in mortal danger in the hostile environment of Hastinapur. But, He lays their fears at rest and proceeds to the royal court at Hastinapur.

After this is a scintillating dance portraying the joy of the people of Hastinapura on Krishna's arrival.

At the palace, Krishna accompanied by Bhishma is led to the chamber where Dhritarashtra, Suyodhana, Shakuni, Karna, Dushyaasana and Vidura are waiting to welcome Him. Krishna refuses the offer of staying and dining with Suyodhana stating that he has come as a peace ambassador. The cunning Shakuni says that this only shows His bias against the Kauravas. But Krishna deftly tackles this taunt saying that if the Kauravas respected Him they would have chosen Him over His army and thus makes it final that He will not stay with them. He decides against established precedent to refuse the royal hospitality and instead stays with the minister Vidura.

The scene at Vidura's residence is quite moving, for Vidura, recognizing Krishna's divinity is very devoted to Him. So overcome by emotion is he at his fortune in playing host to the Lord that while offering fruits to Him, he peels bananas and then absentmindedly feeds Krishna the peels which Krishna lovingly accepts.

The following day at the court, Vidura and Bheeshma try to explain to Dhritarashtra that he must take the arrival of Krishna as a peace ambassador seriously. Suyodhana warns them that, if Krishna exceeds His limits, he will not hesitate to make Krishna a prisoner. Bhishma and other elders present are outraged at this show of disrespect to the Lord and warn Suyodhana that this arrogance would prove costly.

The next scene beautifully captured the dilemma raging within Dhritarashtra as his conscience battles with his filial attachment to Suyodhana. This was done by using Dhritarashtra as a metaphor for the mind with the evil forces represented by Suyodhana, Karna, Shakuni and the good forces represent Vidura, Bheeshma and Drona each pulling him towards their camp. But, in the end, it is the evil forces that prevail and this was later to spell disaster and much grief to the blind king.

The denouement of this episode takes place in the court of Dhritarashtra where Krishna puts forward the peace proposal stating that peace would be the best solution to the feud in the family. The consequences of war would be disastrous for both the parties. In order to maintain peace, He reasons with Suyodhana to at least sanction five villages, one for each of the Pandava brothers. Suyodhana rejects the offer outright and tells Krishna to convey the Pandavas that if they had some courage and strength, they would come into the battlefield to fight it out. Krishna threatens Suyodhana that he and his entire family would be decimated and even his mother would not have enough tears to cry. This enrages Suyodhana who in a fit of rage orders the palace guards to bind Krishna and throw Him into the prison.

As the guards advance to capture the unarmed Krishna, suddenly they see a profusion of Krishnas. This was the Vishwaroopa (cosmic) form of the Lord as the one who is present in all places and in all beings. Was it possible then for an ordinary mortal to then bind him through force.

This was the final electrifying scene of the drama that drove home two important messages: one, that there is no earthly power that can claim victory over the Lord save the power of sincere love and prayer; second, the most valuable and permanent relationship is the one we cultivate with God, that alone brings lasting joy.

At the end of their presentation, the performers gathered near Bhagavan even as He happily beamed His approval. They gathered near Him for the coveted photographs and His words of appreciation. Bhagavan had every reason to be proud of His students' performances. Not only was the caliber of the thespians one of very high order, the intellectual content of the play, the powerful dialogues - all reflected the high academic standards of the Institute. The Telugu verses from the 'Pothana Bhagavatham' as well as the verses in Sanskrit created the right atmosphere to engage the attention of the audience. The magnificent props for the royal court at Hastinapur too did their part in making this presentation an unforgettable experience for the devotees who had gathered in Sai Kulwant Hall on that sacred day.

January was truly a month of breathtaking events in the sporting, thespian and musical fields. What a privilege for all concerned, both the performers and spectators, that all the effort was made not for personal achievement - but for God. The joy that is won comes from Sai, and radiates not only in our hearts but all over the world as expressions of His love. Prashanti Diary is documenting and elucidating the details of His Story and hopes that you, dear reader, will be inspired and amazed by the tales told therein. Until next month, Sai Ram.

SWAMI AND ME

HE TAKES CARE OF EVERYTHING...WELFARE AND FAREWELL

This is the transcript of the talk delivered extempore by Dr. T Ravi Kumar in the divine presence of Bhagavan Baba during Dasara Celebrations on October 1, 2006.

Prayerful Pranams at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet. Most Beloved and Dearest Bhagavan, Respected Elders, Brothers and Sisters.

Faith is Trust Without Reservations

A couple of days back, Bhagavan was speaking about Education and Educare. He said: **“Educare is drawing out from within. There is a well within which contains the water of *Bhakti* (devotion). Draw out these life-giving waters of *Bhakti* with a container. For this, you need a rope. This rope is Faith.”**

What is faith? Faith is not belief without proof; it is Trust without reservations. Many people say that God should give us experience; then we will get faith. **But Swami says: “You have faith; I will give you experience!”**

How is it? He says: “You say, ‘I want to learn swimming first’ and then jump into water. But I say, ‘Jump into water and I will teach you swimming.’ Bhagavan tells us the importance of having faith. Faith is to believe that there is God; and that God cares for each and every one of us.

Rather than speak to you about just these philosophical truths in abstract terms, let me illustrate it with incidents which I have had the privilege of seeing – as a ringside observer.

The Sorry Tale of the Scalpel

In the year 1966, my father had a very serious illness and he went to the doctor. After examining him, the doctor found that he had cancer. So he said, “You must get this operated.” The doctor was an FRCS; and a great surgeon – besides being a costly one too! He said, “You get this operated and it will all be fine.”

So my father got admitted in a hospital in Bangalore and the first surgery was done. After this, it looked like everything was okay for a month. But when he went for getting himself checked up, he found that the cancer had not stopped and it was continuing. The doctor with the same air of confidence said, “No problem! One more surgery.” So, one more surgery was done. And after that again it was the same story.

This continued not once; not twice; not thrice; not five times; not ten times; but twenty five times! After twenty five times this famous surgeon lifted up his hands in defeat and called my sister – who was then in the final year of her

MBBS – and said, “Look here, as a professional to a fellow professional, let me confess – the knife has failed! It cannot cure cancer! I have done all that I can do. And medical science as it is practiced today knows only this.”

My sister was in the final year and the doctor said, “Take your father home. In matter of few days, he is going to pass away. So there’s no point in keeping him here in this atmosphere of phenyl. Take him home; let him die peacefully amidst you.”

My sister was heartbroken because we had already lost our mother when we were very young. I was only four and a half years old when my mother passed away. And when this happened, I was barely nine years old. That afternoon after getting my father discharged and bringing him home, my sister went to the college, and she was naturally very gloomy. It was then that the sun rays of God entered our lives.

‘No new God is going to save me.’

There was a classmate of my sister who was a devotee of Bhagavan who asked her, “Why are you so gloomy today?” And when she told this, she said, “Come, let’s go to Whitefield – Bhagavan is there; He is God and He will save your father.” So my sister went with her to Whitefield; she had Swami’s *Darshan* and returned.

In those days, there used to be just one bus going to Whitefield (from the Bangalore city) – it was the number 99. It used to come only once in a while; so when she arrived home it was quite late. Then my father asked her, “Why are you so late?” My sister said, “Father, I have seen God. Today I went to Whitefield and I saw Bhagavan. He will cure you. Come, we will go to Whitefield. But my father said, “All along my life, I have been very sincere; I have been worshipping God and if that God is not going to save me – no new God is going to save me.”

A couple of days later there was a phone call from the office (where my father worked) saying, “Please report to the office because you have not come for six months and we don’t know whether you are alive!”

So father went to the office. The director asked him, “How are you?” And after speaking to him for some time he said, “Thyagaraj, there’s a gentleman who has come from abroad who wants to see someone called Sai Baba. I don’t know anything about the place where He stays. Since you know Bangalore well, why don’t you take him with you? The office car can drop you at home on the way back.”

Because it was his boss’ request my father was compelled to go. They didn’t know anything about *Darshan* timings. They just went to Brindavan. When they were entering the outer gates, Swami had finished His *Darshan* and was entering the inner gates of Brindavan. My father felt terribly devastated – whatever little hope he had was shattered! He said, “Even God has turned His back on me.”

But anyway, the other gentleman said, “It is so peaceful here; let us stay for some time and then go.” And so they sat under a tree. A few minutes later, the inner gates opened or should I say, ‘The gates of heaven opened!’

‘Your cancer is cancelled!’ - Bhagavan

Swami came out and He walked briskly towards where my father was sitting and He started speaking something. My father thought it was for the other gentleman; ‘I am not a devotee’, he said to himself. We have such distinctions; Bhagavan has no distinctions like this. But Swami was speaking in Kannada so my father heard it. Swami said, “Why did you have twenty-five operations?” My father sat up! Swami said, “The doctor is saying that you will die; he has given you only few days. You will not die! Your cancer is cancelled!”

This was in the year 1968 and my father was alive for thirty eight long years! He died a couple of months back when he was touching 89 years - out of old age.

I am telling you this incident because Swami is so kind. He says: “I will give you what you need to have Faith in Me; have sincerity”. And He gives us the experience. After this, my father came to Swami and he was at Swami’s feet serving in Prashanti Nilayam – in Brindavan first, and then in Prashanti Nilayam.

Father’s Stirring Faith

A couple of incidents which showed me what kind of faith Swami expects. It was one Dasara day like this; I had just joined Brindavan College as a student of the pre-University class in the year 1974. One day before the Narayana Seva, normally the students know - we take out the bundles of *dhotis* which come in pairs and we cut them and pack them in bundles of twenty five or so.

A few of us were doing this upstairs in the Mandir here. Swami was walking around and talking to us. He came to me and asked, “Has your father come?”

I said, “No Swami.”

He then asked, “Is your father coming?”

I said, “No Swami.”

He said, “Ah! How can you say that?”

I said, “Swami, he is scheduled to have an operation today in the morning; so I am sure he won’t come.” Swami said, “No, No. He is coming! And when he comes, ask him to stay with you in the hostel.”

I am talking of the time when there were hardly any buildings; there was only one row of buildings here. When the work upstairs got done I came down. When I came he had reached Prashanti – my father was walking in with his luggage! I was stunned. I asked him, “How is it that you are here? What about your operation? Did you not have your operation?”

He said, “No, No. I had my operation today in the morning!” I asked, “Then how is it that you are here?” He said, “I couldn’t miss the opportunity to have Swami’s Darshan, so I got discharged and came straight from the hospital.”

I was stunned and asked him, “Father, there is no accommodation here. Don’t you think you will get infection?” He said, “Infection? Swami’s Darshan will take care of everything! He will provide me accommodation.” Then I remembered and I said, “Yes! He has provided you accommodation. He has told me that you were coming and He has told me to take you with me and make you stay in the hostel.” When we have Faith in the Lord; the Lord is the most faithful. He takes care of us so much.

There was another instance which I remember – this happened in the year 1971 – even before I joined here. I was in the bal-vikas of a Samithi (centre) called Ulsoor Samithi and they wanted to have a drama in Swami’s presence. So they had asked me to be a part of it and I was getting trained. One week before Dasara, when our half-yearly exams were announced, I noticed that all the exams were exactly during the Dasara time. So I told the Bal Vikas teachers, “I will not be able to come for the drama.”

Making the Right Choice

They were very shocked! When I went home and told this to my father, he said, “No! You are going for the drama!” I said, “Father! I have exams!” “Exams don’t matter – they keep coming every year,” my father said and continued, “But this chance to go near Swami comes rarely. Don’t miss it – go ahead! This is the most important thing; have faith in Swami and do what He tells you.”

We are a joint family and nobody else knew much about Swami at that time – many of them were teachers and they told my father, “No! You are spoiling his education.” My father said, “No! This is the true education! The more closer you go to God; that is true education. I want him to go closer to God.”

So we came to Prasanthi Nilayam. I would just like to tell you one instance of how things were in those halcyon days. When we landed at 2:30 pm in what was called the ‘*pata-shala*’ block at that time, the bal-vikas teacher called me after a few minutes and said, “Go to the Mandir and find out what time is the Darshan.”

When I opened the door; Swami was standing outside! Swami had come to see whether all the bal-vikas children were housed properly. I was so stunned! Swami came inside and sat and spoke to us for forty five minutes! So we finished our drama in Prashanti Nilayam; and Swami blessed us and sent us back.

When we returned home after Dasara, I went to one of my classmates and said, “Please tell me what exam we have today so that I can read and come.” He said, “What do you mean exams? All exams have been cancelled! The

government has sent an order that they want to have some Dasara sports – so all exams have been cancelled.” – Not even postponed!

So this is the way God takes care of you. And when He takes care of you; He takes care of your welfare – and as Mr. Popat said - your farewell! How does Swami take care of you?

God's Arrangements – Always in Perfect Alignment

Brothers and Sisters, let me narrate to you how kind Swami is. When you have God with you; when you reach out to God; you get all the happiness in the world. When you get God; you get everything. Like the person who climbs the real coconut tree; gets the real fruits and the shadow fruits; when you reach God, when you go to God, you get everything.

During my visit to Parthi at Guru Poornima, events so arranged themselves that I had to stay back for a few days. This was the only time – in all the thirty two years that I have been in Brindavan – that I stayed back even after all the students had left. Swami had created a circumstance by which I stayed for one week after all the students left - looking after my father; meaning, I cooked for him. I knew very little of cooking but he insisted I cook everyday and he would say I cooked very nicely!

I was leaving – it was a Sunday. He came to me and said, “Ravi, I want to get you a pair of clothes.” I said, “Why?” He said, “You looked after me so well!” I said, “It’s my duty! Swami has given me true education and this is the basis of that – *Matro Devo Bhava; Pitro Devo Bhava* (Mother and Father are embodiments of God) – so I have to do this.” He said, “Let me at least pay for the taxi.” I said, “No Father! This is also my duty. Serving you has given me so much of joy – that is enough for me.”

And then I left for Brindavan. This was on Sunday evening – on Tuesday morning my father had his bath at 4:30 in the morning; came for Suprabhatam and came for Vedam. After Vedam, he went back to the room and had his breakfast. He told my sister, “I am going for Darshan.” He was staying on the second floor and as he was coming down; he met somebody on the first floor. He told him the same thing, “I am going for Darshan.”

He came to the ground floor, turned towards the Mandir, prostrated looking at Swami’s Residence and said “Sai Ram!”. There can be no greater death than this!

Somebody came and told my sister, “Your father has fallen!” She took a glass of water and went thinking that he had fainted. But when she sprinkled there was no reaction. Sister was dazed! And when she looked up she saw two people carrying a stretcher and coming – she had not even asked for it! And while they were coming, an ambulance had just come to park in front of our house!

God's arrangements are always like that. Perfect! When Swami takes care of you; He takes care of your welfare; and your farewell too!

Swami, you have given me so much in life that one life is not enough to serve Your Lotus Feet. How many ever lives I have; let it be spent second by second in Your service - till the last breath!

Jai Sai Ram!

THE LORD OF THE HEART

By John Hislop

This is the transcript of a talk by Dr John Hislop delivered at Dharmakshetra, Mumbai on Jan 1, 1971, which was subsequently published in the February 1971 issue of Sanathana Sarathi. We bring this special article from the archives of Sanathana Sarathi to celebrate the golden jubilee year of this hallowed magazine.

When Baba sent word that I was to make some remarks at this great New Year's gathering of Sathya Sai Devotees, the thought occurred to me was that if I were to speak with all the truth that I could muster; there was only one topic on which I could speak. And, that topic is personal in its reference, not general.

It is: What does Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba mean to me, to this mind and body, educated and cultured in a foreign country and also, what does He mean to that subtler aspect of me, which is without nationality?

Hearts Spring with Love

My wife and I first heard of Swamiji in 1968, through a description of Him as given to a friend of mine by a lady who had visited Prasanthi Nilayam. This lady had brought back some sacred Vibhuti, a beautiful ring as a gift to her from the miraculous nature of Baba and she had many fascinating stories to tell. But one special remark struck fire to my mind and imagination. The lady said that she had felt a change in her character, while at Prasanthi Nilayam, and that change persisted even after returning home.

This statement really struck my mind with the impact of a great storm. Could there be a man, was there a man living today, whose art was so subtle, so powerful, so mysterious; so divine, that he could change the human heart.

If it were indeed true that such a man lived in today's world, then nothing else in my life could equal the urgency of seeking Him out, prostrating myself at His Feet, and praying that through His Grace, He would be so kind as to cultivate my dry heart with His Divine Power so that my heart might open into fresh life as the dry fields become alive and vibrant with the spring rain.

My wife and I heard the story of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba on a Monday and that same week we were abroad a plane to India. I should not imply that my faith was able to keep up with the eager rush of my heart to the Lord. After all, my mind was educated in the cold scientific methodology of a Western University and then, cultured in the profit climate of the business world. Moreover, I had disappointing experiences with various spiritual preceptors.

However, my intellectual doubts which had gained considerable strength during the journey were unable to survive even the first meeting with Swamiji.

In His Divine Presence, how can doubt maintain itself? In His Presence, doubt is like very shallow water in the burning sun—in no time at all, it disappeared.

As my wife and I sat before Swamiji at Prasanthi Nilayam, in the room reserved for meetings with inquirers, we soon realised that the elegant and charming Indian gentleman speaking with us was unmistakably something far more than that. We listened to His sweet voice, felt the warmth of His loving smile, noted the impression of irresistible power conveyed by the cast of His features, looked as deeply as we dared into His eyes—now soft, now flashing. But, beneath these surface impressions, our awareness was deepening, we became conscious that a state of love and affection now existed in the room. In my heart, there arose a movement, a new feeling, a joy so intense that tears came from my eyes.

So to me, first of all, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is the Lord of the heart, He who is able so quickly to remove all the hardness accumulated in the years and make the heart fresh again, new again, joyful again.

The Mystery of His Divinity

Then, the next aspect of Baba that strikes me with real force is the overwhelming and incomprehensible mystery of His Divinity. There appears to be a man, but, even a dullard can see that Baba is not a man. One looks at Him and sees the blue perfect calm of the deep sky. One tries to define His Form but can see only space. The only thing certain about Him is that He loves us—otherwise, to predict Him or define Him is like trying to capture the wind, or the silver of the moonlight.

Even the stories we read of the Avatar are just other futile attempts to define Swamiji. It is said that the Supreme and Only Being wills to take Form as an object within that world of Maya created by Himself and that, there He plays a human role without in any way compromising His Total Subjectivity.

Out of such words, reason may satisfy itself, constructing some framework of meaning. But, that meaning can only be relative, whereas Baba is not relative. So, if we are honest about it, we end up where we started facing a Divine Mystery that is incomprehensible.

The Divine Teacher

The third aspect of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba which has a tremendous importance for me, is Baba as the Supreme Teacher of men, He who guides us to, liberation—to reunion with Him.

Each word that He speaks carries a lesson intended for our benefit. Certain basic principles are repeated by Baba again and again. Perhaps these basic principles could be summarised into seven cardinal points:-

No. 1. Be happy. Bliss is God's Nature expressed in the Individual and happiness is also our social duty. Simple happiness rooted in good becomes value to every one around us.

No. 2. Feel always that you are Divine. There is One Only. We are not different from that One.

No. 3. Let thought, word and action flow from that Divine which is one's essential nature. How happy we feel when we engage in noble action, and how miserable when our action is petty or hateful!

No. 4. Behave to others with the same kindness that we use to ourselves, because at some subtle level of our being, I am you and you are me—we are not two, opposing forces.

No. 5. Awake with love, fill the day with love, end the day with love. It is not that we should feel love. In truth, we are love. As man, we are just appearance. In truth, each one of us is a flame of love, dancing in ecstasy against the background of the Lord's Maya.

No. 6. Love God with all your heart. Trust Him completely. Abandon your will and your life to Him. He is the only refuge. Even though pain and death be our lot, only in God may we find refuge.

No. 7. Let the mind be alert, always to penetrate appearance, and uncover Reality. Let the mind never be caught up in appearance, but let it be engaged always in ceaseless enquiry: Who am I? What is my real nature? Where do I come from? Where am I going? Where and what is my home?

This summary of the seven cardinal points of Swamiji's Teachings is just as it appears to my mind, which is severely limited. Today we have the great joy of being able to hear the Truth from the unlimited, from the Lord Himself, from our beloved Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

RAYS OF VIRTUE AND GRACE

By Ms Indra Devi

This article originally entitled "Parva Nai" first appeared in the February 1971 issue of Sanathana Sarathi. We bring this article from the archives of Sanathana Sarathi this month to celebrate the golden jubilee of this hallowed magazine.

Although most of us know that Baba is Bhagavan and nothing is impossible for Him, still we like to hear about His Mahimas (miracles), marvelling at them, all over again, as if they were not a self-understood matter, when He is concerned.

Therefore when addressing the Fourth All-India Conference of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations at Prasanthi Nilayam on November 21 (1970), I preferred to share with the delegates some of my experiences, rather than bore them with a lengthy report of the activities of the Sai Family in California where we have several centers—the Sathya Sai Society of America, the Sathya Sai Book Center, and the recently formed Sai Foundation (in place of the Indra Devi Yoga Foundation) which maintains a Center on 2720 Sunset Boulevard, and Sai Nilayam, a retreat in Tecate, California, especially popular with long-haired and big-bearded youngsters, who are prevented from crossing the border into Tecate, Mexico—the home of our main center.

Saved from Fire

A recent fire, the biggest ever in that area, had destroyed 3000 homes and thousands of acres of forest. It was threatening to burn down both our branches on the Mexican and USA sides. The devotees in Sai Nilayam (the American Retreat) had no time even to save their belongings from a tent pitched near the house; the fire was spreading so fast. They all fled in cars to the top of Mount Chuchuma, where they had to spend hours, between life and death in a small cement building, praying to Baba. The entire mountain caught fire and was engulfed in a blaze of flame. After the fire subsided and when they were able to come down, they found, to their amazement, that though the truck was destroyed by the fire, the house had remained intact! Inside, it was covered by a thick layer of soot except for the Meditation Room which had the picture of Bhagavan! In that room, the carpet had remained white! Baba must have been here, protecting the place, someone suggested.

This fire broke out, when I was away in Chicago, lecturing on Bhagavan. So, when I saw it on television, and read in the papers that it was raging 200 feet away from the Indra Devi Yoga Foundation, to my own surprise, the news didn't touch me in the least bit. To the suggestion that I should fly home immediately, I answered, "What for? It is Bhagavan's place. If He wants to protect it, He will. If He thinks it should be destroyed, let it be". They asked, "What! So much faith you have in Him?" I answered, "Yes. I do".

I then told the delegates to the Conference that there were many more things happening to me, but, I didn't want to take up their time. But, a "PARVA NAI" (Does not matter) from BABA encouraged me. So, I told another miraculous happening that occurred several months ago, when I was driving alone at midnight, from Los Angeles to San Diego, where I was to give a lecture at the University the next morning.

Careering Car Crashes Averted

It was raining heavily and I was tired. So I must have dozed off at the wheel for a moment, when suddenly my car skidded, and, making a swift turn, swerved across to the other side of the Freeway, where cars were dashing into the opposite direction at a speed of 65-70 miles per hour! The Freeways have eight lanes - four on each side, and no traffic (except motor vehicles) is allowed on them. Having lost control of the steering wheel, I was awaiting the unavoidable crash, as the car kept on circling from one side of the Freeway to the other, like a merry-go-round!

Luckily there was a narrow strip of grass there, as the dividing line between the two halves of the Freeway, instead of the usual iron grilles. "Stop, Stop, Stop!" I finally pleaded with the car, in despair. At that moment, my eyes, fell on Bhagavan's photograph. I realised only then that my right foot was still on the gas pedal!

Afterwards, when the police came to my rescue, (I had a flat tire), and told the officers what had happened, they simply could not understand how I did not meet with a fatal accident. "You must have a special guardian angel", one of them said. "A very special one", I answered, without mentioning Bhagavan, lest they would take me for treatment against hallucinations into a mental hospital!

Once on this subject of car accidents, I briefly described to the audience another incident which took place when I was about to get on the Freeway from a lower road and make a turn – when a passenger bus speeded by in front of me (!) like a hurricane, narrowly missing the nose of my car! Completely flabbergasted, I stopped with an open mouth in the middle of 'Govinda Krishna Jai' and after a deep breath, I continued 'Gopala Krishna Jai' singing to Bhagavan a praise of gratitude for saving me from being run over by that flying giant of a bus (which I did not see coming behind a parked lorry that had obstructed it when I looked whether the highway was clear.)

I ended my talk, saying that many miraculous things were happening to me during this past year which was a very trying one for me. I said if it were not for Bhagavan's help and guidance, I don't know how I could get through it sanely, since the most incredible situations were involved, including the use of witchcraft and black-magic, to do away with me.

Ringside View

"Tell them about the ring!" urged Bhagavan, as soon as I concluded the talk. So, I resumed and told about the ring which Bhagavan had given to me about three years ago, pleased with the Yogasanas I had been teaching the boys of the Sanskrit Patasala at Prasanthi Nilayam. Actually, He had first given me a different one He created. "Shadguna!" He said, "Rays of Virtue!" He explained, while He gave it to me. When I came to my room I didn't feel too happy about it, because it didn't have His image and I had given up wearing jewels ever since starting to teach Yoga in 1939.

The next morning, when we were all called back into the 'interview room' the first thing Bhagavan told, turning to me was, "Give me the ring: *Accha nahi hai* (it is not good)" Then, taking it by the hand, He merely, blew on it, there by transforming it into a ring set with a single diamond. "You wanted to see My image in it?" He smiled, knowing my thoughts. "You will see it whenever you want, but, no one else will". With these words, He placed the ring on my finger. "Wear it, especially when going out", Bhagavan instructed, "it will let me know when you are in danger so that I can protect you."

Once when I was in far-off California, I looked at the ring and clearly saw in it Baba sitting in a white car! "He must be going somewhere", I figured and wrote down the date in the calendar. On another occasion, I saw Him addressing a crowd that was sitting in a semicircle. It did not look like Prasanthi Nilayam. Again, I made a note of the date and on my next pilgrimage to Prasanthi Nilayam, I checked the dates with Brother Kasturi.

He attested that on the first occasion, Bhagavan had gone on tour on the date I saw Him. "I saw Him in a white car, whereas His car is a dark one". I argued! "He has now a white one", replied Brother. He also verified that on the second occasion Bhagavan was addressing a gathering in Kerala, where people sat in a semicircle!

"Are you spying on Him?" Brother Kasturi asked me, jokingly! When I quoted this remark of Brother Kasturi, Bhagavan and with Him, the entire audience broke into laughter. I felt that was the best time for me to end my talk.

H2H SPECIAL

WITH THE LORD IN THE MOUNTAINS - PART 7

By Prof. G Venkataraman

I am sorry that last month, due to pressure of work, I had to skip this segment. I hope that what I have to say this time would make amends for that omission. As I sit down at the computer and peer at my notes [I took extensive notes both during my 2003 trip and during the one in 2006], I wonder how I ought to process it. Clearly, there are many ways of doing that and I have decided that I would simply digest it all and squeeze the essence, for in the end that is what is more important from a Spiritual point of view.

Swami – The Divine Conductor

In this instalment, I shall offer some reflections on how Swami “conducts” His Kodai trips – I use the word “conducts” in the same spirit in which the word is used in relation to the Conductor of a Symphony Orchestra. If you think about it, in many respects the Kodai visits are like the tour of a famous Orchestra, led by a Divine Maestro!

I believe Swami has visited Kodai as early as the sixties – we even have a rare photo of Swami standing near the Silver Cascade, wearing an overcoat! But the earliest visit of the “new series” [with students] appears to have commenced in the early eighties, when Swami took a small party and stayed in Kodai at the residence of Mr. V. Srinivasan, currently the All India President of the Sri Sathya Sai Organisation. We have broadcast many times over Radio Sai, Mr. Srinivasan’s moving recalls of this memorable visit; so I shall not repeat those details here. But this much I can say: Basically, there are three “circles” around Swami – the “inner circle of students”, the “middle circle of devotees blessed by Swami to be a part of His group visiting Kodai” and the “outer circle of devotees flocking to have Darshan of the Lord in the Mountains.” Swami’s “symphony orchestra” is conducted in delicate manner as to bring *Ananda* to all, with, of course, Swami playing the role of the [Divine] Conductor and the students the members of the orchestra. Let me now try and fill in with the details.

Kodai’s ‘Soul’

As you must have already gathered, the “Soul” of the trip is made up of the sessions where Divine intimacy is granted to all present in a thousand different ways. These sessions mostly take place in the small room adjoining Swami’s dining hall in Sai Sruthi. There is a sofa on which Swami sits, and the boys crowd round His feet. Many teachers and elders too sit there, though at the periphery. The ladies sit towards the rear, near the staircase leading up to the upstairs region, where Swami stays and boys sleep. On one side, there is a sofa on which a few elders sit.

In a sense, it is like the Trayee sessions, which are better known, especially since many more have been privileged to be present there. One important difference is that the Trayee sessions are confined to just about an hour or so, and after they are over, Swami withdraws. In Kodai, it is different; students continue to be with Swami and maybe adjourn for dinner or some other activity.

The Elements of Kodai

There are many segments to the Kodai sessions, and Prof. Anil Kumar has told us in detail how it used to be in the old days. In the late eighties and early nineties, not many devotees used to come to Kodai when Swami went there; maybe about a hundred or so people, mostly foreigners. Now, all that has changed, with people coming in thousands. Correspondingly, there have been major changes to the routine also. In addition, the passage of time produces its own compulsions on the physical body, even for the Avatar. So the number of hours that the boys get to spend with Swami has necessarily come down, but the quality remains as wonderful as ever.

Intimacy Sessions

The intimacy sessions, if I might call them that, can be categorised as follows:

- Giving-away sessions. During these, Swami just overwhelms everyone by giving away goodies, in a torrential flow; I have described a bit of this earlier.
- Next, there are the sessions where one or two people get special attention. This year [2006], it was Mr. Kishore Singhal and his wife [from Canada] who were so blessed. Basically, Swami would start talking about olden times, and in between, He would turn to Mr. Singhal and add a few special notes. For example, there was a lot of talk about Ooty. There used to be a huge estate then, and the building there was once occupied, I believe, by Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy of India himself. When that estate became a part of the Central Trust property, the residence area was renamed Nandanavanam. The Primary School had its beginnings there until it was shifted later to Prashanti Nilayam. Swami would pick up the topic, and old-timers present would immediately pitch in. Lots of nostalgic recalls and in between, Swami would turn to Mr. Kishen, bringing him into the loop by adding various explanatory notes.
- Many sessions revolve around recalls, and sometimes, they are very humorous. For example, one day this year Swami recalled an old-timer named Koti Reddy of Kurnool. He used to be a Minister back in the days when the Capital of Andhra was Kurnool [and not Hyderabad as at present]. This gentleman had a huge moustache, and Swami regaled the audience with great stories about how Mr. Reddy first had to adjust his moustache before he could drink coffee or soup! With recalls like this, Swami brought the house down as only He can. Of course, we all thought we were hearing funny stories, but the real point is that Swami was busy giving us *Ananda*. That is what He did when

He mingled with the Gopalas when He and the Gopalas were all out there grazing the cows. He gave the Gopalas *Ananda* in one way, and He now gives *Ananda* in many other ways suited to present needs; the style may be different but the goal remains the same. A blessed few realise that the experience is far beyond jokes or narrations of funny incidents. To the chosen ones, a few precious moments are given to feel one with God. Those who realise that aspect and use the experience to better themselves, benefit; others merely add to the collection of stories they have heard from Swami.

- There are other kinds of intimacy sessions too, and they can be very unpredictable. In 2003, we had one evening when there was a wonderful session with quiz, *Bhajan Anthakshari* (bhajan quiz) and so on. This year, one evening a proposal was made for a similar program but Swami said 'no'. The boys who were determined to have a good time, then tried many other possibilities and finally Swami agreed to a mimicry session. The boys imitated all sorts of things, but what stole the show was a mimicry of a cock crowing early in the morning. If you click below, you can actually hear a recording made of that imitation. If you listen hard, you could possibly also hear the laughter that swept the room. Even Swami laughed loudly! In fact, He asked for a repeat of the demo! Imagine that, God Himself mixing so freely and in a picnic spirit!

The subtle point about the intimacy sessions is that they a) give the people concerned a wonderful opportunity to be physically close to the Avatar for an extended period of time, and b) they also offer subtle lessons about how to give *Ananda* to others. If we watch Swami carefully, He uses all sorts of occasions and even excuses to grant intimacy. Why? To fill us with *Ananda*!

Spreading *Ananda* – Doing Our Part

Learning from that, we too must try and see if we can spread *Ananda*, at least in our neighbourhood to some extent. Just to amplify, these days, many youngsters get trapped into spells of depression – there are so many things that bother them, many of them connected with a deep sense of insecurity. But how many care to spend a few intimate moments with these poor lost souls and talk to them? In fact, one does not even have to talk to them; merely listening to them and giving them an opportunity to unburden themselves is itself a great Seva these days. But do we have the time for all that? Do we ever bother to think why, when the world is in such deep trouble, God in human form is giving us so much personal time? There is a reason. As is said, "He to whom much is given, is expected to give back in equal if not greater measure."

Does Swami expect us to give anything back to Him personally? Not at all. All He expects from us is that we do our bit in spreading *Ananda* in whatever way we can. In short, what we get from the Lord, we must distribute in our own way to the wide world; that is a duty and obligation that we ought not to forget, ever. To put it differently, the *Ananda* we get from Swami is His *Prasaadam* to

us and we must share it with others to the maximum extent possible in every conceivable way.

The Perfect Host

Kodai also gives Swami's boys an opportunity to see how to play the role of a perfect host. Basically it is all about attending to minute details. Swami makes it a point to take many people with Him. Having undertaken that responsibility, He then bends backwards to see that all the needs of His flock are fully taken care of; He insists on playing the perfect host.

I saw this aspect at its best in 2003. That year, the new Guest House Complex and the attached Canteen had not yet come up, and almost all elders in Swami's party were put up outside in various houses. Swami went into great detail to ensure that everyone had proper accommodation, that adequate breakfast arrangements had been made for all, that they had the transport to come to and go from Sai Sruthi as needed, and that was also a doctor to attend to emergencies, should they arise. Even laundry arrangements were taken care of. And on the day of departure, Swami personally went into the details of who would go in what vehicle or car, worried about distribution of snacks to the people travelling by the different buses and cars, collection of luggage earlier and taking it direct to the airport, etc. It was an amazing exercise in thoroughness that I hope our boys absorbed in detail.

It is not only "guests" who receive all this loving care; students also do. For example, when He takes them to Kodai, Swami gives them as I have described earlier, many immediate necessities starting with shaving kit, sleeping bags, rugs, sweaters, torches, alarm clocks and so on. He then makes sure they do all the sight-seeing that tourists are supposed to do: going for horse rides, going for boating, and going for shopping [for which He makes sure He gives them a generous allowance!]. It is not merely that He arranges all these but also gives advice as required. For example, when He sends them for boating, He would tell them, "Do not try to row the boat yourself; it calls for experience; so let the boatman do it. Also, do not get up and start walking across the boat; that can tip the balance and all of you might find yourselves in the water!"

Long before I personally saw this for myself, I had heard many accounts about all these things. In the beginning, I was very thrilled to hear descriptions of these incidents or events, but later I began to wonder: "What on earth has all this got to do with Spirituality?" The answer to that came slowly and that too only after much introspection and enquiry. You see, God is the ultimate teacher. The worldly teacher [like myself] generally prefers to give instructions, with a set of do's and don'ts. If I want to be modern, then I would do it all with a slick Powerpoint Presentation. But at the end of it all, it boils down to a style going back to Moses and the Vedic seers, giving a package of do's and don'ts.

Swami Teaches by Example

Now the *Vedas* declare that the guest must be treated like God. Swami does not teach that hymn. Instead, He gives a demo but people miss the demo! They see but do not observe as Sherlock Holmes would say. If you go back to every one of the Kodai stories, told either by me or someone else, you will find behind it a lesson. Let me now narrate a few so that you get a feel for how God works in a far subtler way than we suppose or imagine.

As I have mentioned earlier, the Kodai sojourn combines “fun” with subtle learning; as one teacher put it neatly, it is a Spiritual Picnic! That sentence gives me an opening to describe a picnic that Swami took His boys for one year during His Kodai trip. Believe it or not, Swami is a great one for a picnic. The old Chitravathi routine every evening [about which old timers still speak in rapturous tones], was really a daily picnic! In His earlier days, whenever He went to Kodai, Swami would always organise a picnic because He knew that it would give an extra dose of *Ananda*. In Madras, He used to take people out to the Red Hills for outing.

This particular picnic story was narrated to me by some students who were an eyewitness to it. It happened some years ago, and was a picnic not organised by Swami but suggested by some Police Officers posted to Sai Sruthi for security duty by the local administration. Overwhelmed by the Love and compassionate attention that Swami showered on them, these Officers began praying to Swami that He must permit them to take the boys out to a nice spot where they could have a great picnic. After a while, Swami agreed to their plea and a day was fixed for the outing. The vehicles were arranged, the wagons stuffed with eats, and for their part, the boys were ready with all their party games to play out there in the picnic area.

Intentions might be good, but sometimes things might not work the way one wants. On this occasion, the roads were bad and the going really tough. The trip to the scenic spot dragged on and on, making all the boys very frustrated. Finally, after a lot of struggle and a really rough ride, that spot was reached. And when they looked around, the boys could hardly hide their disappointment; the spot selected did not command a grand view as had been promised; the view was anything but fantastic and ill-suited for a nice picnic.

Swami knew very well the thoughts racing through the minds of the boys, but beautifully averted a flop ready to occur. He looked around and said, “Hey boys! This is a beautiful spot, is it not?” The boys quickly caught on, and soon the mood was such that the Police Officers who were feeling a bit sheepish for having troubled Swami to travel to a spot less than scenic began to feel better. Swami made them even happier by not only praising their devotion, but also creating rings and so on. Later in the privacy of Sai Sruthi, Swami told the boys, “See, these Officers meant well. They really wanted to please Swami. Maybe they made a wrong choice of place for the picnic, but Swami cares only about the intentions. If they are pure and loving, Swami overlooks physical shortcomings.”

What Matters is Intention, Not Success

I can add this is something very common in Swami. I recall a person telling me about a drama staged by students many years ago. When the cast of actors for the drama was being discussed, Swami suggested that a particular part be given to a certain student. That was done and soon the boys were practicing the play. One afternoon, Swami went along with an elderly devotee to the College to see the rehearsal. Later, Swami asked the elder for comments. The gentleman said, "Swami, on the whole, the boys did a commendable job, but one actor was below par. He did not act well." He was referring to the person specially selected by Bhagavan. Swami looked at the devotee and said, "I know what you mean. I am aware that his acting abilities are not that good." The devotee was astonished and asked, "Swami, in that case why did You chose that boy for acting in the drama?" Swami smiled and replied, "You know, that boy is very devoted to Swami and he was desperate to act and show his love for Me. I responded, that is all." For God, it is not success that matters – after all, He is the one decides on success and failure. What matters to Him is the spirit with which one attempts any task.

Maybe I should use this opportunity to recall an event I personally witnessed. It happened many years ago when Swami went to the College auditorium for some function. Swami was expected to give a Discourse, and as always, some boys had been identified for speaking before Swami gave His Discourse. One of the boys so chosen started off well but soon got lost. Quickly he lost his confidence and very soon became literally speechless. It was very embarrassing for all of us, especially for the boy. Naturally he broke down and began to cry. You know what happened then? Swami called him near, consoled the boy and materialised a chain for him! Is it any wonder God is called *Dayanidhi* (Ocean of Compassion)?

Service is Pure Love, Not a Duty

Now to another Kodai incident; this happened one year when Swami was in Kodai on Easwaramma day. Occasionally this happens and whenever it does, there is a special Narayana Seva, plus distribution of clothes and blankets for the poor at Sai Sruthi. After the distribution was over, Swami came back inside, but seemed lost in thought. Normally, after such Seva, Swami is usually in an expansive mood and often talks to students about service, etc. This day, He did not and something seemed to be bothering Him, but no one could figure out what exactly it was. Suddenly, Swami called for the car, gave some instructions, took a few people with Him and simply drove out. Swami is known to go out occasionally for a drive while in Kodai, but this clearly was not one of them.

Swami was away for a while, and even as the rest were waiting for His return, there was a lot of speculation as to why He went. After a while, Swami returned, and this time His face was glowing and wearing a big smile. As the boys crowded around Him He said, "Boys, do you know where I have been? I went out to distribute blankets to the old and infirm that could not come here for the Narayana Seva. As I saw the poor people who came here, My

thoughts went out to the many old and sick people out there who could not come here. I just could not bear to think of them suffering in the cold. So I **had** to go, seek them out, and give them the blankets. They were so happy!” How much joy there was in His voice and eyes, even as He spoke those words!! For God, service is not a duty or an obligation. It is an act of Pure Love that gives Him as much joy as it does for the one who receives, if not more.

The entire Kodai trip gets punctuated with “small” and occasional incidents like these. At the time they occur, they do not appear more than acts of compassion, but as time goes on, it is these incidents that leave a profound impression on students, drawing them continually to service, long after they leave the University. Many are such stories that teach their own lessons. Here is one that I heard from Sri Sanjay Sahani. This happened many years ago, when Swami decided to have a small dining hall built as an extension to the original Sai Sruthi building. Such a hall was needed because the number of people showing up for lunch and dinner was rapidly increasing over the years.

Building the dining hall needed first some heavy earthwork, in the shape of cutting into the slope of rocks there, and volunteers were deployed, many of them students. Just before this activity commenced, one day when Swami went out for a drive, He saw the police chasing away many vendors who had gathered in front of Sai Sruthi, trying to sell their wares to people coming there. The police were keen to prevent congestion and regulate traffic and that was why they were making efforts to keep the place free of vendors. From the point of facilitating traffic, what they were doing was certainly valuable and important, but the compassionate Lord saw it another way. These poor vendors depended on tourists for their livelihood and tourists came to Kodai only for a couple of months, especially when Sai Baba visited Kodai. So Swami intervened and told the police officers that He was not personally inconvenienced by any means and that perhaps they could let vendors ply their trade. The police officers obliged and the vendors were happy; they were not merely happy but grateful too. And do you know how they showed their gratitude to Swami? By joining the volunteer force during their lunch hour and helping with the excavation! Love begets love; that was another of those lessons.

The Lord is Always Ready to Help

Talking of the dining hall construction, I am reminded of another story relating to it that Dr. Sainath told me. He was in the batch of students taken by Swami to Kodai that year and he too was involved in the heavy digging chores. He said it was real tough work, breaking rocks with a heavy crowbar. Doing that for many hours, almost all the boys ended up with big blisters on their hands at the end of the day. And at dinner time, they all had problems eating, because of the blisters. However much they tried to conceal their difficulty, the Good Lord did not fail to notice it and the next day, from somewhere, He managed to produce leather gloves for all them to wear while they did the heavy labour! The Lord is not up there in the clouds far away; He is ever close and also ever ready to help!

There are so many of these stories, but they all add up to just one thing; Kodai may seem like a fun trip but to the seeker, it is always full of lessons, precious lessons that only the Lord can teach. The lucky ones pick up the lessons even while enjoying the stay to the full. For them, Kodai is a rich experience. For the rest, it is a great picnic. As Krishna says, in whatever way devotees approach Him, in that same way He responds. He does that everywhere, in Prashanti and Kodai too!

Jai Sai Ram.

GET INSPIRED

BEING YOURSELF

by Kay Challenor

She plunged into the water and diving deep, began to walk along the bottom of the riverbed. Her movements were slow as she moved against the current, similar to a space man walking on the moon.

Life just was not fair!

The water around her was cool and soothing after being in the heat of the day. Calming to her emotions as well, which were running high.

It was so unfair being a hippo. Running out of breath, Lady lifted her head, kicked her feet and returned to the surface. Immediately she could feel the sun scorching on her back so she made her way to the muddy bank and, covering herself with wet orange clay, stood amid the reeds half submerged in water.

She was soon joined by Pee, a very smart looking Oxpecker with yellow and grey marking his feathers.

"Why, Lady, whatever is the matter?" Pee inquired, seeing tears slowly roll down the hippo's cheek.

"It's miserable being a hippo," replied Lady with a sigh.

"Why?"

"Well look at me. I'm big and fat, ugly and clumsy, destined to spend my life waddling around in the mud to stop this grey hairless skin of mine from burning in the sun."

"Why, Lady..."

"Don't call me Lady! Some lady; look at me! Now they are ladies, look at them."

Lady paused to watch a group of gazelles darting across the sandy earth. Their golden and cream coats gleamed in the sun and they leaped this way and that, higher and higher into the air.

"They look so light, so beautiful and so carefree," moped Lady, "Just like dancers, so graceful."

A family of giraffes followed the gazelles. They too had beautiful coats that glistened with health. Their long necks gently moved as they took slow

deliberate strides on their long legs. They looked completely at peace with the world around them.

"Wish I was a giraffe," whispered Lady.

"You are funny," laughed Pee. "Do you know why the gazelles leap and dart from one spot to another as they run?"

"For fun?"

"Hardly! They are running away from predators; lions, leopards or hyenas. They leap to confuse their pursuers, in an attempt to put them off the chase. It is not so much a dance as a fight for life, even if it is beautiful to watch. You wouldn't really want that would you?" said Pee, "After all what are you afraid of as a hippo?"

"Why, nothing really," replied Lady. She paused and gazed up at the blue sky in deep thought.

"I guess the only thing is the occasional hungry lion, but I just charge to see them off and then come into the water. Nothing bothers me in the water, not even the crocodiles. Actually I do love being in the water. It is so, well, calming and comforting. She waded deeper into the river until just her eyes and nose were showing above the surface. The water moved around her body, caressing and soothing. Feeling happier, Lady kicked out her legs and began to swim. Pee flew onto her head for a free ride.

"Have you any idea how gracefully you swim?" he said. "Quite the expert."

"Just watch," said Lady as she dived to the bottom of the river. She began to move her legs and head, moving and turning, a picture of skill and expertise. Looking a bit like a small grey submarine in the hand of a master helmsman. She came back to the surface and was rejoined by a chuntering Pee.

"You nearly drowned me diving like that with no warning!"

"Good though, aren't I?"

"Yes, yes, very good. So why don't you start to believe in yourself? We all have our own individual skills. Time you began to enjoy yours rather than comparing yourself with others. Comparing only makes you miserable."

"Hum," said Lady.

The two swam to the opposite side of the river where the giraffes were enjoying their afternoon drink. With their long necks they had to splay open their legs to enable their mouths to reach the surface of the water. It was a very tricky procedure and in this position the giraffes were very vulnerable, open to an attack from a predator.

"Oh Lady, you made me jump!" one startled giraffe remarked. "Thought you were a crocodile for a minute. I could only see your eyes and nose and that is just how they sneak close before they make an attack."

"Sorry," said Lady. "Do you know I have always wanted to be tall and elegant like you, but it isn't very easy for you to drink is it?"

"No we have to be very careful. You wouldn't want to be us Lady. You would miss your water too much. We often see you swimming and diving in the cool water and it looks so much fun. You are very lucky you know."

The giraffe's words remained in Lady's head and she thought about them for a long time. She thought about them all that day and all the next day as well and the day after. In fact, she remembered the words for the rest of her life and from that day on she was never sad or critical about who she was or what she looked like. She spent her days rolling in the orange mud to keep cool and having long conversations with Pee. And often, at night, she would lay half submerged in the water, gazing up at the stars and thinking just how lucky she was to be alive.

Swami says, **"Learn to make the best of life, this chance offered to you to sublimate your instincts, impulses and vasanas (impressions left on the mind by past actions) and rise higher and higher on the moral and spiritual ladder. Make the best use of opportunities like this and derive Ananda (bliss)."**

- SSEHV (UK) Newsletter, Dec 2006.

JUST P. U. S. H.!

A man was sleeping at night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light, and the Lord told the man he had work for him to do, and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might. The man did so, day after day. For many years he toiled from dawn to dusk, his shoulders set squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock, pushing with all his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain. Since the man was showing discouragement, the Adversary (Satan) decided to enter the picture by placing thoughts into the weary mind. "You have been pushing against that rock for a long time, and it hasn't moved." Thus the man was led to believe that the task was impossible and that he was a failure. These thoughts discouraged and disheartened the man. Satan said, "Why kill yourself over this? Just put in your time, giving just the minimum effort, and that will be good enough."

That's what he planned to do, but decided to make it a matter of prayer and take his troubled thoughts to the Lord. "Lord," he said, "I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength to do that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock by half a millimeter. What is wrong? Why am I failing?"

The Lord responded compassionately, "My Child, when I asked you to serve Me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to Me with your strength spent, thinking that you have failed. But, is that really so? Look at yourself. Your arms are strong and muscled, your back sinewy and brown, your hands are callused from constant pressure, your legs have become massive and hard."

"Through opposition you have grown much, and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. Yet you haven't moved the rock. But your calling was to be obedient and to push and to exercise your faith and trust in My wisdom. This you have done. Now I, my child, will move the rock."

At times, when we hear a word from God, we tend to use our own intellect to decipher what He wants, when actually what God wants is just simple obedience and faith in Him. By all means, exercise the faith that moves mountains, but know that it is still God who moves mountains.

When everything seems to go wrong, just P. U. S. H.;

When people don't react the way you think they should, just P. U. S. H.;

When people just don't understand you, just P. U. S. H.!

P.U.S.H. = Pray Until Something Happens!

IN THE REALM OF YAMARAJA

There was a Brahman, a religious man and fond in his affections, but without deep wisdom. He had a son of great promise, who, when seven years old, was struck with a fatal disease and died. The unfortunate father was unable to control himself: he threw himself on the corpse and lay there as one dead. The relatives came and buried the dead child and when the father came to himself, he was so immoderate in his grief that he behaved like an insane person. He no longer gave way to tears, but wandered about asking for the residence of Yamaraja, the king of death, humbly to beg of him that his child might be allowed to return to life.

Having arrived at a great Brahman temple, the sad father went through certain religious rites and fell asleep. While wandering on in his dream he came to a deep mountain pass where he met a number of samanas (monks) who had acquired supreme wisdom. "Kind sirs," he said, "Can you not tell me where the residence of Yamaraja is?" And they asked him, "Good friend, why would you know?" Whereupon he told them his sad story and explained his intentions. Pitying his self-delusion, the samanas said: "No mortal man can reach the place where Yama reigns, but some four hundred miles westward lies a great city in which many good spirits live; every eighth day of the month Yama visits the place, and there you may see him who is the King of Death and ask him for a boon."

The Brahman, rejoicing at the news, went to the city and found it as the samanas had told him. He was admitted to the dread presence of Yama, the King of Death, who, on hearing his request, said: "Your son now lives in the eastern garden where he is enjoying himself; go there and ask him to follow you." Said the happy father, "How does it happen that my son, without having performed one good work, is now living in paradise?" Yamaraja replied, "He has obtained celestial happiness not for performing good deeds, but because he died in faith and in love to the Lord and Master, the most glorious Buddha. The Buddha says: 'The heart of love and faith spreads as it were a beneficent shade from the world of men to the world of gods.' This glorious utterance is like the stamp of a king's seal on a royal edict."

The happy father hastened to the place and saw his beloved child playing with other children, all transfigured by the peace of the blissful existence of a heavenly life. He ran up to his boy and cried with tears running down his cheeks: "My son, my son, do you not remember me, your father who watched over you with loving care and tended you in your sickness? Return home with me to the land of the living." But the boy, while struggling to go back to his playmates, upbraided him for using such strange expressions as father and son. "In my present state, he said, "I know no such words, for I am free from delusion."

On this, the Brahman departed, and when he woke from his dream he bethought himself of the Blessed Master of mankind, the great Buddha, and resolved to go to him, lay bare his grief, and seek consolation. Having arrived

at the Jetavana, the Brahman told his story and how his boy had refused to recognize him and to go home with him.

And the World-honored One (Buddha) said: "Truly you are deluded. When man dies the body is dissolved into its elements, but the spirit is not entombed. It leads a higher mode of life in which all the relative terms of father, son, wife, mother, are at an end, just as a guest who leaves his lodging has done with it, as though it were a thing of the past. Men concern themselves most about that which passes away; but the end of life quickly comes as a burning torrent sweeping away the transient in a moment. They are like a blind man set to look after a burning lamp. A wise man, understanding the transiency of worldly relations, destroys the cause of grief, and escapes from the seething whirlpool of sorrow. Religious wisdom lifts a man above the pleasures and pains of the world and gives him peace everlasting." The Brahman asked the permission of the Blessed One to enter the community of his bhikkhus, so as to acquire that heavenly wisdom which alone can give comfort to an afflicted heart.

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

1.

In which year was Sanathana Sarathi, the monthly magazine from Prasanthi Nilayam, inaugurated by Bhagavan?

- a. 1968
- b. 1958
- c. 1959
- d. 1962

2.

What are the gods known as in the Shinto religion of Japan?

- a. Samurai
- b. Kimono
- c. Kami
- d. Matsuri

3.

Recently Swami blessed the city of Chennai with the holding of an Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam in His divine presence. When did this take place?

- a. January 2007
- b. December 2006
- c. March 2006
- d. February 2007

4.

Which religion teaches the principle of *Yin* and *Yang*?

- a. Confucianism
- b. Shinto
- c. Taoism
- d. Buddhism

5.

How did Lord Krishna leave this world?

- a. By natural means i.e. old age.
- b. Through deathly combat with a demon.
- c. By disappearing into thin air.
- d. Through a poisoned arrow.

6.

The Jewish faith has one day set aside each week for rest and spiritual pursuits. What is the name of this day?

- a. Torah
- b. Sabbath
- c. Bar Mitzvah
- d. Kosher

7.

One of Bhagavan's most popular acronyms is taken from the word WATCH where W refers to ____; A refers to Actions; T refers to Thoughts; and H refers to Heart. What does the W refer to?

- a. Watch
- b. Waste
- c. Words
- d. Wisdom

8.

What is the name of the Indian emperor who converted to Buddhism and helped to spread that religion around the world?

- a. Akbar
- b. Chandra Gupta I
- c. Pulakesi I
- d. Ashoka

9.

From which religion's sacred book does the following passage come from?

Do not argue with the People of the Book unless it is in the politest manner, except for those of them who do wrong. Say: "We believe in what has been sent down to us and what has been sent down to you."

- a. The Christian Bible
- b. The Jewish Torah
- c. The Muslim Koran
- d. The Sikh Guru Granth Sahib

10.

How does Swami explain by analogy the principal of Brahman ever present in the Universe?

- a. By way of paper coming from wood.
- b. By way of a garland strung on a thread.
- c. By way of oxygen present in air.
- d. By way of sound present in speech.

ANSWERS

1B. 1958.

Sanathana Sarathi was inaugurated on 16 February 1958, Mahashivarathri day, and in Swami's first message for the magazine He declared:

From this day, our Sanathana Sarathi is on the march, at the head of the spiritual cohorts – the Vedas, the Upanishads and scriptures – to subdue the evil ego brood – injustice, anarchy, falsehood and licence. May this “Charioteer” fight for world prosperity and, by making the drum of victory sound and resound, spread joy among all mankind.

2C. Kami

Followers of Shinto worship the *kami* - deities or spirits. Some *kami* are local and can be regarded as the spirit of a particular place, but others represent major natural phenomena for example, Amaterasu, the Sun goddess, or Mount Fuji. Although divine, they are close to humanity; they inhabit the same world as we do, make the same mistakes as we do, and feel and think the same way as we do. Anyone who dies automatically becomes a *kami*, and is revered by their families as an ancestral *kami*. Shinto teaches that everything contains a *kami*; every rock, every living and nonliving thing contains a *kami*. *Kami* might also be created after noteworthy people or more abstract entities like growth and fertility.

3A January 2007.

Bhagavan blessed the Athi Rudra Maha Yagnam with His presence, which was held from 20-30 January 2007, in Chennai. Over 60,000 people had gathered to have Bhagavan's darshan and to watch the *yagnam*, benefiting from the spiritual vibrations, uplifting speeches delivered by learned people and wonderful musical concerts.

4C. Taoism

Yin and Yang is the principle of natural and complementary forces, patterns and phenomena that depend on one another and do not make sense on their own. These may be masculine and feminine, but they could be darkness and light (which is closer to the original meaning of the dark and light sides of a

hill), wet and dry or action and inaction. These are opposites that fit together seamlessly and work in perfect harmony. You can see this by looking at the Yin Yang symbol: the dark area contains a spot of light, and vice versa, and the two opposites are intertwined and bound together within the unifying circle. Yin and Yang are not static, the balance ebbs and flows between them - this is implied in the flowing curve where they meet.

5D. Through a poisoned arrow.

Realising that His end on earth was drawing near, Lord Krishna went to lie under a peepul tree, and took the form of Lord Vishnu. His left foot looked like a red lily. A hunter by the name of Jara mistook the foot for the mouth of a deer and struck it with an arrow. The arrow was pointed with a piece of iron from a remnant of the accursed mace of the Rishis. Lord Krishna was fatefully injured by this.

6B. Sabbath.

The Sabbath is an important part of Jewish life which is a day of rest and spiritual rejuvenation. It commemorates God's day of rest after He created the world and also the Jews' release from slavery under the Egyptians, thousands of years ago. Jews treat the Sabbath as a day of great joy, eagerly awaited throughout the week; it is a time when they set aside mundane concerns and devote themselves to higher pursuits. The Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday, when Jews will attend the Synagogue for prayers. The next morning is taken up with a prayer service after which the Sabbath meal is taken with much joy. Jews will also study the Torah during this time and spending time together as a family is also important. The Sabbath ends at sunset on Saturday.

7C. Words. Bhagavan tells us about this in the following discourse:

I often refer to the spelling of the word, WATCH. The spelling consists of five letters, namely, W A T C H. These letters stand for:

W - Watch your Words

A - Watch your Actions

T - Watch your Thoughts

C - Watch your Character

H - Watch your Heart

The real watch is when you keep a watch on your words, actions, thoughts, character, and heart; not the one you tie to your wrist. The wrist-watch may go for repair, but the word 'watch' will never get spoiled. It will always bring purity of thought, word and deed. How great these words are!

Divine Discourse on 20-11-2002

8D. Ashoka.

Emperor Ashoka (304-232 B.C.) was the leader of the vast Maurya Empire and led the first part of his life in military conquests. After a particularly bloodthirsty battle, he was consumed with remorse and adopted Buddhism, attracted by its teachings on Ahimsa. Ashoka preached an official policy of ahimsa in his empire and even the unnecessary slaughter or mutilation of animals was immediately abolished. He used his position to propagate Buddhism as far as ancient Rome and Egypt, building thousands of Stupas and Viharas for Buddhist followers.

9C. The Muslim Koran.

The expanded quote is as follows:

Do not argue with the People of the Book (the Jews and Christians) unless it is in the politest manner, except for those of them who do wrong. Say: "We believe in what has been sent down to us and what has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is [the Same] One, and we are committed to [observe] peace before Him. Thus We have sent you down the Book. The ones whom We have given the Book to believe in it.

(Koran chapter 29 from verse 46)

10B. By way of a garland strung on a thread. Swami explains the analogy in the following passage:

This vast gathering of people will appear to the Aadhyaathmic intellect as a garland of multi-coloured flowers strung on the one single thread, God. Develop this vision; see the One behind the many; see the Brahmasuuthra---the string that runs through each flower.

(Divine Discourse, Simla, 4 April, 1975)

QUIZ ON HEART 2 HEART

We are now bringing you a new quiz to test your recall power from reading Heart2Heart. Please refer to the old issues to find out the full stories.

1.

A '*Sai*'lent Revolution Of Rural Rejuvenation was our cover story of the October 2006 issue which dealt with the work of the Sai Youth. Which state in India was the subject of the story?

- a. Andra Pradesh
- b. Orissa
- c. Tamil Nadu
- d. Karnataka

2.

In our *Expressions Of Love* series on cards presented to Swami by students, we carried the story of a very special card in the March 2006 issue in the "Swami and Me" section which helped to bridge a communication gap between the students and their Lord. What was special about the card?

- a. It carried the story of Shivaji, a heroic warrior.
- b. It was a Valentine's Day card.
- c. The card was laden with the most beautiful fragrance.
- d. The boys sang sweet songs to Swami at the time they presented the card.

3.

In our March 2006 cover story we told you about glorious Sundaram (Swami's abode in Chennai): Swami's involvement in its history and how so many devotees are blessed simply walking through its doors. When did Bhagavan perform the inauguration?

- a. 1972
- b. 1991
- c. 1977
- d. 1981

4.

Readers who were with us since 2003 may remember the amazing story related by a Dr R. who was sleeping on a train with his wife. He was suddenly awakened when the fan caught fire....what happened next?

- a. He jumped out to safety with his wife.
- b. A man appeared to fix it.
- c. He doused the fire with some Vibhuti.
- d. He chanted Sai Ram and the fire went out.

5.

In our August 2006 cover story *Shimmering Flame of Eternal Wisdom* we informed you about Zoroastrianism. By what name do Zoroastrians call God?

- a. Zeus
- b. Jehovah
- c. Ahura Mazda
- d. Apollo

ANSWERS:

1A. Andra Pradesh.

This cover story was on the myriad rural development schemes initiated by Swami's seva organisation and the reactions from the fortunate beneficiaries.

2B. It was a Valentine's day card.

3D. 1981. Here follows an extract from our article:

On the 19th Jan morning, there was a grand welcome for Swami. Devotees had gathered since early morning and Sundaram was all decked up for the occasion. Bhagavan consecrated Sundaram as His "Mandir" on that glorious day when He made it His abode. It was a red-letter day in the history of Chennai and Sai devotees celebrated it in the grandest way possible. Sweets were distributed, clothes were given away, all the workers were handsomely felicitated and there was joy all around. On the 55th year of His advent, the 55ft "Sundaram" paid her obeisance to her Lord with gratitude and reverence. The divine rays emanating from Sundaram since then have attracted many spiritual seekers to this holy abode. If we have to describe Sundaram in one phrase, it is 'Beauty with Sublimity'.

4B. A man appeared to fix it.

But this was no ordinary man. It was in fact Baba come to save him. Please read the full story from the Sanathana Sarathi of Oct 1961, in the Dec 2003 issue.

5C: Ahura Mazda. Here is an extract from the article:

'Zoroaster asks Ahura Mazda, "Reveal unto me that Name of Thine that is the greatest, best, fairest, most effective, best healing, that which destroyeth best the malice of men and demons." Ahura Mazda then replied: O Holy Zoroaster, My first Name is, "I am". My Second Name is the Giver of Herds. My Third Name is the Strong One...'

THE HEALING TOUCH

DAWN...AFTER A LONG DARK NIGHT!

Tanjore Painting – Rich and Special

Tanjore or Thanjavur as it is called today acquired its name from the ancient pronunciation of the place which was then called Thanjavoor. It was then the capital of the mighty Chola empire. The Chola rulers besides being great warriors, were builders of magnificent temples and great patrons of arts. It was against this setting that a highly specialized form of painting, with its characteristically beautiful ornamental relief work, flourished. These paintings are known for their elegance, rich colours, and attention to detail. The paintings are notable for their adornment in the form of semi-precious stones, pearls, glass pieces and gold. Crafted with meticulous care the Thanjavoor (Tanjore) pictures are unique. What sets them apart from Indian paintings in general are the embellishments made over the basic drawings with precious and semi-precious stones as well as the relief work which gives them a three dimensional effect. The pictures are of various sizes, ranging from huge works spanning whole walls to small miniatures no longer than 6-inch square.

Bangalore – A Beautiful Blend of Cultures

It must be evident from the above précis that Tanjore painting is an art that involves dexterity, imagination, creativity and a lot of patience. It is not an art for the ones who live in the hustle and bustle of a world of business lunches and deadlines. Malini T.P.S, the youngest daughter of late Mr. T.P Subbaiah and Mrs Padmavati, hailing from the city of Bangalore is learning this ancient art. Bangalore itself has a hoary past and the presence of this art form in this city is not a surprise. A brief look at the history of Bangalore will suffice to show how various cultures intermingled in the course of time. An inscription in stone found near Begur reveals, that the district was part of the Ganga kingdom ruled from Gangavadi until 1004 and was known as 'Bengaval-oru', the City of Guards in old Kannada. From the Gangavadi kingdom, the land passed into the hands of the Cholas. The Hoysalas ruled after the cholas until the establishment of the Vijayanagara empire.

Modern Bangalore was founded by a feudatory of the Vijayanagara Empire, Kempe Gowda I. The city as it is known today was named by him. Later captured and ruled successively by the Marathas under the Adilshahi sultans, the Mughals, the Wodeyars, Hyder Ali and his son, Tipu Sultan and then Wodeyars again under The British East India Company until independence in 1947.

Most of the civic development of Bangalore was done after the plague crisis of 1898. Sanitation improved, and in turn, improvements in sanitation and health facilities helped to modernize Bangalore. Telephone lines were laid to help coordinate anti-plague operations. Regulations for building new houses with proper sanitation facilities came into effect. The city was divided into four wards for better coordination and the Victoria Hospital was inaugurated in 1900 by Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy and Governor-General

of British India. In 1906, Bangalore became the first city in Asia to have electricity, supplied by the hydroelectric plant situated in Shivanasamudra. Prior to developments in the last few decades, Bangalore was a well laid out city with many spacious gardens, which provided it the moniker, the Garden City.

Malini's Malady

So, cultures have influenced each other, but fundamentally all are born from the minds of men. As a philosopher once said, "every great thing that ever happened to mankind began as a single thought in someone's mind." But then one has to dare to dream. The fear of failure is the biggest stumbling block in human initiative. But that was not the case with Malini. She did a one-year course at the Chitrakala Parishat of Karnataka in Tanjore painting. She is now going to embark on a new journey. A journey with a companion of a lifetime...on January 27, 2006 she married the man of her dreams and is now moving to Gujarat.

One would wonder why so much ado is being made of a young lady from Bangalore, who has learnt the difficult art of Tanjore painting and is newly married. Well! It would definitely seem a run of the mill story except for the fact that Malini, the young lady in context, was a patient of Chronic Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (fits) for three decades of her life!

Born and brought up in this city, Malini was fortunate to be the youngest in the family. She has one elder brother and four elder sisters to look up to. All would have been well had she not been a victim of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE). She had the history of seizures since she was ten months old. Her parents took her to NIMANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences) and other private nursing homes that gave treatment for seizures. She had spent around Rs. 25,000 on various forms of diagnostic tests and medicines. She had no idea how much more it would cost. Since it was an ongoing process of medical management, no amount had been fixed. Her father, an employee of Glaxo (a Pharma company), breathed his last in 1982. This was a tremendous blow to the ailing child. Her mother was working for a short period in NGEF (New Government Electrical Factory), but had to give up after demise of her father. Her family had to struggle hard to make ends meet. When God closes a door, he opens a window. Fortunately, all her sisters and brother got married without any problems and were settled in life, but the agony continued for Malini.

She had to discontinue her education from her 9th standard on, since her fits were too violent to be controlled in school. Notwithstanding this, she took up fine arts and her interest led her in the direction of Tanjore painting. The decision is, in itself, a reflection of her will and "never say die" attitude to life.

SSSIHMS Provides Options...of Hope and Health

She visited the specialists at NIMHANS and was advised medication. The drugs were of no avail, since they were only palliative. She came to know about Baba's Hospital in Bangalore only in the year 2004 through a poly clinic at Girinagar, Bangalore. The news that there existed a place where her malady could be cured absolutely free of cost came to her as manna from heaven. With economic help from her family she came to the SSSIHMS Whitefield.

She had no expectations from the SSSIHMS till she came, saw and was admitted into its portals. The very sight of the Hospital filled her with hope: a Hospital that looks like a temple? Could this be the answer to her prayers? She was accompanied by her mother who stayed with her through out the treatment.

A Plan for Treating Her Brain

She was first admitted in December 4 for investigation and again after detailed investigation and study, she was admitted for the operation under the guidance of Dr. Geetha Rangan. She found the treatment plan explained to her very clearly. There was no ambiguity as to the surgical procedure she was to undergo and the medication she was to take before and after the surgery.

Her final diagnosis as on March 25, 2005 read, Left Mesial Temporal Sclerosis (LMTS). The diagnostic procedures included MRI scans, EEG and Spect scans. Through the video EEG the doctors were able to diagnose that the seizures were emanating from a disorder of the left temporal lobe.

The brain is still a medical frontier that human beings with all technology at their fingertips are yet to breach. And to those of us who are not very much in the know...here is a small note on how important "small" things are in the "big" scheme of things.

Normal Brain Workings

The brain primarily consists of the Cerebrum, Cerebellum and the Medulla Oblongata which extends down into the spinal cord. The brain is in two halves called hemispheres – the gap between the two halves is called the Sylvian fissure. Each of these areas of the brain is unique to a particular function of the human body and to date many areas have been mapped to their corresponding functions. The temporal lobe – the dysfunctional one in Malini's case – is the lower horizontal lobe of either cerebral hemisphere, located in front of the occipital lobe and containing the sensory center of hearing in the brain.

Temporal lobes are part of the cerebrum. They lie at the sides of the brain, beneath the lateral or Sylvian fissure. Seen in profile, the human brain looks something like a boxing glove. The temporal lobes are where the thumbs would be. Behind the temporal lobes is the occipital lobe, where visual information first reaches the cortex.

This part of the cortex (primary auditory cortex) is involved in hearing. Adjacent areas in the superior, posterior and lateral parts of the temporal lobes are involved in high-level auditory processing. In humans this includes speech, for which the left temporal lobe in particular seems to be specialized. The functions of the left temporal lobe are not limited to low-level perception but extend to comprehension, naming, verbal memory and other language functions.

The underside of the temporal area appears to be involved in high-level visual processing of complex stimuli such as faces and scenes. The front of this tissue for visual processing is involved in object perception and recognition.

The medial temporal lobes (near the sagittal plane that divides left and right cerebral hemispheres) are thought to be involved in episodic/declarative memory. Deep inside the medial temporal lobes, the hippocampi seem to be particularly important for memory function - particularly transference from short to long term memory and controlling spatial memory and behavior.

All this would be Greek to even the educated, but then it suffices to say that the temporal lobes play a very important role in our interface with the world outside. So any dysfunction will have serious physical symptoms in the form of 'seizures' or 'fits' and the technical name given for this condition is Temporal Lobe Epilepsy. (TLE)

Temporal Lobe Epilepsy

Temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) is a term that refers to a condition where seizures are generated in the portion of the brain called the temporal lobe. Either the right or the left temporal lobe can be involved, and in rare cases both temporal lobes can be involved in a particular individual.

Under the broad category of TLE, there are a number of specific types. Malini was suffering from the mesial type (MTLE), there are characteristic abnormalities in the mesial aspect of the temporal lobe. The treatment goal of any epilepsy is freedom from seizures with no side-effects of medications. Although this is the goal, it is frequently not attained. In mesial TLE, medications frequently fail to adequately control the seizures. Fortunately, this particular epilepsy is most responsive to surgical treatment. The surgery for mesial TLE offers up to an 80% chance of cure and involves the removal of a portion of the affected temporal lobe.

Malini's Miraculous Recovery

A Left temporal lobectomy was performed on Malini on the fourth of February 2005. Post operatively, she didn't have any seizure recurrence. She was on antiepileptics (seizure prevention drugs). Sutures were removed on 8th post operative day and the Wound was clean and healthy. She was in the hospital for the usual post operative recovery period. She did not have any untoward incidents in her recovery and had no neurological deficit whatsoever.

Before she underwent surgery she had a very poor outlook towards life, because long-standing, poorly controlled epilepsy has a number of psychosocial ramifications. These can include (but are not limited to) memory difficulty, reduced self-esteem, depression, reduced ability for gainful employment, and greater difficulty with interpersonal relationships. All these disappeared after the surgery. She is now not just cured, but “healed” in both the clinical and esoteric sense of the expression. The ultimate aim of a clinical procedure is “to give the patient a better quality of life”. Malini received this gift at the temple of healing, The SSSIHMS Whitefield.

She never dreamt of getting such good and free treatment in this hospital. “It is really amazing how all patients are getting free treatment without spending a rupee,” she says. She feels that she would not get similar service and attention if she had paid even in reputed nursing homes. To her joy, so far not a single instance of seizure has occurred.

Beginning a New Life

Appearances can be deceptive. And what is apparent is not necessarily inherent. From the ebullient smile of Malini and the well lined care worn visage of her mother, one can learn lessons of life. To be firm in the face of all adversity and never to give up hope. Every cloud has a silver lining and every dusk is followed by a dawn. To those of us who lead our lives ephemerally, floating on the surface of this ocean of life, let us remind ourselves that still waters run deep. There is much more to everything...we only have to look past the smiles...we understand what pain went into creating those expressions of joy. Pleasure is an interval between two pains – this also means that pain is an interval between two pleasures. Hard work definitely bears fruit, so does patience and forbearance. Let us learn from the life of Malini these lessons. As the poet Longfellow wrote in the concluding lines of his psalm of life,

*Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.*

YOUR SAY

Reader's Feedback to the January Issue

Responses to the Cover Story of the January Issue

Sairam

The tale of Sai Geetha was simply amazing, so touching, so very beautiful; I have no words to express the joy and inspiration I derived reading her story. Her devotion to Swami is unbelievable. I was simply overwhelmed. It was so touching, so emotional for me. For three years I was in Bhagavan's college and I did not even care to know about her. I was ashamed of myself for not possessing as much devotion & love for Swami as she did. Thank you so much for giving us such a lovely start this New Year.

Sairam, with Love and regards, Latha

Sairam,

The article on Sai Geetha and her devotion was a very touching and inspiring one. When the animal in the human hearts run amok, Sai Geetha stands before us steady and gentle, dancing gently to the Divine music. Einstein would certainly agree to the modifications to his statement. I am sure Gandhiji would agree too!

Sri Sai Swaminathan G

Loving Sai Ram to H2H team,

I have just finished reading the article titled "Sai Geetha" in the current edition of H2H. Words are in shortage to express my state of bliss. It was a trip around heavens. It was truly an experience of divine Love. As I read through the article it was a continuous stream of tears.

What is that one can pay in return to this 'bliss – bestowing' article. I feel greatly indebted to receive this gift of an article from you. It is only Swami's *Sankalpa* to bless the multitude of devotees at the beginning of new year that has prompted you to bring out this article in this month's edition. I hope and wish that millions of devotees all over the world read this article, enjoy the bliss and more importantly, pickup the wonderful message it gives us on "pure love and single minded devotion" that Sai Geetha possesses for Swami.

Sai Ram, Seshagiri Rao, Bangalore.

Sai Ram H2H Team,

I would like to express how I feel but do not have the words to write it, with regards to the article on Sai Geetha. It is so beautifully written and I have read it twice over. It is amazing to know how devoted Sai Geetha is to Swami. Only if we could be a little like her in this day and age and not be so serious about our problems and life. I have learnt from Sai Geetha that I need to improve

myself and to be like her and to think of the Lord and love Him the way she does. She has so pure love for Swami. Thank you so much for the cover story on Sai Geetha it has so much value and inner meaning for all.

Sai Ram Sarika (UK)

Responses to the January Issue Articles

Dear H2H Team,

Thank you very much for the beautiful article "The Sai Movement In Dominican Republic". I believe it was great. The devotees are excited with it. May this 2007 be full of Health, Love, Peace & Prosperity! May Swami's Love & Grace be with all of you!

Sai Love, Sixto Inchaustegui

Jai Sai Aap Ko,

I was going through your site in search of recent pictures of Swami, and I saw the collection posted of his Birthday. Tears ran down my cheeks to see Swami. Thank you very much for putting His pictures up. I am a Bal vikas Guru here in Fiji at the Prasanthi Nilyam center. My heartfelt thank you again for your beautiful website.

Jai Sai Ram, Darshana Singh

Dear Sai brothers,

I like very much your bhajan teaching programme (bhajan tutor) which comes recently on your radio programmes once a week. Here you have selected bhajans for teaching. What I want to know is that can we, the listener, ask the bhajan that we would like to learn. I would like to learn, for example, the bhajan "Hey Bhagawan Sai Bhagawan, Daya karo Bhagawan, kripa karo Bhagawan." (Sundaram Volume no.38). I would appreciate your view and reply please. Thanks for your great work on this Radio Sai. May Swami bless you all in plenty.

AumSairam, Gopal Mehta

[Dear Gopal Mehta, in the Bhajan tutor we have bhajans which are generally sung in Baba's presence by His students – H2H Team]

Responses to Sai Inspires

Dearest H2H Team,

This is to express my gratitude for the wonderful service that you all do by bringing Swami into our lives everyday. In fact the first thing I do when I start my day at work is to open my email and receive Swami's instructions. I am sure thousands or perhaps millions around the world do the same and send a

silent "thank you" your way. I just wanted to give voice to it today and let you all know how much your hard work and efforts are appreciated by all of us out here.

So thank you for a job marvellously done,

Sairam, Meena Kalluri M.D, Charleston, USA

Dearest Heart2Heart Team,

Best wishes for 2007!! May the blessings of Our Dear Lord be always with you, may He keep inspiring you all along your way. I really wish to thank you - from my heart - for your wonderful work, and thank you for the careful and loving selection of Baba's most precious pictures and messages for our daily life. These are not only truly inspiring but also sent whenever I needed the most a loving word from our Dearest Lord, a reminder of what should the true service be, loving and selfless action-word-thought-feeling towards all of His creation...

On a daily basis, this is of crucial importance, that we never forget why we are here and why are we doing what we are doing...For all this, my deepest gratitude for your loving work. May the Lord bless your efforts.

Sai Ram, Carola Prochaska

Dear Sir,

Once I come into office your mail is the first to be read and it gives me a good start for the day. Notwithstanding the jealousy and turmoil I have to overcome in my working environment, the Thoughts for the Day & the Divine's Message are reassuring. Thanks for a great job. Hoping to read Bhagavan's speech and the 2 other speeches delivered on 25.12.06 soonest. I take this opportunity to wish you and your team a Blissful and Blessed 2007.

Sai Ram, Kunalan

Dear Heart to Heart Team,

I would like to thank you BABA to change my life and your wonderful team which provided Sai 's instructions. And the content in website is very useful. I felt lucky that I can find Radio Sai website and Swami's teachings as per my purpose. Everyday I read Swami's instructions, I feel like "**He talked to me, and I talked to him.**" It's hard to explain in words. He knew what I think, and gave me some advice which I can adapt in my real life. I am so lucky....Since I read it, my regret and stress has been emitted. I want to say the word "Thank You", and encourage you to continue Sai Inspires e-mail and develop the website. And Thanks again to Baba.

Jai Sai Ram, Jeed

Responses to the Sunday Special Article “Do We Understand What Freedom Really Means” sent on 24 Dec 2006

Sairam,

It was a very nice article and it truly reflects Swami's way of describing freedom. I could put myself in situations described and fully understand how, in various occasions I "exercised" my freedom to only fall victim to the six vices, and felt disempowered than empowered! I agree, True Freedom is an empowering Context, not a Disempowering context.

Sairam, Kota Siva

Responses to the Sunday Special Article “Preserve the Thought” sent on 31 Dec 2006

Om Shri Sairam!

Kudos to Shri Vijay Prasad for so eloquently expressing Swami's message on "Spirituality". Indeed he is very blessed as a student and fully understanding and conveying the concept to all of us remarkably well. Our greetings to him and all the rest of you, the Blessed souls, for a year of wonderful and significant service to humanity. Our humble pranams to Swami.

Cordially, Shanti Chakravarti

Dear Heart2Heart team,
I cannot even express how much this article moved me! God's "love letter" to man - "preserve the thought"! Sometimes it is easy to forget what it really means to be aware of Swami's Divinity - and ours. This article was a powerful and impeccably crafted reminder. Thank you! What a wonderful way to start my Sunday!
Sai Ram, Ellesha Wanigasekera, Toronto, Canada

Dear Team,
This Sunday Special is very inspiring, as all the others. The more I walk this spiritual path, the more I "feel" that the answer is Love, and Love alone. Love is the only thing that can make things go towards God. Still I don't know exactly what Love is, but is in me, and is emerging...
Have a divine new year!

Laura

Responses to the Special Article “God, The Avathar and the Doubting Thomases” by Prof G Venkataraman

Dear H2H,

Indeed the wait was worth it, every single word, every single fact, clarification, and the spiritual philosophy. One cannot but withhold tears of joy for such an intellectual and scientific reasoning that only a scientist of the calibre of Prof GV could produce.

It is indeed a valuable resource for a lot of overseas devotees, who have to answer to queries put forth not only by Indians, but local friends alike, who have been prey to the misinformation campaign. Till now our faith and confidence in Swami helped us with inspiring answers, but Prof GV's article, all 37 pages and the references give enough strength of proof and conviction to answer all the 'Doubting Thomases'. A true service at the Lotus Feet of our Beloved Sai,

Dr Narayan Ramachandran, Oman

Loving Sai Ram,

I read the article by Professor Venkataraman and found it a brilliant read. His love and emotions for Swami are so wonderfully and powerfully expressed. I suppose all of us feel the same anguish. I had written a mail to Mr. Sanghvi regarding his irresponsible and humiliating comments about Swami in the media. I am attaching a copy of the mail for your kind reference.

Sai Ram, Arnapurna, Research Scholar, Bombay.

Sairam,

The article written yesterday by Dr. G Venkataraman about setting straight the recent critics of Swami and His Mission was profoundly educative. It is very well written and very well thought out and perhaps is the best explanation to the “questions” raised by mindless critics. I’m an ex-student of Swami living in the US for a long time. I’m so glad that Dr. GV has taken the bull by the horns, so to speak and has given a fitting reply to malicious propaganda. I only wish that the Sathya Sai organizations which are the generally the “first-stop” for any one exploring the Sai path, are as clear and educated about these issues! Thank you and I’ll make it a point to make copies of this great write-up and educate anyone who wishes to get more clarification about baseless stories and propaganda. Thanks once again, for your magnificent service through H2H and Radio Sai.

Best Regards

Perry Naik, Marketing Science employee, Atlanta, USA

Dear and Respected Shri Venkataraman,
Sairam. Namaskarams and Greetings from Manila for the New Year and Pongal. I read with keen interest your recent article on “God, the Avatar and

the Doubting Thomas.” It is very inspiring, insightful, and provides a balanced, fact based argument. The personal anecdotes in your life were very touching and brought me to tears when I read them. I hope that this article will be widely published by newspapers and magazines for serving the larger good in this world. As suggested, we will share it with our friends and interested persons.

Warm regards, Seetharam

Dear Venkataraman Sir, Sairam,

First of all the article you wrote 'God, The Avathar and The Doubting Thomas' was fantastic. Sometimes people cross their line of decency and behave in a manner which compels other persons to react sharply and not only me but many of the listeners would agree with what you wrote in the article. My heart felt congratulations for writing such meticulous and scientifically written article. When a person of high calibre and credibility writes an article, I think that would be the best reply we can supply to these so called 'journalists'.

I am a 23 year old young man and have faith in the Lord and this would also be same for millions of Sai youth all around the world. Once Sai has touched your life our faith only gets stronger and 'tested' occasionally. But what was heartening was the manner in which you tackled these issue in one of the most brilliantly written pieces of scientific paper on the miracles and God as such.

I am student of science and my kind request to you would to write such articles connecting science and spirituality. Many of the youth are not lucky to have studied in Swami's institutions to get your guidance. Such articles not only give us an opportunity to appreciate the mysteries of nature and admire His creation but also give us an opportunity to admire the work of great physicists like you and pioneers of a bygone era.

Also congratulations for re-vamping the program schedule. I am in US and the only way I can connect with bhajans and spiritual articles is through Radio Sai. So please keep up the great work you and your team is doing.

Sincerely, Sai Santosh, University of Alabama, Birmingham, USA.

Dear Professor Venkataraman,

First of all, many thanks for the splendid article providing material for us to use, should we be confronted with defamation of Swami. This defamation has been going on for years, and has recently intensified as jealousy and fear of Swami's goodness are aroused by His light.

I have from time to time been in touch with the distinguished CBC reporter Eve Savory who has been covering water issues, and have shared information on Swami's work with her. She always replies most kindly. Apparently, however, the CBC does not find in its coffers enough money to

finance direct objective coverage of Swami's work. I should perhaps needle them about this, or rather encourage them to put their money where goodness and mercy are truly happening every day.

As a trained journalist I am still somewhat addicted to what is called the news. Paradoxically I watch it less and less, and keep turning to Radio Sai for a healthy dose of reality. Thank you all so much. I do not know what I would do without you. Not only do you cheer me up but you also keep me informed about such developments as attacks on Swami in the media, otherwise unknown to me. And so I am not burying my head in the sand even though I keep away from direct exposure to this defamation.
Loving Sai Ram, Helen Heubi

Sairam,
Thank you very much for the article by Prof .Venkatraman. After I read it, I just wanted to stand up and applaud. I hope this would silence all the doubting Thomases. Swami Vivekananda would say, "Barking dogs make no scars on sparkling stars". All the criticism will only help to deepen the faith of the devotees.

Sairam, Latha