

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

November 23, 1990 was a historic day. Not only because it was the 65th anniversary of the Avatar’s advent on earth, but also because of what Bhagavan Baba said on that important occasion. "There are countless people in this country, who cannot afford the huge costs of going abroad, and seeking a heart surgery....Next year, we are going to establish a fully equipped, modern hospital at Puttaparthi, at the cost of hundred crores of rupees, where all cardiac patients will be given treatment, totally free of cost. Besides this, patients and their attendants will be provided facilities for their food and stay, totally free of charge. The first operation will be performed on the 22nd of November, next year."

When Baba made this grand declaration, many hailed it; but an equal majority, especially in the medical fraternity, doubted it. And for this, they had good reasons because there was not even a plan on paper for the hospital as on that day. When the students of Bhagavan’s Institute went to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi for training, the medical professionals there mocked them. "Your Sai Baba has no clue; He has no idea what it takes to build and run a hospital completely free of cost. It will not last," they said. Exactly a year later, the Hospital was indeed inaugurated by the then Prime Minister of India, and today, nearly 18 years later, it has breathed new life not only into hundreds and thousands of patients - rich and poor, theists and atheists alike - but also into the profession of medicine itself! [Read Healing Touch].

This was almost a replay of what had happened ten years prior. On Vijayadasami Day (the last day of Dasara celebrations) in 1980, while inaugurating the Sri Sathya Sai College at Prasanthi Nilayam, Swami emphatically stated: "This [campus] will be transformed as a University next year. We must ensure a stable basis...since Swami’s Will is the almighty Will, the Government of India has agreed to the inauguration of a University by us here. Therefore, this very day, Vijayadasami, the college at Prasanthi Nilayam and the college at Anantapur are raised to the status of the constituents of the University." Many educationists and eminent men including Dr. Bhagavantam, who was a former Scientific Advisor to the Government of India, said, "It is impossible!" On October 8, 1981, the day of Vijayadasami the next year, Swami announced that the Sri Sathya Sai University will be inaugurated on November 22, that year, one day before His fifty-sixth birthday. When the marvelous edifice which sits atop a hill in the divine valley was unfurled, it was truly, as Prof. Kasturi writes, "The dawn of the Sai era of re-education of man for the establishment of peace on earth and goodwill among all peoples."

Even after the University came into being, surprises from Swami, in the field of education, never ceased. While there was something new happening every year, five years later, Bhagavan shocked the then Vice Chancellor, Prof. S. N. Saraf, when He expressed His desire to start a management programme, and also said that he had resolved to begin the course in the following year itself! It happened just as He had willed, and on Aug 21, 1986, after inaugurating the MBA programme, Swami said, "In the Sai Institute, we are attaching special

importance to cultural and ethical values. Among these, the primary place is being given to ‘Indian Ethos and Values’. The course will cover such matters as the Indian Economic Environment, Personnel Management, Organizational Behaviour and Business Communication. Emphasis will be laid on Personnel Management and Human Values, which do not figure very much in the courses of studies in other management Institutes now....”

And that is how the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance (SBMAF), Puttaparthi, right from its inception, has been very different. Apart from the regular subjects dealing with analytical skills, production, finance, marketing, etc., it had special courses on Value-based management, leadership and national perspectives, at a time when no other management institute in the world even thought about these topics. The significance of this becomes apparent only if we closely watch the changing contours of the corporate scene in the last few decades.

Though business originally started as a way of serving society by providing a few goods and services, in the last hundred years or so, with the rise of capitalism, its objective has been dangerously redefined to ensure wealth maximization for shareholders. In fact, in 1970, Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate economist, aggressively propagated the idea that ‘the sole concern of business should be maximization of profit’ and that it cannot accommodate a host of other ‘conflicting interests’.

Even though, most companies today do not concur with this verbally, or in their mission statement and do acknowledge alternate paradigms of business, they do precious little to embrace them wholeheartedly. At best, they engage in a few activities that can be labeled as acts of ‘corporate social responsibility’, ‘sustainable development’, and so on, to appear as ‘responsible companies’ while they pursue their capitalistic goals with undiminished zeal. At worst, they selfishly concern themselves only about their profits, unmindful of the resultant social or environmental damage accruing from their activities. The scene has only become more dismal with the rise of super capitalism in the current times, which is dividing the world into two halves; and increasing the gap between ‘the haves and have-nots’ at an unsympathetic and fast pace. With the capitalistic frenzy taking over the corporate boardrooms, anything other than economic growth of the company is overlooked, and any shortcut to growth, even though questionable, is welcome.

This is precisely the reason why the “Enron Collapse” happened and shook the corporate sphere like the 9/11 in 2001. The next year, it was MCI Worldcom, which filed the largest bankruptcy protection in the US history. In the same year, Adelphia, the fifth largest cable company in the US, became insolvent. And this trend continues even till this day, as much in India as elsewhere. Not a week goes by without the news of one big scam or the other being unearthed. And this happens, in spite of so many checks and balances being introduced into the system by the regulatory authorities. Can these unfortunate situations be prevented by introducing stringent regulations? Can corruption at high places in the corporate world be reduced just by introducing

more rules? Maybe yes, but it will only be a temporary measure before someone finds another loophole to exploit. The problem truly needs deeper introspection, and if one analyses carefully, it winds its way to the corridors of the world’s business schools.

Rakesh Khurana, an associate professor at Harvard, in his new book *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands: The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfulfilled Promise of Management as a Profession*, says, “The university-based business school of today is a troubled institution, one that has become unmoored from its original purpose and whose contemporary state is in many ways antithetical to the goals of professional education itself.” B-schools which started to make management a profession with a commitment to using a body of knowledge for the good of society, have today transformed themselves into a “marketable commodity” with the students often being treated as ‘customers’, he says. This is where the root of all problems of modern business lies.

Bhagavan Baba says, “True business is that which is carried out on the lines of truth and righteousness. Profit earned without these two cardinal principles should be considered as loss, not profit. Giving up life for the sake of truth, love and righteousness is true profit.” To the students of His business school, Swami directs, “This should become the objective of all managers of this institute.” It will be heartening to note that this, in fact, is the life-breath of scores of graduates that leave the portals of SBMAF every year. How do they do it? Can anyone be successful in this highly competitive and ruthless world conforming to one’s sacred values? What are the costs to pay? Are these boys ‘achievers’? Read our cover story, which is in two elaborate parts, to find out.

It will not only enlighten you but also inspire you to shed your inhibitions, believe in your self and go forth for the right courageously. The business of business and the business of life are not different; both have to be played diligently, delicately and with a spirit of dedication to God. Only then can we replace our every moment of pain and pleasure with undisturbed calmness and bliss.

Let us go for the business of bliss! Let us let go the ‘ego’ and let in ‘love’!

Loving Regards,
H2H Team

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The Sole Mission Of Lord Krishna

The Purpose of *Avatar*

When the Divine comes down as *Avatar* (a Divine incarnation) - whether it is as Rama or Krishna, or any other form - it is only for one purpose. You all recognise only the momentary results of the advent. But you should note that the Divine comes as *Avatar* only to teach mankind the truth about love. "Oh man, it is because you lack love and are filled with selfishness that the world is plunging in so much conflict and chaos. It is only when you develop love and the spirit of sacrifice that you will realise the divinity that is in the human." The man who has no spirit of *thyaga* (sacrifice) will be a prey to all ills. A man without love is a living corpse. It is love and sacrifice which make man divine.

Love alone is the fruit of love. Love is its own witness. There is no trace of self-interest in it. Because love exists, for its own sake, it has no fear. It is to teach humanity the way of love that *Avatars* come in the world. The world displays the diversity that has emanated from the One. The Divine demonstrates the unity that subsumes the diversity. Recognition of this "Unity in Diversity" can be learnt only from the Divine.

The Krishna *Avatar* has been described in various ways: as a sport of the Divine in human form, as an ideal for the world, as a sacred ruler, as a manifestation of the *Atma* (spirit). The Divine comes as *Avatar* to proclaim the pure, unsullied and selfless love of devotees towards God. People may consider that the *Avatar's* activities include punishment of the wicked, protection of the good, weeding out of unrighteousness and restoration of right conduct. This is how they may look at the activities of the *Avatar*. But that is not the way the Lord sees things. There is nothing bad in God's view. Hence, there should be no hatred or ill-will towards any being. It is only when you love all, that you can be said to love God.

Think of the Divine at all Times

The devotees' feelings determine his concept of God. When a devotee prays: "Oh Lord! Don't you see my sufferings? Don't you hear my lamentations? Can't you see the troubles I am going through?" The Lord appears to him only as a pair of eyes. He is not able to see the full form of the Lord.

The state of mind of spiritual aspirants today is like this: when they are in meditation they appear like *yogis*. After the meditation is over, they return to their daily activities and are immersed in mundane pleasures. This is not the way of life preached by Lord Krishna. He declared: "*Sathatham Yoginah*" (Be *Yogis* at all times). What we witness today is: "*Yogis* in the morning, *bhogis* (epicureans) during the day and *rogis* (sick) at night." How can such persons

ever remain *yogis* at all times? You have to think of the Divine at all times, in all situations, in whatever you see, do, say or experience. To pray to God when you are comfortable and to blame God when you are in trouble reflects your selfish and narrow outlook...

The Gopikas' Devotion

Lord Krishna once enacted a small drama to demonstrate how the devotion of the illiterate cowherdresses (Gopikas) of Brindavan was deeper and fuller than that of His consorts, Rukmini or Sathyabhama, or the sage Narada. He pretended that he was suffering from a severe headache, and that only the application of the dust from the feet of a devotee would cure Him. Neither Rukmini, Sathyabhama or Narada were willing to offer the dust from their feet, as they felt that they would be condemned to live in hell if they allowed the dust of their feet to pollute the Divine head of Krishna.

When Narada approached the Gopikas, they had no hesitation in collecting the dust of their feet, because their only concern was to relieve their beloved Krishna's pain instantly, without caring about what happened to them as an outcome. Even though they were warned by Narada about the dire consequences of their action, they told him that they were not concerned about the worst that might happen to them, if only their Krishna would be relieved of pain.

The Ways of the Divine

Krishna's pain was gone the moment the Gopikas offered the dust of their feet. Narada realized that the totally unselfish devotion exhibited by the Gopikas was *Parama Bhakti* (the highest form of devotion). The Divine exists in everything, in every being, in every foot, as well as in the dust on the foot. He is also in the one whom you may consider as a thief. The troubles besetting the world today cannot be removed except through the promotion of unity.

This unity can be promoted only through love. There is nothing that cannot be accomplished through love. Love is God. God is Love. Live in Love. Here is an illustration on how love works. For the past fifteen days I could not move about without feeling a "shock." Today, when I came out and saw the happy faces of the devotees I was filled with joy and forgot the state of my body altogether. This is how the Divine works to experience your love and fill you with love in return. There can be no joy where there is no love. The Gopikas were filled with such love that they saw Krishna in all that they did.

Fill Your Hearts with Love

When you fill your hearts with love, you have no ill-will towards anyone. Cultivate the faith that the Divine is in everyone. Surrender to the Divine in a spirit of dedication. The symbolic meaning in the relations between Krishna and the Gopikas is this: The heart is the Brindavan (in each person). One's

thoughts are like the Gopikas. The *Atma* (spirit) is Krishna. Bliss is the sport of Krishna. Everyone must convert his heart into a Brindavan and consider the indwelling *Atma* as Krishna. Every action should be regarded as a *leela* (sport) of Krishna. Krishnastami is celebrated by offering to Krishna *Paramaannam* (rice cooked with jaggery). The real meaning of *Paramaannam* is *Annam* (food) relating to *Param* (Supreme). *Paramaannam* is sweet. Your love must be sweet. What you offer to God must be your sweet love. Your love must be all embracing. This is the foremost message of the *Avatar*.

- *Divine Discourse on Krishnastami Day, August 3, 1988*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI

Satyopanishad - Part 7: Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear reader, in response to positive feedback to this section where we have a dialogue with the Divine, we continue with Prof. Anil Kumar’s “Satyopanishad” after completing the serial Dr. John Hislop’s “Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba” in January 2008.

This also is in the “question-answer” format that many devotees prefer, and has answers from Bhagavan on topics as wide-ranging as the origin of evil, the goals of human life, aspects of God – embodied and formless, to price hikes, women’s liberation, vegetarianism and the generation gap of the present times.

Published in two parts by the author, these volumes have 270 questions in all, which are neatly grouped under separate chapters. In this issue, we continue with chapter two, called Trends in Society.

Chapter 2 - Trends In Society (Continued from the previous issue)

Anil Kumar: Swami! Many speak of culture? What is the value of culture?

Bhagavan: Culture is very important because your life and its value depend on it. Culture is a way of life. It enables you to experience divinity in your life and realise unity in diversity. Without culture, a person becomes a demon. He falls down in stature and ultimately ruins himself/herself.

You know that sea water is saline or salty. Human life is like a vast sea. God's grace is like sunlight that falls on the sea. The seawater, because of the heat of the sun, becomes vaporised. This is the vapour of bliss that settles as clouds in the sky to fall down to the earth as rain. It is the rain of love. The seawater is salty but the rainwater is sweet. Why? Where does the difference lie? Seawater is refined by sunlight. So also, our life must be cultured and refined. The value of life will then rise. A piece of iron worth less than a rupee can be made into a beautiful and expensive watch after it is processed and refined. This is due to the culture it has undergone. So long as a boulder remains itself, it is bound to be neglected. But, once it is in the hands of a sculptor, chiseled and hammered, and shaped into a beautiful Krishna idol; it starts receiving respect and worship. Why? It is only culture that makes all the difference. A boulder, once trodden by everyone underfoot, now in the form of an idol, occupies a place at the altar in a temple and is worshipped everyday. This is the value that culture confers.

Without culture, one develops a foolish view of life finding diversity in unity. For example, take a needle. It stitches pieces of cloth into a garment. The needle stands for culture. But scissors cut the cloth into pieces. This is the condition in the absence of culture.

Anil Kumar: Swami! Have people come closer to God in this modern world?

Bhagavan: The modern world is completely superficial and artificial. Outwardly, all say 'hello', 'hello' to each other. Everyone says 'thanks' for every small thing. This is all mechanical, routine courtesy, and those words don't mean anything. You find utter selfishness everywhere.

Modern science has enabled man to land on the moon. But, man has forgotten to step into his neighbour's house. Yes, he can reach *chandra*, the moon, but can't see Ramachandra (God) in his heart. Modern man can swim in water like a fish, and fly like a bird, but can't walk a mile with his two legs on the ground. With his physical eye, which is not even two inches in size, he is able to see a galaxy several thousand miles away from him, but he is not able to see himself. The eye and the ear are so near but they don't see each other!

Do they? God reclines on the *ksirasagara*, 'ocean of milk' located in your Heart, but today we find that the 'Heart' has become *ksarasagara*, 'ocean of poison'. How do you expect him to realise Divinity?

Even after having become a very rich country, France, lost the Great War. Why? It was because of her reckless youngsters and the vices of the day. This trend is increasing today among people. Man is living and working for the fulfillment of his *asalu*, lowly desires, but he should live for *asayalu*, ideals. People with high ideals alone can come closer to one another spiritually.

Anil Kumar: Swami! How can we come up in life?

Bhagavan: You have to work for it. It may be difficult, but it is desirable to achieve it. In fact, everyone should strive to come up in life, therefore, it is said, 'Aim high. Low aim is a crime'. One has to travel in the right direction and reach the goal. This is the purpose of the birth of every human being. Man has to realize that he is essentially divine. One has to attain Divinity. But this is not as easy and as simple as it seems. After all, a fall is easy and quick too.

Take this example. As you come to Kodai Kanal by bus climbing the hills, the vehicle makes a lot of noise. Lorries also struggle and make loud sounds climbing these hills. But, the very same bus or lorry finds it easy to go downhill. So is the case with human life too! You have to struggle and work hard to come up in life. But to fall from a height and ruin yourself is easy, simple, and quick.

Take another example. When you shoot an arrow, the more you pull it backwards closer to the string, the farther the arrow goes when released. Similarly, if you work more, your success will be equally greater. A rocket, the moment it is launched with force, jerks backwards and thereafter it gets

released into space where it rises with burning flames. So, in life the amount of effort you put in decides your rate of success.

Anil Kumar: Swami! Kindly tell us how to achieve greatness in life?

Bhagavan: Never allow this sort of idea to get into your head. You are mistaken if you think that you have achieved something very special and unique by becoming great. It is not true at all. Becoming great in life should not be your aim. There are several great people in society. I don't think this is important or matters the most. Goodness is superior to greatness. Instead of aiming to be great, try to be good. It is far more important to be a good man than a great man.

What is the difference between the two? A great man sees man in God, while a good man sees God in man. Ravana, as portrayed in the Ramayana, was undoubtedly a great man. He considered Rama, the Lord, a mere man. But, Rama was an ideal good man. He saw divinity in a bird like Jatayu, in squirrels, and even in demons like Vibhishana. Even women like Sabari, illiterate people like Guha as well as saints appeared to Rama like His own reflections. So, Rama was good. You should try to get the reputation that you are a good man and not a great man.

Anil Kumar: Swami! What is an ideal government?

Bhagavan: In an ideal government everyone willingly observes the rules and regulations of the State. Everybody discharges his or her responsibilities. 'Godment' is superior to Government. But, today we see people fighting for their rights, forgetting their duties.

You should not give any scope for laziness. All employees should work most sincerely doing justice to the salaries they receive every month. Otherwise, it will amount to cheating or betraying their fellow beings or the government. People should cultivate *samarasyam*, integration, *samagrata*, coordination, *samaikyata*, unity, and *saubhrdtrata*, fraternity.

Look at this piece of cloth. This is very strong because the threads are closely interwoven. But if you separate the threads, you can cut it with your finger. Everybody should know that strength lies in unity. India could achieve independence but not unity. You are free to walk waving your walking stick, so long as it does not hit the nose of another pedestrian and your freedom does not rob the independence of others.

Fundamentals applicable to all must be followed. The individual is less important than the community or society. It is always better that you manage to employ yourselves in learning those things that are needed for society. Your education should help you to better the community.

Anil Kumar: Swami! This gentleman is a famous journalist. Many say that he reports well for the newspapers.

Bhagavan: Is that so! Good! Who is a journalist? He who writes a general list of matters in papers is a journalist. What is news? All the information from North, East, West and South form news. It is good to know the news that comes from the outside world. What about nuisance that comes from within you? Know that and correct yourself.

Anil Kumar: Swami! What is essential for us now?

Bhagavan: If you have love, it is enough. Everything will be added unto you. Service, sacrifice, humility, devotion, discipline, etc. are contained within love. It is only love that prompts and promotes all virtues. Where there is love, there will be no ego, hatred, jealousy and such other low and mean animal qualities.

There was a lady in Paris. She led her life with the little money she had. One day she saw some helpless footpath dwellers shivering in the cold. She was deeply moved by this sight. Everyday she used to take a few blankets along with her and offer them to those poor, needy and forlorn. This had gone to the notice of the elders and finally the government. They decided to honour her. A few youngsters came to her to congratulate her. She said that she was not happy since she could not help everyone, when the compassionate Almighty God was helping everyone always. She further added that she felt ashamed and frustrated, as her help could not be extended to everyone.

I will tell you another story. There was in an army a soldier who lost both his legs in a war and had to move with the help of crutches. Since his service was relatively short, he was not eligible for all the retirement benefits. The Major of his unit gave him some money and asked him to return. The soldier, on his way back home, had to stop in a village and take shelter in a choultry as it was raining heavily. The money on hand also was exhausted. Next morning, a schoolgirl happened to pass the same street, saw this soldier, and made enquiries. The girl was deeply moved by his plight. Since then, she used to go to school an hour early everyday, collect some fruits on the way, sell them, and purchase a few *chapatis* for the soldier.

After a couple of weeks, the Major happened to pass the same way and noticed the soldier. The major was surprised to see him, for even after a long time he had not yet reached home. He found that it was due to paucity of funds. The Major also learnt how the soldier was managing himself all these days. In the meantime, the girl came and served *chapatis* to the soldier. The Major followed her and went to her house. On seeing him, her parents thought that their daughter must have done something wrong and therefore he had come to make an enquiry. When they were about to punish her, the Major intervened and said to her parents, "You are indeed very lucky! How many of us have such children with magnanimity, love, concern for the needy, and the spirit of service?" He was about to give some gold coins to her parents who said, "Sir! We don't want all this. We can live with our hard earned money. Who can guard these gold coins at home? Please leave us alone, Sir!" The Major felt happy and left for his native place where he found an eligible bridegroom for this girl and performed her marriage. This is the true wealth of love. 'Expansion of love is life. Contraction of love is death'.

CHINNA KATHA

Solving Problems of Life with Ease

Once Wealth and Poverty approached a merchant and introduced themselves as Goddesses. The merchant offered his salutations to both of them and said: "May I know what brings you to my humble tenement?" The Goddess of Wealth said: "We want you to judge and tell us as to who is more beautiful between the two of us?"

The merchant was in a fix. He knew he was between the devil and the deep sea. If he were to declare wealth as more beautiful than poverty, poverty would curse him. If he were to declare poverty as more beautiful than wealth, then wealth would forsake him. But, very soon he regained his composure and said: "I have great respect for you both. Would you please act according to my instructions? Only then I can judge you two properly."

The Goddesses agreed. He then said: "Mother Wealth, would you please go to the entrance (gates) and walk into the house? Mother, Poverty! Would you please walk from here towards the gates? I can then have a good look at you both, from near and far."

The two Goddesses walked as the merchant had wished them to. After seeing them walk, the merchant happily declared: "Mother Wealth! You appear very beautiful when you enter the house. Mother Poverty! You look very beautiful when you leave the house!"

The merchant had very beautifully circumvented the predicament that had befallen him and in doing so had also not hurt the goddesses' sentiments. The Goddesses immensely appreciated the wit and wisdom of the merchant. So, while the Goddess of Wealth happily stayed in his house, the Goddess of Poverty cheerfully walked away.

When a serious problem confronts us, if we look within and think calmly, a ray of hope and light will beam forth and show us the way.

- Baba

COVER STORY

BEACONS TO BOLSTER THE SOUL OF BUSINESS – PART 1

...Watching the Corporate Universe through the eyes of the alumni of the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance, Prasanthi Nilayam,

On the 21st of this month, the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance (SBMAF), located in Puttaparthi, celebrates its 22nd anniversary. Since its inception in 1986, without much fanfare, this business school has been different, in fact, a trail blazer, in ways more than one. Under the divine guidance of Bhagavan Baba, who is the founder and the soul of the Sri Sathya Sai University, this school of business has not only convincing answers to the problems afflicting the corporate hemisphere today, but also has resurrected the soul of business which is so essential for the welfare of society, and the nations of the world today. The alumni of this unique seat of learning are the medium through which Bhagavan Baba is reawakening the true spirit of commerce, as well as the right responsibility of B-schools the world over.

Three years ago in this same month, we brought the story of the genesis and growth of SBMAF. In the August 2007 issue of H2H, we had stories from leading corporate executives spanning all corners of the globe who have transformed themselves into enlightened leaders by making spirituality their way of life, in business and otherwise. And now, we present you something even more inspiring. It is the story of how alumni of SBMAF have metamorphosed from being excellent managers to ‘man-managers’ and finally enlightened leaders - just what the world needs today to bring more sensitivity, equality and harmony in the present society. This cover story, which is in two parts, we are sure will fill you with much hope and inspiration to always ‘Follow the truth and practice right conduct’ come what may! Happy reading!

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SIXTH ‘M’ OF MODERN BUSINESS

All’s fair in love and war, it is said. If we were to extrapolate this proverb to the world of modern business, it would imply “All’s perfect if we are making profits”. After all, wealth creation for promoters, employees and shareholders is the sole reason why a company exists, operates and competes aggressively in the business world.

To put it simply, business is a function of 4 Ms to create the fifth M - the conglomeration of men and material, methods and machines to generate – Money. Period. This is what most capitalists, be it a small entrepreneur selling her/his wares in a tiny town, or the CEO of a multinational company will vouch for.

Boom to Bust - What Drives Big Businesses to Sudden Bankruptcy?

But then, why did Enron, which was one of the world's leading electricity, natural gas, pulp and paper and communications companies and named as "America's Most Innovative Company" for six consecutive years by the Fortune magazine, go bust in late 2001? Why did MCI WorldCom, which was born out of a US \$ 37 billion merger of WorldCom and MCI Communications, and dominated the American Telephone Industry in the 1990s, file the largest bankruptcy protection in the history of United States in 2002? It was action replay with Adelphia, the fifth largest cable company in the United States, which suddenly went insolvent in 2002.

All these companies had the 4Ms in plenty and did pretty well to have a swell fifth M for a short while too. Enron had a workforce of 22,000 employees and claimed US \$ 111 billion revenues in 2000; Worldcom's assets were to the tune of US \$ 103 billion; Adelphia had 110,000 customers in 27 states. Why and how then did things go so extremely astray despite the expertise, resources and robust plans?

Ethical Integrity Takes Back Seat to Bottom Lines

"The fact of the matter is that today, stuff-selling mega-corporations have a huge influence on our daily lives. And because of the competitive nature of our global economy, these corporations are generally only concerned with one thing... the bottom line. That is, maximizing profit, regardless of the social or environmental costs," says Mr. David Suzuki, a well known Canadian environmental activist. It is said, "To give real service you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity."

Enron, Worldcom Debacles Generate Headline News, Intellectual Debate

In all the boom-to-bust stories cited above, there was one other crucial 'M' – which was either overlooked completely or was given only lip service, and that was Morality. Huge, systematic and mischievously creative accounting frauds led to the collapse of these corporate behemoths. Whenever such man-made earthquakes shook the corporate sphere, it generated a lot of discussion and debate on topics like 'ethics', 'values', 'social responsibility' and the like, which were otherwise lowest in the list of priorities for companies, which were busy with shareholder wealth maximization, almost to the exclusion of everything else.

Corporatisation of Business Education

Though in modern times, there is much more awareness and appreciation of the importance of these ideas, there has hardly been any paradigm shift in trying to reorient the goals and focus of the business organisation towards this direction. What makes matters worse is the 'corporatisation' of business education, which panders to the demands of the business world often blindly. As Rakesh Khurana, Associate Professor of Organization Behaviour at

Harvard Business School, puts it in his latest book – *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands: The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfulfilled Promise of Management as a Profession*: “Contemporary business schools increasingly see themselves as business organisations and not educational institutions. Over the past decade, the apparent dominance of market logic in how business educators think about their enterprise has become evident in their discourse. Business schools make a ‘value proposition’ to students, who are now commonly described as ‘customers.’”

Marketing Business Education Endangers Social Health

Business education today has become a marketable commodity rather than a professional education. Some social scientists view this situation as perilous to the future of humanity, as it poses long term health hazards to modern society, many of them of a terminal nature. In such a scenario, for many budding managers, pay packages and perks become far more important than ethics, economic value takes precedence over eternal values, and money takes the centre stage, often at the cost of morality. One visionary who redefined the role, goal and responsibilities of managers and clinically disengaged corporate success from the no-bars-hold ideology of profit-making at any cost, not surprisingly is the Universal Teacher and the most committed champion of Character Education, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Divine Manager Stems the Rot

As a part of His efforts towards a spiritual awakening of human consciousness, He foresaw the need to stem this rot, and set for the world a new, wholesome and ideal dimension in business education. Towards this end, Bhagavan Baba set up the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance (SBMAF) in 1986, five years after the establishment of the unique Sri Sathya Sai University in Puttaparthi. If the proof of the pudding is in its taste, then the performance, drive, success and lofty standards set by the graduates of the Sai MBA programs speaks amply for the viability of the glorious vision for modern business that Bhagavan Baba has elucidated for mankind.

Alumni Bloom Wherever Planted

In 2006, Bhagavan Baba’s Business School celebrated its 20th anniversary. On this momentous occasion, the Dean of the SBMAF received the following letter from Mr. T. R. Ramachandran, who is currently Business Manager – Retail Banking, Citibank:

“I thought it would be appropriate to let you know of the progress of one of your alumnus Mr. C.D.K. Sai Narain in Citibank.

“After a very successful stint in Citibank India, Sai has now been transferred to work in Citibank Taiwan as the Marketing Director – Credit Cards. Sai has been working with me for over five years. During this period, I have been impressed with him as a professional and also as a person. In his professional

capacity, Sai has demonstrated exemplary work principles, a strong focus on doing the right thing and doing things right, and devotion to duty. I do believe the grounding he received on ethics and principles have helped shape him as a professional. As a person, Sai is universally liked by superiors, peers and subordinates alike. With respect for the individual, strong family ties, and a desire to improve the community around him, Sai is a role model in this area as well.

“From what Sai has told me about your institute, it is evident that his formative years there have helped significantly in shaping his personality. Our thanks to you and the faculty who help turn out students like these.”

Conviction of Character, Baba’s Gift to His Students

Ask Sai Narain about his success mantra, and he says, “You need to be absolutely selfless and not worry about what you gain or lose, because in the short term it could hurt you.... In a 15 year corporate career, I have had my ups and downs, but I have tried my best to stick to the direction from Baba: ‘Care more about your remarks than your marks’. Today, when I analyse and introspect, I don’t find anyone having raced ahead of me by compromising on their values. In fact, I have more than a handful of names who have had their reputation tarnished and lost out badly for deciding on the wrong side of ethical dilemmas and taking a shortcut to reach their seniority...

“You need to have character to tread this path...Now, such character cannot be easily nurtured within the organisation. It cannot be taught in B-Schools either. This is something that has to be bestowed on you. **And that is what Sri Sathya Sai University and Bhagavan Baba have done to us, Sai students. And this conviction of character in us is so strong that no force at anytime can tempt us to take any path other than the right path.**”

Currently, Mr. C. D. K. Sai Narain serves as Head - Consumer Transaction Banking & Strategic Initiatives, Standard Chartered Bank, India.

Taking a Moral Stand Proves a Worthwhile Risk

Probe any alumnus of SBMAF a little and he will come out with a story of how he chose to swim against the tide to stand for his principles, and more importantly, did it with confidence and élan. Citing one instance, Mr. Jitendra Panjabi, currently working as Macro Analyst with the Capital Group in Singapore, says,

“I was once in a meeting with a few very senior industry members to talk about a specific issue leading to an extremely important deal, and one that was being vied by the best in the industry. The decision of this group of three members was meant to have very significant ramifications on how the deal would move ahead and on my future. At one point in the conversation, one of the senior persons on this panel started asking me questions to elicit information on the inside state of affairs on a specific issue that was very confidential. I clearly refused to talk anything about that particular area. The panel member then tried circuitous means to get the information out of me through clever questions, but I was adamant. Finally, the senior member tried

to threaten me. I was told that it would amount to a significant loss in my career if I did not open up.

“Nevertheless, I politely continued to be firm on my stand; not budging even an inch, irrespective of anything on offer in return. I remember, the meeting that day, ended pretty abruptly, with some of the panel members expressing anger at my ‘stubbornness’. However, a few weeks later, I was informed that the panel had selected me for the mandate, as the chairman of the panel felt that I was the right person to ethically manage their interests. My strong stance had, in fact, impressed them greatly.”

Ethical Managers Swim Against the Tide

Ethical challenges like this in the corporate careers of SBMAF alumni have been numerous. “There was another situation at work where a senior colleague asked a group of us to produce backdated reports and file them to maintain the files in order,” recalls Mr. Jitendra Panjabi. “Most of my other colleagues complied with this, while I refused to follow it. My stand was that backdating reports by people who had not made the recommendations was not a righteous action. I personally felt we have to be honest about our actions, and accept that the processes need to change. This, however, did not go down well with the person concerned. My colleagues, who complied with the orders, were benefited with opportunities, while I was singled out with negative repercussions in the near term.

Dare to be Right: No Pain, No Gain, nor Growth

“The pain I went through for taking this stand troubled me for many months, till, one day it reached the ears of the CEO. The big boss immediately came down on the issue, and asked me to bypass formal channels and report to him directly on such matters from thereon. A few years later, when the same CEO was looking for a senior person to take charge of the leadership on a couple of new and important initiatives, he chose me, bypassing all the other senior persons in the organisation. The top management wanted someone who could stand up for righteousness against power. My steadfastness to principles was rewarded handsomely, even though it took a while.”

Now, it is no wonder that two years ago the employers of Mr. Jitendra Panjabi sent an appreciation letter to Sri Sathya Sai University thanking the college for producing such a gem of a personality. Signed by Mr. Sunny Oberoi, Managing Director of Capital International, Singapore, the letter addressed to the Principal of the College, said:

“I have observed Jitendra Panjabi (Jeetu) and worked closely with him over the years, and feel the Capital Group of companies (one of the largest investment management organizations with assets under management at US\$ 1.1 trillion) has been extremely fortunate to have him as part of the team.

“Jeetu has been a sincere hard worker with very strong capabilities. He has performed very well in the different roles he has worked in over the years, and has adapted well to changing situations. His ability to think laterally and add value through his unique perspective has been an excellent analytical asset for the company. Jeetu has always been intense in his work and has considered 'work his worship'. He has also exuded strong team building and leadership skills from his early days with us, which has been a big help in cementing the cultural aspects of our organization, first in India and now in Singapore.

“The non-business areas where Jeetu would stand out relative to students from other institutions are: (1) strong character and integrity, (2) trust and dependability and (3) high emotional quotient and the ability to calmly deal with tough situations. These coupled with his spiritual aspects of looking at issues have made him a unique member of the team.

“I might add that he is the only member of our joint venture company in India whom we asked to join our business in Singapore. This speaks very well for his business capabilities as well as interpersonal skills.

“Jeetu has clearly been a solid asset to Capital, and **from what I have heard from him over the years he attributes all his success to Baba, who is the force from whom he derives his strength. I believe your Institute has been playing a unique role in creating good citizens for society, and wish it the very best for its continuing success.**”

Making a Difference by Taking the Path not Taken

The students of SBMAF have stood apart from the crowd and have made the top management of companies they work for, sit up and take notice because of their out of the ordinary and impressive character. And in the process, they have also added a fresh and noble dimension to the whole business of being in business. However, achieving this has not been easy. It is easy to walk on the beaten track than through the woods, but then you will not get a new and clean way unless someone has the guts to go against the grain. Recalling his early days in the corporate jungle, Mr. Katta Bhaskar, an alumnus now working as Operations and Technology Director, Russia and CIS Cluster, Citibank, says,

Universal Values Hard to Ignore, Even by Die-Hard Cynics

“Four of us, alumni from SBMAF, joined a multinational company immediately after our degree. During those initial days, our softness and empathy awarded us sympathized looks and mocking smiles. In deep contrast, the aggression of my colleagues was admired and rewarded. The long run, however, had a different story to tell. People realised the power of our simplicity and the strength of compassion. Superiors and peers were touched by our concern

and we turned out to be glowing examples worthy of emulation. It was then I realised that our MBA provided the impetus for this human face of management. Humility, which once seemed to be a sign of weakness, emerged to be the hallmark of greatness.”

Citing his own experience in the corporate world where the only language often understood is that of the mammon and men can get ruthless and ridiculous in this pursuit, Mr. P. V. Krishna Mohan, an alumnus serving as Head – Spare Parts, Telco Construction Equipment Company in Jamshedpur, India, says,

“Never in my last 13 years of service, I compared my salary with others or jumped jobs for bigger pay packets. I stuck to the same company enjoying my work and practicing the values we learnt from Baba.

“In February 2005, when I was posted in Bangalore, I had tendered my resignation not to budge on a particular moral issue. I was unwilling to compromise on my principles; my self esteem was at stake. On receiving the papers, the Managing Director of the organization sent for me and gave me a patient hearing. He realised the folly of the company, and assured me such events would not repeat. A few months later, in December 2005, when a prestigious project was to be executed, I was picked to head the project overlooking other senior personnel; it was a reward for my sincere and forthright approach in carrying out my duties.”

Value Driven Approach Redefines Evaluation Parametres

Explaining more about this new project and its share of novel challenges which he could overcome because of his values-driven approach to business, Mr. Krishna Mohan says, “This project entailed an end-to-end solution encompassing the entire supply chain spanning the suppliers, partners and the dealer fraternity. The key to the success of this project was a software deployment at the dealers’ end and providing a logistics partner as a link between suppliers and dealers. It was to be completed in one year.

“One of the first challenges in this job was to select a suitable logistics partner. Major players in this area of business had sent in their quotations, and we were evaluating all these requests on a point scale on various Techno, Commercial and Operations related parameters. The top companies were more or less in the same score bracket which made our job even more difficult. I had two days left to present our recommendation in the next steering committee meeting. Unable to come to a clear conclusion, I tried a new approach. **Taking inspiration from what I had learnt at SBMAF, I used Values as the differentiating factor to decide. Apart from Techno, Commercial and Operations related parameters, we used Organisational Culture as the third dimension under which Level of Integrity,**

Professionalism and Organisational Value Systems were rated for each of the clients. Surprisingly, a new entrant in this line of business scored the highest. Nevertheless, we presented our findings to the steering committee headed by our Managing Director. Most of the members of the committee appreciated our method of evaluation, but a few raised doubts on our choice of a new and inexperienced partner. Confident and convinced about our decision, we went ahead with the new organization, and the subsequent weeks only proved that we were correct in our assessment.”

Setting the Fundamentals Right

The very first course in the management programme offered at SBMAF, Puttaparthi, is not “Management Principles” like any conventional management school, instead, it is “Value-Based Management”. And this remains as the undercurrent in all the other subjects dealt inside the classroom and outside. It is no wonder therefore that when a product of this Institute steps into the corporate world, he is as passionate about values and ethics as he is about performance and progress. Mr. Manoj Gautam, an alumnus serving as Financial Advisor in Sinhasi Consultants, Bangalore, says,

Yearn, not Earn, Command, not Demand: the Challenge of Being Different

“At SBMAF, we learnt not to earn but to yearn, to command and not demand; to be complete and not try to compete. We have been taught to emphasise and empathise; to look at every event and incident in life with the prism of humanness. Elsewhere, students are tutored to be impersonal in the name of professionalism, but we give a personal touch to everything we do, and that is what makes us different from the rest.”

Is it difficult to be different? Manoj explains, “Surely, it is easier said than done. You have to struggle when you stand for a principle. People appreciate what you do, but don’t dare to support you when their personal interests are jeopardized. In one of my earlier offices, I was heading the account section of a particular state office of a private company. Many malpractices were prevalent there. With strong measures, I could stop and change a few practices at levels below me in organizational hierarchy. But there were others happening with the connivances of the higher authorities. I put forth these issues to my higher ups and requested them to change their ways for the good of the client and the company. But my concerns fell on deaf ears. I was told ‘it should be done this way as it has been done that way since long’. Now, I had no choice; I wanted to follow what I was taught – ‘If you cannot influence your company to turn into good, run away from that bad company’. When you do not have enough strength to change others, you should have the strength to change yourself and take corrective course of action. Therefore, I quit the job without a second thought. It was a difficult decision, and I was persuaded by many not to take this seemingly ‘hasty’ step, including the ones who were instrumental in helping me find a placement in that company. But this decision

strengthened my self-confidence and determination to follow my conscience. No management institute teaches these values and instills the same in you, but for SBMAF. This, I believe, is the stark difference that sets the Sai Business School apart from the herd.”

Though small in physical frame, Manoj is big in the eyes of his colleagues and employers today because of his uncompromising adherence to principles. Ask him from where does he derive such confidence and passion to follow the voice of his soul, and he says,

“All said and done, our greatest strength is Bhagavan. In any difficult situation, we, the alumni of SBMAF, turn to Him for solace. He has trained and prepared us for the world as professionals through His management school, set to bring about a change. We begin with changing our own selves, and from there move onto transforming our surroundings, and finally, the world. My alma mater has given me the strength of knowledge and character, which enables me to march ahead in life with confidence and conviction that we are here, for a greater purpose.”

Reiterating the sentiment, Bipin Poddar, currently working as a Manager, Treasury Support at a reputed Telecommunication group in Toronto, Canada, explains, “My most cherished take-away from the experience was the divine discourses of Bhagavan that showed me the higher things in life... At His University, Bhagavan is the central focus of all students and teachers. Because everyone focused on Divinity and shared a similar thought process, the intensity of the teachers and students was magical and could be used to achieve anything...The ambience lends itself to the requisite discipline and determination needed...Being value driven is not enough. A strong value set accompanied by discipline and determination alone will bestow success. Without determination, one will be easily swayed by others who encourage you to give up your values and follow conventional methods... I find I am less politically motivated and I consider this as my strength. The objective of the Institute is to develop Love for God and fear of sin. I think we are marching towards this goal.”

Manager Divine Redefines Corporate Success

When Bhagavan Baba inaugurated the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1981, speaking to the students on that landmark occasion, He had stated:

“This College has not been established just to prepare you for earning degrees. The main purpose is to help you to cultivate Self-knowledge and Self-confidence, so that each one of you can learn Self-sacrifice and earn Self-realization. The teaching of the University Curricula, the preparation for presenting you for the University examinations, and the award of University degrees are only the means employed for the end, namely, Spiritual uplift, Self-discovery and Social service through Love and Detachment. Our hope is that by your lives, you will be shining examples of Spiritual Awareness and its beneficial consequences to the individual and society.”

Today, when one looks at the lives of Jitendra Panjabi, Krishna Mohan, Manoj Gautam, and the like, one finds a fulfillment, to whatever extent it may be, of the University's grand vision. It offers hope of a new world of business where integrity is as important as analytical ability, men and methods are governed by ethics and morality, and the sole objective of business is not to sell to the society whatever it produces to further its selfish interests, but to serve society with whatever it needs, and in a manner that is economically sound, ecologically harmonious, environmentally friendly and humanely driven, for the business of business is not divorced from the business of life.

When the Divine Manager designs the syllabus, selects the teachers, defines the values and exemplifies them in His actions, choices, words and the silence between them, the inevitable net result is the trail blazing School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance, Puttaparthi.

COVER STORY

BEACONS TO BOLSTER THE SOUL OF BUSINESS - PART 2

...Watching the Corporate Universe through the eyes of the alumni of the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance, Prashanthi Nilayam,

REDISCOVERING THE MODERN MANAGER

Take a look at any successful business organisation in this world that has stood the test of time and become a part of the lives of generations such as the Tata group in India, Tom’s of Maine in the US, and then ask the question “How did this company become so great?”

Inner Inspiration Drives Higher Purpose

Start analyzing its incredible growth story and you will find that it is either a great idea executed to perfection, as was the case with JRD’s Tata empire; or amazing teamwork, carving a specific niche in the market like the Indian IT giant Infosys; or a sound business plan with a strong value system such as Volvo of Sweden or The Body Shop of the UK or Lijjat Papad, a women’s cooperative in India; or an effective and creative deployment of huge resources to beat the competition or another such incredible initiative. But many management gurus will tell you that this is not the real reason for their incredible success. What actually propelled these organisations to the big league was a clear and profound vision, and behind this was a personality or a group of individuals who pursued this vision with a passion so compelling that it made everyone around look at them with awe, and filled them with inspiration to join the endeavour and give it their best.

Organisations Defined by the Character of their Decision Makers

More than great technology, copious capital and impressive opportunity, it was the person(s) behind, who deployed these resources effectively, that made these companies legendary. The argument may appear obvious to many, yet, most of the business schools, consciously or unconsciously, overlook its relevance while designing and delivering their programs.

Across the board, the world over, top Business Schools concentrate on training their management graduates on all facets of modern business starting from Analytical Tools and Techniques to Total Quality Management to Business Strategy, Mergers and Acquisitions, but sidestep that crucial aspect which transforms a person into a visionary. Even more significant is the journey that guides and trains, instructs and impresses upon an individual the need to first become a complete and whole person – holistic in outlook, genuine in personality and a master of oneself - before venturing to lead others as a manager. This, truly, is at the crux of the ideal and wholesome management style, when viewed from the Sai lens.

Business institutions that create such integrated personalities, who can infuse a new approach and vigour into the way modern business is done, are a rarity. What the B-schools churn out in the present times are experts, intelligent men, professionals, great managers of money, machines and materials, but not necessarily, good managers of men and women, who value the individual; let alone visionary leaders.

Avatar Spearheads Spiritualisation of Management Philosophy

It is for this reason that right from its inception in 1986, the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance (SBMAF) in Puttaparthi, has courses like Leadership, National Perspectives and Rural Development, Self Awareness and Personality Development and Values-based Management under the clear direction of the University’s Founder, Bhagavan Baba.

When the Business school was set-up, few could have envisaged the tremendous impact Sai Business graduates would wield upon the global corporate culture within a couple of decades. Today, the results of this novel perspective are there for all to see.

Sai Managers Exude the Light of Chancellor’s Wisdom, Purity

Talking about Tumuluru Kumar, an alumnus of SBMAF, Mr. Bruce Scott, Director, Partnership and Communications, of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) located principally in Ethiopia, says,

“Tumuluru Kumar is a professional with high standards and a person of integrity. He has a work ethic based on principles and values. In addition, Tumuluru Kumar has a very nice personality and is able to blend easily with staff from a range of cultural backgrounds. He is pleasant and liked, and is admired by peers and staff.”

And then, Mr. Scott makes a very significant statement. He says, “If I could clone and hire ten Tumuluru Kumars, then all of my management issues would be solved.” He further adds, “Tumuluru Kumar has worked for ILRI since 2000. He started working on specific projects such as the introduction of new finance software to a line position responsible for Budget and Operations. He is intelligent and very hard working. Additionally, he is determined and output oriented; he strives for perfection. He always came to senior management with solutions not with the problems. If he did not know an answer, he knew how to get information to solve the issue....I developed high regard and respect for Tumuluru Kumar during the period that we worked together. He made a great contribution to ILRI.”

Bhagavan Baba Extols Man Management

When Bhagavan Baba inaugurated the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance (SBMAF) in the Sri Sathya Sai University in 1986, it was meant to be a path-breaker and worthy role model for others to emulate, to awaken all the business management institutes and, in fact, the entire world of business into a novel and noble dimension of commerce. In

His historic discourse during the opening ceremonies on August 21, 1986, Bhagavan was very candid when He said, “All over the world there are numerous Institutes of Management. They confer the Masters degree in Business Administration. In our Institute, we are attaching special importance to cultural and ethical values... We should turn out Masters in Man Management. Our students should develop a broader outlook and prepare themselves to serve the society with sincerity and dedication. They must set an example in morality, bringing credit to the country by their work and by their contribution to the development of the nation.”

Right Attitude, Unblemished Character Confer True Management Qualifications

Tumuluru Kumar is just one example of the quality of managers, nay leaders, that this hallowed University nestled in the tiny hamlet of Prasanthi Nilayam – surrounded by under-developed India and about 160 kilometres from the country’s software capital, Bangalore – offers to the world in scores every year.

If we study the mission of this management programme, it says,

"We endeavour to develop dedicated, dynamic, professionally sound and socially responsible managers/leaders of wholesome and balanced personality, who are academically equipped as well as spiritually aware and embody noble values, and above all, possess a right and positive attitude with an unblemished character."

The most pertinent and profound phrase in this lofty mission statement actually comes right at the very end - “right and positive attitude with an unblemished character.” Well, how important is this in today’s competitive and fast-paced business environment? Is ‘attitude’ or ‘character’ more important than intelligence and analytical ability or achieving targets and creating shareholder wealth? Can it really serve as a competitive edge in the career, personality and growth of a prospective manager?

Sai Business School Enjoys Edge Due to Holistic Vision

Mr. Amar Singh, an alumnus of SBMAF, currently works as Senior Manager, US Strategy, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. in the USA, and has had the opportunity to watch the changing contours of the corporate landscape, having been in the consulting business for nearly 15 years. He says, “With the proliferation of specialized educational inputs in various fields worldwide, intelligence is increasingly losing its sheen as a slick differentiator in the marketplace...in tomorrow’s workplace, intelligent people with the ‘right’ attitude will become increasingly sought after instead!”

And it is here, Amar believes, that SBMAF has a huge edge and also a big role to play. Why does he think so? “A healthy attitude is based firmly on an individual’s emotional maturity and to acquire an emotionally mature mind, spiritual growth is essential,” he explains, and adds, “But very few educational

institutions in the ‘so-called secular world of today venture to mix values, spirituality or ethics in their courses, in the fear of being politically incorrect, or in some countries, being subject to libel.”

Values Blend Seamlessly in Sai School Culture

Contrasting this to what is offered in the management school at Puttaparthi, Amar continues, “Business schools across the world are scurrying to teach courses in ‘ethics’, ‘leadership’, and ‘corporate governance’, but I am not aware of many doing what is done so seamlessly at Puttaparthi – blending spiritual thinking into the mental and emotional make-up of students.”

And how this happens, is an interesting story by itself and we have dealt this in some detail in an earlier cover story on SBMAF. In the present article, however, we would like to present to you the new and humane dimension of business. You will learn about this not by way of a thought provoking essay, but through the actual experiences of the alumni of the School of Business Management, Puttaparthi.

Always Speaking Obligingly Wins Respect

Here is the first instance to start with. Mr. Bala Ramchandran, an alumnus of SBMAF currently serving as Manager, Learning & Development, South India, in HDFC Bank, Chennai, taking a page out of his corporate diary, has this to say about his attitude and its subtle impact in the performance of his daily duties:

“During the recent annual appraisal (2007-2008), one day, my boss called me to his chamber and confided this to me: ‘Whenever I suggest something, even when your opinion on that is different from mine, you listen and initially seem to accept. And then, at a later date, you come out with your point of view. And in almost all cases, I seem to finally go by your suggestion. Can you tell me how you do that?’

“I then explained to him that this was one of the many values I learnt from my stay at Puttaparthi. Sri Sathya Sai Baba always taught us that ‘You may not always oblige, but can speak obligingly’. Additionally, He advised us to be calm under any situation, and first obey before complaining to our seniors. After mentioning this, to illustrate my point better, I went on to relate the story from the epic Mahabharata which Baba often narrates in this context. The Mahabharata, by the way, is as important to businessmen as to religious seekers, because in it is contained profound lessons about holistic life and living. In any case, this is what I narrated to my boss.

“On one occasion, Balarama, the brother of Krishna, is furious with Arjuna and decides to kill him. And on this mission, he asks Krishna to accompany him. Even though Krishna is very close to Arjuna, at that juncture he calmly agrees to Balarama's proposal and accompanies him. After they have gone halfway, sensing that Balarama's fury has subsided noticeably, Krishna, slowly tells Balarama, ‘Brother, you are right. Arjuna clearly deserves to be punished.

However, there is a technical constraint here.’ Balarama, who is now more receptive than before, is inquisitive and wants to know the reason. Then Krishna continues, ‘No doubt, Arjuna should be punished. But, since he has married our sister Subhadra, if we take away his life, she would become a widow.’ “Balarama now realises his folly, and then turns to Krishna and says, ‘I never thought of this. Turn the chariot, let’s go back’.

“This is a classic example of good emotional quotient – to maintain composure at all times and understand the emotions of the other person and react most appropriately at the right time, just like Krishna did. My boss was so impressed with this that he asked me to share this anecdote with all my colleagues in the Training Department. As expected, it stuck a deep chord with them too, as they understood the significant import conveyed by the incident.

“I would say this is the value addition, in the form of real life lessons that we, the extremely fortunate students of the Sri Sathya Sai University, receive when compared to students outside. It gives us the strength and the intelligence to handle any situation calmly and intelligently.”

Master the Mind and Become A Mastermind: Baba

Thanks to the value-oriented curriculum and the constant emphasis by Bhagavan Baba on the need by students to master the mind, in order to become a ‘mastermind’, which, He says, is the key to becoming a successful manager, the products of SBMAF are not only equipped with an impressive emotional quotient, but something even higher, and that is SQ or the Spiritual Quotient. This is perhaps unheard of and rarely talked about by conventional management experts, but that in no way lessens its importance. In fact, this has become one of the important new age concepts which is much-discussed by enlightened corporate gurus of the current times as a solution to the corporate conundrums of the 21st century and beyond.

Recognizing the Strength of Managers’ Spiritual Quotient

Dinah Zohar and Ian Marshall in the book *Reconnecting with our Spiritual Intelligence* say, “By Spiritual Quotient we mean problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our lives in a much wider, richer, meaning-giving context, the intelligence with which we can assess that one course of action or one life-path is more meaningful than another. It is the necessary foundation for the effective functioning of IQ and EQ. It is our ultimate intelligence.”

Sharing his real-life corporate experience of this profound concept on which volumes, in dozens, have been written in the recent past, Mr. Vivekananda Sahoo, an alumnus currently working as Business Analyst in Compassites Software Solutions Pvt. Ltd. says,

“Our Spiritual Quotient, in many ways, is shaping up to be more important than even our Intelligence Quotient. This parameter provides an accurate

reliable predictor of how well we’ll do not just in school or on our job, but in life as a whole, which ultimately is what matters the most. And interestingly, SQ is nothing but the three ‘P’s that Baba often talks about - Purity, Patience and Perseverance - there should be purity of thought, word and deed. Practising patience when dealing with others is love, patience with oneself is hope, and patience with God is faith. In these three words, Baba has summed up the entire meaning and quest for business and life as a whole.”

It ultimately boils down to ‘right attitude’ not only rationally and emotionally, but also spiritually. That, in essence, is Spiritual Quotient. An organisation can live up to its grand vision only if it has right people – people who are not only intelligent, but also emotionally mature and spiritually aware. This is precisely the reason why Bhagavan Baba has always emphasised on ‘Man Management’ in His address to the Sai management students.

Chancellor - Epitome of Spiritual Man Management

As someone who strives to put His Chancellor’s vision into practice at his workplace, an alumnus Mr. Arjun Banerjee, currently the Chief Financial Officer of CSIE, Washington DC, says, “Man Management is about ‘touching-lives’, just like Bhagavan Baba does. It is about effective communication, just like He has displayed to us many a times. It is about loving and doing things without any expectation whatsoever.”

Another alumnus Mr. D. Anand Bhaskar Raju, currently serving as Senior Consultant in Capgemini, Bangalore, who has reaped the benefits of effective Man Management in his corporate sphere, says,

“A couple of years ago, I was working with a large chain of retail stores which had employees in hundreds. The effects of declining business growth, in the post 9/11 phase, created ripples that lasted long after the event itself. We faced constant pressure not only to increase the top-line, but also to reduce operational costs, often, read this as retrenchment and rationalisation of stores. There were two approaches open to us as management. Indiscriminate dismissal of all the employees accompanied by the closure of stores, or selective rehiring of potentially good employees even though it meant increased overheads to the remaining stores. Obviously, it would appear that firing lock, stock and barrel would be the economically sensible option.

Doing it Right - A Long Term Investment

“There were lengthy discussions, as the management team debated the feasibility of adding costs in an uncertain environment. After many sessions of convincing, we could develop consensus that the latter approach deserved a chance. There were several merits to this approach as we learnt subsequently, through our experience.

First, the action reaffirmed to the employees that management has faith in quality and that good behaviour will be rewarded. The attitude of the

employees in the remaining stores turned positive, leading to improvement in customer service. Second, employees with good potential eventually replaced the recruitment errors, stemming the decline in business. The stores were strengthened as a result. Third, the employees retained, despite the closure of stores, transformed themselves from semi-interested participants in the business process into loyal stakeholders of the business. They transformed themselves into self-motivated drivers for future business growth. Fourth, the action was perceived as a strong positive reinforcement and reward mechanism for positive attitude and commitment to business.

The experience was only made possible due to the top management's receptiveness to the Sai School of integrated business thought and the perseverance of the entire team to the core values that define our holistic approach to management and work. The process of managing a business is always beyond meeting goals and growing sales; the essence of management lies in unifying the efforts while effectively addressing the concerns of the stakeholders of the business in achieving these goals. The truly successful organisation deals with them as vital resources that define its soul, giving it a lifecycle that can span many generations."

Transforming Convictions into Conduct

"We, the alumni of Sri Sathya Sai University, are moulded with this attitude as the very foundation of our learning. It is our duty to work tirelessly in achieving our respective corporate objectives through the practice of management by values. There is no doubt, far more joy in adding value to life, than in signing the next million in sales. The challenge for us lies in being able to achieve financial success through the process of value addition both to life and work."

"Over a decade ago, I walked the blessed sands of our school aiming for a few lessons in management. I walked out of the hallowed portals with invaluable lessons about life. The finest tribute to our school is in transforming our convictions into conduct."

If every manager recognises and operates on the conviction that the other person, be it his peer, boss or the subordinate, is first a human being who needs love, respect and attention like every being on this planet, then, the results that man management in action can produce are truly incredible. There are plenty of instances like the one above from the alumni of SBMAF, but let us take a look at just one more.

Applying Baba's 3 Rs to Client Relations

Mr. N. Dayasindhu who graduated SBMAF in 1995 and is currently a Principal in a premier Multinational IT and Consulting Company, recalls a powerful instance when he dared to do something which none in his office had ventured into, and in the process brought about a complete turn around in their relationship with an important client, purely by putting man management

into work. Narrating that episode, where he applied the principles of reaction, reflection and resound to a tricky situation, he says,

“In a consulting assignment that I was a part of, there was an important manager in the client organisation who was haughty. He would often taunt us with near abusive language. Our team was getting fed up with this attitude, and meetings with this manager were a dreaded ordeal. Some of my colleagues were getting impatient and wanted to give it back in the same coin to the client manager. Some complained about the client within our company and wanted to be shifted out of the project. I was also thinking that this was probably the only way out.

“But then, one morning, I had a flash. I thought maybe we could try to be extra nice to this manager and see if this helps in sobering his attitude. My colleagues dismissed this as an absurd idea. However, I felt there was nothing to lose if it could be tried for a day.

“Instead of avoiding this manager, the next day I was smiling and wishing him well. He was taken aback at first, and then responded with muted acknowledgement. A few days later, we were to meet him late evening, and I suggested that we could possibly do that next morning since he may want to spend the evening with his young son. The next morning there was a sea change in this manager’s interaction with us.

“He turned out to be very supportive and cheerful. My colleagues felt that someone had cast a spell on the manager. Only later we realised that he was frustrated with us since our project meant additional work for him that translated into spending less time with his young son. Since we were now sensitive to his personal time, he started treating us like trusted colleagues.”

Sound Character Key to Effective Man Management: Baba

Management is often believed to be the art of getting things done through others. But Bhagavan Baba says that this is where this profession becomes lifeless. “A manager should be able to identify the strengths of his subordinates and underplay their weaknesses,” Baba says. He further adds, “A good manager should take a vicarious approach and stand in the shoes of other people to become a socially responsive one and learn the proclivities of various people.” But more importantly, according to Baba, “People can become effective in Man Management only if they possess good character...The manager who is going to control other non-human factors of production of an organisation should be good himself at the first instance.”

This is where SBMAF stands out. Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s concept of Man Management goes much beyond the concept of a manager who has a broad mind and a compassionate heart, and treats his superiors and subordinates with respect and love. ‘Man Management’, for every manager, is as much an internal process as much it is external.

Bhagavan Baba explains, "Management means knowing mankind. First, one must have the 'mind of a man'...only when man cultivates moral values and manifests the divinity within him, will his true personality as a human being be revealed." In understanding this concept and translating it into practice lies the complete fulfilment of this important profession. And the students of SBMAF, by virtue of their association with the Divine Master, are more equipped than others, in assimilating and living by this idea.

Management Style Reflects Self Awareness

Reflecting on what he had learnt at SBMAF and how he tried to apply that learning in his decade-long stint in the corporate environment, as well as in his life, Mr. Praveen G. Vishwas, currently working as Associate Manager in Accenture, says, "'Man Management', I realised was about managing oneself, discovering one's own inner self, and realising the fact that there is a greater purpose to life than what meets the eye. The various roles we live - of a son, a father, an employee, a boss, etc., are vocations that we assume to discharge certain responsibilities, but at the same time each of us has responsibilities towards oneself - to know oneself and to know what one's true goals are. I realised that this has always been the essence of what Swami has been telling us all the while. This awareness is truly the key."

It is therefore, without doubt, this spiritual awareness, where one not only is able to manage others with ease, but also governs his own life with confidence in an enlightened manner, which is the stepping stone in the making of a good leader.

From I to We to Team

"A great team cannot be made without a noble thought. Put in a different way, a good leader should be one who is ever ready to give the credit to where it is more deserved. If a leader always wants to grab the credit for success, he creates a recipe for disaster," says Mr. Damu Nair, an alumnus currently working as Manager, Deloitte Consulting LLP, in the USA.

Peter Drucker, one of the foremost management thinkers of this century, says, "The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say 'I'. And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say 'I'. They don't think 'I'. They think 'we'; they think 'team'. They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but 'we' gets the credit.... This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done."

Picking a story from his decade long corporate life when he saw this concept of enlightened leadership and teamwork do wonders, Mr. Damu Nair, an alumnus, narrates,

"In early 2002, we were on a project in Germany. We had a team of about ten people. One weekend, we planned a visit to Paris. We were to start on a Friday evening driving through Belgium to France. When the project manager

came hurriedly to our room on that Friday afternoon, I felt something was amiss. As it turned out, one critical object for the project was running behind schedule, and to make things worse there was not even a design on how to build it. I was drafted to look into it immediately and to have a solution ready by Monday. Along with another colleague of mine, we started on the job. In a rare show of solidarity, our entire team cancelled the trip to Paris and stayed back in the office, supporting us. We were able to provide a solution that was well appreciated. Our team work and dedication went a long way in cementing a long term relationship with that client.”

Dwelling a little deep and drawing significant lessons from this seemingly simple anecdote, Mr. Damu Nair, says,

Selflessness Yields Superior Results

“It might seem contradictory that I am referring to selfless service and furthering of business interests at the same time. As Bhagavan Baba sometimes refers, we plant a tree sapling with the intention of it providing shade. If it grows and yields fruits that is only a collateral benefit. When we sacrificed an enjoyable weekend and worked, hardly did we imagine that it would start a business relationship which will continue till date. The intention was not selfish in any way. Therefore, it is my belief that if the drive is superior, we accomplish results that far exceed our capacity.”

Explaining more, he says, “This philosophy also works at a different level. Time and again I have seen Bhagavan making people accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. It could be as simple as giving a diffident student the confidence to address a large gathering or as complex as helping a doctor perform a complicated surgery. In these cases, when Baba guides, we cease to be the doers and we become instruments in His hand. Our goal is to share our experience to help others. Obviously this is not an easy task for everything that we perform. But given our training, I believe, we, as Sai students, stand a better chance in converting every opportunity to work in accordance with this principle.”

This immensely powerful trait of subduing and sublimating one’s ego is where the wall between the business of business and the business of life melts away. Mr. V.V. Ranganathan, former Senior Partner in Ernst & Young, India, says, “I think the current boundary line that has been dictated by ethics is driven largely by human knowledge, meaning that somebody tells you this is not right or that is not right...but there is an invisible line that is within everyone’s system that is driven by consciousness. This is a consciousness that has its own existence...I feel that my spiritual purpose is to be a *karma yogi*, a person who performs selfless actions. Yes, God has given me the equipment to pursue my desires, but I must do so in such a manner that I remember the principles of *karma* and that my decisions are not fuelled by selfishness or egoism...I believe that anyone who is moving towards this path of being a *karma yogi* will get more than they deserve.”

Giving it Your All, Without Clinging to Results

Anybody who had walked on this path of 'egolessness' with faith and confidence, has only been bestowed with immeasurable benefits in all respects, be it in business or life. Sharing his own story, Mr. Easwar Prasad, an alumnus serving in a premier company of the telecommunications sector, says,

"I used to wonder what practical impact 'crushing one's ego' would have on life. The concept of being egoless is very difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, once I started treading on this path, I found that my dealings with fellow workers became very smooth.... This also has made a huge difference in company meetings related to sensitive issues. In most of them, there is a certain ego element in the air which permeates the decision-making. **Fortunately, whenever my colleagues perceived problems, I focused on the solutions. Where there was shouting before, we have smiles now.** I also find that as an individual, if we start the 'cooling process', it has a great effect on the ambience of the workplace. It is again the effect of positive vibrations."

Loving to All, Attached to None

Elaborating further, he says, "'God is your only friend,' Baba often says. At work, I have found that this truth too has a different dimension. By helping others solve problems, we get close to people but intimate with none. By understanding that most of the people are acquaintances and not friends, we are not a part of any group. Not being a part of any particular cluster helps us in becoming stronger. We tend to remain impartial in our judgment and apolitical in our dealings...I always remind myself that whatever happens is the will of the Almighty. If there are challenges, it means that He wants more effort from my side. I remind myself that, 'Problems are like exercises for the soul and you become more pure as you overcome them.' And if the results are positive, it is all His Grace.... in short, I have found peace and happiness after I learnt to curb my ego and dedicate all actions to Him."

Evolution of a Manager to an Enlightened Leader

The journey of a student of SBMAF from being a professional manager to a 'man manager' and then to becoming an enlightened leader is truly fascinating, and absolutely unique. Ask any alumnus, what he thinks is the sole factor for SBMAF standing out among all other B-schools in India and abroad, and he will say, 'It is because we get the knowledge to make a prosperous living and a good life directly from The Source – Bhagavan Baba.'

The students of School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance in Puttaparthi are singularly fortunate, for, here they learn lessons of management not only from reputed management gurus who are members of the faculty as well as eminent visiting Professors from around the world, but also from the Divine Manager Himself. More importantly, they develop an

indelible bond with their Founder which is their formidable source of strength and inspiration at all times, everywhere.

Alumni Continues to Draw upon Divine Dictums

Recollecting one beautiful evening in the company of their beloved Chancellor and eternal guru Bhagavan Baba, an alumnus Mr. V. S. Ramamurthy, currently serving as Team Lead, Infosys BPO Ltd., says, “During the first year of our MBA Course in 2000, we prayed to Bhagavan to come to the Senior Boys’ Hostel. Pleased with our continuous prayers, Swami decided to come to our Hostel. The whole atmosphere was energised and all boys started working towards putting up a very good programme. Swami came in the evening. After the Vedic chants and the various programmes were over, Bhagavan started His Divine Discourse, and then He said, ‘You (boys) have come from different places in the country to Me, to be my students. You are really blessed to be here. However, on the completion of your studies here, you will return to your respective places in the pursuit of a job. But remember students, wherever you go, Swami will always be with you, above you, below you, beside you. Have such faith and continue your studies.’ Tears welled up in our eyes after listening to Swami’s proclamation of His love towards us.”

Once a Sai Student, Always a Sai Student

In fact, this is the sole reason what makes the students of SBMAF different. As Mr. Amar Singh says, “Increasingly, I feel I am capable of handling any situation life puts me in, not because I trust any capability I may possess, but because I know I am sustained entirely by a power in me that is not my own. And remaining connected with that power, in essence, is the core competency of any alumnus of the SBMAF.”

This eternal connection to the ultimate reservoir of energy, hope, life and inspiration is something that students of the School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance in Prasanthi Nilayam are blessed to be bestowed with. That is the ‘force behind’ because of which they forge ahead with heads held high with morality, integrity and a sound character – redefining the rules and practices of modern commerce and governance by their words, action and example.

Dear Readers, we hope you enjoyed the two-part cover story offering glimpses of the eternal human values that the alumni from the Business School of the Sai University are breathing into the international corporate environment. What we were unable to capture in this story are the stupendous projects that these inspired alumni are spearheading for rural uplift and empowerment, as they translate their Founder and Master Bhagavan Baba’s teachings into real life lessons. Those silent but powerful achievements deserve a separate feature. Please stay tuned to an article on that topic at a later date.

FEATURE ARTICLES
IN QUEST OF INFINITY – 18

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. I wonder whether you recall that towards the end of the last instalment, I mentioned that in the next issue we would be taking a sharp turn. That moment has arrived and I am now going to take you along an entirely different road in our Quest for Infinity. Thus far, I have been telling you many things about the Cosmos, what it contains, how one tries to understand the nature and the structure of the Cosmos, how it might have been born, how it evolved etc. From now on, I shall, for some time at least, be discussing the Principles of Physics that are involved in these investigations. Why do we need to know about the Principles of Physics? That would become clear as we go along.

The Heavier They Are, the Same They Fall

Let me start with Aristotle, who believed that the heavier an object is, the faster it would fall. In those days, there were no watches, that is to say good timing devices, and hence there was no way this hypothesis could be put to a rigorous test. Intuition suggested that this was the way things were, and that was what Aristotle also believed.

Much later, Galileo, whose name I am sure must be familiar to all of you, questioned this. I am sure you are also aware of the famous experiment attributed to Galileo, which is discussed in the figure below.

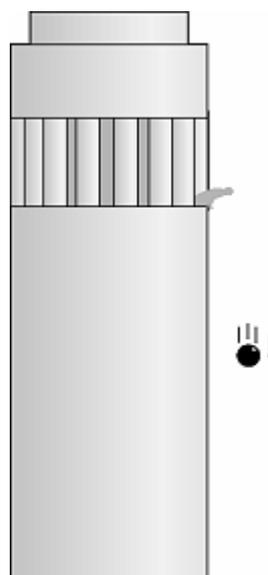


FIGURE 1: This figure shows on the right the famous leaning tower of Pisa. It is said that Galileo dropped a cannonball and a musket ball simultaneously from the top of the tower and found that they hit the ground at the same time. This contradicted the long-held view due to Aristotle that heavier objects fell down faster. From this, Galileo drew some conclusions. That allowed Newton [who came later] to make a huge leap forward.

Newton’s Great Discoveries

While Galileo unquestionably gave us what might be called the cornerstones of Classical Mechanics, it was the famous Newton who achieved the first great leap forward. Newton’s contributions to Physics are absolutely monumental. Today, what Newton discovered is taught even in schools and so many of the present generation might not think much of his contribution. However, the great Chandrasekhar, concerning whom I have said a lot in an earlier issue, rates Newton as the greatest Physicist of the second millennium.

Why is this? For many reasons. Where the science of mechanics is concerned [apart from mechanics, Newton made contributions to many other branches of Physics] Newton not only discovered the famous Laws of Classical Mechanics now named after him [as Newton’s Laws of Motion], but also invented the mathematical tool calculus, that was very much needed for doing practical calculations. [Leibnitz in Germany also developed calculus about the same time, and for a while there was a fierce battle between these two as to who did it first.]

Besides giving us the Laws of Mechanics, Newton made another monumental contribution; he discovered the existence of the gravitational force. When gravity was used in conjunction with the Laws of Mechanics, it opened up new vistas in astronomical calculations, which was a huge leap forward. Now while developing his laws, Newton considered the motion of particles that had a mass but no size; that is to say they were supposed to be point particles. However, most of the particles we deal with in Nature have a finite size [at least in the macro world]. So the question arises: “How did Newton get away with it, because the Sun, the Moon, the Earth and so on are all such huge objects?”

Newton was able to get away with it all because of the kindness of Nature! You see, all the astronomical objects we normally deal with are usually spherical; maybe they are not perfect spheres, but that does not matter too much. Newton proved that if an object is spherical then it acts like a point mass, at least where mechanics is concerned. To put it more explicitly, a spherical object acts as if it is a point mass with the same mass as the spherical object. Thus, when it comes to discussing ideal trajectories and so forth, one can forget about the big sphere and pretend that it is just a point mass. But caution: One cannot quite get away with it, if one brings in factors like the force that wind might exert on the sphere, whether the sphere is rotating or not, and collisions with an extended object!

So you see while one can get away with a lot, the details cannot entirely be swept under the rug. Many have slogged away in precisely those areas but unfortunately, though their work is very useful, they did not quite achieve star status! Sometimes, life does seem to be rather unfair!

For a couple of centuries after Newton, Classical Mechanics developed further, with many famous names like La Grange and Hamilton being involved. I obviously cannot go into all those details, and in any event, they do not concern us. It suffices to say the following:

1. While Newton’s work largely involved linear motion, attention was now extended also to rotation, an important aspect of the motion of objects.
2. Most important of all, focus slowly began to shift to developing a **framework** for description that took explicit notice of what are now called **invariances**; more about this soon, since that is very important.
3. More than anything else, it came to be recognised that Space was not absolute as Newton believed; rather, it was relative. Time, on the other hand, was held to be absolute, but even that came to be questioned when Einstein appeared on the scene. That happens somewhat later and so we need not be bothered about that right now.

The Invariance Principle

Let me spend some time now explaining what is meant by an invariance principle in Physics. In simple terms, it refers to something that remains unchanged, even when we change the perspective. I am sure that statement is as mystifying to you as the word I am trying to explain, and so let go over all this in slightly greater detail.

Let us imagine there is a street with multi-storied houses on both sides. Say there is a boy on the balcony of an apartment in the building on the left – see figure below: This boy is on the tenth floor say. There are two people in a building right opposite, that is to say on the other side of the road, and these two people are watching what this boy is doing. One of these observers is, say on the fifteenth floor, while the other is on the fifth. The boy now drops a marble, on to the road; not a good thing to do for the marble could well injure someone walking on the road below; but then boys are boys! This boy drops the marble, and the two observers in the building on the other side are watching. Question: “Suppose these two people are asked to describe what they are seeing, namely the falling of the marble under the influence of gravity. Would they both see exactly the same thing or would what they see be different?”

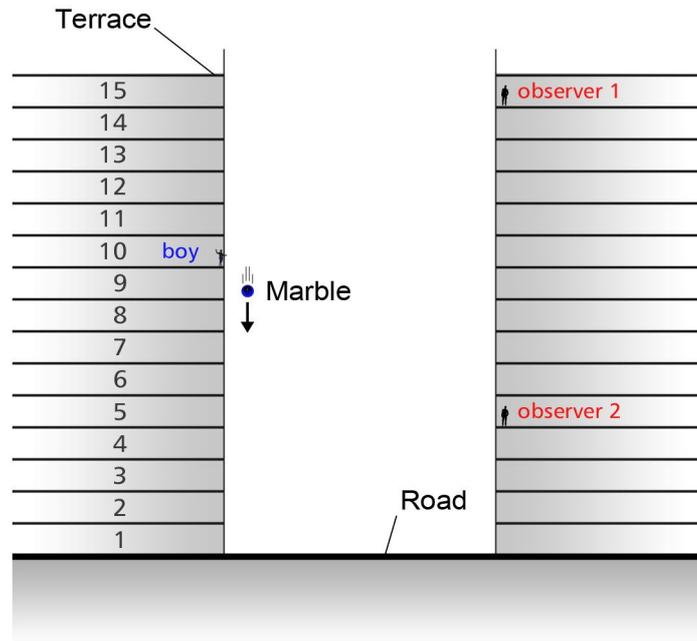


FIGURE 2: This is a schematic of the marble being dropped by a boy in a tall building on one side of the road, and the event being observed by two observers on the other side, observers who are in different locations. There is an issue associated with all this, and that is what is discussed in the text.

It turns out, and this is what the investigations of people who came after Newton showed, that the mathematical descriptions of the two observations would be identical. Now to describe the trajectory of a moving object, in this case the falling marble, one needs a way in which one can describe the position of the object from instant to instant. The mathematical way of doing this, and that is the best way, is to choose a set of axes, as in the figure below. Having chosen the axes, the position of the particle is then described with respect to these chosen set of axes. In Physics, one refers to this as choosing a **frame of reference**. Now clearly, when one chooses a set of axes, one must choose an origin; in fact, that is the starting point.

The whole point about the boy dropping a marble and two others watching boils down to this: Suppose, a motion is observed and is to be described. Clearly, this requires the observer to choose an origin and specify also a set of axes. Now would the description depend on how the axes are chosen by the observer? Intuition tells us that it should not, but intuition is not always a good guide. There must be sound and logical arguments to make the case. All this was gone through, and nineteenth century physicists concluded that if **space is uniform**, which it is, then the origin can be chosen anywhere. That is to say, thanks to the uniformity of space, description of motion does not depend on where one locates the origin of the axes. This is referred to as **Translational Invariance**. By the way, there is also, in many cases a similar freedom in choosing the **orientation** of the axes; this means, that the basic observations do not depend on how the axes are oriented [one stands up and

sees the marble falling, or one could stand on one's head and observe: results would be the same!]. This is called **Rotational Invariance** and has deep implications of its own.

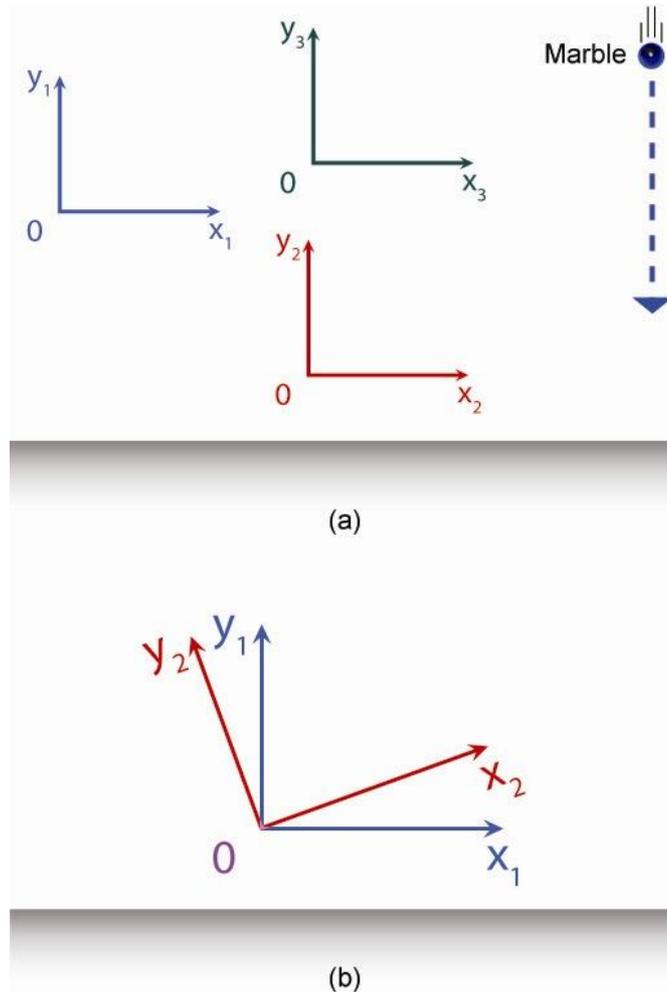


FIGURE 3: This figure seeks to illustrate how, while describing the motion of particles, the choice of co-ordinate axes could be made in various ways. In (a) is shown several choices, that are laterally displaced with respect to each other. In (b) are shown similarly, two different choices of axes that are rotated with respect to each other. In physics, it is a great boon if the essence of what one observes is independent of the choice of axes. This is called invariance. If invariance obtains in case (a), we have what is called translational invariance. Similarly, in (b) we would have rotational invariance. These are related to symmetries and symmetries play a great role in a deep understanding of the underlying physics.

Now why did I bring in this invariance business? For the reason that the formulation of Physics based on invariances opens the door to symmetry, and that allows to deduce many general results, otherwise not so easy to obtain. Translational invariance simply means that space looks the same from

everywhere. Where Physics is concerned, this is far from a trivial statement. The nineteenth century opened the door to a new way of looking at mechanics, centred around Invariance Principles and symmetry.

Translational invariance is connected with a symmetry of Space, and it demoted Space from the Absolute status that Newton had given it, to a lower status. What about Time? That is a different story, to which I shall come a little later. Life is not always all about motion of particles. There are also the phenomenon of heat, light and so on. How did the physics of these subjects develop and evolve? A few words now about that, for that story is also relevant.

Understanding the Workings of Heat

Let me start with heat. For long, heat was regarded as some kind of [an invisible?] fluid that resided in objects, and heat flow from a hotter to a colder object was simply a case of this mysterious fluid flowing from one object to another. However, there were many unsatisfactory aspects to this hypothesis, and people wanted to see if heat could in anyway be related to the motion of the particles of which matter was made. Of course, this did not happen all of a sudden. There were what are called gas laws; there were actually two laws, one called Boyle’s Law which is older and the second called Charles Law that came later. These equations represented the behaviour of what was called a perfect gas. Nevertheless, real gases such as hydrogen, oxygen and so on, by and large obeyed these laws, which were referred to as the Equation of State. Basically, they tell us what happens to a perfect gas held in a finite enclosure, like say a balloon or even a hollow metallic sphere.

The two gas laws that I just mentioned dealt with macroscopic matter. There was no reference to the fact that matter might be made up of atoms. I must mention that in the middle of the nineteenth century, the chemists were way ahead of physicists in believing in an atomic theory of matter; shame on physicists! But that is a different story and I shall not get into that right now. What happened was that not all physicists were so backward in their thinking about atoms. James Clerk Maxwell of England wondered: “Let me say that matter is made up of atoms. I do not know what exactly these atoms are, but I believe that it is reasonable to assume that hydrogen gas say, is made up a huge bunch of hydrogen atoms, such as the chemists are talking about. Let me next assume that the atoms in a gas move about randomly, and with varying velocities. Since there would be trillions of atoms even in a gas balloon, it is quite likely that often there would be collisions – traffic accidents one might call them! When two atoms collide, I shall imagine that it goes off rather like the collision of two billiard balls. So there are millions of these collisions taking place every second. Surely no one can analyse this vast number of events in detail. But how about talking about certain averages?” Thus Maxwell started asking questions like:

1. What is the average velocity squared of the atoms/molecules of gas? This quantity is usually denoted $\langle v^2 \rangle$, and is referred to as the mean-square velocity.

2. Is the mean square velocity in any way related to the temperature of the gas? There was a feeling that the higher the temperature, the faster the motion of the molecules of gas; in turn, this would raise the mean square velocity.
3. Clearly, at any given instant, all molecules could not be moving with the same velocity. What is the distribution of velocities like? Does it change with temperature?

I hope you get an idea of the kind of questions Maxwell was asking. Basically, he was trying to give an atomic theory of gases and in those days, it used to be called the **Kinetic Theory of Gases**, perfect gases of course. One reason why I am drawing special attention is because I want you to appreciate how while some were looking at generalities like invariance principles, others were thinking in terms of explaining physics on a molecular basis.

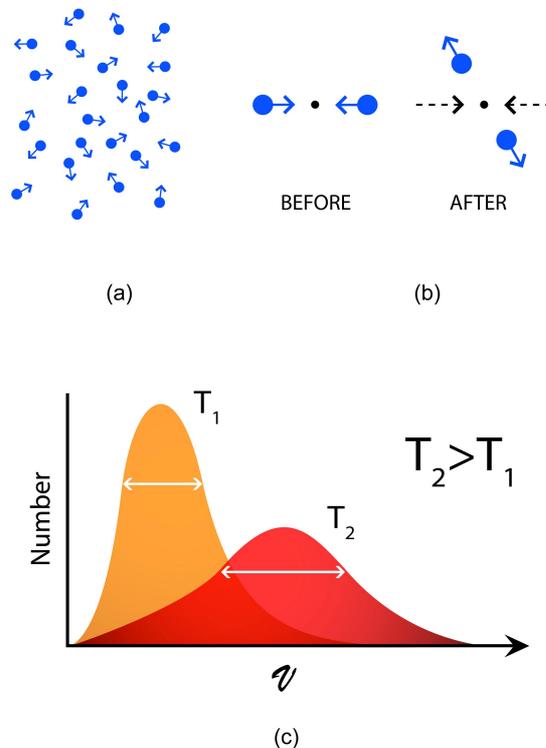


FIGURE 4: The different sketches in this figure are intended to give you a rough idea of what Maxwell’s Kinetic Theory of gases is all about. The basic assumption is that matter is made up of atoms, and in a gas, as (a) shows, the different atoms would be flying in different directions with varying velocities. Of course there would be collisions, and these would be very much like billiard ball collisions as shown in (b). The whole process is of course completely random, that is to say collisions would occur randomly and the change of direction after collisions also would be random; the randomness of the process is an essential aspect of the phenomena. The sketch in (c) highlights an important principle underlying all random phenomena, and that is while the behaviour of individual

*entities might appear to entirely random, one **can** make many predictions related to the **average** behaviour of the assembly of atoms as a whole. What is shown in (c) the distribution of velocities, that is at any given instant, how many atoms would have a particular velocity. Let us say that corresponding to a particular instant there are N_1 atoms with velocity v_1 . Clearly, N_1 would be much smaller than N the total number of atoms. At the next instant also, the number would be N_1 , although the atoms now having the velocity v_1 would be different. That is because the set that we observed might have changed its velocity due to collisions. On the other hand, other atoms might have acquired this velocity v_1 due to collisions. Thus, while at the micro level the scene is constantly changing, at the macro level remains the same. The curve that you sketched in (c) is called 'Maxwell's distribution of velocities'. Notice the curve has a width; this width depends on temperature; the higher the temperature, the wider the width.*

Unifying Light, Electricity and Magnetism

Let me move on and turn to another aspect of physics, that which deals with light, electricity and magnetism. If around say 1830 you had told any physicist that all these three were intimately connected, it is more than likely that the physicist would have considered you a fit case for admission into a mental asylum. But you know what? Barely forty or so years later, Maxwell [yes, the same man!] gave an amazing theory that completely unified precisely all these three aspects of physics. This is the famous Electromagnetic Theory, perhaps the greatest triumph of classical physics in the nineteenth century. Commenting on this theory, the incredible Richard Feynman once told his students that centuries from now the world might forget the American Civil War that was fought around the same time, but Maxwell's Theory would not be forgotten – that shows what a great milestone it was.

Now what was the big deal about Maxwell's Electromagnetic Theory? A few words about that next. You see, for many years, indeed for some centuries in fact, people had bits and pieces of this puzzle related to electromagnetism; but in those distant days, they did not even know that these bits were all part of one big puzzle; that came later. What I am trying to say is that people knew something about static electricity, people knew there were magnetic objects that could attract iron filings and, when suspended, always pointed North, and so on. Soon other interesting things came to be discovered.

It was found that a static charge produced an electric field around it, but when the charge was moved, not only did the electric field start varying in time as it should but in addition there now appeared a varying magnetic field. Similarly, when a magnet was kept stationary, it produced a magnetic field in the neighbourhood. However, if the magnet was moved, it induced a current in a wire loop kept nearby. See Figure 5.

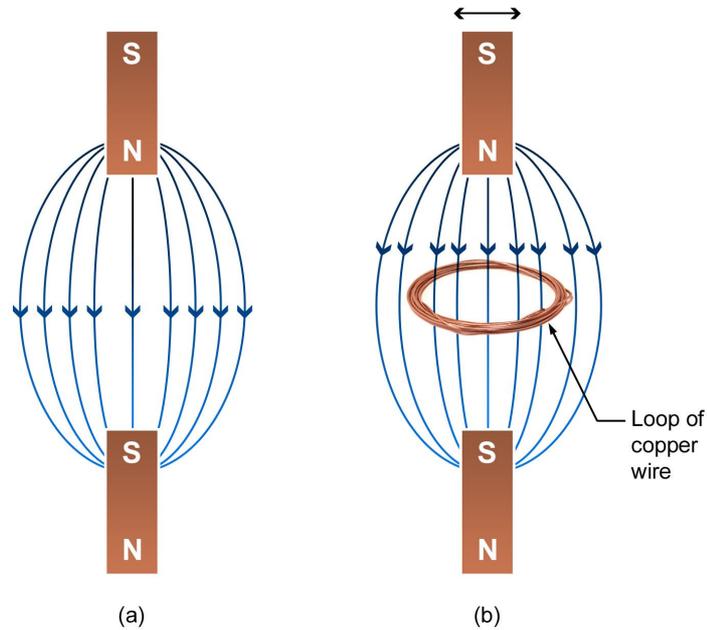


FIGURE 5: (a) shows two bar magnets between which there exists a magnetic field. (b) shows a copper loop placed between the magnets. If say the top magnet is moved quickly sideways, a current would start flowing in the loop; this is what Maxwell’s equations tell us. The existence of a current means that charges are moving in the copper loop. Thus, there is an important link between magnetism and electricity; it was this unification that Maxwell achieved through his famous Electromagnetic Theory.

So it was clear that electric charge, magnets, electric and magnetic fields and motion of charges as well of magnets were all interlinked. In what way? That was the question that Maxwell answered in 1862, and earned eternal fame. What he gave are referred to as Maxwell’s Electromagnetic Equations.

Maxwell’s Groundbreaking Equations

I do not want to inflict technicalities, but I think it does not harm one to have at least the “Darshan” of Maxwell’s equations which represent a great triumph of human ingenuity. Doesn’t matter if you don’t follow it all; not many do! However, it was through an understanding of these equations that production and transmission of radio waves was first discovered. And everything electromagnetic, from radio, TV and cell phones, owe so much to Maxwell! But how many know about him today, except perhaps for college students studying Physics?

$$\nabla \cdot E = \frac{\rho}{\epsilon_0} = 4\pi k \rho$$

$$\nabla \cdot B = 0$$

$$\nabla \times E = -\frac{\partial B}{\partial t}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \nabla \times B &= \frac{4\pi k}{c^2} J + \frac{1}{c^2} \frac{\partial E}{\partial t} \\ &= \frac{J}{\epsilon_0 c^2} + \frac{1}{c^2} \frac{\partial E}{\partial t} \end{aligned}$$

$$k = \frac{1}{4\pi\epsilon_0} = \text{Coulomb's constant} \quad c^2 = \frac{1}{\mu_0\epsilon_0}$$

Now one of the great discoveries of Maxwell was that using moving charges, one could actually produce electromagnetic waves; what was even more staggering was Maxwell's prediction that these waves would travel exactly with the speed of light. At that time, this was an astounding discovery, for it gave the hint that light could indeed be a kind of electromagnetic wave; today of course, every school boy knows that. See figure 6.

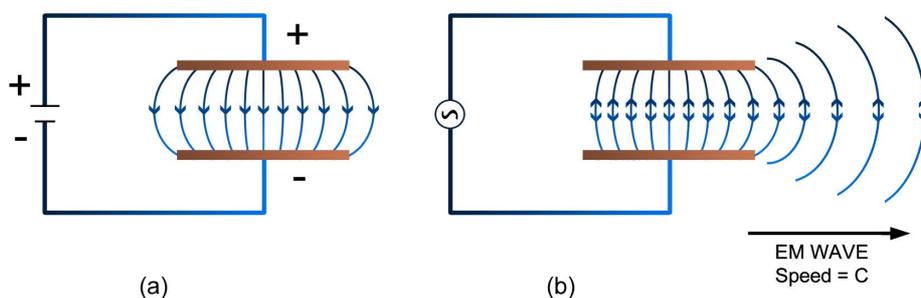


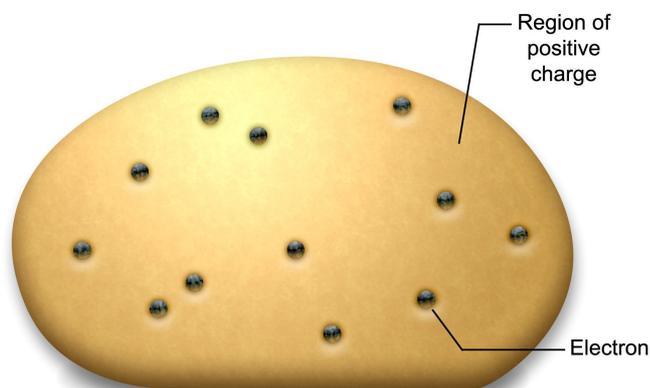
FIGURE 6: This figure offers a very crude depiction of how electromagnetic waves might be generated. (a) shows a pair of copper plates connected to the two ends of a battery. As a result, one plate acquires a positive charge while the other acquires similarly a negative charge. The net result is that there is a

static electric field between the two plates. Suppose now that the two plates are connected to an AC [alternating current] sources. The electric field between the plates would consequently vary in time. Not only that; the fluctuations or variations would be propagated as an electromagnetic wave, that travels at the speed of light. This was a major discovery by Maxwell, and was the first hint that light was nothing but an electromagnetic wave. For the first time, we had a clue that if we see light, then it means some charges somewhere are moving around in some manner or the other.

The Electrons and The Atomic Plum Pudding

Let me now move on to about the end of the nineteenth century, when J. J. Thomson discovered the electron. Thomson suspected that the electron was a constituent of the atom and made up a model of the atom which we in college used to call the 'bun model' [in England it was called the 'plum-pudding model'; we did not know about plum pudding in those days, and so our teacher introduced the model as the bun model!]. I do not know how it is these days but in those days, the bun used to have raisins put in; in the same way, said J.J, the atom was like an object with positive charge in which were embedded the electrons.

Now why on earth did J.J come up with such a picture at all? For a very simple reason. You see the electron is a tiny particle with a certain mass and beside mass it also had negative electric charge. [The electron has a mass of about 9×10^{-28} gm, and one unit of negative electric charge. Its size no one knows exactly, but it is probably as small as 10^{-16} cm.]J. J then said, I know the electron is a part of the atom; so that means there is negative electric charge in the atom. However, the atom as a whole is electrically neutral. Which means that there must also be positive charge in the atom. How much of positive charge? Just the right amount to cancel all the negative charge being contributed by the electrons in the atom. Now the electron is pretty light; so J.J figured that the mass of the atom must be coming mainly from whatever it was that was carrying the positive charge. Everything put together, led to the model that you see in the figure below.



*FIGURE 7: This is a schematic of Thomson’s bun model of the atom. The electrons which are like embedded raisins carry the negative charge; the rest of the “bun” carries the positive charge. The amount of positive charge **exactly** cancels all the negative charge contributed by the electrons. As a result the atom is electrically neutral. If this were not so, we would all be carrying very heavy charges and if two people shook hands, huge sparks would fly literally! By the way, the mass of the atom is supposed to be carried almost entirely by the positive charge.*

Discovering Nuclear Physics

In 1909, Ernest Rutherford working in Manchester University discovered that the positive charge in an atom was not at all spread out like in the Thomson plum-pudding model. Rather, all the positive charge of an atom was concentrated into a very tiny sphere about 10^{-12} cm in diameter. Now this was an amazing discovery. Why? Because of the following. Let us say we consider the hydrogen atom, the simplest among the atoms found in Nature. This has a size of about 10^{-8} cm. So, let us imagine the atom to be a sphere of diameter 10^{-8} cm. In this atom, there is positive charge; that is sitting in a tiny sphere of dia 10^{-12} cm; that is to say, the positive charge is concentrated in a tiny, tiny region whose dia is one-ten thousandth of the size of the atom. And the mass of the atom, which remember is also associated largely with the positive charge, is located in this minute region. In other words, Rutherford’s discovery demolished the J.J model and gave what was called the **nuclear model of the atom**, shown below.

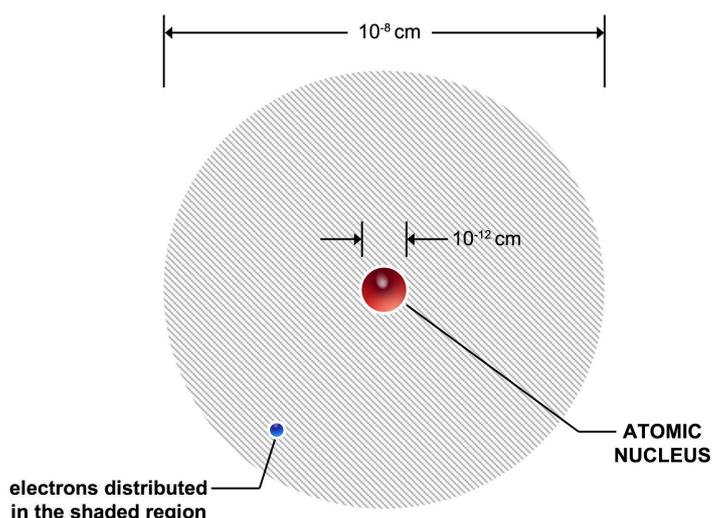


FIGURE: 8 This figure illustrates how Rutherford’s discovery of the atomic nucleus changed the picture of the atom. The plum-pudding model due to Thomson was given up and in its place there emerged the picture that is sketched above. Basically, the atom has a size of about 10^{-8} cm. In the centre, occupying a very tiny region is the nucleus. The electrons that make up the

*atom [and in the process also **exactly** cancel out the positive charge of the nucleus, are somewhere in the shaded region.] At that time, no one had any idea how these electrons were distributed. However, one thing was very clear. Taking into account the size of the nucleus and of the electrons, most of the atoms was really empty space! Yet, when it comes to many aspects, atoms seemed to behave like a billiard ball of size 10^{-8} cm! Emptiness behaving like a hard ball! Amazing, is it not?!*

So you have this picture: The atom is like a sphere; right in the centre of this sphere, in a very tiny region in fact, are concentrated the entire positive charge as well as the almost the entire mass of the atom. Surrounding this central core region, which, by the way was called the **atomic nucleus**, was the negative charge in the form of electrons. How many electrons? Just the number required to exactly cancel the positive charge carried by the nucleus. Fine, but where exactly were the electrons? In 1910, this was a million dollar question.

Working Out the Inner Picture of the Atom

At that time, there came to Rutherford's lab a young man named Niels Bohr from Denmark. Rutherford said to Bohr, "Why don't you come up with a working model for the atom?" Bohr said he would try. So the first thing he did was to say, "Well, why not imagine the atom to be a mini replica of the solar system? That is to say, there is the nucleus at the centre, presiding over the atom like the Sun does over the solar system, and the various electrons simply whirl around the nucleus in various orbits like the planets do around the Sun."

This is almost an obvious thing to try, but Bohr found that there was one huge problem with this model. What was that? To understand that, consider a single electron going round a nucleus. See figure 9 below. Now the nucleus is positively charged while the electron, remember, carries a negative charge; and the electron is going round and round the nucleus, rather like what our earth does, going round the Sun. And this precisely is where the problem surfaces. You see, as the electron goes round in its orbit, it experiences acceleration. According to Maxwell's famous equations, an accelerated charge would emit radiation. Thus, as the electron goes round and round the nucleus, it would go on emitting radiation. When the electron emits radiation, it would lose energy; thus as the electron keeps going round and round, it would keep on losing energy. Using Maxwell's equations and all that, one can show that as the electron loses energy, the orbit starts shrinking. In other words, the electron orbit would start spiralling inwards and in no time at all, it would collapse into the nucleus, and become one with it. What it means is that the electron disappears! And when it does, the positive charge of the nucleus would decrease by exactly one unit of charge, due to the cancellation produced by the electron.

I hope you are getting the picture. Bohr found that one by one, all the electrons would very quickly fall into the nucleus and get annihilated there; it is all like the moths flying into the fire! And soon, there is only the tiny nucleus

left, completely without charge of course, because all the positive charge in it would have been exactly neutralised by the electrons that have been captured. In short, the solar model does not work; in no time at all, the “solar system” collapses! Something was horribly wrong somewhere. Where exactly?

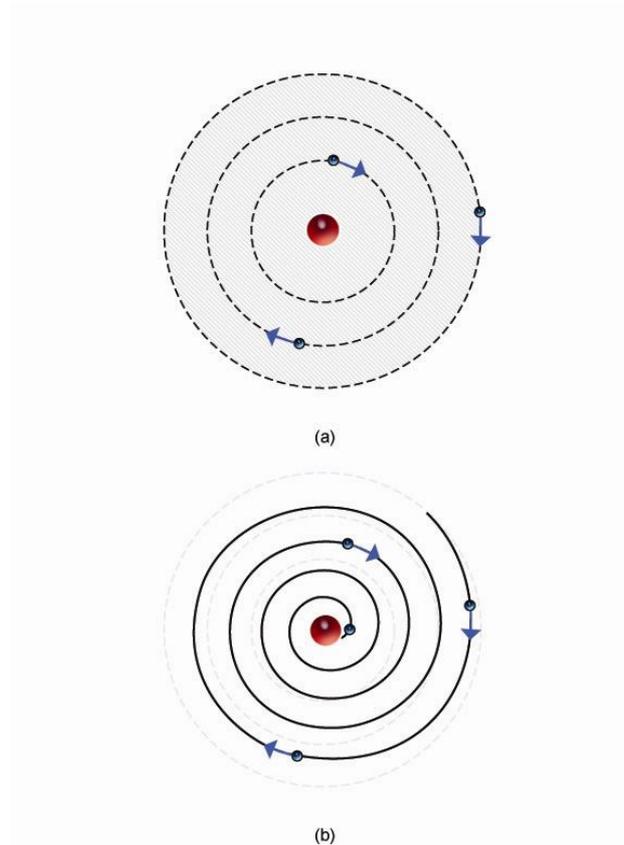


FIGURE 9: (a) shows the solar system model of the atom that Niels Bohr started with. Here we have the nucleus at the centre rather like the Sun, with electrons going round it in various orbits. Bohr then tried to do some calculations about the orbital motions of the electrons, using Newton's Laws of Motion, exactly as one would while analysing planetary motion. However, there was one important difference in this case. As the electrons went round, they continuously lost energy by radiating electromagnetic energy; this was required by Maxwell's equation. In planetary motion, there is no such loss. Bohr found that the loss of energy due to radiation made a huge difference. In no time at all, the electrons spiralled inwards and fell into the nucleus! See (b). In other words, before one could even utter the word atom, all the electrons were gone, and so was the positive charge on the nucleus. Instead of the atom, one merely had a tiny object size 10-12 cm, and with no charge! Disaster!

Bohr came up with the answer a few years later, and for that momentous discovery that literally turned the tide of Physics, you have to wait till the next issue!

LOVE AND LIBERATION

By Howard Murphet

"True and effective forgiveness includes forgetting, but the memory of some wrong done may exist somewhere in the mind. It is not as easy as cleaning a word from a slate, or erasing it from a piece of paper," says Mr. Howard Murphet in the final chapter of his book "Sai Inner Views." He goes on to beautifully explain the intimate connection between forgiveness, healing, love and finally, liberation. Even though love is perhaps the most common four lettered word and an emotion that is alien to none on this planet, at the same time, only a handful have understood its truest form and experienced the true bliss arising there from. It is to help us in understanding this seemingly simple but extremely profound idea that can change our life dramatically from dust to diamond, that we have this article for you.

The author, Mr. Howard Murphet, was an Australian journalist who came to Bhagavan Baba in 1977, and later authored many books on Him, the most popular of them being "Sai Baba: Man of Miracles". He wrote many volumes after that like "Sai Baba: Avatar", "Sai Baba: Invitation to Glory", "When the Road Ends", and so on. The book "Sai Inner Views" from which the present article is an extract was composed by him when he was in his nineties and had lost his eye-sight, but the insight he has left behind for humanity is immense and precious, which you will perceive as you read on.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." These well-known words from the Lord's Prayer have a deeper implication than it may at first appear. In His mission on earth, Jesus showed that there was a very close connection between the forgiveness of trespass, or sin, and the healing of diseases. After healing somebody, He would say, "Your sins are forgiven. Now go your way and sin no more."

The Need to Forgive

At the healing centre of a church I know in Australia, the sick person is told by the Christian priest in charge that before any healing can be accomplished, the patient must ask God for forgiveness and prior to that he must forgive anybody who he thinks has sinned against him. This forgiving of those who have trespassed against him will, no doubt, involve a search back through many years to unearth anyone against whom he may still feel some resentment, hidden anger or any other signs of non-forgiveness. Having located the person against whom he holds any of these negative emotions, he must declare sincerely in his heart and mind that he truly forgives him. But such a declaration of forgiveness, if he also says in his mind, "But I cannot forget", is not true forgiveness.

True and effective forgiveness, includes forgetting, but the memory of some wrong done may exist somewhere in the mind. It is not as easy as cleaning a word from a slate, or erasing it from a piece of paper. In forgiving those who have trespassed against us, we must effectively forget it, by never again dwelling on the wrongs we think have been done against us. Until this is accomplished sincerely, we cannot expect the Divine One to forgive our trespasses or sins.

Some patients ask, "Does this mean that God is unable to forgive us until we have truly forgiven all those who have trespassed against us, or is it that He will not?" We must remember that God is omnipotent and can therefore do anything He wills to do. Because as well as being omnipotent, He is also omniscient and compassionate, He will answer any prayer that does not go against the ultimate spiritual welfare of the one who prays. Why then this requirement that we must forgive before we are forgiven? And why is the whole process of forgiving and being forgiven essential before the truly effective healing of a person's disease?

Understanding True Love

To understand this, we must take a penetrating look into that which we know as divine, unconditional love. We must be careful not to confuse such a love with the so-called romantic love that comes as a result of Cupid's irresponsible arrow-shooting. This love is an emotional state that keeps a man and a woman in a state of constant agitation, a state of great joy and ecstasy followed by misery and sorrow. Even so, romantic love between man and woman may be an echo of the real thing because it does bring some moments, a few flashes of the great bliss that lies above the passing joys and pains. Thus, in a sense, it is a promise of the true love that will someday come.

Perhaps, the best echo in man and in other animals of the divine love, for which we are forever searching, is what we call mother-love. This, at its best, is completely unselfish, giving-and-forgiving. It demands no return in its purest state, yet like God Himself, the mother does enjoy a response of love for love. Mother-love is certainly brave, even warrior-like in its protectiveness of its offspring. I have seen mother geese attack big farm horses that have strayed too close to the young goslings. The mother goose will face almost any danger to shield her young from harm.

When I was a boy I thought that mother magpies went a bit too far in this. If I inadvertently came too close to a tree where the baby magpies were being hatched out of their shells in some high-up nest, I was attacked by mother magpie from the air. Other birds, including plovers, took the same protective, aggressive action against boys whom they thought were likely to steal their eggs. Such love in human beings is equally strong and lasts longer. It can, however, in time become tainted. It may become more attachment than love, sprouting selfish tentacles to contaminate the original selfless love of the mother.

Is it possible, we wonder, to find somewhere that pure selfless never-changing love that forgives and gives, and asks nothing in return? Yes, it is possible to find and experience that love. First, let us try to understand something of what it is. As the great seer-poet Dante said, "Love is the energy that moves the Sun and the other stars." In fact, it is the primal power that created the universe and holds it together as one unit or system. It could be called the great cosmic magnet that keeps the wheels of the cosmos turning. As Swami says, God is Love and the energy He emanated in creating the universe, the premier energy, the primal energy to begin creation and hold it together, is love.

In Sanskrit, this pure love of God is called *prema*, and in the fullness of time, this divine magnet which we call love draws all things back into conscious oneness with the great Creator. Those, who have eyes to see, witness its reality around them as the inner-truth of the one within the many. Their eyes may fill with tears as their inner-vision apprehends this essence of divine oneness in the beauty of a flower, or a cloud, or the words of a poem. But, above and beyond these occasional flashes of the great truth, there is a way to experience the flow within one's being of this primal *prema*, or divine love. That is, to come within the aura, or the influence, of one who may be called living divinity, for such a one is a veritable fountain of love.

Sri Sathya Sai - Living Avatar of Love

The greatest of these in my own experience is the living Avatar, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Undoubtedly, there are others on earth today who can, to some degree, as Baba does in full measure, open the human heart to release the flow of love that is waiting there. It is the wonderful influence of such Godmen that finds and opens the buried spring of love, pure unconditional love, that is hidden in every person's heart.

But, of course, not everybody who has set his feet on the spiritual path will have the good fortune of meeting one of these divine surgeons of the spiritual heart who will bring forth the flow of love. Perhaps, it is safe to say that the majority will not. Therefore, there must, surely be some other way. Yes, there are several. For one, a deep study of the philosophy concerning the reality and truth of divine love is of great help. We must understand that this *prema* is the primary force within the universe and is the great magnet that holds all in oneness, finally bringing all into our realisation of this unity with its attendant felicity and never-ending yet ever-changing bliss.

With this understanding of the mind and even with slight glimpses, passing experiences of the divine love in our hearts, we will do all we can to practise and promote this important power of love in our lives. How do we do that? As the old French bishop said to the young priest, about this puzzling question, "You learn to walk by walking, you learn to ride a bicycle by riding one. You learn to swim by getting in the water and trying until you learn. There are many things you must learn just by doing them, and loving is one. You learn to love by loving. The more you practise loving, the more love you will develop, until in the end you will be a master in the art of loving."

Practising the Presence of Love

That is the key. Realise that it is the most important thing in your life and begin to practise it on your fellow-men. Start with those who are easy to love. In the end you will be loving those to whom you are indifferent, and eventually even hate will be replaced by love. Furthermore, this trickle of love for our fellow-men can grow into a full stream through heart-felt worship and devotion to one of the princes of love no longer in the body. Two such are Christ and Krishna. Calling on their hallowed names and picturing their forms will help release the pent-up divine love in the human heart.

Finally, we should be aware that, in our own individual divine plan to love not only all of humanity but all of life, forgiveness is the greatest builder of love. Forgiving others and being forgiven by God repairs the broken channels through which the unifying and healing streams of love are meant to flow. In this divine business of forgiving there is one aspect that we should try to understand and remember. You may have heard people say that it is important to forgive ourselves. That is true but who forgives whom in ourselves? The social science of psychology divides us into many different parts, the number and names of these depending on the particular system of psychology we study.

Divine science divides the human being into two main parts. These are, the lower self, usually called the ego, and the high Self, being synonymous with the God within. These two inhabit the one human body. An interesting analogy is shown in the Indian story about two birds which live in the same tree. One has his nest and his existence on the lower branches. He is a very busy little bird, following his instinctive life of food-gathering, mating and fighting the enemies who want to usurp his territory. Sometimes he is happy, at times he is angry and sometimes tragically sad. He catches in his active lifestyle occasional glimpses of another bird living in the thick branches of the tree above him. This bird of the shining plumage seems to live a very calm and contented life, never fighting with other birds over territory or morsels of food. Though in the same tree, this 'top bird' seems to live in a different world. His songs are full of joy, flowing from him, naturally. In time, the 'lower bird', by comparison, sees his own little life as a continual struggle on the treadmill of desires. He longs to be like the shining bird, the calm, beautiful, wise bird on the lofty branches.

The wise bird sees all that his little brother on the lower branches is doing. He knows that his brother on the lower branches will, in the course of time, learn the vital lessons that will make him discard his many agitating desires and start to climb the branches where he can live the life of the higher bird, the life of calmness and peace, the life of light and joy. The high bird will then do all he can to help his lower brother upward, until in love they finally merge as one. The busy bird on the lower branch represents the human lower self or ego, while the bird in the upper branch symbolises our higher Self, our true divine Self.

Being Forgiven by God

In the question of forgiving, what is known as forgiving ourselves must mean the divine Self, who has no sin, but witnesses the misdemeanours, the trespasses, the foolish errors of the little thoughtless desire-filled ego, must be the forgiver of the sins of the ego. So it is that the sinful ego must be forgiven by the divine Self so that forgiving ourselves is the same as being forgiven by God. Our inner God is no different from the one great eternal God who is omnipresent in the universe. In brief, to be forgiven by God is the same as forgiving ourselves.

The inner God forgives the erring ego. It is clear, then, that this process of forgiving and being forgiven, mending as it does the shattered truth of oneness, is one of the most important roads to the state of living in universal love. This is not far from, and may itself be, the liberation we seek. It is said that when an individual reaches this state of enlightenment, or liberation from the bondage of all earthly desires, two paths lie open to him. One is that he may rest in Nirvana, which means being merged with the Divine Absolute for eternity. Otherwise, through the power of the divine love that is now his very being, he may help to do the work of God while merged in Him. That is, he may help his brothers and sisters on earth to mend the broken bridges that hold them in the sorrows of mortal existence, thus bringing them to the truth and joy that he has found.

The first way could be called the Nirvana of rest, and the second the Nirvana of divine action. To attempt to describe what this state of Nirvana or liberation is would be an attempt to describe the indescribable. But Paramahansa Yogananda has given a concept of this that is worthy of our contemplation. What he says, in paraphrase, is that in time we become tired of everything, even pleasure and happiness. Even from the high heavens of joy, men and gods come back to earth to seek the spring-board that will take them beyond the high heavens, in other words, to unity with God or Nirvana. This, he says, is "ever-changing, ever-new, ever-lasting bliss". It is a joy, though eternal, is ever new. This, I feel, is a worthwhile attempt to explain the inexplicable.

"When I wake in the morning thy love is there,
Like the golden sunrise in clear mountain air,
And, sheltered all day in thy aura of blue,
I rest in the beauty and love of you.
There's a silent presence, whatever I do,
Lighting the hours as the day wears through.
Come nearer and nearer, great Lord divine,
Till thy being is mine and mine is thine,
Till this ego can really cease to be,
And I am forever one with thee.
Then, though atoms burst and mountains fall,
No earthly disasters can matter at all,
And even the dark of the cosmic night
Shall shine with thy love in eternal light."

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 9

...LIVING UP TO THE CHALLENGE OF CONSCIENCE IN DAILY LIFE

Dear Reader, in this series, we offer you real life stories from contemporary heroes who have demonstrated the courage to follow their conscience when confronted with difficult dilemmas or challenging circumstances in their daily lives. This segment is an ode to the strength of the brave-hearts who chose to listen to the voice of their conscience, thereby abiding by the values of Right Conduct, Truth, Love, Peace and Non-violence, even though the choice had appeared tough.

In our previous issues, we brought you inspiring stories from Mrs. Priya Davis, Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani, Mr. Karthik Ramesh, Mr. Amar Vivek, Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam, Mr. Hiten Morarji and Mr. N. Prabhakar.

In this issue we have an invigorating story, a deeply personal account from Mr. Sathya Jambunathan, who shares the challenges of conforming to the highest levels of values and ethics while working in the top ranks of a world class sales and marketing team, where many untruths are considered ‘normal’ and unethical business practices ‘necessary’. Read this revealing tale to find out how he avoided tarnishing his conscience or compromising his values when faced with rather uncomfortable and awkward corporate situations, and how by doing so, he has now become a role model for his colleagues.

BALANCING THE BUSINESS OF BUSINESS AND THE BUSINESS OF LIFE

By Mr. Sathya Jambunathan

Mr. Sathya Jambunathan from Mumbai, India grew up under the inspiring guidance of the 9 year Bal Vikas (Sri Sathya Sai Education in Human Values) Diploma Program. He later joined the Maharashtra Sevadal team as a volunteer, before moving to the United States in 1999, where he joined the telecom industry.

Marketing, Sales and Business Development were like dream words to me when I embarked upon a career in the Telecom industry, way back in 1994. It was the time when India was undergoing its telecom makeover. Big companies making a mark in the world were slowly entering the Indian market. Companies such as Lucent, Ericsson, Nortel Networks and Nokia had painted a picture of the high flying telecom executive armed with a sleek laptop and an even sleeker cell phone. This apart, in all fairness, the possibility of taking part in the telecom revolution was also too good to ignore.

So, with this frame of mind, I embarked on my journey in corporate Telecom India, hoping to make a mark in the telecom industry. Sales and Business Development, as good and exciting as it sounds, also had its underlying

challenges in terms of meeting numbers, achieving targets and sticking to principles.

The Soothing Shelter of Bal Vikas

When I underwent the Bal Vikas (Sri Sathya Sai Education in Human Values) program, it used to be a routine “Sunday” fun time with many friends, more than anything else. Little did I realize that the seeds planted during those Sunday classes, would quietly grow into the Divine Tree, whose shade I would come to frequently to seek comfort from, and derive quiet guidance and direction under its many branches. The challenge we face in our daily lives is to realize the presence of this ‘tree’ always being by our side.

Whilst in India, and continuing in the USA, a major part of my job was to interact with clients / customers and convince them of the excellence of my company’s product line. Now, convincing people about the technical excellence of a product was rather simple. In comparison, convincing a human mind to do business with us was far more tedious.

Let me share some of the simple challenges I faced as a spiritual seeker amidst the business of business. The following situations are from the dealings with one of several clients I handle on a regular basis.

Conforming to the Client’s Taste

Quite often, as a part of the business deal process, we had to “socialise” with the client. In particular, this translated as taking the client for late night dinners at restaurants of their choice. Now, being a strict vegetarian by religion and choice, my options of restaurants offering vegetarian dishes were rather “close to nil”. All of a sudden, the business of business came down to sitting at a table with the client who was relishing a plethora of non-vegetarian dishes. ‘How do I handle this?’ was the question in my mind. Sometimes, it may sound straightforward – my mind told me to just not go to these dinner meetings at all. But then, what about the relationship with the client? A client, who is about to sign a \$5 /\$10 million deal the next day morning. This was the first practical shocker, so to say.

Balancing Lifestyle Choices with Occupational Hazards

The face of the client, my manager, and my colleague showed obvious signs of discomfort, seeing me with a plate of salad and baked potato and a glass of water, in contrast to their plates of steak with bottles of beer. All through the dinner, I could sense uneasiness around the table. Also, more importantly for me, I was in doubt, as to whether I had done the right thing by standing out with my meager salad on the table. Somehow the dinner was over, and we retired for the day. I spent that night in the hotel room, struggling to find the right balance between what I do for a living and how I live.

Another challenge was the pressure to indulge in gossip and small talk about pertinent people from competitor companies, when others were using

indecent language under the influence of alcohol. I used to maintain silence, answering only when asked. On many occasions, my manager has disapproved of my being silent. Talking is one of the “biggest” requirements for sales professional, he felt. On the other hand, I firmly believed in the strength of silence.

Honesty and Transparency

Yet another challenge I faced, almost in every transaction with clients, was to “own up” shortcomings in our products. During a business presentation, when we have to showcase the strengths and weaknesses of our solution, the bone of contention for me and our sales team usually is on how much of the weaknesses we should own upfront with the client. The standard answer I get from my colleagues is “let’s get the deal for now, and we can deal with the shortcomings later”. The standard answer I give them is that if we cover up at this stage, it will affect our credibility with the client, and also affect our reputation in the market. But, this approach didn’t go too well with my teammates.

One more aspect of sales organisation is to gather competition product information and create comparison charts. While this activity is definitely useful towards refining our products, it has its own spiritual challenges when it comes to presenting a comparison chart to the customer.

In a competitive environment, the human mind often resorts to conveying what it does better than others. It’s always an external competition. I noticed my teammates resorting to degrading remarks about the competition. It was however an irony to see these same teammates, when they joined the same competitor company, they praised that company’s product and degraded their previous company’s product – it was all in the name of doing business.

For me the main question was if the above mentioned challenges were part and parcel of sales jobs, then do I give in, to make the client happy or do I stand my ground regardless of people and situations?

Gaining the Respect of Colleagues

In the face of these moral dilemmas that I confronted as a part of the corporate culture, the Divine Tree from the seed of Bal Vikas, which was silent so far, showered its grace in the form of self-confidence, self-satisfaction, and clarity of thought towards sticking to principles and to values.

In terms of food situations, every lunch / dinner used to be a challenge in itself - overcoming the desire to decline the invite and then on top of it being a part of the table. But over a period of time, my sales team and sometimes the client took notice of my persistence with vegetarian ways. Once we were in Little Rock, Arkansas, for a two-day business meeting. We were in the midst of the final negotiations for a large deal. Keeping a few pertinent people from the client side in good spirits through this final stage was of prime importance. So, when our meeting took a break for lunch, discussions started on where to

go and what to eat. Given the stress of back-to-back meetings for the previous two days, everyone wanted a good “bite” as they call it here, in the USA. Finally, after 10 minutes of discussion, they decided to go to the most popular “steak house / bar” to informally celebrate the deal which was just a formality at that point. But at the last minute, to my pleasant surprise, a senior member from the client side changed the venue stating that he had realized that restaurant didn't offer any vegetarian dishes, and hence he had found a good but a not so well-known restaurant which offered a variety of dishes for everyone in the team. My hungry stomach swelled with joy and I thanked God profusely!

Silence: Strength or a Social Stigma?

Avoiding gossip discussions / small talk on many occasions, earned me the nametag of a “silent” individual. Over a period I noticed that whenever my teammates started talking, after 5-10 minutes into the conversation, if they saw me in the room, they would either change the topic, or quietly move away from that place. I was later told by one of them, that out of respect for my preference to silence, they refrained from indiscreet and idle talk in my presence.

Contrary to my company's beliefs, owning up shortcomings in our products, and also a fair comparison to competitor products was greatly appreciated by the client, so much so, that they overlooked some of our competitors to choose us, just for this one point of honesty and straight forwardness. Many a time I used to be overlooked for important final stage deal negotiations. Once, in the midst of an important business deal, which if won would be a landmark deal for my company, at the penultimate stage the client found a glitch which although not too big to be worried about, was never mentioned to them.

This glitch never had the potential of breaking a network, but did have the potential of breaking the “trust” of the client. The question now was as to who will tell the client that this was a genuine oversight on our part. After much deliberation, my team picked me to do this so-called “dirty job”, with fingers crossed that the client doesn't drop the deal. As per plan, I conveyed the news to the client, whose reaction only strengthened my beliefs. He mentioned that he trusted my words more than anyone else, as in the past I had owned up our product shortcomings openly. Needless to say, we went on to win the deal, which made our company the first ever company in United States to offer a nation-wide network.

Playing the Game of Life, Fairly!

Life is a game, play it, Bhagavan Baba says. ‘Play it’ – we do. But then, ‘How fairly do we play it?’, is what is more important. Can we be true to ourselves even at the cost of losing our so-called friends, promotions, bonuses, and commissions?

Baba explains that stones exist, plants respond and animals react. Its only humans who have been given the supreme power to discriminate. The Sri

Sathya Sai Education in Human Values programme in its truest perspective has helped me reach where I am in my life today. It continues to help me progress through the four states of stone, vegetable, animal to human and in that process enables me to follow Baba's maxim, *Life is a Challenge, Meet It.*

From the worldly perspective, I was made the sole point of contact with this client, handling around \$10-15 million worth of business. But from a spiritual perspective, I feel greatly blessed, that amidst all the hustle and bustle of Business, I am constantly guided by the Divine to carry out the Business of Life.

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part – 44

(Continued from the previous issue)

ACT XVIII - SCENE 1

PRINCIPAL: Students! In the past, Sathyam used to lead the Prayer Session everyday. And we all know He was very good at it. But Sathyam has now discontinued School and taken to the spiritual path. He has resolved to go on the path of devotion, and will soon make His Voice of Love heard all over the world. So, today I want one of you to lead the Prayer Session. Gafur Khan, you come here and start the proceedings.

Gafur Khan at the behest of his principal leads the prayer session. But despite that there is an air of vacuum. All the boys, including Gafur were so used to seeing their Sathyam lead the prayer session that somehow that day’s session left a feeling of unrest and dissatisfaction in their hearts. Sensing this, the principal said:

PRINCIPAL: Boys, calm down! Sathyam gave His love to all of you, and along with that a Prayer Song that will remain in our hearts for all time to come. Your love for Sathyam is very evident. Instead of merely singing a prayer song, you have all poured out your hearts. Now that the session is over, all of you may go to your respective classes.

SCENE 2

LADY: So they brought Raju back to Puttaparthi.

LADY 2: Is that so?

LEELA: Vasanthamma, this is Kondama Raju’s grandson Raju, is he not?

VASANTHA: Yes, this is Raju, the son of Easwaramma. When young, He along with His friends used to play on the sands of Chitravathi. What a glorious sight it used to be! Later when He went away to Uravakonda for studies, Chitravathi felt lonely.

LEELA: Well, He is back again and seeing Him, Chitravathi seems happier than even us!

VASANTHA: Do you know that there is Divinity in Raju? It seems that He sings and conducts *Bhajans*, gives Discourses and all that. That's why He discontinued studies and has returned to Puttaparthi. Isn't that wonderful? How radiant He is!

SURESH: Raju, do You know that after You went to Uravakonda, we all felt most miserable?

SATHYA: I know.

RAVI: Raju, we were all eagerly looking forward to Your return.

SATHYA: Happy to hear that.

SURENDRA: Raju, You must always be with us, and we must all play once more on the banks of Chitravathi.

KASI: Wow! Look how many fruits this tamarind tree has!

SURENDRA: That's right, so many tamarind fruits here!

SURESH: What a thing to say, as if there will be guavas on a tamarind tree! Sathyam, what do You say?

SATHYA: You want guavas?

SURESH: Guavas from a tamarind tree? Well, pluck one and let us see!

GROUP: Laughter.

SURESH: Guava!

RAVI: Yes!

SURENDRA: Where is Raju?

GROUP: Raju, Raju!

SURESH: Hey! Raju is on the tree!

SURENDRA: Raju, I want grapefruit.

SATHYA: OK.

KAMESH: Raju, I want oranges.

SATHYA: Alright, here are two oranges.

SURENDRA: Raju!

SATHYA: What fruit do you want?

SURENDRA: I want an apple!

GROUP: Apple, apple!

BOY: Raju, I want a banana.

SATHYA: You want a banana?

BOY: Hey! The tamarind has become a banana! Raju, Raju!

BOY 2: Raju, Raju, I want citrus fruits.

SATHYA: Oh alright.

BOY: Citrus fruit!

BOY 2: Whatever anyone asks Raju gives!

CHORUS: Raju, Raju,.....Where is He? Raju!

SURENDRA: Over there! There He is!

SURENDRA: Hey, He is there also;... now He has vanished!

BOY: Yes, He cannot be seen.

BOY 2: Yes, and it is all very strange!

GROUP: Raju, Raju!

SURENDRA: Here!Raju is here!

GROUP: Raju, You are here!

SURENDRA: Raju, when You disappeared, do You know how anxious we were?

SURESH: Just now we saw You here on the banks of the Chitravathi. Raju, how did You suddenly come there?

SATHYA: I am everywhere. How can you search for Me in just one place?

BOY: It is all so very mysterious! From one tree, You gave us so many fruits! Raju, did You chant any *mantras*?

BOY 2: Yes, Raju, did You chant any *mantras*?

SATHYA: It is neither magic nor *mantra*. Divinity can always alter the nature of Creation. That is all there is to it. Anyway, let us leave that aside; shall we all go now to the Hanuman Temple?

GROUP: Yes. Let's go, Raju.

SCENE 3

GROUP: Jai Hanuman! Jai Anjaneya!

BOY: Come, let's circumambulate.

GROUP: Jai Hanuman, Jai Anjaneya, Jai Hanuman, Jai Anjaneya!

ANJANEYA: Rama! Sri Rama!

SATHYA: Hanuman!

ANJANEYA: Sri Ramachandra! Sri Rama! Swami! Sri Rama should not go round Hanuman; rather, it should be the other way around. Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram,.....

RAVI: Raju, instead of going round, why are You just standing? Come, let's circumambulate.

SATHYA: Hanuman is holding My feet! I can't take even one step!

RAVI: Hanuman holding Your Feet? Good God! Where?

GROUP: Where is Hanuman? We can't see him!

RAVI: Hanuman is not to be seen!

SURESH: Raju, are You joking?

GROUP: Come, let's pull. Come on, hold on fast and pull!

RAVI: Raju, is Hanuman really holding Your Feet?

SURESH: Then, are You Sri Ramachandra? Tell us!

GROUP: Tell us, Raju, tell us! Are You Sri Ramachandra?

GROUP: Sri Ram, Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram, Sri Ram, Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram,[7 times].

BOY: Raju, what a dazzling *Darshan* You gave us in the Form of Sri Ramachandra!

SATHYA: In future, you will see even more of the grandeur of My *Avatar*. Come, let's go.

GROUP: Raju, we are indeed most fortunate!

SCENE 4

MAN/PEOPLE: That is Kondama Raju, the grandfather of the Young Swami.

KONDAMA: You are a liberated soul, a form of God, and the Jewel of the Ratnakara family. I have had the good fortune of seeing God in form of my grandson. I have now brought these fruits not as a grandfather, but as a devotee! Please accept!

SATHYA: O old and Wise one, you are equal to the Divine! Good be unto you!

KONDAMA: In my time, I have, with these hands, offered the first morsel of food to many babies, initiated many children into education, and blessed many marriages. With these hands, I have also carried many grandsons and granddaughters. They were the hands of Your grandfather but Your hands will confer universal good. They will perform great deeds for the world. I ask, not as Your grandfather but as a devotee, please apply *Vibhuti* on my forehead with Your Sacred hands. That would be the ultimate fulfilment.

MAN/PEOPLE: Salutations!

EASWARAMMA: My boy Sathyam, who are You really? Are You my Sathyam or something else? And what are all these powers?

SATHYA: When the time comes, you will know all the answers.

[To be continued]

MUSINGS ON AVATARS - Part 6

(Continued from the previous issue)

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Dear Readers, for 40 previous issues – from October 2004 to February 2008 - we brought you a spiritual feast in the form of the "Gita for Children" in a serialized form. Prior to that, we had started our first series entitled "Shirdi Sai – Parthi Sai" which is continuing till date. The "Gita for Children" series was taken from the book "Krishna - Arjuna Dialogue" authored by Prof. Venkataraman. As we concluded the final segment of this book in February 2008 issue, from March 2008, we started a new series on "Avatars" or Divine Incarnations. The articles in this series are actually adaptations of talks delivered recently on Radio Sai by Prof. G. Venkataraman, and are based on the book "Message of the Lord" authored by him a few years earlier. We hope H2H readers will relish the spiritual insights this series offers.

The story of Krishna that I narrated earlier does not include a description of the Great War between the Kauravas and the Pandavas which took place at Kurukshetra. This war is a story in itself, and Krishna's role in this war is of paramount significance, particularly because it was at the beginning of this eighteen-day war that Krishna preached the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna.

The Kurukshetra War was basically a family feud which not only snowballed into a huge conflict but actually became a tussle between righteousness (*Dharma*) and unrighteousness (*Adharma*). Initially it seemed as if fortune favoured the forces of evil (as indeed it always appears to). Eventually of course, *Dharma* triumphed, as it has to always, though throughout history mankind has generally lacked the confidence that it will! By the way, it is no surprise that *Dharma* had the final say since the Blessed Lord was personally backing it. As in every other instance, the war left a massive trail of devastation, reminding us that the price of victory is never cheap; but when *Dharma* itself is at stake, no price is too expensive - that was the moral then and it remains the same today too.

King Santanu's Marriage Vow to Goddess Ganga

The story starts with King Santanu of Hastinapura who one day came across a damsel of extraordinary and bewitching beauty. The young lady was none other than the goddess Ganga (representing the River Ganges) who, for divine reasons, had assumed a human form. Succumbing to her charms, the King begged her to become his wife, which Ganga agreed to but on one condition. She said: "O King, under no circumstances must you ask me who I am, where I come from, etc. Nor must you ever probe my actions however legitimate your concern might seem to you. If you agree to my stipulations, I shall marry you but be warned that if ever you violate your promise, I shall

forthwith leave you for ever.” So infatuated was the King that without a second thought he agreed to all the laid conditions.

Soon a child was born but Ganga, without batting an eyelid, threw the baby into the river Ganges! Santanu was horrified but bound by his promise, could do precious little. Other children came but every one of them was promptly despatched to a watery grave and the count quickly rose to seven. Then came the eighth child and as Ganga was about to throw the baby boy into the river, Santanu picked up courage and tried to stop her. Ganga then said to Santanu: “O King, you seem to have forgotten your promise and so I have to leave you now. This child I shall not kill but will take him with me; however, later I shall hand him over to you. But before I go let me tell you that I am not a heartless woman given to killing her own children. Those whom I was forced to destroy were bound by a curse and I was the agency used for implementing the curse.” She said so and disappeared with the baby. About eight or so years later Ganga appeared before Santanu and handed over his son who had been named Devavrata and had already become proficient in the martial arts. Ganga then vanished.

Bhishma's Terrific Vow

Four more years went by and one day, Santanu saw a young fisherwoman named Satyavati whom he wanted to marry. He approached the father of the girl and the father said that he would give his daughter in marriage provided Santanu would make her child the King of the realm after Santanu's death. This, the King would not agree to, because that would amount to rank injustice to Devavrata, now blossoming as a fine prince. Nevertheless, he continued to pine for Satyavati. Seeing his father in a distraught condition, Devavrata made enquires. Once he came to learn of the reason, he promptly renounced his claim to the throne and in addition swore that he would never marry so that there would be no children through him who could later contest the kingship. On account of this vow Devavrata came to be known as Bhishma or the one who took a terrific vow, a name that replaced the one given by his mother.

Santanu had two sons named Chitrangada and Vichitravirya through Satyavati, and to Vichitravirya were born two sons named Dhritarashtra and Pandu. Dhritarashtra married Gandhari and sired a hundred sons known collectively as the Kauravas. Pandu married two wives - Kunti and Madri - and had five sons in all, known as the Pandavas.

Dhritarashtra, the elder son, was born blind and therefore Pandu was appointed to the throne. At that time, Pandu had no sons. One day he went hunting and as the result of unhappy circumstances came under the curse of a Rishi according to which he, Pandu, would forfeit his life if he sought conjugal pleasure. Heartbroken, Pandu surrendered the kingdom to his elder brother Dhritarashtra, and retired with his two wives to the forest to lead a life of penance and austerity. Dhritarashtra was advised in the affairs of the state by his able minister Vidura and of course also by his uncle Bhishma.

A Gift from the Sun God

Pandu's elder wife Kunti was actually the sister of Vasudeva, the father of Krishna. You might remember that I have mentioned this before. When she was young she had been given in adoption to a king named Kunti Bhoja and for that reason, she was known as Kunti. As a young girl, Kunti had won a special boon from Sage Durvasa. According to that, by chanting a sacred *Mantra* and thinking of a deity, she would get a son with all the qualities of that deity. Tremendously excited, Kunti decided to try it out immediately and chanting the Mantra, she meditated upon Surya (the Sun god). Surya at once appeared before her and said: "I bless you with my son." Aghast, Kunti said, "My Lord, I didn't realise that this *Mantra* was so powerful and that it would work so fast! I am not married and what would people say if I were to have a son now? Please help me!" Surya replied, "I am afraid I cannot take back the son. But don't worry, for, the baby would be born right now and you don't have to wait for nine months; also, the birth would not affect your virginity."

Karna, the child of Surya, was born forthwith and putting the baby in a sealed box, Kunti let the box afloat in a river. The box was spotted and picked up by a charioteer named Adhiratha, and Karna grew up under the care of the charioteer's wife named Radha. For this reason, Karna was also sometimes referred to as Radheya.

Later Kunti got married to Pandu and when she went along with him to the forest, Pandu desiring progeny asked her to invoke the boon granted by Durvasa. Thus it was that Kunti gave birth to Yudhishtira by meditating upon *Dharmaraja*, the Lord of righteousness and death; Bhima, by meditating upon *Vayu*, the wind god; and Arjuna by contemplating on *Indra*, the King of the *Devas* (angels). On Pandu's request, Kunti taught Madri the same *Mantra* and helped her to get two sons named Nakula and Sahadeva. In this way, Pandu became the notional father of five sons [collectively known as the Pandavas], but biologically he was not.

Arjuna vs. Karna: A Prelude to War

After the birth of the five sons, Pandu was one day seized with physical desire and sought to enjoy conjugal relations with Madri. Instantly the curse became effective, and he died. The Pandava princes now returned from the forest to Hastinapura and came under the protection of their grandsire Bhishma. The latter appointed Kripa (known reverentially as Kripacharya) as a teacher to the sons of Dhritarashtra as well as of Pandu. Though the Kauravas and the Pandavas grew up together, there was generally no love between them, particularly between Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, and Bhima. The only one to rise totally above all ill feelings was the eldest of them all, the wise and gentle Yudhishtira (also known as Dharmaputra) who was singularly different.

Sometime later, the task of imparting instruction fell to Drona (also referred respectfully as Dronacharya), the brother-in-law of Kripacharya. One day, Drona announced a public contest to test the skills of his pupils. It was a big

event, and besides the king, the elite as well as the general public were invited to witness the proceedings. One by one the young princes were called upon to display their skills, and when it came to the turn of Arjuna, there appeared in the arena an intruder who dared to challenge Arjuna, and actually displayed equal skill in archery. Feeling deeply insulted, Arjuna challenged the intruder to a combat; the intruder was none other than Karna. At this stage, Drona intervened to say that a prince could fight only another prince. Would Karna identify himself? Was he a prince? Whose son was he? Karna, who believed that he was the son of a charioteer, felt deeply pained that he was being kept out on flimsy technical grounds. It was at this stage that Duryodhana came forward to extend support and patronage to Karna, an act that was to have far-reaching consequences. On the spot, Duryodhana made Karna the King of Anga, a territory lying within the kingdom of Dhritarashtra. Meanwhile the Sun had set and the days proceedings were declared concluded; as a result the fight between Karna and Arjuna did not take place. But deep animosity between the two took root and it lasted till Karna was finally killed in the Kurukshetra war.

Duryodhana's Plot Backfires

When the Kaurava princes and the Pandavas reached the age of assuming responsibility, there was much speculation about how Dhritarashtra would transfer power. On the compelling advice of Bhishma and Vidura [in passing I should mention that Bhishma and Vidura acted as advisers to Dhritarashtra], Dhritarashtra appointed Yudhishtira as the Crown Prince. However, that did not imply, at least in Dhritarashtra's mind, that Yudhishtira would automatically succeed to the throne. Duryodhana, of course, was in no mood to be deprived of power or even to share it with the Pandavas, and he spared no pains to hatch schemes for the elimination of his cousins. Plotting with his uncle Sakuni and Karna, Duryodhana got built a fabulous palace at a place called Varanavata. The palace was unusual in that it was built entirely of lacquer, a highly inflammable material, though this was not evident to the eye. Duryodhana's idea was to somehow entice the Pandavas to visit the palace and once they were there, to arrange an "accidental" fire in which his cousins would perish. The Pandavas duly fell into the trap, but Vidura who got wind of Duryodhana's evil intentions gave a coded warning to Yudhishtira with the words: "A forest fire cannot hurt a rat which shelters itself in a hole."

When the Pandavas reached their destination and discovered that the palace was nothing but a fire bomb, they quietly built a tunnel, set fire to the palace themselves before Duryodhana's agents could do so, and silently escaped through the tunnel into the forest. News about the fire reached Hastinapura and Duryodhana, who did not know that his plan had gone astray, assumed that the Pandavas were dead and secretly rejoiced. Only Vidura knew that the Pandavas were safe and he shared that information with Bhishma alone.

Deeply conscious now that the Kauravas would not stop at anything, the Pandavas chose to remain in disguise as they wandered about. In the process, they came to the kingdom of Panchala (the land of the five rivers, i.e., modern Punjab) ruled by Drupada. Drupada was an enemy of Drona, and

he had two sons named Dhristadyumna and Sikhandi. The latter was actually born as a girl but aided by divine circumstances later transformed into a boy; this sex change was to have implications in the elimination of Bhishma in the Great War.

A 'Prize' for the Pandavas

At the time when the Pandavas made their entry into Panchala, Drupada had arranged an exotic archery contest to select a suitor for his daughter Draupadi (also known as Panchali). Disguised as Brahmins, the Pandavas made their way to the scene of the contest. The contest, which was open to members of the warrior class (i.e., the Kshatriya caste), soon got under way. None could score a success, including Karna, who missed by the proverbial hair's breadth. At this stage, Arjuna stood up to ask if a Brahmin could make a try. Draupadi's brother Dhristadyumna said that any noble son of a noble mother could do so, whereupon Arjuna with effortless ease shot into the complex target. Without a moment's hesitation, Draupadi followed Arjuna to the hut of the Pandavas. As the victors were entering, Kunti asked them what they had brought home from the contest. "A prize", was the reply, whereupon, Kunti having no knowledge of the nature of the so-called prize, asked them to share it equally. Naturally this posed a nasty problem, and Draupadi was duly consulted. She did not mind marrying all the five simultaneously, but her father Drupadha was shocked beyond words - naturally. At this stage, Sage Vyasa arrived on the scene and he told Drupadha that in her previous birth, Draupadi had prayed five times intensely to Siva for a good husband. Her prayers were being answered all together now in this birth, and so, a one-time exception could be made to a woman marrying more than one husband. Vyasa also added that no other woman could invoke this example as an excuse to marry more than one husband. Drupada withdrew his objection, and Kunti welcomed the new addition to their family.

At the time of their marriage, the Pandavas gave up their disguise, and of course, Drupada was most delighted to learn that his sons-in-law were actually princes. The Pandavas returned to Hastinapura triumphantly, much to the delight of Vidura, Bhishma and the general public as well; needless to say that Duryodhana and Karna boiled inside with fury since their plan had completely backfired.

The big question was: "What would happen now?" Bhishma advocated that the best course would be for Dhritarashtra to divide his kingdom into two parts and hand over one of these to the Pandavas to rule, leaving the other half to the Kauravas. Vidura lent active support and added, "It is a common talk among the people that we tried to kill the Pandavas. This is the only way of silencing such gossip." Though not quite willing, Dhritarashtra yielded as this seemed the best way of securing peace. Outwitted, Duryodhana tried to make the best of a bad bargain by making sure that the portion of the empire that the Pandavas received was dry, barren and unproductive. Naming their kingdom as Indraprastha, by sheer hard work the Pandavas transformed it into a lush and prosperous country, whereupon Duryodhana once again became furious and consumed with jealousy. Meanwhile, Krishna's

association with the Pandavas grew, and that is how He came to use Bhima to exterminate Jarasanda. Later, Krishna exploited the opportunity provided by the *Rajasuya Yajna* performed by Yudhishtira to personally annihilate Sishupala.

Fates Decided by a Game of Dice

Duryodhana's anger against the Pandavas having reached new heights, the plotting against them resumed with renewed vigour. Many plans were considered, outright war being one of them. Karna was fully in favour of a direct attack, but Duryodhana's uncle Sakuni strongly advised against it. He said, "We must use brains and not brawn. Entice them to a game of dice and leave the rest to me." Seeing the merit of the suggestion, the plotters then met Dhritarashtra and sought his blessings to invite the Pandavas for a game of dice. Dhritarashtra consulted Vidura who was revolted by the idea. However, by exploiting parental softness, Duryodhana had his way and Vidura, the objector, was himself despatched to convey the invitation to the Pandavas for a game of dice. In those days, the etiquette among kings was that an invitation to a sport, especially a game of dice should be honoured and not refused. And thus, it was that Yudhishtira and his brothers came to Hastinapura for what they thought was a normal game of dice.

Duryodhana, of course, had other plans and proposed that while he would make the wagers, the dice would actually be thrown on his behalf by Sakuni. The ever-soft Yudhishtira raised no objections, not suspecting in the least that Sakuni would skilfully manipulate the dice, literally making them dance to his (Sakuni's) tune. Yudhishtira had a string of failures or bad luck, unprecedented in history but never once did he suspect foul play. In all innocence, he played according to the rules, while his opponents cheated at every conceivable opportunity. To cut a long story short, Yudhishtira wagered and successively lost jewels, chariots, animals like horses, elephants, even cows, sheep, etc. Having lost all worldly possessions, he then bet his four brothers and lost them too. Egged by Sakuni, he then thoughtlessly offered his own self as a wager, and soon found that he too had become the slave of Duryodhana!

One would have thought that would be the end of the game; no, Yudhishtira was reminded that he still had something he could wager and that was his wife, Draupadi. His discrimination entirely blunted, Yudhishtira took the incredible step of offering Draupadi as a bet and lost her too. And this precisely was what many like Karna were waiting for - to inflict the ultimate in humiliation.

While all this drama was going on in the royal assembly, Draupadi was indoors blissfully unaware that her husband had lost everything including himself and her too. But when Duryodhana's brother Duhsasana burst into her chambers to drag her by her hair to the assembly, the reality of the situation hit her like a ton of bricks. There she was in the assembly, the high and the mighty at one end, her enslaved husbands at the other, and she in the middle held by her hair by Duhsasana, while the Kauravas took turns in taunting her and hurling filthy remarks.

Draupadi's Miracle

Deep in anguish and eyes drenched with tears, Draupadi looked pleadingly at her husbands, five of them, but there was no help from that quarter. She then appealed to the learned ones like Bhishma and Kripacharya, but they silently looked the other way. And then, rising to new levels of indecent and atrocious behaviour, Duhsasana, at the behest of Duryodhana and Karna tried to disrobe Draupadi in public. The distressed damsel now had only one resort, and that was to appeal to Lord Krishna Himself. Loudly and pathetically she wailed, "O Krishna, O Lord of Mathura, O Lord of Dwaraka, O my Indweller, where are You in my hour of distress? They say You have a thousand eyes. Are they not watching what is going on? And pray, what did I do to deserve all this? My husbands swore by the sacred fire to protect me and my honour. Look at them now standing silently and not lifting a little finger! You are my only refuge and I surrender totally to You; it is now entirely up to You to protect my modesty."

Lo and behold, an extraordinary miracle took place. Even as Duhsasana tried to remove Draupadi's garments, fresh ones kept appearing. He tried and tried to strip her completely, but her sari kept extending endlessly. Eventually he became physically tired and simply quit, after which the proceedings abruptly ended.

Altogether, it was an electrifying drama and different people reacted differently. Dhritarashtra, for one, was frightened out of his wits, and counselled by his Queen Gandhari, he drew Draupadi aside, profusely apologised to her and promised that he would grant any wish of hers. Draupadi merely desired that her husbands be set free; they did not come to her rescue but here she was rescuing them! Dhritarashtra gladly did as asked and offered another boon to Draupadi which she politely refused. However, in a rare mood of generosity, Dhritarashtra gave back to Yudhishtira all that had been won (by unfair means) from him. So, at the end of the day, the Pandava brothers went back with their kingdom intact and a bag full of unpleasant memories.

This scene in the Mahabharatha is full of significance. This I shall elaborate in the next episode. Till then, all the best and may God be with you.

Jai Sai Ram.

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

ENRICHING KANCHEEPURAM...THE SAI WAY ***By Enveloping it with Pure and Selfless Love and Service***

An ambitious national project of the Sri Sathya Sai Service Organization, the Sri Sathya Sai Village Integration Program, ‘SSSVIP’ is paving the way for the geo-spiritualization of India from the grassroots up. It is emerging as a highly successful and silent spiritual revolution that is constructively galvanizing the youthful energy of those who recognize that all life forms share a deeper connection and that in the well-being of one lies the health of all.

Shining as the chosen instruments of the Sai Era, through whom the Lord of the Universe is sharing His boundless love, these young knights clad in loving armour, are living the ultimate wisdom that universal Love is the true religion of the entire human race.

In the previous month we brought you the story of the Sai youth from New Delhi who found their moment of nirvana as they stood knee-deep in a garbage dump, cleaning the physical surroundings of a village within the national capital.

This issue brings you an account of the efforts of the dynamic Sai youth from Tamil Nadu, who believe that the only way humanity can survive harmoniously is through the collective power of human compassion and empathy. By combining their love, energy, knowledge and skills with their idealism, they have adopted a comprehensive program in three districts of the State of Tamil Nadu to eradicate human suffering, one inequity at a time.

Well-known for its rich culture and heritage, Kancheepuram, the ancient capital of the Pallava dynasty, is a historic region located in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, near the city of Chennai. It has also acquired international fame because of its rich silk saree industry. Today, Kancheepuram sarees are synonymous with classic style, a must-have in every saree *connoisseur’s* wardrobe.

Despite its name and fame, this district, dotted with numerous villages and tiny hamlets continues to be a primarily agrarian society, with a growing population that, till recently, struggled daily to survive pathetic living conditions, which included no access to potable water for its residents, inadequate learning supplies for its children and scant employment opportunities for its youth and women. That was up until the time a brigade of Sai Youth from Tamil Nadu stepped in to dispel the atmosphere of gloom and doom with the brilliance of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s love and light.

Translating their devotion for His teachings into selfless action, the Sai Youth of Tamil Nadu committed themselves into taking up genuine responsibility in their hearts to view every person on this planet, especially those in need, as their own brother and sister. Adopting Kancheepuram and two other neighbouring districts, as their ground zero, they are bringing sustainable development and relief to the communities that have suffered decades of

neglect and dejection. What have they done and how are they going about it? This is what they have to say:

Inspired solely by Bhagavan's divine life, we, the Sai Youth of Tamil Nadu, undertook various service projects including a *Water Purification Project*, a *Free Notebooks Project* for school children and the *Sapling Project* to eradicate malnutrition covering the rural areas of three districts in our state, namely, Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur and Vellore. Most of these villages lacked basic amenities and the villagers lived way below the poverty line.

The service activities were undertaken as a part of the Sathya Sai Village Integration Programme or SSSVIP, a nation-wide project launched by the ocean of compassion and non-judgmental love, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba to care for those who stand neglected for generations in the villages of India.

Priority # 1: Water Purification Project

The initial survey of the area was a startling revelation for us as it pointed to a total lack of clean drinking water in the villages and a plethora of dreadful diseases that were devastating young lives due to the contamination they were exposed to. Recalls one of the youth members involved in the operation, "Villagers had a terrible time earlier as far as drinking water was concerned. They used the water from small ponds and lakes, which were very dirty and absolutely unhygienic. As a result, diarrhea and vomiting was endemic. They were always a few who were down with these ailments and it was more so with children, which was a pathetic sight...The villagers had their own method of purifying the water which was generally to allow the visibly dirty water to 'rest' for 3-4 hours before they used it - because only then the mud settled down at the base of their vessels."

Realizing the importance of providing the local population with sources of pure and potable water, the life sustaining elixir essential for healthy living, the water purification project became a priority, and one of the first projects that the Sai Youth took up in June 2007. Initially it covered eight villages of the Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu. Today, the effort has grown to encompass 22 villages and is still growing!

It is indeed no simple task to survey the villagers, get approval from village heads and the local Panchayat board, install water purifiers and maintain them across 22 villages. Needless to say, it was made possible only by Bhagavan's divine will, blessings and guidance.

We initiated the project by conducting a detailed survey of each of the villages. We went door to door and took into consideration the economic condition of the villagers and their health and hygiene practices. Local involvement and support being critical to the success of such an initiative, we had meetings with the village leaders and sought their approval. At the same time, we apprised the authorities of the service ideals, which form the core of Bhagavan Baba's teachings. The village elders and government authorities, not only readily agreed to the proposal, but also offered all necessary support. In one village, the temple priest, who was held in high esteem by the villagers,

offered his wholehearted support. In another village, a school headmaster came forward and immediately threw his weight behind the efforts.

As with any Sai service activity, this project also cut across all religious lines and appealed to all communities alike, receiving everybody’s whole-hearted approval. The spontaneity with which everyone involved wanted to embrace the projects bearing the name of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba moved the young participants deeply. For the Sai youth, it was indeed a humbling experience to observe the reaction of relief and welcome that Bhagavan’s holy name evoked instantly even in such a remote region. To act as His representatives was both a privilege and a responsibility, for they had to live up to the purity associated with the name of Sai.

Sai Synchrony Guides Youth Efforts

Next, the Sai volunteers or the Sevadals collected water samples and sent them for evaluation to government-authorized laboratories to test water quality. The results only confirmed their worst fears. A team member closely associated with the work recalls, “After testing their water at a government testing facility, we had no doubt that the villagers had to be provided with water purifiers. So we contacted a company making such products, and luckily the owner was a Sai devotee. He supplied the needed *Water Purion* water filters at a very good price.

“After careful analysis, water purifiers were installed in strategic locations in the villages, such as beside temples and churches, village water tanks and other sources of stored water. In addition, three purifiers were also installed in schools.”

Transformation through Information

The installation of the purifiers was done on a step-by-step basis. A team member further explains: “After installing the systems, we went door to door and explained to the members of the family about the new facility that was set up for them, and briefed them on how to use it effectively. We told them to use this water only for drinking and cooking. We also printed all the relevant information in a pamphlet in Tamil, the local language, and distributed it to every household. We started with three villagers and now we have completed all the 22 villages in our district.”

No surprise that the response from the local population has been that of big relief and heartfelt gratitude. The head of one village, expressing his relief, said, “Earlier whenever we used to cook rice, it used to get discoloured because of bad water, but now our rice is cooked white and healthy. The children in our village are hale and hearty; there are no more complaints of diarrhea or vomiting.”

Another villager was candid to admit that “It has saved us so much time, energy and effort. Previously, we had to wait for 3-4 hours before we could use the collected water from the local pond as it would take that much time for the mud to settle at the bottom of our vessels. But now, we use the water from the purifier instantly. It has made tremendous difference in our lives. Now we do not have any tension and have more time to work and earn well. We are daily-wage labourers and this facility has made our lives so easy. It has given us health and happiness.”

Rev. Thiru Arputha Raj, Head Master, Don Bosco High School, Sagayathottam village, expressed his gratitude through his message where he said, "Our Don Bosco High School is situated in a remote village lacking basic facilities and away from the main road. In this school, the destitute boys and the ward of poor peasants are studying. We convey our gratitude for having installed the PURION machine to facilitate the boys to drink purified water."

Self-Sustaining Empowerment

To ensure the long term viability of the project, two village youth were selected in each village and trained to maintain the purifiers. Sai Youth still visit these villages to monitor the working of the purifiers. The highlight of the entire project was not just the water purifiers, but also the purification that it brought about in all those who participated - from the Sevadals volunteers to the villagers.

Explaining the impact of the project on the lives of around 200 families within his village, a local resident said that the community values the water enough to use it "only for drinking. Since it is filtered well, it is potable and tastes good. We also use it for cooking."

He goes on to add that "I knew it from the very beginning that this is from Sai Baba. The water is very nice to drink."

Another village lady explains how it has ended the community's health woes. "Earlier, we used to boil water, but we still had problems such as jaundice. Now we use this water directly without boiling, and we have no such problems anymore."

Project Purified not just the Water, But Human Hearts too!

During the course of the project when it began in 2007, around 150 village youth were shown videos of Bhagavan, His teachings, and His various projects. This inspired and ignited their hearts and minds and many of the youth made a pilgrimage to Prashanthi Nilayam in 2007. This year (2008) another 150 village youth have registered for the Sai Youth Pilgrimage to the holy land of Puttaparthi in August.

Involvement in this activity brought change not only at the village level, but also at an individual level. Four plumbers accompanied the Sai youth from Chennai to help install the purifiers. The plumbers were unfortunately caught in the vicious grip of the harmful and self-destructive habits of smoking and alcohol. Continuous exposure to Bhagavan's life, teachings, love and energy through their day-and-night interaction with the Sai Youth transformed them totally. One Seval volunteer, later on happened to visit the humble dwelling of one of the plumbers and enquired about the general welfare of his family. The plumber's wife was full of joy and praise. "He used to smoke and drink earlier. He only gave a small portion of his (daily) wage to me to run the family. However, today he gives it all! There is a visible transformation in him. I am very happy!" Another plumber was so moved by the effort that he offered a hundred rupees, which is a lot of money for a daily wage earner, for *Narayana seva* or feeding the poor!

Divine Masterplan includes Ecology, Environment and Nutrition

In a bid to provide a long term solution to widely prevalent malnutrition and environmental neglect, we also planned another project involving the plantation of tree saplings beside village homes. We approached Bhagavan for His blessings during His visit to Chennai in January 2007. Swami graciously approved the plan and even suggested the species to be planted – drum sticks (*Moringa oleifera*), papaya and curry leaf (*Murraya koenigii*)!

We procured the seeds of the three species from Krishnagiri, the very place where the saplings were conditioned. By Bhagavan’s grace, we could get them at half the actual price! Next, we stored them in a central location and allowed them to germinate in specially prepared containers. From the location, we then transported the saplings by trucks, specially arranged for the purpose and distributed them to about 700 families in villages. This mammoth task was implemented in its entirety within a single day! Who but God Himself could have made this possible in such a vast geographic area?

Supreme Project Manager Multiplies Food

The divine hand of God was evident at all levels of the project. As a member explains, “We previously had many youth members who did not turn up regularly for service activities. But, it so happened that they willingly came forward to participate in this service project. All of them now come for such service activities regularly. They all expressed their delight and contentment in doing these activities.

“There is a particular incident that I would like to share. Before commencing the coconut sapling plantation in the villagers’ houses, we had to make sure that pits were dug and properly conditioned to aid growth of the saplings. So, on a particular Sunday, ten of us were asked to go to each of the houses and check if this was made ready. As the villages were far away from our place, we had to start early. I was co-coordinating the task along with another Sai brother. We decided to complete our breakfasts at home. As per the instructions of our youth leader, I took 30 buns with us for our lunch - three buns per person. I counted them myself and put them in a bag. We reached the villages as planned and went around checking if the pits were dug and maintained as specified. It was afternoon and all of us felt very hungry. So, I started distributing three buns each. As we were hungry, we didn’t really bother to look into how many we ate. Many of us had four or more. We also gave buns to our van driver. After all this bountiful distribution, we still had buns remaining! We completed the remaining areas and left for the day. Only later that night did I realize this silent miracle of Bhagavan!”

Buoyed by the recurring vote of approval from Bhagavan, as a follow up to the project, Sai Youth visited these villages every weekend to ascertain that the plants were cared for and growing well. Presently, these saplings have grown into healthy tall trees! The experience to see the team’s efforts come to fruition so efficiently, effectively and quickly has been a gratifying, inner eye-opener for all of us concerned.

Free Notebook Distribution Project

When we surveyed the villagers’ needs, we further discovered the severe dearth of appropriate school supplies in the local schools. This deprivation of

basic learning necessities was posing a serious impediment to the intellectual growth of the children. The extremely low family incomes pushed education down on the local villagers’ list of priorities, aggravating the situation even further.

As a third project, about seventy of us, Sai Youth, came together to issue notebooks and English/English-Tamil dictionaries to village schools in the district. This was accomplished in two phases, once in July 2007, and repeated in June 2008. Twenty-three villages were identified and about twenty-five schools stood to benefit from this drive to promote a love for learning without burdening the students’ impoverished families.

Phase One Sows Seeds of One Human Faith -, the Religion of Love

On July 1st 2007, we distributed over 16,600 specially designed notebooks with Bhagavan’s picture on them to students from Grades I to X. The rear cover of these notebooks contained Bhagavan’s quotes on the importance of respecting our mothers. Given the universal nature of all Sai teachings, it was again a heart-warming experience for us to watch one school’s headmaster, a Christian priest, explain the significance of Bhagavan’s quotes to the children. In Bhagavan’s words, “One cannot revere God without first respecting one’s own parents. Respect and love your parents.”

In addition, we also gifted specially designed LIFCO (The Little Flower Company) dictionaries, which contained Bhagavan’s quotes and relevant pictures to students from Grades VI to VIII. The special-edition dictionaries had two sections. The first contained information on Bhagavan’s teachings and universal human values. It also highlighted Bhagavan’s mammoth service projects in Puttaparthi and elsewhere. The second section comprised of an English/English-Tamil dictionary. The task of distribution was carried out simultaneously in ten centres by forming ten groups of youths with one leader for each group. This well-conceived distribution system ensured proper distribution with the help of the local Panchayat President and headmasters of the schools. The Block Development Officer and the Assistant District Education Officer for elementary schools also attended the distribution program. The government officials were extremely happy with the event. They, along with the various headmasters of all the local schools, requested the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organization to conduct rural Sathya Sai Education classes for the students of their schools in order to teach them about the message of the five human values and their universal appeal.

Love, Kindness Common to All Faiths

The Sai youth were received warmly by the local residents, who were largely Christians by faith. Appreciating the biblical virtues that the Sai youth were practicing, they reciprocated with natural love and reverence towards Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s concern for their well-being. A large picture of Bhagavan was also given to these schools. In one particular village, a set of books was earmarked for a Christian missionary school. Unsure as to whether the management would accept a picture of Bhagavan, a copy was not proffered. However, the local Roman Catholic Missionary (RCM) nun came up to a Seval volunteer and requested that a picture of Bhagavan be given. Since the purified drinking water project was started, many local residents like the

nun, see Bhagavan as the personification of boundless love, who resolved and addressed their daily concerns through us, His instruments - the Sai youth from Tamil Nadu.

Profuse in their expression of gratitude, the local residents, representing a variety of spiritual backgrounds, were able to appreciate the selflessness of the Sai service initiatives in their communities, which rise above all religious barriers and bind everyone into one, erasing all tensions and divisions among various religious communities that existed earlier.

What helped everyone transcend above the religious divide was the purity of the Sai mission where there is no place for proselytizing. As always, all help was offered to everyone, without any strings, attached, resonating Bhagavan’s dictum that “All are One, Be Alike to Everyone”.

Phase II - Year 2008

Preparing for God’s Work with Perfection

In July 2008, the activity gained momentum and was done on an even larger scale.

Initially, we conducted a detailed survey school-wise, which took into account minute details such as the number of schools per village, number of classes per school, the individual class strength, the different types of exercise books required per subject by different grades and the exact requirement per student.

The thoroughness with which we undertook this project was a great growth opportunity for us as well as others who were watching us from the periphery, and getting drawn into the centre of the divine action. As one of the participants explained, “What struck me most this year (2008) was the excellent plan that was drafted, covering minute details of the whole program. The youth leader explained to us in detail various activities mapped against the timeline. He even covered contingency plans!”

The superb project management opportunity was handled by us with utmost professionalism. Since it bore the name of Bhagavan Baba, it had to be executed with perfection. A participant explains, “We were formed into sub-teams led by a person within each sub-team. I was fortunate to lead my sub-team. We were assigned sub-tasks that collectively led to the completion of the project. We had meetings among the teams. A team was formed to conduct a detailed survey on the number of schools per village, number of classes per school, the individual class strength, the different types of notebooks required by different classes and the exact requirement per student. All these were documented in spreadsheets. The survey lasted for weeks to ensure correctness and completeness of the data. After finalizing the list, we ordered notebooks and stationary.”

Recalling the memorable experience, he says, “We bought these notebooks from the dealers in batches. These were stored in a central location. After all the required items were collected, we began segregating and packaging these notebooks as per the requirement, school-wise and class-wise. We had

different notebooks for different classes and in various quantities as required. The task took two complete days with many of us working day and night. After everything was set, we loaded them on to trucks and started off on the decided day to the villages. When the travel began, I thought it was going to be difficult to complete the distribution in a day. But to everyone’s amazement, and purely by Bhagavan’s Grace, all things were executed in time! We were already formed into sub-groups and were allotted two to three schools each. We took our stock of notebooks and reached the schools at the right time. All students had assembled and were made to sit class-wise. We began the distribution chanting Sai Gayathri.”

Echoing the truth that India truly lives in her villages, we came face to face with experiences that brought forth positive emotions as they extended themselves to bring joy to others. Confesses one team member, “The best part of our service, then, began. We saw in the faces of these children so much delight that some of us were moved to tears. When we had been to these schools last year, many did not know who Bhagavan was. But this time, I saw all these students using Bhagavan’s notebooks distributed last year (2007). All of them, including the headmaster, welcomed us with warm ‘Sai Rams’, with folded hands, a smile in their lips; the love and gratitude for Bhagavan in their hearts was hard to miss. It touched us, one and all. We worked for more than nine hours and enjoyed every single minute of it. To tell you frankly, throughout the day we never felt tired even for a minute. The headmaster of a government school hailed us when we were about to leave, and asked if we could share the Sai Gayathri with the school so that they could include this as a part of their daily school prayer.

“The immense satisfaction and the love of Bhagavan we felt through these children and the wonderful learning we had in executing the whole project left us all eagerly waiting for such a wonderful opportunity next year.”

Within a day, over 27,000 notebooks with Bhagavan’s picture on them had been successfully distributed to students from Grades I to 8. Senior students from classes VI to VIII were also issued specially designed LIFCO dictionaries. Pencils, pens, pencil sharpeners, erasers and rulers were distributed to students of standards I to V of the schools.

Many life lessons were gained during this experience. Another young adult from the team shares his perspective. “On the distribution day, we went about our work chanting the powerful Vedic hymn *Rudram*. All the children in 21 villages were simultaneously distributed notebooks, pens, pencils, erasers, sweets, a photo of Bhagavan and a Vibhuti packet.

“We bought a few articles from a place 6 kilometres away from our first village. This was carried in a manual rickshaw. It was very hot and the load was heavy too, with 7 big-sized boxes. After the transportation was done, we wanted to pay the rickshaw driver, but to our surprise, he refused. He said, ‘Please allow me to do this much service. I have always longed to serve Sai Baba. This is my contribution to the wonderful service activity you are doing.’

Sai Youth Model after their Idol, Sri Sathya Sai

Thanks to the meticulous planning, packaging and distribution, everything was delivered within a single day. A weekday had been chosen to ensure each and every child received these notebooks personally. Despite busy schedules, 65 of us turned up that day to be a part of this noble endeavor and earn Swami’s grace.

We explained the idea behind the service effort to the school management and government education officers through a presentation. A local political personality from a village called Oralur, who was also there, walked up to us and said, “I have never bowed before anybody. The first time I had *darshan* of Sai Baba was on Tamil New Year Day. From that very moment, I don’t get angry for anything. I knew I was transformed. I humbly offer Him my pranams!” She then offered her salutations to Bhagavan.

Local Authorities, Parents and Students Appreciate Sai Compassion

The management of many schools expressed their heart-felt gratitude to Bhagavan for His love and compassion. “Many children last year (2007) had no notebooks,” they said. “Thanks to the Sri Sathya Sai Organization, this year all students have sufficient notebooks. All this has been made possible only by Sai Baba and His organisation.”

While appreciating the positive feedback from the officials, we were particularly touched by the reaction from the students and the relief expressed by their parents. Since the notebooks had a picture of Swami on them as well as quotations of Swami on how one should revere one’s mother, many children said, “We will never throw these notebooks. We will preserve them for ever because these are Swami’s books.”

One of the parents said, “Our children have been taken care of so well. Now, we do not have to worry about their notebooks and other study material for one whole year. Actually it is very difficult for us to provide them these articles because we are daily wage earners and our income is never regular and steady. But we have no worries now; our children can study without any problems. Mentally, we are so relieved.”

With Sai, Impossible becomes ‘I Am Possible’

For us, the Young Adults of the Tamil Nadu Sai Organization, this service project provided a morale and confidence boost, firming our faith in His will and guidance. As one of them admits, “This was the first time that I shouldered responsibilities. I was actually tense and worried about how things would go. I perceived it to be a Herculean task considering the distance we had to travel. We could not afford a van so we decided to take five bikes (two on each bike) and we started off. All I could do was pray to Bhagavan to give us mental strength. We did not carry food either as we had to start early. Also, it would be difficult to carry them over long distances on bikes. But let me emphasize - once we reached there, all our apprehensions vanished. We never felt hungry or tired. Rather, we felt energized in reaching out to the deserving children. At the end of the day, I realized I did nothing. Throughout, it was Bhagavan who had carried out all the activities through each one of us.

I learnt that meticulous planning with total faith in God will certainly bring success. Needless to say, I now plan my daily activities, office projects and my own personal chores with total faith in Bhagavan. I now see a change in myself. I am now convinced that with Bhagavan nothing is impossible.”

Feeding the Poor – an Indispensable Component of Sai Seva

As a part of the service projects, we also distributed food packets across many villages in the district. Preparing for this stupendous task required all the Sai Centres in and around the city of Chennai to cooperate and work as a team. That experience by itself was worth the effort for the oneness of purpose bound diverse groups into one large family headed by the Lord Himself. As a youth member explains, “We had a wonderful time meeting and interacting with youth from different Samithis. It was a fulfilling experience. We all felt we belong to a larger family. Bhagavan’s love binds us all together.”

The entire organisation threw its weight behind our effort to prepare food hampers for every family in the region. As a result, every home in these villages received the food packets along with a photo of Bhagavan, a vibhuti packet and Sai Protein, a grain-based nutritional supplement! During the occasion, we also distributed tricycles to physically challenged persons at their very doorstep, enabling them to be mobile.

Providing Equal Employment Opportunities

We have now planned to educate the rural youth, train them in vocational skills and make them employable and useful to the society. As a first step towards this goal, we have identified a set of youth members to receive a free course in taxi driving in order to help them earn their livelihood. Also, the village women have been helped to form self-help groups and trained to package camphor and make incense sticks. The various Sai Samithis or centres provide the various raw materials on a periodic basis and the finished goods are also be used by the devotees in and around the districts to ensure regular income for these women. The idea behind this effort is to enable the local population to be gainfully employed and financially viable.

Transformation - the Essence of Seva

All these service projects, not only helped transform villages as a whole, but also transform individual lives too. One of the volunteers who had been a part of these projects all through says, “During the initial phase of the water purifier installation that lasted for four days, I was with the plumbers overseeing their work. During our interactions, I often used to talk about Swami and His mission, and all the Sai service activities undertaken worldwide. However, during this period, I had been away from my family and didn’t have proper food and sleep. There was a time when I was frustrated and thought this probably was a waste of time. I could have been home with my family, taking care of my business and making money. As these thoughts passed my mind, two of the plumbers approached me. One of them said, ‘I am moved by all that you are doing to the society. I feel I have wasted my life doing wrong things and have not really been useful to anyone. To begin with,

I take a vow sir that I will not smoke henceforth.’ This brought tears to my eyes. Not just him – the other plumber came and gave me a hundred rupee note and said, ‘Sir, please use this small amount towards *Anna Danam* or the feeding of the poor. I want to do my bit towards these noble activities that you are doing inspired by Sai Baba’. This truly struck a chord in me and I realized the true meaning of service. I then shed tears of gratitude, thanking Swami for having chosen me as an instrument.”

Audacity of Hope

By allowing us, to be the chosen agents of change in His hands, Bhagavan Baba has blessed us with the audacity of hope, as instruments, potent enough to make a genuine difference. This is an honour and a privilege that we the Sai youth of Tamil Nadu, can never take for granted. We are ever beholden to the Founder of the Sri Sathya Sai Village Integration Program, Bhagavan Baba, for showing us the way to experience a deeper connection with everyone else on the planet, starting with the villagers in rural India. What better way to nurture our nation’s soul then by revitalizing its villages!

The Sri Sathya Sai Village Integration Program experience has brought to life Bhagavan’s counsel that ‘service to man is service to God’ for we have truly experienced God in the joy of selflessly serving our disadvantaged brothers and sisters.

Jai Sai Ram!

*Sai Youth, Tamil Nadu, India
and the Heart2Heart Team*

PRASHANTI DIARY

July 5, 2008 – Music Programme by Devotees from North-East USA

Swami had graciously agreed for a music programme by the devotees of the Zone1 (North-east) of USA. The men, women and children alike were seated in the marbled block in front of the stage with their characteristic blue scarves. Swami came for *darshan* at about 4:50 p.m. Like the three previous days, once again, Swami turned towards the interview room after giving *darshan* on the ladies side and went straight to the stage. He immediately indicated the Veda chanting to be stopped and enquired with the US devotees about their programme.

A few devotees came up to Him and showed the programme schedule. The women and children representatives too went to Him with roses and offerings. Swami blessed them all and spoke to them lovingly. The programme then began with an introduction which was a heart to heart talk with Swami. The speaker on the mike said, "Swami, to finish the required course to graduate from the attachment to the world to complete attachment with You, for nine months, our centers in USA have collectively studied the true flowers of non-violence, sense control, forbearance, penance, peace, meditation and Truth." As he spoke, Swami looked intently at him and kept nodding.

The first song was entitled, "Who am I". It was followed by a song in Spanish. The songs were simple in their tunes and rich in their meaning. Each song had a small introductory talk which was very apt. Swami listened and appreciated each of them. Swami also seemed particularly impressed with the person playing the violin in the first line. In fact, His gaze went on him for quite a number of times during the programme. There were more songs on the divine romance between Swami and His devotees. The only prayer embedded in every song was, "Swami, let our Love for you grow stronger with every passing moment." Swami often says, "The Lord knows what you need. You do not have to ask Him for anything." It is so true that any prayer we make may not be "appropriate" in a sense. When we pray for wealth, material comfort, good health, more time or anything else for that matter, either for ourselves or others, how do we know that it is for our good? God is the wisest and it is prudent to admit that His wisdom is absolute and complete compared to our tiny minds. It is better to be quiet and trust Him completely while we Love Him with all our hearts. In this context, the prayer, "Swami, let our Love for you grow stronger with every passing moment", becomes very perfect. For, there is absolutely no risk in loving God. Though not all things we pray for may be good for us in the long run, loving God more intensely is always beneficial, irrespective of time and circumstances!

The final song was the realization that, "I am God! I am no different from God." As the song concluded, so did the programme. Swami asked the group to sing *bhajans* and they began. One particular *bhajan* was, "Sai Mata Pita". A line in it goes, "Mujhe Bhakti do....Mujhe Shakti do" culminating in "Mujhe Mukti do". As the first two lines were being sung, Swami kept mouthing the word, "Mukti do." It was a nice sight to see Him smilingly do so. He then

looked at the violinist and told him to accompany on the violin for the *bhajans* too. As if awakened from a divine stupor, the devotee began to play for the rest of the *bhajans*. After a few more *bhajans*, Swami asked His boys to continue the *bhajans*. They sang two and then with a quick sideward glance and a lovely smile, He said, "Shlokam". The next *bhajan* was "Sree Raghunandana..." and it was rendered beautifully with a prelude chant or "sloka" as it is called. After that, Swami asked for the *Aarathi* to be taken. He beckoned the violin player, spoke to Him and ended it with a loving pat on his cheeks. Then, He retired to Yajur Mandir. On the way, He spoke to the Principal and a few teachers of the Anantapur campus of Sri Sathya Sai University.

July 6, 2008 – Swami Blesses USA Exhibition and Listens to His Boys' Programme

Panels for an exhibition on Swami's teachings had been moved into and arranged in the Poornachandra Auditorium by the devotees from the North-East region of USA after Swami had sent word that He would bless the exhibits. Everyone and everything had been kept in perfect readiness in the morning. At about 9:05 a.m., Swami came out of Yajur Mandir. He moved into Sai Kulwant Hall and that too in the chair. Being a Sunday, the hall was quite filled, almost upto its capacity. As He moved gently, He completed a full *darshan* round, collecting letters and speaking to many devotees. Later, Swami granted a few interviews, and then moved into the Bhajan Hall where *bhajans* were in progress. At about 9:55 a.m., He received *aarathi* and retired.

In the evening, Swami arrived for *darshan* after 4:45 p.m. He took a detour after the ladies side and after a few minutes in the portico, entered the Bhajan Hall. The hall had been filled up by the senior-most students of the Institute - the final year post graduates. They had come with the focused agenda of inviting Swami to visit the hostel as it had been long since He had done so. When Swami entered the Bhajan Hall, a few students went on their knees and prayed to Him for an opportunity to speak and sing for Him. Swami agreed and told them very sweetly, "There is still time for that. Be ready. I will come." Then in the chair, Swami began to move towards the Yajur Mandir. Then, as He moved for the second time through the ladies side, they exulted; they were on cloud nine! But this time around, it appeared as though the "cloud nine" had decided to come "down to earth". The skies darkened and huge drops began coursing down. Swami reached the ladies side end of the Sai Kulwant Hall, and immediately a huge colourful umbrella was brought for Him. For all the devotees who had gathered near the western gates of Yajur Mandir, it was a lovely sight.

On an evening when everything looked dull and grey, Swami's orange robe topped with His scented mop of hair lent a dash of vibrant colour to the scene. And to "top" it was the multi-coloured umbrella, open wide and full. The sweet fragrance of rain on earth wafted in the air as the breeze caressed and played with His abundant curls and locks. Swami looked so magnificent and grand - an emperor nonpareil in this world! He came out of the western gate and the devotees were thrilled, to say the least. Blessing all of them, He moved into

the Poorna Chandra Auditorium. The meaning of the statement, "God's delays are not His denials" would have come to light for the US devotees who had been waiting patiently and lovingly since morning. Swami moved in and as token of their love, the devotees offered Him many roses. They then offered Swami a candle to light the traditional lamp that had been placed there, and Bhagavan very sweetly lit all the wicks of the lamp.

Then began a sort of "guided tour" for Swami! He went around all the panels that had been placed and looked intently at them. He was the perfect observer, asking questions about the message and the pictures on display. A few members of the visiting group got the great and wonderful opportunity to "explain" to the Lord! At different points were seated youth members with placards on the section to follow. Swami read each and every one of these and also spoke to some of the youth. He spent almost 15 minutes going around the exhibits. After all were done, Swami came to the devotees group that had assembled in a disciplined manner in the auditorium. He called out the little children and began asking their names. He asked one of them, "Which class?" The boy seemed bewildered till an adult said, "Which grade are you in?" He answered, "Swami, I have completed my 2nd."

"Why did you come here?" He asked another kid. "To sing for you, Swami" was the answer. He sent back the kid after rewarding him with a sort of handshake and a pat on his cheeks. He was smiling and was very happy with them. Blessing all with *abhayahastha* (hand raised in blessing) and many with *Paadanamaskar* (the permission to touch His feet), Swami sat in the car and started for a second time towards the Sai Kulwant Hall.

This time, He went for a complete round in the hall and those that had missed a close *darshan* few minutes ago were rewarded for their patience. He entered the Bhajan Hall and asked for the assembled 2nd year post graduate students to begin their programme. It consisted of songs and short speeches. The talks, in different languages, were nostalgic accounts of the wonderful times when Swami visited the hostel. And listening to them, at times, Swami too became overcome with emotion. He too seemed to be nostalgic. One of the students said, "Swami, we are your *dunnapotas* forever."

Swami: What is meant by *dunnapota*?

Boy: Swami, male buffaloes.

Swami - Why only male? Not female?

Even amidst all the boys, Swami had His children at Anantapur too in mind! He, then, said, that all were good and none were *dunnapotas*. The songs were the popular ones and a few *qawwalis* too were embedded into the programme. It was like a game show at times. Swami was given a list of songs and the boys said, "Swami, tell us whichever song you like, we will sing it out for you." And so, Swami kept picking songs and they were rendered. The programme was interspersed with persistent pleading to Swami to visit the hostel! Swami asked where the hostel was, and He said that one must never refer to it as your hostel or my hostel; it is always "ours"! Letters and

cards were given. Finally, the boys showed Him a video clipping on a laptop of His previous visit to the hostel! Then, one of the students came up to Swami and said, "Swami, it has been very long since you have come to hostel. We will do whatever you want. Tell us what to do and when you will come, please!" Swami said, "I will tell...wait. There is a programme tomorrow. After Tuesday, I will tell." Blessing all the students, Swami received *aarthi* and retired to Yajur Mandir. Thus ended a day when the Lord drowned so many, devotees and students alike, with His irresistible pure Love.

July 7, 2008 – Distribution of Livelihood-generating Implements to the Poor

Men and machines filled the central blocks of the Sai Kulwant Hall on the evening of July 7, 2008. The devotees from the Anantapur district had arranged for the service activity of distributing to the poor rural folks various implements which could help provide them with a source of livelihood. Many devotees from the surrounding villages and other poor regions of Anantapur had gathered for the occasion. Swami had very graciously agreed to preside over the distribution. In front of the stage was an impressive array of tools, machines and implements. Sewing machines, carpentry kits, sowers, tillers, insecticide sprayers, wet grinders, cycles, pushcarts, embroidery machines, handlooms and steam irons constituted this grand array. Swami came much before 4 p.m. and after a short round, went into the interview room.

Later, at about 3:55 p.m., He came onstage to begin the proceedings. The District President of the Sai Organisation began with an introductory talk in Telugu. After that, Prof. Anil Kumar gave a short introduction in English and Telugu, and what a talk it was! The professor spoke of how Swami was an ideal to all the leaders, for He, like a magnificent tree, had stood rooted at His home village and brought the whole world to Him rather than travel around the world. "Anantapur," he said, "stands for the meaning 'every body'. 'Pura' is the body and 'Ananta' means infinite." As he was speaking of Swami's shower of Grace and Love, a steady drizzle began and soon it turned into a tremendous and wonderful shower. It began to beat down so much that the rain literally 'drowned' the professor's talk in volume. The thrill of joy surging in every soul assembled was such that very soon, the sound of the rain was drowned in the thunder of the applause. The professor then started to read out the names of the recipients and the implements they were being gifted.

Sewing machines, bicycles, push-carts, grinding machines, electrical kits and other such items were duly passed on to the beneficiaries from the rural areas of the district. In the beginning as the various heads came to Swami to take *padanamaskar*, Swami created Vibhuti for all of them and blessed them.

Each recipient had been chosen and all of them were gifted items of work in which they were skilled. It was indeed a very noble endeavour. Silently an economic revolution was taking place! Swami, with His spontaneous and loving action, had created more than 500 jobs in an hour! Anyone with little common sense and basic awareness of the secondary and tertiary beneficiaries in an economy would understand and appreciate the magnificent entrepreneurial implications of this seemingly "simple" act of service that was

being done that afternoon. And most importantly, there was no big fuss being made about it. On the contrary, the afternoon's scene was much akin to the quote "Instead of giving bread, teach a man how to make bread". These oft quoted words of wisdom were seen in its full meaning as Swami lovingly blessed the recipients when they came forward and placed a flower of gratitude at His feet. In about half an hour, the whole distribution was complete. After that, Swami permitted the children of Anantapur Sai centres to stage a cultural programme in His presence.

Four children came up to the front with roses, bouquets, cards and dry fruits. Swami was so happy seeing them that He spontaneously materialised a gold chain with a locket for one of the girls! Then, the programme began. It was in Telugu and based on the vows of Swami to protect the vedas, the wise people, the sufferers and all the devotees of God. A major portion of the programme was through various colourful and rhythmic dances. The music and composition were very impressive and heart-warming. Swami saw the entire programme and as it concluded with a final formation, He blessed all of them with *Abhayastha*. Next, Swami went into the interview room, and emerged after a few minutes onto the stage in His chair and started distributing saris to the children who had participated in the programme. The children sat in disciplined rows and Swami gifted each child with a beautiful violet saree. Once that was done, He asked whether all had received the saree. Then, with a smile of satisfaction, He looked at all the assembled children. He called them to come to Him and pose for group photographs! Again, in disciplined groups, the children came to Him and photos were taken. After blessing the participants with group photos, the Bal Vikas children began singing *bhajans*. As *bhajans* went on, *prasadam* was distributed, and Swami accepted *arati* at six o'clock.

July 12, 2008 – Inauguration of Gastro-Intestinal Department at SSSIHMS, Puttaparthi

With Swami's blessings, a new Gastro-intestinal (GI) endoscopy department had been furnished and kept ready for opening on July 12, 2008. Swami too had graciously consented to inaugurate the new department, blessing the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences with His divine presence! Everyone thought Swami would visit the hospital in the morning, but that did not happen. Instead, at about 2:45 p.m., message from Swami came that He would be blessing the SSSIHMS at 3:30 p.m. Everyone immediately swung into action and in a matter of minutes everything was readied for the divine visit.

Escorted by flag bearing bike riders, Swami arrived at the south entrance of the hospital at about 3:40 p.m. He had sent a delegation of six guests before Him and they were also waiting in readiness for Him at the hospital. As soon as He descended from the car, many roses exchanged hands and Swami blessed all the heads of the various offices. The Veda chanting began and led the procession of which Swami formed the "completion" at the end! The central corridor of the SSSIHMS was lined by nurses, ward boys and helpers in the hospital. Swami moved through the corridor and seemed so happy looking at all the people who were serving Him so lovingly and selflessly.

What followed next were *abhayahastas* galore as Swami kept glancing to His right and blessed everyone seated reverentially to catch one divine glimpse. The GI exhibition was on the way and as Swami passed by it, He displayed a lot of interest in visiting it.

As soon as He entered the new GI endoscopy department, *bhajans* began there. Swami spoke to many doctors and devotees who were directly responsible in setting up the department. Then, moving inside to the area of the main altar, He lit the lamp. Each and every wick in the lamp received its share of attention as Swami lit up each one. Then He was taken into the upper GI endoscopy room where the doctors had thoughtfully and creatively arranged a demonstration of the capabilities of the department. A small flower bud with its stem had been placed in a long roll of white cloth to simulate a cyst/tumour in the digestive system. As Swami sat seeing the demonstration, the doctors inserted the endoscopic camera tube and showed the proceedings on the TV screen. They then literally nipped the makeshift cyst "in the bud"! Swami saw that and as the flower bud was put in a jar and presented to Him, He asked whether the tumours would be that size. The doctor replied that these outgrowths vary in size from a minute dot to sometimes the size of a tennis ball! Swami blessed the doctors and seemed impressed!

The same thing happened in the next lower GI endoscopy room too. The equipment had been connected not only to the TV screen but to a computer too so that the processor gave the doctors far greater ability in diagnosis and analysis. This was shown to Swami and there too He asked a few practical questions. The doctors found great joy in answering them and said, "Swami, this department is a fruition of your Grace on us."

Whenever Swami listens to either the doctors or the students, the scientists or the primary school children, it brings to mind the mother and child analogy. The mother knows everything that the child knows, in fact, much more but in spite of that, whenever the child gurgles or recites its little rhymes, the mother listens with all appreciation and wonder. That is not an indication of the mother's ignorance, but a powerful reminder of Her great love for the child!

Swami was next taken to the GI-endoscopy ICU room. The various facilities and conveniences that were built for the future patients were shown to Swami. He was very happy and said there was no need to show Him all the little details and that they should proceed and make the patients comfortable and happy. He trusts His doctors. His faith and trust in man is so much more than man's faith and trust in either Swami or himself! And that's what makes Swami so special and divine. Blessing everyone who had gathered, Swami moved out of the department. On the way out, He passed by Veda chanting staff and pored over each and every face that was flexing with the twirls and turns of the Vedic hymns. Outside the department, a very warm and devoted assemblage of devotees formed a reception for Swami. He then went to the GI exhibition that He had noticed during His entry.

In the beginning, there was a small video presentation on how endoscopy

actually worked. After that, Swami was given a "guided" tour of the various afflictions that tormented the human digestive tract and Swami listened with all interest. At one point when the lady who was explaining spoke of some problems, Swami said, "That comes due to hurry and more importantly - worry. If worry is avoided, many problems will disappear!" A wonderful banquet had also been kept ready for Swami. When He was requested to have something, He said, "No! Not now. The devotees will be waiting there!" Though He was in the heart of the SSSIHMS, His heart was still with the devotees squatting in the Sai Kulwant Hall. He completed a full round of the exhibition. At the end of it, many of the doctors took *padanamaskar*. He was then requested to bless the ongoing orthopedic conference with His presence.

He agreed. The conference hall was on the way. Swami entered the conference hall in the middle of a presentation. But when the Lord arrives, everything comes to a standstill. He lit up the conference, literally and figuratively, when He went to the lamp placed in the corner and lit all the wicks. A few distinguished doctors were to receive citations and they were indeed fortunate to receive them from the divine hands. Swami was literally surrounded by the doctors and in midst of that too, He materialised a ring for one of the doctors. At this point, the whole assembly came down to its knees in humble prayer. All the delegates came to the aisle and knelt down on either side with a prayer that Swami should traverse that path. Swami obliged happily and very soon all the discipline seemed to vanish as devotion took precedence. Swami moved gently through the eager beavers and blessed them all. They were thrilled at this act of Grace. As Swami exited the hall, there was an orthopedic endoscopy device too. As Dr. Sundareshan demonstrated with a dummy bone in a cast how the instrument could be used, Swami looked on. By now, the people around Swami were swarming and the mass of devotees around Him was swelling to huge proportions. Swami started moving a little quicker now.

As Swami moved out to the main corridor and back towards the side door, people took all the vantage points available to have a glimpse of Him. By now, news of the Lord's presence in the hospital had spread all around and doctors, nurses, helpers, patients and relatives alike gathered in a hurry to see their sweet Lord. Swami was all smiles and blessings as He moved out. Some of the sisters from the dietary services had books and cards blessed. They tried to invite Swami to the dietary department too. Swami very sweetly told them that He had to rush back to the Mandir as devotees were waiting there. *Aarthi* was taken as Swami came out and entered the car. Before leaving, Swami waved out to all who had gathered around the car and it was such a wonderful and poignant moment for everyone. Swami was then escorted back to the Mandir.

July 13, 2008 – Performance by Mr. Kunal Ganjawalla

As a part of the Ashadi Ekadasi function, the introductory honours had been gifted to Mr. Kunal Ganjawalla and his wife Gayatri Ganjawalla. Swami had agreed to a concert by the artist couple and the whole stage had been set and kept ready for them. Swami came out at about 3:45 p.m. and took a round in

the car in the Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami is also called as "Nitya Nootana", which means "the ever new". True to this, no two days are ever similar in the things He does. On July 13, He took the route via the portico from the gents side and then moved to the ladies side again. From there He went back towards Yajur Mandir and via the passage between the Yajur Mandir and the Sai Kulwant Hall, He drove out! He went for a *darshan* granting ride in Puttaparthi and returned to the Mandir after a few minutes.

This time, He came straight to the portico and then soon onto the stage. He called the artists of the day and asked them to begin. The veda chanting came to a halt and then Mr. Kunal and his group of artists sought His blessings. The first song was on Lord Ganesh, and it was an auspicious beginning. Mr. Kunal and his wife kept alternating between themselves in the songs, and it was a treat not only for the ears, but also for the eyes as Swami's reactions and responses to the songs were so sweet and full of Love. When Mrs. Gayathri began the song "Thumak Chalat Ramachandra" after saying that it reminds her of the beautiful days when Swami would come glidingly walking down for *darshan*, Swami seemed to get overwhelmed. He began singing along with her! In fact, at one point, when the singer stopped singing to allow the flute to play a piece, Swami continued singing and was apparently surprised as to why the singing had stopped! He looked at the singer and gave vigorous rhythm on His lap indicating her to begin singing.

Kunal then sang the song, "Sainath Tere Hazaro Haath" from the movie "Shirdi Ke Sai Baba". Being a very popular song, the members of the audience too began to sing along with him. At the end of that performance, Swami looked at the artists and lipped, "Very, very happy!" and that was exactly the feeling shown on the faces of the artists too, for, what can be a greater reward than being able to make the Lord happy. A Meera *bhajan* followed next and the audience lapped it up as it went through the highs and lows of pitches! As the songs continued, Swami called Kunal and made some enquiries of him. Then taking leave for a few minutes, Swami went into the interview room. He returned soon and sat on the stage. There was another lady artist too who sang the Telugu song, "Oh Rama! Nee Nama Yenta Ruchira" and Swami sat swaying to it and enjoying it. Really, the only tunes the Lord dances to are the tunes of Love from the heart.

Every action of Swami has so much of meaning to some people. It may appear that it means nothing for the world, but it definitely means the world to somebody! Knowing the story in the background sometimes helps one in appreciating the actions He does. And in that day's case, having met the artists and got a chance to interact with them, the writer is able to enjoy and share some of these stories now. Some time back, Swami had appeared in the dream of Kunal's sister and had told her that Gayatri must sing the *bhajan* "Sri Venkatesha Saishwara" and that evening, very soon she began that *bhajan*. It appeared as if Swami had been waiting for that *bhajan*. As soon as it concluded, Swami called Kunal and then starting waving His palm. At this juncture, it is necessary to reveal another part of the story in flashback. As Gayatri put it, "It was our dream that we get married in His presence. It did not happen that way, but He knows every desire in the heart!" Swami created a

golden chain and instead of putting around Kunal's neck, gave it to him and told him to tie it around his wife's neck! Then immediately, He materialised a ring and gave it to the wife to put it on the finger of the husband! Both husband and wife broke down. Showers of Grace and showers of tears are often synonymous. And that's what happened on stage as Swami fulfilled a deep desire in the devotees' hearts without them even telling Him their wish, physically. Seeing them in tears, Swami also momentarily was overcome with emotion. He then presented sarees to the ladies and shawls to the gents.

As this shower of Love came to a pause, Swami asked Kunal to sing a *bhajan*. He started, "Bolo Bolo Sab Mil Bolo" - a *bhajan* which urges everyone to sing out the name of the Lord. Having witnessed all that happened on the stage, nobody needed any urging, only an excuse was needed, to sing out the divine name! The *bhajan* had a whole hearted and vociferous following. At the end of that, Swami told the artists that He would come to the centre stage and pose with them for photographs. They were all thrilled and overjoyed. When Swami wants to make you feel special, He goes all out to do so. As the pictures were being taken, Swami looked at the boy shooting the video and told him, "Move your fingers! Don't block the video!" everyone smiled in merriment. Then, Swami spoke to almost every member of the performing troupe. He blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed to all. Then as *aarathi* began, He called Prof. Anil Kumar and told him to announce the next day's programme He also blessed a couple of books that the state president of Maharashtra presented to Him. After *aarathi*, blessing all with *abhayahastha*, Swami retired to Yajur Mandir.

July 15, 2008 – Ashaadi Ekadasi Celebrations in the Divine Presence

The morning of Ashaadi Ekadasi dawned with a dash of colour and a rush of energy in the abode of highest peace. It had been announced the previous evening that the morning programme would begin at 9:00 a.m. At 8:50 a.m., Swami arrived from the Yajur Mandir. The usual Vedic chanting started, but very soon it was replaced by songs that had been especially composed for the occasion of Ashaadi Ekadasi. The song was full of vigour and life, and the audience began to clap rhythmically with it. Specially dressed men stood in the centre blowing conches heralding Swami's entry into the Mandir premises. Swami moved on the chair and went through the Sai Kulwant Hall granting the joy of close *darshan* on the auspicious morning. Well, any morning when one can have the beautiful *darshan* of the Lord becomes holy and auspicious! Passing through the students' area, He blessed all the boys holding trays and celebrating birthdays.

From the portico as He came onto the stage, there were many VIPs and MLAs seeking His blessings. He was bestowing smiles on everyone and was radiating joy and peace as He came on the dais. The stage had been decorated very grandly with a beautiful idol of Vitthala adorning the centre. Swami looked at the whole stage and moved to the gents' side corner to light the lamp. A blue gentle wax candle was given to Him and He slowly lit all the six wicks in the lamp and a round of applause rented the hall. The programme began with the arrival of the traditional *Varakaris*. Every year, thousands of

pilgrims walk all the way to the banks of the mighty Chandrabhaga River, to the "mother's home"- Pandharpur and pray to Lord Vitthala. Now, Puttaparthi has become the "mother's home" and dear Sai - the Lord, as the pilgrims conclude their walking pilgrimage in His divine presence on the Ashaadi Ekadasi day. ("Co-incidentally" Pandharpur translates into English as 'white field!') The dance was the folk type and was marked by the energy and quick movements demanding lot of stamina. Before the dance actually began, a garland of Tulsi leaves and dry fruits were brought to Swami for blessings. The dance consisted of many human pyramid formations. Each pyramid that came up was more intricate and tougher to form than the previous one. There was a formation of steps and the lotus formation too. The dance received a lot of appreciation and it was after the dance that the main programme of the morning began.

The programme was by the Bal Vikas children from the Pune district of Maharashtra. Entitled "Adhyatma Ramayanam", it was based on the inner significance of the Ramayana as Swami has explained it. The actors who were playing the part of Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva and the squirrel who helps a 'tiny' bit in the bridge building, came up to the stage to offer the card and flowers to Swami. The Lord blessed them and then the enactment began. It began with all the great poets who had written the Ramayana - sage Valmiki, Kamban, Tulsidas, Thyagaraja - arriving to the present where a Bal Vikas teacher is discussing the Ramayana with the children. The whole story of Ramayana was weaved by these great saints and the various landmark events were depicted on stage.

The narration starts with a joyous dance at the prospect of Rama being made the king of Ayodhya. Then the queen Kaikeyi, under the influence of her maid Manthara, tells Dasharatha to banish Rama into exile for 14 years and asks for the coronation of Bharatha. Everyone is shocked and worried, except Rama, the epitome of calm and composure. Sita and Lakshmana follow Rama to the forest. In the forest, the episode of Sita being kidnapped by Ravana was depicted after she is enticed by her desire for a golden deer. It was brought out powerfully that in life too, once *Kama* (desire) overpowers, Rama (God) leaves! Sita pining for the golden deer ends up getting the golden city (lanka) itself, but in the process loses Rama. She is sad and despondent. Stated another way, as long as the Rama *tattwa* (spirit of Godliness) exists, Ravana *tattwa* (the negatives) cannot enter. The special smoke and lighting effects as Ravana tries to cross the famous "Lakshman Rekha" were good.

The drama then went on to depict how the Eagle king Jatayu fights valiantly to help Sita and in the process loses his own life. That act of bravery and selfless love wins Jatayu the supreme merit of having his last rites performed by Rama himself - a merit that even the great Dasharatha was not fortunate enough to be blessed with, though he was Rama's father. Rama and Lakshmana then meet Hanuman and Sugriva. Vali, who stands for body attachment, is slain by Rama and then the search for Sita begins. Hanuman meets Mother Sita after crossing the Indian Ocean. Hanuman's flight across the ocean was also creatively depicted. There he gives courage to Sita and strikes terror in the hearts of all the demons at Lanka. He returns triumphantly

and very soon the bridge to Lanka is built. The episode of the squirrel contributing a few grains of sand to the bridge was also shown. The special message was very clear. The world judges a person by the fruits or the results the person produces. God judges not and He sees only the efforts made. Efforts, not results, please Him! The drama concluded with the coronation of Rama and a grand dance to celebrate that. The inner significance as stated by Swami, and brought out by the drama, was this:

Rama is the Indweller in every Body. He is the Atma-Rama, the Rama (Source of Bliss) in every individual. His blessings up surging from that inner Spring can confer peace and bliss. He is the very embodiment of Dharma, of all the codes of morality that hold mankind together in love and unity. The Ramayana, the Rama story, teaches two lessons: the value of detachment and the need to become aware of the Divine in every being. Faith in God and detachment from objective pursuits are the keys for human liberation. Give up sense-objects; you gain Rama. Sita gave up the luxuries of Ayodhya and so, she could be with Rama, in the period of 'exile'. When she cast longing eyes on the golden deer and craved for it, she lost the presence of Rama. Renunciation leads to joy; attachment brings about grief. Be in the world, but, not of it. The brothers, comrades, companions and collaborators of Rama are each of them examples of persons saturated with Dharma. Dasaratha is the representative of the merely physical, with the ten senses.

The three Gunas - Sathwa, Rajas and Thamas - are the three Queens. The four goals of life - the Purusharthas - are the four Sons. Lakshmana is the Intellect; Sugriva is Viveka or Discrimination. Vali is Despair. Hanuman is the embodiment of Courage. The Bridge is built over the Ocean of Delusion. The three demon chiefs are personifications of the Rajasic (Ravana), Thamasic (Kumbhakarna) and the Sathwic qualities (Vibhishana). Sita is Brahmajnana or the Awareness of the Universal Absolute, which the Individual must acquire and regain, undergoing travails in the crucible of life. Make your heart pure and strong, contemplating the grandeur of the Ramayana. Be established in the faith that Rama is the reality of your existence.

As the drama concluded, all the participants came into a final mass gathering. 143 girls and 81 boys formed a huge mass of children in all colours and forms! Swami was very happy and blessed all of them. The Ramayana is such a powerful story that one does not need a fantastic script or great acting skills. The story simply narrated, in itself inspires and brings feelings of devotion and love from within. It is small wonder then that Swami holds the Ramayana so dear to His heart. He told all the children that He would come down for group photos. The sight of so many children sitting around Him must be seen to be believed! He called the little squirrel and spoke to 'it' asking his name and place! Even in this age, the Lord seemed to be appreciating the efforts rather than the size of the role played! Swami created a chain for the boy who played the role of Rama in the forest. He then told all the children to come and sit close so that good pictures could be taken. Then He moved to the front where He called for Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, and posed for pictures with them. Then He asked one of the photographers, "Call Pattabhi Rama also." So the crowned and decked Rama, Lakshmana and Sita too

came and were blessed with photos with Him. After the photo session, Swami said that He would stand up and bless all. As Swami rose, there was an uproarious applause. Swami beamed and blessed all. Then slowly, He walked up the way on to the stage.

As He sat on the stage, He called the main organiser and spoke to him about the children - how they had practiced, how they had put in the efforts and how many days it had taken. Swami was told that everything had come out so wonderfully because of His Grace alone. Swami spoke quite a lot and it was very evident that He was very happy. He called Sita onstage and asked, "Are you a boy?" The boy blushed and the redness on his face traveled very soon to His face too! He asked his name and patted him on the cheeks. He blessed the *prasadam* that was to be distributed and, in fact, He himself distributed it to some of the actors who were nearby. Then *aarthi* was taken and Swami raised both His hands in loving benediction to all the children. In between all this, He also granted interviews to some people and the artists of the previous day's programme. It was about 11:10 a.m. when He finally retired for the morning.

In the afternoon, Swami arrived at about 4:30 p.m. He moved through the ladies side on the chair and then cut through the central stage area and went straight to the interview room. At 5:00 p.m., He came out and sat on the stage. After a short while of Veda chanting, He raised His hand to signal it to a stop. A musical dance ballet entitled, "Tripura Rahasyam" was to be presented in the divine presence by the Balvikas students and Gurus of the Mumbai organisation. The lead actors and dancers came on stage and presented Swami with the card and flowers, and sought His blessings for the success of the programme. Swami blessed them and the programme began.

The "Tripura Rahasyam" literally means, "beyond the trinity". It is the greatest among the works of Sri Ramana Maharshi expounding the traditional teachings where a steadily self-aware Sadguru imparts knowledge about inner perception, enabling the disciple to share the same state. For his part, however, the disciple must be eager, have full zeal to know and have unqualified faith in the Guru's guidance. The programme began with a dance for the veneration of Goddess Sri Tripura. The goddess, regarded as the pure unsullied intelligence, manifests in ten forms then. Each form was welcomed with the appropriate musical chants. Covering the entire aspects of the manifest and the unmanifest, the ten forms are very interesting, at least from an academic point of view. They are - *Dhoomaavathi*, *Tripura Sundari*, *Bhuvaneshwari*, *Tripura Bhairavi*, *Maha Kali*, *Tara*, *Matangi*, *Chinnamastha*, *Bagala Mukhi* and *Kamalathmika*.

This knowledge had been first imparted by Lord Dattatreya, considered as the ultimate Guru, an embodiment of the holy trinity, to the great sage Parashurama. The great knowledge was imparted through parables. The story of princess Hemalekha's sound advice to the prince Hemachuda was depicted very creatively. The fickle mind, thoughts, the senses and the vices were all "humanized" and built up as a single family with the relationships between them subtly hinting towards the actual relationships existing as they

arise in humans. There are heavy conflicts within the family and this ruins the intellect, and ultimately makes one ignorant. And ignorance is the root cause of all the problems. Another story of the brothers Rukmangada and Hemangada was also depicted. They use wisdom to save themselves from being devoured by the demon of doubt.

By way of these parables, in dreams and visions, Lord Dattatreya resolves the doubts of Manav - the representative of humanity. Everything begins with *Virakti* (disgust of material possessions) leading to *Vairagya* (detachment) which finally leads to *Viveka* (discrimination). But for all this, the Grace of the Lord is paramount. The programme concluded with the manifestation of the Devi in all her glory and grandeur on the chariot when all the sages viz. Sanaka, Vasishtha, Pulasthya, Pulaha, Kratu, Bhrigu, Athri, Angiras, Prachetasa, Narada, Cyavana, Vamadeva, Vishwamitra, Goutama, Sukra, Parashara, Vyasa, Kanva, Kashyapa, Daksha, Sumanthu, Shanka, Likhita and Devala, and the Gods of the trinity pray for her! As the final song began, Swami called the protagonist and created a golden chain for him. In the meantime, everyone came into the final formation and Swami said that He would move down and bless the children with group photos.

Swami went down and like bees swarming around sources of nectar, the children came all over Swami. Swami was so happy! He went through the children and posed for pictures twice or thrice. He also spoke to many of them and took letters from many more. He even asked the names of some of the children. He saw 'Hemalekha' and asked 'her', "Where is your husband?" much to the merriment of everyone around. Once again, for the second time that day, He rose from the chair and holding on to the children, posed for group photos. He moved back onto the stage and as He sat there, He kept selecting boys to come up and pose with Him. He picked similarly costumed people to come up and it was such a beautiful photo shootout! A "demon" told Swami that He wanted to go on stage to pose with Him. Swami told him to put on his crown and then come on the stage! After a very joy filled and eventful session, Swami asked for *bhajans* to begin. After a while He went into the interview room. Soon, He came out, received *Aarthi* and retired to Yajur Mandir at about 6:40 p.m.

July 15, 2008 – Concert by Mr. Kailash Kher

On the evening of July 15, Swami had agreed for a concert by Mr. Kailash Kher, a singer famous for his quick and exciting numbers especially on Sufi mysticism. A "blue carpet" welcome had been arranged for him on the stage. Swami arrived to Sai Kulwant Hall at about 4:25 p.m. on the chair. He took the detour to the stage after the ladies side. All the accompanying artists were already on stage. Most of them were in white *kurta* and *pyjamas*. A few, however, were in jeans and t-shirts. Obviously, it was their first trip to Puttaparthi, and the first time ever they would be seeing Swami. Swami came on the stage and sat by the artists. Though a little of a fantasy, it would be interesting to make this narrative as one of the artists on stage would probably have seen it! Here it goes anyway!

"Swami comes on stage and all eyes rivet to Him. He sits simply and yet with an unseen kind of elegance. All the people in front are dressed in white and they are all (or at least most of them) holding folded papers and seem to be pleading with their eyes for him to take! He calls a few of them and takes their notes. Oh! Those are letters that have been written to Him and He opens a few of them and reads through. The others He simply stores on His lap or gives them to the aides by His side. Chants are going on and everyone seems to know them. Amazing! All of a sudden, Swami, as everyone seems to call Him, calls a Caucasian boy and speaks a while with him. Anyone coming even within metres of His ambience suddenly seems to have joy and peace blossoming on the face. Swami speaks very little and whatever little He speaks, everyone around eagerly laps it up. He then turns back and leaves the stage."

Swami sat for a while and then moved into the interview room. He went around for *darshan* rounds in the Bhajan Hall and the portico. The artists too went to the portico. Swami, then, came on stage. It was then about 5:20 p.m. He was smiling gently and watched on as the artists came and took their positions on stage. Mr. Kailash Kher was the last to arrive and he went ahead and offered a rose to Swami. Swami blessed him and told him to begin. Now, let our fantasized onstage 'artist-reporter' take over.

"Kailash began with his usual panache and style with his uniquely soulful, raw, high-pitched voice. The song was *Allah Ke Bande*. Normally people go gaga and start swaying and dancing the minute he begins. Here it was different. There was that excitement on the faces, but none would give expression to it through their bodily movements. And all that calm as Kailash was storming seemed to arise from the other presence on stage - Baba! He was clapping His hand on His lap rhythmically, and that beat seemed to control the clapping and rhythm of the entire hall. Kailash was in his usual elements and he moved over to faster songs and kept urging the people to join him. But these people instinctively are so loyal to Baba that nothing seemed to excite them out of the decent squatting posture they had all adopted."

Swami was amused at times seeing the raw enthusiasm that Mr. Kher embodied. Mr. Kher suddenly narrated what had happened in the morning. "Today I am fortunate to be in Guruji's presence. I arrived late last evening and was sleeping in the morning. Guruji asked here in Mandir to the organisers, 'Where is Kailash?' Later when I confirmed this, I realized that He had asked exactly the question at the same time when I had opened my eyes in my room. That was a miracle for me and I realize that I was sleeping in Guruji's lap and He woke me up!" There was a loud cheer from the crowd.

"As Kailash spoke that, I was touched and what would have surprised me anywhere else, but not here, was that people now seemed aroused and excited! He then continued with other songs and providing the music for him today was turning out to be a unique sort of experience."

It was an interesting evolution that was going on at the stage. Mr. Kher who had begun with addressing Him as Guruji was now calling Him Swamiji. The

second song he sang was "Om se kar lo preet pyaar se". Inspired by his father and by the earthy, energetic strains of legendary Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Kailash Kher has also been completely influenced by Sufism. He dedicated a few Sufi songs to Swami and was all energy as he sang out. In fact, during one of the songs, he even got up and lifted the mike with the stand to his face and sang out aloud! That energy was infectious and everyone was clapping hard for the songs and some even started gently swaying to the tunes. "Teri bin nahi lagta", followed suit soon. In between the songs, he did something very sweet and good. He introduced all the members of his band - 'Kailasa' and spoke highly of their skills and talents. He had everyone applauding for the members of his team, a very noble leadership trait indeed.

"The people received us very warmly as Kailash introduced us to them. Kailash did everything and built a rapport with the crowd. But still I could not help noticing the fact that in spite of him suddenly rising in middle of the concert and clapping vigorously, the crowd maintained a reserved excitement. Loud clapping was the only way they vented their enthusiasm. On the left, Swamiji was smiling always. He kept tapping His lap all the while and encouraging Kailash to sing more! There is something very magical about Baba! Before another Sufi song Kailash said boldly that it was a great fortune to be in the presence of almighty God and he would sing a song of the *Atma* to the *Paramatma*!"

After a very touching Sufi song calling out to the Lord, Swami called out for Kailash Kher to come to Him. Waving His right palm, He brought a gold ring and put it on the singer's finger. Then as he kissed His knee in supplication, He created a gold chain and put it around his neck. A few loving words and many sweet smiles were exchanged between the Lord and His Sufi devotee. Mr. Kher went back and started another song. He said, "Swami is Lord Shiva. I now sing a song on Lord Shiva." At the end of it, Swami called all the artists and presented them with shawls of honour. By now, most of them fell at His feet and sought blessings. Swami was all smiles and He spoke to almost all of them. As Swami was looking around apparently for *bhajans*/songs by boys, Kailash Kher made a request, "One last song Swamiji! This is for those people who are mad like me. So now at least, please do not hold yourself. Go on let loose!"

"As Kailash sang with all energy, I was sure that a part of the crowd at least will be on its feet. But no! Swami's presence is The Presence. He has a magical effect on everyone and I can myself feel it and it is so thrilling. The song concludes and the crowd jumps up with joy finally. But wait a minute! They are shouting, "Jai Bolo Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Ji Ki - Jai" Simply amazing! And Swamiji sits calm and composed on the stage. A faint flicker of a smile lights up His lips as He tells everyone to remain calm!"

Swami blessed the *prasadam* to be distributed and *aarathi* was taken. Kailash Kher went up to Swami and bending down, kissed His feet. At the end of the *aarathi*, people began shouting Jaijais to Swami. Swami told them to calm down and blessing everyone, retired to Yajur Mandir at about 7:05 p.m.

July 16, 2008 – Mobile Van Inauguration and Concert by Pandit Phalguni Mitra

There was a mobile medicare van parked in front of the Yajur Mandir at about 8:30 a.m. It was part of the ongoing efforts by the Mumbai Sai Organisation to provide better medical facilities in inaccessible areas. They had over ten such vans to serve as a mobile dispensary and a preliminary diagnostic 'vehicle'! A novel idea, first initiated by the Sathya Sai Seva Organisations (SSSO), Tamil Nadu, had been implemented by Maharashtra too. About 4-5 hospitals had agreed to give treatment free of cost to the tune of 1 hospital bed to the SSSO, Mumbai, as a philanthropic measure and the medical vans would find the suffering and needy and be instrumental in providing them help, health and hope. The Sai Organisation would pay for the post operative care! It is a very good example, indeed, of society serving society.

At about 9:10 a.m., Swami came out of Yajur Mandir. He seemed to be a little surprised when He saw the vehicle standing on the left! He went close to it and the people there explained to Him about the concept and utility of the vehicle. These vans had been given away by the Chief Minister of Maharashtra in a special ceremony held a few weeks ago in Mumbai. The vehicle had all the items and utilities required for the doctor to engage in primary health care. Swami saw the vehicle through the front door and then again went to the rear and peered through that door. He inquired about the procedure in which it would be operated. Blessing everyone who had assembled there in connection with the van, Swami proceeded to the Sai Kulwant Hall to grant *darshan*. The *bhajans*, which start daily at 9 a.m., were already on. At 9:30 a.m., He received *aarthi* and then returned to Yajur Mandir.

In the evening there was a concert scheduled to be performed by Mr. Falguni Mitra. A foremost exponent of Dhrupad, the authentic and respected form of Hindusthani Classical music, Pandit Falguni Mitra was initiated into music by his father, Sangeetacharya Pandit Shib Mitra at the tender age of four and a half. Swami arrived for *darshan* and after taking a detour on the ladies side, moved to the portico. He then took a round in the Bhajan Hall and after a visit to the interview room, came on stage for the programme.

All the artists bowed down to Swami and sought His blessings. The programme on this day was entirely a different flavour compared to the one the previous day. While the performance on July 15 thrilled with its pace and pitch, on July 16 it was a unique blend of power and profundity! The concert began with Ganesha Vandana and was followed by a wonderful piece in *raag* Bhimpalās. Gifted with a deep, melodious voice, Mr. Falguni Mitra has inspired a reformation to the unique art-form of Dhrupad singing through successful innovations in its melodic structure and rhythmic variations. True to his reputation, he sang a song on the "colour-play", as he put it, of the *gopikas* and *gopalas* of Brindavan with Krishna, in that famed style. He slowly weaved his melodies and one really needed a highly refined and cultured mind to appreciate this higher form of music. He sang a song on the victorious return

of Lord Rama to Ayodhya and capped up the performance with an excellent rendering of the song, "Chalo Man Ganga Jamuna Teer." Swami too sang along with him for parts of the song.

At the end of it, Swami materialised a ring for the Pandit and gifted him a shawl. His wife, who was on the harmonium, received a saree from Swami. The other members of the team too were similarly blessed with shawls. Finally, Swami posed with them for group photos and after that was over, He lovingly blessed the esteemed artist and his wife by placing His hand on their heads. *Aarthi* was then performed after which Swami retired.

July 17, 2008 – Violin Concert by Students from Thailand

On the evening of July 17, Bhagavan arrived after the *bhajans* had begun and went straight to the Bhajan Hall at 5.30 p.m. He entered the hall in His chair from the rear door after moving around in the verandah, and moving up the aisle, went out of the front door. On the verandah, He interacted with Dr. Jum Sai of Thailand, and consented to have a violin recital by the boys from Sathya Sai School, Thailand. There was an immediate response from the students of the school. From all the different places in the hall, they began to stream in towards the center. By that time, even the chairs were placed for them. In Prasanthi Nilayam, there is no stopping once God gives consent, just like any other part of the world! The boys moved to the centre of the Sai Kulwant Hall where place had been left for them, and with the *bhajans* coming to a halt, their programme commenced at six o'clock. However, the lady conductor was conspicuous by her absence!

Dr. Jum Sai himself began to conduct the little orchestra, swinging his arms rhythmically and gently. The pieces played were mostly popular *bhajans* and the children did a very good job of it. After fifteen minutes of playing, their conductor arrived! A loud round of applause filled the hall as everyone realised that the present conductor was only the stand by and yet had done such a good job. However, the difference became evident as the violinists bonded and blended wonderfully well with their conductor, and the same pieces sounded more harmonious than before. The orchestrator is as important, if not more, than the orchestra. So, they began playing the pieces once again. At 6.40 p.m., once the violins concluded, Swami blessed all of the children and asked for *bhajans* to commence in the Sai Kulwant Hall.

Swami had the programme sheet in His hand which contained all the *bhajans* that the students had played. He called the lead singers from the *bhajan* group and handing over the sheet to them, told them to sing the same *bhajans*! It took a while, but soon everyone in the hall realized what was going on and felt very touched at this little act of Grace from the Lord. Swami told the singers that they needn't sing the *bhajans* in both speeds; what was important was that all *bhajans* be sung! And so, from *Ganesh Sharanam* to *Manasa Bhajore* to *Bhajana Bina*, the *bhajans* were sung; the Thailand students were simply delighted. Then, as the *bhajans* were done, Swami suddenly asked for a Meera *bhajan*. That song began and was halfway through when Swami told them to stop. Then, He asked the violinists whether

they could play any Meera *bhajan*. They smiled sheepishly and said 'no'. Swami too smiled and told them to sing any *bhajan*. They sang in chorus, *Shambho Shankara Deva* and everyone in the hall followed them.

After this, Swami called them up for a group photo beside Him onstage, and interacted with them for nearly twenty minutes. As the flashes fired, Swami spoke lovingly to the children. Some of them began to show small card photos to Swami. He blessed them and said, "I will give photos. I will give." At 7:25 p.m., Swami received *aarathi* and left for Yajur Mandir as *prasadam* was distributed.

July 18, 2008 – Guru Poornima in the Divine Presence

Thousands thronged to the holy hamlet of Puttaparthi to be with their dear Guru on the occasion of Guru Poornima. Sai Kulwant Hall was brimming with people everywhere. The students from all the campuses too had arrived and what greater good fortune for a student than being with their Guru on this occasion. The Sun had risen quite early in the morning and was shining bright already. Maybe the sun too wished to have a glimpse of the Sadguru from the heavens! Resplendent in a golden yellow robe, the Sun in every heart rose at 8:50 a.m. Unlike the heavenly star, the sweet Lord seemed to bring in waves of calmness and coolness with His arrival. A special Golden coloured chair was His chariot and He was led in the procession by His baby elephant which was bedecked in festival finery.

Swami moved slowly through the throngs of devotees and a "Mexican wave" of joy moved through the crowd, the crests of the wave coinciding with His position in the hall, as everyone craned to gift their eyes with the heavenly sight. There was exuberance and joy everywhere. Swami, in sharp contrast to the reactions of the devotees, was the epitome of calm and had a stoic smile as He gently moved through the surging and swelling crowds. He was the centre of calm in the devotional storm. Completing a full round, He moved to the portico. A huge cake adorned the veranda. The cake was thickly covered with icing. But the 'icing' on the icing was a lovely model of Lord Rama embracing his dear most Hanuman. Swami lit the candle on the cake and also cut it gently. There was another cake too which Swami cut and blessed. Then He moved onto the stage.

The moment He was on stage, the magic and joy of spontaneity was experienced by all in the hall - seeing Him so majestic and powerful, yet so dainty and sweet, the crowd burst in rapturous clapping so spontaneously, and seeing His devotees oozing with joy and enthusiasm, Swami raised both His hands in the ultimate act of Grace and benediction, as spontaneously. That divine smile now danced on His lips. He sat for a while listening to the Vedam chanting along with the *Nadaswaram* and *Panchavadyam* performed by the students. He also kept beat with the music as the boys continued playing.

After a while, Mr. Shivraj Patil, the Union Home Minister of India, presented a book to Bhagavan for release. This tome on the Bhagavad Gita was written by

the distinguished statesman and was being made available in English, Hindi, Marathi and other languages. Swami was very eager in blessing the book. Bhagavan then asked Prof. Anil Kumar to announce the details of the book and after that Mr. Shivraj Patil was asked by Bhagavan to address the gathering. In his short speech, Mr. Patil thanked Bhagavan profusely for inspiring the book. As he completed his speech, Swami asked for a pen. Then He took the book and signed on its first page. It seemed so fantastic and appropriate. The Bhagavad Gita is an immortal treasure trove of wisdom that has inspired countless aspirants on the path to ultimate realization. And the teacher there is the Lord Himself in the form of Krishna. To be released on Guru Pournima by that same Krishna is a blessing that could not have got better for Mr. Shivraj Patil.

After releasing the book, Swami asked for His mikes to be brought. Wow! It was indeed a supremely blessed day for the best possible event was about to take place. The Guru addressing all! Swami began with a long Telugu poem which the translator did not get the opportunity to translate. Then the discourse proceeded:

"It is the power of Love that makes everything possible. All the names are God's names. But the Truth is 'Aham Brahmasmi'. The universe derives from and dissolves into the Truth. There is no place without Truth, and God is the cause for everything in the universe.

Shivraj Patil has written this Gita after poring over various texts and grasping this essence. There are many who write books but this one is very special for it has been written from the heart. Whenever, I visited him, he used to get it corrected and verified by me. And since it has arisen from his heart, the essence of the Gita is present in it.

Guru Pournima is not just a day when you pay respects to the elders by giving them some money. "Gurur Brahma, gurur Vishnu, gurur devo maheshwara; Guru sakshath parabrahma tasmai sri gurave namaha". In that sense, God is the only Guru. Pournima is the moon that is full without any defects or black spots. With a pure heart, whatever is said, comes true. And whatever comes from the heart is the true word of the Guru.

Once in their childhood, when the Pandavas and Kauravas were engaged in a ball game, the ball fell into a well and the children began to weep. Drona, his wife and son Ashwattama were passing by that way. Drona, the master, shot an arrow to the ball. Then successively, he shot arrows one behind the other and made a rope out of the arrows and pulled out the ball for them. Such was his greatness. Ekalavya wanted to become his disciple too but Drona refused to take him as one stating that he would not teach hunters. So the lad made a clay idol of Drona and mastered the art of archery. Once when Drona and all the princes were in the forest, a dog started barking and disturbing. Very soon, its mouth was rendered shut by hundreds of arrows shot with great precision! All wondered who had done so and it was discovered that Ekalavya was the one responsible. At this time, Arjuna grew very jealous. How can there be anyone else who is so skilled? On inquiry, when Ekalavya said that

his guru was Drona, Arjuna was angry too! The art of shooting by mere hearing the sound was something his Guru had promised to teach him alone. He wanted his guru Drona to ask as a Gurudakshina (gift of gratitude to the Guru), the shooting thumb of Ekalavya! This stemmed from his ego that he was the best archer in the world. Drona did so to please Arjuna and Ekalavya lost his thumb and thus his career too.

The guru may ask anything, but the true Guru is one who resides in the heart and gives instructions from there. The Bhagavad Gita is the teaching of the heart. Though Shivraj Patil read a lot, he had a lot of doubts. Finally he wrote what his heart felt. He did not follow any other text or teaching. It was Swadhyaya (the delving into the soul or Atma) that gave joy and clarity. Just remove the feelings of 'I' and 'mine', ego and possessiveness, and the Atma Tatwa stands revealed. Many make attempts to know the Self. To do that first drop the 'I'. That is also symbolised by the Christian Cross. The Cross stands for the fact that when 'I' is crossed, Jesus is liberated. Also, one must give up possessiveness.

Shivraj Patil has been coming to me for 30 years now. Chavan and Patil came together to Swami. Patil was first made a minister in Mumbai and then He moved to Delhi. He became the Speaker of the Parliament. But he never asked Swami for anything. He has achieved a good name in the government too. They have full confidence in him. One must always have three things - Self confidence, Self-sacrifice and Self-satisfaction. And for all these 3, faith is absolutely essential. And Love of course! Demons have faith in God, but they hate God! Just reading and speaking is not enough. What you do practically counts. First see, then develop faith and follow. That will finally lead to Self-realization and that is Poornima - being spotless in thought, word and deed.

Share with all whatever you know. This applies to the teachers and students alike, who are like the positive and negative respectively. Whatever you experience, tell your parents. Have a close relationship with your mother and father. One who pleases parents will have progress on all fronts. God will be with them always. The last shloka of Gita states that where there is Arjuna (devotee) with Krishna (God), there will be ultimate victory and fulfillment.

Today Shivraj Patil has given you a book with beautiful ideas and sentiments. That is why he has satisfaction and the book is respected. But you see boys reading all sorts of novels these days. They will hold a big spiritual book and concealed in it will be a novel! Such bad books must not be kept in our libraries. Even if they are kept, our boys will not even glance at them. Have sacred hearts and that will lead you to The secret place. Boys are all very good, but due to the age some disturbing thoughts do come. Be resistant at such times. All of you too must write books. We have one student.....what's his name? (after conferring a while with some people around), Ah yes! Hungary government has called him....He is Gowri Shankar. He is going to Hungary for the paper that he has published. Every Tom, Dick and Harry doesn't get called like that.

{Swami blessed the lecturer Mr. Gowri Shankar on stage and told him to earn a good name for his parents and the Institute.}

Whatever you learn, you must spread it to some people. You should go everywhere and tell everyone about what you have learnt here in our Institute. There are two girls in the Anantapur campus too. Having excelled in English and Physics, they are being financed for a trip to USA. All of you should earn such a good name."

Concluding His discourse, Swami called two students from the *bhajan* group and told them to sing Shiva *bhajans*. And then, again He told them "Sing shankar *bhajans*". Mysterious and indeed unfathomable are the ways of God. Maybe a mere coincidence but still worth noting is the fact that while on His left sat Shivaraj Patil, on His right was Gowri Shankar! The boys told Swami that they had prepared some songs for the occasion. Swami agreed and told them to sing two songs. After the two were sung, Swami asked for the *aarathi* to be performed and retired to Yajur Mandir.

In the afternoon, there was no scheduled programme. But with Swami, it's always about loving His uncertainty! Swami arrived at about 5:10 p.m. in the same chair as the morning! This time, like the evening sun, He was in the orange robe. He took a full *darshan* round and moved to the stage. The Malladi brothers were seated one side of the stage and Swami played His first stroke of loving uncertainty. He called them and told them to sing! They did not have their accompanying artists. So students were called to accompany them on the harmonium, *tabla* and *mridangam*. They began with a song on the glory and grandeur of the guru. Then, in their usual panache and wonderful style, they sang other songs.

The highlight of the evening was the song, "Nagumomu". If all the feelings that coursed through all the people including Swami during that 15 minute period that the song lasted is to be captured, either 1 trillion words are needed or just one suffices - Bliss! The skill of the throat when it combines with the magical composition of a literary genius and most importantly with the streams of devotion in the heart - sheer bliss is the inevitable result. Swami was very frequently singing along with the singers. As the song moved through its ups and downs of scale and moods, Swami seemed to reflect every thing. At one point, the singers were at the heights of both, devotion and pitch, like a glistening dew drop on the lotus petal, a tear seemed to form in His eye! Simultaneously, there were wet eyes all over in the hall. The Malladi brothers went about their vocal gymnastics and thrilled everyone. There was not a single moment when Swami sat 'still'. He was all the while moving His hands or swaying - and it is the highest of achievements to "move" the Lord! In this case, Swami was literally and figuratively moved. Very few manage to replicate the technical genius of the uneducated Thyagaraja, but it is only a magical few who bring alive the devotion to Rama that he embodied. Any amount of description cannot do justice to those mesmerising moments in His presence.

Swami asked for shawls to be brought and very lovingly honoured the singers who had brought so much of Love for God in the hearts of thousands. To intensely Love God is indeed a blessing from Him, but it is a greater boon to bring out the Love for God in the hearts of others too and the brothers were doing just that. After receiving shawls and Love, the concert continued for some more time. 3 songs later, Swami asked for *aarthi* and then as *prasadam* was being distributed, Swami retired.

July 19, 2008 – Choir Programme by Austrian Devotees

On the evening of July 19, 2008, the devotees from Austria had been permitted to present a choral programme. Swami came for *darshan* at 5 p.m., and took a round of the Sai Kulwant Hall in His chair before coming to the verandah. Before the programme commenced, He once again took a round of the ladies' side in His chair and granted a 'bonus' *darshan*. Then, slowly He moved up to the centre of the Sai Kulwant Hall. After He came onstage, the proceedings began. It was 5.25 p.m. The Austrian devotees must have felt very special at these acts of love and grace. They had a conductor who would sit down and speak into the mike after each song and explain the significance of the upcoming song.

The feeling of joy of sitting and singing in the immediate presence of Lord was apparent on the beaming faces of the choir members, both men and women, and it was a torrential outpour of devotion in the form of music during the twilight session. Starting the programme with the song *Dass Du mich einstimmen lasst*, expressing gratitude to Bhagavan for the opportunity granted to them, the troupe sang the second song *Wenn wir erklimme*, expressing the feeling - 'together we are climbing the mountain of life with full desire to reach the goal of merging with God, facing all challenges, enjoying the wonderful beauty of nature, which is the ornament of our Supreme Lord'.

The next to come was from the composition of Austria's illustrious composer W. A. Mozart, and the song was "Hallelujah", the song in praise of The Lord which was followed by a song on Sathya Sai, *Gurudev Gurudev* composed by a devotee from Austria. The sixth song was an exclusive song, *Werte de Lebens*, on five Human Values followed by *Atme in uns*, a song which was a speedy prayer to the Holy Spirit for enlightenment, love and transformation. *Andachtsjodler* was the next to come, a devotional yodeler for praising the Lord at midnight mass. An old famous Austrian folk song about the splendour of nature, *In die Berg bin I gern* was the eight piece and that was followed by *Lob and Preis*, which was yet again another invitation to one and all to come and sing in praise of the Lord, and the last piece was *Vater unser*. Acknowledging that with the Lord's Prayer, which is the most common prayer in the Christian tradition, the troupe got the unique opportunity and immense grace to praise the Lord in His physical Presence in their mother tongue.

Sitting through the entire session and watching the graceful artistes singing their hearts out, Swami asked them to continue with two more songs. They repeated the songs. Swami was also very concerned that the speaker be given a standing mike so that he would not have to exert sitting and standing

alternatively. Expressing happiness, "Very Happy" in so many words, simultaneously gesticulating with His typical hand movement, and with His face beaming in complete satisfaction, He showed His greater concern and love asking the conductor, who appeared to be tired after his physically demanding conductor show, whether he wanted water...and lo! He replied through the mike, "Yes, Swami, a lot of water has come out and its time some water went in!" The students got glasses of water for the members of the choir.

Bhagavan asked them to sing some more after their half-hour of songs, and so an encore followed. Swami then asked the devotee who introduced the songs whether he wanted water, and referring to their tears of joy, he said, "Yes, Swami, so much water has come out, now some water must go in also!" The students supplied them with water. It was followed by *prasadam* distribution even as *bhajans* were being sung for the next half hour. The day ended with *arati* at seven o'clock.

20th July 2008 – Inauguration of Sri Sathya Sai World Education Conference

At about 11 a.m. there was a sudden hustle outside the Yajur Mandir on July 20. Swami was going to the Poorna Chandra auditorium to inaugurate the Sai Vidya Jyoti exhibition that had been erected there. A dash of *rangolis* (symmetric drawings with colour powder on the floor) adorned a large portion of the auditorium floor, and children from various nationalities held flowers to welcome the Lord. Swami entered the grand entrance and lit the lamp to mark the opening. Then, He went around the various sections of the exhibition. There was an elaborate and well-made documentary on the various facets of Educare and Swami sat through the entire video of about 20 minutes. Next Swami moved to see the different sections of the Exhibition which were based on Sathya Sai System of Education being practiced in different regions of the world. Swami spent about 40 minutes in the exhibition. After blessing all the participants and watching brief clips at different points, He returned to the Yajur Mandir at about 11:50 a.m.

In the evening, the opening ceremony of the Sri Sathya Sai World Education Conference was scheduled. Swami arrived in the chair and took a detour to the stage between the seated ladies and gents delegates. And next, a very interesting episode occurred. All the delegate letters had been bundled into a huge package and the devotee sitting right in the front offered it to Bhagavan. Swami looked at it and it appeared as if He wanted to take it. But at the last minute, He blessed it and the package remained in the devotee's hands. However as Swami came on the stage, He told the student beside Him, "Go down, take that package and keep it." There was an applause of joy and thrill at this act of Grace. After that Swami lit the lamp to mark the inauguration of the conference. This was followed by opening addresses by Dr. Michael Goldstein and Mr. V. Srinivasan. After their speeches, Swami asked for His mikes and began His divine discourse.

"Today education has become physical. There are millions who have studied but of what use are they to the society? They are all achieving their own selfish needs and none are there who think of others or realize the condition of the society. In public, they declare that they help the poor but do nothing. You know the plight of the world today. There is misery everywhere and there is no trace of bliss. Every region or country speaks highly in self-praise but the suffering continues. Who are rich? 'Manas ekam, Vachas ekam, karmanyekam Mahaatmanam.' They are great who have unity in thought, word and deed. Big countries are doing a lot of harm to other countries. They are unmindful of the poverty and do not even feel repentant at what they are doing. Every country helps only the rich. You must all stand by the poor and for this Prema (Love) and Daya (Compassion) are essential. Only those with Thyaga (sacrifice) get bliss, never those with feelings of 'I' and 'mine'.

Today Paapa Bheeti (fear of sin) and Daiva Preeti (Love for God) are both missing. These two can get you everything. The selfishness is on the rise and the largeness of the world is reducing. The rich sit in palatial houses while the poor toil. Everything is God's gift. How can it be denied to anyone? Serve and be served by the poor. Today 100% of the educated are selfish. They are responsible for cheap behaviours. People fight on selfish grounds. A human is one who has human values. You cannot be happy when your fellowman is suffering. If you give pain to any child of God, that pain will come back to you. Today, the spirit of unity and equality is needed. Unity leads to purity of heart and finally to divinity in experience. Do not be indifferent to suffering. God resides in every heart - even in ants and mosquitoes. So, do not kill them by using Flit (an insecticide). If you want to protect yourself, use a mosquito net.

Show a little humanity. Today there is no compassion, only "come- fashion". Anger, lust, greed, hatred and jealousy are all demonic qualities. What is the use of a human form if you have these qualities? For everything, there is reaction, reflection and resound. If you make a country suffer, it will make you suffer later. Go to any of our schools and ask any kid what is meant by human values and they will tell you. A time will come when we have to learn from the children.

Truth comes from the heart. Go deep within and enquire. The Truth will be revealed. Truth with right action gives Love and peace, and this will lead to non-violence. All these human values are within us. Man is indeed God. Ask God, "Who are you?" and He will respond, 'Aham Branhmasmi'. Names are different and given by the parents. 'Ek Atma Sarva Bhootantaratma' - the same soul resides in all beings. You see ants moving in a row. Whenever they meet another ant, they kiss, consult and then move on. A calf keeps crying out to its mother when born. When a hunter shot the male of a pair of birds, the female cried and died. That episode led to the composition of the Ramayana itself. Animals exhibit such sentiments, man has to learn from them. No amount of speaking and listening will help. Only when you follow, you will understand. You feel bad when others shout at you, but what happens when you shout at others? Consider everything as God's will as it is good for you.

Today people have lost Self-confidence. When you say 'this is my kerchief', the kerchief is different from you. So too, when you say 'this is my body', 'my mind', 'my intellect', you are different from them. You are not making an effort to understand your true nature. Know your true nature and identity. God is with you, in you, around you and above you. In fact, you are God. Education is not merely learning. You learn the meaning of words and not their significance. Ask who you are and get the answer for that question. It is not enough if you keep reading books. One student came to me saying that he had read the entire Shirdi Sai Satcharitra. I asked him as to what he had practised from it. He said that he hadn't practised anything!

When you open your eyes, you see thousands around. But close your eyes and you see only yourself. I am I. That is the answer. Names are only for practical purposes. Examine and recognise your heart. Goldstein and Srinivasan spoke so much about education but educare is not related to the world. It relates to you. Only then will you be able to proclaim 'I am I'. Once you clearly understand this, you will realize divinity. Remember, literacy is not knowledge. Truth is God, Love is God.

You cannot be the sole possessor of Love. God is the only owner of Love. Educare is to bring that Love out from within. In just 25-30 years, there will be harmony and peace in the world. Tomorrow, I will clear all the doubts you have. Now it's late. We will have the music."

So, as Swami went for a short break into the interview room, the stage was set for the Sai Symphony Orchestra. As all the members of the orchestra were ready, Swami arrived and asked them to start the performance. Conducted by Michael Koehler from Germany, the orchestra consisted of violins, violas, cellos, bass, clarinets, saxophones, oboes, bassoons, flutes, trumpets, trombones, French horns, percussions alongside, a tube, a timpani and a keyboard - a wide array indeed! Representing 21 countries, the musicians just let themselves to be ruled by their heartfelt feelings. The program consisted of Romantic music pieces of the great western classical masters. They played Shostakovich festive overture, Ottorino Respighi, Felix Mendelssohn and some more pieces. As they completed, Swami blessed them and asked for tetrapacks of mango juice to be served to all. He also blessed *prasadam* to be distributed. He then received *aarthi* and left to Yajur Mandir.

July 21, 2008 – Second Day of World Education Conference

In the morning of July 21, all the delegates were seated in the Sai Kulwant Hall and were eager as Swami's discourse had been scheduled. Swami arrived for *darshan* at 10:45 a.m. Almost immediately, He came to the stage and wanted the proceedings to begin. There were four speeches scheduled before His discourse. The first speaker was Dr. Tom Scovill. After his 15 minute speech, there was a very interesting talk by Dr. B.G. Pitre. He spoke on the techniques and impact of Sathya Sai Education, with illustrative anecdotes. The next, was Dr. Dalton de Souza Amorim. Finally, Mr. Srirangarajan from the Sri Sathya Sai University delivered his talk which

revolved around the four E's of educare - experience, example, empowerment and ennoblement.

After the talks, Swami said that He would deliver His discourse in the evening. Swami thus accepted *aarthi* and retired to Yajur Mandir at noon.

The delegates for the conference gathered at various venues in the *ashram* for their respective post-lunch sessions and returned to the Sai Kulwant Hall for the afternoon plenary session. Swami arrived in His chair and moved to the interview room after four o'clock. At 4.30 p.m., the speeches for the afternoon commenced. Mr. Victor Krishna Kanu from Zambia, who arrived on stage in a wheel chair, was the first to be invited to speak. He roared like an African lion, saying that it is time to move ahead into action. He powerfully impressed on all that being born at a time when the Avatar is on earth is no small 'coincidence'. Swami was visibly moved with his "roars". He blessed him profusely at the end of his short speech. Then, Mr. Jeremy Hoffer, spoke on his experiences as a teacher in the SSE programme. Next, Mr. M. K. Kaw dwelled on the functioning procedures at the Sri Sathya Sai International Center at Delhi. And finally, Mr. Sanjay Mahalingam, a research scholar at Sri Sathya Sai University, elaborated on how the goal of educare is to gift one with absolute silence within. Bhagavan, then, graciously consented to speak to the delegates. A list of questions was handed over to Him. Next, He asked for the mikes and began His discourse.

"Study that which can confer on you immortality. Education without action is useless in spite of all the titles and degrees you may boast of; practise is important. The greatest ignorance is among those who have learnt much. Following them, the children too get spoilt. Here are is the list of questions that have been submitted to me.

1) *For students, what is the way to have a relationship with God?*

God is in you. Live in Love as one with God. It is only when God is considered as separate that you need a relationship. He is not separate. 'God is in me and is me' - have this identity firm in your minds.

2) *How to evaluate one's spiritual worth?*

You have to examine yourself. Do I have strong faith or is my faith for the sake of worldly gains? Faith is that which never wavers.

3) *What are the signs of spiritual transformation?*

There are nothing like special signs; it is an experience. It may be your dreams or may come as listening to your inner voice. Finally, it is you who have to feel for yourself whether you are growing in devotion or not. Rely on yourself and your own faith.

4) *What should be the qualities of a Guru for Sathya Sai Education (SSE)?*

The teacher should be one of Love and must inculcate virtues in students by example. The students must not simply be left free to do anything they please. Apply some brakes on their freedom. Punishment also must be there if needed. But the punishment must be as a cautionary warning and not as a means to hurt or inflict pain on the student. The teachers and student should both move together on the same path and not on divergent ways.

5) *How to ensure that students grow in discipline along the spiritual path?*

The students must remain students and teachers must remain teachers. All you have to do is just make the students happy in the true sense of the term, that's all.

6) *How do we mould students into ideals?*

This is very important. If the teacher has good conduct, the students will emulate him/her. Whatever you tell them not to do; you too must refrain from doing so. Eat with them, and live and eat the same type of food. Do not eat fish and meat, and advise on vegetarianism. Practise what you preach. Foster the children yourself as you would do to your own children. Do not behave egoistically just because you are a teacher. An ideal student will be humble and obedient.

7) *How to behave when girls are there?*

When boys are around, it is usually fine. Very good behavior is needed when there are girls. Consider them as your sisters with respect. Lead an ideal life.

8) *How should students and parents be taught?*

In front of children, parents should never discuss family problems, financial matters and their worldly woes. They should keep it to themselves. Children will themselves understand the problems of the parents. Do not speak to them directly. Parents should first cultivate the virtues and take care not to be cautioned by the children.

As children, do not trouble your parents. They have many hopes on you and they have sacrificed a lot. Know that you have come up because of those sacrifices. Even if you cause a little pain to them, you will have lot of difficulties. Even if you go for a marriage and family, keep parents happy without troubling them. Never neglect your parents. Your main duty is to make your parents happy. It is your mad and bad company that makes you go wayward. Tell me your company and I will tell you what you are. Correct those who neglect their parents.

The maximum disturbances are due to the differences in the aspirations of the child and parent. If you choose as you wish, what about your parents then? It is the worst sin to cause pain to your parents for your selfish happiness. This is not expected of any son or daughter. Today you marry and get your in laws,

but who were there with you since birth? Desire good and discharge your duties. Do not simply get involved in others affairs. Do not show your temper in front of those who desire your good. Express gratitude and never make your aged parents shed tears.

Is that all? Are there any more questions?

Parents should recognise Human Values and teach the children. Practice whatever you say. Don't say, "I have no time. I have to go to office." If you think about your office, what about the children? After education, girls go for jobs. Who will look after the children and household duties then? You keep an aaya (maid) to take care of the children. Who will maintain the family honor and prestige? This will bring down the reputation of the family. Hence, you have to take up employment only after ensuring smooth running of the household. You can certainly take up a job, provided the children are taken care of in a proper manner. Even the males do not understand this situation. Some people spend their time in reading newspapers and watching TV after returning from their offices. Some others go to the club and play cards. They do not bother about their family and children.

There is none with copyrights on Human values. They are for all. The way police and government officials behave has a bearing on the children. Do not allow the children to sleep till 8 in the morning. Nowadays parents themselves sleep till late morning. Only retired people can sleep that way as they are free from responsibilities.

Have a capital fund if needed. If parents come to help financially, you can accept. Mutual co- operation and help should grow. Discipline, Devotion and Duty are most important. Teach Human Values. Show the way to get closer to God. Do not give everything that the child asks for. Give only what is necessary. Sai System must be applicable for parents too. There should not be a mismatch between what the teacher tells in class and what the parents say at home. Parents must visit the schools and find out about their children. Check what sort of books they read. They will read novels hidden in their text books. Throw and burn all the cheap novels. In our libraries such books are absent.

In Bharat, especially in villages, children take care of their parents. It is only the officers in towns who neglect. The children keep roaming in the streets. The students should not be vagabonds. What is most important is that you must not waste food, energy, money and time. Have a ceiling on desires. None have this today. In India, people engage in saving. Seeing this, people in USA and Japan feel jealous. They spend wasteful dollars on food. Serve the hungry with the left over food. If you waste money, difficulties are sure to come. We are ready to waste but do not serve. Do not talk too much. Keep all the organs under check. Time waste is life waste. Misuse of money is evil. Do not splurge unnecessarily. If the rich people keep spending more, everybody demands a raise in their salaries! So when you spend, see if it is being properly used.

So these were all the questions in the minds. Be careful in society. Any small blunder is seen as huge. Never commit a mistake in society. Lead life with utmost care.....HmMMM. Now do bhajans."

The students sang *bhajans* for 10 minutes after Swami's Discourse while the delegates moved out from the centre of the Sai Kulwant Hall to make way for the devotees from the CIS (former USSR) who were to make a musical presentation. Bhagavan returned to the stage after a brief visit to the interview room and the music program began with a brief introduction. Songs from Russia, Georgia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan kept the packed hall enthralled with their catchy tunes and lively beat. The joy and enthusiasm radiating from the faces of these devotees was very infectious. Everyone had a smile and some of them were even almost laughing aloud! It was truly a very divine atmosphere as the joy radiating from the Lord and devotees combined, spread a thrill everywhere.

After their half-hour programme, Swami asked them to sing one more song. So they sang the popular "Kalinka" and had the audience clapping all through. Then, as all the organisers came around Swami, He spoke to them. All of a sudden, waving His hand, Swami materialised a huge golden *Lingam*. The lingam was awesome by its sheer size alone! He handed it over to Dr. Goldstein with some instructions. He asked for a cover and wrapped the *lingam* in the cover. He told him to perform the *abhishekam* or the holy bath for the deity. Promising further instructions later, Swami displayed the *lingam* for all the eager devotees to have a look at. There were gasps and shrieks. It is true that in the state of highest happiness, man does not know how to react. The mixture of spontaneous reactions was something that must be seen and heard to be truly experienced! Blessing all the devotees, Swami accepted *aarati* and returned to His residence at 7.30 p.m. while *prasadam* was distributed.

July 22, 2008 – Valedictory Day of Sri Sathya Sai Education Conference

The morning of July 22, 2008, found all the delegates of the Sri Sathya Sai Education Conference assembled in the Sai Kulwant Hall for the third and final day of the conference proceedings. *Bhajans* began at 9 o'clock, and Swami arrived in His chair at 9.50 a.m. He took a small *darshan* round and then came onstage. He saw that the delegates had collected their letters and made two bundles, one was with a senior lady and the other with a gentleman. Swami called two students and told them to take the huge bundles of letters and place them on the stage. Then, He called out for the Thailand school boys who had played the violin concert a few days ago. Dr. Jum Sai gathered and got some of them onstage. Swami distributed watches to them and they were thrilled. Since Swami had promised them earlier that He would give them their photographs, they asked Swami, "Swami, our photographs." At this time, one photographer immediately went up to Swami and handed over all the copies of the photos. They were all happy to receive them from the divine hands. Then, Swami sat onstage for a few minutes and interacted with the conference organisers. Then He moved to the interview room and called in a few lady delegates for an interview. Once He emerged from the

interview, He came onstage and accepted *arati* before returning to His residence at 11 a.m.

The final session of the conference got underway in the evening when Swami came onstage just before 5 a.m. The three speakers for the session were Dr. Narendra Reddy, Mr. Nimish Pandya and Dr. Michael Goldstein. Once the speakers summed up the conference proceedings and outlined the course of future action, Bhagavan delivered His benedictory message.

Embodiments of love,

From the past two days you have been sitting and listening all the while. Having spent a lot of money, energy and time, you have come here and it is indeed your great good fortune to be here. Your heartfelt experience is the witness for it. Many have money but only a few get this opportunity. What is to be learnt?

There are lakhs of schools and colleges. understand that the true college is in your heart. Understand the five values of Sathya, Dharma, Shanti, Prema and Ahimsa. We have lawyers in the world who become liars and doctors who fight amidst themselves. There is no unity. First cultivate unity that we are all brothers and sisters. Father is one - he is God. Have conviction that we are all the children of the same God. Have adjustment and understanding. For the former to come, latter is most important. Today, the number of scientists is on the rise, but their actions are senseless. Science is not "dealing with the senses". They make errors and society is being hurt and harmed.

Today man is full of fear to do anything. He cannot even board or alight an aircraft without fear. (At this point, a tiny mouse scuttled amidst the primary school children. Everyone started shrieking and even the ladies began to get up! Swami saw the commotion gently for a while.) If you are so scared of a small mouse, how can handle other events in life? Don't fear. Fear leads to imagination. People are scared of everything, including fruits and vegetables as there are medicines in them. Everything is polluted today - the food, water and air. So it's best, you make everything by yourselves. Do not go by taste. Health is most important. Speak the Truth always. Whatever people say, be calm and peaceful. In the olden days, people kept mounam (silence). For all spiritual practices, silence helps. When you are peaceful and silent, pure love is generated. Who is your enemy? There is none. Make attempts to lead a life of love. People talk of peace, but it is often pieces. Countries are being broken in pieces. Always say, I am from India - not Puttaparthi, Anantapur, etc. Similarly, do not say that you are from California. Say you are from USA. Become broad minded. Once you become so, the children too will follow. If the children are not proper, the parents are to blame. At a certain age, children will not listen to the parents if the parents' behaviour is not fine.

Even the ants move in a straight line but not man! Parents are the ones that mould children. They must not stay separate. They must speak and remain united. Teach Truth as the first step. Truth is having unity and purity in thought, word and deed. Truth is the great grandfather of all virtues. Have a

heartfelt life and not an artificial one. Today, reading, meditation and chanting have all become artificial. Keep the heart alive and the mind under check. The mind of man alone is responsible for either his bondage or liberation. Have good thoughts, automatically good actions will follow..Direct the mind properly and it will remain silent. When the sun of wisdom rises to its zenith, then the shadow of ignorance is below our feet. And while doing it, have patience and take time. Just like the hour hand of the clock in which everyone is interested, and not the second hand (which is "second-hand"!), God is more interested in steady progress. Divert the mind on to God always. You feel that is difficult, but it is the simplest. Grow in love for God and the mind is automatically controlled. Live in love, and that is not the worldly love but spiritual love.

Never think that it is your will. If it is yours then why are you not able to control things? It is all God's will. Both bad and good are His gifts. You run after the worldly law, but the divine law is the law of Love. Let anyone speak anything or criticize, the love within is safe, secure and divine. If anything happens, the heart comes to know of it. In the bag of the body, the mind, intellect, etc. are present. Also the six vices are present that trouble you always. Offer everything to the Lord and get bliss for yourselves.

Has anyone invited you all here? Love has brought you all here, it is your love for Swami that has brought you. Love unites. See when you add '+' and '+', you get '+'. But add up '+' and '-', you get '-'. Have love always. Love can achieve anything. When Hanuman went to Sri Lanka, he saw Sita telling Ravan about the sterling qualities of Rama. Lord Rama was a man of great character. The end of education is character. Without it, there is no use. Install goodness and character in your heart.

More than anything be prepared to sacrifice. What will you do with so much money? When Alexander was dying, he asked that he be taken in the funeral with outstretched arms. He wanted to show that the greatest emperor of all times leaves the earth with nothing as his possessions! Be prepared to help the needy and poor. That will give you great joy.

The children here will now put up their program.

At the end of His Discourse, He went to the interview room briefly, and returned with Dr. Goldstein in tow. Swami took the *lingam* that He had given to Dr. Goldstein last evening and displayed it to everyone. He then created vibhuti and sprinkled it on the *lingam*, and it was the perfect *abhishekam*. He again created some more of the holy Vibhuti and asked Dr. Goldstein to immediately put all of it into his mouth. He announced that He's giving the *lingam* to Dr. Goldstein for him to distribute the water from ritually bathing the *lingam* to those who are unwell. There were thunderous claps and joyous shouts of Jaijaikars as Swami said that. He then asked for the evening's cultural programme to begin.

Children from the Sri Sai Vidya Vihar, Alwaye, Kerala, presented an hour-long dance drama on Bhaktha Jayadeva. The drama began with a wonderful ballet between Krishna and Radha. Then a teacher arrives on the scene and

starts narrating to the children, the story of Jayadeva. The Lord literally composes the verses for Jayadeva who is lost in His glory alone. When the ruler of the land, Lakshmana Sena tries to harass the poet, the Lord is always present, rescuing and glorifying the devotee. There was also a scene of the great devotion of Padmavathi towards her husband Jayadeva. When the queen fools her telling that Jayadeva is dead, she immediately drops down dead in sorrow. Jayadeva's sorrowful, yet devotional hymn rushes to the very gates of heaven and drags the Lord down to shower mercy and resurrect Padmavathi. The final scene was about how the Lord comes down as a scholar to subject Jayadeva to the final test. But the all humble saint submits completely and the Lord Krishna is lost in his love. The drama concluded with a final song.

Swami's face was covered in smiles watching the small children make their presentation. During the scene when the wife dies, all the ladies in the front were in tears at the nobility of the woman. The pleadings to Lord Krishna, were all directed to Sai Krishna and Swami too reflected the same sentiments. As they concluded, He got up from the stage and walked down to take group photographs with them. He walked down the steps and all the children came towards Him to receive Him. After a while, He also sat on the chair and posed for photographs with them. He called the actor who played the role of Jayadeva and gifted her a clock embedded in a laminated photograph. He later gave one of that to each of the participants as they came up one by one, while *prasadam* was distributed to all the devotees. He also threw a couple of sweets to some of the drama participants. It was 8 p.m. when Swami accepted *arati*, blessed everyone and returned to His residence.

July 23, 2008 – Music Programme by Italian Devotees

Devotees from Italy had filled up the marble block as they had been granted permission to perform in the divine presence on the evening of July 23, 2008. The whole choir was seated on the floor. There were two violins, a flute and a clarinet player on the ladies side on chairs. Mirroring them in position on the gents side were a violin, an accordion, a guitar and tambourine players. Swami arrived for *darshan* at about 5:20 p.m. And when He came, there were gasps! He had come on the special golden chair that He had used for Guru Poonima. Since it is at a nice height, all the devotees benefit from a wonderful *darshan*. Swami moved to the stage and asked for the programme to begin. The programme was presented as an offering of devotional songs from Italy. As Swami sat, the offerings were made to Him. A little boy gave Him the Italian flag. Swami blessed the conductor of the programme and asked them to start.

There was that little boy, maybe 8-9 years of age, who began the programme with Vedic chanting. As he completed it, Swami was all smiles. He called the boy and asked him as to from whom had he learnt the chanting. He blessed him and sent him back. The next item also was by this boy who played a solo guitar piece. It was followed by a short piano recital and then the singing began. It started with a rapid "Om Sri Ganesha", followed by an emotional song addressing Swami as the mother. A soulful song entitled, "Oh My Sun"

was next and it gave way to a high pitched and quickly changing song entitled, "Flying with God". The "Tarantella Divina" or the divine dance was ushered in next and "Longing for Sathya Sai" gave them an opportunity to pour out their feelings for Him. Swami noticed that the gentleman sitting right in front had no mike before him. He asked, "Won't he sing?" There was merriment and that devotee was immensely touched. He needed no mike after that encouraging statement! Two more songs later, they concluded. But Swami wanted them to continue. He asked for one more song which they sang whole heartedly and in full throat. They seemed to be in a sort of pleasurable trouble when Swami asked them to sing another. They began to repeat a song and as they concluded, like a sweet child Swami asked, "One more?" They continued with the encore and then finally they told Swami that they were done!

He then told them to sing *bhajans*. They began to sing and Swami blessed chocolates to be distributed among them. The conductor put aside her stand and took a harmonium and began playing. This day also happened to be the 13th anniversary of the Sri Sathya Sai Junior Boys Hostel. So the children had brought a model of the school hostel to be blessed by Swami. Swami, however, did not seem to notice them. He concluded the *bhajans*, received *aarthi* and went into the interview room. Whenever God "denies" something, it is only because He has something greater and grander to gift us. The children appeared a little downcast but a lot more determined. They sat with the model at the Lord's door awaiting His arrival. What happened next is something that will remain etched in the memories of all present for a long time to come.

Swami came out of the interview room and seeing the boys, called them. They went to Him with the model and trays of chocolates and goodies. Swami was impressed with the model. But the perfectionist that He is, He asked them, "Turn the model around...". He examined all the sides and, His students that they are, they had made it very well. Swami seemed to be very happy with the model being perfect on all the six sides, yes, top and bottom included! Then He blessed the trays of chocolates and goodies. And in that instant, it seemed He was going to do something exciting. He took a few "gold coins" chocolates and began distributing them to the VIPs there. Then, He moved to the ladies side and began distributing coins one by one to the devotees. He saw the ladies sitting on wheelchairs. He moved towards them and began to give each of them "golden" coins with His own hand. He moved along the lines distributing coins. He moved back to the shutters area also where there were ladies on wheel chairs. He gave coins to all of them on priority basis. Their joy knew no bounds. They would not have imagined in their wildest dreams of this happening to them. But that is the way with God. He may not give you what you expect at times, but at other times, He gives that which we don't even dare to imagine! Some of the women raised up their babies for Swami to bless. Swami gently touched the babies on their foreheads.

He went around in this manner distributing among the ladies till the gold coins ran out! He stretched out His hand and the tray was empty. A satisfied smile blossomed on His face and there were thrilled faces all around. He slowly came back to the center where the Italian group was seated. He called and

had a set of photographs taken with the youngest member of their group who had recited Vedam and played a guitar solo, and asked the students to sing *bhajans*. The *bhajans* began and none need to say that they were in full gusto. Swami blessed all the birthday boys and the boys with trays too. He threw some chocolates to the members of the Italian choir. He just sat there smiling so blissfully and there was just joy and joy everywhere. At about 7:15 p.m., Swami received *aarthi* for the second time and then retired to the Yajur Mandir.

SWAMI AND ME

“THIS LIFE IS FOR HIM”

An interview with Mr. Y. Siva Rama Krishnaiah, Principal, Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School

He was totally new to Sri Sathya Sai Organization till 1971, and before that he was a shy graduate who thought he failed in the first year examination of his Masters; well, that is what his results said. But assured earlier by Bhagavan that he would pass the exam, he waited, only to hear that he indeed had passed in first class. And the very next year he went on to top the university in the final examinations. After that, he waited again for two years for another shower of Grace, which came as his first job, a chemistry lecturer in the erstwhile Sri Sathya Sai Junior College.

Embraced and assimilated into the Sai mission, slowly but surely, Mr. Siva Rama Krishnaiah was to become the Principal of the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School, Prasanthi Nilayam. In 2003, he was conferred with the “Best Teacher” award by the Central Board of Secondary Education of the Government of India. Fortunate to be an instrument in the divine hands in shaping the school for the last 25 years, his journey to Sai is as wonderful and exciting as the story of the school itself! In the July 2008 H2H issue, we offered you the sublime story of the School, and now here is the tale of the school’s principal, a story suffused with same love, care and protection of the Supreme Teacher and Divine Mother, Lord Sai.

In July 2008, H2H met this 59 year old principal, who never reduced the number of his lectures, in spite of umpteen administrative responsibilities as a principal. “I am a teacher first, and only then a principal,” he said. “I never dreamt that I would become the principal of this school. And tomorrow, if Swami gives me some other assignment, I’ll do it gladly. This life is for Him. For what He has done for me, I cannot ever repay Him for any number of lives to come.”

H2H: How did you come into Swami’s fold? And how did He groom you to become a vital part of His education mission?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah (SRK): I was totally new to the organization till 1971. In that year, I got married and since my in-laws were devotees, I came to Brindavan (Bangalore) along with them for Swami’s blessings. When we reached there, we saw Bhagavan going to the college to speak to the boys. We were in the crowd and did not know if He had seen us. But just when He was entering the college building, He seemed to have told one of the caretakers there: **“Call the people from Guntur; they have come.”**

So, we went inside. Swami was talking to the boys about the Geetha in Kannada. It was a very informal session, and since Telugu and Kannada are quite similar, I could fairly understand what He was saying. He spoke for more than half-an-hour and then returned to His residence.

We waited for two more days and Swami came to us on the third day. He blessed my wife and me, and accepted a garland from us. In those days, we could offer Him garlands. He also gave us *Prasadam* and said, “**I will see you in Puttaparthi.**” After that, we returned. That was my first personal interaction with Swami.

H2H: Did Swami ever interact with your wife’s family prior to this incident? Was such an experience a first for your wife too?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Prior to our marriage, my wife had been an active Sevalal member for 2-3 years. Their entire family used to come to Swami. So, it was not new for them; but for me, it was. Yet Swami spotted me out in that crowd! He came to me and said, “**I just saw your wife, I blessed her. Take Namaskaram.**” So I bowed down and touched His holy feet.

Later, in 1971, I got admission into M. Sc. (Master of Science).

H2H: Oh, so you were still studying?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes, I had just finished my B.Sc. (Bachelor of Science) and had joined the Masters programme. After the first year of M. Sc, I came to see Swami again. He called me for an interview and spontaneously said, “**I will see that you get a job. Don’t worry.**” He also told me that I would achieve first class result in the examinations, and before sending me off gave me clothes and blessed me profusely.

When I returned to Guntur, I was shocked to hear that I had failed in the first year examination! Since Bhopal, the city where I was doing my M.Sc., was quite far, I decided I would join a college in Guntur itself, and switch my discipline to M.A. (Master of Arts) in English.

During this time, I used to attend *bhajans* in my hometown, Guntur, every Monday. One such day, as we just started *Omkaaram*, I got a telephone call from Bhopal which said that the previous communication was a mistake and that I had passed the exam in first class!

H2H: Oh, that’s wonderful!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes, but the people who had seen the examination results in Bhopal were still surprised since they could not find my hall-ticket number anywhere in the list of passed candidates! I believe it is just Bhagavan’s word that turned the situation around.

I returned to Bhopal and completed my second year. At the end of it, I achieved first rank in the college!

H2H: That’s great!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes, then I came to Swami and He called me for an interview and said, **“I will help you in getting a job. Don’t worry, just be here.”**

I waited. He called me for an interview two or three times again and every time He assured me about my employment, blessed and sent me back.

Later, when I went to Brindavan, Swami introduced me to Prof. V. K. Gokak, saying that I was from the Andhra Seva Dal. Actually, I never heard the word ‘Sevadal’ till then! That was the first time I was hearing it! Now when I look back at it, I understand that it was all a preparatory ground He made for me.

Prof. Gokak called me later and said that they needed experienced lecturers for their college and not fresh ones like me. When Swami returned to Puttaparthi, I also came along with Him and told Him what Prof. Gokak had told me. Then, Swami asked me to wait, and I waited for five months!

However, those five months were, in fact, the golden period in my life, because I participated regularly in Sevadal work. It was then the domes of the Mandir and the Poornachandra Auditorium were being constructed, and I eagerly participated in that work. At the construction spot, Swami used to stand on the barricades and supply drinking water to us! There He saw me one day and acknowledged my participation saying, **“Oh! You are here too! See, your hands have become soiled and red!”**

Swami used to stand at the construction site and spend time with us on a daily basis. There were about twenty of us.

H2H: This was in 1973?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Right, 1973. Earlier, Mandir did not have any domes. Swami used to spend hours with us talking casually. Mr. Subba Rao, who teaches mathematics in our school, Mr. Ramana Rao, Mr. Patel, Mr. Narendra Popat and other Hyderabad Sevadals were also there. Swami used to bring so many things for us to eat. That was how He initiated us to participate in service.

In the end, on December 28 or 29, there was a conference in Rajahmundry which Swami was going to preside over. The evening before that, He came for normal rounds to the construction spot. I was sitting there. He came to me and asked, **“Did you see the newspaper today?”**

“Swami, I did not!” I replied.

Then, He said, **“In the newspaper, there is a notice requesting interested and experienced teachers to apply to the Brindavan College. By now, they have already selected a person for the post.”**

Then I asked, “What shall I do, Swami?”

He said, “**Nenu emi chesthaanu?**” (What can I do? They have already made the selection.)

I kept silent and Swami went to Rajahmundry the next day. I returned to Guntur and with the initiation into Seva that I had in Puttaparthi, I continued participating in Seva activities. I had no job for the next two years; I was just waiting.

In 1975, a miracle happened. One night, I returned from service, and we, my wife and I, were sleeping in our bedroom. Suddenly, Swami came into our room!

H2H: He appeared!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes, physically! He tried to wake me up but I wasn’t opening my eyes (I came to know of this later). But my wife woke up. Swami, then, sat on the bed! He spoke of a few things and then asked my wife to go to the library and check a particular newspaper. He also told her that in it there was an advertisement. After this, He just disappeared.

Startled, my wife woke me up saying, “Swami came! Swami came!”

“Are you mad?” I asked her.

“Go to the mirror and check yourself!” she replied.

When I looked myself in the mirror, there was *Vibhuti* on my forehead which Swami had placed. In fact, both of us were having *Vibhuti* marks on our foreheads! Now, I had to believe this.

So, I went to the library and checked the newspaper Swami had mentioned. In one corner of this daily, I saw the ‘Wanted’ column, and there I saw an advertisement from a college seeking three chemistry teachers. It was from a big and reputed college in Guntur by name ‘The Hindu College’. This college had a long tradition; it was started in 1885! I applied for the post.

Within 15-20 days from then, I saw so many changes happening in that college and so fast! The D.E.O (District Education Officer) of the college was transferred and the new person in charge happened to be my father-in-law’s friend!

When my father-in-law spoke to the new D.E.O, he advised me to apply for the post. I did and I was called for an interview. I was a little nervous as I was fresh graduate, without any work experience. But when I went into the interview room, I mustered some courage since the interview panel members were already known to me.

They asked me a few questions and I could answer all of them satisfactorily. Though I performed very well, getting selected was not going to be easy. There were three teachers who had retired from the college at that moment

which had created three vacancies. But they had one son each, and all three of them had done M. Sc. in Chemistry! Each one of them had applied for the job; hence I was the fourth candidate. Somehow, by God’s grace, one person among them was overlooked and I was given the job!

H2H: So, it was divine intervention!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Nothing else. Swami was guiding us all the time. Even before my marriage, when my in-laws were looking for a boy for their daughter, they were considering four or five matches for her among which I was also one. When they took all the profiles to Swami, He chose me among them saying, **“This boy is very good. I will look after him. You give your daughter to this boy.”**

H2H: Even before you knew Swami physically, He has been looking after you! Sometimes instances like these makes your hair stand on end!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes! He was guiding me. In fact, He was making up for every deficiency of mine. Since Prof. Gokak asked for an experienced candidate, Swami granted me the job in the Hindu college, only for me to gain a couple of years of experience.

I worked there for four years and returned to Swami in 1979. At that time, they were looking for a teacher who could work for the junior college in Puttaparthi. They wanted someone who could teach in Telugu too. I was told later that Swami showed my application to Dr. Bhagavantham and said, **“Why don’t you call this boy?”**

That is how I was called to Puttaparthi. I came and when I sat in Darshan line, Swami came straight to me and said, **“Aaa...Emappa? Class theesuko, choosthaam.” (How are you? Take the demo class, I will see.)**

I said, “OK, Swami”, and took *Namaskar*. I actually had never thought Swami would come to me!

I went to take the demo class. Three other lecturers were seated in that class. I started the lecture in English and then changed to Telugu. While I was lecturing in Telugu, Swami came in and sat in the last bench!

I looked at Him, and He said, **“Carry on!”**

I started writing chemical equations on the board.

Swami then asked one of the boys, **“What would happen if you consume more calcium?”**

The boy could not answer, and so He passed the question to me. Actually, I could not hear the question properly and communicated to Him the same.

Swami then answered the question Himself saying, “**If you take more calcium than needed, you will loose your teeth.**” Then looking at me, He said, “**Good! Write big letters on the board so that they would be visible even to the people sitting at the back**” and went away.

I finished my lecture, came out of the class and was standing on the steps. Swami suddenly came there and said, “**Aa vaachaavaa? Namaskaram theesuko! Baga chesuko!**” (Oh, you are here! Take *Namaskaram*. Perform well.)

With that, I knew I was in. That was the initiation; that was how I came here and joined the Junior college.

H2H: So, how did the Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School come about?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: From 1979 to 1982, only the junior college existed. In 1982-83, a new building was constructed, and Mr. Anjaiah, the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, was expected to open the building. Swami arrived at the venue, but Mr. Anjaiah was late. Swami did not wait for Mr. Anjaiah, He entered the building passing below the ribbon and inspected the rooms. The school was formally opened by Mr. Anjaiah a little later.

H2H: Interesting!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: The Sri Sathya Sai Higher Secondary School was started in the new building, and I was instructed by Swami to take care of it.

H2H: So, that was how you were associated with the school. How was Swami’s involvement in the school activities in the early days?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Swami used to come to the school often. When the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) inspection committee came to the school to check our functioning and grant us affiliation, Swami also came along with them. He even entered into my classroom!

He also used to come for the practice sessions of Christmas carols and sit in the portico of the school. He also gave two discourses in a small room of the school.

But the very first time when Swami came to the school, we, the teachers invited Him chanting Vedic hymns. All of us learnt *Narayana Suktam* just for this purpose!

H2H: Swami must have been extremely pleased. And about carols, this is something really good! We never knew that Swami used to come for carol practice sessions! Can you share with us any other experiences?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes, once I had to go to appear for my B. Ed. (Bachelor of Education) examination.

H2H: Oh, did Swami ask you to do B. Ed?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes, He asked me to do it. But I could not go and write the examination. That was the period of time, for some reason, Swami wasn’t talking to me often; I thought He was not so happy with me (or that is what I thought with my limited knowledge). I wanted to ask Swami to permit me to go and write the examination, but I did not have the courage. I was afraid, “What if He asked to me leave forever!” Thinking so, I did not ask Him. I thought, “Let it go! If Swami wills that I should write the exam, He will tell me.”

Of course, that period cleared up, but then I forgot about it, thinking that I should wait for a clear directive from Swami. I waited for ten years! In fact, I was asked to do B. Ed. in 1982-83. I prepared well but did not write because I could not a chance to seek His permission. After ten years, Swami asked Mr. Chakravarthi, who was then the Registrar of His University, “**Why hasn’t Siva Ram Krishnaiah done B. Ed.? I told him to do it long back.**”

It was only then that I actually went and wrote the exam. We never know how Swami’s plans are!

H2H: It is all Divine design! Coming back to the school, can you recollect how Swami used to interact with the students?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Swami used to encourage the boys, in whatever program they took up. Be it a drama or a skit, Swami used to inspire them always.

Once, in 1984, Swami gave Discourses on the Geetha for almost 35 days! In those days too, Swami used to give opportunities to one boy from the institute and one from the school to speak every day. We had speakers on all the thirty-five days.

Swami used to call a few X or XII grade boys during morning Darshan and give them interviews. He used to create things for them and fascinate them. He loved and encouraged them like anything!

Once I was holding a set of examination hall tickets (for the Board examinations) in my hand waiting to distribute them to the boys. Swami came to me and said, “**I will distribute them.**” He gave hall-tickets to all the 80 boys personally! He continued this sweet and benevolent act for 2-3 subsequent years.

Once He also called the boys for an interview and explained to them how to prepare for examinations. We keep a copy of that divine lecture on the notice board every year during examination time for the boys to take advantage of it.

H2H: Can you relate any more instances where you witnessed the love that Swami has for students?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes! We used to conduct science exhibitions. Swami used to visit the school on these occasions, stand patiently at each model and ask the students to explain to Him what the model is all about. He came to each of the three exhibitions during the years 1994, 95 and 96. He spent hours together in each exhibition.

It is in one of those exhibitions, that the famous burglar’s alarm *leela* took place. The boy who was demonstrating the model of a burglar’s alarm to Swami, requested Him to put His Hand across the model, saying that it would ring the bell. Swami kept His Hand, but the bell did not ring! Swami then asked the boy to keep his hand in it. It rang! And this mysterious thing happened twice! Then Swami commented beautifully, **“I am not Chora; I am Chittachora.”** (I am not a stealer, but stealer of hearts.)

Once I was telling Him about a particular boy. Even before I started to talk about him, Swami told me his residential address. He said, **“Oh, that boy is from Bombay, isn’t he? He lives near Andheri. His father is a doctor...”** In fact, I had never seen Swami speak to that boy before!

H2H: Moments like these are really a revelation to you, aren’t they?

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes, what else do we want! Even now, I remember those incidents and derive such inspiration and satisfaction. He, of course, gives internal guidance so that we can carry on our work.

Whenever I took the results of the examinations of each class with me to Swami, He used to ask me how many students passed in first class, how many got through in the second class and similarly in third class. When there were one or two who passed in third class, Swami would be very concerned. **“Why did this happen? Ask the teachers to conduct special classes in the evenings for academically weak students. Make them work more and they will improve automatically. Nobody should be left behind,”** He used to say.

H2H: Yes, for Swami, the fact that 99 boys have passed is not important but that one boy who failed is of note!

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Yes! That is His love! He built up the institution in such a way! For each student who was weak in academics, He asked us to appoint one boy who was senior to him as his mentor. The idea behind having student-mentors was that the boys would be able to exchange their ideas easily among themselves. We did it, and we are doing it even now. It works wonderfully.

H2H: Having served as a principal for so many years, you would have surely received lessons from Swami regarding running the institution. What has been your guiding principle? There must be a few things in your mind which always help you to self-check if you are going on the right track.

Siva Rama Krishnaiah: Well, everyday, as soon as I get up, I put before Swami the day's work which I would be taking up that day and ask Him to guide me. And whatever is the first thought that I get after that, I do not question it. I firmly believe that it is Bhagavan's message. I never faced any problem following this approach. Bhagavan has always been guiding me.

At times, I might not get a chance to seek His direct guidance. But during such times, I remind myself that whatever I do, it should bring glory to Him. I always question myself "Will Swami like this?" Only after an affirmation, I proceed. I also draw upon my previous experiences and His inner guidance to take decisions. When we act after thinking of Him, He is always there with us.

To be continued...

MY SAI - THE INCREDIBLE GOD, WITHIN AND WITHOUT

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I was born an atheist. At least that is what my parents tell me. But a series of incidents in my life turned me to the person I am now – a lover of God. What were those incidents? How did Swami bring about so much transformation in me? And why am I writing about it? Here is the story of my journey to Sai.

I was in the ninth grade when my mother started believing in Swami. At that time, my mother had contracted some kind of an eye infection and had lost nearly 70 per cent of her vision in the left eye. In the course of events that followed, while she never regained her lost vision, she was blessed with the most supreme vision – the SAI vision. She later told us that during the period of her illness, whichever hospital or doctor or even pharmacist she visited had a picture of Swami – and from every picture Swami appeared to beckon her. He kept calling her to Him! My mother almost instantly got transformed and that marked the entry of Swami in all our lives.

Since then, my mother developed a firm faith in Swami, but I was far from it. For me, Swami was just another photograph in our altar; nothing more and nothing less. It took a good two years for me to develop faith in Bhagavan. But after that, there has been no looking back.

Worship God not as a Picture, but the Picture as God

I had heard and read many instances of the various miracles Swami had performed for His devotees. But there is a huge difference in reading about these miracles as against personally experiencing them. That day however was not too far - I was soon to witness a miracle, which sowed the seed of love for God in my heart.

I was in the eleventh grade and had gotten up early in the morning to prepare for my final exams. My mother had been to Parthi only a few days before and as a result our house was full of Swami's photos. Every other wall in the house had a photograph of Swami! But there was this one photo, on the wall in the dining hall, which bothered me every time I had to pass by it. In that particular photo, Swami appeared to be staring angrily, unlike the other photos in my house in which He was all smiling. I even jokingly teased my mom for her poor choice of the photo! To put it simply, I was dead scared of that photo. And so, every time I passed by it, I would look at Swami and give Him a sheepish smile. That perhaps was my way of telling Swami that even if He looked angry, I was not really afraid – see I am smiling!

But that morning, things changed, and changed forever. As usual when I passed by the photo I gave my by now routine smile to Swami. But this time, the angry-looking Swami from the photograph smiled back at me! Now these

were only miracles that you typically read about in books, but here I was, standing in front of a photo and looking at the man in the photo smiling back at me. "Was it all really happening?" – I immediately woke my parents and sister up. I wanted all of them to see what I thought I was seeing! But to my chagrin, none of them could. All along when I could see Swami smile and even move about in the photo frame, my family only saw the photo for what it was. How could that be? Was I hallucinating? I immediately posed Swami a challenge. I told him that if what I had seen was true and not some figment of my imagination, then He needs to come up with a miracle that all of us could see. The very next day, *amritham*, or divine nectar came from that particular photo of Swami! And as I had wanted, all of us could see it.

Swami had, through this incident, not only made me realize that He was God; He had also removed my fear of God and turned it into Love for Him. And most importantly, Swami had proved to me that He is present everywhere including photographs and is privy to whatever I say or even think in my mind. Instantaneously I fell in love with God!

Becoming His student

In the two years that followed after that day, Swami became an essential member of our family. We started visiting the local Indore Sai Samithi regularly and life seemed great. My faith in Swami had also grown by leaps and bounds, and so when I heard that Swami had a college, getting admitted into His College became my next big and at that time the only objective in life. I knew Swami loved His students a lot, so I wanted to become His student to experience that love. Coming to think of it now, in the final year of my schooling I had only prayed for getting admitted to Swami's college and Swami had very lovingly through many dreams, miracles and visions assured me of that.

But then nothing comes easy with Swami. He has this knack of testing you till the last minute and just when you are about to give up, He does some magic and turns things around. So, while I was busily nurturing dreams of studying in Swami's college, I almost forgot the aspirations my parents would have had for me. My father wanted me to become a software engineer and my mother wanted me to become a doctor. They just could not buy my logic of studying in Swami's college. Everyday we used to have 'verandah conversations' when my parents used to try convincing me to get into a professional course as against the plain vanilla graduation course that was available at the Sri Sathya Sai University.

After a lot of brainstorming, we reached an agreement. The agreement was that I would write all the three entrance tests - engineering, medical and Swami's college test. If I got in all three, I would go for medical. If I got into medical and engineering, it would still be medical. And if I got into only engineering and Swami's college, I would take the engineering option. My only chance of getting into Swami's college was when I would flunk the other two and get through only Swami's college. A rather biased agreement, you would say, but nevertheless it was a progress, so I agreed.

But all along, deep inside my heart, the resolve to study in Swami's college and become His student kept growing and getting stronger. The only problem was convincing my parents and that work I had dutifully assigned to Swami. And when you completely surrender to Him, He takes care.

The day I was supposed to buy the application forms for the medical and engineering entrance exams, the miracle happened. It is precisely for this reason that I chose to pen my experiences with Swami. Early in the morning we got a call from a fellow Samithi member who was very keen to talk to my mother. She asked my mother to read a particular article in the latest Sanathana Sarathi. That article was a transcription of the speech that Professor Venkataraman (who was then the Vice Chancellor of Swami's university) had given sometime back. In his speech, he had said, "It really surprises me that these so-called devotees of Bhagavan Baba want to put their children in medical and engineering colleges and not in Swami's college. But when these very same devotees fall sick, they come running to Swami and do not go to any doctor!"

It was as if Professor Venkataraman had said those words keeping just me in mind! Reading these two lines did what the many 'verandah conversations and confabulations' could not. My parents immediately asked me not to buy any forms for the engineering and medical entrance exams. For that matter, they even said that I should appear only for Swami's college entrance exam and if I did not get through that year, I should try again the next year!

They had, in just under a minute been transformed by the divine wand of Sai, which had come in the form of a speech from the Vice Chancellor of His University. Needless to say, in another two months, I found myself in the campus of divine learning.

Loving God

But after I started believing in Swami, I had set for myself a sacrosanct set of do's and don'ts. And I, unknowingly, was using the same criteria even to judge the people around me. I knew I was wrong but found it really difficult to change myself. So, I wrote to my divine problem-solver. In that letter, I asked Swami to "help me love Him the way He loved me". And He very sweetly obliged. He put me through situations, where I myself did the things that otherwise were in my "list of don'ts"! And in doing so, I realized why people did such things and how wrong I was to judge them on such narrow criteria. Swami loves everyone equally...He treats all who come to Him with love... So when the creator Himself did not judge His creation, who was I to judge anyone?

Studying in Swami's college was an eye-opener. I was face to face with students who loved Swami but had different ways of expressing it. And in the three years that I spent there, I learnt to love that diversity, which was bound by the love for God. But there nevertheless is a strange paradox in having physical proximity to Swami for at times, He appears distant. A God, who was

internal all the time, suddenly appears far and out of reach when you see Him in Puttaparthi. But despite that, be assured that He is the indweller of your heart and would certainly be there for you no matter what.

It was the year 2000 – the year of Swami’s 75th birthday celebrations. Bhagavan had announced the Grama Seva project that year and we had all stayed back in Parthi to participate in the service project. It was a dream that had come true! How many times do we get to serve the Lord and that too at His behest? But just before His birthday, some of the girls in the dormitory contracted measles. And since the disease is infectious, those girls were sent home. Rightly so, because we could not risk the disease spreading to others, but sadly it also meant that those girls would be missing the birthday celebrations! A friend of mine had also got affected, and I was scared that I too will get it. So, when one day when I got up to go for *darshans* and saw that I had a few rashes on my face, I was petrified - getting rashes was one of the first symptoms of measles! I did not want to be sent home, I wanted to be present during Bhagavan’s birthday celebrations. And so, I prayed for divine intervention.

I prayed to Swami that somehow He should avert this disaster. I even went on to give Him ideas and said that if He wanted to give me measles maybe He should give it later, after we had gone back to Anantapur! Praying so, I rubbed vibhuti on the rashes and went for *darshan*. And when I came back, the rashes had disappeared and very conveniently I also forgot about this little prayer for mine. In a few weeks, the birthday celebrations were over and we came back to Anantapur. The very next day I was down with measles and was sent home to recuperate!

Yet again, He proved that He listens to whatever we say or even think. How else can one explain the mysterious disappearance of the rashes and the timing of its recurrence later?

Life as Swami’s student only reiterated the belief that Bhagavan was there every where. In my final year of college in the year 2002, when Bhagavan had blessed us with an interview, He spoke at length about important topics and at the end of it asked us if we had any questions. One girl then asked Swami, “What should we do to be with you always?” It was a question that lingered in all our hearts at that time, because we knew our days in the campus of divine learning were numbered. Swami then gave the most beautiful reply. He said, “I am within you; above you; below you; around you; I am you. There is absolutely nothing that you can do to be away from me!”

With that single reply, He had put to rest all our apprehensions. There was nothing in this world that could keep us away from our dear Lord. We were ready to face the world!

Crying for God

It is said that crying for God is perhaps the best emotion that can ever be, for when He chooses to end your misery, the joy is unfathomable. This could not have been truer in my life.

My first darshan of Swami came a year before I joined His college. Some family friends were going to Puttaparthi and they had offered to take my elder sister along with them. I was not considered to join them because I was at that time in my twelfth standard and missing school for ten days was thought not possible. While for me it meant missing God over mere attendance at school, to my parents missing school at such a crucial stage meant missing the chance to secure a good future. On hearing that, I cried. I cried like a baby. I could not imagine missing Swami's darshan over anything. Here was my chance to see Him and I was not being allowed to go. But, seeing me cry so much, my parents relented. My first darshan of Swami came only after I pined for Him.

But there was another occasion when I had to cry and crave for Swami's *darshan*. And that happened a good eight years later. Last year (2007), when Swami had come to Chennai for the Athi Rudra Maha Yagna, some alumni members such as myself, had been assigned the security duty at the Yagna site. But since only a few days back I had taken up a new job and was under probation, I could not be very liberal with taking leave. I had nevertheless taken the first three days off. But when the fourth day came, I knew I had to go to office. So, I decided that I will leave for office after having Swami's darshan when He would come to the Yagna site. But, Swami's routine when He was in Chennai did not follow a pattern. While He sometimes would come to the Yagna site in the morning, some other days He just would not. On that day, news came in that Swami would not be coming to the Yagna site. My heart sank for this meant that I would have to leave for office without seeing Swami!

Now all along, I had consoled myself thinking that I will leave after Swami's *darshan*. But now He left me no choice! I was so disappointed that I started crying. My seniors, who were with me consoled me and told me to go to office; I could always come back in the evening and have darshans, they said. Reluctantly, I conceded. I caught an auto rickshaw to go to my office. But the vehicle barely covered a kilometer, when I got a message on my mobile phone that Swami had started from Sundaram, His residence in the city of Chennai, and that He would be coming to the Yagna site now! Had that message come even five minutes before, my joy would have known no bounds. But now when it did, it only made me feel worse - I felt as if Swami was just waiting for me to leave! I cried even harder.

I knew there was no way I could go back to the Yagna site - I was getting late and traffic was also bad – so I thought maybe if I at least saw Sundaram, where Swami was residing, before I went to office, I might feel better. I asked the auto driver to take me to office via Sundaram. Now Chennai auto drivers

are not exactly known for their politeness, but to my surprise, this driver agreed instantly.

And so I reached Sundaram, but at the time when Swami's car was just coming out! I was on the opposite side of where Swami was seated and so there was no one but me on that side. I was now standing just feet or two away from Swami! Without realizing, I had tears running all over my cheeks. I had come to Sundaram with no hope of getting Swami's Darshan and here I was standing just a couple of feet away from Him! But His benevolence did not stop with that - Swami turned around and looked at me! He gave me the most beautiful, all-knowing smile that only made me cry harder. Seeing Swami by itself was a difficult emotion to handle but now seeing Him look at me was beyond everything. Seeing me crying so much, Swami smiled again and raised his hand in a blessing gesture before His car zoomed past me. Needless to say, that was perhaps the only day I was so happy to go to office!

Being His Instrument

When that evening I narrated this incident to my senior, she said something that was so potent that it unnerves me even today. She said, "To whom much is given, much is expected". Swami has given me, and for that matter all of us, so much... But what does He expect from us? Coming to think of it, not much. All He wants is that we share the love He has showered on us on with the people around us. This essentially means that all of us have a significant role to play in Swami's mission. Perhaps, bigger than what we are playing now.

Swami's mission is divine and will go on with or without us. That means, it is only up to us to seek and get a role from this divine director, however small it may be and play it to perfection, or rather, pray that He makes us play it perfectly.

MY DEAR SAI – ALWAYS INFALLIBLE

A Relationship with God, Right from Birth

This personal story is not an account of any extraordinary experiences of a devotee with Swami. It is, on the contrary, about a simple middle class girl from Orissa (a state in the east of India) who experienced God and His omnipresence, and later learnt to love His uncertainties, delays and denials. However, unlike the many other mortals in this world, this girl was quite lucky. She was inducted onto the “Sai Path” right from her birth. She grew up with complete faith in Swami. She was taught that Bhagavan was the head of her family, and that He loved her as if she was the only one to be loved on this earth. She was told that Bhagavan was her only true friend, her *Sathya Sakha*, who would be with her forever come what may. She learnt that it was okay to shed tears and pour her heart out before Him, and that He will always be there to take care of her.

Over the years, her bonding with Swami grew stronger. She started having everyday conversations with Swami’s photos – talking, chatting and praying to her best friend. While she never got instant replies and never saw any Vibhuti materialize from His photos, her prayers never went unheeded. They were always answered... just that they were either “Yes, granted”, “No, this is not for you, my child”, “Wait, this is not the right time” or “Take something better, dear”. In all, her Lord always kept her happy and satisfied.

A few more years and the girl grew to become thankful to her parents, who introduced her to Swami and showed her the path to the ultimate happiness. Her family was different from the ones her friends had. Her parents were always involved in Swami’s service work. She had a father who was blessed to serve as a district president, a mother who was a Bal Vikas guru – a family she knew was the blessing from her dear Lord Sai.

Sacred Blessing as a Babe

Her years of emotional proximity to Swami, however had its roots in an experience which she had when she first went to Puttaparthi. It was the year 1988; the girl was only two years old, when her parents took her to Puttaparthi. Her father was praying that his daughter be blessed with Bhagavan’s divine touch. But then do we not know that Swami answers prayers only when the time is right? In her case too the right time had not yet come. Her father had to wait patiently, and so he did. Days passed, but Bhagavan did not bless the girl. And then, when it was time for the family to leave, their last darshan, Bhagavan blessed the girl! Walking amidst the devotees who stretched their hands out to their Lord with lips bearing silent prayers, eyes wet with tears, who were trying to touch the Lord’s Feet, Swami slowly walked towards her father. He glided near and nearer... came right in front of her father, took the slate he was holding and wrote the magical word - OM. That marked the beginning of a life that had found its meaning. Needless to say, that slate since then has been one of their treasured possessions, and even today is precious preserved in the family’s *pooja* room or altar, with the

date – 16-08-88, written behind it – a day, which is etched in their hearts forever. The girl was indeed lucky.

She grew up learning devotional hymns, *bhajans*, attending Bal Vikas and not to mention the frequent trips to Puttaparthi and Whitefield. She was also formally inducted into music, so that she could sing *bhajans* with more finesse. But testing times were up ahead. The girl attended a normal convent school, where only a few had heard of Swami’s name, and to her despair, many others spoke ill about her beloved Lord Sai. Initially their irresponsible remarks made her furious and she went into heated arguments, but later she learnt to exercise restraint. She realized that people cannot develop faith in Baba, unless He wills it so. She reminded herself of the divine quote: “Even hundreds of horses cannot pull them near Me if I haven’t called them” and thus taught herself to accept the invisible and inscrutable ways of the Lord.

She loved listening to Swami’s miracles, the various touching incidents of God’s supremacy and love; the miracles at Swami’s Hospitals and His University – the Sri Sathya Sai University. She resolved to herself that she had to get a seat in Swami’s college. This was her life’s dream – a dream that appeared far but yet reachable if her loving Lord willed it. And thus began a quest that, with time, would teach her many important lessons.

Modeling Herself on the Divine Pattern

Right from the time when her neighbour got admitted into Swami’s college, when she was in the tenth grade, her every wish, prayer and efforts were towards getting a seat in His divine college. She wanted nothing else; she wrote no other college entrance examination. Her quest to study in Swami’s college was so intense that even when she was in school she learnt to wear a saree, inculcated the habit of rising up early in the morning for *Suprabhatam*, grew her hair long, developed a routine of saying morning and evening prayer – to sum it up, she left no stone unturned to tell her Lord that she wanted to study in His college. She spent a lot of time drawing His pictures, collecting His articles in a diary given to her by her father. She wanted to show that to Swami some day. She had a strong feeling that Swami will surely call her.

Finally the day came when she filled up the form for her dream Institute, for a normal graduation course that some of her friends aspiring to be engineers or doctors failed to understand. And then began the days of long waiting hours and sincere prayers. Each time someone rang the house bell, she used to run to the door to see whether it was her call letter. But that day came soon. April 9, 2004 was the day when destiny knocked her door - she was finally holding her call letter that day. She was elated so much so that her mother warned her to keep her excitement low – she still had a long way to go, this was after all just her first step.

The girl and her father left for Puttaparthi to appear for the entrance exam. But at that time Swami was in Whitefield. They planned to go there only after her entrance exams were over. Her exams were on May 1, 2004. As soon as she entered the college campus, she fell in love with everything she saw

there. All the classrooms had Swami’s photo and everyone present had a friendly smile that carried the holy name -“Sairam”. She immediately felt at home. She felt she was born to come there. Her finished the exams and her prayers became more and more fervent by the hour. She promised Swami that if given a seat she would utilize those three years to her best.

The Unexpected Blow

The results were to be announced the next day. Both the girl and her father went to the college to check the results. Students, who would clear the entrance test, had to face an interview before their admission is confirmed. Her faith was so high, that she had even prepared for the interview! But she never got a chance to face the interview panel. She had failed to secure a seat in the college. Unable to believe her destiny, she checked and rechecked the entrance results sheet... her name was not on the list. All her dreams were now shattered. She could not contain her tears; she held her father’s hand tight, but that was not enough to weather the emotional onslaught. Even her father was equally hurt but he had to stop his tears to support his daughter. He was choked with emotions but he couldn’t cry out loud, for his daughter’s sake.

The two of them decided to leave for Whitefield; they had no energy to walk back to their room. But they somehow managed to pull themselves together and collect their belongings. In the meanwhile, the girl came to know there were many students who didn’t want to study in Swami’s college but were selected. She could not help but wonder at her Lord’s uncertainty. On their way to Whitefield, both father and daughter, could not stop weeping; they cried till there were no more tears to shed. They were speechless, everything seemed dark, pitch black ahead. They reached in time to have Swami’s darshan in Whitefield. On seeing her Lord, her best friend, her tears flowed out with more vigour. Her mind had umpteen questions for Swami. Did she not deserve to be Swami’s student? Did Swami not love her? Why did Swami call her this far then? Why did her eyes see such dreams that were never made for her? However, all her questions were left unanswered then.

On returning home, she hugged her mother and cried her heart out. Her mother had accepted Swami’s Will and smilingly embraced her daughter. She taught the girl to accept Swami’s Will for whatever He did could only be right for her. The girl’s mother told her that Swami had come in her dream and given her His most assuring million-dollar smile. In the dream, she was fortunate enough to get a chance to sit in the first row and received the sacred Vibhuti from the Divine hands. The dream happened on the night before the girl came to know that she had not been selected in Swami’s Institute. The mother taught her daughter that since joy and sorrow come from the same source, both should be accepted with a smile. Those were the most difficult and unforgettable times of this girl’s life.

But we all know that it is only in difficult times that we grow as individuals, and so was the case with this girl too. She got immense support from her parents and some of her friends. Her parent’s devotion was questioned. People

around her felt Swami had sent her back, rejected her - she was unlucky. But her father explained to her: “My dear, staying at Anantapur/Puttaparthi/Whitefield and abiding by Swami’s teachings is an easy task, but staying among the people in the outside world and not only abiding by His teachings, but also spreading them is comparatively difficult. So be happy and grateful that Swami has chosen you for a difficult task.”

A Stalwart Promise

That day she made a promise to herself that she will be no less than a Sai student. She will make her life Swami’s message. The only aim of her life will be to participate actively in Swami’s grand mission, much like the squirrel who tried to help Lord Rama (in the epic Ramayana). After that she read her first book on Sai Literature -“Sai Baba - Man of Miracles” written by Howard Murphet. It was then she understood the difference between listening to Swami’s miracles and reading about them. She no longer wondered why her father was so fond of collecting those books and spent ample amounts of time with them. One of those countless books was “Sathya Sai Speaks - Volume II”. That was a special one. It contained our Beloved Mother Sai’s signature in the first page -“With love, Baba”. These are their prized possessions that include the pen Swami had used that very day. These books helped her recognize the countless miracles occurring around her.

Despite the initial setback, she had managed to get along with life. While some of their family friends suggested that they try again, the girl was sure that she wouldn’t come back empty handed even if she did not succeed in getting admission. She made her last efforts, sent a fax to Swami and hoped against hope to get through this time. She got a chance to interact with the Registrar of the Institute. But yet again she had failed to secure a seat in Swami’s college. She returned, but this time not empty handed, for now, she had a promise to keep. She thanked Swami for calling her twice in the same year to His ashram.

With a new-found vigour, she moved ahead with life. She joined an engineering college at Bhubaneswar, the capital of Orissa. To her hostel, she carried a photo of Swami along with her. Through her, her roommates heard about Sri Sathya Sai Baba for the first time. Her friends started joining her during evening prayers. They loved to hear the *Suprabhatam*. One day, a few students beside her room, on hearing the Vedic chants, came in and showed interest to hear more. They enjoyed listening to *bhajans* too. She realized that each person on this earth has a spiritual being hidden in them, they just need to identify it – that there were no atheists even if some claim to be. Life rolled on and soon came time for exams. There were many students brighter than her in the class but she managed to be the second best in her batch of over 400 students. Swami had indeed blessed her. How dare she feel that Swami had left her? She was again assured that Swami and His love was always there for her. Inspired to live His message to perfection, she later joined a group of students who taught the little children in the slums. The group was named “**Prayas - an effort**”. Her parents who were involved in

such noble activities at their hometown, Nalconagar, inspired her. She enjoyed spending time with those children.

Who is a Sai Student?

Once when her younger sister had gone to Puttaparthi as a part of the group III Bal Vikas students’ visit arranged by the State Samithi, the participants got a chance to interact with Professor Anil Kumar. During the course of the interaction, her sister asked the Professor – “Sir, when Swami refers to ‘My students’ does He mean only the students in His Institute?” And then came a reply from the Professor which answered all the doubts and questions that had bothered the girl when she had failed to get admitted in Swami’s college. Prof. Anil Kumar said that each one of us is Swami’s student. He further explained the difference between “Swami’s institute student” and a “Sai student”. The former, he explained, is one who is a student of that Institute for a certain period of time and the latter is one who surrenders at the Lotus Feet for the entire lifetime. She realized that the Lord assigns different jobs to each of His children.

Next, came the campus selection, a process in which students get job offers from companies in the final year of their college. Yet again Swami’s grace came in abundance. She got through at the first company (Tata Consultancy Services) that visited the campus. Thereafter, the girl’s family planned to visit Shirdi and Puttaparthi.

After darshan in Shirdi, they went into the village to visit the houses of those fortunate people who had the chance to be a part of Shirdi Baba’s *leela*. They visited Shyamaji’s, Laxmiji’s house and saw the nine coins (representing the nine forms of devotion) given by Baba to Laxmiji that are preserved by their grandchildren. They were on a spiritual high for their stop was at Puttaparthi. A few days later, after returning from Puttaparthi she received a great gift. She got the chance to touch the auspicious orange robe given away by Bhagawan in a District President’s meet at Puttaparthi to her father in August 2007. This added to their most prized possessions.

Living Swami’s Teachings

In the meanwhile, back in her college with the help of friends, she initiated a movement to help underprivileged students. They called it - TOMS (Tomorrow On My Shoulders). When they had started they had nothing but a few dedicated students. But slowly as the project took shape they were bestowed with many helping hands. They had decided to survey different orphanages in the city. And in the very first orphanage they visited, Sri Anand Mission, Bhagawan proved His omnipresence. When she spoke to the owner of that mission over the phone, she got to hear the same friendly holy name - “Sairam”. Wherever she went she saw Swami’s photo already present there, giving her the same mysterious smile as if it was Swami’s plan to call her there.

Soon time came to leave the college. In the four years at college, she had earned love of many hearts and respect from friends and juniors alike. But while she had won her friends’ trust, she had also brought a smile back to father, who was glad that his daughter would be returning home. What more she could ask for? She had managed to build a small Prashanthi around her. She was proud to be a “Sai student”.

The girl now firmly believes that “God is too wise to make a mistake; He is too kind to punish us.” He mends our plans to make His - and His plans are Masterplans. She had realized that God knows what suits each devotee and gives them only what best fits their need - not their desires. Who are we to dispute Divine Providence? The girl confessed that she did not understand what salvation meant, but she knew that life spent under the divine Lotus Feet of Swami was no less. With Bhagavan’s grace she has grown to accept the Will of the divine which works through mysterious ways.

The girl is none other than me, Ms. K. Saidutta, named after our Beloved Mother Sai. I offer my sincere thanks to all those readers who had the patience to go through this article and I hope it will inspire many to accept everything that comes in our life as God’s gift, as God can only do us good all the time, nothing else. Sairam!

H2H SPECIAL

MESMERIZING MOMENTS WITH THE DIVINE MASTER

Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 5

A devout and dedicated devotee for nearly sixty years, Mrs. Rani Subramanian, who originally hails from Tamil Nadu, came to Bhagavan Baba as early as 1950. Now eighty five years old and fondly called 'Rani Maa' by Bhagavan, her life is a treasure-chest of scintillating experiences from yester years. A sincere spiritual seeker, she currently resides in Puttaparthi and shares her elevating memories with eager devotees with deep conviction, insight and faith. This is the fifth part of her wonderful reminiscences, continued from the previous issue.

I was once engaged in a conversation with a lady at Prasanthi Nilayam. She said her reason for coming to Puttaparthi was to be healthy. However, she was very dissatisfied with what she had received. I said, “You aren’t recognizing what you are receiving here! Swami is giving you health - spiritual health!” “What do you mean?” she asked. I said, “He didn’t call this place an ‘ashrama’ - which literally means ‘a place where there is no “shrama” or effort, He named it 'Prasanthi Nilayam', because it is an abode of God, where you will receive peace. He has promised peace that surpasses all understanding; peace that one derives from divine love. Such peace is permanent, unshaken by circumstances. This is not any temporary peace that makes you happy when somebody is kind to you and unhappy when they aren’t.”

The same truth is recorded in our ancient scriptures. In the Bhagavad Gita the Lord said, “He is my true devotee who transcends the pairs of opposites” that is, one who is unaffected by the duality of good and bad treatment, honor and dishonor. One must not pay heed to these because they exist in the realm of delusion. Swami says, “You are all in slumber, I have come to wake you up!” Once He said to me: “Rani Maa, as far as I am concerned, there is no problem. Problem is an error in perception; you are seeing something that is unreal. You are above problems, but you are not realizing this fact because you have not reached that state of consciousness yet. You are therefore day-dreaming that you are the body. All your experiences contribute only to your body consciousness. You are judging every experience from the level of the body. Swami has not descended to help us with problems related to your body consciousness. Tomorrow a certain illness or tragedy may befall you - they, however, belong to your body consciousness.”

The Sweetest Victory

It is delusion or what we refer to in Sanskrit as *Maya* or *Moha*. What is this illusion or attachment that Swami alludes to? It is nothing but delusion - ignorance that happiness and sadness are related to the body. It is this ignorance that Swami has come to uproot. He is an *Avatara purusha* (divine

incarnation); He is not like other gurus. Once, Swami told a group of devotees including me, "Don't think that by coming to Puttaparthi, you are going to be very happy. You will, in fact, be very disturbed, but if you secure your victory here, you can go to any part of the world and nothing will ever disturb you. Puttaparthi is the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Lord Krishna gave the immortal message of Bhagavad Gita on the battlefield because life is a battle. And when you are victorious in battle, what do you get? Peace! Similarly, when you transcend the difficulties here with equanimity gained by the knowledge of who you really are and what the world really is, you will receive that permanent peace that I have come to give". This is why He named it 'Prasanthi Nilayam' - the abode of everlasting peace.

Many years ago, my daughter's mother-in-law wanted to settle down in Prasanthi Nilayam. She had become a devotee only after meeting us, and in a subsequent interview with Swami, she happened to be present. On that occasion, she expressed to Swami her wish to reside in Prasanthi Nilayam. Swami, then asked, "Why do you want to stay here? You have two sons, live with them. Who will take care of you here?" She replied, "Swami, here, I get peace". But Swami said, "No, no! There is no peace here. Do you know where peace is? It is in the inner self. Prasanthi Nilayam will help you struggle righteously to achieve that peace. Struggle is needed here as well. It is not as if once you come to Prasanthi Nilayam everything in your life gets sorted out automatically. You have to work on yourself with your knowledge. Swami gives you that wisdom; but you have to practice it. It is similar to going to a school or college where the teacher teaches you but doesn't do the work for you."

Know that He is the Divine Master. The purpose of His advent is not to give us paltry things. He will give us whatever we desire. He once told me, "Rani Maa, I will give you whatever you ask for, but that will not give you peace. If you want peace, ask for peace itself; leave the rest to Me. Say, 'God, I want permanent peace, I don't want anything else.' That is surrender. True surrender is when you don't want anything other than peace. You run after so many things - money, position, power, etc., because you think they will grant you peace. But despite this, you are perturbed. This is because *jnana* (knowledge) is missing."

Prasanthi Nilayam, not 'Sri Sathya Sai Ashram'

Swami says that is why He calls the ashram at Puttaparthi 'Prasanthi Nilayam' and not 'Sri Sathya Sai Baba Ashram'. You have to make the effort, the *shrama*. He can only help you and guide you to face the ups and downs effectively. All you have to do is ask Him for that guidance. He, once, warned me saying this will be difficult, and then added, "Do not be scared. You pray to me: 'Swami, don't test me too hard, I may fail! (How does He know my innermost prayers? I did not verbalize them anytime to Him!) Why are you so scared of the struggle? This is wrong. When I give you the challenge, I also give you the strength and wisdom to face it. You should say 'Swami, test me as much as you want, but give me victory.' When you are fighting a battle,

what do you ask for? Do you say I want a gun, a sword and so on? You just say, I want victory! Therefore, ask for that peace.”

You have come to Puttaparthi seeking that peace, so ask for that peace. But being householders, something or the other keeps bothering us now and then, and we are forced to ask Swami to help us with those difficulties. Sometimes Swami responds immediately to alleviate them, at other times He does not. However, always ask for things that conform to *dharma* or righteousness. Things which do not confirm to this will not be entertained by Him at all. Even in the case of desires that are within the bounds of *dharma*, He chooses whether the desire uplifts us or not because He is the Guru.

Once in an interview, He told us that whatever good you wish for, will be granted. But He decides the right time to grant our wishes, because He knows what is good for each of us, and knows our past, future and present. In the spiritual path, patience is a key requisite, so we should patiently wait for Swami to grant us our wishes.

I have a direct experience with respect to this. My husband was very reluctant to stay in Puttaparthi. He said that he could not relate to the place and wanted to leave the ashram. During one visit, at the very last moment, in the evening, I said I will not leave Puttaparthi, and if he so wishes, he could go and live with the children. I kept praying all night that it would be good for him to stay at Puttaparthi and imbibe His aura. I prayed to Swami saying that if He wanted to keep him here, He could; I completely surrendered the problem to Him. The next morning to my utter surprise, my husband said that he has decided to stay in Puttaparthi! He stayed in the ashram till his last moments.

Leave the Results to Him

In the Bhagavad Gita, it is said that you have only the right to act and not to the result. The result is in His hands and we don’t control the result. So, the right thing to do is to leave the result to Him, so that He grants us the fruit of the action at the right moment. The message that Swami conveys is this: “When you come to Puttaparthi, you will meet many people, some good and others bad. You might get a good place to stay for one day and an uncomfortable location the next day. But all these should not affect you. You have come to the ashram for your inward journey. Do not look for peace outside. It is within you, so look within. If you think there is peace freely available in Puttaparthi, it means you have not understood the subject. This is the *jnana*, the knowledge that you should know. “

Mind, sometimes, plays tricks on us but it is also helpful in acquiring wisdom. Therefore, we must train our mind. This is what is mentioned in *Karma* yoga (the spiritual path of action). After mastering the mind, one can move to *jnana* yoga (the path of wisdom), and then to *bhakti* yoga (the path of devotion). Till then our devotion is not complete. Devotion is complete only when we have wisdom. This is pointed out in the Bhagavad Gita as well. With *jnana* (knowledge) you must perform *dhyana* (meditation), and with *dhyana* you must develop *phala tyagam* (renouncing the fruit of the action). Sometimes

we may perform a good action but it could give us an unfavourable result. However, we should accept the outcome, be it good or bad. We are not engaged in work to get victory; we are working to transcend victory and defeat. God does not want to see us become sorrowful and despondent on getting an unpleasant result. On the other hand, God wants us to take the test, but not suffer.

Awakening Our Conscience

Once, in Whitefield, Swami said, “Rani Maa, I have come to awaken the inner Guru. Don’t depend on the external Guru. Pray to me thus: ‘Swami, please become my inner Guru. Tell me what I should do from the inside and I will do it.’ Then I will surely guide from within you.” There should be no ‘me’ and ‘my’. It should become Swami’s completely. As soon as the feelings of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ arise, we enter the realm of ignorance in that instant.

Swami says, “There are to be no likes and dislikes. The duo of *raga-dwesh*a (anger and hatred) should be transcended.” Irrespective of whether someone is lovable or not, we must love everyone. We should understand that one is acting ignorantly because of their body consciousness, and therefore, take pity on him/her as the person has not yet understood the *atma* (spirit) principle. We must have compassion and pray for such people. We should understand that Swami is the indweller of every being, and therefore not hurt anyone. Only then can one say that he or she understands Swami, and not until then.

We should not compare and judge people. By doing so, we are buying sorrow. When we take that path even Swami will not help us because we are taking the wrong path. Once, when I said to Him “Swami, I want to be a good devotee”, He said, “It is very simple, all that you need to do is to obey Me. No books or scriptures can help. Only the Guru can take you through the spiritual path.” Obedience to the Guru is a very important trait in a spiritual aspirant. This can take a person very high. It should not be such that in some matters we obey Swami, and in others we take our own decisions. Surrender to Swami must be complete. He has promised us liberation if we practice this kind of surrender. Liberation is nothing but freedom from our body consciousness and ego. The feelings of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ constitute the ego.

The Bhajan Lesson

Two years after Swami moved to Prasanthi Nilayam, we were still in the Old Mandir and used to come to Prasanthi Nilayam for *bhajans*. On one occasion, during the *bhajan* session, He asked us to stop singing. I was sitting very close to Him. Looking at me, Swami asked, “Do you sing?” I replied in the affirmative, and added that I did not know Carnatic music and can sing only Hindustani. I was of the view that He liked only Thyagaraja *kirtanas* (based on Carnatic music) and the like. But He said, “It doesn’t matter, you sing a *bhajan*.” So I began to sing a *bhajan* that came to my mind at that moment. I didn’t realize it then, but later, while ruminating on it, I realized that Swami wanted me to take a great and profound lesson out of that *bhajan*. The

meaning of that *bhajan* stressed on the *Adwaita* (non-dualistic) principle, which is what Swami wanted to point out to me.

The next day when I went, Swami wanted me to sing the same *bhajan* again. The third day was no different. I was getting a bit frustrated of singing the same *bhajan* because I was not paying heed to the meaning. So I asked Swami in front of everyone, “Swami, I know many *bhajans*, shall I sing another one?” He said, “No need! I want you to sing this *bhajan* alone”. We can never understand Him of our own accord. He has to reveal Himself to us. Trying to understand Him is like counting the grains of sand on the beach.

After a few days, He called a few ladies upstairs to clean His room. About five of us went up and while I was busy cleaning, I heard Him sing, “Raama Naama Japanaaree...”, the same *bhajan* that He had asked me to sing a few days ago. I was a bit surprised and started to tell myself “I have had enough of that *bhajan*. Why is He boring me with the same *bhajan*?” I turned and looked at Him; my face was a question mark. He said, “You are wondering why I am singing the same *bhajan*, right? I am singing this again and again because it has the essence of knowledge. If you can assimilate that knowledge, there is nothing more you would need to do. You would have attained your spiritual goal.” Till then, I had not realized that I had not paid attention to the meaning of the *bhajan*.

When we sing a Thyagaraja *kirtana*, we must get into the mood of Thyagaraja. Only then can we appreciate it. The meaning is more important than how good the *Thaala* (rhythm) is! The meaning of the *kirtana* goes like this, “Chant Rama’s name always, oh human! As long as you are breathing, this place is yours (*jab lag yah swaas tan bheetar, tab lag yah jag apna re*)! As long as you are breathing you say ‘my money’, ‘my place’, etc. But once breathing stops, nothing is yours!” Then he says, “Mother, father, children, relatives, etc. are only your own imagination, *kalpana*. Whole creation is only imagination; it is a projection of your mind which doesn't really exist. It is delusion. All relationships exist, but only relatively real, not in absolute terms. You are only playing a role.” *Kalpana* means you imagine a role and play it. It is not true. It further goes, “You will have to leave your kith and kin. *Jhooti jagath, kalpana saari, aakhir yah jag sapna rey!* In the end it is only a dream.” The end doesn't mean one is going to realize it after death.

That took me a while to understand. He said, “You will awaken from that day dream when you realize life is a dream.” Dream is not always available; when you wake up the dream is no more. Similarly, when we awaken to our true self, the dream ceases to be. Swami says, “Awaken to your true self, the world which is bothering you, will cease to exist”. It took me quite sometime to completely understand this song. Now, I repeat this song wherever I am asked to talk. This is the essence of what Swami taught me 2-3 years after I arrived at Puttaparthi. I came here in 1950. So it has been more than a half-century. This song I must have sung in 1954 or so. So, it has taken me lot of *sadhana* (spiritual effort) to go inward and really understand it completely.

An Easy Solution to Our Problems

Years ago, in an interview He said, "Rani Maa, there is no problem for Me to come down to your level and understand your problem because I have no problem. But I don't understand your problems at all, because there really is no problem!" I didn't understand all this then. So He granted the real meaning to me through this song. What was my duty? To contemplate on it. He told me: "Contemplate, you have got the essence". I wasn't thinking deeply on the meaning and kept thinking about the problem. So He wrote in a letter: "Rani Maa, you have got a problem." Problem, according to me and not Him. Let us remember, Swami has no problem! Crisis is our making and we have to solve it. Bhagavad Gita says, "You are the cause of the problem and you must find a way out of it, no one else will, not even the Guru. So He said, "You are constantly thinking of the problem, and hence I can't help you. If you cease to think of the problem then I can help you. When you forget your problem, keep your mind fixed on Me, and constantly chant My name, you contact me! Divine name is like an arrow which will go from you to Swami. How do you contact Swami? By repeating His name."

Sing Only for Him

I used to go to Delhi often and stay with my elder sister, Kamala Sarathi, during the holidays. She lived in the vicinity of the Ramakrishna Math. After the first visit, Swami told us to be in *satsang* (good company) and we asked Him as to how could we do that. He told us to participate in Gita classes and similar activities. We asked Swami if we could continue to go to Ramakrishna Math. At that time, we thought Swami was a great person, but did not know that He is God Himself. So, we were not sure if He would approve. But Swami said, "Yes, it is a very good place, go to Ramakrishna Mission! Go and participate in all their study circles and talks." They had regular Gita and *Upanishad* classes and we attended them sincerely. During some occasions like the Holy Mother's birthday or Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, they wanted a few good *bhajan* singers to sing on the stage in the presence of large audiences. So, my sister said, 'Rani Maa knows *bhajans* and if you would like her to sing, I will ask her'.

I happened to be there at the time. I sang a few *bhajans* that of Meera, Surdas, etc. on one of these occasions. Subsequently, they started inviting me regularly to the celebrations for singing, and since these were public functions, people came to know of my talent. So, they used to call me for various events, birthdays, etc. and request me to sing. I used to take my harmonium and sing at these events. I was doing this quite innocently. During one of the visits to Puttaparthi when Kamala Sarathi came alone, in an interview, Swami asked her: "Ask Rani Maa whether she wants to realize herself or wants name and fame? If she wants to realize her divine self, she must stop singing in public, and only sing for God in her *puja* room. I find her going everywhere."

Now, Swami is not in Delhi, how does He know? He is proving His omnipresence to us, He knows everything we do! We didn't know He is

omnipresent. I thought He is omnipresent only when we pray! My understanding of His omnipresence was limited. I didn't know He was my inner self and was aware of every thought, word and deed during the whole day. He knows what I am up to. I can't do anything without Him knowing it. When you get that awareness, you will be very vigilant and careful. If you know Swami is aware of everything that you do, will you do many things you do in His physical absence? No, you will not. You will talk very politely even to individuals with whom you have disagreements. You will think, "Swami is watching, let me be polite". It is this awareness He wanted us to develop. It has to be developed. It doesn't come easily. It is the torturous passage of the grain through the grinder. It is like climbing the Himalayas. So Swami said, "Ask her what she wants, if she wants name and fame, she can go and sing anywhere she likes. But if she wants to realize her true self she must stop going out, and sing only in the shrine of her home for God". After I got this message I stopped going anywhere.

One day, one Ms. Malini called me up and said that she wanted me to sing. I said, "Sorry, I don't have my Guru's permission." But she said, "You are not singing for public, only for nuns." I said I didn't know if I could or not and that I have to pray to Swami and think about it. She insisted that I should. I thought about it and prayed. Something told me that 'since it was for nuns, I could, but no more after this. I should make it clear'. I went there because the nuns had assembled and Swami had asked me to keep attending *satsang* at the Ramakrishna math. Ramakrishna and Sharada maths have given us so much, and so, I owed it to them. Therefore, with that attitude, not knowing whether it was obedience or not, I went. I felt the decision was consistent with *dharma*. It was not for publicity. It was not for name or fame. After this event, I completely stopped. I don't sing till date when I go out. Swami is constantly keeping track because we are asking Him for guidance.

He told me once: "I don't guide everyone, I do it only for those who ask for it. In your case, you ask me for guidance in everything, small to big (I even ask Him very mundane things related to this *maya* existence, shall I cook this or that, etc.), so I will interfere in everything and guide you." I was momentarily hurt as to why He stopped me from singing. After all, I was singing only *bhajans*, not even classical numbers. I stopped that long ago. I remembered Thyagaraja, when he was invited to the court to sing, he said he sang only for the Lord. I didn't understand Swami then. I thought it was not as if I was giving radio programs. But then when I thought deeper I realized that I must live only for God. One has to renounce things that belong to the realm of 'I' and 'mine'.

Renouncing 'I' and 'Mine' and Life is so Easy

We were in the Old Mandir. When the quarters got ready, Swami was allotting quarters to all permanent residents who were helping in His mission. But we were only occasional visitors. At this time He was personally allotting rooms! We had to inform Him when we arrived and He would allot accommodation based on the availability. Very few quarters were available and especially during functions He used to put us together with some family or the other. About eight or ten of us used to live in a small room. We had to accommodate

each other and share everything. Prior to these rooms being available, it was even more difficult. He passed us through various stages of learning to adjust. Can you limit your needs to the situation? This is the demand for spiritual evolution. We never grumbled because He gave us the strength, acceptance and happiness. We were not at all sad inside. Now I ask myself "What is it that allowed us to undergo all that joyfully?"

On one occasion, we had to leave Puttaparthi in a couple of days; those days we had to inform Swami when we were leaving. This was during Dasara and Swami used to stop all interviews a month before Dasara as He used to get involved in the organisation of the festival Himself. Devotees used to come forward to help, but it was all under His direct supervision. So He couldn't give interviews at that time. I wanted to leave before Dasara, and so I wrote a letter to Him saying, "Swami, I would like to leave, Salutations". I sent it through Prof. Kasturi. Upon receiving the letter, Swami told him: "Tell Rani Maa I must see her before she leaves. I can't call her to the interview room because others will think I gave her an interview. So ask her to come to the Hospital, I am going there on a visit."

I had to go to the General Hospital which was very small at that time. "She can come with her younger sister". So we went to the Hospital quietly and waited on the appointed day. He came directly to us and took us into the surgical room. I don't remember the entire conversation we had, but I do remember this much. I asked Him something that had been bothering me. "Swami, you have allotted quarters to everybody, but I have not received one. It is difficult to stay with somebody every time I come here. Can you please allot a room to me?" He said, "No, I am not going to give you any accommodation here! No room for you". I thought perhaps I have done some mistake and therefore don't deserve a room. Then He said, "You know what you are practicing? It is the feeling of 'Thou and Thine'. If I give you a room you will start thinking 'My room'. I want you to go up, not come down. So I put you in a number of rooms. Once in a small room when four of you were staying, you had to get water from the outside; while on another occasion, at Chincholi Maharani's place, you were very comfortable. You never grumbled whether it was a big room or small one; you stayed happily and told yourself that everything is God's."

Swami has put the thought in my mind that every place is God's and therefore I did not grumble. But there was one thing that He did promise me. "Whenever you come here, I will see to it that your stay here is not hindered by any external problem". Once He put us in a garage. There was Swami's car behind which there was Shirdi Baba's *Ratham* (chariot) which left only the four corners of the garage empty. We used to cook in one corner and sleep in the other. We didn't feel bad about it. We managed everything without feeling sorry for ourselves. I have to thank Swami for this. He has given us that power of acceptance and the joy therein. He has demonstrated to us that this acceptance has to come from within and that He has been instrumental in making this happen. He gave us the power of acceptance because we had gone there for His sake and He wanted to give us peace. He did not give us external peace. We were accommodative with every hardship we

encountered, but He gave us internal peace in abundance. Now, when I think of those days and remember how happy I was even after accommodating all those hardships, I realize that He did all this for me. If you live for Him, He will take care of everything - your thought, word and deed. If you are finding it difficult, tell Him, 'Swami, I am finding it very difficult.' He will surely help you.

Speaking the Language of Silence

Never think "I cannot accomplish this task". When you think so, you come crashing down to the body level. The 'I' is ego. There is no 'I'. There is only He. Swami is doing it from within us. It is my experience that whenever I have thought that I need to solve a problem, it never worked. But when I leave the problem to Him saying, "You are the doer and I am only an instrument", then everything starts working fine. I have not yet reached that highest state of realization. If someone rebukes you for no reason you should not retaliate. You should suffer the hurt internally and keep calm externally. "Silence is the language of the spiritual seeker". We are all seekers. Devotee means '*Bhakta*'. That is why Swami does not address us as *Bhaktas* (devotees). He told us once that He addresses us as "*Atma Swaroopulaara*" (embodiment of divine *Atma*) because, not one in this congregation can be called a devotee. However, each one here is an *Atma Swaroop* (embodiment of the spirit) although they may not know that truth. They cannot be called devotees because they have not imbibed the qualities of a devotee as listed in chapter XII of the Bhagavad Gita which says: "One who has transcended the pairs of opposites, and has recognized the true nature of the world (that it is temporary)".

Swami, therefore says, "Don't talk". We shouldn't even talk about others. Years ago, He had said that you have come here only to focus on yourself. You should not be worried about how someone else is behaving. They are all my children and each one has started their own pilgrimage. Some are spiritually advanced; others are still going through the process of development. They are rude because they are stressed, poor things! They are all struggling to maintain their equanimity. Therefore, in a moment of anger, they might behave rudely; sometimes some volunteers might behave unkindly. They do so because if they speak calmly and lovingly, no one listens to them. Thus, it is necessary for them to behave in such a manner to maintain the discipline of the place. However, one should not worry about why someone has been rude, it is not one's business to do so.

Loving God, but Living for Him or the World - Decide

It should be clear that it is all delusion. *Asatoma Sadgamaya*, what does this mean? It means, "Lead us from the unreal to the real." We chant this *mantra* everyday, but do we understand its meaning? Mere chanting is of no use. We should apply it in our daily life. Applying the teachings of these chants in our daily life is very difficult. It can only be achieved by a few people. Those who are sincere and want nothing but God are the only people who have practiced all these teachings in their daily lives. It is very difficult to imbibe the teachings

of the Guru but Swami once told us, if you feel it is very difficult, it means that you are progressing fast. The Guru subjects us to so many trials so that we come near our goal. It is like nearing the sea. As you approach the sea, you hear the roar of its waves getting louder. Therefore, if you want God, submit yourself to the tests that He puts you to happily. Otherwise, if you want to enjoy the world, be honest and say so to Swami.

Be a good, righteous spiritual aspirant and pursue the desire. He will make you very comfortable in whatever you want. He will give you whatever you ask of Him. In the Bhagavad Gita, it is said that a man has four things to attain, '*Dharma*', '*Artha*', '*Kama*' and '*Moksha*' (right conduct, wealth, desire and liberation). Be honest and tell Him: "I can't take the tests that you are putting me to. I love You. I have full faith in You, but I want the world. I can't live for You." Be true to your own self first. He once said, "If you don't get any inspiration by coming to Puttaparthi, don't come here. Bhagavan is not limited to Puttaparthi. He is the Lord of the Universe. Wherever you get inspiration, go there."

[To be continued]

GET INSPIRED

THE BUTTERMILK VENDOR

It was the hottest part of summer in Andhra Pradesh, the last week of April. While many sought a lazy afternoon in the company of a split air conditioner at home, we were out in the burning compartment of a sluggish train, which was chugging along fuming tracks somewhere near the border between Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.

I was taking my family to my hometown, Cuttack, in Orissa. We were on a trip to meet the other members of our family in Cuttack and were looking forward to an early dinner and of course, sweet rest! Traveling in a train by itself is a drain on the energy, but traveling in peak summer in a crowded train is even worse. To add to our misery, we were sweating profusely inspite of the fans, thirsty and bored to death. No one in the compartment was speaking! Cool drinks were all that we wanted since our water containers had been drained to the last drop.

Somewhere around Ichhapuram, a small town, a lady climbed into our coach with the tell-tale pot on her head. She was dressed in a sari, had a huge nose ring, heavy metal bangles in each wrist and had peculiarly large bare feet. And since our coupe was near the door, when she settled down with her pot there, she was right in front of us. Only then did we notice her pot - it was filled with delicious looking butter-milk! We instantly woke up from stupor to a heavenly reality – cold buttermilk on a sunny day! That was more than what we had wanted and began drinking glasses after glasses which the lady handed over to us with great joy. In the course of sipping this ambrosia, I began talking to her. She lived in a close by village, she said.

“Who else is there in your family?” I asked her.

“I have a ten year old son, *babu* (which means, sir). But since his father left me before he was born, I am looking after him all alone.”

Given her modest clothes and looks, she did not appear as one who was conferred with any semblance of financial prosperity. So, I asked, “How do you manage your living?”

“I cook *ragi* (finger millet) in the night for dinner and the next day’s lunch. In the morning, I buy curds from our village, churn and make buttermilk, crush some lemon leaves and *chili* on it for taste, and leave home around 10 a.m. Then I travel in the train from my village to and from Berhampur each day to sell this buttermilk to the passengers on board. But before I come on my rounds, I feed my son the *ragi* with some *chili* and salt. And after I return home late afternoon, we again take *ragi*.”

“The same *ragi* and *chili* all the days!” I could not believe a person could eat the same food both for lunch and dinner, and that too all throughout the week.

Even normal mortals like us need ‘variety’ from lunch to dinner. Unmindful of my surprised expression, she continued. “Sometimes when I sell a little *ghee* (clarified butter), I buy a fish, or some vegetable to go with the *ragi*. My son likes dried fish with *ragi*,” she said, matter-of-factly. She picked up her measure, which was swimming in her pot, and poured another glass for me.

While sipping I asked her again.

“What are you planning for your son? Do you want him to follow your trade too?”

“No *babu* (sir), I want to send my son to school. He must be a *babu* like you, get married, and give me a grandson”, she smiled vastly.

On hearing her simple wish, I could not help but think - Life had not defeated her; poverty had not blotted her smiles. For years she had not fallen sick. She had no complaints against anyone. And she had only one dream: retire from work and play with her grandson. How simple can life’s desires be. I recapitulated my own life, which was cluttered with a great amount of rubbish, in search for a moment of such satisfaction. And I confess, I could not find any. All my life, I had not lived any moment which was a match to the satisfaction that reflected in this lady’s life.

After we had our fill of her buttermilk and her enviable smiles, I slipped into her hand a ten rupees note, more than her due. She looked at it, tucked it into her ancient looking metal purse - a cylinder like little container with a lid - and started to fill the glasses again.

We said we didn’t want any more. She looked at all four of us in surprise, and asked, “If you didn’t want any more then why did you give me that extra money?” I told her that she can use the extra money to buy some rice and vegetable and have a good dinner that night with her son.

Oh, you must have seen her face when I said that! The moment she realized that I was trying to be charitable, she felt humiliated. She protested that she wasn’t prepared to accept anything more than what she deserved and pulled out her purse to return the extra money it to me! Needless to say, I felt thoroughly embarrassed. I didn’t know how to react. But my wife intervened and assured her that since we were returning by the same train two or three days later, she could make us drink as much buttermilk as she wanted then. It was not charity, but a kind of advance payment. The lady was not convinced until she made us promise that we would keep to our words.

After she left, I picked up a newspaper lying by my side. Someone had bought it but left it there. I turned around the pages, trying hard to suppress a lump rising in my throat. The paper, like it always is, was filled with stories of “high-placed” people who were swindling the country of thousands of crores! I threw it away through the window in disgust.

- B. K. Misra

CHAIN OF LOVE

"How do you account for your remarkable accomplishment in life?" Queen Victoria of England asked Helen Keller. "How do you explain the fact that even though you were both blind and deaf, you were able to accomplish so much?"

Ms. Keller's answer is a tribute to her dedicated teacher. "If it had not been for Anne Sullivan, the name of Helen Keller would have remained unknown."

"Little Annie" Sullivan, as she was called when she was young, was no stranger to hardship. She was almost sightless herself (due to a childhood fever) and was, at one time, diagnosed as hopelessly "insane" by her caregivers. She was locked in the basement of a mental institution outside of Boston. On occasions, Little Annie would violently attack anyone who came near her, and most of the time she generally ignored everyone in her presence.

However, one elderly nurse believed there was hope. She made it her mission to show love to the child and started visiting Little Annie everyday. For the most part, the child did not acknowledge the nurse's presence, but that did not deter her for continuing her visits. The kindly woman left cookies for her and spoke words of love and encouragement everyday. She believed Little Annie could recover, if only she was shown love.

Eventually, doctors did notice a change in the girl. Where they once witnessed anger and hostility, they now noted an emerging gentleness and love. They moved her upstairs where she continued to improve. Then, the day finally came when this seemingly "hopeless" child was released.

Anne Sullivan grew into a young woman with a desire to help others, as she, herself was helped by the kindly nurse. It was she who saw the great potential in Helen Keller. She loved her, disciplined her, played with her, taught her a sign-alphabet, pushed her and worked with her until the flickering candle that was her life became a beacon of light to the world. Anne Sullivan worked wonders in Helen's life; but it was the loving nurse who first believed in Little Annie and painstakingly transformed an uncommunicative child into a compassionate teacher.

"If it had not been for Anne Sullivan, the name of Helen Keller would have remained unknown." But if it had not been for a kind and dedicated nurse, the name of Anne Sullivan would have remained unknown.

These three great souls formed their own chain of love. But how far back does the chain of redemption extend? And how far forward will it lead? When we seek to reach out and help others, we become an integral part of a chain of love that can extend through the generations. Therefore, on any day, it is okay if we skip our breakfast or dinner, a TV show or a friendly get together, but let us never miss an opportunity to love. For we may never know what a single

and nameless act of compassion of ours could do in transforming not one but many lives.

Love is powerful. Providing a glass of drinking water to a needy; offering medical help to one who is in crisis; or simply lending a listening ear to a troubled friend – every such act maybe small but their implications are much more than we can often imagine. We can never overestimate the power of love in action. It is a fire that, once lit, burns forever.

AN AFTERNOON IN THE PARK

There once was a little boy, called Tommy, who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a few orange juice cartons and started on his journey.

When he had gone about three blocks, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park just staring at some pigeons. Tommy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his orange juice when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie.

She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a juice. Once again she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word.

As it grew dark, Tommy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old woman and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever. When Tommy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face.

She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" Tommy replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the elderly woman, who too was radiant with joy, left the park with a song on her lips. When she returned home, her son was struck by the look of peace on her face, and asked, "Mother, you're looking great – how come you're so happy?" She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." But before her son could respond, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I had expected."

Bhagavan Baba says, "Every person is essentially divine. Therefore, the more one manifests the divine attributes of love, justice, truth and peace, the more happiness one can enjoy and also impart to others."

All we have to do is to see God's glorious reflection everywhere and in every person, and not limit Him to the idols and statues in the temples and churches, or to a name or form. So, if we can sincerely look upon every body we work with, live or play with as embodiments of the Divine, then truly our life will be one of perennial joy and love. It's a simple change of perception, and as easy as we make it !

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ ON PRAYER

Bhagavan Baba says: “Prayer is not the pronouncing of words. Prayer is the yearning one experiences to awaken the divinity latent in the heart....The individual self has to yearn for the Supreme Self. Prayers must issue not from the lips but from the heart. Prayers from the lips are like a telephone number call. They will not reach the person you want. Prayers from the heart are like a ‘particular person call’. They will go straight to God. Prayers, again, are used for seeking fulfillment of material desires. Out of the millions who offer prayers, very few seek God Himself with pure hearts.”

We all know how important and vital prayer is in the life of everyone in this world, more so with individuals on the spiritual path. And how people from different faiths have used this medium to convey their love and communicate with the infinite is incredible and interesting. The current quiz will take you through this journey of man through prayer spanning all faiths over many ages.

1. In one divine discourse, Swami said: “Sage Vishwamitra discovered the *mantra* named Gayatri, which is addressed to the energy of the Sun, Surya. This *mantra* has infinite potentiality. It is a vibrant formula. It has immense powers, powers that are truly amazing. For, the Sun is its presiding deity.

Gayatri is known as *Panchamukhi*, meaning ‘she has five faces’. What are they? *Om* is the first face; *Bhur Bhuvah Suvah*, the second; *Tat Savitur Varenyam*, the third; *Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi*, the fourth; *Dhiyo Yo Na Prachodayat* is the fifth.

In fact, the Gayatri *mantra* has three parts: praise, meditation and prayer. Which part is the prayer?

- A. *Om bhūr bhuvah svah*
- B. *Tat savitur varenyam*
- C. *Bhargo devasya dheemahi*
- D. *Dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt*

2. ‘The Lord’s Prayer’, also known as the ‘Our Father’ prayer, taught by Jesus Christ to His followers, is probably the best known prayer in Christianity.

***‘Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.***

***And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.’***

According to Swami, where is this ‘Kingdom’ that Jesus was referring to?

- A. Within everybody.
- B. In quiet, secluded retreats.
- C. In Jerusalem.
- D. In the sacred precincts of Churches.

3. One of the most popular Buddhist prayers is called ‘The Refuge Prayer’.

***‘Buddham sharanam gacchami
Dharmam sharanam gacchami
Sangham sharanam gacchami’***

In His Divine 1999 Discourse, extolling Buddha, Swami said: “It means: *buddhi* (intellect) should follow the path of *dharma*, and *dharma* should be fostered in society. Only then the country will prosper. Buddha sacrificed everything and went around in search of truth. He said, ‘*Dharmam sharanam gachhami* (I take refuge in *dharma*).’ If you want to attain divinity, one has to practice, propagate and experience *dharma*. That is the meaning of *dharmam sharanam gachhami*. But, this must also lead to the welfare of all (*Sangham sharanam gachhami*). This is the inner meaning of the teachings of Buddha.”

According to Swami, how did he attain the title ‘Buddha’, even though he was christened ‘Siddhartha’ at birth?

- A. He always disliked pomp and ostentation.
- B. He developed intellect and discriminatory powers.
- C. He was always compassionate.
- D. He always yearned for renunciation.

4. The ‘*Navkar Mantra*’ is the most fundamental mantra in Jainism and can be recited at any time of the day.

Namo Arihantanam: I bow down to Arihanta,
Namo Siddhanam: I bow down to Siddha,
Namo Ayriyanam: I bow down to Acharya,
Namo Uvajjhayanam: I bow down to Upadhyaya,
Namo Loe Savva-sahunam: I bow down to Sadhu and Sadhvi.

Eso Panch Namokaro: These five bowing downs,
Savva-pavappanasano: Destroy all the sins,
Manglananch Savvesim: Amongst all that is auspicious,
Padhamam Havei Mangalam: This *Navkar Mantra* is the foremost.)

What does this ‘*Navkar mantra*’ stress on?

- A. The virtues of all saints.
- B. The essence of all religions.
- C. The commandments of God.
- D. The latent divinity in all people.

5. The Sikh prayer '*Japji Sahib*' appears at the very beginning of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book of the Sikhs. It is regarded as the most important prayer, or *Bani* (set of verses), by the Sikhs and is recited every morning by all practising faithful of this religion.

Ik onkar, satnam, karta purakh, nir-bhau, nir-vair, aakaal murat, ajooni saibhan, Gur parsaad.

***Jap. Aad sach, jugaad sach,
Hai bhi sach, Naanak hosi bhi sach.***

There is but one God, He is the Eternal Truth, The Creator, All-Pervading Divine Spirit, Unfearful, Without hate and enmity, Immortal Entity, Unborn, Self-Existent, He is realized by His Own Grace.

*Meditate upon Him. Who was True before the Creation,
Who was True in the beginning of the Creation, Who is True now, and O Nanak, Who shall be True for Ever.*

The word '*Jap*' means to 'recite' or 'to chant'. What does '*J*' stand for?

- A. To show love.
- B. To show devotion.
- C. To show respect.
- D. To show humility.

6. *Salat* is the daily ritual prayer enjoined upon all Muslims as one of the five Pillars of Islam. *Salat* is a precise worship, different from praying on the inspiration of the moment. '*The Fatihah*' is a prayer full of praises to Allah that form the opening words of the Qur'an:

***Bismillaah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem
Al hamdu lillaahi rabbil 'alameen
Ar-Rahman ar-Raheem Maaliki yaumid Deen
Iyyaaka na'abudu wa iyyaaka nasta'een
Ihdinas siraatal mustaqeem
Siraatal ladheena an 'amta' alaihim
Ghairil maghduubi' alaihim waladaaleen
Aameen.***

*In the name of Allah, Most gracious, Most merciful.
Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds*

*Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
Master of the Day of Judgment.
Thee do we worship, and Thine aide we seek.
Show us the straight way;
The way of those on whom Thou has bestowed thy Grace, those whose
portion
Is not wrath, and who do not go astray.*

Islam professes five pillars to its faith. What number is *Salat*, or Prayer?

- A. First.
- B. Second.
- C. Third.
- D. Fourth.

7. Prayer has always been fundamental to the Zoroastrian faith. The *Ahuna Vairya*, a prayer attributed to Zoroaster himself, venerates both the oneness and supremacy of the Supreme God of the Zoroastrians, Ahura Mazda, and the importance of moral choice, making it one of the most important in the tradition.

***ýathâ ahû vairyo
athâ ratush ashâtcît hacâ
vanghêush dazdâ mananghō
shyaothananām anghêush mazdâi
xshathremcâ ahurâi â
ýim drigubyō dadat vâstârem***

Just as the righteous Creator of the world is powerful, in the same way any person will be powerful according to his/her righteousness. The gift of the Good Mind is both the effect and the cause of serving God's Will. One who dedicates one's life to serving the needs of the world will have the help of God's powers and glory.

According to the Zoroastrian faith, what does this prayer teach?

- A. How to become more devoted.
- B. How to become less selfish.
- C. How one should live life.
- D. How one should surrender.

8. The *Shema* is considered the most important prayer in Judaism. It is an affirmation of Judaism and a declaration of faith, a pledge of allegiance to One God and creates a model for remaining faithful to a belief in God and in God's unity. It is said when praising God and when beseeching Him. It is the first prayer that a Jewish child is taught to say.

***‘Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.
Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever
And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all
your soul and with all your might.
And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart.
And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall
speak of them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the way,
and when you lie down and when you rise up.
And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be for
frontlets between your eyes.
And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your
gates.’***

(English translation)

How many times a day is a Jew obligated to say this prayer?

- A. Once
- B. Twice
- C. Thrice
- D. Four times.

9. Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, encouraged Bahá'ís to pray frequently. He wrote that prayer should be used both individually as an act of worship in turning to God, and collectively in meetings. Bahá'u'lláh wrote that prayer is essential to any undertaking, and that it attracts confirmations from God.

Bahá'u'lláh also wrote that a brief prayer that is joyful is better than a long prayer which does not induce a spiritual state; that it is the spirit in which the prayer is offered that is important. He wrote three Obligatory prayers. One of them is ‘The Short Obligatory Prayer’, called *Salat Saghir*, which is a brief affirmation of the Supreme Power of God and the servitude of the worshipper:

***‘I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and
to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to
Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but
Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.’***

(English translation)

What is this Short Obligatory Prayer also known as?

- A. The morning prayer.
- B. The noon prayer.
- C. The evening prayer.
- D. The night prayer.

10.

*“Asatho maa sadgamaya;
thamaso maa jyothir gamaya;
mrityor maa amritham gamaya,”*

In His Divine 1983 Discourse, Swami explains: “This is a prayer asking to be led from the *Jagath* (mundane world), which is constantly being built and rebuilt, resolved and dissolved, into the Divine whose Being undergoes no change. The darkness symbolizes the ignorance which induces identification with the body-senses-mind-reason complex. The light reveals the Divine core, over which all the rest is superimposed by the fog of faulty vision. Death affects only the body-mind complex. When we are led into the light, we become aware that we are the undying *Aatma*, and so we become immortal.”

What is this prayer called?

- A. The Shanti Prayer.
- B. The Immortality Prayer.
- C. The Sai Prayer.
- D. The Wisdom Prayer.

ANSWERS:

1D. *Dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt.*

In His Divine 1983 Discourse, Swami says: “The *Gayatri mantra* has three parts: praise, meditation and prayer. First, the Divine is praised, and then it is meditated upon in reverence and, lastly, prayer is offered to the Divine to dispel the darkness of ignorance and to awaken and strengthen the intellect. *Dheemahi* relates to the meditative aspect. *Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat* relates to the prayer.”

2A. Within everybody.

In His Divine 1987 Christmas Discourse, Swami said: “Christ declared that God can be realized only through love. Once a high priest in Jerusalem called Jesus and asked him: ‘Are you King of the Jews?’ Jesus replied: ‘I do not say so.’ The priest told Jesus: ‘You are leading the people astray by your wrong teachings. You are telling them that everyone can enter Heaven only through you.’ Jesus said that he had been telling the people to seek the Kingdom of Heaven. The priest asked: ‘Where is that Kingdom?’

Jesus replied: ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, within everybody. When this is my teaching, how can I be accused of claiming that the Kingdom of

Heaven can be attained only through me?’ How did Jesus get the courage to speak in this fashion? It was because he was proclaiming the truth. Truth is born of love, which comes from faith in God.”

3B. He developed intellect and discriminatory powers.

Swami declared: “Through his teachings, Buddha instilled sacredness and wisdom in people. His teachings are highly sacred, with profound inner meaning. He was christened as Siddhartha at the time of his birth. He came to be known as Buddha because he developed *buddhi* (intellect) and discriminatory power.

This is also the inner meaning of the word SAI. **S** denotes spiritual change, **A** denotes association (social) change, and **I** denotes individual change. Man's mind will become pure and sacred only when these three changes take place.”

4A. The Virtues of all saints.

The ‘*Navkar mantra*’ enables Jains to worship the virtues of all saints instead of just worshipping one particular person. While reciting the *Navkar Mantra*, the aspirant bows with respect to the *Arihantas*, *Siddhas*, *Ācharyās*, *Upādhyāyas sadhus* and *sadhvis*, who are the models in Jainism. Jains believe that they should try to be like them and everyday in the morning and before going to bed, they should pray to them, by paying respect to their achievements.

This mantra contains the essence of Jainism. It points out that if we want to be truly liberated, we have to give up worldly life (*samsar*). The first stage of renunciation is to become a monk (*sadhu*) or nun (*sadhvi*). While progressing on a spiritual path, some may be designated as *Upadhyayas* or *Acharya*. The ultimate aim is to attain omniscience, becoming an *Arihanta*, which leads us to liberation, becoming a *Siddha*.

5C. To show respect.

‘*Ji*’ is a word that is used to show respect as is the word ‘*Sahib*’. ‘*Ji*’ can also be used to refer to one's own soul.

This *Bani* was composed by the founder of the Sikh faith, Sri Guru Nanak Dev, who was the first of eleven Sikh Gurus. ‘*Japji Sahib*’ is said to be the condensation of the whole of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Sikhs believe that whoever recites this *Bani* with love, dedication and humility will have the complete blessing of Guru Nanak Dev ji and one who regularly recites *Japji* daily will gain spiritual peace and tranquility; wisdom about the mysteries of God’s creation; understanding and appreciation of the ups and downs of life;

the knowledge and confidence to move forward in this world at a higher moral level; and become an inspiration to others.

6B. Second.

The second pillar of Islam is *Salat*, the requirement to pray five times a day at fixed times. The time of day to pray are at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night fall. *Salat* is intended to focus the mind on Allah; it is seen as a personal communication with Allah, expressing gratitude and worship.

For Muslims, the position of prayer is very important and unparalleled by any act of other worship. The prayers consist of recitations from the Quran in Arabic and a sequence of movements: standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting. All recitations and movements express submission, humility, and homage to God. The various postures Muslims assume during their prayers capture the spirit of submission; the words remind them of their commitments to God. As they prepare to pray, Muslims face Mecca, the holy city that houses the Kaaba (the ancient place of worship built by Abraham and his son Ishmael). At the end of the prayer, the *shahada* (testimony of faith) is recited, and the greeting of peace, "Peace be upon all of you and the mercy and blessings of God," is repeated twice.

7C. How one should live life.

The *Ahuna Vairya* prayer has been hailed as the most fundamental of all prayers of the Zoroastrians. It is claimed to declare the credo of Zoroastrianism, and shows the way one should live.

In other words, this prayer is in three parts: 1. The Law: Model after God. 2. The Purpose: Serve God's Will. 3. The Way: Godliness through service.

1. The Law of Life: We should model our ways after our Creator. God who is the Righteous Creator of the world is all powerful. Any pious person will also be powerful according to his/her level of righteousness.

2. The Purpose of Life: Those who choose to serve God's Will, will have the gift of the "Good Mind", and those who tap into their "Good Mind" will choose to serve God's Will.

3. The Way of Living: Those who choose to serve God's Will, will do so by doing what needs to be done in this world, by serving the needy, both human and other creations. And by doing so, they won't need to just rely on their own resources because they will benefit and receive the help of God's powers and glory.

8B. Twice.

The obligation to recite the *Shema* is separate from the obligation to pray. A Jew is obligated to say the *Shema* twice each day: once in the morning and again in the evening. This requirement is derived from the verse: "And you should speak about them when you...lie down and when you get up." The *Shema* speaks of loving God, learning Torah, and passing on Jewish tradition to the children.

Children must be actively taught and rehearsed in the truths of God's ways rather than being left to the vagaries of nature. It can be very comforting to children to have a nightly ritual of saying the *Shema*, a prayer to the Almighty to protect them. As soon as a child begins to speak, he is taught to repeat daily, with the utmost awe and reverence, the ringing Hebrew words of the *Shema* until he knows them by heart. The *Shema* is a declaration that all events are from the One, the only One.

9B. The noon prayer.

The 'Short Obligatory Prayer' is one of three obligatory prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. One of the three prayers which must be said each day. The short obligatory prayer is said while standing and facing the Point of Adoration - Bahji near Akko, Israel - where rest the sacred remains of Bahá'u'lláh. The obligatory prayers should be said after ablutions, the washing of the hands and face and with an attitude of humility before God.

The believer is entirely free to choose any one of these three prayers, but is under the obligation of reciting one of them, and in accordance with any specific directions with which it may be accompanied. It is to be said between noon and sunset and is thus commonly called "the noon prayer."

The Bahá'í writings state that prayer is essential to the development of spirituality and that it is natural to have the impulse to pray, thus, prayer is used to express an individual's love of God and to affect their inner self. Prayer can also be used to obtain specific material ends, but the Bahá'í writings state that it is more important to pray for the love of God, without any other hope or fear.

10A. The Shanti Prayer.

In *Prashanti Vahini*, Swami explains: "Even for being blessed by the Lord's Grace, one must have *Shanti* and wait patiently. This is the *Shanti Mantra*. The meaning of this *mantra* is given variously by various people, some elaborately, some succulently.

'Oh, Lord, when I am deriving happiness through the objects of this world, make me forget the unreal objects and show me the way to permanent happiness,' This is the first prayer.

'Oh Lord, when the objects of the world attract me, remove the darkness which hides the all-pervading Atma, which every such object really is.' This is the second prayer.

'Oh Lord, bless me through Your Grace with Immortality or Paramananda, resulting from the awareness of the Effulgence of the Atma, immanent in every object.' This is the third prayer. This is the real meaning of the *Mantra*.

QUIZ ON DIVINE JANMASHTAMI DISCOURSES

Bhagavan tells us: “Krishna is not born on every Janamashtami day. Krishna is born in us when we try to develop divine love as the means to overcome our bonds. Man’s Hridaya (heart) is the birthplace of Krishna. The true birthday of Krishna is only when the Hridaya becomes cool, pure and peaceful like the Himachala (the Himalayan Mountains). God makes such a heart His dwelling place which is pure, sacred and peaceful.”

To recapitulate the beautiful messages that Bhagavan Baba has gifted us over many years on the Avatarhood, mystery and message of Lord Krishna, here is a special quiz. Let us dwell on these divine revelations and celebrate Lord Krishna’s Birthday on the 24th of this month.

1. In His 1966 Divine Discourse, Swami directs us on how to make our consciousness sublime:

“Krishna-thrisha - Thirst for Krishna, for seeing Him, hearing Him, His Flute, for installing Him in the heart, in the mind, for grasping His Reality through the intellect - this thirst is the healthiest, the most conducive to peace. Devotion to Krishna is the chain by which the monkey mind can be fastened and subdued. Transmute all the desire with which the senses torment you into the thirst for Krishna and you are saved.”

According to Swami, what happens when this *Krishna-thrisha* is quenched?

- A. The spiritual path becomes easier.
- B. The highest bliss is attained.
- C. We will not have to reincarnate again.
- D. We eschew bad company.

2. In His 1977 Divine Janmashtami Discourse, Swami explains the significance of Krishna’s birth as the eighth child:

*“Sri Krishna was born as the eighth child of Devaki. This is significant, for *Samaadhi* is the eighth stage of spiritual effort, coming after *yama*, *niyama*, *aasana*, *pranaayaama*, *prathyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyaana*. These are known as *ashtaanga-yoga*; the eight-fold discipline - abstention from evil-doing, observance, control of breath, posture, withdrawal of mind from sense objects, concentration, meditation and absorption in the *Aathma*. The Lord can be visualized only after the seven steps are successfully negotiated and the mind purified in the process. The term, *samaadhi* (superconsciousness state of bliss), is generally identified with a temporary loss of consciousness, or even more, a temporary heightening of the consciousness. But we have to judge the state by the effect it has on the person and his attitude towards himself and others.”*

According to Swami, what does *samaadhi* mean?

- A. Experiencing equality of every being and everything.
- B. Cessation of the breath in meditation.
- C. Equal distribution of wealth in society.
- D. Full knowledge of scriptures.

3. In His 1990 Divine Janamashtami Discourse, Swami explains:

“We must understand properly the meaning of the term Krishna. The word has three meanings. One is *‘Krishyathi iti Krishnah’* (The one who cultivates is Krishna). What is it that has to be cultivated? The *Hridayakshetra* (field of the heart). Krishna cultivates the field of our hearts by removing the weeds of bad qualities, watering it with love, ploughing it with the use of *sadhana*, and sowing the seeds of devotion. This is how Krishna cultivates our hearts.

The second meaning of the word is: *‘Karshathi iti Krishnah’* (The one who attracts is Krishna). Krishna attracts you by His eyes, His speech, His sports, and by every action of His. By His words, He softens and calms the hearts of even those filled with hatred and makes them rejoice. Krishna displayed these qualities even as a small child. Once He had entered the house of a *gopika* at night and climbed a pillar to get at the butter that was kept in a pot suspended from the ceiling. The *gopika* woke up, caught Him in the act and held fast His legs, saying that she would now expose Him before His mother Yashoda. She asked Him what He was doing at the top of the pillar.”

According to Swami, what innocent reply did the prankster child Krishna give?

- A. He was checking for the pillar’s strength.
- B. He was helping the ants to cross the pillar safely.
- C. He was sleep-walking and got lost.
- D. He was searching for the missing calf.

4. In His 1996 Divine Janamashtami Discourse, Swami enlightens us about the Divine relationship between Krishna and Radha.

“In the case of Radha, Krishna churned her heart and gave her the nectar of Divine bliss. Radha had no attachment to any of her kith and kin. Krishna appeared before Radha before she gave up her life and blessed her. God will give anything for the devotee including Himself. No one can equal Him in the sacrifice He will make for the sake of the devotees. Krishna asked Radha what she wanted at the last moment of her life. Radha said: ‘I don’t want anything except to listen to the music of your flute once before I pass on. Sing, Oh Krishna, speak to me to fill my heart with bliss,’ sang Radha. ‘Distill the essence of the *Vedas* and make it flow into the eternal music of your flute, oh Krishna.’

Krishna took out His flute and played on it and when Radha closed her eyes, He threw it away. He never touched it again. He dedicated the flute to give delight to Radha. Thus, all the mysteries of Krishna served to relieve the distress of the devotees. Krishna used all His powers to serve the devotees. When the purport of the Bhagavatha stories is properly understood, one can realize the puissance of the Lord...I have told you many times that Radha does not simply mean the form of a woman. It is something far more important.”

So, according to Swami, what does Radha mean?

- A. One who constantly chants the Name of the Lord.
- B. One who brings delight to all.
- C. The ultimate example of selfless devotion.
- D. Krishna’s escort.

5. In His 1987 Divine Discourse, Swami tells us how Krishna teaches us one of the reasons of man’s falling on the spiritual path by revealing a story:

“On one occasion, Krishna was conversing with the Pandava brothers when Arjuna expressed disagreement with certain statements of Krishna. Krishna assumed an angry pose and left the place. Hardly had He gone a short distance when Dharmaja, Bhima and Nakula turned on Arjuna and berated him for insulting Krishna, who was their very life-breath. Unable to bear this rebuke, Arjuna prayed internally to Krishna. Meanwhile Krishna returned and told the brothers: ‘What Arjuna has done is true to human nature. Man is fickle-minded and prone to doubts....’”

According to Swami, what reason did Krishna give to Arjuna for his temporary failing?

- A. His short temperedness.
- B. His lack of faith.
- C. His false sense of doership.
- D. His intellect.

6. In His 1996 Divine Janamashtami Discourse, Swami reveals the significance of Krishna’s love for pure white milk and butter and curds:

“Krishna used to visit the houses of the cowherds and drink curds and milk. The symbolic meaning of this action is Krishna's preference for *sathva*, represented by the pure white curds and milk. Krishna explained to Yashodha the reason why He preferred the butter in their homes to the butter offered by Yashodha.”

According to Swami, what reason did Krishna give to His Divine Mother Yashoda?

- A. He was testing the quality of their butter.
- B. Their butter was tastier than Yashoda’s.
- C. They were more generous than Yashoda.
- D. The hearts of the gopis were pure and selfless.

7. In His 1994 Divine Janamashtami Discourse, Swami instills true devotion in us by clarifying the truth of Krishna’s Advent:

“Krishna, in fulfilling the pledge He had given to Mother Earth, rid the world of many wicked rulers and sought to establish the reign of Righteousness for the protection of the good. The Divine incarnates from age to age for the purpose of protecting the virtuous, punishing the wicked and establishing *Dharma*. Krishna is said to have destroyed many wicked persons. But this is not quite correct.”

According to Swami, who or what really killed His wicked uncle Kamsa?

- A. The people of his kingdom.
- B. His own fear of Krishna.
- C. His unrighteous acts.
- D. A few jealous demons.

8. In His 1990 Divine Janamashtami Discourse, Swami uses the gopis as an example of the pinnacle of devotion:

“Krishna *Naama* (name) makes you strong and steady; it is sweet and sustaining. Look at the gopis (milk maids of Gokulam) and their yearning for the Lord! They never swerved from the path of *bhakthi*, of continuous *smarana* (remembrance) of the Lord. When in pain, the gopis always called on Krishna only; whether in joy or in grief.

Prema (Love) is nectarine in its sweetness. *Bhakti* (Love for the Lord) was the highest expression of devotion among the gopis because they were saturated with the sweetness of _____”

- A. Divine Love.
- B. The Nectarine music from Krishna’s Flute.
- C. Krishna’s undivided attention on them.
- D. Being a part of the group with the other cowherdresses.

9. In His 1996 Divine Janamashtami Discourse, Swami delightfully reveals to us the comparison between the two Avathars – Krishna and Rama:

“If you recognize the distinction, between Krishna and Rama, you will appreciate better the nature of Krishna. Krishna always smiled at the outset and carried out His task later. For Rama, the deed came first and then the smile. Krishna made women cry. Rama wept for the sake of women. Rama went into the battle only after having a strong cause for it. Krishna first provoked the conflict and then determined its outcome. The Krishna principle revels in delight. The Rama principle is based on the concept of *baadhyatha* (obligation).”

One of the differences between Rama and Krishna Avatar was that Krishna had no kingdom of His own. According to Swami, who did He rule then?

- A. The cowherds.
- B. Radha.
- C. The hearts of millions.
- D. The Pandavas and the Kauravas.

10. In His 1977 Divine Janamashtami Discourse, Swami describes the symbolism of the jewelry that Krishna wore:

“Krishna's complexion was neither fair nor dark; it was three parts dark and one-part fair, an amalgam of both. Since they were of the *Vaishnava* caste, the parents placed a line of musk on the centre of his brow. He wore silver *kankans* (bangles) on His wrists, such as cow-herd boys wore in those days in that part of the country. But the *kankans* that Krishna wore were not mere *kankans*. They had profound implications.’

According to Swami, what did the *kankans* signify?

- A. The eternal bondage between man and God.
- B. His determination to fulfill the vows He undertook for liberating His devotees.
- C. For teaching detachment from the material world.
- D. For destroying ego and illusion.

ANSWERS:

1B. The highest bliss is attained.

Swami reinforces:

“When *Krishna-thrishna* is quenched, the highest *Ananda* is attained; there is no more need, no more want, defect or decline. The urge to take inferior drinks that only feed the thirst disappears, when once the sweetness

of *Krishna naama* and *Krishna bhaava* (name and thought of Krishna) are tasted. Sense objects are like sea water that can never allay thirst.

The thirst for Krishna is a sign of health in the spiritual field. Not to have it is a sign of *bhava roga* - the disease that afflicts worldly persons, the symptoms being grief, discontent, pain and worry, even when wealth and health are endowed. That thirst can be cultivated by the reading of scriptures, the cultivation of congenial company, lessons from a kind and considerate Guru and regular practice of *japam*. Once it is acquired, the thirst itself will lead you on to places and persons able to quench it. That is the advantage of spiritual quest; the first step makes the second easy.”

2A. Experiencing equality of every being and everything

Swami continues: “*Samaadhi* combines *sama* (equal) *dhi* (intelligence), that is to say, **intelligence grasping the fundamental equality of every being**. Not only will all feeling of difference and distinction disappear, but even notions such as heat and cold, grief and joy, good and bad, will become meaningless. When man reaches that state, the Lord is automatically born in his consciousness.”

3D. He was searching for the missing calf.

Swami delights us further with the story:

“Krishna, in the most innocent manner, answered that He was searching for the calf that was missing from His house. The *gopika* could not contain her laughter at the answer. And as she laughed, she let go Krishna's Feet and this gave Him the chance to jump down and make good His escape.

A third meaning of the word Krishna is ‘*Kushyathi iti* Krishna’ (one who is always blissful). Krishna was always in a state of bliss. It was because He had these various qualities, that the sage Garga named Him Krishna. The ordinary meaning of the word Krishna is ‘one who is dark.’ But people think only of this meaning and forget the deeper and truer meanings of the Lord's name.”

4A. One who constantly chants the Name of the Lord.

In His Divine 1978 Summer Showers Discourse, Swami explains in detail:

“Radha exhibited the totality of the stream of love; or *Prakruthi* has taken the form of Radha. If Radha was attached to Krishna and Krishna was attached to Radha, it simply means that *Paramatma* and *Prakruthi* were attached to each other.

This is a silver tumbler. It is not possible for us to remove the silver from the tumbler. Because, the silver and the tumbler have joined together, we call it a silver tumbler. In the same manner, it is not possible to separate Radha and

Krishna from each other. Because *Prakruthi* and *Paramatma* are identical with each other, it is one single entity. Without *Prakruthi* or creation, there is no Krishna, without Krishna, we will not be able to see creation...I have told you many times that Radha does not simply mean the form of a woman. It is something far more important. The language develops as a confluence of several letters. The letters come together to form a word. In the word, Radha we have the letters R-A-D-H-A. When we commence with A we get *Adhar*, when we commence with D we get *Dhara* and in reverse direction it reads *Aradh*. Thus, the word **Radha means, one who constantly chants the name of the Lord.** Everyone who does the *aradhana* can be described as Radha. The word does not relate to a feminine gender indicating the name of a woman at all. Krishna’s aspect demonstrates that there is no such difference at all in the presence of divinity.”

5D. His intellect.

Swami shares with us what Krishna taught Arjuna:

“The more intellectual a person is, the more he is subject to these traits. Such persons have no firm belief in anything. **Because of your intellect, you, Arjuna, behaved without understanding what has gone before or what is to come.** Henceforth don't rely on your intellect. Carry out the Will of the Divine.”

Then Arjuna said: “*Karishye Vachanam Thava*” (I shall abide by whatever You say). It was then that the Lord gave Arjuna the assurance: “Centre your thoughts on Me, be My devotee, worship Me always and I assure you will reach Me.”

6D. The hearts of the gopis were pure and selfless.

Swami enlightens us with:

“The hearts of the gopikas were pure and filled with selfless devotion to Krishna. Their devotion was superior to the maternal affection of Yashodha, which bore a taint of selfishness. Krishna told Yashodha: **‘I am attracted to the hearts of those who are pure and selfless.’**”

Krishna had always eluded the gopikas after playing his mischief. But once, out of compassion for them, He wanted to provide a clue by which they could trace Him. One day they all lay in wait around their houses to catch Krishna. Krishna went into a house stealthily, broke a pot of milk and quietly hid Himself. The gopikas found that He had broken the pot and tried to trace Him. The milk white steps which He had left revealed to them His hide-out. Then, Krishna revealed to them the spiritual truth that if they cling to the feet of the Lord they could realize Him. ‘Follow My footsteps and you shall find Me,’ Krishna told the gopikas.”

7B. His own fear of Krishna.

Swami corrects the commonly held text-book version:

"It is their own wickedness which destroyed these evil persons. Today, if the Divine wants to punish the wicked and protect the righteous, there will not be even one wholly righteous person. All will qualify for punishment. It is not a question of destroying the wicked. The task today is to transform *Adharma* (unrighteousness) into *Dharma* (righteousness). How is this to be done? Through love alone.

Krishna also changed the hearts of many people through love. It may be asked: "Is it not Krishna who killed Kamsa?" Not at all. This is the text-book version. In truth, it was Kamsa's own heated *bhrama* (delusion) which killed him. He was always haunted by the fear of Krishna. **His death was a result and a reaction of that fear.** Men's thoughts determine their destiny. Hence, men should cultivate good thoughts and eschew all bad feelings. God has no dislike for anyone. He envies no one. He has no ill-will towards anyone. Nor does He have favourites. The grace one gets is the result of one's own feelings.

"Bhaavaatheetham Thriguna rahitham" (The Divine is beyond feelings and attributes). He is *"Ekam Sathyam Vimalam Achalam"* (the One, Truth, Pure, Immovable). He is *"Sarvadhee Saakshibhuutham"* (Eternal Witness in all minds).

When devotees complain now-a-days why they are being punished by the Lord in various ways, they do not realize that it is not God who is punishing them. Their own fears and fancies are the cause of their troubles. He alone is a true devotee who recognizes that his sufferings are the consequence of his own bad thoughts and actions."

8A. Divine Love.

Swami informs us that:

"They were saturated with the sweetness of Divine Love. They did not seek liberation or higher knowledge. The ecstasy they derived from merely seeking Krishna, they did not get from any other source. Narada coined the phrase, *"Parama Bhakti"* (Supreme Devotion) to describe the devotion of the gopikas. These supreme devotees regarded the Lord as their companion and most precious treasure. So intense was their devotion that they used to go about as highly intoxicated persons who were unmindful of the world. Leaving their homes, on hearing the music of Krishna's flute, they rushed to the forest in search of Krishna, oblivious to everything.

The Gopikas realised that *Jnana* (supreme wisdom) consisted in experiencing oneness with the Divine and that all other knowledge was only mundane and related to the physical. Krishna was everything for them. In their feeling of

oneness with the Divine, they made no distinction between the animate and the inanimate. They saw the Divine in everything.

9C. The hearts of millions.

Swami extols Krishna’s Avatarhood further:

“The Ramayana is intended to promote the reign of Truth and Righteousness on earth. The Krishna *Avathaar* was intended to give a perennial message to the world. He sought nothing for Himself. He kept nothing for Himself. He gave away everything to the people. He slayed his maternal uncle, Kamsa. He installed on the throne Kamsa’s father Ugrasena. He did not covet the Kingdom. He befriended the Pandavas, defeated the Kauravas and crowned Dharmaja as the emperor. He did not make Himself king. He was a King without a crown. He was the King of kings. **He had no kingdom of His own. But He ruled over the hearts of millions.** It is this profound Truth that is proclaimed by the *Krishna-thathva* (Krishna principle). If you enquire deeply, you will find that every *Avathaar* has incarnated to convey a special message and carry out a particular mission.”

10B. His determination to fulfill the vows He undertook for liberating His devotees.

Swami describes in length:

“One rite that every Hindu has to perform before undertaking any enterprise of a sacred nature like performing a *yajna* (sacrificial rites) or undertaking a vow or taking on a new stage of life, is the tying of a *kankan* to the wrist, which is symbolic of his determination to fulfill that vow or carry out the duties of that stage of life. **Krishna had taken three vows and the *kankans* were symbolic of his determination to fulfill them.** They were, as mentioned by Him in the Geetha:

- (i) *Dharma samsthaapanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge* (I shall incarnate Myself in every age, to revive and resurrect *dharma*).
- (ii) *Yogakshemam vahaamyham* (I shall bear the burden of ensuring peace and prosperity for all who rely on Me).
- (iii) *Mokshayishyaami maa sucha* (I shall save all those who surrender whole-heartedly to Me, and I shall liberate, them from the cycle of birth and death).

Thus Krishna assured man that He would save him from penury and grief and from sin and its terrible consequences, provided he adheres to Him and adores Him. He also assured the world that He would come in human form and lead mankind onto the *dharmic* path, and thus liberate it from its grief and the succession of births and deaths.

How fortunate you are that you have today the same Krishna, the full *Prema-Avathaar*, moving among you! I shall show you the very *kausthubha* that I was wearing at that time. (Here Baba waved his hand, and in a trice a brilliant flash of light revealed a unique Jewel in his palm - the *kausthubha*, famed in the *Bhaagavatha* and the *Puraanas* (mythological stories). A large greenish-blue emerald of unexcelled brightness, rectangular in shape and bordered by resplendent diamonds, hung on a gold chain.)”

HEART2HEART QUIZ ON GITA FOR CHILDREN

H2H carried a long serial called the 'Gita for Children', which was of course suitable for all ages to learn from! It comprised of a modern style conversation between Lord Krishna and His devotee Arjuna and was packed with wisdom in easily digestible form. Now, here are five quiz questions from that series, which will bestow on you greater spiritual understanding.

1. In our January 2007 issue, Krishna explains to Arjuna how God runs the Universe: "When the Universe is created, God pervades it in two complimentary aspects. This helps to 'run' the Universe. These two complimentary aspects are Consciousness and _____, or Spirit and Matter, if you prefer."

- A. Super Consciousness.
- B. Omnipotence.
- C. Energy.
- D. Supreme Will.

2. In our Feb 2007 issue, Arjuna expresses his confusion: "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?"

What classic analogical example did Krishna give to Arjuna to resolve this dilemma?

- A. Fire and Water.
- B. Sand and Pebbles.
- C. Sky and Earth.
- D. Birds and Fishes.

3. In our March 2007 issue, Krishna teaches Arjuna the Purpose of Life. "This purpose is very simple. From God you have come, and to God you must return; that is all! People, may shake their heads and declare, 'This is impossible! How can one make God the only object of life? What about family and relatives? What about work and relaxation? Should life become one long, dull and monotonous pilgrimage to something we do not understand?' Let Me answer this doubt."

What was the first step that Krishna recommended Arjuna to achieve this goal?

- A. “Chant My Name.”
- B. “Do Selfless Service.”
- C. “Go into meditation and explore your inner Self”
- D. “Find a Guru!”

4. In our May 2007 issue, Krishna elaborates on the apparent diversity in man’s behaviour: “There are basically three qualities - also known as *Gunas* - *Tamo Guna*, *Rajo Guna* and *Sattva Guna*...The characteristic of a person basically reflects his mental attitude. Thus, a *Sattvic* person is gentle, usually calm, often smiling, generally helpful, soft-spoken, etc. There is a distinctive aura about such a person. A *Rajasic* person is restless and itches for action. Sometimes, he is even hyper-active! Of course, it is ambition and desire that drive his activity and make him dynamic. Naturally, such a person can get agitated, can become angry, feels disappointed when he fails, and so on. The *Tamasic* person is at the bottom, being a personification of dullness, sloth, inertia, laziness, and what have you. He is totally devoid of initiative, and a confirmed work-shirker! Well, that gives in a nutshell, what the three basic types of people are.”

What was Krishna’s reply when Arjuna asked Him whether a *tamasic* person, who knows that he is so, can change.”

- A. It is impossible!
- B. He should observe strict fasts first.
- C. Only if it is written in his destiny.
- D. Only on advice from a noble soul.

5. In our June 2007 issue, Krishna explains how man can attain liberation: “Worldly desire is the main cause for rebirth. Every person has desires peculiar to his personality. But there is one thing that can be done and that is to change the direction of desire. Instead of desiring the pleasures of the world, have an intense desire for God and seek the Bliss that the Lord alone can confer. Thus, by converting one type of desire into another type, all problems can get solved...Such a person is called a *Gunatheetha*.”

According to Krishna, what happens to a *Gunatheetha*?

- A. He turns into a monk.
- B. He only seeks gurus.
- C. He rises above the *gunas*.
- D. He becomes a preacher.

ANSWERS:

1C. Energy.

Krishna elaborates further: "When you look at the sea, you see just water. Dissolved in this water is salt; yet when you look at the expanse of water, you never talk about the salt but only refer to the sea.

You might have seen villages on the sea shore. Many villagers there make salt. Do you know how? They gather the sea water in shallow pans and allow the water to evaporate. After a while both water and salt are visible. It is the same in Creation. Before Creation, one cannot really talk separately of Consciousness and Energy. Energy is subsumed in Consciousness. But **after the Universe comes into existence, it is meaningful and also convenient to talk separately of Consciousness and Divine Energy or Spirit and Matter.** At the working level, these two entities can be separately experienced."

2B. Of Sand and Pebbles.

Pleased with question asked, Krishna said, "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...

When the pebble is pulverized, 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.

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.

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 pulverized into sand. Those who do not, are like the pebble that is yet to be shattered.

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.”

3A. “Chant My Name.”

Krishna helped Arjuna: “Arjuna, you should remember that it is I who created Society, building diversity into it. Therefore, I know very well that Society needs all kinds of services for it to exist and carry on. I am not asking anyone to walk away from life. But, and this is an important point, no matter who one is and to what strata one belongs, everyone can follow his or her vocation in life in such a manner that life’s purpose is also duly fulfilled.

First, **quietly chant My Name** while going about your work. Let us say you are sweeping the floor. It is quite easy to sweep the floor and also chant My Name at the same time. By the way, there are no restrictions when it comes to Name selection. I am known by many Names and you can pick any one that pleases you. Just make sure that when you chant My Name, you do so with feeling and with Love in your Heart.

Sometimes, chanting may not be possible while you are working. For example, pretty soon you would be busy fighting. Obviously, you would have to concentrate on the battle and cannot be chanting My Name continuously. But no problem. Just think of Me for a moment before you start. Say a small prayer like, ‘Lord, I am going to be busy for a while. But it is Your work I shall be busy with. Please bless it and accept that as a humble offering from me to You.’ After that short prayer, you can go about your business. When the task is completed, you can once again say a small prayer offering thanks and expressing gratitude. So, a little prayer before, work in between and a short prayer on completion – a spiritual sandwich if you like! That will do the trick, converting work into worship!

The essential point is this. I have given man a body and a mind to discover Me and to come back to me. That is why I confer the human form on a select few. That opportunity ought to be properly used and not wasted.”

4D. Only on advice from a noble soul.

Krishna explains: “On account of his very nature, it is doubtful if a *Tamasic* person, would, of his own accord, want to change. Yet, **he may feel the urge, on advice from a noble soul**. In such an event, laziness must be eliminated with activity; in other words, *Tamas* must be conquered with *Rajas*.

Continuing, Krishna adds, ‘While *Rajas* is certainly preferable to *Tamas*, one must not forget its undesirable aspects. In fact, *Rajas* has a strong tendency to get amplified. Hence, before much damage is done, *Rajas* itself must be vanquished with *Sattva*. Likewise, *Sattva* is invoked by avoiding bad company and seeking only good company. By the way, don’t imagine that good

company means only good people; a good book also can be a good companion. In this context, the scriptures must be given priority number one. So *Tamas* first with *Rajas* and *Rajas* then with *Sattva*.”

5C. He rises above the *gunas*.

Krishna guides further: “A person who desires only God automatically rises above the *Gunas*. Such a person is called a *Gunatheetha*. Such a person is not *Tamasic*, he is not *Rajasic*, and he is not *Sattvic* either. He is beyond all the three standard types. Such a person couldn't care less about the attractions of the world; that is because the only thing he wants is God. He is not bothered about friend and foe, about joy and sorrow, etc. That is to say, he is completely above the pairs of opposites. Things like joy and sorrow bother only a person with a dual mind, or one who is below the *Gunas*. But our friend has a one-track mind; he is concerned only with God and nothing else. Thus, he is immersed in the world of Oneness. That is why he is said to be beyond the *Gunas*.”

THE HEALING TOUCH

DESTINY’S CHILD

A well-to-do techie couple from the city of Bangalore recalls the turning point in their lives when their picture-perfect existence came to a sudden standstill with the birth of their second child – a precious little boy with serious neurological and cardiac conditions. Despite their financial stability and educational backgrounds, they were shattered by the news of their son’s illness and the formidable costs of treatment proposed by the mercenary medical professionals in the private healthcare system, which left them with more questions than answers. Destiny, finally, brought them to the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences in Bangalore. A grateful father shares with Heart2Heart, the story of the family’s tryst with the Sai Healthcare system that did way more than just restore their precious child’s health, absolutely free of cost.

Bangalore with the sobriquet of ‘software capital of India’ has become the proverbial melting pot with people from various parts of the country coming over to find their destiny in the ‘binary’ world. On reflection, it is funny to see how much we have ‘coded’ our existence to the digital world. ‘Indispensable’ has taken on a new meaning with electronic gadgets taking the place of our memories and the age old pen and paper. Zeros and ones are reflections of reality. Absolutes, black and white, in a world full of grey. We think in absolutes but act in approximations. We believe in good and bad, but are unsure of decisions, for one man’s food is another’s poison. We all look for our destinies and my wife and I found ours in Bangalore.

My name is Sanjay* and my better half is Sudha*. I personally feel she fits the bill since when food, clothing and shelter are taken care of, the mind looks for balance in different ways. Yin for Yang and such...

A High-Tech Family

We actually met at a trade fair for Information Technology Products in Bangalore. At that time we were working for competing electronic giants and our conversations were on those lines. But as time passed we resonated and so put up the matter to our parents. I had come to Bangalore on a project, and my boss was so pleased with the output that he asked me if I could shift over to Bangalore, on a higher pay scale and more responsibility. By the way, I am from Maharashtra, and Sudha is a native of Bangalore. I was and still am doing well in my position and money was never a problem. When Sudha entered the picture I made up my mind to shift over. We are both from conservative families; thrift and frugality has been drilled into our psyche. With our families’ approval, we got married and have since been living in Bangalore in our own flat.

Picture Perfect Lives Granted to None

It is said God does not give everything to everyone...probably He wants us to think of Him more often. We had a perfect life. Great jobs, great place to live,

mindful of our expenses, planning our children, saving for their education and our retirement... we did everything by the book. Our daughter Shravanthi was a perfect delivery and as advised by the doctor we got all the routine tests done and she was declared healthy. No congenital disorders of any sort, no complications...she was clean. A year passed and then another without any complications. We decided to have another child. And Gambhir joined us a year later.

Misfortune Strikes the New Born

This is when the perfect mirror of our lives shattered into a thousand fragments. Our son was diagnosed as having a rare combination of both neuro and cardiac disorders. We could not believe the news but the symptoms were staring us in the face. Somehow, in retrospect, I feel all our planning was worth it. My parents came up the hard way and imbued me with the value of every penny earned or saved. And they used to say God will never put you to a test you cannot pass. I was lucky to have Sudha who shared my belief. We put our noses to the grind and decided to take the bull by the horns.

Frantic Parents Research Illness and Cure Options

We went to the best of hospitals for reconfirmation of diagnosis and treatment options. Sudha did a great job of collecting information on the net; so we both were well informed of the facts. **The surgery costs were phenomenal... I don't want to go into the numbers now**, they are scary (At least Rs. 3,00,000 [US \$ 7500] for the neuro problems that would require multiple surgeries, and Rs. 2,00,000 [US \$ 5000] for the cardiac ailment). Though the doctors reassured us that we would have our son back, none of them were really convincing. Not that we had much choice. **The institutions that were capable of doing the surgery were few and the costs were sky-high, even for us who were not hard pressed for money.**

Even Financially Stable Family Daunted by Formidable Medical Costs

It was then that we got to know about the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences. Since it was relatively low profile it did not reflect in Sudha's searches on the internet. One of the doctors referred us to the hospital...but he had his share of imaginary warnings. Now that all his fears have been proved false I see no reason to hide the information. He was apprehensive of the quality of treatment as everything was offered totally free.

Finding a Balance between Objectivity and Faith

We asked around, and to my surprise, I found that many of my friends on Facebook (social networking website) were devotees of Baba. And all of them urged me to go ahead without any fear. It was a tough call: here we were - two high tech professionals, placing the life of our child in the crucible of faith. We spoke to our parents and they advised us to approach the matter objectively. We shopped around and finally managed to get an appointment with one of the doctors at the Sai Hospital through email. We finally came to the Hospital in a private taxi, and when the driver pointed out the building to us, we could not believe him; we asked him if he had brought us to the right place...

The Hospital Evokes Amazement and Awe

I mean...the place had the look and feel of a temple. I looked at the opposite side and saw a glass and steel high rise that said SJR Technology Park, and next to that was the Makino center. I got down from the car and at the end of the road I saw the towers of ITPL (International Technology Park Ltd.). All the landmarks that I had been given to reach the hospital were correct, but I read the etched granite repeatedly to reassure myself that it was indeed the hospital. I had seen information on the website but it was nothing compared to the real thing. I am not boasting, but **my jobs have taken me out of the country and I have seen many beautiful buildings... but the feeling of awe that filled me when saw the rearing sweeping arms of the hospital...well! I don't know what to say.**

Holy Hospital Ushers Hope in Parents' Hearts

My first reaction when I entered the main building was that of utter amazement. I struggled hard to focus on the issue at hand but my eyes kept returning to the Ganesha Idol on the raised altar under the dome. **I had seen hospitals that had great Atria but this was one of a kind...and most important...the open space...vast expanses of space. Most other hospitals we had visited earlier had crammed every inch of available space with beds and facilities. All aimed at attracting as many patients as possible. They were run as profit centers and there were billing counters right at the reception desk. You pay, only then you enter. Here it was totally different, no rush, no bustle, no cash counters...nothing...it was so ...so peaceful! For the first time we felt hope!**

Impressed by the Integrity...the Tranquility

This was many months ago. We got a date for admission, we came and Gambhir was operated upon for the neuro condition – uneventfully. All the apprehensions the earlier doctors had raised were washed away. He was ready for discharge in less than three weeks. We then came back again for the cardiac problem and that too was uneventful. I don't want to go into those details here as H2H can have them from the hospital database.

With the healthy lease of life for our child, what stayed with the both of us after that were our experiences at this one-of-a-kind facility and that is what I would like to dwell more upon at this point.

Ethical Professionalism, Steeped in Humane Values

What impressed me most was the transparency of the medical staff. They told us everything, but in a manner that I never heard anywhere else. The truth was not bitter here. Perhaps it is the ambiance of the place, or Baba working through the staff. This practice of humane medicine sets this hospital apart from all the rest we had considered till then.

Techie Parents Find Order and Hope

As a techie, so to speak, I don't like ambiguities. Every process must be crystal clear. That is how we work on our projects. Each step is evaluated, re-considered, probable deviations factored in, contingency plans considered in

parallel...we are systematic and we find order in chaos. That's our job. But life...is the greatest of chaos. And only the One Above is capable of bringing order into it. And He has brought not just order, but hope into mine.

There is a lot that one receives from society. By society, I mean my parents, teachers, friends, family, colleagues in the office, my driver, and many more. I don't know the engine driver of the train that took me to Mumbai; neither do I know the pilot who flew me to Frankfurt. But each of them has touched my life, and now I realize that the perfect calm that we show to the world hides a million volcanoes. Each of them has their story to tell and this is mine.

Sai's Magnanimity Evokes Gratitude, Sense of Social Responsibility

I want to offer back what I have received. And that is not limited to any particular means. I have started reading books on Bhagavan Baba and have begun to understand why He is who He is. We have taken up service activities in our locality and for all the things that we didn't have time in the past. Life is too precious to be frittered away in the pursuit of money and money alone. We have, by this experience in this hospital, found a new meaning for the expression "giving with love". It is an open secret that many of us donate money to charities to avoid paying tax.

It is of course beneficial to both parties. But then the benefit is limited to monetary terms only. When I signed the cheque in the past it was with a tinge of regret that the money is no longer mine. But now when I sign it, I will sign it with the feeling that this money is going to make a difference in someone else's life.

To be honest, **it is this good will of a thousand faceless nameless people who love Bhagavan Baba that has given my son back to me.** I will come back here to this Hospital, and offer my services in whatever manner I can. The other day I was reading an email that someone forwarded to me.... It was titled:

'What Can Money Buy?'

Associates - but not Family and Friends.

A House - but not a Home.

Pleasure - but not Happiness.

Pieces of Art - but not Peace of Mind.

Medicine - but not Medicare.

Hospitals but not Health.

Favor - but not Respect.

A Degree - but not Education.

Luxury - but not Love.

Status - but not Character.

I have not yet been to Prasanthi Nilayam, Baba's ashram in Puttaparthi. Perhaps the time is yet to come. I just wanted to share the experience of our family.

As for my son, Gambhir, he is growing stronger day by day, I can see it happening. His appetite is improving and so is his energy. Even before the operations, he was interested in sports, music and dance...and now it is hard to contain his enthusiasm. Earlier his mother Sudha, would say, don't strain yourself...and he would look up at me with pain in his eyes, but what could I do? I had to protect him from himself. I had to be careful. Now, whenever his mother cautions him he grins back and retorts, 'Relax mom! Now, I am normal...'. Thank you Baba!

By Sudha and Sanjay Ambre* as told to Mr. Y. Arvind*

**Names and dates have been changed on request.*

Gambhir's Grave Ailment

Gambhir had a congenital malformation of the spine called scoliosis. Congenital scoliosis is defined as a curvature of the spine that is the result of malformations of the vertebral elements. The elements of the spinal column develop at the same time as several other major organ systems such as the bladder, kidneys, and heart. As a result, there is an association between congenital vertebral anomalies and other malformations. Gambhir, for this reason, had a very delicate spine; he could not exert any pressure on his backbone, and therefore, even though a child, unfortunately playing for him was out of question. Additionally, He had multiple VSD, Ventricular Septal Defect, where the intervening wall of the lower chambers of the heart had a hole, mixing pure and impure blood.

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the July 2008 issue

Feedback on our cover story: *The Zenith of Holistic Learning*

Sai Ram,

The six articles in this cover story series are inspiring. I have always cherished a deep admiration for Swami's educational institutions. I have been there for the Annual Sports meet a couple of times, and could get the feel of the lives of pupils there. What the world needs today is exactly the same teaching/learning that happens at Swami's institutions. In a world where people go to educational institutes only because they promise them a great pay package, the Sathya Sai Institutions (School, College, University) actually stand out. In fact, I have a great respect for the people who have been educated here. These people not only know the "how" and "when" of things, but also the "why". And this is the hallmark of intelligent living. Divine Grace moulds the young minds and helps them to see things as they are - the manifestations of the Single Entity.

As an eminent educational legend said "No university can regard itself complete until it equips its students with technical/ professional expertise, proper human values and a compassionate heart." I'm happy our country has at least one school, one college and one university, and sincerely wish that we have many more real educational institutions that eliminate (mitigate, at least) *avidya* (ignorance) from human beings, at their budding stages.

Regards,

Purnima.

Sairam,

Your cover story about the inner working of Swami's School is an excellent example of unity between the teacher and the taught, with harmony, humility and selfless loving relationship pervading there. Swami's School should be the role model for the other schools in India and the rest of the world. I was impressed by the teachers' loving, caring and motivating attitude. The students' adherence to discipline, their highest sense of acquiring excellence in secular and spiritual areas and still being sincerely loving and caring for fellow students is amazing and unique.

Please bring in more short videos with students' views and their reflections about the greatness of Swami's educational system and how much they have benefited from it. I sincerely wish that other educational institutions and their administrators in India and outside India accept the principles and procedures of the Sri Sathya Sai School, to bring out the best from the students and make them the great citizens of their country.

Gopal Mehta Canada

Sai Ram,

Of late, before getting engrossed into normal office and other engagements, I look for Bhagavan's words and the articles in H2H which stay with me for the whole day. I cannot find a more inspiring way to attract one's mind to *Namasmarana*. The ongoing articles on Bhagavan's school must have evinced keen interest in the Sai Family. I am indeed blessed with Bhagavan's Grace as my son studied in Swami's School and thereafter did his graduation from Brindavan campus. At present he is doing his post graduation from Prasanthi Nilayam Campus. My daughter too has completed B.Sc (Hons.) and B.Ed. from Anantapur Campus.

I pray to Bhagavan to help discipline my mind for constant *Nishkama Namsmarana* which was so beautifully conveyed in today's H2H.

G.G.Shukla

Sai Ram,

Thanks for the wonderful inspiring cover story! I did not know so much about the school. Only when all the petals join together, it becomes a beautiful flower fit to be offered at Bhagavan's Lotus Feet! Thanks once again and keep up the good work!

Love
Veda Narayan

Dear Heart2Heart Team,

The article on the Sai School really touched me especially the photo of seniors carrying the belongings of the fresher kid. Indeed, He is rewriting the destiny of the human race, which has reached the edge of bottomless desires, through His instruments - the students of Sai institutions.

Sanjeev Menon

Sairam,

The article about the school was very nice. I studied at the school almost 15 years back, and I can say without doubt that the teachers there were the most devoted and dedicated lot. The article brought back a lot of memories.

Thanks,
Aditya, Ph D student Nashville, USA

Sai Ram,

Excellent...brought tears to my eyes.....my own memories as a student of the senior boys' hostel came alive once again.....truly refreshing, the photos and the content make it even more interestingCongratulations to Radio Sai.

Thanks,

Ganesh Seshadri, MBA, (2002-2004)

Dear Editor,

I found the cover story very inspiring and again had lots of tears running down my face. The SSS Higher Secondary School is an amazing Institution and with Swami's Grace it will change this world and fill it with Love.

Sai Ram.

Feedback on: *Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 4*

Sai Ram!

Dear Sir,

Part 4 of Sister Rani's interview was absolutely fantastic! It was extremely inspiring and gave great insight into how our beloved Swami wants us to think, behave and react. Please continue to give us such excellent articles. I am anxiously waiting for part 5! Please interview other devotees like Sister Rani so that we can read and learn more how to conduct ourselves in a proper fashion.

Best Wishes and Warmest Regards,

Sunil Daswaney.

Sai Ram,

This is one of the most inspiring H2H articles. I am going to forward this to my son and daughter. I open my computer to read H2H and all the doubts are being answered. I used to feel so far away from Sai Ma since He has kept me so long in the "Workshop". But then after I read the article, I realized that all this is for a reason. Sai Ma loves all. We should not restrict Him to being

Sathya Sai Baba, instead we should understand, learn and follow His Teachings.

Sai Ram,

Deena Bomi Motiwalla

Feedback on: *Dancing To Life’s New Tune*

“Count your blessings!” The article shouted to me... It is not uncommon for people to lose sight of what they have been blessed with. Instead of using these blessings to make this world a better place to live, unfortunately many people just complain about what they wish they had, comparing themselves with others and sulking for not being able to enjoy the pleasures of this world. The articles in Healing Touch help to heal us.

Indeed, all the people involved in the process at the Temple of Holistic Healing are very fortunate to be able to see life in its true colors and absorb its lessons. Rather I should say, be blessed with this frame of mind where all they can see is God's grace, everywhere! Good going!

Sai Ram,

Purnima

Feedback on: *The Neuroscientist Discovers New Life At His Feet*

Dear Author,

I feel compelled to share my feelings after reading Dr. Shashidharan's story which my aunt forwarded to me. My aunt knows that I am a firm believer of Bhagavan Shiva and she tried to tell me several times that Sai Baba is a reincarnation of Bhagavan Shiva, but I have difficulty believing that the Lord will walk among man on earth in these days of Kali Yuga. As a child, my grandparents had a photo of the divine Sai Baba on their altar and I would put flowers at His Feet but I thought that Sai was just a guru of my grandparents. The reason for writing is to let you know how I was deeply touched whilst reading this story. I had several goose bumps on my skin as though this was a real person sharing his experience with me. You brought tears of joy and reassurance to me. I have had some tough times in my personal life but never give up on my Lord. As I read the greatness of Sri Sai Baba and the author's experience I hope that someday I can get closer to worshipping Sai Baba as I do with Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva. Please continue to share these stories. Thank you kindly.

Special thanks to the author for sharing such a touching experience. May Sai Baba continue to guide you.

Jai Sai Ram,

Sandra Kemraj, USA

Sairam,

I am totally inspired by the article how Sai Ma has transformed Dr. Shashidharan, and has taken care of him in every walk of his life. It is only possible by the abundant Love of Swami towards His children.

S. Ravikumar, India.

Feedback on: *Mother Sai - My Heart and Soul*

Dear Heart to Heart Team,

It was a great pleasure reading this beautiful article. Mrs. Krishnaveni is blessed to have such divine experiences. Swami is our Universal Mother - a Mother whose love ever keeps us secure, all through our lives. Blessed are we to have such a divine motherly love. There is no Love that can match our Universal Mother's Love. I thank Mrs. Krishnaveni and Heart to Heart team for sharing it with us. You are really doing a great service, every time it takes the readers through all these journeys. Thank you for all that you are doing.

Sairam,

Girija

Feedback on the Quizzes

Sairam,

I attempted the Quiz and got 17/30 marks. But the wisdom I got is immeasurable. My humble thanks to all in H2H.

N. Balasubramanian

Feedback on: Prashanti Diary

Sai Ram,

My heartfelt thanks for Prashanti Diary and to the H2H Radio Sai organisation. I am working as an automobile engineer in Dubai, but I felt that I was at Prashanti Nilayam, after I read the diary.

Jai Sai Ram,

K.J. Mohansai,

General Feedback

Om Sai Ram, Brothers and Sisters,

I open the e-mail every morning at work and I enjoy reading through the good topics that you people send to me. Although I am very busy most of the time, I find the time to read Swami's teachings. You all are doing a fantastic job and just to say how grateful we are of receiving the scripts. Thank you and may God always be with you and your team.

Om Sai Ram,

B. Rambajan

Sai Ram,

I simply love your editorials. There is so much information and so well written. All personal experience stories are moving and teach us the love that is going around. I love getting the updates in my e-mail. Your journal is great. It's helping me to stay in touch with Swami, day in and day out. I look for articles from here to prepare lessons for study circles.

Pushpanaresh