

HEART 2 HEART

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BETWEEN YOU AND US

It was one of the most traumatic periods in human history. Millions of innocent lives were brutally obliterated from the face of the earth. The year was 1941. The Second World War was on, and the ruthless German armies had now invaded Poland and were plundering it. Thousands of simple people went through agonizing pain. Among them was a pious Polish Saint Maximilian Kolbe. The way he reacted to this utter human insensitivity was simply unimaginable. When the SS guard arrested him for selflessly serving the Polish refugees, most of whom were Jews, and tersely questioned him, "Do you believe in Christ?" Without losing a second, he replied "I do". And the guard struck him, mercilessly. He was asked again, and another brutal blow fell on him. But his answer never varied. This repeated many times, and then his rosary was snatched and he was locked away with little to wear and eat.

He was later deported to the infamous Auschwitz death camp. In spite of having one lung (having lost the other to tuberculosis), Fr Maximilian carried blocks of stone and the pain of the vicious blows without even a slightest murmur of complaint; he was always calm. Unbelievably, whenever the SS guards came to him, he was cheerful. The same smile shone on his lips even when the heartless men sent him away forever from this earth with a lethal injection. What was the power behind his graceful disposition?

Guru Teg Bahadur Sahibji was the ninth Guru of the Sikhs. This Master, endowed with a golden heart, traversed the breadth of colonial India from Punjab in the North to Kolkotta in the east, uplifting the lives of thousands through selfless service and the message of brotherhood. It was the time when Muslim fundamentalists had a sinister free play of their ideas; they had completely clouded the mind of the emperor of Delhi, Aurangzeb. Non-Muslims were tortured wretchedly, taxed heavily and discriminated callously to force them into accepting Islam. Utterly helpless, they came to the refuge of Guru Teg Bahadur, and the Guru pledged them all support even at the cost of his life. Emboldened, the Hindus now petitioned the Emperor, and the Guru was summoned to the Imperial Court. The Emperor gave three alternatives to the Guru. 1) to show miracles, 2) embrace Islam or 3) be ready for death. The holy one chose the last. Before his very own eyes, his beloved Sikhs were put through unmentionable tortures (they were boiled alive, wrapped in wool and set alight, etc.). Still, the only sound that emanated from his lips were the sacred lyrics from the Sikh Bible, Guru Granth Sahib. Finally, in a most dastardly manner, his head was severed from his body as he stood still, stoic and fearless as ever. Now, what was it in him that enabled him to undergo this highest sacrifice so serenely?

What is it that propelled Lord Jesus Christ to open his heart out completely at the biggest trial of his life, at the height of human cruelty, and announce to the world, "O Father! Please forgive them, for they know not what they do."

How could Lord Rama at the end of the great battle in Ramayana, grant the highest attainment, Liberation, to the very demon King who was at the root of all His 'sorrows' in His earthly drama? And to cut to the present, why is it that

Bhagavan Baba, even at the age of 83, works tirelessly and incessantly to alleviate the suffering of the poor and ignorant, announcing one mammoth service project after another? Why has He been granting *darshan* and discourse relentlessly, decade after decade, whether individuals realise its value or not? Like with all other incarnations of the Divine, now too there are those who try to systematically malign His name and challenge His Divinity. But to all of them, Bhagavan says, "People may speak ill of Me, but I have no enemies. I look after all as My children...There is nothing credible in doing good to those who love us, we must love those who harm us. Therein lies our true greatness...My only Power is Love. You are unable to fathom its depth." This is what Bhagavan said in His most recent discourse delivered on His 83rd Birthday, November 23, 2008.

The only way God can be defined, is as - Pure Love. And when portions of this crest jewel of all human emotions, saturates an individual, it creates Masters out of men and saints out of simple folks.

Two millennia ago, during that beautiful Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven; Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted; Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth..." There were eight such spirited salvos of Love. 'These beatitudes of Jesus are beautiful and powerful, no doubt,' many concur, but add, "We are not sure if they are practical; the world now is so different." True, society has changed. We are disturbed practically everyday with the societal turbulence that confronts and confounds us. The recent terrorist attacks on Mumbai landmarks have once again shaken India and the world to the horrors of hate that manifested as the mindless struck again. As a nation grieves, and the international community condemns such dastardly acts of violence, we are appalled at the depth of vacuity of human values in our own brethren with whom we live and work. But, contrary to what we think, Bhagavan Baba beautifully says in Dharma Vahini, "*Dharma* (righteousness) never declines; it is only the practice of *dharma* that diminishes." And what is *dharma*?

Again, Bhagavan enlightens. "Love in action is Righteousness." Therefore, Love is alive. In fact, it is ever effervescent; and works too, irrespective of which age we live in. To demonstrate and elucidate this emphatic message, which is so very vital in the present times, we have the cover story "The Be-Attitudes of Jesus." Truly, if we want to live in a world where *dharma* dazzles, the Beatitudes can and must become our attitudes. And how do we do it? There are plenty of illustrations, spanning from the 21st century to the times before Christ in the current cover story.

Every article in this issue has this as the underlying theme. When the state of Bihar faced its worst disaster in half a century with the completely unexpected and unprecedented flooding of River Kosi, millions of lives were marooned. The night of August 18, 2008 in this most populous and least developed state of India was the darkest. But there was a light shining. The inspired Sai volunteers, unmindful of the grave risk to their lives, undertook the most perilous of adventures in chaotic waters to reach out to the trapped, isolated and devastated. When you read this moving story in the Sai Seva section, you

will know why the Golden Age, after all, is not a utopia. All you need for a huge conflagration is a bunch of small fires at various strategic places. And many of those fires are already burning and many more are being lit.

How else can we explain the gargantuan selfless Sai service that goes on in every corner of the world? What motivates thousands from every continent of this world to flock to His Lotus feet in Prasanthi Nilayam? In a recent discourse on Convocation Day, November 22, 2008, Swami Himself explained, "Swami has not sent any invitation to anyone, but thousands have gathered here. It is only your love for Bhagavan that has drawn you here...We belong to only one party – the party of Love. Wherever you may go, you will be respected and honoured if you belong to this party of Love. Love is selfless. A true man is one without an iota of selfishness...there is no greater quality than Love."

As India's financial capital Mumbai comes to grips with the pain of 195 precious lives that were lost and thousands other wounded and scared for life, the pain and suffering are unbearable. In this mind numbing scenario, the only balm that is holding Mumbai together is selfless love in the form of a united front from Mumbai residents, regardless of their caste, religion or language. Bhagavan Baba tells us that Love as action is Nonviolence. Strange but true, the only emotion that can salvage the world and heal Mumbai and all other trouble spots in the world is selfless love.

When you read the story of Robert A. Bozzani in the Swami and Me section, you will get a real glimpse of how we can transform our lives and our immediate surroundings, if only we fill ourselves with this powerful element – Love. Another compelling real-life story of Love doing wonders is in the Get Inspired section. Don't miss "The Love Alchemy."

The great Nobel laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore said, "He who wants to do good, knocks at the gate. He who loves, finds the gates open." There is no problem that Love cannot solve, if we only care to ponder over it deeply.

Let us dive into this sublime virtue, make it the *raison d'être* of our existence, just as it was with Jesus and now is with Sai. For, truly, if we have Love, our life is never dull, it is always meaningful!

Loving regards,
Heart2Heart Team.

SPIRITUAL BLOSSOMS

SATHYA SAI SPEAKS

The Divine Unity of Humanity

More than two and half decades ago, Bhagavan Baba sent a powerful message to an International Symposium held in Rome on October 30-31, 1983 on the theme "Unity is Divinity." Each directive in this message is profound and extremely pertinent for all times, and more so in the present world scenario. It is for this reason that we have dug this out from our archives to place it before you. As you read excerpts of this Divine Message below, do ruminate upon them and try to make them a part of your understanding and conduct in your daily societal life.

Embodiments of the Divine Spirit!

The ancient saying, "All roads lead to Rome," has been vindicated today. It is not without great significance that people from many countries have gathered in this historic city. You have to realise that you have come here to learn things which you have never heard before, and to derive inspiration from new ideals about the human adventure.

The whole of mankind belongs to one Religion - the Religion of Man. For all men, God is the Father. As the children of one God, all men are brothers. This Conference is therefore a family gathering. It is not a meeting of nationalities and religions. It is a meeting of minds. It does not relate to any one culture or philosophy. It is concerned with the Divine way of life that is implicit in the teachings of all religions. Its purpose is to see Unity in Divinity.

The One Truth of all Religions

The basic truth in all religions, irrespective of country or race, is one and the same. The philosophic ideas or the practices and methods of approach may vary. But the final objective and goal is only one - all religions proclaim the Unity of Divinity and preach the cultivation of Universal Love, without regard to caste, creed, country or colour. Those who are ignorant of this basic Truth develop pride and ego because of their own religion. Such people are creating great confusion and chaos by fragmenting Divinity. To confine and divide the Infinite Divine into such narrow compartments is treason to the Divine.

The basis for a spiritual, God based life is the indwelling Spirit - the *Aathman* (Divine soul). The body is the home of Spirit. Life in society should also conform to this spiritual basis. Man, however, bases his life on the belief that the body alone is real. It is to rid him of this error that he has to be taught about the Spirit. Mankind has to realize that both the individual and society are manifestations of the Divine Will and that the Divine permeates the Universe. Only by recognizing this Truth can man give up his ego and lead a life of devotion to duty. Society should not become a cockpit of selfish individuals, but a community of divinely guided Individuals.

With the progress of science, man imagines that he is the lord of the universe and he tends to forget the Divine. Although man today has gone to the moon and is exploring outer space, if he were to consider the innumerable mysteries and wonders in creation yet to be known, he will realize that these are far beyond the limited capacity of mind and intelligence. The more man discovers the secrets and mysteries of the Cosmos, the more he will realize that God is the Creator and motivator of all Creation. All religions are agreed upon this Truth. All that man can do is to strive through his limited intelligence and knowledge to understand the Invisible and Infinite Divine and learn to worship and adore Him.

Service to Society is the Means to Promote Unity

Instead of realizing his innate Divinity, man is caught up in the prison house of his own material achievements. Greater than all his scientific and technological progress is man himself as a being endowed with the Divine consciousness. By choosing to regard only the material world as real, it may be possible to bring about the prosperity of a scientific, technological and materialistic society for a time. But if, in the process, human selfishness, greed and hatred develop, as they usually do, society will destroy itself.

If, on the contrary, the essential Divinity of man is realized, mankind can build up a great society based on unity and on adherence to the Divine principle of Love. This profound change must begin in the minds of individuals.

When individuals change, society will change. And when society changes, the whole world will change. Unity is the secret of social progress, and service to society is the means to promote it. Everyone, therefore, should devote oneself to such service in a spirit of dedication. It should be realized that material comfort is not the sole aim of social living. A society in which the individuals are concerned only about material welfare will not be able to achieve harmony and peace. Even if it is achieved, it will only be a patched-up harmony, for, in such a society, the strong will oppress the weak.

Nor will an equal distribution of the bounties of nature ensure anything but a nominal equality. How will the equal distribution of material goods achieve equality with reference to desires and abilities? Desires have, therefore, to be controlled by developing the spiritual approach and diverting the mind from material objects to the Divine seated in each one's heart.

Divine Experience is Inherent Nature of Man

Once the Truth of the Indwelling Spirit is recognized, there dawns the awareness that the world is one family. One is then filled with Divine Love which becomes the driving force for all of one's actions, and man turns away from the pursuit of endless desires to the search for peace and equanimity. By converting the love for material things into Love of God one experiences the Divine. This experience is not something which is beyond man. It is, in fact, a

part of the inherent nature of man. It is the secret of his humanness and his Divinity.

Whatever one's religion may be, everyone should cultivate respect for other faiths. One who does not have such an attitude of tolerance and respect for other religions is not a true follower of his/her own religion. It is not enough merely to adhere strictly to the practices of one's own religion. One should also try to see the essential unity of all religions. Only then will man be able to experience the oneness of Divinity. There should be no kind of coercion or compulsion in the sphere of religion. Religious matters should be discussed calmly and dispassionately. Do not entertain the feeling that one's religion is superior and another's inferior. Conflicts on the basis of religion should be totally eliminated. To divide men on grounds of religion is a crime against humanity.

Man today imagines that he knows everything about Nature and the Universe. But of what use is all this knowledge if man does not know himself? It is only when he understands himself that he will be able to know the Truth about the external world. Man's inner Reality cannot be known by exploring the world outside. When he turns his vision inward and realizes his essential Divinity, he will acquire an equal-mindedness towards all beings. Out of that feeling of oneness he will experience the Bliss that passeth understanding.

*- Divine Message to the International Symposium in Rome on the theme
"Unity is Divinity," held on 30 and 31-10-1983*

CONVERSATIONS WITH SAI
Satyopanishad - part 11:
Direct Directions from the Divine

Dear Reader, in response to your positive feedback to this section where we have a conversation with the Divine, we continue with Prof. Anil Kumar's 'Satyopanishad' after completing Dr. John Hislop's series 'Conversations with Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba' in January 2008.

This series is also 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, and 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 begin the fourth chapter: The Outer Door.

Chapter 4 – The Outer Door
(Continued from the previous issue)

Prof. Anil Kumar: Bhagavan! Should we follow any discipline or regulation in our food habits? Is that necessary for our spiritual pursuit? Sai devotees all over the world are vegetarians because of Your teachings; this is amazing. However, we have none today to tell us matters relating to our food habits. Kindly direct us.

Bhagavan:

*As is the food, so is the mind.
As is the mind, so are our thoughts.
As is the thought, so is the action.
As is the action, so is the result.*

Therefore, the result depends on the food you eat. Meticulously and unerringly, you should follow discipline in your food habits. Food, Head, and God are to be viewed in this sequence. As is your food, so is your head; as is the condition of your head, so is the manifestation of God in you.

You should not eat too much. You eat to live and never live to eat. Eating in excess is a *tamasika* quality. If you eat once a day, you are a yogi; if you eat twice a day you are a *rogi* (sick). If you take *sattvika*, soft, and balanced food in moderate quantity, you develop *sattvika* or a pious mind. However, if you eat *rajasika*, spicy, hot food you will have *rajasika* or an emotionally agitated mind, and if you have *tamasika* food, that is meat, alcohol, and so on, you will have *tamasika* or a bestial, dull, and passive mind. So, it is food that shapes the mind, and on this your actions depend, leading to their corresponding consequences.

You should also think of *patrasuddhi*, the cleanliness of the vessels and utensils used; *padarthasuddhi*, purity of the materials; *pakasuddhi*, clean method of preparation or cooking; and *bhavasuddhi*, purity of the thought of the person who cooks the food. You shouldn't eat food offered to you everywhere.

A few years ago, there lived a *sanyasi* (ascetic) who on invitation dined at the residence of a businessman. That night this *sanyasi*, a celibate and spiritual seeker, could not sleep. Somehow, he fell asleep very late, and had a dream in which he saw a sixteen-year-old girl shedding tears. Then, this *sanyasi* went to his guru and told him about the dream. The guru meditated for some time and told him the reason behind the dream. The day on which the businessman invited him for dinner happened to be the eleventh day after the death of his sixteen-year-old wife and he was performing the traditional special rites.

Since the *sanyasi* ate the food cooked for the occasion, the girl who had died appeared in the dream with tears in her eyes. The young girl's father was very poor and could hardly maintain his family. So, much against her wish, he gave her in marriage to this aged businessman. Out of frustration, she committed suicide by jumping into a well. The businessman had been performing her customary funeral rites and on the eleventh day requested the *sanyasi* to come over to his house for meals. This is the whole story behind the *sanyasi*'s dream. Hence, without discrimination, you shouldn't eat any food offered to you.

A similar thing happened once to a disciple of Swami Nityananda. One day, he went out of the *ashram* and ate food outside. While returning, he stole from a house a silver tumbler and brought it to the *ashram*. But soon, he felt very sad over this action of his. He cried and repented. The next morning, he went to his guru and confessed the whole incident. Because of his spiritual power, Nityananda could find out the reason. He said to his disciple, "Well, the food you had outside the *ashram* was prepared by a cook who at one time happened to be a thief, and as a result you developed the instinct to steal." Therefore, cooks must have purity of thought.

Further, you should feel your body as light after eating, as before eating. The best thing is to keep half of your stomach empty. The remaining half should be filled in with water and other foodstuffs. Tubers are not good for the body. You should not drink whole milk. You should mix some water in your milk before drinking. You should have a minimum interval of four hours between two meals. You should take food, which gives you enough calories needed for the body. You shouldn't have too much of oily and fried curries. Sleep a while after lunch, and walk a mile after dinner. You should work hard and eat well.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! In Your organization or your institutions, workers, students, teachers, devotees and doctors wear the white dress always. Why? What is the reason?

Bhagavan: White symbolizes purity and cleanliness. A pure white cloth may be compared to a clean mirror. If dust gathers on the mirror, you will not be

able to see your reflection clearly. Similarly, *buddhi* or intellect is like a clean white cloth. It is only then that you will be able to find out your own faults and apply your discrimination to rectify them. Today, this does not happen. People are able to see clearly the mistakes of others but don't find their own faults. If you stand in front of a mirror, you see your reflection. But, if you turn it towards another man, naturally you will find his reflection. Isn't it so? Similarly, the mirror of your *buddhi* or intellect is turned towards others, and this makes you see the mistakes of others.

Even the slightest spot or mark is very clearly visible on a white dress. If you wear a colored dress, you don't see dirt, spots, or any other stains. This is wrong. You should never hide and cover the dirt on your person. You should immediately wash it off. You should share the good with others. Neither good nor bad should be in you. You should shed the bad in you and share the good with others. But, some of you keep the good to yourselves and distribute the bad to others. It is a mistake on your part to do so.

Lord Siva offers you the best way by setting forth an ideal to this world. He kept and retained poison in His throat. So, He is *Nilakantha*, the blue-throated God. But, the cool and comforting moonlight from the moon over His head is distributed to others. It is for this purpose of sharing comfort with others that He kept the moon on His head.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Today Sai devotees are spread all over the world. They range from Heads of Governments to ordinary citizens. As Your devotees, they enjoy special respect and esteem in society. What is the key to this?

Bhagavan: Naturally so! This is the effect of the company you are in. Even the string that passes through and binds the flowers in a garland acquires a value. The rat as the vehicle of Lord Ganesh is also worshipped. The bull as the vehicle of Lord Siva is respected. Likewise, all the vehicles of all our deities are worshipped.

Once, Lord Vishnu sent a message to Siva through His vehicle, Garuda, the eagle. As Garuda was flying fast with the message and was about to land near Siva, due to severe gusts of wind from his wings, the dust rose up as in a dust storm. Watching this, the snakes adorning the neck of Siva started hissing at Garuda ready to bite him. Then, Garuda replied to the snakes, "You are with Siva, so you are hissing at me fearlessly. You come out of the Lord and see what will happen to you! I can finish you off in no time." In the same manner, since you are with Me, you are respected and served. If you are away from Me, you will be put to infamy and humiliation.

You should not run after all silly, worldly things, like the common flies that land on anything and everything. Like honeybees you should only draw honey from flowers. Look at the person who drives the car of the President of India. He can never act as a common taxi driver. Similarly, those who sing the glory of God shouldn't run after people for petty favors.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! We visit temples religiously. We go on pilgrimage once in a while. We continue to do our rituals and religious acts. But there is no cognizable change in our life pattern. Why is this so?

Bhagavan: Worship, penance, meditation, *bhajan*, and so on are sacred activities that make your life meaningful, purposeful, and useful. But you can't brand them as spiritual. All these are good actions and help you to spend time in a sacred way. Anything that you do with your mind (ego, 'I-ness') can't be spiritual. The true spiritual path is *atmavicara*, self-enquiry.

The seeker should know that he/she is not the *deha* (body), the *manas* (mind), or the *buddhi* (intellect) and that his/her *atma* (true self) is beyond time and space. The self is not a *nama* (name) or a *rupa* (form) with which it is identified in this transient world. *Atma* is eternal, pure, and non-dual. True spirituality is the awareness of the *atma*. This is Brahman, the divinity which is spread all over in all creatures according to the scripture which says "*eko vasi sarvabhutantaratma*." True spirituality alone can make you experience this awareness. But you find many forms of religious practice in the name of spirituality. The *prasadam* or sacrificial food offered to God is actually eaten by the devotees. They just show it to a picture or an image of God and it is then consumed by them only (*cupulu* and *mepulu* in Telugu). If God really starts taking anything offered to Him, I am sure no one would offer Him anything.

Always remember that *tyaga* (sacrifice) is the highest and the best form of *sadhana*. You have to sacrifice your time, money, resources, and energy. You should at least offer a *tulasi* leaf to God in worship. So, *tyagenaike amr tatvamanasuh*. Sacrifice makes you attain immortality. *Tyaga* is yoga, spiritual exercise.

Love expresses itself as sacrifice. Love without sacrifice is meaningless and totally selfish. You have to sacrifice the body feeling or attachment to the body. You have to sacrifice your wicked thoughts and bad feelings. Sacrifice is your true nature. Sacrifice is a divine quality gifted to man. In fact, you are not doing anything great and special by sacrifice. You are doing it for your own self.

A yogi noticed a cow struggling for life in a river. He went and rescued it. Someone asked him, "Why did you save the cow?" The yogi replied, "I saved the cow for my own happiness. I couldn't see the cow struggling and suffering." Many might have passed that way and noticed the cow in its miserable plight, but none did a thing to save it. Therefore, sacrifice is an opportunity given to man.

There is another small story. A householder one day wanted to serve food to a Brahmin as part of a ritual he was performing. He could get one poor old Brahmin who agreed to dine at his house. The Brahmin came and hurriedly started eating the food placed before him. The householder thought, "What a Brahmin is he? He didn't even take his bath and do any puja before taking the food. It is not *punya*, meritorious to feed such a man." He grew so angry with the old Brahmin that he beat him with a stick and drove him out holding him by the neck.

On that day when the householder was asleep, he had a dream in which God appeared and said to him "Why did you invite the old Brahmin for food and beat him? Why did you turn him out wringing his neck? After all, you could not feed him even for one day while I have been giving him food all these eighty years! What a shame!"

Tyaga is above any restrictions and stipulations. A mother is ready to sacrifice her life for her child. Why? It is only love that makes her sacrifice. Trees sacrifice fruits so that you may eat them. No tree takes its own fruits. Rivers flow and sacrifice water to quench your thirst. The cow yields milk and sacrifices it for all of you to drink and nurture your body. Your body too is intended for sacrifice, *Paropakarakardhamidam s'ariram*.

Worship, *bhajan*, and such other external activities are less than *seva* and sacrifice. The hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray. Love of God is devotion, which has to be expressed as sacrifice. Love is sacrifice. Sacrifice is *Prema yoga*, the path of love to God. Sacrifice is yoga. If you have this faith, devotion and steadfastness would get strengthened and deep rooted. Through the path of *jnana* (self-enquiry) proceed to *atmavicara*, follow and experience God. It is said, *jnanadeva tu kaivalyam*, the practical wisdom obtained from *tyaga* is the only way to *kaivalyam* (liberation). This is a process beyond the mind and the activity performed by the body. Only then will you be able to achieve the expected results and attain *ananda* (bliss).

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Why do we differ? Why does our behavior vary? What is the root cause behind these differences? How are we to cultivate good ideals and ways in life?

Bhagavan: Since you have not studied and understood human nature wholly, you get this doubt. Man is a combination of three primary qualities, demonic, bestial, and human. It is the human quality that helps you to attain divinity.

Take, for example, an orange fruit. It consists of an outer bitter skin, hard seeds, and a soft juicy pulp. Likewise, a human being has a demonic nature like the outer bitter skin of an orange, bestial temperament like the hard seeds, and finally the human values like the soft juicy pulp. If we take, for instance, the ripe tamarind fruit, its outer skin is the bestial nature, its hard seeds symbolize the demonic nature, while its soft pulp is like human nature. If the pulp joins the seed, that is, if human nature is in association with demonic behavior, it manifests itself like a demon. Similarly, if the soft pulp associates itself with the outer skin, that is, if human nature joins bestial behavior, he behaves like a beast.

So, more or less, this depends on the association, be it demonic or bestial. This is the root cause of all the differences. But it is the human value that makes you ideal and enables you to experience divinity. There lies the sweetness and purpose of life.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Is it necessary for us to observe austerity and follow discipline only inside an *ashram* or should we follow them in the society outside as well?

Bhagavan: I suggest that you follow discipline and lead a simple life wherever you live. You may go to any place, you should always follow *niyama* (discipline), have *sraddha* (sincerity), and take to *sadhana* (spiritual practice). This is the spiritual way of life.

Out of two sick persons, one may be treated as an outpatient and the other may be admitted to a hospital depending on the ailment. But, both should necessarily take medicine for a cure, should they not? Similarly, you may reside in an *ashram* or outside, but you should definitely follow discipline, be simple, and lead a spiritual life. As individuals caught in the cycle of birth and death, *Bhava roga*, you need to take the medicine of *sadhana*.

Prof. Anil Kumar: Swami! Some people pose challenges that are quite unwarranted. Pious and noble people are disturbed and agitated in such situations. What should we do with those who challenge us unnecessarily?

Bhagavan: Only egoistic and jealous people with bodily attachment challenge in this manner. Aspirants and seekers should not be disturbed by these challenges. You should not react to their words and be affected thereby. A cow that grazes in a field may challenge another cow. A pig that feeds on dirty matter can challenge another pig. Should man, who takes good food, challenge a pig? You can talk to an equal, but not to everyone. Don't respond to everyone and lose your peace. In fact, you should face a challenge, if you must, in this way, "Do you help everyone as I do? Have you taken up welfare programmes as I have done? Are you broadminded like me? How many people have you transformed into the righteous way of life?" People should have healthy competition. You should not challenge for petty, low, and mean things.

CHINNA KATHA

Fortified By Faith

During the Second World War, a steamer carrying Indian soldiers was bombed by a Japanese aircraft and was sunk. Many lost their lives. However, five among them managed to board a lifeboat and hoped to survive in spite of the surging ocean. They were tossed about for many hours.

One of them became desperate and cried, "The sea will swallow me. I will be a meal for the sharks!" Due to such fear, he drowned.

Another warrior wept for his family, "Oh, I am dying without arranging for the future of my family." He too lost faith and breathed his last.

The third soldier thought, "I have with me the insurance policy and other documents. What a pity! I should have kept them at home. What will my wife do now? I am sure to die." Needless to say, he too lost hope and died.

The other two men, however, reinforced each other's faith in God. They said, "We shall not yield to fear. We shall prove that however desperate the situation may be, God will certainly protect us if we have faith in Him."

Even as they were encouraging each other in this manner, a helicopter sent from a coastal ship, which had received signals for help, caught sight of these two men and hauled them up. When they were safe on land, they said, "It is only five minutes between victory and defeat. Faith earned the victory; lack of it brought about defeat and death."

- Baba

COVER STORY

THE 'BE-ATTITUDES' OF JESUS

...Through the lives of enlightened souls and divine incarnations

Every December, devout Christians around the world revisit the message of Jesus Christ with renewed vigour, and examine its relevance to our contemporary lives. The term "Beatitudes" refers to the eight life lessons that Jesus delivered during the Sermon on the Mount.

Two thousand years later, what was good advice then, is still so for anyone keen to live for a higher purpose.

Apart from their timeless appeal, the Beatitudes transcend cross-cultural barriers and apply in inter-faith contexts as much as they did when Jesus spoke His words of wisdom, drawn straight from the Spirit, to the suffering Jews.

As a tribute to the one whom the Christians worship as the son of God, and the rest of humanity looks up to as a universal Master, in this Christmas month, Heart2Heart examines the practical quotient of the Beatitudes and their place in our lives and times.

Do the Beatitudes belong to seminary discussions, speeches and sermons, or can they actually be lived? Can the talk be walked? Has anyone really done so? If so, when, where, how and most importantly, were they all Christians?

Join us in this journey to discover the state of bliss that is yet another definition of the Beatitudes, and that can be unlocked when the Beatitudes become truly the *be-attitudes* of our lives.

The Birth of the Beatitudes

When Lord Jesus began His first address to a large crowd gathered at His feet on a hillside in Galilee, Israel, He began with His most radical teachings – The Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes are a series of eight blessings through which Jesus succinctly portrayed the character of a person who truly and powerfully walks the spiritual path to God. In these poetical phrases, Jesus laid down the golden path traversing which every man and woman, be it in Israel or Iceland, Africa or Australia, pauper or king maker, could envelope their self with divine light. It is these eight sublime tenets with which Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount, the revolutionary discourse that shocked His listeners, who were used to the traditions of Judaism.

In this first Sermon, Jesus gave a new and revolutionary dispensation of the path to God: He reinterpreted Mosaic Law, and in particular, the Ten Commandments; condemned the 'good works' of fasting, giving alms, and prayers when they are only done for show; expounded the Lord's Prayer; and denounced those who judge others before first judging themselves.

The Beatitudes were His opening salvo - a torpedo of love to shake humanity awake from material values and a fixation on the world of the senses. Centuries have rolled by, but even today the Beatitudes surprise and tantalise us, they awaken and illumine us as they are all reversals of commonly held beliefs and attitudes. The powerful declarations embedded in them pull us away from earthly and worldly rewards and redirect us within, to the inner world of God's grace and purity.

Sermon on the Mount: Divine Discourse Delivered at a Dangerous Time and Place

More than two thousand years ago, when Jesus began His ministry among the Jewish people, the world was a dangerous place. The Roman occupiers were wholly in control and life was often harsh and brutal for the Jews. They longed for release from their problems and many prayed for the expected Messiah to come and save them, and usher in the Kingdom of Heaven.

For many Jews, this new Kingdom would very naturally involve the overthrow of the Romans and a restoration of the rights, dignity and aspirations of the Jewish people. Of course, they would expect greater material gains as most of their wealth was being siphoned off as taxes to their Roman masters.

However, Jesus' first teachings to His people were not what any ordinary person would have expected. Jesus did not give the people what they wanted – He gave them what they needed; that is, if they had the eyes to see and ears to hear. He taught that "The Kingdom of heaven was within" and the Beatitudes are His testimonial to that fact, for they point to an inner living reality open to all.

Inside-Out Transformation: Sermon Marks Radical Departure from Conventional Ethos

Scholars and seekers alike see the Beatitudes as a completely new life of the spirit, whose values are totally at odds with a worldly life, but if practiced, powerful enough to completely transform our attitudes, goals and lifestyle.

By the time He delivered this powerful message, the compassionate Lord Jesus Christ, had already established Himself as a great spiritual teacher, orator and healer of the sick. Crowds were following Him from all around. Just before Jesus delivered the Beatitudes to His followers, the Bible records that:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-

possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Gospel of Matthew, chapter 4, v23-25

The people had faith in Him. He was tall and robust, with fiery eyes that blazed a divine light. He had just withstood the temptations of the devil in the wilderness; and now, wholly sanctified and ascending into His full power He was ready to save His flock. And He used choice and chaste words to attract them. His pronouncements were piercing and He spoke only to teach and guide those around Him, those who looked up to Him. Already a few had become his pledged disciples, like Peter, Andrew, James and John. The people were ready to listen to His message – but could they assimilate it? Were they able to understand the profound and deep meaning that could change their lives? And in the same vein, are we, as we read His words afresh?

Jesus opened His Sermon on the Mount with the most powerful directives ever given to man. As He taught His followers, there could be no doubt as to His stature, His authority and the divine origin of His wisdom. Here are those timeless assertions from the Divine, one by one, each one as pointed and powerful as the other.

I. "BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN."

What was Lord Jesus trying to convey through this first declaration? What does 'being poor in spirit' mean? Simply this: 'My child, don't rely on your ego; don't let worldly pride and assertiveness take hold. Be humble and gentle, then God will bless you; you will be welcomed into God's kingdom.'

The truly 'poor in spirit' are completely empty of ego and their hearts are entirely open to the Word and World of God. Like empty cups, God can fill them with humility and inner peace, which keeps them ever acting from the Will of God. A man who shines by way of being 'poor in spirit' will never put himself first; he lives only to bring comfort and joy in others' lives. A glorious example of this is the life of St. Maximilian Kolbe. One of Christianity's much revered modern day saints, St. Kolbe lead an extraordinary life of sacrifice, which will stand out forever in the history of mankind.

The Life of St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941) – A Saga of Divine Humility

St. Kolbe was born as the second son of a poor weaver on 8 January, 1894 at Zdunska Wola near Lodz in Poland, and was given the baptismal name of Raymond. Both his parents were devout Christians with a particular devotion to Mary. In his infancy, Raymond seems to have been normally mischievous, but one day, after his mother had scolded him for some misadventure or other, her words took deep effect on him and brought about a radical change in the child's behaviour. Later, explaining this change, he said: "That night, I asked the Mother of God what was to become of me. Then she came to me holding

two crowns, one white, the other red. She asked me if I was willing to accept either of these crowns. The white one meant that I should persevere in purity, and the red that I should become a martyr. I said that I would accept them both." Thus, very early the child believed and accepted that he was destined for martyrdom. His belief in his dream coloured all his future actions.

In 1907, Raymond and his elder brother entered a junior Franciscan seminary in Lwow. Here he excelled in mathematics and physics, and his teachers predicted a brilliant future for him in science. Others, seeing his passionate interest in all things military, saw in him a future strategist. For a time indeed, his interest in military affairs together with his fiery patriotism made him lose interest in the idea of becoming a priest. The fulfillment of his dream would lie in saving Poland from her oppressors as a soldier. But before he could tell anyone about his decision, his mother announced that, as all their children were now in seminaries, she and her husband intended to enter religious life. Raymond hadn't the heart to upset his parents' plans, and so he abandoned his idea of joining the army and decided to carry out his aspiration to be a priest.

He was received as a novice of the Franciscan monks in September 1910 and with the habit he took the new name of Maximilian. From 1912 to 1915, he was in Rome studying philosophy. On April 18, 1918, he was ordained in Rome. He lived the next 21 years as a passionate and exemplary Franciscan monk until the Second World War broke out. The Nazis overran Poland as their first conquest and began their ruthless oppression of the Polish peoples.

By September 1939, Maximilian began to organize a shelter for 3,000 Polish refugees, among whom were 2,000 Jews. "We must do everything in our power to help these unfortunate people who have been driven from their homes and deprived of even the most basic necessities." The friars shared everything they had with the refugees. They housed, fed and clothed them, and brought all their machinery into use in their service.

Inevitably, the community came under suspicion and was watched closely. On 17 February 1941, he was arrested and sent to the infamous Pawiak prison in Warsaw. Here he was singled out for special ill-treatment. A witness tells us that in March of that year, an SS guard, seeing this man in his habit girdled with a rosary, asked if he believed in Christ. When the priest calmly replied, "I do", the guard struck him. The SS man repeated his question several times and receiving always the same answer went on beating him mercilessly. Shortly afterwards the Franciscan habit was taken away and a prisoner's garment was substituted.

On 28 May, Fr Maximilian was with over 300 others who were deported from Pawiak to the infamous Auschwitz death camp. He was put to work immediately carrying blocks of stone for the construction of a crematorium wall. The work went on all day without a stop and had to be done running --- with the aid of vicious blows from the guards. Despite having only one lung, (the other had been lost to tuberculosis) Father Maximilian accepted the work and the blows with surprising calm. Sometimes his colleagues would try to come to

his aid but he would not expose them to danger. **Always he replied, "Mary gives me strength. All will be well." At this time he wrote to his mother, "Do not worry about me or my health, for the good Lord is everywhere and holds every one of us in His great love."**

In Aushchwitz, where hunger and hatred reigned and faith evaporated, this holy man opened his heart to others and spoke of God's infinite love. He seemed never to think of himself. When food was brought in and everyone struggled to get his place in the queue so as to be sure of a share, Fr Maximilian stood aside, so that frequently there was none left for him. At other times, he shared his meagre ration of soup or bread with others. He was once asked whether such self-abnegation made sense in a place where every man was engaged in a struggle or survival, and he answered: **"Every man has an aim in life. For most men it is to return home to their wives and families, or to their mothers. For my part, I give my life for the good of all men."**

Men gathered in secret to hear his words of love and encouragement, but it was his example which touched everyone the most. Fr Zygmunt Rusczak remembers: "Each time I saw Fr Kolbe in the courtyard I felt within myself an extraordinary effusion of his goodness. Although he wore the same ragged clothes as the rest of us, with the same tin can hanging from his belt, one forgot his wretched exterior and was conscious only of the charm of his inspired countenance and of his radiant holiness."

There remained only the last act in the drama. The events are recorded in the sworn testimonials of former inmates of the camp, collected as part of the beatification proceedings. They tell us this moving story:

Tadeusz Joachimowski, clerk of Block 14A: "In the summer of 1941, the camp siren announced that there had been an escape. The commander announced that on account of the escape of the three prisoners, ten prisoners would be picked in reprisal from the blocks in which the fugitives had lived and would be assigned to the Bunker (the underground starvation cell)."

Jan Jakub Zegidewicz takes up the story from there: "After the group of doomed men had already been selected, a prisoner stepped out from the ranks of one of the Blocks. I recognized Fr Kolbe. Owing to my poor knowledge of German, I did not understand what they talked about, nor do I remember whether Fr Kolbe spoke directly to the commander. When making his request, Fr Kolbe stood at attention and pointed at a former non-commissioned officer known to me from the camp. It could be inferred from the expression on commander's face that he was surprised at Fr Kolbe's action. As the sign was given, Fr Kolbe joined the ranks of the doomed and the non-commissioned officer left. A little later, the doomed men were marched off in the direction of Block 13, the death Block."

The non-commissioned officer was Franciszek Gajowniczek. When the sentence of doom had been pronounced, Gajowniczek had cried out in despair, "Oh, my poor wife, my poor children. I shall never see them again." It was then that the unexpected had happened, and that from among the ranks

of those temporarily reprieved, Fr Kolbe had stepped forward and offered himself in the other man's place. Then the ten condemned men were led off to the dreaded Bunker, to the airless underground cells where men died slowly without food or water.

Bruno Borgowiec, an eyewitness, recalls what happened: "In the cell of the poor wretches, there were daily loud prayers, the rosary and singing, in which prisoners from neighbouring cells also joined. When no SS men were in the Block, I went to the Bunker to talk to the men and comfort them. Fervent prayers and songs to the Holy Mother resounded in all the corridors of the Bunker. I had the impression I was in a church. Fr Kolbe was leading and the prisoners responded in unison. They were often so deep in prayer that they did not even hear that inspecting SS men had descended to the Bunker; and the voices fell silent only at the loud yelling of their visitors. ...Fr Kolbe bore up bravely, he did not beg and did not complain, but raised the spirits of the others. ...Since they had grown very weak, prayers were now only whispered. At every inspection, when almost all the others were now lying on the floor, Fr Kolbe was seen kneeling or standing in the centre as he looked cheerfully in the face of the SS men.

Two weeks passed in this way. Meanwhile one after another, they died, until only Fr Kolbe was left. This, the authorities felt, was too long; the cell was needed for new victims. So one day they brought in the head of the sick-quarters, a German, a common criminal named Bock, who gave Fr Kolbe an injection of carbolic acid in the vein of his left arm. Fr Kolbe, with a prayer on his lips, himself gave his arm to the executioner. Unable to watch this, I left under the pretext of work to be done. Immediately after the SS men with the executioner had left, I returned to the cell, where I found Fr Kolbe leaning in a sitting position against the back wall with his eyes open and his head dropping sideways. His face was calm and radiant."

By living this Beatitude in its truest and literal sense, in his thought, word and deed, St. Kolbe rose above all divisions, including the racial divide. There were no Jews and non-Jews for him. All was one. In that state of inner unity, he experienced a state of equanimity and bliss otherwise unimaginable under his circumstances. The *poor in spirit* are indeed ever full of rejoicing and thanks to God, because they have overcome their ego, and rest in the presence of God. Their strength comes directly from God; they spread only love, and indeed, they live in the ever present 'Kingdom of God' forever. They inspire not a few hundreds, but millions for centuries.

II. "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY WILL BE COMFORTED."

Jesus was living with a people who continued to suffer terribly. The Romans did not hesitate to abuse and exploit the Jews, and it was only three decades before that King Herod commanded all babies to be murdered as he feared the portent of the baby Jesus, as told to him by the three wise men.

There is nothing more welcoming to a sorrowing person than to know that one's pain will come to an end. Did not Lord Krishna give Arjuna a slip of paper with the words "This too will end" when he and the Pandavas were in the midst of terrible travail? And in our times, numerous are the instances when Lord Sai has reached out and bestowed upon us His sacred Grace; either spiritually to nourish our souls and give us the strength to go through the pain, or through needed practical changes in our lives which only He could have arranged! Everyday, in this age, we see this Beatitude in action! Here is one such telling story of Grace from the husband of a lady, whose life was wracked by a condition known as osteomalacia:

"Aaspathrulu, doctorlu, mandulu... emi akkara ledu" (Hospitals, doctors' medicines... no need for any of them). "Oka naadu, nenu, tak tak tak! Anni sari chesthanu." (One day, tak, tak, tak. Like that, I shall set right everything!).

*Baba told me thus, snapping his fingers to produce the sound, **tak... tak... tak**, when He spoke. I was overwhelmed with joy and thankfulness; for, just imagine what He was promising to set right: My wife was suffering since three years from acute osteomalacia, with pathological fractures of the pelvic bones. The doctors were sure about that; many experts had examined her with great care. They had told me that prolonged stay in bed and persistent treatment might be able to give some relief. I was also informed that the condition was due to the absorption of the osseous substance of the bones, which causes, as in my wife's case, softening and rarefaction, followed by spontaneous fracture. She was emaciated and exhausted, the pelvic bones were affected much; she had become extremely weak. Her spine was hurting a lot and the doctors said, she will be bed-ridden for years and her limbs will become shortened and useless. Opiates and drugs to dull the pain were the only medicine that could be given, besides various costly experimental palliatives.*

What a terrible life for a poor middle class family with five children and the breadwinner holding a Government job, requiring frequent long journeys! I was hit very hard by the calamity. No one held out the slightest hope. Baba was my refuge, some good friend said. I came to Puttaparthi, I was called by Baba and this was what He said, "One day, tak, tak, tak....I shall set right everything!" Now, you know why I was so full of joy and thankfulness.

Well, I returned home to Besagarahalli, in Mandya District (in the South Indian State of Karnataka). Three months passed and there was no improvement in her physical condition. In fact, she became worse; my faith in Baba began to waver. My home was a cell of pain and grief. Without regular food and sleep, racked by pain and worry, my wife became a shadow of her former self. Baba's words were her only solace. She and I held on to them, in spite of the despair.

I awoke one morning rather early, because I had to leave for a distant village on Government work. And I found the lamp burning in our kitchen. Surprised, I called out, "Who is there?" It was my wife who replied. Yes! She had lit the fire and... would you believe it? She was preparing coffee for me!

*She said, she had a dream; or, was it a dream? Baba had come to her bedside and ordered her to get up, come down from the cot and do Namaskaram to Him! And, she had obeyed! While she was at His Feet, Baba with many a consoling word, patted gently on the diseased joints... she could hear the sound the bones made inside her... **Tak, Tak, Tak!** She had become quite right. "Anni sari Chesthanu - I will make everything alright", He had said. He had kept His Word! When she looked up, after a while, with tears of gratitude in her eyes, the Lord had disappeared. She amazed all of us, and of course the doctors. And from that very day she had started her daily routine of work, as if nothing at all had happened to her.*

The bone specialist who had studied the X-ray photographs of my wife was informed of this miraculous overnight cure. He declared, "During my five years stay abroad, I could not see a single case of osteomalacia cured, among the several which I treated. It is beyond the ken of a human physician. God has blessed you!" Nothing is impossible for Baba. What He says, happens!

(From Heart2Heart Archives, Aug 1, 2004 issue)

Pain and suffering seem to be the recurrent theme in all instances of spiritual renewal; for, those who mourn, earn themselves the right to God's direct intervention. And how numerous are these instances when we have seen Sai's compassion flow out so spontaneously. Only last month, Bhagavan assured the thousands of people whose lives had been marooned by the ravaging floods in Orissa, (East India), that He would rebuild their homes and schools in concrete. And today (and for the past few years) lakhs of neglected and suffering people are drinking pure uncontaminated water due to Bhagavan's free drinking water projects. His free Hospital care accessible to the poorest of the poor is famous the world over for alleviating the suffering of millions over the last few decades, and Bhagavan's free educational services have provided thousands of children with resplendent characters, world-class education and assured prospects in life. One can go on and on with the tale of the Lord's infinite compassion; for every grain of sand that is apparent, there is a mountain that is hidden.

[To read moving stories of patients treated in Baba's Hospitals, please visit our archives here. And to access stories of Sai Seva which is incessant in all corners of the globe, go here.]

III. "BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY WILL INHERIT THE EARTH."

Lord Jesus showed His followers that it is not by force that one can make gains – even in this world. He urged His followers to be gentle and to practice the path of non-violence and least resistance as a positive character trait. To be meek from a place of inner strength is a constructive and active virtue, one that inspires calm action, rather than a negative disposition of timidity.

"Then, the meek are those who yield to acts of wickedness, and do not resist evil, but overcome evil with good." St. Augustine

A few minutes after this Beatitude, Jesus would tell His disciples:

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5 v38-42

This quality of self-negation is a hallmark of the truly enlightened, as perfectly illustrated by an anecdote from the divine life of Sri Ramana Maharshi:

It was 11:30 in the middle of the night, June 26, 1924. Though at that time Sri Ramanasramam consisted of only a few thatched sheds, some thieves came thinking it to be a rich mutt (ashram). They tried to break in through the windows by smashing them, and threatened to destroy everything. The noise woke up the devotees who were sleeping in the shed where Sri Bhagavan was lying. Sri Ramana then invited the thieves to come in through the proper doorway and asked the devotees to give them a hurricane lamp so that they could look for whatever they wanted, yet they shouted angrily, 'Where are you keeping your money?' 'We are sadhus who live by begging. We have no money. From what you can find here, you may take away anything you want. We will come outside.' So saying, Sri Bhagavan came and sat outside followed by the devotees. As they came out of the shed, the thieves beat them with sticks and one blow even fell on the thigh of Sri Bhagavan. 'If you are still not satisfied, beat the other thigh as well,' said Sri Bhagavan feeling sorry for them.

Was this the limit of His kindness towards the thieves? No, He also prevented a young devotee who, unable to bear the sight of Sri Bhagavan being beaten, jumped up with an iron bar in retaliation. Sri Bhagavan advised him, 'Let them do their dharma. We are sadhus, we should not give up our dharma. In future, the world will blame only us if any wrong happens.' Some days later the police caught the thieves and brought them before Sri Bhagavan, and an officer asked Him to identify the one who had beaten Him on that night. Sri Bhagavan at once replied with a smile, 'Find out whom I beat in a previous birth for it is he who has beaten me now!' He never denounced the criminal!

One may wonder if such meekness will really work in the present world where we see so much insensitivity all around us. But let us not forget that the independence of the largest democracy of this world was won not by force, but by the assertive strength of meekness. What startled, humbled and threw the seemingly invincible British Empire out of India in the early 20th century was the sheer power of Non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of independent India, said, "I cannot teach you violence, as I do not myself believe in it. I can only teach you not to bow your heads before any one even at the cost of your life.... Non-violence is a weapon of the strong."

Meekness is an amazing virtue which enables us to accept the Will of God. Instead of railing against the Lord when our life does not go the way we want it to, we can surrender and say, "Lord not my will, let Your will be done." Perhaps the most profound example of this was when Lord Jesus prayed to God, knowing that He would soon be crucified, at a time when He could have escaped. Yet He accepted what was to come as His Father's Will.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done."

When He came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

(Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26, v36-46)

Meekness and the abasement of the ego before God is the holy and joyous path which culminates in complete surrender to the Lord. Bhagavan Baba describes this beautifully:

Then, what does surrender of the self signify or imply? To experience God as Omnipresent, to be aware of nothing other than God – this is true surrender. To see God in everything, everywhere, at all times, is true Sharanaagathi.

- Baba

Meekness also refers to the quality of modesty. A meek person is free from the tendency to show off, and will never selfishly put himself forward to gain attention from others, or ever try and dominate people. Moreover, a meek person is wholly above the senses and shines with *sattvic* (pure) qualities. The Koran eulogises this quality emphatically and says:

And the slaves of the Most Beneficent (Allah) are those who walk on the earth in humility and sedateness, and when the foolish address them (with bad words) they reply back with mild words of gentleness.

(Holy Koran, chapter 25, v63)

Clearly, through this Beatitude, Jesus was resonating the principle that runs like the common thread through all great spiritual traditions. This is, in fact, the hallmark of sincere seekers along the path of God, regardless of their religion, who are in search of a life filled with unruffled peace and spiritual joy.

IV. “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY WILL BE FILLED.”

Taking the road less travelled or not yet travelled is never easy; but that is the only way a new path has ever come into being. To stand for Truth and live by it day in and day out is what makes an individual a complete man. Bhagavan Baba says, “Fullness in life is marked by the harmony of thought, word and deed.” In crucial periods, history has blessed us with personalities who have acted out their cherished principles in the face of indomitable challenges and gifted mankind with a new world of hope. Thereby, they not only fulfilled their sojourn on earth but also brought meaning and solace into the lives of millions of their brethren.

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) has often been hailed as the greatest President of the United States of America. Bhagavan Baba too, on many occasions, has narrated stories from the life of this great leader to inspire the young minds. In a discourse in May 2002, Baba said:

Before Lincoln became the President of America, people did not realize the power of self-confidence and faith in God. It was Lincoln who taught these values to the people of America. Following the example of Lincoln, more and more people started developing these precious virtues of self-confidence and faith in God. It is enough if a country has one person like Lincoln.

Divine Discourse, 16-05-2002

Lincoln struggled with all his might to preserve the unity of the United States during the four year American civil war, which was threatened by the breakaway southern states, who wished to continue slavery. He strove to emancipate the four million black slaves, convinced in the equal rights that should be bestowed upon them. This last view was quite contrary to the beliefs of the vast majority of white Americans and he risked losing a large number of people from the north who might have fought on his side, but who were actually against freeing the slaves. Yet he stuck to his principles.

Let us again return to Bhagavan's words:

The slaves were treated in a very harsh manner by the Whites in those days. Abraham Lincoln wanted to ameliorate their condition and secure equal rights

for them. He was of the firm conviction that all human beings were equal and any differences on the basis of colour or race were improper. He tirelessly worked for the cause of the slaves. Eventually, he succeeded in the abolition of slavery in the United States. He is still held in high esteem for this noble work.
(Divine Discourse, 23-11-2000)

Abraham Lincoln was closely involved in the military effort and guided the northern American states to victory. As the war was drawing to a close he was assassinated by a southerner, incensed at Lincoln's wish to give voting rights to the black American former slaves.

Lincoln always strove to carry out what he believed were acts of *righteousness*. True, this conviction brought about his untimely death, but it also created a United States that could more fully express its Declaration of Independence precept:

"...that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Lord Buddha also taught His followers to sanctify their lives by following the same life principle of Right Conduct or *Dharma*. Just as Lord Jesus gifted the world eight Beatitudes, so too did Lord Buddha teach His followers the Noble Eight-fold Path which involved Right Vision, Right Thought and Feelings, Right Speech and so on.

[Please see the June 2006 cover story which contains a lucid account of these eight virtues.]

Doing the right thing, or doing things the right way, actually means to be in harmony with our true selves and our real nature. We might doubt if this is really practical in the present world which is steeped so much in unrighteousness. While our concern is valid, what is also equally and emphatically true is that it is possible, only we should have the confidence to follow the voice of our conscience.

There is nothing impossible once we are less dependent on our smaller selves, and derive advice and sustenance from the Higher Self.

V. "BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY WILL BE SHOWN MERCY."

Jesus was a visionary for his times, for he reminded his flock that what goes around, comes around. The concept of cyclical karma was new to the people at that time. Yet, the Master prodded them to practice mercy for their own good.

Nothing proves the timelessness of Jesus' message on this virtue of mercy than the life of an American who was visited by unspeakable tragedy:

Sue Norton lives in Arkansas City, Kansas. She received terrible news during a phone call from her brother in January 1990. Her much beloved father, Richard Denny and his wife Virginia were found murdered in their home. Sue's father was shot to death in his isolated Oklahoma farmhouse. The crime netted the killer \$17.00 and an old truck.

Sue says she felt "numb". She couldn't understand why someone would want to hurt people who were old and poor. The loss of her father just broke her heart.

Sue sat through the trial of Robert Knighton (B.K.). She was confused about how she should feel. She tells that everyone in the courtroom was consumed with hate. They all expected her to feel the same way. But she couldn't hate that way because she says, "It didn't feel good."

For the last night of the trial, she knew, there must be another way. She couldn't eat or sleep that night and prayed to God to help her. When morning came, she had this thought. "Sue, you don't have to hate B.K., you could forgive him".

The next day, while the jury was out for deliberation, Sue got permission to visit B.K. through the bars of his holding cell. Sue relates, "I was really frightened. This was my first experience in a jail. B.K. was big and tall; he was shackled and had cold steely eyes." At first, B.K. refused to look at Sue. She asked him to turn around and he answered, "Why would any one want to talk to me after what I have done?" Sue replied, "I don't know what to say to you. But I want you to know that I don't hate you. My grandmother always taught me not to use the word hate. She taught me that we are here to love one another. If you are guilty, I forgive you."

B.K. thought Sue was just playing games. He couldn't understand how she could forgive him for such a terrible crime. Sue says, "I didn't think of him as killer, I thought of him as a human being."

People thought that Sue had lost her mind. Friends would step to the other side of the road to avoid her. But Sue says, "There is no way to heal and get over the trauma without forgiveness. You must forgive and forget, and get on with your life. That is what Jesus would do."

B.K. resides on death row in Oklahoma. Sue often writes to him and visits occasionally. She feels that B.K. should never leave prison, but she does not want him executed. She has become friends with B.K. and because of her love and friendship he has now become a devout Christian.

Sue states that some good has come out of her father's death. "I have been able to witness to many people about Jesus and forgiveness, and helped others to heal. I have brought B.K. and many other men on death row to our Lord Jesus Christ. I live in peace with my Lord!"

Ref: <http://www.catherineblountfdn.org/rsf.htm>

The virtue of mercy as *forgiveness* is much needed in today's world. In the Lord's Prayer, Lord Jesus taught His followers the sacred teaching that when we forgive, God then forgives us.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

The Koran similarly emphasises:

God loves the kindly, and those who remember God and seek forgiveness for their offences when they commit some shocking deed or harm themselves (for who forgives offences besides God?) and do not knowingly persist in whatever they have been doing. Those will have forgiveness from their Lord as their reward, plus gardens through which rivers flow to live in for ever. How blissful will such workers' wages be!

- Holy Koran, Chapter 3 v133

When we open our hearts to those who need our help we show them mercy. Does not Bhagavan Baba tell us that when a beggar approaches us, he is invoking the divine in us to show mercy to him? 'God helps those who help themselves' is a familiar cliché – but here Jesus teaches us that 'God helps those who help others'.

When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours... But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous...

(Gospel of Luke 14:12-13)

The image that comes spontaneously to mind is that of Bhagavan reaching down to serve the *Narayanas* during the Narayana Seva that He has organised any number of times during His divine life, teaching His devotees by perfect example. And now thousands of members of the Sai organisation are engaged in that very same service, every single day of the week, all over the world, tending and serving those who are bereft of support, who are poverty stricken, sick or disabled.

Bhagavan Baba places this virtue of forgiveness on the highest pedestal. In a discourse in January 1994, He said,

Only a person who has this attitude of Kshama (forgiveness) can be considered to be endowed with sacred love. This cannot be learned from textbooks. Nor can it be acquired from preceptors, nor from any one else. It is to be cultivated by oneself in times of difficulties, trials and tribulations that one is forced to meet. Only when we face problems and difficulties that cause grief and misery this quality of forbearance and forgiveness has the scope for taking root.

When you are confronted with tribulations you should not get upset, and become victims of depression which is a sign of weakness. You should bring in

tolerance and an attitude of forgiveness into play; And do not get agitated giving rise to anger, hatred and revengeful attitude.

*You are embodiments of strength, not weakness. Therefore, in times of despair, you should be filled with the feeling of forbearance and be ready to forgive and forget. **This quality of Kshama is the greatest power for a human being.** If one loses this quality, he becomes demonic.*

*Kshama is Sathyam, Truth.
Kshama is Dharma, Righteousness.
Kshama is Ahimsa, Non-Violence.
Kshama is Yajna, Sacrifice.
Kshama is Santhosha, Happiness.
Kshama is Dhaya, Compassion.
Kshama is everything in the world.*

(From a Divine Discourse delivered on 1st January 1994)

Such is the power of this Beatitude. And what is also conveyed in this fifth blessing is that everything we do in our lives comes back to us as 'reaction, reflection and resound' as Baba explains it. Therefore, at the root of all peace, prosperity and happiness, is a heart of love and mercy, now and hereafter.

VI. "BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY WILL SEE GOD."

In this Beatitude, Jesus explains one of the greatest mysteries of human life in eleven words. Mankind has always been fascinated with his creator; the apparently Unseen Being who rules this Universe. What form does He take; where does He live; and what does He do?

Various scriptures have purported to elucidate these questions to the common man, who has been taught to visualise the Lord through the factual accounts of the lives of the Avatars, myths, legends and images. But at the time of Jesus - and for the time preceding the Divine Advent of Bhagavan Baba - beholding the Living God oneself...that was a matter only for the saints and sages, the adepts at meditation and austerity.

But here Lord Jesus explains that it is so easy to see God. A pure heart really 'sees God'. Purity is 'all one needs'! But behind this succinct maxim we know that purity is not an easy virtue, demanding a life dedicated to God and endowed with strict sense control.

Bhagavan tells us that Purity is one of the 3 P's; the other two being Patience and Perseverance, which can convert man into Divine.

Purity of heart is visible when the love of God is reflected so clearly and strongly that it shines through, even in the most adverse conditions and circumstances. Such a man has reached a point where nothing can touch him because he has come so close to God that his whole life is based on the solid

foundations of truth, love and devotion to God. How can anything touch such a man?
- Baba

In the human lives of divine incarnations, we can see Purity in action right from day one. They demonstrate to mankind what it means to lead a life which is pure in every thought, word and deed. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was one such purity-personified being.

So pure was this Avatar of God, who lived in Kolkata, India, from 1836 to 1886 that even the very touch of money on His hand while He slept caused it to writhe in pain. So pure was He that He was blessed with countless revelations of God (including Lord Jesus) and Goddesses, especially His most beloved Mother Kali. Though born in a peasant's hut and unlettered, the scholars and sages of the day came in hordes to pay homage at His feet.

So perfect was His purity and state of divine consciousness that the greatest love that men had ever known emanated from His being during His *darshan*. He naturally attracted many disciples, chief of whom was the world renowned Swami Vivekananda, who brought the message of Vedanta to the West for the first time. As a young and troubled man he came to Sri Ramakrishna in search of God...

'For the first time I had found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I began to go to that man, day after day, and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance, can change a whole life. I had read about Buddha and Christ and Mohammed, about all those different luminaries of ancient times, how they would stand up and say, "Be thou whole," and the man became whole. I now found it to be true, and when I myself saw this man, all scepticism was brushed aside. It could be done; and my Master used to say, 'Religion can be given and taken more tangibly, more really than anything else in the world.'

Swami Vivekananda (then known as Narendrenath) and a fortunate group of other disciples discovered that His effulgent purity and love were unmatched and became convinced that Sri Ramakrishna was an Embodiment of God.

The purity of Sri Ramakrishna was also redolent with great spiritual power that He could even impart it to others so easily. Swami Vivekananda relates this miraculous experience of the Master's Grace, in the early days of knowing Him:

The magic touch of the Master one day immediately brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was astounded to find that really there was nothing in the Universe but God! I saw it quite clearly, but kept silent to see whether the impression would last; but it did not abate in the course of the day. I returned home, but there too, everything I saw appeared to be Brahman. I sat down to take my meal, but found that everything—the food, the plate, the person who served, and even myself—was nothing but That. I ate a morsel or two and sat still. I was startled by my mother's words, "Why do you sit still? Finish your

meal," and then began to eat again. But all the while, whether eating or lying down, or going to college, I had the same experience and felt myself always in a sort of trance.

While walking in the streets, I noticed cabs plying, but I did not feel inclined to move out of the way. I felt that the cabs and myself were of one stuff. There was no sensation in my limbs, which seemed to be becoming paralysed. I did not relish eating, and felt as if somebody else were eating. Sometimes I lay down during a meal; after a few minutes I got up and again began to eat. The result would be that on some days I would take too much, but it did no harm.

My mother became alarmed and said that there must be something wrong with me. She was afraid that I might not live long. When there was a slight change in this state, the world began to appear dream-like. While walking in Cornwallis Square, I would strike my head against the iron railings to see if they were real or only a dream. This state of things continued for some days. When I became normal again, I realized that I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita (non-dualistic) philosophy.

Later Sri Ramakrishna famously blessed Swami Vivekananda again, empowering and sanctifying him to begin his mission to the West of propagating *Sanathana Dharma* (ancient Indian tradition) for the first time in the United States and Europe. That he succeeded in a historic fashion and brought fame and acclaim to India's culture and spiritual traditions in America and Britain was no mean feat, as at the time India was a subject nation of the British. Narrating about this momentous event, Swami Vivekananda says:

Two or three days before Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, She whom he used to call "Kali" entered this body. It is She who takes me here and there and makes me work, without letting me remain quiet or allowing me to look to my personal comforts. [Question: Are you speaking metaphorically?] Oh, no; two or three days before his leaving the body, he called me to his side one day, and asking me to sit before him, looked steadfastly at me and fell into Samadhi. Then I really felt that a subtle force like an electric shock was entering my body! In a little while, I also lost outward consciousness and sat motionless. How long I stayed in that condition I do not remember; when consciousness returned I found Sri Ramakrishna shedding tears. On questioning him, he answered me affectionately, "Today, giving you my all, I have become a beggar. With this power you are to do many works for the world's good before you will return." I feel that power is constantly directing me to this or that work. This body has not been made for remaining idle.

Can anyone doubt that Purity will lead one to see God, know God, feel God and even share God?

VII. "BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY WILL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD."

The true story of 'peace breaking out' between two enemies occurred during the savagery of World War Two, resonates with this sacred Beatitude of Jesus:

Two countries were at war. Many had been injured or killed on both sides. Intense hatred flowed between the soldiers. One night a wounded soldier knocked at the door of the poor dwelling of an old woman. Bravely she let him in her house.

"I have a bullet in my arm and need help," he said. "My son is in the army too, but he is away now..." she replied. The woman offered food. The soldier was uneasy: was he in enemy territory? If so the woman could poison him. But because he was badly wounded he was helpless. But in his fear he continued to refuse her assistance and later fell asleep overcome by exhaustion.

There was a knock at the door and another soldier walked in. "Mama" he called out. She was overjoyed to see him. Her son saw the wounded soldier sleeping. "Ma" he said, "This is the enemy. You have put us in danger by letting him in. The mother said, "He's badly hurt and needs our help. Enemy or not, we must help him."

The commotion woke up the wounded man and he immediately realised he was at their mercy. With her son's help, the woman removed the bullet from the man's arm, cleaned and dressed the wound. The soldier then wanted to leave but was too weak to even get out of bed. He was invited to spend the night there.

Next morning he ate breakfast. Turning to the woman he said, "How can I ever repay you?" She replied, "By killing enmity. Not the enemy!" Unnerved, he did not know what to do, and said "I will try my best."

Then, instead of giving each other handshakes the two soldiers embraced. On leaving they both understood the meaning of the word "brotherhood". The only weapon they used was love which lead to peace overcoming all previous enmity...

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- St Paul

Explaining how we can cultivate this sublime virtue of peace, Baba says,

You must discover your identity; then only can you have peace. You are like a man who has forgotten his name, address and his mission in life. Realise it and try to delve into yourself; so that you may know who you are. Then you get security and peace.
- Baba

We shall act ever as if we are in the presence of God, as if God is watching and weighing every thought, word and deed. See yourselves in all; See all in yourselves; that is the road to lasting peace and joy. - Baba

Be it Lord Jesus, St. Paul or Bhagavan Baba – the message is same: True peace lies beyond the mind and is a gift of God which we experience only in our inner being.

In fact, peace is a gift of God which we receive once we begin to realise our innate divinity. It is then that we begin to work as His instruments and are filled with perennial peace. In a profound message, given years ago to Mr. Charles Penn, Baba said:

Your mission has begun. Those are My words to you, My devotees. Each of you has a unique and valuable part to play in this lifetime. Only those whom I have called can serve Me.

My Mission has now reached that point in time when each of you now has work to do. This planet has a purpose in the great galaxy in which it is held. That purpose is now unfolding before our eyes. I call upon you to radiate the Bhakti (devotion) within you so that its unseen power will envelop all who come into your orbit. To successfully perform your part, always remain centred upon Me.

Allow yourself to impart that purity of heart within you towards all human beings and all living creatures and do not reach for the fruits of your work.

This part of My Mission is performed in absolute silence. You are My instruments from whom My love will pour. Be always aware that the moment you let your ego descend upon you My work ceases. When you have overcome your negative unmindfulness, you will again become My Source.

The multiplication of My Love will be felt throughout the world. I have prepared you for this work over many incarnations. I have drawn you to Me. I have made great steps in My Mission over these past incarnations. My work is ceaseless, and so your work, too, is without end.

Know that I am within and without you. There is no difference. Rid yourselves of the petty matters forevermore. You are now in Me and I am now in Thee. There is no difference. My Darshan (spiritual blessings) will pour forth from Me to and through you. You may be unaware of this constant action. Be ever pure of heart and soul, and mankind in your lifetime will benefit from your unique qualities.

Others, too, will join Me in this Mission when I draw them to Me. The time is approaching when all humanity will live in harmony. That time will be here sooner than one expects. Before it arrives be prepared for whatever is needed to reveal to every living thing the true purpose of existence. It is not what anyone alive can imagine. It is not something that one can try to aspire to. It is beyond all comprehension. I can say that its beauty is magnificent beyond all

dreams. And as each of you perform your silent work, I embrace you to My Heart and henceforth your souls shall be lifted up and your eyes will reveal My Presence within.

This I say to all My Devotees from the Lord's Mountain Top where all the Universes become one. Be about My work, My beloved devotees. Your breath will carry the scent of the blossoms of Heaven. Your example will be that of Angels. Your joy will be My Joy.

(Message received by Charles Penn from Sri Sathya Sai Baba – 1979)

What a historic and epochal missive! What a grand opportunity to sanctify our lives and fill it with peace that is everlasting? When we are truly one with God in our thought, word and deed, we are, as Jesus says, the *'sons and daughters of God'*.

Many who have contemplated seriously over the disturbed state of our present world believe that real peace in the world cannot and will not be created through dialogue between nations, through negotiation tables, or treaties – these are all, in a manner of speaking, tricks of our egos. Real peace will dawn when humanity, in greater or lesser numbers, submits their egos to the Presence of God, by whatever Name they call Him! Be it Allah, the Christ, Lord Buddha, or Lord Sai, or simply the Higher Self. Only then will real peace blossom on the planet, and the Golden Age, which Bhagavan refers to, will manifest.

VIII. "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN."

This final beatitude of Jesus evoked much debate and controversy for its time and continues even today to be a topic of much discussion for many sceptics. Yet, it ushers hope in every caring heart that bleeds when good people suffer terribly in this life.

To live and breathe the Beatitudes, or Swami's teachings, demands a life directed against the common flow of the world. We may come across opposition to our *dharmic* principles from a variety of quarters: family, friends, neighbours or work colleagues. But Jesus assures us that the goal is beyond all earthly gains, beyond even our mind's wildest expectations and petty designs. By adhering to *dharma* we can attain the greatest reward known to man – the kingdom of heaven itself - the perpetual awareness of our true Self, the permanent bliss that everyone knowingly or unknowingly longs for.

Nelson Mandela, the little Prahalad, Prophet Mohammed, Mahatma Gandhi, and many other great and noble souls who have graced Mother Earth, have all experienced unspeakable oppression and opposition. But they never gave up their struggle for the greater good of humanity, knowing that their persecutors were just blips in history and only served to make their light shine even more!

Martin Luther King (1929-1968) was one such beacon, and today he is one of the most loved figures of the last century. But in his time, he was also one of the most hated people in America. That his struggle against racism in the US bore fruit against seemingly insurmountable odds, is testament to him walking the path of Truth with God. Even a brief glance at his noble life fills us with great inspiration:

He didn't intend to change history. In fact, his first career plan was to finish a graduate degree in divinity, and then return to his hometown to take over his father's church. It was a path that had been preordained by two generations of ministers, his father and grandfather. It was a legacy that was both empowering and welcoming, embracing principles that he loved, and keeping him close to his family's roots.

When he was just twenty-six years old a request to lead a protest march became a journey to the heart of social justice; the call to lead a small gathering became a national civil rights movement of non-violent resistance.

In 1959 King traveled to India to study the philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi. He spent time at Gandhi's ashram, and returned to the U.S. with a fuller understanding of Gandhi's philosophy of radical change through non-violent resistance, which was to guide him in his monumental work in the US.

When we idealize him, it is easy to forget that, at the height of his power, he was one of the most hated figures in America. It is easy to forget that the conflicts within the civil rights movement, between advocates of non-violent resistance and advocates of violent confrontation, were so powerful that he was nearly derailed several times in his short career.

But it was in moments such as the march on Washington, in 1963, when he made the historic 'I have a dream' speech that King rose above it all. That August, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he expressed a vision of the future that had no second. Here a few excerpts of that landmark speech:

"Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends. And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" - one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; 'and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.'

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day."

These truly powerful words can only be born from the life of someone who was pledged to carry out his mission against injustice. And these words still ring true for our world as it continues to be wracked by racism and hate in many guises.

In fact, such was the momentum that his power and charisma created that he won international acclaim and in 1964 King was honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize. His work had lead to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, both milestones in the acceptance of equal rights of African-Americans.

In 1968, King addressed a joyous crowd of supporters: "We've got some difficult days ahead. It really doesn't matter what happens now, because I've been to the mountaintop.... And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land." He was assassinated on a motel balcony the next morning.

He had been to the mountain top and was not afraid to die. Reflecting on the momentum of his life, he said that events had transformed him. Maybe so. But what is more important is that he transformed events, and through the power of his spirit, created a vision that has inspired and pressed people forward towards a better day and a vision ever since.

Ref: A Leader Becomes a Leader, by J. Kevin Sheehan

Be it Mahatma Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, or the Joan of Arc, the righteous pay the price for the glory of martyrdom that immortalises them for centuries. Their example serves as the highest inspiration for generations to come.

Civil Rights movements the world over still quote from King's inspired speech, drawing strength from his example. In life, as in death, the likes of King and the Mahatma literally lived the last Beatitude, proving that one needs nerves of steel and inner strength to live out the divine directives Jesus delivered thousands of years ago and it is the courage to make this tough choice that sets them apart from rest of humanity.

Conclusion – Living in the Kingdom of Heaven

Let us now take a look at all these magnificent declarations all in one go.

***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will
be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***

They are beautiful and profoundly meaningful. And whether we still believe it or not, they are practical and very much doable. In fact, Bhagavan Baba has summed up all these powerful pronouncements so succinctly in just five timeless words – Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Non-violence. Of this, Baba says, Love is primordial. In fact, it is the sole virtue which is the undercurrent of all the other sacred values. And that is why Baba makes it even simpler for us, when He says, simply “Love All, Serve All”.

It is this message that echoed two centuries ago in the form of these beatific Beatitudes, and even before that through the immortal messages of many incarnations of the Divine. The Masters may be different, but the essence of their Messages has always remained the same, and that is *Love*. Period. As the poet says: "all ye need to know, or all you will ever know". And having known this, let us learn to live by it. It is not as inconvenient or uncomfortable as many of us imagine it to be; in fact, the Lord is waiting with His outstretched arms to carry us along, for our own good and happiness. Let us allow ourselves to be led by Him, and give up our tiny egos. We can then feel His love in every little thing that happens in our lives. Soon, unknowingly, we will be, in fact, living in the Kingdom of Heaven as we walk and talk on this earth, just like the Lord did centuries ago and does so even now!

FEATURE ARTICLES

IN QUEST OF INFINITY – Part 21

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prashanti Nilayam. I do hope you recall where we left off last time. Basically I told you that via his model for the hydrogen atom, Niels Bohr, managed to get a toe-hold into a new world. But little did he know at that time, how revolutionary and incredible this new world was and how it was going to dominate not only Physics but indeed most of Science and even day to day life in an incredible fashion for the rest of the next century and indeed into the 21st century as well! In this instalment, we shall try and get a glimpse how the first few chapters of that story unfolded in the two decades or so following Bohr's triumph.

As I told you last time, Bohr's model was very tantalising; it seemed to explain very nicely many previously known facts about the hydrogen spectrum that were totally baffling. However, the model was of no use at all one step beyond hydrogen, that is to say, where the helium atom was concerned, it fell totally flat. In fact, it was soon discovered that even where hydrogen was concerned, there were many subtleties that the Bohr model failed to explain. From all this it was clear that what the Bohr model had really succeeded in calling attention to was that if progress was to be made in the world of the small, then some radical quantum ideas were needed. What exactly were those ideas?

De Broglie Visualises the Duality of Matter

People began furiously searching all over the place and the first clue about how to change one's thinking came from Prince Louis de Broglie of France. De Broglie put forth a simple idea. He said, "Listen we now know that where light is concerned, it has two aspects, a wave aspect known to us for over a century and a quantum aspect first suspected by Planck and later made much clearer by Einstein. Now I wonder whether matter too has a dual aspect. We all know it has a particle aspect, but could it be that it has a wave aspect too that becomes important when one goes to small distances like in an atom?"

Was de Broglie just tossing a wild idea or did he have some basis for thinking so? It turns out that he did have a hunch, and argued as follows: In the case of light, we know three things:

1. It has a wavelength λ and a frequency ν the two being related by the simple formula $\lambda\nu = c$, where c is the velocity of light.
2. Next, according to Planck, the energy of light is bundled into quanta, and the minimum energy of a bundle associated with light of frequency ν is $E = h\nu$, where h is the Planck constant [I introduced you to this earlier].
3. The light quantum carries momentum, like a moving particle does. According to Einstein, this momentum p is given by the formula, $p =$

(E/c) . Remembering $E = h\nu$, and that $\lambda = (c/\nu)$, it is easy to show that $\lambda = (h/p)$.

De Broglie now boldly suggested: "I say that if there is a particle of mass m that is moving with a velocity v [so that its momentum is mv], then there is associated with this particle a wave whose wavelength λ is given by $\lambda = (h/mv)$." Now this was a daring conjecture, and De Broglie made this suggestion in 1923. Soon this prediction was proven to be correct by two independent experiments, one done by Davisson in America and the other by G.P. Thomson in England. Working with electron beams, they showed that these beams got diffracted as if they had a wave aspect. See Fig. 1

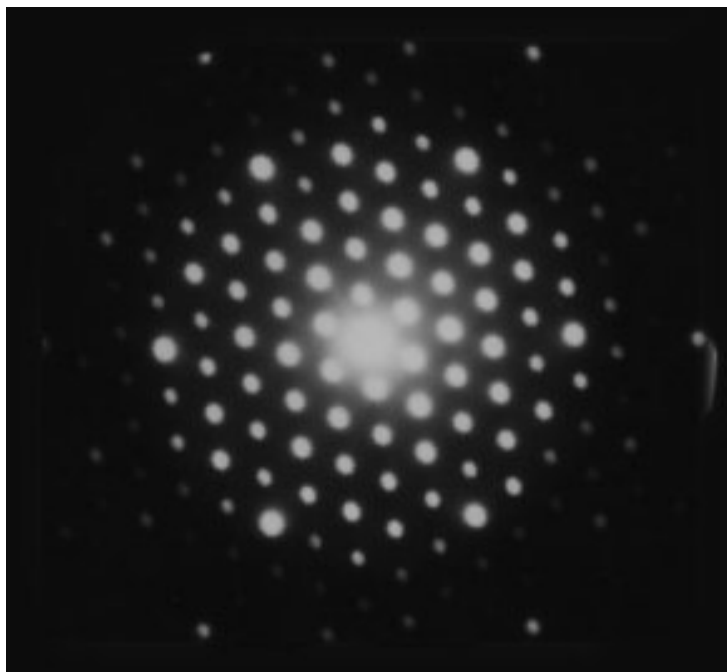
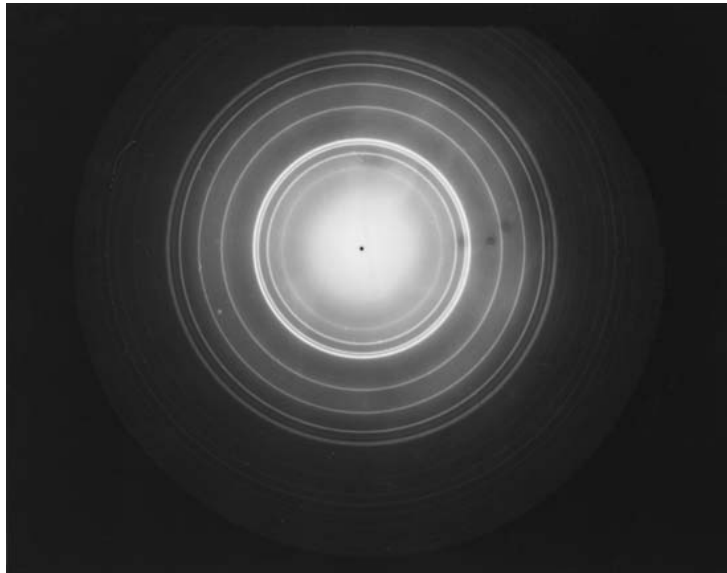
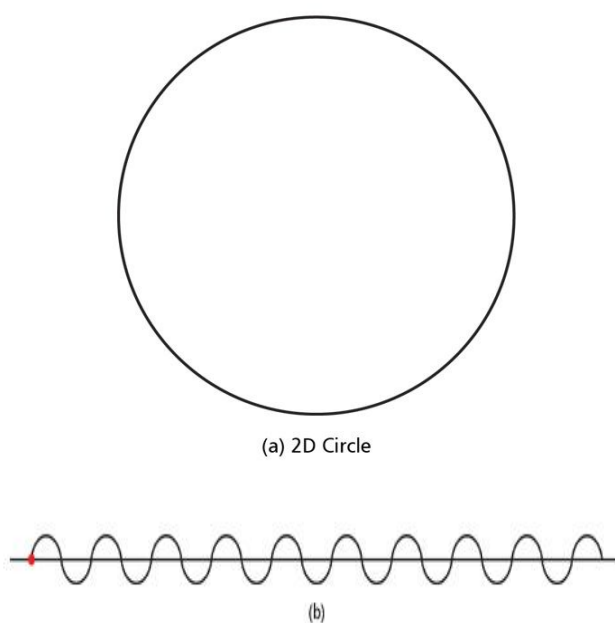


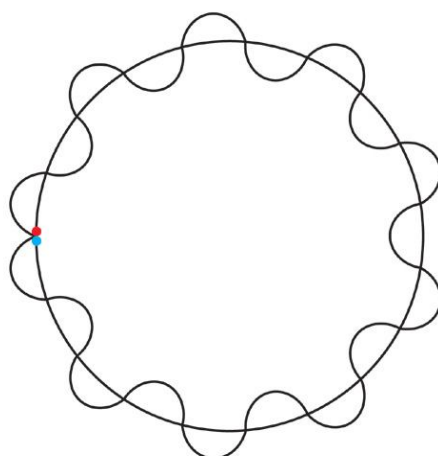
Figure 1: *The photos above are samples of electron diffraction. The one showing rings was obtained using what is called a polycrystal, like a sheet of iron for example, where millions of tiny iron crystals are randomly packed. The second picture showing individual spots was obtained using a single crystal. Both types of patterns are quite familiar from x-ray work. But then, x-rays being electromagnetic waves, are expected to show diffraction behaviour. That electrons could behave like waves was totally unknown, until de Broglie called attention to that possibility in 1923. These pictures confirm that indeed electrons and hence all matter does have a wave aspect, provided one goes to small enough distances.*

By the way, it is interesting that G.P. Thomson was the son of J.J. Thomson who discovered the electron. If you recall, JJ identified the electron as a particle and also measured its mass. The son demonstrated that the electron also behaved like a wave! All in the family – happens sometimes!

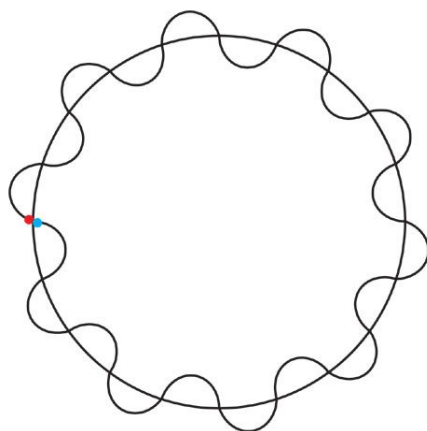
Wrapping Up Electrons' Orbits

To get back to the main story, people now began to say, "We think we can understand why Bohr speculated that not all orbits are allowed for the electrons and why only some are allowed." Their argument went something like this. Take a particular orbit. For the electron to move in that orbit, whose radius is say r , it must have a particular velocity v say. If the mass of the electron is m , then the momentum in that orbit would be mv . One can now use de Broglie's formula and calculate the associated wavelength λ . Now draw a circle of radius r , and try to wrap a wave of wavelength λ around this circle. There are only two possibilities; either one can wrap an integral number of wavelengths around the circle or one cannot – see figure below.





(c)



(d) Case 2

Figure 2: What we have here is a circle, and a wave wrapped around it. There are two cases shown. In one case, the wavelength is such that it is not possible to wrap an integral number of waves around the circle; in the other case, one can wrap an integral number of such waves. When de Broglie introduced the idea of matter waves, people said: “The electron probably has a wavelike aspect. The wavelength depends on the velocity of the electron and for an electron moving in a circular orbit, that velocity is determined by the radius of the orbit. Thus, electrons moving in different orbits would have different velocities and hence also different wavelengths. Now if the wavelength is such that an integral number of waves cannot be wrapped around that orbit, then that orbit is not allowed. This is what Bohr discovered intuitively. However, the idea of de Broglie waves gives some additional scientific basis for such a concept. When Schroedinger came up with his wave mechanics, there was no longer any need for such intuitive guesses, for there was now a regular way of determining what are the actual allowed states for the electron in a hydrogen atom.

If one cannot wrap an integral number of wavelengths, then it means that nature does not favour that orbit; on the other hand, if one could do such a wrap, then that is a preferred orbit. In this way, some justification was found for why Niels Bohr was forced to choose some orbits and reject others – it all seemed to be connected with the wave aspect of the electron. However, all this was just hand-waving; what was needed was a proper theory. And that came as the result of independent efforts by three different people in three different countries! That story next.

This is not exactly a historical account of how it all happened, but roughly speaking, the three pieces of the story referred to above can be described as follows. First there was Schroedinger in Austria who said, "If according to de Broglie matter has a wave aspect of it, let me introduce a quantity Ψ [Greek symbol, pronounced psi] which I shall call a wave function. This wave function should describe for me the wave-like behaviour of matter. For example, if I want to know about what the electron in a hydrogen atom does, I shall start with the idea that Ψ represents the wave function of the electron in the hydrogen atom. This Ψ should depend on where the electron is and so I shall make that explicit by writing the Ψ as $\Psi(x, y, z)$. This way of writing enables me to describe the wave function at every point with co-ordinate (x, y, z) . Now how do I find this mysterious Ψ ? Well, let me now write down an equation that this wave function would satisfy, in this case an equation specific to the hydrogen atom."

Schroedinger figured out a way of writing such an equation and this equation is now called the **Schroedinger equation**. So the first thing one must do if one wants to solve a problem is to write the Schroedinger equation for that problem. This equation happens to be what is called a differential equation, and differential equations are quite familiar in mathematics. So, having written down the equation, one now goes about solving the equation, and when one does that, one gets many solutions. In the case of the hydrogen atom, it turns out that these solutions represent the different ways in which the electron can behave in the hydrogen atom. As one expected, these different solutions did have some connection with the intuitive picture that Bohr had conjured up earlier. However, from Schroedinger's more detailed and scientifically superior analysis, it emerged that the idea of orbits is meaningless! We shall come to that later. One strange thing that happened was that in general this wave function Ψ could be a complex quantity instead of a real quantity. I am sure that would fox many of you and so at this point I must make a few introductory remarks about real, imaginary and complex numbers.

The Meaning of Imaginary Numbers

Real numbers are what we deal with normally. Whole numbers could be integers like 1, 2, 3, ...etc., fractional numbers like 3.14, 17. 832 etc., and negative numbers like - 24, - 6.5 and so on. All these are examples of real numbers and we understand what they mean. Now consider square roots; I am sure everyone knows that the square root of 4 is 2, the square root of 25 is 5, and so on. Similarly, the square root of 1 is just 1; I am sure you know that also.

Now suppose I ask: What is the square root of the negative number -1 ? This is a perfectly valid question to ask. It turns out that, as all of us know, that there is no real number that can qualify to be the square root of -1 . Does that mean that the square root of -1 does not exist? Mathematicians say, "Of course it does; however, that square root is an imaginary number!" Now you and I may not be comfortable with imaginary numbers but in mathematics not only are they freely allowed but also found to be very useful. The square root of -1 is denoted i . What it means that $i \times i = -1$. I am not too sure that makes things a bit clearer, but even if it does not, please just accept that the imaginary number i introduces a new set of numbers called complex numbers. That is what I shall explain next.

Now once one allows room for the imaginary quantity i , then one can straight away introduce complex numbers like $(3 + i4)$. One says that this complex number has two parts, a real part with a value 3, and an imaginary part with a value 4. I am mentioning all this because it was found that in general, the wave function that Schroedinger introduced was a complex quantity, that is to say, it had a real as well as an imaginary part. What sort of a meaning was to make of this complex matter wave? That remained a problem till Max Born showed a way out; I shall come to that later.

The 'Incredible Simplicity' Discovered by Heisenberg

Let me now turn to another very different chapter in the evolution of quantum mechanics. This chapter was written by young Werner Heisenberg, quite independent of Schroedinger. Heisenberg was 24 when he did the work that got him an entry into the Hall of Fame of Physics. At that time, having finished his doctorate, Heisenberg was spending time in Copenhagen in Bohr's Institute, having won a Rockefeller Fellowship. One day, he suffered an attack of hay fever and was advised to withdraw to an island called Helgoland where grass did not grow.

Here, Heisenberg was literally all alone. With hardly anything to do and plenty of time to think, Heisenberg began playing round with an old problem he had become interested in as far back as 1922. He decided to attack the problem in an unusual way, inspired by recent developments that strongly suggested that Nature had a quantum aspect. One evening, he caught on to a new way of looking at the problem but was making many arithmetical errors because the calculations were long and tedious. However, he pressed on and it was quite late when he could finish it. This is how he recalled it later:

"It was almost three o'clock in the morning before the final results of my calculations lay before me.... And I could no longer doubt the mathematical consistency and coherence of the kind of quantum mechanics to which my calculations pointed. At first, I was deeply alarmed. I had the feeling that, through the surface of atomic phenomena, I was looking at a strangely beautiful interior, and felt almost giddy at the thought that I now had to probe this wealth of mathematical structure Nature had so generously spread out before me. I was far too excited to sleep."

To his wife he wrote later:

"I was lucky to look over the good Lord's shoulder while He was at work."

And to his sister he said, recalling those exciting moment of discovery:

"... the last few weeks were full of excitement for me. And perhaps I can best illustrate what I have experienced through the analogy that I have attempted an, as yet unknown, ascent to the fundamental peak of atomic theory..... And now, with the peak directly ahead of me, the whole terrain of interrelationships in atomic theory is suddenly and clearly spread out before my eyes. That these interrelationships display, in all their mathematical abstraction, an incredible simplicity, is a gift we can accept only humbly. Not even Plato could have believed them to be so beautiful. For these interrelationships cannot be invented; they have been there since the creation of the world."

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

Heisenberg also made one more monumental discovery, central to the quantum world, namely the famous Uncertainty Principle. In the popular world, this principle is often misquoted and stretched beyond its legitimate limits, but historically, what happened was the following. Heisenberg began his paper by observing that his objective was "to establish a basis for theoretical quantum mechanics founded exclusively upon relationships between quantities which in principle are **observable**."

Thus it is that not only did observables become an important element of Quantum Mechanics but, along with it [though a bit later], the notion of the OBSERVER! After all, if a thing has to be observed, there has to be an observer, is it not? Those are philosophical matters to which maybe we shall come later, but the point I want make is that Heisenberg said that he wanted to establish a quantum rule book that would spell out the grammar for making calculations relating to quantities that could be observed in an experiment.

Now two of the most fundamental entities that one assumes to be observables in classical mechanics are the position and the velocity of a moving particle. That is to say, one asserts, that at every specific instant of time, one can determine where exactly the particle is; and, in principle, one could simultaneously measure the position and the momentum of the particle to infinite accuracy. Let us rephrase this remark to see what exactly it means. It means that in Classical Mechanics, one can in principle, know both the position and the momentum of a particle simultaneously, and with infinite accuracy – in practice this might be a tall order but there is nothing in principle that forbids this; that is what the rule book says in Classical Mechanics. Please note that when we draw trajectories for bullets and the like and actually calculate these trajectories using Classical Mechanics, we are actually assuming implicitly that we can know with infinite accuracy at every instant, both the position as well as the momentum of the particle. Until the advent of quantum mechanics, no one had any reason to suppose that this

was theoretically impossible; yes in practice there might be some errors, but in principle, there was no conceptual obstacle.

Heisenberg decided to see if this rule applied in the new quantum world also and to his surprise and astonishment he discovered that it did not always do so. He found, for example, that the position and momentum of a particle could never, even in principle, be determined simultaneously with infinite precision. If the position is measured with very high accuracy, then that very act of measurement would disturb the particle to change its momentum. Likewise, if the momentum is measured accurately at a particular instant, then that would upset the position and so the measurement of the position would give inaccurate results. For some strange reason, Nature seemed to have paired off certain observables in such a manner that they could never even in principle, be simultaneously measured with infinite accuracy. Heisenberg went further and determined a rule that goes as follows:

Let Δp be the uncertainty in the measurement of the momentum p of a particle at a particular instant. Similarly, let Δx be the uncertainty or error in the measurement of the position x of the particle at the same instant. The point here is that uncertainties in measurement are **unavoidable**. And so an observer, despite all the care he takes, has these uncertainties in his simultaneous measurement of the momentum and position of a particle. Heisenberg then went on to show that these two quantities are related by the formula:

$$\Delta p \Delta x > \text{or} = (h/2\pi),$$

where h is Planck's constant and the symbol $>$ means greater than. In other words, there is always a **minimum** error, reflecting a certain **basic uncertainty** in Nature when we try to simultaneously measure two quantities that seem to be tied up peculiarly. This is a feature **totally absent** in Classical Mechanics.

Dirac Creates the Quantum Mechanics Framework

Schrodinger and Heisenberg were like two people, feeling two parts of an elephant. The man who tied it all up and said that what these people were feeling was really part of one piece called Quantum Mechanics was Dirac, who came into this game in a strange manner. Let us hear that story from Dirac himself:

"The first I heard about Heisenberg's new ideas was in early September 1925, when R. H. Folwer [Dirac's thesis adviser] gave me the proof sheets of Heisenberg's paper. At first I could not make much out of it, but after two weeks I saw that it provided the key to problem the of quantum mechanics. I proceeded to work it out for myself."

Later, Dirac said,

"At that time, I was expecting some kind of a connection between new mechanics and the Hamiltonian dynamics [this is a reference to the complete

edifice for Classical Mechanics that had been built up earlier in the 19th century by Hamilton]. I felt that when the quantum numbers became large, quantum systems tend to behave rather like classical systems.”

So that puts Dirac's work in some perspective. Basically, Schrodinger said, “If matter has a wave like behaviour, let me write down an equation for matter wave and examine what they predict.” This analysis led to what are called wave functions, associated with various states of the system.

Around the same time, quite independently, young Heisenberg made some basic discoveries. They are:

1. It makes sense only to talk about quantities that can be observed in experiments.
2. One cannot ever observe a system in a particular state but one could observe a system as it changes its state, that is to say, it goes from state 1 to state 2. One could also measure the transition rate, that is to say, how quickly the transition from state 1 to state 2 is made. Technically, this is called the **transition probability**.
3. Since in Heisenberg's way of looking at things it was always a case of dealing with **two** states instead of one [recall that in the Bohr model, spectral lines arose due to transitions between two states], Heisenberg found it was necessary to use a strange kind of mathematics where one dealt with an array of numbers. Later, Max Born [that story comes soon] realised that what Heisenberg had stumbled upon was well known to mathematicians as matrices, and it seemed as if matrix algebra was central to quantum mechanics.
4. Another profound discovery that Heisenberg made was the Uncertainty Principle.

What Dirac did was to put all this together into a nice and most elegant framework, so that one had a complete working scheme for making practical calculations for a quantum system, just as Hamilton had given a complete scheme for a classical system almost a century earlier. In a manner of speaking, Dirac followed the same route as classical physicists normally did, but built into it all the quantum exceptions. Dirac initially published his work as papers but finally wrote a book, which became a classic. For generations, this was like the Bible, and so many learnt their quantum mechanics from this book. With good justification, it was often hailed as the book of the century!

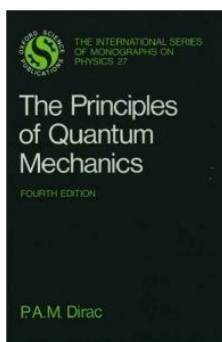


Figure 3 offers a rough flow diagram of how the various ideas evolved.

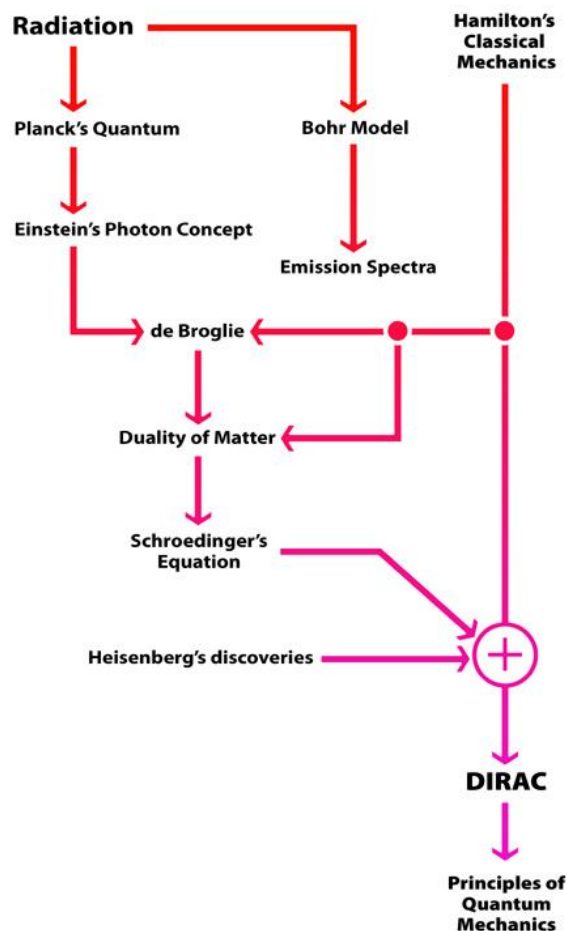


Figure 3: This flow diagram shows roughly how ideas evolved, and linked to each other as also influenced each other during that critical period, 1923 – 1928 or so.

Dirac's beautiful consolidation and "synthesis" of the different ideas literally gave one a rule book for doing practical calculations using the tools of quantum mechanics [of course ignoring relativistic effects, which one could afford to on many occasions]. Thus it is that Dirac at one time during that period went to the extent of saying that Physics was almost over and the "rest is all chemistry"! That of course was a fatally flawed prediction! But the fact is that like Hamilton's tool box for Classical Mechanics, thanks to Dirac there was now a Quantum tool box, which was a must at the atomic and molecular level.

However, the story does not end there; in fact it begins there! The first big question was: "What on earth does the wave function of Schroedinger represent? Does it have any physical meaning?" The question was a legitimate one, because Schroedinger's Ψ was a complex quantity. How could a quantity with an imaginary part have any meaning in Physics, which dealt with physical reality? Yet, this Ψ delivered answers; so clearly, there was

something to it. But how does one make any meaning of it? The answer to that question was first attempted by Max Born, and that was a real breakthrough. But it also opened the Pandora's box, and some of the problems raised over seventy years ago, are still with us! All that story later.

Biographies of the Scientists featured in the article

De Broglie

Louis de Broglie was born in an aristocratic family France in 1892. After passing out of school in 1909, he first took up a study of history. Finding that he liked science better, he made a switch in the following year and earned a degree in 1913. During the First World War, young Louis was conscripted by the French Army. However, throughout the war, he was posted in Paris, and in the famous Eiffel Tower [I don't know why!]. Anyway, it gave de Broglie a lot of spare time to study problems in science and engineering.

After the war, he resumed his study in Physics and began to take particular interest in the research of his brother Maurice. A lot of work in Maurice's lab involved x-rays, and this got young Louis thinking about the dual character of light, i.e., the wave-like nature on the one hand, known for about a hundred years, and the particle like behaviour discovered by Einstein. De Broglie began to speculate that matter might behave in a similar fashion, and in 1924, he sent several notes to the French Academy outlining his thoughts. Soon he wrote it all up as his thesis for a doctorate degree. Einstein saw the thesis and described it "as a feeble ray of light" in the darkness that then prevailed. It was the bold ideas of de Broglie that inspired the birth of wave mechanics.

De Broglie received many awards including the Noble Prize in 1929, and the Kalinga Award of the UNESCO. He died in 1987.

Schrodinger

Erwin Schoredinger was born in Vienna in 1887. He was the only child of his parents. His father owned an oil-cloth factory but he was more interested in botany, chemistry and painting. Young Erwin's education was by private tuition at home, but Schroedinger later recalled that he learnt more from his father than his tutor. He then entered the Gymnasium [some kind of a preparatory school] where he concentrated on Latin and Greek rather than on science. However, during this period, he discovered the pleasures of science and promptly switched to it in the university. He emerged with a doctorate degree in 1910 but had to serve in the army during the First World War.

After the War, Schroedinger worked for a while in Vienna where he did some experimental work. In 1920 he moved to Zurich in Switzerland to take up the Professor's post previously held by Einstein. At Zurich, Schoredinger started working in statistical physics, following in the footsteps of the famous Austrian physicist Boltzmann.

In 1924, Satyan Bose of India sent a paper to Einstein in which he proposed what has since come to be called Bose-Einstein statistics. Schroedinger saw the paper of Bose when it was published [on the recommendation of Einstein] and did not quite like it. He instead wanted to understand the results in an entirely different way, and thus was born what we now know as wave mechanics.

In 1927, Schoredinger went to Berlin to succeed Max Planck as the Professor in the University there. But life became difficult after 1930 when Hitler came to power and started persecuting people belonging to the Jewish faith [Schoredinger was a Jew]. So Schoredinger left for England in 1933. During that period there was some talk of his coming to India to settle down here, like Max Born had done at that time. Schoredinger was attracted to this idea because of his liking for *Vedanta*. But it did not work out. In 1939, he shifted to Ireland. After the Second World War, Austria tried very hard to persuade Schroedinger to return to his native land. Even the President of Austria pleaded, but Schoredinger refused because the Soviet troops were still occupying the country. It was only in 1956 when the Soviet troops finally left that Schroedinger returned. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1933. He died in 1961.

Heisenberg

Werner Heisenberg was born in Germany in 1901. His father was a Professor of Greek. Young Werner studied Physics at Munich under the famous Arnold Sommerfeld, and his fellow students included Wolfgang Pauli. In 1922, Sommerfeld brought his star pupil to Gottingen to attend a course of lectures being given by Bohr. There, Heisenberg promptly came under the notice of both Bohr and Max Born. For his doctoral dissertation, Heisenberg studied a complicated problem in turbulence and the result pleased Sommerfeld very much. Unfortunately, when the examiner [known for his law of radiation] was not so much impressed, because Heisenberg failed to answer some simple questions in optics! As a result, Heisenberg did not receive as high marks for his thesis as he deserved.

After getting his doctorate degree, Heisenberg became Born's assistant in Gottingen. A little later he obtained a Rockefeller fellowship that enabled him to work in Bohr's Institute in Copenhagen. It was during this period that he made his famous discovery that earned for him the Noble Prize in 1932.

During the Second World War, Heisenberg stayed back in Germany [he was not a Jew and therefore did not have to flee]. In 1941, he was appointed Professor of Physics in Berlin, and also the Director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics. During this period, Heisenberg became involved with a project to build a nuclear reactor as a part of a programme to develop the atom bomb. But the project did not progress well.

After the war, Heisenberg and several other German scientists were taken prisoners by American troops. There was a special team of the US Army which went hunting for German scientists. This team had the German-

scientist prisoners sent to a special detention centre in England where they were intensely cross examined to find out how much progress the Nazis had made in their atom bomb project.

In 1946, Heisenberg was released and he returned to Germany. Immediately, he set about rebuilding Physics in his country. He died in 1976.

Dirac

Paul Adrian Maurice Dirac was born in England in 1902. His father was Swiss while his mother was English. Father Dirac worked as a Teacher of French in England and so all the children grew up there. However, they were registered as Swiss citizens. Young Paul studied in Bristol. His father was a strict disciplinarian, and the children were required to speak grammatically correct French. Later, Dirac said that it was this fact that made a rather silent person!

In school, young Dirac simply excelled in mathematics; clearly, he was exceptional. After school Dirac took a B.Sc degree in engineering but his dream was to study science and mathematics in Cambridge. His family could not afford such an education, but eventually he did realise his ambition by winning a scholarship.

In Cambridge, Dirac's supervisor was a man named Fowler [who was also the famous Chandrasekhar's supervisor]. Great discoveries were in the air, and hearing about them, Dirac started explorations on his own. In the process, he discovered what has come to be called *Transformation Theory*. In 1926, Dirac wrote up his thesis, and later this thesis was developed into a book on Quantum Mechanics, that remained a real classic for a long time.

Dirac was real legend even in his time, and many are the stories revolving around him. Here is one that is typical of how he saw even ordinary things from a deep mathematical point of view. Once, he visited the house of Prof. Peter Kapitza. Kapitza was Russian but had come to Cambridge where he did wonderful work in low temperature physics. [Later, he was forced to go back to Russia – those were the days when Stalin ruled and life was very different.] Later, Kapitza won the Nobel for his amazing discoveries. To get back to the Dirac story, when Dirac went to the house of Kapitza, Mrs. Kapitza was knitting a sweater, even as Kapitza and Dirac were discussing physics. Suddenly, Dirac said to Mrs. Kapitza, "You know Anya, watching the way you were making this sweater I got interested in the topological aspect of the problem. I found that there is another way of doing this, and that there are only two possible ways of knitting. One is the way you are doing right now and the other is" Dirac explained what the other method was. Mrs. Kapitza stared at Dirac and said, "Your other way is well-known to women. It is called purling." So much for Dirac's great topological discovery in knitting!

Dirac received the Noble in 1933. Dirac loved mathematical beauty and was always fascinated when equations were beautiful. While on a visit to Moscow in 1955, Dirac gave a lecture in the famous university there. During the

lecture, Dirac wrote on the board: *Physical Laws Must Have Mathematical Beauty*. Those words are still preserved! Dirac died in 1984.

Max Born

Max Born was born in Germany in 1882. He studied in several universities, before settling down in Gottingen. Following his father's advice, he kept an open mind and avoided specialising in any one subject. But he was much attracted to mathematics, especially that which involved applications. Curiously, as a young man, he did not find Physics interesting!

After obtaining the doctorate degree [with a thesis in applied mathematics], he became a lecturer at the Gottingen University. Came the First World War in 1914, and like most scientists of the day, Born had to serve in the Army. His job was to do some calculations on ballistics but since he could finish these off in a jiffy, he and his friend Theodor von Karman [later to become famous in aerodynamics] secretly worked on a theory for the vibrations of atoms in a crystal lattice. This theory called the Born-von Karman theory is used even today. [In 1973, I wrote a book on this subject, which I dedicated to the memory of Max Born.]

As far as quantum mechanics is concerned, Born shot into the limelight with his famous probabilistic interpretation. Somehow, at least at that time, he did not receive enough credit for his work, with people often mistaking that it was Niels Bohr who gave such an interpretation. To make matters worse, he was consistently overlooked for the award of the Nobel Prize when awards were handed for the discovery of quantum mechanics. Naturally, this upset Born very much and it was only in 1954 that his contribution was finally acknowledged.

When Hitler came to power, Born fled Germany. He first went to Cambridge and while there, he received an offer from C.V. Raman, who was then at the Indian Institute of Science. That is how Born came to Bangalore as a Visiting Professor. Raman liked Born very much and for a while the two got along famously. In fact, Raman tried his best to get Born a permanent job but did not succeed. Meanwhile, a professional controversy broke out between the two, and even as this was happening, Raman himself was facing tough times being ultimately forced to step down from the Director's job.

As for Born, he left for Europe, settled down in Scotland and spent many years developing a quantum mechanical theory of the dynamics of crystalline lattices. His work was then written up as a book by his Chinese colleague Huang, and the book became a classic. When the war ended, Born returned to Germany which upset Einstein very much, who could never forgive Germany. Born died in 1970.

HARNESSING THE HEART - PART 13

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 K-Alldis, Mr. Dev Taneja, Mr. C. B. S. Mani, Mr. Karthik Ramesh, Mr. Amar Vivek, Mr. Krish Venkatasubramaniam, Mr. Hiten Morarji, Mr. N. Prabhakar, Mr. Sathya Jambunathan, Mr. U. Pardha Saradhi, A courageous woman executive (Part 11) and Mr. Shalabh Mittal.

'Render to Caesar what is Caesar's' said Lord Jesus, when his disciples complained about the taxes the Jews had to pay the Romans. The professional life of Mr. Kannan, a tax official, is a story redolent with such strict adherence to the principles of righteousness. Temptations always surrounded him, but he remained unaffected; none could influence him with any objectionable means, and he was fearless. Tax advisors are often coaxed to find legal loopholes which might benefit the individual, and bribery and gifts are a regular occurrence when one is dealing with such important officials, but Mr. Kannan was different, and how? Read this reinvigorating story.

THE TAX OFFICER WITH TWO PENSIONS!

The story of Mr. P.S. Kannan by Mr. Krish Venkatsubramaniam

Mr. P. S. Kannan, is a retired Income Tax Official from Chennai, India. He started his career in 1966 as an Upper Division Clerk and rose up the ladder to eventually become an Additional Commissioner of Income Tax, before retiring in 2006. A man of principles and integrity, after his superannuation, he now leads a peaceful life with his wife and daughter in Chennai.

"What kind of pension, sir, do you receive from the Heavenly Father? Does He drop money in your lap?"

He laughed. "I meant a pension of fathomless peace . . ."

*This conversation between Sri Paramahansa Yogananda and his Guru in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, immediately brings to my mind, Sri. P.S. Kannan, a retired Income Tax Official, known for his honesty and straight forwardness.*

Whenever I read the "Harnessing the Heart" section of Heart2Heart, I had always wanted to meet him and get his inspiring story. He is one of the people I knew who has been consistent in his ethical practices in this ever-changing

world! I know him professionally for more than 20 years, right from the time of my Chartered Accountancy Articleship training.

People who were aware of his unique character have always maintained a respectful fear because of the highest standards of integrity Mr. Kannan always set for himself! This was in the back of my mind, when I hesitatingly called him. But when I asked for his time, explaining the objective, he readily agreed. His voice was, as always, enthusiastic and cheerful.

When I reached his home, I was not surprised, having known him, to find that he was as simple as ever, with a *dhoti* and a vest. His house had simple but neat furnishing – slightly upgraded from the couple of wooden benches I used to see some 10 years ago!

He joined service in 1966 as an Upper Division Clerk in the Income Tax department and rose to the level of Additional Commissioner of Income Tax before retiring in June 2006.

Once, when he was assessing Government officials, there were some Wealth Tax arrears due from a very senior Government official. Without any hesitation, he had sent a formal notice as per the established procedure to the person. The concerned official, seeing the notice, not only readily agreed to pay the arrears, but also mentioned to his secretary, "I want to meet this person!" He was impressed by his moral fiber.

*"Taxes, after all, are dues that we pay for the privileges of membership in an organized society."
Franklin D. Roosevelt*

Another time, during the Wealth Tax assessment of a well-known personality, Mr. Kannan found that the value of a property was mentioned at a much lower figure, while advance received for selling just a part of the property was itself much more. Hence, he sent it for formal valuation, which resulted in the property being assessed at Rupees one crore!

*"I think it is only fair that we pay our fair share of taxes here otherwise how do we make sure that the poor have access to education, healthcare etc.? So I am a firm believer in our paying of fair share of taxes."
Mr. Narayanamurthy, Chief Mentor, Infosys*

The person was very upset and personally came to his office and tried to convince him to assess the property at a lower value. He even invited Mr. Kannan to a party at his home, which Mr. Kannan flatly refused. Not only that he even conveyed politely yet firmly that what he had done was the right way to assess, and also that this will be the only way he would be doing it. The person became even more upset, but tried to now lure him with gifts. But what can tempt a person who considers righteousness as his very breathe?

The case ultimately was referred to an appellate authority, where it was not only confirmed that Kannan's view point was right, but it was also well

appreciated. Since his conscience was clear and the approach was as per the procedure, he was never under any tension, even though there was pressure from higher authorities.

*"To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men."
Abraham Lincoln.*

Spiritual Support

When I asked him as to how he drew the spiritual strength required to face such challenging situations, he replied in his own inimitable style, "Following the right path by itself is a spiritual practice!" But then, he went on to say that he had the habit of writing *Rama Nama* (writing the name of Lord Rama) whenever he required to recharge himself. I remember an Indian folk song which goes like this:

"Chant the name Rama Rama. If you cannot do that, have the company of good people"

Once, after the completion of assessment of a leading business organization, the owner had given Mr. Kannan, a box of sweets. Only after he left, was Mr. Kannan shocked to find that the owner had actually kept an expensive gift in the box. He immediately called that person and asked him to take the gift back. Kannan did not sleep the whole night and was relieved only after that box was returned the next day. The point here is tax assessments might be favorable to some while unfavorable to others. And *dharmic* leaders such as Kannan believe strongly in just doing what is right as per the law and not what would please others.

Mr. Kannan assures confidently that not even once had he the slightest wish to misuse his position for any personal advantage. In fact, there were occasions when he had taken his visitors to the office canteen and provided coffee or snacks to them as per the Indian tradition of *Athithideivo Bhava* (Guest is God).

Likewise, for deserving candidates from the lower strata of society, Kannan had recommended and got them educational scholarships from corporate foundations; none of the students were even personally known to him.

Formula for Success

While being transparent and honest, one must also be humble, and more importantly, intelligent and tactful, while dealing with cases. Mr. Kannan possessed these during all his dealings. Even as a file reached his table, if he felt that it could be an "influential case", that is, the file of a person or entity who could try to circumvent the procedures, he ensured right from the beginning, to document every detail formally, before sending it to his superior. This way, he ensured that he did his part as per the right procedure.

Secondly, he always believed in putting forth his view point to his superiors with courage, though with humility. He was never scared of anybody as he was doing his duty as per *dharma*. Whenever his boss or any senior official's opinion differed or when they were angry, he never reacted or retaliated immediately. He would rather return to his seat and after a considerable time-gap would go back to them and explain his view point. And this sense of timing, he recollects, invariably helped his cause.

He has always believed that a person with sufficient maturity and emotional mastery can deal with any person or situation, irrespective of the difficulty or complexity involved.

Another facet of his personality that awed me is that during his appraisal, he normally came to summarize his achievements in two lines, but his bosses invariably elaborated his achievements, which eventually used to end up to twelve lines!

On Time for 40 Years!

Throughout the forty years of his service, Mr. Kannan was always punctual to his office, dot on time. He was often addressed as the 'Punctual Officer'! There was one senior official who used to call all officers over the Intercom at 9.20 a.m., and wish them, but did not call Mr. Kannan even once. Mr. Kannan even once had asked him, "Why is it that you never call me, not even once?" It was then that the officer explained, "I am calling all my officers to check and ensure they are on their seats on time. I do not have the necessity to call you; you are always punctual!"

"Friends and neighbors complain that taxes are indeed very heavy... but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. We are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly." - Benjamin Franklin

Mr. Kannan is an alumnus of A.M. Jain College, Chennai. He had imbibed this habit of punctuality right from his college days. Even when star cricket players like Venkataraghavan played matches at the college ground during class hours, all students religiously attended classes; not one would be found on the ground during the class!

Likewise, Kannan recollects that even players such as Venkataraghavan used to attend office in the afternoon, if the match was only in the morning. Probably that was the reason why cricket was once referred to as a gentleman's game!

"Time is God" - Baba

Once when an attempt was made to check the attendance of all junior staff, Mr. Kannan (a senior official by then) had suggested that it is even more pertinent for the senior officials to be on time as they were provided with office

cars for transportation! "Leaders must first set the right example themselves," says Mr. Kannan.

Learning from Mentors

Kannan recollects that he had learnt many good things from his seniors right from his first year into the job. For instance, Mr. Muthu Balasubramaniam, a very senior official had taught him punctuality and to be systematic and effective in work. Even in 1967, when there were no computers or organizers, he had an impeccable system to ensure effectiveness. He used to write down the list of tasks assigned to different team members and retained a carbon copy of that document to follow it up every evening. It is because he was so methodical that he had a strong grip over all tasks assigned!

Face the Fear!

Six months before retirement, Kannan was allotted to do "transfer pricing", which was quite new to him. ("Transfer Pricing" refers to the pricing of assets, services, and funds transferred within an organization, for example, from a parent company to a foreign subsidiary. Since the prices are set within an organization (i.e. controlled), this is a major concern for fiscal authorities who worry that multi-national entities may set transfer prices on cross-border transactions in such a manner so as to reduce taxable profits in their jurisdiction. This has led to the rise of transfer pricing regulations and enforcement, making this a major tax compliance issue for multi-national companies.)

His seniors had the confidence in him and he kept up to their expectation. He did not hesitate to take this up, even though he knew he was about to retire and this was completely a new area for him. "One must be ready to take up new areas with confidence and be ready to go forward even if through trial and error," he says. "Consistent and sustained efforts, commitment to the cause, full involvement and honesty would only ensure one's success in any endeavor."

No Short Routes Please!

I remember many occasions when I had consulted Mr. Kannan on taxation-related technical matters. Throughout, Mr. Kannan did not encourage even a passing reference to anything related to avoiding tax, even if it's his close relative or friend. "Because," he says, "*dharma* is larger than any individual and more important than any relationship!"

"Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws." Plato

I could clearly observe one thing during the entire conversation. He never once described himself as being honest or ethical. He always gave more prominence to the principles and values rather than to his practicing them!

His wants have always been limited and hence they get fulfilled. He says that he is contented with what God has given him and thus, is leading a peaceful life. When he goes to bed, he falls asleep like a child without any thoughts worrying him. "This," Mr. Kannan says, "is possible only if a person has a strong value system and transparency."

Post retirement, Mr. Kannan considers the house he owns and lives in as God's gift to him. The retirement benefits that he received, including the pension is sufficient for his family. And more than all these, he considers the guilt-free, peaceful retired life as, by itself, a great boon!

As I drove away from his house, I saw a huge banner advertisement of a leading brand of mattress guaranteeing a cozy sleep for its user. I wondered how many could get the boon of tranquil sleep as Mr. Kannan!

*"Now I ceaselessly enjoy the spiritual pension. Never from that day has the Blissful Creator remained hidden from my eyes behind any screen of delusion."
Autobiography of a Yogi*

SERIAL ARTICLES

SHIRDI SAI PARTHI SAI

Part – 48

*(Continued from the previous issue- **Final Episode**)*

ACT XXII - SCENE 1

The fourteen year old who went from Puttaparthi as Sathyanarayana Raju has returned as Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, and is now established in a shed built on a piece of land donated most kindly by Subbamma. This shed is now enshrined in history as Patha Mandiram [Old Mandir]. It is from here that Baba started His Mission that now has grown to immense proportions, spanning all continents. But back in 1940, the crowds were small [by today's standards] and some were yet to be convinced of Baba's Divinity. The most important of them was Seshama Raju. Seshama accepted that there was something extraordinary about his brother, but found it difficult to accept that this brother of his was in reality God walking on earth! People today find fault with Seshama, but this is an opinion based on hindsight. We must remember that Seshama merely played a part he was destined to – God wanted to show that there would be 'Doubting Thomases', and He cast His own bodily brother as the first doubter. However, Seshama finally realised that he was mistaken and accepted Baba as an Avatar. In this, the last scene of this play we see how finally, even Seshama came around.

A group of devotees have gathered around Baba in the Patha Mandiram, and this includes members of His family; Seshama Raju is also present. Baba is seen speaking to them.

SATHYA: Embodiments of Divine Love! Man believes in everything, but does not have faith in God! He is not able to know that God resides within him. He is unable to understand this fact...God's Grace cannot be earned through tricks, cunning, power, charity, or learning.

You can see the radiant Moon by its own light. In the same way, God who is the very source of Divine Love, can be seen only with Love...

*Man today has become blind,
Having lost his eyes of faith.
He may not see God,
But does that mean God does not exist?
Foolishly he may believe God is **nowhere**,
But for you, **God is NOW HERE!***

A blind man cannot see the Sun, even if it is shining brightly. And those who shut their eyes, cannot see the world. Does that mean that the Sun or the world does not exist?

If the child does not have faith in its mother, it will not love its mother. In the same way, in the case of God also, faith is very important. It is sheer ignorance to declare that there is no God just because He cannot be seen. It is wrong to assert that the Unseen does not exist.

The rose can be seen, but can its fragrance be seen? Similarly, the mother has a form but her love does not.

Faith is God. Devotees must therefore cultivate faith... Faith begets peace and in this way you can secure total happiness.

Sathya creates sugar candy by a wave of this hand and calls his mother to receive the prasadam.

SATHYA: Lady.....

EASWARAMMA: Seshama... come, take it Seshama.

VENKAMA RAJU: Seshama, why are you looking like that? Go ahead and receive it.

KONDAMA RAJU: God's Grace is dependent upon the merit earned in earlier births. One who enjoys God's Grace in full measure has Divine qualities. One with Divine qualities appears as God to all, and one who worships this God [in human form] will find happiness and fulfilment. All this holds true in the case of Sathyam! Go. Go and receive *Prasadam*.

SESHAMA RAJU: In Nature, it is only after ripening that one has a fruit. One cannot have a fruit as soon as a flower transforms into a bud. Similarly, in life, some time is required for the attainment of spiritual maturity. Grandfather, you know all this! Yet, you see Divinity in your grandson in His boyhood. That may be OK for you but for me, I cannot understand how Sathyam can be called God.

EASWARAMMA: Seshama! What are you talking!

SESHAMA RAJU: Yes, mother. It takes years of arduous spiritual practice to become a Wise One... to become a saint. Such being the case, is it not strange if one who is innocent of the ways

of the world and is yet to enter it has suddenly become spiritual? Above all, how can He say He is God?

VENKAMA RAJU: Seshama, you are wrong! There is no age bar for receiving God's Grace. It all depends on the merit earned in earlier births. Once upon a time, I too had such doubts. But now I am convinced.

If so many devotees have such strong faith and belief, I cannot but fall in line. As father says, I believe it is all the result of good actions done in earlier births.

SESHAMA RAJU: It is okay to talk about the fruits of Wisdom and earlier births, but one must also be realistic and think of the present too. While some revere Sathyam as God, there are others who dismiss it all as trickery and magic. We all know that right from childhood, Sathyam's behaviour has been quite unusual. It was because of this that He was sent to Uravakonda. But that did not produce any change. He was brought back to Puttaparthi... and what happened here?

KONDAMA RAJU: What happened? Devotees are coming in large numbers; they sing *bhajans* and listen to discourses.

SESHAMA RAJU: True. I agree with what you say. But, was not Sathyam's abode also set on fire? Why?

VENKAMA RAJU: Oh that! Some people were jealous of Sathyam, that's all.

SESHAMA RAJU: Indeed. But don't you see that those who wanted to test Sathyam did not believe in His Divinity?

VENKAMA RAJU: Yes.

SESHAMA RAJU: As long as there are such non-believers who are prepared to test Sathyam, who can say what danger awaits Him, where and when?

EASWARAMMA: Seshama, what is it that you are saying? Are there people who would harm my child? Is this true Seshama?

SESHAMA RAJU: Yes, mother. How can you bear to see harm come to the child whom you have carried for nine months? What is the guarantee that others would not inflict danger in the future, just as some did recently? Mother! Sathyam's life is in danger because of the path He has chosen. No mother, we don't need this kind of danger.

KONDAMA RAJU: Seshama, think again. Perhaps this event occurred in order to reveal to the world the Divine power latent in Sathyam. That is why nothing happened to Sathyam. Besides, the wicked ones have had their eyes opened.

SESHAMA RAJU: Grandfather! Is it enough to say that the present danger has passed? Is there any guarantee that there will be no danger tomorrow or the day after? How do you know? It is better for Sathyam to give up this path and choose some other. I am not saying this out of any selfishness. Father... Mother... it is only in the interests of Sathyam that I am speaking like this. All of you please understand the words of this brother.

EASWARAMMA: Seshama, Sathyam has chosen this path for Himself long ago. He has also firmly declared that He will never give it up. But who can say what God's Will is? I fully understand your anguish as a brother. Whatever I have to say as a mother, I already have. Your father too has. When Sathyam says He has no bonds of relationship with us, how can we stop Him? Tell me!

SESHAMA RAJU: If you won't tell Him, I will! Sathyam, You have said that You have no bonds with us. Does that mean that similarly, no bonds exist between devotee and God?

SATHYA: No! That relationship is not bondage. The devotee has love for God, and God has compassion for the devotee. That is all.

SESHAMA RAJU: If You really have Divine power in You, then how come those wicked people were able to set fire to Your hut?

SATHYA: You have already said that they were wicked people. Only when people are wicked there is retribution. Punishment is given not to hurt, but to correct and to proclaim to the world that evil actions beget pain as the ultimate reward.

SATHYA: I have incarnated not for punishing the wicked. Instead, it is for correcting them, leading them to the proper path and to show them the Light of Wisdom. It is the duty of the *Avatar* to show the correct path to evil ones.

SESHAMA RAJU: Agreed! But such work must be done by people who are rich in experience and therefore full of Wisdom. It ought not to be done by one of Your age!

SATHYA: Nowhere is it said at what age Wisdom should dawn.

SESHAMA RAJU: Look. I am Your elder brother who came running here out of deep anxiety about what happened to You. I am Your brother who wants You to be safe and happy, wherever You are... mother, father, and grandfather all regard You as God. But, I alone am not able to understand You! Now tell me, if God exists in all, why then are You alone acting so different from others?

Who exactly are You? What is Your goal in life? What is Your life's objective? I must know Your true nature.

What is it that You possess? Are Your materialisations due to the power of magic, or the result of Divine power that can also transform the wicked?

SATHYA: Here is your answer... God is not only the One who materialises objects, but in fact, the One who created the entire Universe. He has no need for any magic. He is the Almighty God who can do anything, including transforming the wicked into good by invoking Divine power.

SESHAMA RAJU: Does that mean You are God? Tell me! Tell me now! Who exactly are You?

SATHYA: Responding to the prayers of Venkava Dhoota, that jewel of the Ratnakara family, I have now incarnated in that very same family, descended from Sage Apasthamba and in the lineage of Sage Bharadwaja.

SATHYA: I, who earlier incarnated as [Shirdi Sai] a sequel to a boon granted by the Lord, have now been born to Easwaramma.

I am ever present in the hearts of those who worship Me with a pure mind, sacred feelings, total faith, and complete devotion.

You asked Me: "Who are You?" The time has come to resolve all your doubts. You will know who I am.

A pause

I AM SAI BABA!

Seshama Raju is stunned by the declaration. Slowly the realisation sinks in that the 'young lad' before him, whom he had all along treated as his younger brother and about whose future he was very much concerned, is not an ordinary mortal. In fact, He is no mortal at all but the very Lord

in human form, born in the Ratnakara family to continue the work begun earlier in Shirdi. Seshama falls at Baba's feet.

SESHAMA: Swami! Forgive me! Till now, I did not realise that You who do things beyond human comprehension, You who say things that even the Wise are not aware of, and You who make the scriptures [*Vedas* and *Upanishads*] come alive, are verily God in human form, visible to our ordinary eyes.

Swami, I found fault with You because You did not follow accepted customs and conventions. I tried to correct You. I even punished You! But now, You have removed the scales from my eyes. You have also annihilated my pride born of ignorance. You have revealed to me Your true nature. With the *Darshan* of that Divine and Auspicious Form, my life has achieved fulfilment. Swami, my life has truly been fulfilled!

From this moment, You alone are my Guru! You alone are my God! And Swami, Your Lotus Feet are my refuge, my sole refuge Swami! Other than You, there is no refuge! To You, I surrender completely! You are the Real Doer!

Protect me, O Shirdi Sai! Protect and save me, O Parthi Sai! Protect and save me, O Parthi Sai!

Everyone assembled chants:

Shirdi Sai, Parthi Sai ki, Jai!
Shirdi Sai, Parthi Sai ki, Jai!
Shirdi Sai, Parthi Sai ki, Jai!

END OF THE PLAY

SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - Part 2

(Continued from the previous issue)

By Prof. G. Venkataraman

*Since **Heart2Heart** started in 2003, readers have very often written to us seeking answers to many spiritual questions. We have answered them at times through appropriate articles in H2H. However, there are still many that have to be explained carefully and in detail. And in the recent past, a lot more queries have arrived on varied topics concerning spirituality and personal growth.*

*We have now meticulously compiled and categorised these questions, and Prof. G. Venkataraman has offered to answer all these queries in a structured and systematic way as a series on Radio Sai as well as in **H2H**. In this way, these answers now remain always on our website as a ready reckoner on spiritual doubts.*

This is a suitably adapted transcript of our radio series of the same name. To listen or download the talk from our website, please visit www.radiosai.org/qa

Loving Sai Ram and greetings from Prasanthi Nilayam. I hope I was able to effectively communicate to you what I explained in the last article, which was the first of this series. I realise that I took an entire article to deal with just one question, but then that was the inaugural piece and I took the opportunity to set the stage for the future articles. But this time, I assure you, the pace would be a bit more brisk. In fact, I would be dealing with not one but three questions, all related of course, and in a sense, variations of the same theme.

These are the questions I will attempt to answer this time:

- 1. What is the ultimate path to finish the cycle of birth and death?**
- 2. Is *Moksha* (liberation) a state of being or is it attained only after death?**
- 3. If *Moksha* means no rebirth, will the Universe come to an end only when all creatures attain *Moksha*, or is Creation eternal?**

As you can notice, these questions overlap to a certain extent. However, before I get on to answering the present crop of questions, I hope that those of you who have read the previous article, would be able to see almost immediately the connection between the present set of questions and with what I dealt with then. Essentially, it was all about the pathway to the state referred in the questions this time as *Moksha* (liberation).

While the first question refers to permanent escape from the recurring cycle of birth and death, the other two speak of *Moksha*. Let me start with the question of repeated birth and death and to do that, I have to briefly go back to my previous article.

If you recall, I had mentioned in it that a human being is actually a body plus *atma*; actually, if one includes the fine print, a human being is, as Swami often

reminds us, a combination of a gross body that is made up of flesh, blood and bones; a subtle mind, which is much more than the brain; and finally the *atma*. So it is a three-tier structure, layer within layer one might say, with the *atma* at the core with a sheath called the mind enveloping the *atma*, and finally the body and the senses as the crust - rather like an onion with its many layers. By the way, please note that this description of a core plus two layers surrounding it is only an analogy and an image to fix our ideas; I am not offering it to you as a description of the actual structure. No one knows for sure if there is indeed actually such a structure. Please keep that caveat in mind.

Now why did I invoke this picture? For a simple reason, which is to discuss what happens to these three entities after death? We all know that after death occurs, the gross body returns, as they say, to the elements. Where disposal of the dead body is concerned, different procedures are adopted in different places and cultures. While most simply bury the body, in India it is customary to cremate it. Parsis, on the other hand, leave it directly to Nature, meaning that they leave the body in a place called the Tower of Silence, where vultures do the job. As for sailors, they traditionally drop the body into the sea – at least that is what they used to do in the old days, when they had to sail for months before touching land; may be these days they bring the body back to the shore to hand over to relatives.

The point simply is that after death, the gross body is disposed off. The question now is: Whatever happens to the other two components, namely the mind and the *atma* trapped within? According to *Vedanta*, these two entities now form a union that is often referred to as the subtle body and at the time of death, the subtle body simply cuts loose from the gross body and floats away. Floats away to where and to do what? Ah, that is where the whole thing becomes interesting!

You may be aware of what Swami says regarding death – that it is the dress of life. What Swami means is that the *atma* wears the human body as a dress. Just as we change dress every day, the embodied *atma* or the *jivatma* as I referred to it in the previous article, also keeps on changing the body. Whenever the *atma* dons a new body, it is young and fresh, it grows and passes through middle age; finally, it becomes old and weak and drops off. What do we do when a dress of ours becomes old and tattered? We simply discard it and go in for a new one, don't we? The subtle body does the same sort of thing; it discards the old body and goes in search of a new one. That is to say, it goes in search of a new foetus.

The question now is: does the subtle body jump into the very first opportunity it comes across and take residence there? Not at all! Then, what are the rules governing the selection of a new body, if there are any? By the way, why should not the subtle body simply say, enough is enough and not search for a new body? Can that happen, and if so, how is the game played out then?

Let us try and deal with this new crop of interesting questions. First and foremost, when it starts wandering, the subtle body just does not park itself

into the very first foetus it comes across. And this is where the 'Law of *Karma*' or Reflection, Reaction, Resound, if you will, comes into play in an amazing manner. You see, the subtle body goes in search of a new body because it feels it still has things left to do here in this world. Mostly, the unfinished tasks are in the nature of unfulfilled desires. For example, the subtle body might say, "The last time I led life as a miserable beggar, dreaming all the while of great fortune. OK, I flopped, but may be I would have better luck this time. So why not look for an opportunity in a rich household?" In short, one of the driving forces for rebirth is unfulfilled desires. From this it should be clear that if one learns to cut down desires sharply, then automatically it brings down the probability for rebirth!

Now, while unfulfilled desires do form one major reason for rebirth, there is another and an even more important reason for it, which is the settlement of *karmic* debt or accounts. The issue of *karma*, rebirth, and so on, is a big one, which I may not be able to go into it in detail here. However, it is bound to come up later. I shall deal with it fully then. For the present, let me just say that along with latent desires, settlement of *karma* also forms one of the important reasons for rebirth. And it is the Law of *Karma* that generally decides who would be born to whom, when and where. Thus, rebirth is a delicate matching process in which the *karma* of the one who is to be born gets tied up with the *karma* of the entire family into which the person is being born.

For example, there might be a person who has led an evil life, caused untold misery to many and hardly paid for his sins during his lifetime. The person dies and when his subtle body floats away, it carries for sure a huge suitcase full of *karmic* debt. This subtle body looks around for a place to park itself. Destiny steers this subtle body to the womb, of say, the daughter of a rich man, given to evil ways himself. He is destined to suffer, and so also is the person to be born. Destiny now plays a matching game by bringing, unknown to the parties involved, all of them together.

The subtle body enters the foetus growing within the womb of the favourite daughter of the rich man, and she consequently delivers a child, probably mentally retarded. The joy of a birth in the family now turns to gloom. Troubles start coming one by one with the mentally retarded child suffering in its own way, the rich man's family paying for their through such multiple pains, and so on. To be sure, the *karmic* debt of the father and the mother of the new-born child would also come into the picture; altogether, it is a complex, but wonderfully balanced process, though we might not be aware of all the details. God does not leave loose ends the way we humans do; we might not be aware of all the details, but the Law of *Karma* has a got a detailed operating system, complete in every sense.

Thus, if we look at the process of repeated birth and death, a seemingly endless cycle, a logically subsequent question becomes apparent: "How to get out of it all? Indeed, is there a way out at all?" The beauty is that not only is there a tried and tested formula, but also that Swami has called our attention to it so many times. All I have to do is to recall it.

The magic formula we are seeking has been offered over two thousand years ago in a very simple form by Adi Shankara in his famous devotional song entitled *Bhaja Govindam*. Swami has often recited this particular stanza, in which Shankara says, "O fool, if only you would constantly chant the name of the Lord, you can get out for sure from this endless cycle of births and deaths."

Hearing this, some might be sceptical and say, "O that one, I have heard it, but I don't think it would work." This is a totally wrong and unfortunate misconception. Why I do say so? Because, in the *Gita*, Lord Krishna Himself says the very same thing and within our lifetime, Swami has reiterated this to us hundreds of times; so, how can the formula be wrong?

Let us reflect a bit and examine what exactly is the *deal* God is offering us. He essentially says, "*Bangaru* (golden one), I know that in this Kali Age, it is not possible to follow complicated paths to get out of recurring births and unite permanently with Me. So, I tell you what, just do this simple thing. Always think of Me. Anything you do, say that you are doing it for My pleasure. And offer all that you do to Me. Of course, you cannot do anything and everything you like, particularly bad things, and offer them to Me! That is simply not allowed. But if you lead a normal life and do the things I say, I shall take full care of you, and even help you to cut loose from this drudgery of countless births and deaths."

To some, this may sound too simple and they might suspect that there is some fine print that is being hidden. Let me assure you that where reposing full faith in God is concerned, there is absolutely no fine print; it is as plain as it could be. Others say, "Listen, how does all this work in practice? Say, there is an airline pilot. What does he do? He cannot be praying all the time." The beauty is that Swami has answered all such supplementary questions.

Let us go back to the example of the pilot. Before a take off, he would of course, do a mandatory pre-flight check along with his co-pilot. When that check is completed, and the ground staff has deplaned, he would, after getting clearance from the Air Traffic Control tower, get ready to start the engines. At that moment, he could, if he loves God, just close his eyes for a few seconds and say a silent prayer, "Lord, I am about to take off on this long trans-continental flight. I offer it to You. And after take off, when I would be busy concentrating on my work, I might not be able to think of You all the time, but Lord, be kind and treat all my attention to work as service to You, because by flying carefully I would be serving my passengers. However, since You are in every passenger, I would like You to treat that as service to You. Help me to fly safely." Once he takes off, the pilot does his job as his profession calls him to do; when he finally lands, he thanks his crew, and just before getting out of the cockpit he says a silent prayer again to the Lord, expressing gratitude for bringing the aircraft and all its passengers safely to the destination. So you see, even modern life can be neatly blended to Shankara's formula.

A lady once asked, "Swami, I am a mere housewife, and the work I do all the time is mundane. How do I offer all that drudgery to You? It does not seem proper at all." Swami smiled and replied, "You are wrong. What you call drudgery is a part of your work and duty. Duty is never trivial, and all duty can be offered to God. In fact, God loves those who perform their duty with great sincerity and thoroughness. Thus, while you are sweeping the house, you can think of God and say, 'Please help me to sweep my heart clean, like I am now doing to the floor.' When you are cutting vegetables, you can similarly pray to God saying, 'God, help me to cut down my ego just like I am now cutting vegetables,' and so on. There are a hundred different ways of remembering God while you are working and offering what you are doing to Him. The important thing is to sanctify time, every second of it. In other words, just because we live in the modern age, it does not mean that the age old formula of Shankara is no longer valid." And, as if to strongly reiterate that point, Swami Himself often sings *Bhaja Govindam* at the end of His discourses.

I trust I have said enough by way of responding to the first question. Let me now turn to the second. Just to refresh your memory, it is:

Is *Moksha* a state of being, or is it attained only after death?

Let me begin my response by reminding you about how Swami defines the word *moksha*, often translated as liberation. He says, *moksha* simply means *moha kshayam* or getting rid of *moha*, or infatuation for and attachment to the attractions of the world. People are infatuated with and have a craving for all sorts of things ranging from power and position to wealth and property. It is this sense of attachment that binds us to this world, causing one to be born again and again. Thus, *moskha* is a state of mind that is free from desires. To put it differently, the mind becomes truly free and thus, liberated when it gets rid of desires.

Stated thus, *moksha* is something that can be attained even while one is alive; indeed it had better be, for otherwise we cannot easily escape rebirth! Now to the second part of the question, which is an important part I might add. Let us say there is a person who during his or her lifetime has become liberated from desires; what happens after death? Is it at all meaningful to ask such a question? It sure is, and to stress that point, I would like to draw attention to one of the many stone slabs one would find in the campus of the Brindavan College. This particular slab I have in mind has the saying or rather the equation, by Swami of course,

Man – desires = God

What it implies is if a person has rid himself or herself of desires while alive, then when that person finally sheds the body, he or she becomes united with God, forever. That means two things; firstly, no rebirth, and secondly, one would be in a state of eternal bliss, for God is the same thing as the *atma*, and bliss is the nature of the *atma*. I hope this is clear.

Now, to the third question in the trio I have taken up for consideration in this article. This question reads:

If *Moksha* means no rebirth, will the Universe come to an end only when all creatures attain *Moksha*, or is Creation eternal?

This is an interesting question. The liberation or the attainment of *moksha* is a process related to an individual, and has to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. At any given time, the earth has billions of individuals, and each is at some stage or the other towards the attainment of *moksha*. *Moksha* does not come easily, and in fact at any given time, there would be millions and millions who are far away from *moksha*, immersed as they all would be in *moha*!

Let me now turn to Creation. If by Creation you mean the birth of the Universe, then modern cosmology seems to veer to the view that the Universe not only has a beginning, but also an end. I must hasten to add that the view that the Universe would come to an end is not absolutely certain; there are many scenarios, but all that does not matter. Even in *Vedanta*, which admits not only of the birth of the Universe as also to its dissolution, nowhere does it say that the Universe would end when all humans are liberated. In fact, it might well happen that the human race might become extinct long before the Universe ceases to exist! This certainly is what one might expect on the basis of science, no matter what model of cosmology one believes in.

This being the case, it is clear that the end of the human race and the end of the Universe are two different things. Incidentally, it took many billions of years after our Universe was created for our solar system to be born, and a billion years after that for the first primitive form of life to appear on earth. And after that first primitive form of life emerged on earth, hundreds of millions of years had to pass before humans appeared. Thus, compared to the life span of the Universe, the span of human existence is exceedingly small. This is something we need to keep in mind. The chances are the human race would vanish long before the earth and the solar system do so; that also should not be lost sight of.

So what happens when humans become extinct? Clearly, at the time of extinction, different people would be in different stages of spiritual evolution, and my guess is that when another Universe is created and populated with humans, it might continue from where things were left off earlier, rather like an episode in a TV serial continuing from where it left off the previous week.

I must confess that this part of my reply is entirely speculative, and I myself have not come across anything substantive on this matter. My own personal view is that these types of issues are interesting for engaging in academic discussions, but not very relevant from a purely spiritual point of view. I am sure many listeners would disagree, but I do not mind that; different people, different views! But this much I am confident of, the world into which we are born is just a stepping stone so to say, for our own evolution. As Swami says in the *Gita Vahini*, we must while we are alive, do all we can to make sure that

we are not born again, and that when we die, it would be the last time! If we get that message and act accordingly, then we are doing fine!

That's all for now and I do hope that I have done a decent job with my answers. In any case, you are welcome to send in your comments, favourable or otherwise, to *h2h@radiosai.org*.

Thanks for reading and I look forward to being with you again next month. Jai Sai Ram!

WINDOW TO SAI SEVA

COLOSSAL TRAGEDY AND THE CURRENT OF SPONTANEOUS LOVE

..How the Sai Volunteers in Bihar braved perilous odds to reach out to the devastated and isolated

This is a story of two currents. One that destroyed and the other that saved. Both were mammoth and moving. How the most unexpected and unprecedented-in-half-a-century massive flood devastated millions of lives, destroyed crores worth of property and devastated hundreds of acres of cultivable land in one of the most populous and least developed states of India - Bihar, in the second fortnight of August 2008 is a shocking story, to say the least. But what is equally astounding is how an Organisation consisting of a band of absolutely selfless workers plunged into this catastrophe without losing a second to provide hope, succor and comfort to thousands who had resigned to their cruel fate and hopeless ends. They did not eat or sleep for days and braved damage and death to ensure that their brethren are safe. This is a story of human empathy that flowed as swiftly as the speeding waters, giving true meaning to the most pious emotion of this universe - 'love'.

The New York Times reported it as the worst flood in the area in 50 years; their headline pronounced: "Millions displaced by floods in India." The Prime Minister of India declared it as a "national calamity" on August 28, 2008. The Indian army and non-government organizations operated the biggest flood rescue operation in India in more than 50 years. More than 2.3 million people were marooned. At least 2,47,000 acres of farmland were swamped destroying precious crops of wheat and paddy. The ravaging waters gushed in at 25000 cubic meters a second and thousands were washed away even before they realised what was happening. Over 800 villages, 1000 individuals and countless families were destroyed. It was unprecedented, unexpected and the most ruthless devastation the state had ever seen in half a century. This is the sorry story of what unfolded in the one of the least developed and most populous states of India – Bihar, in the second fortnight of August 2008.

The Saddest Day in Bihar in Half a Century

In a matter of a few days from August 18 – when the people of India elsewhere were still upbeat after celebrating a lively Independence Day on August 15 – thousands of poor folk in Bihar were running for their lives, literally. Leaving behind their homes and belongings, helplessly they sprinted as if possessed by a devil to find areas of safety; it was as if the God of death was after them. "Yes, it was not an ordinary flood, it was like a *Maha Kal (a terrible wrath of the God of Death)*," asserts Mr. S. B. Chaudhury, the State President of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisations of Bihar. "Floods in Bihar are not uncommon," he adds and continues, "Every year the River Kosi flows into the inhabited lands of Bihar and destroys crops and property. This river, as it is often called, is truly the 'Sorrow of Bihar'. But the people on these occasions are not taken by surprise; they are prepared for it. But what happened this year is shocking; it caught everybody unawares. The River

broke its embankment at Kusaha in Nepal and through a huge 2 km breach in the dam, picked up an old route it had abandoned over 100 years ago! On the night of August 18, a huge wall of 22 feet of water started rushing in furiously and washed away everything - buildings, people, cattle, castles, trees, etc. – that came on its way. For all we know, the 1000 deaths might be an underestimate. Thirteen districts were affected, but in four the damage was severe; in Supaul it was the worst.”

Another Flood Begins...the Current of Sai Love

Mr. Shiv Shankar Choudhury, the District President of the Sai Organisation of Supaul, rushed to the site of devastation as soon as he heard the news. “We took motorcycles and rode immediately towards the affected areas. What we saw there was simply pathetic. A middle-aged man was running carrying his children on his shoulders; an old man rushed as fast as he could with a tiny bag of belongings on his head; a third was trying to save his cattle; the fourth had tied a little food in a torn towel and was rushing crying out aloud as he had lost everything.... The flood waters were closing in at a fast pace; they had no time to think. They were just running piteously to elevated areas. Tears started streaming down our cheeks... People were now living on trees; they had nothing to eat or drink, except the polluted water that pervaded them on all sides.”

Shiv Shankar and other members of the Organisation returned and immediately started preparing for relief work. The government and other non-governmental organisations, who were ill-prepared for a calamity of such magnitude, were still trying to come to the grips of the situation. Meanwhile, the spirited Sai volunteers collected essential food items and on the night of August 21, served more than 2000 people. They went into villages which were completely marooned and where approachability was very poor. In fact, it was highly risky to visit those remote pockets of inhabitants. “Yes, it was a perilous adventure and we did not even have regular boats; we had to make use of country boats,” recalls Mr. Shiv Shankar, and adds, **“The current of the water was so high that if you stood on two feet of water, you would surely be washed away. In fact, the police and government authorities were stopping people from going into those areas. But, we were not afraid because we were absolutely confident that Bhagavan is with us.** That is why Sai Organisation was the first to start relief work and we started with really remote areas where people were stranded on trees and elevated structures. Loaded with *poha* (beaten rice), jaggery, biscuits, milk, salt, candles, bread, clothes and medicines, we rowed kilometers on the rickety boats and reached out to the distressed. We had no fear; Bhagavan gave us the strength and we distributed all these items as His *prasadam* (gifts).”

Overwhelming Sai Love in Action

Twenty sevadals served from 9 o'clock in the night till 4 in the morning with the help of torches. They located every individual seeking help in the destroyed zone of Supaul and offered them food and clothes. If this was the situation in Supaul, it was no different in Madhepur, another worst-affected

district. "When we surveyed this area on 23rd, we found that water had entered into the offices of the District Collector and the Superintendent of Police," says Mr. Ram Avatar Razaq, the District President of the Sai Organisation of Madhepur. "In fact, the entire capital town of the district was a sea of water. We found people perched on top of buildings and on elevated embankments. They were hungry, crying, shocked and devastated. **When we filled their desperate palms with food carrying love in our hearts and the name of 'Sai' on our lips, they cried copiously. Overwhelmed with gratitude, they too vociferously chanted 'Sairam!'. It was three days since their lives had turned completely upside down and nobody had come to their rescue. Since we served each one of them personally with lot of dignity and concern, they started treating us as if we were gods.**"

The Mission *I'm-Possible*

Were there not other Organisations doing relief work? "Yes, they were," clarifies Mr. Ram Avatar, and adds, "But they would not venture into risky areas. For example, the village, Rampur, was 30-35 kilometers from Madhepur. It was completely covered with water, and all the people had taken shelter on an elevated land; they were anxiously waiting for relief but nobody would go there. In fact one of the government boats was drowned while making an attempt. But with the name of Sai in our hearts and the continuous chanting of Sai Gayatri, we rowed into that danger zone with loads of food and other essential items. There was a huge crowd waiting eagerly standing on a single piece of high land and surrounded on all sides by water. When we reached out to them and distributed milk, biscuits, rice and clothes, their sense of relief and joy knew no bounds! And Rampur, mind you, was not the only such location, there were plenty and we went to many such remote and completely isolated villages like Murliganj, Tunahi, Sukhasan and Garibtola. This was our continuous activity for days and weeks."

While individual districts started relief activities immediately as a spontaneous reaction to the calamity on August 21, the State President of Sai Organisation felt the need to coordinate and organize the efforts more systematically to sustain the momentum of the good work. Hence, he called for a meeting of all the district presidents on the 24th. After this session, supplies to the affected areas started arriving from more than 30 districts of Bihar and Jharkhand. 30 truck-loads of essential items came in immediately, and meanwhile, with the direction of All India President of Sai Organisations, neighbouring states too started sending in truck loads of materials.

"Now, resources were not a problem," says Mr. Chaudhury, the State President. "Many states joined in. The state of Maharashtra sent vitamin biscuits for small children; and rice and dal, soaps and tarpaulins, sarees and *dhotis* came in from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. Similarly, other essential food items and clothes arrived from Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. What was needed at this point was proper organisation of packaging and distribution. For this purpose, we created a base camp at Saharsa because this was the only place from where all the affected districts could be reached at the earliest. A theatre owner in Saharsa offered two big

rooms and it was here that 50 Sai workers worked tirelessly every night for days and weeks making individual packets of all essential supplies. Each bag contained a minimum of 2 kilograms of beaten rice, jaggery, biscuit packets, milk powder, soaps, candle, matchbox, common medicines, clothes and other small items. Early in the morning everyday, a truck load of such packets were ready and a team of youth carried them to the distressed areas.

Where There is Nobody To Help, There is Sai

To give you one instance, our Sai Youth went to a completely marooned village called Sukhasan. Now, this hamlet was covered with three kilometers of water on all sides. When our devotees reached there with lot of difficulty on the country boats, the people there started crying out of joy because they said, 'Nobody has bothered about us till now; we have been suffering for so many days.' They felt 'there is somebody who has not forgotten us' and we told them it is Sai Baba who is concerned about you. They had never seen a picture of Bhagavan earlier, but now whenever we go there, in joy they exclaim 'Sai Baba has come, Sai Baba has come'. What needs to be highlighted here is that while there were many other agencies engaged in relief and rehabilitation work, their efforts were restricted mainly to the towns and the areas that were easily accessible. They asked the people of affected areas to come to the urban areas to collect the supplies, but our Sai Youth went to the remotest of areas and delivered the items wherever they were. Like all Sai activities, we did all of this with great reverence and love for the unfortunate ones."

Mr. Srinivas, a Sai Youth from Jamshedpur, adds, "I went with the first big consignment from our city to Saharsha on August 29. The next morning, when we went to the affected areas in Madhepur, I was utterly shocked. The district head quarters was completely inundated; it was a such a sorry sight because there were shops on either side of the main road, or rather which had been the main road, because now, there was no road; it was covered with two feet of water! People were moving about on boats. Soon we reached the relief camps and other affected areas. At every place, we first made everybody – children, ladies and gents - sit in neat rows and only then started the distribution chanting Swami's name. What generally happened in such situations, with other organisations, is that there would be a stampede, and then many items would be either destroyed or lost because of grabbing and fighting. But we treated them with love and they responded well too. We ensured that there is discipline and calmness during distribution so that everybody got his/her packet."

The 'Grama Seva' Experience Put Into Action

"It was not difficult for us to immediately strike a chord with the villagers because we are used to serving in the rural areas all the year around," explains Mr. P. V. Krishna Mohan, an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University and now Jamshedpur Sai Youth Coordinator. "We understand them very well. Besides, because of our experience in disaster and relief management, we were among the first organisations to get into the rescue act. And our focus

was on the villages and isolated areas because it was these areas which no other organisation was venturing into.”

“I cannot forget Garibtola,” adds Mr. Ram Avatar Razaq. “It was so risky to get there. The river was overflowing; at places it was very deep. Our boat was literally rocking dangerously; we could bang into anything and turn upside down. It was due to His sheer Grace that we reached that village which had now become an island. We saw people sitting on raised platforms and trees; they were probably living in that situation for at least ten days. They drank the same flood water as they had no choice. The government helicopters did drop relief material, but many a times these fell into the river.

“Once we reached there, we personally distributed food, clothes and medicines to women, children and the adults. Throughout the day, like during many other days, we were so occupied with relief work that we forgot hunger. We used to eat only after we returned to our base camp in Saharsha in the midnight.

New Challenges, But Same Solution - Love

“But the challenges were different in every area. In another village, Rampootola, we traveled on knee-deep water for 40 kilometers in our jeep, and after that there was absolutely no road. So we walked another 3 miles carrying all the relief material on our shoulders. In fact, a few of our volunteers and the villagers had to act as security guards with sticks because there were people in the towns who looted the supplies. We did finally manage to reach the completely devastated village. Our hearts broke when we saw the sight there. The children were crying; the women had lost all hope – you could see the emptiness in their eyes, and the men folk were hungry and helpless. They had received messages from other organisations to go to the towns for food, but they had no energy or hope. When we served them food, they were still dazed; they could not believe that somebody had actually come to their destroyed village and was concerned about them. I was so grateful to Bhagavan at that moment for having blessed me with that opportunity to help those poor souls. I did see God in each one of them, and with that feeling I wiped their tears. I had never before experienced the bliss of serving and giving like I did that day. This entire project has been such a powerful and divine experience for me.”

Sustained by His Energy, Nothing Else

“I sincerely felt that it was God who was reaching out to another form of God,” says Mr. Shiv Shankar Choudhury, the other district president. “The grueling five weeks of service was like a penance for me. I used to get up at 4 every morning and sleep only after midnight. At 6.30 a.m. every day we started with our loaded trucks and returned not before 10.30 p.m. After that I had to attend to other organizational and paper work to ensure that the supplies are properly received and packing went on smoothly, apart from preparing official reports. On many days, the only food I had during the whole day was a biscuit packet. I have no idea from where the energy came from. If none of us have

fallen ill, it is purely His grace. In fact, we felt His love and protection every single day.”

Saved by His Unmatched Grace

Now, Mr. Ram Avatar takes over again. “Yes, I remember, on August 28 evening, when we were returning with left over relief material on our truck, it started raining heavily. Our materials were not covered; they were in jute bags. We intended to distribute them on our way back. At 9 p.m. when we stopped at a town called Jitapur, we were shocked to see that none of the packets were wet! We immediately brought them down and distributed it to the people of that area. There was one building which had survived the flood in Jitapur and that government shelter was crowded with people. They were needy and too delighted to receive our food and clothes.”

“Instances of His Grace are numerous,” continues Mr. Shiv Shankar Choudhury. “When the dam breached on August 18 near the Indo-Nepal border, one of the villages which was terribly destroyed was Dirpul. None of the houses – old or newly constructed - in that village could withstand the ferocious water current, except one. It was a family of Sai devotees; they climbed onto the roof of their house. Their faith in Bhagavan was so strong that they had no fear. The water rose to 20 feet but they, along with their house, were safe. They stayed on their roof for 10 days and once the water receded, came down the stairs and found all things in their house intact!

“There is another incident of how Swami amazingly saved a boat full of people. The sister of one of the Sai devotees was trapped in a flooded area. This area was 40 kilometers from Supaul. We were unable to reach her in spite of our best efforts for many days. And then suddenly, on the eighth day, she called up from her mobile. We were taken aback. Her phone, by providence, had started working after more than a week! Then, we arranged for a military boat to go to her rescue. As the vessel moved, it found a lot of people on the way seeking to be helped, so it got all of them on board. Slowly, the number increased and by the time the boat reached his sister, there were already 80 people inside; there was no room for her. So the vessel turned, promising her to return for the second trip.

On the return journey, suddenly the engine of the boat stopped functioning. It was a precarious situation because the water current was very high. We were worried and started chanting Swami's name. Next, the boat hit the pillar of a bridge, and was tossed back and forth by the ravaging waters. It again banged into another concrete post. Mind you, these were really hard collisions, but somehow the boat was not destroyed. And fortunately during this process, the vehicle got stuck to the bridge. Then the military personnel on the bridge got immediately into action and dropped ropes. Soon, all the people were saved. After two days, the devotee's sister too was rescued. It was prayer alone which saved so many lives, quite mysteriously, that day. Baba says ‘I am the Indweller’ and we felt His presence in so many ways.”

Sai Service – An Eye-opener For Many White-Collared

Mr. Krishna Mohan, the enthusiastic Sai Youth who works in Telco Company, Jamshedpur, says, "This chance to serve blessed us with a higher level of self-satisfaction because we felt we were offering service not to people, but to different forms of God. More than the bliss of being use to others, it was an eye-opener too to many people in the Sai Organisation and beyond. I sent out an email to all the employees of our company informing them of our service initiative, and so many came forward to help. They were shocked when we showed them the pictures and video clips of our work. The ideals of the Sai Organisation moved them. It shook their beliefs and they came out of their comfort zone to help the distressed wholeheartedly. This transformation in their outlook is something very valuable to themselves and to the society at large. Therefore, there were such silver linings too to this dark cloud of disaster."

A Diwali with a Difference

The relief work that started in right earnest in August 21, 2008 continued for five weeks benefiting 50,000 people in the worst affected districts. "Once the water receded completely and people returned to their respective villages, we distributed them special kits to help them rebuild their lives," says Mr. S. B. Choudhury, the State President of Sai Organisation of Bihar. "These comprehensive packs which had cooking utensils, serving plates and spoons, blankets, 20 kilograms of rice and other food grains, sarees and *dhotis* were gifted to them before their festival day of Diwali which fell on October 28. The joy in their faces is to be seen to be believed. For us, there was no other way we could have celebrated this festival of lights better."

Sai – The Perennial Stream of Love

Truly, we shine brighter when we lend our lives to others. The Sun is glorious because it gives itself to others incessantly. And walking in this sunlight path of selfless service, the volunteers of the Sai Organisation of Bihar have experienced true bliss; they were able to fathom the source of genuine joy. The magnitude of their service may not be mammoth when compared to the colossal devastation that this poor state saw, but at the end of this sacred exercise, Sai workers grew richer by enriching the lives of how many ever they could in the best manner possible. It was simply Pure Love in action, inspired by Pure Love Incarnate, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

PRASHANTI DIARY

October 29, 2008 – Gujarati New Year Day in Prasanthi Nilayam

October 29 was the occasion of the Gujarati New year. This occasion is synonymous with *sudekam* of the *Kartik* month - the first day of the first month of Gujarati lunar calendar. Most other Hindus celebrate the New Year in early spring, but the Gujarati farming community celebrates the New Year after Diwali to mark the beginning of a new fiscal year. More than 2500 devotees had arrived specially for this occasion from the Indian state of Gujarat.

It was at about 4:30 p.m. that Swami arrived to the chanting of the Vedas. The youth were seated in neat rows and were distinct by their deep brown scarves. Swami took a complete *darshan* round and then came on stage. He lit the lamp that had been decorated and placed for the occasion. It is interesting to note that the drama they were about to stage in a few minutes was called "Prema Jyoti" and here we had "Prema" lighting the "Jyoti"! Lighting the lamp, Swami went into the interview room for a short while. As soon as He came out on the dais again, He asked for the programme to begin. The opening was a parade of items for Swami to bless. Devotees from the ladies and gents sections moved up the stage with cards, a lamp, brochures of the Grama Seva being done, fruit trays and even a cake. Swami slaked everyone's thirst for His proximity and blessed them too. Then the programme began.

There was a 10 minute presentation of welcome songs. After this, the drama began. It portrayed the manner in which the Sri Sathya Sai Organization in Gujarat went about organizing the exhibition - Prema Jyoti. This exhibition had been inaugurated by Swami during the Guru Poornima of 2007 and by His will travelled the length and breadth of India conferring the joy of witnessing His Life and work to millions. Like any other noble endeavour, organising the exhibition had its ups and downs, but 'the Hand of God' was felt in every aspect of the work. Experiences based on the actual interaction of the volunteers on site with various people from the different walks of life were shown dramatically in the drama. Dance and music were embedded into the fabric of the plot. The conclusion was with a song and dance sequence and all the participants gathered in the centre, and offered their prayers and *pranaams* to Swami.

Swami appeared very happy and moved during various portions of the drama. In one scene, when the organisers of Prema Jyothi were facing a very tough situation with getting the arch and gateway ready in time for the D-day, they surrender completely to Swami and are fully confident about His Grace flowing on them for hasn't He said, "If you need me, you deserve me." Swami seemed so charged during the course of this episode that when one of the characters fell on his knees and prayed, "Swami only you have to help", Swami nodded His head and blessed Him saying, "Yes! I will help." At the end, Swami moved down and posed for group photos with all the participants. As that was being done, many of them gave letters to Bhagavan; one little

boy, in particular, dug deep into his pockets trying to extract a card that he had made for Swami. Bhagavan on His part, sat sweetly and patiently, and accepted the extracted letter! Then with a lovely smile and a gracious *abhayastha*, Swami moved to the ladies section of the youth. He posed for photos with them too before moving back to the stage. He then blessed Mrs. Piu Sarkhel to present Hindustani Classical songs. As the stage was being prepared for her, Swami went into the interview room and returned with watches for all the participants.

At this time, the lady began her songs and Swami noticed two primary school children right up in the front. He called them on stage and began to see through the card that they had made for Him for the occasion of the Gujarati New Year. One of the boys also gave Swami an invitation to the ground breaking ceremony of the land for his house. Swami had a detailed look at it. He also played with the boys with comments about the card that they had made. Blessing both of them, He sent them to their places. Then again, as if like an afterthought, Swami called both back on the stage and materialized vibhuti for them. Putting spots on their foreheads, He put the remaining into their palms and told them, "Eat it now itself!" And immediately, the boys stuffed the *Vibhuti* into their mouths much to the glee and amusement of all the devotees assembled. Playfully patting them, Swami sent them back.

Mrs. Piu Sarkhel then presented Hindustani classical songs and *bhajans* on the stage for half an hour. Swami blessed her and her group with clothes and photographs. Soon after, *bhajans* by the devotees commenced at six o'clock. Ten minutes later, Swami asked the students to sing the 'Allah ho Akbar' *bhajan* with *alap*. After this, He accepted *arati* and returned to His residence.

October 30, 2008 – “Vision of the Divine” Drama by Gujarat Devotees

The concluding programme of the devotees from Gujarat was based on real life experiences at Navsari in Gujarat in a drama entitled "Vision of the Divine". It was 5:10 p.m. when the programme began in the true sense as Swami came out to grant *darshan*! As always, the central area was kept empty and free, and the backdrop stood majestic. Swami looked at it as He slowly passed by it and it was wonderful moment - Swami looking at a majestic backdrop that proclaimed, "Vision of the Divine". Completing the round, Swami moved to the stage. Once again, there was a parade of lucky souls who went up to Swami seeking blessings before the programme. This is a great opportunity and everyone utilises it to the full. Swami blessed all the people who came up the stage and then the programme began.

The drama had as its theme the "cataract surgery" Seva activities done in Navsari district of Gujarat. The region, being backward, was infested with many self-proclaimed quacks who always attributed the eye problems of the suffering masses to the curse of God for all the sins they had committed. The story, that was portrayed, could have been the story of any one of the hundreds of tribals treated and nursed by the doctors and devotees of Swami. It showed how a poor man is deprived of his sight by a cataract and of hope by a local "witch doctor" wielding peacock feathers and chanting mumbo-

jumbo. It is firmly ingrained in the minds of the affected person that he has been cursed by God. When the volunteers from the Sai Organisation arrive to help and treat the people of the area through eye camps, everyone at first eyes them suspiciously. [Isn't it funny that nowadays we accept selfishness as natural and are unable to believe that selflessness exists? Else how can one explain the amazement that we express at Swami's Love and Grace? As Bhagavan aptly puts it, "What is *aascharyam* (surprise) for you is *sahajam* (natural) for me."]

The drama was very simple but powerful in showing how a little care and love coupled with the Lord's grace can literally help thousands to see more clearly! The drama was backed with the power of Truth and though no 'flashy' miracles seemed to happen, the miracle wherein the patients were blessed from seeing through the milky fluid of the cataract to the clear fluid of grateful and joyous tears was awe inspiring in itself. The eye camps in this region have been vastly successful and have covered more than a hundred villages and more than four thousand operations have been successfully conducted. The *drama* was short and sweet and at the end of it as all the participants gathered in a formation, Swami called the "tribal" who had been "cursed" by God according to the "village quack" and blessed him with a gold chain. Everyone burst in applause and Swami blessed the participants with *abhayahastha*. He then told all of them to sit in their places and the next part of the evening's programme began.

Mr. Devesh Dave sang some popular songs and *bhajans*. Before the performance, he and the other artists bowed to Swami and that included a small kid who was to play the cymbals. Swami smilingly kidded with the kid asking him, "Are you going to sing?" The smile was returned by the apparently startled kid. The concert then began and went on for about half an hour. At the end of it, Swami accepted *aarthi*. It was 6:30 p.m. and Swami started moving towards Yajur mandir in the chair itself! Now this was a bonus for all the ladies and they rejoiced at the close *darshan*. At Yajur Mandir, the security guards prayed to Swami for group pictures as their shifts had been completed and a new set of guards would be replacing them the next day. With a sweet smile, Swami posed for photographs with them before retiring for the day.

November 6, 2008 – Gifting of Red Silk *dhotis* to Veda Chanting Students

Since the month of September, the learning of the Vedic hymn Rudram moved into a new gear in Puttaparthi and all around the globe. That's what happens when one receives patronage from God Himself! On November 6, Swami added something very special to the "incentives list" of this "patronage package". It was the fulfilment of a promise that had been made at the very beginning of the Rudram tutorials - Swami had said, "I will personally give prizes to those who learn the Rudram well." As per His command, 150 members from the staff and students of the Sathya Sai University and the Central Trust who were well versed in the Rudram sat in the Mandir portico by 8:00 a.m.

Swami had said that He would distribute *dhoties* and *angavastrams* to all of

them. There was an air of eager anticipation and the atmosphere seemed charged. But come 9:00 a.m., the *bhajans* began. Grama Seva, that had already begun a few days ago, continued and all the other students left for serving in their respective villages. The *bhajans* also concluded eventually and the special 150 students and staff were the only people in Mandir now. At about 11:30 a.m., giving added emphasis and meaning to the statement, "God's delays are not His denials", Swami came out of Yajur Mandir in the car. The 150 seated comprised of cream of the Veda chanting students, and so, there was vociferous chanting of the Rudram. There were no mikes, but the spirited spirits of the energetic youth pining for the Lord more than compensated for that.

Swami came to the portico and then had the *dhoties* brought. To the delightful amazement of all, Swami was gifting His very own brand new silk *dhoties* to all! Everyone felt a surge of thrill and as the Rudram chants continued to eclipse all other sound vibrations in the vicinity, Swami began to call the boys one by one and personally delivered the bundles of silken joy. As He was distributing, He opened up many of them and asked as to where the *angavastrams* (the cloth put on the upper half of the body) were.

He commanded that the *angavastrams* too be distributed to those that had already received the *dhoties* from His hands. The distribution went on for about 20 minutes after which Swami sat listening to the chants. It felt really vibrant to see the Lord amidst the divine chants. As Swami was moving towards the car, there was another chanting - this time in English, as all cried out, "Thank you Swami!" And then, in the perfect silence that ensued after that, Swami said in His sweet gentle voice, "I have the right to give and you have the right to take. Then, why thank you?" As He beamed a smile to the joyous gathering, smiles were beamed back at Him and shouts of "Jai Bolo Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Ki Jai" rent the air.

From the Sai Kulwant Hall, Swami moved to the Vidyagiri stadium to check the progress of the stage being built along with the galleries being extended and also the kitchen and bathrooms being constructed for the priests.

In the evening, Swami arrived at about 4:50 p.m. for the *darshan* round. As the *bhajans* were on, Swami came out and sat on the stage. Many students had letters and they sat holding them in their hands with prayers on their lips. Swami, in the middle of His rhythm-tapping, signalled the boys to put down their letters. But none seemed to obey. They held out with greater desperation and eagerness! After about 10 minutes, Swami called one boy and taking his letter opened it. It was an A4-sized paper and both sides had been filled with writing. Swami had a shocked expression as He asked, "Why such big letters? Keep writing like mad people? Write only two or three lines, enough!" Blessing the boy nevertheless He once again said to all the students, "I will not take letters if you write such big ones!" After a while, one more student was called and Swami opened it. It was again a huge one! Swami gave that, "see-I-told-you" look and signalled that He would not take letters. At this point, some of them dropped open the letters to show Swami that theirs were small!

Swami smiled and went in for *bhajans*. Thus ended another beautiful day with the Lord.

November 8 and 9, 2008 – Global Akhanda Bhajan Days

If at all we get a chance to rise and travel with the Sun along its perennially westward journey, we will find that the second weekend in the winter month of November is something very special. As the sunset time gets due, the primeval sound - the Omkara - resounds marking the beginning of the 24 hour long Akhanda Bhajans. As we move along in the westerly direction into the later time zones of the world, more and more nations join this activity of devotion, peace and love till a point when the whole world is reverberating with the divine name. This practice which began as a small stream of singing at a senior devotee's house in Bangalore has today gathered momentum into a massive river of devotion worldwide, surging towards the tranquil ocean that the Lord is.

It was about 5 p.m. Indian Standard Time when Swami entered the Sai Kulwant Hall for the darshan rounds. He took the detour after the Primary School block to enter the Bhajan Hall where a lovely large lamp had been prepared. This is the lamp that Swami would light to mark the beginning of the global Akhanda Bhajan. Swami inspected it and He was shown the various fittings that would be added on soon to the lamp to make it taller and grander. He also examined the wicks, and once satisfied that all was fine, He moved out to the stage.

What happened there was something so special that maybe we could also term November 8, 2008 as the "Kalpavriksha Day"! Swami sat outside listening to the Veda chanting that was on. The Rudram was soon completed and the Purushasukta began. Swami called the Vedam tutorial teacher and in a spurt told him that Swami's wish was that all learn the Purushasukta as well. The teacher, on his part, assured Swami that all the students and staff would begin efforts in earnest towards that direction. Swami then called the boy in front who was holding up a tray. He spoke to him and blessed him by sprinkling the holy Akshatha grains on his head. As is the practice, when Swami calls one of the boys with the tray, it is assumed that He has called the other "tray boys" too. So, one by one, the boys started to move to Swami and the Lord blessed them all. He spoke a few words to some, listened to a lot of words from many and granted the twin joys of an *Akshatha* shower and a *padanamaskar* to all. The grace-hungry are a huge number and even Swami seemed a bit startled as about 25-30 boys came up to Him with trays! Though He jocularly asked once, "How many boys!?", He ensured that every boy returned with a heart full of satisfaction and joy.

Then began part two of the "Kalpavriksha Day" celebrations. Swami called a boy who was holding a letter in the front. He took his letter, went through it and then spoke a few words of advice to him. Another boy, meanwhile, decided to play his chances and moved to Swami along with the first boy and he too gave a letter. Swami simply smiled at him and took his letter and spoke to him too. Emboldened by this response another boy, and then yet another

moved to Swami. And again from His side, it was the same response. With smiles on their faces, the boys slowly made sort of a line that was headed to the Lord and Swami too noticed that from the corner of His eye and merely smiled. And so, from 5:20 p.m. till almost 6:00 p.m., boys kept moving to Swami handing over their letters of gratitude, love, prayers and petitions, and Swami satisfied each and everyone. The whole block now resembled a river that was flowing on to become a waterfall as all the boys converged to join the stream that was headed towards Swami and bliss! As the time became 5:55 p.m., the boy sitting next to Swami "reminded" Him that He was due to light the lamp at 6:00 p.m. At that time, Swami sweetly said, "Only 5 minutes left now." That acted as a prod for all to go quickly to Him and offer letters. It was seconds before 6:00 p.m. that Swami moved into the Bhajan Hall and gently lit the beautiful lamp as the Aumkaram began.

Swami sat for about an hour listening and keeping beat for the *bhajans*. The boys and girls, as usual, alternated in singing the *bhajans*. It was about 7 p.m. when Swami left for Yajur Mandir.

The 9th morning saw Swami coming out for *darshan* at about 9:20 a.m. after a plethora of "Aao" *bhajans*. These are *bhajans* which request and plead with the Lord to come and bless all with His *darshan*. Swami cut through after the Primary school block. However, He moved to the stage and sat outside, and everyone assembled in the hall had beautiful *darshan*. Singing the name as we see the form is a sublimely uplifting experience. And that experience was conferred on the thousands gathered in the Sai Kulwant Hall. Soon after that, Swami moved into the Bhajan Hall where there were quite a few boys who had spent the whole night singing the divine glories of God. He sat through 6-7 *bhajans* and then asked for the car, and left for the Institute Auditorium where the students were rehearsing for the Convocation drama.

Swami takes keen interest especially in the Convocation drama and though it is performed in His presence on November 22, He sees through every aspect of the drama right from the script writing to the acting and costumes. As always, the devotees from the Sai Kulwant Hall and other places in Puttaparthi made a beeline towards the car to glimpse their beloved Lord as He drove by. Swami was welcomed into the auditorium by the Vice Chancellor, the Principal and the Controller of Examinations. All the boys lined up the path through which Swami entered. Swami, then, signaled to them to go on stage and begin the drama.

Swami watched the drama with rapt attention. Speaking to the warden who sat beside Him, Swami enquired into the various roles and characters on stage. There was a scene from the Ramayana which was very apt to the situation and it evoked very positive response from Swami. He was absolutely touched. All the various songs that were part of the drama were sung live by the students. Swami gave feedback on the drama to the warden and asked for it to be trimmed at certain points to make it crisp. After watching for 50 minutes, Swami blessed all and said that it was time to leave. As Swami moved towards the car, all the students crowded around Him and sought blessings. Chocolates were blessed to be distributed to all. As He came out of

the auditorium, the Institute brass band struck up the National Anthem. It was played beautifully and listening to that, Swami left for the Mandir and moved into Yajur Mandir.

Meanwhile the *bhajans* continued in the Mandir and as the evening drew close, more and more people thronged the Mandir premises. The *prasadam* to be distributed at the end of the *bhajan* session was also carried in or wheeled into the Sai Kulwant Hall. The rows of vessels holding tamarind rice and the *laddoos* were placed neatly at the Northern end of the hall. It was about 4:45 p.m., when Swami came out once again. He moved through the ladies and then took a detour towards the Northern gate where all the *prasadam* had been kept. He blessed them and then surveyed all the preparations done for the distribution. Turning back, He moved towards the Mandir again and near the gents side took another detour. Now this detour was something that pleased all the gents as it meant that Swami was coming towards them. After a gap of many days, Swami was going through this path and naturally there was a rejoicing. Swami took a complete round as if rewarding all for whatever efforts they had put in for the Akhanda bhajan.

The evening was characterized by Swami moving in and out of the Bhajan Hall. He moved through the central aisle in the Bhajan Hall and also through the upper and lower porticos in the Mandir. He sat out for a while collecting a few letters and granting *darshan*. Nobody could have complained of not having *darshan*. The tempo and enthusiasm levels of the *bhajans* went up as the conclusion time arrived. At about 5:55 p.m., Swami asked a pair of boys in the front to sing the Sree Raghavam *aalaap* bhajan. Everyone expected that with that *bhajan* the 24 hour session would culminate. But sensing another minute and an opportunity remaining, the girls began in full speed, "Namah Parvati Pataye Hara Hara". Swami saw that and smiled. After a while, He told the boys with puckered lips that the girls took the opportunity and they are concluding. A total of more than 400 *bhajans* had been sung and according to one student, the exact number stands at 424! With that *bhajan*, *aarathi* began.

The last stanza where the tempo picks up was marked by resounding clapping and vociferous singing. Swami also asked all to sing the "Samastha Loka Sukhino Bhavanthu" in a very loud voice and all were only too happy to oblige. Swami then sprinkled water over the vessels holding the *prasadam* and blessed them to be distributed. When a boy started serving the boys immediately, Swami told him that ladies must be first and so the *prasadam* must be kept on the other side for serving the ladies! The prayer, "Brahmaarpanam" was then done after which everyone began to eat in the divine presence on the divine command.

Swami then moved out of the bhajan hall and surveyed the food being served to the Primary school children. They too began to chant the prayer and so sweetly at that too! It was a high pitched one and Swami sat sweetly swaying to the chants. As they completed, Swami told them all to begin eating. Then He slowly moved through the ladies side and blessed the Anantapur students who were seated there. Finally, leaving all with full hearts and quickly filling bellies (!) Swami retired into Yajur mandir.

November 10 and 11, 2008 – The First and Second Day Of Bhagawatha Parayana Sapthah

As part of the grand and sublime celebrations for the Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Yajnam (SPCDY), the Bhagawatha Parayanam was to begin on November 10. The Bhagawatham is the collection of the *leelas* (divine sports) and *mahimas* (miraculous powers) of Lord Mahavishnu with special emphasis on His glories as Lord Krishna. Aeons ago, King Pareekshith had been cursed to meet death in 7 days and he made the correct choice to listen to the Srimad Bhagawatham in the last week of his life. Death approached him but it was immortality that embraced him as he was freed forever from the tyranny of the flesh. The power of this is such because as Swami says, the Name equals the Form. What then do we say when the name and form come together?

November 11 was a day that many of the westerners, the ladies especially, will cherish throughout their lives. Lets go through the beautiful day without hurrying, in the order in which the events unfolded for this is the best order - hasn't it been ordained by Swami Himself?

The idol of Sri Venugopalaswami (Lord Krishna) had been installed and decorated with all jewels and flowers at the centre stage. There were priests attending on to the Lord in the idol form at all times. At about 10:30 a.m., Swami arrived for the installation and the first *aarthi* was performed in the Sai Kulwant Hall. The hall was empty as the morning session had just concluded and everyone had given up the thought of Swami coming out in the morning. But well, as He came, many of the students who were still around, rushed in and were lucky to witness what happened. Since the hall was almost devoid of the full strength of Seval volunteers, the gates were quickly closed to prevent the exuberant and charged devotees from rushing in. Swami blessed all the priests and all who were on the stage seemed to be intent on just falling prostrate at His feet. The priests and organizers were all part of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam. Receiving *aarthi* and blessing all the priests, Swami made another round to the Vidyagiri stadium where the work now has taken on a feverish pace and one could already feel the magnificence and grandeur of the upcoming event. From there, Swami drove back to the Yajur Mandir.

Come the evening and Swami came out for *darshan* as usual - only this day it would not be that usual! Swami's *darshan* is never the same or "usual" in the way we use the term. New and refreshing things keep happening. It is only on a few fortunate occasions that we come to know what is happening or at least what happened! On November 11, Swami completed the *darshan* rounds and all expected Him to come on the stage. What does the Lord do instead? He moves to the ladies side for a second round and in what seems like a random choice, starts picking up ladies and tells them to move towards Bhajan Hall.

"Is it an interview? But...wait. An interview will not be for 30 people! And Swami is simply picking up people from everywhere? The only thing common

among all of them (other than their Love and devotion to Him of course) was that they were all westerners or shall we say non-Indians."

Swami then went into the Bhajan Hall and the ladies sat, overwhelmed and happy. Swami spoke to a few of them as to where they had come from. Then He said, "Two Russian ladies...they run behind Swami's car always... call them." These two ladies have been so persistent and tireless in their pursuit of God that not only the All-knowing One but almost everyone in Puttaparthi for quite some time knew them! They were immediately brought to His presence and Swami gifted them a smile. He moved up and down the aisle and gave a command, "Call all the foreigners." As people hurried to put His command into action, He gently moved around the hall bringing tears from many eyes. To those lost in the Love of God (and who is not? Many who have claimed and even paraded themselves as atheists have sobbed and wept in front of Him as children for apparently no reason whatsoever) there seem to be tears always. When they cannot see their Lord, their tears speak of their agony and when they see Him, it is the tears again that speak of the unspeakable joy. Tears! Those salty droplets that carry with them the sweetest of feelings!

When the Bhajan Hall's ladies' side was filled to its capacity, Swami began the distribution. Distribution? Of what? When the Bhagawatha Parayanam begins, it is customary to do *Vasthradaanam* (distribution of clothes). Boxes of brown silk sarees were opened and lovingly Swami began to distribute these to the ladies who had assembled. As He gave away the sarees, many of the ladies spoke to Him in their native tongues. There was so much that each wanted to tell Him and there seemed to be so little time. To top it all, this opportunity had arrived as a pleasant bolt in the blue and no one seemed prepared with what they wanted to tell Him. And that shows the importance of living every moment of life occupied with those thoughts and feelings that we cherish the most, for at such sudden times, only they surface in the mind and get spoken out by the tongue. Swami's response to the multitude of languages being showered on Him was in a language that all know and understand - that of the heart. His smile seemed to have a magical calming effect on all and His *abhayahastha* seemed a satisfactory enough answer to all the travails and tribulations of every heart.

There were mothers with their babies, grandmothers who had difficulty standing such that Swami had chairs arranged for them to sit, and young women beginning their journey of Life receiving the gifts of Love from His hands. Swami advised one of the women to eat well and have porridge and milk. To another He enquired whether she was happy and she replied loudly, "Very happy Swami. Very, very, very happy." All the babies inside were blessed and the mothers were so pleased with that. Swami went on this way for about one whole hour and it was only after He had personally distributed sarees to everyone inside (that is at least 250 of them) that He moved back into the interview room. In that one hour, He had spread happiness to various parts of the globe even with His physical frame as the grateful and joyous recipients spread it through word of mouth and the scientific technology of the cell phone and the internet. As Swami moved out of the Bhajan Hall, one of the boys there exclaimed to Him, "Swami, how You shower so much *ananda*

on all!" Swami just seemed to shrug it away for what seems as extraordinary for us is so natural for Him. And it was so apt too. The story of Krishna is sweetest when He performs His divine *leelas* as a child among the gopikas. Sai Krishna seems to have gopikas from all the nations of the world and what we witnessed before the Bhagawatha Parayanam was the ceaseless flow of love that exists between Sai Krishna and His gopikas, the Lord and His beloved devotees. It was a practical lesson even before the theory class, if we can call it so!

Swami then quickly moved to the stage where the Saptaham was to commence. The priests did a brief ceremony and Swami moved across the stage to observe the Idol. After a short introduction in Telugu, Brahmasri Dr. Nagaphani Sharma took the stage with his Bhagavatha narration. Interspersed with songs and poems, the scholar described the glory of Sai in mellifluous Telugu for an hour. The speaker, an orator par excellence, had a mridangam and harmonium supporting him as he spoke and sang. Swami seemed very happy and touched with his rendition. So lost was he in the glories of Sai, that it truly became a Sai Bhagawatha Parayanam. Swami blessed him profusely and patted him while posing for pictures with him. Then as He moved into the car, He raised both His hands in a smiling benediction for all. There were gasps of delight from everyone who saw the beautiful scene. It was 7:30 p.m. when Swami retired into Yajur Mandir.

November 11 saw a sort of repeat of the previous day in the sense that Swami came out at the same 10:30 a.m. or so and after a brief stint with the installed idols, made His way to the grounds. The grand stage looked wonderful once the supporting scaffolding was removed. It looked so inviting that everyone felt it would not be a surprise if very soon Swami ascended the stage once again to do the final checks. Swami then returned to the Yajur Mandir.

The evening saw the continuation of the talks on the Bhagawatham. Swami came for *darshan* at about 5:15 p.m. and took the detour that the narrow passage after the Primary school block afforded Him. He came on stage and the priests did the brief ceremony. Swami blessed one of the priests to introduce the speaker of the day. He did so with such force and vigour beginning with the glory of Lord Sai that one could have easily mistaken him to be the speaker of the evening! Garikapati Narasimha Rao, a renowned scholar and excellent orator, was the scheduled speaker for the day. He spoke to an enthralled crowd for about an hour and fifteen minutes. Though the speaker was excellent and flawless in his rendition, it was only Swami's presence that kept the entire crowd in order. There is the scientific law of entropy that states that with passage of time, the randomness or disorderliness increases unless energy is spent to maintain order. But in the Divine Presence, this law gets reversed. With the passage of time, more and more orderliness sets in and perfect unity and harmony gets achieved, that too apparently effortlessly! But that just speaks of Swami as the greatest generator of Godly energy! This got demonstrated when Swami went briefly into the interview room. People started getting up and relaxing their muscles and moving around a bit maybe to refresh the blood circulation in their tired

legs! Some even began to get up and file out. Five minutes later, Swami arrived and then it was all back to perfect order! It must be said that the speaker did a really fantastic job and narrated the Bhagawatham from Pareekshith's curse and dilemma till the Varaha Avatar of Lord Vishnu. The talk was peppered with examples from day to day life and sprinkled liberally with humour. For instance, the speaker said that worries were like Government buses - 5-6 of them arrive in a row and after that for the next 3-4 hours there are none! So when in worry remember that trouble-free days are coming soon. It is a pity that each language has its own unique specialty that cannot be properly translated into other languages! It suffices to say that it was a Telugu person's delight to hear Sri Narasimha Rao Garu.

At the end of his speech, at about 6:45 p.m., Swami materialized a beautiful gold necklace for him and lovingly put it around his neck. He also blessed him with silk clothes - *dhoti* and *angavastram*. The *aarthi* to Swami and the idols were simultaneously performed and blessing everyone Swami retired for the day.

November 12 and 13, 2008 – The Third and Fourth Day of Bhagavatha Sapthah

The morning of the third day of the Bhagavatha Sapthah saw Swami arriving into the Mandir in the chair and going for a complete *darshan* round. Those seated on the gents' side would have definitely rejoiced at this change of route after quite a few days of His taking the detour. Swami went through the portico and then came on the front stage and moved slowly across the shrine with the idols. He then went into the Bhajan Hall for *bhajans*. As *bhajans* concluded and *aarthi* was being sung, Swami moved out of the Sai Kulwant Hall towards the stadium where the stage was on the verge of completion.

The lift had been put in place and the roof of the Yagna area wore a regal look. Just as Swami approached the dais, the power supply bowed out - maybe in honour of the greatest "power" supply that was headed towards the stage! Providence, as the world calls it or Swami's Grace in the Sai devotees' dictionary, ensured that a diesel motor engine powered vehicle with the makeshift lift was also present and it got the blessing of transporting Swami up to the stage. Once on stage, Swami was surrounded by all the main and important members of the Central Trust and they were all eager to ensure that Swami was happy with all the preparations being made. Swami went around the *Yagna kundams* and was very particular in finding out what place had been allotted for Him to sit. "Swami, one place is right in the centre of the stage", it was suggested. Swami went to the actual Shanti Vedika, off the newly constructed platform, and had a look. The sight of Swami against the huge backdrop of Krishna and Arjuna in a magnificent chariot being pulled by powerful stallions was really thrilling. Swami had a brief glimpse of the room that had been made for Him. But all the while, something seemed to be on His mind. As we see it now, it was the fact that He had not found a spot from where all devotees could see Him. He moved right to the front edge of the stage. All the students and others who had gathered to see Him were down there and their faces lit up as Swami came there. Seeing this, Swami also

seemed pleased and satisfied. He had found a place from where He could see all His beloved devotees and from where all could see Him too.

As He was moving around all the workers atop the stage had close *darshan* and many of them were blessed with a personal and personalized smile from Swami! As Swami moved to the western end of the stage, He stopped and gently looked up. Then and there, right before everyone's eyes, a piece of the decorative plywood from the top crashed down with a thud. Swami was the centre of calm among the sea of storm. The beauty of Divinity is that it guides, foretells, warns and finally congratulates for a job well done! The warning before the congratulations that He surely will give seemed to have been served. "Take care of the tiniest of the details. It is inappropriate to say that the devil is in the details. Perfection and God lie in the details!" seemed to be the message. Swami then descended the stage and drove back to Yajur Mandir.

The evening sessions were dominated by the stories of the Lord as the Bhagawatha Parayanam continued in full zest and vigour. Swami arrived and after half a round, moved to the stage. Swami then got started the proceedings with the puja by the Tirupati priests for a few moments followed by the introduction of the speaker for the day - Tribhasha Sahasravadhani V. Padmakar garu. The topic for the day was one that is very close to Swami's heart - the story of little Prahalada. Prahalada was the son of the demon Hiranyakashipu who had boons that made him immortal - at least he thought that way. Like a single ray of light that dispels the darkness existing in a room for centuries, Prahalada illumined everyone with his intense faith and love for Vishnu. His story is a witness to the fact that the Lord will tolerate anything done against Him, but touch His devotee and it is all over. Lord Vishnu took up the terrible Narasimha avatar and annihilated Hiranyakashipu. The faith of the little boy is awe-inspiring and Swami seemed so touched and happy throughout the narrative. As the 75 minute long talk concluded, the Lord materialized a beautiful gold chain for the speaker and put it round his neck. He also gifted him with silk clothes. Then He received *aarthi* and blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to everyone. The concluding *poojas* for the idols were performed after Swami retired.

The night of November 12, 2008 is immortalized in the history of mankind for it is on this night that the 1000th full moon got its opportunity to shine down upon that earth which also held the physical frame of the Lord of the Universe. So, date wise, the Sahasra Chandra Darshanam was completed. The moon seemed to shine with added luster and why not? It had every right to feel like the one in thousand that it was!

In the morning of 13th, Swami did not come out for the morning session. It also happened to be the concluding day of the Grama Seva being done by the students. As a fitting finale, the seva was carried out for the inmates of the ashram. This concept is so beautiful for in all of our homes too, the hosts eat last after ensuring that everyone has had their fill to their heart's content. But another wonderful thing that happened on this day was the supreme boon that Swami bestowed on the members of the family of His physical frame.

As mentioned earlier, the previous night was the formal completion of the sighting of a thousand full moons. To celebrate that, Swami permitted the family members to gather for a private function in His residence at Yajur Mandir. It was a very warm and homely ceremony. *Aarthis* were taken and other religious items waved at the Lord to ward off the "evil eye" as it is called. The Lord belongs to the whole Universe equally but it is really the blessings of God and the merits of many previous births that one gets the opportunity to be born in the same family as the Lord. Though Sri Krishna belonged to and loved everyone equally, the Yadavas were His family members and that was something unique and special. As the ceremony went on, Swami sat sweetly receiving the offerings and the *Padapooja* (worship of His lotus feet). He spoke to the members of the family and lovingly advised them as the eldest in a family should and would. It was an entirely new facet of Swami on display. He was now the Uncle, Father and Grandfather all rolled into one. He posed lovingly for pictures and the members of the family were grateful for this chance of many lifetimes that Swami conferred on them. Swami also had wonderful lunch prepared for all of them. Really, one has so much to learn from the Lord. Every moment with Him is a lesson on how one must live one's life - happy and contented always and spreading the same to everyone who comes into contact with him/her.

The evening saw the exposition of the "Gajendra Moksha" story by the scholar, Bachampalli Santosha Kumara Shastri. He had been introducing the speakers daily and so Swami called on His translator, Prof. Anil Kumar to introduce him to the audience. The talk centered around the story of the mighty elephant-king, Gajendra, who is caught in the ferocious jaws of a crocodile. When all fails, the elephant calls out to the Lord who then arrives on the scene and rescues him. As has been through the past three days, people sat listening to him in rapt attention. Swami was there for all the 70 minutes on the stage. The greatness of these speakers lies in the manner they extrapolate the stories to our day to day lives and draw inspiring lessons for all. As he concluded, Swami materialized a gold chain and presented it lovingly to him. He requested Swami for a picture with him and Swami agreed to it. He also gifted Him with silk clothes. *Aarathi* was then performed and Swami moved towards Yajur Mandir.

Again at Yajur Mandir, lamps had been lit forming the outline of the Shivalinga. The ladies from the family did *Aarathi* to Swami and sought His blessings. Smilingly showering His blessings on them Swami went into the residence.

November 15, 2008 – Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Mahayagna Begins

The much awaited day of the Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Mahayagna finally arrived on November 15. The Sun also seemed to be in a hurry to come out and see the beginning of the day! Crowds were slowly flowing into Puttaparthi and though the resources available in the Spiritual Capital of the Universe had not yet been tested to the hilt, massive preparations were on for the inflow that was expected especially for the concluding day. If one has the

chance to go through reservations archive of the roadways and railways to Puttaparthi and Bangalore, and the Airways to Bangalore during this season, one would notice a waiting list that was only the tip of the iceberg of the "waiting list" of people wanting to be here for the occasion. And all this is only because of the interest that Swami has taken up for this Yagnam. And He has involved Himself so much because this Yagnam is for the welfare of humanity. It is a self-reinforcing circle of Love - the Lord jumps in whenever and wherever the devotees' welfare is concerned, and for the devotee, welfare lies wherever and whenever the Lord jumps into any activity!

Apart from the arrangements for food and shelter for the inflow of devotees at the Mandir, massive preparations had been made for the devotees at the venue – the Vidyagiri stadium - itself. Huge screens had been erected which could be seen easily and clearly even in broad daylight so that the activities of the Lord could be "magnified" to the "correct scale" for all to see! The sound systems were in place and seating arrangements were elaborate. The entire ground had been covered with waterproofing polymer material and it looked like a giant and neatly trimmed lawn. There was a temporary medical centre with qualified doctors to attend over any small illnesses like nausea and headaches. It had only basic medicines but the general hospital and Super Specialties hospital nearby continued to work with the staff sacrificing the joys of seeing Swami for the joy of serving Him in devotees, and that more than made up the elaborate and wholesome complete medical attention that the devotees might have needed. All gates were thrown open and "welcome all" was the body language of the never tiring and ceaselessly working sevadals. The arrangements for the residence, food and rest for the priests themselves were complete and more on the gratifying than a satisfying note!

Coming to the actual proceedings of the day itself, Swami arrived into the Vidyagiri stadium shortly after 9 a.m. in the Porte car. The energy and enthusiasm levels just shot up. With the mere sight of the gray of Swami's car, all the grayness of the morning got replaced with the vibrant colours of love and adulation for the Lord. Swami's car slowly moved on the road alongside the ladies' galleries and reached the lift on the western end of the stage. As Swami came out, an orange dot in the huge stadium, all the giant screens came alive with His form and the crowd rejoiced. In fact, it was a beautiful sight to see the car on the road and the car in the screen too as the car actually passed by the screen. Swami slowly came onto the lift and soon was on the stage. Simultaneously crackers went off at the Hanuman statue in celebration of His arrival.

The stage setting too was something so grand and divine that any description would not be able to give the complete idea. The eyes would have to see the myriad colours of the flowers and the beautiful form of Lord Venkateshwara completely bedecked with flowers and jeweled finery right in the centre stage. It is said that whenever there is the Sahasra Chandra Darshanam celebrated, an elder blesses the one completing the "thousand moon sighting." It was as if the Lord of the seven hills had come to bless Swami for the occasion for who else can confer blessings upon the Lord other than the Lord Himself? The ears would have to hear the chants of the priests and Swami's beloved

students who were rightly charged up from the minute one! That combined with the music and the *naadaswaram* seemed to conjure some celestial harmony. The nose would have to breathe in the wafting fragrance of the incense and the fresh fruits and flowers. The tongue would have to taste the sweetness of the name that pervaded the entire stage and the skin would have to sense the powerful vibrations that seemed to resound and resonate with the gently twirling of Swami's hands. And now, to get an idea of what it felt on the stage, all of the above would have to be combined and felt in an instant!

Swami was welcomed onstage with the Poorna Kumbham amidst chanting by the priests and the students. Swami moved through the stage blessing all the *ritwiks* who had gathered there. As He neared the students, He had a tiny smile that escaped the corner of His lips – He was proud, and that pride stemmed from the fact that His students had mastered the Vedic hymns and were today chanting on the same level alongside the *ritwiks* from all over the country. Once He reached the shrine in the centre of the stage, He gave permission for the Yagnam to begin. Morning rituals included the chanting of the names of Lord Ganesha, the Lord who removes obstacles, a hundred thousand times followed by Sahasra Modaka Ganapathi Homam by 62 *rithwiks* from the Sringeri Sharada Peetham. This was followed by Shatha Rudra Abhishekam and Navagraha Japam — chanting of 10,000 names for each of the nine *grahas*, which was to continue till evening. Of the 12 *homa kundas*, only three were lit for the day, one each for Maha Ganapathi Homam, Sudarshana Homam and Maha Mruthyunjaya Homam. Lakshmi Narayana Puja was performed to the main deity of Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshanam. Now, the rituals performed on the stage are so vast in their content and significance that one can go on writing volumes about them. Let us concentrate on Swami's reactions and actions instead.

After a few minutes in the center, Swami wanted to grant *darshan* to all the devotees who had gathered there braving the heat of the Sun and tedium of waiting for hours to see their sweet Lord. Forgive the inappropriate language! For the devotee, waiting for the Lord is never tedious. The very thought of the sight of the Lord seems to tingle energy into the enervated nerves and muscles. Swami moved till the very end of the stage and as He saw His beloved devotees sitting, His eyes lit up. There was such a joyous response on the devotees' side too. The Lord and His devotees seem to become one, lost in the bliss of seeing each other. Swami was the Sun from whom the green lawns of the devotees derived their life from! After a while, Swami moved slowly on the stage. Everywhere, some activity was on and those chanting were lost in their own worlds. The time then came for the sacred fire to be lit. The priests came together and the ceremonial churning and rubbing of wooden blocks to produce fire in the most natural way began. The experience during the yagnam at Dusshera is that the fire springs to life in a minute or two. But this day, the "spark" seemed to be missing! After the sweaty efforts of half a dozen or so priests, the sweet Lord volunteered, "Shall I bless?" It was then that the to-be embers were brought up for His blessings. The touch of that Hand that has lighted up many lives brought life into the embers too and in a few moments after that, the "spark" seemed to have

arrived! The wisps of smoke came and the fledgling fire was held up for all to see. Finally, the *Yagna kundam* was roaring and alive.

Swami then continued His rounds to various corners of the stage. His sole concern seemed to be for those souls seated in the stadium pining to see Him. He moved through the priests and along the students who were chanting the Vedas. Then, cutting through them, He arrived at the east side of the stage and sitting by the receptacles holding waters of all the holy rivers, He became the ocean into which all the rivers of devotion from the gents' side merged into. He then moved to the western side of the extended Shanti Vedika and mirrored the actions performed at the other side. He blessed the ladies this time and they were so happy. Just there, there were priests who were performing the *sashtang namaskars* (lying fully prostrate). Swami sat for a while watching them as they went about religiously and athletically performing it. They stood on one leg and revolved around 360 degrees many times. Then they did what can be called as the religious equivalent of the athletic pushups. Seeing the rigour they were going through, one could not help but well in gratitude for the simple ways of pleasing the Lord that Swami has prescribed for all of us. Swami continued moving around and spoke to some of the *ritwiks*. All of them were vying for a picture with Him and it was indeed an amusing sight to see the Vedic *ritwiks* take out mobile phones to take His picture! Anything done to capture God is justified! Swami similarly moved to the back side of the stage where more rituals were in progress. He cast His gracing glance on all and it was indeed a very fulfilling feeling for everyone.

The *Poornahuthi* or complete offering to the sacrificial fire was done. Each day, different *Homams* were scheduled and their respective *poornahuthis* would be done on that day itself. The priest came with the bundle of offerings to Swami and the Lord blessed it to be lowered into the fire. After spending more than 90 minutes going around the different parts of the stage and blessing the entire congregation, Swami accepted *arati* at 10:25 a.m. before retiring to His Divine Abode. The Navagraha Japam continued till 12:30 p.m. In the afternoon, Sudarshana Japam has been scheduled to be from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m., and Sundarshana Homam from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

In the afternoon, Swami arrived at Sai Kulwant Hall at 5.20 p.m. He moved through the ladies' side and it was the detour through the Primary children then. It was the penultimate day of the Bhagawatha Saptaham and the decoration of Govardhanagiri (the hill Lord Krishna lifted to save the cowherds of Vrindavan from prosecution by Indra, the king of devas and rain) was done on the idol of Venugopala Swami. The idol was beautifully placed on a swing, with priests continuously swaying the Lord. After 15 minutes, the speaker for the day was introduced. Dr. Rajagopala Chakravarthy spoke for an hour on the stories of Ambareesa and Kuchela, with references to nuances from other Shastras. King Ambarisha's story is another powerful reminder of the fact that the Lord can be won only by love and devotion and that only the devotee is stronger than the Lord! Sage Durvasa, famous for his anger, loses temper when the king breaks his fast, so the auspicious time is not past by sipping a

few drops of water before the sage has eaten. When he creates a demon to kill the king, the chakra of Lord Vishnu appears and annihilates the demon and almost does the same to sage Durvasa too but he is saved as he falls at Ambarisha's feet. Kuchela or Sudhama was Krishna's poor friend whom the Lord remembered and redeemed. The Lord never forgets anyone. As the speaker concluded, Swami created a gold chain for him. As he gratefully fell at Swami's feet and accepted the chain, Swami showered him with clothes and blessed him.

The next programme was a classical Carnatic concert by the Priya sisters - Shanmukha Priya and Hari Priya. The Priya sisters began their concert at 6.30 p.m. and sang for nearly an hour. The first song was an invocation to Lord Ganesh in Raga Naatai – Mahaganapatim Manasasmarami. That seemed only like a warm up for what was to come. They sang many popular songs and to name a few - *Bantureeti Koluviyyavayya Rama...* sung in Hamsa Nada Raga, *Mudakarata Modakam Sadavimukti Sadhakam...* in Yamuna Kalyani Raga, *Jo Achyuthananda Jo Jo Mukunda...* in Neelambari Raga. This song, which is specifically sung as a lullaby song, had a special significance on the evening of this day's programme because Lord Venugopala Swami was being continuously swayed in the swing. The highlight song however was a *bhajan* - *Jai Maa Jai Maa Jagadeeshwari Sai Maa*. The timing of that *bhajan* was such a divine drama.

As the sisters sat on that part of the stage which had the rods in front blocking the view, the cameraman giving the live feed into the huge display screen in Sai Kulwant Hall seemed to struggle to get a good view to be screened for all to see. At precisely that moment, Swami said that He wanted to go into the interview room. Taking this break, the cameraman readjusted and within minutes there was a good view on the screen. All were happy to witness on the big screen what they could never see with their eyes. And exactly then, Swami came out of the interview room and the sisters began that *bhajan*. Swami had a sweet smile on His face and that was picture perfect for the outpouring of devotion and emotions that the raga of that *bhajan* elicits from the listeners and singers alike! As they completed their concert, Swami blessed them with sarees and photos. It was 7:30 p.m. as Swami retired to the Yajur Mandir.

November 16, 2008 – The Second Day of Sahasra Chandra Darshana Mahayagna

The second day of the Yagna had a different kind of start. If it was the Sun that came out early to see Him the previous day, it was the turn of the clouds and rain to do so this day. The day was a '**Sun**'day but it stopped at that! From early in the morning, what began as heavy showers reduced to a gentle drizzle that went on and on. But that could not dampen in the least the spirits of the devotees. In this context, it is important that we flashback to a few weeks earlier when Swami was inspecting the stage being constructed. At that time, Swami had suddenly asked about what would be the case if it happened to rain during the yagnam. People were taken aback a bit because rains in the heart of winter at Puttaparthi are something that are rare if not

absent. And even if it would rain, it would be so less that a least bit of protection would suffice. Here it is pertinent to recollect what Swami Himself declared during His Vijayadashami discourse, "Sathyanarayana does not speak even one word lightly. It is always Truth, Truth and Truth." He knew that the heavens would open out for even the gods above would have loved to be a part of this grand event!

As stated before, the rains could do nothing to wash away the enthusiasm of the devotees pouring down on Puttaparthi. In fact, greater than the rains were the flocks of devotees as it was the weekend too. Anything that could afford some protection from the rains was used by the devotees. Umbrellas, raincoats, plastic bags and even kerchiefs were used as defense against the rain. The downpour also induced camaraderie and unity as dozens of people spread huge plastic sheets above them and held them that way as they moved about in herds. Umbrellas dotted the huge stands and it was so amazing to see that people still wanted to catch the front seats and await the Lord. Meanwhile, the huge screens in Sai Kulwant Hall too were active in case anybody wanted to sit in the shelter there and have a look at the proceedings going on. The proceedings on the stage were different from the ones the previous day.

Two main rituals for the second day of the Yagna were Satharudra Abhishekam and Maha Mrithyunjaya Homam. Satharudra Abhishekam was performed to the Sayeeshwara Lingam that was consecrated during the Ati Rudra Maha Yagna held in the year 2006. Abhishekam was done to the *Lingam* with milk, curds, clarified butter, turmeric paste, sugar, *vibhuthi* (holy ash), coconut water, etc. Maha Rudrabhishekam is performed invoking greater benediction from Lord Rudra. As each of these items were offered under strict religious discipline with accompaniment of vedic *mantras*, the Linga that was charged by the Divine hands during the Atirudra Ceremony was shining in splendour evoking nostalgic memories. The Sarva Veda Shaka parayanam (where all the branches of the Vedas come together) was also on.

It was about 9:30 a.m. as Swami arrived and there were two huge tuskars waiting to welcome Him. The pachyderms, procured from Kerala, were well trained and they stood in all their might and glory on either side of the *Vedika* (dais). As Swami came out of the car, a colourful and wide umbrella was held above Him denying Varuna devata (the God of water) His chance of *sparshan* with the Lord! But He satisfied him too as He took on the fine micro-droplets that fell on Him, bouncing off the nearby surfaces. Swami then came on stage and everything seemed to gather life and momentum. Especially the students chanting Vedam became so charged and they drowned all other chanting on the stage. Very soon Swami was at the centre of things and the stage when his holiness Parama Puja Sri *Ganapati* Sachchidananda Swamiji, the Pontiff of Avadhoota Datta Peetham at Sri *Ganapati* Sachchidananda Ashrama in Mysore, came on stage paying obeisance to Swami. He was escorted to Swami and the Lord blessed him with a smile. He enjoyed the rare honour and privilege of sitting on a chair beside Swami and was also blessed with a few words from Him.

As is the case always, Swami's heart was with His devotees. And the fact that they were enduring the rain to just glimpse Him made Him get irresistibly attracted to the front of the stage. It was a sight to see. As Swami reached there, all the umbrellas rose higher and plastic sheets got dropped as people prostrated from their places to Him. Swami was saying, "Paapam" (poor ones) seeing that the people were getting wet. A few minutes after this the drizzle also subsided. The tuskers, trained in the temple traditions, raised their trunks in salute to Swami and the crowd cheered this act of the huge tusked mammoths. Swami seemed amused as He saw them perform the *pranam* without even being aware of what they were doing (or maybe they were aware and it is we who think that it was their training that made them do so!). Whatever be the case, it was a wonderful sight. The stage atmosphere was magnificent what with 150 priests sitting around chanting Vedic *mantras* and performing rituals along with 150 boys chanting the powerful Rudram. Once again, like the previous day, Swami moved to various sides and corners of the stage, blessing devotees gathered there and having a look at the rituals being performed.

The Maha Mrithyunjaya Homam was done, invoking immortality for all the living beings. The two hour long *homam* was done by the Chief Priest for the Yagnam. With the accompaniment of holy chants and with Swami presiding over, Poornahuthi was offered to the Yagna Purusha. This whole Yagna had been called the "Vishwa Prapancha Maha Yagna" as it is being done for the welfare of all humanity. It was 10:30 a.m. when Swami retired to Yajur Mandir.

The evening saw Swami entering the swelled up Sai Kulwant Hall at 4:40 p.m. As Swami came to the dais, the priests started *abhishekam* (ceremonial sacred bath) of the idols of Lord Krishna, and also Rukmini and Sathyabhama (the consorts of Lord Krishna). The *abhishekam* was done with religious fervour accompanied by the chanting of Vedas by students and priests. As the ceremonial bathing of the idols with milk, curd, honey, diluted sandal paste, tender coconut and Kumkum continued in the traditional way, the students chanted Sri Rudram, Purusha Suktam, Sri Suktam, Bhu Suktam and Narayana Upanishad from the Vedas. After each ceremonial bathing with water, the idols were dried with soft cloth and *arati* was offered to the Lord. Lord Krishna with His consorts was garlanded with different types of garlands. If it was Tulasi (basil) garland one time, it was a fragrant rose garland next time. The entire ritual was performed with such scrupulousness and devotion. An LED screen placed at the eastern side of the Hall, gave a view of the entire landscape of the proceedings. After completing the *abhishekams*, elaborate decoration was done on the idols. It was a sight to watch the Lord and His consorts adorned with jewels and gems of exquisite beauty and diadems on the head. After this, it was the turn of Sahasraavadhani Medasani Mohan, another erudite scholar to conclude the proceedings of the Bhagavata Saptaham. He dilated at length on Sri Krishna Leela, right from the Lord's birth to His killing of demons and His childhood pranks.

If it was the mellifluous rendition of Priya sisters the previous day, it was the beautiful compositions and their singing in ornate style by Malladi Brothers from Vijayawada this day. All their songs were sung in Carnatic classical style.

Bhagawan released a DVD "Sai Naada Jhari" sung by the brothers. As it was being released, a song from the album, *Sai Namasmaranam Sada Rupa Dhyanam* was played on the public address system. Their father, who also happens to be their Guru, gave a lead to the songs in the form of a verse melodiously. They sang out many renditions of the poems composed on Swami by the devotee poet Santhisri Jandhyala Papayya Shastri. Ramadas and Thyagaraja kirtans adorned their presentations. One beautiful composition that won many accolades was one which said, "Swami, I have taken Your Grace and blessings in times of misery without Your knowledge. I am thus a thief and so please hold me and never let me go!" Among other songs, the song for the occasion was *Sathya Paritraana, Dharma Paala, Santhi Varada, Prema Swarupa Sai...* This raga "Sai Chandrika" needs special mention here as it was invented by Malladi Brothers themselves. Sai Chandrika is the derivative of Kokila Priya Raga, which is the 11th raga in the list of 72 Mela Kartha Ragas (fundamental ragas) in the Carnatic School of Music. Since it was the 83rd Birthday of Bhagawan, the 11th raga in Carnatic music, i.e., 83 subtracted by 72 Mela Kartha Ragas was chosen as the raga for this song.

As they concluded their concert, Swami blessed them with silk clothes. He also blessed *prasadam* to be distributed to all before receiving *aarthi* and leaving for Yajur Mandir.

November 17, 2008 – The Glorious Final Day of the Sahasra Chandra Darshana Mahayagna

On November 17, the wonderful day dawned. A day for which everyone had eagerly waited for and had borne with many hardships as though they were great pleasures, a day which would get etched in the hearts of people and humanity for times to come as a sample of the glory and grandeur of God on earth. In an act of great Love and kindness, Swami had agreed to arrive into the Yagnashala in the golden chariot! More often than not when History is made, those that are part of it scarcely realize its worth and magnitude. But that was not the case when History ("His Story, God's Story") was etched in Gold on November, the 17th 2008 at Prasanthi Nilayam. The significance of the occasion was not lost to the thousands of devotees who had thronged to the Hill View Stadium. In the wee hours of a chill November morning they waited for the Sun of their lives to arrive. They yearned to celebrate His life that had presided over a thousand moons, the thousand moons being a metaphor. They had gathered to celebrate His presiding over the minds (the mind is compared to the moon) of men, directing the thought of the world towards goodness and godliness.

People started filing in great numbers to the Hill View stadium. They came in various modes - by foot, on motor vehicles, cycle rickshaws, on crutches, in wheelchairs - you name it and it was there. From all directions, people were headed towards the ground. The name "Sairam" continuously emanated from the lips and hearts of everyone. The charging in the atmosphere must have been felt and one could relive it throughout one's life. The speakers in the stadium were pouring out songs specially recorded for the occasion by top

artists of India - Shankar Mahadevan, S.P.Balasubramanyam and Hariharan. The stands were full and people were just flowing in. Surely, there would be many absentees on this Monday in offices everywhere for though not a holiday, it was a holy-day of unprecedented proportions. The golden chariot was waiting in the Primary School premises. It surely would have known the great privilege it was being granted this day. It seemed to be sparkling with even greater shine and one felt that a smile could be noticed on the faces of the golden horses that were drawing the chariot. One just had to move through the crowds and the pulsating energy and vibrating excitement could easily be felt. There was an anticipative joy everywhere and everyone was aware that they were about to witness something that would be passed down generations as a legend. Generations to come would surely say, "My (great) grandfather/grandmother/uncle/aunt saw the Lord on the golden chariot!"

Swami arrived to the Primary School premises in the Porte car and as He came out, everyone in the proximity let out gasps of joy as the Lord was dressed in resplendent golden yellow. A mere sight of Him moistened the eyes nearby and like a flash of lightning, news spread in the stadium that the Lord was in the *pitambara*. The traditional "control rod" of the chariot was presented to Swami and He accepted and blessed it. This meant that He had granted His permission for the chariot to move. A beautiful wooden lift got its own line in this glorious page of history as it conveyed the Lord up the chariot. Once Swami was seated, the gates were thrown open and the chariot began to move. A wonderful song struck up the melody and everyone watched with gaping mouths as Swami came out into the Sun from the shade. The sight of Swami on the "Suvarna Ratham" erupted goose bumps on the skin.

It is not even the slightest exaggeration to say that even the Sun seemed to pale in front of that majesty. People began to spontaneously cry and there were tears flowing generously everywhere. Everyone rose up and stretched out their hands with palms facing Swami in order to grasp some of that splendourous glory. No one seemed to know how to react. Mothers and fathers burst out in tears. The children too were crying. And at the same time, all were beaming their best smiles. Many old people strained their eyes and exuded feelings that their lives had been sanctified. A peaceful smile lit up their faces. But that was the case even with the youngsters...and the womenand the priests - with just everyone who were witnessing it. It was a conglomeration of powerful positive emotions. And amidst that powerful storm of emotions, Swami sat so serene and beautiful, gently swaying His hands and a lovely smile dancing on His lips. The sight in itself was maddeningly beautiful and is one of those for which souls wait for births together to view. A huge procession led the chariot. The Institute brass band and the students of the Vedam chanting were followed by the huge tuskers and finally the baby Gita who also seemed to realize the magnificence of the event.

Oh! What a sight it was, a sight for all mankind. The crowd burst into raptures at so marvelous a scene. There were two Suns out there; one up in the heavens and another upon the earth. Dazzling and soothing alike, unmoved yet propelling, aloof but alluring, a tender sunflower and a diamond studded in gold, grand and godly, the King arrived upon a hill of gold. The devotees

gaped openhearted, drinking every moment, to slake the thirst of their souls, to imprint in their hearts a golden moment when the Lord arrived gliding in gold. There were two Suns nay there were thousands; in the glistening eyes of every devotee there was embossed the flame of gold. Oh! What a sight it was, a sight for the gods.

In the villages it is said that if one wants to watch the Sun one gets ready to get ones eyes burnt. So one is advised to mix cow dung in water and look at the reflection of the Sun in that blackened water. That way, one can watch the Sun and also be safe. Looking at Swami, the joy that would burst through one's being would make one just drop down in sheer ecstasy. Like looking at the Sun through its reflection, it was enough to see the reflection of that sheer joy in the faces of the devotees. They were absolutely crazed with joy. As it was told by many later on, everyone felt that Swami granted them a special glance. The omnifelicity that our Lord has to be added to the list of His attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience. The people who pulled the chariot, on their part, tugged it so very gently and slowly, and won the blessings of thousands who were blessed with that beautiful *darshan*. How much ever is written, the feelings, emotions and spiritual ecstasy that coursed through all cannot be captured. It was like being transported into another surreal world completely devoid of worries of any kind with only sheer joy to be offered to all.

As the procession moved on, Swami gently blessed the devotees assembled everywhere. And His upraised hand on this day seemed to be conferring special blessings if one were to read the reactions on the faces of those in whose direction Swami blessed. Explosions went off at the Hanuman statue but they were reduced to a miniscule in effect compared to the explosions of joy in hearts. It was definitely one of those times when the Lord out of His infinite Love decides to confer on all, irrespective of all distinctions, a blessing that would transform them for times to come - a blessing that has no reason or rationale, for that is the nature of Divine Love. Personally, we feel that we have not seen anything grander in our lives nor would we ever see it again, unless of course Swami repeats History or 'His Story' as He refers to it! The Sanathana Sarathi was in His chariot and what else is there to be said?

18 Divine minutes of some of the most beautiful times since the Big Bang later, Swami reached the stage. There, before moving onto the stage, Swami sat on the chariot watching the thousands and spreading that aura of uncontrollable joy to all. Then He slowly moved onto the stage where He was welcomed by the traditional Poornakumbham. Earlier the proceedings for the final day began at 6:30 a.m. with *Ganapathi pooja* and special *sankalpa* for the homam. The priests, in groups, gathered around the 10 *homa kundas* offering ghee and boiled rice with the accompaniment of Vedic chanting, that went on for almost 2 hours. After Swami entered the Yagna Vedika, this being the concluding day, the Lakshminarayana Poornahuti was performed for the Yagna. The priests chanted sacred Vedic Mantras in unison, Veda chanting students chanted Sri Rudra Prasna, Purusha Suktam, Sri Suktam and Durga Suktam as Swami was giving *darshan* to devotees from the *Vedika* (dais). And Swami was just the same sweet self moving to all corners and sides of

the Vedika granting *darshan*. Another feature on this day was the wide array of *Mathadipathis* (heads of Maths) from different Maths of India. These luminaries are the heads of prominent Maths in India. They had come to share in the joy of this auspicious function and were also privileged to share the dais with Swami. They were: **Sri Sri Sri Dr. Shivakumara Swamigalu**, Head of Sri Siddaganga Math, Tumkur - a nonagenarian who also spoke a few words in Kannada on this occasion, **Sri Jagadguru Madhwacharya**, Mahasamsthana Pejawara Mathadeesha H.H. **Sri Vishweshwara Tirtha** of the Dwaitha Matha, Sri Sri Sri 1008 **Sri Sushameendra Thirtha** from the Mantralayam Peetham, Sri Jagadguru Kanchi Kamakoti Peetadhipathi **Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal**. Also was present Mr. **Vilasrao Deshmukh**, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra who had the privilege of sharing the dais with Bhagawan and receiving His blessings.

The head priest then came forward to seek Bhagavan's blessings to go ahead with the *poornahuti* (final offering marking the end of the holy sacrifice). Bhagavan consented and then proceeded to each of the 12 fire pits to personally supervise the *poornahuti*. Flowers, fruits, cereal, clothes along with copious amounts of ghee were offered to the presiding deities accompanied by holy chants. With Bhagavan going around to each of the pits, it appeared as if He personally arrived to accept the offerings being made to Him. He would sit sweetly braving the smoke. And then He materialised a golden chain for the priest at the end of the whole exercise. The *poornahuti* done, Bhagavan went about inspecting the *Sooryanamaskars* (prostrations to the Sun God), *Sundarakanda parayana* (Recital of the glory of Hanuman from The Valmiki Ramanaya) that had been diligently conducted for over three days. Having profusely blessed all the participants and satiated all, He went and seated Himself at the front of the stage from where He could be viewed by the thousands that had thronged to the Hill View stadium.

The seers seated at the rear end of the stage followed and the front of the stage was now decorated with revered pontiffs with the Lord in their midst. It was so wonderful to see the bright yellow amidst the row of saffron. The various seers proceeded to personally pay their respects to Bhagavan and offer Him gifts on behalf of their sects. The TTD (Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam) Trust offered a Bhagavad Geeta. This most auspicious and holy function concluded with Jaikars "Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba Ki Jai" and the offering of *aarati* to Bhagavan at 11.00 a.m. Simultaneously, a helicopter came hovering above dropping confetti and paper-stars to add to the colour of the occasion. The *teertham* from the occasion was also dropped on all the devotees from the helicopter.

The afternoon program was scheduled at 5:00 p.m. in the Sai Kulwant Hall. Bhagavan arrived at 4:30 p.m. in a chair. He proceeded to take a complete round through the devotees on both the sides before seating Himself on the stage. On the stage was set the resplendent idol of Lord Sri Krishna and Rukmini. The afternoon's proceeding was the symbolic and ceremonial marriage of Lord Sri Krishna and Rukmini. Bhagavan watched intently as the priest conducting the nuptial ceremony went through the proceedings in accordance with the Hindu marriage ritual. The significance of the event was

to proclaim the union of *Prakrithi* (Mother Nature) and *Paramathma* (God). After the elaborate ceremony Bhagavan proceeded to give away gifts to the priests who had conducted the entire ritual.

The *Mangalasutrams* ('Mangalasutram' means an auspicious thread or cord or gold necklace) for the celestial wedding was first shown by a priest to the entire audience on either side. Then the gold necklaces were placed on the arm of Lord Krishna. After some time, the necklaces were removed and worn round the neck of Rukmini and Sathyabhama. Thus, the ceremonial wedding was performed to the thunderous applause of devotees. Flower garlands were exchanged between the idols of Sri Krishna and Rukmini and Sathyabhama. After this, there was a brief period of chanting of Sama Veda by the priests. *Mahamangala arati* was offered to the idols at the end of this ceremony. The priests chanted Vedic Mantras religiously standing in front of Sai Krishna. Bhagavan blessed the priests with mementoes. He then materialised a gold chain for the head priest of the Yagna, Sri Lakshminarayana Somayaji. Bhagawan then went amidst the priests of the Yagna. Then, as is His wont, (He can never stop giving) He went around giving a bonus round of *darshan* to the priests and then to all the devotees too.

After the Rukmini Kalyanam, there was a concert by Ms. Mahalakshmi Iyer and party. She began her performance with a Marathi song, which was dedicated to Lord Ganesha and Guru (preceptor). Her second song was a Mira Bhajan and the third was a composition for the occasion, Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Mahotsavam, the meaning of which was, "As long as there is water in the Ganges, may the Lord Sathya Sai live (!). Whatever the world may say, I should always love and worship You. I should always cling on to Your Lotus Feet." Some more popular songs followed culminating with the song, "*Damadam Mast Kalandar ...*" which enlivened interest in the audience. One could see the audience joyfully clapping to the song. Swami then called the Malladi brothers to come and occupy the stage. They were quick to follow His instructions. Starting their performance with "*Radha Sameta Krishna ...*" they followed it up with a livelier song, "*Shambo Mahadeva ...*" in Panthuvrali raga. And then, the master plan of the Lord became evident as all the pundits and scholars seated in the front began to sway and sing alongside the brothers as these were all songs that they knew well by heart! The brothers' concert of just 15 minutes met with vociferous following and the fact that they were in Telugu only added to their popular appeal. As they concluded, Swami gifted *sarees* and clothes to the first performers, and then to the latter performers too. *Prasadam* was distributed to all the devotees in the end. The *arati* for this memorable day was offered at 8.10 p.m. Thus, concluded the grand and glorious Sahasra Poorna Chandra Darshana Mahotsavam festival which will ever remain etched in the hearts of everyone who was present physically or emotionally at Prasanthi Nilayam.

November 18, 2008 – Rathotsavam Day in Prasanthi Nilayam

It is tradition in Prasanthi Nilayam that on November 18 every year, the idol of Venugopala Swami moves back to its original location in a chariot procession led by the idols of Lord Rama and Mother Sita. After worship is

offered to the deities, the idols of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita return to the Mandir. Later, in the evening, the idols are taken out in a procession in the village of Puttaparthi, amidst joyous celebration by the villagers. And so, this year too on November 18, the statues were ready in the Bhajan Hall decked up and waiting for Swami to arrive. It was after 9:20 a.m. that Swami came for *darshan*. He headed into the Bhajan Hall after the *darshan* round. There were still huge crowds - spillovers from the previous day's event and new arrivals for dear Swami's birthday.

Swami entered the Bhajan Hall and all the students dressed in red *dhotis* gathered there began the chanting. Swami had a look at the idols and the priest added on a few decorations in Swami's presence. Swami also had a special crown that was made for Venugopalaswami, and so, the Krishna adorned with the flute was crowned with that pretty piece. *Aarthi* was performed to the idols and Swami enquired into the proceedings of the morning. The Seval volunteers then came up till the idols and raised the palanquins on their shoulders. With the Veda contingent leading the procession, the bhajan group boys also joined in and heralded the statues towards the Gopuram gate of the Mandir. Swami moved out of the bhajan hall and saw the idols being taken out. He too followed suit through the central path that was made between the boys seated in the marble blocks. As Swami moved down, all the students took the opportunity to touch Him in some way or the other and there were many who were trying to give letters to Him. Swami seemed to say, "I will take them on My way back!"

Huge floral decorations (*rangolis*) adorned the floor and Swami saw them intently as He passed by them. Then, through the Gopuram gate, Swami too moved out onto the road. The whole world seemed to be waiting for Him there as every inch of real estate had been taken up. The balconies were brimming with people and devotees thronged to whichever place afforded them a view of their dear Lord. Many snapped pictures for this was one of those rare times when they would be able to click pictures of the Lord. Swami sweetly sat watching as the idols were hoisted up on shoulders to their places in the chariot. He blessed coconuts to be broken in front of the chariot and then had the camphor waved at the idols. Blessing the procession to begin, Swami moved back slowly to the Mandir. As He was returning, the devotees from both the ladies and gents side thronged from above sending down their salutations as Swami was moving through the huge area behind the Rama, Lakshmana and Sita statues in the Sai Kulwant Hall. Swami looked up at the devotees and blessed them. (He always looks up to His devotees!). Keeping His promise, He collected letters from the students as He moved through them into the interview room. He then returned to the Bhajan Hall and asked for *bhajans* to begin. It was now a few minutes before 10 o'clock.

The procession in the village was led by the little Sathya Geetha, followed Veda chanting and *bhajans* by group of students of the Sri Sathya Sai University. The whole village came out in unity to celebrate. There were women who poured water all along the way to wash the path to be traversed and many more women came up in front to break coconuts and pay homage. Children came running to just touch the chariot as it is believed to be

sanctifying. The youth were there dancing and playing fast rhythms on the drums. On the whole, it was a cheerfully loud and colorful affair. Meanwhile, back at the Mandir, Swami sat outside for the *bhajans* that were on so that maximum people could benefit from having His *darshan*. He called all the boys holding trays and blessed them. After about 20-25 minutes, Swami went back into the Bhajan Hall and soon, at about 10:30 a.m., received *aarthi* and left.

November 19, 2008 – Ladies Day Celebrations in Prasanthi Nilayam

Swami said right from the beginning of His Avatarhood that the redemption of a nation has to begin with the redemption of its women and it was for this reason that He began His massive educational revitalizing and reform programme by starting a college for the girl students in Anantapur. In the same manner, He dedicated November 19 as a day to recognise the rich contributions of women and ever since the World Ladies' Day is celebrated with intensity on the 19th of the Birthday month. In fact, at many places, the 19th of every month is observed as Ladies' Day. In Prasanthi Nilayam, Ladies' Day began with the traditional Suprabhatam being sung by the renowned Telugu singer Mrs. P. Susheela just before 5.30 a.m. Even the Veda chanting around Swami's Mandir in the morning was done by a women's contingent.

Sai Kulwant Hall seemed to be the bride on this day ready to receive her Divine groom! Rows of lamps had been lined up on either side of the path that Swami would be moving on. The brass band from the Anantapur Campus and the bagpipes band from the Primary school stood in readiness to escort Swami. There was also a Veda chanting group with the traditional Poorna Kumbham. The marble block was filled with solar lamps, water filters and blankets which Swami would be blessing to be distributed to the needy in and around Puttaparthi. Swami arrived in Sai Kulwant Hall at 9.30 a.m. in a procession led by the girls' bands of the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University and the Primary School, along with Vedam chanting students, as a welcome song was aired. As He moved onto the stage, He lit the lamp to mark the beginning of the day's proceedings. He then sat on the ladies' side of the stage where a huge picture of the Divine Mother Easwaramma rested, adorning the stage by her Son's side!

Ms. Chetana Raju delivering the introductory speech dwelled upon the mystery of Divinity encased in human form. *"Most of us live and carry upon the surface of the wondrous workings of Bhagavan, remarkably unaware of the levels upon levels with which so much is going on. Who is His instrument and who is not? What is God's work and what is not?"* asked the speaker. Reflecting on the right perspective one should inculcate with our approach to Bhagavan, the speaker further added: *"We are opportunists whom Bhagavan gives 101 chances to serve and becoming a servant. Our stay on earth is like a flicker of a candle placed against eternity. It is He what He is today, and shall be Sri Sathya Sai what He will be tomorrow. His name will echo in the heart of creation for ever and ever, for eternity"*. So saying she concluded her speech. The second speaker for the session was Dr. Ankhi Mukherjee, an alumnus at Anantapur Campus between 1984-1991. Ankhi Mukherjee started

with a meditation on knowing Bhagavan through the register of "vidya" and spoke of "vidya" as the "portable property" she has carried away from her years at the Institute. Describing her relationship with Bhagavan as one of telepathy, both distant and intimate (from "tele" and "pathos" of the same word), she discussed the implication of Women's education for not just self-improvement, or the improvement of a particular class of women, but for the overall improvement of women. The last speaker was Sylvia Alden, from the US, a retired teacher, holding a Masters in Special Education. In a moving speech packed with emotion and devotion, she prayed to Swami: *"Swami, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart will be acceptable to You, my Lord and my all"*. Dwelling upon the concept "Universal" and its dictionary meaning, the speaker extolled Bhagavan to be the Universal Solution. He is that which exists and is true in all places and at all times and in all situations as justice and beauty. She also stressed the fact that Swami says, **"Even the words I speak as a joke is Truth."** But sadly we seem to take that declaration itself in a light manner. She exhorted to all that we should rise out of that foolishness.

As the speeches concluded, Swami blessed the distribution to begin. The needy had been identified and were seated in lines. They came up to the front and bowed to Swami before receiving the gifts of Love from various ladies who had been blessed to do that noble deed of giving. Swami's love is such that while He gives some the joy of receiving gifts, He gifts the joy of giving to some others - but it is sheer Joy that He gifts to all. The solar LED lanterns, water purifiers, rugs and other items useful for the rural folk were passed on to the recipients drawn from various parts of Anantapur district. Swami sat watching the proceedings throughout. After that was completed, Swami gifted something of which everyone is needy - Grace in the form of 'sweet' *prasadam*! After this, Bhagawan accepted *arati* at 11.10 before returning to His residence.

In the evening, once again Swami was ushered into Sai Kulwant Hall in a grand and elaborate procession, with another welcome song played over the speakers, at 5 p.m. When He completed the *darshan* rounds and reached the Mandir, He moved to the Bhajan Hall where the children from the Primary school were ready in costumes for their programme this evening. The children were shining in their multi-coloured dresses and Swami's eyes seemed to light up seeing them. After a brief interaction with them, Swami came onstage and started the programme for the evening.

The evening session started off with a soulful rendering of devotional music by Sunita, Surabhi Shravani and Smita. While it was a home coming for Sunita after the wonderful opportunity during the Guru Purnima, for the other two, it was the maiden venture - an opportunity that they cherished; and so they expressed themselves as best as possible through their music. Starting with an invocation prayer to Lord Ganesha, "Shuklambharadharam Vishnum", they sang the famous "Sathyam Sivam Sundaram", "Jagadi Sigadu", a patriotic piece, "Sri Rama Chandra Kripalu", "Allah Tero Naam", "Vendi Ginneluka" and "Eashwar Hey Allah Ek Pukaar...", receiving applause from the packed Sai Kulwant Hall. In between, Swami went into the interview room

for a brief while but soon returned with sarees to give to the artists. The joy that the singing in Swami's presence bestows is such that one becomes oblivious to everything else. That was the case with the three singers too and it was Swami who made a sweet request, "Its enough now! The children are waiting to perform." The beauty with Swami is that whether He tells anyone to start singing or stop singing, they do it instantly with the same joy! They concluded the concert and Swami gifted sarees to the ladies and white safari pieces to the gents. As the musicians were packing up, tiny tots came up the stage with cards, flowers and presents.

The name of the dance drama was "Sai Vighrahan Prema" inspired from the famous statement, "Ramo Vighrahan Dharmah". Avatars have come at different times with different missions and their glories and their stories have become the life breath for multitudes everywhere. Is it ever possible to bring all these incarnations on one stage depicting their stories? This seemed to be the attempt by the students from the Primary School through a dazzling display of light, music, dance and drama in the fading light of the Ladies' Day evening. Their 70 minute dance-drama brought out the glory of Sai down the ages of Krita Yuga till the present, with video projections on the back-drop adding to the narrative. The story shifted between eras of time and the different Avatars to highlight the glory of His story and the story of His glory. Shown were episodes from Swami's childhood and dialogues were borrowed from Swami's daily vocabulary of Telugu words and that seemed to strike at the heart chords of the audience! The performers ranged from the 12th standard girls till the little ones from 2nd or 3rd standard. The hard work and sincerity of purpose and practice was easily visible in all the performances, and so it was no surprise that Swami was very happy at the end of their performance.

He moved down the stage and posed with the children for photos. All the girls came in small groups and sat by Him posing for pictures. Some spoke to Him and many took *padanamaskar*. Granting joy to all His children, Swami moved up the stage again. The children were all in the centre of the marble block as both the divine mother, Easwaramma, and The Divine Mother, Swami, seemed to look at them with Love and Grace. Blessing them, Swami received *aarathi* and retired to Yajur Mandir.

November 22, 2008 - 27th Convocation Day of Sri Sathya Sai University

The dawn of November 22 saw hectic activity in Sai Kulwant Hall as the Muddenahalli students worked in great zest and zeal to play what has now become their annual role in the Convocation ceremony of the Sri Sathya Sai University. Swami has chosen them to do all the decorations for the ceremony for which He is the host! And every time, they do a job that fills Him with joy and satisfaction. By 1:00 p.m., the whole Sai Kulwant Hall wore a new look. The stage was tastefully decorated with flowers of various hues. A beautiful arch decked with flowers bearing the letters XXVII Convocation of Sri Sathya Sai University was placed at the western end of the hall to welcome Swami. Another arch bearing the same lettering embossed in gold was placed near

the gate facing the dais. At about 2:00 p.m., Swami came in the car to inspect the arrangements.

All those students graduating on the day were seated in the central marble block. Swami got down and with the first view of the decked stage, He seemed overwhelmed. His face seemed to say, "It's so beautiful!" He wanted to test the switch that would light up the decorated board to mark the "Convocation being declared open" by the Chancellor. As those lights came on, His face lit up! He then moved along both the right and left wing of the stage and inspected the arrangements. When He came on stage, two students came up to Him with the convocation robes. The post graduate students had a brown coloured robe while the undergraduates had light blue. He saw the robes but blessed the students! He then wanted to go to the eastern side of the stage and for that He had to literally wade through the boys.

Having satisfied Himself that all was fine, Swami was about to leave when from the corner of His eye, He saw an ex-student. Well, the concept of ex-student is only from the University angle. As far as Swami is concerned, once you are His student, you always remain as one. He called him to His side and enquired about his well-being. He also asked him, "How is the decoration?" The boy told the truth - that it was magnificent. Swami was so pleased, and as they say, when God is very happy, He bestows that look which fulfills all the desires of those on whom that look falls on. It appeared to be that kind of a look! Then, moving through the veranda where the roof had been decorated, He reached the other end of the Mandir. The veranda had been curtained from public view and so His journey through it was like a ride in a dark corridor. As He moved near His beloved students, they mobbed around Him. Like bees hovering around a flower, they buzzed near Him and Swami smiled warmly and spoke to some of them. Then, getting back into the car, Swami drove back to Yajur Mandir.

The 27th Annual Convocation of Sri Sathya Sai University was held as a glittering ceremony which it richly deserved for the matchless service it has been rendering in the field of education for more than a quarter century now. This prestigious institution that promotes value education with spiritual orientation, a chiseller of wonderful students whom Swami prefers to address as His future ambassadors, has thousands of students as its alumni who are engaged in relentless service activities in different parts of the world. The regal convocation procession began at 3.50 p.m. led by the students of the Institute Brass Band. They were followed by two students on either side holding the scepter with the Institute insignia embossed on it. The Registrar of the University carried the ceremonial mace. Members of the Governing Body and Members of the Institute Trust followed them. Swami came out of the Yajur Mandir in a beautiful maroon robe and as always was the shining star and life of the procession. As the procession moved on Swami did something so wonderful and beautiful - something that comes very naturally to Him.

Sitting on the chair, Swami was engulfed by the procession in such a manner that surely none would be able to see Him when He arrived into the Sai Kulwant Hall. So after being part of the procession for a few moments, He

asked to be moved out of it. As the entire procession entered the Sai Kulwant hall, He sat watching it. He told the photographers nearby, "The procession has gone there. Go there and shoot.....Why here?" Surely, He knows as well as anyone else why they were there and not with the procession! Then He started. As Swami entered the hall, there was a huge burst of applause. Whatever is the occasion or ceremony, the Lord remains the heartthrob of His devotees. Swami moved gently through the rows of capped graduates from both the men's and women's campuses. Then, via the 'filled-to-the-capacity' marble block Swami made His way to the stage.

The revered chief guest this time was Prof. G. Venkataraman, a man of superhuman achievements both in the scientific world as well as in the sphere of Swami's mission. Educated at the University of Madras, he had an illustrious career. He has rendered yeoman service to the nation, starting his career at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). He also held the position of Director, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). In recognition of his services, he was elected President of Indian Physicist Association. He was also conferred the prestigious national honour "Padma Shri" by the Government of India. Being the director of the Prashanti Digital Studios and the world renowned Sai Radio channel "Radio Sai Global Harmony", he has been a true instrument in the Lord's hands. It was no surprise that Swami had decided to bestow him with that exalted honour on this day. At the outset, Prof. Vishwanath Pandit, the Vice Chancellor of the University garlanded the Chief Guest Prof. G. Venkataraman. He also welcomed the prominent guest from the UGC, the Vice Chairman of University Grants Commission, Prof. Moolchand Sharma. The proceedings began with the customary Vedic chant which has a lofty meaning to consider the mother, father, preceptor and guest as God, and hold them in high esteem. The Vice Chancellor then requested the Chancellor, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba to declare the convocation open.

Swami held the mike and everyone in the audience - their breath. With a sweet smile and even sweeter voice, Swami said, "I declare the Convocation open" and thunder seemed to strike the Sai Kulwant Hall. There was genuine pure joy on every face as people applauded with all their might. The Vice Chancellor then delivered his opening address. The highlight of this was the statement of the UGC committee that he quoted, **"Rather than the University having a need for the UGC, the UGC needs the University."** The candidates for the various degrees were then presented to the Chancellor. The Vice Chancellor then administered the oath to the students. This was followed by medal distribution ceremony. The gold medalists received their most cherished dreams - the medal from the Divine Hands! The feeling of a gold medalist as he/she goes on stage to receive the award from Swami is something that no other will understand. If an actor gets the Oscar or a soldier is awarded the ParamVir Chakra, that joy is still lesser compared to this medal from Swami. It is as if Swami is saying, "I am happy and proud of you, My child." And that is enough for this birth and later births too, if any! The students made no secret of that joy as they posed beside Swami for photographs after getting the medal. Swami too smiled broadly at the

photographers for He knew that these pictures would be something that not only the medalists but their generations to come would treasure and cherish.

This year 437 students received their degrees, and 20 students were decorated with gold medals by Bhagavan. Five students had completed their doctoral dissertations from the departments of Mathematics, Physics, Finance (2 students) and Economics.

The Chief Guest of the Convocation, Prof. G. Venkataraman began his convocation address by expressing his gratitude to Bhagavan for conferring upon Him the honour of being the Chief Guest of the 27th Convocation. Prof. Venkataraman congratulated the graduates not for only for their degrees, but mainly for being the students of Bhagavan. His entire talk traced the wonderful story of the University intertwined in which were the many love stories between Swami and His students.

One story will suffice as an example. When in 1975, the Brindavan College was growing and the hostel was relatively small, Swami wanted to build a spacious hostel near the sports ground, which was a few meters away from His compound. All preparations were being made by Col. Joga Rao, the Central Trust Engineer. A day before the ground breaking ceremony, Swami came to hostel. Then a student gave a letter to Swami. He read the contents of the letter and then asked the student whether He could ask the warden to read the letter for the benefit of all the other boys. The student readily agreed. He had expressed his anguish at being separated from Swami. He had written, "Swami why are You so upset that You are distancing us from You?" Swami was so moved by the sincere prayer of this boy that He immediately changed the plans to construct the hostel at the distant location. Instead the hostel was now built close to His residence. The erudite speaker said that the current economic meltdown was due to the uninhibited consumerism without any regard to moral values. And thus, it is that the Sathya Sai University gains profound importance. His talk moved many a member of the audience to nostalgic and joyous tears of hope. As he completed his speech, he received a loving congratulation from Swami. Then, Bhagavan asked for His mikes to be brought. Along with the mikes came a feeling of anticipative joy in all. Given below is a summary of Swami's discourse:

Bharat is the motherland of many noble souls who earned great reputation in all the continents of the world. This is the land of many valorous people who could vanquish the enemies in the battlefield. This is the land of many learned people who taught the Vedas and other sacred scriptures to the people of other countries. But, unfortunately, the Bharatiyas today have forgotten the principles of spirituality and are taking to wrong path.

(Telugu Poem)

Boys and Girls!

It is your responsibility to uphold the glory of this country, Bharat. This country Bharat is highly reputed and is the land of plenty and prosperity. In spite of many foreign invasions, this country has prospered. The real beauty in this

land is the observance of forbearance. There is no greater feeling than the one each one has towards one's own mother. This country Bharat is known for women of chastity. Savitri could bring her dead husband back to life. Do you find such chaste women in any other country? This is also the birthplace of Damayanti. Mother Sita came out of blazing fire unscathed to prove her chastity. Today everyone seems to succumb to silly problems. People seem to have forgotten their responsibilities. Just as a mighty elephant submits to the dictates of the mahout, the Bharatiyas are unaware of their own strength and are aping others. Truth and righteousness have been the guiding principles of Bharat. Since these twin principles are forgotten by the Bharatiyas they are suffering.

Man should declare that I am a human being not an animal. When he declares that he is a human being, he should have human qualities and not animal qualities. Where there is love, there is no chance for hatred or enmity. The dog loves its puppies and the birds love their young ones, but modern man does not love his fellowmen. Today, there is no unity in Bharat. Where there is unity, there is purity; where there is purity, there is divinity.

Man should develop faith in the Self. But man today lacks Self-confidence. Self-confidence leads to self-satisfaction, self-satisfaction in turn leads to self-realization.

Human quality is still prevalent in Bharat. In other countries, there are so many problems. Today, even countries like U.S.A. and Japan are envious of Bharat. Today the food, water and even air are polluted. Bharat faces no such pollution problems.

Man is verily God. But man is not able to know his true nature. Education leads to only argumentation. Modern education is not conferring the knowledge of the Self. Parents spend many lakhs to send their children abroad for studies. But they return totally spoiled. There is no need to go abroad. What is available in Bharat is not available elsewhere. The greatness of Bharat is beyond estimation. The kind of fortune that you find in Bharat is not found anywhere. There are many people who invite Swami to foreign land. They are prepared to bring airplanes to take Bhagavan with them. I do not want these comforts, I want only devotion. There are no enemies of Swami. Swami loves everyone. But His pure divine love is often misunderstood.

If your desires are fulfilled, you are sure to be spoiled. So, Swami is training youngsters here with all limitations. Students have great love for Swami. As Swami leaves this place to go elsewhere, they bid farewell with tears. Such is their love. He is an intelligent man who helps those who have harmed him too. That is true human quality. Whomsoever you meet, consider him as God. God is in human form. Rama, Sita, Hanuman - all were humans. All are divine. Names may be different, but the principle of Atma is the same in all. It is necessary to develop equal-mindedness at this young age. You may think it is difficult, but in reality it is easy. You will not experience this in spite of doing Yajnas and rituals. In the outside world, there are only pieces. Peace is within you.

You call yourself as humans and behave like an animal. Evil qualities like greed, avarice, hatred are animal qualities. Be a human with fellow human beings. Do not hate anyone. Till this moment, Swami has not hated anyone. Bhagavan is full of love. Swami maybe at a distant place, but divine love is drawing people like magnet. He is not angry with anybody. He is always happy. Bhagavan always smiles. Swami wants you to be blissful. Swami has not sent any invitation to anyone, but thousands have gathered here. It is only your love for Bhagavan that has drawn you here. When Bhagavan goes in the streets, shopkeepers come running out of their shops to have His Darshan. On this sacred day, one has to develop love primarily. Very soon the world will be united under one roof. Nobody would say, I am from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and so on. Everybody would call themselves a Bharatiya. We do not belong to any party. We have only the party of love. You may go anywhere; you will be respected and honoured if you have the party of love. Love is selfless. A true man is one without an iota of selfishness. Every human being has love. There is no greater quality than love. Samasta Lokah Sukhino Bhavantu (May all the beings of all the worlds be happy!). This should be our prayer if we want the world to be peaceful. This is the message of Swami today.

Swami concluded His discourse with the *bhajan* 'Hari Bhajana Bina'. But there was another beautiful thing that happened. Swami keeps telling, "My boys are my voice." This day, after singing the first line, Swami told the boys to lead! The whole *bhajan* was sung by the students as the rest of the Sai Kulwant Hall followed. It was a wonderful feeling and Swami watched on with a gleam in His eye. As that *bhajan* concluded, Swami told everyone to rise for the national anthem. The Institute brass band struck up the national anthem and everyone joined loudly in chorus. As the ceremony concluded, announcement was made that in another 20 minutes there would be a cultural programme by the students of the University - a play "Divya Premashrayam" (Under the Umbrella of Divine Love), in the Poornachandra Auditorium.

Anand, an alumnus of Sri Sathya Sai University, rejects offers from many top companies and decides to dedicate his youthful years in uplift of villages. He chooses a village called Ramanathapuram for this endeavor. There, he joins forces with an educated and hardworking youngster named Krishna for the hard task at hand. Anand gets a glimpse of the difficulty ahead at his first meeting with the village elders. During his arrival there is an altercation between two brothers on a property issue. Anand attempts to resolve the issue by various means, and having gained their goodwill narrates the story of the two great brothers from the Ramayana, Sri Rama and Bharatha.

Sage Vasishta and King Janaka are the arbiters between the two brothers. On one hand there is Sri Rama who having got the command from His father is firm that he will not return to Ayodhya till He completes 14 years in the forest. On the other side is Bharatha who emphatically states that only Lord Rama has the right to ascend the throne and that he will take his brother's place in the forest. Sage Vasishta raises his hands in surrender and says that he is incapable of judging in this confrontation not between two brothers but between *Dharma* (Righteousness) and *Prema* (Love) itself. He requests King

Janaka to do the honours. The *Rajarishi* then delivers a landmark judgment. He informs Rama that in a battle between *Dharma* and *Prema*, *Prema* has to be the victor. He then instructs Bharatha that though *Prema* is the victor, *Prema* by definition is selfless and hence, he should ask what his brother desires and act accordingly. The scene ends with Bharatha taking the *padukas* (sandals) of his brother and agreeing to rule the kingdom as the caretaker but not the king.

Moved by the story, the brothers decide to set aside their differences and work together. What follows is a golden period for the village when Ramanathapuram becomes a model village enriched with development and communal harmony. However, the wheels of fortune turn and the village is engulfed by ravaging floods and epidemics. The same people who lived peacefully in the past now change in the face of crisis. Selfishness becomes the order of the day. Anand is devastated and in a moment of severe introspection cries aloud to his Lord. He opens a book of Bhagavan's messages to his students and reads about the enthralling story of Emperor Shivaji.

Faced with a severe crisis wherein his kingdom was becoming weak internally and the power of his enemies was growing exponentially, Shivaji longs to call it a day and renounce his kingdom. At that moment, Shivaji's guru, Sri Samartha Ramadas enters and offers to give Shivaji renunciation. Shivaji surrenders his crown and sword to the sage and accepts the ochre robes. On the enquiry of Sage Ramadas he reveals that he feels extremely peaceful now. Content with the answer, the holy one commands Shivaji to rule the kingdom on his behalf from thereon and returns the crown to Shivaji.

Having learnt this lesson in non-doership, Anand now becomes the very embodiment of peace, and he feels confident that Swami will take care, and sets aside the burden from his shoulder. No sooner had he done this, he learns that Swami has sent a contingent to the village to rebuild the houses. The whole village gathers together again in gratitude to Bhagavan. The story was based on the recent announcement that Swami made about rebuilding the homes and in fact, the lives of flood affected people in Orissa.

After the drama, Swami blessed the participants with group photographs onstage before accepting *arati* and retiring for the day at 8.20 p.m. The group photograph session this time had a new flavour as Swami posed for photographs with the "Sets' boys" too as they are called (the boys who set-up the stage). And so, scores of boys in black dresses surrounded The Orange and had pictures taken. Swami, then, blessing everyone, moved backstage and finally retired. An announcement was made about breakfast and lunch being provided tomorrow free to all as Bhagavan's *prasadam* on the occasion of His 83rd Birthday.

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 – THE SACRED 83RD BIRTHDAY OF BHAGAVAN SRI SATHYA SAI BABA

The beauty of the Avatar is that when He descends on the earth, He not only assumes the earthly responsibilities for which He actually has no binding, but He also indulges humanity in their joys and celebrations. So, every year, without fail, as devotees congregate for His birthday, He too pays special attention to the day and celebrates it with them. That is not because it is His birthday, but because it is an occasion that the devotees revel and joyously congregate. Surely, any other occasion that confers the same kind of joy would be given the same kind of attention by Swami! He lives for His devotees who love Him. And the devotees strive to live for Him who gives His all for them.

It was from about 5:00 a.m. that the serpentine queues to get into Prasanthi Nilayam Ashram began. All roads in Puttaparthi actually lead to the Mandir which is the heart of the town, but on this day none of those roads seemed sufficient for the huge numbers of devotees assembling for a sight of the Lord. These scenes are so powerful in the hope and positivity they evoke. If at all one is confounded anytime by negative thoughts and assailed by doubts as to if there is any hope in this violence and hatred ridden world, a reminiscence of these scenes will certainly calm one's turbulent mind. There are so many people alive who are ready to give their all for God who is Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love, and that is enough reassurance that the world is soon going to find Truth, Auspiciousness and Beauty - *Sathyam*, *Shivam* and *Sundaram*. In a regulated manner, these crowds were slowly allowed into the Mandir premises, and soon the Sai Kulwant Hall was filled to its capacity. Though we will now jump ahead of time, it is important that we know an important fact. At 11:30 a.m. on this day, when all the morning festivities at the Mandir had concluded, there were still people in the queues with the hope that if not in the morning, they would see their beloved Swami in the evening!

Now coming back to the morning session, inside the Sai Kulwant Hall, every inch of space has been taken up. A beautiful arch with the lettering 83rd Birthday of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba was seen richly decorated with flowers and other paraphernalia. The dais too was a treat to the eye with magnificent flower decorations. Video cameras were stationed at important points to catch all the live action. Pressmen had cramped every available space in the exclusive gallery allotted to them with their scribble pads. Lensmen too had taken their positions in their allotted places. It was at about 9:45 a.m. that Swami arrived from the Yajur Mandir. There were a host of people waiting to wish Him on this day that was so special for them. Roses were exchanged and the *Kalasham* of the Veda group was blessed. The band leaders of the different bands offered their prostrations at His feet on behalf of their respective bands. There was the wonderful procession to usher the Lord into the Sai Kulwant Hall. Led by the bands of the Primary School, the Anantapur campus and the Prasanthi Nilayam campus, there were the Vedam chanting students from the Primary School, Higher Secondary School and the

Sri Sathya Sai University following and completing the procession. Swami, like the previous day, allowed the procession to proceed before Him.

"Reserve the best for the end" it is said, and towards the end was Swami in His shining pure white robe on a wonderful throne chair which was golden in colour. Wherever Swami went, there was a surge in the crowds. The hinges of the gates seemed strained to the last strand of metal as people cramped behind them to have a glimpse of Swami in this beautiful form. The Sri Rudrah Prasnah chanting was on. Swami moved to the stage and as He sat on the centre stage, the Prasanthi Nilayam band struck up the world's most popular tune, "Happy birthday to you." Everyone seemed to clap and sway with it. Following that, the girls' band from Anantapur too played their version of the same song. Soon after that, like a cycle of tunes, each band began to play. The Primary bagpipes and trumpets band too joined the party. Swami sat almost expressionless listening to all of them. When the kettle drums band from the Primary school was playing, Swami told the University band boys to sit down. He then gave the same instruction to the Anantapur band.

As the Vedam chanting continued, Swami moved into the veranda where there was an array of cakes. He was welcomed at each cake and He lit the candle and cut the cake. There were about 9 cakes in all and Swami gave everyone joy as He went about the portico. He also moved to the ladies side to cut cakes from the Anantapur campus. Before that, He cut a huge specially decorated cake which had Lord Krishna adorning it. The governor of Karnataka, His Excellency Mr. Rameshwar Thakur was present on the dais paying obeisance to Bhagavan. He presented Swami with a garland and told Him that it was his privilege to be present and witness such a grand occasion. Swami blessed him.

Then the cricket legend, Mr. Sunil Gavaskar presented Swami a cricket bat signed by the members of the 1983 World Cup Winning Team. Swami took the bat and stared at it for long as if remembering how He had specially blessed those members to win what was their cup of Life. Then Swami moved out through the portico to the stage. He signaled to the students to start *bhajans* and after a while even songs like "*Sri Raghavam Dasarathmaja Aprameyam ...*", "*Namo Sathya Sai Baba ...*", "*Manishini Madhavuni Chese Mahine Swargamuga Marche Sathya Sai Bhagawan Ki Enta Premayo, Enta Premayo ...*" were sung. This final song has a profound meaning, which is worth mentioning in this context: "The love of Sathya Sai Baba for humanity is so incomparable and indescribable that He is transforming humans into divine and earth into heaven."

And so, on the birthday morning, as hundreds of top notch musicians worldwide prayed for a chance to sing for Him, (there were at least half a dozen maestros in the Mandir itself) it was the privilege of the students to sing for their Swami. After the songs, Swami received *aarthi* and retired as *prasadam* was distributed to all.

The evening session proved to be another unforgettable one for all those present physically in Sai Kulwant Hall, especially for the staff and students of

Muddenahalli. It was almost 5:40 p.m. when Swami came for *darshan*. Once He reached the stage, He asked Prof. Anil Kumar to speak a few words in Telugu, and introduce the speakers for the evening. Mr. V. Srinivasan, All India President of the Sai Organisations spoke first, and was followed at 6.15 p.m. by Mr. Ajit Popat from the UK.

Mr. Srinivasan said that it was a defining moment in the chronicles of time because on this day the universe, the galaxies, planets, sun, moon, asteroids, all were fortunate to have 1,008 *darshans* of Sri Sathya Sai Avatar. Referring to Bhagavan's discourse on the occasion of 27th Convocation of the University, the learned speaker said that Bhagawan has declared that in 28 years time, India would be the vanguard of all the countries of the world. All would be one. There would be absolute unity. Swami has brought hope to the seemingly loveless world. The erudite speaker also said that after the morning function that day, Swami told him and others to construct permanent houses in Orissa to those who are rendered homeless by the recent floods. Bhagawan is love personified. The message of the previous day's drama is love. Bhagawan reaches out to the people of the villages. The speaker as All India President had many such experiences when he visited different parts of the country.

Mr. Ajit Popat began his speech by offering his salutations to Bhagawan in his customary manner – *Namaste Prema Rupaya Namaste Paramatmane, Namaste Shirdi Nathaya, Namaste Sathya Sayine*. Mr. Popat, in his inimitable style, said that the ABC of life is 'Always Be Compassionate/Charitable'. Man at the time of birth cries '*Koham*' (who am I?); people now, instead of saying '*Soham*' say '*phonum*' (referring to the proliferation and usage of mobile phones). The speaker said that one should get up from bed at *Brahmamurtam* (early hours in the morning) and do *Sadhana*. He mentioned how one should be energetic, efficient and enterprising. If we want to be with the Master, we should be efficient. He quoted Bhagavan's saying '*Follow the master, face the devil, fight till the end and finish the game*'. Every *darshan* of the Lord is precious and important. That understanding is the dawn of golden age in us. Our devotion should be as intense as the thirst of a weary traveler in the midst of a desert at 12 noon Mr. Popat prayed to Swami on behalf of millions of devotees in U.K. and Europe to visit Sai Kutir in U.K. He concluded his speech by saying, "Let us love all for the sake of the Master, Bhagawan, and serve all in His name".

It was after Mr. Popat's speech that the thunderbolt seemed to strike in the Mandir as Swami signaled for His mikes to be brought up. Below is a summary of the Divine Discourse.

All the names and forms are but the manifestations of the Supreme Being who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and non-dual. He is the embodiment of Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram (Truth, Goodness, Beauty). He is Sathya Sai Maheswaram.

Embodiments of Love!

Bharat is a highly sacred land. In this sacred land of Bharat beauty lies in forbearance. In fact, character is more important than even life. Such principle is getting wiped out of this land. We follow the principles of foreign culture. Just as a mighty elephant is not aware of its strength, Bharatiyas are not aware of their innate strength. This is the sad plight of the Bharatiyas. An illiterate mahout controls the mighty elephant.

The Vedas declare that no property or association will confer immortality, only Thyaga (sacrifice) will confer immortality. We have ruined ourselves because of the absence of unity. Therefore, it is most essential to develop unity. Calling ourselves as human beings we behave like animals. Suppose we have partaken of a few delicious items. But the next morning it becomes faecal matter. Though it comes out of one's own self, it has to be discarded. We have to accept all that is good in society.

There is nothing great in doing good to those who have done good to us. Greatness lies in doing good to those who have harmed us. Yad Bhavam Tad Bhavathi (As are the feelings, so is the result). When our feelings are good, our actions will also be good. After eating mango fruit, one cannot get the belch of cucumber. If there is goodness in the mind, all that you do will be good, but when there is no goodness in the mind, all that you do will also be bad. There is a place called Muddenahalli near Chikballapur. All the inhabitants of that place are very poor. Earlier when the school was built, many extended their help to construct classrooms and a hall for bhajans. But to pursue higher studies, the people have to go to Bangalore since there is no university in Muddenahalli.

Today I have decided to have a separate campus affiliated to Sri Sathya Sai University in Muddenahalli. Bhagawan's Will is bound to happen. The work will start from tomorrow. Therefore, Swami has Willed to have Sathya Sai University in Muddenahalli. The people living in Muddenahalli are village folk. They live by physical labour. To pursue higher studies, they have to go to cities or towns. Once they have completed their education, they can go elsewhere to earn a living. Swami has decided to inculcate spirituality through Bhagavatam, Bhagawad Gita and Ramayana. It takes three years to learn. Without spirituality, all education will be in vain. There are many educated people but they are not doing anything to society. They indulge in gambling and other unhealthy practices. When you direct children in the right way, they will become responsible citizens. Therefore, Bhagavan has decided to start University Campus in Muddenahalli. It will take 2 to 3 crores to construct the University Campus, but Swami has decided to do it.

In Prasanthi Nilayam, we have students like pure gold. There may be some defects, but they would correct them. Not only correction, they do adjustment too. Today the elders are responsible for spoiling the students. Nowadays students are correcting even parents. If the father is a drunkard, the son corrects him by saying that he will earn a bad name in society. If the children are to be good, the elders should be perfect in their life. If the elders smoke

cigarettes and drink liquor in front of them, naturally the children too get addicted to these vices.

I am going to build a hostel and campus in Muddenahalli with all facilities. It would be completed in one year. This is Bhagavan's Divine Will. Bhagavan has been waiting to make this declaration.

Many extol Swami in many ways. Swami is not happy when He is extolled. Swami is love personified. People may speak ill of Him, but Swami is full of love. There are no enemies for Swami. He takes care of everyone like children. The love of Swami can be compared to a thousand mothers' love. With this power, Swami is carrying on His mission. Swami corrects people by feigning anger when they commit mistakes, but He is never really angry. You are not recognising Swami's love in depth. There is no difference in the heart of Swami. Samasta Lokah Sukhino Bhavantu (May all the beings of all the worlds be happy!) Swami wishes all to be happy and healthy with plenty and prosperity.

*Swami never asks for money from anyone. Out of thousands of devotees present here, not even a single person can say that Bhagavan had asked money from him. If there is anyone like then, please stand up. (**There was a stunned silence for about 20 seconds**). See, there are none. Money comes and goes, morality comes and grows. Ramdas spent all the money he collected as tax to build a temple for Rama. He was incarcerated by the king when he came to know of this. In this moment of agony, Ramdas cried to the Lord, "O Lord, you flaunt all your jewels in all grandeur, but see my condition now!" But afterwards Ramdas repented and asked for forgiveness from the Lord. People speak according to their whims and fancies. But Swami has no such imagination. People may say thousand bad things about Swami, but He never punishes them. You may question now, but later in future you will repent for your mistake. No one has recognised even a fraction of His thoughts. They do not recognise the love that comes out of His heart. All should be happy and live in love. We may not have property and wealth, but if we have the wealth of love, we are sure to succeed. When you are confronted by difficulties, loss and grief, consider them as God's gift. When anyone asks your name, you should not say Rama, Krishna, but you should say, "I am I".*

I and mine are the origin of man's ego. We should first of all give up this quality of ego. Bhagavan wants you to live long and stand united. Let us all grow together, move together and live together.

Swami has made drinking water available to one crore people in Chennai. I have brought water all the way from river Krishna. What the British could not do, I did it. I gave drinking water to the people living in the upland areas of East and West Godavari districts. Bhagavan always does some or the other good thing. Now Bhagavan is going to build a separate campus affiliated to Sathya Sai University in Muddenahalli. Any Muddenahalli teachers in the gathering? Did you hear Bhagavan's words? Be happy. Narayana Rao, the Principal of Muddenahalli is a double doctorate holder. He takes care of the entire management. He was waiting for Bhagavan's compassion. (Bhagavan

called Dr. Narayana Rao to the stage to speak a few words. Bhagawan spoke in Kannada language. He told him, "Consider this as an act of laying the foundation stone. Publish this good news in the newspapers and begin work from tomorrow itself.)

"I have no words to express my thanks. He is always looking after us. We will do His work. We will do our best to please Him in all ways", said Dr. Narayana Rao in his short speech.

You share this bliss with everybody. Be happy always.

Swami then concluded His discourse with the *bhajan*, "Rama Rama Rama Sita." Blessing everyone, Swami received *aarthi* and retired for the day.

ILLUMINATING LESSONS AT HIS LOTUS FEET - Part 2

By Mr. R. Venkatesh Prasad

Mr. Venkatesh Prasad is an alumnus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, Prashanti Nilayam. He joined the university in 1987 and passed out of the portals in 1992 after completing his Bachelors in Commerce and Masters in Business Administration (MBA). Venkatesh currently lives in Bangalore and works for Polyflex India Private Limited as Chief Financial Officer (CFO). This is the transcript of an episode of the Radio Sai serial "Fleeting Moments...Lasting Memories". To download this programme, please visit www.radiosai.org/saistudents

The lessons that I have learnt studying in the proximity of Bhagavan in the Sri Sathya Sai University are priceless. Here are two which remain ever fresh in the inner recesses of my heart. These happened when I was in Prashanti Nilayam pursuing my Master in Business Administration (MBA).

The Major Management Test

Every Management student, as per curriculum, has to submit a project report. We usually spend two to three months on this. I was preparing my project report on an Act passed by the Indian government called the MRTP Act. My research was based on the impact that this act had on the performance of many Indian companies. As stated, I had spent a couple of months on this and the day came when I had to submit my report and present myself for a viva voce before a learned panel.

Normally, vivas were conducted during the holidays and would go on for a few days. I could notice that during that year's viva voce session, not many students had performed particularly well; in fact the entire batch that I belonged to had not made it up to the mark. As my name starts with the alphabet 'V', I was the last in my class to appear for the viva session. My morale was not at its very best, especially after seeing the glum countenances of my friends. The additional knowledge that the interviewing panel consisted of very distinguished people added to my discomfiture.

My viva day dawned. I was scheduled to present myself at 9.30 a.m. at the institute. On such a day, we generally do not come to Mandir for the morning *darshan*; we see Him in the afternoon. So, having got up early, I went for a brisk jog on the ground and returned to the hostel in a positive mood and picked up the morning newspaper.

"I will give you Viva"

Newspapers were generally delivered in the hotel at around 6:30 a.m. I causally glanced through the headlines when I saw a headline that made my heart skip a beat: the very Act that I had studied so hard and long, and had made the subject of my project report was scrapped by the Commerce Ministry of the Government of India! I cannot forget that moment. It was 1991

and the then Commerce Minister of India, Mr. P. Chidambaram, had abolished the entire MRTP Act stating that it was detrimental to the country's progress. For a minute, I did not know what to do! My entire mind went blank except for one – Swami. Lord, only You can help me now! I had a hurried shower. All my optimism on the forthcoming viva evaporated. I quickly changed into whites and rushed to Mandir. Bhagavan used to come out for *darshan* at about 6.00 – 6.15 in the morning. I was desperate and He was my only solution.

In those days, like it is still now, we students had the priceless privilege of referring any issue straight to Swami. It so happened that on that particular day Bhagavan had not yet come out for *darshan*. It was almost 7.15 a.m. So I ran all the way to Mandir and sat in the portico, which was almost empty; the student population was small as it was the vacation period.

Swami came out for *darshan* and He saw me. "What happened? Why are you here?" I got up and said, "Swami, viva..." He did not allow me to complete. He directed, "I will give you viva (a popular energy drink of those days pronounced as VIVA), you go and do viva (WHYWA). Take *padanamaskar*." But the fear in me was so strong, I started to open my mouth again, "Swami..." Swami's voice adopted a stern tone. "Take *padanamaskar*." So I fell at His feet never getting a chance to explain.

"Go," He ordered. I just got up and walked away from the portico when He was standing there! My mind was still numb. Needless to say, while walking back to the hostel, I was thinking about the issue in hand. In my report, I had said that the Act was detrimental to Indian companies. Then, it struck me: "Why don't I look at the unforeseen turn of events from a different angle? If the Indian government has really scrapped the Act, then my stand and the Indian government's are in agreement. So, why should I feel bad about it? In fact, the news of the Act being trashed could not have come on a better day for me!" Now I was filled with ideas. I ran to the hostel, picked up a copy of my report and other necessary documents, and headed straight to the venue of the viva, well ahead of time. When the panel had arrived and settled themselves, I was completely ready. I straight away put up the conclusion sheet. Some of the members of the panel probably thought I was acting smart by offering the conclusion first. They questioned me in this regard.

I told them point by point how the Act was affecting everybody and as a trump card, I carried the day's newspaper edition with me. I opened the paper, kept it on the table and told them, "It has been scrapped." For a minute, they did not believe it! Then, when the news sank in, they all burst out laughing. They said, "Since anyway the Act is now gone, there is no point in dwelling on your project report. However, as we cannot let you go without asking you anything about your project, we'll question you to check your understanding of various concepts." What happened after that I really do not know; only Swami answered through me. For forty five minutes, I was questioned on a number of concepts that ranged from the meaning of *Kaalatithaya* (a name of Lord Shiva) to IBM clones to the leadership qualities between John Major and Margaret Thatcher, and the qualities of difference between Narasimha Rao

and Rajiv Gandhi (former prime ministers of India). I had seven learned members asking me questions on everything possible, on all the subjects which they could think of. Only by Swami's grace, I answered everything to their satisfaction. They patted me and sent me home. I knew that I had done well. When I returned to the hostel I found all my classmates waiting for me. Naturally, they thought I would have been grilled thoroughly, especially because of the surprising news in the papers. However, I thumped myself and bragged to them about my performance, "I am going to get an O (Outstanding) grade." But the story did not stop there.

Swami Decides to Teach...

I enjoyed the day thoroughly. During the evening at *darshan*, I sat in the first row in full spirits to share the good news with Swami. Bhagavan came out, looked at me sternly and said, "*Kyare, naamam de diya (Hey, you have tricked me)*" enacting the way the *naamam* mark is applied on ones' forehead. In South India, especially in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, when you say *naamam*, it jocularly means that you have outwitted somebody. Now, Swami made this statement and just walked away. I was devastated because I could not understand the import of what He just said. In the morning He gave me the spirit to do well, and now when I have come to share the news and offer my gratitude, He is ridiculing me!

He is the Doer

This made me introspect. Swami refused to look at me the entire evening. So, I returned the next morning. Only after an entire day, did the truth dawned on me! I had given '*naamam*' to Swami Himself! He had given me the energy to perform well, but when I returned from the interview, I bragged to my classmates about my prowess. I took the entire credit for it. So, by this, I had given *naamam* to the Lord!

It was indeed a great lesson in humility. I have not forgotten the lesson to this day. Even as I write this incident, it is Swami writing through me. At the end of all my activities I pray to Him and leave the results to Him; all credit goes to Him alone as we are only instruments in His hands.

An Enlightening Lesson from a Towering Personality

Swami often teaches us through His devotees. I would like to share with you one such incident that occurred at Trayee Brindavan. This happened during a *darshan* session.

It so happened that on that day there was a devotee from Puttaparthi whom Swami lovingly called His 'Hanuman', sitting next to me. This devotee had, in Swami's own words, achieved a different plane of living. The relationship between him and Swami was totally different. This devotee, during the strict silence that generally pervades before Bhagavan's arrival, asked me a question, "How does Swami know everything?" At that point I did not want to answer this question because I did not want to talk as it was *darshan* time.

Also, I knew that such discussions could potentially last a long time! I realized that I would be creating trouble for myself entering into such a conversation sitting right outside Swami's main door. So, I tried to avoid the topic, but he would not let me go. Therefore, without turning my head towards his side, I said, "Swami is *antaryami* (*All-knowing one*).” He immediately said, "That is what Swami says in His discourses, but now you tell me how does Swami know everything?" I had only one thought running through my head: stop this conversation. Again I replied tersely, "Swami is God." He gave me the same response, "That is what Swami says in His discourses, but how does Swami know everything?" The question-answer volley was heading in a direction in which I did not want to go. So, with all humility I asked him, "Uncle, why don't you tell me how Swami knows everything." I thought by making him talk I might escape. But, what followed after that was one of the greatest blessings that Swami has showered on me. What he told me is perhaps the greatest truth.

He said, "I will tell you how Swami knows everything. When an ant bites your feet or hand, how do you know?"

I said, "It is my hand and my leg, so I know."

"Very true!" He said, "Have you seen in Hindu households a picture of a standing Vishnu with twenty arms, twenty heads, a cow in His stomach and so on? That is the *Viraat Swaroop* (cosmic form) of Vishnu."

"Yes, I have seen that."

"Through the art, the artist wanted to communicate the cosmic form of the Lord. If you notice, all living forms are present in His body, in fact, the entire universe. Everything is contained in Him. Everything is Him, He is everything. Now, just as you come to know of the sensation when an ant bites your hand or leg, the Lord knows whatever happens in this universe and the universes beyond, because everything is sustained in Him. They are part of the Lord. That is how Swami is *Antaryami* and how He knows everything."

I cannot describe the profound impact that simple explanation made on me. It was a very lucid, crystal clear explanation of how Swami is omnipresent. The devotee cleared once for all in my mind any ambiguity that may arise when we say Swami is watching us always. I felt how much mercy Swami had showered on me that day. I wondered in total amazement at how many years this uncle would have struggled and prayed to the Lord to arrive at this state of mind, and here he was putting everything in one small, sweet easily swallow-able capsule.

With that the devotee stopped talking and as if on this cue, Swami opened the door, walked towards us and then stood right in front of us. I had a wonderful *padanamaskar*. The devotee too prostrated at His feet. From that day on I never lost the thought that I am alone. He is always with me. There was never an occasion after that where I found making decisions tough, for I am in Swami and whatever happens is His will!

SAI – THE RHYTHM OF MY LIFE

Anisha Bordoloi was born in Assam and raised in Prasanthi Nilayam. Swami guided her parents to admit her in the first grade in Sri Sathya Sai Vidya Vihar, Ooty, India, and later had her moved to the primary school in Prasanthi Nilayam. She went on to get a Bachelor's degree in Commerce from the Anantapur campus of the Sri Sathya Sai University, graduating in 1994. Currently, Anisha lives in Chennai and devotes her time in a voluntary organisation which endeavours to bring happiness in peoples' lives, near and far via the internet. She also works as a freelance writer/editor.

Over the years, my life with Swami has taken on a whole new meaning. My pigtailed years at school and college serve as the basis of my present life. It had meant a lot at the time, but not in the way it is priceless now. Having been blessed to belong to a family who literally had Swami to talk to at will, I appreciate now, more than ever, that my parents brought me to Swami even before I could speak my first coherent word, and then put me in His care before I was six. As a matter of fact, my mother reminds me every once in a while that the first ever word that escaped my lips was Baba. My life with Swami and what I have made of it can flow like a happy cascade into pages. However, I shall make an honest effort to keep it as short as I possibly can.

My Priceless Possession

Swami dubbed me 'Assam ka pakora' for all practical purposes when I was in grade 1 and 2 in His primary school in Ooty. *Pakora* is a fritter of vegetables dipped in chickpea flour. We had 'story sessions' with Swami after dinner on a daily basis when Swami would regale us with stories or tell us at random to answer His questions, often asked in jest. We would have our ears and eyes peeled just so we didn't miss a word or gesture. On one such after-dinner session, Swami called out for a certain "Assam ka pakora". When I made my way up to Swami's chair, He pulled my cheeks, smiled at me and ever so lovingly said, "Good girl, yes, you are Assam ka pakora."

Swami asked me to sing a *bhajan* and before I could begin the first verse, He handed me a pair of cymbals. At barely 5, I felt thrilled to sing for Swami to the self-accompaniment of cymbals. The omniscient Swami knew that I had an uncanny sense of rhythm for a girl my age. Swami evidently set the rhythm of my life in those magical moments. He then let a devotee capture this memory in a Polaroid photo. The photo, undoubtedly, is still the best memory of this lifetime.

My Understanding of Intelligence

Unlike my sisters, I considered myself rather unfortunate not to have received a material form of blessing from Swami. He gave my sisters gorgeous pairs of earrings and pendants. One of my sisters was even named by Swami. But Bhagavan decided to give me a surprise one fine evening. He called my family for an interview when He looked at my mother and said, "Today is your second daughter's day." He called me to where He sat, patted me, and said,

"Good girl, good girl." Swami then blessed me with a pair of gold earrings, an acknowledgment of my secret unhappiness. He knows how we feel and what He needs to do to lift our dampened spirits.

My academic record in school was quite impressive, but in grade 6, I wasn't the top ranker. I was miserable and felt I let myself down. During another interview, Swami remembered to restore my somewhat dented confidence. He told my parents I was an intelligent girl. His words soothed me.

I have a theory about Swami's meaning of intelligence in my case. Intelligence, for most of us, generally means the idea of scoring top grades in school and university. Swami meant to tell me that scores aren't all, and that I was still intelligent regardless of my rank. I want to think He determined my intelligence not so much by my grades but by my sense of empathy, my inclination to reach out to people for no apparent reason. In retrospect, I think Swami attributed my intelligence to my understanding of life in its simplest sense. He knew I was going to use my intelligence to extend help and support to people that needed it.

Believe With Every Fibre of Your Being

Our grade 10 exams over, the summer holiday was a welcome respite and deservedly so. One afternoon, my mother was waiting in the ladies' verandah to go into the Bhajan Hall to sing *bhajans*. Whilst she was lost in a reverie of sorts, Swami nearly gave her a fright by appearing in front of her through the window bars of the Bhajan Hall. She collected her wits together in time to catch Swami's query. "Do you know your second daughter's results? She has secured first class!" My mother was obviously elated, and thanked Swami for the grand news. Little did she know that she was in for a massive shock when the school results were out. Her whoop turned into dismay in a matter of days. Did Swami give my mother to understand the opposite of "first class" if this was what she was supposed to be prepared for?

It turned out that the first 18 of us on the roll call apparently failed that year. As luck would have it, the top 5 rankers were in this chosen 18. It was too ludicrous a piece of reality to digest. How could the best of them appear in the list of failures? I have to admit I felt completely gutted as it slowly sunk in. Many tears were shed, but most of us were stunned to silence. Our headmistress wrote to the Central Board of Secondary Examination in New Delhi about this unusual story. The results came back on a different note the second time around. The 18 failures were actually first division holders. There's more to the sweet miracle. There wasn't a single student with a third division! It was a lesson from Swami - Believe in Him with every fibre of your being.

Don't Take Yourself Too Seriously Always

Swami was full of quips when it came to my grandmother. One morning Swami stood in the verandah of the *mandir* and beckoned her to go up to Him. As she hobbled up with the aid of a walking stick reaching her

destination, Swami, with a playful look in His eyes joked, "Mataji, (mother) who called you here?" Visibly embarrassed in front of a hushed crowd, she turned back and obediently started her little journey to her seat. Just as she walked a few steps away, Swami called her back, "Did I ask you to go back? Return to the verandah!" Stifled chuckles could be heard from the crowd. Swami seemed to enjoy the little drill till He finally let her walk up right into the room in the *mandir* for a lovely session with her. I was a little girl then; just as amused like the rest of the devotees that morning. It struck me only years later that Swami intended to tell us that we don't have to take ourselves seriously all the time. A few laughs a day are needed to make sense of our time on the planet.

Nothing Escapes Swami's Divine Radar

My father wished to get my wedding invitation card blessed by Swami, days before I got married in the summer of 2002. One morning in Brindavan, my sister and I could see Swami talking to a gentleman across the aisle that looked like my father. Since it happened to be my husband's birthday that day, I was delighted that Swami acknowledged my father. Swami wanted to know every detail about the ceremony. He then asked my father where my husband was working. My father mumbled, "Swami, he's a manager in Tata Tea" to which Swami asked, "But what is he doing now?" My husband had just quit his job. No picayune piece of information escapes Swami's Divine eye; He keeps track of the most inconsequential detail that may make little difference to the rest of the world. Swami definitely looks out for us.

The Divine Valley of Peace

My husband didn't know Swami in His human form, much less the fact that Swami was his shadow all along. It was only after my marriage that he came upon a treasure that he was looking for all his life. He had preserved some scrawls of his, written possibly a decade before we married; they were rambling thoughts that had no significant meaning at the time. I began to read his scribbles in no definite order when by a curious coincidence, I came upon the words: "Dear God, please take me to the valley of peace where I hope to find the meaning of my existence." I was gobsmeared, absolutely speechless, as you would imagine. I said a quick prayer of thanks to Swami and continued reading the rest of what came across as thoughts written in rumination.

Months went by and I forgot all about his prayer till my husband's first trip to Prasanthi Nilayam. As we entered Puttaparthi, there was a huge billboard on one side of the road with "Welcome to Prasanthi Nilayam, the Divine Valley of Peace" in bold. It was almost as if it was hollering at us to be heard. My mind raced to my husband's prayer. It was his turn to gape in utter disbelief recalling the words he had written at a time when he didn't know that God existed in Swami's form. Time had flown since the day he cried to someone called God. "The Divine Valley of Peace" indeed! He did realize in that instant that Swami knew him all that time. He did have to wait for a decade, but the waiting was worth the while. The few minutes of a prayerful silence that lasted will remain as one of the most stirring memories of our lives.

Have Faith for God's Sake

A few years ago, my husband and I found ourselves strapped for cash before the month end. On our way back from work, we happened to see an ATM. My husband came up with a purely funny question: "Let's stop to see if Swami has deposited any magic money in our bank account." Don't we say things for the lark of it?

"Why would Swami help us when there are a million homeless people with little to eat and survive on?" "What have we done to ask God on a whim for a few currency notes just because we are broke?" Half amused, he continued, "What if there's some big-hearted person somewhere who remembered us today? Have faith for God's sake." I clearly got the feeling that my husband had lost his marbles. It's not usual for him to be daft. I relented. "Let's have a go if you will." What happened in the next few minutes is beyond my limited understanding of generosity! Please note the exclamation mark! There was a month's salary in my bank account! It wasn't from my then employer, yes, you have to believe me. A mysterious stranger, in a very magnanimous moment, thought of two people in dire straits.

Complete Faith or No Faith at all

My husband spends his birthday with Swami, well, since 2003. April end is that time of the year when Swami leaves Prasanthi Nilayam for a while. No one can tell till we hear that Swami has gone to either Kodai Kanal or Bangalore or anywhere else. So, it's a bit of a guessing game when April comes to a close every year. This year (2008) was no exception then. What made it even trickier to decide was that there were rumours galore. The list of possible destinations sort of doubled in size. Brindavan, this year, seemed to be most unlikely as elaborate construction work was going on right in front of the *ashram*. Why would Swami choose Brindavan to inconvenience people?

I couldn't make my mind up, and was already beginning to get glum. My husband's theory of "complete faith or no faith at all" helped him settle for a four-day trip to Brindavan. I wasn't overly excited at his obvious sense of sureness. The mind doubts, but the heart never does. While my mind wasted time thinking too much, my husband followed his heart.

The rumours continued to swirl, but we touched Brindavan by 3 p.m., a good two days before my husband's birthday. There was no sign of Swami's possible arrival. My niece, who was with us, saw a picture of two stark opposites - one of blatant doubt, and the other of a childlike faith. We assumed we didn't have much to do for the rest of the day as Swami wasn't around. A few people were seen milling about, not enough to indicate Swami's arrival.

Around 5 that same afternoon, suddenly the place came alive. People appeared from nowhere and filled both sides of the road, all smiling. Where were these people all this time? Streamers, garlands, banners welcoming Swami, and festoons, found their places quickly, a regular feature when

Swami arrives. "Swami, is it true that you are going to be here in the next hour?" My husband and my niece wore their best smiles, and we waited. By 7 o'clock, Swami's car blessed the street we stood on; He even looked at us beaming. Our hearts leaped, we saw Him after all! Another lesson on faith?

Well, my husband's birthday was special in every sense. I prayed, sheepishly, for a sweet. Why should Swami acknowledge one person's birthday in this large gathering? The morning saw Swami sway to some soulful fusion instrumental music, and the devotees were lost in it, too. We normally sing *bhajans* every morning in Brindavan unless it's an occasion or special event. It wasn't a festival or anything grand that day. It was not even a Sunday. Swami then had His students give away sweets to all of us in the prayer hall. Did Swami really listen to my silly prayer?

At the end of our four-day stay, we headed back home. My sister called us the following morning to say that Swami had started from Brindavan and would be in Prasanthi Nilayam by that afternoon. My husband and I were dumbstruck! Swami planned His stay in Brindavan just the way we did! We were humbled by Swami's love for us.

Swami Listens to You

My father had to undergo cataract operations in both his eyes last month (October 2008) in a reputed hospital in the metropolitan city of Chennai. My family and I prayed to Swami to take care of my father through both the operations and even begged for signs that He was there with us. My father had brought a CD of the *Rudram* (Vedic chants) for us to listen to from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. everyday. The afternoon ritual is yet another feeling of Swami's presence in our home. As soon as we got to the lift, I spotted a gentleman with the familiar blue scarf worn by people who serve at Swami's *ashram*. Mind you, this was not in Swami's hospital in Puttaparthi or Bangalore, but in a private hospital in Chennai! Instinctively, I ran up to him and said the magic words "Sai Ram!" Even before this gentleman could see who I was that greeted him, he reached for his pocket and gave me 3 *vibhuti* packets. When my father gave him a hug and uttered "Sai Ram", he had something even more wondrous for my father. It was more *vibhuti* with a photo that had Swami and the *Rudra Yagna* (Vedic chants around a sacred fire) in it. Truly, a fortuitous encounter!

The first operation was successful, and we were all happy. In our subsequent visits to the hospital, there was no sign of the generous gentleman. A week after the first operation, my father had to get his left eye operated. My father and his entourage, my husband and I, got to the lift when we saw another all too distinctive blue scarf. Same scarf, only a different face. The three of us looked at one another, beaming in acknowledgement that Swami was waiting in earnest to bless us yet again. Amongst greetings of Sai Ram, my husband and I were given two packets of *vibhuti* each and a very kind pat on my father's back with words of reassurances, "Don't worry. Your operation will go off well." It was unmistakably Swami in the guise of the kind man.

I can write for days, but I must stop now. Swami is the pivot around which my life revolves. I have learnt with humility that Swami touches our lives everyday through people and situations. I have experienced His love and guidance through total strangers. Every rough patch, every scar, every poignant cry into an empty sky, every harsh loss, is when Swami shows us He is the only one with a comforting word, a gentle pat, an avenue of strength, a solution that we couldn't have dreamed of. Swami's manifestations in disguise are evocative of His boundless love and constant concern.

His inimitable presence in our lives spurs us on to greater efforts to love and serve in our own little ways. Swami is the air we breathe, our muse, our inspiration, our white light in the darkness. Swami is everything to us. Everything. I remain inspired by these words of Bhagawan Baba: "Love seeks no reward. Love is its own reward."

HOW SWAMI U-TURNED MY LIFE

By Mr. Robert A. Bozzani

One among the few devotees from the western hemisphere who came to recognise Baba's divinity way back in the early seventies, Mr. Bozzani was a forty-five year old flourishing businessman from the USA when he came to Baba for the first time more than thirty five years ago. Since then he has visited Puttaparthi at least once every year and has been a hand-picked instrument of Bhagavan in His Divine Mission. Currently, he is a Trustee of the Sathya Sai Book Centre of America, California, USA.

God draws people to Himself in myriad ways. And every traveller bound for the Divine Pilgrimage has a different and interesting tale of how he was first drawn to the Lord. So too is my story.

My tryst with divinity began when I was a 12 year old boy, studying in a public school in Pasadena, California. My mother, giving in to the counsel and pressure from her friends, decided to switch me over to a Church school. Three weeks into this school, and I encountered something which sowed the seeds for a transformation that was to last a lifetime. For, at the Church School, our teachers told us – "You know, there is one thing we must tell you. That is, God would not like it if you went to another Church. If you do so, you will be doomed to perdition."

Three Unanswered Questions

I did not feel too comfortable with that. Instead, three questions raised themselves to my mind.

One – If there is a God, shouldn't He be there for everybody?

Two – If He has manifested as Jesus Christ, does that mean that He has not manifested earlier, or will not manifest hereafter?

Three – Shouldn't there be more to this universe than what I can think of? This thought stirred the depths of my consciousness every time I looked up at the night sky even as a young boy and saw all the beautiful stars twinkling and shimmering in the empyrean.

I stopped going to the Church school. But then, unknown to myself, the Journey had begun.

It was essential that I first lose my way in the labyrinths of worldly happiness, for only then it would strengthen the urge for spiritual bliss and peace. Thus, I took the path of the temporal and the mundane, because my path, being born in America, was to seek happiness in a materialistic way. So I went, full barge as one would say, and finished school, and later went on to become a flourishing business man. Then I got married and even had wonderful children.

I had everything that was supposed to make one happy; I could not ask for more. But, at the age 45, I was so unhappy that I didn't want to be around any more. The feeling was, in fact, deeper than that. I just thought life was useless, but nobody could feel or know how I felt inside; absolutely nobody, not even my wife, family, or my mother. I was trying to find happiness in the pursuit of the great American dream. But I could feel that in spite of having everything, I had nothing.

'Sai Yoga' – Union with Sai, Through Hatha Yoga

It was around this time that Bhagavan decided to draw me to Himself. And this happened in early seventies through my wife who had developed an interest in Hatha Yoga. Keen in her intent of pursuing this ancient form of Yoga, she got in touch with Indra Devi, the leading Yoga practitioner in the West, who was also an ardent follower of Sathya Sai Baba. My wife went twice to Tecate, to supposedly learn Hatha Yoga but when she was there with Indra Devi, they spent so much time talking about Baba.

When my wife returned to California, she told me that she had learned about Sathya Sai Baba and would like to go India sometime. Reluctant and unconvinced, I dropped it at that. But my wife wanted to go the following year, and she did.

Then, towards the end of the year 1973, about December, my wife made a statement which was so unlike her. She said, "I am going to go to India, whether you come or not." I did not say no to Satya Sai Baba, because, fortunately, we had an open upbringing. We were brought up that way. So, I said, "Well, I guess I am going."

He Appeared, Not in Dream, But in Person

Here, I should mention something very significant which happened in this month of December. Actually, during this period I was deeply depressed and one night Sathya Sai Baba appeared to me not in a dream, but in person. I woke up in the middle of the night on December 9, and there was Baba standing at the end of our bed! He was clothed in a white robe and with a raised hand as if blessing and comforting me. He said, "Don't worry, everything will be alright." And the unique thing about this experience is that Swami spoke to me in the voice of my physical father who had actually passed away the year before! In fact, I remember, saying to Him, "How are you, father?" And Swami again answered in my father's voice. He sweetly said, "I am fine, but working very hard." It wasn't until several years later that I found out that Shirdi Baba often talked to newcomers in a voice they are familiar with so that they feel comfortable.

It did not stop at that on that momentous night. Baba, next, took me out of my body and I remember looking down on the bed where my wife and I were actually sleeping. It was such a unique experience. He then put me back into my body and told again, "Don't worry, every thing will be alright." After this, Swami left. But again, it wasn't until a year later that I completely understood

the message that Swami wanted to give me that night. It was very clearly this: "I wasn't the body".

So, filled with such experiences, we came in February 1974 to Bangalore, India. And as per our plan, I was to escort my wife to Puttaparthi, ensure that she was safe, and then I was to go back to Bangalore, and from there, start touring. I was still, not so convinced about His divinity.

But way back in 1974, having come to Puttaparthi, it wasn't easy to turn around. We reached Puttaparthi into the evening and it was impossible to go back. So I decided to stay on for the night and return the next morning to Bangalore. In fact, I hadn't checked out of the hotel even, since I knew I was going back.

Answering the Three Divine Puzzles

The next morning, Swami was very kind to call our group in the Mandir. It was not an official interview, but a sort of a small discourse. Professor Kasturi was there who translated His words for us. And then, something very beautiful transpired. It was actually quite extraordinary for me then. For, as I was to learn later on, Bhagavan talks to each one of us - heart to heart. And one is sure of a message from Him, whether it is in a discourse, or whether one is in *darshan*. Directly or otherwise, Swami has a message for each of us, if we are alert to it. Sometimes we get it, sometimes we don't. But in my case, it was direct.

For, here was Swami giving us a sweet talk. But suddenly I could feel Swami answering the three questions that I had asked of an unseen Creator when I was a twelve-year old. I could hear His message distinctly, addressed straight to my heart, though not verbally, and felt their import and impact.

Yes, there is a God and He is here for everyone.

He has come before Jesus, and He is here now and He will come even after.

No doubt, there is much more to this universe than what man thinks there is.

After the discourse and that wonderful get-together, I walked out of the Mandir, found my wife and said to her, "He is God. We are staying." And I sent somebody, who was going to Bangalore, to check out of my hotel and send my luggage to Puttaparthi.

Instantaneous Realisation

Then came the dramatic twist to my tale. My wife, who was very enchanted by Sathya Sai Baba, and wanted to come and see Him in the first place, was dumbfounded. For I, the non-seeker, had realized Baba's divinity instantly. Whereas, it took her three years to accept the fact that Sathya Sai Baba was God Incarnate and the Avatar of the Avatars. That's interesting. I got it like that! She took a little bit longer.

But acceptance or not, Bhagavan ensured that He made us feel comfortable all the time when we were with Him. Let me share one instance. We were

fortunate to have a private interview with Swami. On that occasion, He told us things that we didn't know. He revealed us about our past and present; it was surprising He knew events about our lives that nobody would know. But what struck me the most, more than His overwhelming omniscience, was this: He had such a beautiful way of personalizing any moment that you were/are with Him, by making you think – 'Here is God of the Universe, and I am the only thing existing at this moment'. That is the divine love that He is able to pour out. You cannot explain it. But it's there.

I still remember that, sometime later, we were standing up with Baba, and so was He. But we did not have to look down at Him. For, He had raised Himself up to our height! And Swami and we were looking at each other eye to eye, and were just in a natural flow, back and forth, at that particular time. It was an unforgettable experience of how He made us so comfortable. And He did so not just for 'that' moment, but during all the moments that we've been with Him, in all these 34 years.

That first time, we stayed at Puttaparthi for about two weeks. We were even fortunate to follow Bhagavan to Anantapur, where He stayed for a couple of days. And from there, we left for America.

Baba came to be a major turning point in my life. For, when I returned to the USA, I was absolutely sure that my life was to take a total U-turn from thenceforth. During that one interview which we had with Baba, Swami had said to me, "You are very unhappy." I must say that I added to myself, "Even though He is God, He doesn't know how unhappy I am right now, which I know now He did." Then Bhagavan in His infinite mercy reassured me, saying, "Do not worry. Things will change... You are unhappy with your work. Don't worry. That will change." So I came back, invigorated by hope and suffused with optimism, thinking, "Oh, wow, work is going to change. A new job on my way! How exciting!" Soon I was to discover that it is not my work which was going to change; it was I who was about to change. And that was the beginning of my transformation.

Swami Sows the Seeds of Change

The seeds of change had already been sown by a discourse that Bhagavan Baba gave in 1968. That particular message to me is still one of those which is most important; I replay it even today. In that discourse, Bhagavan clearly stated the reason behind His Divine Descent. He said that this time He had come to protect the righteous. However, since everybody was tainted with sin at this particular time, He had come to 'Transform'. To me, that really hit home. I tried to dive deep into that, and listen intently to the Voice of Bhagavan to put into practice any particular idea that He might point at me in my path of transformation.

Guiding me also on my individual path of transformation was Swami's message to me, which He pointed out in that interview. Swami told us – "Duty without love is deplorable. Duty with love is desirable. Love without duty is divine." And that is where I started my journey from. For, though I always did

my duty with a sense of moral righteousness, I could not say that it stemmed so much from Love. Thus, Swami decided to set to me on to this path of 'Love without Duty'.

It has been 34 years now, since I first met Swami. And I am now beginning to get His message. I would not say that I practice 'Love without duty' in the truest spirit, but I've been fortunate enough to get parts of that, and it is really beautiful. Swami's message is Love. "Love is God. Live in Love. And do everything with Love". That is where Swami has been dragging me along - to really dive in and get that message. More importantly, practising this Love was very important to my personal and spiritual growth, because at that time, my heart was very dry and I didn't know it. I thought I was being nice but the fact was that I felt completely devoid of Love from within.

Sai Can Spot You, Wherever You May Be

The next time we arrived at Puttaparthi was in 1975 for the World Conference of Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation. That was the time when the American chapter of the Sri Organization was first put together. Dr. John Hislop was appointed as the first chairman of the American Council. And it so happened that I was appointed as one of the Council Members. It was again a very interesting experience. I was seated half way back in the Poornachandra Auditorium during the function. Bhagavan Baba was present even as Dr. Hislop announced the names. And when my name was called out, Swami acknowledged me in that crowd, even though I was seated right in the midst of a jam-packed hall. It is amazing how Swami can directly see you even in the midst of a multitude of people. I was touched, truly overwhelmed!

Thus it was that, when I began getting His message of Love and doing everything in Love, I could feel the change, both in my workplace and in the Sai work. This has been my wonderful and fortunate path all the way. Because, when you begin to get this subtext of Love, you become a happier person.

Thus, I went back to the same society and environment, and yet I was able to fit in an entirely different way. It was a slow yet steady process of metamorphosis. For, on the one hand was the wonderful feeling that God is here and now. Yet, on the other hand, my desires took awhile to loosen their hold on me. Although I wasn't too happy with the endless merry-go-rounds of pleasures and pain, I was still getting entrapped in their vicious cycle in my quest for happiness.

Swami has this inimitable way of uplifting one's spirits. With His soothing words, He would make you feel that when you are returning to your world, you are going to be happy immediately and everything is going to be perfect. And I learnt that it was not quite so, because things begin to happen to slowly. They neither change overnight, nor by themselves. I encountered this fact of life, even in my work, where I found it difficult sometimes to handle people; there were a few with whom I had to necessarily interact. But I realized that Swami sent such people to me so that I could learn to open my heart.

Bhagavan told me that everything would change for the better, and I thought that it was going to happen instantly. But Swami taught me through my personal experience that first I needed to put His Words into practice. What mattered was not the change, which would, in due course, effect itself, but the effort that went behind working that change. And that's the effort that really pays off. That's when I understood that if I took one step towards God, He'd take a hundred, even a thousand steps towards me; that He would pour His grace on me. But what was essential was the first individual step.

Bhagavan Roots Out an Unseen Weed

When I made that conscious effort to transform myself, Swami would pitch in with more lessons and guidelines so that I made some headway on this path to progress. There is one instance of this transformation which is very dear to my heart. We've been fortunate to come to Puttaparthi every year since our first trip; sometimes we'd be there at least once for a length of time. Many times, we undertook two trips, even were blessed with three trips in a year. This incident occurred in the 1980s when we arrived once more to this Holy Abode of Peace. But this one time, Bhagavan walked up to me when I arrived, and pointing His finger, said, "No ill-will".

When Swami turned and left, I said to myself, "One thing in my heart, I've never had any ill-will against people. That's not in there. But Swami, You know even if there is a little bit of those 'weeds', and I know that You are going to pull them out." Nevertheless, Swami's statement got me thinking, and triggered in response a self-introspection as to what I had done in all these days to warrant such a statement from Him. I tossed and turned in my bed, and finally, after 10 days, the 'why' of Swami's message dawned on me. And when it came, it came as a revelation!

The day after I was supposed to return, I was scheduled to meet a manufacturer that we represent. I was in the automobile business. And this was a meeting with the factory representative, who I felt, beforehand, was not comfortable with me and I too wasn't compatible with him. In fact, I thought he had an "ill-will" against me. I somehow felt that he wanted me out of his path. And when that struck me, I said to myself "Oh my goodness, that's the ill-will I hold against this person." The next morning, during *darshan* time, Swami came up to me and said, "When did you come?" Then I knew I had got the message right!

So I returned to my country. The meeting was to be held the next day. This gentleman came with his team of managers, and my team of executives were supposed to meet them at this big meeting. I do not recollect the agenda of that meeting now. But I remember, I said to this man, "Before we meet, won't you come into my office?" Once in my office room, I told him, "You know, I really understand that you are doing the best that you want for your company and I admire you for that." I really said that. Wonder of wonders! This gentleman began to cry. We hugged and we went out; there was no meeting. We had coffee and tea, and it was over. That's the divine guidance that Bhagavan Baba can give us. And since then, we were just very good friends.

Indeed, Swami's message has a great meaning in today's complicated setup where everyone looks at the other with suspicion and malice. And if only we would go out and reach out to people, the world can be a different place.

And this miracle can be achieved by the simple yet powerful word – Love.

With Swami, it is not U-turns, it is L-Turns – Transforming Through Love!

Talking of Love takes me back to that 1968 discourse wherein Swami said that He would be known all over the world by how we devotees conduct ourselves and put into practice His teachings. And that discourse has always been my touchstone in these 34 years whenever I keep getting off-base from Swami's teachings. Because whatever we do in a moment of true Love or sharing catches the attention of people. And I have encountered this even in far-away America, with people wondering as to who is this guy who goes to India so often.

The point is I realized that as I began to practice what this Beautiful Avatar is trying to teach, I began to see a nice relationship. I observed a change was occurring. It was not that the people were changing. In fact, whether they changed or not became irrelevant to me, what was important was that I was changing, and what really mattered was how I interacted with them.

I knew that a metamorphosis had been effected for certain when my mother told me – “You know, I don't quite understand who your Satya Sai Baba is, but He must be something really special because you have changed so much.” And that's a beautiful statement to come from your own physical mother.

THE OVERPOWERING DIVINE 'PRESENT'

By Ms. Nooshin Mehrabani

Ms. Nooshin Mehrabani was born in Iran and worked as a reporter for Iranian National Radio and Television. She continued her career with an Iranian TV station after moving to Los Angeles, USA. Since 1991, when she first heard about Sai Baba, she has made many trips to India and has been blessed with several chances of interaction with Bhagavan. She now lives in Puttaparthi.

Swami Fulfills Heaps of Dreams

The afternoon *darshan* on the day after the *Akhanda Bhajan*, on November 10, 2008, brought joy to the hearts of thousands of devotees, especially the ladies from overseas countries who were present in Prasanthi Nilayam. It was the first day of the *Sapthaham* of the **Srimad Bhagavatam**, the week-long reading of the great epic tale of the life of Lord Sri Krishna.

The afternoon began like any other day in the Divine Valley of Prasanthi Nilayam, with Swami coming out for *darshan* in His chair, crossing over to the gents side and then moving up to the verandah of the Sai Kulwant Hall. But that day He didn't stay there for long. Soon, Swami was again on the ladies side and it appeared as if He would just return to His residence. But what actually happened was something unusual. Swami did not turn towards His residence, instead He moved to His right, and now the second round of *darshan* had begun! Swami now stopped at one place and selected three foreign ladies, and asked them to "Go". He then spun around and headed back into the hall, and on the way began to call more ladies from overseas. Everyone was amazed and delighted to see Swami selecting ladies from even the seventh and eighth rows! They gathered in a group and were led to the verandah by the head of ladies' security.

The devotees on the ladies' side had another chance to see Swami as He walked up to the verandah again, giving instructions to the ladies to assemble in the Bhajan Hall. Then, the Divine Drama really began.

Soon, the security girls were seen going back and forth, selecting more foreign ladies and leading them into the mandir. Meanwhile, Swami began to talk to some of the ladies in the Bhajan Hall, and allowed them to touch His feet and personally gave each of them a beautiful maroon silk saree! A gift from the Lord Himself! It definitely became a special occasion to be cherished! As He moved up and down the aisle, more ladies flooded the hall, making it a huge challenge for the security team to actually maintain discipline with the increasing numbers.

Pining for His *Darshan*

Word spread throughout the *ashram* quickly as a result of which women ran to join the stretching queue on the ladies side of the Sai Kulwant Hall. All of them were eager to have this unexpected chance of closeness with the Lord.

I entered the hall quite late that day and joined the queue where I was able to watch the women stepping out of the mandir. They were crying with joy

holding tightly their precious gifts from Swami. It was such a personal moment of joy for them! Most of them had the fortune to touch His feet as well, converse with Him, and offer their salutations. It was more than a dream that saw the light of day! Like it was with many other ladies, for me too, the saree was not as important as being able to touch His feet.

Soul Searching Begins....

Swami let the ladies inside the Mandir revel in His glorious company for nearly an hour. He made sure that every heart sitting there had an experience of Divine Love. It was already 6 p.m. when Swami came onto the stage to the delight of the devotees, waiting in eagerness, in the Sai Kulwant Hall. There was an important programme scheduled for the evening.

Now, some of us who were still in the queue and could not get the opportunity to even go inside Bhajan Hall were devastated when we were asked to return to our seats. Obviously, it was heartbreaking, and some of us began to break into sobs.

At first, I did not know what to feel. "Should I feel rejected?" No, that was not the truth, since God never rejects anyone. "Should I feel ignored?" That wasn't the reality either because I have sat at His Lotus feet daily, morning and afternoon, fully aware that He wanted me to be there. I started to pray to Swami, asking Him to help me understand the lesson I was to learn from this *drama*.

After a few minutes of silence, a soothing thought dawned on me. If we identify ourselves on the basis of our physical form, we see others as well as God as entities separate from ourselves. This is why we find it hard to appreciate another's joy or feel another's sorrow. I strongly felt Swami saying to me, "If you are not envious or jealous, you should be able to enjoy the happiness that others experience around you. You should be able to sense the pain of those who consider themselves unfortunate and hope for them and for yourself that I will bless you when it is the right time for you."

Feeling the Joy of Others

While my eyes were still closed, I felt my heart filling with happiness and joy for those who were blessed in that one precious hour. I was as much a part of this event as the women who had received *padanamaskar* and a saree. I felt as if Swami had given this gift to me, too. The mind is the obstacle that creates separation when, in reality, nothing of this sort exists. It is only at the physical level that we experience duality. The lesson I learned that day was one of unity.

There are many times when Swami has given interviews to some, or gifts to others. If we feel disappointed, then where is the spiritual practice of love and oneness? I am sure people were crying not over the saree; everything we have has been given to us by God. People were dejected because they felt they might never have this opportunity of closeness with the Divine again. But Swami is our compassionate God. We should always believe that we are worthy of His Love and Grace. We should always be hopeful that He will find the perfect way to shower His Grace at the most opportune time. This is why

He has called us to His perfect world of bliss. We are not any less special to Swami because we didn't get this chance. We have our own special moments with Him.

Unexpected Gift from a Sai Friend

As I reflected on this divinely-inspired awareness, I felt very grateful to Swami. But the Lord had something more beautiful in store for me that afternoon.

Before I left Sai Kulwant Hall that evening, Swami actually gave me a precious gift. I saw an Iranian friend who introduced me to a woman who had just arrived from Iran the day before. The lady seemed a bit familiar to me, but I could not place her as I had not lived in Iran for quite some time. When I mentioned my name to her, she said, "I know someone by the same name who lives in Canada." I asked her that "someone's" last name. She uttered my last name. "That person, you know, is me!" I told her. With tears in her eyes, she began to hug me, asking me if I remembered her. I felt a bit odd to tell her that I still could not recollect having met her or known her in any special way.

The new Iranian stranger began to tell me her story. Eight years ago, when I traveled to Iran from India, this stranger had sat next to me on the plane. As usual, my conversation was all about Swami. This lady had been in India at the time not for any spiritual reason, but for business, and it was her first time to hear Sai Baba's name. I had shared some of my experiences with her for close to an hour. I left her with telephone numbers of some Sai devotees in Iran and never heard from her again. Little did I know that during the years since I had not seen her, she had become a devotee of Baba and made several visits to Prasanthi Nilayam.

In this particular trip, she had even brought her brother along; his first visit to India. She told me how her life had dramatically changed for the best since she came to Swami. What moved me the most was when she narrated about the altar she had made for Swami in her home. "When I go there to pray, I remember how you introduced me to Swami and I always pray for you." Now, this was too overwhelming for me. By this time, as you can imagine, we were both crying! I told her I was just an instrument Swami had picked to bring her to God, and it is our constant prayers that make us worthy to be at His Lotus Feet.

I returned that evening to my home on a joyous note. Swami did not give me the same gift that so many had received that day, but He did give me what He knew was the best present for me. He is God, and He knows what we need and just when. Swami had shown me when I hadn't expected in the slightest that He had not forgotten me in that big gathering! His ways of comforting us are subtle, which makes it even more overwhelming. If we are able to trust His judgement, and humbly surrender to Him, and accept His will for us, we can be happy in every moment regardless of what comes our way or doesn't! And that is truly His greatest grace!

H2H SPECIAL

Mesmerizing Moments with the Divine Master Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 9

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 Ma' 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 ninth and last part of her wonderful reminiscences, continued from the previous issue.

A Perilous Encounter

In 1974, I had gone to Chennai to visit my in-laws. I was with them for about three days. On the morning of my return to Bangalore, I had asked my son to pick me up at 6.00 a.m. as I wanted to leave as early as possible. Having been with his cousins the previous evening, he had stayed up late. However, he did arrive promptly to pick me up. Before leaving, I took my three-year-old grandson, Dhruv, to the shrine to pray before we embarked on the journey as I wanted to inculcate that good habit in him. Both of us chanted "*Tvameva maataa cha pitaa tvameva*" (Oh Lord! you are our mother, father...) and did *namaskaar*. We then got into the car. My grandson, my daughter's mother-in-law, Rajam, and I were the occupants of the car. My husband was also with us, but on the way, we dropped him off at the airport as he had to catch a flight to Delhi.

It was early morning and the road was clear. We encountered very little traffic. As we neared Kolar, my son fell asleep at the wheel! However, I was engrossed in reading *Vishnusahasra Naamam* (1008 names of Lord Vishnu) in order to catch up on my reading that I had missed during the past couple of days. Hence, I did not notice him dozing at the wheel. Without warning, I heard a loud noise and realized that the car had crashed into a huge tree. The door had flown open. There were some heavy steel parts in the boot that my son was carrying for the factory he used to work at. Due to the force of the impact, they broke through the rear seat and hit me on the back. My handbag with Swami's picture and *vibhuti* had flown out of my hand and was strewn on the road.

Had we not hit the tree, we could have gone off the road into a culvert or even a gorge in which case, the accident would have been fatal! My son realized that he was uninjured except for a bruised toe! He was in a state of shock, disoriented, and confused about what had transpired. He just kept repeating, "What have I done?" My grandson was not injured as well, but was badly shaken and kept asking what happened. It was quite a job consoling him.

However, I was badly hurt. I had a gash on my forehead, a profusely bleeding nose, internal injuries, muscle tear, dislocated teeth, bruises all over the body, and my back too suffered severely from the impact of the heavy steel parts. I couldn't stand straight and was in terrible pain. Rajam had fallen from the front passenger's seat and was unconscious. My son feared the worst. There were no signs of life...

I recollect that the first thing I had asked my son to do was to retrieve Swami's photo and *vibhuti* from my handbag. My son got out of the car, collected the purse and contents that were strewn on the road. I applied the *vibhuti* to my son, grandson, Rajam, and myself. Then as I shook her, all the time praying to Swami for guidance, she regained her consciousness. Thinking about it now, the biggest miracle was that I was completely calm through the entire accident. The car was completely crushed and in spite of all these Swami had protected my son so that he could take care of us. We came to know later that Rajam had sustained multiple fractures of the jaw bone and teeth, but no other injuries.

I prayed to Swami to send someone for help. Soon, we saw a huge truck approaching us. My son was still in shock. However, by Swami's grace I was completely calm and managed to wave the truck down. I requested the driver to drop us at the nearest medical center. The driver agreed, but was concerned that we wouldn't be able to climb the steps to get into the truck. At that moment, an ambassador car arrived. They were pilgrims returning from Tirupathi. The gentleman driving the car stopped and offered help. I requested him to drop us to the nearest medical center. As the car was already occupied, he requested all his passengers to get down, and took us to the nearest medical center.

At this time, I asked my son to call my daughter and sister at Bangalore to inform them of the accident and to ask them to get to the medical center with a couple of cars to transport us back to Bangalore. I also asked them to make arrangements to admit us at a hospital in Bangalore. My son found a phone booth and spoke to them.

In the meantime, we found that the doctor at the medical center was a Sai devotee! He saw the *vibhuti* on our foreheads and asked if we were Sai devotees too. However, he told us that he will not be able to treat me because the wound needed stitches from a surgeon and he wasn't equipped to handle it. He could only provide first-aid, but said we could rest at the center until help arrived. He felt sorry that he couldn't do more for us. I told him not to worry and that I can somehow bear the pain.

My son-in-law, daughter, and sister arrived from Bangalore about 3 hours later. My sister's son was a doctor and a house surgeon at St Martha's Hospital at Bangalore. She saw that I had a black eye. She started crying and her first comments were "*Didi* (sister)! You may become an invalid for life!" I consoled her saying Swami would look after me. We got into the car and headed to the hospital.

My husband had gone to Lucknow from Delhi on a WHO assignment for eradication of smallpox. He was staying at the Ramakrishna Math in Lucknow. Upon hearing the news of the accident, he rushed to Bangalore the very next day. However, after I was admitted to the hospital, I began suffering from severe giddiness and disorientation. It was so bad that I felt the floor was spinning like the ceiling fan! The very next day, the doctor said he cannot treat my giddiness and that an expert from NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences) would be needed. So, Dr. Mani, who was the director of NIMHANS and a friend of my husband, came to see me. His opinion was that a brain surgery would be needed. Now, I lost my composure and became very scared. I told Dr. Mani that I do not wish to undergo surgery. I asked him to try oral medication first and if that didn't work I would consider it to be Divine will and would submit to the surgery, but not until then. My husband was annoyed that I was resisting expert opinion. However, he called his brother-in-law, a leading neuro-physician who lived in Chennai, who also happened to be Dr. Mani's professor, for advice. His brother-in-law said, "Follow what she says. Tell Dr. Mani that I said the operation can wait and ask him to put her on medication". So, they put me on simple medication thrice a day, but said that they would only wait for 24 hours before resorting to surgery.

I fervently prayed to Swami to save me from the operation. The next morning, when I awoke the giddiness was gone! When Dr. Mani came, I apprised him of the event. He said, "That's great! No operation is necessary, but you need to continue the medication for one more month." I happily complied. After three weeks, during which I was treated for other minor injuries, I was discharged. During this period, everyone including my father-in-law and mother-in-law, who came from Chennai to visit me, were more disturbed about the event than I was. I had to console them! Rajam did not have any injuries other than the jaw fractures and she recovered completely as well.

My grandson however asked me, "Grandma, how come God did not look after you although you prayed?" I told him, "Dhruv, You would not understand! God is kind. That's why He has given me all your pain. I would feel terrible if you were hurt. I can happily bear this pain as you are unhurt!"

Amazing Grace!

For several months after the accident, I suffered from muscle ache. I could not sit in a comfortable posture and meditate. I prayed to Swami. I told Him that I did not mind the pain, but that He should bless me to sit comfortably and meditate. After this, I had a dream. Swami sat opposite a priest across a *homa kunda*. Both, the priest and Swami, were pouring offerings into the sacrificial fire chanting *mantras*. I wondered why Swami Himself was performing the *homa*. Swami looked at me and said, "I am performing the *Mrithyunjaya Homa* (sacrifice to protect one from death) for your sake!" It was clear to me that I would have been killed but for Swami's grace. After six months, I was able to sit in a comfortable posture and meditate.

The lesson here is that Swami's grace is available to everyone. But you have to earn it by living right, by putting into practice Swami's teachings. Only then can He confer His *Kripa* (grace) on you. I did not know that I would be in an accident. But by His grace, nobody else was hurt! It would have been a disaster if they had been hurt. Who would look after them? My son was not even married at that time.

His Overwhelming Omnipresence!

During the initial stages, we had doubts about Swami being God Himself. He knew we had our apprehensions as He knows everyone's innermost thoughts. He told us, "You have doubts. So, you have to test me on my omnipresence. Only then, would you be convinced about what I am. Only God can be omnipresent."

Here is an incident that proved His omnipresence to us once for all. I was traveling from Calcutta to Delhi by train to assist my sister who was expecting a child. I was alone and I had opted for a ladies' compartment in the train. Upon getting into the train, I realized that I was the lone occupant of the ladies compartment! That didn't bother me. But presently the railway guard came by, and upon finding that I was alone, warned me to bolt both doors because some of the regions that the train would pass through, such as Mughalsarai, were dangerous and that dacoits were known to attack ladies' compartments on trains. There were two heavy steel doors to the compartment and three latches on each. I managed to bolt all the three latches on the first door, but found to my dismay that the second heavy steel door was out of alignment and was stuck. I kicked, pushed and did everything I could, but the door wouldn't budge. So there was no question of latching it properly.

Then I remembered Swami's direction to us to test His omnipresence. I sat in the compartment, closed my eyes, directed the thoughts of my predicament to Swami and started chanting *mantras*. Moments later, I heard a soft swishing sound in the compartment followed by a heavy thud of the door! I told myself that this must have been Swami responding to my prayer! I walked to the door and lo! The same door that had been out of alignment and stuck moments ago was lodged perfectly in place! This experience stunned and thrilled me at the same time. I had received ample proof of His omnipresence so far away from His physical presence. I could not sleep the whole night. I poured out my experience to my friend and my sister as soon as I met them on the platform at Delhi!

There have been several every day events when I have felt His omnipresence.

***Vibhuti* – The Powerful Panacea**

I was fortunate to have a cook, Himmat Rao, who was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He was 40 years old and his wife was in her thirties; they were childless. They had tried all types of medicines, temples, doctors, everything they could possibly think of, without success and were in distress. Himmat

Rao requested me for help. Since my husband was a doctor, I managed to get his wife medically examined and found that there was nothing wrong with the couple. He had seen me pray to Swami and knew that He was my guru. But he had never physically seen Baba. My advice to him was that his wife should drink a glass of water with *vibhuti* every morning and evening, and for both of them to pray to Swami for a child. I also advised them that no matter how much time this takes, they must not give up faith and must keep praying patiently. After a few months she conceived and gave birth to a baby boy! After this child, they ended up with five more boys at two-year intervals! Obviously, they were overjoyed. Himmat Rao requested me to take him to Puttaparthi so that he could see Swami. As His grace would have it, my husband had to travel to Chennai in his car and he gave Himmat Rao a ride to Bangalore in his car. At that time I happened to be in Bangalore on some work. I took Himmat Rao to Puttaparthi and he finally had the fortune of the *darshan* of Baba after experiencing His abundant grace.

Here is another instance of the power of *vibhuti*. I had a young maid servant in her late twenties. Her husband had disappeared almost a decade ago. He just failed to return one fine day and could not be traced. She was very distressed because of this and sought my help. I advised her to take Swami's *vibhuti* in water every day and pray to Swami to bless her with her husband's return. The maid kept praying for a few months. One day someone knocked at her door and she opened the door to find her long-lost husband! He said he was very sorry that he had abandoned her and had returned for good. Although I had prayed for her as well, I was stunned by this incident! This is one more proof that nothing is impossible for Swami.

Vibhuti is a cure for anything if you take it regularly with faith – not just physical or mental ailments, but really anything. When I was young, I had some problems at which time Baba had advised me to take *vibhuti*. This had cured me. To this day, I keep a bottle of *vibhuti*-water as my panacea for every little day-to-day ailment.

I remember another incident when I experienced the power of *vibhuti*. I had a young neighbor in Chennai who was in her late twenties. She was just an acquaintance at that time. One day she requested me to come to her house. I was surprised as I hardly knew her, but went to her house all the same. She said to me, "I am a Shirdi Baba devotee and I understand that you're a Sathya Sai Baba devotee. I hear they are the same, could you relate your experiences to me?" I spent an hour with her and related several of my experiences.

A few days later, I was surprised to find her at my door. She said that during her prayer, a voice directed her to talk to me. She also asked, if she could join me during my prayers every evening. I said I would normally not do that because prayer is done in solitude. But since she had been guided to ask, it would be selfish on my part to disagree. From then on, every day, rain or shine, she would show up at my home on time. She would ask me questions and I would answer them based on the Bhagavad Geeta and Swami's teachings. I later came to know that she was the wife of the IGP of Chennai

who had died of a heart attack a couple of years ago. She had three small children and was very distressed. She could not sleep at night and the doctors had put her on sleeping pills. I advised her to stop taking the pills as it would turn make her an addict. Perhaps this is the reason why Swami, in His compassion, had prompted her to meet me.

I advised her to take *vibhuti* water every night and pray to Swami to grant her sleep without pills. I asked her to be patient even if it takes weeks or months, but steadfastly desist from taking the sleeping medication. "Be positive and keep chanting your *mantra*. Say to Swami that if You do not want me to sleep, I would gladly spend that time in chanting Your name!" Within a few months she managed to sleep without pills and she continues to do so to this day. She is over 60-years old now. She calls me every month and still remembers the experience.

You must be positive in your thinking and must have faith. Faith is very powerful. He will help, but you must have faith in Him. I shall end with a chant:

Aum Mangalam, Omkara Mangalam, Guru Mangalam, Gurupaada Mangalam

*Raam Naam Japa Naari
Raama Naama Japa Naari |3|
Jab Tak Shwas Rahe Tanu Bheetar |2|
Tab Tak Yaha Jaga Apanaare |2|
Raama Naama Japa Naari |2|*

*Maata Pitaa Suta Baandhava Naari |2|
Jhooti Jagat Kalpanaa Saari |2|
Aakhir Yaha Jaga Sapanaare |2|
Raama Naama Japa Naari|2|*

*Sri Raam Jaya Raam, Jaya Jaya Jaya Raam |2|
Aum Sri Raam, Jaya Raam, Jaya Sai Raam*

Om Shaanti, Shaanti, Shaantihi

Om, the primordial sound, is auspicious. Guru is auspicious; His feet are auspicious.

Chant the name of Lord Rama;
Chant Rama's name repeatedly.
As long as there is breadth in your body,
Till then this world is yours.
Chant the name of Lord Rama.
All the relations and relatives, mother, father and friends
Are all in reality unreal; they are just imagination.
This world is after all a dream;
Chant the name of Lord Rama.

Victory to Lord Rama, Chant His name.
Chant the name of Sai, Chant His name.

Let there be peace! Let there be peace!

GET INSPIRED

THE LOVE ALCHEMY

Much of what we experience in life has the Lord's touch to it even if we do not realize it or acknowledge it. Only in moments of introspection, it occurs to us that but for His Will, nothing really works. All that is required of us is a moment of connection with Him. And then magic happens!

During my one year in a leading bank in the Middle East (it is West Asia if India is the base), there had been many occasions when I had to go to the country's Government Relations Cell (GRC) which is a part of the Human Resource Department for processing my wife's or my documents like residence card, visa, etc. Well, my experience with the GRC can be described as anything but pleasant. Though I have worked in different banks in a couple of countries, nothing prepared me for the lackadaisical behaviour of the manager handling this particular cell of the bank.

This gentleman appeared to treat most expatriates (I am Indian) with disdain and a blatant lack of respect. We were convinced that he was callous towards those with the 'expatriate' tag. He would almost always manage to look through us whenever any of us had to go to him for getting our documents processed. It became a ritual for foreign citizens like us to stand for quite some time by his desk, hoping that the 'nearness' would force him to glance our way. Well, we were, at times, successful in getting his attention after much waiting, but what ensued after that was pretty dissatisfying because, through his words and gestures, we were reminded that he had little regard for us. And yes, it didn't surprise us in the slightest.

Now, here is what happened a few weeks ago when I had to meet him regarding our exit visas; I was understandably 'pre-irritated'. Just thinking of the time I would have to spend in his harrowing company was enough to spoil my mood. Dreading that I would have to undergo his 'regular treatment' yet again, I virtually dragged myself to his office that morning. When I reached his cabin, he was on a phone call. The waiting game had to be played once more.

While my patience was being tested, I happened to recollect a talk given by a student of Bhagavan Baba in Radio Sai the previous day. He narrated an incident where his father had once asked him to get his passbook updated at the local post office when the person at the counter was quite rude and uncooperative. The student remembered Bhagavan's beautiful words to see Him in every being. He told himself to see Swami in that postal employee and prayed fervently to the Lord to help him. Quite unexpectedly, the employee was polite and his job was done the same day. (The student explained that he was actually prepared to wait for a week!)

This remarkable experience set me thinking. I said to myself, "I will see Swami in the manager I am about to meet and see how it goes." I must admit though that my previous visits warned me to prepare myself for another round of

patronising behaviour. Thankfully, my belief in Bhagawan got the better of me. With renewed resolve I decided to treat the manager as if he was Swami and filled my heart with love. I also prayed earnestly to Swami to dispel any negative thoughts that I may have had of the manager.

While I had this little session in my mind, the manager had completed the call after which I entered his cabin and wished him. He gladly wished me back. I immediately knew Swami was at work! More surprises followed, he even offered me a seat. Now, he had never done that in the past one year! I then went on to explain to him that I was there to request him to arrange exit visas for myself and my wife. He asked me for some papers which I handed over to him. He went through them and asked me for one more document. The entire conversation so far had been very friendly till I realized that I had not brought that particular piece of paper he had asked of me. With some trepidation as to how he would react, I told him that I did not bring along that one document. His reaction to this was something I could not have imagined even in the wildest of my dreams. The manager continued to be polite to me and said, "No problem, bring that paper on Saturday and we will get you the visa. It will take just one day. Do not worry".

Since this was my first conscious attempt to see Swami in a person whom I had so far seen as a displeasing person, I had somehow forgotten about my resolve to see him as Swami during our conversation, but obviously He had not. It took a couple of minutes before it dawned on me that the entire experience had only 'Swami' written all over it. He had, as always, stood by me and converted what could have otherwise been an irksome interaction into a good-natured and positive meeting.

When I think of it again, I'm reassured that it isn't a complicated, long-drawn-out conversation we need to have with Swami. On the contrary, we need just a small moment of complete faith and a sincere prayer to set things right for us. We need to believe in the power of His Love that we too can radiate if we seek to attune ourselves to Him constantly. The power of God and the power of Love are synonymous. If there is nothing impossible for God, so it is for pure Love too.

- Mr. S. Sivakumar

GOD, IS THAT YOU?

A young man once went to an evening Bible study class. In the course of the meeting, the pastor spoke at length about listening to God and obeying the Lord's voice. The young man could not help but wonder, "Does God still speak to people?"

Now that was an interesting proposition. And when the young man went out with his friends for coffee and snacks after the Study, they discussed the pastor's message. Some of his friends even shared amazing experiences of how God had guided them at different stages in their lives.

It was about ten o'clock when the young man started driving home, full of wonder whether God might speak to him. Was it possible? Sitting in his car, he began to pray, "God, if you still speak to people, speak to me. I will listen. I will do my best to obey." He said this prayer earnestly and repeated it over and over...

As he drove down the main street of his town, he had the strangest thought to stop and buy a gallon of milk.

He stopped his car and said out loud, "God is that You?" No response.

"Weird," he said, shrugging his shoulders and resumed his journey homewards. Hardly had he driven a few yards than the thought 'Buy a gallon of milk' filled his mind once more. This time, the thought was overpowering.

"Okay, God, in case that is You, I will buy the milk." It didn't seem like too hard a test of obedience. He could always use the milk. So the young man stopped his car, purchased a one-gallon can of milk and started off towards home.

As he passed by a street, the seventh in a row of streets, he felt the urge, 'Turn down that street.'

"This is crazy," he thought, and drove on past the intersection.

But then again, he felt the compelling impulse to turn down Seventh Street.

"Okay, God, I will," he said aloud, half-jokingly.

At the next intersection, he veered his car, back to Seventh Street.

He drove past several blocks when, suddenly, he felt that he should stop. So the young man pulled his car up to the curb and looked around. He was in a semi-urbanized area of the town. It wasn't the best of neighbourhoods, but it wasn't the worst of them either. The shops were closed, and in most of the houses, the lights had been put out for the day.

Again, he sensed a voice that said, "Go and give the milk to the people in the house across the street." The young man looked at the house. It was dark and it looked as if the inmates of the house were either out, or were already asleep.

The young man started to open the door of the car, but slumped back in his seat.

"Lord, this is insane. Those people are asleep and if I wake them up, they are going to be mad at me, and I will look stupid." But the feeling to deliver the can of milk would not go away.

"Okay God," the young man said finally, "If this is You, I will go to that house and hand over this can of milk. If You want me to look like a dingbat, it is Your wish. I want to be obedient. I guess that will count for something. But if they don't answer right away, I'm outta here."

He walked across the street and rang the doorbell. He could hear the shuffling of feet within. A man bellowed from inside, "Who is it? What do you want?" Sensing the unfriendliness in the voice, the young man turned around to leave, but the door had opened.

A man was standing there in a rumpled t-shirt and jeans. He looked like he had just got out of bed, and not too happy to have some stranger standing at his doorstep. "What is it?" the man asked testily.

The young man thrust out the can of milk, "Here, I brought this for you." The man took the milk and rushed down a hallway calling out, "Hey honey, look at this!"

Immediately, a woman came out, carrying the milk and a baby. The little one was crying. The man followed his wife out to where the young man stood.

Tears streaming down his face, the man began half-speaking and half-crying, "We were just praying. We had some big bills this month and we ran out of money. We didn't have any milk even for our baby. We were just calling out to Him and asking God to show us a way."

The lady of the house continued, her voice choked with gratitude, "I asked Him to send an angel with some milk. Are you an angel?"

The young man reached into his wallet, pulled out all the money he had with him, and put in the man's hand. Then, he turned and walked back toward his car, tears streaming down his face.

He knew that God still answers prayers. And he knew that obeying God's voice had the most beautiful results – beyond all imagination.

Sometimes it's the simplest things that God asks us to do. If we pay heed to His call, we can actually hear His voice clearer than ever.

God is always speaking to us. But to listen to Him clearly, we need to shut out the sounds of the world, put our egos aside and make ourselves pure of heart. For, as Bhagavan Baba puts it – “It is in the depths of silence that the voice of God can be heard.”

One devotee had such an experience of inner-hearing on Akhand Bhajan day in Prasanthi Nilayam a few days ago. This happened on November 9, 2008, mid-morning time. Swami had gone out of the *ashram* in the car and there were many possible routes for Him to enter His residence. Walking with his baby daughter he was yearning for a *darshan* of Swami together with his newborn as looking after his little one had not allowed him many opportunities to see Bhagavan Baba.

But, how to catch a glimpse of Swami? He could return via the back gate and move around the ashram; or come through the school children's entrance; or go straight into the Mandir from the road. At that point of wondering and yearning, he clearly heard the words within “Go to the Shirdi Baba Temple.” This lay near the main road and he felt it was a sign to go to the road there after having *darshan* of the Shirdi Sai statue. He quickly made the 10 minute journey from the north buildings lawn, trusting that this was a sure sign from His Lord - or maybe His ministering angels!

Arriving at the shrine of Shirdi Baba he made a prayer and then straight away made his way to the road which lay 100 metres away. Just at that very moment Swami came by. He did not even have to wait a minute! He was overjoyed with Bhagavan's precious *darshan*, while holding his three weeks old daughter!

This is just one instance of inner guidance by the Lord. There are, of course, many thousands of such prayers which are simultaneously fulfilled, all over the world every day. These touch our hearts, heal our bodies and connect us within to the Omnipresent One.

All we have to do is to fill our hearts with love and keep a prayer always on our lips; His voice will resound within louder than anything else in this world. We can then truly become His angels and our lives will revolve in harmony.

THE FIRST TEMPLE

Christmas, the most special time of the year, is when we remind ourselves of the birth of Lord Jesus into the world. Christ brought with Him a new dispensation of Light and Truth to humanity through His Love and Teachings. Possibly His most profound, yet unheeded, divine teaching is 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.' Jesus urged us to look within ourselves for the inherent divinity in us and experience the beauty of a heaven nestled within our hearts. We often spend time concentrating on a God as an entity separate from ourselves when in reality He can't get any closer than where He always resides.

Hundreds of thousands of years ago, God asked one of His chosen saints to find a suitable place where He could build the First Temple. God stipulated that the local people should be virtuous and good, and that they should be in contemplation of the divinity within themselves, thereby, keeping the temple sacrosanct.

The saint did not search for long when he found a village where all seemed peaceful. The place was immaculate, the well was clean, people were polite and civil to one another, and the beggars received enough to eat from kind strangers. It seemed the perfect place to build the first temple. The disciple went to the Lord to say that he found a place, after all. Of course, the Omniscient Lord knew what was missing in the seemingly perfect place, but He wanted to teach a lesson to His devotee. God lovingly told his disciple, "Look closely, child, can you not see that there is an absence of love in that small village? Though everything seems fine on the surface, I find no love within the hearts of those villagers."

And sure enough, when the disciple returned and made a deeper inspection, he heard arguments from behind closed doors, saw that the cleanliness of the place was more due to fear of punishment than real care, and that beggars existed only because of broken families and an obvious lack of empathy.

God asked the saint to continue his search relentlessly for the ideal place. And so, the disciple wandered from pillar to post, trying to find that elusive sublime quality of love blossoming within the hearts of the people. His search took him to places far and wide, but it was all in vain. There wasn't a single place in sight that exuded pure love, compassion, and generosity.

After several weeks of futile attempts, the disciple began to become quite despondent. He did come across people speaking nicely to one another and practicing charity where needed, yet there was no evidence of that spontaneous, absolutely magical presence of selfless love, no signs of joy, not a single trace of humility anywhere, no witness of hearts aflame with devotion.

He was about to give up, and then, one day he came upon a quiet farm nestled in a serene valley. The two farmers there looked like brothers and they seemed to move about with a sparkle in their eyes and a spring in their steps for no apparent reason at all. They wore the warmest of smiles, and seemed to

revel in their chores. The disciple was certainly curious now, and needed to know the secret of the spectacle of bliss.

The devotee approached the brothers and asked them why they appeared so joyful. "Oh, he's my good brother who looks after me so well. There is no need of mine that is uncared for, I have so much to be grateful for and happy about," effusively replied the one who seemed to be the older brother. Almost immediately, the younger brother looking on gushed, "My brother takes wonderful care of me day in and day out. I couldn't ask for more from life! Please do come in and share a meal with us, for you must have walked many a mile and must be weary by now."

The disciple soon realized he had found the place indeed. Here he was in the company of two brothers who knew nothing other than perfect harmony, love, graciousness, noble spirit, caring, sharing, and peace, and if that's not enough, they even had the time and inclination to welcome a passing stranger in their midst and treat him with utmost warmth and hospitality. It was nothing short of heaven in those moments.

After a few hours of spending time in the delightful company of the two blessed brothers, the disciple decided to take leave of them to go back to God with the wondrous discovery. He couldn't wait to ask God if his find was the right choice. The Lord was indeed very pleased and congratulated His disciple on finding the correct place to build the first temple. "Yes, you have come to the place. This is the place I wanted you to see. Let me tell you a touching tale about those two loving brothers."

God began the beautiful story. "You must have observed that they work on a common piece of land and share the produce equally. Well, the older brother has no family of his own, whilst the younger brother has a wife and children.

"One day, the older brother thought to himself, 'I live alone and my needs are few. Whilst I have only myself to feed, my brother has a family to take care of. Surely, he must live with great difficulty. It is unfair on my part to claim equal share of the produce.' With this thought, he decided to secretly transfer some of the grains from his stock to his brother's storehouse. He carried out his plan every night when everyone in the house was asleep. It made him immensely happy at the thought of his younger brother having enough for his family."

"About the same time, the younger brother suddenly realised that his older brother was getting old, and thought to himself, 'I have my sons to look after me when I grow old. Who is there really for my elder brother? There will be no one to support him when he grows old. He can't work forever to feed himself; there will come a day when he can't carry out the tasks of the day.' So, he decided to secretly transfer each night some stock of grain to his older brother's granary."

"This went on for some time till one night they came face to face, sacks of grain on their shoulders, on their way to the other's granary. As a result of their comical but startling encounter, they confessed to each other about their similar surreptitious transfers. Overwhelmed by their mutual unconditional love,

tears flowed down their cheeks. They embraced each other in the dead of the night in quiet acknowledgement for what they received from each other. The bond that had tied them together over the years became known to them in those few minutes."

God went on, "This rare scene moved me deeply."

God, then, looked at His disciple, beaming a radiant smile, and said to him with untold joy, "Yes, this is where we shall build the First Temple for they have already built the Kingdom of God within themselves. They alone can preserve the sanctity of the new House of God. Now, get some stones and wood together. It is time to start!

TEST YOUR SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

MULTI-FAITH QUIZ

Be it the 50 feet Sarva Dharma Stupa which stands tall right next to Bhagavan Baba's residence, or the Sarva Dharma logo of the world wide Sai Organisation, or the huge and impressive statues of Divine incarnations in the Vidyagiri stadium, or even the vibrant celebrations of Christmas, Buddha Poornima and Shivarathri in Prasanthi Nilayam - Unity of all Faiths has been one of the principal tenets of Bhagavan's message right from the early days of His Avatharhood. To more we are open to other beliefs, the more we enrich our lives. And to help us in this endeavour, H2H continues this series of quizzes on the unique facets of world's religions.

1. Although born into his religion at birth, a Zoroastrian child will undergo an initiation ceremony when he is invested with the sacred Sudreh-kusti (a white muslin undershirt and a hand-woven thread) vestments, as he recites the following affirmation of the Zoroastrian creed prayer in Avestan:

"May there be propitiation of the Just knowledge created by Ahura Mazda,
which is the holy Mazda worshipping Good Religion."

What is the name of this ceremony of initiation into the Zoroastrian Religion?

- A. Amrit
- B. Navjot
- C. Upanayanam
- D. Jatnat

2. Compassion is an intrinsic part of Islam. It is not restricted to human beings alone, but embraces plants and animals as well. Some of Allah's names are Rahmân and Rahîm (Compassionate and Merciful). Every Muslim prayer begins with: "Bismillah al-Rahmân al-Rahîm (begin in the name of Allah who is Compassionate and Merciful).

The Holy Qu'ran has several references to compassion to reinforce the beauty of this beautiful virtue. It emphasises two ways of expressing compassion.

One is fasting during the month of Ramadan. By fasting, we learn to be sensitive to the state of the hungry and less fortunate. We realize what it is to stay without food and water as a result of which we feel compassion for every living creature around us.

What is the other way of expressing compassion?

- A. Sadaqah
- B. Salat
- C. Zakâh
- D. Shahadah

3. Jainism is based on two basic concepts, namely *atma* and *karma*. The effect of virtuous deeds (*shubha karma*) earns us *punya*, and *paap* is the effect of evil deeds (*ashubha karma*). Man's happiness and misery hinges on his karma. Jains are given to understand that right faith, right knowledge and right conduct need to be practised to become free from the bondage of karma.

According to Jainism, what is the ultimate bliss called after all *karmas* have been destroyed?

- A. *Oopapat*
- B. *Kevalgnan*
- C. *Moksha*
- D. *Mohaniya*

4. In their daily lives Sikhs practice viewing the equality of all peoples regardless of caste, creed, or religion. Every gurudwara (Sikh place of worship) has a room attached to it where free meals are served without any distinction to people seated in one line. It truly symbolizes a sense of humanity. What is remarkable about this practice is that it has been carrying on since Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism, first started this beautiful act of generosity.

What is the name of the hall where these community meals are served?

- A. Nishan sahib
- B. Langar
- C. Takht
- D. Kirtan

5. Confucianism is a school of thought based on the teachings of a Chinese scholar, K'ung Fu Tzu, commonly pronounced as Confucius in English. Some of his basic teachings were:

- Be kind and good to everyone.
- Every relationship, especially families, should have their foundation on sincerity, loyalty, and respect.
- If rulers are wise and good, then the people follow accordingly.
- People serving the government should earn their positions through education.

This faith has the cultivation of virtues as its central belief. There are two most important virtues according to this faith. One is *jen* (a benevolent and humanitarian attitude). The other is:

- A. *Hsiao* (love within the family)
- B. *Yi* (righteousness)
- C. *Li* (maintaining proper relationships and rituals that enhance the life of the individual, the family, and the state)
- D. *Xin* (honesty)

6. "However many holy words you read, however many you speak, what good will they do you if you do not act upon them?" - The Buddha

There are 'Six Perfections' to be practiced by a Bodhisattva (an enlightened being who has discovered the Ultimate Truth also known as nirvana, but puts it off for a time till he has guided all his fellow beings to that state of discovering the real Truth) to become a Buddha. Through compassion we can achieve the six perfections. The real motivation for the Mahayana Path, one branch of Buddhism, is love and compassion. The absolutely enlightened state is one of perfect marriage of wisdom and compassion – *bodhichitta*. Compassion, in the words of Shantideva, a great Buddhist master, is beautiful. "Others are my main concern. When I notice something of mine, I steal it and give it to others."

According to Mahayana Buddhism, the 'Six Perfections' or Six *Paramitas* to be practised by a Bodhisattva to become a Buddha are:

- 1) the perfection of giving (*dana-paramita*)
- 2) the perfection of morality (*shila-paramita*)
- 3) the perfection of patience (*kshanti-paramita*)
- 4) the perfection of energy (*virya-paramita*)
- 5) the perfection of meditation (*dhyana-paramita*)

What is the sixth perfection?

- A. the perfection of truth (*satya-paramira*)
- B. the perfection of wisdom (*prajna-paramira*)
- C. the perfection of love (*prem-paramira*)
- D. the perfection of bliss (*ananda-paramira*)

7. These lines are familiar to most of us. What is the common thread that runs through all these 5 quotes?

But You, O Lord, are a God full of, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. Psalm 86:15

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Matthew 9:36

And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with for them, and healed their sick. Matthew 14:14

Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." Matthew 15:32

When the Lord saw her, He had on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." Luke 7:13-14

- A. Love
- B. Forgiveness
- C. Compassion
- D. Mercy

8. Jews across the world believe that God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh day. It came to be known as the Sabbath or Shabbat, the seventh day of the week, a day considered for rest for all Jews. What is the time frame of the Sabbath?

- A. From Friday midnight to Saturday midnight
- B. Depends on individual choice
- C. From sunrise on Saturday to sunrise on Sunday
- D. From Friday sundown to Saturday sundown

9. Bahá'u'lláh's founded the Bahá'í religion and his essential message is of unity. He preached the oneness of God, the oneness of the human family, and the oneness of religion. Bahá'ís are of the firm belief that humanity must cultivate the vision of unity to perceive nature and the purpose of life. This unifying vision is explained lucidly in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh said, "The earth is but one and mankind its"

- a) one planet and mankind its creatures.
- b) one continent and mankind its people.
- c) one country and mankind its citizens.
- d) one universe and mankind its residents.

10. Bhagavan Baba once told a charming tale of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and a thief who had become attracted by the saint and wished to have a *mantra* from him:

Chaitanya then said: "I shall impart the sacred name to you on one condition. Whichever place you may choose for thieving you must recite the sacred name 108 times before you break into the place.

Chaitanya then drew the thief near to him. The thief's heart had considerably softened after listening to Chaitanya's words. Sambhaashanam Sankatanaashanam ("conversation with a holy person removes distress"). Sparsanam Karma Vimochanam (the touch of a holy person frees one from the effects of past deeds). Chaitanya held the thief's head and whispered in his ear three times the mantra: "Om Namo Bhagavathe Vaasudevaaya." The mere sight (darsanam) of Chaitanya destroyed the sins committed by the thief. His words dispelled the worry felt by the thief. The touch of the saint freed him from the bonds of past deeds.

(Meanwhile)...a rich man had taken his wife and children to meet Chaitanya, leaving his house unguarded. The thief broke into the house and entered the safe-room in which all the valuables were kept. He saw gems of all kinds. He was resolved not to touch any of the valuables till he had completed recitation of the mantra given to him by Chaitanya. But before he completed the mantra japa (recitation of holy formula), the master of the house and others arrived there.

What does Bhagavan tell us happened next?

- A. The residents of the home immediately chased the thief away.
- B. The thief escaped with some jewels.
- C. The residents of the home began to worship the thief.
- D. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu entered the home and all began to sing *kirtans*.

ANSWERS

1. B: Navjot. The name of the ceremony observed wherein a new believer is initiated into the Zoroastrian Religion

On this auspicious day, the child for the first time wears the sacred 'Sudreh' and 'Kushti' – a white muslin undershirt around which is tied a consecrated hand-woven thread made from lamb's wool. These vestments are unique to the Zoroastrian faith and their ritualistic wearing serves as a daily affirmation of the doctrines of Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Light and Wisdom. The ceremony generally takes place between the ages of seven and fifteen.

2. C: The other way of expressing compassion according to the Holy Qu'ran is Zakâh.

Technically Zakâh is defined as “a determined portion taken from wealth and allocated to those deserving it, by a Qur'anic injunction.” A true believer of Islam who is blessed with wealth is urged to look beyond himself to help the less fortunate, share with them generously what he has been blessed with. Compassion and charity truly represent the quintessential Muslim heart.

3. C: Moksha is the ultimate bliss after all karmas are completely destroyed.

Jainism is also known as *Mokshamarga* – the path to liberation. All practices and beliefs have one goal – liberation of the soul. *Moksha* is a state of ecstasy of existence of a soul that is free from the cycle of birth and death. A soul that has attained *Moksha* experiences eternal bliss, infinite wisdom, and feels oneness with the Supreme soul. To reach this state of consciousness is the ultimate objective of every person who follows Jainism as a faith.

Kevalgnan is omniscience, achieved when the four *karmas* attached to the soul have been destroyed. *Mohaniya* is a type of *karma* arising from lust, ego, and greed. *Oopapat* is the method through which gods and devils alike are born.

4. B: Langar, the room and ceremony where these community meals are served.

Guru Nanak designed the Langar so that everyone would sit on the floor together, as equals, to eat the same simple food. All are welcome to share the Langar; no one is turned away. The food is normally served twice a day, every day of the year. Each week a family or several families volunteer to provide and prepare the Langar. This is very generous, as there may be several hundred people to feed, and caterers are not allowed. All the preparation, the cooking and the washing-up is done by volunteers.

5. C: The other virtue is: *Li* maintaining proper relationships and rituals that enhance the life of the individual, the family, and the state.

Li can be understood as the appropriate manner of overt behaviour needed to express one's inner thoughts or intentions. It includes socially proper ways of acting, and also acting toward others in ways such that they will not mistake your intentions. One's outer expression should reflect one's inner nature, or at least one's intention in this situation.

6. B: the perfection of wisdom (*prajna-paramira*)

The Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras, such as the Heart Sūtra, describe *prajñā* as supreme, highest, incomparable, unequalled, and unsurpassed. It is spoken

of as the principal means of attaining nirvana, through its revelation of the true nature of all things.

7. C: Compassion

The common thread running through all these quotes is compassion. Christ knew nothing but compassion for all beings. Jesus showed us the joy of giving, sharing and caring.

8. A: From Friday midnight to Saturday midnight.

The Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week begins from Friday midnight to Saturday midnight. The Sabbath day can be observed either at home or in the synagogue. Jews follow the ritual of lighting two Shabbat candles and say a special prayer. They also recite two more prayers over a glass of wine and eat special bread called *challah*. To mark the end of the Sabbath day, by Saturday midnight, Jews light a single candle and raise a spice box that fills the room with a beautiful scent.

9. C: Bahá'u'lláh said, "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens," which are cherished as one of his most famous sacred phrases. On the same theme he also stated:

"The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch."

"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established."

10. C: The residents of the home began to worship the thief.

Baba continues the tale by stating that when the people arrived...

They thought he must be some saintly person who had honoured their home by his visit. All of them began to offer worship to him and prostrate before him. They thought that in the wake of the saint Chaitanya other saintly persons were also visiting their village.

Meanwhile, on the completion of the recitation of the mantra, the thief opened his eyes and to his astonishment found a large group of people standing reverently before him. The master of the house asked him: "Oh sir! Who are you? Where from have you come? We have been sanctified by your visit. Please take your food in our home and redeem our lives by doing us this honour."

A great change came over the thief. He thought: "If the mere recitation of the Lord's name can bring me so much honour and respect, although I had come here only to steal, how many greater things may be in store for me if I genuinely recite the Lord's name for its own sake? I may hope for the highest position by the grace of the Lord." That very moment he decided to give up stealing. He prostrated before the master of the house and his wife and said: "Mother! Let me tell you the truth. I am a thief. Let me go to a forest. I shall spend the rest of my days contemplating on God and leading my life of a true ascetic."

Sathya Sai Speaks, vol. 20, chapter 12

QUIZ ON DIVINE DISCOURSES ON 'UNITY IN DIVERSITY'

Why does God incarnate? To enable man to understand and experience his latent divinity, and unity in diversity. The essence of spirituality lies in visualizing unity in diversity. This is the goal of human life.

Give up all differences and concentrate on realization of the Brahman (the Omni Self). All are embodiments of Brahman. In due course all will realize this truth by eschewing narrow-minded differences. Develop the sense of spiritual oneness by continuous practice. This sense is bound to grow if you act up to Swami's injunctions. The primary requisite is love for God.

Where there is unity, there will be divinity. Where there is divinity, there will be bliss. Unity brings purity, and purity in turn leads to divinity. Therefore, always remember the inseparable relationship between unity, purity, and divinity and strive to achieve that.

- Baba

Here is a quiz on this salient theme "Unity in Diversity". All the questions have been sourced from Bhagavan's divine discourses delivered over decades.

1. In a Divine Discourse delivered in 1998, Swami said:

"The *Atma* is the same in all; irrespective of their name, country, and life style. This *Atma* is referred to as conscience, which permeates the body from top to toe. The goal of spirituality is to realize oneness of the *Atma* in all.

"Man, on account of attachment to body, is oblivious of his innate divinity and visualizes diversity in unity. This is due to _____. God incarnates in order to teach the underlying unity in diversity."

- A. Previous Karmas.
- B. Secular teachings.
- C. Ignorance.
- D. Influence of company.

2. In *Sutra Vahini*, Swami reveals:

"God is the material cause of creation, of the cosmos, of the universe. He is the substance, the basis, the material cause. Like silver in the cup, the cosmos is all God. He has been manifesting Himself as all this. He has willed to become all this. In every thing (*padartha*), He, the highest Truth (*Param-aartha*), is immanent. In the absence of this highest Truth, no thing can exist. Each one is sustained by the all-comprehensive Reality.

"This wondrous mystery is beyond one's grasp. The intelligence cannot unravel it. With distorted vision (*kudarshan*), one sees only the name-form, the appearance. One is deluded into confusion. One is tossed by likes and dislikes, pleasure and pain, elation and depression. One is aware only of the unreal many, parading diverse names and forms."

According to Swami, what will help release us from this delusion??

- A. Selfless service.
- B. Correct vision.
- C. Swami's *Darshan*.
- D. Guru's Mantra.

3. In a Divine Discourse given in 1990, Swami guides us:

"Consider every human being as a spark of the Divine. Every man is a child of immortality. Today we are failing to cultivate that sense of unity. All the ills we are suffering from are due to the lack of unity. Union is strength. Lacking unity, we are becoming weak. To promote unity, we have to give up selfishness.

"People talk about spirituality. What does it mean? Is it performance of *Japa* or sitting in meditation? No. Spirituality means the quest for _____."

- A. Immortality.
- B. Freedom from Desires.
- C. Vision of the Lord.
- D. Oneness.

4. In a Divine Discourse delivered in 2003, Swami enlightens us by stating:

"Man suffers from various ailments, some internal and others external. A doctor can cure the external ailments. The *Atmic* feeling is the only remedy for all the internal ailments. You should make efforts to know the principle of *Atma*. The *Atma* is a synonym for Brahman, which is nothing but the all-pervasive *Chaitanya* (consciousness)."

According to Swami, what is that *Chaitanya* called that is present in the human body?

- A. Spiritual growth.
- B. Conscience.
- C. Meditative state of mind.
- D. Egolessness.

5. In a Divine Discourse delivered in 2001, Swami teaches us on Oneness through the example of Buddha's teachings:

"You have to make efforts to understand and experience unity in diversity. Buddha could experience bliss only after understanding this principle of unity. He sacrificed all sensual pleasures. He understood that all that we experience through the senses is useless and leads to bondage. He realized that misuse of the senses destroys the very humanness itself. He left his house and family and renounced the world. Ultimately, he realized *Atmic* unity and attained the state of *Nirvana*."

According to Swami, of all the five senses, using which one can lead to understanding unity in multiplicity?

- A. Sacred Vision
- B. Sacred Speech
- C. Sacred Listening
- D. Sacred Feeling

6. In a Divine Discourse given in 1998, Swami teaches:

"Just as each limb is as important as any other in the body, so also is each individual in the society. All limbs have to work in unison for the effective functioning of the body. Unity is most essential for man. Cultivate the feeling of brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God. People may come from varied cultures, languages and countries, but all are the children of God.

"Since you make distinctions based on country, culture and language, you are unable to comprehend divinity. Everyone is a member of the universal family. Teachers must understand this truth and teach their students.

"Lack of unity can lead a country, community, or society to _____"

- A. Stagnation
- B. Fragmentation
- C. Distraction
- D. Materialism

7. In a Divine Discourse given in 1996, Swami teaches us that:

"Seeing a rope at a distance, suspecting that it may be a snake, a man develops fear. Soon another person arrives and assures him that it is not a snake but a rope. The moment he realizes that what he feared was a snake, was only a rope, he gets rid of his fear. During all the stages, the rope was only a rope. Likewise, the ignorant man mistakes the phenomenal world for

the *Brahman*, till a *jnaani* (wise man) reveals to him that what he thought was Nature is in reality *Brahman*.

"All that one sees in the entire universe is a manifestation of the *Brahman*. Some people declare: 'Where is *Brahman* and what are we, petty human beings? How can we be equal to the all encompassing *Brahman*?' This is not correct. You are that omnipotent, all-pervading *Brahman*. Because of your _____, you are not recognizing the Reality."

- A. *Karmas*
- B. I-ness
- C. Separation from God
- D. Worldly attitude

8. In a Summer Showers Discourse in 1979, Swami explains:

"In our daily lives, we see that the same object assumes different forms and names. The same seed develops into the trunk, the branches, the twigs, the leaves, the flowers and the fruits of a tree with distinct forms and names and displaying different qualities. Similarly, the same gold takes the form of various jewels and one flame brings into being an infinite number of flames of several hues.

"In the very same manner, the Primal Light of *Paramatma* is one, but it manifests itself as the *Atma* in all beings of the universe. It is essential that we discern this unity in diversity."

According to Swami, what is the cause of the creation of this diversity?

- A. God's Will
- B. Insistence of other deities
- C. Prayers of devotees
- D. God's Nature

9. Swami often says: "Diversity in creation is an obvious fact. No two human beings, not even twins, are identical. But diversity should not lead to differences and conflicts. We must learn to see the unity that underlies the diversity. This unity is based on the divinity that is present in everything in the universe. The realization of this unity can come, only through firm faith in God."

In a Divine Discourse in 1993, Swami reveals the reason for the differences: "Though the Divinity that resides in all human beings is one and the same, the capacities and personalities of various individuals are different. Depending on the ripeness of their experience on the cultural practices they have pursued, on the nature of their spiritual disciplines, and on their parental background, these individuals have _____."

- A. Positive or negative behaviour.
- B. A wide or narrow outlook.
- C. Good or evil thoughts and tendencies.
- D. Liberation or Re-birth.

10. In a Divine Discourse delivered in 1996, Swami expounds on what happens when we fill our vision with love:

“Embodiments of Divine *Atma*! When you fill your vision with love, the whole creation will appear divine to you. The cosmos appears to you as a manifestation of diversity, but in reality there is no diversity. No one makes any effort to discover the unity that underlies the diversity.

“In every human being, both Divinity and the *Maya* principle are immanent. How is this to be comprehended? *Sath-Chith-Aananda* (Truth-Awareness-Bliss) represents the Divine in man. The _____ which man perceives are expressions of the *Maya* principle.”

- A. Dreams in sleep.
- B. Permanence of life.
- C. Names and Forms.
- D. Chasing after desires.

ANSWERS:

1C. Ignorance.

Swami continues: “**Man, on account of attachment to body, is oblivious of his innate divinity and visualizes diversity in unity. This is due to ignorance.**

Good and bad are the reflections of our mind; they do not exist in the persons around. Defect lies in vision, not in creation. So, purify your vision and sanctify your heart. Only then you can experience unity in diversity. Develop unity. There is immense strength in unity. In unity, not only you, but also the country would have a chance to develop. Only love brings about unity.”

2B. Correct Vision.

Swami helps us further: “**Correct vision (*sath-darshan*) makes one see the One in the many.** It reveals unity in diversity and confers supreme delight, for one becomes aware of the One immanent in the multiplicity, the supreme Truth (*Parathathwa*).

"Liberation is the realization of this awareness, this achievement of Brahmanhood. Each and every living being has to attain this consummation, this goal, the Brahman. That is its true destination."

3D. Oneness.

Swami continues: "**Spirituality means the quest for oneness.** It means discovering the underlying unity in the apparent multiplicity. Preoccupation with one's own destiny is not spirituality. That also is a form of selfishness. Hence, in every way, the awareness that "*Viswam Vishnuswaroopam*" (Cosmos is manifestation of the Divine) should be obtained.

"The truth of the *Upanishadic* declaration, "*Isaavaasyamidamsarvam*" (All this is permeated by the Divine), should become a firm conviction.

"Everybody is like a bulb, in each of which Truth shines as a manifestation of Divinity. The One has willed to become the many. Therefore, spirituality consists in recognizing unity in diversity. All are children of one God. Like the waves of the ocean and the rays of the sun, Love emanates from the Divine in infinite drops. There is an inextricable relationship between God and Love. Hence, 'Love is God; live in love.' Your lives have to be lived on this basis."

4B. Conscience.

Swami expands: "The consciousness is permeating every human being. Man has a name and form, but *Chaitanya* has no form. **The *Chaitanya* that is present in the human body is called 'conscience'.**

"The all-pervasive *Chaitanya* is called 'consciousness'. When the individual understands the principle of unity in diversity, the 'conscience' gets transformed into 'consciousness'.

"You are deluded by the differences based on caste and culture. In fact, there is only one caste, the caste of humanity. The love that originates in the heart is true religion. The entire humanity is one family. All are brothers and sisters. The whole world is but one mansion. It is impossible to describe in words the happiness you would experience when you develop such broad-mindedness. Hence, make every effort to visualize divinity in humanity.

"Spirituality is not a business activity. Spirituality is a divine mansion. It is associated with unity. This unity in diversity alone will bring you happiness."

5A. Sacred Vision.

Swami reveals: "***Samyak drishti* (sacred vision) is the first step toward *Nirvana*.** Consider all that you see as divine. Let your vision be suffused with love. A vision filled with love is the hallmark of a true human being. All are one, be alike to everyone. You can understand unity in diversity only when you develop sacred vision. *Samyak drishti* makes you realize the presence of divinity in all. The *Vedas* declare, "*Ekam Sath Viprah Bahudha Vadanthi*"

(truth is one, but scholars refer to it by many names). See the world with the vision of truth. All are one; all are essentially divine. Give up multiplicity to attain unity.

"The *Vedanta* declares that the *Atmic* principle is the underlying unity in diversity. Bulbs are many but the same current flows in all of them. Likewise, the *Atmic* principle exists in all. Man's inability to understand this principle of unity is the cause of his ignorance. **True humanness lies in understanding unity in multiplicity. You have to develop *Samyak Drishti* in order to develop unity.**"

6B. Fragmentation.

Swami expands further on it: "**Lack of unity can lead a country, community, or society to fragmentation.** So, we should first and foremost achieve unity.

"Members of Sai Organizations should consider unity as their very life breath. They should not differentiate between people on the basis of caste, creed and nationality. Follow the example of Sai! When Sai Himself treats everyone equally, why not you? Never give scope for any differences. True independence lies in fostering unity. Therefore, to develop sacred divine human values, you should have unity first."

7D. Worldly attitude.

Swami says: "**Because of your worldly attitude, you are not recognizing the Reality.** You are separating yourself from the Divine. All that you see is *Brahman*. To search for God as something different from you is a delusion. But this truth is not easily recognized by man. When you look at the ocean, its endless series of waves and the foam from the waves, they all appear separate from each other. But the truth is they are all one. The water in the waves and in the foam comes from the same ocean and has the same qualities."

8A. God's Will.

Swami continues: "**It is the Will of *Brahman* that has created the myriad facets of this dynamic universe with its multifarious forms and innumerable objects.** Yet, we must remember that it is *Brahman* that has manifested itself in all this infinitude.

Krishna exhorted Arjuna to ignore the diversity in unity and discern the unity in diversity. We have to comprehend the non-dual *Atmic* nature of this world of multiplicity.

Dhyaana (meditation) enables man to cognize this unity and discern both the Immanence and the Transcendence of *Brahman*. For meditation to be most effective, it should be performed at a fixed time and at a fixed place every day, and according to a well-regulated procedure."

9B. A wide or narrow outlook.

Swami expands further: **"Depending on the ripeness of their experience on the cultural practices they have pursued, on the nature of their spiritual disciplines, and on their parental background, these individuals have a wide or narrow outlook."**

"The attitudes of individuals are determined by their day-to-day experiences. Hence, people should engage themselves in good deeds. Only through hard striving can the Divinity in man be realized, like the fire that emerges from the rubbing of two sticks and butter from the churning of butter-milk."

10C. Names and Forms.

Swami continues to explain: **"The names and forms which man perceives are expressions of the *Maaya* principle."**

"On the ocean, the wind is the cause of waves, on the ocean of *Sath-Chith-Aananda*, the wind of *Maaya* gives rise to the innumerable living creatures. Therefore, the individuals who have emerged from the ocean of *Sath-Chith-Aananda* are manifestations of the Divine. Divinity is everywhere. But because of man's ignorance, man is a prey to numerous troubles."

HEART2HEART QUIZ ON “UNITY IN DIVERSITY”

Bhagavan Baba teaches us that “Unity brings purity, and purity in turn leads to divinity.” To visualize the unity inherent in this apparent diversity is a sacred step on the path to realising our own divinity. Heart2Heart now offers you a quiz culled from the pages of our archives on this theme.

1. In ‘Gita for Children’, from the April 2007 issue, Arjuna learns the different view points on perceiving the world. Krishna says,

“Let Me illustrate with a simple example. Say you have a narrow beam of white light. Allow this beam to strike a prism at a suitable angle. Passing through the prism, the beam gets split into the seven rainbow colours. A person who is seeing the beam before it has entered the prism would say it is white, while a person who sees the emergent beam would say it has rainbow colours.

An evolved being is like the person who does not see diverse rainbow colours but just a white beam.”

According to Krishna, what does the evolved being use to see this unity in diversity?

- A. The Guru's teachings.
- B. Inner Vision.
- C. His Intuitive Confidence.
- D. Repetitive chanting of His Name.

2. In ‘Getting Spiritually Better: Atma = Brahman’, from the April 15th 2004 issue, we talked about what a true seeker must do to see unity in diversity:

“This Universal presence and manifestation of God is not very evident to us. This is because we have become conditioned to superficial existence. We see only the ‘surface’ and not beneath the ‘surface’. On the surface, a mountain is a beautiful geographic formation, formed due to upheavals of the earth's plates, continents colliding, etc. But beneath the surface, the mountain is manifestation of God's majesty. And so on.”

As true seekers we must not see the surface, but always below the surface. Why?

- A. So we won't lose sight of reality.
- B. So we can share the Truth with everybody else.
- C. It can cause attachment.
- D. It gives us greater prosperity in life.

3. In 'Getting Spiritually Better' from the January 15th 2004 issue, we tried to understand the different viewpoints on God's creation.

"In this world, we see both good and bad. People sometimes wonder: 'If everything came from God, why is there bad at all? Why isn't everything good?' This is a legitimate doubt. But there is an answer to this 'problem'.

It all depends on one's perspective. A truly evolved soul sees everything as a play of the Lord. Not only that; he sees the Lord Himself playing all the roles; thus, in this viewpoint, even a so-called evil person is merely the Lord in disguise. In other words, since everything is the Lord and the Lord alone, nothing is bad - QED. It is as simple as that – this is the philosophy of _____."

- A. Monism
- B. Dualism
- C. Theism
- D. Atheism

4. In 'Getting Spiritually Better: Concerning *Gun*as', from the July 15th 2004 issue, we shared our view point on '*Gun*as'.

"The word *Guna* basically means tendency. The *Guna* of a person provides an index of the personality of that person. *Gun*as are not restricted to humans alone; in fact, they are intrinsic to Creation and come in all sorts of shades and varieties. Without *Gun*as, it is not possible to have the diversity one sees in Nature.

"To understand the role of *Gun*as in Creation, let us first start with God. The Lord in His Pristine Form is, so to say, 'structureless', i.e., without structure. There is just an Infinite Oneness. But when He projects Himself as _____, God injects the element of differentiation so that there is diversity."

- A. The Trinity
- B. Different Deities
- C. Nature
- D. An Avatar

5. In 'Elevating our Intentions and Actions....The Sai Way' from the December 2006 issue, we shared a story to illustrate the means to prove how heavenly the experience of seeing unity in diversity can be.

"A soldier once went to a Zen Master and said, 'Master, I have fought many a pitched battle. I have undergone the rigors and the training and the discipline of being a soldier. Yet, I do not know what peace is. Pray! Tell me what is hell,

what is heaven?' The Master looked at the soldier and asked, 'Who are you?' And the soldier said, 'I am a samurai!'

The Master then exploded, and asked, 'You! A samurai? Who on this earth would take you as a soldier?' This infuriated the samurai. He drew out his sharp sword and rushed at the Zen Master. The Zen Master calmly said, 'Here opens the gate of hell.'"

What was the samurai's reaction to that?

- A. He simply cut off the Master's throat.
- B. He simply decided to change his profession.
- C. He vowed never to see the Master again.
- D. He bowed down in humility.

ANSWERS:

1B. Inner Vision.

Krishna expands further: **"Incidentally, such a person does not see the world merely with his physical eye. Rather, he uses Inner Vision; that is how he is able to see Unity in Diversity.**

"In the example that I just gave, the prism is *Maya* or delusion. If the prism is removed, there is no beam splitting and no rainbow colours. In the same way, if a person gets rid of *Maya*, he would see only Unity and not Diversity."

2C. It can cause attachment.

"Because, **looking at the surface can cause superficial feelings like desire, attachment, infatuation, hatred, jealousy, etc. All these promote the feeling of differentiation.** Looking beneath the surface, on the other hand, promotes the feeling of unity; it enables one to see the underlying unity beneath the superficial diversity.

Human birth has been specially conferred to see Unity and not diversity. Seeing diversity and being guided by it is the characteristic of animals and demons. Being in harmony with diversity is human and seeing unity beneath diversity is Divine.

Man must perceive the Unity underlying diversity and thus discover his intrinsic Divine nature; it is for that purpose and purpose alone that the rare gift of human birth has been given."

3A. Monism.

“This is the philosophy of monism or Advaitam, as Swami refers to it.

Most of us, indeed, 99.999999% of the people are nowhere near *Advaitam* or this state of Absolute Oneness, being immersed in the world of duality or pairs of opposites. In this perception, there is 'good' on the one hand and 'bad' on the other. However, what seems 'bad' is not really bad; it is a case of something that has not 'evolved'.”

4C. Nature.

“When He projects Himself as the Cosmos or Nature, God injects the element of differentiation so that there is diversity. This diversity is needed because the different entities have to perform different functions and play different roles, of course according to His Grand Master Plan.”

5D. He bowed down in humility.

“The samurai then realized in whose presence he was, sheathed his sword, bowed down in humility and surrendered. And the Master then said, ‘Here opens the gate of heaven.’

If there were to be a moral to this story, it is that we are the architects of our own hell, and our own heaven. When we contract the world into ourselves, and take in all the dualities that the world is associated with, in the process we open the gates of our hell. But **when we expand to encompass the entire world, we see unity in diversity and open the gates of our heaven.”**

THE HEALING TOUCH

COMPLETING THE CIRCLE...

By Mr. Y Arvind

Surgeries are common in tertiary hospitals everywhere and so it is with Bhagavan's Super Speciality Hospitals in Puttaparthi and Whitefield. But there is a difference. Yes, it is done absolutely free of cost. It is also true that Baba's Hospitals are technologically as well-equipped as any premier hospital in the developed world. It is a fact that patient recover faster here and there is no distinction whatsoever of any kind. But this is still an incomplete portrayal of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences. Because when a person steps into these abodes of healing, surgeries happen at different levels simultaneously. A person is not only physically operated, there are mutations that happen in the metaphysical plane too, quite silently, but surely, and the individual returns home as a new person, in every way. What does all this mean? Read the present story and you will know for yourself.

'As many religions as there are men,' said Swami Vivekananda, and he was right since no two minds think alike. One connotation for the word religion is "return to the source". This can and is interpreted in different ways, physical, emotional and spiritual. Everything that has a beginning has an end. All that is born must die. But then life is meant to be lived...to the fullest and most productive extent. With modern technology extending the average life span of humankind, we have more reason than ever to yearn to live life to the fullest extent. But how many of us have the opportunity to do so? All of us do – within our limits.

I do not tire of repeating the line I read in a textbook of pathology 'to be normal is a miracle'. When all else fails man turns to a power that is beyond the physical realm and calls it by whatever name is closest to his heart. To those that 'believe' that power is called God. This article is in effect a condensed letter from a patient who came to Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, Whitefield, with doubt and returned a believer. On his request we have withheld his personal details but we are sure you will find it interesting.

Dear Sir,

Sairam,

It is not often that one gets a chance to express heartfelt gratitude but, I think I am lucky to have been given this chance. My parents always told me that one should be grateful for everything one receives in life but I don't know what words to use to say thank you to this temple of healing that has given me and my family a new life, a new hope and new faith. I am an academic

and pardon me if my letter begins to sound like a classroom lecture. Old habits die hard and I am all of forty five summers.

Before I came to SSSIHMS Whitefield, I was an atheist. I did not believe in God. I believed and still believe that man is the ultimate in the evolutionary cycle, but earlier did not believe in the existence of a power beyond. Everything that happens in the world we see must have a scientific explanation. Cause and effect, there cannot be an effect without a cause, there can be no smoke without a fire. Likewise everything that happens in one's life is the result of one's actions.

Allow me first to explain why I was what I was, before coming to the present. My logical reasoning was based on the four dimensions – three in space and the fourth in time. The physical world we see is a reflection of these four dimensions. Years of scientific research have revealed these and we have tonnes of information extracted from even more voluminous data telling us that life is not an accident and everything is part of a larger scheme of things. As it is said, you cannot move your finger without disturbing the stars. The laws of magnetism and gravitation hold the visible world together.

Going back to cause and effect, consider a rudimentary example. When we are children we are told not to put our hands into flame since it will burn our hand. With inborn curiosity we don't hesitate to disobey and that leads to many 'first hand' experiences through which we 'realise' what was 'told'. Many such small experiences teach us to learn from the mistakes of others and grow. This is probably the origin of the aphorism 'Don't reinvent the wheel'. One may wonder why I have referred to this example. It is to reinforce the power of the concept of cause and effect. Putting one's hand into fire is the cause – a burn wound is the effect. The results in this case are instantaneous. Fire is immediately associated with heat, burns, wound and we immediately develop a respect for this element of the universe. But consider other 'causes' such as smoking tobacco, drinking alcoholic drinks and eating non-vegetarian food. The effects are spread over a long time. Though over time, research has proven that the above three are very much in the cause list for heart problems, diabetes, cancer and a host of other diseases – many of us prefer to ignore the signs because the effect is not immediate.

My scientific bent of mind was similar. I looked for immediate results for all my actions. Being an extravert and a workaholic, I had no patience with things that 'take time'. To me Karma, rebirth and such philosophical thought was just the rambling of a few men who preferred to lose their reality in some plane of consciousness that took them away from the misery of their existence. A way to attribute their current inadequacies to a past that they never knew even existed. I could not accept such convenient 'logic'. When someone would tell me, "There are no coincidences in life" I would reply, "Your life is a coincidence". What with a million to one chance of conception and then uneventful gestation and uncomplicated child birth. There are always chances of things going awry anywhere down the path. Science was the answer to all my questions. Science always had the answer to any query that defied logic – it was just that man did not as yet find the answer.

But one day everything changed. Around my fortieth birthday I had a sudden pain in my chest. I immediately rested and it subsided. I didn't have to

go to a doctor to know what it meant. Every magazine I picked up had proclaimed India to have the largest number of coronary artery disease cases. I knew it was a heart attack, or at least a prelude to worse damage. Prudently I approached a cardiologist and my 'diagnosis' was confirmed. Being educated has its advantages I suppose, but being educated did not help me in preventing my present condition. I knew that coronary artery disease could be prevented; I also knew that my habits as regards diet and exercise were nothing to boast of. I enjoyed non-vegetarian diet and even learnt a few recipes knowing that I was filling up my arteries with fat. I relished wine and prided myself on an iron stomach, knowing that my liver could only take so much. I was on the path to perdition but chose to look the other way, all this, because the Effect of the Cause was far away in the future.

The doctors gave me a very grim picture of my condition. I had what they called triple vessel disease and it was not rocket science for me to see the line diagram of my heart in my case file. It had an arrow pointing at a blood vessel called the LAD, a portion of which had been blackened showing the blockage; the alarming thing was it said "90%". I went on line to the internet and did some reading. I was shocked to know that the LAD, left anterior descending artery, was called "the widow maker". Married with a wife and two sons, I had no right to do this to them. The boys are still studying and my better half is also an earning member of our family of four. It was then that I looked back on my life wistfully. Surprising what scientific thinking had done to me. I had prided myself on the infallibility of scientific rational thinking and had ignored the loud and clear messages that they were shooting at me.

It is now more than six months since I emerged from the SSSIHMS Whitefield. My heart still beating, the titanium steel wires holding my sternum (breast bone) intact, nitro-glycerine tablets in my pocket, the number of my eldest son under the name "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) in my cell phone along with a card identifying my blood group and the number of a local ambulance. Everything is the effect of a cause – me. I have only myself to blame for my present condition. But everything that happened in SSSIHMS left me a changed man.

In the other hospital, along with the diagnosis, I also got a bill that told me that I need to be poorer by Rs.3,00,000/- if I wanted to continue living. And I was also informed that coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) was only a palliative procedure. The disease was progressive and could not be cured. The body that was used to a certain level of fat in the blood was not going to change in a hurry. Science could only do so much. I began to look for alternatives. My elder son had just finished his 12th and being at the top of his class wanted to go abroad for higher studies. Consider the irony – he wanted to be a doctor. I had a home loan to pay and a car loan – both biting large chunks out of our salaries, my wife's and mine. I needed the money for his education. He showed so much promise that to deny him the opportunity would be a crime. I did not know what to do.

I must confess here that for the first time in my life, I looked up and 'prayed' for a 'miracle'. I had reached a point in my life where human action was at its end. Only a 'power beyond' could save me. "When the pupil is ready the master appears". At around this time I met one of my childhood

friends – I will not call it coincidence any more – he and I had studied in college together and had gone our separate ways. It could not have been coincidence that both of us had parked our cars in the same parking lot, next to each other on the same day, outside the same hospital. It was he who recognised me, caught up as I was in my own sorrow. We fell into conversation and I told him of my predicament. He immediately invited me home – it could not have again been coincidence that he had recently shifted to Hyderabad and was just – hold your breath.....20 minutes driving distance from my house! I walked across the threshold of his house and right up on the wall, beautifully framed in gold bordered with crimson velvet was a huge, larger than life photograph of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba! Here is where I first met God!

My friend is a member of the Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samiti and he informed me of Swami's Super Specialty Hospitals at Prasanthinilayam and Whitefield. My sceptical scientific mind found it difficult to accept the truth that these Hospitals offered medical care totally free of charge. But he was persuasive and subsequently both of us visited SSSIHMS, Prasanthigram. As there were many others ahead of me in the list at Prasanthigram, we were told to go to SSSIHMS Whitefield. I could not have a *darshan* of Swami on my first visit, but my mind was in too much of a whirl to think of anything on these lines. The very place defied imagination, what with the Hospital looking like a temple and the beautiful ashram, perfectly planned and executed timetables, the amenities... It was mind boggling. I came to Bangalore definitely a changed man.

At the SSSIHMS, Whitefield, I was once again amazed at the efficiency of operation. My friend accompanied me along with my wife but he had to wait outside the Hospital since "one patient one attendant" rule was strictly enforced. I had no complaints. Things were moving too fast for me. Even before I knew it, I was photographed, registered and was holding an ID card.

In the Out Patient Department things moved smoothly and there was no delay – I had brought all my earlier records with me. The doctors repeated the tests and confirmed the diagnosis except that the situation was not as serious as had been portrayed to me in Hyderabad. I refrain from mentioning the names of the institutions I visited, since Swami does not appreciate us condemning others. I am now deeply into Sai Literature and sincerely regret why I did not go to Him earlier. Anyway, back to the story, I was told to come back when I received a call letter from the Hospital and was put on 'call'. The condition was to be medically managed till then. I returned to Hyderabad and sure enough the letter arrived in a few months.

I came, was admitted, the preliminary tests were done, and I was found fit for surgery. Few days later I opened my eyes in the Intensive Care Unit surrounded by life support equipment, and a doctor loudly calling me by my name. The first thought that flashed through my mind, "Thank you Swami" the second thought "I am alive". The rest is a blur; days in the ICU and the ward, physiotherapists pounding my back to get the phlegm out, the dieticians visiting and asking me what I would like to eat, honestly I don't think this happens in all hospitals – but then I had never been hospitalised before. In all this there was a group of ladies counselling me on my emotional plane. I was

really impressed with the patience and genuine concern with which they drilled down to my deepest worries and helped me root them out. Then finally the day of discharge... my wife and I stood in the central dome that soared high above us and offered our prayers of gratitude to the Lord who had given me a fresh lease of life.

In one of Swami's discourses in the collected volumes of "Sathya Sai Speaks" He has said, Science is only half the circle, spirituality completes the circle. I had lived two score and odd years satisfied with just half a circle of existence. But as a wise man once said, the road to oneself is long and we at times stray from the path, but God is merciful and has made U turns so that we may return to the source. I was an atheist, but am now a believer. I believe in God and to me God is Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Thank you Swami for this fresh lease of life, I pray that I live it in a way worthy of Your grace and mercy.

YOUR SAY

- Feedback from our readers on the November 2008 issue

Feedback on the cover story: *Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba: Pure Love Unparalleled*

Dear H2H team,

About two weeks have gone by and I have read the cover story twice. It takes me hours to carefully read each and every line that has been worded so beautifully, lovingly, invoking one's thought process and touching somewhere deep inside. Every line that I read makes me think, rethink and reflect, analyze and most of all feel lucky - that I know of the Divine who is now on this very earth!

The first time I finished reading the article, I had tears in my eyes. I could feel the Love with which the article had been written - the Love that the Lord Himself asks us to feel and distribute and that He overflows with. Yet, we human beings are so stingy with a commodity that the Lord gives in abundance.

Dear H2H team, in simple words, as my 7-8 year old students say - the cover story "rocks"! Congratulations!

Sairam,

Aditi Jain, Toronto, Canada.

Dear H2H Team,

Thank you for the elaborate feature article on Bhagavan Baba's love and His magnetic pull of people from all walks of life, from all faiths and from different countries. Such articles especially with video clips are welcome by both old and new devotees. I certainly appreciated it. Hope you will have more similar type of articles.

Sai Ram,

Venugopal, Canada

Sai Ram,

In response to *Pure Love Unparalleled*, I would like to tell you how much it means to people like me. I have shifted to the UAE about a year back and felt really sad at being farther away from the physical form of Swami. However I

now begin each day reading Sai Inspires and feel His love clearly as if I were in Prashanti Nilayam.

Articles like this inspire us to be good, do good and consider everything as a gift from Him. I thank Swami for keeping us close to Him wherever we are and for His abundant Love that reaches our lives even in distant lands. Thank you for being there with us Swami and Sai devotees.

Sai Ram,

Dr. Niti

Feedback on *My Soulmate and I*

Dear H2H Team,

Congratulations on another successful issue of H2H! Just wanted to share with you how nice and inspiring it was to read Ms. Priya Mani's article. It was very well written and touched my heart. We know Swami is Omnipresent, still we sometimes forget that He is first and foremost in our hearts. Thank you for this article and making us realize once again how important it is not to forget this fact. With heart felt gratitude,

Aditi Jain, Toronto, Canada

Dear H2H team, Sai Ram!

The article was superbly written and very inspiring. Please post more such divine interaction and experience laden stories. Thank you for all that you do to bring Swami to us every month. What more can we ask for? With million salutations to our Beloved Bhagawan for this great boon,

Sincerely,

Bharati Bala, USA

Sai Ram,

I was very please to read the article *My Soulmate and I* written by Ms. Priya Mani and looking forward to receiving more stories experienced by the students. My name is Anzeela Prahalad and I live in Calgary, Canada. I started believing in Baba since 1972.

Sai Ram, Anzeela

Sai Ram,

(After reading this article) I am still in tears. I live in the US and am 78 years old. I have only known Swami since His call to me in 1995 I am hoping to come there one more time. I was there only once and He looked into my eyes once, that was all, and the moments stayed with me.

More stories like this are very welcome. Thank you so very much.

Sai Ram,

Maria Crane

Dear Organizers of Radio Sai,

Thank you for the inspiring stories. The story of Ms. Priya Mani presented in the article 'My Soulmate and I' touched me so much. I could not believe that this Embodiment of Divinity can touch souls so deeply. But as I have read the story of Ms. Priya, I started crying, even though I am a western-trained clinical psychologist.

Thank you! Be blessed as you are,

Sincerely,

Aiste Dirzyte

Dear H2H,

All your articles are great and Ms. Priya Mani's *My Soulmate and I* really is a 'Soul-Stirring' one. She really deserves the gold medals that she has obtained from Bhagavan's University, for sure. So amusing and so very beautifully presented. Wow Priya...

Please do feast us all with more and more of these from all the other students there too, former or current.

Meena Chandramouli

Feedback on *Simply a Miracle*

Dear Sai brothers at Radio Sai,

It was immensely blissful and educating experience to read 'Simply a miracle' the story of a mason from a nearby village of Calcutta. As a result of his life-threatening injury he would probably never be able to walk again in life, and for this hard working man, it was a definite battle of survival. With no hope of

getting cured by the local hospitals, his visit to Swami's super hospital was like a sinking man finding a boat to survive. It was truly a miracle as one of the operating doctors, Mr. Vasuki mentioned that, one in a 100,000 will be able to recover... and even after successful surgery normally the patient still can not walk without difficulties as before.

After a gruelling 10 hour's surgery and seven month's stay in Swami's Hospital Mr. Jehangir was easily walking without any help, to the immense joy and happiness for him and his family members. This can happen nowhere in the world except in Swami's Hospital where Bhagawan Baba's blessings and grace flows ever to the doctors and patients equally.

Blessed are those doctors, nurses and volunteers who have surrendered to Bhagawan and are working as His instruments in His Hospitals to serve those patients who otherwise would have no future. Thanks for informing us about this great story.

Aum Sai Ram, Gopal

Feedback on *Mesmerizing Moments with the Divine Master, Interview with Mrs. Rani Subramanian - Part 8*

Dear Radio Sai members,

I have been regularly reading your magazine Heart2Heart and every day is a sweet source of inspiration being constantly in touch with Swami. The experiences of Rani Ma are so profound that I have learnt a lot from them. In fact, many of my questions were answered through such articles and it feels like Swami is actually talking to me through them.

Do keep up the good work and I pray Swami gives all the members enough health and energy to keep up the vibrancy of this wonderful work. I would like to read more anecdotes from the experiences of Swami's old students.

Jai Sai Ram,

Radhika Bala

Feedback on *Spiritual Question and Answers*

Aum Sri Sai Ram

Dear Heart2Heart team,

It is very interesting that Heart2Heart is starting a new serial Article "Spiritual Questions and Answers". It is a great opportunity for us to have in-depth thought on spiritual matters especially on practical considerations. Certainly this article would help the devotees to practice *Srevaana, Manana*

and *Nidhidhyasa*. The very first question itself is very important and interesting as it relates to an important spiritual topic of living in this world unattached.

Of course "Equanimity" is required for living in this world unattached. Then the question is how to attain that equanimity and who can attain it?...

To attain unwavering equanimity one has to be a hero. One cannot be a hero until convinced that the "the sensory world and the experiences in it are unreal". For ordinary folk like us who have not reached that Hero level, before trying for detachment, *karma nishta* engaging in *Swakarma*, obligatory action with devotion and spiritual wisdom, would be best suited. When one stabilises and become perfect in *karma nishta* one gets the inner urge for *Jnana nishta* and the detachment naturally follows...

Absolute detachment is possible only when reaching the level of a *Jnani* with a pure mind, feeling the very presence of God always everywhere. Until then what is required is steady practice, practice to attain sense control, mind control, spiritual discrimination and spiritual wisdom. Thanks a lot for the new article.

Jai Sai Ram,

Sathyapalan, Abu Dhabi

Sairam to H2H,

The Spiritual Question and Answers session which you have started newly in this month Heart to Heart is very good. Prof. G. Venkataraman has explained everything in detail. It is simple and easy to understand. Thanks for the effort. Happy to know it would also be aired in Radio Sai and about the idea of releasing it as book.

Jai Sairam!

Bhuvana Raghav

Radio Sai Feedback

I want to firstly express my sincere gratitude to the entire team and first and foremost Swami for bringing Sai Global Radio into our homes. My radio at home has been networked with speakers to every bedroom and is on 24hours/7 days a week. We cannot imagine life without it. Thank you so much.

Steven Moodley

General Feedback

Dear H2H,

Thank you for every effort you put in to compile the articles. They come to me when I need them most and are mostly guiding me as to what I should do in my life; it's all simply beautiful. They are my maps charting out my life.

Thank you,

Narayana Swamy

